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after rising to God, in order to rest in the love of the friend.⁴⁹ Moreover, Ælred noted that even though one may move from an *experience* of one love to an experience of another, one does not cease one love in order to begin the other. The two loves are necessarily possessed together.⁵⁰ The spiritual friends are already together in Christ as members of Christ's body. They are together in Christ as their relationship is animated by Christ's spirit. They are together in Christ as they live in union with God through their virtuous lives. They are together in Christ as they model their own friendship after the pattern of Christ's friendships.

When describing eschatological glory, Ælred reinforced the concurrence of friendship among humans and friendship with God: "this friendship, to which we here admit only a few, will be poured out upon all and by all poured back upon God, when God shall be all in all" (Spir amic 3.134). Then human hearts and souls will be united, as all together are united with the Spirit of the triune God.

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⁴⁹ Ælred spoke of the "ladder of charity" when discussing the second of his two examples of monastic friendship: "Was it not a foretaste of blessedness thus to love and thus to be loved; thus to help and be helped; and in this way from the sweetness of fraternal charity to wing one's flight aloft to that more sublime splendor of divine love, and by the ladder of charity now to mount to the embrace of Christ himself; and again to descend to the love of neighbor, there pleasantly to rest?" (Spir amic 3.127).

⁵⁰ Love of self, love of others, and love of God "are engendered by one another, nourished by one another, and fanned into flame by one another. Then they are all brought to perfection together. What is more, it happens in a wondrous and ineffable way that although all three of these loves are possessed at the same time (for it cannot be otherwise), still all three are not sensed equally" (Spec car 3.2.5).

"The Right Occasion for the Words": Situating Ælred's Homily on Saint Katherine

by

Marie Anne Mayeski

When, in 1983, Fr. Gætano Raciti, OCSO, of the Abbey of Notre-Dame d'Orval, Belgium, properly identified the author of two anonymous collections of sermons as the work of Ælred of Rievaulx, scholars were introduced not only to more Ælred homilies, but also to a few homilies for different liturgical occasions than those previously known.¹ A homily in one of the newly identified collections,² that on Saint Katherine of Alexandria, seems singular: it is one of the very few homilies given by a twelfth-century Cistercian on a woman saint other than the Virgin.³ Ælred's homilies are, for the most part, those of an abbot preached on fixed days of the liturgical year as required by the Constitutions. Indeed, most of the collections we now know are organized according to the cycle of seasons and feasts common in and to the West from about the ninth century onward; they follow closely the *cursus* of the temporal cycle and include those feasts of the Virgin, of the apostles, and of John the Baptist, figures central to the Gospel narrative and the mystery of salvation, that were introduced into the liturgical calendar at an early date. But the feast of Saint Katherine was not in the Cistercian liturgical calendar in Ælred's time. A commemoration of Saint Katherine was instituted for the Order by the General Chapter only in 1207 (Statute 1); in 1214 her name was added to the Litany of the Saints and her feast raised to the rank of a twelve-lesson Office and Mass (Statute 56 of the General Chapter of 1214).⁴ This fact suggests that the homily in question was occasioned not by a Cistercian context but by local interests or concerns specific to Ælred.

¹ "Deux collections de sermons de saint Ælred—une centaine d'inedits—découvertes dans les fonds de Cluny and de Clairvaux," Coll 45 (1983): 165-84.

² Paris, nouv. acq. lat. 294.

³ Raciti's article underlines the possibility that other early Cistercian homilies may well come to light. But for those presently known, the above judgment stands.

⁴ I am indebted to Fr. Chrysogonus Waddell, OCSO, of the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky for this information.

Liturgical Evidence for the Katherine Cultus

Devotion to saints such as Katherine proliferated under various and diverse influences; regional and local differences were many and are not easily identified. Local cult and custom shaped the local liturgical calendar. The movements of bishops, monastic personnel, and pious travelers transported the stories of saints and the customs that honored them to new areas. Often a local benefactor bestowed the name and the patronage of his own favorite saint along with the material resources he contributed to a local church or monastery. Relics, around which cults flourished, were also donated by local patrons or by others. All of this background raises the possibility that the cult of Katherine of Alexandria had become important in the Abbey of Rievaulx, in the surrounding region of Pickering, or in Yorkshire generally, and that Ælred was honoring local devotion by preaching on her feast. This is a hypothesis that must be tested against the textual evidence of English liturgical calendars.

One such calendar that is informative for our search is that of the *Vita Sanctorum Wallensium* (B.M. Cotton Ms, Vespasian A. xiv).⁵ The calendar was probably copied around 1200 and its internal evidence is consistent with this date. Its provenance is a particular section of Wales with strong and early associations with the Abbey of Saint Florent in Saumur. Very soon after the Conquest, the churches in the region of Hereford between the Wye and the Usk were given to Saint Florent on condition that the monks build a priory there; that gift is confirmed in the Domesday Book of 1086. Of all the sanctoral feasts represented in this manuscript, by far the largest number (thirty) are commemorations of Welsh saints, an eloquent indication that liturgical practice, especially in Britain, remained fiercely local well into the twelfth century. When these Welsh feasts are eliminated, the calendar represents a much simpler and early cursus, lacking many vigils and feasts that were common in Roman usage after Charlemagne. The latest saint honored in the calendar is Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, who died in 1153 and was canonized in 1174. The feast of Saint Katherine has been added to the manuscript in a later hand, possibly in the mid-thirteenth century and more probably in the fourteenth. The layers of this manuscript suggest a pattern that may very well have been followed elsewhere in England: primitive Roman usage is the framework for rich local practice and devotion, which is not destroyed by the Norman influences in the eleventh century and to which saints such as Saint Katherine are added in the thirteenth century when they become popular throughout Europe. The recently canonized Bernard of Clairvaux is a suggestive inclusion; it hints of Cistercian influence added to local practice rather than displacing it.

