DYE, MARY SUE. Purity, A Fourteenth Century Penitential Sermon. (1973)
Directed by: Dr. Charles P. R. Tisdale Pp. 55

This study analyzes Purity as a fourteenth century penitential sermon which is representative of its age. It hypothesizes that the Pearl-poet followed the medieval techniques of sermon construction and that the work is probably based on II Peter 2.

The thesis examines Purity on three levels. It is first studied in accordance with the form of the University sermon. The introduction is divided into three segments: the pronouncement of theme, the protheme, and the repetition of the principal theme. The body is noted to contain three major exempla and six minor exempla, and the work concludes with a seven line exhortation to purity.

Second, the poem is compared to II Peter 2 of the Douay Bible. Comparison reveals that the poet probably used this Biblical text as the outline for his sermon, deviating only when he found it necessary to draw on other stories for additional exempla.

Third, the work is interpreted to be a fourteenth century verse homily stressing the necessity for penance and reinforcing the importance of spiritual cleanness.

In the final conclusion the penitential nature of the medieval sermon is emphasized. The thesis affirms that the Lateran Council of 1215 and the advent of the preaching friar are two factors instrumental in the evolution of the lyrical sermon and penitential literature so popular in the fourteenth century. Purity is recognized as a product of these historical events.

Purity, A Fourteenth Century Penitential Sermon

by

Mary Sue Dye

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Greensboro
1973

Approved by

Charles P.R. Tisdale
Thesis Advisor

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Thesis Advisor Charles P. R. Tisdale

Committee Members

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The researcher is deeply grateful to Dr. Charles Tisdale, Thesis Advisor, whose guidance and patience made this work possible.

Sincere appreciation is extended to the thesis committee, Dr. James I. Wimsatt and Dr. Walter Beale for their helpful suggestions and guidance during the preparation of this thesis.

Special thanks are given to Mrs. Janet Saunders who typed many drafts of the thesis and prepared the final copy. Thanks are also extended to the Danville Community College Library personnel who spent many hours securing research materials.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The following is an analysis of the Middle English alliterative poem Purity or Cleanness. Because of its didactic nature, this poem and its companion Patience have been avoided by most literary critics and scholars, and scholarship has been devoted to Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and The Pearl--the poet's better known works. Thus, a need exists for a study of both Purity and Patience as typical medieval verse sermons. Present studies of Purity have treated the work solely from the literary angle, disregarding its homiletic dimension. Were this the fourteenth century, this distinction would never have occurred. Rather, it would have been judged in large part on its theological merits. Therefore, if we of the twentieth century are to understand the meaning of Purity, we must view it in the context within which it was written. This is the task of this thesis.

In the course of this study, we will be concerned with first, an analysis of the structure of the sermon[1] as an example of a University-type vernacular sermon intended for lay audiences; second, a comparison of the

---

[1]Throughout this thesis the words sermon and homily will be used interchangeably. They are defined in Webster's Dictionary as: sermon - "a religious discourse delivered in public usually by a clergyman as a part of a worship service" and homily - "a discourse on a religious theme especially delivered to a congregation during church service." See: Webster's Third International Dictionary of the English Language, Philip Babcock Gove, Ed. in-chief (Springfield, Massachusetts, 1961), pp. 2073 and 1083 respectively.

work with what this writer believes to be the Biblical text used as a basis for the sermon; third, an examination of Purity as a penitential sermon; and fourth, a proposal that Purity could have been written in celebration of Whitsunday.

Chapter I

A "MODERN SERMON"

The fourteenth century was the golden age of religion in England. Many anonymous preachers added to the literary canon while great ecclesiastical names such as Fitzralph, Brunton, Bromyard, and Rypon began to emerge.[1] The preceeding century had seen the climax and gradual decline of discussion of the doctrine of transubstantiation, the institution of a required "annual confession and penance for all Christians," and the establishment of the Franciscan and Dominican Friars in England.[2] All of these changes were important to the Christian church, but the latter two acted as a catalyst for the literary output of the fourteenth century by influencing the revival of preaching.

Prior to the thirteenth century, preaching had reached its lowest ebb, and very little religious instruction was carried on. That which was done was filled with the logic and law of scholasticism and failed to inspire the ordinary congregation of the day. However, with the advent of the friars, the style and method of preaching began to change. The parish priest found himself in constant competition with the friar who was successfully using a practical approach that stressed the "human,

---

[1] W. A. Pantin, The English Church in the Fourteenth Century (Notre Dame, 1962), p. 236.

[2] Jerrit P. Judd, A History of Civilization (New York, 1966), p. 173.

simple, and personal" aspects of religion. He emphasized the love and compassion Christ felt for His people, and he told stories drawn both from the Scriptures and from real life.[3] This approach to religion appealed to the medieval man, and the priest found change inevitable. He was no longer able to bombard his congregation with dry logic but was forced to imitate the pleasing style of the friar.

However, change in preaching cannot be attributed solely to the influence of the friars. Of equal importance is the revitalization of the clergy brought about by the initiation of a required annual confession and by John Peckham's decree in 1281 to improve the preaching standards in England. The decree required each priest to appear before his parish at least four times a year. At this time the priest was to explain the Creed, Ten Commandments, Seven Deadly Sins, Seven Cardinal Virtues and the Seven Sacraments of Grace.[4] The regulation was again revised seventy-six years later when Archbishop Thoresby required religious instruction to be given every Sunday.[5] This zeal to improve instruction at the grassroots level and to require confession at least once a year, coupled with the necessity to compete with the pulpit technique of the friars, inspired the secular clergyman. He was hard pressed to provide quality instruction in a more pleasing manner.

---

[3]Joseph Albert Mosher, The Exemplum in the Early Religious and Didactic Literature of England, (New York, 1966), p. 113.

[4]Thomas Frederick Simmons and Henry Edward Nolloth, "Introduction," The Lay Folk's Catechism: The English and Latin Versions of Archbishop Thoresby's Instruction for the People, EETS, OS,CXVIII (London, 1901), p. xii.

[5]Ibid., p. xvii.

Telling stories and jokes in the pulpit in order to provide a more palatable medium of instruction soon grew to include the delivery of sermons in verse. This particular innovation spread in popularity and became a "general contagion."[6] It was not simply an English "fad," but also spread into France and other parts of the continent.[7] Many medieval preachers attacked the new pulpit literature as a means to "seduce the ear, rather than to convert the soul."[8] And John Wyclif, who played a very important role in church history, condemned verse sermons as an abominable form. He writes:

> For freres in her prechinge fordon prechinge of Crist, and prechen lesyngus and japes plesynge to þe peple...for þei docken goddis word and tateren it by þer rimes þat þe fowrme þat Crist ȝaf it is hidde by yposcrisie.[9]

Chaucer's Parson[10] reveals an acquaintance with the technique when he too excludes rhyming from his pulpit repertoire. He says:

> ...[I] kan not geeste 'rum, ram, ruf,' by lettre,
> Ne, God woot, rym holde I but litel bettre;
> And therefore, if you list--I wol nat glose--X [1] (42-45)

It must be noted that Wyclif's disapproval and the Parson's ineptness is no indication of the popularity of the verse sermon and religious

---

[6]G. R. Owst, Preaching in Medieval England: An Introduction to Sermon Manuscripts of the Period (New York, 1965), p. 271.

[7]Natalie E. White, "The English Liturgical Refrain Lyric before 1450 with Special Reference to the Fourteenth Century," Diss. Stanford Univ. 1945, p. 245.

[8]Owst, p. 274.

[9]John Wyclif, Select English Works of John Wyclif, Ed. Thomas Arnold (Oxford, 1899) II, p. 301.

[10]All references to Chaucer are based on F. N. Robinson's edition, The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer (Boston, 1961).

lyrics of that day. Rather, the medieval preacher apparently delighted in the use of religious verse to drive home a particular point or to "unstop the ears" of an inattentive audience.[11] John Small suggests that these metrical works were intended to be read to the congregation after the regular service and were used to relay some final bit of information that might have been missed.[12] The preacher's intent was to draw his congregation closer to God and to inspire them to live according to His dictates.[13] If this could be accomplished best by rhyme, then he was not adverse to its employment.

Sermon Structure

With the growing emphasis on ministerial technique, a new approach to sermon structure also emerged. This approach, referred to as the 'modern' or 'University' sermon was a welcome change from the unplanned 'ancient' sermon of the past. It was a highly organized method of sermon construction and initiated a new era of preaching.[14]

Working within the confines of the University-type sermon required that the minister select a Biblical text that could be divided into at least three main divisions. This number "three" was especially popular

---

[11]Pantin, p. 141.

[12]John Small, "Introduction and Notes," English Metrical Homilies from Manuscripts of the Fourteenth Century (Edinburgh, 1862), p. vi.

[13]Steven Brown, The World of Imagery; Metaphor and Kindred Imagery (New York, 1965), p. 215.

[14]Woodburn O. Ross, "Introduction," Middle English Sermons, EETS, OS, CCIX (London, 1940), pp. 1-li. For a homely portrayal of a fourteenth century mass see: Joseph and Frances Gies, Life in a Medieval City (New York, 1969), p. 122. For a more formal description see: Henry Osborne Taylor, The Medieval Mind: A History of the Development of Thought and Emotion in the Middle Ages (London, 1925), I, pp. 103-104.

because of its apparent association with the Trinity.[15] Moreover, the tightly knit structure of the University or "modern" sermon required seven separate parts or divisions--the theme, antetheme, protheme, repetition of the theme, division, subdivision and discussion. The text for the day was necessarily taken from the Scriptures [16] and could be the text assigned for "the lesson, the epistle, or the gospel" for that particular day. However, on special days on the church calendar such as Easter and Whitsunday, the preacher could select his text from any part of the Bible that he wished. Having announced his theme, he would then introduce the antetheme through prayer and invocation "followed by the repetition of 'Pater' and 'Ave' by all present." The protheme, immediately following, repeated the original theme by elaborating on some part of the theme not discussed in the sermon.[17]

Woodburn Ross reminds us that the fourteenth century preacher would frequently combine the antetheme and the protheme into one unit, thus eliminating the need for additional consideration of the theme. If this were done, he would then begin what was now the third segment of his sermon--the repetition of the main theme. This segment allowed the speaker to repeat his theme for the benefit of any late comers in the congregation. It was also beneficial as a restatement of purpose. At this point the division of the sermon, the most important part of the homily, was begun. The writer could begin his discussion of the separate parts of the theme

---

[15] Owst, p. 332.

