‘FÆGERE þURH FORÐGESCEAFT’: THE CONFIRMATION OF THE ANGELS IN OLD ENGLISH LITERATURE

In the Old English Genesis A, after the fall of Satan and the rebel angels, the poet states that peace was restored in heaven and that the ‘þrymmas’ (‘powers’ or ‘glories’) of the angelic hosts increased:

þa wæs soð swa ær     sibb on heofnum,
fægre freoþoþeawas    frea eallum leof,
þeoden his þegnum.     þrymmas weoxon
duguða mid drihtne    dreambahbendra.¹ (lines 78–81)

(Then there was again truth as before, peace in the heavens, fair peaceable customs, the Lord dear to all, the Prince to his followers. The powers/glories of the hosts of the joyous ones increased in God.)

B. F. Huppé compared a passage in Pseudo-Bede’s Quaestiones super Genesim that states that the good angels were ‘strengthened’ or ‘confirmed’ (‘confirmati’) after the fall of Satan so that they could never fall.² In his edition of Genesis A, Doane explicitly identifies this passage as an allusion to the doctrine of the ‘confirmation of the faithful angels’, citing Augustine, De ciuitate Dei XII.9:

si utrique boni aequaliter creati sunt, istis mala uoluntate cadentibus illi amplius adiuti ad cam beatitudinis plenitudinem, unde se nunquam casuros certissimi fierent, peruenerunt …³

(if both were created equally good, with these falling through evil will, those others, having been assisted to it more fully, attained the fullness of bliss, from whence they were made certain that they would never fall …)

As we shall see, the doctrine of the confirmation of the angels was usually expressed (as elsewhere in Augustine’s works) with various Latin words for ‘strengthening’ or ‘making firm’. In Genesis A we are told that the ‘þrymmas’ of the angelic hosts increased (‘weoxon’) after the fall of the rebel angels, and OE þrymm means ‘power, might’ as well as ‘glory’.

Neither Huppé nor Doane traces the background of this tradition beyond the single Latin passage that each cites to illustrate it; nor do they refer to parallels elsewhere in Old English. Two other poems, however, The Advent Lyrics (Christ I) and The Dream of the Rood – the latter in a notably problematic passage – likewise allude to the confirmation of the good angels. Werferth’s OE
translation of Gregory the Great’s *Dialogues* also includes a passage referring to the confirmation of the angels, more clearly in fact in the translation than in the source. And Ælfric explicitly invokes the tradition in three of his works, though to my knowledge there has not been any extended discussion of his references to the tradition; nor have all of the poetic allusions been related to each other or to the references by Ælfric.⁴

A particularly clear and succinct statement of the doctrine occurs in Ælfric’s *De initio creaturae* (= *Catholic Homilies* I.1):

> Da getrynde se ælmihtiga god þa nigon engla werod & gestadolfæste. swa þæt hi næfre ne mihton ne noldon syðdan fram his willan gebugan. ne hi ne magon nu ne hi nellad nane synne gewyrcan.⁵

(Then the almighty God *strengthened* and *confirmed* those nine ranks of angels so that afterwards they might never be able or wish to depart from his will, nor might they now commit or wish to commit any sin.)

In a study of Ælfric’s views on the creation and fall of the angels, Michael Fox⁶ has noted that Ælfric refers to the good angels as having being ‘confirmed’ both here and in his *De creatore et creatura*:

> God þa gestadolfæste & gestrangode his englas <þa> <forleton> þæt hi lybbad nu æfre buton ælcere synne orsorge on <bliss> <gehyrsume> on wuldre mid him.⁷

(God then *confirmed* and *strengthened* his angels … so that they now live always without any sin free from anxiety, blissfully obedient in glory with him.)

Fox does not discuss the tradition, and neither does Malcolm Godden in his commentary on *De initio creaturae*. Nor does Godden’s *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici* entry for the *De initio creaturae* cite any source for this particular passage.⁸ Lynne Grundy, however, has compared the passage in *De initio creaturae* with another passage from Augustine’s *De ciuitate Dei* (XX.1):

> qui casum angelorum voluntarium iustissima poena sempiternae infelicitatis obstrinxit atque in eo summo bono permanentibus ceteris, ut de sua sine fine permanzione certi essent, tamquam ipsius praemium permancionis dedit … ⁹

(God bound with the most just punishment of eternal unhappiness the voluntary fall of the angels, and to the rest who continued in that highest good, so that they might be certain of their own endless continuance, he gave as it were the reward of that very continuance …)

Yet another allusion to the confirmation of the angels occurs in Ælfric’s Homily *Nativitas Domini*:

> <Da> <halgan> <englas> þe on heofonum wuniað syndon gestapelfæste & <gestrangode> <swede> þurh þæt halige Word þæs heofonlican Fæder. & þurh þone Halgan <Gast> <hi> <synd> gegladode to heora Scyppendes lufe, þe hi gesceop on wuldre … ¹⁰
(The holy angels who dwell in the heavens are confirmed and greatly strengthened through the holy Word of the heavenly Father, and through the Holy Spirit they are made to rejoice in the love of their Creator, who created them in glory …)

No direct source has been identified for this passage, though Pope was able to cite a general parallel in Pseudo-Bede, *In psalmorum librum exegesis.*

As Doane and Grundy independently recognized, the doctrine of the confirmation of the angels derives ultimately from Augustine, whose opinions have been conveniently summarized by Jeffrey Burton Russell:

The angels, being limited and fallible as well as free, are capable of sinning if left to their own devices. But God did not wish them to fall. He therefore decided to strengthen them, to confirm them in their goodness by a gratuitous act of grace. He confirmed some of the angels in their blessed state, giving them a ‘fullness of goodness’. This confirmation brought with it a deep understanding of God, of the cosmos, and of their own condition. Thus illumined, they became incapable of sinning, unable to fall. They became fully free by losing their freedom to sin, by freely submitting to the service of God, a free choice that God’s grace made inevitable.

What Augustine could not resolve to his own satisfaction was whether this confirmation occurred at the moment of the angels’ creation, or only after the sin and fall of the rebel angels. In *De ciuitate Dei* XI.13 he acknowledged that it might seem hard to accept that all angels were not originally created with equal felicity, but he considered it harder to accept that the good angels are not certain of their eternal felicity, and yet by definition the rebel angels could never have had that certainty. Augustine concluded his discussion of the problem in this chapter inconclusively: ‘It remains either that they were unequal, or, if they were equal, the good angels came into the certain knowledge of their eternal felicity after the fall of the others.’ Yet in the later chapter (XX.1) cited by Grundy and quoted above, Augustine clearly preferred the second possibility. And in his *Enchiridion* (IX.28), Augustine chose not to muddy the waters, representing the confirmation of the good angels as subsequent to the fall of the rebel angels:

sed eo qui diabolus factus est cum sociis impietatis elato et ipsa cum eis elatione prostrato, ceteri pia obedientia domino cohaesperunt, accipientes etiam, quod illi non habuerunt, certam scientiam qua essent de sua sempiterna et nunquam casura stabilitate securi.

(but when he who was made the devil became haughty along with his impious companions, and by that very haughtiness was cast down with them, the rest clung to the Lord in pious obedience, receiving in addition what those others had not had, the certain knowledge by which they would be secure in their own everlasting and never-failing steadfastness.)
For later authorities, at least from Gregory the Great down through the early Middle Ages, the default version of the doctrine was that the confirmation took place after the fall of the rebel angels, and that from that time forward the good angels were no longer capable of sinning. These authorities regularly expressed the idea with the verbs confirmare or solidare, literally ‘to strengthen’ or ‘to make firm’. Gregory formulated the doctrine concisely in his homilies on Ezekiel:

Tales creati sunt angeli ut si uellent, in beatitudinis luce persisterent, si autem nollen, etiam labi potuisse. Vnde et Satan cum sequacibus legionibus cecidit. Sed post eius lapsum ita confirmati sunt angeli qui persisterunt, ut cadere omnino non possent. Quod bene in ipso exordio Genesios libri ex historica descriptione signatum est, quia creauit Deus caelum quod postmodum vocauit firmamentum.  

(For the angels were created such that they might continue steadfastly in the light of beatitude, if they wished; if they did not wish, they would even be able to fall. And so Satan fell with his legions of followers. But after his fall the angels who had remained steadfast were confirmed so that they would not in any way be able to fall. Which is well designated from the historical narrative in that same prologue of the book of Genesis, that God created heaven which he afterwards called the firmament.)

This comment (preserved by Paterius) was repeated almost verbatim by Gennadius, Liber ecclesiasticorum dogmatum, by pseudo-Alcuin (John of Fécamp), Confessio fidei, by Wigbod, Quaestiones in Heptateuchem, and by Pseudo-Bede, Quaestiones in Genesis. Gregory also twice referred to the confirmation of the angels in his Moralia in Iob, in one passage using the word ‘confirmata’ (sc. ‘natura angelica’) and in the other ‘solidati sunt’. Isidore of Seville likewise allegorically equated the ‘firmness’ of the good angels and their subsequently being ‘strengthened’ (‘solidati’) with God’s creation of the firmament in Genesis.

Ælfric echoes the traditional Latin terminology of the angels’ being ‘strengthened’ or ‘made firm’ with three roughly synonymous OE verbs (getryman, gestrangian, gestaþelfæstan). While his exact sources remain unidentified, Ælfric was manifestly familiar with the doctrine of the confirmation of the good angels.

