Radical saints and conservative churches: Cynewulf's *Juliana* in its cultural context

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Radical saints and conservative churches: Cynewulf's *Juliana* in its cultural context

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Juliana, the saintly heroine of Cynewulf’s ninth-century poem that bears her name, fearlessly rebukes male authority figures, publicly defends her refusal to participate in a marriage she believes to be sinful, fights with a demon, and becomes the leader of a group of Christians. She is remarkably independent and authoritative, denying any obligation to follow cultural, legal, or familial expectations that conflict with her understanding of her Christian faith. Far from censuring her radicalism, Cynewulf’s poem idealizes and elevates it, celebrating Juliana’s martyrdom and status as an influential saint in the medieval canon.

Juliana’s story is by no means an anomaly, but instead belongs to a large body of similar literature: the very popular hagiographies about virgin martyr saints. The early medieval church actively promoted such stories, and people actively listened to and appreciated them. As a whole, scholars note this genre for its repetition of characters, action, and themes (Jones viii, McInerney 50, Magennis 173, Sanok 1-2).

Given the repetitious nature of the genre, I will use Juliana, notable for its length and its poetic treatment of the subject, to take a closer look at precisely what these stories are repeating. For a culture in which women were denied the ability to make legal contracts, such as marriage (Bitel 71), the genre’s repetition is quite radical: the stereotyped characters are all young women who, because of their faith in God, boldly deny male authority, speak assertively in public situations, and claim the right to manage their own lives. The stories also include intense verbal sparring between the saint and her male persecutors and always end with the vindication of the saint’s transgressive behavior. The stories’ themes stress an independent, unmediated practice of the Christian faith.
Paradoxically, none of these often-repeated elements are likely to be appreciated, in real life, by the ninth-century church, the same institution that promoted such stories. Rather than independent, unmediated faith, the church supported faith that was mediated and communal, where people relied on instruction and intercession rather than struck out on their own. An apparent disconnect thus emerges: how could the same church simultaneously promote stories about radical saints and advocate a practice of faith that was fundamentally conservative?

I propose four ways through which the church could potentially reconcile this apparent doctrinal contradiction. One is to emphasize Juliana’s status as a saint rather than a common believer. Another possibility is the promotion of “legitimate” authority in the face of the “illegitimate” authority of Viking attackers. Yet a third perspective is to emphasize the way saints as a whole interact with people on earth, and finally, to emphasize the way in which people on earth can maintain a proper relationship with heaven. These four areas potentially allow the church to interpret Juliana’s independent, unmediated faith in a way which allowed it to simultaneously promote her independence and its own communal, mediated faith.

My method in pursuing this question has been to study the text and scholarly criticism of Juliana in tandem with secondary sources about the poem and Cynewulf’s cultural context. These sources include information about the church in Anglo-Saxon society, women in Anglo-Saxon society, Anglo-Saxon culture and history, and hagiography, both as a genre and as regards to individual saints.
CHAPTER 2: THE POEM AND ITS CONTEXT

Beyond the four poems which bear his runic signature, Cynewulf left no record of his life. However, from the language used in his poems, most scholars believe he wrote in the early part of the ninth century, before the Danish invasion of England (Grose & McKenna 85, Modwenne 4, Boenig 48, Bremmer 205-206). Linguistic grounds also lead scholars to postulate an Anglian (Grose & McKenna 85) or Mercian (Boenig 85, Bremmer 205-206) location for his activity. Since Cynewulf uses Latin prose accounts of Juliana’s life to compose his poems, he was evidently educated and thus probably a cleric (Grose and McKenna 85). Nothing else is known about Juliana’s author.

Juliana itself exists in only one manuscript: the Exeter Book, which Bishop Leofwine gave to the Exeter Cathedral library in 1072 (Boenig 53). The Exeter Book contains a wide variety of both sacred and secular texts, including Cynewulf’s Christ II, other well-known, anonymous poems such as The Wanderer and The Wife’s Lament, and nearly one hundred riddles. Juliana’s manuscript contains two gaps, but comparing Cynwulf’s work with the probable Latin source he used reveals that most likely only a single page of text is missing in each place.

Cynewulf used a Latin work, the Passion S. Iulianae or Acta Sanctae Julianne, as the source for his poem. These works exist in many versions, and while Cynewulf’s exact source is unknown, Michael Lapidge argues convincingly that “a manuscript copy of the Passio S. Iulianae very similar to, and possibly identical with, the exemplar used by Cynewulf is extant in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale De France, lat 10861” (147). Whatever the exact Latin manuscript may be, however, it is highly likely that Cynewulf did not follow
his source slavishly, but rather modified it according to his own purposes, changing the focus and personalities he found in the *Passio* while remaining true to its basic narrative structure.

Although other Old English poems include lists of virgin martyr saints and references to their exploits, no other Old English poem focuses on the life of one virgin martyr saint as *Juliana* does. The three other extant Old English texts to focus on this kind of saint are the prose accounts of Agatha, Agnes, and Lucy (Donovan 4), though many other accounts of such saints would have been available in Latin during Cynewulf’s time.

Evidence for a historical Juliana, at least one who did the acts attributed to her, is lacking. The earliest Latin references to her name are quite brief, for example “in Campania at Cuma, the deposition of St Juliana” from the Echternach recension of the *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* (Lapidge 148). The earliest accounts are also somewhat unclear as to Juliana’s place of interment, the date of her death, and even her gender. The above version of the *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* celebrates Juliana’s martyrdom on 16 February, while two other early recensions from Bern and Wolfenbuttel make no mention of Juliana on that date, but do record the martyrdom of a St Julian (male). These recensions also record a St Julian (male) as martyred on 13 February in Nicomedia (Lapidge 149). According to Lapidge, it is likely that “the redactor of the Echternach recension has turned a male martyr of Nicomedia into a female St. Juliana. It is difficult not to think that the hagiographical fiction of the transport of Juliana’s remains from Nicomedia to Cuma was concocted to explain the coincidence in the Echternach recension of a Juliana martyred at Nicomedia and a Juliana interred at Cuma” (149).

Such shaky evidence regarding even the existence of a woman named Juliana martyred at a specific time and place, much less regarding the stories of her rejecting pagan
marriage offers and fighting demons, did not at first affect her status as a saint. According to David Rollason, “with few exceptions, there was no absolute definition of a saint in the Anglo-Saxon era” (3). The veneration and identification of saints was often a regional affair and often had grass-roots beginnings. The official definitions of and requirements for sainthood were not established until 1234 in the decretals of Pope Gregory IX (Rollason 3). Whereas papal canonization did not apply to past saints, Juliana’s saintly status did decline over time due to the insubstantial nature of the records of her passion. Current works listing saints often describe her account as “unreliable” (Farmer 274) or “legendary” (McBrien 108).

Juliana can be roughly divided into three parts: conflict regarding Juliana’s marriage, Juliana’s fight with a demon, and Juliana’s final trials and martyrdom.

In part one, Cynewulf reveals that Juliana’s story takes place in “the days of Maximian” (Kennedy 2) (in dagum…/Maximianes [2b-3a]), locating the story in the early fourth-century Roman empire. Maximian is a violent pagan ruler who actively seeks out churches to destroy and Christians to kill. One of his prefects (a position of great, though localized, military and civil power), Elusius, lusts after a young virgin named Juliana who, unbeknownst to him, is a Christian. Elusius approaches Africanus, Juliana’s father, and the two men arrange a betrothal without consulting Juliana.

But Juliana has strong opinions on this subject, as she wishes to remain a virgin in the service of Christ and believes marrying a pagan would be a sin. On the way to the wedding, Juliana publicly tells Elusius that no matter what he does to her, she will never consent to marry him unless he becomes a Christian.

Elusius, angered and humiliated, goes to Africanus and complains about Juliana’s behavior. Africanus tries to convince Juliana to recant her Christianity and marry Elusius,
but Juliana boldly and decisively refuses to comply. Africanus scourges her and turns her over to Eleusius, who also tries to convince her to recant and submit to marriage with him. Before a large crowd, Juliana confidently rejects Eleusius and his gods and defends her decision to remain loyal to her own vastly superior God. Eleusius retaliates by hanging Juliana naked from a tree, having her scourged for six hours, and then putting her in prison.

In part two, a demon disguised as an angel visits Juliana in prison. The demon tries to convince her to worship Eleusius’ gods, but Juliana cries out to God for help. God tells her to grab the demon and make him tell her about himself. Juliana does so. The first gap in the manuscript inconveniently occurs here. When the manuscript resumes, the demon is in the midst of reciting the litany of his past sins. Juliana continues to question him regarding who sent him to her, how he works harm on righteous people, and how he tempts people. The demon, though he protests, must answer all her questions, detailing his past sins and temptation methods. He acknowledges Juliana as someone who is “bold in combat beyond all womankind, so that thou has thus firmly bound me with fetters, wholly powerless to resist” (Kennedy 10) (wigþrist ofer eall wifa cyn,/þæt þu mec þus fæste fetrum gebunde,/æghwæs orwigne [432a-434a]). Finally Eleusius calls for Juliana. She exits the prison, dragging the demon behind her. A crowd witnesses this feat, after which she lets the demon go.

The second gap in the manuscript occurs before part three, which resumes when an angel of God protects Juliana from Eleusius’ attempt to burn her alive. The angel also protects Juliana from being boiled in molten lead. When Eleusius sees he cannot torture Juliana, he blasphemes his gods and declares that he will have Juliana beheaded with a
sword. Juliana receives this sentence with joy, since it means her time of trouble on earth is nearly over.

