

# Orthodoxy and Authority: Rites of Passage in the *Vita Wilfridi* and the *Vitae Cuthberti*

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*The seventh-century Easter controversy raised questions of orthodoxy and the consequent authority of the clergy to minister rites. References to rites of passage are present in three of the most important sources written in early eighth-century Northumbria: the Vita Wilfridi and the Vitae Cuthberti. This article uses rites of passage to examine two debates, concerning Bishop Wilfrid's continental credentials and the relationship between the Vita Wilfridi and the Vitae Cuthberti. How the three authors use these important religious moments gives insight into the saintly image they wished to portray. The article argues that rites of passage in the Vita Wilfridi are designed to prove Wilfrid's continental (and thus orthodox) credentials but also show the extent to which this is a constructed image. In addition, it suggests that the rewriting of the first Vita Cuthberti was prompted by questions of orthodoxy raised in the Vita Wilfridi and subsequently weaponized in the febrile atmosphere of early eighth-century Northumbria.*

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Now there are here in Britain many bishops for whom it is not for me to criticize, but I know for a fact they are Quartodecimans like the Britons and Scots; by them were ordained men whom the Apostolic See does not receive into communion.<sup>1</sup>

Such was the reasoning behind Wilfrid's request to be sent to Francia for consecration. Much of Wilfrid's career is defined by the Easter controversy, the debate concerning which method of calculating Easter should be followed and of which the charge of

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<sup>1</sup> 'Sunt enim hic in Britannia multi episcopi quorum nullum meum est accusare, quamvis veraciter sciam quod quattuordecimanni sunt ut Brittones et Scotti; ab illis sunt ordinati, quos nec apostolica sedes in communionem recipit': Stephen, *Vita Wilfridi* [hereafter: VW] 11 (*The Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, ed. Bertram Colgrave [Cambridge, 1927], 24).

Quartodecimanism was a significant and emotive part. The Irish used an eighty-four-year cycle to calculate the date of Easter, known as the *Latercus*, while Wilfrid championed the Dionysiac method used in Rome.<sup>2</sup> A third set of tables, drawn up by Victorius of Aquitaine, was also circulating.<sup>3</sup> In Northumbria, the Ionan mission centred on Lindisfarne followed the *Latercus*, which was erroneously deemed to adhere to the Quartodeciman heresy.<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, the Synod of Whitby (664) resolved the matter in Rome's favour.<sup>5</sup> The significance of the epigraph for a discussion of rites of passage is that the final ritual step of Wilfrid's ecclesiastical career, his consecration as bishop, was intimately linked to a rejection of Northumbria's Ionan heritage.

Such an attitude was not limited to Wilfrid and his supporters. The *Penitentials of Theodore* makes it clear that when Theodore, bishop of Canterbury (669–90), arrived from Rome in 669, he regarded the orders of those associated with the *Latercus* as invalid. His initial view was that those who had been ordained by heretics were to be reordained; he moderated this position later, but nonetheless felt that their orders needed to be completed by a catholic bishop.<sup>6</sup> One of the fault lines in the Northumbrian church in the wake of the Synod of Whitby was consequently centred on the legitimacy of the rite of ordination. The ramifications of such a debate are difficult to overstate. The authority of priests to minister sacraments and rites had enormous implications for the quality of pastoral care, while repudiating the authority of specific bishops to ordain legitimate clergy could destroy the Northumbrian church.<sup>7</sup> It is no wonder

<sup>2</sup> VW 10 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 20–2); Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* [hereafter: *HE*] 3.24 (*Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and Roger Mynors [Oxford, 1969], 294–308).

<sup>3</sup> Erin Dailey, 'To choose one Easter from three: Oswiu's Decision and the Northumbrian Synod of AD 664', *Peritia* 26 (2015), 47–64, at 49–56.

<sup>4</sup> Clare Stancliffe, *Bede, Wilfrid and the Irish*, Jarrow Lecture 46 (Jarrow, 2003), 4–5; Bede, *The Reckoning of Time*, ed. Faith Wallis, TTH (Liverpool, 1988), xxxv–xxxvi, lxi.

<sup>5</sup> VW 10 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 22).

<sup>6</sup> Arthur Haddan and William Stubbs, ed., *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, 3 vols (Oxford, 1869–78), 3: 180–2, cf. 3: 197; Stancliffe, *Bede*, 11–17. The use of 'catholic' here is in reference to an orthodox bishop who celebrates the correct date of Easter.

<sup>7</sup> Julia Barrow, 'Grades of Ordination and Clerical Careers, c.900–c.1200', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 30 (2008), 41–61, at 41; Dailey, 'One Easter', 62; Marilyn Dunn, *The Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons, c.597–c.700* (London, 2009), 116–19.

that Bede observed that believers were ‘fearing lest, in receiving the word of Christianity, they were running or had run in vain’.<sup>8</sup>

Wilfrid’s life was recorded both in Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica* (*HE*) and in Stephen of Ripon’s *Vita Wilfridi* (*VW*).<sup>9</sup> Both authors knew Wilfrid, and Stephen probably wrote within four years of Wilfrid’s death and was close to his bishop, possibly accompanying him on his final appeal to Rome.<sup>10</sup> Stephen’s narrative is far more detailed than Bede’s and, while nakedly partisan, does not obscure points of conflict.<sup>11</sup> It is easy to assume that Stephen presents a more straightforward account of Wilfrid’s life. However, William Foley observed that Stephen was writing in a model derived from St Augustine of Hippo: Stephen emphasized or embellished aspects of Wilfrid’s life in order to provide a more edifying account.<sup>12</sup> On Wilfrid’s consecration, Stephen weaponized his account to dismiss the earlier Irish missionaries in Northumbria as heretics, allowing his hero to bring true orthodox Christianity to the Northumbrians. Overall, the rites which mark out Wilfrid’s passage through the Christian faith and Church are prominent in Stephen’s text, covering Wilfrid’s birth, his possible confirmation, his tonsuring, his abbatial ordination, his priestly ordination, his episcopal consecration and his death and the translation of his relics. Stephen also describes Wilfrid performing rites of passage as a bishop: baptizing, confirming and ordaining in his Northumbrian diocese and further afield. Given the nature and function of the text, these apical moments may have been moulded to Stephen’s agenda and so are worthy of study.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Timentium ne forte accepto Christianitatis vocabulo in vacuum current aut currissent’: *HE* 3.25 (*Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 296).

<sup>9</sup> *HE* 5.19 (*Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 516–30); *VW*. Stephen identified himself and his rank as a priest in the preface to his work and explained that he wrote at the request of his abbot, Tatberht of Ripon, and the bishop of Hexham, Acca. Stephen’s use of the first person at points in the text suggests that he may have witnessed some of the events he described.

<sup>10</sup> *HE* 4.19 (*Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 390–2); *VW* 50 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 102); David Kirby, ‘Bede, Eddius Stephanus and the “Life of Wilfrid”’, *EHR* 98 (1983), 101–14, at 103–4; Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History* (Princeton, NJ, 1988), 282–3.

<sup>11</sup> Alan Thacker, ‘Wilfrid: His Cult and his Biographer’, in Nicholas Higham, ed., *Wilfrid: Abbot, Bishop, Saint* (Donnington, 2013), 1–16, at 3–4; David H. Farmer, ‘Saint Wilfrid’, in David Kirby, ed., *Saint Wilfrid at Hexham* (Newcastle, 1974), 34–59, at 36–8.

<sup>12</sup> William Foley, *Images of Sanctity in Eddius Stephanus’ Life of Bishop Wilfrid* (Lampeter, 1992), 12–14.

