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## Rewriting Ælfric: An Alternative Ending of a Rogationtide Homily

#### Jonathan Wilcox

Joyce Hill has contributed more than most scholars to our understanding of Anglo-Saxon homilies in general and the working methods and significance of Ælfric's homiletic achievement in particular. One of Joyce's fundamental insights throughout much of her scholarship has been into the importance of investigating manuscripts rather than printed editions for understanding the Anglo-Saxon preaching tradition. I would like to add to that picture with one small example of homiletic adaptation that has been largely overlooked: an alternative ending to Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies* I.18, 'In letania maiore', in MS Cambridge, Trinity College, B. 15. 34, which has not seen print or much notice of any kind. I offer this brief foray into the Old English homiletic corpus as a tribute to Joyce and her valuable work in this field.<sup>3</sup>

Rogationtide, the three weekdays preceding Ascension Day featuring a period of fasting and repentance and the procession of relics, has long been recognized as a particularly important moment for preaching in Anglo-Saxon England and one that generated an unusually extensive range of Old English homilies. The period is known in modern terminology as the Minor Litanies, as distinct from the Major Litany on 25 April, although Joyce has demonstrated that such was not the terminology of Anglo-Saxon England, where Rogationtide was often designated as *In letania maiore* (i.e. the Greater Litany) and known in the vernacular as *gangdagas* (literally walking days, referring to the processional nature of the festivities) or *bendagas* (petition days) or *gebeddagas* (prayer days). The festival was instituted, according to tradition, by Mamertus, bishop of Vienne, c. 461-75, to save his city from a series of calamities. Ælfric provides homilies for each of the three days in both the first series of *Catholic Homilies* (*CH* I.18-20) and the second series (*CH* II.19-22). A further homily by Ælfric on auguries in *Lives of Saints* is also for this period (*LS* 17). Anonymous homilies

survive for this occasion with some abundance, namely Vercelli 11-13, Vercelli 19-21, and Bazire and Cross 4-11, while Blickling 8-10 may have been intended for this time.<sup>6</sup>

The reason for the popularity of Rogationtide as a preaching occasion in Anglo-Saxon homilies surely has a lot to do with the useful thematic range of sermons for the occasion. As Joyce observes, the frequency of copying 'must in part result from the general utility of the subject matter, since the focus was on penitence, prayerful petition and basic instruction in the faith'. Bazire and Cross also make this point, suggesting that Rogationtide homilies teach basic tenets of the faith and serve as an opportunity 'for taking the warning of the Doomsday to come. The visualization of Doomsday is created from the popular apocrypha and from other descriptions, and almost becomes a homiletic topos'.8 The underlying lection, as Joyce shows, was Luke 11. 5-13 and related gospel texts. This is a passage where Christ teaches his disciples to pray, immediately after telling them the Lord's Prayer, and expands on the significance of prayer with the parable of a friend who knocks at midnight to ask for three loaves of bread for the sake of hospitality, centering on the idea 'Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you' (Luke 11. 9). Explicating this lection is conducive to general explanation of the nature of God and his accessibility.

Ælfric's first series homily 'In letania maiore' (CH I.18), which this essay focusses on, is something of a model of Old English Rogationtide preaching. Ælfric translates the name of the festival as gebeddagas (prayer-days) and characterizes it as an occasion of prayer for the abundance of earthly fruits, for health and peace and for the forgiveness of sins. He explains the origin of the Rogationtide observance in the three day fast established by Bishop Mamertus as a reaction to the calamities afflicting his city of Vienne, a practice that Ælfric sees as modelled on the penitence of the Ninevites in the story of Jonah, which he then recounts. He then translates the pericope, Luke 11. 5-13, and provides an exposition based largely on Augustine, explicitly named as his source. The friend who comes in the night is a call to turn to Christ in the ignorance of the world; the three loaves the friend asks for stand for faith in the holy trinity; the friend is supporting a visitor just as we are all wayfarers in this world. In further exposition, Ælfric sees the householder as Christ and the petitioner as the Christian, who must persevere in his or her prayers. The request for fish, egg and bread symbolizes the need for faith, hope and charity, which are given to us by the heavenly father, who 'deð bæt we habbað godne gast. bæt is godne willan' (ll.

