I

LOUE GOD AND DREDE

SUMMARY

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

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

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

TEXT

(1)

Eche man be war, that bereth astate, 
Of counseil of double entendement, 
Of tyrauntrye, and preuey hate, 
And synguler profit by fals assent, 
And 3ong to 3yue Iugement.

In Euenhede Lawe 3e lede. 
Worche be good auisement. 
Man, knowe thy self, loue God and drede.
Drede God and knowe thy selue,
That ouer puple hast gouernaunce.
Noght for the loue of ten or twelue.

Brynge not a Comone in greuance.
Make vnyte ther was distaunce.
Weye o lawe in euenhede
Bytween fauour and vengeaunce.
Man, knowe thy self, loue God and drede.

Eche mannys gouernours
Of hous or lordshipe or cite:
The puple is Godes, and not 3oures,
Thow they be soget to 3oure degre.
Gouerne the puple in vnyte,
In the comaundements that God bede,
And 3e wole lyue in charite.
Knowe thy self, loue God and drede.

Eche man wot that hath wyt,
These worldes goodes bethe not his.
Alle is Godes, he oweth hit,
And land and see, and pyne and blis.
God wole haue rekenyng y wys,
Of men and cloth, the leste shrede,
Thy getyng, thy holding, thy spendyng mys.
Man, knowe thy self, loue God and drede.

Man of his owen hath no thyng;
Man is Goddis, and al God sent.
God wole haue rekenyng
Of ryht and wrong, how it is went.
Man, not nys thyn, alle God lent,
And borwed thyng mot home ful nede.
And 3ut thy soule is Goddis rent;
Quyte that wele in loue and drede.

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1 Do not, to please only a few people
2 Ll. 14–15: Apply one law in impartial balance / Between mercy and vengeance
3 The masters of all the people
4 Pay what is due without fail, in awe and with fear
(6)

Serve God for hell's dread,
42 Fle from sin and all vices.
And serve God for heaven's peace,
3yue him, from fleshly delights.

For worldly wisdom is mostly folly,
And fools' ends may not succeed.
In beginning to be wise:
48 Know yourself, love God and dread.

(7)

And see what it is proper:
What man pursues his soul to save,
3if he be left of God to hear,
He enables his soul to have.
Riches and health make the wicked wild,
That to virtues does not heed.
Early soul be the devil's slave,
Know yourself, love God and dread.

(8)

That man who is governed by wisdom,
Fle from folly, and worldly delusions.
Look his charge how it is knitted,
And take counsel that is wise.
Follow moderation in an impartial manner,
Let no false seed be sown.
And law be kept, no folk will rise.
Then serve God in love and dread.

(9)

When a fool steers a barge,
66 Himself and all the folk is ruined.
There as conscience is large,
By wrath or judgement the doom is gone.
The bow of God's wrath is bent
On him that death not that God be
War words of double entendence,
Know yourself, love God and dread.

(10)

If a kingdom falls a chance
That all the realm may grieve,
Against that make an ordinance,
To kepe 3ow euere fro suche myscheue.  
And chastise hem that matere meue;  
Make othere take ensaumple treuth to hede.  
Who so is wys, his werkys preue.  
Loue God, and 3e that not drede.

(11)

Goddis bowe of wratthe on vs was bent;  
There we thenke al to lyte.  
His 3erde of loue on summe is lent,  
With swerde of vengeaunce he summe doth Smyte.  
Or fendys alle 3oure werkys wryte,  
Man, knowe thy self, loue God and drede.

(12)

Why pore men don riche reuerence,  
Two skylles y fynde therfore:  
To tyrauntes don hem greuaunce,  
Goode men for loue they worshipe more,  
Man, knowe thy self, loue God and drede.

(13)

Eche man wot that bereth estate,  
Worship for drede is preue hate;  
Suche worship of frendes men schold refuyse.  
Be suget to resoun in lengthe and brede,

5 Make [sure that] others take [this] as a warning to heed the truth
6 We think all too little about that
7 Those who champ the bit [like a restless horse]
8 ll. 91–94: They respect violent persons, who have done them an injury, / [So that] they (i.e. the violent persons) will take pity and make amends. / Good men they respect out of love, / Who treat them kindly and help [them] in [times of] need
9 For God sees everything
10 Respect out of fear is secret(ly) hatred
11 Let reason prevail in all respects
For God seeth through each mistake.  
Man, know thyself, love God and dread.  

(14)

As long as man does wrong,
He makes God his full foe;
The more he dwells therein long,
To his soul he increases woe.  
Before; heat; advise; stop

For God sees through each mistake.  
Wrongdoing

Man, know thyself, love God and dread.

(15)

The man without charity
May never win heaven bliss.  
As thou wouldst men desire for the,
Do thou so like each man have his due.  
Can

For all that ever is gotten wrongly
Must be reckoned, a drop of even a drop that you spill,  
Those worlds are good and thou must kiss.  
Obtain/receive; choose

Man, know thyself, love God and dread.

(16)

False men buy hell dearly.
That taken with wrong are God’s thieves;
They have heaven in this world here.
After in hell, huge mischiefs.
What they believe here works prove.
Hereafter; suffering

Arn heretics, and out of the Creed.  
Why God doth love, why God doth grieves:  
They (i.e. the false men) are; faithless

Man, know thyself, love God and dread.

(17)

Man, sin not in overhope;
Thou winnest not God’s mercy with fight.
Hit wolde brynge the in wanhope,
Expect; may

To wene no mercy thou haunen myght.
Alle thyng is nombred in God’s sight,
The least tryp that euere 3e trede.
Taken account of; eyes

12 Do likewise yourself, so that everybody may have his due
13 Ll. 117–19: You will have to account for everything you acquired wrongfully, / [And for] the tiniest single fragment you wasted / [At the end of your life] when you must part from your worldly possessions
His mercy is medled with his right.
Man, knowe thy self, loue God and drede.

(18)
Mannes conscience wil hym telle,
138 Riche and pore, fool and wyse,
Whether he be worthi heuene or helle
To rescuyue, after his seruyce.
141 Eche man auyse hym that is wys,
Pore and prync, styf on stede,
Or vyces ouer vertues rys.
144 Man, knowe thy self, loue God and drede.

(19)
Who that takeþ fro pore to eke with his,
For that wrong is worthy wo.
147 Another, richer than he is,
Of the same shal serue hym so.
That 3eueth to that li3e or go,
Mete or drynke, herborwe or wede,
God sendes y now to tho
That louen God and Hym wolen drede.

(20)
He is a fool that doth answere
To a man er tale be told.
But after the dede deme there.
156 Lete not lawe be fauoured ne sold,
Suche maken fals men be bold,
And false men myghte stroye a thede.
159 Er charitee in hert wexe cold,
Man, knowe thy self, loue God and drede.

(21)
3if a man do another mys,
Neigbores shuld hem auyse,
The trespaour amende and kys,
Do bothe parties euene assise.
Old horded hate maketh wratthe to rise,
And ofte gitelles blod to blede.
Fle fro fooles and folwe wise.
Man, knowe thy self, loue God and drede. Amen

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

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

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

11–12 for pe love of ten or twelue] The same turn of phrase occurs in XII.99.

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

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

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

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

47–48 See the note to l. 8.

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

80 that] 3sg. pres. of thurven.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

164 Moderation and fairness in the administration of justice is expressed in similar words in III.12–13, 

168 Amen] Struck through in red, as at the end of XIII. In both instances, the mark is doubtful as a deletion mark, as no scribal error is discernable, although erasion may have been purposely for another reason. Alternatively, the red line may signify an attention mark. Kail here omits Amen altogether. In
XIII he adds a note: ‘*Amen* is struck through in red ink; but whether it is meant to be erased or not is doubtful’.
II
MEDE AND MUCHE THANK

SUMMARY

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

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

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

TEXT

(1)
In blossemes buske I bode boote,  
In ryche array, with ryches rank,  
Faire flores under foote,  
Sauour to myn herte sank.  
I sawe two buyrnes on a bank;  
That on preysede moche thank,  
That other helde al with mede.

