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## ***Anhyld þinre heortan eare: Mind as Body in the Sermons of Ælfric***

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By using a metaphor of the mind as body, with eyes, and ears, a throat and voice, Ælfric explains the complexities of an Augustinian understanding of the mind in comparatively simple terms, to lead: ‘those who dwell in cities and towns and villages’ (Cassian 1997: 375) to an understanding of Christ. In Ælfric’s *Dominica in Quinquagesima* (1997: 260), the mind is endowed with the potential for sight and has a voice: *swa hwa swa oncnæwð þa blindnysse his modes Clipige he mid inweardre heortan* (he who is aware of his mind’s blindness let him shout out with inward heart). We see here the complexity of this mental structure. Ælfric’s references to the inner mind or heart go beyond a bodily personification and refer to layers of consciousness, where one part of the mind has an awareness that another part does not. This layered mind, conveyed through the metaphor of mind as body, is also to be found in the Alfredian translations and the Old English translation of the Benedictine Rule. This paper will argue that Ælfric employs the image of mind as body to facilitate the teaching of those outside the cloister to understand and therefore control their minds that they may learn to pray employing the essential elements of the monastic way of prayer. In doing this, Ælfric would seem to be offering the hope of achieving, at some level, a mystic union with Christ in a vision of God’s light to those who live beyond the cloister walls.

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## Introduction

The opening of Æðelwold's translation of the Benedictine Rule enjoins the novice monk to *anhyld þinre heortan eare* (incline the ear of your heart) (Benedict, 1885: 1).<sup>1</sup> Like a body, this representation of the mind has organs linked to the senses of perception giving access to the outside world, and like a body it is capable of movement. It can incline.<sup>2</sup> The figurative organs of the mind are here presented as offering a bridge between the inner man and the outer world. The image renders the Latin exactly: *inclina aurem cordis tui* (Benedict, 1981: 156).

Such representations of the mind in bodily terms belong to the Christian tradition and reflect a grounding in the conceptualisation of mind by Christian thinkers, most notably St Augustine. In this quotation from the Benedictine Rule, the ear of the mind appears to be inclining towards an external and worldly stimulus: the novice's teacher. Similar images of the mind with organs are most often employed in an attempt to communicate with God or to describe an impediment towards that communication. Even in this example, we might ask why it is the ear of the mind that must be turned towards the teacher and not just the ear of the body (after all, the sensory organs of the body relay information to the mind). The answer: a specifically spiritual engagement is required; it is the soul of the novice that must engage, and the goal is *Gode gecyrran* (to turn towards God).

In the monastic context of the Benedictine Rule, the lives of monks are centred around prayer and communion with God. They learn the dangers of temptation and the need for mental control through readings of John Cassian, himself a disciple of Evagrius of Pontus. They learn that mind must control mind in order to fight the dangers of temptation. This is an essential step in the search for communion with God through a vision or *theoria*. Benedict's use of mind as body imagery facilitates for the novice an understanding of the layered nature of the mind. This paper will argue that Ælfric, who also employs mind as body imagery, is doing so in order to lead lay men and women to a similar understanding, teaching them a simplified version of the monastic approach to prayer that they too may have a spiritual engagement with God.

It is worth pausing to consider the precise meanings of the Old English terms for mind and soul.<sup>3</sup> These terms are confused even in modern usage and their value depends

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<sup>1</sup> The OE term *heorte* glosses Latin *cor* and has a similar range of meanings. All translations are my own, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed examination of the early medieval understanding of the operation of the senses, especially sight and touch, see O'Brien O'Keefe (2016).

<sup>3</sup> There have been many studies of the early medieval mind, including: Godden (1985); Harbus (2002); Lockett (2011); Low (2001); Matto (2016); Mize (2006); and Mize (2013).

largely on interpretation of context. However, the Old English glosses of Latin terms give some indication of ranges of meaning, at least in prose. *Mod* frequently glosses *mens*. If we look up *mens* in Lewis and Short (1879), we are little the wiser. The value of *mens* is given as: the mind, disposition, feeling, character, heart, soul. According to the *Thesaurus of Old English* (2000: 359–405), *mod* and its compounds can represent a range of values including spirit, soul, heart and the place of thought.<sup>4</sup> Low (2001: 11) includes *mod* (with *sefa*, *sawol* and *ferhð*), as representing the seat of emotions.<sup>5</sup> In the glossed version of the Benedictine Rule, *mod* glosses both *animus* (the rational soul) and *anima* which in a Christian context usually refers to the life force or part of the soul common to men and animals, although this usage is not entirely consistent. *Heorte* glosses *cor*, and in both Old English and Latin this is a mind term, and often seems to refer to the place in which thoughts are held. There does not seem to be a hard and fast distinction between some of the Old English mind terms, and, to a lesser degree, this also true of those terms in Latin or Present-Day English. Therefore, as Soon-Ai Low (2001: 15) concludes, it is necessary to consider the terms in context.

