cléchúi do marbad, ‘not to kill clerics’. And we know that our sole complete version of Text A is introduced with the words ‘i. fíon marbhtha fil suan, ‘this is on the basis of homicide’. Not only were the fractions for attempted murder based on the fine for homicide, attempts by more than one offender attracted the full attempt fine for each participant co morfeisir, ‘up to a group of seven persons’. We are told elsewhere that this way of fixing the limit of multiple liability was peculiar to one text: the Càin Phátraic. It may be that the Càin Phátraic is still a lost text, or it may be that we have discovered nine copies of at least a part of it.

St Cuthbert of Lindisfarne,
was not a great writer like Bede. He was not a first preacher like Aidan; he erected no magnificent building. He was not martyred for his faith or for his church. His episcopate was exceptionally short, and undistinguished by any event of signal importance.1 These were the words of Joseph Barber Lightfoot, Bishop of Durham, in 1883. They are an accurate representation of the facts pertaining to Cuthbert’s life. Cuthbert was born around 634 in an unknown location. His lay life included some time tending sheep. He entered the monastery of Melrose in his early adulthood around 651. He moved to Ripon, where he was guestmaster, then returned to Melrose soon afterwards and became prior there. He then moved to Lindisfarne where he was also prior. In 676 he retired to the island of Inner Farne, where he lived as a hermit. He was ordained Bishop of Lindisfarne in 685. In 686 he visited Carlisle, then again retired to Farne. He died of natural causes on Farne on 20th March 687 and was buried at Lindisfarne. To this bare outline we can add very few details which we can claim with any certainty as fact.

Despite his undistinguished career, Cuthbert became the subject of an extremely popular cult in the medieval period, and still bears the dedication of many parish churches and a cathedral in the north of England, not to mention any number of churches as far afield as Australia. Furthermore, he has been the subject of an enormous body of hagiography, fiction and non-fiction literature. The earliest surviving item from this corpus is a Vita written by an anonymous monk of Lindisfarne around 700; less than twenty years after Cuthbert’s death. This was followed by no less than three separate works by the Venerable Bede.

2 B. Colgrave, ed. and trans., Two Lives of St Cuthbert (Cambridge, 1985).
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Bede's first version was a metrical arrangement based largely on the anonymous Vita. This was followed by an extensive prose Vita which still drew largely on the anonymous Vita, but considerably rearranged the material, as well as adding comments and some new information. Finally, Bede dedicated six chapters of his Ecclesiastical History of the English People to a survey of Cuthbert's life and achievements.

After Bede, a wide range of ecclesiastical writers chose Cuthbert as their subject, ranging from Alcuin, who included Cuthbert in his eighth-century poem on saints associated with York, and the anonymous tenth-century author of the History of Saint Cuthbert, to an eighteenth-century Bishop of Ossory who included a chapter on Cuthbert in his Irish Saints in Great Britain, and of course Bishop Lightfoot. Writers of fiction have also found Cuthbert a sufficiently interesting character to weave him into historical novels. A major recent work of this genre is Melvyn Bragg's 1996 novel Credo. Cuthbert is not one of the protagonists in Credo: these are the reconstructed character St Bega and the fictitious Prince Padric of Rbeged. Cuthbert, though, is a strong character in the novel and central to much of the action.

This paper examines two works, Bede's prose Vita of Cuthbert and Bragg's Credo, asking why the writers have chosen to write about Cuthbert rather than any other holy man, and what they hoped to achieve by their writing. Bragg, as novelist and presenter of television's South Bank Show, specialises in portraits of famous and interesting persons. Many viewers in Britain and Australia base their opinions of these persons on the image presented for them by Bragg. Bede played a similar role in his own time through the medium of hagiography. This paper argues that by selective inclusion of material, the use of ambiguity, and the presentation of personality, each author characterises Cuthbert in a certain way in order to serve particular political aims.

An understanding of the two works will be assisted by a very brief background in ecclesiastical politics of Cuthbert's lifetime. The Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Northumbria in which Cuthbert dwelt was evangelised from two separate directions. The one was a Roman mission to Kent, which had gained an entree into Northumbria because of a political marriage between the two kingdoms. The other was an Irish mission to Iona, which had been invited by a Northumbrian king to establish a monastery at Lindisfarne. Each mission had brought its traditions, including its method of calculating the date for celebrating Easter, its style of tonsure, and its monastic rule.

