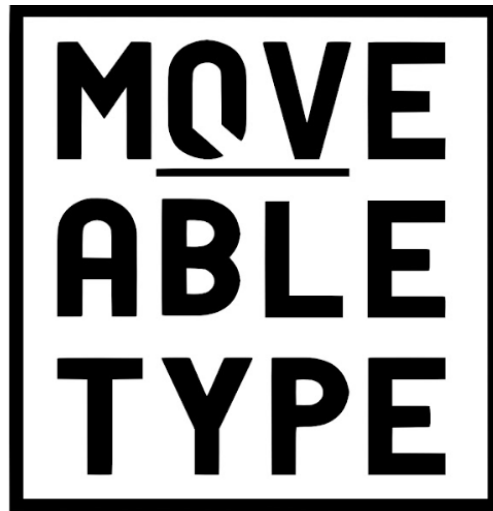




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Saintly Promises: The Spiritual Bond Between God and Saints in the Old English *Andreas* and *Guthlac A*

BRUCE N. XIAO

This article examines the significance of promise in two Old English poems, *Andreas* and *Guthlac A*. At once spiritual and moral, promise connects God with His pious followers on earth. Beginning with linguistic analysis that interprets saintly promise through the lens of biblical covenant, this article proceeds to show both the external and internal features of promise as presented in those two poems. It argues that the poetic portrayal of promise underscores verbal performance and heightened inner qualities, both of which are crucial in showing saints' commitment to, and fulfilment of their promises. In the *Andreas*, particularly, we also see that Andreas's transformation from a flawed to a flawless apostle suggests that saintly promise to God is also a form of self-promise which enhances Christian virtue.

Keywords: promise, Old English poems, *Andreas*, Biblical covenant, saints

Saints in Anglo-Saxon England 'were distinguished – if at all – by the glory of their martyrdoms (a visible token of their acceptance to God) and by their efficacy in dealing with various human suffering'.¹ Acting as soldiers of Christ (*Cristes cempa* in Old English), saints are often presented as intermediary agents between the spiritual and earthly spheres. This belief in saintly intercession was crucial in both the medieval Church and the literary imagination of the period.² A large corpus of prose and verse hagiographical narratives composed in Latin and Old English had an essential role in maintaining and reinforcing the spiritual and territorial legitimacy of religious communities. Saints' lives 'could be read out on the appropriate feast day, either in refectory while the monks or clerics dined in silence, or else during the Night Office on the vigil of the saint's day [...]'.³ Crucial to these narratives are their emphatic concerns about promise. As this article seeks to demonstrate through a close-reading of two Old English verse hagiographies, *Andreas* (c. 850–950) and *Guthlac A* (c. 720–50), pledge underpins the shape of the poems. Saints and apostles make solemn promises to the everlasting Lord, whilst God swears divine pledges to his followers. This reciprocal bond, profoundly spiritual and cooperative, is a connecting force between heaven and earth. Recent criticism has acknowledged the aesthetic qualities of Old English verse saint's lives, and this article reads promise in the *Andreas* and *Guthlac A* as a spiritual, linguistic, and literary exercise.⁴

¹¹ Michael Lapidge, 'The Saintly Life in Anglo-Saxon England', in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, eds. by M. Godden and M. Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 251–72 (p. 269).

² Saints' ability to cure diseases, for example, was institutionalised by medieval church to promulgate a religious understanding of disability. Crucial to these ends would be the circulation of hagiographical literature. This is what Edward Wheatley calls the religious model of disability. For a further discussion, see Edward Wheatley, 'Monsters, Saints, and Sinners: Disability in Medieval Literature', in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Disability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 17–31 (p. 22).

³ Lapidge, p. 261.

⁴ Robert Bjork, for instance, argues for the unique individuality of Old English verse saints' lives. As he points out, 'the tendency of the Old English lives [...] has traditionally caused them to be viewed as individual, autonomous works of art, differing as much among themselves as from their continental progenitors'. See Robert Bjork, *Old*

The *Andreas* offers useful insights into the linguistic construction of ‘promise’. This long poem, preserved in a manuscript known as the *Vercelli Book* (Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare MS CXVII, s.x²), is intimately linked with the Greek apocryphal *Acts of Andrew and Matthias* (*Praxeis*), probably written around the fifth century.⁵ It tells of Andrew’s heroic adventure into the exotic land of Mermedonians to fulfil his apostolic mission. At the beginning of the poem, God sends Andreas to save Matthew who has been tortured by the cannibalistic Mermedonians. Intimidated by the dangers of the sea and foreign inhabitants, he is reluctant to accept the mission and questions the logic of this divine plan, as one of God’s angels could effortlessly reach the exotic land (‘ðæt mæg engel þin eað geferan/halig of heofenum’ (194–95a)).⁶ To this, God replies:

Ne meaht ðu þæs siðfætes sǣne weorðan,
ne on gewitte to wac, gif ðu wel þencest
wið þinne waldend wære gehealdan,
treowe tacen (211–14a).⁷

[You cannot be reluctant about this journey, nor weak in mind, if you well
intend to hold the pledge of true faith with your Ruler]

God warns Andreas that his reluctance might potentially undermine the *treowe tacen*. The noun *tacen*, normally glossed as a token, denotes a pledge here, while the adjective *treowe* means true or loyal. Accordingly, the phrase can be translated into ‘pledge of true (faith)’.⁸ It is widely accepted that the sense of being true implied in *treowe* is only slightly associated with objective description or gnomic wisdom;⁹ instead, it implies putting faith on someone, because *treowe* is derived from the Proto-Germanic *trewwaz ‘reliable’.¹⁰ Therefore, this phrase, I would suggest, establishes a basic lexical framework within which to understand saintly promise: it articulates the *raison d’être* of the promise (God and the entire Christian discourse) and the innerly refined qualities crucial for the fulfillment of promise (faithfulness and steadfastness). The phrase *treowe tacen* also suggests a mutually mandatory bond between God and his follower(s) that a failure in fulfilling its moral obligations amounts to a denial of divine will. Furthermore, I argue that

English Verse Saints Lives: A Study in Direct Discourse and the Iconography of Style (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), p. 1.

