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THE FAMILY SAGAS AND THE BIBLE

This paper will amplify some suggestions made by Knut Liestøl in The Origin of the Icelandic Family Sagas (1930):

There were many points of contact with the Scriptures. Just as the Icelanders treasured many stories of the period of colonisation, the Israelites had had their accounts of the journey to Palestine and the settlement of the country. In the Bible, too, there were stories of mighty men, battles and deeds of heroism. The numerous lively dialogues and interpolated songs in the Bible remind one of the Icelandic family traditions. May not the Biblical narrative have been used as a model, and may not this furnish a clue to certain things in the Icelandic saga literature? But we look in vain for traces of Biblical style in the family sagas. I know of only one motif taken from Scripture. In ch. 21 of the Flóamannasaga we read of Thorgils' dreams: "Then it seemed to him that Thor led him to some cliffs where the surf beat against the rocks. 'In waves like these thou shalt remain for ever, except thou hold fast to me'. 'Nay,' said Thorgils, 'get thee gone, foul devil! He that redeemed all men with his blood will help me'. Then he awoke". This dream, which is clearly modelled on the temptation of Jesus by the Devil, may have been a feature of the underlying oral tradition. (pp. 156-157)

I hope to show that there are more motifs taken from Scripture than the one from Flóamanna saga and that more can be said about the general parallels between the situation of the Icelanders and that of the ancient Israelites. As for literary style: where Liestøl saw no trace of biblical style in the family sagas, I hope to show a number of similarities. The order in which I shall treat these three topics is: 1) general parallels, 2) style, and 3) motifs or scenes.

1. General

Both the ancient Hebrews and the men who came to Iceland fled a tyrannical ruler and, after some delay en route — the islands around England corresponding roughly to the wilderness of Sinai, arrived at a land which

they had reason to regard as their own. Unique to Israel, of course, is the notion of the Promised Land as part of a covenant with the Creator of the universe and a view of history as an account of God's dealings with His chosen people. Apart from a story in Landnámabók (ch. 7) about Ingólfr Árnarson sacrificing to the gods and being told by an oracle to go to Iceland, the Icelandic tradition lacks the religious dimension, but there is nonetheless a sense of destiny, of divine purpose being fulfilled, in the stories of Norwegians fleeing the tyranny of Harald Finehair and arriving at their new home, where the high-seat pillars washed ashore at the appropriate place. In the Bible God assisted the Hebrews in driving alien tribes out of the Promised Land; in the North there is a corresponding sense of assistance and destiny in the fact that the island was virtually uninhabited, waiting for settlers.

Both traditions then are about a new people -- so defined by a formative historical event -- and a new land that is specifically theirs and in which they proceeded to settle. The new society which they formed was at first loosely organized, with no central authority (goðar corresponding roughly to judges) but with a strong respect for law and an acceptance of the principle of blood vengeance; eventually this loose structure gave way to monarchy.

The historical events just characterized may or may not actually have taken place as set down in the Bible and the sagas; what is important is that after a period of time they were set down as we have them, in prose and governed by the same tendency to attach particular meaning to formative historical events. The use of prose in both traditions -- among ancient peoples only Israel cast its sacred national traditions in prose, and the Icelanders were unique in medieval Europe for their prose narrative literature -- is probably related to the importance both societies attached to their history.

Both bodies of prose, furthermore, contain embedded poems, presumably of earlier date than the composition of the prose and often, though not always, attributed to one of the protagonists (Song of Miriam, Ex. 15.21; Song of Deborah, Judges 5). The inclusion of these poems serves to authenticate or to make vivid the narrative, but on occasion the matching of verse to prose is an awkward one. Jonah's poetic prayer to God to deliver him from the belly of the whale is actually a prayer of thanksgiving for a favor already granted, not a petition for rescue (Jonah 2), and we have to assume -- as

sometimes in the sagas — that the poem was originally composed for a different occasion than the one presented in the prose.