⁵Edited and annotated with an introductory study by Silas M. Harris (William Lewis: Cardiff, 1953).

Francis Wormald has given us a helpful printed edition of *English Calendars Before 1100*.⁶ Five of those calendars, all of them dated from the second half of the eleventh century, indicate the celebration of the feast of Saint Katherine: numbers 8, 12, 13, 17 and 20.⁷ Of these, four of the five entries citing Saint Katherine are made in a later hand; a twelfth-century hand has added her feasts to the original kalendar in numbers 17 (with a Worcester provenance) and 20 (from Lincolnshire), while in calendar 13 (from Christ Church, Canterbury), the addition is in a fifteenth-century hand. In calendar 8 (connected by Wormald to Lorrainer Giso, Bishop of Wells), the addition of Katherine's name is very early, probably in the eleventh century, while only in calendar 12, that is, London B.M. Cotton ms, Vitellus E xviii (from Winchester around 1060) is the entry for Saint Katherine's feast in the original hand.⁸ The pattern that emerges from this assortment is clear: before 1100, there is almost no reference to the feast of Saint Katherine in English liturgical calendars; the single eleventh-century indication is found in the area of Winchester, strongly Norman from almost the moment of the Conquest. During the twelfth century, on the other hand, some sporadic observance of the feast is making its way into liturgical practice (as evidenced by two twelfth-century additions to earlier calendars); the provenances of Worcester and Lincolnshire suggest that the cult is gradually spreading northward as the Romanizing influence of the conquerors' agenda moves on. At least one worshiping community adds Katherine to its list of previously honored saints as late as the fifteenth century. However, this community is that of Christ Church, Canterbury, a healthy warning that no easy identification can be made between individual and isolated manuscripts and patterns of Norman influence and liturgical changes.

Another collection of homily manuscripts that spans a long, and for this study appropriate, period of time is that contained in *Medii Ævi calendarium or Dates, Charters and Customs of the Middle Ages with calendars from the tenth to the fifteenth century* by R. T. Hampton.⁹ In this collection, also, only one of the pre-Conquest manuscripts contains any reference to Katherine,¹⁰ while all those of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries indicate the feast firmly in place on November 25. Unfortunately for our purposes, there are no twelfth-century manuscripts in this collection, and that was, according to all the textual evidence, the precise period for the dissemination of Katherine's cult. Indeed, in

⁶Vol 1: Texts (London: Harrison and Sons, 1934).

⁷Calendar 8 is London, B.M. Cotton ms, Vitellus A. xviii (1061-1088); 12: London, B.M. Cotton ms, Vitellus E. xviii (c. 1060). 13: London, B.M. Arundel ms 155 (1012-1023); 17: Cambridge, Corpus Christi ms 391 (latter half of XI century); 20: Oxford, Bodleian Douce ms 296 (mid-XI century).

⁸The provenances of these mss are given by Wormald on pp. vi-viii of the Introduction.

⁹London: Henry Kent Causton, 1896.

¹⁰The one that does is Vitellus E, xviii, given also in the Wormald collection discussed above.

their edition of *The Bosworth Psalter*,¹¹ Abbot Gasquet and Edmund Bishop draw that precise conclusion:

For the twelfth, thirteenth, and early fourteenth centuries additions were made [to the Psalter] by successive hands and they are of a very miscellaneous character; some witness to cults like Saint Faith, Saint Mary Magdalen, Saint Katherine, Saint Leonard, etc. which became widely spread among the devout people in the twelfth century. . . .(33).¹²

The textual evidence of the calendars support only tentative conclusions; they can direct lines of inquiry and restrict speculation, but their survival has been too problematic to allow more. Liturgical codices were much used, practical documents; they were more subject to wear and tear than esoteric manuscripts and therefore what we have is a sample provided by the truly random hand of fate. They were often the victims of the Reformers' purifying intentions as well. We can conclude from what we have that the cult of Saint Katherine and other non-Anglo-Saxon saints came, for the most part, with the Conquest. Her celebrations show up earliest in those centers, like Winchester and Canterbury, where Norman influences were earliest and most powerful.¹³ The texts also act as a negative restraint on our assumptions. The twelfth century is the period of transition; textual witnesses suggest that liturgical celebration of Katherine's cult was scattered and sporadic.¹⁴ However, the introduction of the Katherine cult into Yorkshire seems to have been subject to influences other than those of the Norman reforms; Rievaulx was far from the Conqueror's appointed bishops. There is no way to determine the presence or absence of the cult of Katherine in the vicinity of Rievaulx during Ælred's time, and therefore we cannot assume that Ælred was following the local liturgical calendar in preaching on her feast.

¹¹London: George Bell and Sons, 1908.

¹²These conclusions are supported by the manuscript evidence of Anglo-Saxon litanies of the saints. In a collection of forty-six manuscripts studied by Michael Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Litanies of the Saints* (London: The Boydell Press for the Henry Bradshaw Society, 1991) there are only six references to Saint Katherine, all except one of them later additions (from early twelfth to fifteenth century). The exception is a Gallican psalter written in the late eleventh century, possibly from the scriptorium of Saint Augustine's Canterbury (81).

¹³Practice probably preceded textual indications, although not by a very long period of time: to be useful, calendars would have to have been up-to-date with experience. So we can assume that Masses in honor of Saint Katherine's feast would have been introduced into community celebrations only shortly before the time they were inscribed into the calendars.

