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University of Leeds
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A Possible Source for the *seofonfealdan Godes gifa*

Loredana Teresi

There are two Old English treatises dealing with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: one is attributed to Ælfric (B 1.6.3) and one to Wulfstan (B 2.2.6).¹ Wulfstan's version is an expanded reworking of Ælfric's text, which, in turn, is thought to have been written by Ælfric on Wulfstan's request.² The present work briefly analyses the way in which the two authors treat the subject, with a view to assessing a possible source.³

Ælfric's exposition of the gifts of the sevenfold Holy Spirit (wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of God) and of the opposed wicked gifts of the devil is found in seven manuscripts: Cambridge, Trinity College, B. 15. 34; London, British Library, Cotton Faustina A. ix;⁴ London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius C. vi; London, British Library, Harley 3271; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 343; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 115; and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 116.⁵ Wulfstan's adaptation is recorded in two manuscripts: Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 113 and Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 201;⁶ a third manuscript (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 419) contains part of the text as the final section of a homily on *De die iudicii*.⁷ Both versions were edited by Arthur Napier in 1883, and Wulfstan's version was later re-edited in Dorothy Bethurum's 1957 collection of Wulfstan's homilies.⁸

The Ælfrician text begins by enumerating the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, giving their names both in Latin (*sapientia, intellectus, consilium, fortitudo, scientia, pietas, and timor domini*) and in Old English (*wisdom, andgit, ræd, modes strengð, god ingehyd, arfæstnyss, and Godes ege*), and quoting the Prophet Isaiah as source.⁹ The list is then followed by a short description of each gift and of the behaviour of the fortunate man on whom it has been bestowed. This happy catalogue is immediately followed, in a symmetrical fashion, by a list

of the seven 'bad gifts' (*ungifa*) offered to men by the devil, again with their names spelled out both in Latin (*insipientia, stultitia, inprouidentia, ignauia, ignorantia, impietas, and temeritas*) and Old English (*dysig or dwæсныss, stunnys, receleasныss butan foresceawunge, abroðennyss or nahnyss, nytenyss, arleasныss, and dyrstignyss*), and by their brief descriptions. Every *spiritus bonus* has, in fact, two bad 'countergifts', since each *spiritus malus*, in its worst expression, takes the form of a hypocritical *simulatio* of its corresponding *spiritus bonus* (for example, the bad counterpart of wisdom is folly, but also simulated wisdom).

Wulfstan modified the Ælfrician text partly in terms of vocabulary and style (by introducing, for example, alliterative tags, binary phrases, formulaic expressions, and other elements typical of his style),¹⁰ and also by adding a long final section on the deceitful and hypocritical behaviour of the Antichrist and of the men that are misled by him.

If we exclude the two manuscripts where the text is defective at the beginning, all the other copies of the text that have come down to us, whether in Ælfric's or in Wulfstan's version, with the sole exception of one (Harley 3271), have a short Latin introduction listing, always with reference to the Prophet Isaiah, the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, each with its two 'countergifts' (its negative opposite and its simulation).¹¹ This Latin preamble has long been puzzling to scholars and editors, who have been uncertain whether to assign the piece to Ælfric himself or to a source still to be identified; the problem being that, although it would not be Ælfric's custom to provide his works with a Latin résumé and then translate it into English, no text was close enough to the Ælfrician Latin introduction to be held to be its source, and most of all, none of the various patristic writings mentioning or discussing the gifts of the sevenfold Spirit seemed to cite also their negative counterparts. In Bethurum's words:

There is no other example in Ælfric's works of his writing out an outline in Latin first, if he did that here, and then elaborating it in English. It is slightly indebted to Gregory's treatment, which Ælfric probably knew directly and may have got also from Amalarius, who quotes Gregory, or from Charlemagne's letter. The form of Ælfric's sentences is like that of Amalarius's, but the opposite vices are not dealt with directly in any of these works.¹²

To the best of my knowledge, the origin of this Latin prologue is still obscure. A very similar passage, comprising not only the seven positive gifts of the Holy Spirit, but also the seven two-fold bad gifts of the devil is found, however, in the eighth book of Ambrosius Autpertus's commentary on the *Apocalypse* (*Expositio in Apocalypsin*),¹³ in the section where he provides an exposition of chapter 17. 3. Although Ælfric's text appears to be slightly more concise, the two passages share the same vocabulary and, for the most part, the same syntactic structure, apart from the very beginning, as can be seen from the following synoptic arrangement of the two versions:

Ambrosius Autpertus, *In
Apocalypsin*
(ll. 110-13 and 156-72)¹⁴

Ælfric, *De septiformi spiritu*
(ll. 10-25)¹⁵

Et in bono enim et in malo septinarium numerum frequenter poni Scriptura sacra testatur.