⁵ Yet, it seems implausible to regard the poem as a direct descendant from the Greek text. The scholarly consensus is that the *Andreas* refers to a Latin translation of *Praxeis*, though it remains indecisive which Latin version is the exact direct source; a number of the poem’s details suggest familiarity with the 12th century *Codex Casanatensis* (C-text), but the late date appears contradictory with the poem’s relatively early composition. For a detailed discussion of textual transmission, see Kenneth Brooks ed., *Andreas and The Fates of the Apostles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), xv–xviii. Moreover, dating the *Andreas* is notoriously difficult. Brooks uses Cynewulfian poems and *Beowulf* as reference and reaches a conclusion of the middle of the ninth century, whereas Samuel Cardwell argues for a later composition in the late tenth century. See Brooks, xxi and xxii; Samuel Cardwell, ‘Go now: Mission and Commission in the Old English *Andreas*’, *Parergon*, 39 (2022), 1–25 (p. 3).

⁶ ‘Your angel can achieve that without difficulty, high from heaven’.

⁷ Mary Clayton ed. and trans., *Old English Poems of Christ and His Saints* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013). Unless otherwise stated, all subsequent references to the *Andreas* are to this edition. All translations of Old English throughout the article are the author’s, who accepts full responsibility for any errors. Emphasis mine.

⁸ In Brooks’ edition of the poem, the glossary reads ‘an earnest of good faith’ (p. 167).

⁹ For example, it is true that winter is cold.

¹⁰ See Don Ringe, *The Development of Old English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 239. The phonological development of OE *treowe* is illustrated as: PGm. *trewwaz ‘reliable’ (Goth *triggws*, ON *tryggr*) > PWGm. *triuwī > *gǣ-trīowī > WS. *gætrīewī.

treowe tacen contains echoes of covenant in Christian soteriology such that promise in vernacular hagiography can be interpreted in the light of it.

In biblical theology, a covenant is the sacramental promise between God and humanity. For God, his covenantal word ‘reveals and interprets his own redemptive acts that develop across time, from creation to new creation, and his covenants with his chosen people provide the structure and unfold his eternal plan of salvation centered in Christ’.¹¹ For humanity, they promise obedience, submission, and cooperation following the divine word. This principle of reciprocity is illustrated by the so-called Abraham digression in the Old English poetic reworking of the Old Testament *Exodus* (c. 950–90):

Wære hie þær fundon, wuldor gesawon,
halige heahtreowe, swa hæleð gefrunon.

[...]

He þæt gecyðde, þa he þone cniht genam
fæste mid folmum, folccuð geteag
ealde lafe, (ecg grymetode),
þæt he him lifdagas leofran ne wisse
þonne he hyrde heofoncynige.

[...]

Soð is gecyðed,
nu þin cunnode Cyning alwihta,
þæt þu wið Waldend wære heolde,
fæste **treowe** (387–88; 406–10; 420–23a).¹²

[They were found there, beheld the glory, the holy pledge, as the warrior told;
he revealed that, when he took the boy fast in hands, drew the famous, ancient
sword, the roared blade, he did not value his life days more beloved than his
obeying the heavenly king; it is made known true that, now the King of all
creatures made trial of it, that you held fast the promise with the Lord]

Abraham’s offering of Isaac as a sacrifice might seem striking, but for Abraham, maintaining the promise of his *halige heahtreow* (‘holy pledge/faith’) remains the priority. His ritualised act thus marks the fulfilment of his obligation, whereas timely divine intervention and assurance of unfailing protection are God’s fulfilment of His obligation. Such a relationship reflects the broader thematic pattern of the entire poem. As Peter Lucas points out, ‘this arrangement, the provision of salvation in return for faith and obedience is the result of a mutual agreement, the abiding *haligu heahtreow*, between God and the Israelites’.¹³ Linguistically, if the *Exodus*-poet deploys ‘treow’ to translate the biblical concept of covenantal promise, that the *Andreas*-poet also uses ‘treow’ to imply the bond between God and Andreas is suggestive. This demonstrates that it is entirely appropriate to interpret hagiographical promise through the lens of biblical theology.

Now that we have examined the Christian covenantal framework that underpins these poems, we can turn to the other aspects of promise in Old English hagiography. Earlier in the *Andreas* a conversation between Matthew and God is particularly interesting for a further

¹¹ Paul Kim, ‘Covenants and The Eschatological Kingdom of God’ (Unpubl. MA Thesis, Reformed Theological Seminary, 2016), p. 3.

¹² Reference to the poem is from Peter Lucas ed., *Exodus* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1977). Emphasis mine.

