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Ælfric's second homily for the Common of a Confessor (Assmann IV) is a work which has received little attention since it was published in 1889.1 This two-part text is, however, a most interesting witness to two common Ælfrician practices: his freedom in combining points from very different authorities to produce a thematically coherent exegesis, and his willingness to disrupt this careful cohesion to introduce a theme which testifies to that increasing concern with addressing issues of contemporary relevance which is so characteristic of his later career. In this article I should like to examine the homily from both these points of view, offering a study of the sources and of the political background which may have inspired the second, and only tenuously connected, part of the text.

The homily can be fairly closely dated by the note which is prefixed to it in one of the manuscripts and by its relationship to other texts by Ælfric. The note, which is found in CCCC 188 and which must have been copied from the source of that manuscript, explains that Ælfric has composed the homily at the request of Bishop Æthelwold the Younger and has had it transcribed in order to preserve a copy for himself after the homily had been sent to Bishop Æthelwold: 'Hunc sermonem super rogatu venerandi episcopi Athelwoldi, scilicet Iunioris, Anglice transtulimus, quern huius libelli calci inscribi fecimus, ne nobis desit, cum ipse habeat' [We have translated this sermon into English at the request of the reverent Bishop Æthelwold, that is the Younger, which we have had written into the back of this book, that we may not lack it when he has it].2 Æthelwold II, or the Younger, seems to have been bishop of Winchester from 1006-12, and a figure about whom very little is known, though it is clear that his prestige was not such as to maintain the prominence which the bishopric of Winchester had enjoyed under his namesake, the first Æthelwold.3 A further aid in dating is suggested by Fehr, who pointed out that lines 195-201 of
Assmann IV, the passage on Arius, are very similar to lines 51-55 of Ælfric's First Old English Letter for Wulfstan. Ælfric's Be þære halgan clænnysse (Assmann II) is very closely dependent on the First Old English Letter for Wulfstan, but does not use this passage on Arius, which is instead used in Assmann IV:

Das Schicksal des Arius wird wohl deshalb als ein abschreckendes Beispiel der schnellen Gottesbestrafung von Ælfric angeführt, weil ihm der altenglische Hirtenbrief II mit seiner Schilderung der vier grossen Konzilien noch frisch in der Erinnerung stand, so frisch, dass Wort und Satzechos noch herüberklingen.

[The fate of Arius is adduced as a frightening example of speedy divine punishment by Ælfric because the Old English Pastoral Letter II, with its depiction of the four big councils, was still fresh in his memory, so fresh that there are still echoes of words and sentences].

Fehr therefore suggested that Ælfric schrieb 2 [First Latin Letter for Wulfstan] im Jahre 1005, die englische Übersetzung 1006 [First Old English Letter for Wulfstan], die Homilie E [Assmann IV] im folgenden Jahre 1007 [Ælfric wrote 2 in 1005, the English translation in 1006, homily E in the following year, 1007]. The homily, therefore, would seem to have been written soon after Æthelwold's installation as bishop in 1006.

There is some evidence to indicate that Ælfric added Assmann IV to Catholic Homilies I, as three of the seven manuscripts contain late versions of this series, but the evidence is not conclusive. In one manuscript it forms part of the group of homilies for the Common of Saints with which Ælfric concluded Catholic Homilies II and it occurs in different contexts in the other three manuscripts.

Assmann IV is Ælfric's second homily for the Common of a Confessor, the first having formed part of Catholic Homilies II. As Sisam pointed out, 'the reform movement had multiplied the popular commemorations of confessors, both by its own saints - Dunstan, Æthelwold, Oswald, Wulfsige - and by the inevitable spread of such relic cults as that of St Judoc; so that there was a need for an alternative to avoid repetition.' This second homily is an exegesis of a different pericope: whereas Catholic Homilies II, xxxviii had been based on Matthew 25. 14-29 (the parable of the talents), Assmann IV explains Matthew 24. 42-47:

[Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect. Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find so doing. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.]

This second pericope is also the pericope in one of the masses for the occasion in the Missal of the New Minster, Winchester (the other mass for the day has Luke 11. 33ff.). Bishop Æthelwold, therefore, may well have wanted a homily based specifically on this pericope rather than the Catholic Homilies II text which may not have corresponded to Winchester practice. Like the earlier homily, Assmann IV is clearly a text for reading aloud on the appropriate day: it is not, as at least some of the Lives of Saints would appear to be, a reading-text for private use. Clemoes sees the mention of an anniversary 'today' as the criterion for distinguishing reading-pieces from liturgical homilies and it is clear that Assmann IV falls into the latter group. Ælfric twice mentions the anniversary today, at the beginning and in the middle:

choran ðe we rædæb  ðæs rædinge forof
tæt þæra halgena mæssan, þe we hataþ Confessores,
swa swa wæs ðæs halga wer Ille, þe we wûðiað to dæg
Mid halgum lofsangum to lote þam hælende,
þe hine gewurðode mid heofenlicum wurdmynte.

(II. 26-30)

[because we very often read this lection at the masses of the
saints whom we call Confessors, like the holy man Ille, whom
we honour today with holy songs of praise, in praise of the
saviour who honoured him with heavenly honour.]

Swa swa þes halga wer Ille dyde, þe we wurdiaþ to dæg.

(I. 136)

[just like the holy man Ille did, whom we honour today.]

