

NEW VOICES IN THE TRADITION: MEDIEVAL HAGIOGRAPHY REVISITED

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[The author argues for the use of hagiographical texts to expand the evidence for the theological tradition, precisely during the early Middle Ages when more obvious sources are wanting. Her thesis is that there is sound basis for reading the lives of the saints through the lens of doctrinal theology. After giving this evidence, she then exemplifies the value of such a reading by an ecclesiological analysis of Rudolf of Saxony's life of St. Leoba, a companion of St. Boniface.]

IN THEIR INVESTIGATION of the medieval period of the tradition, Catholic theologians have long privileged the texts and thinkers of the Scholastic age. There are many possible reasons for this privilege. The monumental accomplishment of the great Scholastics such as Bonaventure and Aquinas has understandably drawn eyes to their work and tends to dwarf other contributions. Leo XIII's virtual anointing of Aquinas as the normative Catholic theologian in *Aeterni Patris* (1879) reinforced the implicit consensus that Thomistic theology *is* the medieval tradition. Since Catholic theology after the Reformation retained, and indeed emphasized, its concern for the integration of theology and philosophy, it is logical that contemporary theologians would look to the philosophical sources of the Middle Ages and these, undeniably, are richest during the Scholastic period. But the theologian concerned to understand and build upon the fullness of the Catholic tradition must wonder whether the privileged position of Scholastic writers might indeed have blinded us to the theological importance of other texts. To be more specific, we may question whether or not narrative sources, specifically the lives of the saints, have been ignored for the wrong reasons and to the detriment of the Catholic theological project. My article addresses the question of medieval theological sources. To answer this question we must first consider some of the reasons that theologians ignore

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hagiographical texts. Then we must consider what medieval writers themselves might have thought they were doing when they composed such narratives. That will enable us to look then at a particular text and attempt to give it a theological reading.

POSSIBLE REASONS FOR IGNORING THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS

Certain assumptions made about hagiographical texts contribute to their theological neglect. They are assumed to reflect only popular religiosity and, although this makes them valuable in documenting the religious and moral catechesis of the people of God in a variety of contexts, they are usually dismissed as uncritical and unrelated to the actual formulation of the tradition itself. The label of popular religion does, often rightly, identify the political motives of those who crafted the narrative texts. Some are the work of those who sought to elevate the importance (and lucrative potential) of particular shrines or who hoped to control the behavior of the laity by giving them appropriate models of behavior. Such judgments have often been made, however, without careful attention to the provenance of each specific text and this failure is, in itself, seriously uncritical. Certainly the theological value of these texts is uneven, but, again, the value of each can only be determined by careful study.

Another assumption about medieval narrative texts is that they may be of interest to the field of history, but are problematic for the study of systematic theologians. Certainly historians have found in them rich evidence to document specific lives and communities, evidence that is particularly helpful in illuminating the lives of “the people,” ordinary Christians otherwise unnoticed. In a helpful essay entitled, “Saints, Scholars and Society: The Elusive Goal,” Patrick Geary has identified recent trends in the historical analysis of the *vitae sanctorum*.¹ He notes how historians have discovered the importance of such texts not only for what he calls “incidental historical information” but also for the study of social values.

The importance of hagiographical texts in social history and their strength, particularly, in documenting otherwise neglected lives have brought them to the attention of feminist historians. Scholars such as Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg have discovered that, “unlike many other sources of the Middle Ages, saints’ lives focus a great deal of attention on women: the *vitae* are directly concerned with female roles in the Church and society as

¹ Patrick Geary, “Saints, Scholars and Society: The Elusive Goal,” in *Saints: Studies in Hagiography*, ed. Sandro Sticca (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1996) 1–22.

well as contemporary perceptions, ideals, and valuations of women.”² That the ideal of holiness preferred by the *vitae sanctae* was also shaped by gender concerns has not gone unnoticed. Jo Ann McNamara has, for instance, uncovered the textual tradition dependent upon the life of Helena, mother of Constantine. McNamara demonstrates that a feminization—and limitation—of royal power was strongly encouraged by a series of royal women’s lives.³ Similarly, Lois L. Huneycutt has studied how the biblical story of Esther was used to empower medieval Christian queens in their ambiguous position as intercessors with the king.⁴

In all of these fine studies—and many others like them—the specifically religious element of the *vitae sanctorum* has been utilized in three specific ways. One, the Christian values and virtues proposed by the text are understood to reveal the social and religious values of a given Christian society. Two, the concrete historical details identifiable in the text have been used as windows into the religious activity of persons otherwise undocumented: ordinary Christians and, especially, women of all classes. Three, the religious ideology of Christian faith has been seen in the texts as empowering women and other marginalized groups to act beyond the usual social boundaries of their class and gender. But the specifically religious import of these historical studies does not ensure that hagiographical texts will bear the weight of interest by systematic theologians, even those who seek to understand the full richness and extent of the Christian tradition.

GETTING INSIDE THE MIND OF THE AUTHORS

To demonstrate that they can bear such weight, we must attempt to understand how the medieval authors of such texts viewed their own work. To understand how early medieval theologians might understand and value narrative genres, we must first reflect on the linguistic influences that shaped their thought and writing. They wrote, of course, in a second language, that is, they did not do theology in the language that was the ordinary vehicle of expression in daily life. They learned their theological language almost entirely through the Bible itself. Though many of them had access to certain texts of the classical grammarians, they learned their alphabet from the alphabetic psalms, their grammar from the sentence

² “Saints Lives as a Source for the History of Women, 500–1100,” in *Medieval Women and the Sources of Medieval History*, ed. Joel T. Rosenthal (Athens: University of Georgia, 1990) 285–320.

³ “Imitatio Helenae: Sainthood as an Attribute of Queenship,” in Sticca, *Saints* 51–80.

⁴ “Intercession and the High Medieval Queen: The Esther Topos,” in *Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women*, ed. Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1995) 126–46.

structures of the Vulgate, and their rhetoric from samples culled from the biblical corpus. The *De arte metrica* and *De schematibus et tropis* of Bede, the eighth-century Anglo-Saxon monk, are but two examples of the medieval tools that were accessible. This means not only that they would have done theology entirely within the thought-world of the Bible, but that they would have had a high regard for the genres through which divine revelation unfolded. Given the importance of the narrative (or historical) books of the Bible, and especially the privileged position of the Gospels, early medieval writers would certainly have understood the theological nature of the narrative form.