*Ælfric follows Augustine in his own description of the mind/soul as a tripartite entity in Feria III De Fide Catholica.*<sup>6</sup> Having established the nature of the Trinity as three equal and undiminishable aspects in one—by comparing it to the sun which is composed of form, heat and brightness—*Ælfric* (1997: 342) goes on to explain in what way man is made in God’s image. It is, he says, *on þære sawle na on þam lichaman; þæs mannes sawul hæfð on hire gecynde þære halgan þrynesse anlicnysse, for þan ðe heo hæfð on hire ðreo ðing, þæt is gemynd and andgit and willa* (in the soul, not in the body; man’s soul has in its nature a likeness to the Holy Trinity, because it has in it three things, that is: memory, understanding and will).<sup>7</sup> This follows Augustine (1991: 328–29): ‘after all, the authority of the apostle as well as plain reason assures us that man was not made to the image of God as regards the shape of His body, but as regards His rational mind’.<sup>8</sup> He explores ways in which mental trinities resemble the divine Trinity, the chief triad being memory, will and understanding. *Ælfric’s* explanation of the Trinity is, in essence, a summary of *De Trinitate*; it is clear that his understanding of the mind is largely influenced by Augustine.

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<sup>4</sup> See the works by Soon-Ai Low on the early medieval mind: Low (2001) and Low (2005).

<sup>5</sup> In this sense, the need for a man to control the *mod* that we see in *Maxims I*, could be the monastic injunction to control the emotions to purify the heart for prayer. See below.

<sup>6</sup> The comparison between God and the sun may have its source in Pseudo-Dionysius’s *Divine Names*. See Pseudo-Dionysius (1987: 74–5).

<sup>7</sup> See Godden (2000: 160–1) for references to other sources for this homily, including several sermons by Augustine (although Godden found no direct source for the image of the Trinity as sun).

<sup>8</sup> *Ælfric* will also have been drawing on Alcuin’s *De Animae Ratione*, but this was itself largely based on Augustine.

The following article will first consider the image of mind as body. Following on from this, it will analyse the presentation of a layered mind that is implicit in that image. Finally, it will look at the way Ælfric uses this imagery, especially the image of the eyes of the mind, to offer a simplified version of the monastic way of prayer.

### Embodied Mind

In *Dominica in Sexagesima*, Ælfric depicts a mind with a throat, teaching that *woruldcarā, and welan, and flæsclīce lustas forsmoriað ðæs modes ðrotan* (worldly cares and riches, and desires of the flesh choke the mind's throat) (Ælfric, 1979: 55). This image is a violent one, describing a mind given over to worldly things and in danger of death as a result. Ælfric is expounding on Matthew 13, the parable of the sower, but he has turned the image of seed falling onto the ground into an image of a mind unable to swallow the word of God because it is choking on vices. The seed that falls is the word of God, and the land, be it rocky or weed-strewn, is the mind. The throat is not a sensory organ, but it is a conduit linking the inside of the body with the outside. The idea of choking hints at impending death, but also suggests a blockage—worldly things are preventing the Word of God from entering the mind. In answer to the question of His disciples as to why He speaks in parables, Christ replies: 'I speak to them in parables: because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand' (Matthew: 13.13). The gospel text is itself obliquely referring to two types of sight and two types of hearing, the one physical and the other spiritual; importantly, this does not refer to every human mind, but the mind of one who has had the opportunity to hear the word of God. This is something Ælfric comes back to when commenting on the story of the blind man in *Dominica in Quinquagesima*.<sup>9</sup> Ælfric's exposition of Luke 18:35–43, the story of the blind man, will be the central focus of this paper, but first we will look at some other examples of mind as body in order to understand more fully the implications and possible sources of this image.

The Alfredian texts frequently depict mind as body. In the *Soliloquies*, the mind's eye is a central image:

Augustinus: Hwæt is þæt þæt þu hetst modes eagen?

Gesceadwisnes: Gesceadwisnesse to æcan oðrum creftum (Hargrove, 1902: 22).

Augustine: What is it that you call the mind's eye?

Reason: Reason, in addition to other faculties.

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<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting that the mind can be described in bodily terms in less obviously Christian contexts. In *Beowulf*, Grendel's mind is capable of laughter, supposing a metaphorical chest and mouth: *þa his mode ahlog* (730, then his mind laughed) (Fulk, Bjork and Niles, 2014).