Furthermore, the *VW* is not divorced from the other hagiography of early eighth-century Northumbria, above all the *Vitae Cuthberti*.<sup>13</sup> As such, it is worth extending the discussion into how the *VW* intersects with the two *Vitae Cuthberti*, one written by an anonymous author at Lindisfarne (*VA*) before the *VW* c.698–705, the second written afterwards by Bede (*VP*) c.720–2.<sup>14</sup> Stephen is infamous for appropriating passages from the *VA*, including the anonymous author's claim that Cuthbert had received the Petrine tonsure, an implausible suggestion for pre-Whitby Northumbria, which may have prompted Lindisfarne to commission Bede's version.<sup>15</sup> In questions of orthodoxy, referencing the Petrine tonsure allowed Stephen to undermine Cuthbert, drawing attention to Cuthbert's Ionan connections.<sup>16</sup> Thus, given the link between Wilfrid's episcopal consecration and orthodoxy, rites of passage provide another avenue to approach the dialogue between the *VW*, *VA* and *VP*.

There are, therefore, three distinct sections to this argument. The first concerns Wilfrid's own rites of passage. This may also be organized into three discrete points. Firstly, the rites proving Wilfrid's continental credentials will be considered: Wilfrid's possible confirmation, his tonsuring and his episcopal consecration. Secondly, those which reveal the constructed quality of Stephen's account are analysed: Wilfrid's birth and the translation of his relics. Thirdly, Wilfrid's ordination as a priest and as an abbot provide the opportunity to access a more nuanced image of the bishop. The second section concerns Wilfrid's carrying out of rites of passage. In the third section the use of rites of passage in the *VA* and *VP* will be analysed

<sup>13</sup> The Whitby *Life of Saint Gregory* may react to Wilfridian themes but shows little interest in rites of passage. Episcopal consecration is mentioned in Canterbury but is not extended to Paulinus, as one might expect if there was a desire to prove an earlier Northumbrian Christian history deriving from Gregory the Great: Anon., *Vita Sancti Gregorii* 11 (*The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, ed. Bertram Colgrave, 2nd edn [Cambridge, 1985], 93); cf. Goffart, *Narrators*, 264–7.

<sup>14</sup> Goffart, *Narrators*, 256–7; Alan Thacker, 'Shaping the Saint: Rewriting Tradition in the Early *Lives* of St Cuthbert', in Roy Flechner and Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, eds, *The Introduction of Christianity into the Early Medieval Insular World: Converting the Isles I* (Turnhout, 2016), 399–429, at 404; Clare Stancliffe, 'Disputed Episcopacy: Bede, Acca and the Relationship between Stephen's *Life of Wilfrid* and the early Prose *Lives* of St Cuthbert', *Anglo-Saxon England* 41 (2012), 7–39, at 10.

<sup>15</sup> Anon., *Vita Cuthberti* [hereafter: *VA*] 1.2, 2.2 (*Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, ed. Bertram Colgrave [London, 1940], 62–4, 76); cf. *VW*, Preface 6 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 2, 14).

<sup>16</sup> Stancliffe, 'Episcopacy', 15, 19.

with reference to how this relates to themes present in the *VW*. In so doing, it may be possible to unpick Stephen's hagiographic presentation and uncover a more nuanced image of Wilfrid, also providing greater insight into the disputes within the early eighth-century Northumbrian church.

#### HISTORIOGRAPHY

There are two particular threads to this discussion, Wilfrid's relationship with the Ionan heritage of the Northumbrian church and the interplay between the texts written in the explosion of literature in Northumbria in the first three decades of the eighth century; both have received significant scholarly attention. Wilfrid is typically portrayed as divorced from the Northumbrian church before the Synod of Whitby. His background lay in the education he received within the Frankish and Roman churches. His career was then dominated by his appeals to the papacy against the authority of the archbishops of Canterbury, Theodore (669–90) and Berhtwold (692–731), and the kings of Northumbria, Ecgfrith (670–85) and Aldfrith (c.686–705).<sup>17</sup> It is little wonder that Alan Thacker summed Wilfrid up as 'pugnaciously pro-Roman'.<sup>18</sup>

The most significant shift in determining Wilfrid's ecclesiastical identity concerns his attitude towards the Irish. Clare Stancliffe has observed that Wilfrid was not anti-Irish and in fact had positive relations with individuals and areas within Ireland. His antipathy was motivated by opposition to the Quartodeciman heresy perceived to be rampant within the Ionan confederation.<sup>19</sup> Theology, not race, dictated Wilfrid's hostility towards Lindisfarne and the heirs of the Ionan mission, although Stancliffe still keeps Wilfrid firmly separate from Irish Christian culture.

<sup>17</sup> Henry Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn (London, 1991), 129–47; Farmer, 'Wilfrid', 40–3; Paul Fouracre, 'Wilfrid and the Continent', in Higham, ed., *Wilfrid*, 186–99; Ian Wood, 'The Continental Journeys of Wilfrid and Biscop', *ibid.* 200–11; Éamonn Ó Carragáin and Alan Thacker, 'Wilfrid in Rome', *ibid.* 212–30; Richard Bailey, 'St Wilfrid: A European Anglo-Saxon', *ibid.* 112–23; Jesse Billet, 'Wilfrid and Music', *ibid.* 163–85, at 168–76; Foley, *Sanctity*, 71–105; Nicholas Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury* (London, 1984), 74, 79.

<sup>18</sup> Alan Thacker, 'England in the Seventh Century', in Paul Fouracre, ed., *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, 1: c.700–c.900 (Cambridge, 2000), 462–85, at 481.

<sup>19</sup> Stancliffe, *Bede*, 2–4; cf. Thomas Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000), 320–1.

Two scholars, Henry Mayr-Harting and Erin Dailey, have argued against such a complete divorce. Dailey has suggested that Wilfrid had come into contact with Columbanian monasticism in Francia and so was sufficiently 'Celtic' for Oswiu to side with him at the Synod of Whitby without creating a fatal split in the Northumbrian church.<sup>20</sup> Mayr-Harting has gone further, locating evidence of Irish influence upon Wilfrid's spirituality and Stephen's hagiography.<sup>21</sup> While not finding much support, their arguments are useful reminders that the dominance of Roman Christianity in the *VW* may be designed to further Stephen's agenda and may not be the full picture.

The dialogue in which the *VA* and the *VW* engage was noted by the texts' modern editor, Bertram Colgrave, although he did not suggest any link between Stephen's borrowings and Bede's rewriting.<sup>22</sup> The theory of tension in the Northumbrian church between pro- and anti-Wilfridians first emerged with David Kirby in 1983.<sup>23</sup> Towards the end of the decade, both Walter Goffart and Alan Thacker developed Kirby's arguments and suggested that debate with Wilfridians provoked the recasting of Cuthbert's life by Bede.<sup>24</sup> Other explanations for the rewriting have been proposed but Alan Thacker in particular has kept the question of Wilfrid at the forefront of the historiography.<sup>25</sup> However, Stancliffe again has suggested a modification, observing that there is a gap of several years between the *VW* and *VP*; the latter is hardly an immediate reaction to the former. Instead, she moots that Acca

<sup>20</sup> Erin Dailey, 'Reappraising the Synod of Whitby', *History Studies* 10 (2009), 31–44, at 38–9.

<sup>21</sup> Mayr-Harting, *Coming*, 139–44.

<sup>22</sup> *Life*, ed. Colgrave, 150.

<sup>23</sup> Kirby, 'Stephanus', 106–10; idem, 'The Genesis of a Cult: Cuthbert of Farne and Ecclesiastical Politics in Northumbria in the Late Seventh and Early Eighth Centuries', *JEH* 46 (1995), 383–97, at 396–7.

