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Ælfric of Eynsham
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The Collected Works of

ÆLFRIC

(c. 955-c. 1010)



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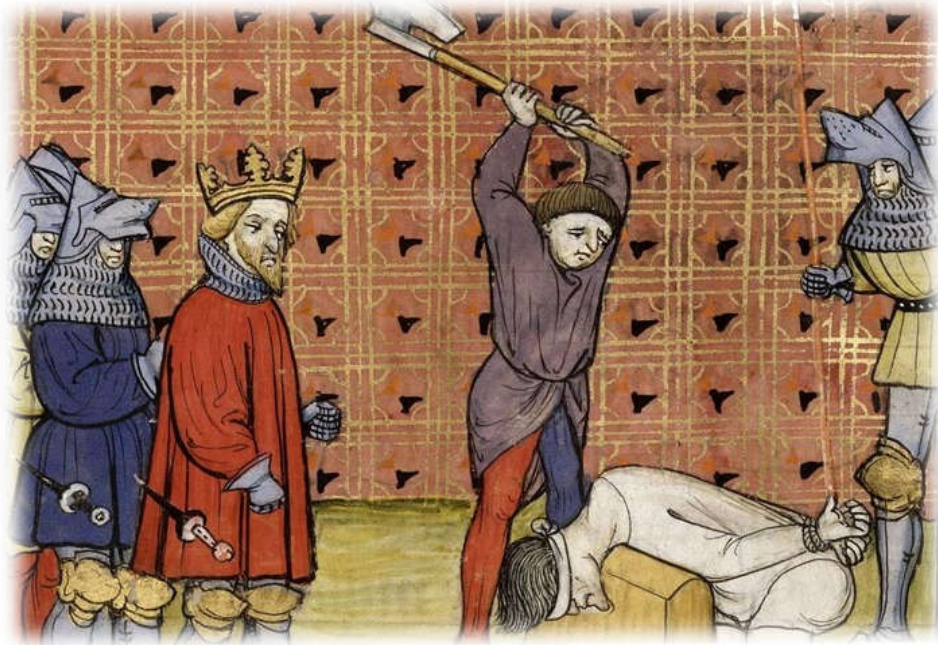


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ÆLFRIC OF EYNHAM



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Collected Works of Ælfric of Eynsham



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The translations of *Sermon on Judith*, *Preface to the 'Hexateuch'* and *A Treatise on the Old and New Testaments* appear here under the kind permission of Brandon W. Hawk, 2015.

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DELPHI  CLASSICS

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The Translations



Winchester Cathedral — Ælfric was educated in the Benedictine Old Minster at Winchester.



