

# *Visions in Late Medieval England*

*Lay Spirituality and Sacred Glimpses  
of the Hidden Worlds of Faith*



Gwenfair Walters Adams

# Visions in Late Medieval England

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*By*

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PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

*To my parents  
Gwyn and Mair Walters  
And my brother,  
Meirwyn Walters*



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## PREFACE

This book began its journey in Cambridge, England. A medieval town and university provide, as one might expect, an inspiring setting for writing about medieval visionaries. For three years, I lived in a town surrounded by the fens of East Anglia, where Margery Kempe of Lynne and Julian of Norwich had experienced their visions more than 500 years earlier. Nearly every day, I would walk past King's College Chapel, the chantry commissioned by Henry VI, the almost-saint whose posthumous visitations were recorded by monks. A visit to Yorkshire brought the scenes of the Byland Abbey ghost stories to life as I took photographs of the abbey where a monk had recorded colorful local stories. We tracked down the chapels where purgatorial ghosts were believed to have confronted their relatives and friends to request suffrages, and imagined the haunting tales in the graveyards of the revenants. Poring over medieval manuscripts in the Cambridge University Library, particularly the Wynken de Worde highly abridged version of Margery Kempe's book, meant touching the very pages that would-be visionaries might have turned.

When I began researching this book back in the late 1980's, very little work had been done in the area of visionary experience in England and virtually nothing had been done with the *exempla* that included visions. The English mystics were quite popular, but lay visionaries were not well-known. Didactic vision stories (illustrations used to teach the laity) had been largely untouched by those studying visions. William Christian mentioned the Spanish equivalent of the English didactic visions in his *Apparitions in Late Medieval and Renaissance Spain*:

Sermon stories must have been important vehicles for the diffusion of church and monastic lore among the rural laity. The striking anecdotes were powerful, long-lasting encapsulations of moral, theological and mystical messages. While the exempla collections did not generally include local Spanish miracles or village apparitions, they did provide

preachers and their audiences with patterns and motifs that seem to have been incorporated into the plots of local visions.<sup>1</sup>

His book discussed the local visions but did not elaborate any further on their relation to didactic visions. Miri Rubin and Eamon Duffy drew on didactic vision stories for their analyses of the Eucharist, and Jacques LeGoff for his study of the development of the doctrine of purgatory—but very little work had been done with the didactic visionary material to see what it said about visions and visionaries.

Dinzelbacher and Benz, who had written two of the most important general works on medieval visions, both used the biographies and autobiographies of visionaries and the accounts of famous visions as their sources, rather than using *exempla*, sermons, and large collections of saints' lives.<sup>2</sup> Their works were thus helpful in assessing famous visions such as the Vision of Tundale, or the visions of renowned visionaries such as St. Catherine of Siena, but did not deal with visions at the popular level. They described and analyzed the experiences of the visionaries but did not explore the impact that the circulation of their stories had on medieval laypeople.

Closely related to medieval visions were dreams. The categories of dreams and visions intersected, with dreams being those experiences that took place in sleep, and visions being those that had a supernatural component. Dreams and dream-visions had been studied extensively, but visions *per se* had been quite neglected. English literary critics focused on the dream in late medieval England as background study for their work on dream-vision poetry, a genre that flourished in England in the Late Middle Ages.<sup>3</sup> What is probably of more interest to the

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<sup>1</sup> William A. Christian, *Apparitions in Late Medieval and Renaissance Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Dinzelbacher, *Vision und Visionsliteratur im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1981); Ernst Benz, *Die Vision: Erfahrungsformen und Bilderwelt* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1969). Another work that uses the same strategy but covers only up to the twelfth century is C. Fritzsche, "Die lateinischen Visionen des Mittelalters bis zur Mitte des 12. Jahrhunderts. Ein Beitrag zur Culturgeschichte," *Romanische Forschungen* 2 (1886): 247–279 and 3 (1887): 337–369. Richard Kieckhefer's chapter, "Rapture and Revelation" deals with the visions of fourteenth-century saints. (*Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984] pp. 150–179).

<sup>3</sup> See Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); J. Stephen Russell, *The English Dream Vision: Anatomy of a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988); Michael D. Cherniss, *Boethian Apocalypse: Studies in Middle English Vision Poetry* (Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books, 1987); Paul Piehler, *The Visionary Landscape: A Study in Medieval Allegory* (London: Edward Arnold, 1971); Kathryn L. Lynch, *The High Medieval*

student of late medieval popular piety, however, is the vision.<sup>4</sup> The dream-vision was a deliberately fictional account, whereas vision stories were intended to depict actual events, and more importantly, events that revealed facts about God and his ways.

Just as dreams and visions could be differentiated yet overlapped, so could visionaries and mystics. Some mystics, such as Julian of Norwich, were also visionaries. Others were not, like the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*. Significant work has been done in the area of Medieval English mysticism, an area that overlaps with visions but tends to downplay didactic visions. Those writers who, like Evelyn Underhill, had (and have) taken mystics rather than visionaries as their starting point tended not to focus on visions, particularly corporeal visions, which were considered inferior.<sup>5</sup> Many of the visions recorded and circulated in the Late Middle Ages were corporeal and thus disregarded by scholars of mysticism. The visions of such respected mystic-visionaries as Julian of Norwich, on the other hand, have been treated in-depth.<sup>6</sup>

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*Dream Vision: Poetry, Philosophy, and Literary Form* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); Constance B. Heatt, *The Realism of Dream Visions: The Poetic Exploitation of the Dream-Experience in Chaucer and His Contemporaries* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1967); A.C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Michael St. John, *Chaucer's Dream Visions: Courtliness and Individual Identity*. Studies in European Cultural Transition Series (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> It is noteworthy that of all the accounts of dreams and visions circulating in and being recorded in the Late Middle Ages in England, almost all the dream accounts were also visions, whereas very few of the visions were dreams, so one ends up dealing with much more material that was considered important enough to record if one approaches the task with the focus of the vision rather than the dream.

<sup>5</sup> "As to the corporeal vision, it has few peculiarities of interest to the student of pure mysticism." Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (London: Methuen, rev. ed., 1930), p. 281. For works on mysticism in general and English mysticism in particular, see Valerie Marie Lagorio and Ritamary Bradley, *The Fourteenth-Century English Mystics: A Comprehensive Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1981); Michael Sawyer, *A Bibliographical Index of Five English Mystics* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 1978); and George Wood Tuma, *The Fourteenth Century English Mystics: A Comparative Analysis*, volumes 1 and 2 (Salzburg, Austria: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1977). For a detailed discussion of the lesser regard given to corporeal visions, see Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (York: York Medieval Press, 1999), pp. 7–19. Voaden argues that women tended to be visionaries and men tended to be mystics, that the former corresponded to the second level of Augustinian sight and the latter to the third and highest level, and that therefore, men's spiritual experience was regarded as of greater value than women's.

<sup>6</sup> See, for examples, Lucie Felix-Faure, "Visions mystique dans l'Angleterre du moyen âge," *Revue des Deux Mondes* 16 (1913): 830–856; Margaret Ann Palliser, *Christ,*

Some work had been done on specific categories of visions, particularly those of otherworld journeys, apocalypses, and ghosts.<sup>7</sup> Research had been done on visions of specific geographical or national regions.<sup>8</sup> With a different focus, Hedwig Röckelein's work approached medieval visions from ethnological and psychoanalytic viewpoints.<sup>9</sup>

What was needed was a book that would map out the visionary landscape as a whole, point out where the vision stories gathered, outline the different kinds of vision, and explore the way the various vision types functioned. Although recently a veritable avalanche of work has been produced dealing with medieval spirituality and mysticism, there is still no book that lays out the full breadth of medieval English visionary experience. Hence, this book attempts this rather ambitious task, and it does so by looking at the phenomenon of the vision from the vantage point of the laity.

The initial phase of research demanded scouring the terrain of medieval English religious literature in hopes of finding rich veins of visionary lore. What was unearthed was the fact that the genres of medieval literature that had the highest concentrations of didactic visionary accounts were the saints' legends, sermon collections, and religious instructional manuals. And the veins were surprisingly deep.

I chose to focus on visions that were not mentioned in the Scriptures so as to deal only with vision stories that were retold for reasons other than because they were in the Bible. I discovered that post-Biblical visions were exceedingly plentiful. Thousands of vision accounts are scattered throughout saints' stories and sermon illustrations and religious manuals. These were the vision stories that the laity would have heard repeatedly on Sunday mornings, would have seen depicted in

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*Our Mother of Mercy: Divine Mercy and Compassion in the Theology of the Shewings of Julian of Norwich* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1992); Tarjei Park, *Selfhood and "Gostly Menyng" in Some Middle English Mystics: Semiotic Approaches to Contemplative Theology*. Toronto Studies in Theology, vol. 84 (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> For visions of the end times, see Barbara Nolan, *The Gothic Visionary Perspective* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977). Works dealing with other types of visions will be mentioned where relevant in the body of the text.

<sup>8</sup> Christian, *Apparitions*; Manuel C. Díaz y Díaz, *Visiones del Más allá en Galicia durante la alta Edad Media* (Santiago de Compostela, 1985); H.J. Kamphausen, *Traum und Vision in der lateinischen Poesie der Karolingerzeit* Lateinisches Sprache und Literature des Mittelalters, Bd. 4 (Bern: Herbert Lang, 1975); Maria Clara de Almeida Lucas, *A Literatura Visionária na Idade Média Portuguesa* (Lisbon: Instituto de Cultura Portuguesa, 1986).

<sup>9</sup> Hedwig Röckelein, *Otloh, Gottschalk, Tnugdal: Individuelle und kollektive Visionsmuster des Hochmittelalters* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1987).

stained glass and sculpture, and in some cases, would have heard read aloud to them. These were the visions I studied to discover what was being taught to the laity.

The next phase of research was to find reports of fresh visions in late medieval England. I wanted to see if there were any similarities in what the laity heard from the Church and what they reported experiencing themselves. Although there were relatively fewer sources for lay visions, there were enough to suggest a number of conclusions as to the efficacy of Church teachings. These sources included Margery Kempe's *Boke*, Julian of Norwich's *Revelations*, posthumous sightings of King Henry VI, the Byland Abbey ghost stories, a revelation of purgatory to a fifteenth-century woman, visits to St. Patrick's Purgatory, and Elizabeth Barton's revelations, among others.

My focus was not on determining whether the visions had actually occurred (contrary to the first question most people asked when they learned what my research was about). Rather, my interest was to see whether the didactic visions had any impact on the reported visionary experiences of the laity. I found that they did indeed have a profound shaping influence. I discovered that each of the major vision types seemed to have a distinct set of unwritten rules of engagement that dictated how the visionary should relate to the visiting presence, whether it was a saint, a demon, or a ghost. I found that the laypeople, in their reported experiences, were acting very much in accord with these rules. The bulk of the book unpacks this parallel between the didactic and lay visions.

One of the interesting questions that emerged was related to the difference between what the clergy intended to teach the laity and what they ended up implying, in some cases perhaps without meaning to. Given that the Church's official stance on visions was to discourage the laity from experiencing them—out of fear of the spread of heresy—it is ironic that its teaching included so many stories about visions. The very prevalence of vision stories was bound to have an impact. In addition, the unwritten rules referred to above were often not the point that the clergy were trying to make in relaying stories about visions. In chapter 3, for example, I will be arguing that visions about demons implicitly modeled how spiritual warfare should be conducted. Most of the more than one hundred accounts of visions of demons, however, served one of three different 'explicit' purposes. First, many of them were recounted in saints' legends or in sermons about saints to affirm the cults of saints by demonstrating the power of saints over demons.



Second, preachers told stories about demons in order to enforce sermon points about moral behavior. And third, a slightly smaller group was told to encourage liturgical practices such as the Ave Maria and the sign of the cross. In almost all the demon accounts, the implicit teachings about how to respond to attacks of demons were not the reason why the story was included in the given sermon or saint's legend, and yet these implicit teachings seemed to have a key role in shaping the people's worldview.

Behind this was also, of course, the interplay of clerical and lay piety. This complex relationship, although not in the forefront of the book's argument, is an important theme implied by it. I found that the clergy were using the vision stories to teach the laity Church doctrine and ethics, but the laypeople were also shaping the reports of visions. The Byland Abbey ghost stories demonstrated how a local region took the basic forms of a particular type of vision, the ghost from purgatory, adopted them, and gave them a regional flavor, the laity clearly cooperating with the clergy but also shaping the material they inherited. The visions recorded at King Henry VI's shrine showed how lay visions served in the formation of a saint's cult. The visions to and from purgatory in the *Revelation* of the fifteenth-century woman, showed how different genres of visions could be combined to help an otherworldly figure find peace, accomplished with an alternation of ghostly and earthly venues, a mixture of visitation and visit. The visions of Margery Kempe revealed how one would-be mystic took hold of a variety of forms, combined them to build a case for her own sanctity, merged them with her meditations to earn merit, and eventually gave them such authority that her lay revelations took precedence over clerical counsel. Although the book emphasizes the impact of the clergy's vision stories on the laity's worldview, it is important to remember that it was not a purely mono-directional process.

After exploring these themes in the early stages of research, over the course of the ensuing years, another line of argumentation wrapped itself around the impact of the didactic visions' implicit teaching on the reported experience of the laity. It had to do with medieval spirituality in general. What I discovered was that the various vision types were each teaching more than just about visionary experience but also modeling and affirming in a powerful way five of the key dynamics of medieval spirituality. Thus, the book has been significantly restructured to show how the visions of late medieval England buttressed the piety of the medieval Church, undergirding it to a degree that nothing else

could, for visions, by their very nature, claimed to be direct windows into the supernatural realm that underlay the medieval Faith. Thus, visions, as visions, played a particularly important part in the strengthening of late medieval spirituality.

The medieval 'world' was not restricted to the area between the four corners of the earth. There was another world alongside it—or above and below it—which was a crucial part of the medieval *weltanschauung*, the world of angels and demons, saints and ghosts, of heaven, hell, and purgatory, the Virgin Mary, Christ, the Spirit, and God the Father. This book examines *visions* in this double world of the Late Middle Ages, where they served as windows and doors punctuating the walls between the earthly and the spiritual worlds. It will look at the many kinds of windows that allowed people to see and know aspects of God's hidden mysteries that would otherwise have remained concealed from them. It will analyze the rules which governed interaction between people and beings from the otherworld whenever someone, whether earthly or ghostly, passed through the divide to visit the other world. And it will examine the uncertainties and fears that arose from never being sure if the window one peered through or the door one walked through was real or illusory. From penetrating gazes to private glimpses, startled visionaries to yearning lay mystics, from miracle-working saints to aid-demanding ghosts, we will discuss the impact of the vision in late medieval England.



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Charles Kors and Edward Peters, *Witchcraft in Europe, 400–1700: A Documentary History, 400–1700* [Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001, revised edition, first edition in 1977], pp. 10, 117–118]. Reprinted by permission of the University of Pennsylvania Press); Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies; Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (excerpts from *Robert Mannyng of Brunne's Handlyng Synne*, edited by Idelle Sullens. MRTS Volume 14 [Binghamton, NY, 1983], pp. 12–13, 41–42, 46–49, 59–60, 64–66, 84, 206–207, 250–251. Copyright Arizona Board of Regents for Arizona State University. Reprinted with permission); and The Edwin Mellen Press. In the Middle English quotations, y's, g's, and th's have been modernized.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

*BA* = *Byland Abbey Ghost Stories*

Grant, A.J., trans. "Twelve Medieval Ghost Stories." *The Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 27 (1924): 363–379.

*BH* = Blacman's *Memoir of Henry VI*

James, M.R., ed. and trans. *Henry the Sixth: A Reprint of John Blacman's Memoir With Translation and Notes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1919.

*DP* = *Dives and Pauper*

Barnum, Priscilla Heath, ed. *Dives and Pauper*. Early English Text Society, Original Series 275. London: Oxford University Press, 1976.

*EL* = *Vision of Edmund Leversedge*

Leversedge, Edmund. "The Vision of Edmund Leversedge." Edited by E. Margaret Thompson. *Somerset and Dorset Notes and Queries* 9 (1905): 19–35.

*F* = Mirk's *Festial* Mirk, John

*Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies*. Edited by Theodor Erbe. Early English Text Society, Extra Series 96. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1905; Kraus reprint, 1987.

*GL* = *The Golden Legend* Ellis, F.S., ed.

*The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints as Englished by William Caxton*. 7 volumes. London: J.M. Dent, 1900.

*HS* = *Handlyng Synne* Mannyng of Brunne, Robert.

*Robert Mannyng of Brunne's Handlyng Synne*. Edited by Idelle Sullens. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*. Volume 14. Binghamton, New York, 1983.

*JN* = Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Divine Love*

Julian of Norwich. *A Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich*. Edited by Edmund Colledge and James Walsh. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978.

*JW* = *Jacob's Well*

*Jacob's Well*. Edited by Arthur Brandeis. Early English Text Society, Original Series 115. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1900, reprinted 1999.

*LMEL* = *late medieval English lay (visions)*

*MES* = *Middle English Sermons*

Ross, Woodburn O., ed. *Middle English Sermons*. Early English Text Society, Original Series 209. London: Oxford University Press, 1940, reprinted 1998.

*MH* = *Miracles of Henry VI*

Knox, Ronald and Shane Leslie, eds. *The Miracles of Henry VI*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923.

*MK* = Margery Kempe's Book

Kempe, Margery. *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Edited by Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, Early English Text Society, Original Series 212. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940, reprinted 1961, 1982.

*OED* = *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

*ODCC* = *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*

Cross, F.L. and E.A. Livingston. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988; second edition, 1974.

*ODS* = *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*

David Hugh Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)

*PL* = *Patrologia Latina*

Migne, J. -P., ed. *Patrologiae cursus completus: series latina*. 221 vols. Paris, 1841–1864.

*PC* = *Pore Caitif* "The Pore Caitif." Edited by Sister Mary Teresa Brady. PhD diss., Fordham University, 1954.

*PofC* = *Pricke of Conscience*

*The Pricke of Conscience*. Edited by Richard Morris. Berlin: A. Asher, 1863.

*RP* = *Revelation of Purgatory by a Fifteenth-Century Woman*

Harley, Marta Powell, ed. *A Revelation of Purgatory by an Unknown, Fifteenth-Century Woman Visionary: Introduction, Critical Text, and Translation*. In *Studies in Women and Religion*, volume 18. Lewiston / Queenston: Edwin Mellen, 1985.

S. & H. = Severs and Hartung

Severs, J. Burke and Albert E. Hartung, eds. *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050–1500*. Hamden, Connecticut: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967-present.

*SEL* = *South English Legendary*

*The South English Legendary*. Edited by Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, volumes 1 and 2. Early English Text Society, Original Series 235 and 236. London: Oxford University Press, 1956, reprinted 1967.

*SPP* = *St. Patrick's Purgatory*

Easting, Robert, ed. *St. Patrick's Purgatory*. Early English Text Society, Original Series 298. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

*SS* = *Speculum Sacerdotale*

*Speculum Sacerdotale*. Edited by Edward H. Weatherly. Early English Text Society, Original Series 200. London: Oxford University Press, 1936, reprinted 2000.

*ST* = Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*

Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. New York: Thomas More Publishing, 1948.





## INTRODUCTION

*English mists beget vapourish imaginings.*<sup>1</sup>

### *Visions, Faith, and the Faith*

A brightly colored rood screen, covered with the images of saints, stood guard at the front of the medieval English parish church, protecting the sacred space where the altar and its holy mysteries resided. The screen was named for the large rood (cross) that stood atop it and carried the painted, wooden, dying Christ flanked by carved figures of the grieving St. John the Evangelist and Virgin Mary. Most rood screens were intricately carved walls of wood and paint that blocked much of the view of the altar, something that was problematic for a laity who valued so highly the sight of the priest performing the Mass. At the crucial moment, the elevation of the Host, when the essence of the unleavened wafer in the priest's raised hands was believed to be changed into the body and blood of Christ, the people strained for a glimpse of the holy drama. Particularly dense rood screens might have squints, holes that the laity could peek through as they knelt for the consecration, the moment when the priest intoned, "Hoc est corpus meum." Staring at the elevation of the Host brought its rewards: safe delivery of a child, forgiveness of forgotten oaths, momentary suspension of the aging process, and many more.<sup>2</sup> Kneeling on the stone floor of the nave and gazing into the sanctuary—that partially hidden world—served as a metaphor for standing in the ordinary while observing the extraordinary, dwelling in the natural while longing for the supernatural.

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<sup>1</sup> Included in a letter of the twelfth-century commentator Pierre de Celle to Nicholas of St. Alban's about English miracle stories. Translated in Nicola Coldstream, "Art and Architecture in the Later Middle Ages," in Stephen Medcalf, ed., *The Context of English Literature: The Late Middle Ages* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 179; cited from J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus: series latina* (hereafter cited as *PL*), vol. 202, p. 614.

<sup>2</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400–1580* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 95–102.

In this multi-layered medieval world, people lived on the surface of a life that rested on a deeper reality beneath. Most never saw below the contours of the mundane, but they believed that the more important life was the hidden, mysterious, and eternal one that lurked behind their material, tangible, perceptible world. Living in this bi-level cosmos required faith: faith to believe that what one saw as one peered through the rood screen on Sunday morning—the fragments of unleavened bread and drops of wine—held the Real Presence of Christ, that scriptural prose delivered four meanings in tandem, that quotidian objects bespoke eternal ideas and that painted saints were present to the contemplating devotee, that broken weather patterns and astronomical abnormalities prophesied the future, that numbers measured the immeasurable, and that deep into the earth's core and far flung to the edges of the universe, inhabited worlds awaited the soul.

Into this world of Faith a phenomenon broke that cut through the barrier of imperceptibility, momentarily making the invisible visible, the insensible sensible. This phenomenon was the vision. *Visions were events that were believed to involve direct encounters with or communications from the supernatural world.*<sup>3</sup> Visions could be experienced by saints and sinners, by mystics and housewives, by monks and peasants, pilgrims and anchoresses. They could come to those who were awake or asleep, in trances or even in near-death states. They could happen in cloisters, in kitchens, in Church, even in one's bed. They could happen during the Mass, while riding a donkey toward Jerusalem, or when walking home through the woods late at night. They could involve visits from saints, angels, ghosts, and demons. Visions could be nightmarish attacks from fiends, delightful conversations with heavenly figures, miracles of healing, marriages to the Godhead, pilgrimages through hell, purgatory, and heaven, and symbolic prophecies. They could arrive unexpectedly or come in response to intense seeking after the things of God. They could be once-in-a-life-time surprises or frequent visitations. A crucifix coming to life and embracing a knight, fiends dragging a screaming soul to hell, a woman waking up holding a broken candle from the Virgin Mary—these were the stories of visions the laity heard time and again. Snowball the Tailor being attacked by a rake-ghost in the forest, Margery Kempe mesmerized by the Host fluttering like a dove at the moment of elevation, the late King Henry and St. Erasmus rescuing Henry Walter de Guildford from the sea where he was drowning

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<sup>3</sup> See appendix A for the range of uses of the term 'vision.'

after being wounded by a cannon and thrown overboard by his fellow sailors—these were visions that the late medieval English laity reported experiencing themselves.

The role of the vision was to bring the deeper reality to the surface where it could be experienced and verified. In doing so, visions strengthened the faith of the people in the Faith, for they affirmed the existence of the invisible and inaudible, which were otherwise imperceptible. Visions brought into the realm of the senses what was normally experienced only through faith, thus strengthening faith and intensifying popular piety. The visionary breaking through of a deeper reality acted like a flying buttress, allowing the ‘walls’ (spirituality) of the Church to go much ‘higher’<sup>4</sup> than they might have gone otherwise. Visions helped secure the Church’s hold on the people’s imaginations and hearts.

Visions became an essential part of the epistemology—the ways of ascertaining truth—of the Late Middle Ages. Occasionally, visions added new aspects of revelation to the Church’s corpus. St. Bridget of Sweden’s (c. 1303–1373) visions of the birth of Christ contributed details to artists’ renderings of the Nativity, including the kneeling stance of the Virgin.<sup>5</sup> Elisabeth of Schönau’s (d. 1164) vision of the Assumption of Mary led, by the fourteenth century, to the depiction of the Virgin ascending awake, rather than sleeping or dead, to heaven.<sup>6</sup> Juliana of Cornillon’s vision (c. 1208) of a moon with a piece missing (symbolic of the fractured Host), led to the establishment of the Corpus Christi (the Body of Christ) festival.<sup>7</sup>

Most often, however, visions supported teachings that were embedded in the prevailing piety of the populace and had already emerged from the revelation of Scripture or the pronouncements of Popes, councils, and the writings of the theologians. Visions illustrated the objective Faith, providing a window through the roodscreen into the inner workings of the core of that Faith. In the process, they also strengthened the

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<sup>4</sup> In *Stripping of the Altars*, Duffy presents a strong case for his introductory assertion that “late medieval Catholicism exerted an enormously strong, diverse, and vigorous hold over the imagination and the loyalty of the people up to the very moment of Reformation” (p. 4).

<sup>5</sup> Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex* (London: Pan Books, 1985), pp. 45, 183.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 89; Sally Cunneen, *In Search of Mary: The Woman and the Symbol* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), pp. 161–162.

<sup>7</sup> Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 170.

subjective faith of the people. These intermittent glimpses behind the curtain of worldly reality assured the medieval Christian that the content of her faith was true, even though most of the time it was unseen.

### *Five Key Dynamics of Late Medieval Spirituality*

The outworking of the Faith in the spirituality of the late medieval world utilized a number of key dynamics. The vision, both by its contents and function, exemplified these dynamics. In this book, we will examine the role that the vision played in demonstrating and reinforcing five of the important dynamics of late medieval lay spirituality in England.<sup>8</sup> First, visions fostered the Transactions-of-Satisfaction dynamic in medieval spirituality that was founded on an Anselmian view of the atonement as satisfaction, particularly evident in visions related to purgatory, hell, and ghosts. Second, visions of the saints supported the dynamic of Reciprocated Devotion inherent in the cults of the saints. Third, visions of demons participated in the dynamic of Spiritual Warfare. Fourth, visions, especially of the Passion and of the Eucharist, reinforced the importance of the visual in the liturgy, a dynamic of Supra-Sacramental Sight. Fifth, the dynamic of Mediated Revelation, in which visions were a crucial element, was brought into stark relief by the late medieval English controversies involving political visionaries.

### *Focus on Late Medieval England*

Late medieval England (c. 1300 – c. 1530) is a propitious time and place for an exploration of the visionary world and its use and support of medieval dynamics. Over a thousand accounts of visions populate extant Middle English writings, making it possible to get a strong, clear picture of the visionary worldview to which the laity would have been exposed. Lay people read fourteenth-century English mystics' writings and Continental visionaries' biographies devotionally.<sup>9</sup> Preachers filled

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<sup>8</sup> A sixth dynamic, that of the pursuit of intimacy, is more common in mystical rather than lay spirituality and is therefore beyond the purview of this book.

<sup>9</sup> See Rosalynn Voaden, ed., *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England* (Rochester, NY: Boydell and Brewer, 1996).

their sermons with vivid illustrations about visions. Two new forms of drama, the mystery plays and miracle plays, brought biblical characters and saints from the past before the very eyes of the people. English poets wrote lyrics replete with graphic visual detail of the Passion and used the period's popular dream-vision form to entertain readers. Woodblock prints, stained glass, and rood screen paintings made images of saints easily accessible even to the poor; increasing literacy and Caxton's printing press introduced devotional and mystical books to a wider audience.

### *The Teachers and the Taught*

We will focus on the role of the vision in English popular piety, particularly the piety of the laity. One of the issues that we will examine is the influence that the 'teachers' had on the 'taught,' the impact that those in spiritual authority had on those who followed, the effect that the contemplatives had on the actives. The teachers included theologians, mystics, monks, preachers, writers, and hagiographers. The learners included the nobleman and the serf, the tailor's son and the merchant's wife, the 'lewde men and women.'<sup>10</sup> In differentiating between the two groups, however, I do not wish to imply that there was a higher class of spirituality that could be distinguished from a lower grade of piety belonging to the laity.<sup>11</sup> The pious practices and beliefs of the poor and

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<sup>10</sup> These terms 'lernyd' and 'lewid' are contrasted, for example, in the *Vision of Edmund Leversedge* (Robert Easting, ed., *St. Patrick's Purgatory*, Early English Text Society, Original Series 298 [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991], p. 106; hereafter cited as *SPP*).

<sup>11</sup> For a variety of brief discussions of the definition of popular piety, see Raoul Manselli, *La religion populaire au moyen age: Problèmes de méthode et d'histoire* (Montreal: Publications of the Institute of Medieval Studies, 1975); Pierre Boglioni, "Some Methodological Reflections on the Study of Medieval Popular Religion," *Journal of Popular Culture* 11 (1977): 697–705; Rosalind and Christopher Brooke, *Popular Religion in the Middle Ages: Western Europe 1000–1300* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), p. 12; John Bossy, *Christianity in the West: 1400–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. viii; Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 2–3. One work that assumes and then explores a relationship between the development of official and popular religion is Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000). An example of tracing the development of popular piety in a particular geographical area is offered by Andrew D. Brown, *Popular Piety in Late Medieval England: The Diocese of Salisbury, 1250–1550* in *Oxford Historical Monographs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

the rich, the secular and religious, and the pilgrim and the monk were all woven from the same wool. Not all teachings originated with those in official positions of religious authority. In fact, many of the stories used as instructional aids emerged from the experiences of the laity in the first place, so it is crucial not to make a rigid distinction between the teachers and the learners. In some ways it would be more accurate to refer to the entire medieval populace as The Taught. The true teachers about piety in general and the visionary world in particular were the stories from the past, preserved and transmitted by manuscripts, stained glass windows, and painted panels.

*Didactic Visions: Past Visions as Teachers*

These yesteryear accounts of medieval visions appeared in both poetry and prose: in chronicles, missals, saints' legends, autobiographies, and miracle collections. They appeared as integrated parts of larger works or as stand-alone documents. They involved visionaries from the laity and the clergy, men and women, children and adults, contemplatives and actives, believers and unbelievers, rich and poor, and the unknown and the famous. Visions were recorded by the visionaries themselves, by their priests, and by monks who collected the stories from word-of-mouth reports. Often, hagiographical telling and retelling of the visions transformed them through the years.

In the midst of this diversity of source, setting, and safekeeping, what all of the vision stories had in common was the element of immediate contact with the supernatural world. This perceived contact led to their effectiveness as teaching tools. In a culture saturated with an awareness of the otherworld and replete with ritual, symbol, and image dedicated to influencing the demonic and the divine, the vision served as the point of *most* immediate and intimate contact between the natural and supernatural worlds.

The vision stories from the past taught that visions were ways of seeing and knowing that revealed hidden secrets of God and the saints. As edifying accounts, they taught that visions were means of interacting with the otherworld. Visions made clear that different groups of supernatural visitors came with distinct agendas. Demons attacked, ghosts from purgatory negotiated for aid, and saints rendered assistance to their devotees. According to the narratives, relationships between visionaries and visitors were governed by clear guidelines that, if fol-

lowed, would preserve the safety of the visionary. On the other hand, the tales also taught that disguise and deception within visions were causes for anxiety and caution.

In order to study the transmission of this complex yet clear visionary worldview in late medieval England, I have focused on the vernacular materials used in the religious instruction of the laity. These were primarily collections of sermons, sermon illustrations, saints' legends, and religious manuals. The vision accounts found in these materials were inherited from the past. I have called them *didactic visions* because of their function as teaching aids. Another body of materials I have reviewed includes the stories of visions purported to have occurred to members of the laity in late medieval England. I will refer to these as *late medieval English lay visions* (hereafter, LMEL visions). We will analyze this material to see how and to what extent the inherited visionary accounts to which the laity were exposed shaped the reporting and experience of the visions that they themselves then had. The first group was modeled to the laity. The second emerged in the lives of the laity.

### *Sources of Didactic Visions*

It is important to acknowledge the limitations involved in speaking of the didactic visions as a body. In order to limit the range of this book, the sources have been restricted primarily to verbal narrative materials, rather than including other means of religious instruction of the laity such as drama, painting, stained glass, and sculpture. The non-verbal forms, however, emerged from the written stories, so that most, if not all of the stories depicted in art were probably included in the written and oral materials to which the laity had access. There are limits as well to how representative a picture the extant writings give of what was widely circulated in Medieval England. For one thing, the survival rates of extant manuscripts do not necessarily accurately reflect the ratio of the production of the copies of each work in the Middle Ages. Even if the production figures were known, they would not necessarily correspond to the amount of exposure each work had to the laity. Also, different regions in England would have had varying levels of access to particular works, so it would be somewhat misleading to present one model as being equally true for all of England. Future scholarship, therefore, will be needed to nuance the model presented in this book according to the unique characteristics of the different regions of England.



Meanwhile, a strong composite model for England as a whole is possible because the extensive extant medieval English religious instruction materials provide a rich repository of vision accounts. I have gathered more than 600 didactic vision accounts from these sources. I have focused on works that have many extant copies and were intended for large audiences rather than individual patrons. These works were ones that were written in the vernacular and were thus understandable by laypeople. They were penned specifically with the laity in mind rather than for monastic audiences. They range from early to late in the period under discussion, with many of the visions being repeated in several sources from different centuries. It is reasonable to assume that the stories that are included in these sources were familiar to most laypeople, since they are repeated in the saints' legends, sermons, and religious manuals listed below, which the historical record shows were disseminated widely across England.

Stories of visions were extremely popular in these materials of religious instruction. *Middle English Sermons* includes twenty-three visions in fifty-one sermons, a ratio of almost one vision to every two sermons. The percentage is even higher for another sermon collection, *Jacob's Well*, for in the ninety-five published sermons, there are at least sixty visions, an average of two visions for every three sermons. In an early fourteenth-century version of the *South English Legendary* (MS Corpus Christi, Cambridge 145), ninety saints' lives include a total of 164 visions. Thus, an analysis of these and similar sources reveals much about the religious conventions of the visionary world of the Late Middle Ages.

### *Sermons*

The sermon collections and collections of materials for sermons we will examine are the fourteenth-century collection of *Middle English Sermons*, the fifteenth-century *Speculum Sacerdotale*, the mid-fifteenth-century *Jacob's Well*, and Mirk's *Festial*.<sup>12</sup> Although there is no guarantee that

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<sup>12</sup> Woodburn O. Ross, ed., *Middle English Sermons*, Early English Text Society, Original Series 209 (London: Oxford University Press, 1940; hereafter cited as *MES*); edited from the fifteenth-century B.L. MS. Royal 18 B xxiii. Most of the sermons seem to have been written during the Great Schism and possibly compiled at Oxford University (pp. xxxi and lxxv). I have collected twenty-four visions from these sermons. Edward H. Weatherly, ed., *Speculum Sacerdotale*. Early English Text Society, Original Series 200 (London: Oxford University Press, 1936; hereafter cited as *SS*); edited from

all the written sermons were actually preached, it is probably safe to assume that their authors intended them to be. It shows that rather than allowing visions to sit in the collections of saints' legends and of *exempla* (short illustrative narratives), the stories that included visions were chosen by English preachers to be used in vernacular sermons that would have been understood by laypeople. The span of the sermons from the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries, with many of the stories being repeated in different collections, shows continuity throughout the era under discussion.

Most of the vision stories in sermons occurred in the *exempla*. These came from collections of *exempla* and saints' legends that were circulating in England and on the Continent. The late-medieval *exempla* collections, such as the *Alphabetum Narrationum*, *Gesta Romanorum*, and Johannes Junior's *Scala Celi*, and compilations from sermons of Jacques de Vitry, drew on Gregory's *Dialogues*, the *Vitae Patrum*, Caesar of Heisterbach's *Dialogus Miraculorum*, Valerius Maximus' *Factorum et Dictorum memorabilium*, Aesop's fables, and saints' lives. In spite of Gregory's sixth-century advocacy of the use of *exempla* in sermons, there is not much evidence of their widespread use until the thirteenth-century, when the preaching friars employed them, at which time they became quite common. In 1386, the Council of Salzburg reflected the irritation that some felt about *exempla*, declaring that "these false prophets [the wandering friars] by their sermons full of fables often lead astray the souls of their hearers," but the form remained popular in England up to the Reformation, as the many editions of Mirk's *Festial*, the most-renowned English *exempla*-replete sermon collection, for example, indicate.<sup>13</sup>

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the fifteenth-century B.L. MS. Additional 36791, which is the only known MS but is not the original. There are at least seventy-four visions in the SS. Arthur Brandeis, ed., *Jacob's Well*. Early English Text Society, Original Series 115 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1900; hereafter cited as *JW*); edited from the unique MS. Salisbury Cathedral, c. 1440. Only one volume out of two was printed, so I have collected all of the visions from the first 95 sermons, a total of approximately 60 visions. (Theodor Erbe, ed., *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies*, Early English Text Society, Extra Series 96 [London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1905; hereafter cited as *F*]). Although compiled by the early part of the fifteenth century, there were printed editions by Caxton (1483) and Wynken de Worde (1493). I collected over 170 visions from the *Festial*.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Albert Mosher, *The Exemplum in the Early Religious and Didactic Literature of England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1911), pp. 7, 12, 18. Mosher defines the *exemplum* as a "short narrative used to illustrate or confirm a general statement" (p. 1). Fritz Kemmler lists several of the uses of *exempla* in sermons as "confirmation, proof,

*Saints' legends*

The second category of sources for didactic visions encompasses the saints' legends. In the seventh century, Adamnan had organized his *Life of St. Columba* into the three categories of visions, miracles and prophecies.<sup>14</sup> Later saints' lives, however, tended to move chronologically through the lives of each individual saint, mentioning visions where they fit naturally into the narrative. Saints included many martyrs, ascetics, monks, mystics, kings, and popes. Their lives were recorded and elaborated by hagiographers in legends that served the "double purpose of honoring the saint and instructing the audience or reader in the significance of the saint for Christian faith."<sup>15</sup>

The collections of saints' legends examined include the early fourteenth-century compilation, *The South English Legendary*, chosen because it was produced early in the period and was copied many times. Approximately fifty-one manuscripts of it survive, indicating considerable popularity and an apparently large readership.<sup>16</sup> The second collection of legends examined is Caxton's *Golden Legend*, which Caxton collated from the French *Legende D'Oree*, the Latin *Legenda Aurea*, and the English version of 1438. The *Legenda Aurea* had been compiled by Jacob of Voragine between 1255 and 1266 and translated into French in the fourteenth century by Jean Belet de Vigny. There were seven printed editions of Caxton's *Golden Legend* by 1527, evidence that they were

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warning, attention, persuasion" in accordance with the *artes praedicandi* principle of "*utilitas et delectatio auditoribus*." (*Exempla in Context: A Historical and Critical Study of Robert Mannyng of Brunne's 'Handlyng Synne'* [Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1984], p. 154. For an analysis of how Chaucer and others adopted and adapted sermon exempla in their writing, see Larry Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> J.F. Webb, ed., *Lives of the Saints* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1965), pp. 16–17.

<sup>15</sup> Charlotte D'Evelyn and Frances A. Foster, "Saints' Legends," *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English: 1050–1500*, edited by J. Burke Severs (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1970) citing Theodor Wolpers, *Die englische Heiligenlegende des Mittelalters* (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1964), p. 411.

<sup>16</sup> Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, eds., *The South English Legendary*, volumes 1 and 2, Early English Text Society, Original Series 235 and 236 (London: Oxford University Press, 1956; hereafter cited as *SEL*) is edited from, among others, the MS Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, 145, an early fourteenth-century version that the editors refer to as "the earliest orderly text" of the *SEL*. I have collected over 160 visions from the legends in this version of the *SEL*. For further discussion of the sources for *SEL*, see S. and H., pp. 412–418.

quite popular, although in this case their use was probably limited to the wealthy, for they were expensive books.<sup>17</sup>

### *Religious manuals*

The religious manuals include *Dives and Pauper*, a prose treatise written between 1405 and 1410 in the form of a dialogue between Dives, a wealthy layman, and Pauper, a mendicant preacher. The *Myroure to Lewde Men and Women* is a prose version of the *Speculum Vitae*, a Northern English poem written in the third quarter of the fourteenth century. *The Pore Caitiff* is a late-fourteenth-century English treatise compiled by a “pore caitiff” to teach layfolk the way to heaven; it has forty-four extant manuscripts. *Handlyng Synne* is Robert Mannyng of Brunne’s translation and adaptation (c. 1303) of the Anglo-French poem *Manuel des Pechiez*. And *The Pricke of Conscience* is “the most popular English poem of the Middle Ages.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> F.S. Ellis, ed., *The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints as Englished by William Caxton*, 7 volumes (London: J.M. Dent, 1900; hereafter cited as *GL*); *ODCC*, p. 579; David Hugh Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, second edition; hereafter cited as *ODS*), p. xv. This is the one work listed amongst the didactic sources for which I have used only a representative sample rather than collecting all the visions. Instead of using all of the legends, I have concentrated on approximately twenty which were not included in either the Latin or French editions and therefore tend to have a closer connection with England, having been added to the collection either in the 1438 version or by Caxton and thus implying a greater chance of being material that was already circulating in English lore rather than being brought in from the Continent at a late date via the Latin and French versions. In addition to these twenty legends of English saints, I examined a small random sample of the other saints to ascertain that they were similar in content to visions in other sources. I thus collected 85 visions from Caxton’s *Golden Legend*.

<sup>18</sup> Priscilla Barnum, ed., *Dives and Pauper* Early English Text Society, Original Series 275 (London: Oxford University Press, 1976; hereafter, *DP*); there are twelve extant MSS and 3 printed editions: Richard Pynson, 1493; Wynken de Worde, 1496; and Thomas Berthelet, 1536.

Venetia Nelson, ed., *A Myroure to Lewde Men and Wymmen* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1981; hereafter cited as *ML*), a version of the *Speculum Vitae* that has approximately 40 extant MSS, one-third from the late fourteenth century and two-thirds from the fifteenth century. The *Myroure* has four fifteenth-century MSS (two are early, one in the second quarter and one in the third). The works are derived from the French *Somme le Roi* by Dominican Lorens d’Orléans, which in turn descends from *Summa de Vitiis et Virtutibus* of Peraldus, c. 1236–1248. Sister Mary Teresa Brady, “The Pore Caitif” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Fordham University, 1954) edited from MS. Harley 2336 (hereafter cited as *PC*). Idelle Sullens, ed., *Robert Mannyng of Brunne’s Handlyng Synne* (Binghamton,

Although all of these works were composed or collected in the late thirteenth through fifteenth centuries, editions of Mirk's *Festial*, *Dives and Pauper*, and Caxton's *Golden Legend* were printed well into the sixteenth-century, indicating that there was continuing interest in and use of sermon manuals and saints' legends up to the Reformation. Therefore, didactic vision accounts were in circulation throughout the entirety of the Late Middle Ages.<sup>19</sup>

*Late Medieval English Lay Visions (LMEL)*

The second grouping of sources includes about 400 LMEL vision accounts. The sources include a laywoman's autobiography, a monk's collection of local ghost stories, a collection of miracles for an emerging saint's cult, and various other shorter pieces. Most of these will be described at the point in the text where they are mentioned, but three are used in more than one chapter and so bear some discussion now.

One source we will use frequently is Margery Kempe's *Boke*.<sup>20</sup> Born c. 1373 into the family of a prominent city official of King's Lynn, Margery married at twenty, experienced a dramatic conversion after giving birth to her first child, had thirteen more children before persuading her husband to join her in a vow of chastity, and then set off alone on pilgrimages to the Holy Land, Rome, and Santiago de Compostela. Her book, which she dictated to two priests, is the first known autobiography in English. It is dedicated almost entirely to recounting and defending the visionary experiences of this tearful, would-be mystic. Margery Kempe's story is replete with accounts of her visions, auditions, and revelations, which she refers to as her high contempla-

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NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1983; hereafter cited as *HS*); nine extant MS's; base text: Bodley MS 415. There are at least 46 visions in this edition.

Richard Morris, *The Pricke of Conscience* (Berlin: A. Asher, 1863; hereafter, *PoC*) edited from B.L. MS Cotton Balba E. IX., (c. 1400–1425). See Robert R. Raymo, "Works of Religious and Philosophical Instruction," in *S. and H.*, p. 2269.

<sup>19</sup> There are, of course, many other possible sources for didactic vision accounts, and I will include examples, where relevant, from those that I have examined. But for terms of clarity, whenever I refer to totals or percentages relating to the didactic visions, I am referring to the 630 accounts collected from the sources listed above.

<sup>20</sup> Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe* Early English Text Society, Original Series 212 (London: Oxford University Press, 1940; hereafter cited as *MK*).

tions and meditations and sweet dalliances with the Lord. Her autobiography provides us with rare insights into the intimate details of a late medieval visionary's experiences. We are allowed to see the impact that visions have on her life and to study her emotional responses to them. Because visions are such an important part of her bid to be regarded as a saint, her book demonstrates how it is possible to draw on the various genres of medieval hagiography in using visions to bolster one's claims to sanctity. In addition, Margery's misgivings about her visions provide us with an excellent case study for the interplay of anxiety and authority in relation to the power of Mediated Revelation in visions in the Late Middle Ages.

Julian of Norwich's (c. 1342—after 1413) visions will also be mentioned at various points. Julian was an anchoress attached to the Church of Julian in Norwich. She recorded and interpreted her sixteen revelations in *Revelations of Divine Love*. It is difficult to fix Julian exclusively into either 'learned' or 'leuwe' categories. She was not a member of an order; her writings did not circulate widely in her time and thus cannot be claimed to have significantly influenced lay piety. Yet she read extensively and wrote her *Shewings* herself. Therefore, I include her to illuminate points under discussion where details from her visions are similar to those of lay visionaries, and to act as a foil where she differs.

Another important source is the collection of Byland Abbey ghost stories. In c. 1400, a monk from the Cistercian Byland Abbey in Yorkshire took a twelfth/thirteenth-century manuscript of the *Elucidarium* and tracts of Cicero and used its blank pages to record twelve visions occurring in his local area.<sup>21</sup> Eleven of the twelve accounts are about ghosts. Unlike the didactic visions, these visions are not incorporated into a surrounding text intended specifically for the spiritual education of the laity. Thus, for example, instead of forming a natural part of the life stories of saints or being embedded in sermons as illustrations, they

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<sup>21</sup> M.R. James published the Latin edition in *English Historical Review* 37 (1922): 413–422 and A.J. Grant an English translation in *The Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* vol., XXVII, 1924, pp. 363–379 (hereafter cited as *BA*), together with notes by M.R. James and Hamilton Thompson. The Royal MS. 15, A.XX in the British Museum is the source. I am relying on James for the dating and attribution of the writing of the ghost stories. M.R. James and Hamilton Thompson have done preliminary research into the names of the people and places mentioned in the accounts, but more work will need to be done.

are isolated from any didactic or legendary context. Nonetheless the monk almost certainly collected these stories for pedagogical purposes, and thus they illustrate the overlap between didactic and lay visions.

### *Overview of Book*

This book is the first to look at a large number of didactic visions that appear in the most widely-disseminated vernacular works for the religious instruction of the laity in a particular country in order to assess both what the accounts say about the visionary worldview taught to the laypeople and to study their impact on the visions of the laity. It explores the paradigm of the teachings' impact on the taught and the learners' adaptation of the material learned. The paradigm is based on the theory that the medieval Church—in its official pronouncements and teachings—presented a set of strategies and principles for dealing with various aspects of piety and that the laity took these symbols, rituals, and theological concepts and adapted them for their own use. Robert Scribner uses this theory, for example, in his study of sacramentals, in which he explores the overlap of liturgy with *functiones sacrae* and of the latter with a third category which he terms “folklorised ritual.”<sup>22</sup> We will apply the theory to the study of visions, examining the impact of didactic visions on ‘folklorised visions.’ The accounts of visions included in sermon illustrations, saints’ legends, and religious manuals reveal what was taught to the laity, both implicitly and explicitly about the strategies, principles, and range of experiences appropriate in the visionary realm. Each of the different categories of visions also reaffirmed key spiritual dynamics important to the life of the Church. The accounts of late medieval English lay visions provide helpful means of assessing the extent to which the laity absorbed what was taught to them and how they adapted the teachings to their own uses.

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<sup>22</sup> Robert W. Scribner, “Ritual and Popular Religion in Catholic Germany at the Time of the Reformation,” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 35 (1984): 58. See Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars* for application of the theory to Candlemass, Holy Week, and magic (pp. 15–52; 266–298).

*Explicit Purposes and Implicit Teachings of the Didactic Visions*

The explicitly stated applications of most of the didactic visionary accounts fell into five categories. The most common aim was to validate saints by demonstrating their competent and repeated dealings with the supernatural world. Secondly, visions were used to encourage the laity to adopt particular pious practices such as prayers for the dead or the sign of the cross. The third most frequent aim was to make a moral point, such as that a lecherous lifestyle on earth would lead to the pains of purgatory, the vision showing the sufferings in excruciatingly vivid detail. Fourth, many visions were used to engender attitudes of repentance in the laity, as preparation for the sacrament of confession. Fifth, occasionally they were used to teach a doctrinal point such as the Real Presence or the Trinity.

In addition to these explicit teachings of the visionary accounts, however, the visions also imparted a large body of implicit information. The inherited visions communicated a great deal of knowledge to the laity about the interaction of the natural and supernatural worlds. Unlike many monastic and ascetic practices, the visionaries' methods of dealing with everything from the appearances of foul fiends to glimpses of heaven were usually within the grasp of the laity. The visions would thus have served as models of behavior for the common people who regularly heard their stories in sermons and in the liturgy and who would have seen them depicted in stained glass windows and rood screen paintings. Although the explicit purposes of the stories of visions in sermons and saints' legends and religious manuals were for aims other than to promote visions amongst the laity, the repeated accounts of visions contributed to the world-view of the laypeople. The visions taught them by example and illustration what the otherworld was like, how saints and demons, ghosts and angels interacted with this World, and what the appropriate human response was to the supernatural's interruption of their lives. The repetition of individual stories in a variety of sources implies common lore, their vernacular language indicates accessibility to the laity, and their frequency suggests familiarity. These stories clearly were not to be relegated to the highly disfavored category of superstition, for the clerics and friars repeated them in church. The frequent recounting of many of the stories in collections of saints' legends and in sermons on saints' feast days and again in the manuals formed the backbone of the commonly inherited folklore, a folklore that bore the Church's imprimatur.



*Summary*

The interplay of the implicit and explicit teachings of the didactic vision accounts informs us that the vision was powerful in both demonstrating and supporting the key dynamics of medieval spirituality. What emerges, then, from this study of over a thousand visionary accounts, about 600 didactic and 400 lay, are five dynamics at the core of late medieval English popular piety that the didactic and lay visions together both participated in and strengthened: the transactional nature of the economy of atonement and satisfaction (chapter 1); reciprocated devotion of the cult of the saints (chapter 2); spiritual warfare (chapter 3); the visual nature of the liturgy (chapter 4); and the power and eventual seeds of self-destruction inherent in the vision as mediated revelation (chapter 5). It is the purpose of this book to explore these five spiritual dynamics and the role that visions played in enhancing them as they provided sacred glimpses into the hidden worlds of faith.

## CHAPTER ONE

### TRANSACTIONS OF SATISFACTION AND VISIONS OF THE OTHERWORLD

#### *The Satisfaction Theory of Atonement*

In the early centuries of the Christian Church, the predominant view of the atonement was the Ransom Theory.<sup>1</sup> Proponents of the theory argued that the primary aspect of Christ's atonement was his ransoming of the souls of human beings back from the Devil who had gained victory over them in the Fall, when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. Working in tandem with this theory was the Early Church's liturgical emphasis on baptism and exorcism, both of which corresponded to the spiritual warfare focus of the Ransom Theory. As the church moved into the early middle ages, a shift took place in the liturgy, moving to a greater emphasis on penitential and eucharistic rites, both of which involved the concept of making satisfaction.<sup>2</sup> Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033–1109), the author of *Cur Deus Homo*, the first treatise to present a full view of the atonement, reflected this trend when he proposed that the atonement was primarily about Christ making satisfaction to God for the sins of humanity. This both imitated and bolstered the increasing emphasis on making satisfaction that was evident in the sacrament of penance in particular.<sup>3</sup>

In his Satisfaction Theory, Anselm argued that the sin of the Fall had dishonored God, and that God's honor, like that of a feudal overlord's, needed to be restored. Much of the *Cur Deus Homo* was devoted to prov-

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<sup>1</sup> See H.D. McDonald, *The Atonement of the Death of Christ: In Faith, Revelation, and History* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1985). For detailed discussion of how the role of the Devil changed in medieval theology of the atonement, see C.W. Marx, *The Devil's Rights and the Redemption in the Literature of Medieval England* (Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 1995), pp. 17–27.

<sup>2</sup> George Huntston Williams, *Anselm: Communion and Atonement* (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1960), pp. 14–15.

<sup>3</sup> See Gwenfair Walters Adams, "The Atonement in the Middle Ages," in Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III, eds., *The Glory of the Atonement* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), pp. 243 and 259–261.

ing why the only one who could restore this honor was a person who was both God and man and therefore could only be Jesus Christ. Christ as God-Man restored God's honor by making satisfaction through his death. Anselm did not go into great detail about how this satisfaction should be appropriated. Thomas Aquinas, however, did, and he taught that Christians took on the benefits of Christ's sacrificial atonement when they participated in the sacraments.<sup>4</sup> This was particularly true of the sacrament of penance. Indulgences made it possible for people to pay money to the Church and receive years off their time in purgatory, through purchasing the resources of the Treasury of Merit. Testators left instructions in their wills specifying the amount of money to be paid for masses to be said and alms to be distributed for the benefit of their own and their families' souls.<sup>5</sup> There was thus an economy, combining the earthly and heavenly currencies, in which the cost of one's sins could be paid through sacramental transactions that made satisfaction.<sup>6</sup>

As part of their function in verifying the unverifiable, the didactic visions supported the Satisfaction Theory and its penitential, transactional implications. This was especially true of the visitations of ghosts from both purgatory and hell, and visits of visionaries to purgatory and hell. These visions bolstered beliefs related to the Satisfaction Theory which otherwise had to be taken entirely by faith, namely the care for the souls of the dead and the importance of preparing for one's own death through moral living and of paying penalties for one's sin now rather than later.

Whereas today morality is often defined in terms of its earthly, visible results, medieval morality—at least in popular piety—referenced otherworldly, invisible, and eternal consequences. The medieval sacra-

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<sup>4</sup> "Christ's Passion is, so to say, applied to man through the sacraments..." (Fathers of the English Dominican Province, trans., *St. Thomas Aquinas: Summa Theologica* [New York: Thomas More Publishing, 1948], III: 61:1).

<sup>5</sup> For example, in 1426, William Hanningfield of Essex and Suffolk left money in his will for his lands to be sold to establish two priests to sing masses for forty years for "the soules of me, the forsaied William, Agnes, Iohan, Cisily myn wyfes, William...and for all the soules that I am bounde to do for...[and] be dispended in dedes of almes by the discrecion of myn Executours." (Frederick J. Furnivall, ed., *The Fifty Earliest English Wills of the Court of Probate, London, A.D. 1387-1439*. Early English Text Society, Original Series 78 [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1882], p. 70).

<sup>6</sup> For a very different approach to medieval views of the atonement, see Jane McAvoys's feminist theology of atonement as satisfaction using six medieval women mystics: Julian of Norwich, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Hildegard of Bingen, Margery Kempe, Hadewijch of Brabant, and Catherine of Siena (*The Satisfied Life: Medieval Women Mystics on Atonement* [Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2000]).

ment of penance and aid to the dead were tied to the system of morality whose consequences were unverifiable—unverifiable, that is, except for by visions, which allowed eternity to break into temporality, and conversely, allowed human beings to catch a glimpse of eternal consequences. Apart from the vision, there was no way of confirming that warnings about eternal sanctions were indeed legitimate. Like testimonials and photographs in travel brochures, the visions associated with the underworld offered a form of evidence, which although not incontrovertible, was the most forceful form of proof available that prayers for the dead, the sacrament of penance, and the medieval standards of morality were accurate.

### 'Ghost'

The first category of Satisfaction–Transaction visions we will examine is that of ghosts. The term 'ghost' was inherited from the Anglo-Saxon and was used to describe the human soul as differentiated from the human body, to refer to good spirits such as angels or bad spirits such as demons, and even to connote the Holy Spirit. But according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, its current primary usage as "the soul of a deceased person, spoken of as appearing in a visible form, or otherwise manifesting its presence, to the living" did not emerge until the period that we are examining, the Late Middle Ages.<sup>7</sup> The earliest reference given by the *Oxford English Dictionary* is c. 1385, in Chaucer. There is a reference that is probably slightly earlier, however, in the Middle English translation of a ghost story from France, the *Spiritus Guidonis*, or the "Gast of Gy." These two Middle English manuscripts, according to Schleich, are mid-fourteenth century and both used the term 'gast'

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<sup>7</sup> Although the fourteenth century seems to be the earliest that the term was used in this way, the phenomenon of the spirits of the deceased appearing to the living was present earlier. Ghosts from purgatory in particular, however, were a relatively recent development, for in the Late Middle Ages, purgatory as a fully developed concept was still a relatively young doctrine. During the thirteenth century, scholasticism played a crucial role in the further development and rising prominence of the doctrine, with the Second Council of Lyons (1274) granting purgatory official status. The earliest representations of purgatory date from the thirteenth century, with its iconography becoming popular only in the fourteenth [Jacques LeGoff, *The Birth of Purgatory* (London: Scholar Press, 1984), pp. 237 and 367]. For a wide-ranging study of medieval ghosts, see Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

and ‘gaste’ to refer to a deceased burgess whose spirit returned to his wife to ask for help to be released from purgatory.<sup>8</sup>

### *Didactic Visions of Ghosts*

In the didactic visions, ghosts returned primarily from either hell or purgatory, and the origination points led to two different models of relating. The ghosts from purgatory came to negotiate for aid, and the ghosts from hell came to admonish. One might think that ghosts returning from purgatory or hell would be differentiated on the basis of the kinds of sins they had committed, but this was not the case. One could not predict by looking at people’s lives whether they would end up in hell, purgatory, or heaven, and therefore, one could not predict from where one’s sinful relatives would return. One could not assume that one’s relatives, no matter how perfect their lives appeared, would be in heaven. Apparently good relatives might return from purgatory rather than from heaven, and those thought to be sinful might return from either purgatory or hell, either asking for help or being beyond it, depending on the case. Thus there was a great deal of the unexpected about visitations from the dead. But although dead visitors might surprise visionaries with the news they brought about the states of their souls, the visionary did not need to be confused about how to respond, for the didactic vision accounts presented clear patterns. In simple terms, ghosts from purgatory came to ask for help and ghosts from hell, to warn. The help should be granted; the warnings should be heeded.

The laity’s awareness of the difference between these two categories is evident in the account of a laywoman’s encounter with an unknown ghost. An English woman reported to her confessor that on St. Laurence Day 1422 she was woken by the appearance of a female spirit. Staring in horror at the apparition’s wounds and the flame of fire streaking out of its mouth, the woman gripped the thought of Jesus’ Passion like a shield against the danger and lashed out with a Trinitarian formula, “Whate art thou, in Goddis name, that thus sore trauaillest me? And I coniur the in the Faderes name and the Son and the Holy Gost, thre persons in on God in Trenyte, that thou tel me what thou

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<sup>8</sup> Gustav Schleich, ed., “The Gast of Gy,” *Palaestra* I (Berlin: Mayer and Müller, 1898), pp. i–ii.

art that thus trauaillest me and whether thou be a spirite of purgatory to haue help of me other a spirite of helle to ouercome me and trowble me.” Faced with an unknown entity from the underworld, the English woman believed that if the spirit were from hell she could be in danger, for it might be a demon, whereas if the spirit were from purgatory, she would merely be asked for help. To her relief, the spirit, formerly a nun named Margaret who had been a sister at a nearby house, responded, “Nay, I am a spirite of purgatory that wold haue help of the and nogt a spirite of helle to drech the...And in the name of God I ask help of the.” And thus began a long and complicated series of negotiations which resulted in Margaret, with the English woman’s help, being freed from purgatory and led to the golden gate of heaven. The English woman’s experience, referred to as a *Revelation of Purgatory*,<sup>9</sup> was not unique. It conformed to the pattern propagated by the many accounts of ghosts from purgatory that were told in the didactic vision accounts.