The *Soliloquies* represent a discussion between Augustine and his own mind, or at least the part of his mind that is reason, in a quest to know the soul and to know God. The Alfredian *Boethius* adapts the original source in such a way that it appears to replicate the schema of Augustine's *Soliloquies*, replacing the figure of Boethius with Mod, thus representing the mind as a man in a prison engaged in a discussion with Wisdom. As Allen Frantzen (1986: 49) observes: 'Alfred's translation is not a lecture delivered by a wise figure who appears in a dream, but a debate between the mind and its own faculties'.<sup>10</sup>

The material representations of the mind are not exclusively bodily. In the *Exeter Book* poem *The Wanderer* (Krapp and Dobbie, 1936), the mind is a strongbox holding thoughts enclosed within like treasure. It is a *hordcofa* (l.14) and a *ferðloca* (l.13); a treasure-chamber and a spirit-locker. This also implies a layered mind; the noble custom referred to of keeping one's thoughts and emotions locked up, surely requires a part of the mind to close the door and turn the key.<sup>11</sup> The term *hordcofa* is also used in the metrical Psalm 118:2 (O'Neill, 2016): *and hine mid ealle innacundum heortan hordcofan helpe biddað* (and pray to Him for help with all the heart's innermost thoughts). *Heortan hordcofan* glosses and expands the Latin phrase in *toto corde*.<sup>12</sup>

The mind can also be a ship that needs to be steered, such as in *Maxims I: styran sceal mon strongum mode* (a person must steer a headstrong mind) (Krapp and Dobbie 1936: l.50a). This line is suggestive of a complex and multi-layered mind. The *mon* can hardly be supposed to represent body but rather self, will or reason—much like Augustine or Gesceadwisnes in the *Soliloquies*. The *mod* here would seem to be the wilful aspect of the mind—the part that needs controlling. This maxim therefore refers to different parts of the same mind, with one part, ideally, controlling the other. This line is echoed in *The Seafarer*, where the manuscript reading *stieran mod sceal strongum mode* (a mind must steer a headstrong mind) (Krapp and Dobbie, 1936: l.109), usually amended to *stieran mon sceal strongum mode*, makes perfect sense. This is mind controlling mind.<sup>13</sup> Whilst critics such as Lesley Lockett (2011) and Malcolm Godden (1985) have argued that vernacular poetry draws on an understanding of mind from a tradition distinct to that of the patristic tradition underpinning the prose, recent scholarship is increasingly challenging this and demonstrating that poems such as *The Wanderer* (Leneghan, 2016) and *Juliana* (Ponirakis, 2022) are following a monastic understanding of mind.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For a discussion on the authorship and aims of the Alfredian *Soliloquies*, including an argument for a unitary soul, see Lockett (2011: 313–73).

<sup>11</sup> The poem can be seen as an exploration of mind in terms of the triad of memory, will and understanding. See Selzer, (1983: 227–37).

<sup>12</sup> For a thorough exploration of the image of the mind as container, see: Mize, (2006: 57–90).

<sup>13</sup> The idea of a layered mind comprising more than one element is not exclusively Christian; in Norse mythology, Odin's mind is famously materialised as two ravens, Huginn and Muninn, thought and memory.

<sup>14</sup> See also Niles (2019).

This image of the mind as a ship, with reason or some controlling element at the helm, is also to be found in Gregory's *Pastoral Care*, and its Old English translation (Fulk, 2021: 478): *ac gif se stiorroðor gehilt, ðonne cymð he orsorglice to lande, hwilum ðeah ongean wind and ongean ða yða, hwilum mid ægðrum. Swa deð ðæt mod, þonne hit wacorlice stiereð ðære sawle* (but if the helmsman holds his tiller, then he comes without anxiety to land, though the wind oppose and the waves oppose, sometimes both. So does the mind when it vigilantly steers the soul). The mind, here *mod*, is once again embodied as a man — the helmsman steering the *sawle*.<sup>15</sup> The wind and waves opposing Gregory's ship of the mind are, of course, the dangers of sin and temptation, comparable to Ælfric's *woruldcaru, and welan, and flæsclice lustas* in his image of the mind as having a throat which chokes on such things.

Ælfric gives possibly his most detailed account of the mind in his sermon for Shrove Sunday, *Dominica in Quinquagesima*, outlining its potential for illumination as well as the dangers it faces in his exposition of Luke 18:35–43, the story of the blind man. Here the mind is presented in material terms, not just as having bodily organs, but as a man. Ælfric's sources for the homily are believed to be Gregory the Great's *Homilia II in evangelia*, and Haymo of Auxerre's expansion of Gregory's work (Godden, 2000: 77–85).<sup>16</sup> However, as Godden (2000: 77) notes in his commentary on this homily, Ælfric's treatment of the story is often independent: 'developing especially the treatment of the mind and soul'. Following Gregory, the human mind is represented here by the whole figure of the blind man, more precisely, the human mind blinded by sin when thrust out of paradise. Ælfric uses the idea of blindness, a material body whose eyes cannot see the light, to play on ideas of spiritual light and darkness. When man is thrust from paradise he enters the world, which is compared to a prison, where we are shut out from the heavenly light, the light eternal, and blinded by lack of faith and *gedwylde* (error or heresy).<sup>17</sup> In the parable, the blind man is sitting by the side of the road when Christ passes by. Christ's arrival then represents two things. Firstly, Christ's historical *to-cyme* or advent into the world, so that mankind has the potential to be saved, indicated by *ac þurh cristes to-cyme we wurdon abrodene of urum gedwylde, and onlihte þurh geleafan* (but through Christ's advent we were freed from our errors and enlightened through faith) (Ælfric, 1997: 259–60).<sup>18</sup> Simultaneously, it is a present possibility to receive Christ into one's

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<sup>15</sup> This demonstrates that, as mentioned above, the Old English mind terms do not have consistent values. In *Maxims I*, it is the *mod* which represents the wayward part of the mind needing to be controlled, here it would seem to represent reason, the controlling force.