¹³ Lucas, p. 62.

insight into the conceptualisation of promise in saints' lives. Although Matthew is blinded by his adversaries, he continues to pray to and honour God in words. His speech, a mixture of sorrowful despair and affective piety, is responded to by God whose glorious voice offers him consolation (ll. 63–87). Matthew's physical blindness holds hermeneutic significance, and could be possibly interpreted under Augustine's theoretical framework of vision and visibility which was mainly discussed in the *De Genesi* and *Contra Adimantum*.¹⁴ In his tripartite classification of vision ('visio corporalis', 'visio spiritalis', 'visio intellectualis'), the third is the most valued; yet, it has nothing to do with real seeing but figurative seeing. It refers to an intellectual understanding or acquirement of truth aimed at a proper reading of Holy revelation:

tertium autem genus uisionis est secundum mentis intuitum,
quo intellecta conspicitur ueritas atque sapientia: sine quo
genere illa duo, quae prius exposui, uel infructuosa sunt
uel etiam in errorem mittunt.¹⁵

[The third kind of vision then happens through the contemplation
of the mind, by which the understanding of truth and wisdom are
perceived. Without this kind of vision the two kinds first introduced
would either be useless or even lead into error]

The paradox here is that the most superior form of vision must be non-visualised; God is discernible only in spiritual reality, not in corporeal reality.¹⁶ As a result, seeing God in *visio intellectualis* appears to imply heightened spirituality and religious devotion, thereby confirming one's purified inner state. If Augustine's approach is applied to the *Andreas*, we can argue that (at least symbolically) Matthew is deprived of *visio corporalis*, but his unwavering adherence to the promise and its constant verbal enactment (i.e., uttering words) compensate his visual loss:

Eadig ond *onmod*, he *mid elne* forð
wyrðode wordum wuldres aldor,
heofonrices weard, halgan stefne,
of carcerne (54–7a).¹⁷

[Blessed and resolute, he still valiantly glorified
the glorious Lord, heavenly guardian, with words
in holy voice from the prison]

The adjectives 'eadig and onmod' and adverbial phrase 'mid elne' indicate Matthew's heightened inner state through a lexical pattern. It is reinforced by the alliteration of *eadig* and *elne* and the semantic closeness of *onmod* and *elne*. Although Matthew's psychological landscape is not fully explored by the poet, these modifiers suffice in presenting his mental resilience. Therefore, we may safely suggest that another aspect of promise is the narrative focus upon the saint's internal

¹⁴ See Jesse Keskiäho, *Dreams and Visions in the Early Middle Ages: the Reception and Use of Patristic Ideas, 400–900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 137–216 (p. 139). Keskiäho suggests that although plenty of Augustine's later writings make covert reference to vision theory, it is only explicitly developed in the *Contra Adimantum*, and *De Genesi* where the theory of visions is fully discussed.

¹⁵ Translation taken from Keskiäho, p. 140.

¹⁶ As Keskiäho argues, for Augustine 'God cannot be perceived by corporeal eyes, but only by the intellect which perceives things which lack visible form'. See Keskiäho, p. 141.

¹⁷ Emphasis mine.

life. Often articulated through a well-crafted lexis, the internal life and internal qualities are crucial evidence of the saint's commitment to promise.

Meanwhile, the passage above conveys the notion that promise is fundamentally a speech act which entails a public and verbalised performance. Keeping a promise does not just demand physical actualisation but requires ritualised utterance. Because Matthew has completed his moral obligations, God responds with assurances of success:

... He his maguþegne
under hearmlocan hælo ond frofre
beadurofum **abead** **beorhtan stefne**:
'Ic þe, Matheus, mine sylle sybbe
under swegle' (94b–8a).¹⁸

[He declared fortune and comfort to his retainer,
valiant in battle and in the chamber of sorrow,
in bright voice: 'I grant you, Matthew,
my peace under the heaven']

The way in which God fulfils his promise is inherently verbal ('abead') and voiceful ('beorhtan stefne'). Such an exchange of words becomes a currency in this Christian dominion governed by the principle of covenantal promise. Emphasising the prominence of words in promise, Matthew's divine inspiration counteracts his physical blindness as he 'sees' God in *visio intellectualis* through religious devotion. The complex semantic network in this episode forges an emphatic pattern that examines promise through an alignment between heightened inner state and heightened verbal performance; the internal merges with the external to demonstrate how the holy bond with God can be maintained even in the most difficult of circumstances. This verbal quality of promise can also be proved through linguistic analysis. In the passage above, the verb *abead* (inf. *abeodan*) is literally translated into 'declared' (or 'announced'); yet, the context suggests that it could also be properly rendered into 'promised'. Semantically proximal to *(a)beodan*, *(ge)hatan* similarly denotes 'to promise' in a hagiographical context. One example is from the *Guthlac A*, which is preserved in a manuscript known as the *Exeter Book* (Exeter, Cathedral Library, MS 3501).¹⁹ The poem accounts the eremitic life of St Guthlac of Croyland, with a particular emphasis upon his spiritual life and the ultimate triumph of Christian faith over the demonic. In the poem, Guthlac once declares in direct speech:

Huru, þæs bihofað, se ðe him Halig Gæst
wisað on willan ond his weorc trymað,
lapað hine lipum wordum, **gehateð** him lifes ræste (361–63).²⁰
[Truly, it is need that the Holy spirit directs him in desire,
encourages his deeds, calls him with pleasant words,
and promises him rest after life]

¹⁸ Emphasis mine.