On the way to her beheading, Juliana teaches a recently converted crowd about how to live a life of Christian victory, mainly by living at peace with each other and eschewing sin. Then Juliana is beheaded and goes to bliss in heaven. A crowd joyfully accompanies her body to its interment. Eleusius, on the other hand, puts out to sea with his warriors, where his ship wrecks. Eleusius and his band are drowned and go to misery in hell.

At this point, Cynewulf brings the reader’s focus from the fourth century to the ninth by beginning to speak in first person. He applies Juliana’s story to himself specifically, asking her to intercede with God on his behalf, because he is afraid his sin will keep him out of heaven. He also asks anyone who reads the poem to pray for his soul, and finishes with a prayer for God to grant him mercy after death.
CHAPTER 3: JULIANA’S FAITH

Juliana grounds her rejection of cultural, legal, and familial expectations on an individualistic understanding and practice of Christianity. Because she believes God’s authority surpasses any earthly authority, Juliana confidently insists on her right to behave according to her often-unpopular beliefs. In this way she becomes a cultural anomaly, *Juliana contra mundo*, someone whose individual interpretation of Christianity cannot be quashed.

Juliana first demonstrates her religious independence when she refuses to agree to the marriage her father arranges for her, a refusal which puts her at odds with her culture. “Then was the maid,” Cynewulf writes, “after the will of her father, betrothed unto this rich man” (Kennedy 2) (Ða wæs sio fæmne mid hyre fæder willan/welegum biweddad [32a-33a]). In Juliana’s culture, her father’s will takes precedence over hers in the question of her betrothal. Marriage, in the viewpoints of Eleusius and Africanus respectively, is either a matter of physical fulfillment of lust or of securing one’s family’s economic stability and social connection. Juliana’s input is not necessary for the fulfillment of either stipulation. Since marriage is a contract between men, Eleusius and Africanus see themselves as within their cultural rights to dictate Juliana’s actions in this area.

Although doing so puts her at odds with her culture, Juliana rejects the planned marriage because of her religious beliefs. Obedience to God rather than cultural expectations is her primary concern; she does not wish to marry Eleusius because she is “greatly minded that she would preserve her purity unspotted of any sin for the love of Christ” (Kennedy 2) (hogde georne/þæt hire mægðhad mana gehwylces/fore Cristes lufan clæne geheolde [29b-31a]). In Juliana’s opinion, submission to the betrothal, which would involve marrying a
pagan and giving up her virginity, represents the surrendering of a precious relationship, “the love of Christ,” in exchange for a worthless relationship, one which spots, sullies and debases. In addition, Juliana believes submitting to such a marriage would be “sin,” something which goes against the direct commands of God. The issue becomes one of authority: Juliana must choose to obey either her God or her culture. When faced with this choice, Juliana takes the independent path of defying her culture in favor of obeying God, and refuses to marry Eleusius unless he converts to Christianity.

As she makes this decision, Juliana acts in a completely independent, unmediated way in both her thoughts and deeds. She asks no one for advice; not the church, not an ecclesiastical authority figure, not even a friend. Her knowledge of how she ought to act seems to come from God himself. In this way Cynewulf presents, in a positive light, a Christian who boldly practices independent faith. Culture cannot bind Juliana; she recognizes no authority other than her own interpretation of divine authority.

Juliana also rejects the authority of the law. In her community, Maximian, “the profane king” (arleas cyning [4a]), suppresses Christianity in an empire-wide campaign in which his men “throughout the world roused up strife, slew Christian men, destroyed churches, and poured out the holy blood of righteous worshippers of God upon the grassy plain” (Kennedy 2) (se geond middangeard./…eahtnyssse ahof - /cwealde Cristne men, circan fylde./geat on græswong godhergendra,/ hæþen hildfruma, haligra blod,/ ryhtfremmendra [3b-8a]). The state’s suppression of Christianity is violent and sweeping. Not even Christians who keep a low profile are safe from persecution, since the state actively “roused up strife,” while those who publicly claim Christianity will likely face a death sentence.
Nonetheless, Juliana does not let the law dictate her religious beliefs, but instead declares her non-compliance “in the assembly of men” (Kennedy 2) (on wera mengu [45b]). Her most dangerous opponent in this assembly is her fiancé himself, who is “a rich man of noble lineage, a mighty prefect. And he did wield it over squadrons, and ever defended the land” (Kennedy 2) (Sum wæs æhtwelig æþeles cynnes/rice gerefa. Rondburgum weold,/eard weardade oftast symle [18a-20b]). Eleusius represents the government which forbids Christianity. As a noble, he must consent at least tacitly to the suppression of Christianity, and as a military leader he has in all likelihood sent his soldiers to work violence against Christians. Because Eleusius is also a prefect, a position of civil as well as military authority, he must judge and enforce the law, including laws restricting the practice of Christianity.

Through her public declaration of her faith, Juliana simultaneously upholds God’s authority and places herself in a very dangerous position.

Juliana’s refusal to submit to legal expectations also highlights her faith’s independence. No one supports or encourages her when she stands up in the “assembly of men.” She knows about other Christian martyrs and may be encouraged by their example, but has no near-by support system or ecclesiastical structure to guide her actions. When she asserts her right to break the law, Juliana again makes decisions based on her individual relationship with God and her faith in his ultimate authority. She will do nothing she believes is sin, no matter who commands her or what the cost may be.

By refusing to marry the man her father approves, Juliana also violates her culture’s accepted principles of family loyalty. The match, by the standards of probably everyone in Nicomedia except Juliana, is a very good one. Eleusius enjoys great wealth, high social position, and political power. He will amply provide for his wife, and through such an
alliance, his wife’s family will increase in security and status. To most Nicomedians, Africanus’ consent to the betrothal must seem the conduct of a reasonable, responsible father. Africanus appeals to family loyalty when he confronts Juliana after her refusal to marry Eleusius. “Thou art my daughter, the dearest and sweetest in my heart,” he tells her, “the only one upon earth, light of mine eyes, Juliana” (Kennedy 4) (Ďu eart dohtor min seo dyreste/ond seo sweteste in sefan minum,/ange for eorþan, minre eagna leoh, Iuliana [93a-96a]). By emphasizing his love for her, Africanus tries to persuade Juliana to comply with his wishes and do something she believes to be sin. Surely, he suggests, she will recognize his authority and will not do anything to damage their relationship.

But Juliana resists her father’s emotional pressure. Instead she declares, “Never will I consent to the alliance of this prince until that he worship God more earnestly than he aforetime did, and love with sacrifices Him who created light, heaven, and earth” (Kennedy 4) (Næfre ic þæs þeodnes þafian wille/ mægrædenne, nemne he mægna god/geornor bigonge þonne he gen dyde,/lufige mid lacum þone þe leoh gescop,/heofon ond eorðan [108a-112a]). Juliana bases her rejection of familial demands on God’s ultimate authority, an authority she highlights by emphasizing his creative power. How, her answer implies, can she disobey the divine creator in order to obey her human father? Her actions must reflect her ultimate, rather than temporal, loyalties.

This situation emphasizes Juliana’s independence because she must reject the counsel of those nearest to her. She cannot turn to her family for advice and help, even though her culture has trained her to see the world from a viewpoint mediated by her father. Because Juliana must shun earthly advice and lacks anyone to give her spiritual advice, she
approaches both God and culture on her own initiative, independent of any one else’s mediation.

These three expectations, culture, law, and familial relationships, support and bolster each other, presenting a formidable and largely united front of power which Juliana faces utterly alone, leaning on no system, organization, or teacher for guidance or support. Juliana’s independent defiance of these forces, in the absence of outside support, highlights the strength of her beliefs about God’s authority and her own right to directly interpret God’s commands.
CHAPTER 4: THE GENRE OF INDEPENDENT SAINTS

Juliana’s independent faith is by no means singular to her. The hagiographical canon brims with saints whose faith demonstrates strikingly similar characteristics. In fact, one of the first things many scholars note regarding hagiography is its repetition of themes, ideas and actions. This assessment certainly rings true if hagiography is restricted to stories about virgin martyr saints, the category to which Juliana belongs.

The scholarly assertion that legends of virgin martyr saints are repetitious occurs so often that it becomes repetitious itself. According to Kathleen Jones, the accounts of women saints “are often so stereotyped that they make dreary reading” (viii). She sums up the virgin martyr saint genre with “Basically, the story is that of a young Christian girl who refuses to marry or to sacrifice to the Roman gods. She is insulted, and attempts are made to violate her. When these fail she is subjected to horrifying tortures…before dying for her faith” (39). Clearly, Juliana’s story fits well into this basic narrative outline.

Not all scholars take such a dismal view of the repetition in such stories, but even those who view such stories as fascinating and important acknowledge that the repetition exists. Common areas of repetition are the verbal sparring that takes place between the saint and her male persecutor (McInerney 50), the threat to the saint’s chastity (Magennis 173), the way the saint is protected from tortures (Magennis 173), and the way “all of these women designate their virginity as the preeminent sign of their faith and openly flout masculine authority in its defense” (Sanok 1-2). The things that happen to Juliana and her responses to them are thus not singular to her, but are so common as to become tropes of the genre.

In this way, most, if not all, of the virgin martyr saints revered in Anglo-Saxon England share Juliana’s steadfast independence, brashness, and refusal to submit to cultural
expectations which conflict with religious loyalties. Direct examples of such similarity are evident in the lives of saints Agatha, Agnes, and Lucy. These prose lives, found in the late tenth century *Aelfric’s Lives of Saints*, are the only extant Old English records of virgin martyr saints besides *Juliana*, although many more contemporary examples exist in Latin texts.