Secondly, we must understand how thoroughly early medieval theologians venerated the work of the Church Fathers and how they sought to continue it. In terms of literary genre, the patristic legacy of theological writing was significantly diverse. The great theologians of the first four centuries left many exegetical texts, both commentaries and homilies, as well as treatises that were somewhat more philosophical in nature, such as Tertullian's *De testimonio animae* or Augustine's *De Trinitate*. They also authored important narrative texts that were no less theological than their exegetical work or treatises. Besides disseminating the ideals of asceticism and monasticism, for instance, Athanasius of Alexandria used the life of St. Antony of Egypt to promote his Christological opinions in the murky maelstrom of conflict on the eve of the Council of Nicaea. Sulpicius Severus, in his life of St. Martin of Tours, offers to Christians in the Merovingian kingdom not just the biography of an extraordinary hero, but also a theology of the episcopacy with all its ecclesiological ramifications. Even as the structures of church governance, crafted within the cultural ideals of the late Roman world, were being extended to peoples with other indigenous traditions (ca. 400), Severus tells the story of a Roman soldier who becomes an effective, even forceful, bishop in the Gallic city of Tours. The way in which he makes that personal transition and subsequently leads his city in fidelity to the gospel becomes an exposition of the possibilities of clerical life and leadership in a missionary context.

No one reading Augustine's *Confessions* can think that it is only his autobiography.⁵ Augustine studies the unfolding of his own life because it is the drama of encounter between God and the human person. "Why do you mean so much to me," Augustine asks God early in the first book and then, a few sentences later, he continues to wonder: "and why do I mean so much to you?" The answers to these questions are to be found only in

⁵ Although a review of Garry Wills' book on Augustine's *Confessions* in the *Los Angeles Times* (3 July 1999) did seem to suggest that Wills was breaking new ground in proposing that Augustine's work was theological rather than pornographic!

the nature of God and in the created nature of the human person. Thus, Augustine's "autobiography" is at once a biographical narrative and a study of God and of Christian anthropology. Perhaps because the Gospels, which follow a biographical pattern, were accepted as the Church's primary instruments of revelation, biographical texts themselves were essentially theological documents in the first five centuries and this patristic precedent would have weighed heavily with early medieval writers. Gregory of Tours and the Anglo-Saxon Bede extended that tradition into their own historical and cultural milieus in the sixth and eighth centuries. Certainly they used the historical narratives of their respective peoples, including the biographies of individuals, to develop their theologies of Church and sacraments, of history, of kingship, and of the realities of the heavenly kingdom.

We have solid evidence to suppose, then, that the medieval authors of saints' lives understood their narratives as fully theological works. They would, quite simply, not understand our contemporary distinction between hagiography and theology. Two early texts confirm this supposition and suggest a conscious effort on the part of authors of medieval saints' lives to give their narratives the theological weight of the Gospels and of the work of the Fathers.

The first text is that of Jonas of Bobbio, the preface (Chapter 1) to his life of St. Columbanus. Columbanus was the late-sixth-century pilgrim monk from Ireland who founded the important monasteries of Luxeuil and Bobbio. Shortly after his death in 615, Jonas published his *Vita* (643) and carefully lists in the prologue a kind of canon of saintly biographies, in imitation of which he has penned his own narrative.

By their shining skill that vibrates with an exceptional brightness, renowned teachers composed the lives of those holy monks and fathers who leaped ahead of the others [in the journey of life] so that the sustaining example of the ancients might pervade the future like perfume. The eternal sower set this in motion from the beginning of all things so that he might make provision for the enduring reputation of his servants. The creator provided that past deeds would leave behind models for the future, so that [the servants of God] might boast in generations to come, either by imitating the example of those who preceded them or by committing them to memory.⁶

Jonas then goes on to list the works that he considers to be covered by this description: Athanasius's life of Antony, Jerome's lives of Paul the hermit and Hilary, the three lives of St. Martin of Tours, and the lives of the great bishops, Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose, and Augustine (written by Fortuna-

⁶ *Ionae Vitae Sanctorum Columbani, Vedastis, Iohannis*, ed. Bruno Krusch, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum* (Hannover: Impensis Bibliopolis Hahniani, 1905) 1.151. Translation mine.

tus, Paulinus, and Possidius, respectively).⁷ He completes the preface with the usual disclaimer that he has neither the personal holiness nor the skill of the preceding authors, but he also affirms that he is following in their footsteps. We are justified, therefore, in applying his description of patristic biographies to his own work. Whatever it was that the early authors were doing, Jonas of Bobbio intends to do the same.

In the two sentences cited, we note, first, that the work of writing these *vitae* is attributed to God's initiative; they are part of God's providential care of those who become members of the divine household. Second, these *vitae* are intended not just as moral guides ("by imitating their example"), but also are to be "committed to memory." The phrase evokes the importance of *memoria* in the theology and anthropology of the early Middle Ages, especially in monastic contexts. It relates the lives of the saints to the reading of the word at eucharistic liturgies as well as to the *imago Dei* anthropology in which memory, like the first person of the Trinity, is the source of all that the human person will know, choose, and become. Clearly these texts are formative as well as informative, theological as well as motivational.

The second text to consider is that of Rudolf of Saxony. Rudolf was the star pupil of Rabanus Maurus who, in the ninth century, was elevated from being the Abbot of Fulda (where he had taught Rudolf) to the episcopal see of Mainz. In an author's preface to his life of Rabanus, Rudolf clearly presents the written narratives of saints' lives as a theological genre, similar to the Scripture and, indeed, a continuation of them.