A more oblique Gregorian statement of the doctrine in the Dialogues, which refers to the region of heaven being ‘more firmly’ established as a result of the loss of the rebel angels, was translated by Bishop Werferth in such a way as to clarify that the good angels were strengthened (‘getrymede’) and made more steadfast (‘staðolfæstlicor’) as a result:

Sed quid mirum quod hoc de homine dicimus, quando illa superna regio in ciuibus suis ex parte damna pertulit et ex parte fortiter stetit, ut electi angelorum spiritus, dum alios per superbiam cecidisse conspicerent, ipsi tanto robustius quanto humilior staerror? Ili ergo regioni sua etiam detrimenta profecerunt, quae ad aeternitatis statum ex parte suae destructionis est solidius instructa.
(But what wonder is it that we say this concerning man, when that celestial region in part suffered a loss in its citizens, and in part stood strongly, so that the elect spirits of the angels, when they were seeing others fall through pride, themselves stood so much the more hardly as they did the more humbly? Therefore they profited even by their loss in that region, which was more firmly equipped for the condition of eternity by the part of its destruction.)

Ac hwylc wundor is, þeah þe we þis be mannum secgan, nu seo uplice leodræden þære ængelican <gecynde> of sumum dæle æwerdlan & wonunge aræfnede of <hyra> efenceasterwarum & on sumum dæle fæstlice gestod & gewunode, swa þat þa geccorenan engla gastas selfe swa myccele strenligicor & fæstlicor gestodon, swa myccele swa hi cadmodran wæron, þurh oferhigde þa oðre ofdune afeollon? Soðlice hi forð fremedon & þungon þurh þa wununge heora geferscipes, & of ðam dæle heora toworpnyse & gedales to ecnesse staðole þy staðolfæstlicor hi wæron getrymede.  

(But what wonder is it, though we say this about men, since the celestial region of the angelic nature in some part suffered loss and diminution of their fellow citizens, and in some part stood firmly and remained, so that the elect spirits of the angels themselves stood so much the more strongly and firmly, (seeing that) the others fell downward through pride? Truly they advanced forth and prospered through the continuing of their fellowship, and from the part of their [the bad angels’] destruction and separation they [the good angels] were strengthened the more steadfastly in stability for eternity.)

The doctrine of the confirmation of the good angels was therefore widely disseminated through standard patristic and early medieval authorities who were well known to the Anglo-Saxons.

To return to the passage in Genesis A quoted above, the poet’s reference to the increased ‘þrymmas’ of the good angels following the fall of the rebel angels corresponds closely to this traditional doctrine. Yet another, hitherto unnoticed allusion to the doctrine in Old English poetry occurs in Advent Lyrics XI:

> Forþon hy, dædhwæte, dome geswiðde, þæt soðfæste seraphinnes cynn, uppe mid englum a bremende unæpreotendum þrymmum singað ful healice hludan stefne, fægre feor ond neah. Habbaþ folgoþa cyst mid cyninge.  

(Therefore they, bold in deed, confirmed in glory by decree, the righteous rank of Seraphim always celebrating with the angels on high, sing with unwearying powers, very exalted with loud voice, beautiful far and near. They have the best of offices with the king.)

The phrase ‘dome geswiðde’ seems to have occasioned little interest or comment. Cook’s definition of geswiðan in his glossary (he does not comment on the line
in his notes) as ‘signalize, crown’ is followed in the translations by R. K. Gordon
(‘crowned with glory’);30 and Robert Burlin (‘crowned in glory’).31 Most other
editors and translators have followed the definition in Bosworth–Toller: ‘To
make strong, confirm, comfort’.32 Thus Patricia Ward in her revision of Cook’s
definition of ‘geswiðde’ as ‘make [sic] strong, confirm’,33 but again without
specific comment on the passage in question (Bradley’s translation ‘endued
with splendour’ reduces it to a cheville). Jackson J. Campbell’s glossary gives
the definitions ‘confirmed, honored’, and Campbell translates ‘dome geswiðde’
as ‘confirmed in glory’;34 as does Pope in a note on the activity of the seraphim
in Advent Lyrics XI.35 Neither Campbell nor Pope explains what ‘confirmed in
quality’ means, presumably because they regarded it either as self-explanatory or
as not carrying any very concrete meaning.

