South Dakota State University
Open PRAIRIE: Open Public Research Access Institutional Repository and Information Exchange

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

1980

# The Effect of Prostaglandin F2-alpha on Synchronizing Estrus in the Ewe

L Dean Churchill

Follow this and additional works at: https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/etd

## Recommended Citation

Churchill, L Dean, "The Effect of Prostaglandin F2-alpha on Synchronizing Estrus in the Ewe" (1980). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 3981.
https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/etd/3981

This Thesis - Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by Open PRAIRIE: Open Public Research Access Institutional Repository and Information Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Open PRAIRIE: Open Public Research Access Institutional Repository and Information Exchange. For more information, please contact michael.biondo@sdstate.edu.

# PENANCE AND CONFESSION

# IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE FOR THE LAITY

BY

MARY J. DANIEL

A thesis submitted
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree Master of Arts, Major in
English, South Dakota
State University

1980

SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

PENANCE AND CONFESSION

IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE FOR THE LAITY

This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the degree, Master of Arts, and is acceptable for meeting the thesis requirements for this degree. Acceptance of this thesis does not imply that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

Dr. George A. West
Thesis Adviser

Date

Dr. Jerry Yarbrough
Head, English Department

Date

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

INTRODUCTION: Medieval Concepts of Judgment . . . . . . . . . . . 1

Chapter

I. The Pricke of Conscience . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 31

II. The Book of the Craft of Dying . . . . . . . . . . . . . 45

III. Chaucer's "The Parson's Tale" . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 60

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WORKS CITED . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 77

## INTRODUCTION

## MEDIEVAL CONCEPTS OF JUDGMENT

The world of the Middle Ages was one which constantly reminded man of his temporary nature and uncertain future. All around him, the medieval man witnessed disease, disaster and death. The bubonic plague mysteriously appeared in the fourteenth century to claim, according to some estimates, as much as one third of the population of the known world. Earthquakes, storms and droughts were considered by many as signs of God's displeasure with man, and the natural explanations of these phenomena were left to the later generations. Poor hygiene and inadequate knowledge of how to deal with the problems of overpopulation contributed to a death toll already boosted by wars. Death was an omnipresent possibility, and suffering was often its companion. Although women often outlived their male counterparts, the life expectancy of medieval man "fell short of the psalmist's three score years and ten. Such life-spans were for the vigorous and robust. The heavy toll of infantile mortality exercised a natural selection for the survival of the fittest."[1] Each person was touched by the Great Leveler, and such an experience surely encouraged the contemplation of life's brevity. Through the examination of the possibilities of a Christian afterlife, medieval man was first confronted with some basic questions

---

[1]Thomas S. R. Boase, Death in the Middle Ages: Mortality, Judgment and Remembrance (London: Thames & Hudson, 1972), pp. 10-11.

about his god and an earthly experience. The resulting versions of Doomsday created by the artists and Church leaders sprang from the medieval attempts to understand eternal punishment or reward in the terms of the temporary rewards of earthly life.

The all too visible shadow of the Fourth Rider of the Apocalypse encouraged dual reactions in the Middle Ages. One result was a reaction of abandonment of life's restraints and an open embrace of its passions. It was a timeless behavior, observed in 430 B.C. by Thucydides following the great plague of Athens: "For seeing how the rich died in a moment and those who had nothing immediately inherited their property, they reflected that life and riches were alike transitory and they resolved to enjoy themselves while they could."[2] Along the same line, Philippa Tristram observes that "the omnipresence of death can as often inspire the febrile gaiety of _carpe diem_ as induce the sobriety and remembrance of _memento mori_."[3]

The Church offered hope of a better life and eternal relief from the miseries of earthly existence, provided man followed the right path. "What the Church offered was salvation, which could be reached only through the rituals of the established Church and by the permission

---

[2]Thucydides, as quoted by Raymond Crawfurd, _Plague and Pestilence in Literature and Art_ (Oxford, 1914), from Barbara Tuchman's _A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous Fourteenth Century_ (New York: Random House, 1978), p. 100.

[3]Philippa Tristram, _Figures of Life and Death in Medieval English Literature_ (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1976), p. 9.

and aid of its ordained priests. 'Extra ecclesiam nulla salus' (No salvation outside the Church) was the rule."[4] The Church was an ordering influence in a chaotic world. The chief authority for centuries, it offered a prescription for spiritual survival and promoted the concept of the superiority of eternal rewards over earthly pleasures. Rather than seek riches and sensual delights, medieval man was urged to prepare for the separation from his physical desires, the lesser part of his being. John Bromyard, in a medieval sermon, "declares that the rich 'are deceived in thinking that they are the masters of their own riches, since only for a short space are they guardians thereof.'"[5] Poverty became an admirable virtue, professed by St. Francis of Assisi, though not always practiced by his followers.

> By a supreme paradox, the Order that Francis founded on rejection of property attracted the support and donations of the wealthy because its purity seemed to offer assurance of holiness. Upon the approach of death, knights and noble ladies would have themselves clad in the Franciscan habit, believing that if they died and were buried in it, they could not go to hell.[6]

Theories of the nature of human experience were aimed at explaining the unpredictable and often transitory encounters with material gains and losses. The cycle of Fortune, with its arbitrary rise and fall, controls man's physical world with a pattern and plan known only to God. Worldly goods, as Everyman finally discovers, cannot

---

[4]Tuchman, p. 34.

[5]Bromyard, quoted by George R. Owst, Literature and the Pulpit in Medieval England (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966), p. 302.

[6]Tuchman, p. 31.

follow us to the afterworld. Even the body of man will not survive the trip to Paradise or Hell, and each man is abandoned by the coarser qualities of his existence. "For man (to paraphrase the language of the time), is begotten in vile matter, in the body more loathsome than any filth, and in the end a mere sackful of dung and meat for worms."[7]

Although Everyman is deserted by the Five Wits, some popular conceptions of the resurrection of the dead offered medieval man concrete assurances about his physical state in the afterlife. "When in the thirteenth century handbooks for the laity were produced, such as La Lumiére as Lais, the blessed, it was stated, would enjoy all the uses of the senses, and experience beauties of sight, hearing, smell and touch."[8] The concept of the Fourteen Beatitudes--seven gifts to the body and seven gifts to the spirit--was a widespread concept of the reward awaiting man. Mâle lists the gifts of the body as "beauty, agility, strength, freedom, health, pleasure, longevity, and the gifts of the spirit will be wisdom, friendship, concord, honor, force, serenity, joy."[9] These same qualities in the afterlife of the righteous appear in the popular literary works of Cursor Mundi, The Book of the

---

[7]Tristram, pp. 159-60.

[8]Boase, p. 19.

[9]Émile Mâle, The Gothic Image, trans. Dora Nussey (1913; rpt. New York: Harper & Row, 1958), p. 385.

Vices and Virtues and The Pricke of Conscience.[10] The difference between these two versions of the state of man in the afterlife is that Everyman is not a depiction of the afterlife, but a lesson in the values which can lead to salvation. While the path to salvation can require a denial of earthly pleasures, it is entirely understandable that man would perceive the final reward in terms of familiar pleasures. But to the medieval mind, the physical comforts of earth were distractions from the matters of the spirit.

If goods and sensual pleasures are to be denied in order to attain salvation, as the medieval man learned, then the worth of his pilgrimage on earth would have to be measured in terms of his spiritual wealth, thus the emphasis on good deeds. A popular idea of the Judgment Day was that each soul was submitted to a manner of inventory in which his sins and redeeming actions were recorded in a Book of Judgment as in the Judgment play of the York cycle:

> Oure wikkid werkis thei will vs wreye,
> That we wende never shuld haue bene weten,
> That we did ofte full pryuely,
> Appertley may we se them wreten.
> (p. 501, ll. 129-32)[11]

---

[10] Cursor Mundi, ed. Richard Morris, pt. IV, EETS, 66 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1877); The Book of Vices and Virtues, ed. W. Nelson Francis, EETS, 217 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1942); The Pricke of Conscience, ed. Richard Morris (London: Asher & Co. for The Phililogical Society, 1865). All subsequent references to The Pricke of Conscience will be taken from this edition and will be made in the text. In all quotations taken from Middle English texts and used in this paper, the thorn (þ) has been changed to "th" and the yogh (ȝ) to its appropriate modern equivalent.

[11] "Judgment," York Plays, ed. Lucy Toulmin Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885).

The emphasis on deeds was, for many, a despairingly harsh notion. The idea that a simple faith in Christ as the Savior was not enough to earn a place among the saved meant that heaven could only be reached through a continual guarding of the soul from sin.

> Because the medieval spectrum of beliefs about life and death was so much wider than ours, it reached to greater extremes: the strenuous vision, on the one hand, of eternal beatitude, led, on the other, to the desolation of wanhope, the despair of those many who could no longer, with confidence, affirm their expectation of immortality.[12]

The result of all these concerns was a questioning of the exact nature of everlasting punishment or reward and attempts to depict in art and literature what the human imagination could conjure. Obsessed by the mystery of the Last Day, craftsmen and artists of the twelfth century began creating sculptures, frescoes and tapestries with this dominant theme. T. S. R. Boase says of the concentration on the Last Judgment in art: "It was a public and general act of communication, such as is hardly found in contemporary art today."[13]

The problems encountered in trying to express an abstract ideal in concrete forms led the medieval Church to debate some difficult and still controversial questions. As Philippa Tristram states, the solution to the problems was a slow process, accomplished partly as a result of the efforts to reckon with the contradiction of popular belief and Church doctrine:

---

[12] Tristram, p. 152.

[13] Boase, p. 22.

> The geography of the afterlife, which now seems so permanent a part of Christian belief, was developed over many centuries: Hell and the Harrowing of Hell, Purgatory and Limbo, are all relatively late developments in Christian thought. Indeed, the immortality of the soul was still matter for debate in the sixth century, and the geography of the afterlife of course depends in part upon the acceptance of this doctrine.[14]

Although the popular fancy was caught up in expressing the forms of Heaven and Hell, most of what the Church established as doctrine was supported by scriptural texts on the Last Judgment. However, the problem encountered by the early Christians in specifying the nature of the afterlife often resulted from ambiguity in the Bible itself. "The teaching of the Gospels was specific about spiritual survival, but imprecise about its nature. 'In my father's house there are many mansions' was a message full of liberal hopes and at the same time a warning against exact definition."[15] Another problem of definition the early Church had to face was the exact role of Christ in the Last Judgment. The New Testament offers support for two differing views of the Son of Man: He can be seen as a Savior, a figure of mercy and compassion, or He can be construed as the Judge who deals harshly with Satan and his followers, casting the rebellious demons into the tortures of an everlasting punishment. Therefore, man could trust in the mercy of God, but not so far that he forgot the <u>dies irae</u> concept reflected in warnings about a harsh judgment on the Last Day. The two

---

[14] Tristram, pp. 1-2.

[15] Boase, p. 19.

concepts of Christ precipitated a discrepancy in Christian doctrine and led to efforts by theologians to reconcile the differences.[16]

While the concepts of Limbo and Purgatory may have been the results of the Christian attempts to reconcile themselves to the finality of the decisions made on the fate of the souls, there were those who found the idea of Hell inconceivable simply because of the contradictory roles of Christ. In The Revelations of Divine Love, Juliana of Norwich, a cloistered nun, wrestles with the contradiction presented by the doctrines of divine love and Hell. Her revelations, in 1373, included a mystical experience which seemed to challenge Church doctrine:

> I wanted (as far as I dared) to get a real sight of Hell and Purgatory. It was not my intention, of course, to put any article of the Faith to the test, for I steadfastly believed that Hell and Purgatory existed for the same end that Holy Church taught. What I was hoping for however was to see (and thereby learn) those things which are taught by the faith. . . but for all my desire I saw absolutely nothing, except. . . where I saw the devil reproved by God and condemned eternally.[17]

Robert Hughes states of Juliana's revelations that "one is left with the impression that God created a Hell but could not, in his nature, use it to punish his creatures; that the only inhabitants are the original rebels, Lucifer and the other demons who revolted against God before the creation of the World."[18]

---

[16] S. G. F. Brandon, The Judgment of the Dead (London: Weidenfeld & Nicoldson, 1967), pp. 98-99.

[17] Robert Hughes, Heaven and Hell in Western Art (New York: Stein & Day, 1968), p. 40.

[18] Hughes, p. 40.

Artists, too, had to deal with seemingly opposing roles of the central figure of the Judgment scene. Reflecting the dual perception of Christ as a merciful savior and a sentencing judge, Abbot Suger, designer of the Judgment scene in the tympanum at St. Denis, carved on the lintel his appeal, "Receive, stern judge, the prayers of thy Suger; Grant that I be mercifully numbered among thy own sheep."[19]

Émile Mâle cites another appeal to the finality of judgment depicted in the Judgment scene by artists' addition of the Virgin and St. John the Evangelist, kneeling beside the Judge, with hands clasped in prayer. While Honorius of Autun reasons the two figures represent "the first-fruits of the resurrection," Mâle disagrees:

> I should, however, be more disposed to believe that in introducing the Virgin and St. John into the scene of the Judgment the artists were guided by a wholly popular feeling of piety. The mother and the well-loved disciple who stayed by the Cross in the day of anguish, surely deserve to share the triumph of the day of glory. But in this case why represent them like supplicants kneeling with clasped hands? One here touches an intimate chord in the Christian soul. The theologians had taught that in that great day no prayer could move the Judge, but the humble crowd of faithful could not believe this, and they continued to hope that the Virgin and St. John would still be powerful intercessors who would save many a soul by their prayers. The artists were inspired by this belief which they shared, and in opposing grace to law they brought a ray of hope into the midst of the solemn circumstances of justice.[20]

---

[19] Émile Mâle, Religious Art in France: The Twelfth Century (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978), p. 179.