¹⁴The naming of churches and charitable institutions in honor of Saint Katherine also seems to begin in the middle of the twelfth century. The royal Hospital and Church of Saint Katherine in London was founded by Matilda, wife of King Stephen, in 1148.

The Vitæ and the Anchorite Movement

R. T. Hampson, who assembled one of the collections of calendars surveyed above, cites a non-liturgical event that suggests an alternate line of inquiry.¹⁵ He records an early exercise in turning the story of Katherine into religious drama. "The first of these scriptural [sic] plays performed in England was Saint Katherine (*Ludus Sanctæ Katerinæ*) which was written by Geoffrey, master of the school in the Abbey of Dunstable and acted by the novices in the eleventh century" (67). If, as this information suggests, popular expressions of the cult such as didactic drama performed by and for young students anticipated liturgical celebrations by a significant period of time, the history of Katherine's *vita* and its dissemination could provide clues to Ælred's interest.

Katherine's history begins in the East. The first reference to Katherine's story is in the *Menologium Basilianum*, probably written for the Emperor Basil I, who died in 886; it is brief and principally narrates her debate with the fifty philosophers and her beheading. Simeon Metaphrases gives a more detailed story in the beginning of the tenth century, a somewhat later version of which by Athanasios became the prototype of the Latin versions. Two copies of the Athanasios text are extant, one in Vienna and the second in the Bodleian Library (Baroccian Collection #180).¹⁶ By the first half of the eleventh century, relics of Saint Katherine had become part of the treasure of the Abbey of Rouen.¹⁷ Moved by a desire to promote the cult of Saint Katherine at her reliquary, Ainhard, one of the monks of the Abbey, wrote a Latin version of her life. Another Latin version followed shortly after Ainhard's (the late eleventh or early twelfth century) and became so popular that at least one hundred mss are extant (some in shorter recensions).¹⁸ Called the "vulgate" by Katherine scholars, this Latin text was the source of English versions that proliferated from the late twelfth century onward.

¹⁵See the section entitled "Popular Customs and Superstitions," which indicates the author's personal bias about the cult of the saints. About eliminating the cult of the saints, he opines that "What the church attempted in vain, and the reformation failed to affect, will be very shortly accomplished by the powerful agency of a more widely diffused and rational system of education" (57). This bias of his time does not effect the integrity of the textual evidence he assembles.

¹⁶Cotton, Caligula A, viii is one of few extant mss of the earliest Latin version based on Athanasios. As it may be dated perhaps as early as 1150, its presence in England along with one of the two extant Athanasios mss is surely indicative of early interest in the Katherine story.

¹⁷Different versions of their translation were in circulation. But adjudicating between them is not important for this essay.

¹⁸Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson, eds., *Anchorite Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works* (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1991) 261.

Two such *vita* are germane to this inquiry. The first is the Anglo-Norman poem of the Life of Saint Katherine written by Clemence of Barking during the last third of the twelfth century, soon after Ælred's death. It has recently been translated from its Anglo-Norman verse original into modern English,¹⁹ and the introductions by the translators, Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Glyn S. Burgess, provide ample and important context for this work. Written at Barking Abbey in the late twelfth century, the poem follows the vulgate Latin life of Katherine referred to above and is intended not only for the nuns of Barking but for a wider lay audience as well. Barking had a long tradition of female literacy, learning, and aristocratic, indeed royal, connections throughout the twelfth century and beyond. The literary influence of the text, witnessed by citation or adaptation in later texts, argues for what the translators call "a certain contemporary esteem for Clemence's *Life*," especially when measured against other Anglo-Norman *vita* (xxiv). It is a witness to the interest of religious women in the life of Katherine and, surprising to some, in the apologetic debates that form a substantial portion of her *vita*.

The second *vita* to raise issues pertinent to this study is the life of Katherine that occurs in the collection of texts assembled for anchorites near Wigmore (in the English West Midlands close to the Welsh border) around the very beginning of the thirteenth century. The collection includes the *Ancrene Wisse*, the lives of Saints Katherine, Margaret, and Julian, and a short treatise entitled *Holy Maidenhood*. Though it is somewhat more distant in time from Ælred than Clemence's text, there may be good reason for associating the compiler's work with Ælred's, as will appear in the discussion to follow. Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson²⁰ have given the most extensive discussion to date of this collection of vernacular devotional texts, found in six small manuscripts, in the West Midland dialect of Middle English,²¹ copied between 1225 and 1250, all in a similar format and of a striking textual unity:

Careful inspection of their language by several generations of scholars has also revealed that the works they contain must have been written in this same place, not long before four of them (which are ten or twenty years earlier than the other two) were copied. Indeed, the manuscripts were probably held in the hands of the people for whom some of these works were written, and looked over, in one case . . . written in, by their author or authors (7).

¹⁹*Virgin Lives and Holy Deaths: Two Exemplary Biographies for Anglo-Norman Women*, translated with introductions and notes by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Glyn S. Burgess (London and Vermont: Everyman, 1996).

²⁰*Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works*, translated and introduced by Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1991).

²¹The translators note the "large element of vocabulary derived from Old Norse and . . . sprinkling of Welsh words" present in this dialect (10).

On the basis of the work of E. J. Dobson on the *Ancrene Wisse*,²² Watkins and Savage suggest a provenance around Wigmore Abbey (an Augustinian house in northern Herefordshire), whose records and grounds reveal the presence of two small groups of women religious living in close proximity between 1190 and 1230. Certain passages of the *Wisse* allude also to other anchoresses, perhaps less well-patronized than those at Wigmore, who are growing more numerous throughout England.

