

The Originality of the *Ormulum*

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Pin macche birrþ þe lufenn wel, 3iff þatt 3ho Drihhtin dredeþþ,
□ tu miht foll3henn hire will Inn all þatt niss nan sinne,
Inn all þat 3ho 3eorneþþ wiþþ skill, To 3unnkerr baþre gode.
□ 3iff þatt iss þatt 3ho iss all Wittlæs, □ wac, □ wicke,
All birrþ þe don þin mahht tærto, To 3emenn hire □ gætenn,
Swa þatt 3ho mu3he bor3henn beon Att hire lifess ende;
Forr 3iff þatt 3ho iss gætælæs, □ e33elæs □ wilde,
3ho gillteþþ sket, □ 3iff þut wast, □ te niss nohht tæroffe,
þa narrr tu nohht all sinnelæs Off-þatt 3ho liþ i sinne.
□ 3iff þin macche iss wis □ god, □ tu wittlæs □ wicke,
þa birrþ þin macche gætenn þe All þatt 3ho ma33 fra sinne;
Forr e33þerr birrþ þurrh oþerr beon Hollþenn to wurrþenn bor3henn¹

(You should genuinely love your wife, as long as she is God-fearing, and you can obey her will in all things that are not sinful, in all that she prudently yearns for, to the good of both of you. But if it's the case that she is wholly witless, weak, and drawn to evil, you must put all your strength to it, to guide and lead her, so that she might be saved at her life's end. For if she is rudderless, and fearless and wild, she will soon come to grief: and if you know this, and you do nothing about it, then you are not without sin yourself when she lies in sin. And if your wife is wise and good, and you're witless and drawn to evil, then your wife must lead you away from sin with all her might: for it is the duty of each of you to help the other to be worthy of salvation.)

This thoughtful advice for married Christians was written in the third quarter of the twelfth century. If it is disarmingly direct, it does not appear unconventional in its piety; nor are we necessarily surprised by a pastoral plea to laypeople to support one another in maintaining a virtuous life, and to take partial responsibility for the sins of those they love. Nevertheless, in the context of its time there is good reason to find the sentiment striking. Much better-known and more widely-circulated poetic sermons for the laity, in both French and English, offered sharply contrasting views of family life:

Kar ueez de cest secle com il est perillus
Or se entre heent ceus. v deust estre amors
Heom ne creit sa moiller ne la moiller lespus
A dulur est torne e tut uait a reburs ...
En cest terrien secle nen ad parfit amur.²

¹ *The Ormulum*, ed. Robert Holt and R. M. White, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1878), lines 6178-201 (printed in long lines with caesura rather than the editors' short lines, here and throughout). The Dedication is numbered separately and its line numbers are indicated with a D. The Preface and all the ensuing homilies are line-numbered continuously.

² *Le Sermon de Guischart de Beauliu: édition critique de tous les manuscrits connus*, ed. Arvid Gabrielson (Uppsala: Akademiska Bokhandeln, 1909), lines 206-9, 289.

(For you should know of this world how dangerous it is: people hate one another where there should be love; the man doesn't trust his wife, nor the wife her husband; everything has gone awry, turned to sorrow. ... In this earthly world there is no perfect love.)

Ne beo þe loure þene þe solf : ne þin mei. ne þin maȝe.
Soht is þet is oðers monnes frond betre þen his aȝen.
Ne lipnie wif to hire were. ne were to his wiue
Bo for him solue ech .Mon. þe hwile þet he bo aliue.³

(Do not love any more than yourself – not your kinsman or kinswoman. He's a fool who is a better friend to another man than to himself. Let no wife trust in her husband, nor husband in his wife: let each man be for himself, for as long as he lives.)

Despairing and critical declarations are entirely conventional of twelfth- and thirteenth-century literature of instruction,⁴ which routinely dwells on the meaninglessness of secular life and its transitory human relationships. Even greater austerity was introduced by the frequent repurposing of writings originally intended for cloistered clergy; newly directed to the laity, they typically show little or no adaptation in their harsh dismissals of ordinary life and the ties of world and family. Edmund of Abingdon's *Speculum religiosorum* was written for a monastic audience, but it was translated into both French and English with little alteration, and enjoyed immense popularity throughout the Middle Ages, despite (or because of?) its uncompromising harshness:⁵

Cur ergo parentes diligis carnaliter qui te genuerunt in sordibus et peccato? Nichil habes ab eis, nec corpus, nec animam, sed a Deo per eos. Si diligis eos quia generatus es ab eis, sic et vermes nati sunt ab eis.⁶

(Why then do you love your parents carnally, who produced you in filth and sin? You have nothing from them, neither body, nor soul, but from God through them. If you love those through whom you were produced, so too should you love the worms who are born from them.)

Against this background, our text stands in precocious isolation: both in terms of its date, since it was composed just ahead of this efflorescence of new and adapted religious works for the laity; and in terms of the approach taken to its audience, which is markedly idiosyncratic even when setting out conventional expositions. The work's author, the Augustinian canon Orm, wrote his English homilies for the laity about a century after the Norman Conquest,

³ *Poema Morale*, ed. Richard Morris, in *Old English Homilies and Homiletic Treatises*. EETS o.s. 29, 34 (London: Trübner, 1867–8), lines 29–35. The final line is (or became) proverbial: see Siegfried Wenzel, *Verses in Sermons: Fasciculus Morum and its Middle English Poems* (Cambridge, Mass.: MAA, 1978), 190–1.

⁴ “A staple set of religious teachings.” George Younge, “Monks, Money, and the End of Old English,” *New Medieval Literatures* 16 (2016), 39–82 (76).

⁵ See Laura Ashe, *The Oxford English Literary History vol. 1: 1000–1350. Conquest and Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 335–9.

⁶ Edmund of Abingdon, *Speculum religiosorum*, §11, in *Speculum religiosorum and Speculum ecclesie*, ed. Helen P. Forshaw (London: British Academy, 1973).

apparently drafting and revising the work over some years.⁷ Long known as a striking experiment in vernacular orthographic and linguistic practice, the poem has received little attention of any other kind.⁸ This essay will argue against current critical orthodoxy by making a case for Orm as an original thinker, a man seriously engaged with the developing theology of his time, profoundly concerned with the structures of society and community, and precociously focused on the needs and difficulties of laypeople. Reading the *Ormmulum* reveals contemporary transformations in the understanding of sacramental practice, particularly in relation to confession and purgation. The work vividly illuminates the ideological, economic and social conflict between monks and canons, and at the basis of that struggle it demonstrates the intense concern of an ordinary preacher for his flock. Furthermore, Orm is no mere reflection of his times: he stands in combative relation with much orthodox teaching; he is in the vanguard of developments in the church's attitude to the laity which we associate with a later period; and he shows himself to be a notably original, idiosyncratic, and humane interpreter of his sources and authorities.

This was a period when writing in English was chiefly sustained by the laity's (and no doubt some of the clergy's) need for religious instruction in the majority vernacular. Surviving twelfth-century English-language manuscripts largely contain homiletic and hagiographical material – much of it copied from pre-Conquest authors, including many of Ælfric's writings – alongside some original compositions, and one or two works newly translated from contemporary texts in French or Latin.⁹ Preachers saw the need to preach in English; they used the available materials, creating new ones when they thought it necessary. Orm's project, nonetheless, was hugely ambitious in scale, in contrast with the physical

⁷ For a completion date before 1180, with composition possibly beginning as early as the 1160s, see: M. B. Parkes, "On the Presumed Date and Possible Origin of the Manuscript of the *Ormmulum*: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 1," in *Scribes, Scripts and Readers: Studies in the Communication, Presentation and Dissemination of Medieval Texts* (London: Hambledon, 1991) 187-200.