[20] Mâle, Gothic Image, p. 371.

Where Church tradition seemed too harsh or the explanations insufficient for the medieval concept of Christ, beliefs in the Judgment were spiced with paradox. Often the Judgment resulted in particularly terrible punishments for sinners who were somehow more offensive to the medieval mind. Offenses resulting from the Seven Deadly Sins were usually clearly depicted in the arts with special, individualized punishments. Sins of greed seemed to encourage the concept of the Judgment as revenge, a theme borrowed from Judaism and developed in Christian art as far back as the thirteenth century.[21] In John Mannyng's Handlyng Synne is a typical reference to the parable of Lazarus and Dives as a warning to the rich:

> Swych ryche men that are agens Goddys pes,
> Thenketh on Lazare and on Dyues;
> And beth nat pynede wyth Satana
> For pore men, as Dyues was,
> And ys, and euer shal be;
> Yet robbed the neuer gold ne fee.
> By thys skylle, than now ye se,
> That ye are wers than was he.[22]

Medieval sermons stressed the vices of a wealthy man: "The righteous poor will stand up against the cruel rich at the day of Judgment, and will accuse them of their works and severity on earth."[23]

While medieval thought personalized the Judgment for particular types of sinners, it found the concept of revenge inappropriate for all non-believers in Christ. This concept of limiting the salvation was

---

[21] Owst, Literature and Pulpit, p. 298.

[22] Robert of Brunne's Handlyng Synne, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS, 119 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1901), p. 219.

[23] Owst, Literature and Pulpit, p. 299.

considered too strict by some, because, taken literally, it meant that all good souls before Christ's coming would be damned to Hell because their souls had not been cleansed of the original sin of Adam and Eve. Rather than having the heroes of the Old Testament suffer the tortures of Hell, the medieval mind designated for them a special place in Hell called <u>Limbus patrum</u>. In this portion of the underworld, the righteous souls were separated from the pain and agony of the demon realm and experienced "only a wistful melancholy over the unfortunate fact that the date of their birth precluded their hearing the saving truth of the Gospel and being baptized."[24]

The Church doctrine allowed for the rescue of the souls from Limbo in what is called the Harrowing of Hell, or Christ's descent into Hell in the days after his death and before his resurrection. In this journey, Christ brings the word of the Gospels to the trapped souls and frees them from the world of Satan. Popular depictions of the Harrowing of Hell, based on the scriptural teachings, were expressed in such forms as the cycle plays, as Jesus greets the forlorn souls:

> Peace to the, Adam, my Darlinge,
> and eke to all thy ofspringe,
> that righteous were in eirth lyvinge;
> from me you shall not sever.
>
> To blis [se] now I will you bringe,
> ther you shall be without endinge;
> Michael, lead these men singinge
> to ioy that lastest ever.
> (p. 326, ll. 189-196)[25]

---

[24]Brandon, p. 115.

[25]"Harrowing of Hell," <u>The Chester Plays</u>, ed. Dr. Matthews, pt. II, EETS, E.S. 115 (1892 & 1916; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1959).

Although the Chester play of The Harrowing of Hell does not include Eve in the saved, the fact that it even allows Adam to be transported is seen by Brandon as being somewhat surprising. He reflects, however, that medieval man was especially concerned about the fate of the first man and believed, according to an "appropriate symbolic pattern, that the place where Adam was buried was the centre of the earth . . . [where] the cross of Christ had been set up . . . ."[26] Since the blood of Christ, the cleansing agent for the souls who witnessed the sacrifice of God's son, found its way through the earth to Adam's resting place, the soul of Adam was thus redeemed.[27]

The concept of Limbo remained useful to the Church in explaining the fate of the Holy Innocents and all unbaptized children since the time of Christ who die without the benefit of baptism and thus retain the stain of original sin. Since their souls are like Adam's before the Harrowing of Hell, they are not considered pure enough to win the pleasures of contemplation of the Beatific Vision. But to men who could not accept the concept of the confinement of the patriarchs of the Old Testament to the dungeons of Hell, the notion of the young souls of unbaptized infants being punished seemed even less characteristic of a merciful god. Limbus infantium was conceived as a department of Hell in which the souls of the infants who died before baptism repose in a state of neither reward nor punishment.[28]

---

[26] Brandon, p. 115.

[27] Brandon, p. 115.

[28] Brandon, p. 116.

The contemplation of the Beatific Vision was an idea which initiated perhaps one of the biggest controversies in the development of the doctrine of the Last Judgment, that of differentiating the General Judgment from the Particular or Immediate Judgment.[29] For medieval man, the only souls who were worthy of immediate salvation, resurrection with God in Heaven at the time of death, were the souls of martyrs.

> With the Crusades, a new element of familiarity modified the remoteness of these elect spirits. In one of the versions of Urban II's speech at Clermont, he is reported as assuring immediate remission of sins to all who die having taken the cross "whether on the road or the sea or fighting against the pagan." This was accepted as meaning crusading deaths were equivalent to martyrdom.[30]

While the new path to instant salvation is, according to Boase, "characteristic of the fervour of the time,"[31] the real issue was not so much how man earned his salvation, but when he received it. In order for the tradition of honoring the saints and praying to them for intercession to be substantiated, the medieval mind had to wrestle with the question of when a saint was granted the audience of God. If a saint was not in the presence of God until the General Judgment on the Last Day, then prayers for the intercession of the saints were a futile means of petitioning the Father.

---

[29]For a discussion of the historical context of this, see John Weakland, "Pope John XXII and the Beatific Vision Controversy," Annuale Mediaevale, 9 (1968), 76-84.

[30]Boase, p. 39.

[31]Boase, p. 42.

356279 SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

While passages of Scripture were found to clearly imply an Immediate Judgment, the General Judgment on the Last Day, a tradition based on Jewish Apocalyptic beliefs, was "warmly defended" by some in the Middle Ages.[32] "The Second Council of Lyons (1274) declared that souls free from sin are at once received into heaven, but did not decide in what their state of beatitude consisted. . . . Benedict XII ended the controversy by the Bull "Benedictus Deus'" in 1336.[33] The New Testament offered support of the Church's decision in the tale of Dives and Lazarus the Beggar, a story of reversed roles for the rich and poor. In the parable, Lazarus finds his heavenly reward after being scorned and abused in his earthly life as a servant to the rich. Dives, on the other hand, calls out to the Lord to send Lazarus to the fiery region with a drink of cool water to soothe his parched throat. The fact that the parable allows for a judgment of each soul at the moment of death is seen as support of the doctrine of Particular Judgment. In addition, perhaps stronger evidence of Immediate Judgment are the words of Christ to the Good Thief, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43).

Once the fate of the souls of the faithful was decided and it was determined by the Church that each soul was judged at the moment of death, it remained for the fate of the imperfect soul to be decided. If all souls are judged at the moment of death and those of the saints

---

[32] "Judgment--Particular," The Catholic Encyclopedia (1907; rpt. New York: The Encyclopediae Press, 1913), VIII, p. 551.

[33] "Judgment--Particular," Catholic Encyclopedia, VIII, p. 551.

pass on to Heaven and those of the damned to Hell, where does the Judge place the souls with the slightest tarnish? Especially if this tarnish is a result of sins already confessed and repented, how could a god who preached mercy and forgiveness damn a soul for eternity for the offenses?

> The great majority of ordinary Christians, while not deserving of immediate damnation as were certain notorious sinners, were nevertheless stained by their sins and needed purification. Moreover, there was also a ready recognition that such purification should be painful, for expiation ought to be made for having sinned. . . .[34]

The Church adopted the concept of Purgatory as dogma with the Union Decree of Eugene IV in 1439, although prayers for the dead and practices of scripture-supported doctrine came from as early as the fourth century.[35] The theory of Purgatory was that sinners who had not died in a state of virtue would be purged or purified of the offenses against God until the time their souls were made free from sin.

> The idea that fire would be the purifying element was probably suggested by I Corinthians iii 13-16; whether it would be material or symbolic fire seems to have been at first uncertain; but the human mind, always prone to think in a concrete imagery, soon produced a thoroughly materialistic picture of Purgatory and the situation of those suffering there.[36]

---

[34] Brandon, pp. 111-12.

[35] "Judgment--General," Catholic Encyclopedia, VIII, p. 550; "Purgatory," XII, p. 575.

[36] Brandon, p. 112.

Contemplation of the pains of Purgatory, sometimes resulting in fruits of the imagination which rivaled those of the efforts to depict Hell, gave men the opportunity to appreciate the sacrament of penance. The Church tended to emphasize the idea of Purgatory by promoting the idea of "the remission or alleviation of the pains of Purgatory."[37] The prospect of the soul's immediate sentencing brought the medieval mind to a contemplation of the last moments of life. Since the sinner could save his soul even by a deathbed repentance, each man hoped to persevere long enough to say "Into Thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit. You have redeemed me, O Lord, thou God of truth."[38] The Book of the Craft of Dying stressed to all Christian men the value of the final moments, exhorting them "to learn and have craft and knowledge to die well."[39] The six-part treatise taught men the lessons of the craft:

> The first is of commendation of death, and cunning to die well.
> The second containeth the temptations of men that die.
> The third containeth the interrogations that should be asked of them that be in their death bed, while they may speak and understand.
> The fourth containeth an information, with certain obsecrations to them that shall die.
> The fifth containeth an instruction to them that shall die.
> The sixth containeth prayers that should be said to them that be a-dying, of some men that be about them.
>
> (pp. 3-4)

---

[37]Brandon, p. 112.

[38]Boase, p. 119.

[39]The Book of the Craft of Dying and Other Early English Tracts Concerning Death, ed. and trans. Frances M. M. Comper (London: 1917; rpt. New York: Arno Press, 1977), p. 2. All subsequent references to The Book of the Craft of Dying will be taken from this edition and will be made in the text.

After all the precautions and reassurances made before the moment of death, medieval man, like men in all ages, could only imagine what the exact nature of the Judgment might be.[40] And imagine he did. The scenes of the Last Judgment became familiar to all Christians by the thirteenth century. By that time, above the entranceway to nearly every cathedral were the figures of the Last Day, the damned and the saved, depicted in all the gruesomeness and glory the Middle Ages could produce. It was intended to be educational to all who entered the house of worship and instill the proper attitudes toward the business of preparing for Doomsday. "The very Judgment scene itself was certainly designed not to excite but to pacify and console the sufferers, while it warned the offender."[41] Mâle explains the difficulty modern man has appreciating the medieval artists' accomplishments:

> The Last Judgment, as understood by the thirteenth century, is a great drama which may be divided very precisely into five acts, but the limitations of his art compel the sculptor to show simultaneously events that were in point of fact successive. It is for us to distinguish them and to follow the chronological order.[42]

Writers and artists of the early versions of the General Judgment struggled with the ideas of determining the actual location of

---

[40]For a discussion of fables and superstitions popular in the Middle Ages, see J. A. MacCulloch, Medieval Faith and Fable (London, 1932; rpt. Folcraft, Pa.: Folcraft Library Editions, 1973).

[41]Owst, Literature and Pulpit, p. 296.

[42]Mâle, Gothic Image, p. 367.

Heaven and Hell. As early as 207, Tertullian in his Adversus Marcion writes that "there is a spatial concept that may be called Abraham's bosom for receiving the souls of all peoples."[43] The concern of early Christians tended to center around the Particular Judgment and the place to which souls migrated until the Last Day. The decisive moment of death was dramatized in painting and woodcuts as a struggle between a demon and an angel for the soul of the dying man. Paintings such as the fresco of Francesco Traini in Campo Santo, Pisa, showed the soul as a naked figure leaving the body. The painting offered a lesson in the triumph of death and a "belief that at the moment of death a person's eternal fate was already sealed."[44]

As attention shifted from the Immediate Judgment to the depiction in art of the Last Day, cathedrals began to show signs of man's perception of Doomsday. While the earliest versions of the Last Judgment began to appear as early as the beginning of the sixth century, the theme became almost universally popular by the twelfth century.[45] According to popular tradition, the Last Judgment scenes filled the areas over the doorways of the medieval cathedrals. With the damned on his left, the saved on his right, Christ ruled over the final sorting of souls as the resurrection of the bodies filled the ranks of those to be judged. The concepts used by one artist would soon be adopted by

[43] Boase, p. 28.

[44] Brandon, p. 113.

[45] Brandon, p. 118.

another, sometimes with variations and additions, until the great portals were found all over Europe. After the twelfth century artists traveled with the groups of pilgrims on their way to ask forgiveness of sins at one of the shrines of the saints. Therefore, as Mâle points out, the cathedrals along these roads were the ones in which the great sculptured portals were found.[46] One particular church in France became a model for the artists of following centuries. It was at St. Denis, Seine, that the great Gothic portal first appeared. Previously, the arches above the doorway had been filled only with a geometric design, but the craftsmen of St. Denis, between 1133 and 1140, "created a whole world there: the elders of the Apocalypse, angels carrying the elect, demons dragging away the damned, beatitudes and punishments, heaven and hell."[47]

The portals often depicted the fate of the soul as being decided on a set of scales, usually held by Michael the Archangel.[48] While a devil may be casting his weight on one pan of the scales to effect a decision in his favor, Michael came to the defense of the virtuous. The history of the Archangel's defense of the soul is depicted in a number of writings. Revelation of John, the Epistle of Jude, the History of Joseph the Carpenter and the Testament of Abraham

---

[46] Mâle, Religious Art, p. 305.

