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**ASSOCIATIVE MEMORY AND THE COMPOSITION OF ÆLFRIC'S *DOMINICA*
*IN QUINQUAGESSIMA (CATHOLIC HOMILIES I 10)***

In a homily for the Sunday before Ash Wednesday (*CH I 10*), Ælfric of Eynsham provides an exposition upon the standard reading for the occasion, Luke's account of Christ's healing of a blind man on the road to Jericho (Luke 18:31–43).¹ As has long been noted, the ultimate source of Ælfric's interpretation is Gregory the Great's *Homilia II in evangelia*, which provides the text for the same occasion in the homiliary of Paul the Deacon and which was also the main source for another vernacular Anglo-Saxon homily for Quinquagesima Sunday, Blickling homily II, but Ælfric seems also to have drawn upon the elaboration of Gregory's homily contained in the homiliary of Haymo of Auxerre.² Having provided a vernacular paraphrase of the Latin reading and explained that Christ performed miracles in order to strengthen the faith of his followers, Ælfric sets out to uncover the allegorical meaning, or *gastlicum andgyte* ('spiritual meaning', 259:38), of the miracle. Following Gregory, Ælfric offers a typological reading of the biblical passage, according to which the unnamed blind man represents post-lapsarian humanity, deprived of the light of understanding until illuminated through the coming of Christ. Here is the passage as it stands in Gregory's homily:

¹ *Dominica in Quinquagesima* in P. A. M. Clemoes (ed.), *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series: Text*, EETS, SS. 17 (Oxford, 1997), 258–65. I have made minor changes to punctuation and capitalization and have silently expanded abbreviations. Translations are my own throughout.

² Malcolm Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, EETS, SS. 18 (Oxford, 2000), 77–84. The text of *Homilia II* is cited from Raymond Étaix (ed.), *Gregorius Magnvs, Homiliae in Evangelia*, CCSL, 141 (Turnhout, 1999), 12–19. I have also consulted D. Hurst (trans.), *Gregory the Great: Forty Gospel Homilies*, Cistercian Studies, 123 (Kalamazoo, 1990), 94–100, where the text is 'Homily 13'. For Haymo's adaptation of Gregory, see *Homilia XXIII. Dominica in Quinquagesima* in *PL* 118:172–82. The text of Blickling II is cited from R. Morris (ed.), *The Blickling Homilies of the Tenth Century*, EETS, OS. 58, 63, 73 (London, 1880), 14–25. On the sources of Blickling II, see Mark Atherton, 'The Sources of Blickling Homily 2 (Cameron B.3.2.8)', *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici: World Wide Web Register* (2000), <http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk> (accessed 29 June 2016).

Caecum quippe est genus humanum, quod in parente primo a paradisi gaudiis expulsum, claritatem supernae lucis ignorans, damnationis suae tenebras patitur, sed tamen per Redemptoris sui praesentiam illuminatur, ut internae lucis gaudia iam per desiderium uideat, atque in uia uitae boni operis gressus ponat. (13:14–19)

(The blind man is truly the human race, which was driven out of the joys of Paradise through its first ancestor. Not knowing the brightness of the celestial light, it suffers the darkness of its condemnation; but nevertheless it is enlightened by the presence of the Redeemer, so that it might see already by desire the joys of the internal light, and plant the footsteps of its good work in the way of life.)

The concision and brevity of Gregory's exegesis is reflected in the equivalent passage of Blickling II, which closely resembles the Latin text:

Eal þis mennisce cyn wæs on blindnesse, seoððan þa ærestan men asceofene wæron of gefean neorxna wanges, & þa beorhtnessa forleton þæs heofonlican leohtes, & þisse worlde þeostro & ermða þrowodan. Drihten þa þurh his tocyme pysne middangeard onlyhte, & eallum geleaffulum monnum heora gong gestapelade to lifes wege, þæt hie magon þurh þa lustfulness heora modes, mid godum dædum, geearnian leoht þæs ecan lifes. (17:14–21)

(All this human race was in blindness after the first people were expelled from the joy of paradise, and left behind the heavenly light, and suffered the darkness and wretchedness of this world. Then the Lord illuminated this world by his coming, and for all faithful people he established their step on the way of life,

so that they could earn the light of the eternal life with good deeds through the longing of their mind.)