<sup>24</sup> Goffart, *Narrators*, 283–5; Alan Thacker, 'Lindisfarne and the Origins of the Cult of St Cuthbert', in Gerald Bonner, David Rollason and Clare Stancliffe, eds, *St Cuthbert, his Cult and his Community to AD 1200* (Woodbridge, 1989), 103–22, at 117–22.

<sup>25</sup> See Walter Berschin, 'Opus deliberatum ac perfectum: Why did the Venerable Bede write a Second Prose Life of St Cuthbert?', in Bonner, Rollason and Stancliffe, eds, *St Cuthbert*, 95–102, at 84–5; William Foley, 'Suffering and Sanctity in Bede's Prose Life of St Cuthbert', *Journal of Theological Studies* 50 (1999), 102–15; Catherine Cubitt, 'Memory and Narrative in the Cult of early Anglo-Saxon Saints', in Yitzhak Hen and Matthew Innes, eds, *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2000), 29–66, at 39–46; cf. Thacker, 'Cult', 11–16; idem, 'Bede and History', in Scott DeGregorio, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Bede* (Cambridge, 2010), 170–89, at 185–6; idem, 'Lindisfarne', 418–25.

(710–31), Wilfrid’s successor as bishop of Hexham, may have sought to suppress the see of Lindisfarne, a crisis which prompted the need for the new life of Lindisfarne’s great saint addressing criticisms based upon Cuthbert’s suitability as a bishop and his attempts to avoid episcopal office.<sup>26</sup> The theme of ‘rites of passage’ provides an excellent new means to test both aspects of the historiography, providing new insights into Stephen’s hagiographic purposes and the length of the shadow Wilfrid and his hagiographer cast upon Northumbrian literature.

#### WILFRID’S RITES OF PASSAGE (1): PROVING CONTINENTAL CREDENTIALS

Stephen delayed describing Wilfrid’s first formal engagement with Christian ritual. Only in the fifth chapter does the reader find Wilfrid kneeling before the pope, being prayed over by him and receiving his blessing.<sup>27</sup> Stephen’s description is not explicit, but Wilfrid conceivably received the rite of confirmation during his first visit to Rome. The rite of confirmation involved anointing and the laying on of hands by a bishop, thereby confirming the candidate’s baptism.<sup>28</sup> The obvious problem with Stephen’s account is the lack of reference to oil. However, since Stephen later describes Wilfrid confirming simply by ‘the laying on of hands’,<sup>29</sup> Stephen may simply have regarded the imposition of hands as more important than anointing and so focused on it in his account. The clinching evidence comes from the *VA*, which describes Cuthbert anointing individuals and placing his hands above their heads, a clear description of confirmation, with phrasing which matches that of Stephen.<sup>30</sup> Stephen’s account reads *ponens manum suam benedictam super caput eius*,<sup>31</sup> while the anonymous author described Cuthbert as confirming with *manum ponens super capita singulorum*.<sup>32</sup> This is fairly compelling evidence that the two authors were describing the same

<sup>26</sup> Cubitt, ‘Episcopacy’, 7–39, especially 11–12, 24–32.

<sup>27</sup> *VW* 5 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 12).

<sup>28</sup> H. Banting, ‘Imposition of Hands in Confirmation: A Medieval Problem’, *JEH* 7 (1956), 147–59, at 150–2.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Cum manus impositione’: *VW* 18 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 38).

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Lynch, *Christianizing Kinship: Ritual Sponsorship in Anglo-Saxon England* (Ithaca, NY, 1998), 102.

<sup>31</sup> ‘He placed his blessed hand on [Wilfrid’s] head’: *VW* 5 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 12).

<sup>32</sup> ‘He placed his hand on the head of each of them’: *VA* 4.5 (*Two Lives*, ed. Colgrave, 116).

ceremony. Certainly, the distinction between the pope's prayers and his blessing indicates that more was going on in Wilfrid's meeting with the pope than a simple papal blessing, and confirmation is a logical alternative.

This importance of this encounter is that it is a significant moment in Wilfrid's Christian journey. It marks the first time Stephen describes Wilfrid engaging with any form of Christian ritual. Wilfrid spent his early life in Northumbria as it was being evangelized by Irish missionaries, presumably receiving baptism from their hands. He ended up in the monastery of Lindisfarne, serving Cudda, a royal retainer who had retired there.<sup>33</sup> Stephen stresses that Wilfrid remained 'untoured', but also that he chose of his own volition to live the monastic life as fully as possible.<sup>34</sup> As Stephen presents it, Wilfrid therefore lacked formal ties to the pre-Whitby Northumbrian church: his own piety drove him to live a holy life. What is curious is that this absence of engagement continues when Wilfrid appears in other Christian centres on his pilgrimage to Rome, including Canterbury (where once again Wilfrid's personal piety is stressed) and, perhaps surprisingly, Lyons.<sup>35</sup> Bearing in mind Foley's comments that Stephen's Augustinian model prompted him to create an edifying rather than historical account, this shows the extent to which this is a constructed image.<sup>36</sup> It is telling that Wilfrid's first narrative engagement with Christian rites appears in Rome. We may assume that Wilfrid was subject to, and engaged with, other rites during his time at Lindisfarne and Canterbury and on his journey through Francia and Italy to Rome. Most notably, he was presumably baptized by Irish missionaries. Nevertheless, as far as Stephen was concerned, Wilfrid's formal engagement with the Christian church began in Rome, kneeling before the pope. This is certainly a powerful image and arguably one that is designed to place Wilfrid beyond reproach, something that would be undermined by reference to his baptism by Quartodecimans. In short, Wilfrid's Christian journey began in the centre of orthodoxy and authority: Rome.

<sup>33</sup> VW 2 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 6).

<sup>34</sup> 'Laicus capite': *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> VW 3-4 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 8-10).

<sup>36</sup> Foley, *Images*, 12-14.

Stephen then hastens on, describing Wilfrid's tonsuring by Aunemundus of Lyons in the subsequent chapter.<sup>37</sup> This was presumably the occasion of Wilfrid's reception as either a monk or a cleric.<sup>38</sup> The significance of this passage lies not so much in the ritual progression of Wilfrid's career, as in the parallels that may be drawn with his papal confirmation. In Rome, Wilfrid's encounter with the pope had been preceded by his education in the four gospels, *computus* and other matters of ecclesiastical discipline.<sup>39</sup> In Lyons, Stephen is frustratingly vague, simply observing that Wilfrid spent time learning 'from the most learned teachers'.<sup>40</sup> Unlike his description of Rome, where Wilfrid was clearly confirmed after his studies with Boniface, Stephen is not specific about the timing of Wilfrid's studies and his tonsuring in Lyons. However, the impression is that after three years studying, Wilfrid received the tonsure from Aunemundus. Consequently, Wilfrid's learning is stressed by Stephen before he describes Wilfrid's first formal engagement with Christianity and then his entry into the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Significantly, in both instances Stephen associates Wilfrid with famous Christian centres: Rome and Lyons.<sup>41</sup>

Wilfrid's episcopal consecration makes Stephen's agenda in describing these rites of passage more comprehensible. It is the final step of Wilfrid's ecclesiastical career and, as the introduction makes

<sup>37</sup> *VW* 6 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 14).

<sup>38</sup> On why the latter may be more likely, see Stancliffe, 'Episcopacy', 30 n. 108; Catherine Cubitt, 'The Clergy in Early Anglo-Saxon England', *HR* 78 (2005), 273–87, at 277; cf. *Life*, ed. Colgrave, 154.

<sup>39</sup> *VW* 3 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 12).