Any concrete meaning one might attribute to the phrase could depend on
how one translates the notoriously ambiguous word dom. Cook and Pope both
opt for ‘glory’, but it could just as well mean ‘decree’ or ‘judgment’, and Roy
Liuzza (also without comment) has recently translated the phrase ‘confirmed in
judgment’.36 It could also be translated ‘confirmed by judgment’ or ‘confirmed by
decree/ordinance’. Any of these translations, however, would be consonant with
an allusion to the confirmation of the angels: if dom is understood as ‘decree’
or ‘judgment’, the phrase will refer to the divine decree to confirm the angels;
if understood as ‘quality’, it will refer instead to the result of that confirmation.
In Old English, of course, dom could refer to either the decree or its result, and
there is no real need to adjudicate between the two senses.

The Dictionary of Old English (s.v. dom) cites this line from Advent Lyrics XI
under sense 11, ‘favourable judgement (esp. after death), glory, fame, victory’,
subheading g., ‘in collocation with verbs meaning “to honour, exalt, make
precious”’. The other four examples cited (all poetic) do employ the past participle
of a verb meaning ‘honour, exalt, make precious’ (geweorþian in Beowulf line
1645b, Genesis A lines 2137b–8a, and Christ and Satan line 535b; gedyrsian in
Judith line 299a); but the literal and most immediate sense of geswiðan is ‘to
strengthen’, so ‘to honour’ would be a contextual extrapolation. The other
attestations might be thought to support just such an extrapolation; yet since
the poet of the Advent Lyrics did not need to substitute geswiðde for alliteration,
it is more likely that what appears to have been the traditional collocation with
geweorþian did not convey what the poet wished to convey.

The immediate context of the phrase ‘dome geswiðde’ favours the translation
‘confirmed’ (whether ‘by decree’ or ‘in glory’) as an allusion to the confirmation
of the angels to whom Christ granted that they might praise the Trinity without
end. The poet describes the seraphim’s ‘unwearying powers’ in praise of the
Trinity,37 using the same word (þrymm) as the Genesis A poet, and further
specifies that their condition is both permanent and mandatory, and that it was
The verb *motan* (line 393a motan = 3pl moton) conveys the fact their ‘confirmed’ state is no longer voluntary but inevitable. The semantics of the modal verb *motan* in Old English has usually been regarded as ambiguous between expressing possibility and necessity, but a recent convincing analysis by Igor Yanovich argues that in Alfredian prose *motan* is a ‘variable force’ modal that always involves the ‘presupposition of inevitable actualization’. According to Yanovich, ‘[t]he presupposition itself would be satisfied in particular in those contexts where some future has already been determined, measured out, granted by some higher force, be it Fate or God’. In the *Advent Lyrics*, Christ had ‘granted’ (‘forgeaf’) to the angels a possibility that is actualized as a necessity (‘hy motan’, ‘they must’). The modal force of *motan* here coincides precisely with the theological doctrine. What had been a mere possibility for the angels becomes henceforth a necessity: the angels will ‘always perpetually’ enjoy the sight of his countenance and glorify the deity. Instead of sinfully striving with God, as the rebel angels had done, the ‘confirmed’ angels zealously strive with one another in their worship of God. Here the poet has imaginatively linked the doctrinal tradition of the confirmation of the angels to the traditional poetic theme of the ‘Contending Throng’ recently identified by Paul Battles, which is attested also in *The Descent into Hell*, *Andreas*, and *The Battle of Maldon*.