⁸ Studies of the *Ormmulum* as text, rather than as linguistic or orthographic phenomenon, have largely discussed its intervention in theories of writing and vernacularity: Meg Worley, "Using the *Ormmulum* to Redefine Vernacularity," in *The Vulgar Tongue: Medieval and Postmedieval Vernacularity*, ed. Fiona Somerset and Nicholas Watson (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 19-30; Christopher Cannon, "Right Writing: The *Ormmulum*," *The Grounds of English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 82-110; Katharine Breen, *Imagining an English reading public, 1150-1400* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 109-21; A. Joseph McMullen, "Forr þeƷre sawle need: The *Ormmulum*, Vernacular Theology and a Tradition of Translation in Early England," *English Studies* 95 (2014), 256-77. Such studies often read against authorial intention and dwell on the poem's difficulty, even when that is interpreted positively: "its form seems so repugnant ... [because] the *Ormmulum* exists to see clearly what we cannot see:" Cannon, 110. Critics who consider the work's content more widely include James H. Morey, *Book and Verse: A Guide to Middle English Biblical Literature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 71-80; Guzman Mancho, "Considering *Ormmulum*'s Exegetical Discourse: Canon Orrmin's Preaching and his Audience," *English Studies* 85 (2004), 508-19; Adrienne Williams Boyarin, who has kindly shared material from her forthcoming book with me prior to publication; and Stephen Morrison's tireless work on Orm's sources (see notes 10, 15, 18, 32 and 44 below).

⁹ See Mary Swan and Elaine Treharne, eds., *Rewriting Old English in the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Aidan Conti, "The circulation of the Old English homily in the twelfth century: new evidence from Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 343," in *The Old English Homily: Precedent, Practice, and Appropriation*, ed. Aaron J. Kleist (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 365-402; Mary Swan, "Preaching past the conquest: Lambeth Palace 487 and Cotton Vespasian A.XXII," in *The Old English Homily*, ed. Kleist, 403-23; Mark Faulkner, "Archaism, Belatedness and Modernisation: 'Old' English in the Twelfth Century," *Review of English Studies* 63 (2011), 179-203.

manuscript, which is famous for its chaotic and impoverished appearance.¹⁰ Orm's full contents list (following the dedication) establishes that the near-20,000 lines remaining represent only 32 incomplete homilies from a projected programme of 243.¹¹ The text is written into almost all the available space on tall, narrow, irregular and patched together vellum pages, in double columns, with numerous crossings-out and insertions, often appearing as lengthy interpolations added on whole separate manuscript fragments, sewn into place like monstrous errata slips. Orm adds delicate, thin lines to clarify the division when the two columns of text threaten to meet; he guides the reader through his textual additions, with connecting lines, asterisk symbols, and makeshift brackets; he marks paragraphs and pauses and sentences. Notoriously he has developed his own spelling system, characterized by doubled consonants where the vowel is short (and, as Meg Worley has convincingly argued, in places where a native French speaker would be tempted to elide the consonant).¹² Nonetheless the text is surprisingly easy to read, and painstakingly corrected; the same word is almost always spelt the same way. Orm's script is not beautiful, but it is large, bold, and clear, without ambiguity, and he is extremely precise in his use of letter formations: he employs no fewer than three separate versions of the letter "g," to indicate /g/, /dʒ/, and the uses of the Middle English yogh.¹³ That said, the later leaves show his script more compacted, even cramped, in the way of someone who has reached many thousands of lines into a work, perhaps over years, with many thousands more projected to come. This autograph manuscript is both first and (to the best of our knowledge) final draft; it is a document with its changes tracked. And if Orm was indeed drafting his text directly onto these (evidently near to scrap-) pages, rather than via a wax tablet – or at the least, that at the stage of copying from wax to vellum he continued to change his mind as he composed – then we must acknowledge that it represents a work of masterful discipline.¹⁴

Examining Orm's book is an unexpectedly moving experience, because its author is so thoroughly present. In the opening dedication to his "broþerr Wallterr" (D1) Orm explains his simple and enormous intentions:

Icc hafe wennd inntill Ennglissh Goddspelless hallþhe lare,
 Affterr þatt little witt þatt me Min Drihhtin hafeþþ lenedd.
 Þu þohhtesst tatt itt mihhte wel Till mikell frame turnenn,
 Þiff Ennglissh follc, forr lufe off Crist, Itt wolde þerne lernnen,
 □ follþhenn itt, □ fillenn itt Wiþþ þohht, wiþþ word, wiþþ dede. (D13-22)

¹⁰ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 1. "[T]he first new major programme of vernacular instruction to have been composed since the publication of Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies* and *Lives of Saints*:" Stephen Morrison, "Orm's English Sources," *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 136 (1984), 54-64 (55).

¹¹ R. W. Burchfield, "The Language and Orthography of the Ormulum MS," *Transactions of the Philological Society* (1956), 56-87, suggests that the work was completed (58).

¹² Worley, "Using the *Ormulum*," 24.

¹³ Parkes, "On the Presumed Date," 194.

¹⁴ See Elizabeth Solopova, "The metre of the *Ormulum*," in *Studies in English Language and Literature: "Doubt Wisely": Papers in honour of E. G. Stanley*, ed. M. J. Toswell and E. M. Tyler (London: Routledge, 1996), 423-38: "unparalleled in Middle English" (423).

(I have turned the holy teaching of the Gospels into English, using the little intelligence that my Lord has entrusted me with. You thought that it might well be put to great profit, if English people would eagerly learn it for the love of Christ, and follow it, and fulfil it, in thought, in word, in deed.)

Famously Orm names himself and his work at the opening of the preface: “Þiss boc iss nemnedd Ormulum, / Forþi þatt Orm it wrohhte” (1-2: “This book is named *Ormulum*, because Orm made it”). “Little Orm” has confused scholars as a choice of title, but an instructive parallel may lie in his later discussion of the allegorical relationship between the world and mankind:

Þe werelld iss uss here sett To tacnenn mannkinn ane.
□ forr þatt manness bodið iss Off all þe werelld feðedd,
Off heffness fir, □ off þe lifft, Off water, □ off erþe...
Forr baþe fallenn inntill an Affter Grickisshe spæche,
Forr werelld iss nemnedd Cossmos ...
□ forþi mahht tu nemnenn mann Affterr Grikkishe spæche
Mycrocossmos, þatt nemnedd iss Affter Ennglisshe spæche
Þe little werelld... (17549-97)

(The world is set before us to symbolize mankind. And because man’s body is composed of all the world, of the fire of heaven, and of the air, of water, and of earth... for both are combined in one in the Greek language, for the world is named “Cosmos” ... And therefore you can name man in the Greek language “Microcosmos,” which in the English language means “the little world.”)

This explanation is not original to Orm,¹⁵ but it captures something of his participation in distinctively Victorine allegorical readings of the world, man, and scripture.¹⁶ His book, “little Orm,” is composed of the same stuff as its creator; it is a work of his soul’s salvation which will bring others to be saved. Even if his intended audience “all forrwerppenn itt / Þurrh þeðre modizness” (155-6: “entirely reject it through their pride”), then Orm himself is certain that his labours “shall hafenn addledd me / Þe Laferrd Cristess are” (151-2: “will have earned me the Lord Christ’s grace”). This claim echoes the scripturally-based reassurance that Wulfstan had offered to priests at the beginning of the previous century,¹⁷ but it also functions as an early sign of Orm’s belief in himself and his mission. His editor

¹⁵ Morrison has convincingly identified the source for this as Isidore’s *De Natura Rerum*: “New sources for the *Ormulum*,” *Neophilologus* 68 (1984), 444-50 (445-6).

¹⁶ On this school and its associations with the *Glossa ordinaria*, Orm’s chief source, see Frans van Liere, “Biblical Exegesis Through the Twelfth Century,” in *The Practice of the Bible in the Middle Ages: Production, Reception, and Performance in Western Christianity*, ed. Susan Boynton (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 157-78 (167-70).