The writers of ecclesiastical matters have resolved not only wisely but also usefully and according to the divine precepts to hand over to posterity the lives and deeds of the just through the revelations of literature. Deservedly [these authors] must be extolled by the faithful with great praises because they have not enviously passed over these things in silence. Rather, overflowing with a charity that desires to benefit everybody, they published them, wishing them to be an example of living rightly, imitated by all those faithful who wish to rely on the truth of faith. For if they had not done so, we would not be able to know at all what the holy patriarchs, prophets, apostles, as well as the rest of the holy martyrs and confessors of Christ, had done or taught. Nor would we know by what signs and acts of power they became famous (either before or after their death), except for the things understood and believed from their writings. The authors have revealed these things, not to receive praise for themselves but that through such examples they might incite everyone possible to reform their customary behavior, depraved through human presumption, and to praise greatly the power of the divine majesty.⁸

Then, like Jonas, Rudolf asserts that he is writing to continue this laudable tradition, even while disclaiming his talents. Rudolf's careful use of lan-

⁷ Ibid. 1.151–52.

⁸ Migne, PL 107.41ab.

guage here, as well as his rhetoric and the line of his argument, require close scrutiny.

First, we may note that these narratives have been written by those concerned for “ecclesiastical matters,” that is, the authors of religious narratives are people of the Church who concern themselves with the full range of church interests—theological, institutional, and pastoral. That is also implied by the two adverbs, “wisely” and “usefully,” the first of which was commonly applied to theology (“divine wisdom”) and the second to pastoral concerns (“useful for Christians”). When Rudolf itemizes the various important narratives in the Christian tradition, he begins with the stories of “the holy patriarchs and prophets” and continues through to include the stories of “the apostles. . . [and] the rest of the holy martyrs and confessors of Christ.” Clearly, for Rudolf, the written lives of the saints as he knows them continue the history of salvation begun in Scripture. Saints’ lives are, in fact, revelatory in a way both similar and comparable to the revelation in the biblical texts.

In describing these texts, Rudolf uses precise theological language. He calls the events narrated the *facta iustorum*, that is, the deeds of those who have been justified by divine grace. He uses the technical word *tradere*, “to hand over,” to denote the process by which the author communicates the story (the word that, in the Vulgate translation of 1 Corinthians 11, Paul uses for the transmission of the institution narrative, and in chapter 15 for the similar transmission of the post-Resurrection appearance narratives). Thus, Rudolf links his own narrative of Maurus’s life to all that “tradition” implied for both doctrine and liturgy. And the content of the stories is identified as *revelationes*, the same word, of course, that is used to describe the fullness of the apostolic patrimony. Rudolf further defines the content of these lives—both biblical and later lives—as *credita* and *intellecta*; they teach what is to be believed and what is to be understood. He thus acknowledges that one of the purposes in reading the *vitae sancti* is the imitation of the saint’s example, but he specifies quite clearly that they also are “to be imitated by all those faithful [who] wish to rely on the truth of faith.” The suggestion is that imitation of good deeds depends upon believing rightly and that these narratives contain not only models of holiness but the truth of doctrine. Finally, Rudolf notes that the early authors of Scripture and the lives of the saints “hand over [their stories] to posterity . . . through the revelations of literature.” This reminds the reader of the discipline of study by which the Christian learned to read biblical texts, with the skills of literary criticism embodied in grammar, logic, and especially rhetoric. Rudolf clearly believes that the disciplines of biblical interpretation, in which he had been schooled by Rabanus Maurus, must also be applied to the lives of the saints, including those he himself wrote. In sum, these lives of the saints are written by those concerned for ecclesiastical

life, they are extensions of the revelatory narratives of Scripture and they contain genuine doctrine which must be both believed in faith and understood by theological reflection and mimetic action. It seems that, in the light of all of the above, there is sound basis for reading the lives of the saints through the lens of doctrinal theology. An example of such a reading may serve to illustrate the possibilities.

RUDOLF OF SAXONY'S LIFE OF LEOBA IN MISSIONARY CONTEXT

A significant body of texts has endured to document the mission of St. Boniface to the Saxons in Germany and to illuminate the theology of the local church that Boniface founded.⁹ Bede records its inception.¹⁰ Toward the end of his *History of the English Church and Peoples*, he explains how various missionaries from Britain experience a call to pagan tribes in Germany, ethnically related to certain of the people of Britain. Among these, one named Wynfrid (who later takes the name of Boniface) was chosen by the bishop of Rome to undertake a mission to the Saxons living on the eastern fringe of the Frankish kingdom. The extant letters of Boniface are many and rich in detail. In addition, the lives of Boniface and many of the other missionaries to the Saxon region were preserved in *vitae* written, for the most part, within a hundred years of the events they narrate. Among these is the life of Leoba, written by Rudolf of Saxony whom I have already identified.¹¹

Leoba (d. 779) was a nun whom Boniface invited to participate in the mission to Bavaria; she became his colleague, an important teacher, and a foundress of monastic houses for Bavarian women. Rudolf writes the story of Leoba about a hundred years after the Bonifatian mission was at its height and, in addition to promoting her as a model of Christian life, he uses the narrative of her life to promote a theology of the Church engaged in evangelization.¹² The text is rooted in a mission theology on two his-

⁹ Thomas O'Loughlin, in his excellent volume *Celtic Theology: Humanity, World and God in Early Irish Writings* (New York: Continuum, 2000), clarifies the importance of local churches and local theologies in understanding medieval texts from a theological perspective. He also gives some norms for their study.

¹⁰ *A History of the English Church and People*, trans. Leo Shirley-Price (Oxford: Penguin, 1980) Book V, chaps. 9–11.

¹¹ *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores*, ed. Georg Waitz, vol. XV, 1.127–31. The English translations that I cite were done for me by a colleague, Dr. Jane Crawford of the classics department of Loyola Marymount University. I have made some changes of my own and, in any case, take responsibility for their accuracy.

¹² I have used the words “evangelization” and “missionary” interchangeably throughout this essay. I wish to note here that evangelization is of recent usage in Catholic circles and has been distinguished as the larger term, describing the entire work of the Church in proclaiming the word of God, while missionary activity is

torical levels. First of all, Leoba spent her adult life as a member of the mission to the Saxons; it was both the context and the instrument of her sanctification. Secondly, Rudolf wrote her life at the request of his bishop and mentor Rabanus Maurus who himself undertook further evangelization in the still pagan regions around his episcopal city of Mainz. Thus, the text of Rudolf's life of Leoba is not only a narrative about a woman deeply involved in the Church's mission of evangelization. It has also been composed to serve the evangelical program of a concerned missionary bishop, committed to the use of texts in missionary practice.

