

Article

A Transcript of Submission: Jesus as Fated Victim of Divine Violence in the Old Saxon *Heliand*

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Abstract: The *Heliand*, written shortly after the conquest and conversion of the Saxons at the hands of Charlemagne, maintains a vexed place in the study of medieval European Christianity(ies). Some argue that the *Heliand*'s overarching intent was pastoral, meant to ease the fears and calm the rage of the defeated Saxons, while others posit that the *Heliand* reflects a "dissident gospel," aimed at subverting the official theological outlook of the Carolingian empire. This study argues that while both theories capture something of the *Heliand*'s ingenious contextual impact, they underestimate one of its key themes: the role of wurd (fate) and its co-identification with the "power of God," which drives Jesus to the cross and scaffolds his submission to the violence of the divine will. Thus, the *Heliand* presents compliant victimization as the proper "fate" of those who submit to God's purposes, promising a heavenly reward and countermanding the Saxon ethos of resistance.

Keywords: *Heliand*; Saxon Christianity; Germanic Christianity; medieval Christianity; political theology; theology of the cross; redemptive violence; contextualization



Citation: Youngs, Samuel J. 2021. A Transcript of Submission: Jesus as Fated Victim of Divine Violence in the Old Saxon *Heliand*. *Religions* 12: 306. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12050306>

Academic Editor: Marina Montesano

Received: 1 March 2021

Accepted: 21 April 2021

Published: 28 April 2021

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1. Introduction

The *Heliand* is, indeed, "a very remarkable work."¹ Composed between 830 and 850 and surviving in several robust (if interestingly divergent) manuscripts, it is one of the greatest examples of overt scriptural contextualization in the history of Christian Europe.² The *Heliand* is a paraphrastic gospel harmony, written in Old Saxon, and while its author is unknown, the work is nonetheless deeply reflective of its immediate historical and religious environment. Indeed, the "Christianizing" of pagan Europe and the "Germanization" of European Christianity are both influentially compelled by and encapsulated within the *Heliand*.³ Apart from its undeniable impact on Saxon-Germanic Christianity in the ninth century, the *Heliand* continued to exert sway for generations thereafter, possibly up to and including Martin Luther himself.⁴

The grand dimensions of the *Heliand*'s historical footprint are complemented by the sheer strangeness of the document. The *Heliand* is nothing if not creative,⁵ for in its pages Peter is transformed into a berserker warrior when he defends Jesus in Gethsemane (58:4866–82),⁶ and the wedding at Cana becomes a grand mead-hall banquet any tribal leader would be proud to host (24:2005–74).⁷ The *Heliand* calls Jesus *drohtin*—warlord or chieftain—and the disciples his warrior-retainers, his *gisiðos*.⁸ Deserts are reimagined as forests, e.g., in the temptation narrative (1121–24), and the villages of ancient Palestine become *burgs*, the hill-forts of Saxon nobility.⁹ These sorts of "minor" alterations can certainly be attributed to the author's vibrant contextualization program, but what are we to make of more substantive and bewildering changes, such as the Magi's backstory of how they came by their prophecies, present in the *Heliand* in great detail (7:562–605) yet without precise parallel in known literature?¹⁰ What of Satan's new role in the dreams of Pilate's wife, which the old fiend facilitates by nothing less than a magic helmet of invisibility (65:5427–59)? What of Jesus' own laconic reference to *muðspel* (31:2591), the eschatological conflagration of Germanic myth that, in some renderings, consumes the world after the *Ragnarök*?¹¹

These mysteries are further amplified by the *Heliand's* historical provenance. Written near the middle of the ninth century, it emerged within the context of longstanding conflict between the Christian Franks and pagan Saxons, as well as the forced conversion and legal oppression of the latter by the former. With a view to this context, the *Heliand* cannot and should not be thought of as an exercise in mere translation; there is too much theological intentionality and innovation afoot for that.¹² G. Ronald Murphy is surely right to identify a full “reimagining” of the gospel account in the leaves of the *Heliand*.¹³ This “Saxon gospel” is aiming to have a particular and theologized impact on its recipients. The most obvious question is also the most fundamental: *what is this intended impact?* What was the author seeking to accomplish? As linguistic and historical consideration of the *Heliand* has continued apace, theological interlocutors have given attention to this question and offered various answers.¹⁴ The present study seeks to enter this space, electing to focus on the portrayal of *the death of Jesus* in the *Heliand*. As a centrifugal element of the gospel accounts as well as the varied soteriological schemas of the Christian religion, the topic of the death of Jesus can shed nonpareil light on the theological aims of the *Heliand* toward its medieval Saxon audience.

In this study, we first proceed to detail the religious thought-world of the pre-Christian Saxons, as well as highlighting key dimensions of their militaristic and ideological clashes with Frankish Christianity. From there, we engage two contemporary perspectives on the death of Jesus in the *Heliand*, one typified in the work of Ronald Murphy¹⁵ and the other in the joint work of Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker.¹⁶ Murphy finds in the *Heliand* a pastoral and evangelistic voice, one that portrays Jesus as a new kind of “chieftain” who loves the Saxons and salvifically dies on their behalf, transcending their honor code loyalties and calling them to new allegiance in Christ. Brock and Parker take up Murphy’s views but push them much further, casting the *Heliand* instead as a “creational gospel,” focused on the renewal of the creation and attempting to subvert the triumphalist violence of the medieval Christian order.

While I appreciate various dimensions of these interpretations, I suggest that they are both too positive in their outlook on the *Heliand*. Instead, I argue that the *Heliand* portrays the death of Jesus as violence fated by the divine will, and thus it intends to summon the Saxons to accept their own suffering and Carolingian rule without resistance; that is, to *accept their fate*. In this way, I argue that the *Heliand* does not present Murphy’s pastoral theology nor the resistance theology of Brock and Parker, but that it is rather, first and foremost, a work of *political theology*.¹⁷

2. Battle, Loyalty, and Fate: Cultural-Religious Themes

Comparative religious study has become increasingly aware of the often unconscious transference of categories derived from the “major” world religions onto smaller, older, more diffusive religious expressions. Rudolf Simek cautions against this tendency in the examination of Germanic religion. He notes that de-emphasizing *texts* (which were often late and synthetic) as well as *deities* (who were rarely conceived in conceptually unified or consistent ways) will enable a “somewhat more complex, more sober and less romantic, but certainly less fanciful picture of the pre-Christian religion of the Germanic tribes.”¹⁸ Given such recommendations, I here focus on “themes” in Germanic religion,¹⁹ allowing for local and chronological flexibility while still capturing the broad impressions significant for this study. These themes are distilled from a breadth of scholarship (for which see the accompanying references), and they are purposefully staged as *broad* enough to avoid presuming too much of the admittedly difficult historical record while also being *specific* enough to be useful in establishing some important context for the *Heliand's* emergence.²⁰

The first theme to emphasize is that of *bellicosity*—preoccupation with physical warfare. Germanic groups, though agriculturally adept at various points in their history, often found the northern and central European climes unforgiving, resulting in regular famine conditions; this scarcity in turn led to a migratory and violent social cycle in the pursuit of resources. In a loosely and tribally organized world, the leaders who could lead most

effectively in combat—and thus most effectively provide for their people—would be extolled.²¹ “War for the Germans was thus a means of social engineering,”²² notes Backman, insofar as ferocity and ambition were uniquely refined and accentuated.²³

While dimensions of Tacitus’ *Germania* have been rightly called into question,²⁴ his discussion of German battle culture remains regularly invoked, and it accords with enough otherwise extant history to be usefully considered.²⁵

When battle is joined it is considered a disgrace for their chieftain to be surpassed in boldness or for his followers not to live up to his prowess. Moreover, it is a lifelong reproach and shame to survive your fallen chief and come back alive from the field. To protect and defend the chief and to dedicate one’s own feats of arms to his renown is the very height of their loyalty. The chief fights for victory, but his followers fight for him.²⁶

This bellicosity of the Teutons lent itself to certain (broadly construed) religious thematics. As Cathey notes, “To the Saxon mind, the world was ruled by forces in it, not apart from it.”²⁷ Whatever else we might say about a German “pantheon,”²⁸ the veneration of gods was deeply bound up in the results of battle, either in victory or defeat. Not only were supernatural forces deemed to empower violent combat and be honored by it, but significant or stirring victories often led to a distinctly battle-focused ritual practice: the “arms sacrifice,” in which weapons and war booty were dedicated to a particular god, often by sinking them in a sacred body of water.²⁹ The Saxon way of evaluating the divine tended, then, to use similar criteria as in their consideration of earthly leaders: capability in battle and, thereby, success in material provision.³⁰

This naturally bridges to a second notable cultural-religious thematic: that of *loyalty*. The Tacitus quote captures this as well, and it is an essential ingredient in what Russell (1994) terms the “warrior ethic” of the Germanic groups.³¹ This warrior ethic was most concentrated in the *comitatus* or *Männerbund*, a group of young warriors or thanes who attached themselves to a lord, seeking to honor him via their battlefield exploits.³² This loyalty and related pursuit of honor (*êre*) meant following one’s lord into battle even when death and defeat were imminent, and it also laid on the obligation for vengeance on behalf of one’s chief (*drohtin*).³³ In terms of religious ethics and spirituality, this meant that little in the Germanic mindset was directed toward anything like personal or moral “holiness” en route to a blissful afterlife.³⁴ Specific or extended reflection on a pleasurable afterlife was quite rare—far more common was the Germanic focus on fame and honor that would live on after a warrior has died honorably, in loyal service to his fighting chieftain.³⁵

With such a battle-focused sense of purpose, loyalty, and, indeed, afterlife itself, a third and final element emerges all the more strikingly: *fatalism*. Crossley-Holland (1999) comments on this pivotal axis in Anglo-Saxon culture: “They were possessed . . . of an acute sense of fate. ‘Fate,’ said the Anglo-Saxon poet, ‘goes ever as it must.’ It governed the passage of a man’s life from his first day to his last, and the only element of choice perceived by the Anglo-Saxon mind appears to have been the way in which a man reacted to his destiny.”³⁶ Indeed, the whole of the Germanic worldview “is saturated with the effects of the belief in an all-powerful destiny.”³⁷ This fatalism was embossed on the uppermost strata of Germanic religiosity in the notion of the *Ragnarök*, the doom or destiny of the gods, in which the most powerful of deities would themselves eventually perish in battle and conflagration—even Odin will be devoured by the dark wolf Fenrir; even Thor will succumb after his deadly battle with the serpent Jörmungandr.³⁸ Cathey and Simek pithily note that, for the Germanic peoples, even the gods “will go down” for “the days of Asgard are numbered.”³⁹ Granted, the most full-throated mythos of the *Ragnarök* may well be a later medieval development (with possible Christian accretions in its finalized form), but Price believes these later developments reflect a distinctive fatalistic core from much earlier Germanic thought, possibly preserving a geomythical memory of a volcanically produced “dust veil” that would have threatened the north European regions in the fifth century.⁴⁰

