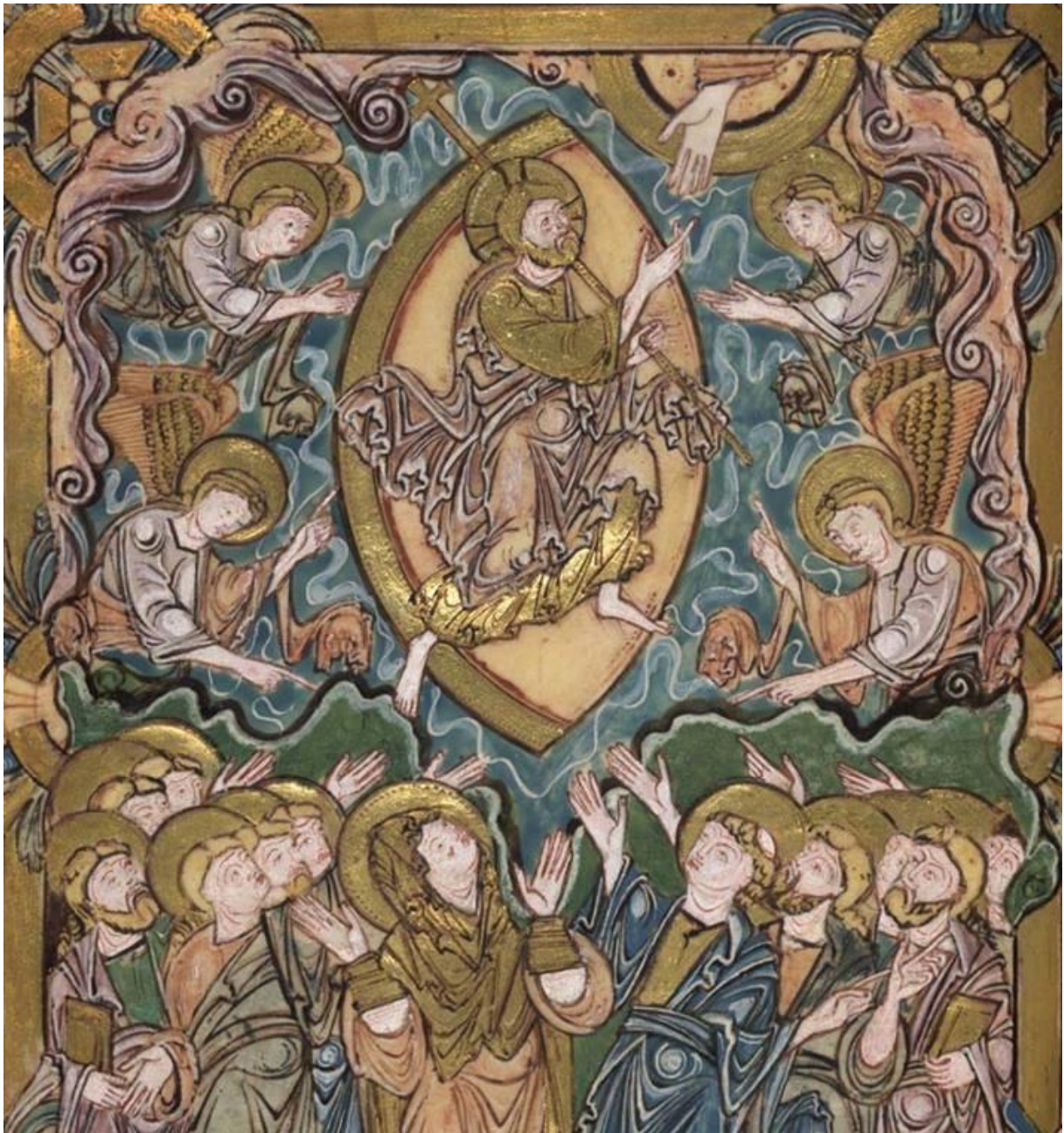# God or Man?
The Dual Nature of Christ in Old English Christian Poetry

MA-Thesis Philology
Student name: Mariëlle van Rijn
Student number: s1267965
Date: 23 December 2016
First reader: Dr. M.H. Porck
Second reader: Dr. K.A. Murchison
Leiden University, Department of Literary Studies

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INTRODUCTION

Anglo-Saxon poets show a splendid ability to deal with difficult and foreign subject matter in their own Germanic style. Accustomed to a pagan warrior culture, the Anglo-Saxons needed to come to terms with a new tradition coming to their island in the sixth and seventh centuries: Christianity. The Anglo-Saxons proved to be particularly good at fusing their vernacular culture with the new Christian faith; they not only adapted themselves to the ideals of Christianity, but also adapted Christianity to their own heroic tradition.[1] This reconciliation of Germanic heroism and Christianity is especially evident in Old English literature. For instance, in the opening lines of *Andreas* the poet portrays the twelve apostles in terms of the Germanic *comitatus*: they are excellent warriors and loyal retainers to the Lord.[2] Similarly, Anglo-Saxon saints such as Guthlac are described as warriors of Christ fighting spiritual battles.[3] Moreover, the devil and his minions are often presented as exiles, for example in *Christ and Satan*, as punishment for their disloyalty to God.[4] As such, the Anglo-Saxon poets cast Christian themes in a heroic mode to make them more acceptable to their Germanic audience.

The Anglo-Saxon poets also faced another challenge: how should they present Christ to their Anglo-Saxon readers? Many existent images of Christ would have been hard to digest for Anglo-Saxon readers because they were so alien to their familiar Germanic culture. For instance, the biblical images of Christ depend to some extent on the culture in which Jesus lived and may thus have seem strange to a Germanic audience whose heroic culture differed greatly from the Jewish-Roman culture of Jesus' time. Moreover, the poets did not only have to deal with the problem of illustrating Christ in an attractive fashion to a Germanic audience, they also needed to present Christ correctly, in the light of the debates about Christ's nature in the medieval Church. From the early Church up until today there have been many theological debates surrounding the nature and person of Christ. The Middle Ages were no different: "in the medieval church there were fierce debates about the extent and nature of Christ's humanity while he was on earth and it could be dangerous to undermine received dogma".[5] Anglo-Saxon

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[1] J.C. Russel, 'Germanization and Christianization: 678-754', in *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity: A Sociohistorical Approach to Religious Transformation*, (New York, 1994), pp. 183-208 (p. 188).
[2] *Andreas*, in *Old English Poems of Christ and His Saints*, ed. and trans. M. Clayton (Cambridge, MA, 2013), pp. 183-299, ll. 1-11.
[3] *Guthlac A*, in *Old English Poems of Christ and His Saints*, ed. and trans. M. Clayton (Cambridge, MA, 2013), pp. 90-144, l. 797.
[4] *Christ and Satan*, in *Old English Poems of Christ and His Saints*, ed. and trans. M. Clayton (Cambridge, MA, 2013), pp. 303-51, ll. 119-24.
[5] R. Marsden, 'Biblical Literature: The New Testament', in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. M. Godden and M. Lapidge, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 234-50 (p. 243).

poets were thus hard-pressed to depict Christ in a theologically correct way, whilst at the same time they had to try and create an image of Christ that was palatable to their Germanic audiences.

In the centuries after St Augustine's mission to convert the Anglo-Saxons in 597, (heretical) doctrines of the person and nature of Christ reached the Anglo-Saxon Church via the teaching of men, such as Archbishop Theodore, and also via the works of the Church Fathers.[6] One of the great issues in medieval debates about Christology (i.e. the study of the person and nature of Christ) was Christ's dual nature: completely divine yet perfectly human. In the early Middle Ages, the Church insisted on the co-existence of Christ's divine supremacy and human suffering.[7] At the same time, there were men who put a particular emphasis on Jesus' human nature, presenting him as friend and lover.[8] As a consequence of all the theological disputes, Anglo-Saxon poets who desired to write about Christ needed to be particularly careful about portraying Christ as divine or human to avoid accusations of heresy.[9] In this thesis, I will elaborate on this matter by looking at some Old English Christian poems in the context of these theological debates, focussing on Christ's dual nature in these poems.

Scholars who have examined Old English Christian poems so far have focussed predominantly on how the poets presented Christ in Germanic heroic terms to suit their audience's predilections. Michael Cherniss, for instance, has provided a chronology for heroic Christian poems, distinguishing between a couple of successive stages in the movement from Germanic heroic to Christian poetry in England.[10] In his discussion, he commented on *Andreas* that heroic imagery is literally used to present Christ and his followers.[11] In *Christ II*, heroic language and motifs are only used figuratively as a means to show how Christ is like a Germanic lord, whereas in *Christ III* there is still heroic vocabulary but it has completely lost its heroic connotations.[12] Catherine Woeber has focussed on the portrayal of Christ as a warrior in *The Dream of the Rood*, *Christ II* and *Christ and Satan*, using a Christian critical approach (i.e. emphasising the poets' use of the Christian tradition).[13] She concluded that in these poems, the poet used heroic elements to depict Christ as a figurative heroic warrior as well as a literal

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[6] R. Woolf, 'Doctrinal Influences on *The Dream of the Rood*', *Medium Aevum* 27.3 (1958), pp. 137-53 (p. 141).
[7] *Ibidem*, p. 138.
[8] G. O'Collins, *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus* (Oxford, 2009), p. 207.
[9] Marsden, 'Biblical Literature', p. 243.
[10] M.D. Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ: Heroic Concepts and Values in Old English Christian Poetry* (The Hague, 1972), pp. 249-51.
[11] *Ibidem*, p. 250.
[12] *Ibidem*.
[13] C. Woeber, 'Heroism in Three Old English Poems: A Christian Approach', *Koers* 60.3 (1995), pp. 359-79 (p. 361).

warrior in his own right.[14] In addition, Kent Hare has argued that the image of Christ as a warrior leading his loyal followers would have been an ideal method of reconciling the vernacular culture with the Christian faith.[15]

Surprisingly, even though much research has been done on the heroic image of Christ in Old English verse, the portrayal of Christ has hardly been analysed in the light of medieval doctrine, Christology in particular. In fact, Judith Garde has complained that "no critical overview of early medieval Christian faith and doctrine has emerged in relation to verse".[16] She even remarked that critical analyses of Old English verse that disregard early medieval doctrine are incomplete and unsatisfying.[17] One of the rare studies that does include medieval theology in its discussion of Old English poetry is Rosemary Woolf's article on doctrinal influences on *The Dream of the Rood*. She has placed the poem in its medieval Christological context, claiming that the poet illustrated the doctrinal thoughts of his time.[18] Kyle Crawford has also referred to the doctrinal context of *The Dream of the Rood* and briefly explained how the poet illustrated Christ's dual nature in the light of medieval theology.[19] Furthermore, James Wilson has approached a couple of Old English Christian poems from the medieval allegorical tradition and concluded that the Old English poets' use of imagery and symbolism was influenced by patristic and exegetical writings on the Continent.[20] After complaining about the sorrowful state of studying Old English religious verse in relation to medieval doctrine, Garde has offered an overview of doctrinal influences on several poems, such as the *Christ* poems, *The Dream of the Rood* and *The Descent into Hell*. However, she wrote a general overview, not specifically focussing on the person and nature of Christ in these poems. Elaborating on Garde's doctrinal approach to Old English verse, I will place several Old English Christian poems in a specific medieval Christological perspective.

This thesis will thus fill a gap in the literature on Old English Christian verse by examining the dual nature of Christ in the Old English Christian poems *Christ I* (or *Advent*), *Christ II* (or *The Ascension*), *Christ III* (or *Christ in Judgment*), *The Dream of the Rood* (or *The Vision of the Cross*), and *The Descent into Hell*. In these poems, Christ is portrayed as a human

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[14] Woeber, 'Heroism', p. 377.

[15] K.G. Hare, *Christian Heroism and Holy War in Anglo-Saxon England*. Unpublished dissertation, Louisiana State University (Ann Arbor, 1997), p. 224.

[16] J.N. Garde, *Old English Poetry in Medieval Christian Perspective: A Doctrinal Approach* (Bury St Edmunds, 1991), p. 1.

[17] *Ibidem*, p. 2.

[18] Woolf, 'Doctrinal Influences', p. 138.

[19] K.R. Crawford, *Christian Culture and Germanic Tradition in Old English Literature: A Syncretic Approach to Reconciling Faith and Culture*. Unpublished MA thesis, University of Central Oklahoma (Ann Arbor, 2011), pp. 41-42.

[20] J.H. Wilson, *Christian Theology and Old English Poetry* (The Hague, 1974).

being (for example as an emotional sufferer in *Christ III)* and as God (for example as the origin of life in *Christ I)* in different contexts and with different functions. These poems are interesting sources in the light of the discussion of Christ's dual nature because they deal with Christ's nature and his deeds in diverse ways. The three *Christ* poems, for instance, provide complementary accounts of Christ's birth, his Ascension, and his Second Coming on Judgment Day and thus depict him, respectively, as Messiah, Redeemer and Judge.[21] In addition, *The Dream of the Rood* and *The Descent into Hell* offer insight into the Anglo-Saxon perceptions of Christ at his death and his subsequent Descent into Hell.

An analysis of the human and divine portrayals of Christ in these poems will lead to an understanding of the Anglo-Saxon approach to Christ's dual nature. By placing the poems in their medieval Christological perspective, this thesis attempts to provide a fresh outlook on Old English Christian verse. I will therefore address the following research question: "how do the poets of these Christian poems address the issue of Christ's dual nature in the light of medieval Christology?". In examining this topic, I will first dedicate a chapter to medieval Christology, which will provide a historical and doctrinal context for the analyses of the poems. The second chapter deals with the *Christ* poems because these are often analysed together and the third chapter comprises *The Dream of the Rood* and *The Descent into Hell* because these two poems particularly use heroic imagery in their portrayal of Christ, and thus raise different questions concerning the interpretation of Christ's dual nature than the *Christ* poems. In the analyses of the poems, I will highlight the passages in which the poet addresses Christ's dual nature, describe how Christ is described as human, divine or both (according to Gerald O'Collins' classification),[22] and discuss the context of these passages to grasp the poet's intention of describing Christ in that particular fashion.

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[21] Marsden, 'Biblical Literature', p. 238.
[22] O'Collins, *Christology*, pp. 230-37.

CHAPTER 1 – THE DUAL NATURE OF CHRIST AND MEDIEVAL CHRISTOLOGY

Who was Jesus? How does he relate to the Father? Why did he do what he did? These are but a few questions that are addressed in Christology, the "part of [t]heology whose object is Christ, i.e. the study of the Incarnation of the Word ([C]hristology in its restricted sense) and of his saving work ([S]oteriology)".[23] Christologists reflect systematically on the person of Christ and his work to come to a better understanding of Jesus himself and his role in salvation.[24] As such, they examine several issues, such as the Person of Christ: the coexistence of a human and divine nature in one person.[25] This dual nature of Jesus Christ was the topic of numerable fierce debates throughout the history of the Church. This chapter will illustrate the development of Christology from the patristic period to the Middle Ages. It will also zoom in on Christology in Anglo-Saxon England and conclude with an overview of human and divine characteristics of Christ as a framework for the subsequent textual analyses.

The history of Christology

New Testament faith set a great challenge to believers: how to correctly interpret Christ's dual nature without sacrificing or reducing either his divinity or humanity. In the early centuries of Christianity, there were many different views on Christ's dual nature. To solve the difficulty of Christ's nature, some reduced or completely ignored either Christ's divinity or his humanity, an approach which was considered erroneous by the Catholic Church. For example, the Ebionites refused to believe in Christ's divinity, Docetists discarded Christ's human body as merely an appearance, and Marcion claimed that Jesus only had a heavenly body.[26] Other heretical Christological views were held by men such as Arius, who claimed that the Father is much more powerful than the Son and is in fact the only true God,[27] Nestorius, who disunited Christ's two natures,[28] and Eutyches, who argued that Christ is from two natures but not in two natures because his divine nature completely absorbs his human nature at the Incarnation.[29] In short, the difficulty of interpreting Christ's two natures resulted in various heretical ideas about Christ's humanity and his divinity.

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[23] G. Berceville, 'Christology', in *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*, ed. A. Vauchez (Oxford, 2002).
[24] O'Collins, *Christology*, p. 1.
[25] M.J. Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, ed. L.A. Hustad (Grand Rapids, 2001), p. 234.
[26] O'Collins, *Christology*, p. 174.
[27] *Ibidem,* p. 181.
[28] *Ibidem*, p. 191.
[29] *Ibidem,* p. 195.

Such claims were often fiercely refuted by other theologians. Athanasius, for instance, opposed Arius' claim that Christ was not fully God by defending the notion that God assumed human nature in the person of Jesus Christ.[30] He advanced two main arguments to support this claim, which eventually led to the rejection of Arianism. Simplified, the first one came down to the following: only God can save, Jesus Christ is the Saviour, therefore, Christ is God incarnate. The second argument concerned Christian worship and prayer to Jesus Christ. Athanasius argued that if Jesus Christ was created, as Arius claimed, then Christians would be guilty of worshipping a creature instead of God, which would be idolatry. In this way, Athanasius accused Arius of "making nonsense of the way in which Christians prayed and worshipped".[31] Because of Athanasius' focus on Christ as God incarnate, he could be assigned to the Alexandrian school of Christology, which emphasised the divinity of Christ and interpreted it in terms of the Incarnation: Christ united human nature to himself so that humanity might become divine. As such, the Alexandrian writers focussed on Christ as having one single nature. By contrast, the Antiochene school of Christology stressed Christ's humanity, claiming that Christ had two distinct natures. The Alexandrian school then accused the Antiochene writers that they denied the unity in Christ, whereas the Antiochene school was convinced that the Alexandrian thought would lead to confusion over the two natures in Christ.[32]

To deal with all these Christological disagreements, ecumenical councils were held in the fourth and fifth centuries: the Council of Nicaea in 325, the Council of Constantinople in 381, the Council of Ephesus in 431, and the Council of Chalcedon in 451.[33] In response to all the different views on Christ's two natures, the Council of Chalcedon established the defining principle of all orthodox Christology:

> [B]egotten of the Father before the ages as touching the Godhead, the same in the last days, for us and for our salvation, born from the Virgin Mary, the *Theotocos*, as touching the manhood, one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way abolished because of the union, but rather the characteristic property of each nature being preserved and concurring into one Person and subsistence …, not as if Christ were parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son and only-begotten God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from the beginning spoke concerning him, and our Lord Jesus Christ instructed us, and the Creed of the Fathers has handed down to us.[34]

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[30] A.E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, MA, 1997), p. 12.

