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'Where of is mad al mankynde' : an edition of and introduction to the twenty-four poems in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 102

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I
LOUE GOD AND DREDE

SUMMARY

The overall theme of this poem is how people in a position of authority, from the king down to the local lord of the manor, ought to exercise their powers in a morally responsible manner, and why.

The author authoritatively, if rather at random, offers a wide range of advice on what is, and what is not admissible in exercising monarchic, judicial, manorial and communal power: beware of aggressive, hostile, covetous or inexperienced counsellors; apply the law wisely and impartially; do not favour the privileged to the detriment of the community; maintain unity; punish troublemakers; do not treat the poor with arrogance but with respect; treat others as you wish to be treated yourself; do not add to your fortune at the cost of the poor; hear both sides in court; keep the legal system free from corruption; settle disputes amicably.

These pieces of advice are variously motivated. For one thing because they serve the personal interests of those in power: peaceful subjects, order within the realm, keeping the poor happy. Fear is another, and more powerful motive. Man is answerable for his behaviour to God, who owns it all and demands a reckoning. His judgement may condemn the unrepentant to eternal doom in hell. Man receives according to his deserts from a righteous, but at the same time merciful God.

TEXT

(1)

Eche man be war, that bereth astate,
Of counseil of double entendement,
3 Of tyrauntrye, and preuey hate,
And synguler profit by fals assent,
And 3ong to 3yue Iugement.
6 In Euenhede Lawe 3e lede.
Worche be good auisement.
Man, knowe thy self, loue God and drede.

*beware; high office
with ambiguous intent
intimidation; secret
personal; connivance
inexperienced people
firmness/impartiality; [should] guide you
Act; prudently
fear [Him]*

(2)

- 9 Drede God and knowe thy selue,
 That ouer puple hast gouernaunce.
 Noght for the loue of ten or twelue¹
- 12 Brynge not a Comone in greuance. *[whole] community; distress*
 Make vnyte ther was distaunce. *discord*
 Weye o lawe in euenhede *Dispense; one*
- 15 Bytween faouour and vengeaunce.²
 Man, knowe thy self, loue God and drede.

(3)

- Eche mannys gouernours³
- 18 Of hous or lordshipe or cite: *In [a]; the household of a lord*
 The puple is Godes, and not 3oures, *[Remember that]*
 Thow they be soget to 3oure degre. *Even though; [social] position*
- 21 Gouverne the puple in vnyte,
 In the comaundements that God bede, *demands*
 And 3e wole lyue in charite. *will; God's grace*
- 24 Knowe thy self, loue God and drede.

(4)

- Eche man wot that hath wyt, *good sense*
 These worldes goodes beth~~e~~ not his. *are*
- 27 Alle is Godes, he oweth hit, *owns*
 And land and see, and pyne and blis.
- God wole haue rekenyng y wys, *an accounting; certainly*
 30 Of men and cloth, the leste shrede, *smallest; thread*
 Thy getyng, thy holding, thy spendyng mys. *misspending*
 Man, knowe thy self, loue God and drede.

(5)

- 33 Man of his owen hath no thyng;
 Man is Goddis, and al God sent. *has bestowed [on him]*
 God wole haue rekenyng
- 36 Of ryht and wrong, how it is went. *has happened*
 Man, not nys thyn, alle God lent, *nothing is; on loan*
 And borwed thyng mot home ful nede. *be returned*
- 39 And 3ut thy soule is Goddis rent;
 Quyte that wele in loue and drede.⁴ *also; God's property rented to you*

¹ *Do not, to please only a few people*

² Ll. 14–15: *Apply one law in impartial balance / Between mercy and vengeance*

³ *The masters of all the people*

⁴ *Pay what is due without fail, in awe and with fear*

(6)

Serue God for helle drede,
 42 Fle fro synne and al vys.
 And 3e loue God for heuen mede,
 3yue hym thyn hert, fro fleschly delys.
 45 For worldly wys is gostly nys,
 And fooles erande may not spede.
 In begynnyng to be wys:
 48 Knowe thy self, loue God and drede.

vice
If; reward
[away] from; pleasures
spiritually; foolish
cannot; be successful
As a start

(7)

And 3e wole wyte, thus mowe 3e lere:
 What man pursueth his soule to saue,
 51 3if hym be lef of God to here,
 He ableth hym self mercy to haue.
 Richesse and hele maketh wylde men raue,
 54 That to vertues take non hede.
 Er thy soule be fendes knaue,
 Knowe thy self, loue God and drede.

If; know; as follows

If; desires; hear
enables
profit; behave foolishly
pay no heed
Before; the devil's slave

(8)

57 That man that wole be gouerned by wyt,
 Fle fro foly, and worldis delys.
 Loke his charge how it is knyt,
 60 And take counseil that is wys.
 Folwe mesure in euene syse,
 Lete no falshed blome ne sede.
 63 And lawe be kept, no folk nyl ryse.
 Than seruest God in loue and drede.

Consider; responsibility; what it includes

moderation; [an] impartial manner
blossom (v.); sow seed
If; will not
Then

(9)

Whanne a fool stereth a barge,
 66 Hym self and al the folke is shent.
 There as conscience is large,
 By wrath or mede the doom is went.
 69 The bowe of Goddis wrath is bent
 On hem that deth not that God bede.
 War wordes of dowble entendement,
 72 Knowe thy self, loue God and drede.

steers
brought to ruin
Where; lax
Because of; [sound] judgement; gone

commands
Beware of

(10)

Gif a kyngdom falle a chaunce
 That al the rewme myght greue,
 75 A3en that make an ordinaunce,

something happens to
realm; injure
Against; decree

- To kepe 3ow euere fro suche myscheue. *for ever; misfortune*
 And chastise hem that matere meue; *stir up trouble*
- 78 Make othere take ensauple treuth to hede.⁵
 Who so is wys, his werkys preue. *will prove [it]*
 Loue God, and 3e thar not drede. *need*
- (11)
- 81 Goddis bowe of wratthe on vs was bent;
 There we thenke al to lyte.⁶ *About that; little*
 His 3erde of loue on summe is lent, *rod; falls on*
- 84 With swerde of vengeaunce he summe doth smyte.
 The brydelle with teeth thay byte⁷ *smites*
 That of God taken non hede. *Such people*
- 87 Or fendys alle 3oure werkys wryte,
 Man, knowe thy self, loue God and drede. *Before; enemies; report*
- (12)
- Why pore men don riche reuerence, *hold in respect*
- 90 Two skylles y fynde therfore:
 To tyrauntes don hem greuaunce,⁸ *reasons*
 To rewe and a3en restore. *injury*
regret; make amends
- 93 Goode men for loue they worshipe more,
 That don hem good, and help at nede;
 For God seeth thurgh euery bore.⁹ *hole*
- 96 Man, knowe thy self, loue God and drede.
- (13)
- Eche man wot that bereth estate, *bears authority*
 Why they hit resceyue, and to what wyse. *by what means*
- 99 Worship for drede is preue hate;¹⁰
 Suche worship of frendes men schold refuyse.
 In loue and drede worshipe the wyse.
- 102 Be suget to resoun in lengthe and brede,¹¹ *obey; breadth*

⁵ *Make [sure that] others take [this] as a warning to heed the truth*

⁶ *We think all too little about that*

⁷ *Those who champ the bit [like a restless horse]*

⁸ Ll. 91–94: *They respect violent persons, who have done them an injury, / [So that] they (i.e. the violent persons) will take pity and make amends. / Good men they respect out of love, / Who treat them kindly and help [them] in [times of] need*

⁹ *For God sees everything*

¹⁰ *Respect out of fear is secret(ly) hatred*

¹¹ *Let reason prevail in all respects*

For God seeth thurgh eche mysse. *wrongdoing*
 Man, knowe thy self, loue God and drede.

(14)

105 As long as man doth wrong,
 He maketh God his ful foo; *enemy*
 The more he dwelleth theryn long,
 108 To his soule he encreseth woo.
 Er he fele het, y rede say hoo, *Before; heat; advise; stop*
 Er his soule glowe as glede. *live coal*
 111 Haue heuene or helle, chese of two. *Obtain/receive; choose*
 Man, knowe thy self, loue God and drede.

(15)

The man withoute charitee
 114 May neuere wynne heuen blisse. *Can*
 As thou wolde men dede for the, *wish; did*
 Do thou so liche eche man haue hisse.¹² *like; his [due]*
 117 For all that euere is goten mysse¹³ *at any time; sinfully*
 Mot be rekened, a drope 3e shede, *accounted for; [even] a [single] drop that you spill*
 Thes worldis good and thou mon kysse. *if; part from*
 120 Man, knowe thy self, loue God and drede.

(16)

False men bye helle ful dere. *pay; dearly*
 That taken with wrong are Goddis theues; *Who have*
 123 They han here heuene in this world here.
 After in helle, huge myscheues. *Hereafter; suffering*
 What they byleue here werkys preues. *believe; deeds; prove*
 126 Arn heretikes, and out of the Crede. *They (i.e. the false men) are; faithless*
 Why God doth loue, why God doth greues; *loves; injures*
 Man, knowe thy self, loue God and drede.

(17)

129 Man, synne not in ouerhope; *presuming there is hope for you*
 Thou wynnest not Goddis mercie with fight. *by striving [for it]*
 Hit wolde brynge the in wanhope,
 132 To wene no mercy thou hauen myght. *expect; may*
 Alle thyng is nombrede in Goddis sight, *taken account of; eyes*
 The leste tryp that euere 3e trede. *smallest journey; undertake*

¹² *Do likewise yourself, so that everybody may have his due*

¹³ *Ll. 117–19: You will have to account for everything you acquired wrongfully, / [And for] the tiniest single fragment you wasted / [At the end of your life] when you must part from your worldly possessions*

135 His mercy is medled with his right.
 Man, knowe thy self, loue God and drede.

goes hand in hand; justice

(18)

Mannes conscience wil hym telle,
 138 Riche and pore, fool and wyse,
 Whether he be worthi heuene or helle
 To resceyue, after his seruyce.
 141 Eche man auyse hym that is wys,
 Pore and prynce, styf on stede,
 Or vyces ouer vertues rys.
 144 Man, knowe thy self, loue God and drede.

*after [he has performed]; task
 take thought
 Pauper; mighty; noble horse
 Before; get the better of*

(19)

Who that takeþ fro pore to eke with his,
 For that wrong is worthy wo.
 147 Another, richer than he is,
 Of the same shal serue hym so.
 That 3eueth to that li3e or go,
 150 Mete or drynke, herborwe or wede,
 God sendes y now to tho
 That louen God and Hym wolen drede.

*to increase his [own fortune]
 deserves; pain [of hell]*

*Will do the same to him
 Who; [those]; who; lie; walk
 shelter; clothing
 enough; those*

(20)

153 He is a fool that doth answeere
 To a man er tale be told.
 But after the dede deme there.
 156 Lete not lawe be faouored ne sold,¹⁴
 Suche maken fals men be bold,
 And false men myghte stroye a thede.
 159 Er charitee in hert wexe cold,
 Man, knowe thy self, loue God and drede.

*answers [in court]
 before; [his] account [of the case]
 on the basis of; pass judgement; thereon*

*brazen
 destroy a whole people
 grows*

(21)

3if a man do another mys,
 162 Neighbores shuld hem auyse,
 The trespasour amende and kys,
 Do bothe parties euene assise.
 165 Old horded hate maketh wratthe to rise,
 And ofte gilteles blod to blede.
 Fle fro fooles and folwe wise.
 168 Man, knowe thy self, loue God and drede. Amen

*harm (n.)
 advise
 malefactor; [should] make amends; kiss
 fair; judgement
 nursed; causes
 be shed*

¹⁴ *Do not show partiality or accept bribes in applying the law*

NOTES

title Robbins (1975, p. 1419) has ‘Love God and redress abuses’. Also in *MWME*, Louis (1993, p. 2983) uses as title ‘Eche man be war that bereth a state’. A biblical source of the antithetical ‘love God and fear Him’ is found in e.g. Ecclus. 2:15–17.

8 See Prov. 1:7, ‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction’.

11–12 *for þe loue of ten or twelue*] The same turn of phrase occurs in XII.99.

12 *Comone*] *MED* s.v. *communes* (*n.*) does not give this spelling.

29 *y wys*] The spelling is unusual, instead of normal *ywys* or *y-wys*.

33 St. (5): The same thoughts on man’s stewardship of, and accountability for God’s gifts to him are expressed in VII (11) and VIII (1).

45 See 1 Cor. 3:19, ‘For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God’.

47–48 See the note to l. 8.

69 Variation on Ps. 11:2, ‘The wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow’. Proverbial. See Whiting, B 480, ‘To bend one’s bow’.

80 *thar*] 3sg. pres. of *thurven*.

83 See Prov. 13:24, ‘He that spareth his rod (=yard) hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes’.

84 *swerde of vengeaunce*] The reference is to Rom. 13:4, ‘for he (i.e. ‘the power’ = the king or the worldly authorities) beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil’. The same phrase occurs in III.39 (with the king’s vicariate of God mentioned explicitly), and in V.39.

85 See *OED* s.v. *bite* (*v.*) sub 16.

95 Proverbial. See Whiting, G 232, ‘God sees through every bore (*hole*)’; cf. l. 103.

98 *to ... wyse*] not in *MED* s.v. *wise* (*n.*(2.)).

102 For its inverse *in brede ne lengthe*, see Whiting, B 527, ‘In brede nor length’.

110 See Whiting, G 152, ‘To glow like (a, any, the) gleed’.

119 *kysse*] *MED* s.v. *kyssen* (*v.*) does not give the meaning inferred here: ‘to kiss goodbye, to part from’.

127 The implied meaning is: do not bother yourself with the question why God is at the same time a merciful and a jealous God (see also Ex. 34:6, 7 and Deut. 5:9, 10).

129 St. (17): similarly worded in VII (13) and XX (26).

135 The same thought reappears in XX.197–98, *I nel deme þe in ry3twisnes, / But medle þerwiþ mercy and grace*.

145 *te*] Kail *to*, but *MED* has the variant spelling *te* before vowels.

164 Moderation and fairness in the administration of justice is expressed in similar words in III.12–13, *Do euene lawe to folle and wyse, / Set mesure in euene assise*, and in IX.65,67, *That haldeþ questes or assise ... / Lette no lawe fro ri3t gyse*. The opposite, satirical sentiment is found in VI.29, *3eue no doom in ri3t assyse*.

168 *Amen*] Struck through in red, as at the end of XIII. In both instances, the mark is doubtful as a deletion mark, as no scribal error is discernable, although erasion may have been purposed for another reason. Alternatively, the red line may signify an attention mark. Kail here omits *Amen* altogether. In

XIII he adds a note: '*Amen* is struck through in red ink; but whether it is meant to be erased or not is doubtful'.

II

MEDE AND MUCHE THANK

reward; gratitude

SUMMARY

The poem relates the debate between a courtier and a military man, overheard by an 'I' figure. The scene is set in a typical *locus amoenus*, an idyll of harmonious love and harmony as counterpoint to the unfolding argument. The courtier admits that he is a lazy flatterer, whose only role in life is to please his master, for which he is richly rewarded, also to the benefit of his dependants. The soldier's life overseas is harsh and miserable. His satisfaction is bloodshed, plunder, and a mere 'thank you very much'. Who will feed you when you are old?

The soldier maintains that doing honest work well is reward in itself and makes him self-reliant, whereas the courtly flatterer becomes cowardly and weak-willed doing nothing. Moreover, he acquires riches not his due, which is as shameful as depriving the bee from its honey.

The courtier has the last word: the soldier is not as disinterested as it seems; he satisfies 'an urgent need' in himself, why else be ready to die of hunger and cold? Which proves that the soldier does in fact serve for a reward, just as the courtier.

TEXT

(1)

In blossemed buske I bode boote,
In ryche array, with ryches rank,
3 Faire floures vnder foote,
Sauour to myn herte sank.
I sawe two buyrnes on a bank;
6 To here talkyng I tok hede.¹
That on preysede moche thank,
That other helde al with mede.

*grove; lingered; in the open
profuse; splendour*

*[A sense of] delight
men; hillside*

*praised
wholly believed in*

¹ *I took an interest in/paid attention to their discussion/conversation*

(2)

- 9 That on a trauaylyng man had ben,
 He was but in mene array. *simple*
 That other clothed in gawdy gren, *yellowish*
 12 Blasande bri3t, embrowdid gay. *Dazzlingly*
 “Loo, felow, chese y may *Surely; I am in a position*
 To ryde on palfray or on stede. *war horse*
 15 Shewe forth moche thonk, y the pray; *Produce evidence of*
 Loo, here y shewe sumwhat of mede.”

(3)

- “Syre, y see thou hast riches;
 18 How thou hit get, whiche is thy fame, *of what nature*
 In corage and prowesse?
 After thy dede resceyue thy name, *according to; reputation*
 21 Other in worshipe or in shame. *Either; honour*
 Men wol the deme after thy dede, *judge (v.)*
 Thy fer trauayle or cochour at hame. *far; travels; [as] a stay-at-home*
 24 How serued thou to haue that mede.”

(4)

- “I plese my lorde at bed and bord, *when [he is] in bed and at table*
 Pou3 y do but strype a stre,² *[nothing] but strip a straw*
 27 And florische fayre my lordis word, *embellish*
 And fede hem forth with nay and 3ee. *lead him on; no; yes*
 Whan trauaylyng men fare euele on see, *endure suffering*
 30 In fight, in preson, in storme and drede,
 With moche thonk than mery 3e be, *be happy*
 And y wole make me mery with mede.”

(5)

- 33 “Flatteryng is the fendis scoles.³
 3oure awen werkys preueth 3ow nys. *deeds; foolish*
 3e skorne lordes, and make hem 3oure foles, *deceive; [appear] fools*
 36 To playe and lawhe at 3oure delys. *laugh*
 Do for a lorde; and he be wys, *Work; if*
 Trewe trauayle shal not lese his dede.⁴
 39 To vertuou lord al worship lys.⁵
 The trewe seruant is worthy hys mede.”

² *Although I perform only trivial/easy tasks*

³ *Flattery is where the devil makes school*

⁴ *Diligent labour will not lose [any of] its effect*

⁵ *[It] will earn a fair master great respect*

(6)

“Say, felowe, what doth the greue
 42 My glosyng, flateryng, play and daunce?
 Shulde my souerayn aske the leue
 Whom hym list to auaunce?
 45 Thou getest the thonke with spere and launce,
 Therwith thou might the clothe and fede.
 I, gloser, wil stonde to my chaunce,
 48 And mayntene my men al with mede.

how; makes you angry
smooth talk; merriment
master; permission
pleases; to favour

may [perhaps]
flatterer; take my chances

(7)

My flateryng, glosyng, not me harmes.
 I gete loue and moche richesse,
 51 When wel faryng men of armes
 In fight, in presoun and distresse.
 When thou art old and feble, y gesse,
 54 Who wole the fynde fode or wede.
 Lete moche think than thy mete dresse,
 And y wole make me mery with mede.”

receive
While; the welfare [of]
[You get] in; hardship

provide you with; clothing
serve your food
enjoy myself

(8)

57 “I likne a gloser in eche weder
 To folwe the wynd, as doth the fane.
 3e begeten hony to gedere;
 60 To stroy3e that cometh the drane.
 Me thenkeþ þere wit is wane
 To stroy3e the hony and foule hit shede.
 63 Gloser hath brought faytour lane
 To halle and chambre, to lordes for mede.”

compare; whatever the weather
weathervane
accumulate
waste (v.); drone
common sense; lacking
stupidly; waste (v.)
an imposter’s gift

(9)

“Thy wikked speche come fro ferre.⁶
 66 Euel thou spekest, worse dost mene.
 Thou woldest euere more were werre,
 For profyt and pilage thou myght glene,
 69 Cristen blod destroyed clene,
 And townes brent on a glede.⁷
 Thy conscience is ful lene,
 72 Thou noldest not come ther but for mede.”

from afar

[that there] were war
plunder (n.); could get out of it
spilled; completely

inadequate

⁶ Behind your wicked words there is an even more wicked meaning

⁷ ... to cinders, or (proverbially): [like a spark] from a live coal

(10)

- “In wikked lyuer no good counsayle,
Is coward of kynde ny3t and day.
75 Good lyuere dar fende and assayle,
And hardy in dede brou3t to bay.
I wolde thou were brou3t to assay
78 At nede a wys counseil to rede.
Were thou as hardy as thou art gay,
3e were wel worthy to haue good mede.”
- a man who lives a wicked life; sound judgement
by nature
fight; attack
difficult; combat
caused; attempt
In; speak
fearless/strong; lighthearted/carefree
deserve*

(11)

- 81 “Thenketh the not it doth the good,
Whan thou out of thy bed dost swerue,
3e clothe 3ow, and do on 3oure hod,
84 At tyme of day thy mete dost kerue?
Why dost thou thy seluen serue?
I trowe thou do it for gret nede;
87 For hunger and cold elles myghtest thou sterue.
This preueth thou seruest al for mede.”
- get out
put; hood
At [the appointed]
are ... self-serving
suspect; out of dire necessity
otherwise; die
only*

NOTES

title Utley (1972, p. 714) renders the title as ‘Mede and much thank: a dialogue between a soldier and a courtier’.

13 *felow*] used in condescending address to a social inferior. Cf. *sire* (l. 17), used by the soldier addressing the courtier.

25 *MED* equivocates as to the interpretation of this line. It quotes the line under four entries: s.v. *at* (*prep.*) sub 6a.(a) the MnE contextual equivalent is given as ‘at’; s.v. *bed* (*n.*(1)) sub 2b.(b) and *bord* (*n.*) sub 5.(d), *at* is given the meaning of ‘in’, i.e. ‘in bed and at table, in all conjugal duties and relationships; in all the affairs of married life’; s.v. *plesen* (*v.*) sub 1.(b) the contextual meanings assigned to this verb have either sexual overtones (‘satisfy’, ‘gratify’) or moral connotations (‘flatter’, ‘cajole’). Since the speaker in ll. 26–28 describes his activities as merely humouring his lord, agreeing to whatever he says, the most plausible meaning of l. 25 is: ‘I flatter my master at his bedside and at his table’.

28 A similar expression occurs in IV.91: *And graunte to purpos nay and 3ee*.

33 The line has a strongly proverbial, but as such unsubstantiated, flavour. An echo of it is heard in a famous parliamentary address of 1576, advocating free speech, without which Parliament ‘is none but a very school of flattery ... and so fit a place to serve the devil and his angels in.’

40 See Luke 10:7 and 1 Tim. 5:18, ‘For the labourer is worthy of his hire/reward’.

57–64 The courtly flatterer is compared with the unproductive drone of the beehive, who merely consumes the honey gathered by the worker bees. See also Coleman (1981, p. 97).

63 *lane*] Northern form, definitely authorial because in rhyme position.

73–76 The same sentiment – wicked men are cowards, good men are brave – is expressed in III (10).

75 Echoed in III.84.

III TREUTH, RESTE AND PES

SUMMARY

The theme of the poem is firmly embedded in the advice-to-princes tradition. In the interest of moral integrity, and in spite of possible slanderers, the writer publicly lectures king and counsellors on issues of responsible governance, and against the abuse of justice and of the law.

Biased and corrupt administration of justice is not only immoral, but leads to social unrest and, ultimately, rebellion. Also, at the lower levels of administration, frequent and controlled changes lead to heated public outbursts. What is needed for a prosperous community are the joint efforts of God-fearing and industrious members of the traditional estates: commons, clergy and nobility. Ideally they are led by a king wise enough to allow himself to be advised by a sensible, purposeful Council, while parliament is there to look after the interests of the commons. The writer urgently repeats that internal strife can only lead to rioting inside the borders and to opportunistic attack from outside.

Ultimately, however, it is God who makes or breaks all human endeavour. He is man's chief overlord, from king and pope down to the humblest beggar. He is both inheritor and recorder of everybody's assets and achievements. For those in high places who govern wisely and sociably, he is a protecting friend. But the choice for good or bad is theirs, they have a free will.

TEXT

(1)

For drede ofte my lippes y steke	<i>close (v.)</i>
For false reportours, that trouhte mys famed.	<i>talebearers; gave a false report of</i>
3 3ut Charitee chargeth me to speke;	<i>Yet; neighbourly love; requires</i>
Dou3 troupe be dred, he nys not ashamed.	<i>terrified; is not</i>
Troupe secheþ non hernes ther los is lamed;	<i>hiding-places; reputation; injured</i>
6 Troupe is worschipeþ at euery des.	<i>honoured; table</i>
In that kyngdom ther troupe is blamed,	<i>criticized/found fault with</i>
God sendes vengeaunce to make troupe haue pes.	

(2)

- 9 Troupe is messenger to ry3t,
And ry3t is counseille to Iustice;
Iustice in Goddis stede is dy3t. *envoy for what is morally right*
- 12 Do euene lawe to foolle and wyse,
Set mesure in euene assise,¹
The ri3te weye as lawe ges. *Apply the law impartially*
- 15 And lawe be kept, folk nyl not ryse;
That kyngdom shal haue reste and pes. *so that; prevails
If; enforced; will not rebel*

(3)

- 3if suche a tale tellere were *talebearer; would*
- 18 To a kyng apayre a mannys name,
The kyng shulde bope partyes here, *damage (v.)
hear*
- And punysche þe fals for defame. *calumny*
- 21 Pan fals men wolde ases for blame,
For falshed body and soule it sles; *desist from slander
destroys*
- Falshed endes ay in shame, *always*
- 24 And troupe in worschipe and in pes. *But; esteem*

(4)

- Whanne lawe is put fro ri3t assise,
And domes man made by mede,² *kept; fair; verdict*
- 27 For fawte of lawe 3if comouns rise,
Pan is a kyngdom most in drede. *judgements; one; would pass; bribery
lawlessness; the common people
peril*
- For whanne vengeaunce a comouns lede,
- 30 Þei do gret harm er þey asses. *cease*
- There no man oþer doþ mysbede, *Where; maltreats*
- That kyngdom shal haue reste and pes.

(5)

- 33 Whan craft riseþ a3ens craft, *force/power*
- In burghæ, toun or citee,
Þey go to lordes whan lawe is laft, *turn to; disregarded*
- 36 Whoche party may strengere be. *side; prevail*
- But wyse men þe sonere se *so much sooner; see*
- By witles wille þey gedre pres.³
- 39 Or lordis medle in foly degre, *Before; intervene; manner*
- Let lawe haue cours in reste and pes.

¹ *Preserve moderation in [passing] a fair verdict*

² *And the outcome of lawsuits would be allowed to be determined by bribes*

³ *[that] through foolish wilfulness they (i.e. the common people) will form a [hostile] crowd*

(6)

3it þere is þe þridde distaunce
 42 Bryngeþ a kyngdom in moche noy3e:
 Ofte chaunge of gouernaunce
 Of alle degre, lowe and hy3e.
 45 A kyng may not al asprie;
 Summe telle hym soþ, summe telle hym les.
 Þe whete fro þe chaf 3e try3e,
 48 So mowe 3e leue in reste and pes.

*There is yet; [cause for] discord
 misfortune
 Frequent
 ranks (n.)
 see
 truth; lies
 wheat; sift
 may; live*

(7)

I speke not in specyale
 Of oo kyngdom the lawe to telle.
 51 I speke hool in generale
 In eche kyngdom the lawe to telle.
 Also is writen in þe gospelle
 54 A word þat God hym seluen ches:
 Raþere þan fi3te, a man go selle
 On of his cloþes, and bi3e hym pes.

*one; speak of
 wholly
 Thus [it]
 chose (i.e. as suitable)
 One; buy; peace*

(8)

57 A worþi kny3t wol worchip wynne,
 He wil not 3elde hym þou3 me þret,
 But raþere as Malice doþ bygynne,
 60 Quenche hit at þe firste het.
 For and 3e lete it growe gret,
 Hit brenneþ breme as fyre in gres.
 63 Laweles nouellerye loke 3e lete,⁴
 So mowe 3e lyue in reste and pes.

*honourable; gain esteem
 yield; people; threaten [him]
 Suppress; heated outburst
 if
 fiercely; [dry] grass or fat*

(9)

Old speche is spoken 3ore:
 66 What is a kyngdom tresory:
 Bestayle, corn stuffed in store,
 Riche comouns, and wyse clergy;
 69 Marchaundes, squyers, chiuairy
 That wol be redy at a res,
 And cheualrous kyng in wittes hy3e,
 72 To lede in were, and gouerne in pes.

*[An] old saying; once
 cattle
 in a crisis/emergency
 valiant/brave; possessing great wisdom
 war*

⁴ *Take heed that you refrain from innovations that disregard the law*

(10)

- Among filosofres wyse, (i.e. moral) *philosophers*
 In here bokes, men writen fynde
 75 Pat synne is cause of cowardyse. *source/origin*
 Wel lyuyng man: hardy of kynde;⁵
 Wikked lyuere: graceles, blynde, *lacking God's grace; [spiritually] blind*
 78 He dredeþ deþ, þe laste mes. *meal*
 Þe good lyuere haþ god in mynde,
 Pat mannys counseil makeþ pes. *A plan/scheme of such a man*

(11)

- 81 What kyng that wol haue good name,
 He wol be lad by wys counsayle, *Council*
 Pat loue worschip and dreden shame, *honour*
 84 And boldely dar fende and assayle. *fearlessly/confidently; defend as well as attack*
 Pere wit is, corage may not fayle, *sound judgement; will (v.)*
 For wysdom neuere worschip les. *relinquished*
 87 Corage in querelle doþ batayle, *armed combat; does the fighting*
 And ende of batayle bygynneþ pes. *war; is the beginning of peace*

(12)

- Defaute of wit makeþ long counsayle;
 90 For witteles wordes, in ydel spoken,
 Þe more cost, þe lesse auayle;
 For fawte of wyt, purpos broken. *lacks; plans; come to nothing*
 93 In euyl soule no grace is stoken,⁶ *litt.: locked [up]*
 For wikked soule is graceles. *nota* *lacks [God's] grace (i.e. is damned)*
 In good lyuere Goddis wille is loken,⁷ *litt.: locked*
 96 Pat mannys counselle makeþ pes.

(13)

- To wete 3if parlement be wys,
 Þe comon profit wel it preues. *[will] give clear proof*
 99 A kyngdom in comouns lys, *common people; depends on*
 Alle profytes, and alle myscheues. *prosperity; misfortune*
 Lordis wet neuere what comouns greues *causes grief/makes angry*
 102 Til here rentis bigynne to ses.⁸
 Pere lordis ere, pore comons releues, *Where; relent; take heart*
 And mayntene hem in werre and pes.

⁵ A man living a virtuous life is fearless by nature⁶ In a wicked/sinful soul there is no room for God's grace⁷ God's will is embodied in a virtuous life⁸ Till their rent income begins to cease

(14)

- 105 Make God 3oure ful frend;
 Do þe comaundement þat he bede.
 Þou3 alle þe world a3en 3ow wend, *against; turn*
 108 Be God 3oure frend, 3e thar not drede. *need*
 For þere as God his frendis lede, *where*
 He saueþ hem boþe on lond and sees.
 111 Whoso fi3teþ, God doþ þe dede,⁹
 For God is victorie and pes.

(15)

- What kyngdom werreþ hym self wiþ ynne,¹⁰ *internally*
 114 Distroyeþ hym self, and no mo. *nothing else*
 Wiþoute here enemys bygynne *Outside [its borders]*
 On eche a syde assayle hem so. *consequently*
 117 Þe comouns þey wil robbe and slo, *kill/destroy*
 Make fyere and kyndel stres. *burn; straw*
 Whan ryches and manhode is wastede and go, *[the lives of] many men*
 120 þan drede dryueþ to trete pes. *fear; negotiate*

(16)

- The world is like a fals lemman, *lover*
 Fayre semblaunt, and moche gyle.¹¹ *appearance; but; treachery*
 123 Wiþouten heire dyeþ no man, *heir*
 God is chief lord of toun and pyle. *[For] God; castle*
 God makeþ mony heire in a whyle,¹² *in due course*
 126 For God ressayueþ eche reles; *[deed of] transfer [of property]*
 God kan breke hegge and style, *break down*
 And make an hey wey to pes. *highway*

(17)

- 129 God made lordis gouernoures
 To gouerne puple in vnyte.
 Þe puple, ne ryches, nys not 3oures,
 132 Al is Goddis, and so be 3e.
 Eche day 3e may 3oure myrrour se. *see*
 Eche man after oþer deses; *dies*

⁹ *Whoever fights, it is God who [actually] does the fighting*

¹⁰ *A kingdom that engages in civil strife*

¹¹ *Beautiful to look at, but full of deceit*

¹² Ll. 125–26: *As time goes by God becomes the heir of many people (i.e. when they die), / For everything is transferred [back] to God as His by right*

135 Ȝoure auncetres arn gon, after shal Ȝe,
To endeles werre, or endeles pes. *eternal*

(18)

Eche kyng is sworn to gouernaunce,
138 To gouerne Goddis puple in riȝt.
Eche kyng bereȝ swerde of Goddis vengeaunce,
To felle Goddis foon in fiȝt. *slay; enemies*
141 And so doȝ euerons honest knyȝt,
That bereȝ ȝe ordre as it wes:¹³ *at all times*
The plough, ȝe chirche to mayntene ryȝt. *the farmers; defend; well*
144 Are Goddis champyons, to kepe ȝe pes. *[They (i.e. king and knights)] are*

(19)

The worlde is like a chery fayre, *beautiful cherry*
Ofte changeȝ all his ȝynges. *physical characteristics/attributes*
147 Riche, pore, foul and fayre, *ugly*
Popes, prelates and lordynges,
Alle are dedly, and so ben kynges. *mortal*
150 Or deȝ lede Ȝow in his les, *Before; power/control*
Arraye by tyme Ȝoure rekenynges, *Put in order; accounts*
And trete wiȝ God to gete Ȝow pes. *Settle [your] differences*

(20)

153 What bryngeȝ a kyngdom al aboute: *to full prosperity*
Wys counseil, and good gouernaunce.
Eche lord wil other loue, *[Then] every*
156 And rule wel labourrers sustynaunce. *provide for; necessities*
God makeȝ for his frendis no destaunce,
For God kan skatre ȝe grete pres. *causes; trouble*
159 God for his frendis maȝ ordynaunce,¹⁴ *scatter; a large army*
And gouerneȝ hem in werre and pes.

(21)

Good lyf is cause of good name; *reputation*
162 Good name is worthi to haue reueraunce. *command respect*
[.]
Synne is cause of greuance. *grief/misery*
165 Eche kyngdom hongȝ in Goddis balaunce,
Wiȝ hym ȝat holdeȝ, wiȝ hym ȝat fles. *stands fast; flees*

¹³ *Who maintains the knightly code as it was (i.e. of old)*

¹⁴ *God makes provision for the welfare of His friends*

3e haue fre wille; chese 3oure chaunce,
 168 To haue wiþ God werre or pes.

make your choice

NOTES

title Robbins (1959, pp. 39–44) includes the poem under no. 13 in his anthology as: ‘What profits a Kingdom’, a title of his own devising, which Dean (1996, p. 153) adopted as secondary title. The poem appears under the same title in Robbins’ bibliographic publication (1975, pp. 1419, 1661). The poem does not take its title from Kail, as Dean suggests (p. 127), but from the manuscript itself (although not necessarily from the author). Dean has *Treuthe* (p. viii) and *Truthe* (p. 153) for MS *Treuth*.

3 *Charitee*] Here to be taken in the political sense it had acquired since the thirteenth century, as Kantorowicz (1957, p. 242) points out, quoting Thomas Aquinas from his *De regimine principum*: ‘*Amor patrie in radice charitatis fundatur* – Love for the fatherland is founded in the root of charity which puts, not the private things before those common, but the common things before the private’.

4 Proverbial. See Whiting, T 507, ‘Truth may be troubled but never shamed’. Similarly XII.75.

5 Proverbial. See Whiting, T 512, ‘Truth seeks no corners’. Similarly IV.157 and XII.74.

13 Moderation and fairness in the administration of justice is expressed in similar words in I.164, *Do bothe parties euene assise* and in IX.65, 67, *That haldep questes or assise ... / Lette no lawe fro ri3t gyse*. The opposite, satirical sentiment is found in VI.29, *3eue no doom in ri3t assyse*.

14 *ges*] Instance of rhyming usage, since throughout the Poems *3sg. pres.* consistently ends *-eth/-ep* when not at the end of a line (with the single exception in XXIV.30: *clayme3*). Note the further occurrences of rhyme-spelling at the end of l. 6 in stanzas 3, 17, 18 and 21, forced by *pes* in l. 8, inevitable because of the recurring refrain.

23 Proverbial. See Whiting, F 51, ‘Falsehood comes to an evil end’.

30 See also in XVI.60, *to ryse craft a3en craft*.

33 This turn of phrase reappears in XVI.60, *þey were rebelle, to ryse craft a3en craft*.

38 *gedre pres*] ‘assemble as a hostile throng’. *wille*] Kail ‘wille’, but fully written out in the MS.

45 See Embree (1985, pp. 121–26) on the topos of ‘the king’s ignorance’.

46 *telle*] Kail *telle*, but fully written out in the MS.

55–56 The lines reflect two passages from the Gospel (see l. 53, *Also is writen in þe gospelle*): Matt. 5:40, ‘And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also’, and Matt. 19:21, ‘If thou wilt be perfect, go sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven’.

57–60 ‘These lines include a rough paraphrase of a famous passage from the Sermon on the Mount ... (Matt. 5:39–40)’ (Dean, 1996, p. 177).

59 *bygynne*] Kail *begynne*.

60 Note the play on *het*: the literal meaning of ‘eruption’ of flames (see l. 62) and the figurative meaning of ‘outburst’ of emotion (see l. 59). See also *MED* s.v. *hete* (*n.*(1)) sub 1(b) and 6(c) and *hete* (*n.*(2)) sub a. and b., all expressing ‘(violent action fired by) heated emotions’.

62 *gres*] *MED* glosses ‘dry grass/hay’ s.v. *gras* (*n.*) sub 1(d), but ‘fat’ is equally possible (*MED* s.v. *gres*(*e*) (*n.*)).

63 Succinctly reiterates ll. 41–43.

73 The view expressed in St. (10) – good men are brave, wicked people are cowards – is similarly phrased in II.73–76.

77 Kail has no comma between *graceless* and *blynde*, but they are co-ordinate adjective phrases, describing the state in which the *wikked liuere* finds himself.

78 *laste mes*] Kail glosses ‘adversity’ for *mes*. Dean (1996, p. 177) comments: ‘the idea is that death is the final rite of passage for the soul, whether for “a well lyvyng man” or for a “wikked lyvere”’. However, since ll. 77–78 and 79–80 form syntactical pairs, it is only the *wikked lyuere* who *dreded deþ, þe laste mes*. None of these readings is satisfactory. The literal meaning ‘last meal’ (i.e. of the condemned) makes simple sense here.

82 *counsayle*] here possibly ‘Privy Council’, as it is the king who is given advice.

88 John Gower expressed a similar sentiment in his poetic address to Henry IV: ‘Ffor of bataille the final ende is pes’ (Wright, 1861, p. 6). *bygynneþ*] Robbins (1959, p. 42): *begynneþ*.

91 Proverbial. See Whiting, C 446, ‘The more cost the less avail’.

98 *comon*] Kail and Robbins (1959, p. 42): *comoun*. Robbins (1959, p. 269) comments: ‘comoun profit] a stock phrase, frequently found in manuals of devotion and in wills, for *pro bono publico*’.

99 The pivotal role here assigned to the common people finds expression again in XII.143–44.

101–102 The subject of the lord’s recognition of his tenants merely as rent payers reappears in XIII.43–44,52.

103 Adopts the punctuation of *MED* s.v. *erren v.*(1). Robbins (1959, p. 42) places the comma between *pore* and *comons*, taking *pore* as a noun, which slightly changes the meaning of the line.

111 Cf. IX.143 and XIII.111, *God dop batayle and not 3e*.

113 St. (15). For a discussion of the internal discord and the resulting attacks from abroad see Kail (p. xiii). See also XII (5) on the same topic.

113–14 See Matt. 8:12, ‘Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation’. Cf. Mark 3:24 and Luke 11:17.

118 *stres*] The harvest or the thatch of houses, or both.

125 The line is meant to fit into the overall theme of stanzas 16 and 17: God’s absolute dominion over man and his world (especially ll. 131–32). He owns it all, and in due course it must all return to Him. God is, in other words, man’s heir. The key to that thought is found in ll. 123–24, *Wipouten heire dyep no man, / God is chieflord of toun and pyle*. The MS text of l. 125 (so without *here*) turns the meaning round: God makes man his heir, which does not make sense in the present context. Insertion of *here* (=MnE ‘their’) before *heire* puts the meaning right again: ‘God over time makes many people their heir’. When they die they return to Him as his rightful inheritance. The assumed omission of *here* in the MS is a plausible one: the copyist overlooked *here* because of its near identity with the following word *heire*. *MED* is aware of the interpretation difficulty that the MS version of l. 125 presents. S.v. *reles* (n.(2.)) sub 3. it quotes l. 126 not in combination with the preceding l. 125, but with l. 124, *God is chieflord of toun and pyle ... ffor god ressayueþ eche reles*. The natural combination would have been with l. 125 (with the conjectured insertion of *here*), not only because it would have made logical sense, but especially because the author throughout his Poems was used to express his thought-units in two-line phrases.

131–32 Cf. XIII.51, *þe puple is goddis and no3t 3oures*.

136 *endeles*] Kail has *endeless*, apparently misled by the peculiar shape of the following *p* in the manuscript.

139 For the biblical reference to *swerd of vengeance* see I.84. The same phrase occurs in V.39.

140 'Written apparently in support of the statute *De Haeretico Comburendo* passed in 1401' (Robbins, 1959, p. 270).

145 Robbins (1959, p. 270) comments: 'chery fayre] A frequent symbol for the transitoriness of life'.

146 *þynges*] refers to the 'quality' or 'appearance' of the cherry as well as of the people mentioned in ll. 147–49.

