

## ABSTRACT

ROSENBERG, KELSEY KAMERON. *A Nuanced Relationship Between the Living and the Dead: An Examination of Ghost Stories in Medieval Exempla from 1000-1200*. (Under the direction of Dr. Julie Mell).

Ghost stories are little studied in the context of medieval history. Because they are left out of the narrative, there is an essential piece missing in our current conception of how the living and the dead influenced one another during this period. As Peter Brown explained the nuanced relationship between popular religion and the established church within the confines of the cult of saint worship, this paper wishes to explore that nuanced relationship within the context of ghost stories. This thesis focuses on the exempla and church writings which relate to ghosts, examining five authors between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, with a short chapter on ghost stories before this period for comparison. This research finds that ghost stories reveal several things about the medieval imagination surrounding death and the afterlife, specifically related to the “mechanics” of ghost sightings (time, place, and authority), the dead begetting death, which sins are most important, and concern with placement in the afterlife with an emphasis on purgatory. These trends are then evaluated in terms of the time period, placing the stories back into context. These patterns illustrate, not only a great shift in medieval feelings towards death and the afterlife, but even more how the medieval people were involved in these matters. This is seen specifically with the shift towards poverty and preaching within church reforms, the rising incidences of lay piety, and the more concrete development of purgatory as a third place. Consequently, ghost stories are an essential piece of knowledge previously missing from the larger discussion on the medieval imagination surrounding death and the afterlife. They aid in our understanding of how medieval people related to their dead and reveal the paramount concern with making it to paradise. Even more importantly, they shed light on a nuanced

relationship between the upper echelons of the church and their doctrine, and the laity's own constructed piety.

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A Nuanced Relationship Between the Living and the Dead: An Examination of Ghost Stories in  
Medieval Exempla from 1000-1200

by  
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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my sweet mother, who instilled and fostered in me both curiosity and a love of learning at a young age.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Kelsey received her undergraduate degree in nursing (BSN) from Appalachian State University in May of 2014. She is currently living in Holly Springs, NC with her husband, Michael, and the sweetest cat in the world, Storm, who is indeed named after the X-Men.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Historiography

Medieval ghost stories are little studied as a singular topic. Only Jean-Claude Schmitt has, to my knowledge, attempted such a work in his 1998 book, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*. While few historians have analyzed medieval ghost stories, several are instrumental in changing the way we talk about medieval perceptions of death. Specifically, Patrick Geary, Jean-Claude Schmitt, Jacques Le Goff, Phillipe Ariès, and Peter Brown are necessary to discuss for any subsequent work on death and the afterlife.

To begin, an understanding of medieval perceptions of the dead is necessary. Geary writes, “Death marked a transition, a change in status, but not an end.”<sup>1</sup> This is a fundamentally different mindset from later periods, and even from earlier periods. Geary writes that the dead were omnipresent in the medieval world. They were commemorated, honored, and inextricably linked to the living world. This may seem like a small point, but it is essential to understanding the purpose and power of ghost stories. The dead are linked to the living in many ways, but it is necessary to know that the dead were included in nearly every aspect of life and were perceived very differently than in other time periods.

Schmitt is an *Annales* historian, meaning that he evaluates across a long history, looking for overarching themes and changes that may be subtle at the time, but cause great change over long periods. His evaluation of ghost stories begins by tracing the history of acceptance, or rejection, of ghost stories among church fathers, and how they came to be prevalent. He then analyzes ghost stories in terms of their purpose, dividing them into *mirabilia*, *miracula*, and

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<sup>1</sup> Geary, Patrick J. *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1996, 2.

exempla.<sup>2</sup> Caciola also notes that Schmitt points out the “banalization of ghosts within [the aforementioned genres] rendered them adaptable to various agendas.”<sup>3</sup> Schmitt focuses a great deal on what ghosts meant in terms of family relationships. Because his focus is far more broad, he discusses a wider range of stories, such as Hellequin’s hunt, and his belief that the hunt rises from both feudalism and the Peace of God movement. Though he talks about exempla and “church” ghost stories, which are the main focus of this research, he states:

Likewise too, out of the church’s religious, ethical, and ideological harnessing of laypeople after the turn of the twelfth century there flowed, into the hands and the mouths of the brothers of the Mendicant orders, the development and the efficacy of the *mass media* of the Middle Ages: the massive and stereotypical narrative collections of *exempla*.<sup>4</sup>

This implies that there was a top down approach to exempla ghost stories – the church creates and controls the laity with exempla literature. However, I believe that the relationship between ghost stories and lay piety is far more nuanced. Later, we will discuss this further, but I believe that Schmitt has glossed over the exempla as being, in some ways, simple church propaganda. I believe there is evidence that ghost stories are both able to influence lay actions, and are also a response to lay actions. Essentially, there is a mutual and reciprocal relationship between the church and the laity being expressed with ghost stories that becomes far too simple if we believe exempla to be a mere top-down method of social control.

Jacques Le Goff takes on the question of how purgatory came to be in his book, *The Birth of Purgatory*. Le Goff argues that purgatory has its roots as a third place, imagined when early Christians considered what happens to the soul between death and final judgement. Le Goff

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<sup>2</sup> Caciola, Nancy. *Speculum* 76, no. 2 (2001): 517-19. doi:10.2307/2903518, 518.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Schmitt, Jean-Claude. *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: the Living and the Dead in Medieval Society*. Translated by Teresa Lavender Fagan. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2007, 223.

continues, informing us that:

in the fourth century, the greatest Fathers of the Church conceived of the idea (shared with minor differences as we shall see, by Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine) that certain sinners might be saved, most probably by being subjected to a trial of some sort, a new belief was born, a belief that gradually matured until in the twelfth century it became the belief in Purgatory; but the place where these souls were to reside and where this trial was to take place was not yet specified.<sup>5</sup>

Le Goff argues that purgatory as a distinct place does not happen until the twelfth century, the word does not even exist as a noun until this time. His goal is to trace the origin of this third place, saying that the birth of purgatory is directly linked to the emergence of the feudal system, arguing that with the chaos of late antiquity resolved, people were able to devote more time to think about “Purgatory, a superfluous luxury.”<sup>6</sup> And as order was restored, “The domestication of the next world that paved the way for Purgatory also made it possible to include the dead among the ranks of the social order. Purgatory gave this society a new lease on eternal life, as it were, a second chance at salvation, and this change entailed other modifications in the social system.”<sup>7</sup>

Le Goff also tells us that “Purgatory is an intermediary other world in which the trial to be endured by the dead may be abridged by the intercessory prayers, the “suffrages”, of the living.”<sup>8</sup> Le Goff is important for the study of medieval ghost stories because as the stories progress we see the importance of purgatory as a concept increase. The imagination surrounding death changes in a way that reflects Le Goff’s own conclusions about the rise of purgatory as a distinct place.

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<sup>5</sup> Le Goff, Jacques. *The Birth of Purgatory*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 13.

<sup>7</sup> Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 13.

<sup>8</sup> Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 11.

Le Goff also tells us that purgatory leads to two results, the first is that what one did in life became more important. Purgatory allowed for a nuancing of the afterlife system. Before purgatory, one could only avoid hell by extreme measure, with taking monastic orders one of the only ways to be sure of avoiding damnation. Purgatory allowed for other types of penance.<sup>9</sup> Le Goff further insists that purgatory permits a new relationship between the living and the dead because the living can help the dead move from purgatory to paradise. It changes the perception of death because it is no longer a black and white type of entry into the eternal afterlife, but one can rather be temporarily in a place to atone for sins. Death is not final but still contains a journey. Le Goff posits that purgatory is of especial importance because of the driving force of paradise. The desire for heaven is what makes purgatory important, it is “the last bleak stretch to be traversed on the road to eternity. Was Purgatory more a pre-eternity than a post existence?”<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, maintaining hell was equally important – hell allowed for purgatory to be the saving grace from the eternal damnation. Le Goff asks, “Wasn’t Purgatory the price that the Church had to pay to hold onto the ultimate weapon, damnation?”<sup>11</sup>

This juxtaposition of purgatory as both a space to escape hell and earn heaven is crucial to our understanding of ghost stories. Throughout this thesis, we build to an understanding of ghost stories in the context of the time period, as well as examining what is revealed about the medieval perceptions of death and the afterlife. This precarious placement of purgatory is essential because ghost stories support both of these notions; that hell can be the ultimate weapon wielded by the church, and that heaven is the driving force behind actions in life. In chapter four we touch on social control, by which we do not mean to imply a cynical attempt to gain power,

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<sup>9</sup> Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 292.

<sup>10</sup> Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 359.

<sup>11</sup> Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 359.

but is the best available to describe the ability of the church to use ghost stories to influence behavior. This desire to influence morality comes, not from a desire to control only, but rather from a deeper desire to lead the flock to salvation. Le Goff's concern with balancing two extremes is essential because we cannot view the church as using purgatory only as a tool to guilt people into penance and good deeds on behalf of their own or a deceased loved one's salvation, but rather it is somewhere in between this negative connotation of social control and a genuine desire for parishioners to attain heaven; just as purgatory lies somewhere between saving a person from hell and allowing them to reach heaven.

Phillipe Ariès, an Annales historian characterizes early medieval imagination surrounding death as "tame death." His work on death was intended to cover a one-thousand-year period, and as such he spends little time with the medieval period. However, some of his ideas are found in Le Goff and are important to our study, though his contribution to this current work is both broader and briefer than Le Goff of Brown. Before the rise of purgatory, he argues that death was accepted, using the term "tame death" to describe the acceptance that all die. Ariès argues this belief eventually shifted to a greater acknowledgement of the death of self or a distinct person, as evidenced by grave art. Tame death is illustrated in some earlier ghost stories – death is a peaceful transition and not to be feared.

Additionally, Ariès evaluates how the oldest romances deal with death, saying, "They were usually forewarned. They did not die without having had time to realize they were going to die."<sup>12</sup> "Let us note that the warning came through natural signs or, even more frequently, through an inner conviction"<sup>13</sup> Ariès continues. Early ghost stories are often warnings of death

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<sup>12</sup> Ariès Philippe. *Western Attitudes towards Death: from the Middle Ages to the Present*. Translated by Patricia M. Ranum. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975.2-3.

<sup>13</sup> Ariès, *Western Attitudes toward Death*, 4.

to come, which fits in well with Ariès assessment. Though he claims that typically there is a natural explanation rather than supernatural, ghost stories can be seen as the special case. These stories support the idea of tame death – because they are the warning Ariès mentions. However, Ariès posits that purgatory rose as a distinct place during the seventeenth century, which is much later than Le Goff. I am inclined to agree with Le Goff, that purgatory rises in the medieval imagination far earlier than Ariès postulates, during the twelfth century rather than the seventeenth. However, Le Goff, on the basis of Ariès, asserts that ghost stories lose their significance during this period. See the two quotes below for a comparison of their thoughts on ghosts:

But from now on, the fate of the immortal soul was decided from the very moment of physical death. There would be less and less room for those who return from the dead and their manifestations. On the other hand, the belief in purgatory as a place of waiting, hitherto long confined to scholars, theologians, or poets, would become truly popular, but not before the middle of the seventeenth century, when it replaced the old images of sleep and rest.<sup>14</sup>

As a matter of fact, Ariès also says that as time went by “there was less and less room for ghosts and their manifestations.” I agree, but I would add that the change had already begun in the thirteenth century, the only exceptions being the small number of souls in Purgatory and the still smaller number of the saved and the damned to whom God granted “special permission” to make brief appearances on earth for the edification of the living, though they were no longer allowed to wander.<sup>15</sup>

Jean-Claude Schmitt agrees with Le Goff that the function of purgatory was, in part, “the imprisonment of ghosts,” stating that “It is true that purgatory put an end to uncertain wanderings. The wandering of ghosts was therefore channeled but not denied, since never had ghosts, or at least the texts that mention them, been so large in number.”<sup>16</sup>

I argue here, and I believe that Schmitt would agree, that the arrival of purgatory as a

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<sup>14</sup> Ariès Philippe. *The Hour of Our Death*. Translated by Helen Weaver. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1981, 107.

<sup>15</sup> Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 293.

<sup>16</sup> Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, 124-125.

third place is a catalyst for more ghost stories within exempla literature during the period studied (eleventh to thirteenth century). This argument will be explored later on in this thesis, but this is an essential contribution of my own work to the current field. I believe that ghost stories in exempla are little studied and as such have been left out of the narrative or inappropriately pushed to the side as a footnote on the larger story of medieval imagination surrounding death and the afterlife.

Peter Brown, a well-known cultural historian, also focuses on this relationship between the living and dead, specifically as it applies to the cult of the saints. In Brown's view, laid out in *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, there are many reasons for the rise of worship around places of dead saints. He rejects Hume's two-tiered model of religion, which divides religious activities into the intellectual religion and the popular superstition of the lower classes. This idea of a separation between popular religion and the upper echelons of a religion allows for a believe that the superstition of the lower classes influenced the upper classes, resulting in the conclusion that saint worship was an altered form of pagan beliefs. Brown fundamentally rejects this idea, because it assumes that there was backsliding in the religion due to adoption of vulgar beliefs. Instead, he wished to illuminate the shift in late antiquity from abhorrence of graves to worship at saint tombs as a shift in the thinking of late antiquity, not a backsliding from the enlightenment of Rome.<sup>17</sup>

The cult of saints is not a product of either intellectual religion or popular superstition, but is rather a product of both. The relationship is far more nuanced than previous scholars have tried to make it. Brown writes, at "the end of the sixth century, the graves of the saints . . . had

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<sup>17</sup> Brown, Peter. *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982, 17.

become centers of ecclesiastical life in the region. This was because the saint in Heaven was believed to be “present” at his tomb on earth.”<sup>18</sup> This is a shift towards the ability to view the living and dead as compatible, illustrating how they interact with one another. This compatibility is essential to understanding how medieval Christians viewed the dead. Brown further continues by saying that we cannot rely on pagan understandings of the dead and the living’s relationship to the dead because this imagination was changing.

#### Medieval Christians displayed

a willingness to focus belief on precise invisible persons, on Christ and his friends the saints . . . in such a way as to commit the believer to definite rhythms in his life (such as the observation of holy days of the saints), to direct his attention to specific sites and objects (the shrines and relics of the saints), to react to illness and to danger by dependence on these invisible persons, and to remain constantly aware, in the play of human action around him, that good and bad fortune was directly related to good or bad relations with these invisible persons.<sup>19</sup>

This willingness to accept the dead as part of the social order allows us to treat ghost tales as literature from the period that illustrates what the living believed to be true about the dead. The growing desire to commune with the spiritual world shows itself in the various cults of saints that grew up in during late antiquity. The cult of saints is a way that the laity is attempting to create their own religious experience, devoid of the church hierarchy and, at times, in spite of it.

Recent scholarship has examined the ways in which the laity created their own spirituality, rather than having it thrust upon them. In relation to our discussion of ghost stories, the cult of saints is about the “very special dead,”<sup>20</sup> while ghost stories concern the uncanny dead. Though they are not quite normal or typical, they are not special. Ghosts are normal people who have passed on and return to instruct the living how to behave, especially in later

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<sup>18</sup> Brown, *Cult of Saints*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Brown, *Cult of Saints*, 119.

<sup>20</sup> Brown, *The Cult of Saints*, 69-70.



stories. In some stories, the ghosts are members of the clergy, but normal people do not seem precluded as ghosts who can return with a message, nor are these lay ghosts the exception to the rule.