Another feature of these two prose traditions is the interest in genealogy, both in tracing the line down to a figure whose story is about to be told and in tracing the subsequent line of a hero or heroine. Biblical examples of the first kind occur in Gen. 5.6-31 (Seth to Noah), 1 Sam. 9.1-2 (Aphiah to Saul), Matthew 1 (Abraham to Jesus), and of course, the sagas are full of such accounts — see the beginning of Hæsa-Thóris saga (Thórir hlammandi to Tungu-Ódd). The second kind of genealogical account occurs at the end of Ruth: ". . . and Salmon begat Boaz [the husband of Ruth], and Boaz begat Obed, and Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David." Drawing the line from Ruth to David brings credit not only to the ancestress of the popular king, but also to David himself for having such a virtuous and worthy great-grandmother. In a similar way Vapnfirðinga saga ends by bringing the line of Geitir Lýtingsson down to St. Thorlák (Thorhallsson, d. 1193) and other worthy Icelanders of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries (ÍF 11:65), and Grænlendinga saga connects Thorfinn karlsefni with Bishop Brand Sæmundsson (d. 1201) and Bishop Thorlák Rúnolfsson (d. 1133). It is in keeping with their historical concern that both traditions show a special interest in stories about people whose progeny will be important.

Along with an interest in genealogy in both traditions goes an interest in how places got their names. Jacob gave the name Beth-el (House of God) to the place where he dreamed of angels going up and down on a stairway (Gen. 28. 17-19), and after he wrestled with an angel "Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, meaning 'I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved'" (Gen. 32.30). Such stories are legion, and one such as this,

And they came unto the brook of Eshcol, and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes. . . . The place was called the brook Eshcol, because of the cluster of grapes which the children of Israel cut down from thence. (Num. 13.23-24)

is not much different from this episode in Laxdæla saga:

In the spring she [Umm] sailed across Breidafjord and went ashore on a headland, where she and her companions ate their morning meal; since then it has been known as "Breakfast-ness." . . . From there she sailed in along Hvammsfjord and went ashore on another headland, where she made a brief stay. Here she lost her comb, and the place

has been called *Kambssness* ever since.

(*ÍF* 5:9; Magnússon-Pálsson transl.)

A final feature that might be mentioned as common to the two traditions is a fondness for strong and influential women. The sagas contain a number of unforgettable figures like Hallgerð and Bergþóra (*Njála*) or Unn, Þuríð, Guðrún and Þorgerð (*Laxdæla saga*); though forceful, not all of them are good, and the same holds true in the Bible where we see Tamar, Ruth, Rahab, Esther, Jezebel, and Mary Magdalen. Deborah, like many an Icelandic woman, stirs and emboldens a man to action -- indeed, like Þorgerð Egilsdóttir in *Laxdæla saga* (*ÍF* 5:164) she even rides along to the scene of the action (Judges 4.6-11). Rebekah, in the way she favors Jacob (Gen. 25:28), reminds us of Ásdís, the mother of Grettir, and other saga mothers who favor a son not favored by the father.

2. Style

Passing now to literary style in a narrower sense, I will treat four matters: Indeterminacy, sparse use of detail, dialogue, and characterization. "Indeterminacy" is a term currently in vogue for a deliberate authorial reticence, a failure to supply all the information, with the result that the reader is left to make important judgements and inferences for himself. Joseph's first reception of his brothers in Egypt is presented this way:

And Joseph was the governor over the land, and he it was that sold to all the people of the land: and Joseph's brethren came, and bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth. And Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them, but made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly unto them; and he said unto them, Whence come ye? And they said, From the land of Canaan to buy food. And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not him. And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, and said unto them, Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come. And they said unto him, Nay, my lord, but to buy food are thy servants come. We are all one man's sons; we are true men; thy servants are no spies. (Gen. 42.6-11)