Nam cum Spiritus Sanctus pro septinaria operatione, Esaia testante, septiformis esse credatur in bono, spiritus etiam nequam septiformis saepius designatur in malo. [...]

Et ut quod dicimus manifestius appareat, spiritus bonus quo aduersitati resistens impletur Ecclesia, spiritus est sapientiae. Cui e contrario malus opponitur spiritus insipientiae, quo aperte ueritati cornibus resistens pars insanit aduersa, alter peior simulatio sapientiae, quo in uerisimile fraude septies ac multiplicius pars aduersa ad seducendum praeualet.

Spiritus sanctus pro septenaria operatione, Isaia propheta testante, septiformis esse creditur in bono; spiritus etiam nequam septiformis designatur.

spiritus bonus

spiritus sapientie, cui e contrario malus opponitur spiritus insipientie, alter peior simulatio sapientiae.

Spiritus bonus, spiritus intellectus; malus autem, spiritus stultitiae; alter peior, simulatio disciplinae.

Spiritus bonus consilii; malus autem spiritus imprudentiae; alter peior, simulatio prouidentiae.

Spiritus bonus, spiritus fortitudinis; cui opponitur malus, aperte ignauiae spiritus; alter peior, infirmitas fallens obumbratione uirtutis.

Spiritus bonus, spiritus scientiae; cui contrarius opponitur malus, spiritus ignorantiae; nequior autem, usurpatio scientiae.

Spiritus bonus, spiritus pietatis; malus uero, spiritus impietatis; alter peior, falsae pietatis obtentus.

Spiritus bonus, spiritus timoris Dei; cui contrarius est spiritus temeritatis; alter peior, dolus fictae religiositatis.

spiritus bonus spiritus intellectus, malus autem spiritus stultitiae, alter peior simulatio discipline.

spiritus bonus spiritus consilii, malus autem spiritus improuidentiae, alter peior simulatio prouidentiae.

spiritus bonus spiritus fortitudinis, cui opponitur malus aperte ignauiae spiritus, alter peior infirmitas fallens obumbratione uirtutis.

spiritus bonus spiritus scientie, cui contrarius malus spiritus ignorantie, nequior autem usurpatio scientie.

spiritus bonus, spiritus pietatis, malus uero spiritus impietatis, alter peior false pietatis obtentus.

spiritus bonus spiritus timoris dei, cui contrarius est spiritus temeritatis, alter peior dolus fecte religiositatis.

The biblical passage that Ambrosius Autpertus is discussing in this section of the commentary concerns the vision of a woman (Babylon) sitting on a red beast with seven heads and ten horns (the empire), covered in blasphemous words:

*et vidi mulierem sedentem super bestiam coccineam plenam nominibus blasphemiae habentem capita septem et cornua decem*¹⁶

This description forms a negative parallel with *Apocalypse* 5. 6, which describes the vision of a Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes, explicitly said to be the seven Spirits of God:

et vidi et ecce in medio throni et quattuor animalium et in
medio seniorum agnum stantem tamquam occisum
habentem cornua septem et oculos septem qui sunt spiritus
Dei missi in omnem terram¹⁷

Because of this parallel, Ambrosius Autpertus associates the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and the seven 'countergifts' of the devil with the apocalyptic Lamb's and beast's horns and heads.¹⁸ He also enumerates the seven gifts when he expounds *Apocalypse* 1. 4, on John's greeting to the seven Churches, which have been filled – he explains – the sevenfold spirit of God.¹⁹ The description of the first gift (*sapientia*) in Ambrosius Autpertus's book eight contains references to this wider context ('quo aduersitati resistens impletur Ecclesia' and 'quo aperte ueritati cornibus resistens pars insanit aduersa'). These references become obscure once the catalogue has been extracted from this wider context, which would easily explain why the Latin introduction in Ælfric's treatise has a slightly altered and more concise text for the first gift; that is to adjust its source to its new context.