*The negotiations of purgatory’s ghosts*

Vision accounts of purgatorial ghosts verified for the laity, as they did for the visionaries, that the Church-sanctioned strategies for making satisfaction and thereby gaining salvation were indeed effective. At least seven percent of the didactic visions involved human spirits returning from the otherworld. Of these, approximately three-quarters were ghosts from purgatory.<sup>10</sup> In contradistinction to the spiritual warfare involved in encounters with demons (see chapter 3), interactions with ghosts from purgatory were usually ones in which the ghosts negotiated with the visionaries for help to get out of their pain. They sought aid including prayers, masses, and alms, substitutionary penance and pilgrimages, and post-mortem absolutions.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Marta Powell Harley, ed., *A Revelation of Purgatory by an Unknown, Fifteenth-Century Woman Visionary: Introduction, Critical Text, and Translation* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1985), p. 61 (hereafter cited as *RP*).

<sup>10</sup> Ghosts from heaven were very rare; souls might return to report that they had been released from purgatory and were on their way to heaven, but usually they did not report if they had gone immediately to heaven upon their deaths. St. Agnes was an exception, for she returned a week after her martyrdom to comfort her relatives at her burial place and to tell them that she was in heaven (*SEL*, p. 24).

<sup>11</sup> R.C. Finucane’s chapter, “Purgatory, Penance and the Restless Dead in the Later Middle Ages” in *Appearances of the Dead: A Cultural History of Ghosts* (New York: Prome-

*Suffrages for the suffering*

The visions affirmed penance and pilgrimage as appropriate means of making satisfaction, calling as they did for the living to help revenants by substituting for them in unfinished penances and pilgrimages. In *Speculum Sacerdotale*, a woman who had made a pact with the devil—including the stipulation that she would never be shriven—died unshriven. Her son confessed in her place and carried out a penance of seven years' fasting for her.<sup>12</sup> *Revelation of Purgatory* also involved substitution, for Margaret thanked her visionary for going on pilgrimage in her place, "And if thou had nogt gone for me to Southwich on pilgrimage in wirship of God and Our Lady—ffor I had avowed hit and I myght nogt do hit and thou hast don hit for me—and els I shold ful foule haue bene letted on my passage when I shold ben weyed out of my peynes..."<sup>13</sup>

Other methods of aid included the giving of alms<sup>14</sup> and the saying of prayers. The Council of Florence (1439) had stated:

And, if [Christians] are truly penitent and die in God's love before having satisfied by worthy fruits of penance for their sins of commission and omission, their souls are cleansed after death by purgatorial penalties. In order that they be relieved from such penalties, the acts of intercession (*suffragia*) of the living faithful benefit them, namely the sacrifices of the Mass, prayers, alms and other works of piety which the faithful are wont to do for the other faithful according to the Church's practice.<sup>15</sup>

Paschasius, in *Handlyng Synne*, served as an illustration of the effectiveness of prayers for the dead. He was the only one to vote for the wrong pope, which condemned him. He died, and long afterwards St. Germanus bathed at a public bath and found him serving there. Paschasius

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theus Books, 1984), pp. 49–89 is highly relevant to this discussion. My observations, arrived at independently, coincide with many of his, even though his are based primarily on two *exempla* collections which are slightly earlier (thirteenth century) than the LMA's, and one of which is a German rather than English work. The similarity in our conclusions provides support for the hypothesis that the English laity heard many of the same *exempla* as the Continental laity and would have shared a similarly-inherited view of visionary experience. More research, of course, would need to be done in order to prove the connection conclusively.

<sup>12</sup> *SS*, p. 227.

<sup>13</sup> *RP*, p. 84.

<sup>14</sup> See *JW*, p. 203.

<sup>15</sup> J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, eds., *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church* (New York: Alba House, 1982), p. 686.

asked the saint to pray for him so that he might be set free. The bishop went home, prayed to God, and the next time he returned, Paschasius was gone.<sup>16</sup> The bishop's prayers had released him to heaven.

The most commonly requested method, however, was the singing of masses, another method advocated by the Council of Florence. One of the most popular illustrations of this was *St. Gregory's Trental*.<sup>17</sup> The story was included in missal rubrics encouraging the use of the trental, which became a frequently requested item in wills. According to the story, the pope's deceased mother appeared to him while he was at Mass, and asked him for help to be released from her 'pains'.<sup>18</sup> She specified that she needed thirty masses:

Who-so trewly wolde take a trentelle  
Of ten chef festes of the yere,  
To syng for me yn this manere,  
Thre masses of crystys natyuyte,  
And of the xij day othur thre,  
Thre of our ladyes puryfycacioun,  
And othur thre of here Annunciacioun,  
Thre of crystes glorious Resurreccioun,  
And other thre of his hyg Ascencioun,  
And of pentecoste othur thre,  
And thre of the blessed trinite,  
And of our ladyes Assumpcioun, othur thre,  
And of here joyfulle natiuite thre;  
These ben the chefe festes ten  
That sokour the sowles that ben fro heuenn.  
Who so sayth these masses with-out fayle,  
For synnfulle sowles they shalle a-vayle.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *HS*, pp. 274–275.

<sup>17</sup> This story is included in the Advocates' Library MS Jac. V. 7.27 as edited by W. Turnbull, *The Visions of Tundale, Together with Metrical Moralizations and Other Fragments of Early Poetry Hitherto Inedited* (Edinburgh: T.G. Stevenson, 1843) and in the British Library MS. Cotton Caligula A II collated with Lambeth MS 306 in F.J. Furnivall, ed., *Political, Religious and Love Poems* Early English Text Society, Original Series 15 (London: N. Trübner, 1866). F.J. Furnivall, ed., *The Minor Poems of the Vernon MS*, Part 2 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1901), pp. 260–267. For discussion of the origins and use of the English version of the Trental, see R.W. Pfaff, "The English Devotion of St. Gregory's Trental," *Speculum*, 49 (1974): 75–90.

<sup>18</sup> This vision raises the question of whether the late medieval laity would have thought Gregory's mother was returning from hell or purgatory. She refers to deserving the pains of hell—most likely because the story originated before the full development of the doctrine of purgatory—but her eventual release into heaven would not comport with the late medieval theology that those in hell are damned forever.

<sup>19</sup> Frederick J. Furnivall, ed., *Political, Religious, and Love Poems*, Early English Text



The pope faithfully performed the trental and his mother returned, her hideousness and stench transformed into such heavenly beauty that her son momentarily mistook her for the Queen of Heaven. An angel then escorted her to heaven.

The high degree of specificity in Gregory's mother's request was modeled by other didactic visions, and was reflected by the *Revelation of Purgatory*.<sup>20</sup> Margaret indicated exactly which masses, psalms, and hymns to say, how many days each, and how many times in a day. She even specified that certain verses should be said repeatedly, and she gave directions about gestures and intensity, insisting that the priest should say the psalm "castynge vp hert and eyghen to Godward, ffor the more deuoutly he seith hit, the more relecet shold by [my] peynes and the grettyr shold be his mede." She wanted the different priests to say different masses, including the Requiem, the Mass of the Trinity, of St. Peter, of the Virgin Mary, and of All Saints.<sup>21</sup>

Contrary to the teachings of the theologians whose views of the *ex opere operato* nature of the sacraments rendered the quality of the priest's prayers or life irrelevant, the exempla seemed to imply that these elements were important to the efficacy of sacraments and therefore, occasionally a revenant became very specific about who he wanted to sing the masses.<sup>22</sup> *Handlyng Synne* told of a knight who was visited by a friend who was suffering punishment in purgatory because of clothing that he had stolen from a poor man. The 'cloth' was hot and heavy like a fiery mountain sitting on him. He said he might be "clere thurgh the sacrament of the autere."<sup>23</sup> But when the knight suggested particular priests, his friend expressed concern because of the sinfulness of their lives. He said that "The messe ys cure gode ynow, / But the preyer hath no myght / For hys lyff ys nat clene dyght."<sup>24</sup> Only when the knight named a priest who was "a gode man and a ryght steadfast" was his friend satisfied.<sup>25</sup> The *Revelation of Purgatory* shared this concern

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Society, Original Series 15 (London: N. Trübner, 1866), p. 87. (By permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society.)

<sup>20</sup> See *F*, pp. 105 and 292.

<sup>21</sup> *RP*, p. 62–63.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Aquinas, for example, discussed the efficacy of receiving communion from a sinful priest in *ST* III:82:5. The quality of alms could also be important. In one vision, a priest saw Pope Benedict riding on a black horse, suffering because the alms that had been given on his behalf had been bought using stolen goods (*JW*, p. 203).

<sup>23</sup> *HS*, p. 59.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 59–60.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60. Another example in *Handlyng Synne* involved a Suffolk man dying near

about having the right priest. When Margaret requested that priests say masses for her, she named five men by name.<sup>26</sup>

The importance of aiding purgatorial souls was further buttressed by the fact that demons persistently attempted to interrupt the process. The visionary who attempted to help a soul out of purgatory should not be surprised if he had to put up with some resistance from fiends. In the *South English Legendary* and *Speculum Sacerdotale* when St. Theobald heard the voice of a ghost from purgatory trapped inside a chunk of ice, he promised to sing thirty masses for him. The devil attempted to distract him by inciting fighting which the bishop was called to stop, by besieging the bishop's town, and finally by causing a fire. But the bishop persevered in saying a mass each day, and the soul was eventually set free.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, didactic visions enforced the substitutionary completion of penances and pilgrimages, the giving of alms, the saying of prayers and masses for the dead, the particular details of the trental, the importance of the quality of life and prayer of the officiating priests, and the urgency of assisting those in purgatory.

### *Reward and coercion*

In addition to demonstrating the methods of making satisfaction, purgatorial ghost stories served as motivators, by suggesting both the possibilities of reward and the threat of pain.

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Sudbury and returning to ask his wife to have a mass sung for him. The following morning, the wife paid a friar to perform a mass "yn comune." When the mass was sung, she went home content. Her husband returned that night and told her that he was not yet "yn blys," for the mass that was sung was only partly for him since it was a communal mass. If a good priest said one especially for him, then there was hope that the mass could save him. He insisted that it be done by "a prest, a prest of clene lyff!" In the morning his wife went to the friary again and asked the prior which brother was best. The prior chose a godly brother who, before he began his mass, "preyed to god hys orysun / Yn ful grete afflyccyun." After the mass, he told the woman to go home and return to them when she had any news. The third night, the husband returned again, but this time from "blys." He said that the mass was so efficacious that if the friar had said it for a hundred additional souls, it would have worked for all of them (*HS*, p. 259–261).

<sup>26</sup> "Sho named a good mannys name, the which was and is my confessour;" secondly "thy gostly fadyr, Sir John;" thirdly "thi fadyr, the recluse of Westmyster;" fourthly "Sir Richard Bone;" and fifthly "Don John Pery" (*RP*, p. 62).

<sup>27</sup> *SEL*, p. 467–469; *SS*, p. 226.

The didactic visions tended to emphasize the reward in helping the dead. Most of the purgatorial ghost stories ended happily. In many of them the ghosts returned one last time to report that they were on their way to 'bliss.' In a vision quite similar to *Gregory's Trental*, for example, the son who had fasted seven years for his mother who had made a pact with the devil, received a grateful visit from her at the end of the seven years, and she was "brygt and schynynge as the sone."<sup>28</sup> Margaret, in *Revelation*, thanked the woman and priests who had helped her, "And God geld the and ham both that haue helped me so sone ther-to. And bot that if I had grace of helpe, I shold haue bene punyshed in purgatory yit iij yer lenger. And if that I had nogt appered to the and had help of the, I shold haue had more stronger peyne than I hadde."<sup>29</sup> In one didactic account, a returning revenant expressed his gratitude in concrete action. The *South English Legendary* told the tale of a clerk who had a habit of saying the *De profundis* for all souls each time that he passed a church. One time when he walked past the graveyard late at night, thieves attacked him. The bodies buried in the churchyard rose and chased after the thieves, brandishing tools they would have used in life, the plough man with his "aker staf," the "schutere" with his bow and knife.<sup>30</sup> The grateful souls had rescued their helper.

On the other hand were a few visions that involved threats or cases of negative repercussions for those who initially refused to help the deceased. The *Speculum Sacerdotale* referred to a bishop who had just suspended a priest for singing masses for the dead every day. As the bishop passed the churchyard, the dead cried out from their graves, "This bisshop synges no masse for vs and hath takyn fro vs oure preste, and sothely therefore but yif he the sonner amende it he schall therfore dye in an euel deth." The bishop reinstated the priest and sang masses for the dead himself for the rest of his life.<sup>31</sup> Another account indicated that sometimes ghosts did not merely threaten but actually wrought vengeance. In the *Speculum Sacerdotale* and the *South English Legendary*, a

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<sup>28</sup> *SS*, p. 227 (*Speculum Sacerdotale*. Edited by Edward H. Weatherly. E.E.T.S. [reprinted 2000]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>29</sup> *RP*, p. 79.

<sup>30</sup> *SEL*, pp. 469–470 (*The South English Legendary*. Edited by Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, E.E.T.S. [1956, reprinted 1967]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>31</sup> *SS*, p. 226 (*Speculum Sacerdotale*. Edited by Edward H. Weatherly. E.E.T.S. [1936, reprinted 2000]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

knight returned to his cousin who had promised to be his executor but who had not sold the knight's horse to give the money to the poor as the knight had instructed. The knight was therefore returning to avenge his having had to endure purgatory an extra eight days. He predicted that his cousin would die and his soul would go to hell.<sup>32</sup> The use of coercion occurred also in the *Revelation of Purgatory*, for Margaret warned the English woman, "Cursed mot thou be and wo worth the bot thou hast the to be my help."<sup>33</sup>

Whereas didactic visions involved both reward and coercion, the Byland Abbey ghost stories, as *lay* visions, leaned almost entirely to the side of coercion. Some involved physical force. One ghost flipped a man over a hedge and then caught him, in order to force him to conjure him, saying, "If you had don so first [i.e. conjured me] I would not have hurt you."<sup>34</sup> The ghost of a canon of Newburgh tore the clothing of a man as he struggled with him.<sup>35</sup> One Byland vision added the threat of a curse. In Snowball the tailor's second encounter, a ghost came in the form of a raven, flying at him, pecking viciously at him, throwing him from the horse, knocking him out, and terrifying him.<sup>36</sup> The ghost then threatened that if the tailor did not help him "your flesh shall rot and your skin shall dry up and shall fall off from you utterly in a short time."<sup>37</sup> Although in several of the Byland accounts we are told that the ghost rested in peace, not one of them mentions the ghost returning to thank the visionary who helped him. Why was there an escalation of violence from the Church's *exempla* to the reported experience of the laity with ghosts? Perhaps it came simply from the desire of the storytellers to emphasize their bravado. Unlike the *exempla* from the past, the Byland Abbey stories were about people living in the area where the accounts would be recounted and where reputations would matter.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 227–228; *SEL*, p. 476.

<sup>33</sup> *RP*, p. 61.

<sup>34</sup> *BA*, p. 372. Conjuring, used to make spirits identify themselves, was something that demons wished to avoid but which the Byland Abbey ghosts desired since without it they could not make their identities and thus their wishes known.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 371.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 365.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 365–366.

*Warnings against ecclesial violations*

A third way in which visions of ghosts supported the Theory of Satisfaction was through providing warnings against the very sins which were, of course, what made satisfaction necessary in the first place. This was true of the minority of the didactic visions of purgatorial revenants in which the ghosts were not returning to ask for aid. Instead of being told in order to foster help for the dead, these accounts served as warnings to listeners. The warnings were especially about avoiding sins against monastic and ecclesiastical rules and authorities, and these visions tended to be associated with ghosts' needs for absolution.

At least two vision accounts emphasized the dependence—of both those in orders and of the laity—on the Church's absolution, for their eternal happiness. *Jacob's Well* told of an abbot who kept money in his house, a violation of his vows. St. Gregory cursed the monk and he died without absolution. The monk's abbot told Gregory that the monk was contrite and shriven and would have been absolved if death had not come so suddenly. St. Gregory wrote his absolution in a bull and asked one of his deacons to read it over his grave. On the next night, the dead monk appeared to the abbot and said that he had been in excruciating pain because of the curse of St. Gregory, but yesterday when the absolution was read over his grave, he was released from his pain.<sup>38</sup> Mirk told of three men who had stolen an ox from Abbot Lulsull and how the abbot had “made a sentens therfor” of excommunication against them. Only two of the men sought absolution. The third man died, and his spirit wandered throughout the parish causing such fear that no one dared venture outside after sunset. One evening, the priest Sir Thomas Woodward, on his way to take the Eucharist to a sick woman, came across the spirit. The spirit begged him to accompany his wife to Abbot Lulsull to have him absolve him. The priest obliged him, and thus he was rescued by the abbot's absolution.<sup>39</sup> Similar stories involved a wealthy lord who refused to pay his tithe and thus needed post-death absolution from St. Augustine of Canterbury, and two annoying nuns who requested posthumous absolution from St. Benedict, who had

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<sup>38</sup> *JW*, p. 63.

<sup>39</sup> *F*, p. 281 (Theodore Erbe, ed., *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies*. E.E.T.S. [1905; Kraus reprint, 1987]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

cursed them.<sup>40</sup> In each of these cases it was a liturgical, sacramental act that called the unabsolved from their graves, thus further demonstrating the power of the Church's rituals over even the dead.

Violating one's religious orders, stealing from an abbot, refusing to pay tithes, and angering one's prelate were all offences against the Church, and it was to the clergy's advantage to repeat stories that showed the consequences of robbing the Church of its due. The clergy's position was further strengthened by the fact that within each of these stories, the ghost was dependent on the clergy for absolution. Only priests had the power to curse parishioners, using the general sentence of excommunication, and they alone had the power to dissolve the curse.<sup>41</sup> At the same time that these vision accounts demonstrated the dependence of the laity on the clergy, they emphasized the necessity of treating the clergy appropriately.

### *The Byland Abbey Ghosts*

It was in this category within the ghost visions—that of warnings not to sin against the Church—that the extent to which the laity absorbed the forms of the *exempla* into their own visionary experience was most clearly seen. This was the category of ghost visions which was most obviously in the clergy's interest, and thus the fact that the monks and the laity nevertheless adopted it therefore shows how much of an impact the *exempla* had on the laity.

Two of the Byland ghost stories involved spirits who were excommunicated for violations of church property. The canon of Newburgh was excommunicated “for certain silver spoons which he had hidden in a certain place.” The visionary was requested to take them to the prior and seek absolution, the implication being that the canon had stolen them from the prior.<sup>42</sup> The ghost of a man from Ayton had been excommunicated “for a certain matter of sixpence,” most likely unpaid tithes. The account specified that absolution and satisfaction were requisite for him to rest in peace.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> *GL*, vol. 3, p. 199; *JW*, p. 64.

<sup>41</sup> As Finucane indicates, by the Late Middle Ages, the “once-dreaded sentence of excommunication could be reversed after death” (*Appearances*, p. 63).

<sup>42</sup> *BA*, p. 371.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 372.

The fact that the stories were handed down by monks and recorded by one was not sufficient reason for their pro-clerical slant. Nor did the fact that one of the ghosts was a canon obviate the message of the visions that crime against the Church did not pay. Both visions appear to have happened to laypeople and thus initially to have been reported by them. The first occurred to a man who was “talking with the master of the ploughmen;” the fact that the ghost asked the man to go to the prior to ask for absolution seems to indicate that the man was not a priest himself. The second man was not identified by vocation, but again there is no indication that he himself granted absolution to the ghost.<sup>44</sup> A third Byland Abbey ghost story which included details that affirmed proper treatment of the Church was the vision which Richard Rowntree, his lay status confirmed by his being married, had. The vision was of ghosts riding past him on “horses and sheep, and oxen...the animals were those that had been given to the church when they died.”<sup>45</sup> This implied, of course, that what was given to the church would benefit one after death. As a monk-written story, then, the account encouraged laity to give materially to the Church. As a lay-initiated report the account showed that the laity had absorbed that teaching. It is indicative of the high degree of influence of the didactic visions on laypeople that the laity should contribute back to the clergy stories which were so clearly in clerically-initiated genres, ones which included messages discouraging crimes against the clergy and reinforced the clergy’s crucial role in the cure of souls.<sup>46</sup>

### *The Admonitions of Hell’s Ghosts*

#### *The seriousness of sin and the complexity of penance*

We now turn to the category of ghosts from hell.<sup>47</sup> These particular visions affirmed the Satisfaction Theory and its implications with

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 371–372.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> For further discussion of the role of the dead in late medieval English life, see Clive Burgess, “‘Longing to be prayed for’: death and commemoration in an English parish in the later Middle Ages” in Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall, eds., *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 44–65.

<sup>47</sup> For a history of the development of hell in Antiquity and the early Church by a

respect to the gravity of sin and the importance of the sacrament of penance. Unlike ghosts from purgatory, ghosts returning from hell did not request help. The fact that they were not asking for help itself affirmed the teaching that there was no way out of hell.<sup>48</sup> Rather, these ghosts simply reported on their damnation or tried to warn those who were left behind.<sup>49</sup> In both cases, the visionary was wise to avoid the actions that had led to the ghost's judgment. A few of these visions were used to exhort against specific sins, and many were used, both for their visionaries and their later listeners, to underscore the importance of proper confession.

One of the implications of the return-from-hell visions when taken as a whole was that it took only one unshriven sin to condemn one to hell. This fit well with the didactic purpose of the visions, since emphasizing one sin in a given sermon helped to underline one cause of damnation per vision of hell. In *Handlyng Synne*, for example, one tale began with:

Seynt gregory of a nunne tellys  
That gede to helle *for no thyng ellys*,  
But for she spak euer vyleyny  
Among here felawys al an hy.<sup>50</sup>

*Jacob's Well* told of a countess who was known for her chastity, generosity to the poor, and devotion in prayer. Shockingly, when she died, fiends snatched her to hell. She appeared—hideously ugly in her visage—to a French lady and warned her that although she had been good in “alle othere thynges,” she had been vain, and for this alone she was eternally damned.<sup>51</sup> In *Handlyng Synne*, a backbiting monk at a renowned English abbey returned after his death to warn a fellow monk that he had been damned for a single sin.<sup>52</sup>

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medieval historian, see Alan E. Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

<sup>48</sup> Thomas Aquinas, for example, taught that “it is safer to say simply that suffrages profit not the damned” (*ST* III:71:5).

<sup>49</sup> Aquinas differentiated between those returning from hell and those from purgatory when he stated that “for man’s instruction and intimidation [the damned may] be permitted to appear to the living; or again in order to seek our suffrages, as to those who are detained in purgatory” (*ST* S:69:3).

<sup>50</sup> *HS*, p. 41 (italics added).

<sup>51</sup> *JW*, p. 80 (Arthur Brandeis, ed., *Jacob's Well*. E.E.T.S. [1900, reprinted 1999]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>52</sup> *HS*, p. 91.



Occasionally it was a hidden motive rather than a visible sin that was condemned in a vision account. In Mirk's *Festial*, a rich man in Ireland who exhibited great generosity to the poor, died and appeared to someone that loved him—dark as a demon and smelling putrid—and told him that his vanity had rendered his almsgiving worthless.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the vision taught that even good deeds, if done with the wrong mindset, were void.

For the preacher, focusing on one sin per entry to hell achieved two purposes, isolating one item for homiletic clarity, but secondly, implying that sin was deadly serious, since it took only one sin or evil intention to condemn one to hell for eternity. Often, however, souls returned from hell to report that it was not simply one deadly sin, but one *unshriven* deadly sin that had damned them. This shifted the focus from the avoidance of sin to the practice of penance. The *Middle English Sermons* told of a dying man who had confessed all but one sin, which he was too ashamed to confess. When he died, fiends took him to hell. Shortly after the burial, a curate was saying his prayers in the graveyard and came upon a terrifying entity. He bade it “in the vertewe of Ihesu do me non harme and tell me now what that thou arte.” The dead identified himself as the man who had been buried the previous day and assured him he would not harm him. The priest wondered how a good man who had participated in the sacraments could be in hell. The dead man informed him that it was his single unconfessed mortal sin that had condemned him to eternal damnation.<sup>54</sup>

In addition to emphasizing the need to confess all *sins*, the vision accounts also stressed the requirement of confessing sins *properly*, a detail that other contemporary religious instruction taught. The twenty-first canon of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, known as the *Omni utriusque sexus* decree, had made annual confession mandatory for all Christians.<sup>55</sup> One important area of scholastic debate in the century following the decree was the relationship between contrition, attrition and the sacrament of penance. As well, in the thirteenth century, English confessional manuals, sermons and synodalia dealt extensively with the topic of penance.

<sup>53</sup> *F*, p. 71.

<sup>54</sup> *MES*, p. 205 (Woodburn O. Ross, ed. *Middle English Sermons*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1998]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>55</sup> See Mary Flowers Braswell, *The Medieval Sinner: Characterization and Confession in the Literature of the English Middle Ages* (London: Associated University Presses, 1983), p. 26.

There were three major streams of thought on the matter. Abelard and others had taught that “contrition is the principal part of penance—that pardon comes from sorrow proceeding from the love of God.”<sup>56</sup> Their view prevailed until Thomas Aquinas, claiming that the sacrament of penance functioned *ex opere operato*, allowed for the sacrament to make up for attrition. Attrition was the imperfect repentance that, instead of flowing from a love of God and a sorrow for having offended him, came rather from a fear of punishment or repugnance at one’s actions. Aquinas stated that the sacrament of penance was necessary for both the contrite and those who were attrite. Duns Scotus, on the other hand, believed that only the attrite person needed the sacrament of penance; those who were perfectly contrite could receive justification apart from the sacrament. Saints, however, were the only ones who could achieve perfect contrition.<sup>57</sup>

Different visions clarified what constituted proper exercise of the sacrament of penance. Many of the accounts were told in *Jacob’s Well*, for it included several sermons on the sacrament of penance. In preaching about penance, *Jacob’s Well* said that contrition (“depe in thin herte, thou sorwe for thi curs”), confession or shrift (“wyth an hole purpos, neuere to trespacyn agen in that curs”), and satisfaction (“make amendys for thi wrongys”) were the crucial elements in penance.<sup>58</sup> It included a sermon each on the three elements plus one on restitution.

In preaching contrition, *Jacob’s Well* told the story of a knight, who, riding homeward in the moonlight saw the spirit of a dead, lechery-prone woman running away from fiends. He could hear the demons in the distance sounding as if they were a pack of hunters and their hounds. The knight wound the woman’s hair about his left arm and held his sword in his right, to defend her. But she was so afraid that she ran away, leaving her hair, and the fiends caught her and took her to hell. The next morning, the knight opened her grave, put the hair on her head, and told everyone that demons had snatched her away to hell because she lacked contrition.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> See Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 19.

<sup>57</sup> Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, pp. 18–19, 22–27.

<sup>58</sup> *JW*, pp. 64–65 (Arthur Brandeis, ed., *Jacob’s Well*. E.E.T.S. [1900, reprinted 1999]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>59</sup> *JW*, p. 166.

Another account in *Jacob's Well* went further and differentiated between contrition and attrition. An illicitly sexually active young man, on his deathbed, had participated in the final sacraments, including penance. He appeared to one of his friends to report that he was eternally damned. The friend was surprised, since he had been "howseled." The dead man said that his confession had not been perfect, for it was more out of a fear of hell (i.e. attrition) than because of concern about "wretthyng my god" (i.e. contrition). And he knew also that if he had lived, he would have returned to sinning. Therefore he was damned forever. Both his contrition and repentance had been imperfect.<sup>60</sup>

The third element of confession, according to *Jacob's Well*, that of restitution, was illustrated twice by the same story of a priest who told a man on his deathbed that as part of his penance, he must make full restitution.<sup>61</sup> The man was willing to engage in all aspects of the sacrament except for the restitution, for it would mean leaving his family bankrupt. After his death, he appeared to the priest and admitted that the priest had been correct, for he was now in hell. Another case of neglected restitution in *Jacob's Well* involved Frederick, a knight who appeared to a city burgess, riding on a black horse, flames coming out of his nose. He wore a sheepskin, which represented the sheep he had stolen from a widow, and he carried an enormous clump of earth on his neck, symbolizing land that he had misappropriated. He told the burgess that the horse was a fiend and that he was being punished for refusing to make restitution for his sins before he died.<sup>62</sup>

Thus, the visions of ghosts *from* hell served to motivate the laity to make sure that they first avoided committing even one mortal sin, that they watched the motivations behind even their good deeds, that they confessed *all* their sins, not neglecting even one, that they participated in the sacrament of penance, that they did not leave out any of the steps, and that their attitude in working the sacrament was correct as well.

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<sup>60</sup> *JW*, p. 176 (Arthur Brandeis, ed., *Jacob's Well*. E.E.T.S. [1900, reprinted 1999]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>61</sup> *JW*, pp. 66 and 197.

<sup>62</sup> *JW*, p. 214.

*Hell-bound ghosts on morality*

The second category of hell ghosts included those on their way *to* hell, and this group of visions taught the importance of morality. Catechetical teaching on morality had become highly schematized and structured in the Late Middle Ages because of the 1281 Council of Lambeth.<sup>63</sup> The category of vision *exempla* which was often used to drive home points about appropriate moral behavior was that of visionaries who had caught glimpses of souls as they were either being borne to heaven for having lived uprightly or, as was more common, to hell for having committed one of the seven deadly sins and not repented of it. Of the twenty-five or so didactic visions involving glimpses of souls on the way to hell, only three were told to encourage confession, four were told to validate the cults of saints, and five to encourage particular liturgical practices. The rest, approximately half of the total, were told in order to promote various aspects of morality. Most of these indicated clearly the specific sin that had led to the punishment, thus overlapping somewhat with the category of visions of ghosts *from* purgatory. The visions denounced a wide variety of sins including gluttony, drunkenness, adultery, lechery, ribaldry, idle, cutting, or angry words, and priest's taking wives.

One detail that was exclusive to a number of the ghost-to-hell visions gave an added punch to the sermonic exhortations to obey the teachings of the church. Like riders on the rollercoaster catching a glimpse of the steep descent a split-second before the inexorable plunge begins, the hell-bound ghosts were not fortunate enough to receive a warning view of hell far enough in advance to be able to act upon it. For example, in *Jacob's Well*, Theodorus, a dying glutton, cried out, "The feend in lyknes of a dragoun byndyth me hand & foot. lo! now he puttyth his mowth in-to my mowth, & swollowyth in my soule for my glotonye." Then he died.<sup>64</sup> Another vision in *Jacob's Well*, in a sermon which affirmed the articles of the Curse (sentence of excommunication), said of an unrepentant man that he informed the people gathered around his deathbed, "I se helle opyn, & my place redy made there. I

<sup>63</sup> See Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature* (Michigan: State College Press, 1952), p. 91.

<sup>64</sup> *JW*, pp. 157–158 (Arthur Brandeis, ed., *Jacob's Well*. E.E.T.S. [1900, reprinted 1999]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

schal sytten be Judas, Cayphas, & Pylat.” The people entreated him to confess, but he said it was too late; there was no longer any grace for him. He died and his soul went to hell.<sup>65</sup> The urgency expressed within these visions gave added incentive to the laity to repent in time.

Thus, whereas the visions of ghosts from hell tended to focus more on the sacrament of penance, the visions of ghosts on their way to hell emphasized the undergirding of late medieval morality.

### *Peregrinations to the Otherworlds*

Another category—that of mock judgments and involuntary journeys to hell or purgatory—took the visionaries themselves out of their own world into the world beyond and give them a direct taste of what awaited them if they did not change their lifestyles and repent properly.<sup>66</sup>

#### *Mock doom*

Mock judgment accounts provided the laity with incentive to amend behavior before it was too late and the Judgment Day had arrived. One very popular story from the *Vitas Patrum* life of St. John the Almoner (c. 620), was of the mock judgment scene of Peris, the rich man who

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<sup>65</sup> *JW*, pp. 21–22 (Arthur Brandeis, ed., *Jacob's Well*, E.E.T.S. [1900, reprinted 1999]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>66</sup> A closely allied group of visions were those in which demons bore a soul to hell, but were intercepted by a saint or by the Virgin Mary. These visions, however, rather than being used to exhort the laity to amend their moral behavior or to engage in contrition, were usually intended to validate the cult of the saint who did the rescuing. In contrast to involuntary pilgrimages to the otherworld, the emphasis of these visions was on the rescue rather than on being taken to hell or purgatory as a warning. What these visions did share, however, was their element of warning, the demonstration of what awaited one who did not abide by certain prescribed rules. But their point was to encourage the laity in their devotion to saints.

For example, Mirk told about a woman whose sole good deed was to keep a ‘serge’ burning in front of the Virgin’s image. When she died and went to hell, the Virgin instructed an angel to light a serge in front of the woman in hell and commanded the demons to stay away from her. The demons objected to the candle, for they were afraid it would provide too much comfort for other tormented souls, so they were relieved to have the Virgin arrange for the woman’s soul to be placed back in her body. The woman did penance and then served the Virgin devotedly for the rest of her days (*F*, p. 62).

threw a loaf of bread at a poor man who was begging for alms. When Peris was taken prematurely to his judgment, fiends placed his evil deeds in the balance, and the only good deed that the angels could find to put on the other side was the rye loaf. Peris was reprieved with a warning to amend his life, which he did. As the visionary, Peris had been given a second chance after experiencing firsthand the possible results of his actions. The story was told in *Middle English Sermons* as a stimulus to almsgiving, in the *Festial* for almsgiving during Lent, in *Jacob's Well* for giving alms as part of satisfaction, and in *Handlyng Synne* in the section on the deadly sin of covetousness, particularly against simony.<sup>67</sup> Thus it was used both to encourage morality and to foster further participation in the sacrament of penance. Both the visionary and the recipient of his story received warning and had the opportunity to amend their behavior before it was too late.

### *Enforced journeys*

The purpose of warning was exhibited as well by what may well be the most widely studied category of medieval visions (other than mystic visions), the stories of journeys to the otherworld.<sup>68</sup> Although these are among the best known medieval visions today, they do not seem to have had this prominence in late medieval England, at least not in the most popular extant vernacular materials of religious instruction. Of the 630 didactic visions, less than two percent involved journeys to the otherworld. That is less than half as many as the visions that involved glimpses of people being borne to hell. And when compared

<sup>67</sup> *F*, p. 104; *JW*, p. 192; *HS*, p. 140; *MES*, pp. 151–152.

<sup>68</sup> See H.W.L. Dana, "Medieval Visions of the Other World" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1910); Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*; Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); Howard Rollin Patch, *The Other World according to Descriptions in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950); Elizabeth Willson, "The Middle English Legends of Visits to the Other World and Their Relation to the Metrical Romances" (PhD diss., Chicago, 1917); Thomas Wright, *St. Patrick's Purgatory: An Essay on the Legends of Purgatory, Hell and Paradise Current during the Middle Ages* (London: John Russell Smith, 1844); George R. Keiser, "The Progress of Purgatory: Visions of the Afterlife in Later Middle English Literature," *Zeit, Tod, und Ewigkeit in der Renaissance Literatur*, volume 3 in *Analecta Cartusiana*, ed. James Hogg (Salzburg, Austria: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1987), pp. 72–100; Easting, ed., *St. Patrick's Purgatory*; Claude Carozzi, *Le voyage de l'ame dans l'au-delà: d'après la littérature latine: (Ve–XIIIe siècle)* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1994); Robert Easting, *Visions of the Other World in Middle English* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, United Kingdom: D.S. Brewer, 1997) and many others.

to the fourteen percent of visions whose main emphasis was interaction with saints and the seventeen percent of visions whose primary focus was warfare against demons, two percent was quite small. Literarily, the otherworld journeys invite perusal, for they are often quite lengthy and complex, more so than any other vision type, and that is their primary appeal today. They also revealed much about medieval conceptions of purgatory as a place. These accounts of otherworld visions circulating in the Late Middle Ages were not used by the vernacular works of religious instruction that we are examining. Some of these were Latin accounts which were not translated into Middle English, including Bede's *The Vision of Drihthelm*, *The Vision of Thurcill* in Roger of Wendover's *Chronicle*, and *The Vision of Boy William* in Vincent de Beauvais' *Speculum Historial*.<sup>69</sup> Those that were translated into Middle English included the twelfth-century visions of Tundale<sup>70</sup> and the Monk of Eynsham.

There were, however, visions of pilgrimages to the otherworld that were regularly included in the instruction of the laity. We will focus on how these vision accounts increased the laity's incentive and ability to take care of their future destinies, in light of the need to make satisfaction before it was too late. These visions included the third-century *Visio Sancti Pauli*, the eighth-century *Journey of St. Brendan*, the sixth-century *Vision of Fursey*, the twelfth-century *St. Patrick's Purgatory*, as well as many less well-known accounts. These fell into two main groups, those journeys that were imposed on the visionary and those that were voluntary. We will examine the latter below as a late medieval visionary 'solution,' but the former is relevant here in the discussion of warnings.

Sometimes the pilgrimage came in the form of a guided tour of heaven and hell with the tourist given a choice of his eventual destination at the conclusion of the expedition. The *Vision of Fursey* is a case in point.<sup>71</sup> According to *Handlyng Synne*, as Fursey was dying, an angel came to him and instructed him to accompany him. "Many stedys he lete hym se, / Merueyles and gret preuyte." Fursey walked through fire and saw many souls burning. A devil threw a flaming soul at him, and

<sup>69</sup> S. and H., p. 452.

<sup>70</sup> Severs and Hartung list five ME MSS, all from the fifteenth-century MSS (S. and H., p. 648).

<sup>71</sup> The *Vision of Fursey* was first written by Bede. According to Severs and Hartung, an expanded version of it appears in *HS. The Golden Legend* of 1438, Caxton's *GL*, an English translation of *Manuel des péchés*, the *Alphabetum Narrationum*, and *The Floure of the Commandmentes of God* all include it (S. and H., p. 456).

he was burned. The soul was a man who had given Fursey a cloth to pray for him and he had neglected to do so. The angel stopped the fire from burning Fursey and led him to heaven and showed him "al the pryuyte." Fursey then returned to his body and lived many years, founding churches.<sup>72</sup>

Another hell-and-heaven tour was described by Mirk who cited a story from the *Miracles of Our Lady* about a Jew born in France who came to London. Traveling from Bristol to Wilton, the Jew was attacked by thieves, tied to a post, and abandoned. As he fell asleep, he saw a beautiful woman clad in white. She untied him and he awoke. She told him to "stond on yondyr stonde befor the and loke downeward." When he did, he saw the "orybyll paynes of hell" and was "nygh out of hys wytte for ferde." The Virgin explained that these torments were the destiny of all those who refused to believe in Christ's incarnation, her perpetual virginity, and his crucifixion. Then she placed him on a mountain and showed him places of "gret ioye and blysse" and explained that they were for those who believed in Christ. She left him with the words, "But now I haue schowet the bothe the ioy and the payne, ches whethyr the ys leuer." The Jew chose joy over pain by being baptized by the Bishop of Bath and lived thereafter as a godly man and devotee of the Virgin.<sup>73</sup>

Occasionally the visionary was given a glimpse of hell but not of heaven, which acted somewhat akin to the principles behind the 'Scared Straight' police programs that take juvenile delinquents on visits to maximum-security prisons to terrify them into observing the law. Mirk cited Bede when he told of an Englishman who fell sick and was in a near-death state all night long. When he woke up the following morning, he got up, divided his goods into three parts, donated his part to the poor, and became a monk in an abbey situated near water. Each night he went into the water, no matter how cold, and stood there a long time. He ate barley-bread and drank only water for the rest of his life. He did this penance because of the horrifying pain he had witnessed when an angel had led him to hell where souls were tossed back and forth by demons, from the icy cold to furnace heat.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>72</sup> HS, pp. 64–66.

<sup>73</sup> F, pp. 248–249 (Theodor Erbe, ed., *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies*. E.E.T.S. [1905; Kraus reprint, 1987]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>74</sup> F, p. 5.



Sometimes the visionary did not simply observe hell, but experienced its pains physically.<sup>75</sup> The *Festial* told of a rude priest in Ireland whose speech led people to lust. Fiends yanked him out of bed one night and took him away for three days and nights. On the third night he was returned to his bed all beaten and burnt, with putrid wounds that never healed. For the rest of his life, he warned those who used lewd language to beware.<sup>76</sup> Another example was the *Vision of Edmund Leversedge*.<sup>77</sup> The story survives in a single manuscript. It was the first-person account of Edmund Leversedge of Frome in Somerset who fell victim to the “plage of pestylence” in 1465. After a deathbed battle with demons that physically assaulted him, he was taken to the otherworld where he was rescued by the Virgin’s prayers from fashionably dressed demons who threatened him. The Virgin told him, “Heere thou well and vndirstand that thou standest in the wey of euerlasting dampnacyon for thy synnes, and principally for the syn of pried as in thi inordinat aray.”<sup>78</sup> She commanded him to amend his behavior, “Wherfore j charge the that thou weer ne vse such aray.” She gave him specific instructions about what to wear and called him to chastity, a call that he protested! She sent him to the University of Oxford for three years. When he returned to his body, he explained that the vision was given to him so that he would “amende me of my lyuyng;” that the vision rescued him from “euerlasting dampnacion,” healed him from his disease, and called him away from the “deuell aray.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> This was the case in the *Vision of Tundale*, which, although not included in the didactic sources discussed, was very popular in the Late Middle Ages in England. The Advocates’ Lib. Jac. V. 7, 27 fol. 98–157, a fifteenth-century MS, is edited by W. Turnbull in *The Vision of Tundale*. Other critical editions include Rodney Mearns, ed., *The Vision of Tundale* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1985) and Jean-Michel Picard, trans., *The Vision of Tnugdál* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1989). Tundale was a man with unconfessed sins, whose soul was led by his angel, while his body was in a ‘near-death’ state, to the underworld to see “what peynis fallyth for dyuerse synne” (ll. 310–311). He was allowed to suffer some of the fiend-inflicted pains, but the angel healed him each time, and when he had endured all his punishments, the angel showed him heaven, where he saw people he knew. When he returned to his body, he sought out a priest for the sacraments of penance and the Mass.

<sup>76</sup> *F*, p. 192.

<sup>77</sup> For critical editions, see E. Margaret Thompson, ed., “The Vision of Edmund Leversedge,” *Somerset and Dorset Notes and Queries* 9 (1905): 19–35 (hereafter cited as *EL*) and W.F. Nijenhuis, ed., *The Vision of Edmund Leversedge* (Published dissertation, Catholic University of Nijmegen, 1990). The latter includes an excellent discussion of the conventional nature of Leversedge’s vision.

<sup>78</sup> *EL*, p. 29.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Several visions sent the visionary to the otherworld for another's benefit instead of for the visionary's own spiritual edification. The otherworld visions examined thus far dealt with visits to hell, purgatory, or heaven that resulted in the spiritual rehabilitation or improvement of the visionary. But there were a few visions that involved visits to dead people who themselves needed help. Occasionally the visionary was in a position to help them, but usually—and here the situation was reversed from the visions of ghosts-returning-from-purgatory—the visionary was unable to do anything more than witness the dead soul's pain. In most cases, when visionaries visited hell or purgatory, they were the sinners needing help. But in these few visions, the roles were reversed, and the visionaries were the spiritually superior beings.

Perhaps the oldest of these visions is the *Visio Sancti Pauli*. It was probably written in Greek as early as the third century. Augustine wrote against its being the vision mentioned in II Corinthians 12:2–4, but the apocalypse was translated into nearly every major language of the Western world between the eighth and seventeenth centuries. It arrived in England by the tenth century, being quoted in the Blickling Homilies and writings ascribed to Wulfstan.<sup>80</sup> In the Late Middle Ages, it was presented in several versions.<sup>81</sup> It was the story of Paul's visit to hell, where he was accompanied by St. Michael, witnessed horrifying tortures, and pled with God to grant the sufferers a Sabbath-day's rest. He did not experience the punishments himself, nor was he in need of repentance or penance. He was the one who was in a position to help those he saw in pain, rather than having to fear that he would some day end up there with them.

By the Late Middle Ages, for the laity, such visions often served the same purpose as return-from-purgatory visitations but provided an even more potent motivation to pray for the dead. They went one

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<sup>80</sup> Theodore Silverstein, "*Visio Sancti Pauli*: The History of the Apocalypse in Latin Together with Nine Texts," *Studies and Documents* 4 (1935): 5–11.

<sup>81</sup> These include the Vernon MS (Bodleian 3938, fol. 230, col 3; ca. 1385), as published in Carl Horstmann, "Die Vision des Heiligen Paulus," *Englische Studien* 1 (1877): 293–299 and the Simeon version B.M. Additional 22283, f. 32b (late 14 Century) is dealt with in F.J. Furnivall, *The Minor Poems of the Vernon MS* (London, 1901), and a similar version in Bodleian 21876 (= Douce MS 302, fol. 17, col 1) (ca. 1425–1450) which is attributed to John Audelay, the blind poet and is published in Ella Keats Whiting, ed. *The Poems of John Audelay* (London, 1931). The BM MS. Additional 10036, f. 81a–85a (fourteenth century) is published by E. Kölbing, "Eine bisher unbekannte me. version von Pauli höllenfahrt," *Englische Studien* 22 (1896): 134–140 as "A question of the peynes of Helle..."

step further than ghost-from-purgatory visions, having the visionary see purgatory itself rather than having to glean information about it in second-hand fashion. The *South English Legendary* told of a man in Rome who saw men lying in golden beds and eating sumptuously while others were naked and hungry. An angel told him that they were in purgatory and that the luxurious beds and rich food were for those for whom masses were being sung and good deeds performed. The others had no friends on earth left behind to take care of masses and almsgiving. Therefore, he was instructed to tell the pope to declare All Souls Day to pray for all souls in purgatory.<sup>82</sup> In another story, a knight who had been performing many alms deeds for his deceased friend had a vision of purgatory in which he saw his friend trying to cross a slippery bridge spanning deep water. He witnessed black-clad figures attempting to pull his friend down and white-clad beings helping him back onto the bridge. The white entities won, and his friend crossed over into a fragrant, flower-filled meadow on the other side. It turned out that the white represented the alms deeds that the knight had done for his soul; the black were the soul's evil deeds. The knight's suffrages won the day for his friend.<sup>83</sup>

One late medieval English account which reflected the connection between purgatorial revenants and involuntary visits to purgatory was the *Revelation of Purgatory*, which alternated between the ghost Margaret visiting the visionary and then the visionary witnessing Margaret in purgatory itself. The visionary had added incentive to help Margaret, having seen her suffering in purgatory. And in the end, instead of Margaret simply returning to thank the visionary, the visionary was allowed to watch her cross the bridge into heaven.<sup>84</sup>

In addition to supporting the need for assistance to the dead through almsgiving and the singing of masses, and the exhortation to amend one's own moral behavior, the purgatory and hell visits, by virtue of their vivid imagery and on-location aspect, gave incentive to people to pay serious attention to the Theory of Satisfaction's implications for

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<sup>82</sup> *SEL*, pp. 463–464.

<sup>83</sup> *SEL*, p. 470. Carol Zaleski states that this particular vision is the most influential of the visions of return from death in Gregory's *Dialogues*. "It was thanks largely to this widely read account that the bridge—as setting for a *psychomachia* or symbolic confrontation with deeds—became such a prominent feature of the medieval otherworld landscape." (*Otherworld Journeys: Accounts of Near-Death Experience in Medieval and Modern Times* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987], p. 29).

<sup>84</sup> *RP*, pp. 85–86.

life, for the graphic depiction of tortures and pains of the underworlds provided terrifying fuel for the layperson's imagination. Tnugdál ('Tundale') observed men trying to walk on extremely narrow, sharp bridges with monstrous creatures waiting in the roiling waters below, ready to chew, masticate, and regurgitate their bodies.<sup>85</sup> William Stranton saw burning nails of iron smashing into people's heads and hearts, serpents, dragons, toads and worms repeatedly stinging and crawling in and out of burning souls, and Owain Miles, shivering from a frigid wind, came into a wide valley where he glimpsed a field of naked men and women, writhing in pain from demonic assault wounds.<sup>86</sup> By presenting such horrifying, eye-witness detail, the visions gave power to the very doctrines of purgatory and hell, first by providing visual evidence for their existence and secondly, by undergirding the urgency of preparation.

### *Vision as pilgrimage*

The glimpses of those being borne to hell, the ghosts returning from hell, the mock judgment scenes, and the involuntary otherworld journeys served as warnings to the visionaries and thus to the laity at large to amend their moral behavior and appropriate the sacrament of penance, thus participating in the Transactions of Satisfaction that would lead to eternal bliss. In addition, however, to changing one's behavior and confessing properly—actions which could be accomplished outside of visionary experience—there was a potential Satisfaction solution which involved a vision. It was the voluntary journey to the otherworld. In it vision functioned as pilgrimage. Pilgrimage may be defined as "a journey made to some sacred place, as an act of religious devotion."<sup>87</sup> If one allows that a journey is not necessarily restricted to movement between two earthly geographical locations but may also be from one world to another, that a sacred place can be broadened to include supernatural locales, then the visits of visionaries to the otherworld may be categorized as pilgrimages.<sup>88</sup>

Medieval pilgrimages were usually made to holy shrines, centers where saints' relics lay in repose while monks recorded the miracles

<sup>85</sup> Picard, trans., *The Vision of Tnugdál*, p. 123.

<sup>86</sup> *SPP*, pp. 97–101 and 12–13.

<sup>87</sup> *OED*, VII, 859.

<sup>88</sup> Carol Zaleski, in *Otherworld Journeys* divides Otherworld Journeys into four models: the Apocalypse, Miracle Story, Conversion, and Pilgrimage.

associated with their power. The most frequented sites were Canterbury, Rome, Santiago de Compostela, and the Holy Land, with local shrines waxing and waning in popularity. The blind, the lame, the sick and the dying flocked to these and other locations in search of cures for their ailments. Many shrines were crammed with wax votives and silver replicas, preserving in sculpted form the memories of body parts once diseased, and the no-longer-needed crutches which bore witness to the healing of fortunate pilgrims' infirmities and inspired the latest, hopeful newcomers to persevere in their quests. Other pilgrims visited shrines to thank saints for help already granted to them in the course of their everyday lives or to request aid for emotional turmoil, marital problems, infertility, and agricultural aridity. These aspects of pilgrimage reflected the Reciprocated Devotion we will study in chapter 2.

Earthly problems, however, were not the only spurs to the pilgrim. Concern for one's eternal destiny also served as motivation. Partial and plenary indulgences, believed to release one from part or all of the temporal punishment that remained after confession had brought remission of guilt, were attached to certain pilgrimages. Pilgrimage could also be an act of penance, again serving as a way of reducing one's time in purgatory. Sometimes an association with baptism was made, particularly with a pilgrimage to the River Jordan that could serve as an act of second baptism. Pilgrimages whose primary aim was to deal with the consequences of sin were not always voluntary. Occasionally they were used as judicial punishments. Often they were imposed by a priest as a form of penance.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> For these and further details on pilgrimage, see Jonathan Sumption, *Pilgrimage: An Image of Mediaeval Religion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), which traces the origin and development of Christian pilgrimage. For an anthropological analysis of Christian pilgrimage, see Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978). D.J. Hall, *English Mediaeval Pilgrimage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965) deals with eight sites within England and Ronald C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (London: J.M. Dent, 1977) deals with some 3,000 people's miracles associated with seven English and two French saints' shrines in England between 1066 and 1300. See also Debra J. Birch, *Pilgrimage to Rome in the Middle Ages: Continuity and Change in Studies in the History of Medieval Religion* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1998); Diana Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England* (London: Hambledon and London, 2000); Diana Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage, c. 700 – c. 1500* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); Colin Morris and Peter Roberts, *Pilgrimage: The English Experience from Becket to Bunyan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Ben Nilson, *Cathedral Shrines of Medieval England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1998).

The visionary pilgrimages had more in common with the pilgrimages of penance than with those for healing. Instead of their goal being a saint's shrine, the primary pilgrimage site was purgatory. The long-term outcome of the visionary pilgrimages tended to affect the visionary-pilgrim's eternal destiny more than his/her earthly physical health or material comfort. And as such, they counted as transactions in the economy of satisfaction.

St. Patrick's Purgatory was the most popular location for earthly pilgrimages taken in order to embark on otherworldly pilgrimages to purgatory. Lough Derg, County Donegal, was the setting for the cave believed to be revealed by God to St. Patrick as an entrance to the otherworld. The earliest known account of a visit to St. Patrick's Purgatory was written by a Cistercian monk, H. Sawtry from Huntingdonshire in c. 1180–1184. This *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii* survives in dozens of Latin manuscripts, and at least three different translations of it were made into Middle English. The earliest of these was the one included in the *South English Legendary*.<sup>90</sup>

In the story, the knight Owain had committed a great sin that his bishop said merited great penance. The knight offered to go to St. Patrick's Purgatory and refused to listen to the bishop's protests. At Lough Derg, he spent fourteen nights in fasting and prayer, and on the fifteenth day, he followed a procession of priests and clerks who sang the High Mass, he took Our Lord's "fleiss & is blod," was sprinkled with holy water, and was led to the cave. The prior unlocked the door to the cave and told him:

...yif thou wolt do by oure rede · thou sselst thi thogt wende  
And other manere thi sunnes bete · as God wole the grace sende...<sup>91</sup>

Inside the cave, after waiting in darkness, he saw a light and walked towards it. He found himself in a noble hall. There twelve men in white greeted him and told him that when the demons attacked him:

Ac yif thou ert stable of bileue · & in Iesu Crist dest thenche  
Ne uor byheste ne for wo · fram him nelt blenche  
Thou worst quit of al thine sunne · that [thou] hast euere iwrogt  
And thou sselst isco al the ioye · that godemen beoth inne ibrogt...<sup>92</sup>

<sup>90</sup> *SPP*, p. xix.

<sup>91</sup> *SEL*, p. 90 (Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, eds., *The South English Legendary*. E.E.T.S. [1956, reprinted 1967]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>92</sup> *SEL*, p. 91 (Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, eds., *The South English Legendary*).

He was then repeatedly saved from frightening, demonic torments by crying out each time to Jesus Christ. After seeing many purgatorial tortures, he visited the earthly paradise where souls waited between their time in purgatory and their entrance to heaven. He was sad to have to return to earth, but a nobleman told him he had now been cleared of all his sins, so he must be careful not to sin on earth. When he returned to earth, he spent fifteen days in prayer and then became a holy man in the Holy Land. His time in purgatory had given him a clean slate, and he lived a godly life from then on.

In 1406 or 1409—the two extant manuscripts disagree on the date—William Stranton visited St. Patrick's Purgatory. His first-person account did not indicate the motive for his pilgrimage, but just as Owain did, he received a revelation of purgatory while in the cave. He too was led by the prior and procession into the cave, but there was no mention of the Eucharist. The prior taught him the prayer: *Jhesu, fili Dei, miserere mei* as protection from demons. Instead of twelve monks in white, William met St. John of Bridlington and St. Hilda or St. Ive—again, the two manuscripts disagree—two saints whose shrines he had visited on pilgrimage. Like Owain, William fought off evil spirits by thinking of Christ, but for William the focus was the Passion in particular.<sup>93</sup> Like Owain, William witnessed a series of purgatorial tortures, but William was not subjected to any himself. After purgatory, he was led by a Lady—after he climbed a rope to her tower—to a beautiful country. And like Owain, William was told to return to earth and live right.

Owain's vision had functioned as a purgative experience, serving as a form of penance for his great sin so that he could return to earth and make a fresh start. William's vision operated differently. It served somewhat as a visit to a spiritual 'financial planner.' Although William did not refer to any sin as having motivated him to undertake his pilgrimage, while he was in the vision, his deceased sister and her lover were brought to him and accused him of having prevented them from marrying. St. John of Bridlington told William that he had sinned in forbidding the love match, and that when he returned to the world again, he must be shriven by the prior of St. Patrick's and do whatever penance he gave him. The 'financial advice' was for spiritual deposits

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E.E.T.S. [1956, reprinted 1967]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>93</sup> This aspect of both Owain and William's encounters with fiends reflects the rules of the dynamic of Spiritual Warfare. See chapter 3.

to be made once the patient client had left the 'bank,' not cash to be deposited in the bank itself, as was the case for Owain. Owain's 'transaction' had taken place while he was in purgatory; William's took place as a result of his visit to purgatory. Secondly, William was allowed to see how his former good deeds had affected his spiritual bank account positively. The presence of two saints to help him through purgatory was due to his having visited their shrines.<sup>94</sup> The rope with which he climbed to the tower of the Lady was the rope which he had given to a man who had been robbed and who had come to him for alms. And when he had arrived in the beautiful land, the monks, canons, and priests came to him:

And that ever y did ony good dede in this world, thei thonkid me therfore, yn so moche that for a candell that y set sumtyme in a chirch bfore an ymage, not for the ymage, but in worship of that seint that the ymage bitokened, y was thonkid therfore.<sup>95</sup>

When he was shown the series of purgatorial fires, it was as if he were being shown around the spiritual 'poorhouse' of those who did not attend to their spiritual health. After seeing the torments of purgatory first-hand, William asked St. John if there were anything that could be done for the poor tortured souls. The saint responded by listing the things that the living could do to help the dead:

as to lernyd men, as bi masses singyng, saing of sawters, Placebo and Dirige; commendacions, .viij. salmes and the .xv. psalmes with the let-enye; bi almes-dede, and bi pilgrimage; and also bi lewid men with the Pater noster, the Aue Maria, and the Crede; almes-dede, fastyng, and pilgrimage; and bi many other good dedis.<sup>96</sup>

At the end of the vision, he was told to return home and:

say as thow hast herd and seen to them that this bilongith to. And lyve rightfully and thow shalt come to everlestyng ioy.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> This aspect of William's vision reflects the dynamic of reciprocated devotion. See chapter 2.

<sup>95</sup> *SPP*, p. 110 (Robert Easting, ed., *St. Patrick's Purgatory*. E.E.T.S. [1991]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106 (Robert Easting, ed., *St. Patrick's Purgatory*. E.E.T.S. [1991]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116 (Robert Easting, ed., *St. Patrick's Purgatory*. E.E.T.S. [1991]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).



William's final words to the listener were:

Wherefore al cristen men that heryn or redyn this, I beseche yow for the  
loue of God, that ye haue me in yowre praier, and ye shul be yn myne.<sup>98</sup>

His spiritual-‘economic’ checkup, conducted in the midst of the obvious manifestations of spiritual poverty, had been successful in prompting him to be concerned for his own spiritual wealth as well as that of others.

The visionary account had yet again affirmed the transactions that made for eternal satisfaction: masses, psalms, alms deeds, pilgrimages, prayers, creeds, fasting, attention to the saints, and good deeds. The voluntary visits to purgatory affirmed these transactions both through their content but also through the liturgical and cult-of-saints actions that precipitated and accompanied them.

### *Visionary Pilgrimages to the World of the Biblical Past*

Margery Kempe participated in a variation on the theme of voluntary visitation to an ‘otherworld.’ Instead of entering a cave in order to earn merit in purgatory, however, she lay on her bed in order to visit the ‘biblical past.’ Via her meditative imagination, she took spiritual pilgrimages to a distant land, the Holy Land. She had visited there literally, as a traditional pilgrim as well, but the dramatic difference between her earthly and spiritual pilgrimages to the Holy Land was that in the spiritual ones, the holy sites were not teeming with pilgrims. Rather, the biblical characters themselves were present and living out the holy stories.

