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Emotional Religiosity and Religious Happiness in Old Norse Literature and Culture

Introduction

One of the strongest feelings of happiness and ecstasy described in medieval European literature is related to the process of accepting the Christian faith, or moments of seeing and acknowledging God. For Augustine “to reach God is Happiness itself” (1873:3); for Boethius “God is the essence of Happiness” (1969:79); for Aquinas “Happiness is the ‘perfection of the soul’ wrought by the contemplation of God” (1911–1925:105).¹ There is no reason to doubt that the theology of faith and happiness was transferred to the far North with the introduction of the Christian religion. The main aim of this article is to investigate how such Christian religious emotionality was adapted to the social and ideological norms and aesthetics of Old Norse literature and culture.

¹ The examples are cited from Ferguson 1992: x–xi.

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Abstract: The main aim of this article is to investigate whether and how the traditional Christian theological premise that “God is Happiness” was adapted to the social and ideological norms and aesthetics of Old Norse literature and culture. This is done by studying the motif of religious awakening in a variety of Old Norse genres, including primary and secondary translations of Latin sources, translations from Old French, and indigenous genres such as Bishops’ sagas, Icelandic family sagas, and legendary sagas. The main conclusion is that religious awakening is represented in a variety of ways in the literary system as a whole: as an emotional, intellectual, and physical/sensory process, as well as a pragmatic rational decision. The differences may be due to the different intended functions and readerships of translated as opposed to indigenous texts, in Norway and Iceland. From an epistemological perspective, the article illustrates that believing had complex connotations in Old Norse culture, and could be understood as an emotional and intellectual process, as a sensory and physical experience, or as a matter of pragmatics and everyday practices, depending on the socio-cultural context.

Keywords: religious happiness, emotions, cognition, religious practices, Old Norse literature, Old Norse translations.

The introduction of the Christian faith has been studied extensively in Old Norse scholarship. From the perspective of history of mentality, scholars have debated to what extent the acceptance of the Christian faith lead to changes in everyday rituals and habits, and ways of thinking.² Such studies touch upon religious ethics and feelings of honor,³ but seldom comment on the emotional side of the process of religious awakening: whether religious awakening is discussed in emotional terms in literature remains thus undiscussed. Recent studies have, however, foregrounded the close link between believing and intellectual and cognitive processes, sometimes in combination with emotionality and sensory experiences.⁴

On the other hand, just as in other scholarly traditions,⁵ scholarship on emotions in Old Norse culture has blossomed in recent years. The emotionality discussed in most studies is however of the romantic or social type, i.e. how emotions are conditioned by social norms, values, and expectations, and how they pre-condition relations between people.⁶ The representations of emotions in connection to religious awakening are discussed sometimes, albeit mostly from a conceptual or stylistic perspective.⁷ There exist also a fair amount of philological surveys of Old Norse hagiographical literature,⁸ and some of them focus on emotional motifs such as crying and weeping,⁹ but the link between such behavioral

² See for example Nedkvitne 2009, Bagge 1998. For more general discussion on religiosity in medieval Europe, see Arnold 2005, Engen 1986, Schmitt 1998.

³ Scholarship on honor in Old Norse society is prolific, see for example Meulengracht Sørensen 1995, Miller 1990, Miller 2014, Nedkvitne 2011.

⁴ See for example Eriksen 2016a, Hareide 2016.

⁵ See scholarship on various aspects of medieval emotions by Rosenwein 2006, Saunders 2005, Rubin 2009, among others. On emotions in European Arthurian literature, see Brandsma, Larrington, and Saunders (eds) 2015.

⁶ For a discussion of Old Norse Arthurian literature, see Bandlien, Eriksen, and Sif Rikhardsdóttir (eds) 2015. On romantic love in various Old Norse genres, see Sävborg 2007. For a broader discussion of emotions, based on other secular and religious Old Norse genres, see Wolf and Denzin (eds) 2008, Ármann Jakobsson 2008, Sif Rikhardsdóttir 2017, among others.

⁷ For a study with focus on the transmission of religious concepts, some of which are related to emotions as *ást* (love), in Old Norse Victorines, see Gunnar Harðarson 1995. On love towards God, see Sävborg 2007: 554–555. See also Clunies Ross 2008:305.

⁸ For an overview, see Cormack 2007:27–42; Cormack 2000; Wolf 2013. For a discussion on the translation of emotional lamentations in some Old Norse Saints' Lives, see Bruvoll 2010: vol. 1, 242–43.

⁹ Patton and Hawley (eds) 2005; Gertsman (ed) 2011; Mills 2014:472–96. Mills studies male weeping in social, and not religious, Old Norse context, and argues that male (and female) weeping over the death of a high-status individual indicates the high esteem in which the deceased was held.

patterns and the emotionality of the language used to describe religious awakening may profit from more attention.

The main aim of the article is thus to study how the motif of religious awakening is discussed in a wide range of Old Norse literary genres. By investigating the terms in which the motif is represented – pragmatic, sensory, rational or emotional – I will search to demonstrate the variety of attitudes towards the link between believing, on the one hand, and feeling, knowing and experiencing, on the other, in a variety of Old Norse literary genres and sources.

Historical Background and Sources

As known, Norway and Iceland converted to Christianity about the year 1000. The two stories of conversion differ with regard to the nature of the conversion process. In Norway, the Christianization was initially imposed zealously and at times violently, by King Ólafr Tryggvason, and was fully established with the death and sainthood of King Ólafr Haraldsson. In Iceland the new religion was democratically accepted at the Thing, when the law speaker Þorgeirr declared that Iceland must follow one law, and that that should be the Christian law.¹⁰ It is therefore relevant to ask whether the introduction of Christianity was simply a political and economic decision, or whether it was inspired or led to changes in mentality, emotionality and spirituality.

The possible sources for such a study are numerous as the introduction of Christianity came with the introduction of the book culture in general, and more specifically with the translations of many European genres and texts, Latin and the vernacular, and with the writing down of a rich corpus of indigenous literature, religious and secular.¹¹

I will start the analysis of the motif of religious happiness in Old Norse translations of Latin texts, where it may be expected that the motif retained some of the features of the traditional Christian topos. My example will be from an Old Norse dialogue between Body and Soul, a translation of Hugh of St Victor's *Soliloquium de arrha animae*. In order to

¹⁰ The implications of the introduction of the Christian law in Iceland differ somewhat in the sources. For a comparison between Ari Þorgilsson's description in *Íslendigabók* and *Njáls saga*, see Hamer 2008.

¹¹ For a more detailed review of this literalization process, with references, see Eriksen 2016b.

unveil nuances in the motif, I will also give examples from secondary Old Norse translations, such as *Konungs Skuggsjá*, which is traditionally regarded as a secular text composed after the model of the Latin genre of *speculum regale*. An example from *Parcevals saga* and *Elíss saga* will illustrate how the motif was dealt with in translations of Old French romances and *chansons de geste*. Thereafter, I will turn to various genres of Old Norse indigenous literature: two Bishop's sagas (*Árna saga biskups* and *Lárentíus saga*), two Icelandic family sagas (*Laxdæla saga* and *Njáls saga*), and a legendary saga (*Örvar-Odds saga*), to investigate the verbalization of the same motif.¹² In conclusion, I discuss the implications of the various representations of the motif, with regard to the function of translated as opposed to indigenous texts, in Norway and Iceland. The aim is to reach better understanding of attitudes towards faith, on the one hand, and emotions, rationality and practices, on the other, in Old Norse society.