There are minor differences here between the Latin and the Old English. The Blickling homilist grants agency to Christ for setting the righteous upon the way of life, but also emphasizes the need for believers to merit (*geearnian*) the joys of heaven. Gregory's rather oblique reference to the *internae lucis*—presumably a reference to the internal light of faith—becomes in Blickling II a reference to the 'light of eternal life' (*leoht þæs ecan lifes*), suggesting that the homilist was working from a text containing the variant reading *aeternae lucis*.³ In spite of these slight differences, however, the homilist clearly follows the Latin source closely at this point. Ælfric, by contrast, notably expands upon Gregory's comments in his own vernacular treatment of this passage:

Þes an blinda mann getacnað eal mancynn, þe wearð ablend þurh adames gylt, 7 ascofen of myrhðe neorxnawanges, 7 gebroht to þisum life, þe is wiðmeten cwearterne. Nu synt we ute belocene fram ðam heofonlican leohte, 7 we ne magon on ðisum life þæs ecan leohtes brucan. Ne we his na mare ne cunnon buton swa micel swa we þurh cristes lare on bocum rædað. Ðeos woruld, þeah ðe heo myrige hwiltidum geþuht sy, nis heo hwæðre þe gelicre þære ecan worulde þe is sum cweartern leohtum dæge. Eal mancyn wæs, swa we ær cwædon, ablend mid geleafleaste 7 gedwylde. Ac þurh cristes tocyme we wurdon abrodene of urum gedwyldum 7 onlihte þurh geleafan. Nu hæbbe we þæt leoht on urum mode þæt is cristes geleafa, 7 we habbað þone hyht þæs ecan lifes myrhðe, þeah ðe we gyt lichamlice on urum cwearterne wunian. (38–50)

³ Cf. Étaix (ed.), *Homiliae in Evangelia*, 13n.

(The blind man betokens all humanity, which was blinded through Adam's guilt and expelled from the bliss of Paradise and brought to this life, which is equivalent to a prison. Now we are locked out from the heavenly light and we cannot profit from the eternal light in this life. We know no more about it except for just so much as we read in books through Christ's teaching. Although it might seem pleasing at times, this world is nevertheless no more like the eternal world than a prison is like the light of day. As we previously said, all humanity was blinded with faithlessness and error. But through Christ's coming we were drawn from our foolishness and restored to sight through belief. Now we may have that light in our mind that is the faith of Christ, and we have the hope of the bliss of the eternal life, although we yet dwell bodily in our prison.)

Ælfric omits entirely the image of the footsteps on the way of life, but the major divergence from the Latin homily is Ælfric's introduction of an analogy between the fallen world and a dark prison. Neither Gregory's homily nor Haymo's adaptation thereof contains anything equivalent to this analogy, and Ælfric's deviation from his source is perhaps signalled by the slightly laboured way in which he picks up the thread of Gregory's rhetoric (*swa we ær cwædon*).

Ælfric's divergence from his known sources at this point led Malcolm Godden to suggest that he is here independently developing the underlying Gregorian argument.⁴ Perhaps so, but a closer examination of the passage from *Homilia II* that forms the starting point for Ælfric's developed treatment may throw new light upon this issue. The spiritual blindness of post-lapsarian humanity is a theme to which Gregory returns frequently throughout his writings, often employing phraseology very similar to that found in *Homilia II*.⁵ Of particular interest,

⁴ Godden, *Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, 77, 79.

⁵ For examples, see Adalbert de Vogüé (ed.), *Grégoire le Grand. Dialogues*, trans. Paul Antin, 3 vols., Sources Chrétiennes, 251, 260, 265 (Paris, 1978–80), III, 19 n. 1. All references to the *Dialogi* are to this edition. See also, Francis Clark, *The Pseudo-Gregorian Dialogues*, 2 vols, Studies in the History of Christian Thought, 27–

however, is the presence of this theme in the opening chapter of Book IV of Gregory's *Dialogi*, where Gregory describes the consequences of Adam's transgression in similar terms to those in *Homilia II*:

Postquam de paradisi gaudiis, culpa exigente, pulsus est primus humani generis parens, in huius exilii atque caecitatis quam patimur aerumnam uenit, quia peccando extra semetipsum fusus iam illa caelestis patriae gaudia, quae prius contemplabatur, uidere non potuit. In paradiso quippe homo adsueuerat uerbis Dei perfrui, beatorum angelorum spiritibus cordis munditia et celsitudine uisionis interesse. Sed postquam huc cecidit, ab illo quo implebatur mentis lumine recessit. (IV. I. 1)

(After the first parent of the human race was expelled from the joys of paradise, driven by sin, he entered into the hardship of this exile and blindness which we suffer, so that, having reached beyond himself by sinning, he could no longer see those joys of the heavenly homeland, which he previously contemplated. Certainly, in paradise the man had been accustomed to enjoy the words of God and to be amongst the spirits of the blessed angels in purity of heart and loftiness of vision. But after he fell hither, he withdrew from the light of the mind with which he used to be filled.)