[47] Mâle, Gothic Image, p. 376.

[48] See, for example, Joan Evans, ed. et. al., The Flowering of the Middle Ages (London: Thames & Hudson, 1966), p. 224, pl. 46.

usually describe the souls of Moses, Joseph or Abraham as being escorted by Michael to a safe passing into the afterlife.[49] These writings and ancient Egyptian and Indian beliefs supported the metaphor of the weighing of vices and virtues. According to Mâle,

> . . . The Fathers of the Church used the metaphor freely. "Good and evil actions," says St. Augustine, "shall be as if hanging in the scales, and if the evil preponderate the guilty shall be dragged away to hell." And St. John Crystostom says, "In that day our actions, our words, our thoughts will be placed in the scales, and the dip of the balance on either side will carry with it the irrevocable sentence."[50]

While the craftsmen and artists usually followed Church doctrine in depicting the scene of the General Judgment, they turned their imaginations loose in depicting the scenes after the Judgment, the separation of the sheep from the goats. Heaven was seen as the place in which man's soul can find satisfaction by experiencing the completion of its existence. "'In his will is our peace.' This renunciation of the ego, this willing absorption of consciousness and personality into the matrix of God's existence, is the joy of Heaven. Desire ceases because all the potential is fulfilled."[51] Compared to the lively dangers of Hell, Heaven was an orderly, peaceful domain of harmony. While Satan's realm was designed to impress medieval man with the absence of God, manifested by chaos and misery, Heaven was

---

[49]Brandon, p. 123.

[50]Mâle, Gothic Image, p. 376.

[51]Hughes, p. 16.

considered to be an intricate arrangement representing the glory of God. Though some may consider the picture of Heaven, when placed next to that of Hell, a boring and monotonous image of perfection, shown on the cathedral portals as an orderly, symmetrical arrangement of tall, straight figures in the ranks of the saved, the scene was calculated to give the proper effect.[52] While the celestial realms might not test the courage of the medieval man, its symbolism was not lost on the viewers. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, paraphrased by Hughes, diversity adds beauty to a work, and "in medieval theological practice this involved a rigid hierarchy of pure spirits in Heaven, of which the angels were the lowest."[53] Following them came the ranks of archangels, principalities, powers, virtues, dominations, thrones, cherubs, and finally, the seraphs.

While the scenes of Paradise may have required less imagination to create, the landscape of Hell was usually a product of wild imaginings. "Hardly a trace of dogmatic teaching is here to be found; the bestial ugliness of Satan and his acolytes, their cynical gaiety, the liberties they take with noble ladies, the despair of the damned, all were the outcome of popular fancy."[54] Hughes points out that the concept of Hell as an actual place rather than a state of mind was the

---

[52]See, for example, Evans, et. al., p. 225. pl. 47; p. 233, fig. 4 & 5.

[53]Hughes, p. 22.

[54]Mâle, Gothic Image, p. 378.

outcome of the medieval mind, becoming carried away with the metaphor. The explanation of this fervor is a simple one when one considers that pain of physical torture would be a familiar idea to the Middle Ages. While it was virtually unimaginable for man to understand the experience of torture presented by the deprivation of the presence of God, Hughes notes that physical pain was a punishment to which each man could relate. Since the human experience in itself is a limitation of the vision of God, the Beatific Vision was a pleasure which needed to be translated in more worldly terms. The loss of this great pleasure was then imagined in the greatest pain the human experience could produce.[55]

Heaven and Hell were created in the art and literature of the Middle Ages as opposites of one another. To a world which revered order and symmetry as evidence of God's handiwork, the absence of God was translated as chaos and random arrangement of figures. However, a Hell of random figures would hardly be as terrifying as the hideous and unearthly creatures the artists created, so they found additional forms to express the counterworlds. The healing atmosphere of Heaven was contrasted with the tortures of Hell in stinking, sulphurous lakes for the rivers of life in Heaven, dark woods with souls trapped in the tree trunks for the beautiful foliage of paradise, and geysers and volcanoes for the fountain of life.[56]

---

[55]Hughes, p. 41.

[56]Hughes, pp. 156-57.

In addition to designing Hell to emphasize the contrasts with heaven, medieval man found significance in a Hell which provided tortures particularly fitting for the sinners. In Summa Predecantium, a sermon about the horrors of Hell, John Bromyard details the rewards for the haughty and envious:

> You will find that, of all their riches, their delicacies and the rest, they have nothing; and the worms, as you will see, have their bodies. . . . Their soul shall have, instead of palace and hall chamber, the deep lake of hell, with those that go down into the depth thereof. In place of scented baths, their body shall have a narrow pit in the earth; and there they shall have a bath more black and foul than any bath of pitch and sulphur. In place of a soft couch, they shall have a bed more grievous and hard than all the nails and spikes in the world; in place of inordinate embraces, they will be able to have there the embrace of the fiery brands of hell. . . . Instead of wives they shall have toads; instead of great retinue and throng of followers, their body shall have a throng of worms and their soul a throng of demons. Instead of a large domain, it shall be an eternal prison-house cramped for both. Instead of riches, poverty; instead of delights, punishments; instead of honour, misery and contempt; instead of laughter, weeping; instead of gluttony and drunkenness, hunger and thirst without end; instead of excessive gaming with dice and the like, grief; and in place of the torment which for a time they inflicted on others, they shall have eternal torment.[57]

In the popular depictions of Hell, demons are clawed, hoofed, hairy creatures, formed from the fanciful imaginations of the medieval mind, straining to imagine the most unimaginable horrors. The picture of the devil as a devouring monster is one that is represented throughout the history of the graphic depictions of Hell. Some pictures show

---

[57] Owst, pp. 293-94.

the demons with human mouths on their limbs and at their abdomen. "What can this signify but that they have displaced the seat of intelligence, and put their souls at the service of their lower appetites--an ingenious way of teaching that the fallen angel has reached the level of the brute."[58]

Depictions of Purgatory were not as common in medieval art as were the sweeping landscapes and terrifying sculptures of Hell. Perhaps, as Boase suggests, the attention of the medieval man was occupied in attempting to give form to Heaven and Hell, but rather than insinuating that the medieval mind did not have the capability to encompass the wide spectrum of afterworld possibilities, Mâle offers a more plausible explanation for the discrepancy. "Nothing could be more logical, for purgatory is subject to the laws of time, and after the Last Judgment the world can only be conceived of under the aspect of eternity. There is then room for paradise and hell alone, for they alone are eternal."[59]

After dealing with the basic questions of doctrine in the concept of judgment, the medieval artists and writers wrestled with how to deal with death and what followed. Particularly during the fourteenth century, the religious and moral literature was directed toward providing for man some specific precautions and improvements in his life to assure him a place among the chosen. The literature of this type

---

[58]Mâle, Gothic Image, pp. 378-79.

[59]Mâle, Gothic Image, p. 389.

was intended to be a warning of the danger confronting man and a means of instruction on how to reform his life in preparation for a "good death."

Death, as the writer of The Pricke of Conscience states, is of three types: bodily, spiritual and endless. Bodily death is the separation of the soul from the body. Spiritual death, a more awful prospect, is a separation of the soul from God. Endless death is what all men fear, a life of dying and a death that is living (Pricke of Conscience, ll. 1683-1752). Medieval men, aware of their own mortality, developed in the fourteenth century a sensitive reaction to the question of human destiny. A subject which was dealt in the thirteenth century with what Émile Mâle calls "unique restraint" appears "revealed in all its horror" by the end of the fourteenth century in the funeral statues and tomb effigies.[60] In literature, such works as The Dance of Death and Ars Moriendi, which also appeared in the arts, depicted an equivalent horror encountered by the dying man. Along with a sometimes curious, sometimes morbid preoccupation with death, the medieval men were concerned with attempting to understand the forces at work in their world, and investigating the nature of death was no exception.

The concern over death and what follows was widespread. Medieval man was most obviously confronted with it in the sermons and religious treatises such as the Summa de vitiis et vertutibus (c. 1250)

---

[60] Émile Mâle, Religious Art from the Twelfth to the Eighteenth Century (New York: Farrar, Straus & Co., 1949), p. 140.

or the Oculus Sacerdotis (c. 1325), works written primarily for the clergy to teach them as much as possible about saving souls. The cathedrals themselves, as we have already seen, were tremendous representations of man's concern for salvation in the Middle Ages. The great portals of the Last Judgment, the paintings and windows of these impressive monuments sought to educate the church-goer in the paths of righteousness.

The popular literature also reflected the lessons of Church doctrine about the afterlife. In drama, it would have been difficult for the medieval man to avoid seeing at least one performance of a pageant play. The English cycles were extremely popular and always ended the scheme of the history of the world with a Judgment play.[61] While a specific Judgment play would have its own central emphasis, one very common theme was the significance of good works in determining the destiny of the soul.[62]

All of these works were directed at encouraging men to take the rougher, but more rewarding, path of righteousness. The concern over educating both clergy and laity in the crucial art of keeping the soul prepared for the Judgment prompted many of the manuals of parish priests. The Church, recognizing the need for a system of teaching the religious doctrine, established a drive to make the practices of

---

[61] A. C. Cawley, ed., Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1959), p. 189.

[62] Also emphasizing this theme were works such as Everyman and Lamentation, or Complaint of the Dying Creature, in Craft of Dying and Other Tracts, pp. 137-169.

confession and penance more familiar to both laity and clergy. Due to the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, confession to a parish priest was an obligation that each church member had to meet annually.

> Confessors were expected to cross-examine penitents on their religious knowledge as well as on their sins, and in this way the confessional was as important as the pulpit as a potential means of religious instruction. The correct use of the sacrament of penance is a theme which dominates or underlies most of the religious literature of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, from the constitutions of the bishops down to such unexpected places as certain passages in Langland, Chaucer and Gower.[63]

During the thirteenth century, the later years of ecclesiastical reform, the Church began groundwork for an elaborate plan of education of its members, both clergy and laity. Manuals of instruction for parish priests appeared, usually written in Latin and later translated for those who did not read the scholarly language. The form and contents of many of these works were later modified for reading by the laity. Such works as Archbishop Thoresby's Lay Folk's Catechism (c. 1357) and John Mirk's Instructions for Parish Priests and Festial, written at the end of the fourteenth century, were models for the later religious and moral treatises in the vernacular and intended for the laity.[64]

---

[63] William A. Pantin, The English Church in the Fourteenth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1955), p. 192.

[64] Other works which inspired versions for the laity were Friar Lorens Gallus' Le Somme le Roi, (c. 1297) which is believed to have been the source for The Book of Vices and Virtues, (c. 1375) and Manuel les péchés, the source of Handlyng Synne. See Pantin, chs. 9-11, for a discussion on the development of the manuals, vernacular treatises and mystical writings.

The moral treatises for the laity were intended to provide guidance in matters of the sacraments and the Seven Deadly Sins. Sometimes the Creed or the Twelve Commandments were the subject of such manuals. With depictions of the Last Judgment surrounding them, the medieval men turned to these works for a remedy to their fears of being caught unaware on the Judgment Day. "The world, to them, was staggering on the brink of Doomsday and final destruction, while everywhere, even in the very pulpits, men scrambled madly after the gold that perisheth."[65] In order to prepare to meet the Doomsday with a soul worthy of joining the ranks of the saved, the medieval men enlisted the aid of the moral literature.

Manuals on confession and the proper practice of the sacrament of penance appeared in a variety of lengths and forms from the mid-thirteenth century. Three such works which I will examine in this thesis are The Pricke of Conscience, The Book of the Craft of Dying, and, from the Canterbury Tales, "The Parson's Tale." These three were selected for study because they are a good representation of medieval times. The Pricke of Conscience and The Craft of Dying were very popular as evidenced by the number of manuscripts and/or versions that survive, and both of them were addressed to the common people. Chaucer wrote for a more sophisticated audience, and "The Parson's Tale," taken together with the other two, shows the pervasiveness of the thoughts of repentance and the path to a favorable judgment.

---

[65] George R. Owst, Preaching in Medieval England: An Introduction to Sermon Manuscripts of the Period c. 1350-1450 (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), p. 88.

The Pricke of Conscience, written around 1350 and borrowing its form somewhat from the clerical instruction manuals, was an extremely popular work concerning penance and the Judgment. The Book of the Craft of Dying, a prose work translated from one of the many versions of Ars Moriendi (c. 1450) was a similar work in that it too was directed at the popular audience of largely uneducated laity. While The Book of the Craft of Dying is primarily concerned with describing what expectations and temptations a dying sinner may have, the longer verse work of The Pricke of Conscience is a work divided into seven books, covering subjects such as man's wretchedness, the physical world, death, Purgatory, Doomsday, Hell and Heaven. Neither work provides an extensive inventory of the Seven Deadly Sins, a popular topic for the treatise writers to borrow from the instructional manuals.

Toward the end of the fourteenth century there appeared an example of an instructional treatise written for readers on a higher intellectual level. Chaucer's Canterbury Tales contains yet another example of literature aimed at teaching the reader the proper attitude and procedure for making a good confession. "The Parson's Tale," containing a thorough inventory of the Seven Deadly Sins, is a prose work which characterizes the type of guide a medieval reader would find helpful in preparing for a good confession.