The tradition of the confirmation of the angels also underlies a vexed passage in *The Dream of the Rood*. The general import of the passage has been correctly understood, but without having been associated with the doctrine of the confirmation of the angels. Near the beginning of the vision, the dreamer states that a group characterized as being ‘fægere þurh forðgesceaft’ beheld either the Cross or Christ on the Cross:
The main textual difficulty is the phrase ‘engel dryhtnes ealle’, which has been variously interpreted and emended. Michael Swanton retains the manuscript reading, taking *ealle* as subject of ‘beheoldon’ and ‘engel’ as its object, translating line 9b as ‘All beheld there the angel of the Lord.’ In this construction ‘engel dryhtnes’ becomes an epithet for Christ, or for the Cross identified with Christ. Those looking on would then be ‘all’ (‘ealle’) those who are ‘fægere þurh forðgesceaft’, ‘fair/beautiful through a condition/decree that continues’. What Swanton concedes to be the ‘awkward but not impossible syntax’ of the manuscript reading of line 9b has, however, prompted various emendations, among them *englas dryhtnes ealle* (‘all the angels of the Lord’); *englas dryhtnes* (‘the angels of the Lord’); *engeldryhte* (‘a company of angels’); and *engeldryhta fela* (‘many companies of angels’). Emendation can readily be defended on grounds of metre, grammar, and sense. According to John C. Pope, ‘The reading of the manuscript does not make sense and violates the syllabic and alliterative scheme characteristic of the hypermetric verses in this poem and elsewhere.’ In his revision of Pope’s edition R. D. Fulk noted that R. F. Bolton’s defence of the unemended line ‘leaves some metrical matters unresolved’. Fulk, who allows that Pope’s emendation ‘renders transparent sense and at least plausible meter’, proposes an alternative emendation ‘beheold on þam engel dryhtnes’, which he translates ‘an angel of the Lord watched them [i.e. the fi fe]’ (that is, the five gems adorning the Cross). While this has the advantage of retaining the manuscript ‘beheold on’ (resolved as two words and supplying a singular verb for ‘engel’), it dispenses entirely with ‘ealle’ and involves further emendation of ‘þær’. Given the Dream of the Rood poet’s fondness for verbal repetition, however, ‘beheoldon þær’ is supported not only by the closely following line 11, ‘ac hine þær beheoldon halige gastas’ (‘but holy spirits beheld him there’), but also by the later line 64a, ‘beheoldon hie ðær heofenes dryhten’ (‘they beheld there the Lord of heaven’). And while the image of Christ as an ‘angel’ does have good patristic precedent, it would be rather abruptly and unexpectedly introduced here without an adequate contextual cue that the word *engel* does not mean what it would normally be assumed to mean: an angel. Paul Cavill, who draws attention to parallels in *Genesis A* line 2269a, *Daniel* line 720b, *Guthlac A* line 116a, and *Seasons for Fasting* line 123b (and there are many others in many prose texts), also draws attention to problems with the parallels for Christ as an angel that have been adduced in *Christ I* line 104b, *Soul and Body I* line 27a, and *Christ and Satan* line 585b. Cavill concludes, rightly in my view, that ‘there is no immediate reason to suppose that *engel dryhtnes* in Old English verse would be thought of as anything other than an ordinary angel’. More recently, Daniel Donoghue has revived Swanton’s suggestion that singular *engel* refers to
the Cross, which Donoghue supports on the basis of the word’s etymological meaning ‘messenger’ (from Greek *angelos*). Donoghue resolves the agreement problem by taking ‘fægere’ as the substantive subject of ‘beheoldon’, translating lines 9b–10a as ‘Those beautiful by eternal decree beheld there the *engel* of the Lord’.\(^{59}\)

A plural subject for ‘beheoldon’ can also be supplied either by retaining ‘ealle’, which creates serious metrical difficulties, or by emending ‘engel’. Pope’s view that ‘fægere’ ‘obviously refers to the angels or the angelic hosts, and modifies the subject of “beheoldon” in the preceding line’, is supported by the parallelism with line 11. That parallelism also supports emending singular *engel* in ‘engel dryhntes ealle’ to a plural referring to the same ‘holy spirits’, whether one prefers *englas dryhtnes*, *engeldryhte*, or *engeldryhta feala*. The application of the collocation ‘fægere þurh forðgesceaft’ would then be specifically to the angels, and lines 11f. would vary line 9b with a different epithet for those angels while adding that two other groups (humans and inanimate creation) were looking on with them. A further advantage of emendation here is that the phrase ‘fægere þurh forðgesceaft’ would then designate just the first of these groups (the angels) instead of ‘all’ (‘ealle’), an extension that makes its meaning seem almost as vague as its referents are comprehensive. Donoghue’s identification of the *engel* as referring to the Cross seems counterintuitive in a context in which ‘halige gastas’ are mentioned in a closely following parallel phrase where the reference is almost certainly to angels; moreover, the only two other uses of the word (‘englas’, line 106b; ‘englum’, line 153b) both refer unambiguously to angels. In any case, even in Donoghue’s reading of line 9b, the word ‘fægere’ in line 10a still refers to angels. It may be that the textual corruption in line 9b is too deep to be resolved by ‘paleographically plausible’ emendation (and it is a fallacy to assume that scribes never made paleographically implausible errors). Even if, as Fulk states, ‘no entirely satisfactory solution has been found’,\(^{60}\) metre and sense favour emendation, and context favours a restoration in which plural angels are beholding the Cross.

If ‘fægere þurh forðgesceaft’ does refer to the angels, it might reasonably be expected to have some concrete meaning deriving from standard Christian angelology. The simplex *gesceaft* has a wide range of senses, including ‘creation’, ‘created thing’, ‘condition’, ‘destiny’, ‘decree’.\(^{61}\) Bruce Dickins and Alan Ross translate the phrase (without comment) as ‘beautiful in virtue of an ancient decree’, but their use of the indefinite article implicitly concedes that they do not know what ancient decree is meant. Pope, who devotes an extended note to the phrase, translates it as “fair by their pre-ordained condition”, or more freely, “fair by eternal decree”, with reference to the angels who were destined not to fall but to maintain their original brightness’. Pope then provides a more expansive paraphrase: ‘Thus the combination means “that which has been created
or ordained to be”, either for all time (the nature of things, the created world, or some preordained condition) or in the future.\textsuperscript{62}