28 (Leiden, 1987), II, 525–8. Clark's suggestion that the *Dialogi* should not be considered an authentic work of Gregory in the form in which it now survives is not strictly relevant to this study, but for convincing counter-arguments, see especially Paul Meyvaert, "The Enigma of Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*: a Response to Francis Clark," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 39 (1988), 355–81, and "The Authentic *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great," *Sacris Erudiri*, 43 (2004), 55–130.

Gregory continues in the *Dialogi* to describe the consequent blindness of Adam's descendants within the fallen world, but it is in this initial account that we see similarities of both thought and phrasing with *Homilia II*, as the table below shows:

Concept	<i>Homilia II</i>	<i>Dialogi</i>
Blindness	<i>caecum</i>	<i>caecitatis</i>
The human race	<i>genus humanum</i>	<i>humani generis</i>
Adam as first ancestor	<i>parente primo</i>	<i>primus ... parens</i>
Expulsion from joys of Paradise	<i>a paradisi gaudiis expulsum</i>	<i>de paradisi gaudiis ... pulsus est</i>
Consequent suffering of mankind	<i>damnationis suae tenebras patitur</i>	<i>exilii atque caecitatis quam patimur aerumnam</i>
Internal light	<i>internae lucis</i>	<i>mentis lumine</i>

Such similarities may not be wholly surprising, given the similarity of subject matter. The significance of the parallel with the *Dialogi* for our understanding of Ælfric's homily, however, is that here, and—so far as I have been able to determine—only here, Gregory goes on to figure the spiritual blindness and exile of post-lapsarian humanity in terms of imprisonment, equating the situation of Adam's descendants to that of a child born within the darkness of the prison:

Ac si enim praegnans mulier mittatur in carcerem ibique puerum pariat, qui natus puer in carcere nutriatur et crescat; cui si fortasse mater, quae hunc genuit, solem, lunam, stellas, montes et campos, uolantes aues, currentes equos nominet, ille uero qui est in carcere natus et nutritus nihil aliud quam tenebras carceris sciat, et haec quidem esse audiat, sed quia ea per experimentum non nouit, ueraciter esse diffidat (IV. I. 3)

(It is as if a pregnant woman is thrown into prison where she gives birth to a boy, who, having been born, is nurtured and grows in the prison. Suppose his mother, who gave birth to him, describes for him the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains and the fields, the flying birds, the running horses—truly, he who is born and nurtured in the prison knows nothing more than the darkness of the prison. He may indeed hear that these things exist, but because he had not known them by experience, he is doubtful of the truth.)

Gregory's *Dialogi* was one of the best known and most influential of patristic texts in Anglo-Saxon England.⁶ Ælfric's familiarity with the text is clear. Not only does he use Gregory's account of the life of St Benedict in Book II of the Latin text as the basis for his own homiletic account of the saint's life, but during the course of his writings he also draws upon material from both Book I and especially Book IV.⁷ In one homily, Ælfric not only names the *Dialogi* as his source, but also informs his readers of the existence of a vernacular translation of the text to which they might wish to refer.⁸ It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that the prison analogy in Book IV chapter I was known to Ælfric. Such knowledge might help to explain Ælfric's expansion of his principle source in *CHI* 10.

This is not to suggest that *Dialogi* Book IV provided a direct textual source for this expansion. The force and scope of the analogy with the prison in each text differs significantly. The use of the prison as a figure for the world is relatively commonplace in early Christian writing, but in the *Dialogi* Gregory provides a very specific analogy in order

⁶ On the knowledge of the *Dialogi* in this period, see, for example, Mechthild Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 34 (Cambridge, 2005), 136–41; Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford, 2006), 304, David F. Johnson, 'Why Read Gregory's *Dialogues* in Old English?', in Hugh Magennis and Jonathon Wilcox (eds), *The Power of Words: Anglo-Saxon Studies Presented to Donald G. Scragg on his Seventieth Birthday* (Morgantown, 2006), 171–204.

