Moving On from 'the Milk of Simpler Teaching': Weaning and Religious Education in Early Medieval England

(Chapter in *Early Medieval English Life Courses*, ed. by Thijs Porck and Harriet Soper, Explorations in Medieval Culture 20 (Leiden: Brill, 2022), pp. 210-228)

Katherine Cross

(Please email me if you would like a version with page numbers.)

Weaning—the process by which a child transitions from complete reliance on milk to eating an adult diet—is an activity imbued with social significance for children and their caregivers, and is identified in many cultures as a period of transition between stages of the life course. In the early Middle Ages, it would also have been a period of vulnerability, not only in terms of separation between mother and child, but in heightened health risk for the child because of the removal of immune support, varied access to nutrients, and greater possibility of exposure to contaminated food.[1] For caregivers, weaning may follow from or hasten the cessation of lactation, and is often accompanied by the return of the mother's or nurse's fertility.[2] More visibly, weaning takes time and work from a caregiver, in food preparation, in encouraging an infant to eat (and perhaps in cleaning up afterwards!), and often in discouraging or limiting access to milk and breastfeeding. Yet, at the same time, weaning is often perceived as a timeless part of natural human development, and thus primary sources discussing its practice in past societies are limited.

This chapter identifies a window onto the cultural and social aspects of weaning in early medieval Europe in two groups of ecclesiastical texts from the eighth and ninth centuries. First, Bede described the topic with care in his exegetical commentary on the Song of Songs, and alluded to it elsewhere in his writings; second, weaning is included as a biographical detail in three missionary hagiographies written by and about migrants from the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms to the Continent. The writers of these latter texts, who wrote in Latin while working in monastic

[1] Rebecca C. Redfern, "Feeding Infants from the Iron Age to the Early Medieval Period in Britain," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of Childhood*, ed. Sally Crawford, Dawn M. Hadley, and Gillian Shepherd (Oxford, 2018), 447–66, at 451–52. I am grateful to the Late Antiquity Reading Group at the University of Sheffield for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this chapter.

[2] Aspects of the impact of breastfeeding and weaning on women's health are explored in Simon Mays, "The Effects of Infant Feeding Practices on Infant and Maternal Health in a Medieval Community," *Childhood in the Past* 3 (2010): 63–78.

houses founded as missionary institutions, built on the presentation of evangelization in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and likely would have been familiar with some of his exegetical work, too: Boniface, the subject of one of the saint's lives and founder of Fulda, wrote to York requesting copies of Bede's works, and Alcuin, author of the *Life of Willibrord*, wrote his own Song of Songs commentary based largely on Bede's.[3] Moreover, all of these writers were concerned with the Christianization of northern Europe. Weaning had a particular significance in this cluster of texts, in which it appears with greater frequency than we find in other early medieval contexts. In various ways, these Northumbrian and West Saxon writers applied the image of weaning to their contemporary concern with conversion to Christianity—gathering together its traditional associations of education, care, and social transition.

While such associations reveal early medieval perceptions of the spiritual significance of this stage in the life course, these discussions also provide insight into practical approaches to weaning and the social relationships that governed them. Until now, research into infant feeding in this period has been conducted by archaeologists and osteologists, in particular through the use of methods of isotope analysis on skeletal bone and dentine in order to reconstruct infant diets and estimate weaning age in past populations.[4] Scientific approaches have provided information about infant and maternal health and nutrition, and begun to illuminate norms of infant feeding in early medieval Europe; insights from textual evidence may contribute to understanding of these themes. Furthermore, the texts under discussion here emerge from a period in which bioarchaeologists posit that a shift in weaning practice occurred. Analysis of skeletons from Iron Age, Roman, early medieval, medieval, and modern cemeteries from western Europe has led to the suggestion that the early medieval period saw a shift to a shorter weaning process: that, in the Roman period, weaning began before the age of 2 and lasted until the child was around 4 but, by the tenth and eleventh centuries in England, weaning was completed by age 3. This shorter weaning process then seems to have shifted earlier during the central Middle Ages, when it was more usual for weaning to be completed at around the age of 2, following the introduction of solid foods approximately one year previously.[5] Isotopic

[3] Joshua A. Westgard, "Bede and the Continent in the Carolingian Age and Beyond," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (Cambridge, 2011), 205–6; Hannah W. Matis, *The Song of Songs in the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2019), 5–6.

[4] Redfern, "Feeding Infants"; B. T. Fuller et al., "Isotopic Evidence for Breastfeeding and Possible Adult Dietary Differences from Late/Sub-Roman Britain," *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 129 (2006): 45–54, https://doi.org/10.1002/ajpa.20244; Mandy Jay, "Breastfeeding and Weaning Behaviour in Archaeological Populations: Evidence from the Isotopic Analysis of Skeletal Materials," *Childhood in the Past* 2 (2009): 163–78.

[5] Hannah Haydock et al., "Weaning at Anglo-Saxon Raunds: Implications for Changing Breastfeeding Practice in Britain over Two Millennia," *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 151 (2013): 604–12, https://doi.org/10.1002/ajpa.22316—suggesting urbanization as the major cause of change; Chryssi Bourbou et al., "Nursing Mothers and Feeding Bottles: Reconstructing Breastfeeding and Weaning Patterns in Greek

evidence alone, however, cannot explain the reasons for such a shift, nor its impact on perceptions of infancy, or the organization of childcare.

While valuable, then, there are limitations with these methods. Estimates are based on limited data, they must be understood within the possibility of significant variation within populations, and in most cases the individuals analyzed are those who have died in infancy, who may well have atypical weaning profiles.[6] Moreover, scientific approaches cannot pinpoint the cultural relevance of the first taste of solid food or the emotional impact of final weaning from the breast, or illuminate practices of wet-nursing and childcare in any detail (these methods, at present, cannot distinguish maternal and non-maternal breastfeeding, for instance). This evidence thus needs to be contextualized and interpreted with reference to sources that provide information on the social organization and cultural significance of weaning. A recent archaeological study has begun to address these intersecting concerns by investigating both the 'weaning profile' and the mortuary treatment of eighty-six infants and children buried in four early medieval cemeteries; the researchers posit a relationship between the infants' early weaning or lack of successful breastfeeding and their burial in 'clusters' around churches, suggesting that these individuals may have been under the direct care of the church rather than their mothers.[7] There is also some evidence from medical texts, the study of which is the primary context in which historians have previously considered early medieval weaning (and infant feeding more broadly).[8] However, both of these approaches necessarily overemphasize pathology and atypical cases. In most cases, weaning is not a medical issue.