Agatha’s story follows Juliana’s both in narrative structure and ideology. Agatha, a young Roman virgin, steadfastly resists the pagan ruler Quintianus’ sexual advances and pressure to serve his gods. Quintianus torments her by putting her in a brothel, cutting off one of her breasts, and burning her. Christ miraculously protects and heals her until she eventually dies by giving up her spirit (Donovan 38-43).

Likewise Agnes, at thirteen, refuses to marry the son of the pagan Roman retainer Simpronius or serve his gods. Simpronius consigns Agnes to a brothel, where she raises a man from the dead, survives an attempt to burn her alive, and is eventually killed with a sword (Donovan 46-55).

In the same vein, Lucy resists the sexual advances of the noble Pascasius and his urging that she worship pagan gods. Pascasius condemns Lucy to a brothel; however, God makes her so heavy no one can drag her into it. God also protects her from attempts to burn her alive, until Lucy too is finally killed with a sword (Donovan 92-95).

All of these women participate in intense verbal sparring with their male persecutors. Both Agatha and Agnes practice their faith entirely independently, claiming no church or spiritual mentor save Christ. While Lucy does have a Christian mother and a church to attend, she too takes direct leadership regarding Pascasius, rejecting culture and law in favor of an independent practice of faith.
These stories and others like them demonstrate that Juliana’s independent faith is not an anomaly but part of a common pattern. What this repetitive genre repeats ideologically are themes of faith that is not contingent on the church for its authority and which is coupled with instant, unmediated obedience to God’s commands.
CHAPTER 5: THE RECEPTION OF INDEPENDENT SAINTS

Historical evidence reveals that stories from this genre were both widely popular and officially sanctioned by the church of Cynewulf’s time. Agatha had a cult of followers in England as early as the late seventh or early eighth century. Both Bede and Aldhelm praise her, and over fifty litanies from before 1100 mention her (Donovan 37). Agnes too had a cult of followers in England around the late seventh or early eighth century. Aldhelm and Bede honor her in poems, and many martyrologies, litanies, and calendars record her name (Donovan 46). In addition, Bede’s eighth century martyrology mentions Lucy, as do the ninth-century Old English Martyrology, Aldhelm’s Carmen de Virginitate, many litanies, and many calendars (Donovan 91).

Juliana’s story is no exception to this widespread popularity. Lapidge, who has studied the source material for Cynewulf’s poem extensively, asserts, “St Juliana was commemorated in Anglo-Saxon England from the very earliest period. The commemorations, almost invariably on 16 February, would seem to derive from the Martyrologium Hieronymianum, a copy of which was brought to England by Augustine in 597” (149). Lapidge speculates that the English chose to venerate Juliana in particular from the thousands of saints discussed in the Martyrologium Hieronymianum because of the influence of Abbot Hadrian, who came to England in 670 and had previously served as abbot of a monastery in Nisidia, which was only a few miles from Cumae, the city where, traditionally, Juliana’s remains were interred (149). The introduction of Juliana’s cult to England thus seems to have occurred early on, centuries before Cynewulf’s time.
Looking forward, Bede also supports Juliana’s story in his early eighth-century Latin *Martyrology*. He presents a fairly lengthy entry on Juliana’s feast day of 16 February, writing,

And in Cumae, the commemorative festival of St. Juliana, virgin: who, in the time of emperor Maximianus, having first been beaten and seriously afflicted by her father Africanus, and having been beaten, naked, with rods and hung up by her hair, and drenched from her head down with molten lead by the prefect Eolesius, whom she had taken as her husband, and having been taken back again into prison where she openly contested with the devil; and having been called back out again, she vanquished the torments of torture wheels, the flames of fire, a boiling-hot pot and accomplished martyrdom by the cutting off of her head. (Bede 181)

Bede’s account is quite similar to Cynewulf’s, though Cynewulf expands greatly on the details. Such an account by Bede demonstrates that Juliana’s story was of interest for the English people and indicates the stable nature of the legend with which Cynewulf worked.

Juliana’s legend remained popular after Cynewulf’s time as well, as her story is retold in *The Golden Legend* (c. 1260) and in the thirteenth-century *Seinte Juliene*.

This evidence argues that stories about virgin martyr saints, their individualistic, unmediated faith included, circulated widely and received official church support in England before, during, and after Cynewulf’s time. Such stories had an important and accepted place in ninth-century worship and doctrine.

In addition to receiving official support from the church, hagiographies like Juliana’s also appealed to diverse audiences. According to Leslie A. Donovan, “with over a thousand texts surviving in medieval manuscripts written either in Latin or in vernacular versions,
saints’ lives were possibly the most popular literary genre of medieval Europe” (5). While most scholars agree that the genre was one of the “‘bestsellers’ of the Middle Ages” (Donovan 5), less scholarly consensus exists regarding the target audience for such accounts, since both verbal and textual retellings of the stories were widespread. Such evidence indicates that many types of people probably revered stories like *Juliana*.

Hagiographical records indicate that both men and women read accounts of saints’ lives, even those of women saints. Although Shari Horner writes “most scholars believe that the Old English version of the legend of *Juliana* was written to inspire an Anglo-Saxon female religious audience” (659), she cites no sources for her assertion and I have been unable to find evidence for this claim elsewhere. While some scholars, such as Donovan, do note that “the heroic strength of spirit of women saints was a source of personal and public inspiration to medieval women” (1), they do not exclude men from the readership of such poems, arguing instead that “collections of saints’ lives from the Middle Ages almost always present the holy biographies of both men and women, suggesting that their compilers saw no reason to distinguish certain texts for specific audiences” (Donovan 13). The *Exeter Book* is certainly an example of this mixed type of collection, and thus a wide audience of both men and women seems likely for *Juliana*.

Scholarly consensus is less united in determining whether the primary audience for hagiographical stories was educated or uneducated. Rollason suggests an educated, ecclesiastical audience as the most likely for early medieval hagiographies. He points out that many hagiographical texts were dedicated to churchmen and claims, “it is fairly clear from the contents that [texts which lack formal dedications] were intended for religious
communities” (83). Uneducated, lay people, Rollason asserts, would have had limited access to the texts and less reason to connect with them.

Magennis, on the other hand, suggests a time-line approach regarding hagiography’s target audience. “Saints’ lives,” he points out, “belong…to the world of Latin textuality, and their first audience in Anglo-Saxon England was of people with training in Latin” (163-64), that is, ecclesiastics. However, Magennis goes on to assert, “As Christianity developed in Anglo-Saxon England, stories from the corpus of Latin saints’ lives began to be adapted and translated into Old English, thus becoming available to a wider audience” (165), namely, lay Christians. Time, then, is a potential factor in determining audience, and by Cynewulf’s time, the trend to translate or retell saints’ lives in Old English had already begun.

This wider audience Magennis mentions is the one which the majority of scholars believe to be hagiography’s primary target audience: the largely uneducated, illiterate, yet Christian lay masses. Scholars locate hagiography’s appeal to illiterate people in the fact that its principles are easily grasped and one need not know a great deal of theology or history to understand it (Peter Blair 272, 279) and that “the primacy of the dramatic deed” results in a good story that can be appreciated by laypeople and that works to strengthen community values (Heffernan 5). In addition, laypeople familiar with secular heroic tales would have been attracted to the way Juliana’s narrative structure reflects such tales (Bremmer 208). Largely uneducated lay Christians, then, were likely included in the audience which would have been familiar with Juliana’s story. Given these facts, the audience which was familiar with and influenced by Juliana was probably varied and wide.

The picture of hagiography in Anglo-Saxon England which emerges from the preceding information is one of a repetitious genre that offers many positive examples of
women who practice independent, unmediated faith and who deny demands of culture, law, and family when those demands contradict their faith. The church endorses such examples and offers them to a wide, mixed audience which is apparently encouraged to and willing to accept such women as paragons of virtue.

But what is the church like in England during the early ninth century? Is it, as the evidence above would suggest, an institution which values independent, unmediated faith? Ironically, the answer to that question is a solid “no.”
CHAPTER 6: THE CHURCH IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

The type of Christianity promoted by the church in Cynewulf’s day valued conformity, centralized power, and a mediated religious experience rather than independently derived faith. For Cynewulf’s culture, unlike Juliana’s, Christianity was decidedly the establishment, and as such it was unlikely to promote independence or radicalism.

By the ninth century, Christianity had been firmly rooted in England for more than two hundred years, having arrived in 597 through a mission led by the Roman Augustine (Bonner 28) and also, in 635, through one led by the Irish bishop Aidan (Bonner 30-31). Although the conversion of England’s small kingdoms from Germanic religions to Christianity took place sporadically and over a period of time, Christianity soon became entrenched as England’s official religion. Christian missionaries to England treated paganism in a largely assimilative rather than destructive manner. This method derived from the teaching of Pope Gregory himself, who instructed Augustine,

I have decided after long deliberation about the English people, namely that the idol temples of that race should by no means be destroyed, but only the idols in them. Take holy water and sprinkle it in these shrines, build altars and place relics in them. For if the shrines are well, it is essential that they should be changed from the worship of devils to the service of the true God. (qtd. in Hylson-Smith 145)

In this way, while the church in England discouraged paganism itself, it also pursued a policy that worked with the existing religious structure at least to some extent, a policy which perhaps helped smooth the transition from Germanic religions to Christianity.