Brown's rejection of Hume's two-tiered model and his assertion that the cult of saints grew out of both popular and intellectual religion is essential. My work is predicated on the idea that ghost stories are far more nuanced than previous research would have us believe. It is my intention to explore, as Peter Brown did with the cult of saints, the intricate relationship between ghost stories and their context – what influence does the more intellectual side of religion have on ghost stories? Where do ghost stories fit into popular religion? Are ghost stories in exempla aiding in influencing religious ideas, or is the dissemination of ghost stories an effort to teach religious ideas to the masses? I wish to deal with ghost stories in the style of Peter Brown's work on the cult of saints – this means that I will in no way answer all the questions which can be raised in a study of ghost stories, but rather I wish to expose the nuanced relationship between the laity and the church using ghost stories, illustrating the complexity of medieval Christianity.

This allows us to view the dead as a part of the social order – they are not to be relegated to only one place, the place of the dead, as it is viewed in the modern mind. The dead were a part of everyday life; they were part of the medieval imagination. Thus, we ought to study the ghost stories that appear as a part of exempla and everyday life.

### **Argument and Significance**

The lack of scholarly literature on ghost stories during the period keeps us from understanding an important piece of the medieval imagination surrounding death and the afterlife. Ghosts in exempla stories are uniquely situated as a piece of church literature which both illustrates the influence the church held over lay piety and simultaneously the laity's ability

to influence the church. In the tradition of Peter Brown, ghost stories are similar to the cult of saints in that they illustrate a great deal about the imagination surrounding the afterlife, and more specifically the rise of purgatory as discussed by Le Goff. However, the cult of saints deals with a different kind of dead than ghost stories; ghost stories are about mundane and ordinary people, not about the special elite who were martyred or otherwise sainted after their death.

Ghost stories reveal the unique relationship between the “normal” dead and the living in a way that the cult of saints cannot. Additionally, the rise of ghost stories in this period makes it especially important to investigate why. The rise of ghost stories in exempla literature between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries point to a nuanced relationship between the living and the dead as well as the laity and the church. They specifically illustrate certain ideas about death prevalent at the time, and inform us about the relationship between the living and the dead, while also subtly illustrating the larger reforms and changes during this period of church history, specifically those related to the rising emphasis on poverty and preaching, the increase of lay piety, and the idea of purgatory.

Ghosts are a bridge between the living and the dead that is not nearly as popular in the modern scholarly literature as the cult of saints. However, they illustrate the concern for the afterlife just as well. Because the dead are perceived as still influencing the living, we should focus on ghost stories as a facet of the medieval imagination surrounding death as part of this bridge. Around 1000, there are many reforms in the church, an increase in lay piety, and the establishment of purgatory as a third place. The rise in ghost stories accompanies and informs those changes. The explosion of ghost stories around the year 1000 demands that we ask what changes in both church culture and the medieval imagination surrounding death and the afterlife.

We begin this evaluation with ghost stories pre-1000 in chapter one. This gives us a

baseline for type and number of ghost stories, which allows us to see that there is an explosion of ghost stories. From this point, we will attempt to investigate this explosion of exempla ghost stories, explaining why there is a rise of ghost stories in this period. In chapter two, the tales will be listed in terms of where the ghost “comes from”; aka heaven, hell, purgatory. This organization allows for easy comparison of the similarities and differences between ghost stories across authors and time period. Once the stories are established, chapter three will explore trends within the ghost stories, postulating why certain things seem prevalent in the stories, and how those trends are different than ghost stories pre-1000, allowing us to observe changes in the medieval imagination. Chapter four will focus on the historical context, showing how ghost stories support these contextual trends and inform them.

### **Boundaries and a Note on the Nature of Ghost stories**

Ghost stories are not, in medieval tradition, dramatic or distressing supernatural appearances. Rather, they are a credible appearance to warn, instruct or otherwise impart wisdom. They are not tales of gothic mystery like we see in Victorian and later periods, nor are they the horror stories of modern cinema. Rather medieval ghost stories are tamer, with purpose, informing the present by way of the past.

The boundaries for this research are two-fold: One is chronological; the stories are pulled primarily from the two-hundred-year period between 1000 and 1200 A.D. The second boundary is in type of story, or story scope. While there are other types of ghost stories, the ones we evaluate here are written by men of the church in church writings. We are not dealing with stories of monsters, demons, devils, and other supernatural types, only those stories of spirits returning from beyond the grave, and only those which appear in church or other spiritual texts, primarily focusing on exempla. The exception to these guidelines are the stories from chapter 1,

which, though written by churchmen, range chronologically from 593-731 AD. These are specifically included to provide contrast to the main body of literature, and to explain the significance of the great amount of works suddenly appearing in exempla form. Because of the time period, these early tales cannot be classified as exempla, for their purpose is not primarily teaching of a moral story within the confines of preaching.

### **Exempla**

Exempla are “told to illustrate a moral lesson”<sup>21</sup> and, in the medieval period, were most noticeable as part of sermons to laypersons. “The Christian exemplum is, first, a narrative referring to a truth existing autonomously and outside of the text, and second, it tells exemplary events from which the audience shall learn a moral lesson.”<sup>22</sup> They could be both formal and informal, and “functioned to bridge the gap between a more or less theologically educated clergy and the popular religion of ordinary people, and therefore many exempla either came from or became widespread in the folklore of town and country alike.”<sup>23</sup> The stories examined here were to be told aloud to a primarily illiterate audience, to impress upon the audience ideas the Church wished them to comprehend. Other scholars have discussed their importance and function in medieval society in the following way:

These short, edifying anecdotes became one of the most useful instruments of persuasion at the disposal of preachers. As a set of basic patterns, enabling an infinite variety of possibilities, the exempla soon became an indispensable auxiliary of the sermon. Provocative, humorous, or frightening, they were meant to motivate the audience to accept the Church's message. They complemented the lessons of the Church Fathers and the rationes, while establishing the basic components of sermons.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Lindahl, Carl, John McNamara, and John Lindow. *Medieval Folklore: an Encyclopedia of Myths, Legends, Tales, Beliefs, and Customs*. EBSCOhost. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2000, 287.

<sup>22</sup> Axel R uth. "Representing Wonder in Medieval Miracle Narratives." *MLN* 126, no. 4 (2011): S89-S114. <https://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed May 3, 2019), S97.

<sup>23</sup> Lindahl, McNamara, and Lindow. *Medieval Folklore*, 287.

<sup>24</sup> Menache and Horowitz, *Rhetoric Medieval Sermons*, 323.

Finally, we must understand that the medieval people and the authors of the exempla believed them to be true, they were not made-up stories, but true retellings and were even considered historical:

For all of them [Cistercian authors of exempla] the stories were both true accounts and persuasive narrative tales. We may not always share their convictions, but in order to understand the role of the exempla in the Cistercian world where they were used, we should never forget that they were meant to be truthful accounts, and that their persuasiveness was in part grounded in their historicity.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Berlioz, Polo de Beaulieu and Smirnova, *Art of Cistercian Persuasion*, 32.

## CHAPTER 1: EARLY TALES (BEFORE 1000)

These early tales come from only two works, *Dialogues* by Gregory the Great and *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* by the Venerable Bede, written in the late sixth century and early eighth century respectively. Both authors were writing for an audience of their peers with the specific aim to write ecclesiastical works for their countries: Gregory for Italian saints and miracles,<sup>26</sup> for Bede an ecclesiastical history of Britain.<sup>27</sup>

Gregory the Great was pope from 590 to 604. He did not originally come from a church background, but rather chose to give up his very successful political life in favor of the church at thirty-five.<sup>28</sup> He lived under the Rule of St. Benedict after giving away his possessions to the poor and gifting his land and home to the church for the building of seven total monasteries. He was made a deacon of Rome and messenger to Constantinople, a position he held for six years, before becoming an abbot. This position was short lived as the people and clergy elected him pope five years later. Gregory chose to write *Dialogues* at the presumed urging of his own household.<sup>29</sup>

Bede's own life remains somewhat mysterious. There is not much biographical information to go on, though we know he spent most of his life in a monastery as, from the age of seven, he was placed there by kinsmen.<sup>30</sup> He was made a deacon, and then a priest. Though sources do not all agree on the dates of events in Bede's life, both these occasions took place far

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<sup>26</sup> Gregory the Great. *Dialogues*. Translated by Odo John Zimmermann. *ProQuest Ebook Central*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2002, vi.

<sup>27</sup> Bede the Venerable. *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People: an Introduction and Selection*. Edited by Rowan Williams. Translated by Benedicta Ward. *ProQuest Ebook Central*. London: Bloomsbury, 2012.  
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncsu/reader.action?docID=967739>, xxiii.

<sup>28</sup> Gregory, *Dialogues*, v.

<sup>29</sup> Gregory, *Dialogues*, vii.

<sup>30</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, xxxiii

before he wrote his very well-known *Ecclesiastical History*.

A main difference between these texts and the ones evaluated in chapter two is the genre. In chapter two, we primarily deal with exempla, but here we are dealing with histories. Even Gregory's *Dialogues* can be viewed as a history of the saints and miracles in Italy, and Bede certainly intended his work to be viewed as a history. This seems to be a typical literary undertaking at the time as other authors, such as Paul the Deacon and Gregory of Tours, were writing histories of the Lombards and Franks, though they were not ecclesiastical in nature. It is important to begin with tales that come before the observed explosion in 1000, to really understand the significance of that event. We will move chronologically through the tales, carefully evaluating each, and summarizing some key points at the end of an author's selection. This will give us context to move from. Then, we will briefly analyze what aspects of these early tales disappear in later tales.

### **Gregory the Great's Dialogues**

Gregory the Great included two ghost stories in his *Dialogues*, which is dated around 593. The tales are similar to one another, and they support the idea that earlier medieval Christians had an idea of something between heaven and hell, but it was not solidified in the imagination as a distinct third place. Instead of revolving around punishment and purgatory as later tales did, Gregory's tales recount departed persons who have been relegated to service at the baths. Unlike later tales, there is no reference to the deaths of those the visions appeared to, and unlike the tales around 1000, there is no fitting punishment or moral judgement passed on these souls. Instead, the tales are recorded to encourage Christians to sacrifice on behalf of their dead loved ones, as well as to give alms in their life to expedite their souls to the afterlife.

In the first, Gregory recounts the tale of Paschasius, a story which he heard while a youth

from his elders and men “acquainted with the circumstances.”<sup>31</sup> Gregory notes that Paschasius has written many well-known works on the Holy Spirit which are still read. In addition, Paschasius had a healthy degree of self-loathing, while his charity was admirable. However, during the turmoil surrounding two elected popes, Symmachus and Lawrence in 498, Paschasius backed the losing candidate, Lawrence, and, according to Gregory, remained devoted to Lawrence to his dying day. This was in spite of eventual unanimous support of Symmachus.<sup>32</sup>

Gregory implies that Paschasius’ error was refusing to agree with the authority of the Church and her bishops. When he died during the reign of Symmachus, Paschasius’ dalmatic<sup>33</sup> cured someone who touched it while it rested on his coffin. Gregory tell us that much later, a bishop named Germanus is told to bathe in the baths of Angulus for his health. Germanus was surprised to see Paschasius standing as an attendant at the baths, and asks him why a man of his dignity is serving here. Paschasius replies: “The only reason I am serving here, is that I endorsed the party of Lawrence against Symmachus. But I beg you, pray for me to the Lord. When you come back and no longer find me here, you will know that your prayers have been heard.”<sup>34</sup> When Germanus has prayed for Paschasius and returns to the baths a few days later, Paschasius is no longer there. Gregory tells us:

This purification from sin after death was possible because the deacon had sinned through ignorance, and not through malice. What we are to believe is that through his previous almsdeeds he obtained the grace of receiving forgiveness at a time when he was no longer able to do meritorious works.<sup>35</sup>

The second tale is of an unnamed priest from Tauriana, told to Gregory by the Bishop

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<sup>31</sup> Gregory, *Dialogues*, 249.

<sup>32</sup> Gregory, *Dialogues*, 250.

<sup>33</sup> According to the online Encyclopaedia Britannica, a dalmatic is an ecclesiastical outer garment that was commonly worn during this period.

<sup>34</sup> Gregory, *Dialogues*, 250.

<sup>35</sup> Gregory, *Dialogues*, 250.



Felix. Gregory points out that this priest was still living in that area two years ago, so rather than a story recalled from the more distant past, this tale was relatively fresh. The priest went to the baths, as his health required it, and one day he was waited on by an especially helpful attendant, who helped him to take off his shoes, cared for his clothes, and brought him towels. After this happened on several occasions, the priest felt it would be rude for him to not acknowledge and reward this man's kind service, so one day the priest brought along two crown-shaped loaves of bread to give the attendant. After the man provides the usual service, the priest offers the loaves, but the man replies:

'Why do you give it to me, Father? That bread is holy and I cannot eat it. I who stand before you was once the owner of this place. It is because of my sins that I was sent back here as a servant. If you wish to do something for me, then offer this bread to almighty God, and so make intercession for me, a sinner. When you come back and do not find me here, you will know that your prayers have been heard.' With these words he disappeared, thus showing that he was a spirit disguised as a man.<sup>36</sup>

The priest faithfully offers prayer and Masses on behalf of the attendant each day for a week, and upon returning to the baths finds him gone. Gregory tells us that, "this incident points out the great benefits souls derive from the Sacrifice of the Mass. Because of these benefits the dead ask us, the living, to have Masses offered for them, and even show us by signs that it was through the Mass that they were pardoned."<sup>37</sup>

*Dialogues* is mostly full of tales of Italian saints, with only the final book dedicated to the immortality of the soul.<sup>38</sup> Odo Zimmermann's introduction to *Dialogues* tells us that Gregory's purpose in Book 4 is different from his purpose in the first three books, where he is attempting to encourage Italian Christians to see that their land too housed miracles and saints: "in Book 4 St.

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<sup>36</sup> Gregory, *Dialogues*, 267.

<sup>37</sup> Gregory, *Dialogues*, 267.

<sup>38</sup> Zimmermann, *Dialogues*, vi.

Gregory endeavored to strengthen their faith in the unseen hereafter by proving that the soul does not perish with the body and can look forward to eternal happiness.”<sup>39</sup> We see that these two stories further his purpose, proving there is an afterlife with the existence of ghosts, and, since the ghosts disappear after they are freed from their punishment, that there is a heaven for which you must earn entrance. Both stories require the belief in an afterlife, and require a belief that you can attain heaven. Further, there is a hint that the living can help the deceased earn their way into heaven. These two tales of the dead, are strikingly similar. Each ghost is being punished for something in life, is able to be freed by the living, and both stories occur in the baths.

One of Gregory’s main goals when writing the *Dialogues* was to encourage the Christian people, thus we should evaluate these two stories as encouragements. He states at the end of each why they are important. The first assures the flock that if they make a mistake out of ignorance, there is hope for their eventual salvation. Even if the mistake is large enough to keep them from going to heaven immediately, they can still be freed by their alms and good character in this life, and the prayers of others. The second tale encourages sacrifices for the dead as a way to achieve their absolution. Gregory also hints that the dead know what they need to reach heaven and can communicate both that need and their appreciation. This is our first hint of interaction; the dead can communicate not only needs, but when those needs are met – we see this again in later tales, though later tales have the purpose of instruction rather than encouragement.

### **Bede’s Ecclesiastical History**

The Venerable Bede also recounts two tales of ghosts in his great work, *Ecclesiastical*

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<sup>39</sup> Zimmermann, *Dialogues*, vi.

