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RELIGION IN GEORGE R.R. MARTIN'S *A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE* FRANCHISE

by  
Sydney Allison Craven

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford  
May 9, 2020

Approved By

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## ABSTRACT

SYDNEY ALLISON CRAVEN: This thesis is a study of religion in George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* franchise. Specifically, George R.R. Martin's use of medievalisms, his interpretation of the Middle Ages, when creating the religions in *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

(Under the direction of Dr. Mary Hayes)

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## INTRODUCTION

The *A Song of Ice and Fire* franchise written by George R.R. Martin includes a highly popular HBO television series called *Game of Thrones* and a book series. *A Game of Thrones*, the first novel of the book series, was not Martin's first novel. He began with science fiction and many of them were not popular. Martin's career did not take off until the *A Song of Ice and Fire* franchise. Today, *Game of Thrones* is one of the most watched television series of all time with a fan base that grew each season.

*A Song of Ice and Fire* has been categorized as a medieval fantasy series. Scholars have linked Martin to great fantasy writers such as Tolkien; he has been named the "New Tolkien" and Shiloh Carroll, author of *Medievalism in A Song of Ice and Fire*, has named him the "American Tolkien." While Martin and J.R.R. Tolkien are similar in some ways their writing is quite different. Both authors chose to write a fantasy story and set it within a world that resembles the medieval period to a degree. Shiloh Carroll goes on to explain in her book that Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* focuses heavily on "medieval legend and romance" while Martin's focuses more on "medieval history" (Carroll 3). Tolkien's story remains simple in that it strictly sticks to the good versus evil story trope. Tolkien defends the escapism in his type of medieval fantasy, "Escape is necessary for one's mental health; the real world is so terrible and hard to live in that there is nothing wrong with wanting to ignore it for a time and go somewhere more

pleasant” (Tolkien “On Fairy-Stories” qtd. in Carroll 5). Martin, however, believes *A Song of Ice and Fire* is a “fantasy for people who hate fantasy” (Martin “His Beautiful, Dark, Twisted Fantasy” qtd. in Carroll 4). His writing *Game of Thrones* is meant to represent the world more realistically. Martin describes his work as “unusual in that it is partially inspired by historical fiction, which I don’t think is true for a lot of other fantasies that are coming out” (qtd. in Carroll 5). Unlike Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, *A Song of Ice and Fire* is supposed to be a product of the twentieth and twenty-first century and is meant to represent the real human problems that society faces today just as they did in the medieval period.

Historians traditionally identify the Middle Ages as spanning from roughly the year 500 to 1500. Much of George R. R. Martin’s inspiration for *A Song of Ice and Fire* came from this period, specifically the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries of England and France. While Martin worked to make *A Song of Ice and Fire* as “realistic” as possible, he did not aim to make it an “accurate” portrait of the Middle Ages. The characteristics of the books and the tv shows that evoke the medieval period are called “medievalisms,” “interpretations of this era and its culture, literature, and modes of thinking” (Carroll 8). Medievalisms are meant to only be interpretations. They are inspired by the Middle Ages but are not intended to authentic representations of historical moments, artistic modes, or cultural customs. The TV intro to *Game of Thrones* is a medievalism in itself. The intro focuses on a large map of Westeros depicting all seven of the kingdoms. The camera travels over the map to each region of the kingdoms and shows the castles and major landmarks being built out of the map into 3D models. As the buildings rise out of the map, they are made out of clock gears and pulleys working and spinning together to create

the finished land mark. The intro ends with a spinning wheel and each powerful house competing for the throne is depicted on it using their house sigil. A lion for the Lannisters, a wolf for the Starks, a stag for the Baratheons, and a dragon for the Targaryens. The stylistic choices of this intro suggest a medieval inspired theme, because of the use of the map and the clock gears. Specifically, because clocks were first found in medieval Europe around 1300 CE. While they were already used outside of Europe, they became highly popular in the fourteenth century. Using the clock gears on an old map is a subtle way to orient the audience in a specific medieval period.

There are a few different periods within medieval English history that George R.R. Martin could have pulled from or is hinting at. First, there was the Roman-occupied Britannia, the outer edge of the Roman empire. There was a wall built along the northern border of Britannia called Hadrian's Wall. The wall separated the border of the Roman Empire by the Scots, and is now present-day Scotland. Present day Ireland located nearby was referred to as Hibernia or "land of winter". While the wall may have separated Britannia from present day Scotland and not Hibernia, this is similar to the Wall that separates George R.R. Martin's Westeros from the North, the land of winter in *Game of Thrones*. Medieval geography informs the structure of Westeros, which is made up of seven different kingdoms that have been united together under the Iron Throne. Anglo-Saxon England was ruled by King Alfred the Great. He is known as the first King of England and the kingdom had been known as the "Heptarchy" or seven kingdoms.

A few major episodes in English history get reworked and insinuated into Westeros's political history. Martin also draws from the Hundred Years War between England and France as inspiration. France is only separated from England by the English

Channel; in *Game of Thrones* there is another civilization across the Narrow Sea who will be battling it out for the Iron Throne. Lastly, there is the Wars of the Roses, a battle fought between the House of Lancaster and the House of York. These two powerful families were fighting for the throne of England. The sigil of House Lancaster was a red rose and House York's was a white rose. *Game of Thrones* is about a great civil war between the Seven Kingdoms or the North and the South for the Iron Throne. Specifically, *Game of Thrones* focuses on two families as well, the Starks and the Lannisters. The Stark sigil is a wolf while the Lannister's is a lion. Their sigils are not roses, but the Lannister family's colors are red and gold which would match the Lancaster family, and the Stark family colors are grey and white to resemble the white rose of the York family.

Martin has claimed to have been a fan of a couple of medieval texts that inspired him when writing *Game of Thrones*. These texts include, Machiavelli's *The Prince* and *Beowulf*. Machiavelli's *The Prince* explains how to play the political game of thrones. It is a "how to" for princes, teaching them how to be a powerful ruler. Power as written by Machiavelli is given or taken by Fortuna. A goddess in control of "The Wheel of Fortune." Each person that sits atop the wheel with the most power will one day fall as the wheel spins and be crushed by it. This wheel could be the spinning wheel pictured in the introduction of *Game of Thrones*, depicting the house sigils of the wealthiest families fighting for the throne. Machiavelli is concerned with the politics of the kingdom, and *Beowulf* is concerned with people and bloodlines. *Beowulf* tells the story of two Germanic tribes, Hrothgar and the people of Demark and Beowulf with the people of Geatland. Beowulf travels from Geatland to save the Danes from the monster, Grendel.

The epic poem lists many names of kings, their sons, and other characters in the world of this story. While the poem is not reality, there is one name that scholars have linked to a real historical event. Hygelac, king of the Geats, was a real king killed in a raid in the year 520. Bloodlines in *Game of Thrones* are highly important and become a theme throughout the franchise. It is bloodline that gives a character a legitimate claim to the Iron Throne. After King Robert Baratheon's death in season one, Eddard Stark learns that Robert's son by the queen, Cersei Lannister, is illegitimate and therefore cannot be rightful ruler. From this point forward, the powerful families of Westeros begin the fight to secure the Iron Throne.

While the similarities between George R.R. Martin's *Game of Thrones* and England and France's history seem to fit perfectly, medievalisms are not 100% accurate; they are interpretations. Medievalisms are often what the audience expects to see from the Middle Ages. For example, *A Knight's Tale*, a popular movie from the medieval genre, possesses many of these medievalisms in the opening title sequence. The film opens at a jousting match with knights dressed in armor and holding lances. "We Will Rock You" by Queen is playing over the scene as the camera pans over an audience dressed in what is perceived to be medieval clothing. The women are wearing dresses, the knights are holding lances, and there is a large castle in the background. These are all characteristics of what many people would believe to define the medieval ages, but they have a modern spin on them. With the crowd dancing to Queen and doing the wave and the knights prancing on their horses to rally the crowd, it is more like a modern-day sporting event. In *Game of Thrones*, there are similar medieval themes with knights, castles, kings, queens, and dragons. As previously discussed, Martin's goal when writing

*Game of Thrones* was to make it a realistic medieval world. However, each medievalism is not going to be a mirror reflection on England or France's historic past. Martin does not often come out and say where he gets every idea for the characters of Westeros, although, he has provided clues with the texts above. Most of the time it is as if he is winking at his audience or teasing them with what each characteristic of the show might point to in Europe's past or what other texts he could have been drawing from when creating the franchise.

What about religion in the *Song of Ice and Fire* franchise? Religion was a significant cultural influence in the Middle Ages such that it defines for contemporary audiences. Religion plays an important role in the world of *Game of Thrones* as well. It is evident from season one and the first book, *A Game of Thrones*, that religion exists within Westeros and there are many different religions with devout followers. There are at least twenty different religions mentioned in the books. Some of them are widespread religions with many followers such as the Faith of the Seven, the Old Gods, and the Lord of Light. While others are more localized to specific people groups such as the Drowned God on the Iron Islands, the Many-Faced God of Death with its assassins known as the Faceless Men, and the Great Stallion of the Dothraki people. While religion is an important cultural force in Westeros it does not seem to be the main theme of the franchise at first. The characters are introduced, and many in the first season and the first book of the series state which gods they worship. As the series goes on, the practices for the different religions become slightly more evident, but they are still a small part of the conversation and largely stay in the background. Later, in the television version of the franchise religion becomes more obviously a part of the crisis at hand. It becomes evident

that this series is not only about a battle for the Seven Kingdoms but for life. The final season consists of a battle between the people of Westeros and the Wight Walkers, an army of the undead. The Wight Walkers existed generations ago during the Long Night, a winter that lasted one thousand years. The army is created by the Night King with the goal of killing all of the living people in Westeros. The Lord of Light religion, a more fanatic religion in *Game of Thrones*, takes on a prominent role in this war with the Wight Walkers. Because the Lord of Light is a god of fire and fire is the only thing that kills Wight Walkers, a red priestess named Melisandre joins the force with Jon Snow and Daenerys Targaryen to help in the war against the undead.