151-52, 'causes that we have good spirit, that is good will'), an amplification which seems to be Ælfric's own and to which I will return. 10

Ælfric turns to a discussion of the responsibilities of the rich as he considers the nature of goodness. Gold, land and riches, while good things in themselves, only make their owner good if that owner uses them to do good, and the ownership of wealth carries obligations. Ælfric emphasizes the importance of charity by appealing to the audience's sense of shame at the break down of brotherly love: 'Hu mihtu for sceame. æniges þinges æt gode biddan: gif ðu forwyrnst binum gelican. bæs be ðu foreaðelice him getiðian miht' (ll. 184-85, 'How could you ask anything from God for shame if you deny to your own kind what you could very easily grant them?'). Avarice, he warns, is the root of all evil. Ælfric does not condemn wealth outright, but does condemn the acquisition of wealth through avarice, even as he draws a distinction for those who are rich simply through inheritance. 11 The rich and the needy are mutually dependent, he suggests (Il. 205-end), the one giving bodily bread that is soon turned to dung, the other giving eternal life by allowing the rich to show their charity. He appeals to Matthew 25. 40: whatever the rich give to the poor, they give to Christ, who lives and reigns with the Father and Holy Ghost forever without end.

Ælfric's first series of *Catholic Homilies* circulated widely – Clemoes identifies some 36 manuscripts that survive in whole or in part and postulates the former existence of some 50 others – and *CH* I.18 participated in this wide circulation, surviving in fifteen manuscripts. These include all six main phases of distribution identified by Clemoes. One representative of the sixth and final phase is the MS Cambridge, Trinity College, B. 15. 34. This is a manuscript copied in the mid-eleventh century at Canterbury, which contains a set of homilies by Ælfric for Sundays and festivals other than saints' days from Easter to the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, at which point it breaks off imperfectly. Clemoes speculates that it represents the first volume of an extensive Temporale collection assembled by Ælfric relatively late in his career.

In this particular manuscript, there is an alternative ending to *CH* I.18, written into the right-hand margin of the last page of the homily (MS Cambridge, Trinity College, B. 15. 34, p. 135). An eleventh-century hand that is clearly distinct from the main scribe, and that Ker considers nearly contemporary with it, has inserted on 24 short unruled lines the following alternative ending. <sup>15</sup> I will first give a literal transcription, then a more accessible edition, then a translation.

Transcription (retaining MS punctuation, word division, line breaks, and corrections)

Se wel willenda god. u| ge wissige to his will[erasure supplied next line]|an [over erasure of about 6-8 characters] þæt we his willan | moton ge wyrcean | her onlife. þæt we m[erasure supplied next line]|oton ge earnian us | þa ecan myrhõe | þe he us ge unnen | hæfð. 7 he ure [erasure supplied next line] | saule eft onfo. þe hy | a sende to ðam lic|haman. Ge unne | us þonne se ælmi[erasure supplied next line]|htiga god. þæt we to [erasure supplied next line] | ðam heofenlican eðel[erasure supplied next line]|e be cuman magon | 7 moton. þær he | sylf leofað 7rixað | mid ['mid' under erasure] fæder 7sunu | 7 mid þam ['mid þam' under erasure] halg[erasure supplied next line]|an gaste an ælmihtig | god un to dæled | æfre á on ecnesse | AMEN

## Edition (with normalised word division and modernised punctuation)

Se welwillenda god us gewissige to his willan, þæt we his willan moton gewyrcean her on life, þæt we moton geearnian us þa ecan myrhðe þe he us geunnen hæfð, 7 he ure saule eft onfo, þe hy asende to ðam lichaman. Geunne us þonne se ælmihtiga god, þæt we to ðam heofenlican eðele becuman magon 7 moton, þær he sylf leofað 7 rixað mid fæder 7 sunu 7 mid þam halgan gaste an ælmihtig god untodæled æfre á on ecnesse. AMEN.

