

A SILENT SAVIOR: THE INAPPROACHABILITY OF CHRIST  
*IN THE DREAM OF THE ROOD*

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IN *THE DREAM OF THE ROOD*

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A SILENT SAVIOR: THE INAPPROACHABILITY OF CHRIST  
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Rebecca Richardson

Prof. Johanna Kramer, Thesis Advisor

ABSTRACT

*The Dream of the Rood* is celebrated as one of the most beautiful poems in the Old English corpus, mostly due to its blending of Christian and Germanic heroic traditions. In this dream vision, the cross is portrayed as Christ's retainer. The result of this portrayal is one of duality: Christ as Germanic hero and Christian Savior, the cross as retainer and lord. These dualities function together to deliver a message of salvation to the Anglo-Saxon community. However, the way in which this spiritual message is brought to the Anglo-Saxon audience holds importance for the temporal, historical, and human-governed institution of the church.

Though many scholars acknowledge Christ's portrayal in *The Dream* as that of a Germanic warrior, few have addressed the relevance of his silence and how Christ should be the one to deliver His message of conquest over sin and death, offering saving Grace. Instead of the cross which becomes the mode of salvation. It is the purpose of this thesis to evaluate the importance of Christ's silence and offer an alternative reading to *The Dream of the Rood*, which does not focus on the balance of the Germanic and Christian traditions but explores the possibility of the Christian church utilizing traditional framework to assert their importance as an intercessor on man's behalf, especially in its role as vocal educator and interpreter of God's message.

## **Introduction: A Silent Savior**

“In *The Dream of the Rood* Christianity and the Germanic heroic code meet and are miraculously fused” – Bruce Mitchell

*The Dream of the Rood* is celebrated as one of the most beautiful poems in the Old English corpus. It is often anthologized and has received much critical attention, mostly in reference to its blending of Christian and Germanic heroic traditions. In this dream vision, the cross as Christ’s retainer reveals to the dreamer, who is also the narrator of the poem’s frame narrative, Christ’s brave battle during the Crucifixion. The result of this portrayal is one of duality on several levels: Christ as Germanic hero and Christian Savior, the cross as retainer and lord, and the poem as a combination of oral and written traditions. These dualities function together to deliver a message of salvation to the Anglo-Saxon community. However, the way in which this eternal, spiritual message is brought to the Anglo-Saxon audience holds importance for the church, that is, the temporal, historical, and human-governed institution. The manipulations of the Germanic traditions and the dual nature of the symbolism of the cross allow the church to assert its importance as an intercessor on man’s behalf, especially in its role as vocal educator, as the interpreter of God’s message in the books of the Bible.

Christ, as a portrayal of the Germanic warrior and the Christian Savior, is expected to be of central focus to the narrative of *The Dream of the Rood*; he should be the one to deliver His message, to boast of His conquest over sin and death, and to offer saving Grace. Instead, it is the cross which appears and addresses the dreamer, becoming the mode of salvation. The content of this particular poem, therefore, suggests that the intent of the church went beyond assimilation, needing to assert both its essential role in

the salvation of man and its primacy over older Germanic customs while using the inherited oral traditions of Anglo-Saxon culture. In exploiting the symbol of Christ, the church asserts that the people need an intercessor to educate them and to speak on their behalf. Read in this light, the poem puts forth an ineffective hero in Christ due to His inaccessibility; He does not directly speak to His people to offer them comfort and salvation. In fact, Christ recedes into the background of the poem. He is a hero and a Savior, whose message must be brought forth by an intermediary in the form of the cross. I suggest in the following pages, then, that the prominent role of the cross serves a two-fold function: to diminish the power of Germanic heroes and to elevate the status of the church. As a consequence—and perhaps unintentionally—Christ’s status as the unquestionable and powerful leader is “sacrificed” since that power comes through a different medium: the cross.

Many scholars of *The Dream of the Rood* would disagree with this suggestion of a sacrifice or that the role of the cross is detrimental to the power of Christ.<sup>1</sup> Michael Swanton maintains that the suffering of the cross “succinctly and dramatically represent[s]” the Passion of Christ “without putting unwarranted words into the mouth of Christ himself” (68-69). I contend that such words would be necessary if Christ was represented as a “true” Germanic hero or if He was meant to show the power of salvation without the aid of an intercessor between the faithful Christian and God. The question guiding this thesis and my research is: according to whom and for what purpose are

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<sup>1</sup> Leslie Stratyner focuses on the importance of viewing Christ as a substitute. In oral tradition, each character in an oral formulaic text often serves as the other’s antagonist. Stratyner points out that, though Jesus is “most certainly a galvanizing force in the Rood’s development” (317), He serves as an important substitute which links him to mankind. “He not only substitutes for the Rood, he ‘substitutes’ for all mankind, making salvation possible” (317), which is of course a Christian reading of the sacrifice without recognizing the power given to the Cross.

Christ's own words "unwarranted" in this poem, especially when considering the importance of speech both in the heroic literature of Anglo-Saxon England and to religious communities in the form of preaching?

With this question in mind, the scope of this thesis will be primarily an examination of Christ's lack of speech in accordance with Germanic tradition and other Anglo-Saxon religious poetry. To begin, I will provide an overview of scholarship of *The Dream of the Rood*, mostly as it relates to the idea of Christ's silence and the question of how the poem fits into church discourse. For the purpose of this thesis, the term "church" will refer to the hierarchical institution, more specifically those in charge of making doctrinal decisions. I will further examine the role of the cross during the early medieval conversion period up until about the beginning of the eleventh century in order to demonstrate the close and ubiquitous connections between the institution of the church and its cruciform symbol in Anglo-Saxon England. Once this connection is established, I will examine the duality of both Christ and the cross, exploring the implications of Christ as both Savior and Germanic hero and the cross as both retainer and lord. Also of importance will be Christ's dual nature as both human and divine and the cross' representation of Christ's humanity. The final section will explore the importance of speech as evidenced in *The Dream of the Rood* and other Anglo-Saxon texts, such as the story of Cædmon, which highlights speech as a divine gift with the power to educate, illustrating that it is an instrument of the church/religious community. This illustration is understandable if we consider that the poem and the story of Cædmon were likely composed by a member of the church, presumably a monk.



The relatively narrow scope of a thesis necessarily imposes limits and prohibits me from addressing some issues concerning *The Dream of the Rood* that have some bearing on my discussion here. In recent years there has been much scholarship on the importance of liturgical influences on *The Dream of the Rood*. This scholarship provides much insight and helps to anchor the poem more solidly within church teachings. While I recognize the importance of these scholarly contributions with regard to Latin liturgy, I will not focus on the specific examples of such influences. I also do not wish to undermine the beauty or craftsmanship of the poem in any way when I assert that there are possible limitations to the duality of Germanic and Christian elements. Instead, I wish only to provide a possible alternative reading of the poem with regard to how these two aspects relate to each other within the poem and how we may read them in light of some larger historical and cultural contexts of Anglo-Saxon England.

## Chapter 1: An Overview of Relevant Scholarship on *The Dream of the Rood*

Much critical attention has been paid to both the Germanic content of *The Dream of the Rood* as well as to its religious significance with relation to church liturgy and iconoclasm. The debates center primarily on the dating of the poem, on the influence of Latin liturgy, and on the question of authorship. Also of central concern to many scholars is Christ's portrayal as a Germanic warrior with relation to the cross as His retainer yet slayer. More recent scholarship also discusses the oral traditional roots of the poem in terms of its formulas and use of prosopopoeia as well as applying contemporary feminist readings to the poem. Most studies deal only marginally with Christ's silence—if at all—mentioning His stoic silence and acceptance of His fate while the cross relates the action of the poem. However, most scholarship stops at the connection between Christ and the cross as essentially one entity, its vocalization of His saving Grace, without exploring the possible role the church plays in this relationship.

The poem known as *The Dream of the Rood* is located in the so-called Vercelli Book (Vercelli Biblioteca Capitolare Manuscript CXVII), whose compilation is generally dated to the latter half of the tenth century (Scragg xlii), with the twenty-three prose homilies being composed somewhere between the late ninth to later tenth centuries (Scragg xxxix). This estimate places its compilation at roughly the same time period as the compilation of many other Old English religious works, such as the *Christ* poems in the manuscript known as The Exeter Book (Krapp and Dobbie x). Also included in the Vercelli manuscript are the poems *Andreas*, *The Fates of the Apostles*, and *Elene*

(Swanton 4-5). The dating of the composition of *The Dream of the Rood* rather than of the manuscript proves difficult but lies at the heart of debates concerning the poem's authorship and its connection to the runic passages on the Ruthwell Cross. If the Vercelli manuscript was compiled in the tenth century, when were the individual poems and sermons completed? Is it possible that *The Dream of the Rood* was composed before the construction of the Ruthwell Cross? Is it possible that either Cædmon or Cynewulf could have composed the poem?

Dating the poem is crucial to recent scholarship due to interest in the runic verses on the Ruthwell Cross.<sup>2</sup> For the poem, the stone cross establishes a precedence of the cross as a symbol of the church. As will be discussed in a later section, the carvings on the Ruthwell Cross directly link it to church teachings. The runes which parallel *The Dream of the Rood* alongside these teachings further link the speaking cross to the voice of the church. These runes either echo or inspire *The Dream of the Rood* depending on the dating of the manuscript example. In the past, scholars such as Bruce Dickins and Alan S. C. Ross mention the difficulty in answering the question whether Ruthwell is the original and the Vercelli text is an expansion. Equally troublesome is dating the Ruthwell Cross itself; dates vary from around 670 AD to early in the twelfth century (Dickins and Ross 6-7). More recent scholarship by Eamonn O'Carragain dates the cross to the mid-eighth century and places more emphasis on the relation between the Vercelli text and the Ruthwell Cross, the prominence given to the cross in the text and its

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<sup>2</sup> The Ruthwell Cross is a "sculptural monument of the Northumbrian Renaissance" which stands approximately 6 meters high and is made of two blocks of red sandstone. The panels of the cross contain runic lines which resemble the text of *The Dream of the Rood* and pictorial engravings of Christian scenes such as the Crucifixion, the Annunciation, Christ's miraculous healings, and "worthy women" from Biblical stories (Lapidge, et al. 403-404). The scenes are both historical and Biblical.

relevance to the religious community. This relationship is important when considering the purpose of having the cross deliver a message of redemption while the Savior himself remains stoically silent. For the scope of this thesis, the exact date will not be essential since the primary concern will be how the poem relates to the elevation of the cross and the role of the church during Anglo-Saxon England more generally; the conceptualized dating O’Carragain provides helps us to understand the function of the speaking cross in *The Dream* as a teacher and intercessor. In this regard, O’Carragain’s research proves informative as to how the runic text interacts with the pictorial carvings on the cross. In his work *Ritual and the Rood*, O’Carragain explores the connection between the runes on the Ruthwell Cross with both *The Dream* text in the Vercelli Manuscript and the pictorial engravings on the Cross. He proposes an order to the story told by the Cross, as if someone were to walk in a complete circle around it. O’Carragain’s work concentrates on liturgical influences on the Cross as well as how the Cross itself functions as an educator, teaching the viewer both the historical and ecclesiastical importance of Christ.

Besides the poem’s connection to the Ruthwell Cross, scholars in the past had concerned themselves with identifying the poem’s author in order to explain the themes of the poem based on a comparison of such an author’s other texts. The two prime candidates for *The Dream of the Rood* author are Cædmon and Cynewulf because we know of other texts attributable to them. The midnight revelation and emphasis on the power of speech in *The Dream* make Cædmon a likely candidate for some, such as G. Stephens and Haigh. However, even though it lacks the runic signature, its style has been classified as “Cynewulfian in manner” by stylistic critics (Dietrich qtd. in Swanton 59), while others note that there are shared features of *The Dream of the Rood* and other

Cynewulfian poems, but nothing to conclude they are indeed the work of the same author (Swanton 59).<sup>3</sup> The poem deals with subject matter similar to poems attributed to Cynewulf such as the finding of the True Cross in *Elene*, Christ's Ascension in *Christ II*, and the idea of conversion as expressed in *Juliana*. Additionally, *The Dream of the Rood* and two other Cynewulfian poems (*Elene* and *Fates of the Apostles*) appear in the Vercelli manuscript together. For this thesis, the importance will not lie in ascribing authorship to the poem but in analyzing the importance of some thematic elements that have been used to discuss authorship. The power of speech in relation to the church is a concern because priests use their words in order to deliver religious messages to the congregation as they are written in the books of the Bible, interpreting the word of God for the listeners. Also essential is the concern of speech as a human action ascribed to the cross rather than to Christ, bringing the cross closer to the audience and isolating a silent Christ as unapproachable God rather than man.