This focus on assimilation rather than outright destruction succeeded. According to John Blair, “from early in the eighth century, everyone was assumed to be Christian in the
formal sense that infant baptism was taken for granted” (161). Also, although remnants of paganism remained in charms and some practices of the common people throughout the medieval period (Bonner 26), residual Germanic paganism as a force was not something the medieval church feared. Blair writes,

Bede seems to take it for granted that by his own day…paganism had died out: certainly he treats the cycle of the pagan year…as something which the English had put firmly behind them. Thereafter no original English text gives any indication that worship of the old gods was a sin available to be committed, with the single exception that Ecgberht’s ‘Dialogue’ of c. 750 includes ‘adoring idols’ in a rather formulaic list of crimes barring ordination to the priesthood. (168)

Both of these situations, though of eighth century origin, remain true in Cynewulf’s time a century later.

In the years more closely preceding Cynewulf’s activity, Christianity continued to consolidate its position as the sanctioned and promoted religion in England. By 735, the church had implemented a diocesan system over England, established many monastic communities for both men and women, and begun sending missionaries to Germanic tribes living in continental Europe (Bonner 37-38). According to John Blair, “The experiment of drawing circles of three-to-five mile radius around the minsters of some sample areas suggests that by 800 most people who lived in England, outside the highland zone, were within what they would have considered a reasonable walking distance from a minster” (152). The presence of these minsters, or churches connected with a monastic establishments, indicate that by the time Cynewulf wrote Juliana, Christianity was an
everyday part of the English landscape. The people of his community, of whatever status, were at least nominally Christians.

Although, following the eighth-century work of the influential Theodore, Wilford, St Cuthbert, Bede, and Aldhelm, the church produced no great leaders until after the Viking invasion, it was by no means weak (Hylson-Smith 197). Rather, it greatly influenced both the political and spiritual landscape of Cynewulf’s time.

With its widespread placement of personnel and centers of activity, the church wielded great political power. For example, in the late eighth century, Offa of Mercia, the most important king in the south of England, worked to gain power over the church by creating new sees at the expense of the existing see of Canterbury. Mercia was one of the likely places for Cynewulf’s activity, and the two may even have been alive at the same time. Although Offa’s wishes prevailed for a while, the church rallied its defenses and caused Offa’s scheme to fail. According to Kenneth Hylson-Smith, “The attempt of a powerful king to intrude in the affairs of the church had been a manifest and dismal failure. The message was plain, that for the benefit of both, the state and the church should work together in harmony” (201). The church also influenced legal codes and jurisdiction (Hylson-Smith 215), demonstrating that it used its political power to cause conformity to its doctrine.

The church also promoted conformity through its administration of the sacraments and penance. Those who lived near churches or monasteries were expected to attend church there, even though the service would be said in Latin and likely would be unintelligible to them. They were also expected to partake in mass, confess to the priests, and accept proper penances for their faults (Frantzen 81). These institutions allowed the church to promote a
mediated religious experience among their constituents and to influence their morals and behavior.

With its extensive, interconnected power structure, touching on such diverse areas as education, art, law, and spirituality, the ninth-century church was not likely to approve of or accept independent, radical behavior of the type Juliana evinces. Rather, it preferred its people conform to its standards and expectations.

Another factor which complicates this issue of church support for an apparently divergent type of faith is the difficulty which the church of this time faced in the education of its laity. The transmission of Christian doctrine to the largely illiterate lay people, even when they were nominally Christian, was a difficult task. The church had limited resources and a limited number of qualified people to send to teach. It also faced problems deriving from the people’s illiteracy, short life span, and difficult, subsistence-style livelihoods (Hylson-Smith 216). Also, according to Hylson-Smith, “Most of the people of England in the seventh and eighth centuries lived in the countryside. There were few towns, and these were mainly very small. In such a situation there were countless communities where there was no provision for Christian witness or worship” (205). While the presence of minsters may have mitigated this problem, the minsters were still unable to provide adequate teaching for all the laypeople.

Even in locations providing for Christian worship, the success of the church in educating the masses was patchy at best. Although upper-class, literate Anglo-Saxons have left records of prayers and devotions (Bonner 39), the religious feelings of the illiterate person are difficult to determine. Gerald Bonner speculates, “If devout, the peasant would know his way about the service and understand its various stages, even if the words remained a mystery. If he were lucky enough to have as his priest one capable of teaching and
preaching effectively…he might have had a good knowledge of the doctrines of the religion which he professed” (39). But many were not particularly devout, and many did not have a priest who was capable of teaching and preaching effectively. The picture that emerges from this situation is that of a church which is adamant that its doctrine is correct and which both desires and demands conformity, but which nevertheless has difficulty spreading its specific beliefs to all corners of England.

This situation of the patchy religious education of the laity in England complicates the contrast between the type of Christianity promoted in *Juliana* and that promoted by the Anglo-Saxon church because even though these two types of Christianity seem so dissimilar, the stories of the saints’ lives were one of the most popular teaching tools used among the laity. If, indeed, saints’ lives were as popular with the common people as the scholarly evidence suggests, then one must ask, since the church seems to value conformity and obedience in its members, and since it has difficulty attaining this conformity and obedience in many areas, why would it promote stories which privilege individual faith and action rather than stories which promote conformity and faith largely mediated by the church?

Further complicating the issue is that Christianized Anglo-Saxon culture as a whole would have directly supported some of the very institutions against which Juliana rebels. For example, Cynewulf’s audience would have been no strangers to arranged marriages. Sandy Bardsley, writing on women in the Middle Ages, asserts that “medieval marriages, particularly those of the elite, were typically arranged by parents in accordance with the best interests of the family as a whole…a woman’s consent was necessary in theory, but in practice it was often taken for granted” (147, 148). Perhaps women in Cynewulf’s audience may not have been pressured to marry pagans, but, like Juliana, they might have wished to
eschew marriage, perhaps even to pursue a religious vocation, and face objections from their families. Juliana’s independent response to the situation of her arranged marriage is thus potentially directly applicable to everyday Anglo-Saxon life. Even though the church would not have supported non-consensual marriages, and though having a priest officiate at marriage ceremonies did not become mandatory until 1076 (Todd 50), the church would still largely have supported arranged marriages, and cultural pressure to adhere to one’s family’s commands would have been strong.

Pressure to conform to kinship expectations in relation to marriage, especially for women, was also a significant factor in Christianized Anglo-Saxon English culture. According to Lisa M. Bitel, “Assumptions of the laws emphasized the importance of family and the negotiated nature of laws, at the expense of women’s public participation. Family was the premier property-owning, oath-swearing and decision-making unit” (70). Women were not authorized to make legally binding contracts, such as marriage, without permission from their male authority figures, such as fathers or husbands (Bitel 71). Cynewulf’s audience would have been normalized to the idea that one’s basic loyalty ought to be to one’s family and that conformity to the desires of one’s family, especially for women, was right and good. The church would largely have supported such legislation and tradition, a situation which again makes the church’s promotion of Juliana seem incongruous.

In all these ways, the ninth-century English church proves itself to be a powerful entity which influences and supervises multiple aspects of people’s lives. It is not interested in diversity of opinion or in cultural rebels, but rather in maintaining conformity and the status quo. It does not seem like an institution that would gladly have supported stories about the independent, rebellious Juliana.
CHAPTER 7: HOW THE CHURCH AND JULIANA INTERRELATE

The fact is, however, that the church did promote Juliana’s story, and thus must have been able to reconcile her apparent independence with its apparent conservatism. I see four ways in which the church could have promoted Juliana’s story, and others like hers, without promoting her radicalism: emphasizing Juliana’s status as a saint, highlighting “legitimate” versus “illegitimate” authority, explaining the way saints in heaven relate to people on earth, and explaining the way people on earth ought to relate to heaven.

Juliana’s Status as a Saint

Juliana’s status as a saint, and the hierarchy such a designation implies, allows the church to use her independent practice of faith to promote conformity among lay Christians. Juliana’s individualistic faith and authority are permissible to her because as a saint she exercises exceeding virtue and enjoys a special relationship with God. Ordinary Christians, however, do neither, and therefore they are not authorized to exercise individualistic faith.

Juliana is exemplary in her dedication to Christianity and virtue. Nothing can shake her from her devotion to doing right, a character trait she shares with most other saints. According to Donovan,

In most cases, the saintly subjects of the early holy biographies were idealized figures, superior in every way to the average Christian in the Middle Ages. With a few notable exceptions, the personal history of the saints embodies the noblest ideals of the culture…Perfect in faith, wisdom, heritage, and the force of their individual wills, [saints] are heroes in the epic of salvation. (10)
As a saint, then, Juliana is human, but she is also more than human; her life reflects a wholesale exemplarity that is beyond the reach of the ordinary Christian. Because she is fundamentally different from average believers, different rules apply to her.

Cynewulf portrays Juliana’s saintly virtue as something so intensely part of her that it manifests itself physically. In contemporary artwork, saints are often depicted as crowned with a glowing halo even while they are on earth (Images). This halo signifies their purity and holiness. While I could find no images of Juliana specifically, Cynewulf’s poem itself demonstrates that Juliana, while still on earth, shines with an unearthly light. Juliana’s inner light is evident to Eleusius, who tells her, “My sweetest sunlight, Juliana, what radiance thou hast” (Kennedy 5) (Min se swetesta sunnan scima./Iuliana. Hwæt, þu glæm hafast [166a-167b]). The crowd also recognizes it, since Juliana appears to them to be “sunbright damsel” (Kennedy 6) (seo sunsciene [229a]). Juliana even appears as a “fair candle of splendor” to the demon (Kennedy 10) (seo vlitescyne wuldres condel [454]). Such radiance, like a halo, derives from Juliana’s near-sinless saintly status, serving to visually set her apart from ordinary believers. Pat Belanoff, who notes that Old English poetry describes many women as “shining,” argues that “Cynewulf’s Juliana is the significant female in Old English poetry whose ‘shiningness’ is least connected to material objects. In fact, she approaches an otherworldly, Christlike status” (822). The ordinary believers in Cynewulf’s poem can tell, just by looking at her, that Juliana is made of a different substance than they.