<sup>16</sup> Godden references Gregory the Great, *Homilia in evangelia*, and Haymo of Auxerre, *Homiliae de Tempore*.

<sup>17</sup> See Thomas (2017).

<sup>18</sup> Harriet Soper links references to light in the Rhyiming Poem with Augustine's 'alignment of the infancies of the individual, humanity and Creation' in his *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*. Soper (2019: 20, 22).



mind, indicated by *nu hæbbe we þæt leoht on urum mode, þæt is cristes geleafa* (now we have the light in our mind that is Christ's faith) allowing us to find *þone hiht þæs ecan lifes myrhðe, þeah ðe we gyt lichamlice on urum cwearterne wunian* (the hope of joy in eternal life, although we are still dwelling bodily in our prison) (Ælfric, 1997: 259–60). The mind is, therefore, capable of transcending the prison of mortal life and 'seeing' the heavenly light, while the body is not. The imagery of light and dark, especially of the mind's own light, is a spiritual one. As Stephanie Clark (2018: 256) argues, Ælfric plays down the Neoplatonic imagery developed by Gregory by focussing on mortal life as exile. I will argue that Ælfric's spirituality is based more on a monastic attitude to prayer than a directly Neoplatonic one (though, of course, the two are not mutually exclusive).

It would also seem that the material representation of the mind, here as a blind man with eyes that cannot see until in the presence of Christ, finds its origins in the teaching of Augustine (1991: 243), who uses the image of a mind endowed with body parts, eyes and ears, when he refers to this light, 'for it is written that God is light (1 Jn 1:5) not such as these eyes see, but such as the mind sees when it hears "He is truth"'.<sup>19</sup> Augustine argues that physical sight requires an act of will to send out rays of light onto the object that it desires to see.<sup>20</sup> In the same way, the eyes of the soul require an act of will to see God, or as Ælfric puts it, *þæt leoht on urum mode, þæt is Cristes geleafa* (1997: 260). For this to be possible (and Augustine recognises that there are very few who will achieve such a *theoria*), first the light of faith must be present, followed by a cultivated longing. Margaret Miles (1983: 125–42) summarises this, and explains the importance of longing as part of this process:

In physical vision, the visual ray must be focused and trained if it is to touch its object with precision; the parallel strengthening of the eye of the mind is the conscious cultivation of longing, the visual ray of the mind's eye. The vision of God will never be a passive or voyeuristic vision.

Ælfric (1997: 260) touches on these ideas in a simpler and summative fashion:

Se man þe nan ðing ne cann þæs ecan leohtes: he is blind; ac gif he gelyfð on þone hælend: þonne sit he wið þone weig; gif he nele biddan þæs ecan leohtes: he sit

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<sup>19</sup> In considering the question of how the mind sees itself, Augustine (1991: 10.3.8) explains that mistakenly, 'it thinks it is a body' because it confuses itself with the things it perceives through the senses.

<sup>20</sup> Referring to the modern metaphor which equates knowing with 'seeing', Miles (1983: 127) explains, 'for the classical people who originated the metaphor, sight was an accurate and fruitful metaphor for knowledge because they relied on the physics of vision, subscribed to by Plato and many others, that a ray of light, energized and projected by the mind toward an object, actually touches its object, thereby connecting viewer and object'.

þonne blind be ðam wege unbiddende; se ðe rihtlice gelyfð on crist and geornlice bit his saule onlihttinge; he sitt be ðam wege biddende.<sup>21</sup>

The man who knows nothing of the eternal light: he is blind; but if he believes in the Saviour: then he sits by the way; if he does not want to pray for the eternal light: he sits blind by the way, not praying; he who rightly believes in Christ and eagerly prays for the enlightenment of his soul: he sits by the way praying.

Here, Ælfric has summarised the essential elements for contact with God. The first prerequisite, as Augustine teaches, is faith; the soul must have the light of faith. The second is longing, which Ælfric interprets as an active willingness to pray. The eye of the soul must strengthen itself, as Miles puts it, to cultivate that longing in order to have the possibility of spiritual vision. The representation of the mind in this sermon corresponds quite closely to the Augustinian model of the mind most thoroughly explained in *De Trinitate*.<sup>22</sup>

### The Layered Mind

Ælfric's exposition of the parable links the mind to prayer and reveals the mind to have levels of consciousness, so that the blind man calling out to Christ represents a man praying for the light eternal, and Ælfric (1997: 260) enjoins his listeners to do the same: *swa hwa swa oncnæwð þa blindnysse his modes, Clipige he mid inweardre heortan, swa swa se blinda clypode* (whoever knows the blindness of his mind, let him call out with inner heart, just as the blind man called out).<sup>23</sup> This image is most interesting in determining just how Ælfric conceives of the mind: it is layered. If there is an inner heart, then there is also an outer one. The other element to notice is that there are layers of consciousness.