*History of the English Peoples*, written in 731. In the first story, Bede recounts the story of some wondrous happenings in a community of pious women, mostly surrounding a sister named Tortgyth. Tortgyth is close with the mother of the community, Ethelburg, helping her instruct the younger sisters. Tortgyth is seized with a bodily affliction, which Bede tells us is to make her “virtue . . . perfect in weakness.”<sup>40</sup> Bede tells us this sickness affected her for nine years, and was to purify her of sins which might remain in her via neglect or ignorance.<sup>41</sup> Bede tells us that Tortgyth saw a vision one night, of a “human body . . . brighter than the sun, wrapped in fine linen”<sup>42</sup> which was borne aloft from the house the sisters slept in by cords of pure gold. Tortgyth considers this vision and determines that one of the sisters will soon pass away, but will be carried to heaven by their good deeds, like the golden cords had carried the body away in her vision. A few days later, Ethelburg dies, and Bede tells us that her life was so exemplary, none could doubt her entrance into heaven. Breaking briefly from Tortgyth’s story, Bede tells us that another nun, who is paralyzed throughout her body, unable to lift a limb, hears that Ethelburg is being kept until burial in the church. She asks to be taken there, and speaks to the body as if it is still living, begging Ethelburg to intercede on her behalf with Christ, that she might no longer suffer the afflictions of her body. Bede tells us that this woman’s prayer was answered, as she died soon after, which was a deliverance from her mortal body’s failings into heavenly reward.

Returning to Tortgyth, Bede tells us that three years after Ethelburg has passed, Tortgyth is completely immobile with her illness. As she nears death, she is unable to speak or move, and, this having been the case for three days, “she was [suddenly] restored by a spiritual vision and

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<sup>40</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book IV, Chapter IX (Bede is here referencing II Corinthians 12:9).

<sup>41</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book IV, Chapter IX.

<sup>42</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book IV, Chapter IX.

opened her lips and eyes, and looking up to heaven, began thus to speak to the vision which she saw: ‘Very acceptable to me is thy coming, and thou art welcome!’<sup>43</sup> She silently listens to the vision for a moment, and responds to it, saying that she cannot “gladly suffer this.”<sup>44</sup> Tortgyth pauses again, and then replies to the vision, entreating that if it not be today that the wait not be long. After another pause, she asks that it not be later than the next night. Those watching asked her who she was speaking with, to which Tortgyth replied, “With my most dear mother, Ethelburg.”<sup>45</sup> Those listening realized that Ethelburg must have come to tell Tortgyth the time of her death, and the next night, Tortgyth dies and she goes to heaven.

The story of Tortgyth is interesting because it contains some miraculous visions along with the final revenant’s return. Bede, unlike Gregory, does not give a commentary on the individual tale, explaining how it may be encouraging to other Christians, but rather writes story after story. Bede also differs from Gregory in that this tale and the following one, both contain parallels to Bible stories. The parallel for Tortgyth begins in 2 Kings chapter 20 verses 1-6, when Hezekiah, a sick king, negotiates with God to extend his life,

Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, “This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover.” Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD . . . Before Isaiah had left the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him: “Go back and tell Hezekiah . . . ‘I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you . . . I will add fifteen years to your life.’<sup>46</sup>

Both Hezekiah and Tortgyth are extremely ill and are visited by a friend who is also close to God, one a prophet, the other a deceased abbess. Both Tortgyth and Hezekiah are unhappy with their prescribed time of death, and beg for it to be changed, though Tortgyth wishes for her life to

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<sup>43</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book IV, Chapter IX.

<sup>44</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book IV, Chapter IX.

<sup>45</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book IV, Chapter IX.

<sup>46</sup> 2 Kings 20:1-6.

be shorter and Hezekiah wishes it were longer. Both are able to favorably negotiate their time of death.

Bede's second tale is of Egbert, a priest, living in Ireland "as a stranger and pilgrim . . . to obtain hereafter a country in heaven."<sup>47</sup> Egbert decides that he wishes to preach to many in Germany, a place Bede says has not entirely heard the good news yet. Bede also notes that the Angles and Saxons of Britain find their ancestors in these German tribes. Remembering that Bede is attempting to write a history of Britain, this is an interesting nod to his main purpose, though it is seemingly haphazard within the story. Bede then tells us that in many places these Germanic tribes are still enslaved to pagan rites, which perhaps gives Egbert even more motivation to make this journey. Egbert also thought that if this evangelical purpose could not be obtained, he could go to Rome, "to see and adore the thresholds of the holy Apostles and martyrs of Christ."<sup>48</sup> Bede tells us that God prevented him from either of these enterprises. Egbert prepares thoroughly for the journey, with Bede emphasizing who Egbert chooses to take with him, when a brother comes to Egbert, relaying to him a vision. This brother was a disciple of the late priest Boisil.

"When after matins," said he, "I had laid me down in my bed, and was fallen into a light slumber, Boisil, that was sometime my master and brought me up in all love, appeared to me, and asked, whether I knew him? I said, 'Yes, you are Boisil.' He answered, 'I am come to bring Egbert a message from our Lord and Saviour, which must nevertheless be delivered to him by you. Tell him, therefore, that he cannot perform the journey he has undertaken; for it is the will of God that he should rather go to teach the monasteries of Columba.'"<sup>49</sup>

Bede reminds his audience that Columba was the first missionary to what is now Northern Scotland, to the Picts. Egbert then asks the brother not to relay his vision to anyone else, in case

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<sup>47</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book V, Chapter IX.

<sup>48</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book V, Chapter IX.

<sup>49</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book V, Chapter IX.

it is a false vision. Egbert, upon considering the vision further determines it is true, but stubbornly decides to carry on with his own journey, continuing to prepare.

The brother who had given Egbert the vision returns a few days later, saying that Boisil had again come to him after matins, rebuking him for not urging Egbert more strongly to go to Columba's monasteries. The brother quotes Boisil: "Yet, go now and tell [Egbert], that whether he will or no, he must go to Columba's monasteries, because their ploughs are not driven straight; and he must bring them back into the right way."<sup>50</sup> Once again, Egbert, though knowing the vision to be true, asks the brother to tell no one of this vision, and determines to set out on his voyage. After gathering their supplies on board a ship, they wait to set sail for fair winds. Instead, after a few days, a storm leaves the ship lying on its side and destroys some of the cargo; though all that belonged to Egbert and his complement were untouched. "Then [Egbert], saying, in the words of the prophet, 'For my sake this great tempest is upon you,'<sup>51</sup> withdrew himself from that undertaking and was content to remain at home."<sup>52</sup>

Once again, we find a biblical parallel between the story and the Old Testament by way of the book of Jonah – here Bede even quotes from the story itself. The similarities are found in Jonah 1:1-11. Jonah is commissioned by God to preach to the wicked city of Nineveh. God's specific reasoning is recounted in verse 2: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."<sup>53</sup> Note the similar reasoning: the city's evil deeds had been noticed by God in Nineveh; Egbert needs to bring Columba's monasteries back to the right way. Then, Jonah gets on a boat going away from Nineveh; similarly, Egbert does

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<sup>50</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book V, Chapter IX.

<sup>51</sup> Bede quotes here Jonah 1:12.

<sup>52</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book V, Chapter IX.

<sup>53</sup> Jonah 1:2

not go to Columba, and in both cases a violent storm arises. In the story of Jonah, the crew wake Jonah asking him to pray to his God for help. Jonah eventually takes responsibility for the storm, telling the seamen “Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” he replied, “and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.”<sup>54</sup> Egbert also takes responsibility for the storm, but instead of going to Columba, Egbert returns home. Jonah eventually makes it to Nineveh to preach as commanded.

The correlation ends here, for Jonah is swallowed by a large fish, and is there for three days and nights.<sup>55</sup> This implies that Jonah escapes with his life, but not much else. He then goes on to Nineveh as first commanded. Egbert, however, is saved from the storm’s devastation, he, his men and all their belongings. Bede does not tell us whether Egbert went to Columba’s monasteries as the vision commanded, rather he ends his tale by stating that Egbert goes home – presumably to Ireland, as it notes at the beginning of the story, while Columba’s monasteries are in Northern Scotland.

We recall that Bede is trying to write a credible church history for medieval Christians in what would become England – thus, to draw parallels to the Bible allows him to establish credibility for saints in this area – they are similar to Bible heroes, and thus become credible heroes themselves. The ghosts themselves feature little in these stories; they briefly appear to bring messages to the living about their coming death in the former, or what they ought to do, in the latter.

We see Bede accomplishing his purpose of establishing a credible church history. While his tales fit into the category of those which herald death or bring a message, they are more

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<sup>54</sup> Jonah 1:12

<sup>55</sup> Jonah 1:17.

deeply rooted in stories of the Bible to establish a credible history of the church by drawing parallels between England's saints and the Bible's own. This parallel also gives us a glimpse into the medieval mind, a message from the dead is not unlike one from God.

### **Differences from later tales**

These early tales are clearly advancing the purposes of each author. We have noted that Gregory has tied his ghosts to the baths, and that his purpose in writing *Dialogues* and including ghost stories was to encourage Italian Christians that there was a life after death. Both of his stories give hope to people who may, like Paschasius, sin out of ignorance, or who, like the bath attendant, may need help from the living to enter heaven. The idea of the living helping the dead to paradise is a fundamental precursor to the idea of purgatory, which, by the later stories we examine, has become a fixed place between heaven and hell in the imagination of medieval people and the church. At the time of Gregory's writing, there is evidence, as in his second story, that the idea of a third place is existing, but it is not as securely placed as it is in later stories.

Gregory's tying of the soul to a place is interesting as well. Later tales do not tie the dead as specifically to one place – some make pilgrimages to atone for sin carried out abroad, some return to their loved ones, and the vast majority are found in or around the graveyard, and are often specifically present at or around matins, or in the night. Gregory does not make a time distinction; both ghosts seem to be present at the baths at all times until atoned for, and while the attendant worked at the baths during his life, Paschasius did not. We see that later tales seem to fix the dead in places which make sense for that person – where they committed sin, where they lived, where they are buried. Gregory seems particularly tied to the baths. The reason for this is unclear and beyond the scope of this research, but in any case, later tales lose the idea that ghosts will remain tied to one place on earth until atoned for. Later tales also establish a more specific and typical



time of day for sightings, while these early tales do not contain a specific time of sighting as part of the story.

Bede is trying to establish a church history in England, he does this in several ways, but one of them is linking bible stories to his own stories. This is something that we do not see in later stories. While bible verses are referenced in the stories, there is no emphasis on the Old Testament stories, or even paralleling bible stories in general, like those we find in Bede's ghost stories. Bede's stories seem to be attempting to mimic biblical tales, where the references we find in later tales are references to specific verses. Additionally, in Bede, the ghosts are not featured in the story, but rather seem to be an aside. If we follow the biblical parallels, they are a stand-in for the responses that God gives in the Old Testament. This is an interesting thread alone. This implies that the dead have a great deal of influence and can give messages in place of God. The implied importance of what the dead say is carried through to later stories.

The weight given to what the dead have to say in these early tales adds meaning to our exempla ghost stories, because we can assume that the dead are taken seriously. However, in later stories the dead are typically featured; they are not side characters who advance the story, but rather they are integral, and the fact that they are dead is integral as well. Additionally, there is a focus on the Old Testament stories here – Hezekiah and Jonah. Around the year 1000 we find a shift in medieval focus from the Old Testament to the New Testament. This change has been suggested as a deliberate attempt to shift authority from the medieval kings (paralleled by the warrior kings of the Old Testament) to the pope (a spiritual descendant of the New Testament apostle Peter.)<sup>56</sup> Thus, the older stories focusing here solely on the Old Testament stories is

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<sup>56</sup> Matthew 6:18 is the reference often give for this: “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”

interesting, as later stories which include biblical references use both Old Testament and New Testament verses.

What we will see on a typical basis is the loss of Bede's biblical parallels, and Gregory's placement of the dead. The ghosts become tied to places that are important to the individual ghost: where they have sinned, their families, or their gravesites; and they are typically seen at night or near matins. We lose the ghost as a "voice of God" side character who advances the story but is not featured. Instead, later tales are often specifically dedicated to a ghost and his or her story. Most importantly, we see where these stories furthered the purpose of the authors' works at large. Later stories will also support the overall ideas of the authors, but are also an indicator for the reforms in the church and general spiritual climate of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries.

## CHAPTER 2: THE TALES

Around 1000, we find an explosion of exempla containing stories of ghosts. Recall that exempla are tales used to teach a moral lesson, and are often found in books that priests used for preaching. I have divided the tales into three groups, which correspond to where the ghost comes from or is going to: heaven, hell, and purgatory. Those who are heaven bound could also be classified as tales of ghosts as messengers of death, as they often usher a person into the afterlife peacefully. Those who are condemned to hell are in no way encouraging, but strictly a warning of what not to do in life. The group of tales that deal with purgatory are the most interesting, because they are both a warning to do good things in life so as to end up in heaven, and also full of instructions to pray for and think of the dead and help moved loved ones from purgatory to heaven. They are primarily tales for instruction.

### Authors

This chapter will specifically evaluate exempla from five medieval authors, Thietmar of Merseburg, Rodulfus Glaber, Guibert of Nogent, Peter the Venerable, and Caesarius of Heisterbach. These authors were writing between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, and their ghost stories were nestled amongst other exempla.

Thietmar of Merseburg was bishop from 1009 until his death in 1018, and his *Chronicle* is supposed to have been written during the final decade of his life. S.H. Bagge writes “Thietmar's work is a goldmine for historians of mentality. Its ‘ecclesiastical’ parts contain a large number of miracles, dreams, and portents, often of the most fantastic kind.”<sup>57</sup> He primarily wrote about the life of Henry II in Germany, but his works contain two tales of spirits heralding

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<sup>57</sup> Bagge, Sverre. *Kings, Politics, and the Right Order of the World in German Historiography: c. 950-1150*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2002.

death.

Rodulfus Glaber is another author whose work was written at the very beginning of the eleventh century. Nothing is known of his life, except what he notes in his works or what can be inferred from them.<sup>58</sup> It seems that he was a wandering monk, kicked out of many monasteries after his uncle placed him in one at the age of twelve. He spends some time at Cluny, but it seems he comes back most often to Saint-Germaine d'Auxerre, a Benedictine monastery in France. It is supposed that he was a Burgundian of high, though not the highest, birth, though this is not confirmed in his works.<sup>59</sup> Though from the title we might assume he is only writing a book of histories, in reality "Glaber was writing the story of his own times, which consciously he conceived as continuing the story of the revelation of God's work in this world."<sup>60</sup>

Guibert of Nogent, a French Benedictine monk, wrote an autobiography, one of his later works, in the style of St. Augustine's *Confessions*. He wrote this work around 1115, ten years prior to his death. He was a brilliant man, well read, and influenced by the classics.<sup>61</sup> Jay Rubenstein, writing on Guibert, tells us that this man was a brilliant, and careful writer. Rubenstein suggests that Guibert crafts "a more clinical, less personal [autobiography] than previously thought."<sup>62</sup> For us, this is an interesting analysis, because his personal revelations and visions, if more clinical, can more accurately be classified as exempla tales rather than only autobiographical in nature.

Peter the Venerable, a Cluniac French abbot from 1122 until his death in 1156, is mostly

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<sup>58</sup> Glaber, Rodulfus. *Rodulfi Glabri Historiarum Libri Quinque: the Five Books of the Histories*. Edited and translated by John France. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, xxiv.

<sup>59</sup> Rodulfus, *Five Histories*, xxxiii.

<sup>60</sup> Rodulfus, *Five Histories*, xxiii.

<sup>61</sup> Rubenstein, Jay. *Guibert of Nogent: Portrait of a Medieval Mind*. ProQuest Ebook Central. New York: Routledge, 2002, 13-14.