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1 I took an interest in/paid attention to their discussion/conversation
(2)

9 That on a traualyng man had ben,
He was but in mene array.
That other clothed in gawdy gren,
12 Blasande bri3t, embrowdid gay.
"Loo, felow, chese y may
To ryde on palfray or on stede.
Shew forth moche thonk, y the pray;
Loo, here y shew sumwhat of mede."

(3)
"Syre, y see thou hast richesse;
How thou hit get, whiche is thy fame,
In corage and prowesse?
After thy dede rescuyte thy name,
Other in worship or in shame.
Men wol the deme after thy dede,
Thy fer trauayle or cochour at hame.
How serued thou to haue that mede."

(4)
“I plese my lord at bed and bord,
Dou3 y do but strype a stre,²
And florische fayre my lordis word,
And fede hem forth with nay and 3ee.
Whan traualyng men fare euele on see,
In fight, in preson, in storme and drede,
With moche thonk than mery 3e be,
And y wole make me mery with mede."

(5)
“Flatteryg is the fendis scoles.³
3oure awen werkys preueth 3ow nys.
3e skorne lordes, and make hem 3oure foles,
To playe and lawhe at 3oure delys.
Do for a lorde; and he be wys,
Trewe trauayle shal not lese his dede.⁴
To vertuous lord al worship lys.⁵
The trewe seruant is worthy hys mede.”

² Although I perform only trivial/easy tasks
³ Flattery is where the devil makes school
⁴ Diligent labour will not lose [any of] its effect
⁵ [It] will earn a fair master great respect
(6)
“Say, felowe, what doth the greue
how; makes you angry
My glosyng, flateryng, play and daunce?
smooth talk; merriment
Shulde my souerayn aske the leue
master; permission
Whom hym list to auance?
pleases; to favour
Thou getest the thonke with sper and launce,
may [perhaps]
Therwith thou might the clothe and fede.
flatterer; take my chances
I, gloser, wil stonde to my chaunce,
And mayntene my men al with mede.

(7)
My flateryng, glosyng, not me harmes.
receive
I gete loue and moche richesse,
While; the welfare [off]
When wel faryng men of armes
[You get] in; hardship
In fight, in presoun and distresse.
provide you with; clothing
When thou art old and feble, y gesse,
serve your food
Who wole the fynde rode or wede.
enjoy myself
Lete moche thonk than thy mete dresse,
And y wole make me mery with mede.”

(8)
“I likne a gloser in eche weder
compare; whatever the weather
To folwe the wynd, as doth the fane.
weathervane
3e begeten hony to gedere;
accumulate
To stroye that cometh the drane.
waste (v.); drone
Me thenkep þere wit is wane
common sense; lacking
To stroye the hony and foule hit shede.
stupidly; waste (v.)
Gloser hath brought faytour lane
an imposter’s gift
To halle and chambre, to lordes for mede.”

(9)
“Thy wikked speche come fro ferre.6
from afar
Euel thou spekest, worse dost mene.
[that there] were war
Thou woldest euere more were werre,
plunder (n.); could get out of it
For profyt and pilage thou myght glene,
spilled; completely
Cristen blod destroyed clene,
inadequate
And townes brent on a glede.7
Thy conscience is ful lene,
Thou noldest not come ther but for mede.”

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6 Behind your wicked words there is an even more wicked meaning
7 … to cinders, or (proverbially): [like a spark] from a live coal
(10)

“In wikked lyuer no good counsayle,
Is coward of kynde ny3t and day.

75 Good lyuere dar fende and assayle,
And hardy in dede brou3t to bay.
I wolde thou were brou3t to assay
At nede a wys counseil to rede.
Were thou as hardy as thou art gay,
3e were wel worthy to haue good mede.”

(11)

81 “Thenketh the not it doth the good,
Whan thou out of thy bed dost swerue,
3e clothe 3ow, and do on 3oure hod,
At tyme of day thy mete dost kerue?
Why dost thou thy seluen serue?
I trowe thou do it for gret nede;
For hunger and cold elles myghtest thou sterue.
This preueth thou seruest al for mede.”

Notes

title  Utley (1972, p. 714) renders the title as ‘Mede and much thank: a dialogue between a soldier and a courtier’.
13 fellow] used in condescending address to a social inferior. Cf. sire (l. 17), used by the soldier addressing the courtier.
25 MED equivocates as to the interpretation of this line. It quotes the line under four entries: s.v. at (prep.) sub 6a.(a) the MnE contextual equivalent is given as ‘at’; s.v. bed (n.(1)) sub 2b.(b) and bord (n.) sub 5.(d), at is given the meaning of ‘in’, i.e. ‘in bed and at table, in all conjugal duties and relationships; in all the affairs of married life’; s.v. plesen (v.) sub 1.(b) the contextual meanings assigned to this verb have either sexual overtones (‘satisfy’, ‘gratify’) or moral connotations (‘flatter’, ‘cajole’). Since the speaker in ll. 26–28 describes his activities as merely humouring his lord, agreeing to whatever he says, the most plausible meaning of l. 25 is: ‘I flatter my master at his bedside and at his table’.
28 A similar expression occurs in IV.91: And graunte to purpos nay and 3ee.
33 The line has a strongly proverbial, but as such unsubstantiated, flavour. An echo of it is heard in a famous parliamentary address of 1576, advocating free speech, without which Parliament ‘is none but a very school of flattery ... and so fit a place to serve the devil and his angels in.’
40 See Luke 10:7 and 1 Tim. 5:18, ‘For the labourer is worthy of his hire/reward’.
57–64 The courtly flatterer is compared with the unproductive drone of the beehive, who merely consumes the honey gathered by the worker bees. See also Coleman (1981, p. 97).
63 lane] Northern form, definitely authorial because in rhyme position.
73–76 The same sentiment – wicked men are cowards, good men are brave – is expressed in III (10).
75 Echoed in III.84.
The theme of the poem is firmly embedded in the advice-to-princes tradition. In the interest of moral integrity, and in spite of possible slanderers, the writer publicly lectures king and counsellors on issues of responsible governance, and against the abuse of justice and of the law.

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

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

**Text**

(1)
For drede ofte my lippes y steke
For false reportours, that trouhte mys famed.
3 But Charitee chargeth me to speke;
Trouþe be dred, he nys not ashamed.
Trouþe secheþ non hernes ther los is lamed;
6 Trouþe is worschiped at every des.
In that kyangdom ther trouþe is blamed,
God sendes vengeaunce to make trouþe haue pes.
(2)
9 Truþe is messager to ry3t,
   And ry3t is counseille to Iustice;
   Iustice in Goddis stede is dy3t.
12 Do euene lawe to foolle and wyse,
   Set mesure in euene assise,1
   The ri3te weye as lawe ges.
15 And lawe be kept, folk nyl not ryse;
   That kyngdom shal haue reste and pes.

(3)
18 To a kyng apayre a mannys name,
   The kyng shulde boþe partyes here,
   And punysche þe fals for defame.
21 Pan fals men wolde ases for blame,
   For falshed body and soule it sles;
   Falshed endes ay in shame,
24 And truþe in worschipe and in pes.

(4)
Whanne lawe is put fro ri3t assise,
   And domes man made by mede,2
27 For fawte of lawe 3if comouns rise,
   Þan is a kyngdom most in drede.
30 Þei do gret harm er þey asses.
   There no man oþer doþ mysbede,
   That kyngdom shal haue reste and pes.

(5)
33 Whan craft riseþ a3ens craft,
   In burghe, toun or citee,
   Þey go to lorde whan lawe is laft,
36 Whoche party may strengere be.
   But wyse men þe sonere se
   By witles wille þey gedre pres.3
39 Or lordis medle in foly degre,
   Let lawe haue cours in reste and pes.