#### Translation

God the Benevolent may guide/steer us to his will so that we may work his will here in life, so that we may merit for ourselves the eternal joy which he has granted us, and he may receive again our soul, having sent it to the body. Grant us, then, God Almighty, that we may and can come to the heavenly homeland, where he himself lives and reigns with the father and son and the holy ghost, one ever indivisible God Almighty, forever into eternity. AMEN

As an addition to the corpus of Old English preaching, this is rather modest. The homilist of this alternative ending is apparently charmed by balance and chiasmus. He picks up on the idea that God gives good spirit, that is good will,

that Ælfric placed in the middle of the sermon and plays up the paradox of willa as human free will which may, nevertheless, be attuned to God's will, just as the soul is given by God to the body and may be received again by Him from there. The return of the soul is to the heavenly home here named as eðel (homeland) as in The Dream of the Rood and elsewhere. The augmenter's emphasis on the journey of the soul picks up on the popular Rogationtide preoccupation with eschatology that is prominent in other homilies for the period. The fact that the soul 'magon 7 moton' journey to the homeland reminds of the other possibility, the anxiety that it might travel elsewhere, although this is not stressed. Instead the emphasis here is on the need to petition God so that the soul does travel in the right direction. In the stress on petition, the passage brings the homily back to the emphasis of the opening on prayer, as is appropriate to the season. This ending returns to Ælfric's own beginning by picking up on the idea of prayer that he will pursue in the next homily, 'De dominica oratione', CH I.19 for Rogation Tuesday, specifically on the Lord's Prayer.

This alternative ending, then, is a sequence of pious commonplaces, quite elegant and appropriate to the context, if rather slight. Such a short passage scarcely seems worthy of comment and it is slight enough that it is hard even to be sure of Pope's confident assertion, in the only comment in print, that this is not by Ælfric, although this seems likely for reasons that I will suggest below. Although modest in itself, though, this ending becomes a lot more interesting as a sign of the uses made of the homily by one deliverer of the text, especially in relation to what it apparently replaces.

There is no point of substitution indicated in the text and the new ending could be cumulative, to be added to what is there, although the repeated closing formulas suggest that it is intended rather as a substitution at some point that has not been marked. The first emphatic punctuation mark on this page comes at 1. 4 – a punctus versus followed by a large capital – which marks the opening of 1. 205 in the edition of the homily – a division of sense that Clemoes registers as a new paragraph in his edition. The most likely intended replacement, then, is the passage from 1. 205 to the end, which is precisely the rather radical statement about the interdependence of rich and poor and the greater value of the poor's gift of the opportunity for charity than the rich's gift of food. This idea is one that seems not to come from Ælfric's sources but rather to be his own development. While Ælfric is generally careful not to condemn the wealthy for being rich, this last paragraph is his most heavy-hitting statement against the wealthy within this homily, mostly carrying a punch from the rhetorical power of the image that sees

the rich donors' bread becoming dung whereas the needy give life eternal. Ælfric states explicitly that 'Se earma is se weig. be læt us to godes rice' (l. 208, 'the poor are the way that leads us to the kingdom of God'). The emphatic moral here is of the need for the rich to give to the poor.

The alternative ending involves a striking shift in agency as well as in moral emphasis and a striking softening of implied social outrage. In the alternative ending, human free-will can be turned to God's will through the guidance of God. Rather than stressing the act of charity, the final stress here is on the need for prayer to defer to God's will, which subsumes human action to divine intervention. The substitute ending thereby backpedals on the emphatic pro-charity, anti-wealth-if-associated-with-avarice position of Ælfric's original. Is the substitute ending evidence of squeamishness by some user of the homily at the strength of that anti-wealth message? Might it arise from a desire not to upset an audience that incorporated precisely such wealthy people?