This chapter, then, seeks to add a complementary perspective to previous approaches to weaning in the early Middle Ages. The group of ecclesiastical texts discussed here provides precious evidence of contemporary perceptions of weaning, suggesting that eighth- and ninth-century writers imagined it as a gradual and gentle process, and that mothers and wet-nurses held responsibility for weaning as the first step in a Christian education. The language and logic

---

Byzantine Populations (6th–15th Centuries AD) Using Carbon and Nitrogen Stable Isotope Ratios," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 40 (2013): 3903–13—suggesting a "Roman breastfeeding pattern" influenced by medical texts.

[6] Chryssi Bourbou and Sandra J. Garvie-Lok, "Breastfeeding and Weaning Patterns in Byzantine Times: Evidence from Human Remains and Written Sources," in *Becoming Byzantine: Children and Childhood in Byzantium*, ed. Arietta Papaconstantinou and Alice-Mary Talbot (Washington, DC, 2009), 65–83, at 67–69.

[7] Elizabeth Craig-Atkins, Jacqueline Towers, and Julia Beaumont, "The Role of Infant Life Histories in the Construction of Identities in Death: An Incremental Isotope Study of Dietary and Physiological Status among Children Afforded Differential Burial," *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 167 (2018): 1–12, https://doi.org/10.1002/ajpa.23691.

[8] Sally Crawford, *Childhood in Anglo-Saxon England* (Stroud, 1999), 71–74; R. A. Buck, "Woman's Milk in Anglo-Saxon and Later Medieval Medical Texts," *Neophilologus* 96 (2012): 467–85.

in these texts provide an example of how early medieval religious discourses, read in their literary and historical contexts, may contribute to social and cultural histories of infant feeding.

Exegetical Discussions of Weaning

Although little attention has been paid to them in the context of social practices, there are numerous references to infant feeding in early medieval writing. Scholars interested in the histories of childhood, mothering, nutrition and the family have overlooked these literary references because they are almost all figurative; discussions of maternal metaphors do note the gender reversal common in such usages, but rarely engage with what the primary images may tell us about infant caregivers.[9] Usually, metaphors of milk-feeding and the introduction of solid food to infants are derived principally from three New Testament passages: 1 Cor. 3.1–2, "I gave you milk to drink, not meat"; Heb. 5.12–14, "you are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat"; and 1 Pet. 2.2–3, "desire the rational milk […]: If so be you have tasted that the Lord is sweet."[10] In their reception of the Apostles' words throughout Late Antiquity and into the early Middle Ages, writers employed the image of feeding a baby as a metaphor for Christian education and pastoral care. As in the New Testament verses, the image could hold positive or negative weight—either used to chastise believers for spiritual immaturity or to provide a model of childlike longing for God. John David Penniman recently published a full-length study on the multiple and adaptive uses of the image by early Christian writers, finishing with Augustine of Hippo.[11] Yet the image of infant feeding continued to be reinvented and reapplied long after Augustine's death and, in the early Middle Ages, with more emphasis on its practical aspects and more concern for its practical application.

---

[9] E.g., Cassandra Rhodes, "Abbatial Responsibility as Spiritual Labour: Suckling from the Male Breast," in *Leaders of the Anglo-Saxon Church from Bede to Stigand*, ed. Alexander Rumble (Woodbridge, 2012), 61–75.

[10] 1 Cor. 3.1–2: "Et ego, fratres, non potui vobis loqui quasi spiritualibus, sed quasi carnalibus. Tamquam parvulis in Christo, lac vobis potum dedi, non escam: nondum enim poteratis: sed nec nunc quidem potestis: adhuc enim carnales estis." [And I, brethren, could not speak to you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal. As unto little ones in Christ, I gave you milk to drink, not meat; for you were not able as yet. But neither indeed are you now able; for you are yet carnal.]; Heb. 5.12: "Etenim cum deberetis magistri esse propter tempus, rursum indigetis ut vos doceamini quae sint elementa exordii sermonum Dei: et facti estis quibus lacte opus sit, non solido cibo." [For whereas for the time you ought to be masters, you have need to be taught again what are the first elements of the words of God: and you are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat (i.e., solid food).]; 1 Pet. 2.2–3: "sicut modo geniti infantes, rationabile, sine dolo lac concupiscite: ut in eo crescatis in salutem: si tamen gustastis quoniam dulcis est Dominus." [As newborn babes, desire the rational milk without guile, that thereby you may grow unto salvation: If so be you have tasted that the Lord is sweet.] The texts given are from the Vulgate and the translations from the Douay-Rheims version.

[11] John David Penniman, *Raised on Christian Milk: Food and the Formation of the Soul in Early Christianity* (New Haven and London, 2017).

The early medieval writer who developed the figurative use of infant feeding in most detail was the Venerable Bede in his exegesis of the Song of Songs.[12] This work, written before 716, is an important contribution to a developing exegetical tradition focused on the sensual and bodily imagery of the biblical text.[13] In his commentary, Bede presents a general interpretation of the Song of Songs as an allegory in which the bridegroom represents Christ and the bride represents the Church: Bede's work encouraged this ecclesiological interpretation to become the most broadly accepted view.[14] In his allegorical scheme, Bede interpreted the frequent references to the bride's breasts as images of the ministers of the Church; they were breasts because they provided spiritual milk to new believers. He extended the metaphor at length, through an exegetical conceit that connected the pastoral care of new Christians to breastfeeding in numerous passages. One of Bede's innovations, developing beyond his biblical and patristic sources, was to develop the metaphor into discussion of the process of weaning from the point of view of mothers and nurses rather than of the infants themselves. Teachers were not only breasts giving milk, but teeth preparing baby-food:

> dentes sunt ecclesiae quia panem uerbi Dei paruulis illius ad quem manducandum ipsi non sufficiunt parant. Solent quippe ipsae nutrices particulas panis dentibus conficere et inter lactandum paruulorum faucibus minuta mansa immittere, donec eos paulatim abstractos a lacte ad usum panis perducant. Sic sancta mater ecclesia habet doctores qui instar uberum lac doctrinae mollioris incipientibus ministrent, habet eosdem ipsos gnaros bene proficientibus panem uerbi fortioris porrigere.[15]

> [They (i.e., teachers) are the teeth of the church because they prepare the bread of the word of God for those little ones who are not capable of chewing it themselves. For the same (wet-)nurses are accustomed to prepare small pieces of bread with their teeth, and, while still suckling them, to insert little chewed-up bits between the jaws of infants, until having removed them little by little (*paulatim*) from milk, they lead them to the use of bread. Thus the holy mother church has teachers, who just like breasts administer to beginners the milk of softer doctrine (*lac doctrinae mollioris*), and she has those very

[12] Bede, *In Cantica Canticorum libri VI*, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL 119B (Turnhout, 1983); Bede, *On the Song of Songs and Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. Arthur Holder (New York, 2011).
[13] Matis, *Song of Songs*, 24, 27–28.
[14] Matis, *Song of Songs*, 57; Matis, "Early Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs and the Maternal Language of Clerical Authority," *Speculum* 89 (2014): 358–81, at 364.
[15] Bede, *In Cantica Canticorum* 2.4, ed. Hurst, lines 97–105. My translation.

same ones well practiced in offering the bread of the stronger word to those who are progressing well.]

In this passage, Bede drew on an idea taken from his main source for the commentary as a whole, the fourth-century exegesis of the Song of Songs by Apponius, but re-imagined it, adding, it seems, a phrase from Cicero's *De Oratore*. However, as will become apparent, in both cases he completely transformed the meaning of his source texts.

Bede presented weaning as a very gradual ("paulatim") process, in which milk and baby food were given together, at the same life stage ("while still suckling them"). This emphasis was essential to his argument that pastoral care of new believers, too, should proceed "paulatim" (lines 105-6). In contrast, Apponius had used the "teeth" of the scriptural passage to draw a distinction between two classes of believers: milk-fed infants, on the one hand, and the "strongest bones in the body of the Church," who could bite and chew solid food, on the other.[16] While these latter actions did benefit other believers, Apponius's image was one of digestion, with teeth passing food to 'all the members of the Church's body,' rather than preparing baby-food for weaning infants. Apponius's text, then, had suggested the image of chewing to Bede, but the earlier author used it to elaborate his central theme of the Church body working in harmony. If his teeth were teachers, they were differentiated in their roles, and provided different sustenance according to the abilities of each Christian.[17] Bede, however, transformed the idea to serve his own model of pastoral care, using the weaning image to place the initiative with nurses and emphasize that it was these same teachers ("eosdem ipsos") who catered for Christians of all stages.[18] In doing so, Bede moved away from the emphases of previous commentators on the varied needs of different believers, and stressed instead the

[16] Apponius, *In Canticum Canticorum expositio* 6.6–7, ed. Bernard de Vregille and Louis Neyrand, *Commentaire sur le Cantique des cantiques*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1997–98), 2:134–37 (on Sg. 4.2): "Dentes itaque Ecclesiae illos opinor intellegi qui non lacte doctrinae indigent, sed infantiae transcendentes aetatem, non solum fortissimum cibum mandunt, sed etiam ut ossa fortissima in Ecclesiae corpore ad diuidendam et ruminandam carnem uerbi Dei constituti probantur." [I believe the teeth of the church are to be understood as those who do not require the milk of teaching but, passing the age of infancy, do not just chew up the strongest food, but even, as the strongest bones in the body of the Church, are suitably placed to divide and ruminate the meat of the word of God. My translation.]
[17] Apponius, *In Canticum Canticorum expositio* 6.6–7, ed. de Vregille and Neyrand, 2:134–37: "et acutissimi ingenio ad diuidendas unicuique animae pro possibilitate quid conueniat diuinorum uerborum sententias. Omnes quidem dentes in uno ore consistunt, sed aliud officium agunt qui labiorum uicinitate iunguntur, qui in partes diuidunt cibum, et aliud qui diuisum ad unam subtilitatem spiritalem redactum ad omnia membra Ecclesiae sustentanda transmittunt." [and, according to their most sharp nature, to divide up the meanings of the divine word, to each one what is suitable according to the ability of the soul. All of the teeth take their positions in one mouth, but those close to the lips carry out one duty, who divide the food into pieces, and others, who reduce each piece to one spiritual fineness, transmit them to all the members of the Church's body as sustenance.]
[18] Matis, "Early Medieval Exegesis," 367, has noted Bede's focus on the *doctores* to the almost total exclusion of the laity, which is of particular relevance for this passage.

actions of the teacher which would allow every individual to progress from spiritual infancy to maturity. His vision of pastoral care was of a long-term relationship which enabled the continuing spiritual development of all believers.

Into this transformation of Apponius's idea, Bede inserted what appears to be a phrase adapted from Cicero's *De Oratore*. Here, Cicero piles up metaphors for what we might call a 'spoon-fed' education: the tone is critical or at least dismissive, contrasting with the kind of education the talented should enjoy.[19] Bede, however, repurposed a phrase describing the physical act of feeding children to refer to the appropriate model of loving education that priests should administer to new Christians, converting Cicero's image from a negative to a positive ideal of teaching. This adaptation reflects the considerable distance between a rhetorical education for elite males in first-century-BCE Rome and the instruction of all new, unlearned Christians in eighth-century northern Europe. Nevertheless, the parallel with infant feeding remained effective, relevant, and specific in its material details, including the reference to wet-nurses. Alternatively, it is just possible that the similarity in phrasing is a coincidence, deriving from practices of preparing masticated baby-food common to both historical periods—and revealing the disparity in attitudes to education.