In composing Assmann IV, however, Ælfric was faced with the problem that
Matthew 24. 42-47, was not a common pericope in the sources to which he turned
most often. Paul the Deacon, Ælfric's main source in the Catholic Homilies, has
two texts commenting on Luke 11. 33ff. headed Item in depositione unius
confessoris (III, 107 and 108) and one on Luke 12. 35 as its Item de confessoribus
(III, 109).12 Haymo has two homilies De confessoribus in his Commune
Smaragdus's homily In natali unius confessoris is based on Luke 14, 26ff., and the
Matthew 24. 42-47 pericope is not expounded anywhere in his collection.14

Some English versions of Paul the Deacon do, however, contain a text which
is more similar to Ælfric's pericope: Royal 2 C iii, Lincoln Cathedral MS 158 and
CUL Kk.IV.13 all contain a short homily which is based on Mark 13. 32-37, which
is thematically and verbally like the Matthew 24 passage.15 The source for this
appears to be a passage from Jerome's Commentary on Matthew, followed by a
passage from Bede's Commentary on Mark.16 These two commentaries were
known to Ælfric in their entirety, so it is not possible to know whether this very
short text was available to him separately. All three manuscripts also contain a
homily extracted from Bede's Commentary on Mark, also expounding Mark 13.
33ff. These would appear to be the only homilies for the feast of a Confessor which
to some extent covered Ælfric's pericope and which could have been available to
him. In addition, Ælfric knew Jerome's Commentary on Matthew and Bede's
Commentary on Mark.17 Luke 12. 35-41, furthermore, is also to some extent a
parallel Gospel passage and Ælfric knew Bede's Commentary on Luke,18 which
expounded this passage, and probably Haymo's homily De confessoribus, which
also deals with this Gospel. The same Lucan pericope is also the basis for Smaragdus's homily *In natalem sanctorum plurimorum*, heavily dependent on Bede, which again would presumably have been known to Ælfric. Although, therefore, opening his copy of Paul the Deacon at homilies for the feast of a Confessor may not have presented him with much in the way of texts which expounded his pericope for the occasion, Ælfric nevertheless undoubtedly had available to him a range of works dealing with very similar subject-matter which he could have drawn upon in composing his own homily.

The homily begins, as is usual with Ælfric, with a faithful translation of the pericope, preceded by a brief introduction to the context of the Gospel passage (ll. 1-21). It then covers the two types of vigil (physical and spiritual), expounding Luke 12. 38, in support of the point on spiritual vigils; deals with the pericope's story of the householder and the thief, interpreted in terms of the spirit's fear of death; then with the necessity to be ready for Christ's coming; with the need for teachers to feed the people and with a definition of good teachers, like the apostles, and the rewards which they will receive for their work; and the remainder of the homily (ll. 168-294) treats of God's revenge, whether immediate or delayed, on those who do not respect him, supporting the point with a long list of examples drawn largely from the Bible and concluding with the declaration that teachers are vital to restrain the foolish, as fear is essential for all. The homily, therefore, becomes chiefly one on the superiority of the religious state, and of teachers in particular, and on the necessity for good teachers, a perennial theme in Ælfric's work.

The homily follows the structure of the running gloss, with sections of the translation of the pericope being repeated and commented upon, beginning with the first sentence (ll. 34-35), 'Vigilate ergo', which is explained in both physical and spiritual terms. The body's vigil is interpreted as 'our' night-office, an exegesis which would appear to be Ælfric's own. It is not specified whether the first person plural here is a monastic one or whether it refers more generally to all those in orders, both monastic and secular orders. Given that Bishop Æthelwold was almost certainly a monastic bishop and certainly presided over a monastic cathedral community in Winchester, however, the laudatory description of those who perform *uhtsange* probably does refer to the monks:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Pæs lichaman wæcce is, } & \text{ bonne we waciað on cyrcan} \\
\text{æt urum uhtsange, } & \text{ bonne ðre men slapað,} \\
\text{and we tobrecað urne slæp } & \text{and gebiddað for eow}
\end{align*}
\]
Mary Clayton

and heriað urne drihten mid halgum lofsangum....
(ll. 37-40)

[The body's watch is when we keep watch in the church at our nocturns, when other people sleep, and we interrupt our sleep and pray for you and praise our Lord with holy songs of praise.]

Ælfric's treatment of the physical vigil is, therefore, one which excludes the laity, relegating them to a much inferior role, dependent on the prayers of the monks. Exactly the same kind of division between 'us' and 'you' can be found in Ælfric's references to divine services in his Second Series homilies on Job and on the book of Genesis. Psalm 119. 55 (the psalm Beati immaculati, which the Benedictine Rule assigned to the beginning of every week and which was quoted in the Rule in support of its organization of monastic prayer) is then quoted and translated in support of the monks' night devotions (ll. 42-45). Ælfric next turns to the spiritual vigil (ll. 47-50), defined as the watch against the devil, who is described in a quotation from 1 Peter 5. 8 (already used in his Catholic Homilies II homily on Job) as a 'grymettende leo' (ll. 52-55). None of the analogues seems to contain this quotation and it would seem that it has been added by Ælfric, probably recalling his earlier use. His exegesis of the spiritual vigil against the devil, however, is very close to his possible sources. In his Commentary on Mark 13. 37, for example, Bede, drawing on Gregory, had expounded the 'vigilate' of the Gospel thus:

Vnieri ianuas cordium nostrorum ne hostis antiquus mala suggerendo irrumpat instanter seruare iubemur. Ne nos dormientes dominus ueniens inueniat sedulo singuli praecauere debemus. Vnusquisque enim pro se rationem reddet Deo. Vigilat autem qui ad aspectum ueri luminis mentis oculos apertos tenet vigilat qui seruat operando quod credidit vigilat qui a se torporis et neglegentiae tenebras repellit.'

[We are all commanded to guard earnestly the doors of our hearts lest the old enemy break in, making suggestions of evil. Individually we should diligently take precautions lest the Lord coming should find us sleeping. Every single one truly will deliver an account of himself to God. A man is vigilant who keeps his eyes open for the sight of the true light of the mind; he is vigilant who continually practises his beliefs; he is vigilant who
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repulses from himself the darkness of listlessness and carelessness.]