The Roman and Irish traditions came into direct competition in 664 at the Council of Whitby. At this council, attended by members of both groups, the Northumbrian king declared that the kingdom would henceforth conform to the Roman observances. The issues surrounding the council and the debate were very complex. The point of particular concern for this paper is that in the wake of the council, monks of the Irish tradition were apparently obliged to either change their ways or depart the kingdom. Departure was certainly the option chosen by the Abbot of Lindisfarne, Colman, and several of his followers. It is generally held that Cuthbert was one of those who surrendered the Irish traditions and converted to the Roman orthodoxy. The evidence, particularly that of Bede, leaves room for speculation.

Bede's Vita of Cuthbert takes its place in the extensive corpus of his works of history, exegesis, instruction and biography. It survives in thirty-eight known manuscripts, an unusually large number indicative of the work's medieval popularity. It was written, according to Bede's preface, at the request of the Abbot and community of Lindisfarne. Given the existence of the earlier anonymous Vita by one of their own community, and of Bede's metrical Vita, this request from Lindisfarne might seem a trifle excessive. However, Bede, as the foremost writer of the day, could be relied on not merely to write an erudite account of Cuthbert's life and miracles, but also to attract a wide readership and suitable respect for his subject. The request for Bede to write an additional version of Cuthbert's Vita was therefore likely to be a calculated step by the Lindisfarne community to add to the popularity and fame of their saint. It apparently succeeded, since Cuthbert, within 120 of his death, had acquired a rich shrine, a sumptuous gospel book, and untold other material goods.

4 Colgrave, Two Lives.
8 P. Moran, Irish Saints in Great Britain (Dublin, 1879).

11 Colgrave, Two Lives, 143.
12 D. W. Rollason, 'Why was St Cuthbert so Popular?', in idem, Cuthbert, 18.
Thus the reason for the existence of Bede’s *Vita* of Cuthbert. It is perhaps valuable to keep this in mind when looking closely at what he has actually written in his work. Much of Bede’s text is formulaic hagiography, showing little individuality. There are, however, some indicators of the subject’s character or personality. Many of these derive from the anonymous Lindisfarne *Vita*. Bede’s Cuthbert is always cheerful. He has patience to the point of obstinacy, illustrated by this charming anecdote: ‘Very often during debates in the chapter of the brethren concerning the rule, when he was assailed by the bitter insults of his opponents, he would rise up suddenly and with calm mind and countenance would go out, thus dissolving the chapter, but none the less on the following day, as if he had suffered no repulse the day before, he would give the same instruction as before to the same audience until, as we have said, he gradually converted them to the things he desired.’

Bede also goes to some lengths to represent Cuthbert’s journeys amongst the common people, when he is gone from the monastery for as much as a month at a time, going to places which by their remoteness and heathenism frighten lesser evangelists. Cuthbert undertakes these journeys from both Melrose and Lindisfarne before and after his election as bishop. So Bede gives us a man of cheerful and patient disposition who delights in teaching and converting the common folk.

Much of Bede’s *Vita* is devoted to details of the miracles performed by, or more properly through, the saint. A long list of miracles is necessary to any saint’s *Vita*, serving to confirm the sanctity of the subject. Indeed, many of the miracles recorded here by Bede imitate those recorded of other saints, coming from a long tradition of miracle stories based on scriptural precedents. Bede, however, makes many of the miracles serve an additional purpose, by embellishing them with such phrases as ‘in this he imitated the miracle of the most reverend and holy father Benedict.’ Benedict was an orthodox authority respected by the Roman church party. He composed the rule which was introduced in their monasteries well before Bede wrote the *Vita*. By likening Cuthbert’s miracles to those of Benedict in particular, Bede acquires for Cuthbert some of Benedict’s orthodoxy.

An interesting episode in the *Vita* is Cuthbert’s short stay at Ripon. He was one of a party invited there to establish a monastery on royal land. According to Bede (Ecclesiastical History V.19), Cuthbert’s party was ejected and replaced by a group who were willing to conform to the ‘better rules and customs’ of Rome. In the *Vita*, though, Bede claims that Cuthbert’s departure is ‘because the whole state of the world is frail and unstable as the sea when a sudden tempest arises’. Bede appears to have deliberately omitted facts which were clearly at his disposal, and which he felt were sufficiently important to include in the later work. His purpose in writing the *Ecclesiastical History* was more concerned with encouraging piety and orthodoxy, and therefore an account demonstrating a victory of Roman orthodoxy over its opponents served that purpose. His purpose for the *Vita* was to promote Cuthbert’s sanctity, and such a contentious episode, which must be included as an important detail of his life, was better used to illustrate his pious determination. The matter of his unorthodoxy is smoothly avoided.