Methodology

But before that a few methodological clarifications. My main aim is to investigate and reveal the existence of a variety of attitudes towards faith in various Old Norse genres. Even though works may be allegedly dated to the same period, very often the manuscripts they are preserved in are not contemporaneous. Comparison of texts preserved in manuscripts of different ages may thus be problematic, especially if the goal is to reveal valid ideologies in a specific temporal and cultural context.¹³ With this in mind, this initial survey will aim to span widely and discuss an existent variety in a broad cultural context. Later, it can be followed up by studies of the same motif on manuscript level and in specific socio-cultural contexts, or by diachronic studies of the transmission of the motif through time.

Another problem is related to the study of medieval translations. Very often the source text for a translation is missing, and even when such a

¹² This study does not claim exhaustiveness. The article will propose some hypotheses and suggest questions for further research, rather than give an exhaustive presentation of the transmission and function of the motif.

¹³ This issue lays at the core of the distinction between traditional and so-called new philology. The topic is much discussed after the introduction of the term by Stephen Nichols in 1990.

text exists, there is almost never a direct relationship between the source text and the target text on manuscript level. In other words, comparison of source and target texts does not always reveal the changes made in the course of translation, but include potential changes introduced in the copying and rewriting process of both source and target texts.¹⁴ But even though we cannot know who made the changes and when, the comparison of two different language versions of a text may, nonetheless, reveal ideological and cultural differences in the two contexts and thus illustrate an adaptation process of the target text to the new target culture, which will be of main interest here.

A final comment concerns the nature of medieval literature and the traditional classifications and generic distinctions. Because of the hermeneutical nature of writing in the Middle ages, I perceive literature as placed on various continuums, such as indigenous as opposed to translated literature continuum; literature of pre-Christian/mythological content as opposed to Christian religious literature; or secular as opposed to religious texts.¹⁵ The traditional dichotomies and classifications serve therefore as structural elements to organize the whole body of Old Norse literature, rather than to impose limitations in analytical approaches and perspectives. Regarding such “dichotomies” more as structural elements on various continuums allows us to do comparative studies of texts across the tradition generic and thematic borders, and thus reach new and different insight about, in this case, the link between religiousness and emotionality in Old Norse literature and society.

Translated religious literature: Body and Soul

As already mentioned, the traditional motif of religious happiness was introduced to the far North with the introduction of Christianity and thereof, the introduction of various religious literary genres. Love for God is a common topic in various texts, such as for example the Norwe-

¹⁴ The issue is discussed extensively with regard to Old Norse Arthurian translations by Kalinke 2011.

¹⁵ For a more detailed argumentation about the organization of Old Norse literature along several continuums, see Eriksen (forthcoming). For another discussion on the rigidity of research-categories and the advantages of loosening up the traditionally set dichotomies such as profane/religious, secular/ecclesiastical, history/legend, facts/fiction, see “Introduction” and “Mythopoiesis in Norway, Denmark and Hungary” in Mortensen 2006.

gian and Icelandic homily books, *Barlaams ok Josaphats saga*, the translation of biblical texts in *Stjórn* and translations of Saints' lives.¹⁶ An illustrative example may be given from the Old Norse *Dialogue between Body and Soul*, which is a translation of Hugh of St Victor's *Soliloquium de arrha animae*.¹⁷ The main manuscript that the Dialogue is preserved in is Hauksbók (now AM 371 4to, AM 544 4to, and AM 675 4to) from the beginning of the fourteenth century. The Latin text aims to lead the body away from the material world and towards an inner process of self-examination, reflection and self-appreciation, which is ultimately the only way leading towards God: true love may be found only through finding God. The main argument of the Latin original is preserved in the Old Norse version even though some passages are foreshortened.¹⁸ The terminology is not used as consistently as in the Latin original, but "true love" (*sonn ást*) is opposed to the restlessness and desires for the material world. The inner movement of the soul remains highly emotional: she is concerned with feelings such as shame and fear, love and desire. With great emotional intensity, the soul urges her inner sins to leave and never come back and thus declares true love to God. This leads to inner and cognitive peace and happiness:

Ek kenni með mer stvndvm ynði sva mikit ok hvggan, fagnað ok gleði, at mer þickir, sem ek se oll onnvr, en ek var skommv [...] mitt briost hefir tekit nyian fagnað, samvizka min er i gleði, dvenar fyst at lita til liðinna meina, i ró er nv hvgr minn, birtiz vit mitt, lysiz hiarta mitt, fyst min stvndar a giæzlv heilagrar giezkv. (Eiríkur Jonsson and Finnur Jónsson 1892–96:328)

I can sometimes feel such a great delight, and comfort, joy, and happiness, that it seems to me that I am something completely different from what I just was [...] my chest has felt new joys, my conscience is in delight, my will has ceased to look at passed pains, my thoughts are in peace, my reason is enlightened, my heart is lightened, my desire is towards the light of Holiness (my translation).

¹⁶ For examples from different genres, see Sävborg 2007:555. For a comprehensive study of the consistency of terminology and concepts, see Gunnar Harðarson 1995:148–60.

¹⁷ Note that there exist two dialogues between Body and Soul, in Old Norse. The other one is a translation of the Old French poem *Un samedi par nuit*, and is preserved in the so-called Old Norse Homily Book, a Norwegian manuscript from c. 1200. This dialogue belongs to the genre of visionary literature and is discussed, together with other Old Norse visions, by among others Wellendorf 2009:121–143. For a recent comparative study of the two dialogues and their contextualization within their respective socio-cultural contexts, see Eriksen 2016a.

¹⁸ For a detailed survey of the Old Norse dialogue, see Gunnar Harðarson 1995.

Even though the Old Norse version of the *Dialogue* is somewhat changed in relation to the source text, the example shows that the translator/scribe chose to communicate the emotionality, happiness and delight of the moment when the soul meets God. In addition to the emotions of happiness and joy, the moment is described as peaceful and enlightening cognitively. Meeting God is thus both emotional and cognitive happiness and satisfaction.

Secondary translations: *The King's Mirror*

Christian literature had an undisputed influence on the composition of indigenous literature, both thematically and stylistically.¹⁹ One indigenous text, which builds heavily on this tradition is *Konungs Skuggsjá*, or *The King's Mirror*. This is a pedagogical conversation between a father/Master and a son/pupil, and the work was composed allegedly for the sons of King Hákon Hákonarson, in the period between 1240 and 1263.²⁰ The text was thus written in the same political and cultural context as the Hauksbók manuscript, as its owner and main scribe Haukr Erlendsson was a lawman and a member of the Norwegian royal court towards the end of the thirteenth and beginning of the fourteenth century. Even though the text is traditionally seen as an original composition, it may be regarded also as a secondary translation,²¹ as it alludes and is indebted to many Latin texts and even includes proper translated passages.²² The text presents a coherent pedagogical model which aims to activate all cognitive faculties of the pupil, such as perception, reflection, memory, evaluation, decision making and application.²³ Attaining knowledge and demonstrating wisdom are seen as the main path leading to God, as God is said to be the origin of all knowledge. The text explicitly argues that believing and relating to God are emotional processes, which includes fear and also love:

¹⁹ See for example Jónas Kristjánsson 1981; Bekker-Nielsen 1968.

²⁰ For a discussion about the dating of *The King's Mirror*, see Schreiner 1971. On the manuscripts, see Seip and Holm-Olsen 1947.

²¹ The term is used and defined by Copeland 1991 to refer to a text which claims the status of an original composition, but alludes nonetheless to other texts and a dominant literary tradition, without referring to these explicitly.

²² For a detailed survey of the sources used of the author of *The King's Mirror*, and the history of the debate, see Bagge 1987:14–15; Eriksen 2014:144–45.

²³ Eriksen 2014.