This makes particularly interesting the question of who made this addition and when. MS Cambridge, Trinity College, B. 15. 34 was written in the mideleventh century at Christ Church, Canterbury, since it was written by the same scribe who wrote MS London, British Library, Harley 2892, the 'Canterbury Benedictional'. 19 There are fairly extensive corrections and alterations throughout B. 15. 34, attesting to interest in and use of the manuscript in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. CH I.18 has plentiful corrections, such as the insertion of 'ba' at MS 119/1 (Clemoes, 1. 10), 'godes' at MS 119/12 (Clemoes, 1. 16) along with many other such corrections, and the addition of two substantial omitted passages added in the margin in a correcting hand that is distinct from the main hand but also distinct from the alternative ending (MS 128/5, Clemoes, Il. 119-21; MS 131/8, Clemoes 158-59). There are also annotations in other hands, such as 'ham' glossing 'botl' at MS 118/17 (Clemoes's 1. 8) or 'loti' glossing 'tan' MS 119/19 (Clemoes 1. 20). Another hand again added the note 'pater noster' beside the story of Jonah at MS 119 (Clemoes's 1. 14). In other words, the homily has demonstrably been the subject of considerable attention both to establish the accuracy of the text when first copied and to make sense and lightly mark up the homily for subsequent users. The main corrections were presumably undertaken at Christ Church, Canterbury, as part of the main writing campaign, although the manuscript probably did not remain there as it is not recorded in the various Canterbury catalogues and additions are not in a south-eastern dialect.<sup>20</sup> The date of the move away from Canterbury is unknown, as is the place that it moved to.

None of the various interventions in the manuscript are quite as substantive as the alternative ending discussed here and the hand of this alternative ending does not appear to be the same as that of any of the other additions or corrections. Ker's description of the script as nearly contemporary with the main hand places it at the late end of the middle of the eleventh century. It is notable that the addition has itself been subject to correction, both in the erasure of 'mid' and 'mid bam' towards the end and in making good a small amount of text lost by cropping. These corrections are themselves of an unknown date, although the cropping from which the text was made good happened at a relatively early stage since this particular folio is some 5 mm. wider than the rest of the book (and now folded over), presumably because the page was preserved from subsequent croppings in an attempt to save this addition. The corrections suggest a desire to keep the alternative ending usable, presumably at a time when the language of the homily was still comprehensible, and so are probably of a piece with the other annotations and corrections of the eleventh and twelfth century throughout the manuscript. The alternative ending was apparently as valued as the main text in the transmission of this homily.

At some time in the second half of the eleventh century, then, possibly at Christ Church, Canterbury, possibly elsewhere, some user of this manuscript composed and wrote in a brief alternative ending to Ælfric's CH I.18, 'In letania majore'. The user was in tune enough with the preaching occasion and with the original text to create an ending that works with a certain elegance to return the homily to its opening theme, an emphasis on prayer, and to create a version of the sermon that was probably recited and used thereafter. As such, this is a modest example of the textual eventfulness or mouvance of Ælfric's homiletic texts that Joyce has described so eloquently. 21 What makes this particular mouvance so interesting is the tantalizing possibility that it reflects some user's unease at the power of Ælfric's indictment of the rich and at the strength of his call that they redistribute their wealth. Presumably the work of a priest, such backpedalling in handling the rich suggests something of the moral laxity that would become the staple of anticlerical satire by Chaucer, Langland, and their like in the fourteenth century. In any event, the very act of softening Ælfric's point with this alternative ending reminds us of the radical - even discomfiting - nature of Ælfric's preaching. Ælfric's Catholic Homilies may have been embraced by the church hierarchy as an official programme of preaching, as I have argued elsewhere, <sup>22</sup> and yet his own position may not always have been simply symptomatic of the Benedictine reform but rather, at times, a reflection of his own priorities, as Joyce

has strongly argued in relation to other issues.<sup>23</sup> Even a modest alternative homiletic ending can open up the intellectual and moral world of England a millennium ago, as the work of our honorand would lead us to expect.