The reader is not told why Joseph at one moment remembers his youthful dreams -- which anticipated the present scene by predicting that the brothers

would one day bow down to him -- and at the next moment accuses the brothers of being spies. There is no apparent connection, and the reader is left to wonder whether Joseph, who certainly knew his brothers were not spies, is here expressing anger for what his brothers did to him, or triumph for the way his dreams have been fulfilled (Robert Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative, 1981, pp. 163-164). In a larger sense the reader of the Joseph story is kept in the dark about Joseph's motivations concerning his brothers until the end. Why does he wait so long to reveal himself? does he place their money in their sacks out of generosity or out of a desire to frighten them? does he place the cup in Benjamin's sack because he wants to keep Benjamin with him or because he wants to test their loyalty to their father Jacob? Only when he reveals himself (45.1ff.), immediately after Judah's speech (44.18-34), do we realize that Joseph has been carefully placing the brothers in a situation where they could choose to repeat their earlier crime -- depriving Jacob of their favorite son -- or show their moral advance by refusing to hurt their father again.

Indeterminacy is of course present in other literatures, but as I argue in an article soon to be published in Saga-Book, it is also very much a part of saga style. The reader of Grettis saga is for a long time unable to make sense of Grettir's youthful doings -- his pranks on his father's farm, his first slaying, his behavior on the ship to Norway and at the Norwegian farm of Thorfinn, etc. The saga is reticent in explanations, and only gradually does the reader achieve some sense of clarity concerning Grettir's character. What Erich Auerbach wrote about Biblical style, in contrast to the style of Homeric epic, is equally applicable to the sagas: "certain parts brought into high relief, others left obscure, abruptness, suggestive influence of the unexpressed 'background' quality, multiplicity of meanings and the need for interpretation, . . ." (Mimesis. Doubleday Anchor ed., p. 19).

Related to this is the notoriously sparse use of detail in saga style. Again Homer, with his love of detail for the sake of detail, serves as a contrast to the Bible and to the sagas, where everyday matters are omitted unless they have a direct and significant bearing on what is to happen. Consider the story of the slaying of Eglon, King of Moab, by Ehud:

So the children of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years. But when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the

Lord raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man left-handed; and by him the children of Israel sent a present unto Eglon the king of Moab. But Ehud made him a dagger which had two edges, of a cubit length; and he did gird it under his raiment upon his right thigh. And he brought the present unto Eglon king of Moab: and Eglon was a very fat man. And when he had made an end to offer the present, he sent away the people that bare the present. But he himself turned again from the quarries that were by Gilgal, and said, I have a secret errand unto thee, O king: who said, Keep silence. And all that stood by him went out from him. And Ehud came unto him; and he was sitting in a summer parlor, which he had for himself alone. And Ehud said, "I have a message from God unto thee. And he arose out of his seat. And Ehud put forth his left hand, and took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it up into his belly: And the haft also went in after the blade; and the fat closed upon the blade, so that he could not draw the dagger out of his belly; and the dirt came out. Then Ehud went forth through the porch, and shut the doors of the parlor upon him, and locked them. (Judges 3.14-23)

The details about Ehud's being left-handed and Eglon's being fat are presented casually and without emphasis, but as befits a style where nothing is wasted, both details later play an important role: because Ehud is left-handed he can reach for his dagger without rousing suspicion -- no one suspects anyone of being left-handed -- and because Eglon is fat the blade is submerged in his body and he is unable to draw it out. (See Alter, 37-41, for further suggestions concerning this passage. For another biblical example, see Absalom's hair, mentioned casually in 2 Sam. 14.25-26 and used functionally in 18.9-17.)

In the sagas details are used with the same economy. In ch. 15 of Gísla saga Thorgrím Thorsteinsson and Gísli Súrsson are making preparations at both their farms for an autumn feast: "There was to be drinking at both feasts, and the floor at Sæbol [Thorgrím's house] was strewn with sedge from the sedge-pond" (ÍF 6:51; George Johnston translation). The importance of this apparently casual detail becomes clear in chapter 16 when Gísli

comes to Saebol to murder Thorgrim, late on the night of the feast. When he enters the room where everybody is sleeping he sees three lights burning.

He takes sedge from the floor and twists it together; then he throws it on one of the lights, and it goes out. He stands and waits, in case anyone wakes up, but he hears nothing. He takes another twist of sedge and throws it on the nearest light and puts it out. Then he knows that not all are asleep, because he sees that a young man's hand reaches for the third light, and pulls the lamp down and snuffs it. (ÍF 6:53)

(Presumably the hand that extinguished the third light was that of Geirmund, Gísli's ally.) The coast is now clear and Gísli proceeds to slay Thorgrim.