According to Pope, his interpretation ‘slightly modifies’ the interpretations of A. S. Cook and of Dickins and Ross ‘without changing the basic concept’. His explanation of the concept with reference to the angels’ future destiny does in fact differ substantively from that of Cook, who refers instead to the angels’ having \textit{originally} been ‘created fair’ (a concept that Cook parallels with Ælfric’s statement that they were ‘on micelre fægernysse gesceapene’).\textsuperscript{63}

Although not cited by Pope, Toller’s \textit{Supplement} to Bosworth’s \textit{Anglo-Saxon Dictionary} (s.v. ‘forþ-gesceaft’) both anticipated Pope’s definition and provided a crucial parallel from Ælfric’s homily \textit{De initio creaturae} that makes the concept underlying the phrase much more concrete and meaningful:

\begin{quote}
III. a condition that continues (\textit{cf. forþ, 3}), the state of the angels whose tenure of heaven was to continue for ever. Cf. God þá nigon engla werod gestæþelfæste swá þæt hi næfre ne mihton fram his willan gebúgan, Hml. Th. i. 12, 8 \textit{[= De initio creaturae]}
Engel Dryhtnes ealle fægere þurh forðgesceaft, Kr. 10 \textit{[= Dream of the Rood]}.\textsuperscript{64}
\end{quote}

The \textit{Dictionary of Old English} (s.v. ‘forðgesceaft’ 2, ‘future (state/condition/destiny)’\textsuperscript{65} follows Toller in specifying that the reference is ‘to the angels who were destined to maintain their original radiance’, the only significant difference being that while Toller understands ‘fægere’ as characterizing the angels’ continuing ‘state’, \textit{DOE} understands it as characterizing their continuing form or appearance (‘original radiance’; \textit{cf. Pope, ‘original brightness’}).\textsuperscript{66} The \textit{DOE} entry does not, however, repeat Toller’s apt citation of Ælfric’s \textit{De initio creaturae}, which as we have seen (above, p. 23) refers to the very concrete doctrinal tradition of the confirmation of the good angels.

The characterization of the angels as ‘fægere þurh forðgesceaft’ in \textit{The Dream of the Rood} refers to them as being ‘fair’ or ‘beautiful’ (morally and/or physically) rather than strong or firm, and the allusion is not explicitly correlated with the fall of the rebel angels; yet the interpretation of the phrase favoured by both Toller and \textit{DOE} and elaborated by Pope makes it refer to the angels who were destined to retain their blessed condition after the fall of the rebel angels – a condition (\textit{gesceaft}) defined as one of future and lasting efficacy (\textit{cf. DOE, s.v. ‘forð’, sense A.3: ‘temporal: onwards (in time), henceforth; continually’}). That interpretation coincides precisely with the doctrine of the confirmation of the good angels. Toller’s definition of \textit{forðgesceaft} as ‘a condition that continues’, facilitated by comparison with the passage in Ælfric’s \textit{De initio creaturae}, expresses the idea succinctly, though ‘a decree that continues’ would express the doctrine equally well in a different way.

Part of the challenge of interpreting Old English poetry is that the corpus is studded with cruces such as ‘fægere þurh forðgesceaft’ whose literal meaning or
referent is uncertain and whose relation to pre-existing conventions (whether Christian-Latin, Germanic, or specifically Anglo-Saxon) available to Old English poets is often poorly understood. A different, less obvious kind of challenge is posed by apparent non-cruces like ‘dome geswiðde’ in Advent Lyrics XI, whose meaning may seem both self-evident and non-specific – mere pious chevilles that invoke no more precise reference. No doubt many are hardly more than chevilles, but in some cases we may simply have failed to identify the concrete traditions to which such apparent non-cruces allude. Even in isolation a strong case can be made for each poetic passage discussed here as an allusion to the confirmation of the angels. The allusion in Genesis A is straightforward enough that its relation to the tradition has long been recognized, but it had never been related to the passage in The Dream of the Rood, whose meaning has seemed obscure enough to require explication, or to the passage in Advent Lyrics XI, whose meaning has seemed obvious enough not to require any. The crux ‘fægere þurh forðgesceaft’ has been correctly explicated as referring to the continuing blessedness of the good angels, though its relation to the doctrine of their ‘confirmation’ has remained hidden in plain sight in the Bosworth–Toller Supplement; and the apparent non-crux ‘dome geswiðde’ has been correctly translated, but never explicated in relation to that doctrine. To bring these passages together along with the Christian-Latin sources of the doctrine and their reflexes in Old English prose is to confirm that all three Old English poets were saying, in different ways, in that the good angels had been ‘confirmed’.

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NOTES
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3 CCSL 48, 364 (cited by Doane, *Genesis A*, p. 230). All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.


