Ælfric’s Colloquy is, of course, first and foremost, a dialogue between a master and his pupils to give practice in the use of Latin at a conversational level. The pedagogic intention of the work is evident from the interlocutors’ habit of lingering over commonly used words in various grammatical forms: for example, in a few opening lines (2–11) the deponent loqui appears as loqui, loquimur, loquamur and loqueris, together with the noun locutio, and within a little more than fifty lines (66–119) we find seven forms of the verb capere, two of them occurring four times each and one twice. Yet, equally certainly, this colloquy has more to it than just schoolboy exercises in declensions and conjugations. It has escaped the oblivion that has been the lot of its more humdrum fellows who – to use Garmonsway’s personification – were assigned the rôle of literary Cinderellas, labouring ‘in obscurity in monastic classrooms to help boys learn their lessons’. 2 It has long been acclaimed for its realism and for its ‘sociological picture of the occupational strata’ 3 of Anglo-Saxon society; and, in our own day, Stanley B. Greenfield has called attention to its literary merits, ‘its fine organization and structure, dramatic in effect, with its pairing and contrasting, for example, of the king’s bold hunter and the independent, timid fisherman . . . and with its lively disputation toward the end about which occupation is most essential’. 4 In the present study I hope to demonstrate that it also draws on a background of ideas and that its longevity is partly due to this ingredient. After all, Ælfric’s work as a whole is intellectual in character and his various writings are related to one another as parts of a plan systematically pursued,

1 Ed. G. N. Garmonsway, 2nd ed. (London, 1947); all references are to this edition.
4 Greenfield, History, p. 52.
as has been suggested by Sisam¹ and reiterated by Clemoes in an admirable metaphor:

Its controlling idea was universal history with Christ's redemption of man at its centre. The conception which moulded Ælfric's writings was in fact that which moulded the Gothic cathedral later. His main structure, as it were, consisted of two series of homilies combining Temporale and Sanctorale, later extended and completed with more Temporale homilies. De Temporibus Anni, the Grammar and Colloquy, and his letters for Wulfsige and Wulfstan and to the monks of Eynsham buttressed this edifice; Lives and Old Testament narratives enriched it with stained glass windows; 'occasional' pieces such as the Letter to Sigeweard gave it the synthesis of sculpture on the West Front.²

All the same, in a work as elementary in purpose as the Colloquy ideas in a developed form are not to be expected. They are likely to be at their simplest and, indeed, may remain no more than mere implications. What, then, are some of them?

Eric Colledge has suggested an influence from St Augustine's Enarratio in Psalmum LXX for the dialogue between the master and the merchant, in which the merchant defends his profit motive in buying goods abroad and selling them at a higher price in England (149–66). As Colledge points out, Ælfric, in allowing his merchant to justify his profit as the means of providing for himself and his wife and family, adopted Augustine's position that the merchant deserves compensation for his labour, provided that this, and not greed, is his motive.³ It may be also that, in putting into the merchant's mouth the point that mortal danger, and sometimes shipwreck and loss of goods, is involved in earning his honest profit (155–7), Ælfric was aware of the Roman satirists' position, represented in Horace, Juvenal and Persius,⁴ that merchants who undergo maritime perils are motivated by avarice, for his merchant's point of view is, in effect, a denial of this charge.⁵