The question of whether Cædmon or Cynewulf is the author of the poem does not solve a central issue in the eyes of those critics who contend that the poem is the work of two authors, with lines 78 forward being composed at a later date (Dickins and Ross 18). The argument that the second half is a later addition stems from both a perceived handwriting change in the manuscript as well as a shift in subject matter.<sup>4</sup> The Judgment which comes in the final lines is the item of scrutiny. The cross moves from relating the scene of the Crucifixion to what roles Christ and the cross will play in the Second Coming.

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<sup>3</sup> Swanton cites Dietrich as believing the characteristics of the poem to be "Cynewulfian" while Das and Schaar admit to shared features that do not necessarily point to shared authorship.

<sup>4</sup> R.P. Wülcker and H. Bütow as mentioned in Swanton's introduction (p. 5). However, this handwriting change is a scribal signal evident in many manuscripts such as *Beowulf*.

Nu ðu miht gehyran, hæleð min se leofa,  
þæt ic bealuwara weorc gebiden hæbbe,  
sarra sorga. Is nu sæl cumen  
þæt me weorðiað wide ond side  
menn ofer moldan, ond eall þeos mære gesceaft,  
gebiddaþ him to þyssum beacne. (lines 78-84a).

(Now you might hear, beloved warrior of mine, that I here endured the work of wicked ones, of painful sorrows. Now has the time come that men across the world worship me far and wide and all this famous creation seek for themselves this beacon.)<sup>5</sup>

The section sounds like a conclusion, but then the poem continues for a further 70 lines.

Was the section added for didactic purposes later on? The answer to this question for many others such as Michael Swanton is a decided “no.” Swanton disputes the idea of two authors, citing a continued theme of salvation through the cross and hope after the symbolic death of the Savior. Furthermore, Swanton maintains that the stylistic change in handwriting is a scribal change consistent throughout the rest of the manuscript. It is merely one scribe who is now writing in a smaller hand in order to conserve space. The questions of whether the scribe follows different punctuation practices from that point on is also debatable since the punctuation is “irregular” and “syntactical” throughout the entire manuscript. Swanton contends that the change is one of scribal style, not of authorial voice (5-6). In terms of this thesis, the perceived change in style holds great relevance but not in terms of authorship. A shift does, in fact, occur in the section, but it is one of power and position. The duality of the cross plays an essential role that will be explained in relation with these lines where the cross shifts away from its role as a mere retainer to gain power as an aid in the salvation of man. It is at this point in the poem that

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<sup>5</sup> Old English text throughout this thesis is from *The Dream of the Rood* edited by Bruce Dickins and Alan S.C. Ross, 1966 without macrons and with the substitution of “w” for the runic *wynn*. All translations of *The Dream of the Rood* are my own.

the focus moves from the actual Crucifixion to the building of the church until the time of Judgment and Christ's return.

In terms of church teachings, the influence of Latin liturgy on *The Dream of the Rood* has been extensively explored. As Eamonn O'Carragain notes in *Ritual and the Rood*, the Gospels do not seem to influence the poet as much as poetic and liturgical traditions (3-4). Other scholars, for example, Rosemary Woolf, Howard Patch, and Bruce Mitchell, have advocated the connection of the poem to Latin liturgy as well.<sup>6</sup> It would exceed the scope of this thesis to explore all of the important liturgical influences, but two particular scholarly studies warrant mentioning as they provide interesting counterpoints as well as useful complements to my own arguments. Thomas D. Hill, in "The Cross as Symbolic Body: An Anglo-Latin Liturgical Analogue to *The Dream of the Rood*," utilizes liturgical practices to assert that the Cross and Christ are one entity in the poem. Hill bases this claim on a passage in the *Regularis Concordia*, the description of a "liturgical ceremony in which the cross on the altar is 'deposited' for the three days from Good Friday to the dawn of Easter Sunday in a receptacle which represents the tomb of Christ" (298). Such a liturgical practice uses the cross as a symbol of Christ's body. However, evidence in the poem itself seems to dispute this claim of unity since the sufferings of the cross and Christ's body respectively do not fully correspond to one

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<sup>6</sup> Rosemary Woolf writes in "Doctrinal Influences on *The Dream of the Rood*" that "all literary and historical probability is against the supposition that nothing but the poet's personal inspiration lies between the gospel narrative and the *Dream of the Rood*...The influences to be considered are in fact not of the kind that can be isolated in any specific text, but rather those of the religious thought of the poet's period" (137). Howard Patch, author of "Liturgical Influence in the *Dream of the Rood*," states, "in the *Dream of the Rood* there are several clear allusions to the liturgy; even the phrases at times seem to be borrowed, especially from the hymn *Pange lingua*" (256).

In *The Battle of Maldon and Other Old English Poems*, Bruce Mitchell writes, "*The Dream of the Rood* is firmly fixed in the Catholic tradition of the Veneration of the Cross...It seems likely that the poet knew the Holy Week liturgy, especially the Good Friday Adoration of the Cross and the Latin hymns of Venantius Fortunatus *Vexilla Regis* and *Pange Lingua*" (124).

another. In his final assertions about what this liturgical parallel reveals about the poet of *The Dream*, Hill also usefully speculates on the poet's milieu of learnedness as important in terms of church influence. He states, "the poetic and theological sophistication of the poet suggests that the poet had read (or listened) widely and thought deeply about the central themes of Christian history" (300). A well-versed and educated poet may also suggest that he was a member of the church who could then incorporate specific teachings in his poem that might express the interests of the larger religious institution of which he was a member.

Aidan Conti's "An Anonymous Homily for Palm Sunday, *The Dream of the Rood*, and The Progress of Ælfric's Reform" also brings up important points concerning *The Dream of the Rood* and the liturgical tradition. Usually the influence of Latin liturgy on the poem is emphasized instead of considering how the oral tradition of the culture may influence how the liturgy is interpreted, which would explain some of the perceived discrepancies between the Gospels and *The Dream*. During the time of Ælfric of Eynsham, that is, the late tenth to the early eleventh centuries, reform was begun to create more accurate vernacular renderings of liturgical readings (377). However, some homilies, like the anonymous homily for Palm Sunday discussed by Conti,<sup>7</sup> reveal that features of the older Germanic tradition rather than strict Biblical interpretation was still present even in liturgical texts. Like *The Dream of the Rood*, the Palm Sunday homily presents Christ's disciples as possible warrior thanes.<sup>8</sup> Another similarity is the action of

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<sup>7</sup> This homily remains unpublished, to the best of my knowledge. In the *Dictionary of Old English*, the homily carries the short title HomS18 and is identified by Cameron number B3.2.18.

<sup>8</sup> "As a result, the Old English homilist, who has changed the Pharisees' request into an imperative issued by Pilate, seems to have understood that the tomb was to be guarded so that none of Christ's thanes should forcefully come, 'þæt nane strange ne cumin his þegna', and steal the body" (378).



the cross which bows to present Christ's body to His followers.<sup>9</sup> One of the conclusions Conti draws is that "though the Old English homilist may have been a poor Latinist, he was well versed in vernacular tradition" (379). However, Conti seems to suggest that the only explanation for such blending is unintentional on the part of church leaders who are not strong in Latin. This conclusion could be the basis of these perceived discrepancies in the vernacular liturgy, but is not necessarily the only possible conclusion that can be drawn. Rather, it could be assumed that in an attempt to reach a primarily Anglo-Saxon audience, liturgy was adapted to the culture of Anglo-Saxon England, drawing off of the older oral tradition and sense of their earlier heroic code.

The oral traditional connections in *The Dream of the Rood* have also been explored at length, especially the concern as to how the poem can be read in a heroic context.<sup>10</sup> Of particular note for this thesis are articles by Alain Renoir and Leslie Stratyner. The central focus of Renoir's work is the concept of prosopopoeia in *The Dream of the Rood* and the evidences of a common theme across Indo-European traditions: "an account of the earlier life of a wooden artifact" (340). As the concern of Renoir's work revolves around oral-formulaic patterns in written texts, his research can

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<sup>9</sup> "After Pilate orders the body of Christ to be handed over to Joseph of Arimathea, the homilist adds that Joseph and Nicodemus then immediately came to the cross and that it bowed down to them forthwith—' & hi ða sona to ðære rode becomon & heo him sona to aleat'" (379).

<sup>10</sup> The heroic conventions will be discussed at more length in chapter 3. However, to name a few scholars, Rosemary Woolf comments in "Doctrinal Influences on *The Dream of the Rood*" that "the presentation of Christ in the *Dream of the Rood* as a young warrior advancing to battle has been commented upon as an example of the common Anglo-Saxon convention of treating Christian subject matter in heroic terms. The conception of Christ as a warrior is, however, not peculiar to the Anglo-Saxon imagination. In visual art, for instance, it was a common Mediterranean theme" (144). In her work "Gift Giving as a Vital Element of Salvation in *The Dream of the Rood*," Adelheid L.J. Thieme remarks, "one significant ingredient of the Germanic code of conduct, which is often alluded to in the poem, has so far been overlooked. Repeatedly, the poet refers to the practice of gift exchange, which prevailed in Anglo-Saxon society" (108). Burton Raffel also notes the connection between traditions: "*The Dream of the Rood* evokes the world of secular poetry by referring to Christ as 'the young hero' (39) and to his disciples as loyal retainers burying their 'mighty prince' (69)" (54).

be applied to this thesis. Even though O’Carragain mentions that the background of the Cross in *The Dream of the Rood* avoids a noble ancestry in order to relate the cross closer to the people, the traditional portrayal of the background of a wooden object such as the wooden ship in Catullus’ *Poem IV* and the rune-stick in *The Husband’s Message* establishes a common oral traditional motif (Renoir 339-340), which could explain the difference in background between the cross in *The Dream* and the cross in the Gospels. The focus on the early life of the cross in this motif also draws a parallel to the focus on the cross’ life after the Crucifixion, its burial and finding, helping to foreground the cross and the church rather than Christ in the poem. Leslie Stratyner concentrates on other oral tradition formulas in her discussion of the poem. She contends that the poem is both “oral-derived” and textually derived: “The poem...straddles both worlds, having ties to both textuality and orality” (309). To develop her argument, she concentrates on the pattern of the “Battle with the Monster” sequence. This pattern is normally applied only to *Beowulf*, but such a comparison helps to draw important parallels between the two texts, which are often avoided due to their difference in genre. However, Stratyner notes that *The Dream of the Rood* “can aptly be termed ‘heroic verse’” and that “the merging of genres of riddle, dream-vision, and Christian narrative complicates things significantly” (310). In other words, as will be important to consider for this thesis, *The Dream* blends genres (through the use of prosopopoeia and other riddlic features as well as dream vision), which also makes possible the comparison of this short religious poem with more traditional heroic poetry like *Beowulf*.

*The Dream of the Rood* merges more than cultural traditions; it combines elements of several poetic genres. What must be explored is how each of these elements

work together and for what purpose. The impact of Christian ideals on the Germanic heroic tradition need to be considered rather than assuming the duality in the poem does not benefit one tradition over the other. Considering the cross as a representative of the Christian church and how the power of speech designates temporal authority provides a key to understanding how the two cultures function together in the poem.

## Chapter 2: The Cross and the Church

While the idea that the cross represents Christ is important to the poem, the cross's connection to and significance within the church is equally important. As a symbol of Christ it represents the Christian church as well as Christ Himself. It fulfills an inherent dual role as a symbol for both Christ and the church which proves beneficial to the Christian church. At the time of the conversion, Anglo-Saxons were already familiar with the cross in their own cultural contexts. In his work, *The Anglo-Saxon Cross*, William Stevens explores the connection between the Anglo-Saxons and the Celts and Germanic peoples in order to understand pre-Christian uses of the cross in the marking of boundaries and in the blessing of objects such as cups and jewelry (87-95). He maintains that the cross held mystical power and stately significance for the Anglo-Saxons (Stevens 43). More recently, scholarship sponsored by Catherine Karkov, Sarah Larratt Keefer, and Karen Louise Jolly conclude that "references to and descriptions or depictions of the cross are not as simple and straightforward as one might think" (xv). However, they do agree that the symbol was prevalent in Anglo-Saxon England and held much significance. Therefore, establishing a connection to between the cross and the Christian church is essential in order to harness the supposed existing reverence in Anglo-Saxon England, reshaping it for Christ and His church.