¹⁹ St Guthlac of Croyland (c. 674–714), once a Mercian warrior, ultimately chose to convert to God and became a hermit at Croyland (Lincolnshire). Much of what we know about him comes from monk Felix's *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, probably written between 730 and 740. The relationship between the *Guthlac A* and Felix's account is tricky, and it has been difficult in identifying the direct source of the poem. For a further discussion on this topic, see Jane Roberts ed., *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 19–29.

²⁰ All subsequent references of the *Guthlac A* are to Roberts' edition, unless otherwise stated. Emphasis mine.

The transitive verb *gehatan* (inf. of 3rd. pres. indi. *gehated*) is glossed by Jane Roberts as ‘to promise’ here. According to Bosworth Toller’s *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* online, OE *gehatan* is commonly glossed with three groups of meanings: 1). to call, to name 2). to bid, to order, to command 3). to promise, to vow.²¹ Etymologically, the PGM. of the stem of *gehatan* (i.e., without preverbal *ge-*), suggests Guus Kroonen, is *haitan, s.v. ‘to call’.²² Some Germanic cognates of OE *hatan* include Old Norse *heita* ‘to call, be called’, Old Frisian *heta* ‘to call, to command, to promise’, and Old Saxon *hetan* ‘to call, to command’.²³ Whilst the question as to how those different meanings of OE *gehatan* are interrelated lies beyond the scope of this paper, it suffices the purpose to observe that they are heavily interactional, relying upon verbal expressions to establish pragmatic relationships between actors and recipients.

Up to this point, hagiographical promise could be seen as comprising three essential elements. Firstly, the framework of biblical covenant is deployed to underscore the moral force in the mutual promise between the saint and God. It is a means through which dynamic connections between heaven and earth can be forged. We have also seen that promise has two representative features in religious poetry: it requires heightened verbal performance (external) and heightened inner state (internal). Both aspects shall be further explored in the ensuing discussion of the *Guthlac A* where their literary, theological and linguistic complexities are fully examined. As I have sought to demonstrate through Matthew’s blindness, hagiographical narratives often emphasise the saints’ spiritual qualities over the temporal duration of promise. Such a focus upon the psychological and the emotional suggests that the interior dynamic associated with promise is as much reiterated as its exterior, verbal force. Since the *Guthlac A*-poet avoids the conventional mode of narrating the saint’s life by demonstrating an interest in the ‘psychology of eremitic and monastic lives’ and the ‘spiritual warfare for the soul’, the poem establishes a semantic network to present Guthlac’s Christian subjectivity enlivened by his commitment to promise.²⁴

In Guthlac’s fifth verbal counterattack against the devil’s hostile intimidation (ll. 592–684), his utterance of saintly promise is almost ritualised:

Eom ic eaðmod his ombiehthera
 þeow geþyldig. Ic gepafian sceal
 æghwær ealles his anne dom (599–601).

[I am his humble obedient servant, patient retainer.
 I shall solely and entirely obey his decree everywhere]

This assurance of humble obedience and unconditional submission is part of the formulaic language universally shared by all the saints. It is unique in this poem, however, that Guthlac’s specific promise is that he will be the authorised guardian of the *beorg* (hill, mound) revealed by God.²⁵ Reciprocally, the divine promise constitutes two dimensions. One is timely, which

²¹ Joseph Bosworth, ‘hatān’, in *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*, eds. by Thomas N. Toller et al. (Prague: Charles University, 2014).

²² Guus Kroonen, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Germanic* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013), p. 202.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Clayton, xiv.

²⁵ The *beorg*, the site of Guthlac’s hermitage, carries symbolic significations and is crucial to the theme and the structure of the poem. As Stephanie Clark suggests, the spiritual struggle between Guthlac and demons is firmly rooted in a struggle over land possession. Although other saints’ lives often describe the relationship between a hermit and their hermitage site, the *Guthlac A* stands out as attaching great importance to eremitic landscape. For a further discussion, see Stephanie Clark, ‘A More Permanent Homeland: Land Tenure in *Guthlac A*’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, (40) 2011, pp.75–102.

includes spiritual inspiration and empowerment ('þætte Guðlace God leanode ellen mid arum, þæt he ana gewon' (449–50)).²⁶ The other is eschatological, which concerns the saint's access to eternal bliss and eternal home in heaven. This transcendental immutability seems to be the ultimate goal for Guthlac as this 'ham in heofonum' ('heavenly home') consistently remains his hope. Hope is always associated with the future, thereby suggesting a temporal discrepancy between the current reality and the prospective situation. It is a period of time of mystery and self-estrangement, in which Guthlac's inner qualities ('gæst') are examined as evidence of his unequivocal commitment to the promise. From line 170 to 204, for example, *gæst* appears four times with subtle variances:

God wæs Guðlac! He in *gæste* bær
heofoncundne hyht [...]
Gyrede hine georne mid *gæstlicum*
wæpnum ond wædum [...]
Ne meahton hy æfeste anforlætan,
ac to Guðlaces *gæste* gelæddun
frasunga fela [...]