³ Eric Colledge, 'An Allusion to Augustine in Ælfric's Colloquy', RES n.s. 12 (1961), 180–1. The importance of Augustine's Enarratio in Psalmum LXX in medieval thought has been observed by J. W. Baldwin, in The Medieval Theories of the Just Price, Trans. of Amer. Philosophical Soc. n.s. 49 (1959), pt 4, esp. 12–16, and in Masters, Princes and Merchants: the Social Views of Peter the Chanter and his Circle (Princeton, 1970) 1, 262–4 and 21, 185–6, nn. 17, 119 and 120.
⁴ All these were curriculum authors in Europe in the early Middle Ages; see E. R. Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, trans. W. R. Trask (London, 1913), p. 49. There is positive evidence that Horace was read at Winchester in Ælfric's time (see M. Lapidge, 'Three Latin Poems from Æthelwold's School at Winchester', ASE 1 (1972), 109); but there is no certain evidence for the study of Juvenal and Persius in late-tenth-century England.
⁵ Horace, carm. 1.1.13–17 and 3.1.25–6; serm. 1.4.23–32; and epist. 1.1.42–58 and 1.6.31–8; Juvenal, sat. 14.250–302; and Persius, sat. 5.132–60; cf. sat. 6.73–90. For the Roman satirists' views on merchants, see Ethel Hampson Brewster, Roman Craftsmen and Tradesmen of the Early Empire (Menasha, Wisconsin, 1917), pp. 30–9. The position of the Roman satirists was adopted
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It is likely that Ælfric’s treatment of the baker and the cook was influenced by a tradition of using the merits of these crafts as a topic for school debate. An early example is Vespa’s poem, *Judicium coci et pistoris*, which belongs to the fifth century or earlier1 and, if Raby is correct in characterizing it as a ‘school piece which gives the opportunity for a rhetorical setting forth of the merits of each trade, with proper mythological allusions’,2 more than likely merely followed the conventions of an already existing tradition. As its title suggests, Vespa’s *Judicium*3 presents a debate between a cook and a baker as to whose occupation is the more useful. The poem proceeds along lines familiar in debate literature: there is a balanced contention on a single subject, each side of the argument is presented with equal force and the outcome is decided by a third party or *iudex*. The *iudex* in this case is Vulcanus, who, as the source of fire, is qualified to understand both sides of the question. Weighing the arguments of each contender, he concludes that flesh and bread are both necessary to sustain life, that the cook and the baker are equals and that their quarrel is neither necessary nor desirable. Direct influence of Vespa on Ælfric is unlikely, since there is no evidence that his poem was known in England,4 and, in any case, there are more differences than similarities between his treatment of the cook and the baker and Ælfric’s. But the school tradition that Vespa represents is another matter. The baker and the cook are juxtaposed in the *Colloquy* and it is in the master’s words to the baker that the validity of a craft is called into question for the first time: ‘Quid dicis tu, pistor? Cui prodest ars tua, aut si sine te possimus utiam ducere?’ (185–6). And the note of contention increases when, instead of addressing the cook directly as he does all the others, the master asks a question about him which demands, and receives, an answer in self-defence:

Quid dicimus de coco, si indigemus in aliquo arte eius?

   Dicit cocus: Si me expellitis a vestrō collegio, manducabitis holera uestrā uiridia, et carnes uestrās crudās, et nec saltem pingue ius potestis sine arte mea habere. (192–6)

by St Ambrose, and much later by Peter the Chanter, who was fond of quoting Horace on this subject; see Baldwin, *Masters, Princes and Merchants* 1, 263 and 11, 185, n. 12.

In the event of a shipwreck, a merchant could lose everything he had, for it was customary in the early Middle Ages for the prince to seize whatever cargo remained, although earlier Roman law had protected the surviving owners or their heirs; see ibid. 1, 247–8.

1 F. J. E. Raby (*A History of Secular Latin Poetry in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1957) 1, 45) associates the poem with the third century. The only evidence for dating the poem, however, is the fact that it appears in the Codex Salmasianus, a collection of Latin poetry of the sixth century and earlier. Vespa’s poem must have been written therefore by the sixth century, but no more certain date is possible. For the text see *Anthologia Latina*, ed. A. Riese (Leipzig, 1869–70) 1. 1, 140–3.

2 *Secular Latin Poetry* 1, 45.

3 ‘Vespae judicium coci et pistoris iudice Vulcano’ in ed. Riese.

But the master is not prepared to accept this as an answer and the cook has to try again:

Non curamus de arte tua, nec nobis necessaria est, quia nos ipsi possumus coquere que coquenda sunt, et assara que assanda sunt.