Each of these works encourages the reader to make an examination of his conscience in preparation for his bodily death. Perhaps just as significant is the fact that the writer in each case not only calls for repentance, but stresses the urgency of making a confession

and amending the wrong done. In this thesis, I will examine the means each of these three works uses to motivate the reader to a proper penance and the prospects a sinner faces when he enters into the Immediate Judgment. Although there exists a wealth of material on the General Judgment, my particular interest is showing how these pieces of literature taught their readers to prepare for the day of their death.

## I. THE PRICKE OF CONSCIENCE

Written in the middle of the fourteenth century, the treatise called The Pricke of Conscience became "perhaps the most popular"[1] piece of literature for the medieval readers. Like many of the popular pious works, it stressed the importance of repentance and the unending mercy of God, but unlike many of the works produced for a similar purpose, it did not include a careful scrutiny of the sacraments, the commandments, or the Seven Deadly Sins. Its purpose was to describe the wretchedness of mankind and his world, death and the Judgment, and the eternal punishments or rewards of the next world. The unknown author, following a trend of fourteenth century writers who made religious subjects available in a vernacular language, composed the book in English so that the learned and unlearned readers could benefit from his message.

Since the intended audience was both the laity and unlearned priests, many of the works of this kind were written in verse such as the couplets which make up the text of The Pricke of Conscience. William Pantin, in suggesting that the works became substitutes for the profane literature of the period, sees the choice of verse as one meant to facilitate the educational values of the literature. "It seems possible that the verse form was adopted, as in the contemporary courtesy

---

[1]Pantin, p. 230.

books, household regulations and instructions for servants, to make it easier for the illiterate to learn at least the shorter works by heart."[2]

The poem's message is very clear and repeated by the very nature of its organization. The divisions of the book are listed at beginning and end of the work, and each section ends with an announcement of the next. Each major point in a discussion is outlined first and then developed in more detail as the writer provides examples and quotations of the point to be made. For example, Book Three of the poem, concerning death, offers four reasons why man should fear death and then develops each point with careful explanation throughout the next eight hundred lines.

Examples used in the poem are usually taken from sources with which the reader would have been familiar such as popular Old and New Testament stories, writings from the Church Fathers, but particularly examples from the life of Christ. While representative opinions and quotations are often quoted in Latin, the poet always offers a translation in English immediately after the passage.

Factors contributing to the popularity of the poem were the quotations from popular authorities, the repetition of major points, and the use of verse. By making the lessons easily accessible to the intended audience, the poet of <u>The Pricke of Conscience</u> appealed to the minds of a greater audience than did the earlier treatises written to encourage the parish priests to educate their congregations.

---

[2]Pantin, p. 221.

In The Pricke of Conscience, the author seeks to instill in the minds of his readers the importance of meekness and fear and love of the Lord. With this purpose clearly in mind, the poet offers an explanation for his choice of title for his work:

> Tharfor this tretice drawe I wald
> In Inglise tung that may be cald
> Prik of Conscience als men may fele,
> For if a man it rede and understande wele,
> And the materes thar-in til hert wil take,
> It may his conscience tendre make,
> And til right way of rewel bryng it bilyfe,
> And his hert til drede and mekenes dryfe,
> And til luf and yhernyng of heven blis,
> And to amende all that he has done mys.
> (ll. 9549-58)

With these three qualities, the poem stresses, each man can find his way to heaven. The poet is adamant that meekness, love and dread all must be present in the heart of man, for only one or a combination of any two is not enough.

> For the right way that lyggus til blys,
> And that ledys a man theder, es thys:
> The way of mekenes principaly,
> And of drede, and luf of God almyghty,
> That may be cald the way of wysdom;
> (ll. 139-43)

Once this purpose is set up in the prologue of the poem, the rest of the work seeks to instill these reactions in the reader. The order of the seven books makes this very clear. Books One and Two speak of the wretchedness of mankind and the instability of his world, reminding the reader of his humble origin and the eventual return of his body and all worldly goods to the ashes and dust from which he was formed. Books Three through Six deal with the termination of earthly life and what follows. Death, Purgatory, Doomsday and Hell are the subjects which

the poet describes with convincing details to elicit the fear and dread needed to lead man to repentance. Book Seven then provides an account of the joys of Heaven, where the righteous will encounter seven blisses for the body and seven for the soul.

Pride is a barrier to man's attaining eternal bliss, according to the prologue of the poem. Because of pride, man tries to excuse his ignorance of God's law.

> In grete perille of saul es that man
> That has witt and mynde and no gude can,
> And wil noght lere for to knaw
> The werkes of God and gode law,
> Ne what hym-self es that es lest;
> Bot lyves als an unskylwys best,
> That nother has skil, witt, ne mynde;
> That man lyfes agayn his kynde.
> (ll. 161-67)

While pride was considered by medieval man as the root to the remaining six of the Seven Deadly Sins, meekness, its remedy, is the beginning of all virtue. For the author of The Pricke of Conscience, an examination of the soul begins with meekness.

Man, made from the foul matter of ashes and dust from the earth, must always remember his humble beginnings and thereby avoid pride in his being. Medieval men were constantly reminded of the wretchedness of their physical being with seemingly irrefutable proof. The poem quotes Pope Innocent:

> "Behalde", he says, "graythely and loke,
> Herbes and trese that thou sees spryng,
> And take gude kepe what thai forth bryng;
> Herbes forth bringes floures and sede,
> And tres fair fruyt and braunches to spede,
> And thou forth bringes of thi-self here
> Nites, lyse, and other vermyn sere.

Of herbes and tres, springes baum ful gude,
And oyle and wyne for mans fude;
And of the comes mykel foul thyng,
Als fen, and uryn and spyttyng;
Of herbes and tres comes swete savour,
And of the comes wlatsome stynk, and sour;
Swilk als the tre es with bowes,
Swilk es the fruyt that on it growes."[3]
(ll. 645-59)

In The Book of Vices and Virtues is stated a similar strategy for attaining an "equity or evenness" of reason and will. After man has overcome pride in order to truly examine and know himself, he must then recognize the wretchedness of his state in reaching the second degree of evenness, that of subjection of the flesh.[4] Believing that the will could be ruined by the lure of the flesh, medieval men sought to keep their physical natures subdued with any number of means. Fasts, wearing of hair shirts, self-flagellation and sometimes fearsome physical abuses to the body were all seen not as masochistic but as means in which men could control the unruly nature of the flesh.

The third degree of evenness in The Book of Vices and Virtues is an "indifference to worldly things."[5] Similarly, The Pricke of Conscience, Book Two, "Concerning the World," warns against love of worldly goods, covering sins of avarice, envy and gluttony. Book Two explains the existence of two worlds: spiritual and bodily. The bodily world is further divided into two more worlds, the lower and higher.

---

[3]Other works mention the vileness of man's physical nature and the decay that will overtake our physical natures at death. See Robert Brunne's "Handlyng Synne," p. 218.

[4]The Book of Vices and Virtues, p. 152.

[5]Vices and Virtues, p. 153.

> The lawest world was alswa made for man,
> For this skylle, als clerkes shew can;
> For that man suld be thar-in wonnand,
> Goddes werkes to se and undirstand,
> And his commandmentes and his wille
> To knawe, and kepe, and to fulfille,
> And to be proved here in gastly batayls,
> Of gastly enmys that man oft assayls;
> (ll. 1030-37)

Through the performance of these works on earth, man is to make himself worthy of the higher world of bliss. Although God created the lower world, and God's works are worthy of love and adoration, man is warned in Book Two of the poem to "lufe nowther worldisshe thyng ne bodily, / mare than our Lord God almyghty," (ll. 940-1). "Worldish men" were seen by the medieval men as those who gave in to the deadly sins of greed and gluttony. The topic was a popular one in medieval sermons which warned that while the world may befriend man in this life, it can do nothing to help him in the next world.[6] In fact, as <u>The Pricke of Conscience</u> spells out, it will do man more harm than good to embrace the worldly goods. Because the world is fickle, deceptive, and the servant of the devil, it is able to draw men away from the path of righteousness. While the world may offer man riches and luxury, the poem argues, it also can cast him into poverty and ruin. Worldly happiness is always in doubt because Dame Fortune works with the world to deceive mankind.

---

[6] See, for example, <u>Middle English Sermons</u>, no. 15, ed. Woodburn O. Ross, EETS, 209 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1940), p. 87. The pervasiveness of this idea can also be seen in drama. <u>Everyman</u>, for example, shows that "Goods" will not accompany Everyman to the grave.

When sho hir whele lates obout ga,
Sho turnes sum douune fra wele to wa,
And, eft agaynward, fra wa to wele;
(ll. 1277-79)

Finally, man is cautioned to avoid worldly wealth because it can lead to eternal woe.

For angres mans lyf clenses, and proves,
And welthes his lif trobles and droves,
And the saul of man may lightly spille;
For welthes, that men has here at wille,
Semes tokenyng of endless pyn.
(ll. 1318-22)

The wise man, then, is warned by the poet not to trust the world and to cautiously choose his way. If he chooses the easy path, he will be led to eternal punishment, but if he stays on the narrow path, he will enjoy eternal bliss.

If man can conquer his pride and remember the transitory nature of worldly rewards, his next step is to understand fully why he should fear the death that awaits all men. In describing fear as a vehicle to salvation, the intent of the medieval religious doctrine was not to generate unwarranted fears in the minds of men, but to instruct the masses on the value of fear in the process of attaining true wisdom. Dread of God was the first step in a chain of understanding man's role in the universe.[7] While the images of the torments of Hell may have converted at least a few sinners for the sheer reason that they were terrified, the real purpose of such images was to initiate a process of growth.

---

[7]This idea, a medieval commonplace, was based on the Bible. See, for example, Proverbs 1:7, 9:10; Psalms 111:10; and Ecclesiasticus 1:1-30.

The poet of The Pricke of Conscience explains the fallacy of a conversion motivated by mere dread of punishment when he insists that fear be accompanied by love.

> For if drede stand by itself anely,
> No mede of God it es worthy,
> Tharfor drede suld be lufes brother,
> And ayther of tham stand with other,
> For who-swa lufes God on ryght manere
> He has grete drede to wrethe hym here;
> Than lufes he his bydynges to fulfille,
> And dredes to do oght ogayne his wille,
> Delites to be with God ay,
> And dredes to be put fra hym oway.
> (ll. 9493-9502)

Although the Church recognized the value of suffering at the time of death as a means to alleviate future punishments, fear of death was considered an important catalyst in the clergy's promotion of a prompt and proper confession. Rather than encourage unreasonable fears, the poet, in a typical order of The Pricke of Conscience gives his readers four reasons to fear death: 1) the pain that each man would feel when the soul and body separated, 2) the fiends that would gather about each soul at the moment of death, 3) the account that each man must give of his life and works, and 4) the uncertainty each man must undergo until it is decided whether his future life will be one of pain or bliss. In addition to this, death is sudden and uncertain since no man knows when it will strike or what forms it may take.

The pain that man suffers when the soul and body are divorced is a pain that even Christ Himself feared.

For he byfor, ar he deyghed on the rode,
For drede of dede he swet blode;
For he wyst, ar he til the dede suld passe,
What the payn of the dede wasse,
Than may we tharby trow right wele
That the payn of the dede es hard to fele.
(ll. 1780-85)

Since the soul and the body were so closely united by God, the sorrow and mourning at their parting would of course be terrible.

While a man's senses and mind are confused, devils will gather about him at the moment of death to tempt him and "to ravissche the saul with tham away / Tyl pyne of helle, if thai may" (ll. 2222-3). In this moment man is not left without examples to follow.[8] The poem states that St. Martin, St. Bernard and even Christ Himself encountered the devil at the moment of death.

Than semes it wele that God wil thus
Suffer the devel apere til us
In tyme of dede, at our last ende,
When we sal out of this world wende,
Sen haly men that here liffed right
Mught moght dygh with-outen that sight.
(ll. 2280-85)

While the fiends are gathered about the soul, a reckoning of the deeds worked during its life will begin. The poet paints a fearsome scene as he describes a soul's life being rehearsed between angels

---

[8] See, for example, Mirk's Festial, ed. Theodor Erbe, EETS, E.S., 96 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1905). Pp. 67-68 give an account in which Adam and Eve are beseiged by demons at the moment of their deaths. Also, all Judgment plays in the English cycles have demons present on the Last Day. See The Chester Plays, pp. 427-453; Ludus Conventriae or the Plaie Called Corpus Christi, ed. K. S. Block, EETS, E.S., 120 (1922; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1960), pp. 373-377; The Townley Plays, ed. George England, EETS, E.S., 71 (1897; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 367-387; York Plays, pp. 497-513.

and demons. All sins that were left "unshriven" will be brought out for all to see, and nothing shall be left out. In the words of St. Anselm, the wretched soul will give an account of

> How thow has here led thi lyfe,
> And how thow has spendyd thi wittes fife,
> Fra the first day that [thou] had witte
> Unto the last day thow shuld hethen flite.
> Than sal walaway be thi sang,
> For thou here dispended thi tym wrang,
> Bathe in werk and word, in though[t] and wille,
> And yhit when thou mught helpe, thou held the stille.
> Thou has done many synful dede,
> To greve God thou had no drede;
> Bot when you sese all thi trespas
> Than sal thou say 'allas! allas!'
> (ll. 2430-41)

The sinner cannot even be comforted by the thought of good deeds, for some of them may not be worthy of praise, "for our gude dedys ere ofte done wrang, / Noght of right maner als thai suld be / Or parchaunce done oute of charité" (ll. 2487-9).[9]

At the end of the reckoning for each soul, immediate sentence is imposed. The fourth reason for dread, the uncertainty of that sentence, is perhaps one of the strongest pieces of persuasive writing the medieval treatises contained. The only way for the medieval man to avoid disaster on his day of Particular Judgment was to prepare his soul for the account and be ever mindful of his last day.