Crosses existed in England before Christianity spread to the British Isles. Great stone crosses had been built presumably in honor of past chiefs to commemorate their victories or their deaths, according to old Celtic traditions of erecting large obelisks to honor chieftains. The size of the stone directly correlated to the value of the tribute paid

(Stevens 43), suggesting a social connection between the cross and the people which could be shifted to the church through association. From these pre-Christian traditions, cross worship begins to blend with Christian ideals, leading to “curious mixtures of Christian and pagan” in natural cures such as in the charm for unfruitful land (Stevens 35). “This charm contains a prayer which is significant in its conception of the cross. ‘Commend thy power,’ it runs, ‘to the praise and glory of Christ and St. Mary, and the Holy Rood’” (Stevens 35). The charm resembles a Christian prayer to the cross, even though it is for healing the land, implying the great power of the cross in the minds of both pagans and Christians since it also prescribes the making and carrying of crosses. This power could benefit the church, giving it prominence since it could possibly be seen as equally powerful as the sign which represented it, profiting off the secular and ritual connections of the cross. Another shared cross usage involved utilizing monumental crosses to mark boundaries. The church, like earlier inhabitants, used these at the corners of graveyards “to mark the limits of church property” (Stevens 61). Such markers established a constant visual connection between the cross and the church.

One of the strongest ways the church was able to mark its boundaries and to establish the cross’ power in terms of Christianity and the church was to portray it as a powerful military/heroic weapon. As Karen L. Jolly notes in her essay “Tapping the Power of the Cross: Who and for Whom?”, “the cross as an object or gesture was a powerful weapon taken from the liturgical arsenal of the church and applied to pragmatic concerns” (58). Two key stories emphasize this heroic quality, proving it as a means of obtaining victory. The first story is that of Constantine’s vision, recounted in the Old English poem *Elene* attributed to Cynewulf. This poem is an *invention crucis* story from

an established Latin source. According to the story, Constantine receives a vision of the cross on the eve of battle with the Huns.<sup>11</sup> He is told by a messenger that the cross is the symbol of victory. In the version told by Cynewulf, the cross itself is inscribed with the message “Mid þys beacne ðu/on þam frecnan fære feond oferswiðesð,/geletest lað werod” (lines 92b-94a) (“With this emblem you will overpower the enemy in the perilous offensive; you will halt hostile armies.”).<sup>12</sup> The next morning Constantine commands the battle standard to be formed in the shape of the cross and with it leading the army onto the field, the Romans triumph over the Huns and Constantine is converted. This story of the Roman emperor is important for the church in that it establishes the power of the cross within the Christian context. The cross was powerful enough to convert the emperor and eventually give recognition to Christianity as an official religion, relieving its followers of the fear of persecution by the Roman government. Another aspect which would be important to the church in Anglo-Saxon England is that the story of Constantine and the cross demonstrates heroic values to which the Anglo-Saxon audience can relate: victory on the battle-field. Even much of the battle imagery is the same as in Germanic heroic context, such as the “Beasts of Battle” theme:

Byman sungon  
 hlude for hergum. Hrefn weorces gefeah,  
 urigfeðra, earn sið beheold,  
 wælhreowra wig. Wulf sang ahof,  
 holtes gehleða (lines 109b-113a).

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<sup>11</sup> As Cynewulf relates the story, the vision is unequivocally that of a cross, echoing language as used in *The Dream of the Rood* when he refers to the sign as a “beacne.” However, as noted by Calvin Kendall in his essay “From Sign to Vision: The Ruthwell Cross and *The Dream of the Rood*” early relations of the Constantine story refer merely to the vision as a “sign” (134).

<sup>12</sup> This and all subsequent translations of *Elene* are from S. A. J. Bradley in his *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (pages 167-168). The Old English from *The Vercelli Book* edited by George Philip Krapp, 1932 (pages 68-69).

(Trumpets sang out loudly before the armies, the raven exulted in the action, the moist-feathered eagle watched the advance and the warring of brutal men. The wolf, denizen of the wood, sent up its song.)

The passage links the battle to the Germanic tradition, effectively blending it with Christianity in the same fashion as has been noted of *The Dream of the Rood*. Equally important for the church in this battle scene is the emphasis on the victory being attributable to the cross, leading to Constantine's conversion. Such a story empowers the church and re-emphasizes the bond between the cross and Christian tradition rather than the ancient beliefs about crosses, even though it maintains the supernatural power of the sign itself. The acceptance of the mystical powers of the cross is equally important in that it empowers the cross in its own right, something also seen in *The Dream of the Rood*.

Another important ecclesiastic and heroic story about the cross hits closer to home for the Anglo-Saxons: the story of King Oswald.<sup>13</sup> According to the Venerable Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Oswald, before battle with the heathens, "set up the sign of the holy cross and...asked God that He would grant his heavenly aid to those who trusted in Him in their dire need" (III.2, p. 144). Oswald's army triumphs over its enemies and the spot where the cross was set up becomes holy ground where many miracles occur. This story of the power of the cross once again eclipses the heroic tradition as in the case of Constantine. More importantly, it shows that praying through the cross delivers power and victory. The first victory credited to the cross is military, something to which Anglo-Saxons can relate. This victory establishes the power of the

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<sup>13</sup> Oswald was King of Northumbria during the mid seventh century. Many of his conquests may have been exaggerated by historians such as Bede, but he was the Christian king who involved himself in the development of the church. When he became king, he "asked the monastery of Iona for help to convert Northumbria to Christianity" (Lapidge 347), and he was the first Anglo-Saxon royal saint.

cross. The second, and higher, victory is that of the church. Their use of the cross gives access to a more awesome power than a mere king possesses: a God who makes military victory possible and provides triumph in more miraculous ways. Seen in this light, the ecclesiastic power of the cross becomes more powerful than the power associated with heroic tradition, a theme later seen in the poem *The Dream of the Rood*.

Oswald's story leads to another way the church can establish the power of the cross on Christian terms: the performance of miracles. The cross itself is shown to possess divine powers. Immediately after Bede's account of Oswald's heroic victory follows the story about the miraculous powers of the ground where the cross stands and the king prayed. Bede claims, "innumerable miracles of healing are known to have been performed...Even to this day many folk take splinters of wood from this holy cross, which they put into water, and when any sick men or beasts drink of it or are sprinkled with it, they are at once restored to health" (III.2, p. 145). In fact, the rest of this chapter section in Bede's work relates tale after tale of miraculous occurrences. The nearby brothers of the church in Hexham build a church on this spot, and one of the brothers is cured of a broken arm overnight due to his placing of moss from the surface of the cross on his arm while he slept.

Setting a precedent for the worship of the cross by the dreamer in *The Dream of the Rood* is the evidence of extreme reverence for the cross within the church. According to William Stevens, worship of the cross begins with Constantine's vision in 312 AD (11). He claims that up to this point the cross had been a shameful remembrance for



Christians (11).<sup>14</sup> The claim that the cross was an embarrassment for Christians before Constantine's vision is highly questionable; however, two major cross festivals are often associated with the fourth century, suggesting that reverence was growing during this time. Beginning in the year 335 AD, at the dedication of the Holy Sepulchre, on the fourteenth of September, the festival of the Exultation of the Holy Cross takes place (Swanton 44-45). Scholars speculate that this festival was probably fully established by the early half of the seventh century when Heraclius recovered the cross relics in 614 AD that had been stolen by the Persians (Swanton 44-45). A second festival in honor of the cross during this time period is the feast of the Invention of the Holy Cross held on May 3<sup>rd</sup> (Swanton 45). The festivals are evidence of the veneration of this symbol within the church and its communities, indicating the increasing value and importance of the cross to the church. It receives its own celebrations as if a saint, Mary, or Christ himself, taking on its own personality. It is the church which provides the cross personality and power through their reverence toward it. The church fathers give the cross ranking "foremost place among the Saints, as if it had a sacred personality of its own" (Stevens 35). Further, because the institution of the church reinforces this power through the exultation of the object, the cross is more strongly fixed as a symbol of the church as well. The two become insolubly linked in Christian imagination as well as in visual representations.

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<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that many of Stevens' conclusions have been deemed debatable or incorrect by more recent scholarship as Thomas D. Hill explains in his preface to Stevens' work. However, much of the information, especially its considerations of the cross' role in penitentials and Old English charms is important as well as the other sources he references. His information is not necessarily faulty, just the conclusions he draws from the information. (Hill 3).

By the third century, as mentioned, there was widespread devotion to the cross (McEntire 395). And, by the middle of the fourth century, “use of the cross among the faithful [as an abstract devotional sign] became ubiquitous, accompanying almost every action and found on almost every object of daily use” (Swanton 43). “The rituals and remedies found in the Anglo-Saxon prayer, medical, and other service books...suggest that signing the cross to draw on divine power to ward off or cure physical and metaphysical ills was a common and practical form of spiritual devotion in Anglo-Saxon England shared by laity and clergy alike” (Jolly 74). These activities of signing and prayer were encouraged by the church fathers. Bede recommended to Bishop Egbert that they should “fortify themselves through the sign of the cross” (McEntire 395). Ælfric composed homilies encouraging praying to the cross.<sup>15</sup> He wrote that “Christian men truly should bow to the hallowed rood in the name of Jesus” (qtd. by Stevens 29) and “In the holy rood token is our blessing, and to the cross we pray, by no means however to the tree itself, but to the Almighty Lord who hung for us on the holy rood” (qtd. by Stevens 30). This last instruction provides key insight to the prominence of the cross in the church community. The need to distinguish between praying just to the cross and to its symbolic representation of Christ suggests its symbolic nature may have changed from simply a representation of Christ. Ælfric was presumably afraid of the possibility of idol worship; with objects there is always the worry that some will pray to the object itself, as they did in both pre-Christian and Christian times. This possibility is seen in *The Dream of the Rood* at the end of the poem where the dreamer prays directly to the cross for help

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<sup>15</sup> “We ever honour it for the honour of Christ” –translation of an excerpt from an Ælfric homily provided by Sandra McEntire in “The Devotional Context of the Cross Before AD 1000,” p. 394.

and salvation. If church members could forget the cross' being a representation of Christ only, so, too, could others who merely associated the cross with the church, an association from which the church could possibly profit by being seen as the mode of reaching Christ and salvation.

As the cross gained power, almost to the point of deification, so too did the church gain power and prominence in the surrounding community. The sign of the cross and swearing or praying to the cross soon became commonplace in otherwise secular contexts. By the fifth century both ecclesiastical and legal documents bear the mark of the cross at the beginning and at the end where the document would be signed (Stevens 36). And though this marking is not necessarily directly linked to the Christian church since the cross had secular importance among the Anglo-Saxons before the appearance of Christianity, it might point once again to a blending of the two cultural uses of the cross with prominence belonging to the ecclesiastical usage rather than the secular usage since many churchmen served as witnesses at legal proceedings, urging also the use of oaths sworn to the cross (Stevens 37).

A final, visual reminder of the close connection between the church and its central symbol is illustrated by the architecture changes in church construction by the ninth century. In the year 810 AD, the first church was constructed in the shape of a cross: the St. Peter monastery in Bernicia (Stevens 19-20). Up to that point, it was not a conventional shape for a church; most were rectangular or square. Indeed, this shape did not become the norm until the time of the crusades (Stevens 19-20). The church in the case of St. Peter is literally a cross and the cross is literally a church—a powerful visual reminder of this association as they exist in the same spatial area. Another visual

reminder of the connection between the church and the cross would have been large carved stone crosses like the Ruthwell Cross. As mentioned earlier, the engravings on the Cross are arranged so that someone walking in a complete circle around it could “read” stories of the Bible. This abundance of examples for the historical roots of the link between the church and its symbol demonstrates that by the time *The Dream of the Rood* is composed the church and the cross can be believed to be an indistinguishable unit.

Besides historical scholarship, feminist scholarship also connects the cross directly to the church, especially in terms of its portrayal in *The Dream of the Rood*. As John Canuteson noted in 1969, the cross seems to represent the church as the bride of Christ. In doing so, it reaches a “nearness to Christ that rivals that of Mary” (296). Nearly thirty years later, Mary Dockray-Miller expands this idea of the feminized Cross in *The Dream* in order to focus on “gender performance in the poem” (1). Exploring how Christ’s masculinity is portrayed, Dockray-Miller argues that in order to be a masculine hero, Christ needs an “oppositional femininity” to make him “superior and dominating” (3). The cross fills that role in the poem. It is mounted and embraced as if in sexual union with Christ. Viewing the cross in this feminine light helps to illuminate why the cross is a passive, reluctant thane who must obediently watch the death of Christ without acting. What I find most useful in this feminist point of view is the reading of the cross as the bride of Christ, as it strongly supports the connection between the cross and the church, further reminding us that when we perceive the cross in *The Dream of the Rood*, we perceive the church. This proposed reading concentrates on the masculine Christ dominating over the cross, mounting and embracing it. In this light, the coming together

of cross and Christ is like the symbolic marriage between Christ and the church.<sup>16</sup> The only way this interpretation can work, of course, is if readers and listeners connect the cross with the church. The Anglo-Saxon audience would have been familiar with the idea of the church as the bride of Christ. Other religious poetry, such as *Christ I*, connects Christ to the church as its foundation and its cornerstone.<sup>17</sup> This idea of a union between Christ and his church makes it possible, then, to view the cross as its representation in the poem, as Christ's bride.