[31] *Ibidem*, p. 335.

[32] *Ibidem*, pp. 336-39.

[33] Garde, *Old English Poetry*, p. 21.

[34] J. Stevenson, *Creeds, Councils and Controversies: Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church A.D. 337-461* (New York, 1966), p. 337.

In short, the Council of Chalcedon insisted on the unity of two natures in Christ. These two natures cannot be separated and are equally preserved in the person of Christ. The dual nature of Christ does not make him two separate persons, but he remains a single person, one with the Father. As such, this fundamental principle contradicted the doctrine of Nestorius that Christ is two distinct persons and the doctrine of Eutyches that overstressed Christ's divinity at the expense of his humanity. The Council also endorsed the Christological teaching of Pope Leo, as written down in his *Tome*.[35] In that document, Leo defined the correct way of speaking about Christ's deeds on earth based on the principle of 'recognizing the difference', that is dividing Christ's human acts (suffering, being thirsty etc.) and divine acts (such as healing, forgiving, and performing miracles).[36] In this way, the Council approved of the distinction between Christ's human and divine acts, but condemned dividing Christ's two natures.

Even though the Council of Chalcedon came to a controlling principle for Christology, it deliberately did not describe how exactly one should explore or articulate the dual nature of Christ. Because there were numerous disputes in the Church about how to interpret the relation between the two natures of Christ in those days, the Council was obliged to find a consensus.[37] The consensus that was reached involved recognising Christ as being both divine and human and accepting a plurality of interpretations of how these natures relate to each other. The Council of Chalcedon proved to be a turning point in the Christological debates in the early Church: its terminology of Christ as one person in two natures would become normative in the following centuries, up until today.[38] As a consequence, it became a point of reference for many future discussions about Christology. Despite the highly influential Chalcedonian Creed, Christological disputes and debates continued to arise in the Christian Church. In the early Middle Ages, for instance, the Anglo-Saxon scholar Alcuin needed to defend the western orthodoxy against the Adoptionists, who claimed that Christ was only the adopted Son of God.[39]

Christology in Anglo-Saxon England

The Christological discussions on the Continent also reached Anglo-Saxon England. Even though the Anglo-Saxons were only recently converted to the Christian faith, and thus had no long tradition of philosophical thinking about Christ, they did not ignorantly accept western

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[35] 'Christology', in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. E.A. Livingstone (Oxford, 2013).

[36] Woolf, 'Doctrinal Influences', p. 139.

[37] McGrath, *Christian Theology*, pp. 343-44.

[38] O'Collins, *Christology*, p. 197.

[39] Woolf, 'Doctrinal Influences', p. 140.

Christological doctrine (as defined at the four ecumenical councils).[40] In fact, the Pope did not want to keep the Anglo-Saxons unaware of heresies and tried to instruct the Anglo-Saxon Church against the danger of such ideas about Christ. In preparation of a council ordered by the Pope, Theodore of Tarsus, Archbishop of Canterbury, summoned the Synod of Hatfield in 679, at which the great heretics such as Nestorius and Eutyches were condemned and a letter with the Council's declaration of faith was drawn up.[41] An account of this synod and a copy of the declaration of faith were written down by Bede.

The Venerable Bede, an English monk and theologian living in the late seventh and early eighth centuries, recorded the Synod of Hatfield in the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, which probably became one of the most popular history books in the Middle Ages.[42] In this book, Bede explains how Archbishop Theodore heard of the heresy of Eutyches and wanted to "keep the English churches over which he presided free from any such taint".[43] Bede's writing thus demonstrates that the heretical doctrine of Eutyches reached the Anglo-Saxon Church and that the Archbishop of Canterbury found it necessary to protect the Church from such an erroneous interpretation of Christ. Bede continued by copying Theodore's account of the synod, in which the Christological doctrine as defined at the Council of Chalcedon was reiterated:

> Following these [the faith delivered by Jesus Christ, handed down in creeds and councils to the Catholic church] in all devotion and orthodoxy, we likewise believe and confess their divinely inspired doctrines and confess the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit to be rightly and truly a Trinity consubstantial in Unity and the Unity in Trinity, that is, one God in three substances or consubstantial persons equal in glory and honour.[44]

As such, the Synod of Hatfield accentuated the notion that Jesus Christ is one with and equal to the Father and the Spirit, thus refuting Arian claims that Christ is not fully God. Bede also copied the part of Theodore's account of the synod that acknowledged the ecumenical councils (as discussed in the previous section). It explains how "the impious Arius and his teachings" were condemned at the Council of Nicaea, "the worthless Nestorius and his teachings" at the Council of Ephesus, and Eutyches and Nestorius at the Council of Chalcedon.[45] This record

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[40] Woolf, 'Doctrinal Influences', p. 140.
[41] *Ibidem*, pp. 140-41.
[42] B. Colgrave, 'Historical Introduction', in *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, eds. and trans. B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), pp. xvii-xxxviii (pp. xvii-xix).
[43] Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, IV Ch. XVII. All translations of this text were taken from *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, eds. and trans. B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), pp. 1-587.
[44] *Ibidem*.
[45] *Ibidem*.

illustrates Theodore's and Bede's sentiment towards the different heretical doctrines that existed on the Continent and also found their way into Anglo-Saxon England.

Bede not only commented on Christological matters in relation to the Synod of Hatfield: he expressed his opinion on them much earlier in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English people*. In Book I, he tells about the peace of the Church in Britain after the Diocletianic persecutions in the early fourth century, until Arianism appears:

> The churches of Britain remained at peace until the time of the Arian madness which corrupted the whole world and even infected this island, sundered so far from the rest of mankind, with the poison of its error. This quickly opened the way for every foul heresy from across the Ocean to pour into an island which always delights in hearing something new and holds firmly to no sure belief.[46]

The terms "uaesaniae" [madness], "ueneno" [poison], and "lues hereseos" [foul heresy] leave no doubt as to Bede's opinion of Christological errors such as Arianism.[47] This intense, scornful description of Arianism, which also led to other heresies, clearly demonstrates that the Anglo-Saxons were aware of Christological debates on the Continent and testifies to the Anglo-Saxons' ability to form their own opinion on these matters. Bede obviously experienced the heresies as a great danger to the British Church. At the end of the chapter he repeats how dangerous these heresies are when he writes how Arianism was condemned at the Council of Nicaea, but still "the deadly poison of its evil doctrine … tainted the churches of the whole world, including those of our own islands".[48]

Another Anglo-Saxon who was preoccupied with Christology was Alcuin, a scholar and teacher who lived in the eighth century and was tutored by one of Bede's disciples.[49] As has been mentioned, Alcuin wrote against the Adoptionist heresy, as presented by Felix, to defend the Christian faith. He wrote several documents, remaining firmly within the patristic tradition of the Catholic Church, which testifies to his "great mastery of the Bible and also access to a range of high quality patristic texts".[50] As such, Alcuin's work is clear evidence that the Christological works of the Church Fathers were accessible in Anglo-Saxon England. In his writings, Alcuin rebuffs Felix's dubious use of patristic authorities to support the Adoptionist claim that Christ was only God's adopted son, and accuses him of disturbing the peace of the Church:

> Who then is to be deemed a heretic: the one who follows the Catholic meaning of the holy Fathers and the entire Church since the beginning of the Christian faith, or

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[46] Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History*, I Ch. VIII.
[47] *Ibidem.*
[48] *Ibidem.*
[49] D. Dales, *Alcuin: Theology and Thought* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 19.
[50] *Ibidem*, p. 85.

> the person who devises at the end of the ages new categories to describe the humanity and divinity of Christ our Lord who was born of a virgin?[51]

Alcuin's reaction to Felix reveals that the Anglo-Saxon Church greatly valued the work of the Church Fathers such as Athanasius and Augustine. Furthermore, Alcuin's understanding of Christ was wholly consistent with Augustine's. They both explained the unity of the two natures in Christ as *communicatio idiomatum*: the exchange of both human and divine properties in the one person of Christ. In addition, Alcuin asserted that "Christ is one, both as God and man, uniting in his words and deed whatever pertains to the divine and human natures, so that they each express themselves in one person, and so that the proper nature of the Son and the dignity of his deity are one".[52] In this way, Alcuin echoes Chalcedon's insistence on the unity of Christ's human and divine natures, thus repudiating Nestorianism and other heresies. Like Bede's, Alcuin's work on theology was very popular in the Middle Ages and led to peace and stability in the Anglo-Saxon Church.

A few centuries after Bede and Alcuin, Ælfric would contribute to the Christology of the Anglo-Saxon Church. Ælfric of Eynsham was an abbot in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries and is generally known as one of the most prolific prose writers of the Old English period.[53] In many of his writings, Ælfric tackles complex theological issues, among which the nature of the Trinity and Christological doctrine.[54] In the same way as Alcuin, Ælfric heavily relies on patristic sources in his homilies. In his homily on the Catholic Faith, for instance, Ælfric writes about "se wisa Augustinus be ðære Halgan Þrynnysse trahtnode" [the wise Augustine's exposition of the Holy Trinity].[55] Malcolm Godden notes that this homily "handles patristic concepts [as can be found in the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed] freely without showing a sustained debt to any particular source".[56] As such, Ælfric appears to handle a complicated doctrine in his own way. After the reference to Augustine, Ælfric sets out to explain the nature of the Trinity, stressing that the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are one and "untodæledlic" [indivisible], thus equal in might and divinity.[57]

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[51] Dales, *Alcuin: Theology and Thought*, p. 86.

[52] *Ibidem*, p. 87.

[53] M. Clayton, 'Preaching and Teaching', in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. M. Godden and M. Lapidge, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 159-79 (pp. 170-71).

[54] *Ibidem*, p. 172.

[55] Ælfric, 'On the Catholic Faith'. All quotations and translations of this text were taken from *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church Containing the Sermones Catholici, or Homilies of Ælfric, in the Original Anglo-Saxon, with an English Version. Volume I*, ed. and trans. B. Thorpe (London, 1844), pp. 275-95 (p. 275-76).

[56] M. Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies Introduction, Commentary and Glossary* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 159-60.

[57] Ælfric, 'On the Catholic Faith', pp. 277-78.

Interestingly, Ælfric illustrates Christ's two natures by comparing the Trinity to the sun: in the sun there is heat and brightness, the heat dries and the brightness gives light. Even though you cannot separate the heat and the brightness, the drying belongs to the heat and the light to the brightness. As such, Christ alone assumed human nature, but the Father and the Holy Ghost were still with him in all his works.[58] This imagery of sun and fire is not completely original because it "seems to go back ultimately to five different Latin sermons".[59] Yet, Godden also acknowledges that the similarities in the use of this metaphor between the Latin sermons and Ælfric's homily are "slight and may be coincidental".[60] As a consequence, one can argue that the use of such a metaphor testifies to Ælfric's ability to make such difficult theological subject matter accessible.

In his discussion of the Trinity, Ælfric also refers to a "gedwolman" [heretic] called Arius, who is indeed the Arius of the great Arian controversy as discussed before.[61] He tells how Arius believed that Christ was not equal to his Father and how he got the emperor's support for this heresy. Bishop Alexander, his opponent, then prayed that God would judge between him and Arius. The next day, at the synod, Arius needed to relieve himself. When he sat down, his bowels came out and he died. And so, Ælfric concludes,

> geswutulode God þæt he wæs swa geæmtogod on his innoðe swa swa he wæs ǽr on his geleafan. He wolde dón Crist læssan þonne he is, and his godcundnysse wurðmynt wanian; þa wearð him swa bysmorlic deað geseald swa swa he wel wyrðe wæs.

> [God manifested that he was as void in his inside as he had before been in his belief. He would make Christ less than he is, and diminish the dignity of his Godhead; when a death was given him as ignominious as he was well worthy of.][62]

Ælfric's condemnation of Arius is a match to Bede's and perhaps even exceeds it. This passage reveals that in the centuries after Bede, the great Christological heretics were still being condemned by Anglo-Saxon theologians in their own imaginative ways and Christological matters were still under discussion and in need of explanation and elaboration.

In conclusion, the Anglo-Saxon Church acknowledged the western Christological doctrine as it was declared by the Church Fathers, the councils and restated by the Catholic Church. This doctrine can be summarised as acknowledging the co-existence of two natures in the one person of Christ: his divine supremacy and his human suffering. He is truly divine and

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[58] Ælfric, 'On the Catholic Faith', pp. 286-87.
[59] M. Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, p. 160.
[60] *Ibidem*, p. 162.
[61] Ælfric, 'On the Catholic Faith', pp. 290-91.
[62] *Ibidem.*

thus equal to the Father and the Spirit, yet he is also truly human, which enabled him to bring salvation to mankind. As the works of Bede, Alcuin and Ælfric have shown, the Anglo-Saxons certainly developed their own opinions on how to interpret the nature of Christ. The fierce and constant rebuttal of heresies in these works indicates that such theories did find some foothold in Anglo-Saxon England. In addition, the works of these Anglo-Saxon scholars and teachers reveal a dependence on and trust in the doctrine of the Catholic Church on the Continent.

Now it is clear that the Anglo-Saxons were concerned with the Christology of the Church and were aware of theological missteps, one can raise the question how the opinions of all these theologians and their theological tracts also would have influenced the Anglo-Saxon poets of the time. For instance, does the poetry of that time also portray a fully united human-divine Christ? Did the heresies of Arius, Nestorius and Eutyches not only find their way into Anglo-Saxon England but also into Old English poetry? How did Anglo-Saxon poets distinguish between the two natures of Christ? To answer these questions, I will examine five Old English religious poems to find out how the poets were influenced by the Christological debates described above. Such an analysis would benefit from a clear classification of the divine and human characteristics of Christ, which I will provide in the next section.

The divine and human Christ

Following Pope Leo's method of 'recognising the difference' between Christ's human and divine acts (see above), I will give a brief outline of the divine and human characteristics of Christ, as defined by O'Collins.[63] Such a classification will be useful as a theoretical framework for the analysis of the portrayal of Christ's nature in the Old English poems.

What is for Christ to be divine? To answer this question, O'Collins takes two approaches: a biblical and a philosophical approach. In his biblical approach, he explains divine characteristics of two kinds. On the one hand, God is beyond our sense experience because his deity is beyond the material world. As such he is mysterious and indefinable to us and human categories of gender and class do not apply to him. On the other hand, God is intimate, loving, compassionate and the Creator of all things, which makes him "'closer' to us than we are to ourselves".[64] The more philosophical approach highlights all "'omni-properties' and 'total' characteristics as being essential for divinity", such as omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence.[65] In his divinity, God is complete and perfect. By recognising all these divine

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[63] O'Collins, *Christology*, pp. 230-37.
[64] *Ibidem*, p. 231.
[65] *Ibidem*, p. 232.

properties in Christ, one can draw the conclusion that God so loved the world that he was willing to become human himself in the person of Christ in order to save mankind.[66] To these characteristics, one could add the divine deeds of Christ, as defined by Pope Leo. Pope Leo argued that Christ in his divine nature performed acts that are proper to this nature, such as performing miracles, healing and forgiving.[67]

The next step is to define Christ's human properties. There are five essential characteristics to being a human: "organic, bodily existence coupled with rationality, free will, affectivity, and memory".[68] In other words, a human being has a living body, intelligence to known and interpret things, the ability to make choices, the capacity to feel and express emotions, and a conscious knowledge of the past. In addition to these five essentials, there are two other themes closely associated with being a human: being dynamic (i.e. humans continually develop) and being social. O'Collins concludes this list by stating that all these elements can be found in the life of Christ as it is described in the canonical Gospels and, therefore, "we may and should declare him to be fully human".[69] In addition, Pope Leo emphasised that Christ's human nature is "overpowered by injuries", in contrast to his divine nature which is "ablaze with the miraculous".[70] As a consequence, Christ's human acts include suffering, being hungry and thirsty, growing tired and sleeping. This clarification of human and divine properties of Christ will be used to study the depiction of Christ in Old English religious verse in the following chapters.

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[66] O'Collins, *Christology*, p. 233.
[67] E. Hunt, 'Letter 28: Bishop Leo, to His Dearly Beloved Brother, Flavian, Bishop of Constantinople (June 13, 449)', in *The Fathers of the Church, Volume 34: Letters of St Leo the Great*, ed. and trans. E. Hunt (New York, 1957), pp. 92-105 (pp. 97-98).
[68] O'Collins, *Christology*, p. 234.
[69] *Ibidem*, p. 237.
[70] Hunt, 'Letter 28', p. 98.

CHAPTER 2 – CHRIST THE MESSIAH, REDEEMER, AND JUDGE IN *CHRIST I*, *CHRIST II*, AND *CHRIST III*

One of the most obvious places to look for the influence of Christological matters on Old English verse is in the Old English *Christ* poems. Each of these three poems concerns itself with one of the major themes of salvation: *Christ I* with Advent (and is correspondingly called *Advent*), *Christ II* with the Ascension (also known as *The Ascension*), and *Christ III* with Christ's Second Coming (*Christ in Judgment*). As such, the poems present three different images of Jesus Christ: Christ the Messiah, Christ the Redeemer, and Christ the Judge. Taken together, the *Christ* poems thus provide a full account of Christ's deeds on earth, from his birth to his Second Coming on Judgment Day. Therefore, an analysis of the nature of Christ in these three poems will highlight the particular way these Anglo-Saxon poets understood Christ's dual nature in relation to different key events in the history of salvation. As the *Christ* poems are often considered to be a single unit consisting of three parts, and are analysed accordingly,[71] I will also treat the three poems in the same chapter.