Modern tiles outline the site of the minster next to Winchester Cathedral

The Homilies

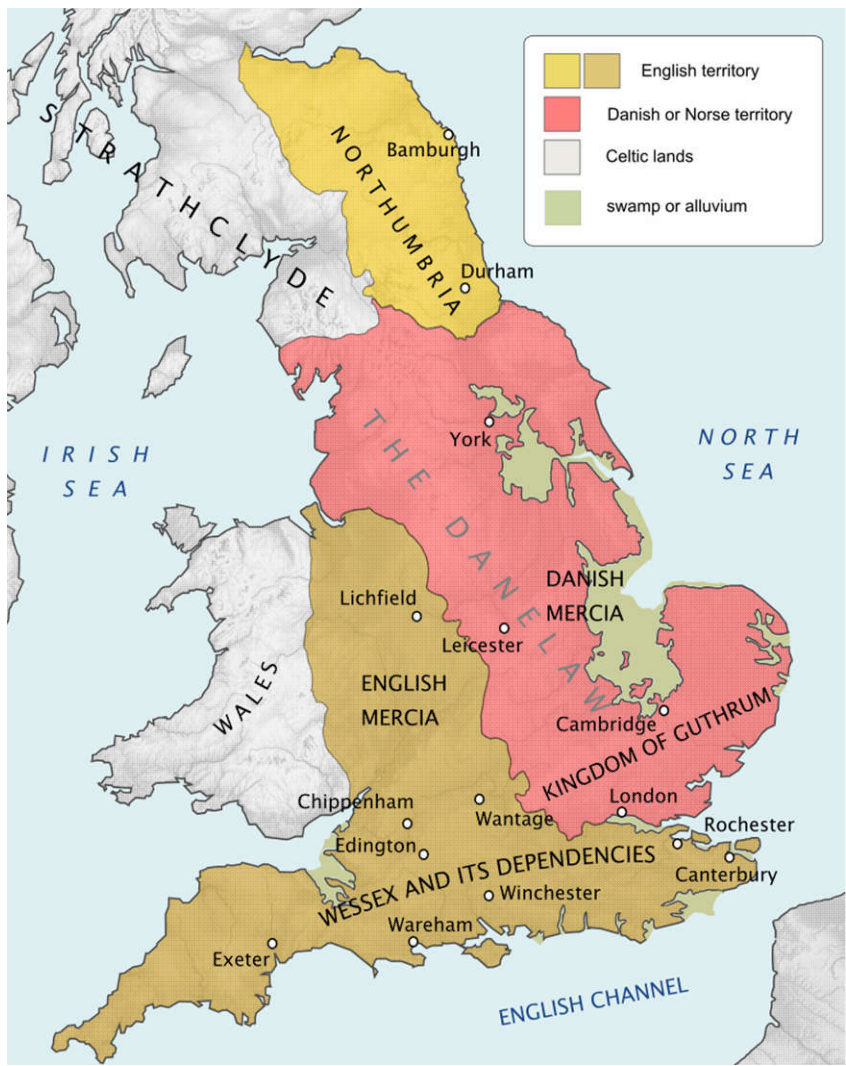


Translated by Benjamin Thorpe, 1844

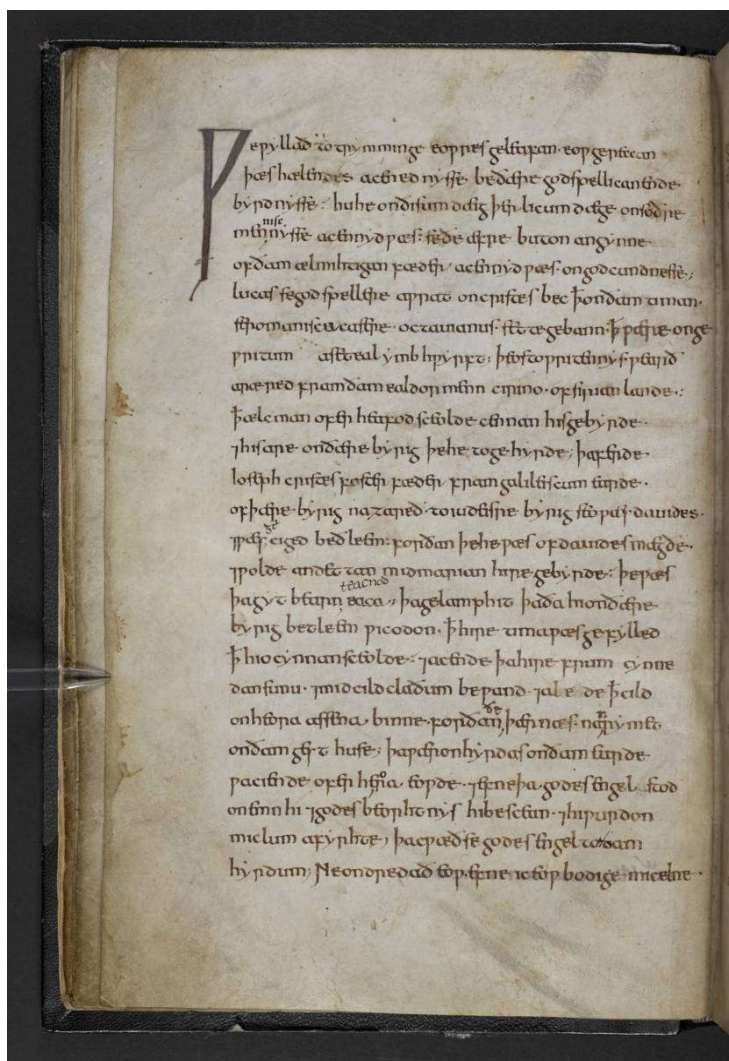
A tenth century abbot and author, Ælfric of Eynsham was educated in the Benedictine Old Minster at Winchester under Saint Æthelwold, who served as bishop there from 963 to 984. Æthelwold had carried on the tradition of Dunstan in his government of the abbey of Abingdon and at Winchester he continued his strenuous support for the English Benedictine Reform. He reportedly took part in the teaching activities of the abbey. In short time, Ælfric gained the reputation of an accomplished scholar and by 987, when the abbey of Cerne (Cerne Abbas in Dorset) was finished, he was sent by Bishop Ælfheah, Æthelwold's successor, at the request of the chief benefactor of the abbey, the ealdorman Æthelmær the Stout, to teach the Benedictine monks sequestered there.