While there, Margery did not merely walk and watch; rather, she interacted with the biblical characters and took part in the narratives. She served the Virgin Mary for years, first informing her when she was a child, that she would become the “Modyr of God.” She arranged for lodging for the Virgin on the way to Bethlehem; she procured white cloths to swaddle the Baby and for the Virgin to lie on after the birth and food for them to eat. Later, when Mary collapsed in sorrow on the way to the crucifixion, Margery encouraged her to follow after Christ

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid. (Robert Easting, ed., *St. Patrick's Purgatory*. E.E.T.S. [1991]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

with her, and she wept together with the Virgin at each of the sites of his suffering. She carried on a conversation with Christ just before he went off to his crucifixion and ran around in frantic circles after his death, longing to be able to spend time alone grieving over his dead body. When the Virgin returned home to grieve, Margery made a “cawdel” for her to give her strength.<sup>99</sup>

The text that has been observed as the stimulus to these particular visions is the Pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, which instructed readers to meditate on the birth and passion narratives and place themselves as characters amongst the biblical figures of the stories.<sup>100</sup> It was translated into Middle English as *The Mirroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ* by Nicholas Love, the Prior of Mount Grace, and was approved in 1410 by Archbishop Arundel.<sup>101</sup> It is the book most often cited in fifteenth-century wills.<sup>102</sup>

Many of those who have analyzed Margery’s meditative visions have offered various theories in regards to her attitude toward their origin. Despres, for example, says that Margery believed she had other visions that were divine, but that these were clearly meditative.<sup>103</sup> Gibson calls Margery’s experiences “meditational visions,” demonstrating that Margery was simply following Pseudo-Bonaventuran meditative techniques, and therefore does not directly address the question of Margery’s attitude.<sup>104</sup> I believe, however, that the supernatural origin of these visions was crucial to Margery but that that did not preclude her awareness that it was her own involvement that brought them on through meditation. I agree with Elizabeth Petroff and John Hirsh who, in different ways, see a balancing of divine and human efforts in this type of vision. Petroff refers to it as the “devotional vision,” one of the

<sup>99</sup> *MK*, pp. 18ff. and 187–199.

<sup>100</sup> John Hirsh suggests that this particular meditative practice of placing oneself in biblical stories has its literary roots at least as early as the twelfth century, but became a practice in the thirteenth century, with St. Edmund of Abingdon’s *Speculum Ecclesie* as a crucial catalyst. (*The Revelations of Margery Kempe: Paramystical Practices in Late Medieval England*. Medieval and Renaissance Authors [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989], pp. 20–21).

<sup>101</sup> Clarissa Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim: The ‘Book’ and the World of Margery Kempe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 152.

<sup>102</sup> See Margaret Deanesly, “Vernacular Books in England in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,” *Modern Language Review* 15 (1920): 354.

<sup>103</sup> Denise Despres, “Franciscan Spirituality: Vision and the Authority of Scripture” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1985), p. 26.

<sup>104</sup> Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 49.

seven categories of visions she attributes to medieval women visionaries.<sup>105</sup> John Hirsh coins the phrase “paramystical devotion:”

Paramystical practices may be found on the boundaries between mysticism and devotion. The ideal of union, so dear to the mystic and to the student of mysticism, has only limited and occasional application...[The paramystic] shares with the mystic a sense of response to an initial impulse which has its origins outside of him and beyond him. But his experience relies less on the suddenness and strangeness of his encounter as on his preparation for it, and even his expectation of it...Often too these experiences sprang from, and were related to, a tradition of empirical affective devotion which may be observed separately, in the many texts which make up the tradition. These texts could lead up to, and sometimes can be observed to have brought about, some of the experiences. ...<sup>106</sup>

Margery did not deny that she had a role to play in bringing on her visions, but she never saw this as eliminating the Lord's role. She was told early on by the Lord to lie on her bed from six o'clock onwards. He told her explicitly that both of them would be involved in the meditations, “Than schalt thow ly styлле & speke to me be thowt, & I schal gefe to the hey medytacyon and very contemplacyon.”<sup>107</sup> When she said that her “visitacyons & holy contemplacyonis” were occasionally withdrawn from her in times of caring for others, it was because the visions “wil be had but in gret qwyet of sowle thorw long excersyse.”<sup>108</sup> Yet, even while referring to the visions being the result of her exercise, she also spoke of them as being withdrawn from her, implying an external agent. Elsewhere, this external agent was referred to more clearly, for when she refused to believe some of her “holy

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<sup>105</sup> Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, ed., *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 6.

<sup>106</sup> Hirsh, *Revelations of Margery Kempe*, pp. 19–20. For discussions of the affective piety of which these meditational exercises form a part, see, for example, Despres, “Franciscan;” Atkinson, *Mystic*, pp. 131–154; John Fleming, *An Introduction to the Franciscan Literature of the Middle Ages* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977), p. 251; and John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order: From Its Origins to the Year 1517* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

<sup>107</sup> *MK*, p. 17 (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214 (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

contemplacyon" was from God rather than from an evil spirit, God removed them from her.<sup>109</sup>

We find out later, through a revelation from Christ, that everything that Margery did while on these visionary pilgrimages, would count towards her reward in heaven:

Than ovr Lord mad a maner of thankyng to hir, for-as-meche as sche in contemplacyon & in meditacyon had ben hys Modyrs maydyn & holpyn to kepyn hym in hys childhod & so forth in-to the tyme of hys deth & seyde vn-to hir, 'Dowtyr, thou xalt han as gret mede & as gret reward wyth me in Heuyn for thi good seruise & the good dedys that thou hast don in thi mynde & meditacyon as yf thou haddyst don the same dedys wyth thy bodily wittys wyth-owtyn-forth.'<sup>110</sup>

Margery seemed able to keep in tension the interrelationship of God's gift of grace in granting her these visions and her participation in her visions in terms of her earning merits in heaven. She did not see it as a contradiction that her visions were gifts from him and that he also granted her reward for her actions in them, nor that they were initiated by her meditation yet sent to her by him. Margery's pilgrimages to the 'biblical past' were one of several examples of her transposition of late medieval meditational techniques into what she regarded as the higher key of visionary experience. At the same time, she was raising purgatorial penalty-paying into a higher realm, that of earning merit through meditation on the biblical past rather than pilgrimage to purgatory. The good deeds she did for the Virgin Mary in her Biblical-Past pilgrimages participated in the economic-transaction dynamic of medieval spirituality.

### *Summary*

The visions of the otherworld which we have examined in this chapter were all concerned with one or both of two issues, caring for one's own

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 201. See also, "& ovr Lord sent hir so hy deuocyon & so hy meditacyon & swech gostly comfortys. ..." Ibid., p. 200 (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 203 (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

eternal fate and helping the deceased with theirs. The visions fell into three main categories in terms of the visitors with which they dealt. The first were the ghosts from purgatory, most of which returned to negotiate for aid to help them out of their pains. Visionaries were expected to assist them by arranging for masses, prayers, alms, or absolution. The second were ghosts from hell. Those that interacted with the visionaries were usually only intent on admonishment, and in these cases, all the visionaries needed to do was listen and heed their advice and amend their immoral behavior. The third category were the otherworld journeys; these involved the visionary leaving his environment and traveling to the otherworld, sometimes for his own sake, sometimes for the sake of those in torment. These negotiations, admonitions, and peregrinations were three models of visionary activity. They were demonstrated by the didactic visions and reflected in the visions of late medieval English laity, as the *Revelation of Purgatory*, the Byland Abbey ghost stories, and the visions of Edmund Leversedge and William Stranton showed. There was a high level of correspondence between the teachings of the didactic visions and the late medieval visions of ghosts and purgatory, demonstrating a high level of congruence between the visionary illustrating of the satisfaction model and the actions and beliefs of the laity.<sup>111</sup>

All of these otherworld visions were used for didactic purposes of warning and/or solution. Certain types of the visions emphasized different categories of sin. Some of the ghost-from-purgatory visions warned against sins against the Church. Most of the ghosts from hell warned about the necessity of the sacrament of penance. Most of the glimpses of souls on their way to hell warned about moral behavior.

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<sup>111</sup> There were a few visions in which visionaries asked questions specifically to find out information about the functioning of purgatory and hell. In *Jacob's Well*, the Abbot Macarius, when in possession of the talking head of a corpse, took advantage of the opportunity to ask it questions about which souls dwelt at the deeper layers of hell (*JW*, p. 301). And the priest in *Gast of Gy*, after asking trick questions to find out whether the ghost was telling the truth, proceeded to press him for information about the relationship between certain types of moral behavior and liturgical practices and the states of people's souls in the otherworld (Schleich, "Gast," pp. 88–107). As we have seen, though, even when visionaries were not asking pointed questions, their visions of ghosts and the otherworld revealed much about the afterlife that corroborated what the laity were being taught about morality, aid to the deceased, and penance. Whether they gave visual verification, incentives or threats, warnings or solutions, all of the otherworld visions provided eyewitness accounts to support the case that one's actions could influence one's own eternal destiny and those of one's "euen-Cristen."

Mock judgments and involuntary otherworld journeys served as further warnings about these issues as well as about the need for conversion and the amendment of life. The two types that offered solutions were the ghost-from-purgatory visions that demonstrated how to give aid to the dead and the voluntary otherworld journeys that offered a premature and thus possibly preventative visit to purgatory. Margery Kempe merged the merit-earning aspect of these visions with the Pseudo-Bonaventuran meditative techniques to provide another version of visionary participation in the medieval economics of spirituality.

Simply by hearing the stories of visions relating to ghosts, purgatory, and hell, the laity would have received 'eye-witness' confirmation of the need to make satisfaction through following moral dictates of the Church, through engaging in the sacrament of penance in all its stages and with proper contrition, through receiving last rites, through praying for the dead, having masses said for the dead, giving alms, substituting on pilgrimages, fasting, and as a most severe case, going on pilgrimage to purgatory and/or hell, and experiencing the penalties in advance. And all of this would be given added motivation by the vivid descriptions of purgatory and hell themselves, together with the hints of beauty and joy in the glimpses of heaven. Thus, vision stories of ghosts, purgatory and hell, in the sermons and stories of the Church, buttressed the medieval spiritual dynamic of performing Transactions of Satisfaction.



## CHAPTER TWO

### RECIPROCATED DEVOTION AND VISITATIONS OF THE SAINTS

Closely related to the dynamic of Transactions of Satisfaction was a second dynamic of medieval spirituality, that of Reciprocated Devotion.<sup>1</sup> Whereas the first dynamic dealt primarily with guilt and punishment, the latter focused primarily on loving service and aid in distress. What the two had in common was the element of exchange, of *quid pro quo*. The dynamic of Reciprocated Devotion exhibited itself primarily in the cults of the saints and in the cult of the Passion. In the former, the devotion usually began with the believer and was reciprocated by the saint. In the latter, the devotion in most cases started with reminders of Christ's actions on the cross and was reciprocated by the believer's worship. In both cults, visions affirmed the dynamic of Reciprocated Devotion.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter we will look at how the didactic visions of saints—and their core dynamic of Reciprocated Devotion—shaped two late medieval cults, one an emerging cult of a king-saint and the other the auto-hagiography of a would-be saint.

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<sup>1</sup> For an illustration of the overlap of these two dynamics, see Anne T. Thayer's exploration of the role of sermons on the saints in leading the laity to repentance. Anne T. Thayer, "Intercessors, Examples and Rewards: The Roles of the Saints in the Penitential Themes of Representative Late Medieval Sermon Collections," in Beverly Mayne Kienzle et al., eds., *Models of Holiness in Medieval Sermons*. Proceedings of the International Symposium (Kalamazoo, 4–7 May 1995) Fédération Internationale des Instituts d'Études Médiévales, (Louvaine-la-neuve, 1996), pp. 339–354. Thayer uses Mirk's *Festial* as well as a number of Continental collections of sermons. Megan McLaughlin explores the connection of saints and prayer for the dead in France in the early Middle Ages in *Consorting with Saints: Prayer for the Dead in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1994). For a detailed exploration of the dynamic of Reciprocated Devotion as "the debt of interchanging neighbourhood" (phrase from the Golden Legend), see Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 160ff. See also Patrick Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 77–92.

<sup>2</sup> In chapter 4, we will examine how, in the cult of the Passion, didactic visions modeled the centrality of spiritual sight in the Reciprocated Devotion related to the crucified Christ.



*Didactic Visions and the Cult of Saints*

Accounts of visions of saints were ubiquitous in late medieval England, with more than half of the didactic visions involving saints. This is not surprising, of course, since more than one-third of the 630 visions are taken from the collections of saints' legends. Almost half of the visions in sermon collections and religious manuals, however, also involved saints, so the high proportion was not restricted to saints' lives. This was mostly due to the high frequency of sermons celebrating saints' feasts and thus drawing illustrations from the saints' legends.<sup>3</sup>

The didactic visions of saints included saints from all eras of the history of the Church. Earlier saints, those featured in sermons and in collections of saints' legends, had more of an impact on the model of Reciprocated Devotion than the later ones, who were usually in the *vitae* or mystical writings of the contemporary mystic-saints. The more recent saints had a greater impact on mysticism than on lay spirituality. According to André Vauchez, ideals of saints changed throughout the patristic and medieval periods, proceeding through at least six phases with different types of holy people being designated as saints in each of the eras: martyrs, ascetics, bishops, king-saints, mendicants, mystics.<sup>4</sup> All of these groups were part of the cult of saints in late medieval England. Virgin martyrs such as St. Katherine of Alexandria (fictional from fourth century), St. Juliana (fourth century), and St. Margaret of Antioch (date unknown) were very popular in late medieval England.<sup>5</sup> Stories abounded of ascetics such as St. Mary of Egypt (fifth century?) and St. Anthony of Egypt (d. 356); and of bishops such as St. Gregory the Great (d. 604), St. Thomas of Canterbury (d. 1170), and St. Edmund

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<sup>3</sup> For the role that sermons played in the development of saints' cults, see George Ferzoco, "Sermon Literatures Concerning Late Medieval Saints," in Kienzle, ed., *Models of Holiness*, pp. 103–125.

<sup>4</sup> André Vauchez, "The Saint," in *The Medieval World*, ed. Jacques Le Goff and trans. Lydia Cochrane (London: Parkgate Books, 1990), pp. 313–346. For additional discussion of the development of the cult of saints, see André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*. Translated by Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) and Aviad M. Kleinberg, *Prophets in their Own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), who presents an alternative view to Vauchez on categorizing saints.

<sup>5</sup> See Eamon Duffy, "Holy Maydens, Holy Wyfes: The Cult of Women Saints in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-century England," in *Women in the Church*, eds. W.J. Sheils and Diana Wood. Studies in Church History (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 178–179. See also Karen A. Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1997).

of Abingdon (d. 1240). England had its own king-saints such as St. Edward the Martyr (d. 979), and St. Edward the Confessor (d. 1066).<sup>6</sup> Mendicant saints such as St. Francis and St. Dominic were enormously influential in late medieval England through their orders. The didactic visions drew mostly on the earlier saints, those in the first four categories in particular.

The explicit purpose of the vast majority of the didactic vision accounts—whether in legend or sermon, and in contrast to the didactic visions of the otherworld—was the expression and buttressing of the cults of the saints rather than the enforcing of a moral point or the explication of a doctrine. This is true both of those visions that had saint-visionaries as well as of those that involved saint-visitations. Visions presented the visionary-saints as having direct access to spiritual realities, and they established that devotion to a saint could later result in that saint coming as a visitor to give aid in a moment of crisis. Saints were, therefore, both visionaries and heavenly visitors. We will examine the role of saint-visions in perpetuating the cult of the saints, first in hagiography and canonization and second in vision as a sub-category of miracles.

### *Case Study #1: Visions in the Emerging Cult of King Henry VI*

The role of visions—and especially the use of didactic vision types—in the formation of a saint's cult in late medieval England can be studied in the failed canonization process of King Henry VI.<sup>7</sup> The hagiographical writings related to the king drew on the didactic visions of saints as their model for attempting to establish their subject's sanctity. In addition there were accounts of posthumous miracles attributed to Henry VI that also followed the pattern of the didactic visions. The hagiographical writings drew on the stories of saints as visionaries; the posthumous miracles paralleled the accounts of saints as visitors.

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<sup>6</sup> All dates are taken from *ODS*.

<sup>7</sup> For discussions of the aborted process, see Leonard Smith, "The Canonization of King Henry VI," *The Dublin Review*, (1921) 168: 41–53; Bertram Wolffe, *Henry VI* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981), pp. 351–358; John W. McKenna, "Piety and Propaganda: The Cult of Henry VI," in *Chaucer and Middle English Studies in Honour of Rossell Hope Robbins*, ed. Beryl Rowland (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1974), pp. 72–88.

Many historians have echoed King James I's assessment of Henry VI as the "sillie weake King"<sup>8</sup> whose bouts of insanity rendered him unfit for royal service.<sup>9</sup> Referring to the prevailing late medieval view of the king, however, Bertram Wolffe writes that "the first fifty years after his death saw Henry VI revered as a royal saint in popular esteem who rivaled St. Thomas Becket in the fame of his cures: the last great posthumous miracle-worker in England before the Reformation."<sup>10</sup>

The king had been murdered in the Tower on May 21, 1471, and by 1484, the miracles recorded at his tomb in Chertsey had reached such numbers that Richard III ordered the body removed to Windsor. But this did not diminish the deceased king's popularity, and hundreds of miracles were recorded at Windsor by 1500. The surviving pilgrim's badges and painted images of the king on rood screens are further evidence of the cult's popularity.<sup>11</sup>

Visions joined the many factors that contributed to the development and growth of Henry VI's cult. The two primary uses of visions in the cults of saints, the saint as visionary and saint as visitor, were evident in the canonization process of King Henry; the first in the tract which was attributed to the king's confessor John Blacman; the second in the miracle collections from Windsor.<sup>12</sup>

### *Saint as visionary in Blacman's tract*

Soon after the king's death, Henry's confessor John Blacman wrote the tract *De Virtutibus et Miraculis Henrici VI*.<sup>13</sup> As its title indicates, it was a panegyric, enumerating the qualities and events in the king's life which made him, as Blacman claimed, a saint:

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<sup>8</sup> Cited by Wolffe, *Henry VI*, p. 351 from Robert Zaller, *The Parliament of 1621: A Study in Constitutional Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 69.

<sup>9</sup> For a study and assessment of Henry VI's kingship in light of the broader political situation of the time, see John Lovett Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> Wolffe, *Henry VI*, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Smith, "Canonization," pp. 43–44.

<sup>12</sup> We will examine the miracle collections later in the chapter.

<sup>13</sup> M.R. James has edited the Latin edition and translated it into English from the 1732 reprint of Thomas Hearne, since no copy of the tract is extant in manuscript, and has collated it with the 1510 printed edition of Robert Coplande of London. M.R. James, *Henry the Sixth: A Reprint of John Blacman's Memoir* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1919; hereafter cited as *BH*).

...I have therefore thought fit to treat of some matters to the praise of God and of the serene prince King Henry VI now deceased; whom, though I be of little skill, I have taken in hand to celebrate; and this especially because to praise the saints of God, (in the register of whom I take that excellent king to be rightly included on account of the holy virtues by him exercised all his life long) is to praise and glorify Almighty God, of whose heavenly gift it cometh that they are saints.<sup>14</sup>

In the opening chapter of his biography of King Henry VI, "The Myth of the Royal Saint," Bertram Wolffe<sup>15</sup> dismissed this tract as an unreliable source of historical information about Henry VI. Cardinal Gasquet, on the other hand, accepted the tract as an "intimate account of the King's private life" and merely summarized its contents.<sup>16</sup> Leaving aside the challenge of sorting truth from fiction in the account, the purpose here is to glean information from the account about late medieval English hagiographical methods, particularly in terms of the use of visionary material.

Since the author of the tract clearly believed that King Henry was a saint, it is not surprising that the visionary experiences he reported were appropriate ones for a kingly saint. In fact, the reported visions bear a remarkable similarity to ones which St. Edward the Confessor, an earlier English king-saint had experienced. St. Edward the Confessor was a highly respected English saint and therefore a valuable saint upon which Blacman could model his hagiographical account of Henry VI. Although St. George was considered the patron saint of England by the time of Henry VI's death, St. Edward the Confessor, together with St. Edmund of East Anglia, had been treated as such until then. At least seventeen churches were dedicated to St. Edward, and the saint was depicted on many screens in East Anglia. His popularity in the fifteenth-century in particular is well attested. At least as late as 1400 when Mirk's *Festial* was compiled, the ring which St. John the Evangelist was purported to have returned to St. Edward was still on view at Westminster, for Mirk exhorted "whoso lust to haue this preuet sothe, go he to Westmynstyr; and ther he may se the same ryng that was seuen yere yn paradys."<sup>17</sup> Fifteenth-century representations

<sup>14</sup> *BH*, p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> Bertram Wolffe, *Henry VI* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981), pp. 4-13.

<sup>16</sup> Cardinal Gasquet, *The Religious Life of King Henry VI* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1923), pp. 19-37.

<sup>17</sup> *F*, pp. 149.

of that particular story included windows at Ludlow and York Minster.<sup>18</sup> A series of fourteen scenes from St. Edward's life decorated the screen at Westminster that was painted c. 1441. Two fifteenth-century manuscripts at Trinity College, an Apocalypse and a Brut Chronicle, both contain series of paintings about the saint.<sup>19</sup> His life was told in the *Golden Legend of 1438* and repeated in Caxton's version as well as in the *South English Legendary*.<sup>20</sup> Given the popularity of this king-saint, it would not have been surprising if Blacman had had him in mind when emphasizing certain aspects of the king he wished to be a saint.

First, Henry seemed to follow Edward in the frequency of his visions. St. Edward the Confessor was one of the most prolific visionaries amongst those included in saints' lives. In Caxton's version, there were thirteen visions associated with the saint, five of which he had himself, six of which others had during his life but which were connected with him, and two in which he appeared to others after his death. Blacman emphasized that King Henry had frequent visions—an audible voice for seventeen days, “consolations” from the “Blessed Virgin Mary and Saints John Baptist, Dunstan, and Anselm”<sup>21</sup> and frequent visions of the transformed Eucharist. King Edward had predictive visions relating to political events; King Henry VI received revelations about his own political future when he was in hiding:<sup>22</sup>

...an audible voice sounded in his ears for some seventeen days before he was taken, telling him how he should be delivered up by treachery, and brought to London without all honour like a thief or an outlaw, and led through the midst of it, and should endure many evils devised by the thoughts of wicked men, and should be imprisoned there in the Tower.<sup>23</sup>

Second, Blacman referred twice to Henry's eucharistic visions, which matched St. Edward's:

Those who were his privy servants say that the king often saw our Lord Jesus presenting Himself in human form in the sacrament of the altar in the hands of the priest.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The story is in the *SS*, *SEL*, *F*, and *GL*.

<sup>19</sup> *ODS*, p. 134–135.

<sup>20</sup> *S*, and *H*., p. 581.

<sup>21</sup> *BH*, p. 43.

<sup>22</sup> This is, of course, reminiscent of St. Thomas of Canterbury's predictive visions of his own impending martyrdom.

<sup>23</sup> *BH*, p. 43.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

He is reported by some in his confidence, to whom he used to reveal his secrets, to have often seen the Lord Jesus held in the hands of the celebrant and appearing to him in human form at the time of the Eucharist.<sup>25</sup>

As will be discussed in chapter 4, most eucharistic didactic visions came at the bidding of a godly person who wished to correct the unbelief of someone who did not believe the sacrament was the Real Presence. Alternatively, the Eucharist transformed itself to horrify unbelievers. There was a rare occasion, however, when the Eucharist transformed itself unbidden into an appearance of Christ himself, and that was in Caxton's tale of St. Edward the Confessor.<sup>26</sup>

Another vision-related characteristic which the two kings had in common was that their courtiers witnessed them having visions. Caxton told how St. Edward, at the moment of elevation during a mass, "falls into a soft and demure laughter" and later his attendants asked him why and he related to them his vision of the Danish king falling into the sea. Another time, at dinner, he smiled in silence for a while and then was sad, and later his privy council asked him why, and he told them his vision of the Seven Sleepers.<sup>27</sup> Blacman wrote of King Henry, in a similar yet even more impressive vein, since it was habitual rather than exceptional:

Further, to confirm his notable devotion to God, many who yet survive and were once of his household say that he was wont almost at every moment to raise his eyes heavenward like a denizen of heaven or one rapt, being for the time not conscious of himself or of those about him, as if he were a man in a trance or on the verge of heaven: having his conversation in heaven, according to that word of the apostle: 'Our conversation is in heaven.'<sup>28</sup>

And finally, there was a direct connection between a set of Henry's supernatural experiences and St. Edward. It was on the feast of St. Edward, for three years in a row, that Henry had a revelation of "the

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>26</sup> Caroline Bynum has collected many visions of holy women in which the Eucharist appeared as a child, but these stories do not seem to have filtered down into ME *exempla* in significant numbers. See Caroline Walker Bynum, "Women Mystics," "Fast, Feast, and Flesh: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women," *Representations* 11 (Summer, 1985): 1-25; "The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages: a Reply to Leo Steinberg," *Renaissance Quarterly* (1986) 39: 399-439.

<sup>27</sup> GL, vol. 6, pp. 11 and 25.

<sup>28</sup> BH, p. 38.

glory of the Lord appearing in human form, of His crown, and of a vision of the assumption of the Blessed Mary both corporal and spiritual.”<sup>29</sup> The connections between the two saints’ visions were not stated explicitly enough to make a categorical statement that Blacman deliberately modeled his Life on the earlier saint’s, but given the popularity of St. Edward the Confessor and the parallels which do exist between their Lives, it is difficult to imagine that Blacman was not at least somewhat influenced by the king-saint’s story. And thus, in appealing to, or at least hinting at similarities to the visions of the well-accepted saint who was an English king, Blacman’s account of King Henry was given added weight. If King Edward the Confessor was a saint, so too the “serene prince King Henry VI now deceased.”<sup>30</sup>

In addition to paralleling the life of a specific saint, Henry VI’s experience of visions at critical junctures in his life reflected a characteristic of the didactic saints’ visions in general. By reporting visions that took place at key moments in saints’ lives, hagiographers demonstrated that the saints were special to God, that they had direct access to him and to his other saints and the Virgin, and that their lives were marked by a special sanctity. This bolstered the faith of the believer, for supplication to a saint needed to have the promise of efficacy to make it worthwhile. Visions served as milestones in many of the saints’ lives, and thereby emphasized the hand of God on them.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *BH*, p. 42. It is ironic that Edward IV thanked St. Edward when he took over the city from Henry VI. (See John Bruce, ed. *Historie of the Arrivall of Edward IV in England and the Finall Recouerye of His Kingdomes From Henry VI. A.D. M.CCCC.LXXI* [London: Camden Society, 1838], p. 17).

<sup>30</sup> *BH*, p. 25.

<sup>31</sup> Mothers of saints had visions predicting the greatness of their unborn or newborn children (*F*, p. 60). Several saints received their callings as children, as St. Cuthbert did, to live special lives (*SEL*, p. 118; *GL*, vol. 3, p. 94) or had visions predicting their deaths, as St. Kenelm did (*SEL*, pp. 283f.; *GL*, vol. 4, p. 62). Other saints’ callings came later in life. St. Nicholas was called in an audition that came to a bishop when the next bishop of Myra was to be chosen (*MES*, pp. 57–58; *SEL*, p. 552–553; *SS*, p. 247; *F*, p. 12). St. Edmund of Canterbury was called to study divinity by an appearance of his mother in a dream (*F*, p. 167; *SEL*, p. 500; *GL*, vol. 6, p. 234), and St. Jerome was called away from his studies of Plato and Cicero by a vision of a Justice (*SEL*, p. 433). The Virgin interceded for the world before Christ’s throne and asked him to send St. Dominic to preach to the world (*F*, p. 73).

*Saints as visitors: vision as miracle*

Having examined how Blacman drew on the didactic visions, particularly those of St. Edward the Confessor, to portray King Henry VI as a saint, the discussion now turns to the ways in which visions of saints as visitors, rather than as visionaries, were used to foster the late medieval cult of saints, again particularly that of King Henry VI. These visions had an impact on the shrine records rather than on his *vita*, since the saint as visitor, by definition, appeared after his death. Whereas presenting King Henry as a saintly visionary showed God's hand of special blessing on him during his lifetime, presenting him as a saintly visitor showed God's hand of special blessing through him after his death.

King Henry's posthumous miracles were recorded in British Museum MS Royal 13 c. viii, which is the Latin translation by a monk, most likely from Canterbury, from vernacular depositions taken from those who had experienced miracles due to King Henry and had reported them on pilgrimage to his tomb at Windsor. The manuscript preserved at least 174 of more than 368 miracles included in the original, ranging in date from 1481 to 1500. Knox and Shane make a strong case for the Royal manuscript being the one that was used in an aborted attempt to verify all the miracles as part of a canonization process in either 1509 or the late 1530's, the latter dating being more likely.<sup>32</sup> Only 23 were successfully verified, most of them involving *miraculés* from the South of England.<sup>33</sup> Since the miracles were all reported at the shrine of King Henry VI in gratitude for acts of mercy attributed to him, were rewritten most likely by a monk who was interested in contributing to the canonization of the king, and were reviewed for his canonization, they were an integral part of the king's cult.

The central feature of the vision-miracles at Henry's shrine was a pattern of Reciprocated Devotion in which devotees of King Henry VI cried out for help to the saint and received his aid. This pattern is a direct reflection of the model set by the didactic visions of saints as visitors. In the didactic vision accounts, when saints returned to the world after their deaths, they did so as part of a relationship that they

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<sup>32</sup> Ronald Knox and Shane Leslie, eds. *The Miracles of Henry VI* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), pp. 25–26 (hereafter cited as *MH*). The complete Latin text is edited by P. Grosjean, ed. *Henrici VI Angliae Regis: Miracula Postuma* (Brussels: Society of Bollandists, 1935), pp. 1–305.

<sup>33</sup> *MH*, pp. 28 and 24.



maintained with their supplicants. Just as there were clear guidelines for how visionaries should relate to demonic intrusions<sup>34</sup> and ghostly interruptions, so there were rules as to how the laity was to relate to saintly visitors. These rules were part of the larger picture of the cult of saints and applied to miracles of the saints, of which visions were a sub-category.<sup>35</sup> Miracles, as defined by their role within the cult of the saints, were events in which devotees were aided by the saints to whom they directed prayers or other forms of devotion.<sup>36</sup> Those miracles in which the saints made their presence known directly, through an appearance or an audition, were visions. The mode of interrelationship between saints and the laity that these miracles and visions fostered, was, therefore, one of Reciprocated Devotion.<sup>37</sup>

This relationship of Reciprocated Devotion meant that the saints were gracious helpers to their devotees in times of need. There was a particularity to the interactions of saints and their devotees. Very rarely did a saint appear anonymously or without there being a reason why that saint rather than another had come. In contrast to appearances of demons, most visions of saints came to those who had a pre-existing relationship with the particular saint in question, whether as a long-standing devotee or simply in uttering a last-minute cry for help. It was usually not important which demon attacked a visionary, but when a saint appeared, his or her identity was usually quite relevant to the visionary. When saints appeared to their devotees they were robust in their interventions. The saints helped Christians in battles versus the Saracens and dragons. They rescued devotees from fiends, from prison, from drowning, from fire, and from being taken to hell. They healed some, called others to repentance, and sometimes brought judgment.

There were many provocations that brought the saint to the aid of a visionary. Often the visionary, in a time of crisis, had called the saint by name.<sup>38</sup> On other occasions, the visionary needed to do more than

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<sup>34</sup> See chapter 3.

<sup>35</sup> At least 29 of the 174 miracles of Henry VI—approximately one in six—involved visions or auditions. Of these, seventeen were ones in which King Henry himself was specified as appearing or speaking.

<sup>36</sup> For background on medieval miracles, see Benedicta Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record, and Event, 1000–1215* in The Middle Ages Series (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987).

<sup>37</sup> See Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 183 f.

<sup>38</sup> In *Speculum Sacerdotale*, for example, an armed knight fell off a bridge into the water at night and called on St. Mark. The saint came and reached his spear to him, drawing him out of the water (SS, p. 134).

simply cry out; sometimes prayer and fasting were required.<sup>39</sup> Certain saints had particular constituencies that they helped in their time of need even if the person in distress had not called for help.<sup>40</sup> At other times, saints responded to those who had longstanding relationships of devotion to them.<sup>41</sup> Saints also defended those who served them in church or regularly visited their shrines.<sup>42</sup>

The miracles of Henry VI reflected this complex relationship of Reciprocated Devotion. Although not all the miracles specified the actions of the victim before the miracle—many of the stories were told only in abbreviated form—the general pattern of the accounts seemed to take the form of calamity followed by a cry for help, often with a promise made to King Henry, resulting in the king intervening, and finally the recipient making a pilgrimage to Windsor to report the miracle. The miracles followed the general format of Reciprocated Devotion with many of the same devotional forms, differing slightly from the didactic visions in some of the details of these devotional forms.<sup>43</sup> In the inherited visions, fasting and feasting to a saint, serving

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<sup>39</sup> A story in *South English Legendary* involved the bishop leading his people into three days of prayer and fasting to St. Michael in order to gain the saint's help in battle against the Saracens (*SEL*, p. 403; see *SS*, p. 211; *F*, p. 259).

<sup>40</sup> By the time of the Crusades, for example, St. George was the patron saint of soldiers. Mirk told how he appeared to the Christian soldiers during the siege of Jerusalem and helped them to conquer the city (*ODS*, 178; *F*, p. 135). St. Leonard repeatedly rescued prisoners from incarceration (*SEL*, pp. 480–482).

<sup>41</sup> In the *South English Legendary*, for example, a man held a feast each year in honor of St. Nicholas. At one of the feasts, a demon strangled the man's child. The father cried out to St. Nicholas, and the saint raised the child back to life. Here the devotee was a target because of his devotion, and therefore his saint rescued his son from the attacks of the envious demon. The narrator explicitly stated that the devotee asked for help on the basis of his having honored the saint for a long time (*ibid.*, p. 565).

<sup>42</sup> Caxton, for example, told of a blind youth whom the monks at the monastery of Westminster had appointed to ring the bells. He visited the tomb of St. Edward the Confessor daily. One time as he was there praying, he saw the crowned king, St. Edward, walking in front of him. He watched him proceed up to the high altar and then vanish, and then discovered that he was no longer blind (*GL*, vol. 6, p. 35).

<sup>43</sup> Unlike the close correspondence between the didactic demon-visions and the lay stories of demonic encounters (see chapter 3), in which the same techniques were used, the didactic saints' stories and the stories in Henry VI's cult showed a somewhat greater differentiation of technique. This perhaps indicated either a greater regionalization of saints' cults or a greater shift in practices over time. More research would need to be done to show whether these responses were geographic or chronological shifts. Either way the difference is greater than with the Spiritual Warfare dynamic. What does this indicate about the difference between Spiritual Warfare and Reciprocated Devotion in terms of cultural flexibility? Both Spiritual Warfare and Reciprocated Devotion, at their cores, remained constant, that is, Spiritual Warfare still involved Christians fighting

the saint in church, attending the saint at his/her tomb, and calling the saint by name were the methods most commonly used. In the King Henry miracles, the popular methods were the bending of a penny in the king's honor, the invocation of his blessed memory, vowing pilgrimage to his tomb, measuring the ill person's height and width to make a taper-candle of the resulting length, and making a vow to fast on Tuesdays.<sup>44</sup>

Many of King Henry's visions—like many of the didactic saint visions—involved miracles of healing.<sup>45</sup> In addition, King Henry's appearances helped his devotees in other ways, several of which are reminiscent of the ways in which saints helped their devotees in the didactic visions. King Henry, *per reuelacionem*, showed Thomas Attwood the location of treasure, paralleling St. Bartholomew's helping a woman find out the location of her deceased husband's treasure, but without invoking a ghost.<sup>46</sup> The King, *per apparicionem*, performed a deed that

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demons with spiritual weapons, and Reciprocated Devotion still involved Christians serving the saints in hopes of receiving aid in crisis in return. But whereas the spiritual weapons seem to have remained the same over time and topography, the components of devotion were allowed to change and adapt. This may be related to the fact that demons were usually anonymous, whereas saints were related to as unique individuals.

<sup>44</sup> John Hill of Dorchester, Oxfordshire, for example, after he had bent a coin, was in a state somewhere between sleep and full consciousness while his neighbors were making a "quatriduum" for him, when he recovered suddenly from his illness because he saw King Henry (*MH*, p. 76). Elsewhere, a little boy, the son of Robert North in London, had a "contagious scourge" that had disfigured his upper lip. When his mother entrusted him to the care of King Henry she then saw her son rolling in the mud. He shouted to her and told her not to cry, for King Henry had thrown him on the ground and rolled him about until his lip bled and had told him to go riding with his mother. He was then cured (*ibid.*, p. 202–203). Agnes, the wife of William Primrose at Hythe in Kent, prayed to King Henry for many months for sight to be restored to her. She had a vision of the King that was accompanied by such a great light that her neighbors came to see if her house was burning down. She was cured of her blindness (*ibid.*, pp. 212–213). The great light is reminiscent of the didactic visions in which St. Augustine's presence in Canterbury was known by shepherds in the fields because of the light over the city (*GL*, vol. 3, p. 195) and the light the fisherman saw the night that St. Peter consecrated his church at Westminster (*F*, p. 191).

<sup>45</sup> William Bartram, who was kicked during a football game, was healed of his excruciating pain after he saw King Henry *in sompno* (*MH*, pp. 130–131). Henry Lancaster was also cured of a deadly fever by King Henry's appearing *in sompnis* (*ibid.*, p. 124). William Wotton at Lindfield in Sussex suffered excruciating pain after being kicked by a horse, and was cured when he saw the "blessed King Henry" (*ibid.*, p. 205). Finally, William Turpin, who was dying of the "sweating sickness," was restored to health by seeing two visions of King Henry, *viso bis beato rege Henrico* (*ibid.*, p. 127).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49; see *SS*, p. 194.

angels or St. Leonard usually did<sup>47</sup> when he released Thomas Burton from his chains at Colchester prison where he had waited for more than twenty-nine weeks without a trial.<sup>48</sup> When the authorities arrested and hanged an innocent Thomas Fullar of Hammersmith along with a sheep stealer, King Henry appeared to him and put his hand between Thomas' neck and the rope and thus saved his life.<sup>49</sup> This was similar to a didactic vision in the *Speculum Sacerdotale* involving St. James' saving the life of a thief who had refused to steal from his church.<sup>50</sup>

Henry's miracles reflected another pattern within the dynamic of Reciprocated Devotion in which the supernatural realm initiated the relationship of devotion. Visions and auditions in a saint's cult might serve the purpose of stimulating a devotee to ask for help or instruct him/her how to do so. There were six such visions/auditions in Henry's miracle collection. They occurred before any plea for help had been made, and thus they precipitated the miracles rather than serving as miracles themselves.<sup>51</sup> In each of these cases, the miracle did not occur until after the vision or audition had spurred the visionary to ask for help. In these accounts, it was the preliminary vision that reflected, specified, and perpetuated the devotional aspect of the cult of Henry.

The cult of the saints, in contrast to the economy of satisfaction, was driven more by devotion than by fear or repentance. However, there were occasional aspects of the cult that involved negative sanctions. In the cult of Henry, visions that occurred after miracles might function

<sup>47</sup> See *SEL*, p. 480f.; *SS*, p. 177.

<sup>48</sup> *MH*, p. 57.

<sup>49</sup> *MH*, p. 97.

<sup>50</sup> *SS*, p. 176.

<sup>51</sup> A voice from heaven (*celesti voce*) instructed John Agelde, who had been troubled by "phthisis" for more than two years, to cry out to King Henry for aid (*MH*, p. 135). A heavenly warning (*celitus premonita*) given by a stranger who whispered in her ear to bend a penny in King Henry's honor, resulted in Katherine Bailey of the parish of St. Edward at Cambridge receiving back the sight of her left eye which she had lost for seven years (*ibid.*, p. 136). A voice warned the mother of Edmund Brown of Higham Ferrers, Northamptonshire that her little boy was drowning, and she went to find him. Prayers eventually brought the child back to life and the mother then set off on pilgrimage to Windsor that very night (*ibid.*, pp. 157–115). Another mysterious visitor came to Thomas Stapleton of Laughton in Sussex when he was stabbed in the belly, telling him to bend a coin in invocation of King Henry, and reminding him that his father had died fighting in a battle for the king (*ibid.*, pp. 178–179). Agnes Wren of Ryarsh near Malling in Kent heard a voice three times, twice in sleep and once while awake, which told her to go to King Henry's tomb. When she bent a penny and traveled to Windsor, she was cured of the crippling disease that had afflicted her for two years (*ibid.*, p. 176).

as warnings to those who had not responded appropriately to being healed. An unidentified man who had a “lump of flesh growing suddenly out of [his] palate” invoked King Henry and was healed. He did not fulfill his vow, however, until he was warned in a dream (*in sompnis admonitus adimpleuit*).<sup>52</sup> William Lamhall from North Waltham, near Basingstoke, survived being run over by the heavy wheel of a packed wagon because of King Henry. When his parents offered an inadequate wax figure, his mother received dreams that led her to present another wax figure that depicted the whole incident.<sup>53</sup> In these accounts, it was the follow-up visions that reinforced the cult, emphasizing the importance of carrying through on devotion to the saint.

These follow-up visions reflected the importance demonstrated in the didactic visions of both the saint and the visionary fulfilling their obligations to one another. Relationships between devotees and saints were not always limited to freely offered devotion prompting a voluntary response of aid. The relationship of Reciprocated Devotion, once begun, imposed conditions on both parties. The visions demonstrated that a saint might require undeviating devotion from the visionary. The *Speculum Sacerdotale* told of a clerk who loved the Virgin and said her hours every day. One day, he got married because his parents had died and left him an inheritance. When the wedding Mass was sung, he realized that he had forgotten to do service to the Virgin that day. So he commanded his new wife and the wedding guests to go home. He knelt before the image of the Virgin, and as he was saying the “*Quam pulcra es, et quam decora*” the Virgin suddenly appeared to him and spoke sternly to him, “O thow grete foole and vntrewe creature, why hast thou left me that was they spowse and thy frende and takest a-nothur. . . .” She then vanished. He was challenged and comforted by the vision, returned home and celebrated with his friends, but when it was bedtime, he tarried, and at midnight he returned to the church of the Virgin and lived and died there in her service.<sup>54</sup>

In full reciprocity, the visionary-devotee could also demand assistance from the saint. *Jacob's Well*, for example, said that a holy man called John of Damascus was condemned for conspiracy and his hand

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>54</sup> SS, p. 201 (Edward H. Weatherly, ed., *Speculum Sacerdotale*. E.E.T.S. [1936, reprinted 2000]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society). Other saints could be just as insistent. See *F*, p. 277; *GL*, vol. 7, p. 27.

cut off and hung before an image of the Virgin in his priory. John returned to the house and showed his arm to the image and said:

Lo, lady, is this the mede for my good dede that I haue don to thi worschip? is this the reward, the blysse, & the worschipp to thi seruauuntys? ...why hast thou sufferyd this hand to be smet of, that hath wretyn to thi worschip manye swete songys and prayers of the And often sacryd in sacrament of the awtere the holy body of thi sone?

He went to bed and the Virgin appeared to him and healed him.<sup>55</sup>

The relationship of Reciprocated Devotion was one that was taken very seriously in the Henry VI cult, violations on either side being treated severely by the injured party. As with the saints' cults in general, there was pressure to fulfill promises made to Henry VI before, during, and after visionary contacts with him. Whether purely out of gratitude or out of a fearful respect for the importance of fulfilling their obligations, the visionaries listed in King Henry VI's miracles had followed through on their promises. A late fifteenth-century woodcut depicting King Henry's shrine at Windsor showed a room crowded with wax votives, a pair of crutches, a chain with fetters, and a model of a ship. The human figures in the woodcut were illustrations of miracles portrayed as if their crises were still in progress. For example, a girl had a knife piercing her throat. Dodgson has connected most of the figures and objects in the woodcut with miracle stories from the collection.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>55</sup> *JW*, pp. 277–279 (Arthur Brandeis, ed., *Jacob's Well*. E.E.T.S. [1900, reprinted 1999]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society). A similar story is told in *F*, p. 302. The *Festial* also told the story of a widow that illustrated the same principle. A widow's son was put in prison. When her prayers to the Virgin seemed to go unheeded, she went into the church and spoke to her image: "Blessyd maydyn, oft I haue prayde the for delyuerance of my sonne, and am not holpen. Wherefore, so as ye wyll not helpe me to haue my son, I wyll take youris ynstyd of myn, tyll ye send myn home." She then kidnapped the image of the Christ Child, wrapped it in white, and locked it away. The following night, the Virgin freed the woman's son from prison. The widow had cried to the Virgin for help day and night and kidnapped the image only when it became clear that her prayers were not being answered (*F*, pp. 247–248 [Theodor Erbe, ed., *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies*. E.E.T.S. (1905; Kraus reprint, 1987); by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society]). An illustration in an English Psalter (c. 1320–1330, BL Royal MS 2B. vii, ff. 229v. – 230) depicts the Virgin appearing to the woman, presenting her son to her. (See figures 6 and 7 in Jonathan Alexander and Paul Binski, eds., *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England* [London: Royal Academy of Arts: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987], p. 29).

<sup>56</sup> C. Dodgson, "English Devotional Woodcuts of the late Fifteenth Century with special reference to those in the Bodleian Library," *The Walpole Society*, 17 (1928–1929):

*Cameos by didactic saints in visions of Henry VI*

The didactic visions from the saints' legends also influenced the emerging cult of Henry VI through those same saints' cameo appearances in visions of Henry. The fact that heavenly visitors accompanied Henry VI or came in connection with him added credibility by showing the company with which he consorted. In three of the seventeen visitations, King Henry appeared with another visitor, and in another three, visitors came without him. When he appeared to Henry Walter de Guildford, who had been wounded by a cannon and thrown out of the ship by his fellow sailors to die in the sea, King Henry was accompanied by St. Erasmus. The text suggested two reasons why this particular saint came. First, Henry Walter had a *speciali deuocione* for St. Erasmus, most likely because he was the patron saint of sailors. Second, the saint joined him in his pain by lying near him writhing in agony just as the saint was "often represented in churches as being tortured by his executioners."<sup>57</sup> It was not surprising that Henry Walter, in anguish over the wound in his stomach, should see St. Erasmus, whom he had presumably viewed in stained glass, alabaster, or paintings, being tormented by having his intestines removed. King Henry's appearance with one who was already acknowledged as a saint, added more weight to the case that the king was a saint.<sup>58</sup>

Visions of the Blessed Virgin Mary that came in conjunction with requests for aid from King Henry VI were even more potent, given the Virgin's high position in the medieval hierarchy. The high proportion of visions of the Virgin amongst the inherited visions illustrated her important status. Out of approximately 150 didactic visions in which

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104f. The woodcut was inserted in an English Bible (MS Bodleian 277) that is ascribed to the mid-fifteenth century.

<sup>57</sup> *MH*, p. 80.

<sup>58</sup> Another Henrician miracle involved what its visionary believed to be the visitation of an angel. Robert Thomson, crying out to King Henry when he was in chains in a filthy dungeon, fell asleep and believed he had been rescued by an angel, for he suddenly discovered he was on a road two miles away from the prison. Here was a case in which the didactic visions seemed to have had a direct effect on a visionary's interpretation of what he experienced, for a recipient of aid from an unknown supernatural visitor assumed that his rescuer was an angel, even though he had called out to a saint for help, perhaps because rescues from prison in the didactic visions tended to be performed by angels. Since angels usually appeared only when sent by God or a saint, the appearance of an angel after the invocation of a saint may have fortified that saint's credibility by showing that he had the right to send out angels.

saints appeared to give aid,<sup>59</sup> virtually every saint was a male. The one saint who was a clear exception to this rule was the Blessed Virgin Mary. She appeared in 60 visions. She was the saint who appeared most frequently in the didactic visions and was quite busy.<sup>60</sup> The Virgin comforted the saints who were dying or in prison, predicted future events, bestowed honor, interceded to stop Christ from performing acts of judgment, substituted for a delinquent nun for 15 years and for the wife of a man making a pact with a devil, protected people from fiends, and acted as guide to the otherworld. Many of these vision stories came from the medieval collections of miracles of the Virgin Mary that circulated widely in England.<sup>61</sup> For example, out of the 81 different stories in Beverly Boyd's collection of all extant Middle English miracles of the Virgin, 49 included appearances of the Virgin.<sup>62</sup> Visions were an important part of the cult of the Virgin Mary.<sup>63</sup>

Her appearances reinforced a devotion that was more complex and well defined than those of the other saints. Some of the practices were similar to those for other saints, such as fasting and praying. But others were specific to the Virgin, such as the saying of her Five Joys, Our Lady's Psalter, the Mass of Our Lady, and sympathy for her sorrow at the cross.<sup>64</sup>

The didactic accounts of the Virgin Mary's visitations were marked by a level of intimacy that was indicative of the nature of her cult. Mirk, for example, recounted the story of the Virgin's healing of St. Philibert, a story that elucidates an aspect of Reciprocated Devotion unique to the Virgin. When Philibert's throat was so greatly swollen that he could not draw breath, the Virgin came to the saint and told

<sup>59</sup> This number includes visions of the Virgin Mary.

<sup>60</sup> Even when compared to all the other categories of visions as well, she is the one individual who appears most often in visions.

<sup>61</sup> Beverly Boyd, ed., *The Middle English Miracles of the Virgin* (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1964). For medieval illustrations of many of these visions, see the cycles of Miracles of the Virgin at Eton College Chapel and Winchester Cathedral. (See M.R. James and E.W. Tristram, "The Wall Paintings in Eton College Chapel and in the Lady Chapel of Winchester Cathedral," *The Walpole Society*, XVII [1928-1929]).

<sup>62</sup> If the same story appears in more than one source, I have counted it only once in my total.

<sup>63</sup> One place where Marian visions overlap with magic is in John the Monk's work, discussed by Nicholas Watson, "John the Monk's *Book of Visions of the Blessed and Undeified Virgin Mary, Mother of God*: Two Versions of a Newly Discovered Ritual Magic Text" in Claire Fanger, ed., *Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), pp. 163-249.

<sup>64</sup> For examples, see *F*, p. 110 and 232; pp. 16 and 300; *GL*, vol. 4, p. 58; *SEL*, p. 236.



him that the throat that had cheered her so often with his reciting her five joys should not have to suffer such penance. She “therwyth toke out hyr swete pappe, and mylked on hys throte, and soo gode hur way” and he was healed.<sup>65</sup> The early fourteenth-century English Queen Mary Psalter includes an illustration of a similar story in which the Virgin came and sprinkled her milk on the face of an unnamed monk who was dying of facial ulcers.<sup>66</sup> Visions, paintings, and relics involving the Virgin’s milk were popular in medieval Europe.<sup>67</sup> Although the discussions about the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin that would eventually eliminate depictions of the Virgin’s lactation were already vigorous in the fifteenth century,<sup>68</sup> stories about visions involving her milk continued to be circulated in England, particularly in the many editions of Mirk’s *Festial*.<sup>69</sup> The visions in which the Virgin gave her milk to the suffering visionary offered a picture of gentle intimacy between the visitor and the visionary, unparalleled by appearances of other saints. The milk brought soothing as well as healing. By offering her milk, the Virgin also enabled the visionary to experience what Christ himself had experienced, thus granting him or her a poignant moment of *imitatio Christi*.

Although not involving the Virgin’s milk, an account in the Henry VI miracles reflects this intimate relationship between the visionary and the Virgin, and thus strengthened Henry’s cult by association. Richard Beys—the hanged man discussed above—prayed to King Henry for aid and was delighted when the king appeared. But he “*longe tamen ei copiosior ilico accessit securitas*” when the Virgin came to his rescue. He felt safer with her. She was dressed in a white garment threaded with gold. She “deigned to manifest her presence so lovingly and so solicitously,” standing near him and holding him up by placing her hands under his feet, and he found this so pleasant that even though his body was being strangled, he could feel no pain. After his release, Richard visited both Walsingham and Windsor to thank both the Virgin and King

<sup>65</sup> *F*, p. 110 (Theodor Erbe, ed., *Mirk’s Festial: A Collection of Homilies*. E.E.T.S. [1905; Kraus reprint, 1987]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>66</sup> Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Pan Books, Ltd., 1985), Figure 30.

<sup>67</sup> See Warner, “Milk of Paradise” in *Alone of All Her Sex*, pp. 192–205. See also Bynum, “Fast,” pp. 15 and 24.

<sup>68</sup> Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p. 204.

<sup>69</sup> In addition to the story of St. Philibert, Mirk recounted the tale of an image of the Virgin which came alive and gave suckle to the Christ Child on her lap (*F*, p. 302).

Henry. The Virgin's appearance, although preferred to the king's visit, nevertheless did not supersede King Henry's appearance, for the devotee visited both shrines. It was another case in which King Henry's cult was buttressed by association with a greater saint, indeed the greatest.<sup>70</sup>

The cult of the Virgin strengthened Henry VI's cult in another way as many of his miracle accounts invoked her simultaneously with him, especially at the moment of death. There was a great degree of overlap in the cult of Mary between the dynamics of Reciprocated Devotion and Transactions of Satisfaction, since it was believed that she could warn believers of their impending deaths and intervene at Judgment. In one of the Henry VI miracles, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared alone, even though both she and King Henry were called. Robbers on the Welsh border attacked William Young, one of the king's bailiffs, when he was collecting rents. He prayed to both the Virgin and King Henry, beseeching them that he might not die until he had seen a priest. The Virgin appeared to him. She told him to visit her shrine at Milan, which he did, but he also left a wax representation of the event at Windsor.<sup>71</sup> The only clue in the text as to why the Virgin appeared instead of the King was that William had fasted in her honor that day. It may also have been related to the fact that people associated the Virgin's appearances with warnings of impending death in which she gave them the opportunity to receive housel and shrift before they died. A rubric attached to the "Obsecro te" in certain versions of the Sarum primer, for example, promised that if one prayed the prayers faithfully, the Virgin would appear to the devotee in time to warn one to prepare for death.<sup>72</sup> It was very rare for a vision to be promised to anyone. The late medieval focus on dying a good death, combined with the Virgin's frequent appearances to help those who were dying combined in this rubric. Mirk's *Festial* included an appeal for the Virgin to appear at the hour of death:

Now, swete lady, I you pray  
 Helpe vs at oure endyng-day  
 And scheld us from the fende  
 And graunt vs alle suche myght  
 Of you forto haue a syght,  
 Or that we hethen wende.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>70</sup> *MH*, p. 154.

<sup>71</sup> *MH*, pp. 196–197.

<sup>72</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 318.

<sup>73</sup> *F*, p. 232 (Theodor Erbe, ed., *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies*. E.E.T.S. [1905;

Thus it was highly appropriate that it was the Virgin who appeared to the dying devotee of Henry VI, and it boosted Henry VI's cult that the Virgin would appear partially in his name.<sup>74</sup>

*Visions and images in the cults of the saints*

Another medieval dynamic, that of the importance of the visual, further strengthened the Reciprocated Devotion of the saints' cult and of Henry VI's cult. Visions, by the nature of the phenomenon, were especially potent in buttressing an aspect of spirituality that was particularly dependent on the sense of sight. Although we will explore the dynamic of spiritual sight in greater depth in chapter 4, it is worth detailing some aspects here, as they relate to saints' visions. It is not surprising that visions, a visual phenomenon, were so commonly linked with the cult of saints, as spiritual sight and the visible expression of the invisible played important roles in devotion to the saints. The veneration of images, the visible representations of saints, was a crucial aspect of the cult.

Veneration of tangible depictions of saints, however, was also the center of an important debate in late medieval England, one that W.R. Jones refers to as the "second Iconoclast Controversy."<sup>75</sup> The Lollards<sup>76</sup> roiled the matter by taking Wycliffe's cautionary but tolerant remarks a step further and, although not advocating the abolition of

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Kraus reprint, 1987]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>74</sup> It was not only didactic visions of saints that buttressed Henry's canonization process. Another sub-category of didactic visions that strengthened his cult was that of angels involved in spiritual warfare. Visions in Henry's miracle stories in which he combated demons demonstrated his power by showing his strength in spiritual warfare. In one example, an unnamed chaplain in Stretton near Leicester was tempted to commit suicide by a demon who appeared to him in a dream. Only when King Henry communicated with him through both a dream and an audition did the chaplain take down the ladder and noose (*MH*, p. 158). Here, responding to a demonic attack, the King was acting in the capacity most often reserved for angels in didactic visions. He succeeded where other saints had failed. St. James' devotee, the unfortunate pilgrim to Santiago de Compostela, took his own life at a demon's instigation. In another miracle account, an evil spirit appeared as a black dog and bit a man, but disappeared when King Henry had been invoked (*MH*, pp. 128–129).

<sup>75</sup> W.R. Jones, "Lollards and Images: The Defense of Religious Art in Later Medieval England," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 34 (1973): 28.

<sup>76</sup> Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1984), pp. 135–192.

images, spoke vehemently against them. The Lollards defined every type of image-veneration, except possibly that of a simple wooden cross, as idolatry, whereas the iconodules (lovers of icons) restricted the use of the term idolatry to heathen images.<sup>77</sup> Iconodules argued for the instructional value of images,<sup>78</sup> but what is of even more relevance to our discussion of visions is their advocacy of the devotional use of images. Mystics, according to Sixten Ringbom, although speaking against the primacy of images yet nevertheless used images in their devotions, and their visions were influenced by works of art.<sup>79</sup> Walter Hilton, for example, in his *Conclusiones de Ymaginibus* defended the use of images in worship.<sup>80</sup> Gregory the Great had written a letter to Secundus in the sixth century in which, while extolling the benefits of meditating on images of Christ, he made a statement which applied to spiritual images in general, "We do no harm in wishing to show the invisible by means of the visible."<sup>81</sup> His statement in favor of images was eventually absorbed into Gratian's *Decretum* and thus became part of the canon law.<sup>82</sup> Aquinas, in turn, had differentiated the types of veneration to be given to various images. The saints' images were not to be accorded *latría*, the highest form of worship given to the divinity of Christ, nor *hyperdulia*, the reverence due to the humanity of Jesus, but rather *dulia*, a lesser degree of adoration. The Virgin's image was to be accorded

<sup>77</sup> Jones, "Lollards," p. 43.

<sup>78</sup> Mirk argued, for example, "...roodes and othyr ymages ben necessary in holy chirch, whateuer thes Lollardes sayn; for yf thay nade ben profitable, goode holy faders that haue be tofore vs wold haue don hem out of holy chirch mony a yere gon. But rygt as a man doth worship to the kyngis sele, not for loue of the sele, but for reuerence of the man that owet hit; so for the roode is the Kyngis sele of Heuen, and othyr ymages that ben made of holy sayntes that ben in Heuen wyth hym: and therefore men worschipe ymages. For, as Ion Bellet tellet, ymages and payntours ben lewde menys bokys, and I say bo[dy]ly th[is] ther ben mony thousaund of pepul that couth not ymagen in her hert how Crist was don on the rood, but as thai lerne hit be sygt of ymages and payntours" (*F*, p. 171 [Theodor Erbe, ed., *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies*. E.E.T.S. (1905; Kraus reprint, 1987); by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society]).

<sup>79</sup> Sixten Ringbom, "Devotional Images and Imaginative Devotions: Notes on the Place of Art in Late Medieval Private Piety," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 6th Ser, 73 (1969): 162–164.

<sup>80</sup> See J.P.H. Clark, "Walter Hilton in Defence of the Religious Life and of the Veneration of Images," *The Downside Review* 103 (1985): 9–16.

<sup>81</sup> Translated by Sixten Ringbom, "Icon to Narrative: the Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting," in *Acta Academiae Aboensis* 31:2 (1965), p. 12; from *PL*, 77, cols. 990f.

<sup>82</sup> Woolf, *Mystery*, p. 87.