Dicit cocus: Si ideo me expellitis, ut sic faciatis, tunc eritis omnes coci, et nullus uestrum erit dominus; et tamen sine arte mea non manducabitis. (197–202)

Argument of this sort does not enter into the master’s dealings with any other craftsman.

Debate as to the usefulness of baker and cook is but a particular application of a more general tradition of school debate over the relative merits of various crafts and callings, as represented, for instance, in a fragment from Carolingian times, De navigio et agricultura.¹ Influence from this wider tradition comes to the fore when the master asks the monk whether there is a wise counsellor among his companions and, on being told that there is, assigns to this counsellor the role of iudex: ‘Quid dicis tu, sapiens? Que als tibi uidetur interistas prior esse?’ (211–12). The counsellor’s decision in favour of the ploughman as the primary secular craftsman does not go unchallenged: a smith and a carpenter each states his own claim, the smith being answered by the counsellor and the carpenter being challenged by the smith. The result of such difference of opinion is an appeal to all concerned for reconciliation, agreement and diligence in fulfilling one’s calling that is similar in kind to the judgement of Vespa’s Vulcan:

Consiliarius dicit: O, socii et boni operarii, dissoluamus citius has contentiones, et sit pax et concordia inter uos, et prosit unusquisque alteri arte sua, et conueniamus semper apud aratorem, ubi uictum nobis et pabula equis nostris habemus. Et hoc consilium do omnibus operariis, ut unusquisque artem suam diligenter exerceat, quia qui artem suam dimiserit, ipse dimittatur ab arte. Siue sis sacerdos, siue monachus, seu laicus, seu miles, exerce temet ipsum in hoc, et esto quod es; quia magnum dampnum et uerecundia est homini nolle esse quod est et quod esse debet. (233–43)

We may safely conclude that elements of a school debate tradition concerning crafts have entered into Ælfric’s handling of the colloquy form. Perhaps he was merely following precedent; perhaps he made the combination for the first time himself.

In his views on occupational specialization, Ælfric probably was influenced by the topos of the God-given ‘gifts of men’, a medieval commonplace having its loci biblii in such texts as I Corinthians xii.8–10 and Ephesians iv.8 but probably best known through Gregory’s Homilia IX in Evangelia

¹ Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini 4, 1, 244–6.
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on the parable of the talents. Ælfric sometimes used this topos with considerable freedom. For instance he seems to echo it in a discourse on tithes when expanding a statement by Caesarius of Arles, 'De negotio, de artificio, de qualicunque operatione vivis, rede de decimas': 'Ælucm men þe ænge tilunge heafð, oððe on cræfte, oððe on mangunge, oððe on Þrüm begetatum, ælucm is beboden þa þy þa reðunge Gode gladlice syllan of heora begeta-tum oððe cræftum þe him God forgeaf.' In the Colloquy the topos is not specifically formulated, but it is surely implied in the advice to each man to practise his particular profession, just quoted: 'Et hoc consilium do omnibus operariis . . . nolle esse quod est et quod esse debet' (237–43).

The 'siue sis sacerdos, siue monachus, seu laicus, seu miles' (240–1) depends on a view of society like that expressed in the threefold classification 'oratores, laboratores et bellatores', which Ælfric used in a piece appended to his Passio Sanctorum Machabeorum and in his Letter to Sigeweard ('On the Old and New Testament'). Since both these writings were later in composition it may well be that the Colloquy lacks their specific formulation because the unidentified source on which they were based had not yet come into Ælfric's hands. But that his view of society was the same before he acquired this new material as it was afterwards is shown by the counsellor's verdict in the Colloquy that the primary secular occupation was the ploughman's (219): just so, in the piece appended to the Passio Machabeorum 'laboratores synd þa þe uru bigleofan beswinca' and their type is se yrðlinge? and in the Letter to Sigeweard 'Laboratores sind þe us bigleofan tiliað, yrðlingas 7 æhte men to þam anum betæhte'. Evidently the ploughman is thought to fulfil most completely the function of the laborator in the social ideal of the three mutually supporting estates. Incidentally, Ælfric's three treatments of the topos are nicely complementary in that in the Passio Machabeorum it is the oratores, as warriors who fight against spiritual foes, that are in the forefront of attention, in the Letter to Sigeweard it is the bellatores, who defend the kingdom, and in the Colloquy it is the laboratores, who provide for the material needs of society.