En ef þú vilt nema mannvit, þá vil ek sýna þér þar grundvöll, er upphaf er allrar speki, eptir því sem einn höfuð spekingr hefir mælt: þat er upphaf speki at hræðask almáttkan guð. En hann skal þó eigi hræðask sem úvin heldr með ástarhræzlu ... (Unger 1848:4)

Now if you seek understanding, I will show you the basis and the beginning of all wisdom, as a great and wise man once expressed it: to fear Almighty God, this is the beginning of wisdom. But he is not to be feared as an enemy, but rather with the fear of love ... (Larson 1917:77–78)

Even though God is at the beginning of wisdom, one can reach neither God nor wisdom without an emotional response to God, who is to be loved and feared at one and the same time. This is emphasized again later on in the text, when the personified Wisdom gives a speech, which demonstrates Wisdom's cognitive rationality, but also dependency on sensory experience and physical perception of the world, and emotionality:

Hugga ek harmanda, gef ek móðum hvíld, skenki ek þyrstanda, fœði ek hungranda. Sæll er sá er drekkur af mínu borðkeri, þvíat minn drykkur hefir úprotligan sætleik ... Sæll er sá er gengr til mins snæðings, þvíat min fœzla þefjar betr hverjum ilm; hunangi sætari er minn drykkur ok skírri hverju víni; at mínu borði má heyra þjótandi strengleika með sætum ok fögrum tóna; þar er kveðskapr ok fáheyrdir söngar; þar er skemtan ok gleði ok flærðlauss fagnaðr án alla sorg. (Unger 1848:138)

I [Wisdom] give rest to the weary, drink to the thirsty and food to the hungry. Happy is he who drinks from my cup, for my beverage has an unailing sweetness. ... Happy is he who goes to my table for my meat has a more pleasing savour than the sweetest perfume; my drink is sweeter than honey and clearer than any wine; tuneful music is heard at my table in sweet and beautiful melody; there are songs and poems such as rarely are heard, merriment and gladness unmixed with grief ... (Larson 1917:302)

Meeting God, through Wisdom, is here described as a deeply emotional and sensory process – the meeting is sweet, beautiful and happy, unmixed with grief. The example confirms once again that Old Norse writers and scribes had the language to describe religious awakening as emotional, sensory, and intellectual.

Even though the concept of love and related vocabulary has been investigated in various religious texts, further study of the degree of emotionality and the type of emotions related to meeting God in such Old Norse texts may be rewarding. It would also be relevant to pay attention to the cognitive and intellectual aspects of such a religious and emotional process. At this stage, however, the examples given above suffice to show

that Old Norse translators and scribes during the second half of the thirteenth century and beginning of the fourteenth century seem to have had the vocabulary to represent the meeting with God in emotional terms.

Translations from Old French

The situation is somewhat different if we turn to other genres, such as the translations of Old French romances and *chansons de geste*. The contention is that translations of Old French literature was initiated by king Hákon Hákonarsson in Norway in the thirteenth century, but most of the translations, except for *Strengleikar* and *Elíss saga ok Rosamundu*,²⁴ are preserved only in later Icelandic manuscripts.

The story about Parceval, being a story about personal and spiritual growth, provides a suitable example for this study. *Parcevals saga* is the translation of Chrétien de Troyes' romance *Perceval, Le Conte de Graal*. The saga was possibly translated in the cultural context of the Norwegian court, but its main manuscript is Holm Perg 6 4o from the beginning of the fifteenth century from Northern Iceland. *Parcevals saga* includes one of the most detailed descriptions of meeting God in the Arthurian romances.²⁵ The French version of the story tells that for a period of five years Parceval does not go to Church, he does not adore God, and he even seems to have lost his memory of God.²⁶ In this mental state, he rides on a journey and meets a group of Christians. When Parceval hears that the Christians have been to a hermit to confess and to ask for forgiveness for their sins, he becomes emotional, starts to weep and wants to go to speak with the holy man himself.²⁷ When he gets directions to the hermit's whereabouts, the narrator tells us "Parceval set out on the path, sighing deep within his heart because he felt he had sinned against God and was very sorry for it" (Chrétien de Troyes 2004:459). He continues towards the hermit, weeping. Parceval is also "very much afraid that he had sinned against Almighty God" (Chrétien de Troyes 2004:459). He then confesses that he has not loved God or believed in him during

²⁴ They are preserved in the Norwegian manuscript De la Gardie 4–7 4to, from c. 1270.

²⁵ On the topic of ethics of chivalric conduct in the Old Norse *Parceval saga* and other Old Norse texts, such as *Hugsvinismál* and *Konungs skuggsjá*, see Barnes 1984.

²⁶ Chrétien de Troyes 2004:457.

²⁷ Chrétien de Troyes 2004:458.

the past five years. The hermit imposes a penance on him: to feel remorse for his soul, to have true repentance in his heart, to do penance in church, to go to church and listen to Mass, to do all of this with a true heart, which will help him improve himself and win honor and salvation. The hermit's invites him to "Believe in God, love God, worship God", thus referring directly to the Credo. Perceval states that he is willing to do the penance, "so he remained and heard the service and his heart was filled with joy; after the service he worshipped the Cross and wept for his sins" (Chrétien de Troyes 2004:460). In this episode, Perceval's acknowledgment of his own sins and his meeting with God is described very much in emotional terms.

In the Old Norse version of the story, when Parceval meets the Christians and hears their story, it is said: *Sem Parceval var slíkt skiljandi, þá komz hann við mjök í hjarta sínu ok kom honum í hug hversu ferliga hann hafði lifat* "When Parceval understood this, his heart was touched very much, and it came into his mind how abominably he had lived" (Wolf 1999:180–81). When he is on his way to the hermit, no emotional reaction is mentioned, it is just said that he rides for a long time before he comes to the man's dwelling. It is only when he meets the hermit that Parceval starts crying: *þá bad Parceval sér miskunnar með knéföllum ok tárur ok fullkominni iðran* "Then, on his knees, and in tears, and with utter repentance, Parceval prayed for his own forgiveness" (Wolf 1999:180–81). Falling on the knees and weeping is an emotionally charged action and a topos in the Latin tradition, here transmitted via the French. In the verbalization of the moment in the Old Norse, there is however no explicit mention of the fear for God as in the Old French version. The core of Parceval's confession is concerned with the fact that he has not prayed for five years and that he has not believed in God during that time, just as in the Old French version. The actions connected to the faith are thus translated faithfully. As in the Old French version, Parceval gets penance from the hermit: *En þú, frændi, gæt nú héðan af sálu þinnar ok gakk jafnan til kirkju fyrr en í nokkurn stað annan ok hlýð messu með lítillæti til guðs* "But you, kinsman, take care of your soul from now on and always go to church before you go any other place, and hear Mass with humility towards God" (Wolf 1999:180–81). The penance does not refer to the Credo as clearly as its French source text, it praises humility, but promotes otherwise specific deeds, and not emotions, as a means towards the salvation of Parceval's soul. In conclusion, the story tells us that Parceval learns a good prayer by heart and lives as a good Christian man. The passage once again omits the emotional aspects of the process,

such as joy, worshipping, and weeping, which figure in the Old French source. All in all, the process of Parceval's recognition of and meeting with God in the Old Norse version is much more a rational-cognitive one rather than an emotional one. Certain behavior patterns, provoked by emotions, such as weeping, are mentioned, but the emotions themselves are not, not even the greatest one of them: Love towards God.