The three Old English poems on Christ constitute the first part of the Exeter Book, the most important collection of Old English poetry.[72] Of the *Christ* poems, only *Christ II* has with confidence been assigned to a known author because it carries the runic signature of Cynewulf.[73] Even though scholars in the nineteenth century assigned *Christ I* and *Christ III* to Cynewulf as well, scholars of the twenty-first century generally agree that he did not write these poems because the style and diction do not match those of his signed poems.[74] The identity of Cynewulf remains a matter of debate, and so does locating him in time, but he likely lived between the mid-eighth and late tenth centuries.[75] As a consequence, *Christ II* has been dated to that same period of time. In addition, *Christ I* and *Christ III* have been dated similarly; some

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[71] Marsden, 'Biblical Literature', p. 238.

[72] Exeter, Cathedral Library, MS 3501. R.W. Chambers, 'The Exeter Book and Its Donor Leofric', in *The Exeter Book of Old English Poetry*, eds. R.W. Chambers, M. Förster and R. Flower (London, 1933), pp. 1-9 (p. 1). The Exeter Book was written by a single hand in the second half of the tenth century: R. Flower, 'The Script of the Exeter Book', in *The Exeter Book of Old English Poetry*, eds. R.W. Chambers, M. Förster and R. Flower (London, 1933), pp. 83-96 (p. 83). The Christ poems can be found on folios 8r until 32r of this manuscript. Unfortunately, at least seven leaves have been lost at the beginning of the Exeter Book, which accounts for the missing beginning of *Christ I*, see M. Förster, 'General Description of the Manuscript', in *The Exeter Book of Old English Poetry*, eds. R.W. Chambers, M. Förster and R. Flower (London, 1933), pp. 55-60 (p. 55).

[73] M. Clayton, 'Introduction', in *Old English Poems of Christ and His Saints*, ed. and trans. M. Clayton (Cambridge, MA, 2013), pp. vii-xxv (p. ix).

[74] R.E. Bjork, 'Introduction', in *The Old English Poems of Cynewulf*, ed. and trans. R.E. Bjork (London, 2013), pp. vii-xix (pp. x-xi).

[75] *Ibidem*, p. x.

suggesting that these are late tenth-century works, whilst others claim they have been written earlier. *Christ I*, for instance, may have been composed during the Benedictine Reform (second half of the tenth century), but such a dating raises problems concerning the poet's sources, which hint at an earlier date.[76] Likewise, the similarities of *Christ III* to Old English prose sermons indicate a late date in the Anglo-Saxon period, whereas it has also been argued that this is an early poem.[77]

In addition to the dating of the poems, scholars also still discuss whether the *Christ* poems are a single unit or not. Scholars in favour of the unity of the *Christ* poems particularly stress the interconnectedness in theme.[78] Some also argue that the motif of a threefold coming of Christ was a conventional one in the late Anglo-Saxon period and, therefore, the *Christ* poems can be seen as a single poem consisting of three parts.[79] Arguments against recognising the *Christ* poems as a unit concern their different authorships,[80] the fact that other poems also focus on single specific events in the history of salvation,[81] and the differences in sources.[82] Nevertheless, the *Christ* poems certainly share a thematic and stylistic unity, which cannot be denied. As Roy Liuzza has argued, reading "any of these poems in isolation is to confine oneself to an excerpt from a longer and more complex work".[83] In addition, Richard Marsden has noted that scholars usually treat the three poems as a whole, even numbering their lines consecutively.[84]

Few scholars have analysed the *Christ* poems in relation to medieval religious doctrine. Marsden has observed that in Old English Christian verse the Nativity always seems to receive scant attention as the poets are often more interested in topics of redemption and most prominently in Judgment Day.[85] This emphasis on Judgment Day is a typical medieval one, whereas most Christians today give it little consideration. Marsden has also noted that the physical torments of Christ are relatively underplayed in Old English religious verse because the poets are keen to portray Christ as *Christus victor* (the victorious Christ who overcomes

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[76] Clayton, 'Introduction', p. xi.
[77] *Ibidem*, pp. xii-xiii.
[78] Marsden, 'Biblical Literature', p. 238.
[79] B.É. Ó Broin, *Rex Christus Ascendens: The Christological Cult of the Ascension in Anglo-Saxon England*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois (Ann Arbor, 2002), p. 113.
[80] *Ibidem.*
[81] J.H. Wilson, *Christian Theology and Old English Poetry*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Tulane University (Ann Arbor, 1965), pp. 244-45.
[82] R.M. Liuzza, 'The Old English *Christ* and *Guthlac* Texts, Manuscripts, and Critics', *The Review of English Studies* 41 (1990), pp. 1-11 (pp. 5-6).
[83] *Ibidem.*
[84] Marsden, 'Biblical Literature', p. 238.
[85] *Ibidem*, p. 241.

Satan).[86] In addition, Brian Ó Broin has placed *Christ II* in the light of the Christological cult of the Ascension in Anglo-Saxon England. His discussion of the dual nature of Christ in *Christ II*, even though only in relation to a single passage, is insightful and offers a Christological outlook on the poem. He even concludes that "[p]ossibly the most important thing to understand, however, in Cynewulf's eyes, is the nature of Christ".[87] Such a conclusion begs for an exhaustive exploration of that theme in the poem, an exploration that the present study attempts to provide. In addition to Ó Broin, Garde has referred to Christological doctrines in her discussion of the *Christ* poems. Especially her discussions of *Christ I* and *Christ II* are valuable for this study because she relates passages of these poems to doctrines and traditions pertaining to the Nativity and the Ascension. Of *Christ III*, Garde only discusses a single passage and hardly refers to the nature of Christ. Since her analyses include other doctrines besides Christology, the specific study of the dual nature of Christ in these poems is incomplete and in need of further discussion. This thesis will thus be a continuation of Garde's approach to these poems and Ó Broin's approach to *Christ II*, offering a thorough analysis of the dual nature of Christ in all of the *Christ* poems. Before I perform textual analyses of the three poems, I will first briefly introduce their contents.

Christ I, also known as *Advent*, recounts the Nativity, telling about the Virgin Mary, Christ's human parentage, Christ's divine origin and the mystery of the Incarnation. The poet praises Mary for her role in Christ's birth and asks her to intercede with Christ on behalf of the people. He also glorifies Christ as the Son of God, entreating him to be mindful of all those in the darkness, waiting for the light of life. *Christ I* is thus a "mixture of expectant joy and intense need", which corresponds to the liturgy of the season.[88] The poem consists of twelve parts based on Latin antiphons, which are verses (usually from Scripture) preceding and following psalms and songs which were sung at Vespers during the Advent season.[89] These Latin antiphons all started with "O" and, correspondingly, the twelve lyrics of *Christ I* start with "Eala".[90] Considering the relationship between this poem and the Advent liturgy, scholars argue that *Christ I* "is almost certainly the work of a monk who saw the Bible through the lens of the liturgy and of patristic exegesis".[91]

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[86] Marsden, 'Biblical Literature', p. 241.
[87] Ó Broin, *Rex Christus Ascendens*, p. 167.
[88] Clayton, 'Introduction', p. x.
[89] Marsden, 'Biblical Literature', pp. 238-39.
[90] Clayton, 'Introduction', pp. ix-x.
[91] *Ibidem*, p. xi.

The second of the *Christ* poems is *Christ II* (or *The Ascension*), which centres around the theme of Christ the Redeemer and links the story of Christ's Ascension to that of his birth. In this poem, Cynewulf elaborates on the meaning of the Ascension and stresses the need to thank Christ for taking on human shape, which enables us to ascend into heaven as well. At the end of the poem, "the poet-as-preacher" takes over, entreating his readers to abstain from sin and choose to live in the glory of heaven, whilst at the same time warning them of the coming Judgment Day at which Christ will return to judge.[92] Cynewulf's meditation on the Ascension of Christ in *Christ II* is based on Gregory the Great's *Homiliae in Evangelia XXIX*,[93] a homily of which parts were used in the divine office for the feast.[94]

The reference to Judgment Day in *Christ II* dovetails the poem to the third one: *Christ III*, or *Christ in Judgment*. This striking account full of visual images includes Christ's sudden coming, his dual appearance to the wicked and the blessed, the signs that accompany his Second Coming, and the fates of the chosen and the damned as determined by the Judge. Interestingly, there is also a strong focus on Christ's human suffering in this poem; Christ even delivers an emotional speech himself about how much he suffered for the sake of the world. To narrate this story of Christ as the Judge, the poet of *Christ III* made use of many sources: the biblical accounts of Judgment Day, works of the Church Fathers and vernacular sermons.[95] A part of this poem resembles a passage of *The Dream of the Rood*, a poem which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Christ I: The incomprehensible origin of God's Son

The poet of *Christ I* appears to be uneasy about portraying the dual nature of Christ at the Nativity. He continually stresses the mystery of Christ's human and divine origins. Moreover, as Garde acknowledges, the poet carefully avoids theological clarification of Christ's Advent,[96] a comment which, as I will demonstrate in this section, can be extended to the poet's description of Christ's human and divine nature. More specifically, the poet refrains most from expanding on the human nature of Christ: his divine nature is not only referred to more often, but the poet also makes several attempts to elaborate on the relationship between the Father and the Son. In order to analyse the poet's own perception of Christ's dual nature, it is important to study the

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[92] Marsden, 'Biblical Literature', p. 240.
[93] Bjork, 'Introduction', p. xii.
[94] Ó Broin, *Rex Christus Ascendens*, p. 111.
[95] Clayton, 'Introduction', p. xii.
[96] Garde, *Old English Poetry,* p. 86.

way in which he made use of his sources, particularly the twelve Great Antiphons of Advent and so I will include the poet's use of sources in the following analysis as well.

To articulate Christ's divinity, the poet of *Christ I* ascribes a number of typical divine attributes to Christ. For instance, he describes Christ as being almighty, which is one of the divine characteristics based on biblical evidence identified by O'Collins (see chapter 1, above).[97] Christ's divine power is also illustrated in terms related to heaven; epithets such as "heofones heah-cyning" [high king of heaven] permeate the poem, which demonstrate that Christ is not just an earthly king and ruler, but a divine one.[98] In stressing Christ's omnipotence and establishing him as a divine king, the poet deviates from the antiphons he based *Christ I* on. In those antiphons, there are hardly any direct references to Christ's almightiness and Christ is identified as king of the earth, rather than the king of the heavens: "Rex Gentium" [King of the nations] and "Rex et legifer noster" [our king and lawgiver].[99] In the poem, Christ's deity is further enhanced by references to his eternal existence, which makes him divine because it places him outside of the material world. For example, the poet writes, "Crist ælmihtig / hu þu ær wære eallum geworden / worulde þrymmum mid þinne Wuldor-Fæder" [almighty Christ, how you existed before all the world's multitudes with your glorious Father].[100] In the poem, the poet thus makes clear that Christ existed before all of Creation. In addition, he emphasises Christ's divine power by addressing him as the Saviour, for instance as "hælende Crist" [savior Christ].[101]

Another recurring quality that O'Collins classified as divine is Christ's ability to create life. This quality is already mentioned in the first passage of *Christ I*. Before the poet writes about Christ as Creator in this passage, he first refers to him as "se weall-stan" [the wall stone], a biblical image that is exclusively used to refer to Jesus Christ and thus indicates that Christ is being addressed here.[102] Christ is primarily spoken of as Creator in this first part of the poem: "[h]e þæt hra gescop / leomo læmena" [he created the body, the limbs of clay].[103] The poet

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[97] *Christ I*, ll. 139b-40a, 214-15, 331b, 395. All quotations of *Christ I* are from *Old English Poems of Christ and His Saints*, ed. and trans. M. Clayton (Cambridge, MA, 2013), pp. 1-30. All translations of *Christ I* are from *Old English Poems of Christ and His Saints*, ed. and trans. M. Clayton (Cambridge, MA, 2013), pp. 2-31.

[98] *Ibidem*, l. 150a. Similar epithets are found in l. 61b, 83b, 134b, 222b, 253a, 332b, 348, 423b-24a.

[99] E. Burgert, *The Dependence of Part I of Cynewulf's Christ upon the Antiphonary* (Washington, 1921), pp. 23-26. The translation is my own. In addition, Cook has also established and discussed the sources of *Christ I*, see A.S. Cook, *The Christ of Cynewulf: A Poem in Three Parts: The Advent, The Ascension, The Last Judgment*, ed. A.S. Cook, trans. C.H. Whitman (Boston, 1900).

[100] *Christ I*, ll. 215b-17. Other references to Christ's eternal existence can be found in ll. 110-11, 122a, 162b-63, 236-40, 272b, 348-50, 366b, 395b, 403-15.

[101] *Ibidem*, l. 250b. Christ is also referred to as Saviour in l. 157b, 324b, 358b, 383b, 398b, 426b, 435.

[102] *Ibidem*, l. 2; Christ as cornerstone is an image evoked in Psalm 118:22, Isaiah 28:16, Acts 4:11, and in 1 Peter 2: 6-8.

[103] *Ibidem*, ll. 14b-15a.

entreats Christ, "þone þe mon gescop" [him who created man] to come and save his "agen geweorc" [own creation].[104] Similar pleas to Christ as Creator can also be found later on in the poem.[105] The poet thus repeatedly addresses Christ as divine Creator when he beseeches Christ to come to the aid of his people. As such, the poet stresses Christ's divinity in relation to his ability to forgive and redeem sinners. This finding opposes Garde's claim that in *Christ I*, sinners must penitently run to Christ's human nature, a claim she hardly elaborates on.[106] It is important to note though that addressing Christ in such a fashion is not original to the poet: Christ is already identified and called upon as Creator in the O Rex Gentium antiphon on which the beginning of *Christ I* is based:

> O Rex Gentium, et desideratus earum, lapisque angularis, qui facis utraque unum: veni, et salva hominem, quem de limo formasti.

> [O King and the Desire of all nations, and chief Corner-stone, who makest two to be one: come Thou and save man whom Thou formedst from the clay.][107]

Hence, both the antiphon and the poem link the biblical prophecy of Isaiah to Christ's Nativity: as cornerstone and divine Creator, Christ alone is able to come and rescue his people.

Interestingly, Christ is not only addressed as Creator himself but also as the Son of the Creator, and so the poet uses this divine quality (i.e. his divine origin) to explain the relationship between the Father and the Son. In fact, mentions of Christ as Son of the Creator occur five times in *Christ I*.[108] Three of these occurrences are spoken by Mary, which is remarkable since the references to Christ as Creator himself are all made by the main voice of the poem. Moreover, Christ is never identified as Son of the Creator in the Great Antiphons of Advent. So why would the poet let Mary say Son of the Creator instead of Creator? One can argue that perhaps he wanted to emphasise that Mary truly saw her Son as having a divine origin and his readers should therefore not doubt Christ's divinity. Such a claim can be substantiated by taking into account that the poet makes several attempts to elaborate on the connection of Christ to the Father, as will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

In his discussion of Christ's relation to the Father, the poet uses some specific biblical images. For instance, the poet calls Christ "seo snyttro" [the wisdom] echoing 1 Corinthians 1:

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[104] *Christ I*, l. 23b; l. 112b.
[105] *Ibidem*, l. 244, 266.
[106] Garde, *Old English Poetry*, p. 86.
[107] The Latin original is from Burgert, *The Dependence of Part I*, p. 23. The translation is from Cook, *The Christ of Cynewulf,* p. 71.
[108] *Christ I*, l. 94a, 126a, 143a, 197b, 210a.

24 and 30, in which Christ is the wisdom of God.[109] This passage resembles the O Sapientia antiphon:

> O Sapientia, quae ex ore altissimi prodiisti, attingens a fine usque ad finem, fortiter suaviterque disponens omnia: veni ad docendum nos viam prudentiae.

> [O eternal Wisdom, which proceedest from the mouth of the Most High, reaching from one end of creation unto the other, mightily and harmoniously disposing all things: come Thou to teach us the way of understanding.][110]

Like the antiphon, the poet establishes Christ as Wisdom and Creator, but he adds that Christ is the Wisdom who created the world *with* the Father: "[þ]u eart seo snyttro þe þas sidan gesceaft / mid þi waldende worhtes ealle" [you are the wisdom who, with the ruler, made all of this spacious creation].[111] He thus emphasises that Christ not only came forth from the Father, but is equal to him, a claim which contradicts Arianism. The poet supports this idea by alluding to the beginning of the Gospel of John again, this time using his own biblical example as he explains how Christ as "word Godes" [the word of God] was coexistent with God in the beginning.[112] These lines also clearly refute Arianism, which claimed that Christ was created by God and therefore not equal to him.[113]

 Furthermore, the poet of *Christ I* uses another divine image of Christ as found in the first chapter of John's Gospel: Christ as the light of men that shines in the darkness.[114] As Hugh Magennis states, light imagery enables Anglo-Saxon poets to express a sense of divinity and sanctity because this kind of imagery had a range of powerful Christian associations.[115] The poet of *Christ I* indeed uses light imagery to portray Christ as a divine being:

> Eala earendel, engla beorhtast,
> ofer middan-geard monnum sended,
> ond soð-fæsta sunnan leoma,
> torht ofer tunglas, þu tida gehwane
> of sylfum þe symle inlihtes.

> [O rising sun, brightest of angels, sent to people all over the earth, and true radiance of the sun, more splendid than the stars, you by your own person always illuminate every age.][116]

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[109] *Christ I*, l. 239a.

[110] The Latin original is from Burgert, *The Dependence of Part I*, p. 30. The translation is from Cook, *The Christ of Cynewulf*, p. 71.

[111] *Christ I*, ll. 239-40.

[112] *Ibidem*, l. 120a; John 1: 1-5.

[113] Cook, *The Christ of Cynewulf*, pp. 92-93.

[114] John 1: 4-5.

[115] H. Magennis, 'Imagery of Light in Old English Poetry: Traditions and Appropriations', *Anglia* 125.2 (2007), pp. 181-204 (p. 193).

[116] *Christ I*, ll. 104-108.

These lines form the beginning of a passage in which the poet urges Christ to come and enlighten those in the darkness, in perpetual night, in the dark shadow of death.[117] The contrast of divine light and human darkness in this passage is striking, but is also found in the O Oriens antiphon on which these lines are based:

> O Oriens, splendor lucis aeternae, et sol justitiae: veni, et illumina sedentes in tenebris et umbra mortis.