While serving at Cerne and partly at the desire of Æthelweard, Ælfric planned two series of English homilies, compiled from the Christian fathers, and dedicated to Sigeric, Archbishop of Canterbury from 990 to 994. The series were edited by Benjamin Thorpe and published in 1844-1846 for the Ælfric Society. The Latin preface to the first series provides some of Ælfric's authorities, the chief of whom was Gregory the Great, though the list does not state all of the authors he had consulted. In the preface to the first volume he regrets that, except for Alfred's translations, Englishmen had no means of learning the true doctrine as expounded by the Latin fathers. Some believe he wished to correct the apocryphal "superstitious" teaching of the earlier Blickling Homilies.

The first series of forty *Homilies* is devoted to plain and direct exposition of the chief events of the Christian year, while the second deals more fully with church doctrine and history.



England in the late ninth century



The beginning of the sermon for Christmas, the First Series of 'Homilies', Cerne, c. 990, Royal MS 7 C XII, f. 9v

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INCIPIT PRÆFATIO HUIUS LIBRI.

PREFACE.

*HERE BEGINNETH THE BOOK OF CATHOLIC SERMONS IN ENGLISH, TO BE
RECITED IN CHURCH DURING THE YEAR.*

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DECEMBER XXVII.

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King Edgar seated between Saint Æthelwold, Bishop of Winchester, and Saint Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury, as depicted on the eleventh-century manuscript 'Regularis Concordia'.

PREFACE.



THE WORK NOW presented to the Members of the Ælfric Society, the first fruit of its praiseworthy attempt to rescue from oblivion the literary remains of our forefathers, was selected for the earliest publication of the Society, on account both of its valuable matter and the beautiful medium by which it is conveyed.

Of the author of the *Sermones Catholici* we know nothing with certainty beyond his name, though from the words of his own preface, where he speaks of king Æthelred's days as past, and informs us that in those days he was only a monk and mass-priest, it follows that he was not Ælfric archbishop of Canterbury, who died in the year 1006, or ten years before the death of king Æthelred.

With better foundation we may assume him to have been Ælfric archbishop of York, who presided over that see from the year 1023 to 1051¹. Against this supposition there seems no objection on the score of dates, and that the composer of the 'Sermones' was a person of eminence during the life of archbishop Wulfstan, of whom, according to our hypothesis, he was the immediate successor, is evident from the language of his *Canons*, and of his *Pastoral Epistle to Wulfstan*, in which he speaks as one having authority; though in the first-mentioned of these productions he styles himself simply "humilis frater," and in the other "Ælfricus abbas²," and afterwards "biscop."

Of Ælfric's part in these Homilies, whether, as it would seem from his preface, it was that of a mere translator from the several works he therein names³, or whether he drew aught from his own stores, my pursuits do not enable me to speak, though it seems that no one of his homilies is, generally speaking, a mere translation from any one given Latin original, but rather a compilation from several. Be this, however, as it may, his sermons in either case equally exhibit what were the doctrines of the Anglo-Saxon church at the period in which they were compiled or translated, and are for the most part valuable in matter, and expressed in language which may be pronounced a pure specimen of our noble, old, Germanic mother-tongue. Of those doctrines it would not be consistent with the object of the Society, nor am I qualified to hazard an opinion: my labour has, consequently, been limited to that of a faithful transcription of what I believe to be the most complete manuscript, and to a conscientiously correct translation of that transcript, as literal as my acquaintance with the language and my notions of good taste permitted⁴; and I venture to hope that such a translation, though unattended by a commentary, will be regarded with interest by the members of each of the great communities into which the Christian world is divided.