While these three cultural-religious elements are interlocking and mutually reinforcing, it is this final theme of fate that will matter most for my reading of the death of Christ in

the *Heliand*. However, before embarking on the more theologically specific dimensions of this study, I must say a bit more about the historical forces that colored the immediate experiences of the *Heliand*'s original audience.⁴¹

3. Felled Trees and Forced Baptisms: Immediate History

Much has been written about the Christian conversion of the Germanic and “barbarian” peoples from late antiquity up through the High Middle Ages.⁴² However, here, we focus specifically on the experience of the continental Saxons in the century leading up to the emergence of the *Heliand*. That century is, indeed, the century of their “conversion” in the simple sense that few Old Saxons were baptized and loyal to a Christian empire in the early 700s while nearly all of them were (ostensibly) so by the mid-800s. However, the transit of that century was painful, and that pain is significant for considering the rhetorical and implicit theology of the *Heliand*. We will note two historical moments, bridged by decades of intermittent war, and extrapolate their significance for the Saxon “reception” of Christianity.⁴³

The first moment occurred in the 720s, when Boniface—the famous English bishop charged by Pope Gregory II to convert the Saxons—came to Geismar and chopped down a mighty oak tree sacred to Germanic peoples.⁴⁴ While previous missionary efforts had allowed some accommodation to Saxon religious practices,⁴⁵ Boniface was not suited to this by his papal orders nor by his temperament.⁴⁶ Boniface had actually come to Frisia some years earlier as a missionary and been unsuccessful. Once made a bishop and returned to the continent, however, he seemed ruthlessly bent to uproot not only pagan practice but also the foregoing (largely Irish) missionary efforts, which he regarded as deeply compromised.⁴⁷ The moment of the felling of the sacred oak, and its impact on the gathered Saxon onlookers, is vividly captured in Willibald's *Life of Boniface*: “As [Boniface], strengthened by his unswerving determination, cut the tree down, there was a great number of pagans present who kept on cursing this enemy of their gods under their breath with the greatest fervor.”⁴⁸ This was a flashpoint not only in Saxon resentment against Christian proselytizing but also in Saxon friction with Frankish military might, for Charles Martel's soldiers were on-site at the tree felling, ready to put down any pagan attempts to prevent it.⁴⁹ Before his death at the hands of Frisian bandits some years later, Boniface, the “Apostle to the Germans,” established a powerful monastery at Fulda, one of the possible sites for the penning of the *Heliand* nearly 100 years later.⁵⁰

The sacred oak incident doubtlessly precipitated the escalation of armed conflict between the Saxons and their would-be Frankish overlords. Pippin III led several expeditions against the Saxons, “inflicting bloody defeats on them” until they “promised to obey all his orders.”⁵¹ However, time and again, a pattern persisted: following a period of subjection, the Saxons would rebel, warfare would break out, and the Saxons would be defeated again after heavy losses, only for the spiral of violence to repeat.⁵² Importantly for our study, disloyalty, “faithlessness,” and “oath breaking” were major themes in the recurrent Saxon rebellions;⁵³ Brock and Parker count fifteen Frankish treaties broken by Saxons in one thirteen-year period alone.⁵⁴

Given the number of Saxon tribes (as well as the shifting alliances⁵⁵) under consideration, a focused Frankish effort against them was a grueling prospect. However, Pippin's son Charlemagne committed himself to it.⁵⁶ Additionally, the resultant military activities of Charlemagne “stand as the most brutal page in Christian missionary efforts in Europe.”⁵⁷ Frankish chroniclers noted that “it is hard to say how often [the Saxons] were conquered,”⁵⁸ as Charlemagne waged near-constant violence against them for thirty years.⁵⁹ The gradual conquering of the Saxons proceeded apace with public baptisms, religious conversion as a condition for acceptable surrender.⁶⁰ These baptisms “were by no means divorced from the violence which characterized the conquest: on the contrary, they were the direct result of that violence and the power which proceeded from it.”⁶¹

An important (though oft unmentioned) fact is that not all Saxons were in continuous rebellion. Many Saxons submitted and complied, though unwillingly. In their account

of the massacre at Verden in 782,⁶² the Royal Frankish Annals describe a key distinction between more “submissive” Saxons and more “rebellious” ones:

The Lord King Charles [Charlemagne] rushed to the place with all the Franks that he could gather on short notice and advanced to where the Aller flows into the Weser. All the Saxons came together, submitted to the authority of the Lord King, and handed over the evildoers who were chiefly responsibly for this revolt to be put to death—four thousand and five hundred of them. This sentence was carried out.⁶³

The binary in the account is clear—there are Saxons who “submitted” (that is, once again pledged fealty to the king’s authority) and there are Saxons who revolted (breaking their fealty in “revolt”). Once a rebelling group of Saxons was conquered, any survivors who were yet “unconverted” would require baptism as well: “In great terror . . . the Saxons came to the source of the river Lippe . . . surrendered their land to the Franks . . . and were baptized.”⁶⁴ This survey of the circumstances is enough to justify the assessment that “it was warfare that constituted the conditioning circumstances under which the Saxons received the Christian faith.”⁶⁵

Such brutality eventually battered the Saxons into near-total acquiescence. Charlemagne, after dividing Saxony into counties and dioceses, proceeded to promulgate the *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae* (c. 785 AD), which ratified as law the death penalty for pagan practices,⁶⁶ while also legally enjoining upon the Saxons various Christian obligations such as building churches, paying tithes, and attending mass.⁶⁷ What was seeded with the fall of Weismar oak and watered with the blood of rebel Saxons now came to full bloom: the Saxons were to be Christian, *Frankish* Christians, or suffer mightily.

It is unclear if Louis the Pious (814–40) or Louis the German (840–76) was emperor at the time of the *Heliand*’s composition,⁶⁸ but even under their less-draconian rule, tensions persisted between Franks and Saxons. The *Capitulatio*’s oppressive measures were lightened (somewhat) under subsequent Frankish legislation,⁶⁹ but its reputation as the “terror capitulary” in modern scholarship is well deserved.⁷⁰ The Saxons continued to sporadically rebel. Execution or exile was the common punishment for ongoing rebellion; the most significant of the forced deportations of Saxons occurred in 804 AD.⁷¹ We have record of minor skirmishes between Franks and Saxons all the way until the 840s, marking nearly a full century of bloodshed.⁷²

The Saxon audience of the *Heliand* thus lived under the heel of Carolingian law and within the shadow of a compounded and humiliating cycle of defeat, subjugation, and deportation.⁷³ Given these immediate experiences, what motivated the author of the *Heliand*? What message did this “Saxon gospel” seek to convey to its recipients?⁷⁴ Most centrally for this study, what lessons were the defeated Saxons to learn from the crucified Christ, their alleged Savior?⁷⁵

4. The *Heliand* Cross as Sympathy with the Saxons (Murphy)

For the English audience interested in the *Heliand*, there have been few scholars as important as G. Ronald Murphy. His partner volumes *The Saxon Gospel* and *The Saxon Savior* remain pillars of erudite and accessible scholarship, granting both a wonderfully readable translation of the poem in contemporary English alongside ample cultural and theological commentary. In both volumes, and in subsequent work, Murphy advanced the following viewpoint on the purpose of the *Heliand*: “The epic poem seems not to have been designed for use in the church as part of official worship, but is intended to bring the gospel home to the Saxons in a poetic environment in order to help the Saxons cease their vacillation between their warrior-loyalty to the old gods and to the ‘mighty Christ.’”⁷⁶, p. xvi. James Cathey also generally agrees with this outlook: “Historical Setting,” pp. 14, 17. The *Heliand* has a decided goal, and, in Murphy’s view, that goal is to “overcome Saxon ambivalence toward Christ.”⁷⁷

Murphy finds the author of the *Heliand* deeply sympathetic to the recent history of the defeated Saxons. Indeed, it is reasonable to assume that the author was a Saxon himself, a

poet (*vates*), possibly also a Christian monk.⁷⁸ On Murphy's reading, this Saxon poet had a complex task: he needed to express sympathy for his own people's recent subjugation while also extolling and propagating the religion that was inextricably bound up with that subjugation. Murphy has great admiration for the *Heliand* author and sees him subtly hinting criticism for the Frankish regime while also grandly presenting Jesus as the victor over "fate," that dark force of German paganism. For Murphy, both of these techniques reach their shared crescendo during the crucifixion of Jesus in the *Heliand*.