Saints are able to maintain their exemplarity because, according to the church, they have been specially chosen by God. While discussing the saints’ lives written by Bede, George Hardin Brown asserts, “Bede composed these pieces with the conviction that God has conferred virtues and superior gifts on certain men and women who have responded
courageously to his special call” (*Companion* 76-77). According to the church, then, God both initiates the close relationship between himself and the saint and gives the saint the power to maintain his or her exemplary virtue. Juliana’s right to act with more independence than ordinary believers is permissible because it is a right God himself has granted her specifically.

Because of the wholesale exemplarity made possible by their special connection to God, saints become the heroes of the religious sphere. Like secular heroes, they must grapple with situations ordinary people cannot endure. These situations demand access to special amounts of authority. According to Magennis,

Like the Germanic epic hero, in the uncompromisingly oppositional world of hagiography the martyr must choose between glory and shame and must face the test of the heroic moment, essentially alone; even non-martyrs must confront profoundly critical times of trial. In striving for and achieving glory the saint displays superhuman qualities that – as with the epic hero – mark him or her out as different from ordinary mortals, someone for ordinary mortals to look up to and be inspired by.

(170)

Saints, like heroes, are mortal without being normal. Their experiences are comparable to those of ordinary people, but are magnified, expanded, increased. Facing trials alone, without access to spiritual guidance, is an integral part of their battles. Because of this stipulation, saints such as Juliana must have special access to God and the authority to practice an individualistic type of faith.

Because of these distinctions between the saint and the ordinary Christian, the church is able to simultaneously promote and forbid the individualistic authority which Juliana
demonstrates. Juliana’s exemplary virtue and God-given special authority make her individualism permissible. Ordinary Christians, however, who can claim neither exemplary virtue nor special authorization from God, ought to emulate her virtue rather than her individualistic practice of faith. Just as the ordinary person cannot wrest arms off monsters and engage in lengthy underwater battles like Beowulf, neither can the ordinary Christian bind demons and respond to trials with Juliana’s authoritative, unmediated faith.

This church-promoted distinction between saint and layperson, and the corresponding level of authority practiced by each, becomes particularly applicable when we consider first the scenes showing Juliana’s counsel to the crowds prior to her beheading, and second Cynewulf’s response to Juliana’s story.

Juliana’s saintly status authorizes her to teach common believers how to live. As she travels toward her beheading, she does not exhort the common people to fight demons or defy the government, as she herself has done, but rather to “make firm your house” (Þæt ge eower hus/gefæstnige [648b-649a]) against sin and to “with love of peace and clear belief, stout of heart, set your foundations on the Living Stone. Hold in your hearts, in desire of mind, true faith, and peace among yourselves and holy counsels” (Kennedy 14) (Ge mid lufan sibbe,/leohte geleafan, to þam lifgendan/stane stiðhydge staþol fæstniað,/soðe treowe ond sibbe mid eow/healdað æt heortan, halge rune/Þurh modes myne [652b-657a]). Juliana’s counsel to common believers focuses on how to live a virtuous life, not how to be a hero of the faith. She sees a distinction between her own responsibility and authority and that of the crowd, and thus exhorts them to a committed yet not supernatural practice of Christianity.

But perhaps even more significant is Cynewulf’s own expression of faith at the end of the poem. Here Cynewulf readily acknowledges that he is not a saint, claiming that he feels
the pain of “the wounds of sin” (synna wunde [710a]) and expressing fear that “it was too
late an hour when first I repented of my deeds of evil” (Kennedy 15) (Wæs an tid to læt/þæt
ic yfeldæda ær gescomede [712b-713b]). In this way Cynewulf distances himself from
Juliana: Juliana may not be sinless, but she has demonstrated vastly superior fortitude against
sin than he. Because of this difference, Cynewulf cannot express confidence, as Juliana can,
that his soul will go to heaven when he dies, but instead expresses uncertainty and
apprehension.

Taking this distinction even further, Cynewulf, an ordinary Christian, writes that
because of his past sins, “have I need that the holy one plead for me with the King of kings”
(Kennedy 15) (Þonne arna biþearf./þæt me seo halge wið þone hyhstan cyning/geþingige
[715b-717a]). Because of Juliana’s piety in life and her current status as a “holy one” in
heaven, Cynewulf believes she has direct access to God and is both able and willing to
intercede with God on behalf of others. By stressing Juliana’s intercessory abilities and
seeking to partake in them, Cynewulf promotes the appropriateness of a mediated rather than
independent practice of Christianity for ordinary believers.

Cynewulf also emphasizes the communal nature of Christianity for ordinary
believers. Not only does he express the need for Juliana to pray for him, he also asks “every
man of the race of men, who may recite this lay, that he eagerly, with earnestness of heart, be
mindful of me, according to my name, and pray unto God that he, the Ruler of heaven, the
Lord of might, grant me help in that day” (Kennedy 15) (Bidde ic monna gehwone/gumena
cynnes, þe þis gied wræce,/þæt he mec neodful bi nomum minum/gemyne modic, ond
meotud bidde/þæt me heofona helm helpe gefremme,/meahta waldend, on þam miclam dæge
[718b-723b]). The prayers of the community of ordinary Christians, then, are also effective
in helping common believers get to heaven. Cynewulf does not give this group of people the
designation “holy” as he does for Juliana, but instead credits them with a sincere-yet-not-
heroic dedication to God. Together, however, the members of the community of ordinary
Christians can support each other, resulting in a closer connection with God than they could
attain individually.

Juliana also asks that the community of ordinary believers “entreat the Son of God
that the Lord of Angels, the God of mankind, the Giver of victories, be merciful to me”
(Kennedy 14) (Biddað bearn godes þæt me brego engla./meotud moncynnes, milde
geweorþe./sigora sellend [666a-668a]), but given that directly after she makes this request
her soul is “separated from the body unto its eternal joy” (Kennedy 14) (Þa hy re sawl
wearð/ælæded of lice to þam langan gefean [669b-670b]), she apparently does not need to
rely on the communal intercession of ordinary Christians as Cynewulf and other ordinary
Christians need to do. Her request thus seems to highlight her humility and the example she
wishes to leave for others rather than evince a diminution of her saintly authority.

Because of the fundamental differences between the saint and the ordinary believer,
the tension between Juliana’s emphasis on individual authority and the early ninth-century
church’s emphasis on mediated conformity can be resolved. Saints, according to Juliana,
must wield authority forbidden to ordinary Christians, who should approach God in a
mediated or communal manner. Also, because saints function so widely as mediators in
Juliana, the hierarchical and communal system of the early ninth-century English church is
actually promoted rather than subverted by Juliana’s independent and authoritative practice
of faith. If ordinary Christians are to approach God through the intercession of others, the
church gains significance and credibility as the institution most able, in the earthly realms, to help ordinary Christians communicate with God.

**Legitimate vs. Illegitimate Authority**

A second way Juliana’s independent, anti-establishment behavior can potentially be reconciled with the church’s conservatism is through the idea of legitimate and illegitimate establishments. Juliana does not rebel against any God-sanctioned authority, but rather against authority that, in the eyes of the church, lacks the legitimating stamp of God’s approval. Such an act, according to the church, can be seen not as a rebellion, but rather as a necessity, one which found ready parallels in Cynewulf’s ninth-century environment.

Although the different sections of England themselves were not particularly united during Cynewulf’s time, all were nominally Christian and all sustained the infrastructure of the established church. Clergy may not have been able to prevent in-fighting among the small English kingdoms, but they could largely rest assured that the political establishment, whatever it happened to be, would support their ecclesiastical establishment. However, before, during and after Cynewulf’s time, a significant threat loomed against English ecclesiastical authority: that of the pagan Viking invaders. The presence of these invaders serves to highlight the difference, in stories of saints written around this time, between sanctioned and deviant authority. It also works to complicate Cynewulf’s presentation of how God’s legitimate authority works.

*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* clearly records the mounting threat of this pagan authority. Its first reference to Viking invasion occurs in 787, where the Chronicles record that in the days of King Bertric “came first three ships of the Northmen from the land of the
robbers.” The entry for 793 records, “the harrowing inroads of heathen men made lamentable havoc in the church of God in Holy-island, by rapine and slaughter,” and the record for 794 reports how “the heathen armies spread devastation among the Northumbrians.” The Chronicles then display a brief respite in the Viking attacks, but the litany begins again in 832, when “heathen men overran the Isle of Shepey,” and in 833, when “this year fought King Egbert with thirty-five pirates at Charmouth…and the Danes remained masters of the field.” Further attacks occurred in 835, 837, 838, and so on. The attacks were violent and their outcome uncertain; at times the English managed to push back the invading forces, but at times the invaders prevailed. These attacks demonstrated a significant threat not only to the authority of the English political establishment, but also to the English ecclesiastical establishment.

The Viking invaders were pagan rather than Christian and did not balk at attacking places of Christian worship. Since many monasteries and abbeys were isolated on the coasts of England, housed men who were not trained fighters, and also held riches, they often became a focus of Viking attack (Boenig 13). In this way the church suffered intense losses of people, learning, and treasure. If the Viking invasion of England were to succeed, the church and its authority would face major setbacks, if not oppression or suppression.