<sup>62</sup> Rubenstein, *Guibert of Nogent*, 15.

remembered for his many letters and works against various heretical and non-Christian faiths. Interestingly, because of his desire to write treatises against them, he was the first to sponsor several translations of Islamic works into Latin, most notably the Qur'an. His work, *De Miraculis* contains many ghost stories. His interest in squelching heresy and subsequent inclusion of ghost stories is further proof of their value to the Catholic church; in other words, if ghost stories were heretical in nature, only arising from popular religion, Peter would not have included them in his own work.

Caesarius of Heisterbach was a Cistercian monk who lived from 1180 to 1240. His work *The Dialogue on Miracles*, widely circulated and copied often,<sup>63</sup> is estimated to have been written around 1220-1235 and is considered perhaps the most famous of early Cistercian exempla.<sup>64</sup> Framed as a dialogue between a novice and senior monk, his work was written as an instruction manual for novices and was in widespread use up until and through the Protestant Reformation.<sup>65</sup> It includes many short ghost stories as part of what Caesarius himself calls his “duty . . . to rehearse to the novices some of those miracles that have been wrought within our Order in our own times, and are still of daily occurrence; and I have been asked with much insistency by many to perpetuate them in writing.”<sup>66</sup>

We find that these authors each wrote stories of revenants to instruct, because they

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<sup>63</sup> Smirnova, Victoria, Marie Anne Polo de Beaulieu, and Jacques Berlioz. 2015. *The Art of Cistercian Persuasion in the Middle Ages and Beyond Caesarius of Heisterbach's Dialogue on Miracles and Its Reception*. Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions. Leiden: Brill, 15.

<sup>64</sup> Mula, Stefano. “Geography and the Early Cistercian Exempla Collections.” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (2011): 27–43, 29-30.

<sup>65</sup> Coulton, editor, *The Dialogue on Miracles*, xvi.

<sup>66</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach. *The Dialogue on Miracles*. Edited by G. G. Coulton. Translated by H. von E. Scott and C. C. Swinton Bland. London, UK: George Routledge and Sons, LTD, 1929, 1.

believed the stories to be historical – thus from the mistakes and warnings of the past educating their present charges. By sampling tales from different monastic and church orders, different geography, and slightly different time periods, we are able to extrapolate trends across these spheres. Ghost stories and the trends found within them are not isolated to one author, order, place, or decade, but rather stretch across these domains.

### **Heaven and Heralds**

First, we will look at those tales which contain ghosts as heralds or otherwise associated with heaven. Thietmar of Merseburg, writing around 1009 gives us two such tales. The first is about a priest in the town of Walsleben. Thietmar simply states “I will intimate certain things which are believed to have occurred.”<sup>67</sup> The priest goes alone to sing matins at dawn in the church, as he often did, but upon arriving in the cemetery he found a great host “bringing offerings to a priest who was standing before the doors.”<sup>68</sup> At first, the living priest stands still; but then, making the sign of the cross to strengthen him, he walks through all of them to reach the oratory. He does not acknowledge any of the ghosts and is afraid. Then, a woman well-known to him who had recently died asks the priest what he wants. When he tells her why he was there, she assures him that they had already attended to these things, and that he will die soon. He told this story to his neighbors, and he died soon after. Thietmar writes at the beginning of the tale that he writes this tale “that no one faithful to Christ may doubt the future resurrection of the dead, but rather proceed to the joy of blessed immortality, zealously, and through holy desire.”<sup>69</sup> This tale reminds us that the medieval believers trusted that the dead

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<sup>67</sup> Thietmar of Merseburg. *Ottonian Germany: the Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg*. Edited and translated by David A. Warner. Manchester, NY: Manchester University Press, 2001, 75.

<sup>68</sup> Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 75.

<sup>69</sup> Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 75.

would be resurrected after death and believed whole-heartedly in an afterlife.

In his second tale, Thietmar again wishes to strengthen the belief that the dead will rise again, saying:

I have written these things which happened in our most recent times so that the incredulous may learn that the words of the prophets are true. One of the latter testifies as follows: Lord, your dead will live! Another states: the dead in their graves will rise hear the voice of the Lord and rejoice. Whenever the living hear of or see this, it foretells a change, as an appropriate example very much indicates.<sup>70</sup>

The following story is witnessed by Thietmar, along with others like his brother. The things he did not see himself he records were viewed by reliable witnesses. Thietmar writes “Because the testimony of two or three suffices,<sup>71</sup> moreover, I have written these things which happened in our most recent times so that the incredulous may learn that the words of the prophets are true.”<sup>72</sup> which establishes the authority for the story fairly well.

Thietmar records the date as December 18<sup>th</sup>, on his estate Rottmersleben, when a great light pours from the church at first cock-crow. He states that the light covered the entire cemetery and loud noises, such as grunting, were heard.<sup>73</sup> Thietmar asks the next day if this had happened before, and some of the older people said that it had happened once before. Thietmar tells us that this event (the noises of the dead being heard) was fulfilled by the death of lady Liudgard that

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<sup>70</sup> Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 77. According to the editor, Thietmar is referencing Isaiah 26:19 “But your dead will live, Lord; their bodies will rise - let those who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy - your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead” and John 5:28-29a “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out.”

<sup>71</sup> Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 77. According to the editor, Thietmar is referencing Deuteronomy 19:15 “One witness is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offense they may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” and Matthew 18:16 “But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”

<sup>72</sup> Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 77.

<sup>73</sup> Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 77.

same year. Liudgard was his niece on one side and on the other his cousin's wife. Also, he states that he was close with her. Thietmar records that at night he "would hear wood falling and once, while everyone else was asleep, my companion and I clearly heard the dead conversing. From these two signs I concluded that death would occur on the following day."<sup>74</sup> As before, Thietmar wishes to encourage Christians that there must be an afterlife because of the occurrence of these ghosts. Thietmar has provided a wealth of information regarding the medieval mind. He seriously considers the spirits of the dead to be heralding death and clearly conceives this message as infallible.

Rodulfus of Glaber also relates two tales of death heralds in his *Five Books of Histories*. His first tale concerns Wulferius the monk, a man Rodulfus says lived an "impeccable life."<sup>75</sup> While there is no direct appeal to authority, Rodulfus does tell us that Wulferius's vision was "well worthy of belief."<sup>76</sup> Wulferius, after the other monks had gone, remained after matins to pray and the church was suddenly filled by a vast host in white robes with purple stoles. Rodulfus tells us that their grave "bearing made a great impression on him as he watched them."<sup>77</sup> Their leader carried a cross in his hands, and he said that he was "a bishop of many nations" saying he "must that day celebrate mass in this monastery."<sup>78</sup> The group then said that they had been with the monks that night and had heard matins. They also stated that the office of Lauds they had heard had been correct for the day. Rodulfus includes here a note that it was Sunday in the octave of Pentecost. It was customary, he says, that in response to the resurrection and ascension and giving of the Holy Spirit for there to be sung responses in harmonies with beautiful words in many

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<sup>74</sup> Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 78.

<sup>75</sup> Rodulfus, *Five Histories*, 83.

<sup>76</sup> Rodulfus, *Five Histories*, 83.

<sup>77</sup> Rodulfus, *Five Histories*, 83.

<sup>78</sup> Rodulfus, *Five Histories*, 83.



regions. He states that these songs are “as worthy of the Trinity as any human creation could be.”<sup>79</sup>

As the bishop began “to celebrate mass on the altar of St. Maurice the Martyr, intoning the antiphon of the Trinity,”<sup>80</sup> Wulferius asks who they are, where they came from, and why they were at this monastery. The multitude responded cheerfully that they were Christians who had been killed by Saracens, and that they were passing through because others were going to be added to their number to be taken to heaven. The bishop then finished the Lord’s Prayer and gave the blessing. He sent a brother to bestow the kiss of peace on Wulferius. “Having done so, the companion indicated that Wulferius should follow him, but when he tried to do this, they vanished. In this way, Wulferius understood by this that he was to die soon, and so it fell out.”<sup>81</sup> This is similar to Thietmar’s first tale, of the priest who met spirits during matins and died soon after. In these tales, we do not find fear surrounding death or the appearance of these visions, perhaps because the holy have nothing to fear from death. Neither of these men try to escape death or even lament its coming, rather, they are unable to follow the spirits, which implies a willingness to approach death.

Before recounting another tale, Rodulfus echoes Thietmar’s words, “One thing we ought to remember with particular care: whenever such prodigies are clearly revealed to men still alive in this world, whether at the behest of good or evil spirits, those men do not live long afterwards.”<sup>82</sup> The tale itself begins by saying that when Bruno was bishop of Langres, a priest named Frottier “was living piously in the town called Tonnerre.”<sup>83</sup> At evening before dinner one Sunday, Frottier

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<sup>79</sup> Rodulfus, *Five Histories*, 85. The editor notes that this is an early reference to observance of Trinity Sunday (Footnote 1).

<sup>80</sup> Rodulfus, *Five Histories*, 85.

<sup>81</sup> Rodulfus, *Five Histories*, 85.

<sup>82</sup> Rodulfus, *Five Histories*, 223.

<sup>83</sup> Rodulfus, *Five Histories*, 223.

looked out his window to see a vast host of riders drawn up in battle lines marching from the north to the west. He became frightened after watching them for a time, and calls for a servant to see, but when he cried out the vision disappeared. He was scared to the point of tears. After this “he fell ill and died in the same year, he made a good end just as he had lived a good life. He was removed by the portent which he saw: those who saw this were witnesses.”<sup>84</sup> Rodulfus then states that in the year following this priest’s death, a great army commanded by Henry, successor to King Robert, descended on Tonnerre and there were many deaths on both sides.<sup>85</sup>

These stories, and especially the words of Thietmar and Rodulfus, cause us to conclude that seeing the dead was commonly an omen of death. Thietmar tells us wherever these visions occur, “it foretells a change”<sup>86</sup> and Rodulfus that when these ghosts appear, whether they are good or evil, “those men do not live long afterwards.”<sup>87</sup> All together, these four tales follow a similar pattern – a spirit returns to bring news of death to a living person, that person dies soon after, but is not afraid of death. The more important section of these tales comes in the introductions and conclusions from the authors, who assert that they are writing for the edification of their readers or hearers – that there is an afterlife, there is a paradise waiting for those who are good and live blessed lives. These stories support the doctrine of the church, encouraging those who hear that there is a place in the afterlife to strive for – they believed these tales were true, therefore they believed these people had indeed passed from this life into a blessed eternity.

### **Warnings from Hell**

Our next section of tales is the exact opposite of the heralds of blessed death we have just

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<sup>84</sup> Rodulfus, *Five Histories*, 223.

<sup>85</sup> The editor of my edition of *Five Histories* notes that there are some historical inaccuracies here and that Rodulfus must have been confused about timeline (Footnote 3 pg. 222-223).

<sup>86</sup> Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 77.

<sup>87</sup> Rodulfus, *Five Histories*, 223.

evaluated. What we see are a series of shorter tales which feature a specific sin and punishment as a direct result of that sin. Essentially, these are a series of cautionary tales to the living – if you commit these sins, you too will end up eternally damned. Once again, we see that these are stories which support church doctrine. Interestingly, all of these stories are written by the Cistercian monk, Caesarius of Heisterbach, the latest of our authors.

A knight died, leaving all of his property to his son; all his wealth gained by usury. One night, the deceased man returned to his home and knocked on the door, but the servant recognized him and would not let him in because the servant knew him to be dead. The dead man kept knocking until finally, giving up, he called out, “Take these fish on which I live, to my son; look you, I am hanging them on the door.”<sup>88</sup> But the next morning the household found not fish, but toads and snakes tied to the door. “In fact,” Caesarius advises us, “that is the food in hell, and it is cooked in sulphurous flames.”<sup>89</sup> Thus, the usurer is assumed to be suffering eternal torments in hell and is not in purgatory waiting to be released. As we keep in mind that these tales were used for moral instruction, it follows that Caesarius would include such a story to warn people against money and its potential evils.

In another fairly straightforward tale, Caesarius warns against drinking too much wine. A knight, Rudinger, was so taken with drinking that he “frequented consecrations at various manors only for the good wine.”<sup>90</sup> On his deathbed, his daughter asked him to return within thirty days of his passing to see her, and he promised that if he could he would. Within those thirty days he returned, carrying with him a pottery mug like he had used in taverns when alive. His daughter asks what is in the mug, and he replies:

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<sup>88</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 305.

<sup>89</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 305.

<sup>90</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 330.

‘My drink, made of pitch and brimstone. I am always drinking this and I cannot finish it.’ And at once the girl understood as much from his previous life as by this punishment that there was little or no hope of his salvation. Wine indeed in this life goes down pleasantly, but in the end bites like an adder.<sup>91</sup>

Perhaps the real sin here is that the man visited consecrations for reasons other than religion, but again, the punishment is fitting of the sin, and as Caesarius tells us at the end of the story “there was little or no hope of his salvation,”<sup>92</sup> which implies that this knight was not trapped in purgatory, but had already been assigned eternal punishment. Another subtler reason for this assumption is the reference to sulphur and brimstone, which, we have seen in Caesarius’s previous tale about the knight who ate snakes and toads, is the food of the damned.

In another tale told to Caesarius by a “man of religion,”<sup>93</sup> Caesarius warns against sexual sin. The mistress of a priest who was near death insisted on being buried in new shoes of high quality. This was done, and the next night a knight and his squire encountered the woman, screaming, well before dawn. The knight immediately took her into his protection, drawing his sword. The woman was wearing only a shift and the new shoes, and the knight recognized her. He then heard a hunting horn in the distance, accompanied by barking hounds. The woman shook violently at these sounds, and the knight then wrapped three locks of her hair around his forearm. When the demonic huntsmen came into view, the woman begged the knight to let her go. The knight tried to keep her with him, but she tore her hair loose and ran. The Devil chased her and, catching her, threw her across his horse and rode off. No one believed the knight’s story until they opened the woman’s grave and found that her hair had been torn off.

At the end of this story, Caesarius points to the main sin of the woman by using the

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<sup>91</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 330.

<sup>92</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 330.

<sup>93</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 306.

novice to ask the monk, “If God so punishes the sin of fornication in concubines, I suppose that his punishment is much more severe for priests, who make them sin.”<sup>94</sup> The monk replies in the affirmative, citing that knowledge of one’s sin makes it worse. Another focus of the story, however, is the woman’s preoccupation with material things instead of last rites. She is not repentant of her sexual sin, but is enamored with wearing new shoes in her grave. Caesarius may be giving a subtle nod to the dangers of material wealth as well as sexual sin, because, as a Cistercian, poverty was considered one of the highest virtues, so to demand expensive shoes to be buried in is not only vain, but greedy. We see this woman being punished for a several things. Though we may first jump to her sexual sin, this is not her only vice, since her punishment involves her running through the woods in those new shoes and being taken by a demon while wearing them.

Caesarius’s next tale may have been the most frightening for Christians, because it warns against the sin of impure motives. Caesarius was told this story by “our Gerard, our monk was witness,”<sup>95</sup> and the story was talked about widely. Caesarius writes that a wealthy official of a Bavarian duke passes away and then returns to his wife while she was sleeping, heralded by an earthquake. The official is pushed into the bedchamber by a large black man,<sup>96</sup> but she recognizes her husband and calls him to sit by her on the bed, covering his shoulders with the covers. She was not afraid at first, but asks about his wellbeing, only becoming distressed when

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<sup>94</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 307.

<sup>95</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 306.