Ælfric then turns to the Gospel of Luke, quoting and translating Luke 12. 38, on the servants who are blessed if their lord comes in the second or third watch and finds them awake, taken from a passage which is very similar to the Matthew pericope that he is expounding here. The process of scriptural association is, of course, a very familiar one in Ælfric's work and the shortage of direct sources for this homily would probably have encouraged his use of it here. He quotes only the first few words of the Lucan verse in Latin, but before translating the whole verse adds the Latin aside: 'Secunda vigilia vel tertia non dicitur, nisi sit prima, quae praecedat' [The second watch or the third are not mentioned, unless there be a first which goes before] (ll. 62-63). As his exegesis will specify the meaning of the first, second and third watches, while the biblical verse mentions only the second and third, Ælfric is concerned to point out that a second watch implies a first, presumably lest his interpretation seem to lack biblical authority. I have not been able to discover a source for this aside and it may well be his own, directed at Bishop Æthelwold. The interpretation of the Lucan passage which follows is one which ultimately goes back to Gregory the Great's homily no. xiii but which would also have been available to Ælfric in Bede's Commentary on Luke and in Haymo's De confessoribus. As teachers and their role feature prominently in Bede's discussion of the passage and as Ælfric, appropriately for the feast of a Confessor, takes up this theme, it was probably Bede's Commentary which he was using here, although he certainly also knew the Gregory homily as a whole and not just what Bede and Haymo extracted from it. Gregory interprets the watches of the night as the ages of mankind: the first is childhood, the second adolescence and the third old age. Man turns to God in one of the three vigils, depending on the age at which this happens. Ælfric takes over this explanation of the three watches of the night, expanding on what it means for the soul to turn to God at each of these stages:

Prima quippe uigilia primaeuum tempus est, id est pueritia; secunda adulescentia uel iuuentus quae auctoritate sacri eloquii unum sunt dicentis: Laetare iuuenis in adulescentia tua; tertia autem senectus accipitur. Qui ergo uigilare in prima uigilia noluit custodiat uel secundam ut qui converti a prauitatibus suis in pueritia neglexit ad uias uitaee saltim in tempore iuuentutis uigilet.
Et qui uigilare in secunda uigilia noluit tertiae uigiliae remedia non amittat ut qui et in iuuentute ad uias uitae non euigilat saltim in senectute resipiscat.26

[The first vigil is of course the time of the first period of life, that is childhood; the second vigil, youth or manhood, which are the same on the authority of the sacred declaration of him who says: 'Rejoice, young man, in your youth'; but the third is understood to be old age. He therefore who was unwilling to keep watch in the first vigil let him indeed observe the second, so that, since he failed to turn away from his evil ways in childhood, he may at all events watch out in the time of his manhood for the true path in life. And he who was unwilling to keep watch in the second vigil should not let slip the remedy of the third vigil, that he who in manhood does not watch for the true path of life may come to his senses at least in old age.]

Seo forme wæcce is witodlice on cildhade,
and seo oðer wæcce is on weaxendum cnihtthade,
and seo þridde wæcce is on forweredre ylde.
Se ðæ wæccan on ðære forman wæccan,
swa ðæt he on cildhade gesohte his drihten
and mid godum bigengum hine gegladode,
waecie he huru on ðære oðre wæccan
and his mod awrecce of middaneardlicum gedwyldum,
forðan de he nat þone timan, ðe his drihten cymð.
Gif hwa donne beð, þe hine sylfne forgyt
on þam twam wæccum and wunað on his leahtrum,
warnige he þonne, þæt he huru ne forleose
þa ǿriddan wæccan, þæt he ne forwøðe mid ealle,
ac huru on his ylde of ðam yfelan slæpe
his ærran nytenynsse ardlice arise
and mid soðre gecyrrednysse gesec his drihten
and on godum weorcum wunige ðæ ende.

(ll. 67-83)

[Truly the first watch is in childhood and the second watch is in flourishing youth and the third watch is in advanced old age. He
who did not wish to keep watch in the first watch, in that he sought his Lord in childhood and gladdened him with good practices, let him at least watch in the second watch and arouse his spirit from earthly errors, because he does not know the time when his Lord will come. If there is someone who forgets himself in the two watches and continues in his sins, let him take heed at all events that he not ruin the third watch, so that he may not perish entirely, but at least in old age vigorously arise from the evil sleep of his former laziness and with true conversion seek his Lord and continue in good deeds until his death.]

Ælfric's lines 84-89, on Christ's concealment of the last day in order that we should live in constant expectation of it, probably depend on Bede's continuation of the passage on vigils (drawn again from Gregory's homily xiii): Bede is commenting here on Luke 12. 40, but this is virtually identical to Matthew 24. 43 and the same exegesis is therefore valid:

Furi autem resisteret, si uigilaret, quia aduentum iudicis qui occulte animam rapit praecauens ei paenitendo occurreret ne impaenitens periret. Horam uero ultimam dominus noster idcirco uoluit nobis esse incognitam ut semper possit esse suspecta ut dum illam praevideere non possumus ad illam sine intermissione praeparemur.27
[He, on the other hand, might have resisted the thief if he kept watch because, guarding against the arrival of the judge who secretly snatches the soul, he would have met him doing penance, lest he should have perished impenitent. Truly our Lord wished for that reason that the last hour be unknown to us, so that it may always be apprehended, that, while we cannot foresee it, we may be continually prepared for it.]

Again, Haymo expresses very similar ideas in PL 118, 790 in his commentary on Luke 12. 40. The exegesis of the next lines seems to blend passages from Bede (who is again dependent on Gregory) and Haymo (who is drawing on Bede and/or Gregory, but not verbatim), with Ælfric's more explicit spelling out of the spiritual meaning of the pericope perhaps owing more to Haymo:
Nesciente etenim patrefamilias fur domum perfodit quia dum a sui custodia spiritus dormit improuisa mors ueniens carnis nostrae habitaculum irrumpit et eum quem dominum domus inuenerit dormientem necat quia cum uentura damna spiritus minime praeuidet hunc mors ad supplicium nescientem rapit.28

[In fact the thief broke into the house unbeknownst to the master of the household because, while the sleeping spirit drops its guard, unexpected death coming breaks into the dwelling place of our body and kills him whom the Lord of the house found sleeping because, when the spirit least expects the coming hurt, death snatches him unknowing away to punishment.]