150 *les*] *MED* s.v. *les*(*se n.*(1) sub 1.b(a) opts for the figurative sense 'control/power'. Kail chooses the literal meaning 'lace', 'snare', hence: 'Draws you into his snare', i.e. brings you under his control. Dean glosses 'untruth'(?), from *li(e)*, 'a lie'.

162 Line lacking in MS, conjecturally ending with **blame*.

IV

LERNE SAY WELE, SAY LITEL, OR SAY NOȜT

nothing

SUMMARY

Greed brings neither material nor moral reward, nor does refraining from theft out of fear bring heavenly rewards. What matters is a truly virtuous life, no matter what persistent scandalmongers may say. Antagonists you have enough already, so you had better provide for your friends and neighbours.

Unnecessary self-accusations only detract from your reputation, whilst uncalled-for self-praise puts your trustworthiness in doubt. What is wise? It is the poor man who puts the rich man wise to the world, certainly not the misinformation and blandishments of flatterers. So the lord should provide for the poor, rather than favouring self-serving courtiers. In the end, good sense will prevail, and the ruler will take his responsibilities seriously. He will send the flatterers and their indiscretions packing, in favour of discreet and trustworthy servants.

The church should have the courage to put a stop to the current widespread loose living and evil practices that will otherwise put the country to waste. The unrepentant sinner goes to hell, where earthly riches will not help him.

Rich and poor must live by God's commandments: do no wrong, do not quarrel, do as you would that men should do to you. It is the peacemakers who are God's children.

TEXT

(1)

As þe see doþ ebbe and flowe, So fareþ þe world hyder and þedere.	<i>hither; thither</i>
3 AȜen þe wynd they sayle and rowe, To gadre worldys gooddis to gedere.	<i>gather</i>
At þe last it goþ, y wot not whyder,	<i>know; where</i>
6 As ende of web out of slay, And hem self stoden so slydere, How it is wiþ hym y kan not say. ¹	<i>piece of woven fabric; weaving reed Whilst; they themselves; precariously them</i>

¹ Ll. 1–8: i.e. People exert themselves on the high seas of life to gather worldly goods. In the end their possessions come to nothing. Whether they can keep their [moral] footing in those treacherous conditions is anybody's guess

(2)

- 9 Sum man dar not be þef for drede; *a thief; fear*
 His troupe is vice, and no vertue. *honesty*
 In heuene he nys not worþi mede, *reward*
- 12 Þat cloþes troupe in falsed hewe. *Who; [of] falsehood; guise (n.)*
 Maugre his teep he is trewe.²
 Stoken in presoun as best fro stray,
- 15 Here wikked wille groweþ newe;
 Þey thenke more þan þey say.

(3)

- Men may not staunche a comoun noys, *put an end to; widespread; rumours*
- 18 Noþer for loue ne for awe. *According as; general; opinion*
 After men lyue is comoun voys,
 In wrongwys dede or ryȝt lawe.
- 21 Who doþ hem pyne, who doþ hem pawe, *blandishes/flatters (see note)*
 Eche on telle oþer, child and may. *woman/maid*
 Tho that to vertues drawe, *Those; seek*
- 24 Hem thar not recche what [men] say. *need (v.); care (v.)*

(4)

- Tak fro þi foo, and ȝeue þi frende;
 Tak not fro thy frend, to ȝeue þi foo:
- 27 Þy frend wole holde þe vnhende; *unkind*
 Þow haddest on enemy, þan hast þou two.
 Man, be war er þou do so;
- 30 To greue the he wol assay. *harm (v.); try*
 When þyn enemys wexen mo, *become more numerous*
 Litil worchipe of þe say. *praise (n.); about you*

(5)

- 33 Oo prouerbe loke ȝe preue, *One; demonstrate in practice*
 ȝe þat wole to resoun bende:
 Look what neyȝebore most may greue; *Consider/keep in mind*
- 36 By al way make hym þi frende. *By all means*
 Þan wole þyn enemys fro þe wende, *leave you alone*
 Here owen þouȝt wol hem afflay. *[change of] mind; discomfit*
- 39 Be out of daunger of the fende, *power; devil*
 And recche neuere what men say. *care nothing about*

² Ll. 13–15: *Against his (i.e. sum man) own natural inclination he remains law-abiding. Their wicked disposition, locked in [the] prison [of their minds], like beasts kept from straying, increases in intensity*

(6)

To synge or preche generale
 42 Werkys of vices for to blame,
 Summe tak to hem speciale,³
 And say: felow, þou dost vs blame.
 45 Pere he accuseþ his owen name;⁴
 All þat hym se, knowe it may,
 He can not hele his owen shame;
 48 And so alle folk wole say.

*it may [well be so]
 conceal*

(7)

3if men speke of Goddis wille,
 To preyse werkys of vertue,
 51 A good man wole holde hym stille,
 And lete as he hem neuere knewe,
 And noþer chaunge hyde ne hewe,⁵
 54 For vaynglory wolde hem betray.
 Who is fals and who is trewe:
 After þey lyue, alle folk wole say.

*behave as if
 skin; complexion*

(8)

57 Thou3 a man holynes preche,
 He shetep no3t, but bent his bowe.⁶
 But he lyue as he teche,
 60 He nys not trusty for to trowe.
 For suche seed he doþ sowe
 In stones, in thornes and in clay,
 63 The same he schal reþe and mowe;
 So he is worthy, folk wole say.⁷

Unless

To that extent; deserving

(9)

A lord of hym self hap no wyt,
 66 He knoweþ wele, but no wo;
 Of pore men he mot haue hit,
 Knowelechyng of frend and fo.
 69 He is wys that can do so,
 And wel twynnen hem o tway.

*is not wise to the world
 well-being; misery
 must
 Recognizing who is*

distinguish; one from the other

³ Some take it as applying to them personally

⁴ He thereby impugns his own reputation

⁵ Nor will he change [his behaviour] in any respect

⁶ Although he bends his bow, he does not shoot (i.e. he does not substantiate his words)

⁷ That will be the measure of his worth, people will say

In sykernes may he go,
 72 And recche neuere what men say. *Confidently; move about/go his way
 care (v.)*

(10)

Gloseres maken mony lesynges —⁸
 Al to sone men hem leue[] — *Flatterers; tell; lies
 distance themselves from them*
 75 Boþe to lordys and to kynges,
 Pat boþe partye ofte greue[].
 Wolde lordis seche repreue, *Which; injure/cause discomfort
 [I] would; rebuke/censure*
 78 Glosers shuld not go so gay,
 Ne not so hardy for to meue *[Because]; move around; carefree
 bold; utter*
 Suche wordes as they say.

(11)

81 Thou3 prestes prechyng hem avyse, *warn*
 Or mynstrallis synge in song now, *raise their voice*
 A glosere wole a lord askuse: *excuse [himself]*
 84 “Sire, þey synge or preche of gow”. *[in praise] of you*
 Þe lord vnderstonde not how
 Þe fals[e] glosere hym bitray.
 87 Wolde he make þo wordis avowe,⁹ *affirm*
 He wolde auyse hym eft to say. *again*

(12)

Many can stomble at a stre,¹⁰ *straw (i.e. a trifle)*
 90 Þey nyl not snapere at a style, *[But]; stumble over*
 And graunte to purpos nay and 3ee, *agree; appropriately*
 Þou3 his þou3t be þens a myle. *away*
 93 Whan falsed lawheþ he forgeþ gyle, *falsehood; laughs; plans (v.); foul play*
 Half in malice is his play.
 Wip wysdom who so voydeþ that wyle, *avoids; trickery*
 96 He is wys, alle folk wole say.

(13)

Thou3 men in erþe trouþe hyde,
 On halle roof he wole be sayn. *it (i.e. trouþe); seen*
 99 In botme of see he nyl not byde, *remain*

⁸ Ll. 73–77: *People soon distance themselves from flatterers, / Who are frequent liars / To lords and kings, / Which they both often resent*

⁹ Ll. 87–88: *[On the contrary] he (i.e. the lord) would [rather] make him (i.e. the gloser) affirm those words, [even] command him to repeat them*

¹⁰ Ll. 89–91: i.e. Many people have scruples over some insignificant make-believe, but think nothing of major deceit, and agree, as the occasion demands, with yes or no

But shewe in market, on the playn. *make his appearance; openly*
 And þou3 trouþe a while be slayn, *suppressed*
 102 And doluen depe vnder clay, *buried*
 3ut he wole ryse to lyue agayn,
 And al the sothe he wole say.

(14)

105 Many callen conscience fleschly willis, *inclinations of the flesh*
 And nelen non opere counseil craue; *seek*
 But soule of reson is gostly skillis, *[endowed with] reason; spiritual; faculty*
 108 Ðat conscience shal hem deme or saue.¹¹
 Fleschely wille is fendes knaue, *the devil's slave*
 Out of reson, out of stray. *[morally] astray*
 111 As they disserue þey shal haue, *deserve*
 For so doþ þe gospel say.

(15)

Falshed wolde trouþes tunge tey3e *tie*
 114 For trewe wordis þat he haþ spoken; *Because of*
 God biddeþ vengeaunce hi3e, *to come quickly*
 And helpe trouþe be wel wroken.
 117 For trouþe lippes ar faste stoken, *tightly locked*
 And false mede haþ þe kay. *bribery; key*
 Whan vengeaunce haþ look broken, *lock*
 120 Ðan trouþe shal al þe soþ say. *truth*

(16)

Sumtyme men halwed the holyday, *Once; observed; holy day*
 Now holiday is turned to glotonye.
 123 Sumtyme men vsed honest play, *decent*
 And now it is turned to vilonye.
 And paramour is turned to lecherye – *If; passion*
 126 Sumtyme was loue of good fay – *[there] was; faith*
 And shameles haunted so comounly, *shameless [people] (i.e. prostitutes); visited (pt. ppl.)*
 Vnneþe þey recche what men say. *Hardly*

(17)

129 Summe men sowe here seed in skornes,¹² *contempt/scorn*
 Ofte on opere mennys londes;

¹¹ Ll. 105–108: i.e. Many people allow their moral sense, with the exclusion of any other yardstick, to be guided by their fleshly desires, but it is the soul, capable of reason, which is the moral yardstick that will decide whether he will be doomed or saved

¹² *Some people spread evil with scornful contempt*

- Summe on stones, summe on thornes,
 132 Summe on hi3e way, summe on sondes. *sandy soil*
 He þat wel vnderstonde,
 Amende while he mende may, *Amend*
 135 Make hym clene and wasche his hondes,
 And recche neuere what men say.

(18)

- Thou3 holy chirche schulde fawtes mende,
 138 Summe put hem of for mede, *put right what is wrong*
 And summe wiþ maystri3e hem defende, *put .. off; them (i.e. fawtes); money*
 That holy chirche stant of hem drede. *[so] forcefully; defend [themselves]*
 141 Do þat rechelesly sowe here sede, *is afraid of*
 Here lond of vertues ligge ful lay. *Those*
 De holy chirche þe corn shuld wede; *Their [own]; lies fallow*
 144 For cowardis þey dar not say. *clear of weeds*
[But]; speak out

(19)

- Glores that wiþ lordis bene, *keep company with*
 Pey thryue faste þou3 þey come late,¹³ *prosper*
 147 For þey wole a lord to wene *persuade; to think*
 Þat he is beloued, ther men hym hate, *although*
 And wiþ his frendis make debate, *[persuade him] to quarrel*
 150 Of pore puple pyke here pray. *steal; property*
 Of alle degre, of eche astate,
 After þey lyue, alle folk wole say. *[They will be judged] according as*

(20)

- Fro Goddis sy3t who may stele *eyes; conceal*
 Word or werk, þe lest[e] þou3t. *every*
 De comoun voys nyl not hele, *Popular sentiment; cover up*
 156 But loue or hate as werk is wrou3t,
 For soþnes neuere hernes sou3t.¹⁴ *truth; hiding places*
 Who secheþ wel, he may assay: *find out*
 159 The good[e] lyuere neuere rou3t *cared*
 Of his werkis what men say.

(21)

- Of alle degre, of eche astate,
 162 After desert þe name haþ prys. *According to; is esteemed*
 Þat lord his owen worschip doþ hate, *reputation; regards with contempt*

¹³ Rise quickly [in his favour], even if they have newly arrived

¹⁴ I.e. Truth will out

- Pat 3eueþ anoper his offys – *appointed task*
 165 For in astate grace lys – *high office; a good reputation*
 And wilfully wast it away. *it (i.e. his offys)*
 Who is fool, who is wys,
 168 After þey lyue, alle folk wole say.

(22)

- A glosere is gredy ay to craue;¹⁵ *overeager; constantly; ask*
 3eue hym nothyng, þou3 he bede.
 171 A lord þat wole his worschip saue,
 Lerne not at a glosere to don his dede. *Teach; as he does*
 3eue to vertuous men þat haue nede,
 174 Þat to God wole for þe pray.
 Þe pore mannys erande God doþ spede; *activity; favours*
 God wil not here what glosere wole say.

(23)

- 177 Alle þe þou3tes ben but wast *Nota* *pointless*
 Wiþ oute contemplacioun. *meditation*
 Fro heritage of heuene is born o hast *driven; speedily*
 180 Shrifte wiþoute contricioun.¹⁶ *Confession*
 And werkys wiþ oute discrecioun. *moral discernment*
 Pat 3ifte pleseþ not God to pay,
 183 Ne preyer wiþ oute deuocioun;
 God nyl not here what þey say.

(24)

- Sum tyme, and a worschip felle *In former days; if; honour; befell*
 186 To a lorde, in batayle, by Goddis grace,
 3if a glosere wolde telle *boast about it*
 Among folk, byfore his face,
 189 Þe lord wolde bidde hym voyde þe place. *to leave*
 Pou corayest fauel, and stelest his hay.¹⁷ *curry favour; steal; hay (n.)*
 Of alle degre, of eche astate,
 192 After þey lyue, alle folk wole say.

(25)

- A cheunteyn may fy3te o day, *commander*
 Þe victorye wiþ hym stande;
 195 For synne God mon tak it away,

¹⁵ *A flatterer is an importunate beggar*

¹⁶ Ll. 179–80: *Who confesses his sins without contrition / Is denied the kingdom of heaven as his inheritance*

¹⁷ *You flatter [your master] and undeservedly appropriate the praise due to him*

And put His swerde in enemys hande.
Vertues make free, vices make bonde.

- 198 To day is quyk, to morwe is fay.
Dat knew hym self, he wolde wonde
Any good of him self ?wolde say.

*[one is] alive: fated to die
refrain from*

(26)

- 201 What a glosere here or see,
Dou3 it shulde to shame falle,
He knoweþ in chambre preuytee,
204 Telleþ his felow in þe halle;
And felow to felow, tyl þey knowe alle,
Fro toun to toun, in alle contray.
207 The glosere þe comoun voyce hit calle,
For non shulde knowe who first dede say.

*Even if; [somebody's] disgrace; result in
It comes to his knowledge*

(27)

- A good man doþ a lord gret ese;
210 Dat is a trewe officere,
Dat wel can serue a lord to plese,
Passe not þe boundes of his powere;
213 In preuyte, vnwetand, he may come nere.
Be handles and stele nopyng away;
Be blynd of ey3e and deaf of here;
216 Be dombe of mouth and nopyng say.

*is of great benefit
servant (in the house)/official (at court)*

*does not exceed
without anyone's knowledge; near [to him]
handless (i.e. not a thief)
hearing*

(28)

- I wolde suche a statute were,
And þer vpon set a payne,
219 What soget wolde make his souereyn swere
Dat he tolde in counseil layne.¹⁸
Oft glosere makeþ lordis fayne,
222 Passe þe boundes of here play.
Al þat trouþe haþ herde and sayne,
Alle tymes nys not soþ to say.

*law [of the land]
with respect to that; penalty
That; compel
confidence; remain silent [about]
happy
(But); game
seen
proper/fit*

(29)

- 225 When al þe world is þurgh sou3t,
In his best tyme is worst to trest.
Dis world is a fayre nou3t,
228 A fals lemman, þat change lest.
His last ende is had y wist,

*closely examined
should be distrusted most
pretty worthless
lover; likes
vain regret (litt.: had I known)*

¹⁸ *That he would keep secret what he was told in confidence*

When deþ haþ þy lyues kay. *key*
 231 Litel while he mon be myst, *not long*
 So þe executours wol say. *executors* (i.e. of the will)

(30)

They rekene his richesse what it amountes,
 234 Ete and drynke, synge ‘hay 3ol hay’, (litt.: ‘Hey, shout “Health!”’)
 Þe while þe fendis his synnes countes, *devils*
 And bryng to hym þe countertayl; *reckoning* (i.e. for payment)
 237 Wiþ hard paynes hym assaile. *afflict*
 Wiþ berkande fendis brou3t to bay, *By; barking*
 What helpeþ his riches or wys counsaile? *legal counsel*
 240 Hym self his owen tale shal say. *account; must; state*

(31)

God made oo lawe for eche astate, *one; all*
 Riche and pore in al degre; *of every social station*
 243 Do no wrong ne [no] debate, *quarrel* (v.)
 But as þou wolde men dede by þe.
 For God hym self þis wrot He,
 246 Betok to Moyses in His lay. *entrusted; law*
 Be Goddis childre in charyte,
 As God doþ in þe gospelle say.

NOTES

title Louis (1993, p. 2980) renders the title as ‘As þe see doþ ebbe and flowe’.

1 Proverbial. See Whiting, S 111, ‘To ebb and flow like the sea’.

6 *slay*] A weaving reed which clamps into the beater of a weaving loom, keeping warp threads correctly spaced and packing the web threads into place.

13 Proverbial. See Whiting, T 406, ‘Maugre (In spite of) one’s teeth’.

21 Quoting this line, *MED* defines *pauen* (v.) as ‘?To touch or strike (sb.) with the paw’, literally copying *OED*. However, *OED* s.v. *paw* (v.) gives 1611 as the year of first occurrence of *pauen* carrying this (possible) meaning. In the present context it is plausible that *doþ hem pawe* carries the opposite meaning of *doþ hem pyne*, so ‘caresses/strokes/pets him’, hence ‘blandishes/flatters him’.

38 *afflay*] from *afleien*, ‘put to flight’ (*MED* s.v. *afleien* (v.)). Kail’s interpretation ‘afflict’ is perhaps induced by the double *f*.

58 Proverbial. See Whiting, B 481, ‘To bend one’s bow but shoot not’.

61,63 Proverbial. See Whiting, S 542, ‘As one sows so shall he reap’. Cf. XIX.21–22, *For suche seed as þou dost sowe, / Perof shall þyn heruest be*.

74 *leue*] MS *leues*, but the rhyme scheme demands *-e*, the usual plural ending in the manuscript.

76 *greue*] MS *greues*. See the note to l. 74.

82 On the role of *mynstrallis* in giving advice to lords, see Scattergood (1971, p. 15).

- 84 *gow*] Kail glosses ‘gull’ (MnE ‘dupe’), apparently supposing a pun on ‘3ow’, but *OED* gives the 17th century as the earliest occurrence of *gow=gull*. *MED* has only *gulle* (a. 1450) for ‘gull’, making no mention of *gow* as a possible variant form. A contextually more plausible interpretation is ‘[in praise] of you’.
- 89 Proverbial. See Whiting, S 823, ‘To stumble at a straw’.
- 91 Kail has *graunte purpos*, which *MED* s.v. *graunten* (*v.*) sub 2.(b) renders as ‘agree to a proposition’, quoting this line as Kail has it. However, the manuscript has *graunte to purpos*. *MED* s.v. *purpose* (*n.*) sub 3.(b) gives *to purpose* as ‘to the purpose, appropriate’, namely with a *nay and 3ee*. A similar expression occurs in II.28: *And fede hem forth with nay and 3ee*.
- 97,102–104 Proverbial. See Whiting, E 23, ‘The earth will discover secrets’.
- 105–110 Cf. Rom. 8:1–13.
- 111 See Matt. 16:27, ‘For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works’. Cf. Ezek. 7:3; 8:27; 33:20; 36:19; Rev. 2:23.
- 141 *rechelesly*] Kail *recchelesly*. Cf. VII.62, *Here landis of vertue laye don ly3e*.
- 157 Proverbial. See Whiting, T 512, ‘Truth seeks no hems (corners)’.
- 162 A similar sentiment is found in VI.58, *After þy dede resceyue thy name*.
- 163 *worschip*] Kail *worship*.
- 198 Proverbial. See Whiting, T 351, ‘Today alive, tomorrow dead’.
- 200 *?wolde*] The manuscript reading makes for faulty syntax, where *to* instead of *wolde* would make sense.
- 240 See Alford (1988) for the legal implications of this line, quoted s.v. *tale*.
- 243 *no*] Insertion follows Kail.
- 244 Cf. Matt. 7:12, ‘Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets’.
- 247 Cf. Matt. 5:9, ‘Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the Children of God’. Also, Luke 6:35.

V
WYT AND WILLE

SUMMARY

The title admirably epitomizes the poem's main theme: the struggle within the human soul between the urgings of the spirit of God (*wit*), and man's self-willed, worldly inclinations (*wille*).

The full force of the Triune God is at work through man's *wit* to guide his life in all its human aspects. Because man will harm his soul and fall from God's grace if he allows himself to be guided by his *wille*. This struggle becomes manifest in all aspects of human life.

Wille prevails in bad counsellors, spiritually blind themselves and despoilers of everything that is good in the country. Equally, the realm is led to ruin by people swayed by personal feud and greed. They will all of them meet with God's vengeance.

If *wit* is to prevail, you, the rulers of the land, must rule fittingly, wisely, evenhandedly. And you had better not presume upon your wealth or health; it may all come to nothing without warning. Use the *wit* God has given you to make the right choice between vice and virtue, so that you may live in God's grace.

TEXT

(1)

Man, be war of wikkid counsaile,	<i>counsel</i>
He wol the lede in wayes slidre;	<i>slippery</i>
3 In day of batayle he wol þe faile,	
And make þi goode men to shidre.	<i>tremble</i>
Ri3t as hay þey mon widre,	<i>Just; must wither</i>
6 As blades of gres his seed doþ spille.	<i>grass; is squandered</i>
Gostly blynd goþ, and not neuere whidre,	<i>[He]; spiritually; walks; knows not; whither</i>
Pat leueþ wit, and worchþ by wille. ¹	

(2)

9 Whoso wist what tresoure	<i>If one realized</i>
He haþ þat worcheþ by wit.	

¹ *Who abandons [spiritual] wisdom, and acts according to his worldly inclinations*

- Pe Fader of heuene is gouernoure,
 12 Pe Holigost, þe Sone wiþ hit.
 In oo Godhede alle þre are knyht,
 Non departe fro oþer nylle.
 15 In eche mannys herte alle þre þey syt,
 Pat makeþ wit lord aboute his wille.

*controls everything**united**Not one; will be separated**reside*

(3)

- Whoso wyste what wille harmes
 18 Pat willefully fro wyt wendes;
 Fro þe Fader of heuene his soule he charmes,
 Fro grace of þe Holygost hym blendes.
 21 Fro angels pere, soget to fendes,²
 Pat nyl not mende, but ay don ylle.
 Gostely and bodily hym self he shendes,
 24 Pat leueþ wyt and worcheþ by wille.

*turns away**attracts [away]**blinds**equals (n.); subject; devils**mend [his evil ways]; again and again**does harm*

(4)

- In kyngdom, what makeþ debate,
 Riche and pore both anoyþed?
 27 3ong counseil, and preuey hate.
 And syngulere profit ys aspiþed,
 Hiþe and lowe men abyþed;
 30 Echon wayte oþer for to kille.
 Pat kyngdom mot nede be striþed,
 That leueþ wit and worcheþ by wille.

*causes strife**[causes to] feel offended**Immature; secret**If; personal; sought**oppressed**seeks**inevitably; destroyed*

(5)

- 33 That leueþ troupe and falshed vse,
 And lyue not after Goddis sawe,
 Suche folk God doþ despuse,
 36 Rebelle and ryse aþen his lawe.
 Po puple that stondes of God non awe,
 But robbe and reue, coffres to fylle,
 39 Pe swerd of vengeaunce on hem is drawe,
 Pat leueþ wit and worcheþ by wille.

*practise**word**despises**[Who]**in awe of**plunder*

(6)

- That ouer puple han gouernaunce,
 42 Loke how Goddis lawe 3e vse,
 Whom 3e refuse and whiche auaunce,
 For Goddis loue or 3oure owen seruyce,

*authority**consider; apply**reject; accept*

² From [being] the equal of angels, he becomes subjugated to devils

- 45 Whiche is þe charge 3ow auyse. *duty; decide [for] yourself*
 Let eche man serue his charge in skylle, *perform; duty; fittingly*
 And 3oure werkis preue 3ow wyse.
- 48 Let wit be lord aboute thy wylle.
- (7)
- Be not to crowele in þy wele, *cruell/pitiless; prosperity*
 Pou nost how sone þou my3t haue lesse. *do not know*
- 51 Be not to sykere of þyne hele,
 Pou no[s]t how sone falle in sykennesse.
 Deþ claymeþ eche man for hesse, *himself*
- 54 And sodeyn deþ no dayes selle. *[has] for sale/available*
 Siþ no man is in sykernesse,
 Be redy euere at Goddis wille.
- (8)
- 57 And on þy strengþe be not to bold, *too confident*
 Ne skorne no pore, ne feble of elde. *[who is] feeble; old age*
 For lyue longe 3e mon be old, *life*
- 60 In feblenes to hoke and helde, *bend; stoop*
 In cowardys 3oure corage kelde. *loses ardour*
 But 3e had help, 3e shuld spille. *If not; die*
- 63 3e þat heuene blisse wole welde, *enjoy*
 Let wit be lord aboute 3oure wille.
- (9)
- God hap lent 3ow discrecioun *ability to distinguish*
- 66 Boþe of wele and of woo,
 Werkis of deuocioun,
 Vyces, vertues, frend and foo.
- 69 Siþ 3e can part hem wel o two, *distinguish; between*
 Let vyces on 3ow brynge no bille. *charge (n.)*
 Þe weye of grace and 3e wol go, *God's grace; if*
- 72 Let wyt be lord aboute 3oure wille.

NOTES

title Louis (1993, p. 2981) renders the title as 'Conflict of will and wit'.

4 *MED* s.v. *shoderen* (*v.*) adds '?error' to the form *shidre*, but in this line it is probably an instance of rhyming usage.

14 Refers to the dogma of the indivisibility of the Trinity.

15 Cf. Gower's *Confessio Amantis* I, 322, 'Thi will is thi principal, And hath the lordschipe of thi witt', as quoted in *OED* s.v. *will* *n.*(1) sub 6.a.

27 Kail ends the line with a comma instead of a full stop, but this makes for both muddled syntax and sense in ll. 27–29.

39 For the biblical reference to *swerd of vengeaunce* see I.84. The same phrase occurs in III.39.

52 *no[s/t]* MS *not* (which Kail follows). *Not* only occurs in the first and third person singular and in the plural.

53–54 Quoted in *MED* s.v. *sodein adv.*, virtually the only quoted instance of the use of *sodein* as an adverb. *MED* follows Kail's reading, where *sodein* is followed by a comma, making it an adverb referring back to *claymep* in l. 53. In the present reading, without the comma, *sodein* is an adjective to *dep*, which makes simple sense of l. 54 as a co-ordinate clause. Cf also VIII.101, '*And sodeyn dep nyl no man kenne*'.

54 Cf. Whiting, D 92, 'Death gives no warning', and D 96, 'Death is certain but not the time'.

61 *kelde*] Rhyme-spelling for *kolde(p)* = 3sg. pres. of *kolden*.

VI
TO LYF BODYLY IS PERYLOUS

SUMMARY

The poem is in the satirical mode, to the extent that it is meant to expose human vices. On the surface, the writer professes to approve as sound moral values the failings he really wishes to expose as abuses. The poem has a touch of humour, but overall the mood is angry. The combination – the ironic reversal of a surface statement, plus the severe tone of voice – properly puts the poem in the category of ‘militant irony’ as Northrop Frye defined it.¹

The poem is a catalogue of recommended misdeeds. Despise, malign, harm and antagonize everybody you value: your best friends, laymen or clergy. Be offensive and obnoxious to them. Scandalize your most valued servants and maids in the worst possible manner. Mix with all the wrong people, fools and undesirables alike. Lead a dissolute life, steal and lie whenever you can, and never give a just verdict. Avoid all acts of charity. Broadcast all these misdeeds, making a public joke of your reputation, and everybody will know and dread you as an immoral and unscrupulous person.

TEXT

(1)

Lerne bodyly to lyue.	
By seruaunt non hyre þou pay.	<i>[his] wages</i>
3 Pore ne riche no 3iftes 3eue,	
But take and gedre al þat þou may.	
Þou3 it come wiþ wrong, say not nay,	<i>in an unlawful manner</i>
6 But falsely loke þou swere and li3e.	<i>see to it that; lie</i>
Ðe pore man is the riches pray.	
Lerne þus to lyue bodilye.	<i>after the flesh/as a sinful person</i>

(2)

9 There market beteres gadere in þrong,	<i>idlers; come together</i>
Loke þat company þou lede.	<i>lead</i>
Stalworþly mayntene wrong;	<i>Resolutely; persist in; wrongdoing</i>
12 So may þou wyne moche mede.	<i>Thus</i>

¹ Frye (1957, p. 224).

- To reue fro pore take non hede.
 Do as þou þou3t neuere to dye.
 15 Say noþer pater noster ne crede.
 Lyue þou in ese bodyly.
- steal; think nothing of*
- comfort*
- (3)
- Rechelesly þe gouerne,
 18 Day and ny3t; walke late
 At cokes hostry and tauerne.
 Pou3 þat no man opere hate,
 21 Go not er þou make debate.
 To lewed, lettred and clergie,
 Do no reuerence to non astate;
 24 Þan men wole drede þe bodylye.
- conduct yourself*
- cook's inn (i.e. serving hot food)*
- Although*
- pick a quarrel*
- laymen; clerics*
- have no respect for*
- (4)
- The þat þe good wolde teche,
 Rebuke hem, and foule despise;
 27 Byd hem go to þe chirche and preche.
 Folwe fooles, and fle fro wyse.
 Zeue no doom in ri3t assyse.
 30 Fle fro trouþe and þou hym spy[e].
 Loke þou be proudest in alle gyse,
 Þan men wole preyse þe bodylye.
- Those who; goodness/virtue*
- administer; justice; proper manner*
- if*
- most arrogant; affairs*
- (5)
- 33 Loke þou haue sorwe sad,
 Whan þou seest folk haue welfare.
 Loke þou be mery and glad,
 36 Whan þou wost folk haue sorwe and care.
 Fede non hungry, ne cloþe no bare;
 Lete herberweles þerout ly;
 39 Visite no syke, and prisoners spare.
 Loue þy seluen þus bodyly.
- are deeply distressed*
- know*
- the naked*
- homeless; out in the open*
- decline to visit*
- (6)
- 3if þy man be a good seruaunt
 42 Þat þe were loþ to forgo,
 Stele þyn owen good fro his hand,
 Bere on hym he stal it so.
 45 Bryng[e] hym in presoun tho,
 Longe there for to lye,
 Til he be fayn, for sorwe and wo,
 48 To swere to serue þe bodylye.
- lose*
- Accuse him*
- then*
- delighted*

(7)

- And 3if þou haue a damysele
 Pat serueþ þe wel, of trewe lynage, *sound; family stock*
 51 Fonde to make here wombe to swelle, *Try*
 Make no fors of no maryage. *effort*
 And 3if she grucche wiþ þe to rage, *resists; have sexual intercourse*
 54 And alway fro the wole wrye, *keep out of your way*
 Bete here, and 3eue here non oþer wage, *Beat*
 And lyue in lustes bodylye.

(8)

- 57 Thus make þe byknowe. *known*
 After þy dede resceyue thy name. *In keeping with; earn; reputation*
 So shal þyn horn oft blowe,
 60 And hunte after his owen shame.²
 3e þou3 þou be of feble fame, *Even though; have a bad reputation*
 Bere good visage; þy nou3t aspye,³ *evil conduct; discover*
 63 Make þerof but iape and game, *Just make a jokelfun of it*
 In fleschly lustis bodylye.

(9)

- At masse, at matyns, rule 3ow so: *behave*
 66 Leue dewe deuocioun 3ow byhynde. *proper*
 Speke no good of frend ne foo;
 Lete non skorneles fro 3ow wende; *without your contempt/ridicule; go*
 69 Loke no man be thy frende.
 Lete no man thryue, but do hem nye; *injury*
 Kepe hem pore, and to þe bende: *bow*
 72 Þen wole þey drede þe bodylye.

NOTES

title Robbins (1975, p. 1420) has ‘Do evil and be feared—a satire’. *lyff* Kail adds a footnote: ‘read “lyue,” *vb.*’, possibly on the analogy of *lyue* in the text of the poem, but spelling inconsistencies within one poem are not uncommon (e.g. in VII, where the title has *know* and l. 8 reads *knowe*).

29 The opposite conduct is urged in I.164, *Do bothe parties euene assise*, in III.12–13, *Do euene lawe to foolle and wyse, / Set mesure in euene assise*, and in IX.65,67, *That haldeþ questes or assise ... / Lette no lawe fro ri3t gyse*.

30 *spye*] MS *spyse*.

² Ll. 59–60: *Thus your horn* (i.e. deeds) *will often blow* (i.e. make known what you are up to), / *And chase* (i.e. follow around) *your own shame*

³ *Keep a cheerful face; make no secret of your evil conduct*

45 *Brynge*] MS *bryng*, but all imperatives in this poem end in *-e*.

57–60 By contrast with these lines see Matt. 6:2, ‘When thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men’.

58 A similar sentiment is found in IV.162, *After desert þe name hap prys*.

59 *oft*] Kail *oft[e]*, possibly because of the exclusive spelling *ofte* elsewhere in the Poems.

61 *3e*] Kail adds a comma: *3e, þou3 thou be etc.*, interpreting *3e* as ‘yeah/yes’ (excl.). The present edition follows the punctuation of this line as quoted in *MED* (so without a comma) s.v. *ye (adv.)* sub 2.c., glossed as ‘even though’.

62 Kail has a comma after *visage*, but since the first half of the line refers back to the preceding line, whilst the second half refers to the following line, a semicolon is appropriate. *MED* is inconsistent in its quotes of this line. S.v. *nought* sub (a) a semicolon is used, as in the present reading, but with a comma s.v. *ther-of* sub 9.(c) and s.v. *jape* sub 3.(b), as in Kail. In the quotation s.v. *jape* *MED* silently amends the manuscript reading *þy nou3t* to *þyn ou3t*, which does not make sense.

VII

MAN, KNOW THY SELF, AND LERNE TO DYE

SUMMARY

Man is finite and must prepare in his lifetime for the salvation of his soul. Unbelievers, those who do not believe in God, hell or heaven, will lose their soul. Make the right choices now, and do not leave your salvation till the moment of your death, when riches, counsellors and flatterers cannot help you, and when God will judge you according to your deeds. So live a virtuous life, assist the poor in their needs (but not the greedy poor), do not boast of any small acts of charity, and keep a careful account of any wrongdoings.

If you have given a good example in your lifetime, exhort other people to follow you on the road to heaven, or if not, warn them not to follow you on the way to your damnation. In man's final reckoning with God, he should not presume upon God's mercy if he has not repented his wasted talents and made a full confession.

Man has been given the capacity to distinguish between good and evil and has a free will, so in the end he must make his own choice, to be saved or damned.

TEXT

(1)

Mannys soule is sotyl and queynt,	<i>strange; mysterious</i>
Shal neuere ende þou3 he dede gynne.	<i>had a beginning</i>
3 The flesch is fals[e], frele and feynt;	<i>wicked; deceiving</i>
Þe world alone wolde wynne,	<i>gain (v.)</i>
Is wormes mete and sek of synne,	<i>corrupted by; sin</i>
6 He nys neuere filt of glotonye,	<i>sated; appetite [for worldly pursuits]</i>
His cloþyng is a dedly skynne.	<i>covering</i>
Man, knowe þy self, and lerne to dye.	

(2)

9 Lerne to dye, and go to skole,	(i.e. train yourself [with that in mind])
Sip þou fro deþ may not fle.	<i>As; cannot</i>
Lete not þy werkys preue þe fool.	<i>stupid (i.e. unfit to learn)</i>
12 Whan deþ wole assaile þe,	

Sende warnestor to þy soule to be;
 By vices fro þy vertues triþe.

*provisions; [continue] to exist
 separate
 place (v.); position*

- 15 3e sette 3oure soule in kynges gre,
 Þat lerneþ wisely for to diþe.

(3)

Eche man in certayn is to dye,

- 18 At domesday stonde in drede.

Þere al þe worldis tresorye
 May not bye thy lyf for mede,

*at any price
 guided*

- 21 No wys counseil þat dede þe lede,
 Ne glosere wiþ his flaterye;
 Non may helpe oþer at nede:

- 24 For thy, man, wysely lerne to dye.

(4)

What may thy richesse þe auayle,
 Whan þou art to deþe dryue.

- 27 Thy wynd is layd, þou mayst not sayle,
 Pou3 þou lete out bonet and ryue.

*calmed; sail forth
 shake out; bonnet; reef
 devote yourself
 held [out]; dead body
 spiritually*

- Loke to vertues þou þe 3yue,
 30 Er tombe be held to þe liþe;

For he þat gostly wel doþ lyue,
 He lerneþ wysely for to diþe.

(5)

- 33 Two skilles y wole telle,
 Why eche man shuld repreue oþeres synne:

nota

*reasons
 condemn
 If; knew*

- And he wist hym self shuld go to helle,
 36 Counseyle no mo to come þer ynne:
 Þe mo brondes, þe hattere brynne,
 Incresyng of his maladye.

*Advise
 fuel; hotter; flames
 Adding to; suffering*

- 39 Here nys no charite, 3ut shal he wynne
 To lasse his pyne after he dye.

*In this life; [act of] charity; succeed
 mitigate*

(6)

And 3if he wiste to heuene to go,

- 42 His soule be saued in sikirnes,
 He shulde counseile alle folk do so,
 Saue here soules, and do not mys;

for a certainty

- 45 Nou3t for here profyt, but al for his,
 His owen ioye for to hyþe:
 Þe mo soules, þe more blis.

fail

- 48 Penk hereon, and lerne to dyþe.

heighten

(7)

- Thy wikked werkis in þy 3owthe, *youth*
 Seke hem wel tylle þou hem fynde,
 51 And al þy tyme ri3t til nowþe, *now*
 Loke þat fardel þou vnbynde, *pack [of sins]*
 And shewe it wel wiþ shrift[e] wynde, *give evidence of it; oral confession*
 54 No fende spot vppon the spy3e, *devil; blemish (n.); detect*
 And haue repentaunce in mynde.
 On þis manere lerne to dy3e.

(8)

- 57 While man doþ synne in werkis wylde, *wanton*
 Al þat tyme he nys but ded.
 He nys not counted as fool ne childe,
 60 But as a man can good and qued. *can [distinguish between]; wickedness*
 For his soule he telyeþ no bred;¹ *works [to obtain]*
 Here landis of vertue laye don ly3e. *Its (i.e. of the soul); lie untilled*
 63 Do comaundementis þat God bed,
 Þan lernest þou wysely to dy3e.

(9)

- Pore, nedy, and gredy, þat not ne haue,
 66 In Goddis name 3eue þat asken ou3t. *ask for nothing*
 Pore, nedy, and not gredy, þat no3t ne craue,
 3eue hem þou3 þey ne aske nou3t.
 69 And nedeles gredy þyn almes sou3t, *If*
 3eue hem noppyng þou3 þey crye: *beg [for it]*
 Þere nys no nede, 3ifte haþ no mede. *merit*
 72 Suche almesdede mon neuere dye. *come to an end*

(10)

- What argument may beter preue *evidence*
 Why men ben bent to don o mys? *wrong*
 75 Not but defaute of byleue. *lack of*
 I trowe þey wene no God þer nys, *think*
 Ne helle pyne, ne heuene blys,
 78 Paradis ne purgatorie,
 Or elles – a noþer heresy þere is – *else*
 As a best wiþoute soule to die. *animal*

¹ I.e. He does nothing to provide food for his soul; no virtue grows thereon

(11)

- 81 Man of his owen nou3ten haue; *nothing*
 Al is Goddis, and he it lent.
 Þerof God wole rekenyng craue, *require*
 84 How þou it wan, held, and spent; *got*
 Þy leste þou3t, and what it ment;
 Troupe, and lesyng þou dede li3e; *the lies you told*
 87 And 3et þy soule is Goddis rent: *God's property rented to you*
 So quyte þat wel, lerne to di3e. *repay what is due*

(12)

- Whanne þou dest þyn almesdede,
 90 Crie God mercie it is so lite. *Beg; little*
 To counte þy richesse þou my3t haue drede, *be concerned*
 In partye of payment so litel quyte. *As partial (re)payment; paid*
 93 Pou3 þou do mys, God nyl not flyte *reproach*
 Ne þrete þe ones ne twy3e, *once nor twice (i.e. not at all)*
 Body and soule he can smyte. *[Although]; destroy*
 96 Man, drede God, so lerne to dy3e.