While the ploughman's craft is recognized as the most essential secular occupation, even greater importance is attributed to the oratores in the coun-

6 I owe this observation to Peter Clemoes.
7 Ed. Skeat, lines 815 and 819.
8 Ed. Crawford, lines 1208–9.
sellor's answer to the question, 'Que ars tibi uidetur inter istas prior esse?'
(211–12). Probably he reflects a common medieval view when he claims
that 'mihi uidetur seruitium Dei inter istas artes primatum tenere, sicut
legitur in euangelio: ‘Primum querite regnum Dei et iustitiam eius, et hec
omnia adicientur uobis’' (213–16). But more particularly his answer is in
accord with the emphasis on monasticism which was especially marked at the
time Ælfric was writing and with the emphasis, within monasticism, on the
liturgical life. It is noteworthy that the same scriptural text (Matthew vi.33;
cf. Luke xir.31) is used in St Benedict’s instructions concerning the character-
istics of the abbot: ‘Ante omnia, ne dissimulans aut paruipendens salu-
tem animarum sibi commissarum ne plus gerat sollicitudinem de rebus
transitoriis et terrenis atque caducis, sed semper cogitet, quia animas sus-
cept regendas, de quibus et rationem redititus est. Et ne causetur de
minori forte substantia, meminerit scriptum: Primum quaerite regnum dei et
iustitiam eius et haec omnia adicientur uobis’ (11. 33–5).1 Similarly, the conception
of the seruitium Dei as one of the artes, or crafts, is reminiscent of Benedict’s
chapter on the instruments of good works, which closes with the statement,
‘Ecce haec sunt instrumenta artis spiritualis’ (iv. 75). The instruments of good
works, such as obedience, humility and chastity, are tools borrowed from
God, to be used with care in the ‘workshop’ and returned on the Day of
Judgement (tv. 76–8), just as the tools of manual labour are to be used with
care and returned to the monastic storehouse at the end of the day.

The Benedictine Rule is, indeed, the most important and pervasive in-
fluence on the Colloquy, although it is impossible to tell how far this influence
was transmitted directly through Ælfric’s familiarity with the Rule itself
and how far it resulted from his experience of monastic practices at Win-
chester and other reformed monasteries in southern England. C. L. White,
noting the strength of Ælfric’s Benedictine associations, recognizes in the
last part of the Colloquy, especially in the horarium (266–78), an expression of
the Benedictine ideal of order in a well-regulated life;2 but it has not been
pointed out that the influence of the Rule extends also to the dialogue on
crafts. Earlier scholars, apparently failing to see the importance of rôle-
playing in the Colloquy, thought that the pueri actually belonged to the social
orders indicated by their crafts, thus providing evidence for ‘an amazing
diffusion of education among all classes, boys in all the different occupations,
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ploughboy, gamekeeper . . . merchant, learning Latin of a secular master side by side with a young monk’. Although this view is now discarded, it is still generally assumed that the dialogue on crafts refers to daily life outside the monastery walls. According to C. L. Wrenn, for example, Ælfric treats of ‘the ordinary happenings of rustic daily life and occupations’ by having each boy ‘assume the character of a rural worker – ploughman, smith, fisherman, etc.’. Similarly, G. K. Anderson considers that the Colloquy gives the sociologist a ‘rare chance to see the common Anglo-Saxon people at work’. Although this more recent sociological view seems plausible enough, quite another possibility is suggested by Garmonsway, who writes that the oblates’ dialogue on crafts is ‘based on their own observation of the manifold activities of a monastic house’. Garmonsway’s position is justified first by the fact that the various crafts described in the Colloquy were commonly practised in and around the monastic enclosure, and second by the fact that colloquies typically dealt with subjects ‘sensibly related to the many and varied activities of a monastic house’, only occasionally ranging beyond its walls.