No þy forhtra ws
Guðlaces *gæst*, ac him God sealde
ellen wiþ þam egsan [...]
(170–1a; 177–8a; 187–9a; 201b–3a).²⁷

[Guthlac was good! In the spirit he bore heavenly hope;
he eagerly prepared with spiritual weapons and armours;
they [i.e., demons] could not forsake their envy,
but brought to Guthlac's spirit many temptations;
Guthlac's spirit was by no means frightened,
and God gave him courage against the terror]

The first occurrence suggests the purification of Guthlac's inner state, as heavenly hope is what his *gæst* is directed towards. Compared with the second occurrence where Guthlac's courage is expressed through martial images, it puts more emphasis upon his undisturbed focus upon the promise, in that only when his promise to God is fulfilled can his heavenly hope become materialised. Moreover, the third occurrence makes it clear that to fulfil the promise Guthlac's internal qualities are constantly put to test; his *gæst* must prove itself capable of triumphing over the demons' temptations through an unambiguous display of steadfastness ('mægenfæste gemynd' (476a)). This extract does not just eulogise these saintly qualities but highlights their association with God. The link between Guthlac and God through the word *gæst* indicates that the two parties in the promise are always in a dynamic exchange which is both profoundly spiritual and cooperative.

So far in my discussion I have used *gæst* as a convenient replacement for inner qualities. It is necessary to justify this choice. In the heroic poem *Beowulf* (c. 7th – 11th centuries), line 86 first introduces Grendel, and he is depicted as an 'ellengæst'; throughout the poem, he is again referred to as a 'grimma gæst' at line 102 and 'gæst yrre' at line 2073. In terms of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, OE *gæst* was derived from 'the same Germanic base as Old Icelandic **geiski*

²⁶ 'God, by virtue of his magnificence, rewarded Guthlac with courage, as he fought alone'.

²⁷ Emphasis mine.

‘fear’, Gothic *usgaisjan* ‘to terrify’, *usgaisnan* ‘to be terrified’.²⁸ Therefore, the fundamental meaning of *gæst* is terror and the ability to terrify. Nevertheless, there seems to be a semantic discrepancy between the negative implication of *gæst* in *Beowulf* and the more Christianised, more spiritual implication in the *Guthlac A*. This phenomenon was systematically studied by Peter Clemoes who treated *gæst* as ‘the only member of pre-Christian Germanic vocabulary signifying a malevolent spirit to become sufficiently purified to denote the Christian benevolent spirit in all its forms’.²⁹ In addition to this change of value, the semantic abstraction from denoting concrete beings like Beowulf and Grendel to denote spiritual beings by virtue of the word’s association with immateriality is more prominent, because it is on this basis that we speculate that *gæst* could signify ‘a human potential for supreme good’ and ‘divine and human spiritual interplay’.³⁰ Therefore, the poem’s emphasis upon Guthlac’s spirit reflects an Christian eagerness to probe into his inner world; it consists of an enabling faith, an optimistic attitude towards salvation, and a perpetual pursuit of what is intellectually wise, morally good, and heavenly secure. From this view, the correlation between ‘gæst’ and interior qualities is legitimised. Moreover, ‘gæst’ embodies a ‘linguistic currency’ that interpersonally connects the mortal’s spirit with that of God.³¹ It is perfectly natural that Guthlac’s commitment to his promise is focalised through both psychological and spiritual lenses.³²

Nevertheless, to demonstrate Guthlac as a soldier of Christ, internal steadfastness is not adequate, as it must conjoin with a harmonious correspondence between speech and action. Although I previously pointed out the performativity of promise through words, it is worth noting here that saintly promise would lose its spiritual prominence without appropriate actions to substantiate what is verbalised. For Guthlac, to fulfil his promise of guarding God’s *beorg* against demonic invasion, consistent articulation of faith must be conflated with stoic endurance of physical agonies. Prior to Guthlac’s third speech (ll. 361–89), we are told that in spite of the demonic attack he is not deviated from the will of God (‘Symle hy Guðlac in Godes willan fromne fundon’ (348–49a)).³³ His resolute actions are particularly lauded when examined by demons in the darkness of night (‘nihta genipu’). That demons think Guthlac would relinquish the *beorg* out of a desire of reintegrating into human society (‘monlufan’ (353b)) contradicts with his determination to integrate into divine love (‘lufan Dryhtnes’ (652b)). This antisocial action taken by Guthlac is transformed into one that cannot be interpreted within the human epistemological framework. As Bjork states, ‘saints are humanity transcended. Beyond life, they rise above the mutable world, becoming one with the imperishable, unchanging body of Christ’..³⁴ Besides, the mention of ‘nihta genipu’ further underlines Guthlac’s commitment to promise, as darkness becomes a foil to his spiritual brightness. Such an association of sainthood and light is made explicit in another speech:

Eom ic soðlice
leohte geleafan ond mid lufan Dryhtnes,

²⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. ‘ghost (n. & adj.)’, Etymology’.

²⁹ Peter Clemoes, ‘This World as Part of God’s Spiritual Dominion’, in *Interactions of Thought and Language in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 438–87 (p. 441).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 445 and 415.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 439.

³² The word *gæst*, in addition to denoting Guthlac’s blessed soul (spirit), is assigned to God’s angel (‘frofre gæst’ (136b)). Interestingly, it is also used for demons (‘earmra gæsta’ (339b), ‘se atela gæst’ (116b)) perhaps for the purpose of spiritual contrast.

³³ ‘They always found Guthlac firm in God’s will’.