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1 Preserve moderation in [passing] a fair verdict
2 And the outcome of lawsuits would be allowed to be determined by bribes
3 [that] through foolish wilfulness they (i.e. the common people) will form a [hostile] crowd
Take heed that you refrain from innovations that disregard the law

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

I speak not in specyale
Of oo kyngdom the lawe to telle.
one; speak of
wholly

I speak hool in generale
In eche kyngdom the lawe to telle.
Thus [it]
chose (i.e. as suitable)
One; buy; peace

A worþi kny3t wol worchip wynne,
honourable; gain esteem
He wil not 3elde hym þou3 me þret,
yield; people; threaten [him]
But raþere as Malice doþ bygynne,

Quenche hit at þe firste het.
 Suppress; heated outburst
If
fiercely; [dry] grass or fat

Laweles nouellerey loke 3e lete,4
So mowe 3e lyue in reste and pes.

[An] old saying; once

Old speche is spoken 3ore:
cattle

What is a kyngdom tresory:
in a crisis/emergency
Bestayle, corn stuffed in store,
valiant/brave; possessing great wisdom
Riche comouns, and wyse clergy;
war
Marchaundes, squyers, chiualry
That wol be redy at a res,

To lede in were, and gouerne in pes.

4 Take heed that you refrain from innovations that disregard the law
A man living a virtuous life is fearless by nature.

In a wicked/sinful soul there is no room for God’s grace; [spiritually] blind.

God’s will is embodied in a virtuous life.

Till their rent income begins to cease.

Among philosophers wise, (i.e. moral) philosophers.

(10)

Wel lyuyng man: hardy of kynde;5
Wikked lyuere: graceles, blynde,
He dredeþ deþ, þe laste mes.
De good lyuere haþ god in mynde,
Pat manmys counsell makeþ pes.

(11)

What kyng that wol haue good name,
He wol be lad by wys counsayle,
Pat loue worschip and dreden shame,
And boldly dar fende and assayle.
Per wit is, corage may not fayle,
Corage in querelle doþ batayle,
And ende of batayle bygynneþ pes.

(12)

Defaute of wit makeþ long counsayle;
For witteles wordes, in ydel spoken,
Þe more cost, þe lesse auayle;
In euyl soule no grace is stoken,6
For wikked soule is graceles.
In good lyuere Goddis wille is loken,7
Pat manmys counselle makeþ pes.

(13)

To wete 3if parlement be wys,
Þe comon profit wel it preues.
A kyngdome in comouns lys,
Alle profytes, and alle myscheues.
Lordis wet neuere what comouns greues
Til here rentis bigynne to ses.8

A man living a virtuous life is fearless by nature.

In a wicked/sinful soul there is no room for God’s grace.

God’s will is embodied in a virtuous life.

Till their rent income begins to cease.

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5 A man living a virtuous life is fearless by nature.
6 In a wicked/sinful soul there is no room for God’s grace.
7 God’s will is embodied in a virtuous life.
8 Till their rent income begins to cease.
III TREUTH, RESTE AND PES 87

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

9 A kingdom that engages in civil strife

10 Beautiful to look at, but full of deceit

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

12 Without heir dyeþ no man,

13 Al is Goddis, and so be 3e.

14 Make God 3oure ful frend;

15 Be God 3oure frend, 3e that not drede.

16 What kyngdom werreþ hym self wiþ ynne,

17 Distroyþ hym self, and no mo.

18 Wiþouten heire dyteþ no man,

19 For God ressayueþ eche reles;

20 For God is victorie and pes.

21 The world is like a fals lemmman,

22 God made lordis gouernoures

23 Wiþouten heire dicateþ no man,

24 For God ressayueþ eche reles;

25 God kan breke hegge and style,

26 And make an hey wey to pes.
Who maintains the knightly code as it was (i.e. of old)\textsuperscript{13}

God makes provision for the welfare of His friends\textsuperscript{14}

Eche kyng is sworn to gouernaunce,

To goure Goddis puple in ri\textsuperscript{3}t.

Eche kyng bereþ swerde of Goddis vengeaunce,

To felle Goddis foon in ri\textsuperscript{3}t.

And so doþ euerons honest kny\textsuperscript{3}t,

That bereþ þe ordre as it wes:\textsuperscript{15}

The plough, þe chirche to mayntene ry\textsuperscript{3}t.

Are Goddis champyons, to kepe þe pes.

The worlde is like a chery fayre,

Ofte chaungeþ all his þynges.

Riche, pore, foul and fayre,

Popes, prelates and lordynges,

Alle are dedly, and so ben kynges.

Or deþ lede 3ow in his les,

Arraye by tyme 3oure rekenynges,

And trete wiþ God to gete 3ow pes.

What brynþ a kyngdom al aboue:

Wys counseil, and good gouernaunce.

Eche lord wil other loue,

And rule wel labourers sustynauence.

God makeþ for his frendis no destaunce,

For God kan skatre þe grete pres.

And gouerneþ hem in werre and pes.

Good lyf is cause of good name;

Good name is worthi to haue reueraunce.

Synne is cause of greuance.

Eche kyngdom hongþ in Goddis balaunce,

Wiþ hym þat holdeþ, wiþ hym þat fles.”
III TRUTH, RESTE AND PES

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

make your choice

NOTES

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

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

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


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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

59 bygynne] Kail beginne.

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

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

63 Succinctly reiterates ll. 41–43.
The view expressed in St. (10) – good men are brave, wicked people are cowards – is similarly phrased in II.73–76.

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

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

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

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

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


The pivotal role here assigned to the common people finds expression again in XII.143–44. 43–44,52.

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

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

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


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

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

Cf. XIII.51, Pe puple is goddis and no3t 3oures.

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

For the biblical reference to swerd of vengeaunce see I.84. The same phrase occurs in V.39.
140 ‘Written apparently in support of the statute De Haeretico Comburendo passed in 1401’ (Robbins, 1959, p. 270).


146 þýnges] refers to the ‘quality’ or ‘appearance’ of the cherry as well as of the people mentioned in ll. 147–49.

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

162 Line lacking in MS, conjecturally ending with *blame.
IV
LERNE SAY WELE, SAY LITEL, OR SAY NO3T

Summary

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

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

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

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

Text

(1)
As þe see doþ ebbe and flowe,
So fareþ þe world hyder and þedere.

3 A3en þe wynd they sayle and rowe,
To gadre worldys gooddis to gedere.

6 As ende of web out of slay,
And hem self stoden so slydere,
How it is wiþ hym y kan not say.¹

¹ Ll. 1–8: i.e. People exert themselves on the high seas of life to gather worldly goods. In the end their possessions come to nothing. Whether they can keep their [moral] footing in those treacherous conditions is anybody’s guess
(2)

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

(3)

Men may not staunche a comoun noys,
18 Noþer for loue ne for awe.
After men lyue is comoun voys,
In wrongwys dede or ry3t lawe.
21 Who dop hem pyne, who dop hem pawe,
blandishes/flatters (see note)
Eche on telle oþer, child and may.
Woman/maid
Tho that to vertues drawe,

(4)

Tak fro þi foo, and 3eue þi frende;
Tak not fro thy frend, to 3eue þi foo:
27 Þy frend wole holde þe vnhende;
unkind
Þow haddest on enemy, þan hast þou two.
Man, be war er þou do so;
30 To greue the he wol assay.
harm (v.); try
When þyn enemys wexen mo,
become more numerous
Litil worchipe of þe say.
praise (n.); about you

(5)

33 Oo prouerbe loke 3e preue,
One; demonstrate in practice
3e þat wole to resoun bende:
Look what ney3e bore most may greue;
36 By al way make hym þi frende.
leave you alone
Þan wole þyn enemys fro þe wende,
[change of] mind; discomfit
Here owen þouþt wol hem afflay.
power; devil
39 Be out of daunger of the fende,
care nothing about
And recche neuere what men say.

² Ll. 13–15: Against his (i.e. sum man) own natural inclination he remains law-abiding. Their wicked disposition, locked in [the] prison [of their minds], like beasts kept from straying, increases in intensity
(6)
To syng or preche generale
42 Werkys of vices for to blame,
    Summe tak to hem speciale,³
    And say: felow, þou dost vs blame.
45 þere he accuseþ his owen name;⁴
    All þat hym se, knowe it may,
    He can not hele his owen shame;
48 And so alle folk wole say.