Rudolf carefully cites the sources of his narrative. He knows that in understanding the Scriptures, a reader must begin with the literal or historical meaning of the text and as a writer, therefore, he is careful to ensure the historical validity of his own text.¹³ He names four women associated with Leoba as sources: her disciples Agatha, Tecla, Nana, and Eoleoba. As Rudolf tells the story, various monks from Fulda had written down the women's testimonies about Leoba; one monk in particular called Mago had even tried to make a careful study of her life and character, speaking to all of these women and taking careful notes. Rudolf complains that Mago died suddenly and left his notes in a terrible state. Nonetheless, Rudolf is able to verify the stories and even amplify them from the memories of monks who still live and who, in their youth, had heard the stories of Leoba from her contemporaries. So his narrative rests on the written testimony of her contemporaries and the living memory of those who had known those who had known her; the pattern of documentation that Rudolf so carefully provides clearly echoes the first four verses of the Gospel of Luke. And like the narratives of Jesus in the Gospels, the reliability of his text rests both on the probity of his sources and on the miracles associated with Leoba's presence, both in life and in her bones which remain in their midst. The parallel between the authorial voice of Luke and that of Rudolf suggests that what the reader finds in the text is more than the objective narrative of a saintly life (or, in other words, not just biography). It is, of course, at the very least, an interpretation of Leoba's life. The premise of my article is that it is also a theology of the local church, an understanding of the life and mission of the Church rooted in the vision and experience of Boniface and nourished by the living tradition of the monks of Fulda until it finds

seen, more narrowly, as "cross cultural proclamation of the gospel." See articles on evangelization and mission in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Joseph Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot Lane (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1987).

¹³ Rudolf shares Bede's assumption that the historical authenticity of the events he narrates is important and that readers will want to have their authenticity validated.

expression in the episcopal work of Rabanus and the texts of Rudolf.¹⁴ Central to that theology, and the burden of the remainder of this essay, is the theological issue of authority in the Church: *ad extra* as it illustrates the relationship of the local to the universal Church and to secular authority; *ad intra* as it explores Boniface's use and sharing of episcopal authority.

AUTHORITY *AD EXTRA*: RELATIONSHIPS WITH PAPACY AND COURT

Just as one's personal identity is constituted by relationships, so the Church's self-understanding emerges from its relational bonds to the larger Church and to the established human community as represented by secular authority. Appropriately, then, Rudolf describes the local church of Boniface and Leoba as it functions in relationship with the church of Rome and with the Carolingian court. In fact, Boniface's mission is part of a much larger story to which the struggle between Frankish political control and Roman ecclesial authority are integral.¹⁵ The missions to the Saxons and the Frisians become both desirable and possible only when Pippin has regained control over the lesser kings who ruled these lands on the eastern frontier of his kingdom. Simultaneously, the bishop of Rome was attempting, after the successful Romanization of the English church, to enlarge his influence over the Frankish church, which had developed along autonomous and idiosyncratic lines. By the time of Boniface, Frankish bishops and missionaries were often the pawns of the aristocracy and the ancient Gallic tradition of synods and provincial organization had significantly deteriorated. Boniface must carry out his mission under the reforming eyes of both Pope Gregory II and Charles Martel, each protective of his own authority.¹⁶ Nonetheless, he also seeks to act with the authentic autonomy of the local bishop. Negotiating these potential conflicts required a clear, nuanced notion of church authority.

Rudolf describes Boniface and his associates as a "deputation" and makes a point of his official character vis-à-vis Pope Gregory, the "presiding officer of the Roman See" (no. 9). The word "deputation" implies that

¹⁴ The relationship between the local and the universal Church is, of course, of perennial concern to the Church. See Henri de Lubac, S. J., *Les églises particulières dans l'Église universelle* (Paris: Aubier, 1971). The topic has been most recently taken up, in print, by Walter Kasper and Joseph Ratzinger. See Kilian McDonnell, O.S.B., "The Ratzinger/Kasper Debate: The Universal Church and Local Churches," *Theological Studies* 63 (2002) 227–50.

¹⁵ See Richard Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999) especially chap. 7, "Campaigning Sectres: the Frankish Drive to the East," 193–227.

¹⁶ See Wilhelm Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1946) 45–93.

Boniface acts essentially as a representative of Rome. From other sources we learn that on 15 May 719 Gregory gave Boniface a commission “to preach to the unbelieving Gentiles and this mandate is the earliest example of such a document that has been preserved”; the same pope consecrated him bishop in the following year. Rudolf telescopes both events into a single statement in his narrative and makes no further reference to relationships with Rome or, for that matter, of his interaction with other bishops. But, again, other sources tell of subsequent connections, not only with Gregory II but also with his successors. Over the years in Germany, Boniface received the pallium (designating him metropolitan of the region), initiated correspondence regarding the application of Roman practice to the new situation, and swore an oath to promote Roman discipline in all spheres under his influence. There is significant evidence that Boniface worked in contentious circumstances where the primacy of Roman authority was by no means axiomatic; Boniface is its standard-bearer in the Rhineland and his oath involved him in a delicate balance of allegiances.¹⁷

But in fact Rudolf portrays Boniface’s autonomy rather than his dependence on Rome.¹⁸ He chooses and names others as collaborators in his mission and functions as one who presides in a collegial manner (about which more later), although he is both authoritative and decisive. He “decides” to go on to still-pagan lands; Rudolf does not say he is sent. Boniface calls Lul to him and commissions him as his own successor; such an independent decision of a single bishop was not entirely consistent with either English or Roman practice. A hundred years later when Rudolf writes, Roman hegemony is an accepted fact and he himself is part of its fruition, writing for a new archbishop sanctioned by Rome. Nonetheless, though he shows that the authority of the Roman See was instrumental in the German mission, he clearly shows an independent episcopal authority as well, giving effective leadership in and to the local church. The balance between local episcopal autonomy and the growing authority of Rome was both delicate and crucial. Boniface seeks appropriate sanction and counsel from the bishop of Rome; but he also acts as a self-conscious, fully empowered successor to the Apostles.