> [O Rising Brightness of the Everlasting light and Sun of Righteousness: come Thou and enlighten those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.][118]

The juxtaposition of light and darkness is thus not an invention of the poet himself, but originates in the antiphon, which in turn corresponds to Isaiah 9:2, a prescribed Advent reading.[119] It is interesting to note that in the same way as the poet adds Christ's relation to the Father to the Wisdom antiphon, so the poet here addresses this relationship when he uses the image of Christ as the Light: "God of Gode gearo acenned / Sunu soþan Fæder … butan anginne æfre wære" [God born of old from God, Son of the true Father, always existed without beginning].[120] In this way, the poet appears preoccupied with confirming Christ's equality to the Father and his eternal existence by adding this information to the antiphonal source.

In addition, the poet also directly employs light imagery to illustrate the relation between the Father and the Son. In his discussion of this relationship, which is in fact a lengthy development of a theme suggested by the words "tu ante saecula nate" [you who were born before all ages] in the O Rex Pacifice antiphon,[121] the poet first states that no one is wise enough to explain correctly how God took Christ as his true Son in the beginning.[122] In the subsequent lines, the poet tries to illustrate with light imagery how Christ relates to the Father: he tells about how God divided light and darkness in the beginning and decreed that there should be "leoht, lixende gefea" [light, a radiant joy] for the people.[123] This radiance has then given light

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[117] *Christ I*, ll. 109-19.

[118] The Latin original is from Burgert, *The Dependence of Part I*, p. 26. The translation is from Cook, *The Christ of Cynewulf*, p. 71.

[119] Garde, *Old English Poetry*, p. 59.

[120] *Christ I*, ll. 109-11.

[121] Burgert, *The Dependence of Part I*, p. 30. The translation is my own. Full antiphon: "O Rex Pacifice, tu ante saecula nate: per auream egredere portam, redemptos tuos visita, et eos illuc revoca unde ruerunt per culpam." [O King of peace, you who were born before all ages, come by the golden gate; visit them whom you have redeemed, and lead them back to the place whence they fell by sin]. The Latin original is from Burgert, *The Dependence of Part I*, pp. 29-30. The translation is my own.

[122] *Christ I*, ll. 219-23.

[123] *Ibidem*, ll. 230-32.

to people throughout the ages.[124] At first sight, the radiance in this passage refers to the sun, but the context indicates that the radiance refers to Christ because the entire passage deals with Christ and the Father. Exploiting light imagery in this context was also a strategy employed by Ælfric, as explained in chapter 1. Edward Burgert adds that the poet's combination of the idea conveyed by the Latin phrase of the antiphon and the creation of light "emphasizes the co-existence of the Son with the Father from all eternity".[125] As such, it appears that the poet of *Christ I* sought familiar biblical and liturgical images to express Christ's divinity and expanded those ideas to stress that Christ eternally existed with the Father, contrary to what Arius and the Adoptionists had claimed, as discussed in the first chapter.

Nevertheless, throughout *Christ I*, the poet avoids going into too much detail about the precise relationship between Christ and the Father. In fact, the poet literally states that no one can fully explain Christ's divine origin:

> Nis ænig nu   eorl under lyfte,
> secg searo-þoncol,   to þæs swiðe gleaw
> þe þæt asecgan mæge   sund-buendum,
> areccan mid ryhte,   hu þe rodera weard
> æt frymðe genom   him to Freo-Bearne.

> [There is now no man on earth, no ingenious person, who is so very wise that he can declare to mankind, explain correctly how heaven's guardian in the beginning took you as his true Son.][126]

In the subsequent lines, the poet reveals why no quick-witted or knowledgeable person can ever clearly prove Christ's origin to the people: Christ already was God's Son before we were even created.[127] The poet's treatment of Christ's mysterious origins can be seen as an extensive elaboration on the antiphonal phrase "[d]ivinum est mysterium hoc quod cernites" [what ye behold is a divine mystery].[128] The poet concludes his report on Christ's mysterious divine origin by noting:

> Us is eallum neod
> þæt we þin medren-cynn   motan cunnan,
> ryht-geryno,   nu we areccan ne mægon
> þæt fædren-cynn   fier owihte.

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[124] *Christ I*, ll. 233-35.
[125] Burgert, *The Dependence of Part I*, p. 30.
[126] *Christ I*, ll. 219-23.
[127] *Ibidem*, ll. 236-43a.
[128] The Latin version is from Burgert, *The Dependence of Part I*, p. 25. The translation is from Cook, *The Christ of Cynewulf*, p. 72.

> [It is necessary for us all to known your descent on your mother's side, the true mystery, now that we cannot explain your descent on your father's side any further at all.][129]

From Christ's divine parentage, the poet now turns to his human parentage, stating clearly that no one is able to correctly explain Christ's divine origin. By mentioning both Christ's descent on his mother's and on his father's side, as Garde explains, the poet "recalls the two marvellous nativities described by Augustine – the one divine (without mother) …, the other human (without father)".[130] In this way, the poet points out the dual nature of Christ when he writes about Christ's nativity.

To sum up thus far, when talking about Christ's divine nature, the poet often expands on the divine images found in the Great Antiphons of Advent. The poet's own additions to these images often include Christ's relation to the Father, which testify to his concern with establishing Christ as being fully God, contrary to Arianism and Adoptionism which both claimed that Christ was not really God's Son. Nevertheless, the poet also avoids going into too much detail about this: he stresses the incomprehensibility of Christ's divine origin by constantly repeating the impossibility to explain Christ's descent on his Father's side.

But what of the poet's treatment of Christ's human nature? First of all, the poet is as mysterious about Christ's human begetting as he is about his divine origin: "þæt degol wæs, Dryhtnes geryne" [it was incomprehensible, a mystery of the Lord].[131] To avoid having to speak about this mystery himself, the poet asks Mary to "arece us þæt geryne þæt þe of roderum cwom" [explain to us the mystery which came to you from heaven].[132] However, Mary has to disappoint the poet because "þæt monnum nis / cuð geryne" [that is not a mystery that is made known to mankind],[133] recalling one of the antiphons, in which Mary also exclaims that it is a mystery.[134] Remarkably, later on in the poem, the poet lets Joseph ask the same question to Mary. The dialogue that follows is original: it has no known source and is not based on any of the antiphons.[135] In this conversation between Mary and Joseph, Mary is willing to provide an answer and reveals the true mystery: she explains that the Spirit illuminated her with his radiance so that she would bear the bright Son.[136] By including Joseph in this discussion, the poet goes beyond his source material and declares his own ideas on Christ's human begetting,

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[129] *Christ I*, ll. 245b-48.
[130] Garde, *Old English Poetry*, p. 83.
[131] *Christ I*, l. 41.
[132] *Ibidem*, l. 74.
[133] *Ibidem*, ll. 94b-95a.
[134] Burgert, *The Dependence of Part I*, p. 25.
[135] *Ibidem*, p. 27.
[136] *Christ I*, ll. 195b-206a.

explaining it in terms of light imagery and thus associating it with the divine as well. It is thus hard to completely separate Christ's human and divine origins in *Christ I*, a notion that neatly corresponds to Chalcedon's insistence on the unity of Christ's divinity and humanity (as discussed in chapter 1) and thus testifies to the poet's own orthodox perception of Christ's dual nature.

In contrast to the many references to Christ as a deity, *Christ I* features only a few allusions to Christ as a human being. Garde claims that the comment "[n]earo-þearfe conn / hu se earma sceal are gebidan" [he knows the dire need, how the wretched must wait for mercy] reflects the Saviour's human experience, his ability to feel human emotions, which O'Collins classifies as part of Christ's humanity.[137] However, this comment can also reflect Christ's omniscience: he knows the need of the wretched because he is the all-knowing God. As such, this comment cannot necessarily be regarded as an explicit illustration of Christ's humanity. One of the other human characteristics of Christ established by O'Collins is having a living body. In *Christ I*, the poet shows Christ to have a living body by tenderly describing him as a child at Mary's breast, instead of using the respective antiphon's description of Christ lying in a manger.[138] Nevertheless, this image is only briefly evoked. In fact, *Christ I* only has one passage in which Christ's human nature is spoken of explicitly and explained in relation to his divine nature. It states how the eternal Word of God became "flæsc firena leas" [flesh without sin] to be a comfort to the sorrowful.[139] What follows is an explicit reference to Christ's dual nature, which does not originate in the poet's antiphonal source:[140]

> God wæs mid us,
> gesewen butan synnum; somod eardedon
> mihtig meotudes bearn ond se monnes sunu
> geþwære on þeode.
>
> [God was seen to be without sins among us; the powerful son of the creator and the son of a human lived in union together among the people.][141]

Despite the poet's dominant focus on Christ's divinity, he still acknowledges Christ to be both God and human. He even states that these two natures form a union, thus accepting the western Christological view held by the Anglo-Saxon Church in his days that the two natures of Christ form a unity. A similar image is evoked at the end of the poem, when the poet repeats how wonderful it is "þætte moncynnes milde scyppend / onfeng æt fæmnan flæsc unwemme" [that

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[137] *Christ I*, ll. 69b-70; Garde, *Old English Poetry*, p. 70.
[138] *Christ I*, l. 341; Burgert, *The Dependence of Part I*, p. 32.
[139] *Ibidem*, l. 123a.
[140] Burgert, *The Dependence of Part I*, p. 26.
[141] *Christ I*, ll. 124b-27a.

the merciful creator of mankind received immaculate flesh from a woman].[142] It is important to note though that the poet never offers a theological exposition of this dual nature of Christ, which would have entailed an elaboration on how the two natures relate to each other in particular acts or events.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of Christ's dual nature in *Christ I*. Firstly, the poet is primarily concerned with portraying Christ as a divine being: he is the Creator, he is almighty and all-knowing, he is the Light of the world, and he is the Word of God incarnate. As such, the poet adapts divine images of Christ found in his sources, the Greater Antiphons of Advent, and further establishes Christ's divinity by adding his own material, which particularly includes references to Christ's relation to the Father. The poet is obviously concerned with demonstrating that Christ is really God's Son, a concern which could have been fed by the existence of troubling doctrines in Anglo-Saxon England such as Arianism and Adoptionism. Another conclusion that can be drawn is that the poet carefully avoids a theological explanation of Christ's human and divine origins by constantly stressing their mystery and incomprehensibility, probably because he felt inadequate to provide such an explanation, especially in the light of the Church's insistence on the inseparability of Christ's two natures. Finally, in contrast to the divine portrayals of Christ, there are hardly any images of a human Christ in this poem. As such, the poet is clearly uncomfortable about discussing Christ's human nature, which is hardly surprising when one takes into account that there were fierce debates in the Anglo-Saxon Church about Christ's humanity on earth. Moreover, the poet's insistence on the union of the dual nature of Christ is in complete accordance with Chalcedon's defining principle of Christology: the two inseparable natures are equally preserved in the person of Christ. Taking these matters into account, one can conclude that the poet of *Christ I* was influenced by the Christological debates of his time and perhaps even felt compelled to make a clear statement against heretical ideas about Christ's dual nature, especially the Arian claim that Christ was not fully God.[143]

Christ II: The Ascension of the human Christ

Unlike the poet of *Christ I*, who was preoccupied with demonstrating that Christ is truly God's Son and thus focussed on Christ's divinity, Cynewulf, responsible for *Christ II*, seems to have

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[142] *Christ I*, ll. 417-18.
[143] Such a conclusion may shed new light on the discussion about dating *Christ I*. If the poet wanted to make a clear statement against Arianism, the poem may have been written at an earlier date, i.e. when Arianism was still an issue in Anglo-Saxon England, rather than during the Benedictine Reform period.

been more interested in discussing the implications of Christ's human nature for mankind. In the same way as the poet of *Christ I*, Cynewulf uses Christ's creative powers, light imagery and his relation to the Father to illustrate Christ's divine nature. Christ's human nature is disclosed by explaining how Christ opened heaven for believers by ascending into heaven as a man. The following analysis includes Cynewulf's use of Gregory's *Homiliae in Evangelia XXIX*, a homily on the Ascension, and other sources to demonstrate which ideas were his own and which were taken from other works.

To emphasise Christ's divine aspect, Cynewulf uses light imagery, like many other Anglo-Saxon religious writers.[144] When Christ ascends into heaven, the angels that accompany him "leohte gefegon / þe of þaes hælendes heafelan lixte" [rejoiced in the light that shone from the savior's head].[145] Moreover, Christ is called "se soðfæsta sunnan leoma / englum ond eorð-warum æþele scima" [the true light of the sun, for angels and earth-dwellers, a noble radiance].[146] Cynewulf recalls part of Gregory's Ascension homily here in which Christ is also portrayed as the sun, an image which originates in the Bible and was later expanded by Ælfric (see chapter 1).[147] Furthermore, Cynewulf also uses light imagery to point out that each person must choose between heaven and hell, between "swa þæt leohte leoht swa ða laþan niht" [the beloved light or the hateful night].[148] Garde comments that this choice between good and evil does not occur in the Gregorian homily, but does reflect traditional Christian teaching.[149] Cynewulf's original statement indicates that light is indeed associated with the divine and the sacred, a notion that is further supported by the fact that radiance is linked to heaven, such as the angels and the heavenly Jerusalem, throughout the poem.[150]

Besides describing the joyful effect of Christ's radiance on the angels, Cynewulf also describes the consoling aspect of Christ's radiance. In contrast to the angels, Christ's disciples are mourning and weeping because they see their friend leaving them, whereas in the Bible they are full of joy and continually worship Christ.[151] This extra-biblical description of the sorrowing disciples draws on an accepted tradition based on homilies and commentaries by Augustine and

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[144] Magennis, 'Imagery of Light', p. 183.
[145] *Christ II*, ll. 504b-505. All quotations of *Christ II* are from *The Old English Poems of Cynewulf*, ed. and trans. R.E. Bjork (Cambridge, MA, 2013), pp. 2-30. All translations of *Christ II* are from *The Old English Poems of Cynewulf*, ed. and trans. R.E. Bjork (Cambridge, MA, 2013), pp. 3-31.
[146] *Ibidem*, ll. 696-97.
[147] Cook, *The Christ of Cynewulf*, p. 142; Malachi 4:3, Habakkuk 3:11. Note the parallel with Christ I, in which Christ is also associated with the sun as the light of the world.
[148] *Christ II*, l. 592.
[149] Garde, *Old English Poetry*, p. 149.
[150] *Christ II*, l. 506, 519a, 546, 548, 553-54.
[151] Luke 24:52-53.

Bede and does not feature at all in Gregory's Homily.[152] By interpreting the apostles as grief stricken, Shannon Godlove argues, Cynewulf deliberately alters the biblical narratives to reinforce "his argument about the implications of Christ's Ascension for humankind".[153] The grieving apostles highlight the difficulty faced by all humanity: overcoming their own human weakness and achieving understanding of Christ's divine nature. In other words, Christ's human nature had to be removed from the disciples in order for them to begin to understand his divine nature, a notion based on Augustine's *De Ascensione Domini IV*.[154] Cynewulf uses light imagery to illustrate this notion of the disciples starting to understand Christ's divine nature at his Ascension. He states that everyone who sadly watches Jesus ascend into heaven, will be consoled because they will see him "frætwum blican" [glowing in his array].[155] In this way, Cynewulf provides an explanation for Christ's radiance: he shines as a comfort to his people. As discussed, light imagery is associated with the divine, and so Christ's radiance in this passage indicates his divine nature and shows it to be a cause for joy for mankind. To sum up, Cynewulf addresses Christ's divine nature by employing light imagery and interprets it as a cause for joy for mankind. In addition to using light imagery, Cynewulf, like the poet of *Christ I*, also uses Christ's role in Creation and his role as Saviour (both divine aspects according to O'Collins) to picture him as a divine being.[156]

Even though *Christ II* focusses on Christ's Ascension in his human nature rather than his divine origin, it also addresses the relationship between Christ and the Father. For instance, Cynewulf mentions that Christ is God's Son various times,[157] but hardly goes into detail about Christ's divine origins. Nevertheless, Cynewulf does note that Christ is "an-cenned Sunu / efen-ece bearn, agnum Fæder" [the only-begotten Son, the child eternal equally with his own Father], thus indicating that Christ existed for ever and is equal to the Father.[158] Cook has found no particular source for these lines. He states that the passage of which these lines are part is a description of the Ascension following Scripture with some poetical additions.[159] Therefore, these lines can be read as one of Cynewulf's own biblical additions to the Ascension narrative. It is important to note that, in this way, Cynewulf, like the poet of *Christ I*, found it necessary to add such information about Christ's eternal existence with the Father to the material he found

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[152] S. Godlove, 'The Elevation of the Apostles in Cynewulf's *Christ II: Ascension*', *Philological Quarterly* 91.4 (2012), pp. 513-35 (p. 516).
[153] *Ibidem*, p. 514.
[154] Ó Broin, *Rex Christus Ascendens*, pp. 156-57.
[155] *Christ II*, l. 522b.
[156] *Ibidem*, ll. 471b-72a, 504a, 505a, 516a, 571b, 579a, 613, 621a, 634b, 656b, 716a, 792b, 859.
[157] *Ibidem*, ll. 451-52, 499a, 572b, 589a, 629b, 635b, 643b, 660a, 682a, 702b, 744b, 774a, 788b, 860a.
[158] *Ibidem*, ll. 464b-65.
[159] Cook, *The Christ of Cynewulf*, p. 115.

in his sources. As such, it seems that Cynewulf also consciously contradicts the Arian claim that Christ was created by God and therefore not fully God himself and the Adoptionist claim that Christ was only God's adopted Son.