This example complies with the well-known narrative about one of the main changes made in the Old Norse romances compared to their Old French sources: namely, the omission and reduction of emotional passages.²⁸ The emotional passages that are most often discussed in scholarship are concerned with human psychology and emotions between people. This example is therefore interesting as it confirms the main tendency also in episodes when emotionality is related to meeting God. The contention in scholarship is that the main reason for such changes was stylistic and semantic adaptation of the translations to the aesthetic, rhetoric, and cultural expectations of the new target audience. Since the emotional language was present in Old Norse primary and secondary translations of Latin texts, the changes made in the Parceval story may suggest that this text, or genre, had a different intended function or a different intended audience compared to the translations from Latin.

In the case of *Parcevals saga*, there may be another explanation as well. Even though the text was possibly translated in the thirteenth century in Norway, the main manuscript of the saga is the Icelandic manuscript Holm Perg 6 4to, from the beginning of the fifteenth century from Northern Iceland.²⁹ At this stage, many of the translations were assimilated in the Old Norse literary system and the fact that they were translations was not an equally important aspect of the texts. They were often transmitted in manuscripts containing indigenous texts, without distinctions between translations and original texts, and they were adapted, stylistically and rhetorically to the indigenous literary context.³⁰ The language of emotional religiosity may thus have been present in the original version of the translation, but may have been reduced in the course of transmission of the text from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century.³¹

This hypothesis could be confirmed through studying Old Norse

²⁸ Cook 2012; Larrington 2015.

²⁹ Slay 1972.

³⁰ Eriksen 2013. On the combination between romances and hagiographic texts in manuscripts, see Sverrir Tómasson 2008.

³¹ See Seidel 2014 for a study of the variation between manuscript versions *Parceval saga*, albeit it is not focused on religious aspects or emotionality.

translations from Old French that exist in thirteenth-century manuscripts, such as *Strengleikar*³² or *Elíss saga*.

In *Elíss saga*, Rosamunda's baptism is a condition for her marriage to Elíss. The baptism is mentioned on several occasions and accounted for as a social and religious necessity. The first time it is mentioned that she needs to accept the Christian faith before she can marry Elíss, is at the end of the Norwegian version of the saga, when Elíss and Rosamunda are besieged in a tower and they are discussing their future and how they would come out of the unfortunate situation. Elíss suggests that he could win over the Saracens' castle with the help of his father's army, and that then she would be baptized, implicitly, as a premise for their marriage.³³ The baptism is not mentioned in the Old French version, and it may be that the Norse translator/scribe has added the information as an explanation at the end of the short version of the saga.

The baptism episode itself is not accounted for in the Norwegian short version, and it is mentioned only shortly in the Icelandic versions: *enn annann dag var henni veitt skirn oc allt gudlikt embæti oc qlvm hennar meyvum oc fylgdarmonnum* "on the second days, she was baptized and given all holly sacraments, as were all her maidens and her retinue" (Köbling 1881:135), after which she is married to Elíss. The Old French version is slightly different, as it explicitly mentions that Elye is present at Rosamunde's baptism, which later makes it impossible for him to marry her, because of spiritual kinship. This leads to Rosamunde marrying Elye's companion, Galopin.³⁴

Even though the baptism in itself is accounted for in a very matter-of-fact fashion, Rosamunda's inner emotional and spiritual process prior to the baptism is more relevant to look at in this context. It is verbalized through different rhetoric, at least in the version of the saga from the thirteenth century, in the manuscript DG 4–7 fol, c. 1270. In the episode

³² An investigation of the short stories in *Strengleikar* reveals that the emotions of joy and happiness are linked to worldly affairs and pleasures, rather than religious experiences. The universe in the short stories is Christian and even when the stories retell about the baptism of various characters, as for example in the case of the baptism of Jonet, this is not accounted for in emotional terms, but more in practical terms, as a means that facilitates a relationship. The Old Norse version says *ok toc riddarenn við þionastonni. ... fruin la þa i hia unnasta sinum ok biuggu þau með miclum fagnade* "The knight received the eucharist ... the lady then lay with her sweetheart and they stayed there in great delight" (Cook and Tveitane 1979:234–25). The Old French version says, "The knight received it [the *corpus domini*] and drank the wine from the chalice. The lady lay next to his beloved: I never saw so fair a couple" (Burgess and Busby 1986:88).

³³ The same information is given in the other versions as well, but the story does not end in them. See Köbling 1881:116.

³⁴ Hartmann and Malicote 2011:171.

where Rosamunda first sees Elíss from her tower, where she consequently heals his wounds and saves his life, her religious affiliation and faith is described as an emotional and sensory experience. Note however that she believes in Maghun, and not the Christian God:

En Rosamundam var snemma upp risin oc hæyrði hon þa siðan sma fogla syngia með faugrom saung, er fagnaðe deginum oc kom henni þegar i hug astar ilmr oc mællti sua: ó minn halæiti herra Maghun! kuað hon, þu ert sua kroftugr oc mattugr, at þu dregr or viðinum lauf oc blom oc alldin: frelsa mer Frankis mann minn or haundum vandra haufðingia oc hæiðingia, at þeir drepi hann æigi ne mæiði! (Köbbling 1881:72)

And Rosamunda was up early and then she listened to the small birds singing beautiful songs, rejoiced the day and the sweetness of love came upon her mind and she said: Oh my highness, lord Maghun, she said, you are so powerful and almighty, that you make leaves and flowers and fruit grow out of the trees. Keep my Frankish man out of the hands of the heathen chieftains and heathens, so that they do not kill him nor hurt him. (my translation)

This passage reminds strongly of a Christian prayer. Further, the rejoice with the song of the birds, the beauty of the day, and the wonders of nature, the highness, powerfulness and almightiness of the god, she is praying to, and the sweetness of his love – these are all rhetorical formulas that were commonly used in connection to the Christian God, that we also witnessed in *The King's Mirror* and the *Dialogue between the Body and Soul*. Further, even though Rosamunda is praying to Maghun, she calls Elís' enemies 'heathens', which again creates a distance between her and them, even though they have the same faith, and makes her appear as a Christian, even though she is praying to Maghun. The passage may be interpreted as suggesting a wakening awareness in Rosamunda of the true God and the Christian faith. In any case, her religiosity is accounted for as an emotional and sensory experience and a state of mind, at least in the Norwegian version from 1270's.

Interestingly enough, and relevant for the observations on reduction of emotionality in younger Icelandic versions of texts, as discussed above in connection to *Parcevals saga*, the emotionality of this passage is indeed reduced in the versions preserved in Icelandic manuscripts, such as Holm Perg 6 4to (the same manuscript as *Parcevals saga*) and Holm Perg 7 fol from the fifteenth century. The passage about the rejoice of the day, the sweetness of love, the powerfulness and almightiness of the god, and the flowers that the god makes grow are cut out.³⁵ The verbal account of

³⁵ Köbbling 1881:72.

Rosamunda's religious moment and address to her god is less rhetorically embellished compared to the thirteenth century Norwegian version and may thus strengthen the hypothesis that the reduction of emotionality may have been done by later scribes, rather than the thirteenth-century translator himself.

Comparison with the Old French version indicates that the translator did change the episode in his own way. The mismatch between the rhetoric in the passage reminding of Christian prayer and Rosamunda's faith in Maghun is also present in the Old French version of the *chanson*, but the mismatch is of a different character. In the Old French version, Rosamunda actually prays to the Christian God, even though up to that moment in the story she is portrayed as heathen.