#### NOTES

- For her broad accounts of Old English homilies, see 'Reform and Resistance: Preaching Styles in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in De l'homélie au sermon: Histoire de la prédication médiévale, ed. by Jacqueline Hamesse and Xavier Hermand (Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut d'études médiévales de l'Université Catholique de Louvain, 1993), pp. 15-46, and 'The Benedictine Reform and Beyond', in A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature, ed. by Phillip Pulsiano and Elaine Treharne (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 151-69. For a wonderful assessment of Ælfric's working methods in composing the Catholic Homilies, see her Translating the Tradition: Manuscripts, Models & Methodologies in the Composition of Ælfric's Catholic Homilies', Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester, 79 (1997), 43-65 (also published separately as The Toller Memorial Lecture and repr. in Textual and Material Culture in Anglo-Saxon England: Thomas Northcote Toller and the Toller Memorial Lectures, ed. by Donald Scragg (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003), pp. 241-59), which builds on and synthesizes her important studies of working method and sources such as 'Ælfric and Smaragdus', Anglo-Saxon England, 21 (1992), 203-37; 'Ælfric's Sources Reconsidered: Some Case Studies from the Catholic Homilies', in Studies in English Language and Literature: 'Doubt Wisely'; Papers in Honour of E. G. Stanley, ed. by M. J. Toswell and E. M. Tyler (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 362-86; and 'Ælfric's Authorities', in Early Medieval English Texts and Interpretations: Studies Presented to Donald G. Scragg, ed. by Elaine Trehame and Susan Rosser (Tempe: ACMRS, 2002), pp. 51-65.
- As she states explicitly in 'Reform and Resistance', p. 46 and 'Ælfric's Catholic Homilies', p. 54; cf. also 'Ælfric, Authorial Identity and the Changing Text', in The Editing of Old English, ed. by D. G. Scragg and Paul E. Szarmach (Cambridge: Brewer, 1994), pp. 177-89, and her examination of the manuscript tradition of Ælfric's Lives of Saints in two essays: 'The Dissemination of Ælfric's Lives of Saints: A Preliminary Survey', in Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and Their Contexts, ed. by Paul E. Szarmach (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), pp. 235-59, and 'The Preservation and Transmission of Ælfric's Saints' Lives: Reader-Reception and Reader-Response in the Early Middle Ages', in The Preservation and Transmission of Anglo-Saxon Culture, ed. by Paul E. Szarmach and Joel T. Rosenthal (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), pp. 405-30.
- <sup>3</sup> This is a good opportunity to publicly acknowledge my great debt to Joyce as the editor of my volume Ælfric's Prefaces, Durham Medieval Texts (Durham: Durham Medieval Texts, 1994).
- <sup>4</sup> Joyce Hill, 'The *Litaniae maiores* and *minores* in Rome, Francia and Anglo-Saxon England: Terminology, Texts and Traditions', *Early Medieval Europe*, 9 (2000), 211-46.