[16] Ross, p. xliv.

[17] Owst, pp. 316-320.

here, or he might divide it even further into subtopics. These subtopics were frequently developed by dilation.[18] Having completed this dilation, he would bring the homily back to the original theme and end his didactic work with a prayer.[19]

Purity's Sermon Structure

In keeping with the form of the university sermon, the Pearl-poet divides his verse homily into three major divisions and six subdivisions. The choice of six for the number of subdivisions is obvious in that it is divisible by two, the result returning to the preferred symbolic number three. However, he deviates from the norm by introducing his subtopics prior to the major ones. Hence, he arrives at a form which is theme, protheme, repetition, subtopics a and b, major topic I, subtopics c and d, major topic II, subtopic e, major topic III, subtopic f, return to major topic III, and closing prayer.

Purity, at first glance, appears to have a rather complicated structural pattern. Therefore, an outline is included in an effort to simplify understanding of the sermon-poem.

I. Introduction (1-204)
   A. Pronouncement of theme (1-48)
   B. Protheme, "Parable of the Wedding Feast" (49-176)
   C. Repetition of principal theme (177-204)

II. Body of Sermon
   A. Exempla first section
      1. Subdivision "a" - "Fall of Lucifer" (205-234)
      2. Subdivision "b" - "Fall of Adam" (235-248)
      3. Major I - "Noah and the Flood" (249-600)

---

[18] Ross, pp. xliv ff.

[19] White, p. 293.

B. Exempla second section
   1. Subdivision "c" - "God's Visit to Abraham" (601-780)
   2. Subdivision "d" - "Angels' Visit to Lot" (781-892)
   3. Major II - "Sodom and Gomorrah" (893-1048)
   4. Exhortation to Purity (1049-1148)

C. Exempla third section
   1. Subdivision "e" - "Capture of the Vessels of the Temple" (1149-1332)
   2. Major III - "Belshazzar's Feast" (1333-1640)
   3. Subdivision "f" - "Nebuchadnezzar" (1641-1708)
   4. Return to Major III (1709-1804)

III. Conclusion (1805-1812)

The poet opens his sermon with a brief introduction to the theme. In the opening lines he proclaims:

> Clannesse who so kyndly cowþe comende,
> And rekken up alle þe resounz þat ho by riȝt askez,
> Fayre formez myȝt he fynde in for[þ]ering his speche,
> And in þe contrare, kark and combraunce huge.
> For wonder wroth is þe Wyȝ þat wroȝt alle þinges
> Wyth þe freke þat in fylþe folȝes hym after.[20] (1-6)

Thus, in this initial segment he announces two themes that will run concurrently throughout the poem. First, God, referred to as "þe Wyȝ þat wroȝt alle þinges," (5) is angry with the unclean or impure, and second, He is an all-powerful God. Elaborating on this theme, the preacher-poet turns to a special type of "renkez of relygioun" (7) which is revealed in "prestez" (8) who "hondel þer his aune body" (11) in the form of the sacrament. He says that those priests who "in clannes be clos" (12) will receive a great reward while those who "conterfete crafte" (13) anger God. This counterfeiting is further described by the poet as a lack of

---

[20] All references to Purity are based on Robert J. Menner's edition, Purity, A Middle English Poem, Yale Studies in English, LXI (New Haven, 1920).

"courtayse" (13) on the part of the priest. Continuing with the pronouncement of his theme, the poet refers to the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:8--"Blessed are the clean: for they shall see God."[21] He then proceeds with the analogy that if a wealthy lord were to have a great feast, he would be especially angry when a guest arrived wearing old torn clothes. The lord would cast the man out of the hall and forever forbid his readmission (36-48). This brief analogy serves as a preface to the protheme (49-176) in which he introduces his first exemplum, "The Parable of the Wedding Feast." Christ tells this parable in Matthew 22:1-14 and Luke 14:16-24. The Pearl-poet combines both versions of the Biblical account. Proceeding from that point, he repeats his principal theme (177-204) by listing a long series of sins none of which angered God more than "fylþe of the flesch" (202).

Having completed the repetition of his principal theme, the poet begins the major segment of his sermon. As previously stated, this segment differs from the normal pattern of the university-type sermon in that the writer introduces his subtopics prior to that of the major, using the "Fall of Lucifer" as his exemplum in subtopic "a" (205-234). This portion of his homily is taken from Isaiah 14:12-23 which explains the tradition of Lucifer's fall from heaven.

The Pearl-poet is thus expanding his sermon by exemplum which may be defined as a "narrative used to illustrate or confirm a general statement."[22] In this instance, the general statement that he wishes to

---

[21]All references to the Bible are based on the Douay version.

[22]Mosher, p. 76.

confirm is the sin of disloyalty which can be interpreted by medieval standards as a failure in "trawth." Lucifer "Ne never wolde for wyl[fulnes] his worþy God knawe,/Ne pray hym for no þite, so proud watz his wylle" (231-232). Yet, the Pearl-poet proclaims that God modifies His anger, "Forþy þaȝ þe rape were rank, þe rawþe watz lyttel" (233).

The poet turns to subtopic "b" (235-248) of his sermon. This segment supports the original theme evidenced in subtopic "a," that is, God is angered by a failure in "trawth." The story told is the "Fall of Adam," and Adam is portrayed as having sinned in pride and disobedience. This version of the fall of man is recorded in detail in the third chapter of Genesis and is compressed by the poet into thirteen lines. He draws the exemplum to a close with the reminder that God tempered his anger when He chose Mary to be the Mother of Christ: "Al in mesure and meþe watz mad þe veng[a]unce,/And efte amended wyth a mayden þat make had never" (247-248).

The first major section of Purity is now introduced as the exemplum "Noah and the Flood." This segment of the sermon-poem extends from lines 249 to 544 and is followed by a fifty-five line discourse on the necessity for purity of life if one is to see God. The flood exemplum is taken from the Genesis account of God's wrath and vengeance visited upon the world. The poet describes the terrible fear and suffering of both man and beast and concludes with the following admonition:

> Lo! suche a wrakful wo for wlatsum dedez
> Parformed þe hyȝe Fader on folke þat he made;
> Þat he chysly hade cherisched he chastysed ful hard[e],
> In devoydynge þe vylanye þat venkquyst his þewez. (541-544)

Throughout this exemplum the poet is not condemning simple impurity of the body, but he is speaking of all forms of impenitent disobedience to the will of God. Thus, the specific sin of impurity serves as a metaphor for impenitence, and the poet is citing examples of men who are doomed to the destruction of hell by virtue of their refusal to follow God's behests. He does not focus, for instance, on failure in "trawth"--"faithfulness, good faith, loyalty, honesty."[23] When this sin is present in the minor exempla God is exceedingly angry, but He does not punish the offender with death. However, in the major exempla, the poet is concerned with impurity of the body as a metaphor for impenitence, and God metes out death as the final judgment. Thus, it is apparent that God's punishment does not depend on the sin committed, but rather on whether or not the sinner is repentant.

The poet reminds his listeners that God felt sorrow for mankind (562-563); yet, He did not regret His decision. Later, He "knyt a covenaunde cortaysly wyth monkynde þere," (564) and, God, according to the poet, acted in the only manner open to him in that "alle illez he hates as helle þat stynkkez" (577).

The Pearl-poet now launches into the second section of his exempla (subsection "c"--God's visit to Abraham and subsection "d"--the Angels' visit to Lot). These stories precede the second major division of the sermon and act as an introduction to that exemplum--the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

---

[23] The Oxford English Dictionary, (Oxford, 1961) XI, p. 402.

God's visit to Abraham is taken from Genesis xviii in its entirety and follows the Biblical text rather closely. The story tells how Abraham pleaded with God to save Sodom even if there were only ten good men found living there. Also included is the account of Sara's scornful laughter at the revelation that she would bear a child. This portion is probably the more important of the two in that it serves to point out Sara's unwillingness to believe that God was able to cause her to give birth even in her old age. When confronted with her laughter, she lied: "Penne swenged forth Sare and swer, by hir trawþe,/Þat for lot þat þay lansed ho laȝed never" (667-668).

Subsection "d" (781-892)--the Angels' visit to Lot--is taken from Genesis xlx:1-23. Again the poet follows the Biblical text rather closely for the general storyline. However, he allows his imagination full sway as he expands the tale. Taking a text that is only twenty-three verses long, the poet is able to expand this section of his sermon into 111 lines. He describes the angels as "Bolde burnez were þay boþe, wyth berdles chynnez" (789). The poem goes on to fully explain the angels' meeting with Lot (796-804) and the invitation that followed: "I norne yow bot for on nyȝt neȝe me to lenge,/And in þe myry mornyng ȝe may yor waye take" (803-804). He then takes the simple line, "He prepared a meal for them baking unleavened bread, and they ate" (Genesis xix:3) and expands it into a lengthy description (818-834) of the meal. This entire section serves to introduce the more important exemplum on the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. It is also the instrument for exposing Lot's wife as one who was guilty of failure in "trawth." She was instructed by her husband to see

that "For wyth no sour ne no salt servez hym never" (820). Yet, she disobeyed him when:

> Þenne ho savarez wyth salt her seuez uch one,
> Agayne þe bone of þe burne þat hit forboden hade,
> And als ho scelt hem in scorne þat wel her skyl knewen. (825-984)

This deliberate disobedience is seen again when she turns to view the destruction of Sodom and is changed into a block of salt (979-984).

The second major exemplum (893-1048) is introduced with a vivid description of the beginning of the day of destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah: "Ruddon of þe day-rawe ros upon uȝten,/When merk of þe mydnyȝt moȝt no more last" (893-894). This entire segment deals with the destruction itself and is based on the account in Genesis xix:15-29. Taking these fourteen verses, the poet expands the tale into 155 lines and tells of the terrible death and destruction that resulted from man's sinful nature. He is concerned with the unnatural vice that takes its name from this incident and describes the final results of God's vengeance: "Þis watz a vengaunce violent þat voyded þise places,/Þat foundered hatz so fayr a folk, and þe folde sonkken (1013-1014). Expanding on the Biblical account which simply states that brimstone and fire fell upon Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis xix:24), the Pearl-poet describes the burned land and the "drovy and dym" (1016) sea. He portrays Sodom, once a place of beauty, as a wasteland, and God, the Creator of all things, as the Destroyer of all those who dare to violate His laws.