The same device is used, in both traditions, of people as well as things. In Judges 4.11 Heber the Kenite is introduced, in an apparent interruption to the story of Deborah and with no other comment than his ancestry and place of residence. Some verses later, however, the reader understands why he was introduced: the defeated Sisera flees to Heber for help, and Heber's wife Jael kills Sisera in his sleep. This is exactly the way in which persons are often introduced in the sagas -- by family and location, with their importance to the story reserved until later.

A third stylistic feature common to the sagas and the Bible is the way in which they allow characters to present themselves largely through dialogue and action rather than through the comments and interpretation of the narrator. The sagas have a high percentage of direct discourse: 40 per cent in Hrafnkels saga, 28 per cent in Viga-Glúms saga, 25 per cent in Gísla saga, etc. (according to Margaret Jeffrey, The Discourse in Seven Icelandic Sagas, 1933). The biblical narratives, e.g. Ruth, are told with a similarly large reliance on dialogue (see Alter, ch. 6). Every saga reader remembers pregnant moments of conversation in which the feelings of characters are expressed: Hallgerd asking Gunnar whether it is important to him to have strands of her hair to twist into a string for his bow, and then her refusing them (ÍF 12:189). Ruth's famous words to Naomi,

Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God,
(Ruth 1.16)

are similarly pregnant in their revelation of her character. In neither

story does the author find it necessary to tell us in his own words what is going on in the character's mind.

The implications of speech in these two cases are quite clear, but there are many cases where the use of direct discourse contributes to indeterminacy. Obviously the pronouncements of one character to another are less reliable indicators than a narrator's explicit statement about motives or moral qualities or mental states. In chapter 12 of Vápnfirðinga saga Geitir Lýtingsson visits Qlvir inn spaki in an obvious attempt to enlist support against Brodd-Helgi. In an effort to be fair, Geitir says that Brodd-Helgi is a good man in many ways.

"But isn't he a very overbearing man?" asked Qlvir. Geitir answered, "Concerning his overbearing nature, it's occurred to me that he doesn't like me to have the same sky over my head as he does. Qlvir asked, 'Should this be tolerated from him?' "This is the way it's been so far," said Geitir. (IF 11:47)

The conversation ends here, and the reader is unable to judge from Qlvir's comments whether he is inclined to help Geitir or not.

In 1 Kings 2.5-6 David, on his deathbed, tells his son Solomon to kill Joab:

Moreover thou knowest also what Joab the son of Zerricah did to me, and what he did to the two captains of the hosts of Israel, unto Abner the son of Ner, and unto Amasa the son of Jether, whom he slew Do therefore according to thy wisdom and let not his hoar head go down to the grave in peace.

The reader may guess, though the text is not specific, that David is more concerned with what Joab did to him than with what he did to Abner and Amasa (and thus indirectly to him), but if so, what offence of Joab's does he have in mind? The slaying of Absalom (2 Sam. 18.10-15)? The support he gave to Adonijah (1 Kings 1.7)? Here again the reliance on direct speech makes for an ambiguity which could have been removed in a style which allowed more authorial comment.

It is not only on dialogue but also on action that the sagas and the Bible place a large share of the narrative weight, and this fact is related to another stylistic similarity: characterization. In the sagas as well as in the Bible characters are mysterious, unpredictable, and changing; their

motives and their actions are presented incompletely and without full specification, much as characters in history come down to us. Alter compares biblical and Homeric style on this score:

Achilles in the Iliad undergoes violent fluctuations of mood and attitude, first sulking in his tent, then transformed into a blind force of destruction by the death in battle of his beloved companion Patroklos, then at the end brought back to his human senses by the pleas of the bereaved Priam; but there is a stable substratum of the man Achilles, and these are, after all, oscillations in feeling and action, not in character. David, on the other hand, in the many decades through which we follow his career, is first a provincial ingenue and public charmer, then a shrewd political manipulator and a tough guerrilla leader, later a helpless father floundering in the entanglements of his sons' intrigues and rebellion, a refugee suddenly and astoundingly abasing himself before the scathing curses of Shimei, then a doddering old man bamboozled or at least directed by Bathsheba and Nathan, and, in still another surprise on his very deathbed, an implacable seeker of vengeance against the same Shimei whom he had forgiven after the defeat of Absalom's insurrection. (p. 127)

Leading saga characters, such as Grettir and Egill, behave with the same kind of freedom and unpredictability that Alter points to in the Bible.