If we accept Garmonsway’s position, it is possible for us to see the unifying theme of the Colloquy as an expression of the Benedictine monastic ideal, derived from the Rule, of an orderly and well-regulated life within the confines of an economically self-sufficient community devoted to the service of God – a community separate from the world but at the same time a microcosmic image of it, in which each monastic craftsman contributes in his own way to the general welfare. Earlier English monachism, exemplified by Guthlac and Cuthbert, had been heavily influenced by Celtic – and ultimately Antonine – ideals, stressing the ascetic struggle of the individual for spiritual perfection. By the time of Ælfric, however, the Benedictine ideal of monasticism had become secure in many parts of England, with its stress on the community rather than on the individual, and on the communal servitium Dei rather than on personal asceticism. The ideal of a self-sufficient community is evident in ch. lxvi of the Rule: ‘Monasterium autem, si possit fieri, ita debet constitui, ut omnia necessaria, id est aqua, molendinum, hortum vel artes diuersas intra monasterium exerceantur, ut non sit necessitas

1 Leach, Educational Charters and Documents, p. xvi.
5 Ibid. pp. 682-5.
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monachis uagandi foris, quia omnino non expedit animabus eorem’ (lxvi. 6–7). Some manuscripts include a *pistrinum* in the catalogue of necessary utilities.1 Besides water, the mill, garden and bakery, Benedict elsewhere mentions the kitchen, the cellar and the office (xlvi) and devotes a chapter to the maintenance of tools used in various crafts (xxxi). In the chapter on manual labour (xlviii) it is clear that the monks are expected to devote much of their time to work, including field work, for idleness is the enemy of the soul, and the presence of monastic artisans, possessed with special skills, is attested in the chapter *De artificialibus monasterii* (lvii), which warns the craftsmen against pride and establishes the policy for hiring their services outside the monastery.

It is obvious, of course, that not all the craftsmen of the *Colloquy* are represented as monks. The merchant has a family to support (163–6), the hunter is a servant of the king (13–5), and the ploughman is a serf on monastic lands (35).2 The shepherd, faithful to his lord (41–2), and the oxherd, whose duties supplement those of the ploughman (44–7), seem to be servants of the monastery rather than monks; however, there is no reason why the other interlocutors could not be monks skilled in specific crafts: the cobbler, salter, baker, cook, smith and carpenter, particularly, all attest their usefulness to the *collegium* to which they belong. It is difficult to say whether or not the fisherman and fowler could be monks, but it is worth noting that fish was so important to the monastic economy that fishponds were maintained even if there was a river nearby.3 In any case, whether or not all the craftsmen are monks is of little importance. The main point of the dialogue on crafts is that each member of the fraternity helps the others by his craft: ‘et prosit unusquisque alteri arte sua’ (235). Each craftsman contributes to Ælfric’s little society in order to make that society self-sustaining, in accordance with the Benedictine ideal.

From a modern point of view, we might be tempted to see Ælfric’s expression of the Benedictine ethos in the *Colloquy* as an early English Utopia, especially when we reflect that St Benedict, in the Rule, combines a practical Roman talent for government with a profound Christian idealism.4 The true spirit of the *Colloquy*, however, is not Utopian but pedagogic. In keeping with the spirit of Benedict’s request that the Rule be read frequently in the community so that the brethren may not excuse themselves on grounds of ignorance (lxvi. 8), in the *Colloquy* Ælfric offers his pupils a picture of the