Spiritualiter autem paterfamilias iste, noster est animus, qui tunc male securus dormit, quando diem mortis obliviscens, a bono opere torpet, et brevissimum tempus vitae praesentis, quasi longum sibi promittit. Furis autem adventus mors est, quae improvisa subito dum non speratur veniens, thesaurum animae nostrae ad poenas rapit . . . . Si autem terminum vitae nostrae sciremus, aliud tempus poenitentiae deputaremus.29

[But spiritually the master of the household is our soul which wrongly sleeps untroubled when, forgetting the day of death, it is inactive in good work and promises itself that the very short time of the present life is long. The coming of the thief, however, is death, which suddenly coming unforeseen, when it is not expected, snatches the treasury of our soul to punishment. If, however, we knew the limit of our life, we would allot more time for penance.]

Ðæs hiredes ealdor soðlice is ure agen mod, and se dyrna þeof, þe digollice cymð, is se gemenelica deþæ þæs mannæ lichaman mid his digelan tocyme to deaðe gebringð. Gif se hiredes ealdor wende him þæs þeofes oððe wiste his tocyme, he wolde him wiðstandan, forðam þæþæt mod wolde micclum hogian,
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[The master of the household is our own spirit and the hidden thief who comes secretly is universal death who, with his secret coming, carries the man's body off to death. If the master of the household expected the thief or knew of his coming he would resist him because his spirit would firmly resolve upon awakening and doing penance for his heavy sins before black death come to it, if he knew of its coming.]

The inevitability of death and the need to keep watch by doing good deeds follows on naturally in ll. 105-09 and is understood in Bede and Haymo, while Ælfric makes of it an explicit exhortation.

The next verse of the pericope, Matthew 24. 44, is almost identical in content and wording to Matthew 24. 42, already expounded at the beginning of the homily, the only changes being that 'vigilate ergo' is altered to 'ideo et vos estote parati' and 'Dominus vester' to 'Filius hominis'. As Ælfric has already explained the spiritual meaning in connection with 24. 42, he therefore concentrates here on the literal level of meaning: he simply reiterates the need to be ready for death in a more sermon-like manner than those texts which he seems to have been consulting and stresses our ignorance of when Christ 'us wile habban to him / of δυσσερε γηρμυθε to εκερε μήνθε' [wishes to gather us to him, from this misery to eternal happiness] (ll. 110-23). He also adds an explanation of 'Filius hominis' which is commonplace in his work (ll. 117-19). 30

Lines 124-26 translate Matthew 24. 45, followed by what seems to be Ælfric's own comment on the literal meaning, which is slightly tangential to the pericope, in which it is the lord's servant who is to give food to the household:

Ælcum hlaforde gedafenaþ,  &æt he do his mannum
symle heora bigleofan on gesettum timan.

(ll. 127-28)

[It befits every master that he should always give his people their food at set times.]

The provision of material food is, however, swept aside in favour of the spiritual
understanding, which again relegates the laity to the passive role of having to be provided for by the clergy:

\[ \text{Ac se hælend mænde  þone gastlican mete,} \\
\text{þa halgan lare,  ðe ge men behofiað} \\
eowrum sawlum to bigleofan,  þa ge sceolon gehyran \\
æt eowrum lareowum,  swa swa hi leorniað on bocum.} \\
\text{(ll. 129-32)} \\
\text{[But the Saviour meant the spiritual food, the holy teaching which you people need to nourish your souls, which you must hear from your teachers as they learn in books.]} \]

This spiritual interpretation in ll. 129-50 probably relies on Bede's exegesis of the very similar passage in Luke 12. 42 ('Quis, putas, est fidelis dispensator, et prudens, quem constituit Dominus supra familiam suam, ut det illis in tempore tritici mensuram?' [Who then is the faithful and wise steward, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time?]). Bede interprets the food as the words of teachers,\textsuperscript{31} as Ælfric does, although Ælfric's exegesis is much more basic then Bede's and is adapted to the homiletic context of the address to a general congregation on the feast of a confessor. Whereas Bede discusses the suitability of the teaching for the type of audience, Ælfric is much more concerned with setting forth the role of the teacher and with supplying a blanket eulogy of whatever confessor whose feast it is:

\[ \text{swa swa þes halga wer Ille dyde,  þe we wurðiað to dæg.} \\
\text{He dælde wislice  on gewissum timan} \\
\text{þone gastlican mete  godes hirede symle,} \\
\text{and he manega sawla  mid his lare gestrynde} \\
\text{þam ðæmælmihtigan gode,  þe hine nu wurðað.} \\
\text{(ll. 136-40)} \\
\text{[like the holy mann Ille did, whom we honour today. He always wisely dispensed the spiritual food to God's household at certain times and he gained, with his teaching, many souls for Almighty God, who honour him now.]} \]

The apostolic succession is briefly explained, validating as it does the preaching of
this text by a bishop who is in the direct line of succession from the apostles and the confessors who 'cyddon Godes lare, oð ðæt hit com to us' [made known God's law, until it came to us] (l. 147). The duty of the clergy to preach is stressed in a reminiscence (l. 150) of Christ's condemnation of the bad servant of Matthew 25. 26 ('Serve male, et piger' [Wicked and slothful servant]): the concern with teaching is one which permeates Ælfric's work and, while the impetus here may be from Bede, the development of the theme is very much a reflection of his own concerns. This urgent warning against being called 'yfele beowan and unnytwyrðe' leads into the opposite, Christ's commendation of the good servant in the final verses of the pericope for the day. These verses, Matthew 24. 46-47, are again virtually identical to Luke 12. 43-44, and Ælfric's exegesis is again clearly influenced by Bede's Commentary on Luke:

Quanta inter bonos auditores et bonos doctores meritorum distantia tanta est et praemiorum. Hos enim adueniens cum uigilantes inuenerit faciet discumbere et transiens ministrabit eis. Illos autem cum uerbi annonam familiae sibi creditae fideliter prudenterque dispensantes inuenerit supra omnia quae possidet constituet, id est supra omnia caelestis regni gaudia, non utique ut horum soli dominium teneant sed ut eorum abundantis ceteris sanctis aeterna possessione fruantur . . . . Et apostolus ait: Qui bene praesunt presbiteri duplici honore digni habeantur maxime qui laborant in uerbo et in doctrina.32