The inclusion of the life of Katherine in this collection for anchorites raises some important questions. Of what pertinence was the life of this virgin-martyr of ancient Alexandria to English anchorites?²³ Again, Savage and Watson suggest that her story, which comes last in the Titus collection, acts as a kind of summary of its themes of courage, wisdom, and intimacy with, and imitation of, Christ (31). But they suggest further that her debates with the pagan philosophers were important too. Her *vita* had pastoral content deemed appropriate for the women's meditation and provided a kind of summary of fundamental theology important for their development. This point raises the question of the background of these women and the literacy expected of them. Gopa Roy addressed this question at the Saint Hilda's Conference in 1993.²⁴ In her study of three texts addressed to women recluses, Goscelin's *Liber Confortatorius*, Ælred's *De Institutione Inclusarum*, and the *Ancrene Wisse*, Roy demonstrates a waning curve in what the clerical author expects recluses to read and to what end their reading should lead them. The Latin text by Goscelin, written about 1082, is a personal letter to Eve, a young woman whom he regards as a spiritual daughter and who has just left a well-established abbey for the cell of an anchorite. He seems to worry that Eve's intellectual abilities will suffer in her absence from Wilton Abbey, and he recommends a hefty program of individual study; among the specific works and authors he suggests are Jerome, Augustine, Gregory, Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*, and Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*. He himself quotes from a wide range of religious and secular authors, including Tertullian, Cyprian, Cicero, and Seneca, in ways that assume her knowledge of these authors. He bids her read much in order to "sharpen [her] slender intellect" and because theological reading is a "holy food" as necessary to her as "the bread of life . . . [and] . . . the water of life."²⁵

²²"The Date and Composition of *Ancrene Wisse*," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 52 (1966): 181-208; *The Origins of Ancrene Wisse* (Oxford, 1976).

²³This collection is not the only witness to this popularity. Goscelin who wrote for the hermit Eve gave also a version of Katherine's story, and there are connections with Christina of Markyate as well.

²⁴Gopa Roy, "'Sharpen Your Mind with the Whetstone of Books': The Female Recluse as Reader in Goscelin's *Liber Confortatorius*, Ælred of Rievaulx's *De Institutione Inclusarum* and *The Ancrene Wisse*," *Women, the Book and the Godly*, ed. Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Taylor (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 1995).

²⁵114-5. The translations are Gopa Roy's.

Ælred's text, also in Latin, was addressed in 1162 or 1163 to his sister, who was already established in the anchorite life.²⁶ He does not give his sister a reading list, but adapts for her a monastic rhythm of life, focused on prayer, reading, and manual labor; he suggests what he has found fruitful in his own Cistercian life, namely the classics of the monastic tradition. His concern is to promote the purpose of monastic reading, adapting it to her specific situation, and to teach her to make the important move from Scriptural and other spiritual texts to contemplation. The thirteenth-century²⁷ anonymous *Ancrene Wisse* is, as we have seen, a work in the West Midlands dialect of Middle English; the use of vernacular already indicates the kind of education the author assumes of his audience. Though he recommends reading in a general way, as Roy says, it "is but one of many in a long list of weapons against temptations. . . ." (121). They are to read his own text, of course, or read it aloud to those who cannot read for themselves, but the author does not seek to lead the recluses to contemplation; instead, his concern is to ensure against the many weaknesses to which women are subject. Clearly, in the roughly one hundred thirty years spanned by these texts, the kind and level of education possessed by women who sought the solitary level had changed significantly. Indeed, Bella Millett, a scholar who has done extensive research on *The Ancrene Wisse*, posits that the women choosing the anchorite life in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries were from a new background; they were not formally educated and therefore not skilled in Latin but, coming from a wider social class that included merchants and tradesman, they were literate in the vernacular languages of Europe. Therefore they required a new kind of vernacular devotional reading, which included the lives of important saints such as Katherine.²⁸

The trail of interest in Katherine has led again back to Ælred, not through his Cistercian connections but through his sister, the anchorite. For her he wrote the *De Institutione Inclusarum*, and though we do not know where she lived, we do know that his text, written about 1163, greatly influenced the *Ancrene Wisse*, written perhaps as early as thirty years later in Herefordshire. Alas, Walter Daniel has not seen fit to give us any more detail about the circumstances of the writing of this text other than that it dates from the last ten

²⁶That it was intended also for other anchorites is clear from his remarks in chapter seven: "non solum propter te, sed etiam propter adolescentiores auae similem vitam tuo consilio arripere gestiunt, hanc tibi formula scribi voluisti."

²⁷The dating of this text is complex. There is an early version which may have been written as early as 1190, more probably around 1200; the later version probably dates from about 1228. See Savage and Watson, 41-2, for a more detailed discussion of the question.

²⁸"English recluses and the development of vernacular literature," *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 17, ed. Carol M. Meale (Cambridge and NY: Cambridge UP, 1993): 86-103. Millett cites the Saint Alban's Psalter, generally acknowledged to have been produced for the circle of Christina of Markyate, which included, along with the Psalms in Latin, a chançon of Saint Alexis in Old French (92).

years of his life, during his long period of illness.²⁹ Interestingly enough, however, among the many manuscripts of Ælred's corpus, there is only one located in the West Midlands region, a manuscript of his rule for his sister; identified as Hereford Cathedral, ms P.I., this manuscript is from the twelfth or thirteenth century, originally from Cirencester. It is mute but suggestive evidence that Ælred's rule was known, possibly popular, in that region noted for its proliferation of women anchorites. This fact may suggest that, as women anchorites and their patrons (especially those in Herefordshire) were interested in his work, he too was interested in the ways in which their life and spirituality continued to develop. Perhaps his interest in Katherine, seemingly not shared by other Cistercian abbots, comes, then, from his contact with the anchorite movement, its literature, and, especially, its growing interest in Katherine as model for the solitary lay woman.