It is early in the poem that Murphy identifies the first slanted critique of Frankish mistreatment of the Saxons. In Song/Fitt 1 of the *Heliand*, the author describes the inspiration of the four gospels as follows:

The ruling God had placed the Holy Spirit firmly in those heroes' [the gospel writers] hearts . . . so that they could lift up their holy voices to chant God's spell. There is nothing like it in words anywhere in this world! Nothing can ever glorify the Ruler, our dear Chieftain, more! Nor is there anything that can better fell [*felle*] every evil creature or work of wickness (lines 21–28).⁷⁹

Murphy focuses on the use of the word "fell" in the final sentence, in which the image of a chopped-down tree is metaphorically applied to the gospel's victory over evil. In light of the Saxons' recent history, Murphy detects here a covert censure of other kinds of "felling," e.g., the felling of the sacred oak by Boniface, as well as the destruction of the Irminsul by Charlemagne.⁸⁰ The *Heliand* contrasts with such fellings; the gospel fells things not with axes (as the destructive Boniface and Charlemagne did) but with its divine message. Murphy elaborates:

The hidden image is that of the tree, the place of Woden worship in Germanic religion. While admitting that the tree of [pagan] religion must be felled, the author praises "God's spell" as the proper weapon to do the task, thereby rendering small support, and implicitly criticizing, the violent conversion method of Charlemagne and Boniface in Saxony.⁸¹

Later in Song 1, in the *Heliand's* description of ancient Jerusalem and Herod's kingship, Murphy finds more implicit critique of the reigning Frankish powers and their rule over Saxony. The passage says that

at that time the Christian God granted to the Roman people the greatest kingdom. He strengthened the heart of their army so that they had conquered every nation. The helmet-lovers from hill-fort Rome had won an empire. Their military governors were in every land and they had authority over the people of every noble race. In Jerusalem, Herod was chosen to be king over the Jewish people. Caesar, ruling the empire from the hill-fort Rome, placed him there—among the warrior-companions—even though Herod did not belong by clan to the noble and well-born descendants of Israel (lines 53–65).⁸²

Murphy's commentary on this passage is as follows:

The author of the *Heliand* is expressing the deepest sympathy with his Saxon brethren when he suggests this brilliant and, I think, very thinly veiled allusion to the situation in Saxony . . . [The] poet has managed to transpose the geographical situation of Palestine onto that of Saxony, but also the geopolitical situation as well. In so doing he evokes Saxon empathy with the sons of Israel . . . subject to a foreign ruler at the whim of Caesar Augustus.⁸³

Though Murphy will not exhaust the point here, he clearly indicates his view that the *Heliand* is "mapping" the oppressed situation of the Saxons under the Carolingian empire onto the oppressed situation of the Jews under the old Roman Empire.⁸⁴ Such an association climaxes at the passion of Jesus, for there Jesus is shackled in chains and led away by "Rome" (lines 4791, 4917–18), an image that, according to Murphy, works to recall the capture and imprisonment of rebellious Saxons.⁸⁵ Thus, the suffering death of Jesus conveys solidarity for the Saxons as well as implicit criticism of Frankish political and

military practice: “Frankish behavior in the Saxon wars might, it is suggested, have been opposed to Christ.”⁸⁶

However, the death of Jesus is more than simple solidarity-in-suffering; it is also, in Murphy’s view, a victorious triumph over the power of fate itself. Saxon terms associated with fate, such as *metod* and *wurd*, occur regularly throughout the *Heliand*. This prominence of a pagan power could indicate compromise in the author’s Christian orthodoxy, but Murphy provides a different assessment:

The *Heliand* author is no heretic or paganizing Saxon. He merely gives paganism its due, rendering unto Fate and time that which is theirs. But he claims that Christ can cure the blindness inherent in our being This is surely not giving too much importance to Fate, but rather expresses in no uncertain Germanic terms just what the absolute power of the *waldand god* [Ruler God] is.”⁸⁷

In short, Murphy conveys that the power of fate is subordinate to God in the *Heliand*.⁸⁸ As fate marks the end of every person’s natural life, Christ’s victorious resurrection over death shows that the Christian God is even stronger than Germanic fate. Thus, the poet helps his fellow Saxons move away from a focus on “freedom from [Frankish] captivity to the more theological concept of freedom from the ultimate captivity of death The monk-poet has cleared a gentle path for his Saxons, a path on which they can overcome their conquerors through the very religion brought by the conquerors[.]”⁸⁹

I have presented Murphy’s viewpoint on the death of Christ in the *Heliand* with little commentary, though I do differ with his assessments in some important ways. While I will expound more thoroughly below, suffice it to say at this juncture that I agree that the *Heliand* does intend to “map” the biblical geopolitical situation onto that of the Saxons and that it intends to comment theologically on the role of *wurd*, but I do not see it doing so in the ways outlined by Murphy. Overall, Murphy’s judgments may be too positive on the pastoral dimensions of the *Heliand*, and too willing to dismiss dimensions of the poem that could readily support Frankish political ideology over the still-rebellious Saxons. Murphy’s highly positive assessment of the *Heliand*’s intent has lent itself to greater overstatement when taken up by other scholars. Such is the case with Brock and Parker, who adopt Murphy’s interpretation but then sail beyond it, exaggerating key dimensions of the *Heliand* to the neglect of others.

5. The *Heliand* Cross as Subversion of Violence (Brock and Parker)

In a wide-ranging work of historical theology, Brock and Parker detail how, in their view, the church “traded love of this world for crucifixion and empire.”⁹⁰ Originary Christianity, they claim, was world-affirming and deeply ethical. However, this commendable beginning was distorted as the church became a tool of empire in post-Constantian history. They see this harmful theological trajectory as compelled by a “shift to an obsession with atoning death and redemption through violence,”⁹¹ particularly during the Middle Ages and Charlemagne’s bloody conversion of the Saxons.

They trace this alleged development across a diverse medley of historical materials, from artwork to hymns to formal theology, but it is the “Gero Cross” which forms the literal crux of their argumentation.⁹² This life-size wooden sculpture, dating from the middle of the tenth century, is the first of its kind to depict the *murdered corpse* of the crucified Christ, rather than the triumphant, peaceful, or living Christ who occupies the cross in earlier Christian art.⁹³ Brock and Parker see the Gero Cross, which comes from the Rhineland, as representative of a Saxon/Germanic outlook which freighted Christian salvation with violent and deathly imagery, reflecting how “the gospel” came to them under Frankish oppression:

To the Saxons along the Rhine . . . Christian theology arrived at the point of a sword. The cross—once a sign of life—became for them a sign of terror. Blood seeped through the gold. Within a few generations of their forced conversion, the Saxons hewed an image of the tortured and dead body of Christ hanging

from the tree [the Gero Cross]. Pressed by violence into Christian obedience, the Saxons produced art that bore the marks of their baptism in blood.⁹⁴

With this basic outline of their position in place, we turn our attention to how the *Heliand* fits into Brock and Parker's interpretation of Saxon history.

Though they see the Gero Cross as a tragic expression of the victory of Carolingian Christianity over the Saxons, they find in the *Heliand* a counterpoint, a subversion of imperial medieval theology, one that accords not only with Christianity's earlier "this-worldly, life-affirming traditions" but with elements of foregoing Germanic paganism as well.⁹⁵ They deliberately align themselves with Murphy's scholarship,⁹⁶ but in their hands, his perceived "hints" of Saxon solidarity are embellished into a "transcript of resistance" that "thumbed its nose" at Charlemagne, and Murphy's notion of Jesus' defeat of fate is conscripted in their elaboration of a "Saxon life-affirming gospel."⁹⁷ These amplifications of Murphy's interpretive paradigm propel Brock and Parker to not only affirm the *sympathetic* elements of Christ's death that Murphy identifies but also to further argue that the *Heliand's* crucifixion is *subversive* of the violent ethic of Carolingian Christianity itself. This interpretation is made most clear in their treatment of the crucifixion.

They state their view simply: "For the poet of the *Heliand*, Jesus's crucifixion had no healing power."⁹⁸ In fact, they render the soteriological vision of the *Heliand* with no reference to Christ's death at all, claiming instead that "incarnation, transfiguration, and resurrection" are "the arc of the story."⁹⁹ The sole theological function they perceive for the crucifixion is as a manner of escape, which the Saxon Christ slips through before being resurrected. Who is Christ escaping? Enemies of the gospel, which Brock and Parker repeatedly identify as Satan, fate, and the Romans, all of which they regard as thin cyphers for the Carolingian empire. On Brock and Parker's interpretation, then, it is this unholy triumvirate which the dissident theology of the *Heliand* radically identifies, subverts, and overturns.

Fate and Satan unite forces against Christ when he faces his enemies from Fort Rome The *Heliand's* Passion story unfolds as a battle with both the demonic earthly enemies from Rome and with Fate In death, Christ escapes captivity to both Fate and Satan. He slips away from his enemies and travels to God. He cannot win against evil or overcome fate with violence. He mounts the cross and through death, his spirit escapes his captors—outwitting them In the dead of night, Christ's fugitive spirit returns to his corpse, right under their noses. "There was the spirit coming, by the power of God, the holy breath, going under the hard stone to the corpse!" (Song 68).¹⁰⁰

Christ's resurrection is seen as an expression of divine creativity, showing the goodness of the created order and the way of human flourishing within it; its gospel is about life, not death: "[The *Heliand*] consistently speaks of this world as beautiful and shining with light. Those who follow Christ's teaching find fortune and happiness in this world."¹⁰¹

Ultimately, Brock and Parker de-emphasize the crucifixion in the *Heliand* too much, reaching far past Murphy in their reflections on the *Heliand*. In what follows, I will engage in a more detailed criticism of their viewpoint, with passing references to Murphy, en route to presenting a third view of Jesus' death in the *Heliand*.

6. The *Heliand* Cross as Submission to Divine Fate

The view of Brock and Parker comes to grief on a few fronts,¹⁰² though this study will focus particularly on its misunderstanding of *how* Christ, God (the Father), and fate (*wurd*) all relate to the specific event of the crucifixion. This range of misunderstanding is encapsulated when they interpretively conflate Rome, fate, and Satan as the violent enemies of the gospel and of Christ.¹⁰³ We will address all three of these alleged "enemies" in some detail and in so doing will construct a different reading, a *political* reading, of the cross in the *Heliand*.