7 De creatore et creatura, 107–12, cited from the Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus <http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doecorpus/> (emphasis mine), but I have corrected ‘or sorge’ to ‘orsorge’; for ‘<bliss>’ read ‘<blisse>’. I cannot construe the bracketed words <þa> <forleton> in this context. I have not been able to consult William Stoneman, ‘A critical edition of Ælfric’s translation of Alcuin’s Interrogationes Sigewulfi Presbiteri and of the related texts De creatore et creatura and De sex aetatibus huius seculi’ (unpub. Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1983).

8 Godden, ‘Catholic homilies I.1’, Fontes Anglo-Saxonici: A Register of Latin Sources Used by Anglo-Saxon Authors <http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk>.

9 Ed. B. Dombart and A. Kalb, CCSL 48 (Turnhout, 1955), p. 807. Grundy, Books and Grace: Ælfric’s Theology, King’s College London Medieval Studies 6 (London, 1991), p. 90 and n. 6, cites this passage in De ciuitate Dei but does not actually quote it. The sense of Augustine’s rather lapidary formulation here is that the good angels’ voluntary continuance (permansio) at the time of the fall of the rebel angels was rewarded with a permanent continuance of a different kind (one that no longer entailed any possibility of their not continuing) as well as with their certainty that it would be so. The qualifying tamquam suggests that the ‘reward’ (praemium) was no mere due compensation but a supererogatory gift.


11 ‘Caeli firmati sunt Verbo Domini. id est, hoc quod caelestis exercitus, ut cherubin et seraphin, praevaricante diablo, perstiterunt, non ex se, sed a Domino Patre et Verbo eius habuerunt’ (PL XCIII, col. 647; cited by Pope, Homilies of Ælfric, I, 201).


14 Ibid., p. 334: ‘restat, ut aut inpares fuerint, aut, si pares fuerunt, post istorum ruinam illis certa scientia suae sempiternae felicitatis accesserit.’


18 Paterius, Liber testamoniorum ueteris testamenti 2 (PL LXXIX, col. 585).

19 Liber ecclesiasticorum dogmatum 62, ed. F. Oehler, Corpus haereseologicum, vol. 1 (Berlin,
1856), p. 350. In cap. 61 Gennadius also quotes the passage from Gregory’s *Moralia* cited in n. 24 below.


21 *PL* XCVI, col. 1119.


24 *Moralia* XXXIV.vii.13, ed. Adriaen, CCSL 143B, 1742 (= *PL* LXXVI, col. 438): ‘Et quia cunctorum opifex deus scit ad bonorum custodiam bene uti etiam mala actione reproborum, lapsum cadentium uerit in profectum manentium; et unde punita est culpa superbientium, inde humilibus angelis et inuenta et *solidata sunt* augmenta meritorum. Iстis namque cadentibus, illis in munere datum est ut cadere omnino non possint. Sancti enim angeli, dum in istis naturae suae damna conspiciunt, in seipsis iam cautius robustius que consistunt’ (emphasis mine).

25 *Sententiae* X.12a–12b, ed. P. Cazier, CCSL 111 (Turnhout, 1998), pp. 32f. (= *PL* LXXXIII, cols 555f.): ‘Postquam apostatae angeli ceciderunt, caeteri perseverantia aeternae beatitudinis solidati sunt. Vnde et post caeli creationem, in principio repetitur: *Fiat firmamentum, et uocatum est firmamentum caelum*, nimirum ostendens quod post angelorum ruinam, hii qui permanerunt firmatem meruerunt aeternae perseverantiae et beatitudinis quam antea minus acceperant. Post diaboli deiectionem,angelorum sanctorum conlatam sanctitatis perseverantium et beatitudinem quam minus acceperant. Vnde oportet agnosci quod malorum iniquitas sanctorum seruat humilitati, quia unde mali corruunt, inde boni proficiunt.’ This is repeated in an addition to Bede’s *Octo quaestiones* (*PL* XCIII, cols 462f.). See also Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologiae* VII.v.30f., ed W. M. Lindsay, *Isidori Hispalensis Etymologiarum Libri XX*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1911). The passage from the *Etymologiae* is repeated in the Homiliary of St Père de Chartres in Cambridge, Pembroke College Library MS 25, fol. 127r (sermo 54), transcribed by Thomas N. Hall <http://www3.nd.edu/~pemb25/Website-tv/PDF/54.pdf>. In Cynewulf’s *Juliana*, lines 497ff., the demon captured by Juliana specifies that he has been causing sufferings ‘silþan furþum was / roder aræred ond ryne tungla, folde gefæstned’ (‘since the firmament was raised up and the course of the stars, the earth established’), which may allude to the tradition that the fall of the rebel angels took place precisely at that moment.