(7)
3if men speke of Goddis wille,
To preyse werkys of vertue,
51 A good man wole holde hym stille,
    And lete as he hem neuere knewe,
    And noþer chaunge hyde ne hewe,⁵
54 For vaynglory wolde hem betray.
    Who is fals and who is trewe:
    After þey lyue, alle folk wole say.

(8)
57 Thou3 a man holynes preche,
    He sheteþ no3t, but bent his bowe.⁶
    But he lyue as he teche,
60 He nys not trusty for to trowe.
    For suche seed he dop sowe
    In stones, in thornes and in clay,
63 The same he schal repe and mowe;
    So he is worthy, folk wole say.⁷

(9)
A lord of hym self haþ no wyt,
66 He knoweþ wele, but no wo;
    Of pore men he mot haue hit,
    Knowelechyng of frend and fo.
69 He is wys that can do so,
    And wel twynnen hem o tway.

³ Some take it as applying to them personally
⁴ He thereby impugns his own reputation
⁵ Nor will he change [his behaviour] in any respect
⁶ Although he bends his bow, he does not shoot (i.e. he does not substantiate his words)
⁷ That will be the measure of his worth, people will say
In sykernes may he go,
And recche neure what men say.

(10)
Gloseres maken mony lesynges –
Al to sone men hem leue[–]
Boþe to lordys and to kynges,
Wolde lordis seche repreue,
Glosers shuld not go so gay,
Ne not so hardy for to meue
Suche wordes as they say.

(11)
Thou3 prestes prechyng hem avyse,
Or mynstrallis synge in song now,
A glosere wolde a lord askuse:
“Sire, ðey synge or preche of gow”.
ðe lord vnderstondes not how
ðe fals[e] glosere hym bitray.
Wolde he make þo wordis avowe,9
He wolde auyse hym eft to say.

(12)
Many can stomble at a stre,10
ðey nyl not snapere at a style,
And graunte to purpos nay and 3ee,
Þou3 his þou3t be þens a myle.
Whan falsed lawheþ he forgeþ gyle,
Half in malice is his play.
Wiþ wysdom who so voydeþ that wyle,
He is wys, alle folke wolde say.

(13)
Thou3 men in erþe trouþe hyde,
On halle roof he wolde be sayn.
In botme of see he nyl not byde,
Confidently; move about/go his way
care (v.)
Flatterers; tell; lies
distance themselves from them
Which; injure/cause discomfort
[Because]; move around; carefree
bold; utter
warn
raise their voice
excuse [himself]
in [praise] of you
affirm
again
straw (i.e. a trifle)
[But]; stumble over
agree; appropriately
away
falsehood; laughs; plans (v.); foul play
avoids; trickery
it (i.e. trouþe); seen
remain

8 Ll. 73–77: People soon distance themselves from flatterers, / Who are frequent liars / To lords and kings, / Which they both often resent
9 Ll. 87–88: [On the contrary] he (i.e. the lord) would [rather] make him (i.e. the gloser) affirm those words, [even] command him to repeat them
10 Ll. 89–91: i.e. Many people have scruples over some insignificant make-believe, but think nothing of major deceit, and agree, as the occasion demands, with yes or no
But shewe in market, on the playn,
And þouþ trouþe a while be slayn,

102 And doluen depe vnder clay,
But he wol ye lyue to lyue agayn,
And al the sothe he wol say.

(14)

105 Many callen conscience fleschly willis,
And nelen non opere counsell crauþ;
But soule of reson is gostly skillis,

108 pat conscience shal hem deme or saue.11
Fleschely wille is fendes knaue,
Out of reson, out of stray.
111 As they disserue þey shal haue,
For so dop þe gospel say.

(15)

Falshed wolde trouþes tunge tey3e
114 For trewe wordis þat he haþ spoken;
God biddeþ vengeaunce hiþe,
And helpe trouþe be wel wroken.
117 For trouþe lippes ar faste stoken,
And false mede haþ þe kay.
Whan vengeaunce haþ þe lock broken,
120 Þan trouþe shal al þe soþ say.

(16)

123 Sumtyme men halwed the holyday,
Now holiday is turned to glotonye.
126 Sumtyme was loue of good fay –
And shameles haunted so comounly,
Vnneþe þey recche what men say.

(17)

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

11 Ll. 105–108: i.e. Many people allow their moral sense, with the exclusion of any other yardstick, to be guided by their fleshly desires, but it is the soul, capable of reason, which is the moral yardstick that will decide whether he will be doomed or saved
12 Some people spread evil with scornful contempt
Summe on stones, summe on thornes, sandy soil

132 Summe on hi3e way, summe on sondes. Amend

He þat wel vnderstondes,
Ammende while he mende may,
135 Make hym clene and wasche his hondes, Amend
And recche neuere what men say.

(18)
Thou3 holy chirche shulde fawtes mende, put right what is wrong
138 Summe put hem of for mede, put .. off them (i.e. fawtes); money
And summe wiþ maystrie3e hem defende, [so] forcefully; defend [themselves]
That holy chirche stant of hem drede. is afraid of

139 Do þat rechelesly sowe here sede, Those
Here lond of vertues ligge ful lay.
þe holy chirche þe corn shuld wede;
144 For cowardis þey dar not say.

(19)
Gloseres that wiþ lordis bene, keep company with
þey þryue faste þou3 þey come late, 13 prosperity
147 For þey wole a lord to wene persuade; to think
Pat he is beloued, ther men hym hate, although
And wiþ his frendis make debate,

150 Of pore puple pyke here pray. [But]; speak out
Of alle degre, of eche astate,
After þey lyue, alle folk wole say.

(20)
153 Fro Goddis sy3t who may stele eyes; conceal
Word or werk, þe lest[e] þou3t. every
þe comoun voys nyl not hele, Popular sentiment; cover up
156 But loue or hate as werk is wrou3t, truth; hiding places
For solpnes neuere hernes sou3t. 14 find out
Who secheþ wel, he may assay: cared
159 The good[e] lyuere neuere rou3t
Of his werkis what men say.

(21)
Of alle degre, of eche astate, According to; is esteemed
162 After desert þe name haþ prys. reputation; regards with contempt
þat lord his owen worship døp hate,
A flatterer is an importunate beggar

Who confesses his sins without contrition / Is denied the kingdom of heaven as his inheritance

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

A glosere is greedy ay to craue;\(^\text{15}\)  
3eue hym nothyng, þou3 he bede.

A lord þat wole his worship saue,  
Lerne not at a glosere to don his dede.

Þat 3eueþ anoþer his offys –

And wilfully wast it away.
Who is fool, who is wys,

After þey lyue, alle folk wole say.

(22)  
A glosere is greedy ay to craue;\(^\text{15}\)  
3eue hym nothyng, þou3 he bede.

(23)  
Alle þe þou3tes ben but wast  
Wiþ oute contemplacioun.
Fro heritage of heuene is born o hast

Shrifte wiþoute contricioun.\(^\text{16}\)  
And werkys wiþ oute discrecioun.
Þat 3ifte plesþ not God to pay,

Ne preyer wiþ oute deuocioun;  
God nyl not here what þey say.

(24)  
Sum tyme, and a worship felle  
To a lorde, in batayle, by Goddis grace,
3if a glosere wolde telle
Among folk, before his face,

De lord wolde bidde hym voyde þe place.
Þou corayest fauel, and stelest his hay.\(^\text{17}\)
Of alle degre, of eche astate,

After þey lyue, alle folk wole say.

(25)  
A cheuenteyn may fy3te o day,  
Pe victorye wiþ hym stande;

For synne God mon tak it away,

\(^{15}\) A flatterer is an importunate beggar

\(^{16}\) Ll. 179–80: Who confesses his sins without contrition / Is denied the kingdom of heaven as his inheritance

\(^{17}\) You flatter [your master] and undeservedly appropriate the praise due to him
And put His swerde in enemys hande.
Vertues make free, vices make bonde.

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

(26)

What a glosere here or see,
Þou3 it shulde to shame falle,
He knoweþ in chambre preuytee,

201 Telleþ his felow in þe halle;
And felow to felow, tyl þey knowe alle,
Fro toun to toun, in alle contray.

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

The glosere þe comoun voyce hit calle,
For non shulde knowe who first dede say.