As illustrated by the many examples of usage of the cross, the Anglo-Saxon cultural world was saturated with the symbol. It provided several different connections to the institution of the church: social, visual, ritual, spatial. Each of these helped to solidify the psychological connection in the minds of the Anglo-Saxon audience. It would be reasonable to assume that by the time of *The Dream of the Rood*, the audience could conceivably link the cross, and thus its voice, to the institution of the church.

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<sup>16</sup> “Christ refers to himself and to the fact that he will be taken away by the metaphor of the bridegroom in Matthew 9:15; John the Baptist denies that he is the expected savior and mentions Christ as the bridegroom in John 3:28-29” (Canuteson 294).

<sup>17</sup> ðu eart se weallstan þe ða wyrhtan iu  
 wiðwurpon to weorce. Wel þe geriseð  
 þæt þu heafod sie healle mærrre,  
 ond gesomnige side weallas  
 fæste gefoge, flint unbræcne,  
 þæt geond eorðb...g eall eagne gesihþe  
 wundrien to worlde wuldres ealdor (lines 2-8) from *The Exeter Book* edited by Krapp and Dobbie, 1936. 3.

“You are the wall stone which the workers previously threw away from the work. It is well appropriate to you that you be the head of the glorious hall and connect together the broad walls firmly, the unbroken stone, so that all, throughout the earth-settlement, with the sight of their eyes, might marvel at the Lord of Glory in the world.” (translation my own)

### Chapter 3: The Duality of Christ and the Cross

#### Section 1: Silencing the Germanic Tradition with a Silent Savior

“What has Ingeld to do with Christ?” questions Alcuin famously during the late eighth century in a letter to a Mercian bishop (qtd. in Duncan 29).<sup>18</sup> His question suggests there should be a boundary between Christian doctrine and Germanic heroic traditions. This idea of boundaries had been a question for the Church fathers even since the time of Tertullian as church leaders debated the use of secular works in terms of Christian faith. However, not all members of the clergy were of the same opinion as Alcuin, and some did, in fact, recognize the value of secular texts within the context of the church as a means of “reinforcing their faith” (Janson 103).<sup>19</sup> *The Dream of the Rood* exemplifies how Ingeld can connect to Christ and provide benefits for the institution of the church. Previous scholarship has focused on the unifying aspects of the converging cultural influences in *The Dream of the Rood*, celebrating its positive blending of older Germanic traditions with newer Christian ones. Christ’s portrayal becomes dualistic in nature as He functions in the role of both Germanic hero and Christian Savior. The argument has been that the action of Christ, his leaping upon the cross to sacrifice His life, gives him power in this dual role. The passivity of the Passion, the acceptance of the

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<sup>18</sup> In 797, Alcuin, who was unhappy with the preoccupation of church members with Germanic legends and songs declared, “Let the words of God be read when the clergy dine together. It is fitting on such occasions to listen to a reader, not a harper; to he sermon of the Fathers, not the songs of the heathen...” (qtd. in Frank 91).

<sup>19</sup> “Men like Augustine and Jerome...asked themselves whether it was right to go on reading and enjoying the pagan philosophers and poets. They did represent culture, but at the same time they might tempt people away from the path of righteous learning...Christians should be allowed to read non-Christian works, but only so as to find better ways of reinforcing their faith...The aim was to absorb their knowledge and their elegant written style, and to use them in a different way, to wrest weapons from the hands of pagans, as the saying has it” (Janson 103).

suffering, is transferred to the cross and allows the Anglo-Saxon audience to embrace Christ and the faith He represents more easily because He faces the crucifixion as a warrior who must fulfill a duty in order to benefit His people. On the surface, the view seems validated that the two cultural traditions indeed play a full role within the poem so that assimilation occurs naturally. Christianity could be seen as a natural extension of the *comitatus* system around which Anglo-Saxon culture is thought to have been based: one more Lord performing gloriously in order to secure gifts of great value for His retainers.<sup>20</sup> However, important elements are missing in Christ's portrayal in *The Dream of the Rood* for this "multi-cultural" equality truly to exist. Most importantly for my argument, the glorified actions are not those of Christ, nor does He speak in His dual role as hero and Savior.

Before focusing on the significance of Christ's role as both Germanic hero and Christian Savior, it is important to consider how the two cultural traditions are seen to merge successfully in the poem. The vocabulary provides one basis of harmony.<sup>21</sup> Christ is referred to as *dryhten* (line 64), meaning "lord," and *cyning* (line 56), meaning "king." These terms originally had only secular meanings referring to political rank within the *comitatus* system. However, after the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons these terms acquired Christian meanings also designating the Heavenly Lord and King. The cross

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<sup>20</sup> As observed by the Roman historian Tacitus, the heroic code revolves primarily around the relationship between a chief/lord and his loyal retainers/followers. A delicate balance exists between the power and strength of a lord and the loyalty and strength of his retainers. According to Tacitus, the chiefs are "mature men whose worth has had prior approval" (Rives 82). These men are followed by retainers of great strength who have or can and will prove their worth in battle. The power of the chief depends on not only the strength of his followers but also their number; a large following increases his reputation in neighboring states as well as drawing more retainers (Rives 82). The retainer must fight for the lord and not leave the battlefield alive if his lord has been slain.

<sup>21</sup> The harmony of vocabulary based on both Germanic, secular meanings as well as religious/Christian meanings has also been noted in *The Seafarer* where *dryht* serves for both temporal lord as well as Lord.

and the disciples, all of Christ's followers, become *dryhtnes þegnas* (line 75): the (Christian) Lord's thanes. Furthermore, much of Christ's crucifixion is described in heroic terminology with which the audience would have been acquainted from their inherited pre-Christian tradition. The cross speaks of warriors who use arrows to pierce it as if in a battle. "Forleton me þa *hilderincas* / standan steame bedrifenne; eall ic wæs mid *strælum* forwundod" (lines 61b-62b).<sup>22</sup> ("Then *warriors* relinquished me, standing covered with blood; I was entirely wounded with *arrows*."") But the vocabulary choice poses an important question to consider: was it a conscious effort on the part of the poet to choose terminology reminiscent of the older tradition?

As has also been noted about the development of classical languages, Old English had to adapt its vocabulary based on availability of terms and knowledge of concepts. Each language has had to either adapt its own extant or develop new vocabulary to explain a new idea introduced into the culture or borrow terminology from another language, which had already absorbed the new cultural idea. Christianity, as a relatively new concept in Anglo-Saxon England, needed to be explained. As Tore Janson notes in *A Natural History of Latin*, common words in Latin acquired new Christian meaning in texts such as the Bible (translated into Latin by Jerome) and hymns. In the example he cites,

The word *dominus* means 'master' or 'lord.' It is usually used in reference to the master of a slave, but in Christian contexts it always means the Lord with a capital 'L'...The word *confiteri* means 'confess' and is in origin a term used in court, but among the Christians it acquires the meaning 'to confess one's faith in,' and the related noun *confessio* 'confession' in turn comes to mean 'a confession of one's faith.' (79)

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<sup>22</sup> Italics added for emphasis.



In other words, the ideas encapsulated within the abstraction called Christianity were adaptable to the accepted cultural ideals of the Romans. This same adaptation can be seen in Old English as well. Albert Keiser explains in his work *The Influence of Christianity on the Vocabulary of Old English Poetry*, “great spiritual movements...are bound to influence the language or languages which serve as the medium of their expression. Thus Christianity in its attempt to reveal ultimate truth in the speech of man has fashioned to a considerable extent the instrument for conveying its meaning. Either old material is utilized and takes on a new meaning, or a new word is created or adopted with the new idea” (7). Native speakers of Old English lacked the vocabulary to explain the concept without borrowing or changing already existing vocabulary.

Much of the vocabulary used to explain the concept of Christianity in Old English came from existing vocabulary. According to Charles Barber in *The English Language: A Historical Introduction*, “to enlarge its vocabulary, Old English depended mainly on its own resources, not on borrowings from other languages” (120). Speakers formed new words by using prefixes and suffixes as well as by forming compounds. Although many were, not all terms in connection with Christianity could be borrowed from Latin or speakers would not necessarily understand the context. So, even in terms of Christianity, “Old English made considerable use of its native language material. Sometimes existing words were simply transferred to Christian use...Sometimes new words were coined from native elements [for example, *þrines* which means “threeness” for the idea of the Trinity]” (Barber 122). Of course, the words the church chooses to use in order to express these new Christian concepts to the Anglo-Saxon audience must be carefully considered. The Old English word which could accurately represent Christ needed to

relate to the heroic context if it were to prove beneficial to the church and provide a clear frame of reference for the Anglo-Saxon audience. If we return to the term *dryhten* (line 64), which meant “lord” of a band of retainers to the Anglo-Saxons in a secular context, we begin to see why this specific word was chosen to represent the idea of Christ. He, too, is a lord to whom service should be paid. He requires loyalty in return for the great gift of Heaven (which is often portrayed as bejeweled in medieval literature and would go along with the idea of Christ as a gold-giver). The idea of a lord who deserves the respect and reverence of his followers is not unfamiliar to the people. That he would sacrifice himself to perform great feats for the sake of glory and his group is also readily acceptable. The adaptation of terms, therefore, is not a random but a carefully chosen process in order to stress aspects of Christianity which would be familiar to the members of the receiving culture. “The new religion was taken into the Life of the people, and in many respects adapted to their mode of thinking” (Keiser 12). In short, the Germanic cultural framework suits certain key concepts of Christianity. This does not mean, however, that these adapted Germanic traditions existed on an ideal plane with the new Christian associations, but the values as seen in the poem shift to give primacy to the Christian values.

Working through the framework of the older Germanic tradition permits the Church greater authority and allows for a greater possibility of the acceptance of aspects of Christianity which differ from the existing culture. Adapting the definition of the lexical terms, as can be seen in religious works where *duguð* comes to mean “heavenly

host” rather than a secular “band of retainers,”<sup>23</sup> alters the concepts associated with this particular word in the accepting culture as well. This alteration becomes of central importance when considering Christ’s lack of voice and the cross’ Germanic role as *bana*, “slayer” (line 66). As I argue, the Christian poet silences the Germanic heroic traditions not by diction, but by the lack of speech and focus on the action not of the hero, but of the retainer/slayer, and he does so by using the parameters of the traditional heroic framework.

As has been noted, Christ is seen to possess a dual Germanic/Christian persona based mainly on the terminology used in his description, especially the phrasing of how He faces the crucifixion: “Geseah ic þa Frean mancynnes/efstan elne mycle þæt he me wolde on gestigan” (lines 33b-34b). (“I saw the ruler of mankind hasten with great courage when he wished to leap upon me.”) Christ rushes to the challenge with bravery, like a brave warrior marching voluntarily to his death in battle. However, diction alone cannot create a completely heroic portrayal. Depictions of the Germanic warrior in other texts suggest important characteristics which are omitted from the description of Christ in *The Dream of the Rood*. If we consider Beowulf as a quintessential model for heroic behavior, it will allow us to examine two key characteristics of the typical warrior: preparation for the heroic task and the *beot*, or the hero’s “boast.” In each of the three major battles presented in *Beowulf* (against Grendel, against Grendel’s mother, and

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<sup>23</sup> Ne þearf him ondrædan deofla strælas  
 ænig on eorðan ælsa cynnes,  
 gromra garfare, gif hine god scildeþ,  
*duguða* dryhten (lines 779-782b) from *Christ II* in *The Exeter Book*, edited by Krapp and Dobbie, 1936.  
 24.

“Any on earth of mankind need not to fear for himself the arrows of the devil, the fierce war-like one, if God protects him, the Lord of *heavenly hosts*.” (translation is my own)

against the dragon), Beowulf first readies himself to face the enemy. For instance, in his fight against Grendel, Beowulf removes his weapons and delivers orders to his men.<sup>24</sup> “Ða he him of dyde isernbyrnan ,/ helm of hafelan, sealde his hyrsted sweord, / irena cyst ombihtþegne, / ond gehealdan het hildegeatwe” (lines 671-674). (“Now Beowulf took off his iron mail and the helmet from his head. He gave his adorned sword, the most choice of steel weapons, to an attendant, and ordered him to guard the battle gear.” [19]) Even when Grendel enters the mead hall, Beowulf still prepares, watching Grendel work, planning his own attack: “Pryðswyð beheold / mæg Higelaces, hu se manscaða/under færgripum gefaran wolde” (lines 736b-738b). (“Hygelac’s mighty nephew watched to see how the evildoer would carry out his attack.” [21]) The preparation of Beowulf’s retainers is relatively irrelevant to the poem since the main focus is the action of the hero.

