

Sense and Sin:
The Perils of the Body and the Path to Salvation
as Taught by Robert Mannyng in *Handlyng Synne*

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Eschatology – the study of the four last things: death, judgement, hell and heaven – pervades Robert Mannyng’s *Handlyng Synne*,¹ exploring intersections of sacred and secular, and incursions of the marvellous into the mundane. For the medieval mind, the actions and activities of daily life, whether voluntary or involuntary, were inseparably linked with notions of reward and punishment in the afterlife, a state in which the sensory experiences of life in this world were believed to be somehow still felt by the souls of the departed. When the faithful attended weekly Mass they would, in many parish churches, be reminded graphically of how the deeds of this life would be dealt with in the next, for there in front of them, usually on the arch dividing nave from chancel, would be a large and graphic picture of the Doom – the Last Judgement when Christ would come on the clouds of heaven and take the good to heaven, but banish the wicked to hell. (Figure 1) Coupled with this necessary contemplation of the four last things, a melancholy activity that lent connotations of the ominous to the very word ‘doom’, was an openness to and delight in the marvellous.

In order to help people lead their lives in such a way as to avoid hell and achieve heaven, escape pain and achieve bliss, the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 laid down a ‘curriculum’ of basic instruction for all Christians and prescribed the duty of annual confession to the parish priest.² This required

¹ The editions used for this paper are: Robert Mannyng of Brunne, *Handlyng Synne*, ed. Idelle Sullens (Binghampton: Medieval and Renaissance Text and Studies, 1983), and Robert Mannyng and Frederick J. Furnivall, *Robert of Brunne’s “Handlyng Synne”, AD 1303, with Those Parts of the Anglo-French Treatise in which it was Founded, William of Waddington’s “Manuel Des Pechiez”*, EETS o. s. 119, 123 (London: Kegan Paul Trench Trubner, 1901).

² These precepts were grounded in the catechetical theology developed by the Parisian Masters such as Peter Lombard, Peter Comestor and Peter Cantor, and some English bishops had already begun to develop their local teaching ordinances even before the Council laid down its norms. Fritz Kemmler, “*Exempla*” in *Context: A Historical and*

detailed knowledge of what was sin, and thirteenth and early fourteenth-century pastors drew up manuals of instruction to inform parish priests and help them carry out their duty of hearing confession.³ The two commandments of the Gospel, love God and love thy neighbour, and the Ten Commandments, were not explicit enough as they stood. They required interpretation in terms of everyday living.



Figure 1: the Doom painting at St Peter's Church, Wenhaston, Suffolk, England.
Photograph by the author

Handlyng Synne is a rhymed vernacular manual, written around 1303 by Robert Mannyng of Brunne (Bourne) in Lincolnshire, who translated, em-

Critical Study of Robert Mannyng of Brunne's "Handlyng Synne", Studies and Texts in English 6 (Tübingen: Narr, 1984), 28.

³ There are many studies of the English Synodalia upon which the *Manuel* and *Handlyng Synne* are based. A useful synthesis is found in Kemmler, "Exempla", 28-34. Other studies of the manuals of instruction for the clergy in the thirteenth century include: Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); F. M. Powicke, *Councils & Synods: with Other Documents Relating to the English Church: A.D. 1205-1313* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964); Leonard E. Boyle, *Pastoral Care, Clerical Education and Canon Law, 1200-1400* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1981).

bellished and expanded an Anglo-French original, the *Manuel des Pechiez*. This had been composed around 1260, following closely on the promulgation of the catechetical programme for the laity which had been formulated for local English Churches in the wake of Lateran IV, around 1237-39, by Alexander Stavensby, Robert Grosseteste and their episcopal circle of friends.⁴ As a vernacular text, the *Manuel* was rapidly copied and disseminated; there are twenty-five copies extant, some dating from well into the fifteenth century.⁵ Mannyng, a Gilbertine canon based first at Sempringham and later at Sixhills,⁶ was important in the growing development of religious writing in the vernacular but, unlike the writer of the *Manuel*, he wrote for lay people, and not in French, but in English.⁷ Writing in 1303, Mannyng may have been mindful of the 1281 Council of Lambeth scheme of instruction for the laity, *De informatione simplicium*, better known by its opening words *Ignorantia Sacerdotum*, which was to be expounded in the vernacular to parishioners four times in the year. His writing, which includes exempla as well as straight didactic teaching, suggests that he was a natural teacher, and may have had the role of Novice Master, or Guest Master at Sempringham Priory,⁸ though a different theory by Michael Stephenson suggests that he held the role of Priest Confessor to both nuns and canons.⁹ In any of these cases he would have been responsible for teaching the laity, and *Handling Synne* is evidence that he had a sophisticated grasp of theological as well as pastoral issues, with the literary skills to communicate them to his lay audience.