<sup>96</sup> This was an interesting descriptive note that I left in the retelling of this story to keep it as close to the original as possible, as I tried to note all interesting or odd details. Though I did not find notes on race in the other stories examined here, this could be an interesting avenue for research, especially given the somewhat open and inclusive nature towards women in ghost stories. This could also be interesting to compare with other descriptions of demons and devils, as to whether the color black has significance as a descriptor.

he says that he has been “consigned to eternal punishment.”<sup>97</sup> She is confused by this eternal punishment because of the many alms her husband had given and his hospitality to pilgrims during his life. He replies that “They are useless for giving me eternal life, because they were done for vainglory and not out of charity.”<sup>98</sup> She tries to talk with him further about other things, but her husband tells her he was allowed to come to her and must leave because his tormentor waits outside for him. As he left the room, the earth quaked as it had when he arrived. His cries were said to be heard for a long time afterwards. Caesarius again tells us that one of their own monks told him the story.

This is an interesting theme. Charity for the sake of recognition is frowned upon, and returning to our example of usury, we see medieval saints rejecting money given with impure motives as “bad money.”<sup>99</sup> This can be extended to this tale, for though the outward appearance had seemed good, the inward intention was more important than the actions. This story was more frightening, for one could practice the motions of Christian charity, but still be damned in the end if one had improper motivations.

These tales taken together (usury, alcoholism, promiscuity, and wrong motives), illustrate our definition of exempla well: they are short tales which attempt to warn parishioners against a specific sin which will send them to eternal damnation. Recall that the medieval authors and hearers considered these tales to be true. They are not tales of a bogeyman intended to frighten parishioners too simple to know better. The writers believed these tales. Truly believing that

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<sup>97</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 306.

<sup>98</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 306.

<sup>99</sup> Mell, Julie L. "Cultural Meanings of Money in Medieval Ashkenaz: On Gift, Profit, and Value in Medieval Judaism and Christianity." *Jewish History* 28, no. 1 (March 2014): 125-58. doi:10.1007/s10835-014-9212-3.

these sins led to eternity in hell is reason enough to relate them as a warning to medieval Christians against specific sins which would ultimately lead to eternal punishment, as these people were certainly experiencing.

### **The Penitent from Purgatory**

Finally, we have the tales which tell of those in between eternal paradise and punishment, those who were in purgatory. Enduring or requiring penance to atone for sins which had not been quite enough to gain them hell, but must be atoned for before heaven. The dead rely on the living in the medieval period for conveyance to eternal rest from purgatory. Writing specifically of Peter the Venerable's work, Axel R uth puts this well,

Although Peter's revenants are far from being saints—generally they are repentant sinners—they are sent by God and thus miraculous, not marvelous. They do not appear in order to help the living, but, on the contrary, in order to ask the living for help, for only prayers could reduce their suffering in the afterlife.<sup>100</sup>

Often, the punishment of those in purgatory still fits their sins, but there is hope for them. These tales are a mix of the moral cautionary tales we saw above and an appeal to the living to pray and give alms on behalf of their dead who may be suffering similar fates. In this section, the works of three authors will be examined: Guibert of Nogent, Peter the Venerable, and Caesarius of Heisterbach.

Guibert tells the story of his mother atoning for his father. His mother often had visions, particularly about her late husband, but Guibert recounts one night's vision in detail. We can assume that Guibert was told these visions by his mother. It was a summer Sunday night, after matins. Her soul rose from her body and was led down a corridor to a deep well. "When she approached it, phantom human shapes seemed to leap out from its depths."<sup>101</sup> The shapes

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<sup>100</sup> R uth, *Representing Wonder...*, S110.

<sup>101</sup> Guibert of Nogent, and Paul J. Archambault. *A Monk's Confession: the Memoirs of Guibert of*

seemed to have worm-eaten hair, and they tried to drag Guibert's mother into the pit with them. But a voice commanded them not to touch her<sup>102</sup> so they retreat into the well. She had been praying throughout her journey that she would be allowed to return to her body. Then, Guibert's mother saw Guibert's late father in the well, looking as he did when he was young. She asked if his name was Evrard, but the ghost denied it. Here, Guibert states,

It should not surprise us that a spirit should refuse to answer to the name it had in its earthly life. A spirit can only answer another spirit in a manner befitting a spirit. To believe that souls know one another by their names is ridiculous, for if it were so we would be able to have only a limited knowledge of our own kin in the afterlife . . . My father's spirit had therefore refused to be called by its name, but my mother continued to be persuaded it was he and asked him where he lived.<sup>103</sup>

The spirit answered by pointing to a place near them, so she then asked about his condition. He replied by revealing his arm and side which were torn and wounded with multiple lacerations. There was also the ghost of a crying child. Guibert's mother asked her husband how he could endure the child and his ceaseless screams. He replied that, regardless of whether he liked it, he had to endure the child.

Guibert explains to us that in life his father had been prevented from having marital relations with his wife because of "the maleficent influence of some people."<sup>104</sup> He had been inappropriately advised to have relations with another woman to see if he was still able to have intercourse. He sinned by sleeping with an immoral woman, and, from that sin, a child was born and passed away before baptism. The man's wounded side and arm signified his broken marital vows, and "as to the wails of that confounded voice it meant the damnation of a child conceived

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*Nogent*; University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 2008, 64-65.

<sup>102</sup> Guibert *Memoirs*, 65: references Psalm 105:15, "Do not touch my anointed ones, do my prophets no harm."

<sup>103</sup> Guibert *Memoirs*, 65.

<sup>104</sup> Guibert *Memoirs*, 65.



in sin.”<sup>105</sup>

Guibert’s mother asks “whether prayer, almsgiving, or sacrifice might bring him some relief.”<sup>106</sup> The ghost replied that those things do help and asks that she mention his name to a pious woman in the village that she might also pray for him. Upon waking, Guibert’s mother, takes this vision, along with others she had seen, to mean that she needs to focus wholly on providing help to her deceased husband. She adopts an orphan, hoping that this direct penance will help atone for the sin of her husband as it pertains to the child. However, the child would cry all through the night, but Guibert assures us that the child’s agitation was not its own fault, but came from a demonic source. But,

[his mother] knew that her pains helped diminish her husband’s, which she had seen in her dream, so she graciously put up with her own . . . the more she had been able to feel that [the Devil] was the one stirring the child’s rage, the more she was convinced that the horrid cries she had heard issuing from her husband’s spirit had begun to diminish.<sup>107</sup>

Guibert’s tale is interesting because it is about his own parents. Guibert gives us the justification for the punishment – his father’s wounds are in direct correlation to his broken marriage vows, and the child was a manifestation of the child spawned immorally and never baptized – thus itself subject to eternal torment. The way to bring peace to her husband seemed clear to Guibert’s mother – raise a parentless child in honor of her husband. In some of these tales, there is some way that the one who is doing the penance to help ease the suffering of the dead knows that their penance is working. For Guibert’s mother, the assurance comes from the Devil himself. Guibert notes that his mother was fortified in her belief that she was easing the suffering of her deceased husband, because the Devil was causing the adopted child to be

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<sup>105</sup> Guibert *Memoirs*, 65-67.

<sup>106</sup> Guibert *Memoirs*, 67.

<sup>107</sup> Guibert *Memoirs*, 69.

frustrating and a trial to her. Guibert also notes at the beginning of the tale:

You know how persistently she struggled – with virtually daily Masses, prayers, tears, and much almsgiving – to redeem the soul of a husband whom she knew to be shackled by his sins. A spurious beauty only produces a false sense of security, the sight of suffering and torment is a wonderful incentive for prayer and almsgiving, and the dead (or rather the angels who watch over those who have died in the faith) require the remedies of the divine office: all of this is sufficient proof that such visions come from you because demons never busy themselves to promote anyone’s salvation.<sup>108</sup>

This establishes the spiritual authority of the visions and where they originated. Additionally, though Guibert is only speaking of the actions his mother took in trying to save his father, these actions can be extrapolated to others who have died. We also find important Guibert’s assertion that suffering and torment can be a strong motivation for praying for the dead. We can see that this is a more broadly applicable idea that stories of suffering of ghosts can spur people on to good deeds.

Likewise, the next tale does not contain a surety of the sufferer’s freedom. Although a logic dictates that the monks ought to help him, there is no promise that they have saved him. The tale of Bernard le Gros by Peter the Venerable begins by establishing that Bernard was a noble with a great deal of secular power, owning many castles in the vicinity of Cluny, from which he raided surrounding monasteries and churches. Peter tells us that Bernard finally has a change of heart, and, offering to put an end to his destruction, he goes to find the respected father Hugo. Bernard expresses a desire to go to Rome in order to atone for his sins. On returning he promises to renounce the world and become a monk. So he goes to Rome, and there does the penance he can. Forty days pass, and he leaves Rome, returning to his country by way of Sutri (a city near Rome). He stops here and contracts an illness which ends his life. As far as was possible in a foreign country, he was decently buried by his companions.

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<sup>108</sup> Guibert *Memoirs*, 64.

Years later, a prévôt<sup>109</sup> of one of Cluny's dependent lands is traveling in the forest near one of Bernard's castles (the castle of d'Uxelles) in the middle of the day. Suddenly, on the path he saw a man with the face of Bernard. When he saw the man, mounted on a mule and wearing a new fox cloak, he was terribly afraid, because he knew Bernard to be dead. However, the prévôt represses his fear and asks the ghost if he is Bernard and why he has come. The ghost replies, "Sache que je suis Bernard, l'ancien seigneur de cette région."<sup>110</sup> He continues, that it is well known that he caused a number of evil acts while he was alive, and because of this he suffers greatly now. "Mais" the ghost says, "ce qui me torture par-des-sus tout, c'est l'édification de ce château situé près d'ici que j'ai construit récemment, comme tu le sais."<sup>111</sup> Bernard tells the official that at the end of his life he repented of his sins, so he has escaped eternal damnation, but he still needs aid for full freedom.

Bernard states that he has received permission to come ask forgiveness of the abbot of Cluny. He says that he hopes the abbot will have pity on him. After this exchange, the steward asks Bernard about his fine coat, which Bernard tells him he gave away to a poor man the first day he wore it, and that this one deed comforts him in the midst of his torments. After these words, Bernard disappeared. The prévôt found the abbot and told him the story. The abbot listened to the tale, and felt favorably toward Bernard, and subsequently prepared oblations and offerings to aid him. Peter tells us that it is reasonable to believe that these measures would liberate Bernard of his torments. Since the spirit was permitted to return, Peter argues, it follows

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<sup>109</sup> According to the Oxford Online Dictionary, a "prévôt" is a government official or (most likely in our case) a head of cathedral. (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/prevot>)

<sup>110</sup> Peter the Venerable. *Livre Des Merveilles De Dieu: De Miraculis*. Edited and translated by Jean-Pierre Torrell and Denise Bouthillier. Fribourg, Suisse: Paris., 1992, 115. "Know that I am Bernard, the old master of this region."

<sup>111</sup> Peter the Venerable, *De Miraculis*, 115. "But that which tortures me over all, is the building of this castle situated just here that I have constructed recently as you know."

that there must be hope for this man, or else what use was there in allowing him to return. Peter adds at the end of the tale that the abbot told the official that he would soon die. Peter tells us this is often the case with those who speak to spirits, and the prévôt afterward became a monk and died shortly thereafter.

In this tale, we also see evidence of cautionary tales – Peter the Venerable tells us that Bernard’s biggest regret, among all his many sins, is the building of a castle on monastic lands. This suggests that this tale may have been circulated widely, subtly reminding nobles to respect the church’s lands; if they did not, it might come back to haunt them in the afterlife.

In the next account, Peter begins by introducing us to the teller and witness of the story, Pedro d’Englebert. Peter notes that Pedro was wealthy, and lived in that secular wealth until his old age.<sup>112</sup> At this time, he was “Finalement touché par celui qui *soufflé où il veut*, il renonça au monde et reçut l’habit de la profession monastique au monastère de Najera placé sous la règle et la juridiction de Cluny.”<sup>113</sup> Peter the Venerable arrived about two years after Pedro’s entrance into the monastery and learned that Pedro had recounted a memorable vision. This vision was familiar to Peter because of its fame, though Peter had not known previously who had recounted it.<sup>114</sup> Peter set out to the hermitage near the monastery where Pedro was staying and on seeing him, Peter states that he matched all the descriptions Peter had heard and “invitaient à accorder résolument une confiance totale.”<sup>115</sup> Pedro then says that he will tell them of the vision, and this pleased Peter and his company greatly so that they could know the story from the person himself

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<sup>112</sup> Peter the Venerable, *De Miraculis*, 178.

<sup>113</sup> Peter the Venerable, *De Miraculis*, 178. “Finally moved by the one who ‘blows where he wishes’ (reference to John 3:8, “The wind blows wherever it pleases . . .”) he renounced the world and accepted the habit of the profession of the monk at the monastery of Najera placed under the rule and jurisdiction of Cluny.”

<sup>114</sup> Peter the Venerable, *De Miraculis*, 179.

<sup>115</sup> Peter the Venerable, *De Miraculis*, 179. “Invited to resolutely grant a total trust.”

rather than other reports.<sup>116</sup>

Pedro begins by explaining that Alphonso of Aragon, the king of Spain, raised an army to put down resistance in Castile and required men from each estate in his kingdom to serve as foot soldiers and knights. Bound by the decree, Pedro sent one of his mercenaries named Sancho to the king's army. Sancho lived only briefly after returning from war, succumbing to illness. About four months after his death, Sancho appeared to Pedro while Pedro lay in bed before a fire in winter. Sancho was naked except for a cloth covering his private parts, and he was poking the fire with the brands used to stir up the fire. Pedro asked who he was and what he was doing there. Sancho replied that he was Pedro's manservant Sancho, and that he was on his way to Castile with a great army who were going there to be freed of the punishment for their sins in the same place where they committed them.

Pedro then asked why Sancho has stopped at his home, and Sancho replies that it is in the hope of forgiveness. Additionally, he says that "si tu voulais avoir pitié, tu pourrais me procurer le repos plus rapidement."<sup>117</sup> When Pedro asks how is it that he can help, Sancho explained that while they were on the expedition for the king of Spain, he and several others pillaged a church, and Sancho took sacred vestments. He says that he is being severely punished and that he was praying with all he was capable of that his master would help him by doing good works. Sancho continues, praying that his master will ask his wife to give to the poor the eight sous he was owed at the time of his death for his service as a way to aid his soul, as in life the money would have sustained his body.

Pedro then asks Sancho about two other people from that region who had died recently,

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<sup>116</sup> Peter the Venerable, *De Miraculis*, 179.

<sup>117</sup> Peter the Venerable, *De Miraculis*, 180. "If you desire to have pity, you might procure me rest more rapidly."

and Sancho replies that one of them, because of his good deeds and charity during famine was counted among those in eternal life. Another had rendered false judgements while he was settling legal disputes in the town, and he was now consigned to hell. Pedro then asks about the late king of Spain. When he does this, another ghost appears at the window frame near Pedro's head. He answers that Sancho has not been with them long enough to know, but because he himself has resided for five years amongst the ghosts he had learned things and wished to answer Pedro's question about the king.