<sup>40</sup> 'A doctoribus valde eruditus': *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Lyon: Elias Lowe, *Codices lugdunenses antiquissimi. Le Scriptorium de Lyon, la plus ancienne école calligraphique de France* (Lyons, 1924); Rosamond McKitterick, 'The Scriptoria of Merovingian Gaul: A Survey of the Evidence', in Howard Clarke and Mary Brennan, eds, *Columbanus and Merovingian Monasticism* (Oxford, 1981), 173–207, at 182; Hubert Mordek, *Kirchenrecht und Reform im Frankenreich* (Sigmaringen, 1975), 79–82. Rome: Farmer, 'Wilfrid', 41; Ó Carragáin and Thacker, 'Rome', 218–22; Thomas F. X. Noble, 'Rome in the Seventh Century', in Michael Lapidge, ed., *Archbishop Theodore: Commemorative Studies on his Life and Influence* (Cambridge, 1995), 68–87, at 83–6; Éamonn Ó Carragáin, 'The Periphery rethinks the Centre: Inculturation, "Roman" Liturgy and the Ruthwell Cross', in Claudia Bolgia, John Osborne and Rosamond McKitterick, eds, *Rome across Time and Space: Cultural Transmission and the Exchange of Ideas, c.500–1400* (Cambridge, 2011), 63–83, at 63–6; Michael Reeve, 'Rome, Reservoir of Ancient Texts', in Bolgia, Osborne and McKitterick, eds, *Rome across Time and Space*, 52–60, at 52.

clear, is intimately linked to a rejection of Northumbria's Ionan heritage. Arguably, however, it goes further. Stephen's comment that Rome rejected 'those who have fellowship with schismatics'<sup>42</sup> is intriguing. Naturally, Wilfrid could not be consecrated by supposed Quartodecimans, but Stephen implies that the orders of the other bishops available to Wilfrid were rendered invalid by their association with the Ionan mission. As the British and Ionan churches both adhered to the *Latercus*, this concern with fellowship can only plausibly refer to the other bishops of the English church, Wine of London (*fl.* 660–72), Berhtgisl of East Anglia (*c.*652–69) and, if he was still alive, Deusdedit of Canterbury (655–64). With backgrounds in Francia and the Roman mission at Canterbury respectively, none followed the eighty-four-year cycle of calculating Easter.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, both Wine personally and the Roman mission centred on Canterbury in general seem to have been comfortable working alongside members of the 'schismatic' British and Ionan churches. Wine, for example, was willing to consecrate Chad with the support of two British bishops.<sup>44</sup> Canterbury's attitude is less clear cut. However, Bede notes that Deusdedit's predecessor, Honorius (*c.*627×31–53) honoured Aidan (*c.*635–51), the leader of the Ionan mission in Northumbria and founder of Lindisfarne.<sup>45</sup> This attitude appears to have been generally held within the Roman mission; Felix of East Anglia (*c.*630–47), a Burgundian and evangelizing East Anglia at the behest of Honorius, shared his positive opinion of Aidan.<sup>46</sup> This might also explain why Wilfrid wrote off Berhtgisl.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, a statement Wilfrid made at the Synod of Austerfeld (*c.*703) suggests that he detected a change in Canterbury's attitude towards the Easter controversy. He observed that he was the first 'after the death of the first elders, who were sent by St Gregory to root out the poisonous weeds of the Scots'.<sup>48</sup> The Roman mission's initial orthodox zeal had lapsed, apparently to the point that they

<sup>42</sup> 'Eos qui scismaticis consentiunt': *VW* 12 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 24).

<sup>43</sup> *HE* 3.7, 20 (*Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 234, 278).

<sup>44</sup> *HE* 3.28 (*Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 316).

<sup>45</sup> *HE* 3.25 (*Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 296).

<sup>46</sup> *HE* 2.15, 3.25 (*Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 190, 296).

<sup>47</sup> *Life*, ed. Colgrave, 159.

<sup>48</sup> 'Post obitum primorum procerum, a sancto Gregorio directorum, Scotticae virulenta plantationis germina eradicarem': *VW* 47 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 98).

honoured a schismatic. Wilfrid could not countenance this and so had to seek episcopal consecration elsewhere.

Stephen draws a deliberate contrast between the flawed nature of the bishops available to Wilfrid and the ‘catholic’ nature of the Frankish bishops, a word used twice within three sentences.<sup>49</sup> He also introduces Agilbert as one of Wilfrid’s twelve consecrators, whose orthodox credentials had already been established by his presence on the Roman or Dionysiac side at the Synod of Whitby.<sup>50</sup> As a result, Stephen appears to be using Wilfrid’s consecration to denigrate earlier English Christian tradition, clearing the stage for Wilfrid, with his true orthodoxy and consequent authority, to take centre stage in establishing the true faith amongst them. With this in mind, Stephen’s stress upon Wilfrid’s education and confirmation in the Roman church and then his education and tonsuring in the Frankish church acquires new significance. Stephen took care to prove that Wilfrid’s continental credentials took precedence over any links Wilfrid had with Lindisfarne and Canterbury, which Stephen presents as more informal. At a time when a lack of orthodoxy could remove all ecclesiastical authority from an individual, it was imperative to render Wilfrid unimpeachable.

#### WILFRID’S RITES OF PASSAGE (2): IDENTIFYING A CONSTRUCTED IMAGE

Stephen therefore sought to use rites of passage to emphasize Wilfrid’s orthodoxy, separating him from the English church and the confusion created by the Easter controversy and the outcome of the Synod of Whitby. Stephen’s description of Wilfrid’s birth and the ceremony surrounding the translation of Wilfrid’s body to the abbey church of Ripon upon his death both contain details which hint that such an image is Stephen’s own construction. Neither are conventionally considered to be ‘rites’, akin to confirmation or baptism. However, the translation of Wilfrid’s body seems to have been the crucial act in establishing his sainthood and so is a ritual steeped in significance. Likewise, Stephen presents Wilfrid’s birth as a momentous spiritual occasion.

<sup>49</sup> *VW* 12 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 26).

<sup>50</sup> *VW* 10 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 20); *HE* 3.25 (*Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 298–300); Dailey, ‘One Easter’, 60–1.

Stephen described the moment of Wilfrid's birth as being accompanied by flames, akin to the burning bush in Exodus 3. The interpretation Stephen placed upon it was as follows: 'Now, brethren, we frequently read that the Holy Spirit has appeared in the form of fire ... This light the Lord commanded to be set, not under a bushel, but on a candlestick and through our blessed bishop it shone openly upon almost all the churches of Britain'.<sup>51</sup> Stephen wished to present Wilfrid's birth as an event divinely marked out as significant, heralding the appearance of the man who would reform the churches of Britain with his knowledge of the Dionysiac Easter. What is noteworthy is the date of Wilfrid's birth, traditionally placed in 634.<sup>52</sup> Stancliffe has used calendar evidence to place Wilfrid's death in 710.<sup>53</sup> Stephen notes that Wilfrid was in his seventy-sixth year when he died; put in more straightforward fashion he was seventy-five.<sup>54</sup> As such, the year of his birth is more likely to be 635. Immo Warntjes has observed that the majority of the evidence points to Lindisfarne's foundation in 635.<sup>55</sup> The Irish annals and the Lindisfarne annals both give 635 as the date of foundation, while Bede is ambiguous, providing relative dates which suggest either 634 or 635.<sup>56</sup> This elision of dates is significant in light of Stephen's comments about the churches of Britain. Wilfrid's birth

<sup>51</sup> 'Nos autem fratres, frequenter legimus spiritum sanctum in igne apparuisse ... quod lumen non sub modio sed super candelabrum Dominus poni iussit. Et hoc per beatum pontificem nostrum omnibus paene Britanniae ecclesiis palam effulsit': VW 1 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 4).