¹⁷ “Gif ðu folce riht bodast and ðu hit gebigean ne miht to rihte, þonne gebyrht ðu þeh þinre agenre sawle” (“If you preach good to the people but you cannot turn them to good, then nevertheless you will burnish your own soul”): Wulfstan, *Institutes of Polity, Civil and Ecclesiastical*, ed. Karl Jost (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1959), 141 (from “Be Sacerdan,” “On Priests”), citing Ezekiel 3:19.

suggests there may be a reminiscence here not of Wulfstan (of whom Orm has been shown to demonstrate very little direct knowledge),¹⁸ but of Ælfric:

Gif we for synfullum mannum gebiddað. and hi þære ðingunge unwurðe synd. ne beo we swa ðeah bedælede edleanes þæs godan willan. ðeah þe we ðam forscyldegodan geðingian ne magon¹⁹

(If we pray for sinful men, and they are unworthy of that intercession, we shall, nevertheless, not be deprived of the reward for good will, even though we may not intercede for the guilty.)

Orm could have known this passage, but the difference in emphasis between it and his own work is important. Ælfric writes not of preaching but of prayer, and while one may pray for another person, the fate of one's own soul is always paramount, and the fate of others' unknowable. Similarly, Wulfstan's direct address to the possibility of preaching to the unconverted merely returns to reassure the priest that his own soul will thereby be safe. But while Orm's initial claim for the value of his labour is superficially similar, what becomes apparent as his work unfolds is the vast, ingenuous reality of his concern for the welfare of other people's souls, and his conviction that in preaching he can, even must, aid them to reach salvation. More than this: in contrast with the ubiquitous command to focus on oneself and the fate of one's own soul, Orm asserts that all men should think first of others: "Uss birrþ lætenn unnorneliȝ / □ litell off uss sellfenn, / □ lætenn wel off oþre menn, / □ lutenn hemm □ lefftenn." (7525-8: "We should think meanly and little of ourselves, and think well of other men, and accommodate them and raise them up.") This attention to other people is the grounding of Orm's theology and his pedagogy, and in the context of his time it must have seemed a message worth repeating. In one of his moments of penetrating rhetorical address, Orm ventriloquizes his audience's possible confusion about their responsibilities to God:

Nu miht tu seggenn her to me Þiss word, ȝiff þatt te þinnkeþþ,
Whi birrþ me lufenn Godd □ mann, Whi birrþ me lufenn baþe?
Inoh iss me to lufenn Godd, Þærþurh maȝȝ icc ben borȝhenn. (5150-5)

(Now at this point you might say these words to me, if it occurs to you: Why should I love God and man? Why should I love both? It's enough for me to love God; by that I can be saved.)

Orm does not patronize this imagined complainant, as he promises to explain the answer as well as he is able. He proceeds logically, observing that God could have arranged matters in any way at all: if God could be satisfied with love of himself alone, then indeed that love could lead you to salvation. But "þe birrþ witenn witerrliȝ" (5168: "you must know for certain") that God could never be satisfied with such love. More than this, if you love not

¹⁸ See Stephen Morrison, "A reminiscence of Wulfstan in the twelfth century," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 96 (1995), 229-34; Jonathan Wilcox, "Wulfstan and the twelfth century," in *Rewriting Old English*, ed. Swan and Treharne, 83-97 (87).

¹⁹ *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies. The Second Series*, ed. Malcolm Godden. EETS s.s. 5 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 303; cf. John Ep. 1, 5:16.

man then “Crist ne lufesst tu nohht all / Inn all hiss twinne kinde” (5174-5: “you love not all of Christ, in the whole of his two natures”). Most importantly, this is not an abstract pronouncement, but one which bears upon the whole conduct of life: “□ ziff þu lufesst Drihhtin ohht, / O menn þe birrþ itt shæwenn; / Forr þe birrþ forr þe lufe off Godd / Wel lufenn menn □ hellpenn” (5180-3: “And if you love God at all, you must show it in your treatment of men, because for the love of God you must love men well and help them”). Love is the whole of God’s commandment, the source and the end of all good action on earth; indeed, love is instantiated and subsists in the virtuous deeds which earn salvation:

□ tær iss all þatt te birrþ don, □ all þe bode iss filledd,
 Ziff þatt tu lafesst Godd □ mann ...
 □ her þu mihht nu sen full wel þatt lufe iss all i dedess:
 Forr ma33 na lufe berr3henn þe Wiþþutenn gode dedess (5254-63)

(And if you love God and man, there is everything you must do, and all the commandments are fulfilled ... And here you can now see clearly that love is all in actions, for you cannot sustain love without good deeds.)

Implicit in these commands, which are pertinent to all men, is the explanation for Orm’s own huge labour of love in producing his book. The ultimate good deed is to bring another soul to salvation; preaching is the supreme act of love, and “ta þatt bringen word off Crist, / Pa sinndenn Cristess enngless” (13878-9: “those who bring the word of Christ, they are Christ’s angels”).

Orm’s address is always that of a preacher to the laity, explaining their duty to one another – as spouses, parents, masters of servants, members of communities – and to themselves, with the help and encouragement of their priests. Orms tells the laity what teaching to expect (or demand) of their priest, and what obedience to that teaching they owe in return, in a mutual enterprise: “Nu ziff þatt zure preost □ 3e / Þus farenn zuw bitwenenn, / Pa ma33 ben god till zure preost / □ till zuw sellfenn baþe” (946-9: “Now if you and your priest work together like this, you can benefit both your priest and yourself”). He urges those who have command of servants and apprentices to exercise both empathy and humility, and adds some practical advice on conduct which is nonetheless backed by implicit scriptural analogy:

□ 3unnc birrþ 3unnkerr le3hemenn Rihht la3helike ledenn,
 Swa þatt 3itt nohht att hofelæs Ne nede þe33m to swinnkenn;
 Forr 3unnc birrþ witenn swiþe wel, □ innwarrdlike trowwenn,
 Þatt niss bitwenen 3unnc □ hemm Nan shæd i manness kinde ...
 □ heore le3he birrþ hemm beon Rædi3, þann itt iss addledd;
 Forr þatt iss Godess bodeword, Loc ziff þu willt itt foll3henn,
 Þatt heore da33whammlike swinnc Beo da33whammlike hemm goldenn. (6222-39)

(And you must conduct your servants truly lawfully, so that you don’t push them too hard or force them to work; for you must know for certain, and believe in your heart, that there is not one jot of difference between your humanity and theirs... And their wages must be ready for them, as soon as they’ve earned them – for that is God’s

commandment, which you must keep if you want to obey it – that their daily work is rewarded daily.)

Here and throughout, Orm draws implicit and explicit parallels between man and God. Proper behaviour is not merely according to God's commandment, but is in God's image:

... ure Laferrd Jesu Crist Iss baþe King, □ Hirde;
Forr Crist iss King, þatt steoreþþ uss, □ Hirde, þatt uss fedeþþ;
□ 3iff þatt tu þurrh Crisstenndom □ þurrh þe rihhte læfe
Willt foll3henn ure Laferrd Crist, Þe birrþ beon king, □ hirde;
Þe birrþ beon king, þatt witt tu wel, To steorenn rihht te sellfenn,
□ ec to steorenn alle þa Þatt arn i þine walde,
Þatt te33 ne dra3he nohht hemm onn To foll3henn ille þæwess;
□ ec þe birrþ beon hirdemann To fedenn hemm □ fosstrenn. (6838-53)

(our Lord Christ is both king and shepherd: for Christ is king, who guides us, and shepherd, who feeds us. And if you want to follow our Lord Christ in Christendom and the true faith, you must be both king and shepherd: you must be a king, as you know, to guide yourself properly, and to guide all those who are under your governance, so that they are not drawn into any wrongful habits; and equally you must be a shepherd, who feeds them and brings them up.)