(27)

A good man doþ a lord grete ese;
Pat is a trewe officere,
Pat wel can serue a lord to plese,

210 servant (in the house)/official (at court)
Passe not þe boundes of his powere;
In preuyte, vnwetand, he may come nere.

213 does not exceed
without anyone's knowledge; near [to him]
Be handles and stele nöpyng away;
Be blynd of ey3e and deef of here;
Be dombe of mouth and nöpyng say.

(28)

I wolde suche a statute were,
And þer vpon set a payne,
What soget wolde make his souereyn swere
Pat he tolde in counseil layne.18

219 That; compel
confidence; remain silent [about]

222 Passe þe boundes of here play.
Al þat trouþe haþ herd
Alle tymes nys not sop to say.

(29)

225 When al þe world is þurgh sou3t,
In his best tyme is worst to trest.
Þis world is a fayre nou3t,

228 closely examined
should be distrusted most
pretty worthless

A fals lemman, þat chaunge lest.
His last ende is had y wist,

18 That he would keep secret what he was told in confidence
When deb haþ þy lyues kay.

231 Litel while he mon be myst,
So þe executeours wol say.

(30)
They rekene his richesse what it amountes,

234 Ete and drynke, syng þay ‘hay þol hayl’,
Pe while þe fendis his synnes countes,
And bryng to hym þe countertayl;

237 Wiþ hard paynes hym assaile.
Wiþ berkande fendis brou3t to bay,
What helpeþ his riches or wys counsaile?

240 Hym self his owen tale shal say.

(31)
God made oo lawe for eche astate,
Riche and pore in al degre;

243 Do no wrong ne [no] debate,
But as þou wolde men dede by þe.
For God hym self þis wrot He,

246 Betok to Moyses in His lay.
Be Goddis childre in charyte,
As God dop in þe gospelle say.

Notes

title Louis (1993, p. 2980) renders the title as ‘As þe see doþ ebbe and flowe’.
1 Proverbial. See Whiting, S 111, ‘To ebb and flowe like the sea’.
6 slay A weaving reed which clamps into the beater of a weaving loom, keeping warp threads correctly spaced and packing the web threads into place.
13 Proverbial. See Whiting, T 406, ‘Maugre (In spite of) one’s teeth’.
21 Quoting this line, MED defines pauen (v.) as ‘?To touch or strike (sb.) with the paw’, literally copying OED. However, OED s.v. paw (v.) gives 1611 as the year of first occurrence of pauen carrying this (possible) meaning. In the present context it is plausible that dop hem paue carries the opposite meaning of dop hem pyne, so ‘caresses/strokes/pets him’, hence ‘blandishes/flatters him’.
38 afflay from afleien, ‘put to flight’ (MED s.v. afleien (v.)). Kail’s interpretation ‘afflict’ is perhaps induced by the double f.
58 Proverbial. See Whiting, B 481, ‘To bend one’s bow but shoot not’.
61,63 Proverbial. See Whiting, S 542, ‘As one sows so shall he reap’. Cf. XIX.21–22, For suche seed as þou dost sowe, / Perof shall þyn heruest be.
74 leue[ë] MS leues, but the rhyme scheme demands -e, the usual plural ending in the manuscript.
76 greue[ë] MS greues. See the note to l. 74.
82 On the role of mynstrallis in giving advice to lords, see Scattergood (1971, p. 15).
Kail glosses ‘gull’ (MnE ‘dupe’), apparently supposing a pun on ‘3ow’, but OED gives the 17th century as the earliest occurrence of *gow*=gull. MED has only *gulle* (a. 1450) for ‘gull’, making no mention of *gow* as a possible variant form. A contextually more plausible interpretation is ‘[in praise] of you’.

89 Proverbial. See Whiting, S 823, ‘To stumble at a straw’.

Kail has graunte purpos, which MED s.v. graunten (v.) sub 2.(b) renders as ‘agree to a proposition’, quoting this line as Kail has it. However, the manuscript has graunte to purpos. MED s.v. purpose (n.) sub 3.(b) gives to purpose as ‘to the purpose, appropriate’, namely with a *nay* and *3ee*. A similar expression occurs in II.28: *And fede hem forth with nay and 3ee*.

97,102–104 Proverbial. See Whiting, E 23, ‘The earth will discover secrets’.


111 See Matt. 16:27, ‘For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works’. Cf. Ezek. 7:3; 8:27; 33:20; 36:19; Rev. 2:23.

141 *rechelesly* Kail *recchelesly*. Cf. VII.62, *Here landis of vertue laye don ly3e*.

157 Proverbial. See Whiting, T 512, ‘Truth seeks no herns (corners)’.

162 A similar sentiment is found in VI.58, *After þy dede resceyue thy name*.

163 *worship* Kail *worship*.

198 Proverbial. See Whiting, T 351, ‘Today alive, tomorrow dead’.

200 *?wolde* The manuscript reading makes for faulty syntax, where *to* instead of *wolde* would make sense.

240 See Alford (1988) for the legal implications of this line, quoted s.v. *tale*.

243 *no* Insertion follows Kail.

244 Cf. Matt. 7:12, ‘Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets’.

247 Cf. Matt. 5:9, ‘Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the Children of God’. Also, Luke 6:35.
V

WYT AND WILLE

SUMMARY

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

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

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

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

TEXT

(1)
Man, be war of wikkid counsaile,
He wol the lede in wayes slidre;
In day of batayle he wol þe faile,
And make þi goode men to shidre.
Ri3t as hay þey mon widre,
As blades of gres his seed doþ spille.
Gostly blynd goþ, and not neuere whidre,
Þat leueþ wit, and worchiþ by wille.\footnote{Who abandons [spiritual] wisdom, and acts according to his worldly inclinations}

(2)
Whoso wist what tresoure
He haþ þat worcheþ by wit.

\footnote{If one realized}
De Fader of heuene is gournoure, controls everything
12 De Holigost, þe Sone wiþ hit.

In oo Godhede alle þre are knyt, united
Non departe fro oþer nylle.

15 In eche mannys herte alle þre þey syt, Not one; will be separated
Þat makeþ wit lord aboue his wille.

(3)

Whoso wyste what wille harms
turns away
18 Þat willefully fro wyt wendes;
Fro þe Fader of heuene his soule he charmes, 
Fro grace of þe Holygost hym blendes.

21 Fro angels pere, soget to fendes,^2^
equals (n.); subject; devils
Þat nyl not mende, but ay don ylle.
bends [his evil ways]; again and again
Fro þe Fader of heuene his soule he charmes,
does harm
Fro grace of þe Holygost hym blendes.

24 Þat leueþ wyt and worcheþ by wille.

(4)

In kyngdom, what makeþ debate,
causes strife
Riche and pore both anoy3ed?
[causes to] feel offended
3ong counseil, and preuey hate.
Immature; secret
And syngulere profit ys aspi3ed,
If; personal; sought
Hi3e and lowe men aby3ed;
seeks
30 Echon wayte oþer for to kille.
inevitably; destroyed
Þat kyngdom mot nede be stri3ed,
That leueþ wit and worcheþ by wille.

(5)

33 That leueþ trouþe and falshed vse,
practise
And lyue not after Goddis sawe,
word
Suche folk God doþ despuse,
despises
36 Rebell and ryse a3en his lawe.
[Who]
Þo puple that stondes of God non awe,
in aw of
But robbe and reue, coffres to fylle,
plunder
39 Þe swerd of vengeaunce on hem is drawe,
Þat leueþ wit and worcheþ by wille.

(6)

That ouer puple han gouernaunce,
authority
42 Loke how Goddis lawe 3e vse,
consider; apply
Whom 3e refuse and whiche auauance,
reject; accept
For Goddis loue or 3oure owen seruyce,

^2 From [being] the equal of angels, he becomes subjugated to devils
45 Whiche is þe charge 3ow auyse.  
   Let eche man serue his charge in skylle,  
   And 3oure werkis preue 3ow wyse.  
48 Let wit be lord aboue thy wylle.