3. Motifs and Scenes

In addition to Liestøl, cited above, who found only one Scriptural motif in the sagas, Paul Schach has also discussed this subject and found traces in other late sagas (Icelandic Sagas, 1984, pp. 169-170): Karl Karlsson's cruel killing of the sons of Yngvild in Svarfdæla saga (ÍF 9:197-198) has a possible source in 2 Maccabees 7 (perhaps by way of Gyðinga saga, pp. 4-8, I might add), and a passage in Bárðar saga recalls the parting of the Red Sea in Exodus 14 (chapter 17, p. 111 in the edition of Bárðar saga by Jón Skaptason and Phillip Pulsiano, New York, 1984; I would say that since a priest plays an important role the passage is closer to the crossing of the Jordan in Joshua 3).

This final part of the paper will point to a few other places where the family sagas -- and not necessarily late ones -- have motifs that are paralleled in the Bible. I would not insist on a direct or even indirect influence in each case, but I wish at least to raise the possibility that there may be more in the Bible that relates to the sagas than we had thought.

In chapter 24 of Laxdæla saga Ólaf Peacock moves to Hjardarholt by arranging all his cattle in a long line that reaches from Goddastaðir to the new farm:

First in the line were driven the shyest of the sheep, followed by the milch ewes and cows; next came the barren cattle, with the pack-horses bringing up the rear. The farmhands were placed so as to prevent the animals straying from a straight line. In this way, the van was reaching the new farm just when Olaf was riding out of Goddastead, and there was no gap anywhere in the line. Hoskuld was standing out of doors with his men; and now Hoskuld wished his son wealth and well-being in his new farm -- 'and I have a feeling that this will be so, and that his name will be long remembered.' (IF 5:67-68; Magnússon-Pálsson transl.)

In Genesis 32.13-21 Jacob sends a procession of cattle to his brother Esau: And he lodged there that same night; and took of that which came to his hand a present for Esau his brother; Two hundred she goats, and twenty he goats, two hundred ewes, and twenty rams, Thirty milch camels with their colts, forty kine, and ten bulls, twenty she asses, and ten foals. And he delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by themselves; and said unto his servants, Pass over before me, and put a space betwixt drove and drove. And he commanded the foremost, saying, When Esau my brother meeteth thee, and asketh thee, saying, Whose art thou? and whither goest thou? and whose are these before thee? Then shalt thou say, They be thy servant Jacob's; it is a present sent unto my lord Esau: and, behold, also he is behind us. And so commanded he the second, and the third, and all that followed the droves, saying, On this manner shall ye speak unto Esau, when ye find him. And say ye moreover, Behold,

thy servant Jacob is behind us. For he said, I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and afterward I will see his face; peradventure he will accept of me. So went the present over before him; and himself lodged that night in the company.

There are of course major differences: Jacob is not moving, he is returning home, and his intention is to placate his estranged brother by offering him all these cattle; also, there is an unbroken line of cattle in the saga, whereas in the Bible they are deliberately broken up into droves. Nonetheless, in both passages we see a man impressing a relative (father/brother) by sending a procession of an unusually large number of cattle; the waiting relative receives the cattle, while the one who sent them comes at the rear of the procession.