Whether Ælfric was drawing directly on Ambrosius Autpertus's commentary cannot be ascertained. It is possible that both were drawing from a third source which has not yet been identified, or that Ælfric copied his text from a source which had in turn copied from Ambrosius Autpertus. What is certain is that Ælfric did not make up the Latin text: he just reproduced it, possibly eliminating the references to the *Apocalypse* if they were still there, and then translated it into Old English, giving the Old English equivalents for the names of the gifts, and finally expanding it, by giving short descriptions of the various gifts and associated behaviours.

There is, however, another element that deserves to be taken into account, since it might help throw some light on the text that Ælfric was using. As mentioned above, Wulfstan adapted Ælfric's text to form a new, longer treatise on the same topic, where he added, at the very end, a long discussion on the Antichrist and on hypocrisy. This addition creates a further link with Ambrosius Autpertus's text, which deserves attention. Ælfric's text never mentions the Antichrist: the *ungifa* are ascribed to the devil, who is named variously (*yfela gast*, *ungesewenlica feond*, *arleas deofol*, *deofol*, *widerræda deofol*, *manfulla*

deofol, *hetela deofol*, and *gramlica deofol*), but never called *antecrist*, and there are no elements in Ælfric's version which directly evoke the Antichrist. Ambrosius Autpertus's text, on the contrary, is centred on the Antichrist, not only because it occurs in the wider context of the *Apocalypse*, but also because it explicitly refers to the Antichrist and to hypocrisy. His text on the seven gifts is immediately followed by direct references to the Antichrist and to hypocrisy, and the whole passage echoes Wulfstan's theme:

Hinc est quod ipsa bestia cum sit e septem, ipsum septinarium excedens numerum octaua inuenitur. Hinc per Psalmistam specialiter de antichristo dicitur: *Sedet in insidiis cum diuitibus in occultis*. De quo etiam Apostolus dicit: *Tunc reuelabitur ille iniquus quem Dominus Iesus interficiet spiritu oris sui, et destruet inlustratione aduentus sui eum cuius est aduentus secundum operationem Satanae in omni uirtute et signis et prodigiis mendacibus, et in omni seductione iniquitatis in his qui pereunt*. In uirtute scilicet apertam potentiam; in signis uero et prodigiis mendacibus ac seductione iniquitatis, hypocrisin simulatae ueritatis designauit.²⁰

This parallelism between Wulfstan's addition and Ambrosius Autpertus's text would seem to confirm that the text from which Ælfric drew his introduction was indeed Ambrosius Autpertus's *Expositio in Apocalypsin*. Wulfstan must have been familiar with Ambrosius Autpertus's work too. He may have spotted the source in the treatise, or Ælfric may have pointed it out somehow. Wulfstan went back to the *Expositio* while reworking Ælfric's treatise, and was inspired by Ambrosius Autpertus's words for his long expansion on the Antichrist's deceitful deeds and the spreading of hypocrisy in the world that he added to the Ælfrician treatment of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The *Expositio* is believed to have been widely known and rather influential in medieval Europe.²¹ There is also manuscript evidence for the circulation of two works by Ambrosius Autpertus in Anglo-Saxon England.²² Ælfric's drawing on Ambrosius Autpertus's commentary for his Latin introduction to the *De septiformi spiritu* seems therefore plausible, and suggests that the *Expositio in Apocalypsin* should also be included in the number of Ambrosius Autpertus's works that were known in late Anglo-Saxon England.

NOTES

¹ For the so-called Cameron numbers see Angus Cameron, 'A List of Old English Texts', in *A Plan for the Dictionary of Old English*, ed. by Roberta Frank and Angus Cameron (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), pp. 25-306. Cameron considers Ælfric's text a tract and Wulfstan's a homily.

² On this and related issues see *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, ed. by Dorothy Bethurum (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), pp. 24-36 and 304-06; Otto Zimmermann, 'Die beiden Fassungen des dem Abte Ælfric zugeschriebenen ags. Traktats über die siebenfältige Gabe des Heiligen Geistes' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leipzig, 1888); Karl Jost, *Wulfstanstudien* (Bern: Francke, 1950); Angus McIntosh, 'Wulfstan's Prose', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 35 (1949), 109-42; and Ida Masters Hollowell, 'On the Two-Stress Theory of Wulfstan's Rhythm', *Philological Quarterly*, 61.1 (1982), 1-11.