*hyperdulia* since she was more worthy of veneration than the other saints.<sup>83</sup> *Dives and Pauper*, for example, reflected this idea of differing degrees of veneration when it described images' purpose as "a book and a tokene to the lewyd peple...to steryn hem to thynkyn of God and of seyntys in heuene and so wurshepyn God abouyn alle thyngge and seyntys in here degre."<sup>84</sup>

By the Late Middle Ages, many images, particularly of the Virgin and of Christ, had indulgences attached to them that gave added incentive to devotees to use them.<sup>85</sup> For example, the 1494 Wynkyn de Worde edition of the primer included a prayer rubric instructing, "To them that before this image of pity devoutly say: v. Pater noster. v. Aves, and a Credo; piteously beholding these arms of Christ's Passion are granted xxxii. M. VII hundred and lv years of pardon." In addition, woodcuts and miniatures of saints often accompanied suffrages, reinforcing the connection between image and devotion.<sup>86</sup>

Accounts of visions of images coming to life joined in the promotion of the veneration of images.<sup>87</sup> Most visions involving saints were told in saints' legends or in sermons attached to their feast days, and they served both to express and to enforce the saints' cults. The saint's image was an important component of his/her cult. Visions in which saints' images were animated gave added weight to the idea that the saints' presence resided in a special way near their shrines, relics, or images—the concept that Peter Brown refers to as *praesentia*, "the physical presence of the holy."<sup>88</sup> In each of these cases, the visionary began

<sup>83</sup> *ST* III:25:3–6; II:103:3–4.

<sup>84</sup> *DP*, p. 90 (Priscilla Heath Barnum, ed. *Dives and Pauper*. E.E.T.S. [1976]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>85</sup> For example, the 1494 Wynkyn de Worde edition of the Primer includes a prayer "Before our Lady of pity." Edgar Hoskins, *Horae Beatae Mariae Virginis or Sarum and York Primers* (London: Longmans, Green, 1901), p. 111.

<sup>86</sup> Hoskins, *Horae Beatae Mariae*, p. 112. For examples in Europe in general, see Ringbom, "Icon," pp. 23–30 and Emile Mâle, *Religious Art in France: The Late Middle Ages: A Study of Medieval Iconography and Its Sources*. Edited by Harry Bober and trans. by Marthiel Mathews (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 96f.

<sup>87</sup> For further details about the relation between sermons and images, see M. Wakelin, "A Note on Preaching, 'Roodes and Other Ymages' in Mediaeval England," *The Downside Review* 103 (1985): 76–86.

<sup>88</sup> Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 88. In the *South English Legendary*, when St. Mary of Egypt repented of her prostitution, she did so before an image of the Virgin, and the image spoke out loud to her (*SEL*, p. 138–139; similar story of an unnamed prostitute in *MES*, pp. 160–162). In *Jacob's Well*, a nun ran away from her convent with her lover,

with a focus on an earthly object, a physical representation of a saint, and suddenly—or after fifteen years—found he / she was in direct contact with the prototype. The prototype in each of these visions was the Virgin, and she was the saint whose image came to life most often.

This coming to life encouraged faith. Animation of a saint's image could bring even unbelievers to faith.<sup>89</sup> And here we encounter a popular theme in the exempla: the conversion of an unbelieving Jew through a visionary encounter. It was not limited to encounters with saints. We will see the theme emerge in visions of the Eucharist and elsewhere. Why were the Jews so frequently referenced in didactic visions? Joan Gregg has explored this theme in medieval sermon exempla in general, placing sermon stories of Jews in the larger context of medieval views of the 'other' and the demonization of women and Jews in particular.<sup>90</sup> Miri Rubin narrows the discussion to a particular category of Jewish exempla, that relating to the desecration of the Eucharist. She demonstrates a strong, complex link between these stories of Jews and anti-Semitism across Europe. At the same time that didactic vision stories of Jews participated in the tragic stream of anti-Semitism, however, they also contributed to the didactic visions' undergirding of the medieval faith. As will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4, the didactic vision accounts as a whole served the purpose of buttressing the Faith. Exempla of Jewish visionaries participated in this purpose. As a Jew moved from unbelief to belief, it added to the power of the vision story, confirming the doctrinal structure of medieval Christianity. Because he was starting from outside of the Faith, his move to belief in a particular Christian doctrine or practice covered a greater distance than that required of a Christian who might doubt one or another of the doctrines. Thus, the visions of Jews served as 'from-the-greater-to-the-lesser' arguments. In Mirk's *Festial*, for example, a monk on pilgrimage to Jerusalem encountered a Jew who refused to believe that a virgin could have a child. The monk praised the Virgin to such an extent that the Jew asked him to paint a picture of her on a board. The monk did so and as they stared at it, the Christ Child in her arms came to life

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leaving her sexton keys before an image of the Virgin. The Virgin substituted for her for fifteen years so that when the nun, finally repentant, returned to the convent, no one had noticed her absence (*JW*, p. 271–272).

<sup>89</sup> The role of images in the cults of the saints will be examined further in chapter 4.

<sup>90</sup> Joan Young Gregg, *Devils, Women, and Jews: Reflections of the Other in Medieval Sermon Stories*. SUNY Series in Medieval Studies (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997).

and suckled her breast. The Jew was astonished and said that it would be less impossible for a virgin to have a child than for an image to come alive, and so he turned to the Christian faith.<sup>91</sup> The exemplum presented the animation of an image as a miracle of great proportions, virtually surpassing that of the Virgin Birth. In a sense, the account was a proof within a proof. The image coming to life convinced the Jew; the story was meant to convince the Christian.

At the same time, however, accounts of images coming to life—by linking the saint's *praesentia* (presence) to an image—showed the 'vulnerability' of the saint within the context of Reciprocated Devotion. Several visions of saints' images showed how seriously the concept of *praesentia* in relation to a saint's image could be taken. One popular story demonstrated that the mistreatment of the image of a saint in order to get help from the saint could prove efficacious. A Jew<sup>92</sup> placed his gold before an image of St. Nicholas, demanding that the saint protect his wealth while he left on an errand. When he returned, the Jew discovered that thieves had stolen his gold, and in his fury he beat the image, threatening to destroy it if the saint did not make sure that his wealth was returned to him. The saint appeared to the two thieves, wounded and bleeding, and forced them to return the stolen goods.<sup>93</sup> Here action taken against a saint's image forced the saint into appearing. The image, in a sense, had exposed the saint to the actions of a human being, even to one who was not a believer.<sup>94</sup> While reinforcing the dynamic of Reciprocated Devotion by modeling that the exchange could sometimes be enforced with violence, the account also confirmed the cult of the saints in general, again by reference to a Jew (or barbarian) as an unbelieving visionary who became a believer through the visual confirmation of a Christian doctrine.

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<sup>91</sup> *F*, pp. 302–303.

<sup>92</sup> In *SS*, it is a barbarian rather than a Jew.

<sup>93</sup> *SEL*, pp. 563–564; *SS*, pp. 248–249; *F*, pp. 14–15.

<sup>94</sup> A similar event, mentioned earlier, was the one reported by Mirk from the *Miracles of the Virgin*, about the widow who had kidnapped the image of the Christ Child from the image the Virgin, refusing to give it back until the Virgin rescued her son from prison (*F*, p. 247). For further discussion of the role of coercion in the saints' cults, see Geary, *Living With the Dead*, pp. 166–124.

*Images and King Henry VI's cult*

The importance of a saint's physical or iconographical—and in both cases visual attributes—was demonstrated in the visions of the Henry VI cult. The way in which Henry VI's image played a part in his cult was primarily through the visual details supplied by his visionaries, who almost invariably included a description of Henry's physical appearance.

It is reasonable to query how it was that a visionary was supposed to know the identity of a particular saint appearing in a vision. The question matters, given the probative value of visions. If accounts of non-visionary miracles functioned more like circumstantial evidence, visions were more akin to eyewitness reports. The saints were caught red-handed, as it were, in the act of aiding the devotee. But how was one to be sure that the one seen was the saint in question? Upon what basis did the visionary identify the saint? The narrator of the Henry VI miracles gave one clue when he said of the appearance of St. Erasmus that he was writhing in pain as he was “often represented in churches as being tortured by his executioners.”<sup>95</sup> That gives us a hint as to how well-established saints were identified, their iconography being known because of its depiction in stained glass, paintings, alabasters, and manuscript illuminations. But what of saints whose cults were only newly-developing? How did people know—or at least think they knew—what King Henry VI looked like?

The first possibility is that people had either seen King Henry VI first-hand when he was alive or had heard descriptions from people who had. King Henry traveled extensively throughout England during his reign. Wolffe's map, which labeled all the towns where the king visited during 1436–1461, showed that the king visited multiple locations in almost every region of England.<sup>96</sup> Although some of the visionaries, particularly those who had visions closer to 1500, may have been born after King Henry's death, it is quite likely that they had heard descriptions of the king's appearance from parents or others who had seen the king in person. For example, if the Henry Walter de Guildford who had the vision of Henry VI out at sea was indeed from Guildford, then it is very likely that he had either seen the king himself or had heard many

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<sup>95</sup> *MH*, p. 80.

<sup>96</sup> Wolff, *Henry VI*, pp. 96–97.



stories about the king, for the king had a hunting lodge at Guildford and visited there on at least six different occasions.<sup>97</sup>

Images of the king were painted in various locales after his death. Many of these were copies of an oil painting done in the late 1440's or early 1450's and were commissioned as founder portraits or as parts of series of the kings and queens of England.<sup>98</sup> It is possible that one could have recognized the king from these portraits, but lay people did not ordinarily frequent the locations where they were kept. They would have been more likely to see one of the many wall paintings of the king on roodscreens in parish churches, which often depicted him along with a pantheon of saints.<sup>99</sup> There were also wooden figurines such as that on the pulpit at King's College Chapel, Cambridge, and at least five surviving stained glass representations.<sup>100</sup> His image also graced pilgrims' badges. Apart from the official portraits, the depictions of the king would not have made for easy recognition, at least not in terms of photographic realism. They would have been more likely to give information about his iconography. He was often portrayed beardless, with cap, scepter and orb, and sometimes with an antelope at his feet.

A few of the visions included descriptions of the king wearing blue velvet. It happens that blue velvet was referred to twice in *The Great Chronicle of London*. Since the king's apparel was significant enough to draw the chronicler's attention, it is quite likely that it drew the attention of many others and may have been part of the stories that circulated by word-of-mouth throughout the kingdom. Since it was so close to the time of his martyrdom and the beginning of his cult, it may have been why this particular outfit occurred in several visions. In 1469, Henry VI had been removed from the Tower where he had been imprisoned for several years and was taken on parade by George, the duke of Clarence:

The said duke accompanied wyth the Erlys of warwyk & of derby & of Shroysbury and the lord Stanley wyth many othir noble men Rode unto the Towyr and flett thens kyng Henry and conveyed hym soo thorwth the hye stretys of the Cyte Rydyng *In a long Gowne of blew velvet* unto

<sup>97</sup> September 25, 1439; May 3–5, 1446; January 11–12 and 26–27, 1447; October 21–23, 1450; June 30, 1452 (Wolffe, *Henry VI*, pp. 94, 362, 365, 368, 369).

<sup>98</sup> R. Strong, *Tudor and Jacobean Portraits: Catalogue of Portraits in the National Portrait Gallery to 1625* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1969), pp. 147–148.

<sup>99</sup> Grosjean lists a dozen or so parish churches that had the medieval paintings of King Henry (*Henrici*, pp. 252–253).

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.

pawlys, and when he hadd there offird at the Rode of the North dore he was then conveyed thorwth the Chyrch Into the Bysshoppys palays & there lodgyd. ...<sup>101</sup>

Later, he was again put on display, again in blue velvet:

The which was more lyker a play then the shewyng of a prynce to wynne mennys hertys, ffor by this mean he lost many & wan noon or Ryght ffewe, and evyr he was shewid *In a long blew gowne of velvet* as thowth he hadd noo moo to chaunge w<sup>t</sup>. ...(*italics added*)<sup>102</sup>

When King Henry appeared in a vision to Richard Beys, an innocent man who was being hanged, he was tall, with full face and pinched features, with gray hair and fair appearance. He was wearing a blue velvet coat, “in which guise,” according to the narrator, “his appearance has been reported by many.”<sup>103</sup> When King Henry appeared to the injured Henry Walter de Guildford, who was floating in a little boat at sea, he appeared dressed as a pilgrim with a blue-velvet gown, a yellow cap, and a pilgrim’s scrip, sporting a fifteen-days’ growth of beard. The last detail reflected the fact that the king was usually portrayed beardless and was, therefore, perhaps in sympathy with the unshaven sailor.<sup>104</sup>

Other visions picked up on other details of Richard Beys’ description. A parish priest, Master Richard Hynstoke of Cumnor near the University of Oxford, made similar comments about Henry’s physical attributes. When ill with the “plague of pricking pimples,” he had a vision one night of King Henry who was tall and fair.<sup>105</sup> The King appeared as a pilgrim to a twelve-year old girl who had worms.<sup>106</sup> The pilgrim motif probably attached itself to the strong association that had developed between Henry VI and pilgrimages to his shrine.

The lay visionaries’ inclusion of details about Henry’s clothing, height, and hair indicated that they considered his appearance to be important. Perhaps it was so because visual detail was a key part of most visionary experience and therefore crucial to report. Since the sense of sight was critical to late medieval piety, visual details added to the potency and credibility of the visionary experience. Although the

<sup>101</sup> A.H. Thomas and I.D. Thornley, *The Great Chronicle of London* (London: The Sign of the Dolphin, 1938), p. 212 (*italics added*).

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

<sup>103</sup> *MH*, p. 153.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

cult of Henry VI was still in its early days and the iconography had not stabilized, the 'visuality' of the saint was important to the reporters of the visions.

*The demise of Henry VI's cult*

Although strengthened and shaped by the two models—saints as visionaries and as visitations—provided by the didactic visions of saints from by-gone eras, Henry VI's cult was not destined to come to fruition. The mere fact that Henry VI was posthumously connected to visions was itself an historical irony. In his early years, as a newly crowned King of England, still a child and visiting France to be crowned its king, he stayed in the same castle as Joan of Arc at the very time she was being tried and executed for her auditions and visions. Later, he would become one for whom it was proudly claimed that he had experienced auditions and visions and that others had subsequently had auditions and visions of him. Far from damning him, King Henry VI's visions and auditions were drawn upon by the people who were attempting to canonize him. They were an important part of the development of his cult, reflecting the roles which visions played in the cults of the saints in the didactic visions, showing the honor bestowed on him by heaven during his life and the power poured through him after his death. It seems that they, along with the other aspects of his cult, would have been enough to gain him the status of a saint, but events which had nothing to do with him prevented the completion of the canonization process. Henry VII had promoted the cause of Henry VI with three popes. In 1494, Pope Alexander commissioned an investigation into Henry VI's life and miracles and Pope Julius II did the same in 1504. On 13 April 1528, the king's proctors at Rome wrote to Cardinal Wolsey:

Yf my Lord o Canterbury and my Lord of Winchester...do send the process hither...the sentence of canonization shal shortly pass here.<sup>107</sup>

But in one of those cruel twists of fate, before sainthood could come to pass, Henry VIII severed relations with Rome.

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<sup>107</sup> Cited by Wolffe, *Henry VI*, p. 351, n. 4; from *Letters and Papers Foreign and Domestic*, IV, pt. II, 1841, no. 4167.

*Case Study #2: Visions and the Auto-Hagiography of Margery Kempe*

A second case in which the didactic visions helped to shape an emerging saint's cult is found in the auto-hagiographical writing of Margery Kempe, a fourteenth-century laywoman, wife, businesswoman, and mother of fourteen who became a pilgrim and self-styled mystic. As far as we know, no one attempted to establish a canonization process for Margery Kempe. Margery Kempe herself, however, with the cooperation or perhaps even influence of her priest-scribes seemed to be trying to lay the groundwork for such a process.<sup>108</sup> It can be argued that in order to build her case for sainthood, she merged two genres of saints' lives in her *Boke*. First, she drew on the conventions of the earlier saints' didactic visions to delineate her own sanctity. Second, she used the more recent style, that of the contemporary mystic-saints, to establish claims to her intimacy with God. We will examine the didactic visions' genre first in order to explore a number of aspects of the didactic saints' visions not covered above.

First, like the hagiographers of the saints, Margery referred to visions at turning points and key moments in her life.<sup>109</sup> It was a vision of Christ at her bedside that healed her from her madness and brought about her conversion. An audition of heavenly music called her to complete commitment.<sup>110</sup> In addition, many of Margery's visions were connected to times of crisis or need in her personal life. These were reminiscent of the many didactic visions in saints' legends in which angels, Christ, or saints comforted a saint who was in prison or being tormented. Many of the saints were recipients of miraculous help.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Katherine J. Lewis, "Margery Kempe and Saint Making" in *A Companion to the Book of Margery Kempe*, eds. John H. Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), p. 199.

<sup>109</sup> For discussion of visions in childhoods, see Rosalynn Voeden and Stephanie Volf, "Visions of My Youth: Representations of the Childhood of Medieval Visionaries," in Pauline Stafford and Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, eds. *Gendering the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), pp. 135–154.

<sup>110</sup> *MK*, pp. 7–8, 11.

<sup>111</sup> A visionary knight healed St. Cuthbert's knee (*SEL*, p. 120; *GL*, vol. 3, p. 95). A dove fed the words to St. Gregory as he wrote (*F*, p. 162). Angels rescued saints from tortures such as St. Juliana from fire, St. Catherine from the wheels, St. Crispin and St. Crispinian from burning oil, and St. Erasmus from a long series of torments. They fed St. Mary Magdalene in the wilderness, rescued St. Agnes from a brothel, and released St. James and St. Matthias from prison. Christ and various saints comforted other saints when they had been tortured or were facing death.

Likewise, the Lord sent St. Paul to comfort Margery Kempe because she had suffered much for the sake of his writings. St. Jerome appeared to her at the site of his relics, affirming her well of tears and comforting her in the midst of her persecution.<sup>112</sup>

One of Margery's visions belonged to the type in the didactic visions in which saints received a sacrament supernaturally.<sup>113</sup> It occurred when she was in Rome and could not find a confessor who spoke English; the Lord sent St. John the Evangelist to hear her confession. She told him all her sins "wyth many swemful teerys" and he listened "ful mekely & benyngly," gave her penance and "asoyled hir of hir synnes wyth swet wordys & meke wordys" and invited her to receive Mass.<sup>114</sup>

In her auditions from Christ, Margery was told that she would experience two of the visionary events which were the most common in the lives of the saints, and which were rarely promised to non-saints. First, she was promised a victorious death. The didactic visions showed that saints were taken directly to heaven by angels; Margery's death was to go one step better. Christ himself would carry her:

Therfor drede the nowt, dowtyr, for wyth myn owyn handys, which wer nayled to the Crosse, I xal take thi sowle fro thi bodd wyth gret myrthe & melodye, wyth swet smellys & good odowrys, & offyr it to my Fadyr in Heuyn, ther thu xalt se hym face to face, wonyng wyth hym wythowtyn ende.<sup>115</sup>

In the second event, just as many of the saints, particularly the 'helper saints,' Margery received a cult-founding speech. The cult-founding speech occurred usually at the end of a saint's life, with the voice from heaven promising to grant the prayers of people prayed in the name of the saint. It served as the sacred moment of founding of the saint's

<sup>112</sup> *MK*, pp. 160 and 99.

<sup>113</sup> Examples included a dove administering a sacrament to a saint in prison and Christ baptizing the saints when evil men attempted to drown them. This supernatural administration of a sacrament came when the natural means were denied to the saint. Christ baptized St. Catherine when her father was trying to drown her (*SEL*, p. 321). In the *South English Legendary*, two angels baptized St. Bridget of Ireland (*ibid.*, p. 40). Both St. Catherine's and St. Bridget's baptisms were performed supernaturally because their evil fathers had prevented them from being baptized naturally.

<sup>114</sup> *MK*, p. 81 (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51–52 (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

cult.<sup>116</sup> Her prayer delineated her particular constituencies as a saint and spelled out various forms of devotion to her that would draw her aid, and it was given authority by the visionary seal stamping it. In Margery's case, not only was the speech's form similar to those in the saints' legends but Christ made the link to saints explicit:

Dowtyr, I be-hote the the same grace that I be-hyte Seynt Kateryne, Seynt Margarete, Seynt Barbara, & Seynt Powle, in so mech that what creatur in erth vn-to the Day of Dom aske the any bone & beleuyth that God louyth the he xal haue hys bone er ellys a bettyr thyng. Therfor thei that beleuyn that God louyth the thei xal ben blyssed wythowtyn ende. The sowlys in Purgatory xal joyn in thi comyng hom, for thei knowyn wel that God louyth the specyaly. & men in erth schal joyn in God for the, for he xal werkyn meche grace for the and makyn al the world to knowyn that God louyth the. Thu hast be despyed for my lofe, & therfor thu xalt be worshepyd for my lofe.<sup>117</sup>

The Lord had promised the grace to Margery that would make it possible for all who called on her to be granted their prayers. Margery was thereby given a similar status to the saints in the didactic visions. She thus, at least in her mind, became the potential focus of Reciprocated Devotion, for she believed that if people turned to her as supplicants, she, like a saint, would be the vessel through which their prayers were answered.

### Imitatio Birgitta: *Margery and Bridget of Sweden*

The second category of saints' writings that Margery Kempe drew on was that of the mystic-saints. This style was included in the list of the many different types of literature generated by the canonization proceedings of the fourteenth century, from *vitae* to *processus canonizationis*.<sup>118</sup> It was the genre that became popular through Middle English translations of Continental works and was the form that Kieckhefer refers

<sup>116</sup> Examples of cult-founding scenes in the inherited visions include: St. Margaret (*SEL*, pp. 301–302), St. Catherine (*ibid.*, p. 542; *GL*, vol. 7. p. 25), St. George (*SEL*, pp. 158–159), and St. Blaise (*SEL*, p. 53) experienced similar cult-founding scenes. See discussion in Duffy, "Holy Maydens," pp. 189–191.

<sup>117</sup> *MK*, p. 52 (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>118</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 3–8.

to as being gathered from “oral autohagiography,” with the writings of Catherine of Siena (d. 1380), Dorothy of Montau, and Bridget of Sweden (d. 1373) as examples.<sup>119</sup> Catherine of Siena’s *Dialogo* was translated into Middle English in the fifteenth century as *The Orchard of Syon*.<sup>120</sup> It is unclear how well known Dorothy would have been in England, but it is highly likely that Margery Kempe was familiar with her through her visit to Danzig in 1433.<sup>121</sup>

It was St. Bridget’s autohagiographical work, *Revelations*, however, that had the greatest impact in England. Her popularity is indicated by the “pardon of Syon,” an indulgence which one could gain by making a pilgrimage to Syon,<sup>122</sup> through the devotion of the Fifteen Oes which was popular in primers and *Horae*, and through the Middle English translations of her *Revelations*.<sup>123</sup> Although she was not included in any calendars of saints’ days other than those connected to her order’s monastery at Syon, and there are no extant records of churches dedicated to her, or any shrines, windows, or lights named in her honor, she was depicted on screens at Horsham St. Faith in Norfolk, Kenn in Devon, and Westhall in Suffolk.<sup>124</sup>

In contrast to the didactic accounts of saints who had one, two, or up to a dozen or so visions,<sup>125</sup> St. Bridget had hundreds of revelations.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>120</sup> See Catherine of Siena, *The Orchard of Syon*, eds. P. Hodgson and Gabriel M. Liegey. Early English Text Society, Original Series 258 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966). *The Orchard*, seems not to have been known outside monastic circles, however, until it was printed by Wynken de Worde in 1519 (p. v).

<sup>121</sup> Atkinson outlines the similarities in their lives (*Mystic*, pp. 179–181).

<sup>122</sup> The poet John Audelay refers to the establishment of this pardon in his poetic salutation to St. Birgitta:

Beside the chene sothly seuen myle fro Lundun,—  
Our gracious kyng Herre the V. wes founder of that place,—  
Haile! he let preuelege that hole place & callid hit Bregit Sion.  
The pope conferme therto his bul throg his special grace  
In the worchip of S. Bregit,  
To al here pilgremes on Lammesday  
& also Mydlentyn Sunday;  
This perdon to last fore yeuer & ay.  
God graunt vs a pert of hit!

(William P. Cumming, *The Revelations of Saint Birgitta*, Early English Text Society, Original Series 178, [London: Oxford University Press, 1929], p. xxxv. By permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society.)

<sup>123</sup> Johnston, “Development,” pp. 170–178.

<sup>124</sup> Francis Johnston, “The Development of the Legend of St. Bridget in England during the Fifteenth Century” (master’s thesis, University of Manchester, 1941).

<sup>125</sup> St. Edward the Confessor and St. Gregory are the saints who have the most

The visions, many of them auditions, were mostly of Christ and the Virgin. They involved extensive dialogue and theological discussion. The visions were usually not connected with key events in her life and very little detail was given about the circumstances surrounding them. In them, Christ showed familiarity to her; he referred to her as “mi doghtir”<sup>126</sup> and “mi spouse” and told her he would show her his “preuai secretis.”<sup>127</sup> Instead of visions playing a supportive role as in the didactic saints’ legends, they took center stage in St. Bridget’s life. In addition, the importance of her visions to her reputation as a saint was evidenced by the fact that on screens and woodcuts she was depicted in the act of having her visions.

Margery’s *Boke* was a work of “oral autohagiography” which reflected St. Bridget’s use of visions. There is ample evidence in Margery’s *Boke* that St. Bridget was very important to her. Margery had St. Bridget’s book read out loud to her.<sup>128</sup> She visited St. Bridget’s chamber in Rome, spoke with her maiden, listened to a sermon on St. Bridget’s revelations and life, and even knelt on the stone “on the whech owr Lord aperyd to Seynt Brigypte and telde hir what day sche xuld deyn on.”<sup>129</sup> When she was in St. Bridget’s chapel on the saint’s holy day and there was a tremendous storm, Margery took this as a sign that “owr Lord wold hys holy Seyntys day xulde ben halwyd & the Seynt had in mor worshep than sche was at that tyme.”<sup>130</sup> She also visited Syon Abbey in 1434.

Although Margery held St. Bridget in great esteem, she was also competitive with her. For example, she reported that when she saw the sacrament fluttering like a dove, she heard a voice saying: “My dowtyr,

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visions in the didactic sources. St. Edward has fourteen visions in his Caxton legend. There are only eleven different visions attributed to St. Gregory in all the didactic vision sources taken together.

<sup>126</sup> Roger Ellis, ed., *The Liber Celestis of St. Bridget of Sweden*, vol. 1, Early English Text Society, Original Series 291 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 7.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>128</sup> *MK*, p. 143.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95 (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.* According to Hope Emily Allen, the “Council of Constance was considering St. Bridget’s canonisation, revelations, and the confirmation of her miraculously dated Rule” at the very time that Margery was in Rome (*ibid.*, p. 304, n. 95/23 [Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. (1940, reprinted 1961, 1982); by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society]).



Bryde say me neuyr in this wyse.”<sup>131</sup> In addition, St. Bridget’s book was included in the list of four mystical works against which Margery measured her visionary experiences and the love she felt as a result of them, and claimed that in none of the books “ne non other that euyr sche herd redyn that spak so hyly of lofe of God but that sche felt as hyly in werkyng in hir sowle yf sche coud or ellys mygth a schewyd as sche felt.”<sup>132</sup> Given this conscious comparison with the visionary experiences of holy people as recorded in their books, it would not be surprising if Margery had emphasized aspects of her life story that matched these and other models of saints with which she was familiar.

Given her familiarity with, admiration for, and competitiveness with St. Bridget, it was to be expected that her *Boke* tracked the saint’s book in many respects. The similarities of Margery Kempe’s writings to St. Bridget’s *Revelations* were many. One scholar suggests that “the model of Saint Birgitta’s life was more important in Margery’s career than were the *Revelations* or the order.”<sup>133</sup> It is true that the order had little impact on Margery, but the historical record suggests that the *Revelations* profoundly influenced Margery’s visions and her *Boke*. The high frequency of Margery’s visions reflected Bridget’s *Revelations* more than any saints’ legends with which Margery would have been familiar. If her only models of sanctity had been the saints of the didactic visions, Margery would hardly have become frantic when visions were removed from her for a day or two. As it was, most saints had only a few visions in their entire lives. But faced with a tome of several hundred Bridgettine revelations, which set the standard against which she measured herself, Margery’s panic becomes more understandable. The centrality of visionary experience to Margery’s life and *Boke*—unusual when compared to other laypeople and sometimes regarded by her peers as idiosyncratic—is more properly viewed as a faithful following of a revered model rather than as eccentric behavior.

Margery drew on the models of sanctity provided both by the didactic visions and on the more recent autohagiographical writings of saints such as St. Bridget, as she attempted to establish her claim to saintly status. She experienced the momentous visions of calling, rescue, and

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 39 (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>133</sup> Atkinson, *Mystic*, p. 175.

honor appropriate to the longer-established saints. She also experienced the large numbers of visions and auditions characteristic of the visions of intimacy of the popular nearly-contemporary saints. Eventually, in spite of the many parallels claimed by Margery between her and both the earlier and more recent saints, no cult formed around her to bring her to sainthood. This, however, does not seem to have been due to anything lacking in her visions. The explanation for her bid for sainthood being unsuccessful lies elsewhere, perhaps in her somewhat abrasive personality and unpopularity amongst many of the laity. She herself recounted that many people were annoyed by her tears and her bossiness. Another possible contributing factor to her failure to achieve sainthood was her inability to attract a clerical patron who would go farther than merely complimenting her on her revelations.<sup>134</sup> Nonetheless, her visions do not seem to have disturbed very many people, especially not the religious authorities, almost all of whom affirmed her revelations. Unfortunately, her saint-like visions could not carry the day and the devotion she craved went mostly ‘unreciprocated’.

### *Summary*

Thus, the accounts of the visions of saints helped to shape the attempted cults of two would-be saints. The royal hagiographer’s emphasis of the saint-genre visionary experiences of Henry VI as signs of his sanctity, and the lay visions of Henry VI that paralleled the didactic visions of saints as visitors, demonstrate the impact of the didactic visions of saints. Margery Kempe’s adoption of the ‘milestone moments’ from the didactic visions and the frequency and intimacy of visions from the mystic-saints’ autohagiography show how seriously she, as a layperson, regarded saints’ visions as she attempted to portray herself as a saint.

The visions of the saints affirmed the dynamic of Reciprocated Devotion in two primary ways. First, the stories of saints as visionaries revealed the saints receiving visions at key moments in their lives, observing holy sights that others could not see, and receiving clear callings, all of which demonstrated that God’s hand was on them in a peculiar way, honoring them as holy people. This established that saints were important to God and therefore had power and sanctity and were

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<sup>134</sup> Kieckhefer discusses the possible reasons for the absence of her cult (*Unquiet Souls*, pp. 188–189).

worthy of devotion. Second, the accounts of miracle-visions performed by the saints after their deaths, encouraged the devotees to be earnest in their service since there were so many examples of saints intervening in the lives of those that were devoted to them. The accounts of these miracle-visions also modeled the devotee's appropriate methods of devotion.

Through these means the visions of the saints undergirded the dynamic of Reciprocated Devotion that lay at the heart of the cult of the saints, and the aborted cults of Henry VI and Margery Kempe show laity taking very seriously the saints' visions and their concomitant dynamic.

## CHAPTER THREE

### SPIRITUAL WARFARE IN DEMONIC ENCOUNTERS

In Medieval England, vision stories abounded of demons that appeared disguised as women or animals to tempt holy men away from their orisons or masses. The devils strangled or stabbed lechers and gluttons. They stood in accusation at the judgment of a soul, and they burned, cut and invaded corpses of evil people. Spiritual Warfare was a key dynamic in medieval spirituality, and didactic vision accounts were important in setting forth the rules of engagement for battle both during one's life and on one's deathbed.

Approximately one-fifth of the 630 inherited visions involved the visitation of fiends. The visions gave insight into whether the demons were acting on their own initiative, how much control God had over them, and how much power the visionaries had over the demons which threatened them. A common element in all the visions of fiends was some form of aggression on the part of the demons, hence their designation as visions of warfare. At first the demonic world that the visions depicted seems capricious and terrifying. A closer look, however, reveals it to be part of an ordered and manageable universe with clear rules as to how one should respond in order to control the fiends. An examination of the LMEL visions reveals that the laity adopted similar techniques and strategies for fighting demons as those demonstrated in the didactic visions.

The mid-fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Europe saw a burgeoning of witchcraft, or at least of witch trials. There is an ongoing debate in the historiography of magic about the causes of this apparently turgescient growth of witchcraft.<sup>1</sup> Theories include claims that

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<sup>1</sup> For the history of medieval witchcraft see Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002, 2nd ed.); Anne Llewellyn Barstow, *Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witch Hunts: Our Legacy of Violence Against Women* (San Francisco, California: HarperCollins, 1994); Edward Peters, *The Magician, the Witch, and the Law* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1978) pp. 203–212; J. Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), pp. 27–43; and for a current but brief bibliography see Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 211–213.

witchcraft was primarily the product of Inquisitors' imaginations, and assertions that it represented a serious threat that justified the Church's attempts to eradicate it. Alan Kors and Edward Peters, in their documentary history, *Witchcraft in Europe, 400–1700*, developed the argument that the intense fear of witches emerged from a shift in the conception of the devil from that of a controllable entity to a devouring force:

In the face of a clumsily brutal, occasionally stupid, and often bungling Satan, the erring but controlled servant of God, churchmen and the faithful could maintain a mutual confidence in their ability to ward off the most serious attacks of the powers of darkness by traditional and unexceptional means: repentance for sin, increased individual moral righteousness and faithful observance of the sacraments in normal times, and exorcisms, particular specialized liturgies (such as protected against storms, crop failures, and plague), and the invocation of saints' aid in abnormal times. The veneration of relics, the wearing of blessed objects, and particular forms of devotion to the earthly 'expertise' of individual patron saints all constituted an effective and durable bridge between high theology and lived Christian beliefs. With the emergence of a more powerful and increasingly effective Satan, however, both ordinary and extraordinary devotional forms and practices often seemed pitifully ineffective. Moreover, the growth of religious reform movements—both inside the church of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and also in the dramatic reform movements of the sixteenth—further weakened much devotional piety by declaring it mere superstition. In the light of these changes, a stronger and more determined response to Satan's threats was necessary.<sup>2</sup>

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Alan Macfarlane's *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A Regional and Comparative Study* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970) and Keith Thomas' *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Scribner, 1971) are primarily about the Reformation and post-Reformation periods but each has a chapter that touches on magic in the Middle Ages. Richard Kieckhefer's *European Witch Trials: Their Foundations in Popular and Learned Culture, 1300–1500* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976) deals with Europe in general as do Russell's *Witchcraft*; Henry Lea, *Materials Toward a History of Witchcraft*, ed. Arthur C. Howland (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1939); Thomas Wright, *Narratives of Sorcery and Magic From the Most Authentic Sources* (London: R. Bentley, 1851) and Lynn Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, volumes 3 and 4 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934). George Kittredge's *Witchcraft in Old and New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929) deals topically rather than chronologically with the witchcraft of both medieval and reformation England and is thus not particularly helpful in tracing the development, but is a useful source for materials about English witchcraft.

<sup>2</sup> Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters, *Witchcraft in Europe, 400–1700: A Documentary History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001, second edition), p. 10. Reprinted by permission of the University of Pennsylvania Press.

Kors and Peters then proceeded to explain that it was this new, more frightening view of Satan which led to the witchcrazes, for witches were believed to be servants of Satan and thus to purge them would be to reduce the power of the terrifying demons.<sup>3</sup>

Kors' and Peters' thesis, however, while applicable to Europe in general, does not hold up as well when applied to late medieval England. The unifying element in the 'bridge' that they describe as joining high theology with popular religion is most likely the religious instruction of the laity. If the liturgy, sermons, saints' legends, religious manuals, drama,<sup>4</sup> and church art are its supporting pillars, the stones which pave the bridge road would be the aspects of popular piety which Kors and Peters list. If we look at the visions that are taught along that bridge between the theologians and laity, at least in England, they continued to present the same views of Satan and of the Church's defensive weapons. The earlier view that demons were capricious but controllable and that the laity could easily and effectively employ the church's piety remains constant. There is no sign in this material of any faltering of confidence in the traditional strategies for the containment and subjugation of evil. Right up to the Reformation, the laity continued to be taught that fiends would attack but that the resulting warfare was one in which any Christian, properly equipped, could successfully engage the Enemy. While Kors and Peters argue that the witchcraze emerged in Europe because of a two-fold change in people's perceptions involving Satan's being regarded as stronger and popular piety as weaker, both the didactic visions and the late medieval lay visions indicate that in England, views of Satan remained consistent, and pious methods of dealing with him remained effective.

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<sup>3</sup> For a similar view, see Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom* (London: Pimlico, 1973), pp. 24–34. Cohn focused, however, on the frightening aspects of demonic attacks rather than on the ineffectiveness of the medieval Christians' responses.

<sup>4</sup> A detailed examination of medieval English drama lies beyond the purview of our discussion. Since we are dealing primarily with post-biblical visionary accounts, the mystery plays do not provide much material. The lives of saints, upon which miracle plays are based, are dealt with both in the saints' legends and in sermons. For a helpful discussion of the Devil in medieval drama, however, see "Lucifer on the Stage," in J.B. Russell, *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 245–273.

*Demons in the Didactic Visions*

In examining the didactic visions of demons, we will look first at the enemy and its attacks, and then at the counterattacks by the visionary. This involves studying the demonology that the visions illustrated and then at the methods that they implicitly advocated for medieval Christians to employ when dealing with the demons.

*The enemy on the offensive*

The demons of the didactic visions were by no means powerless. Often motivated by envy, they were persistent in their attacks.<sup>5</sup> Their efforts were launched in an all-out war against believers, and the visions in which demons were involved in executing earthly punishment, causing death, taking souls to hell, and abusing corpses, might quite reasonably strike fear into listeners' ears. In fact, with most of those accounts, that was the explicit intention, to scare listeners into changing their moral behavior or repenting of unconfessed sin.<sup>6</sup> One of the most horrifying stories was about a little five-year old whose father had never disciplined him. One day when the little boy was ill and was sitting on his father's lap, he cried out in fear:

...blake men, blake  
Are aboute me, to take  
Me wyth hem wyle they lede.  
Y ne shal skape for no nede.<sup>7</sup>

He tried to hide in his father's arms, but the demons "refte the saule vnto helle." For the narrator, this was not an illustration of a universe run amuck, where an innocent child could be snatched away to hell. Rather, what was wrong was that the father had not chastised the

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<sup>5</sup> See *HS*, p. 221, *MES*, p. 219, and *SEL*, pp. 73, 122, 206, 471, 491, 565. See the six attacks directed against St. Benedict or his followers in *SEL*, pp. 122f.; or the forty years spent by one demon trying to cause a monk to fall into lechery (*HS*, pp. 194–198).

<sup>6</sup> This was similar to the visions examined in chapter 1. There was significant overlap with the explicit purposes of ghost stories, even though the implicit information about rules of interaction differed. Some of the didactic visions examined in chapter 1 will be examined here as well since a number of the ghost visions included demons as well. But whereas we focused on the interaction with the ghosts in chapter 1, we will analyze that with demons in this chapter.

<sup>7</sup> *HS*, p. 123.

child, for “Better were the chyld vnborne / Than fayle chastysyng.”<sup>8</sup> The illustration was not meant to cause Christians to be afraid of demons but rather to be afraid of the consequences of not fulfilling their obligations as parents.

This narrative and others like it, when seen in context with those in which near-victims of demons repented in the nick of time, made it very clear that if a change in behavior or a move toward repentance was made in time, no one needed to be afraid. In fact, the accounts were so consistent in their emphasis on the fact that the victims of the demons were always unrepentant sinners who deserved their fate, one could make the mistake of thinking that the demons were deliberately acting as agents of justice. This was not the case, of course, for the demons were involved in a spiritual war, seeking to gain power. The visions, however, made it clear that the righteous and repentant were safe. The inability of demons to triumph over the innocent was emphasized in a number of different ways.

### *Demons and the guilty*

In all of the didactic visions in which victims were punished without intervention from above, it was clear that the victim had sinned and was unrepentant. Many of the accounts indicated that all that was needed was one unshriven sin.<sup>9</sup> Many of these indicated the specific sins, whether of pride, improper tithing, or being a dishonest executor.<sup>10</sup> The explicit purpose of focusing on one or two sins was to serve a homiletic intention, that of reinforcing a specific point about either moral behavior or repentance, as with many of the purgatorial, hell, and ghost visions in chapter 1. An important implication of these sto-

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>9</sup> In *Middle English Sermons*, one story, mentioned above, involved the horrifying ghost appearing to the curate in the churchyard, having been damned to hell because he had been too embarrassed to confess one of his mortal sins (*MES*, p. 205).

<sup>10</sup> *Jacob's Well* had two such accounts: the chaste, generous, and devout countess mentioned earlier, who went to hell because of her vanity (*JW*, p. 80); and the earl, interrupted while eating with his knights in his palace, who was taken to hell on demonically-airborne horseback for his pride and improper tithing (*JW*, p. 46–47). The *Speculum Sacerdotale* told of fiends who came to a knight who had been a false executor. In the form of black ravens, the fiends lifted him and his horse into the air and drop them on jagged rocks. Crying like wild animals, they tore him to pieces and whisked him off to hell (*SS*, p. 228).



ries, however, was that the scope of demons' activity was limited by human behavior. Sin put one in danger from demons, but right behavior prevented demons from exercising their powers. Thus, demons were controllable entities.

Didactic accounts in which the punishment fit the crime further accentuated the link between human actions and demonic activity. Demons might make someone who drank too much in life drink boiling oil in hell; who pampered himself in perfumed baths on earth be bathed in pitch; who lay in bed instead of engaging in the *opus Dei* lie on a red hot iron grille over a roaring fire.<sup>11</sup> Some accounts showed that demons' abuse of corpses was done in a manner that symbolically portrayed aspects of the sin that damned the victim, thereby further emphasizing the sin-punishment connection. There were two stories of women whose dead bodies were discovered mutilated according to their sins. One was of a nun who was faithful in her celibacy but whose words led people into sin. When demons attacked her, they cut her mouth to pieces and burned the upper part of her body, sparing the lower because of her chastity.<sup>12</sup> Another story in *Handlyng Synne* showed what could happen to the corpse of an unchaste woman: a dragon was discovered lying between two halves of a woman who had been adulterous. An angel explained that this was a result of her having split her body between her husband and her lover.<sup>13</sup> While these stories were clearly told to frighten the laity into moral living, they also ironically implied a more reassuring message, that if one avoided immorality, one would not be abused by demons after death, for demons were limited to punishing sins, not to torturing on a whim. Demons could only cooperate with God's purposes of judgment.

In addition, human beings could have an impact on demons' punishment of sins through calling out for justice. A bishop-saint could pray for justice to be done to an annoying man and expect it to be delivered.<sup>14</sup> Someone could even call judgment down upon herself and it

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<sup>11</sup> *JW*, p. 9–11.

<sup>12</sup> *HS*, pp. 41–42; there are at least three other versions of this story (*JW*, pp. 95 and 232, *F*, p. 97).

<sup>13</sup> *HS*, pp. 46–49.

<sup>14</sup> According to Mirk, when St. Wulfstan was bishop, the people brought before him a man who caused his neighbors much harm. After preaching earnestly to him without effect, the bishop prayed to St. Matthias to give the man what he deserved. Then in the view of all those present, two fiends, brandishing flaming hooks, yanked the man down into hell. The village was then at peace (*F*, pp. 81–82).

would be granted.<sup>15</sup> In each case, the agents would be demons. But humans again had been involved in the equation. Even with terrifying tales of the demonic, there was a comforting aspect in the knowledge that the demons were successful in hurting only those who were worthy of judgment, and that although human beings did not have absolute power, they could or did have some involvement in bringing about that justice.

### *Demons and the innocent*

A second way in which demons were limited was in their inability to succeed in their attacks against those who were not worthy of judgment. At the same time that fiends managed to punish only those who were deserving of it, they were, of course, very interested in tormenting the innocent as well. They would direct their cruelty even at saints. In such attacks, however, they were always unsuccessful. There were many stories of demons' failures in battle. When they attended the deaths of those who were not destined for hell, for example, they were incapable of kidnapping the souls, for angels or saints, such as the Virgin Mary intervened.<sup>16</sup> Such vision stories demonstrated the superior power of the saints and angels over the demons. And they gave the uplifting message that if one were innocent, one could not be destroyed by demons. Demons failed when they tried to tempt or

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<sup>15</sup> A sermon illustration in *Middle English Sermons* taken from "cronycles" described the case of an unforgiving woman who was strangled by a devil. She had pretended to forgive another woman so that the priest would allow her to receive the sacrament on Easter day, which she had done unworthily for seven years. When neighbors and the woman brought gifts to her home, she said, "Wene thou that I forgave this womman hure trespasse with myn herte as I dud with my mouthe? Naye than, I preye God that I neuer take vp this rush at my fote." She leaned over and the devil strangled her (*MES*, p. 62 [Woodburn Ross, ed., *Middle English Sermons*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1998]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society]).

<sup>16</sup> In *Speculum Sacerdotale*, Martin of Tours lay in ashes as he died, refusing his disciples' offer of proper bedding. Clearly, as a saint, he was not an evil, unrepentant man, and yet he saw the devil standing beside him. He reprimanded the devil and informed him that angels were waiting to take him to heaven. When he died, his shining face and the sound of angels singing indicated that the devil had failed in his mission (*SS*, p. 238). Another example was in Mirk's *Festial*, when a crowd of demons came to Bishop Robert Grosseteste at his death and tormented him almost to despair but were prevented by the Virgin Mary who rescued him (*F*, p. 78).

deceive good people.<sup>17</sup> Even in cases where they initially succeeded in fooling the victim, the fiends lost in the end.<sup>18</sup> As long as someone was innocent, or at least repentant, he would be safe. There were even cases in which the demons not only failed but their plans backfired and ended up benefiting people instead. Occasionally, even in meting out a punishment, they would run into someone who would repent as a result and be restored.<sup>19</sup> Thus, even while dealing with the wicked, which they were allowed to, demons might find themselves dealing with a repentant person and thus have to back off.

### *Meeting their match*

The third way in which the power of demons was limited was by the presence of angels who served as defenders whenever demons acted as accusers. Whenever a soul was under judgment, the devils always lined up on the accusing side, and the angels lined up for the defense. The devils and the angels would place their records in the appropriate pans of the scales of judgment. The angels prepared themselves with the evidence needed to defend Christians against the demons' prosecution on the Day of Doom.<sup>20</sup> And fiends actively collected data during

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<sup>17</sup> For example, Sts. Juliana and Justina refused to break their vows of chastity even though tempted to by demons in disguise (*SEL*, pp. 64–65; *HS*, pp. 205–207).

<sup>18</sup> There was a story of a pilgrim to St. James at Santiago de Compostela who was persuaded by a demon disguised as the saint to cut off his offending body parts—he was on a penitential pilgrimage because of lechery—and even to commit suicide. St. James and the Virgin intervened, however, and the kidnapped pilgrim was returned to life. The pilgrim, although a sinner, was saved because his pilgrimage was a clear indication of his repentance, and, therefore, the demons were not able to gain ultimate victory over him (*SEL*, p. 338; *SS*, p. 177).

<sup>19</sup> For example, in the *South English Legendary*, a monk, without permission, was sleeping in St. Oswald the Bishop's bed while the saint was at his prayers. A devil entered the room and asked the monk why he was in the bed, and when the monk could not explain, the devil beat him so hard that he cried out loud and woke the other monks, who came and helped him. The monk confessed his guilt, was told that his penance had been adequate, and the saint forgave him (*SEL*, p. 76).

<sup>20</sup> For example, in *Jacob's Well*, a hermit fetching water in the desert grew discouraged at the long distance he traversed each day and considered moving his cell closer to the well. He looked behind him and saw an angel counting his steps. The angel explained to him that angels counted steps to use, “for to schewyn the noumbre therof a-for god agens the feend, that thou ther-through mowe haue mede in heuen” (*JW*, p. 111 [Arthur Brandeis, ed., *Jacob's Well*. E.E.T.S. [1900, reprinted 1999]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society]).

people's lives to use against them at the time of their judgment.<sup>21</sup> The demons, however, won their case only when the sinner was unrepentant.<sup>22</sup> The angels could win even if their records were not as weighty as the demons.<sup>23</sup> Thus, when a soul lost his case, it was because of impenitence rather than a lack of legal representation.

Thus, the demonology implicit in the inherited visions showed demons who, motivated by envy and the desire to capture as many souls as possible, tempted the good, kept records of human wrongs to use against them on the Day of Doom, always appeared for the prosecution in judgment scenes, served as executioners, attempted to snatch both evil and innocent people at the moment of death but succeeded in tormenting and escorting to hell only those who were both evil and unrepentant. The humans' moral behavior and spirit of repentance limited their actions. Saints, angels, the Virgin Mary, and backfiring schemes thwarted them. The didactic sources, even when describing demons in terrifying terms, were careful to specify that the demons were within God's control. *The Pricke of Conscience*, for example—after referring to the demons which appeared to the dying as beings so horrifying that

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<sup>21</sup> One vision account which was repeated at least five times and was the only visionary account in the *Lay Folks' Mass Book* told of the deacon who, while he was reading the gospel, laughed out loud, for he saw a demon sitting between two women who are talking. The fiend-scribe marking down every word they said, and as he filled the parchment, he tried to tug at it with his teeth. He pulled so hard that his head knocked against the wall and he lost the parchment. In one version of the story, the fiend was asked why he was writing, and he answered, "I wryte thise talys of the peple in this cherche, to recordyn hem a-fore god at the doom for here dampnacyoun." Thomas Simmons, ed., *The Lay Folks' Mass Book or The Manner of Hearing Mass with Rubrics and Devotions for the People* Early English Text Society, Original Series 71 (London: N. Trübner, 1879), pp. 136–138; *JW*, p. 115. Other versions are in *HS*, p. 232; *JW*, p. 232; *F*, pp. 279–280. In the *Festial*, St. Richard started to shave on a Sunday and saw a fiend collecting his scattered hairs. The fiend told him he would keep the hairs until Judgment Day because St. Richard's actions had dishonored Sunday. St. Richard stopped shaving, took the hairs from the fiend, and burned them in his own hand for penance, remaining half-shaven until Monday (*F*, p. 125).

<sup>22</sup> In one popular vision account, for example, two angels showed a tiny book sparsely filled with good deeds to a wicked, unrepentant knight who was dying. Immediately thereafter, two demons showed him a large black book packed with his evil deeds. The fiends then stabbed him with burning knives (*MES*, pp. 144–145; *HS*, p. 112; *JW*, pp. 225–226).

<sup>23</sup> The commonly told account of Peris, the rich man mentioned earlier, had fiends showing him his selfish life and weighing it in a balance. Angels put his one good deed in the balance, overcoming the fiends, and Peris was allowed to return to earth to repent and amend his life (*MES*, pp. 151–152; *HS*, pp. 140–142; *JW*, p. 192; *F*, p. 104).

no painter could depict them—said that God prevented demons from appearing in all their horror to living people so that “thai may na man tempte ne greve, / Ferrer forthe, than thai hafe leve.”<sup>24</sup> The demons of the didactic visionary accounts were thus powerful beings whose activities were restricted within carefully ordered parameters.

### *Illegitimate counter-offensive strategies*

Now that we have examined what the visions tell us of the circumscribed nature of the activities of demons, we can study what they instructed were appropriate Christian responses. Before we look at what the visions taught, it may be helpful to trace the history of the official stance of the Church vis-à-vis demons and then scan some of the events recorded in late medieval England in which people appeared to have interacted with demons. This will provide perspective on the particular range of choices that the inherited visions presented for dealing with the attacks of fiends. We will then look at the responses that the visions condemned, such as sorcery, necromancy, and witchcraft.

### *The Church and magic*

During the High and Late Middle Ages, the Church’s legislation and teaching against magic and diabolism were being defined with increasing rigor. The *Canon Episcopi*, a fourth-century decision of the council of Ancyra (whose first known appearance is in the tenth-century compilation by Regino of Prüm) had been included in Gratian’s *Decretum* (c. 1140), which became the standard text for canon law in the Middle Ages.<sup>25</sup> The *Canon* stated that:

Bishops and the officials and clergy of bishops must labor with all their strength so that the pernicious art of *sortilegium* and *maleficium*, which was invented by the devil, is eradicated from their districts, and if they find a man or woman disgraced from their parishes. For the Apostle says, “Avoid the man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition” (Titus 3:10–11). Those who have been subverted and are held captive by the Devil, leaving their creator, seek the aid of the Devil. And so Holy Church must be cleansed of this pest.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *PC*, p. 64.

<sup>25</sup> Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters, *Witchcraft in Europe, 1100–1700* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972), p. 26.

<sup>26</sup> Regino of Prüm, *Canon Episcopi*, from Henry Charles Lea, *Materials*, 1:179–180,

In the thirteenth century, Aquinas presented the theological case that magic involved demons. In his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas argued that magic was not the result of the influence of heavenly bodies, because magicians were able to use their art to learn hidden information, and they heard voices, saw apparitions, and moved inanimate objects. All those were actions which celestial powers were incapable of performing. Because magicians used words, figures, and rituals, they must have been addressing intelligent beings, for signs and symbols could not influence inanimate matter. He then demonstrated that the intellectual nature to which these magicians appealed was evil rather than virtuous, since the magic arts were used to promote adultery, murder, and theft, and the invocations involved lies, and the rituals included child sacrifice.<sup>27</sup>

In 1258, the Inquisition requested and was denied permission from Pope Alexander IV (1254–1261) to add witchcraft to the list of offenses it could prosecute. That same year, in his decretal letter *Quod super nonnullis* the pope stated, “The inquisitors of pestilential heresy, commissioned by the apostolic see, ought not to intervene in cases of divination or sorcery unless these *clearly savor* of manifest heresy.”<sup>28</sup> In 1320, however, William, the Cardinal of Santa Sabina, directed the Inquisitors of Toulouse and Carcassonne to proceed against witches. In 1326, Pope John XXII’s decretal, *Super illius specula* excommunicated any involved in demon worship. Pope Innocent VIII’s Bull, *Summis desiderantes*, the “Witch-Bull,” was issued in 1484 in response to pleas from the Inquisitors Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, giving Inquisitors the power to punish witches.<sup>29</sup> Many historians mark this as the beginning of the witch persecutions. Two years or so later, Kramer and Sprenger produced the *Malleus Maleficarum*, (Hammer of Witches), an encyclopedic overview of witchcraft and of inquisitorial techniques for dealing with witches.<sup>30</sup> In 1501, Pope Alexander VI’s Bull *Cum acceperimus* to Angelo

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with revisions from F.G.A. Wasserschleben, ed., *Reginonis Abbatis Prumiensis Libri duo de synodalibus causis et disciplinis ecclesiasticis*, 2, chap. 371 (Leipzig, 1840), pp. 534–536., Lat. Rev. E.P., as cited in Kors and Peters, *Witchcraft in Europe, 1100–1700*, pp. 61–62.

<sup>27</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Contra Gentiles*, The Third Book (Part II, Ch. CIV–CVI) translated excerpt in Kors and Peters, *Witchcraft, 400–700*, pp. 90–96.

<sup>28</sup> Kors and Peters, *Witchcraft, 400–700*, pp. 117–118; 120; 177–180. Reprinted by permission of University of Pennsylvania Press.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 177–180.

<sup>30</sup> Montague Summers, trans., *The Malleus Maleficarum of Heinrich Kramer and James*

of Verona, the Inquisitor of Lombardy, extended the geographical area of the Inquisition against witches.<sup>31</sup>

The Inquisition, of course, did not come to England, but if we turn to court records, we discover that people were nevertheless being prosecuted for sorcery and witchcraft. Kittredge gives many examples in his chapter, “English Witchcraft Before 1558.”<sup>32</sup> Many prosecutions were for murder attempts against royalty instigated by magic. These particular criminal proceeds were primarily about treason, with the charges of witchcraft being secondary. Others, however, did focus on sorcery. Gregory’s *Chronicle*, for example, mentioned a man who was pilloried c. 1444 in London for simply invoking a demon:

the whyche wrought by a wycckyd spyryte, the whyche was callyd Oberycom, and the maner of hys proces and werkynge was wretyn and hanggyd a bowte hys necke whenne he was in the pellery.<sup>33</sup>

Records survived of at least forty instances of sorcery or magic being brought to the attention of the authorities in late medieval England.<sup>34</sup>

### *Magic in the visionary accounts*

The inherited visions supported the anti-magic stance of the theology of Aquinas and the church’s legislation as officially stated in the writings associated with the Inquisition and as carried out by English courts. The visionary accounts consistently condemned magic as an inappropriate way to respond to the Enemy’s attacks. Almost all of the accounts that involved magic showed its relative ineffectiveness when compared with the rites of the Church. In the visions, this comparison often led to conversion. These particular visions involved unbelievers who were involved in demonic activity such as necromancy or a pact with the devil and who turned from their wicked ways when they saw the power that the sign of the cross had over demons.<sup>35</sup>

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*Sprenger* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1971; originally published 1928 by John Rodker, London), p. vii.

<sup>31</sup> Kors and Peters, p. 229.

<sup>32</sup> Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, pp. 23–72.

<sup>33</sup> Gregory’s *Chronicle* edited by James Gairdner, *The Historical Collections of a Citizen of London in the Fifteenth Century* (Westminster: Camden Society, 1876), p. 185; quoted by Kittredge, *Witchcraft*, p. 59.

<sup>34</sup> See Kieckhefer, *Trials*, pp. 108–147.

<sup>35</sup> For example, in *Speculum Sacerdotale* and *Handlyng Synne*, Cyprian, a “nygroman-

Rather than exhibiting fear about magic and witchcraft, the visions show that while necromancy and sorcery might be powerful weapons, they were not as devastating to the enemy as, for example, a bishop's prayers. In *Speculum Sacerdotale*, a wife went to the dedication of an oratory of St. Sebastian, the martyr. The night before, she was overwhelmed by such lust that she could not abstain herself from her husband. At the church, as the relics were being borne into the church, "at the laste a wickid spirite began for to have dominacion in the woman and be-gan foullye to vexen hure afore all the peple." The priest covered her with a cloth, and her neighbors took her to sorcerers and necromancers:

for to put remedy vnto hure. And for a tyme with sorcerye sche was profetid. And she was ladde to a flode and in-to the water, and there these sorcerours be-gan for to do with here incantaciouns for to drenchyn the devell that hadde entryd in hure. And throug the marvelous dome of God oone was put out fro hure throug that vnlawefull crafte, but a-noone a legion sodeynlye entrede in-to hure. And then sche be-gan for to wagge and mone and for to crye with as many voycis as there were spiritis withyn hure.<sup>36</sup>

Then her friends took her to bishop Fortunatum. He prayed persistently for her and she was restored. Although God graciously allowed a momentary reprieve through the use of a sinful means such as necromancy, it was only temporary and was followed by the situation grow-

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cyene" attempted to cause the maiden Justina to give up her chastity, using "wycraft." He "transfigures" devils into three likenesses in succession (*SS*, p. 151). Using the sign of the cross, Justina managed to escape falling prey to their temptations. When Cyprian realized that the cross had more power than the demons, he turned to Christendom and "he forsoke...al the craft that he had haunted" (*HS*, p. 207). In the *South English Legendary*, St. Christopher experienced a similar conversion. He had made an agreement to serve the devil, and as they rode forth on horseback, the devil suddenly, in terror, veered off the path and into thorns and briars to get away from a cross that was standing in the way. Christopher asked him why, and the devil was reluctant to tell him, but Christopher threatened to abandon him. So the devil told him "with a such crois as thou iscie · the hei God that was here / Ouercom & in sorwe brogte · me and alle mine uere." St. Christopher then left the demon's service and sought Christ (*SEL*, pp. 341–342 [Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, eds., *The South English Legendary*. Early English Text Society. London: Oxford University Press, 1956, reprinted 1967]).