Ælfric demonstrates a mind with parts, where one part of the mind knows things of which the other parts of the mind are unaware. This is not dissimilar from the Alfredian/Augustinian presentation of the mind in the *Soliloquies*. The reference to one who is

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<sup>21</sup> As Godden demonstrates, this passage follows Gregory quite closely; Godden (2000: 79).

<sup>22</sup> It is important to note that Ælfric does not follow Augustine slavishly, and Clark (2018) demonstrates several occasions where the two diverge.

<sup>23</sup> Ælfric rewords Gregory's injunction in a way that draws greater attention to the image of a mind with layers or parts. Gregory has *quisquis ergo caecitatis suae tenebras agnosit, quisquis hoc, quod sibi deest, lumen aeternitatis intelligit, clamet medulliscordis, clamet et vocibus mentis, dicens* (therefore, whoever acknowledges the darkness of his own blindness, who understands what is missing from him, cries out from his heart's marrow, cries with the voices of his mind, saying...'. The 'darkness of blindness' is replaced with 'the blindness of the mind' and heart's marrow (another material metaphor) is replaced with a less ambiguous reference to a heart with different parts, here the inner part. The idea is similar and indeed Gregory's use of the plural *vocibus mentis*, is intriguing, but Ælfric seems keener to describe a clearly understandable image of a mind that does not entirely know itself. Godden (2000: 79–80).



aware of his mind's blindness describes a part of the mind that is aware and conscious of something that another part of the mind is not. There is, therefore, a conscious and unconscious mind, conveyed through the image of the mind with eyes and able to see or not see. This figuration of the mind closely follows the one detailed by Augustine in Book XII of *De Trinitate*,<sup>24</sup> which was, according to Michael Lapidge (2006: 80), a staple of the Anglo-Saxon library. Augustine uses metaphor to describe the mind or psyche as he sees it. He defines man as inner and outer, with the body being the outer man, but he also includes that part of the mind or soul that we have in common with animals as being part of the outer man. The mind or soul has a higher part, where wisdom (*sapientia*) resides, and ideally this part should be focussed on the contemplation of God; beneath that is knowledge (*scientia*), or the rational, decision making part of the mind, and beneath that is the part of the mind that is held in common with animals, which contains memory and is linked to receiving sensory impressions from the outside world. In *De Trinitate* XII, Augustine symbolises the upper part of the mind, associated with wisdom, as Adam, the rational or scientific part associated with knowledge, as Eve, and the lower part receiving sensation as the serpent. Man's fall is brought about by the mediating action of the middle part, represented by Eve, which consents to illicit thoughts through the temptations offered through the senses and turns the higher part of the mind away from the contemplation of holy things downwards to a contemplation of worldly things.

In *De Trinitate* XIII–IV Augustine uses this schema of the three-part mind to demonstrate salvation and the contemplation of the divine through the arrival of Christ. Edmund Hill (in Augustine, 1991: 262) explains: 'it is only when the sciential function has consented to this divine condescension by faith and began to control the appetites of the outer man by virtue, that the highest sapiential function can begin to be released once more for the loving contemplation of the divine'. Ælfric has simplified the schema, but the inward heart of the man who has faith and prays for enlightenment corresponds to the sciential part of the mind that controls the outer man, and in taking this action of prayer through faith, permits the sapiential or highest function to be enlightened.

### **The Light of Faith: A Monastic Model for Prayer**

Ælfric (1997: 260), following Gregory, then expands on the idea of prayer, and here seems to enter monastic territory. The multitude who attempt to silence the blind man as he calls out to Christ represent *ure unlustas and leahtras þe us hremmað, and*

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<sup>24</sup> It is principally in *De Trinitate* that Augustine explores trinities in the higher part of the mind, such as memory, will and understanding.

ure heortan ofsittað, þæt we ne magon us swa geornlice gebiddan, swa we behofedon (our disinclinations and sins that cry out to us, and oppress our hearts, so that we cannot pray as eagerly as we need to). This would seem to correspond to the *logismoi* of Evagrius, the intrusive thoughts sent in by demons to distract the monk from prayer. *Unlustas* is translated as ‘evil desires’ by Thorpe (1844: 156) but could also be read as an absence of desire, or listlessness, corresponding to *acedia*. Whilst often glossing *voluptas*, in *Eadwine’s Psalter* at Psalm 118: 28, it glosses *taedium* (Harsley, 1889). There were eight *logismoi* [*gastrimargia* (gluttony), *fornicatio* (lustful thoughts), *filargyria* (love of wealth), *ira* (anger), *tristitia* (sadness), *acedia* (anxiety or weariness of heart), *cenodoxia* (vainglory), and *superbia* (pride)] and they are included in Cassian’s *Conferences*.<sup>25</sup> Ælfric (1979) gives us the Old English names for them in *Dominica in Media Quadragesime* as *gyfernyss*, *galnyss*, *gytsung*, *weamet*, *unrotnys*, *asolcennyss/æmelnyss*, *gylp* and *modignyss*. *Unlustas* could therefore correspond to either *fornicatio* or *acedia*.