<sup>52</sup> Catherine Cubitt, 'Appendix 2: The Chronology of Stephen's *Life of Wilfrid*', in Higham, ed., *Wilfrid*, 334–47, at 342; Farmer, 'Wilfrid', 40; Alan Thacker, 'St Wilfrid', in Michael Lapidge et al., eds, *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, 2nd edn (Chichester, 2014), 495–6, at 495; but contrast Mayr-Harting, *Coming*, 107.

<sup>53</sup> Clare Stancliffe, 'Dating Wilfrid's Death and Stephen's *Life*', in Higham, ed., *Wilfrid*, 17–26, at 17–22.

<sup>54</sup> VW 66 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 142).

<sup>55</sup> Immo Warntjes, 'Victorius vs Dionysius: The Irish Easter Controversy of AD 689', in Pádraic Moran and Immo Warntjes, eds, *Early Medieval Ireland and Europe: Chronology, Contacts and Scholarship. A Festschrift for Dáibhí Ó Cróinín* (Turnhout, 2015), 33–98, at 43 n. 36.

<sup>56</sup> *The Annals of Ulster to AD 1131*, ed. Seán Mac Airt and Gearoid Mac Niocaill (Dublin, 1983), s.a. 632; *The Annals of Tigernach*, ed. Whitley Stokes, *Revue Celtique* 16–18 (1895–7), s.a. 635; HE 3.17 (*Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 262–4); Wilhelm Levison, 'Die Annales "Lindisfarnensis et Dunelmenses" kritisch untersucht und neu herausgegeben', *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 17 (1961), 447–506, at 480, 492.

is arguably portentous not simply because Stephen sought to give his hero a grand entrance, but because Stephen implied that the saviour of the Northumbrian church came into the world at the same time as its corruptor.

This gives a hint at the constructed nature of Wilfrid's image in the *VW*, which is furthered by the translation of Wilfrid's body and the establishment of his saintly cult.<sup>57</sup> Alan Thacker has discussed the origins of this ritual, involving the washing of a body and removal of it into the church itself for burial. It certainly derived from the Frankish church, with Eligius, bishop of Noyon, probably the central figure, who developed the rite in the 640s.<sup>58</sup> Thacker has commented that 'almost certainly, those who devised Wilfrid's funeral ceremonies had Gaulish episcopal translations in mind'.<sup>59</sup> The association is certainly Frankish but the context is another matter. The Wilfridians did not introduce the practice into the English church. Two individuals were translated before Wilfrid: Æthelthryth of Ely (c.695) and Cuthbert of Lindisfarne (c.698).<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, Bede notes Wilfrid's presence at Æthelthryth's translation.<sup>61</sup> This means that when Wilfrid's followers removed his body for burial in Ripon, they may have had an English, rather than a Frankish, exemplar. It is a compelling hint that Wilfrid and his followers may not have been as sundered from the rest of the English church as Stephen's account may lead the reader to believe.

### WILFRID'S RITES OF PASSAGE (3): NUANCING WILFRID'S BACKGROUND

Wilfrid's birth and translation thus give good grounds for believing that the image Stephen presented was carefully engineered to set Wilfrid up as the saviour of Northumbrian Christianity, grounding him in the indisputably orthodox Roman and Frankish churches. It is at this juncture that Wilfrid's priestly and abbatial ordinations become relevant, as they provide a means of picking apart Stephen's carefully crafted image.

<sup>57</sup> *VW* 66 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 142).

<sup>58</sup> Alan Thacker, 'The Making of a Local Saint', in idem and Richard Sharpe, eds, *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West* (Oxford, 2002), 45–73, at 54–62.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 62.

<sup>60</sup> Bede, *Vita Cuthberti* [hereafter: *VP*] 42 (*Two Lives*, ed. Colgrave, 290–4); *VA* 4.14 (*Two Lives*, ed. Colgrave, 130–2); *HE* 4.19, 30 (*Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 392–6, 442–4).

<sup>61</sup> *HE* 4.19 (*Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 394).

Wilfrid's priestly ordination by Agilbert is described in great detail by Stephen, not least to predict Wilfrid's subsequent episcopal consecration.<sup>62</sup> The point to focus on is how Stephen presents Agilbert; he is described simply as a 'foreign bishop'.<sup>63</sup> Agilbert's background is contextualized a few chapters later, when he participates in Wilfrid's episcopal consecration in Francia.<sup>64</sup> Reading the *VW*, one would assume that Agilbert was a random orthodox Frankish bishop who had made his way to Northumbria for some reason. Fortunately, Bede provides a fuller description of Agilbert's career, specifying his time in Wessex and (more intriguingly) that Agilbert had received episcopal consecration in Ireland.<sup>65</sup> Naturally, it is necessary to be cautious about textual silences. However, the lack of any description of Agilbert's career is an interesting silence on Stephen's part.

Agilbert was clearly a significant figure in Wilfrid's life, ordaining Wilfrid priest and then bishop in quick succession.<sup>66</sup> Wilfrid had significant links with the kingdom of Wessex, forming friendships with at least two of its kings, including Cenwalh, whose bishop Agilbert was, and who commended Wilfrid to Alhfrith, sub-king of Deira.<sup>67</sup> During his first exile, Wilfrid came to associate himself with Cædwalla, receiving significant grants of land from him.<sup>68</sup> With these links, can Stephen plausibly be thought to have been ignorant of Agilbert's West Saxon career? Wilfrid's objections to episcopal consecration in Britain are worth revisiting because it is necessary to stress that the Quartodecimans were not the only people causing Wilfrid anxiety. Those who had fellowship with schismatics were not received into communion by the papacy.<sup>69</sup> This aspect of the objection must refer to any surviving bishops of the English church, such as Wine, who was comfortable to consecrate Chad to Northumbria with two

<sup>62</sup> *VW* 9 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 18).

<sup>63</sup> 'Episcopus transmarinus': *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *VW* 12 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 26).

<sup>65</sup> *HE* 3.7 (*Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 234).

<sup>66</sup> Wood, 'Journeys', 202; Fouracre, 'Continent', 191–4.

<sup>67</sup> *VW* 7 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 15–16).

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* 42 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 84); *HE* 4.16 (*Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 382; P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography* (London, 1986), no. 235 (printed in *Cartularium Saxonicum*, ed. W. de Gray Birch, 3 vols [London, 1883–94], no. 72); Richard Sharpe, 'King Ceadwalla and Bishop Wilfrid', in Scott DeGregorio and Paul Kershaw, eds, *Cities, Saints and Communities in Early Medieval Europe* (Turnhout, 2020), 195–222.

<sup>69</sup> *VW* 12 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 24).

British bishops.<sup>70</sup> Stephen's silence may have been an attempt to separate Agilbert from an English church that could be considered corrupt. By stressing Agilbert's foreignness and ultimately locating him in the catholic Frankish church, the validity of Agilbert's orders could not be questioned and so, in turn, Wilfrid's orders and indeed his orthodoxy were assured. A comparison of the *VW* and *HE* often reveals discreet Bedan silences, to hide inconvenient truths that disrupted the golden age of Christianity Bede wished to portray.<sup>71</sup> Perhaps here the reverse is detectable; the *HE* demonstrates an uncomfortably close link between Wilfrid and the pre-Whitby English church that Stephen sought to obscure.