This suggestion leads to the reasonable hypothesis that Ælred's homily in honor of Katherine of Alexandria, virgin and martyr, is occasioned by some personal contact that he has with a single anchorite, an anchorite community, or another religious community of women who share the anchoritic interest in that courageous saint. Perhaps he was present at an enclosure ceremony or other special celebration of her feast particular to religious or anchoritic women.³⁰ In that case, the audience for this homily would be female, or at least, mixed. Now we must turn to the text of his homily to see what, if any, clues to its specific occasion it contains.

The Homily: Contents and Structure

What follows immediately is an abstract, in English, of the homily.³¹ Ælred begins by announcing to his audience that their celebration of the feast of the wise virgin, Katherine, is a commitment to praise her wisely, that is, by deeds that are consonant with the praise that is sung. To call her a virgin is only the beginning of praise, because virginity without wisdom is easily corruptible. Together virginity and wisdom form the jewelry appropriate for every woman: virginity is the refulgent but fragile gem, while wisdom is the strong metal into which it is set. Of such a combination is the ring made that adorns and seals this wise virgin. The ring is a treasure hidden in the field of heavenly study.

²⁹*Vita Ælredi* 32.

³⁰We know that he traveled much during his life, even during his severe last illness. See Marsha L. Dutton, "Introduction to Walter Daniel's *Vita Ælredi*," Walter Daniel, *The Life of Ælred of Rievaulx*, CF 57 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 1994) 32-6.

³¹This collection of homilies is being transcribed, edited and prepared for publication by Fr. Raciti. This summary and the citations which follow in the text are my own translation, based upon a transcription done for me by Dame Gertrude of Stanbrook Abbey, Worcester, England, who undertook the task at the urging of Dame Felicitas Corrigan, ever a patron of scholars and a friend to me.

Like her virgin spouse before her, this wise virgin has proved a good businesswoman, buying the field in which the true treasure is hidden and thus exchanging all earthly honors and treasures for heavenly ones. She is a new Solomon who prefers wisdom and understanding to kingdoms, thrones, and riches.

Though to call her wise adds to the praise of calling her virgin, only acknowledging her perseverance can complete the praise. Thus do we sing that she was found waiting when the Lord came. She had prepared to wait by providing an ample supply of oil for her lamp, the sweet and holy oil of salvation which flows over her head and down upon her body. But she was not content with merely waiting for the Lord. Like the bride in the Canticle, she sought him "through the districts and the streets."

Let us contemplate the life of this wise virgin as a journey or a passing over in three stages. In the first stage, she is in the rest of contemplation, a state in which the more she possesses her Lord in her mind, the more she longs for the attainment of his presence. She seeks her bridegroom throughout the long night of this earthly life, sighing for him with the whole intention of her heart. Then she arises to seek him in public, in the city. She endures the public anger of a sinful people and a cruel tyrant; they strike and wound her, finally stripping her of the cloak of her flesh by beheading her. Through all this, she is made firm by Christ who is a city of strength. Free of the cloak that was more an impediment than an ornament, Katherine finds Christ and is led into the bridal chamber where she enters into full and loving partnership with her divine spouse.

The songs that we sing in telling her story help us to experience the life and passing over of this wise virgin. Let us imitate her insofar as we can, seeking God through a pure conscience, quiet contemplation, and a holy manner of life. Let us ever look upward and be vigilant so that we welcome the unexpected cry "the spouse comes" and enter into joy.

Though this summary does not convey the full richness of Ælred's thought and style, it does allow us to see clearly the careful structure of the homily. The opening and closing lines—a description of wise praise and an invitation to appropriate actions—form a frame for the kind of tableau that unfolds in the body of the text; it also draws the audience into the drama. The body of the homily falls, roughly, into two parts. The first half is developed according to the opening line of the homily, a simple statement that applies the Gospel parable of the wise and foolish virgins, the Gospel of the Common of a Virgin Martyr, to Katherine: "This is the wise virgin whom the Lord found watching, etc." Ælred comments, in turn, upon each of the perfections that the sentence applies to Katherine: she is "virgin," a woman of wisdom, and a saint who exercises consistent vigilance. The vigilance which to Ælred means perseverance has been the hallmark of monastic theology, especially in the anchoritic tradition, since early eastern monasticism. In this first section of the homily the controlling Scripture text is the Gospel of the day, Mt 25:1–13 combined with the brief parable from Mt 13:44, about which more later. The predominant

metaphor or allegory is that of a ring, constituted by virtues particular to Katherine, which becomes the signet ring of one committed to Christ.