While there are many religions that are mentioned throughout *A Song of Ice and Fire* franchise, there are three that stand out. The religion of the Old Gods in the northern part of Westeros, the Faith of the Seven in the southern region, and the devout followers of the Lord of Light who are scattered throughout Westeros and the Free Cities across the Narrow Sea. The Old Gods and the Faith of the Seven are most often mentioned throughout the beginning of the series. Later, the Lord of Light plays a significant role in the battle against the Wight Walkers. These three religions are quite important to the series. With historical aspects of the franchise Martin seemed to have certain sources in mind or ideas that evoke the Middle Ages. It is fair to assume that like the rest of the franchise, Martin had a few analogues or sources in mind from the medieval period when shaping these three religions. There will not necessarily be an exact mirror image of each of the religions or any of them found in the middle ages. Martin, when designing these religions, did not flesh them out and explain every little detail of their doctrines; this

leaves them open for interpretation when comparing them to medieval religions and religious themes.

The first chapter of this thesis will discuss the religion of the Old Gods. It is the first practiced religion in Westeros and a faith that is practiced out in nature. The symbol of these Gods is the weirwood tree. This is a religion mostly practiced by those living in the North. It is an older religion that is centered around nature; those who worship the Old Gods worship them in a natural area that they have sectioned off as a garden or “godswood.” Because of the connection to nature and the animistic qualities of this religion, it is closely related to a Celtic version of Christianity. There is a strong connection between the physical world and the spiritual world. This strong connection makes the godswood a space that can be referred to as a “thin place.” A “thin place” is a space where the barrier between the physical world and the spiritual world becomes thin. It is Martin’s choice to write of places such as the godswood, where the barrier between the natural physical world and the spiritual world becomes thin that suggest a connection to a Celtic Christianity practiced in the Middle Ages.

Unlike the religions of the Old Gods, the Faith of the Seven is located in the built environment and has decidedly anthropomorphic iconography. This religion is the focus of this thesis’s second chapter. The Seven are described as the New Gods and they are described as being seven beings in one God, much like the Trinity within the Christian tradition. The Faith of the Seven resembles an era of medieval Christianity when beautiful Gothic cathedrals are being built to evoke the images of heaven on earth. This religion in *Game of Thrones* is newer and more popular in the southern region of Westeros. It is the prominent religion in King’s Landing, the kingdom from where all

seven kingdoms of Westeros are ruled under one king. It is the religion that is the mostly developed out of human needs, desires, and interpretations.

In this thesis's third and final chapter, I will analyze the religion of the Lord of Light. The Lord of Light is introduced early on in *A Song of Ice and Fire* franchise. Unlike the previous two religions mentioned, Martin fleshes this religion out more as the series goes on. It is the religion of the Lord of Light that takes on the most prominent role in the major plot of the franchise. It is the followers of the Lord of Light who play the biggest part in the battle against the Wight Walkers. Because the followers are often depicted as fanatics living on the fringe and widely rejected as having a legitimate faith throughout Westeros, it can be assumed that they are to represent a religious heretical group from the Medieval Ages. The Cathars, a Christian heretical group, is a likely fit for the Lord of Light religion. They share similarities in their dualistic beliefs in an ultimate good and evil god, their opposition to everything of the world, and the laying on of hands in a ritual to "purify" their followers.

Despite the importance of religion to modern notions of medieval culture, the religions of the *A Song of Ice and Fire* franchise has not been fully explored. Instead, commenters have focused on Martin's adaptations of historical events and political regimes. This thesis is not a complete study of religion in the *A Song of Ice and Fire* franchise. Rather, it discusses Martin's medievalisms, his interpretations of the Middle Ages, using religion as a focal point.

## CHAPTER I

### THE OLD GODS: CELTIC CHRISTIANITY AND THIN PLACES IN THE NORTH

The world of George R. R. Martin's *Game of Thrones* is threaded with unique characteristics of a religion that evoke Celtic Spirituality, a religious worldview that is attuned to the significance of nature to Christianity. The religion of the North, known as the "Old Gods," is the religion that belongs to the Starks. The religious practices observed by the followers of the Old Gods center around nature, specifically a "godswood" where they pray to the Old Gods beneath a weirwood tree. The weirwood tree is a tree with white bark and blood red leaves. There is also a face carved into every weirwood tree; the belief is that the gods are watching them through these faces. The devotional practices of this religion focus so heavily around this godswood and the weirwood tree such that it seems an older, nature centric spiritual path. The strong connection to nature as their chosen place of worship is what makes this religion so similar to that of Celtic religious practices. There is not much that can be known for sure of the Celtic religious practices that took place before the first century in England, because of the Graeco-Roman influence. What can be agreed upon is that there is a connection between the natural and spiritual world.

The definition of Celtic Spirituality is difficult to pin down. It is a broad term and refers to the groups of people inhabiting western Europe. There is debate over what kind of religion existed before Christianity in the region. But a strong connection with the natural world is a defining characteristic of Celtic spirituality. When describing their gospel illustrations influenced by this religious mode, Oliver Davies contends, “The intricate, interweaving designs and natural motifs convey the impression of a religion that is in close dialogue with nature rather than withdrawn from it [...]” (Davies 3).

George R. R. Martin includes religious themes throughout the *A Song of Ice and Fire* franchise; it is not the focal point but it plays a significant underlying part in the narrative. The series is essentially a fight for power; each family that is fighting for the throne claims the help from their gods as the reason that they will be the ones to come through at the end. George R. R. Martin never makes it clear what different religions he is specifically pulling from but he surely is alluding to Celtic Spirituality or Celtic Christianity when referring to the Old Gods.

This connection is evident in the thin places seen throughout the franchise. A “thin place” is an area where the barrier between the physical space and the spiritual space is thin. Thin places are spaces where miracles happen or where an individual might go to pray. It is in a sense “holy ground.” “A ‘thin place’ is referring to the thinness of the boundary between this world and the spiritual world” (Beres 394). The idea of a “thin place” can be seen throughout Celtic tales and histories, texts that inspired George R.R. Martin’s portrait of the Old Gods revered by the Northern people of Westeros and the Stark family. The thin places that will be discussed includes the godswood containing the

weirwood trees, the paranormal connection between the Stark children and their direwolves, and the Starks' family crypt.

The Northern inhabitants of Westeros, including the Starks, worship the Old Gods or the nameless gods, in their own thin place, such as the godswood. The Old Gods are the first to be mentioned in the books and in George R. R. Martin's *The World of Ice and Fire: The Untold History of Westeros and the Game of Thrones*. The godswood is typically where worshipers of the Old Gods pray for help and guidance. Specifically, their practice is to pray before a weirwood tree, a tree with a carving of a face that represents the gods watching them. The Old Gods were the gods of the First Men in Westeros. These men learned about the Old Gods through the Children of the Forest, fairy-like beings who formerly inhabited Westeros. Before the Seven Kingdoms were established on Westeros the Children of the Forest worshipped the "nameless gods" who would come to be known as the Old Gods. "The gods the children worshipped were the nameless ones that would one day become the gods of the First Men—the innumerable gods of the streams and forests and stones" (*The World of Ice and Fire* 6). The Children of the Forest were the ones to carve the faces into the weirwood trees.

The significance of praying in nature to connect with divine can be seen in Celtic Christianity stories as well. The natural world becomes the thin place for the believers. Instead of a church, the closest connection to God is found in nature. In the sixth-century life of an Irish saint, "The Life of St. Melangell", princess Melangell is first found by prince Brychwel praying in the woods while he was hunting. "In the thicket he found a girl of beautiful appearance who, given up to divine contemplation, was praying with the greatest devotion, with the said hare lying boldly and fearlessly under the hem or fold of

her garments, its face toward the dogs” (Davies 221). She had escaped to nature and lived in the woods for fifteen years praying and devoting her life to God in order to escape an arranged marriage. She was called by her God into nature and devoted herself to Christianity there, and she has a deep connection with nature there as the rabbit is seen hiding under her skirt unafraid. St. Melangell devoted herself to God within nature and there was a spiritual aspect about where she prayed, because she was able to dwell there among the animals. That same spot is later devoted to her and becomes an abbey where other girls can live the contemplative life in a monastic house. In this miraculous thin place, she found a connection to the divine within nature. St. Melangell’s natural sanctuary is not unlike the godswood, a thin place where worshippers go to dwell with their gods.