The part of Cuthbert’s life that is most interesting is the portion which falls after his first retirement to the Inner Farne. This takes place some twelve years after the Council of Whitby. Bede attributes Cuthbert’s withdrawal to a fairly regular saintly desire for ‘the repose of divine contemplation’. I would argue that Cuthbert’s desire for repose, however saintly, was not quite regular. This man had been guestmaster and then prior for many years. He loved to work with the common people. He was clearly what we would today call a ‘people person’. Why would such a man seek solitude? Perhaps because Archbishop Theodore of Canterbury was drawing ever closer to executing certain plans to restructure the church in Northumbria, creating new bishoprics and reallocating old ones. Theodore had been appointed directly by Rome, and this was a Roman-style restructure in which Cuthbert may have been less than enthusiastic to participate.

This marked lack of enthusiasm, albeit for supposedly different reasons, is also evident in Bede’s account of Cuthbert’s appointment to the bishopric: ‘when no small synod had gathered together, in the presence of the most pious King Egfrith beloved of God over which Archbishop Theodore of blessed memory presided, he was elected to the bishopric of the church at Lindisfarne

13 Colgrave, *Two Lives*, 211.
16 Colgrave, *Two Lives*, 203.
17 Colgrave and Mynors, 523.
18 Colgrave, *Two Lives*, 181.
with the unanimous consent of all. And when he could by no means be dragged from his place by the many messengers and letters that were sent to him, at length this same king himself, together with the most holy Bishop Trumwine, as well as many other religious and powerful men, sailed to the island: they all knelt down and adored him in the name of the Lord, with tears and prayers, until at last they drew him, also shedding many tears, from his sweet retirement and led him to the synod. When he had come, in spite of his reluctance he was overcome by the unanimous will of them all and compelled to submit his neck to the yoke of the bishopric. His consecration however was not carried out until after the end of that winter which was then beginning.\textsuperscript{21}

In hagiography, it is accepted that in their laudable humility saints will be reluctant to accept worldly glory in the form of senior ecclesiastical posts. However, Cuthbert's resistance to his election as bishop, and even to attending the synod, seems extreme. Bede's words, while fitting the framework of admirable reluctance established by hagiographical tradition, give some specific details. Archbishop Theodore's absence from the delegation to Inner Farn is significant. The group is instead led by the king and the bishop of the Picts. King Ecgfrith and his family seem to have been very close to Cuthbert,\textsuperscript{22} as undoubtedly were a good number of the delegation. Cuthbert's reluctance to obey his ecclesiastical superior may be attributable to a continuing resistance to the Roman restructure, broken down only by the tearful entreaties of his friends.

The holding over of Cuthbert's consecration until Easter is also interesting. It seems to have been planned as a large public event, Easter being the principal celebration of the church calendar. This publicity may have been calculated to reinforce the election itself, which by placing Cuthbert within the church hierarchy would ensure a certain degree of public conformity. There seems to be two motivations for Cuthbert's election: his friends want him to be a bishop because he has qualities they admire, the Archbishop because he has qualities to be deplored. The delayed consecration also made it possible for Cuthbert to arrange to swap sees with his former abbot, Eata, a fact which Bede omits from the \textit{Vita} but includes in the \textit{Ecclesiastical History} (IV.28). Cuthbert was originally to be sent to the Romanised and more central Hexham, but contrived to stay at Lindisfarne while Eata took up the Hexham post.\textsuperscript{23} This exchange may well have been arranged because Cuthbert could retain his more

Irish way of life with less central interference at Lindisfarne. Bede's glossing over of this irregular arrangement is part of his attempt to pass off Cuthbert's entire election and ordination as quite regular, in what can best be seen as yet another assertion of Cuthbert's nonexistent orthodoxy.

Cuthbert's deathbed speech to his brethren, as recorded by Bede, has long been of concern to readers. Bede here claims to quote Herefrith, who was present at Cuthbert's death: 'when I asked him very earnestly what words he would bequeath and what last farewell he would leave the brethren, he began to utter a few weighty words about peace and humility, and about being on our guard against those who would rather fight such things than delight in them. He said: 'Always keep peace and divine charity amongst yourselves; and when necessity compels you to take counsel about your affairs, see to it most earnestly that you are unanimous in your counsels. But also have mutual agreement with other servants of Christ and do not despise those of the household of faith who come to you for the sake of hospitality, but see that you receive such, keep them, and send them away with friendly kindness, by no means thinking yourselves better than others who are your fellows in the same faith and manner of life. But have no communion with those who depart from the unity of the catholic peace, either in not celebrating Easter at the proper time or in evil living. And you are to know and remember that if necessity compels you to choose one of two evils, I would much rather you should take my bones from the tomb, carry them with you and departing from this place dwell wherever God may ordain, than that in any way you should consent to iniquity and put your necks under the yoke of schismatics. Strive to learn and to observe most diligently the catholic statutes of the fathers; and practice with zeal those rules of regular discipline which the divine mercy has designed to give you through my ministry.'\textsuperscript{24}