Cassian, who was a student of Evagrius, based much of his writing on the teachings of the Greek father when he wrote his *Conferences*, to adapt the principles of desert monasticism, where the monks lived alone, to that of a collective rule. The eight *logismoi*, or vices, were adapted to seven by Gregory the Great, and these ultimately became the seven deadly sins. It is unlikely that Ælfric would have been directly familiar with Evagrius, but he would have been familiar with Cassian’s *Conferences*, as these were to be read regularly to monks in Benedictine monasteries, as explicitly stated in the Benedictine Rule, chapters forty-two and seventy-three. Quoting Luke 21:34, Cassian writes:

therefore if we wish our prayers to penetrate not only the heavens but even which is above the heavens, we should make an effort to draw our mind, purged of every earthly vice and cleansed of all the dregs of the passions, back to its natural lightness, so that thus its prayer might ascend to God, unburdened by the weight of any vice (1997: 332).

Ælfric uses the verb *ofsittan* to describe the effect of these vices on the mind. This verb has a range of meanings. Bosworth Toller (2014) gives: ‘to sit upon, occupy, take possession of’ and ‘to oppress’. This corresponds closely with Cassian’s *gravo*, to load, weigh down or oppress, which in turn echoes Christ’s words in Luke 21:34, *attendite autem vobis, ne forte graventur corda vestra in crapula, et ebrietate, et curis hujus vitae, et superveniat in vos repentina dies illa* (and take heed to yourselves, lest perhaps your

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<sup>25</sup> See Cassian (1997) Fifth Conference on the Eight Principal Vices. For more on Ælfric and the eight vices (and corresponding virtues), see Mary Clayton’s introduction in Clayton (2013: 71–107). See also Godden (2000: 462).

hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly).<sup>26</sup>

Ælfric's explanation of prayer in *Dominica in Quinquagesima* is a condensed version of Cassian's ninth and tenth conferences on prayer, when he explains that *hit gelimpð gelomlice, þonne se man wile yfeles geswican, and his synna gebetan, and mid eallum mode to gode gecyrran, þonne cumað þa ealdan leahtras þe he ær geworhte, and hi gedrefað his mood, and willað gestillan his stemne, þæt he to gode ne clypige* (it often happens that when the man wishes to withdraw from evil and atone for his sins, and with all his mind turn towards God, then the old sins that he wrought in the past come and agitate his mind and wish to still his voice, so that he cannot call out to God) (Ælfric, 1997: 260–61). This reflects Cassian's ninth conference on prayer (1997: 331), 'for whatever our soul was thinking about before the time of prayer inevitably occurs to us when we pray as a result of the operation of memory ... it recalls past lusts or business, or it strikes us with foolish laughter'. The solution to combat these intrusions is offered repeatedly in the tenth conference (Cassian 1997: 379–83), where for each of the vices and intrusive thoughts which present themselves, the monk is enjoined to ask God's help by repeating the devotional formula: 'O God, incline unto my aid; O Lord, make haste to help me!' (*Deus, in adiutorium meum intende; Domine, ad adjuvandum me festina!*). This finds its echo in Ælfric (1997: 261) who adapts the monastic injunction and advises that we call out to Christ for help with the words of the blind man: "*Hælend, Dauides Bearn, gemiltse min*" (Saviour, son of David, take pity on me!) and he develops this further: *gif us deofol drecce mid mænigfealdum gēpohtum and costnungum: we scolon hryman swiðor and swiðor to ðam hælende, þæt he todræfe þa yfelan costnunga fram ure heortan, and þæt he onlihte ure mod mid his gife* (if a devil troubles us with numerous thoughts and temptations: we must cry out with more and more force to the Saviour so that He drive away the evil temptations from our hearts and so that He enlighten our minds with His grace). Clark (2018: 262) translates *deofol* as 'the devil', arguing that Ælfric introduces the devil as the agent of trouble, setting him up as Jesus's opponent'.<sup>27</sup> However it is clear in *CH1.1, De Initio Creatura* (Ælfric 1997: 170–189), where Ælfric gives the story of Creation, that he differentiates between *deofol* and *se deofol*. He refers to *deofol* without an article when asking whether God made devils, *God gesceop to mæran engle, þone þe nu is deofol* (God made as a glorious angel the one who is now a devil), but when referring to the devil in his role, *se yfela ræd ne com of Godes gēpance, ac com of þæs deofles* (the evil advice did not come from God's conception but from the devil's) and heaven is the kingdom *þe se deofol forwyrhte mid modignysse* (that the devil forfeited through his pride). This is

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<sup>26</sup> The Latin is from the Vulgate and the translation Douay-Rheims.

<sup>27</sup> Thorpe (1844: 157) also translates *deofol* as 'the devil' here.

an important point, as it is not ‘the devil’ troubling us with thoughts and temptations, but ‘a devil’ — one of those mentioned by Evagrius and Cassian who disturb us when we pray. This presentation of prayer is adapted from a monastic framework.