In Martin’s franchise, the children of the forest are the first individuals known to exist in Westeros before the First Men came and created the Seven Kingdoms. It is said that the children lived in the forest among the trees and possessed magical abilities related to nature. These people are the ones who carved the faces into weirwood trees. The faces are meant to represent the gods watching over their worshippers. These weirwood trees can be found in the godswood of the northern families. There are some places in Westeros where the weirwood trees no longer grow. The trees were all destroyed in the south and cannot be found there at all. Catelyn Stark, wife to Eddard Stark the Lord of Winterfell, grew up further south in Westeros where the families did not worship the Old Gods. She remembers that even though her family did not serve the Old Gods they tried to create a godswood, and she could view it from her sister Lysa’s room. “Lysa’s apartments opened over a small garden, a circle of dirt and grass planted

with blue flowers and ringed on all sides by tall white towers. The builders had intended it as a godswood, but the Eyrie rested on the hard stone of the mountain, and no matter how much soil was hauled up from the Vale, they could not get a weirwood to take root here” (*A Game of Thrones* 434). The weirwoods can only be found in the Northern part of Westeros and beyond the wall in the far North. Where they do not grow it is said that the Old Gods do not have power. This is what Osha tells Bran Stark when his older brother Robert is moving south to continue fighting his war. “Your lord brother will get no help from them, not where he’s going. The Old Gods have no power in the south. The weirwoods there were all cut down, thousands of years ago. How can they watch your brother when they have no eyes?” (*A Game of Thrones* 577-8). The weirwood trees are a thin place for the Old Gods. The trees mediate worshippers’ connection with them.

Why do the weirwood trees grow exclusively in the northern part of Westeros? Throughout the franchise, “the North” is described as wilder. The idea that the Old Gods are found within nature where the weirwood trees grow wild conveys that the Old Gods are associated with wilder and more natural ideals. They are not manmade and therefore their followers feel more connected to them when they separate themselves from their everyday life and seek quiet in the godswood.

The connection that worshippers experience through nature evokes a central conceit of Celtic spirituality: that the natural world—in particular ‘thin places’—are conduits for the divine. Jane Webster in “Sanctuaries and Sacred Places,” describes Celtic sacred spaces that may have existed. Webster quotes Miranda Aldhouse-Green, “Natural loci such as woods, groves, and trees are often advanced as Celtic cult loci par

excellence” (Green qtd. in Webster 448). Most sacred places associated with Celtic Christianity are popular because of their connection to nature.

For example, there is a monastery on a tiny island called Iona in the Scottish Hebrides where many pilgrims travel to each year because of its isolation within nature. Iona was a medieval monastery started by St. Columba, and it became “the center of early Christian influence in the British Isles” (Beres 397). Today there are about one hundred and five permanent residents living on the island with about one hundred and fifty thousand tourists visiting each year.

Many people take a pilgrimage to this place each year in order to become more connected to God. Laura Beres explores what makes Iona so special and what draws in the pilgrims in her article, “A Thin Place: Narratives of Space and Place, Celtic Spirituality and Meaning”. Beres writes,

Iona felt like home. It felt as though the saints and angels were walking with me... I felt completely safe. And here, back in Glasgow with the Orange parade going on, it feels as though there is a thickness... a buffer of distraction and human failing, with layers and layers of stuff and junk; a feeling of thickness rather than thinness. (400)

At Iona, the monastery acts as a thin place between the spiritual world and the physical world just as the weirwood tree in the godswood acts as a thin place for the Old Gods. Being in nature disconnects the pilgrims from “distractions and human failings.”

*In the world of Game of Thrones*, the Starks too are seen going to the godswood when they need help making decisions or need to escape the world they are in. For

example, when Sansa Stark is being held captive in the south in King's Landing, she still visits the godswood despite there not being a weirwood tree.

By the time she reached the godswood, the noises had faded to a faint rattle of steel and a distant shouting. Sansa pulled her cloak tighter. The air was rich with the smells of earth and leaf. [...] There was something wild about a godswood; even here, in the heart of the castle at the heart of the city, you could feel the Old Gods watching with a thousand unseen eyes.

*(A Clash of Kings 283)*

The idea of being in nature of some sort was more appealing to her than staying within the castle to pray or going to the sept like the Lannisters and other families in the south.

The Starks, being from the North portrayed as the Other in the franchise, are presented as having a supernatural quality about them. As discussed previously, they worship the Old Gods that are connected to the weirwood trees and nature. They still hold to the First Men and their old ways while the majority of Westeros follows the New Gods, known as the Seven. In the beginning of the books and the TV series, Eddard Stark must execute a man who has deserted the Knight's Watch. This is the first time the audience meets the Starks. George R.R. Martin is making it clear from the beginning that the Starks are different from the rest of Westeros. After the execution he explains to his seven-year-old son Bran why Eddard himself had to do the execution instead of the King's headsmen, "Yet our way is the older way. The blood of the First Men still flows in the veins of the Starks, and we hold to the belief that the man who passes the sentence should swing the sword" (*A Game of Thrones* 16). The execution scene takes place outside with no judge and no jury. Only Eddard's men and sons must be present. The

man deserted because he witnesses his friends die by Wight Walkers. He frantically informs Eddard of this, but the Wight Walkers have been gone for thousands of years. Whether there were Wight Walkers or not the man left his post, and to the Starks this is dishonorable and he must die by the sword.

While the Starks do live differently from most of Westeros, the supernatural quality that they possess comes from their connection to the Old Gods. In fact, the Stark children themselves seem to be chosen by the Old Gods and themselves become thin places of a kind. In book one and season one of *Game of Thrones*, Eddard Stark, Rob Stark, and Eddard's bastard Jon Snow find six direwolf puppies in the woods while hunting around their castle, Winterfell. The direwolf is the house sigil of the Starks, and like the weirwood trees they are not usually found in large numbers below the wall. A man hunting with their group says, "There's not been a direwolf sighted south of the Wall in two hundred years" (*A Game of Thrones* 18). The wolves were rare in Westeros. Most of them lived north of the Wall, the large Wall of ice spanning the border of Westeros separating it from the wild northern lands. Jon Snow makes a point to make it clear to Ned Stark that these wolves were sent to the children by the gods. "' You have five true born children,' Jon said. 'Three sons, two daughters. The direwolf is the sigil of your House. Your children were meant to have these pups, my lord.'" (*A Game of Thrones* 19). They also discover that there is another pup that had been separated from the group because it was the runt. This pup becomes Jon Snow's direwolf, complementing Jon's status as a bastard who is unlike the other Stark children.

The Stark children and their wolves have special connections, each wolf represents their owner in some way. For example, Ghost, Jon Snow's wolf, is pure white

with red eyes making him different from the others. Lady is the smaller one that suffers greatly due to other's cruel actions much like her owner Sansa does in her story arc. Nymeria is strong willed and eventually runs free and wild like Arya. And Shaggy Dog is untrained and mischievous like young Rickon. Summer, Bran's direwolf, is the adventurer that he wants to be but cannot because he becomes crippled.

The wolves mirror their owners' personalities. Additionally, there are spiritual connections between the Stark children and their wolves. For example, both Bran Stark and Jon Snow experience dreams of actually embodying their wolves.

“Do trees dream?”

‘Trees? No...’

‘They do,’ Bran said with sudden certainty. ‘They dream tree dreams. I dream of a tree sometimes. A weirwood, like the one in the godswood. It calls to me. The wolf dreams are better. I smell things, and sometimes I can taste the blood.’” (*A Clash of Kings* 74).

Jon Snow dreams of the wolves running together and it is as if he is Ghost. He dreams that he hears Bran calling his name,

“*Jon?* The call came from behind him, softer than a whisper, but strong too. Can a shout be silent? He turned his head, searching for his brother, for a glimpse of a lean grey shape moving beneath the trees, but there was nothing, only ... A weirwood. It seemed to sprout from solid rock, its paleroots twisting up from a myriad of fissures and hairline cracks. The tree was slender compared to other

weirwoods he had seen, no more than a sapling, yet it was growing as he watched, its limbs thickening as they reached for the sky. Wary, he circled the smooth white trunk until he came to the face. Red eyes looked at him Fierce eyes they were, yet glad to see him. The weirwood had his brother's face. Had his brother always had three eyes? *Not always*, came the silent shout. *Not before the crow*" (*A Clash of Kings* 766).

Jon is actually a part of his wolf and he is speaking to his brother through this dream and the weirwood that has the face of his half-brother. Bran also has dreams that he is his wolf, Summer, running through the godswood. In his dreams he can see, smell, taste, and hear everything that Summer can. Just like Jon, Bran is experiencing more than a dream. Bran is actually alive inside of his wolf.

There are events in the story that Bran experiences through being awake as Summer. Within these dreams he is also visited by a crow that pecks him between the eyebrows telling him to open his eyes. This is the "third eye" that Jon refers to in his dream where Bran speaks from the weirwood tree. Osha, Bran's servant from beyond the wall, suggests that the gods are speaking to him. "You should not fight so hard, boy. I see you talking to the heart tree. Might be the gods are trying to talk back" (*A Clash of Kings* 79). When Bran finally opens his "third eye" he can see the past, present, and all future possibilities. The Stark children all experience a "thin place" via their relationships with their wolves. But for Bran specifically, experiencing dreams was the method connected to the Old Gods used to open his "third eye" making him transcend above the rest of his siblings and all of the

people of Westeros, because he contains their history, their present, and every possible future.

This type of human connection with animals evokes Celtic Spirituality as it is represented in Gerald of Wales: *History and Topography of Ireland*. There is a tale in Gerald of Wales called “The wonderful happenings of our own time; and first about a wolf that talked with a priest.” The tale is about a talking wolf that approaches a catholic priest. The priest is frightened at first but learns that the wolf is actually human. In his village because of a curse two people must be exiled every seven years from the village and their physical bodies. They become wolves and must learn to survive the next seven years, and when it is over they may return to the village. He explains to the priest that a woman in wolf form with him is dying and in need of the revelation that this experience brings.

They put off the form of man completely and put on the form of wolf.