Relationships between the Church and the empire during the Carolingian period were also complex and often problematic. On the one hand, missionaries and bishops could not function within the Frankish empire and its dependencies without the consent of the rulers. On the other hand, church authorities were often obliged to struggle for sufficient indepen-

¹⁷ Ibid. 72.

¹⁸ According to Yves Congar this is the common emphasis in Western ecclesiology throughout the early medieval period. See, *L’Écclésiologie du Haut Moyen Âge* (Paris: Cerf, 1968) 131–41.

dence to pursue their own spiritual and institutional purposes. Abundant documentation exists to clarify the ups and downs of this relationship during the time of Boniface and it has been dealt with in other places.¹⁹ Rudolf presents a rather serene picture of the situation, noting primarily the way in which Leoba, the subject of his biography, fostered good relations between the mission and the various kings/emperors. He credits Leoba's reputation for sanctity and wisdom with attracting the respect of no fewer than three successive kings, including the emperor Charlemagne. He tells how Pippin, Karloman, and Karl "cherished her with all respect" but that Karl, in particular, ruling alone after the death of Karloman, demonstrated an unusual degree of deference to her person and her opinion. "He so cherished the Catholic faith that, in contrast to the way in which he ordered everyone else, he entreated the servants and handmaids of God with high humility. He treated the pious virgin of God [Leoba] in this humble manner; with the greatest reverence he invited her frequently to visit him and honored her with worthy gifts" (no. 18). Rudolf seems to imply that Charlemagne was moved by Leoba's holiness to an unaccustomed humility that ecclesiastical power alone could not induce. Rather, the Church's influence over Charlemagne was exercised, at least in part, through the saintly Leoba.

Other influential people shared Charlemagne's attitude. "Princes loved her, nobles supported her, bishops embraced her with the greatest joy. And because she was very learned in the Scriptures and full of foresight in her counsel they used to discuss the word of life with her, discussing the business of ecclesiastical institutions" (no. 18). Rudolf's affirmation may seem like hagiographical exaggeration, but her relationship with Charlemagne's court is well documented and Rudolf's readers would have recognized in his description of Leoba the operation of a powerful political role, that of royal counselor. Jonas of Orleans, a bishop much engaged in the political crises during the reign of Louis the Pious (814–840), wrote extensively on the role of the counselor.²⁰ Similarly, in her *Liber manualis*, Dhuoda of Septimania,²¹ writing just about six years after Rudolf's life of Leoba, gave elaborate instructions to her son on his obligation to prepare for that important role. Dhuoda, the wife of one of Charlemagne's magnates, specifically addresses the tension to which a counselor is subject in balancing

¹⁹ See, e.g., Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century*; also Rosamond McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdom under the Carolingians, 751–987* (New York: Longmans, 1983).

²⁰ *De institutione regia* on the role of monarchs and bishops, and *De institutione laicali* on marriage and the obligations of the laity as an order within the Church.

²¹ *Sources chrétiennes* 54, ed. Pierre Riche (Paris: Cerf, 1974). For an English version, see *A Mother's Advice to Her Son*, trans. Carol Neel (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1985).

the conflicting claims of legitimate authorities (in her son's case, those of God, his father and his political overlord).²² Leoba, too, had to counsel princes, bishops, and the king so that they could negotiate their various legitimate but often conflicting claims, always giving the primacy to God's. Hence Rudolf's emphasis on both her religious and practical wisdom. In addition, he points out that she was loved by Queen Hildegard, Charlemagne's consort, and became her spiritual director. This is not just a gratuitous note on Rudolf's part. In a period when the "court" was essentially a domestic reality and not yet a bureaucratic one, the queen was a member of that court with potentially significant influence on its policies.²³

In Rudolf's time, as in Boniface's, the possibility for effective church leadership depended on the work of counselors. These were people whose holiness won them the respect of powerful secular leaders and whose wisdom taught them to negotiate the legitimate but often conflicting claims of spiritual and political authority. Carolingian political theory gave such counselors the official role of interpreting the will of God as expressed in the Scriptures; they believed that, without such counselors, the political power of kings or the coercive power of the Church could easily usurp an authority that went beyond the bounds of legitimacy. Rudolf's ecclesiology, based on his interpretation of the practice of Boniface, promotes an ecclesiastical role for such a counselor, known for wisdom and holiness, who can bridge both worlds. Sought for her religious wisdom and perspicacity in institutional matters, Leoba the counselor was integral to Boniface's mission in Saxony. Through her, Boniface can hope to insure that his plans for the Church's progress and development are understood and approved by the powerful at court.

AUTHORITY *AD INTRA*: AN EARLY COLLEGIALITY

If Rudolf presents Boniface as a local bishop who exercises legitimate autonomy in relationships *ad extra* and Leoba as an effective counselor who helps him negotiate these relationships successfully, then one must ask about the structures of authority internal to this local church. I will argue that Rudolf attributes a collegial understanding of the Church to Boniface and that this is a central, even determinative, theme of his text. He notes, first of all, that Boniface was sent by Gregory II as "*antistes* of the Roman

²² See Marie Anne Mayeski, *Dhuoda of Septimania: Ninth Century Mother and Theologian* (Scranton, Penn.: University of Scranton, 1989).

²³ See Janet L. Nelson, "Queens as Jezebels: The Careers of Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History," in *Medieval Women*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978) 74–75. See also Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, "The Making of the Mulier Sancta: Public and Private Roles," in *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998) 59–125.

Seat” (no. 9), a word that affirms Gregory as bishop, but makes no linguistic reference to his primacy. Certainly the title of Pope was in full use already in Bede’s day and in his circle (though it would be anachronistic to attribute to it all that the word later implied). Bede habitually uses the language of “the apostolic See” as well. Indeed, one of Bede’s central concerns is to document the importance of the Roman traditions of Christianity and the need for the local church to be connected to and approved by the one who sits in the episcopal seat of Peter. At the heart of his history is the Synod of Whitby (A.D. 664) at which the Roman discipline triumphs over that of the Celts on the island of Britain; the Roman position had been argued precisely in terms of Peter’s identification with the Roman See. Therefore Rudolf’s use of this rather different terminology must be noted.