The second half of the homily is dominated by scenes and texts from the Canticle of Canticles, which was not read in the Common of a Virgin Martyr but was so traditionally connected to a theology of virginity that the transition is an easy one. In this case, the scenes and sentiments of the Canticle become parallels or metaphors for narrating Katherine's own life as given in the written version to which Ælred specifically refers. He cites such specifics as a sinful people enflamed by anger, a cruel tyrant, the debate with "rhetoricians and grammarians," the beheading by a sword, the "wheel-machine," a queen present at the ordeal, and fifty converted "orators." In matching the violence done to the bride in Sg 5:7 with the passion of Katherine, Ælred says, "This is not in need of explanation. Who doubts this except someone who has not heard nor read nor understood the passion of the glorious virgin?"³²

Ælred turns both the story of the Canticle's Bride and Katherine's story into a drama in three acts: in the first act, the Bride/Katherine is at rest (though restless) on her couch; this is the time of earthly life when the "rest" of contemplation is one's best lot in life. Act II is the passion, a time of suffering and violence, which explicitly becomes, however, a passing over from one state of rest to another. Act III is the entrance of the Bride/Katherine into heavenly rest, depicted as a ritual of entrance into a royal presence in a gloss on Ps 45. On that moment, when he has everyone's eyes looking up, as it were, to the scene of joy and glory, Ælred ends his homily with the admonition to keep looking up, for this is the stance of vigilance, which the Lord commands as the sure way to glory. That the homily ends with the description of an entrance possession must, indeed, remind us that the ritual of separation and entrance into cloister or anchorhold normally followed the reading of the Gospel and the homily at the ceremony of a consecration of a virgin.

The Virgin's Oil and the Bridal Ring

Two passages from the homily require closer attention. The first is a small elaboration upon the Gospel of the ten virgins. Those among them who are "wise virgins," according to Ælred, show their providence by storing up oil. Ælred lingers momentarily over the symbolism of the oil: it is abundant, it is extraordinary oil, sweet and holy, indeed the oil of salvation ("oleum suave, oleum santum oleum salutare," a reference to Ps 44:8, the gradual psalm for the Common of a Virgin Martyr). The connection between Katherine and sacred oil is found in the earliest Latin account of her martyrdom and cult, that authored by a brother of the Abbey of Sainte-Trinité-du-Mont in Rouen sometime in the second half of the eleventh century. According to that text, "Symeon, a monk at

³²"Quis de hoc dubitet nisi qui forte passionem gloriose virginis vel non audivit vel non legit vel non intellexit" (Leaf 172, ll. 13-15).

Mount Sinai, during his turn to collect the oil emanating from Catherine's tomb, was graced by having three bone particles flow into his vial."³³ These he later transported to Rouen where they continued to give forth oil. According to Charles Jones, references to this miraculous oil are found in all subsequent texts and a multitude of hymns in her honor, so a reference to oil, especially since it occurs also in the gradual chant, is not unexpected here.

Indeed, this reference is a clear indication that Ælred is familiar with some text of Katherine's life and believes that his audience is as well (as he later makes explicit in his reference to reading the story of the passion, 172, 13-5). However, Ælred's language can suggest something more: "A wave of saving oil flows upon the virginal members of her body."³⁴ In the written story of Katherine's passion, it is the body of the devout that receives the beneficent anointing at her tomb; here it is the virginal body of the wise virgin herself that is anointed with saving oil. Ælred does not name the virgin Katherine in this sentence. Is it an oblique reference to a ritual of anointing by which a woman was consecrated for religious or anchoritic life? There is some sparse evidence that the enclosure ceremony of an anchorite contained elements of an entombing ritual. In that context, the anointing of the body would make liturgical sense.³⁵ And if anointing was an element in the ritual for enclosing of anchorites, then the story of a saint known for exuding miraculous oil could easily have become popular among them.³⁶

The second passage important for this essay is found in the first half of the homily, which is an extended development of Mt 13:44, the single-verse parable of the treasure hidden in a field. Ælred's move to this text can bear some comment. It was not the Gospel of the day according to the Cistercian *ordo* most probably in usage at Rievaulx, nor was it the reading for the Common of a Virgin Martyr in Roman usage. When a proper for the feast of Saint Katherine does gain widespread usage in the next century, as represented in the Missal of the Gilbertine Rite edited by Maxwell Woolley,³⁷ the Gospel remained that of the Matthean parable of the ten virgins. In post-Tridentine Roman usage, a second Common of a Virgin Martyr, with the reading of Mt 13:44 as Gospel, was given as an alternate, suggesting a traditional connection between this

³³Charles W. Jones, *Saint Nicholas of Myra, Bari, and Manhattan: Biography of a Legend* (Chicago and London: Chicago UP, 1965) 146.

³⁴"Menbris [sic] virgineis olei fluit unda salubris. A capite itaque ordientes dicamus, 'Hæc est virgo sapiens quam dominus vigilantem invenit'" (171, b, 1-4).

³⁵René Metz speaks of the use of the term "ordination" to describe the ritual for consecrating a virgin; such usage was only in the twelfth century and, according to Metz, "de façon passagère seulement. . . ." ("Benedictio sive Consecratio Virginum?" ETL 80 (1966): 267; hereafter Metz).

³⁶To my knowledge, no one has as yet suggested a persuasive rationale for the popularity of the Katherine narrative among anchorites. A ritual of anointing for enclosure might provide such.

³⁷Vol LIX of The Henry Bradshaw Society (London, 1921), pp. 48-49.

Gospel and the virgin-martyr, but in Ælred's day it was not a mandated text. The connection seems logical: the evangelical call to sell all for the kingdom is answered most evidently by the one who gives her life not only to Christ but for Christ, and Ælred will emphasize that teaching. But he arrives there by a less obvious route.

In praising the virginity, wisdom, and perseverance of Katherine in the opening sentences of the homily, Ælred lingers somewhat on the fragile, even ambiguous, nature of virginity. It is a shining virtue, but easily corruptible; therefore it must be surrounded and sustained by the strengthening power of wisdom. His metaphor for this important combination of virtues is jewelry, specifically women's jewelry. The jewel of virginity is so fragile, he says, that it must be encircled by more solid material such as gold or silver. "Behold virginity and wisdom [together] are the decoration beyond every necklace, every earring, every collar, beyond whatever ornament is precious and most beautiful to women."³⁸ In particular, the gem of virginity and the gold of wisdom make up the precious ring that seals the bond between the wise virgin and Christ, the Lord. This same ring is the treasure hidden in the field.