³⁴ Bjork, p. 20.

fægre gefylled in minum feorhlocan,
reostum inbryrded to þam betran ham,
leomum inlyhted (651b–55a).³⁵

[I am truly pleasantly filled with bright faith,
with the love of God in my breast, inspired in my mind
towards the better home, enlightened with radiance]

Following this powerful display of Guthlac's deeds is his unwavering utterance of words. In the first part of the third speech (ll. 361–68), he verbalises God's promise and his own, and underscores the significance of words in their spiritual bond ('lapað hine liþum wordum'). This lays foundation for the second part of the speech (ll. 369–89) which concentrates on conceptual pairings including body and soul, transience and eternity, words and deeds:

þeah ge minne flæschoman fyres wylme
forgripen gromhydge gifran lege,
næfre ge mec of *þissum wordum* onwendað (374–76a).³⁶

[Although you, fierce-minded, assailed my body
with surge of fire, greedy flames,
you are not to turn me away from these words]

Based on the text, 'þissum wordum' should be referring to Guthlac's iterations of obedience and verbal counterattack of demonic obsession with transitory goods. Empowering and enspiriting, they serve as an inexhaustible source of his heroic sanctity, constantly reminding himself, God, and his adversaries of his sacred promise(s). In this sense, embodying actions, words also compensate actions to fulfil obligations within the spiritual bond of *halige heah treow*.

Since my philological analysis at the beginning of the article has demonstrated that verbal enactment is vital to promise, it is worth noting that this indulgence in words also has broader theological prominence. The most remarkable evidence is perhaps from the Gospel of John: 'In principio erat Verbum, Et Verbum erat apud Deum, Et Deus erat Verbum'.³⁷ By organising words into coherent speech, Christians express their affective piety, 'emulate the Creator himself, praise him, and become part of his everlasting body'.³⁸ Being transactional and interactional, this linguistic network within which people verbalise faith and promises allows them to participate in God's reality, because for Karl Barth, human words used for this purpose are equal to God's own word. He argues that 'our words then possess the entire veracity which they have in God himself, in which God the creator, who places them at our disposal, knows about himself, and with which he describes himself'.³⁹ To access God's reality is essentially to grasp a reality of His presence, for it is God's incarnation that gives a full meaning to Christian discourse. To illustrate this point, Andrew Moore conceptualises God as the 'grammar of Christian faith'.⁴⁰ Since

³⁵ Emphasis mine.

³⁶ Emphasis mine.

³⁷ 'In the beginning was the word, and word was with God, and God was word'. For a further discussion of the relationship between the significance of words and its theological sources, see Bjork, pp. 18–20.

³⁸ Bjork, p. 6.

³⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, Volume II: The Doctrine of God, First Half-Volume* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), p. 231.

⁴⁰ See Andrew Moore, 'The Grammar of Christian Faith and the Relationship Between Philosophy and Theology', in *Realism and Christian Faith: God, Grammar, and Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 108–137. Emphasis mine.

grammar regulates the possible combinations of words, thereby giving language an order and a meaning, God orders the practices of faith. Failure to recognise such divine realism would result in an incomplete understanding of Christian theology. As Moore claims, ‘practices help us discover the meaning of Christian discourse, but unless they are pursued in obedience and acknowledgement of God’s involvement in them, they are an inadequate guide to meaning’.⁴¹ Therefore, if we turn back to the poem, Guthlac’s incessant practices of verbalising promises to God are not simply a semantic participation in God’s reality but a means to grapple with His presence, to become one with His body, to touch that immutable truth.

Saints’ words and speech matter. This argument has been undisputed in terms of literary representation and theological explanation. Yet, no attempt is made in the *Guthlac A* to interrogate and instruct the nature of God’s verbal promise. In fact, God barely intervenes in human affairs in the poem. By contrast, the *Andreas* is featured by divine interventions; without His handful guidance, Andreas would not have accomplished his mission. It is in this poem that an answer to the essence of divine promise is found. Much of the poem’s focus is on the apostolic missionary bond between Andreas and God. It is another type of mutual promise encountered in hagiography, slightly differing from the one between Guthlac and God, given Andreas’ peculiar role as Christ’s apostle. Nonetheless, it is homogeneous to the sacred promise in the *Guthlac A* by virtue of the eulogy of heightened spirituality, self-sacrifice, and commitment to moral obligations. Focusing upon Andreas’ repeated calls for divine assistance, and the narrative suspense created through a misperception of his being forsaken by God, the following discussion attempts to argue that divine promise is featured by eternity and infallibility.

In the second part of the narrative, instigated by Satan, Mermedonians rush out to capture Andreas. At this critical moment, God reveals in holy voice that he must fortify intellectual and emotional faculties (‘modsefan’ (1209b), ‘hyge’ (1213a), ‘heortan’ (1213b)), embrace the forthcoming assaults (‘mirce manslaga’ (1218a)), and believe that God remains with him (‘ic þe mid wunige’ (1218b)). Yet, God also emphasises that although Andreas’ body is to be substantially disabled, he will not die (‘Ne magon hie [...] deaðe gedælan’ (1215–17a)). This is explicitly set as a test of Andreas’ commitment to his promise of adhering to divine guidance, and of completing the sacred commission. Since saintly suffering evokes Christ’s Passion and consequently gestures towards an increasingly typological conflation with Christ, Andreas’ corporeal body must be disabled so that his saintly body can be enabled. In the meantime, the assurance that ‘ic þe mid wunige’ (1218b) (‘I remain with you’) symbolises God’s promise that is instrumental to Andreas’ navigation of the foreign land. This pledge of divine protection and companionship has in fact already been underscored in the first part of the narrative when Andreas recalls Christ’s speech:

Bodiað æfter burgum beorhtne geleafan
ofer foldan fæðm. ***Ic eow freoðo healde*** (335–6).⁴²

[Preach the bright faith in cities after cities,
over earth’s embrace.
I shall hold you in peace]

Such thematic repetition lends more authority to Christ’s promise, thereby leaving no room for interrogation. As Cardwell notes, ‘the poem emphasises the continuing presence of Christ with his followers after his ascension (‘ic eow freoðo healde’), which is drawn specifically from

⁴¹ Moore, p. 118.