(7)  
   Be not to crowele in þy wele,  
   Þou nost how sone þou myþt haue lesse.
51 Be not to sykere of þyne hele,  
   Þou no[s]t how sone falle in sykenesse.  
   Deþ claymþ eche man for hesse,
54 And sodeyn deþ no dayes selle.  
   Siþ no man is in sykernesse,  
   Be redy euere at Goddis wille.

(8)  
57 And on þy strengþe be not to bold,  
   Ne skorne no pore, ne feble of elde.  
   For lyue longe 3e mon be old,  
   In feblenes to hoke and helde,  
   In cowardys 3oure corage kelde.  
   But 3e had help, 3e shuld spille.
60 3e þat heuene blisse wole welde,  
   Let wit be lord aboue 3oure wille.

(9)  
   God hap lent 3ow discrecioun  
66 Boþe of wele and of woo,  
   Werkis of deuocioun,  
   Vyces, vertues, frend and foo.
69 Siþ 3e can part hem wel o two,  
   Let vyces on 3ow brynge no bille.  
   Pe weye of grace and 3e wol go,
72 Let wyt be lord aboue 3oure wille.

Notes

title  Louis (1993, p. 2981) renders the title as ‘Conflict of will and wit’.
4  MED s.v. *shoderen* (v.) adds ‘?error’ to the form *shidre*, but in this line it is probably an instance of rhyming usage.
14  Refers to the dogma of the indivisibility of the Trinity.
15  Cf. Gower’s *Confessio Amantis I*, 322, ‘Thi will is thi principal, And hath the lordschipe of thi witt’, as quoted in OED s.v. *will* n.(1) sub 6.a.
Kail ends the line with a comma instead of a full stop, but this makes for both muddled syntax and sense in ll. 27–29.

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

not (which Kail follows). Not only occurs in the first and third person singular and in the plural.

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

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

Rhyme-spelling for kold(e)þ = 3sg. pres. of kolden.
The poem is in the satirical mode, to the extent that it is meant to expose human vices. On the surface, the writer professes to approve as sound moral values the failings he really wishes to expose as abuses. The poem has a touch of humour, but overall the mood is angry. The combination – the ironic reversal of a surface statement, plus the severe tone of voice – properly puts the poem in the category of ‘militant irony’ as Northrop Frye defined it.¹

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

TEXT

(1)
Lerne bodyly to lyue.
By seruaunt non hyre þou pay.
3 Pore ne riche no ʒiftes ʒeue,
But take and gedre al þat þou may.
Þouʒ it come wiþ wrong, say not nay,
6 But falselie loke þou swere and liʒe.
Þe pore man is the riches pray.
Lerne þus to lyue bodilye.

(2)
9 There market beteres gadere in þrong,
Loke þat company þou lede.
Stalworþly mayntene wrong;
12 So may þou wynne moche mede.

¹ Frye (1957, p. 224).
To reue fro pore take non hede.  
Do as þou þouȝt neuer to dye.  
15 Say noþer pater noster ne crede.  
Lyue þou in ese bodyly. 

(3)  
Rechelesly þe gouerne,  
18 Day and nyȝt; walke late  
At cokes hostry and tauerne.  
Þouȝt no man opere hate,  
21 Go not er þou make debate.  
To lewed, lettre and clergye,  
Do no reuerence to non astate;  
24 Þan men wole drede þe bodylye.

(4)  
The þat þe good wolde teche,  
Rebuke hem, and foule despise;  
27 Byd hem go to þe chirche and preche.  
Folwe fooles, and fle fro wyse.  
30 Flete þou be proudest in alle gyse,  
Þan men wole preyse þe bodylye.

(5)  
33 Loke þou haue sorwe sad,  
Whan þou seest folk haue welfare.  
Loke þou be mery and glad,  
36 Whan þou wost folk haue sorwe and care.  
Fede non hungry, ne cloþe no bare;  
39 Visite no syke, and prisoners spare.  
Loue þy seluen þus bodylye.

(6)  
3if þy man be a good seruaunt  
42 Þat þe were loþ to forgo,  
Stele þyn owen good fro his hand,  
Bere on hym he stal it so.  
45 Bryng[e] hym in presoun tho,  
Longe there for to lye,  
Til he be fayn, for sorwe and wo,  
48 To swere to serue þe bodylye.
Thus your horn (i.e. deeds) will often blow (i.e. make known what you are up to), / And chase your own shame

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

And if thou haue a damyse that serueþ the wel, of trewe lynage, sound; family stock

Fonde to make here wombe to swelle, Try

Make no fors of no marryage. effort

And 3if she grucche wiþ þe to rage, resists; have sexual intercourse

And alway fro the wole wrye, keep out of your way

Bete here, and 3eue here non oþer wage, Beat

And lyue in lustes bodylye.

Thus make þe byknowe. known

After þy dede rescuye thy name. In keeping with; earn; reputation

So shal þyn horn oft blowe,

And hunte after his owen shame. Even though; have a bad reputation

3e þou þou be of feble fame, evil conduct; discover

Bere good visage; þy nou3t aspye, Just make a joke/fun of it

Make þerof but iape and game,

In fleschly lustis bodylye.

At masse, at matyns, rule 3ow so: behave

Leue dewe deuocioun 3ow byhynde. proper

Speke no good of frend ne foo; without your contempt/ridicule; go

Lete non skorneles fro 3ow wende;

Loke no man be thy frende. injury

Lete no man thrue, but do hem nye; bow

Kepe hem pore, and to þe bende:

Þen wole þey drede þe bodylye.

Notes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MAN, KNOW THY SELF, AND LERNE TO DYE

SUMMARY

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

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

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

TEXT

(1)
Mannys soule is sotyl and queynt,
Shal neuer ende þou3 he dede gynne.
The flesch is fals[e], frele and feynt;
þe world alone wolde wynne,
Is wormes mete and sek of synne,
6 He nys neuere filt of glotonye,
His cloþyng is a dedly skynne.
Man, knowe þy self, and lerne to dye.

(2)
9 Lerne to dye, and go to skole,
Sip þou fro dep may not fle.
Lete not þy werkys preue þe fool.
12 Whan dep wole assaile þe,
VII MAN, KNOW THY SELF, AND LERNE TO DYE

Sende warnestor to þy soule to be;
Py vices fro þy vertues triðe.
15 Þe sette 3oure soule in kynges gre,
Pat lerneþ wisely for to diðe.

(3)
Eche man in certayn is to dye,
18 At domesday stonde in drede.
Þere al þe worldis tresorye
May not bye thy lyf for mede,
21 No wys counsel þat dede þe lede,
Ne gloser wiþ his flaterye;
Non may helpe ðþer at nede:
24 For thy, man, wysely lerne to dye.

(4)
What may thy richesse þe auayle,
Whan þou art to deþe dryue.
27 Thy wynd is layd, þou mayst not sayle,
Þou þou lette out bonet and ryue.
Loke to vertues þou þe 3yue,
30 Er tombe be held to þe liðe;
For he þat gostly wel doþ lyue,
He lerneþ wysely for to diðe.

(5)
Two skilles y wolde telle, 
Why eche man shuld repreue ðer synne:
And he wyst hym self shuld go to helle,
36 Counseyle no mo to come þer ynne:
Þe mo brondes, þe hattere brynne,
Inresyng of his maladye.
39 Here nys no charite, 3ut shal he wynne
To lasse his pyne after he dye.

(6)
And 3if he wiste to heuene to go,
42 His soule be saued in sikirnes,
He shulde counseile alle folk do so,
Saue here soules, and do not mys;
45 Nouþt for here profyt, but al for his,
His owen ioye for to hyþe:
Þe mo soules, þe more blis.
48 Þenk hereon, and lerne to dyþe.
Thy wikked werkis in þy 3owthe, youth
Seke hem wel tylle þou hem fynde, now
And al þy tyme riȝt til nowþe, pack [of sins]
Loke þat fardel þou vnbynde, give evidence of it; oral confession
And shewe it wel wiþ shrift[e] wynde,
No fende spot vpon the spyȝe, devil; blemish (n.); detect
And haue repentaunce in mynde.
On þis manere lerne to dyȝe.