<sup>36</sup> *SS*, pp. 94–95 (*Speculum Sacerdotale*. Edited by Edward H. Weatherly. E.E.T.S. [1936, reprinted 2000]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).



ing far worse than before. Not until a holy means such as prayer was used was there permanent relief. The vision accounts did not deny that demons were powerful entities. Rather they used the examples of demonic power to show the greatness of the Church's power by comparison.

The most serious form of encounter with the devil was the pact, for it went beyond sorcery into diabolism, or direct worship of the devil.<sup>37</sup> In terms of Spiritual Warfare, the pact was a laying down of arms, a surrender to the other side, an agreement to join the enemy's forces, or at least to stop fighting against them. There were at least five accounts of pacts in the inherited visions. Common to all of them was that the pact, whether initiated by the devil or the devotee, was eventually broken in favor of the human being. Pact-breaking was accomplished through using one of the church-approved 'counter-offensives,' that is, the pious practices or rituals advocated by the Church; or it was obtained through the character of God. Intervention by the Virgin Mary, penance, repentance, and appeals to God's mercy were the warfare techniques used to free the visionaries from their illegitimate pacts with the enemy, demonstrating the greater power of legitimate methods over illegitimate in dealing with demons.<sup>38</sup>

The best-known account of a demonic pact, included in both the *South English Legendary* and *Middle English Sermons*, recounted the legend of Theophilus of Cilicia and dated back to the sixth century.<sup>39</sup> St. Theophilus, who according to the narrator of the *South English Legendary* was a great man and cleric, lost his wealth and desiring to become rich again succumbed to a Jew's leading him to make a pact with a high devil. The devil insisted that Theophilus put in writing that he forsook the Virgin Mary, for "Marie so ofte hath myne men · fram me ilad." Later, the Virgin Mary was able to rescue Theophilus anyway. Even a

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid. See Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials*, p. 6f. for definition of diabolism as "deliberate worship of the devil, or of demons." The notion of demonic pact eventually contributed to the witcheraze, for witches were believed to have made pacts with the devil.

<sup>38</sup> *SEL*, p. 231; *SS*, pp. 189–191; *SS*, p. 227; *JW*, p. 31–32; *HS*, pp. 8–11. This tale bears many similarities to the one that Saint Jerome tells of Saint Basil in the fifth century and which is perhaps the story that originated the idea of the formal pact. The story was retold by Hincmar of Reims in *Divorce of Lothar and Teutherga*, c. 860 (Russell, *Lucifer*, p. 80).

<sup>39</sup> See Russell, *Lucifer*, pp. 80–82.

signed charter was not enough to safeguard the devil's claim on a soul when the Virgin intervened.<sup>40</sup>

Although illustrating the comparatively ineffective power of magic, the vision stories were still careful not to give readers too much information about magic itself. When vision accounts mentioned illegitimate responses to demonic attacks, they remained relatively silent about details of the magic formulae involved. They did not tell us the method that Cyprian, the necromancer, employed to transfigure fiends. Apparently there was at least one version of the Theophilus story which had him conjuring the devil and which gave the formula,<sup>41</sup> but the versions in the English inherited visions did not quote the conjuration. *Speculum Sacerdotale* told the story of the emperor Julian who "was connyng in wycchecraft fro the tyme of his childeheede" and who, when he "began for to reede coniuraciouns, there come a-fore hym a grete multitude of blak deuells."<sup>42</sup> The account did not quote the conjurations. It is significant that the versions used in sermon illustrations did not repeat the magic formulae, avoiding revealing information about the exact techniques used in conjuring demons. One would need to turn to necromancers' manuals for such information, manuals that were, of course, forbidden by the Church. On the other hand, the visionary accounts were replete with details about the non-magical ways to fight against demons. Even in the visions that dealt with magic, we have already been introduced to some of the methods. We shall now look at these legitimate counter-offensive strategies in more detail.

### *Legitimate counter-offensive strategies*

The first strategy was that of holy words. One way in which the visionaries gained control over demons was by speaking to them. The mere act of talking, however, was not enough. The words had to be the

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<sup>40</sup> *SEL*, pp. 221–226; see *MES*, pp. 260–261. (*The South English Legendary*. E.E.T.S. [1956, reprinted 1967]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society.)

<sup>41</sup> Kurt Seligmann, *Magic, Supernaturalism and Religion* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1948), p. 153.

<sup>42</sup> *SS*, pp. 149–150 (Edward H. Weatherly, ed., *Speculum Sacerdotale*. E.E.T.S. [1936, reprinted 2000]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

right words and, therefore, sometimes needed to be taught to the visionary by one who was wiser, such as a hermit.<sup>43</sup> In at least one account, attention was drawn to the fact that the words were not simply formulae, but were important for their theological meanings.<sup>44</sup> Responding appropriately to a demonic attack was not something that one could do intuitively. Rather, it was something that needed to be learned through the Church, whether through a holy man or through the implications of the theologians' teachings, or through sermon illustrations of visionary encounters. The precision of the wording in the visionary accounts emphasized that the laity needed to pay attention to the Church's teachings in order to be safe. Yet, at the same time that the visions supported the dependence of the laity on the Church, they demonstrated yet again the effectiveness of the Church in fighting against demons.

The term 'conjure' indicated another set of verbal formulae and involved the commanding of demons. We have already seen it used of sorcerers, but it was also used to describe the activity of legitimate exorcism.<sup>45</sup> In the visionary accounts, the word was usually used to describe the godly visionary commanding the apparition to give him or her information, often to identify itself, at other times to explain its actions.<sup>46</sup> The visionary accounts, usually silent on details of the conjurations of sorcerers, might be more forthcoming on those of legitimate exorcists. Whereas the *Speculum Sacerdotale* did not give details about the

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<sup>43</sup> For example, in Mirk's *Festial*, a woman was tempted by a fiend who often came to her in the form of a man. She tried to drive him away with holy water and many holy words. She eventually sought counsel from a holy hermit who told her to say, "Saynt Mary, helpe me!" When the fiend came again, she held up her hands and exclaimed, "Saynt Mary, helpe me!" The fiend was afraid and retorted, "An euol deuyl goo ynto his mowth that the that taght." And so she was permanently rescued from the fiend (*F*, p. 226 [Theodor Erbe, ed., *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies*. E.E.T.S. [1905; Kraus reprint, 1987]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society]).

<sup>44</sup> By crying "Ihesu, haue mercy on me," a holy man stopped a fiend who threatened to burn his hands and feet with a fiery chain. Previously, the fiend had been unperturbed when the holy man simply cried out "Ihesu, Ihesu," for the devil answered that he too could say that. But a fiend could not call for mercy (*MES*, p. 160 [Woodburn O. Ross, ed., *Middle English Sermons*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1998], by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society]).

<sup>45</sup> Kieckhefer, *Magic*, pp. 72–75.

<sup>46</sup> See, for examples, *SEL*, p. 468, *SS*, p. 47.

emperor Julian's unholy conjurations of demons, the *South English Legendary* told exactly how St. Martin exorcised a cow. He told it to stand still, in God's name. He then saw that the reason the cow was acting so strangely was that there was a devil riding on the cow's back. So, St. Martin asked the devil why he was bothering an innocent animal. Then he proclaimed, "Acursed thing thu wend awei · ne com hire neg nomore" and the demon went away in tears.<sup>47</sup>

In at least two visions, children were taught prayers or songs to be used as preventative measures against demons. According to Caxton, a child who identified himself as Christ taught the child St. Edmund of Abingdon to pray "*Jesus Nazarenus rex Judeorum, Filius Dei miserere me*" so that the devil would have no power over him.<sup>48</sup> And Mirk told a tale for Rogation about a procession in Constantinople in which a child was suddenly pulled up into the air and into heaven and taught by angels to sing, "*Sanctus Deus, sanctus fortis, sanctus et immortalis, miserere nobis!*" In both these cases the narrator gave the words of the prayer or song. Mirk even translated the words into English, "Holy God, holy strong, holy and neuer schall deye, haue mercy on vs!"<sup>49</sup> Immediately following the song, Mirk specified that "God wylnythe that ye be holy, and he wylnythe that ye be strong, forto feght wyth the fend, wyth the world, and wyth your owne flessch. ..." <sup>50</sup> Thus, the listener to the vision account had in his arsenal an effective weapon for Spiritual Warfare, including demonic attack.

The second legitimate strategy involved holy objects and rituals to banish the enemy. The lighting of tapers,<sup>51</sup> burning candles combined

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<sup>47</sup> *SEL*, p. 488 (Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, ed., *The South English Legendary*. E.E.T.S. [1956, reprinted 1967]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>48</sup> *GL*, vol. 6, p. 231.

<sup>49</sup> *F*, p. 151 (Theodor Erbe, ed., *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies*. E.E.T.S. [1905; Kraus reprint, 1987]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* (Theodor Erbe, ed., *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies*. E.E.T.S. [1905; Kraus reprint, 1987]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>51</sup> The *South English Legendary* told how, at midnight, a puff of wind blew the tapers out. It woke no one but Martha. Devils came to her, bearing a book. She was afraid and called on Christ, saying that they had a book with all her evil deeds in it. Her sister Mary Magdalene came with a large group of angels. They relit the tapers, and the devils flew away (*SEL*, p. 352).

with holy curses,<sup>52</sup> the presence of the Sacrament,<sup>53</sup> and the consecration of a church with the saints' relics arriving in procession, were all examples of holy rites or holy items that sent the enemy packing.<sup>54</sup> The sacrament of penance was often crucial for defending one from satanic attack. Participating in the sacrament could prepare the way for ridding one's home of demons.<sup>55</sup> Penance could also protect one from demons by making one invisible or unrecognizable to them.<sup>56</sup> In addition, if one initially succumbed to the temptation of a devil, repentance could suffice to prevent future attacks.<sup>57</sup>

Holy candles, holy objects, holy sacraments, and holy ceremonies all played their part in dispelling the demon. Closely linked with these holy items and rituals were holy attitudes. Not all strategies against demons required tangible objects or visible actions. One's frame of mind could also be used to counteract an attack. A particularly potent thought

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<sup>52</sup> In *Jacob's Well* an incubus tormented a woman by lying in bed with her repeatedly over the course of six years. When the woman asked St. Bernard for aid, he handed her his staff to place in her bed. When the demon could not get near the bed, it angrily threatened the woman. St. Bernard came with many townspeople, all holding lit candles; he cursed the fiend, "interdicting" him so that he would stay away from the woman. The demon departed (*JW*, pp. 63–64).

<sup>53</sup> In one of Mirk's stories, a fiend in the form of a black horse found itself kneeling against its will at the sight of the sacrament that a priest had unintentionally dropped in a meadow (*F*, p. 174).

<sup>54</sup> In another story in the *Festial*, when a church was consecrated and relics of saints brought in, suddenly a hog ran out of the building. The narrator explained that it was thus that God demonstrated how sanctifying a church building exorcised her (*F*, p. 278).

<sup>55</sup> For example, when a devil in the form of a dragon terrorized an island, a hermit told the people to weep for their sin, doing penance with prayer and fasting for three days. Then the hermit prayed for "Ihu cryst, god almighty" to show him where the dragon was hiding. An angel led them to the dragon and commanded it to fly away (*HS*, pp. 46–49).

<sup>56</sup> In *Jacob's Well*, a woman in Rome slept with her own son, gave birth to his child, and then killed it. She performed deeds of restitution, but was too ashamed to confess to a priest. A fiend, dressed as a clerk, told the emperor and the people what she had done, but they did not believe him. The lady participated in the sacrament of penance. When she returned to the king, the fiend did not recognize her. He complained that she was protected by the Virgin Mary and then vanished (*JW*, pp. 66–67). See also *HS*, pp. 303–304.

<sup>57</sup> In *The South English Legendary*, when a devil appeared as a beautiful woman to St. Benedict during his prayers, St. Benedict was momentarily tempted to go with her. He then changed his mind and through making the sign of the cross, drove away the devil. Afterwards, he rolled himself naked among the thorns and briars until all his flesh was torn. The narrator said that if a man gave in to the temptation of the devil to a particular sin, he would be plagued by that sin ever after, but if he fought the sin, that sin would never undo him again (*SEL*, p. 122).

was that which focused on the Passion.<sup>58</sup> Prayer and moral goodness combined could also protect one from demonic attack.<sup>59</sup> In another case, it was an attitude of humility that overpowered a fiend.<sup>60</sup> These visions showed the tremendous power that one's mind could have. One did not even need to do anything out loud or with one's body in order to counteract demons. The thoughts, however, needed to be in line with Church doctrine, sacraments, and morality.

Although physical actions were not always necessary, some visionaries, particularly the saints, were portrayed as being able to gain physical control over demons, a fourth legitimate strategy. Hitting a demon with a rod<sup>61</sup> or grabbing his tongue and shoving it into a smithy's furnace<sup>62</sup> are two examples of saints' violence against evil angels.

The fifth set modeled by the vision stories was the intervention of the saints. As mentioned above, it was very rare that a fiend was able to overpower someone who was innocent or repentant. But in those rare

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<sup>58</sup> Caxton and the *South English Legendary* both told the story of St. Edmund of Abingdon which affirmed the protective power of thinking of the Passion. While studying late one night, the saint forgot to bless himself or to meditate on the Passion. He fell asleep and the devil lay on top of him so heavily that he could not make the sign of the cross with either hand. At first the saint did not know what else to do, but then he remembered the Passion, focused on it, and the fiend fell off him. St. Edmund asked the devil how best to defend oneself from fiends, and the fiend said that it was by remembrance of the Passion (*GL*, vol. 6, p. 235; also in *SEL*, pp. 501–502). Chapter 4 will discuss the role of focusing on the Passion in late medieval affective piety.

<sup>59</sup> For example, Macarius, the abbot, saw Satan in man's clothing, carrying a large number of cruets. The abbot asked him where he was going. The fiend said, "I go to enpoysen thi bretheryn, thi munkys." He had a variety of temptations in each cruet: evil thoughts, laziness, sleeping, chatter, idleness, lusts, heaviness, and sloth. When he returned, Macarius asked him how he fared. He said that the monks were all so occupied in holy prayer that only one of them drank from his cruets. The abbot went to that monk and converted him from his sloth by his teaching. Later, the fiend attempted to poison the monks a second time, but he returned to the abbot and said that this time all the monks were so righteous that they are impervious to him (*JW*, pp. 115–116 [Arthur Brandeis, ed., *Jacob's Well*. E.E.T.S. [1900, reprinted 1999]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society]).

<sup>60</sup> A demon tried to injure Abbot Macarius with a sharp scythe but could not touch him. The fiend said that he fasted more and was awake longer than Macarius, but he did not have "lownesse," and it was Macarius' "lownesse" that had overcome him (*JW*, p. 75).

<sup>61</sup> When a devil appeared as a little boy to drag away an invalid monk by the sleeve, St. Benedict followed behind, struck the devil with a rod and chastised him until he fled (*SEL*, p. 124).

<sup>62</sup> St. Dunstan grabbed the tongue of a devil that appeared to him as a woman in his smithy, laid it in the fire, and shook the fiend by the nose. Finally the shrew fled away (*ibid.*, pp. 206–207).

exceptions where fiends were able temporarily to overcome an innocent person, it seemed that a saint or angel was usually available to undo the damage. The *South English Legendary* mentioned two such stories. When a devil disguised as a beggar strangled the child of a devotee of St. Nicholas, the saint brought him back to life.<sup>63</sup> Elsewhere, when a child-monk working on building an abbey was killed by a devil, St. Benedict raised him from death to life.<sup>64</sup> This was where the dynamic of spiritual warfare overlapped with the Reciprocated Devotion of the cult of the saints.

An even more powerful overlap, however, was that of Spiritual Warfare with the Reciprocated Devotion of the cult of the Passion (see chapter 4). Although physical control over demons might be restricted to saints, and statements might have to be exactly right to work properly, and although one might be reluctant to let things go so far that a saint would be needed to raise one from the dead should fiends have their way in spite of one's innocence, there did seem to be a weapon which was extremely powerful and which never seemed to miss the mark. It was the sign of the cross. In wielding it the visionary's devotion to the cross became a potent weapon of war. This was the sixth and most commonly used strategy used against demons in the visions.

According to a vision purported to be from early church history, demons had been afraid of the sign of the cross from at least as long ago as the Invention of the Cross. As the legend explained, when the three crosses were discovered and Christ's was identified by its touch raising a corpse to life, the devil appeared, vociferously complaining to Jesus for having raised a man from death, and for the discovery of the cross, for "inabbe poer non so gret · an eorthe amang manne / Yif hi maketh the forme of the crois."<sup>65</sup>

This demonic fear of the cross made the sign of the cross effective in causing fiends to vanish. A devil attempted to scare St. Oswald during his prayers by making a "ruefol bere," but St. Oswald made the sign of the cross and heard him no more. When the devil tried a new tactic of appearing to him as an angel, again during his prayers, St. Oswald blessed the 'angel' in the form of the cross and was about to answer him when the devil vanished. It seems that although St. Oswald did not recognize that the angel was in fact a demon, his action, which would

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 565.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

have had a positive effect on an angel, acted as a vanishing formula for the devil.<sup>66</sup> When the demon in the form of a dragon swallowed St. Margaret, she made the sign of the cross and the demon-dragon burst, revealing her to be miraculously still in good health, and paving the way, somewhat ironically, for her to become the patron saint of pregnant women.<sup>67</sup>

In the didactic vision accounts, even non-believers were aware of the power of the sign of the cross. The Jew who led Theophilus to make a pact with the devil, told Theophilus not to make the sign of the cross or even think about it.<sup>68</sup> And the *Speculum Sacerdotale* claimed that the emperor Julian, when a child, conjured demons to appear to him and then used the sign of the cross to make them vanish. He later questioned his master, who explained that devils hated the sign of the cross more than anything. So when Julian was emperor and involved in witchcraft, he made “apostetacion of the signe of the crosse and destroyed it oueral.”<sup>69</sup>

The ones who were most aware of the power of the cross over demons and who were the most vocal about it, were the demons themselves. In *Handlyng Synne*, the fiend in the story of Cyprian and Justina had explained to Cyprian—after first asking him not to believe in what he was about to say—that the reason that Justina had overcome the fiends was that:

She ouercometh vs wyth a croys.  
 When we se hyt we haue no voys:  
 The sygne ther of cure we fle  
 And drede we haue when we hyt se.  
 Oure myght ys noght no neure shal  
 Ouer any that blesseth hym wyth al...  
 Ouer vs alle hyt hath maystry,  
 And euremor so shal be down  
 For hyt was hys owne passyoun.  
 No thyng that man may of hym sey  
 Doth oure power so moche away  
 As nemne that passyoun & that rode  
 That he shedde on hys swete blode.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 73; For other examples, see *HS*, pp. 188–190, *SEL*, pp. 122 and 379, *SS*, p. 152 and many others.

<sup>67</sup> *SEL*, p. 297.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>69</sup> *SS*, p. 150.



Heuene & helle that passyoun douten  
 And creatures alle thar to louten,  
 And specyaly Ihc, that name,  
 Ys oure shenshype & oure shame.<sup>70</sup>

A demon facing the sign of the cross experienced the exact opposite of the devotee of the Passion gazing at the crucifix. For the latter there was apotropeic protection, sacramental efficacy, challenge to confession and amendment of life.<sup>71</sup> For the former, there was shame, weakness, and fleeing in fright.

### *Demons in Late Medieval English Visions*

Did the model of interaction with demons illustrated by the didactic visions affect the laity's own interactions with what were believed to be demonic attacks? We cannot make definitive statements, due to the limited amount of extant material. The accounts of Margery Kempe, Julian of Norwich, and the Byland Abbey, and others, however, seem to indicate that the prevailing model was quite influential.

#### *Demons and Margery Kempe*

Demons, in a role similar to the fiends of the inherited visions, played the antagonists in Margery's visions. Early in her life, in the throes of what might today be diagnosed as post-partum depression, and overcome by the guilt of a sin she was too ashamed to confess, Margery fell victim to vivid visitations of demons. She was so overwhelmed by their threats that she followed their instructions and slandered her husband, her friends and her self, desiring "all wykkydness." She even bit her own hand so violently that she bore the scars for the rest of her life. She scratched the skin over her heart with her fingers and would have done worse had she not been bound to keep her from harming herself:

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<sup>70</sup> *HS*, pp. 206–207.

<sup>71</sup> See chapter 4.

And in this tyme sche sey, as hir thowt, deuelys opyn her mowthys al inflaumyd wyth brennyng lowys of fyr as thei schuld a swalwyd hyr in, sum-tyme rampyng at hyr, sum-tyme thretyng her, sum-tym pullyng hyr & halyng hir bothe nygth & day duryng the forseyd tyme.<sup>72</sup>

Margery's demons were similar to those in the didactic visions; they were associated with fire and with swallowing and pulling at people. They tempted Margery and attempted to completely undermine her weak faith. She was released from their horrifying grip only when the Lord sat on her bedside and healed her.

At a later time, when she went through her crisis of refusing to believe that the revelations about the damned were from God and thus he allowed her twelve days of being drenched with evil thoughts by the Devil, "Sche was schreuyng & dede al that sche myth, but sche fonde no relesyng tyl sche was ner at dispeyr."<sup>73</sup> The fact that Margery turned to the Sacrament, prayers, good deeds, and penance for release from the demons indicated that she was aware that they were means of combating evil attacks and that she believed that they could be effective. The fact that they did not work for her was not indicative of either her conception of the Devil being stronger than he had been in earlier centuries—her demons were similar to those of earlier times—nor did it imply that she felt that the traditional methods were losing their potency. Rather, an angel explained to Margery that God was the one who was allowing the demons to fill her with "cursyd thowtys" and would continue to do so for a full twelve days as chastisement for her unbelief in her revelations.<sup>74</sup> Thus, for Margery, it was not that the Devil had grown stronger or that the traditional formulae had become weaker, but rather, it was that God was more powerful than either and in control of both.

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<sup>72</sup> *MK*, p. 7 (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145. (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

*A demon and Julian of Norwich*

Julian of Norwich, on the other hand, found that the formulae were highly effective. Like Margery, she was visited by a demon after she doubted her revelations. She described his physical appearance in detail, and reported that he tried to strangle her but could not:

And in all this tyme *I trustyd to be sayyd and kepte by the mercy of god.* And oure curtesse lorde gaue me grace to wake... The persons that were with me beheld me and wett my templys, and my harte beganne to comfort. And anon a lytyll smoke cam it at the dorre with a greette heet and a foule stynch. And than I seyde: *Benedicite dominus!* Is it alle on fyre that is here? And I went it had bene a bodely fyre that shuld a burne vs all to deth. I asked them that were with me if they felt ony stynch. They seyde nay, they felt noone. I seyde: *Blessyd be god!* for than wyst I wele it was the fende that was come only to tempte me. *And anon I toke me to that oure lorde had shewed me on the same daye with alle the feyth of holy church, for I behelde it as both in one, and fled ther to as to my comfort.* And a non alle vanysschyd away, and I was brought to grete reste and peas, without sycknesse of body or drede of conscience.<sup>75</sup>

Julian trusted in God's mercy, used a verbal formula, and turned to the faith of holy church, as revealed to her. The devil, therefore, vanished.

*Demons in Yorkshire*

The third set of late medieval visions that showed that the church's traditional practices were still perceived to have power over evil were the Byland Abbey ghost stories. Although these were about ghosts rather than demons, the visionary when initially confronted with the apparition did not know whether it was a demon or ghost and responded to it as if it were a demon. The ghosts, like demons, used disguises and were so violent that the visionary had no choice but to treat them as evil spirits. The visionaries used the formulae of Spiritual Warfare and found them effective. When a man at Rievaulx confronted the apparition of a rearing horse, he forbade it in the name of Jesus to do him any harm. When the horse transformed itself into a "revolving haycock," the man said, "God forbid that you bring evil upon me." The spirit then became a man and the visionary realized it was a ghost.<sup>76</sup> Tailor

<sup>75</sup> *JN*, pp. 636–638 (italics added).

<sup>76</sup> *BA*, p. 364.

Snowball “crossed himself and forbade [the ghost / raven], in the name of God, to bring at that time any harm upon him.”<sup>77</sup> It flew away but returned; Snowball fought it with his sword for awhile and then conjured it, saying “God forbid that you have powere to hurt me on this occasion, but begone.” It flew away again. When it returned as a dog, Snowball adjured it in the “name of the Trinity and by the virtue of the blood of Christ from His five wounds.” This time it confessed who it was and Snowball was able to help it.<sup>78</sup> Visionaries in seven of the other accounts also used verbal formulae or conjuring to gain control over apparitions and all were successful. Not one of the twelve accounts mentioned an unsuccessful use of the Church’s methods.

*William Stranton and Edmund Leversedge*

Several other late medieval English visions—all from the fifteenth century—demonstrated a similar successful use of the traditional styles of counterattack against demons. William Stranton<sup>79</sup> was told by the prior at the entrance to St. Patrick’s Purgatory: “haue thow in thi mynde the passion of owre lord Jhesu Crist, and sai thi praier and thei [demons] shul voide and be knowe to the such as thei be.” During his vision of purgatory, he followed the prior’s advice and discovered that it was true:

Then I thought on the passion of Crist, and blissede me on my forhede wyth the prayer that was taghtt me before. And then sodenly the men they flewe fro me away in liknes of evyll sprettyys as they were. Then was I more sekyr and more bolder then I was before, ffor then I knew that my prayer was of mekyll vertu.<sup>80</sup>

When Edmund Leversedge (c. 1465)<sup>81</sup> was being attacked by demons as he lay in a near-death state, his mother, although frightened, prayed

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 365.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* This story involved details about practices which were closer to the realm of magic and superstition than would be told in the didactic visions, for Snowball was instructed by the ghost to draw a circle with a cross inside it and to carry on him “the four gospels and other holy words” and to place “four reliquaries in the form of a cross on the edge of the circle.” But the magic was not used in the fight against the apparition; the traditional methods were adequate for that.

<sup>79</sup> See chapter 3.

<sup>80</sup> *SPP*, p. 83 (Robert Easting, ed., *St. Patrick’s Purgatory*. E.E.T.S [1991]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>81</sup> See chapter 3.

for him and sprinkled holy water on him.<sup>82</sup> In his vision of purgatory, he was again attacked by demons but “by the grace of God and his help and through the withstanding of the temptacion my saule was departid fro them.”<sup>83</sup> Having seen the efficacy of God’s help, he stated his opinion that “if hit myght be possible that a dampnyd saule in hell had power ther of God euer to call this name Jhesus, j wot wil all the deuelis ther shuld neuer have power ouer hym.”<sup>84</sup>

### *Deathbed Battles*

Most medieval people never encountered demons directly during their lives. The religious instructions on death, however, taught that all human beings would encounter demons at their time of death.<sup>85</sup> We have already seen a number of examples above of visions depicting demons present as saints, believers and unrepentant sinners each died. In addition to these stories, there were books that explicitly presented exactly what would happen to one on one’s deathbed. These books, known collectively as *Ars Moriendi* spelled out in detail exactly what the believer should do during the spiritual battle that would take place around his deathbed.

In a sense, every believer would become a visionary at his or her death. Not all would see with their eyes what was unfolding in the spirit world, but all would have a direct encounter with demons, angels, saints, and the Trinity. This had come about because of a shift in

<sup>82</sup> *EL*, p. 23.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* Two other examples of late medieval laypeople who responded effectively with the traditional techniques have already been mentioned in previous chapters: in chapter 1, the unknown woman (c. 1422) who confronted a female spirit named Margaret which she was not sure was a demon or a ghost and used verbal conjurations to gain control over her. And in chapter 2, two of the people who had visions related to Henry VI found the ‘saint’ helping them when they saw demons.

<sup>85</sup> For an exploration of the wider context of death in the Late Middle Ages, see John Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse: Confronting Famine, War, Plague, and Death* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 181–257. See also Rosemary Horrox, “Purgatory, Prayer, and Plague: 1150–1380,” and Philip Morgan, “Of Worms and War: 1380–1558,” in Peter C. Jupp and Claire Gittings, eds., *Death in England: An Illustrated History* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000), pp. 90–118 and 119–146; Colin Platt, *King Death: The Black Death and its Aftermath in Late-Medieval England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); Christopher Daniell, *Death and Burial in Medieval England, 1066–1550* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

theology in the Late Middle Ages that took the attention away from the Last Judgment and placed it on the moment of death. The separating of the resurrection of the individual believer from the Last Judgment and its moving instead to the time of one's death meant that the writers of handbooks on dying focused on the importance of decisions made during the hour of death.<sup>86</sup> Philippe Ariès describes the late medieval final hour, the deathbed scene, as follows:

According to custom, the bedroom is full of people, for one always dies in public. But those assembled see none of what is going on, nor is the dying man aware of their presence. This is not because he has lost consciousness, his gaze is riveted with fierce attention upon an extraordinary spectacle visible to him alone. Supernatural beings have invaded the bedroom and are crowding around his bedside. On one side are the Trinity, the Virgin, the whole court of heaven, and the guardian angel; on the other side, Satan and his monstrous army of demons. ...<sup>87</sup>

The demons spearheaded the spiritual battle by putting the dying person through the five temptations to doubt, to despair, to become impatient, to be complacent, and to "over great occupation of outward things and temporal."<sup>88</sup>

The protective effect of focusing on the Passion was particularly important in the deathbed battle. The *Crafte of Dyinge* exhorted the dying to think on the Passion and the *Ars Moriendi* block prints included illustrations of priests holding crucifixes before the eyes of dying parishioners.<sup>89</sup> Julian of Norwich gave us a first-person account as one who survived to tell of such a dying moment:

My curate was sent for to be at my ending, and before he cam I had set vp my eyen and might not speake. He set the crosse before my face, and sayd: I haue brought the image of thy sauour; looke ther vpon and comfort thee ther with. My thought I was well, for my eyen was sett vp right into heauen, where I trusted to come by the mercie of god; but nevertheles I ascentyd to sett my eyen in the face of the crucyfixe, if I

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<sup>86</sup> Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 106–107.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>88</sup> Francis M.M. Comper, ed., *The Book of the Craft of Dying, and Other Early English Tracts Concerning Death*, (London: Longmans, Green, 1917), pp. 1–65. For detailed analysis of the *Craft of Dying*, see Nancy Lee Beaty, *The Craft of Dying: The Literary Tradition of the Ars Moriendi in England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 7–35.

<sup>89</sup> Comper, ed., *The Book of the Craft of Dying*, pp. 14 and 27; Sister O'Connor, *The Art of Dying Well: The Development of the Ars Moriendi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), p. 109.

might, and so I dide, for my thought I might longar dure to looke even forth then right vp. After this my sight began to feyle. It waxid as darke about me in the chamber as if it had ben nyght, saue in the image of the crosse, wher in held a comon light; and I wiste not how. All that was beside the crosse was oglye and ferfull to me as it had ben much occupied with fiendes.<sup>90</sup>

Here an autobiographical description testified to the effectiveness of the sight of the crucifix in keeping demons at bay in the shadows of death. It is interesting that Julian seemed to have been protected while looking trustfully up to heaven. She had assented to look at the crucifix simply because she thought she would be able to look ahead longer than upwards. It was only when she looked at the crucifix that she found her eyes failing, and she became aware of darkness, ugliness and fear as if demons were in the room. The cross itself had made her aware of the spiritual battle involved in dying. It remained more powerful, however, than the forces of darkness, its “comon light” contrasting its solid reality over the delusory nature of the dark fearsomeness of the room.

The woodblocks were, in a sense, images that were visionary themselves, depicting in images the normally invisible spiritual reality that would be present at each person’s dying moments. Demons were depicted with scrolls functioning like today’s cartoon bubbles recording the taunts and temptations they launched at Moriens. Even the temptations themselves were presented visually, with drawings of a barn filled with wine kegs and the dying man’s family pleading with him to provide for them.

The dynamic of Reciprocated Devotion was present through the assistance of the saints and the Virgin Mary. The woodblock prints showed saints, identified by their iconography, standing at the side of the dying person’s bed. The *Crafte of Dyinge* instructed the dying person’s friends and family to encourage him to pray “devoutly, to all the apostles, martyrs, and confessors, and virgins—and specially to those which he loved and worshipped most specially in his heal—that they would help him then in his last end and most need.”<sup>91</sup> The final prayer called on the saints and angels for help:

...Come to thy meeting and succour thee the holy Angels of God, the Archangels, the Virtues, the Potestates, the Dominations, the Thrones, the Cherubins, the Seraphins. Come to thine help and aid the patriarchs

<sup>90</sup> *JN*, pp. 290–291.

<sup>91</sup> Comper, ed., *The Book of the Craft of Dying*, pp. 30–31.

and prophets, the apostles and evangelists, the matrons and confessors, the monks and hermits, the virgins and widows, the children and innocents. Also help thee the prayers and visions of all priests and deacons, and of them of all degrees of the Church Catholic; to the end that thy place be in peace, and that thine habitation be in celestial Jerusalem.<sup>92</sup>

In addition, there was the Reciprocated Devotion of gazing at the crucifix and receiving Christ's help at the moment of death. A large crucifix showed prominently in the woodcuts, held by the visiting priest. The *Crafte of Dyinge* also included numerous prayers to Christ, requesting his intervention at this critical moment.

And finally there was the dynamic of Transactions of Satisfaction. One's final choices affected one's eternal destiny and the deceased person entered the otherworld after God the Father pierced him or her with the arrow of death.

Although the battle was complex, what was clear from the *Crafte of Dyinge*, was that it was winnable. The repentant believer who persevered and overcame the final temptations would be safe. The demons would not be strong enough to overcome the rituals and faith of the final moments. In properly using the spiritual dynamics, the faithful Christian would win the ultimate spiritual victory, coming (eventually) into the eternal presence of the Beatific Vision. We will examine that Vision in the next chapter.

### *Summary: Limited Demons, Effective Piety*

Kors and Peters argue that the shift in attitudes towards the Devil came in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries through the writings of the scholastics.<sup>93</sup> They state that the new emphasis on the suffering of

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>93</sup> Kors and Peters, *Witchcraft*, pp. 8–9. C.W. Marx presents a different assessment of the scholastics' views on the Devil: "In the new formulation [vs. the Patristics] the Devil is conceived as a figure within a model of society: the Devil is a servant of the king; he is a jailer, one who must do the will of the king and one who is treated in law like any of the king's servants. ... the Devil is one who exists within a framework or social structure in which the capacity for disruption is less, because of the overriding power of the king; the Devil has no 'right of possession.' The new analogy implies that evil consists of crimes against both the state and the individual, and a greater sense of confidence in society and its ability to maintain order—evil can be overthrown" (C.W. Marx, *The Devil's Rights*, p. 26). Marx's analysis fits better with the evidence from late medieval England.



God coincided with a ‘strengthening’ of the Devil in literature and art from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries:

This shift in the human conception of God and Satan is a critical force in the growth of the phenomenon of witch beliefs, because witch beliefs and persecutions of witches were all based on the doctrine of the malevolence, strength, cunning, and ubiquity of an absolutely hostile, ruthless, and relentless devil whose capacity for harming mankind had increased greatly.<sup>94</sup>

It is expected that if such a change in the conception of Satan had occurred in England it would have been memorialized in three sets of materials recounting the stories of face-to-face encounters with demons, namely the *exempla*, the accounts of late medieval English people, and the instructions for dying. Instead, the demons of the English *exempla* corresponded to the descriptions given by Kors and Peters for the older conception of Satan and his cohorts. Saints and laypeople who encountered demons in the stories successfully used various formulae that Kors and Peters mention were considered to be “weak and ineffectual” by Europeans. And if the extant accounts of late medieval English laypeople’s response to encounters with what they believed were demons are representative, the English laity still believed in the efficacy of the traditional prayers, gestures, and holy objects. The Byland Abbey visionaries and Julian of Norwich in the fourteenth century, Margery Kempe, William Stranton, and the ‘unknown woman’ in the early fifteenth, Edmund Leversedge in the mid-fifteenth, and Henry VI’s visionaries in the late fifteenth century, all used the traditional methods. None of them succumbed to horror or resorted to witch hunting. As evidenced by the English didactic and lay visions relating to Spiritual Warfare, there does not seem to have been either a magnifying of the strength of the Enemy or a weakening of the trust in the weapons of the Church.

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<sup>94</sup> Kors and Peters, *Witchcraft*, rev. ed. p. 10. Reprinted by permission of the University of Pennsylvania Press.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SEEING THROUGH THE SURFACE: VISION AS SUPRA-SACRAMENTAL SIGHT

The importance of the visual in late medieval piety is well attested.<sup>1</sup> The brightly colored ceilings, sculpted and painted images of saints, stained glass, marble alabaster carvings, soaring cathedrals with flying buttresses, ribbed vaults, and intricate tracery, served as a visual feast to the laity. Latin liturgical drama continued to be popular as vernacular religious plays developed. Both vivified scriptural stories and saints' legends, going beyond simply stating the narrative. By visually embodying the stories, the religious thespians spurred the watchers to devotion. Colorful processions, liturgical rituals, illuminated manuscripts, vestments, altar cloths, flickering candles, holy objects and relics—all contributed to this emphasis on the visual. Even the evocative power of the rood's sifting of sight, relied on the importance of vision in the life of the penitent.

The extent of this visual orientation is highlighted when contrasted with the verbal emphasis of the Reformation that followed. The Reformers stressed the centrality of the Word, specifically the written word, and urged that it must be available to all believers, not just the clergy. By doing so, they aimed to obviate the need for the Bible-of-the-illiterate that Gregory the Great had advocated. The Reformers were also highly motivated to eliminate idolatry. At what point does an image become an idol? Many of the Reformers believed that medieval images had been used idolatrously. They were not, of course, the first to have this concern; the East had dealt with it in the Iconoclastic Controversy. This had in turn influenced the West. Christian writers defended icons and images on a variety of bases. In the period

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<sup>1</sup> See Carrolly Erickson, *The Medieval Vision: Essays in History and Perception* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Mâle, *Religious Art in France*; M. Rickert, *Painting in Britain: The Middle Ages* (London: Penguin Books, 1954); J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (London: E. Arnold, 1924); Kathleen Kameron, *Popular Piety and Art in the Late Middle Ages: Image Worship and Idolatry in England, 1350–1500* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998).

between the eighth/ninth-century Iconoclastic Controversy and the sixteenth-century Reformation—the two movements that had the most widespread influence on the use of art in Christian piety—England saw intense debate over the use of the visual in worship. That debate took place in the period under discussion. The followers of John Wycliffe, known as the Lollards, instigated the debate and addressed many of the same issues that the Iconoclasts and, subsequently, the Reformers raised.<sup>2</sup> The complexity and vehemence of their arguments underscored the prevalence of the visual orientation of late medieval England.

Visions played a role as instances of ‘supra-sacramental sight’ in a piety deeply saturated in multiple forms of what may be termed ‘sacramental sight.’ The visual orientation of visions was not idiosyncratic. Instead, it fit into the larger picture of medieval theology and piety. An exploration of the English medieval didactic visions related to the cult of the Passion and to issues of epistemology uncovers the deep connection between this emphasis on the visual and the sacramental nature of medieval spirituality. The exceptional instances of Supra-Sacramental Sight, as found in visions, supported the daily habits of sacramental sight affirmed by the Church. Visions yet again buttressed key elements of the Faith.

### *The Surface and the Deeper Reality*

For the medieval, there was a more profound meaning, a deeper reality, behind the surface of life. Medieval thought perceived not only the objective reality of reason and the five senses but also an additional, still objective and even more important reality behind them and beyond the conscious and the tangible. For the medieval person, objective reality was found not only on the surface but also somewhere deeper and hidden.

This multi-layered view of the world was reflected in a variety of aspects of medieval life, including the seven sacraments, transubstantiation, the four levels of interpretation of scripture, symbolism in art, images of the saints, omens, numerology, cosmology, and philosophy. The seven sacraments were not the boundary of sacramental belief.

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<sup>2</sup> See Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, pp. 96–159.

Instead, because these multiple layers infused so many facets of life the medieval engaged a sacramental view of life that began with the seven sacraments but went far beyond them.

*Sacraments and the deeper reality*

The sacraments, by their very nature, involved two levels of reality, arising in part from the method by which human beings came to know truth. Thomas Aquinas stated that:

Now it is part of man's nature to acquire knowledge of the intelligible from the sensible. But a sign is that by means of which one attains to the knowledge of something else. Consequently, since the sacred things which are signified by the sacraments, are the spiritual and intelligible goods by means of which man is sanctified, it follows that the sacramental signs consist in sensible things: just as in the Divine Scriptures spiritual things are set before us under the guise of things sensible.

For Aquinas, the sacrament signified three deeper realities, relating to the past (i.e. the Passion) to the present (i.e. Christ's grace at work in the believer) and to the future (i.e. the glorification and eternal life of the believer). He specified that it was essential that a sacrament have a sensible element. Each of the seven sacraments was a visible sign indicative of invisible realities.<sup>3</sup>

*Transubstantiation and the deeper reality*

At the heart of the most important of the sacraments, the Mass, was an additional bi-level reality, one elucidated by the doctrine of transubstantiation. In transubstantiation, the scholastic theologians adapted Aristotle's analytical tools from his *Ten Categories*. Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354–430), in his *Confessions*, had reminisced about cracking the code of Aristotle's *Ten Categories* on his own, giving an example of the application of the categories by referring to a man:

This book seemed to me an extremely clear statement about substances, such as man, and what are in them, such as a man's shape, what is his quality of stature, how many feet, and his relatedness, for example whose brother he is, or where he is placed, or when he was born, or whether

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<sup>3</sup> *ST* III:60:3–4.

he is standing or sitting, or is wearing shoes or armour, or whether he is active or passive, and the innumerable things which are classified by these nine genera of which I have given some instances, or by the genus of substance itself.<sup>4</sup>

For the scholastics, the first item in the list of categories was what became known as the *substance*, and the last nine together constituted the *accidents*. As with Augustine's illustration, most of the time, the accidents corresponded to the substance. What was unusual about the theology of the Mass, however, was that it took the substance and accidents of a particular object and made them into two different realities. Transubstantiation may have been the first and only instance in which substance and accidents did not coincide. After consecration, what had been in concord now became two different realities. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 officially defined this as follows:

[Christ's] body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the appearances of bread and wine, the bread being transubstantiated into the body by the divine power and the wine into the blood, to the effect that we receive from what is His in what He has received from what is ours in order that the mystery of unity may be accomplished...<sup>5</sup>

What was on the surface was unleavened bread and wine. The deeper reality was Christ's body and blood, his Real Presence. This was, of course, not merely a different reality but a much more important reality.

#### *Deeper reality and the scriptures*

While the Mass and transubstantiation were at the center of medieval liturgy, scriptural revelation was at the heart of medieval epistemology. Here again, the multi-level nature of reality came into play. The scriptures operated on the surface, the grammatical, lexical level, but also on three other levels, the allegorical / typological / tropological, the moral, and the eschatological / anagogical. Nicholas of Lyra in c. 1330 had taught that:

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<sup>4</sup> Henry Chadwick, trans., *St. Augustine: Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 69.

<sup>5</sup> Neuner and Dupuis, eds., *The Christian Faith*, p. 15.

The letter teaches events, allegory what you should believe,  
 Morality teaches what you should do, anagogy what mark you should be  
 aiming for.<sup>6</sup>

Godfrey of Saint Victor, in the mid-twelfth century, pointed out the relative difficulty or ease of using the various levels:

This stream has four different features:  
 In some parts it can be crossed, in other parts it is deep.  
 Here it is more pleasing to the taste, sweet and delightful,  
 Nor does it flow back to the heights from which it has sprung.  
 When it is more clearly history, it is easy to cross,  
 Whereas it is hard to swim the deep waters of allegory,  
 It is easy to drink the savory waters of morality,  
 While anagogy is regurgitated and does not stay down...<sup>7</sup>

The allegorical level was referred to as deep waters that are difficult to swim. This 'deeper' level was the one in which there could be the most significant seeming dichotomy between the surface and the below-the-surface meanings.

A late medieval English example of this can be found in *Middle English Sermons*. The text for the day's sermon is Matthew 15:22, the story of the Canaanite woman who came to Christ for help with her demon-possessed daughter. This story is a narrative of an event that actually happened to Christ, not a parable or fictional story told by Christ with the intent to provide a metaphor of a spiritual truth, yet the medieval preacher interprets it as a set of symbols:

Be this womman of Cananye is vndirstonde euery synnefull creature reasonable preyinge to God for is dowthure, that is, for is owne sowle, dede in synnes. And be that that folowith and maketh mencyon traveled with a feende, betokens vounded and dispoyled in naturall wilfulnes and blyndet with the powdyre of worldely loue... [This womman of Cananye] ranne to Crist, the beste leche of all, and forsoke hure countrey... Therefore euery creature trustyng in oure Lorde God shall take feygthe as this womman of Cananye dude, besechyng the mercye of God as she dude... For euery preyere is redressed to the ese of som man, as this preyere was reduced to the ese of hure dowgtur, that was hure owne sowle.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*. Volume I. Translated by Mark Sebanc (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1959, trans. 1998), p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> *MES*, p. 66 (Woodburn O. Ross, ed., *Middle English Sermons*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1998]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

An historical account of an encounter between Christ and a woman took on an allegorical meaning not apparent on the surface of the passage.

*Symbolism in art*

A similar multi-level view of reality was reflected in the art of the period. Virtually every object in a late medieval painting had a symbolic meaning. Even the carpenter's tools and a ship's paraphernalia represented theological concepts. Many different symbols could represent one single biblical figure. The Virgin Mary, for example, was alluded to through sealed fountains, enclosed gardens, closed gates, lilies, thorn-less roses, and a dozen stars. One object could symbolize multiple ideas. Ivy connoted death, immortality, fidelity, attachment and faithful affection.<sup>9</sup> A garden could evoke thoughts of a bouquet of theological concepts from the clover Trinity to the aspen Cross to the chestnut as chastity, the evil apple, the Marian bleeding heart of the cyclamen, the humility of the fern, and the hyacinth's longing for heaven, and the oak's strong faith and virtue.<sup>10</sup>

Lyrics from the period seem to indicate that the symbolic view of everyday objects went beyond the visual arts. A thirteenth-century Middle English bestiary allegorized thirteen animals including the whale, ant, fox, and elephant. The lion represented Christ, the whale the Devil, and the stag various aspects of human behavior.<sup>11</sup>

Laypeople were also encouraged to make symbols out of ordinary aspects of their daily life. For example, in the fifteenth-century, "Instructions for a Devout and Literate Layman," the author advised the layman, "You can make a cross on the table out of five bread-crumbs. ..." <sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> George Wells Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 33.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 27–34.

<sup>11</sup> Brian Stone, trans., *Medieval English Verse* (London: Penguin Books, 1964), pp. 89–94.

<sup>12</sup> William Abel Pantin, "Instructions for a Devout and Literate Layman," in J.J.G. Alexander and M.T. Gibson, eds., *Medieval Learning and Literature: Essays Presented to Richard William Hunt* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 400.

*Images of the saints and the deeper reality*

Another way which the visual arts demonstrated the bi-level nature of medieval reality involved the images of saints. As discussed in chapter 2, the icons of the saints went beyond functioning as symbols to presenting the saints themselves. Peter Brown has argued that, from late antiquity, worshipers associated the presence of the saint with his or her relics.<sup>13</sup> By the Late Middle Ages, however, the saints' images themselves had become as important as the relics, and the presence of the saints was attached to their images.

The Seventh Ecumenical Council declared that any veneration directed at the icon went to its prototype. Thus, actions done in front of or to an image were believed to honor the corresponding saint. Physical motions performed on tangible objects simultaneously exerted an impact on the spiritual realm. Common actions included kneeling, lighting candles, chanting prayers, and touching the image with precious jewels while on pilgrimage.

Illustrating the belief in this bi-level reality of images of the saints, the chronicle of the *Arrivall of Edward IV. in England and the Finall Recouerye of His Kingdomes From Henry VI. A.D.M.CCCC.LXXI.* told of an encounter between King Edward IV and an image of Saint Anne during the time that he was fighting for the throne:

...he specially prayed Seint Anne to helpe hym, where that he promysed, that, at the next tyme that it shuld hape hym to se any ymage of Seint Anne, he shuld therto make his prayers, and gyve his offeringe, in the honor and worshipec of that blessyd Saynte. So it fell, that, the same Palme Sondag, the Kynge went in procession, and all the people after, in goode devotion, as the service of that daye askethe, and, whan the processyon was comen into the churche, and by ordar of the service, were comen to that place where the vale shulbe drawne up afore the Roode, that all the people shall honor the Roode, with the anthem, *Ave*, three tymes begon, in a pillar of the churche, directly aforne the place where Kynge knelyd, and devoutly honoryd the Roode, was a lytle ymage of Seint Anne, made of alleblastar, standynge fixed to the pillar, closed and clasped togethars with four bordes, small, payntyed, and gowynge rownd about the image, in maner of a compas, lyke as

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<sup>13</sup> Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, p. 88. For discussion of the cult of the saints and the role of images in serving as junctions between the physical and spiritual worlds and the use of 'beholding' in the cult, see Kathleen Kamberick, *Popular Piety and Art in the Late Middle Ages: Image Worship and Idolatry in England, 1350-1500* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002).



it is to see comonly, and all abowt, where as suche ymages be wont to be made for to be solde and set up in churches, chapells, crosses, and oratories, in many placis. And this ymage was thus shett, closed, and clasped, accordynge to the rulles that, in all the churchis of England, be observyd, all ymages to be hid from Ashe Wednesday to Estarday in the mornynge. And so the sayd ymage had bene from Ashwensday to that tyme. And even sodaynly, at that season of the service, the bords compassynge the ymage about gave a great crak, and a little openyd, whiche the Kynge well perceyveyd and all the people about hym. And anon, aftar, the bords drewe and closed togethars agayne, without any mans hand, or touching, and as thowghe it had bene a thinge done with a violence, with a gretar might it openyd all abrod, and so the ymage stode, open and discovert, in syght of all the people there beynge. The Kynge, this seinge, thanked and honoryd God, and Seint Anne, takynge it for a good signe, and token of good and prosperous aventure that God wold send hym in that he had to do, and remembringe his promyse, he honoryd God and Seint Anne, in that same place, and gave his offrings. All thos, also, that were present and sawe this worshippyd and thanked God and Seint Anne, there, and many offeryd; takynge of this signe, shewed by the power of God, good hope of theyr good spede for to come.<sup>14</sup>

Edward had deliberately sought out an image of Saint Anne, in order to venerate his favorite saint. The actions of the image of Saint Anne in coming out her Lenten hiding portended political success for her kingly devotee. The spiritual interaction of king and saint took place around a wooden, boxed, painted depiction of the invisible. Those who looked on acknowledged the heavenly activity that lay behind the creaking open of a crated alabaster sculpture.

#### *Omens and the deeper reality*

Another way in which natural things had deeper significance was through omens. Out of the ordinary but still natural events were interpreted as having a deeper significance. Chronicles often included references to propitious or portentous events in the world of nature that indicated something of political or religious significance. For example, in the Westminster Chronicle in 1382:

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<sup>14</sup> John Bruce, ed., *Historie of the Arrivall of Edward IV. in England and the Finall Recouerye of His Kingdomes From Henry VI. A.D. M.CCCC.LXXI.* (London: Camden Society, 1838), pp. 13–14.

For two days and three nights before the feast of St. Thomas the Apostle [21 December] there was a ceaseless downpour of rain, causing such overflowing of streams and rivers in various parts of England that incalculable damage resulted to crops and other property. On St. Thomas' Day the bishop of Norwich took the Cross and set it up in St. Paul's on the steps before the entrance to the choir, the ceremony being conducted by the bishop of London. Clear and cloudless weather on the day itself provided a sort of happy omen...

Later in the same chronicle, during a battle, thunder, lightening and "murky cloud" hovered over the enemies with "tranquil weather and a gentle breeze over the English."<sup>15</sup>

### *Numerology and the deeper reality*

Even numbers did not merely point to what they counted but rather also spoke of a deeper reality.

Alfred Crosby notes that the passion to measure reality is one that emerged in late medieval Europe. Aristotle valued qualitative over quantitative analysis; and Plato looked for ideals in the abstract rather than specifics in the material world.<sup>16</sup> Crosby pinpoints a shift towards the valuing of measurements, occurring in c. 1275–1325.<sup>17</sup> He explores the impact of this in music, painting, bookkeeping, and mathematics.

In religious arenas, counting seemed to become important even earlier. For example, pilgrims would measure and count objects at shrines. One pilgrim, Jacinthus the Presbyter (c. 750), in the early middle ages, wrote of his visit to Bethlehem:

From the well to the place where our Lord was born is *one-and-a-half paces*. Then from this place, where it pleased our Lord to be born, to the Manger is *three paces*. And there are *twelve steps* by which we went down to the Manger. *Two* bronze doors are there. The house where the Manger stands (and where it please the Lord to be born) is *three paces in length and two-and-a-half in breadth*.... There in the Church are *forty-four* columns which hold up the aisles of the Church, but there are also another *four* in the tribunes, and another *six* standing in the choir of the Church....

<sup>15</sup> L.C. Hector and Barbara F. Harvey, ed. and trans., *The Westminster Chronicle, 1381–1394*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 33 and 41.

<sup>16</sup> Alfred W. Crosby, *The Measure of Reality: Quantifications and Western Society, 1250–1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 13 and 15.

<sup>17</sup> Crosby, *Measure*, p. 18.

When I had done all this and *measured everything* I was happier than ever before. We commended ourselves to God and Saint Mary, and so we went our way to Jerusalem.<sup>18</sup>

Measuring and counting everything seemed to bring great joy to him. Adamnan, writing about Arculf (c. 685), was another early medieval who seemed to consider measuring pilgrimage sites an important endeavor:

...The distance between the floor and the edge of the Sepulchre on the side is about three palms. This information was given me by Arculf, who had been many times into the Lord's Sepulchre, and *measured it accurately*.<sup>19</sup>

In the later middle ages, the measuring of pilgrimage sites did not seem to be as common, but the interest in numbers showed up in the many enumerated lists that were at the core of medieval piety: Ten Commandments, Twelve Articles of Faith, Seven Deadly Sins, Seven Works of Mercy, Fifteen Oes, Five Wounds of Christ, etc. Sermons such as those in *Jacob's Well* drew on intricate outlines with carefully enumerated points and subpoints. For example, using the metaphor of a shovel to explore fasting, the preacher said:

The schouell, thowg it haue a scho & an heued, but gif it haue an handyl, it is nogt spedy to schouelyn out of thi pytt of thi flesch the wose of synne...This handle muste be iiij. spanne in lengthe. The firste is fastyng...The secunde spanne lengthe in this handyl of satysfaccyoun is hardnes of clothyng on bak & and in bed...The iij. spanne in lengthe of this handyll in satysfaccyoun muste be mekenes, lownes, & myldenes...The iiij. spanne in lengthe of the handle in thi satysfaccyoun is restitucyoun...<sup>20</sup>

Enumerating, measuring, counting seemed to be ways of organizing the deeper spiritual realities using the more quotidian tools of earthly life.

<sup>18</sup> John Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades* (Warminster, England: Aris and Phillips, rev. ed. 2002), p. 270 (italics added).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 171 (italics added).

<sup>20</sup> *JW*, pp. 194–196 (Arthur Brandeis, ed., *Jacob's Well*. E.E.T.S. [1900, reprinted 1999]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

*This world and the deeper reality of the otherworlds*

The cosmology of the Middle Ages was literally multi-level. There was the world in which people lived, and simultaneously there were the otherworlds that most people never saw until death. Heaven, hell, purgatory, and limbo were invisible but important realities. These worlds were inhabited by angels, demons, saints, and deceased souls, all of which were normally invisible to humans. Dante Alighieri's (1265–1321) *Commedia* fleshed out an elaborate *schema* of this multi-layered otherworld. All of the levels were normally out of sight and experience until after death.

It was not only visual things that were imperceptible. The music of the spheres was a sound that was inaudible to human beings because it never stopped. In addition, there was a heavenly music that broke in on mystics and visionaries that was normally inaudible. And there were demonic stench and heavenly fragrances that wafted across some people's paths but were normally 'un-smellable.'

*Philosophy and the deeper reality*

The philosophical underpinnings of late medieval spirituality also supported the multi-layered approach to life. In addition to Aristotelian thought's scholastically-transformed impact on transubstantiation, Neo-Platonism exerted a strong, shaping force. The body-spirit dichotomy, and the greater reality of Forms than their corresponding entities on earth ran parallel to and provided a dualistic interpretation to Christianity's teachings on the earthly and non-earthly realms. In the *Republic*, Plato had presented an allegory about prisoners chained in a cave whose only view of life outside was through shadows cast on the wall by flickering firelight. Only if led out into the sunshine, and after his eyesight adjusted to the brightness, would a prisoner be able to see, for the first time, the real objects that had cast shadows in the dark cave. Andrew Louth summarizes Plato's interpretation of the allegory as follows:

The Cave is the world revealed to us by our senses. It is a world characterized by unreality. And yet, it is the world we are used to—it is what we think of as 'reality'. The soul, which really belongs to the divine realm of the Forms or Ideas, has made itself at home in this world of unreality

revealed to us through the senses. Plato's concern, then, is with the soul's search for true reality.<sup>21</sup>

Plato's ideas were adapted by Neo-Platonists such as Plotinus, adopted in part by Augustine, and carried into the Middle Ages on the wings of mysticism and dualism. They supported the bi-level view of reality of the late medieval Church.

### *The Incarnation*

The Incarnation was the key theological doctrine that conjoined the surface and the hidden realities. In the birth of Christ, the invisible God of the Universe took on humanity and thus visibility. With visibility came touch-ability, vulnerability, and eventually suffering. In Christ, the surface and the deep intermingled for the salvation of humanity. Mirk's *Festial* taught in the Christmas sermon:

He made pes bytwyxx God and mon; wherfore forto be a trewe mediatur bytwyxx hom, he toke kynde of bothe: and veray God and man. And soo, by hys medyacyon, he knet the loue of God to man so sadly, that the fadyr of Heuen spared not his owne sonne, but send hym forto bye man wyth his blod, and bryng hym by wayes of mekenes ageyne to the joye of paradyse that man lost by couetyse and heghnes. Thus he made pes bytwyxx God and man.<sup>22</sup>

The intrusion of Christ into humanity's realm was what made possible Man's eventual, eternal in-breaking into God's realm.

*Middle English Sermons*, answered four questions relating to the Incarnation:

As to the first question, the wiche towcheth is personell dignite, loo to that the first word satisfieth when he seis, 'Goddess Sonne.' As to the secound question, of is maner of lyvyng, answereth the secound word, declarynge, 'He lyvid as a man.' / Than as to the thirde question, of is auctorite, answereth the thirde worde to-gethur, declarynge that he is God and man: 'Verbum caro factum est.' And as to the fowrte question,

<sup>21</sup> Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> *F*, p. 21 (Theodor Erbe, ed., *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies*. E.E.T.S. [1905; Kraus reprint, 1987]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

of is dwellyng, answereth the last word, seying that he hath dwellid amonge vs—‘et habita[v]it in nobis.’<sup>23</sup>

In Christ’s incarnation, God lived among us in the surface reality. Visible as a man, he was yet completely of the deeper reality, fully man and fully God.

### *Faith and the Faith*

Faith was the theological concept most dependent upon and crucial to this multi-layered view of reality. In its very definition from the Scriptures, faith was belief in what was not seen. As explained in Hebrews 11:1 “Est autem fides sperandarum substantia rerum, argumentum non apparentium” (Vulgate). Faith had both subjective and objective aspects. In its subjective use, faith was the positive and accepting attitude or stance of the believer towards his/her belief. In its objective use, Faith was the content of the Church’s teaching that was regarded as essential to salvation. Subjective faith was essential to grasp the hidden realities of the objective Faith. The absence of the visual in relation to the *deeper* reality was at the core of the very meaning of faith. It is, therefore, not unexpected that there was an emphasis on the visual in relation to the *surface* reality. It is quite likely that the medievals devoted much attention to the visible nature of piety largely as a response to the invisible nature of the majority of the content of their Faith. The vision, then, was especially important to faith, for it was the breaking through of the normally invisible deeper reality into the realm of the visible, thus confirming the existence of the deeper reality to those who lived on the surface.