If Beowulf is our heroic model and standard of comparison, then Christ’s preparation for the Crucifixion would have to be critical to our understanding of him as a Germanic hero. The portrayal of Christ in *The Dream of the Rood* seems to mirror that of Beowulf. He, too, strips for battle, bravely facing his “adversary”: the cross and certain death. However, the subtle differences between the two scenes raise doubts as to whether Christ is the central focus of a heroic passage at all, indicating his limited abilities as a hero. His description is delivered in first person narrative, seen through the eyes of the cross: “Geseah ic þa Frean mancynnes / efstan elne mycle þæt he me wolde on gestigan” (lines 33b-34b). (“I saw the ruler of mankind hasten with great courage when he wished to leap upon me.”) This observation is immediately followed by the cross’ reaction and

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<sup>24</sup> This and all subsequent passages from *Beowulf* are taken from Klaeber (1950) without the inclusion of macrons. The translation of *Beowulf* passages come from Constance Hieatt, 1967.

thoughts, effectively pushing Christ's heroic action into the background of the poem and empowering the Cross:

Ʒær ic Ʒa ne *dorste* ofer Dryhtnes word  
*bugan* oððe *berstan*, Ʒa ic bifian *geseah*  
eorðan sceatas. Ealle ic *mihte*  
feondas *gefyllan*, hwæðre ic fæste *stod* (lines 35-38).<sup>25</sup>

(I *dared* not *bow down* there or *break* against the word of the Lord, when I *saw* the surfaces of the earth tremble. I *might have struck down* all foes; however, I *stood* firm.)

In this passage, the action of the cross as it prepares for the upcoming struggle becomes centralized. The poet chooses expressive, active verbs in relation to the cross while Christ is merely seen by the cross just as it sees the surfaces of the earth tremble. All actions are observances of the cross. When the narration returns to Christ, the audience sees his disrobing in preparation for the Crucifixion:

Ongyrede hine Ʒa geong Hæleð, (Ʒæt wæs God ælmihtig),  
strang ond stiðmod. Gestah he on gealgan heanne,  
modig on manigra gesyhðe, Ʒa he wolde mancyn lysan (lines 39-41).

(The young hero then undressed himself, that was God almighty, strong and resolute. He climbed onto the high gallow(s), bold in the sight of many, when he wished to free mankind.)

Like *Beowulf*, Christ undresses and a purpose for the battle is expressed (by a narrator other than Himself). He is seen as bold. However, the remaining twelve lines before the statement "Crist wæs on rode" (line 56). ("Christ was on the cross") are dedicated not to the actions and preparations of Christ, but to those of the cross. In *Beowulf* we witness the action of the hero. In contrast, the poet of *The Dream* shifts the focus away from our presumed hero, Christ, and instead concentrates mainly on the hero's slayer, the cross. It

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<sup>25</sup> Italics added for emphasis.

is first hewn down (þæt ic wæs aheawen holtes on ende,[line 29]) and borne by enemies to the hill where they fasten it into place (Genaman me ðær strange feondas. / Geworhton him þær to wæfersyne, heton me heora wergas hebban. / Bæron me ðær beornas on eaxlum, oððæt hie me on beorg asetton, / gefæstnodon me þær feondas genoge [lines 30b-33a]<sup>26</sup>). Christ's actions slip into the background rather than assume center stage. Christ, even though the Germanic hero, is not the poet's primary concern. And, in reality, the cross has been the main focus even as Christ prepared for His battle since with every step the cross related its feelings and thoughts.

As Graham Holderness notes in his analysis of *The Dream of the Rood* in terms of its Germanic elements, “the relationships between Christian and pre-Christian traditions, literacy and orality...lie at the heart of the *Dream* and have been central to the history of its critical interpretation” (351). Christ portrayed as the Germanic hero lessens the indignity He suffered as the stripping of Him becomes an “athletic stripping for battle” (Holderness 351). By the end, His death is “mourned bitterly by his surviving retainers” (351) and that is where we leave the Germanic elements behind. The focus becomes, according to Holderness, the cross and the dreamer who must now await the Harrowing of Hell. The focus becomes the Christian theological message, which the church brings to its believers, because in terms of the heroic body of Christ, through the “central narrative of the Cross...we are left with nothing more encouraging than a dead body” (Holderness 359).

Throughout the poem, leading up to the discouraging dead body of the hero, the poet has provided several clues as to the hierarchical placement to each other of Christian

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<sup>26</sup> See complete translation in the Appendix.

and Germanic ideals. A major clue comes in line 44 of the poem where there is a switch from an active Christ to an active cross. “This line...divides the active Christ from the passive one and the passive cross from its active role” (Pasternack 413). It is at this moment that the passively raised cross (“Rod wæs ic aræred”) then actively raises Christ (“ahof ic ricne Cyning”). A close look at the verbs during the scene of the Passion reveals the true actor and, thus, central focus. In line 44, the cross begins in passive voice but immediately switches to the active, signaling a change in power. The Germanic hero is no longer the active one. From that point forward all action of the persecutors of Christ, in fact, is directed towards and received by the cross. It “endured” (“gebiden”) all these torments. The culmination of the scene occurs in line 56b with the short, powerful phrase “Crist wæs on rōde”: “Christ was on the rood.” However, even here at the central moment of power, where critics have noted “with the agony transferred to the cross, Christ can sensibly be seen to rule from the gallows” (Swanton 71), there is no active verb attributed to Christ even to suggest any ruling. He is eventually taken down from the cross and mourned over, but the next time any action comes from Christ, it is His resting (“reste”) and then growing cold (“colode”). The body, the Germanic hero, is indeed dead. The triumph comes from the Christian, divine nature of Christ who will bring redemption and judgment, but only as related of course through the church.

The same effect of subjugating the Germanic hero is achieved in regard to the *beot*, a term often translated as “boast,” but one that is better seen as a kind of promise or social contract of deeds to be accomplished. In many examples of heroic poetry, the hero speaks of his own feats and abilities in order to gain respect and loyalty. Beowulf, our model for the purpose of this argument, announces his abilities and what he will

accomplish before each battle as well as on several other occasions. Before his confrontation with Grendel, he proclaims,

No ic me an herewæsmum hnagan talige  
guþgeweorca, þonne Grendel hine;  
forþan ic hine sweorde swebban nelle,  
alder beneotan, þeah ice al mæge:  
nat he þara goda, þæt he me ongean slea,  
rand geheawe, þeah ðe he rof sie  
niþgeweorca; ac wit on niht sculon  
secge ofersittan, gif he gesecean dear  
wig ofer wæpen, ond siþðan witig God  
on swa hwæþere hond halig Dryhten  
mærðo deme, swa him gemet þince. (lines 677-687a)

(I do not consider myself a lesser fighter than Grendel does himself; therefore I will not kill him with a sword, and deprive him of life in that way—though I surely could. He does not know the proper ways to strike back at me and hew my shield, although he is renowned for hostile works. No: this night we two will abstain from swords, if he dares seek out a fight without weapon. Afterwards, may the wise God, the holy Lord, assign glory to whichever side seems fitting to him.[20])

This “boasting” builds Beowulf’s credibility within the society because those in the meadhall view him as confident and able, a man whose capabilities are to be trusted.

Indeed, Hroðgar turns over control of Heorot for the night to Beowulf because he believes his promise and trusts that Beowulf will conquer Grendel and end the rule of terror. The *beot* inspires others, giving them hope: “þæt hie feond heora / ðurh anes cræft ealle ofercomon, / selfes mihtum” (lines 698b-700a). (“help against Grendel was with them,/And through the might of a single man/They would win.”)

When we turn to *The Dream of the Rood*, we can see that Christ does not fulfill this expectation of a hero’s *beot*. Christ gives no boast before he leaps upon the cross: he makes no announcements of his deeds to come. Some would argue that because of genre



difference (*Beowulf* being a heroic epic and *The Dream* a shorter lyric) such a comparison in terms of *beot* holds no ground. But one should note that scholars, in fact, discuss the poems in conjunction with each other.<sup>27</sup> And while it may be true that a shorter poem cannot always provide room for an actual *beot*, it can certainly still refer to a speech the hero bravely made or his wise words before battle. For example, *The Battle of Maldon* contains a *beot*. During battle with the Vikings, the son of Alfric reminds the thanes of the promises made in the meadhall with regard to battle: “Remember all the vows we raised in the meadhall when seated on the benches we often pledged to do our part in battle. Now it can be seen who is truly brave” (Heiatt, 114). With the inclusion of a *beot* in *The Battle of Maldon* we cannot assume that the motif is exclusive to epic. Besides, the audience would have certain expectations of the hero, which are, however, disappointed by Christ in *The Dream of the Rood*: He gives no hope to the audience and inspires no awe or respect in terms of Germanic heroism. The hope of salvation instead comes from a different source: the cross.

In terms of a possible *beot* from Christ, one must also consider the role of the Gospels and Christian discourse. Any speech attributed to Christ could be seen as a violation of Biblical scriptures and possible heresy. To put words into the mouth of Christ that are not warranted in the Gospels would be this type of violation to many Christians even though liberties are often taken with the accounts of saints or Biblical objects. With as much liturgical influence which has been explored by scholars in

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<sup>27</sup> Many scholars reference the two works together, though, especially in terms of heroic poetic elements. Leslie Stratyner (as mentioned previously) pursues the parallel in the two works concerning the Battle with the Monster sequence usually reserved for epic poetry. Dockray-Miller in her work also references the two pieces together: “show Christ as a lord in the heroic sense seen in *Beowulf* and in historical documents such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*” (3).

relation to the poem *The Dream of the Rood*, not much has been done to establish a direct link between the Gospels and the poem. Even though such a connection has not been established, I contend that there is a strong connection between *The Dream of the Rood* and the Gospel of John, which allows the closest comparison between the Christian and Germanic heroic traditions. In this Gospel, Christ can be seen as more heroic and in charge of His duty, for example, carrying His own cross: “So the soldiers too charge of Jesus. Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha)” (John 19:17). Using this Gospel as a guide, the poet can draw parallels more easily between the Christian narrative and Germanic literary traditions, while still remaining within the boundaries of the teachings of the church. At the same time, this Gospel as the base easily allows the poet to assign more significance to the church’s message, diminishing the influence of the inherited ideals of heroic culture. It also places more emphasis on Christ’s silence since He does not speak in this Gospel. In this way the church can interpret Christ, reaffirming its own necessity.

However, the Gospel of John simultaneously complicates the consideration of the *beot*. Just because it is not present in this Gospel does not mean that Christ does not speak to His people. A closer look at the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke illustrate that the poet could have chosen for Christ to speak. The Synoptic Gospels “agree extensively in language, in the material they include, and in the order in which events and saying from the life of Christ are recorded” (Barker). In fact, they are so similar that scholars have concentrated their efforts on attempting to answer whether a common original source exists for the three. Noticeably, the Gospel of John is left out of this debate due to its significant variance from the other three. Of most importance to

this study of *The Dream* is the relation of Christ's crucifixion in the Gospels. The Synoptic Gospels spend significantly more verses on their description of the event. In each of the three, the crucifixion party encounters Simon of Cyrene (whether it is before they set out to Golgotha or along the way), who is ordered to carry the cross for Jesus: "As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross" (Matthew 27: 32). In the verse presented in Luke, Jesus begins his speech to the Marys on his journey to Golgotha with: "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children..." (Luke 23: 28). Such words could easily be expressed as the beginning of a Germanic *beot*, since it is in essence a promise or social contract. With this speech, Jesus does speak His intent and explain what can be expected from His actions. Therefore, it could be concluded that the silence of Christ in the Old English poem serves a different purpose: to utilize the Germanic traditional framework in order to assert the necessity of the church who must speak and give promise to the people.

Not only does the limited role of Christ as Germanic hero undermine the heroic tradition, so does the role the cross plays in a heroic context. While much scholarly attention has been paid to the duality of Christ, the duality of the cross has not been thoroughly discussed, even though many scholars note parallels between Christ and the cross. The duality of the cross, however, indeed allows it to participate in the silencing of the Germanic tradition as well as in usurping temporal power from Christ and transferring that power to the Christian church. In the poem, then, the cross is retainer, slayer, and lord as well as human and divine.

Within the Germanic context, the Cross plays an integral role which often creates problems for scholars. The trouble arises from the Cross' role within the system of *comitatus*. It speaks of its own role in the crucifixion utilizing terms associated with the *comitatus* where it loyally obeys the (unspoken) command of its lord: "Pær ic þa ne dorste ofer Dryhtnes word / bugan oððe berstan," (lines 37b-38) ("I dared not bow down there or break against the word of the Lord."). However, the active role it seems to play in the actual death of Jesus conflicts with the role of the retainer. As a retainer, it should fight for its lord, not leaving the battlefield alive if its lord is slain. The cross, though, in its fight to do as its Lord requests, must ironically allow for His death. The cross' duty, therefore, is to kill Christ, or at least not to prevent his death. It is even referred to as *banan* (line 66), which complicates the cross' role as a retainer (O'Carragain 2). Becoming the slayer of one's lord instantly exiles one from society. Any Anglo-Saxon audience would have seen the slaying of one's lord, and especially of a king, as a most serious crime, a view also expressed, for example, by Alfred's laws, which state that the killing of a king, or even just plotting against a king's life, is punishable by death.