Here Christ, and priest, and lay parishioner, are all versions of the same ideal: this is a pattern which reaches down to the most minute relations between individuals, and all the way up to salvation and eternity.

While always speaking *to* the laity, Orm does not only speak of them. When he turns to what he calls “þatt operr lif,” the life of the monk, he uses it as a didactic comparison, acknowledging the conventional superiority of monastic over secular life. Importantly, it will become clear that he regards his own role as Augustinian canon, focused on the pastoral duties of preaching and teaching, as a very different matter. The virtues of monasticism are not unqualified (repeated conditionals subtly allow the possibility of unrighteous monks), but above all it is presented to Orm's lay audience as a particular exchange of terrible hardship for great reward, an alien arrangement, special but unenviable:

Þatt lif þatt iss i muneclif Iss shadd fra 3ure swinnkess,
□ itt iss all an operr lif □ hehhre lif □ bettere;
For 3iff þatt itt iss haldenn rihht Itt addleþ mare mede ...
Himm birrþ all weoreldshipe flen, □ all þwerrt ut forwerrpenn;
□ himm birrþ all hiss flæshess lusst Forr lufe off Crist forwerrpenn;
□ tatt iss swiþe strang □ harrd To forþenn her onn eorþe,
□ forrþi witt tu wel þatt itt Iss hehhre lif □ bettere
To libbenn rihht i muneclif, Swa summ þær iss to libben,
Þann iss to ledenn 3ure lif Wiþþ weddlac □ wiþþ ahhte ...
□ himm birrþ æfre stanndenn inn To lofen Godd □ wurrþenn,
□ a33 him birrþ beon fressh þærto Bi da33ess □ bi nihhtess;
□ tat iss harrd □ strang □ tor □ hef3 lif to ledenn (6294-351).

(The life that is in monasticism is separate from your labours, and it is an entirely different life, and a higher and better one, for if it is undertaken properly it earns a greater reward ... He must abandon all worldly business, and reject it all entirely; and he must forgo all his bodily desires for the love of Christ, and that is very taxing and difficult to do here on earth: and so you well understand that it is a higher and better life, to live righteously the monastic life, as there are some who will live it, than it is to lead your life with marriage and possessions... And he must forever persevere in loving God and worshipping him, and he must always be ready to do so, day and night: and that is hard, severe, and difficult, and a burdensome life to lead.)

Ormm explains that monks must live owning nothing – not even a comb – and dwells on their harsh devotions:

Wipþ daʒʒsang □ wipþ uhhtennsang, Wipþ messess □ wipþ beness,
 □ wipþ to letenn swingenn himm þe bodig swa to pinenn,
 Wipþ fasting forr þe lufe off Godd, Wipþ cneling □ wipþ wecche. (6360-5)

(With daily song and the service at dawn, with masses and with prayers, and with having himself scourged to torment the body, with fasting for the love of God, with kneeling and vigils.)

All of this is straightforwardly pious, as he reiterates the greater reward such men can hope for in heaven; but in the context of his own position it is also highly aggressive. As the regular canons had become established in England in the twelfth century, they entered a battle with the Benedictines over the care of souls. The new canonical orders had been created with a pastoral mission in mind, and their foundations were accordingly endowed with great numbers of parish churches and the care of other charitable institutions.²⁰ A new emphasis on the need for preaching and instruction of laypeople had led to widespread atmospheric change in the Church; its effects on traditional monasticism have been regarded as profoundly damaging.²¹ But in England as elsewhere, whether or not it was nuanced by genuine evangelism, the economic incentive to preach was a strong one. The Benedictines were not willing to give up the lucrative business of preaching to the charitable laity, which had been a part of their role before the Conquest, and it was the black monks who were responsible for compiling most of the twelfth century's homiletic manuscripts.²² In effect there was outright competition between monks and canons for the right to engage with the laity, and in this context Ormm's praise of the *muneclif* is relentlessly absolute: the monks who live "þatt operr lif" have no business at all beyond the cloister.

²⁰ Janet Burton and Karen Stöber, "Introduction," in *The Regular Canons in the Medieval British Isles*, eds. Burton and Stöber (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 1-16; see also David A. Postles, "The Austin Canons in English Towns, c. 1100-1350," *Historical Research* 66 (1993), 1-20.

²¹ See, respectively, Richard H. Rouse and Mary A. Rouse, *Preachers, Florilegia and Sermons: Studies on the Manipulus florum of Thomas of Ireland* (Toronto: PIMS, 1979), ch. 2, "The New Emphasis on Preaching," 43-64; Norman Cantor, "The Crisis of Western Monasticism, 1050-1130," *American Historical Review* 66 (1960), 47-67.

²² Younge, "Monks, Money," 41-4.

Ormm here compares the cloistered monastic life with the secular world; at this point he offers no direct comparison between cloistered clergy and pastoral preachers. But when he comes to describe the tripartite hierarchy of lives towards the end of his homily on the wedding at Cana, he does something both distinctive and shocking. The three degrees of life, defined as the ascending states of chastity of marriage, widowhood, and virginity, were a widespread convention. Ælfric’s version of the homily provides the standard reading, derived from his authoritative sources:²³

on godes gelaðunge sind þry stæpas gecorenra manna; Se nyðemysta stæpe is on geleaffullum læwedum mannum. þe on rihtum sinscipe wuniað. swiðor for bearnteame þonne for galnysse; Se oðer stæpe is on wydewan hade, þe æfter rihtre æwe on clænnysse wuniað. for begeate þæs upplican lifes; Se hehsta stæpe is on mægðhades mannum. þa ðe fram cildhade clænlice gode þeowigende. ealle middaneardlice gælsan forhogiað²⁴

(In God’s church there are three levels of chosen men. The lowest level is faithful laymen, who live in rightful marriage, rather for the sake of having children than for lust. The next level is widowhood, when after lawful marriage they live in purity, in order to gain the heavenly life. The highest level is virginity, those who from childhood purely serve God, abandoning all worldly desires.)

Ælfric seems to have thought a great deal about sexual behaviour. He was engaged in the reforming campaign to eradicate married clergy, and he combined this with a real concern for the sexual continence of laymen, returning to this universal hierarchy of chastity on several occasions.²⁵ The three degrees appear frequently in patristic and later writings; of the sources Ælfric himself names in the preface to his homilies, he could have found them in Bede, Gregory, Smaragdus of St Mihiel, and Haimo of Auxerre.²⁶ His was the standard interpretation, and it could be extended by analogy to compare the different lives of clergy and laity, as Ælfric’s contemporary Abbo of Fleury illustrates:

siquidem ex utroque sexu fidelium tres ordines, ac si tres gradus, in sancta et universali Ecclesia esse novimus; quorum licet nullus sine peccato sit, tamen primus est bonus, secundus melior, tertius est optimus. Et primus quidem ordo est in utroque sexu conjugatorum; secundus continentium, vel viduarum; tertius virginum vel sanctimonialium. Virorum tantum similiter tres sunt gradus vel ordines, quorum primus est laicorum, secundus clericorum, tertius monachorum.²⁷

²³ “The spiritual hierarchy of marriage, widowhood and virginity... is in Smaragdus (PL 102, col. 89A). It is also in Haimo (PL 118, col. 136C):” Joyce Hill, “Ælfric and Smaragdus,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 21 (1992), 203-37 (223).

²⁴ *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies. Second Series*, ed. Godden, 39.

²⁵ Robert K. Upchurch, “For Pastoral Care and Political Gain: Ælfric of Eynsham’s Preaching on Marital Celibacy,” *Traditio* 59 (2004), 39-79, esp. 49-50; Malcolm Godden, *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*. EETS s.s. 18 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 380.