Rosamunde s'estut sus el palais autor,/ Et vint a la fenestre, por oïr la
douchour,/Des oissellons menus, qui chantoient al jor:/ L'euriel et la
merle ot chanter, sor l'aubor, Le cridel rousingol, se li sovientd'amor./
"Vrais Dieus," dist la pucele, "con tu es presious!/ Tu fais croistre les ar-
bres, porter foilles et flors,/ Et le blé nous fais sourdrede la terre en
amour!/ Et en la Sainte Viergene, presis anonsion,/ Biaus Sire, et sanc et
char i presistens por nous!/ Aussi con chou est voirs, Biaus sire glorïous,/
Desfendés le Franchois de mort et de prison!/ Por la soie amistiet, renoie-
rai Mahon,/ Et guerpirai ma loi, que je voi que n'est prous!" (Hartmann
and Malicote: 2011:88, ll. 1365–1378)

Rosamunde was sitting up there in the palace,/ and she came to the win-
dow to hear the sweet sounds/ Of the Little birds who were singing at
break of dawn:/ The oriole, the merlin, she heard singing up in the arbor./
The song of the nightingale reminded her of love./ "True God," said the
maid, "how wonderful You are!"/ You make the trees grow and bear
leaves and flowers,/ And Your love for us causes wheat to sprout from the
earth,/ And in the Holy Virgin You took shape and form./ Dear Lord,
You took on flesh and blood for us. Just as this is true, dear glorious
Lord,/ Preserve the Frenchman from death and from prison. For love of
him, I'll renounce Mahomet,/ And I'll leave my religion, which I know is
worthless. (Hartmann and Malicote: 2011:89, ll. 1365–1378)

This passage accounts of Rosamunde's first spiritual meeting with God. It is the truthfulness and wonder of the Christian God that appeal to her, as well as His sweetness and almightiness over nature and humankind. Her meeting with God is sensory and intellectual, as she refers to the Christian history of the Holy Virgin. The moment is described as intimate and private, which emphasizes that meeting God was an inner spiritual process. The fact that this subtlety was not translated in the Norwegian version of the story, may suggest that it would not have been

understood by the Norse audience, for whom conversion was maybe more of a social and political concern, than an inner spiritual concern. Or maybe, the fact that a Saracen princess prays to the Christian God just did not make sense to the translator, and he ‘corrected’ the story. Nonetheless, we see that the thirteenth-century translator/scribe kept the emotional language when he verbalized this religious spiritual moment, while this was lost in the version rendered by the Icelandic scribe from the fifteenth century.

Bishops’ Sagas

As suggested, the emotional passages in romances and *chansons de geste* may have been shortened in order to adapt the text to a local norm of aesthetic and representation. To check the validity of this hypothesis, we need to turn to the body of indigenous literature and study the representation of the same motif there. Many texts and genres may be surveyed here, but devotional literature of various types, such as Bishops’ sagas and Saints’ Lives, is possibly a suitable starting point.

Bishops’ sagas are narratologically and stylistically indebted to both European and Icelandic literary tradition.³⁶ Based on content, Bishops’ sagas have been regarded as a separate indigenous genre, in the same way as sagas about kings or saints. In manuscripts, however, the distinctions are, as usual, not that clear and Bishops’ sagas appear sometimes with Kings’ sagas and Saints’ Lives, both local (St Óláfr) and European (St Peter, St Cecilia); sometimes with historical material such as *Sturlunga saga*, and sometimes with romances. Because of the subject matter, the example given here is regarded as one from the indigenous Icelandic literature.³⁷

One example may be given from the Icelandic saga about bishop Árni of Skálholt, *Árna saga biskups* from c. 1300.³⁸ The saga retells of events after the end of the Icelandic Commonwealth 1262/64 until 1290. This

³⁶ For an exemplification of how this is done in the sagas about the two saint bishops Þorlákr Þórhallsson (1133–1193), bishop of Skálholt, and Jón Ögmundsson of Hólar (1052–1121), see Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2006.

³⁷ Whaley 1994; Roughton 2002; Cormack 2007.

³⁸ The oldest fragments of the saga are AM 220 VI fol. from the middle of the fourteenth century and AM 122 b fol., or Reykjavíjarbók, from c. 1375–1399 (Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1998:v). For a full list of manuscript see ONP 1989:20.

was a period characterized by the establishment of new laws and administration forms in Iceland, as well as a tension between the Icelandic episcopacy and the secular elite over the major church farms (*staðir*). The saga offers insight in Church administration and the intense political game in Iceland during that period. Because of its extensive inclusion of facts and information from documents and annals, it has only rarely been approached for its narrative and literary merits.³⁹

We may nonetheless look at the manner in which the character of bishop Árne is described and built up. Árne is the youngest of three sons, who is good at many different activities (*íþrottir*), such as *hagleik ok áskurð ok allt trésmíð, rit ok bóknám ok allar klerkligar listir; var hann af þessu öllu saman fáskiptinn við almenning* (Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1998:5) ‘skills in handcraft, carving and all carpenting, writing and book-learning and all scholarly arts; and among all he was generally quiet in public’ (my translation). After this brief description, the saga tells of an episode about how, when playing one of the common games, Árne manages to break his knee. This leads to him renouncing similar games, dances, and other social activities, characterized as *óskeynsamligri skemmtan* (foolish pleasures). His childhood and school years are thus described as pious, studious, quiet and serious. He is ordained priest in 1263. Some of his actions during the first part of his life predestine his future career and standing as an individual in an office, whose utmost concern is to defend divine laws (also Canon law) on to the socio-political reality.⁴⁰ Árne’s path to God, and his office, is thus described in terms of actions, and not feelings; he leaves the socio-political system as he has lost his position at the *staðir*. This is the main reason for him becoming an ascetic and presenting himself to Abbot Brandr at the monastery Þykkvabær, and not because of inner spiritual development.⁴¹

The second part of the saga, which is marked by the death of king Magnús, includes less annalistic references, and more biblical comparisons and parallels. These serve to emphasize how bishop Árne stands often alone against the enemies of God’s order. The saga promotes thus power of the episcopal office, in connection to Niðarós, Rome and ultimately heavenly Jerusalem, and in juxtaposition to the mighty secular figures in post-commonwealth Iceland.

Another example may be given from *Lárentíus saga*, the saga about the Icelandic bishop Lárentíus Kálfsson, bishop of Hólar 1324–31. It was

³⁹ See Antonsson 2017; Cole 2015.

⁴⁰ Antonsson 2017:268.

⁴¹ Cole 2015:38; Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1998:6–7.

presumably written in the third quarter of the thirteenth century and covers the period 1267–1331.⁴² The saga relates of the birth of Laurentius and his early years. He is born on St. Laurence's day, but when born, no one sees any sign of life in him. Sir Þórarinn calls the baby after the saint and promises that he will keep a water-fast before St. Laurence's day. The baby comes to life then and is baptized. The next event from his life that we hear about is from when he is ten. Lárentíus and other boys have a fight at the church at Vellir and Lárentíus throws something that hits an image of Our Lady and breaks off a leaf of the scepter she is holding. Lárentíus is threatened with punishment, so he *kastar sér niðr á gólfít fyrir líkneski várrar frú með tárur ok biðr sér hjálpar ok fyrirlátningar af henni ok einkanliga at hugr frænda hans mýktiz nokkot til hans* (Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1998:226) "he throws himself on the floor in front of the image of Our Lady, in tears, and prays for her help and forgiveness and especially that the heart of his kinsman may be softened towards him" (my translation). He is consequently saved and not punished, as it turns out that the Virgin Mary has come to the dream of his kinsman and asked him not to punish him.

When Lárentíus grows up, we are told how he in various contexts is put to book-learning and that he is exceptionally good at that. He would often stay and read, study and teach while others would be out feasting and drinking. At twenty-two he is ordained priest and it is said: *Svá gjörðiz hann þá framr í klerkdómi at dikta ok versa at hann gjörði svá skjótt vers sem maðr talaði skjótast latínu* (Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1998:229) "He was so excellent in his scholarship and composition of prose and verse, that he composed verses as fast as other men could talk Latin". This ability will turn important for him in his future career.