For Ælred, the field is the discipline of heavenly study ("coelestis studii disciplina," 2.15-6), and in that field, the holy virgin Katherine found Christ in whom is the fullness of knowledge, wisdom, and love and, having found him, joyfully exchanged all earthly possessions and delights to possess him. Therefore she was able to "speak truly" ("ut vere dicere posset" 1.29-30). Though in the second half of the homily Ælred refers to Katherine's debate with "the rhetoricians and grammarians" and her conversion of "fifty orators," he pays little attention to her intellectual accomplishments.³⁹ Instead, he underlines a truly Cistercian and Ælredian theme, that the foundation of all true wisdom is the personal knowledge of Christ, possible only to one who loves him. Indeed, what he calls Katherine here is not Christian or saintly scholar, but businesswoman!⁴⁰ In exchanging every earthly delight and possession for the kingdom of heaven, Katherine is wise and prudent in the most practical, almost worldly, sense. With a great sense of propriety, Ælred puts into her mouth the words of Solomon, that king whose very worldly accomplishments, according to the Scriptures, were a result of his choosing wisdom early in his career: "Therefore, let this prudent virgin say [*dicat*]: 'I prayed and understanding has been given to me; I asked and the spirit of wisdom found me, and I preferred that

³⁸"Ecce ornamentum omni monili, omni in aure omni torque sive quocumque ornamento mulieribus preciosus et speciosus virginitas cum sapientia" (Leaf 170 v, col b, lines 1-5).

³⁹Given Cistercian involvement in the debates over learning in the twelfth century and their commitment to monastic learning—that was meant to be at once scholarly and affective and to flower in holiness, we might expect here some such development of thought, if the audience for this sermon were a Cistercian monastic community.

⁴⁰"Considerate quid fecerit hæc sapiens negociatrix" (170V, b, 33-34).

spirit to kingdoms and seats of power and riches; I considered nothing else to compare to that [wisdom]."⁴¹

The use of the present subjunctive of the verb *dicere* in the sentence just cited can help to focus the question of the audience of this homily, as revealed in the segment of text under discussion. Is there present in the audience a "prudent virgin" whom Ælred exhorts to speak Solomon's words? The typology with which the medieval exegete, and very specifically Ælred, identifies the contemporary Christian with the persons and events of Scriptural and secular history often makes it virtually impossible to distinguish between the audience addressed and the Biblical figures being commented upon. But here, perhaps, the choice of mood can signal a direction. He is unlikely to be exhorting the historical Katherine; might he be exhorting someone who is imitating her in his own day? The elaborately developed metaphor of the ring suggests the possibility that the homily is occasioned by the celebration of the rite of consecration for a virgin, dedicating herself to some form of celibate life. As Ælred says, "Of such a jewel [virginity] and such gold [wisdom] is made that precious ring which is a seal of charity and chastity. The wise virgin glories in this ring when she says, 'With his ring, my Lord Jesus Christ has espoused me; this is that treasure hidden in a field. . . .'"⁴²

There is no ring of espousal or consecration contained with the narrative of Katherine's life,⁴³ but René Metz has studied the medieval development of the consecration rite⁴⁴ and believes that three elements show up in its early manifestations: the putting on of the veil, the tradition of the ring, and the imposition of a crown. In a tenth-century Pontifical from the Abbey of Saint-Alban de Mayence (reflecting Romano-Germanic usage),⁴⁵ Metz finds a careful distinction in the rite between those who are being consecrated for life in community and those who will continue to live in the world, with the ring and crown restricted to monastic consecrations. But his evidence demonstrates that this distinction was no longer made from the twelfth century onward. In three witnesses to Roman usage from the twelfth century, Metz finds that the distinction between two types of virgins has been eliminated and the rite of

⁴¹"Dicat ergo prudens hæc virgo, optavi et datus est mihi sensus invocavit [sic] et invenit me spiritus sapientiæ et præ posui illam regnis et sedibus and divitias nihil esse duxi in comparatione illius" (171, a, 6-10).

⁴²"Ex hac gemma et hoc auro fabricatus es annulus ille preciosus amoris et castitatis signaculum quo se gloriabatur subarratum virgo sapiens cum dicent 'Anulo suo subarravit me dominus meus Jesus Christus, hic est thesaurus ille absconditus in agro. . .'" (170V, B, 6-10).

⁴³She calls Jesus Christ her bridegroom, but does not speak of any ring sealing that espousal. The only ring mentioned is that by which the king seals his proclamation to the rhetoricians.

⁴⁴Metz 265-93.

⁴⁵According to Metz, this Pontifical had widespread influence; copies have been found in Italy, France, England, and even Poland (Metz 278).

consecration for anchorites is no longer a simple veiling but contains the elements of the ring and the crown as well (279-80). Thus the reference to a ring that seals the commitment of a "wise virgin" to Christ may indicate that Ælred is preaching on the occasion of a religious consecration of one or more women, but it does not let us hypothesize further about what kind of enclosed woman it might have been.