(13)

- Man, synne not in ouerhope, *presumptuously*
 Pou wynnest not Goddis mercy wiþ fi3t; *striving [for it]*
 99 Hit wolde brynge þe into wanhope
 To wene no mercy þou haue ne my3t. *think; expect*
 Goddis mercy is medled wiþ his ry3t, *blended; justice*
 102 And fro ry3t God nyl not ply3e; *waive*
 After þe dede þe doom is dy3t. *In accordance with; judgement; passed*
 Man, knowe þis wile er þou dy3e. *well (adv.)*

(14)

- 105 Eche dedly synne is a dedly knyf;
 Why loue men þanne so ofte to synne.
 Eche vertue is a plastre of lyf. *remedy/curative for*
 108 He haþ fre wille: lese or wynne. *lose*
 To salue 3oure sores now begynne;
 Þe Holygost 3oure grace gy3e. *ease the pain of*
 111 Siþ body and soule mon parte o twynne, *may guide*
 To saue þy soule, lerne to dy3e. *from each other*

(15)

- Truste not al to oþere men
 114 In almes dede ne preyere, *Just because of [their]*
 For state of soule can no man kenne,

For þey ben alle in Goddis daungere,
 117 In helle pyne or blisse clere.
 Repentaunce mot mercy byʒe.
 While þy dede is in þy powere,
 120 Be þyn awen frend er þou dyʒe.

power
splendour
earn

NOTES

3 *fals[e]* MS *fals*.

4 Cf. Mark 8:36, 'For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?'

53 *shrift[e]* MS *shrift*.

62 Cf. IV.142, *Here lond of vertues ligge ful lay*, where *here* refers to heedless persons.

81 St. (11): Similarly worded in I (5) and VIII (1).

97 St. (13): Similarly worded in I (17) and XX (26).

98 Cf. IX.13, *To stryue wiþ God we may not wynne*.

VIII
A GOOD MAKYNGE OF IOUR DELAYE

SUMMARY

As its main theme, the poem stands out against abuses among the secular clergy. In particular, it inveighs against those who take tithes without looking after the souls of their parishioners, and against beneficed clergymen who are only interested in increasing their temporal possessions.¹

The poem starts off with a general warning: man is answerable for his own deeds, and whether he deserves the bliss of heaven or the pains of hell is entirely his own responsibility. In stanza (3) the focus shifts to a specific target: the parish priest who neglects his divinely ordained duty of caring for the souls of his parishioners, but takes their tithes all the same. With an authoritative ‘*y 3ow forbede*’ the writer then raises his aim and attacks the ecclesiastics of high rank who devote their time to the pursuit of wealth, status and leisure, hiring others to perform their religious duties, and presumptuously relying on God’s mercy and Christ’s redeeming death. Pious words without the deeds to match, in the end will be judged accordingly. So make haste to make good, before unheralded death overtakes you.

TEXT

(1)

- Man, haue hit in þy þou3t
Of what matere þou maked is.
3 God made the of nou3t, *nothing*
Al þat þou hast, þou wost, is his. *know*
Wheþer hast þou serued pyne or blisse, *deserved*
6 Seche þy werkis and assaye. *Investigate; test [their quality]*
þy getyng, þy holdyng, þy spendyng mysse, *wrongly*
Fro blisse wolde make Iour delaye.²

(2)

- 9 To þy bed whan þou shalt go,
þenk what þou hast don sen morn,
Wheþer serued blisse or wo, *[you] have deserved*

¹ See section 3.4.1.3 on the ills within the church, criticized by both orthodox churchmen and Wyclif.

² I.e. Will postpone the day of [eternal] happiness (see also the note to the title)

- 12 Or Goddis name in ydel sworn, *taken in vain*
 Or ellys fals witness born, *given*
 Letted pore men of here pray, *Deprived; what is theirs*
 15 In þy defaut here goodis lorn: *fault; possessions; lost*
 Pou shalt answeze here iour delay.³

(3)

- Who takeþ cure, he bereþ charge *accepts a benefice; has the task*
 18 By Goddis lawe þe folk to preche.
 Pey make conscience large,⁴ *nota*
 Take tye and nyl not teche. *tithes; teach [the Gospel]*
 21 Crist his postles tau3t in speche
 Fro worldis worschip to wende away, *from; esteem; turn away*
 Gostly and bodyly þe soules to leche, *redeem (spiritually)/heal (physically)*
 24 And bad hem: make no iour delay. *(i.e. seek no excuses for delaying)*

(4)

- Worldis good nes not holichirche; *[meant for] the clergy*
 Richesse and worschep y 3ow forbede. *renown*
 27 Þe folkis cherche, in hem 3e worche, *people*
 Here noo oþer to don þy dede. *hire; perform; task*
 Þat doþ þe dede is worþy mede. *work; reward*
 30 Pou mayst not serue two lordis to pay; *cannot; satisfy/please*
 Þat on he serueþ in loue and drede, *The one; fear*
 Þat oþere he serueþ wiþ iour delay.⁵

(5)

- 33 Who ressayueþ benefys for richesse and ese, *benefice; physical comfort*
 To haue his lyuyng in sykernes, *For a secure livelihood*
 Raþere þan serue God to plese,
 36 He ressayueþ hit o mys. *falsely/wickedly*
 For ri3t as Iudas dede kys *just*
 Ihesus, and after hym betray, *afterwards*
 39 So þey gyle þe soules fro blisse,⁶
 Of Goddis seruyce make iour delay. *In; you waste time*

(6)

- Many seyn: God is so wys, *say*

³ *You will here (i.e. in this life) be answerable for wasting your time*

⁴ Ll. 19–20: *They make their conscience large, / If they take tithes and are not prepared to teach [the Gospel]*

⁵ *Serving the other is wasting your time*

⁶ Ll. 39–40: *So they defraud the souls (i.e. of their parishioners) of [heavenly] bliss. / You waste time [that should be spent] in God's service*

- 42 Endeles ful of alle mercy;
 God nyl not, þou3 y be nys, *does not want; foolishly*
 Lese me þurgh myn owen foly. *Damn*
- 45 So dere God mankynde dede bye; *dearly; bought* (i.e. through Jesus' redeeming death)
 What greueþ God, þou3 y go gay.⁷ *why; merrily*
 Pat synnen in ouerhope, in helle mon ly3e; *presumptuous/unjustified hope; must; lie*
- 48 Pereof mon be non iour delay. *cannot; postponement*

(7)

- Many wole say, þat leue vneueene:⁸ *believe; insecurely*
 And it were soþ þat clerkis telle, *If; true; clergy*
- 51 Fewe folkes shulde come in heuene, *[That]*
 So fele as shulde renne hedlyng to helle. *As many*
 Hit were hard þere to dwelle,
- 54 Wiþ helle houndis stonde to bay. *By; cornered*
 Synne mon be punshed, as saip þe gospelle; *must be punished*
 Perof mon be no iour delay.

(8)

- 57 That ouere puple haue astate, *authority*
 Colege or eny oþer degre,⁹
 Mayntene no debate *Do not engage in disputes*
- 60 For synguler profyt of temperalte. *personal; worldly goods*
 3oure rule is groundid in charyte,
 As li3t of lanterne to lede þe way.
- 63 To gouerne þe puple in vnyte,
 God bad hem: make no iour delay.

(9)

- Beter is litel ry3twys wonne, *in a just manner; obtained*
- 66 Pereof among þe pore to dele,
 Pan ouermoche geten wiþ synne, *too much* (i.e. more than is one's due)
 Wiþouten desert take pore mennys wele, *undeservedly; possessions*
- 69 And helpe not þe soule to hele, *heal*
 But crye in pyne weylaway. *woe!*
 Þe soules þe curatours wole apele¹⁰
- 72 To answeere of here iour delay. *their*

⁷ *Why should God be angry, if I go [my way] merrily?*

⁸ *Many people of shaky belief may say*

⁹ *In a college* (i.e. the resident body of ecclesiastics of a collegiate [= endowed] church), *or any other body in the Church hierarchy*

¹⁰ *The souls will challenge the curates* (having 'cure' [= spiritual charge] of souls) *[before God's throne]*

(10)

- Why ressayue 3e worschipe þat 3e haue. *[the] esteem*
 For 3oure vertues or for 3oure vys.
 75 And 3e ful worschip saue, *If; true; [wish to] preserve*
 In word and werk 3e mot be wys.
 Þis worldly wysdom is gostly nys, *folly*
 78 Whan werk acordeþ not wiþ wordis 3e say.
 Heuene blys, and þis worldis delys,
 Þat on wil make iour delay. *One of the two*

(11)

- 81 Thow may not knowe a cristen man *cannot*
 Þou3 þou here hym say his crede, *hear*
 Þe ten comaundementis tan *profess*
 84 And speke, and do not þe dede, *but*
 Ne serue God in loue and drede,
 Is heretyk, out of fay. *outside the faith*
 87 After 3oure werkis ressayue þy mede;
 Þerof mon be no iour delay. *In accordance with; reward must*

(12)

- Thou3 worldis richesse on þe falle, *befall you*
 90 And wolde gon bytween God and þe,
 Suffre not þy soule be þralle; *Do not permit; slave*
 Þenk, God bou3t it to make þe fre.
 93 Þou3 þy mayster a tyraunt be,
 Fro Goddis lawe wolde say nay, *Against; no*
 Do as [thapostle] Poule bad þe:
 96 Abyde, and suffre wiþ iour delay. *Endure your lot*

(13)

- Man, þou wost wel þou shalt dy3e;
 What deþ, ne where, þou nost whenne. *do not know*
 99 And synnes wolde þy soule ny3e, *afflict*
 Ay more and more [in] rerage we renne,¹¹ *debt; incur*
 And sodeyn deþ nyl no man kenne. *unexpected*
 102 I rede we drede domesday;
 Be euene wiþ world er 3e gon henne, *urge [you]*
 For þere schal be no iour delay.¹² *Get square; from here postponement*

¹¹ I.e. We become ever more indebted [to God]

¹² I.e. of Judgement Day

NOTES

- title** In Robbins (1975, p. 1420) as ‘Evils in the church’. *A good makynge*] A ‘making good’, i.e. ‘atonement’ (see *MED* s.v. *god* ((*adj.*) sub 4.a)), punning on *makynge*, ‘poem’ (see *MED* s.v. *making(e)* (*ger.*)). *delaye*] ‘postponement’; *Iour delaye*, legal term: ‘day set for a postponed trial’ (see *MED* s.v. *delaye* (*n.*) sub 3.c); *maken delaye*, ‘procrastinate, tarry, waste time’ (ibid. sub 1.c), and [4] sub. 5.b.
- 1–2 Similarly worded in XXII.1–2, *Thenke hertely in þy þou3t / Of what matere þou dede bygynne*.
- 1–3 See Ps. 103:14, ‘For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust’, and Gen. 3:19, ‘... for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return’.
- 2 *is*] A Northern form of ON origin.¹³
- 3–7 I (5) and VII.81–84 express the same thoughts about man’s stewardship of and accountability for everything God gave him.
- 12 See Ex. 20:7 and Deut. 5:11, ‘Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thou God in vain’.
- 13 *fals*] Kail emends *fals[e]*, which is neither rhythmically nor syntactically required. *MED* s.v. *idel* (*n.*) sub 1.b(c) quotes the line as in the manuscript.
- 18 Kail’s punctuation (a comma after *lawe*, no punctuation mark after *preche*) confuses what are otherwise two straightforward statements: a curate under God’s law is obliged to teach his flock, and: he takes much upon his conscience if he fails to do so, but does take the people’s tithes.
- 21 Kail erroneously has ‘[not*a*]’ in the margin.
- 25–26 See Matt. 6:19, ‘Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth’.
- 29 See Luke 10:7, ‘The labourer is worthy of his hire’.
- 30 See Matt. 6:24 and Luke 16:13, ‘No man/servant can serve two masters’.
- 33 *benefys*] ‘an ecclesiastical living, an office or position in the Church’ (*MED* s.v. *benefice* (*n.*)).
- 41 St. (6) reflects the message in Rom. 6:1–2, ‘Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid’.
- 49 *vneue[n]*, ‘improperly’, following Kail, although neither *MED* s.v. *uneven(e)* (*adv.*) nor *OED* s.v. *uneven* (*adv.*) give this meaning.
- 55 See Rom. 6:23, ‘For the wages of sin is death’.
- 58 For the MnE rendering of *college* and *degre*, see also *MED* s.v. *college* (*n.*) sub 1 and s.v. *degre* (*n.*) sub 8.
- 62 See Ps. 119: 105, ‘Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path’.
- 77 See 1 Cor. 1:20, ‘... hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?’, and 1 Cor. 3:19, ‘For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God’.
- 81 St. (11) reiterates the warning in VIII (15) against the hypocrite whose outward show of piety is not in keeping with the true state of his soul.
- 81–82 For the Creed and the Ten Commandments as topics of religious instruction, see the note to IX.39.
- 83–84 See James 1:22, ‘But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only ...’, and Rom. 2:13, ‘For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified’.
- 87 See Rom. 2:6, ‘[God] will render to every man according to his deeds’, and Isa. 59:18, ‘According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies’. Cf. I.140 and VI.58.

¹³ See Wright & Wright (1972, p. 203).

92 *it*] i.e. *py soule*; see also l. 45 above, for the doctrine of God's mercy to man through the redeeming death of Jesus Christ.

95 *thapostle*] not in the manuscript. The insertion follows Kail, to preserve the consistent four-beat rhythm. *Seynte* is, however, equally possible. *MED* quotes the line s.v. *nai* (*interj.*) without insertion.

96 See Eph. 6:5, 'Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ'.

97–98 Proverbial. See Whiting, D 96, 'Death is certain, but not the time'. See also XXII.57, *Denke þou shalt dye, and nost whenne*.

100 [*in*] *MED* is in two minds about it: *rennen in rerage*, 'go into debt, be found in arrears', s.v. *rerage* (*n.*) sub 1.(a), but *rennen rerage*, 'incur debt', s.v. *rennen* (*v.*(1)) sub 26.(a). See Alford (1988) for the legal implications of the term s.v. *arverage*, where this line is quoted.

IX

WITH GOD OF LOUE AND PES 3E TRETTE

come to terms

SUMMARY

In preparation for Easter Communion, the shining high point of the Christian year, the faithful are exhorted to do penance by making a sincerely contrite and full confession, holding back nothing, including money clipping, tampering with weights and measures, or any such sins. If you pretend remorse and keep sinning, the writer warns, you do so on pain of forfeiting your soul to the devil.

It is all too easy to backslide, but stay firm, so that you can take communion (i.e. on Easter Sunday) with a clear conscience. Be prepared: judges must refrain from discriminating the poor. Servants must be paid their due. The fighting man, if he must, should fight only in a just cause, exercising charity towards rebels. The clergy, finally, is bound to hear full confessions and practice all Acts of Charity. They must not leave the cure of the souls, their divinely ordained charge, to somebody else. The parish priest should himself tend his flock: teach the ignorant, help the needy, lead them on the path to heaven. If you are all thus reconciled with God, you may receive Him in Holy Communion.

Again: do as the priest has taught you: be repentant, do penance, seek God and remain with Him and His angels always.

TEXT

(1)

This holy tyme make 3ow clene, Burnysche bry3t 3oure soules blake.	<i>until they shine; black</i>
3 Fro 3ow to God let þe prest be mene, To do penaunce, and synnes forsake.	<i>intermediary</i>
Wiþ almes dede amendes make,	<i>almsgiving</i>
6 And repentaunce may grace gete. In goode werkis wysely wake, And wiþ God of pes y rede 3e trette.	<i>be diligent</i> <i>I urge you</i>

(2)

9 Wiþ soulis bri3t in God 3e glade As shynyng angels out of synne, In worschip of hym þat 3ow made,	<i>rejoice</i> <i>free from</i>
---	------------------------------------

- 12 To knowe 3oure seluen now bygynne.
 To stryue wiþ God we may not wynne,
 Boþe body and soule he can bete.
- 15 Ihesus is broþer of oure kynne;
 For þy wiþ God of [pes] 3e trete.

*rebel against; cannot
 get the better of
 our kin (i.e. mankind)
 Therefore*

(3)

- Ofte han we treted wiþ God o trewe,
 18 And sayde no more synne we wolde;
 And euery 3eere we breke it newe.
 Thre dayes no trewes wiþ hym nele holde
- 21 Synne to bay; many a folde
 On soules helle houndes slete.
 Er 3e come þere, 3onge and olde,
- 24 Wiþ God of pes y rede 3e trete.

negotiated; about [a] truce

anew

at bay; time

attack

(i.e. in hell)

(4)

- Trete while 3e haue 3oure hele,
 For sodeyn dep [maþ] stomblen as blynde.¹
- 27 Þe grettere lordschipe of worldis wele,²
 Þe more in þraldom hit doþ hem bynde.
 Man, þenke þy lyf is but a wynde;
- 30 When þat is blowen, þou art for3ete.
 Holde couenaunt to God, and be kynde.
 For þy wiþ God of pes 3e trete.

health

[makes you] stumble

slavery

breath of wind

has died down

keep [your] pact; honour it

(5)

- 33 3e mot hit shewe, wiþ herte sorwe,
 To a prest, and weel 3ow shryue;
 No3t turne a3en þerto to morwe,³
- 36 But þenke be good al thy lyue.
 Wiþ Goddis sonde looke 3e not stryue,
 Ne derne mornyng counterfete.
- 39 Rekne wysely alle þy wittes fyue,
 Wiþ God of pes when 3e do trete.

make known (i.e. your sin[s]); contrition

properly; make confession

revert

be intent on

against; command; fight

deceptively; remorse; pretend

Answer for [what you have done with]; senses

(6)

- The synnes þat wolde þy soule apayre,
 42 To a prest shewe þe cas.
 Loke þat þou not paynte hit fayre,

would; damage

case

favourably

¹ I.e. Sudden death takes you unawares

² *The more of the world's wealth they have under their control*

³ *Do not return to it (i.e. your unrepentant state) tomorrow*

But shewe it forþ riȝt ful as it was.

- 45 Þat shame is mede for þy trespas; *[your] just deserts*
 For synne þat wolde þy soule þrete *threaten*
 Aske mercy and seche gras, *[God's] grace*
 48 Wiþ God of pes when 3e trete.

(7)

- That clippen money, þey haue þe curs *excommunication*
 Foure tymes in þe 3ere,
 51 Here waȝtes þat þey waye þe wors; *weights; because*
 3erde or elne, fer or nere, *Yardstick; ell measure; far or near (i.e. anywhere)*
 Wheþer þey selle good chep or dere,
 54 But þey þe fulle mesure mete, *Except*
 Hit semeþ in skornyng þat it were⁴
 Wiþ God of pes whan 3e trete.

(8)

- 57 Auyse 3ow þat leden lawe: *Bethink yourself; apply*
 For drede of lordschipe or for mede *[higher] authority; bribery*
 Holde no pore men in awe, *do not overawe*
 60 To storble here ryȝt or lette here nede. *To take away; deprive from*
 Hit bryngēþ þe soule in gret drede *peril*
 Aȝens Goddis lawe to plete. *plead/argue*
 63 Þe rolles ariȝt y red 3e rede, *[court] rolls; carefully; urge you*
 Wiþ God of pes when 3e trete.

(9)

- That haldeþ questes or assise, *inquests; court of assize*
 66 Þat takeþ or 3eueþ fee or hire, *charges; pays; fee; wages*
 Lette not lawe fro riȝt gyse, *Do not prevent; practice*
 Ne mayntene wrongis as master and sire. *Nor; practise*
 69 Þey may be ferd for helle fire, *fear (v.)*
 To ete here neyȝebore at here mete;⁵
 Þat lyf shal not euere more dure. *This [present] life; last (v.)*
 72 For þy wiþ God of pes 3e trete. *Therefore*

(10)

- 3e þat comeþ to Goddis bord, *table (i.e. the altar at communion)*
 Resceyueþ hym in clene lyf; *Receive; guiltless*
 75 Holde non old synnes in hord, *Keep ... hidden*
 For þanne begynneþ a newe stryf; *conflict*

⁴ It would seem that it was in contempt [of God's command]

⁵ I.e. Who ruin their neighbours by abusing their hospitality

For he to God haþ drawn his knyf, *against*
 78 Þat þenkeþ in skorne þere wolde hym etc.⁶ *Who; with scorn [in his heart]; eat (i.e. the host)*
 Here be war, man and wyf, *Here [on earth]*
 Horde no synne when 3e trette. *(i.e. with God)*

(11)

81 Man, 3if þou haue tan a fal, *made*
 Ryse vp, and no more slyde. *fall (i.e. into sin)*
 O prest, þy shrifte schewe it al,⁷ *reveal*
 84 But hyde no synne in hord by syde. *on the side (i.e. unmentioned)*
 In venyale synne longe to byde, *venial (i.e. minor); remain*
 Makeþ dedly synnes to growe grete. *Causes*
 87 Wiþ 3oure werkis 3e mot chyde *By means of; argue*
 Wiþ God of pes when 3e trette.

(12)

Seuene syþes on þe day, *times*
 90 Men seyn, the ri3twis man doþ falle. *say; righteous*
 Þanne he þat falleþ in synnes alway, *Then*
 How shulde he rekene þo synnes alle, *count/answer for*
 93 But he wrot hem, grette and smalle, *Unless; has written them down*
 Summe at shrifte he schulde for3ete. *[In case]*
 He shulde þe prest þe oftere calle,
 96 Wiþ God of pes when 3e trette.

(13)

Foure acountes þou shalt 3elde: *nota* *pay/render*
 – God made þe lyk to his ymage –
 99 How þou it wan, how þou it helde,
 How þou it spendid in wast outrage. *wasteful excess*
 Forfete not heuene, þyn heritage;
 102 Among seyntes þy soule sete.⁸
 Rekene ere þou renne in rerage, *Count [your money]; debt*
 And wiþ God of pes 3e trette.

(14)

105 Holy writ biddeþ God sende vengeaunce *urges; may impose*
 To kyngdom þat nele not holde his lawe,
 Wrappe and stryf and alle greuaunce *Anger; hostility; malice*

⁶ Ll. 77–78: *For he has drawn his knife against God, / Who would partake of communion with a scornful heart*

⁷ *O priest, when you hear confession everything must come out*

⁸ *Win a place for your soul among the saints [in heaven]*

- 108 Among prynces and pore men þrawe, *rulers; cause*
 þat nele not leue Goddis sawe, *accept; commandments*
 Ne counte His gynnyng at o clete. *Regard; creation; as a nail (i.e. worthless)*
 111 To werkis of wysdom by tyme 3e drawe, *in time; turn to*
 And wiþ God of pes 3e trette.

(15)

- Whoso leued þat God were trewe, *trusted; would be faithful*
 114 Ðan wolde þey do þat God hem bede. *commanded*
 þat mende no mysse, but synne ay newe, *make amends for; again and again*
 Hem lakkeþ alle þe poyntes of þe crede.
 117 Serue God for helle drede, *for fear of hell*
 Lest þy soule falle in chete; *be forfeited (i.e. to the devil)*
 And loue God for heuene mede. *reward*
 120 Wiþ loue and drede wiþ God 3e trette.

(16)

- Pou3 þou take ordre or religeoun, *join the clergy or a religious order*
 Wiþ oute charite þou seruest no mede, *deserve; reward*
 123 3eue drynke to þursty, þat han and mown.⁹
 Cloþe þe naked, and hungry fede,
 Vysite þe pore and syk þat nede, *need (v.)*
 126 And giltles presoneres loos 3e lete, *loose*
 And burye þe dede, is charite dede. *act*
 Wiþ þes werkis wiþ God 3e trette.

(17)

- 129 Ðere þou hast borwed, quyte þy dette, *Where/If; repay*
 And to þy seruaunt þat reson is. *And [pay]; reasonable*
 Loke what degre God haþ þe sette;¹⁰
 132 Quyte hym þy dette, þy soule is his, *what you owe Him*
 And resceyue þy dette: heuene blis. *what is due to you*
 Ðere thar þe noþer swynke ne swete; *need; labour (v.); sweat (v.)*
 135 And ordeyne þe wele, and amende þy mys. *properly manage; [worldly] wealth; misdeeds*
 Þus wiþ God of pes 3e trette.

(18)

- Caste þe not to couetys, *Be not inclined; greed*
 138 3e þat ry3twys werryours be, *with a just cause*
 But loke where ri3t querel lys; *consider; just; [ground for] dispute*
 Chastise þe rebelle in charite.

⁹ ... *who have* (i.e. 'drynke') and *who can* (i.e. 'drynke')

¹⁰ *Be mindful of the place* (i.e. in society) *God has accorded you*

- 141 Pere God is frend, his foomen fle; *foes*
 3e thar not counte hem at o pete; *need (v.); not a bit (litt. 'count as peat')*
 God doþ batayle and not 3e.
 144 Forthy with God of pes 3e trete.

(19)

- And 3e in batayle haue maystrie, *If*
 And fortune serue, and God 3ow spede, *is with you; helps you*
 147 Thank God þe victorie,
 And holde it not 3oure owen dede. *achievement*
 Serue God in loue and drede,
 150 And be not proud of 3oure by3ete. *spoils/booty*
 After 3oure werkis wayte aftur 3oure mede,¹¹ *according to; [may] expect; afterwards*
 And so wiþ God of pes 3e trete.

(20)

- 153 3if a clerk haue þurgh hap *happens to have*
 Cure of soules or bischopriche,¹² *Care*
 He hat not bischop, he hat a by shap: *is called; shepherd/'maker-in-the-manner-of'*
 156 Make opere after his werkis like.¹³ *(i.e. He makes etc.)*
 To kepe his shep fro helle tike, *hounds*
 In folde go, amonge hem blete; *sheepfold; bleat*
 159 Saf and sounde brynge hem y lyk, *together, without distinction*
 Bytween God and hem to trete.

(21)

- Benefice of holychirche first was graunted *Living; originally*
 162 For prestis, holy lyf to lede,
 Dryue out synne, suffre non be haunted; *allow; to be practised (i.e. sin)*
 Here non oper to do his dede. *To hire; perform his task*
 165 Þe werkman is worþy his mede
 In felde, in toun and in strete.
 Teche vnwys, helpe hem þat nede, *[the] ignorant; those who*
 168 Byfore God for hem to trete. *them*

(22)

- In wordis þey sayn þey wil do wel,
 Take cure of soules as worthi clerkis,
 171 And resceyue þe charge euery del *accept; in every respect*
 To wasche synful soules serkis. *garments*

¹¹ *According to/Following your deeds you may afterwards expect your reward*

¹² *I.e. Responsibility for the people's spiritual welfare or for a diocese*

¹³ *Shapes others in accordance with his (i.e. the bishop's) works*

Pey preue hem self fooles in werkis,
 174 Wiþ holy water nele no parischen wete. *refuse; wet (v.)*
 Caste away Antecrist merkis, *Throw (imp.)*
 Goþ wiþ God of pes to trette. *[Who] goes*

(23)

177 Now sumwhat y haue 3ow sayd *some things*
 What is salue to 3oure [sore].
 To sau3ten wiþ God, holde 3ow payed,¹⁴ *be reconciled; regard (v.)*
 180 And arraye 3ow wel þerfore *prepare yourself*
 To resceyue God, 3oure soules store, *treasure*
 His body in forme of bred o whete, *outer appearance; wheat*
 183 And kepe hym. So 3e nede no more *hold; Thus*
 Eft of pes wiþ hym to trette. *Afterwards*

(24)

Whan þou hast told al þy greuaunce, *that has grieved [your soul]*
 186 Pan do as þe prest þe tau3te;
 Holde wel þy penaunce;
 Repentaunce, for3ete þat nou3t.
 189 Whan 3e wiþ loue God han lau3t, *caught hold of*
 Neuere fro 3ow hym 3e lete. *let go*
 God brynge 3ow to his angels sau3t, *reconciled/at peace*
 192 Þere neuere nys nede o pes to trette. *Where there is never the need*

NOTES

title Robbins (1975, p. 1420) has 'Evils in the state'.

1 'From the exhortation to do penance (l. 9) it follows that the holy time mentioned in the first line is Easter, the time of shrift and penance' (Kail, p. xv). The reference must be to l. 4, rather than l. 9.

4 I.e. during the forty-day period before Easter (Lent), especially in the last week (Holy Week).

13 Cf. VII.98, *Pou wynnest not Goddis mercy wiþ fi3t.*

14 *OED* s.v. *beat* v.(1) sub 10.a signals the meaning 'to overcome' from early 17th c., with transitory meanings from late 15th c. onwards, but l. 14 demonstrates that *beten* was understood as 'overcome, get the better of' as early as the first quarter of the 15th c., as recognized by *MED* s.v. *beten* v.(1) sub 3.

16 *pes*] Inserted, following Kail.

17 In the *MED* citation s.v. *o* (*prep.*(2)) sub 5.b(a), for *treated* read *treted*.

26 The syntax is difficult. I have assumed that (contracted) *math* is missing before *stomblen*.

29 See Ps.103:15–16, 'As for man, his days are as grass ... For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone' for a comparable meaning, but with 'grass' as the symbol of transitoriness rather than the wind.

31 Kail glosses 'kind' for *kynde*. I have adopted 'obedient' as in *MED* s.v. *kind(e)* (*adj.*) sub 4.(a), as

¹⁴ I.e. By Christ's redeeming death

consequent upon the *couenaunt to God*.

33 *herte*] = *sg. gen.*: ‘of the heart’.

38 *derne*] Kail glosses ‘sad’, which is not given in *MED*. The straightforward meaning in this context, as an adverb to *counterfete*, is ‘deceptively’.

39 For the *wittes fyve* as one of the topics of popular religious instruction, see Bremmer (1987, pp. xxii, xxiii). For other such topics see also the reference to the Seven Deadly Sins (l. 86), the Creed (l. 116), and the Seven Works of Bodily Mercy in St. (16).

49–50 *the curs*] ‘The formula read in churches four times a year, setting forth the various offenses which entailed automatic excommunication of the offender,’ *MED* s.v. *curs* (*n.*) sub 2.(a).

65,67 Moderation and fairness in the administration of justice is expressed in similar terms in I.164, *Do bothe parties euene assise*) and in III.12–13, *Do euene lawe to foolle and wyse, / Set mesure in euene assise*. The – satirical – opposite sentiment is found in VI.29, *3eve no doom in ri3t assyse*.

83–84 Confession, to be valid, has to be complete.

89 Refers to Luke 17:4, ‘And if he (i.e. thy brother) trespass against thee seven times a day etc.’.

93 *But*] *Bot* in the *MED* quotation of this line s.v. *gret* (*adj.*, *adv.* and *n.*) sub 5.(b). A misprint.

97–100 See Matt. 5:8, ‘Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect’; and 2 Tim. 3:17, ‘That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished until all good works’; see also Matt. 19:21.

97 *Foure acountes*] Only three are actually listed: *how pou it wan ... helde ... spendid* (ll. 99–100), cf. VII.84.

98 See Gen. 1:26, ‘And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness’.

103 Cf. VIII.100 and the relevant textual note.

105–106 See Ps. 149:6–7, ‘Let ... a two-edged sword [be] in their hand (i.e. of the saints); To execute vengeance upon the heathen and punishment upon the people’. See also Jer. 45–51, about the prophecies regarding the devastation of the heathen peoples.

115 Cf. V.22, *Pat nyl not mende, but ay don ylle*.

117 The same sentiment is expressed in ll. 21–22.

123–28 The Seven Works of Bodily Mercy. See also the note to l. 39 above.

143 Cf. III.111, *Whoso fi3teþ, God doþ þe dede*, and XIII.111, *God doþ batayle, and not 3e*.

155 *by shap*] Carries the double meaning ‘near-in-shape’ (referring to l. 156) and ‘with-the-sheep’ (referring to ll. 157–58).

165 See Luke 10:7, ‘The labourer is worthy of his hire’. See also VIII.29, *Pat doþ þe dede is worþy mede*.

169 *þey*] i.e. the *prestis* of l. 162.

172 See Rev. 7:14, ‘These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb’.

175 See Rev. 13:16, ‘And he [i.e. the Beast] causeth all ... to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads’.

178 Proverbial. See Whiting, S 43, ‘Lay salve to your own sore’. *sore*] MS *store*.

182 *forme*] For a discussion of the Wycliffite controversy around the ‘accident’ (the outer appearance) and the ‘substance’ (the essential nature) of bread and wine in the Eucharist, see Hudson (1988, pp. 281–90).

185 Kail glosses ‘grievance’ for *greuauunce*, but the need of penance (l. 187) points at sins that have ‘grieved’ the soul.

191 *sau3t*] ‘longed for’ is also possible (see *MED* s.v. *sechen*, sub 6.(e)), but less likely.

X

A GOOD STERYNG TO HEUENWARDE

guide/guidance

SUMMARY

The opening lines are a stinging condemnation of those who behave as masters instead of stewards of God's creation, collecting advance payment by accumulating wealth in this world, while losing their souls in the process.

What follows is in the poetic tradition of the 'complaint of God to man': Man, I created you perfect, but twice you forfeited everlasting life and bliss, first by trespassing against my commandment in paradise, and again by nailing me on the cross. I suffered the pain you deserve for your sins. You hoard the wealth of the world that is really mine, and do nothing to relieve the poor. You steal, commit adultery, desecrate my church, take my name in vain and neglect your divinely ordained duty to care for the souls. But for my lasting love for you, I all but destroyed mankind and his world in the great flood. Yet you thoughtlessly fell back into sin again. You turn to me only when you are in trouble. You are full of pious, but empty words, making a mockery of my law. I am a merciful God, who does not repay your rejection of me. But if you persist in your evil ways, my wrath will find you. I can annihilate everything and everybody on earth. It is all mine, and I can do with it as I please. It is your deeds that will speak for you, king or beggar, at the last judgement. Again: be faithful stewards of my world and of the poor on it. Do not leave any of the gifts I gave you unused, at your peril.

TEXT

(1)

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Many man is loþ to here | |
| Repref of vices and werkis ylle; | <i>Reproof</i> |
| 3 For pride hem þenkeþ hem Goddis pere, | <i>equal</i> |
| Pat welde þis worldis wele at wylle; | <i>control; wealth</i> |
| At a sarmon wil bid a frere: | <i>sermon; [they] will; friar</i> |
| 6 Make it short, or ellys be styлле. | <i>else</i> |
| Hym þat is loþ good to lere, | <i>unwilling</i> |
| He shal, wheþer he wole or nylle. | <i>wants to or not</i> |
| 9 We fareþ as knaue þat takeþ his hyre byfore, | <i>behave; servant; in advance</i> |
| Serue his mayster wel þe worse þefore. | <i>for it</i> |

Richesse and hele makeþ men vnkynde,
 12 Þat Goddis seruyce is out of mynde;
 For graceles and gostly blynde
 Þe flesch distroyeþ soules store.

*wealth; indifferent [to God]
 So that; to God; forgotten
 who lack [God's] grace; spiritually
 treasure*

(2)

15 God seiþ: man, y made þe of nou3t,
 And put the into paradys,
 Of erþely þynges þat y wrou3t
 18 To neme þat neded to þyn eys.
 I lent þe fre wil and þou3t,
 Warnyng of foly, to be wys;
 21 At þe tre of wysdom foly þou sou3t,
 And 3af for an appyl þe most of prys.
 Þe same mouþ þat þe appyl gnewe,
 24 In þat mouþ þe holy croys grewe,
 Wheron y dyed for 3oure gylt.
 Purgh þe herte and þurgh þe mylt
 27 I hadde þe poynt, and 3e þe hylt;
 3oure heritage y bou3t 3ow newe.

*nothing
 created
 what you need; eyes (i.e. judgement)
 tree
 highest; price/prize
 ate from
 grew
 spleen*

(3)

3e þou3te 3e had not ynow:
 30 Euere lastyng lyf and euere more rest;
 3e braken my byddyng, 3e benden a bow,
 3e boten an appyl þat þirled my brest.¹
 33 Wiþ water, for synne, þe world y slow,
 Saue seuene, and Noe þat was my gest.
 My loue to man it was so tow,
 36 Hit lasted forþ and nolde not brest.
 For mannys loue I come fro blisse to pyne.
 Man was so pore, he had not to fyne.
 39 3oure gyltes greued God so sare,
 3oure gyltes on my bak y bare,
 Þat God my fader nolde me not spare
 42 Tyl he had 3euen my lyf for þyne.

*enough
 eternal; life; peace
 commandments
 ate of; pierced
 destroyed
 Except
 strong
 break
 love for mankind
 to pay the fine [for his trespasses]
 pained; grievously
 bore/endured*

(4)

My puple, where greued y 3ow or pyne.
 But ladde 3ow þurgh þe see so rede,
 45 With Aaron and Moyses, myn owen hyne,
 And alle 3oure enemys y drowned to dede.

*grieved; pained
 Didn't I; red
 servants*

¹ I.e. You wounded me by forfeiting paradise, you wounded me again on the cross

- For 3e shuld kepe lawe myne,
 48 In wildernes y made 3oure stede,
 To 3ow y planted myn owen vyne,
 And fourty 3eer fed 3ow wiþ angels brede.
 51 Wiþ loue I dede, 3ow my lawe to teche,
 Bycom a man, to be 3oure soule leche. *incarnated; healer*
 Wiþ a spere 3e shed myn herte blod;
 54 Þe pore 3e harme, and do no good;
 3eue I chastyse, 3e calle me wood. *If; mad*
 And but 3e mende, y wol take wreche. *Unless; mend [your ways]; vengeance*

(5)

- 57 Man, hast þou ou3t in mynde *ever think of*
 Þe pyne y suffred wiþ þe Iewes felle. *cruel*
 3oure soules of derkenes to vnbynde *free from*
 60 I suffred deþ and heryed helle. *harrowed hell*
 Answer me: man, was y kynde. *was[n't] I obedient*
 Mi3t y do more, canst þou me telle.
 63 A beter frend and þou can fynde, *if*
 Leue me, and go wiþ hym dwelle.
 I do þe wele, why dost me woo.
 66 I am þy frend, þou art my foo. *Where; quarrel (v.)*
 Þere y 3eue pes, þou makest debate;
 Þere y loue, þou dost hate,
 69 And stekest me wiþ oute þe 3ate. *put; outside*
 My worldys goodis þou holdest me fro. *took away from me*

(6)

- Man, þou dost as a thef
 72 Þat hat holycherche gre; *enjoys the favour of*
 Whan men wold take hem wiþ repref, *disgrace*
 Þat to chirche he wole fle.
 75 So doþ man þat is in gref *trouble*
 Or in syknes: þan calleþ he me.
 And 3ut, man, þou art me so lef, *yet; dear to me*
 78 Wiþ mercy and ruþe y bowe to þe. *compassion; pity*
 3if y byd þe my lawe to fulfille,
 Þou hauntest þy synne, and wonest þeryn stille. *frequent (v.); live; up to this time*
 81 Þou hatest alle þat loue my name.
 Þou wost þou seruest so gret blame;
 How darst þou byd me, for shame,
 84 To bowe to þe or worche þy wille. *know; deserve*
ask; how shameful!
do your bidding

(7)

Man, þou to my lawe art knyht;	<i>bound</i>
Why ho[l]dest þou werre agaynes me,	<i>wage war</i>
87 My worldis goodis in hord to pyt	<i>store up</i>
Fro pore þat þy breþeren be.	<i>[Away] from</i>
Art þou not warned by holy writ.	
90 I made and bou3te hem as dere as þe.	<i>them (i.e. the poor)</i>
Hit is wanhope goþ byfore 3oure wit. ²	<i>vain hope; understanding</i>
Þat 3e hyde, ful bry3t y se.	<i>What; see</i>
93 For þe pyne y dede for 3ow dry3e,	<i>suffered</i>
3eue þyn herte, wiþ teres of þyn ey3e.	<i>tears</i>
Repente sore for þy trespas.	
96 So ly3tly my3t þou come to gras,	<i>easily; grace</i>
To heuene, to þat worþy plas,	<i>magnificent; place</i>
To by3e to þe on rode gan dy3e.	<i>redeem you; cross; [I] died</i>

(8)

99 Man, how darst þou my lawe preche,	
And telle þe articles of þe fay.	<i>faith (i.e. the Creed)</i>
My wit word wiþ þy mouþ teche,	<i>covenant [with you]</i>
102 And in þy werkis þou seyst hit nay.	<i>deny it</i>
Wiþ theues and wiþ spouse-breche	<i>adulterers</i>
Pou delest and rennest ny3t and day.	<i>have dealings and carryings-on</i>
105 In pyne þou sechest þyn owen wreche,	<i>suffering; seek; destruction</i>
Thow temptest me to be wrappeful ay.	<i>provoke; angry; forever/eternally</i>
I mad þe wys and fayre, angels pere,	<i>pure; of an angel; equal (n.)</i>
108 Pou makest þe fool, and foul fendis fere. ³	
Þy ly3tnes þou spendest in harlotrye,	<i>beauty; waste (v.)</i>
Þy strengþe in wrappþe and tyrauntrye,	<i>anger; oppression</i>
111 Þy fayrenesse in pryde and lecherye.	
Pou settest at nou3t y bou3t so dere.	<i>do not care at all</i>

(9)

To greue me, men þenke it game	<i>cause grief; amusing</i>
114 To breke þe lawe þat y þe bed,	
In despyt forswere name ⁴	<i>contempt; swear profanely</i>
By woundis y had in handis and hed.	
117 I do þe worschipe, þou dost me shame;	<i>hold in high esteem; disgrace (v.)</i>
I 3af þe lyf, þou 3af me ded,	<i>inflicted; death</i>
Mirre and galle to drynke wiþ game.	<i>Myrrh; sorrow</i>

² *Your ungrounded presumption of salvation takes precedence over your understanding/common sense*

³ *You make a fool of yourself, and consort with evil devils*

⁴ *To insult me by taking my name in vain*

- 120 I 3eue þe my body in fourme of bred.
 3e fare wiþ me as gest his yn doþ borwe,⁵ *lodging*
 Resceyue to day, and put me out to morwe.
- 123 Agayn to synne whan 3e go,
 Shamely 3e put me 3ow fro.
 And 3e desyre I be 3oure foo, *enemy*
- 126 3e gete but wreche and dowble sorwe. *bring; only; [my] vengeance [upon you]*
- (10)
- And 3e defoule my holy place, *And [further]; desecrate/profane*
 Ðat turneþ þe chirche out of his gyse: *disrupts; customary rites*
- 129 Holy chirche is spirytualle grace, *divine*
 Ðe duwe dette: deuyne seruyse. *obligation duly to be fulfilled*
 Pey calle me as he þat no God was.
- 132 Ðat cure of soules don despise,
 Fro hem y wole turne my face,
 And calle hem as fooles out casten fro wyse. *expelled; the wise*
- 135 Ðat sellen soules for temperal getyng,
 Pey maken skourges to here owe betyng;⁶ *worldly; gain*
 Here good dayes ben wastyng, *In this life; coming to an end*
- 138 And þey, to helle hastyng
 To be wiþ fendis chastyng, *punishment*
 Fulfille on hem my thretyng. *themselves; threats*
- (11)
- 141 My swerde is fyre þat brynnep bry3t,
 Shal shede þe ri3t fro þe wrong. *separate*
 I brenne sheldis and swerdis in fy3t,
- 144 As whirlewynd y skatre þe fals þrong. *scatter; wicked*
 No kyng shal be saued by his my3t, *power*
 Ne þe geaunt, be he neuere so strong. *giant*
- 147 Ðat y am God 3e shal knowe ry3t;
 Nes non bot I, endeles long. *full well*
 3e may not serue two lordis to plese, *for all eternity*
- 150 Fede fatte shep in greceles lese. *grassless; pasture*
 Ðat plesen me, 3e holde hem nys; *Who; foolish*
 Ðat gyleþ þe world, 3e holde hem wys. *deceive*
- 153 3e may not wynne wiþ 3oure delys,⁷ *achieve; self-indulgence*
 Here and in heuene boþe, 3oure ese. *peace of mind*

⁵ *You treat me as a guest who may use his room just for a time*

⁶ *They make whips with which they will themselves be beaten*

⁷ Ll. 153–54: *Your pleasure-seeking [way of life] will not gain you / Peace of mind, either in this life or in heaven*

(12)

In this world, to folk ful fele	<i>people; many</i>
156 Goddis wordis þis myȝt be: ⁸	
Man, þou serued me not in þi wele,	
Why shulde y knowe þi pouerte.	<i>have regard for</i>
159 Pou loued me not in þi hele,	<i>when in good health</i>
In syknes why shulde y rewe þe.	<i>take pity on you</i>
Fro my comaundement, þou dede stele	<i>Against</i>
162 Of hem þou serued, fong þy fee.	<i>receive; payment</i>
Ȝet o God, þe fader of blysse,	<i>one</i>
Þe Holy Gost salueþ soule syknesse.	<i>heals</i>
165 Pouȝ we agylte þe godhed,	<i>sin against</i>
Mercy moueþ þe manhed,	<i>[God's] forgiveness; changes; mankind</i>
For loue of his breþered,	<i>brotherhood</i>
168 Ȝeue mercy to mekenesse.	<i>[those who live in] affliction/wretchedness</i>

(13)

Ȝif man ligge long in synne,	
And wilfully fleep fro grace,	<i>obstinately/deliberately</i>
171 To sharpe my wreche y wole bygynne,	<i>sharpen/increase; retribution</i>
Take vengeaunce for his trespas:	
His enemys I wole leten hem ynne,	
174 As bestes in forestes ȝow to chas,	
For drede ȝe shal nowhere wynne,	
But fynde my wrappþe byfore here face.	<i>precedes them (i.e. the enemies)</i>
177 I saued Moyses in þe rede see,	
Ionas in whales wombe dayes þre;	
Þre children in þe fyre so rede.	<i>red</i>
180 Dauyd slow Golyas to dede.	
Do ȝe þe lawe þat y hem bede,	
And ȝe shal haue þe same degre.	<i>[high] rank/position</i>

(14)

183 Man, I can do þe erþe to shake,	<i>make</i>
Wip flood and drowtes distroye ȝoure wele.	
I chastise erþe, ȝe sample take;	<i>[as a] warning</i>
186 I may sle, ȝeue lyf and hele,	
Fyre and thonder fro heuene make;	
Nes non fro my strokes may stele.	<i>Nobody; blows; can; escape</i>
189 At domesday do ȝow alle quake,	<i>tremble [with fear]</i>
Whan ȝoure owen werkis wole ȝow apele;	<i>accuse</i>
Þanne knaue, beggere, pore broþelyng,	<i>good-for-nothing; [any] worthless person</i>

⁸ *May well hold this for God's word*

- 192 May apere wiþ pape and wiþ kyng; *appear [before me]; pope*
 Pere shal non reuerence haue, *nobody; enjoy respect*
 Ne mercy, þou3 þey wolde craue; *beg for it*
- 195 Here dedis shal hem deme or saue;
 Pan alle to me shal 3elde rekenyng. *account [for their deeds]*

(15)

- Man, þe worldis good is myn;
 198 How þou it spende tak good hede.
 Hit is myn, and not þyn,
 No more þan þou hast of nede; *need (v.)*
- 201 Not to fostre þe as a swyn,
 Py foule flesche in fylþe to fede, *stuff yourself*
 And leue þe pore in hunger and pyn, *sinful*
 204 And fynde hem noþer foode ne wede. *wretched circumstances*
 And pore folk on þy defaute dy3e, *clothing*
 Wiþ diues in pyne þou shalt ly3e. *If; fault*
 207 For þou shuld 3eue God dede þe sende; *the rich man; torments (i.e. of hell)*
 Tak kep how þou it spende, *[of what] God provided*
 For þat leueþ þe byhende *Take care*
 210 Þow mon rekene or þe aby3e. *what you leave behind*
consider/assess; before; paying [the penalty] for it

NOTES

3 *hem*] between *þenkeþ* and *Goddis* omitted by Kail.