And so does the story about Lárentíus' life, endeavors, conflicts and career continue. For us, it is relevant to note that none of these episodes are described in especially emotional terms – the childbirth and Lárentíus' baptism are just accounted for. As a child, he prays to St. Mary in tears, but the tears are not due to his regret about being mischievous, but rather to his fear of his coming punishment. His early career in the Church is due to his eagerness, intelligence and capacity in school, and no inner processes are mentioned.

This sober intellectual approach to dedicating one's life to the Church is contextualized in a specific socio-political frame: a characteristic of the

⁴² There are two versions of the saga, preserved in two main manuscripts written at Hólar: AM 406 a I 4to, ca. 1530 and AM 180b fol., ca. 1500. For more information on young manuscripts and the contexts of the manuscripts, see Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1998: lviii.

saga is that the life of Lárentíus, from his first year onwards, is closely related to historical events in Norway, Iceland, and medieval Europe. For example:

Þat gjörðiz þá til tíðenda í öðrum löndum á þeim misserum sem Laurentius var fæddr, at þá andaðiz Hákon erkibyskup í Niðarósi ok junkæri Óláfr. Karl konungr at Púlu var krossaðr til Jórsala ok Hloðver Frakkakonungr, bróðir hans. Þá birtiz Marie Magdalena ok lögð í skrín á Sanctum Maximinum. (Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1998:222)

This is what happened in other countries, during that year when Laurentius was born: Hákon, archbishop of Niðaróss, and prince Óláfr died. King Karl (Charles) of Apulia went on a crusade to Jerusalem, and Ludvig/Lewis, his brother, king of the Franks. Then appeared Maria Magdalena and was set in a shrine of Saint Maximin. (my translation)

This is 1267. The saga continues: *Á öðru ári Laurentii* ... “In the second year of Lárentíus’ life ...”, *Á þriðja ári Laurentii*... “in the third year of Lárentíus’ life”, and so on until his tenth year, which is 1276. During that year, Pope Gregory, and Pope Innocent, and Pope Adrian (who was the chief of the cardinals, but not a priest) died; John XXI was Pope. In Tønsberg, King Magnús gave the title of Earl to Magnús, son of Magnús, Earl of Orkney.⁴³ The way the early childhood of Lárentíus is described and the way the saga is structured do not place any weight on emotionality in religious processes.

Even though the stories about the two bishops are different, both are contextualized in the framework of historical and political events in Iceland and Europe and thus anchored in the wider context of Christendom. These are however not individual ecclesiastical biographies, but biographies of the episcopal office. We hear of the individuals’ piety and learning, as well as their actions, as these are the individual characteristics relevant for their episcopal authority, while their inner emotional processes are not considered relevant in this context.

Icelandic Family Sagas

It is probably not surprising that the religious experiences and biographies of these two bishops are accounted for in socio-political terms – after all the bishops were some of the most important political actors at that time. We may therefore want to turn to the religious experiences of

⁴³ Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1998:225.

more “ordinary” people in order to see how their spirituality and religiosity is described. Some of the Icelandic family sagas include relevant examples, and here we will look at two sagas: *Laxdæla saga* and *Njáls saga*.

Laxdæla saga was written in the middle of the thirteenth century⁴⁴ and it is traditionally regarded as one of the family sagas that is written under the influence of European literary and cultural ideals, as represented in chivalric and ecclesiastical texts, as well as Eddaic poetry.⁴⁵ It was one of the most popular sagas, judging by the number of manuscripts preserved, and it seems to have influenced the writing of other family sagas.

Andrew Hamer has showed how Christian theology and metaphors infuse *Laxdæla saga* on various levels of its composition, and I will mention just a few of his main points. He shows, for example, how the many drowning episodes have a structuring function in the sagas. Drownings often occur to non-Christians or Christians defying the Christian values and are juxtaposed to the surviving of shipwrecks. The latter is seen as alluding to the acceptance of the Christian faith, baptism in holy water, the purpose of Noah’s ark and Noah’s salvation. In medieval theology, the Church was seen as the Ark sailing on a pilgrimage, and faith was the main force that saved each individual from shipwreck. If one was taken by the worldly tempest, i.e. tempted by worldly pleasures and vices, penance was the second force that could save one from drowning. Þorkell Eyjólsson, Guðrún’s fourth husband, drowns, as he does not regret his own arrogance and is doomed to stay outside the Church, while Guðrún manages to get reconciled with the Church, through her penitence, grief and humbleness at old age.

Further, the saga author seems to have been aware of the liturgical calendar as he lets important events happen on special days, which allows for an additional layer of meaning of these events. It is not just any sermon, but a Christmas sermon (see below) which makes Kjartan change his attitude to Christianity and he decides to convert. He dies on Thursday after Easter, which is when Jesus Christ ascends to Heaven. Kjartan is not carrying one of the gifts from the Norwegian king, his sword, which causes him to lose his life; but he is carrying with him the other gift, namely his Christian fate. Kjartan’s acceptance of Christ on Christmas day and his death on the Thursday after Easter correspond thus to Christ’s birth and incarnation, and his ascension.

⁴⁴ The saga’s main manuscript is AM 132 fol., or Möðruvallabók, from c.1350 (Einar Ol. Sveinsson 1933). For a full list of manuscripts and fragments, see ONP 1989:323.

⁴⁵ Hamer 2008:21.

Guðrún becomes a penitent nun after the death of her fourth husband Þorkell Eyjólfsson, on Maundy Thursday. He drowns on his way home to Iceland, bringing back lots of timber given to him in Norway by King St. Óláfr for the rebuilding of the church at Helgafell. Þorkell's desire was to build a church even bigger than the king himself built in Niðarós, but much of the timber is lost because of the shipwreck. Maundy Thursday is a special day in the liturgical calendar. This is when Christ invites to the Last Supper, which symbolized his building of the universal Church. The feast commemorates the founding of *the* Church by Christ. When the saga author chooses to stage the drowning of Þorkell on Maundy Thursday, and with it the loss of timber which was to rival the king's main church and archiepiscopal cathedral in Niðarós, the importance of a unified Church and faith is promoted, and Þorkell is punished for his haughtiness and arrogance, or lack of Christian virtues, by dying unrepentant with God and doomed to everlasting wait outside the doors.

These are just a few of the arguments showing to the inherent Christian thought that structures the whole narrative. Keeping in mind the elegance and intricacy of the way the Christian worldview and symbolism are promoted in the saga, let us see more closely at the moments when its characters chose the Christian God. One relevant episode is the baptism of Kjartan and Bolli and their troops by King Ólafr Tryggvason in Niðarós. The two heroes travel to Norway and hear of the new religion that the king tries to convert everyone to. They are initially reluctant and find the king's endeavors so provoking, that Kjartan even boasts with a plan of burning the king in his quarters. He is very clear about his stance: *Engis manns nauðungarmaðr vil ek vera, meðan ek máuþp standa ok vápnnum valda; þykki mér þat ok lítilmannligt, at vera tekinn sem lamb ór stekki eða melrakki ór gildru* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934:119) 'no one is going to force me to do anything against my will, as long as I can stand on my own two feet and wield a weapon. Only a coward waits to be taken like a lamb from the fold or a fox from a trap' (Viðar Hreinsson 1997:60). When the king hears of Kjartan's opinion and plan, he lovingly and generously forgives him his taken-on evilness, because Kjartan is not afraid of admitting that he has indeed planned the burning. The king benevolently explains that he is not interested in forcing Kjartan to convert and that it is important for him that this happens because of free will. The king grants the Icelanders peace and safety, whatever course they chose. The king gathers that Kjartan is reluctant to take on any faith because he puts more trust in his own strength and weapons than in God, or Þor and Óðinn. Then we hear of how the king builds a church in