1 Ed. Hanslik, p. 157, note to lxvi. 6.
2 For serfdom on monastic lands see John Chapman, *St Benedict and the Sixth Century* (London, 1929), pp. 147–73.
Rule in its practical application. Thus the demand for correct Latin usage and pronunciation, which was enforced by whipping boys who made mistakes in the oratory (Regula xlv), finds expression in the children’s request to the master ‘ut doceas nos loqui latialiter recte, quia idiote sumus et corrupte loquimur’ (Colloquy 1–3). The use of corporal punishment for children, to which Benedict devotes a chapter (xxx; cf. xxviii and xlv), is evident in Ælfric’s community, where the boys find it necessary to learn their lessons (7–10) and behave circumspectly (279–83) in order to escape whipping. The master’s final advice to his pupils, admonishing them to obedience, reverence and seriousness in all places, especially in the oratory, the cloister and the study (308–15), reflects the spirit of obedience and humility which permeates the Rule (cf. v, vi and vii).

Finally, the children’s special dietary allowances and dormitory accommodation, which of course reflect monastic practices in Ælfric’s day, are ultimately based on the Rule. Quadrupedum carnes were forbidden to monks (Regula xxxix); however, the oblate is allowed meat ‘quia puer sum sub uriga degens’ (Colloquy 285–6), in accordance with special provisions for youth, old age and illness (Regula xxxvi and xxxvii). After cataloguing the variety of foods available in the monastery (Colloquy 285–9), the oblate’s assertion that ‘Non sum tam vorax ut omnia genera ciborum in una refectione edere possim’ (292–3) reflects Benedict’s stipulation that only two dishes be served at any one meal (Regula xxxviii. 1–4); and the boy’s claim that he is not a glutton (Colloquy 295–7) is in keeping with the general spirit of Benedict’s chapter De mensura ciborum. The restriction on wine, reserved for the old and wise, and forbidden to those who are young and foolish (Colloquy 300–2), accords with Benedict’s warning that ‘uinum apostatare facit etiam sapientes’ (Regula xl. 7). The oblate’s statement that he sleeps ‘in dormitorio cum fratribus’ (Colloquy 304) accords with the dormitory arrangements described in the chapter Quomodo dormiant monachi, where there is even a provision for children predisposed to sleep late in the morning (Regula xxii; cf. Colloquy, 305–7). These parallels between the Colloquy and the Rule, whether they result from direct or indirect transmission, indicate that even the minor details of Ælfric’s composition are thematic.

At the beginning of their lesson the oblates ask their master for instruction and practice only in correct Latin usage, not caring about the subject of their discourse, provided only that it would not be idle or shameful (1–6); but the master has more to offer than correct grammar and pronunciation. The disciples’ gradual induction into wisdom takes place in three stages, the first two marked off by ‘false closures’ and the third by the master’s concluding advice. In the first and longest phase (1–243) the dialogue on crafts develops into a debate over which craft is most essential.
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The dispute is resolved, probably not without influence from the commonplaces of the ‘gifts of men’ and the ‘three estates’ but more especially as an expression of the Benedictine ideal, by an affirmation of the need for a harmoniously unified society which is devoted to the service of God and in which each craftsman works in his own way for the benefit of the whole. In the second phase (244–60) the oblates have revised their educational goals upwards. They are now willing to study diligently to acquire not only a knowledge of correct Latin usage but also wisdom ‘quia nolumus esse sicut bruta animalia, que nihil sciunt, nisi herbam et aquam’ (250–1). Nevertheless an abstract discussion of the quality of wisdom would be beyond their comprehension. As in the dialogue on crafts, in the third phase (261–315) the master must guide his pupils toward an expression of spiritual wisdom in simple and practical terms. The Benedictine ideal of order and the servitium Dei thus find expression in the horarium (268–78), and the discussion of the boys’ food, drink and sleeping arrangements (284–307) shows in practical terms how an individual benefits from life in a self-sufficient community whose members work together for the common good. By combining an all-pervasive Benedictine idealism with the practical needs of language instruction Ælfric produces a work of art – simple but not pedestrian, thoughtful and yet lively and witty – that is altogether worthy of one of England’s most learned and creative teachers.1

1 I am indebted to Stanley B. Greenfield for his encouragement, and to Peter Clemoes for his guidance, in the composition of this paper.