This article will examine the role of the exempla within the work, and in particular, some of the ways in which Mannyng's exempla, and those of the *Manuel* on which it is based, link the mundane with the supernatural as they interpret concepts of punishment and reward, sin and mercy, good works and redemption, heaven and hell. I will preface an examination of four exempla with some theoretical considerations about the development of doctrines that underlie both the didactic sections and the exempla used to illuminate the teaching points. Several critics have commented on a perceived tension between what the didactic sections of the work propose and what the exempla seem to imply;

⁴ Kemmler, "Exempla", 30-32.

⁵ Matthew Sullivan, "A brief Textual History of the 'Manuel des Péchés'," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 93 (1992): 337-46.

⁶ Brian Golding, *Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertine Order, c. 1130-c. 1300* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

⁷ For discussion on this subject see Anne M. Scott, "'For lewed men y vndyr toke on englyssh tonge to make this boke": *Handlyng Synne* and English didactic writing for the laity,' in *What Nature Does Not Teach*, ed. Juanita Feros Ruys (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 377-400.

⁸ Joyce Coleman, "Handling Pilgrims: Robert Mannyng and the Gilbertine Cult," *Philological Quarterly* 81 (2002): 311-26, surveys sources that suggest Mannyng was Novice master, but argues cogently for his role as guest-master for pilgrims.

⁹ Michael Stephenson, "Further Biographical Notes on Robert Mannyng of Brunne," *Notes and Queries* 45 (1998): 284-85.

Ganim, for example, suggests that the power of the inset narratives destabilises the moralising framework.¹⁰ Cannon claims that the exempla are nodes for a profound theological education, and that the point of the exemplum is often at some distance from the point of the pastoral teaching.¹¹ In this article, I shall argue, with Cannon, that the exempla are a demanding form of teaching tool, integral to the didactic intention of the work, and that they require the audience to apply sophisticated levels of interpretation in order to gain the full import of teaching which is sometimes only obliquely connected to the didactic part of the text.¹² This is particularly noticeable in those exempla that deal with the intervention of the supernatural in everyday affairs, and it is here that the instrumentality of the senses comes vividly into play. For the poem is concerned with ‘Handlyng Synne’, and while the didactic sections about the ten commandments, the seven deadly sins, the sin of sacrilege, the seven sacraments, and finally, the twelve points and twelve graces of shrift – confession – give clear direction as to species, types and occasions of sin, it is in the exempla that sin is portrayed as a sensory, whole-person experience, with which the audience is invited to identify. Using stories drawn from time-honoured sources such as the Dialogues of Gregory the Great, Bede’s *History of the English People*, the *Vitas Patrum*, Scripture, and folk narratives, many of which are derived from the exempla collected by Jacques de Vitry¹³ to illustrate its teaching, the work sets out to inform lay people how they must conduct their lives on earth in order to become eligible for heaven.

While the work, as a didactic piece, is anchored in the culture and theology of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, the tales,¹⁴ which derive from sources varying widely in time and geographical origin, carry resonances of cultures other than that of late medieval England. The didactic sections are down-to-earth, comprehensive discussions of doctrine and morality relating to the here and now of Mannyng’s Lincolnshire audience and readers, but the mode of the tales is to invoke the otherworldly or the marvellous, working out in narrative form complex issues that reflect theological debates concerning heaven and hell, body and soul, the nature of sin, the sensory suffering of those who die in sin, and the power of the sacraments. Throughout

¹⁰ John Ganim, *Chaucerian Theatricality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 26.

¹¹ Christopher Cannon, “Form,” in *Middle English: Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature*, ed. Paul Strohm (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 185-87.

¹² “Their very awkwardness is a method for arming the potential sinner with a set of narrative experiences that will not only teach him the content of wrong belief, but will help him to resist it.” Cannon, “Form,” 187.

¹³ *The Exempla or Illustrative Stories from the Sermones Vulgares of Jacques de Vitry*, ed. Thomas Crane (New York: Burt Franklin, 1890).