### *Power of the hidden realities*

The hidden realities exerted tremendous power over the medieval person. Belief in the efficacy of the sacraments, in the existence of purgatory, the necessity of penance, the essential role of the Church in dispensing salvific grace, the importance of viewing the Eucharist on a

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<sup>23</sup> *MES*, p. 230 (Woodburn O. Ross, ed., *Middle English Sermons*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1998]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

regular basis, the need to venerate the saints and to fight against the power of demons, these were all central to medieval life, and involved faith in things not seen—not seen, that is, by the majority of believers. The people saw only the surface, the raising of the Host at the moment of consecration, not Jesus himself, the building of St. Peter's from the indulgences of the people, not the forgiveness of sin, the smoke floating upward from the candle before the image of the Virgin, not Mary herself. Gazing upon these things, particularly upon the Eucharist, with believing sight, was considered efficacious. Looking around the world with the eyes of faith, perceiving all as surface to the profounder reality of God's privities, that was the life of faith. It involved a way of seeing that could be described as sacramental.

*Seeing Through the Surface: Sacramental and Supra-Sacramental Sight*

The breaking through of the deeper reality into the realm of the visible, or the momentary ability to see into the realm of the invisible served as a form of Supra-Sacramental Sight, our fourth dynamic. Life in the middle ages involved sacramental sight, the regard of faith, for even the ordinary layperson. The visionary, however, went beyond sacramental sight into the 'supra-sacramental,' pushing through faith to actually seeing the object of her faith. After examining the medieval vocabulary for visionary sight, we will explore a number of different types of sacramental and supra-sacramental ways of gazing at spiritual matters: the Passion-ate, the eucharistic, the concretizing, and the 'visionized' gazes.

*The language of the visual in visionary experience*

The medieval world had categories for the various types of seeing involved in visions.<sup>24</sup> The terms were inherited from Augustine. *The Chastising of God's Children*, a treatise written in the vernacular between 1382 and 1408, probably by a confessor to a woman religious, included

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<sup>24</sup> For broader discussion of the five senses in mystical experience, see Rosemary Drage Hale, "'Taste and See, for God is Sweet': Sensory Perception and Memory in Medieval Christian Mystical Experience," in Anne Clark Bartlett et al., eds., *Vox Mystica: Essays on Medieval Mysticism in Honor of Professor Valerie M. Lagorio* (Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 1995), pp. 3–14.

a discussion of the levels of sight that Augustine had outlined in *De Genesi ad Litteram*.<sup>25</sup> The treatise seems to have been quite popular in the fifteenth century, particularly in religious houses, but copies are mentioned as well in the wills of laypeople.<sup>26</sup> The first was the corporal vision, “whanne any bodili thing bi the gift of god is shewid to a mans bodili sigt whiche other men seen nat,” such as Belshazzar’s seeing a hand writing on the wall. The second type was the spiritual or imaginative vision, which involved seeing “ymages and figures of diuerse thinges, but no bodies, bi shewyng or reuelacion of god” as with John the Evangelist’s Apocalypse or Peter’s visions of a “disshe ful of diuerse bestis.” The third kind was the intellectual vision, “whanne no bodi ne image ne figure is seen, but whanne in suche a rauysshing the insigt of the soule bi a wondirful mygt of god is clierli fastned in vnbodili substaunce with a soothfast knowing.” St. Paul’s visions of the third heaven were in this category. This was the highest form, “more worthi than corporal or spiritual or any other.”<sup>27</sup>

Although the narrators of the didactic visions tended not to attempt to describe the actual process of having a vision,<sup>28</sup> late medieval visionaries who recorded their visions themselves, such as Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich, tried to define the process of their visionary experiences. They tried to explain the precise kinds of seeing which their visions involved. And although the ineffability of visionary experiences interfered, they were at the very least able to communicate the complexity of the modes of seeing.

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<sup>25</sup> Augustine, *Sancti Aureli Augustini: De Genesi ad Litteram*, ed. Josephus Zycha in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* vol. 28 (SECT. III Pars 1) 1894, Liber Duodecimus.

<sup>26</sup> *The Chastising of God’s Children and the Treatise of Perfection of the Sons of God*, eds., Joyce Bazire and Eric Colledge (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), pp. 37–38.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 169–172.

<sup>28</sup> Rather, they frequently simply referred to the supernatural visitor as ‘coming’ or the visionary as ‘seeing’ someone. Occasionally some visitor would ‘appear’ or the visionary would ‘think he sees.’ Sometimes the state of consciousness of the visionary was mentioned, either as being asleep, drowsing, or occasionally in a trance. Most often, however, the visionary was awake, and this was merely implied rather than specified. Occasionally the vision was referred to as a vision, or as a dream, a “sweyven,” a fantasy, illusion, phantom, meeting, or sight but such terms were very rare. Usually the experience was described simply as an event and not focused on as a visionary phenomenon.



Although it is not clear how conscious Julian and Margery were of the Augustinian categories<sup>29</sup>—and it is dangerous to draw too rigid equivalencies between their terms and Augustine’s—it is apparent that both women, like Augustine, analyzed vision in terms of a spectrum which ranged from the more physical to the more spiritual.<sup>30</sup> Julian of Norwich used the terms ‘bodilie’ and ‘ghostly’ to differentiate between her visionary means of seeing. Her use of the term ‘bodily sight’ can be connected to Augustine’s corporeal sight both because of its obvious linguistic parallelism and because Julian specifically relates her desire to have a bodily sight of the Passion to wishing that she had been present at the original event.<sup>31</sup> Her use of the term ‘ghostly’ can be equated with the second Augustinian level, again on linguistic grounds, since ghost and spirit were medieval synonyms. She even experienced two modes of vision simultaneously, “And in alle that tyme that he schewd thys that I haue now seyde in gostely syght, I saw the bodely syght lastyng of the (plentuous) bledyng of the hede.”<sup>32</sup> Her modes of vision seemed to be unpredictable and beyond her control. In the eleventh revelation, when she expected to see the Virgin in “bodely lykyng” she was instead shown a “goostly syght of her.”<sup>33</sup> At one point, she described the tripartite nature of a showing, but it is not clear that there is a point-by-point use of the Augustinian system:

All this was shewde by thre partes, that is to sey by bodyly syght, and by worde formyde in my vnderstondyng, and by goostely syght. But the goostely syght I can nott ne may shew it as openly ne as fully as I would.<sup>34</sup>

If the ‘worde’ were the third Augustinian level, one might expect more ineffability to be ascribed to it than to the second level. It is possible

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<sup>29</sup> See Christopher Abbott, *Julian of Norwich: Autobiography and Theology*. Studies in Medieval Mysticism, 2 (Rochester, NY: Boydell and Brewer, 1999), p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> Rosalyn Voaden argues that women tended to be visionaries and men tended to be mystics, that the former corresponded to the second level of Augustinian sight and the latter to the third and highest level, and that therefore, men’s spiritual experience was regarded as of greater value than women’s. *God’s Words, Women’s Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (Rochester, New York: York Medieval Press, 1999), pp. 9–19.

<sup>31</sup> Julian of Norwich, *A Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich*, eds. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978), pp. 285–286.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 311.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 400.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 323.

that her third revelation, for example, was one of intellectual understanding. Julian used neither the term ghostly nor bodily to analyze how she saw it. In fact she did not describe what she saw in that revelation. Instead she seemed to have learned a spiritual truth directly: that God is in all things.<sup>35</sup>

Both Julian and Margery were interested not only in differentiating between their visionary sight and their ordinary sight, but also between the different types of visionary seeing that they experienced. Margery Kempe, like Julian, used the terms ghostly and bodily to describe her visionary modes of seeing. When visiting the Mount of Calvary, “beforn hir face sche herd and saw in hir gostly syght” the mourners around the cross.<sup>36</sup> Back in England, in meditations on the birth and childhood of Christ, she “han so gret feyth in that sche sey wyth hir bodily eye lych as sche had be-forn wyth hir gostly eye.”<sup>37</sup> Another phrase that she often used to indicate spiritual sight was “in the syght of hir sowle.”<sup>38</sup> Margery’s use of these terms occurred in the context of her meditations which were very similar to those encouraged by the *Mirroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ*, where the terms, however, described meditation rather than visionary experience.<sup>39</sup> Although both Margery and the *Mirroure* aimed to use the terms to differentiate spiritual sight from ordinary physical sight, their use of the same set of phrases to describe both visionary and meditational sight shows that by the Late Middle Ages there was a continuum rather than a dichotomy between meditative and visionary sight.

For both Julian and Margery, this bi-level experience of life seems to be an extension and expression of their belief in the Incarnation and therefore in incarnationality. Christopher Abbott suggests this comes from the ‘autobiographicality’ of Julian’s writings, which seems to apply to Margery as well, although the connection of visionary experience to the Incarnation is discussed more explicitly by Julian. Both women attempted to operate both in the realm of the physical and that of the

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 336–341.

<sup>36</sup> *MK*, p. 68 (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 187 and 208.

<sup>39</sup> Nicholas Love, *Nicholas Love: The Mirroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ*, Eds. James Hogg and Lawrence F. Powell. *Analecta Cartusiana* (Salzburg: Institut Für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1989; hereafter cited as *MB*), Volume 2; “With the ynner yye of thy soule” (p. 237). See below for further discussion of Margery’s use of the *Mirroure*.

spiritual. Julian did so in a literary, theologizing fashion, through her stories of the Servant and Master, for example, where she portrayed Christ's taking on humanness, so that then humans could partake in Christ's nature.<sup>40</sup> Marion Glasscoe also explores the incarnationality present in the language of Julian's visions:

The whole sequence of showings clearly relates to an experience of ultimate reality, understood in Christian terms, which is at the heart of Julian's experience of being in time. Her understanding of the Incarnation is not expressed in the intellectual albeit imaginative terms of Hilton, but experienced as a catalyst which transfigures everyday experience. Julian uses the language and assumptions of medieval theology but her text is shaped by literary means to convey creatively her psychological understanding of the realities such theology seeks to discover. Ultimately, of course, literary means, and the reader's response to them, cannot recreate Julian's mystical experience, but they can embody signs by which her faith and the grounds for it may be recognised.<sup>41</sup>

Diane E. Krantz argues that Julian's experience of enclosure shaped her theology, spirituality, and writing.<sup>42</sup> According to Frederick Bauerschmidt, Julian's enclosure, while affecting her deeply, did not make her anti-community.<sup>43</sup> She remained an active and integral part of the body of Christ in the world even while meditating on the spiritual world she had accessed through her visions. According to Nanda Hopenwasser, Margery connected these two worlds by giving extensive details about her own earthly life as it intersected continuously with the spiritual realm.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Abbott, *Julian of Norwich*, pp. 80ff.

<sup>41</sup> Marion Glasscoe, *English Medieval Mystics: Games of Faith* (London: Longman, 1993), p. 222. Glasscoe finds a parallel incarnationality in Margery, tracing the interplay of the physical and spiritual realms in her chapter, "Margery Kemp: The Form of her Living," pp. 268–312.

<sup>42</sup> M. Diane E. Krantz, *The Life and Text of Julian of Norwich: The Poetics of Enclosure*. Studies in the Humanities, vol. 32 (New York: Peter Lang, 1997).

<sup>43</sup> See Frederick C. Bauerschmidt, *Julian of Norwich and the Mystical Body Politic of Christ* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999).

<sup>44</sup> Nanda Hopenwasser ("A Performance Artist and Her Performance Text: Margery Kempe on Tour," in Mary A. Suydam and Joanna E. Ziegler, eds., *Performance and Transformation: New Approaches to Late Medieval Spirituality* [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999], pp. 90–131) treats Margery Kempe as a "performance artist." In some ways this is a helpful metaphor insofar as it implies that Margery enacts what she believes, but should not indicate that Margery stood at a distance from her true self and pretended to be something she was not. Although Margery's actions were often 'dramatic' in the sense that they were energetic, highly emotional, and exaggerated beyond the 'normal,' they were not dramatic in the sense of intentionally taking on a foreign persona.

*The Passion-ate gaze*

In addition to the Augustinian and mystical categories of seeing, there were many other variations on spiritual sight.<sup>45</sup> We will begin with an examination of seven aspects of seeing in relation to the cult of the Passion, seven related to the crucifix and three connected to the Eucharist.

In the Late Middle Ages, the most popular image was not of a saint but rather of Christ.<sup>46</sup> The crucifix was one of a pair of twinned centerpoints—the other was the Eucharist—of the constellation of ideas and images associated with the Passion in the Late Middle Ages, and the Passion, as Emile Mâle has stated:

...was the favorite subject of the age...The High Middle Ages had almost always represented the Triumphant Christ; the thirteenth century found its masterpiece in the type of Christ as Teacher. The fifteenth century wanted to see in its God only the man of suffering, and henceforth, the dominant aspect of Christianity was to be pathos. The Passion, to be sure, never ceased to be its center: but previously, the death of Jesus Christ had been a dogma addressed to the mind; now it becomes a moving image that speaks to the heart.<sup>47</sup>

There was significant overlap between the cult of the saints and the cult of the Passion, for both shared in the dynamic of Reciprocated Devotion. The devotion took a different turn, however, in each of the two cults and caused a complex relationship to develop between them. To begin with, the emphasis on the Passion and on the Eucharist had a rather unusual effect on the perception of Christ on the part of the medieval believer as contrasted with many other Christians in other times and places. Christ was thought about primarily as dying on the cross. And the cult of Reciprocated Devotion to him centered around

<sup>45</sup> For discussion of the role of gender in various medieval modes of seeing, see Madeline H. Caviness, *Visualizing Women in the Middle Ages: Sight, Spectacle, and Scopic Economy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

<sup>46</sup> Whereas earlier discussions of images dealt in-depth with saints' images and icons, late medieval discussions tended to center on images of the Passion. See Woolf, *Mystery*, pp. 88–89. For an anthropological analysis of the role of images of the crucifixion in the middle ages, see Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture, and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (New York: Routledge, 1993). On the role of vision in medieval life, including a detailed discussion of vision in relation to the Passion, and coining the phrase "ocular communion," see Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages: Ocular Desires* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

<sup>47</sup> Mâle, *Religious Art in France*, p. 82.

that image. Thus, the believer's relationship with Christ tended to be oriented to a moment frozen in time and repeated endlessly throughout time, but divorced from the medieval layperson's time. The other way in which Christ tended to be portrayed was as Judge on the Day of Doom. Therefore, what was missing was a strong sense of the reality of Christ as intercessor before the throne of the Father in the meantime. It is this gap that may have allowed for the cults of the saints to become so powerful. The saints were seen as more likely to be responsive to needs in the present. The relationship of Reciprocated Devotion with Christ was like an ellipse that orbited around the two foci of meditation on his Passion from the past and preparation for his judgment in the future. The relationship of Reciprocated Devotion with the saints, especially with Mary, had a stronger sense of immediacy, an intimacy and trust. The devotion to Christ had sorrow at its core, whereas the devotion to the saints had a happier cast. But both the cults had at their core a Reciprocated Devotion that was supported by the visions of the time and that linked devout believers directly to the helpful saints and the Suffering Savior that waited for them in the world of the almost-always invisible.

The cult of the Passion, while sharing, in its own way, the dynamic of Reciprocated Devotion, was also marked by the dynamic of Supra-Sacramental Sight.<sup>48</sup> Viewing Christ as he was on the cross, whether by gazing at a crucifix, watching the crucifix come alive, meditating on the gory details of the crucifixion or seeing it in bodily or ghostly sight, or receiving a visit from Christ in which he showed one his wounds were all ways in which Christ's death became a real event rather than mere abstract dogma to the minds of late medieval people.<sup>49</sup>

### *Vision and veneration*

The first aspect of vision and the crucifixion was that of veneration, for the crucifix was first of all an object of veneration. Aquinas believed that meditation on God's divinity was the best incentive to love and

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<sup>48</sup> The cult of saints also participated in the idea of Supra-Sacramental Sight, but to a lesser degree and with much less complexity and variety than the cult of the Passion.

<sup>49</sup> See Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* for detailed discussion of the Passion, the crucifixion, and the Eucharist in vernacular devotional writings.

devotion, but recognized that the weakness of the human mind required ‘sensible objects’ to lead to love of the divine. He regarded the *humanitas Christi* as the most effective of these objects. When Aquinas differentiated between the *hyperdulia* due to Christ’s humanity and the *latria* due to his divinity, he accorded *latria* to the cross, for he associated the cross with the divinity of Christ.<sup>50</sup> This veneration could take many forms, from quiet contemplation to the dramatic lavishing of attention.<sup>51</sup> An example of the latter was included in the Middle English life of St. Elizabeth of Spalbeck:

An then anon is taken to hir a tabil, ful wele depeynte with an ymage of our lorde crucifyed; and holdyng that open and vncouer with booth handys, ful deuoutly she lokith on oure lorde, and often and thikke sche seith these woordys: ‘youche here, youche heere’, that is to sey in Englysche: swete loord, swete lord, and with hire clene virgyn-lippys she kysseth often sweetly the feet of oure lordis ymage... After that sche lokith euene in the same ymage with alle the intente of hir mynde. And a litil after, whanne she has tasted, as it is trowed, the vnspekabil swetnesse of his passyone: forth-with, as sche is wonte, sche is rauesched and waxes alle starke, holdynge the tabil as sche didde byfore; and othere-while her lippes are ioyned to the feet of the crucifix, and hir necke and hir heed a litil reryd fro the grounde, as accordith to a kyssynge.<sup>52</sup>

Veneration of the cross took place not only in private moments but also in public, liturgical events. It was, of course, the central focus of the Good Friday liturgy. The veiled crucifix was carried into the church while the people sang the “Improperia,” and was then uncovered while the priest intoned, “Behold the wood of the cross, on which hung the Saviour of the world. Come, let us worship.” Then the worshippers crept forward barefoot on bended knees to kiss the crucifix.<sup>53</sup> Beholding was critical to venerating.

<sup>50</sup> *ST* II:82:3 and II:104:4.

<sup>51</sup> For a discussion of the development of devotion to the cross from the sixth century onwards, see Salter, “Nicholas Love’s ‘Myrrour,’” pp. 119–129 in the context of a growing emphasis on the humanity of Christ. See also Ellen M. Ross, *The Grief of God: Images of the Suffering Jesus in Late Medieval England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>52</sup> Horstmann, “Prosalegenden,” p. 110. For discussion, see Vincent Gillespie, “Strange Images of Death: The Passion in Later Medieval English Devotional and Mystical Writing,” *Zeit, Tod und Ewigkeit in der Renaissance Literatur*, vol. 3 (Salzburg, 1987), pp. 113–115.

<sup>53</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 29.

*Vision and empathy*

Intricately intertwined with veneration of the crucifix was empathy for the sufferings of Christ. Gazing at the crucifix was meant to evoke an affective response. The Franciscans, of course, contributed to this late medieval emphasis on the vulnerable, pain-enduring humanity of Christ.<sup>54</sup> As part of their “tendency...to find a language of literal objectification for all kinds of spiritual experience,” they, according to John Fleming, “attempt to keep always before their eyes an image of the crucified Christ in vivid verisimilitude.”<sup>55</sup> In his history of the order, John Moorman writes, “The most characteristic feature of the mysticism which stems from St. Francis, and owes much to his example, is its devotion to the person of the incarnate Christ and its self-identification with him, especially in his sufferings.”<sup>56</sup> Meditation on the cross was meant to produce an emotional response of love. Late medieval English religious lyrics dedicated to the Passion illustrate the depths of love and sorrow that were stirred by meditating on the crucifix. The lyrics would sometimes accompany images such as the Man of Sorrows, serving as aids to devotion. One such lyric from the early fourteenth-century and extant in several versions, reflected on the rood that was at the top of the rood screen in the church:

Whan I see on rode i-don  
 Jhesus my lemman,  
 And by him stonden  
 Marie and Iohan,  
 His herte depe i-stongen,  
 His body wyth scourge i-swongen  
 For the synne of man:  
 Ethe I may wepe  
 And salte teres lete  
 If I of love can.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> They were also not the first to encourage the use of images of Christ in leading to love of his humanity. Gregory the Great, in his letter to Secundinus (Ep. ix, 52) had written, “Your request [for images] pleases us greatly, since you seek with all your heart and all intentness Him, whose picture you wish to have before your eyes, so that, being so accustomed to the daily corporeal sight, when you see an image of Him you are inflamed in your soul by love to Him Whose picture you wish to see. We do no harm in wishing to show the invisible by means of the visible.” Translated by Ringbom, “Icon,” p. 12 from *PL*, 77, cols. 990f.

<sup>55</sup> Fleming, *An Introduction to the Franciscan Literature of the Middle Ages*, p. 251.

<sup>56</sup> Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, p. 256.

<sup>57</sup> Robert D. Stevick, ed., *One Hundred Middle English Lyrics* (Urbana: University of

Other lyrics elaborated the symptoms that meditation on the visual details of the Passion could engender:

Loverd thi passion,  
 Who the thenchet arist tharon,  
 teres hit tollet,  
 and eyen hit bollet,  
 nebbes hit wetet,  
 ant hertes hit swetet.<sup>58</sup>

This affective piety influenced the visions of at least two of the late medieval English visionaries. Julian of Norwich was not satisfied with merely meditating on the crucifix, whether in her imagination or a painted version; she yearned for a bodily vision of Christ's Passion:

Me thought I wolde haue bene that tyme with Mary Mawdeleyne and with othere that were Crystes loverse, that I myght have sene bodylye the passionn of oure lorde that he sufferede for me, that I myght have sufferede with hym as othere dyd that lovyd hym not withstanding that I leevyd sadlye alle the peynes of Cryste as halye kyrke schewys and techys, and also the payntyngys of crucyfixes that er made be the grace of god aftere the techyng of haly kyrke to the lyknes of Crystes passyonn, als farfurthe as man ys witte maye reche.<sup>59</sup>

Her stated reason for wanting to see his Passion was so that she could suffer with him as those who were in attendance at the crucifixion were able to do. Julian's wish was granted with several revelations of various aspects of the Passion.

Margery Kempe also had many visions of the Passion.<sup>60</sup> She recorded how at the Mount of Calvary, the most appropriate site possible for such a vision:

Sche had so very contemplacyon in the sygth of hir s[owle] as yf Crist had hangyn befor hir bodily eye in hys manhode. &, whan thorw dispensacyon of the hy mercy of owyr Souereyn Savyowr Crist Ihesu it was grawntyd this creatur to beholdyn so verily hys precyows tendyr body, alto-rent & toryn wyth scorgys, mor ful of wowndys than euyr was duffehows of holys, hangyng vp-on the cros wyth the corown of thorn up-on hys heuyd, hys blysful handys, hys tendyr fete nayled to the hard tre, the

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Illinois Press, 1964), p. 22.

<sup>58</sup> Rosemary Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 20. The lyric is included in three thirteenth or early fourteenth manuscripts.

<sup>59</sup> *JN*, pp. 201–202.

<sup>60</sup> The ones that took place in the context of her journeys to the Biblical Past are discussed in chapter 1.



reuerys of blood flowyng owt plentevowsly of euery membre, the gresly & grevows wownde in hys precyows syde schedyng owt blood & watyr for hir lofe & hir saluacyon...<sup>61</sup>

The reference to a dove house full of holes shows the influence of Richard Rolle who, although not a Franciscan friar, contributed to the popularization of affective piety.<sup>62</sup> Together with the graphic details about Christ's wounds and blood, it showed the impact of the empathetic piety on medieval visions of Christ. Margery, upon seeing this vision, fell to the ground, crying in a loud voice, writhing and spreading her arms wide. The visual impact of the experience stimulated a whole body reaction. She asked how anyone seeing a friend "takyn in her sygth," brought before a judge, and condemned to death, could remain unmoved. The vivid immediacy of 'seeing' Christ's crucifixion, rather than merely thinking about it as a concept was what triggered the outburst of emotion in Margery. A similar vision occurred when Margery was in contemplation in a Lady Chapel, "hyr thowt verily that <she> saw owr Lord aperyng to hir gostly syght in hys manhod with hys wowndys bledyng as fresch as thow he had ben scorgyd be-forne hir."<sup>63</sup> It caused her to weep in sorrow and increased her love "to-owr-Lord-ward," exactly the type of result that meditation on the crucifix was intended to induce.<sup>64</sup>

These visions were extensions of meditation. What was seen by visionary sight was exactly what could be seen in meditation promoted by the Church, enacted in religious plays, and painted or sculpted in the rood. What differed was the process by which it was seen, a way of seeing that was beyond imagination and which the visionary claimed was granted from above. Here devotion involving images led directly to visionary experience and then to empathy, all of which were part of the dynamic of visual devotion.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>61</sup> *MK*, p. 70 (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 291, citing Richard Rolle, *English Writings of Richard Rolle: Hermit of Ham-pole*, ed. Hope Allen, p. 35: "Efte, swet Jhesu, thy body is like to a dufhouse. For a dufhouse is ful of holys, so is thy body ful of woundes..."

<sup>63</sup> *MK*, p. 207 (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>64</sup> These crimson glimpses of the Passion come frequently to Margery. See *MK*, pp. 138, 140, 151, 176, 187.

<sup>65</sup> For further discussion of the role of empathetic suffering in the visions of the

*Visual Stimulus to Repentance*

Another aspect of the dynamic of devotion present in the cult of the Passion was that of the link between visual spirituality and repentance. According to Fleming, one of the characteristics of the Franciscans, along with their “schematic contemplation of the physical Passion of Christ” was their “insistence on penance.”<sup>66</sup> Meditation on the former could lead to the latter. A penitential lyric (a variation of one quoted above) from a Franciscan manuscript makes a connection between the two:

*Whanne ic se on Rode*  
*Jesu, my lemman*  
*And besiden him stonden*  
*Marye & Johan,*  
*And his rig iswongen*  
*And his side istungen*  
*For the luv of man,*  
*Well ou ic to wepen,*  
*And sinnes for to leten,*  
*Yif ic of luv can,*  
*Yif ic of luv can*  
*Yif ic of luv can.*<sup>67</sup>

It was *seeing* the rood that led one to repentance.

*Repentance as exchange of “privitees”*

The visionaries made a direct connection between God’s revealing his privities—the special, personal secrets, the intimate, loving aspects of his innermost being—and humans therefore being able to reveal their

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Passion of Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich, see Ellen Ross, “‘She wept and cried right loud for sorrow and for pain’: Suffering, the Spiritual Journey, and Women’s Experience in Late Medieval Mysticism,” in Ulrike Wiethaus, ed., *Maps of Flesh and Light: The Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1993), pp. 45–59.

<sup>66</sup> Fleming, *Introduction*, p. 241. He states that the Franciscans “made penance popular, and transformed its sacramental practice from what one scholar has called ‘a rare, perhaps even a dramatic event in the life of a Christian’ to a normal and habitual spiritual exercise performed by millions of ordinary laymen” (p. 168).

<sup>67</sup> Despres, “Franciscan Spirituality,” p. 24. Quoted from B.M. MS. Royal 12 E.; see Simon Tugwell, *Ways of Imperfection: An Exploration of Christian Spirituality* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1984), pp. 157–160 (italics added).

own privities to him. For humans, the latter process of revelation was synonymous with confession. Repentance was, therefore, an exchange of the human's privities in return for God's having revealed his privities in Christ. There was a sense in which visions and the sacrament of penance, particularly the stage of confession, were mirror opposites of one another. Confession revealed the hidden sin of the human. Visions revealed the hidden glories of God.

One vision account in *Middle English Sermons* showed how the appearance of Christ, particularly when exhibiting his wounds, could link the Passion and penance. It did so in a way in which the Passion would elicit penance directly as a reciprocation of devotion.<sup>68</sup> A woman was too ashamed to confess a deadly sin. Christ, aware that she could be damned for that sin, came to her one night as she lay in bed. He asked her if she knew him, and she said, "Yee, me thenketh that thou arte he that died vppon the Rode Tree for me and for all mankend." Christ told her to put her hand in his side, but she said that she was unworthy. He said, "I bid the that thou do so, for I shall shewe the my priuetees." So she put her hand in and thought that she felt Christ's heart, lungs, and everything that was inside him. Then Christ said to her, "Loo, dowgter, thou hast feled and seeyn my herte and all my prevetees. Why arte thou aschamed to shewe me thin herte more than I am to shewe the myn herte blode that I shede for the?" She awoke and discovered that her hand was blood red. No matter how much she washed it, the redness would not wash away. Then she remembered Christ's words, went to her confessor, and was shriven. When her tears fell on her hand, the redness washed away.<sup>69</sup>

The visionary had the privilege of knowing God's privities in the most literal fashion. She was allowed to touch his innermost parts, his very heart, entering through the wounds he suffered when he was pierced for her transgressions. It was a poignant, tangible embodiment of the cost paid to make it possible for a human being to be able to

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<sup>68</sup> The linking of repentance with the revelation of God's privities had a parallel in the sacraments of penance and the Mass, both of which were required annually for the medieval layperson. The Eucharist, in a sense, was the tangible expression of God's privities to each recipient, and penance was the ritual in which the medieval person revealed her privities to God. Thus, the linking of these two sacraments invited each medieval layperson into an exchange of privities with Christ.

<sup>69</sup> *MES*, pp. 216–217 (Woodburn O. Ross, ed., *Middle English Sermons*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1998]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

have access to God's privities. Like St. Thomas, who was considered a hero in the Late Middle Ages,<sup>70</sup> she was allowed to bolster her faith by touching the wounds. Margery Kempe offered a fascinating insight into the yearning for this tangible aspect of late medieval piety when, in describing one of her contemplations, she commented that she could not understand how Mary could have been joyful after having been told not to touch Christ's feet:

And than the creatur thowt that Mary went forth wyth gret joye, & that was gret merueyl to hir that Mary enioyd, for, yyf owr Lord had seyde to hir as he dede to Mary, hir thowt sche cowde neuyr a ben mery. That was whan sche wolde a kysyd hys feet, & he seyde, 'Towche me not.' The creatur had so gret swem & heuynes in that worde that euyr whan sche herd it in any sermown, as sche dede many tymys, sche wept, sorwyd, & cryid as sche xulde a deyde for lofe & desir that sche had to ben wyth owr Lord.<sup>71</sup>

When Christ appeared to saints in saints' legends he usually did not draw attention to his Passion but rather came to feed, rescue, and comfort them when they were in trouble. When he appeared to non-saints, however, he came as the Passion incarnate. It was almost as if he had just stepped down from the rood even when there was no rood in sight. These visions demonstrate the longing for the sensible, tangible aspects of worship of Christ which meditation on the crucifix fostered.

Seeing Christ in his Passion, however, was not intended merely to produce a change of heart. The repentance was supposed to lead to changed moral behavior as well. Religious lyrics discouraged the seven deadly sins by connecting them to the five wounds.<sup>72</sup> On the other side of the coin, such meditation on the cross encouraged good behavior such as giving gifts to the poor:

Thorug my lifthond a nail was dryue—  
Thenke thou theron if thou wolt lyue,  
And helpe the pore with almesdede,  
If thou in heuene wolt haue thi mede.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion*, pp. 16–18.

<sup>71</sup> *MK*, p. 197 (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>72</sup> Woolf, *English Religious Lyric*, p. 224.

<sup>73</sup> Carleton Brown, ed. *Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1924), p. 227. See also Woolf, *Lyric*, p. 224.

*Vision and judgment*

In the didactic visions related to the Passion, however, Christ's appearance as his 'Passion-ate' self did not always lead to positive changes. When rebellion rather than shy reluctance interfered with repentance, the blood of the 'Passion-ate' Christ brought judgment rather than release. Mirk told of two men living near Norwich. One man was good, the other evil. The evil one refused to do penance, fell sick, and lay on his deathbed. The good man tried to persuade him to confess, but he refused. At midnight, Christ appeared at the sick man's bedside, his wounds bleeding, and told him to ask for mercy, but the man refused. Then Christ dipped his own hand into the open wound in his side. Christ told the unrepentant man that his refusal to accept mercy would haunt him at the time of judgment, for he would be marked by Christ's blood. He then cast the blood into his face and the sick man screamed, "Alas! Alas! I am dampnet for ay!" and died. The other man, who had witnessed the encounter, was so terrified that he could not move. When at last he lit a candle, he found the dead man with blood streaked across his face and his body blackened, the latter a sign that his soul was in hell.<sup>74</sup> The vision indicated that it was not enough to be brought into a direct encounter with Christ; one's heart attitude and response were critical. An inappropriate response to Christ's offer of mercy resulted in judgment.

*Animation of the crucifix*

Another type of vision related to visual images of the Passion involved the animation of the crucifix. Like appearances of Christ, the animated crucifix could be either positive or negative. In one account in *Jacob's Well*, it brought opprobrium. The preacher told of a man who was habitually tardy to church and noisy during the services. He died, and while his body was lying on the bier in church and the clerks were singing "Placebo & Dirige" for his soul, "the crucifix on the bere loosyd his handys fro the crosse, & stoppyd his eerys wyth his handys. The peple seyng this & merueyledyn sore." The priest asked God what it

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<sup>74</sup> *F*, pp. 91–92. (Theodor Erbe, ed., *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies*. E.E.T.S. [1905; Kraus reprint, 1987]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

meant, and a voice responded, “Myn ymage on the cros stoppyth his erys, to schewe you that I, god, stoppe myn erys in heuen, that I here no prayere, prayed for hym in holy cherche. Therefore, prayeth no more for hym, for he is dampnyd.”<sup>75</sup>

In yet another polemical Jew-conversion narrative, an initially negative reaction from the crucifix prompted repentance.<sup>76</sup> The *Festial* told of a Jew who came to a church and seeing no one inside, marched up to the rood, and out of envy, cut the throat of the crucifix Christ with a sword. Blood spurted out all over his clothes, and when he saw himself covered with blood, he was frightened and took the rood and hid it in a private place. As he traveled home he ran into a Christian who saw the blood on his clothing, accused him of murder, and asked him what he had done with the body. The Jew confessed and became a holy man.<sup>77</sup>

In several of the visions of the animated crucifix, honor rather than condemnation was bestowed upon the visionary. The liturgical veneration of the cross, as discussed above, provided the setting for a story told by both *Jacob's Well* and the *Festial* of a knight who slew the father of another knight. The wronged knight granted the guilty knight mercy. On the following Good Friday, they went forward together during the creeping to the cross, and when the merciful knight kissed the cross, the crucifix “halsyd hym abowtyn hys necke, & seyde, ‘Thou forgyue this knygt thi faderis deth for my loue, & kyssed hym; therfore I forgeue the alle thi synnes & kysse the.’”<sup>78</sup> Christ's words referred directly to

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<sup>75</sup> *JW*, p. 110 (Arthur Brandeis, ed., *Jacob's Well*. [1900, reprinted 1999]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>76</sup> See Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales* for the impact of a related category of vision stories—the ones involving desecration of the Eucharist—on Christian-Jewish relations throughout Europe.

<sup>77</sup> *F*, p. 252. These visions indicated that it was not necessary for the visionary to be a believer or to be worshipping the image on the rood in order for the image to come to life. These vision accounts also paralleled those in the cult of the saints that showed the negative consequences of not participating in the dynamic of Reciprocated Devotion. They were, however, even more serious than the ones in the cult of the saints, for one's eternal destiny was influenced, if not determined, by how one participated in Reciprocated Devotion in the cult of the Passion.

<sup>78</sup> *JW*, p. 252 (Arthur Brandeis, ed., *Jacob's Well*. E.E.T.S. [1900, reprinted 1999]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society). Mirk's version says, “Then, when thys knygt com crepyng to the cros and kyssyd the fete, the ymage losyd his armes, and clyppyd the knygt about the necke, and kyssyd hym, and sayde thus that all the chyrch herd: ‘I forgeue the, as thow hast forgeuen for me’” (*F*, p. 124 [Theodor Erbe, ed., *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies*. E.E.T.S. (1905; Kraus reprint, 1987); by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf

the devotion of the knight, pointing out that his actions were taken for the love of Christ. Christ made it clear that it was because of this that he, in return, would forgive him and kiss him. Margery Kempe seemed to have been familiar with this story, for referring to her early post-conversion years, she explained, “Sche was smet wyth the dedly wound of veynglory & felt it not, for sche desyryd many tymes that the Crucifix xuld losyn hys handys fro the crosse & halsyn hir in tokyn of lofe.”<sup>79</sup> It is possible that the reason why Margery considered her desire vainglorious was that she associated ‘halsying’ by the crucifix with the bestowal of honor and therefore in hindsight analyzed her desire as vainglorious, although at the time she ‘felt it not.’ Another didactic vision in which the crucifix bestowed honor was told in the *Speculum Sacerdotale*. A notary and his master visited the temple of St. Sophie. As they stood before the rood, the master noted how the eyes of the image stared steadfastly on the notary. He made the young man stand to his right, and the image turned his eyes and gazed at the notary on that side as well. The master asked what the notary had done to deserve the image of Christ gazing at him, and he said that he had not denied Christ before the devil.<sup>80</sup> In this case the Reciprocated Devotion was returned by the one normally gazed upon, returning that gaze as a token of favor. Thus the visual aspect of the dynamic of Reciprocated Devotion could go both ways in the cult of the Passion.

#### *Vision and protection from demons*

As discussed in chapter 3, the dynamic of Reciprocated Devotion formed a nexus with that of Spiritual Warfare in the category of visions in which the cult of the Passion provided protection from the demonic. For Mirk, the rood was an important reminder of the power of thinking on the cross in protecting one from demons:

For as Saynt Austyn sayde: ‘The mynde of Cristis passion is the best defence agens temptacions of the fende.’ Herefor ben roodes sett on hey in holy chirch, and so by sygt therof haue mynd of Cristis passion.<sup>81</sup>

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of the Council of the Early English Text Society)).

<sup>79</sup> *MK*, p. 14.

<sup>80</sup> *SS*, p. 152.

<sup>81</sup> *F*, p. 171 (Theodor Erbe, ed., *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies*. E.E.T.S. [1905; Kraus reprint, 1987]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

Focusing on the rood on the top of the rood screen in one's local parish church could serve as a reminder of the sign that would help one when attacked by demons.

*The eucharistic gaze*

Gazing at images of saints was important. Gazing at the Passion was critical. The third type of gaze encouraged in the Late Middle Ages, the eucharistic gaze, was salvific. It was, of course, integrally, theologically allied with the Passion. Gazing at the crucifix was a means to an end, a form of meditation intended to lead one on to the worship of the divinity of Christ, to an affective response, or to repentance and a change in moral behavior. Gazing at the Eucharist, however, was an end in itself. By the Late Middle Ages simply seeing the Eucharist had become, although not officially, both sacramental and apotropaic.<sup>82</sup> Thomas Becon, one of the sixteenth-century Reformers, complained that the people:

Beleue that bread, which the priest heaueth aboue hys head to be Christ perfect God and perfect man. Therfore knele they down vnto it, knocke their breastes, lift vp their handes, worship and honour it. When the Bell once ryngs (if they can not conueniently see) they forsake their seates and runne from altare to altare, from Sakering to Sakering, peeping here and touting ther, and gasing at that thing, which the pilde-pate Priest holdeth vp in hys handes. And if the Priest be weake in the armes, and heaue not vp hye ynough, the rude people of the country in diuers partes of England wyll crye out to the Priest, holde vp, Sir John, holde vp. Heaue it a littel hyer. And one wil say to another: Stoupe downe, thow fellowe afore, that I may see my maker: for I can not be mery, except I see my Lorde God once in a day.<sup>83</sup>

The adoration of the sacrament at the moment of elevation was approved by the Church, and it may be termed properly the eucharistic gaze. Many believed the sight of the Eucharist to be sacramentally

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<sup>82</sup> According to Miri Rubin, the debate amongst the theologians over the sacramental nature of viewing the sacrament had found its solution in the Sentences of Alexander Hales c. 1222 when Hales differentiated between *manducatio per gustum* and *manducatio per visum*, granting only the former sacramental status (Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 64). See Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 95–102.

<sup>83</sup> Quoted by Leah Sinanoglou, "The Christ Child as Sacrifice: A Medieval Tradition and the Corpus Christi Plays," *Speculum* 48 (1973): 498 from The Worckes of Thomas Becon, Part III (London, 1563), folio 44.



efficacious.<sup>84</sup> In general, the laity received the Host only once a year, on Easter. The rest of the time, they were limited to seeing it. The moment when it was visible to the congregation coincided with the most important part of the liturgy, the point at which the priest intoned, “Hoc est corpus meum.” The doctrine of transubstantiation taught that that was the time in which the Host turned into the body and blood of Christ and Christ became truly present. It is thus not surprising that seeing the moment of elevation took on such prominence in the spirituality of the laity. This moment also became the focus for many visions.

*Unbelieving eucharistic sight*

In most eucharistic visions the Host either bled or took on the form of a child.<sup>85</sup> Not all of these, however, required the visionary to be staring at the sacrament with a eucharistic gaze of belief. In fact, many of the eucharistic miracles occurred for the very purpose of bringing the visionary to a place of belief, using the age-old principle of ‘seeing is believing.’ Mirk told the well-known story of *The Mass of St. Gregory*, which was first recorded in the eighth-century *Vita* of St. Gregory by Paul the Deacon and eventually became part of the thirteenth-century *Legenda Aurea*.<sup>86</sup> In Mirk’s version, a woman named Lasma made the bread for the Mass. One day, when St. Gregory performed the Mass for the people, he came to her and said, ‘Take here Godis body,’ but she smiled inappropriately rather than taking the Host. The pope asked the people to pray to God for a miracle so that the woman might be helped to turn from her unbelief. When they had prayed, Gregory went to the altar and found the Host had been transformed to raw, bleeding flesh, which he showed the woman. And she believed. After further prayer, the flesh turned back into bread. And this time, the woman participated in the communion.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Miri Rubin writes of “widespread understandings entertained by the laity that gazing was as good as reception” (Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 150).

<sup>85</sup> For further discussion of eucharistic visions, see Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind*, pp. 13–18 and Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 102–107.

<sup>86</sup> Rubin, *Corpus*, p. 121.

<sup>87</sup> *F*, p. 173; *SS*, p. 39. For an analysis of the role of Christ’s blood in popular piety, see John C. Hirsh, *The Boundaries of Faith: The Development and Transmission of Medieval Spirituality in Studies in the History of Christian Thought*, vol. 67 (New York: E.J. Brill, 1996), pp. 91–110.

Another version, in the *South English Legendary*, said that there were many laypeople in Rome who did not believe that the Sacrament became the Lord's "licame." Therefore, one day when St. Gregory broke a little of "Our Lord's flesh," it became a child's finger, running with blood.<sup>88</sup> Another example, in *Middle English Sermons*, involved a clerk, who, on his way to the Easter Mass, agreed to return to a Jew afterwards to speak with him. When he returned, there was a crowd of Jews waiting to harm him. An angel comforted him and said that God would defend him. The Jews bound him and cut into him, presumably to find the Host. Crowds came out from the church. The Host became a child and spoke to the people and then became the Host again, and the clerk was healed. As a result, many were converted.<sup>89</sup> In all of these, the Host's transformation into a visual, literal representation of the Real Presence brought salvific belief. A doctrine had become a living picture.

In another didactic vision, the picture turned into a mini-drama. *Handlyng Synne* told of a man who was generous to the poor but did not believe in the Real Presence. He informed two abbots that he would not believe in the doctrine until he saw it with his own eyes. The abbots prayed for a week that God would appear "Yn flesshe & blode on the autere / To conferme hys beleue clere." The man also prayed, saying:

Lord...for no mys beleue  
That thou shuldest wyth me the greue,  
But for to shewe the ryght sothnesse  
That thou art the sacrament of the messe,  
That y may make outhere certeyn  
Whan y wyth yen haue the sen.<sup>90</sup>

The man explicitly stated that he would be better able to make others believe once he had seen it with his own eyes. On the seventh night, the abbots brought the man to the church:

Whan the vbble was on the autere leyd  
And the prest the wrdes had seyde,  
All thre thocht than verreylyk  
Byfor the prest that a chyld lay quyke  
Yn feyr forme of flesshe & blode:  
Thys saye they thre there they stode.

<sup>88</sup> *SEL*, p. 84.

<sup>89</sup> *MES*, pp. 63–65.

<sup>90</sup> *HS*, pp. 250.

Whan the prest shuld parte the sacrament,  
 An aungel down fro heuen was sent  
 And sacryfied the chyld ryght thare:  
 As the prest hyt brak, the aungel hyt share.  
 The blode yn to the chalys ran...<sup>91</sup>

Here the image was not a static one but rather a small drama in which the Passion was symbolically reenacted.<sup>92</sup> In addition, the body was partially separated into the two communion elements, the blood running into the chalice,<sup>93</sup> and the flesh placed on the patten. At the houseling, the man thought that the priest brought on the patten:

Morselles of the chyld al newe sleyn,  
 And bedde hym a morsel of the flesshe  
 Wyth al the blode ther on al fresshe.  
 Than gan he crye wyth loud steuene,  
 ‘Mercy, goddes sone of heuene!  
 The bred that y sagh on the auter lye,  
 Hyt ys thy body, y se wyth ye.  
 Of the bred thurgh sacrament,  
 To flesshe & blode hyt ys al went.  
 Thys y beleue and eure y shall,  
 For verly we se hyt all.’<sup>94</sup>

Then it turned back into the form of bread again. As was the typical practice in the period, the man was brought only the bread, but the

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., pp. 250–251.

<sup>92</sup> Margery Kempe seems to have been familiar with this story or similar ones, for when in the choir of St. Margaret, she had a vision of Christ lying before her, facing upward close beside her. Then she saw someone come with a “baselard-knyfe to hir syght & kytt that precyows body al on long in the brest” (*MK*, p. 208 [Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. (1940, reprinted 1961, 1982); by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society]).

<sup>93</sup> Mirk told another story that involved blood running into a chalice. A bishop oversaw several clerks who did not believe in transubstantiation, so the bishop prayed to God for their theology to be corrected. One day during the Mass, he observed blood dripping down from the Host into the chalice. He pointed it out to the clerks, and when they saw the blood they were frightened into believing. They asked the bishop to pray “to hym that thou hast ther in thi hondys” for mercy. The sacrament turned into bread again, and from then on the clerks believed properly (*F*, pp. 170–171 [Theodor Erbe, ed., *Mirk’s Festial: A Collection of Homilies*. E.E.T.S. (1905; Kraus reprint, 1987); by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society]).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. (Theodor Erbe, ed., *Mirk’s Festial: A Collection of Homilies*. E.E.T.S. [1905; Kraus reprint, 1987]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society]).

“blode ther on al fresshe” might serve as a visual representation of the belief that the entire sacrament was present in each element. The “y se wyth ye” was transformed to “For veryly we se hyt all” as one man’s vision became everyman’s in the retelling.

Eamon Duffy points out that visions of the bleeding Host came only to unbelievers, both those who were hostile to the Christian faith as a whole and those who merely doubted the efficacy of the sacrament. The Host as child came to those who already believed in the sacrament.<sup>95</sup> It is perhaps ironic that in an age in which meditation on the gory details of the Passion were being encouraged for believers, stories of visions of the bleeding Host were routinely connected with unbelief.

### *Believing eucharistic sight*

On the other hand, the non-gory visions, the ones that stemmed from the believing eucharistic gaze came as tokens of honor or as comfort rather than as exhortation to believe in the Real Presence. Caxton told of a time when St. Edward the Confessor was in the church of St. Paul at Westminster, hearing Mass. Earl Leofric was kneeling behind the king and saw with his “bodily eyes” the Lord Jesus Christ appear between the priest’s hands, looking like a beautiful child and blessing the king. After the Mass, the earl and the king talked about the vision. Here two men who were gazing at the sacrament at the moment of elevation, were rewarded by the sight of Christ in the Eucharist, although the story, because it was written as part of the saint’s life, was, of course, told as if the Earl was merely witnessing the honor bestowed on the saint.<sup>96</sup> As we saw earlier, King Henry VI was reputed to have seen Christ at the moment of elevation as well.

Margery Kempe reflected this in a vision she experienced at the moment of elevation:

On a day as this creatur was heryng hir Messe, a yong man and a good prest heldyng up the Sacrament in hys handys ouyr hys hed, the Sacrament schok & flekeryd to & fro as a dowe flekeryth wyth hir wengys. &, whan he held up the chalys wyth the precyows Sacrament, the chalys mevyd to & fro as it xuld a fallyn owt of hys handys.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 105.

<sup>96</sup> *GL*, vol. 6, p. 19.

<sup>97</sup> *MK*, p. 47 (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery*

It is not clear whether she believed that she saw the sacrament take on the form of a dove or whether, as is more likely, it merely moved like a dove. What is clear, however, is that she regarded it as an honor. She heard the Lord say to her, “My dowtyr, Bryde, say me neuyr in this wyse,”<sup>98</sup> making a direct comparison to her much-admired St. Bridget’s visionary powers. Here is perhaps the clearest example of Margery’s autohagiography and competitiveness in the arena of spiritual ways of seeing. Even if Margery genuinely believed that the Lord had made the statement to her—and it is quite possible that she did believe it—the fact that she repeated it to anyone was evidence of spiritual one-up-manship. She seemed to be well aware that non-bloody visions of the Eucharist were marks of honor on the visionary. Margery was also eager to see the sacrament move again:

Whan the Sacre was don, this creatur had gret merueyle of the steryng & mevyng of the blyssed Sacrament, desyryng to se mor Sacreys & lokyng yf it wold don so a-gen. Than seyde owyr Lord Ihesu Crist to the creatur, ‘Thow xalt no mor sen it in this maner, therfor thank God that thow hast seyn.’<sup>99</sup>

Her once-in-a-lifetime moment of eucharistic honor had to suffice.

#### *Encounters with Christ in the Eucharist*

Most laypeople never had such a moment. Yet, although most medieval laypersons never had visions of the Passion or the Eucharist, there was a sense in which all of them believed they had direct encounters with the crucified Christ. The doctrine of the Real Presence taught that Christ was present in the transubstantiated elements. Since the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 required that all the laity receive communion once a year, there was an annual opportunity for each layperson to have a tangible encounter with Christ. The didactic visions of the Passion and especially of the Eucharist supported the belief that Christ was truly present, particularly at and after the moment of consecration. This made the Eucharist a parallel experience to the deathbed

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*Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

scene. Both were occasions in which the laity could be sure that the otherworld was present with them in a special way, even though usually unseen.<sup>100</sup>

*The concretizing gaze*

In addition to Passion-ate gazing and eucharistic gazing, there were modes of sacramental and Supra-Sacramental Seeing that can be termed ‘concretizing gazes.’ They were visions in which spirits and spiritual concepts took on visible, ‘concrete’ form.

*Concretizing of spirit / Spirit*

A very common group of visions involved doves and operated with the mechanism that gave something that was normally spirit and invisible a physical, visible form. There were two sets of doves, those that were the spirits of deceased human beings and the Dove, which was the Holy Spirit.

When it occurred in visions, the most frequent venue for the presence of a ‘human’ dove was the moment of a saint’s death, particularly at martyrdoms. Often the saint’s soul would fly out of the corpse’s mouth or throat and wing its way to heaven amidst great light, angelic hosts, and often accompanied by a voice from heaven. Sometimes, at the moment of death, the Holy Spirit would fly down to the saint as a dove. At St. Margaret of Antioch’s death both occurred. In the *South English Legendary*, a white dove flew down from heaven and blessed her and promised her the immediacy of heaven to follow her martyrdom. The dove flew back to its heavenly home. Then, at her death, a white dove flew out from her and went up to heaven.<sup>101</sup>

The more common vision, however, presented the dove as the Holy Spirit rather than as a human spirit. In the *Festial*, it was the Holy Spirit as dove who fed St. Gregory the words to write<sup>102</sup> and who supplied the sweet-smelling “creem” at the font-hallowing for the baptism of

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<sup>100</sup> G.J.C. Snoek has explored another parallel, that between the Eucharist and relics, which supports another connection, that between the presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the presence of the saints in their relics / images. *Medieval Piety from Relics to the Eucharist: A Process of Mutual Interaction* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995).

<sup>101</sup> *SEL*, p. 301.

<sup>102</sup> *F*, pp. 162–163.

Louis, the King of France.<sup>103</sup> In the *South English Legendary*, the dove designated St. Fabian as pope,<sup>104</sup> fed St. Catherine in prison,<sup>105</sup> and flew down with a message for the Pope about the location of St. Kenelm's corpse.<sup>106</sup> The dove fed St. Edmund of Canterbury the Eucharist so that he became an expert on the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>107</sup>

In several visions the presence and absence of the dove indicated the spiritual state of a sinner. In *Handlyng Synne*, in a story from the *Vitas Patrum*, a dove flew out of a monk's mouth when he became involved in sexual sin. A hermit counseled the monk to perform bodily mortifications for three weeks. At the end of the first week, the monk saw the dove flying in the sky above him. At the close of the second week, he saw the dove right in front of his face. But it was not until the end of the third week that the dove sat on the monk's head and then flew back into his mouth.<sup>108</sup> *Handlyng Synne* also told how each time that Chrysostom sang Mass, a white dove attended, except for awhile when Chrysostom's deacon's attention was drawn lustfully to a demon disguised as a woman. The dove returned only when the deacon had repented.<sup>109</sup> In both these visions the normally invisible Spirit being made visible brought the presence or absence of the Holy Spirit to the attention of the visionary. And thus the visionary was given the opportunity literally to see the results of sin. This type of seeing fell into the first Augustinian category since the spirit had taken on a corporeal form so that the visionary was seeing something corporeal.

The dove visions involved the visionary seeing normally invisible spirits. This dichotomy of spirit and body, of the incorporeal and the corporeal, so essential to medieval cosmology, anthropology, and theology, was momentarily overcome. The incorporeal was made corporeal, without lowering itself. It was not an incarnation, for it was not a case of the divine taking on human nature. Rather it was the Spirit taking on a visual and symbolic appearance. It is perhaps ironic that people gave such honor to making the intangible tangible when so much

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>104</sup> *SEL*, p. 16.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 539.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 287.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 501.

<sup>108</sup> *HS*, pp. 7–11.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., pp. 221–222.

of mysticism and neo-Platonism pushed so hard in the other direction towards escaping sensory perception and moving into the realm of pure intellect or spirit.

*Concretizing of spiritual states*

In some visions, the sight seen was not a spirit but instead a spiritual concept, and thus instead of concretizing what was normally invisible spirit, they concretized abstract ideas. In them sight became insight. As with the visions in which the Dove-Spirit flew away from sinners, two particular visions revealed what was usually unknown, a person's true spiritual state. In *Speculum Sacerdotale*, an old man at a feast was watching people eat, and instead of seeing what they were actually eating, he saw "in his spirit" some of them eating honey, some bread, and some turds. He asked God for an explanation, and a voice told him that the different foods corresponded to the level of gratitude expressed by the people.<sup>110</sup> Along the same lines, *Handlyng Synne*, *Speculum Sacerdotale*, and the *Festial*, all told of a priest who asked God to show him who was worthy of receiving the Easter sacrament, and as people entered the church he saw some with red faces, others with black, some swollen. Later it was explained to him what each face signified.<sup>111</sup>

The concretizing visions were consonant with the sacramental core of medieval theology. There was an inherent irony to the sacraments. While the sacraments emphasized the greater importance of the spiritual realities they were intended to portray, they nonetheless honored material realities by catering to and acknowledging the value of the senses. While the Neo-Platonic vector of medieval spirituality aimed in the direction of escape from matter, another vector, that of the symbol, emphasized the importance to spirituality of sensory perception. Symbols by their very nature gave visual representation to invisible realities. Medieval visions overlapped with symbols, in some cases merely representing truths, and in others visibly and literally embodying spiritual realities. Visions, symbols, and sacraments shared an essential purpose, bringing as they did spiritual concepts and relationships into the realm of the perceptible senses.

<sup>110</sup> *SS*, p. 126.

<sup>111</sup> *HS*, pp. 254–255; *SS*, pp. 123–125 and *F*, pp. 131–132 tell a variation.



*Margery Kempe's vision-ized gaze*

Margery Kempe extensively used a fourth category of 'gazing,' namely 'visionized gazing.' There was no limit to the kind of subject that her gaze transformed into vision. She was so active in her pursuit of intimacy with God that virtually anything that connoted theological or liturgical meaning served as a trigger for her visionary experience. For her, images, crucifixes, and the Eucharist as well as other liturgical events and quotidian sights all served as springboards launching her from earthly to ghostly realms. She valued the instructions of such works as Nicholas Love's *Mirroure* and took them a step further into what she believed were divine rather than merely human experiences. What, for others, would have remained pious gazing was transformed by Margery Kempe into visionary or Supra-Sacramental Sight.

The liturgical calendar and rituals often acted as springboards for Margery. The Mass provided the occasion for the fluttering sacrament. At Candlemass, Margery stumbled like a drunken woman when she went up to offer her candle, for she was "raueschyd in-to beholding" the Virgin Mary presenting Christ at the Temple. On many a Palm Sunday while in procession, she saw the biblical crowds receiving Christ into Jerusalem. When a priest struck the church door with the cross-staff and entered with the sacrament with the people following him, Margery saw the Lord speaking to the Devil, opening hell's gates and delivering souls from hell. On Holy Thursday, again while in procession and "in her soul," she saw the Virgin, St. Mary Magdalene and the twelve apostles taking leave of Christ. On Good Friday, as the priest drew the cloth three times above the crucifix, "hir thowt that sche saw owr Lord Crist Ihesu as verily in hir sowle wyth hir gostly eye as sche had seyn be-forn the Crucifixe wyth hir bodily eye."<sup>112</sup>

Holy sites provided settings for visions as well. When Margery rode over the hill and caught her first glimpse of Jerusalem, she almost fell off her donkey because of the sweet dalliances that swept over her as she thought of the heavenly Jerusalem. At Christ's grave, she saw him being buried and the Virgin Mary sorrowing. At the grave, the Virgin spoke to her. At the Mount of Calvary, she saw Christ crucified. This led to

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<sup>112</sup> *MK*, pp. 198, 184, 186–187, 174, and 187 (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

her seeing visions of the Passion elsewhere as well, for, ever after, if she saw an injured man or beast, or a man beating a child or whipping an animal, she saw Christ being beaten and wounded. It was not only biblical settings and characters that appeared to her in relation to holy sights and sites. St. Jerome appeared to her at the site of his relics.<sup>113</sup>

An image also served to launch her into visions. When she traveled on her pilgrimage with a woman who clothed and kissed an image of Christ that she carried with her, Margery slipped into high meditations on the birth and childhood of Christ.<sup>114</sup> Seeing a poor mother and her baby child produced the same result, the Lord validating her holy thoughts by saying, “Thys place is holy.”<sup>115</sup> She had transformed a real-life scene into an icon, using an ordinary sight as a meditational aid.

Back in England, other sites and sights led to “sigts” for Margery. At the Abbey of Leicester, when the abbot and brethren approached her, she saw the Lord and his apostles coming towards her and had to lean against a pillar because she was “so raueschyd in-to contemplacyon wyth swetnes & deuocyon.” Lepers and wounded men brought sights of the Passion, “for thorw the beheldyng of the seke man hir mende was al takyn in-to owr Lord Ihesu Crist.” At one point in the narrative, Margery indicated that hearing holy books and holy sermons increased her contemplation and holy meditation.<sup>116</sup>

Towards the end of her *Boke*, almost everything began to launch her into experiencing the numinous. “So be processe of tyme hir mende & hir thowt was so ioynyd to God pat sche neuyr forgate hym but contynualy had mende of hym & behelde hym in alle creaturys.” If she saw a “prince, a prelat, er a worthy man of state,” her mind was “refreschyd in-to owr Lord.” When she saw the Sacrament being carried around town in procession and the crowds kneeling to it, then she had “many holy thowtys & meditacyonys.”<sup>117</sup> She had holy thoughts when someone was anointed, and when she saw someone dying she would see the Virgin Mary sorrowing over her son’s dying. There was a sense of progression in the narrative, as the ‘springboarding’ was carried through to its logical extreme, and eventually virtually anything

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., pp. 67, 73, 68, and 99.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 77. See Gibson, *Theater*, pp. 62–63.