The metaphor, as Bede employs it, relies on a shared understanding with his audience of weaning as gradual and directed by a caring mother or nurse. This shared understanding is essential to the representation of Bede's view of pastoral care as an ongoing process, led by the same well-educated priests as those who care for the more advanced believers in their flocks. The question of whether this related to contemporary practices of infant feeding, or whether Bede's presentation of weaning was dictated primarily by his ideas on pastoral care, is difficult to answer. However, it is notable that these details of the practicalities of gradual, gentle weaning contrast directly with Sally Crawford's proposal, based primarily on tenth- and eleventh-century evidence, that the norm in early medieval England was for caregivers to instigate an abrupt transition to solid food.[20] Exegetical uses of weaning in the eleventh century seem closer to this idea: Bede's concern with providing spiritual milk and weaning gently contrasts with Catherine Karkov's recent reading of the 'weaning of Isaac' image in the Old English Hexateuch (early eleventh century) as a "cut," something to be emphasized as

[19] Cicero, *De Oratore* 2.39.162, ed. and trans. E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham, *On the Orator*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1948), 1:314–15: "Ego autem, si quem nunc rudem plane institui ad dicendum velim, his potius tradam assiduis […] qui omnes tenuissimas particulas atque omnia minima mansa ut nutrices infantibus pueris in os inserant." [For my part, if just now I were to want a complete novice trained up to oratory, I should rather entrust him to these untiring people … for them to put into his mouth none but the most delicate morsels—everything chewed exceedingly small—in the manner of wet-nurses feeding baby-boys.]
[20] Crawford, *Childhood in Anglo-Saxon England*, 71–74.

completed, so that "the mother's milk […] must be discarded."[21] These contrasts between eighth- and eleventh-century practices and perceptions also correspond to bioarchaeological arguments for a shortening of the weaning process over the course of the early medieval period.[22]

The appeal of the metaphor to Bede is suggested by his later use of it in his *Ecclesiastical History*. In a well-known passage, Bede reported the words of the Ionan monk Aidan to his predecessor, who returned frustrated in his efforts to preach to the Northumbrians:

> Tum ait Aidan […]: 'Videtur mihi, frater, quia durior iusto indoctis auditoribus fuisti, et non eis iuxta apostolicam disciplinam primo lac doctrinae mollioris porrexisti, donec paulatim enutriti uerbo Dei, ad capienda perfectiora et ad facienda sublimiora Dei pracepta sufficerent'.
>
> [Then Aidan said: 'It seems to me, brother, that you have been unreasonably harsh upon your ignorant hearers: you did not first offer them the milk of simpler teaching (*lac doctrinae mollioris*), as the apostle recommends, until little by little (*paulatim*), as they grew strong on the food of God's word, they were capable of receiving more elaborate instruction and of carrying out the more transcendent commandments of God'.][23]

This passage is generally identified as an allusion to 1 Cor. 3.1–2 but, in fact, Aidan's words do not refer directly to any one biblical passage (although they do refer to Paul).[24] Instead, they represent a distillation of Bede's full exegetical treatment of "milk" for new believers, as found in his commentary on the Song of Songs and, indeed, elsewhere in his exegetical writings. Scholarly work of recent decades has explored the manifold links between Bede's exegetical and historical writings, demonstrating the importance of such allusions for a full understanding of the *Ecclesiastical History*.[25] In taking such an approach, Jennifer O'Reilly illuminated the

---

[21] Catherine E. Karkov, "The Circumcision and Weaning of Isaac: The Cuts that Bind," in *New Readings on Women and Early Medieval English Literature and Culture: Cross-Disciplinary Studies in Honour of Helen Damico*, ed. Helene Scheck and Christine Kozikowski (Amsterdam, 2019), 126, 130.
[22] See above, 000.
[23] Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica* 3.5, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), 228–29.
[24] E.g., Lesley Abrams, *Bede, Gregory, and Strategies of Conversion in Anglo-Saxon England and the Spanish New World*, Jarrow Lecture 2013 (Jarrow, 2013), 7, where she also notes the metaphor's use in a letter of Fulk, archbishop of Reims, to King Alfred.
[25] Roger Ray, "Bede, the Exegete, as Historian," in *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede*, ed. Gerald Bonner (London, 1976), 125–40; Alan Thacker, "Bede's Ideal of Reform," in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill*, ed. Patrick Wormald, Donald Bullough, and Roger Collins (Oxford, 1983), 130–53; Jennifer O'Reilly,

significance of milk and meat in Bede's thought, identifying his association of the weaning image with an exegetical progression inwards from the outer court of the Temple, and suggesting that Bede considered Aidan's concerns in parallel with debates about gentile converts in the early Church. The metaphor may also have held special relevance to the conversion of the *gens Anglorum* through its use by Pope Gregory the Great, 'apostle of the English.'[26] The influence of Gregory on Bede's exegesis, as well as his ideas about pastoral care more generally, is exemplified by his compilation of Gregorian passages as the final book of his Song of Songs commentary.[27]

However, while scholars have identified the complex layering of meaning embedded in Bede's references to milk and meat, the primary referent of the metaphor should not be overlooked or over-generalized. Aidan's words contain verbal echoes of Bede's Song of Songs commentary, demonstrating that, in writing this passage, Bede had in mind the specific image of a nurse (or mother) weaning an infant from breastmilk to baby-food.[28] Bede's phrase "lac doctrinae mollioris" or a close variant of it appears throughout his Song of Songs exegesis, and in Aidan's words he emphasizes not only the milk's simplicity, but its strengthening quality.[29] Crucially, Aidan's words incorporate a reference to the gradual *process* of weaning from milk to solid food—the new element that Bede had added in his exegesis of the Song of Songs. Again, Bede specifies that weaning is to be done "paulatim," little by little, so that new Christians could progress gradually to that "more elaborate instruction."

In applying these ideas about pastoral care to the Northumbrian mission, Bede emphasized that conversion was not merely a rite-of-passage or one-off event, but was an educational process, guided by an expert minister and founded on an enduring relationship—

"Islands and Idols at the Ends of the Earth: Exegesis and Conversion in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*," in *Bède le Vénérable entre tradition et postérité*, ed. Stéphane Lebecq, Michel Perrin, and Olivier Szerwiniack (Lille, 2005), 119–45; Julia Barrow, "How Coifi Pierced Christ's Side: A Re-Examination of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, II, Chapter 13," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 6 (2011), 693–706; Máirín MacCarron, "Royal Marriage and Conversion in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*," *Journal of Theological Studies* 68 (2017), 650–70.