³ I chose to write on this topic not only because of the very valuable work that Professor Joyce Hill has done in this field, but also because, the first time I ever met her, she was giving a very interesting and enlightening lecture on Ælfric's and Wulfstan's style. This short essay is my modest way of saying 'thank you' for that lecture, for all her inspiring work, and for her friendly and contagious enthusiasm for our discipline.

⁴ In this manuscript the beginning of the text is lacking.

⁵ See N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), nos 86, 153, 199, 239, 310, 332 and 333, respectively.

⁶ Here the text begins imperfectly.

⁷ See Ker, nos 331, 49b and 68. CCCC 419 contains the final part on the Antichrist, which is not found in Ælfric's text.

⁸ *Wulfstan: Sammlung der ihm zugeschriebenen Homilien nebst Untersuchungen über ihre Echtheit I Text und Varianten*, ed. by Arthur Napier (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1883), pp. 50-56 (no. VII: Wulfstan's text) and pp. 56-60 (no. VIII: Ælfric's text); Bethurum, pp. 185-91 (no. 9). See also H. Logeman, 'Anglo-Saxonica Minora', *Anglia*, 11 (1889), 97-120 (pp. 106-10, no. VI), for the version in Cotton Tiberius C. vi.

⁹ Cf. Isaiah 11. 2-3: 'et requiescet super eum spiritus Domini, spiritus sapientiae et intellectus, spiritus consilii et fortitudinis, spiritus scientiae et pietatis, et replebit eum spiritus timoris Domini' [and the spirit of the Lord will rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and piety, and the spirit of the fear of God will fill him]. All biblical quotations are from *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem*, ed. by Robert Weber, 3rd edn (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983).

¹⁰ See Bethurum, p. 306, and Jost, pp. 117-29. Wulfstan also translates the Latin names of the *ungifa* differently from Ælfric in two instances: *insipientia* becomes *unwisdom* (Ælfric had translated it as *dysig* or *dwæsnys*) and *ignauia* is rendered as *wacmodnys* (Ælfric's *abroðennyss* or *nahtnys*).

¹¹ According to Bethurum, the Latin prologue was only part of Ælfric's text, and was not retained in Wulfstan's version: p. 321. Ms Hatton 113, however, includes it.

¹² Bethurum, p. 305. Zimmermann considers it Ælfric's own work: p. 52.

¹³ *Ambrosii Autperti Opera*, ed. by Robert Weber, Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis: 27, *Expositionis in Apocalypsin Libri I-V*, and 27A, *Expositionis Apocalypsin Libri VI-X* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1975). Ambrosius Autpertus was born in Gaule, in Provence, and became a monk in the monastery of San Vincenzo al Volturno, in the South of Italy, around 740. He became abbot, only for a very short time, in 777, but left the monastery probably because of conflicts between the Lombard and the Franc monks. He died in 778, while on a journey to Rome. The commentary on the *Apocalypse*, written between 758 and 767, was his main literary achievement, and was mainly based on Primasius, but also, often indirectly, on Victorinus, Jerome, Tyconius, Augustine, Gregory, and Benedict. For more details see *Ambrosii Autperti Opera*, vol. 27, pp. v-xvi and Claudio Leonardi, 'Spiritualità di Ambrogio Autperto', *Studi medievali*, 9 (1968), 1-131.

¹⁴ *Ambrosii Autperti Opera*, vol. 27A, book VIII, ch. 17. 3b, pp. 649-50. [The Holy Scripture attests that the number seven appears frequently, in connection with both good and evil. While the Holy Spirit is believed, on the basis of Isaiah's testimony, to be sevenfold because of his sevenfold action, the wicked spirit is often also designated as sevenfold in connection with evil. [. . .] And in order to make clearer what we are saying, [we will say that] the good spirit – which resists adversities – with which the Church is filled, is the spirit of wisdom. To this is opposed, in contrast, the wicked spirit of insipience, by which the opposite party is driven mad, overtly resisting the horns of truth. An even worse [spirit] is the simulation of wisdom, by which the opposite party succeeds in seducing with well-disguised deceit, seven times and many more. A good spirit is the spirit of understanding, whilst wicked is the spirit of stupidity, and an even worse spirit is the simulation of intelligence. A good spirit is the spirit of counsel, whilst wicked is the spirit of imprudence; even worse is the spirit of the simulation of prudence. A good spirit is the spirit of fortitude, to which is opposed the overtly wicked spirit of moral weakness; a worse spirit is weakness that deceives through the false aspect of virtue. A good spirit is the spirit of knowledge, to which is opposed the wicked spirit of ignorance, and even wickeder is that of the illegitimate use of knowledge. A good spirit is the spirit of piety; wicked, conversely, is the spirit of impiety, and an even worse spirit is the exhibition of false piety. A good spirit is the spirit of fear of God, to which is opposed the spirit of temerity; an even worse one is the malice of feigned religious devotion.] I wish to thank Prof. Patrizia