26 In *Catholic Homilies*, I.24, Ælfric draws on Gregory’s *Homiliae in Euangelia*, II.34, ‘quia uoluntatem eius continue in sua stabilitate custodiunt’ (ed. R. Étaix, CCSL 141 (Turnhout, 1999), p. 302) in referring to the troops of angels who maintain God’s will in
their ‘firmness’: ‘for þan ðe hi healdað on heora staþolfæstnysse. singallice his willan’ (ed. Clemoes, p. 372, lines 37–9). This source is noted by Malcolm Godden, Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary, EETS ss 18 (Oxford, 2000), p. 194. Subsequently (p. 374, line 108) Ælfric refers to the number of the elect being as large as the number ‘of confirmed angels’ (‘staþolfæstra engla’).

32 The definition in J. R. Clark Hall’s Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, 4th edn with Supplement by H. D. Meritt (Cambridge, 1962), s.v., is similar: ‘to strengthen, establish, support: use force against’.
39 Ibid., p. 502.
40 Battles, “Contending Throng” scenes and the comitatus ideal in Old English poetry, with special attention to The Battle of Maldon’, Studia Neophilologica, 83 (2011), 41–53.
43 Ó Carragáin, Ritual and the Rood: Liturgical Images and the Old English Poems of the Dream of the Rood Tradition (Toronto, 2005), p. 336 n. 69, cites previous scholars who have identified the ‘engel dryhtnes’ as Christ.
44 Ó Carragáin, Ritual and the Rood, p. 325. For a convenient summary of scholarly

45 Most editors and translators have taken þurh as a causal preposition, so that forðgesceaft characterizes how the angels (or ‘all’) became ‘fair’; Ó Carragáin (Ritual and the Rood, p. 325) takes it adverbially, and contrues fægere with ealle, translating ‘all fair things throughout creation looked on the angel of the Lord there …’ The word forðgesceaft has been variously understood in this context; my translation anticipates my understanding of the word in relation to the doctrine of the confirmation of the angels, and is consistent with the meanings given in the standard dictionaries (cited on p. 31).


47 Eduard Sievers, Altgermanische Metrik (Halle, 1893), p. 144.


52 Pope and Fulk, Eight Old English Poems, pp. 68f. (bold font in the original; I have omitted Fulk’s diacritics). In Fulk’s view, then, the five gems are the object of the angel’s gaze and are also what the poet characterizes as ‘fægere þurh forðgesceaft’.

53 As recently pointed out by Daniel Donoghue, ‘ealle’ is also problematic because of its alliteration in final position. See Donoghue, ‘Dream of the Rood 9b: a cross as an angel?’, in Old English Philology: Studies in Honour of R. D. Fulk, ed. Leonard Neidorf, Rafael J. Pascual, and Tom Shippey, Anglo-Saxon Studies 31 (Cambridge, 2016), pp. 276–91 (pp. 277–9). Donoghue suggests that ‘ealle’ might be taken as the first word of line 10a rather than the last word of line 9b, though he acknowledges that an expanded line 10b would involve metrical problems of its own.


55 Fulk seems to have abandoned this reading, however, for in his recent Old English grammar he prints the half-line as ‘ – beheoldon þær engeldryht – ’, returning to the reading of Dickins and Ross (see n. 48), though differently punctuated. Fulk, An Introductory Old English Grammar with an Anthology of Readings, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 463 (Tempe, Ariz., 2014). Fulk’s revised reading of the half-line was noted by Donoghue, ‘Dream of the Rood 9b’, p. 276.

56 For references see Ó Carragáin, Ritual and the Rood, p. 336 n. 69; as Ó Carragáin notes (p. 325) the scriptural basis is Isa. ix.6.

57 The gen. pl. engla dryhtnes/dríhtnes also occurs in Exodus line 559b, Christ and Satan lines 395a and 518b, and Solomon and Saturn line 462b. Prose examples in various cases can be found by searching the DOE Corpus.

Donoghue, ‘Dream of the Rood 9b’, p. 287. As an alternative, Donoghue refers to a suggestion by Fulk (Eight Old English Poems, p. 69) that fægere could be an adverb, with the subject of beheoldon being the spirits, living people, and all creation listed in lines 11f.: ‘By eternal decree they courteously/graciously/tenderly beheld there the engel of the Lord.’

Pope and Fulk, Eight Old English Poems, p. 68.


Pope, Seven Old English Poems, p. 64.

The Dream of the Rood, ed. Cook, p. 15.


OE fæger can of course refer to moral as well as physical beauty, as the DOE entry (sense 3) recognizes. In the case of the angels they are intimately related, as Satan’s perception of his own ‘fairness’ led to his moral and physical disfiguration.