Once the story of Sodom and Gomorrah is told, the poet begins a ninety-nine line "Exhortation to Purity." Beginning with line 1049, he reminds his listeners that God's love can be gained by imitating Him (1049-1068). He then describes the purity of Christ's life on earth (1069-1108)

and concludes with an explanation on how man can imitate this purity (1109-1148).

Having completed the discussion of his second major exemplum, the Pearl-poet once again returns to the subdivisions of his work. As in the four previous subdivisions, he tells two stories which illustrate a failure in "trawth." Subsection "e" (1149-1332)--"Capture of the Vessels of the Temple"--serves as the introduction to the poet's final major exemplum--"Belshazzar's Feast." This story tells of the capture and defilement by the Babylonians of the sacred vessels (basins, bowls, cups, etc.) from the temple in Jerusalem. The Biblical texts are Jeremiah lii:1-26 and 2 Kings xxiv:18-25. He illustrates the failure in "trawth" in this subsection and reveals the punishment meted out by God for disobedience. Zedekiah, Solomon's successor, turned from the laws of God to idolatry, and God caused Nebuchadnezzar to destroy him.

At this point, the poet deviates from his normal structural pattern of two subsections followed by a major exemplum. He begins the last segment of his sermon with a single separate subsection followed by a major exemplum within which the second subsection is contained. The third major exemplum (1333-1640/1709-1804) tells of Belshazzar, the son of Nebuchadnezzar, who irreverently uses the vessels of God. He is punished by death since his sin is defilement of the body. The connection is not readily apparent to the reader. However, the human body is frequently referred to as a vessel in Biblical literature, and this writer believes such was the intent of the Pearl-poet. The analogy of God as the potter and man as the

vessel is asserted in Isaiah xlv:9,11 and lxiv:8. Thus, the vessel metaphor seems to be especially appropriate to symbolize the defiled bodies of God's children.

Within the story of Belshazzar is the last subsection of the poet's sermon, the story of Nebuchadnezzar's sin of pride and loss of "trawth" (1641-1708). As a result of his failure to obey God, he became insane and wandered unknown forests. God continued to punish him in this manner until he accepted God as the greatest of all powers, at which time his kingdom was returned to him. It should be noted that Nebuchadnessar's sin was similar to that of Satan in that he was guilty of pride and desired to elevate himself above God.

The poet returns to his major exemplum and completes the story of Belshazzar's final destruction (1709-1804). He explains to his audience that Belshazzar was:

> ...corsed for his unclannes, and cached þerinne,
> Done doun of his dygnete for dedez unfayre,
> And of þyse worldes worchyp wrast out for ever. (1800-1802)

In the traditional manner of the "modern" sermon, the preacher poet then reminds his people of the lesson taught that day and prays that "grace he uus sende" (1810).

Conclusion

It is thus obvious that the Pearl-poet has not written an unbalanced and poorly planned sermon. Rather, examination reveals that each section is a well planned segment of a didactic statement which stresses the sins of man. It divides man's sins into those which anger God but do not call down His greatest wrath (those against "trawth"), and those which cause God

to punish man with death (impurity of body). In each case, a kind of impurity is present, but the latter is most distasteful to the Maker since it is used as a metaphor for impenitent sin.

Another preoccupation of the poem is penance as the means to cleanse the impurity of sin. The poet is calling for the penance of the congregation, for it is only through penance that they can become pure or clean enough to enter the kingdom of heaven. He is calling for immediate action for the time is now. Otherwise, warns the poet, man may find himself unfit to be invited to live with God, even as the poorly dressed wedding guest was unfit to remain in the wedding hall. There is an urgency in his message as he reminds them that God's call may come at any time and that they can only be prepared through confession and penance. To be unprepared, says the writer, is to risk the wrath that he has illustrated abundantly in nine different exempla.

Chapter 2

PURITY AS A FOURTEENTH CENTURY VERSE HOMILY

Basis for Sermon Outline

As we have seen, the fourteenth century views on sermon construction suggested that the writer divide his work into three separate divisions and that each division should comment on the chosen theme. Thus, a fourteenth century writer could follow one of two courses. He could select a Biblical text that would lend itself to the natural division of at least three sections, or he could prepare his sermon from several different texts and incorporate all the information. Since the exact text used by the Pearl-poet is not known, scholars have simply stated that the Latin Vulgate is the source of Purity.[1]

---

[1] It is generally admitted that the Latin Vulgate Bible is the source of Purity. See: Sir Israel Gollancz, Ed., Cleanness, An Alliterative Tripartite Poem on the Deluge, the Destruction of Sodom, and the Death of Belshazzar by the Poet of Pearl, Select Early English Poems, VII (London,1921), p. xix, says: "The poet had before him some form of the Vulgate text, and this was his major source... it is remarkable how closely he adheres to the actual words before him." See also: Robert Menner, Purity, A Middle English Poem, Yale Studies in English, LXI (New Haven, 1920), p. xxix; John Gardner, The Complete Works of the Gawain-Poet (Chicago, 1965), p. 25; Richard Morris, Ed., Early English Alliterative Poems in the West Midland Dialect of the Fourteenth Century (London, 1864), p. xiii, Edwin Dodge Cuffe, "An Interpretation of Patience, Cleanness, and the Pearl from the Viewpoint of Imagery," Diss. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1951, p. 83.

To date, the specific Biblical text used as a basis for the work has not been identified. Rather, several references are cited, often non-Biblical, as the source for the individual stories told in the metrical sermon. For instance, John Gardner suggests that the poet might have borrowed ideas from Tertullian and Bonaventura.[2] This writer believes the Pearl-poet was working with the Bible as his primary source of inspiration and that he chose II Peter 2 as the framework for his poem. Not only are six of the nine exempla told in Purity found in this particular text, but they are included in the same sequence as that of the Biblical work. Also, II Peter 2 carries the same didactic message as that of the Pearl-poet's metrical sermon. It is not immediately apparent why the poet did not specifically cite the Biblical source. However, one must remember that the Pearl-poet was not living in an age of the enlightened reader. Few, if any, of his parishoners owned a Bible, and fewer still probably ever heard of II Peter. They depended upon oral transmission of the Bible. So what would the preacher gain by citing a text that was probably hitherto unknown to his listeners?

The text of II Peter 2 begins with the admonition that the reader beware of "lying teachers" (II Pet. 2:1), for God has placed many punishments upon those who do not follow His precepts. The apostle[3] warns any

---

[2]Gardner, pp. 343-344.

[3]Historically, II Peter is attributed to Simon Peter or to someone who was writing in the name of the apostle. Tradition tells us that the writer was attempting to "combat doubts growing out of the delay of the Parousia" or second coming. See: M. S. Enslin, "Second Letter of Peter" The Interpreters Dictionary of The Bible, III (Nashville, 1962), pp. 767-768.

future offenders of a similar fate and cites three Old Testament stories--the Fall of the Angels, Noah and the Flood, and the Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah--as examples of God's punishments. In the first, he says that He "delivered them, drawn down by infernal ropes to the lower hell, unto torments, to be reserved unto judgment" (II Pet. 2:5). He reminds his reader that Noah's family alone was saved from the great deluge because Noah was "the preacher of justice" (II Pet. 2:5). Not satisfied with these two examples of the punishments meted out by God, the author launches into the third Old Testament story--Sodom and Gomorrah. He writes that God destroyed these cities and saved only Lot and his family because Lot was "oppressed by the injustice and lewd conversation of the wicked" (II Pet. 2:7). He continues his description of Lot as a man who was "just" and whom the Sodomites "vexed...with unjust works" (II Pet. 2:5). At this point in his narrative the writer begins the essential message intended in II Peter 2. He states that God reserves his most terrible anger for those "who walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness," and who "despise government" (II Pet. 2:10). He accuses these sinners of being "audacious, self-willed" and "blaspheming" (II Pet. 2:10). Unlike the fallen angels whom God did not punish with a "railing judgment" (II Pet. 2:11), fallen man is said to be an "irrational" beast who tends toward "the snare and to destruction..." (II Pet. 2:12). He concludes his epistle with a reminder that "...it had been better for them not to have known the way of justice, than after they have known it to turn back from that holy commandment which was delivered to them" (II Pet. 2:21).

Historically we are told that the writer of II Peter 2 was confronted with two problems. First, he wished to oppose the Gnostic teaching that there would not be a second coming. Second, he allowed that scriptural prophecy could not be a matter of self-instruction. Rather, since the Scripture was written by inspired men, it could only be interpreted by inspired men. He was reserving interpretation to the "ecclesiastical teaching office," and preventing the spreading of what he believed to be false doctrine.[4]

It is therefore apparent that the writer of II Peter is warning his readers to avoid those men who reject the Parousia and to prepare for Christ's second coming by remaining in a state of penance. He cites four examples of the wrath God visits upon those who disobey His commandments. In so doing, he reminds his people to be prepared for the last day and to avoid recontamination with sin once they have received purification.

Comparison of II Peter 2 with Purity

A comparison of this Biblical work with Purity reveals an apparent dependence on II Peter 2 as a basic framework for the metrical sermon. As noted in Chapter I of this study, there are three main stories which are incorporated into Purity. They are the Flood (249-544), Sodom and Gomorrah (893-1048), and Belshazzar's Feast (1333-1640). There are six minor stories also included--the Fall of the Angels (205-234), the Fall of Man (235-248), Abraham (601-780), Lot (781-892), the Fall of Jerusalem (1149-1332), and Nebuchadnezzar (1641-1708)--making a total of nine exempla in

---

[4]Werner Georg Kümmel, An Introduction to the New Testament, trans. A. J. Mattill, Jr. (Nashville, 1966), p. 304.

all. Present in the Biblical text are four stories--the fall of the angels (II Pet. 2:4), the Flood (II Pet. 2:5), Sodom and Gomorrah (II Pet. 2:6), and the deliverance of Lot (II Pet. 2:7). Verses twelve and thirteen suggest the stories of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar making a total of six exempla in all. Thus, it is plausible that the Pearl-poet used II Peter 2 as an outline for the metrical sermon Purity. He deviates from this outline only when he finds it necessary to include three additional minor exempla to maintain his tripartite division.