6.1. Rome and “Disloyal Jews” in the *Heliand*

“Rome” is the simplest to remove from the evil trio of Brock and Parker, as the *Heliand* actually (and infamously) *distances Rome* from violence against Jesus in its crucifixion narrative. Indeed, it portrays *Jews alone* as those who torture Christ, mock him, build his cross, and hang him to die.¹⁰⁴ The following excerpts are drawn from Songs 65–67,¹⁰⁵ which do not mention the Romans at all:

The folk of the Jews loathed Christ Savior as their foe (line 5422)

The host of Jews so wanted [Jesus’ death] (5470)

All the clanspeople of the Jews cried out together . . . ‘Let his gore drip down’ (5481, 5483)

He was given to the Jews . . . unto those who loathed him (5487, 5490)

They erected the gallows [the cross] . . . the Jews set it up (5532–33)

The Jews put on each side of Christ on the cross two criminals (5560–61)

Then truly did the folk of the Jews laugh to mock him (5639–40)

This vilification of the Jews in the *Heliand* works doubly against Brock and Parker’s reading, since Rome is not only absent from the perpetuation of violence against this Saxon Christ but the violence is in fact carried out on him by the Jews, his own people, who would represent the Saxons themselves on Brock and Parker’s reading. The same criticism applies, though to a lesser degree, to Murphy’s suggestion that the poet intends to sympathetically map Saxony onto Palestine. The Jews, as a people group, are not portrayed as victims of oppression in the *Heliand*. Rather they are portrayed, unflinchingly and often, as the enemies of Christ.¹⁰⁶

Murphy has a more recent essay on “The Jews in the *Heliand*,” and there he acknowledges the “unusually high degree of hostility” the poem evinces for them.¹⁰⁷ One portion of his explanation says that the Jews are portrayed antagonistically in order to exemplify *disloyalty* and thus contrastively highlight the value of loyalty (*triuue*) to Christ, rather than to Woden.¹⁰⁸ However, because the *Heliand* presents the Jews so negatively, and because Murphy remains committed to seeing the *Heliand* as pastorally sympathizing with the Saxons, he is driven to also idiosyncratically argue that the Jews represent the Saxons early in the poem, but then switch to representing “foreigners” (Franks) later on: “The Jews in the *Heliand*, outside of the infancy narrative [that is, Songs 1–9], are always described as non-Saxons, as a foreign army, as a different people,” whereas, on Murphy’s reading, “the poet everywhere depicts Jesus as a *Saxon* chieftain.”¹⁰⁹

This interpretation is problematic. Besides the ad hoc notion that the *Heliand*’s symbolic reading of the Jews changes (with no indication) after the ninth Fitt, it is quite beyond the bounds of the poem’s discourse to say that it identifies some Jews as Saxon or non-Saxon. The whole of the poem is written in Old Saxon (with a few Latin terms); everyone lives in *burgs*; and all of the Jews, including the apostles and Jesus, belong to the same *kunni* (clan, people) or same *liudiun* (folk). The *Heliand* has the prophet Simeon say to the child Jesus, “Your coming, my Lord Chieftain, brings glory and honor to the sons of Israel, your own clan, your own dear people” (lines 489–92). Jesus’ most common appellation in the poem is *Crist*, the “Jewish” messiah. At all these levels, Murphy’s attempt to separate Jesus (the Saxon) from the Jews (“a foreign people”) cannot be sustained. The Jews and the Saxons are conflated holistically.

However, there is a different kind of separation *among the Jews* that is very clear in the *Heliand*. Some Jews (e.g., Mary, Jesus himself, the disciples, Joseph of Arimathea) are clearly portrayed in a positive light and contrasted with the other “wicked people of the clan” (line 5720). The point becomes clear: the pervasive and important geopolitical contrast is *not* between “wicked” Rome/Franks and the Jews, *but rather between disloyal Jews* (Judah and other “evil adversaries,” *wrêða wiðersakon*) *and the Jews who are loyal to Jesus*.¹¹⁰ The *Heliand* is certainly concerned with loyalty, loyalty to this Saxon Christ. However, this Saxon Christ stands as a “proper” Saxon under Frankish rule. For nearly a century, the

Saxons had taken oaths of allegiance, made treaties, and pledged fealty to the Franks, and with every recurrent rebellion, they have been “disloyal.” The *Heliand* highlights, via the “disloyal Jews,” how such Saxon disloyalty and rebelliousness is not aligned with Christ.

It is worth remembering that the final punitive movement of Charlemagne against the major Saxon rebellions was deportation, that is, exile from Saxony.¹¹¹ In this light, note how the *Heliand* discusses disbelieving or disloyal Jews:

The more the Chieftain’s Son did good work every day with his followers, the more the Jews did not believe at all in his mighty power because of that! Nor did they believe that he was the All-Ruler of everything, people and country. They are still receiving their reward for that—farflung journeying in exile—because they fought against the Son of the Chieftain (2284–90).¹¹²

Hereby, things are clarified; the political theology of the poem *does* map Palestine onto Saxony: the Jews who resisted Jesus correspond to the Saxons that still resist Frankish (Christian) rule. The *Heliand* does want to summon loyalty; like the disciples, the “good Jews,” Saxons should be loyal and obedient—to Christ, and thus also to their Frankish Christian king.

6.2. Fate and the “Power of God” in the *Heliand*

Brock and Parker’s evil trio also includes fate as something that the *Heliand* is somehow opposed to and that Jesus somehow overcomes. This interpretation is hard to sustain. Radically and often, the *Heliand* comes close to *conflating fate with the power of God*.¹¹³ The working of the Christian God is not opposed to fate; they are, in fact, deeply aligned. As Green has it, in the *Heliand*, “the implication is that God possesses or disposes of fate, that its decrees are in fact his.”¹¹⁴

Murphy, for his part, is aware of this, often acknowledging moments in the *Heliand* where this conflation is evident.¹¹⁵ However, as we’ve seen, Murphy can also sometimes speak of the *Heliand*’s Christ overcoming the pagan notion of fate (*wurd*) by his death and resurrection: “Christ in the *Heliand* has surpassed Woden. Not only has he overcome fate’s power over people, He has also overcome His own fated death by his own strength.”¹¹⁶ Importantly, however, the *Heliand* itself never says that Christ defeats fate; it never presents Christ as opposed to fate; it never names the resurrection as the undoing of fate. Again, the overriding depiction of *fate* in the *Heliand*, when it is in reference to the violent death of Jesus, is as parallel with the will and power of God (*maht godes*). In these contexts, fate is either presented as subordinate to God’s power or equated with it.¹¹⁷

The work of Augustyn is among the most detailed to engage the “semiotics” of fate, (as well as the question of the “Christianization” of fate) in the *Heliand*.¹¹⁸ Augustyn sees the poem as polyvalent on the question of fate and its relation to the Christian God. She states simply that “there is ample evidence of replacement of pagan belief in fate with the Christian omnipotent God. The *Heliand* displays this shift not as a simple replacement, but rather through an intricate interplay of given and new.”¹¹⁹ Accordingly, her reading of the *Heliand* detects that fate is, at times, opposed to God,¹²⁰ and, at other times, virtually synonymous with the providential activity of God.¹²¹ Augustyn is especially intent to argue that the OS term *wurd* is associated with death and is presented as the force of death in the cosmos, and that this distinguishes “fate” (in these cases) from God.

The chief difference between Augustyn’s reading and my own is that I attribute a stronger overall theological coherence to the *Heliand*, and thus I find it highly unlikely that the author—charged with a Christian proselytizing project—would retain the pagan notion of fate as a God-opposing power in any form.¹²² However, this difference in the interpretation of fate need not overly occupy us here. It is in reference to the death of Jesus itself that the *Heliand* most obviously conflates fate (*wurd* and related terminology) and the plans/power of God, and it is here that my reading and Augustyn’s find much common ground.

Some relevant passages are presented below in Table 1, first in OS and then in English translation,¹²³ followed by a brief commentary. In order that the theological implications

are made clear, I not only present passages containing the well-known fate terms but also passages that indicate the relation between God's will and Christ's death even when such explicit fate terms are absent:

Table 1. Conflation of fate and divine power in the *Heliand*.

<i>Heliand</i> (OS)	English Translation	Commentary
<p>49:4061-4064 <i>“ik gilô b̄iu that thu the wāro bist”, quað siu, “[Krist godes sunu:] that mag man antkennen wel, witen an th̄inun wordun, that thu giwald ha bes thurh thiū hēlagon giskapu himiles endi erðun.”</i></p>	<p>“I believe,” she [Mary] said, “that you are the true Christ, God’s Son. It can be recognized clearly and known from your words that You, by decree of holy fate, have power over heaven and earth.”¹²⁴</p>	<p>This passage’s expression of Christ’s life and power being owed to <i>helagon giskapu</i>—holy fate—is perhaps the most blatant blending of fate/God in the <i>Heliand</i>. Murphy’s analysis here is revealing: “It is [the author’s] ultimate if uneasy synthesis: the ‘fate’ of the Saxons and the ‘power of God’ are one and the same.”¹²⁵</p>
<p>55:4563-69 <i>Nu ik iu [iuwes] drohtines skal willeon seggian, that ik an thesaro weroldi ni môt mid mannun mēr [. . .] Mi is an handun nu wīti endi wunderquāle, thea ik for thesumu werode skal, tholon [for thesaru thiodu].”</i></p>	<p>Jesus: “Now I will tell you that it is your Chieftain’s [or Lord’s] will that I no longer enjoy food with men For me, the pain and terrible torture which I am to suffer for this world and its people is now at hand.”¹²⁶</p>	<p>Here, Jesus himself notes that his upcoming passion is entirely God’s will. He is not, it bears noting, simply saying that the later resurrection is God’s will, but the whole course of the “torment and torture” (<i>wīti endi wunderquāle</i>).</p>
<p>55:4619-20 <i>“ . . . Thiū wurd is at handu thea tīdi sind nu gināhid.”</i></p>	<p>Jesus says this to Judas, prompting him to go and put his betrayal in motion: “Fate is at hand. The time has now come close.”¹²⁷</p>	<p>Jesus here indicates that the upcoming betrayal by Judas (a moment of great contextual significance for the recently subjugated Saxons) is entirely “fated.”¹²⁸</p>
<p>57:4778-80 <i>Thiū wurd is [at] handun, that it sô gigangen skal, sô it god fader [gimarkode] mahtig.</i></p>	<p>Jesus, to the disciples in the garden of Gethsemane: “Fate is at hand, so that everything will go just as God the Father in his might has determined it.”¹²⁹</p>	<p>Again, the author has Jesus claiming clearly that the Father’s will equates to Jesus’ upcoming agonizing fate.</p>
<p>58:4827 <i>thar he mid is jungarun stôd, māri drohtin: bêd metodogiskapu</i></p>	<p>As the soldiers approach Jesus to arrest him: “There [Jesus] stood with his followers. He was awaiting the workings of fate.”¹³⁰</p>	<p><i>Metodogiskapu</i>—means “measured-workings of fate” or even “divine fortune,”¹³¹ the author again leaving no doubt about the conflation of Jesus’ divinely willed suffering and fate.</p>
<p>59:4936 <i>ni was it thoh be ênigaru blôði, that sie that barn godes, [. . .] ni mahtun sie is bemīðan</i></p>	<p>Referring to the disciples’ desertion of Jesus: “It was not because of any cowardice . . . they could not have avoided it.”¹³²</p>	<p>The fated and deterministic language embraces all dimensions of Jesus’ fate, including his abandonment by his followers.</p>

Table 1. Cont.

