

## GODEFRIDUS OF ERLACH, *Sermones super orationem dominicam* (*Sermons on the Lord's Prayer*)

In Latin, manuscript on parchment and paper  
Cologne, 1451-1500

i + 156 folios in parchment and paper, complete, 1 and 7 of each quire are parchment singletons with tabs visible, (collation: i-xiii<sup>12</sup>), at least one watermark, unidentified, of a bull's head with eyes and nostrils, and a sign above of a rod consisting of one line surmounted by an indecipherable device, horizontal catchwords, single column, ruled in graphite (justification 140 x 100 mm), 33 lines copied in a northern semihybrida, majuscles flashed in red, 2-4-line red ink initials without flourishing, 6-line red ink initial flourished in violet (f. 1), some rubs, marginal tear f. 101, marginal repair of vellum f. 106, overall in excellent condition. Bound in contemporary blind-tooled calf over wooden boards (remains of two clasps, surface rubbed, some corners slightly scuffed), with typewritten sheet describing the volume inside the front cover and a library reader ticket dated 1923 also filed inside the front cover, in a fitted dark blue morocco box. Dimensions 220 x 150mm.

A rare North American copy of a complete sermon collection in a contemporary, blind-stamped binding. Godefridus of Erlach's sermons on the Lord's Prayer circulated widely in the fifteenth century, but copies have only occasionally arrived for sale in North America. This clean copy was made to resupply the Cologne Charterhouse's library after a devastating fire in 1451 and remained in the collection for several hundred years thereafter. Future research may determine why an order as intellectual as the Carthusians prioritized such elementary spiritual material.

### PROVENANCE

1. Charterhouse of St Barbara, Cologne: contemporary inscription on verso of front flyleaf, "Liber domus Sancte Barbare in Colonia ordinis Carthusiensis / Sermones super orationem dominicam. S. xl [Book of the House of St. Barbara in Cologne of the Carthusian Order/ Sermons on the Lord's Prayer. Shelfmark S. xl]." The Carthusian Charterhouse of Cologne was founded in 1334 and by the fifteenth century had become the largest charterhouse in Germany. Following a devastating fire in 1451, the Charterhouse library was quickly rebuilt, and concerted efforts were made to restock it. To this end, new manuscripts were acquired, or borrowed to be copied, and the present manuscript was part of this refurbishment process. The volume is apparently listed among the holdings of the library into the early modern period (Bruce, 1974).
2. Hawarden Castle Library, library label, KK I.2. This accession (and deaccession) may not have been Hawarden's owner, Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone (1809-1898)'s decisions, however, as the GladCAT project demonstrates that Gladstone had a personal bookplate for his own collection, and the present volume instead shows the Library bookplate. A library call-slip held inside the front cover documents that D. J. Jones examined the book on 30 November 1923, during Henry Neville Gladstone, 1st Baron Gladstone of Hawarden (1852-1935)'s lifetime.

3. Christie's, London, "Valuable Books and Manuscripts," 11 December 2024, lot 14.

## TEXT

ff. 1-152, Godefridus Heriliacensis OSB, *Expositio super orationem dominicam*, incipit, "Cum oratis dicite pater noster qui est in celis secundum Mattheum VI. Carissimi vos debetis scire quod inter omnia opera quae possunt fieri in hac vita".... "Ad quam nos perducatur ille qui vivit et regnat in secula seculorum, Amen," ff. 152v-156v blank. Not included in Schneyer.

Based on Thomas Aquinas' commentary on that fundamental Christian prayer, the "Our Father," this sermon sequence was composed in the mid-thirteenth century by a Franciscan-turned-Benedictine Godefricus Heriliacensis from the Abbey of Erlach on Lake Biel (Guyot, 1969). Godefridus penned 68 sermons in this sequence, each built around a line from the prayer "Our Father," and constructed from other scriptural quotations, together with *exempla*, or short, exemplary stories that illustrated the theme of each sermon.

The library collection that St. Barbara's rebuilt after 1451 is today known from two seventeenth- and eighteenth-century lists, after which the collection was dispersed during the Napoleonic period. When Richard Bruce traced the location of the medieval library's books in 1974 he could not identify the "Sermones super orationem dominicam," mentioned in those library lists. The same description occurs on the present volume's flyleaf, and it seems this lost Carthusian book has been located at last (Bruce, 1974, p. 427). These sermons survive in some 60 manuscripts, mostly copied in the fifteenth century, and all but one held outside of North America. Dating to just prior to the work's translation into several European vernaculars, this present manuscript therefore marks a late Latin copy. Indeed, these sermons were not printed in Latin until 1494. Further, the present copy was not known to Guyot, the only scholar to publish about these sermons since the 1960s.

Future research may reveal more about the reasons that the Cologne Charterhouse prioritized recopying this basic text in their rush to replenish their library. As Aquinas himself admitted, any commentary on the Pater Noster engaged introductory audiences. Yet, the Carthusians were as well-known for their erudition as they were for their careful claustration. Charterhouses distributed the Latin texts associated with the new *Devotio Moderna* movement across Europe, transmitting works through Carthusian networks as far away as England (Doyle, 1989). At the same time, Carthusians themselves rarely left their individual monastic cells' walls, engaging in largely solitary lives of reading, silent prayer, copying manuscripts, and gardening in the tiny plots adjacent to their cells. They gathered with their brothers almost exclusively on Sundays and holidays for prayer and meals. Sermons, and sermons aimed at the less-learned, therefore, make for an unexpected addition to a Charterhouse library, particularly at a time when they had to prioritize acquisitions carefully.

## LITERATURE

Bruce, Richard. *The Medieval Manuscript Library of the Charterhouse of St. Barbara in Cologne*, Salzburg, 1974.

Doyle, A. I. "The European Circulation of Three Latin Spiritual Texts," ed. Alastair J. Minnis, *Latin and the Vernacular: Studies in Late-Medieval Texts and Manuscripts*, Cambridge, 1989, pp. 129-46.

Guyot, B.-G. "À propos de quelques commentaires sur le 'Pater Noster'," *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 53 (1969), pp. 245-255.

Schneyer, Johannes Baptist. *Repertorium der lateinischen Sermones des Mittelalters: für die Zeit von 1150-1350*, Münster, 1969-1990.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

English Heritage, *The Daily Life of a Carthusian*. <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/mount-grace-priory/history-and-stories/carthusian-life/>

GladCAT: An Online Catalogue of the Books and Reading of William Ewart Gladstone  
<https://www.gladstoneslibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/GuidetoGladCAT.pdf>

Godefridus of Erfurt, *Sermones super orationem dominicam*, Paris, 1494, ISTC ig00635000  
<https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/view/bsb00072592?page=510,511>

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