⁴² Emphasis mine.

Matthew 28 (*ego vobiscum sum*)'.⁴³ As 'the central tropological or even "pastoral" concern of the [Andreas] legend', it provides an enhanced assurance of the intervening power of Christ-as-God.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, over the three-day torture Andreas grows increasingly skeptical about the validity of divine promise. In his first appeal to God the speech is marked by an emotional display of vulnerability and an emphasis on God's power (ll. 1281–95):

Ic gelyfe to ðe, min liffruma,
þæt ðu mildheort me for þinum mægenspedum,
nerigend fira, næfre wille,
ece ælmihtig, **anforlætan**,
swa ic þæt gefremme, þenden feorh leofað,
min on moldan, þæt ic, meotud, þinum
larum leofwendum lyt geswice (1284–90).⁴⁵

[I believed in you, my source of life, that you,
compassionate Saviour of men and eternal Almighty,
will never forsake me because of your majestic power,
so that I, while I live my life on earth,
contrived little to be false to your pleasant teachings.]

Andreas reiterates the fact that he has kept to his promise of remaining true to the divine teaching. This statement is not false because, as the poet tells us, 'hæfde him on innan ellen untweonde, wæs þæt æðele mod asundrad fram synnum' (1241b–43a).⁴⁶ Although Andreas' sainthood proves exemplary, it is by no means flawless as he subsequently interrogates God's credibility by hinting at the possibility that he has been forsaken ('anforlætan'); the multiple references to God's 'mægenspedum' convey the subtext that 'since I have been true to my promise, and you are omnipotent, where are you now?'. Around 110 lines later comes Andreas' second appeal and the key word 'anforlætan' thematically unifies the two speeches (ll. 1401–28):

to fæder cleopodest,
cininga wuldor, ond cwæde ðus:
'Ic ðe, fæder engla, frignan wille,
lifes leohtfruma, hwæt **forlætest** ðu me? (1410b–13).⁴⁷

[[Christ] cried out to the Father, the glory of kings,
and thus said: 'I want to inquire you, Father of angels,
Author of light and life, why you forsake me?']

Andreas quotes from Christ's own words; by associating Christ's fear of abandonment ('forlætest') with his own, he offers a superficially convincing justification for his despair. Divine promise seems to have become void of authority, given that Andreas explicitly contrasts his present corporeal deformation with Christ's previous pledge of the twelve apostles' bodily

⁴³ Cardwell, p. 14.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 15.

⁴⁵ Emphasis mine.

⁴⁶ 'he had within himself undoubting courage; that was a noble mind sundered from sins'.

⁴⁷ Emphasis mine.

wholeness in combating the adversaries.⁴⁸ The iteration of the trope of bodily dismemberment, in addition to creating a sympathetic pattern, suggests the saint's figurative dismemberment of selfhood: Andreas descends into an existential crisis.

At this point, narrative suspense is created, and the ensuing resolution is marked by a climatic revelation of God in holy voice that reassures Andreas of His everlasting authority:

So þæt gecyðeð
mænig æt meðle on þam myclan dæge,
þæt ðæt geweorðeð, þæt ðeos wlitige gesceaft,
heofon ond eorðe, hreosaþ togadore,
ær awæged sie **worda ænig**
þe ic þurh minne muð meðlan onginne (1435b–40).⁴⁹

[It is true that many people at the assembly on that great day
will reveal it shall come to pass that this beautiful creation of heaven
and earth shall perish together before any words
that I begin to speak through my mouth are made void]

That God's promising words will not be invalidated even though 'ðeos wlitige gesceaft' (this beautiful creation) perishes counteracts Andreas' previous skepticism. Charles D. Wright's study of the formulaic expression 'þurh+demonstrative pronoun+adjective+gesceap/gesceaft' in Cynewulfian poems demonstrates that the 'focalisation or reference point [of this expression] is often human rather than divine [...] the specific referent of *gesceaft* in the sense 'creation' is almost always determined deictically'.⁵⁰ However, this formulaic phrase is used here as an exception, because the focal point is not humans but God. His self-reflection upon the ephemeral nature of 'ðeos wlitige gesceaft' persuasively conveys the idea that divine words are incapable of perishing. Therefore, God's declaration embodies a self-reflection upon the immutable essence of speech and promise. His voice, more crucially, recovers Andreas' almost disintegrated sainthood.⁵¹

While Guthlac's psychology and spiritual state are very much in focus, he remains depersonalised simply because he is too flawless. This is largely due to the generic requirement of hagiography; rather than create a complex individual self, the aim is to make Guthlac into a mouthpiece for Christian doctrine. In contrast, the literary representation of Andreas is more interesting. Although he is conventionally characterised by saintly excellence, the poet does not entirely erase his human nature, that is, an intrinsic predisposition to imperfection. As Amity Reading similarly points out, 'Andreas is not a perfect type of Christ, but rather a weak one, *full*

⁴⁸ ðu ðæt gehete þurh þin halig word,
þa ðu us twelfe trymman ongunne,
þæt us heterofra hild ne gesceode (1418–20).