<i>Heliand</i> (OS)	English Translation	Commentary
<p>59:5024-25 <i>... it weldi god, that sô lioben man lêð gistôdi</i></p>	<p>The author reflects on the sorrow of Peter after he has denied Christ: "... why God so willed it, that such a beloved man should suffer such sorrow."</p>	<p>Again, the remit of fate/God's will enfolds all pain and suffering attendant to the passion. Peter's grief is willed by God. In fact, even his foregoing denials were fate (see 59:4978-79).</p>
<p>64:5394-95 <i>Thiu wurd nâhida thuo, mâri maht godes endi middi dag, that sia thia ferahquâla frummian skoldun.</i></p>	<p>As Jesus is being accused and tried: "Fate was coming closer, then, the great power of God, and midday, when they were to bring his life-spirit to its death agony."</p>	<p>This passage serves as the climax in the overt conflation between fate and God's desire for and power over Christ's suffering death.¹³³</p>

In short, there is little basis for seeing fate as an enemy or opposing force that Christ overcomes (the view that Brock and Parker espouse and that Murphy, at times, points toward). In the *Heliand*, Christ's suffering fate is the direct result of—indeed, it is the same as—God's all-determining will.

The significance of this for the implicit political theology of the *Heliand* can be effectively seen in the following passage, which comes on the heels of Peter's violent defense of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane:

[Jesus says:] The ruling God, the all-mighty Father, has determined it differently: we are to bear whatever bitter things this people does to us. We are not to become enraged or wrathful against their violence, since whoever is eager and willing to practice the weapon's hatred, cruel spear-fighting, is often killed himself by the edge of the sword and dies dripping with his own blood. *We cannot by our deeds avert anything.*¹³⁴

To the subjugated Saxons, the implications of this passage are manifold: (1) violence and suffering are under the remit of the divine will; (2) do not rebel against divinely sanctioned violence (or even be angry about it); (3) if you fight back, the violence done to you is your own fault; and (4) rebellious actions cannot alter anything anyway; all is as God fates it.¹³⁵

The *Heliand's* vision of Christ's passion, then, is one of divinely mandated salvific violence—suffering that leads to eternal life. For the oppressed Saxons, the political theology could scarcely be more overt: Christ's violent suffering, though terrible, was God's will, and ultimately redemptive. Likewise, by implication, the Saxon's violent suffering, though terrible, was God's will, and ultimately redemptive. The *Heliand* does not subvert the violent theology enjoined on the Saxons by Frankish imperialism. Rather, the *Heliand* sacralizes it, associating it with both the salvific cross and the divine will. To rebel against such violence, rejecting Frankish rule, and opposing the Christian king, would be tantamount to rejecting salvation and opposing God's will. The Saxons "cannot by their deeds avert anything." Submission is salvation.

6.3. Satan and "the Passive Christ" in the *Heliand*

Peter tries to resist the divine will (fate) in Gethsemane and is chided by Christ. Does anyone else in the *Heliand* attempt to prevent Jesus' unjust execution? Only one: Satan. Additionally, it is here that Brock and Parker's estimation of the "subversive" political theology of the *Heliand* comes to its final obstacle. Here, the character of Satan is no violence-monger. Instead, he actively attempts to prevent the violence done to Christ by giving disturbing dreams to the wife of Pilate:

[Satan] immediately wanted to come to Christ's aid to help prevent the sons of men from taking Christ's life or killing him on the cross! ... The sinister enemy

began showing mysterious signs very clearly to the governor’s wife so that she would use her words to help Christ, the Chieftain of the human race, to remain alive (He was then already predestined to die) . . . The woman was very worried, she was frightened by the visions that were coming to her in broad daylight. They were the doings of the deceiver, who was invisible, hidden by a magic helmet (lines 5443–52).¹³⁶

Murphy is insightful in his commentary on this passage, duly noting the conflation between fate and God and how Satan relates to them:

In a clever if somewhat intimidating reversal, the *Heliand* poet draws a necessary conclusion. If fate and the will of God are one, *anyone who opposes fate (what happens in the world and when), opposes the will of God . . .* The only one who opposes the inevitable is Satan.¹³⁷

This aligns well with what we have argued above: the *Heliand* conveys to its Saxon audience that to stand against holy violence is to stand against fate, that is, God’s will. However, now the necessary corollary comes into focus: to stand against God’s will is also to be aligned with *Satan*.¹³⁸

However, if being aligned with Satan means opposing divinely sanctioned violence, then what does it look like to be aligned with Christ, the “Saxon savior?” It would mean accepting one’s fate, even if it be violence. However, how—in *what manner*—should one act in the face of violence? The *Heliand* poet gives clear indications via the comportment of Jesus himself throughout the account of his passion. Throughout these narratives, there is a dual emphasis on both Jesus’ *chains* (the physical restraints—*bendi, feteros*) and his *passive submission* to the abuse heaped on him. The emphasis and repetition of these thematics in the *Heliand* are striking, as illustrated in Table 2. below. The *Heliand* reference is provided, followed by translation and an identification of the pertinent theme of the passage, as it relates to either Christ’s chains or Christ’s passivity. Additionally, to highlight the extremity of these emphases, I have included a column to note any parallels to the *Heliand* text in the Vulgate.¹³⁹

Table 2. Twin themes of Christ’s chains and passive suffering in the *Heliand*.

<i>Heliand</i> Reference	Summarized Content	Vulgate Parallel
58:4822	Judas giving directions to the soldiers on their way to capture Jesus: “That person [whom I kiss] will be Christ Himself, whom you are to capture by the might of the clan, tie him up [binden] , up on the mountain, and bring Him back to the fort.” ¹⁴⁰ <i>Theme: Chains</i>	None. In Mt 26:48 and Mk 14:44, Judas simply enjoins the soldiers to “hold Jesus” [<i>tenete eum</i>] at his arrest.
58:4894-95	Jesus advises Peter not to resist violence: “We are to bear whatever bitter things this people does to us. We are not to become enraged or wrathful against their violence[.]” ¹⁴¹ <i>Theme: Passivity</i>	None. In John 18:11, Peter is admonished simply to put his sword away.
58:4917-18 59:4927-28	“They [the Jews] fastened His hands together with iron handcuffs and His arms with chains [<i>fitereun</i>] [they were] able to put the Holy Christ in body irons and bring him back in chains [<i>fitereun</i>].” ¹⁴² <i>Theme: Chains</i>	Partial. John 18: There is a single mention of the arresting crowd binding Jesus [<i>ligaverunt eum</i>], but what he is bound with is unmentioned.

Table 2. Cont.

<i>Heliand</i> Reference	Summarized Content	Vulgate Parallel
58:4923-4924	“He [Jesus] did not say a thing about what they wanted to do to Him in their spiteful hate.” ¹⁴³ <i>Theme: Passivity</i>	None.
59:4927; 59:4947; 59:4959; 59:4983-85; 59:4991	Repeated references to Jesus being “ bound ” or “ in chains ” while Peter is questioned and denies knowing Christ. ¹⁴⁴ <i>Theme: Chains</i>	None.
60:5052-54; 60:5078	As Jesus is abused by the crowds and falsely accused: “[He was] suffering the iron bonds [<i>bendi</i>] for the sake of mankind He stood there in chains and bore with patience whatever evil things this clan’s people did to him Christ kept silent and endured it .” ¹⁴⁵ <i>Themes: Chains and Passivity</i>	Partial. Luke 22:61-65 recounts Jesus being blindfolded and struck, but there is no parallel to any specific mention of noted passivity or his bonds. Mark 14:61 says that Jesus “held his peace” (<i>ille autem tacebat</i>) which emphasizes his silence more than his suffering.
61:5113-22	“He was held in iron bonds . . . The enemy horde heaped words of mockery and scorn upon Him His arms were chained , He suffered in patience whatever bitter things the people did to him Then wrathful men took Him, God’s Son, still in irons” <i>Themes: Chains and Passivity</i>	Partial. Matthew 27:2 and Mark 15:1 simply note that Jesus was “bound” [<i>vinctum</i>] when he was brought to Pilate.
62:5171	“God’s Son waited at the assembly house, enduring the pain of the iron bindings [<i>bendi</i>]” <i>Themes: Passivity and Chains</i>	None.
62:5214-23	Pilate questions Jesus; Jesus’ bound status is referenced three times between them. <i>Theme: Chains</i>	None. This scene in the <i>Heliand</i> is derived from John 18:33-37, which contains no mention of Jesus being bound.
63:5260-69	“Pilate then ordered his warrior-heroes to take the prisoner, as He was, in His chains They led the holy Christ . . . in chains . Christ walked with His arms and legs in iron shackles” <i>Theme: Chains</i>	None. This is when Jesus is being taken to Herod in Luke 23; this sequence mentions nothing of Jesus’ bindings in the Vulgate.
63:5280; 63:5301	Facing questions and mockery in Herod’s presence: “The mighty Christ stood there, enduring and keeping silent Patiently the Chieftain’s Son endured all their violence, words and deeds, every spiteful thing they wanted to do to him.” ¹⁴⁶ <i>Theme: Passivity</i>	None. Luke 23:9 simply says Jesus “answered him nothing” (<i>nihil respondebat</i>). No reference to suffering or endurance is made.

Table 2. Cont.

<i>Heliand</i> Reference	Summarized Content	Vulgate Parallel
64:5381-85	<p>“The Jewish people said many different sinful things about mighty Christ. He stood there, keeping silent in patient humility He let the evil clan subject Him to whatever terrible torture they desired.”¹⁴⁷</p> <p><i>Theme: Passivity</i></p>	None.
65:5489-5504	<p>“As the heinous enemy took Him, He was held tightly by the pressure of the iron bonds, and a great crowd of cruel people surrounded him. The great Chieftain endured patiently whatever the clanspeople did to him.”¹⁴⁸</p> <p><i>Themes: Chains and Passivity</i></p>	<p>None.</p> <p>The canonical gospels relate some of this abuse, which comes between Jesus’ sentencing and crucifixion (Mt 27:27–31; Mk 15:16–20; Jn 19:1–3). However, none of these passages discuss Jesus’ bindings or highlight Jesus’ patient endurance.</p>

Murphy says the following about the constant reference to Jesus’ chains:

This seems to be a poetic effort to stimulate sympathy for Christ among the Saxon hearers, and, even more, empathy. Many of the Saxon hearers of this epic must have been themselves or by proxy of their relatives, precisely in this situation from the ruling Christian authorities. The New Testament, of course, knows no such emphasis on chains and body irons in Christ’s Passion.¹⁴⁹

The sheer number of references to the chains, as well as the immediate history of the Saxons under Frankish oppression, puts Murphy’s assessment here on plausible ground. However, it does not go far enough, for it does not pair this observation with the equally overwhelming amount of emphasis placed on Christ’s passivity. If the Saxons are summoned by the poem to see themselves in Christ’s *chains*, then they must also find themselves in his submission to his oppressors. As Hines (2003) has it: “[What] is demanded of the individual Christian is an imitation of Christ’s own behaviour, a passive acceptance of the hatred of enemies Passivity in the face of violence[.]”¹⁵⁰

6.4. Christ as the Doomed Chieftain in the *Heliand*

One of the *Heliand*’s favorite appellations for Jesus is *drohtin*, chieftain. Surely, this is a mark of its rich Saxon contextualization. However, our reading of the *Heliand* has now indicated a plausible political intent embroidered with these contextual colors: Christ is, in fact, the *doomed chieftain*. Indeed, he suffered the fate that befell so many Saxon chieftains: afflicted by the disloyal, fated by the divine will, and passive in his chains, Christ was doomed to an oppressive fate.