[As great as is the difference between the merits of good pupils and good teachers, so great is the difference between their rewards. These, truly, whom he will have found watching when he came, he will make sit at table and passing by he will serve them. Those, however, whom he will have found faithfully and wisely dispensing the provisions of the word to the household entrusted to them, he will set over all he possesses, that is, over all the joys of the heavenly kingdom, not only that they alone may possess absolute ownership of these things, but that they may enjoy eternal possession of them, more abundantly than the other saints. And the apostle says: 'Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching.']
The servant of these verses is again the teacher who will be set over the heavenly kingdom in greater honour than the unlearned, but Ælfric's enumeration of the ways in which the teachers have deserved this reward is very much his own:

\[\text{ða lareowas swincað} \quad \text{swíðor þonne ða læwedan,}\]

\[\text{ge on heora þeowdome,} \quad \text{þe hi gode þeowiað,}\]

\[\text{ge on heora gehealdsumnysse,} \quad \text{þe hi healdan sceolon,}\]

\[\text{ge on þære boclican lare,} \quad \text{þe hi bodian sceolon,}\]

\[\text{and bið for ði mare heora med mid gode.}\]

(ll.163-67)

[Teachers work harder than lay people, both in their divine service, in which they serve God, and in their chastity, which they have to preserve, and in the spiritual teaching, which they have to preach, and therefore their reward with God is greater.]

The responsibility and authority of this office prompt the remainder of this homily, which, indeed, can no longer be termed a homily: it now becomes a sermon on God's revenge:

\[\text{We sceolon eow secgan and forsuwian ne durron,}\]

\[\text{hu se ælmihtiga god foroft gewrecð swipe}\]

\[\text{his forsewennyssse on forscyldegodum mannum,}\]

\[\text{and hwilon eac forberð, swa swa we on bocum rædaþ,}\]

\[\text{and læt ðam yfelum fyrst, þæt hi heora yfeles geswicon}\]

\[\text{and hine gladion mid godum weorcum.}\]

(ll. 168-73)

[We must tell you and dare not be silent how Almighty God very often avenges himself fiercely on wicked people for their contempt of him and sometimes also refrains, as we read in books, and allows a respite to the evil, so that they may cease from their evil and delight him with good deeds.]

Ælfric gives a catalogue of exempla (Miriam, Moses's sister, King Ozias, Judas, Annanias and Saphira, Arius, Olympius, Adam, Cain, Saul, Solomon and the Jews): all offended against God, who took vengeance on them all, either
immediately or after a delay. The list of offenders, in including many who have already featured in Ælfric's work, has ramifications back through his career and can only have been compiled by Ælfric himself, who seems to have contrived a rather tenuous link in order to have the opportunity to tackle a subject on which he obviously had strong feelings. His sources here are either biblical or are those already used in his earlier treatment of these exempla.

The list begins with Miriam, struck with leprosy when she criticized God and Moses (Numbers 12. 1-16), and continues with another story in which leprosy is also the divine punishment, that of Ozias (Uzziah), who offended God by burning incense, a duty reserved for priests (2 Chronicles 26. 16-21). It was probably the similarity of punishment which prompted the second story, by the very common process of association, Ælfric continues with a mention of Judas, 'he ure drehten belæwde' [who betrayed our Lord] (l. 190), taken from Matthew 27. 5, then with Annanias, 'he on his agenum swicode' [who was deceitful about his property] (l. 192), and his wife Saphira, whose tale, from the Acts of the Apostles 5. 1-5, he had already recounted in Catholic Homilies I, xxii and xxvii. These biblical exempla are followed by two stories about heretics: those of Arius and Olympius. The story of Arius (ll. 195-99) is the passage which connects this homily with the roughly contemporaneous pastoral letters, Ælfric's first Latin and Old English letters for Wulfstan, and it had already been treated also in Catholic Homilies I, xx, and in Pope x, and mentioned in Lives of Saints xvi. His treatment of it here is very similar to that in Catholic Homilies and in Pope x, for which his sources seem to have been Rufinus, Book X, 1-14, and, probably, Haymo's Historiae Sacrae Epitome. In Pope x the passage on Arius is followed directly by one on Olympius, burnt in his bath for speaking against the Trinity, and Ælfric does the same here, again with a very similar account which seems to be derived from Isidore's Chronicon. In Pope neither of these stories occurs in the main sources for the homily.

Ælfric then moves (l. 213ff.) to those cases where God avenged himself after a long delay. Adam lived for 930 years after God promised him death (Genesis 5. 5) and Cain until the seventh generation (Genesis 4. 24). Saul's offence against God had already been dealt with by Ælfric in Catholic Homilies II, iv (l. 179ff.) and in his Lives of Saints xviii, and he is drawing here on 1 Samuel 15. 1-11, and the Acts of the Apostles 13. 21. Solomon's sin (ll. 231-38) is based on 1 Kings 11 and the rebellion against Roboam (Rehoboam) on 1 Kings 12. 1-20. The Jews' sin in killing Christ, punished by the Romans, is the third sin in succession which God
waited forty years to avenge, and the repeated forty years may have served to associate these three events in Ælfric's memory. This passage is similar to Ælfric's account in *Catholic Homilies I*, xxviii and depends on Rufinus. This catalogue of vengeance concludes with Ælfric generalising about God's vengeance on those who do not heed him; immediate, in order to set an example to others and in order that the sins be not increased, or delayed, to allow an opportunity for repentance (ll. 249-68). This leads on to a passage on the necessity for teachers and counsellors to restrain the foolish, with its notably narrow explanation of the necessity for teachers:

For ði synd witan gesette and wise lareowas,
ðæt hi scelon styran stuntra manna anginne,
ðæt, gif se dysega him ne ondræt his drihtnes yrre,
ðæt he huru hæbbe her for worulde
woruldllice steore, ðæt he ne forwrðe mid ealle,
gif nan steor ne gestilð his stuntnysse on ær.
(ll. 269-74)

[Counsellors and wise teachers are appointed in order that they have to correct the actions of foolish people so that, if the foolish man does not fear his Lord's anger, he should at least have an earthly discipline, so that he may not perish entirely, if no restraint stops his foolishness beforehand.]