While man doþ synne in werkis wylde, wanton
Al þat tyme he nys but ded.
He nys not counted as fool ne childe,
But as a man can good and qued.
can [distinguish between]; wickedness
For his soule he telyȝe no bred;1
Here landis of vertue laye don lyȝe.
Do comaundemtis þat God bed,
Pan lernest þou wysely to dyȝe.

Pore, nedy, and gredy, þat not ne haue, ask for nothing
In Goddis name Þeue þat asken ouȝt.
Pore, nedy, and not gredy, þat noȝt ne craue,
Þeue hem þouȝ þey ne aske nouȝt.
And nedeles gredy þyn almes souȝt,
Þeue hem noȝyng þouȝ þey crye: beg [for it]
Þere nys no nede, ȝifte haþ no mede.
Suche almesdede mon neuere dye.

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

1 I.e. He does nothing to provide food for his soul; no virtue grows thereon
Man of his owen nou3ten haue;  
Al is Goddis, and he it lent.  
Perof God wole rekenyng craue,  
How þou it wan, held, and spent;  
Þy lest þou3t, and what it ment;  
Trouþe, and lesyng þou dede li3e;  
And 3et þy soule is Goddis rent:  
So quyте þat wel, lerne to di3e.

Whanne þou dest þyn almesdede,  
Crie God mercie it is so lite.  
To counte þy richesse þou my3t haue drede,  
In partye of payment so litel quyте.  
Þou3 þou do mys, God nyl not flyte  
Ne þrete þe ones ne twy3e,  
Body and soule he can smyte.

Man, synne not in ouerhope,  
Þou wynnest not Goddis mercy wiþ fi3t;  
Hit wolde brynge þe into wanhope  
To wene no mercy þou haue ne my3t.  
And fro ry3t God nyl not ply3e;  
Man, knowe þis wile er þou dy3e.

Eche dedly synne is a dedly knyf;  
Why loue men þanne so ofte to synne.  
Eche vertue is a plastre of lyf.  
He haþ fre wille: lese or wynne.  
Siþ body and soule mon parte o twynne,  
Siþe body and soule mon parte o twynne,

Truste not al to oþere men  
In almes dede ne preyere,  
For state of soule can no man kenne,
For þey ben alle in Goddis daungere,  
117  In helle pyne or blisse clere.  
    Repentaunce mot mercy byþe.  
    While þy dede is in þy powere,  
120  Be þyn awen frend er þou dyþe.

NOTES

3  fals[e] MS fals.
4  Cf. Mark 8:36, ‘For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?’.
53  shrift[e] MS shrift.
62  Cf. IV.142, Here lond of vertues ligge ful lay, where here refers to heedless persons.
81  St. (11): Similarly worded in I (5) and VIII (1).
97  St. (13): Similarly worded in I (17) and XX (26).
98  Cf. IX.13, To stryue wiþ God we may not wynne.
As its main theme, the poem stands out against abuses among the secular clergy. In particular, it inveighs against those who take tithes without looking after the souls of their parishioners, and against beneficed clergymen who are only interested in increasing their temporal possessions.¹

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

TEXT

(1)
Man, haue hit in þy þouȝt
Of what matere þou maked is.
3 God made the of nouȝt,
Al þat þou hast, þou wost, is his.
Wheþer hast þou serued pyne or blisse,
6 Seche þy werkeþ and assaye.
Þy getyng, þy holdeþ, þy spendyeþ mysse,
Fro blisse wolde make Iour delaye.²

(2)
9 To þy bed whan þou shalt go,
Þenk what þou hast don sen morn,
Wheþer serued blisse or wo, [you] have deserved

¹ See section 3.4.1.3 on the ills within the church, criticized by both orthodox churchmen and Wyclif.
² I.e. Will postpone the day of [eternal] happiness (see also the note to the title)
12 Or Goddis name in ydel sworn,
Or ellys fals witnesse born,
Letted pore men of here pray,
15 In þy defaut here goodis lorn:
Þou shalt answere here iour delay.3

(3)
Who takeþ cure, he bereþ charge
18 By Goddis lawe þe folk to preche.
Þey make conscience large,4
Take tyþe and nyl not teche.
21 Crist his postles tauþt in speche
Fro worldis worschip to wende away,
Gostly and bodlyþ þe soules to leche,
24 And bad hem: make no iour delay.

(4)
Worldis good nes not holichirche;
Richesse and worschep y 3ow forbede.
27 Þe folkis cherche, in hem þe worche,
Here noo oper to don þy dede.
Pat doþ þe dede is worþy mede.
30 Þou mayst not serue two lordis to pay;
Pat on he serueþ in loue and drede,
Pat òpere he serueþ wiþ iour delay.5

(5)
Who ressayueþ benefys for richesse and ese,
To haue his lyuyng in sykernes,
Råpere þan serue God to plese,
33 Who ressayueþ benefys for richesse and ese,
To haue his lyuyng in sykernes,
Råpere þan serue God to plese,
He ressayueþ hit o mys.
36 He ressayueþ hit o mys.
For riþt as Iudas dede kys
Ihesus, and after hym betray,
39 So þey gyle þe soules fro blisse,6
Of Goddis seruyce make iour delay.

(6)
Many seyn: God is so wys,
42 Endeles ful of alle mercy;
   God nyl not, þouȝ y be nys,              does not want; foolish
   Lese me þurgh myn owen foly.              Damn
45 So dere God mankynde dede bye;          dearly; bought (i.e. through Jesus’ redeeming death)
   What greuep God, þouȝ y go gay.7       why; merrily
   Þat synnen in ouerhope, in helle mon lyȝe;    presumptuous/unjustified hope; must; lie
e8 Pereof mon be non iour delay.        cannot; postponement

(7) Many wole say, þat leue vneuene:8
   And it were soþ þat clerkis telle,       believe; insecurely
   Fewe folkes shulde come in heuene,       If; true; clergy
   So fele as shulde renne hedlyng to helle. [That]              As many
   Hit were hard þere to dwelle,             By; cornered
   Wip helle houndis stonde to bay.         must be punished
   Synne mon be punschéd, as saip þe gospelle;     
   Þe ðerof mon be no iour delay.              

(8) 57 That ouere puple haue astate,
   Colege or eny oþer degre,9         authority
   Mayntene no debate      Do not engage in disputes
60 For synguler profyt of temperalte.
   Þoure rule is groundid in charite,    personal; worldly goods
   As liȝt of lanterne to lede þe way.  
63 To gouerne þe puple in vnyte,
   God bad hem: make no iour delay.     

(9) Beter is liȝt ryȝtwys wonne,
   Þereof among þe pore to dele,        in a just manner; obtained
   Þan ouermoche geten wiþ synne,       too much (i.e. more than is one’s due)
   Wiþouten desert take pore mennys wele, undeservedly; possessions
69 And helpe not þe soule to hele,
   But crye in pyne weylaway.            heal
   Þe soules þe curatours wole apele10     woe!
72 To answere of here iour delay.        their

7 Why should God be angry, if I go [my way] merrily?
8 Many people of shaky belief may say
9 In a college (i.e. the resident body of ecclesiastics of a collegiate [= endowed] church), or any other body in the Church hierarchy
10 The souls will challenge the curates (having ‘cure’ [= spiritual charge] of souls) [before God’s throne]
Why ressayue 3e worschipé þat 3e haue.
For 3oure vertues or for 3oure vys.

75 And 3e ful worschip saue,
In word and werk 3e mot be wys.
Þis worldly wysdom is gostly nys,
Whan werk acordeþ not wiþ wordis 3e say.
Heuene blys, and þis worldis delys,
Þat on wil make iour delay.

(10)

81 Thow may not knowe a cristin man
Þou þou here hym say his crede,
Þe ten comandementis tan
And speke, and do not þe dede,
Ne serue God in loue and drede,
That on wil make iour delay.

(11)

90 And wolde gon bytwen God and þe,
Suffre not þy soule be þralle;
Þenk, God bouȝt it to make þe fre.
93 Þou þy mayster a tyrunt be,
Fro Goddis lawe wolde say nay,
Do as [thapostle] Poule bad þe:
Abyde, and suffre wiþ iour delay.