Antistes means variously priest, overseer, or presiding officer; it was used in pagan circles to denote the chief priest at a large temple and, therefore, implies a kind of presider, coordinator or executive officer of temple activities. In the Latin literature of the Fathers, it is used as an alternative to the more common “episcopus.” But we find it most often in letters, as the title one bishop uses in writing to another. Therefore, usage gives it a quality of familiarity or at least of peer respect. To designate Gregory as the *antistes* who sent Boniface suggests the interaction of peers. It may also imply that the diocese of Rome is led and administered by a number of different “officers,” united by Gregory who presides over and administers the whole. There is no emphasis on hierarchy here; there is no mention of Gregory as Peter, the first among the Apostles (an emphasis dear to Bede). And since Gregory, the presider, sends Boniface as his envoy or delegate, it may be presumed that Boniface is to imitate Gregory’s example and preside over the local church as the overseer of many ministers. It is a genuinely collegial model of church structure, though the term itself is anachronistic.

A good evangelist, Boniface is clear about his pastoral goals. Those already baptized are to be strengthened by “constant exhortations”; those still pagan are to be “instructed in the faith” until they “eagerly flock to baptism” while the “depraved [learn] the way of correction” (no. 9). The language of this description emphasizes a slow process of persuasion that appeals to both intellect and intentionality; it requires a long-term educational policy. Boniface also has a practical sense of the strategy of mission: first the message is preached to the “town” where the central church has been built; then it is extended “through the villages and farms” (no. 9). This, too, is a vision that requires both time and patience and, above all, intellectually trained personnel. Rudolf identifies the two methods by which Boniface seeks to accomplish the task: “wholesome teaching and miracles of virtues” (no. 9). By “wholesome teaching,” Boniface means more than exhortation or sermons preached to large gatherings and he

intends that the people of Germany shall have a deep understanding of the faith they have already heard about. Therefore, cleric and monk, man and woman, all missionaries must be equally “learned in divine law” (no. 9). It has long been acknowledged that the Anglo-Saxon church placed a strong emphasis on an educated faith; Boniface clearly intends that tradition to take hold in his German mission. He has no intention of converting people only in the minimalist sense of leading them to baptism. Rather, he “work[ed] for the establishment of a distinctive Christian culture in the lands beyond the Rhine and the Scheldt.”²⁴ His contemporaries understood this as his over-all design; shortly after his death, Cuthbert, archbishop of Canterbury, wrote to Boniface’s successor, Lul, praising his efforts in promoting a learned Christian culture.²⁵ Such a goal required generations of work. In fact, Boniface himself is an evangelist to lands and peoples who have already heard something of the gospel of Christ because they are living within the orbit of Frankish rule. But it has not yet taken deep root. Pagan practices continued long after Clovis’s conversion as Gregory of Tours bore witness to and they would remain even after the work of Boniface. This is presumably why Rabanus Maurus must undertake yet another mission to the countryside around Mainz, as Rudolf tells us in his *vita*, and why a theology of mission is still an important question for the Maurus circle of theologians. The work of creating a Christian learned culture, without which there can be no full appropriation of the faith, is still in process. Learning is still an evangelical task.

This extensive and intensive policy of evangelization is not within the capacity of a single missionary, no matter how charismatic his gifts nor how potent and spectacular his miracles; it requires wide collaboration. Upon his arrival in Germany, Boniface set about assembling the ministers who are to share his task, forming a kind of ministerial team (Rudolf uses the word “deputation” and, sometimes, “legation” probably because of Boniface’s status as envoy of Pope Gregory II). He carefully balances his team, seeking both secular clergy and monks, men and women ministers, indigenous leaders as well as people from his homeland. At the same time, Rudolf notes that Boniface is a strong leader; it is he who ultimately administers the mission and it is not from weakness that he invites collegial support. “He sent representatives and letters in the land of the Angles (whence he himself derived) and from a separate order of clerics he summoned certain people, learned in divine law and suitable for the preaching of the living word by their merit and probity of character. With the support

²⁴ George William Greenaway, “Saint Boniface as a Man of Letters,” in his *Saint Boniface: Three Biographical Studies for the Twelfth Centenary Festival* (London: A. and C. Black, 1955) 33.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 33–34.

of all of these and *not without his own strength*, he administered the deputation joined to him” (no. 9, emphasis mine). It is rather with a sense of all that the mission entails that he invites the participation of others. In choosing the members of his delegation, he seeks qualified partners, capable of leadership. Given his pastoral objectives, he exercises special care to provide ministers who can provide leadership in his educational program. Boniface’s collegium is representative in every way that matters to him. Even under the constraints of an urgent mission, he willingly takes time to select and gather those who will share it and to prepare his colleagues adequately for their task.

Undoubtedly following the English pattern, Boniface clearly envisions both a diocesan and a monastic structure as essential to the christianization of Germany and especially to its educational formation. He sent his student Sturmi (a leader in the local church and indigenous in his cultural heritage) to Monte Cassino for proper Benedictine training and invited Leoba to come from Anglia as founder and superior of women’s monasteries. Leoba’s full story, as Rudolf tells it, demonstrates the wisdom of these decisions: Sturmi’s foundation of Fulda became the stronghold of the Bavarian Church and the seed-bed of bishops while Leoba and her nuns form the spine of its educational strength. The name of Leoba’s monastery is Bishopsheim, “the bishop’s home”; he probably gave her his own dwelling as the core of the monastery to be built there. Such an action was a potent visible symbol of the bishop’s incorporation of her work into his pastoral and ecclesiastical project.²⁶ According to Rudolf, Leoba is to be “a comfort of his residing abroad and a help for the legation attached to him” (no. 10), that is, she will be a member of the missionary team as well as a personal friend to him.