¹⁴ Mannyng uses the term ‘tale’ for his exempla, and I use it interchangeably with ‘exempla’ in my discussion of his tales.

the 66 tales, the mechanisms for achieving repentance and forgiveness reflect differing concepts of sin, whether and how sin can be expiated in this life, or, if not, what is to happen in an afterlife which is often imagined as intensifying the sensory experiences of pain or delight that belong to the temporal world. Peter Brown¹⁵ argues that the changes in concepts of sin, forgiveness and the afterlife from late antiquity to the early medieval period reflect thought patterns that derive from the cultures in which they are expressed. This argument supports my view that the fourteenth-century English audience is invited to make an imaginative leap in order to process the didactic material alongside the moral and theological points worked out in the exempla; for the exempla lock the reader into a vision of Christian beliefs which stretch back to the earliest times in the church's history, and portray aspects of culture and belief sometimes apparently at variance with the teaching being promulgated in the didactic sections. This tension leads to an awareness of the work as a cultural artefact which raises, for the modern reader, interesting questions about what the medieval reader and audience might have done with the material as they grappled with their own need for purgation and redemption.

Handlyng Synne and its direct source, the Anglo-Norman *Manuel des Pechiez*, are latecomers to the tradition of the penitentials which had developed in ancient Irish and Germanic communities as systems of discipline and control; rules governing behaviour and tariffs of punishment for breaches of conduct were drawn in detail to cover every aspect of a person's life. The old penitentials had been concerned to establish social control and moral discipline in primitive and barbarous societies and worked alongside secular law in prescribing penances. For example, the *Penitential of Theodore*, 668-690, in its section on Manslaughter, says: 'If one slays a man in revenge for a relative, he shall do penance as a murderer for seven or ten years. However, if he will render to the relatives the legal price, the penance shall be lighter, that is, [it shall be shortened] by half the time.'¹⁶ A *Book of David*, c 500-525, gives some indication of the penitential tariff to be attributed to particular sins:

10. The saints of old decreed that a bishop should do penance for twenty-four years for capital sins; a presbyter, twelve; a deacon, seven; and a virgin, a reader, and a monk, the same; but a layman, four years.

11. Now, however, the penance of a presbyter, a deacon, a sub-deacon or a virgin who falls, as well as of anyone who puts a man to death, who commits fornication with beasts or with his sister or with another's wife, or who plans to slay a man with poisons, is three years. During the first

¹⁵ Peter Brown, "The Decline of the Empire of God: Amnesty, Penance and the Afterlife from late Antiquity to the Middle Ages," in *Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 41-59.

¹⁶ Quoted in J. T. McNeill and H. M. Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938, repr. 1990), 187.

year he shall lie upon the ground; during the second his head is to be laid upon a stone; during the third, upon a board; and he shall eat only bread and water and salt and some pease porridge. Others prefer thirty periods of three days, or [penances] with special fasts, with food at nones, until the second year. Another penance is for three years, but with half a pint of beer or milk with bread and salt every second night with the ration of dinner; and they ought to supplicate God regularly in the twelve hours of the nights and of the days.¹⁷

By the thirteenth century, the tariff system of the ancient penitentials had been abandoned, but the format of categorising sins and enumerating different ways of committing sins within those categories remained. *Handlyng Synne* takes the view that the good Christian can be saved by practising virtues and avoiding vices. Sin is portrayed as objective: this is wrong and you will be damned if you do it. Ignorance and lack of intention are no excuse. Mannyng's tale (ll. 4867-4900), about a five-year-old boy who was carried away by the devil because his father did not chastise him for cursing, is a horror story reflecting this view of sin. But if a person can fall into sin unwittingly, then proper instruction is crucial, and this is provided by the text. While the didactic sections explain church teaching, the tales drive home the doctrine that repentance must take place while a person is in full health, sins must be confessed and satisfaction carried out by some form of penitential act. These are the three conditions for valid sacramental confession, and the tales often portray the death of unrepentant sinners who die unshriven as a violent breach in the continuum of life. Life death and resurrection becomes life, death and eternal damnation.