Pedro became curious to know who the other ghost was and turns to the window where the ghost was sitting to ask who he is. Illuminated by the moon, the ghost says that he is one of the companions of Sancho and is going to Castille with him and a number of others. When Pedro asks again if he knows where King Alphonso is, the unknown ghost replies that he knew where the king had been, but did not know where he was now. The king had been suffering cruel punishments with the criminals; afterwards he had been snatched by the monks at Cluny. The ghost states that after this happened, he did not know what had happened afterwards. The ghost then tells Sancho they must hurry and leave if they are to catch up to their companions, and Sancho reiterates his request to Pedro, asking him to talk with his wife immediately to give what is owed him to the poor for the saving of his soul. After saying this, both ghosts disappeared.<sup>118</sup>

Pedro, when the ghosts had left, wakes his wife and asks her how much they would have owed Sancho if he had lived, to which she answered eight sous. He then believed all that the spirits had said, and the next day took the eight sous to the poor and, for the purpose of a more complete remission of Sancho's sins, and, for the saving of Sancho's soul, has masses recited. Peter the Venerable resumes the story from here, saying:

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<sup>118</sup> Peter the Venerable, *De Miraculis*, 182.

Cette vision si manifeste et mémorable, je l'ai mise fidèlement par écrit en la reproduisant pour ainsi dire mot á mot, pour l'édification de la foi et des moeurs tant des générations présentes que futures, et j'ai montré clairement, par le témoignage des morts eux-mêmes quelle prudence est nécessaire aux mortels."<sup>119</sup>

Unlike Guibert of Nogent who assumed a certain penance would help, this tale has the ghost instruct the living to make a specific penance. Give the eight sous to the poor to benefit Sancho's soul just as they would have saved his body before. Masses should also be recited for him. Sancho's punishment and penance are not as specific to his sin as others. He had raided a church while at war, and while he must return to the place where he had sinned, the penance that the living are able to perform for him does not involve raising a church or restoring vestments, but are rather generic good deeds any person could perform to save their loved ones from specific sins. The purpose of this is two-fold: first, it instructs anyone who fears for a sinful, dead loved one that alms and mass will help save them, regardless of their sin, and two, it shows that over time, the authors were becoming more specific – the dead knew what would save them and were able to communicate that when they returned. Thus, Caesarius, writing later than both Peter the Venerable and Guibert of Nogent, is able to marry these two, giving us specific punishments fitting the specific sin.

Another account of just punishment comes from Caesarius concerning a man named Erkinbert, who is the father of one of Caesarius' fellow monks, John. This familial relationship implies that John probably relayed this story to Caesarius. Erkinbert encounters a figure on the road, mounted on a black horse which breathes fire and smoke from its nose early in the

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<sup>119</sup> Peter the Venerable, *De Miraculis*, 183. "I have set this vision so clear and memorable, faithfully reproducing it through writing and in this way to say it word by word for the building up of the faith and the mores for the present generation and future, and I have shown clearly by the testimony of the dead themselves that caution is necessary in mortals."

morning. The figure rode on the highway, eventually leaving to ride across the fields. Erkinbert must cross the ghost's path and is afraid at first. But Erkinbert makes the sign of the cross and takes up his sword. Upon approaching the knight, he found that he knew him to be a famous knight named Frederic, recently deceased. Frederic was clothed in sheepskins and carried a load of mud upon his back. Erkinbert asks the figure if he is indeed Frederic and what all of this means. Frederic replies that he suffers greatly. The sheepskins he had stolen from a widow, and so now they burn him. Also, because of his unjust demand for a parcel of land, he carries earth on his back. Frederic tells Erkinbert that if his sons were to return this land it would decrease his pain and then he disappears. Erkinbert tells Frederic's sons what he saw, but they "preferred that he should remain for ever in his pains than themselves give up what had been left to them."<sup>120</sup>

Frederic is being punished for specific sins from his life. His penance for those sins was very specific—return the lands unjustly seized and his torment would have greatly lessened. Caesarius does not tell us if these lands were seized from the church or from lay people, but we have seen a precedent from Peter the Venerable about the seizure of church land. This then is also full of cautionary language – do not seize land or steal from widows, or it will haunt you in the coming life. But there must be hope for Frederic, since he claims that if his sons would return the land he would be freed from at least some of his suffering. However, cruelly, his sons refuse. Caesarius does not leave us with any sort of explanation. We do not get to know what happens to Frederic afterward or whether someone else is able to make any kind of atonement for him. The living could have been involved in this soul's release from purgatory, but they chose not to be, adding more cautionary measures to the tale. If Frederic had never committed these sins he would not have needed to rely on the living to save him.

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<sup>120</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 303.



Perhaps the strangest tale from Caesarius is about a knight named Henry Nodus, who was “extremely full of wickedness, regarding rapine, adultery, incest, perjury and the like as virtue.”<sup>121</sup> These events occurred in the same area as Erkinbert’s sighting of Frederic, which again can lead us to the assumption that John, a monk, may have told Caesarius this story as well. After he had died, Henry Nodus’s ghost appeared to many people dressed in a sheepskin, and he often frequented his daughter’s house, as he had when he lived. Neither the sign of the cross nor sword could deter him. In fact, Caesarius tells us, that many tried to wound him with a sword, but that the ghost was never wounded, instead making a sound like a soft bed would when struck. Finally, his friends asked the bishop of Treves what they should do to expel him – “he advised them to pour water on a nail of crucifixion and to sprinkle the house and his daughter and the man himself, if he was present.”<sup>122</sup> Once this had been complete the ghost never appeared again. Caesarius notes here that the daughter herself was conceived outside of marriage with a maidservant, and that her father had then had relations with her when she grew up.

Caesarius includes this tale, noting it is an example of the same principle as the tale of Frederic. At the end of the Frederic tale, he refers to another previous tale where the punishment is directly correlated to the sin: “God punishes the sinner according to the nature and manner of his sin.”<sup>123</sup> From this context, Caesarius is trying to say that Henry Nodus, the incestuous ghost, is also being punished for his sins specifically. Perhaps the significance of the crucifixion nail is the key here, some obvious punishment being implied that is lost on modern readers. Perhaps the haunting of his daughter is simply the proof that the past does not disappear in the afterlife.

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<sup>121</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 303.

<sup>122</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 303.

<sup>123</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 79.

Rather, his sinful habits continued just like his sin would continue to haunt him – sinners pay for sins in the afterlife, habits are not erased by death.

Not even children were exempt from just punishment. One of the more interesting tales written by Caesarius tells the story of a little girl named Gertrude who passed away at nine years old and her penance. The sisters had assembled for choir after her death, when she walked in and took her place in the choir, after bowing before the altar. Another girl, Margaret, was fearful when she recognized the dead girl standing beside her. Her terror was noticed by the abbess, who asked why she was so afraid. When the little girl replied that Sister Gertrude had returned and prostrated herself at the mention of Our Lady, the abbess was afraid Margaret was being deceived and told her if Gertrude came back to “say to her ‘Benedicite’ and if she answers ‘Dominus’, ask her whence she comes and what she seeks.”<sup>124</sup>

When Gertrude returned, she answered correctly and so the little girl asked her why she had come. Gertrude replied that she and the little girl used to whisper together during choir and now she had been ordered to seek atonement in the same place she had sinned. Gertrude warns her friend that if she did not take care, she would suffer the same fate upon death. After coming four times, Gertrude told Margaret that her atonement was complete and she would not return. As Margaret watched, Gertrude passed through the cemetery wall, and, as Caesarius bluntly puts it, this was her purgatory. “But Margaret,” Caesarius continues, “was so terrified by the warning of the dead woman that she fell ill and ended her life. Falling into a trance she lay as if dead; but returning to life after a season, she testified that she had seen some of the sisters in the presence of Our Lady and some she did not see.”<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 324.

<sup>125</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 324-325.

First, this tells us that children had some kind of responsibility for their sins. Second, though this story does not involve the living doing penance for the dead, we do see a full completion of a penance and a release from purgatory. Gertrude is to seek absolution by returning to where she had sinned and prostrating herself during masses. After she had done this the allotted amount of times she was free to take her eternal rest. Her friend was privy to all of this. Not only was there a just punishment and penance to be released from purgatory, but when Gertrude is able to appear to her friend, for the abbess cannot see her, and she warns her to change her behavior, elements of the cautionary moral tale are again seen. Additionally, we see elements from other stories included, such as Margaret falling ill and dying for a time after she sees Gertrude, and then Margaret acts as a messenger when she returns and notes that some of the sisters were in heaven and others were not.

### **Conclusions**

The tales in this section have had clear punishments related to the sins committed in life – penance was typically based in the specific sin. It is understandable how the authors would consider using these tales to instruct laypersons in moral truths because there is a clear one to one to one correlation – a specific sin begets a specific punishment, which begets a specific penance. Though the penance done by the living on behalf of the dead is not always specific, some of these stories suggest that it is not uncommon for a specific penance to be helpful, for example, Guibert of Nogent’s mother caring for the orphaned child, or Pedro’s return of the soul owed to Sancho. This correlation is somewhat sophisticated – there is no mystery in the minds of these authors concerning how to atone for sin, what sins to avoid, or what pleases or displeases God.

Returning to our discussion of early tales in chapter 1, we see clearly established the time

and place components that were missing or different in those early tales – most typically, the ghosts are found in the cemetery, return to their loved ones, or are tied to the place of their sin (see Gertrude above). Typically, ghosts appear at night around matins, though we have a few exceptions (Bernard appears at noon to the official). Gregory and Bede’s tales are mostly a simple encouragement, proof of an afterlife. They do further the purpose of each work, as we saw in chapter 1, but these early tales do not have the added purpose we find in the vast majority of later stories– that of moral tale. In the next chapter, we are going to more fully examine the stories and their similarities and differences. This analysis will allow us to identify trends within the ghost stories, which will be linked to specific medieval context in chapter four.

### CHAPTER 3: WITHIN THE TALES

Now that we have sampled tales from different authors and time periods, we can establish certain trends within the stories. We see two interesting trends found within the “mechanics” of the stories. I call mechanics here the setting and components which appear in most ghost stories. This contains time, place, and the appeal to authority. They are precise, and the very mention and breadth of their inclusion in the stories denotes something about the medieval mind. The details concerning time and place are typically very similar across both different authors and the considered chronological range (11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries). Recall that this is different from the earliest tales by Bede and Gregory. This difference also tells us that there must be a shift in a ghost’s function or the idea of ghosts more generally. Furthermore, most of the tales during this period contain an appeal to some kind of spiritual authority; this is most interesting in the context of the time period as we will see in the following chapter, but is mentioned here that we might see and establish this trend from the stories themselves.

Next, we find that the sighting of the dead often leads to death in some form, typically of the seer of the ghost. This is interesting because it does not change across author or chronology, but is rather one of the most consistent aspects of these stories during the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. Beyond the basic function of exempla tales, note that these particular tales all establish the idea of an afterlife. While the nature of this afterlife alters a bit during the years studied, we find that even in the tales before the clear emergence of purgatory as a third place that ghost stories, by their very character, establish that death is not the final end. By examining stories spanning the period where purgatory became firmly established as a fixed place in the medieval imagination, we can see how this perspective on the afterlife grew and changed in the medieval mind.

Finally, we will look at the specific sins focused on by the medieval authors. This will show us what was most important to the medieval church. These four aspects will be teased out of the stories here, with speculation as to why we see these aspects during this time period. Chapter 3 will examine the context in which these stories were written, shedding further light on why these elements are pervasive in our tales.

## **Mechanics**

### *Time and Place:*

Some of the most basic changes from older tales are found in the mechanics of ghost stories. Recall that Bede, for example, has ghost stories in *Ecclesiastical History*, but the ghosts in each story stand in as a messenger for God. They are not the featured player of the story, but rather a side character in someone else's story. In Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*, the ghosts feature prominently, as they do in later stories, but they are tied to the baths. The baths are not significant to either ghost he discusses; though one was a keeper of the baths, the other was a prominent church official who is serving out penance for supporting a candidate for the papacy who did not win. Thus, the place for each of these ghosts seem to have little to do with the ghost, but rather with the person they are appearing too, or for some other reason. They also do not have a set time when the ghost is more likely to appear.

This changes in the later stories. With only a few exceptions, ghost sightings occur around or at matins, generally around two in the morning. In Thietmar's *Chronicon* he quotes his niece, a godly woman: "As the day to the living, so the night is conceded the dead."<sup>126</sup> This idea persists even today: we would rather walk through a graveyard in the middle of the day than in the middle of the night. The night seems closer to the dead, because, in a way, death is the

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<sup>126</sup> Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 77.

night of life. In the medieval imagination, is the spiritual realm somehow closer to the physical one at this time of night? Perhaps more ghost sightings appear at night because only the more religious people are awake at that hour to experience the spirits during the quietude of nighttime prayers. It could also have been simply that people were up to pray at that hour and therefore could see the dead, regardless of how religious the person was.

During this period (1000-1200), we also see the ghosts in places that were important to them. They are often in or around the church or graveyards. They are also found in their own home, on their previously owned lands or close roads, or other significant, specific places to that ghost. This is reminiscent in a way of the cult of saints, where miraculous things happen in places related to the dead person, where they were born, or more often, where they died, where their relics are or end up etc. Geographic locations become increasingly significant to the dead in a way not seen in the earliest ghost stories.

*Authority:*

For each tale, the author tells us who told him the story. This is the appeal to authority for these tales. Often, the storyteller is a personal acquaintance, or the story is told to him by an abbot or other member of the church. Establishing this authority is necessary for the story to be considered credible. We must remember that these stories were not stories created to fool an unsuspecting and illiterate audience. Rather it is imperative that we evaluate these stories assuming the writers believed them to be true. There is evidence for this in the assurance they give of where the story came from. In addition to the story often being told to them by someone who was part of the church, typically it is a first-hand account that the author is receiving. It is interesting to note that if an authority figure is presented they are not, in any of the stories we examine, a secular authority figure such as a king or other wealthy noble. While the stories do

talk about secular persons, specifically knights and landowners, the ghosts do not only appear to those of secular importance, nor is the authority of the story established outside of the church. Ghosts can be of any social strata, job, and gender, and they can be viewed by anyone as well. Whoever tells the story is typically of the church, but can be a man or a woman. This makes ghost stories interesting in the context of the medieval period. The disadvantaged are not precluded from this experience, rather, the authority must come from a spiritual place, but the ghost and the story are not relegated to the pious.

### **The Dead beget Death**

Finally, we see in these stories the idea that seeing the dead begets death. In nearly every story, the person who sees the ghost dies soon after. Sometimes this makes sense, for example the ghosts whose purpose is to usher that person to eternity, as in our stories from Thietmar and Rodulfus. However, often in the tales related to purgatory those who see the ghosts die soon afterwards as well. For example, both of Thietmar's stories contain a death as the fulfillment of the ghost's appearance. The priest in Walsleben was specifically told by one of these ghosts that everything was prepared for him, which is how he knew he was going to die soon. In the second tale, however, Thietmar and his companions heard noises and his niece died within the year, fulfilling the event. This is interesting because Liudgard was not the one to hear the ghosts in this tale, but Thietmar says "And sadly, I saw this event fulfilled, and in the very same year, with the death of that illustrious lady Liudgard."<sup>127</sup>

Again, in both of Rodulfus's stories we observe that seeing a ghost equates to death. For both of his stories, the person who witnesses the ghost is the one who dies, while in Thietmar we saw one story which follows this pattern and one which does not. Wulferius sees ghosts who

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<sup>127</sup> Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 77.



have come to celebrate mass, one beckons for him to follow and when he tries to do so they disappear, but he knows that he will die soon after. Frottier sees the great host riding on the hillside and dies within a year of seeing this host. Rodulfus also notes that Frottier is taken away by this same host of riders, to the testimony of many witnesses. We definitely see the element of ghost as guide to the afterlife in these stories. We only see this element in those stories where the person is being taken to heaven. These heavenly specters seem to have more of a transport role, rather than the warning and cautionary tales we see in the stories about ghosts from hell and purgatory. In these stories, where the ghost is the guide to heaven, it makes sense that part of the action of the story is a death following the ghost visit. However, there are more stories not connected to the guide of death which contain this element of seeing the dead bringing death.