Niðarós and holds services there, which the Icelanders like to attend because they find them amusing. The service given for Christ's birth is the one that impresses Kjartan especially and after that reflects upon how he has always been impressed by the king's attitude and concludes: *öll ætla ek oss þar við liggja vár málskipti, at vér trúim þann vera sannan guð, sem konungr býður* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934:122) 'It seems to me that our welfare depends upon our believing this God whom the king supports to be the one true God' (Viðar Hreinsson 1997:62). Nothing about inner happiness is mentioned with regard to Kjartan's own decision, but when the king hears that he has changed his mind, he exclaims that indeed *hátiðir eru til heilla beztar* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1934:123) "Festivals are a time of fortune" and that he would baptize him with pleasure (Viðar Hreinsson 1997:62). What follows is a story of great success for Kjartan at the court of the Norwegian king, where he demonstrates his excellence and capabilities in many matters. The baptism we hear of here is thus not a matter of inner reflection and thought, it is not an emotional matter either, neither happy, nor sad emotions. Taking on a religion and believing in God is described as a loss of agency, loss in faith in one's own strength and power. Kjartan's sees his individual independence as the major resource he has, in order to create the life he wants. He accepts the Christian God as he sees that that would influence his welfare positively, which it certainly does in social and political terms. Kjartan is nonetheless a good Christian, and we hear for example how his atonement and general behavior is noble and always in agreement with Christian values. He even is the first man in Iceland to keep his fast – he fasts on dry food alone during Lent before his marriage to Hrefna (chapter 45).

At the end of *Laxdæla saga*, we hear of another commitment to God. After the drowning of her fourth husband Þorkell, Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir wears her grief with dignity, but she is greatly stricken by the event. She is then said to become very religious, she starts attending Church regularly and learns her psalms:

Guðrún gerðisk trúkona mikil. Hon nam fyrst kvenna saltara á Íslandi. Hon var lönqum um nætr at kirkju á bænum sínum (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1984:223) ... [Guðrún] var fyrst nunna á Íslandi ok einsetukona; er þat ok almæli, at Guðrún hafi verit gofgust jafnborinna kvenna hér á landi. (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1984:228)

Guðrún became very religious. She was the first Icelandic woman to learn the Psalter, and spent long periods at the church praying at night. (Viðar Hreinsson 1997:117) ... She was the first woman in Iceland to become a

nun and anchoress. It was also widely said that Guðrún was the most noble among women of her rank in this country. (Viðar Hreinsson 1997:118)

Guðrún's spirituality is not described as emotional; it is rather measured by her behavior and actions: going to church and attending Mass. The saga makes it clear though that she is grieving; we hear how her tears scold the bones of the prophetess buried under the church's floor. The question is thus whether the tears are caused by her turbulent emotional life, or whether that emotionality is provoked by her spirituality and Church-visits. The two may be interrelated, but the only emotion we hear of, with regard to Guðrún, is her grief, up until her death at Helgafell monastery. The union with God does not seem to bring any joy that is worth mentioning explicitly by the saga author. This may be of course due to the soberness of the saga-style, which leaves space for promoting only the practical and intellectual consequences of a spiritual process, in a somewhat similar way as was done in *Parcevals saga* and the other Norse texts.

Njáls saga is another saga that accounts of the Christianization of Iceland. The way the Christianization is conceptualized and represented in the saga is widely discussed by scholars,⁴⁶ but we will here cast a glance at how the event is verbalized in the saga, and whether the new religion is related to individuals' emotional, intellectual or social concerns. This will be done based on the version preserved in the fourteenth century manuscript *Möðruvallabók*.⁴⁷ The Christening of Iceland is accounted for in detail in chapters 100–105 of the saga.⁴⁸ Already in Njáll's first commentary on the new religion, he states: *Svá lízk mér sem inn nýi átrúnaðr muni vera miklu betri, ok sá mun sæll, er þann fær heldr* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1971:255) "It seems to me that this new faith is much better, and that he who accepts it will be happy/fortunate" (Viðar Hreinsson 1997:121). The saga author then tells us that Njáll repeated that often and that he 'often went apart by himself and meditated aloud (*þulði*)' (Viðar Hreinsson 1997:121).

The first Christians who are sent to preach the new faith are met with exclusion from trade. They are then helped by Hall of Síða. There, Þangbrandr celebrates the mass of the archangel Michael and baptizes Hall

⁴⁶ See Lönroth 1976, 2012; Hamer 2008; Sävborg 2011; Miller 2014.

⁴⁷ For a full overview of the manuscripts, see ONP 1989:340–343.

⁴⁸ For a discussion on the differences between the representation of the Christianization of Iceland in *Njáls saga* as opposed to other Old Norse sources, such as *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* or *Kristni saga*, see Hamer 2008:105–107.

and his household. Thereafter, they start their travelling, baptizing one family and farm after the other. Now and then they meet obstacles: Þangbrandr is challenged to a duel by a man called Þorkell from Stafafell; the former turns up with a crucifix to the duel instead of a shield and still manages to win over and kill Þorkell. Another time a sorcerer causes the earth to split open in front of Þangbrandr; his horse falls off and is swallowed by the chasm, but Þangbrandr survives and praises God, and thereafter kills the sorcerer. Many others prepare ambushes and want to kill Þangbrandr and Guðleifr, but the latter are unstoppable in their pursuits and when necessary, kill their opponents. Þangbrandr gets the advice to suggest the acceptance of Christianity at the Althing, even though he has done that once already, without success, as *eigi fellr tré við it fyrsta þoggg* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1971:269) “a tree doesn’t fall at the first blow” (Viðar Hreinsson 1997:126). At the Althing, a dangerous situation and a conflict between the Christians and heathens is about to develop, but it is resolved by Þorgeir the lawspeaker. After thinking seriously for a day by himself, he chooses to first make sure that everyone will abide the law he proclaims. Thereafter Þorgeir states that the Christian law is to be the foundation of Icelandic law that everyone is to believe in one God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – give up all worship of false idols, the exposure of children, and the eating of horse meat.⁴⁹

The way the Christianization of Iceland is described in *Njáls saga* has been discussed by many. Lars Lönnroth and Andrew Joseph Hamer are of the opinion that the episode is central for the saga as a narrative, and that the Christianization conditions the ethics and behavior of the characters in the rest of the saga. Other scholars such as Robert Cook and Daniel Sävborg, argue on the other hand that the main patterns of behaving and relating in the rest of the saga are not immensely influenced by the Christianization. This is a complex discussion which is important for a holistic reading of the saga but remains peripheral to our main concerns here. It is a fact that the Christianization episode is not represented in emotional manner. At best, if we choose to follow the scholars who advocate for the high significance of Christianization, it has to be recognized that the event is described in a way and with terms that have deep theological connotations,⁵⁰ suggesting that the author was highly learned in theology, the Bible and other authoritative texts. However, the event is

⁴⁹ Viðar Hreinsson 1997:128.

⁵⁰ Hall’s baptism on St. Michael’s day and his desire that he becomes his *fylgjuengill* may be seen as a direct reference to the cult of guardian angels associated with St. Michael, see Hamer 2008:110–11.

not represented in emotional terms, except for that one comment by Njáll that the new faith may bring fortune to those who take it and that he practices a sort of meditation. But even these elements reveal that the author is more concerned with representing Njáll as aware of the blessing that comes with accepting the Christian God, and as a man practicing meditation, in the same manner as monks are known to have meditated, muttering words to themselves, to make their addresses to God audible. Nowhere in this description do we hear of inner happiness, or other emotions for that manner, that accompany Njáll's, or others', meeting with the Christian God.