We suggest that this is the political theology of the *Heliand*; it enjoins its Saxon hearers to passively submit to “God’s will”—that is, to their rule by the Christian Franks. They are, in this way, to *share Christ’s doom*. Thomas, in the *Heliand*, says as much to his fellow disciples:

We should continue on, stay with Him, and suffer with our Commander. That is what a thane chooses: to stand fast together with his lord, to die with him at the moment of his doom [*duome*]. Let us all do it therefore, follow His road and not let our life-spirits be of any worth to us compared to His—alongside His people, let us die with Him, our Chieftain! Then our decision and our doom [*duom*] will live after us, a good word among men! (pp. 3995–4002)¹⁵¹

In uniting its Saxon audience to Christ and in encouraging them to follow his path, the poem conveys a message both overtly political and theological: the Saxons are doomed

to their fate (Frankish rule) and, thus, should cease their rage against it. This is as God would have it.

By recognizing that “by their deeds they cannot avert anything,”¹⁵² the Saxons are promised a heavenly reward to make up for their earthly suffering, for this is where they are told the path of Christ leads. Jesus strikingly declares, “With my body, I will free [*losien*] you to come to God’s kingdom, to eternal life in heaven’s light” (pp. 4642–43).¹⁵³ The word for freedom here is—significantly—a term that can be used for loosing or releasing captives.¹⁵⁴ True freedom lies not in rebellion against violence, but in submission to it.¹⁵⁵ This political theology is ultimately one of “redemptive suffering,” wherein the pain and humiliation of Christ (and the Saxons) represent the necessary and divinely fated path to afterlife bliss.¹⁵⁶

7. Conclusions

Ronald Murphy’s reading of the *Heliand*, though with some of the variation and ambiguity we have noted, generally favors a “sympathetic” reading of the *Heliand*, in which the author is clandestinely critical of Frankish power but pastorally encourages Saxon allegiance to Jesus. Our reading agrees with the sympathizing nature of the author but differs in our interpretation of his goals: he wants his fellow Saxons to cease their “disloyalty” (rebellion) and passively submit to their fate (in this case, life after the *Capitulatio*); to do otherwise—to resist the divine will—is to align with paganism and, indeed, Satan.

Along these lines, my treatment of the *Heliand* almost entirely disagrees with that proffered by Brock and Parker. Their radicalization of Murphy’s interpretation promotes the idea that the poem is “subversive” and presents a “transcript of resistance” in which the creation-affirming gospel undermines the deathly trio of Rome (Franks), fate, and Satan. Our close reading of all three of these categories in the *Heliand* has demonstrated how this interpretation struggles, for Rome does not execute Jesus, fate is God’s own will, and Satan tries to “aid” Christ against his unjust execution.¹⁵⁷ Rather than a transcript of resistance, I suggest that what we find in the *Heliand* is a *transcript of submission*. It stands as a marked example of political theology: state-sanctioned catechesis, religiously conscripting the ethos of the Saxons and transforming it into compliance for the sake of a promised heavenly reward.

In many ways, then, I have here presented in long form what Fletcher (1997) indicated in his own terse interpretation of the *Heliand* over twenty years ago:

The *Heliand* poet consistently presents Christianity as a mild, peaceable faith. He nowhere even implicitly suggests that the faith might come in another manner. The violence which marked the historical conversion of Saxony under Charlemagne is swept from view. Whatever we may think of the morality of such a stance, it may be regarded as one way of trying to reconcile the Saxons to their lot.¹⁵⁸

Alternatively, we might say, *to their fate*, the fate the poem calls them to share with Jesus, the doomed chieftain.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

¹ See (Fletcher 1997, p. 265).

- ² See the following selection of contemporary attempts to delineate the *Heliand*'s overarching socio-theological or ideological impetus: (Cathey 2002; Murphy 1989, 1992, 2010, pp. 34–62; Therus 2020, pp. 135–44; Rembold 2018, pp. 208–17).
- ³ Fletcher (1997) on the *Heliand* for conversion and “Christianization,” pp. 265–69. See Russell’s famous study for the *Heliand*'s significance in “Germanization:” *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity: A Sociohistorical Approach to Religious Transformation* (Russell 1994, pp. 23–24, 205–6). Earlier scholarship on the *Heliand* divided into two opposed camps, one typified by August Vilmar—who emphasized the Germanization of Christianity in the poem—and the other by Walther Köhler, who emphasized instead its “Christianization of Germanness.” See the summary in Friedrich (2010), “Jesus Christ Between Jews and Heathens: The Germanic Mission and Portrayal of Christ in the Old Saxon *Heliand*,” in *Perspectives*, pp. 261–62. A masterful outlook on the intersection of Germanic and Christian ideas in the *Heliand*, especially ideas relating to providence/Fate and anthropology (of great significance for this present study), is Augustyn (2004a), especially chps. 4 and 5. See also (Augustyn 2004b).
- ⁴ Once regarded as a remote possibility, the case has grown quite strong in recent years. See (Price 2011; Murphy 2010, p. 264).
- ⁵ Michael Moynihan calls the process of the *Heliand*'s composition a “complex and artistically creative strategy of religio-cultural re-contextualization, accommodation, and amalgamation” (“Images of the Germanic Drinking Hall in the Old Saxon *Heliand*,” in *Vox Germanica: Essays in Germanic Languages and Literature in Honor of James E. Cathey* (Moynihan 2012, p. 158). See also Gantert (1998), *Akkommodation und eingeschriebener Kommentar: Untersuchungen zur Übertragungsstrategie des Helianddicters*.
- ⁶ cf. John 18:10. Where section or line numbers are given or where the Old Saxon is quoted directly, I have used *Heliand und Genesis* (Behaghel 1996). English translations are indebted to both Murphy (*Saxon Gospel*) as well as occasionally (Scott 1966) and will be cited as such.
- ⁷ cf. John 2:1–10. Feasting scenes in the *Heliand* much emphasize drinking, featuring “Christ’s virtual condoning of intoxication,” and feasters who are *drunkane suiðo* (“most drunk”); on this and the *Heliand*'s contrast on the subject of drinking with other Christian literature of the era, see (Magennis 1985, pp. 126–33, quote from p. 129). See also (Moynihan 2012, pp. 168–73).
- ⁸ On the *Heliand*'s unique deployment of warrior terms, see (Woods 2006, pp. 135–50).
- ⁹ See Murphy (2010)'s comments, “Old Saxon *Heliand*,” p. 265.
- ¹⁰ See (Murphy 1992, p. 22n35). Some of the account here likely came from Rabanus, but key elements of the section are not reflected even there (Windisch 1868).
- ¹¹ See the entries (and related bibliography) on both *muðspel* and *Ragnarök* in (Simek 1993); see also (Davidson 1965, pp. 204–10).
- ¹² Pace (Green 2003, p. 251), who is overly concerned to claim that the *Heliand* is simply pursuing a “Christian vocabulary in the Germanic vernacular.” While unbridled claims that the *Heliand* represents a “Germanizing” of Christian theology may go too far, as Green rightly notes, his own analysis swings too far in the opposite direction.
- ¹³ Murphy, *Saxon Gospel*, xiii; *Saxon Savior*, vii. In this, he differs importantly from a commentator such as Cathey, who, when venturing to comment on the actual *theological content* of the *Heliand*, says simply that it is “theologically correct” (*Heliand*, p. 1) or that it “adheres faithfully to the Christian gospel” (“Historical Setting,” p. 20). Neither of these assertions is self-evident as applied to the *Heliand* (e.g., its christological bearing may be at-odds with orthodoxy when, for instance, it seemingly states that the Holy Spirit became Christ in lines 291–92), nor is it clear what either designation means precisely. Murphy, as a theologically attuned commentator, more ably balances both the author’s obvious creativity and the theological “fringes” that the text sometimes occupies. On the fuller question of the *Heliand* poet’s christology, see the study by (Pelle 2010, pp. 63–89, esp. 80–85). Pelle’s argument on the incarnational passage noted above (vol. 4, pp. 291–92) claims that *hêlag gêst* could be taken as “holy/saintly soul” rather than “Holy Spirit.” If this sense is adopted, it would seemingly preserve orthodox christology in the relevant passage. While more could be said in response to this argument, the fact that the *Heliand* author (on Pelle’s own interpretation) is aiming at theological correctness makes it very strange that *hêlag gêst* would be employed in 4:291–92, as the poem elsewhere uses the phrase repeatedly to refer to the Holy Spirit (e.g., 1:11, 1:50, 12:985–1006, 24:2004, 33:2791, 57:4708); using it at 291–92 surely raises a christological question at the outset. While Pelle demonstrates some plausible flexibility in the *hêlag gêst* language, why should the poet have employed it at all in detailing the most crucial claim of Christian theology (the incarnation)? The christological difficulty thus remains, and I find more agreement with Murphy’s outlook on the passage (see his *Saxon Savior*, pp. 44–45; *Saxon Gospel*, p. 13n20).
- ¹⁴ Prominent *Heliand* commentators who are also well-versed in theology include Murphy as well as the authorial duo of (Brock and Parker 2008).