When Juliana is taken in context with the Viking invasions, another potential way to reconcile Juliana’s individual, anti-establishment behavior and the church’s communal, conservative policy emerges. Juliana’s behavior, while boldly anti-establishment, defies an illegitimate establishment, one which wields an authority contrary to God’s. The early ninth-century English church believed its own authority was legitimately derived. Thus, while Juliana may seem to advocate a radical response to authority as a whole, the poem could
instead be seen as advocating a radical response to illegitimate authority. Since pagan Vikings posed a threat to England during Cynewulf’s time, the church could easily have applied Juliana’s anti-establishment behavior in a way that threatened not their own authority, but that of the pagan invaders, and which also encouraged lay support for the church. Stories like Juliana’s could then be seen as supporting rather than undermining the authority of the church, again bringing Juliana’s apparent individualism into conformity with established church doctrine.

Indeed, evidence exists that such radical adherence to God’s authority did occur in England at this time. Horner records the instance of the abbess Ebba and her nuns at Coldingham, “who knew in advance of the approaching invaders…These nuns, to defend their virginity, cut off their noses and lips with razors, preferring self-mutilation to rape…The Danes, repelled by the sight, burned down the convent with the nuns inside it” (671). This occurrence illustrates the responses to the various types of authority which both Cynewulf’s poem and the early ninth-century church advocate: a radical refusal to obey any human authority that is not predicated on the ultimate authority of God and also a radical acceptance of God’s ultimate authority. The church, in this way, potentially contains and guides Juliana’s radicalism.

But Juliana also works to complicate and expand on popular ecclesiastical ideas regarding pagan persecution, presenting the workings of legitimate authority in a slightly different way from that often promoted by the church of this time.

One of the most common ways the church responded to Viking threats was to defend the legitimacy of God’s authority by taking the attacks as a sign that the English people had sinned and so God was punishing them. Gale R. Owen notes, “To the Christians, such
destruction of God’s property by heathens could be explained in only one way: God must be angry with them…This explanation is all the more understandable in view of the fact that for some time pious men had been deplored a decline in standards” (165). The church thus preached the urgent need for people to repent from sin and recommit themselves to their faith. Through this means, the church worked to maintain and legitimize its authority in the face of pagan invasion. The Christians were not losing because God was not powerful, but because God was rightfully punishing them. The way to get rid of the punishment was to submit to the authority of the church as the mediator of the ultimate authority of God. Any authority which the Vikings managed to acquire was both illegitimate and contingent upon God’s ultimate power.

The scholar Alcuin’s letter to King Aethelred of Northumbria after the Viking attack on Lindisfarne in 793 is representative of this push for careful self-scrutiny and repentance. Alcuin writes:

Consider carefully, brothers, and examine diligently, lest perchance this unaccustomed and unheard-of evil was merited by some unheard-of evil practice. I do not say that formerly there were no sins of fornication among the people. But from the days of King Ælfwold fornications, adulteries, and incest have poured over the land, so that these sins have been committed without any shame and even against the handmaids dedicated to God. What may I say about avarice, robbery, violent judgments? – when it is clearer than day how much these crimes have increased everywhere, and a despoiled people testifies to it. Whoever reads Holy Scriptures and ponders ancient histories and considers the fortune of the world will find that for
sins of this kind kings lost kingdoms and peoples their country; and while the strong
unjustly seized the goods of others, they justly lost their own. (qtd. in Owen 165-6)
While not excusing the invaders, Alcuin places much of the blame for their presence in
England on the English people themselves. He focuses on sexual sins and sins of greed as
the most probable culprits of God’s displeasure.

When perceived in this context, Juliana’s emphases on the ultimate authority of God,
sexual purity, and the renunciation of material goods take on new dimensions. Throughout
his poem, Cynewulf contends, as does Alcuin, that apparent pagan power in the material
world does not disprove the ultimate authority of the Christian God. However Cynewulf
does not, like Alcuin, necessarily equate persecution with divine punishment. In this way his
poem presents a perhaps more complex view of how God’s legitimate authority works in the
world.

The state of pagan versus Christian authority in Juliana in many ways mirrors the
state of pagan versus Christian authority in late eighth- and early ninth-century England. As
Maximian and his thanes appear to be defeating Christians in the beginning of Juliana, so the
pagans appear to be defeating Christians in England. As they did in Maximian’s day, pagan
forces in England have “roused up strife” (eahtnysse ahof [4b]), “destroyed churches” (circan
fylde [5b]), and “poured out the holy blood of righteous worshippers of God upon the grassy
plain” (geat on græswong gohdergendra,…haligra blod,/ryhtfremmendra [6a-8a]) (Kennedy
2). According to Alcuin, this state of affairs ought to mean that the Christians of Juliana’s
day have sinned against God and thus deserve punishment.

But Cynewulf does not paint that picture. Instead he highlights Juliana’s exemplary,
virtuous behavior. Her response to illegitimate pagan authority is to remain loyal to the
legitimate authority of God, practicing Christianity in ways quite similar to the measures of repentance Alcuin recommends. For example, Juliana absolutely refrains from sexual sin. She rejects an improper marriage and even sex as a whole because “she in her heart cherished holy faith, and was greatly minded that she would preserve her purity unspotted of any sin for the love of Christ” (Kennedy 2). Juliana sees any sort of sexual relationship, even one within the bonds of marriage, as something which will diminish herself and her purity. She defends to the death her decision not to participate in such “sin.” Juliana thus completely abstains from committing Alcuin’s prohibited “fornications, adulteries and incest.” Because of her virtue she ought, Alcuin’s teaching implies, to expect a peaceful, non-violent life.

Juliana also upholds God’s legitimate authority by refusing to value material wealth above spiritual wealth. Even though Eleusius is affluent, Juliana still “despised his friendship. For the fear of God was more in her thoughts than all the treasure that lay in the possession of that prince” (Kennedy 2). Juliana shuns material wealth, and the power and prestige that come with it, in favor of maintaining her relationship with God. Again this behavior is in line with Alcuin’s instructions for how to maintain God’s favor: she has clearly rejected “avarice, robbery, violent judgments.” In these ways, Juliana distances herself both from the things the pagans desire and from the very things which, according to Alcuin, result in God’s displeasure and administration of punishment.
But for Juliana, the pagans do not disappear, as Alcuin implies they ought. Instead, their attack on Juliana continues, becoming more and more violent. Here Cynewulf offers another, more complicated, understanding of legitimate and illegitimate authority. Maybe, his poem argues, God sometimes allows illegitimate authority to seem to win in the material world because the material world is not the one that ultimately matters. Thus, when a person eschews the physical world, as does Juliana, in favor of conforming to God’s commands, even though that person may suffer hardship and tribulation, God will intercede on his or her behalf, granting him or her spiritual favor and support. Personal purity, according to Cynewulf, leads to spiritual gain, and sometimes to physical gain as well. But people who acknowledge the ultimate authority of God and keep his commands are blessed, no matter what happens to them. Persecution, according to Juliana, is not necessarily a corollary of sin.

Cynewulf’s poem thus works to expand his audience’s understanding of God’s power and work, and also to explain certain occurrences which Alcuin’s teaching seems to overlook. Juliana supports the church by complicating and expanding on issues which were considered highly relevant.

Through these issues of legitimate and illegitimate authority, Juliana’s and the early ninth-century church’s positions on authority may be seen to converge and complement each other. The church is able to maintain the ideal of individualistic practice of faith in tandem with the promotion of everyday behavior that is mediated and communal, at least in regard to “legitimate” authority.
How Those in Heaven Relate to Those on Earth

Although Juliana practices independent, unmediated faith during her life on earth, as soon as she dies Cynewulf records a significant change in her activities. After she becomes part of the great company of Christians living in heaven, she no longer needs to act independently but instead responds to people on earth in a way which stresses the need for mediation and community in matters of faith. The way saints in heaven relate to common people on earth also opens the door for the ninth-century church to use Juliana’s example to promote conservative rather than radical faith.

Cynewulf demonstrates Juliana’s transformation at the end of his poem, when she interacts with the community of recent Roman converts. As Eleusius’ soldiers lead her to her execution, Juliana “began to teach, and to encourage the people from their sins unto worship, and promised unto them comfort and a path to glory” (Kennedy 14). Prior to this moment, Juliana faced her trials alone, a situation appropriate to her saintly status as a heroine of the Christian faith. At this point, however, just steps away from her death, she no longer needs to act in solitude but begins to be integrated into the Christian community, functioning as a saintly teacher for ordinary Christians.

Although they have just witnessed Juliana’s independent defense of her faith, the ordinary Christians in the crowd do not see independent behavior as their proper mode of operation. They act corporately instead of independently, coming to Juliana as a body and being received by her in the same manner. None of them attempts to set himself apart from the crowd, but instead all focus their attention and respect on their saintly teacher. As such a
teacher, Juliana is simultaneously part of the Christian community and yet distinctly separate from ordinary believers.

Juliana’s death intensifies both roles. Neither she nor the new community of Christians whom she has taught is sorrowful at the physical separation which occurs when she is beheaded and her soul is “separated from the body unto its eternal joy” (Kennedy 14) (Da hyre sawl wearð/alæded of lice to þam langen gefean [669b-670b]). From Juliana’s point of view, her time of trial on earth is over. Since death is the entrance into “eternal joy,” a new and better state of existence, she receives it with gladness and thanksgiving. But even more significant than her physical separation from earthly believers is her spiritual separation from them. Juliana does not need to spend any time waiting or in purgatory before she can enter heaven. Her soul goes directly to its “eternal joy,” indicating the superior virtue that sets her apart from ordinary believers.