Interestingly, Cynewulf also alludes to the Trinity. When he elaborates on Christ's Crucifixion, which Gregory merely mentioned as one of Christ's "five leaps", he states that the Trinity ascended the Cross: "he [Christ] on rode astag / Fæder, frofre Gæst" [he, the Father, the comforting Spirit, ascended the cross].[160] Cynewulf uses the singular verb here, which signifies the unity of the Trinity.[161] Likewise, at the end of *Christ II*, Cynewulf writes, "utan us to Fæder freoþa wilnian / biddan Bearn Godes ond þone bliðan Gæst / þæt he us gescilde wið sceaþan wæpnum" [let us entreat the Father for refuge, implore the Son of God and the merciful Spirit that he should shield us from the weapons of foes].[162] Again, Cynewulf refers to the Trinity as a unity. In sum, Cynewulf ensures his readers that Christ is indeed God's only-begotten Son and forms a unity with the Trinity, in accordance with Chalcedon's principle that Christ is one with the Father and the Spirit. As such, he contradicts Christological heresies that deny such a unity, but Cynewulf certainly does not pay as much attention to Christ's divine origins as the poet of *Christ I*.

Instead of elaborating on Christ's divine origins, Cynewulf focusses on the implications of Christ's descent to earth and ascent into heaven. In doing so, Cynewulf particularly discusses Christ's human nature, aligning himself with Gregory's interpretation of Christ's dual nature at the Ascension. As opposed to Gregory, though, Cynewulf also includes Christ's humanity at his birth in his poem about the Ascension. In the beginning of the poem Cynewulf describes how Christ came to earth as "beorn" [man].[163] Through his Incarnation, this salvation-child gave redemption and freed and defended people on earth, so that each person might choose between the joys of heaven or the lamentation of hell.[164] Moreover, Christ reversed the sorrow of human beings, which was to live in misery, strife and pain.[165] In fact, "us þis se æþeling yrðe gefremede / þa he leomum onfeng ond lic-homan / monnes magu-tudre" [the prince made this easier for us, the human race, when he took on limbs and body].[166] It is thus Christ's humanity which brought joy and redemption to the people in distress. It was his taking on of "mennisc

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[160] *Christ II*, ll. 727-28a.
[161] Cook identifies similar allusions to the Trinity though in different contexts in *Juliana* (l. 724) and *Elene* (l. 1106), two other poems by Cynewulf, see Cook, *The Christ of Cynewulf*, p. 145.
[162] *Christ II*, ll. 773-75.
[163] *Ibidem*, l. 449a.
[164] *Ibidem*, ll. 584-98a.
[165] *Ibidem*, ll. 618b-26.
[166] *Ibidem*, ll. 627-29a.

fiw … butan firenum þæt to frofre gewearð / eallum eorð-warum" [human form without sin; that became a comfort for all earth's inhabitants].[167] This particular emphasis on the role of Christ's humanity in salvation in relation to his descent to earth is Cynewulf's own addition to Gregory's homily, which primarily focusses on Christ's humanity in relation to the Ascension.

Furthermore, Cynewulf mentions Christ's suffering, which is, according to Pope Leo, a typical human act of Christ.[168] He writes that through his "þrowinga" [sufferings], Christ fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies.[169] However, Cynewulf, like many other Anglo-Saxon poets, underplays Christ's physical torments and instead glorifies him as *Christus victor*. In contrast to the brief and single reference to Christ's sufferings, Cynewulf elaborately describes how Christ engaged in battle against Satan and won.[170] After his glorious battle, Christ "[w]ile nu gesecan sawla nergend / gæsta gief-stol, Godes agen bearn / æfter guð-plegan" [wants now to seek the gift-throne of spirits, after the battle-play].[171] Throughout the poem, Christ is presented as a glorious warrior, often in heroic terms. Cherniss argues that Cynewulf employs "heroic terminology to describe the spiritual victory of Christ, and His subsequent glory".[172] Moreover, Cynewulf enhances the *Christus victor* image when he writes that Christ "on rode astag" [ascended the cross],[173] thus presenting him as a great warrior willing to mount the Cross, instead of describing him as a suffering Christ. By portraying the suffering Christ in such a heroic way, Cynewulf creates an image of Christ which his Anglo-Saxon audience would have recognised and understood as it fits into their own Germanic heroic culture.

Even though Cynewulf is very brief about Christ's human suffering, he does go into detail about Christ's ascent into heaven as a man. As Garde rightly notes, the act that is described in *Christ II* is Christ's entry into heaven as a man, though she hardly elaborates on this notion.[174] Nevertheless, the poem offers a very direct hint to Christ's human nature at his Ascension. When Christ is welcomed into heaven by his jubilant angels, it is said that "[h]yht wæs geniwad / blis in burgum, þurh þæs beornes cyme" [hope was renewed, bliss in the cities through the coming of the man].[175] Cynewulf thus clearly states that Christ entered heaven as a man. Christ's humanity at his Ascension can also be deduced from the fact that Christ was

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[167] *Christ II*, ll. 721b-23a.
[168] For Pope Leo's classification of Christ's human and divine acts see chapter 1.
[169] *Christ II*, ll. 468-70a. One of the most profound prophecies of Christ's sufferings in the Old Testament can be found in Isaiah 52:13-53:12. Other prophecies related to Christ's sufferings can be found in Psalms, Isaiah, and Zechariah.
[170] *Christ II*, ll. 558-70.
[171] *Ibidem*, ll. 571-73a.
[172] Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*, p. 223.
[173] *Christ II*, l. 727b.
[174] Garde, *Old English Poetry*, p. 137.
[175] *Christ II*, ll. 529b-30.

resurrected "in monnes hiw" [in the shape of a man],[176] after which he stayed forty days on earth until he ascended to heaven. Again, Cynewulf concerns himself with explaining the implications of Christ's human ascent for mankind. When Christ ascended to heaven as a man, Cynewulf argues, he opened heaven for all believers.[177] Because of his Ascension, Christ will return and ascend from earth "mid usse lic-homan" [with our body], if we believe in him.[178] As such, Christ's Ascension shows that man can indeed enter heaven, a conclusion also drawn by Ó Broin in his discussion of *Christ II*.[179]

It should be said though that Cynewulf is certainly not original in approaching Christ's human Ascension in this way. In fact, Gregory is even more outspoken about Christ's ascent into heaven as a man than Cynewulf is. For example, Gregory explains that the angels wore white at Christ's Ascension but had not done so at his birth "[q]uia, nascente Domino, videbatur divinitas humilitia; ascendente vero Domino, est humanitas exaltata" [because when the Lord was born the divinity seemed to have been humbled, whereas when the Lord ascended the humanity was exalted].[180] Cynewulf also addresses this question in his poem but does not provide such a clear and direct answer about Christ's humanity and divinity. By contrast, throughout his homily, Gregory explicitly refers to the two natures of the "Deus homo" [God-man] and particularly explains how they relate to each other at the Ascension.[181] As opposed to Gregory, Cynewulf is less interested in how Christ's human and divine natures relate to each other and focusses on what Christ's Ascension as a man means for believers. Perhaps Cynewulf's different focus can be explained as insecurity about directly addressing the connection between Christ's two natures, considering that it was exactly that interaction between the two natures that resulted in heretical ideas about Christ. As discussed in the first chapter, the Council of Chalcedon did establish a defining principle of Christology but did not decide on the correct way of interpreting the relation between the two natures in Christ because there were so many different views about this. By focussing on the implications of Christ's Ascension as a man for mankind, Cynewulf avoids tackling the difficult question of how Christ's humanity and divinity relate to each other.

In summary, Cynewulf does two things. Firstly, he establishes Christ as a deity by employing light imagery and referring to him as Creator and Saviour. In addition, he shows

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[176] *Christ II*, l. 657b.
[177] *Ibidem*, ll. 864-66.
[178] *Ibidem*, ll. 751b-55.
[179] Ó Broin, *Rex Christus Ascendens*, p. 159.
[180] Cook, *The Christ of Cynewulf*, p. 118. The translation is my own.
[181] *Ibidem.*

Christ to be one with the Trinity and eternally existent with the Father, both of which are his own additions to the source material. As such, it seems that Cynewulf, like the poet of *Christ I*, wanted to demonstrate that Christ is fully God, contrary to Arianism and Adoptionism, which were active Christological heresies in the Anglo-Saxon period, as explained in the first chapter. Nevertheless, Cynewulf does not go into as much detail about Christ's divine origins as the poet of *Christ I*. Secondly, Cynewulf investigates the implications of a divine Christ taking up human nature, rather than focussing on how Christ's two natures relate to each other, like Gregory did in his homily. In doing so, Cynewulf discusses Christ's human nature at the Nativity and the Ascension, arguing that Christ brought redemption and opened heaven to human beings precisely because he took on human nature at his birth and ascended into heaven as a man. As such, Cynewulf stays in line with the western Christological doctrine, as laid out in the previous chapter: Christ is truly divine and one with the Trinity, yet he is also truly human, which enabled him to bring salvation to mankind.

Christ III: An emotional Christ

The poet of *Christ III* daringly discusses Christ's human suffering in his poem, contrary to the poet of *Christ I* who avoids elaborating on Christ's human nature altogether and Cynewulf who only mentions Christ's suffering once and instead focusses on portraying him as the victorious Christ. In *Christ III*, the poet has Christ himself talk about his human sufferings on the Cross in a rather extraordinary, emotional fashion when he addresses the damned. The poet of *Christ III* thus lets Christ present himself as a human being, while at the same time he also pictures Christ as divine and mighty Judge. As opposed to the other two *Christ* poems, it is much harder to pinpoint direct sources for *Christ III*. Cook names a few themes which are dependent upon other works, but he also acknowledges that the poet's "imaginative power and command of language [are such] that sutures are nowhere visible; the whole is molded, or rather fused, into a poem of the greatest moral fervor, intensity, and vividness".[182] Cook does name one particular source: a Latin hymn quoted by Bede, but Frederick Biggs has convincingly argued that similarities between the hymn and the poem arise because both rely heavily on the Gospels.[183] In the following analysis, I will attempt to include the poet's use of sources, for as far as those sources have been identified by either Cook or Biggs.

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[182] Cook, *The Christ of Cynewulf*, p. xlv.
[183] F.M. Biggs, *Studies in the Sources of the Old English "Christ III"*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University (Ann Arbor, 1987), p. 2.

Even though Magennis only recognises light imagery in *Christ I* and *Christ II*,[184] the divine image of Christ in *Christ III* also heavily relies on light imagery. In fact, the first scene of *Christ III* in which Christ is described, he is announced as "sunnan leoma … scynan leohtor / þonne hit men mægen modum ahycgan / beorhte blican" [the radiance of the sun, shining more brightly than people can image in their minds, gloriously radiating light], which comes to earth from the east.[185] It should be noted that "sunnan leoma" was a common Christological image, which, as the previous sections have shown, also occurs in *Christ I* and *Christ II*.[186] The poet expands this common image by juxtaposing Christ's coming as the sun to the destruction of the sun, the moon and the stars.[187] The passage about the destruction of the sun, moon and stars is based on numerous biblical verses.[188] The poet of *Christ III* decided to place these two biblical images of Christ as the sun and the destruction of the real sun on Judgment Day close together. By contrasting the coming of the true Light and the destruction of the created sources of light, the poet establishes Christ as supreme and divine Light.

In addition, the poet describes the effects of Christ's divine radiance. To the damned, Christ's brightness and that of his company awake fear and terror because the damned will know that Christ comes to judge and rebuke every individual.[189] Thus, light imagery is associated with Christ's divine capacity as eternal Judge. At the end of the poem, the poet narrates how the damned will live in eternal night, whereas the chosen ones will live in the glory of heaven, praising the Lord, "leohte biwundne" [encircled by light].[190] They will see "seo dyre Dryhtnes onsien / eallum þam gesælgum sunnan leohta" [the dear face of the Lord, brighter than the sun for all those fortunate ones].[191] To the blessed, Christ's radiance is thus a source of joy and happiness and they themselves will share in his brightness. Biggs notes that Revelation 22:4-5 may suggest the comparison between the Lord's face and the sun.[192] Yet, in placing such a dominant stress on the relation between light and joy, the poet goes beyond his source material, which not only includes the biblical reference but also the works of Gregory

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[184] Magennis, 'Imagery of Light', p. 185.

[185] *Christ III*, ll. 34b-37a. All quotations of *Christ III* are from *Old English Poems of Christ and His Saints*, ed. and trans. M. Clayton (Cambridge, MA, 2013), pp. 34-86. All translations of *Christ I* are from *Old English Poems of Christ and His Saints*, ed. and trans. M. Clayton (Cambridge, MA, 2013), pp. 35-87.

[186] Biggs, *Studies in the Sources*, p. 26. This image of Christ as the sun is based on biblical verses such as Mal. 4:2.

[187] *Christ III*, ll. 68-74.

[188] Cook, *The Christ of Cynewulf*, p. 184. Cook identifies Is. 13:10, Ezek. 32:7, Joel 2:10, 31:3-15, Matt. 24:29, Mk. 13:24-25, Rev. 6:12,13.

[189] *Christ III*, ll. 149-60.

[190] *Ibidem*, ll. 763-82.

[191] *Ibidem*, ll. 784-85.

[192] Biggs, *Studies in the Sources*, p. 126.

and Augustine.[193] Furthermore, light imagery is also used to illustrate Christ's divine role in Creation: he is "gesceafta scir-cyning" [the radiant king of creation] and "scyppend scinende" [the shining creator].[194] In sum, the extensive use of light imagery to portray Christ's divinity in this poem is the poet's own development from the biblical references to Christ as the sun.

Another way in which the poet enhances Christ's image as a deity is by often referring to his omnipotence and omniscience, which have been identified as typical divine qualities by O'Collins. Christ is not only "meahtan Dryhtnes" [mighty Lord] but also "heofona heah-cyning" [high King of heaven].[195] In fact, he is "ælmihtig" [the almighty], who comes to earth "mid þy mæstan mægen-þrymme" [in his great majesty], holy and glorious.[196] Christ is "alwalda" [omnipotent] as well as omniscient:[197]

> Opene weorþað
> ofer middan-geard   monna dæde.
> Ne magun hord weras,   heortan geþohtas,
> fore waldende   wihte bemiþan.
> Ne sindon him dæde dyrne[.]

> [People's deeds will be exposed all over the world. Men will not in the least be able to hide their hoards, the thoughts of their hearts, in the presence of the ruler. Their deeds will not be hidden from him.][198]

No one will be able to keep something from Christ, the divine Judge, on the Day of Judgment. Everything will come to light before the king of heaven.[199] Christ's omniscience in this poem echoes several passages from the Bible, such as Hebrews 4:12-13 and Psalm 90:8, in which the secret sins of men are said to come to light before Christ.[200]

To this image of Christ as mighty and divine Judge and Ruler, the poet adds that Christ is also "Frean … ealra gesceafta" [the Lord of all creation].[201] As the other two poets of the *Christ* poems, the poet of *Christ III* recognises Christ as Creator, which is another godly quality. Christ is the "meotude" and the "scyppende" [creator].[202] The biblical signs accompanying Christ's Second Coming testify to Christ's status as Lord of Creation: the Creation will resound, raging fires will travel over the world, the sun will turn dark, the moon and stars will fall, the

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[193] Cook, *The Christ of Cynewulf*, p. xlv.
[194] *Christ III*, l. 286a; l. 353a.
[195] *Ibidem*, l. 2b; l. 473a.
[196] *Ibidem*, l. 75a; ll. 142-43.
[197] *Ibidem*, l. 498b.
[198] *Ibidem*, ll. 179b-83a.
[199] *Ibidem*, ll. 170b-72.
[200] Cook, *The Christ of Cynewulf*, p. 188.
[201] *Christ III*, ll. 58b-59a.
[202] *Ibidem*, l. 10b; l. 35a.

mountains will melt, water will burn, and from the heavens will come a terrible noise.[203] He will even command everyone to rise from their graves and come to the assembly and "[ð]onne biþ geyced ond geedniwad / mon-cyn þurh meotud" [then mankind will be replenished and renewed by the creator], by the "lif-fruma" [source of life].[204] Even though these descriptions all find their origins in the Bible, especially in Revelation but also in the books of the prophets, the poet stresses Christ's role as divine Creator in these events. The Second Coming of the Creator is thus ablaze with the miraculous, which Pope Leo associates with Christ's divine nature.

In addition to the miraculous events on Judgment Day, the poem also describes a couple of miraculous events during Christ's life and at his death to establish him as divine Lord of Creation. The source for these events is Gregory's *Homiliae in Evangelia XX*.[205] Using Gregory's homily, the poet of *Christ III* recounts how heaven recognised its Creator by sending a messenger star to proclaim Christ's birth.[206] How the sea made itself firm when Christ wished to walk over its waves.[207] How, at Christ's death, hell recognised "þæt se scyppend cwom" [that the creator had come].[208] The poet uses these events to illustrate his own point: that even though the Creation perceived that its Creator had come, some people "ne cuþon … meotud oncnawan" [did not know how to acknowledge their creator].[209] To emphasise the wickedness of those that did not accept their Creator, Christ himself reminds the damned that he created them with love and devotion:

> Hwæt ic þec mon   minum hondum
> ærest geworhte,   ond þe ondgiet sealde!
> Of lame ic þe leoþe gesette,   geaf ic ðe lifgendne gæst,
> arode þe ofer ealle gesceafte,   gedyde ic þæt þu onsyn hæfdest,
> mæg-wlite me gelicne.
>
> [It was with my own hands that I made you human in the beginning and gave you understanding! I formed your limbs from clay, I gave you a living spirit, showed favor to you above all other creatures, and I caused you to have a shape and form like mine.][210]

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[203] *Christ III*, ll. 64-140.
[204] *Ibidem*, ll. 156-76a.
[205] Cook, *The Christ of Cynewulf*, p. 195. Gregory's homily was later translated into Old English by Ælfric in his homily on the Epiphany of the Lord.
[206] *Christ III*, ll. 282b-86a.
[207] *Ibidem*, ll. 297b-303.
[208] *Ibidem*, ll. 293b-96a.
[209] *Ibidem*, ll. 320b-21.
[210] *Ibidem*, ll. 513-17a.