When the seven years are up, and if they have survived, two others take their place in the same way, and the first pair return to their former country and nature. My companion in this pilgrimage is not far from here and is seriously ill. Please give her in her last hour the solace of the priesthood in bringing to her the revelation of the divine mercy. (Gerald of Wales 70)

In Gerald of Wales’s text, the act of becoming a wolf was a way for them to experience a spiritual revelation from God. In an analogous way, Bran experiences a spiritual revelation through his dream within his wolf Summer and the three-eyed raven, and Jon sees what is happening to Bran through his dream as Ghost. These characters’ experiences evoke Celtic tales of humans’ relationships with animals as these imply mystical spiritual experiences.

Another extraordinary relationship, that between the living and the dead, transpires in the “thin place” that is the Stark family crypt, which is located beneath their castle, Winterfell. The Starks have a family crypt below their castle where generations and generations of Starks have been buried. Each Stark buried there has a stone statue carved in their likeness with a stone direwolf carved to stand by their side. The Stark men that were lords of the House sit with a great sword laid across their lap in addition to the direwolf by their side.

We find a similar type of thin place, one evocative of Celtic spirituality, in Gerald of Wales. In the chapter called “An island where human corpses exposed in the open do not putrefy,” Gerald describes an island where human corpses are never buried and never decay. The dead bodies are “placed in the open and remain without corruption. Here men see with some wonder and recognize their grandfathers, great-grandfathers, and great-great-grandfathers and a long line of ancestors” (Gerald 61). As can visitors to this island described by Gerald of Wales, the Starks can walk through the crypt and see the faces of their ancestors even if their bodies are physically decaying.

The connection to the dead, especially ancestors, is essential to the history of the Stark family. In the case of the Stark’s crypt, we find that the historical significance of a space is often what contributes to it becoming a thin place. Laura Beres discusses the history of the monastery on Iona in order to show its religious significance. “Pilgrims and tourists visit Iona primarily because of its connection to St. Columba. Iona has been called the ‘cradle of Christianity in Scotland’” (Beres 397). Columba traveled to Iona from Ireland in AD 563 to establish a monastery. It was this monastery that became the center of early Christian influence in the British Isles (397). The monastery was later destroyed by Vikings

and then rebuilt. Four hundred years later another monastery and a nunnery were built by George Macleod in place of Columba's monastery. It is these two buildings that believers make pilgrimages to. Macleod was the first to refer to Iona as a thin place. Beres argues,

In doing so he was drawing upon the manner in which Celts experienced 'the narrowness of the line that divides the world from the next. This intertwining of the natural and the supernatural, the material and spiritual was carried over when they became Christians... This sense of the thinness of the veil which separates this world from the next produced a strong feeling of the closeness and proximity towards the dead... They had an almost physical sense of the great company of heaven which surrounded God, embracing not just saints and friends who had passed on but a whole host of angels and other heavenly powers (Bradley, 2010 p.37).' (Beres 398-399)

This island allows believers to experience the a "thin place" where they can feel closer to their God but also to their ancestors and saints before them. It is the great history of this place that allows visitors to feel the presence of their friends and ancestors.

The Stark House crypt provides a thin place that creates a feeling of closeness to their family history and to the dead. Bran and Rickon Stark both experience the thinness between the spiritual and physical in the crypt after their father dies. Both boys "know" before anyone else in the North that Eddard Stark died in the South. Each boy dreamed that their father was standing in the crypt, and when they went to it, they knew he had died hundreds of miles away from Winterfell. After Eddard Stark has been beheaded at King's Landing, Bran confesses to Maester Luwin that he dreamed his father was in the crypt

speaking to him and he was sad. Rickon, the youngest Stark child, has the same dream and adventures down to the crypt to find his father. While down there searching for Eddard in the crypt, Bran explains to Osha the importance of the space. “‘They were the Kings of Winter,’ Bran whispered. Somehow it felt wrong to talk too loudly in this place” (*A Game of Thrones* 732). It is a sacred space to their family; the crypts tell their history and connect them to their past. It is where Eddard Stark would eventually be buried and it is where he speaks to his children to let them know that something terrible has happened to him.

The thin place found within the crypt allowed for the Stark children to converse with the dead. A thin barrier between the other world and the physical world oftentimes brings those experiencing thin place in contact with the dead. This is seen in Celtic Christian texts that describe the lives of famous saints. For example, in “The Life of Patrick,” St. Patrick speaks to a dead man about the cross that is placed above his tomb. The dead man was a pagan and the cross had been wrongly placed over his tomb by mistake. St. Patrick learned this from the man and placed the cross on the tomb of the young man it was intended for. The dead man speaks to St. Patrick with the intention of righting a wrong and expressing the history of how the cross had been misplaced. The dead man’s communication with Patrick evokes Eddard Stark’s visit to his children in their dreams to let them know of the wrong that had been done.

The religion of the Old Gods is ancient and the way it is rooted in nature makes this evident. It is a religion that is not created by man, but felt within nature. Instead of worshipping in a building that will one day crumble, the followers find the Old Gods in weirwood trees. Because of its power in nature it is a religion that will not easily be changed, and will be felt in the “thin places”. These characteristics evoke Celtic

Christianity as described in Celtic literature and histories. Although they may not match exactly, it is evident that George R. R. Martin drew upon Celtic Spirituality as a source for devising the religion of the Starks and the Old Gods.

## CHAPTER II

### THE FAITH OF THE SEVEN: MAN-MADE RELIGION

The Old Gods and their followers focus on the power of nature, and nature is where the families of the North connect with their gods under the scarlet red weirwood trees. The faith of the Old Gods and of the Seven both serve humans in their spiritual needs; however, the Faith of the Seven is seemingly a human oriented religion. It is practiced within soaring cathedral walls while the Seven themselves depict important human characteristics of individuals functioning within the society of Westeros. Instead of hearing from their gods through nature, the followers of the Seven depict grand references to heaven through great septs, gleaming with gold and marble, and sunlit stained-glass windows. It is a human religion based on human desire. Of course, the most prominent desire throughout *Game of Thrones* is the need for power. In fact, the gods themselves only seem to have as much power as those who are worshipping them. Every noble family begs their gods for a powerful army, good fortune, or the upper hand in order to sit on the Iron Throne and rule the Seven kingdoms of Westeros. In general terms, how does the Faith of the Seven function as the outlet for expressing human need and desire?

The center of this popular religion is the Great Sept of Baelor built by the Targaryen King Baelor during his rule in King's Landing. While the Old Gods of the

North are worshipped under the weirwood tree in natural surroundings, the Seven are often worshiped in great septs that have been built within the walls of most highborn families living in Westeros. The Great Sept sits on Visenya's hill with seven crystal towers noticeably distinct above the city (*A Game of Thrones* 168). Cersei describes it as having a high dome made of gold and crystal and the Seven isles meet in the middle under the great dome (*A Feast for Crows* 143). In addition to the great dome there are large windows made of colored glass. There is also a representation of each of the Seven within the walls of the Sept surrounding the main room under the dome. Beneath the Great Sept is where kings and High Septons are buried. The kings who lie here are the ones who ruled the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros from the Iron Throne.

Given the franchise's basis in the Middle Ages, the Great Sept is meant to evoke an iconic medieval structure: the Gothic Cathedral. Gothic Cathedrals were often built with a certain image because they were meant to represent the image of heaven. In *The Gothic Enterprise: A Guide to Understanding the Medieval Cathedral*, Robert A. Scott writes,

To the medieval theologian, however, the term image had a different meaning, closer to the Greek word mimesis, which signifies "imitation," or a literal copying of a natural form. It implied the actual embodiment of the thing it stood for, an attempt at a literal representation of the thing itself, or...at least as literal a depiction of a spiritual ideal as one could achieve in the material world. (121)

As Scott explains, cathedrals suggested to medieval people that "a literal rendition of heaven was now available to humans here on earth" (121). Cathedrals began to be built in

the twelfth century as it became more common for heaven to be associated with urban places as opposed to more natural spaces.

This divine order is created by following the laws of geometry and taking into account the importance of each material, which was thought to bear the image of God (Scott 122). This is because of the belief that all physical objects have the potential to reveal the divine image of their Creator. The wood, stone, and glass all allow the individuals to experience God and therefore a building attuned to such splendor must bear the image of heaven. The Great Sept is built with stained glass windows and great marble statues. The structure of the Great Sept, besides just the materials it is built from, is also meant to represent the divine nature of the Seven. For example, there are seven towers, seven paths leading to the middle within, and actual representations of the Seven inside through statues.

Along with the geometrical design of the Cathedrals, the light that shines through the perfectly placed stained-glass windows also plays a significant part in evoking the divine. As Scott points out, “Medieval theologians regarded light as the medium par excellence through which physical objects became capable of revealing their divine properties to humans” (122). In a stained-glass window, the placement of each component is important so that the light can aptly magnify its excellence. The exact placement is what helped to bring out the divine beauty of the object, and divine beauty was present in the exact geometry of the Cathedral: “Through studying the mathematical proportionality of physical objects, by grasping the underlying logic of their geometry, [...] the mind could be guided past the world of appearance to achieve contemplation of divine order” (Scott 124). The stained glass that the light would make the most noticeable

within Cathedrals often times depicted images of Jesus' life, death, burial, and resurrection.

In the *Song of Ice and Fire* franchise, the windows within the Sept did not depict images of the Seven, but they did have a seven-pointed star, each representing one of the Seven. The Great Sept exemplifies the medieval idea that the geometry of a cathedral---with its colored glass windows, floors made of marble, ceilings of gold and crystal, and seven walk ways made to line up with each statue of the Seven---is created to evoke the divine nature when light reflects on it.