Peter the Venerable's story about Bernard le Gros illustrates this well. The prévôt who saw Bernard became a monk after the encounter, and he dies soon after. In this case, the abbot of the story tells the prévôt that he will soon die. "Quant à cet homme à qui la vision était apparue, le saint abbé lui prédit sa mort prochaine . . . il est rare d'entendre dire que la mort de quelqu'un qui a parlé avec un défunt ait été longtemps différée."<sup>128</sup> What is interesting about this, is that the abbot, who has not seen the ghost but has only heard the prévôt's tale, knows that the prévôt will soon die. This implies that people dying after seeing a ghost must have been a typical progression of events, or at the very least common knowledge.

What is it about seeing a ghost that makes it more likely for someone to die after seeing one? We see this trend is especially prevalent in that period right around the year 1000. It is possible that people believed that those who were close to death could more easily see the dead.

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<sup>128</sup> Peter the Venerable, *De Miraculis*, 117. "Then to this man who the vision had appeared too, the abbot predicted his nearing death . . . it is rare to hear it said that death is long deferred with those who the dead have spoken to."

Or it could be that seeing the dead was an event that caused you to become more likely to die. With either being the case, we do see that the dead were often seen by those who shortly died afterward. The evidence suggests that, for the most part, those who were close to death already saw ghosts, and that was their way of learning they were to die soon. This also implies that there is potential for the dead to appear more easily to those who were closer to death. This is similar to the somewhat mystical element of the night belonging to the dead. In both cases, it seems that these two circumstances make it easier for ghosts to appear, or for the living to see them.

This restraining of ghosts to specific time and place implies that ghosts have certain restraints. Another restraint would be that not everyone who is present at a ghost sighting sees the ghost, for example, Gertrude and Margaret in the choir. There are many other girls around, as well as the abbess and other nuns, but only Margaret can see Gertrude's ghost. The bishop Frottier calls for a servant to come and see the host on the hill, but they vanish before the servant can see them. Most often though, the ghosts only appear to one person while they are alone, rather than with a vast crowd. The exception would be Henry Nodus, whose ghost is seen entering his daughter's house by a great many witnesses at many times, which is part of why they decide he needs to be exorcised.

### **Afterlife**

Some idea of an afterlife is essential to ghost stories, regardless of what that afterlife looks like. At the core, ghost stories are affirmation of something beyond death. Without a place to return from, there cannot be ghosts. Thus, ghost stories are predicated on the assumption that something happens after death. Ghost stories can be an encouragement and affirmation to medieval Christians that there is something after death. Recall that the earliest tales, written by Gregory, were part of an effort specifically to "strengthen [Italian Christians']

faith in the unseen hereafter by proving that the soul does not perish with the body and can look forward to eternal happiness.”<sup>129</sup> Even the tales from the beginning of our time period (1000-1200) seem to be primarily for medieval Christians to see evidence of the afterlife: as Thietmar writes: “that no one faithful to Christ may doubt the future resurrection of the dead, but rather proceed to the joy of blessed immortality, zealously, and through holy desire.”<sup>130</sup> Thietmar’s words here show us a main staple of this earlier period – ghost stories can prove the existence of an afterlife. This is central to the teaching of the Catholic church. Proof of an afterlife is a powerful motivator because there are consequences to present actions in the next life. What is most interesting is to see the growth of this simple affirmation of an afterlife into an assertion of a wholly new third place: purgatory.

Le Goff has asserted that purgatory was established as a third place by the twelfth century, though he believes this to leave less room for ghosts. Ghost stories, however, support this rise of purgatory as a third place during this period, the third section of stories from chapter one tells of ghosts who are in purgatory, trying to escape by way of alms, masses, prayers and other good deeds done by the living as retribution for the dead’s sins. The consequences of life become more and more direct, transferring to the afterlife in a nearly one for one ratio. Guibert’s father has a child out of wedlock, breaking his marriage vows, so his purgatory involves now carrying around a crying child and suffering a wounded side. Bernard gave away a fox fur, he wears one now as comfort; Erkinbert unjustly seized land, he now carries a mound of dirt on his back; Gertrude whispered in the choir, so she must return to the same place and prostrate herself as atonement. These ghosts can also be helped, with the exception of Gertrude, by outsiders to

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<sup>129</sup> Gregory, *Dialogues*, vi.

<sup>130</sup> Thietmar, *Chronicon*, 75.

their punishment. Guibert's mother hopes to ease her late husband's pain by adopting a parentless child, Bernard asks forgiveness of the abbot at Cluny who in return performs masses, and Erkinbert requests his sons return the land to ease his punishment.

Sometimes atonements are more specific to the sin, as seen above. But many of the stories also describe those who can be helped by more basic means, like Sancho and Bernard. Both assert that they can escape purgatory by alms, prayers, masses, and other pious actions done on their behalf. These good deeds can save them, but they are not specific to their sins. They are also doable by everyone. In this way, the stories could be seen to have a double purpose. The first is to inform the audience which sins to avoid in life, else you'll reap the consequences in the afterlife. The second is that regardless of the sins committed by loved ones in life, they can be helped by good deeds done in their dead loved one's name. This allows for the church to exert a form of social control over the laity, using one of the most influential weapons they have – guilt over current actions and what those actions mean in the afterlife. The idea of social control will be revisited and further explored in chapter four.

Our second section of tales was concerned with those ghosts who returned from hell. These stories do more than assert the afterlife; they assert that there is still a hell that one can go to directly. Purgatory has not erased the possibility of eternal damnation. Though Caesarius is the only author to have written this type of ghost story, on evaluating these stories we can see what sins were considered to be more heinous by, if not the Catholic church as a whole, then at the very least Caesarius's Cistercian order.

### **Sins**

Ghost stories also allow us to see some of what could be considered the author's agenda, whether unconscious or intentional. The sins which are chosen as having certain consequences

in the afterlife tell us something about what was most important to the church. This importance might take the form of attempts to gain or grow power, or maintain order, peace, or control. Even the way sins were atoned for and the good deeds completed to aid a dead loved one or themselves in the afterlife are deeply rooted in contemporary ideas of what could benefit the church, either physically or in furthering their authority. This idea also relates more directly to social control, which will be covered in chapter three.

However, in examining the sins within the story, we can also see what morals were most important at the time. The most important ones here seem to boil down to the sin of impure motives. This then relates to all sins of money and usury. If money is given as alms correctly, it is a good deed; but if given with impure motives or obtained through usury or other impure means, then the deeds are considered bad ones. We can also list the tale of the drunkard as one of impure motives, since Caesarius discusses how the man attended consecrations specifically to drink wine. We find these stories of social control in Caesarius most often. The man in Caesarius's tale warns against impure motives by telling his wife, "They [the good works and alms] are useless for giving me eternal life, because they were done for vainglory and not out of charity."<sup>131</sup> This encapsulates the concern of the medieval church with pure intentions. Without the purity of motive, deeds cannot be counted towards salvation.

Caesarius also discusses sexual sin with the story of the priest's mistress. However, because she wishes to be buried in new shoes, this story also covers the sins of vanity and greed. We also see sexual sin being severely punished by the exorcism of Henry Nodus, the incestuous ghost, as well as with Guibert of Nogent's personal story regarding his father's adultery and subsequent punishment.

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<sup>131</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 306.

Peter the Venerable wrote two tales which, interestingly, have to do with their subjects cheating the church and thus ending up in purgatory. Sancho stole sacred items from the church during a war, and because of this needs help escaping purgatory. Bernard le Gros, though he repented at the end of his life and intended to join the church, had built a castle on church lands, for which he wished to ask forgiveness of the Abbot of Cluny. These two tales tell us that Peter the Venerable was concerned with medieval persons knowing that crossing the church had consequences as well. Again, this is asserting a form of social control over the people, by showing them what their actions would lead to in the afterlife.

**Conclusion:**

Upon close examination, ghost stories from the eleventh to the thirteenth century contain many similarities and trends. By examining exempla literature, we know that we are looking at a specific genre containing short stories meant to teach a lesson and stick in the mind of the reader. Beyond that, similarities across authors and consistencies or increasing trends throughout the two centuries examined allows us to gain insight in to the medieval mind concerning the afterlife.

First, we see that these stories all have similar “mechanics.” Time of day is nearly always in the middle of the night or around the earliest hours of the morning (matins), and place is typically one of significance to the ghost or to the general dead. This is why we see lots of ghosts in the courtyards, thresholds, and graveyards of churches, because the dead were buried in and around the church grounds. It is interesting to note that these two details are not found in the tales predating 1000 that we evaluated in the first chapter. This points to a distinct medieval imagination surrounding this period, which coincides with the explosion of ghost stories found in exempla literature. Finally, if there is an appeal to authority, it is always to a spiritual rather than secular authority. None of these tales are told to the authors by a king or knight, rather the

storyteller is always connected to the church in some way.

Another trend we discussed is that seeing the dead typically heralds the death of the seer. If the person seeing the ghost doesn't die, someone else is often noted to have died. This is especially true of the earlier tales, where we see more ghosts ushering others into heaven. As we proceed further through the two centuries examined we see less of this death begetting death trend. However, this idea of the dead bringing death gives us insight into the way that the medieval people viewed the dead. While medieval Christians tended to be more comfortable with the dead, there is still something foreboding about them.

Though technically each of these topics is some form of discussion of the afterlife, we also analyzed this aspect specifically in terms of the growth of purgatory as a third place in the medieval imagination. This is crucial to the growth of ghost stories as a preaching tool, and is essential for the understanding of purgatory as an aspect of ghost stories. Purgatory is also the key to the idea of both the church's ability to control the laity, as well as the laity simultaneously being able to control their own salvation. Purgatory also allows us to see those sins which are still wrong, but less wrong than those which send a person to hell immediately.

We also have broader categories of sin being handled rather than individual mistakes as seen in Gregory the Great and Bede's stories where we find more individual mistakes made, or we find simply the messenger from God coming to warn of impending death, or to give a message. These later tales have a clearer purpose. We have moved from simple affirmation of the afterlife, to distinction between the three eternal resting places, including specific sins that lead to hell or purgatory. But, we have also moved to a time where one can save others from purgatory with certain actions. Stories are no longer for assurance of the afterlife and encouragement, but rather they are for instruction about the afterlife. This shows a clear and

distinct evolution in medieval thought about death and the afterlife.

Before 1000 we do not see the same need for ghost stories that arises after 1000. We see an evolution in the medieval imagination concerning death, which allows for ghost stories to be not only relevant, but necessary for understanding and teaching about the afterlife. The ghost stories illustrate a shift from death being simple, with writers having to assure their flock that there was even an existence after death, to a complex weighted system with three places one could end up. The addition of purgatory allows for the creation of grey in what had once been a black and white world. Before, the few ghost stories written down have only the purpose of being a stand-in for God or his messenger, and to assure people that death wasn't an end.

However, we find that ghost stories have more purposes as the church became more powerful, purgatory became an established third place, and preaching became more important. They are, in terms of preaching, a way to illustrate a moral, directing and dictating morality. This relates directly to the attempt by the church to socially control its parishioners. An effective way to legislate morality was to threaten placement in the afterlife. The church's monopoly on control centers around death in a way. They used death and what happened after as a motivator for people to behave in a certain way. Ghost stories are an influential piece of this puzzle. The stories contain directions for how to behave and display in graphic form what happens if you do not live your life in a certain way. Our next chapter will continue to evaluate this outside context as it relates to ghost stories, but this discussion illustrates that the stories were changing significantly to reflect a change in thoughts about the afterlife and death more generally.



## CHAPTER 4: CONTEXT AND GHOST STORIES

During this period, there are a number of shifts and changes happening within the church and in the western medieval world. Several of these big picture changes affect our ghost stories. Here we will place the ghost stories in context by explaining the changes and discussing how they fit into the larger changes occurring during this time. Church reforms, specifically the bent towards poverty and preaching, the increase in lay piety and the rise of purgatory are the three areas we will examine.

### Church Reforms

Around the year 1000, the church experienced a number of observable changes. One of the most easily observable are the monastic reforms that occurred between 1000 and 1200. Because of an increase in Latin translations, the ancient world's texts were becoming more accessible. This sparked an interest in the ancient world that ultimately led the medieval church to reflect on the primitive church. The medieval church wished to regain what they believed to be the ancient church's prominence and authority.<sup>132</sup> This was one of the central aims of the Gregorian reform, to restore the "discipline and order of the primitive church"<sup>133</sup> by scouring ancient records for early canon law.

This search for antiquity led to the establishment of new orders or reform of old orders, primarily as a reaction to the wealth and secular ties larger abbeys had.<sup>134</sup> These reforms led to an increase in hermits (a return to the Desert Fathers of old), and a desire to live the "apostolic life" which, though defined differently by different individuals and orders is best "summed up in

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<sup>132</sup> Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 135.

<sup>133</sup> Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 136.

<sup>134</sup> Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 136.

two words: poverty and preaching.”<sup>135</sup> In addition to a desire to return to the apostolic life and hermitage, an emphasis was placed on returning to a stricter understanding of the Benedictine Rule which led to the development of the Cistercians.<sup>136</sup> The Cistercians were deeply concerned with poverty, believing that this made them more like Christ,<sup>137</sup> and they also developed a great deal of exempla in the late twelfth century.<sup>138</sup> Another of these reforms which were important, were similar to hermits in their desire for solitary and simple lifestyle, but were “wandering preachers.” They belonged to no approved order, but were essentially beggars who preached in the streets.

This shift within the orders was caused by access to more ancient documents, and though the documents informed the shift, the new monastic order was a much stricter interpretation of solitude and poverty. This strict attitude informs our ghost stories, such as those which target specific sins. Additionally, the Gregorian reform is deeply concerned with re-establishing order and discipline, and expanded to the laity as well. This provides support for the stories concerned with punishing those who cheat the church.

Another development within the church was the rising emphasis on the New Testament. Joseph Lynch stresses that this revival did not change the status of the Old Testament, but rather that the New Testament became more applicable.<sup>139</sup> During the early medieval period, Lynch argues that the Old Testament resonated with the peoples who occupied the former Roman

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<sup>135</sup> Lynch, Joseph. *The Medieval Church: A Brief History*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013, 193.

<sup>136</sup> Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 136-137.

<sup>137</sup> Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 162.

<sup>138</sup> Mula, Stefano. “Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Cistercian Exempla Collections: Role, Diffusion, and Evolution.” *History Compass* 8, no. 8 (2010): 903–12. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2010.00709.x>, 903

<sup>139</sup> Lynch, *The Medieval Church*, 187.

Empire. Interestingly, we see an example of this in our early ghost stories through Bede's parallels to Old Testament stories. These tribes could see themselves reflected in the wandering Jews and the years of battle under kings.<sup>140</sup> This shift to the New Testament was occurring simultaneously with the many monastic reforms.

Recall that the Gregorian reforms would center on the primitive church, in part to bring authority to the medieval church – one of the ways in which the papal monarchy wished to establish this authority was to emphasize the promises of Christ to Peter.<sup>141</sup> This removed the spiritual importance of the kings found in the Old Testament, and shifted it to the New Testament primacy of Peter, a spiritual head connected to the popes. This undermining of the kingly spiritual authority in turn allows for papal authority to reign supreme.<sup>142</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, we see an interesting trend in ghost stories with each story having some kind of appeal to a spiritual authority, not a secular one. This is perhaps a reflection of the conflict over power between the kings and the papacy.