[26] For instance, Gregory quotes 1 Cor 3.2 in relation to preaching in *Regula pastoralis*, 3.39, though without further elaboration of the image. Jennifer O'Reilly, "Introduction," in *Bede: On the Temple*, trans. Seán Connolly (Liverpool, 1995), xliv-xlv; Brian Butler, "Doctor of Souls, Doctor of the Body: Whitby *Vita Gregorii* 23 and Its Exegetical Context," in *Listen, O Isles, unto Me: Studies in Medieval Word and Image in Honour of Jennifer O'Reilly*, ed. Elizabeth Mullins and Diarmuid Scully (Cork, 2011), 168–80. My thanks to Máirín MacCarron for drawing my attention to these discussions.

[27] Matis, "Early Medieval Exegesis," 364. On Gregory's extensive influence on Bede, see Scott DeGregorio, "The Venerable Bede and Gregory the Great: Exegetical Connections, Spiritual Departures," *Early Medieval Europe* 18 (2010), 43–60.

[28] This is surely a crucial distinction: in contrast, the "milky foods" referred to in Chapter 23 of the Whitby *Life of Gregory* (as discussed by Butler, "Doctor of Souls") are in this text the diet of shepherds in the Alps, and thus presumably based on sheep's milk; Bertram Colgrave, ed. and trans., *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great* (Lawrence, 1958; repr. Cambridge, 1985), 116–17.

[29] In addition to the passage above, see Bede, *In Cantica Canticorum* 4.7, lines 185–204 (including *lac doctrinae mollioris*); 3.4, line 307: "lac doctrinae salutaris"; 3.4, line 529: "lac doctrinae lenioris"; 5.7, lines 465–89.

just like weaning from milk on to solid food. His presentation of this message drew upon a deep engagement with New Testament texts and the Song of Songs, a long tradition of Christian exegesis, and his modification of the conceptualization of education in Roman literature. But it was also fundamentally based on a particular perception of the quotidian material experience of teaching an infant to eat.

Hagiographical References to Weaning

Hagiographical references to weaning in texts of the same period may reflect social practices, but they also allude to biblical models. Although mentions of weaning as a biographical detail are rare and fleeting, such references appear in three missionary saints' lives from the eighth century: Alcuin of York's *Life of Willibrord* (796), Willibald's *Life of Boniface* (763x769), and Hygeburg of Heidenheim's *Hodoeporicon of Willibald* (760x785). The coincidence is likely to derive, in part, from the connections between these texts as well as the fact that two of them drew on family traditions.[30] Such accounts of the births and childhoods of saints cannot be understood as purely biographical, but represent carefully composed and culturally significant images. As Crawford has pointed out, in hagiographical accounts of childhood, "an apparently matter-of-fact statement may be a complicated vehicle for allegory. […T]he audience was alive to layers of meaning, and symbols and secret messages were habitually read into texts."[31]

In the first place, references to weaning seemingly allude to the biblical model of Hannah and Samuel, as Mayke de Jong has identified.[32] The Old Testament text (1 Samuel 1–2) describes how Hannah, having promised her son to God, keeps him at home with her until he is weaned, and only then dedicates him to serve in the Temple. This reference point is made explicit in Alcuin's *Life of Willibrord*, the Northumbrian missionary to the Frisians:

> *Factum est post circulum dierum, peperit* mulier *filium* [1 Sam. 1.20], sacroque baptismatis fonte regenerato, imposuit ei mater nomen Wilbrord, et statim ablactatum

[30] Ian Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelization of Europe, 400–1050* (New York, 2001), 53 has a diagram showing some of these textual connections.
[31] Crawford, *Childhood in Anglo-Saxon England*, 35–36. Examples of hagiography used in the study of childhood include Joyce Hill, "Childhood in the Lives of Anglo-Saxon Saints," in *Childhood and Adolescence in Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture*, ed. Susan Irvine and Winfried Rudolf (Toronto, 2018), 139–61; Shulamith Shahar, "Infants, Infant Care, and Attitudes towards Infancy in the Medieval Lives of Saints," *The Journal of Psychohistory* 10 (1983): 281–309; see Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London, 1990) for a more developed approach. She restricts herself largely to later medieval evidence. Valerie Garver, "Childbearing and Infancy in the Carolingian World," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 21 (2012): 208–44; Bourbou and Garvie-Lok, "Breastfeeding and Weaning Patterns in Byzantine Times," 70–75, include some examples.
[32] Mayke de Jong, *In Samuel's Image: Child Oblation in the Early Medieval West* (Leiden, 1996), 162.

> infantulum, tradidit eum pater Hrypensis ecclesiae fratribus relegiosis studiis et sacris litteris erudiendum […] ita ut nostris temporibus novum Samuhel nasci putares, de quo dictum est: *Puer autem Samuhel proficiebat atque crescebat et placebat tam Deo quam hominibus* [1 Sam. 2.26].[33]
>
> [And it came to pass when the time was come about, the woman bore a son, and when he was reborn in the holy font of baptism his mother gave him the name Willibrord and, as soon as the infant had been weaned, his father handed him over to the church at Ripon to be instructed in religious studies and sacred letters by the brothers … so you would think that in our times had been born a new Samuel, of whom it was said: "But the child Samuel advanced, and grew on, and pleased both the Lord and men."]

Not only does Alcuin call Willibrord "a new Samuel," but he also borrows much of the phrasing directly from the biblical passage. As the title of de Jong's book—*In Samuel's Image*—indicates, in the early medieval West, Hannah's dedication of Samuel more broadly provided a model and justification for child oblation—the practice of offering children to God and handing them over to be raised in the monastic life. Alcuin's phrasing thus presented Willibrord's early life according to both a biblical model and a contemporary pattern.