This concept of the Sept and Gothic Cathedrals directly contrasts the nature of the Old Gods and their godswood. While the believers in the Old Gods use nature itself to worship their creator, those believing in the Seven use materials they have manipulated from nature to create something of great magnitude and beauty. This shows how the Faith of the Seven is a religion more controlled by the human hand and desires than that of the Old Gods. The building of cathedrals was complicated and a difficult undertaking. In *The Gothic Enterprise*, Scott describes how a detailed overall plan was the first step, so that each step following could be pictured perfectly when imagining the pieces fitting together. A site had to be picked and cleared, the appropriate materials had to be bought, and plenty of workmen had to be hired to carry out the labor. Because the streaming in of light was so important to obtain in a cathedral, builders had to manipulate their visions often times while building in order to create a structure that would allow for beautiful displays of light. The intricate work involved in designing and building the cathedrals could often times take a hundred years to complete. The majority of workers were recruited around the area and they often worked from sunrise to sunset. Scott goes on to

emphasize that these cathedrals were built by a society who had an average life expectancy of forty-five, depended on crops to survive, had low literacy rate, and often faced plagues (Scott 42). Cathedral building was a difficult undertaking but one that was highly important in that the people who believed they were created in God's image desired to build cathedrals that would also bear the image of their creator.

The Faith of the Seven is a human centered religion created to serve the people of Westeros. It is a religion that is more prominent in Westeros, especially in the southern parts of the kingdom away from the North and their Old Gods. The Seven are described as being one god with seven different parts. “‘God is one’, Septon Osmynd had taught [Catelyn Stark] when she was a girl, ‘with seven aspects, as the sept is a single building, with seven walls’” (*A Clash of Kings* 495). This concept of one god comprised of several persons is very much like the Christian idea of the Trinity. However, *Game of Thrones* expands this Trinity. There is a Father but there are also female characters. The Mother and the Maid represent the women. Unlike the Christian trinity, the Faith of the Seven includes both male and female showing that both are prominent in their society. Along with women there are other characters who represent important ideals in their lives such as war from the Warrior, respect for the elderly and their advice through the Crone, and work through the Smith. While there is no Holy Spirit, there is the Stranger, a character that is undefined and mysterious much like the Holy Spirit.

The best description of the Seven is provided by Catelyn Stark during her visit to the Sept to pray.

The Father was bearded, as ever. The Mother smiled, loving and protective. The Warrior had his sword sketched in beneath his face, the

Smith his hammer. The Maid was beautiful, the Crone wizened and wise.  
And the seventh face... the Stranger was neither male nor female, yet  
both, ever the outcast, the wanderer from far places, less and more than  
human, unknown and unknowable. Here the face was a black oval, a  
shadow with stars for eyes. (*A Clash of Kings* 495-6).

The Seven in this text are described by Catelyn as human figures who can be found in most individuals in their society. Every one of them is a father or a mother, or each of them has a father and a mother. The warrior and the maiden would be familiar to most, and everyone knows a stranger. They are common representation of the very basic human characters functioning in their world.

The divine is often humanized by believers in order for an individual to create more of a personal connection between them and their gods. The personification of the Seven is a mirror of the personification of the Christian God, in particular, in the form of Jesus Christ. Medieval Christianity often focused on the humanity of Jesus, specifically, on his suffering. Suffering is a common part of most individual's lives and therefore, highly relatable to devout Christians. Medieval western Christians had a special devotion to the human body of Christ. The body is what humans suffer in; it is the source that feels all pain and pleasure of the world. In *Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336*, Caroline Walker Bynum explains,

The idea of person, bequeathed by the Middle Ages to the modern world, was not a concept of soul escaping body or soul using body; it was a concept of self in which physicality was integrally bound to sensation, emotion, reasoning, and identity (11).

Western Christianity in the Middle Ages did not hate the body. They were fascinated by it and often theologians discussed what would happen to the body when resurrected in Christ. A person was not a person without body; it is the “expression” of the human individual. Because Jesus had a body, a body that he was capable of suffering in and feeling what human beings feel made him human and relatable. It is the human duties and the human bodies that the Seven are depicted as having that make their divine personalities relatable to their followers.

This desire to instill holy figures with a human aspect also underpinned medieval veneration of the Saints. Thomas More (1478-1535), a renaissance writer, addressed the veneration of saints within the Catholic faith and the positives and negatives of those actions within the faith. While More has been a renaissance writer, his writings leading up to the English reformation addresses popular medieval religious thoughts and practices. More wrote a dialog between himself and a Protestant sympathizer he calls “the Messenger.” More wrote this in order to combat the rising Protestant beliefs and argue against those beliefs by better explaining the dominant Catholic mindset of that period. On the eve of the English Reformation, More spoke to the general concern that if the saints are worshipped too much they could supplant God himself. Saint veneration was popular because the saints were human. It is their humanity that makes them relatable and therefore worshiped and prayed to for everyday things. It was not uncommon for medieval Christians to venerate certain saints for their specific duties. The Messenger presents a few examples to illustrate the fear he has that saint veneration is turning into sin and idolatry,

St. Sitha [a housemaid] women appoint to find their keys. St. Roch, we appoint to attend to the plague because he had a bubo [on his thigh]. And with him they join St. Sebastian because he was martyred with arrows [symbolic of plague]. Some [e.g., St. Lucy, whose eyes were torn out at her martyrdom] serve for the eyes only (qtd. in Shinnars 220).

More ultimately explains that it is acceptable to carry out devotions to the saints, giving them their own duty and praying to them for that specific reason because it is not “latria” or the Greek word for worship (Shinner 222). He explains that what they are not doing when they venerate the saints is the most important point of all, “This is that they worship God with the intention that he is God, which is the only thing that makes it ‘latria’, not any gesture or physical observance” (Shinner 222). In other words, God is worshipped with the intention that he is God while the saints are not and that is the difference in More’s opinion. Saints themselves were human and they were never meant to be anything more than human. Because these saints were human the belief was that they would understand these troubles; they would be more likely to answer a prayer for lost keys or any ailments of the eyes.

This type of devotion evokes the iconography of the Seven in *Game of Thrones*. Instead of a faceless deity or deities, the Seven take the faces of humans in statue form. The Seven each have their own “duty” assigned to them as who they are. They are given duties such as Mother, Father, and Warrior. There are occasions when the Seven are individually prayed to for different reasons. For example, when Catelyn Stark prays to the Warrior before her son goes to war. It is

a specific duty of the Warrior and the one to pray to for such a request as safety or victory during battle. It is these duties that they are assigned that give them human qualities because each of the Seven evoke a human role that is highly important to them.

It is evident from More's discourse on saints that there are certain duties prayed for from the different saints, but it was also common to expect to visit their graves or touch their relics and experience healing of any kind. "The Miracles of St. Thomas Becket" is a record of miracles that took place at the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket. He was the archbishop of Canterbury and was murdered on December 29, 1170 by knights who, allegedly, were acting on behalf of Henry II (Shinners 165). "The Miracles of St. Thomas Becket" chronicles specific tales of people who visited his grave just to touch it or to pray to him with the hopes of being healed. While the believers of the Seven in *Game of Thrones* do not travel to a specific burial place it is evident in an instance with Catelyn Stark that there are superstitious beliefs regarding performing certain actions in order for the Seven to provide healing or protection. In season three of *Game of Thrones* Catelyn Stark sits to make a "prayer wheel" and she says, "You can't help because a mother makes one for her children to protect them. Only a mother can make them" ("Dark Wings, Dark Words"). In this scene Catelyn is making one with all of her children in mind. She is also seen in season one making a prayer wheel for Bran while he lay unresponsive and paralyzed in his bed. He later wakes up and it is a miracle; it was believed that he would never open his eyes again. The action of making a specific object or praying a specific prayer evokes the medieval practice of praying to certain saints or visiting certain sites hoping for a miracle.

In “The Miracles of St. Thomas Becket,” the first miracle comes to a woman whose disease has made her unable to walk and bed bound. She was carried to the martyr’s grave and then returned to her home with no pain. However, it was recorded that she was not completely healed.

The people saw her walking about and praising the Lord; they were filled with wonder and amazed over what had happened to her. But we refrain from discussing why she remained lame and did not regain complete health, considering it more prudent to keep totally silent about God’s secret judgments than to draw rash conclusions from them. (Shinners 166)

Brandon Stark was also paralyzed but eventually the Seven answered Catelyn’s prayers and Bran woke up again. However, he too is never completely healed and remained unable to walk for the rest of his life. Catelyn Stark believed that making her prayer wheel for Bran and praying to the gods would heal him and it did. Just as the woman in “The Miracles of Saint Thomas Becket” believed that if she could only just touch the grave of the saint she would be healed. Many medieval Christians like the injured woman prayed to and visited the graves of saints because of their human nature. They related to their mortality and prayed to the saints in their suffering because they knew that those saints also suffered once. Those that have faith in the Seven and medieval Christians both believe in appealing to their deities or holy saints because of the human qualities they possess.

Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* is a fictional account of a group of pilgrims traveling to visit the shrine Saint Thomas Becket. The group is made up of people from all walks of life including a knight, a nun, a physician, a shipman, a

pardoner, and a summoner. This group is an inclusive picture of a diverse nation; there are people of different ranks and areas of life in the group sharing one goal. The importance of these stories is to show their humanness despite their title or role. The “General Prologue” begins this by explaining each person and choosing to do so by describing their physical characteristics first; by that alone they are all depicted as normal and human. The Summoner and the Pardoner, although they are religious figures, they are described in the same way as the rest of the group. They may be religious figures with the job of summing those who have committed spiritual crimes before the church or providing papal pardons, but they are described as utterly human and with that there is corruption.

The Pardoner, in his prologue openly admits that at the end of his sermons he brings out a bag of fake relics, and promises that they bring healing and blessing,

I speak some words in Latin—just a few—

To put a saffron tinge upon my preaching

And stir devotion with a spice of teaching.

Then I bring all my long glass bottles out

Cram-full of bones and ragged bits of clout,

Relics they are, at least for such are known. (Chaucer L. 344-349)

The Pardoner admits to pocketing all of the money that the people offer to the “relics.” This abuse of power through religion is actually a major theme presented in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*. “The Pardoner’s Tale” is an example of how those working in the name of religion actually could be working for their own gain at the expense of those who willingly believe in what their religious leaders tell them. The

Pardoner's job was to travel around giving believers in Christ the opportunity to be forgiven from their sins by paying him to do it or by paying to touch the "holy relics" the pardoner carried on him. The Pardoner explains that each of his sermons is about, "Radix malorum est cupiditas" which mean "greed is the root of all evil" (Chaucer L. 334). While claiming this to be true, he is very honest about how he is scamming the believers in order to make money for himself. Even while committing these actions he is protected by the papal seal. "But first I make pronouncement whence I come, show them my bulls in detail and in sum. And flaunt the papal seal for their inspection as warrant for my bodily protection, that none may have the impudence to irk or hinder me in Christ's most holy work" (Chaucer L. 335-340).

After emphasizing the religious cover, the Pardoner was able to act under, he is very clear about how he himself is greedy just as the people that he preaches about in his tale. "But let me briefly make my purpose plain; I preach for nothing but for greed of gain, and use the same old text, as bold as brass, *radix malorum est cupiditas* (greed is the root of all evil)" (Chaucer L. 423-426). The sermon that he tells them involves three men who find a large sum of gold that they decide to split three ways. Each of them becomes greedier and they end up killing each other because they selfishly wanted more gold than their share allowed. In the end all of them died and no one gets to enjoy the riches they had found because they became too greedy.

The Faith of the Seven is a religion but, perhaps more so, a bureaucratic organization run by fallible and even corrupt human beings. There is a High Septon that leads the monks, nuns, and lay people from the Great Sept in King's Landing. There is one instance where the power shifts from the individual on the Iron Throne, Cersei

Lannister's son, to the High Septon. The High Septon produces a kind of extremist group called the Sparrows in order to better control the royal family and take back the power within the religion of the Seven. This shift in power is when the Faith of the Seven assumes a godlike role in punishing fellow humans for their sins. Like Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, something must happen in return for sin. As seen in the "Pardoner's Tale", the believer would often offer money to the Pardoner to receive prayers for forgiveness or salvation. Cersei's experience is the most obvious connection to this sin and punishment. She meets her match when Margery Tyrell uses religion as the only way to gain the upper hand against Cersei. Margery uses the extremist group, the Sparrows, to accuse Cersei of her sins. These sins would include Cersei's affair with her twin Brother Jamie Lannister and her cousin Lancel Lannister. Ironically Lancel has renounced his old way of living and has given up everything to become a sparrow. Cersei's options become admitting to her own sins and suffering atonement for them or pleading not guilty. If she is to choose the second, Lancel guarantees that he will personally testify against her which would ultimately lead to her execution. In the end she pleads guilty and chooses to bare the atonement for her sins. Her atonement consists of her walking the streets of King's Landing from The Great Sept of Baelor presenting herself "as the gods made [her]" (*A Dance with Dragons* 931). She must begin at the Great Sept, the place that is supposed to represent holiness and the Seven themselves. It is on these steps of the holiest place in Westeros that Cersei is sentenced to walk the streets shaved from head to toe and naked before the eyes of her subjects. It is a clear picture of the binaries and the human corruption. The Sept was meant to represent the gods and yet it now contains a corrupt extremist group who seeks only to punish Cersei for their own gain of power.

Before her walk of shame, Cersei debates the irony of the situation. She is being presented as naked before the city and yet they cover her as she walks through the Sept from her cell. “One of the novices had brought a robe for her, a soft white septa’s robe to cover her as she made her way down the steps and through the sept, so any worshipers they met along the way might be spared the sight of naked flesh. *Seven save us all, what hypocrites they are*” (*A Dance with Dragons* 931). The Sparrows themselves are hypocrites in the sense that they were very eager to gain the upper hand over Cersei. Now that they have the ear of King Tommen through Margery Tyrell, they have arguably more power than the one sitting on the iron throne. The Sparrows were corrupted by their greed for power, and like the Pardoner, used their religious title as protection for taking the power they sought after.

The Faith of the Seven is a man-made and human oriented religion. Their place of worship is built by man and like the medieval cathedrals the Great Sept is meant to represent the gods and their glory. The Seven themselves are depicted as human; their statues are carved in human likeness. As well as the duties they stand for evoke human characteristics with the Mother, Maiden, Warrior, and Stranger. It is a religion that the people of Westeros can relate to because of the human likeness, but it is also a religion that experiences corruptness at human hands.

## CHAPTER III

### THE LORD OF LIGHT: THE CATHARS AND MEDIEVAL HERESY

The religion of the Seven and the Old Gods are interesting to look into and wonder what George R.R. Martin intended when writing them. Martin makes the audience work to understand the inspiration for these different religions. For example, the Great Sept for the Faith of the Seven representing a Gothic cathedral or the godswood of the Old Gods evoking a “thin place” that could be found in Celtic Christian tales. He does not develop them fully for his audience and leaves it to them to tease out the images and practices of them.

The Lord of the Light religion is seemingly the most cohesive and comprehensive religion in the *Game of Thrones* franchise. So, it is tempting to think that Martin had a particular medieval analogue in mind when he created it. For example, the Lord of Light Religion is the only one that the show specifically follows through a group of devotees. Melisandre also known as the red woman is a priestess of the Lord of Light and a prominent character within the TV series and the book series. She shows up in season two and she is present until the end of the TV series. In addition to her character, part of one season is devoted to following the Hound as he travels with a group of Lord of the

Light followers. Suffice it to say that it has the most detailed portraits of any of the religions, and thus the franchise's fans are the most familiar with it.

It is also the religion of the Lord of Light that is connected to the main problem within the series. While the series begins with the problem seemingly being who will sit on the throne and rule the Seven Kingdoms, by the end the true issue is between life and death as the people of Westeros realize they have to battle an army of the undead known as the Wight Walkers. This battle between the living and the dead is ultimately a battle between the light and the darkness of death, wherein the Lord of Light at the center represents all those who are fighting for the living. It is said that the Lord of Light is in battle with the dark Other, an obliterating force.

The cosmic battle inherent to the imagined religion suggests its likeness to a medieval heretical group known as the Cathars, a dualistic sect of Christianity that existed in the thirteenth century. Like the Cathars, followers of the Lord of Light believed in a strictly good god and a strictly bad god battling it out. The Cathars were a heretical group so they were shunned by the Catholic church and lived outside of mainstream society. In a similar way, *Game of Thrones* viewers get the sense that the Lord of Light followers are on the outskirts of society within Westeros. The Seven and the Old Gods are the prominent religions and those that follow them look at the Red Woman and other followers as the "others". In light of these and other similarities between this medieval heretical group and a religion featured in a medieval-fantasy series, we must wonder: Why was Martin inspired to make this particular adaptation?

There are few texts describing the exact opinions and beliefs of the Cathars, but fundamentally they believe in one good God and one evil God. The details surrounding

this fundamental belief often change among the few texts that can be found on Cathar beliefs. Malcolm Barber in his book, *The Cathars*, explains much of their beliefs found in a text called *De Heresi Catharorum*. He writes that *De Heresi Catharorum* was written by an “anonymous but knowledgeable Lombard” who explains, “this party of Cathars believe and preach that there are two gods or lords without beginning and without end, one good, the other wholly evil. And they say that each created angels: the good God good angels and the evil one evil ones, and that the good God is almighty in the heavenly home, and evil one rules in all this worldly structure” (qtd. in Barber 7). Barber explains that the author is describing a belief in absolute dualism. There are other absolute dualistic thoughts described by Barber, such as some Cathars believing that Satan was the evil God and some that he was tempted by the evil God to sin in heaven and bring back the good angels with him. The angels that chose to follow him are the souls trapped in human bodies on earth that the good God sends Jesus Christ to save. Living their lives trapped on earth, basically hell according to the Cathars, is their punishment for choosing to follow Satan. According to the *De Heresi Catharorum* that it is actually Satan who is “the God who, in Genesis, is said to have created heaven and earth and to have accomplished this work in six days” (qtd. in Barber 8). For this reason, Earth is the hell that they are trapped in and their goal is to live pure lives in order to be restored back to their angelic forms in heaven with the almighty good God. They believed in two worlds essentially, one that was sinful and corrupt which is the physical world they live in and one that is spiritual and invisible to their eye but it is pure and the place where they could be set free. Barber further explains the absolute dualism of the two worlds from his reading of *The Book of the Two Principles*, a text most likely written by John of Lugio, a

dualist from the thirteenth century. He was among the many writers who took to writing down the different Cathar theologies they had learned in order to compare and create a more complete theology. Barber quotes *The Book of the Two Principles*,

“It should be clearly realized,” says The Book of the Two Principles, “that these universal symbols which refer to what is evil, vain, and transitory are not of the same sort as those other universal symbols already mentioned, which designate the good, clean, and highly desirable, and which persist forever.” They therefore argued that the two principles, good and evil, existed from eternity, and that each principle had created his own world. Consequently, as the Albigensian author says, “the devil engendered the children of this world, who are born of the flesh of sin, who are born of blood and of the will of the flesh and of the pleasure of man.” (qtd. in Barber 89-90)

Because Earth functions as “hell” in Cathar theology, the human body they are trapped in is unclean, sinful, and their trap keeps them in a living hell. They worked to avoid all earthly and fleshly things such as sex, eating animals because it was eating flesh, and then basic immoral acts such as murder, stealing, and lying.