---

[9]The remorse of the soul is a common concept in the Judgment literature. The Lay Folks' Prayer Book contains a prayer for the dead which beseeches the Lord for mercy, asking that He turn away the soul's wickedness, ed. Henry Littlehales, EETS, 105 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1895), p. 70. Also, Everyman and the Judgment plays of the English cycles all emphasize the necessity of good deeds strengthened by penance. In the Judgment plays, Christ the Judge reminds the souls that deeds done for or against any man on earth have thus been committed for or against Him.

> Thynk thou sal dyghe, thou wate never whan,
> Ne in what state thou sal be than,
> Ne thou whate never in what stede
> Thou sal dyghe, ne of what dede.
> (ll. 2664-7)

In using fear as motivation for the sinner to modify his life-style, the Church and its clergy could rely on the idea of eternal punishment (or, in the case of positive reinforcement, eternal joy) and the fear or irrevocable consequences of a sinful life. But to the majority of the people, who were most likely neither saints nor deadly sinners, the idea of Purgatory must have seemed a preferable alternative to the horrible tortures of Hell. Perhaps it was tempting for medieval man to contemplate on the purging as a mere stepping-stone to heaven. The Pricke of Conscience seeks to eliminate such a reaction by reminding readers of the true nature of Purgatory, according to Church doctrine. Once again, the poet relies on fear to initiate the proper attitude toward the consequences of sin.

> Many spekes, and in buke redes
> Of purgatory, but fon it dredes;
> For many wate noght what it es,
> Tharfor thai drede it wele the les.
> Bot if thai knew wele what it ware,
> Or trowed, thai walde drede it the mare.
> (ll. 2692-7)

The poem, which describes Purgatory as a part of Hell (ll. 2817-38), reminds readers that the pain of Purgatory is the same as the pain of Hell, the only difference being that Purgatory lasts until Doomsday while the punishments of Hell are eternal. The pain of Purgatory is described as "mare bitter than alle the tourmentes / That alle the marters in erthe tholed" (ll. 2723-4), "mare / Than the mast payn that

may be / In al this werld, to fele or se" (ll. 2733-5), and "Bot ever a day of penaunce here / May stand in-stede that for a yhere" (ll. 2758-9).

The seven pains of Purgatory are somewhat similar to the dreads of death since the soul in Purgatory has not yet reached its destination for eternity. Firstly, the soul is in great dread since the devils are still gathered about it. The soul remains uncertain about its future state while devils and angels contend for its possession while it remains in Purgatory. The isolation of Purgatory is the third pain; the soul mourns its exile from friends in heaven and on earth.

The nature of the soul being that which supplies life to the body, the more tender soul suffers in Purgatory diseases of the body which are more torturous than the body on earth might experience. In addition, the soul is deprived of all pleasure and freedom. The greatest pain a soul shall feel is "the grete yhernyng that thai haf to se / The face of God, that es swa bright, / And the lang tarifying fra that syght" (ll. 3267-9).

Since the purpose of Purgatory is to cleanse the soul until it is acceptably free of the blemish of sin to graduate to the presence of God, the time each soul may spend in the cleansing varies according to the quality of its earthly life.

> Som sawles pyns les, and som mare;
> For the sawles byhoves duell thar-in,
> Aftir the charge es of their syn.
> Bot som sawles thar sal be delyver[d] sone,

That large penaunce here has done;
Som sal duel thar many a yhere,
That litel penaunce had don here.
(ll. 3155-61)

If a soul has died with the blemish of deadly sin[10] (The Pricke of Conscience lists these as pride, hatred, gluttony, sloth, lechery, covetousness, sacrilege, false witness, perjury, murder and theft), then that sin must be not only honestly confessed, but also fully amended. Otherwise, penance will be paid in Purgatory, or, in the case of the unconfessed deadly sin, the soul is condemned to Hell. Nothing the trapped soul can do once in Purgatory will alleviate the pain of the cleansing. Righteous men who still dwell on earth are able to help the souls in Purgatory by prayer, almsdeed, fasting and offering a mass.[11]

The emphasis The Pricke of Conscience places on fear and dread as precedents to an examination of conscience and eventual repentance can be seen by comparing the amount of material devoted to describing the General Judgment and its awful nature, as well as the subjects of death and Hell, to the number of lines devoted to warning the reader against despair in God's mercy. While the topics of mercy and despair are given more lengthy treatment in The Book of the Craft of Dying and "The Parson's Tale," this work of 4812 couplets contains fewer than sixty lines discussing the merciful nature of God. However, this should

[10] For a complete discussion of the concept of deadly sin, see M. W. Bloomfield, The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of the Religious Concept, with Special References to Medieval English Literature (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1952).

[11] The Lay Folks' Prayer Book contains prayers for such a purpose, pp. 52-18.

not be considered particularly unusual, considering the primary focus of the work: the General Judgment, which medieval men nonetheless believed to be very near. Since Christ represents a figure of dual functions, a work about the Last Judgment would obviously emphasize the role of the stern judge over that of merciful savior.

The popularity of the work, attested by the fact that over one hundred manuscripts of it have survived,[12] seems to defend the author's hope that the message of the poem would reach to those learned and unlearned of the matter of good and ill. The call for an examination of the conscience is perhaps made even more urgent by the poet's choice to encompass such a scope as reaches from man's humble beginnings to the fifteen signs of Doomsday[13] and the scenes of Heaven and Hell. The urgency of the call for penance is certainly no less central to the mind of the reader as he reads of the awful permanent tortures of Hell and the fierce, stern command of the Judge at the separation of the sheep from the goats.

---

[12]Pantin, p. 230.

[13]Also listed in Cursor Mundi, pp. 1283-99. For a discussion of this popular concept and the textual history of it, see William H. Heist, The Fifteen Signs before Doomsday (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1952).

## II. THE BOOK OF THE CRAFT OF DYING

The various versions of the treatise Ars Moriendi, of which The Book of the Craft of Dying is a translation, can be divided into three distinct areas: the Latin treatise, found under three titles and believed to have been written around 1470; the popular block-books of the Ars Moriendi, depicting the various temptations suffered by a dying man; and the French book, L'Arte de bien Vivre et bien Mourire, unrelated to the block-books and their eleven illustrations.[1] The version with which this thesis is concerned is taken from the Bodleian manuscript which, according to Frances Comper, may have been translated from the Latin work, De arte Moriendi, by Richard Rolle, although he is not considered the author of the original Latin text.[2]

Divided into six chapters, the prose work of The Craft of Dying is directed "not only to lewd men but also to religious and devout persons" (p. 3). Given in the second chapter are the five temptations a dying man can expect to confront at the very moment of death. Although the five temptations encompass either directly or indirectly the Seven Deadly Sins, The Craft of Dying makes no attempt to examine in detail the mortal perils but instead concentrates on "a short manner of exhortation, for teaching and comforting of them that be in point of

---

[1]Comper, p. 49.

[2]Comper, p. 48.

death" (p. 3). This seems to contrast somewhat with the focal points of the poem The Pricke of Conscience. Fear and dread are employed as catalysts of contrition more obviously in The Pricke of Conscience, and the targets of the treatise are clearly more universal in that all men of all ages and physical and mental conditions are exhorted to repent before the Judgment Day. While each work is aimed at the same end--to urge man to examine his soul--The Craft of Dying is more pointedly directed to the man on his deathbed, in no position to risk despair by confronting the dreadful descriptions of Purgatory, Doomsday and Hell. In addition, while The Pricke of Conscience takes some pains to make its message more accessible to those who are not members of the clergy and do not fully comprehend Church doctrine or read Latin, The Craft of Dying offers the following observation:

> This cunning is most profitable of all cunnings, in the which cunning religious men specially, more than other, and every day continually, should study more diligently than other men that they might apprehend it; namely for the state of religion asketh and requireth it more in them than in others (p. 9).

This does not necessarily imply that the religious were in greater need of a speedy repentance, but rather, it indicates the value the writer placed on the clergy as important models and sources of knowledge to the laity. The fact that The Craft of Dying was a translation from a treatise originally written in Latin could explain this difference from The Pricke of Conscience's more direct appeal to the populace.

The Pricke of Conscience and The Craft of Dying differ also in the employed tactics of fear and dread as the first steps in the rebuttal to the devil's temptations. While The Pricke of Conscience may use descriptions of Purgatory, Doomsday and Hell to convince the reader of the urgency of his penance, The Craft of Dying relies on positive reinforcement with the use of lessons in what a dying man should know in order to "die well."[3]

But each treatise strikes a common chord when it states the death of a repentant sinner is not to be feared. In the words of The Craft of Dying,

> Thou shalt understand also that not only the death of holy martyrs is so precious, but also the death of all other rightful and good Christian men; and furthermore the death, doubtless, of all sinful men: how long, and how wicked, and how cursed they have been all their life before, unto their last end that they die in--if they die in the state of very repentance and contrition, and in the very faith, and virtue, and charity of Holy Church--is acceptable and precious in the sight of God (pp. 5-6).

The encouragement offered the sinner is representative of the medieval emphasis on hope. By following the counsel of such manuals, the sinner was assured that there was at least a chance that a merciful judgment could be wrought.

The organization of The Craft of Dying reflects the influence of the instructional manuals for parish priests in that its lessons

---

[3]This is very similar to Henry Suso's fifth chapter of Orologium Sapientiae in which a dying man receives counsel and a vision from Eternal Wisdom. See The Book of the Craft of Dying and Other Tracts, pp. 105-126.

are sometimes directed to the friends or companions of a dying man.[4] Following an introductory first chapter on the value of knowing the art of dying and a second chapter on the principal temptations, the book provides an inventory, questions that should be asked of the dying man while he still retains his reason, if not his senses. The fourth and fifth chapters are similar in that they provide instruction to both a dying man and those that may be gathered about him. The final chapter in the book contains prayers, prefaced with these instructions:

> In these prayers, if thou say them thyself, turn the words that should be turned, as thou shouldest do to say them thyself; for I write them as another should say them for thee (p. 40).

Although the author of The Craft of Dying acknowledges the general belief that the best preparation for death is a life of righteous observance of faith, Church doctrine and scriptural teachings, he has organized the lessons of his book around the need for the sinner to know how to react to the terrible temptations visited upon him at the moment of death. The gravity of this moment was frequently depicted in other works of medieval literature and art. The terrifying prospect of Immediate Judgment was heightened by the possible sudden arrival of death. As Everyman says, "O Death, thou comest when I had thee least in mind!"[5] In The Book of Hours of Rohans, Émile Mâle finds the fateful moment depicted with horror and fear:

---

[4]For example, see John Myrc, Instructions for Parish Priests, ed. Edward Peacock, EETS, 31 (London: Trubner & Co., 1868). Much of the work is in the form of questions to be asked of the penitent.

[5]Everyman, p. 210.

> The dying man lies on his bed, his wife and son beside him, holding him by the hands in an effort to keep him back. But the moribund, rigid with horror, stares before him at something which he alone can see--a tall black mummy which is just entering with a coffin on its shoulder. . . .
> . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
> While the angel and the demon dispute his soul, the wretched man still dares to hope, and a supplication inscribed on a banderole issues from his mouth.[6]

Mirk's Festial also contains a reference to the fight between angels and devils for the soul. The picture is vivid as the reader learns the scene consists of "hys angyll on that syde tellyng hym redely wher and how oft he hathe don amys; on that other syde fendes chalenchyng hym horres as by ryght; vnder hym helle yeonyng and galpyng, and spyttyng fyre and stench redy forto swolon hym ynto the payne that neuer schall haue ende."[7]

The engravings of the versions of Ars Moriendi usually accompanied the dramatic text which is paralleled by the contents of The Book of the Craft of Dying. The artwork was designed to convey the terrible battle the dying man had yet to face. Mâle describes the central theme of such a work:

> Verard's edition opens with a preamble expressing the nameless anguish of the dying man who feels that everything is abandoning him. His senses, by which every joy came to him, "are already closed and locked by the strong and horrible lock of death." A sort of vertigo takes possession of the soul; and this is the tormented hour which the demon has been waiting for. The

---

[6] Mâle, Twelfth to the Eighteenth Century, pp. 141-42.

[7] Mirk's Festial, p. 4.

> dogs of hell which prowl around the dying man's bed attack the Christian more furiously than he has ever been attacked before. If at the ultimate moment he doubts, or despairs, or blasphemes, his soul goes to the enemy.[8]

The grievous temptations, The Craft of Dying points out, are companions of all men to their last moments. The sinner's defense from these torments and the proper reaction to the call of death, even as his last breath is drawn, are skills necessary if one is to die prepared to submit to the account each soul must make. Any one of the five temptations would be enough for a test of courage and steadfastness, but The Craft of Dying reminds the reader that St. Paul gives the best advice for those who need assurance. "God, he saith, is true, and will not suffer you to be tempted more than ye may bear; but He will give you such support in your temptations that ye may bear them" (p. 9).

Just as Everyman discovered that his Five Wits would not accompany him to the grave, the reader of The Craft of Dying is warned that, while his senses may not be trustworthy at the moment of death, "the devil may not noy thee, nor prevail against no man, in no wise, as long as he hath use of his free will, and of reason well disposed" (p. 11). In other words, only man's consent can earn him the damnation the fiends so eagerly promote.