Yet these patterns appear to conflict in their representation of parental responsibility. In the biblical text, it is Hannah who dedicates Samuel to God, and it is her decision to keep him with her until he is weaned; at every stage Hannah, as mother, takes the initiative and makes choices for her child. As we can see, Alcuin departed from this model in having Willibrord's father, Wilgils, give him to the monastery at Ripon. Manuscripts of the *Life* (and its verse counterpart, composed by Alcuin as part of the same work) also disagree as to whether it was Willibrord's father or mother who named the child. Despite Levison's edition (and Talbot's translation) preferring to use *pater*, David Townsend has argued for the reading *mater*, on the basis of two manuscripts and the otherwise unnecessary (re-)statement of *pater* as subject in the subsequent clause.[34] Alcuin's text, therefore, presented a transfer in care, probably at the

[33] Alcuin, *Vita Willibrordi archiepiscopi Traiectensis*, ed. W. Levison, MGH SS rer. Merov. 7 (Hanover, 1920), 117–18. My translation; a translation of the main text of the prose Life appears in "The Life of St Willibrord by Alcuin," in *The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany*, ed. and trans. C. H. Talbot (New York, 1954), 1–22 (but, here, 4–5, Talbot translates the reference to weaning as "when he had reached the age of reason," thus assuming a single significance for "ablactatum infantulum" and eliding the further parallel here to Samuel. The MGH text, and Talbot's translation, also read *pater* rather than *mater* in the first sentence here – see discussion below).On this passage, see Darren Barber's chapter above, pp. 92-3.

[34] David Townsend, "Alcuin's Willibrord, Wilhelm Levison, and the *MGH*," in *The Politics of Editing Medieval Texts*, ed. Roberta Frank (New York, 1993), 127.

point of weaning, from Willibrord's mother to his father, by whom the child was then dedicated to the church. De Jong has shown that the dedication of oblates dedicated by their mothers became a topic of controversy in ninth-century Francia, when the monk Gottschalk sought to reject his own childhood oblation to Fulda: Alcuin's pupil Hrabanus Maurus used Hannah as a model to argue for the validity of such oblations.[35] But, in the *Life of Willibrord*, Alcuin emphasizes the paternal role instead—whether to forestall such criticisms, because he wanted to develop Wilgils's role, or simply in reflection of the paternal offering of oblates as standard practice.

A similar transfer from maternal to paternal care appears in Willibald's *Life of Boniface*, written some 30 years earlier, between 763 and 769.[36] Here, Willibald (apparently a West Saxon priest working in Germany after Boniface's death) presented this image of the saint's childhood in Wessex:

> Cum enim primaevo puerilis aetatis decore multa ut solet maternae sollicitudinis cura ablactatus atque enutritus esset, magna nimirum dilectatione, ceterorum postposita amore filiorum, adfectatus est a patre. Sed quia iam labentia cuncta animo subiecerat et aeterna magis quam praesentia cogitare disposuerat, cum esset annorum circiter quattuor seu quinque, Dei se servitio subiugare studivit multoque mentis conamine de monasteriali iugiter vita insudare et ad eam mentis cottidie nisibus anhelare.[37]
>
> [In his very early childhood, after he had been weaned and reared with a mother's usual anxious care, his father lavished upon him more affection than upon the rest of his brothers. When he reached the age of about four or five he conceived a desire to enter the service of God and began to think deeply on the advantages of the monastic life. Even at this early age he had subdued the flesh to the spirit and meditated on the things that are eternal rather than those that are temporal.][38]

Here, there is little indication that Samuel is being used as a direct model (in fact, at this age, Boniface's father had forbidden him to enter a monastery). We are told that Boniface/Winfrith

[35] De Jong, *In Samuel's Image*, 78–85; 158–63. The *Life of Leoba*, commissioned by Hrabanus Maurus after the Gottschalk controversy, shows an overwhelmingly female role in early childhood: Leoba's mother and her mother's own nurse are the central figures, as discussed below.
[36] Wood, *Missionary Life*, 61.
[37] Willibald, *Viti Bonifatii*, ed. Wilhelm Levison, MGH SS rer. Germ. 57 (Hanover, 1905), 4–5.
[38] "The Life of St Boniface by Willibald," in Talbot, *Anglo-Saxon Missionaries*, 27.

(his English name) had been "weaned and reared" by his mother, after which his father cared for him. This seems to indicate a transition from maternal responsibility in early childhood, to paternal care at a certain age or developmental moment. The archaeologist Duncan Sayer has used the evidence of child burials in early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries to argue for a "rite of passage into childhood" associated with a similar transition from maternal to paternal care and obligation, although he places it later, at around age 5, whereas in Boniface's case the transition clearly took place at an unspecified point *before* "the age of about four or five." 5 is later than any suggested weaning age for children in early medieval England, but the age of 5 was inbuilt into Sayer's research design, and not derived from his findings.[39] It is possible, therefore, that the phenomenon he has identified related primarily to children of a younger age, and that the presentation of weaning in these hagiographies reflects contemporary custom.[40] Alternatively, if we accept Sayer's interpretation, it may be that Christian writers encouraged a transition to paternal authority for children at an earlier age, in part through the imposition of biblical models and with reference to weaning.[41]

An analysis of how the word for 'weaned,' *ablactatum*, was used in different texts takes us further from the biblical model. Alcuin seems to convey the biblical sense: weaning is presented as an event in which Samuel is removed from the breast, gives up drinking milk, and is able to be parted from his mother. In other hagiographical texts in this group, however, the word for 'weaned' appears with another: "weaned and reared" ("ablactatus atque enutritus") in Willibald's *Life of Boniface*, or "weaned and cherished" in Hygeburg's *Hodoeporicon of Willibald* ("ablactatum atque confotum").[42] In these cases, 'weaning' appears not as a moment to be passed, but as a process guided either by the mother or by both parents as part of caring for their child, and an essential prologue to the child's spiritual education.

---

[39] Duncan Sayer, "'Sons of athelings given to the earth': Infant Mortality within Anglo-Saxon Mortuary Geography," *Medieval Archaeology* 58 (2014): 78–103, at 98. Sayer structured his research around "cultural" age categories of 0–5 and 6–12 (p. 81), derived from studies of grave goods and legal texts by Sally Crawford, Nick Stoodley, and Heinrich Härke. Yet these same studies have also proposed a change in mortuary ritual at around age 2 or 3, possibly associated with weaning (see Haydock et al., "Weaning at Anglo-Saxon Raunds," 604). Perhaps further isotope analysis, in association with this kind of investigation into mortuary ritual, will provide more conclusive answers.