Sex and procreation are especially looked on as an act of sin and evil, because they believed it was a fleshly act. This fleshly act and other immoral acts were avoided by the “perfecti,” Cathars who had devoted themselves to living a pure life. A theological Cathar text called *The Secret Supper*, is in the form of a dialogue with John, the disciple, discussing the world at a secret supper in Heaven. Barber writes, “It is the story of how the invisible celestial hierarchy established by god was corrupted by the sins of pride,

avarice, and lust, leading to the creation of the prison of the material world” (Barber 83). It was written in *The Secret Supper*, that Satan in the Garden of Eden “sated his lust on her with the serpent’s tail’. The same longing was instilled in Adam and both ‘were affected by a lust for debauchery,’ which explained why all known offspring were ‘sons of the devil,’ a concept which inquisitorial depositions show that some perfecti were often very determined to impress upon pregnant believers” (qtd. in Barber 84). Barber explains that this writing is what the “perfecti” would use in order to shame pregnant women and encourage people to abstain from sex and having children.

Good versus Bad or light versus dark is at the root of Cathars’ beliefs and is a major plot point within *Game of Thrones* as well. While *Game of Thrones* is about the power struggle for the Iron Throne it is even more about the battle of the living against the dead or light versus darkness. This comes to a head in the final season when the characters must fight the Wight Walkers, an army of the living dead. This theme takes off within the series in season two when the audience is introduced to Melisandre, the Red Woman. Via her character, we are introduced to R’hllor, the Lord of Light. The religion of the Lord of Light is a monotheistic religion; its followers believe that R’hllor is the one true god and that the Seven and the Old Gods are just idols. It is not evident in the show or the books if there is a head figure of the religion but there are red priests and priestesses. The Lord of Light is known as the god that represents light, warmth, fire, and all that is good while his opposite, known as the Great Other represents all that is dark, cold, and evil. Melisandre, a red priestess, describes the religion’s beliefs as “a god of light and love and joy, and a god of darkness, evil, and fear eternally at war” (“The Lion and the Rose”).

The Lord of Light is embodied in a physical sense within the living of Westeros while the fear of the “other” such as the Great Other manifests itself physically in the show through their fear of the Wight Walkers. The Wight Walkers represent the darkness of the Great Other, the ruling opposite to the Lord of Light, because they are living death. Throughout the show and the books there is a fear of the Wight Walkers that at first may or may not exist. It is ultimately discovered that they do exist and they exist with the sole purpose of killing all of the living in Westeros. In the franchise it is frequently discussed how there was once a “Long Night” when winter lasted for a thousand years. During this war the people of Westeros were fighting the wight walkers with the help of the children of the forest. The wight walkers bring the dead back to life and create an army of the living dead. They are the embodiment of everything that is dark and evil such as the Great Other. This long night and winter are what the red priests and priestesses warn against with the saying, “The night is dark and full of terrors”.

Melisandre speaks as if the world that they live in is one to be feared and fight against, thus evoking the beliefs of the medieval Cathars. She also represents well the disapproval that Cathars had of having children. In season two episode two, Melisandre sleeps with Stannis Baratheon and then gives birth to a shadow or demon baby. Melisandre is depicted with a large full-term belly in a very short amount of time. She coaxes Davos, a devoted man of Stannis Baratheon, to take her by boat through the water tunnel under Storm’s End. This is the location of Renly Baratheon, the man she means to murder with the shadow baby. She lays in the tunnel to give birth to a dark shadow that seems to crawl out of her body rather than pushed. First emerge its large claws that grasp her ankles to pull itself out. Through this disturbing scene, the shadow proceeds to enter

the world with the only purpose of killing Stannis' brother, Renly Baratheon. The child being a dark shadowy figure indicates that it is some type of demon or evil force. This points back to the Cathar belief that children were "sons of the devil" (qtd. in Barber 84). The belief was that Satan instilled lust within Eve in the garden of Eden and then did the same within Adam, this lust is what drives them to have sex which then leads to children. In *The Secret Supper*, Satan is believed to have been the "God" mentioned in Genesis. He creates Earth and man and he places man in the Garden of Eden. There, in the form of a snake, he gives Eve the desire of lust and then he does the same to Adam, both "were affected by a lust for debauchery" (qtd. in Barber 84). Children are the results of this lust that was given to them and created by Satan; therefore, all children were the children of the devil.

While the Cathars did not believe in having children, they did believe in reincarnation, the continuation of souls that were trapped on earth and had not yet devoted their lives to the one good God. *De heresi catharorum* explains their beliefs that Satan brought angels down from heaven with him to be trapped on Earth. It is their souls that are trapped in the human bodies. The souls cursed to live in the fleshly human body, and must live perfect, pure lives in order to be free of the flesh. If they fail, they are placed into a new body to start again. "Those souls do penance in these bodies and, if not saved in one body, a soul goes into another body and does penance" (Barber 7). This reincarnation continues until the individual believes in Jesus Christ who was sent to save these souls from the damnation of hell on earth. Barber quotes, *Summa de Catharis et Pauperibus*, a work by Rainier Sacconi who was an ex-Cathar and wrote about their

beliefs. Barber uses this quote to further describe how the Cathars believed the reincarnation worked.

“These he [the devil],” says Rainier Sacconi, “implants daily in human bodies and in those of lower animals, and also transfers them from one body to another until such time as all shall be brought back to heaven.”

Rainier is referring here to the idea that souls transmigrated with their guardian spirit. (qtd. in Barber 90)

They believed that all of these souls could be moved from one body to the other and also transferred to different bodies after the death of the current life. They did believe, like the orthodox medieval Christians, that Jesus was God Incarnate. He represented the good God; however, for the Cathars John the Baptist was the bad God Incarnate. “Christ entered the world through the ear of Mary, an angel of the Lord, an action which the devil countered by sending his angel, ‘the prophet Elijah, who baptized in water and was called John the Baptist’. The Day of Judgement would come about when ‘the number of the just shall equal the number of those crowned [angels] who fell’” (qtd. in Barber 85).

The idea of reincarnation is represented within *Game of Thrones* specifically for those who believed in the Lord of Light as well as a possible incarnation of the good and bad. In *Game of Thrones*, Beric Dondarrion, is a follower of the Lord of Light. Because he is a follower his soul is brought back to his body multiple times by a Red Priest named Thoros. He was believed to have been killed in a battle with the Lannisters, but he was brought back to life by Thoros and so he and his men formed a group of Lord of the Light followers called, the Brotherhood without Banners (Season 2). Beric is brought back to life by Thoros as many as six times, and he often says that the Lord of Light allows it

because he has a greater purpose. Beric explains that he believes his purpose is to fight for the living. This belief is what leads him to the wall in order to fight the Wight Walkers with Jon Snow. Later in the series of *Game of Thrones*, Beric explains to Jon Snow why he is fighting with him. Beric says, "I'm not fighting so some man or woman I barely know can sit on a throne made of swords" ("Beyond the Wall"). When Jon Snow asks what he is fighting for he replies, "Life. Death is the enemy. The first enemy and the last. The enemy always wins. And we still need to fight him. That's all I know. You and I won't find much joy while we're here, but we can keep others alive. We can defend those who can't defend themselves" ("Beyond the Wall"). It is clear that the Lord of Light allows for Thoros, a red priest, to bring Beric's soul back to his body each time because he is meant to continue fighting for the living. The Cathars believed that the souls could be moved around and passed because they had not yet believed in Jesus Christ to be saved. They had not fulfilled a destiny that is required of them from their good God. In the same way Beric has not yet fulfilled his destiny that the Lord of Light requires he complete. Beric does continue to fight for the living and it is because of Beric that Arya lives, the one person who kills the Night King and puts an end to the wight walkers.

The Cathar belief of the good God Incarnate in Jesus Christ and the false messiah John the Baptist as the bad God Incarnate, suggests a key story line in *Game of Thrones*. Throughout the show there is a debate about who could be the "Prince that was promised". The two options that the believers of the Lord of Light are presented with are Jon Snow or Daenerys Targaryen. Daenerys Targaryen is a good candidate for the Prince that was promised, because she is the rightful heir to the Iron Throne, as Aerys Targaryen's daughter, the king of Westeros before Robert's Rebellion. Her older brother,

Rhagar was meant to succeed the throne before Robert Baratheon's rebellion. He died fighting the battle against Robert. Daenerys and her other brother, Viserys, were smuggled out of the castle and taken to Essos, a continent separated from Westeros by a narrow sea. She and Viserys grow up believing that one day the Targaryen family will take back the throne as the rightful ruling family of Westeros. Once Viserys dies, Daenerys carries on his mission of leading an army back to Westeros to conquer her throne. She spends many of the seasons conquering cities and liberating slaves. Therefore, she is a princess that holds a claim to a physical throne and she starts her character's journey as a seemingly good character filled with light. She is also the mother of dragons, who breathe fire, and fire is a symbol of the Lord of Light.