- 15 Especially in his *Saxon Gospel* and *Saxon Savior*.
- 16 *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of this World for Crucifixion and Empire* (2008).
- 17 I agree with Auweele and Vassányi on the plastic and vagrant nature of “political theology” as a variegated and interdisciplinary concern (Auweele and Vassányi 2020, p. 1). My application of the label in this paper is simple and analysis-oriented: the use of theological ideas in supporting or legitimating political ends. On reading the *Heliand* in this manner, Harrison (2018) remarks simply that “one cannot deny the poem’s intent as a method of political control”, p. 87.
- 18 See (Simek 2004, pp. 73–75).
- 19 As done in Russell (1994), *Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity*, chp. 6.
- 20 A similar strategy is employed by Augustyn, *Semiotics of Fate*, pp. 25–26ff.
- 21 Well-described in (Backman 2003, pp. 49–50).
- 22 See (Backman 2003, p. 50).
- 23 Woods (2006) relatedly notes that “the idea that a warrior should be forbidden to avenge an injury to his honour or pride was completely unacceptable; the idea of turning the other cheek was foreign to him” (“Germanic Warrior,” p. 147).
- 24 Excellent reflection on the question of the *Germania*’s “reliability” can be found in Rives’ commentary: *Tacitus: Germania* (Rives 1999, pp. 57–66). After noting many “weighty considerations,” Rives affirms that “it would be going much too far to abandon the *Germania* as a major historical source for the peoples of northern Europe” (p. 64). See a similarly nuanced and cautiously affirmative stance in (Krebs 2011, p. 49).
- 25 See (Backman, *Worlds*, p. 50; Russell 1994, pp. 116–18; Augustyn 2004a, pp. 36–38).
- 26 *Germania*, p. 113.
- 27 *Heliand*, p. 13.
- 28 While their gods were diffusive and flexible in local expression, even Simek admits a fairly standard shape to a recognized pantheon emerging by the year 900 or so (“Germanic Religion and Conversion,” p. 83). See also the useful commentary on the Norse-Germanic “pantheon” in Price (2020)’s recent *Children of Ash and Elm: A History of the Vikings*, pp. 44–50.
- 29 See Simek (2004), pp. 76–78, who also notes the routine sacrifice of prisoners-of-war, doubtless a factor in the paucity of slaves among the Germans.
- 30 Clovis allegedly converted after a battlefield appeal to Wodan (Odin) failed and a similar appeal to Christ did not: Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, cited in Cathey, “The Historical Setting of the *Heliand*,” in *Perspectives*, p. 5.
- 31 See (Russell 1994, pp. 116–18). See also (Murphy 1992, Appendix 2).
- 32 Tacitus noted further: “Both prestige and power depend on being continually attended by a large train of picked young warriors, which is a distinction in peace and a protection in war” (*Germania*, p. 112).
- 33 See (Russell 1994, p. 121; Jones 1959, pp. 40–41).
- 34 Relating to the Northmen, Price (2020) notes that “it is hard to find a moral scheme in the Viking mind or in the actions of their gods” (*Children of Ash*, p. 266, see further pp. 261–67); see also (Augustyn 2004a, pp. 29–30).
- 35 See (Russell 1994, pp. 120–21).
- 36 *The Anglo-Saxon World*, p. x. See also Cathey (2002), p. 12; Weil (1989) makes this point in relation to *Beowulf* (e.g., lines 1533–36): see her “Grace under Pressure: ‘Hand-Words,’ ‘Wyrd,’ and Free Will in *Beowulf*,” *Pacific Coast Philology*, vol. 24.1 (November 1989), especially pp. 96–97.
- 37 See (Winterbourne 2004, p. 11). Weil (1989) notes that “the motif of *wyrd* [fate] as the implacable arbiter of men’s struggles resounds throughout the Anglo-Saxon canon like a perpetual minor chord” (“Grace Under Pressure,” p. 94).
- 38 “The Seeress’s Prophecy” [the *Völuspá*], in *The Poetic Edda* (Larrington 2014, pp. 3–12). See further (Price 2020, p. 506; Green 1960, pp. 17–28, 203–8).
- 39 See (Cathey 2002, p. 13; Simek 2004, p. 93). Augustyn speaks to this as well: “The Germanic gods are mere parts of the creation with a certain influence on human lives, but they were equally subjected to the supreme creative force: fate” (*Semiotics of Fate*, p. 39). Diverse strands of Germanic mythology also bear witness to the Norns, the “weird sisters” who, on some renderings, cut and measure the cords of destiny; see (Winterbourne 2004; Murphy 2010, p. 271; Weil 1989, pp. 94–95; Price 2020, pp. 50–52).
- 40 Price (2020), *Children of Ash*, pp. 74–82. For the Northmen, at the cultural and ideological level, Price affirms that “the preordination of fate, the inevitability of the Ragnarök, and the god’s knowledge of their coming doom form the constant pulse of Norse mythology” (p. 81, emphasis original; see also p. 267).

41 It is worth noting that “audience” is just as appropriate as “readers,” since it is agreed that the *Heliand* was likely to
be not only read but also sung or recited to a gathered party. See Murphy, *Saxon Gospel*, p. xvii.

42 See (Simek 2004; Fletcher 1997; Brown 2012, chps. 5, 8, 11, 14, 15).

43 Scholarship on the “Saxon wars” during the Carolingian period continues to swell. Of recent and crucial note is
(Rembold 2018; Hines 2003).

44 Cathey (2002), “Historical Setting,” p. 9.

45 In the style of Gregory the Great, Augustine of Canterbury, and others among the Celts, on which see Paul Cavill’s
contributions to *Not Angels but Anglicans: A History of Christianity in the British Isles* (Chadwick 2010, pp. 9–24).

46 Indeed, as Peter Brown notes, Boniface “radiated ‘correct’ ecclesiastical order” (*Rise*, p. 423).

47 Brown, *Rise*, pp. 419–23; Murphy, *Saxon Savior*, p. 13.

48 *Bonifatii Epistolae: Willibaldi Vita Bonifatii* (Rau 1976, p. 21; quoted in Murphy, *Saxon Savior*, p. 14).

49 Brock and Parker, *Saving Paradise*, p. 226; Murphy, *Saxon Savior*, p. 14. Augustyn thus distances the work of Boniface a
bit too far from Charlemagne’s “cruel Saxon war” (*Semiotics of Fate*, p. 53).

50 Fulda is the most probable of the three possible authorial locations for the *Heliand*, all described by Cathey in
“Historical Setting,” pp. 19–20.

51 Cathey (2002), “Historical Setting,” p. 10, citing from the *Royal Frankish Annals*.

52 Davies (2017) reflects on the uniqueness of the political and military difficulties for the Carolingians in Saxony:
Charlemagne’s Practice of Empire, p. 242.

53 See (Rembold 2018, pp. 60–61, 75–81).

54 *Saving Paradise*, p. 228.

55 See (Rembold 2018, pp. 40–44).

56 See (Hines 2003, pp. 300–1).

57 Brock & Parker, *Saving Paradise*, p. 227. See also (Rembold 2018, pp. 50–53).

58 Murphy, *Saxon Savior*, p. 18.

59 A broadly accessible reference to the whole course of Charlemagne’s Saxon wars is (Dean 2015, pp. 15–20).

60 The Royal Frankish Annals alone recount several such baptisms; see *Carolingian Chronicles* (Scholz 1970, pp. 55–58, 63,
73).

61 See (Rembold 2018, p. 77).

62 While it is one of the better known mass executions of the Saxon wars, Verden should not be considered an anomaly
in terms of scale; thousands of slain Saxons are repeatedly enumerated across the Frankish annals of the wars, see
(Rembold 2018, pp. 51–53).

63 *Carolingian Chronicles*, p. 61.

64 *Royal Frankish Annals*, quoted in Murphy, *Saxon Savior*, p. 21; see also Brock & Parker, *Saving Paradise*, p. 228.

65 Murphy, *Saxon Savior*, p. 17. At the Lippe baptism, Rembold (2018) notes that the “Saxons were baptized in the
shadow of Charlemagne’s new fort [at Eresburg], a visible symbol of Frankish domination” (*Conquest*, p. 77). Likewise
Davis: “the imposition of Christianity by Frankish command went hand-in-hand with political control” (*Charlemagne’s
Practice*, p. 101).

66 See (Davies 2017, p. 101n75; Hines 2003, pp. 303–4, 307).

67 Cathey, “Historical Setting,” pp. 13–14. Hen (2006) has interestingly argued for an Islamic influence on Charlemagne’s
approach to the Saxons in the *Capitulatio*, pp. 33–52, though substantial difficulties with this perspective are raised in
König 2016, pp. 3–40.

68 See (Rembold 2018, p. 210; Hines 2003, p. 308).

69 See (Davies 2017, p. 101n75; Hines 2003, p. 307).

70 See (Rembold 2018, p. 168; Davies 2017, p. 101n75).

71 See (Dean 2015, p. 20; Rembold 2018, pp. 54–60).

72 Murphy and sources, *Saxon Savior*, pp. 25–26, though the saga of violence is really lengthier than this; Hines (2003)
rightly notes that conflict between Franks and Saxons had been regular “from virtually the beginning of Merovingian
times” (“Conversion,” p. 299).

73 See Brock and Parker, *Saving Paradise*, pp. 230–34.

74 We agree with the growing consensus, well summed by Rembold, that the *Heliand* was mainly written to “Christianize
an already Christian elite” (Rembold 2018, p. 212; see also Hines 2003, p. 308). However, it should be understood
that “already Christian” in this case simply means already-converted-by-way-of-conquest. For such an audience to
be “Christianized” by the *Heliand* would then mean something akin to “catechized”—given an initial theological
orientation within the newly won micro-Christendom of Saxony (see further Pelle 2010, pp. 64–66). It is on these

same grounds that we differ from Rembold's framing of the *Heliand's* audience as "judges and would be litigators, not the wronged and oppressed" (p. 214). Such a characterization (1) ignores too much of the *Heliand's* manifold theological attentions (as will be discussed below); (2) operates within a false binary wherein the station of the Saxon audience would somehow alter their status as members of a "wronged and oppressed" people group; and (3) neglects the additional point made also by Rembold (and many other *Heliand* scholars) that, as a work intended for recitation, the *Heliand* would have been "accessible to literate and illiterate" Saxons alike (p. 213; see also [Green 2003](#), pp. 252–55). A balanced treatment of authorship and audience can also be found in ([Hintz 2019](#), p. 29).