Animal examples illustrating the necessity for fear (that of the lion who fears the white cock and the elephant who fears the mouse) complete the text:

Ælc ðing sceal habban sumne ege on his life,
ge furðon þa wildan deor, þe on wuda eardiaþ.
We rædah be þære leon, þe is swa reðe deor,
þæt ðurh hyre grymetunge, bonne heo grædig bið,
þæt ða ðe re deor, þe hyre stemne gehyrð,
þe mihton hire æftleon þurh heora fota swiftnysse,
þæt hi beóð swa afyrhte, þæt hi fleon ne durron.
Ac swa þeah seo leo þone lytlan hanan
hyre ondræt, gif heo him on besyð,
and ealra swidoðst, gif se hana hwit bið.
Eac se micela ylþ, þe ða modigan fearras
mid ealle ofbeat mid his egeslican nypele,
ondræt him forðbearle, gif he gesihð ane mus,
ðeah ðe seo mus ne mage his micelnyssse derian.

(ll. 275-88)

[Every creature must have some fear in its life, even the wild
animals who live in the forest. We read about the lion who is
such a fierce animal, that, because of its roaring when it is
hungry, the other animals, who hear its voice and who could
escape from it by flight, because of the swiftness of their feet, are
so frightened that they dare not flee. But nevertheless the lion
fears the little cock, if it sees it, and most of all, if the cock is
white. The great elephant too, who completely kills the brave
oxen with his terrifying trunk, is greatly afraid if he sees a
mouse, although the mouse cannot injure his greatness.]

Both of these examples are found, as Cross has pointed out, in Ambrose's
Hexaemeron, a text which Ælfric appears to have used as a source for his own
Hexameron, in which he had already dwelt on the subject of elephants.37 That
discussion of the nature of elephants had concluded, regretfully, with 'we nellað na
swiðor nu embe ðis sprecan' [we do not wish to talk any more about this now], an
indication that he would return to the topic, as he does here.38 Ælfric concludes by
stressing the hierarchical ordering of the world, with some animals fearing others
and all subject to man, who is subject to God.

This second part of the text, therefore, is devoted entirely to God's vengeance
and it seems a little odd that the establishment of the superiority of teachers and the
invocation of the tradition of the apostles should issue in the very single-minded Old
Testament message of God's vengeance and descriptions of his punishments. One
can imagine more inspiratory, positive applications of the office of confessor,
particularly on a feast celebrating the achievements of such a figure. The need to fill
out a text which, possibly because of a shortage of suitable source-material, would
otherwise have been too short, is hardly an adequate explanation, as it totally fails to
account for Ælfric's choice of subject-matter. While this may be explained partly by
the pericope's warnings to prepare for death, which naturally bring with them the
confessor's duty to prepare his people, this does not seem an entirely adequate
reason for the way in which so much of the text is devoted to exempla illustrating the
revenge which will be the inevitable result of disobedience to God's commands or of
any kind of disloyalty or treachery. Ælfric's tone, too, is strikingly insistent in this part of the text:

Ac we secgan swa þéah: Se ðe his scyppend gremanþ,
þæt hit bið gewrecen gewislican on him,
swa ær, swa lator, locahu god wylle,
buton he swa gesælig beo, þæt he hit sylf gebete
his agenes willes ær his geendunge.
God gewrecð his forsewenyssæ, swa swa we sædon ær,
hwilon ær, hwilon lator, locahu him gewyrð.

(ll. 251-55)

[But we say nevertheless: he who angers his creator, it will certainly be avenged on him, either earlier or later, however God wishes it, unless he is so fortunate that he voluntarily makes amends before his death. God will avenge contempt of him, as we said before, sometimes early, sometimes later, however it pleases him.]

Clearly, this was a moral which Ælfric was much concerned to hammer home, choosing to avail himself of the public platform offered by the opportunity to compose a homily for the bishop of Winchester to do so. If Æthelwold II of Winchester preached this text on the feast of a major saint, such as one of the Winchester confessor-saints, then it could well have reached a large audience of influential people.

Why, then, did Ælfric divert the homily into this course, electing to stress an angry, avenging God on a feast which should have been a joyful celebration? One possible explanation for this somewhat odd choice of topics is that it is in some way a response to a contemporary situation which disturbed him and we are fortunate that the text can be dated to within fairly narrow limits, as this allows us to look at the circumstances of the time for some elucidation of the problem. In Ælfric's later work, in particular, it is not difficult to find instances where his desire to address contemporary conditions seems in some way to disrupt the kind of smooth progression otherwise characteristic of his work. Malcolm Godden has pointed to passages in the Lives of Saints where Ælfric refers directly to contemporary evils: 'many of these comments and extrapolations spring exceedingly abruptly from the hagiographical narratives which are the main concern of the Lives of Saints.
Alfric's Second Homily for the Feast of a Confessor

Godden has also suggested that Alfric's choice of texts, especially his Old Testament narratives, appears to be influenced by their 'relevance to contemporary troubles'. The fragment Wyrdwriteras, too, deals with the policy of kings delegating military leadership to generals and has a clear contemporary application, either 'advocating the adoption of the policy of delegation or defending its continued implementation' and Pope homilies xiii and xiv denounce current evils. In Alfric's later work, therefore, his willingness to allude to contemporary conditions, particularly those which he considered in need of correction, is conspicuous and these allusions are phrased in general terms, not naming particular individuals or events.