Legendary Sagas

A final example from an indigenous literary genre may be given from the Legendary saga about Örvar-Oddr. The saga is dated to the second half of the thirteenth century, and it is preserved in a couple of fourteenth century Icelandic manuscripts, Holm Perg 7 4to (1300–1325) and AM 344 a 4to (1350–1400).⁵¹ When in Aquitaine, Oddr and his company see a church: they do not know what the “house” is for and *þar fylgja leti, þau er þeir hafa aldri þvilík heyrt*⁵² “[heard] a noise like nothing they’d ever heard before” (Hermann Pálsson and Edwards 1985:72). The “noise” they have heard is the Mass. When they are asked whether they are complete heathens, they answer: *Vér vitum alls ekki til annarrar trúar en vér trúum á mátt vörn ok megin, en ekki trúum vér á Óðin* “We don’t know anything about any religion except that we believe in our own power and strength and we don’t believe in Odin” (Hermann Pálsson and Edwards 1985:72). When told that God has created heaven and earth, the sea, the sun and the moon, Oddr answers *Sá mun mikill, er þetta hefir allt smíðat, þat hyggjumst ek skilja* “He must be very great, If He’s made all that. That much I can understand” (Hermann Pálsson and Edwards 1985:72). At the end, Oddr, Guðmundr and Sigurðr embrace the faith, and Odd adds: *Ek mun taka sið yðvorn, en háttá mér þó at sömu sem áðr. Ek mun hvárki blóta Þór né Óðin né önnur skurðgoð* “I’ll take your faith, but keep my old habits, I won’t offer sacrifice to Thor or Odin or any other idols”

⁵¹ For a full list of manuscripts, see ONP 1989:428.

⁵² The short Old Norse version of *Örvar-Odds saga*, based on the Icelandic manuscript Holm Perg 7 4to (beginning of the fourteenth century) is available online: <http://www.sn-erpa.is/net/forn/orvar.htm> [last checked 05.02.2017].

(Hermann Pálsson and Edwards 1985:72). In addition, he demands to be free to roam among Christians and heathens, just as he has done prior to his change of religion. Meeting God and changing a religion is here not described as an emotional enterprise – this is, to an extent, an intellectual process, but also very much a pragmatic, practical, every-day convenience.

These examples illustrate that in Old Norse indigenous literature, meeting God or accepting Christianity is most commonly not represented as an emotional process, but rather as an everyday pragmatic matter, with rational and cognitive triggers, conditioned mostly by social, political, or economic expectations and norms.

Summary and Implications

Examples from many other texts and genres could have been included to illustrate further the multitude of attitudes and links towards religiosity and emotionality.⁵³ Texts that evade generic classification are of special interest: *Mírmanns saga*, for example, has been designated as a hybrid between an Icelandic family saga and a hagiographical romance,⁵⁴ or the various sagas about St Ólafr, which are both historiographies and allude extensively to the hagiographical tradition.⁵⁵ The present article is there-

⁵³ The emphasis on the social and pragmatic significance of the religious awakening, and not on its emotional aspects, is at stake in yet another group of indigenous literature, namely Marian skaldic verse. Margaret Clunies Ross (2008) studies Marian poetry in skaldic verse and shows that while religious devotion in the Icelandic Marian miracle poems is not described in emotional terms, the poems are concerned with a range of human emotions, but in a different way. Because of the traditional form and style of the skaldic poetry, the Virgin is represented as exploring human emotions that were otherwise tabooed according to contemporary norms for social and sexual relationships. In much medieval European Christian poetry, love for God is superior to love between people, even though the emotions may be described by the same concepts. In the Marian skaldic poetry, it is the Virgin Mary who is given a vast range of human emotions, such as distress, anger, and jealousy, even in sexual terms, while the standard image of her is merciful, graceful, and compassionate. According to Clunies Ross, such a human representation of the Virgin indicates that choices made allegedly because of faith in Old Norse society (for example to live in celibacy), are actually made because of social and secular motivations. Clunies Ross concludes that secular and spiritual love is rendered similar in the poem because of the strong social norms of the contemporary Old Norse audience: love depends on reciprocity and reward, even when one of the sides is more powerful than the other.

⁵⁴ See Sverrir Tómasson 2008.

⁵⁵ See Phelpstead 2007.

fore a teaser, a starting point, rather than an exhaustive and conclusive study. The questions discussed address the gap between scholarship on religious conversion and practices, on the one hand, and emotionality and representation of emotions, on the other, in a variety of Old Norse genres. The examples show that religious awakening was treated and described in different terms in various genres and texts. In Old Norse translations of Latin texts, such as the translation of Hugh of St Victor's *Soliloquium*, among others, the motif is treated in a traditional Christian manner: meeting God is Happiness. The Old Norse translators and scribes choose to represent the motif in an emotionally charged way, keeping the emotional rhetoric. The emotional language is also used in secondary translations that are original compositions, but nonetheless build upon the Christian Latinitas, such as *Konungs skuggsjá*, *The King's Mirror*. In Old Norse translations of Old French texts, however, such as *Parcevals saga* and *Elíss saga*, the translator and subsequent scribes choose to reduce the emotional intensity of the narrative. Even though the same motif may be depicted, for example falling on one's knees and weeping, the verbalization of the motif makes it pragmatic and practical, hinting to rationality and everyday practices rather than emotionality. This pragmatic attitude towards religious awakening exists in various indigenous texts as well, such as *Árna saga biskups* and *Lárentíus saga*, *Laxdæla saga* and *Njáls saga*, and *Örvar-Odds saga*. The degree of emotionality in connection to religious awakening in the translated romances, in their late Icelandic versions, seems thus to have been adapted to a Norse manner of describing religiosity and faith. This may be due to a different intended function of translations and compositions made in Norway or Iceland at the end of the thirteenth/the beginning of the fourteenth century, whose main purpose may have been to introduce new European cultural, intellectual and religious impulses, as opposed to younger versions of the translated romance and indigenous Icelandic literature from the fifteenth century, whose aim was maybe to reflect social habits and norms related to religiousness.

Methodologically, this study was a comparison of the literary renderings of the motif of religious awakening in different literary genres. In a further survey on the topic, it would be interesting to discuss various works based on their text witnesses preserved in various manuscripts. As we have seen, Old Norse society as a whole seems to have allowed for various representations of religious awakening. A comparison of specific manuscript versions, grouped in terms of their respective temporal and social context, would reveal whether smaller social contexts would have

tolerated such variations or whether the various attitudes were related to separate social contexts.

Conclusively: this multiplicity of attitudes towards faith and belief is not exceptional for Old Norse tradition. Medieval mysticism in the Latin tradition can also be divided in at least two categories: in the apophatic tradition, the ultimate stage of human existence is a selfless and unknowing merging with the infinite, while in the affective tradition, the focus falls on the way in which mystical union can be experienced and expressed in emotional, physical and sensory terms.⁵⁶ Even though none of the examples given here describe mystical experience as such, the existence of these two pan-European traditions together may be seen as a useful contextualizing framework for the variations in representations of religious awakening in Old Norse literary tradition. From an epistemological and cultural perspective, this study illustrates that believing had complex connotations in Old Norse culture, and could be understood as an emotional and intellectual process, as a sensory and physical experience, or as a matter of pragmatics and everyday practices, depending on the socio-cultural context.

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⁵⁶ See for example Dyke 2010.

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