75 In many ways, this is the question of "Saxon Christianity" at-large; as Rembold has it: "The textual record is clear: during the reign of Charlemagne, Saxony became Christian. Precisely what this conversion to Christianity entailed, however, is far from clear. How was Christian doctrine disseminated in Carolingian Christianity, and what were the expectations of Christian observance?" (*Conquest*, p. 205). The *Heliand*, of course, provides one of the great seedbeds for probable answers.

76 *Saxon Gospel*

77 "Old Saxon *Heliand*," p. 263.

78 Murphy, "The Jews in the *Heliand*," in *Perspectives*, p. 237. The literacy of this poet is a disputed matter. See ([Haferland 2010b](#), pp. 167–207); for a contrasting view, see ([Pelle 2010](#), pp. 66–67).

79 Murphy's translation: *Saxon Gospel*, p. 4.

80 See ([Dean 2015](#), p. 16).

81 Murphy, *Saxon Gospel*, p. 4n5. See also *Saxon Savior*, pp. 13–16.

82 *Saxon Gospel*, p. 5.

83 *Saxon Savior*, pp. 19–20.

84 He makes this claim more clear in a separate note: "No doubt a description of a Saxon attitude of mind toward the Holy Roman Empire of Charlemagne as much as the Hebrew one toward the old Roman Empire of the Caesars" (Murphy, *Saxon Gospel*, p. 5n10).

85 *Saxon Gospel*, pp. 158n245, 162n253; "Jews in the *Heliand*," p. 244. More on this will be said in the argument below.

86 "Jews in the *Helaind*" p. 245; see also *Saxon Savior*, p. 96.

87 *Saxon Savior*, p. 41.

88 "Christ's sovereign status above normal Fate-workings" (*Saxon Savior*, p. 46).

89 *Saxon Savior*, pp. 114–15.

90 This is their book's provocative subtitle; see further their Prologue in *Saving Paradise*, esp. pp. ix–xxii.

91 Brock and Parker, *Saving Paradise*, p. xix.

92 The keystone section of their argumentation occupies pp. 223–33 in *Saving Paradise*.

93 See the analysis of sculptural history of the crucifixion, and the comments on the Gero cross in particular, in ([Dale 2019](#)).

94 Brock and Parker, *Saving Paradise*, p. 232.

95 See their discussion of the *Heliand* in *Saving Paradise*, pp. 240–48, quote is from 249.

96 In their initial mention of Murphy, they attribute to him the somewhat unnuanced notion of the *Heliand* as a "story of resistance," for the Saxons, which evidences their "struggle against subjugation" (*Saving Paradise*, p. 240).

97 Brock and Parker, *Saving Paradise*, 241; see ([Scott 1990](#)).

98 Brock and Parker, *Saving Paradise*, p. 248.

99 Brock and Parker, *Saving Paradise*, p. 245.

100 *Saving Paradise*, pp. 245–46.

101 *Saving Paradise*, p. 247.

102 Though without their specific interpretation in view, [Hines \(2003\)](#) raises several pertinent points against the notion of the *Heliand* promoting a "world-accepting ethos" or being "substantially and ironically subversive in such a way" ("Conversion, p. 309).

103 Murphy's observations on these three are more complex and balanced but perhaps too colored by his optimism toward the "pastoral intent" of the *Heliand*.

104 See ([Friedrich 2010](#), pp. 269–71).

105 Murphy's translation.

106 See ([Haferland 2010a](#), pp. 222–33).

107 "Jews in the *Heliand*," in *Perspectives*, 238. This is an important and seemingly partially corrective move for Murphy, as *The Saxon Savior* hardly mentions this negative portrayal of the Jews (see e.g., *Saxon Savior*, pp. 109–10).

108 Murphy, *Saxon Savior*, p. 238.

- 109 Murphy, *Saxon Savior*, p. 244, emphasis mine.
- 110 This point is complemented by Murphy's correct observation that the *Heliand* author has removed all of the more typical Jewish sub-group designations from the text (Scribe, Pharisee, Sadducee, etc.)—see Murphy, "Jews in the *Heliand*," p. 241. These distinctions mattered little to the author and his audience. However, the distinction of loyal/disloyal mattered a great deal.
- 111 Hostage taking and small-scale deportations were much the norm throughout the Saxon wars (see [Rembold 2018](#), pp. 54–60). However, by far the most significant forced exiles in the Saxons' recent cultural memory would have been those implemented between 795 and 804, which affected thousands of Saxon families ([Rembold 2018](#), pp. 46, 55–57).
- 112 See also lines 2339–45.
- 113 The major terms are *wurd*—"fate," *giscapu*—"create, shape," and *metod*—"fortune/fate." Green notes that in the *Heliand*, "all three of these of these Old Saxon terms for fate are shown as synonymous with God's power" (*Continental Saxons*, p. 257).
- 114 Ibid.
- 115 *Saxon Savior*, pp. 110–11; *Saxon Gospel*, pp. 157n244, 164n255, 178n279, 188n302.
- 116 *Saxon Gospel*, p. 198n319; "Old Saxon *Heliand*," pp. 46–50; Murphy also phrases this as, "he [Jesus] could overcome his doom even after death" (*Saxon Savior*, p. 52), see also pp. *Saxon Savior*, pp. 110–15.
- 117 See ([Hines 2003](#), pp. 256–57). Murphy, *Saxon Gospel*, p. 7n12.
- 118 While her monograph on the subject (*Semiotics of Fate*) ultimately concerns the movement and transformation of culture via a Peircean analysis of linguistic meaning, rather than expressed textual *theology*, the depth of her engagement with the relevant *loci* in the *Heliand* makes her a valuable interlocutor for this point of the present study.
- 119 *Semiotics of Fate*, p. 42.
- 120 E.g. *Semiotics of Fate*, pp. 62–68, esp. p. 64.
- 121 E.g. *Semiotics of Fate*, pp. 71, 74, 82.
- 122 The case for such a "coherent" reading of the *Heliand* is owed to its manifest proselytizing, catechizing, and indeed "pastoral" intent, on which see especially [Pelle \(2010\)](#) as well as [Harrison \(2018\)](#), pp. 89–73, and Murphy, *Saxon Savior*.
- 123 Principally relying on Murphy, *Saxon Gospel*.
- 124 Murphy, *Saxon Gospel*, pp. 132–33.
- 125 On which, see Murphy, *Saxon Gospel*, pp. 132–133n191. I agree with all of Murphy's analysis here.
- 126 Murphy, *Saxon Gospel*, p. 150.
- 127 Murphy, *Saxon Gospel*, p. 152.
- 128 Murphy translates *thiu wurd* as "Fate" (and thinks it refers to Jesus' fate), while Augustyn takes it as referring to Judas' fate (Murphy, *Saxon Gospel*, 152n231; Augustyn, *Semiotics of Fate*, pp. 68–69). Either meaning works for my interpretation, wherein the whole course of deathly events (including both Judas' and Jesus' fates) is in accordance with the all-encompassing divine will.
- 129 Murphy, *Saxon Gospel*, p. 157.
- 130 Murphy, *Saxon Gospel*, p. 159. Scott translates this as "god-sent fate" ([Scott 1966](#), p. 165).
- 131 Cathey, *Heliand*, p. 336.
- 132 Murphy, *Saxon Gospel*, p. 162.
- 133 Augustyn agrees on the reading of this keystone passage: "It is made clear in the *Heliand* that Jesus is fulfilling God's inevitable will. [. . .] His death, or *wurd*, is inescapable. It is determined by God to happen so [The *Heliand* author] makes it clear that God is the ultimate ruler over life and death" (*Semiotics of Fate*, p. 71).
- 134 58:4893–900, Murphy's translation (*Saxon Gospel*, p. 161), emphasis added.
- 135 [Hines \(2003\)](#) also finds in this passage a direct repudiation of the "Germanic warrior ideal," ("Three Aspects," pp. 258–59).
- 136 Murphy's translation (*Saxon Gospel*, pp. 179–80).
- 137 *Saxon Gospel*, p. 179n282, emphasis added.
- 138 To make the associations even more clear, the poet gives Satan a *helidhelm* (magic helm), a distinctly pagan trope, used by Siegfried and other cultural heroes of Anglo-Saxon mythos.
- 139 The author followed the *Diatessaron* in the main but of course would have also had access to the Vulgate. Since the Vulgate contains more gospel material for the *Heliand* author to draw on, it has the best chance of providing parallels and thus serves to highlight the *Heliand*'s contrast with the canonical gospels most effectively. Vulgate is cited from ([Kinney 2013](#)).
- 140 Murphy, *Saxon Gospel*, p. 159.
- 141 Murphy, *Saxon Gospel*, p. 161.

- 142 Murphy, *Saxon Gospel*, p. 162.
- 143 Murphy, *Saxon Gospel*, p. 162.
- 144 See Murphy, *Saxon Gospel*, pp. 162–64.
- 145 Murphy, *Saxon Gospel*, p. 167.
- 146 *Saxon Gospel*, p. 174.
- 147 *Saxon Gospel*, p. 177.
- 148 *Saxon Gospel*, p. 181.
- 149 *Saxon Gospel*, p. 173n270.
- 150 “Three Aspects,” p. 260.
- 151 Murphy’s translation, *Saxon Gospel*, pp. 130–31.
- 152 Scott: “We must not destroy one whit with our deeds” (Scott 1966, p. 168).
- 153 Murphy, *Saxon Gospel*, p. 153.
- 154 See Cathey, *Heliand*, p. 334.
- 155 Therefore, as should now be clear, my reading of the *Heliand* could actually be seen to align with Brock and Parker’s larger thesis about Carolingian Christianity, the violent subjugation of the Saxons, and a mythos of redemptive violence. I simply see the *Heliand* as a fairly transparent continuance of these motifs, whereas they see it as a counterpoint to that prevailing political theology.
- 156 “To them is granted afterwards God’s meadow and spiritual life for eternal days—thus the end will never come of their beatific happiness” (1322, *Saxon Gospel*, p. 47). See Woods: “The [*Heliand*] author is able to say, in effect, “If you find all of these foreign [i.e. Christian] notions difficult to accept, just think of the reward” (Woods 2006, p. 148; Rupp 1973, p. 251).
- 157 However, this need not indicate a failure of Brock and Parker’s overarching thesis in *Saving Paradise*. Indeed, if my reading of the *Heliand* is accepted, then it could simply join their reading of the Gero Cross as a Saxon artifact testifying to a theology formed by bloodshed and inclined toward motifs of redemptive suffering.
- 158 Fletcher, *Barbarian Conversion*, p. 267.

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