²⁶ See e.g. Bede, PL 91.415D, 508C, 570B, 751B; 92.507D, 661D-662A; Gregory, PL 75.535C; 76.657B, 1014A; note 23, above.

²⁷ Abbo of Fleury, *Apologeticus ad Hugonem et Rodbertum reges Francorum*, PL 139.463A–B.

(So we know among the faithful of both sexes three orders, or so to speak three grades, in the holy and universal Church; of whom although none is exempt from sin, nevertheless the first is good, the second better, and the third best. And the first of these orders is the marriage of the two sexes; the second is chastity, or widowhood; the third virginity, or sanctity. Just so among men there are three grades or orders, of which the first is the laity, the second the clergy, the third the monks.)

An unknown twelfth-century author shows that this expansion too could be regarded as a commonplace: “Hi sunt tres ordines in Ecclesia: conjugatorum, continentium, virginum; vel laicorum, clericorum, monachorum”²⁸ (“These are the three orders in the Church: the married, the chaste, and virgins; or the laity, clergy, and monks”). But in fact, the three degrees had always appeared in two, quite distinct, forms: the highest is only sometimes identified as virginity. Perhaps half as frequently it is a different quality entirely: “tres sunt in Ecclesia ordines fidelium, conjugatorum, continentium et doctorum”²⁹ (“there are three degrees among the faithful of the Church: the married, the chaste, and teachers”). In one homily Gregory offers “conjugatorum, continentium, atque praedicatorum”³⁰ (“the married, the chaste, and preachers”); Hrabanus Maurus has “virginum” in one place and “praedicatorum” in another.³¹ Evidently these categorizations could be regarded as interchangeable, or partly metaphorical: the highest are those who live purely in the service of God, who can teach (and embody) the doctrine of the Church. In the *Glossa ordinaria*, one of Orm’s main sources,³² the three are “doctores, continentes, conjugati,” and it is explained that the steward of the feast, to whom the wine was first brought, signifies “aliquis legisperitus, qui bibit spiritualem sensum legis”³³ (“anyone expert in the law, who drinks the spiritual sense of the law”) – the water transformed into wine as Christ transformed the old letter into the new spirit. If the *Glossa* was his source for this homily, then Orm had good reason to choose the less common designation of the highest life: but even so, he used it to compare lay and clerical lives in a startlingly unconventional way. The three kinds of life are not equal, he tells us:

Forr an iss heh, □ oþerr lah, □ þridde iss allre laʒhesst.
 Þe maste lott tatt heʒhesst iss Iss þatt lærede genge,
 Þatt iss ʒuw sett abufenn ʒuw To ʒemenn □ to lærenn,
 To spellenn ʒuw off Cristenndom, To shrifenn ʒuw □ huslenn,
 To birʒenn ʒuw i kirrkegærd, To biddenn forr þe sawle.
 Þiss lott off all Crisstene folle Iss heʒhesst unnderr Criste,
 Forr itt iss set her att te ster To sterenn baþe þoþre.
 Pat oþerr lott iss all þatt folle Þatt lifeþþ i clænnesse,
 I maʒþhad □ i widdwesshad I minnstress □ i tuness.

²⁸ *Auctor incertus* (?Hugh of Saint-Victor), *Miscellanea* (“De eodem”): PL 177.869A.

²⁹ Smaragdus, *Collectiones in epistolas et evangelia*, PL 102.89A.

³⁰ Gregory, *Homilia VII*, PL 76.1014A.

³¹ Hrabanus Maurus, *De Universo Libri Viginti Duo*, PL 111.488B; *Incipiunt Commentaria in Ezechielem*, PL 110.930A.

³² Stephen Morrison, “Sources for the Ormulum: a re-examination,” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 84 (1983), 419-36.

³³ *Evangelium secundum Joannem, Glossa ordinaria* (misattributed to Strabo): PL 114.364B.

Þiss lott iss heh biforenn Godd, Forr þatt itt here onn erþe
 Stannt inn to follzhenn enngleþed Þurrh soþ clænnessess bisne.
 Þatt forrme, þatt iss att te ster To 3emenn baþe þoþre,
 Þatt lott iss he3hesst, forr þatt itt Her foll3heþþ soþ clænnesse,
 □ iss þær tekenn att te ster To 3emenn baþe þoþre.
 Þe þridde lott iss all þatt follc Þatt wiþþ weddlac iss bundenn;
 Þiss follc iss la3hest, □ tiss lott Addleþþ þe læste mede,
 Forr þatt te33 hafenn allre masst Off þe33re flæshess wille,
 □ tohh swa þehh, 3iff þe33 weddlac Rihht la3helike follzhenn,
 Þe33 addlenn unnderr Crisstenndom To brukenn eche blisse. (15246-83)

(For one is high, and the other low, and the third is lowest of all. The great group that is highest is the host of the learned, who are set above you to lead and to teach, to instruct you in Christianity, to confess and absolve you, to bury you in the churchyard, to pray for your soul. This group of all Christian people is the highest under Christ, for they are set here at the helm to govern both the others. The next group is all the people who live pure lives, in virginity and in widowhood, in monasteries and in towns. This group is high before God, because here on earth they strive to imitate the angels in their example of true purity. That first group, that is at the helm to guide both the others, that group is highest, for as well as living on earth in true purity, they are also at the helm to guide both the others. The third group is all the people who are bound in wedlock; these people are the lowest, and this group earns the least reward, because they have the greatest part of their fleshly desires. But even so, if they live fully lawfully in wedlock, they will earn enough in Christendom to enjoy eternal bliss.)

In his absolute elevation of the teacher and preacher's role in society, Ormm openly contradicts the conventional assumption that the highest form of life is the monastic rule.³⁴ Indeed he makes no special allowance at all for monasticism, implying that the chaste laity living in towns can be an equal example of angelic purity. Ælfric would certainly not have agreed with this reading, and perhaps none of his (or Ormm's) sources would either: but it must be acknowledged that this is a rational extrapolation of the brief comparison "conjugatorum, continentium et doctorum" as rendered in (for example) Smaragdus; it is no more tendentious than Ælfric's own expansion on the theme.

This passage demonstrates several key aims and characteristics of the *Ormmulum*. First is his independent approach to exegesis. Ormm writes within an authoritative tradition of both Latin and earlier English homilies and commentaries, and yet while no one doubts his general dependence upon earlier works, sustained or precise source parallels are notably scarce.³⁵ Ormm deployed multiple sources, adapted to suit his purposes, and he added his own interpretations and elaborations on the themes which interested him most. Here Ormm works logically to his conclusions, offering an explanation which no layperson could refute, and which any monk would have to enter a detailed discussion in order to rebut. Of course the

³⁴ On this cf. Mancho, "Considering *Ormmulum*'s Exegetical Discourse."

³⁵ See Morrison, "Ormm's English Sources;" "Sources for the *Ormmulum*;" "New sources for the *Ormmulum*."

intended audience is not monastic but lay, and in the last part of this quotation we come to another important aspect of Orm's work: his generosity and encouragement with respect to lay lives. When he asserts that a law-abiding Christian married life is sufficient to earn salvation, he addresses the twelfth-century Church's key difficulty in pastoral care: its ambivalence about the value of the secular life. While Orm does not specify precisely what is involved in living "rihht laʒhelike" in marriage (and Ælfric, for example, had tried to enjoin celibacy on married couples),³⁶ his very vagueness is decades ahead of the Church's official teaching. Not until the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 did the papacy offer tentative, official encouragement: "Non solum autem virgines et continentes verum etiam coniugati per fidem rectam et operationem bonam placentes deo ad aeternam merentur beatitudinem pervenire"³⁷ ("For not only virgins and the continent, but also married people, by right faith and good actions pleasing to God, deserve to come to eternal blessedness"). Orm's words here and throughout the *Ormmulum* give us proof of a logical speculation about the twelfth century: that some parish priests, and many clergy of all kinds who sought to engage with the laity in any way, must perforce have adopted a gentler attitude with their flock than Church orthodoxy could yet support. In this he nonetheless stands in contrast with the contemporary majority of extant written didactic material, which continued to offer little comfort to the laity: "Uel is þat ne wile his agene saule helpen. and we ben mest alle. and ure wei þe we shule leten. is ure liflode þe we shule rihtleche"³⁸ ("He is evil who will not help his own soul, and we are almost all in that condition; and our way that we must abandon is our way of life, that we must correct").