Strange words from Cuthbert. Do we assume as so many have that he is warning against the 'schismatics' who adhere to pre-Whitby ways, or is this too simple? It has been suggested that Cuthbert may actually be exhorting his brethren to themselves adhere to these pre-Whitby ways.\textsuperscript{25} Herefrith's prelude to Cuthbert's speech is illuminating; the quest for peace and humility is fairly universal. The same cannot be said of 'those who would rather fight such things than delight in them', which together with Cuthbert's words about consenting to iniquity and putting necks under the yoke of schismatics, seems to be referring to an organised and identifiable campaign against the brethren's way of life.

\textsuperscript{21} Colgrave, \textit{Two Lives}, 239.
\textsuperscript{22} Rollason, 'Why was St Cuthbert so Popular?', 19.
\textsuperscript{23} Colgrave and Mynors, \textit{Bede's Ecclesiastical History}, 439.
\textsuperscript{24} Colgrave, \textit{Two Lives}, 283-285.
\textsuperscript{25} Terry Ryan, \textit{pers. comm.}, 1995.
Such a campaign would surely most logically be conducted by the Roman party to stamp out Irish practices. Cuthbert’s exhortation to fraternise with ‘your fellows in the same faith and manner of life’ must refer to the few remaining of obstinately Irish persuasion. None of this, however, is made clear by Bede. Cuthbert’s insistence that his brothers practice the rules which he gave them is also important. The passage quoted earlier referring to disagreements in chapter refers to the rule given to the monastery by Cuthbert. This is the same rule which the anonymous claims is observed at Lindisfarne ‘even to this day along with the rule of St Benedict’. It predates the Council of Whitby and is clearly Irish in derivation.

We have seen that Bede is not averse to omitting information from the Vita which he later uses in the Ecclesiastical History. He is also careful in his use of the material from the anonymous Vita. The anonymous clearly lacks Bede’s subtlety, although he seems to have a similar goal in his writing. Within the space of a few lines, the anonymous informs his reader that Cuthbert is ‘orthodox in faith’ and that upon joining the church he takes the ‘Petrine tonsure after the shape of the crown of thorns’. The first of these claims is questionable, the second almost certainly untrue. Cuthbert, entering an Irish-based foundation prior to the Council of Whitby ought to have taken the Irish tonsure. The anonymous seems to be making a clumsy and not particularly credible attempt to establish Cuthbert’s orthodoxy. Bede, on the other hand, is by no means clumsy, and merely states that Cuthbert obtains permission to ‘receive the tonsure’, drawing no attention to the tonsure itself and therefore avoiding altogether the question of its form.

Bede’s prefatory claim that his work is ‘quite free from all obscurities and subtleties’ is far from just. This paper argues that he has used all the obscurities and subtleties at his not inconsiderable command to make Cuthbert, a stubborn and unrelenting adherent to the Irish traditions, acceptable to the Roman orthodox establishment, without losing his attraction for the Irish minority. Bede is a master of subtlety, and he has used it to its full potential to further the political ends of his commissioning brothers at Lindisfarne and foist the unorthodox Cuthbert onto the orthodox establishment: a situation which undoubtedly made Cuthbert’s incorrupt body turn in its grave.

Melvyn Bragg, in *Credo*, gives us a young Cuthbert in marked contrast to Bede’s. Where the physical appearance of Bede’s saint never draws attention, Bragg’s is always dressed raggedly and seldom washes self or clothes. His golden hair is cut in the Irish tonsure. Bede’s balanced, patient man is replaced by one of burning passions. He is racked by worldly desires for power and possessions, but fights them like the devils he believes them to be. To quote Bragg, ‘in a world of zealots Cuthbert’s zeal was outstanding. At a time when there were those prepared to go to any lengths to torment and torture their bodies for the good of their souls, he was unparalleled for the ferocity with which he attacked what he contemptuously called ‘the weak vessel’ of his body.’

Bragg’s Cuthbert is a manipulator, drawing close in character to the worst kind of American television evangelist, followed by a band of disciples who set up sufferers for him to miraculously heal and crown for him to baptise. His treatment of Bega shows him to be relentlessly manipulative, directing her life not for the glory of God, as he at first asserts, but selfishly.