The cross, however, does not become exiled, nor is it sentenced to death (if that was possible); it receives praise and honor. Focus is clearly on the sufferings endured by the Cross. The audience feels *its* anguish and hears *its* thoughts. It wants to fight a battle but is restricted from doing so, must instead stand by and help kill its lord: "Ealle ic mihte / feondas gefyllan, hwæðre ic fæste stod" (lines 37b-38). ("I might have struck down all foes; however, I stood firm"). While the cross is the slayer and Christ is slain, they are also thane and lord respectively, the most constitutive aspects of the *comitatus*. However, the thane's complicity in killing the lord draws the audience's sympathy rather

than anger because the lord is not the primary focus. It is the cross who is foregrounded and performs actively after line 44. The cross reveals its emotional struggle as well as its physical suffering because it is forced to violate its loyalty to the lord by slaying him, but in doing so also keeps its loyalty since redemption is only possible if Christ dies. By drawing on the audience's sympathy, the poet effectively subjugates the heroic tradition as he reshapes the framework to fit a Christian context, glorifying not the heroic action of Christ, but the sacrifice made on the part of the cross by its acceptance of a paradoxical, non-heroic role.

An interesting consequence of the cross' "triumph" over its own lord, is not only that it escapes punishment for its complicity in Christ's death, but it *becomes* the lord who now has his own retainers. The dreamer takes his place as the first of these retainers in the poem. The cross addresses him as "hæleð min se leofa" (line 78b) ("my beloved warrior"). It has been argued that lines 78ff of the poem differ in style from the first part, as if the second part had been added at a later date in order to promote a didactic purpose different from the original purpose by focusing on the Last Judgment. I agree that there is a perspectival shift, but I contend that this shift occurs here because it is at this point that the duality of the cross becomes apparent as both loyal retainer and lord. It now has authority and commands respect. It also commands its follower: "Nu ic þe hate, hæleð min se leofa, / þæt ðu þas gesyhðe secge mannum" (lines 95-96). ("Now I command you, dear warrior of mine, that you tell this vision to men"). Christ has now become a distant lord, one who will eventually return not just to save but also to judge, as the poem reminds us. The immediate and more approachable source of help is the cross as a lord to

its Christian retainers and a retainer to the Lord, an intercessor between the people and Christ, a representative of the Church, and thus the authority left on earth.

The Germanic elements in the description of Christ are central and serve a purpose, but perhaps not the one most scholars contend. Rather than blending the two cultural traditions equally, the church, in fact, asserts its dominance through a manipulation of the heroic ideal. If indeed we are left with just the dead body of a Germanic Christ, what significance does that hold? The Germanic element allows for the heroism of Christ without having to explain the dual nature of Christ as both God and man, an issue that will be explored in the next section. With the death of his body and the heroic tradition, a void is left for the audience. Christ as God is left as a threatening being who will bring harsh judgment, so the listeners need another outlet, one that will help them approach that fearful God. The cross, as the representative of the church, provides that outlet. It will be the intercessor who can align itself with man due to its human portrayal in the poem. It will speak on their behalf because it understands their position.

### Chapter 3: The Duality of Christ and the Cross

#### Section 2: Sidestepping a Church Debate

Christ's duality in the poem goes beyond that of a Christian Savior portrayed in a Germanic light; the very nature of Christ as both man and God features as a central concern in the poem. As is well known, within the growing early Christian church the question of Christ's dual nature became the basis for serious debate. Two sides, the Eutychans and the Severans,<sup>28</sup> among other groups, contended opposite beliefs with regard to the person and nature of Christ. During the fifth and sixth centuries the debate lingered at an impasse, neither side willing to compromise while the church's official position teetered precariously. In the seventh century, two great councils were called at Byzantium with the hopes of settling the dispute.<sup>29</sup> The debate, however, failed to settle the issue effectively and so the position of the church based in Rome remained in flux throughout the eighth century (Swanton 56-57). This debate influenced the minds of church members and their views of how Christ should be portrayed. This uncertainty can be seen in *The Dream of the Rood* where Christ's divinity is emphasized while the cross takes on His human characteristics.

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<sup>28</sup> Eutychans followed the teachings and beliefs of 5<sup>th</sup> century theologian Eutyches who believed Christ's human form to be incorruptible and so would not suffer physical agony. The other extreme in the debate, the Severans, aligned themselves with the teachings of 6<sup>th</sup> century theologian Severus of Antioch who stressed the "human infirmities of the body, which were believed to extend to the soul of Christ, being entirely manlike" (Swanton 56).

<sup>29</sup> The Byzantine Council of 626 adapted the monothelite doctrinal revision which stated that the divine and human natures were distinct but subject to one will. Due to the intensity of the debate which ensued, discussion of the subject was forbidden until the Lateran council of 694 after another failed council in Byzantium in 680 (Swanton 57).

Since the church debated the dual nature of Christ so vigorously, it serves to consider for a moment why the idea of Christ as both man and God would be problematic. If indeed man, would He not be subject to the same sins and flaws of us all? Can He then be more than that? Anglo-Saxon culture attributed much significance to the body. As Graham Holderness notes, the humanity of Christ is aligned with

the noble warrior whose being would naturally inhabit a social world of communal pleasures, ‘hall-joys’, ceremonies of ring- and gold-giving...the world so vividly represented, often in terms of its loss, in Anglo-Saxon heroic and elegiac poetry. That attachment to the body, and to the material objects by means of which the body was situated in the symbolic order, was clearly not dislodged by Christianity from the Anglo-Saxon imagination (357).

The human element of Christ would need to be downplayed, and thus also the heroic aspect of Christ as a warrior in *The Dream of the Rood*, in order to emphasize the spiritual importance of God, that no regular man could respond in the same manner as Christ to temptation and death. The role of the body must be given less importance than the divinity of the sacrifice. Focusing on the humanity of Christ puts Him and His sacrifice in a vulnerable position. There is the risk that “insofar as the Christ of *The Dream* is represented within that [Germanic heroic] tradition, the poem is stressing the human and incarnational torment, rather than the abstract theological triumph, of the Crucifixion” (Holderness 357). In other words, if we view Christ as merely human, the divine glory of the sacrificed life and the salvation to come would be lost. One way to prevent such an interpretation is to transfer the suffering and humanity to the cross, which “bears the pain on Christ’s behalf, thus protecting his divinity from the imputation of mere corporeality” (Holderness 358). In this way, the two natures of Christ are preserved, but not necessarily in one body, in this poetic representation of the Passion.



Ironically, this preservation of Christ's divinity effectively distances him from the audience.

In light of the church fathers debates about the official position of Christian belief regarding Christ's dual nature, scholars assume that poets strove for balance between the debate of whether Christ was pure man or pure God in order to avoid accusations of heresy, either of denying the true divinity or the true human suffering of Christ.<sup>30</sup> This neutral position poses a problem in poems such as *The Dream of the Rood*: one cannot focus on the physical agony and/or beauty of Christ during the Passion because it would emphasize His humanity over His divinity. Therefore, His suffering becomes delegated to another, now primary, player: the cross. Prosopopoeia, that is, for an inanimate object to speak and take on other human characteristics, was relatively standard practice in Old English poetry, especially in the riddles with which *The Dream* shares a lot in common. This literary device "allows the poet to express the physical suffering of Christ through the parallel experience of the cross, thus avoiding...theological controversies concerning...the human and divine aspects of Christ" (Marsden 193). If the poet is averting a theological debate, then one can reasonably claim that *The Dream* is part of the effort by the church to influence how doctrine is delivered to the people. Because of the fear of possible church backlash, Christ is essentially taken out of the Passion by *The Dream* poet. The result is a distanced Christ, one which can only be accessed through the intermediary of the cross, the symbol not only of Christ but of the Christian church. It is as the symbol of the Church that the cross speaks throughout the poem, and thus it is the Church's message and not Christ's direct message that the audience receives.

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<sup>30</sup> For further information on this see Swanton (58) and Greenfield (140).

That message of the church shows Christ, in his foregrounded divinity as God, is to be feared. He will bring judgment and the potential of eternal punishment: “Ne mæg þær ænig unforht wesan / for þam worde þe se wealdend cwyð (lines 110-111). (“None can then be unafraid on account of the word which the ruler will speak.”) He heroically triumphed over death and seemingly experienced no agony other than weariness and a moment of disgrace in conjunction *with* the cross: “Bysmeredon hie unc butu ætgædere” (line 48a). (“They disgraced us both together.”) The audience trembles before him just as the earth did at His moment of triumph. His speech will be fearsome and not consoling like that of the cross. As Richard Payne notes, “the dreamer (and, by extension, the reader) reacts with the fear and apprehension that are to be expected under the circumstances and awaits the arrival of the dread Judge” (340). Why such dread is to be expected rather than forgiveness could be a matter of the proclivity of the Anglo-Saxon church, which often enforces the awe- and fear-inspiring godliness of Christ-God rather than His human suffering. Such a portrayal is typical of Old English homiletic and poetic depictions of the Judgment. Examples can be seen in the runic signature passages of the poems attributed to Cynewulf as well as in numerous sermons.<sup>31</sup> People need to live in fear, leading a righteous life, so that they may be spared on the Day of Judgment. They look, therefore, to the cross instead of Christ alone as a means of hope and salvation: “Me ist willa to ðam mycel on mode ond min mundbyrd is geriht to þære rode” (lines 129b-131a). (“For me the desire for that is great in my heart and my (hope of) protection is directed to the cross.”) The dreamer expresses the need not for grace but for

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<sup>31</sup> *Juliana*, *Elene*, and *Christ II* are attributed to Cynewulf and promote the awe and dread of Christ-God, especially in the runic signature passages.

protection, instilling the fear of God into the audience. He insinuates that it is the cross who understands their own flaws, suffering, betrayal, and pain, and who is aligned more closely with them; the cross will be able to show pity and intercede on their behalf before the fearful face of God. Seeing these human aspects of suffering represented by the symbol of the church makes the church easier to approach rather than seeking a direct line to God, the warrior, the Judge of doom. Fear brings men to the cross, that is, to the church.

The question remains as to how the preservation of Christ's divine nature actually plays out in *The Dream of the Rood*. During the crucifixion scene, the only description of Christ's actions and suffering are lines 33b-34 and 40b-41. He is the warrior and God, about to embrace the torture with a magnanimity to which a Christian audience may find it difficult to relate, satisfying the Anglo-Saxon idea of heroism but distancing the Savior from mankind. The human aspect of suffering should and does elicit sympathy from the audience. However, it is sympathy for the cross who is driven through with dark nails: "Ʀurhdrifan hi me mid deorcan næglum" (line 46a) ("They drove me through with dark nails"), and is given visible scars: "on me syndon þa dolg gesiene" (line 46b) ("the scars are still visible on me"). The cross receives treacherous wounds "opene inwidhlemmas" (line 47a) ("open treacherous wounds"); it is drenched with blood, "Eall ic wæs mid blode bestemed" (line 48b) ("I was completely drenched with blood"), and must endure many hostile fates: "Feala ic on þam beorge gebiden hæbbe wraðra wyrda" (lines 50-51a) ("I have endured many hostile fates on the hill"). Meanwhile, Christ is portrayed as weary after battle but otherwise seemingly unharmed: "beheoldon hie ðær heofenes Dryhten

ond he hine hwile reste, meðe æfter ðam miclan gewinne” (lines 64-65a) (“They beheld there the Lord of heaven and he rested there a while, tired after the great struggle”).

Because of the courage and resolution of Christ and his apparently impossibly uninjured body, a Christian audience feels distanced from this obviously superior figure, empathizing instead with the suffering, more sympathetic cross and empowering it with their belief. Christ has endured the trial unscathed and is surrounded instead by an air of awe and respect. These feelings are not necessarily negative, but they create a gap between Him and the listener. Scholars have noted before the distance created between Christ and the audience during this act of sacrifice. According to Christina Heckman, “the sufferings of the heroic Christ occur at a distance, since they are related through the suffering of the Rood. As the Rood speaks, the Dreamer and the poem’s audience identify with the cross rather than with Christ” (141). Such a result may have been unintentional on the part of the poet who may simply have wished to avoid church controversy; however, the result of the empowered church remains the same. Audience members look to the cross, the symbol of the church, for help since it is more accessible to them, able to intercede on their behalf with the obvious superior of Christ to whom they can no longer relate as easily.