But the crowd is not distressed at such separation. Instead Cynewulf writes that “the body of the holy maid [was] borne with songs of praise and a great multitude unto its grave in the earth, so that a mighty throng brought it within the town” (Kennedy 15) (Ungelice ðæt hy hit gebrohton burgum in innan,/sidfolc mical [688b-692a]). The multitude, far from being upset at losing its teacher, makes Juliana’s funeral almost a celebration. Clearly they do not feel that either her physical or spiritual separation from them is a bad thing. Rather, the community is confident that Juliana continues to exist and care about it, and therefore she remains part of the community even though she may be physically and spiritually separated from it. Because Juliana has passed into a heavenly state of being, she has even more direct access to God than
she enjoyed previously, and the community seems confident that she will use this access on its behalf.

What follows Juliana’s burial account best illustrates her continuing partial integration into the community of people on earth. After describing Juliana’s victorious interment, Cynewulf shifts time periods from the fourth century to the ninth, writing, “There is to me great need that this holy maid grant me help, when the dearest of all things shall depart from me, when the two brothers shall dissolve their kinship, their great love” (Kennedy 15) (Is me þearf micel/þæt seo halge me helpe gefremme,/þonne me gedælað deorast ealra,/sibbe tosliðað sinhiwan tu,/micle modlufan [695b-699a]). In figurative language, Cynewulf describes his own death, the severing of the soul from the body. The fact that Cynewulf requests Juliana’s help directly after he describes the joy surrounding her burial adds weight to the idea that the people of Juliana’s day also expect her to help them from beyond the grave.

This statement also sheds light on Cynewulf’s understanding of the relationship dead saints maintain with the community of Christians on earth. He speaks about Juliana in the present tense, demonstrating his belief that she is still “alive” and active, even though she died roughly five centuries before he wrote his poem in her honor. Saints, he believes, do not cease activity simply because they die, nor do they lose interest in living Christians. Rather, those in heaven are both able and willing to give important help to those still on earth. Clearly Cynewulf never met Juliana in person, yet as part of the community of Christians, he feels comfortable asking for her help and confident in her interest in him. Juliana will, he believes, know about his request for help and grant it.
What emerges from this passage is not a picture of the independent, radical Juliana of the first part of the poem, but rather of a Juliana who, though still separate, is also immersed in and deeply interested in the Christian community, both in heaven and on earth. As a saint, she is still not quite “of the people,” but even so the Christian community rather than the individualistic defense of her faith now seems to be her primary concern. The conservative, communal church of Cynewulf’s time could easily find common ground with this Juliana, as long as their people patterned their behavior on Cynewulf or the crowd rather than Juliana herself.

The conservative church could also wholeheartedly endorse Juliana’s intercessory work as part of the heavenly Christian community. Because, as a saint, Juliana is both part of the community and set apart from ordinary Christians, she fills a go-between role which fits well with conservative, ninth-century church doctrine that stressed a mediated relationship with God. Cynewulf sets the example in this area when he calls on Juliana for cosmic spiritual help, trusting that she both is able to approach God directly and wishes to help him. In this way, Juliana functions in a church-approved mediatory capacity which is useful to ordinary people and which ordinary people cannot attempt to usurp.

Cynewulf’s position, that saints in heaven relate to people on earth in communal, mediatory ways, is one which is well-attested in the early Middle Ages both in regard to contemporary and ancient saints. Benedicta Ward writes that to Bede, the lives of Anglo-Saxon saints illustrated most of all “that life here and now was open towards this other dimension, that life on earth was still the threshold of the kingdom of God…The gate between the worlds was not entirely closed when the saints had passed through in death” (*Bede* 103). Thomas J. Heffernan concurs when he mentions how Pope Gregory “believed
that the saint, unlike the rest of humankind, lived simultaneously in two worlds, the heavenly and the earthly” (10). Saints, as a class, are powerful precisely because their piety allows them special access to heaven while they are on earth and special access to earth while they are in heaven. Their special access to God sets them apart from ordinary believers, but their special access to earth allows them to be a vital part of the Christian community there.

The church taught that saints in heaven used this special access to God to petition him on behalf of Christian souls not yet in heaven. According to Paul Cavill, “the Anglo-Saxons felt that the enterprise of salvation, while effected uniquely by Christ, was nevertheless an intensely corporate affair. Those who had gone before were interested in the salvation of people in the world, and when people practiced the virtues which the saints were renowned for, the saints were somehow involved” (173-174). This connection supported the ninth-century church’s understanding of the church as a great community in which all members, dead and alive, interact with and assist each other, a community which Juliana, in death, actively embraces.

An excerpt from a Latin Hymn for All Saints Day, November 1, provides an example which can be compared to Cynewulf’s requests for Juliana to aid his soul:

4. May all the hosts of the angels and the troops of the patriarchs and the prophets by virtue of their merits pray for forgiveness unto us. 5. May the Baptist who preceded Christ and the bearer of the key to heaven release us from the bond of sin in concert with the other apostles. 6. May the holy choir of martyrs and the priests by virtue of their being confessors and the maidens by virtue of their chastity purify us of our transgressions. 7. May the intercession of the monks and may all citizens of heaven
grant the requests of the suppliants and ask the reward of life for them. (qtd. in Cavill 173)

This prayer demonstrates that Cynewulf’s assumptions regarding Juliana’s mediatory abilities are aligned with the doctrine and teaching of the church at large. Saints and apostles, the church teaches, are anxious to function in a mediatory role between God and common believers. The duties of the common believer and the duties of the saint cannot be confused.

Because both Cynewulf and the early ninth-century church agree on the ways in which saints in heaven relate to people who are still on earth, the apparently different kinds of Christianity which Juliana and the early medieval church promote can be reconciled. Although the saints themselves may be renowned for their independent behavior while they were alive, after they die they become promoters of community and mediated religious experience. With the help of the saints, even common people could understand themselves to be part of a vast, interconnected Christian community which transcends time and place.

According to Ward,

One of the attractions of Christianity for [Anglo-Saxons] was its perspective of a wider reality which lay around their lives. They were always conscious of being part of the Church of God, and aware of saints of the past linked with those of the present. The lives of the saints, past and present, showed most of all to the new converts that life was open toward another dimension, that life on earth was the threshold of the kingdom of God. (High King 51)

Therefore, although Juliana’s independent behavior makes her a saint, her communal behavior makes her intensely relevant to Cynewulf’s audience. Not only does Juliana
independently renounce evil and proclaim her dedication to God, she is also deeply interested in petitioning God on behalf of the common person. The church’s understanding of how saints in heaven relate to people on earth makes Juliana an appropriate example and role model for their constituents.

### How Those on Earth Relate to Heaven

The ninth-century church and *Juliana* also demonstrate similar ideas regarding how those on earth ought to relate to heaven, providing a final platform for the reconciliation of their differences. Juliana, as a saint, may provide an example of how to live steadfastly and refrain from sin, but common people are not saints. Because of ordinary believers’ fallibility, the church is able to step in and promote itself as an institution which can help those who are not saints reach the standard Juliana is able to meet on her own.

Relating to heaven was a significant concern for many ninth-century English people, in part because they encountered death so regularly. Life expectancy was from twenty-five to thirty-five years (Crawford 74), and disease, famine, accident, war, and childbirth made staying alive a perpetual uncertainty. Being properly prepared for the next life seemed, to many, a wise and necessary precaution. Cynewulf’s clearest instruction regarding how ordinary people can relate to heaven occurs near the end of his poem, when Juliana teaches the common people on the way to her execution.

Juliana’s first instruction to lay Christians is that they need to remain steadfast in their faith because of God’s magnificence. She counsels the people to “Take thought upon the joy of warriors, and the Splendour of glory, the Hope of the holy, the God of the angels of heaven. He is so worthy that the nations and all the race of angels worship Him in the skies,
the Supreme Power” (Kennedy 14) (Gemunað wigena wyn ond wuldræs þrym./haligra hyht, heofonengla god./He is þæs wyrdæ, þæt hine werþeode/on eal engla cynn upp on roderum/hergen, heahmægen [641a-645a]). Juliana’s use of six lofty titles for God emphasizes God’s power, mercy, and dominion. Implicit in the use of these titles is the idea that for people to do anything less than follow such a God wholeheartedly would be foolish and wrong. Understanding God’s glory and worthiness will, Juliana implies, help people remain steadfast in their faith in him, unmoved by the distractions of earth, and so in a good relationship with heaven. But since Cynewulf has already equated remaining steadfast in faith with remaining steadfast in prayer, “taking thought” in this instance seems to imply more than a passive understanding that God is great. Lay people must respond to God’s glory actively, through worship, in order to properly relate to heaven.

According to the demon Juliana binds in Part Two, it is prayer that allows the righteous man to maintain his spiritual loyalty. The demon relates that if he meets a courageous Christian who, when tempted, neither gives in to sin nor flees from the challenge, but instead, “bold in prayer, standeth at bay in his course, then must I flee away from that place, humiliated, cut off from joy” (Kennedy 9) (Ac heald in gebede bidsteal gifed/feaste on feðan, ic scéal feor þonan/heanmod hweorfan, hroþra bidæled [388a-390b]). The victorious Christian’s boldness in combating temptation derives, according to the demon, directly from prayer. When the beleaguered Christian prays, he is refusing to see the world as the demon wants him to see it, but instead is choosing to believe that God is the ultimate authority whom he must obey. In this way, prayer and steadfast faith in God are, in Cynewulf’s work, very closely related. Both are of paramount importance to the person who wishes to maintain a positive relationship with heaven.
Conversely, the demon claims that those whom he tempts successfully are those whom he convinces to abandon prayer. Of the one who falls to temptation he says, “I grievously inflame him with sin, so that, burning, he ceaseth from prayer and walketh insolently, nor may he steadfastly remain longer in the place of prayer, for the love of his sin” (Kennedy 9) (Ic hine þæs swiþe synnum onæle/þæt he byrnende from gebede swiceð,/stepeð stronglice, staþolfæst ne mæg/fore leahtra lufan lenge gewunian/in gebedstowe [372a-376a]). The one who sins cannot pray because by his sin he has demonstrated that he has lost his steadfast faith in God. According to Juliana’s teaching, faith in God requires acknowledging him as the ultimate ruler of the universe. Sin, however, means going directly against the commands of God, a condition which demonstrates that the one sinning no longer acknowledges God’s ultimate authority. Losing the ability to pray is an active evidence that one has given up one’s proper relationship with heaven.