This is confirmed by the first ordination in the *VW*, Wilfrid's abbatial ordination. While the establishment of an abbot is not normally deemed ordination, this is the term used by Stephen.<sup>72</sup> It also appears in the *Penitentials of Theodore*, which discusses the ordination of an abbot in a section dedicated to ordination, including that of bishops, priests and deacons.<sup>73</sup> The ritual to ordain an abbot involved the bishop celebrating the eucharist, blessing the new abbot and handing him his staff and sandals.<sup>74</sup> The abbatial ordination follows on from a detailed description of Alhfrith's gifts to Wilfrid. Stephen notes that after giving him ten hides at *Stanforda* Alhfrith 'granted him the monastery at Ripon, together with thirty hides of land and [Wilfrid] was ordained abbot'.<sup>75</sup> The voice of the sentence shifts from the active when Alhfrith's gifts are discussed to the passive when Wilfrid is ordained. This suggests that this is not some form of investiture ceremony involving Alhfrith; indeed, the use of the word 'ordained' implies an ecclesiastical ceremony.<sup>76</sup> While the *Penitentials of Theodore* is a later document, it provides the sole insight into this ceremony and it gives the central role to a presiding

<sup>70</sup> *HE* 3.28 (*Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave, 316).

<sup>71</sup> Stancliffe, 'Episcopacy', 11; Kirby, 'Stephanus', 102; Goffart, *Narrators*, 307–24; James Campbell, 'Bede II', in idem, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London, 1986), 29–48, at 41–2.

<sup>72</sup> *VW* 8 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 16).

<sup>73</sup> Haddan and Stubbs, eds, *Councils*, 3: 192–3.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> 'Coenobium Inhrypis cum terra xxx mansionum ... concessit ei, et abbas ordinatus est': *VW* 8 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 16).

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'A Contract between King and People in Early Medieval Ireland? *Crith Gablach* on Kingship', *Peritia* 8 (1994), 107–19, at 109–11.

bishop.<sup>77</sup> Significantly, Wilfrid's abbatial ordination occurs before Agilbert comes north and there is no credible reason why Stephen would neglect to attribute this to Agilbert if he had been involved.<sup>78</sup> The context for Wilfrid at this point in time in Northumbria is the Ionan mission centred on Lindisfarne. The bishops in the vicinity of Ripon would have been the bishop of Lindisfarne, either Finan (d. c.661) or Colmán (661–4), and the bishop of Mercia, Trumhere (c.658–62).<sup>79</sup> In that case, Stephen could not identify the person who ordained Wilfrid abbot because to do so would be to ritually associate Wilfrid with someone condemned as a Quartodeciman heretic.

Thus the very questions that Wilfrid raised at the Synod of Whitby had ramifications upon how Stephen was able to develop Wilfrid's hagiography. Stephen had to manage Wilfrid's pre-Whitby career, when the majority of his rites of passage occurred, with intense care. Wilfrid's significance to the English church hinged upon his reforming zeal and rejection of the Scottish weeds, as Wilfrid expressed at the Synod of Austerfeld.<sup>80</sup> Any formal association with them undermined this image. Furthermore, Wilfrid's claims to have been the first since the early Gregorian mission to have eradicated the Scottish weeds are conceivably a claim to primacy in the English church. As the *Penitentials* reveals, such an association risked tainting the legitimacy of an individual's ecclesiastical rank and his consequent authority to act in that capacity.<sup>81</sup> For all Wilfrid's Romanizing tendencies, it is important to remember Mayr-Harting's comment that 'it is easy to underrate the influence on Wilfrid of the four happy years which he spent at Lindisfarne'.<sup>82</sup> Stephen provides a constructed image, not a complete one, in which Wilfrid acts within a corrupt church in need of reform.

<sup>77</sup> Haddan and Stubbs, eds, *Councils*, 3: 192–3. It also derives from a Roman centre, although for Irish influence upon it, see John McNeill and Helena Gamer, eds, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance* (New York, 1968), 181–2; Allen Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1983), 62–9; Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'The Penitential of Theodore and the *Judicia Theodori*', in Lapidge, ed., *Theodore*, 141–74, at 143, 162–3.

<sup>78</sup> *VW* 8 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 16–18).

<sup>79</sup> *HE* 3.17, 24 (*Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 264, 292–6); S. Keynes, 'Appendix 2', in Lapidge et al., eds, *Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, 539–66, at 555, 565.

<sup>80</sup> *VW* 47 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 98).

<sup>81</sup> Haddan and Stubbs, eds, *Councils*, 3: 180–2, 197.

<sup>82</sup> Mayr-Harting, *Coming*, 142.

## WILFRID'S PERFORMANCE OF RITES

It is in this light that Wilfrid's performance of rites of passage should be viewed. As a priest and then a bishop, whose career stretched across numerous kingdoms and sees, Wilfrid would have conducted a wide range of rites that marked individuals' progression through both the Christian faith and the Christian church. As a hagiography of an individual who lived in a missionary period and indeed pioneered the evangelization of two kingdoms, Sussex and Frisia, there are several references to baptism, with large numbers of converts cited.<sup>83</sup> Curiously, there is only a single reference to Wilfrid baptizing and confirming while he was acting as a diocesan bishop. Stephen refers in passing to Wilfrid carrying out these rites in order to set up a miracle: recalling a young boy from death.<sup>84</sup>

Stephen seems to have been far more interested in Wilfrid's ordinations. He stressed that Wilfrid 'ordained many priests ... and not a few deacons'<sup>85</sup> in Kent before Theodore's arrival in 669. Likewise, when claiming that Wilfrid diligently fulfilled his episcopal duties in Northumbria, Stephen evidenced this by citing that 'in every part he ordained numbers of priests and deacons'.<sup>86</sup> There is also a reference to Wilfrid's episcopal duties in Mercia, presumably including ordinations, but Stephen does not make this explicit.<sup>87</sup> In terms of episcopal consecrations, the only one that Stephen specifically references is that of Chad, although Bede notes Wilfrid's involvement in two more.<sup>88</sup> The importance of these acts to Stephen is evidenced by the fact that when narrating Wilfrid's death, Stephen asked: 'who can tell how many bishops, priests and deacons he had ordained and how many churches he had dedicated during the forty-six years of his episcopate?'<sup>89</sup> While Stephen spoke on a local level regarding this latter

<sup>83</sup> *VW* 26, 41 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 52, 82–4).

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* 18 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 38–40).

<sup>85</sup> 'Presbiteros multos ... et non paucos diacones ordinavit': *ibid.* 14 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 30).

<sup>86</sup> 'In omnibus locis presbiteros et diacones sibi adiuvantes abundanter ordinavit': *ibid.* 21 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 44).

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* 14 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 30).

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* 15 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 32); *HE* 4.23, 5.11 (*Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 410, 484).

<sup>89</sup> 'Quantos vero per quadraginta sex annos episcopatus sui episcopos et presbiteros et diacones ordinaverat et quantas ecclesias dedicavit, quis enumerare potest': *VW* 66 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 142).

point – the foundation of local churches – it offers a prism through which to approach Stephen’s agenda concerning Wilfrid’s performance of rites of passage.

Wilfrid’s performance of rites of passage are primarily related to the church in a structural sense. Two of the three references to baptism are evangelistic in context and so are foundational in nature. Through his evangelism and subsequent baptisms, Wilfrid established the South Saxon church and the Frisian church (although this latter claim is certainly over-optimistic).<sup>90</sup> References to ordination and episcopal consecration relate to the church’s ability to carry out its ministry. The stress laid on the latter by Stephen upon Wilfrid’s death means that serious thought needs to be given to Stephen’s occasional references to ordinations.