The first temptation confronting the dying man is to abandon his faith. As soon as man begins to doubt the principal articles of faith, he is lost to any healing his soul might gain and falls into the

---

[8] Mâle, Twelfth to the Eighteenth Century, pp. 150-51.

clutches of the devil. The temptation against faith may be worked through deception or superstition, so the sinner is admonished to remember three defenses against doubt. First, the dying man must remember that the devil is a liar and his illusions are not to be dreaded. If a sinner can speak, he is encouraged, "with an high voice oft times to say the Creed before him, that he that is sick may be mortified in stableness of the faith; and fiends that may not suffer to hear it may be voided and driven away from him" (p. 11). Finally, a dying man should recall the faithful departed and the perseverance and steadfastness of their belief, by which nothing is impossible.

Failing to shake the faith of the dying man, the devil will next tempt him to look upon his sinful life and despair. To the medieval mind, the virtue of hope was an essential one for a true penance, for, as The Craft of Dying states, "there is no sin so great but it may be healed, outake despair alone" (pp. 13-12). Yet man can avoid despair if he remembers the mercy of God:

> For though any one man or woman had done as many thefts, or manslaughters, or as many other sins as be drops of water in the sea, and gravel stones in the strand, though he had never done penance for them afore, nor never had been shriven of them before--neither then might have time, for sickness or lack of speech, or shortness of time, to be shriven of them--yet should he never despair; for in such case very contrition of heart within, with will to be shriven if time sufficed, is sufficient and accepted by God for to save him everlastingly (p. 13).

Because of the gravity of the sin of lack of faith in God's mercy and forgiveness, the sinner is reminded of those who were sinful in terrible ways yet did not despair:

> Furthermore, that no sinful man should in no wise despair--have he sinned never so greatly, nor never so sore, nor never so oft, nor never so long continued therein--we have open ensample in Peter that denied Christ; in Paul that pursued Holy Church; . . . in Mary Maudeleyn, the sinful woman; . . . in the thief that hung on the cross beside Christ . . . (p. 15).

Medieval sermons often used these same examples, though sometimes as illustrations of those who were sinful in thought, speech and deed yet trusted in the mercy of God.[9]

The sinner, bound by his faith to love God in all things, is next tempted to consider his sickness and suffering, testing his charity and devotion to God's will. The Craft of Dying reminds the sinner and dying man that complaining even in grievous pain is a sin against God, for "all things that we/suffer, we suffer then rightfully" (p. 16). If a man can retain his charity, then he will later reap a reward, for "sickness before a man's death is as a purgatory to him, when it is suffered as it ought; that is to understand, if it be suffered patiently, gladly, and with a free and a kind will of heart" (p. 17).[10]

If the sinner has persevered thus far, The Craft of Dying warns, he is next tempted with flattery in order that he be tested to withstand a sin of pride.

> For when the devil seeth that he not bring a man out of faith, nor may induce him into despair,

---

[9]See, for example, Middle English Sermons, no. 32, pp. 163-64 and no. 42, p. 275.

[10]This provides an interesting parallel to The Prick of Conscience's concept of Purgatory as a sickness, pp. 82-83.

> neither to impatience, then he assaileth him by complacence of himself, putting such manner temptations in his heart: O how stable art thou in the faith! how strong in hope! how sad in patience! O how many good deeds hast thou done! (p. 18).

The defense against this temptation involves a careful balance of meekness and hope. The sinner must remain humble in remembering his good works and the mercy of God, but at the same time, he cannot let the contemplation of his imperfections drive him to despair. A further warning is similar to that found in Archbishop Thoresby's Lay Folks' Catechism: "Ne we schal not truste so fer in the mercy of god: / that we leue goode dedys un-don."[11] The ideal attitude towards one's chances at everlasting reward can be found in the life of St. Antony, who caused the devil to complain:

> Antony, thou hast overcome me; for when I would have thee up by pride, thou keptest thyself adown by meekness; and when I would draw thee down by desperation, thou keptest thyself up by hope (p. 19).

The final temptation that plagues the dying man is the devil's reminding him of his worldly possessions and friendships. Sins of gluttony, lechery, avarice and sloth face the sinner if he gives in to the temptation to love temporal things more than God. "For he that will die well and surely must utterly and fully put away out of his mind all temporal and outward things, and plenerly commit himself all to God" (p. 20).

---

[11] Archbishop Thoresby, The Lay Folks' Catechism, eds. Thomas F. Simmons and Henry E. Nolloth, EETS, 118 (London: N. Trubner & Co., 1904), p. 79.

Once the author has taught the reader what to expect from the hands of the devil at the final moments of life and how to respond to those challenges, he provides an interrogation which, for one who can respond favorably, would reveal that "he shall be of the number of them that shall be saved" (p. 26). The seven interrogations of Chapter Three are questions concerning the quality of the faith and penance of the dying man, designed to inform and comfort him. Meant for secular and religious men, the questions were for all Christians, that they could be "examined, enquired, and informed, more certainly and clearly, of the state and health of their souls" (p. 24). Bloomfield observes, "the questions, which are often very intimate, show a common sense."[12] They are intended, among other things, to discern whether or not the three ingredients of a good penance (contrition, confession and satisfaction), are present. For a sin to be fully forgiven, it must be recognized and proclaimed as an offense against God and then repented with proper contrition. To this end, the dying man should be questioned, as in The Craft of Dying:

> Art thou sorry in heart of all manner of sins that thou hast done against the high Majesty . . . not only for dread of death, or any other pain, but rather more for love of God and His righteousness--and for thou hast displeased His great goodness and kindness . . . ? (p. 25).

To attain satisfaction for his misdeeds, the sinner must promise to make amends for the wrong committed and swear to never repeat such an offense. A dying man must promise to hold to these commitments should

[12]Bloomfield, p. 210.

he escape the clutch of death, and his willingness to do these things is the all-important aspect of his making a good penance.

While the seven interrogations parallel the five temptations in the previous chapter of the book, they are more specifically designed to help the sinner prepare for the trials described in the temptations. After all, if the reader were a dying man and had survived long enough to read through the five temptations, then the interrogations would give him more to reflect on, strengthening the lessons learned earlier in the book. But, the author states the questions should be asked of the dying "while they have reason with them and their speech. For this cause if any man is not fully disposed to die, he may the better be informed and comforted thereto" (p. 22). The final interrogation of the seven is one which covers the three virtues of faith, hope and charity as well as provides a meditation on the passion of Christ by which "all the devil's temptations and guiles be most overcome and voided" (p. 27).

In a contemplation of Christ's passion on the cross, the sinner is provided with the example of what to do at the moment of death. Man should do the same that Christ did, and He did five things, according to The Craft of Dying's lesson from St. Gregory. First, man should imitate Christ by praying at death. The author quotes St. Isidore who said "that it is better to pray still in the heart, without any sound of voice outward, than to pray with word alone, without devotion of heart" (p. 28). Secondly, man should cry as Christ did, but to desire the forgiveness of his own sins. By weeping, the third act of imitation,

man shows his true repentance. Just as Christ commended his spirit to the Father, medieval man also practiced the phrase to say in heart, if not with his actual voice: "Lord God, into Thine hands I commend my spirit; for truly Thou boughtest me dear" (p. 20).[13] Finally, the fifth imitation of Christ was that man should die willingly and conform to God's wishes by giving up his spirit obediently to God.

Having comforted the reader with the means to meet the five temptations and lessons in how to examine his soul, The Book of the Craft of Dying provides in Chapter Five a serious warning of the peril of the dying man. This warning is intended not just for the sick and dying man, but for all men who are not disposed to die in the grace of God. The primary purpose of this section is to stress the urgent need for man to "provide and procure himself his soul's heal by very contrition and confession" (p. 34). The argument centers around reaching the "many men, through such idle hope and trust, [who] have forslothed themselves, and have died intestate, or unavised, or undisposed, suddenly" (p. 32).

In grave danger is the soul of a sick man, "for often times, as a certain decretal saith, bodily sickness cometh of the sickness of the soul" (p. 32). Too often, warns the author of The Craft of Dying, sick men are comforted with false promises when they should be warned to repent.

---

[13]This occurs most notably in the illustrations of the Rohan Book of Hours. See Boase, p. 118, pl. 102; Evans, et. al., p. 205, pl. 1. The idea that the soul would be a subject for dispute among the devils and angels appears in a variety of artwork, including La Science de bien Mourir, Grimani Breviary and the block-books of Ars Moriendi.

> It is better and more rightful that he be compunctious and repentant, with wholesome fear and dred, and so be saved, than that he be damned with flattering and false dissimulation; for it is too inconvenient and contrary to Christian religion, and too devil-like, that the peril of death and of soul--for any vain dread of a man, lest he were anything distroubled thereby--shall be hid from any Christian man or woman that should die (p. 36).

The Craft of Dying argues that repentance before the handicap of sickness is all the more essential because, in the grip of afflictions, "devotion passeth out from thee" (p. 38). If man is to avoid deception or grievous error, he needs to make his penance while his wits and reason are still with him. Otherwise, warns the author, the sorrow for sins may be more a sorrow of his sickness, and the dread of death mistakenly identified as a fear of God. So important is a good penance before death that the author tries to convey the gravity of the moment of death by saying the dying man is "in such peril and in so great need at that time, that, and it were possible, all a city should come together with all its haste to a man that is nigh to the death or dying" (p. 38).

Concluding The Book of the Craft of Dying are the prayers which may be said by the dying man or by the company gathered about him. Most of the petitions ask that "sweet patience, very repentance, and full remission; with rightful faith, stable hope, and perfect charity" (p. 41) be granted to the dying man. But one or two of the prayers are addressed to seeking the intercession of the Virgin Mary or Archangel Michael in assisting the soul in a safe passage to heaven. But,

assuming the penitent man has lost his powers of speech, the prayers also include the proper pleas for mercy, the recognition by proxy of sinner's belief in the Savior and a commending of his spirit into the hands of God.

A distinctive quality of The Book of the Craft of Dying is the effort it makes to reassure the sinner at the moment of his death. By providing an individual defense for each of the five temptations that the devil makes at the fateful moment and the emphasis on the instructive potential of the interrogations, the treatise seeks to allay the fears of the sinner who is close to death. But, as the reader progresses through the book (perhaps because his proximity to death is not as close as he thought), the literature becomes more aggressive in suggesting that the dangers the soul faces put each dying and healthy man in peril of damnation. While the author is content, in earlier chapters, to discuss the five temptations with a comparatively calm and methodical approach to the means of defense a dying man might have, the tone changes somewhat at the fifth chapter where man is urged to learn the craft of dying with these words:

> In this matter that is of our last and most great need, all manner of points and sentences thereof, and adverbs also that be put thereto, should most subtly and diligently be charged and considered of every man; forasmuch as there shall no man be rewarded for his words alone, but for his deeds also joined and according to his words (p. 37).

The restraint of the early chapters rests in the medieval belief that "to die well is to die gladly and wilfully" (p. 7). A good man, according to the author's quotation from St. Paul, would find comfort

in death. The author's intentions to first comfort the dying man become evident at the end of Chapter One when St. Paul's sentiment is followed by these words: "And thus much sufficeth at this time, shortly said, of the craft and science of dying" (p. 9). A later emphasis on repentance and hasty reform appears as the reader is evidently in less danger of an immediate barrage of temptations against his virtues. The book was obviously meant to be used at the actual deathbed of a person, seen by the shift in emphasis and the instructions such as these which accompany the prayers:

> And if he that is sick can not all these prayers, or may not say them for grievousness or sickness, let some man that is about him say them before him, as he may clearly hear him say them, changing the words that ought to be changed in his saying (p. 31).

> Afterward, if he live yet, let some man that is about him say the orisons that follow hereafter, as the time and opportunity will suffer (p. 39).

More closely resembling the instructional manuals than does The Pricke of Conscience, The Craft of Dying gives less attention to effecting penance through intimidation. The primary purpose of the book is to provide a source of comfort and knowledge for the dying man to use. When that much is accomplished, the audience and purpose shift somewhat to include a wider range of readers with more time to assimilate the message of the urgent need for repentance.

## III. CHAUCER'S "THE PARSON'S TALE"

A tale once described as "undeniably dull,"[1] "The Parson's Tale" has enjoyed increased popularity in the past decades with the recognition of its particularly appropriate placement at the end of the Canterbury Tales. While it was once thought that Chaucer's intentions were satiric in ending the lively and sometimes ribald classic with a treatise on penance, more recent opinion has shifted to point out the unity of the pilgrimage scheme in the Parson's remarks.[2] That Chaucer should assign the final tale to such a devoted and religious character as the Parson and allow the lengthy catalog of the Seven Deadly Sins to culminate a work of arguments, boastings and fabliaux from the other pilgrims is sometimes perplexing to modern readers. However, if one considers the medieval sensitivity to death and the Judgment, an examination of the conscience is entirely appropriate to the culmination of the Tales as well as of the pilgrimage (both real and allegorical) on which the characters travel. Some critics feel Chaucer himself provides support of this religious idea

---

[1]Fred N. Robinson, The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton, 1957), p. 765.

[2]For a more complete discussion on the critics' difference of opinion on the tale's significance, there are a variety of sources to consult. However, a good summary is provided in an article by Rodney Delasanta, "Penance and Poetry in the Canterbury Tales," PMLA, 93 (1978), 240-47.

when he formalizes his penance in his "Retraction."[3] According to Donald Howard, Chaucer "is practicing 'the art of dying,'"[4] when he asks for the mercy of God in forgiving his sins, hoping he may "been oon of hem at the day of doome that shulle be saved" ("Retraction," l. 1092).