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Lendinara, Prof. Giorgio Di Maria and Dr Filippa Alcamesi, from the University of Palermo, and Dr William Flynn and Dr Mary Swan, from the University of Leeds, for very kindly helping me with the translations from Latin in this essay. Any mistakes which remain are mine.

¹⁵ Napier, p. 50. [On the basis of the Prophet Isaiah's testimony, the Holy Spirit is believed to be sevenfold in connection with good, as it performs a sevenfold action; the wicked spirit is also designated as sevenfold. A good spirit is the spirit of wisdom, to which, in contrast, is opposed the wicked spirit of insipience and the even worse spirit of the simulation of wisdom. A good spirit is the spirit of understanding, whilst wicked is the spirit of stupidity, and an even worse spirit is the simulation of intelligence. A good spirit is the spirit of counsel, whilst wicked is the spirit of imprudence; even worse is the spirit of the simulation of prudence. A good spirit is the spirit of fortitude, to which is opposed the overtly wicked spirit of moral weakness; a worse spirit is weakness that deceives through the false aspect of virtue. A good spirit is the spirit of knowledge, to which is opposed the wicked spirit of ignorance, and even wickeder is that of the illegitimate use of knowledge. A good spirit is the spirit of piety; wicked, conversely, is the spirit of impiety, and an even worse spirit is the exhibition of false piety. A good spirit is the spirit of fear of God, to which is opposed the spirit of temerity; an even worse one is the malice of feigned religious devotion.]

¹⁶ [and I saw a woman sitting on a red beast, full of blasphemous words and having seven heads and ten horns.] The beast is also described in *Apocalypse* 13. 1-3.

¹⁷ [Then I saw a Lamb standing in the centre of the throne, surrounded by the four living creatures [= the four symbols of the evangelists] and the elders. The Lamb appeared to have been killed. It had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God that have been sent throughout the whole earth.]

¹⁸ *Ambrosii Autperti Opera*, vol. 27, p. 262 and vol. 27A, pp. 646-50.

¹⁹ *Ambrosii Autperti Opera*, vol. 27, pp. 28-29.

²⁰ *Ambrosii Autperti Opera*, vol. 27A, p. 650. The underlining is mine. [This is the reason why the very same beast, although being part of the seven beasts, exceeds the number seven and becomes the eighth beast. Therefore, through the words of the Psalmist, the Antichrist is described especially in these terms: *He lies in ambush with the rich, in the dark*. The Apostle also says about him: *And then the wicked will reveal himself, and will be killed by Lord Jesus, by means of the spirit of His mouth, and, with the light of His coming*, [Lord Jesus] *will destroy him that comes through the power of Satan with all sorts of false wonders, signs and prodigies, and with all sorts of impious deceits, among those who will perish*. By virtue he obviously meant undisguised power; by signs, in truth, and by false prodigies and by the seduction of injustice he meant the hypocrisy of simulated truth.]

²¹ Gerald Bonner, [Saint Bede in the Tradition of Western Apocalyptic Commentary', in *Bede and His World: The Jarrow Lectures*, 2 vols (Aldershot: Variorum, 1994), 1, 155-83 (p. 168).

²² The *De conflictu vitiorum et virtutem* and the *Sermo de cupiditate*, both attributed to Ambrosius Autpertus, feature in manuscripts that are thought to be of English origin or provenance. See Helmut Gneuss, *Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts* (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001), nos 41, 112, 363 and 519, and Richard Gameson, *The Manuscripts of Early Norman England (c. 1066-1130)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), nos 81, 471, 485, 596 and 838.