Cuthbert suffers temptations of the flesh. He says in the novel ‘I have felt desire for a woman and I will do so again … it has, once at least, threatened me as much as any other temptation.’ Later, he and Bega almost engage in the sexual act, and he is prevented only by Bega’s interposition of her fragment of the cross. There is no suggestion in Bede or his contemporaries of Cuthbert being thus tempted. Bragg may perhaps have taken inspiration from Cuthbert’s documented habit of keeping vigil immersed in the sea. This practice has been associated with a penitential need to crush desire, ‘a precursor of the cold shower’. It is clear, however, that immersion was also carried out as an act of simple piety.

Cuthbert’s friendship with King Egfrith is also a source of torment for him in *Credo*. Bragg’s Egfrith is a savage brute, murdering, torturing and raping virtually at random for the love of it. Yet Egfrith fights his battles before the sign of the cross and Cuthbert feels a need for Egfrith’s patronage. He says

27 Colgrave, *Two Lives*, 77.
28 Colgrave, *Two Lives*, 175.
30 Bragg, *Credo*, 544.
31 Bragg, *Credo*, 256.
32 Bragg, *Credo*, 397.
33 Colgrave, *Two Lives*, 189.
there is only one thing that I have seen which convinces people more than a miracle and that is an unexpected victory in battle under the protection of the Lord of Hosts.

Bragg continues this theme with Bega's realisation that 'the essential piety and humility of Cuthbert ... simply had to co-exist with a ruthless, tormented and entrepreneurial life which could distort the character. The price of the double life could be high: hence the strained jealousy and partially thwarted avarice of Cuthbert.'

Bragg makes much of the contrast between Cuthbert and the Roman speaker at the Council of Whitby, Wilfrid. He makes Wilfrid ambitious, worldly and fastidious. He wears a habit of fine cloth, jewellery and perfume, and travels with a sizeable entourage. While the two young men are shown to be very different, Bragg resists the urge which prompts many of his fellow to make Wilfrid a villain and Cuthbert a hero. Here, neither is a particularly likeable character, and both are credited with a little sincerity of religious purpose.

After the Council of Whitby, Bragg's Cuthbert converts to the Roman ways, deciding that it is essential to maintain royal patronage. He seems to feel little loyalty to his roots or to his fellows from the Irish tradition. He refuses to speak on their behalf, which they believe would weigh in their favour. Although Bega entreats him, he forbids the revelation of the existence of the cross fragment, which would surely overturn the decision of Whitby. Bragg, then, makes Cuthbert a politician first and a monk second. Cuthbert's loyalties are primarily dictated by the support that the church draws from the state. He has the opportunity to influence events to the benefit of his friends and dependants, but refuses to take it.

Bragg's primary intention in writing this novel must be to entertain. It is clear, though, that in writing Credo he also reacts against some recently established traditions. There has, in the modern period, been a tendency to romanticise the medieval Celts. Take for instance the Celtic revival of last century, which recreated a world that never existed where idealised Celtic heroes lived. A similar trend can be seen in reflections of the Celtic church groups. Their lifestyle is seen to have been beautifully simple, naive and unworldly, and therefore somehow better than the worldly, ambitious Roman way of life. Cuthbert can easily be seen to typify the Celtic groups, and therefore falls rather easily into the role of hero. Bragg's Cuthbert is a reaction against this romanticisation.

Bragg's work belongs to a time when postmodernism is a well-established phenomenon. Postmodernist texts 'cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text.' Bragg's rejection of the traditions concerning Cuthbert and the Celtic church in effect prevents us from categorising his text and characters. Like the postmodernists, Bragg makes it impossible 'to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable.' He forces on us a Cuthbert who has been stripped of his recognisable heroism, who represents a Celtic church which does not function as a harmonious whole, but consists of many individuals who all have faults. He insists that all concerned are ordinary human beings, and most of them violent or unpleasant. In rejecting so many traditions, though, Bragg perhaps misrepresents the figure of Cuthbert to the extent where little historical validity can attach to this strange character of his creation.

Cuthbert was caught up in an exciting moment in British history. It will probably always be his fate to be used in literature based on that period. Writers within a few years of his death were using him for their own specific purposes. The anonymous used him as an example of admirable humility. Bede edited his text to skim over, but not eliminate, Cuthbert's allegiance to Celtic ways and bring him into the Roman fold. More recent writers have used him as the gentle hero of the frail but beautiful Celtic church. Now with Bragg, he is used in a different, but no less political way. Bragg uses him as an unusual but not heroic man, to oppose the construct of the romanticised Celtic church and of the sanitised dark ages.

36 Bragg, Credo, 416.
37 Bragg, Credo, 441.
38 A. Duncan, The Elements of Celtic Christianity (Longmead, 1992), 45.