The principle of making confession while in good health harks back to the ancient practice of canonical penance in use during the first two centuries of Christianity. This was a once-only act, initially used to reconcile a public sinner, such as a murderer, with the community.¹⁸ After the severe canonical penance had been performed, disabilities remained. The reformed penitent could not, for example, take up arms, or marry, or, if married, return to conjugal rights. Because of these disabilities, as the centuries wore on, people came to defer the practice of penance to the hour of death, for in such a case, forgiveness could be sought while the disabilities of reconciliation could be avoided.¹⁹ But was deathbed repentance sufficient to procure salvation?

St Leo and St Augustine represent two extremes in debates on the subject. Leo felt that deathbed repentance was better than none at all: 'No-one is to be

¹⁷ Ibidem, 173-74.

¹⁸ Henry Lea, *History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences in the Latin Church*, 3 vols (New York: Greenwood Press, 1896, repr. 1968), I, 20-38. Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 4-6.

¹⁹ Oscar D. Watkins, *A History of Penance*, 2 vols (London and New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1920), II, 556, 561; Tentler, *Sin*, 6.

despaired of while he still lives in this body'.²⁰ Augustine was not so sure, and promoted goodness during life as the surest way to be certain of salvation:

The faithful man living well leaves here sure. The man who is baptised in that hour, leaves here sure. A man who has done penance and been reconciled while he is healthy and afterwards has lived well, leaves here sure. But a man who does penance at the end and is reconciled, whether he leaves here sure, I am not sure.²¹

Brown describes a shift of emphasis that occurred in the fifth century. In early Christianity sins meant 'crimina', sins such as adultery, murder and idolatry.²² Later, writing around c. 420, Augustine taught in *Enchiridion* that the majority of ordinary people were neither the *valde boni* nor the *valde mali*, but subject to the perpetual state of weakness and ignorance, which resulted in *peccata levia* – the everyday sins and failings which were part of the human condition since Adam's fall. In this view, every human being is constantly sinful, and at the hour of death, any sins which have been inadvertently left unatoned for still need to be purged by the prayers of the faithful.

While Augustine did not attempt to specify what precisely happened to the soul between the time of death and the ultimate forgiveness of sin, by introducing the idea that prayer for the deceased could help them atone for their sins while they waited for the ultimate day of Judgement he had, as Brown and Carozzi point out, introduced 'an ambiguous wedge of "duration" into the timeless world of eternity'.²³ Where Augustine had stopped short of describing the nature of the interlude between death and salvation, there were many writers who filled this gap. The imagination of antique, early and later medieval Christians grappled with the issues of time implied in the concept of a soul waiting to be accepted into the kingdom of heaven. Once death occurs, the person has left temporal existence; yet if sins need to be purged before God accepts the soul, there is some interim temporal state which must be imagined. Stories became a way of presenting the progress of the soul from death to salvation, and they reflected the culture and thought world in which they were produced. For example, in the late antique versions, God might behave like a Roman emperor, ready to excuse, to pardon, to grant amnesty according to his own judgement or desire to act with clemency. As Brown says, '*Clementia* was an all-important imperial prerogative because the act of forgiveness was a stunning suspension on the part of a Roman emperor of an untrammelled power to harm.'²⁴ In this version, God could be swayed to act with mercy by the

²⁰ Quoted in *ibidem*, 8.

²¹ St Augustine, Sermo 393, 'De Poenitentibus,' *PL*, 39, 1713-1715, quoted in Tentler, *Sin*, 8.

²² Brown, "The Decline," 43.

²³ *Ibidem*, 46, quoting Claude Carozzi, *Le voyage de l'âme dans l'au delà, d'après la littérature latine, Ve-XIIIe siècle*, Collection d'Ecole Française de Rome 189 (Rome: Ecole Française de Rome, 1994), 23, 22-33, 296, and 640.

²⁴ Brown, "The Decline," 47.

intercession of powerful advocates, the saints, the angels, and above all, his mother. The first tale of the work, concerning the lustful desert monk forgiven his apostasy because he repents with prayer and fasting (ll. 171-336, discussed below), is a striking example of this approach. By contrast, in stories set in times and places dominated by the tradition of the Celtic penitentials, the concept of sin and forgiveness had nothing to do with acts of amnesty on the part of God. In a culture where every infringement had its countervailing obligation which had to be paid off, the penitentials promulgated elaborate tariffs to regulate sin and penance. The tale of the monk condemned to gnaw his tongue perpetually in retribution for having been an inveterate backbiter in life (ll. 3555—620) is one example from many of this type of punishment. In this tradition of narrative, sins not accounted for in life must be expiated in the afterlife according to a strict system of accounting.