The difference between the suffering of the cross and the mere weariness of Christ must be considered when deciding on how the two are related. In his article “The Cross as Symbolic Body: An Anglo-Latin Liturgical Analogue to *The Dream of the Rood*,” Thomas D. Hill shifts attention away from the interpretation of Christ as hero in order to avoid the appearance of heresy through overemphasizing either the divine or human nature of Christ. Instead, he proposes that the cross functions as the body of

Christ as evidenced by parallel liturgical practices described in the Latin *Regularis Concordia* (298-299). He claims that because the cross is placed inside a tomb-like structure for three days during Easter weekend, it represents the body of Christ. However, if the two entities—Christ and the cross—are indeed meant to be one, one would expect them to suffer the same (or at least a similar) fate, no matter whose perspective is narrated. But, as the lines above make clear, the Cross suffered dearly while Christ is merely weary from the battle. The Cross seems to be the protector of Christ who speaks on His behalf after suffering the torment and in return gains much power, taking on an important Christian duality itself.

In order to preserve the magnanimity of Christ so that His divine origin and nature would not be disputed, His brave sacrifice needed to be seen as the central aspect of the crucifixion according to church debate. He graciously gave His life without hesitation, exhibiting His strength and courage. The cross, “by its passive endurance...becomes a surrogate for Christ, representing that other aspect of the Crucifixion which was to predominate in the later Middle Ages, the humanity of Christ” (Greenfield 138-139). As a surrogate, it becomes the one faced with an ethical problem. Christ’s divine mission is clear, but the battle the cross faces is full of pain, terror, and confusion. It struggles with the command it received from God to stand and not bend no matter what: “ne dorste ic hwæðre bugan to eorðan, / feallan to foldan sceatum. Ac ic sceolde fæste standan” (lines 42b-43). (“Nevertheless, I dared not bow down to the earth, fall to the surfaces of the earth, but I had to stand fast”). It fights its own urge to retaliate against the enemy, saying, “Ealle ic mihte/ feondas gefyllan” (lines 37b-38a) (“I might have struck down all foes”), but standing still for Christ’s sacrifice. The cross must be complicit in the death

of Christ, an agonizing position. However, it is precisely this position which relates exactly to the position of the dreamer and the entire human race. The cross expresses the guilt that all must feel for Christ's death. It is the sin of all men that led to Christ's death. In that sense all Christians are His killers, and in the Eucharist they repeatedly reenact this sacrifice of the true and actual body of Christ, while asking for forgiveness for their sinful deeds.

Equally important to the description of the cross is the relation of its origins. Typically, the wood of the True Cross was purported to have noble ancestry, a connection to the Tree of Life. The *Dream*-poet, however, avoids this interpretation, providing instead a humble background: "Þæt wæs geara iu—ic þæt gyta geman-- / þæt ic wæs aheaven holtes on ende, / astyred of stefne minum" (lines 28-30a). ("That was once long ago, that I even now remember, that I was cut down from the edge of the forest, removed from my root") By emphasizing a common background, where the cross is not exalted until Christ makes it so, the poet presents it as "an arboreal 'Everyman': a guiltless 'ordinary' follower" (O'Carragain 3). This "Everyman" identity of the ordinary witness to Christ's sacrifice facilitates identification of the equally ordinary Christian who witnesses the suffering of the cross in *The Dream of the Rood*. The poem thus draws in a broad audience that can connect to the cross.

The human aspect of the cross empowers it, but is not the only aspect of the cross. As the representative of a dual Christ, it too must be seen in duality. Its "divinity" is represented in the schizophrenic appearance of the cross in the opening vision. In the first lines the cross appears "encircled in light" ("leohte bewunden" (line 5b)) and "entirely covered with gold" ("gegyred mid golde" (line 16a)). Its wondrous appearance

makes the dreamer realize his own stained appearance: “Syllic wæs se sigebeam ond ic synnum fah” (line 13) (“Wondrous was the victory-tree and I was stained with sins”). It is beyond that golden appearance of the cross that the dreamer perceives the humanity of the cross, its suffering in connection to Christ, as it begins to bleed on its right side: “Hwæðre ic þurh þæt gold ongytan meahte / earmra ærgewin þæt hit ærest ongan / swætan on þa swiðran healfe” (lines 18-20a) (“However, I could distinguish beyond that gold the former strife of the wretched ones when it first began to bleed on the right side). It then alters its appearance between the divine and the human sides with the description “adorned with treasure” (“hwilum mid since gegyrewed” (line 23b)) listed last. The last description provides the prevailing image with which the dreamer, and the poem’s audience, then perceives the cross’ words. Right after this description that the cross begins to speak, delivering a message from an exalted one, but not from Christ Himself. Even though the message pleads for human sympathy, the final message of the bejeweled cross is how to attain glory through belief in it: “Ne þearf ðær þonne ænig anforht wesan, / þe him ær in breostum bereð beacna selest” (lines 117-118) (“Then none need to be fearful, who previously carries the best of beacons in his breast”). The adorned cross assumes its exalted place above men, but below God, thus securing its place as the approachable intercessor who has power but understands their sins and needs.

It becomes clear, then, that it is ultimately the cross who delivers Christ to the audience, both His message and His body, interpreting the scene of the Crucifixion as it sees proper. It speaks the message and interprets on His behalf. In this way it is serving as the institution of the church who necessarily interprets the Bible and delivers the exegetical message to the people. In this way, we can also read the lines when Christ’s

body is removed from the cross as symbolic of the cross' representative role as the church for which it stands in the poem, reinforcing the larger point I have been trying to make in these pages. When Christ's body is taken from the cross, it once again actively participates in this process and bows down to deliver the body of Christ to His retainers who take down the body: "hnag ic hwæðre þam secgum to handa / eaðmod elne mycle. Genamon hie þær ælmihtigne God, / ahofon hine of ðam hefian wite" (lines 59b-61a) ("However I bent down humbly with great courage to the hands of warriors. There they took the almighty God, lifted him from the heavy torment"). As it delivers the body to the people, so too does it deliver Christ's message, the message that it wants us to receive, the message of a fearsome God who will bring judgment but the cross (as the church) will intercede if only Christians place their belief properly in this cross.



## Chapter 4: The Power of Human Speech and the Mission of the Church

The power of speech and who is given this power has profound influence in Anglo-Saxon poetry and in the religious community. As a human trait, speech gives the cross in *The Dream of the Rood* more human representation than just the suffering of the Passion, bringing it even closer to the audience while simultaneously widening the gap between them and itself and a silent Christ. The role played by voice in *The Dream* receives less scholarly attention than other debates, such as on the combination of heroic and Christian cultural elements, but a careful examination of the presence and absence of speech distribution among “characters” in the poem can reveal a great deal about the shifting power relation between Christ, the cross, and the poem’s audience. If we accept my interpretation of the cross as a representative of the church, then we can view the cross as serving as an intercessor to the people. Voice empowers the church while distancing Christ from the audience.

Much of the poem is dedicated to the power of speech in general. It is that of the cross which transforms the dreamer, and hopefully the audience. For when the cross finishes its speech, the dreamer immediately expresses his faith and his hopes of accomplishing the mission of spreading that faith with which the cross has charged him.

Gebæd ic me þa to þan beame bliðe mode,  
elne mycle, þær ic ana wæs  
mæte werede. Wæs modsefa  
afyсед on forðwege feala ealra gebad  
langunhwila. Is me nu lifes hyht  
þæt ic þone sigebeam secan mote  
ana oftor þonne ealle men,  
well weorþian. Me is willa to ðam  
mycel on mode ond min mundbyrd is

geriht to þære rode (lines 122-131b).

(I prayed for myself then to the beam with joyous mind, much courage, where I was alone with a little company. My spirit was urged on the journey; it experienced many [of all] times of weariness. Now it is my hope of life that I may seek the victory-tree, alone more often than all [other] men, honor it properly.)

The mission to spread the message of the cross, of course, also pertains to speech, which is set up from the beginning of the poem by the term the poet chooses to denote “men”: “reordberend” or “voice-bearers.” The poet could have chosen from several terms which mean “men” but selected the one associated with voice. The dreamer and all men who accept the message of the cross will be the voices, as prescribed by the cross, which will lead to man’s conversion and subsequent salvation.

Nu ic þe hate hæleð min se leofa,  
þæt ðu þas gesyhðe secge mannum;  
*onwreoh wordum* þæt hit is wuldres beam,  
se ðe ælmihtig God on þrowode  
for mancynnes manegum synnum  
ond Adomes ealdgewyrhtum (lines 95-100).<sup>32</sup>

(Now I command you, dear warrior of mine, that you tell this vision to men, *revealing with words* that it is the tree of glory, that on which almighty God suffered for the many sins of mankind and the old works of Adam.)

Because the message of salvation will be revealed with words, the cross gains power and authority. It teaches the dreamer of this power of speech and then spreads that power among men, making them teachers. It is as if the section reveals the founding of the church in order to spread God’s *word* rather than to focus on the sacrifice of Christ. In fact, in the above passage, Christ and his actions are added as a parenthetical note. The

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<sup>32</sup> Italics added for emphasis

main clause places emphasis on the mission of spreading the word as revealed by the cross in the vision.

This revelation coming through the cross empowers the church by placing Christ's participation in the teaching of man in the background. In the Bible, Christ originally charges his disciples with this mission, thereby establishing the church.<sup>33</sup> It is this institution which uses its voice to convert non-Christians as well as teach religious truths to believers. In creating the church through His instruction of disciples, Christ opens a path to saving grace that began with His sacrifice. It is the resurrected Christ who delivers this message in the Bible, but the voice the audience receives is that as reported through the gospel of Matthew. *The Dream of the Rood* furthers this distance between the people and Christ by silencing His voice completely: the church alone holds this message of salvation because the only words which will come from Christ will be at the Second Coming when He will speak of final judgment. The poem sets up a dichotomy in which human voice and teaching equals salvation while divine speech will equal terror.

The importance of human speech parallels other Old English religious texts, primarily *Cædmon's Hymn*. Preserved in seventeen manuscripts and related in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, *Cædmon's Hymn* celebrates the Glory of God's creation (Greenfield 169). It spreads the word of God's grace in much the same manner as *The Dream of the Rood*. However, the story behind *Cædmon's Hymn*, the story of Cædmon himself, is where the power of human speech is revealed. Cædmon, a cowherd in

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<sup>33</sup> "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you'" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Northumbria at Whitby Abbey, leaves the feast one night before it would be his turn to entertain the brothers due to his embarrassment at his lack of musical or poetic skill and receives the gift of song:

Wæs he se mon in weoruldhade geseted oð þa tide þe he wæs gelyfdre  
ylde ond næfre nænig leoð geleornade. Ond he forþon oft in gebeorscipe,  
þonne þær wæs blisse intiga gedemed þæt heo ealle scolden þurh  
endebyrdnesse be hearpan singan, þonne he geseah þa hearpan him  
nealecan, þonne aras he for scome from þæm symble ond ham eode to  
his huse (lines 15-19).

(He, that man, was settled in secular life and until the time when he was of advanced age had never learned any song. And he, therefore, often at a feast, when it was deemed for the reason of merriment that they all should in turn sing with the harp, when he saw the harp approach him, then he arose from the feast because of shame and went home to his house.)<sup>34</sup>

Cædmon feels unable to perform by using his voice, a powerful human tool: he feels that he lacks the gift given to the brothers of the monastery. When God gives him the gift of song to be used in glorification of Him, Cædmon gains power and prestige, becoming a brother in the abbey.

In both cases of *The Dream of the Rood* and *Cædmon's Hymn*, the power to use human speech correctly is portrayed as a divine gift. For Cædmon, the gift is directly purported to be divine. A man comes to him in a dream and gives him the ability to create poetic renditions of Christian stories and truths of which he before had no knowledge or understanding. In *The Dream of the Rood*, Christ exalts the cross, perhaps implying that the power of speech parallels that exaltation since now the cross can speak His message. As a divine gift, it would seem that the salvation does indeed come straight

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<sup>34</sup> *Cædmon's Hymn* from Marsden, Richard. *The Cambridge Old English Reader*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004. pp. 78-79 without macrons. Translation is my own.

from God. However, one must look at that message of the power of speech in both instances and consider the church's role (the human element) within that message.