If this homily for the feast of a Confessor was written around 1007, as Fehr convincingly argues, then it coincides with a very troubled period in Anglo-Saxon political history. The problems were such that they could not but have affected Alfric as they seem to have involved his patron, Æthelmaer, son of Æthelweard, his other main patron. Æthelmaer, who founded Cerne Abbas and then, in 1005, Eynsham, of which Alfric was the first abbot, seems in that year to have retired from the court, probably going to live at the monastery in Eynsham. Before this, from about 990 until 1005, he had been one of the most prominent noblemen at Æthelræd's court, but in 1005 and 1006, as Simon Keynes has shown, there was a major upheaval among the king's principal lay advisers. In 1006 the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records that 'on þam ilcan geare wæs Wulfgeat ealle his ar ongenumen, and Wulfheah and Ufegeat wasron ablende, and Ælfelm ealdorman eaflegan' [In the same year Wulfgeat was deprived of all his possessions and Wulfheah and Ufegeat were blinded and Ealdorman Ælelm slain]. Alfrelm, Wulfgeat and Wulfheah had all been important at court in the same period as Æthelmaer and, like him, had been foremost among the king's advisers at a time when Æthelræd, despite his nickname, was surrounded by men of 'wisdom, loyalty and goodness': one cannot avoid the impression that during the 990s and early 1000s the king was surrounded by men of considerable calibre, many of whom turn out to have been closely associated with the advancement of the monastic cause. While it is possible that Æthelmaer's retirement from the court was motivated solely by his desire to share in the monastic life of his new foundation, other explanations also suggest themselves: the coincidence in time between the apparent retirement of Ordulf and Æthelmaer in 1005 and the alarming sequence of events in 1006 which left Wulfgeat disgraced, Ealdorman Ælelm murdered and Wulfheah and Ufegeat blinded, is certainly remarkable – and one might be forgiven for suspecting that it is not entirely
The main result of the displacement of these noblemen in 1005 and 1006 was the rise to prominence of Eadric Streona (the epithet is glossed as *adquisitor* by Hemming of Worcester) and his family and Keynes argues that 'one cannot avoid the inference that Eadric had effected a considerable coup at the expense of his colleagues'. Florence of Worcester lays the blame for the death of Ælfhelm on Eadric Streona, describing 'how the "dolosus et perfidius" [deceitful and treacherous] Eadric Streona devised a trap for Ealdorman Ælfelm by inviting him to a feast at Shrewsbury, and then arranged for him to be murdered while they were all out hunting in the forest'. Shortly before these events, Eadric and his brothers had been coming to the fore at Æthelræd's court, having been 'present in strength at the meetings in 1005', though the connection between this and Æthelmær's withdrawal to Eynsham is unclear: 'one can but guess, however, whether they were taking advantage of the imminent retirement of Ordulf and Æthelmær to advance their own interests, or whether Ordulf and Æthelmær retired because they could not countenance the growing influence of Eadric and his family'. These changes in the king's advisers were the beginning of the downturn in Æthelræd's reign, leading to the disasters which characterised its last ten years. It does not take much imagination to judge the effect that these changed circumstances at court would have had on Ælfric, who could not have been indifferent to the fall from grace of his patron. Eadric's 'complicity in an assortment of murders, base strategems and acts of treachery' does not compare well to the piety of Æthelmær and what appears to have been the ousting of one by the other must have pained Ælfric deeply.

The way in which the pericope-exposition in the homily for the feast of a Confessor gives way to a sermon on God's vengeance, illustrated by a long catalogue of exempla, may well be connected with the events outlined above. The vengeance sermon is hardly a natural development from what has gone before and its somewhat forced and sudden introduction may be the sign of an extra-textual motivation prompting Ælfric's deflection from a straightforward homiletic exposition. He presumably would have been inhibited from commenting directly on what had been happening at court, as those to whom he would, it seems reasonable to assume, have objected were now at the centre of power there and his only recourse, therefore, would be the type of veiled, general warning that we find here. Examples of traitors and deceivers of all kinds – heretics, murderers, blasphemers, idol-worshippers – are accumulated, with the punishment meted out by God rehearsed in each case to make the point that no-one can evade his vengeance. Whereas in other texts he could directly castigate his contemporaries, because he is
objecting to, for example, English men going over to the Danes or to the lack of proper faith and morals, here his objection would have been against men who would have been central in government and could not, therefore, be voiced as openly. It may be fanciful to imagine that the concluding images – the white cock who frightens the cruel lion and the mouse who frightens the huge elephant – are intended as an image of his own role as preacher, but they certainly seem to offer a parallel: in one sense he is powerless to influence events, in another he is empowered, by virtue of his office, and can set out to make even the mighty fearful.

It could be argued that Assmann IV is not the only text in which Ælfric discusses divine punishment and that its occurrence as a theme elsewhere in his work undermines the interpretation put forward here. Against this, however, it is possible to argue that, when Ælfric does, as here, passionately argue the case for God's intervention there is generally an immediate reason, although it cannot always be recovered precisely. His other main treatments of the theme are subtly different, and their individual emphases suggest that he employed it in response to varying circumstances. As early as Catholic Homilies II, xxviii Ælfric had been concerned about the problem of divine justice not always being in evidence: ‘Ælic ðæra ȏsc hine onhēfð bið geeadmet. and se ȏsc hine sylfne geeadmet. se bið ahafen; Ne bið þes cwýde na symle sona gefylded. on manna gesiðum. bið swa ðeah forwel oft. swa swa we on bocum gehwær rædað. þæt se ælmihtiga scyppend foroft ða ofermodan unðances geeadmette’ [Each of those who exalt themselves will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted. This saying is not always fulfilled immediately in the sight of men but nevertheless, as we read everywhere in books, it very often happens that the Almighty Creator humbles the proud against their will]. The exempla of God's vengeance on Nebuchadnezzar and Balthasar, with which he illustrates this comment, deal specifically with the proud and with the necessity for humility, however, and so are not strictly comparable with Assmann IV. In a long, later addition (c. 1005) to this homily, Ælfric adds the story of the Emperor Theodosius voluntarily submitting to the penance imposed by St Ambrose for commanding that the citizens of Thessalonica be killed. That Ælfric felt impelled to add this passage ten years after the composition of the homily suggests a particular reason and an obvious contemporary parallel to Theododius's command is Æthelræd's order that the Danes in England were to be killed on St Brice's Day. Again, this exemplum is appropriate to the homily to which it was added in its concern with pride and humility but its main emphasis is on how to forestall divine retribution by repentance and submission to ecclesiastical authorities. Ælfric's
inclusion of it could possibly have been intended, therefore, to 'catch the conscience of the king'. Whereas in Assmann IV Ælfric is concerned more to stress that God will always punish the evil, in this addition to Catholic Homilies II, xxviii the emphasis is on how to avert this punishment by timely penance, though both stress the important role of ecclesiastical teachers in very similar ways. The Catholic Homilies text, therefore, seems concerned to stimulate a change of heart in someone about whose spiritual welfare he was concerned, whereas the tone of Assmann IV suggests a situation in which Ælfric's main desire was to fulminate against someone or something.