"The Parson's Tale" has also been the source of disagreement in defining the exact nature of the Parson's scope, causing the tale to be labeled by some critics as a sermon and by others as a treatise. While H. G. Pfander pointed out the genre as a confessional manual,[5] C. O. Chapman had earlier described the tale as a sermon because of its structure.[6] Most agree, however, that the technical nature of the tale is evidence that the tale did not originate in the work of a layman.[7] French religious manuals, such as Summa de vitiis de virtibus (c. 1250), are thought to be Chaucer's source because of the similarity in structure and content. But, for the poet who bemoans "the lack of

---

[3] The Complete Poetry and Prose of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. John H. Fisher (New York: Rinehart & Winston, 1977), p. 397. All subsequent references to the Canterbury Tales will be taken from this edition and will be made in the text.

[4] Donald Howard, The Idea of the Canterbury Tales (Berkely: Univ. of California Press, 1976), p. 172.

[5] H. G. Pfander, "Some Medieval Manuals of Religious Instruction in England and Observations on Chaucer's Parson's Tale," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 35 (1936), 243-58.

[6] C. O. Chapman, "The Parson's Tale: A Medieval Sermon," Modern Language Notes, 43 (1928), 229-34.

[7] Fisher, "Introduction, Canterbury Tales, Part X," p. 345, and Siegfried Wenzel, "The Seven Deadly Sins: Some Problems of Research," Speculum, 50 (1968), 19.

steadfastnesse,"[8] the literary form of the sermon was no stranger. There are many examples of sermonizing in the Canterbury Tales.[9]

"The Parson's Tale," a discussion of qualities of a good penance, is organized into three divisions: contrition, confession and satisfaction. Included in the part on confession is a lengthy discussion of the Seven Deadly Sins, with some of their related offenses, or "twigges," mentioned briefly. While some readers may feel the 600 lines devoted to the Sins are out of proportion, Delasanta feels the suggestion that the discourse is a digression

> bespeaks an ignorance of the process of sacramental confession. On the contrary, the so-called digression is perfectly related to the tract on confession, the instrumental cause of which is mortal sin--and all its works. The old scholastic distinction between material and formal sin applies here. To quicken the pilgrims' consciences into formal awareness of their own specific sinfulness, the Parson must first remind them what it is that materially constitutes serious sin.[10]

The character of the Parson is perhaps the best indication of Chaucer's seriousness with his subject matter in this particular tale. Described as an ideal Christian, the Parson is first an example to his congregation and later a preacher.

---

[8] "The Lack of Steadfastnesse," Poetry and Prose of Chaucer, p. 701.

[9] See Chapman, and Susan Gallick, "A Look at Chaucer and His Preachers," Speculum, 50 (1975), 456-76, who hold that this and other Canterbury Tales are modeled from sermons.

[10] Delasanta, "Penance and Poetry," p. 242.

> This noble ensample to his sheep he yaf,
> That first he wroghte, and afterward he taughte.
> Out of the gospel he tho wordes caughte,
> And this figure he added eek therto,
> That if gold ruste, what shal iren do?
> For if a preest be foul, on whom we truste,
> No wonder is a lewed man to ruste.
> ("The Prologue," ll. 496-502)

During the entire pilgrimage, there is no account of the Parson performing a charitable act. At the same time, as observed by Donald Howard, it is significant that the Parson does no unkindly deed, either. "It appears that Chaucer meant to leave the real Parson in the background."[11] In this, Chaucer is being true to the character of the Parson. Trevor Whittock sees "The Parson's Tale" as a tale consistent with the Parson's image:

> How would the Parson's character emerge in any sermon he preached? Surely scarcely at all, for the Parson's character at such a moment would be to be without character: he would surrender his own personality, pursuing selflessly the performance of his calling. The teaching would be everything. Therefore the sermon he preached must be a genuine sermon: one that can be attended to without thought of the man delivering it.[12]

When the Host calls for a tale from the Parson, the exemplary preacher promises to "telle a myrie tale in prose / To knytte up al this feeste and make an end" ("Prologue of the Parson's Tale," ll. 46-47). His tale, he promises, will show his listeners the way on

[11]Howard, p. 379.

[12]Trevor Whittock, A Reading of the Canterbury Tales (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1968), p. 294.

a pilgrimage to the celestial city, Jerusalem. Then begins the treatise on a good penance and the lessons one must learn to make a good confession.

In most medieval preaching on the necessity for a true penance, the preacher could rely on the horrors of Hell as his most effective oratorical weapon, followed by a Doomsday account and warnings of the strict judgment yet to come.[13] "The Parson's Tale" does not omit these essential elements, nor does it attempt to induce a hasty reform in its listeners. Beyond this, however, what the Parson delivers is a careful instruction of the meaning of penance, stressing the importance of comprehension of the tenets of the faith.

The concept of penance and confession is first introduced in the Prologue of the tale when Chaucer refers to the sign of Libra in line 11. Delasanta holds that by doing this, Chaucer deliberately evokes the image of the scales, the sign of Libra, and reminds the reader that the Judgment is near.[14] That the Parson sees the need for reform in the Canterbury pilgrims can be seen in his encouragement to them to seek the righteous path. As the Parson quotes Jeremiah 6:16, his listeners may be reminded of the original purpose of their journey:

---

[13]Owst, Preaching, p. 336. Mirk's Festial, and John Bromyard's Summa Predecantium also contain good examples of this strategy.

[14]Rodney Delasanta, "Theme of Judgment in the Canterbury Tales," Modern Language Quarterly, 31 (1970), 304.

> Stondeth upon the weyes and seeth and axeth of
> olde pathes (that is to seyn, of olde sentences)
> which is the goode wey; / and walketh in that
> wey, and ye shal fynde refresshynge for youre
> soules, &c.
>
> (ll. 76-77)

After the penitential system of the Church had become well defined after the Fourth Lateran Council, the idea of a pilgrimage was endorsed as one means of accepted penance. The original concept of the pilgrimage as penance was based on the idea that such undertakings held "adequate punishments inflicted for certain crimes. The hardships of the journey, the penitential garb worn, the mendicity it entailed made a pilgrimage a real and efficient penance."[15] While the trip was intended to be a purging of sins, the pilgrims often had their minds elsewhere. For the Canterbury pilgrims, the Parson's words were a reminder of the purpose of their trip.[16]

The Parson emphasizes penance as the one way to reach the destination in a celestial pilgrimage. His straightforward discourse on the nature of penance is complex and thorough.[17] In discussing the three necessary ingredients of a good penance, the Parson provides a means for his audience to adequately prepare themselves to reinstitute the grace of god into their lives.

---

[15] "Pilgrimages," The Catholic Encyclopedia, XII, p. 85.

[16] For a discussion on sociological and psychological motivations in making a pilgrimage during the Middle Ages, see Victor Turner's essay, "Death and the Dead in the Pilgrimage Process," in Religious Encounters with Death, eds. Frank E. Reynolds and Earle H. Waugh (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 24-39.

[17] Whittock, p. 290.

The first condition of a good penance is that the sinner be sorry for his sins. In order to be properly contrite, the sinner is warned by the Parson that contrition involves a variety of reactions. First, the sinner must regret his consenting to the temptation of the devil and resolve that his sin will be confessed and not repeated. In this warning, the Parson makes it clear, as did the previous pieces of penitential literature we examined, that sorrow for sins is not enough by itself. Man must earn forgiveness through an acknowledgement and amendment of his sins:

> And right so as contricion availleth noght withouten sad purpos of shrifte, if man have opportunitee, right so litel worth is shrifte or satisfaccioun withouten contricoun.
> ("The Parson's Tale," l. 309)

Like other works on penance, "The Parson's Tale" discusses the motivations of true contrition. The six causes of contrition are the memory of sins, the belief that a sinner is a subject of the devil, Doomsday, good deeds left undone, the Passion of Christ, and the hope of forgiveness, the gift of grace and the attainment of eternal reward. The Parson discusses these in fairly equal proportion, placing no undue emphasis on Doomsday to take advantage of the persuasive power of fear. He just as carefully explains the sorrow man will feel when he contemplates the Passion or sins of omission.

The second part of "The Parson's Tale" provides a lesson in confession. This section consists of an explanation of the nature of sin and a complete definition of the types of deadly sin. The Parson's

concern centers around providing for his audience an explanation of the identifying characteristics of sin, seeking to educate rather than intimidate his listeners.

Naturally, if man is to avoid sin, then he must know where it comes from. What Robertson observes about Handlyng Synne can also be said of "The Parson's Tale:"

> Mannyng wished to attract the uneducated laymen from their profane conviviality and to teach them to recognize the true character of actions which they had not thought to be sinful. . . . Mannyng wished to have readers recognize their sins, but such recognition was a necessary preliminary to confession.[18]

Although the Parson aimed his comments at a more educated group, the concept is the same. The Parson patiently details the origin of sin and provides a definition of sin as a death. Through the original sin of Adam and Eve, the Parson states, all men were born into sin. But, in order to know how to avoid deadly sin, man should remember the qualities possessed in deadly sin. According to the Parson, even the very first sin of man had these qualities:

> There may ye seen that deedly synne hath first suggestion of the feend, as sheweth here by the naddre; and afterward, the delit of the flessh, as sheweth heere by Eve; and after that, the consentynge of resoun, as sheweth heere by Adam.
> (l. 331)

Fleshly desire, or "concupiscence" in man makes him more willing to listen to the devil's temptation and, in the supposed words of the devil,

---

[18]D. W. Robertson, Jr., "The Cultural Tradition of Handlyng Synne," Speculum, 22 (1947), 166.

once "my lust shal been accompliced in delit, I wol drawe my swerd in consentyinge" ("The Parson's Tale," l. 335).

The Parson differentiates the two types of sin, venial and deadly, for his listeners, but warns of the grave danger of either one with the following example:

> A greet wawe of the see comth somtyme with so greet a violence that it drencheth the shipe. And the same harm dooth somtyme the smale dropes of water that entren thurgh a litel crevace into the thurrok, and into the botme of the shipe, if men be so necligent that they ne descharge hem not bytyme. / And therefore, although ther be a difference bitwixe thise two causes of drenchynge, algates the shipe is dreynt. / Right so fareth it somtyme of deedly synne, and of anoyouse veniale synnes, what they multiplie in a man so greetly that thilke worldly thynges that he loveth, thurgh whiche he synneth venyally, is as greet in his herte as the love of God, or moore.
> (ll. 363-65)

When man loves the world and its goods more than he does God, he is guilty of a deadly sin. In order that the medieval man could recognize the commission of such a sin, he had to be aware of all the subtleties of his offense. "The Parson's Tale" with its central discussion of the Seven Deadly Sins was derived from literature which carefully identified the character of such sin in order for its readers to make as complete a confession as possible.[19] For example, the sin of Pride has, according to the Parson, a "nombre of twigges," which included "inobedience, avauntyng, ypocrisie, despite, arrogance,

---

[19] A complete confession was considered absolutely essential to making a good penance. All three works studied in this paper mention the importance of confessing all the sins one has committed: otherwise, the penitent commits a further and more serious offense.

inpudence, swellynge of herte, insolence, elacioun, inpacience, strif, contumacie, presumpcioun, irreverence, pertinacie, veyne glorie and many other twig that I kan not declare" (ll. 390-91).

Of the Seven Deadly Sins which are listed, (Pride, Envy, Anger, Sloth, Greed, Gluttony and Lechery), medieval men had plenty of opportunity to incur some guilt. Among the Canterbury pilgrims alone, one can find numerous examples of the very sins the Parson describes as "spryngers of alle other synnes" (l. 386). When one considers the greed evident in the behavior of the Monk, Friar and Pardoner, or the pride of dress found in the Wife of Bath, the list of offenses is just begun. The tales told by the company are representative of even more vices the Parson warns against. A case has been made for the theory that Chaucer's entire Canterbury Tales are attempts to embody the Seven Deadly Sins as the central point.[20] However, as Fisher states, "the variety of the Canterbury Tales cannot be compressed into this or any other unified scheme. In the Middle Ages, the Seven Deadly Sins were spectacles through which human behavior was observed, just as we observe it through the spectacles of behaviorism or Freudianism."[21]

The accompanying virtues to the Seven Deadly Sins suggest to the audience the best way to remedy the damage done to their souls when

---

[20]Frederick Tupper made such a case in "Chaucer and the Seven Deadly Sins," PMLA, 29 (1914), 93-128, but John Livingston Lowes disputed this in "Chaucer and the Seven Deadly Sins," PMLA, 30 (1915), 237-371. Lowes feels the Canterbury Tales are representative of a wider perspective of medieval life.

[21]Fisher, "Introduction, Part X," p. 345.

they fall victim to the Sins. Although the Parson does not lecture to specific pilgrims, the reader can easily correspond the lack of a particular virtue with some of the actions among the traveling company. For example, the marriage argument and the dispute over women's sovereignty comes easily to mind when the Parson discusses the remedy to lechery.[22]

> Now comth how that a man sholde bere hym with his wyf, and namely in two thynges, that is to seyn in suffraunce an reverence, as shewed Crist whan he made first womman. / For he ne made hire nat of the heved of Adam, for she sholde nat clayme to greet lordshipe. / For ther as the womman hath the maistrie, she maketh to much desray. Ther neden none ensamples of this; the experience of day by day oght suffise.
>
> (ll. 925-27)

After the Parson has provided enough instruction that the reader should be able to both acknowledge and recognize his sins, essential points in the process in a good penance, the next concern is to teach the proper way to make a confession of the offense. While The Craft of Dying mentioned two types of confession, confession of heart and confession of mouth, "The Parson's Tale" is concerned only with the confession of mouth, or telling of sins to a priest.