Orm's passionate idealization of priesthood and teaching, and his concomitant devotion to the laity, create a consistent, humane, and ambitious picture. On the other side of the pastoral competition, as George Younge has devastatingly shown, the Benedictines' attempts to win the lay audience were sometimes characterized by a distasteful combination of harsh severity about secular sins, and a "fawning attitude to wealthy benefactors," a constant emphasis on God's approval of worldly riches as long as their possessors make substantial offerings to the church.³⁹ Criticisms of this kind were levelled at the time: John of Salisbury complained that for the Benedictines "elemosina peccatum extinguit"⁴⁰ ("alms extinguish sins"), leaving monasticism corrupted by greed and the laity unprotected. It is in this context that we must read Orm's vituperative condemnation of financial corruption. In his homily on Christ's casting the moneychangers out of the temple, he has nothing but scorn for those who "turndenn Godess hus / Inntill huccsteress bope" (15816-17: "turn the house of God into a hucksters' booth"), and he rapidly identifies these *huccsteress* with corrupt clergy: the men who sell doves (John 2:16, Mark 11:15, Matt 21:12) are priests who try to sell the Holy Spirit:

Forr Halig Gast comm uppo Crist Inn aness cullfress like,

³⁶ Upchurch, "For Pastoral Care."

³⁷ *Concilium Lateranense IU*, in *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, ed. J. Alberigo, J. A. Dossetti, P. P. Joannou, C. Leonardi, P. Prodi, and H. Jedin, LLT-A (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 230–71 (231).

³⁸ R. Morris, ed., *Old English Homilies of the Twelfth Century*. EETS o.s. 53 (London: Trübner, 1873), 69.

³⁹ Younge, "Monks, Money;" quotation at 61.

⁴⁰ *Policraticus*, ed. Clement C. I. Webb, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1909), 2.191: cited by Younge, "Monks, Money," 49.

□ ure Laferrd Jesu Crist Draf ut off Godess temmple
 Þa menn þatt saldenn cullfress þær, □ ec þa þatt hemm bohhtenn.
 □ all swa doþ he 3et to da33, All þwerrt ut he forrwerrpeþþ
 Þa menn þatt sellenn Hali3 Gast, □ ec þa þatt itt biggenn. (15956-65)

(For the Holy Ghost came to Christ in the likeness of a dove, and our Lord Jesus Christ drove out of God's temple the men who sold doves there, and also those who bought them. And so he does yet to this day, for he absolutely rejects men who sell the Holy Ghost, and also those who buy it.)

Orm expands his attack with reference to priestly sacraments, transparently condemning practices of his own time. Those who sell or buy the Holy Spirit “Att fullhtninng, oþerr att hanndgang, / Oþþr att hadinng, forr mede, / Hemm addlenn swa þe maste wa / Þatt ani3 mann ma33 addlenn” (16100-3: “at baptism, or at confirmation, or at ordination, for gain, by that earn themselves the greatest sorrow that any man may earn”). Any “prestess fe” (16008: “priest's fee”) is an immediately corrupt sign of people's “gredi3nesse ... an / Full hefi3 hæfedd sinne” (16027-8: “greed ... a very heavy, chief sin”). Above all, Orm is enraged with those who misuse his own great vocation:

... þatt læredd folc Þatt læreþþ well □ spelleþþ,
 Acc all forr lufe off erþli3 loff □ all forr erþli3 mede ...
 Forrþi þatt te33 ne spellenn nohht Forr hefennlike mede,
 Acc all forr lufe off idell 3ellp □ all forr menness spæche (15876-89)

(Those learned people who teach well and preach, but all for the love of earthly things and all for earthly gain ... Because they don't preach for heavenly reward, but all for the love of vain glory, and all for the sake of men's praise.)

This demonstrates another idiosyncrasy: Orm's general disdain for and mistrust of displays of learning.⁴¹ He is keen to note that the apostles were uneducated men, whom Christ chose precisely because of that quality: “Forr nollde he chesenn nan off þa / Þatt cuþenn mikell lare.” (13932-3: “For he wished to chose none of those who had great learning.”) His reasons were known to his followers, who “settenn itt o boke; / □ forþi ma33 icc nu till 3uw / Summwhatt tæroffe shæwenn” (13937-9: “put it down in a book, and so I am now able to reveal some of it to you”). There is no trace of irony intended here, which is revealing: Orm lives in a world of community literacy, in which books are vital to shared memory, performing this function for those who cannot read as well as those who can. The written record does not belong to the learned: it is an instrument of communication to all, mediated by the humble preacher who thinks only of his flock, employing “þatt little witt þatt me / Min Drihhtin hafepþþ lenedd” (D15-16: “the small intelligence my Lord has lent me”).

Christ's apostles could not be learned men, Orm explains, because then “Ne munnde nan mann ben off hemm / Noff þe33re spell forrwunndredd, / Ne nohht ne munnde þa þe folc

⁴¹ Morey, *Book and Verse*, observes that Orm's “læredd” are usually Jews: 77. It is tempting to consider that he might also have meant to imply the Benedictines, who positioned themselves as lone custodians of the Old English literary tradition: Younge, “Monks, Money,” 80-1.

/ Till þeʒʒre lare buʒhenn” (13942-5: “no one would have been astonished at them or their preaching, and so the people would not have bowed to their teaching”). They were given the gift of preaching through the Holy Spirit, so that the miracle would bring men to faith, and Christ would not have died “all forr nohht” (13948). This is an oddly glib explanation, but as he moves smoothly on to the humility of the Incarnation, as a lesson of humility to all (13964-81), the mild *non sequitur* does important work of juxtaposition. The “læwede ... possless” (13953: “uneducated apostles”) were humble men chosen for heavenly glory when learned men were incapable of seeing or preaching the truth; Christ became one of the humble men, and lived among them. Orm continues this apostolic mission to the unlearned, as one of them, preaching Christ’s message “Þatt whase wile borʒhenn ben / Himm birrþ hiss herrte turnenn / Till haliz bokess gastliʒ witt / Ut off stafflike lare” (19775-8: “that whoever would be saved must turn his heart to the spiritual understanding of holy books, away from lettered learning”). A *staff* is a written letter, and Orm’s meaning is clear: *littera enim occidit, Spiritus autem vivificat* (2 Cor 3:6: “for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life”).

Throughout his book, Orm attends to the inner life of the soul, and the dangers of worldly approval even of charitable acts:

Ne birrþ þe nohht forr erþliʒ loff, Ne nohht for menness spæche,
 Ut i þe stræte oppnenn þin hord, To don þin allmess dede
 Biforenn folc, þurh idell ʒellp, Ne þurh nan modiʒnesse,
 Forr swa to winnenn erþliʒ loff Wipþ allmess þatt tu wirrkest;
 Acc þe birrþ dærnelike don, Wipþ innwarrd herrte □ clene,
 Þin allmess dede onn alle þa Þatt hafenn ned off hellpe (7362-73)

(You should never for the sake of earthly gain, or for men’s good word, unlock your hoard out in the streets, to perform acts of charity in front of people, through vainglory, or through any kind of pride, in order to win worldly gain with the charity you do; but you should perform charitable deeds secretly, with a pure inward heart, for all those who need help.)