For the case of Cædmon, three factors should be considered in connection with human speech and salvation. "Most critics feel it [the nature of the miracle] resided in the linguistic feat which enabled Christian thought to be expressed...in alliterative meter" (Greenfield 171). The miracle resides in the man-made accomplishment of poetry. Furthermore, the entire story of Cædmon is told by Bede, a member of a monastic community, and preserved in his history of the church in England. Without an ecclesiastical historian such as Bede, the miracle of Cædmon would have been lost, reinforcing that an intercessor, also with the power of human language, is necessary for God's message to reach the people. The church intercedes: it preserves knowledge and instructional narratives as well as nearly all religious texts. The message needs the church in order to be heard. Another important clue to the importance of the church in this message of salvation through human voice is the honor bestowed on Cædmon by the church: he is offered a position in the abbey as a member of the brotherhood. His becoming a monk implies that his powerful speech that conveys God's message needs to come through the church, as the patron of this speech. The church—in the form of the monastery—facilitates the production of speech. It creates the conditions that ensure that Cædmon's voice and thus God's message reaches the larger Christian community. Someone outside of the church should not, could not, possess such a power and would not receive the kind of facilitating support and training given to Cædmon by Abbess Hild.

In *The Dream of the Rood*, as in the case of Cædmon, it is once again the church who interprets the message of Christ and delivers it to the people. Christ wishes to save mankind but does not speak of that intent. Instead, the cross tells his follower in much the same way as a preacher to his congregation of Christ's intent and sacrifice. The dreamer, then, becomes a teacher within the church, since he is a "beloved warrior" of the cross (line 78b "hæleð min se leofa"). In order to preserve this sequence of the way the message should be delivered, the cross portrays the speech of the Lord as something to be feared:

Ne mæg þær ænig unforht wesan  
for þam worde þe se Wealdend cwyð;  
frineð he for þære mænige hwær se man sie,  
se ðe for Dryhtnes naman deaðes wolde  
biteres onbyrgan, swa he ær on ðam beame dyde (lines 110-114).

(None can then be unafraid on account of the word which the ruler will speak. He will ask before the multitude where the man might be who in the name of the Lord would want to taste bitter death just as He previously did on the cross.)

The future speech of the Lord brings judgment and possible doom: the cross tells the dreamer that none can be unafraid of Christ who will hold the power to send some to harsh death, redeeming only some. Any listener would want to be spared a harsh judgment and would seek a solution to alleviating this terror. They will have to seek someone with a gentler voice to speak on their behalf and save them; they will seek the cross. It is the voice of the cross, as the church and therefore a human voice, which brings hope and comfort:

Ne þearf ðær þonne ænig anforht wesan  
þe him ær in breostum bereð beacna selest.  
Ac ðurh ða rode sceal rice gesecan

of eorðwege æghwylc sawl,  
seo þe mid Wealdende wunian þenceð (lines 117-121).

(Then none need to be fearful, who previously carries the best of beacons in his breast, but each soul must seek the kingdom through the cross away from the earthly path who thinks to dwell with the Lord.)

In other words, as long as people follow the human intercessor who brings the voice of Christ through their own voice (i.e. the church), they will find salvation. The church will filter God's word and interpret it for the congregation just as the cross interpreted the scene of the Crucifixion.

Another reason besides fear why such an intercessor is necessary has been addressed in other Old English religious texts. In *Christ II*, attributed to Cynewulf, the speaker refers to the divine message as spoken in books (of the Bible):

Huru ic wene me  
ond eac ondræde dom ðy reþran,  
ðonne eft cymeð engla þeoden,  
þe ic ne heold teala þæt me hælend min  
*on bocum bibeað.* Ic þæs brogan sceal  
geseon synwraece, þæs þe ic soð talge,  
þær monig beoð on gemot læded  
fore onsyne eces deman (lines 789b-796).

(Yet I know for myself and also dread a more severe judgment, when the leader of the angels comes a second time which I did not hold properly that my Savior commanded to me in books. I must behold the terror for sin punishment, that which I consider the truth where many will be led into assembly before the presence of the eternal judge.)<sup>35</sup>

Of course, books cannot literally speak. Christ speaks through the books and someone learned must give voice to these words. The fathers of the church (exegetes, priests, homilists) deliver these words to believers. Once again, because they possess the

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<sup>35</sup> The emphasis is also again placed on the words of Christ as bringing possible doom: a fearful image for the audience.

knowledge of Latin and many of the Anglo-Saxon congregations—especially the lay audiences—would not possess such bi-lingual skills, these spiritual leaders hold the keys to the kingdom of heaven. The believer needs the representative of the church in order to unlock the divine words by giving them voice in liturgical readings and interpretations in homilies. Exegetical interpretation is, of course, a form of education, following also the gospel of Matthew in which Christ instructs the disciples to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). But the church decides how the message is delivered and what aspect receives emphasis, giving them power over the text just as the cross has power over Christ in *The Dream of the Rood*. Since the cross is the one with the power of speech, it also has the power to decide which aspects of the Passion to emphasize. By focusing on its own pain and guilt, it removes focus from Christ, replacing it with focus on itself and thus the church and its salvational power. Therefore, a parallel can be drawn between this portrayal of the books of the Bible, which cannot deliver a message without the interceding exegesis of the church, and the portrayal of Christ in *The Dream*, who also cannot deliver His message without the voice of the church.

Within a culture still pervasively marked by its oral traditional past, the church gave voice to the written words of the Lord. In doing so, they established their necessary role as an intercessor. The divine voice does not reach the audience directly; rather it is the “human” voice of the cross, as a representative of both Christ’s human nature and the church, and the voice of the dreamer, which provides the lesson of how to attain salvation. The church establishes its power through the guise of moral education, insinuating that the people need it in order to reach salvation. The church promotes the



message that they are entrusted with the encrypted message and that the people need someone to soften Christ's judgment.

## **Conclusion: A Case for Church Doctrine Delivered Through the Cross**

It has been the purpose of this thesis not to undermine the beauty or craftsmanship of *The Dream of the Rood*, but to consider an alternative reading of the cultural aspects which it successfully combines. The poem clearly draws on the conventions of several genres of Old English poetry, as we have such poetry categorized, and includes motifs from both Christian and Germanic heroic traditions. How these genres and traditions work together, however, provides much opportunity for scholars that has not been thoroughly explored. I speculate that the church influenced the poet extensively and that consideration of the church colors our understanding of the cross within the context of the poem as an instrument of the church.

The connection between the cross and the church had been clearly established by the time of *The Dream of the Rood*, and therefore merits attention when considering the voice of the cross within the poem. This voice is one of instruction and guidance, one intercessory in tone as it bridges the gap between the Anglo-Saxon audience and a fearful image of God who will bring judgment with Him when He returns. The cross offers hope and a chance for salvation through it. The church, in other words, will provide the instruction and guidance towards salvation.

Unfortunately, the role of Christ in the poem becomes that of a distant Lord on two levels. As the Christian God, He is to be feared, not sought directly. Further complicating His role is the one He plays within the heroic context of the poem. As the Germanic hero of the poem, he should offer hope to the people. But this hope instead comes from his retainer (his slayer in actuality), which diminishes the role he plays as

lord within that heroic context. His temporal power is usurped by the cross as the authority on earth when the hero dies.

## Appendix—Original Translation of *The Dream of the Rood*

### *The Dream of the Rood*

1 Listen! I wish to tell the choicest of dreams which I dreamed during (at) the middle of night while voice-bearers (men) dwelled at rest. It seemed to me that I saw a most wondrous tree led into the air, encircled in light, the brightest of beams. That sign/beacon was entirely covered with gold. Beautiful gems stood on the surfaces of the earth: in like manner were five above on the crossbeam. All fair ones throughout the world beheld there the Angel of the Lord. This was certainly not the gallows of a criminal, but holy spirits, men across the world, and all this great creation beheld it [the cross] there.

13 Wondrous was the victory tree and I was stained with sins, wounded with faults. I saw the tree of glory honored with garments, shine with joy, encircled with gold. Gems had splendidly covered the tree of the ruler. However, I could distinguish beyond that gold the former strife of the wretched one when it first began to bleed on the right side. I was entirely afflicted with sorrows, afraid I was before that sight. I saw that eager beacon change garments and colors; at times it was bedewed with wetness, drenched with the flow of blood, at times adorned with treasure. Yet I, lying there a long while, beheld the troubled tree of the Savior, until I heard that it proclaimed; the best tree began to speak these words:

28 “That was once long ago, that I even now remember, that I was cut down from the edge of the forest, removed from my root. Then strong foes seized me; they worked me there into a spectacle for themselves, commanded me to raise their accursed ones. Then

men bore me on (their) shoulders until they placed me on a hill; foes enough fastened me there. I saw the ruler of mankind hasten with great courage when he wished to leap upon me. I dared not bow down there or break against the word of the Lord, when I saw the surfaces of the earth tremble. I might have struck down all foes; however, I stood firm.

39 The young hero then undressed himself, that was God almighty, strong and resolute. He climbed onto the high gallow(s), bold in the sight of many, when he wished to free mankind. I trembled when the man embraced me. Nevertheless, I dared not bow down to the earth, fall to the surfaces of the earth, but I had to stand fast. I was raised as a cross, I raised the powerful king, the lord of the heavens; I dared not bend myself. They drove through me with dark nails; the scars are still visible on me, open treacherous wounds; I dared not injure any of them. They disgraced us both together. I was completely drenched with blood poured forth from that man's side when he had sent forth his soul. I have endured many hostile fates on the hill. I saw the God of hosts harshly stretched out. Darkness had covered with clouds the corpse of the lord, the shining brightness; shadows went forth, dark under the heavens. All creation wept, bewailed the fall of the king. Christ was on the cross.

57 Indeed the eager ones came from afar to the prince. I beheld all that. I was sorely disturbed with sorrows; however, I bent down humbly with great courage to the hands of warriors. There they took the almighty God, lifted him from the heavy torment. Then warriors relinquished me, standing covered with blood; I was entirely wounded with arrows. They laid down the limb-weary one; they stood by the head of his body; they beheld there the Lord of heaven and he rested there a while, tired after the great struggle. The men began to make a grave for him in sight of the slayer; they carved that of bright

stone; therein they placed the ruler of victories. They began then to sing a sorrow-song for him, sad in the eventide when they, tired, wished to depart again from the famous prince. He rested there with a small company. Yet we stood there in position a good while lamenting, the voice of warriors went up. The corpse grew cold, beautiful life-house. Then one began to cut us all down to the earth; that was an awful fate!

75      One buried us in a deep pit. However the thanes and friends of the Lord learned of me, adorned me with gold and silver. Now you might hear, beloved warrior of mine, that I here endured the work of wicked ones, of painful sorrows. Now has the time come that men across the world worship me far and wide and all this famous creation beseech themselves to this beacon. On me the son of God suffered for a time; for that I now rise glorious under the heavens and I may save each one of those who is himself in awe of me. Once I was made the harshest punishment most hated by men before I opened up to voice-bearers a right way of life for them.

90      Lo! The prince of glory, the guardian of the kingdom of heaven, then made me worthy above (all other trees), just as he, the almighty God before all men, likewise honored his mother Mary above all womankind. Now I command you, dear warrior of mine, that you tell this vision to men, revealing with words that it is the tree of glory, that on which almighty God suffered for the many sins of mankind and the old works of Adam. There he tasted death; however, after that the Lord arose with his great strength as help to men. He then ascended to heaven. Hither again the Lord himself will come onto this middle earth to seek mankind on Judgment Day, almighty God and his angels as well, because he, who possesses the power of judgment, then wishes to judge each one as he for himself earlier here in this transitory life earned. None can then be unafraid on

account of the word which the ruler will speak. He will ask before the multitude where the man is (might be) who in the name of the Lord would want to taste bitter death, just as he previously did on the cross. But they will then be afraid and hardly imagine what they will begin to say to Christ. Then none need to be fearful, who previously carries the best of beacons in his breast, but each soul must seek the kingdom through the cross away from the earthly path who thinks to dwell with the lord.”

122 I prayed for myself then to the beam with joyous mind, much courage, where I was alone with little company. My spirit was urged on the journey; it experienced many (of all) times of weariness. Now it is my hope of life that I may seek the victory tree, alone more often than all (other) men, worship properly. For me the desire for that is great in my heart and my (hope of) protection is directed to the cross. I have not many powerful friends on earth; but they have all departed forth from here, from worldly joys; they sought for themselves the king of glory and live now in the heavens with the high father (God), dwelling in glory, and I expect for myself each of days (a time) when the cross of the Lord, which I previously beheld here on earth, may fetch me from this transitory life and bring me then where there is great bliss, joy in the heavens, where the people of the Lord sit at the feast and there is everlasting bliss, and set me then where I may be allowed afterwards to dwell in glory, properly enjoy the joys among the holy ones.

144b The lord be a friend to me, he who previously suffered on the gallows tree here on earth for the sins of men. He set us free and gave us life, a heavenly home. Hope was restored with splendors and with bliss for those who endured the burning (fires of Hell). The son was victorious on the journey, mighty and powerful when he came with the

multitude, a host of spirits, into the kingdom of God, almighty ruler, to the bliss of angels and all the holy ones, those who dwelled before in glory in the heavens, when their ruler came, almighty God, to where his ancestral home was.



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