If we accept this hypothesis, then we must assume that the poet had only to fill in the blanks left by the epistle by selecting three additional minor exempla and fitting Belshazzar's Feast into the last segment of his sermon. At first, Belshazzar's Feast appears to be a rather unusual choice, and scholars have accused the poet of damaging the composition of his sermon.[5] However, one must remember that he was dealing with vessels as a metaphor for the human body and receptacle of the soul of man. Within this context, the Belshazzar segment fits into the overall plan devised by the Pearl-poet in that it suggests that the sacred vessels taken from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar were symbolic of those

---

[5]In his introduction to Purity, p. iii, Professor Menner states that "in spite of the fact that the outline is clear and carefully worked out, the poem is not well proportioned. ...the introduction to Belshazzar's Feast, which narrates the siege of Jerusalem and the seizure of the sacred vessels, both elaborated with much irrelevant detail, is also unnecessarily long. The poet apparently found such excellent material for story-telling in the events recorded that he could not refrain from inserting it. He becomes so engrossed in his narrative that he forgets that his stories are not being written for their own sake, but as illustrations of a particular theme."

children of God who were taken from the Holy Church by Satan. Since Belshazzar's whores drank from the vessels, the objects were defiled. It is not unlikely that the poet is suggesting a physical violation of chastity here.

If one is to establish Purity's dependence upon II Peter 2, a more thorough comparison of the two works is necessary. In so doing, the reader finds that there is not only a similarity in structure and content, but also in theme and moral intent. For example, in comparing the two texts it is discovered that the author of II Peter begins the second chapter of his book by warning the Church that:

> ...there were also false prophets among the people, even as there shall be among you lying teachers, who shall bring in sects of perdition, and deny the Lord who bought them: bringing upon themselves swift destruction.
> And many shall follow their riotousnesses, through whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.
> And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their perdition slumbereth not. (II Peter 2:1-3)

In a like manner, the Pearl-poet speaks initially of men of religion. First, he tells of those who are honest clergymen:

> As renkez of relygioun þat reden and syngen,
> And aprochen to hys presens, and prestez arn called.
> They teen unto his temmple and temen to hymselven,
> Reken wyth reverence þay r[ec]hen his auter,
> Þay hondel þer his aune body and usen hit boþe:
> If þay in clannes be close, þay cleche gret mede. (Pur. 7-12)

And then he turns to those who are dishonest:

> Bot if þay conterfete crafte, and cortaysye wont.
> As be honest utwyth, and inwith alle fylþez,
> Þen are þay synful hemself, and sulped altogeder,
> Loþe God and his gere, and hym to greme cachen. (Pur. 13-16)

As the apostle is intent upon warning the Church that there are "false prophets" (II Pet. 2:1) among them who will lead them to destruction, the Pearl-poet follows his lead when he contends that there are dishonest preachers who "conterfete crafte and cortaysye wont" (Pur. 13). These, says the poet, will be punished by God--"hym to greme cachen" (Pur. 16). Finally, like the Apostle Peter, the poet emphasizes the seriousness of living an impure life, "For wonder wroth is þe Wyz þat wroȝt all þinges/ Wyth þe freke þat in fylþe folȝes hym after" (Pur. 5-6) and urges his congregation to confession and penance.

The concept of purity is then expanded by insertion of the "Parable of the Wedding Feast" which tells how a wealthy lord prepared a great feast in honor of his son's marriage. However, the invited guests, for one reason or another, refused his invitation. Angrily, the lord ordered his servants to go out into the highways and invite all who traveled there. Soon the great hall was filled. But one guest was found to be improperly attired. The lord demanded that the man be thrown into the dungeon and never permitted entrance into the castle again. Using the metaphor of clean clothes to represent the sinless state of man, the poet explains this segment by reminding his listeners that God will not allow them to enter the gates of heaven if they, like the guest, appear before Him with souls that have not been made clean:

> For such unþewez as þise, and þole much payne,
> And in þe Creatores cort com never more,
> Ne never see hym with syȝt for such sour tornez. (Pur. 190-192)

Turning once again to the epistle of St. Peter, we note that the writer reminds the Church that God did not withhold punishment from the angels as the originators of sin. Rather, He:

> ...spared not the angels
> that sinned, but delivered them drawn
> down by infernal ropes to the lower hell,
> unto torments, to be reserved unto judgment. (II Pet. 2:4)

The Pearl-poet, too, reviews the story of Satan's fall. However, in the tradition of the medieval preacher, he expands the story to play upon the imaginations of his congregation. He says:

> For þe fyrste felonye þe falce fende wroȝt,
> Whyl he watz hyȝe in þe heven hoven upon lofte,
> Of alle þyse apel aungelez attled þe fayrest;
> And he unkyndely as a karle kydde a reward.
> He seȝ noȝt bot hymself how semly he were,
> Bot his Soverayn he forsoke,...(Pur. 205-210)

After a ten line description of Satan's conduct, the poet concludes with the following description of God's punishment of the offenders.

> Þikke þowsandez þro þrwen þeroute,
> Fellen fro þe fyrmament fendez ful blake,
> [S]weved at þe fyrst swap as þe snaw þikke,
> Hurled into helle-hole as þe hyve swarmez. (Pur. 220-223)

At this point it was necessary for the poet to expand his sermon in order to maintain the three-stage tripartite division. This time he chose to tell the story of Adam and Eve. Following the Genesis storyline very closely, he concludes with the reminder that man's punishment is "...þe deþe þat drepez uus alle" (Pur. 246). At first it appears that the Adam and Eve story should logically follow the story of Satan's fall. The average person frequently thinks of the two as companion pieces, and it is not unlikely that the Pearl-poet was reasoning along the same lines. However, another possibility also exists. The apostle reminds us that God did

not punish the angels with a "railing judgment" (II Pet. 2:11), but He found fallen man to be an "irrational" beast who tends toward "destruction" (II Pet. 2:12). Although he does not definitely identify Adam in this segment, the inference is clear. Perhaps the poet felt that he was correctly interpreting II Peter 2:11-12 as being a reference to the fall of Adam and is following the apostle's line of thinking.

Having completed his minor exempla, the poet again returns to II Peter 2 for the next segment of his sermon. This time he tells the story of Noah and the flood in accordance with this Biblical text. The epistle reads:

> And spared not the original world, but preserved
> Noe, the eighth person, the preacher of justice bringing
> in the flood upon the world of the ungodly. (II Pet. 2:5)

Since he was a natural storyteller, he delighted in the expansion of the Old Testament story and began by explaining the reasons for God's anger.

> But in þe þryd watz forþrast al þat þryve schuld:
> Þer watz malys mercyles and mawgre much scheued,
> Þat watz for fylþe upon folde þat þe folk used,
> Þat þen wonyed in þe worlde wythouten any maysterz. (Pur. 249-252)

He describes in detail the evil that mankind devised (Pur. 253-280) and sees the earth as becoming complete in its corruption--God "knew uche contre coruppte in hitselven,/And uch freke forloyned fro þe ryȝt wayez" (Pur. 281-282). Thus, according to the Pearl-poet, God became angry with mankind because man was guilty of sins of the "flesh." He decided that He would "delyver and do away þat doten on þis molde,/And fleme out of þe folde al þat flesch werez" (Pur. 286-287). God proclaims that "Al schal doun and be ded and dryven out of erþe" (Pur. 289). He describes the dimensions of the ark in vivid detail (Pur. 309-322) and narrates the events of the flood

as though he were among the eight passengers aboard (Pur. 361-544). Finally, drawing the Noah segment to a close, the Pearl-poet reminds his audience that God would never again destroy the entire world, for He:

> ...knyt a covenaunde cortaysly wyth monkynde þere,
> In þe mesure of his mode and meþe of his wylle,
> Þat he schulde never, for no syt, smyte al at onez. (Pur. 564-566)

Once again it was time to return to his Biblical text. He was rewarded with still another exemplum--the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah--as a second example of God's punishment of sinful man. The epistle reads:

> And reducing the cities of the Sodomites, and of the Gomorrhites, into ashes, condemned them to be overthrown, making them an example to those that should act wickedly.
> And delivered just Lot, oppressed by the injustice and lewd conversation of the wicked.
> For in sight and hearing he was just: dwelling among them, who from day to day vexed the just soul with unjust works. (II Pet. 2:6-8)

Since the poet apparently desired that the three divisions be tripartite, he was forced to select an additional minor exemplum to complete the sermon division. His Biblical text was providing him with one minor exemplum for this section. It seems only appropriate that he chose to divide the story of Sodom and Gomorrah into the same division as that of Genesis 18 since it already had a natural three-part apportionment. Thus, he includes the story of Abraham and, in so doing, assumes the same story sequence as the Genesis version. The story progresses from God's visit with Abraham (Pur. 601-688), through Abraham's plea for Lot's life (Pur. 713-776), the description of the angels' visit to Lot (Pur. 781-892), and to the final destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Pur. 893-1048).

In his writing the poet is able to make full use of description. He describes the total destruction of the two great cities and visualizes the terrible wrath of God:

> To waken wederez so wylde þe wyndez he callez.
> And þay wroþely upwafte and wrastled togeder,
> . . . . . .
> Of felle flaunkes of fyr and flakes of soufre,
> Al in smolderande smoke smachande ful ille,
> . . . . . .
> Al birolled wyth þe rayn, rostted and brenned,
> . . . . . .
> Þe brethe of þe brynston bi þat hit blende were,
> Al þo citees and her sydes sunkken to helle. (948-968)

Moreover, the poet introduces the penitential theme which runs throughout his text. He reminds his parishoners that penance alone can prevent damnation:

> Nou ar we sore and synful and souly uch one,
> How schulde we se, þen may we say, þat Syre upon throne?
> ȝis, pat Mayster is mercyable, þaȝ þou be man fenny
> And al tomarred in myre, whyl þou on molde lyvyes;
> Þou may schyne þurȝ schryfte, þaȝ þou haf schome served,
> And pure þe with penaunce tyl þou a perle worþe. (Pur. 1112-1116)

Finally, he is ready to return to his text. But a problem exists. The exempla intended for the third segment of his sermon are not precisely spelled out. Unfortunately, there is no way one can definitely prove that the final exempla in Purity were inspired by the Biblical verses. Certainly, there is no definite reference to the stories of the looting of the temple, to Nebuchadnezzar or to Belshazzar. Although the phrase "rioting in their feasts" (II Pet. 2:13) may have logically suggested any feast, there was certainly none more riotuous than that of Belshazzar. In describing the preparations for the Babylonian festivities, the poet imagines

the king to say:

> 'Bryng hem now to my borde, of beverage hem fylles,
> Let þise ladyes of hem lape--I luf hem in hert!
> Þat schal I cortaysly kybe, and þay schin knawe sone
> Þer is no bounte in burne lyk Baltazar þewes.' (Pur. 1433-1436)

One can readily see that not only are the words and phrases reminiscent of particular Bible stories, but that the general message of the epistle is the same as that of the Pearl-poet. When St. Peter speaks of those "who walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleannes" (II Pet. 2:10), he is a kindred spirit with the Pearl-poet who asks, "Hou schulde þou com to his kyth bot if þou clene were?" (Pur. 1110). The apostle describes those who persist in sinning as:

> Having eyes full of adultery and of sin that ceaseth not: alluring unstable souls, having their heart exercised with covetousness, children of malediction. (II Pet. 2:14)
> . . . . . .
> For if, flying from the polutions of the world, through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they be again entangled in them and overcome: their latter state is become unto them worse than the former. (II Pet. 2:20)

And the medieval preacher-poet warns his listeners:

> Bot war þe wel, if þou be waschen wyth water of schryfte,
> And polysed als playn as parchmen schaven,
> Sulp no more þenne in synne þy saule þerafter,
> For þenne þou Dryȝtyn dyspleses wyth dedes ful sore. (Pur. 1133-1136)

Whether we agree that the Pearl-poet was inspired to tell the Belshazzar story by significant words in St. Peter's text or that he borrowed his outline and thematic content from the epistle are moot points. What is not debatable, however, is the poet's reasoning for selecting a nearly self-contained text. Theories on sermon construction did not bind him to one particular text, but the University form did suggest a tripartite

division. Therefore, he elects to maintain the framework of the Biblical text since it provides a basic pattern.

Of course, we cannot overlook the poet's mastery of the Bible. His use of a textual outline is no indication that he is entirely dependent on this single source. Instead, the poet follows the text only as an outline, and then he expands that outline by going to the primary source of each exemplum. Knowing the Bible well enough to be able to locate and often combine versions of the same tale requires a thorough knowledge. This knowledge is not best illustrated by his switching from Matthew 22 to Luke 14. Rather, it is best illustrated by his knowing that II Peter 2 carries the same didactic message as that he wishes to present in his sermon.

When the poet decides to introduce the two most despicable sins as failure in "trawth" and sexual impurity, he knows that II Peter 2 discusses the anger that God feels for those "who walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness" (II Pet. 2:10) [sexual impurity], and those who "despise government" (II Pet. 2:10) [failure in trawth]. Therefore, he has only to incorporate the need for penance, and his sermon is complete. This step is taken early in the poem when the poet tells the story of the wedding feast. He reminds his listeners that Christ may come for them at any moment. Therefore, they must confess, repent, and receive absolution to be ready for His coming. Otherwise, as the man in the parable, they will not be invited to see God because their heavenly souls are soiled with impenitent sin.

We must conclude that II Peter 2 and Purity bear a great many similarities. In general format, six of the nine exempla presented in II Peter 2 are repeated in Purity. These six also appear in the same sequential arrangement in both works. Both record instances of God's punishment of the unrepentant, and they reflect the same themes and deliver the same didactic messages--repent, for the time is now. Perhaps the Pearl-poet was not combating the Gnostic intrusion into the fundamental doctrine of the Parousia, but he was fighting the eternal procrastinator who is forever delaying his annual visit to the priest. The poet's and apostle's concluding words might be interchanged to speak one final warning to mankind that "...it had been better for them not to have known the way of justice, than after they had known it, to turn back from that holy commandment which was delivered to them" (II Pet. 2:21), for God becomes especially angry when "þat ones watz his schulde efte be unclene" (Pur. 1144).

Purity and Penance

When the modern reader approaches Purity, he must be reminded that a proper understanding of the poem requires an insight into the religious traditions within which the author wrote. As such, the eccleiastical reform which culminated in the Fourth Latern Council of 1215 is the one factor which influenced the literature of the fourteenth century more than any other.[6] The decree required that:

> Every Christian of either sex, after attaining years of discretion, shall faithfully confess all his sins to his own priest at least once a year....[7]

---

[6]W. A. Pantin, The English Church in the Fourteenth Century (Notre Dame, 1962), pp. 191-192.

[7]Medieval Handbook of Penance, Eds. John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer (New York, 1938), p. 413.

This emphasis on church attendance, coupled with the requirements that the priest should counsel his congregation, created an immediate need for penitential literature.[8] Purity is part of the literature which developed from that need.

Penance, as it relates to uncleanness, is the major theme of Purity and dominates the entire sermon. This seems especially appropriate if we remember that penance was a pervasive religious concept throughout the fourteenth century.[9] In 1357 Archbishop Thoresby included the penitential doctrine in The Lay Folks' Catechism as one of the seven sacraments of the church. This sacrament is described as:

> ...forthinking we have of our syn
> Wythouten will or thought to turne agayne to it.
> And this behoues haue thre thinges if it be stedefast:
> Ane is sorow of our hert that we have synned;
> Another is open shrift of our mouth how we have synned;
> And the third is rightwise amendes makyng for that we haf synned.
> This thre, with gode will to forsake our syn,
> Clenses us and wasshes us of alkeyn synnes.[10]

Thus, the Pearl-poet reflects ecclesiastical trends when he announces one of his themes in the opening statement of the poem. He will recommend "clanness," he says, because God is very angry with those who "in fylþe folȝes hym after" (Pur. 6). God and the angels, muses the poet, are so "clene" (Pur. 17-19) in the heavenly court, that it is no wonder

---

[8]Pantin, p. 192.

[9]Ibid., p. 236.

[10]The Lay Folks' Catechism: The English and Latin Versions of Archbishop Thoresby's Instruction for the People, Eds. Thomas Frederick Simmons and Henry Edward Nolloth, EETS, OS, CXVIII (London, 1901), pp. 64,66.

that uncleanness is not allowed (Pur. 17-22). He paraphrases the sixth Beatitude, "þe haþel clene of his hert hapenez ful fayre,/For he schal loke on oure Lorde wyth a bone chere" (Pur. 27-28), and conversely, he who "unclannesse hatz on" (Pur. 30) will never see God.

All of this serves as an introduction to a second theme "clannesse" which acts as a vehicle to allow the poet to stress the major issue at hand--man's need for penance. This is done first in the parable of the Wedding Feast wherein the poet explains that the great feast is the "kyndom of heven" (Pur. 161) to which all are invited that are baptized "fulȝed in font" (Pur. 164). The wedding clothes are reflections of the deeds that one does during his lifetime.

This clean clothes metaphor is essential to the verse sermon since it incorporates the essence of the sermon message. It is not an original idea with the Pearl-poet. Rather, it is a Biblically inspired metaphor which was a favorite with medieval writers. A twelfth century sermon on confessions describes soiled clothes as:

> Sume bereþ sole cloþ to þe watere forto wasshen it clen. Swo fasteþ þe sinfulle man his festing to clensen him selven of his fule sinnen.[11]

Another explains the allegory of white clothing:

> ...Þe angell þat was clothed in white betokeneþ clene life and be comford þat we shuld have in God. And he þat will not wash hym white here may neuer be bold to a-bide þe commynge of Criste to þer saluacion, for þe white clotþinge betokeneþ þe joy of heven.[12]

---

[11] Old English Homilies of the Twelfth Century from the Unique Ms B. 14, 52 in the Library of Trinity College, Ed. Richard Morris, EETS, Second Series, (London, 1873), p. 56.

[12] Woodburn O. Ross, Ed., Middle English Sermons, EETS, OS, CCIX (London, 1940), p. 136.

Thus, the Pearl-poet is making full use of a popular clothing metaphor in order to illustrate the need for penance. He is attempting to present an intangible concept to a group of people who think best in concrete terms. Therefore, the suggestion is made that man's wedding garment (baptismal robe) is pure when he is baptized as an infant. However, in the course of a lifetime he soils his garments through sin which causes him to be in frequent need of purification. The poet reveals penance to be the laundry in which our unclean wedding garments are periodically washed. He reminds us that all of this is made possible by Christ's death on the cross and is unavailable to persons in the Old Testament, except possibly those who lived in the shadow of the cross as suggested by the Abraham exemplum.

The parable of the Wedding Feast is one of the few instances in which the Pearl-poet stops to explain the allegorical interpretation of a passage. However, he limits his interpretation by the simple announcement that man's "wedez" (Pur. 165) are his "werkez" (Pur. 171). Apparently he expects his audience to understand the tropological aspect of the parable which says that in order to be admitted into the lord's hall (the kingdom of heaven), one must be clothed in "wedez...clene" (Pur. 165) (the garment of righteousness) made possible through penance.[13]

The poet's inclusion of the parable is seen to be a forthright plea for penance. He is reminding his listeners that they are invited by God to live with Him. However, a necessary ingredient for admission into His

---

[13]Joachiem Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, trans. S. H. Hooke, (New York, 1963), p. 69.

kingdom is to remain clothed in the white robes of purity. If one has received infant baptism and paid penance for his sins, he is entitled to enter the kingdom of heaven. But if he refuses to abide by these sacraments, as did the first guests of the parable, there will be no room in the Messianic kingdom.

A modern theological scholar suggests that the guests could have been waiting for a second invitation to the banquet. He explains that since most banquets of that time lasted well into the night, the guests might have taken time to carry on additional business before accepting the banquet invitation at sundown.[14] The poet's interpretation therefore could suggest that the first invited guests were those persons who postponed reparation anticipating that death or the Parousia was far into the future. Thus, the Pearl-poet insists on immediate action. This is noted in the parable when the poet imagines the lord of the castle to say of his guests "'Now for her owne sorȝe þay forsaken habbez'" (Pur. 75), and he then sends his servants to invite "þe wayferande frekez" (Pur. 79) <u>without any prior notice</u>. Could the poet be reminding his listeners that they do not have time to put off penance, for God sends no warning?

Penance is again brought into play in the two minor exempla, the Fall of Satan and Adam's sin. Each story illustrates a general uncleanness or failure in "trawth." In the stories, neither Adam nor Satan is guilty of fleshly sin. Satan, the first sinner, is impenitent and is condemned to hell. He is, however, allowed to tempt man to join forces with him.