Boniface’s collegial vision and, especially, his inclusion of Leoba as a member of the ministerial team, were not diminished or eroded by the practical experience of administering his mission. He did not move away from his ideal of collaboration, even when the conflicts and constraints of his mission grew burdensome. When he decided to leave the Mainz region for the still-pagan land of Frisia, Boniface called his colleagues Lul and Leoba to him and commissioned both as his deputies in their respective spheres. Lul was to undertake the pastoral care of the diocese, while Leoba was to continue to put her knowledge of Sacred Scripture and church law at the service of the mission, having special care for the women’s monasteries (no. 17). They are depicted as partners in the fulfillment of Boni-

²⁶ I am reminded of the way in which Archbishop Raúl Silva Henríquez vacated his palace on the central plaza in Santiago, Chile, to make room for the “Vicariate of Solidarity,” an organization of Catholic lawyers called by the Archbishop to work for the protection and civil rights of Chileans during the Pinochet regime.

face's mission, partners with him and with each other. Indeed, Boniface especially underlines Leoba's role as his own partner in his farewell address. He asks Lul to bury them both in the same tomb at Fulda "so that they, who with equal vow and zeal had served Christ in their lives, might await the day of resurrection side by side." Then he gave Leoba his own cowl (no. 17).

This act, made even more solemn because it was part of a departure ritual, conferred on Leoba, first of all, a share in the power of Boniface's personal presence. Like relics, clothing contained the personal identity of the owner; by giving his own garment to Leoba, Boniface empowers her with his own personal authority. But the cowl is, further, a ritual garment, part of the Benedictine habit. It confers on Leoba the power and authority that devolves from Boniface's office, as abbot and as bishop. It is interesting, though not surprising, that after the death of Boniface and Leoba, the monks of Fulda refuse to honor the martyr's request for their burial. Rudolf records that they "were afraid to open the holy tomb of the blessed martyr" (no. 20) and so buried her elsewhere.²⁷ But in narrating a later miracle that takes place in the Fulda chapel Rudolf attributes it to both saints. He editorializes that, "although not in one tomb, nevertheless . . . with the same piety with which they were accustomed to come to [someone's] assistance when they lived together in the flesh . . . they do not cease to support those seeking their intercession" (no. 23). The monks of Fulda did not share their founder's appreciation for Leoba's partnership, but Rudolf does. He believes that their partnership is divinely confirmed by the miracle that was always, for Rudolf and early medieval theologians as a whole, the authenticating sign of true holiness and effective ministry.

Leoba's symbolic location in the bishop's home and Boniface's concern to demonstrate her partnership with him come from the fact that she is central to his episcopal project, the evangelization of Germany.²⁸ Rudolf returns repeatedly to this theme in his narrative. She has been chosen for

²⁷ Today a museum in Fulda, the Dom Museum, is dedicated to the work of the Bonifatian mission and in one room there is an elaborate gold altarpiece that serves as a frame and display-case for the relics of the various missionaries. Surprisingly, St. Leoba is not among them. In 1999, her head was located in a locked closet of the museum and the women of Fulda brought organized pressure on the city officials to have her head returned to the church in which the rest of her relics were placed, Michaelskirche, in a suburb of Fulda. She was brought there in the autumn of 1999 in a procession led by the women. "Plus ça change. . ."

²⁸ It is interesting to note that at the first session of Vatican II Marie-Dominique Chenu described the absence of an evangelical perspective in the preparatory schemata on the Church and what he regarded as an overemphasis on sacraments. In a letter to Mgr. Ancel of 29 September 1962, he wrote: "La transmission de la foi, le témoignage authentique de la Parole de Dieu, est la première fonction de l'Eglise, soit en corps, soit en hiérarchie sacrée." Cited in Chenu, *Notes quotidiennes au*

her learning and she exercises, throughout her life, the ministry of teaching. He describes in great detail her intellectual formation as a youth and her achievements in learning and wisdom when she is working in Germany. Rudolf portrays her learning as the reason why Boniface chooses her for the task. Indeed, he repeats several times that it was her learning and devout life that made her fit for participation in the mission to Germany, rather than her kinship with Boniface. His insistence on this point suggests the possibility that her inclusion in the mission could be misinterpreted; her supportive presence in Boniface's life, the support only a kinswoman could offer, was important, but it was second to her intellectual gifts.

When Rudolf describes Leoba's function as teacher, he uses official, even canonical, terms to identify her position. He describes her as having been placed above others "by the order of the office of teacher" (no. 11). We may note here the use of the technical terms "order" and "office" (*ordine magisterii ceteris esset praelata*), although we cannot be sure of exactly what these terms meant to Rudolf. We do know that the ministry of prophecy, included in the Pauline list of ecclesiastical charisms, had come over time to include those who expounded the mysteries of Scripture to the faithful. Rabanus Maurus reflects this line of interpretation in his commentaries on Romans and 1 Corinthians and places the teacher-prophet within the clerical ranks of his own day.²⁹ Others besides Rudolf and Maurus recognize Leoba's teaching as official and trustworthy. Rudolf notes that bishops consulted her about pastoral theology contained in the Scriptures and "often" sought her counsel regarding the management of "ecclesiastical institutions" (no. 18).

We do not have evidence of a liturgical consecration for the office of teacher at this place and time, but perhaps Rudolf suggests that there is one; the words with which he describes her character echo the words of the diaconate ordination. "Believe what you read, preach what you believe, practice what you preach." Having noted how her teaching office elevates her, Rudolf says that nonetheless she expressed both her humility and her appreciation of what this office entailed because "she believed in her heart, spoke with her voice and showed in her appearance that she wished to be last" (no. 11). In any event, the context of Rudolf's praise makes it clear that Leoba's vocation as teacher is treated as both "order" and "office," raising her above her peers and requiring true humility lest it corrupt her sanctity and her usefulness. In this passage, Rudolf says much both about Leoba and about clerical office.

Concile: Journal de Vatican II, 1962-1963, ed. Alberto Melloni (Paris: Cerf, 1995) 197 n.1.

²⁹ See Marie Anne Mayeski, "'Let Women Not Despair': Rabanus Maurus on Women as Prophets," *Theological Studies* 58 (1997) 237-53.

RUDOLF'S ECCLESIOLOGY AND THE FOUR MARKS OF THE CHURCH

A theology of mission is, in itself, an ecclesiology. Christian faith is ecclesial; it is not the inchoate or unspecified belief in a deity, but a belief in the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ whose earthly mission of redemption is continued by and in the community of faith which is called Church. In undertaking to communicate the faith to those still outside of it, therefore, the missionary acts out of specific understanding of Church and makes the Church present as an instrument of redemption.