It seems likely that Stephen viewed these in a foundational sense too and was extending the theme begun with Wilfrid’s apparently Frankish priestly and episcopal ordinations. Stephen’s descriptions highlighted that Wilfrid’s orders could not be associated with the questionably orthodox English church. Consequently, Wilfrid’s activities in ordaining clergy across numerous kingdoms, including Kent, renewed and reinvigorated the English church.<sup>91</sup> There is an additional thread, which demonstrates the scale of Stephen’s ambitions for Wilfrid. A very similar sentiment about the orthodoxy of the English clergy is visible in Bede’s *HE*. Bede noted that Oswiu and Ecgberht sought consecration for Wigheard in Rome so that ‘he could consecrate catholic bishops for the English church throughout the whole of Britain’.<sup>92</sup> Wigheard’s death meant that Theodore was sent to fulfil this need to ensure the catholic nature of the English church.<sup>93</sup> The ordinations that Wilfrid carried out in Kent were done before Theodore’s arrival. As a result, Stephen gave Wilfrid primacy over Theodore in reforming the post-Whitby English church, an idea continued in the consecration of Chad, which sees Wilfrid, rather

<sup>90</sup> James Palmer, ‘Wilfrid in Frisia’, in Higham, ed., *Wilfrid*, 231–42, at 241–2.

<sup>91</sup> Brooks, *Canterbury*, 71.

<sup>92</sup> ‘Catholicos per omnem Britanniam ecclesii Anglorum ordinare posset antistites’: *HE* 3.29 (*Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 318); Brooks, *Canterbury*, 69–70; cf. Richard Shaw, ‘Bede, Theodore and Wigheard: Why did Pope Vitalian need to appoint a new Bishop for the English Church in the 660s?’, *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique* 113 (2018), 521–43.

<sup>93</sup> *HE* 4.1 (*Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 328–32).

than Theodore, as the prime mover in his reordination and translation to Lichfield.

Wilfrid's performance of rites of passage, while less detailed in Stephen's account, is therefore no less important. They show Wilfrid as a foundational figure, establishing Christianity in both Sussex and Frisia, but more importantly reimbuing orthodoxy into the English church in the wake of the Easter controversy. Wilfrid's 'Frankish' ordinations meant that he was not caught up in questions of legitimacy visible in the *Penitentials of Theodore*. Moreover, Wilfrid's actions preceded Theodore's arrival in Kent; he consequently had primacy in guiding the English back to orthodox Christianity.

#### THE *VITAE CUTHBERTI*

Whether reacting directly to Wilfrid or not, it is clear that the author of the *VA* was sensitive to the same questions of orthodoxy. The reference to Cuthbert's receiving the Petrine tonsure implied that Cuthbert was Roman in practice and consequently acted with legitimate authority within the Northumbrian church; he was not to be tainted by the label of schismatic.<sup>94</sup> Not only was the Celtic tonsure associated with the perceived Quartodeciman heresy of Iona, but it was also said to derive from Simon Magus and was consequently linked to simony, raising further questions about legitimacy.<sup>95</sup> The Petrine tonsure allowed the anonymous author to introduce Cuthbert's pastoral work with the confidence that it was orthodox and the sacraments he ministered were legitimate. The anonymous author provides two descriptions of Cuthbert ministering to the laity while in the house of Melrose, baptizing converts to Christianity.<sup>96</sup> He then proceeded to describe Cuthbert's episcopal election and consecration by Theodore and a synod of the English church, which set up descriptions of rites which only a bishop could conduct: the blessing of the chrism and confirmation.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>94</sup> *VA* 2.2 (*Two Lives*, ed. Colgrave, 76); Stancliffe, 'Episcopacy', 15; eadem, 'Cuthbert and the Polarity between Pastor and Solitary', in Bonner, Rollason and Stancliffe, eds, *St Cuthbert*, 21–44, at 23, 27.

<sup>95</sup> *HE* 5.21 (*Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 546–8).

<sup>96</sup> *VA* 2.5 (*Two Lives*, ed. Colgrave, 84–6).

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* 4.5 (*Two Lives*, ed. Colgrave, 116).

In many respects the *VA* is unremarkable in its description of rites of passage, mentioning them in an incidental manner while describing Cuthbert's devout ministry in Northumbria, both as a monk and as a bishop. They acquire significance when placed alongside Bede's reworking of the account.

How Bede chose to rewrite the *VA* in these specific places is striking, as [Table 1](#) demonstrates. There is not a precise concordance between the two *Vitae*, but there are similarities. Bede seems to have taken Cuthbert's episcopal election and consecration as a significant moment. References to baptism, which the anonymous author placed before this event, have been removed, with Cuthbert simply preaching, while the one to confirming has been kept.

The reference to Theodore at Cuthbert's episcopal election is a useful guide to Bede's thinking. Bede notes Theodore's role earlier in his narrative of the election, suggesting he was eager to associate Cuthbert with the great archbishop.<sup>98</sup> Theodore's orthodox credentials were impeccable, with Pope Vitalian certainly consecrating him bishop and potentially ordaining him through the other orders in preparation for that.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, Bede observed the request for papal consecration of a new archbishop of Canterbury was made so that he 'could consecrate catholic bishops for the English church'.<sup>100</sup> In short, orders derived from Theodore were entirely orthodox. Once Cuthbert was made a bishop at the hands of Theodore there could be no question about the legitimacy of rites that he enacted.

This provides a useful context for Bede's rewriting of the anonymous author's references to baptism. The circumstances in which a baptism was deemed invalid were unclear and the writer of the *Penitentials* observed that in two places what had been handed down as Theodore's teachings differed from œcumenical or papal decisions.<sup>101</sup> What is consistent, however, is that baptism should ideally be performed by a priest and that if the priest's orders were suspect, it caused questions about the legitimacy of any baptism he had conducted.<sup>102</sup> Cuthbert is never described as receiving priestly ordination, but Bede notes in the *HE* that at Lindisfarne 'those of them

<sup>98</sup> *VA* 4.1 (*Two Lives*, ed. Colgrave, 110); cf. *VP* 24 (*Two Lives*, ed. Colgrave, 238).

<sup>99</sup> *HE* 4.1 (*Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 330).

<sup>100</sup> 'Catholicos per omnem Britanniam ecclesiis Anglorum ordinare posset antistites': *ibid.* 3.29 (*Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 318).

<sup>101</sup> Haddan and Stubbs, eds, *Councils*, 3: 181, 185.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* 3: 185, 192.

**Table 1.** Rites of Passage in the two *Lives of Cuthbert*

| VA   | VP   |
|--|--|
|  | 9 'he would tarry in the mountains, summoning the rustics to heavenly things by the word of his preaching as well as by the example of his virtue'. <sup>103</sup> |
| 2.5 'he was going along the river Teviot and making his way southward, teaching the country people among the mountains and baptizing them ... Then they set out according to God's will to the mountains, as we have said above, teaching and baptizing.' <sup>104</sup> | 12 'he had left the monastery to preach as was his wont ... having resumed their journey, they set out to reach those whom they purposed to teach'. <sup>105</sup> |
| 2.6 'while baptizing there among the mountains'. <sup>106</sup>  | 13 'when he was preaching the word of life to a crowd of people'. <sup>107</sup>   |

<sup>103</sup> 'Demoratus in montanis plebem rusticam verbo predicationis simul et exemplo virtutis ad coelestia vocaret': VP 9 (*Two Lives*, ed. Colgrave, 186).

<sup>104</sup> 'Proficiscebatur iuxta fluvium Tesgeta tendens in meridiem inter montana docens rusticanos et baptizabat eos ... in voluntate Dei, ad montana ut supra diximus proficiscebant docentes et baptizantes': VA 2.5 (*Two Lives*, ed. Colgrave, 84–6).

<sup>105</sup> 'Predicaturus iuxta consuetudinem suam populis, de monasterio exiret ... resumpto itinere, ad docendum eos, quos proposuere profecti sunt': VP 12 (*Two Lives*, ed. Colgrave, 194–6).