---

[14]Jeremias, p. 188.

By contrast, Adam, also impenitent, escapes punishment because Christ purchased his salvation via the cross.[15] Although the poet offers no explana- for the ways of God, he appears to be working within the same framework as the apostle who announces that God does not judge the two offenders equally since angels are "greater in strength and power" (II Pet. 2:11) and man is an "irrational" beast "tending to the snare" (II Pet. 2:12).

A second metaphor illustrating the need for penance is introduced later in the Noah segment of the homily. After telling the story of Noah's remarkable escape in the ark, the poet reminds his listeners to beware "þe fylþe of þe flesch þat þou be founden never" (Pur. 547). According to him, "One spec of a spote" (Pur. 551)may cause man to miss the sight of God. He concludes this segment by saying that he shall seek to be like a margery pearl which has no seams or spots--an unblemished jewel.

The Pearl-poet has frequently drawn on this particular metaphor to signify the state of innocence obtained though penance. He refers to it in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, and he builds an entire work around it in the Pearl. In these writings he uses the metaphor in the typical sense of the fourteenth century. That is, it is the symbol of purity and virtue drawing its meaning from Matthew 13, the parable of the Pearl of Great Price.[16] The Biblical text reads:

> Again the kingdom of heaven is like to a merchant seeking good pearls.
> Who when he had found one pearl of great price, went his way, and sold all that he had and bought it. (Matt. 13:45-46)

---

[15]See the following views on the stories: Menner, p. 76; John Gardner, Ed., The Complete Works of the Gawain Poet (Chicago, 1965) p. 65.

[16]Robert Max Garrett, The Pearl: An Interpretation, Univ. of Washington Publications in English IV, (Seattle, 1918), p. 17.

The parable is interpreted by Wyclif as:

> Clerkes seien þat margarites ben prescious stones founden in þe see wiþinne shellfishe; and þei ben on two maneres: sum hoolid and sum hool. And margaritis ben a cordial medicine, and þei maken faire mennes atire, and comforter mennis hertes. Þis oo margarite is oure Lord Jesus Crist...[17]

A modern scholar, Robert Max Garrett, goes one step farther when he interprets the pearl as an image which has four possible symbolic meanings. It is the Host which is the body of Christ; the Eucharist, for Christ is part of that; man, because man may become a pearl by cleansing himself of all sin; and Christ himself, the one great Pearl.[18] As one can see, the poet is working with a very complicated image that can draw up a number of possible interpretations, three of which focus on Christ as the Pearl.[19]

Thus, when the poet admonishes his audience that "one spec of a spote may spede to mysse/Of þe syȝte of þe Soverayn þat syttez so hyȝe" (551-552), he is thinking in terms of the sins that may keep man from the sight of God. And when he says that it behooves him to shine like the "margery-perle" (556), he is deeming it necessary to become like Christ. Therefore, man's only recourse is to become as pure as Christ through penance.

---

[17]John Wyclif, Select English Works of John Wyclif, Ed. Thomas Arnold (Oxford, 1899) I, p. 286.

[18]Garrett, p. 25.

[19]Historically we find that early Christians frequently referred to the pearl as Mukta, the pure. It is also found to be the "only precious stone mentioned in the New Testament" according to George F. Kunz and Charles H. Stevenson, The Book of the Pearl: The History, Art, Science, and Industry of Gems, (New York, 1908), p. 4.

The idea of penance underlies the entire flood exemplum in that the poet interprets the deluge as man's punishment for sexual offenses. This explanation is necessary if he is to retain the same moral message throughout his sermon. At first it might appear that he is interpreting the text to his own advantage since the Bible version is not specific as to the exact causes of the flood. However, modern scholars believe that the idea of sexual impurity as the cause of the alluvion is in keeping with a medieval tradition.[20] This is apparently the case since Chaucer's Parson suggests a similar view when he says:

> ...by the synne of lecherie God dreynte al the world at the diluge. And after that he brente fyve cities with thonderleyt, and sank hem into helle. (839)[21]

And the Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry reiterates the same idea.

> ...Noy is flode that stroied the worlde for the pride and the disguysinge that was amonge women. And whanne the deuelle sawe hem so disguysing and counterfeting hem, he made hem falle into the foule synne of lechery, that displesed so moche oure Lorde, that he made it reyne fourti dayes and fourti nightes without cesing,...[22]

It seems apparent that the Pearl-poet has only one view in mind. He is intent upon convincing those before him that God will condemn them to

---

[20]Edwin Dodge Cuffe, "An Interpretation of Patience, Cleanness, and the Pearl from the Viewpoint of Imagery," Diss. Univ. of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1951, p. 101.

[21]Geoffrey Chaucer, The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, Ed. F. N Robinson, (Boston, 1961), P. 255.

[22]The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry, Ed. Thomas Wright, EETS, OS, XXXIII (London, 1868), p. 62.

the fires of hell if they do not repent and pay penance. Thus, he sees God as a vengeful Deity who punishes those who dare to appear before Him in unclean garments. He reminds his listeners that when God finds a man whose heart is "honest and hol, þat haþel he honorez" (594). But those others who commit bodily sins, he commits to the "dome of þe douþe for dedez of schame" (597).

The concept of penance is treated in a converse manner in the Abraham exemplum. Actually, it is not Abraham with whom the poet is concerned. Abraham is guilty of no sin, and it is the sinful about whom the poet writes. He wishes us to direct our attention toward Sara, Abraham's wife. In many respects, Sara is guilty of a sin that appears unpardonable. She laughs at God for she does not believe Him:

> Þenne þe burde byhynde þe dor for busmar laȝed,
> And sayde sothly to hirself Sare þe madde:
> 'May þou traw for tykle þat þou t[em]e moȝtez,
> And I so hyȝe out of age, and also my lorde.' (653-656)

And later when God accuses her of this indiscretion, she lies to Him:

> Þenne swenged forth Sare and swer, by hir trawþe,
> Þat for lot þay lansed ho laȝed never. (667-668)

However, God does not become angry with her actions even though there is no outward show of penitence. Apparently, the poet wishes to establish the loving father image in order to explain those impenitent sins that go unpunished. Thus, he uses this story as a basis for presenting a second facet in the nature of God, his mercifulness. In this manner, he gives God more human characteristics than noted heretofore. The Genesis version of the story emphasizes Sara's fear of God. "Sara denied, saying: I did not laugh: for she was <u>afraid</u>. But the Lord said, Nay: but thou didst laugh" (Gen. 18:15).

But, the Pearl-poet interprets God's response to her laughter as: "'Now innoghe, hit is not so,' þenne nurned þe Dryȝtyn, 'For þou laȝed aloȝ, bot let we hit one!'" (669-670). It is clear that the poet wishes to suggest an entirely different image than that of the Biblical writer. He desires to present God as a loving and charitable Father who will forgive the sins of His children. This father figure fits the poet's design in that it enables him to illustrate the two aspects of this Deity--the loving Father and the avenging God. Each view is important to his overall message since it is the loving Father who forgives the penitent sinner and the avenging God who condemns the impenitent to hell.

In the Lot exemplum, the poet reverses his technique to allow God to assume a more fearful role. Lot's wife serves as an example of a disobedient, and hence unclean, wife. When Lot was making preparations for the evening meal, he cautioned his wife that "wyth no sour ne no salt servez hym never" (820). However, pride and the wife's disobedient nature leads her to ultimate destruction. Deliberately ignoring her husband's instructions, she reconciled her decision to salt the food when she said to herself:

> ...'þis un[s]avere hyne
> Lovez no salt in her sauce; ȝet hit no skyl were
> Þat oper burne be boute, þaȝ boþe be nyse.' (822-824)

By salting the food, she lays the groundwork for the final story in which she receives her just punishment.

By disobeying her husband's behest, Lot's wife is guilty not only of "mistraupe" (996), but also of pride. However, since her sin is not one of the flesh, God does not punish her until she sins a second time. This occurs

in the second major exemplum. God warns Lot and his family not to look on the destruction of Sodom. But his wife does not obey; she "Blusched byhynden her bak, þat bale for to herkken" (980). For this second transgression, she was turned into a pillar of salt. The author of the Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry interprets the Biblical story:

> ...Looth is wiff was not wise to kepe the comaundement of God, but she loked ageine, and sawe the towne and the pepille, and she turned to a stone, the whiche is significacion of hem that God deliverithe oute of perille and synne, the whiche turnithe ayen therto into the waye of dampnacion, that is to mene, that they that be confession are clensed and repented, and beden that they shulde not loke bakwarde ayenne to do synne.[23]

Apparently, the Pearl-poet wishes us to view the wife's actions in much the same manner as The Book of the Knight. He interprets her initial sin as being unworthy of punishment; however, her second offense cannot be disregarded. All of this looks forward to the Belshazzar segment which repeats the same message as II Peter 2:21:

> For it had been better for them not to have known the way of justice than after they have known it, to turn back from that holy commandment which was delivered to them.

As in his first major exemplum, the Pearl-poet again illustrates the consequences of unrepentant sin in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. The people of these cities were participating in a form of sexual activity that offended God, for He had ordained that sex should be such as:

> When two true togeder had tyȝed hemselven,
> Bytwene a male and his make such merþe schulde co[m]e,
> Wel nyȝe pure paradys moȝt preve no better. (702-704)

Therefore, when the townsmen dared to deviate from the norm and refused to feel any need for repentance, God grew very angry. They had soiled their

---

[23] Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry, p. 71.

garments of righteousness; their souls were no longer pure as the margery pearl; and they had failed to pay penance for their sins. God had no alternative except to punish their wickedness.