Ælfric appears to be adapting Cassian’s monastic teaching on prayer to teach ordinary men and women. This may seem surprising, but it is less so when we consider that in the tenth conference on prayer (Cassian, 1997), which Ælfric seems to be drawing on, it is explained that *every* mind is formed in prayer ‘according to the degree of its purity’ (374), and the mind is purified by drawing itself away from earthly, material things, causing ‘Jesus to be seen by the soul’s inward gaze — either as still humble and in the flesh or as glorified and coming in the glory of His majesty’ (374). Whilst the higher vision of Christ is sought by the monks, Cassian is quite precise that ‘Jesus is also seen by those who dwell in cities and towns and villages — that is by those who have an active way of life and its obligations — but not with that brightness with which he appears to those who are able to climb with him to the aforesaid mount of virtues’ (375). Ælfric addresses the two aspects of Christ in his explanation of the image of Christ as either passing or standing on the way where the blind man was sitting. The image of Christ passing represents His mortal passage on earth; our ability to experience Christ in this way would correspond to Cassian’s description of the soul which sees Christ with its inward gaze as ‘still humble and in the flesh’ (374). The image of Christ standing is His divinity: *he stent þurh þa godcundnysse* (He stands through the divine nature) (Ælfric, 1997: 261), or as Cassian would say, ‘in the glory of His majesty’ (374). In considering these two aspects of Christ, Ælfric focusses on the image of light, *þurh ða menniscnysse he besargað ures modes blindnysse and þurh ða godcundnysse he forgifð us leoht and ure blindnysse onliht* (through His human nature He sorrows for the blindness of our minds and through His divine nature He gives us light and illuminates our blindness) (1997: 261). The light that we must pray for is a *gastlican leoht* (spiritual light), and one that *we magon mid englum anum geseon* (that only we along with the angels can see) (1997: 262). This insistence on light suggests a spiritual approach to prayer, one that is suggestive of meditation and communion with the divine. A final detail which Ælfric chooses to include is the discussion of the steep and narrow path, and this again has a monastic source. The biblical reference in Matthew 7:13–14 refers to a narrow gate and not a path. The image of a steep and narrow path, *se weg is swiðe nearu and sticol se ðe læt to heofonan rice* comes from the adaptation of this image in the Benedictine Rule: *se [weg] is neara and sticol þe to life and to heofona rice læt* (the path is narrow and steep that leads to life and the heavenly kingdom) (Benedict, 1885: 5–6).<sup>28</sup> There is little doubt

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<sup>28</sup> Godden remarks that none of Ælfric’s sources use this text and assumes that the development is Ælfric’s own; clearly the Benedictine Rule was one of the source texts. Godden (2000: 83).

that Ælfric is drawing on monastic sources to develop his consideration of the mind's light, the way of prayer and the way to heaven.

The Alfredian translation of Gregory's *Pastoral Care* also uses the image of the human body to represent perfection, or lack thereof, leading to an ability or inability to see the celestial light. In Book 1 (Fulk, 2021: 70–80), when considering those who are unfit for a position of authority, Gregory lists physical defects given by Moses to Aaron in Leviticus 21:16–23, preventing those in Aaron's family from giving offerings to God. The defects relate to blindness, and other ocular conditions, as well as lameness, broken hands and feet, a nose too big, too small or too crooked, a hunchback, skin conditions and testicular deficiencies. All of these physical defects are shown by Gregory to represent mental defects relating to absence of will (to follow God and perform good works) and understanding.<sup>29</sup> The image of the eye is once again a focus of the mind's ability to perceive celestial light:

Se bið eallenga blind, se ðe noht ne ongiet be ðam leohte ðære uplecan sceawunge, ond se se ðe bið ofseten mid ðæm ðistrum ðisses anweardan lifes, ðonne he næfre ne gesieħ mid his modes eagum ðæt towearde leoht, ðy ðe he hit lufige, ond he nat hwider he recð mid ðæm stæpum his weorca (Fulk, 2021: 70).

He is totally blind who understands nothing through the light of celestial understanding, and who is oppressed by the darkness of this present life, when he never sees with his mind's eye the light that is to come, so that he may love it, and he does not know where he goes with the steps of his doings.

The images of light and darkness are very much the same as those in Ælfric's sermon (unsurprisingly, as both are based on works by Gregory the Great and are typical images relating to spirituality). Like Ælfric, here too is the suggestion that the mind's eye is able to see celestial light. This is a mystical concept, linked to the ability to see God (*theoria*) through purification of the mind and through prayer. Gregory links the other parts to the vices, or *logismoi*, that need to be perceived and rejected. The nose, for example, reflects the mental capacity of reason or discernment:

Forðæm sio halige gesomnung ðurh gesceadwisnesse gesieħ ond ongietað of huan ælc costung cumeð, ond ðæt towearde gefeoht ðara uncyste, hwonon hie ðæs wenan sculon (Fulk, 2021: 72).