It is difficult to know why there is an explosion of ghost stories, but I would argue for two reasons: the shift towards preaching and poverty which occurred during this period led to a rise in and greater need for church writings centered around preaching. This in turn led to an increase in exempla and similar texts, which are where I have focused my search for ghost stories in this period. More exempla equate to more written ghost stories.

### **Poverty and Preaching in the Stories:**

Where we see the most direct correlation between these church reforms and the ghost

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<sup>140</sup> Lynch, *The Medieval Church*, 185.

<sup>141</sup> Matthew 16:18 “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”

<sup>142</sup> Lynch, *The Medieval Church*, 187.

stories are the tales which Caesarius wrote about ghosts who return from hell. Those who return from purgatory also give us interesting insight into this, but those who return from hell are a better representation. What we see are specific sins being laid out, which we can infer then are the worst sins. Caesarius himself has several chapters of *Dialogue on Miracles* dedicated to usurers. He discusses how alms from a usurer are worthless, illustrating the point with a story about a sum of money a usurer entrusted to a monastery. When he came to reclaim his money, both it and the monastery money had disappeared. With no evidence of tampering, the monk had to assume that “the money of the usurer had destroyed both the monastery money and itself. From this it can be gathered that the property of a monastery is not only not increased, but actually diminished by the alms of usury.”<sup>143</sup> Additionally, the man with impure motives often gave alms, but he did it for the fame and glory it would bring him, not to help others. This is another example of money being the root of the problem.

Excessive drinking, sexual sin, greed, and impure motives are also dealt with in our stories. Again, these issues were presumably problems not just morally, but were likely frequent social issues. Otherwise they would not have been pulled out as especially problematic and sinful enough to get a soul sent to hell. As we saw with the issue of usury, impure motives cause good deeds to be worthless in the eyes of God, which means that we must be more concerned with why we do things than what we do.

What we see here is an attempt by the church to control the medieval population, to police them, if you will, using the tools they had – preaching and fear of consequences in the afterlife. These two tools were potentially the most successful forms of social control that the church held. It must be noted that the term “social control” is not used in a negative or cynical

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<sup>143</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogues on Miracles*, 121.

sense, rather, we mean the simple idea that the church attempts to exert influence over the laity. This attempt to control the laity may even be in direct response to the rise of lay piety, which gave agency to the laity within their own religion. This is further discussed below.

Another interesting thread is that of poverty. Those ghosts which suffer, either eternally or in purgatory in these stories are often suffering because they were greedy in some way. For example, the priest's mistress demands burial in new shoes. In the synopsis of this tale, I mention that though Caesarius cites sexual sin as the main damning issue here, the inclusion of the shoes seems superfluous if we forget that Caesarius is part of the Cistercian order. Cistercians are deeply concerned with poverty in an attempt to avoid the corruption that comes with worldly wealth. This is their point of departure from other monastic orders. Thus, the inclusion of the shoes is enlightening – not only is this woman sexually impure, but she is also greedy and wasteful – which would be directly contrary to the idea of poverty and humility touted by Caesarius and his order

We also see greed, specifically the seizure of land, dealt with in these stories, which leads us to the inference that this was a widespread problem, or at the very least that the church benefitted from making it a heinous sin. The desire for wealth is the downfall of Frederic with his mound of earth, of Bernard who is haunted by the castle built on church lands, and of Sancho who stole sacred vestments. These three stories together show us that Peter the Venerable and the Benedictine monks at Cluny were concerned with the seizure of church goods. We can cynically argue that they were concerned with maintaining the church's wealth, specifically their own order and monastery's wealth, however, we must also recall that the authors of these tales believed these stories to be true. This eliminates the idea that Peter was making up stories to gain and store church wealth, however, their inclusion in written works can be seen as evidence

that Peter the Venerable felt this was important enough to deal with specifically.

Additionally, the solution for those who are in purgatory is to have alms given on their behalf, symbolizing the desire to please God and help others more than to gain wealth for themselves. This focus on giving money to the church and leaving what is the church's with the church is another place we see social control exerting itself. By attempting to control what people do with their money and wealth, the church has a great deal of influence, and again, the greatest way to motivate this behavior is by threatening pain or damnation in the afterlife for loved ones or self.

### **Lay Piety**

This revival stretched further than the educated or church elite – even the laity were seeking a more religious life. This not only fueled the incredible numbers of people becoming hermits or entering Cistercian, Franciscan, or Dominican orders, who allowed the poor to enter their ranks, but also allowed for the rise of certain types of literature, such as the exempla, to instruct the lay person on the moral life.<sup>144</sup> As stated above, the explosion of written ghost stories around the year 1000 can be attributed to the growing number of exempla stories. Recall that exempla were short moral tales which were meant to be used in preaching. Stories have the distinct advantage of being memorable, and this allows for a moral lesson to be taught in a lasting way. Lay piety rose in this period simultaneously with the emphasis on preaching. These two go hand in hand. As the laity desired more spiritual experience and influence, the church attempts to provide it for them. Lay piety in the medieval era can be defined as the set of actions conceived by the non-clerical as holy and religious, which would eventually lead to salvation or some other sort of merit in the afterlife. André Vauchez much more eloquently sketches the

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<sup>144</sup> Lynch, *The Medieval Church*, 190.

importance of the rise of lay action and what lay piety is:

the growth of the laity's role in the Church seems to me to be related above all to the rehabilitation of the active life in Christian spirituality. Whether it be holy wars or works of charity, the practice of poverty or the exercise of justice, all forms of concrete action in the world aimed at bringing it into conformity with the evangelical ideal grew in importance in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>145</sup>

Additionally, pious actions by the laity can be seen as supporting the church. The church has a monopoly on death. The dead are buried in church grounds, the priest gives the mass and last rites, and the church, in a way, controls the information the laity knows about the afterlife. In return, those who wish to be involved in the salvation of others or even in their own, can often do so through the mode of death – after someone has died an indulgence can be purchased to release them from hell, alms can be given on their behalf, masses can be paid for on the behalf of the deceased. Though the cult of saint could be examined as a type of lay piety, the church still has a hand in “sainting” a person. Thus, even this worship of the dead and the miracles they perform falls under church jurisdiction in a way.

All this makes death the realm of the church, and not only the realm of the church, but a realm which the laity can participate in, but ultimately cannot control. They can enter into these pious acts on their own behalf, or the behalf of their loved ones, but the church controls and benefits from most of these actions. These actions remind us of the close connection between the dead and the living, and the instrumental role that the dead played in the life of the living. In spite of the rising importance of the laity, and the fact that anyone can be considered a credible ghost, there is still almost always an appeal to a church authority figure included in these short stories. The exception tends to be those which are told to the monks by their own family. But

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<sup>145</sup> André Vauchez, and Daniel Ethan Bornstein. *The Laity in the Middle Ages: Religious Beliefs and Devotional Practices* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), xviii.

these are few, nearly always the author (in our case always a monk) has witnessed the story himself, or it was told to him by a bishop, monk, or other such authority.

It is important to note that this rise in lay piety is not dictated, nor is it exclusively beneficial to the church. The church is not informing the laity and their actions, rather they are ultimately able to benefit from the laity's desire to become more involved in pious actions, but this benefit comes at the cost of the laity's agency in their own religion. They are not being dictated to, and they are not blindly following the will of the church, rather, the church is doing what it can in this period to gain control in spite of lay actions. In studying ghost stories this complex relationship is revealed – ghost stories are told by the church to influence lay pious actions, those lay actions can help the church. However, this simultaneously gives the laity a great deal of freedom to create their own salvation and inform their own religion. This is because they do not need a churchman to perform some good deeds, and the ones such as masses for the dead where the church is required in some way still depend on the layperson's instigation.

### **Lay Piety in the Stories**

By examining who the ghost is, who sees the ghost, and who tells the story in each of the tales we have evaluated chronologically, we gain an interesting insight into the rise of lay piety. Our early tales from Gregory and Bede (around 600 and 700 respectively) are told by church men and women, about church men and women. Both the ghosts and the seers are monks, priests or nuns or some other form of church person. Out of the four tales by Thietmar and Rodulfus, written around 1000, three contain ghosts which are nameless and vast hosts more spectral in nature. The seer is still a churchman, and, in these tales, it seems that the stories are more common knowledge. But in our final stories, by Guibert, Peter the Venerable, and Caesarius, the ghost and the seer are more often lay persons; the teller is consistently a church



figure. Interestingly, in all three of these time periods we have examples of women being involved as a ghost or seer. This evolution matches the rise of lay piety and the rise of exempla literature – ghost stories are not just about the religious, but are also normal people. This allows the general public to relate to ghost stories more easily, which allows for easier recollection of the story.

Importantly, in all of these stories, we do not see upper echelons of the church – no popes or saints or cardinals are referenced as the ghosts, the seers, or the tellers in these stories. While the authority for the truthfulness of the story always falls on the church in some way, none of these very special people are the ones being called on to contribute authority. Rather, the lower levels of the church, more community based figures, such as bishops, monks, abbots and family are used as authority figures.

The laity's concern with the afterlife can also be seen as a part of lay piety. This concern with the afterlife gives the church a lot of power to educate and mold the laity's ideas of the afterlife. One could argue that concern with where one ends up after death is the chief motivator of lay piety – this chief motivator is one that the church uses to its advantage. While some scholars rightly examine the lack of influence or control that the church exerted on the laity, and especially the impotence of the highest church officials in demanding morality and piety from all of the church parishioners, we cannot ignore that when it comes to the realm of the dead, the church has a great deal of influence and thus can wield a great deal of power, resulting in a great deal of control. While the concern of this thesis is not to measure the effectiveness of the exempla and the ghost stories contained within them, we can argue that these lend a modicum of control to the church. We can also argue that, because lay pious actions related to death sometimes required the assistance of clergy or giving of alms, land and etc. to the church on

behalf of loved ones, that the church benefitted from lay piety. However, throughout this discussion we must remember that the relationship between lay piety and the church within the confines of death and the afterlife is complex – the laity and the church are mutually benefitting and affecting one another.

### **Rise of Purgatory**

Finally, perhaps the most obvious connection to our tales is the rise of purgatory as a third place. Purgatory serves two functions – it simultaneously brings the dead into the realm and thoughts of the living, while also allowing the living to serve and save the dead. Though we find ghost stories featuring ghosts returning from heaven and hell as well, it is far more typical to see those who are in the in-between. In fact, only Caesarius writes about ghosts returning from hell, and only some of the ghosts from heaven actually come from heaven to earth. Those ghosts which come from heaven are always specifically retrieving a person to take them to their final resting place. The tales where ghosts return to ask for aid are especially important in the solidification of purgatory in the minds of the public. These tales would reinforce the church's assertion that helping their dead relatives with alms, indulgence and other good works would be beneficial in the long run.

### **Evidence of Purgatory in the stories**

The evidence for purgatory as an established place is present in three of the five authors analyzed here. Interestingly, the first two, Thietmar of Merseburg and Rodulfus Glaber, who are both writing right at the turn of the millennium in the eleventh century, have evidence of the afterlife, but do not include the idea of purgatory as a distinct place. Recall that Jacques Le Goff has argued that the distinct place of purgatory was not well established until the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The other three authors are writing in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, with Caesarius being

the latest.

What we see in these tales, is a direct line between the affliction of the ghost, and the sins they committed in life. Often, the penance is tied to correcting those mistakes, for example, the return of the land unjustly seized by Erkinbert or the caring for a child by Guibert's mother to ease the suffering of her late husband. However, we also see the more typical and universal penance for sins apply. This is helpful because these are things anyone can do to save their loved ones. For example, Guibert's mother asks if sacrifice, prayer and almsgiving will relieve her husband's suffering; Bernard le Gros asks that the official beg forgiveness of the abbot of Cluny, who in turn offers oblations and offerings for him; Sancho asks Pedro to do good works on his behalf and to give to the poor the 8 sous he would've been owed had he lived.

The evidence for social control is seen here again, as these lay piety actions are specifically tied to the church's monopoly on the afterlife and death. The ability to remove someone else from purgatory is paramount in our ghost stories, and would have been first in many of the laity's minds. This is that relationship which Peter Brown and others have discussed – the dead are more like an age group in the medieval period, they are still influencing and acting on the living, as well as being acted upon by the living. Essentially, we find that purgatory not only allows for more ghost stories, but that these ghost stories communicate and establish meaning for purgatory and the lay piety's actions associated with removing someone from purgatory.

**Conclusion:**

In this chapter, we have established how church reforms, lay piety and the rise of purgatory are present in our ghost stories. Mostly, these three realms are part of the monopoly the church holds on the afterlife and death generally. However, it is interesting to note that ghost

stories can provide meaning for these categories as well. By containing evidence that lay actions actually mean something in removing souls from purgatory, ghost stories provide assurance to the hearer that their actions mean something. This is dependent on the shift towards preaching, which allows for the rise of exempla literature where we find these moral ghost stories. Thus, church reforms allowed for ghost stories, and ghost stories solidified an idea of purgatory which could be changed by lay actions. Ghost stories are intertwined with the context of the medieval church during this period. The afterlife and where one ends up is a strong motivator that allows the church to yield social influence over its flock.

## CONCLUSION

Ghost stories and their relationship to the medieval world are far more nuanced than they may seem at first. While some authors have posited that ghost stories lost significance with the rise of purgatory, the stories found in exempla literature of this period illustrate quite the opposite. Purgatory allows for the emergence of ghosts as warnings to the living. This role reinforces the previously established belief that the dead and living in the Middle Ages are inextricably linked, but this link creates a dynamic and nuanced relationship. This relationship is necessary to explore as several facets of the imagination surrounding death and the afterlife have yet to be exhausted.

Even within this research, I find myself with more questions. Further research into other types of ghost stories would yield more information on the dynamic of death in the Middle Ages, as would further research into exempla literature as a whole, examining how typical the ghost stories are compared with other stories. A comparison between stories of saints and stories of ghosts could inform us as to the differences between the afterlife of the special dead and the mundane dead. And while many other subtler facets of ghost stories can and certainly should be attempted, my own assessment is that ghost stories ought not be left out of the main narrative. This is the main problem I see in the current scholarship; ghost stories are not included beyond a passing footnote or mention in most works I explored on medieval death and the afterlife.

This research has illustrated that ghost stories were a part of exempla literature, and therefore part of preaching and thus mass dissemination of doctrine and ideas. Ghost stories illustrate very specific ideas about death – such as the pervasive idea that the dead are more likely to return at night and to places of their burial. More importantly, it is apparent that the relationship between the dead and the living is reinforced by ghost stories, for example, the

importance of saying mass and giving alms on behalf of deceased loved ones are essential parts of lay piety during this period, and the inclusion of ghost stories perpetuates the idea that the living can do something for the dead, and that the dead may not permanently be in one eternal resting place or another.

Perhaps it is enough to merely say that this is not an exhaustive look at ghost stories. We have surveyed five authors across two centuries in one genre of literature. But within this relatively small sample we see many similarities which allow certain conclusions to be drawn, that time and place of ghost sightings are typically at night in a place familiar to ghosts, that seeing a ghost often means that death of the seer will follow shortly. We learn what sins were most important to the writers, specifically illustrating that fear of bad money and bad motives is prevalent amongst the ghost stories and exempla of this time. We see that ghost stories illustrate the emphasis on poverty and preaching during this time period, and that they illustrate the complicated relationship between the laity and the church, as well as supporting the rise of purgatory.

Ghost stories are a necessary part of the medieval imagination surrounding death. I have tried to place them into the broader narrative of how the living and the dead relate to one another during the medieval period.

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