Perhaps the poet anticipated that his congregation would look upon these stories in two ways. First, they would see them as illustrations of God's anger when His children are guilty of "fylþe of the flesch." And second, they would see the punishment that is placed upon impenitent offenders in hell. Their only recourse would therefore be to seek the same comfort as the writer of this fourteenth century verse:

> To God it is a sacrifyce
> The goost þat is [a]greuyd sore;
> Meke hert schal thow noght despice,
> Whiles repentaunce may it restore.
> I haue forslowthid, Lorde, thi service.
> And litel leuyd after thi lore,
> Bot now I repent and aryse;
> Mercy, Iheuse, I wil no more.[24]

The Pearl-poet amplifies his posture on penance in his exhortation on purity (1049-1148). He asserts that if one wishes to enter God's court, he must be "clene" (1056). However, to be "clene" is to be as the pearl or Christ, a state made possible "þurȝ schryfte" (1115) and "with penaunce" (1116). The pearl itself is explained by the poet as having less monetary value than other stones. However, according to him, it has certain qualities which make it desirable. Among these are its "schap rounde" (1121), and its purity and perfection, "wythouten faut oþer fylþe" (1122). In this instance, it seems apparent that the poet is urging the acceptance

---

[24] The Wheatley Manuscript: A Collection of Middle English Verse and Prose Contained in a Ms. Now in the British Museum, Ed. Mabel Day (London, 1921), p. 41.

of the Eucharist as a primary means of becoming like Christ--the Pearl. The pearl then assumes some of its earlier symbolic meanings. It is the host that is "schap rounde" (1121); it is the soul which may be washed clean with the wine of the Eucharist; and it is Christ who awaits the penitent soul.

In the final Belshazzar exemplum, the Pearl-poet introduces a third metaphor to illustrate man's need for penance. The image is first established in the initial segment of the story when the poet describes the seizure of the holy relics (1269-1292). He views this pillage in the same manner as that of the previous massacre. It is as though he is indicating, without really saying, that these relics were more than prized religious objects.

If we remember that the Bible often refers to mankind as a vessel, then the seizure of the relics becomes the seizure of God's children. The Prophecy of Jeremias gives credit to this assumption:

> And the vessel was broken which he was making of clay with his hands: and turning he made another vessel, as it seemed good in his eyes to make it.
> Then the word of the Lord came to me saying:
> Cannot I do with you, as this potter, O house of Israel, saith the Lord? Behold as clay is in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand. (Jer. 18:4-6)

The analogy is again noted in Isias:

> And now, O Lord, thou art our father, and we are clay: and thou art our maker, and we all are the work of thy hands. (Isa. 64:8)

Apparently medieval man found this to be a particularly attractive metaphor. In the Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry the story is told of an evil lady who was saved from drowning. After her near fatal accident,

she dreamed that she had found a silver platter in a dung hill. It was covered with black spots. While admiring her newfound treasure, the lady heard a voice which advised her to cleanse the platter until it shone as "white and clene, as whene it came oute of the maistres honde that made hit." In the story, the dream is then interpreted by a holy man who says:

> the platter drawen oute of the donge likeenithe the soule in the bodi, and yef the bodi consented not to synne, the soule shulde be as white and as clene as the siluer whanne it come furst from the goldsmithe, for so clene is the soule whan he comithe from baptime; and the soule is the plater that was founde in the dongge, so is the bodi dongge, wormes, and felthe.[25]

Therefore, even though the Pearl-poet does not explicitly state that he has the vessel metaphor in mind, he is apparently continuing the Biblical and medieval tradition by working within this context. The vessels then take on anagogical overtones as they become the children of God who had been consecrated to His service. In this instance, they are defiled by the satanic concubines and represent those who have sinned a second time, have refused penance, and are doomed to hell. All of this appears to be the antithesis of the marriage feast.

Of course, the message intended by the poet is simply stated in the two feast exempla. If man seeks to live a virtuous life through "schryfte" (1115) and "penaunce" (1116), he will join Christ in the heavenly Jerusalem. But, it he refuses to follow the precepts of the Church, he will be doomed to the Babylonian hell. Thus, the poet begins his sermon with the promise of God's reward for a virtuous and faithful life. And he concludes it with

---

[25]Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry, p. 11.

the reminder that, even as God rewards the faithful, He also punishes those who refuse to live according to His dictates. In this manner, the writer provides a circular pattern to his sermon in that it ends in the same manner as it began. The intended message is given both a positive and a negative aspect.

As John Gardner suggests, a complete understanding of Purity requires a view of the poem as a whole. The work progresses from Noah who represents "all mankind," to Lot who represents a "particular man."[26] In each instance the poet reveals the punishment given those who sin against God. His wrath is tempered when there is a failure in troth as in Adam and Eve, Sara, Zedekiah and Nebuchadnezzar. But, when there are sins of the flesh, God's wrath is complete. The distinction must be made, however, that the Deity forgives all sin when penance is done. When persons are impenitent (unclean), they are doomed, as were Noah's countrymen, Lot's wife, the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, and Belshazzar. Therefore, he wishes to encourage his people to realize that man, by virtue of living in a fallen world, has soiled his garments of righteousness.

He has the alternative to remain in that state or to accept God's invitation to join His select company. This can be done only through penance. Purity and the apostle's II Peter 2, thus, are seen to be unified through the utilization of an identical penitential theme. Each calls for immediate penance and each insists that a return to the sinful state after absolution is worse than having never received penance at all. By stressing the need for penance, both writers hope to move man, whether he lives in the second or the fourteenth century, to recognize his need and to prepare for the coming of God. The Pearl-poet saw this thematic similarity, and

he knew that the text would provide him with a readily available pattern. This adoption was especially appropriate in the fourteenth century since the Bible was the undisputed authority and, by medieval standards, the best source for exemplary materials.

CONCLUSION

Having viewed Purity from the structural, thematic, and historical points of view, the poem is found to be more thematically sophisticated and structurally organized than most former studies have suggested. First, the sermon is not simply the product of a poet's desire to express his aversion to sexual impurity. Rather, it is part of the Church literature evolving from the Lateran Counsel of 1215 which created a need for penitential writings. It is also a reaction to the advent of the preaching friar who influenced fourteenth century preaching techniques out of which grew the metrical sermon. Second, the work is not a rambling bit of medieval didacticism without any form or plan. It is a precisely organized University sermon that follows the accepted standards for sermon construction. Not only does the Pearl-poet retain the tripartite division throughout, but he carefully incorporates the three-fold plan into his three sets of exempla. Finally, Purity is not a random selection of Biblical tales inspired by a love for description. Rather, the poet's choice of exempla is probably the result of his decision to use II Peter 2 as the primary source for his sermon.

Since the work is so highly structured, what then is the thematic unity we might suspect to be a product of such order? We have already noted in the opening lines that he wished to "comende" (1) cleanness, but he does so by writing in contrasts. He demonstrates the hatred God feels

for "fylþe," (6) and presents nine stories which deal with failure in trawth and sexual impurity. At first, the reader is convinced that the poet wishes to present the two aspects of sin in a negative sense and that he plans to distinguish between the two. This is only partially true. He indicates that failure in trawth is less serious than "fylþe" of the flesh. However, his prime concern is not really with the particular kind of sin in which man becomes involved. The major point is the state of impenitence. If man sins, regardless of the type of sin, and refuses penance, he is doomed to hell. If he repents, he is saved and will enjoy heavenly communion with God.

Therefore, the poet's primary purpose is to encourage his parishoners to look at themselves objectively and to determine whether they are in need of penance. He does this by telling nine stories, each of which has a specific purpose. He begins with the parable of the Wedding Feast which is intended to remind the congregation of the imminence of either the Parousia or death and the necessity for immediate penance. He then moves from one exemplum to another until he has told all nine stories illustrating God's wrath. He tells of the sins of the world (Noah's flood), the sins of the two cities (Sodom and Gomorrah), and the sins of a single man (Belshazzar). He begins with the story of the heavenly Jerusalem (Wedding Feast) and ends with the Babylonian hell (Belshazzar's Feast). In all of this he emphasizes man's need for immediate penance and its availability only through Christ.

In the preparation of this thesis a rather interesting aspect was noted. First, Purity seemed to have an affinity with the subject matter in

other church literature written in celebration of Whitsunday. Second, Whitsunday derived its name from white Sunday in deference to the increased baptisms on that date,[1] and in Purity the Pearl-poet made frequent references to man's white baptismal robes. Third, the medieval liturgy of Whitsunday was concerned with the "heavenly Jerusalem,"[2] and the poet himself interpreted the wedding feast as such. Fourth, Whitsunday is in celebration of the Pentecost which is defined as the "outpouring of wit." This pouring metaphor seemed appropriate to the Belshazzar segment. In this exemplum man becomes a receptacle which may be defiled by sin and unfit to receive God. Although this hypothesis is interesting, it is too tenuous for a conclusive argument. However, the similitude cannot be entirely disregarded, and it is, at least, a subject for future research.

In spite of this, the poet's ultimate goal is not too tenuous to be ascertained throughout his sermon. He is seen to emphasize the Christian concepts of humility, avoidance of sin, cleansing of sin, and seeking the highest goal of Christianity--the contemplative life. He reinforces the necessity to retain spiritual cleanness through penance:

> ...schyne þurȝ schryfte, þaȝ þou haf schome served,
> And pure þe with penaunce tyl þou a perle worpe. (1115-1116)

Thus, he is outlining the standard way in which the Christian soul may

---

[1]Edward M. Deems, Ed., Holy Days and Holidays (Detroit, 1968), p. 258.

[2]Sarah Appleton Weber, Theology and Poetry in the Middle English Lyric: A Study of History and Aesthetic Form (Columbus, 1969), p. 9.

attain the necessary purification in order to attain happiness. In his final lines he admonishes his audience to remember that filth "Entyses hym to be tene, tel[des] up his wrake," (1808) but concludes with the assurance that "clannes" is his comfort.

What more could the twentieth century ask than to accept the Pearl-poet on his own terms? He was a man who truly cared for the souls of those around him. He took the time to compose a precise penitential sermon in the hope that he would draw his listeners to penitential action, and he did it in the most pleasing way that he knew, by verse. After six hundred years, we can only hope that he accomplished what he set out to do.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Ancrene Riwle. Trans. M. B. Salu. Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press. 1956.

Atkins, J. W. H. English Literary Criticism: The Medieval Phase. Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1961.

Baldwin, Charles Sears. Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic to 1400. Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1959.

Bateson, Hartley. "The Text of Cleanness." MLR, XIII (1918), 377-386.

Bennett, H. S. Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947.

The Bible. Douay Version.

Bloomfield, Morton W. "Symbolism in Medieval Literature." MP, LVI (1958), 73-81.

The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry. Ed. Thomas Wright. EETS, OS, No. XXXIII, London, 1868.

Brown, Steven. The World of Imagery; Metaphor and Kindred Imagery. New York: Russell and Russell, 1965.

Burghart, Walter. "Early Christian Exegesis." Theological Studies, XI, (1951), 78-116.

Camp, Leo Leonard. Studies in the Rationale of Medieval Allegory. Diss. Univ. of Seattle, 1943.