14 Cf. IX.181 where the ‘soules store’ is said to be embodied in God. See also Matt. 6:20–21, ‘But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven ... For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also’. Similarly Luke 12:33–34.

22 *MED* s.v. *yeven* (*v.*) sub 2a.(c) interprets *3ef... þe most of prys* as ‘gave up the highest prize’, but ‘paid the highest price’ is equally possible. Implied in both interpretations is that man, by eating of the forbidden fruit, forfeited eternal life.

24 According to legend, the wood of the holy cross originated from the tree of life in paradise, a seed of which was placed in Adam’s mouth upon his death by his son Seth. The legend was recorded in 1260 by Jacopo de Voragine, bishop of Genoa, in the *Golden Legend*, a popular collection of the legendary lives of saints.

27 I.e. I, Christ, bought [through my redeeming death on the cross] your heritage [of the kingdom of heaven] in a new covenant [with God, which replaces the Old Testament covenant between God and man that held out the *promise* of the kingdom of heaven].

31 *3e benden a bow*] Punning on ‘you bent a branch’ (to grasp the apple), and ‘you sought a new experience’ (the current meaning). The expression derives from Ps. 11:2, ‘the wicked bend their bow’.

40 See Ps. 35:22, ‘Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee’, and Isa. 53:4, ‘Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows’. The reference is also to Christ carrying the cross (of our

guilt) on his back on the way to Golgotha.

43 St. (4) echoes some of the lamentations in the *Improperia* or the Reproaches of the Passion, sung during the Catholic liturgy of the Veneration of the Cross on Good Friday. It laments Israel's ingratitude for being led from their captivity in Egypt as a prefigure of man's ingratitude for being freed from eternal damnation through Christ's redeeming death.

49 See Ps. 80:8, 'Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it'.

50 *angels brede*] The 'manna' of Ex. 16, with which God fed the Israelites in the desert. Dubbed 'angels' food' or 'angels' bread' in 2 Esd. 1:19 and in Wisd. of Sol.16:20. The *panis angelicus* of the Roman Catholic liturgy.

53 *blod*] Kail *blood*.

60 *heryed helle*] The 'harrowing of hell' refers to Christ's descent into hell, between the time of his crucifixion and his resurrection, as also formulated in the Apostles' Creed: 'He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again'. In hell Christ saved the souls of the righteous dead who had been waiting there since the beginning of the world. See also XI.19, *Pe soules he loued he fet fro helle*, and *heryed helle* in XXII.52.

69 Carries the double meaning of 'shut me out from your heart' and 'put me [on the cross] outside the gate (i.e. on Golgotha)'. The latter meaning finds expression in Hebr. 13:12, 'Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate'.

86 *holdest*] MS *hoddest*; Kail emends *holddest*, as also *MED* s.v. *putten* (*v.*) sub 8b.(a), but a scribal error of *d* for *l* is the more straightforward possibility.

89 The Bible indeed abounds with warnings against the rich who oppress the poor. The Old Testament in particular in numerous places threatens dire punishment. For instance Ezek. 22:29, 31, 'The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy: yes, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully Therefore have I poured out my indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord God'.

98 The keystone of the Christian faith. Christ's redeeming death is referred to in many places in the New Testament, especially in Paul's epistles. See for instance Eph. 1:7, 'In whom (i.e. Jesus Christ) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace'.

149 See Matt. 6:24, 'No man can serve two masters'. Cf. VIII.30.

190 *apele*] A technical legal term, listed by Alford (1988, p. 7), who quotes this line.

197–200 Good stewardship is one of the poet's preoccupations. Cf. I.37–38, VII (11), XIV.74 and XVII.54.

206 Refers to the fate of the rich man in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19–25), also known as 'Dives and Pauper'. Mentioned again in XXIV.382.

209 *MED* quotes this line s.v. *byhende* sub 4.b with the general meaning 'for that leaves you at a disadvantage', an illogical inference in the context of the last four lines of the poem, which warn the rich man to keep account of what he has still not shared with the poor of everything God granted him.

XI

GOD AND MAN BEN MADE ATTE ON

SUMMARY

An Easter eulogy on the reunion of God with man through Christ's redeeming death and resurrection, which set man free from Adam's original sin. Freedom was also achieved for the souls of the righteous dead in hell by Christ's 'harrowing of hell', uniting them with the angels in heaven. Thirdly, unity between man and man can be achieved by man himself, if sought in mutual love, humility and peace. A fourth source of unity with God lies within the heart of man, if only he will open his heart to God's permanent offer of reconciliation. And, finally, oneness of God with man becomes possible if and when tearful repentance meets with God's mercy.

God, the all-powerful creator, gave man stewardship of the world, promising heaven for good governance, but hell after misrule. Man has a free will, so the choice is his. He all too soon tired of Christ's love, allowing him too short a time on earth. But the joy of Easter has come, and God and man are once more united. Love me and obey my laws, God says, and you will prosper and have nothing to fear from your enemies. I do this just for my love of you, asking nothing in return.

TEXT

(1)

Glade in God, þis solempne fest	<i>holy feast (i.e. Easter)</i>
Now, Alleluya, is vnloken.	<i>has arrived</i>
3 Þenkeþ how God, lest and mest,	<i>humblest; greatest</i>
On oure enemys hap vs wroken,	
Ðat hadde vs in cheynes stoken,	<i>put</i>
6 Wrappid in synnes many on.	<i>a one</i>
Þe fendis are flowen, þe cheynes are broken,	<i>have fled</i>
And God and man are wel at on.	

(2)

9 First whan God wiþ man was wroþ,	<i>angry</i>
Ðat Adam forfeþed for his vvs,	<i>Whom</i>
Man to angels was so loþ,	<i>hateful</i>
12 Þey dreuen hym out of paradys.	

To amende here foly, God so wys,
Wip fals Iewes let hym slon.

atone for
By; allowed himself

- 15 Here raunsom was his blod o prys;¹
So was God and man at on.

(3)

And 3it a ferly more byfelle,

marvel

- 18 Pat God dede þurgh his grete my3t:
Ðe soules he loued he fet fro helle
To paradys, among his angels bry3t.

came and took

- 21 Hem þou3te þat was a wonder sy3t,
Among here frendes brynge here foon.
Al on wrong God made ri3t;

They; splendid
their; enemies
Everything

- 24 So made God angels and man at on.

(4)

Ðe þridde saw3tenyng mowe 3e proue:²
When posteles stryuen for hi3e degre,

reconciliation; prove [in practice]
Quarrelled/argued about; position

- 27 God spak to hem a word of loue,
And seyde: pes wip 3ow be,
Elles 3e may not folwe me,

Otherwise

- 30 But 3e wille in my gates gon.
So God bond man in charite,
Byddis man and man be wel at on.

Unless; enter into
Thus; imposed an obligation
[He] urges

(5)

- 33 The ferþe saw3tenyng God vs tau3te,
Ðat best may kepe eche in state:
Let body and soule to gydre be sau3te,
36 Kepe God wipyn 3oure ynnere 3ate.
For who so loueþ þere God doþ hate,
Is berselle to his owen flon.

[good] spiritual condition
reconciled

(i.e. the gate of your soul)

what

- 39 We ben vnkynde wip God debate,
Foreuere he profreþ to ben at on.

target; arrows
rebellious; oppose
offers

(6)

The fyfte saw3tnyng: synne refuse,

- 42 Let eche man haue þat shulde ben his.
On mannys syde repentaunce doþ rise,
And on Goddis syde mercy is;

arises/comes about

¹ I.e. With his precious blood he paid the price for their deliverance [from their state of sin]

² *Thirdly, there is a harmony you can bring about yourself*

45 Pay trefeþ of pynes and of blis.³ *are about*
 Repentaunce makeþ wepyng mon. *causes tearful lament*
 When repentaunce and mercy kys,
 48 Pan is God and man at on.

(7)

Thow made not þy self; God dede þe make,
 Put soule of resoun in flesche so fre. *rational soul*
 51 God can leue, God can take *grant; take away*
 Richesse, strengþ, fayrnesse and hele.
 He is victorye in batayles fele, *many*
 54 Can sle soule, blod and bon.
 Nes non fro his strokes may stele. *Nobody; avoid*
 Glade in God, 3e ben at on.

(8)

57 God 3af erþe to mankynde,
 And heuene to hem þat wole be wys, *wise in spirit*
 Þat holden his lawe, haue hym in mynde,
 60 And helle to hem þat wole be nys. *sinful*
 In oure fre wille þe choys it lys
 Heuene or helle to haue, that on. *one of the two*
 63 In heuene and 3e wole haue delys, *if; enjoy bliss*
 Let body and soule be wel at on.

(9)

God may say, fern3ere folk were fayn *last year (i.e. only a short while ago); glad*
 66 To resceyue me ymydde here brest; *(i.e. into their souls)*
 On morwe þey put me out a3ayn; *[But] (i.e. soon after)*
 In my palays þey made þe fendis nest. *(i.e. the church); devil's lair*
 69 To lityl whyle y was here gest. *All too short a time*
 My loue y loste, y make my mon. *beloved (n); grieve/weep*
 Let God now lengere wiþ 3ow rest, *stay*
 72 Now God and man is wel at on.

(10)

Folk þat were fendis fere, *consorted with [the] devil[s]*
 Sulpid in synne derk as ny3t, *Were defiled*
 75 Now are þey fayre angels pere, *equals*
 As shynyng sune in Goddis sy3t.
 3e haue resceyued 3oure God of my3t, *admitted [to your soul]*

³ [God and man] came to terms, with repentant anguish [on the part of man] and [merciful] bliss [on the part of God]

78 Ayþer in oþer 3oure wille is on.⁴ *Mutually; as one/alike*
 3oure hertys were heuy, þey may be li3t;
 Glade in God, 3e ben at on.

(11)

81 Man, and 3e holde my lawe, *if*
 All þyn enemys shal þe drede;
 And þou stonde of me non awe, *[But] if; in awe*
 84 Þyn enemys outeray þe in dede. *overcome; battle*
 For þere as I my frendis lede, *whither*
 Þey shul not sporne at stok ne ston.⁵ *stumble; tree trunk; rock*
 87 In alle here werkis þey shal wel spede, *prosper*
 3if God and man be wel at on.

(12)

Myn enemys y shal reue here sy3t, *deprive of*
 90 3eue syknes and drede, pouert and wo;
 My frendis y 3eue sy3t and my3t,
 Richesse, strengþe ouer here foo.
 93 Hem thar not drede where þey go, *They need not*
 Here wele and worschip, in euery won. *[I give them]; place*
 Siþ 3e be syker, kepe 3ow so. *Now that*
 96 Now God and 3e are wel at on.

(13)

Man, y aske noþyng of þyn. *I (i.e. Christ)*
 For loue, my loued in helle y sou3t. *beloved*
 99 3eue me þy loue, þy soule is myn;
 Or 3eue it hym þat [it] derrere bou3t. *more dearly*
 Suffre[d] pyne for þe; me nedid nou3t *nothing [to relieve my pain]*
 102 In hed, in hand, in foot ne ton. *toes*
 3oure gyltis y bare in herte and þou3t, *endured*
 I made my fadir and 3ow at on.

(14)

105 Sum of my kyndenes 3e my3te me quyte, *beneficence; repay*
 Do þre wordis of my comandement:
 My name, my pyle take not in despite, *castle (i.e. the church); disdain/disparage*
 108 Rule wel þy selue in good atent. *with the proper frame of mind*
 Thow nost how sone be after sent, *do not know; sent for*
 To 3elde rekenyng of Goddis lon. *loan*

⁴ I.e. God and man are both filled with the same spirit

⁵ *They will stumble over nothing* (i.e. their path will be made smooth)

- 111 The rolles of rerage þe fendis han brent, *records of indebtedness; burnt*
 For god and man is wel at on.
- (15)
- And þou me loued, þou wolde me leue, *if; have faith in/believe*
- 114 And do my lawe, and holde it trewe. *renounce*
 How my3test þou me more repreue *reject/relinquish*
 Pan leue my lawe, and tak[e] newe.
- 117 Py vyces wole make þy soule to rewe: *wickedness; cause; regret [them]*
 In derkenes neuere sonne shon;
 Vertues shyne bry3t of hewe. *in bright colours*
- 120 Holde Goddis lawe, 3e ben at on.

NOTES

- 3 *lest and mest*] See Phil. 2:8–11, ‘He (i.e. Jesus) humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death on the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name That every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord’. Also Mark 12:10, ‘The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner’.
- 19–20 For the ‘harrowing of hell’, see X.60. Also mentioned in XXII.52.
- 26 See Mark 9:34, ‘By the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest’. Also Luke 9:46.
- 30 See Ps. 100:4, ‘Enter into his gates with thanksgiving’.
- 47 A distant echo of Ps. 85:10, ‘Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other’.
- 65 *fern3ere*] Kail *fern 3ere*, but there is no good reason to deviate from the manuscript.
- 86 See Prov. 3:23, ‘Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble’, and Jer. 31:9, ‘I will cause them to walk by the rivers of water in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble’.
- 97 Stanzaic pilcrow missing in MS.
- 100 *it*] Rhythmical emendation of MS *hap it*.
- 101 *suffre[d]*] MS *suffre*.
- 107 *pyle*] litt. ‘pillar/castle’; here, *pyle* refers back to *palays* in l. 68.
- 110 *lon*] *MED* glosses ‘spiritual gift of God’ s.v. *lon(e n.*(1) sub 2., quoting this line. Straightforward ‘loan’ is more probable, as something ‘to 3elde rekenyng of’.
- 116 *take*] MS *tak*.

XII

GOD KEPE OURE KYNG AND SAUE THE CROUNE

SUMMARY

Three major themes alternate throughout this piece: to avoid internal disorders within the realm, to support the king, and to defend the nation against its enemies.

The opening lines are a brief burst of Easter joy, immediately followed by an appeal to the nation to stop dissidents and rally around the king. The keynote is unity, symbolised by the royal crown. Nobility, clergy and commons, town and countryside, they must all stick together in peaceful unity, to the envy of our enemies, who are pressing us by force to surrender our possessions abroad. Weakness merely attracts more enemies. What weakens us, to the point of breaking the circle of our unity, are internal quarrels and seditious rumours, let alone open rebellion. Rebellion must be met not with leniency, but with the vengeful hand of the law, to be administered by the king as God's deputy on earth. The ill-considered rebellion of 'Flaunders' (the assassination of a royal prince of France by the Duke of Burgundy) should be a lesson to us.

As God's deputy, the king must do God's bidding, and wield his power to the good, especially of the poor. Abroad, England on several occasions acted as God's scourge wielded against other nations. Internal conflict must not weaken that position of strength. So let reason prevail. The people need a ruler, but at the same time they are the backbone of society.

The poem finally, and once again, makes an urgent plea never to allow the kingdom to go down in internal quarrel and strife, as the laughing-stock of other nations. May God give our people time to repent and revert to a God-fearing life.

TEXT

(1)

Glade in God, calle hom 3oure herte,¹
In ioye and blisse 3oure merþe encres,
3 And kepe Goddis lawe in querte;
Pes holy tyme, lete sorwe ases.
Among oure self God sende vs pes.

*summon back
happiness
free from harm
cease*

¹ *Rejoice in God, renew your loyalty* (i.e. to the king)/*faith* (i.e. in God)

6 Perto eche man be boun: *prepared/ready*
 To letten fooles of here res, *stop (v.); actions*
 Stonde wiþ þe kyng, mayntene þe crowne. *to support*

(2)

9 What doþ a kynges crowne signifye,
 Whan stones and floures on sercle is bent? *[precious] stones; in a circle (i.e. band)*
 Lordis, comons and clergie
 12 To ben alle at on assent. *of one mind*
 To kepe þat crowne take good tent, *take good heed*
 In wode, in feld, in dale and downe.
 15 Þe leste lyge man, wiþ body and rent, *lowest; vassal; possessions*
 He is a parcel of þe crowne. *[integral] part*

(3)

What signifyeþ þe stones aboute? *around [the crown]*
 18 Richesse, strengþe, and gret bounte, *excellence*
 Oure townes and castels, þe reme wiþ oute, *realm; around [them]*
 Þey are oure stones of gret pouste. *power*
 21 In pes þey kepe alle þis contre, *preserve*
 Holynes, contemplacioun. *[In] purity/virtue; [and with] consideration*
 God, let hem neuer skaterid be, *them (i.e. þe stones); dispersed*
 24 And saue þe kyng, and kepe þe crowne.

(4)

By 3onde þe see and we had nou3t, *Beyond; if; nothing*
 But alle oure enemys so ney3e vs were, *nearby*
 27 Þou3 alle here gold were hider brou3t, *to this place*
 I wolde set hit at lytyl store. *of little value*
 Oure enemys wolde coke þerfore *go at war over it*
 30 Wiþ ordynaunce and habergeoun, *ordnance; armour*
 Wynne þat, and wel more:
 Oure landes, oure lyues, þe reme, þe crowne.

(5)

33 3if we among oure self debate, *quarrel*
 Ðan endeþ floure of chyualrie. *flower; knighthood*
 Alle oþere londis þat doþ vs hate,
 36 Oure feblenes wole aspye. *notice*
 On euery syde þey wole in hye, *hurry in*
 Þe stalworþe cast þe feble adoun. *overpowers*
 39 3if þey wiþ my3t haue maystrye, *carry the victory*
 Fro þe ri3t heire wolde take þe crowne. *rightful*

(6)

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| 3if sercle, and floures, and riche stones | <i>If [from]</i> |
| 42 Were eche a pece fro oþer flet, | <i>segment/part; be separated</i> |
| Were þe crowne broken ones, | <i>once</i> |
| Hit were ful hard a3en to knet. | <i>mend</i> |
| 45 Auyse 3ow er 3e suffre þat fit; | <i>Bethink yourself; misfortune</i> |
| Amende, 3e þat mende mown. | <i>are able to</i> |
| 3e þat ben wysest, cast 3oure wyt; | <i>take thought</i> |
| 48 Stonde wiþ þe kyng to kepe þe crowne. | |

(7)

- | | |
|--|--|
| To kepe þe crowne God graunte 3ow grace, | <i>God's grace</i> |
| And let it neuere be to broken. | <i>broken to pieces</i> |
| 51 For word of wynd lityl trespase, ² | <i>violates the law</i> |
| Non harm nys don, þou3 word be spoken. | |
| Let wysdom be vnloken, | <i>set free</i> |
| 54 Apert and preuyly to rowne. | <i>Openly; privately; make deliberations</i> |
| For non euylle wille no man be wroken, | <i>is intended; avenged</i> |
| But stonde wiþ ri3t, mayntene þe crowne. | <i>sides with; just cause</i> |

(8)

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| 57 A man my3te be forborn | <i>removed</i> |
| Fer fro a kynges place, | |
| Wolde make a kyng to be forsworn | <i>cause; perjure himself</i> |
| 60 To lette þe lawe, it most not passe, | <i>violate; happen</i> |
| And make hym wene þat he grace, | <i>fancy; [enjoys] God's favour</i> |
| And holy in condicioun, | <i>disposition</i> |
| 63 And mayntene hym in his trespase, | <i>stiffen; criminal conduct</i> |
| While he pykeþ þe stones out of þe crowne. | |

(9)

- | | |
|--|--|
| A kyngdom must be gouerned by ri3t, | <i>justice</i> |
| 66 To chastyse false þat ar aspyed. | <i>punish; wrongdoings; discovered</i> |
| Falsed and troupe to gydre wole fi3t, | <i>against each other</i> |
| Til oon þat oþer haþ distroyd. | |
| 69 Til troupe be fro treson tryed | <i>separated</i> |
| Shal neuere be pes in regyone. | <i>realm</i> |
| In all kyngdomes þat man haþ gyed, | <i>governed</i> |
| 72 To þe place of vertues God geueþ þe crowne. | |

² I.e. Since empty talk is hardly a violation of the law

(10)

Thou ³ falsed troupe defame,	veritas	<i>discredits</i>
Troupe secheþ non hernes to shewe his speche;		<i>[obscure] corners; make known</i>
75 Troupe of his craft þenkeþ no shame; ³		
He is bold alle folk his craft to teche.		<i>dares; demonstrate</i>
And euere by troupe stondes wreche,		<i>always; supports/maintains; retribution</i>
78 For wreche is Goddis champioun.		
Or wreche smyte, God be leche,		<i>Before; strikes; physician</i>
And saue þe kyng, and kepe þe crowne.		

(11)

81 Loke of þyng þat 3e bygynne,		<i>Consider</i>
Caste before how it wole ende,		<i>Imagine</i>
Gostly, bodyly, what mowe 3e wynne.		<i>Spiritually</i>
84 Eche man destroy ^{3e} his best frend:		<i>Any; may kill</i>
So dede Flaundes; how dede it wende?		<i>come to pass</i>
Of noblay þey han lore þe sown.		<i>nobleness; lost; reputation</i>
87 Pray we God his bowe of wrappe vnbende,		<i>slacken</i>
And saue þe kyng, and kepe þe crowne.		

(12)

God 3eueþ his doom to alle kynges þat be;		<i>confers; [power of] judgement</i>
90 As a God, in erþe a kyng haþ my ^{3t} .		
Holy writ byd: blissed be he		<i>demands</i>
In alle tymes þat demep ry ^{3t} .		
93 Men do in derk, God seep in ly ^{3t} .		<i>act; darkness</i>
Synne, morþere, derne tresoun,		<i>murder, secret</i>
Not may be hyd fro Goddis sy ^{3t} ,		
96 To ry ^{3twys} Iuge God 3eueþ þe crowne.		

(13)

That lord loueþ lityl hym selue,		
þat 3eueþ his blisse for sorwe and woo.		
99 For þe loue of ten or twelue		
Make alle folk his foo,		
And lese þe loue of God also,		<i>loses</i>
102 For fawte of perfeccyone. ⁴		<i>want/lack</i>
Pou ³ he had no vauntage but of þo, ⁵	<i>If; benefit; except from them (i.e. the ten or twelue)</i>	
He my ^{3te} were a symple crowne.		

³ *Truth is not ashamed of his moral strength*

⁴ *Because of his moral shortcomings*

⁵ Ll. 103–104: *If he owed his success only to those [few], / His crown would be a modest one indeed*

(14)

- 105 Eche a kyng haþ Goddis power
 Of lyf and leme to saue and spille. *limb; destroy*
 He muste make God his partener, *co-ruler*
- 108 And do not his owen wille.
 For God resceyueþ eche pore mannys bille, *[formal] complaint*
 And of here playnt God hereþ þe sowne. *sound*
- 111 Sette þoure [domes] in euene skille,
 Counseile þe kyng to kepe þe crowne. *Form your [judgement] properly*
Counsel; preserve

(15)

- The fadir þe wanton child wole kenne, *teach*
- 114 Chastyse wiþ þerde, and bete hit sore. *rod; beat*
 So after, þe fadyr þe þerde wole brenne, *burn*
 When child is wys, and takeþ to lore. *study*
- 117 We han ben Goddis þerde þore,
 Chastysed kyngdom, castell and towne. *We (i.e. the English); once*
 Twyggis of oure þerde we haue forlore. *lost completely*
- 120 God saue þe kyng, and kepe þe crowne.

(16)

- Engliche men dede maystryþes make;
 Purþ all þe world here word it sprong. *won victories*
 Cristen and heþen þey mad to quake, *command; went forth*
 Tok and slown kynges strong. *Made prisoner; killed*
 God, let neuere werre be vs among,
- 126 To lese þat blo of gret renowne,
 Ne neuere oure riþt be turned to wrong. *ruin; reputation; power*
 God saue þe kyng, and kepe þe crowne. *Nor*

(17)

- 129 Among oure self 3if fiþt be raysed,
 Þan stroye we oure awen nest; *spoil*
 Þat haþ victor wole be euel payed, *victory; pay dearly*
- 132 So many good men ben lest. *lost*
 3it is beter bowe þan [brest]. *It*
 Eche man is bounden to resone;
- 135 3e þat ben wysest take þe best;
 Conseile þe kyng, mayntene þe crowne.

(18)

- A comons myȝt sone be shent⁶
 138 Wiþ outen kyng or gouernour. *lord*
 And a kyng wiþoute rent
 Myȝt liȝtly trussen his tresour.⁷
 141 For comons mayntene lordis honour, *exalted status*
 Holy chirche, and religyone; *the religious orders*
 For comouns is þe fayrest flour *flower*
 144 Ðat euere God sette on erþely crowne.

(19)

- God, lete þis kyngdom neuere be lorn
 Among oure self in no distance. *controversy*
 147 Oþer kyngdomes lauȝhe vs not to skorn, *[Let]; ridicule (v.)*
 And sey: for synne God send vengeance.
 God, ȝeue vs space of repe[n]tance, *time for*
 150 Good lyf, and deuocioun. *[A] virtuous way of life*
 And God, kepe in þy gouernance *guidance*
 Oure comely kyng, and saue þe crowne. *noble*

NOTES

title Kail: *God save the kyng, and kepe the crown*, probably on the analogy of the refrain. Robbins (1959, p. 45; 1975, p. 1420) has ‘God save King Henry V’.

6 The feudal arrangement of a vassal and his liege lord.

7 Here, as well as in l. 51, Kail (p. xvi) reads an allusion to a plot by former followers of the deposed Richard II, ‘spreading rumours that the deposed King Richard was still alive, and would come before long to drive away the usurper’. St. (13) is ‘most probably aimed at the Duke of Albany, who had harboured the individual bearing a resemblance to Richard II’ (p. xvii).

8 *þe]* Robbins (1959, p. 45) *þo*, but there is no good reason here to deviate from the manuscript reading.

10 *floures]* Possibly an allusion to the ‘flowers’ in the actual crown of Henry V, in fact of all Plantagenet kings, namely the French ‘fleurs-de-lys’, symbolic of the Plantagenets’ claim on the crown of France.

11 *comons]* Kail, Robbins (1959, p. 45) *comouns*, but there is no reason for an emendation of the MS reading.

12 *at]* Added in a different hand.

19 *þe]* Robbins (1959, p. 45) *þo*. The same remark applies as against l. 8.

25 I.e. in France.

28 *lytyl]* Kail, Robbins (1959, p. 46) *lytel*. But see again the remark against l. 8.

⁶ *The common people are soon brought to ruin*

⁷ *May easily see his fortune/wealth shrink*

- 45 *fit*] Kail glosses 'shock, blow'(?).
- 51 Quoted in *OED* s.v. *wind* *n.*(1) sub 15.(a). Cf. XIII.127.
- 57 According to Robbins (1959, p. 271), St. (8) seems to refer to Henry V's leniency to Oldcastle, the nobleman who chose the side of the Lollards.
- 72 *vertues*] Probably the four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude.
- 73 St. (10): cf. III (1).
- 81 *of*] Robbins (1959, p. 47) emends (?)*or* (= before).
- 81–82 Proverbial. See Whiting, E84, 'Look at the end'.
- 91–92 See Ps. 106:3, 'Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times'.
- 99 *For þe loue of ten or twelue*] The same phrase occurs in I.11.
- 109 *bille*] Kail glosses 'bill, account', but in the context (*playnt* [l. 110], *counseille* [l. 112]), *MED*'s rendering s.v. *bille* (*n.*) sub 3(a): 'a formal written petition', is more appropriate.
- 111 [*domes*] restores the metre. With the insertion the line is identical with XIII.71. Robbins inserts *assise*.
- 133 Proverbial. See Whiting, B.484, 'Better bow than break'. *brest*] MS *berst*
- 137 *comons*] Robbins (1959, p. 49) *comyns*.
- 147–48 Cf. XVI.63–64.
- 149 *repe[n]tance*] MS *repetance* (no nasal stroke above the second *e*, unless the scribe treated as such the backward slant of the downstroke of the *y* immediately above).

XIII
DEDE IS WORCHYNG¹

SUMMARY

Parliament is there to correct abuses in the realm, but quite often it is too lenient, which invites others who notice this to persist in their wrongdoings. Contrary to other countries, the English judicial system is corrupt, and unstable because of the frequent changes in the law.

You, magnates, are there to rule in righteousness those who are dependent on you. They are not your property; God has placed them in your custody. So take their complaints seriously, and let nobody distract from their rights. They pay their rents and fees, and in return expect to be treated fairly by you. On the other hand, neither pity nor bribes must keep you from correcting with a hard hand treasonable behaviour, incorrigible foolhardiness and self-enrichment. In so doing, make sure you punish the real offender, not an innocent bystander.

The king is admonished to act, openly and wisely, in a God-fearing manner: ban from your court all extravagant wastrels, spendthrifts, in general all untrustworthy and deceitful people. When internal order is restored, strengthen your borders and sea power. With the help of your valorous knights – of greater value for this purpose than the spineless clergy – forcefully press your rightful claims on the throne of France, never giving in to negotiations, which only works out to the enemy's advantage. God may help you to rule your subjects according to his laws. Encourage the good, punish the wicked. Your deeds should prove your moral strength, to bring you heavenly rewards. So start now!

TEXT

(1)	
Whanne alle a kyngdom gadrid ysse	<i>assembled</i>
In Goddis lawe, by on assent,	<i>of one mind</i>
3 For to amende þat was mysse,	<i>wrong</i>
Perfore is ordayned a parlement.	<i>For that purpose; established</i>
Troupe wiþ glad chere þeder went,	<i>Loyalty; cheerful face; there</i>
6 And falsed stondis ay in drede	<i>treacherousness; all the time; fear</i>

¹ *[Proper] action produces [positive] results*

For ferd of ry3twis iugement,
For to be demed after his dede.

*fear; righteous; judgement
judged; according to*

(2)

9 In doom of parlement ofte is fauour,
Pat afterward it harmeþ grete;
Make opere bold take þerof sauour,
12 To mayntene falsed for be3ete.
Slouþe vntyme eft mon swete²
When it is hot, and gloweþ as glede.
15 Stonde wiþ trouþe, and smyte an hete,³
Pat God þonke 3ow for 3oure dede.

*the administering of justice; leniency
does harm
encourages; [who] acquire a taste for
persist in; disloyal/treacherous practice(s); benefit
Negligence; soon; after; sweat (v.)
live coal
on (i.e. with)
So that; will thank*

(3)

Lawe 3eueþ kyng lyf and leme;
18 To hasty slau3t and sodeyn fed,
Lawe 3eueþ no grace to heme.
Morþere, ne treson, ne forcast ded,
21 To 3eue þere mercy God forbed;
Pat fauour my3t destroye a þede.
God in his lawe 3af Moyses red,
24 Wiþ oute he dampneþ þe dede.

*[power over] life and limb
quick-tempered; manslaughter; rash; hostility
gives/allows; them
premeditated act (i.e. act of conspiracy)
allow; them
nation
[his] commandments
Outside [his law]; condemns*

(4)

In alle kyngdomes here lawe his wryten;
For mede ne drede þey chaunge it nou3t.
27 In Engelande, as alle men wyten,
Lawe as best is solde and bou3t.
Eche 3eer newe lawe is wrou3t,
30 And cloþe falsed in trouþe wede.
Fern3er was lawe, now nes it nou3t.
We ben newe fangyl, vnstable in dede.

*their
bribery
cattle
are; being made
garments
In an earlier time; [what] was; of no validity
newfangled*

(5)

33 To stonde wiþ comons in here ry3t,
Is hy3est poynt of charite.
To quyte þat dede no man my3t,
36 Saue onely God in Trynyte.
Þou3 þe comons vnkonnyng be,⁴

*the common people
act
reward; can
ignorant*

² Ll. 13–14: i.e. Negligence to eradicate such treacherousness soon makes it necessary [for Parliament] to double its efforts when treason runs rampant

³ *Stand on the side of loyalty and strike down [treacherousness] with fervour*

⁴ *The common people may be unaware [of your stance on their side] (see l. 33)*

God 3eueþ 3ow neuere þe lasse mede.⁵

- 39 Þat mede askeþ so hey3 degre,
Nes non bot God may quyte þat dede.

requires; standing

(6)

- 3et o wysdom mot 3e lere,
42 Most profyt, and heyest honour:
3oure tenauntes playntes 3e mot here,
For þey kepen alle 3oure tresour.
45 3e are holden to ben here socour.
Non wiþ wrong oþer mysbede;
Forþy God made 3ow gouvernour,
48 In Goddis ry3t to deme þe dede.⁶

*one [piece of]
[That yields] the greatest
listen to
maintain; fortune
their; protector
others; maltreat (imp.)
Therefore; ruler*

(7)

- Lordis þat han castels and toures,
Alle folk stonden of 3ow awe.
51 Þe puple is Goddis, and no3t 3oures,
Þey paye 3oure rente to gouerne lawe.
Let no man here ry3t wiþdrawe,
54 Body ne catelle hem mysbede.
Who doþ so, God sayþ in sawe,
He shal haue heuene for þat dede.

*[Yet]
to you; fees; administer
take away; rights
Man; beast; maltreat
[his] Word*

(8)

- 57 Þe lord þat wole haue good loos,
Stonde fast in trouþe, waxe not faynt.
Let trouþe gon out of cloos,
60 Þat alle folk may here his playnt.
Let treson be shamely ataynt,
Graunte hem no mercy, ne take no mede,
63 For mede wiþ poyson sotyly is maynt,
Mercy my3t cherische hem in here dede.

*enjoy; reputation
loyalty; grow
[its] confining bounds
So that; complaint
convicted
bribes
treacherously; mixed
encourage them (i.e. the traitors)*

(9)

- 3if a man wolde þe ouertylt,
66 Caste þy deþ for to kille,
Let not anoþer by3e his gylt,
Þat neuere in dede dede þe ylle.
69 Dampne no man for non euyl wille
To do þe gylteles blod to blede.