These are issues raised repeatedly in the tales of *Handlyng Synne* which, in the context of illustrating particular vices, incidentally, and often powerfully, demonstrate the perils of leaving repentance until the hour of death. This is the point at which, most poignantly, the mundane encounters the supernatural, for, at the moment of death, the account will be settled in terms of whether a person's life in this world has fulfilled the obligations necessary for salvation in the next. If the afterlife was unknown and unknowable, death was certain, and death experiences could be and were witnessed by the living. Incursions of the supernatural into the mundane world at the time of death are recounted in 20 tales of *Handlyng Synne*. How a person died and what was to be the soul's fate after death were subjects capable of interpretations as varied as the people making the observation, but preachers, whose duty it was to educate the laity in the truths of faith, shaped their interpretations to suit the aspect of truth they wished to embellish. Mannyng's tales, many of which are drawn from Gregory's *Dialogues* and the *Vitas Patrum*, place the reader imaginatively in contact with this afterlife which, in all but five of the tales, shows a world in which the soul goes straight to heaven or hell, fully judged, with no hint of purgatory, in spite of the fact that, by the thirteenth century, the doctrine of purgatory was established.²⁵

In my first example, the otherworld experience testifies to the rigorous requirement that a person should both repent of sin and make satisfaction for it, recalling the ancient Irish and Germanic penitential systems with their precise penalties for wrongs done. Bede's story of King Conrad of Mercia's sergeant (ll. 4369-514) belongs to this way of thinking. Retold in Mannyng's section on the sin of sloth, this story portrays a world in which the boundary between the temporal and eternal is porous, where the inhabitants of the supernatural world can enter the natural world and inflict sensory pain on a dying man

²⁵ Of the 66 tales, only five deal with the question of purgatory, and this exclusively in the context of the efficacy of Mass to relieve the suffering of a soul in purgatory.

foreshadowing his damnation. The tale presents Conrad's sergeant as a man to be admired – a loyal servant to his king:

A wys man and of body vaylaunt,
Yn armes was he a doghty squyere,
Yn al the land ne was hys pere. ll. 4374-76

Yet beneath this admirable facade, the man had conducted affairs on behalf of King Conrad so that the king and the realm became rich, but at the cost of great wrongdoing:

He ne lette nat for no fals oth,
Ne for wraththe of leff no loth,
That he ne made ofte desherysun
And holy cherche trauelyed wyth tresun.
For wrong ne lefte he nyght ne day,
But onely that he seruede the kyng to pay. ll. 4381-86.

Conrad's sergeant steadfastly refuses to confess, initially because he does not want to be thought afraid to die, and plans to make his confession at a later time, possibly fearing the rigorous penance that could be imposed upon him in the interim between making his confession and his hour of death.²⁶ On his deathbed he is visited first by two fair young men (angels) who show him a small but beautiful book containing the few good thoughts, words and deeds of his life. Then two ugly black men arrive (devils) carrying an enormous book, larger than a bible, full of all his sins. In many vision stories, at this point the sinner is given a chance to repent, and indeed, following the custom that the living gather round a deathbed to assist the passing soul in making a good end, King Conrad, who recognises that he himself has shared in the fruits of the sergeant's sin, and therefore shares his guilt, strenuously tries to bring him to repentance. But this tale is set in a culture where every misdeed has to be paid for according to a tariff of punishment, and the sight of the huge black book filled with horrible writing fills the sergeant with such despair (a branch of the deadly sin of sloth), that he prejudges himself as unforgivable. The reality of damnation is typified by the dying man's vision of two devils who set about cutting through his body with burning knives, and although those around the dying man's bed cannot see the devils, they share his terror in the knowledge that, once the two knives reach his heart he will be dead and damned. It is a bleak view of judgement with a strict correlation between numbers of good deeds and bad deeds performed in life and their relative weight; there is no intervention from a merciful God and no allowance for the few good deeds of the man.