The Parson indicates that a sinner must consider not only his sins but also the circumstances in which they were committed, for these are conditions which intensify or "agreggeth muchel every synne"

---

[22] Siegfried Wenzel, "Chaucer and the Language of Contemporary Preaching," Studies in Philology, 73 (1976), 134.

(l. 959). In addition, for a true confession, there must exist five conditions in the sinner. He must feel shame and be humble, be tearful yet not inhibited by his shame or embarrassment, and finally, he must be willing to accept the penance or reparation assigned to his sins.

Similar to other works about penance, "The Parson's Tale" is also insistent on a hasty confession, or one that is not delayed for any reason.[23] Perhaps anticipating the reaction of some of his listeners, the Parson carefully explains the danger of procrastination in repenting. The longer a man lies in deadly sin, he explains, the nearer he comes to damnation. If a sinner waits to repent, he may be caught with the unshrift sin by an unexpected death. Furthermore, the hesitancy to confess can be fatal if one puts it off to be done on his deathbed.

> And if he abide to his laste day, scarsly may he shryven hym or remembre hym of his synnes or repenten hym for the grevous maladie of his deeth. / And for as muche as he ne hath nat in his lyf herkned to Jesu Crist at his laste day and scarsly wol he herkne hym.
> (ll. 1000-01)

The Parson's warnings about the actual telling of the sins is more explicit in defining the correct attitude of the sinner than are similar warnings in The Book of the Craft of Dying or The Pricke of Conscience. Conditions stipulating that the confession be of the sinner's free will, given to a lawful priest of the Church and directed

---

[23] "The Parson's Tale" closely follows the text of The Book of Vices and Virtues in discussing how to "shrive oneself properly," p. 173ff.

thoroughly and honestly at only the penitent's sins and no one else's are carefully spelled out in the final lines of the section on confession.

To amend the misdeeds he has done, the sinner is told in "The Parson's Tale" that the primary means of satisfaction for sin are good deeds and bodily pain. The good deeds are works of charity which are especially valuable, because "Of thise werkes shaltow heren at the day of doome" (l. 1032). But the deeds must not be boasted of, for "thow shalt not forbere to doon almesse though men seen it; so that it be not doon for thank of the world, but oonly for thank of Jesu Crist" (l. 1034). Bodily pain in fasting, abstinence and in wearing of such garments as a hair shirt are further means of atonement for sin. But the sinner is again warned to remain virtuous in his satisfaction of sin. The Parson particularly speaks about the danger of losing one's perspective in subjection of the flesh:

> But war thee wel that swiche manere penaunces on
> thy flessh ne make thee nat bitter or angry or
> anoyed of thyself. For bettre is to caste away
> thyn heyre than for to caste away the sikernesse
> of Jesu Crist.
>
> (l. 1052)

As a final encouragement to the sinner for making a good penance, the Parson quickly dispels the usual reasonings of man which interfere with his making a good penance. Man should not dread having to do penance in the form of bodily pain since if he puts off repenting for this reason, the pain of Hell will be much worse. Secondly, man should not trust so greatly in God's mercy that he believes he will

either live a long life or escape punishment of his sins. "For thilke perpetueel wil to do synne shul they han perpetueel peyne" (l. 1068). Against the despair in God's mercy, the sinner is advised to remember "that the passion of Jesu Crist is moore strong for to unbynde than synne is strong for to bynde" (l. 1071). Finally, for sinners who despair in their own strength to resist temptation, they are reminded that the work of the devil will not succeed unless man consents to temptation.

Just as contrition begins with remembrance of sin, so the Parson has reminded the pilgrims of their sins.[24] The act of penance has already begun if any of the readers of the tale recognize their own wrongdoings, and the Parson has accomplished all of this with a careful and purposeful instruction. In the midst of the chaotic life represented by the Canterbury Tales, such manuals, whether they be of penance or of the sacraments, brought an ordering influence to the life of those who encountered them, attempting to understand the laws set down by the invisibilia Dei.[25] While "The Parson's Tale" is not personal in directing its advice to any specific sinners, it is relevant in that it reminds its readers, whether they be medieval or modern men, of the truly human quality of life which teaches us that no one is perfect and everyone has room for reform. The attitude of this manual of penance differs markedly from the tone of either The Book of the Craft of

---

[24] Howard, p. 380.

[25] D. W. Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1962), p. 173.

Dying or The Pricke of Conscience. Perhaps because it was directed to an audience of learned rather than lewd men and because it was incorporated into a complex network of tales of less explicitly didactic interests, the tale has a calm and patient tone that contrasts so clearly with the terrible threats of damnation in The Pricke of Conscience or the awful sense of urgency in The Craft of Dying. One should also remember that Chaucer's work was much later than the original manuals of this kind and came a half century after The Pricke of Conscience. Even if Chaucer translated his material from a source contemporary with the earlier treatises, he had the advantage of writing for an audience more familiar with the concept of an instructional manual.

One thing is certain: Chaucer exhibits in "The Parson's Tale" that he is not apart from the age regarding death and judgment. Indeed, the pervasive preoccupation with death in the Middle Ages is evidenced at all levels, literary, intellectual and religious, by the presence of the enormous quantity of work instructing men on how to die with their souls prepared to bypass the harsh sentence of Hell. It is difficult for a man of the twentieth century to appreciate the intensity and earnestness with which the questions of the Judgment were pursued more than a thousand years ago. While we may attempt to interpret the fervor of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as a preoccupation with death, at the same time, we should be conscious of the paradoxical quality of medieval thought. Medieval men firmly believed in the superiority of

the life of the spirit and the rewards of the afterworld, and their focus on attaining that bliss was both a concern of "dying well" and living virtuously.[26] Or, as stated by Heiko Oberman: "Just as the horror of death reflected a new amor vitae, so the ars bene moriendi became an inverted ars bene vivendi."[27]

Each of the three works I have examined has a distinctive approach to the subject of penance. The Pricke of Conscience, directed at the uneducated laity, sought to intimidate the reader with terrifying accounts of Hell, Purgatory and Doomsday. Believing that fear of God was the sprout of wisdom, the writer spends much of his time discussing reasons to fear either death or judgment. The audience of such a work was probably intrigued by the vivid descriptions and thorough account of Doomsday. It is not unlikely that the work held an attraction similar to modern day disaster and horror films. The Book of the Craft of Dying offered a less panoramic view of the Judgment and deals almost entirely with the Immediate Judgment rather than Doomsday. Hence the emphasis of this book is on preparation rather than fear. The urgency of the author's plea is more evident as the reader advances through the work, indicating that The Craft of Dying was intended for the immediate concerns of the dying man and could serve a secondary function of instructing healthy men on how to right their lives. Of all three works, "The Parson's Tale," written for a later and more

---

[26] Tuchman, p. xix.

[27] Heiko Oberman, "Fourteenth Century Religious Thought: A Premature Profile," Speculum, 53 (1978), 93.

educated audience of laymen, offers the least aggressive but most intellectual discussion of the values of penance. The Parson neither threatens, as Pricke of Conscience does, nor seeks primarily to comfort, as Craft of Dying does. Instead, the Parson's approach could be termed argumentative and instructive. Although each work may have a unique narrowed theme on which to base its central message, the basic intentions are in accord. Each piece of literature depicts penance as the foremost skill in the art of dying well. This concern over the Judgment is virtually universal in not only these three treatises, but also in the literature and art of the later centuries of the Middle Ages. What little comfort there was to be found probably was found in the search for a defense to the attack of Satan and his lure to sin. The literature of confession and penance offered such a defense, although it may seem feeble by modern standards. Such works had a sustained popularity, and many of the modern concepts of Judgment were fathered by the art and literature of this time. That such an intriguing question should offer such a total and lasting response from the medieval minds is a phenomenon that modern men are only slowly discovering.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WORKS CITED

### A. Medieval Works


The Book of the Craft of Dying and Other Early English Tracts Concerning Death. Ed. and trans. Frances M. M. Comper. London, 1917; rpt. New York: Arno Press, 1977.

The Book of Vices and Virtues. Ed. W. Nelson Francis. EETS, 217. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1942.

The Chester Plays. Ed. Hermann Deimling and Dr. Matthews. EETS, E.S., 62 & 115. 1892 & 1916; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1959.

The Complete Poetry and Prose of Geoffrey Chaucer. Ed. John H. Fisher. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1977.

Cursor Mundi. Ed. Richard Morris. Pt. IV. EETS, 66. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1877.

The Dance of Death. Ed. Florence Warren. Notes by Beatrice White. EETS, 181. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1931.

Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays. Ed. A. C. Cawley. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1959.

The Prymer or Lay Folks' Prayer Book. Ed. Henry Littlehales. EETS, 105. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1895.

Ludus Conventriae or The Plaie Called Corpus Christi. Ed. K. S. Block, EETS, E.S., 120. 1922; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1960.

Middle English Sermons. Ed. Woodburn O. Ross. EETS, 209. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1940.

Mirk, John. Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies. Ed. Theodor Erbe. EETS, E.S., 96. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1905.

Myrc, John. Instructions for Parish Priests. Ed. Edward Peacock. EETS, 31. London: Trubner & Co., 1868.

The Pricke of Conscience. Ed. Richard Morris. London: Asher & Co. for The Philological Society, 1865.

Robert of Brunne's "Handlyng Synne." Ed. Frederick J. Furnivall. EETS, 119. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1901.

Thoresby, Archbishop. The Lay Folks' Catechism. Ed. Thomas F. Simmons and Henry E. Nolloth. EETS, 118. London: N. Trubner & Co., 1904.

The Townley Plays. Ed. George England. Intro. Alfred Pollard. EETS, E.S., 71. 1897; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966.

The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer. Ed. Fred N. Robinson. 2nd ed. Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton, 1957.

York Plays. Ed. Lucy Toulmin Smith. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885.

B. Modern Works

Bloomfield, M. W. The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature. East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1952.

Boase, Thomas S. R. Death in the Middle Ages: Morality, Judgment and Remembrance. London: Thames & Hudson, 1972.

Brandon, S. G. F. The Judgment of the Dead. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967.

The Catholic Encyclopedia. Ed. Charles G. Heberman, et. al. 1907; rpt. New York: The Encyclopediae Press, 1913.

Chapman, C. O. "The Parson's Tale: A Medieval Sermon." Modern Language Notes, 43 (1928), 229-34.

Delasanta, Rodney. "Penance and Poetry in the Canterbury Tales." PMLA, 93 (1978), 240-47.

__________. "Theme of Judgment in the Canterbury Tales." Modern Language Quarterly, 31 (1970), 298-307.

Evans, Joan, ed. et. al. The Flowering of the Middle Ages. London: Thames & Hudson, 1966.

Gallick, Susan. "A Look at Chaucer and His Preachers." Speculum, 50 (1975), 456-76.

Heist, William H. The Fifteen Signs Before Doomsday. East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1952.

Howard, Donald. The Idea of the Canterbury Tales. Berkely: Univ. of California Press, 1976.

Hughes, Robert. Heaven and Hell in Western Art. New York: Stein & Day, 1968.

Lowes, John Livingston. "Chaucer and the Seven Deadly Sins." PMLA, 30 (1915) 237-371.

MacCulloch, J. A. Medieval Faith and Fable. London, 1932; rpt. Folcraft, Pa.: Folcraft Library Editions, 1973.

Mâle, Émile. The Gothic Image. Trans. Dora Nussey. 1913; rpt. New York: Harper & Row, 1958.

__________. Religious Art in France: The Twelfth Century. Trans. Marthiel Mathews. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press for Bolligen Series, 40, 1978.

__________. Religious Art from the Twelfth to the Eighteenth Century. New York: Farrar, Straus & Co., 1949.

Oberman, Heiko A. "Fourteenth Century Religious Thought: A Premature Profile." Speculum, 53 (1978), 80-93.

Owst, George R. Literature and the Pulpit in Medieval England. 1933; rpt. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966.

__________. Preaching in Medieval England: An Introduction to Sermon Manuscripts of the Period c. 1350-1450. New York: Russell & Russell, 1965.

Pantin, William A. The English Church in the Fourteenth Century. 1955; rpt. Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1963.

Pfander, H. G. "Some Medieval Manuals of Religious Instruction in England and Observations on Chaucer's Parson's Tale." Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 35 (1936), 245-53.

Robertson, Jr., D. W. "Cultural Tradition of Handlyng Synne." Speculum, 22 (1947), 162-185.

__________. A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1962.

Tristram, Philippa. Figures of Life and Death in Medieval English Literature. New York: New York Univ. Press, 1976.

Tuchman, Barbara W. A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous Fourteenth Century. New York: Random House, 1978.

Tupper, Frederick. "Chaucer and the Seven Deadly Sins." PMLA, 29 (1914), 93-128.

Turner, Victor. "Death and the Dead in the Pilgrimage Process." In Religious Encounters with Death, pp. 24-39. Eds. Frank E. Reynolds and Earle H. Waugh. University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1977.

Weakland, John E. "Pope John XXII and the Beatific Vision Controversy." Annuale Mediaevale, 9 (1968), 76-84.

Wenzel, Siegfried. "Chaucer and the Language of Contemporary Preaching." Studies in Philology, 73 (1976), 138-61.

__________. "The Seven Deadly Sins: Some Problems of Research." Speculum, 43 (1968), 1-22.

Whittock, Trevor. A Reading of the Canterbury Tales. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1968.