*overthrow
Plans (v.)
pay [the penalty] for
actually
Declare guilty; intent
make; shed*

⁵ *God's reward is not the less for it*

⁶ *To pass judgement on the [people's] conduct according to God's law*

Sette 3oure domes in euene skille. *Form; judgement; properly*
 72 In drede of God 3e deme 3oure dede. *consider*

(10)

Who skorneþ hem þat telleþ hem wit,⁷ *is contemptuous of; gives; sound advice*
 Is rebelle to God þat repreueþ reson.
 75 Þat loueþ hym most þat hateþ hit *Who; who; it (i.e. wit)*
 A3enst Goddis counseille cast acheson. *aspersions*
 To worschipe hym, þere wit is geson. *respect (v.); lacking*
 78 For fawte of grace, vertue ben gyde. *In the absence of; good will; force; guide*
 To chastyse fooles is ay in seson, *punish; opportune*
 To worschip or shame, after þe dede. *respect; according to; their; [mis]deeds*

(11)

81 Syngulerte is sotyle þefte. *Personal gain; vile*
 Pey calle hit custom troupe to blende. *blindfold (v.)*
 Whan Troupe wole reherce þat efte, *divulge; afterwards*
 84 Pan God wil vengeance wiþ troupe sende,
 Shamely falsed to shende,⁸
 Drede and stryf among hem shede. *spread*
 87 To preue who is Goddis frend, *find out*
 Comons be witesse of here dede. *their*

(12)

Putte fro court þat chericheþ vys, *Banish from; vice*
 90 Þat place of vertues wolde shende. *Who; revile/mock*
 Nedeles delys and nedeles gys *Extravagant; luxuries; clothing*
 Þe wastours out of worschip spende. *wastrels/spendthrifts; dishonourably*
 93 Wiþ wit and vysement alle amende;
 Lete werk be witnes 3e can 3oure Crede. *sense and prudence; put right*
 Wiþ corage and hardynes 3oure reme defende, *deeds; know*
 96 In Goddis querelle 3e do 3oure dede. *resolution; realm*
cause; perform your task

(13)

A trewe man reccheþ neuere a delle, *honest; cares; not at all*
 Pou3 alle þe world his werkis aspy3ed. *If; see*
 99 And falsed, for he doþ not welle, *But*
 He wolde troupes tonge were ty3ed, *tied*

⁷ Ll. 73–80: *He rebels against God / Who is contemptuous of sound advice, / Who rejects common sense, / Who loves best who hates it (i.e. common sense) / Who casts aspersions on God's counsel. / In the absence of [their] good will, strength be [your] guide, / To punish fools – always opportune – / To teach [them] respect or shame, according to their [mis]deeds*

⁸ *To put falsity to disgraceful shame*

For he shulde not telle who hym ny3ed. *he (i.e. truth); may; him (i.e. truth); harmed*
 102 Perfore þe fals þe false fede, *Thus; support*
 Til trouþe in preson be faste aly3ede, *securely put*
 And dampne trouþe for falsed dede. *condemn*

(14)

105 Whanne 3e han made pes wipynne, *internally/at home*
 All 3oure reme in vnyte,
 Vtteremore 3e mot bygynne, *In the outer regions*
 108 Strengþe 3oure marche, and kepe þe see. *borders; keep [control of]*
 Ofte haue 3e made 3oure fomen fle, *enemies; flee*
 Here hatest blod o brod to sprede.⁹ *Their; hottest; far and wide*
 111 God doþ batayle, and not 3e;
 Pou3 3e fau3t, God doþ þe dede. *did battle; decides; outcome*

(15)

To Fraunce kyng Edwardē had queryle, *With; [a] dispute*
 114 Hit was his kynde heritage; *legitimate*
 And 3e han þe same style, *have; formal title*
 Wip armes of þe selue parage; *coat of arms; equal rank*
 117 And 3it 3oure querelle dede neuere aswage, *abated/subsided*
 Þat God haþ shewed in 3oure manhede.¹⁰
 On see, on land, in eche vyage, *expedition*
 120 In dent of swerd, God demed 3oure dede.¹¹

(16)

Stuffe 3oure castels in eche coost, *Equip; shore*
 Warnestor and folk þeder sende; *Provisions; there*
 123 So mow 3e abate 3oure enemys bost, *put an end to; arrogance*
 But not in trete, in wast to spende. *negotiations; to no purpose*
 Wheþer 3e assayle or defende, *attack*
 126 On see or land, God 3ow spede. *may help*
 Wip word of wynd mad neuere werre ende,¹²
 But dent of swerde endid þe dede. *action*

(17)

129 And 3e þenke werre to holde, *If; wage war*
 Do after hem [þat] is most wys.
 Corage of 3ong, and wit of olde,

⁹ *So that even the most impetuous of them were scattered far and wide*

¹⁰ *This God has instilled in your nature/character*

¹¹ *Through the force of [your] sword, God has passed judgement on your deeds*

¹² *Empty talk has never made an end to war*

- 132 Can telle where þe vauntage lys,
 In dede of armes wonnen prys. *have been won; victories*
 Whan gloser and flaterer on tapetis trede, *sycophant; come forward*
 135 For wynnyng þey counseled to cowardys. *advised*
 Man wan neuere worschip by here dede. *honour; their*

(18)

- Als ofte as 3e trete, *negotiate*
 138 3oure enemys ordynaunce þey di3t. *Conditions; [want to] dictate*
 While 3e trete, ay þey gete; *always; win*
 3e trete 3oure self out of 3oure ri3t.
 141 Pere lakkeþ conscience of kny3t,
 Lete falsed growe tyl he sede. *Where; attitude of mind*
 Ordre of kny3t was mad to fy3t, *nota Milicia &c* *treacherousness; runs to seed*
 144 In Goddis ri3t to ende þe dede. *Estate*

(19)

- Ordre of kny3t hardest is, *toughest*
 On see, on lond, on sholde and depe. *shallows*
 He passeþ relegous ywis, *surpasses; the clergy*
 148 Pou3 þey preye and faste wepe. *However much; uncontrollably*
 Ofte wiþ ful wombe relegous slepe, *stomach*
 Whan kny3tes han hunger, and moche in drede.
 151 Þe beter in clene lyf þey au3t hem kepe,¹³
 As Goddis kny3t to don here dede.

(20)

- On of two 3e mot chese,
 154 On lond or see, o[n] shippes bord,
 Wiþ fi3t 3e wynne, wiþ trete 3e lese. *lose*
 3oure enemys han þat eure in hord, *mind*
 157 Þat þey wynne wiþ word
 3oure townes and castels in lengþe and brede.
 And þat 3e wynne, 3e wynne wiþ sword, *But; what*
 160 Perfore wiþ swerd do 3oure dede.

(21)

- God 3eue 3ow grace þis reme to 3eme, *help; rule (v.)*
 To cherische þe goode, and chastyse þe nys. *hold in esteem; punish; wicked*
 163 And also serue God to queme, *to please [him]*
 Þat 3oure werkis preue 3ow wys. *May; prove*

¹³ They would do better by keeping themselves (morally) clean

- And in 3ow þe helpe it lys¹⁴
 166 Þe puple in Goddis lawe to hede. *rule (v.)*
 Do so now, 3e wynne 3ow prys, *prize*
 And heuene blisse for 3oure dede.
 169 Amen.

NOTES

- title** Robbins (1975, p. 1421) takes for a title ‘Maintain law and Henry’s foreign policy’.
- 4 Cf. XIV.57–58, there with reference to justice instead of parliament.
- 9 *fauour*] ‘Leniency’, in view of St. (3), especially ll. 21–22.
- 14 *glowep as glede*] Proverbial. See Whiting, G 152, ‘To glow like a gleed’.
- 34 For the signification of *charite* see the note to III.3.
- 37 ‘The passage ... seems to include a reproof of the “cunning” lords who used to cheat the Commons by changing the text of their petitions’ (Kail, p. xviii). Yet Kail glosses ‘unskilled’ for *vnkonnyng*, where ‘ignorant/unaware of’ seems more appropriate.
- 45 *socour*] ‘Protector’, in view of St. (7), which describes the traditional role assigned to the *bellatores* as defenders of the *laboratores*.
- 51 Cf. III.131–32, *Þe peuple ... nys not 3oures, / Al is Goddis*.
- 63 *Maynt*] *pt. ppl.* of *mengen*.
- 67 *by3e*] Aphetic form of *abien*.
- 71 XII.111 is identical (but see the note there).
- 73–76 Concisely summarized in XVI.19, *And hate hem þat telle hym so*.
- 81 Cf. I.4, [*Eche man be war ... of...*] *synguler profit by fals assent*, and XVI.59, *For defaute of Iustice, and singulere to wynne*.
- 94 *Crede*] See also the note to IX.39.
- 110 *hatest*] A Northern feature.
- 111 Cf. III.111, *Whoso fi3teþ, God doþ þe dede*, and IX.143, *God doþ batayle and not 3e*.
- 113 *Edwarde* = King Edward III (1327–1377), Henry V’s great-grandfather.
- 115 *3e* = King Henry V (1413–1422).
- 127 Proverbial. See Whiting, W.638, ‘Word made never war’s end, but sword ended the deed’.
- 130 [*þat*] Follows Kail.
- 154 on shippes bord] MS *or*, but illogical after *see*.
- 168 ‘*Amen* is struck through in *red* ink; but whether it is meant to be erased or not, is doubtful’ (Kail, p. 60, n.). See the note to *Amen* (also struck through in red) at the end of poem I.

¹⁴ *And it lies with you to be the means*

XIV

MAN, BE WARRE ER THE BE WOO

SUMMARY

The highest in the land, even those nearest the king, may easily fall from grace, either because of their own foolishness, the slander of others, or attempts on their lives, in which case they had better leave the country for a while and return when the peril is past.

Every magistrate, including the king, is judged by his deeds, with man as well as God passing verdict on his performance. Climbing the social ladder is fraught with danger anyway, especially as one gets near the king, where his whim or one's own overgreediness may spell social disgrace. And not only the lords of the land, also the humble priest may be called to account, if he neglects his parish in search of more lucrative sources of income. If a magistrate is himself a judge, he should take care to apply the law evenhandedly, without favouritism. Law and justice applies to everybody alike.

Unlawful gain, treason, plunder and killing, tampering with weights and measures, wastefulness and running up debts, squeezing the poor for the benefit of the rich, these are the lordly vices committed in the hunt for ever more riches and which tend to stir up hatred among the common people. And with a church that tolerates simony, and a secular law that tolerates usury, God cannot possibly favour the country.

TEXT

(1)

The herrere degre, þe more wys;
Ðe gretter worschip, þe noblere fame.

3 Ðe herrere degre, þe more nys;
Ðe gretter foly, þe more blame.

After foly folweþ þe shame.

6 Repreued of frendis and scorned of fo,
After þy dede ressayue þy name.
Eche man be war, er hym be wo.

*The higher the rank
importance; illustrious
foolish*

*Rejected; held in contempt
In accordance with; reputation*

(2)

- 9 3if þou be kyngis chaunceller,
Kepe þe crowne hool in stat; *in full power*
3if þou be kyngis counselere,
12 Loke no stoness þerof abate. *Make sure; are reduced [in quality]*
3if oþer wolde make þe kyng þe hate,
others; hate you
Or falsed ouer trouþe go, *treacherousness; before; loyalty*
15 Tak þy leue, and kisse þe 3ate. *leave (n.)*
Eche man be war, er hym be wo.

(3)

- On a mowntayne a sete may not be hyd, *house*
18 Ne lordis werkis in no degre. *in no way*
A lordis werkis wiþ comouns is kyd, *are known by*
Ðat he doþ most in preuete. *[Even] those; in private*
21 Gouvernour of kyngdom or Cyte, *Sovereign ruler*
After þey lyue men deme so. *According as; so judge them*
For eche a werk God 3eueþ a fe. *act performed; reward*
24 Eche man be war, er hym be wo.

(4)

- A symple prest wole synge his masse *lowly*
While his lyuyng is but smal. *[ecclesiastical] income*
27 As summe encrese, serue God þe lasse, *increases; less*
Wiþ benefices ten my3te lyue wiþal,¹
And fynde þere noþer houshold ne halle, *Even though; not to be found*
30 Ne serue þe parische, but take hem fro. *takes/steals*
Er God suche rekenyng calle, *Before; calls [for the payment of]*
Be tyme be war, er þey be wo. *In time*

(5)

- 33 Man, do resoun þou3 þou be riche, *do justice*
Ouer cite or town hast gouernaunce.
Loue al crafty folk yliche, *craftsmen; alike*
36 Mayntene no party in distaunce.²
Sette mendis for trespas in euene balaunce; *Fix; damages; in proportion [to the offense]*
For a penyworth of harm tak not two.³
39 Rule wel mesure and sustenaunce.⁴
Eche man be war, er hym be wo.

¹ Ten people could easily live on [his income from] benefices² Do not take sides in a dispute³ I.e. Do not impose a heavy penalty for a light offence⁴ Set proper rules for measures and foodstuffs

(6)

- | | | |
|---|-------------|--|
| <p>De wyseman his sone forbed
 42 Masoun craft and alle clymbyng,
 And shipman craft, for perile of dede,
 And preuey in counseil be ney3 no kyng.
 45 For his mysrulyng þou my3t hyng,
 þat shep my3te grese vnder þy to.
 To fli3e to hy3e treste not þy wyng.
 48 Eche man be war, er hym be wo.</p> | <p>nota</p> | <p><i>[should] forbid</i>
 <i>[To practice] the craft of masonry</i>
 <i>death</i>
 <i>in [his] privy council; near</i>
 <i>misgovernment; hang</i>
 <i>[So] that; sheep; graze; toe</i>
 <i>too; trust; wings</i></p> |
|---|-------------|--|

(7)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>Pou3 þy kyng be fre to 3yue,
 Be þou not gredy to craue;
 51 Make opere folk þe worse to lyue,⁵
 For synguler profyt þou wolde haue.
 Er drede and repref þy berde shaue,⁶
 54 Asese of Couetys and say hoo.
 The man þat wole his worship saue,
 Be tyme be war, er him be woo.</p> | <p><i>generous; make gifts</i>
 <i>greedy/importunate; ask</i>
 <i>Because of; selfish gain</i>
 <i>shame</i>
 <i>Desist from</i>
 <i>honour</i></p> |
|---|--|

(8)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>57 For to amende þat was mys,
 Perfore is ordeyned eche Iustice.
 Lat eche man haue þat shulde ben his,
 60 And turne not lawe for couetyse.
 Ne contryue tresons þere trouþ lys,
 In tyrauntrie to robbe and slo.
 63 Er 3oure werkis preue 3ow nys,
 Eche man be war, er hym be wo.</p> | <p><i>evill/wrong</i>
 <i>For that purpose; created; law</i>
 <i>treasonably conspire; loyalty; is due</i>
 <i>outrageously; kill</i>
 <i>Before; foolish</i></p> |
|--|---|

(9)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>3if 3e wole haue pes of 3ong and old,
 66 Let eche man haue þat is ry3t.
 Let comon lawe his cours hold,
 Euene mesure, mett and wy3t.
 69 Man, þou3 þou be moche of my3t,
 Mende fawtes er þou make mo.
 For þat 3e hid God seeþ in sy3t.
 72 Eche man be war, er hym be wo.</p> | <p><i>among</i>
 <i>rightfully his</i>
 <i>have its proper course</i>
 <i>Correct; measure; size; weight</i>
 <i>may possess great power</i>
 <i>mistakes; more</i>
 <i>what; conceal; clearly</i></p> |
|--|--|

⁵ *[It would] make the living [conditions] for other people worse*

⁶ I.e. Before fear and shame get too close for comfort

(10)

- Eche lord knoweþ his astate,
 Lyue on þat God hym lent.
 75 Þat borweþ moche, he geteþ hate,
 Spende waste, passyng his rent;
 For suche a kyngdom haþ ben shent.
 78 Stryf wiþ comons, threp and thro,
 To brynge þat in amendement,
 Eche man be war, er hym be wo.

*the state of his affairs
 granted
 Who; borrows; causes
 wastefully; exceeding; income
 such [people]; ruined
 contention; wrangling
 put; to rights*

(11)

- 81 Whanne holichirche suffreþ symonye,
 And is wiþ hym enchaunted,
 And lawe of land suffreþ vsurye,
 84 Vnkyndely synne, and shameles haunted,
 And vicious folk auaunsed and dawnted,
 And vertues flemmed fro eche a wro:
 87 In þat kyngdom God haþ vengeaunce graunted.
 Eche man be war, er hym be wo.

*tolerates
 deluded
 Scandalous; shameless people/?prostitutes; frequented
 evil; favoured; flattered
 banished; nook and cranny
 permitted*

(12)

- In a kyngdom what makeþ stryf,
 90 No man standes of oper awe:
 Vnkyndely synne, and tyrauntes lyf,
 Vsurye, symonye, and letter of lawe,
 93 And holy chirche rebelle to Goddis sawe.
 To kepe his comaundement þey say no.
 Fro þat kyngdom God his loue wil drawe.
 96 Eche man be war, er hym be wo.

*is respectful
 of cruell/violent people; conduct (n.)
 those who obstruct
 commands
 refuse
 withdraw*

(13)

- 3if eny folk forgeþ gyles,
 Wiþ falsed þy deþ to cast,
 99 Pulle vp þe stakes and breke þe styles,⁷
 Lete hem no more styke so faste.
 And whan 3e be þe perile paste,
 102 Kepe 3ow wel fro deþes flo,
 Fro costage, and be no more agaste.
 Eche man be war, er hym be wo.

*plot(s); false tricks
 intend(s)
 posts/pegs; stiles
 be rooted; firmly
 have behind you
 death's arrow
 (?legal) expense; terrified*

⁷ I.e. Abandon your position

(14)

- 105 De flesch hap many frele frendis: *unstable/transitory*
 RICHESSE, strengþe, fayrnesse, and hele; *beauty; health*
 Whan it is mysved, þe soule it schendis. *corrupts*
- 108 RICHESSE, rauenerere of worldis wele, *thief/plunderer; wealth*
 Take fro þe nedey, to þe nedeles dele,⁸
 And wyldre recheles as a roo. *becomes unruly; reckless(?ly); roe deer*
- 111 Er þoure synnes þoure soules apele, *accuse*
 Eche man be war, er hym be woo.

NOTES

title Proverbial. See Whiting, W45, 'Be ware ere you be woe'. Louis (1993, p. 2983) chooses as title 'Eche man be war, er hym be wo'.

9–12 What is here urged on the king's closest advisers: to keep the realm intact, is extended to all three estates in XII (2) and (3).

17 Alludes to Matt. 5:14, 'Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid'.

31 An allusion to the parable of the talents in Matt. 25:14–30, verse 19 in particular: 'the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them'.

37 *in euene balaunce*] *MED* s.v. *balaunce* (*n.*) sub 3a gives 'impartially' as the sole meaning, but here 'in proportion' is meant, in view of the following line: *For a penyworth of harm tak not two.*

42 Punning on the figurative meaning 'social climbing' in ll. 3–4.

43 *shipmancraft*] *MED* s.v. *ship-man* (*n.*) sub (a) glosses 'the art of navigation', but 'being a sailor' (by implication: climbing the rigging of a ship) seems more appropriate in the context of the dangers of heights (see ll. 42 and 47).

46 Proverbial. See Whiting, S 224, 'To have sheep graze under one's toe'.

53 *thy berde shaue*] Proverbial. See Whiting, B 119, 'To shave one's beard'.

57–58 Cf. XIII.3–4, with reference to parliament instead of justice.

59 The principle of *suum cuique tribuere* that lies at the root of common law (see also ll. 66–67).

68 *Mesure* and *mett* are virtually synonymous. Also used in a figurative sense in the phrase *measure and met* = 'moderation/temperance' (see *MED* s.v. *met* (*n.*) sub 6).

106 *fayrnesse*] Kail: *fayrenesse*.

⁸ *Takes from the needy, gives to those not in want*

XV

THE DESCRUYUNG OF MANNES MEMBRES

limbs

SUMMARY

The core argument in this piece is the overriding importance of harmony between the social classes within the realm, on pain of its disintegration. The argument takes the familiar form of an analogy of the body politic and the human body, frequently found in the medieval philosophy and literature of the estates.¹ The main theme is introduced by an enumeration of the four elements: earth, water, fire and air, that combine to form the bodily humours, and of the three elements that constitute the rational soul (*þat haþ þe mynde*): life, feeling and reason. What follows is a detailed comparison of parts of the human body and the estates of the realm. Just as the human limbs and organs work together to make the body as a whole function properly, so the estates must work together to make the realm operate as an organic whole.

The detail is remarkable. Passing review are: the head (with the brain as control centre, served by the eyes, ears, nose and mouth), the neck, breast, shoulders and spine, arms, hands, fingers, ribs, thighs, legs, feet and toes. They respectively represent: the king, justice, the clergy, lords, knights, squires, yeomen, lawyers, merchants, craftsmen, farmers and servants. Successive reproachful dialogues between various parts of the body exemplify the lesson that even the slightest discord will trigger a chain reaction that throws the system of interdependent bodily functions out of order. In the same way does the social mechanism in a country come to a standstill if the different, but closely connected classes of society fail to cooperate in good harmony.

TEXT

(1)

Where of is mad al mankynde.

Of seuene þynges, and it be sou3t:

3 Erþe and water, fyre and wynde,

Ðerof is þe body wrou3t;

Ðe soule of þre, þat haþ þe mynde,

if; examined
air
made
possesses; consciousness

¹ For a detailed discussion of the subject, with reference to the present poem, see Mohl (1933, pp. 109–10, 263–64).

6 Of lyf, felyng and of þou3t. *reason*
 Þe soule fro þe body vnbende, *is separated from*
 Whan on of þese lakkeþ ou3t. *is lacking; in any way*

(2)

9 Þe heued y likne to a kyng,
 For he is lord souereyn of al.
 Haþ foure to his gouernyng: *four [organs]; controls (v.)*
 12 Mouþ and nose and eyen wiþal, *also*
 Eryn fayre to his heryng, *good for*
 To serue þe brayn, is pryncypal
 15 Chef of counseil ymagenyng, *Centre; thinking; imaginative*
 To caste before, er after fal. *think ahead; lest; afterwards; [one] falls*

(3)

I lykne þe nekke, moche of my3t, *strength*
 18 Þat body and heued to gydre knyht, *links*
 To a Iustice þat demeþ ry3t;
 For þurgh it comeþ alle wordis of wyt. *judges (v.)*
 21 3if a man take ordre of kny3t,
 Þe coler in þe nekke het; *sound judgement*
 And feloun forfeþe in þefte or fy3t,
 24 Þe iugement in þe nekke set. *chain (as badge of honour); touches*
If; criminal; breaks the law
penalty; is imposed

(4)

Now I lykne mannys brest
 [To] presthod in good degre, *reputation*
 27 Most in perile, lest in rest, *Greatest; humblest; times of peace*
 For besynesse in spirituale,² *Concerned with; task*
 In penaunce and in preyer prest, *renunciation; gathered*
 30 Meke of spirit in pouerte, *humble*
 Holde hospytal to Goddis gest,
 And fede þe pore in charyte. *Practise; hospitality; guests (i.e. strangers)*

(5)

33 Þe shuldres and þe bakebon *spinal column*
 I likne to lordis of þe lond;
 Þe armes to kny3tes, to fende fro fon. *defend; enemy*
 36 Þe squyers I likne to þe hondes;
 Þe fyngres to 3emen þat byfore gon, *yeomen; in front*
 Wiþ bent bowes and bry3t brondes. *swords*

² I.e. Dedicated to a spiritual way of life

39 While alle þys lymes arn wel at on, *As long as*
 Þe body in good plyt it stondes. *condition*

(6)

Mannys rybbes y likne now –
 42 Flesch and skyn in body hydes – *hide/conceal [them]*
 To men of lawe, is to alow *[which] exists (i.e. the law); take into account*
 Þat kepes in loue boþe sydes. *What; harmony*
 45 Rybbes to resoun þou3 þey bow,³
 So lawe doþ, ofte in fauour bydes, *of both parties*
 Tyl ground be sou3t þere lawe doþ grow,
 48 Ende in charite, þat no man chydes. *complains about*

(7)

I likne þe thies, flesch and bon,
 Þat beren þe body quantite, *main part of*
 51 To marchaundes, in perile ride and gon, *go [on foot]*
 Bryngen wynnyng, gold and fee, *profit; movable property*
 Make hi3e houses of lym and ston, *lofty; mortar*
 54 Mayntene burghæ, toun and cyte, *Support*
 Welþe and worschip in here won, *renown; dwelling*
 And good houshold of gret plente. *prosperity*

(8)

57 Mannys leggis likne y may
 To alle craftes þat worche wiþ handes, *crafts[men]*
 For al þe body beren þay,
 60 As a tre þat bereþ wandes. *branches*
 Þe feet to lykne y wole assay
 To alle trewe tylyers of landes, *faithful*
 63 Þe plough, and alle þat dygge in clay;
 Alle þe world on hem standes.

(9)

The toes of þe mennys feet,
 66 Þo y likne to trewe hyne, *servants*
 Þat trauayle boþe in drye and weet, *work (v.)*
 In þurst, in hungere and in pyne,
 69 In het, in cold, in snow and slet, *sleet*
 Many hi3e none er þey dyne, *high; noon; [can] eat*
 And wiþ good mete selde met; *solid food; seldom; encounter*
 72 But after howsel, þey drynke no wyn. *Except; in conformity with; Eucharist*

³ Just as the ribs bend to the extent that is reasonably required

(10)

- Toes helpeþ man fro fal to ryse;
 He may not stonde þat haþ no toon,
 75 Lepe ne renne, ne ryde in syse, *in the normal way*
 Wrastle ne fy3te, ne put þe ston. *put the stone [in contest]*
 3if seruant þe maystere refuse, *refuses [to obey]*
 78 Þe seruant lyuyng sone were gon. *livelihood*
 And maystres, þou3 þey ben wyse, *if*
 Wiþ out seruant lyue not alon.

(11)

- 81 I likne þe wombe, and þat wiþ ynne, *stomach*
 To botemeles purs, þat moche doþ take;
 To couetous no wyket pynne; *the avaricious; wicket [gate]; [is] locked*
 84 To glotoun þe garner wyd open make. *the glutton; mouth (litt. storehouse); [is] opened wide*
 Þe wombe preyed þe mouþ to blynne: *pleased; stop moving*
 Þou etest and drynkest, þat y ake. *ache (v.)*
 87 To slepe, quod þe ey3e, we may not wynne *manage*
 Þe wrecched wombe so doþ vs wake. *keeps us awake*

(12)

- We dulle of heryng, quod þe ere. *get dull*
 90 We dase for dronken, quod þe ey3e, *get befuddled*
 I wende but o mone þere were, *thought; one moon*
 And me þou3te two y sey3e. *saw*
 93 Quod þe handis: fro mouþ may we not vs were. *against; defend*
 Quod þe mouþ: y drank while y my3te drye. *dry out*
 Allas, quod þe feet, alle we bere,
 96 And 3oure bargayn dere abye. *pay dearly for your dealings*

(13)

- The handes and feet þe mouþ gan preye:
 Let vs thre dayes reste,
 99 Wiþ alle þyn opere lymes pleye, *play/enjoy ourselves with*
 Wiþ felaschip, frend and geste. *guests*
 Þe mouþ in anger he dede saye: *grudgingly*
 102 Þes þre dayes do 3our best.
 Al þat tyme, ny3t ne daye,
 No mete ne drynk come in my brest.

(14)

- 105 Thre dayes the mouþ dede faste,
 Tyl wombe calde þe mouþ vnkynde. *cruel*
 Vn[b]ynde thyn handes, are þey faste. *free (v.); tied*

- 108 Stere, and lete þe mylle grynde. *Start moving*
 Quod þe eren: oure heryng is at þe laste. *at an end*
 Quod eyen: we dase, and waxe blynd. *are growing blind*
- 111 Quod handes and feet: oure strengþe is paste.
 Quod brayn and herte: vs wantes mynde. *we lack; [sound] mind*

(15)

- Quod þe mouþe: 3e playne whyle y ete,
 114 And while y faste 3e make gret doel. *lamentations*
 Quod hondes and feet: also we gete *while*
 Þat þou spendest eche a deel, *[Of] what; consume; every part*
 117 We may play, swynke and swete, *labour (v.)*
 While mouþe in mesure makeþ his mele. *as needed; meal*
 For mesure kepeþ kynde hete, *preserves; body heat necessary for life*
 120 And al þat tyme we fare wele. *are in good health*

(16)

- I likne a kyngdom in good astate *Nota bene*
 To stalworþe man, my3ty in hele. *powerful; in good physical condition*
- 123 While non of his lymes oþer hate,
 He is my3ty wiþ an oþer to dele. *able; somebody else*
 3if eche of his lymes wiþ oþer debate, *quarrel (v.)*
- 126 He waxeþ syk, for flesch is frele.
 His enemys wayte erly and late, *becomes; weak*
 In his feblenese on hym to stele. *creep up to/stalk*

(17)

- 129 And hed were fro þe body stad, *If; separated*
 Noþer partye were set at nou3t, *Either; considered worthless*
 And body wiþoute armes sprad. *spread out*
- 132 Were armes wiþ oute handis ou3t?
 Ne handis but þey fyngres had? *anything*
 Wiþoute fingere what were wrou3t? *Or; unless*
 135 Þes lymes makeþ hed ful glad, *made*
 And al þe body, and it be sou3t. *These; joyful*

(18)

- 3if a man hurte þy fynger or too, *toe*
- 138 But þou make deffens o ferre,⁴
 Leg or arm may take þe fro,
 To body or hed aunte hym herre.⁵ *venture (v.); higher*

⁴ Unless you keep your distance in defending yourself

⁵ He may venture higher, to the body or the head

- 141 Ensamble to kyngdom y set this so:⁶
 And oure frendis be destroyed by werre, *If*
 Pan kepe þe wisely fro þy foo;
 144 For wiþ alle his myȝt he wole come nerre. *nearer*

(19)

- God saue þis man is so deuysed: *may save; [who]; formed*
 Hed and body, alle lymes in kynde. *in their natural state*
 147 But þere as vertues ben despysed, *if on the other hand*
 To preye to God þey waste here wynde. *breath*
 God leue þat synne may be refused, *grant; got rid of*
 150 And of dedly synnes vs vnbynde, *release*
 And eche stat in his kynde be vsed.⁷ *according to; nature; employed*
 God of his mercy haue vs in mynde. Amen *may remember us*

NOTES

title Robbins (1975, p. 1421) has the title ‘The state compared to man’s body’.

1–7 For a discussion of the medieval view of the faculties which the human body and soul exercise, see Lewis (1964, pp. 152–74).

2 *and it be souȝt*] metrical filler; see also l. 136.

14 *pryncypal*] Treated as a noun in *MED* s.v. *principal*, but clearly adjectival to *chef*. This line and the following are punctuated accordingly, which finds support in the way these lines are quoted in *MED* s.v. *imaginge* (*ger.*).

24 I.e. to be beheaded or hanged.

26 *To*] MS *In*. Kail also has *To*, but does not mark it as an emendation.

29 *prest*] Kail glosses ‘ready’, which is hardly plausible in this context.

55 Cf. XI.94: *Here wele and worschip, in euery won.*

107 *Vnbynde*] MS *Vnkynde* does not make sense. Kail does not emend, but adds the note: [? *for Vnbynde*]. There seems little doubt that the close similarity with immediately preceding *vnkynde* must have caused the scribal error. *Vnbynde* fits the context perfectly.

126 Proverbial. See Whiting, F 272, ‘The flesch is frail’. Echoes Matt. 26:41, ‘... the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak’.

⁶ I use this as an illustration of a kingdom, as follows

⁷ And each estate [of the body politic] may function as it was ordained by nature

XVI

A REMEMBRAUNCE OF LIJ FOLYES¹

SUMMARY

As the note to the title explains, the principal motive for this poem is the assassination in 1419 of the Duke of Burgundy and Flanders, although nowhere in the poem is there any explicit mention of the murder itself. What is discussed at length are the duke's follies, their immediate consequences for Flanders and the Flemish themselves, as well as the general lessons to be drawn from these mishaps for the benefit of the author's public.

The accusing finger is first pointed to the self-serving, smooth talkers in the duke's retinue, and their fateful influence. Their advice resulted in an ill-considered, naive understanding with the French Dauphin, as frivolous as buying without paying, as being too intimate with one's superiors, or as making empty assertions and ineffectual threats. The duke's useless and risky earlier war with the Dauphin, also prompted by wicked courtiers, was equally ill-considered. Underrating the strength of his enemy and oblivious of the consequences, Burgundy could not win for lack of the necessary means. It taught him no lessons. The intended alliance with the Dauphin against the king of England was to lead the duke into an unlawful enterprise, with new dangers he did not recognize. The warnings of prudent men remained unheeded, and the plan caused the death of the Duke and the ruin of Flanders, a once thriving country, now in disorder and without peace. It was seen as God's punishment for earlier sins, when the secular authorities were curtailing the Church's rights to preach and teach the Gospel.

It is the story of a Godless, unthinking, irresponsible, loose-living ruler, who gambles all and everything away to win it all, but loses all, and is punished by God accordingly, unlamented by the rest of the world. After all, man has only four true friends, and these he will always find at his side: illness, sorrow, death and fear. They spare neither the poor nor the rich, bringing them meekly to their knees to render account of their deeds.

¹ *A reflection on fifty-two foolish acts*

TEXT

(1)

- Loke how Flaundres doþ fare wiþ his folyhede;
 Durste no man dygge after trouþe wiþ no manere toles.
 3 To wynne wrongly wele, wod þey gan wede,²
 But werkis of wys men were cast vnder stoles.
 Glosers counseled lordis for to take mede,
 6 To maken hem riche, and here lordis pore foles.
 Whan þe souereyns were set here sogettis to drede,
 Þe glosers skulked away for shame of here sooles.³
 9 Falsed shal neuere ben ateynt,
 Til Iuge here eche mannys pleynt,
 Redresse and make an ende,
 12 Or ellys to mercy bende,
 Make hem kyssen and be frende
 Þat were fon feynt.

folly
Dared; tools of any kind
wrongfully; wealth; wildly; went mad
acts (n.); seats (i.e. were disregarded)
Flatterers; accept bribes
themselves (i.e. the glosers); dupes
lords; brought; subjects

Falsity; condemned
hears; complaint
Puts right [a wrong]
else; is inclined

enemies; deceitful

(2)

- 15 Fyfty folyes ben and two;
 Alle þo y wole mynne among.
 To triste in trete to his fo,
 18 Þat haþ begyled hem ofte and long;
 And hate hem þat telle hym so,
 And wilfully wole suffre wrong,
 21 It is worthy he smerte and be wo,
 Þat of his owen skyn wole kerue a thong.
 Þat chepen moche, and not han to paye,
 24 And wiþ his lord to homly wole playe,
 Swere moche, and not be trowed;
 Boste moche, and not allowed;
 27 Threte alle men, and neuere on bowed:
 All are folyes, þat y say.

those; tell together (i.e. enumerate)
trust (v.); by [concluding] a treaty
betrayed
those
willingly; are prepared
fitting; suffer pain
from; carve
buy; have [anything]
on too familiar terms; joke (v.)
Swear; but; trusted
Brag; appreciated
Threatens; no one ever; bowed [in submission]

(3)

- He is a fool þat werre wole wake,
 30 Þat may not maynten it wiþ mede;
 And so moche vndertake,
 Pat wot wel he may not spede;
 33 And of his neyþebour his enemy make,
 For a straunge mannys dede.

stir up
back up; bribes
take on
cannot; achieve his goal

unknown

² I.e. Without legal justification they went in mad pursuit of wealth

³ *The glosers skulked away out of embarrassment of (the baseness of) their souls*

- And he þat mesure wole forsake,
 36 And nedles put hym self in drede,
 Of mannys dep haue no rouþe,
 But hate hem þat tellen hym trouþe,
 39 Loue hym þat cherische hym in synne,
 And suche games bygynne
 Where þat he wot he may not wynne,⁴
 42 But besyen hym in slouþe. *restraint/caution; abandon
jeopardy
does not regret
those
hold in high esteem*
- (4)
 He is a fool þat no good can,
 Ne non wole lere, but slow in dede.
 45 A gret fool y holde þat man
 Þat of his enemys haþ no drede.
 Þurgh suche foly Flaundres began,
 48 Of after perile þey tok non hede. *later danger(s)*
 Hit is worthy he ete bred of bran,
 Þat wiþ floure his foo wil fede,
 51 And truste al in gloser charmes,
 In hyndryng in worschip of armes,
 And lette lawe it mot not syt, *of a flatterer; spells
To the detriment of; respect for
obstruct; [so that it] cannot; function*
 54 And conscience away flyt,
 May brynge a lord, er þat he wyt,
 Emyddis grete harmes. *becomes aware [of it]
In the midst of*
- (5)
 57 Flaundres was þe richest land, and meriest to mynne;
 Now is it wrappid in wo, and moche welþe raft. *most delightful to remember
deprived of [its] great wealth
personal gain*
 For defaute of Iustice, and singulere to wynne,
 60 Þey were rebelle, to ryse craft aþen craft. *rebels; force; against
Their; shared in; embroiled in*
 Here lord had part of þe foly þey were wounden ynne,
 For thy he les his lordshipe, and here fraunchise raft.⁵
 63 Here enemys lawhen hem to skorne and seyn: for synne,
 Of here banere of grace God broken haþ þe shaft. *ridicule (v.); because of [their]
[protective] banner*
 When prelat is forbode to preche,
 66 No trewe man trouþe dar teche, *dares*
 Encresyng of temperalte *[The] increasing [role]; secular authority*
 Suspende spiritualte *Puts aside; ecclesiastical authority*
 69 What land is gouerned in þat degre, *manner*
 May wayte after wreche. *expect [God's] vengeance*

⁴ Which in the [prevailing] circumstances he knows he cannot win

⁵ For that he lost his honour, and they were robbed of their freedom

(6)

- I holde hym a fool, þou3 he be wys,
 72 Þat spekeþ among men of name
 Þat at his wysdom set no prys, *consider of no value*
 But skorne hym and don blame; *ridicule (v.); criticize*
- 75 And he þat telleþ where peryle lys,
 And gete no þonk, but harm and shame.
 And he þat pleyneþ y holde hym nys, *complains; take for a fool*
 78 Þat get no mendys, but dowble grame. *receives; damages; grief*
 By þese poyntes Flaundes was lest, *Because of; ruined*
 Now is it out of rule and of rest; *in disorder; without peace*
- 81 Drede is here chef gayte. *joy*
 So eche man on hem bayte, *everybody baits them*
 Þat 3et þey honge in awayte *wait in expectation*
 84 Of a newe conquest. *yet another*

(7)

- He þat my3t thryue, and nel not thee, *but; will not/is unable to; prosper*
 Ne his owen harmes knawe,⁶
- 87 Apert ne in preuytee, *Openly; nor; to himself*
 Serue God for loue ne awe, *out of love; out of fear*
 Ne gouerne wel his owen degre, *protects; station in life*
- 90 Ne rule hym self in ry3twys lawe, *conducts; in [conformity with] just*
 Whan wyse men fro hym fle,
 Þen God his grace wole fro hem drawe.
- 93 Þat moche wynneþ, and no thyng wole haue, *[He is a fool] who; but keeps nothing*
 But 3eue it away to nedeles þat craue, *[who] needlessly; beg for it*
 A3ens conscience despit, *In despite of*
- 96 Borwe moche and neuere quyt: *pays back*
 When God for þat gylt smyt, *strikes [in punishment of]*
 What glosere can þat wounde saue. *heal*

(8)

- 99 Þat freek may wel be holden a fool *man*
 Þat wayueþ wit, and worcheþ by wille, *eschews; sound sense; acts; wilfully*
 And skippe into sclandre scol,⁷
- 102 And scorne hym þat telleþ hym skylle;⁸
 And lyue in Lenton as in 3ool *Lent; as if; Yule (i.e. Christmas time)*
 His flesch in foly to fulfille. *gratify*
- 105 Þou3 þe dotarde deye in dool, *imbecile; distress*

⁶ *And does not acknowledge his own moral evil-mindedness*

⁷ *And is quick to enter the School for Scandal (i.e. the company in which one learns to act disgracefully)*

⁸ *And treats with contempt who teach(es) him proper conduct*

	De ry3twys nel not rewe his ylle.		<i>bewail; misfortune</i>
	Who so wil not knowe his awen astat,		<i>the state of his own affairs</i>
108	Ne deliuere chekkys er þat he be mat, ⁹		
	He shal haue worldis wondryng,		<i>derision</i>
	And his soule hyndryng,		<i>harm</i>
111	And ay in paynes pondryng;		<i>for ever; pondering</i>
	To mende þanne is to late.		<i>remedy (v.); then</i>
	(9)		
	Of alle folk vppon fold y fynde but foure trewe,		<i>in the world; faithful</i>
114	Þat don here deuere dewely, and take no mede:		<i>duties; duly; payment</i>
	Syknes is oon, and sorw doþ sewe,		<i>comes next</i>
	De thridde hat deþ, and þe fierþe drede.		<i>is called</i>
117	Pey clayme vs by custom, for þey oure kyn knewe, ¹⁰	Nota	
	And endid wiþ oure aunsetres tyl þey to erþe 3ede.		<i>fell [in death]</i>
	Pey spare prynce ne pore, old ne newe,		<i>young</i>
120	For þey crepe into his cors, and cloþe hem in his wede.		<i>body; garments</i>
	Drede bryngēþ man to buxomnes;		<i>meekness</i>
	Sorwe of herte makeþ synnes les,		<i>Repentance; sincere; less [important]</i>
123	Syknes breþe stekenynng,		<i>[makes] the breath; smell offensively</i>
	And bowe to a bekenyng,		<i>And [makes man]; summons (n.)</i>
	And bryngēþ hem to rekenyng,		<i>an accounting</i>
126	Tyl deþ alle redresse.		<i>resolves</i>

NOTES

title Robbins (1959, p. 50, and 1975, p. 1421) has this poem under the title ‘The follies of the Duke of Burgundy’. Kail (p. xxi) deduces that ‘XVI ... must have originated in 1419, because it contains references to the folly and to the assassination of John, duke of Burgundy and Flanders. While Henry V was successfully advancing in France, the Dauphin and the Duke of Flanders made war upon each other. At last John, moved by the representations of some friends, agreed to an interview with the Dauphin in order to form an alliance against the King of England. On that occasion the duke was assassinated by the followers of the Dauphin’. For a detailed account of the events that led up to, and ensued from John the Fearless’ assassination at Montereau on 10 September 1419, see e.g. Keen (1973, pp. 369–75).

20 *wole*] Kail *wolle* (err.). Glosses ?‘wish’.

22 Proverbial: to have oneself to blame for misfortune. See Whiting, T 216, ‘To carve a thong of one’s own skin’; a variation of S 652, ‘To have a staff (yard, whip, wand, rod, hammer) for oneself’.

33–34 ‘Instead of assisting his cousin against the King of England, he made war upon him, and so promoted the cause of a stranger’ (Robbins, 1959, p. 272).

⁹ *Nor delivers a check before he is checkmated himself* (i.e. nor delivers a blow before he is attacked himself)

¹⁰ *They claim us according to an old tradition, for they knew us people [already]*

- 33 *nei3ebour* = the Dauphin.
- 34 *straunge mannys* = Henry V of England.
- 37–38 ‘He did not scruple at killing the Duke of Orleans; he even defended that deed, and openly boasted of it, and nobody durst call it a crime’ (Kail, p. xxi).
- 40 *bygynne*] Robbins (1959, p. 51) erroneously has *begynne*.
- 46 *enemys* = France.
- 49–50 Proverbial. See Whiting, B 513, ‘He is worthy to eat bread of bran who feeds his foe with flour’. A variation of C 153 (‘Charity begins with oneself’) and M 63 (‘Each man had liefer do better to himself than to another’).
- 59 Cf. XIII.81, *Singulerte is sotyle þefte. syngulere*] Kail *singulere* (err.).
- 60 Cf. III.33, *Whan craft riseþ a3ens craft*.
- 62 *MED* s.v. *lesen* (v.(4)) notes ‘chiefly early SW’ against *pt. les*.
- 63 Cf. XII.147, *Oþer kyngdomes lau3he vs not to skorn*.
- 65–70 The death of John of Burgundy (alluded to in l. 62) is here seen as God’s *wreche* (l. 70) for the restraints imposed on the Church by the secular authorities in Flanders, not, as Kail (p. xxi) maintains ‘as a punishment for the assassination of the Duke of Orleans (l. 63 *et sqq*)’.
- 66 *trewe man*] a term strongly reminiscent of Lollard usage. See Hudson (1978, p. 146, n. 50).
- 86 *knaawe*] A Northern form, colonized for rhyming purposes only (*knaawe-awe-lawe*).
- 87 *in preuytee*] Robbins (1959, p. 272) glosses ‘in secrecy’; however, ‘to himself’ is more apposite in the context of the confession of sins (see *MED* s.v. *privete* (n.) sub 2.(c)).
- 88 *for love ne awe*] *MED* s.v. *awe* (n.) sub 3.(c) glosses ‘for love nor dread; also, on any account, at all’. I have opted for the more pregnant literal rendering ‘neither out of love nor out of fear’.
- 100 Cf. the refrain line in V: *þat leueþ wit and worcheþ by wille*.
- 101 *sclaundre scol*] Richard Sheridan used a similar phrase for his comedy *The School for Scandal* (1777). I have not been able to establish whether Sheridan borrowed the phrase from the Poems or from any other source, medieval or otherwise. *MED* quotes l. 101 s.v. *sclaundre* sub 2. as its sole source for the phrase *sclaundre scol*.
- 108 Proverbial. See Whiting, C 169, ‘To say checkmate’.
- 119 *ne*] Robbins (1959, p. 51) erroneously has *no*.
- 123 *stekenynng*] *MED* s.v. *stinken* (v.) sub 2a.(b) notes ‘?read *stenkyng*’, indeed the most probable reading.