'You promised through your holy word, when you began to fortify us twelve, that the maniac war against enemies would not harm us'.

⁴⁹ Emphasis mine.

⁵⁰ Charles D. Wright, 'An Old English Formulaic System and Its Contexts in Cynewulf's Poetry', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 40 (2012), 151–74 (p. 170).

⁵¹ As Mary Hayes indicates, 'Christian subjectivity itself is constructed as being voiceful [...] Andreas concludes by reinforcing the notion that the Christian voice's economy is one that holds up eternally, under any circumstances'. See Mary Hayes, *Divine Ventriloquism in Medieval English Literature: Power, Anxiety, Subversion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 98.

of promise but flawed'.⁵² His transformation from a doubtful apostle to a fully-fledged soldier of Christ does not only illustrate his commitment to and fulfillment of promise, but also symbolises the completion of his self-promise. In the spiritual bond of *halige heah treow*, saints' promises to God are concurrently externally and internally directed. The latter is to create a more spiritually desired self, infinitely close to the body of Christ, close to perfection. Two pieces of evidence are supportive in revealing Andreas' renewed subjectivity.⁵³

The first piece of evidence is that the bloody track caused by Andreas' wounds is transformed into groves with fruits:

Geseh he *geblowene* *bearwas* standan
blædum gehrodene, swa he ær his blod aget (1448–49).⁵⁴

[I saw groves in full flower and blossom standing
where he shed his blood before]

The likelihood is that the fruits symbolise healthier food aimed at rectifying Mermedonians' cannibalism because 'in early Christian thought, anthropophagy threatened to interrupt the continuity of the human from living body, to corpse, to resurrected body', suggests Leah Parker.⁵⁵ Spiritually, the 'supernatural fecundity' of Andreas' blood embodies a Christianising force that combats Mermedonians' moral sinfulness. In this sense, Andreas is signified as capable of fulfilling his ultimate missionary promise to Christ (i.e., to convert non-Christians).⁵⁶ The second piece of evidence is that as a result of God's miraculous power, Andreas' deformed body is made unharmed:

Næs him *gewemmed wlite*, ne wloh of hrægle
lungre alysed, ne loc of heafde,
ne ban gebrocen, ne blodig wund
lice gelenge, ne laðes dæl (1471–74).⁵⁷

[He was not disfigured in appearance.
Neither the garment fringe [was] entirely torn off,
nor lock of hair or bone broken,
nor bloody wounds on the body left,
nor any portion of harm [remained]]

Such rehabilitation from disability is significant as it goes beyond the corporeal boundary to denote spiritual completeness and empowerment. Several scholars such as K. B. Wallace and Fay Skevington propose the word *unhælu* as an Old English counterpart of impairment or disability; it is often deployed to 'refer to physical impairment and disease, mental disorder, and spiritual

⁵² Amity Reading, 'Baptism, Conversion, and Selfhood in the Old English *Andreas*', *Studies in Philology*, 112 (2015), 1–23 (p. 20). Italics mine.

⁵³ Although Reading suggests that the indication of Andreas' acquirement of full apostolic selfhood is his baptising and instructing the Mermedonians at the end of the poem, I am inclined to argue that his renewed subjectivity has been explicit after bodily sufferings, after the holy voice of God is revealed to him.

⁵⁴ Emphasis mine.

⁵⁵ Leah Pope Parker, 'Eschatology for Cannibals: A System of Aberrance in the Old English *Andreas*', in *Monstrosity, Disability, and the Posthuman in the Medieval and Early Modern World*, eds. by Richard H. Godden and Asa Simon Mittman (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2019), pp. 227–48 (p. 235).

⁵⁶ Parker, p. 245.

⁵⁷ Emphasis mine.

degeneracy'.⁵⁸ Thus, we can infer that the semantics of *hælu* should incorporate bodily and spiritual wholeness alike. Andreas' symbolic resurrection directly points towards his self-renewal and fulfillment of his self-promise to become a soldier of Christ.

To conclude, examining the concept of promise in the *Andreas* and *Guthlac A* has been useful in shedding light on the literary landscape of Old English verse hagiography. The morality in the spiritual bond between God and saint, which is the nature of promise, bears affinities with the covenant in biblical theology. It is also observed that hagiographical promise has two representative features. Externally, linguistic analysis of Old English verbs denoting 'to promise' shows that they are interactional, relying upon words and language to establish relationships with others. Meanwhile, this indulgence in words carries broader theological prominence, a means to grapple with God's presence. Internally, the saint's psychological and emotional landscape shows that heightened inner qualities are crucial in unveiling the saint's commitment to and fulfillment of the promise. In the *Andreas*, there is a self-conscious meditation on the transience of the created world which suggests divine promise is infallible and incapable of perishing. Furthermore, Andreas' transformation from a flawed to a flawless apostle reveals another implication in saintly promise: the saint's fulfilment of the promise to God is an accomplishment of the promise he has made to himself. The promise does not simply enhance the saint's Christian virtue, but forges a more human and subjective self.

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⁵⁸ Karen Bruce Wallace, 'Grendel and Goliath: Monstrous Superability and Disability in the Old English Corpus', in *Monstrosity, Disability, and the Posthuman in the Medieval and Early Modern World*, ed. by Richard H. Godden and Asa S. Mittman (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2019), pp.107–26 (p. 108).

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