This is uncontroversial advice, but written in twelfth-century English it pits itself against both a long history of poetic pride in declaration and action, and contemporary instruction from the Benedictines which sought to harness that pride in encouraging public charitable giving: “se forholena cræft and forhyded gold / ne bið ællunge ungelice”⁴² (“concealed talents and hidden gold are not wholly unlike”). The conviction of Orm’s teaching cannot be doubted, and nor can the weight of his sense of social responsibility. Where other homilists address an individual soul as though stripped of responsibilities to all but God and the Church, Orm continually returns to consider people’s practical and spiritual duty to others, even when he begins by temporarily echoing conventional pessimism:

Þatt mann birrþ lokenn allre mast Aʒʒ till hiss aʒhenn sawle;
 For birrþ me nowwþerr hellpenn þe To lif, ne to þe sawle,

⁴² *Instructions for Christians*, ed. Christopher A. Jones, in *Old English Shorter Poems vol. 1: Religious and Didactic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), lines 69-70.

Swa þatt icc ohht forrgillte me 3æn Godd onn ani3 wise.
Acc all þatt icc ma33 gengenn þe, Swa þatt I nohht ne gillte,
All birrþ me bliþelike don Forr heofennlike mede. (3122-31)

(For man should most of all look to his own soul, for I should neither help you to life, nor to the good of your soul, if it meant that I in any way sinned against God by doing so. But everything that I can do for you, as long as I don't commit sin, I should joyfully do it all, for heavenly reward.)

In this encouragement he anticipates the later development of a great shared economy of penance and prayer, by which Christians could directly aid the souls of loved ones both living and dead.⁴³ For Orm in the mid-twelfth century there is no expressed idea of purgatory as a location of yet unperfected souls after death, but he does speak of purgatorial cleansing, and particularly of fire. In this he builds upon earlier interpretations of scripture, strikingly illustrating the dynamism of his contemporary moment, as he stands on the cusp of the bureaucratization of post mortem salvation.⁴⁴ In Orm's exegesis of John the Baptist's prophesying and baptism of Christ,⁴⁵ he seizes upon Matthew's gospel's "baptism by fire:"

□ tatt tatt Cristess þeww Johan Þær se33de to þe leode,
Þatt ure Laferrd Jesu Crist Þe leode shollde fullhtnenn
þurrh Haliz Gast □ ec þurrh fir, To clennsenn hemm off sinness,
Þatt se33de he forr to don uss wel To seon □ tunnerrstandenn,
Þatt tatt iss all þurrh Haliz Gast Þatt fulluhht clenmseþþ sinness.
□ Haliz Gast iss haliz fir, Þatt bærneþþ i þatt herrte
Þatt iss þurrh 3ife off Haliz Gast Wiþþ soþfast lufe filledd. (10442-55)

(And that which Christ's servant John there said to the people – that our Lord Jesus Christ would baptize the people through the Holy Spirit and also through fire, to cleanse them of sins – he said that to make sure that we would see and understand, that it is entirely through the Holy Spirit that baptism cleanses sins. And the Holy Spirit is the holy fire that burns in the heart which is filled with true love, through the gift of the Holy Spirit.)

In itself this echoes conventional exegesis, as in Ælfric's second homily on the Epiphany, which like Orm's is "a conflated account of John the Baptist and the baptism of Christ:"⁴⁶

Pa apostoli wæron gecorene. and gesette lareowas eallum mancynne; Pa com se halga gast ofer him on fyres hiwe. to ði þæt hi sceoldon beon byrnende. and caue to godes

⁴³ See Laura Ashe, *The Oxford English Literary History vol. 1: 1000-1350. Conquest and Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 246-52.

⁴⁴ For a similar departure in keeping with subsequent cultural changes, see Stephen Morrison's account of Orm's depiction of the *militia Christi*: "Continuité et innovation littéraire en Angleterre au XIIe siècle: la prédication de la *militia Christi*," *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 44 (2001), 139-57.

⁴⁵ Matthew 3:11-17.

⁴⁶ Malcolm Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*. EETS s.s. 18 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 363.

willan. and forniman ælcne unðeaw mid heora lare swa swa fyr fornimð swa hwæt swa him to cymð⁴⁷

(The apostles were chosen and appointed teachers to all mankind: and the Holy Ghost came over them in the form of fire, so that they would be burning and keen to do God's will, and would destroy all vices with their teaching, just as fire destroys whatever it touches.)

Ælfric's fire is not burning away the apostles' sins, however, but giving their teaching inflammatory fervour. Orm's is different; he compares it to the physical pains willingly suffered by holy people during their lives, "Þatt clennseþþ hemm all þwerrt ut wel / Off alle þe33re sinness" (10460-1: "that cleanse them completely of all their sins"): and then he goes further, into the newer doctrine.

□ 3et we mu3henn, þurh þatt fir Þatt Sannt Johan Bapptisste
Spacc offe to þa sanderrmenn, All full wel unnderstandenn
Þatt fir þatt iss inn oþerr lif To clennsenn menness sawless.
Forr here uss clennseþþ Hali3 Gast Þurh fulluhht □ þurh trowwþe,
□ tær þatt fir, 3iff þatt we riht Her endenn unnderr shriffte (10464-73)

(And yet, by that fire of which Saint John the Baptist spoke to the messengers, we must full well understand that fire which is in the other life, to cleanse men's souls. For here the Holy Spirit cleanses us through baptism and through faith, and there that fire cleanses us, if we end our lives properly with confession.)

Ælfric says nothing of the kind – his parallel comment is sacramental, and says nothing of the soul after death, of purgatorial fire, nor even directly of confession:⁴⁸

Preo healice ðing gesette god mannum to clænsunge. An is fulluht. oðer is
huselhalgung. þridde is dædbot mid geswicennysse yfelra dæda. and mid bigencge
godra weorca; Þæt fulluht us aþwehð fram eallum synnum. se huselgang us gehalgað.
Seo soðe dædbot gehælð ure misdæda⁴⁹

(God has established three excellent things to cleanse men: one is baptism, the second is the eucharist, and the third is penance, with the avoidance of evil deeds and the performance of good works. Baptism washes us of all sins, the eucharist purifies us, and true penance heals our misdeeds.)

Writing more than 150 years later, Orm shows a new focus on the idea of purgatorial fire after death, alongside the strengthening influence of the ideal of confession. There had long been an understanding that some sins might be cleansed by a purgatorial fire after death, but

⁴⁷ *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies. Second Series*, ed. Godden, 24.

⁴⁸ On the changing understanding of penitence/penance across this period see Ashe, *Conquest and Transformation*, 132-6.

⁴⁹ *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies. Second Series*, ed. Godden, 26. Ælfric repeats his understanding of baptism and penance in *Lives of Saints*, ed. Walter W. Skeat, 2 vols, EETS o.s. 76, 82, 94, 114 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, repr. 1999-2003), 2.270-2.

there was little clarity on the mechanism.⁵⁰ Orm’s immediate, twelfth-century sources, the *Glossa ordinaria* and Pseudo-Anselm *Enarrationes in Matthaem*, show the early stages of a codification of purgatorial doctrine, but also its limitations. Demonstrating dependence on older authorities, they assert that purgatorial fire after death, as an extension of living penance (which is now also figured as fire), can only eradicate the residue of lesser sins:

Vel designantur haec duo genera purgationum, alterum in aqua ubi originalia et actualia condonantur per spiritum. Alterum vero, quando aliqua post baptismum subrepat macula, quae vel igne poenitentiae, vel alicujus mundanae persecutionis, vel denique; igne purgatorio, si qua levis macula est residua, purgatur.⁵¹

(So two kinds of cleansing are set out, the first in water, where original and current sins are remitted by the Spirit; and the other, for when any kind of sin has insinuated itself after baptism, which is either penitential fire, that is some kind of worldly punishment, or finally, by purgatorial fire, which cleanses the residue of any lesser sins.)