XVII

LOUE THAT GOD LOUETH

whom

SUMMARY

The heart of the poem is God's appeal to man to win his soul. The author works towards that high point with a preliminary appeal of his own: follow and love God in all his ways, because he is worth loving. He created us in his image, he paid for our sins with his death on the cross, and he is all-forgiving. But we must not love him, or do good works, out of fear for God's retribution, or to earn heavenly bliss. We should love him just for himself, because he is good, because he set us free.

Then follows God's passionate, direct appeal to us: first of all, be deserving of my love, keep away from the pleasures of the world, return everything you acquired wrongfully, and do not steal, flatter or lie. Do good works, do penance and give alms, but above all give me your heart, because all the treasures and beauty of the world, the bones of all the saints' shrines, they mean nothing to me compared with man alive, in expectation of his resurrection. I gave you my love and paid the highest price for it: my death on the cross. Out of love for you I became man myself. If you return my love, your reward will be immense, the bliss of heaven. But if you reject me, my wrath will be terrible: hell and its fiends will await you. And even so, you still belong to me, just as everything else in this world, in heaven and in hell.

Who is your true friend, Satan or I? Satan will let you down. What I offer you is my true love, far more than what the world has to offer. If you turn to me and leave earthly desires behind, you will find me a loyal friend. That I can guarantee, on Jesus' redeeming sacrifice, a herb of incomparable beauty, whose leaves will heal you in times of need.

TEXT

(1)

That ilke man wole lerne wel
To loue God wiþ al his myȝt,
3 Þat loue in his herte fele.
Pere God doþ loue, loue þou ryȝt;
There God doþ hate euerydele,
6 Hate it boþe day and nyȝt,

same

Who

Where; what is [morally] right

utterly

3eue hym noþer mete ne mele,
But flyt hym fere out of 3oure sy3t.

food nor meal (i.e. food in whatever form)
drive

(2)

9 Many gret[e] causes is
To loue God why men ou3te.
He shop vs lyk ymage his,
12 And wiþ his deþ fro pyne vs bou3t.
And 3ut, þou3 we don ofte amys,
For eche a gylt he betep vs nou3t;
15 And we þenke to amende, he profreþ to kys.
Man of loue he haþ besou3t.¹

[There are] a great many reasons
created
misdeed; punishes
If; are minded; make amends; offers

(3)

3if a lord 3eue fee or rent
18 For to do a gret office,
To serue hym wel is þyn atent,
For thy profyt, but not for his.
21 For he fyndeþ þe þy vaunsement,
Py loue vpon þe profyt lys.
Suche worldly louers are gostly blent;
24 Suche loue to God is cold as yse.

wages; income
important; task
intention
considers; advancement
[Whilst]; in ... lies (i.e. depends)
spiritually; blind
ice

(4)

3if þou serue God for helle drede,
Or loue God for his blisse,
27 Þat loue is worth no parfyt mede:
Þou [sechest] thy profyt, and not hisse.
To pyne ne blis take non hede,
30 But loue God for good he is.
Suche loue to God his erande doþ spede,
And pleseþ best to God y wys.

Nota de
amore dei
&c.

fear
the bliss [he bestows on you]
full; reward (n.)
torments [of hell]; [heavenly] bliss
because; [the all-]good
advances his cause
certainly

(5)

33 Fleschly man may do wele
Þe seuene werkes of mercy þat God bed –
3eue pore folk mete and mele,
36 Herberwe, drynk, cloþe and fed –
For syngulere profyt, eche a dele,
For drede of pyne and couetys of mede.
39 Loue God ouer alle, for good he is;
To pyne ne blisse take non hede.

Worldly; may well do
dictated
Shelter; food
[Just] for; selfish; entirely
covetousness
above

¹ *He has entreated man for [his] love*

(6)

- 3if þou sette loue in þat degre: *value (v.); so highly*
 42 To loue God for he þe wrou3t, *because*
 Þan make þou hym as he dede þe, *regard (v.)*
 Þan loue for loue euene is brou3t. *on equal terms*
 45 3if þou loue God for he made þe fre, *because*
 Þat dy3ed for the, to blisse þe bou3t, *Who; died; redeemed*
 Þan dy3e þou for hym, as he dy3ed for þe;
 48 3ut heuene blisse þou quytest hym nou3t. *But; requite; not at all*

(7)

- 3it o thyng þere is byhende, *one; left*
 Man, þat God askeþ of the:
 51 Alle worldys delys fro þyn herte wende, *pleasures; ban (v.)*
 Wiþ alle þyn herte loue þou me.
 Py swete þou3tes [þou] me sende, *pleasing (i.e. to God)*
 54 For worldis goodis myn are he. *are (already); they*
 Loue me gostly, þat am þy frende, *devoutly, [me,] who is*
 Þanne al euyl shal fro þe fle.

(8)

- 57 Þat loue me gostly y can assay, *Who; test*
 For gostly loue in herte y sou3t.
 Do worldly thyng fro þyn herte away,
 60 And haue me principal in þy þou3t. *foremost*
 Be lordē and haue richesse þou may,
 Worldis richesse for man was wrou3t,
 63 Gostly loue, þat is my pray, *property*
 But worldly goodis in heuene comeþ nou3t. *nota* *come; not*

(9)

- For gold and syluer and precyous stones, *For [all their]*
 66 Swetnes of floures, erþely bewte, *flowers; beauty*
 Þe shrynes wiþ alle seyntes bones,
 In heuene were foul felþe to se. *would be; filth*
 69 Tyl body and soule a3en arn ones, *reunited*
 Mad parfyt in claryte,
 Saue God hym self, in heuene wones, *in splendour*
 72 Þe principal mankynde shal be. *Except; [who] lives*
Man [on earth] takes first place

(10)

- God, how may y, man, bygynne
 Wiþ myn herte to loue þe.
 75 Repente, and wylne no more synne, *desire (v.)*

So mowe [we] frendis be.

Good soule sybbe to my kynne,

[is spiritually] kindred; nature

78 For y made it lik to me;

Mankynde y tok, a mayden wiþ ynne,

Human form; assumed; in [the womb of]

So, gostly and bodyly, breþeren be [we].

(11)

81 Who loueþ God, he wil bygynne

For to folwe Goddis lore:

commandments

Loke where he dede wrongly wynne,

immorally; made profits

84 Make amendis, aþen restore.

return (v.)

þoure loue fro me þe parten o twynne

from; have separated

For worldis worship, ryches in store;

honour

87 Heuene þates þe steken and pynne,

shut; lock [against yourself]

þat þe schulde saue þe haue forlore.

What; lost

(12)

To gete loue þus bygynne:

90 Wiþ clene herte and swete þouþt,

Wiþ trewe tong, not falsely wynne,

honest

Ne stele, ne flatre, ne lyþe nouþt.

flatter; lie

93 Do ryþtwys dede, out and ynne,

Act righteously; everywhere

Loke þy werkys be euene wrouþt,

Take care; justly; performed

Do almes and penaunce, and leue þy synne;

96 Wiþ þese þre loue is bouþt.

(13)

God spekeþ to man, and lerneþ lore,

teaches [his] bidding

þe comaundementis and þe Crede.

99 þeue me þy loue, y aske no more,

Wiþ al þy herte, in loue and drede.

And þou nylt þeue it me, warne me byfore,

If; will not; in advance

102 Sette pris to selle it, loue and bede,

ask and bid [a price] (i.e. make a bargain)

I wole þeue the my self þefore.

you; in return

Where myþtest þou haue a betere mede.

get; better value

(14)

105 And þou nelt þeue ne selle it me,

will not; it (i.e. your love)

Aþens me þou wilt debate,

fight (v.)

þan wil y gon away fro þe,

108 And þelde to þe hate for hate.

pay; with

My face wiþ loue shalt þou not se,

But steke þe wiþoute heuene þate,

exclude; outside

111 Fro alle vertues and charyte,

Bereft of

Wiþ helle houndes, in endeles date.

eternally

(15)

Haue y þy loue, so may þou quyte;²

114 I mad þe lik ymage to me.

in my image

And 3if þe þenke þat was to lyte,

little

Þanne þenk y dyed on rode tre.

cross [on which Christ died]

117 Pou3 þou trespas, y do not smyte,

cause affliction

But byd 3if þou wilt mendid be.

ask; cured

And þou be lost, whom wiltow wyte,

blame (v.)

120 Is it long on me or þe.

because of

(16)

Discrecioun of 3ong and old,

Discriminating; between

Of alle þynge, nou3t ou3te;

ought not to exist

123 Of alle þat may be bou3t and sold,

Loue for loue is euenest bou3te.³

with; on the most equal terms

Whan worldis loue doþ fayle and folde,

crumples

126 Goddis loue fayleþ nou3t.

Trewe loue makeþ men be bolde,

fearless

Wiþ loue felawship to gydre is brou3t.

friendship; formed

(17)

129 For loue God com fro heuene toure,

tower (i.e. palace)

In mayden Mary tok mankynde.

For oure swete, he drank ful soure,⁴

sweetness; sourness

132 Where my3t we trewere loue fynde.

His loue passeþ worldis tresoure,

3af sy3t in helle to gostly blynde.

135 And we wole knytte his loue to oure,

If

For soþe, þat knot shal neuere vnbynde.

(18)

Haue y þy loue, so may þou gete

win

138 Þat loue wole þy soule saue.

That love [which]

Among myn angels haue a sete

In ioye of heuene, as seyntes haue.

141 3if þou nelt, y wol þe þrete

do not want to; threaten

² Ll. 113–14: *If I have your love, [then] that is how you may repay the debt you owe me, / [Namely that] I created you in my own image*

³ I.e. Receiving love by offering love is the fairest deal

⁴ I.e. We may enjoy the sweetness of God's forgiveness, because he drank the bitter vinegar and gall on the cross

In helle pyne be fendis knaue. *the devil's servant*
 Wip þy conscience þou trete *come to terms*
 144 Wheþer is þe leuere for to haue. *Which [of the two]; more desirable*

(19)

And þou madde in þy mood *are mad [enough]; mind*
 To werne me þe loue þou has, *deny*
 147 I wole caste on þe myn herte blod, *shed (v.)*
 To bere witesse þou forfetest gras; *As proof; forfeit; [my] grace*
 And my vengeance, þat is so wood, *terrible*
 150 Wip helle houndis in fyre þe chas. *the fire [of hell]; drives (v.)*
 Pou hast fre wille, knowest euylle and good;
 Chese where wyltow take þy plas. *place*

(20)

153 And þou of þy loue daungere make,⁵ *resistance*
 What may thy loue profyte me.
 And þou3 þou woldest me forsake,
 156 Out of my lordschipe þou my3t not fle. *power*
 Angels bry3t, and deueles blake,
 In helle and heuene, my lordschipes be. *[under] my control*
 159 Þere be no mo wayes to take,
 Is loue or hate more profyt to þe.⁶

(21)

3if þy loue to þy flesch doþ bende, *submits*
 162 To greue me þou dost bygynne. *make me angry*
 3if þou loue þe worlde, þat wole make ende, *will be the end*
 Of hym þou shalt more lese þan wynne. *By; lose*
 165 3if þou be suget, and loue þe fende, *subject to; Satan*
 He wole þe hate, and 3eue pyne for synne.
 Loue me, y am God, þy frende,
 168 And oure loues shal neuere twynne. *be separated*

(22)

Wheþer trewe loue go or sende,
 Hym thar not tary in his dede.⁷ *He must not be delayed*
 171 When mede haþ leue to stande byhynde,⁸

⁵ *If you withhold your love [from me]*

⁶ *What profits you more, love or hate?*

⁷ Ll. 169–70: *Whether true love goes [forth] or sends [forth]* (i.e. to find a friend in need, see l. 174), / *He must not tarry in the act*

⁸ *When worldly reward is allowed to stay behind* (i.e. is no longer of importance)

- Panne trewe loue his erande may spede. *mission; accomplish*
 Pou3 trewe loue haue lityl to spende,
 174 Euere he fyndeþ a frend at nede *Invariably; in need*
 Þat fro his foon wole hym fende. *Who; defend against*
 Who so is loued, hym thar not drede. *need not be afraid*
- (23)
- 177 God sayþ: y haue mercyes to dele; *give*
 Þat wole amende, no more do mys. *Who; wrong*
 My mercyes þousandes mo ken fele *feellenjoy*
 180 Þan þousandis worldis wikkidnes.⁹
 His herte blod wrot oure hele, *salvation*
 And Ihesus body þe parchemyn is; *parchment* (i.e. the document it was written on)
 183 Wiþ trewe loue he prented oure sele,¹⁰ *pressed; seal*
 Þat is heritage of oure blis.
- (24)
- Pere is an herbe þat hatteþ ‘trewe loue’, *is called*
 186 And by name it haþ no pere, *most certainly*
 Is lykned to Ihesus, y may proue: *[as] I can demonstrate*
 His handes and feet þe leues were,
 189 His herte was wiþ a spere þurgh shoue, *thrust through*
 Mannys loue was hym so dere.
 What soule is syk, lay þat herbe aboue, *Every soul that; on it*
 192 Hit makeþ hool al yfere. *all together* (i.e. entirely)
- (25)
- God biddiþ vs do no þynges but two:
 In loue and drede to hym bende; *submit*
 195 Lede þy soule lustes fro, *away from*
 World and flesch, and fro þe fende. *devil*
 Ihesus herte was cleued so, *pierced* (i.e. by the spear); *as it was*
 198 To lete out trewe loue to his frende. *allow to be poured out*
 In that blisse God graunte vs go, *walk*
 Pere trewe loue woneþ wiþ outhen ende.

NOTES

title ll. 4–5 point to the meaning ‘love whom God loves’, rather than ‘love who loves God’.

3 *mele*] Serves as rhyme tag.

28 *sechest*] Inserted as in Kail.

⁹ Ll. 179–80: *Thousands are able to feellenjoy my mercy more/ Than thousands the wickedness of the world*

¹⁰ I.e. He confirmed His covenant with repentant man with the seal of His true love.

35–36 Of the seven corporal works of mercy, the first six are based on Matt. 25:35–36, ‘For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me’. The seventh: ‘bury the dead’, is inspired by Tobit 1:17–19. Here, only four of the seven are mentioned.

63–64 The logical, reverse, order of the lines is prevented by the necessities of rhyme.

67–68 A Wycliffite notion, for which see the eighth of the ‘Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards’ (Hudson, 1978, p. 27, and 1988, p. 307).

69 The Christian article of faith that body and soul will be reunited on the day of resurrection finds expression throughout the New Testament, e.g. in John 5:28–29, ‘... all that are in the graves ... shall come forth ... onto the resurrection of life’, and in the text of the Creed: ‘... I believe in ... the resurrection of the body, and the everlasting life’.

76 *we*] MS *3e*.

80 *we*] MS *wet*.

88 *3e*] Kail *ye*.

102 *bede*] Kail renders ‘prayer’, but *loue* and *bede* are both imperatives here, like *sette*. The set phrase *loven and beden* (‘asking and offering a price, to bargain’) appears in *MED* s.v. *loven* (*v.*(2)) sub 3(a) with the meaning ‘ask a price for’, and s.v. *beden* (*v.*) sub 1(b), with the meaning ‘to offer (money for sth), bargain for’. Cf. Dutch ‘loven en bieden’.

129 *heuene toure*] Cf. the vision of heaven in *Piers Plowman*, Prov. 14, *I seigh a tour on a toft trieliche* (= choicely) *ymaked*, and I.12: ‘*The tour up the toft*’, *quod she* (= Holy Church), ‘*Truthe* (= God the Father) *is therinne*’.

131 *he drank ful soure*] See Matt. 27:34, ‘They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink’. As here, the second half of the verse is often disregarded. Whiting gives numerous ‘sweet and sour’ proverbs, see e.g. S 943, 945, 946, 947.

147 See Matt. 27:25, ‘Then answered all the people and said, His blood be on us, and on our children’.

179 *fele*] Kail glosses ‘much, many’, which makes for improbably distorted syntax.

181–83 The skin of Christ’s crucified body as the parchment on which is written the redeeming covenant between God and man is a common medieval metaphor known as the Charter of Christ. Repentant man pledges his love of God, and in return inherits heavenly bliss. In the so-called ‘Long Charter’ the metaphor is extended with detailed imagery, such as Christ’s blood as the ink with which the charter is written, and the wound in his side as the seal. Spalding (1914) provides a detailed discussion of the Charter of Christ.

196 Alludes to Eph. 6:11–12, ‘... that you may be able to stand against the whiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against ... the rulers of the darkness of this world’. The following verses (Phil. 6:13–17) describe the armour of *Goddis kny3t* (see also XVIII.69 and note). The fixed sequence: ‘world’, ‘flesh’, and ‘devil’, is of common occurrence in ME literature, and generally referred to as ‘the three foes of man’, or ‘the unholy trinity’. See e.g. in *The Sayings of St. Bernard* the description of man’s three foes: his flesh, the world and the fiend (Furnivall, 1892–1901, pp. 760–61). For a more detailed discussion of ‘the three foes’, see Jeffrey (1992, pp. 850–51).

197 See John 19:34, ‘But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water’. The spear also pierced the heart, it is held, which was thus opened to enable Christ’s love to be poured out towards mankind. The Sacred Heart in Catholic symbolism always shows the mark of the spear.

XVIII

THE DECLARYNG OF RELIGIOUN

explanation

SUMMARY

The double meaning of *religioun* in the title ('a pious life' and 'a life in holy orders') is faithfully reflected in the poem itself. The writer's thoughts on *religioun* are sometimes worded in general terms, applying both to a religious life as such and to a life in holy orders; in other places *religioun* refers to a set of principles and rules of conduct specifically applying to the monastic life.

At the start the author identifies *religioun* with obedience to the rules of charity, chastity, contemplation and devotion. Further on in the poem there is mention, in various detail, of such 'house rules', as how to deal with the temptations of the flesh, about the tonsure, monastic habit, vigils, fasting, liturgical prayers, as well as rules about relations with the outside world. If and when to touch hands with secular persons, on correspondence with the secular world, buying and selling at a profit, possession of private property, hours of prayer and work.

In between these concrete subjects pertaining to the monastic life, we find the poet's thoughts on what constitutes a pious life in general, whether in holy orders or not. Preoccupation with worldly matters leaves no room for a spiritual life, a pure heart and moral judgement. Nor does hypocritical obedience to religious duties help to get nearer to God. We must work hard to emulate those more pious than we are, keep away from the loose livers, exercise humility and frugality, love friend and foe, and be charitable in matters of justice.

TEXT

(1)

Who þat wole knowe condicion
Of parfyt lyf in alle degre:¹
3 God is foundour of religion,
Obedyent to charyte.
Swete þou3t in deuocion
6 Is weddid to chastite;
In brennyng contemplacion,
Þe hi3est lyf of spiritualte.

desire (v.); what constitutes

religious orders

[the rule of] charity

[Spiritually] agreeable

*Goes hand in hand
ardent; religious meditation*

¹ *Of a life governed in all respects by religious/monastic vows*

(2)

- 9 The goode lyueres in spirituale,
 Þe worldly lyueres hem doþ hate;
 Wiþ occupacioun of temperalte
 12 Dryueþ relegeon out at þe 3ate,
 For besynesse of vanyte,
 Vaynglory and hy3e astate.
 15 Þat þus chaungen here degre,
 Þey come to heuene neuere or late.²

*Those who live a good life
 hate them
 Engaging in worldly matters
 [They] drive
 matters
 office
 Who; their ways*

(3)

- What is religion in mynde.³
 18 In clene herte is soule o prys,
 Out of þraldom doþ vnbynde,
 A louer of vertues, a hatere of vys.
 21 Eche soule is parfyt clerk of kynde
 In hy3e discrecion, and wys.
 Of soules men may no fooles fynde,
 24 But assente to þe flesch and make hym nys.

*[It means that]; pure; of great value
 [Which]; servitude (to sin); frees
 [And is]
 in essence
 moral judgement
 Among; cannot
 Unless; yield; [of] themselves; fools*

(4)

- Religeon is champion in batayle,
 Discomfites hys enemy;
 27 3if temptacions hym assayle,
 Þere he hath þe victory.
 Religeon is trewe trauayle
 30 In Goddis seruyce, neuere werye.
 Haue mede wiþ martyres he may not fayle,⁴
 Þat euere is redy for to dy3e.

*victor
 Defeats

 means; faithful; labour
 weary

 Who*

(5)

- 33 Werkys wiþ oute discrecion:
 Vaynglory in staat is brou3t.⁵
 And shrift wiþ oute contricion:
 36 In skorne þe sacrament þey sou3t.
 And preyere wiþ oute deuocion:
 Þou3 þey preye, God hereþ hem nou3t.
 39 Þe lippes turne prayers vp so down,
 Þat spekeþ oþer þan herte þou3t.

*[Pious] acts; moral discernment

 confession
 contempt; the Eucharist; participated in

 turn upside down (i.e. make the reverse of)*

² I.e. They have very small chance of attaining heaven

³ *What is a religious life as we understand it*

⁴ *He cannot fail to receive his reward with the martyrs (i.e. in heaven)*

⁵ *Vainglory that has come to be held in high regard*

(6)

- Cherische no vices in 3oure warde, (i.e. of the monastery)
 42 To serue God in good atent; *proper; attitude*
 And non wiþ other be to harde, *severe*
 Pat ben professed in 3oure couent;⁶
 45 Pey my3te forþenke it afterwarde *regret*
 Pey tok þe abyte, and wolde repente;
 Pey lese of God a gret rewarde *forfeit; from*
 48 Whan wille fro religeon is wente. *fervour; turned away from*

(7)

- A questyon of 3ow y craue – *ask*
 Resoun assoyleþ it by skille – *will argue it out*
 51 Who may here soules saue
 To were an abyte, wole or nelle. *By; will they or will they not*
 Penk on þy berþe, þenk on þy graue, *birth*
 54 Py fleschely lustes not fulfille, *gratify*
 For helle ne heuene shal no man haue,
 Mawgre his teeth, a3eyns his wille.⁷ *Against; [own] desires*

(8)

- Þou3 þou be of gentyll blod, *noble ancestry*
 Penk alle com of Adam and Eue.
 Gadre not in propre worldis good;⁸ *[private] property*
 60 Pat nes no religeous, but worldis reue. *not [in accordance with]; spoils (n.)*
 Þe herre degre, þe mekere of mood.⁹
 Tak no vengeance, þou3 folk þe areue; *rob*
 63 Lat comon lawe stonde as hit stood, *be observed*
 Loke no proude herte þy charyte meue. *Beware; affect*

(9)

- Haue non enuye, day ne ny3t,
 66 To goode lyuers bet þan 3e, *those who live a better life*
 But auy3e faste wiþ alle þy my3t *strive constantly*
 To lyue beter þan doþ he;
 69 Pan countrefetest þou Goddis kny3t;
 Pat is enuye in charite. *you follow the example; soldier of God*
 Alle þou3tes in Goddis doom are di3t, *will be dealt with*
 72 And dedes, after þat þey be. *in accordance with what they consist of*

⁶ *Who have taken the vows of your monastery*

⁷ Ll. 55–56: i.e. For man has a free will; he has the choice of heaven or to hell

⁸ *Do not gather worldly goods into private possession*

⁹ *The higher the position, the humbler the heart*

(10)

- Tho þat lyuen in fleschly delys,
 Fro þat companye remewe; *distance yourself*
 75 Loue here bodyes, but not here vys, *persons; vices*
 And cherische hem to good vertue. *encourage*
 And þo þat wil al gate be nys, *always; foolish*
 78 Loke þou no3t here maneres sewe. *Take care; follow their ways*
 Go to company þat is wys,
 Lete fooles drynke þat þey dede brewe.¹⁰

(11)

- 81 Religeous, be war wiþ whom 3e stonde, *in whose company you are*
 Wiþ gentyles or folk þat worldly is,¹¹ *noble or common people*
 Þat 3e grype not hand in honde; *clasp hands with them*
 84 When 3e take leue loke not 3e kys. *kiss*
 Man to man hem thar not wonde, *hold back*
 Ne woman to woman no peryle ne is, *danger*
 87 But man to woman my3te breke þe bonde, *pledge [of chastity]*
 In towche is susspescioun of mys. *physical contact; sin*

(12)

- Suche towches not 3e byde, *put up with*
 90 Wolde buffete þe soule, and wounde wiþ ynne, *chastise; inwardly*
 3eue oþere cause, þat stonde bysyde, *[It would] give; near(by)*
 To wene it were a bargayn of synne. *think; pledge (n.)*
 93 Towches, in custom, þou3tis hide; *usually*
 Þan sclaundre and shame nylle not twynne. *Nota de*
 With conscience sclaundre and shame doþ chide; *religione,*
 96 To shewe opert he wol begynne. *&c. slander; disgraceful conduct; go away*
argue
show; openly; they

(13)

- With mekenesse 3e may heuene gete, *humility; obtain*
 Dispyse non in low degre; *look down on [people]*
 99 Resceyue no worschip, ne hy3e sete, *Accept; honour; position*
 Þat pryde go bytween God and þe, *So that; comes*
 Wolde make to hem self for3ete, *So that they; each other (i.e. God and you)*
 102 For worldis ryches and vanyte. *Because of*
 War for dronkenesse of drynkes grete, *Beware of*
 Fro glotry of metes of gret daynte.¹² *gluttony; food; excellence*

¹⁰ *Let fools take the consequences of what they have done*

¹¹ I.e. Of secular people, whether of noble or common descent

¹² *Against an intemperate appetite for choice dishes*

(14)

- 105 To religeon mekely bende,
 To serue God in loue and drede.
 To herkene tydynges not 3e wende,
 108 Ne bokes of vanyte not 3e rede.
 Resceyue no lettere, ne non out sende,
 But hit be for 3oure hous nede,
 111 Oþer to kyn or certeyn frende,
 In goodnes 3oure erande for to spede.

*[The rules of your] order; humbly; bow**listen to gossip; concern yourself with**[religious] house**Or; family; reliable**virtue; purpose (n.); serve*

(15)

- Kepe 3oure wacche and seruyce dewe,
 114 And rule of habyte clenely 3eme;
 And fille 3oure hertes wiþ good vertue,
 And wikked vyces fro 3ow 3e fleme,
 117 But loke deuocion growe ay newe.
 Be suche wiþ ynne as 3e outwarde seme.
 Good aungel and wikked boþe 3ow sewe,
 120 And wryten 3oure dedes þat shal 3ow deme.¹³

*vigils; mass; duly**regarding; habit; fully; heed**banish**intensifies; always**in your soul**follow you*

(16)

- Wacche not outrage in wast despence,¹⁴
 Fro hard to nyce þy flesh to fede.
 123 Wiþ bischop or shryfte 3e mowe despence,
 Fro hard to hardere 3oure lyf to lede.
 Withstonde temptacions, make defence;
 126 Þe moo 3e withstonde, þe more mede.
 And 3e wiþ seyntes willē haue reuerence,
 Þan moste 3e countrefete here dede.

*Guard (v.); intemperance; excessive; expenditure**firm; dissolute**confessor; do without**[If you want]; bad to worse**defend yourself [against them]**reward**If; from; respect**follow the example of*

(17)

- 129 Kepe sylence, whyder 3e byde or go,¹⁵
 Fro wordis of vanyte 3oure lippes steke.
 Speke faire to frend and fo,
 132 For fayre speche doþ wrappe breke.
 Þat doþ wrong, deme so.
 Lete not vengeance þy wrappe wreke.
 135 Vengeance is Goddis, he demeþ þo
 In werk and word, all þat men speke

*remain**close**courteously**judge [him] accordingly**revenge (v.)**those (i.e. whom it concerns)**By [their]*¹³ *And keep a record of your deeds, whereby you will be judged*¹⁴ *Be on your guard against overindulging in excessive expenditure*¹⁵ *I.e. Refrain from speaking, whether you are in or away from the monastery*

(18)

- In rule of religeon is ordeyned 3ore: *religious order; in the past*
 138 By3e no thyng to selle and wynne. *Buy; for gain*
 Marchaunt and religeous: on mot be forbore, *[The spirit of]; monk; one; given up*
 Pey may not wone on herte wiþynne. *remain present in*
 141 Ne kepe no iewels ne propre in store; *property; private possession*
 Pat nes no religeous, but dedly synne *in accordance with monastic spirituality*
 In fleschly delices, and loue it more *delights*
 144 To parte þy loue and God atwynne.¹⁶

(19)

- That þenkeþ good þou3t in sylence,
 Pey speken to God in specyale. *in particular*
 147 How mow 3e lette hem, for conscience, *prevent; in fairness*
 Calle hem to werkis genera[l]e.
 Summe bidden, in vertue of obedience, *pray; vow of obedience*
 150 Contemplatyf in spirituale; *Devout; religious duty*
 To religeon they don a gret defence *harm*
 Pat bryngen hem to werkis temperale. *tasks; worldly*

(20)

- 153 Hy3e astate, ne gentyl blod, *noble*
 Bryngeþ no man te heuene blisse.
 Gret hors, ne iewel, ne browded hood, *embroidered*
 156 Nes no cause of holynesse, *D* *o not constitute*
 But pore of spirit and meke of mood. *humble; disposition*
 3eue God þy soule, and eche man hisse. *his [due]*
 159 Gret lordschipe, ne myche good, *honour; many possessions*
 Nes no cause of sykernesse. *security*

(21)

- Tonsure, abyte, ne no wede, *habit; [religious] clothes*
 162 Nes no cause of religeon,
 Ne wakyng, ne fastyng, ne almesdede,
 Ne preyere, ne oreson, *Private nor liturgical prayer*
 165 But þe herte þerto take hede, *Unless; is moved*
 Wiþ werkys of discrecion. *morally conscious action*
 Deuocion makeþ soules to spede *causes; prosper*
 168 Wiþ werkis of contemplacion.

¹⁶ To cause separation between God and your love (i.e. love as a means of attaining union with God)

(22)

Religeon is most meke	<i>humble</i>
In abyte, of alle vertues floures.	<i>flowers</i> (i.e. height/glory)
171 Richesse ne worldis worschipe seke,	<i>honour</i>
But offre to God alle honoures.	<i>proffer</i>
Richesse and worschipe make soules syke,	<i>ill</i>
174 In vaynglory and sharp[e] shoures.	<i>violent storms</i> (i.e. hardship)
Make vertues þe wax, deuocioun þe wyke,	<i>your wax; wick</i>
To brenne bri3t in heuene boures.	<i>mansions</i>

(23)

177 Iustice is religeon in sete,	<i>religion; in court</i>
Ðat demep ri3t in alle degre.	<i>judge (v.); in all respects</i>
And queste is religeon, troupe to trete;	<i>inquest; find</i>
180 3eueþ eche man þat his schulde be.	<i>his due</i>
A child may wiþ his fader plete,	<i>argue</i>
And 3ut kepe his charyte,	<i>still; love</i>
183 And of his kyng blameles gete,	<i>innocent; gets [the verdict:]</i>
Lawe is so gentylle and so fre.	<i>generous; independent</i>

(24)

Þou3 summe of thy breþeren don a trespas,	
186 He wole amende and do no moo.	<i>They</i>
Paraurenture þou art in þe same cas,	<i>Perhaps</i>
Or after my3t ben in suche two. ¹⁷	
189 Loke not þat þou hym chace,	<i>See to it; harass</i>
Ne sclaundre hym not to haue shame and wo.	<i>calumniate</i>
Pray God for3eue hym of his grace,	
192 And kepe þe wel þou do not so.	<i>take heed</i>

NOTES

4 See 1 Cor. 14:1, 'Follow after charity'.

6 *neuere or late*] A common collocation, with variations such as *selden or neuer* and *now or neuere*.

56 Proverbial. See Whiting, T 406, 'Maugre (in spite of) one's teeth'.

57–58 Echoes the popular rebellious rhyme of the time: *When Adam dalf, and Eve span, / Who was thanne a gentilman* (Dean, 1996, p. 140).

57 *gentyll*] Kail's 'gentle' does not fit the context. See also ll. 82 and 153.

63 *comon lawe*] as administered in the king's courts.

69 *Goddis knyght*] The archetype of the *miles Christi*, 'the soldier of God' is described in Eph. 6:11–17, where he is urged to 'put on the whole armour of God', comprising 'the breastplate of righteousness',

¹⁷ *Or twice as many in the future*

‘the shield of faith’, ‘the helmet of salvation’, and ‘the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God’. The *miles Christi* metaphor is thoroughly treated with Jeffrey (1992, pp. 506–509).

80 Proverbial. See Whiting, B 529, ‘As one brews, let him drink’.

82 *gentyles*] in contrast with ordinary *folk*, as in ll. 57–58. See also l. 153. Kail’s gloss ‘godly people’ is out of context.

106 *serue God in loue and drede*] Echoes the stanzaic refrain in I.

123–24 Clearly anti-Wyclif and anti-Lollard. Wyclif held that God alone can forgive sins, since he alone can know the confessor’s state of mind; hence no priest or friar has power of absolution. See Hudson (1988, pp. 294–301).

138 Quoted in *MED* s.v. *winnen* sub 3a(d.) with the definition ‘to exact extortionate profits; benefit materially by usurious practices or sharp dealings’. But extortion and usury do not come into it. The clergy was simply forbidden to buy and sell at a profit, which is what this line says.

148 *generale*] MS *generall*. See the discussion of scribal crossed *ll*-variations in section 2.5.3.

153 *gentyll*] See the notes to ll. 57 and 82.

157 Alludes to Matt. 5:3, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’.

174 *shoures*] Kail glosses ‘abundance’, but the combination with *sharpe* points to suffering.

180 A literal rendering of the legal tenet of *suum cuique tribuere*.

XIX

SUMMARY

The poem is in the 'Complaint of God' tradition. God says: 'I created you in my image, I became man, and redeemed your sins on the cross. All for my love of you. Now, what have you done for me? What have I done or missed, that you refuse to return my love? You turned away from me in anger, submitting to the sins of the flesh. Repent; stop calling good what is bad, and remember that I am not only a merciful, but also a righteous and avenging God. You have a free will and can make your own choice between heaven and hell. It is so easy to please me: just forsake your sinful pleasures, exert yourself to perform the seven acts of mercy, and observe the Ten Commandments and the Creed.'

TEXT

(1)

[I]n my conscience I fynde, And in my soule I here and see, 3 To repreue man þat is vnkynde, Goddis wordis þis may be: Man of resoun, haue in mynde, 6 I made þe lyk ymage to me. For loue y hadde to mankynde I toke manhed, lyk to þe.	<i>[That]; reprove; rebellious [against God] words; these keep Because of became man</i>
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(2)

9 Mannys loue y 3erned 3ore, þat loue was in myn herte sou3t; Mannys loue sat me so sore, 12 Nas neuere bargayn derrere bou3t. ¹ Man, is þe laft no loue in store. What is þe cause þou louest me nou3t. 15 Telle me 3if y my3te don more, What is byhynde þat lakkeþ þe ou3t.	<i>desired; for a long time desired troubled purchase (n.) left (v.); store (i.e. [your] heart) missing; at all</i>
--	---

¹ I.e. Never have I paid more dearly for what I did

(3)

- For þy loue y meked me lowe, *humbled*
 18 And dyʒed on þe rode tre. *cross*
 Answer, man, and be aknowe, *confess*
 Shewe what þou suffred for me. *Show*
 21 For suche seed as þou dost sowe,
 Þerof shal þyn heruest be,
 In heuene or helle to repe and mowe: *reap and mow* (i.e. get one's deserts)
 24 As þou deserued fong þy fee. *you [will] receive; wages*

(4)

- Man, to þe y make my mone, *complaint*
 I bouʒt þe fro pyne to blisse; *to [attain]*
 27 Melte þyn herte, as hard as stone,
 Þouʒ it be late, amende þy mysse. *Soften*
 In wrappe þouʒ þou be fro me gon, *misdeeds*
 30 Turne aʒayn, y wol þe kysse. *back*
 To make me frendis of my fon, *enemies*
 Þerfore y ʒaf my lyf for hysse. *theirs*

(5)

- 33 Be war, and loue not worldis good,
 To gete wiþ wrong, and calle it thyn. *in a sinful manner*
 Man, haue it in þy mood: *keep in mind*
 36 Þou shalt rekene, for alle is myn.
 Why bouʒte y þe on the rood. *give an account [of your conduct]; everything*
 For þou shulde serue, and be myn hyne. *cross*
 39 Make not myn argumentis wood² *servant*
 To caste þe fro blisse to pyne. *reasons; angry*

(6)

- Man, why turmentest þou me so.
 42 Euere þy synnes don encresce, *Constantly; add to*
 And þy vices waxen moo, *further*
 And þy vertues wanen lesse. *dwindle*
 45 Thenke good y be thy foo. *[can] be your enemy* (i.e. a vengeful God)
 Whanne wylt þou of þy synne ses, *put an end to*
 Haue mercy on þy soule woo, *Have concern for*
 48 Or haue mynde on me, and ʒeue me pes. *And*

² I.e. Do not make me reason in anger [why I should not]

(7)

To suffre deþ y meked me,
 Fro pyne to blisse þy soule to wynne.
 51 To me so shuldest þou meke þe,
 Leue and forbere þy synne.
 Fro my lordschipe myȝt þou not fle,
 54 Heuene ne helle, ne see wiþ ynne,
 But where and whenne my wille be
 Þy body and soule to parte o twynne.

*humbled myself**in return**reign (n.)**deep in the sea**I may decide**separate (v.)*

(8)

57 Thouȝ y haue graunted þe grace
 To knowe boþe good and ylle,
 Wyte þy self in eche a place,
 60 Wheþer þou wylt þy self spille.
 Þouȝ flesch and world and fend [þe] chas,
 Temptacion profre þe tille,³
 63 Þou myȝt forbere and nouȝt trespas;
 I lente þe knoweleche and fre wille.

*gift**Ask; wherever you are**ruin (v.)**devil; harass**It is in your own power; not*

(9)

In syknesse and pouerte,
 66 Glade þerynne, and þanke me alle.
 Þe more þou hast þerof plente,
 Þe nerre þe be y shalle.
 69 Þan say: Lord, kepe me neyȝ þe;
 At nede here me when y calle.
 Take fro me hele and prosperite,
 72 Raþere þan lete me fro þe falle.

*Rejoice; for everything**nearer**near**In [times of]**health*

(10)

Man, rewe on my paynes sore,
 Repente þy synne, and mercy craue.
 75 By my woundes swere no more,
 Dysmembre no lymes þat y haue.⁴
 Þy wrong wynnyng aȝen restore,
 78 Ȝif þou wilt þy soule saue.
 Lete soule be lord, and go byfore,
 And make þy body þy soule knaue.

*feel pity for**ask for**ill-gotten gains; return**take precedence**subservient to*

³ *Hold out temptation to you*

⁴ I.e. Do not profane me by naming parts of my body in oaths

(11)

- 81 Man, and þou wist how *if*
 So li3tly my gre to make,⁵
 Pou noldest, for alle þe worldis prow, *would no want; wealth*
 84 For fleschly lustes me forsake.
 In þy lyue besye þe now, *exert yourself*
 In goode werkis wysely wake; *be diligent*
 87 In loue [and] drede to me bow,
 And fle to me fro synnes blake. *black*

(12)

- Seuene werkis of mercy, kepe hem welle,
 90 Þe comaundementis and þe Crede.
 Alle þy lyue, as y þe telle,
 3eue me þyn herte in loue and drede.
 93 Whyle body and soule to gydre dwelle,
 Pou my3t serue pyne and mede.⁶ *deserve*
 When soule is out of flesch and felle,⁷ *skin*
 96 Shal neuere do synne ne almesdede. *no longer*

(13)

- Mayntene not wrong to calle it ry3t. *Persist in*
 Vengeaunce and mercy ney3ebores ben þo; *they*
 99 As messageres þey ben dy3t, *[God's] messengers; appointed*
 Mercy to frend, vengeaunce to foo.
 3oure dede in derk y se in sy3t, *clearly*
 102 Þere nys no þou3t hid me fro.
 After þy dede þe doom is dy3t; *judgement; passed/administered*
 Vengeaunce and mercy departeþ hem so. *are distributed; accordingly*

(14)

- 105 For my doom is ri3twisnesse,
 Ri3twys longeþ to þe godhede; *Rightful(ly); belongs*
 And my sones dom is wys,
 108 For mercy longeþ to þe manhede.
 Þe Holy Gost grace lys, *grants*
 He 3eueþ lyf, he 3eueþ no dede. *death*
 111 Ouercome my wrapþe and fle fro vys, *Appease*
 And do þe comaundementis þat y bede.

⁵ *How easily you can win my favour*

⁶ I.e. It is in your power to deserve either punishment or reward

⁷ I.e. When the soul has left the body

NOTES

title Missing in the manuscript (as also in XX). For a discussion of the missing title and initial capital, see section 2.2. Kail conjectures: 'God's Appeal to Man'.