He continues his emotional appeal by saying that they obeyed the deceitful devil more than their Creator.[211] As such, in dealing with the topic of Judgment Day, the poet stresses that Christ returns to judge his Creation and that the fates of the people depend on whether they accepted Christ as their Creator or not. The poet of *Christ III* clearly demonstrates that Christ created the world and thus eternally existed with God before he came to earth, contrary to heretical beliefs which discarded Christ's equality to the Father, such as Arianism and Adoptionism. Nevertheless, as opposed to *Christ I* and *Christ II*, *Christ III* hardly mentions the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Father; it features only two references to Christ as "bearn Godes" [Son of God].[212]

This divine and mighty Christ, however, is also shown to be human in *Christ III*. The poem specifically mentions Christ's sufferings, which, as discussed in chapter 1, is part of his human nature. Like Cynewulf, the poet of *Christ III* links Christ's human nature to redemption. While Cynewulf discusses the significance of Christ's Ascension, the poet of *Christ III* describes the implications of Christ's human sufferings, a topic which most Anglo-Saxon poets carefully avoided.[213] For instance, the poet of *Christ III* addresses Christ's human nature at the Cross and states that he lovingly redeemed us with his "lic-homa" [body], with which he did no evil and committed no sins.[214] Likewise, when the poet comments on how sinners will have to look upon the sores, wounds and torments of the Lord, he states that Christ brought redemption through his body: they will see how the king, out of his merciful heart "mid sine lic-homan lysde of firenum" [redeemed them from sins with his body].[215] In *Christ III*, the poet emphasises how Christ suffered much for the love of men.[216]

Moreover, Christ's human suffering is also linked to his status as divine Creator. When he suffers, all of Creation suffers with him. The poet again recalls Gregory's *Homiliae in Evangelia XX*, when he says that the earth felt for the suffering of the Lord, that when his enemies seized their Creator, the sun was obscured by his torment.[217] To the events described in Gregory's homily, the poet adds that the "beamas onbudon hwa hy mid bledum sceop" [the trees proclaimed who had created them with their fruit], when Christ mounted on one of them

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[211] *Christ II*, ll. 528-29.
[212] *Ibidem*, l. 37b, 206b.
[213] Marsden, 'Biblical Literature', p. 241.
[214] *Christ III*, ll. 224-33a.
[215] *Ibidem*, ll. 338-44.
[216] *Ibidem*, ll. 250-51, 335-36.
[217] *Ibidem*, ll. 261b-67.

to suffer for mankind.[218] In addition to Gregory's mourning universe, the poet of *Christ III* shows how the trees shared in their Creator's pain:

> Ða wearð beam monig   blodigum tearum
> birunnen under rindum,   reade ond þicce;
> sæp wearð to swate.   Þæt asecgan ne magun
> fold-buende   þurh frod gewit,
> hu fela þa onfundun   þa gefelan ne magun
> Dryhtnes þrowinga,   deade gesceafte.
> Þa þe æþelast sind   eorðan gecynda,
> ond heofones eac   heah-getimbro,
> eall fore þam anum   unrot gewearð,
> forht afongen.   Þeah hi ferð-gewit
> of hyra æþelum   ænig ne cuþen,
> wendon swa þeah wundrum,   þa hyra waldend for
> of lic-homan.

> [There, under its bark, many a tree was wet all over with bloody tears, red and abundant; the sap was turned to blood. Human beings, with their wise understanding, cannot tell how much these dead creatures, which cannot feel, experienced the sufferings of the Lord. The noblest of earth's species and also of heaven's high halls all became sorrowful, gripped by fear on account of that one man. Although they did not have any spiritual understanding as their birthright, they nevertheless apprehended it miraculously when their ruler departed from his body.][219]

By recounting Christ's pain in such a fashion, the poet combines Christ's two natures in his account of Christ's Passion. On the one hand, Christ endures hardships and pain in his humanity. On the other hand, his Creation acknowledges Christ as their divine Creator when he suffers on the Cross, and the marvellous ability of Creation to experience Christ's pain testifies to Christ's divinity. As such, Christ is shown to be one and the same person in two natures: one divine, in which he is Lord over all Creation, and one human, in which he endured pain and torment to save his Creation. Such an equal stress on Christ's divinity and humanity conforms to Chalcedon's insistence on the dual nature of Christ, which became the dominant Christological doctrine in the western world, as explained in the first chapter.

Furthermore, Christ himself emotionally tells about how much he suffered for the world. Even though this emotional address of Christ is rather extraordinary in medieval literature, Cook argues that the poet of *Christ III* based Christ's speech on *Sermo 57* of Caesarius of Arles, one of the Church Fathers.[220] In this sermon, Caesarius explains how Christ will address the

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[218] *Christ III*, ll. 303-307.

[219] *Ibidem*, ll. 308-20a. Cook suggests that the motif of the bleeding trees is based on the apocryphal 2 Esdras 5:5 (p. 200), which states that "blood shall drop out of wood".

[220] Cook, *The Christ of Cynewulf*, p. 210.

sinner on Judgment Day. The tone and contents of Christ's speech in Caesarius' sermon are very similar to those of *Christ III*. In both texts, Christ tells about his humiliating birth in darkness to save his people and give them eternal life.[221] Echoing Caesarius' Christ, the Christ of *Christ III* stresses how he suffered for mankind: "[h]wæt ic þæt for worulde geþolade!" [how I suffered that for the sake of the world!].[222] Christ explains why he endured all the pain:

> Næs me for mode,   ac ic on magu-geoguðe
> yrmþu geæfnde,   arleas lic-sar,
> þæt ic þurh þa   wære þe gelic,
> ond þu meahte   minum weorþan
> mæg-wlite gelic,   mane bidæled.
>
> [It was not because of pride in me, but, as a young man, I endured miseries, merciless pain in my body so that, through it, I might be like you and you might become like me in appearance, released from guilt.][223]

Hence, Christ took on human nature and suffered pain so that he would be like us in our humanity and we would be like him in his divinity, holy and pure. Christ continues his emotional appeal by explaining in extraordinary human detail (uncharacteristic of early medieval crucifixion scenes)[224] how he was hit for love of men, spitted at, hated, violently treated, put on a painful crown of thorns, hung on a tree, cruelly fastened on the Cross, bled from his side, which he all humbly endured so that we would be rescued from the devil.[225] He took on our pain, so that we might enjoy his homeland, happy and blessed, and with his death he paid for our long life, so that we might live in the light.[226] Throughout this moving speech, which the poet of *Christ III* almost completely copied from Caesarius' sermon, Christ demonstrates his love for his Creation, but also justifies his condemnation of all those who were not thankful to their Saviour for all that he had done. In fact, he complains that by continuing to sin, the unbelievers fastened Christ on the cross of their sins again, which is a heavier cross than that which he willingly ascended before.[227] From his address to the damned, it becomes clear that Christ brought redemption by suffering with his body and so the poet of *Christ III* shows the significance of Christ's human nature in salvation, using Caesarius' sermon.

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[221] *Christ III*, ll. 552b-61; Caesarius of Arles, *Sermon 57*, in *Fathers of the Church Sermons*, ed. M.M. Mueller (Baltimore, 1956), pp. 281-85 (pp. 283-85).

[222] *Christ III*, l. 557b. Caesarius' Christ tells that he suffered "the outrages of infancy and human pain to become like you, in order that I might make you like Me … I took upon Myself your sufferings to give you My glory". Caesarius of Arles, *Sermon 57*, p. 284.

[223] *Christ III*, ll. 562-66.

[224] L.R. Kuznets, M. Green, 'Voice and Vision in the Old English *Christ III*', *Papers on Language and Literature* 12.3 (1976), pp. 227-45 (p. 228).

[225] *Christ III*, ll. 567-87.

[226] *Ibidem*, ll. 594-98.

[227] *Ibidem*, ll. 621-28.

In sum, *Christ III* features two dominant images of Christ: Christ as divine Judge and Christ as human sufferer. To establish Christ's divinity, the poet of *Christ III* employs light imagery, Christ's role as Creator, and Christ's power over all Creation. He makes clear that Christ is the divine Judge who returns to earth to judge his own Creation. In addition, the poet goes at great lengths to show his readers that Christ was truly a human being: he suffered tremendous pain in his body. Basing himself upon Caesarius' sermon, the poet lets Christ himself explain in how much mortal torment he was when he was on earth. Such a dominant focus on Christ's bodily agony is extraordinary because most Anglo-Saxon poets underplayed it and favoured a victorious portrayal of Christ.[228] Furthermore, Anglo-Saxon poets often avoided talking about Christ's human nature because of the fierce debates in the Church about Christ's humanity while he was on earth. As such, this poem offers a remarkable view on Christ's dual nature. Nevertheless, it needs to be said that the poet of *Christ III*, even though he discusses Christ's humanity in a very daring way, does align himself with the western Christological doctrine. In this poem, he reveals how Christ is both divine and human. He never indicates that Christ is two separate persons, that he is not fully divine or that he is not fully human (which were all known heresies in Anglo-Saxon England). In fact, I would argue that this poem is the most balanced of the three when it comes to presenting both Christ's divine supremacy and his human suffering and emphasises this interplay by having all Creation suffer with him.

The analyses of the three *Christ* poems have shown several things. Firstly, the poets of the poems have no problems in creating a divine image of Christ. They use divine images of Christ as found in their sources, they stress his omniscience and omnipotence (based on the Bible), they use light imagery, which had strong Christian associations of divinity and sanctity in their days, they establish him as Creator and thus as Lord over all Creation and they refer to him as God's Son. Neither of them thus doubts Christ's divine nature and origin and so they all refute heresies which discard Christ's divinity such as the teaching of the Ebionites and Arianism, as laid out in the first chapter. In fact, especially the poet of *Christ I* appears to be concerned with establishing Christ's divine origin.

Secondly, Christ's human nature appears to be a more delicate subject. *Christ I* hardly expands on Christ as a human being, yet does note that he was human as well as God, *Christ II* does elaborate on Christ's humanity in relation to the Nativity and the Ascension but avoids

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[228] Marsden, 'Biblical Literature', p. 241.

going into detail about Christ's sufferings, whereas *Christ III* has a strong focus on Christ's human sufferings, but places an equal emphasis on Christ as divine Judge. As such, the three poets make clear that Christ is human as well as divine.

Moreover, each of the poet approaches this dual nature in a different way. The poet of *Christ I* stresses that Christ is truly God's Son (contrary to Arianism), the poet of *Christ II* elaborates on the meaning of a divine Christ taking up human nature and the poet of *Christ III* illustrates Christ as divine Judge as well as human sufferer. Even though the three poems focus on Christ's dual nature in a different way, they all conform to the western Christological doctrine: Christ has a divine as well as a human nature preserved in one person. One can conclude then that, apparently, these poets were influenced by the debates about Christ's dual nature in the Church: they are all keen on portraying a united human-divine Christ.

CHAPTER 3 – CHRIST THE WARRIOR IN *THE DREAM OF THE ROOD* AND *THE DESCENT INTO HELL*

The *Christ* poems depict Christ as being both divine and human at a number of major events in the history of salvation, such as Christ's birth, Ascension, and Second Coming. This chapter is devoted to Christ's portrayal at two other major events in his life: the Crucifixion and the Descent into Hell, as found in *The Dream of the Rood* and *The Descent into Hell*. These two Old English texts particularly portray Christ as the victorious warrior who heroically overcomes death. These two poems thus heavily rely on Germanic heroic imagery to depict Christ. As such, *The Dream of the Rood* and *The Descent into Hell* are prefect examples of inculturation: by describing Christ in Germanic heroic terms, the poets of these two poems successfully reconcile their own Germanic culture with the Christian faith. In other words, they employ familiar Germanic images and concepts to clarify Christ's person and deeds so that their Germanic audiences would come to a better understanding of Christ. In the light of the discussion of Christ's dual nature, it is interesting to analyse how this Germanic heroic portrayal of Christ affects the interpretation of Christ's dual nature. Therefore, this chapter, after introducing the poems, will explore the human and divine images of Christ in both *The Dream of the Rood* and *The Descent into Hell*, with a special focus on the use of heroic imagery.

The Dream of the Rood (also known as *The Vision of the Cross*) can be found in the Vercelli Book.[229] This manuscript contains a selection of texts which were probably chosen for their devotional benefit to one's spiritual life.[230] The most famous of these texts is *The Dream of the Rood*, which is also one of the best-known Old English poems and even seems to have been so during much of the Anglo-Saxon period.[231] In *The Dream of the Rood*, a man dreams about seeing Christ's Cross as a decorated, bright symbol but also as a tree drenched in blood. In his vision, the Cross talks to him, telling the dreamer about how it experienced Christ's sufferings. The Cross narrates its own life story, from the moment it was cut down to be Christ's Cross to the moment it was buried after Christ had died. It tells of his loyalty to Christ and how it wanted to save Christ but was not allowed to because Christ had to die to save mankind. Whereas the Cross recounts the sufferings it had to go through with Christ, Christ himself is portrayed as a

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[229] This manuscript, Vercelli Cathedral Library CXVII, written by a single scribe, contains Old English prose texts and poetry and is dated to the second half of the tenth century.
[230] Clayton, 'Introduction', p. xvi.
[231] Marsden, 'Biblical Literature', p. 244.

victorious hero, who mounts the Cross willingly rather than being nailed to it. Modern scholars praise this poem for its unique reading of the Crucifixion, for which no direct sources have been found in earlier Latin or other literature.[232] As such, the poem reflects the poet's own opinion about the Christian tradition pertaining to Christ's Passion.

This extraordinary account of Christ's sufferings from the perspective of the Cross has been analysed by many scholars in relation to medieval doctrine. Woolf, for example, has argued that the poem is a reflection of the religious thought of the poet's period especially regarding the person and nature of Christ.[233] At that time, she argues, the Church insisted on the co-existence of Christ's divine supremacy and human suffering, a notion which is clearly reflected in the poem: Christ as God triumphs on the Cross, whereas Christ as man suffers.[234] Crawford has come to a similar conclusion and argues that by presenting Christ as a heroic warrior while enduring human torment "the poem successfully reconciles the Christological disputes of the seventh and eighth centuries concerning Christ's dual nature as both divine and human".[235] Woeber has added to this argument that the Cross represents Christ's suffering as a human being, "leaving him [Christ] free to be represented as the divine conqueror".[236] In addition, Marsden has argued that the poet did not express Christ's thoughts and feelings directly to avoid accusations of heresy in the light of the fierce debates about Christ's human nature in the medieval Church.[237] I will elaborate on these arguments by offering an exhaustive textual analysis of Christ's divinity and humanity on the Cross in *The Dream of the Rood*.

The Descent into Hell is the final poem of the Exeter Book, the manuscript which also contains the *Christ* poems. *The Descent into Hell* narrates the apocryphal Harrowing of Hell, at which Christ descends into hell after his death to free the righteous who were trapped there until Christ's death opened heaven for them. The poem starts with the two grieving Marys at Christ's sepulchre, after which it turns to John the Baptist who prepares the inhabitants of hell for the Lord's coming and then welcomes Christ with a liturgical address. Throughout the poem, Christ is portrayed as heroic warrior, who does not need any help in rescuing his saints. The poem ends with a plea for mercy and baptism. This *descensus* motif of Christ descending into hell after his death to save his saints was developed from some small references in the Bible and

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[232] Marsden, 'Biblical Literature', p. 242.
[233] Woolf, 'Doctrinal Influences', p. 137.
[234] *Ibidem*, p. 138.
[235] Crawford, *Christian Culture*, p. 42.
[236] Woeber, 'Heroism', p. 368.
[237] Marsden, 'Biblical Literature', p. 243.

gradually became a dogma in the Church through centuries of theological discussion and patristic commentary.[238] It even found its way into the Apostles' Creed in the clause "descendit ad inferos" [descended into hell]. The theological discussion about Christ's Descent into Hell also related to Christology. Athanasius, for instance, stated that the Descent proved both Christ's humanity and his divinity.[239] Other theologians, such as Hillary, Ambrose and Rufinus claimed that Christ descended in his human nature. Oecumenius added that while Christ descended as man, he ascended as God, instead of vice versa as the Nestorians claimed.[240] Obviously, many different views were held regarding Christ's dual nature at his Descent into Hell. Taking this into account as well as the fact that the theme of the Harrowing of Hell is largely based on secondary works rather than biblical narratives, the poet of *The Descent into Hell* could approach this theme with more creativity than for instance the poets dealing with Christ's birth and death.

Scholars have argued that the poem is very reminiscent of *Christ I*, in for instance its use of *Eala*, references to Christ's birth and typological thinking.[241] Unlike *Christ I*, no direct source for the poem has been identified, but the poem seems to be inspired by the liturgy of Holy Week and especially Easter Saturday.[242] While some claim that the poem was based on the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*, the many differences between the poem and the apocryphal narrative show that it is highly unlikely that the *Gospel of Nicodemus* was used as a direct source, but the poet could certainly have known the text.[243] Therefore, in the analysis of the poem I will sometimes compare motifs and concepts to those found in the *descensus* tradition as found in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* to come to an understanding of the creativity on the poet's part. Besides having no known direct source, the poem also has no known author. Mary Rambaran-Olm has argued that, even though many scholars reject Cynewulf as the author of his poem, the poet responsible for *The Descent into Hell* borrowed typical Cynewulfian poetic techniques.[244] As such, she suggests a date for the poem's composition close to Cynewulf's time, perhaps the late ninth or beginning of the tenth century.[245]

The scant attention paid to *The Descent into Hell* in scholarly literature stands in sharp contrast to the popularity of *The Dream of the Rood* (see above). As Rambaran-Olm comments,

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[238] M.R. Rambaran-Olm, *'John the Baptist's Prayer' or 'The Descent into Hell' from the Exeter Book: Text, Translation and Critical Study* (Cambridge, 2014), p. 45.
[239] *Ibidem*, p. 186.
[240] *Ibidem*, p. 194.
[241] Clayton, 'Introduction', p. xv.
[242] *Ibidem.*
[243] Rambaran-Olm, *'John the Baptist's Prayer'*, p. 50.
[244] *Ibidem*, p. 28.
[245] *Ibidem*, p. 30.

the poem has been neglected and misinterpreted for centuries.[246] Her edition offers an elaborate analysis of the poem, discussing elements such as the heroic portrayal of Christ and the poem's relation to the *descensus* doctrine. Even though she does observe that two lines of the poem carry the Christological message that Christ descends in complete divinity, she primarily focusses on that part of Christology which was earlier identified as Soteriology (i.e. Christ's saving work) rather than Christ's dual nature, which is the object of this study. Likewise, Garde focusses on Christ's Descent as theological phenomenon in the poem's medieval context, without analysing the two natures of Christ in this event. As such, my analysis of the dual nature of Christ in *The Descent into Hell* in this chapter will fill part of the large gap in scholarly literature about this Old English poem and its relation to medieval doctrine.