If we accept, for the moment, the possibility that religious consecration is the occasion for this homily, a very small textual detail becomes significant, that is, the reference to Katherine as a good businesswoman, *sapiens negociatrix* (170V, b, 34). Scholars have noted that among those drawn to religious life, but especially to the life of the anchorite, there were larger numbers of well-to-do middle-class women in the latter part of the twelfth century and in the thirteenth than in earlier times. These changes have been detected most clearly in the kinds of literature associated with anchorite communities and the level of literacy expected of them.⁴⁶ Middle-class women were probably literate in the vernacular, though not so much in Latin. Some of these women would have come from commercial backgrounds, the daughters of wealthy merchants, and these would have had the pragmatic literacy necessary for the transaction of business. Here, of course, the homily is in Latin, but the issue for this essay is not literacy but the reference to Katherine as a businesswoman, one which rings with more force for a congregation in which commercial families may be sitting to observe their daughters' consecrations than to one of monks, no matter how worldly the latter may have been.⁴⁷ Certainly, when speaking in some detail about women's jewelry, Ælred gives no hint of criticism about the desire of women to adorn themselves; there is only a clear contrast between earthly jewelry and the ring of consecration. This would both encourage and flatter an audience assembled for the consecration of a virgin, made up as it would have been of other women who had renounced the world as well as their families involved in business and commerce.

⁴⁶Bella Millett, "Women in No Man's Land: English recluses and the development of vernacular literature in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries," *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, ed. Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993): 86-103. See also Roy, n. 22 above.

⁴⁷Is this reference to the business world echoed toward the end of the homily where Ælred describes Katherine's entrance into glory? Having been introduced into the royal bridal chamber, Katherine, according to Ælred, takes hold of Christ who is her spouse and partner ("sponsoque suo sociata") and she will not allow herself to be separated from this double *consortium*. Both words can bear overtones of commercial partnership.

Conclusions

If readers have persevered to this point, they may well have another Gospel passage in mind. "To what purpose is this waste?" Has this rather lengthy exercise in text and context enabled us to determine a "right occasion" for these homiletic words of Ælred? And if so, what benefit arises from this knowledge? Àpropos of the occasion, we have, first of all, solid negative evidence: Ælred was definitely not preaching in response to the Cistercian calendar and probably not to the local Yorkshire one. Positively we have determined that Katherine's story was definitely connected to the anchorite movement as Ælred was also, through his concern for his sister. Ælred expected women anchorites to be literate (in Latin) as later writers expected them to read the vernacular and provided vernacular literature (including the story of Katherine) for them. He expects the audience of this particular sermon to have read the life of Katherine (whether in Latin or in the vernacular is not indicated) and preaches to them in Latin. Nothing in Ælred's text contradicts the possibility of an audience gathered to celebrate an anchorite feast or enclosure, while some references in his text (to the jewelry of women, to a ring of espousal given to a virgin by Christ, to an anointing, even to the wise virgin as a businesswoman) suggest the possibility of a congregation of religious women or anchorites and appear more reasonable in that context.

We have not fixed the occasion of Ælred's homily with the surety and precision that a note in Walter Daniel would provide. But the exploration of these possibilities allows us to reflect more concretely upon Ælred's life outside the Cistercian cloister. As an Englishman, an abbot, and a member of a family, he was tied into the full life of his world and times. His historical works have always demonstrated his consciousness of English political and social life. The *De institutione inclusarum* reveals something of his family feeling. This homily, too, is not just an exercise of liturgical and monastic piety, but a complex document that reflects the development of popular lay devotion and the growing movement of consecrated women anchorites.

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Introduction to Blessed Rafael Baron, OCSO

by

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On September 27, 1992, Brother Rafael Arnaiz Baron, oblate monk of the Abbey of San Isidro in Spain, was beatified. This event could not have been foreseen by those who witnessed his emotional departure from the monastery of San Isidro in southern Spain on May 26, 1934, half blind, pale, and emaciated from a severe onslaught of diabetes. It seemed that his dreams of life as a Cistercian monk were now as shattered as his health. Sobbing and supported by the arm of his anxious father, he was helped into the automobile that was to bear him away and then he vanished, presumably forever.

My first acquaintance with the writings of Br. Rafael came after I entered Mount Saint Mary's Abbey, December 8, 1962. A pictorial had been published in Spanish by his monastery on his life and work, and I was encouraged to read it. I must admit that I was turned off by a spirituality that seemed foreign to me. Although my parents were Hispanic, my life as a born New Yorker was thoroughly "north of the border," as was that of my four brothers and my sister. However, we were all also bilingual of necessity, since my parents were poor in English, and we had a large circle of their friends from the old country who visited us and whom we visited. So I was able to read the work in the original.

When I started the *Vida y Escritos (Life and Writings)* of Br. Rafael, consequently, it was with an inward groan, and I spent more time at first perusing the illustrations than reading the text. But by the time I finished the book I was convinced he was not only a saint but a blazing saint, on a par with John of the Cross, Teresa, and Ignatius. I had also gotten in touch with my roots in a real way. I mean, I felt I understood myself, for the first time, and felt a new sense of kinship with the mind and heart of Spain. Instead of looking at Rafael from the outside I was looking at the monastic life with his eyes and saying to myself, "Yes, that's how it is. That is what I mean."

Had Rafael lived I am convinced he would have become the "Spanish Merton," although from a completely different perspective. Thomas Merton, too, had a way of speaking for you. You identified with his feelings, you got inside of him whether he was alone in his beloved hermitage or careering, deliriously happy, through the woods in a jeep he did not know how to drive. He was the monastic twentieth-century "Everyman," and he made us love ourselves with all our quirks. That is why we loved him.

Something would have sparked between Thomas Merton and Rafael had they lived contemporaneously. As it was, Rafael was dying in Spain while Merton