Also in Laxdæla saga, the account of the relations among Hǫskuld, his wife Jorunn, and his concubine Melkorka (ch. 13) may recall Abraham's similar domestic crisis with his wife Sarah and her handmaid Hagar (Gen. 16.1-16; cf. Gen. 21.9-21). The main difference between these stories is that Sarah is barren and suggests the concubinage herself in order that Abraham may have an heir, while Hǫskuld gains Melkorka on his own accord. The similarities are: 1) a married man takes a concubine and has a son (Ishmael/Ólaf) by her; 2) bad feelings develop between the concubine and the wife (cf. Gen. 16.4); 3) the husband is forced to send the concubine and her son away; 4) the concubine's son is blessed with his progeny (cf. Gen. 16.10, 21.18); and 5) there will be bad blood between his progeny and that of the legitimate son(s) (Isaac/Thorleik and Bolli).

The story of Jonah at sea (Jonah 1) may have influenced the account of Grettir's initial voyage to Norway (Grettis saga, ch. 17).

But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken. Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep. So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God

will think upon us, that we perish not. And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.

Parallels to the Grettir story are these: 1) the hero takes passage on a ship that encounters a storm at sea; 2) while the crew works to remedy the situation, the hero remains aloof; 3) the captain speaks to the hero in a friendly manner (see Elie Wiesel, Five Biblical Portraits, Notre Dame, 1981, p. 146); 4) the hero saves the ship, Jonah by confessing and suggesting that he be thrown overboard, Grettir by helping to bail water.

For Grettir as a character there may be other, more general Biblical parallels. His fondness for lifting heavy stones (IF 7: 48, 102, 191-192) has its antecedent in Jacob's feat of rolling from the mouth of a well a stone that normally required a number of shepherds to move (Gen. 29.1-10). There is also a parallel between Grettir and the figure of Samson which may have a literary as well as a folk-tale dimension; both are men of unusual brawn and a capacity for erotic exploits who do a number of unsociable and unlikeable things, and yet also perform great feats which are a benefit to their society. And of course the idea of a narrative covering an extended period of outlawry, during which the hunted hero undergoes a whole series of adventures, did not originate in medieval Iceland -- it occurs in the David cycle (1 Sam. 19.18 - 2 Sam. 1.27).

Finally I wish to mention a well-known scene in Grettis saga (chapter 39) where Grettir is about to undergo the ordeal of bearing hot iron in the church at Trondheim, in order to clear himself of the charge of slaying the sons of Thorir:

Grettir himself was led to the church, and when he arrived many people kept looking at him and saying how his strength and stature marked him out from all other men. As he was walking down the aisle, a youth with an unpleasant look on his face suddenly jumped forward and said to Grettir, 'How remarkable it is that in this country, where the people are supposed to be Christians, all sorts of criminals, robbers, and thieves can move about freely and are allowed to undergo ordeals.'

The youth continues rebuking Grettir and calls him names, so that

Grettir grew angry and lost control of himself. He raised his fist and boxed the boy on the ear, knocking him senseless, and some people said that the boy died on the spot. No one could tell where the boy had come from or what became of him afterwards, but it is thought most likely that he was an unclean spirit (óhreinn andi) which had been sent to bring ill-luck to Grettir. This caused a great tumult in the church.

(ÍF 7:133; Pálsson-Fox transl.)

This scene deserves comparison with Mark 1.21-27 (cp. Luke 4.31-36):

And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes. And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit (spiritus immundus); and he cried out, Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And they were all amazed.

. . .

The two scenes may be compared schematically:

Mark 1.21-27

Grettis s., ch. 39

Synagogue in Capernaum.

Church in Trondheim.

Jesus is wondered at for his teaching.

Grettir is wondered at for his afi and yoxt.

Man with unclean spirit cries out against Jesus.

Boy with unclean spirit cries out against Grettir.

Jesus rebukes man and purges him of unclean spirit.

Grettir kills boy with unclean spirit.

Those in the synagogue are all amazed.

There is a great uproar (hark) in the church.

One would not expect the parallel to be greater than it is; Grettir can only kill the boy, he has not the power to perform miracles. Both the figure of the Óhreinn andi -- the term also occurs in Stjórn, p. 469, for the spiritus malus which came over Saul -- and the structure of the events in the church at Trondheim indicate a clear use of biblical material, and this should encourage us to discover even more such influences.