The Dream of the Rood: Divine victor and human sufferer

As scholars have pointed out, *The Dream of the Rood* illustrates Christ's dual nature by presenting Christ as a divine heroic warrior and as a human sufferer, the latter particularly represented by the Cross. In fact, the poem perfectly balances portraying Christ's two natures by using the Cross as a substitute for Christ's human vulnerability, whilst at the same time suggesting that Christ and the Cross are one, thus showing that his two natures cannot be separated. Moreover, *The Dream of the Rood* offers some interesting solutions to writing about Christ's dual nature during the Passion, such as Christ's death in his divine nature.

Christ's divinity is established in several ways. For instance, the poet often refers to Christ as a divine warrior who is able to bring salvation to mankind because he is God. This presentation of Christ as heroic warrior advancing to battle has been identified by many scholars as an Anglo-Saxon example of treating Christian subject matter in heroic terms.[247] For instance, the poet emphasises Christ's great courage and power in which he as "Frean man-cynnes" [Lord of mankind] ascends the Cross,[248] and thus "accepts his fate willingly and pro-actively".[249] With great courage, strong and resolute, Christ, the warrior, "wolde man-cyn lysan" [was intent on setting mankind free].[250] The poet makes sure to point out that this heroic warrior is God himself: "þa geong hæleð – þæt wæs God ælmihtig" [this young hero – who was God

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[246] Rambaran-Olm, *'John the Baptist's Prayer'*, p. 1.
[247] Woolf, 'Doctrinal Influences', p. 144.
[248] *The Vision of the Cross*, ll. 33b-41. All quotations of *The Vision of the Cross* are from *Old English Poems of Christ and His Saints*, ed. and trans. M. Clayton (Cambridge, MA, 2013), pp. 160-72. All translations of *The Vision of the Cross* are from *Old English Poems of Christ and His Saints*, ed. and trans. M. Clayton (Cambridge, MA, 2013), pp. 161-73.
[249] Marsden, 'Biblical Literature', p. 243.
[250] *The Vision of the Cross*, ll. 39-43.

Almighty].[251] As such, Christ is clearly presented as deity, whilst at the same time the poet shows that he is human by calling him young. The poet continues emphasising Christ's divinity, by demonstrating that it is "ricne cyning / heofona Hlaford" [the powerful king, the Lord of the heavens], "weruda God" [the Lord of hosts] who hung on the Cross, not a mere human being.[252] In this way, the poet uses heroic imagery, such as bravery and courage in battle, and terms with military connotations, such as "Frean" [Lord], to picture Christ as a divine warrior, whose bravery and power exceeds that of human warriors. Clarifying Christ's divine nature in this particular fashion would appeal to the poet's Anglo-Saxon audience, for whom such heroic imagery was familiar and understandable. Likewise, Crawford states that the warrior metaphor effectively communicates Christ's dual nature to a Germanic audience.[253]

Furthermore, the poet presents Christ as a divine being by referring to his divine origin and omnipotence. For instance, Christ is "bearn Godes" [the Son of God], "wuldres Ealdor" [Lord of glory], and "ælmihtig God" [Almighty God].[254] Crawford adds that these "strong names for God" highlight Christ's divine power and thus foreground the way Christ brings divine victory while hanging on the Cross.[255] Even Christ's body is described in divine terms: "scirne sciman" [the shining brightness].[256] The use of light imagery here implies that Christ is not just a man with an ordinary body, but God incarnate. Interestingly, Christ never talks in *The Dream of the Rood*, while Christ's final words are so important in the Gospel narratives.[257] James Earl has argued that Christ's silence is "an aspect of his ineffable transcendence",[258] and can thus be ascribed to Christ's divine nature according to O'Collins.

In addition, as in the *Christ* poems, Christ is shown to be the Lord of all Creation, which according to O'Collins is part of Christ's divine nature (see chapter 1). As in *Christ III*, Creation suffers with Christ. From the many trees wet with bloody tears because of Christ's torment in *Christ III*, *The Dream of the Rood* focusses on the one tree: the Cross. The Cross tells how it felt compelled to slay all Christ's enemies, but did not do so because that would be against "Dryhtnes word" [the Lord's word].[259] Instead, the Cross stood fast and dared not bend or bow

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[251] *The Vision of the Cross*, l. 39.
[252] *Ibidem*, ll. 44b-45a; l. 51b.
[253] Crawford, *Christian Culture*, p. 43.
[254] *The Vision of the Cross*, l. 83b; l. 90b; l. 93a, l. 98a.
[255] Crawford, *Christian Culture*, p. 42.
[256] *The Vision of the Cross*, l. 54a.
[257] Matthew 27:45-50; Mark 15:33-37; Luke 23:34-46; John:26-30.
[258] J.W. Earl, 'Trinitarian Language: Augustine, *The Dream of the Rood*, and Ælfric', in *Source of Wisdom Old English and Early Medieval Latin Studies in Honour of Thomas D. Hill*, eds. C.D. Wright, F. Biggs and T.N. Hall (Toronto, 2007), pp. 63-79 (p. 73).
[259] *The Vision of the Cross*, ll. 35-38.

down to the ground.[260] The Cross' loyalty to its Creator echoes the loyalty between a lord and his retainer in the Anglo-Saxons' Germanic culture.[261] Considering that the reciprocal relationship between a lord and his retainer was a familiar concept to the Anglo-Saxons,[262] the image of the relationship between Cross and Christ would be an acceptable one to the poet's audience. As such, the poet uses the lord-retainer relationship to emphasise that Christ is a divine lord, to whom all of Creation is loyal. Furthermore, when Christ dies "[w]eop eal gesceaft / cwiðdon cyninges fyll" [all creation wept, lamented the fall of the king], thus demonstrating that it was the divine Lord of all Creation who gave his life on the Cross.[263]

After Christ's death, Christ is also referred to as God rather than man: people come to take Christ off the Cross, the "ælmihtigne God" [almighty God], "heofenes Dryhten" [the Lord of heaven].[264] They place "sigora wealdend" [the Lord of victories] in a sepulchre.[265] This divine Lord rose from the dead "mid his miclan mihte mannum to helpe" [through his great power to help mankind].[266] He ascended into the heavens and on Judgment Day he, "ælmihtig God" [almighty God], would return to earth to judge mankind.[267] In this way, the poet of *The Dream of the Rood* repeatedly refers to Christ's omnipotence, a divine quality according to O'Collins. At the end of the poem, the dreamer hopes that the Lord may be a friend to him, he who suffered on the tree "us onlysde ond us lif forgeaf / heofonlicne ham" [set us free and gave us life, a heavenly home].[268] He adds that Christ, "[s]e Sunu wæs sigor-fæst … mihtig ond spedig" [the Son was victorious … powerful and successful].[269] This victorious Christ enters heaven, not as a man (as in Cynewulf's *Christ II*), but as "anwealda ælmihtig" [the almighty Lord] and "ælmihtig God" [almighty God].[270] In sum, the poet explicitly discusses Christ's divine nature: in his divinity, Christ had the courage to ascend the Cross, to bring victory and to save mankind. In doing so, the poet specifically employs heroic imagery, as opposed to the *Christ* poems, which more heavily rely on light imagery in their presentation of Christ's divinity.

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[260] *The Vision of the Cross*, ll. 42b-46a.

[261] M.D. Cherniss, 'The Cross as Christ's Weapon: The Influence of Heroic Literary Tradition on *The Dream of the Rood*', *Anglo-Saxon England* 2 (1973), pp. 241-52 (p. 242).

[262] K.O. O'Keeffe, 'Values and Ethics in Heroic Literature', in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, eds. M. Godden and M. Lapidge, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 101-19 (p. 101).

[263] *The Vision of the Cross*, ll. 55b-56a.

[264] *Ibidem*, l. 60b; l. 64a.

[265] *Ibidem*, l. 67a.

[266] *Ibidem*, l. 102.

[267] *Ibidem*, ll. 103-14.

[268] *Ibidem*, ll. 147-48a.

[269] *Ibidem*, ll. 150-51a.

[270] *Ibidem*, l. 153a; l. 156a.

When the poet discusses Christ's human nature, he uses the Cross as a representative of Christ's humanity.[271] Richardson has argued that the poet does so because focussing on Christ's agony directly would emphasise Christ's humanity over his divinity, which should be avoided because of the Christological position of the Church in those days, which was that there should be an equal stress on Christ's divinity and humanity.[272] In the poem, it is the Cross who is seized by strong enemies, made a show of in public, and fixed on the hill, not Christ.[273] Instead, Christ hastens with great courage to the Cross, strips himself and climbs onto the Cross.[274] In this way, the Cross as the representative of Christ's human nature is vulnerable, whereas Christ as God fearlessly embraces his slayer. Similarly, instead of describing Christ's pain directly, the poet lets the Cross explain it:

> Þurhdrifan hi me mid deorcan næglum.   On me syndon þa dolg gesiene,
> opene inwid-hlemmas.   Ne dorste ic hira ænigum sceððan.
> Bysmeredom hie unc butu ætgædere.   Eall ic wæs mid blode bestemed,
> begoten of þæs guman sidan,   siððan he hæfde his gast onsended.
> Feala ic on þam beorge   gebiden hæbbe
> wraðra wyrda.
>
> [They drove dark nails through me. The cuts are visible on me, open malicious wounds. I dared not harm any of them. They mocked us both together. I was all soaked with blood, drenched from that man's side, after he had given up his spirit. I experienced many cruel events on that hill.][275]

As such, the Cross is said to receive the nails, the cuts and the wounds instead of Christ. Nevertheless, this passage also demonstrates that the Cross and Christ suffer together: they were both mocked and the tree is wet with Christ's blood. Moreover, the Cross later explains that it has suffered "sarra sorga" [the pain of bitter sorrows] at the hands of evil men, while "bearn Godes / þrowode" [the Son of God suffered] on the Cross.[276] There is thus a certain unity between Christ and the Cross. In fact, they represent Christ's two natures in one person, in accordance with Chalcedon's principle as described in the first chapter. Moreover, Woeber has noted that, by identifying the Cross with Christ, "the poet has linked the idea of sacrificial offering and divine victory", thus uniting Christ's human act of suffering and his divine act of bringing victory.[277]

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[271] Woeber, 'Heroism', p. 366.
[272] R. Richardson, *A Silent Savior: The Inapproachability of Christ in The Dream of the Rood*. Unpublished MA thesis, University of Missouri-Columbia (Ann Arbor, 2008), p. 44.
[273] *The Vision of the Cross*, ll. 30b-34a.
[274] *Ibidem*, ll. 33b-41.
[275] *Ibidem*, ll. 46-51a.
[276] *Ibidem*, ll. 79-84.
[277] Woeber, 'Heroism', p. 369.

In addition, the poet also talks about Christ's human suffering in a more direct manner. After his death, Christ was lifted down from "ðam hefian wite" [the heavy torment], laid down, "lim-werigne" [weary limbed] and "meðe æfter þam miclan gewinne" [exhausted after his great struggle].[278] Hence, the poet implies that Christ was both almighty God and human sufferer. In his humanity, Christ suffers, is thirsty, grows tired and sleeps (see Pope Leo's classification of Christ's acts in chapter 1). Remarkably, Christ's death is described as sleep rather than death: when Christ is taken off the Cross, he "he hine ðær hwile reste" [he rested there for a while], before they lay him in a sepulchre of bright stone.[279] As opposed to this sleeping, divine Christ, the Cross as representative of Christ's humanity does die: the Cross's "[h]ræw colode" [corpse grew cold] and was buried in a deep pit.[280] By describing Christ's death in this fashion, the poet possibly shows that Christ really dies in his human nature, and merely rests in his divine nature because a god cannot die. He thus reconciles Christ's two natures in the same event, again illustrating that Christ is one person with both a divine and a human nature. Woolf adds that this description of Christ's death is "a most brilliant poetic solution" to the theological difficulty of writing about Christ's death in his divine nature.[281]

To conclude, *The Dream of the Rood* portrays both Christ's divine and human natures. In his divinity, Christ is a victorious hero, the almighty Lord of Creation, and the powerful king who arose from the dead and ascended into heaven to return again on Judgment Day. In his humanity, primarily represented by the Cross, Christ suffers physical pain and torment. These two images are equally dominant. The poet also makes clear that these two natures co-exist in one person, thus refuting Nestorianism, which disunited Christ's two natures (as laid out in the first chapter). Like the poets of the *Christ* poems, the poet of *The Dream of the Rood* has no difficulties in writing about Christ's divine nature. He establishes Christ as Son of God and shows him to be almighty. Interestingly, the poet particularly uses Germanic heroic imagery to highlight Christ's divine nature and actions, rather than employing Christian light imagery (as the poets of the *Christ* poems have done). In this way, the poet presents a recognisable image of Christ to his Anglo-Saxon audience. Christ's human nature, however, the poet approaches with more care. He uses the Cross as a mirror of Christ's human torment, instead of describing the Crucifixion from Jesus' perspective. As such, the poet clearly avoids talking about Christ's feelings directly, probably because of the debates in the Church about Christ's humanity on

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[278] *The Vision of the Cross*, ll. 60b-65a.
[279] *Ibidem*, ll. 64a-66.
[280] *Ibidem*, ll. 72b-75a.
[281] Woolf, 'Doctrinal Influences', p. 147.

earth. By placing an equal emphasis on Christ's divinity and humanity in this poem, the poet evades Christological heresies and follows the orthodox Christological principle that Christ's human nature and divine nature are equally preserved in one person.

The Descent into Hell: The descending divine warrior

From all the poems analysed so far, *The Descent into Hell* is the least outspoken about Christ's dual nature. The poet does not use light imagery nor addresses Christ's relation to the Father, as was the case for the *Christ* poems. Moreover, there are hardly any references to Christ's human sufferings. Nevertheless, the poem does resemble *The Dream of the Rood* and *Christ II* in its heroic portrayal of Christ: Christ is presented as a divine warrior descending into hell to save his people. Elaborating on Rambaran-Olm's note about the poem's Christological message of a divine Christ descending into hell, I will analyse the portrayal of Christ's divinity in this poem as well as the minor allusions to his humanity.

The poet of *The Descent into Hell* shows that Christ's descends into hell in his divine nature in several ways. Preceding the actual descent, Christ passes from his mortal to his immortal state, which Garde calls "the re-emergence of the Saviour's divine form".[282] In that particular passage, the poet describes Christ's Resurrection from the dead as follows:

> [Æ]þelinges lic
> onfeng feores gæst.   Folde beofode;
> hlogan hel-waran.   Hago-steald onwoc
> modig from moldan;   mægen-þrym aras
> sige-fæst ond snottor.

> [The prince's body received the breath of life. The earth shook; inhabitants of hell laughed. The courageous young warrior awoke from the earth; the majestic one arose, victorious and wise.][283]

Remarkably, Christ's Resurrection precedes his Descent into Hell in this poem, whereas the *descensus* doctrine generally teaches that Christ descended into hell before his Resurrection, even though some theologians have placed the Descent after the Resurrection or even at the Ascension.[284] Relevant for this study are the implications that this ordering of events has for

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[282] Garde, *Old English Poetry*, p. 125.
[283] *The Descent into Hell*, ll. 19b-23a. All quotations of *The Descent into Hell* are from *Old English Poems of Christ and His Saints*, ed. and trans. M. Clayton (Cambridge, MA, 2013), pp. 148-56. All translations of *The Descent into Hell* are from *Old English Poems of Christ and His Saints*, ed. and trans. M. Clayton (Cambridge, MA, 2013), pp. 149-57.
[284] M.E. Ruggerini, 'A Just and Riding God: Christ's Movement in *The Descent into Hell*', in *Myths, Legends, and Heroes: Essays on Old Norse and Old English Literature in Honour of John McKinnell*, ed. D. Anlezark (Toronto, 2011), pp. 206-24 (p. 206). Some scholars have attempted to explain the poet's unusual ordering of

the interpretation of Christ's dual nature. By placing the Resurrection before Christ's Descent, the poet implies that Christ has already overcome death and his own mortality before he rescues his saints in hell. As such, Christ descends with full divine authority and power; he is no longer subject to human pain and death. Moreover, the poet describes Christ's Resurrection in heroic terms in this passage by referring to him as a courageous young warrior.

The image of Christ as divine warrior that is evoked in the Resurrection passage is sustained in the subsequent account of Christ's Descent. After Christ's Resurrection, John the Baptist heralds Christ's coming, as he does in the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*, and witnesses the "Sige-Bearn Godes" [victorious Son of God] entering hell to free his people.[285] The entire description of Christ coming in hell resonates with military imagery:

> Fysde hine þa to fore   Frea mon-cynnes;
> wolde heofona helm   helle weallas
> forbrecan ond forbygan,   þære burge þrym
> onginnan reafian,   reþust ealra cyninga.
> Ne rohte he to þære   helm-berendra,
> ne he byrn-wigend   to þam burg-geatum
> lædan ne wolde,   ac þa locu feollan,
> clustor of þam ceastrum.   Cyning in oþrad,
> ealles folces fruma,   forð onnette,
> weoruda wuldor-giefa.
>
> [Then the Lord of mankind hastened on his journey; heaven's protector, the most righteous of all kings, intended to demolish and cast down the walls of hell, to carry off the great body of people in that stronghold. He did not care about helmeted soldiers for that battle nor did he intend to lead armor-clad warriors to the gates of that stronghold, but instead the locks and bars dropped off that city. The king, the ruler of mankind, who gives glory to the hosts, rode in and hastened on.][286]

Christ's depiction as a lord who has no need of warriors or weapons emphasises the realisation of Christ's complete divinity.[287] As divine being, Christ has no need of earthly support. In fact, he is so mighty and powerful that the locks of hell break down when he approaches them. Like the Christ in *The Dream of the Rood*, the Christ of *The Descent into Hell* is described in heroic terms and presented as a warrior whose divine, supreme power surpasses earthly heroism. The image of Christ as warrior during his Descent is a common one in *descensus* stories. In *The Gospel of Nicodemus*, for instance, one of the angels describes Christ as "a Lord who is mighty

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events in this poem, but none of those explanations is of interest for this study. See Garde, *Old English Poetry*, p. 125, and Rambaran-Olm, *'John the Baptist's Prayer'*, pp. 63-64.