Besides the Homilies, the chief works attributed to our Ælfric are, —

I. A Grammar of the Latin tongue, printed at the end of Somner's *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, with a Glossary of Anglo-Saxon words⁵.

II. A short astronomical treatise, entitled *De Temporibus Anni*⁶.

III. An abridgment in Anglo-Saxon of the Pentateuch, the book of Joshua, and the book of Judges, printed by Thwaites⁷.

IV. A Treatise on the Old and New Testaments⁸.

V. *Excerpta ex Libro Æthelwoldi de Consuetudine Monachorum*⁹.

VI. A Latin Dialogue, with an interlinear Anglo-Saxon gloss¹⁰.

VII. *Ecclesiastical Canons*, addressed to Wulsine, bishop of Sherborne.

VIII. A *Pastoral Epistle*, written by command of archbishop Wulfstan.

IX. An Epistle entitled “Quando dividis Chrisma¹¹.”

X. A Collection of Homilies on the Saints’ days observed by the Anglo-Saxon Church.

Though the present is the first edition of these most ancient sermons in any of the Germanic tongues, it may be interesting to some readers to be informed that two attempts at publishing them were made in the early part of the last century by Mrs. Elizabeth Elstob, which failed through want of encouragement, a few leaves only having been printed¹².

In assigning to Ælfric, archbishop of York, the honour of being the author of the Homilies and other works enumerated above, it would have been gratifying to add, that the character of that prelate given by the chroniclers was beyond a doubt all that could be desired, and such as to render it highly probable that to him we are indebted for those noble and holy labours. Unfortunately the case is otherwise, the few facts recorded of Ælfric of York being for the most part quite irreconcilable with the portrait of the pious student which our imagination spontaneously draws, on calling to mind the exertions in the cause of religion and learning attributed to our Ælfric. Of the archbishop, Malmesbury speaks in terms of no ordinary severity, asserting, that at his instigation Hardacnut caused the corpse of his brother Harald Harefoot to be taken from the grave and decapitated, and afterwards thrown into the Thames; also, that being exasperated against the people of Worcester, who had rejected him for their bishop, he again instigated the same king to burn their city and confiscate their property, under the pretext of their having resisted the royal tax-gatherers¹³. The better testimony of Florence of Worcester, with regard to the first of these transactions, is, however, less prejudicial to the character of Ælfric: he says merely, that Ælfric, archbishop of York, with others was sent to London by the king for the purpose of digging up the body of Harald and casting it into a fen¹⁴. Of the second transaction Florence makes no mention. But the earliest account is that in the Saxon Chronicle¹⁵, and in this it is simply said, that “he (Harthacnut) caused the dead body of Harald to be taken up, and had it cast into a fen:” to Ælfric and the others there is no allusion whatever. In the same record his death is mentioned in the following terms of respect: “This year (1052) died Ælfric, archbishop of York, a very venerable and wise man.” It is also stated that he was the accuser of earl Godwine, of the earl of Kent, and of Living, bishop of Worcester, as the murderers of the young Ælfred, the son of Æthelred¹⁶.

The manuscript from which the text of the present volume is taken belongs to the Public Library at Cambridge. It is a small folio and probably coeval with its author, though hardly, as it has been supposed, his own autograph copy¹⁷. It is not perfect, having suffered mutilation in several places, but its defects are all supplied in the present work from another MS. in the British Museum¹⁸. For the most liberal use of the Cambridge manuscript, I beg leave, on the part of the Ælfric Society, to express the sincerest thanks to the Syndics of that University.

To W. E. Buckley, Esq., Fellow of Brasenose College, and Professor of Anglo-Saxon in the University of Oxford, I return my sincere thanks for his kindness in removing my doubts of the integrity of the text by collation with the Bodleian manuscript; also to my greatly respected friend, the Reverend Daniel Rock, D.D., I acknowledge myself much indebted for the kind promptness with which he at all times satisfied my inquiries respecting the ancient observances of the Church, as well as other points of doubt, which his deep knowledge of ecclesiastical antiquities so well qualifies him to solve.