Because of the close connections Cynwulf draws between these concepts in other parts of his poem, Juliana’s council that the common people “take thought” on God’s greatness leads, in a practical sense, to an admonition to remain steadfast in faith and prayer. Those who really “take thought” on God, Cynewulf teaches, who wish to maintain a proper relationship with heaven, can do no less. This area of prayer is yet another place where Juliana’s faith and that of the early medieval English church converge. According to the church, one of the main ways people on earth relate to heaven is through prayer. Juliana apparently knows how to remain steadfast in prayer all on her own, but she is a saint. For common people, the church, with its emphasis on mediated worship, has much to communicate about the proper way to pray.
The church advocated both personal and corporate prayer, and maintained a leadership role in both styles. According to Ward, “The central ingredient in [the Anglo-Saxons’] new life was that contact with God which is called prayer. Prayer among the Anglo-Saxons was done together in church and also in private…prayer in church provided that essential framework on which all personal prayer and conduct could be based” (High King 30). Prayer, then, was largely church-sponsored in Anglo-Saxon England. The church instructed people that prayer was necessary and it instructed them on how prayer ought to be performed. Lay people wishing to properly relate to heaven would understand that doing so depended on praying in a manner which the church endorsed.

The church’s supervision of prayers extended to both ecclesiastic and lay Christians. Monks were to use the psalms as the central part of their daily prayers (Ward, High King 34), and the church instructed common people to follow this example. According to Ward, “Bede had made a selection of single verses from each psalm which he formed into an abbreviated psalter, which could easily be known by heart by anyone. This way of using extracts from the psalms for the basis of compunction in prayer had a central place in the articulation of devotion in England, from the seventh century to the eleventh” (High King 81). The church thus provided both the motivation for and the content of many of the common people’s private prayers. In order to relate properly to heaven, the common people had to pray. In order to pray, the common people had to listen to the church’s instruction. Through this means, the church would be able to define Juliana’s independent faith and her exhortations to the common people in a manner which did not undermine its authoritative position, but rather bolstered it.
Juliana also admonishes the common people to maintain their relationship with heaven by abstaining from sin. In her address to the people, she says, “I will righteously teach you that ye make firm your house, lest the winds with their breath overthrow it. The strong wall shall more firmly withstand the blasts of the storm, the suggestions of sin” (Kennedy 14) (Forþan ic, leof weorud, læran wille./æfremmende, þæt ge eower hus/gefæstnige, þy læs hit ferblædum/windas toweorpan. Weal sceal þy trumra/strong wipstondan storma scurum/leahtra gehygdum [647a-652a]). According to Juliana, refraining from “the suggestions of sin” is a necessary corollary to focusing on God as ultimate authority and maintaining one’s steadfast faith through prayer. Juliana warns the common people that temptations will come, and that therefore they need to bolster their “house,” their relationship with heaven, in order that they may withstand such temptations. Whereas previously Juliana stresses God’s worthiness as a motivation for doing right, here she goes into the possible dire consequences of what might happen if sin is not checked and steadfast faith is not maintained. Sin, she teaches, can indeed “overthrow” the house, sweeping away one’s proper relationship with heaven and excluding the sinner from a heavenly afterlife, a situation which the common person needs to consider with concern.

Juliana’s instruction in this instance also picks up threads which Cynewulf has previously woven through his poem. Whereas Juliana uses imagery to instruct the people, Cynewulf has already clearly spelled out precisely what that imagery means: Christians, through Christ’s sacrifice, may be on the road to heaven, but sin may yet cause them to fall from grace and forfeit their heavenly destination. The demon Juliana binds makes it quite clear that those whom he tempts successfully put themselves in danger of perdition. He tells Juliana, “I am an eager teacher, that he [the man who falls into sin] may live after my evil
fashions, turned openly from the law of Christ, corrupted in heart, for me to rule in the pit of sins” (Kennedy 9-10) (Ic beo lareow georn/þæt he monþeawum minum lifge/acyrred cuðlice from Cristes æ./mod gemyrred me to gewealde/in synna seað [409b-415a]). “Living after evil fashions,” according to the demon, causes people to go to the “pit of sins” after they die. Since one cannot “turn openly” from the “law of Christ” unless one has previously followed the law of Christ, the people to whom the devil is referring here are clearly not pagans but Christians who have forfeited their proper relationship with heaven.

Once again, Juliana’s exhortation to the common people opens the door for the church to promote its mediated practice of faith. Juliana leads a nearly blameless life, but her independent and unmediated virtue is beyond the grasp of most ordinary Christians who, like Cynewulf, must admit they have committed many sins. But common people need not despair of maintaining a proper relationship with heaven, because according to the ninth-century church, it can help Christians who have committed sin rid themselves of that sin. In this way the sacraments, strongly connected to the church as an institution, were pivotal in early medieval English church doctrine. Common people wishing to rid themselves of sin needed to follow Juliana’s independent example through following the teachings of the church.

The church taught that ridding oneself of sin in a general way could take place through church ceremonies such as baptism and mass. In Cynewulf’s time, the church administered baptism to infants throughout England. As for celebrating the Eucharist, according to Owen, “Layfolk were expected to attend mass on Sundays and feast days. If they lived near a monastery they would worship at the monastery church” (159). Such ceremonies worked, the church taught, to help people receive forgiveness from their sins and stay on the path to heaven.
The church in Anglo-Saxon England also advocated the more specific means of penance as a way common people could rid themselves of sins. The practice of private penance derived from Irish traditions, but had been popular in England since the influence of Theodore of Tarsus, who came from the Pope in 669 (Frantzen 62). This system of penance “entailed a private exchange between the confessor and the penitent in which confession was followed by the acceptance of a prescribed penance and absolution” (Frantzen 5-6).

Although the system did not spread immediately throughout England, Allen J. Frantzen writes,

> We find good evidence that penitential practice was an important part of eighth-century pastoral activity. The decrees of the Council of Clovesho required that bishops make sure, before conferring Holy Orders, that the candidates for priesthood know how to preach sound doctrine and discern suitable penances for sinners. The same council urged frequent communion among the laity, which would have necessitated confession as part of the preparation for receiving the sacrament. (81)

According to the church, ordinary Christians could gain forgiveness of sins through penance. Gaining this forgiveness, however, necessitated the presence of the church and its clergy. People could not gain that forgiveness, or the right relationship with heaven which Juliana advocates, without accepting a mediated type of faith that placed them in a subordinate role and demanded conformity.

Juliana’s advice to the common people regarding how to maintain a proper relationship with heaven can thus be interpreted by the church in very communal, mediated ways instead of in independent ways. Common believers, because they are not saints, cannot expect to maintain the steadfastness and near sinlessness which are the signs that they are on
the path to heaven. Instead, common believers must rely on the instruction and intercession of the church in order to perpetually renew their faith. By framing Juliana’s behavior as an unattainable ideal, the church is able to promote its own position as mediator between God and people. Whereas saintly Juliana may be able to approach God independently, fallible ordinary people, according to the church, had better approach him through the church’s ministration.
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

Because of these four areas where Juliana’s faith and that of the ninth-century English church converge, we can resolve the apparent tension in the church’s acceptance and promotion of Juliana and stories like hers. Juliana’s independence and radicalism do exist, but the church is able to interpret them in ways which do not threaten their establishment or their promotion of communal, mediated religious experience. Juliana’s apparently transgressive behavior can be used for very conservative ends.

This area of study is significant because of the vast body of extant medieval hagiographic literature and the popularity of this literature in its time period. Other areas of this repetitive genre could be examined with profit, such as a deeper study on the types of torment (Why do people always wish to burn virgin martyr saints? Why is there a pattern of consignment to a brothel?), their miracles/miraculous deliverances (What visions do they see? How is their faith manifested/vindicated?), their method of death (Why the trope of death by sword? Is their death ultimately a choice they make?), and so on. Studying the repetition of this repetitive genre would potentially open new areas for understanding and appreciating medieval life, culture, and faith, since again and again in these stories the medieval community repeats its values, ideals, and beliefs.

This area of study is also significant for its presentation of a strong female protagonist during a time when female agency was not universally promoted. The whole genre of virgin martyr saints, and that of women saints in general, complicates the modern understanding of the place of women in medieval society. Examining the behavior of such transgressive-yet-culturally-sanctioned women may shed light on ways women could practice acceptable agency in a society that largely cast women in a submissive role. In the same vein, exploring
how medieval women themselves, rather than the established church, interpreted such texts would be enlightening. Did some women apply these stories to their lives in ways that emphasized the saint’s independence? How might women have related these stories to their own experience and faith?

Studying accounts of female saints would legitimately and logically round out curricula which stress medieval poems dealing mainly with male activity. Hagiographical accounts were a significant part of the medieval period that should not be overlooked by those wishing to gain an understanding of the period, and accounts of women saints would both challenge common perceptions of medieval women and give voices to people who do not figure prominently in heroic poetry.
WORKS CITED


WORKS CONSULTED