The appendage to the life of St Alban in the Lives of Saints similarly deals with repentance and divine punishments and, as with Assmann IV, the topic is introduced out of the blue, having nothing to do with Alban and even being given a separate heading, Item alia. The subject of traitors and their fate clearly troubles Ælfric here and is the theme of the longest exemplum in the piece, on Absolom and Achitophel, and one gets a distinct impression of a personal agitation demanding expression in this strongly worded, abruptly introduced treatment of different kinds of betrayal. Again, it is hard to avoid the idea that the pressure of contemporary circumstances lies behind this striking outburst. As with Assmann IV, the force of Ælfric's passion signals a more than academic interest in the fate of those who betray their lords and Æthelræd's reign provides plenty of examples of such behaviour, even if one accepts Keynes's revisionist reading of the events of this period, which plays down the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's catalogue of English disgraces. The theme of divine retribution, therefore, is not confined to Assmann IV, but the other conspicuous instances of it seem to share with the Confessor homily both a force and a seeming digressiveness which act almost as a signal of Ælfric's personal and emotive response to contemporary circumstances.

Ælfric's second homily for the feast of a Confessor, therefore, with its dire warnings of the consequences of ill-doing offers us, I would argue, his reaction to events in the immediately preceding period, events which must have worried him greatly. The change half-way through the text to the roll-call of the guilty alerts us to the possibility that Ælfric had an agenda which was not directly connected to the need simply to meet Æthelwold II's request for a homily for the occasion and that agenda, it seems to me, is an urgent wish to make known his dismay and his opposition to recent developments. The text, therefore, is interesting not only as an example of Ælfric's procedure when asked to compose a homily for which he had few obvious sources, but also of the way in which he was able to use biblical stories.
to censure obliquely some of his more powerful contemporaries, having validated his right to do so by establishing the authority and necessity of his office as preacher.
NOTES

1 B. Assmann, *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligleben* (Kassel, 1889), repr. with a supplementary introduction by P. Clemoes (Darmstadt, 1964), pp. 49-64.

2 Assmann, p. 49.

3 As is clear from his position in witness lists; see S. Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred The Unready* 978-1016 (Cambridge, 1980), p. 156, n. 8 and Table 3.

4 B. Fehr, *Die Hirtenbriefe Ælfrics in altenglischer und lateinscher Fassung* (Hamburg, 1914), repr. with a supplementary introduction by P. Clemoes (Darmstadt, 1966), p. LI.

5 Fehr, pp. L-LI.

6 Fehr, p. LI.


13 *PL* 118, 781-90.

14 *PL* 102, 532-34.

15 *PL* 94, 470-01.


17 See *Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. Pope, I, 159-60 and 170.

18 See Pope, I, 159-60.

19 *PL* 118, 785-90.

20 *PL* 102, 538-40.

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23 See Die angelsächsischen Prosabearbeitungen der Benediktinerregel, ed. A. Schrör, 2nd ed. with a supplement by H. Gneuss (Darmstadt, 1964), Ch. XVI and XVIII (pp. 40-44).
27 Bede, Commentarius in Lucam, p. 257, ll. 1060-66.
28 Bede, Commentarius in Lucam, p. 257, ll. 1056-60.
29 PL 118, 789-90.
31 Commentarius in Lucam, pp. 258-59, ll. 1106-14.
32 Commentarius in Lucam, p. 259, ll. 1117-29.
33 Homilies of Ælfric, ed. Pope, pp. 394-95.
34 Homilies of Ælfric, ed. Pope, p. 395.
35 This interpretation of Genesis 4. 24 depends on a common exegesis found, for example, in Bede's Commentarius in Genesim, ed. C. W. Jones, CCSL 118A (Turnhout, 1967), p. 90, ll. 620-26.
36 Historia Ecclesiastica, ed. T. Mommsen in Eusebius Werke II, i (Leipzig, 1903), II, 5-6.
37 J. E. Cross, 'The Elephant to Alfred, Ælfric, Aldhelm and Others', Studia Neophilologica, 37 (1965), 367-73 (at 373); Ambrosii Hexaemeron, ed. K. Schenkl, CSEL 32.1 (Vienna, 1897), VI, iv-vi.
38 Exameron Anglice, ed. S. J. Crawford, Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa, X (Hamburg, 1921), 1. 296.
40 'Ælfric's Saints' Lives and the Problem of Miracles', p. 95.
42 Keynes, The Diplomas of King Æthelred, p. 207.
43 For an outline of events in 1006-07, see Keynes, pp. 209-14, and B. Yorke, 'Æthelmær: the Foundation of the Abbey at Cerne and the Politics of the Tenth Century', The Cerne Abbey Millennium Lectures, ed. K. Barker (Cerne Abbey, 1988).
44 Quoted by Keynes, p. 210, from MS C.
45 Keynes, p. 193.
I am most grateful to Professor Malcolm Godden for bringing the following passages to my attention.