The story contrasts sharply with that of Piers Tollere (Piers the Usurer, ll. 5575-938), a tale taken from the *Vitas Patrum*. Piers, a thoroughly bad man, falls sick and, like King Conrad's sergeant, has a vision of his particular judgement, where his one good deed is placed in the scales against his heap of

²⁶ See above, p. 36.

sins. In this case, God accepts the one good deed, as balancing the bad, in an act of what Peter Brown would call emperor-like mercy. It is immaterial that the deed is good by accident – Piers gave bread to the hungry by hurling a loaf of bread at a beggar because he could not find a stone to get rid of the annoying man. Equally forgiven is his life as a usurer. Later medieval exempla depict usurers as incapable of forgiveness; Piers however, is given a second chance and devotes his whole life to acts of charity and penitence, ultimately making the publicly penitential act of selling himself into slavery and distributing his price among the poor. From then on his whole life is a gigantic act of penance; having been one of the world's wealthiest men, he lives the life of a slave in self-denial, charity and service. At the end, he does not die, but is taken up into heaven like Enoch and Elijah. This, in itself, is an interesting take on judgement, for it would appear that Piers has already been judged, forgiven, and performed the salutary penance that later ages would consider to be his purgatory. Once again the boundary between the mundane world and the afterlife is porous; Piers is taken up body and soul, like Elijah, to an afterlife where the senses are acute and form as much part of the individual's experience as during life on earth. These two tales reflect opposing concepts of merit and reward or punishment. In the tale from Bede, the numerous evil deeds outweigh the good and the sergeant is damned. In the tale from the *Vitas Patrum*, one good deed is enough to call down God's mercy and forgiveness for a lifetime of bad. One way of explaining the difference is to consider that Conrad's sergeant illustrates the perils of despair. Having refused to repent while he was in good health because he saw this as weakness, he refuses to repent at the hour of death because he despairs, thus effectively prejudging himself and leaving no room for God's mercy. Nevertheless, God's mercy gets no mention within this exemplum; the tale represents a world of punitive justice.

God's mercy is, however, beautifully exemplified in another tale, taken from the *Vitas Patrum* (ll. 171-328). The teaching point, explaining the first commandment, is that God should be worshipped as the one true God. The exemplum tells of an Egyptian desert monk who has such lustful thoughts and dreams that he cannot bear his solitude a moment longer. He rushes to the nearest city, falls into hot passion for the first woman he meets, and asks her father, a 'prest of sarysyne', permission to have her. When this pagan priest consults his idol he is told that the monk may have the daughter if he gives up his faith in 'God of heuene and hys bapteme' (l. 200). The inflamed monk renounces God, his christening, and his religious vows on the spot, 'and chese hys damnacyoun' (l. 214). Seeing a dove fly from the apostate's mouth, the priest returns to consult his idol who advises that the family should have nothing to do with him, because in the end he will return to his God who is full of mercy and will forgive him.

Thogh thou forsake hym rythtnow here,
To morue mayst thou come ageyne

And make acorde with hym certeyne. ll. 243-45

Realising that the 'maumet' (idol) has spoken truly, the monk comes to his senses, makes confession to a hermit, and does penance, the hermit accompanying him by prayer, for three weeks. The dove returns to him, signalling that he is restored to grace.

This tale fits with early Christian ideas of sin. The monk commits a grave *crimen*, the sin of apostasy, but the point of the tale is that God is merciful, a truth recognised even by a 'maumet of helle' (l. 256). The sensuality that drove the monk to the extreme of renouncing God is arrested, not by the monk repenting, but by the pagan priest who will not allow the monk to marry his daughter in view of his oracle's warning that the monk's God will forgive him. The monk enacts in his own body the temptations to bodily excess that typify life in the Egyptian cities, as well as the worship of plausible alternatives to the one true God, for the oracle, speaking truthfully, seems a real alternative to God.

The wise counselling hermit confirms the idol's prediction of God's mercy. Repentance is necessary, but this is not a measure for measure situation. The monk has committed two of the three grave sins of the early church: apostasy and lust,²⁷ but the exemplum only treats of the apostasy. Three weeks of sensory penance, fasting, accompanied by the more important spiritual exercise of prayer, eventually restore the sinning monk to his former state of union with God, symbolised by the return of the dove. There is no suggestion that God will impose further rigorous punishment in an afterlife, such as is found in many other tales, for this is the world of early Christian antiquity in which the mercy of God is the paramount factor, not the punitive fires of purgatory.