<sup>115</sup> *MK*, p. 94 (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., pp. 117, 176, 144.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

acted as a means to translate Margery from earthly sight to ghostly vision. It was as if she no longer saw the earthly view as being enough in its own right.<sup>118</sup> Once the earthly had lifted her into the ghostly, she no longer heeded the earthly. At one point, when she was caught up into the sight of Christ's Ascension, she saw that "sche had forgetyn alle erdly thyngys & only ententyd to gostly thyngys." Thus Margery took religious instructions such as ones to visualize the Passion in the Good Friday liturgy, to associate saints with their images, to see the Real Presence in the Eucharist, and to see the spiritual in the physical, and used them to move herself beyond meditation and contemplation to what she believed to be the visionary.<sup>119</sup>

*When Deeper Reality Becomes the Surface: The Beatific Vision*

There were many medieval 'windows' into the world of God's privities. Windows allow light in and are thus welcome breaks in an otherwise seemingly impenetrable wall. Many medieval believers were aware, however, that even when gazing through a visionary window, they were looking through a glass darkly. It took special ways of 'seeing' to peer through those windows. As will be discussed in chapter 5, visions could be deceptive. And even when they were not demonic subterfuges, visions as ways of seeing and ways of knowing were fallible and less than perfect representations of spiritual realities. The Holy Spirit was far more than a dove. Symbolic dreams needed interpretation. And even if the image of the Virgin came to life for a moment it always became inanimate soon thereafter. As windows, visions were useful but

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<sup>118</sup> Margery's desire to see the heavenly more than the earthly reflected a theme found in some particularly poignant didactic visions. In one such vision, the visionary—in contrast to the primer prayers usually said in order to see the Virgin Mary before death so as to be warned about one's impending decease—prayed simply to see the Virgin for the joy of seeing her. Mirk told the story of the clerk who loved the Virgin Mary so much that he was wiling to lose his eyesight in exchange for catching a glimpse of her (*F*, p. 234).

<sup>119</sup> *MK*, p. 174 (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society). For Margery's attitude toward the interaction of human meditation and divine inspiration in her visions, see chapter 5. For further discussion of Margery's use of vision / sight / meditation, see "Re-visioning in the Book of Margery Kempe," in Denise Despres, ed. *Ghostly Sights: Visual Meditation in Late-Medieval Literature* (Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books, 1989), pp. 57–86.

limited, and thus the medieval Christians longed for the day when not even windows would separate them from the sight they yearned to see, the Beatific Vision, the face-to-face encounter with God, where knowledge and sight would be perfect, unflawed, immediate.<sup>120</sup> Although there were medieval accounts of visions in which visionaries caught glimpses of Christ on the heavenly throne, or like Margery Kempe, visionaries married the Godhead, these were not truly Beatific Visions. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, no one other than Moses and St. Paul had ever had the Vision and lived to tell of it.<sup>121</sup> But in the end, all believers would experience the Beatific Vision and live to tell of it with praise, and the peek-a-boo nature of earthly visionary experience would give way to unobstructed vistas of the Divine. Near the conclusion of the Long Text of her *Revelations*, Julian of Norwich captured this hopeful expectation when she wrote:

For as verly as we shulle be in blysse of god without end, hym praysyng and thankyng, as verly we haue been in the forsyght of god lovyd and knowyn in his endlis purpose fro without begynnyng, in which vnbegonne loue he made vs. ... And therfore whan the dome is gevyn, and we be alle brough(t) vppe aboue, *than shalle we clerely see in god the prevytees whych now be hyd to vs*. And then shalle none of vs be steryd to sey in ony thyng: Lorde, yf it had ben thus, it had ben wele. But we shalle alle sey with one voyce: Lorde, blessyd mott thou be, for it is thus, it is wele; and now we see verely that alle thyng is done as it was thyn ordynawnce or ony thyng was made.<sup>122</sup>

It was in the Beatific Vision that all believers would at last see God's privities fully, without question, without hiddenness, without deception, without uncertainty.<sup>123</sup> It was the goal toward which all faith looked.

<sup>120</sup> Pope Benedict XII in 1336 "formally defined that the Divine Essence would be seen by direct intuition and face to face (*visione intuitiva et etiam faciali*)" (*ODCC*, p. 146). For discussion of the views of Albert the Great, Bonaventure, and Aquinas on the Beatific Vision and whether believers could see it before and/or after death, see Jeffrey P. Hergan, *St. Albert the Great's Theory of the Beatific Vision* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002). Some would argue that mystic visions of union were versions of the Beatific Vision. Nonetheless, most, perhaps even all, would agree that the fuller experience of the divine essence would not come until heaven. A fascinating twist came in the form of a thirteenth-century ritual that attempted to conjure up the Beatific Vision, discussed in Robert Mathiesen, "A Thirteenth-century Ritual to Attain the Beatific Vision from the *Sworn Book* of Honorius of Thebes," in Claire Fanger, ed., *Conjuring Spirits*, pp. 143–162.

<sup>121</sup> *ODCC*, p. 146.

<sup>122</sup> *JN*, pp. 728–730 (italics added).

<sup>123</sup> For a history of the development of heaven, the context of the Beatific Vision, up to the early fourteenth century, see Jeffrey Burton Russell, *A History of Heaven: The Singing Silence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

It was the ultimate in epistemological forms. It was unmediated revelation. It was the direct apprehension, direct knowledge, direct sight, direct understanding of God. The author of *The Pore Caitif* declared:

But no man hath perfit sigt of heuene while he lyueth bodili here but he that cendith in this loue as sone as he dieth is brougt bifore god with companyes of aungels & seeth him face to face & woneth with him withoute eende.<sup>124</sup>

It was the ultimate vision in late medieval spirituality, and it was the vision that no one experienced while still in the Late Middle Ages.

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<sup>124</sup> *PC*, pp. 173–174.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### VISIONS, POWER, AND THE DYNAMIC OF MEDIATED REVELATION

All visions fell short of the Beatific Vision in terms of accuracy and infallibility. Nonetheless, visions often provided the knowledge necessary to get *to* the Beatific vision. As a result, visions caused tension in the Late Middle Ages. The Church was responsible for mediating all supernatural knowledge that was essential to one's eternal destiny. Yet visions could bring new revelation that would be made part of essential doctrines of the faith. Thus it was critical that the Church scrutinize and verify any visions that claimed to mediate new revelatory content. Because visions, particularly prophetic visions, served along with the Scriptures as means of divine revelation, they could have great power. Visions thus both participated in and reaffirmed the fifth dynamic we will examine, that of Mediated Revelation. This dynamic gave power to medieval visions. But, ironically, it was this dynamic which would be the undoing of the medieval vision. It would be subverted by the arrival of the Reformation and its *Sola Scriptura* principle that significantly narrowed the hermeneutic range and thus undermined the authority implicit in revelatory visions.

#### *The Dynamic of Mediated Revelation*

This dynamic of Mediated Revelation is the fifth and final dynamic of medieval spirituality under examination here. In late medieval Christendom, all information that was critical to salvation came from God, indirectly, through mediators, to the laity.<sup>1</sup> The primary mediator was the Church. Within the Church, revelation was further mediated through the Scriptures, through papal statements and conciliar decisions, and finally, through visions. Some knowledge about God came

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<sup>1</sup> For discussion of visions and authority in the early middle ages, see Isabel Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority in Merovingian Gaul* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).

directly to human beings through natural theology. This data, however, was only enough to make a person responsible for unbelief but was not sufficient to provide salvation. All spiritual information essential to one's eternal destiny came through Mediated Revelation.

This dynamic of Mediated Revelation—the driving force of epistemology in medieval spirituality—found support in the didactic visions. The visions buttressed the dynamic first by their content, including the economy of salvation, the cult of the saints, warfare against the Devil and the importance of the sacraments. As discussed below, they also added to revelation with their own new content. Third, visions participated generally in the dynamic of Mediated Revelation by their very nature. Finally, because of their powerful visual mediation of revelation, visions possessed an authority and were therefore a nexus of power. This often resulted in conflict within the Church and even extended to national politics.

Because the spiritual information in the medieval era had eternal consequences, accuracy was critical. At the point of their occurrence, visions were not under the control of the Church. It was essential, therefore, that they later be assessed and validated by the Church. The Church was committed to doctrinal purity, and considered any willful, stubbornly held deviation to be heretical. The Church sanctioned such erroneous belief heavily, often by death. Visionaries, therefore, found the stakes to be very high.

We will explore the Church's dream and vision theories by which it sought to provide a theoretical framework to analyze the origins of visions. That framework, although neither centralized nor uniform, sought to distinguish between visions and dreams and, in both cases, between the trustworthy and the deceitful.

It is true that didactic visions in general portrayed a world with which, subject to a set of rules, the penitent could competently interact. Nonetheless, and despite the Church's hermeneutic framework for examining visions, visionaries experienced an inherent anxiety. That unease arose primarily out of two elements, disguise and uncertainty about source. We will look at four case studies of women who struggled with these fears: Margery Kempe, Jeanne d'Arc, St. Bridget of Sweden, and Elizabeth Barton. We will see how the attitudes towards visionary experience and its reliability shifted as the Reformation entered England and brought with it a new epistemology.

*Discernment: Medieval Dream and Vision Theories*

The question of what was true was important to contemporaries who wrote theoretically about both dreams and visions in late medieval England. We will examine what the English vernacular works, those available to the laity, expressed about the theory of dreams and visions.<sup>2</sup> It becomes clear that there was great disagreement as to the veracity and source of visions and dreams. Writers warned that there were many possible sources and provocations for dreams and visions, only some of which could be trusted.

*Chaucer's debate*

Chaucer brought together all of the most popular medieval dream theories in two of his poems.<sup>3</sup> In the first, "The Nun's Priest's Tale" in the *Canterbury Tales*, Chauntecleer, the cock, while perched one night next to his favorite wife, the "faire damoysele Pertolete," (l. 4060) dreamed of a hound-like beast poised to attack him. Waking in terror, Chauntecleer looked to Pertolete for comfort but found it sorely lacking, for his beloved hen exclaimed, "Allas! and konne ye been agast of swevenys? / Nothyng, God woot, but vanitee in sweven is" (ll. 4111–4112). She dismissed his nightmare as being merely the result of a superfluity of the choleric humor, brought on by overeating and causing him to see a red beast, just as an overabundance of the melancholic humor would have made him dream of black devils. She appealed to Cato as an authority against dreams and offered to prepare a laxative from herbs to purge her husband of the choleric humor and concluded by exhorting him,

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<sup>2</sup> For a thorough discussion of the history of dream theory in Europe in general, see Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> For further discussion on Chaucer and medieval conceptions of vision, see Carolyn P. Collette, *Species, Phantasms, and Images: Vision and Medieval Psychology in The Canterbury Tales* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2001). Further work on medieval theories of vision in relation to literature can be found in James F. Burke, *Vision, the Gaze, and the Function of the Senses in Celestina* in *Penn State Studies in Romance Literatures* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000) and Simon A. Gilson, *Medieval Optics and Theories of Light in the Works of Dante*. *Studies in Italian Literature* 8 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000). For discussion of how these relate to spiritual ways of seeing, see Robert Scribner, "Popular Piety and Modes of Visual Perception in Late-Medieval and Reformation Germany," *The Journal of Religious History* 15 (1989): 463–464.



“Dredeth no dreem” (l. 4158). Chauntecleer retorted that there were greater authorities than Cato who declared that “dremes been signifi-caciouns / As wel of joye as of tribulaciouns” (ll. 4169–4170). He related two stories of men who disregarded dreams to their peril, and several of visions which were heeded, amongst them referring to Macrobius, Joseph, and Daniel, arguing that “heere may men seen that dremes been to drede” (l. 4253). It turned out that Chauntecleer’s dream was indeed prophetic, for a fox attacked him. And the cock almost died because the fox’s flattery momentarily made him forget his dream. He eventually managed to escape and the story ended happily.<sup>4</sup>

The matter of whether dreams were real or worthless was far from settled. What is interesting is that Chaucer drew most of both sides of the vehement argument about dreams from only one late medieval English source, Robert Holcot’s *Sapientiam Salomonis*.<sup>5</sup> Unlike Chaucer, however, instead of showing that dreams were worth heeding, Holcot had used those same arguments to conclude that “somnia ne cures nam fallunt sompnia plures.” Holcot’s arguments were not unique to him, but rather they reflected a variety of views on dreams held by medieval scholars. Chaucer’s humorous use of the same group of arguments to come to a completely different conclusion, one in favor of visions instead of against them, creatively illustrates the medieval ambivalence towards dreams and visions.

Leaving aside Chaucer, the most important authorities were Macrobius’ five-part categorization of dream types, Gregory’s six-part analysis of dream causes, and Augustine’s three-part classification of modes of vision. Their classifications ranked dreams and / or visions in terms of those that were higher or lower in value, the Macrobian and Gregorian classifications dismissing some dreams as not being worthy of interpretation. Prophetic fulfillment was a key issue. In their theories, dreams were significant only if they were predictive in nature and confirmed by their fulfillment. The Augustinian classification also assigned differing values to different sights, claiming that all three modes of vision revealed divine truth, but some in a higher form than others.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Anthony Burgess (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988), pp. 253–261.

<sup>5</sup> Robert A. Pratt, “Some Latin Sources of the Nonnes Preest on Dreams,” *Speculum* 52 (1977): 539–548.

<sup>6</sup> I have tried to restrict this survey of medieval dream theories to those extant in English vernacular works as much as possible. For Thomas Aquinas’ views on visions, however, see *ST* II:172–175.

*Macrobian dream theory*

One of the influences on medieval dream theory that Chaucer referred to is the *Dream of Scipio* by Macrobius that outlined five categories of dreams that people had in their sleep.<sup>7</sup> The *insomnium* (*enyption* in Greek) was a dream caused by mental or physical distress or anxiety about the future.<sup>8</sup> These dreams were “noteworthy only during their course and afterwards have no importance or meaning.”<sup>9</sup> The *visum* (*phantasma*) was an apparition that occurred in the moments between waking and sleep. The dreamer “sees specters rushing at him or wandering vaguely about, differing from natural creatures in size and shape...either delightful or disturbing.”<sup>10</sup> Like the *insomnium*, the *visum* could not help one foretell the future.

The three other categories were useful for predicting the future. The *oraculum* (*chrematismos*) was an oracular dream in which a “parent, or a pious or revered man, or a priest, or even a god” indicated what would happen in the future and what actions to take.<sup>11</sup> The *visio* (*horoma*) was a prophetic vision that showed the future in clear rather than figurative terms. It was shown to be prophetic only when it came true.<sup>12</sup> The *somnium* (*oneiros*) was an enigmatic dream which “conceals with strange shapes and veils with ambiguity the true meaning of the information being offered, and requires an interpretation for its understanding.” There were five kinds of these *somnium* or enigmatic dreams, according to the realm that the dream affected, “personal, alien, social, public, and universal.”<sup>13</sup> These five categories appeared in several different works in Middle English. One avenue through which they came was John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus* which outlined the five: “...aut enim insomnium, aut phantasma, aut somnium, aut oraculum, aut visio es.”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Macrobius may have inherited his system from Artemidorus or they may have shared a third source, but Macrobius was the better known in the Middle Ages (Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans. by William Stahl [New York: Columbia University Press, 1952], p. 88). See Robert J. White, trans., *The Interpretation of Dreams: Oneirocritica by Artemidorus*, pp. 14–18 for Artemidorus’ classification.

<sup>8</sup> Macrobius gives examples of a lover who fears losing his love, of overindulgence in or deprivation from food, and of anxiety about losing an important office (Macrobius, *Commentary*, p. 88).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>12</sup> For medieval examples of the *somnium*, *oraculum* and *horoma*, see appendix C.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Clement Webb, *Ioannis Saresberiensis Episcopi Carnotensis Policratici*, volume 1 (Oxford:

*Gregorian dream theory in Handlyng Synne*

Dreams were sometimes dealt with in treatises on the Ten Commandments under discussions of the first commandment, along with witchcraft.<sup>15</sup> In this context, the emphasis was usually on the danger of believing in dreams. Robert Mannyng of Brunne's *Handlyng Synne* followed this pattern, drawing on Gregory and Cato as his authorities.

Gregory had analyzed dreams according to their causes, listing six categories: overeating (*Ventris plenitudine*), hunger (*inanitate*), delusion (*illusionem*), a mixture of thought and delusion (*cogitatione simul et illusionem*), revelation (*revelationem*) and a mixture of thought and revelation (*cogitatione simul et revelationem*).<sup>16</sup> The first two were physiological explanations. The third might be initiated by the devil, and Scripture warned against it.<sup>17</sup> The fourth was the result of anxious thoughts. For the fifth type, Gregory gave examples of Joseph's dreams of the sheaves and the stars bowing to him<sup>18</sup> and the angel appearing to warn Joseph to go to Egypt<sup>19</sup> and for the sixth, King Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the image with feet of clay.<sup>20</sup> Francis X. Newman differentiates these last two categories in terms of the latter being more difficult to interpret than the former.<sup>21</sup> *Handlyng Synne* listed them as follows:

On syxe maners may a man mete:  
Sum beyn to beleue, sum beyn to lete.  
Sum men dreme for surfeture,  
That etyn or drynkyn ouer mesure,  
And sum dreme of veyn thyng  
For ouer mochyl and gret fastyng.

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Clarendon Press, 1909), p. 86. See Constance B. Hieatt, *The Realism of Dream Visions: The Poetic Exploration of the Dream-Experience in Chaucer and his Contemporaries* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1967), pp. 27–30 for harmonization of Salisbury with Macrobius.

<sup>15</sup> Morton Kelsey, *God, Dreams and Revelation: A Christian Interpretation of Dreams* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1974), p. 155 refers to Jerome's translation of Leviticus 19:26 and Deut 18:10 as "You shall not practise augury nor observe *dreams*" rather than witchcraft or soothsaying. Thus, according to Kelsey, "by the authority of the Vulgate, dreams were classed with soothsaying."

<sup>16</sup> Francis X. Newman, "Somnium: Medieval Theories of Dreaming and the Form of Vision Poetry" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1962), pp. 92f. He cites Gregory, *Moralia in Job VIII*, xxiv, 42–43 (*PL*, 75: 827–881), and *Dialogues* iv, 48 (*PL*, 77: 409–412).

<sup>17</sup> Leviticus 19:16.

<sup>18</sup> Genesis 37.

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 2:13.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel 2:29.

<sup>21</sup> Newman, "Somnium," p. 93.

And sum beyn the fendys temptacyun  
 That to the trowthe ys fals tresun,  
 And sum come of ouer mochl thocht  
 Of thyng that men wolde haue wroght.  
 And sum beyn goddys pryuyte  
 That he shewyth to warne the,  
 And sum come thurgh gret stodye  
 And shewe to the apertlye.<sup>22</sup>

*Handlyng Synne* then expounded on Gregory's writing by saying that the "outrage" of overeating and the "febylnes of corage" in too much fasting were part of everyday experience, whereas the other four categories were in the Bible. If dreams did not come through the temptation of the fiend, then Solomon would never have said that "dremys men deseyue manyon." And if dreams could not come from thoughts, Cato would not have taught children:

Geue no charge to dremys;  
 They beyn but as glemys  
 That yn thy thocht lepys  
 A nyght whan thou slepys,  
 That thou wakyng thenkys  
 Before thyn eyyn hyt blenkys,  
 Yyf they ne come thurgh pryuyte  
 That god wyle shewe me or the.<sup>23</sup>

When Mannyng moved on to the dreams that were to be believed, the ones that came through "goddys pryuyte" and "gret stodye," he referred to the biblical dreams that Gregory had mentioned, saying of the category of the two Josephs' dreams, "Thys ys klepyd reuelacyun: / To shewe before wat ys to doun." He said of the sixth category that if dreams did not come through studying, then Daniel would not have known Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Because dreams had such varied sources, it was critical to discern their origin. He concluded, however, that although some men are "pryue" with God, so many dreams are "yn veyne," it was better, on the whole, not to trust them.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *HS*, pp. 12–13.

<sup>23</sup> *HS*, p. 13. Cato's *Distichs* were amongst the most popular books read in grammar schools from the 13th to 16th centuries in England (Nicholas Orme, *English Schools in the Middle Ages* [London: Methuen, 1973] pp. 102, 104, 114). For a discussion of Chaucer's use of Cato, see Richard Hazelton, "Chaucer and Cato," *Speculum* 35 (1960): 368–373.

<sup>24</sup> *HS*, p. 14.

*Dream theory in Dives and Pauper*

Like *Handlyng Synne*, *Dives and Pauper* dealt with dreams under the topic of the first commandment. When Dives asked whether people should put faith in dreams, Pauper answered by listing the various causes of dreams. There were three inward causes: “steryng of mannys fantasye or womany,” the disposition of the body, and the disposition of the soul.<sup>25</sup> Outward causes of dreams could be either “bodily” or “ghostly.” Bodily causes included the temperature of the body being cold, for example, causing the dreamer to dream of snow. Ghostly causes were two-fold, either divine or demonic. God himself or angels could send three types of dreams. The first occurred only in the imagination, such as Pharoah or Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams. The second were only in the understanding. Here St. Paul and Balaam were given as examples. The third combined imagination and understanding, with St. John’s Apocalypse and Daniel’s prophecy as two illustrations.

*Vision theory in Chastising God’s Children*

A strong warning about visionary experience was included in *The Chastising of God’s Children*, the popular late-fourteenth or early-fifteenth century English treatise. This discussion had vision rather than dream as its starting point. The section on visions was translated from Bishop Alphonse of Pecha’s *Epistola Solitarii* that was written as a defense of Bridget of Sweden’s visions. According to Bazire, the *Chastising* author transformed Alphonse’s arguments from “an apologia for genuine visionaries” to “a warning to the unwary of how easily they may be deceived by the devil.”<sup>26</sup>

After outlining the Augustinian categories of visions,<sup>27</sup> the treatise then discussed how a visionary should be examined in order to “proue his reuelacions.” The concern was whether the visions “comen of a goode aungel or of a wicked spirit.”<sup>28</sup> Elsewhere in the text, the Holy Spirit was mentioned as a potential source as well.<sup>29</sup> The treatise listed

<sup>25</sup> *DP*, pp. 174–175. If the body is cold, for example, the dreamer may dream of snow; and one often dreams of what occupied one when awake.

<sup>26</sup> Bazire and Colledge, eds., *The Chastising of God’s Children*, p. 48.

<sup>27</sup> See chapter 4.

<sup>28</sup> *Chastising*, p. 173.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

at least twenty-two criteria including whether the visionary had reported his visions to a spiritual confessor, whether the visionary held to all the ordinances and teachings of the holy church, whether the visions accorded with holy scripture and with virtuous living, whether they were accompanied by holy sweetness and “shyneng aboute kynde,” and whether the visions stirred men to obedience or to worship riches. Some of these criteria were repeated as the seven tokens, with the additional criterion that the visions of one visionary must always be true, for the devil causes a mixture of true and false visions. The author warned that not believing true visions might be perilous but that if, on the other hand, visions were judged too quickly and without discretion,

thanne shal sooth be taken for fals, and fals sumtyme for sooth, into gret perel; and so goode visions and sooth shuld be forsake, and men shuld nat obeie vnto the priuy speche of god, ne geue no credence to hem, but rather take errour for triewth, as ofte tyme hath it falle, and fallith al day, for defaute of discreet and triew examynacion.<sup>30</sup>

*Chaucer's smorgasbord and the Church's ambivalence*

Far from showing a credulous acceptance of all dreams and visions as being divine in origin, therefore, the medieval theories presented a wide range of alternative causes. Physiological and psychological explanations such as the temperature of one's body, over-eating or excessive asceticism, wish-fulfillment dreams, anxiety-induced nightmares, and day-thought reflections, have a surprisingly modern ring to them. Particularly medieval in flavor were the humors as influences. On the other hand, demons, angels, God, and the Holy Spirit were all possible supernatural causes.

What all the dream theories and assessments of visions had in common was their ambivalence towards dreams and visions. Even though examples were given of prophetic dreams, important dreamers, and genuine visionaries, the preponderance of argumentation was on the dangers of believing dreams. This confusion and profusion of both negative and positive attitudes towards visions and dreams was illustrated by the wide range of medieval theories that provided the fuel for Chaucer's fifty-line sentence on dreams that opened his “House of Fame.” In the proem, the poet feigned confusion about dream theory

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

while brilliantly reviewing the entire late medieval range of classical, patristic, and medieval views on the validity of dreams.<sup>31</sup>

God turne us every drem to goode!  
 For hyt is wonder, be the roode,  
 To my wyt, what causeth swevenes  
 Eyther on morwes or on evenes,  
 And why th'effect folweth of somme,  
 And of somme hit shal never come;  
 Why that is an *avision*  
 And why this a *revelacion*,  
 Why this a *drem*, why that a *sweven*,  
 And noght to every man lyche even;  
 Why this a *fantome*, why these *oracles*,  
 I not; but whoso of these miracles  
 The causes knoweth bet then I,  
 Devyne he, for I certainly  
 Ne kan hem noght, ne never thinke  
 To besily my wyt to swinke  
 To knowe of hir signifiounce...<sup>32</sup>

Although too long to rehearse here, the poem is fascinating with its wide range, complexity, and ambivalence towards dreams and visions reflecting the medieval Church's attitudes towards revelatory contact with the supernatural. This ambivalence is the backdrop against which all accounts of visions must be studied. It is the reason why although vision accounts were highly popular as sermon illustrations and as parts of saints' lives, the clergy rarely encouraged the laity to seek similar visionary experiences for themselves. When utilized as educational tools, they were used for purposes which often had very little to do with their being visions, while at the same time serving as powerful instruments because of their visionary nature. We explored in earlier chapters how visions of purgatorial ghosts, for example, were used as illustrations against particular sins, rather than as instructions

<sup>31</sup> B. Koonce, *Chaucer and the Tradition of Fame: Symbolism in 'The House of Fame'* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 46–57. For development of ancient and patristic dream theory and its impact on medieval dream theories, see Newman, "Somnium" and "Dream-Pattern and Culture-Pattern" in E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1951), pp. 102–134. Jacques Le Goff, "Le christianisme et les rêves," in *L'Imaginaire médiéval: Essais par Jacques Le Goff* (Éditions Gallimard, 1985) and Kelsey, *Dreams* both trace the attitudes toward dreams throughout the Old and New Testaments and through church history; Le Goff proceeding only to the eighth century.

<sup>32</sup> Chaucer, *House of Fame*, Book I, ll. 1–17 (*Riverside Chaucer*, p. 348; italics added).

for how to deal with ghosts; and how visions for demons were used to exhort sinners to repent, not to make warfare against demons. But we also saw how these visions implicitly taught the laity how to respond to visionary experience, for example, how to help purgatorial ghosts or to combat demons. As well, the extant stories of late medieval lay experiences of the supernatural demonstrate that the laity responded in ways very similar to that of the visionaries in the didactic visions. Thus the Church's ambivalence towards visions was captured in the very telling of the didactic visions.

Much of the medieval debate over the source of dreams and visions centered on the need to know whether they were reliable sources of information, particularly about the future. Many of the medieval categories of dreams inherited from late antiquity, applied to only a small group among the didactic visions. Oddly, when contrasted with the centrality of the issue to the debate over dreams and visions as a whole, the proportion of didactic visions that had knowledge about the future as their main feature was quite small. It is likely that this was a direct result of the Church's disapproving concern about predictive visions. The visions that were circulated in the *exempla* and saints' legends were deliberately skewed in the direction of visions that affirmed the core teachings of the Church. The Church kept to a minimum the most controversial visions such as those that contained new revelation or directives specific to contemporary events.

### *Visions vs. dreams*

The Macrobian categories did not truly capture the medieval categories of dreams, since they were from an earlier and different culture. E.R. Dodds argues in *Greeks and the Irrational* that dreams conform to "culture-patterns" with different cultures having different sets of dreams.<sup>33</sup> Two of the terms that Chaucer listed in his proem, however, were of particular relevance to late medieval visions: the dream and the vision. Macrobius had used the term *somnium*—as John of Salisbury noted—both as a specific category of dreams and as the term for dreams in general. The term "dreme" in Middle English was used for this broader sense of *somnium*. It emerged in the thirteenth century to fulfill the need for a word which would differentiate between sleep-

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<sup>33</sup> Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, pp. 103–104.



ing and dreaming, something which its predecessor *sweven*, did not do.<sup>34</sup> According to Macrobius, all *somnia* occurred in sleep, a part of their definition that accorded with the general usage of the term in the Middle Ages.<sup>35</sup> A dream was thus an experience which one had in one's mind while asleep. As indicated by the various medieval theories, the dream might have physiological, psychological, or supernatural causes.

Unlike the dream, the term vision was not defined in the Middle Ages by the visionary's state of consciousness, for one could experience a vision when asleep, awake, half-awake or in a trance.<sup>36</sup> Like *somnium*, it could refer to a specific Macrobian category or else to a more general phenomenon. This broader definition had as its essential characteristic the belief that the experience under question had a supernatural component and/or prophetic function. This was perhaps most easily illustrated by the occasions in which writers distinguished between visions and dreams. For example, when the narrator of the *Vita* of Mary of Oignies (c. 1215), related the story of how Mary had a revelation that a particular priest should not take on an additional benefice, he expressed his fear that the reader would "count the visyouns of Crystes mayden fantoms, or ellis, as youre maner is, scorene hem as dremes."<sup>37</sup>

As discussed above, dreams could have a wide variety of causes from physiological to supernatural, with all falling within the accepted use of the term. Visions, however, had only two possible sources, both of which were supernatural. The concern with visions, as indicated in *Chastising*, was whether they were from a good angel or from a wicked spirit. As a general rule, the terms vision and dream were used synonymously in the Middle Ages only when referring to supernatural or prophetic events. Some dreams involved supernatural components, and were therefore called visions, and some visions occurred when the visionary was asleep and could thus be termed dreams. When they were used in opposition to each other, vision referred to the supernatural and dream to the non-supernatural.

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<sup>34</sup> For the development of the term 'dreme' see Edward C. Ehrensperger, "Dream Words in Old and Middle English," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 46 (1931): 80–89 and Bogislav Von Lindheim, "OE. 'Dream' and Its Subsequent Development," *The Review of English Studies* 25 (1949): 193–209.

<sup>35</sup> Macrobius, *Commentary*, p. 87.

<sup>36</sup> For example of vision in sleep, see *SEL*, p. 40; for vision while awake, see *SS*, pp. 201–202; for vision in trance, see *GL*, vol. 6, p. 28.

<sup>37</sup> C. Horstmann, ed. "Prosalegenden" pp. 167–168.

*Anxiety, Disguise, and Source Concerns in the Didactic Visions*

Because of their claim to supernatural origin, vision accounts could exert influence and possible harm. In addition, by mere virtue of their direct contact with the otherworlds, they were fraught with danger. Even though the vast majority of the didactic visions were from the non-prophetic and therefore less controversial categories and even though they presented a consistent and relatively safe picture of the rules of interaction with the otherworld, there were factors at the core of these visions that could lead to anxiety. The world of the supernatural presented by the didactic visionary accounts was an orderly world. As long as the visionary knew the distinct roles of the various apparitions and what was the expected response to them, he / she could function safely. Once one knew the category of vision that confronted, one could engage with it effectively using Spiritual Warfare tactics with demons, assisting ghosts returning from purgatory, and interacting devotedly with one's saint or the Virgin Mary.

There were two issues, however, which were problematic and could make a visionary feel unsure of how to act.<sup>38</sup> The first was the use of disguise, which made it difficult to be sure which category of vision one was facing at any given moment. The second was the possibility that the vision itself was an illusion, and that its source was demonic rather than divine. Visions thus gave rise to angst because things were not always as they appeared to be. Naturally such uncertainty had a significant impact on the authority of revelation. First, we will look at the matters of disguise and source.

*The problem of disguise*

A large number of the didactic visions, almost 100—approximately one out of six—involved disguise. Demons were the ones who disguised themselves most often. And they took on a wide variety of forms. First, demons might disguise themselves as animals such as horses, birds, pigs, and even dragons. Animal disguises might be the least difficult to

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<sup>38</sup> Further anxiety was caused by the possibility of demonic possession, an issue explored in-depth in Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages*. Conjunctions of Religion and Power in the Medieval Past Series (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

identify, for the demon-animals usually behaved in such an unusual way that it became fairly clear that the animal was not simply an animal.

Where it became more disturbing to the visionary was when a demon appeared as a visitor from another category of the didactic visions, thus making it difficult for the visionary to respond appropriately. Demons might appear as angels, as Christ, or as a saint. For example, in the story mentioned earlier of the pilgrim who was on his way to Santiago de Compostela, the demon had disguised himself as St. James. He convinced the young man that because he had committed fornication, he should cut off his private members and commit suicide. Although the Virgin Mary and St. James intervened and returned him to life, he did not emerge wholly unscathed. According to the version in the *South English Legendary*, his private members were never restored to him.<sup>39</sup> The visionary had responded as appropriate to the rules of engagement with a saint, following the directives of the visitor in the dynamic of Reciprocated Devotion. What he had not realized was that he was, in fact, involved in Spiritual Warfare. Disguise had caused him to follow the wrong rules of interaction.

In the didactic visions, at least when a fiend appeared as a saint or as Christ, the visionary was aware that he was having some sort of vision. But there were many stories of fiends appearing as ordinary men and women, with the result that the visionary was not immediately aware that he or she was dealing with a supernatural visitation. There was a trade-off for the fiend, for appearing as a human being did not give him the same authority that appearing as an angel or saint would. But it might be more unobtrusive and thus effective nevertheless. The fiends took on a large variety of human forms. Sometimes they came as children, as with a boy whom St. Benedict figured out was a fiend and struck him with a rod as he attempted to kidnap an invalid monk.<sup>40</sup> They often came as men. These demon-men were unsuccessful, for example, in tempting St. Margaret,<sup>41</sup> but they were successful in tempting a man in the woods to make a pact to become rich.<sup>42</sup>

There were many stories of demons disguising themselves as women, mostly in order to entice men to lechery. One fiend-woman attempted

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<sup>39</sup> *SS*, p. 177; *SEL*, p. 339.

<sup>40</sup> *SEL*, p. 124.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 297.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

to seduce St. Benedict away from his orisons,<sup>43</sup> another appeared to St. Dunstan in his smithy. Occasionally the female disguise was momentarily successful, but ultimately it always failed.<sup>44</sup> This particular form of visionary deception had implications not only for trust in visions but also for misogynous attitudes and behavior toward women.<sup>45</sup>

Sometimes the fiends appeared in the place of people that the visionaries already knew. In many of these stories, the fiends were successful in fooling the visionary with their disguise but were nevertheless unsuccessful in their mission. The *Middle English Sermons*, for example, told the story of a lord who had been assigned the penance of not speaking with anyone during the Mass. He thought this would be an easy penance, but, one day, during the Mass, a devil disguised as the lord's servant came to him and convinced him that his wife and son were dying. Nevertheless, he refused to leave the Mass, and when he rushed home, he discovered that it had been merely a hoax.<sup>46</sup>

Demons were not the only ones, however, who appeared incognito. Angels, Christ, and the saints could take on a variety of forms as well, and in these cases, disguise served a positive function. Often they took on disguises as poor people in order to test the charity of godly people.<sup>47</sup> Sometimes the disguise was intended to fool a demon rather than the visionary, as with the stories of St. Andrew and St. Bartholomew coming disguised as pilgrims to rescue their devotees from the clutches of fiends who were disguised as lecherous women.<sup>48</sup> Sometimes angels and Christ came as children in order to communicate with saints who were still children.

Occasionally disguise was intended to bestow honor on a saint. In the *South English Legendary*, a sleeping man had a vision of the Virgin Mary and heard someone say, "Lo this is the holy Marie · that among you an eorthe is." When he awoke, he told people what he had seen and described the Virgin to them. Then a woman entered the room

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, *ibid.*, p. 546.

<sup>45</sup> See Joan Young Gregg, *Devils, Women, and Jews: Reflections of the Other in Medieval Sermon Stories*. SUNY Series in Medieval Studies (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), pp. 85–101, esp. 100. Dyan Elliot explores the links between women, sex, demons, and witchcraft made by the writers of the *Malleus Maleficarum* in *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality and Demonology in the Middle Ages* from The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 155.

<sup>46</sup> *MES*, p. 184.

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, *SEL*, p. 609.

<sup>48</sup> *SEL*, p. 546; *SS*, p. 193.

and the man thought he recognized her as the Virgin Mary, but instead it was St. Bridget: “Oure Leuedi dude hure gret honur · that hure owe forme hure sende / And made hure honored as hure sulf.”<sup>49</sup>

Finally, people returning from the dead could look like the living. In *Handlyng Synne*, Felix, a priest, went regularly to have a bath, and each time, the same man served him. One day, Felix brought two loaves to the man and thanked him for his help, but the man said that he could not eat for “Y am a man that ys ded.” In this case, a dead man had passed for a living man.<sup>50</sup>

These disguises created dilemmas. If a demon could appear as a saint, it was difficult to know whether to trust a saint who appeared to one. If a demon could appear as an angel, how could one be sure it was safe to follow the angel when he guided one to another place, whether out of prison or into purgatory? If a demon could appear as Christ, how could one trust the things Christ said if he appeared at one's bedside in the middle of the night? If a demon, Christ, a saint, and an angel could each appear as a poor man, then when giving alms, one could never be certain that the beggar was merely human. If a fiend could appear as an angel and an angel as a live person, discernment of spirits became highly complex. If a demon could maintain the role of a chamberlain for fourteen years and the Virgin Mary could impersonate a nun for fifteen, then perhaps even the people one had known for years were not who they seemed to be. And if a demon could disguise himself as a woman and tempt one to the sin of lechery, what was to guarantee that any woman was not a devil in disguise sent to cause one to fall? All of these implied a significant level of uncertainty about the validity of any contemporary vision.

### *Concerns about validity*

Demonic disguise within a vision was not the only potential problem. The vision itself could be a demonic illusion. This was part of a larger question of the validity of the accounts of visions. Occasionally the

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<sup>49</sup> *SEL*, pp. 41–42. (Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, eds., *The South English Legendary*. E.E.T.S. [1956, reprinted 1967]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society). The Virgin Mary might also substitute for women when they were in need. See *SEL*, p. 232; *SS*, p. 190; *SS*, p. 202.

<sup>50</sup> *HS*, pp. 257–259.

didactic account itself explicitly raised the question of the legitimacy of a given vision. Sometimes it was the narrator himself who discussed the question, sometimes the audience to which the visionary told her story, at other times the visionary himself, and even occasionally the one who made the appearance in the first place.

Narrators varied in their responses to the validity of the visionary accounts they told. Usually they did not comment at all about the veracity of the stories they told. And when they did, it was, not surprisingly, more often to enforce the trustworthiness than to question it. The preacher of one of the sermons in the *Middle English Sermons* collection, for example, insisted, after relating the story of Theophilus' pact with the devil, "This is no fabull that I sey yow. It is euery woke songe and rad in holychurch in remembrance of the good Ladies kyndenes and grace."<sup>51</sup> The narrator of *Handlyng Synne* recounting the tale of the arrogant woman who returned from the dead, said that "Ryght at that terme that she seyde, / The knyght and that squyer deyde. / Be that tokenyng weyl men knewe / That the tale was ryght and trewe."<sup>52</sup> Mirk made it possible for the readers of his *Festial*, to check out the truth of one of his tales for themselves. After relating the story of the ring which St. Edward gave to the poor man and thus to St. John the Evangelist, Mirk wrote, "Then whoso lust to haue this preuet sothe, go he to Westmynstyr; and ther he may se the same ryng that was seuen yere yn paradys."<sup>53</sup>

The narrator of the *South English Legendary*, however, took the unusual step of questioning the veracity of a tale:

Me telth that the deuel com...  
 ...ac inot wether me lie...  
 Ac this netelle ich nogt to sothe · for it nis nogt to sothe iwrite  
 Ac wether it is soth other it nis · inot noman that wite  
 Ac agen kunde it were · that the deuel were to dethe ibrogt  
 For he nemai tholie nanne deth · i nemai it leue nogt  
 And also i neleoue nogt · that is migten were so stronge  
 A so holy creature · inis wombe auonge.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> *MES*, p. 261. (Woodburn O. Ross, ed., *Middle English Sermons*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1998]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>52</sup> *HS*, p. 84.

<sup>53</sup> *F*, p. 149 (Theodor Erbe, ed., *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies*. E.E.T.S. [1905; Kraus reprint, 1987]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>54</sup> *SEL*, p. 297 (Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, eds., *The South English Legendary*).

He questioned the tale because it contradicted two of his beliefs, first that demons did not die, and secondly that demons were not strong enough to overcome holy people, even temporarily. That he believed that a demon could indeed appear is attested by his next tale which began: “Ac to sothe it is iwrite · that in a monnes like / The deuel to this maide com. ...”<sup>55</sup>

The consequences of not believing a vision could be quite serious, whether by not recognizing a demonic disguise or by refusing to believe a vision that had a divine source. A case of mistaken identity could even be fatal. Mirk told the story of an eleven-year old child who woke from a sickness-induced trance to report on the wonders he had seen. An adulterous man went to visit him, but on his way he ran into a demon disguised as his lover. He kissed her and continued on his journey. The child warned him that the fiend had contaminated him with a cancer on his lip when kissing him and that he would die if he did not repent and change his life. The man, however, took his words for a mere fantasy and thus this “kanckur quikkonod, and ete him os he sayde, and dyud theron.”<sup>56</sup>

### *Anxiety undermining visionary authority*

The high stakes involved in disobeying revelations from God—when taken in conjunction with the uncertainty about visions caused by the possibility of demonic disguise and of demonic source of visions—compounded the anxiety. This uncertainty tended to be focused particularly on revelations that were prophetic in nature, requiring action on the part of the visionary or whoever was the vision’s target. This was evident in the fact that the theoretical discussions about dreams tended to emphasize dreams that required interpretation. These were the dreams that usually had a message that could impinge on the behavior of others. It is possible that this is one reason why there were so few examples in sermons of visions that were oracular in style.

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E.E.T.S. [1956, reprinted 1967]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 297.

<sup>56</sup> *F*, p. 293 (Theodor Erbe, ed., *Mirk’s Festial: A Collection of Homilies*. E.E.T.S. [1905; Kraus reprint, 1987]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

One category of medieval vision that tended to emphasize the prophetic was the symbolic dream. Although rare in the didactic vision accounts, this category of dreams had great fascination in the Late Middle Ages, fostering interest in several books of interpretation that had been inherited from the past. The *Somnia Danielis*, the most popular of these dream books, for example, can be traced back to Artemidorus' second-century *Oneirocritica*.<sup>57</sup> Dream books were, however, officially prohibited. "The book of dremys" was included, for example, in *Dives and Pauper's* prohibition against witchcraft.<sup>58</sup> And John of Salisbury criticized dreambooks because they gave only one meaning to each *topos*, something that he considered illogical.<sup>59</sup> Although symbolic dreams were merely discouraged rather than prohibited, the outlawing of books of interpretation and the skepticism surrounding the dreams because of their prophetic claims may be the reasons why less than two percent of the didactic visions were symbolic dreams.<sup>60</sup>

Overlapping with the symbolic dreams were the prophetic revelations. These tended to be discouraged, for they were the ones that could potentially cause the most damage. If taken seriously, they could wield enormous power, galvanizing armies and hampering the plans of kings. If they turned out to involve demonic disguise or be satanic illusions, the results could be disastrous. Thus discernment of the source of such revelations was highly critical. We will examine three cases in which late medieval women visionaries suffered because of fears that their prophetic visions were in fact demonic delusions.<sup>61</sup> Margery Kempe

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<sup>57</sup> Other related books of dream interpretation included dream chancebooks such as the *Somnile Joseph*, dreamlunars, and physiological dreambooks. For details about these and the *Somnia Danielis*, see Steven R. Fischer, *The Complete Medieval Dreambook: A Multilingual, Alphabetical Somnia Danielis Collation* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1982).

<sup>58</sup> *DP*, p. 157.

<sup>59</sup> "...the dream interpreter which is inscribed with the name of Daniel is apparently lacking in the weight which truth carries, when it allows but one meaning to one thing. This matter really needs no further consideration since the whole tradition of this activity is foolish and the circulating manual of dream interpretation passes brazenly from hand to hand of the curious." (John of Salisbury, *Frivolities of Courtiers and Footprints of Philosophers: being a translation of the First, Second, and Third Books and Selections from the Seventh and Eighth Books of the 'Polycraticus' of John of Salisbury*, trans. Joseph Pike [Minneapolis, 1938], p. 84; for the Latin see John of Salisbury, *Ioannis*, pp. 97-98).

<sup>60</sup> For further discussion of medieval dream interpretation, see Peter Brown, ed., *Reading Dreams: The Interpretation of Dreams from Chaucer to Shakespeare* (Oxford University: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>61</sup> Numerous scholars have explored the relationship of visions and women, particularly with regards to authority. Melanie Costello, for example, states that "with the exception of the high aristocracy, a medieval woman's only hope for gaining a voice in



experienced the fear herself but eventually resolved it. In Jeanne d'Arc's case, the fear was used by the English as fuel to feed the fire that eventually eliminated her as a national enemy. Elizabeth Barton's visions withstood the rigorous canonical tests designed to eliminate uncertainty about the origin of visions. Her visions later fell victim to the same kind of political opposition as Jeanne's and collapsed in the face of the changing of the guard as a new set of Reformation principles replaced the medieval criteria for determining the source of a visionary's revelations.

*Margery Kempe: Personal Anxiety Resolved*

From the outset, Margery established her fear that her visions were not divine as one of the main themes of her book, "Than had this creatur mech drede for illusyons & deceytys of hyr gostly enmys."<sup>62</sup>

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society was to represent her words as the fruit of mystical auditions." (Melanie Costello, "Women's Mysticism and Reform: The Adaptation of Biblical Prophetic Conventions in Fourteenth-Century Hagiographic and Visionary Literature," [PhD diss., Northwestern, 1989], p. 1.) Her dissertation shows how hagiographers of fourteenth-century women visionaries used biblical prophetic conventions to establish the authority of the women's messages. Patricia Rosof shows that while their being women precluded their preaching, anchoresses could nevertheless have great influence on men through having visions. (Patricia J. Rosof, "The anchoress in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries" in Lillian Shank and John A. Nichols, *Medieval Religious Women*. Volume 2: *Peaceweavers* [Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1987], p. 135.) Another way in which visions helped anchoresses overcome the weakness of their position as women was through visionary figures serving them communion when their male priests refused to administer it (Shank and Nichols, p. 138). For a further sampling of the many other works which touch on women's visions, see Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*; Carolyn Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) and Bynum, "Religious Women in the Later Middle Ages" in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Jill Raitt (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1987), pp. 128–135; Frances Beer, *Women and Mystical Experience in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 1992); Elizabeth Petroff, *Consolation of the Blessed* (New York: Alta Gaia Society, 1979); Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*.

<sup>62</sup> *MK*, p. 3 (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society). For a thorough discussion of Margery's struggles in this area, see Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices*, pp. 109–154. See also Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), pp. 97–127 for discussion of Margery's text in relation to the issue of the authority of her visions. For further discussions on Margery Kempe and authority, see David Lawton, "Voice, Authority, and Blasphemy in *The Book*

This anxiety may have—like her hagiographical techniques—been a combination of what was modeled by the didactic visions as well as what was present in her mentor St. Bridget's book, for St. Bridget had been anxious about her revelations.<sup>63</sup> Uncertainty about her revelations caused Margery anguish through much of her life:

Thes felyngys & swech other many mo than be wretyn, bothe of leuyng & of deyng, of summe to be sauýd, of summe to be dammyd, weryn to this creatur gret peyn & ponyschyng. Sche had leuar a sufferyd any bodyly penawns than thes felyngys & sche myght a put hem a-wey for the dred that sche had of illusyons & deceytys of hir gostly enmys. Sche had sumtyme so gret trubfyl wyth swech felyngys whan it fel not trewe to hir vnderstandyng, that hir confessowr feryd that sche xuld a fallyn in dyspeyr therwyth. And than aftyr hir turbele & hir gret fere it xuld ben schewyd vn-to hir sowle how the felyngys xuld ben vnderstondyn.<sup>64</sup>

This anxiety was resolved in a three-part process for Margery. First, she was punished by God for doubting the divine source of her revelations. Secondly, she sought the affirmation of a series of religious authorities. And thirdly, many of her revelations came true.

One of the most painful crises in Margery's life occurred when she refused to believe the divine origin of the revelations she received about particular souls being damned. When the Lord gave her revelations about the status of people's souls, she had joy when she heard of those who would be saved, but had great pain when she learned of those who would be damned. She could not believe that it was God who was showing her such horrifying things and so refused to think about them. Then, because of her unbelief, God withdrew her pleasant visionary experiences for twelve days, during which she was tempted with thoughts of "letchery & alle vnclennes" as though she were a prostitute. She was haunted with visions of members of the clergy parading naked before her. The devil insisted that she sleep with at least

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of *Margery Kempe*," pp. 93–115 and Eluned Bremner, "Margery Kempe and the Critics: Disempowerment and Deconstruction," in Sandra J. McEntire, ed., *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays* (New York: Garland, 1992), pp. 117–135; and Lynn Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), pp. 1–38.

<sup>63</sup> See Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls*, p. 175 for a discussion of St. Bridget's "fear of demonic delusion."

<sup>64</sup> *MK*, pp. 54–55. (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

one of them. Eventually, she was released from this torment, having been persuaded to believe that the revelations about the damned were indeed from God.<sup>65</sup>

Apparently, however, this experience did not cure her of her ambivalence and fear. Even at the end of the first book, she explained that sometimes she was in great heaviness because of her “felyngys.” Sometimes she was so afraid that they were deceits or illusions, “that hir thowt sche wolde that hir hed had be smet fro the body tyl God of hys goodnesse declaryd hem to hir mende.” This high level of concern drove her, along with the Lord’s exhortations, to seek confirmation from religious authorities. She visited “many worshepful clerkys, bothe archebysshoppys & bysshoppys, doctowrs of dyuynyte & bachelers also. Sche spak also wyth many ankrys. ...”<sup>66</sup> She consulted Bishop Philip Repingdon of Lincoln, and he assured her that her experiences were of the Holy Spirit and exhorted her to write about them.<sup>67</sup>

For almost all of the people to whom Margery showed her feelings and revelations, the two possible options of source were either the divine or the demonic. The anchor at the Friar Preachers told her that “...I schal, wyth the leue of ower Lord Ihesu Cryst, telle yow whethyr thei ben of the Holy Gost or ellys of yowr enmy the Deuyl.”<sup>68</sup> At Assisi, when she told an English Friar minor her revelations, the friar thanked God and “seyd that sche was mech beholdyn to God, for he seyde he had neuyr herd of non sweche in this worlde leuyng for to be so homly wyth God be lofe & homly dalyawnce as sche was, thankyd be God of hys gyftys, for it is hys goodnes & no mannys meryte.”<sup>69</sup> Only one or two religious figures posited the possibility that their source might be “tryfelys & japys.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., pp. 144–146. (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., pp. 220; 3; similar lists appear on pp. 25, 43 (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 18 (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 79 (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 44 (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of*

Some of these religious leaders, in trying to discern whether Margery's visions were divine or demonic, included in their comments what may be termed "validity tests." These provide us with insights into the tests actually applied in pastoral practice rather than simply written about in theological treatises. Julian of Norwich, who Margery described as "the ankres...expert in swech thyngys & good counsel coud geuyn," advised Margery to follow the dictates of her visitations as long as they were not against the worship of God and were to the profit of her "euyn-cristen's":

For yf it wer [not], than it wer nowt the mevyng of a good spyryte but rathar of an euyl spyrit. The Holy Gost meuyth neuyr a thing a-geyn charite, & yf he dede, he wer contraryows to hys owyn self, for he is al charite. Also he meuyth a sowle to al chastnesse, for chast leuars be clepyd the temple of the Holy Gost, & the Holy Gost makyth a sowle stabyl & stedfast in the ryght feyth & the ryght beleue.<sup>71</sup>

William Southfield, a white friar, determined the validity of her visions on the following basis:

[The Holy Gost] askyth of us a lowe, a meke, & a contryte hert wyth a good wyl...Syster, I trost to owyr Lord ye han these condicyons eythyr in yowr wyl or in yowr affeccyon er ellys in bothyn, & I [hel]d[e] not that owyr Lord suffryth hem to be dysceyued endlesly that settyn al here trost in hym & no-tyng sekyn ne desyryn but hym only, as I hope that ye don. And therfor beleuyth fully that owyr Lord louyth yow & werkyth hys grace in yow.<sup>72</sup>

An English Friar who was the papal legate in Constance approved of her visionary experiences because, "the Deuyl hath no powyr to werkyn swech grace in a sowle."<sup>73</sup> The one religious authority who did disbelieve Margery's visionary experience, did so, according to

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*Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42 (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society). For discussion of Julian of Norwich in relation to authority, see Lynn Staley, "Julian of Norwich and the Late Fourteenth-Century Crisis of Authority," in David Aers and Lynn Staley, eds., *The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), pp. 107–178.

<sup>72</sup> *MK*, pp. 41–42 (Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, eds., *The Book of Margery Kempe*. E.E.T.S. [1940, reprinted 1961, 1982]; by permission of Oxford University Press on behalf of the Council of the Early English Text Society).

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

Margery's confessor, on the basis that she was too recently a sinful woman for God to be so "homly wyth yow" in such a short time.<sup>74</sup> It seems that character traits of humility, charity, chastity, contrition, faith, and evidence of God's grace were important in assessing the potential validity of a visionary's supernatural experiences.

After listing the various encounters she had with religious authorities about the validity of her visions, Margery listed a series of revelations, most of them 'anchored.' One example amongst many involved a time when Margery was in the choir of the church of St. Margaret where there was a corpse present. The husband was offering his mass-penny, and our Lord said to Margery that the woman's soul was in purgatory and that the husband was in good health but would die in a short time. The man died shortly thereafter. "& so it be-fel as sche felt be reuelacyon."<sup>75</sup>

Only after these sections that dealt primarily with the issue of the validity of her visions did Margery proceed to describe her pilgrimages and more complex meditative visions and to graduate to the point of fully trusting her visions. It was not until Book II that Margery seemed to have found enough confidence in her visionary experiences to actually go so far as to disobey a religious authority in favor of instructions given to her in an audition from the Lord. It involved a situation in which her confessor had not given her the necessary permission to accompany her daughter-in-law overseas. When Margery was at the docks to send off her daughter-in-law by ship, she received an audition bidding her to go as well. Margery was at first quite reluctant, "Lord, thu wost wel I haue no leue of my gostly fadyr, & I am bowndyn to obediens. Therfor I may not do thus wyth-owtyn hys wil & hys consentyng." The Lord replied, "I bydde the gon in my name, Ihesu, for I am a-bouyn thy gostly fadyr & I xal excusyn the & ledyn the & bryngyn the a-geyn in safte." When Margery pointed out that she had no money and that the ship's captain might not want her on the boat, the Lord reminded her that if he were for her, no one could be against her. This was confirmed to her when she attended a sermon in which the words "Yyf God be wyth us, ho schal be a-geyns us?" were repeated many times. Margery thus acquiesced. She traveled to the continent and visited various sites. When she returned, her confessor was angry, "He gaf hir ful scharp wordys, for sche was

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

hys obediencer & had takyn vp-on hir swech a jurne wyth-owtyn hys wetyng." But the Lord helped her so that "sche had as good loue of hym & of other frendys after as sche had be-forn, worschepyd be God. Amen."<sup>76</sup> This is the last sentence of Margery's *Boke*. At last, she had become so confident in her visionary experiences that not only did she no longer need constant affirmation from religious authorities, but she chose her revelations over their commands. For at least one late medieval English visionary, anxiety about the source of her visions, although not totally dissipated, had been conquered to the point where she now placed, at least for one climactic moment, the authority of her visionary experience over the authority of the Church.

*Jeanne d'Arc: Anxiety Exploited as Political Weapon*

For Jeanne d'Arc, personal anxiety about the validity of her visions was not a consuming issue. Her problem was the exploitation by others of questions about source, used by the English as political weapons to undermine her authority as a visionary and thus her power as a military leader. Jeanne d'Arc was only thirteen years old when she first heard the voices and saw the apparitions that would motivate her to leave her home in Lorraine, to seek out Charles VII and to offer to lead armies to make him King of France. Her auditions and visions of St. Michael, St. Gabriel, St. Catherine, and St. Margaret led her to military triumph and to the reanointing of Charles VII as King, but they also resulted in her capture by the Burgundians who handed her over to their English allies. Her consequent trials, although conducted at Rouen were nevertheless riddled with English influences and took place at the instigation of the English. As Henry Lea has argued, the English, although themselves outside of the jurisdiction of the Inquisition nevertheless recognized that a trial for heresy was a particularly efficient way of crippling an enemy, for it was very difficult for anyone to defend oneself against such a charge. It was well worth the high price of ransoming Jeanne from the Burgundians and paying for the full cost of the trial.<sup>77</sup> Jeanne was aware of the English backing

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., pp. 227 and 247.

<sup>77</sup> See Henry Lea as paraphrased by W.P. Barrett, trans., *The Trial of Jeanne d'Arc: A Complete Translation of the Text of the Original Documents* (London: George Routledge, 1931), p. 13.

for her trial and specifically asked for there to be as many French clerics as English.<sup>78</sup> This request seems to have simply been ignored. At several points the interrogators themselves raised the English-French issue, asking Jeanne if the voices spoke English as well as French and whether God loved the English as well as the French. It is clear that Jeanne's crime was in leading the people against the English King. Many times the records referred to Charles as "him whom she calls her king." Many of the questions, even though this was supposedly a heresy trial, related to her battles and to her relationship with Charles. But the reason that Jeanne d'Arc could be more effectively disposed of through a heresy trial than through trial for treason was that her power came through revelations. Claims of having received visions and auditions left one wide open to charges of demonic influence and thus of witchcraft, an area being absorbed increasingly into the Inquisition's jurisdiction, as mentioned in chapter 3. In a sense, Jeanne's visions were thus her Achilles heel.

On the other hand, without her visions Jeanne would never have risen to such prominence and influence. She was young, she was a peasant, and she was female. Apart from the supernatural authority that her revelations gave her, Jeanne would never have been taken seriously. But she *was* taken seriously. Her visions gave her authority because they were believed to be genuine and divinely originated. Various people came to believe her visions in different ways. Jeanne herself came to accept her visions because, even though she initially did not believe them and was frightened by them, she came to trust in St. Michael because of the good doctrine he taught her and because of his faithfulness to her over the years. During the trial, she insisted that she would have been able to discern if he were the Devil in disguise. She claimed also that there were signs, signs that could not be seen by everyone. She trusted in saints Catherine and Margaret because St. Michael had predicted that they would come to her. Robert de Baudricourt, the first person to whom she told her revelations, sent her away twice before he believed her. Charles himself did not believe her until he saw a sign. Jeanne was highly reluctant to reveal the nature of this sign to the tribunal, but eventually she told them that an angel brought a heavenly crown to the king and told him to listen to the Maid and give her men to fight for him. The common people, treating her as

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<sup>78</sup> The Usher's writ of 20 February, 1431 (Barrett, *Trial*, p. 48).

a saint, seem to have believed in the authority of the revelations on the basis of her resulting military successes.