Cargill, Oscar and Margaret Schlauch. "The Pearl and its Jeweler." PMLA, XLIII, (1928), 105-123.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer. Ed. F. N. Robinson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961.

Clark, John W. "Observations on Certain Differences in Vocabulary between Cleanness and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." PO, XXVIII, (1949) 261-273.

Cleanness, An Alliterative Tripartite Poem on the Deluge, the Destruction of Sodom, and the Death of Belshazzar by the Poet of Pearl. Ed. Sir Israel Gollancz. Select Early English Poems, VII, London: Oxford University Press, 1921.

Crosby, Ruth. "Oral Delivery in the Middle Ages." Speculum, XI, (1936), 88-110.

Cruden's Complete Concordance of the Old and New Testaments. Eds. A. D. Adams, C. H. Irwin, and S. A. Waters. New York: Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston, 1949.

Cuffe, Edwin Dodge. "An Interpretation of Patience, Cleanness, and the Pearl from the Viewpoint of Imagery." Diss. Univ. of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1951.

Danielou, Jean. The Bible and the Liturgy. Notre Dame, Indiana: Univ. Of Notre Dame Press, 1956.

Danielou, Jean. "Deluge, bateme, judgment." Dieu vivant, VIII, (1947), 97-112.

Danielou, Jean. From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers. London: Burns and Oates, 1960.

Day, Mabel, Ed. The Wheatley Manuscript: A Collection of Middle English Verse and Prose Contained in a Ms. Now in the British Museum. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1921.

Deems, Edward M., Ed. Holy Days and Holidays. Detroit: Gale Research Co. 1968.

Dictionary of Theology by Louis Bouyer of the Oratory. Trans. Rev. Charles Underhill Quinn. New York: Desclee, 1965.

Donahue, Charles, "Summation." Critical Approaches to Medieval Literature. Ed. Dorothy Bethuram. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1960.

Donaldson, E. Talbot. "Patristic Exegesis in the Criticisms of Medieval Literature." Critical Approaches to Medieval Literature. Ed. Dorothy Bethuram. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1960.

Dunbar, Helen Flanders. Symbolism in Medieval Thought and its Consummation in the Divine Comedy. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1929.

Ebbs, John Dale. "Stylistic Mannerisms of the Gawain-Poet." JEGP, LVII, (1958), 522-525.

Emerson, Oliver Farrar. "Middle English Clanness." PMLA, XXXIV (1919), 494-522.

Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics. Ed. James Hastings, 5 vols., New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969.

Enslin, M. S. "Second Letter of Peter." The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible. 4 vols. Nashville: Abingdon Press, (1962), 767-768.

The Exempla of Jacques de Vitry. Ed. Thomas Frederick Crane for the Folk-lore Society. London: David Nutt and W. C. Strand, 1890.

Everette, Dorothy. "The Alliterative Revival." Essays on Middle English Literature. Ed. Patricia Kean. Oxford: Clarendon Press, (1955) 46-96.

Ferguson, George. Signs and Symbols in Christian Art. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1954.

Fielder, Ernest J. and R. Benjamin Garrison. The Sacraments, an Experiment in Honesty. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969.

Frank, Robert Worth. "The Art of Reading Medieval Personification Allegory." Interpretations of Piers Plowman. Ed. Edward Vasta. Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1968.

Gardner, John. The Complete Works of the Gawain-Poet. Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1965.

Garrett, Robert Max. The Pearl: An Interpretation. Seattle: Univ. of Washington Publications in English IV, (1918), 1-48.

Gies, Joseph and Frances. Life in a Medieval City. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1969.

Greene, Walter Kirkland. "The Pearl--A New Interpretation." PMLA, XL, (1929), 814-827.

Hillman, Sister Mary Vincent. Text and Literal Translation of the Pearl with Explanatory Notes and an Interpretation. Diss. Fordham Univ. 1942.

Hulbert, James R. "A Hypothesis Concerning Alliterative Revival." MP, XXVIII (1931), 405-422.

The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible, 4 vols., Eds. George A. Buttrick, Thomas S. Kepler, John Know, Herbert G. May, Samuel Terrien and Emory S. Bulke. New York: Abingdon Press, 1962.

Jeremias, Joachiem. The Parables of Jesus. Trans. S. H. Hooke. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963.

The Jerusalem Bible. Gen. Ed. Alexander Jones. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1966.

Judd, Jerrit P., A History of Civilization. New York: The MacMillan Co. 1966.

Kaske, R. E. "Patristic Exegesis in the Criticism of Medieval Literature: The Defense." Interpretations of Piers Plowman. Ed. Edward Vasta. Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1968.

Kean, P. M. The Pearl, An Interpretation. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967,

Kümmel, Werner Georg. An Introduction to the New Testament. Trans. A. J. Mattill, Jr. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966.

Kunz, George F. and Charles H. Stevenson. The Book of the Pearl: The History, Art, Science, and Industry of Gems. New York: The Century Co., 1908.

Langland, William. The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman in Three Parallel Texts Together with Richard the Redeless, I. London: Oxford Univ. Press. 1961.

Lapple, Alfred. Key Problems of Genesis. Glen Rock, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1967.

The Lay Folks' Catechism: The English and Latin Versions of Archbishop Thoresby's Instruction for the People. EETS, OS CXVIII. Eds. Thomas Frederick Simmons and Henry Edward Nolloth, London, 1901.

Laymon, Charles M. The Life and Teaching of Jesus. New York: Abingdon Press, 1962.

Legge, M. Dominica. Anglo-Norman in the Cloisters. Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1950.

Linnemann, Eta. Jesus of the Parables. New York: Harper and Row, 1966.

Longmans, Adrian Fortescue. The Mass: A Study of Roman Liturgy. London: Greer and Co., 1950.

McKensie, John L. The Roman Catholic Church. New York: Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston, 1969.

McNally, Robert E. The Bible in the Early Middle Ages. Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1959.

May, Rollo. Ed. Symbolism in Religion and Literature. New York: George Braziller, 1963.

John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, Eds. Medieval Handbook of Penance. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1938.

Mickelsen, A. Berkely. Interpreting the Bible. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963.

Mirkus, Johannes. Mirk's Festial, A Collection of Homilies. Ed. Theodore Erbe. EETS, ES, XCVI. London, 1905.

Morris, Richard, Ed. Dan Michael's Ayenbite of Inwyt or Remorse of Conscience. EETS, OS, XXIII. London, 1866.

Morris, Richard, Ed. Early English Alliterative Poems in the West-Midland Dialect of the Fourteenth Century. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1864.

Morris, Richard, Ed. Old English Homilies and Homilies and Homiletic Treatises of the 12th. and 13th. Centuries. EETS, OS. London: N. Trubner and Co., 1868.

Morris, Richard, Ed. and Introduction. Old English Homilies of the Twelfth Century from the Unique Ms. B. 14, 52 in the Library of Trinity College. EETS, Second Series. London: N. Trubner and Co., 1873.

Mosher, Joseph Albert. The Exemplum in the Early Religious and Didactic Literature of England. New York: Ams Press, Inc., 1966.

The New Catholic Encyclopedia. Prepared by editorial staff at the Catholic Univ. of America, Washington, D. C., 15 vols., New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1967.

Oakden, J. P. The Alliterative Poetry in Middle English: The Dialectical and Metrical Survey. Hamden, Connecticut: The Shoestring Press, 1968.

Owst, G. R. Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961.

Owst, G. R. Preaching in Medieval England: An Introduction to Sermon Manuscripts of the Period. New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1965.

Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church. Ed. F. L. Cross. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1958.

Oxford English Dictionary. Eds. James A. H. Murray, Henry Bradley, W. A. Craigie, C. T. Onions. 12 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961.

Pantin, W. A. The English Church in the Fourteenth Century. Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1962.

Pearl. E. V. Gordon, Ed. London: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1953.

The Pearl: The Fourteenth Century English Poem. Ed. Stanley Perkins Chase. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1932.

Pickrel, Paul Murphy. Religious Allegory in Medieval England: An Introductory Study Based on the Vernacular Sermon before 1250. Diss. Yale Univ. 1944.

Purity, A Middle English Poem. Ed. Robert J. Menner. Yale Studies in English, LXI. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1920.

Robert of Brunne's "Handyling Synne," Ed. Frederick J. Furnwell. EETS, OS, II, No. CXXIII, London, 1901.

Robertson, D. W. Jr. "The 'Heresy' of the Pearl." MLN, LXV, (1950), 152-155.

Robertson, D. W. Jr. "The Pearl as a Symbol." MLN, LXV, (1950), 155-161.

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

Schofield, William Henry. "The Nature and Fabric of the Pearl." PMLA, XIX (1904), 154-203.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. Eds. J. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon, Second Edition. London: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1967.

Small, John. "Introduction and Notes." English Metrical Homilies from Manuscripts of the Fourteenth Century. Edinburgh: William Patterson, 1862.

Spearing, A. C. The Gawain-Poet: A Critical Study. London: Cambridge at the University Press, 1970.

Speculum Sacerdotale. Ed. Edward H. Weatherly. EETS, OS, CC, London, 1936.

Swete, Henry Barclay. Church Services and Service Books before the Reformation. Revised by Arthur John Maclean. New York: The MacMillan Co., 1930.

Taylor, Henry Osborne. The Medieval Mind: A History of the Development of Thought and Emotion in the Middle Ages. 2 vols. London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd., 1925.

Tos, Aldo J. Approaches to the Bible: The Old Testament. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1963.

The Towneley Plays. Ed. George England. Notes and Introduction by Alfred W. Pollard. EETS, ES, LXXI, London, 1897.

Webber, F. R. Church Symbolism. Introduction by Ralph Adams Cram. Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1971.

Weber, Sarah Appleton. Theology and Poetry in the Middle English Lyric: A Study of History and Aesthetic Form. Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1969.

Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language. Ed. David B. Gurnalnik. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1970.

Welter, J. Thomas. L'Exemplum dans la Litterature Religieuse et Didactique du Moyen Age. Paris: Occitania, 1927.

White, Natalie E. "The English Liturgical Refrain Lyric before 1450 with Special Reference to the Fourteenth Century." Diss. Stanford Univ. 1945.

Wimsatt, James I. Allegory and Mirror: Tradition and Structure in Middle English Literature. New York: Pegasus, 1970.

Wyclif, John. Select English Works of John Wyclif. Ed. Thomas Arnold. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899.