The second volume, containing Homilies for another year, is in preparation, and will, it is hoped, be laid before the Members of the Society in the course of the year 1845.

B. T.

ENDNOTES

¹ See also H. Whartoni Anglia Sacra, t. i. p. 125.

² He was abbot of Eynsham. See Biogr. Brit. Lit. p. 482, *n.* †

³ Among his sources he mentions Smaragdus and Haymo: of these the former was abbot of St. Mihiel, a monastery in the diocese of Verdun, in the eighth century. He wrote commentaries on the Scriptures, Sermons, etc. Haymo was bishop of Halberstadt, about the middle of the ninth century: he compiled, from the works of the fathers, commentaries on almost every part of the Scriptures. There was also a Haymo of Canterbury, who wrote commentaries on the Pentateuch, Isaiah, etc., of whom see Biogr. Britan. Lit. vol. i. p. 510. The other sources mentioned by Ælfric are too well known to need further notice.

⁴ It is right to observe, that in the MS. the texts taken from the Gospels are frequently of very great length; these I have ventured to abridge, presuming that all readers of the Homilies have a copy of the N. T. either in Anglo-Saxon or English.

⁵ Ælfrici Abbatis Grammatica Latino-Saxonica, cum Glossario suo ejusdem generis. Folio. Oxon. 1659. That the author of the Grammar, the compiler of the Homilies and the translator of the Heptateuch was the same individual, is evident from the prefaces to those works.

⁶ Published at the expense of the Historical Society of Science, in a volume entitled 'Popular Treatises on Science written during the Middle Ages,' edited by Thomas Wright, Esq., M.A., F.S.A., etc. etc. 8vo. 1841. That this work is by our Ælfric is evident from his own words immediately following his last homily: Her æfter fyligð án lytel cwyde be gearlicum tidum, þæt nis to spelle geteald, ac elles to rædenne þam ðe hit licað. — *Hereafter follows a little discourse concerning yearly tides, which is not reckoned as a sermon, but is else to be read by those whom it pleases.* MS. Cantab. p. 492.

⁷ Heptateuchus, Liber Job, et Evangelium Nicodemi; Anglo-Saxonice. Historiæ Judith Fragmentum; Dano-Saxonice. Edidit, etc. Edwardus Thwaites. Oxon. 8vo. 1699.

⁸ A Saxon Treatise concerning the Old and New Testament, written about the time of king Edgar by Ælfricus Abbas, etc., by William L'Isle of Wilburgham, Esquier for the King's bodie, etc. 4to. Lond. 1623.

⁹ An edition of the Anglo-Saxon text of this work, with a translation by W. E. Buckley, Esq., Fellow of Brasenose Coll. and Prof. of A.-S. in the Univ. of Oxf., is announced for early publication by the Ælfric Society. The ealdorman Æthelweard, son of Æthelmær, mentioned in the preface to the Homilies and other works of Ælfric, is without doubt the chronicler of that name, concerning whom see Literary Introd. to Lappenberg's 'History of England under the Anglo-Saxon Kings,' p. xlv.

¹⁰ According to the Oxford MS. of this Colloquium, it was originally composed by Ælfric (of Canterbury or York?) and enlarged by his pupil Ælfric Bata. It is printed in the 'Analecta Anglo-Saxonica.' For more ample information concerning the Ælfrics the reader is referred to Mr. Wright's interesting and useful publication, 'Biographia Britannica Literaria; Anglo-Saxon Period,' edited for the Royal Society of Literature.

¹¹ The three last-mentioned works are printed, with a translation, in the 'Ancient Laws and Institutes of England.' It appears from a note at the end of Matthew in the C.C.C.C. MS. of the Saxon Gospels, that an Ælfric was either the translator or copier of the Gospel of St. Matthew, if not of the four Gospels. See Notes to my edition of the Anglo-Saxon Gospels.