[40] Indeed, we might speculate that Alcuin's Samuel parallel was prompted by a similar phrase in his now-lost source text, an earlier *Life of Willibrord* composed by "an unlearned Scot," possibly in the same milieu as our two other examples; Talbot, *Anglo-Saxon Missionaries*, 2.

[41] Sally Crawford, "Childhood and Adolescence: Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Archaeological and Documentary Evidence," in Irvine and Rudolf, *Childhood and Adolescence*, 28, links Sayer's article to an episode in the *Life of Wilfrid*, in which Wilfrid claims a child from his mother at the age of seven.

[42] Hygeburg, *Vita Willibaldi episcopi Eichstetensis*, ed. O. Holder-Egger, MGH SS 15,1 (Hanover, 1887), 88: his mother and father worried for him "quem prius de primordialis infantiae cunabulis ablactatum atque confotum usque ad triennium nutriebant." [whom they had raised, weaned and cherished, from the very first infancy of the cradle until he was three years old.] My translation.

Hygeburg, who described herself as "an unworthy Saxon," gave an unusually detailed account of Willibald's childhood, perhaps drawing on her own knowledge of him as his relative as well as her discussions with the bishop himself.[43] Equally, in writing at some point before Willibald's death in 786, Hygeburg had access to the newly composed *Life of Boniface* by another Willibald (who should not be confused with her subject, the bishop of Eichstätt), and her account of the saint's early childhood bears many similarities to that of Boniface. She also, for example, identifies the age of 5 as the moment of spiritual understanding and of his entry into monastic education. However, the dedication of the child to the Church comes earlier, at age 3, immediately after the mention of weaning in the text. At this point, Hygeburg recounted that "a sickness of the body severely overwhelmed the three-year-old," from which the young Willibald recovered only after his parents had promised him to God as a monastic oblate by placing him at the foot of a standing cross.[44] The link to weaning is suggestive, since the withdrawal from the diet of breast-milk and the immune support it offered would have been a precarious moment for the child's health.[45] Weaning appears here as a process of parental care preceding the commencement of monastic education.

Weaning and Education

The notion of weaning as an educational process reflects classical and late antique ideas about infancy. As Penniman has pointed out, Paul's words in his first Letter to the Corinthians drew on intertwined ideas of physical nourishment and spiritual formation from Greek and Roman antiquity, as found in medical texts, rhetorical handbooks, and educational treatises.[46] In these varied contexts, "whether from the breast of the nursing woman or the mouth of the teacher, *romanitas* was passed from one generation to the next." In subsequent centuries, the idea was applied and adapted to the transmission of Christian identity.[47] By the early Middle Ages, the parallel between rearing and nourishing on the one hand, and education on the other, was so commonplace that the double meaning of *nutrire* can no longer be said to have functioned as a metaphor.[48] From a more practical perspective, wet-nurses were classed as educators in

[43] Hygeburg, *Vita Willibaldi*, 86: "ego indigna Saxonica"; see 86–87 for her mention of their relationship and discussions.
[44] Hygeburg, *Vita Willibaldi*, 88: "illum triennium grave corporis opprimebat egritudo."
[45] Diane Watt, *Women, Writing and Religion in England and Beyond, 650–1100* (London, 2020), suggests that the age of 3 is a symbolic allusion to the three days between Christ's death and resurrection.
[46] Penniman, *Christian Milk*, 5.
[47] Penniman, *Christian Milk*, 51.
[48] This makes an interesting contrast with the overlapping meanings of the Old English word *afedan*, which emphasize particularly the mother's bodily roles, as discussed by Caroline Batten above (pp.146-7).

classical and late antique Rome.[49] Their educational role was highlighted most concretely in the fact that, as Quintilian had stressed, nurses taught children to speak—a stage also identified as the end of infancy (quite literally: as Isidore put it, "it is called an infant because it does not yet know how to speak").[50] The Roman association of basic education with weaning, therefore, had developed in a context where both were the responsibility of a hired or enslaved nurse, and the passing from her care signified the completion of these processes. Early medieval Christian texts were clearly building on this tradition, but more often assigned the provision of early care and instruction to the child's mother as the person responsible for the first steps towards the ultimate formation of a Christian adult. This rhetorical shift towards maternal instruction and feeding may relate to a decline in the use of wet nurses and household slaves, coupled with a new emphasis on exclusively religious education, which had traditionally been the responsibility of the parents, and especially the mother.[51]

A later saint's life from the same milieu, Rudolf of Fulda's *Life of Leoba*, written in 836, places great emphasis on maternal roles in education. It narrates the life and miracles of another Anglo-Saxon migrant to the continent, the West Saxon nun Leoba, friend and relative of Boniface and abbess of Tauberbischofsheim. Rudolf, who was ultimately basing his narrative on the recollections of Leoba's nuns and kinswomen, recounted Leoba's progression from the care of her biological mother, Æbbe, to that of her spiritual mother, Abbess Tetta (*spiritalis mater, venerabilis mater*; Leoba is her *spiritalis filia*).[52] Rudolf, like Alcuin, compared his holy subject's childhood enrollment in a monastery to Samuel's dedication by Hannah. However, Rudolf made no mention of weaning: rather, her mother, Æbbe, is instructed by her own former nurse to teach Leoba scripture from her earliest infancy, before offering her to the monastic life.[53] Weaning, which in other texts implied education, is here replaced by the nurse's explicit

[49] Christian Laes, "Educators in the Late Ancient City of Rome (300–700 CE)," *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 94 (2016): 183–207.

[50] Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 1.1.4–5, ed. and trans. Donald A. Russell, *The Orator's Education*, 5 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 2001), 1:66–67; Isidore, *Etymologiae* XI.ii.9, trans. Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof (Cambridge, 2006), 241: "A human being of the first age is called an infant (*infans*): it is called an infant, because it does not yet know how to speak (*in-*, 'not'; *fari*, present participle *fans*, 'speaking'), that is, it cannot talk."

[51] Laes, "Educators," 198–99; Ville Vuolanto, "Family Relations and the Socialisation of Children in the Autobiographical Narratives of Late Antiquity," in *Approaches to the Byzantine Family*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Shaun Tougher (Farnham, 2012), 53.

[52] Rudolf of Fulda, *Vita Leobae abbatissae Biscofesheimensis*, ed. Georg Waitz, MGH SS 15,1 (Hanover, 1887), 122, 124.