Many of the tribunal's articles against Jeanne were patently unfair. They accused her of having used her revelations to promote schism, even though she specifically stated that she believed in the pope at Rome. They transformed childhood references to a tree, a fountain, and fairies into charges of witchcraft. They chastised Jeanne for claiming to be able to identify the figures in her apparitions, something that virtually every visionary in the didactic visions, for example, did. And they accused her first of obeying the voices and then censored her for disobeying them.<sup>79</sup>

But several of the issues that the tribunal raised were substantive criticisms of Jeanne's conduct as a visionary, particularly in relation to the authority that she granted to her revelations. She had disobeyed her parents, or at least acted without their permission and against what they would have wished, when she left home, but what was more serious was her disobedience to the Church. When the tribunal asked her if she would submit to the authority of the Church Militant in addition to the Church Triumphant—an especially profound way of phrasing the dilemma facing every visionary whose revelations contradicted the demands of Church authorities—Jeanne affirmed her obedience to the Church Triumphant but refused initially to say anything about the Church Militant. After the seventy articles were read to her, she answered the repeated question by saying that she would never stop doing what God told her to do even if the Church required her to.<sup>80</sup> When Jeanne refused to don woman's clothing even though it would mean she would be allowed to receive the Sacrament, she put commands placed on her through her revelations above the requirements of Church teachings. Her persistent, even stubborn adherence to dictates about her clothing was a distinct contrast to Margery's ambivalence about her directives to wear white clothing and her submission to church authorities on the matter.<sup>81</sup> In addition, Jeanne admitted that

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<sup>79</sup> See Marina Warner, *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism* (London: Vintage, 1981), pp. 123–127 for an analysis of the semantic trap laid by the tribunal for Joan in relation to the sensory nature of her revelations.

<sup>80</sup> Saturday, 31 March, 1431 in prison (Barrett, p. 225).

<sup>81</sup> See Atkinson, *Mystic*, pp. 50 and 120. For further discussions of Joan of Arc's spirituality and her relationship with the clergy, see Ann W. Astell and Bonnie Wheeler, eds., *Joan of Arc and Spirituality* from New Middle Ages Series (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) and Jane Marie Pinzino, "Speaking of Angels: A Fifteenth-Century



she—again unlike Margery Kempe—never went to religious authorities for assessment of any of her visions. She even stated that she believed in the visits of St. Michael “as firmly as she believes that Our Lord Jesus Christ suffered death to redeem us.”<sup>82</sup> In the end, her certainty about her revelations contributed significantly to her downfall. A contemporary of the Maid, the Norman clerk Lohier, who was opposed to the trial, said, “You see how they proceed. They will get her if they can by her words, by the statements where she says *I know for certain* when speaking of the revelations. If she said *I think* instead of *I know for certain*, I do not believe any man could condemn her.”<sup>83</sup> Her certainty was used as a sign that she was presumptuous. On May 2 at the public admonition of the Maid, the archdeacon exhorted Jeanne that “every revelation from God leads us to preserve meekness and obedience towards our superiors, and never otherwise: for our Lord never desired anyone to presume to call himself subject to God alone...Indeed, he committed and gave into the hands of the clergy the authority and power to know and judge the deeds of the faithful, whether they were good or evil: who scorned them, scorned God.” Whoever did not believe that the “Catholic Church is incapable of error or false judgment” violated the article *Unam Sanctum* and was thus a heretic and a schismatic.<sup>84</sup>

In addition to objecting to the supreme authority that Jeanne gave to her revelations, another major theme of the tribunal’s charges against the Maid was its concern over the origin of her revelations. In the series of letters commenting on the final twelve articles against the Maid the reasoning behind the decisions of those who sat in judgment over her are most clearly seen, and they show three main options which were theoretically possible for the Maid’s revelations: divine, demonic, and humanly-fabricated. Three bachelors of theology believed that the revelations came either from demons or from God or a good spirit, but the decision “is dependent upon a positive distinction which our insufficiency cannot attain, concerning the origin of the revelations mentioned in the articles which you addressed to us.”<sup>85</sup> Their reluctance

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Bishop in Defense of Joan of Arc’s Mystical Voices,” in Bonnie Wheeler and Charles T. Wood, eds., *Fresh Verdicts on Joan of Arc* from New Middle Ages Series (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), pp. 161–176.

<sup>82</sup> Barrett, *Trial*, p. 229.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>84</sup> Text of public admonition, May 2 (Barrett, *Trial*, pp. 271–272).

<sup>85</sup> Barrett, *Trial*, p. 260. See also Steven E. Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250–1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale

to assign a negative origin to the revelations without further information was rare, however, for most of the writers only seriously considered one or both of the negative options, i.e. demonic or fabricated. Lord Bishop Philibert of Coutances found Jeanne to be lacking in "virtue and humility" and these two signs being absent she was thus considered "to be bereft of the grace of the Holy Spirit."<sup>86</sup> Master Raoul Roussel, a doctor of canon and civil law, believed that the revelations were "false, treacherous and cunningly invented by this woman and her abettors to accomplish her aims and those of her party."<sup>87</sup> The lord bishop Zanon of Lisieux, citing the decretal *Cum ex injuncto*, stated that "we cannot give credence to any person who simply and barely affirms he is sent from God to show forth in the world the secret and invisible judgment of God, unless he is justified by the appearance of signs and miracles or by the special testimony of the Scripture."<sup>88</sup> He found these lacking in Jeanne's case and thus there were two possibilities, first that her revelations were "deceptions and phantasms on the part of devils" or "that they are lies humanly conceived and invented." He seemed to favor the former option, saying that the revelations were "false and scandalous innovations, rash and presumptuous declarations, full of false pride offensive to pious ears, of impiety, and of contempt of the sacrament of Communion." He nevertheless suggested that she be given the opportunity to submit to the Church or be judged a schismatic. Master Raoul Le Sauvage, a bachelor of theology, went through the articles point by point, showing which he thought were "phantasm or invented lie." He pointed, for example, to Jeanne's claim that St. Catherine and St. Margaret did not speak English as evidence of the falsehood of her revelations, for "is not God lord of all, the supreme providence, both for the English and others?"<sup>89</sup> He took a more gentle approach than most of the other writers, seeing Jeanne as more a victim of demonic delusion than a perpetrator of it, for he encouraged the tribunal to give

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University Press, 1980), pp. 30–31 and Warner, *Joan of Arc*, pp. 88–89 for the closely-related issue of the heresy of impeccability.

<sup>86</sup> Barrett, *Trial*, p. 255. See William Christian, Jr., *Apparitions in Late Medieval and Renaissance Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 191 for discussion of these two in Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*.

<sup>87</sup> Barrett, *Trial*, p. 259.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257. Advocates from the court of Rouen, also drew attention to the fact that Jeanne had not confirmed "her words by working miracles or by the testimony of the Holy Scripture" (Barrett, *Trial*, p. 252). For the abbots of Jumièges and of Corneilles, the criteria which Jeanne failed were "holiness of life or miracles."

<sup>89</sup> Barrett, *Trial*, p. 263.

regard to the “frailty of womankind” to speak to her in French, and to “charitably admonish” her to “reform, and not to presume so much upon revelations which may be uttered and invented by the evil spirit or some other.”<sup>90</sup>

In the end, however, the sentence read to Jeanne d’Arc before her abjuration pronounced her charges as follows:

We, having Christ and the honour of the orthodox faith before our eyes, so that our judgment may seem to emanate from the face of Our Lord, have said and decreed that in the simulation of your revelations and apparitions you have been pernicious, seductive, presumptuous, of light belief, rash, superstitious, a witch, a blasphemer of God and His saints, a despiser of Him in His sacraments, a prevaricator of the divine teaching and the ecclesiastical sanctions, seditious, cruel, apostate, schismatic, erring gravely in our faith, and that by these means you have rashly trespassed against God and the Holy Church.<sup>91</sup>

In the final analysis, she was not presumed merely to be fabricating her visions. The labeling of her as a witch explicitly linked her to demonic influences.<sup>92</sup> The final sentence which was read to her before she was burned did not give as much detail about her charges, summarizing them in a short list: “divers errors and crimes of schism, idolatry, invocation of demons and many other misdeeds.”<sup>93</sup> It too explicitly linked her revelations to demonic involvement. By accusing Jeanne of witchcraft and the invocation of demons, they were implying that the figures of St. Michael, St. Gabriel, St. Catherine, and St. Margaret were not simply imaginary figures created by Jeanne to gain power over others but rather were demons in disguise. Thus, the English had successfully exploited the belief that demons could disguise themselves.

Unfortunately for Jeanne, she had not taken the possibility of demonic disguise seriously enough herself. In not seeking the advice of the clergy about her auditions and visions, in expressing equal certainty about her revelations as about the central truths of the church, and in consequently placing a greater authority in her revelations than in the teachings and admonitions of the Church, she laid herself wide open to charges of heresy. The references in the Sentence (quoted above) to “presumption...schism...prevarication...despising of the Sacraments...

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., pp. 330–331.

<sup>92</sup> See Warner, *Joan of Arc*, for discussion of link between heresy and demonology (pp. 102 & 128).

<sup>93</sup> Barrett, *Trial*, p. 328.

apostasy...and light belief" all give witness to this. Thus, the very revelations which gave her, a young peasant girl, the power to persuade a king and more than 10,000 men to fight with her, which helped her to raise the siege of Orleans, which made the laypeople think of her as a saint, and which made her a threat to the English, were the very revelations which led to her downfall. Without her visions and auditions she would not have triumphed over the English; without her visions and auditions, she would not have been burned at the stake at their behest.<sup>94</sup>

*St. Bridget of Sweden: Ironies and Authority*

Further ironies in relation to visionary authority and the Hundred Years' War emerge with the examination of St. Bridget's involvement. St. Bridget, amongst the hundreds of visions and auditions recorded in her *Liber*, received revelations about the need for peace between England and France. She died in c. 1373, was canonized in 1391 and her cult was introduced into England in the early fifteenth century. Ironically, King Henry V was a devotee of this saint<sup>95</sup> who preached peace between England and France, an irony made even more potent by the fact that 1415, the year, of course, in which King Henry fought the battle of Agincourt, was also the year in which he placed the cornerstone for the Bridgettine monastery, Syon Abbey, and the year in which he mentioned the saint in his will.

It seems that with revelations of dead visionaries, even those revelations whose messages still applied and demanded reformed behavior or changed circumstances, people did not take the same kind of offence as when a live visionary's words led crowds to battle. Revelations from the past could be ignored or adopted at will. The visionary was no longer alive to object to revisions or to repeat the original message. Thus Henry V could ignore St. Bridget's messages while still being devoted to her and the English and the French could take turns using her words to bolster their causes. In 1439, a mere eight years after Jeanne's death, the Archbishop of York, pleading the English cause in

<sup>94</sup> An English charge of treason against Jeanne d'Arc would probably have further exacerbated Anglo-French relations. It was far more effective to have the Church try the Maid and condemn her as a heretic.

<sup>95</sup> See Johnston, "The Development of the Legend of St. Bridget" for details of the king's devotion (pp. 176-177).

negotiations with the French, appealed to St. Bridget's revelations as support for his case. The French responded by quoting John the Hermit who said that although, "for her sins, France should be afflicted by the English, the French should expel them from the kingdom."<sup>96</sup> The Archbishop retorted that one could hardly expect the Hermit to be taken as seriously as a saint of the caliber of St. Bridget. Years later, in 1455, it would be the French who would quote St. Bridget.<sup>97</sup>

Which visionary one decided to listen to was also clearly influenced—if not completely determined—by whether their message matched one's previously held views. Jean Gerson provided a further demonstration of this in his involvements with both St. Bridget and Jeanne d'Arc. In 1415, he was called upon to give his opinion at the Council of Constance about whether St. Bridget of Sweden's visionary writings should be approved. He wrote the tract, *De probatione spiritum*, urging caution in regards to the revelations of visionaries, particularly women visionaries.<sup>98</sup> In the last year of his life, however, two weeks after the raise of the Siege of Orleans, he wrote a tract *De puella aurelianensi* in defense of Jeanne d'Arc. It has been suggested that this change in stance towards a woman visionary was due to Gerson's concerns that St. Bridget's revelations tended towards schism whereas Jeanne d'Arc's cause was one that he supported.<sup>99</sup> This seems highly likely, and further raises the question as to whether, once a visionary's revelations became involved in politics, the visionary's authenticity could be judged fairly.

### *Elizabeth Barton and the Changing of the Guard*

This problem is highly evident in the case of Elizabeth Barton. Like Jeanne, she began receiving revelations at an early age, but where Jeanne's revelations were political from the start, Elizabeth's initial visions were not.<sup>100</sup> This makes it possible to contrast responses to her

<sup>96</sup> Walter F. Hook, *Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury*, vol. 5 (London: Richard Bentley, 1867), p. 231.

<sup>97</sup> Johnston, "The Development of the Legend of St. Bridget," p. 192.

<sup>98</sup> Costello, "Women's Mysticism and Reform," p. 71.

<sup>99</sup> D. Catherine Brown, *Pastor and Laity in the Theology of Jean Gerson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 224.

<sup>100</sup> Alan Neame argues that the messages of Elizabeth's earlier revelations were uncannily relevant to the issues which the Reformers were to attack, thus implying that they served as a form of political comment from the outset, but I believe that their content is probably too similar to the issues dealt with in the sermons and didactic

earlier non-political visions with her later political revelations. What emerges from the comparison is the fact that it was not until her revelations became political that they were condemned. Elizabeth's early revelations were submitted to the appropriate procedures—dictated by canon law—for the verification of visions. Alan Neame outlines the steps. First, the visions were examined by the Magistrate Edward Thwaites to see if they had any natural explanation. It being decided that the visions were supernatural in origin, the Maid's parish priest, the Rector of Aldington Richard Master reported the visions to Archbishop Warham who then asked him to collect more information.<sup>101</sup> An Episcopal Commission of Investigation was then set up, composed of seven men. They visited Court-at-Street where many of the trances had transpired, they examined the Maid's theology to determine if she was orthodox, and they interviewed witnesses. Their conclusions were that the visions were not satanic in origin, and the Maid's reputation as a church-sanctioned visionary was established. Thus, in 1526, Elizabeth's early visions survived the rigors of the full canonical procedures.

In 1528, as proceedings got underway to make it possible for Henry VIII to divorce Catherine and to separate from the papacy, Elizabeth's revelations shifted from inspiration to threat; this change in orientation from non-political to political was the first step in placing Elizabeth in a vulnerable position. Elizabeth, however, was not actually arrested until her visions became a clear threat to the King's reign. That moment did not come until after the king had made his break with Rome. Until then, Elizabeth's political visions were taken seriously and had a significant impact—at least on those who were trying to maintain the medieval religious system. This was both because the messages of her visions were useful ammunition for furthering their cause, but also because her visions, when viewed from within the medieval framework, carried authority *because* they were visions. And this authority gave incentive to the conservatives to fight for their cause. Elizabeth was instructed in her revelations to deliver warnings to Thomas Wolsey, Archbishop Warham, and even to the king himself. Several extant

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visions to require an explanation other than that Elizabeth had absorbed the traditional teachings on hell, purgatory, judgment, the Mass, the cult of the saints, and prayers for the dead. (*The Holy Maid of Kent: The Life of Elizabeth Barton, 1506–1534* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1971], pp. 37–45).

<sup>101</sup> Usually the diocesan bishop would be appealed to first, but in this case, the diocesan bishop and Archbishop were the same man (Neame, *The Holy Maid*, pp. 49–51).

documents testify to the efficacy of these revelations in delaying the divorce proceedings.<sup>102</sup> Years later, the *Act of Attainder* would state:

The late Cardinal of England and the late Bishop of Canterbury, being so well minded to further and to set at an end [procure definitively] the marriage the which the King's Grace now enjoyeth, according to their spiritual duty, were prevented by the false revelations of the said Nun.<sup>103</sup>

Warham became an advocate for her visions, and the revelations served as fuel to Wolsey's desire to see the King change his mind. Both John Fisher and Thomas More were accused of supporting her visions, much to their detriment. And the *Draft of Charges*<sup>104</sup> drawn up in 1534 implied that Elizabeth's visions had influenced even the Pope:

That if he did not his duty in reformation of kings, God will destroy them... at a certain day which she appointed.

By reason whereof, it is to be supposed that the Pope hath shown himself so double and so deceivable to the King's Grace in his great cause of marriage as he hath done, contrary to all truth, virtue and equity.<sup>105</sup>

And King Henry, ambivalent about the steps he was taking against Rome, could not help listening at first to the Maid. When he heard the 1528 tri-partite revelation warning him not to separate from the papacy, exhorting him to destroy "all these new ffolkes of opynyon and the workes of there new lernyng," and predicting the "vengaunce of God shuld plage hym" if he were to marry Anne Boleyn, he did not immediately accuse Elizabeth of treason.<sup>106</sup> It does not seem to have occurred to him at that point. The second time that Elizabeth visited the King, in December of 1529 or January of 1530 he looked dismayed<sup>107</sup> when she warned him that he would die "a shameful and miserable death" if he divorced and remarried. He offered to make

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<sup>102</sup> See, for example the Sermon against the Holy Maid in L.E. Whatmore, ed. "The Sermon against the Holy Maid of Kent and her Adherents," *The English Historical Review* 58 (1943): 468.

<sup>103</sup> James Gairdner, ed., *Calendar of Letters and Papers Foreign and Domestic of the Reign of Henry VIII* quoted by Neame, *Maid*, p. 116.

<sup>104</sup> Neame suggests that this document may be "a draft for the Lord Chancellor's speech when introducing the Bill into the House of Lords" (Neame, *The Holy Maid*, p. 303).

<sup>105</sup> *Draft of Charges* quoted in Neame, *The Holy Maid*, p. 224.

<sup>106</sup> Item i of Wolff's list in Thomas Wright, *Three Chapters of Letters Relating to the Suppression of Monasteries* (London: Camden Society, 1843), pp. 14–15.

<sup>107</sup> According to Fisher's biographer, the king "gave her a quiet hearing, seeming to all men that were there present not only content with her words but also dismayed to hear them at the mouth of such a woman" (quoted by Neame, *The Holy Maid*, p. 127).

her an abbess, and Queen Anne attempted to have her stay on at court. Elizabeth refused both offers. Even after her third visit, in 1532, Henry took no immediate action against her. It is likely that he was still torn between his respect for the traditional religion that the Maid represented, and his desire to have a male heir to the throne, a longing whose fulfillment necessitated separation from Rome. The content of the Maid's revelations were a threat to his divorce plans, but her reputation and character vouched for her visions and thus gave them an authority which may have given the king reason to pause.

Those who judged Elizabeth in medieval terms believed her. The person for whom the most details are extant for the reasons why he placed his faith in her visions is the renowned English theologian John Fisher. Elizabeth's were not the first woman's visions that Fisher had affirmed. In the Sermon of Month's Mind for his patroness, Lady Margaret Beaufort (d. 1509), while eulogizing her, he had included mention of a vision which she had at age nine in which St. Nicholas, from whom she had prayerfully sought advice, "appered vnto her arayed like a bisshop, & naming vnto her Edmonde bad take hym vnto her husbände."<sup>108</sup> Speaking well of Lady Margaret's vision did not endanger Fisher; the vision was uncontroversial. Speaking well of the Maid of Kent's visions, however, was another matter. Fisher was against the King's divorce and this, combined with his openness to the potential authority of visions, made it natural for him to draw on the Maid's revelations as ammunition for his cause. In fact, Cromwell accused him of believing the Maid's revelations only because he agreed with them:

My lord, all thes thinges moved you not to gyve credence unto her, but only the very mater whereupon she made her fals proficyes, to whiche mater ye were so affected (as ye be noted to be on al maters whiche ye enter ons into), that no thing could come amysse that made for that purpose.<sup>109</sup>

Fisher, however, had advanced additional reasons for having believed Elizabeth's revelations. His arguments survive only in a paraphrased form in Cromwell's response to the letter that had contained the original wording:

<sup>108</sup> John Fisher, *The English Works of John Fisher*, Part I, ed. John E.B. Mayor (London: N. Trübner, 1876), p. 293.

<sup>109</sup> Wright, *Letters*, p. 30. See Richard Rex, *The Theology of John Fisher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 60. "...the use [Fisher] made in his polemics of private revelations and of miracles confirms that for him the supernatural was almost an everyday matter."



The first is grownde upon the brute and fame of her; The secunde upon her entering into religion after her traunces and disfiguration; The third upon rehersall that her gostly father, being lerned and religious, shuld testifie that she was a maide of greate holines; The fourth upon the report that diverse other vertuose prestes, men of good lernyng and reputation, shuld so testifie of her, with which gostly father and preestes ye never spake, as ye confesse in your letters; The fyveth upon the prayses of my late lord of Canterbury, which shewed you (as ye write) that she had many greate visions; The sixt upon this saing of the prophete Amos, *Non favet Dominus Deus verbum, nisi revelaverit secretum suum ad servos suos prophetas*; by whiche considerations ye were induced to the desire to know the very certene of this mater, whether thes revelations whiche were pretended to be shewed to her from God were true revelations or nott.<sup>110</sup>

The first five reasons relate to testimonies about her spiritual character and to the successful testing of her visions by those in spiritual authority, two important elements in ascertaining whether a medieval visionary was genuine. The arguments were unsuccessful, however, in achieving freedom for Fisher. His name was included in the Act of Attainder against the Maid and his sentence commuted only after he protested. But soon after, for refusing to sign the Act of Supremacy, Fisher was beheaded.

Elizabeth was never tried for treason. Nor was she tried for heresy. She simply was not tried. Neame suggests that any case brought against her would have given Henry's opponents the opportunity to argue against the divorce, and he could not afford to have the issue debated in public. The threats of humiliation and even possibly of revolt were too great.<sup>111</sup> Thus, the Maid was condemned by an Act of Attainder rather than being given a trial. Such a trial, had it occurred, would have juxtaposed in particularly acute contrast the reformation and medieval forms of piety. The Maid and her revelations stood for everything that the medieval system represented.

Not only the messages of Elizabeth's revelations, but the forms in which they came, were in opposition to the principles of the Reformation. Although many of those principles would not be put into action until years had passed—many would have to wait until even Henry VIII himself had passed away—the ideas were present in the minds of the Reformers. One wonders how many of those Reformational principles would have emerged in a trial involving a visionary.

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<sup>110</sup> Wright, *Letters*, p. 28.

<sup>111</sup> Neame, *The Holy Maid*, p. 278.

Clues can be found in the writings of the Reformers that mention the Maid of Kent. In judging visions, the Reformers maintained the three-fold division of revelations into divine, demonic, and hoax, but used different criteria for deciding to which category given visions belonged. William Tyndale, for example, writing against the Maid of Kent in 1528, had labeled her miracles demonic on the basis that they “confirm[ed] doctrine contrary to God’s word.”<sup>112</sup> In 1530 he specified that particular doctrine as the putting of “such trust and confidence in our Blessed Lady.”<sup>113</sup> An exile during the Marian reign would write a tract entitled “Of Unwritten Verities” dealing specifically with visions. He would refer to Elizabeth Barton as surpassing “all others in devilish devices” and he would outline the criteria for discerning true from false visions and miracles:

...St. John saith... ‘Hereby is the Spirit of God known...every spirit which confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God,’ &c. Whosoever therefore saith, that there is any thing that pacifieth the wrath of God, or obtaineth his favour and forgiveness of sins, but only Christ’s death and passion, he denieth Christ to be come a Saviour in the flesh. Wherefore these angels, saints, souls of the dead, and miracles, that allow worshipping of saints by invocation and praying to them, the sacrifice of the mass for the quick and the dead, worshipping of images, pilgrimages, offerings to holy relics, to forgive sins, or to deliver the dead out of purgatory, deny Christ to be come an only Saviour by his flesh.<sup>114</sup>

A brief overview of the didactic visions reveals that the vast majority of late medieval vision accounts were inextricably linked to these very aspects of late medieval piety which the Reformation dismantled. Veneration of the saints, service of the dead, belief in the Real Presence, worship of images, crucifixes, and the Host all came under the attack of the Reformers and were legislated against in various Henrician and Edwardian Acts. These by implication eliminated visions of saints, visions of ghosts, and visions of seeing related to images and image-aided meditation. The only large category that remained was that of visions of demons, the very last category from which a visionary could hope to draw authority.

<sup>112</sup> *The Obedyence of a Christen Man* (printed in Hesse, 1528), f. cxxiii as quoted in Neame, *The Holy Maid*, p. 91.

<sup>113</sup> Tyndale, *Answer to Sir Thomas More’s Dialogue* in *Works of William Tyndale* (Parker Society, Cambridge, 1850), pp. 89–92 quoted in Neame, *The Holy Maid*, p. 96.

<sup>114</sup> “Of Unwritten Verities,” Thomas Cranmer, *Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer*, ed. John Emund Cox. Parker Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1846), p. 67.

Had the ideas expressed in “Unwritten Verities” and legislated in the Acts been brought to bear on the Maid’s visions, most of her visions would have been discredited. One of her early revelations, for example, had promised Marian aid at death to devotees at Court-at-Street:

If any depart this life suddenly  
or by mischance in deadly sin,  
if he be vowed to our Lady heartily,  
he shall be restored to life again  
to receive shrift and housel, and after  
to depart this world with God’s blessing.<sup>115</sup>

Elizabeth had claimed, according to a letter of accusation written to Thomas Cromwell, to have seen Cardinal Wolsey in purgatory and to have released him from there by her penance:

That syns he dyed she was the disputacion of the devylles for his sowylle, and how she was iij. tymes lyfte up and culd not se hym nether in hevyn, hell, nor purgatory, and at the last where shew saw hym, and how by hur pennaunce he was browght unto hevyn, and what sowylles she saw ffly thorow purgatory, etc.<sup>116</sup>

Three of her revelations were directly opposed to the Reformers. An angel commanded her to go to a monk and “byd hym burne the New Testament that he had in Inglyssh.”<sup>117</sup> Another vision opposed her to Tyndale; it involved “ij. other monkes which had takyn shippyng to go unto Tynldalle, which by hur prayer was torned, and the ship had no powre to depart from the haven, etc.”<sup>118</sup> And of course, her first revelation to King Henry had explicitly opposed her to the Reformers, those “new folks of learning.” Each of these visions would have drawn fire had she been brought to trial.

Elizabeth Barton was not the only one whose visions were opposed by the Reformers. A less well-known visionary was George Lazenby, a monk of Jervaulx who also had visions that encouraged him to defend the Pope and made him willing to die for the Church. The Reformers denigrated his visions, however, as indicated, for example, in a letter from Sir Francis Bigod to Cromwell on 20 July 1535 who referred to the visions as “such other madness” and accused the monk of “[blinding] simple folks and establish[ing] his treason with revelations, as he calls

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<sup>115</sup> Neame, *The Holy Maid*, pp. 53–54.

<sup>116</sup> Item vi of Wolff’s list in Wright, *Letters*, p. 16.

<sup>117</sup> Item x in Wolff’s list (*ibid*).

<sup>118</sup> Item ix in Wolff’s list (*ibid*).

them." Sir Francis, showing which side of the Reformation debate he upheld, accused the monk of "defending yonder same idol and blood supper of Rome."<sup>119</sup> The monk did not live long after this, for by October he was executed for high treason.<sup>120</sup>

The Reformation criteria for judging visions were not fully in place in the 1530's when George and Elizabeth's visions were under scrutiny. We do not have records of a trial for George Lazenby, and conjectures about which of the Reformers' ideas could have been used and by whom at such an early date in the Reformation if Elizabeth had been tried are doubly hypothetical, for Elizabeth, even if given a trial, would not have been tried as a visionary. In the autumn of 1533, when questioned by a Commission at the King's command, Elizabeth rescinded her claims of being a visionary. She had received a revelation as stated in Wolff's list:

How the angell of God hath comaundyed hur to say that all ar but yllusions, for the tyme is not cum that God wulle put forth the wurk, etc.<sup>121</sup>

Therefore, when Dr. Salcot preached the sermon of penance against the Maid and her adherents as they sat on the scaffold before the large crowds at St. Paul's Cross, London and at Canterbury, he had no choice but to label her visions hoaxes, for she herself had confessed as much. We may never know the answer to the question of why Elizabeth Barton refused to defend her visions. Unlike Jeanne d'Arc, she was not under the immediate threat of being burned at the stake, and her confession did not guarantee her an easier death. In fact, by admitting to a hoax, she opened herself up to a charge of treason. And unlike Jeanne d'Arc, she never reversed her confession and thus died in April of 1534, having stated only a few minutes before:

...the things that were done by me...were altogether feigned...I, being puffed up with...praises, fell into a certain pride and foolish fantasy with myself, and thought I might feign what I would.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> James Gairdner, ed., *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1850's; reprint, Vaduz: Kraus, 1965), viii, 1069.

<sup>120</sup> See Gairdner, ed., *Letters and Papers*, ix, 37 & 557. For a fuller account of Lazenby's martyrdom, see Leonard Whatmore, "George Lazenby, Monk of Jervaux: A Forgotten Martyr?" *The Downside Review* 60 (1942): 325-330.

<sup>121</sup> Item xxvi of Wolff's list in Wright, *Letters*, p. 18.

<sup>122</sup> Neame, *The Holy Maid*, pp. 335-336.

Neame suggests that this final confession was said out of an agreement to spare “the Benedictine community of S. Sepulchre’s, Canterbury.”<sup>123</sup> This would not account for the initial confession, however. Nor would a hypothesis that the revelations had indeed been hoaxes. Elizabeth’s large following and the high esteem of reputable men makes it very unlikely that Elizabeth had intentionally fabricated her revelations. It is highly improbable that she herself actually believed that her revelations were false. Apart from the moral question about whether it was right for her to lie—even in response to a revelation expressly telling her to do so—there is the question of why she was instructed, or at least believed she was, to deny the validity of all her previous visions.

Did it come from a realization that it was useless to attempt to defend the traditional religion against the “new folks of opinion and the words of their new learning” using weapons which were themselves being blunted by the new ideas? Perhaps, like Samson discovering his hair has been cut, Elizabeth recognized immediately that the source of her strength was being destroyed. With the arrival of *Sola Scriptura*, which limited the foundation of divine revelation to the Scriptures, visions could no longer be regarded as determinative for dogma or prophecy. If something was not communicated in the Old or New Testaments, it could not be proclaimed with certainty to be divine truth. The dynamic of Mediated Revelation, which had undergirded the vision’s power, had been narrowed to the point that it no longer included visions. Visions as a potent source of authority were fading and it would be some time before they would revive in a new, non-medieval form. Never again would a visionary worldview be the common heritage of the people of England. No longer would there be a shared understanding of clear guidelines about how to relate to visitors from heaven, hell, and purgatory. No longer would visions feature prominently in sermons and religious manuals of instruction.<sup>124</sup> Visions and visionaries would become rare. The hanging of Elizabeth Barton sounded the death knell of the late medieval English vision.

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 335.

<sup>124</sup> There may have been a brief and partial resurgence in the Marian years. “Of Unwritten Verities” mentions a sermon in which three stories of visions are recounted (Cranmer, *Miscellaneous*, p. 66).

## CONCLUSION

In face-to-face encounters and direct communications with visitors from heaven, hell, and purgatory, visionaries were privileged to witness first-hand the efficacy and veracity of Church teachings. Thus, for the historian, the vision highlights medieval conceptions of the otherworld and demonstrates the accepted rules of interaction between human beings and the supernatural. The vision also illustrates the visual emphasis of medieval spirituality and shows the importance of meditation, image, and imagination in the devotion of the period. By studying the vision, one can learn much about medieval attitudes and practices with respect to the demonic, the cults of the dead and of the saints, the sacraments of the Eucharist and penance and the authority of scripture and the Church.

Although relatively few late medieval lay people reported experiencing visions themselves, the vision as a phenomenon was very familiar to the ordinary person. Knowledge about visions, about the typical supernatural visitors and their predictable behaviors and how to respond to them were well known. The numbers of vision accounts and their high proportion amongst the *exempla* and saints legends makes it almost certain that most laypeople would have been highly familiar with the characters of the visionary stage, the etiquette of visionary relations, and the range of styles of visionary sight. Thus the vision was an important part of the *Weltanschauung* of the late medieval layperson.

Preserved in the vernacular materials of religious instruction of the laity in late medieval England, the stories of visions encompassed a wide range of types. The figures who made appearances included demons and angels, ghosts from purgatory and hell, biblical saints, post-biblical saints, the Blessed Virgin Mary, Christ Incarnate, the Holy Spirit as dove, and the Father as the voice from heaven. Most of the visions emphasized interaction with beings from the otherworld. That interaction presented three primary modes of relating, the plea for help by a ghost from purgatory, the attack by a demon, and the rescue by a heavenly visitor. In each of these three modes, there were clear rules about how the visionary should respond in order to avoid being hurt.

Although in all cases the visionaries were dealing with beings who had power over them, if they followed the conventional guidelines they were assured of a safe outcome.

Visions revealed God's privities, his thoughts of the future and his personal secrets. Visions offered sights, insights, and foresights into spiritual matters, some through symbolic dreams, predictive dreams, clairvoyance, glimpses of heaven, and auditions, and others through the conversion of spirit and Spirit into dove-form, and the appearance of Christ in various forms such as a crucifix come to life, as the Eucharist or as an incarnate human sharing his pain-bought blood.

Visions revealed information about matters that would otherwise have remained shrouded in mystery. They undergirded the piety of the day. Some, like the sights of souls on their way to hell, the ghosts returning from hell, the staging of mock judgments, and the involuntary pilgrimages to purgatory, served as vivid warnings to the laity to prepare properly for their deaths. Some gave visionaries the opportunity to influence their destinies by means of engaging in an activity in the midst of visionary experience itself. The Pseudo-Bonaventuran meditative exercises, transformed into vision by Margery Kempe, gave her the setting in which to earn rewards in heaven for help she gave to the Virgin. The pilgrimages taken to St. Patrick's Purgatory in imitation of Sir Owein the knight, gave visionaries the ability to suffer their purgatorial pains early and avoid purgatory after death. Together, these visions buttressed the sacrament of penance and the doctrine of purgatory. Other visions functioned as miracles encouraging lay folk to maintain devotion to their saints. They endorsed the credibility of the saints by showing their interactions with the divine while on earth and their power to help devotees while in heaven.

Forming a background to all these types was the ambivalence of the Church towards dreams and visions. Despite exhorting great caution towards dreams, the Church included hundreds of stories about visions and dreams as sermon illustrations and crucial elements in saints' lives. Theological writings prohibited the use of dream manuals and often linked dreams with witchcraft. Nonetheless, visions were included as part of the miracle collections at saints' shrines, ghost stories were recorded by local monks, and visionaries' biographies were widely circulated.

The didactic visions and late medieval visions taken together exemplified and buttressed late medieval spirituality, affirming five key dynamics. The economic transactions embedded in the model of atone-

ment as satisfaction were 'proved' by visions related to purgatory and hell. The dynamic of Reciprocated Devotion in the cults of the saints was affirmed by the visions of the saints. The visions of Spiritual Warfare demonstrated the limited power of the demonic and the effective control of ecclesiastical rituals. The visual dynamic was exhibited by numerous forms of sacramental and Supra-Sacramental Sight. And the importance of authority in the mediation of revelation was taught both by the content and the controversy of the prophetic visions. By bringing to the surface these deeper realities of medieval belief, the vision gave intensity to late medieval theology, piety, and spirituality.

On the other hand, the official cautions against putting trust in dreams about the future provoked apprehension, which demonic disguise then compounded. Thus, it is no surprise that the laity expressed confusion in regards to visionary experience. Margery Kempe's strong desire to have visions was held in tension with her terror over mistaking demonic illusions for God's revelations. The anxiety she inherited was inherent both in the church's teaching and in the illustrations used. This uncertainty about the sources of visions was exploited for political ends in the cases of Jeanne d'Arc and Elizabeth Barton. For these visionaries in particular, the supernatural world turned out to be a far safer place than the natural.

The medieval caution towards visions, however, was not what destroyed the visionary world. The visionary system would be dismantled in England because of new theology that undermined the medieval visions and their content. The Late Middle Ages grounded its epistemology in church-mediated knowledge. The Reformation would be founded on a very different hermeneutic, that of *Sola Scriptura*. Instead of Scripture, papal and conciliar decisions, and visions together being under the authority of the Church in disseminating salvific knowledge, the Scriptures would serve as the touchstone for all truth. This change in the authority base from the Church to Scripture closed canonical revelation and thus made it necessary to monitor visions even more carefully. Scripture was given ultimate authority over visions. This resulted in a narrowing of doctrine to that taught by the Scriptures, which meant the elimination of the doctrines of purgatory, and the cult of the saints.

In addition, the content of the visions lost its importance, gutting their authority. A major shift in the theory of atonement from one related to satisfaction to one based on justification by faith alone, resulted in the elimination of the economy of satisfaction, for Christ had



paid the full penalty on the cross. The focus on the finished nature of the work on the cross meant that there was no longer such an emphasis on the crucifixion. Attention shifted to the resurrection, ascension, and the priestly intercession of Christ at the throne of grace, so the cult of the Passion faded away. The closer relationship with Christ and the teachings on Christ as the only mediator eliminated the cults of the saints. Therefore the dynamic of Reciprocated Devotion was narrowed to Christ and took on a different tone. Spiritual Warfare continued to be important, for demons were an important part of the Scriptures. Thus, visions became a much less significant part of life and spirituality once the Reformation reached England.

This contrast between the role of visions in late medieval England and Reformation England accentuates the key role that visions played in pre-Reformation spirituality. Vicarious visions and second-hand dreams were peddled by the late medieval preachers. Wrapped in *exempla* and saints' legends, the visionary accounts themselves contained kernels of spiritual truth that the clergy wished the laity to consume. In 1509, Erasmus' *In Praise of Folly* illustrated the popularity of *exempla* and saints' legends:

[In] church at sermon time...everyone is asleep or yawning or feeling queasy whenever some serious argument is expounded, but if the preacher starts to rant (I beg your pardon, I mean orate) on some old wives' tale as they often do, his audience sits up and takes notice, open-mouthed. And again, if there's some legendary saint somewhat celebrated in fable (you can put George or Christopher or Barbara in that category if you need an example) you'll see that he receives far more devout attention than Peter or Paul or even Christ himself.<sup>1</sup>

We have examined what these 'wives tales' and 'fables' would have taught their attentive listeners about the world of demons and the dead, of saints and symbolic dreams. It was an orderly, structured world where the act of being shriven made a repentant man invisible to an accusing fiend, a short phrase caused an angry devil to vanish, a holy bishop's prayers were clearly more powerful than a necromancer's incantations, souls from purgatory presented easy-to-follow petitions for help to escape into eternal bliss, and saints came to the rescue of their devotees. It was a world in which a voice gave clear instructions about the appointments of bishops, in which Christ appeared in the flesh, and

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<sup>1</sup> Betty Radice, trans., Erasmus of Rotterdam. *Praise of Folly*. (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1971), pp. 135-136.

where deathbed battles of the godly were successfully engaged at the edge between this world and the next.

But it was also a world where, if one mistook the source of one's visions or failed to see through a disguise, one could end up wandering through a swamp in the middle of the night or committing suicide while on pilgrimage; a world for which the price of entry—if one were accused of sorcery, heresy, or treason because of one's visions—could be as expensive as death.

The late medieval English laity entered this world themselves when John of Powderham made a pact with the devil, when Snowball the Yorkshire tailor crossed himself at the sight of a raven-ghost, when the sight of King Henry VI cured William Wotton from Sussex from a horsekick, when Edmund Leversedge of Somerset visited purgatory, and when Margery Kempe of King's Lynn saw Christ sitting on her bed.

In late medieval English popular piety, the vision provided a world in which, although tinged with the possibility of illusion, delusion, and disappointment, there was the opportunity to earn merit by feeding nourishing broth to the Virgin Mary, to learn divine secrets, and to momentarily enter a predictable, controllable 'interworld' in which the weak won over the strong. It was a time and place, now lost, where the fire-breathing dragon-demon burst asunder at the simple criss-cross gesture of a gentle maiden.



## APPENDICES



## APPENDIX A

### VISION: RANGE OF USES OF TERM IN LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

The term ‘vision’ was used to describe a wide variety of supernatural experiences in the Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup> It referred to apparitions or visitations of angels, saints, the Virgin Mary, Christ, and ghosts. It appeared, for example, in the accounts of two angels baptizing St. Bridget of Ireland,<sup>2</sup> St. Edward the Martyr appearing to a holy man to instruct him to translate his bones,<sup>3</sup> St. John coming to St. Marcelle to show him where his head was hidden,<sup>4</sup> the Virgin appearing to a newly-married devotee to exhort him not to leave her,<sup>5</sup> Christ coming to St. Barnabas to call him to martyrdom,<sup>6</sup> and St. Edmund of Abingdon’s mother appearing to him to tell him to study divinity. ‘Vision’ was occasionally used to refer to events which seemed to be merely auditions, as with St. Thomas of Canterbury’s clerk to whom “in auision ther com / A cler uois that sede...”<sup>7</sup> ‘Vision’ referred to journeys to the otherworld, as with the keeper of St. Peter’s in Rome whose soul was taken up into heaven to witness the assembly of the saints on All Hallows Day,<sup>8</sup> or sometimes simply to a glimpse of the otherworld, as when St. Martin saw Christ in heaven.<sup>9</sup> It referred to symbolic dreams like the one of the wicked scholar in which he found himself in a tempest and visited the houses of Righteousness, Truth, Peace, and Mercy, with only the last one letting him in out of the storm.<sup>10</sup> And it was used to describe a eucharistic vision such as St. Edward the Confessor’s seeing the Host as

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘dream’ referred to what occurred in sleep, whereas ‘vision’ implied a supernatural causation, whatever the state of consciousness of the visionary.

<sup>2</sup> *SEL*, p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> *SEL*, p. 117.

<sup>4</sup> *SS*, p. 197.

<sup>5</sup> *SS*, p. 201–202.

<sup>6</sup> *F*, p. 176.

<sup>7</sup> *SEL*, p. 646.

<sup>8</sup> *SS*, p. 220.

<sup>9</sup> *SS*, p. 236.

<sup>10</sup> *JW*, p. 255.

the Christ Child at the moment of elevation.<sup>11</sup> Thus the term vision was used to describe visitations or apparitions, auditions, predictive and / or symbolic dreams, eucharistic sights, and glimpses of and journeys to the otherworld. What united all of these categories was that they were *stories of what were believed to be direct encounters with or communications from the supernatural world.*

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<sup>11</sup> *GL*, vol. 6, p. 19.

## APPENDIX B

### BYLAND ABBEY GHOST STORIES AS CONTEMPORARY ACCOUNTS

A number of factors make it clear that the Byland Abbey ghost stories were contemporary stories rather than ‘exempla.’ Whereas the majority of visionary accounts used as exempla began with ‘I rede of...’ or cited a particular written reference, the Byland Abbey ghost stories seem to have come to the recording monk by word of mouth.<sup>1</sup> In the didactic ghost stories, the ghosts and visionaries were usually not named and locations were rarely given with greater specificity than their country. This gave many of the accounts a sense of timelessness and universality. The Byland Abbey stories, however, all took place within the Yorkshire region, near where the Byland Abbey was located, and the references were quite specific.<sup>2</sup> This imbued them with a sense of immediacy and rootedness.<sup>3</sup> The didactic visions, unless they were about saints, usually did not give the names of the visionaries. On the other hand, there were many named visionaries in the Byland Abbey stories, including William of Bradeforth<sup>4</sup> and named ghosts such as Robert the son of Robert de Boltby of Kilburn.<sup>5</sup> In addition to place

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<sup>1</sup> Two of the stories refer to old men or ‘my elders’ as their source (*BA*, pp. 375 and 370). In Account III, the narrator adds some details after completing the main story, “It is said, moreover, that...” and “some people say that...” writing in an almost gossipy tone, referring to peoples’ claims that the ghost had listened in at doorways to people’s homes, and perhaps had even been an accessory to murder (p. 370). In Account XII, he adds the after-detail, “It is said, however, that Adam de Lond, the younger, made partial satisfaction to the true heir after the death of the elder Adam,” letting the reader know of information not included in the story itself but which is rumored to be the case (p. 375).

<sup>2</sup> See Thompson’s “Topographical Notes” in Grant’s translation in *BA*, pp. 375–377.

<sup>3</sup> Also, a tailor walking from Gilling to Ampleforth saw a ghost near a ‘beck,’ asked the ghost to wait at the Hodgebeck but then submitted to the ghost’s preferences to wait at the Byland Bank, and then went to York to obtain the absolution (*BA*, p. 365). One of the ghosts had been buried in the front of the chapter house of the Byland Abbey (p. 370). Another ghost had been buried in the churchyard of Ampleforth (p. 375). Other specified locations included Kirby, Newburgh, Gormyre, and Exon / Exeter.

<sup>4</sup> *BA*, p. 372. Others included young man Robert Foxton (p. 370) and Richard Rowntree of Cleveland (p. 373).

<sup>5</sup> *BA*, p. 369. Others were James Tankerly the former Rector of Kirby, and “the



and person specifications, one of the accounts included a detail that dates it to the Late Middle Ages; it claims to have happened in the reign of King Richard II.<sup>6</sup> There were several comments by the Byland monk that seem to indicate that he believed that the accounts were more than mere fabrications.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the clearest indication that the monk was attempting to write fact rather than fiction, however, was his asking forgiveness in Account XII in case what he had written was not true.<sup>8</sup>

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sister of old Adam of Lond" (p. 375). Two of the ghosts were unnamed but specified by their town, "a certain canon of Newburgh" (p. 371), and a man from Ayton in Cleveland (p. 372).

<sup>6</sup> *BA*, p. 364.

<sup>7</sup> First, he seemed to believe that at least some of the stories involved demonstrations of God's power. The incipit to Account XI is "Concerning a wonderful work of God, who calls things which are not as though they were things which are, and who can act when and how he wills; and concerning a certain miracle." In two of the stories, he referred to God's involvement in the outcomes of the events, in Account III, referring to the ghost's eventual peace as being the result of God's will (p. 370) and in Account IX claiming that "In all these things—as nothing evil was left unpunished nor contrariwise anything good unrewarded, God showed himself to be a just rewarder" (p. 372). In Account VIII, the narrator concluded with a conjecture as to the motives of the ghost, "So that it seems that he was a ghost that mightily desired to be conjured and to receive effective help" (p. 372).

<sup>8</sup> *BA*, p. 375.

## APPENDIX C

### ADDITIONAL VISIONS AND VISION TYPES

We have dealt with the major types of medieval visions in the main text, but there are several remaining that deserve mention.

#### *St. Brendan's Journey as Quasi-Visionary Pilgrimage*

In chapter 1, we examined numerous peregrinations to the otherworlds of heaven, hell, and purgatory. St. Brendan's Journey does not fit exactly into the chapter, so we will explore it here. It is an account of a possible spiritual, visionary pilgrimage. St. Brendan lived ca. 489–570/583 in Ireland. The story of his “quest for the Promised Land” was written in Ireland perhaps as early as 800.<sup>1</sup> It was very popular and was translated in the Middle Ages into many European languages, including Middle English.<sup>2</sup> St. Brendan's Journey does not fit neatly into the category of otherworld visions, for it is not clear whether the narrator believed that St. Brendan ever left this world to enter another or whether he instead wandered into some imaginary landscape. The fact that the land he discovered was incorporated into many maps as the Island(s) of Brendan from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, seems to indicate that listeners to his story believed he had voyaged to a distant point on this planet rather than to heaven itself.<sup>3</sup> His voyage,

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<sup>1</sup> John J. O'Meara, ed. *The Voyage of Saint Brendan: Journey to the Promised Land* (Ireland: 1976), p. x.

<sup>2</sup> For a list of the printed editions of the English manuscripts, see Carl Selmer, “The Vernacular Translations of the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*: A Bibliographical Study,” *Mediaeval Studies* XVIII, 1956, pp. 148 and 154.

<sup>3</sup> This view was supported internally in the text as well, for the abbot Barrind, who had visited the land, compared the flowering plants and fruitful trees to those that would be in heaven, implying that he was not actually in heaven itself (*SEL*, p. 181). Note that it is the naming of the islands as St. Brendan's rather than locating them on the map that precludes their being thought of as paradise or heaven, for there were medieval maps that included paradise and hell. For maps with St. Brendan's Islands, see R.V. Tooley, C. Bricker, and G. Roe Crone, *A History of Cartography* (London, 1969), pp. 66, 71, 192, 204, 216 as cited in O'Meara, *Voyage*.

however, had some elements of pilgrimage, being a journey to a holy place, and it involved apparently visionary components.

St. Brendan's story was told in the *South English Legendary*.<sup>4</sup> St. Brendan, an abbot prone to much abstinence, was inspired to go on his pilgrimage by a returning 'pilgrim,' Abbot Barrind, who reported that God had commissioned him to take a sea voyage. St. Brendan gathered twelve monks to accompany him on the journey. At many times, it resembled a literal sea voyage, but in at least eight places, it drifted into apparently visionary realms. A mysterious messenger suddenly appeared to them in an aura of light when they prayed to God to assist them fording a river. In the Latin original, there were visions of an Ethiopian demon, of a large fish, of talking birds, a flaming arrow lighting lamps, a monk being snatched by demons and set on fire, demons wanting to take Judas back to his torture, and Paul the spiritual hermit's vision of St. Patrick.<sup>5</sup> In the end, the men saw the Promised Land and a young man instructed them to return home, for God wanted them to see "is priuetes" at sea,<sup>6</sup> and he predicted that St. Brendan would soon die. When Brendan returned home, he did not live for long: "For euer eft after thulke tyme · of the worle he ne rogte."<sup>7</sup>

Unlike figures such as Tundale, St. Brendan was a holy man who did not need to undertake a penitential pilgrimage. His visit to potential otherworlds was not a form of substitutionary purgatory but rather an expression of his longing for the ultimate 'promised land,' heaven itself.

### *The Eucharist and Supra-Sacramental Taste*

In chapter 4 we examined eucharistic visions in relation to Supra-Sacramental Sight, but there was one eucharistic encounter that was about consuming rather than seeing the sacrament. It was the story of the dove feeding St. Edmund of Canterbury with the Eucharist.<sup>8</sup> *The South English Legendary* told how one day, the saint was preparing to discuss the theology of the Trinity. While waiting for his scholars to come, he dozed off in a chair. A white dove flew down from heaven

<sup>4</sup> *SEL*, pp. 180–205.

<sup>5</sup> O'Meara, *Voyage*, pp. 4–5, 11–12, 19, 20–22, 31, 55, 58–59, and 63.

<sup>6</sup> *SEL*, p. 203.

<sup>7</sup> *SEL*, p. 204.

<sup>8</sup> Another story in the *SEL* told of a vision in which Christ himself fed a saint his "fleiss & blod." *SEL*, p. 439.

and placed a piece of Christ's flesh into the saint's mouth. When St. Edmund awoke, he found himself contemplating the majesty of Christ, and when he joined the disputation, the university scholars were in awe.<sup>9</sup> Caxton added that by this event, "he knew great privities of our Lord in heaven, for he passed all the doctors in Oxenford in conning, for he spake more like an angel than a man, and in all his lessons he remembered ever our Lord's passion."<sup>10</sup> Here God's privities were revealed not by sight but by savor.<sup>11</sup>

### *Visions of God's Privities*

In the didactic visions, there were a few diverse, small categories of visions that fit roughly into the categories of visions whose form caused the Church most concern. These were the visions in which God's privities (i.e. secrets) were revealed by the imparting of information which otherwise would not have been known.<sup>12</sup> These vision categories emphasized supernatural ways of 'knowing' rather than 'meeting.' In them, the vision's message was more important than the encounter with the visitor, in contradistinction from the didactic visions in the first three chapters of our text where interaction was often more important than information. This occurred in at least four formats: the symbolic dream, the *oraculum*, the *horoma*, and the audition.<sup>13</sup> The reason why the Church was so concerned about these dreams was that they purported to reveal truths directly from God, exposing God's "privities."

God was believed to reveal his secrets in visions which primarily involved seeing—the viewing of vistas which were usually hidden from

<sup>9</sup> *SEL*, p. 501.

<sup>10</sup> *GL*, vol. 6, p. 235.

<sup>11</sup> Extensive research has been done on the Eucharist as food. See Rudolph Bell, *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Caroline Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953); Bynum, "Women Mystics and Eucharistic Devotion in the Thirteenth Century," *Women's Studies* (1984): 179–214. There are dozens of reports of late medieval continental saints, particularly women, being supernaturally fed the Sacrament.

<sup>12</sup> Mirk used the term 'privity' twice in connection with visions of this type when he wrote of St. John the Evangelist that he knew "the privity of God" by revelation and thus knew the thoughts of two rich young men who regretted giving up their wealth and knew that a child he had entrusted to the care of a bishop had fallen into the company of thieves (*F*, p. 33).

<sup>13</sup> See chapter 5 for discussion of the Macrobian categories, including the *oraculum* and the *horoma*.

the eyes of humans. The connection between privities and seeing was made explicit in several vision accounts. In *Handlyng Synne*, when Fursey visited hell and heaven, he saw “gret preuyte,” and when a monk saw a ghost, he thought that “thys ys sum pryuyte / That god almyghty shewyth to me.”<sup>14</sup> The *South English Legendary* said of St. Dunstan’s visions of heaven that God must have loved him tremendously to have shown him “so much of is priuete.”<sup>15</sup> God’s revealing of his privities through visual means was consonant, of course, with the visual emphasis of late medieval religion. With visions related to the cult of the Passion, we observed the critical role of the visual in worship and devotion. With the four categories of visions related to God’s privity, we see the role of the visual in epistemology.

### *Symbolic dreams*

The first of these four categories was the symbolic dream. These dreams tended to fall into one of two categories. The first were prophecies about saints.<sup>16</sup> The second served as indications of the spiritual states of sinners or repentant sinners’ souls. An example of the former was St. Kenelm’s dream at age seven of climbing a tree that his governor had chopped. When the tree crashed down, Kenelm saw a bird flying joyfully to heaven. When he awoke, he asked his nurse to interpret the dream, and she told him that his sister and governor were plotting to kill him.<sup>17</sup> An example of the latter type was the vision of the converted prostitute who lived in a cell for three years, surviving on bread and water, prostrating herself on the ground crying for God’s mercy. Towards the end of her self-imposed incarceration, she saw a revelation of a beautiful bed in heaven, and the angels informed her that she would rest in it forever because she had repented perfectly of her sin.<sup>18</sup>

None of the accounts of symbolic visions, whether of saints or sinners, referred to books or systems of interpretation. Those that indicated the mode of interpretation referred to a godly person. For exam-

<sup>14</sup> *HS*, pp. 64 and 91.

<sup>15</sup> *SEL*, p. 209.

<sup>16</sup> These predictive symbolic dreams correspond to the Macrobian category, *somnium*, or figurative dream.

<sup>17</sup> *GL*, vol. 4, p. 62; There is a longer version in *SEL*, p. 283.

<sup>18</sup> *JW*, p. 23.

ple the two symbolic visions<sup>19</sup> that St. Thomas of Canterbury's mother had, the first when she was pregnant and the second when the saint was a baby, were both interpreted by her confessor, to whom she turned after each dream. This was very much in keeping with the procedure the church affirmed for dealing with prophetic visions, thus serving as a positive model to the laity.

### *Macrobian oraculum*

Only occasionally did a didactic vision take the form of a Macrobian *oraculum*, a parent or revered person appearing to give directives about the visionary's future. While studying arithmetic at Oxford, St. Edmund of Canterbury had a vision in which his mother appeared to him and asked him what figures he was studying and told him there were better figures to study. She took his right hand, traced three circles in his palm and wrote Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in them. She told him to "entende to this lore." He realized, therefore, that God wanted him to study divinity.<sup>20</sup> Such visions were more common in Graeco-Roman times.<sup>21</sup> St. Edmund's vision was, in fact, reminiscent of a Christian vision that took place in late antiquity, that of Jerome.

Authority figures in medieval visions tended to be saints rather than parents, and any returning relatives tended to be ghosts from purgatory requesting help rather than offering advice or predictions of the future. Thus the *oraculum*, although included in medieval taxonomies, was rare in medieval exempla and saints' legends. Also, in the Christian versions of the *oraculum*, although the parent figures had some authority from their role as parents, the primary authority in the visions came from their delivering messages from God.

### *Macrobian horoma*

Another rare type of medieval vision was the Macrobian *horoma*, the category in which the visionary, with divine help, saw the future exactly as it would happen. The *South English Legendary* claimed that St. Thomas

<sup>19</sup> *F*, pp. 38 and 196–197.

<sup>20</sup> *SEL*, p. 500; *F*, p. 167; *GL*, vol. 6, p. 234.

<sup>21</sup> Dodds, *Greeks*, p. 107. The fading popularity of the *oraculum* corresponds to what Dodd calls a shift in 'dream-pattern' that stems from a change in 'culture-pattern.'

had told an abbot that he would defend the Church at Canterbury against the King, that four knights would strike his head, and that his brains would be scattered on the cathedral stones.<sup>22</sup> And, of course, history showed that that was exactly what did happen to Thomas of Canterbury.

### *Clairvoyant visions*

Very rarely, a vision was a matter of seeing something that was going on elsewhere in the present (rather than predicting the future), a case of clairvoyance. This type of vision paralleled the *horoma*. Caxton told the story of St. Edward the Confessor who had a vision of the King of Denmark falling between two ships and drowning. This turned out to be true and to have happened at the precise moment at which the saint had the vision.<sup>23</sup> Having such prescient visions affirmed the holiness of a saint.

### *Auditions*

One frequent way in which information (rather than a meeting/ encounter taking place)—not necessarily restricted to the future—came from God was through auditions. In Middle English, the term vision was sometimes applied to events that involved no clear visual component and to some that were clearly auditions. The most common type of audition involved the ‘voice from heaven.’ Almost thirty of the didactic visions mentioned this voice. It was a common phenomenon in the saints’ legends and occurred occasionally in the exempla as well. Being a voice rather than an incarnate being, it usually did not perform feats of rescue or healing. Instead, it tended to present information. Since the voice was often associated with God himself, the audition was usually a direct message from him. Sometimes it simply served as an explanation of a vision that it followed. At other times it gave an answer to a request for information or for help. For example, a voice from heaven answered the bishops’ prayers about who should be the next bishop of Myra, by indicating Nicholas.<sup>24</sup> The voice might give instructions about liturgical

<sup>22</sup> *SEL*, p. 662; also in *GL*, vol. 2, p. 193.

<sup>23</sup> *GL*, vol. 6, p. 11.

<sup>24</sup> *MES*, p. 58; *SEL*, p. 552–553; *SS*, p. 247; *F*, p. 12.

practices, as with the occasion Mirk told about, when during a time of famine, a voice from heaven told a country to observe St. Mark's Day. When the country conformed, God ended the country's famine.<sup>25</sup> The voice might even presage judgment. *Jacob's Well* told the story of an angry dice-player who cursed. A voice from heaven spoke against him and he was struck by a fatal thunderbolt.<sup>26</sup> The most common time at which the voice occurred in saints' legends was at a saint-martyr's death, particularly at the founding of the saint's cult.<sup>27</sup> In addition, the voice often offered encouragement to the saint at the moment of martyrdom. *The South English Legendary* described how, right at the moment of St. Quentin's execution, a voice from heaven said, "Quintin Quintin mi seriant · com her anon to me / & vnderfong the croune that igarked is to the / Myn angles the schulle vnderfonge & into heuene lede."<sup>28</sup>

### *Angels*

Chapter 3 focused on demons, the sub-category of angels regarded as fallen angels and often referred to as 'bad angels.' There were, however, also visions of 'good angels' or simply, angels. (When an angel was mentioned without a descriptive adjective, it was assumed to be a good angel). The angels were often presented as battling with demons, but they also played other roles in visions. Most often, they were coming to the aid of a believer. In this respect, they were similar to the saints in visions. However, one significant difference was evident. Whereas saints usually responded to believers who had a devotion to them in particular, angels usually responded to prayers that were directed to God himself. They were his messengers and acted on his behalf.

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<sup>25</sup> *F*, p. 137.

<sup>26</sup> *JW*, p. 100.

<sup>27</sup> See chapter 2.

<sup>28</sup> *SEL*, p. 460.





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