⁷ For details, see Max Förster, "Über die Quellen von Aelfrics exegetischen Homiliae Catholicae," *Anglia*, 16 (1894), 1–61, 17; Godden, *Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, liii; Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 258.

⁸ M. R. Godden (ed.), *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series: Text*, EETS, SS. 5 (London, 1979), 21:176–80.

to dramatize the problem of belief and the epistemological limitations of fallen humanity. The parable of the boy born within the prison, and the emphasis on the difference between the boy's experiences and those of his mother, are distinctive features of Gregory's treatment. By contrast, Ælfric focuses primarily upon the quality of human experience after the fall, drawing a less specific equation between life within the world and the darkness of the prison. Although Ælfric does refer to the epistemological consequences of the fall, the force of his analogy depends not upon a contrast between Adam's understanding and that of his descendants, but upon that between the limited pleasures of the world and the superior joys to be had in heaven. There is no reference here to the specific case of a child born in prison, and the more general use of the prison as a figure in Ælfric's homily is shown in the final lines of the passage in question. Whereas each of the first two references to the prison in this passage explicitly serves to draw an analogy with the fallen world, the final time the prison is mentioned Ælfric moves from analogy to metaphor. Expanding again on his principle source, Ælfric directly addresses his audience in stating that, following Christ's redemptive mission, 'we' may enjoy the anticipation of the spiritual joys of heaven 'although we yet dwell bodily in our prison' (*þeah ðe we gyt lichamlice on urum cwearterne wunian*).

If, however, Gregory's analogy in the *Dialogi* did not provide a direct model for Ælfric's expansion of his main source, it might nevertheless have provided the general impetus behind his reference to the prison. In his summary account of Ælfric's compositional methods, Godden notes that 'his close renderings of many Latin passages [...] confirms that he had direct access to the source-texts at the time of writing', but that nevertheless 'some of the material he uses could have been drawn from a good memory of earlier reading'.⁹ That Ælfric had access to the text of the *Dialogi* is clear, but the case of the prison analogy in this homily demonstrates, I suggest, the writer's good memory more than his textual scholarship.

⁹ Godden, *Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, xlv.

The role that Ælfric's 'retentive' and 'associative' memory played in the composition of his homiletic works is a question that has been addressed on numerous occasions, particularly in a series of articles by the late James Cross.¹⁰ Such a process of association may lie behind the use of the prison analogy in *CHI* 10. The most likely explanation for Ælfric's departure from his source at this point is, I think, that the ideas and phrasing of the relevant passage of *Homilia II* brought to his mind the similar passage in *Dialogi* Book IV, and that his memory of this latter text then came to influence his own composition.

The relevant section of the *Dialogi* certainly seems to have held an appeal for other writers throughout the middle ages. In Anglo-Saxon England, Gregory's prison analogy was, as I discuss elsewhere, adapted by an anonymous homilist to form the basis of the vernacular homily Napier I.¹¹ On the Continent, Burchard of Worms included an extract from the *Dialogi* containing the prison analogy amongst the instructional texts collected in the final book of his early eleventh-century *Decretum*.¹² Burchard's text was a major source for subsequent canon law collections, including the *Decretum* of Ivo of Chartres, compiled after 1093, which contains the same passage from the *Dialogi*.¹³ At around the same time, the analogy influenced various passages from the hagiographic writings of Goscelin of Saint-Bertin,¹⁴ and in the twelfth century it appears in modified form in a sermon of Bernard of Clairvaux.¹⁵ Meinolf Schumacher has also traced the afterlife of the analogy in Germany in

¹⁰ J. E. Cross, 'Ælfric and the Medieval Homiliary—Objection and Contribution', *Scripta Minora Regiae Societatis Humaniorum Litterarum Lundensis*, 4 (1961–2), 3–34 ('retentive memory' at 34); 'Bundles for Burning—A Theme in Two of Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies*—with other sources', *Anglia*, 81 (1963), 335–41; 'More Sources for Two of Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies*', *Anglia*, 86 (1968), 59–78; 'Ælfric—Mainly on Memory and Creative Method in Two *Catholic Homilies*', *Studia Neophilologica*, 41 (1969), 135–55; 'The Literate Anglo-Saxon—On Sources and Dissemination', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 58 (1972), 67–100 ('associative memory' at 93).

¹¹ Arthur Napier (ed.), *Wulfstan: Sammlung der ihm zugeschriebenen Homilien* (Berlin, 1883), 1–5. See further, Daniel Thomas, 'Rewriting Gregory the Great: the Prison Analogy in Napier Homily I', forthcoming.