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<sup>29</sup> I maintain reference to Gregory as author of the *Pastoral Care*, as the Alfredian version in Old English is a translation rather than an adaptation. See Fulk (2021: ix).

Therefore, the holy church sees and understands through reason/discernment whence each temptation will come, and the direction from which the battle of vices is to be expected.

The nose then, represents the mental faculty that sniffs out and anticipates the attack of vices. In this way, Gregory links the various vices with an image of a mind with impaired body-parts, reflecting an impaired mental attitude. The broken hand and foot represent one who knows God's will but refuses to walk or work in it; the hunchback represents one bowed down by earthly desires; the one covered in scabs represents one engrossed in frivolity and fornication. Other skin conditions represent cupidity, and hydrocele (the testicular inflammation) represents one who, although not acting on his lascivious desires, is addicted with the idea in his mind. *Siwenige*, or bleary eye, a condition where the eye is healthy but the eyelids and lashes are not, eventually damaging the eye, represents *se ðe his ondgit bið to ðon beorhte scinende ðæt he mæg ongietan soðfæstnesse, gif hit ðonne aðistriað ða flæsclican weorc* (one whose understanding is given to shining brightness so that he can understand truth, if it then darkens through works of the flesh). This can be reversed by the applying of a salve or ointment:

Ðonne we smierewað ure heortan eage mid sealfe ðæt we mægen ðy bet geseon,  
 ðonne we mid ðam læcedome godra weorca gefultumað urum ondgite ðæt hit bið  
 ascirped to ongieltenne ða bierhtu ðæs soðan leohtes (Fulk, 2021:74).

When we smear the eye of our heart with salve, so that we can see better, then we help our understanding with the medicine of good works so that it is sharpened to perceive the brightness of the true light.

Not surprisingly this too reflects the teaching of Augustine.<sup>30</sup> Miles (1983: 132), explaining Augustine's theory of spiritual light and vision, demonstrates the necessity for cleansing the eye as one of the vital steps in the spiritual journey towards seeing God (we earlier saw the need for faith and longing): 'the second step of preparation for spiritual vision and the vision of God is the cleansing of the eye of the mind: "These eyes must be cleansed"'. This cleansing links directly to the Augustinian theory of sight, both physical and spiritual: 'the cleansing that is preliminary to spiritual vision and the vision of God is the collection of oneself from the variety of images which occupy and structure the soul' (Miles, 1983: 133). In other words, the mind must separate itself from worldly things, *woruldcara*, and *welan*, and *flæsclice lustas*, as *Ælfric* puts it, moving from the mind's eye to its throat.

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<sup>30</sup> Gregory the Great was influenced by the writings of St. Augustine.



## Conclusion

Miranda Wilcox (2006: 179–217), tracking the images of the mind’s eye in Alfredian texts, concludes that ‘a discrete part of the mind, the intellect or understanding, perceives insensible truths by means of divine illumination’. This illumination, we have seen, requires faith and must be actively longed for through persistent prayer; it is only possible in a mind, or mind’s eye, that has been purified from worldly distractions.<sup>31</sup> The examples given show that references to the mind as having bodily organs and members are part of a spiritual and even mystical representation of the soul’s battle with the vices, as detailed in Evagrius and Cassian, that has for ultimate aim the possibility for the mind to ‘see’ the celestial light, and ultimately, to see God. The presence in Old English texts of a mind with body parts — eyes, ears, a throat and voice — is quite common, especially in Christian texts with a didactic element, such as the sermons of Ælfric and the Alfredian translations. The image seems to be coming either directly from the teachings of Saint Augustine, or indirectly through the work of Gregory the Great, and from the desert fathers through Gregory and Cassian.

The most important of these mental body parts are the eyes, able to contain the light of faith, and to see, after purification and striving, a vision of heaven and of Christ Himself. This is a metaphorical image, built on contemporary and classical beliefs about the physical workings of the bodily eye. These images demonstrate a mind that is complex and made up of distinct elements. The idea of a more rational part of the mind controlling a more wayward part and bringing it to heel, can be found beyond the Christian writings of Ælfric and the Alfredian translations, in such writings as *Maxims I* and the Exeter Book Elegies.

That Ælfric and the Alfredian translators of Augustine and Gregory adapt and combine these ideas to synthesise them, rather than reproducing them slavishly, demonstrates that these complex theological ideas were fully understood, integrated and engaged with, revealing a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of mind, especially with regards to faith. Both Gregory and Ælfric saw fit to explain in somewhat simplified terms, through the medium of a homily, an understanding of the mind figuratively portrayed in bodily terms. They use this image to offer an invitation to recognise the illumination of the soul with arguments and images drawn from Augustine and the desert fathers, with an aim not just to lead a good life, but to recognise the possibility of a spiritual encounter with God. This shows a commitment to the democratisation of faith and spirituality beyond the cloister, and a belief in the spiritual potential of those who lived beyond its walls.

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<sup>31</sup> In an appended table, Wilcox identifies 52 references to the eyes of the mind in the Alfredian corpus, pp. 211–14.

## Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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