- Elfric's homilies are cited from the following editions: Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series: Text, ed. by Peter Clemoes, EETS, s.s. 17 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) = CH I; Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series: Text, ed. by Malcolm Godden, EETS, s.s. 5 (London: Oxford University Press, 1979) = CH II; Ælfric's Lives of Saints, ed. by Walter W. Skeat, EETS, o.s. 76, 82, 94, 114 (1881-1900 repr. as two vols, London: Oxford University Press, 1966) = LS.
- These homilies are ed. by D. G. Scragg, *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, EETS, o.s. 300 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); *Eleven Old English Rogationtide Homilies*, ed. by Joyce Bazire and James E. Cross (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1982); and *The Blickling Homilies*, ed. by R. Morris, EETS, o.s. 58, 63,73 (1874-80; repr. as one volume London: Oxford University Press, 1967). The speculation about Blickling is by Rudolph Willard, ed., *The Blickling Homilies*, EEMF, 10 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1960), pp. 39-40: one of these homilies is attributed to Rogationtide in another manuscript and has an erased rubric to this effect in the Blickling manuscript. The corpus of Rogationtide homilies is assembled by N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), p. 529, and by Bazire and Cross, *Rogationtide Homilies*, pp. xvii-xx.
  - <sup>7</sup> 'The Litaniae maiores and minores', p. 226.
  - <sup>8</sup> Bazire and Cross, Rogationtide Homilies, p. xxiv.
- <sup>9</sup> The homily is ed. by Clemoes, *Catholic Homilies: First Series*, pp. 317-24. For a commentary on Ælfric's sources in this homily, see Malcolm Godden, Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary, EETS, s.s. 18 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 145-53.
- Godden, *Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, p. 152, note to II. 150-52 points out that this idea is not drawn from the main source of Augustine but develops an association in Haymo.
- M. R. Godden, 'Money, Power and Morality in Late Anglo-Saxon England', Anglo-Saxon England, 19 (1990), 41-65, shows how Ælfric grapples with the moral status of the rich repeatedly throughout his works, attempting to soften biblical condemnation of the rich simply for being rich.
- Clemoes, Catholic Homilies: First Series, provides a full textual introduction, pp. 1-168; the summary of the circulation is at p. 162.
- Trinity B. 15. 34 is described by Ker, Catalogue, pp. 130-32, and by myself in a forthcoming description in the series Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts in Microfiche Facsimile. It is given the siglum U in editions of Ælfric's homilies and described by John C. Pope, ed., Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection, EETS, o.s. 259-60 (London: Oxford University Press, 1967-68), I, 77-80, Godden, Catholic Homilies: Second Series, pp. lxx-lxxi, and Clemoes, Catholic Homilies: First Series, pp. 45-46.

- See P. A. M. Clemoes, 'The Chronology of Ælfric's Works', in *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in Some Aspects of their History and Culture presented to Bruce Dickins*, ed. by Peter Clemoes (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1959), pp. 212-47, and *Catholic Homilies: First Series*, pp. 85-97 and 122-25.
  - 15 Ker, Catalogue, p. 131.
- <sup>16</sup> Climactic in the last line of *The Dream of the Rood*, I. 156, but common enough in the homilies of Ælfric and others; see *DOE*, s.v. ebel.
- In the only published comment on this ending apart from mention of it in Ker's Catalogue, Pope states 'It imitates Ælfric for a few clauses but is plainly not his work' (Homilies of Ælfric, p. 78, n. 1). Clemoes makes no mention of the ending in his edition.
- Godden comments 'The final passage is Augustinian in style but not from Augustine's Serm. 61 or 105', which are his sources throughout the exposition; he points to a source for the idea in a sermon of Caesarius (*Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, p. 153).
  - As identified by Ker, Catalogue, p. 132.
- See Ker, Catalogue, p. 132, and Simon Keynes, Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts and Other Items of Related Interest in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge, Old English Newsletter, Subsidia 18 (Binghamton: CEMERS, SUNY, 1992), p. 35.
- Hill, 'Reform and Resistance', pp. 41-43, 'Translating the Tradition', p. 64, and 'Ælfric, Authorial Identity and the Changing Text'. On the reuses of Ælfric by later homilists, see Mary Swan, 'Old English Made New: One Catholic Homily and Its Reuses', Leeds Studies in English, n.s. 28 (1997), 1-18; 'Ælfric's Catholic Homilies in the Twelfth Century', in Rewriting Old English in the Twelfth Century ed. by Mary Swan and Elaine M. Treharne (Cambridge: Cambrisge University Press, 2000), pp. 62-82.
- <sup>22</sup> 'Ælfric in Dorset and the Landscape of Pastoral Care', in *Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Francesca Tinti (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), pp. 52-62, building on the work of Clemoes on circulation.
- See, especially, Joyce Hill, 'Ælfric's "Silent Days", *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 16 (1985), 118-31, and 'Benedictine Reform', p. 162.