First, Rudolf presents the Church as one. He understands a ministerial vocation as a charism that is given ecclesial status through commissioning by ecclesiastical authority. He shows that Boniface receives various and successive signs of official approbation: in turn, Boniface gives official status to Leoba by calling her to a participation in his own mission. Leoba particularly illustrates the relationship between charism and office; she has the natural gifts and the carefully acquired skills of teacher that are given official status by Boniface's call. Such official designation insured that the local church of Saxony was the one Church, united to the Apostles through the representative of Peter in Rome and united in itself under the authority of Boniface.

Secondly, the Church is catholic. Rudolf greatly emphasizes the collegial character of the local church founded by Boniface. It was made up of a number of missionaries each of whom represents an important dimension of church life. The ethnic identity of the local population is represented in the person of Sturm, chosen from among them because of his piety and leadership. The mission also represents the full access to salvation that is offered to women in the Church. Leoba, one of the holiest members of the team, is given official status as teacher because of her learning and demonstrates the full salvation and active participation possible for women who respond fully to the call of grace. Central to the story of Boniface's collegiality is Rudolf's insistence that Boniface envisioned her as his partner in the mission, emphasized most of all in his giving her his cowl. Thus the collegium of missionaries that Boniface assembles reveals the catholicity of the Church he preaches, a Church inclusive of ethnically different peoples (like the Jews and Gentiles of old), of women as well as men, and, we may presume, of all social classes (Galatians 3:28).

Third, the Church that Rudolf portrays and praises is apostolic. The Church of Boniface, as Rudolf presents it, is apostolic precisely because it is committed over and above all to proclaiming the apostolic legacy, that is, the living word of God, to all people. Boniface assembles missionaries capable of and committed to teaching the word of God and validating that teaching by the holiness of their lives. Leoba stands in this text as the epitome of such a teacher, fully prepared academically, devoted to the

intellectual apprehension of the faith and with a perceptible holiness that validates her teaching. As in the Church, the power of the Word is expressed in and validated by the power of the sacraments, so, in Rudolf's text, Leoba's holiness is validated by miracles. We have not considered these miracles in detail here but, as presented by Rudolf, they function in quasi-sacramental ways. That is, they bring the powerful and empowering presence of Christ into salvific contact with the community of faith. Like sacraments, they extend a kind of sacramental power into the daily life of the community of faith. Through her miracles, Leoba judges and forgives sinners, heals the sick and, through water, saves the community from death, all signs that extend the realities of sacramental penance, the unction of healing and baptismal conversion, into a community still reluctant in its faith, still bound by the chains of sin.

Finally, the Church of Boniface, Leoba, and the other missionaries is holy. For Rudolf, the holiness of the Church unquestionably comes from the presence of Christ within it. Rudolf identifies each significant person in his narrative by his or her relationship to Christ and the intimate bonds that bind each believer to Christ are shown to be the foundation of their relationships to one another. Because the virgins Leoba and Hadamout are brides of Christ, for instance, they are also Christ's consorts, partners with him in the administration of his saving power. In his narrative, the transcendent Christ of faith—Lord, Savior, and Judge—is never beyond the bounds of intimacy, never inaccessible to plea and invocation. Rather Christ assumes a new humanity, assuming the historical reality of each of his believers, especially those who are themselves "holy." Tertullian's time-honored phrase lies behind Rudolf's life of Leoba: *Christianus alter Christus*. Christ is present in his saints, especially Leoba; he is present also in the Word they preach, which Rudolf consistently identifies as a "living word."

CONCLUSION

Let us return, briefly and by way of conclusion, to the issue of theological sources, specifically narrative sources. My analysis of Rudolf's text, though it in no way exhausts the theological themes of that work, has demonstrated, I hope, that narrative texts, the lives of the saints, are capable of a theological reading. If one approaches them with a variety of specific and systematic questions, they yield new insights into the theology of a particular period. One caution must, however, be given. A solid and careful historical analysis of such texts must precede a theological reading. Before we can ask, "what is Rudolf's ecclesiology," we must know as much as we can of his particular circumstances and the questions and challenges that faced his specific Church. This requires a kind of variant of the historical-critical method without which further theologizing will be a house built on sand.

That said, we can briefly note here some of the benefits of extending the category of theological sources to include other than systematic treatises. First of all, it will illuminate many more places and times than are usually included within our understanding of “the tradition.” If the genius of Catholic theology is, as I believe, the careful and critical attention that it pays to Christian tradition as constitutive, then it is incumbent on theologians to have as broad and complete an understanding of the tradition as possible. Otherwise, we risk privileging the theology of a given time or place simply because it is the one we know best. To do that is to make a virtue of ignorance. A second benefit of the use of narrative sources is that they most often demonstrate the theology of a particular church through its practice. We can see the theology that a community has actually interiorized, often consistent with what it proclaims, but sometimes not. This enables the theologian more aptly to assess the tensions within the theological tradition and to identify emerging new insights. Finally, such narrative texts bring new, previously ignored, voices into the theological conversation. Through them we hear, not indeed the whole Church, but more of the Church, speak, though we still have access only through the work of the literate elite. But there are other voices there, in this case, women’s voices.

In her work, *Writing a Woman’s Life*, the noted scholar Carolyn Heilbrun has argued that power means having a part in the conversation and having one’s part matter. I would argue that, in his life of Leoba, Rudolf allows Leoba and the women who were his sources a part in his theological conversation about the nature of the Church. Their participation mattered to him. They require him to present his theology of the local church as inclusive of the life and work of Leoba, calling attention to her official status and to the way in which her mission is integrated into the unity of the institutional Church. By her official presence in the missionary legation, she makes that body more truly catholic, representing both the importance of women in the Church and the opportunities for full salvation and membership to the women she evangelizes. Because he is narrating her life, Rudolf must recognize that she is Boniface’s full partner in the mission and, thus, with him, a representative of the Apostles. In the presence of the women at his theological conversation, he acknowledges that Leoba is a medium of Christ to the local church. Christ assumes Leoba’s humanity and, through her, continues to reveal the living Word of God and to offer his saving power. In this case, enlarging the range of possibilities for theological sources means recognizing the small but significant ways in which women shaped the Church’s self-understanding.