¹² *PL* 140:1021–22.

¹³ *PL* 161: 976–77. On the date of the *Decretum*, see Christof Rolker, *Canon Law and the Letters of Ivo of Chartres* (Cambridge, 2009), 137.

¹⁴ Tom License (ed. and trans.), *Herman the Archdeacon and Goscelin of Saint-Bertin: Miracles of St Edmund* (Oxford, 2014), cxxiii and n. 454.

¹⁵ J. Leclercq, H. Rochais, and Ch. H. Talbot (eds), *Sermo XII in Bernard de Clairvaux: Sermons Divers: Tome I (Sermons 1–22)*, trans. Pierre-Yves Émery and Françoise Callerot, with introduction and notes by Françoise Callerot, Sources Chrétiennes, 496 (Paris, 2006), 244–57, at 3:1–15.

the works of the thirteenth-century authors Hugo von Trimberg and David of Augsburg,¹⁶ and in various fourteenth-century texts, including the *Horologium sapientiae* of Henry Suso.¹⁷ This last text, including the prison analogy, was translated into Middle English as *The Seven Points of True Wisdom* in the early fifteenth century.¹⁸

The ongoing popularity of Gregory's parable of the boy born in prison can no doubt be attributed to the didactic force of the analogy, as well as to Gregory's powerful rhetoric. These same qualities may have made it a memorable passage for Ælfric. Such a suggestion can never be definitively proven, and it is clearly possible that Ælfric acted completely independently in augmenting his source with the comparison of the world and the prison. As discussed above, the similarities between Gregory's analogy and that of Ælfric are by no means sufficient to suggest direct, textual borrowing. The influence that I have in mind is of a less tangible and less demonstrable kind, but it would be a coincidence if Ælfric independently chose to employ a prison analogy at precisely this point, when translating a passage from Gregory which so closely recalls another, with which we can assume that Ælfric was familiar, in which Gregory also draws an analogy between the post-lapsarian world and a prison.

In a recent study, Joyce Hill has again emphasized the need to take memory into account when considering Ælfric's compositional techniques. Discussing the complexity of Ælfric's relationship to his various sources and influences, and the density of the tradition in which he was working, Hill urges modern scholars to 'think about the practicalities of how an author might proceed when working with manuscript codices and in a context where memory was

¹⁶ Meinolf Schumacher, 'Noch ein Höhlengleichnis: Zu einem metaphorischen Argument bei Gregor dem Großen', *Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch*, 31 (1990), 53–68.

¹⁷ Meinolf Schumacher, 'Eyn meyster und s. Gregor sprechent: Das "Höhlengleichnis" Gregors des Großen bei Heinrich Seuse und in deutschen Predigten des Spätmittelalters', *Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch*, 33 (1992), 361–6.

¹⁸ K. Horstmann, 'Orologium Sapientiae or The Seven Poyntes of Trewe Wisdom, aus MS. Douce 114', *Anglia*, 10 (1888), 323–89, at 368:13–23.

far more exercised than it is today'.¹⁹ As an example, Hill points to how Ælfric echoes (rather than quotes) an aphorism from Augustine in one of his supplementary homilies—an aphorism that might have stuck in Ælfric's mind 'because of its memorable phraseology and the usefulness of the didactic points that it makes'.²⁰ Hill concludes that whilst '[t]he tradition within which Ælfric was working was firmly text-based, very aware of authorship and authority', nevertheless 'the effects of memory in contributing to the weaving and interweaving of texts certainly cannot be excluded'.²¹ The introduction of the prison analogy in *CHI* 10 may reflect just this sort of memory-driven interweaving of the rich background tradition within which Ælfric operated. As both Hill and Cross have pointed out, the rigours of traditional source study—though invaluable—may sometimes obscure a more nebulous sort of influence such as that which the current article posits. An alertness to the possibility of such influence can, however, provide insights into the processes of composition that underlie the works of Ælfric and other early medieval writers.

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¹⁹ Joyce Hill, 'Weaving and Interweaving: The Textual Traditions of Two of Ælfric's *Supplementary Homilies*', in Maren Clegg Hyer and Jill Frederick (ed.), *Textiles, Text, Intertext: Essays in Honour of Gale R. Owen-Crocker* (Martlesham, 2016), 211–23, at 222.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 221–2.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 222.