However, Jon Snow comes after her to prove himself a worthy candidate when Melisandre brings him back from the dead. Jon Snow was known as the bastard son of Eddard Stark, Lord of Winterfell. It is a mystery for majority of the series who Jon's mother is. Because, he is rejected by Eddard's wife, Catelyn Stark, he never feels that he belongs at Winterfell with his half siblings. He makes the decision to leave for the Wall. The Wall is a large ice wall built after the Long Night or Long Winter that lasted a generation. The Wall was built to hold back the White Walkers, and the Night's Watch was established to guard the wall and keep back the people living beyond it. All men of the Night's Watch take a vow that they will never leave the watch and they will never have a wife or a family. In this, the men are also giving up any claim they have to their family names; the Night's Watch becomes their family.

Jon imagines that this is a noble choice for him since he feels that he is already without a family and without a name. Jon eventually becomes commander of the Night's

Watch until he is killed by his own brothers. This is the death that Melisandre brings him back from. Once he has been brought back to life he rescues Winterfell from a previous invasion and is then proclaimed King of the North, which directly defies the powers of the ruler who claims the Iron Throne. While Jon assumed that he was of no important familial ties, it is later discovered that he is the son of Rhaegar Targaryen, the older brother to Daenerys and successor to the throne before his death. With Jon being his son, Jon also has the blood of the Targaryens and fire on his side as well as having more claim to the Iron Throne than Daenerys. Jon Snow as King of the North and Daenerys Targaryen as rightful ruler of the Iron Throne are left as the only two who can truly bring the people of Westeros together to battle against the Wight Walkers; therefore, making them both perfect candidates for the Prince that was promised. This dynamic between Jon and Daenerys suggests the Cathars' juxtaposition of Jesus Christ as the true messiah and John the Baptist as the false messiah.

Jon Snow's death and burial rituals performed in *Game of Thrones* evoke another Cathar belief and tradition known as Consolamentum. Within the Cathars' religion there are those known as the "perfecti" or the followers that work to live perfectly pure lifestyles. In order to be a "perfecti" a believer must undergo Consolamentum in order to cleanse their souls from all sin and then they must live pure lives until death. They were expected to "keep the commandments of Christ [...], not to commit adultery, kill, or lie, nor swear an oath or steal. [...] He should hate this world and its works and the things which are of this world" (Barber 78). They were expected to avoid all thing fleshly and of the world. This was meant in a literal sense as well; they were not permitted to eat meat because it is flesh. This was not believed to have been an easy or desirable task. Because

of this, many Cathars would wait until they were on their deathbed to receive Consolamentum. This was so they would be released from their sin before their death and they would not have to live a pure lifestyle for long. The practice of Consolamentum was popular throughout the Cathar Church between the 1140s and the 1320s. It is what continually replaced the “perfecti” or the elect of the Cathar faith. The “perfecti” were needed to act as intercessors between the believers still living sinful lives and God; they interceded for them through prayer. Consolamentum allowed these dying believers to gain their salvation on their death bed without previously committing to a completely sinless life like the “perfecti”. The Consolamentum included the laying of hands on the person by the “perfecti” in order to pray to God to rid the individual of their sins before their death.

The Cathars used Consolamentum often times as a ritual performed on the dying in order to save them from the darkness of their sin. There is a similar ritual in *Game of Thrones* that saves their people from the darkness that comes with death. In the series, there is the ritual of burning the dead on funeral pyres in order to save the person from rising again as a Wight Walker. Heat and fire are often seen as purifying element; it is also the symbol of the Lord of Light as previously mentioned. In the final season of *Game of Thrones*, large funeral pyres are built for all of those that died in the battle of Winterfell, the battle against the Wight Walkers. Previously, their dead, even those having been buried in tombs for generations came back as Wight Walkers. Without this burning ritual the living would die by the hands of the dead. It was also the fire that was the only thing that could kill the dead once they were already Wight Walkers. Even more

than this example there is the raising of Jon Snow from the dead. Melisandre lays her hands upon Jon Snow in order to perform a ritual to bring him back to life.

A ritual such as Consolamentum can also specifically be seen in Jon Snow's life. He is murdered by his brothers of the Night's Watch for making an alliance with the Wildlings. After the Wight Walkers had not made a reappearance for thousands of years the entire purpose of the Night's Watch became keeping the Wildlings out of Westeros. The Wildlings are a group of people that live north of the wall. They are not considered part of Westeros and they elect their own kings. As previously mentioned, Jon eventually becomes Lord Commander of the Night's Watch and begins to have his men save the wildlings from the white walkers by offering them passage into Westeros. His men resent him for saving the wildlings and allowing them into the Seven Kingdoms. This resentment and hatred of his friendship with the wildlings causes the men of the Knight's Watch to murder Jon. At the end of season five Jon is betrayed and tricked by his brothers of the Knight's Watch into coming into the courtyard for him to receive a message. There he finds a sign that reads "traitor" and he is then stabbed by the men and left in the snow to die. In the first episode of season six he is resurrected by Melisandre. She does this by laying her hands on him, similar to consolamentum in the Cathar tradition, and prays to the Lord of Light. Once Jon wakes up, she is convinced that he must be the Prince that was Promised. Jon was not finished in his fight against the dead, against the great Other god that embodies darkness and evil. So, he is cleansed of this death and brought back to the living by the Lord of Light to finish the battle with the Wight Walkers.

The Lord of Light religion is the best developed religion within the franchise. It has striking similarities to the medieval Cathars in theology and practice. A religion on the fringe and found to be heretical in the eyes of the biggest religions of the time and culture. As well as a religion with examples that closely resemble that of good versus evil, the belief in reincarnation, and the belief of consolamentum for the dying or dead. Because the Cathars had so few texts for individuals to nail down their exact beliefs today, it leaves the door open for Martin to take the basics and mix it up to give his show an interesting spiritual aspect. The plot is no longer just a battle for the Iron Throne, but a cosmic battle between light and dark, the living and the dead.

## CONCLUSION

The *A Song of Ice and Fire* franchise is one of the most popular fantasy series of all time. The television series, *Game of Thrones*, has been nominated for one hundred and thirty-seven Emmys and won forty-seven of them, and it has been nominated for seven Golden Globes and won one (*Forbes*). *Forbes* magazine has also reported that the eighth and final season was the most expensive to produce at ninety million dollars for an eight-episode season. As the show grew in popularity, the watch audience continued to grow right up until the final season. Fans could not get enough of Martin's fantasy world. It is Martin's dedication to realism that makes the *A Song of Ice and Fire* franchise so popular.

Martin's medievalisms or interpretations of the Middle Ages seem realistic when discussing the history and politics of the franchise, because they are adaptations of real events and political authorities. Diverse kingdoms fighting for a throne over the legitimacy of bloodlines is a realistic theme of *Game of Thrones*, because it is the same cause for England's Wars of the Roses. So, how does Martin bring realism to his adaptations of religions in his franchise?

The concept of having faith or believing in a higher power is a strong belief in something based on spiritual hopes rather than actual proof. All religions require some amount of faith from their followers because there is a fantasy quality to them that cannot

be proved as absolute reality. Fantasy and religion are related in that they deal with concepts that are intangible or impossible. Martin's religions discussed in this thesis all require faith in intangible gods who the believers can never be one hundred percent sure of their existence or control over the believer's lives.

While all three religions require a belief in a higher power, Martin's use of these religions is realistic in how they are diverse in their beliefs and characteristics. The religion of the Old Gods is rooted in a nature centric spirituality while the Faith of the Seven directly contrasts it by being a religion practiced in grand Septs at the center of large cities. The Faith of the Seven is the worship of seven persons in one god. The Lord of Light is just one god with one personality, and both of these contrast with the hundreds of unnamed gods that make up the Old Gods.

As well, the medievalisms mentioned in this thesis about each of these three religions are what make them realistic. The emphasis on "thin places" seen in *Game of Thrones* with the Old Gods is characteristic of Celtic spirituality and many places with strong religious history. Many places of worship convey a closeness to the spiritual world and the divine. The Faith of the Seven is realistic in that it is, like all religions, practiced by human beings. In addition to this it is a religion that is run by human beings. As discussed, there is a clergy featuring the High Septon who leads the followers from the Great Sept. With it being a religion led by humans it has the potential of becoming corrupt when people of power within the faith stray from their religious convictions and use their power for personal gain. The Lord of Light religion also features men and women as priests and priestesses to lead followers; however, it is the heretical characteristics of this religion that make it realistic. Their beliefs are in opposition to the

other two religions such as the belief in an ultimate good God and a bad God known as the Great Other. They are also different in that they believe in reincarnation of the soul and in some cases resurrecting believers. They are often offensive to the other religions of Westeros. Melisandre advocates for burning statues of the Seven in *A Clash of Kings* (145). The followers are radical in their beliefs about competing religions.

While these three religions are creations for Martin's fantasy world, they are adaptations of the Middle Ages and possibly designed to evoke the real medieval religious beliefs and practices discussed in this thesis. The three religions do have qualities that match Celtic Spirituality, practices seen in medieval Christianity, and Cathar beliefs. While the religions of the *A Song of Ice and Fire* franchise are not often discussed they are an interesting and thought-provoking part of the series because of Martin's realistic interpretations.

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