17–18 Cf. Phil. 2:8, 'he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death on the cross'.

21–22 Proverbial. See Whiting, S 542, 'As one sows so shall he reap'.

27 Cf. Ezek. 11:19, '... and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh'. See also Whiting, H 277.

87 [*and*] The set phrase is *loue and drede*, as in l. 92 and throughout the other Poems (see e.g. I.40; VIII.31; XVIII.106).

92 Alludes to Prov. 23:26, 'My son, give me thine heart'.

XX

SUMMARY

This poem might be seen as a companion piece of the Complaint of God to Man in the preceding poem XIX.

Here fleshly man complains to God that God's son Jesus has wooed away man's beloved, his soul. The complaint reads as a traditional secular love story. The soul, earlier man's paramour and completely subservient to him, has left him to start a passionate love affair with Jesus. She repudiates contemptuously man's entreaties, and declares herself completely contrary to anything he suggests. Man is not so much averse to Jesus' intentions with regard to mankind in general, as his successful efforts to conquer man's soul with promises of a superb home with him in heaven. She comes to treat man like dirt, accusing him of a wicked, blasphemous and wastefully luxurious life.

Man pleads earnestly with God to be united again with his soul, but Jesus and the soul prove inseparable. He loves her to the extent that he was prepared to die for her on the cross. In her turn she is firmly resolved to stick to Jesus throughout his life, his death and his ascent into heaven, and faithfully to follow his example.

God replies, reproving man for his empty complaints, indeed for his sinful life, and praising the soul for her conduct. God points out that it is not man, but Jesus who has reason to complain, his bountiful love for man remaining unrequited. So there is every reason for man to confess and repent, in return for which God is more than willing to forgive him. In the future, man should take what is coming to him uncomplainingly. Then God will bring him unflinchingly to the bliss of his heaven.

TEXT

(1)

The tixt of holy writ, men sayn,
Hit sleep, but glose be among.¹

³ The spirit of vnderstandyng quykenep agayn,²
And makep the lyue endeles long.
A fantasie y herde sayn,

*Holy Scripture
kills; unless; comment (n.)*

*life; eternal
imaginary conversation*

¹ I.e. Is daunting, unless explanatory comment goes with it

² *The desire to comprehend restores [the soul] again*

6 Thereof me lust to make a song,
 How mannys flesch to God dede playn
 On Ihesu Crist, had don hym wrong.

I wish(ed)
complain
About

(2)

9 The flesch his playnt þus doþ bygynne
 To God fader, in heuene on hy3t:
 Ihesu, brother of oure kynne,
 12 Haþ bygyled me wiþ his sley3t.
 He haþ parted my soule and me o twynne,
 And raft [here] fro me by his my3t.
 15 Now, ry3twys God, let mercy blynne.
 On Ihesu, þy sone, do me ry3t.

our kin (i.e. mankind)
deluded; cunning
divided into two (i.e. separated)
stole; strength
righteous; forgiveness; cease
On (i.e. in my case against)

(3)

Body and soule þou dede me make
 18 In vnyte to gydre so.³
 Now haþ Ihesu my soule take,
 And þus parted oure loue o two.
 21 My soule haþ me [?now] forsake;
 Sum tyme was frend, now is fo;
 Byd me go wolward, faste and wake,⁴
 24 Alle here ioye is of my woo.

closey
Requires; dressed in wool; fast (v.)
her; for; misery

(4)

Fro me to þy sone my soule is flet;
 Ful ofte þy sone in me here sou3te;
 27 Now here loue to hym so fast is knete,
 Away fro hym wol sche nou3t.
 She semes dronken, or out of wit,
 30 Of myn euelfare she has no þou3t.
 Þat sorwe is so in myn herte hit,
 I trowe to deþe y mon be brou3t.

has fled
sought her
closey; knit
misfortune
has struck so forcefully
believe; must

(5)

33 Sum tyme my soule was mylde
 To my bidyng, in hoot and colde,
 Synge or playe, or chambres bylde,
 36 Chef seruaunt of myn housholde.
 Now Ihesu haþ made here made and wylde,

Once; compliant
 (i.e. at all times)
[To] sing; dwellings (i.e. castles in the air)
mad; wild

³ Ll. 17–18: *Body and soul you joined together in unity*

⁴ [*My soul*] *requires me to be penitent* (i.e. to wear a rough woolen shirt on the naked body), *to fast and to keep vigil*

Fro hym departe neuere she nolde. *does not want*
 39 She setteþ on hym ri3t as a childe, *clutches*
 A3ens me she bereþ here bolde. *behaves; with hostility*

(6)

Whan I of here counseil craue *from; assent (n.); ask*
 42 Of fleschly lustes to haue my wille, *mad*
 She calleþ me wod, and seyþ y rauē; *consent to it*
 She wille neuere graunte þertille. *urges; to think about*
 45 She biddeþ me haue mynde of my graue, *To control myself; good sense; moderation*
 Rule me in resoun and skille. *slave*
 I was mayster, now am y knaue; *reduce me to*
 48 In that stat brynge me she wille.

(7)

Wolde y be proud, she biddeþ be meke;
 Wolde y be gloton, she biddeþ me faste;
 51 Pere y wolde take, she biddes me eke;⁵ *[to] increase (v.)*
 Wolde y be lyther, she biddis be chaste; *wicked*
 3if y fy3te, she biddes ley forþ my cheke; *lay forth (i.e. expose)*
 54 Pere y am slow, she biddis be haste; *quick*
 Here answee is not to seke;⁶ *need not be sought*
 To speke to here, my wynde y waste. *breath; waste (v.)*

(8)

57 Ihesu com fro heuene blisse, *came*
 And tok flesch in a mayden fre, *assumed; gracious*
 Lowely and most [in] mekenesse, *Humbly; supreme; humility*
 60 Hyd vnder flesch oure fraternite. *Covered; in; state of being brothers*
 Now wold take my soule to his, *him*
 For he suffred pyne and pouerte.
 63 3it sumwhat y my3te acorde to þis,⁷
 But why shulde my soule hate me.

(9)

Whan Ihesu and my soule be met,
 66 Sone my werkis þey aspi3e: *deeds; espy*
 Here wit on me fast þey whet: *minds; eagerly; sharpen*
 In shame and skorne and vylenyē *disgrace; immoral behaviour*
 69 To folwe þy fleschly lustes let, *cease*

⁵ *When I want to take [from others], she instructs me to increase [my wealth by my own efforts]*

⁶ *I.e. She need not look for an answer*

⁷ *Indeed, to some extent I can agree to this*

Or ellis boþe 3e shal dy3e.

Þus am y vnder and ouer set;

72 She spettes on me, and doþ me fy3e.

*both (i.e. you and your soul)
from all sides; set upon
spits; expresses disgust of*

(10)

Wiþ me my soule he doþ þrete,

And makeþ my soule me to hate.

75 Wiþ plesande wordis he hotēþ here gete

In heuene blisse a quenes astate.

Þan comeþ she hom in wrāþþeful hete,

78 Bedēþ here lette, boþe erly and late,

Casteþ me doun and doþ me bete,

And tredeþ on me, and makeþ debate.

*Against; warns
causes
promises; to get
position
furious anger
Begg; to let [her] be
quarrels (v.)*

(11)

81 Thanne renneþ she a3en, as she were wood;

To Ihesu, þy sone, she doþ fly3e.

He fedēþ here wiþ his flesch and blood,

84 But þanne here þou3tes mownten hy3e.

She biddiþ me water and bred to food;

As mortkyn forsaken she let me li3e.

87 She holdeþ me euylle and no þyng good,

But a stynkyng carayne in here ey3e.

*as if; mad
flees
And; ascend to great heights
to live only on
carcass
regards
corpse*

(12)

Þus my soule my body slees,

90 Wiþ gret anguysche and turment.

She telles: Ihesu dy3ed for pes;

But fro his skole she is went.⁸

93 Bytwen vs werre doþ encres,

Here swerdē is drawn, here bow is bent.

She sayþ: but fleschly lustes sees,

96 We mon be dede, and boþe be shent.

*castigates
agony
unless; cease
will; [spiritually] dead; destroyed*

(13)

She acordid wiþ Ihesu, and me dede flyte,

And sayde y shulde be maked tame,

99 And sayde my werkys me adyte,

And bryngen me in wikked fame.

3if worldly men me don smyte,

102 And don me boþe wrong and grame,

*came to an agreement; fled from
subdued
condemn
give me a bad reputation
make me suffer
injure me*

⁸ I.e. But she does not practice his teachings (of peace) herself

She loueþ that don me despyte,
And preyep for alle þat don me shame.

*Speak ill of
bring disgrace on*

(14)

105 Hy3e fader, God of ri3twisnes,
Haue mynde of my sorwe sore.
And it be founden Ihesu loued mysse,
108 To me my soule a3en restore –
A litil playnt nes no3t þisse,
And alle þat y haue sayd 3ore –
111 Þat y and my soule be frendis and kisse,
And loue as we dede here byfore.

If; loved [my soul]; in error

small; request

earlier

So that

(15)

For my soule Ihesu suffred wo,
114 Bounden and beten wiþ skourges ynowe,
Crowned wiþ thorn, nayled also
On croos, tyl deþ dede hym bowe.
117 Wiþ a spere his herte let cleue a two,
Wyde open his loue my3te out flowe,
So loþ hym was his loue forgo;⁹
120 He is worþy be loued þat so dede wowe.

[He was]; many

could

so [earnestly]; courted

(16)

My soule, y holde, holy [es it],
For she loueþ Ihesu, þat loueþ here wel.
123 But loue were tendere to loue vsed,
Were harder þan ston, and styffere þan stel.
On Ihesu she is amerous and ful auysed;
126 What worldly þyng she seeþ or fele,
Al worldly ioye she haþ refused,
And me she loueþ neuere a dele.

in my regard

Unless; gently; made familiar with

more unyielding

quite resolved

not at all

(17)

129 I wante my wille, and euel fare y,
Fro worldly merþe put o syde.
Fro worldis worschip she doþ me tary.
132 I may no þou3t fro here hyde.
Þere y blisse, she doþ wary;
Þere y speke fayre, she doþ chyde.
135 She is newe waxen al contrary;
Þere y dwelle, she nyl not byde.

am not getting; badly; feel

joy; deprived of

esteem; keeps away from

can; hide

am full of joy; complains bitterly

pleasantly; scolds

recently; hostile

⁹ *So much he hated forsaking his love [of my soul]*

(18)

- She repreueþ my dagged cloþes,
 138 And longe pyked crakowed shon;
 Vpbreyde[þ] me my grete oþes,
 And sayþ y breke Goddis bone.¹⁰
 141 Þat me is lef, alle she loþes.
 I seye: oþere men so don.
 She seyþ: þey go to helle woþes.
 144 Wole to wende, wiþ hem to wone.¹¹

showy
shoes with long pointed toes
Reproaches; oaths

despises

punishment
live

(19)

- Wiþ Ihesu alway is she,
 And now she lyþ wiþ hym in cracche,
 147 Now into Egipt wiþ hym doþ fle
 Fro Herowdes, lest he hem cacche.
 In his moder armes born wol she be,
 150 And sowke wiþ hym, as chylde in tacche.
 She folweþ hym in al degre,
 And countrefeteþ to ben his macche.

*manger**carried*

suck; together with; at the nipple
respects
follows his example; bride

(20)

- 153 Wiþ hym doþ drynke and ete,
 To lerne of his discessioun;
 Wiþ hym sche is skourged and bete,
 156 And crucyfyed in his passioun;
 She is wiþ hym in helle hete,
 Wiþ hym in his resurexioun,
 159 And stye into heuene in his fadres se[t]e,
 Pens nolde she neuere come down.

*about; moral judgement**suffering**ascends; home*

(21)

- Now þe playnt is at þe last.
 162 God answerde wiþ mylde soun:
 Flesch, he sayde, þou iangelest fast,
 Moche dene and no resoun.
 165 Alle þy wordes þou dost waste;
 Wille wiþ oute discessioun;
 Pyn awen pleynt þe doþ caste;
 168 Þou turnest þy self vp so down.¹²

*has come to an end**voice*

argue; a great deal
[noisy] clamour; sound thinking

*Wilfulness; sound judgement**throws you (i.e. defeats your own case)**upside down*

¹⁰ I.e. And says that my behaviour is torture to God

¹¹ *Would you want to go [there,] [too,] to live with them?*

¹² I.e. You put yourself in a state of confusion

(22)

- Thou makest maystershepe in al vys,
 And here [turnest] fro my way,
 171 And makest here þral to fleschely delys,
 In vanyte to al worldly play.
 She is ashamed, now she is wys;
 174 Sche lyued in vowtrye so many a day.
 She haþ chosen þe loue most o prys,
 And cast þe fals[e] loue away.

excel; vices
her (i.e. the soul)
slave
frivolous pursuit; pleasures

adultery
precious

(23)

- God seip: man, y made þe of nou3t,
 And kyd þat y loued þe dere,
 And soule of resoun in þe wrou3t,
 180 Fayre and wys, angels pere.
 Pou hast defouled þe ymage þat y wrou3t,
 In seruage to fendis and fendis fere.
 183 Sche folwed þy wille in dede and þou3t,
 In alle place, fer and nere.

showed

Sound; equal
profaned
servitude; companions

(24)

- On Ihesu þou pleynt dost make,
 186 Sayde he bigyled þe wiþ sley3te,
 And biddest me lete mercy slake,
 And on Ihesu do þe ry3t.
 189 My sone for þe dede deþ take,
 And kydde þe loue most of my3t.
 Þou3 he loue dede forsake,
 192 How woldest þou þis doom were dy3t.

Against
deceived; trickery
forgiveness; cease
against; deal justly with you
suffered
showed; most powerful
Since; gave up
case; dealt with

(25)

- Flesch, þy synnes mochil is;
 Pou art cast in þyn awen caas.
 195 Knowleche, repente, and mende þy mys,
 And be in wille no more trespas.
 I nel deme þe in ry3twisnes,
 198 But medle þerwiþ mercy and grace,
 And brynge þy soule to heuene blys,
 Wiþ loue to se me fayre face.

are many
caught; case
Confess
desirous; to do wrong
in righteousness (i.e. by the rules of the law)
mix

(26)

- 201 In ouerhope, be not to bold
 In synne, for to haue mercy.
 Let not wanhope in þe be old,

unjustified hope; too daring

exist long

- 204 For my grace is euere redy.
 Fro helle pynes hoot and cold *torments*
 I assoyle þe, and out of purgatory. *release*
- 207 At þy deth, or body be cold, *before*
 To Ihesu in heuene þy soule shal fleye.
- (27)
- In good werkis wysely wake, *be diligent*
 210 Playne not on Ihesu, what he sende; *whatever*
 Sykenes, pouerte, mekely take, *humbly*
 Richesse and hele wysely spende, *wealth*
- 213 And helpe alle pore for Goddis sake.
 Ðan God wole lede 3ow, as his frend,
 To ioye of heuene þat shal neuere slake. *diminish*
- 216 Into þat blisse, God graunte vs wende. Amen *to go*

NOTES

title Missing in MS. Kail conjectures: 'How Man's flesh complained to God against Christ'.

14 [*here*] Kail *it*. 'The soul' admittedly is neuter in other Digby poems (see e.g. VIII.91–92, XI.99–100, XVII.77–78), but throughout the present poem the soul is consistently feminine as the beloved of Christ.

21 [*?now*] Follows Kail's conjectural insertion. An insertion is clearly required, but admittedly almost any other contextually suitable adverb will do.

23 [*go wolward*] My gloss as in *MED* s.v. *wolward* (*adj.*). In addition, *MED* s.v. *welleward* (*adv.*) glosses *go wolward* as 'the act or practice of going to a well to keep vigil for devotional purposes'. *MED* adduces two quotes for this meaning, both from *Dives and Pauper*, but neither of them gives convincing textual support.

45 [*haue mynde of my graue*] The traditional *memento mori* theme.

59 [*in*] makes better sense contextually than Kail's insertion *of*.

60 [*flesch*] MS *flesch fleschly*.

61 Kail unnecessarily inserts *he* before *take*.

83 [*flesch and blood*] i.e. the bread and wine of the Eucharist.

121 [*es it*] MS *it es*. Scribal inversion error, as evidenced by the rhyme scheme.

125 [*amorous*] *MED*, quoting this line s.v. *amorous* (*adj.*) sub 4.(a), glosses 'devoted to', but straightforward 'amorous' seems preferable, the description of the 'love affair' between Christ and the soul bearing overtones of courtly love throughout the poem.

139 [*Vpbreydeþ*] MS *Vpbreyde*, but should parallel *repreueþ* in l. 137.

159 [*sete*] MS *see*.

176 [*false*] MS *fals*. Emended to restore the metre.

183 [*Sche*] Kail *She*, but MS *Sche* is a common variant.

197–98 Echoes I.135, *His mercy is medled with his right*.

201 St. (26): the same warning, similarly phrased, against *ouerhope* and *wanhope* is found in I.(17) and VII.(13).

XXI

A LERNYNG TO GOOD LEUYNGE

instruction

SUMMARY

Man will be blessed, says Christ, according to eight deserts, and the writer expands in turn on the reasons why Christ's blessing is pronounced on those who practice each of these virtues. The humble are generous, charitable and wise counsellors. The meek are openhanded, pacifiers and spiritual healers. The sorrowful repent their sins, obey God, restore illicit gains, and aid the poor. Who hunger and thirst for righteousness seek God and man's fair due and the amendment of sins. The merciful seek no revenge, give to the poor, cheer the troubled and feed the hungry. The peacemakers obey God, want all wars to cease, and the enemies of God to become God's friends. The pure of heart observe God's laws, conform to their destined position and conduct in life, and practice charity. The persecuted for righteousness' sake remain charitable in their oppression, and will find refuge with God.

As an antithesis to, and following each blessing, the author proclaims eternal doom for the sinners whose misdeeds are exactly the reverse of the virtues of the blessed. It should be noted here that the gist of the four curses, or 'woes', in Luke 6, where they follow after the four Beatitudes, does not tally with the substance of our author's curses.

The poem ends, as the corresponding passage in the Gospel, with God's blessing on all people who speak the word of God, the key to heaven for the people who hate and curse you. So fear God, not the worldly oppressor, and be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

TEXT

(1)

Pore of spirit blessed be,	
Pou3 he be lord of richesse fele.	<i>owner</i>
3 He bereþ penaunce and pouerte,	<i>endures hardship</i>
That of his good to pore folk dele.	<i>Who; wealth</i>
Of þe kyngdom of heuene a lord is he,	<i>In; occupies a most eminent position</i>
6 Þat counseyleþ wel to soule hele, ¹	
And lyueþ in werkis of charyte.	<i>lives for [the sake of]</i>
Suche folk to heuene preuyly stele.	<i>quietly; steal away</i>

¹ *Who give good advice towards the salvation of the soul*

(2)

- 9 Siþ God doþ blisse, and graunteþ blis
 Pat don his word, and holde it trewe,²
 Ðan þat man cursed is,
 12 Pat lyueþ contrarious þat vertue,
 Pat filleþ his herte wiþ ryches,
 Nedeles aueryce gadryng newe;
 15 For wikkid counseil, helle is his,
 Ðere neuere nes reste, but euere remewe.

causes (i.e. is the source of); *grants*
[To those] who
It follows that

[Out of]; new [riches]
advice
change (n.)

(3)

- Blessid be man þat in herte is mylde,
 18 Buxom to lerne, and lef to teche,
 Shal owe þe erþe, and þeron bylde,
 In helpe of mony his rychesse reche,
 21 Of shrewes make Goddis childe,
 Of gostly woundes be soule leche,
 Make tame to God þo þat were wylde.
 24 Of eche good lyuere his werkis preche.

Eager; glad
possess; build (i.e. make his home)
many [people]; gives
wicked people
spiritual; healer

speak [for themselves]

(4)

- Ðanne cursed be man in herte ruyde,
 Pat neuere nel lere ne vnderstond.
 27 Ðou3 he owe erþe, he shal not byde
 Til it be out of his hond.³
 When conscience his werkis chyde,
 30 Pat man shal neuere reioyse lond.
 Fro alle vertues þat doþ hym hyde,
 To alle myscheues he makeþ hym bon[d].

obdurate
will not; learn
possesses; wait

disapproves of
enjoy [the possession of]
he hides himself from
wickedness: slave

(5)

- 33 Blessed be he þat morneþ sore
 His breþere synnes, his awen mysdede
 Repente, and wille to do no more,
 36 But holde þe hestes þat God bede,
 His wrong wynnyng a3en restore,
 And helpe pore þat han nede.
 39 He shal be counforted þerfore,
 In heuene blisse haue his mede.

mourns; grievously
brothers'; wrongdoings

commandments
wrongful gains

comforted
reward

² *To those who do his will and remain faithful to it*

³ *I.e. Till he has lost it again*

(6)

Than cursed be he haþ ioye of synne,	<i>he (who)</i>
42 And euere encreseþ mo and mo,	<i>adds [to them]</i>
Boste þerof, delyte þerynne,	<i>Boasts</i>
3eue men ensample to do so,	<i>likewise</i>
45 Heuene 3ates fro hem they pynne,	<i>against; them[selves]; lock (v.)</i>
Of Goddis frendis make Goddis foo;	
In helle þey purchas here ynne;	<i>acquire; their; lodging</i>
48 His felaschipe with hym thay go.	<i>followers</i>

(7)

Blessed euere mote he be,	<i>they</i>
Ðat hungren and thursten ry3twisnes;	<i>[after] righteousness</i>
51 He wolde were wel in al degre	<i>They; it would be; respects (n.)</i>
Ðat God and man echon had his.	<i>each; his [due]</i>
Gostly hunger and thurstes he	<i>Spiritually; hunger (v.); thirst (v.)</i>
54 Ðat fayn wolde mende þat is mys.	<i>gladly</i>
Ful filled he shal wiþ grete deynte	<i>Gratified; abundance</i>
At Goddis feste in heuene blisse.	

(8)

57 Than cursed is he þat ful is fylde,	<i>[already] satiated</i>
Wiþ wrong take pore mennys thrift,	<i>Wrongfully; savings</i>
Ðat makeþ pore men be [spilde],	<i>ruined</i>
60 For synguler profyt is sotylle theft;	<i>personal gain; deceitful</i>
Make gulteles folk presoned and kylde,	<i>Causes; innocent; to be killed</i>
Of hous and land make wrongwys gyft;	<i>makes a gift; illegal</i>
63 Wiþ hunger and þirst his hous is bylde.	
In helle is shewed euelle sponnen wyft. ⁴	<i>becomes visible; faultily spun weft/fabric</i>

(9)

Blessid be þe mercyable;	<i>merciful</i>
66 Mercy and mede of God he fonges.	<i>reward; receives</i>
In Goddis doom he stondes stable	<i>judgement; securely</i>
Ðat wrekeþ not alle his owen wronges.	
69 To pore folk he is profytable	<i>helpful</i>
Ðat leueþ his good hem amonges. ⁵	
Sorefulle and hungry, he fyndeþ hem table,	<i>The distressed; meal</i>
72 The sorwefulle he gladeþ to synge songes.	<i>gladdens</i>

⁴ I.e. In hell it becomes clear the evil he had done in his lifetime

⁵ *Who leaves his possessions with them*

(10)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>Thanne, how of hem han hertis stoute
 Pat rewep non pore þat han penaunce,
 75 Han nedeles gold no3t to lene it oute,
 But to þe borwere gret greuaunce;
 But he may quyte, is 3erne aboute
 78 To presone hym or make destauce;
 But he be cursed it is in dowte;⁶
 Þat haþ no mercy, mote haue vengeaunce.</p> | <p><i>about those; cruel
 do not care about; suffer hardship
 unnecessary
 But [that]; borrower; [causes] much distress
 Unless; repays [his debt]; diligently busy
 cause trouble
 compassion; receive retribution</i></p> |
|--|---|

(11)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>81 Blessed be he þat louep pes,
 Mekely to Goddis byddyng bende.
 He shal be cleped, at Goddis dees,
 84 Goddis sone, good and hende.
 He wolde alle werre shulde asses,
 Of Goddis foon make Goddis frende,
 87 Make soule wiþ ioye to heuene pres,
 And sorwe and werre to helle wiþ fende.</p> | <p><i>Humbly; submits
 throne
 virtuous
 cease
 Cause (v.); proceed with haste
 fiends</i></p> |
|--|--|

(12)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>Than, how of hem þat pes doþ hate,
 90 Wolde oueralle were werre and woo,
 Eche man wiþ oþer debate,
 Pat shulde be frend, make hem foo.
 93 For synguler wynnyng to his astate⁷
 Ledde his men oþere to sloo;
 He shal be blessed neuere or late;
 96 His werkis curseþ hym where he go.</p> | <p><i>everywhere
 quarrels
 He leads; kill
 everywhere</i></p> |
|---|--|

(13)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>The clene of herte blissed be,
 Pat lyueþ after Goddis lore;
 99 God hym self he shal see,
 Pere as blisse is euere more;
 And gouerneþ wel his owen degre,
 102 And doþ þe dede þat he come fore;
 Fulfylleþ þe werkis of charyte;
 His vertue gadereþ mede in store.</p> | <p><i>pure
 commandments
 Where; for ever
 manages; station [in life]
 for which he was born
 reward</i></p> |
|---|--|

⁶ But he has reason to fear that he is condemned [to hell]

⁷ To add even more personal gains to his possessions

(14)

- 105 The herte þat is fyled in synne, *defiled*
 And sulpeþ his soule wiþ spottes of blame, *pollutes; stains; disgrace*
 Goddis curs he doþ wynne *incurs*
- 108 Þat spyseþ hym self and Goddis name. *puts to shame*
 His astate he nele not dwelle þer ynne; *position in life*
 To serue God hym þenkeþ shame. *considers; disgrace*
- 111 3if God and he departe o twynne, *separate*
 In helle he may be meked tame. *be tamed*

(15)

- That is p[ur]sued for ri3twisnes *persecuted; because of [his]*
- 114 Is blessid, where he go or ryde; *wherever he goes*
 Þe kyngdom of heuene is his,
 Þat querelle to ende in charite byde. *remains charitable*
- 117 God wole brynge hym to heuene blis,
 And fro his enemys þere wole hym hyde; Nota *protect against*
 And þo þat pursue hym with mys, *evil deeds*
- 120 To helle þey ben here awen gyde. *guide*

(16)

- Thanne are they cursed in here lyf, *lifetime*
 Þat auaunceþ þe fals, and stroyeþ þe trewe, *favour; wicked; faithful*
- 123 Mayntene fals querelle and stryf,
 Ri3twis men wrongly pursue; *unjustly*
 Defowle boþe maydene and wyf, *Defile*
- 126 Þat shulde be clene in alle vertue. *pure*
 Eche dedly synne is a dedly knyf,
 For he shal repe þat he sewe.

(17)

- 129 3e shal be blessid, erly and late, *at all times*
 By vertue of Gospelle þat 3e preche.
 3e shul be blessid whan folk 3ow hate,
- 132 And cursen 3ow for 3oure speche.
 3oure tonge is kaye of heuene 3ate, *key to*
 3oure word þe way to heuene hem teche.
- 135 Folk wiþ 3ow schal debate, *quarrel*
 For me wiþ lesynges 3ow apeche. *Because; men (i.e. they); lies; accuse*

(18)

Glade 3e wiþ ynne and ioye wiþ oute;⁸

138 3oure mede in heuene moche is.

Drede no tyrauntes sterne and sto[w]te

May sle þy body, and take as his.

*oppressors; merciless; mighty**[Who]*

141 God, þe fader of heuene, 3e dowte,

May brynge þe soule to pyne or blis;

He schal deme alle the world aboute,

judge; entire (adj.)

144 To heuene for goode, to helle for mys.

sins

(19)

Of erþe 3e ben cleped salt,⁹

For salt of wisdom soule saues.

147 Go vp ri3t and be not halt,¹⁰

For mayster of seruaunt his seruice craues.

Pyn astate rekene þou shalt,¹¹*do not limp**demands (v.)**possessions; account for*

150 How þou it gat, how þou it saues.

acquired; preserve

Fewe ben chosen, þou3 mony ben calt,

Fro Goddis seruyce are worldly knaues.¹²

(20)

153 To lanterne 3e ben likned ri3t,

Nota

lamp; compared; justly

In alle þe worlde 3e shal be kyd.

visible

3oure prechyng shal be candel li3t,

156 Nou3t vnder worldly buschel hyd,

hidden

But on a candel styke on hi3t,

Nou3t vnder a chiste, vnder a lyd,

in a box; lid

159 In good werkis shyne 3e bry3t,

And lyue 3e so, ri3t as 3e byd.

are bidden

NOTES

title *lernyng*] Refers to the Sermon on the Mount in Matt. 5, the first sixteen verses of which the poet faithfully follows. They contain the eight Beatitudes, followed by two equally well-known exhortations: to be the spiritual ‘salt of the earth’ and the ‘light of the world’. Four of the eight Beatitudes are also found in Luke 6, but this version is not reflected in the text of the present poem.

17–19 A direct reference to Ps. 37:11, ‘But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace’.

⁸ I.e. Rejoice in your soul and show your joy to the world

⁹ *You are called ‘salt of the earth’*

¹⁰ I.e. Conduct yourself virtuously, not immorally

¹¹ I.e. You will have to give an account of how you have managed the resources entrusted to you

¹² *[Away] from the service of God [they] are the slaves of worldly matters*

- 32 *bond*] MS *bonde* The rhyme requires *-d*. Word-final *-d* in the manuscript was flourished as an automatism.
- 59 *spilde*] Emendation as in Kail of MS *spi3ed*, a scribal error, which does not fit the rhyme scheme. *MED* quotes the line as in MS s.v. *spien* (*v.*(2)), but recognizes the possibility of a scribal error.
- 60 The line is nearly identical with XIII.81: *syngulerte is sotyle þefte*.
- 64 Proverbial. See Whiting, W 571, 'Evil spun wool (yarn, web, weft) comes out evil'.
- 113 *pursued*] MS *presued*.
- 128 Proverbial. See Whiting, S 542, 'As one sows so shall he reap'.
- 139 *stowte*] Kail emends *stoute* (without marking it as such), but *stowte* is a valid variant spelling.
- 148 Alludes to Matt. 8:9 and Luke 7:8, 'and I say to ... my servant, Do this, and he doeth it'.
- 149–52 The lines refer, in a free interpretation, to verse 13 in the Beatitudes in Matt. 5, but l. 151 refers directly and verbatim to Matt. 20:16 and 22:14, 'for many be/are called, but few [are] chosen'.
- 156 *buschel*] A bushel, a vessel for measuring out grain.

XXII

KNOWE THY SELF AND THY GOD

SUMMARY

The poem is an urgent call on man to remain faithful to his creator. Man's own fleshly origin, as the poet describes in quite graphic language, is nothing to be proud of. Yet God created him in his own image, prepared him for a blissful life in heaven and, becoming man himself, sealed his love for man as with a bond of marriage. Man in his turn is urged to remain unflaggingly faithful to God and his commandments. He has a choice between good and bad, and the record kept will decide whether it is going to be heaven or hell.

We must never forget that God sent his son among us, who suffered on the cross, harried hell, was resurrected, and ascended to his father. From there he will return to pass judgement, whether we shall go to heaven or to hell. With that in mind, we must keep the ten commandments, perform the seven acts of bodily mercy, avoid the seven capital sins, and use our five senses to good purpose. We must do penance, pray diligently, and keep away from the world and all its wickedness.

TEXT

(1)

Thenke hertely in þy þou3t	<i>earnestly</i>
Of what matere þou dede bygynne.	
3 Of fylthy seed þou were wrou3t,	<i>From; made</i>
And wan in at þe wyket of synne. ¹	<i>entered; wicket</i>
Foulere fylþe knowe y nou3t	
6 Þan þou were fed þy moder wiþ ynne;	<i>Than; inside</i>
In a sake ful of filþe þou was out brou3t,	<i>sack</i>
In wrecchednes horyble, and stynkyng skynne.	<i>vileness</i>

(2)

9 What þou art, knowe þy self wel.	
Þou were conceyued in synne, and born wiþ woo.	
Þy moder and þou, on fortune whel,	
12 In perile of deþ parted a twoo.	<i>separated; in two</i>

¹ I.e. Entered the womb through the vulva

In pynes of helle what soules fele –
 And þou in mynde keped þoo –
 15 Hit wolde make þy corage kele,
 Whan þou hadde wil to synne goo.

*that; feel
 them (i.e. pains)
 grow weak
 become sinful*

(3)

God made þe of nou3t, haue in mynde,
 18 Wiþ soule of resoun, lyk his ymage.
 In heuene wiþ angels aboue þe wynde,
 He ordeyned þe endeles heritage.
 21 Wiþ more loue he dede þe bynde,
 Bycome þy brother in mannys lynage.
 He ielous loue and trewest to fynde,
 24 Py soule is spouse to his maryage.

*faculty; reason
 winds (n.)
 prepared; for you
 bound you [to him]
 of mankind; family
 He [is]; most loyal*

(4)

To God thy wedlok wiþ loue holde,
 In brennyng contemplacion,
 27 And make nou3t hym cokewolde,
 To loue in fornycacion.²
 On Goddis mercy be not to bolde,
 30 To falle in temptacion.
 Kepe charite hot, let it not colde,
 For quenchyng of deuocion.

*Before; maintain
 fervent
 cuckold
 By living; adultery
 Of; confident
 So that [you]
 cool (v.)*

(5)

Loue alle folk in charyte,
 Body and soule in good atent,
 As þou wolde þey dede þe;
 36 Þat it Goddis comaundement.
 Who breke þo hestes, cursed is he
 Til þey come to mendement.
 39 Pou preyest eueremore in alle degre
 Tyl þat þou to synne assent.

*proper; frame of mind

 commandments
 repentance
 constantly; in every way
 Before; give in*

(6)

That þou hast don siþ þou were bore,
 42 Alle þy lyuyng byþenk þe newe,
 Wheþer hast þou more in store
 Or of vices or of vertue;
 45 And wheþer hast þou folwed more
 Good aungel or wykked, for boþe þe sewe;

*What; born
 life; ponder; anew
 Which [of the two]
 Either

 follow*

² Ll. 27–28: i.e. And do not forsake his love / by courting worldly temptations

Py countretayle þey wil shewe, þe skore,³
 48 In helle or in heuene, wreten trewe. *faithfully*

(7)

Haue mynde, God sente his sone adoun,
 Tok mankynde in flesh and felle,⁴ *Take thought*
 51 And suffred hard passioun, *Assumed the shape of; skin*
 Dyed on croys, and heryed helle. *endured; sufferings*
 Haue mynde of his resurexioun; *harried*
 54 Byleue alle þis trewe gospelle.
 Haue mynde on his Assencioun;
 On God his fader ri3t hond doþ dwelle. *father's*

(8)

57 Denke þou shalt dye, and nost whenne;
 Pou art incertayn, þefore drede. *Keep in mind; do not know*
 Fro heuene to erþe God shal come þenne, *ignorant*
 60 Deme euel and good after here dede;
 Þe good to heuene blisse renne, *Judge (v.); in accordance with*
 In endeles lyf to haue here mede; *hasten*
 63 Þe wikked in helle for to brenne,
 In endeles pyne deþ shal hem fede. *eternal; reward*
feed

(9)

The ten comaundementis þou hem kepe;
 66 Þe seuen werkis of mercy wel hem vse; *practise*
 Þe seuen synnes þou be wepe, *bewail*
 Þy fyue wittes þe auyse. *senses; direct (v.)*
 69 Do penaunce, and preye whyle þou schuld slepe;
 Þe fend and fals[e] world despise; *devil*
 No fleshly lustes þe vndercrepe; *move in on you stealthily*
 72 Fle alle foly and folwe þe wise.

NOTES

1–2 Virtually identical with VIII.1–2.

24 The thought of the tie between Christ and the soul in terms of a courtship is treated in a sustained allegory in XX.

³ They present the other half of the tally, your score

⁴ I.e. Became man in every respect

33–35 Alludes to Matt. 7:12, ‘Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them’, and to Luke 6:31, ‘And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise’.

40 *tyl]* Kail *til*.

52 *heryed helle]* For the concept of the Harrowing of Hell, see also X.60 (and note) and XI.19–20.

57 Proverbial. See Whiting, D 96, ‘Death is certain but not the time’. Cf. VIII.97–98: *Man, þou wost wel þou shalt dy3e; / What dep, ne where, þou nost whenne*.

XXIII
OF THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTARE

SUMMARY

This poem is a solid, thoroughly orthodox treatise on the meaning and significance of the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Holy Church is the assembly of the faithful, who praise and worship their God day and night, especially in the sacrament of the Eucharist, which feeds the faith of the participants with its life-giving bread, to their everlasting joy. The Eucharist commemorates the institution of the Holy Supper by Christ, on the eve of his sacrificial death and resurrection as a redemption of man's sins, promising everlasting joy to the truly repentant, who partakes of the bread and wine of the Eucharist in the sincere belief that they are Christ's body and blood. Not visibly so, but to us as clear and joyful tokens of a miracle not otherwise comprehensible to earthly man. Not what one sees matters, but what the tokens of bread and wine signify when consecrated by the priest. Nor does it matter how many communicants partake of the one bread. Christ's body remains whole in each of the many pieces of bread, just as Holy Church, being the assembly of no matter how many faithful, is one.

The Eucharist is not without engagement. Those who approach the altar unthinkingly, like animals, without devotion and repentance, will be condemned for ever. The good receive eternal life and the salvation of body and soul.

Holy Supper was a watershed. Before, the Israelites ate the sacrificial paschal lamb – as a prefiguration of Christ's redeeming death – and lived by the Ten Commandments. We, under the new dispensation, live by the life-giving bread of the Eucharist and God's teachings.

The poem ends with an appeal to God to forgive us our sins and lead us to heaven to enjoy Christ's festive meal among the saints. To our senses Christ seems just bread, dead, immaterial, of little consequence. In faith, he is alive, both God and man, and greater than any man on earth. Abraham's sacrifice of his son, the life-giving manna in the desert, the paschal lamb, they are all foreshadowings of Christ's redeeming death and resurrection, which we commemorate in the Eucharist.

TEXT

(1)

I wole be mendid 3if y say mys.	<i>make amends; speak; erroneously</i>
Holychirche nes noþer tre ne stones:	<i>neither; of wood</i>
3 Þe hous of preyers God nempned þys,	<i>has called it</i>
Boþe goode men and wikked ressayueþ at ones.	<i>it welcomes; together</i>
Þere as gadryng of goode men ys,	<i>Where</i>
6 Is holychyrche of flesch and bones.	
Prestes are lanterne, hem to wysse	<i>show</i>
Þe wise weyes to heuene wones.	<i>abodes</i>

(2)

9 Holychirche, hery3e þy saueour –	<i>worship</i>
Þynk þy hurd, God on hi3t –	<i>Think of; flock; high</i>
Wiþ song and ympnes, tyde and houre,	<i>hymns; (at the canonical) times and hours</i>
12 Reioys in hym day and ny3t,	
For he is more þan any honour,	<i>[worldly] glory</i>
For his honour passeþ oure my3t,	<i>surpasses; [earthly] powers</i>
15 For we ben his, and he is oure;	
Alle þou3tes ben to hym dy3t.	<i>dedicated</i>

(3)

A specyalle tyme of heryeng here:	<i>worship; hear [about]</i>
18 Lyueliche quyk bred is put forþ þis day,	<i>Life-giving; living</i>
Whyche in þe table of þe holy soper,	<i>at; supper</i>
Wiþ outen doute was 3ouen oure fay	<i>given; [for] our own faith</i>
21 To þe company of twelfe breþeren þere were.	<i>(i.e. the twelve disciples); [who]</i>
By here ful heryenge ioyed þay –	<i>praise (n.); rejoiced</i>
Wel sowned in here ere –	<i>Well-sounding; ears</i>
24 Wiþ ioly herte fayre song to say.	<i>joyful; pleasing; to sing</i>

(4)

A day is mad of solempnyte,	<i>One [particular]; established; celebration</i>
Of þis table first ordynaunce is worschipful tolde. ¹	<i>institution; devoutly</i>
27 In þis newe kynges table, now knowe we,	<i>With</i>
Newe Estren endeþ the olde.	
Newe thyng dryueþ old þyng fro his degre,	<i>established place</i>
30 Out of mynde, þe lasse of tolde;	<i>even less spoken of</i>
So soþfast sunne, by his pouste,	<i>Just as; real; sun; power</i>
Dryueþ away shadewe and stri3eþ colde.	<i>overcomes</i>

¹ I.e. When it is devoutly related how this [communion] table was first instituted

(5)

33 As ly3t li3tenep ny3t fro derkenes of kynde,
 So dede Crist at þe holy soper;
 Bad pertely do so of hym mynde,
 36 By holy ordynaunce tau3t vs to lere,
 Halwe bred and wyn, by hys word and wynd,
 To an ost of helpe to cristen men here,
 39 Fro shadwe of deþ to gostly blynd,²
 To li3t of lyf, to shynen clere.

lights up; in nature
in plain words; in his memory
divine decree; learn
consecrate; spirit
To [become]; bread; salvation; for; here (on earth)

(6)

Lore is 3ouen to cristen men,
 42 Into flesch passeþ þe bred,
 As holychirche doþ vs kenne,
 Þe wyn to blod, þat is so red.
 45 Pou seest not fleschly þou takest þenne;
 By byleue of herte makeþ þe fast fro ded,
 Wipouten ordre of þynges to renne
 48 By tokene and word þat he bede.