In the context of the full work of *Handlyng Synne*, these exempla pose some questions. Does the Egyptian monk's fasting and prayer cancel out his previous sin of lust? This is passed over, though in many other tales lechery is unforgivable.²⁸ And what about the truth spoken by the pagan priest's oracle, and the integrity of the priest himself? This may be a 'maumet of helle', but it is doing God's work, reflecting the scriptural truth, not mentioned here but surely underlying the tale, that 'All of creation waits with eager longing for God to reveal his children'.²⁹

More questions surround the fate of Piers Tollere – the usurer – particularly when one reads the often retold Celtic Tale of Saint Fursey's visit to hell (ll. 2473-590). Mannyng retells how a devil hurls a burning soul at the saint, leaving him with a permanent scar which he subsequently carries through life. The tormented soul was 'an okerer (usurer)', who, when he was alive, had given Fursey a cloak and asked him to pray for him. Fursey's punishment was to

²⁷ The third grave sin was homicide. See Lea, *History* I, 16.

²⁸ Cynthia Ho, "Dichotomize and Conquer: "Womman Handlyng" in *Handlyng Synne*," *Philological Quarterly* 72:4 (1993): 383.

²⁹ Romans 8:19 (Good News Translation).

experience first-hand the burning reserved to the souls in purgatory, because he forgot to say the prayer, and he carried the burn throughout his subsequent life. This tale illustrates the seventh commandment, ‘Thou shalt not Steal’, showing the perils of negotiating with usurers. Fursey has committed two sins – taking a gift from a usurer, and forgetting to perform the prayers for which the gift was given. But the tenor of the didactic passage suggests that the usurer could not have been forgiven even if Fursey had prayed for him,

For some haue so gret cumbrement
That they may make no testament,
For holy cherche neuer vndyrstode
To haue of okerers gode. 2471-72

and this fits with medieval precepts concerning usury, that absolution can only be had by the living and Christian burial by the dead, on condition of complete restitution of all usurious gains.³⁰

By contrast, in the tale of Piers Tollere (the usurer) which illustrates the deadly sin of coveitise, the teaching is just as severe, that usurers:

...shulde not come in crystes herd,
Ne come in cherche ne cherche yerd. 5559-60

Yet Mannyng concludes the tale with the advice:

Taketh ensample here of pers
And parteth wyth the pore, ye okerers,
For yow shal neure come come ioie wyth ynn
But ye leue fyrst that synne,
And yyue to almes that yche thyng
that ye haue wune wyth okeryng. 5939-44

Usurers must repent, leave their usurious practices, restore what they have taken in usury, and, if this is impossible, give the equivalent to the poor, generously and with good will. The possibility of forgiveness, denied to the ‘okerer’ in Fursey’s tale, is allowed here. This reflects debates about usury and the spiritual status of repentant users current in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.³¹

Fursey is punished even though he has sinned unintentionally. The Egyptian monk is forgiven his two intentional sins by one act of penance. Piers is saved even though he did only one good deed, and that unintentionally.

³⁰ Lea, *History II*, 385 says: “so much worse was it considered than ordinary theft that, as we have seen, it was not allowed to enjoy the benefit of *parvitas materiae* – even the most trivial of gains could not render it venial.”

³¹ Early thirteenth-century concern with this particular problem is treated in detail within the context of theologians’ discussions of almsgiving in Spencer E. Young, *Scholarly Community at the Early University of Paris: Theologians, Education and Society, 1215-1248* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 133-69. For the later thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century discussions, see Ian P. Wei, *Intellectual Culture in Medieval Paris: Theologians and the University c. 1100-1330* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 348-53.

Conrad's sergeant, even though he has a few good deeds to his name, perishes because his bad deeds outnumber them. It would take a particularly astute clerk to unravel the inconsistencies implicit between these stories, and yet the tales are offered for the edification of the lay audience.