[53] Rudolf, *Vita Leobae*, 124: "Et sicut Anna Samuel omnibus diebus suis in templo Dei serviturum obtulit, ita hanc ab infantia sacris litteris eruditam in sancta virginitate quamdiu vixerit illi servire concedas." [And as Anna offered Samuel to serve God all the days of his life in the temple so you must offer her, when she has been taught the Scripture from her infancy, to serve Him in holy virginity as long as she shall live.] Trans. "The Life of St. Leoba by Rudolf, Monk of Fulda," in Talbot, *Anglo-Saxon Missionaries*, 203–26, at 211. Rhodes, "Abbatial Responsibility as Spiritual Labour," 65, points out that spiritual motherhood is emphasized above the biological.

instruction to the mother to begin teaching her child in the Christian faith from birth. The prominent role played in this passage by Æbbe's nurse from her own childhood, apparently an unfree servant or slave, may hint at one reason for this excision of bodily nurture: perhaps a wet-nurse fed Leoba, too. Rudolf does not specify this detail, but records that, at the time of Leoba's entry to the monastic life under Tetta, Æbbe granted the nurse her freedom.[54] While emphasizing the importance of maternal education in a Christian upbringing, this particular saint's life hints at the more complex social relations surrounding infant feeding, which might not always mirror expressions of their spiritual significance.

These brief references to weaning in individuals' life histories were not included carelessly, therefore, but evoke Old Testament and Roman notions of early childhood relationships. The extent to which they reflect contemporary practice is less certain. When ecclesiastical writers of the eighth and ninth centuries referred to weaning, they did so by employing a distinctively Christian language.

From Bede's exegetical and historical writings to hagiographical accounts of saintly childhoods, mentions of weaning accrued layers of meaning in early medieval texts. These writers drew on a long history of creative engagement with the metaphor of infant feeding. However, in the early Middle Ages, the metaphor was adapted to new contexts of mission and Christianization. At the same time as infant baptism became standard practice in Christian communities, missionaries aimed at converting entire peoples to the faith. Infants and converted pagan *gentes* thus began their Christian journeys together. Moreover, priests in northern Europe grappled with the problems of educating in the Christian faith communities who had no traditions or institutions of education in the Roman sense.

This challenge explains these writers' emphases on early education and the demands of pastoral care. But it also explains another important shift: the texts discussed here were not written for converts, but for those who ministered to them. The metaphor of infant feeding, in turn, shifted away from a focus on the nature of milk and solid food and towards the nurturing role played by those administering this spiritual sustenance. Bede used the metaphor to emphasize the labor required of teachers, first in producing milk, then in coaxing their *parvuli* gently onto solid food, all the time "acting with full diligence" and providing "careful

[54] Rudolf, *Vita Leobae*, 124: "Adultamque Deo consecravit et supradictae matri Tettae divinis studiis inbuendam tradidit; nutricem vero suam, pro eo quod tanta ibi gaudia futura praedixerat, libertatis praemio remuneravit." [And when the child had grown up her mother consecrated her and handed her over to Mother Tetta to be taught the sacred sciences. And because the nurse had foretold that she should have such happiness, she gave her her freedom.] Trans. Talbot, *Anglo-Saxon Missionaries*, 211.

attention."[55] Priests and monks who wrote and read these texts adapted the image to convey messages about the roles they occupied—those of mothers and nurses.

Whether employing exegetical allegory or following biblical models, references to infant feeding in early medieval texts were not empty phrases but living metaphors, which writers played with creatively. Not only did they draw on multiple traditions, from Christian scripture and Roman education, but they also evoked everyday experiences of bodies and babies. These monastic authors, while perhaps not directly involved in infant care, were not isolated from their surrounding communities, but were concerned with the pastoral care of the laity.[56] Moreover, they would have remembered infant feeding and weaning as a feature of their own childhoods and family lives. We can therefore use these same sources for insight into social practices: as valuable evidence that weaning in eighth-century England was gradual, took place around age three and, although sometimes the work of wet-nurses, fell under the responsibility of the mother as part of a child's early education.

These references could never be simple metaphors, because they partially coincided with actual practices of infant feeding, and much of their symbolic weight derived from the overlap in significance between bodily nourishment and spiritual instruction. Penniman has referred to the impossibility of separating figurative and literal uses of infant feeding images, because being physically fed and cared for was frequently perceived as an intrinsic part of the soul's formation.[57] In these early medieval contexts, the overlap was essential, as the raising of infants now coincided with the beginnings of their Christian formation. Weaning was a necessary first step to formal Christian education: a process in which mothers taught the fundaments of learning, eating, and speaking, before entrusting their children to monastic teachers. At the same time, as a gradual (*paulatim*) process guided with love, weaning provided a model for that Christian education's early stages.

Alcuin's own biographer engaged creatively with these ideas in his account of the scholar's entry to a monastery in childhood. He stated that "when [Alcuin] was weaned from the fleshly breasts of his mother, he was handed over to be initiated by the mystical breasts of the church," thus uniting the two themes: the transition from maternal care and teaching marked by weaning, and the use of the same image as an allegory of elementary ecclesiastical

[55] Bede, *In Cantica Canticorum* 5.7, lines 706–46: "crebra agentes industria" (line 734); "ut sicut paruulos sedula intentione lactare solent nutrices" (lines 706–11).
[56] Thomas Pickles, "Church Organization and Pastoral Care," in *A Companion to the Early Middle Ages: Britain and Ireland, c.500–c.1100*, ed. Pauline Stafford (London, 2009), 168–70.
[57] Penniman, *Christian Milk*, 6–9.

education.[58] The statement is a clear example of the overlap between literal and figurative references to infant feeding, moving from Alcuin's physical weaning by his mother to a metaphorical breastfeeding which at once succeeded and imitated that maternal care. The resulting image demonstrates the interplay of ideas that circulated around images of infant feeding and weaning: pastoral care, education, and conversion as an ongoing process.

[58] W. Arndt, ed., *Vita Alcuini*, MGH SS 15,1 (Hanover, 1887), 185: "qui cum matris ablactaretur carnalibus, ecclesiae traditur misticis imbuendus uberibus." My translation.