[Christian] belief; given
[That]; changes
teaches
in a worldly sense (what); then
faith; heartfelt; safe
Without; order; [worldly] things; live
token; instituted

(7)

Wip outen help of ordre of þyngis,
 Þe bok of oure byleue is lent,
 51 Vnder dyuerce spices only tokenynges,
 Pou3 þe spices fro hym be went,
 Not durked ne hyd, but ri3t shynynges,
 54 Pou3 fleschly sy3t fro hym be blent,
 Þe soule haþ ioye and mery synges,
 When good byleue seeþ þe sacrament.

faith; has been given
visible forms (i.e. bread and wine); tokens
by; him (i.e. Christ); instituted
obscured
natural; eyes; obscured

(8)

57 Þe blod is drynk, þe flesch is mete,
 Ys gostly fode, þe soules delys;
 Neuere-þe-lattere, of Crist to trete,
 60 He dwelleþ vnder ayþer spys.
 Þe ressayuour countep not þat þey ete,
 Ne brekeþ it not, but hool it lys.
 63 Pou3 a thowsande take at o sete,
 Alone on takeþ as moche o prys.³

drink; food
soul's; delight
However; [it is also] to give thought to
is present; both; [visible] forms
communicants
whole; remains
partake; in one sitting
Only; one; precious

² Ll. 39–40: *For the spiritually blind [to lead them] from the shadow of death / To the light of [eternal] life, to shine brightly*

³ I.e. It is of as much value if only one partakes

(9)

- While obley in yrnes or boyst ys stoken,
 66 Hit nys but bred, and sengyl bake;
 Whanne þe prest to hit Goddis wordis hath spoken,
 Crystys quyk body vndir bred o cake,⁴
 69 Pou3 it a þousande peces seme broken,
 Nes parted ne wasted, but al holle take.
 In byleue of holychirche who wyl hym 3oken,⁵
 72 A3en þis non argument may make.

*sacramental wafer; baking-irons; casket
 simply baked/baked once*

*appears [to the eye]
 divided; entire
 teachings; yoke (v.)
 argue*

(10)

- That ressayueþ: children, man and wyf,
 Not al yliche deuocioun.
 75 Summe taken it in synne and stryf,
 As bestes wiþ outen discrecioun.
 Þe wikkid resceueþ a dedly knyf,
 78 And his endeles dampnacioun;
 Þe good resceyueþ endeles lyf,
 To body and soule saluacioun.

*receive [the host]
 Know (i.e. experience) not; equally
 mental confusion
 animals; spiritual insight*

eternal

(11)

- 81 When þou to chirche gost
 To resceyue God, wisely go.
 I suppose þe prest haue but on ost,
 84 Breke it, and parte to twenty and mo:
 As moche is þe leste cost⁶
 As in þe grettest pece of þo.
 87 Deme alle yliche, lest and most;
 Quaue not, ne drede not, to sen hit so.

*go wisely (i.e. in a spirit of godliness)
 expect; one; host*

value

*Regard; the same
 Quaver*

(12)

- Pou3 þe prest þe sacrament clyue
 90 In a þowsand peces and þre,
 Þe state, ne stature, ne my3t doþ myue,⁷
 Ne leseþ ne lasseþ of his pouste.
 93 Py fleshly sy3t þou shalt not lyue,
 But tokene of brekyng makeþ he;

breaks up

*character; substance; power; change (v.)
 loses; weakens; power
 vision; believe*

⁴ [It is] Christ's living body, beneath the outer appearance of the bread of the Eucharist

⁵ I.e. Who is willing to take upon himself the yoke of the church's teachings

⁶ Ll. 85–86: i.e. The value of the smallest piece of the host is as great as that of the largest

⁷ Ll. 91–94: *Neither its essential character nor its material substance, nor its efficacy changes / Nor does it suffer a loss or weakening of its power. / Do not accept at face value what you see with your eyes, / But [accept] that with the breaking [of the bread] he (i.e. the priest) performs a token (i.e. of Christ's broken body)*

For fleshly skyn no sacrement kan preue,⁸ *explain*
 96 In gostly bylyue shal saued be.

(13)

In old lawe, 3e wyten how
 At estren þey eten a lamb al ded, *Easter*
 99 Is ouer put in newe lawe now: *set aside for*
 At estre we eten quyk bred. *living*
 In old lawe, for mannys prow, *spiritual benefit*
 102 God þe comaundementis bed; *the Ten Commandments; gave*
 And oure newe lawe we don allow, *At the same time; admit as valid*
 And kepen boþe by Goddis red. *teaching*

(14)

105 Lete þy mercy passe ryȝt, *outweigh; justice*
 And forȝeue vs oure mysdede.
 Þy face wiþ loue to seen in syȝt, (i.e. fully)
 108 In lond of lyf þou vs lede. *[eternal] life (i.e. heaven)*
 Among þy seyntes in heuene on hyȝt, *on high*
 At þat feste of lif, God, vs fede. *nourish*
 111 Sopfast bred, God of myȝt, *True*
 Ihesus, herde, þou vs hede. *shepherd; guard*

(15)

In syȝt and in felyng þou semest bred,
 114 In byleue: flesh, blod and bon;
 In syȝt and felyng þou semest ded,
 In byleue: lyf, to speke and gon; *walk*
 117 In syȝt and felyng: noþer hond ne hed,⁹ *hand; head*
 In byleue: boþe God and man;
 In syȝt and felyng: in litil sted, *of little consequence*
 120 In byleue: grettere þyng nes nan. *no one*

(16)

Whan Abraham of Ysaac his offryng made, *sacrifice; presented*
 For a fygure he lykned is *As; prefiguration; is compared*
 123 To angels bred oure fadres hadde, *angels' bread (i.e. manna)*
 Þat God fed hem in wyldernes.
 Afterwarde God hem bade:
 126 A paske lomb rosted and etep þes. *paschal lamb; that*

⁸ I.e. For natural man (*fleschly skyn*) cannot explain the true nature of the sacrament

⁹ *noþer hond ne hed*] i.e. (without) either deed or thought

In stede of þat, oure soules to glade,
 We resecyue oure houselle, God o blisse.

holy communion

NOTES

- 3 See Isa. 56:1, 7, ‘Thus saith the Lord ... mine house shall be called an house of prayer’.
- 11 *tyde and houre*] The seven times of the day set aside for prayer.
- 15 Alludes to Ps. 100:5, ‘We are his (i.e. God’s) people’.
- 26 The institution of holy communion is described in Matt. 26:17–30.
- 28 Christ’s death on the cross, as a sacrifice for our sins, replaces the sacrifice of the lamb on the eve of Israel’s exodus from Egypt. See the note to ll. 97–100 below. Kail (p. xxii) inferred from this line that poem XXIII was ‘apparently intended to be an Easter poem’. Kail was in error here, not, as McGarry (1936, p. 258) assumed, because he should have misinterpreted the medieval connotations attached to *Estren*, but because the poem is actually an English version of St. Thomas Aquinas’ sequence *Lauda Sion* (c. 1264), which he composed for the mass on Corpus Christi, established especially in honour of the Eucharist (*ibid.* pp. 258–59).
- 30 A variation on the saying ‘Out of sight, out of mind’ (see Whiting M 569 and S 307).
- 38 *ost*] MnE ‘host’, the consecrated bread of the Eucharist.
- 65 *yrmes*] According to McGarry (1936, pp. 24, 25, 261) the reference is to the wafer-irons used for the baking of the sacramental bread. See also *MED* s.v. *iren* (n.) sub 2.(h). *boyst*] > OFr *boist* = a box or casket in which the hosts were kept for later use in the Eucharist (*ibid.*). See also *MED* s.v. *boist(e)* (n.) sub 1.(a).
- 66 *sengyl bake*] *MED* s.v. *baken* (v.) glosses ‘baked once’, whereas s.v. *sengle* (adj.) sub 3.(d) the (adverbial) meaning given is ‘simply, just’. Both versions are possible. Kail glosses the phrase as ‘simple bread’, but the single reference to *bake* as a noun in *MED* s.v. *bake*(n) (*pt. ppl. as n.*) only carries the meaning ‘a dish baked in pastry, pie’.
- 71 See Matt. 11:29–30: ‘Take my yoke upon you and learn of me For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light’.
- 77–78 Alludes to 1 Cor. 11:29, ‘For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself’.
- 94 See Luke 22:19: ‘And he took the bread ... and brake it ... saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me’.
- 97 *old*] Kail unnecessarily emends *olde*, as also in l. 101. *3e wyten how*] *MED* s.v. *witen* (v.(1)) sub 5.(h) interprets this phrase as a rhetorical question, but the context does not support this construction.
- 97–100 Refers to the Jewish traditional sacrificial lamb as a prefiguration of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. Ex. 12:1–24 relates how the exiled Israelites in Egypt were promised by God that they would be spared his wrath and be ‘passed over’, if they smeared the blood of the sacrificial ‘Passover lamb’ on their doorposts, eventually to be led out of exile and into the promised land. So will the repentant sinner be saved from damnation and eventually go to heaven if in the Eucharist he eats the bread of Christ’s body, and drinks the wine of his blood, in recognition of his salvation through the redeeming death of the ‘sacrificial lamb’ who died in his place.
- 105 Sts (14) and (15) are directly addressed to God.
- 107 See 1 Cor. 13:12: ‘For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face’.

111 See John 6:33: 'For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven'.

121–22 Refers to Gen. 22:2, 'And he (i.e. God) said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest ... and offer him ... for a burnt offering'. Isaac is thus a prefiguration of Christ, God's only and beloved son, who uncomplainingly sacrificed himself.

123 *angels bred*] The daily 'manna' God gave to the Israelites during their forty years through the desert on their way to the promised land. A prefiguration of the divine, life-giving food of the Eucharist. See X.50 and note.

125 *Afterwarde*] Actually the paschal lamb (l. 126) is part of the story of the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, which of course preceded their forty years in the desert, where God provided the manna to sustain them. The paschal lamb is a prefiguration of Christ's redeeming sacrifice for mankind on the cross..

126–28 An *encore*, with some modification, of ll. 97–100.

XXIV

THE LESSONS OF THE DIRIGE

SUMMARY

The poem paraphrases the nine lessons from Job in the Dirge from the Matins of the Dead, concluded by the imploration *Libera me, Domine, de morte aeterna*, from the Requiem Mass. The nine passages from Job are as follows, in the sequence of the Lessons: (1) 7:16–21, (2) 10:1–7, (3) 10:8–12, (4) 13:22–28, (5) 14:1–6, (6) 14:13–16, (7) 17:1–3, 11–15, (8) 19:20–27, (9) 10:18–22.

Each paraphrased biblical text in the poem, as well as the *Libera me, Domine* passage, is interspersed with, or followed by a few stanzas which elaborate on the same theme.

TEXT

*lectio prima: parce mihi, domine*¹

(1)

Almyȝty God, Lord, me spare, For soþe, my dayes werkys ben noȝt.	<i>nothing</i>
3 My wittes on nyȝtes wrong y ware, Perof longe ȝeres mon be wroȝt. ²	<i>wrongly; wear out</i> <i>can; made</i>
ȝenke, man, þou ware born ful bare;	<i>naked</i>
6 Into þis worldē what hastou broȝt. Out of þis worldē whanne þou shalt fare, Þou schalt bere with þe ryȝt noȝt.	<i>depart</i> <i>absolutely</i>

(2)

9 What is man of gret renown, That of hym self makeþ aldre mest. ³	<i>renown</i> <i>of all</i>
Why settyst þou þy herte, aȝen resoun, ⁴	
12 And sodeynly repreuest hem mest. In þe dawenyngē þou souȝtest hem vpsodoun: Contrary to Godis hest	<i>reject; utterly</i> <i>dawn; examined; thoroughly</i> <i>[Whether]; command</i>

¹ *The first Lesson: spare me, O Lord*

² I.e. Long years are compounded therein.

³ I.e. Who has the highest regard for himself

⁴ *Why do you set your heart [upon him], against [all] reason*

15 Pou purchasest þy saule helle prisoun,⁵ *obtain for*
 For fleschely lust, wormes fest.

(3)

How longe sparest þou me no3t
 18 To swolwe my spotel bote it me gryue.⁶ *but (i.e. only when); causes pain*
 Pou keper of men, alle þyng hast wro3t; *protector*
 What schal y do to þyn byhyue. *benefit/interest*
 21 What hastou set me, contrarie þy þo3t, *Why; caused; intention/desire*
 Py holy lawe to repyue. *reject*
 Lord, whenne my werkis mon be so3t, *examined*
 24 Dyspyce me no3t in my myschyue. *affliction*

(4)

Ful heuy to my self y am maad withynne; *heavy [burden]; have become*
 My werkes on me heuye isse. *heavy*
 27 Why takest þou no3t away my synne, *take*
 And bere from me my wykednesse. *related (i.e. are dust also)*
 I slepe in dust, for we ben kynne,
 30 For erthe clayme3 me for hisse. *early (i.e. in the morning)*
 To seche me eerly 3if þou begynne, *cannot; hold out against; surely*
 I ne may withstonde þe y wisse.

lectio secunda: tedet animam meam⁷

(5)

33 My soul of my self anoyed isse. *in; feels weary*
 I shal leue my speche a3ens me,⁸
 To my soul y wole speke in bitternesse,
 36 And y shal saye to God so fre: *eagerly*
 Wyl no3t dampne me fro blisse,
 Shew me þe cause, þat wolde I se, *reason*
 39 Why demestou me þo3 y dede mysse, *just because; wrong*
 Lorde, whether þe þynke good to þe.⁹ *whilst; consider [it]*

(6)

3if þou chalenge my werk and bere me doun, *censure; oppress*
 42 Me, that am werk of þy hande,

⁵ Ll. 15–16: *You pay with your soul's imprisonment in hell / For the delectations of the flesh, [to become] food for hell's creatures*

⁶ *That I swallow my spittle only in pain*

⁷ *The second Lesson: my soul is weary*

⁸ *I will allow my words [to continue] against myself*

⁹ *Lord, whilst you consider that to you it is proper*

And þou in consayl helpe 3e moun
 To wykked men here synnes withstande,
 45 Wiþ repentaunce and sorwful soun *sounds*
 May launce hem from þe deuelys bande; *cut loose*
 To 3erde of loue y moste me boun; *rod; bow*
 48 Lord, me chastice wiþ þat wande. *rod*

(7)

Wheþer þyn ey3en ben fleschlye,
 Or þou seest as man shal see. *Is it the case that; fleshly (i.e. not spiritual)*
 51 Or þy dayes so sone sy3e, *pass (v.)*
 As other mennys dayes be. *years; just; quickly*
 Or þy 3erys ri3t so hye, *according to; [own] nature/condition*
 54 As mennys tymes in here degre, –
 For þou art God, shal neuer dy3e,
 For sorwe and deþ shal from the fle. –

(8)

57 That þou seche my wykkednesse, *[So] that; inquire after*
 And ransake my synne, *search through*
 And wyte I haue no3t down mysse, *know; sins*
 60 Bote hert and soule clene withynne.
 Sopes þer no man nesse *Truly; is not*
 May skape þyn hond, and from the twynne, *escape from; part (v.)*
 63 Bote repentaunce and mercy kesse. *Unless; kiss [each other]*
 Ðat now ben frendis, Lord, make hem kynne. *kindred*

*lectio tertia: manus tue fecerunt me*¹⁰

(9)

Thy hand made me man of [resoun], *[possessing the power] of reason*
 66 And shope me al in compas, *formed; all around*
 And sodeynly þou cast me down,
 For knew y no3t what þou was. *who*
 69 Of me men sample take mowen, *By; take warning*
 Be ware lest þay folwe my tras. *footsteps*
 I hadde lordshipe in feld and toun, *power*
 72 Now on a donghille is my pas. *ordeal*

(10)

Haue mynde on me, Lord, and take hede, *remember*
 Of fen of erthe þou dede me make. *mud*
 75 Into dust a3en þou shalt me lede,

¹⁰ *The third Lesson: thine hands made me*

- My soule from þe body take.
 My flesch is ful sleper atte nede,
 78 And solpeþ my soule wiþ synnes blake.
 Lord God, þy dome y drede;
 Whanne þou comest, y mon awake.
- (11)
- 81 My hert shulde be stedefast:
 Þou hast lopred as mylk and slep in þou3t,¹¹
 Ri3t as chese þou croddest me fast.
 84 I wyte my synnes þat y wrou3t;
 Lorde, alle my synnes away þou cast,
 Bote wiþ my synnes cast me no3t.
 87 Þou knowest how longe my lyf shulde last;
 Þou sette my terme, y passe it no3t.
- (12)
- Þou clopedest me with flesch and skyn,
 90 With bones and synewes made me to gyder;
 Lyf and mercy 3af me withyn,
 As brotel vessel y stonde slyder.
 93 Þy sechyng haþ kepyd my gost with wyn.
 A, Lorde, whenne þou comest hyder
 To deme al erþe, þy domes to twyn
 96 Þou3 I wolde fle, I not no3t whyder.
- (13)
- To deme þe erthe whanne þou wendys,
 Fro face of þy wraþþe whyder shal I go.
 99 To hyde me wiþ angels aren Goddis frendys.
 And God me hate, þay ben my fo.
 And I hyde me in helle among fendys,
 102 In pyne þay wolen tormente me so.
 I haue synned ri3t moche, my synne me schendys;
 Me thynke þay waxen mo and mo.
- (14)
- 105 My trespas moche arn blamed,
 Bote repentaunce be mendement;
 Byfore þe y drede, y am aschamed.
 108 Whenne þou comest to iugement,
- unreliable; in [time of] trouble*
defiles
judgement
had better be awake
- strong/unwavering*
in thought (i.e. as it were)
- I blame*
- But; throw me [down]*
- appoint/fix*
- [The spirit of] life; imparted; inwardly*
fragile; uncertainly
searching; preserved; joy
hither
escape (v.)
do not know; whither
- come*
where
[who] are
If; they (i.e. the angels)
fiends
- [state of] sin; condemns*
increase
- found fault with*
But; remedy (n.)
[filled with] awe
pass judgement

¹¹ Ll. 82–83: *You have curdled [me], as it were, like milk and milk-cheese, / Just like cheese you have firmly formed me*

Pat weren wylde mon be tamed,
Al wopen of wraþþe mon be brent;

*[Those] who; unruly; subdued
weapons; burnt*

111 In bok of lyf þo þat be named¹²
To ioie of heuene mon be sent.

(15)

Almyȝty God, Lord, me ȝeme,

take heed of

114 In thy mercy þou me lede.

Whenne my soule is boden out fleme,
Helpe me, Lorde, atte al my nede.

summoned; to flee [from my body]

117 Whenne þou al þe worlde shal deme,
Dampne me noȝt after my dede.

*in accordance with
trumpets*

Whenne þat angels blowen here beme,

120 Penne alle folk may haue gret drede.

(16)

From worldis worschipe y am shoue,
And broȝt abas from al astat.

*renown; expelled
down; high position*

123 My skyn is cloped al on roue,

covered; scabs

In pouerte and peyne my wyt is mat.

suffering; distraught

Lorde, chastice me wiþ ȝerde of loue,

rod

126 Þouȝ y haue seruyd þe swerde of hat.

deserved; hate

Wherto wyltou þy maystry proue,

Why; authority

Wiþ suchon as I to make debat.

such [a person]; quarrel (v.)

*lectio quarta: quantas habeo*¹³

(17)

129 Als many wykkednesse and trespas

without more numbers (i.e. countless)

And synnes withoute noumbre mo

Shew me, why hydest þy fas

Are clear to

132 Fro me, and demest me þy fo.

Lorde, þenkes þe solace¹⁴

pleases [me]

This turment, and do me wo.

whilst [you]

135 A drope of thy mercie of oyle of grace,

Lorde, graunte me er y go.

(18)

I am slyme of erthe, haue in mynde,

remember

138 Pore of matere and dedely,

lacking in substance; mortal

¹² *Those who are named in the book of life* (i.e. the chosen for eternal life)

¹³ *The fourth Lesson: how many are mine [iniquities]*

¹⁴ Ll. 133–34: *Lord, do you think [that] this torment [gives me] solace / pleasure, whilst you inflict misery upon me*

<p>As a lef styrede with wynde; On me þou prouest þy maystry. 141 Pou prouest þy myȝt, and þat I fynde O þe stubble, þat is so drye. Pou pursuest me, and wylt me bynde, 144 Wiþ synnes in my ȝouþe þou wylt me stroye.</p>	<p><i>leaf; shaken</i> <i>superiority</i> <i>as I observe</i> <i>want to</i> <i>of; youth; destroy</i></p>
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(19)

<p>Lordē, þou pursuest me fast, For soþe, aȝens me þou doest wryte: 147 Bitternesse; bote swete is past. I may noȝt blenche whenne þou wylt smyte. I trowe þat þou wolt me wast, 150 With synnes in my ȝouþe do me endite; Lordē, on me þy wille þou hast.¹⁵ My grete synne my self y wyte.</p>	<p><i>greatly</i> <i>Verily; me (i.e. my name)</i> <i>on the contrary; blissful state</i> <i>cannot; escape; destroy</i> <i>fear; wasted away</i> <i>charge</i> <i>blame</i></p>
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(20)

<p>153 In synne þou settest my fot and hede,¹⁶ And alle my werkes hastou soȝt, And alle steppys y euere ȝede; 156 Ȝe haue nombred alle my wordes and þoȝt. And als þou hast taken hede, Roten y schal be, wasted to noȝt; 159 As clothes þat moþþes on hem fede, So shal my flesch with wormes soȝt.</p>	<p><i>put; head</i> <i>deeds; examined</i> <i>went</i> <i>counted</i> <i>Even if; notice (n.)</i> <i>Rotten; nothing</i> <i>on which moths</i> <i>attacked by</i></p>
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(21)

<p>Wo me, so mon y be, 162 For y haue don moche synne. I, wreche, whyder shal y fle, For wrechyd lyf y lyued ynne, 165 My Lord, my God, noȝt bote to the. God of mercie, on me mynne. Lord, haue mercie on me, 168 Let noȝt thy loue fro me twynne.</p>	<p><i>thus it must be with me</i> <i>flee</i> <i>Because of; in which</i> <i>[I am] nothing; except</i> <i>be mindful of</i> <i>be separated</i></p>
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*lectio quinta: homo natus*¹⁷

(22)

Man, that is of woman born,

¹⁵ *Lord, you do with me as you please*¹⁶ I.e. You put my deeds and thoughts in [a state of] sin¹⁷ *The fifth Lesson: man [that is] born*

Luynghe short tyme he is.

171 Er his nauel be knytte and shorn,
Fulfilde with many wrechidnes.
Er he fro moder be forborn,

174 In peryl of deth bothe partie es.
3if flesch be lord, the soule is lorn;
Bote soule be lord, he leseth his blys.

Before; knotted; cut through
[He is already] filled; vileness
born
parties (i.e. mother and son); are
gains the upper hand; doomed
If; loses

(23)

177 Man geth out as don floures,
Corage and strengthe, and fayre of hewe;
Makeþ moche of hym self, sayþe: al is oures,

180 And repeth þat he neuere ne sewe.
He is defouled be dayes and houres,
And fleep as shadow þat neuere grewe;

183 Dwelleþ neuere in þe self stat of ouris,
Encresceþ mo vyces þan vertew[e].

comes out (i.e. is born)
[With]; in appearance
reaps; sowed
polluted; (i.e. all the time)
Remains; condition; wretchedness
Adds to

(24)

And þou holdest worthy to open thyn ey,

186 And come to me, and clayme for rent,
To loke on such a wrecche as y,
And lede hym with the to iugement,

189 Þer al mankynde in company,
Atte thy general parlement:
Vertues to heuen ther schul 3e try,

192 The vyces in helle fyre be brent.

If; deign
ask; [your] due
worthless person
Where; [is] gathered together
full assembly
lead

(25)

What man may make hym clene,
Pat is conceyed in vnclene sed.

195 Ywhether þou art alone, withoute mene.
To felowschipe þou hast non nede.
Short ar mannys dayes sene,

198 And the nombre of hys monthes in thy dede.
Þou hast sette his terme of fat and lene,
He passeþ it no3t for no mede.¹⁸

himself
from
[I ask you]; company
companionship
appear
according to your decree
times; riches and poverty
exceeds

(26)

201 A, go away a lytel hym fro,
In mendement that he mow rest
Tyl the day he 3erned so,

distance yourself
repentance
longed for

¹⁸ *He cannot exceed it, however much he would be prepared to pay*

- 204 A, of harde man come þat is best. *hard-working*
 Lord, haue no mynde to do me wo, *desire*
 Forber my synnes wolde make me lest. *Bear with; [that]; the most insignificant [of men]*
- 207 Lord, whenne þou comest to deme so
 Al þe world be fyre, boþe est and west,
 God, in þy sy3t þy way y go *before your eyes*
- 210 Ry3t ham; in þy fayþ me fest. *confirm me*

(27)

- Lord, whenne þou demest alle þyng in ri3t, *justice*
 Wher mercie shal no3t knawen be, *known*
- 213 Ry3t leseþ no3t his my3t, *loses*
 Þou3 mercie be in companye. *present*
 Mercy is euere in þy sy3t, *before; eyes*
- 216 For mercie euere þyn ey3en se.
 Wher euere þy dome is dy3t, *judgement; dispensed*
 Ri3t claymeþ mercie for his fee. *demands; as payment*

*lectio sexta: quis mihi hoc tribuat*¹⁹

(28)

- 219 Who 3eueþ to me þat y me hyde *grants*
 Tylle þy wrapþe in helle be past,
 Withouten pyne þy dome to byde,
- 222 Tyl body and soule a3en be fast? *united*
 With arguments no3t me chyde; *argumentation; rebuke*
 Þou knowest how longe my lyf shal last.
- 225 Lord, lat mercie be my gyde, *guide*
 And neuere fro þy face me cast.

(29)

- Þou set me a tyme; couenant is tan. *set (imp.); has been agreed*
- 228 Haue mynde on me what dome is di3t. *Remember; prepared*
 Trowest þou ou3t þat y, dede man,
 Shal haue a3eyn man of my3t, *Do you think at all*
become; power
- 231 And 3elde rekenyng sen y bygan *settle my account; (i.e. since my birth)*
 With alle dayes þat y now fy3t? *struggle against*
 Now I abyde þat I fro ran, *remain; what; fled from*
- 234 Tyl my folwyng come to myn insi3t. *sequel [to my life] (i.e. my death); understanding*

(30)

- Lord, þou shalt clepe me,
 And I shal answer to þe, werk of þyn hande. *your handiwork (i.e. creation)*

¹⁹ *The sixth Lesson: who will give me this*

237 Werk of þy ri3t hand take to þe;
 Pou shalt not bynde it in helle bande.
 Pou hast noumbred my steppes, how mony þay be, *fixed the number of*
 240 How monye y ran, how monye I stande.
 Bot spare þou, Lord, to þe synne of me, *show forgiveness; for*
 Ne wilne no3t deme my werkes 3e fande. *judge; examined*

(31)

243 Deme me no3t after my dede, *according to*
 Lorde, I byseche þe,
 I haue don in þy si3t, and tok non hede; *[That]; before your eyes*
 246 Perfore I praye þy mageste, *majesty*
 God, my wikkednesse away þou lede, *take*
 Myn vnry3t away wasche 3e. *wrongdoings*
 249 Non more. Lord, at my nede, *No; in*
 Of alle my synnes clense 3e me.

lectio septima: spirit[us] meus²⁰

(32)

My gost, shalt þou be made newe, *spirit*
 252 My dayes shulle yshorted be; *will [surely]*
 My soule fro þe body mon remewe, *depart*
 Alone a graue byleueth to me. *Only; remains*
 255 I haue non synne, no vices me sewe, *are visible to me*
 Myn eyen in bitterness dwelle y se. *remain*
 Deliuere me, Lorde, and on me rewe, *have pity on me*
 258 And sette me bysydes the.

(33)

Whos hande þou wolt a3eyn me fy3t,
 And þou proue þy stronge hande? *If*
 261 My dayes ben passed to withstonde þy my3t, *are over*
 I may no3t bere þy litel wande. *[even] your light rod*
 My thou3tes ben wasted, turned in ry3t, *grown feeble; confused; completely*
 264 Turmentynge my herte inwith and ande; *internally, [my] spirit*
 And turnyd day to þe ny3t. *into*
 After derkenesse I haue bedded my bed, I fande. *made my bed*

(34)

267 I sayde to stynke and rotenesse: *stench*
 My fader and moder arn 3e;
 And to wormes y sayde þysse:

²⁰ *The seventh Lesson: my soul*

- 270 My systren and my brethern both be 3e.
 And erthe claymeþ me for hysse,
 Where þen now my bydyngge to me. *If dwelling [place]*
- 273 My felyngge þou art, and my God of blisse.
 Drede of deth droueth me. *refuge torments (v.)*

(35)

- Eche a day synnyng,
 276 And euere newe encres; *increase [of sins]*
 Neuere a day blynnynng, *stopping (i.e. when it stops)*
 Bote euere vertue [wane les.] *all the while; becomes smaller*
- 279 To repente no bygynnyng,
 No3t bote gadre synne ay in pres.²¹ *[There is] Nothing; except; accumulate; always; abundance*
 In helle is no wynnyng, *saving [of souls]*
- 282 Ne non a3eynbyyngge to pes. *redeeming*

lectio octava: pelli mee²²

(36)

- My flesches ben wasted, don me refuse, *wasted away; reject*
 My bones cleuyn vnto þe skyn; *are stuck to*
- 285 My lippes arn shronken out of syse,
 Aboute my teth arn left atwyn, *in size*
- Haue mercye on myn werk vnwyse, *All around; have become apart*
 foolish
- 288 Haue mercie on me, let mercie wyn.
 Namly my frendes me no3t despyse; *prevail*
 Lordis hande hath towched me more and myn. *[That] especially more and less (i.e. entirely)*

(37)

- 291 Why purs[ue] 3e me, and on me syte,
 And arn filled of my flesh and fel.²³ *sit [in judgement]*
 Who 3eueþ to [me], þat wolde y wyte, *with; skin*
 gives
- 294 Wordes in boke be ered wel,
 Or in a plate of led wryten *[that] are inscribed*
 sheet; lead
- With an yren poyntel, *stylus*
- 297 Or in a flynt grauen and spyten *hard stone; carved; engraved*
 By craft of werk, withoute chysel. *hard labour; chisel*

(38)

- I byleue þat soth y say, *truth; speak*
- 300 Myn a3eynbyere lyuyngge isse. *redeemer*

²¹ I.e. Because our sins keep accumulating²² *The eighth Lesson: my skin*²³ I.e. And why have you (i.e. the friends) devoured me entirely?

- I shal rysen of þe erthe my laste day,
 Bylapped in my flesch and skyn ywisse; *clothed*
 303 Byholde with myn ey3en twey, *eyes*
 Se God, my sauour, in blisse;
 Non other ey3en bote þes, withouten nay; *except these; (i.e. beyond a doubt)*
 306 Þe hope in my bosom yput vp isse. *This; preserved*

(39)

- The soule is in derkenesse from gostly sy3t.
 Lord, 3yue here rest and pees
 309 Withouten ende, 3yue here ly3t,
 Euerlastynge ly3t þat neuere shal sees. *cease*
 Þou þat rered Lazar on hy3t *raised; up*
 312 Out of þe graue, stynkyng fro wormes pres, *the mass of worms*
 Py pauylon of mercy be on hem py3t, *tent; over; pitched*
 To reste fro pyne make hem rele. *bring him deliverance*

lectio nona: quare de [uulua] eduxisti me qui, &c.²⁴

(40)

- 315 Out of þe wombe why hastou me bro3t.
 Þat wolde y hadde be fordon; *[Me] who; brought to perdition*
 Þanne hadde I be as no3t, *been*
 318 Noon ey3e hadde sene me after son; *soon after*
 Þan hadde I be as vnwro3t, *uncreated*
 No3t born from wombe to berelis doun, *burial*
 321 Where my short dayes arn in my þo3t,
 Where þay shal no3t be ended moun. *allowed*

(41)

- A, þerfore, Lord, graunte me þes:
 324 To wepe and wayle, repente my synne,
 Þat y torne no3t a3eyn to erthe of derkenes, *turn; land*
 To stryues of deþ, be curyd þerynne, *struggles; covered*
 327 Lond of wrethes and þesternesse *wreathing shapes; darkness*
 Þer is shadew of deþ, noon oþer wyne;
 Þer woneþ euerlastynge for hem lyued mysse, *joy*
 330 Euere gryslyhede, þat neuere schal blynne. *Where; those who lived in sin*
horribleness; cease

libera me, domine²⁵

(42)

Delyuere me, Lord, from endeles deþe,

²⁴ *The ninth Lesson: wherefore hast thou brought me forth out of the womb, etc.*²⁵ *deliver me, O Lord*

In þat grete dredful day,
 333 Where heuenys schullen be styred from erþe breþe,
 Whenne þou shalt come to deme for ay.
 To heuen or helle, þat on he geþ;
 336 Þe word be fyre and grete afray,
 Panne woo to the synful, his soule sleþ,
 And fendys claymen hym for here pray.

*On
 removed; earthly life
 [to] only one [of those two]
 verdict; terror
 [that verdict] destroys*

(43)

339 That day shal be a day of drede,
 Of wrapþe, and myschyf, and wrechidnesse;
 Pere may no man opere rede,
 342 Ne make amendis for his mysse.
 For worldly witesse of synful ded:
 Gostly payne in bitternesse;
 345 Pere helpeþ neþer counseil ne med,
 Ech man for hym self, to payne or blysse.

*affliction
 can; advise
 wrong(s)
 Spiritual; suffering; misery
 advice; bribery*

(44)

What shal y say for shame and drede,
 348 Or what to do, fool and nys,
 Whanne y shal schewe forþ no good dede,
 Byfore so gret iuge and wys?
 351 Al folk on me woln take hede,
 Wayte after vertue, and fynde vys.
 Say: God, mercy, þy dome y drede,
 354 For in þe al mercy lys.

*sinful
 show
 wish; pay attention to
 Search for*

(45)

Now, Crist, of þy mercie we craue;
 Haue mercie on vs, and leue noþt;
 357 We byseche þe, þat come mankynde to saue.
 To bye vs, þou from heuene vs soþt,
 Oure herytage for vs to haue;
 360 Þat wern lorn þou hast boþt.
 Wyl noþt dampne in helle kaue
 Thy honde warke þou hast wroþt.

*beg
 desert [us]
 came
 condemn [us]; pit
 work of your hands*

(46)

363 Þe brennyng soule in helle hete,
 Withouten ende wepe thoo.
 Allas, oure synnes don vs bete,
 366 Þay say: wo, wo, wo.
 Here is no remedie to gete.

*they
 get the better of*

Pay walke in derkenesse to and fro,
 369 Þe stynk and derkenesse is so grete,
 Allas, in þystrnesse we go.

(47)

God, that art shapere of al,
 372 Of slyme of erthe þou me wro3t.
 Wiþ þy blod principal,
 Wonderly þou haste vs bo3t.
 375 Þou3 my body now rote smal,
 My soule to my body shal be bro3t.
 Out of my graue reyse me þou schal
 378 To lyues man; and fayle no3t²⁶

noble
Marvellously
rots; away

raise
aliveliving; [will] fail

(48)

Blod and boon, flesche and felle.
 Here my prayer: in parfitnesse
 381 At domesday comaunde my soule to dwelle
 In Abrahamys bosom, in thy blisse,
 Whenne þou shalt delyuere me fram sy3t of helle.
 384 Þou breke þe 3ates of helle, ywisse,
 Þou sou3test helle in peynes felle,
 3af ly3t to hem in grete bry3tnesse.

perfection

bosom

cruel
those [in hell]; splendour

(49)

387 Alas, y may be schamed sore,²⁷
 At domesday stonde in drede;
 I, to come so gret a Iuge byfore,
 390 And shewe forþ no good dede,
 Bote fardel of synnes gadred in store;
 Þe fendes redy my rolle to rede,
 393 Þe countretayle to shewe, þe score,
 Þe leste steppe þat euere y 3ede.

judge

pack
roll (i.e. the record of my sins); read
other half of the tally (i.e. the reckoning)
smallest; took

(50)

The good aungel on his ry3t syde,
 396 Whenne he hem ladde with merye songe,
 And whenne he wolde no3t folwe hy[m], glyde
 Out of the waye, he wente wronge;
 399 In vertues he nolde abyde.
 Þe good aungel mourned amonge:

led the way
went
Off the path; in the wrong direction
did not want to
grieved; meanwhile

²⁶ To [become] a living man [again], and nothing will be lacking

²⁷ Alas! I have cause to feel deep shame

With þe soule nel y chyde;
402 Y 3eue þe vp for endeles longe.

*will not argue
length [of time] (i.e. eternity)*

(51)

At domesday no man shal be excusyd,
Lord ne lady, mayde ne knaue;
405 For wykked counsel scholde be refusyd,
And after good counsayle craue.
After warke þat þay vsed,
408 I shal hem deme or saue.
Ðe sauyd excusyd, þe dampnyd accusyd,
As thay deseruyd echon haue:

*assumed innocent
maid nor servant

desire (v.)
According to; deeds; done

Those who are saved
everyone gets*

(52)

411 Ech touche and mouynge with hys honde,
Ðe leste twynkelynge wyþ his ey3e,
His wronge worke: sitte or stonde,
414 Ryde or go, sitte or ly3e.
Þou3 he spede no3t þere he dede fonde,
Hys conscience wole hym bewrye;
417 Benefice, auauncement, hous or londe,
The leste bargayn þat he dede bye.

*movement

did not succeed; where; tried
betray
Gain; promotion
deal; concluded*

NOTES

title ‘Lessons of the Dirige II’ in the bibliography of Muir (1970, p. 384). Kail in his edition mentions ten, instead of nine, Lessons in the title at the top of each page of the poem. However, the tenth is in fact not a Lesson, but the famous part of the Requiem Mass, as put to music by countless composers.
3 *ware*] *MED* s.v. *waren* (v.(2)) sub (b) glosses ‘employ/use’, but ‘tire out/exhaust’ sub (e) is more apposite here.

11 Without the comma after *herte* (as Kail has it), *a3en resoun* is read as a prepositional adjunct to *herte*. The line then assumes a negative meaning, whilst the corresponding line in Job 7:17 is positive: ‘What is man ... that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him?’

12, 13 *hem*] The *man of gret renoun* of l. 9.

20 *schal*] Kail misprints *shal*.

30 *clayme3*] Variant spelling of *claymez*. See also III.14: *ges*, as the only other example of 3sg. *pres.* in *-es/-ez* (rather than *-eth/-ep*), occurring not at the end of the line.

47–48 Refers to Prov. 13:24, ‘He that spareth his rod hateth his son; but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes’.

57 *That*] Starts a consecutive clause (ll. 57–60), subordinate to the main clause in ll. 49–54.

61 *Sopes*] MS *soper*. Follows Kail, who does not mark the amendment. *nesse*] Contraction of *ne* and *es(se)* = ‘is not’.

65 *resoun*] MS *þe soun*.

72 *pas*] Glossed in *MED* s.v. *pas(e (n.(1)))* sub (g), as ‘way of life’, but ‘predicament/ordeal’ sub (h) is more apt here.

82 *lopred*] MnE ‘hardened/curdled’, where the liturgical text of Lesson iii has the opposite meaning of *poured out* (*L. mulsisti*, ‘milked’). The author ignored the liturgical text at this point and with *lopred* opted instead for the literal translation of the following *coagulasti*, in *sicut caseum me coagulasti* (‘Hast thou not ... curdled me like cheese’) in the liturgical text. As a result, there is now mention of ‘hardened/curdled’ three times (including the added mention of slip-cheese), whereas the intended meaning in the liturgical text (as in Job itself) is to illustrate the first lines of Lesson iii: ‘Thine hands have made me and fashioned me’ with the simile of man’s creation as the ‘pouring out as milk’, and his formation as the ‘curdling as of cheese’.

105 *trespas*] Uncommon plural form.

111 *bok of lyff*] Referred to several times in Revelation, e.g. in 3:5, ‘I will not blot out his name out of the book of life’, and 20:15, ‘And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire’.

123 *roue*] Quoted twice in *MED*, correctly glossed s.v. *rove (n.)* as ‘scabby/covered with scabs’ (cf. Job 7:5, ‘My skin is broken, and become loathsome’), but, erroneously associated with the preceding word *clothed*, as ‘something rough/a rough garment’ s.v. *rough(e (n.(1)))* sub (e).

161 Kail unnecessarily inserts *to* between *Wo* and *me*.

184 *vertewe*] MS *vertew*.

186 *clayme for rent*] God asks back man’s soul as his due. Cf. I.39–40: ... *thy soule is Goddis rent; / Quite that wele in loue and drede*.

250a *spirit[us]*] MS *spē*.

267–70 A markedly deviating rendering of Job 17:14, where Job calls corruption ‘my father’, and the worm ‘my mother and my sister’. The same ‘mix-up’ occurs in the prose version of the *Lessons* in the Wheatley Manuscript, betraying that it served as a source for the Digby text (Day, 1921, p. 278).

278 *wane les*] MS *waneles*.

291 *pursue*] MS *pursuye*.

293 *me*] Inserted emendation unmarked in Kail.

314a *uulua*] MS *nulla*

323 *pes*] The line is quoted in *MED* s.v. *striff(e (n.))*, where an alternative for *pes* is given as ‘[?read: pes]’. Unnecessarily so, as here *thes* (‘this’) is cataphoric (see *MED* s.v. *this (pron.)* sub (3)); hence the following colon, introducing the things Job asks of God in the rest of the stanza.

378–79 Run-on lines straddling stanzas 47 and 48.

382 *Abrahamys bosom*] Refers to the story of ‘Pauper and Dives’ in Luke 16:19–26. The beggar Lazarus after his death ‘was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom’. The rich man ends in torment in hell and begs that Lazarus ‘may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue’. But Abraham points out to the rich man that he enjoyed the good things in his life and Lazarus the evil things, and that their fates are for ever reversed in the hereafter. ‘Dives’ is also referred to in X.206: *Wiþ dives in pyne þou shalt lyȝe*.

397 *hym*] MS *hy*.

410 I conclude the description of the proceedings on the Day of Judgement in St. (51) with a colon, to introduce the list of standards by which man will be judged in St. (52).