Part of the solution lies in appreciating the differing cultural backgrounds of the exempla, and in understanding the development of doctrine, particularly the doctrine of purgatory. As Le Goff has said, 'medieval Purgatory reused motifs that had gained currency in very early times: darkness, fire, torture, the bridge as ordeal and passageway, mountains, rivers and so on'.³² But these concepts were developing, and the way in which they were used reflected the culture in which the exempla grew up, which was by no means uniform. Le Goff again: 'Purgatory did not emerge automatically from a "diachronic" series of beliefs and images. Rather, it was the result of history, ... in which chance and necessity both played a part'.³³ The tales from which I have quoted, and many of the others used by Mannyng, were popular and influential in the development of concepts of the afterlife, sin and forgiveness. If the beliefs of the early church as exemplified in these tales from the *Vitas Patrum* concentrate on reparation for sin during this life, later ages, in developing the doctrine of purgatory, imagined stages of purgation through which the soul had to go before it was purified and able to see the face of God. The stages were intensely sensuous, since the body had sinned and must therefore be punished in expiation. Many of the tales show bodies mutilated in punishment after death, indicating that the body continues to be punished after death – such an instance is that of the adulteress whose body is cloven in two and guarded by a dragon (ll. 1741-1862), or the tale of the quarrelsome nun, half of whose corpse is found burned to cinders while the other half remains in the grave (ll. 1547-91). Others describe the moment of death when the body is suffering the physical conflict of the struggling soul – enacting the struggle between good and evil, like the tale of Conrad's sergeant. Fear of hell, 'attrition', though considered less worthy than 'contrition', was by the fourteenth century well accepted as basis for the forgiveness of sin.

Another important aspect of the exempla is that they lend themselves to being read separately, and therefore being used as meditation material. Mannyng intends the whole work to be treated in this way. Right from the start, in the prologue, he recommends that the book be opened at any point:

Whedyr outys thou wylt opone the boke,
Thou shalt fynde begynnyng on to loke.
Oueral ys begynnyng – oueral ys ende,
Hou that thou wylt turne hyt or wende. ll. 121-24

This is an invitation to be selective, to read the work in excerpts, and to ruminate on the teaching of each section on its own. If the exempla are used in this way, a

³² Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory* (London: Scolar, 1984), 17.

³³ *Ibidem*, 18.

reader, whether modern or medieval, can concentrate on the celebration of God's love, mercy and forgiveness in some tales, and learn from the cautionary horrors of particular sins and their punishment in others. The idea of using exempla as material for meditation is not new; the sixth-century monk, Dorotheus of Gaza, compiled a collection of instructions and exempla, all of which, and particularly the exempla, were offered as material on which his fellow monks should meditate.³⁴ To treat the work in this way, is to replicate a medieval manner of dealing with the text which would, for the most part, be read aloud in measured segments, to be heard and remembered, rather than studied seriatim in the mode of a modern literary scholar.

Structurally within the work, the exempla definitely illuminate the points of teaching that Mannyng develops in his systematic exposition of the commandments, the sacraments, the seven deadly sins and their contrary virtues, and specific teaching on penance, or shrift itself. Taken together, they offer views of sin, repentance, the supernatural and the afterlife that build a strong body of evidence for the human being as a 'body-soul', able to suffer intense physical pain in the afterlife in consequence of sins committed in this life. For all their differences in outlook, the exempla bring to the work powerful elements of instruction. They examine what it means to repent and what it means to despair. They warn about the vigilance necessary in order to avoid objective sin – something that may be a sin even if the person committing it lacks intention. They introduce the numinous – a sense of God's presence – and of supernatural forces that intrude upon the sensory life of each person. And most powerfully of all, through visions of sensory suffering in the afterlife, they offer incentives for good living in this.

³⁴ I owe this insight to Dr Michael Champion, The University of Western Australia, who is currently researching the works of Dorotheus of Gaza.

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VON GERHARD JARITZ

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Vorwort

In diesem Heft von *Medium Ævum Quotidianum* zeigt sich im Besonderen die Internationalität, die sich heute in Forschungen zur Kultur- und Alltagsgeschichte des Mittelalters erkennen lässt. Jene Situation kann zur Hoffnung Anlass geben, dass sich auch die internationale und kontinentenübergreifende Kooperation in Zukunft in ähnlicher Weise verstärken wird.

Die zwei ersten Beiträge von Autorinnen aus Argentinien und Frankreich, Andrea Vanina Neyra und Marina Viallon, basieren auf Vorträgen, die am International Medieval Congress in Leeds im Jahre 2014 in einer Sektion zu „Animals and Identity“ präsentiert wurden. Anne M. Scott von der Western Australian University analysiert die Exempla des englischen Gilbertinermönches Robert Mannyng (ca. 1275-ca. 1338) in dessen *Handlyng Synne*. Der vierte Beitrag der rumänisch-ungarischen Wissenschaftlerin Andrea-Bianka Znorovszky konzentriert sich auf das Phänomen des Cross-Dressings von heiligen Frauen und dessen Repräsentation im visuellen Befund.

Gerhard Jaritz