<sup>106</sup> 'Ibi inter montana baptizans': VA 2.5 (*Two Lives*, ed. Colgrave, 86).

<sup>107</sup> 'Dum congregatis ... per plurimos verbum vitae praedicaret': VP 13 (*Two Lives*, ed. Colgrave, 198).

- 4.1 'he was elected to the bishopric of our church at Lindisfarne ... while the council together with Archbishop Theodore still awaited him'.<sup>108</sup>
- 4.4 'anointing her with chrism consecrated by his blessing'.<sup>110</sup>
- 4.5 'he placed his hand on the head of each of them and anointing them with consecrated oil he blessed them'.<sup>111</sup>
- 24 'when no small synod had gathered together, in the presence of the most pious King Ecgfrith beloved of God over which Archbishop Theodore of blessed memory presided, he was elected to the bishopric of the church at Lindisfarne with the unanimous consent of all'.<sup>109</sup>
- 29 'laying his hand on those who had been lately baptized'.<sup>112</sup>
- 

<sup>108</sup> 'Ad episcopatum nostrae aeclesiae Lindisfarnensium electus est ... invitus ... abstractus est expectante etiam adhuc senatu, cum archiepiscopo Theodoro': *VA* 4.1 (*Two Lives*, ed. Colgrave, 110).

<sup>109</sup> 'Congregata sinodo non parva sub praesentia piissimi ac Deo dilecti regis Egfridi, cui beatae memoriae Theodorus archiepiscopus praesidebat unanimo omnium consensu ad episcopatum ecclesiae Lindisfarnensis electus est': *VP* 24 (*Two Lives*, ed. Colgrave, 238).

<sup>110</sup> 'Unguens eam crisma': *VA* 4.4 (*Two Lives*, ed. Colgrave, 116).

<sup>111</sup> 'Manum ponens super capita singulorum, liniens unctione consecrata benedixerat': *VA* 4.5 (*Two Lives*, ed. Colgrave, 116).

<sup>112</sup> 'Nuper baptizatis ... manum imponeret': *VP* 29 (*Two Lives*, ed. Colgrave, 252).

who held the rank of priest administered the grace of baptism'.<sup>113</sup> There is also a miracle in the *VA* that could be read as Cuthbert holding priestly orders. A woman was very sick, afflicted with a demon, and her husband, Hildmer, asked Cuthbert, then prior of Lindisfarne, to supply a priest to administer the last rites. Cuthbert ordered a priest to depart but changed his mind, stating that he should go instead. Only while journeying to Hildmer's wife, Cuthbert revealed that the cause of the woman's illness was a demon and that she did not need the last rites. The passage could be read as implying that Cuthbert originally intended to carry out priestly functions.<sup>114</sup>

Bede removes any possibility of such a reading. While the general narrative of Hildmer's wife's sufferings and cure is the same, Bede explicitly states that before he chose to go himself Cuthbert 'suddenly realised in his spirit that the wife for whom the man was praying was afflicted by no ordinary infirmity but by the attack of a demon'.<sup>115</sup> By reworking the casting out of this demon and removing references to baptism, Bede prevents any suggestion that Cuthbert was a priest and so, through his association with the *Latercus* and its questionable dating of Easter, had orders that were either incomplete or invalid. In essence, what Bede's recasting of rites of passage reveals is how threatening Stephen's lifting of the anonymous author's description of Cuthbert's Petrine tonsure actually was. Stephen did not simply catch Lindisfarne in a lie about an embarrassing association.<sup>116</sup> By undermining the credibility of this claim to orthodoxy, he raised questions about the authority with which Cuthbert performed baptismal rites, which in turn raised questions about his ecclesiastical rank and its legitimacy.<sup>117</sup> In terms of Acca's designs upon the see of Lindisfarne, it would have been an excellent means by which to denigrate Lindisfarne's great episcopal hero and patron.<sup>118</sup> It is perhaps a mark of the seriousness of the position Lindisfarne found itself in that Bede did not respond directly to these questions. Instead, Bede

<sup>113</sup> 'Gratiam baptismi, quicumque sacerdotali erant gradu praediti, ministrare': *HE* 3.3 (*Ecclesiastical History*, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, 220).

<sup>114</sup> *VA* 2.8 (*Two Lives*, ed. Colgrave, 90–2).

<sup>115</sup> 'Cognovit repente in spiritu quia non communi infirmitate sed demonis infestatione premeretur coniux, pro qua supplicabat': *VP* 15 (*Two Lives*, ed. Colgrave, 204).

<sup>116</sup> *VW* 6 (*Life*, ed. Colgrave, 14).

<sup>117</sup> Cubitt, 'Clergy', 277 n. 19.

<sup>118</sup> Stancliffe, 'Episcopacy', 32–3.

sidestepped them, removing any suggestion that Cuthbert was bound to the Lindisfarne mission by ordination, only acknowledging rites of passage once Cuthbert was elected and consecrated bishop by Theodore and no questions could be asked about the validity of his orders. Furthermore, by giving Theodore greater prominence in Cuthbert's succession to the episcopate, Bede could associate Cuthbert with a source of orthodoxy equal to Wilfrid. In so doing, he shored up Cuthbert's legitimacy and suitability as an example of episcopal conduct. Bede was doing for Cuthbert what Stephen did for Wilfrid; constructing an image of orthodoxy upon which to ground the legitimacy of Cuthbert's ritual actions.

#### CONCLUSION

At the outset, it is striking how similar the *VW*, *VA* and *VP* are in their use of rites of passage to prove the orthodoxy of their subjects and their consequent right to hold positions of authority within the seventh-century English church. The questions of legitimacy raised at the Synod of Whitby and stamped upon the *Penitentials of Theodore* cast long shadows that reached into the eighth century. In light of this, Wilfrid's rites of passage demonstrate three specific points. Firstly, one of Stephen's priorities in describing them was to prove Wilfrid's ritual links to the Frankish and Roman churches. This is fundamental to the image of Wilfrid that Stephen wished to present: a man whose orthodoxy was beyond doubt in the febrile atmosphere in the wake of the Synod of Whitby. Secondly, this concern was not limited to the Northumbrian church; rather the entire pre-Whitby English church was suspect. Thirdly, this was a constructed image. Through what Stephen does not say about Wilfrid and his rites of passage, it is possible to associate Wilfrid with the pre-Whitby Northumbrian church specifically and the English church generally. Wilfrid may not have been as sundered from his peers as Stephen may lead readers to believe. Stephen also used Wilfrid's performance of rites of passage to create a foundational authority for him, which would have been impossible had Wilfrid been tainted through formal association with Christianity corrupted by 'Quartodecimanism'.

Bede and the anonymous author were both similarly sensitive to the problems of legitimacy raised by the *Laterculus*. The anonymous author sought to reassure readers that Cuthbert had always adhered

to Roman practice by reference to the Petrine tonsure. Bede instead avoided ritual questions in his account of Cuthbert's monastic career, focusing on his episcopal consecration at the hands of Theodore, an act to which no one could object. In terms of the dispute with Acca and Hexham, it confirms that questions of orthodoxy were part of the threat to Lindisfarne's position in the Northumbrian church and that Bede, in rewriting the *VA*, did not seek to attack Wilfrid but to rehabilitate Cuthbert. Evidently, rites of passage were rendered highly charged issues by the questions of orthodoxy in the Northumbrian church after the Synod of Whitby, being used to grant authority to, or dispute the authority of, saintly figures associated with both sides of the Easter controversy. They provide a means to cut through the hagiographic propaganda and access the concerns of the authors and in so doing provide a fuller understanding both of Wilfrid and of the debates between Lindisfarne and Hexham in the wake of his death.