[285] *The Descent into Hell*, l. 32b, 50b.

[286] *Ibidem*, ll. 33-42a.

[287] Rambaran-Olm, *'John the Baptist's Prayer'*, p. 72.

and powerful, a Lord powerful in war".[288] However, the poet of *The Descent into Hell* deviates from the *descensus* tradition as found in *The Gospel of Nicodemus* by having Christ enter hell alone (rather than in the company of many angels) and emphasising the fact that he does not need any help to break down hell's gates.[289] This deviation supports the interpretation of Christ as an overwhelmingly powerful, divine warrior.

  The Descent into Hell also differs from *The Gospel of Nicodemus* in another way. In the apocryphal *Gospel*, Christ enters hell as a mighty warrior and commands the gates to be opened, after which he reprimands Satan.[290] By contrast, the Christ of the poem is a silent Christ. As in *The Dream of the Rood*, Christ's silence can be seen as an aspect of his ineffable transcendence, which is according to O'Collins part of his divinity. In addition, Maria Ruggerini notes that the descriptions "[f]ysde hine þa to fore" [then (he) hastened on his journey] and "forð onnette" [hastened on] in this passage "seem to adhere to a formulaic pattern employed in connection with other divine redemptive acts", such as Christ hastening to the Cross in *The Dream of the Rood* and Christ hurrying to his Father's kingdom in *Christ II*.[291] Her interpretation of these two verbal phrases thus supports a reading of the passage as highlighting Christ's divine nature.

  According to Rambaran-Olm, Christ's divinity is also established in this poem through light imagery. She uses the following passage to illustrate her claim:

> Geseah þa Iohannis Sige-Bearn Godes
> mid þy cyne-þrymme cuman to helle;
> ongeat þa geomor-mod Godes sylfes sið.
> Geseah he helle duru hædre scinan,
> þa þe longe ær bilocen wæron
> beþeahte mid þystre; se þegn wæs on wynne.
>
> [Then John saw the victorious Son of God coming to hell with royal majesty; sad at heart, he then understood this expedition of God himself. He saw the doors of hell shining brightly, those doors which long before had been locked, enveloped in darkness; that warrior was joyful.][292]

She argues that in this passage "the poet ensures that one of the central images of the Easter Vigil, involving light breaking through darkness, is duly included".[293] I find this claim an

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[288] *The Gospel of Nicodemus B* 21:3, in *The Apocryphal Gospels: Texts and Translations*, eds. and trans. B.D. Ehrman and Z. Pleše (Oxford, 2011).

[289] Rambaran-Olm, *'John the Baptist's Prayer'*, p. 72. Implicit scriptural references to a mighty Christ breaking the locks of Hell can be found in Isaiah 45:2 and Psalm 24:7-10.

[290] W.D. White, *The Descent of Christ into Hell: A Study in Old English Literature.* Unpublished dissertation, University of Texas (Ann Arbor, 1959), p. 148.

[291] Ruggerini, 'A Just and Riding God', pp. 212-13.

[292] *The Descent into Hell*, ll. 50-55.

[293] Rambaran-Olm, *'John the Baptist's Prayer'*, p. 88.

unconvincing one for two reasons. Firstly, the light imagery here is applied to the doors, not to Christ. Perhaps the reason that the doors shine is because Christ is behind them, but such an interpretation requires a rather great imagination on the reader's part. Secondly, considering that the motif of a shining Christ piercing the darkness of hell was a common feature of *descensus* stories,[294] such a mere mention of shining doors hardly counts as the use of the traditional motif. To compare, in *The Gospel of Nicodemus* Christ's entry into hell is described as follows:

> But when it was middle of the night, into that darkness there arose as it were the light of the sun, and it shone and enlightened everyone … At once filled with joy, they said to one another, "This light is from the great enlightening." The prophet Isaiah who was there said, "This is the light from the Father and from the Son and from the Holy Spirit, about which I prophesied while still living: 'O land of Zebulon and land of Naphtali, the people who sit in darkness, see a great light!'[295]

Clearly, the shining doors in *The Descent into Hell* are dwarfed by the many references to Christ as the light in *The Gospel of Nicodemus*. The absence of light imagery in relation to Christ in this poem is striking as the previous chapter has shown that the *Christ* poems heavily rely on light imagery in highlighting Christ's divinity. Despite the lack of light imagery, Christ's divine nature is clearly stated when the poet describes the victorious Christ as "Godes sylfes" [God himself].

Furthermore, like the poets of the *Christ* poems, the poet of *The Descent into Hell* presents Christ as a divine being by addressing him as Saviour and Creator, both of which are divine titles according to O'Collins. Both titles are especially used in the poem's closing plea for baptism, where the poet implores, "Nu ic þe halsie, hælend user / deope in gedyrftum – þu eart Dryhten Crist – / þæt þu us gemiltsie, monna scyppend" [now deeply troubled, I entreat you, our savior – you who are Christ the Lord – that you have mercy on us, creator of people].[296] He continues stressing Christ's divinity by explaining that Christ did not come to earth because of his own need, but out of mercy, thus showing that he is a compassionate Creator.[297] It is Christ, the powerful Lord and greatest king, who "meaht ymbfon eal folca gesetu" [can encompass all the dwellings of mankind], just as he "meaht geriman … sæs sond-grotu" [can count the grains of sand in the sea].[298] Only in his divine nature, Christ is capable of doing these extraordinary things. To sum up, after passing into his immortal state, Christ descends into hell

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[294] Rambaran-Olm, *'John the Baptist's Prayer'*, p. 35.
[295] *The Gospel of Nicodemus B* 18:1.
[296] *The Descent into Hell*, ll. 107-109.
[297] *Ibidem*, ll. 110-14.
[298] *Ibidem*, ll. 115-17.

in his divine form, in which he is capable of doing extraordinary things such as breaking the gates of hell without help and without touching them. The poet especially uses heroic and martial imagery to describe Christ as a divine warrior who conquers death.

The question that remains to be addressed is: does the poet of *The Descent into Hell* also refer to Christ's human nature, considering that he demonstrates that Christ descends in his divine capacity? In the beginning of the poem, the poet does hint at Christ's human nature when he describes Christ's death: "[r]æst wæs acolad / heard wæs hin-sið" [his resting-place had grown cold; his journey out of this world had been hard].[299] This sentence can be read as an indication that Christ's body has grown cold, which is a clear reference to Christ's humanity (see O'Collins).[300] Moreover, the second part suggests that Christ greatly suffered when he died and suffering is one of Christ's human acts as established by pope Leo. A few lines later, there is another mention of Christ's human body: "æþelinges lic / onfeng feores gæst" [the prince's body received the breath of life].[301] It is important to note that these mentions of Christ's humanity are found in the passages that describe his death and Resurrection rather than in the account of his Descent. In fact, in the entire description of his Descent into Hell, there are no hints to his human nature. After the Descent, the poet once more touches on Christ's human suffering when he entreats Christ "fore þære wunde" [for the sake of your wounds] to sprinkle his people with water.[302]

If one accepts that the poet would indeed have known *The Gospel of Nicodemus*, it is striking that he so obviously chose not to refer to Christ as a human being in his account of the Descent because the apocryphal text explicitly states that Christ enters hell "as a human".[303] A possible explanation for the poet's decision not to mention Christ's Descent as a human can be found in the function of Christ's human portrayal in *The Gospel of Nicodemus*. Early Christians believed that Christ disguised himself as a human to deceive Satan.[304] Indeed, in *The Gospel of Nicodemus* Satan boasts to Hades that he is not afraid of Christ because he thinks Christ is human:

> 'But this one is a human, and because of our joint efforts the Jews crucified him. Now that he has died, be prepared so that we can keep him securely here. For I know that he is human, as I heard him saying 'My soul is deeply grieved unto death''.[305]

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[299] *The Descent into Hell*, ll. 6b-7a.
[300] Rambaran-Olm, *'John the Baptist's Prayer'*, pp. 162-63. Note a similar use of the phrase in *The Dream of the Rood* l. 72b, where the body of Christ represented by the cross grows cold.
[301] *The Descent into Hell*, ll. 19b-20a.
[302] *Ibidem*, l. 120a.
[303] *The Gospel of Nicodemus B* 21:3.
[304] White, *The Descent of Christ*, p. 70.
[305] *The Gospel of Nicodemus B* 20:3.

However, when Christ comes in his divine power, Satan and Hades cower and Christ is victorious. That Satan and Hades are deceived by Christ's appearance as a man is evident when Hades exclaims,

> 'Woe to us! But who are you who has such authority and power? What sort of being are you who comes here without sin, you who seem small yet has power to do great things, the one who is humble yet exalted, the slave and the master, the soldier and the king, the one who has authority over the dead and the living? You were nailed to the cross and placed in the grave, and now you have become free and have destroyed all our power'.[306]

Obviously, Satan and Hades are at a loss when they encounter the God-man whose power and authority surpass that of any other being. Returning to *The Descent into Hell* then, one can argue that the poet's decision not to mention Christ's human nature is directly related to the fact that he also chose not to include the characters of Hades and Satan in his poem. As such the poet's decision to focus on Christ's divine power and leave out Christ's humanity seems to be his own way of narrating the *descensus* story.

To conclude, the poet of *The Descent into Hell* demonstrates that Christ descends into hell in his divine nature. It is God himself who enters hell to save his saints and in doing so, he is depicted as a heroic warrior who does not need earthly help. The use of heroic terms allows the poet to create an image of Christ during his Descent which his Anglo-Saxon audience would appreciate. In the account of the Descent, there are no references to Christ's human nature, but a few allusions to it can be found in the poem's treatment of Christ's death, Resurrection and the final plea for baptism. These findings stand in stark contrast to those of the *Christ* poems and *The Dream of the Rood*, in which the poets appeared to have been preoccupied with creating an image of a fully united divine-human Christ. Is *The Descent into Hell* a heretical poem then? The poet's treatment of Christ's nature at his Descent could have a Nestorian tendency (i.e. separating Christ's two natures). Nevertheless, it should be said that the poet does imply that Christ has two natures when he recounts Christ's death, Resurrection and pleas Christ for baptism. Moreover, the poem's subject required a creativity on the poet's part when it comes to portraying Christ and his two natures because the *descensus* story is largely based on secondary works and hardly finds its roots in the Bible. As such, the poet's decision to focus on Christ's divine power in his account of the Descent would hardly have caused trouble in the Anglo-Saxon Church, since the *descensus* concept had always been a complicated one. Furthermore, the poet demonstrates that Christ is God's Son, even identifying him as God

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[306] *The Gospel of Nicodemus B* 22:1.

himself, thus at least refuting Arianism, like the poets of the *Christ* poems. In sum, the poet's treatment of Christ's nature at his Descent reflects his own interpretation of the event, showing much less concern with countering heretical ideas about Christ's dual nature than the poets of the *Christ* poems and *The Dream of the Rood*, probably because the Descent was a complicated topic which perfectly lent itself to creativity.

In conclusion, the poets of *The Dream of the Rood* and *The Descent into Hell* particularly employ heroic imagery in their portrayal of Christ's dual nature. One might expect that depicting Christ as a heroic warrior makes him more human. Remarkably, Christ's portrayal as a warrior in these poems does not necessarily make him more human, quite the opposite: heroic imagery is used to establish him as a divine warrior. In his divinity, Christ is the victorious hero who ascends the Cross willingly to save mankind in *The Dream of the Rood*. Likewise, Christ descends into hell as a divine warrior to save his saints in *The Descent into Hell*. The use of heroic imagery in this fashion allows the poets to present a recognisable and comprehensible image of the divine Christ to their Anglo-Saxon audience.

Even though Christ's divine nature is approached in a similar way in both poems, his human nature is treated rather differently. In *The Dream of the Rood*, the Cross is used as a mirror of Christ's human torment to avoid talking about Christ's feelings directly, whereas Christ's human nature is hardly referred to in *The Descent into Hell*. Moreover, the poet of *The Dream of the Rood* appears to be more concerned with placing an equal emphasis on Christ's human and divine natures than the poet of *The Descent into Hell*. As such, *The Dream of the Rood* clearly conforms to the orthodox Christological principle that Christ has two natures which are equally preserved in one person, whereas the poet of *The Descent into Hell* has approached his topic with more creativity and decided to focus on Christ's divinity rather than his humanity.

CONCLUSION

From weeping trees to warrior traits: the Anglo-Saxon poets responsible for the Old English *Christ* poems, *The Dream of the Rood*, and *The Descent into Hell* expose their views on the dual nature of Christ in multiple ways. As such, this study's research question, "how do the poets of these Christian poems address the issue of Christ's dual nature in the light of medieval Christology?", has several answers. Firstly, the poets express Christ's divinity with biblical and liturgical images, such as Christ as Creator and Christ as the eternal Son of God. While the poets of the *Christ* poems also rely on light imagery to portray Christ's divine nature and actions, the poets of *The Dream of the Rood*, and *The Descent into Hell* appear to favour heroic imagery in their presentation of the divine Christ. Even though the poets use different strategies to highlight Christ's divinity, each poem testifies to a correct Christological belief that Christ has a divine nature in which he is equal to the Father and in which he is truly the Son of God, contrary to Christological heresies such as Arianism and Adoptionism.

Secondly, Christ's humanity proves a more delicate topic as each poet approaches it in his own way and does so with caution. *Christ I* stresses its incomprehensibility; *Christ II* focusses on the implications of Christ's human nature for mankind; *Christ III* balances the image of an emotional human Christ with the image of Christ as divine Judge; *The Dream of the Rood* substitutes the Cross for Christ's vulnerable humanity; and *The Descent into Hell* hardly mentions Christ's human nature. As such, the poets appear to have been affected by the fierce Christological debates about Christ's human nature in the Anglo-Saxon Church. By treading carefully on the issue of Christ's humanity while he was on earth, the poets avoided the danger of being accused of heresy.

Moreover, following Chalcedon's principle of Christology, the poets of these poems portray a fully united human-divine Christ. In their poems, the poets acknowledge the co-existence of two inseparable natures in Christ: Christ is fully God and perfectly human. In this way, the poets deny, to quote Bede, "the worthless Nestorius and his teachings", who separated the two natures in Christ. The poems which most successfully create a balance between the two natures of Christ are *Christ III* and *The Dream of the Rood*. By putting an equal stress on Christ's divinity and his humanity, these two poems perfectly align themselves with the western orthodox Christology and contradict heretical claims that overstress either Christ's divine or human nature. It should be noted that the poet of *The Descent into Hell* is the least concerned of all these poets with correctly depicting Christ's dual nature. His divergence from portraying a fully united human-divine Christ probably has to do with the topic: the *descensus* doctrine

has long been a complicated one and perfectly lent itself to creativity on the poet's part since it is not rooted in firm biblical traditions like the topics treated by the other poets.

The present study makes several contributions to the existing scholarship about Old English Christian verse. Above all, it has proven that placing these Old English poems in a doctrinal context is a rewarding approach: it has led to new insights into over-analysed poems such as *The Dream of the Rood*, but also into neglected poems like *The Descent into Hell*. One of those new insights relates to heroic imagery in these poems: in these two poems the portrayal of Christ as heroic warrior directly affects the reader's interpretation of his dual nature. Surprisingly, instead of using heroic imagery to create a more human image of Christ, the poets of these poems use heroic terms to explain Christ's divine nature.

Moreover, this study has shown that doctrines and the position of the Church indeed influenced Anglo-Saxon poets. This implies that further research into Old English Christian poems should incorporate medieval doctrine as well. The study into heroic imagery in Old English Christian poems, for instance, would benefit from including medieval doctrines to understand the function of heroic terms, but also their originality (i.e. heroism might be inherent to relevant doctrines, such as the *descensus* doctrine). Furthermore, the way these poets handled Christ's dual nature in relation to Christological beliefs can lead to new insights into other aspects of the poems, such as dating and authorship. Take, for instance, *Christ I* in which the poet appears to make a claim against Arianism, which suggests that the poem may have been written at a time when Arianism was still an issue in Anglo-Saxon England.

In spite of these contributions to existing scholarship, some limitations of this research are hard to deny. Firstly, this study is limited by the selection of Old English Christian poems. In order to give a complete overview of the dual nature of Christ in Old English verse, other poems, such as *Christ and Satan*, should be taken into account as well. Moreover, as many scholars have recognised, it is hard to establish with certainty which doctrines, patristic texts, and theological ideas the Anglo-Saxons knew and had access to. As such, mistakes in determining which doctrines and sources influenced the poems, directly affect the credibility of the conclusions drawn about the poets' treatment of Christ's dual nature. Despite these shortcomings, this study has laid the foundation for further research into Christological influences on Old English poetry.

Further research might explore the portrayal of Christ in the Old English poems *Christ and Satan* and *Andreas*, which are two poems in which Christ interacts with other characters. Another promising line of research would be to analyse Christological influences on Old English prose as well as poetry. Furthermore, the present study has demonstrated that including

early medieval doctrine and theological ideas in the study of Old English Christian poetry can lead to new insights, and, therefore, further research should be done into doctrines and theological ideas that relate to other matters than Christology and that were known in Anglo-Saxon England, and thus could possibly have influenced Old English Christian poetry.

To conclude, the present study has unravelled part of the mystery of the dual nature of Christ in Old English poetry, and thus proven that, to quote the God-man himself, "[a]ll things are possible for one who believes".[307]

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[307] Mark 9:23.

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