¹² *Elfrici Homiliæ*, edit. El. Elstob. (fol. Oxon. 1715.) Of this first attempt only thirty-six pages were printed. Her second attempt was under the title, "The English-Saxon Homilies of Ælfric, Archb. of Cant., who flourished in the latter end of the tenth century and the beginning of the eleventh. Being a course of Sermons collected out of the writings of the ancient Latin Fathers, containing the Doctrines, etc. of the Church of England before the Norman Conquest, etc. etc. Now first printed, and translated into the language of the present times by Eliz. Elstob. fol. Oxon. 1715." Of this only two leaves were printed. A copy of both is in the Brit. Mus. See *Biogr. Brit. Lit.* p. 493. Mrs. Elstob also published Ælfric's Homily on the birth-day of St. Gregory, with a translation. 8vo. 1709. Reprinted with some account of Mrs. Elstob in 1839.

¹³ *De Gestis Pontificum Anglorum*, lib. iii.

¹⁴ *Fl. Wigorn. Chron.* ad a. 1040.

¹⁵ *Ad ann.* 1046.

¹⁶ *R. Wendover*, t. i. p. 478.

¹⁷ The handwriting, though very nearly alike, is not the same in the two parts of the MS.; they also occasionally differ in orthography, 'middangeard,' for instance, in the first part being in the second constantly written 'middaneard.'

¹⁸ *MS. Reg.* 7. c. xii.

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IN NOMINE DOMINI.



EGO ÆLFRICUS, ALUMNUS Adelwoldi, benevoli et venerabilis Presulis, salutem exopto Domno Archiepiscopo Sigerico in Domino. Licet temere vel presumptuose, tamen transtulimus hunc codicem ex libris Latinorum, scilicet Sancte Scripture in nostram consuetam sermocinationem, ob ædificationem simplicium, qui hanc norunt tantummodo locutionem, sive legendo sive audiendo; ideoque nec obscura posuimus verba, sed simplicem Anglicam, quo facilius possit ad cor pervenire legentium vel audientium, ad utilitatem animarum suarum, quia alia lingua nesciunt erudiri, quam in qua nati sunt. Nec ubique transtulimus verbum ex verbo, sed sensum ex sensu, cavendo tamen diligentissime deceptivos errores, ne inveniremur aliqua hæresi seducti seu fallacia fuscati. Hos namque auctores in hac explanatione sumus sequuti, videlicet Augustinum Hipponensem, Hieronimum, Bedam, Gregorium, Smaragdum, et aliquando Haymonem; horum denique auctoritas ab omnibus catholicis libentissime suscipitur. Nec solum Evangeliorum tractatus in isto libello exposuimus, verum etiam Sanctorum passiones vel vitas, ad utilitatem idiotarum istius gentis. Quadraginta sententias in isto libro posuimus, credentes hoc sufficere posse per annum fidelibus, si integre eis a ministris Dei recitentur in ecclesia. Alterum vero librum modo dictando habemus in manibus, qui illos tractatus vel passiones continet quos iste omisit; nec tamen omnia Evangelia tangimus per circulum anni, sed illa tantummodo quibus speramus sufficere posse simplicibus ad animarum emendationem, quia seculares omnia nequeunt capere, quamvis ex ore doctorum audiant. Duos libros in ista translatione facimus, persuadentes ut legatur unus per annum in ecclesia Dei, et alter anno sequenti, ut non fiat tedium auscultantibus; tamen damus licentiam, si alicui melius placet, ad unum librum ambos ordinare. Ergo si alicui displicit, primum in interpretatione, quod non semper verbum ex verbo, aut quod breviorum explicationem quam tractatus auctorum habent, sive quod non per ordinem ecclesiastici ritus omnia Evangelia tractando percurrimus; condant sibi altiore interpretatione librum, quomodo intellectui ejus placet: tantum obsecro, ne pervertat nostram interpretationem, quam speramus ex Dei gratia, non causa jactantiæ, nos studiose secuti valuimus interpretari. Precor modo obnixè almitatem tuam, mitissime Pater Sigerice, ut digneris corrigere per tuam industriam, si aliquos nevos malignæ hæresis, aut nebulosæ fallaciæ in nostra interpretatione repperies: et adscribatur dehinc hic codicillus tuæ auctoritati, non utilitati nostræ despicibilis personæ. Vale in Deo Omnipotenti jugiter. Amen.

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