What is missing here is the doctrine of confession, as the necessary condition for purgation. Orm clarifies that proper confession is the mechanism which enables both the substitution of purgatorial fire for penance performed while living, and the post mortem purging of major sins. In adding the requirement of “rihhte shriffte,” Orm removes all limits on the power of “þatt fir” to cleanse the soul after death, and as such he illustrates a profound theological development. That development is part of the turn to interiority and affectivity – it is confession, and the soul’s true repentance, which gives pre- and post mortem penance its efficacy – and it is writ large in the changing orthodoxy on the sacraments and on purgatory. In the *Ormmulum* these questions even seem to be undergoing some kind of progression as he wrote, whether in his literary or social environment or merely in his own mind. In an earlier part of the text Orm had written of the urgent need to fulfil God’s word in this life:

To cwemenn Crist þurh haliz lif, □ þurh unshapinesse ...
 Swa þatt mann muzhe wurrþi beon To winnen Cristess are.
 Forr niss nan time inn oþer lif Affterr þiss lifess ende (2699-714)

(To satisfy Christ through holy living, and through guiltlessness... so that a man might be worthy to win Christ’s reward. For there is no time in the other life, after this life ends.)

Apparently there is no opportunity here for the cleansing of sins after death – Orm lists the good deeds of charity and of Christian ritual which the dead cannot perform – and nor do confession or penance emerge to ameliorate this warning of the need for *unshapinesse* (sinlessness). “Shrift” appears surprisingly rarely in the bulk of the text, and often in mildly equivocal contexts, such as the statement that if a good man commits any sin, “itt iss all 3æn

⁵⁰ See Helen Foxhall Forbes, “*Diuiduntur in Quattuor*: The Interim and Judgement in Anglo-Saxon England,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 61 (2010), 659-84.

⁵¹ Pseudo-Anselm *Enarrationes in Matthaem*, PL 162.1266B. Cf. *Evangelium secundum Matthaem*, *Glossa ordinaria*, PL 114.82A: “igne purgatorio ad purum exuret: quod de levioribus credendum est peccatis” (“they will be burned away to purity by purgatorial fire: that is to be believed of the lesser sins”).

hiss wille, / □ nile he nohht tærinne lin, / Acc riseþþ upp þurh shriffte” (6019-21: “it is all against his will, and he won’t rest in it, but rises up through confession”). Yet later on, it is as though Orm has suddenly heard – or read – something which encourages him to place a much greater emphasis on the efficacy – and the affectivity – of confession, and the possibility of recuperation: “To clennessenn □ to bæwenn hemm / Off alle þe33re sinness, / Þurh shriffte □ þurh dædbotes baþþ / □ ec þurh be33ske tæress” (18042-5: “To cleanse and purify them of all their sins, through both confession and penance, and also through bitter tears”).⁵² In this long work we can see new ideas gradually taking hold.

I want to close this essay with a particular example of Orm’s active and humane engagement with scripture, which manifests itself in real wit and originality. He can surprise and delight, as when he explains of the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11) that the new wine signifies the death the Christian should be willing to suffer in return for Christ’s Passion, because when wine is drunk “Att oferrdon, itt cwennkeþþ” (15213: “to excess, it destroys”). In more sustained exegesis, Orm goes on to explore the allegorical meanings of the steward’s famous declaration “Tu autem servasti bonum vinum usque adhuc” (“But thou hast kept the good wine until now”). The standard interpretation of this is the miraculous difference between the old law and the new spirit, sometimes briefly elaborated.⁵³ In none of his known sources could Orm have found inspiration for the imaginative flight he undertakes around this theme, suddenly addressing God directly:

Þe defell □ þe defless þeww Þe33 3ifenn menn to drinnkenn,
 Acc nohht tatt wise þatt tu dost, Allmahhti3 Godd off heffne.
 Þe33 3ifenn firrst te gode win; Forr þe33re firrste lare
 Iss haliz lare, □ soþ, □ riht, □ halsumm forr to lernenn ...
 □ siþþenn don þe33 falls □ flærd Amang þe gode lare,
 □ all biswikenn swa þe folc Þurh þe33re laþe wiless ...
 □ affterr þatt te33 hafenn all Wharrfedd te wrecche lede
 Þurh þe33re laress attredd win Inntill swillc drunnkenesse,
 Þatt te33 ne cunnen nan innsiht Noff Godd, noff Godess lare,
 Þæraffterr 3ifenn þe33 þe folc 3et werrse win to drinnkenn,
 Forr siþþenn iss all þe33re spell Shir atter □ shir galle (15356-83)

(The devil and the devil’s servants give men drink – but not in the way you do, almighty God in heaven. They first give the good wine, for their first teaching is holy lore, and truth, and righteousness, and wholesome to learn ... And later they mix falsehood and deceit in with the good teaching, and so they utterly betray the people through their hateful cunning ... And after they’ve totally changed the wretched people through their teaching’s poisoned wine, into such drunkenness that they can have no knowledge of God, nor of God’s teaching, then they give the people yet worse wine to drink – from then on all their preaching is pure bitterness and pure gall.)

⁵² This is the third such statement in a short span of lines: see also 17839-45; 17861-6.

⁵³ See e.g. note 33, above.

Orrm describes an empathetic horror at what we can recognize as the destructive power of addiction: “A33 (*ever*) werrse □ werrse drinnchess:” finally leading to the depths of hell. All of this stands in violent contrast with Orrm’s preceding (conventional) exegesis of the “gastli3 drunnkenesse” brought about by Christ’s miraculous wine, in which the spiritual meanings of scriptural history can newly, fully, be understood. The comparison returns in direct, domesticated address to Christ:

□ tu lef Laerrd Jesu Crist, Ne shennesst nohht tatt wise,
Ne birrlesst tu nowwþerr þin hird Ne swa, ne swillke drinnchess,
Forr þu þe33m birrlesst lifess drinnch Þurh lare □ ec þurh bisne.
Pin forme win iss swiþe god, Pin lattre win iss bettere (15402-9)

(And you, dear Lord Jesus Christ, do not pour drinks like that; neither do you serve your household so, nor such drinks, for you serve them the drink of life, through teaching and by example. Your first wine is very good; your later wine is better.)

I have not found anything resembling this exegesis in earlier (or contemporary) gospel commentaries or homilies. But there is one twelfth-century work which could have provided the inspiration – though not as a direct source, for the differences are too great. Hugh of Saint-Victor’s *De archa Noe* (ca. 1125) opens with “the difference between the love of the world and the love of God,” and uses the gospel quotation to explain it: fleshly man serves the good wine first out of weakness, until pricks of conscience persuade him to turn to the bad. In comparison, God begins with the bitter wine of afflictions, so that eventual grace may be ever the sweeter.⁵⁴ Perhaps Orrm had read Hugh’s work and partly remembered it; perhaps he chose to adapt it.⁵⁵ His version is vastly more empathetic, involving, and domesticatedly humane, not to say logical. A century later Aquinas would say something similar in his own commentary on John, but he too would note the bitterness of Christ’s first wine.⁵⁶ Only for Orrm, in what seems a characteristically optimistic, generous, and even inspiring interpretation, is Christ’s first wine wonderful, and the wine to come even better.

⁵⁴ Hugh of Saint-Victor, *De Arca Noe Morali*, PL 176.619, trans. in *Selected Spiritual Writings translated by a religious of C.S.M.V.*, ed. Penelope Lawson (London: Faber, 1962), 47-8. This passage also circulated attributed to Hildebert of Lavardin: PL 171.206.

⁵⁵ Several extant manuscripts of English provenance can be dated to the twelfth century: Patrice Sicard, *Iter Victorinum: la tradition manuscrite des œuvres de Hugues et de Richard de Saint-Victor* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 88-102.

⁵⁶ *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis*, caput 2, lectio 1, 363.