(12)

Man, þou wost wel þou shalt dyȝe;
What deþ, ne where, þou nost whenne.

99 And synnes wolde þy soule nyȝe,
Ay more and more [in] rerage we renne,¹¹
And sodeyn deþ nyȝl no man kenne.
102 I rede we drede domesday;
Be euene wiþ world er 3e gon henne,
For þere schal be no iour delay.¹²

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¹¹ I.e. We become ever more indebted [to God]
¹² I.e. of Judgement Day
title  In Robbins (1975, p. 1420) as ‘Evils in the church’. A good makyng [A ‘making good’, i.e., ‘atonement’ (see MED s.v. god ((adj.) sub 4.a)), punning on makyng, ‘poem’ (see MED s.v. making(e (ger.)), delaye) ‘postponement’; iour delaye, legal term: ‘day set for a postponed trial’ (see MED s.v. delaye (n.) sub 3.c); maken delaye, ‘procrastinate, tarry, waste time’ (ibid. sub 1.c), and [4] sub. 5.b.

1–2  Similarly worded in XXII.1–2, Thenke hertely in þy þou3t / Of what matere þou dede bygynne.

1–3  See Ps. 103:14, ‘For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust’, and Gen. 3:19, ‘... for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return’.

2  is] A Northern form of ON origin.

3–7  I (5) and VII.81–84 express the same thoughts about man’s stewardship of and accountability for everything God gave him.

12  See Ex. 20:7 and Deut. 5:11, ‘Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thou God in vain’.

13  fals] Kail emends fals[e], which is neither rhythmically nor syntactically required. MED s.v. idel (n.) sub 1.b(c) quotes the line as in the manuscript.

18  Kail’s punctuation (a comma after lawe, no punctuation mark after preche) confuses what are otherwise two straightforward statements: a curate under God’s law is obliged to teach his flock, and: he takes much upon his conscience if he fails to do so, but does take the people’s tithes.

21  Kail erroneously has ‘[nota]’ in the margin.

25–26  See Matt. 6:19, ‘Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth’.


33  benefys] ‘an ecclesiastical living, an office or position in the Church’ (MED s.v. benefice (n.)).

41  St. (6) reflects the message in Rom. 6:1–2, ‘Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid’.

49  vneuene], ‘improperly’, following Kail, although neither MED s.v. uneven(e (adv.) nor OED s.v. uneven (adv.) give this meaning.

55  See Rom. 6:23, ‘For the wages of sin is death’.

58  For the MnE rendering of college and degree, see also MED s.v. college (n.) sub 1 and s.v. degree (n.) sub 8.

62  See Ps. 119: 105, ‘Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path’. 

77  See 1 Cor. 1:20, ‘... hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?’, and 1 Cor. 3:19, ‘For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God’.

81  St. (11) reiterates the warning in VIII (15) against the hypocrite whose outward show of piety is not in keeping with the true state of his soul.

81–82  For the Creed and the Ten Commandments as topics of religious instruction, see the note to IX.39.

83–84  See James 1:22, ‘But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only ...’, and Rom. 2:13, ‘For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified’.

87  See Rom. 2:6, ‘[God] will render to every man according to his deeds’, and Isa. 59:18, ‘According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompense to his enemies’. Cf. I.140 and VI.58.

13  See Wright & Wright (1972, p. 203).
92  it] i.e. 

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

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

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

100  [in] MED is in two minds about it: rennen in rerage, ‘go into debt, be found in arrears’, s.v. rerage (n.) sub 1.(a), but rennen rerage, ‘incur debt’, s.v. rennen (v.(1)) sub 26.(a). See Alford (1988) for the legal implications of the term s.v. arrerage, where this line is quoted.
WITH GOD OF LOUE AND PES 3E TRETE

SUMMARY

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

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

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

TEXT

(1)
This holy tyme make 3ow clene,
Burnysche bryȝt 3oure soules blake.

3 Fro 3ow to God let þe prest be mene,
To do penaunce, and synnes foriske.
Wiþ almes dede amendes make,
And repentaunce may grace gete.

6 And in gode werkis wysely wake,
And wiþ God of pes y rede 3e trete.

(2)
Wiþ soulis bryȝt in God 3e glade
As shynyng angels out of synne,
In worschip of hym þat 3ow made,
To knowe 3oure seluen now bygynne.
To stryue wiþ God we may not wynne,
Boþe body and soule he can bete.

Ihesus is broþer of oure kynne;
For þy wiþ God of [pes] 3e trete.

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

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

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

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

---

1. I.e. Sudden death takes you unawares
2. *The more of the world's wealth they have under their control*
3. *Do not return to it (i.e. your unrepentant state) tomorrow*
But shewe it forð ri3t ful as it was.

45 Ṣat shame is mede for ṣy trespas;  [your] just deserts
For synne Ṣat wolde ṣy soule Ṣrete
Aske mercy and seche gras,

48 Wiþ God of pes when 3e trete.

(7) That clippen money, Ṣey haue Ṣe curs
Foure tymes in Ṣe 3ere,
51 Here wa3tes Ṣat Ṣey waye Ṣe wors;
3erde or elne, fer or nere,
Wheþer Ṣey selle good chep or dere,

54 But Ṣey Ṣe fulle mesure mete,
Hit semeþ in skorning Ṣat it were4
Wiþ God of pes when 3e trete.

(8) Auyse 3ow Ṣat leden lawe:
For drede of lordschipe or for mede
Holde no pore men in awe,
60 To storble here ry3t or lette here nede.
Hit bryngeþ Ṣe soule in gret drede
A3ens Goddis lawe to plete.
63 Ṣe rolles ari3t y red 3e rede,
Wiþ God of pes when 3e trete.

(9) That haldeþ questes or assise,
66 Ṣat takeþ or 3eueþ fee or hire,
Lette not lawe fro ri3t gyse,
Ne mayntene wrongis as master and sire.
69 Ṣey may be ferd for helle fire,
To ete here ney3ebores at here mete;5
Paþ lyþ shal not euere more dure.
72 For Ṣy wiþ God of pes 3e trete.

(10) 3e Ṣat comeþ to Goddis bord,
Resceyueþ hym in clene lyþ;
75 Holde non old synnes in hord,
For Ṣanne begynneþ a newe stryf;


4 It would seem that it was in contempt [of God’s command]
5 I.e. Who ruin their neighbours by abusing their hospitality
For he to God hath drawn his knyf,

Who; with scorn [in his heart]; eat (i.e. the host)

Here be war, man and wyf,

Here [on earth]

Horde no synne when 3e trete.

(i.e. with God)

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

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

8 Win a place for your soul among the saints [in heaven]
Among pynces and pore men þrawe,  
Þat nele not leue Goddis sawe,  
Ne counte His gynnyng at o clete.  
To werkis of wysdom by tyme 3e drawe,  
And wiþ God of pes 3e trete.  

(15)  
Æorðou leued þat God were trewe,  
Who安全保障 þat God hem bede.  
Þat mende no mysse, but synne ay newe,  
Hem lakkeþ alle þe poyntes of þe crede.  
Serue God for helle drede,  
Lest þy soule falle in chete;  
And loue God for heuene mede.  
Wiþ loue and drede wiþ God 3e trete.  

(16)  
Þou take ordre or religeoun,  
Wiþ oute charite þou seruest no mede,  
3eue drynke to þursty, þat han and mown.  
Cloþe þe naked, and hungry fede,  
Vysite þe pore and syk þat ned,  
And giltles presoneres loos 3e lete,  
And burye þe dede, is charite dede.  
Wiþ þes werkis wiþ God 3e trete.  

(17)  
Þere þou hast borwed, quyte þy dette,  
And to þy seruaunt þat reson is.  
Loke what degre God haþ þe sette;  
Quyte hym þy dette, þy soule is his,  
And rescuyue þy dette: heuene blis.  
Þere þat þe noþer swynke ne swete;  
And ordeyne þe wele, and amende þy mys.  
Þus wiþ God of pes 3e trete.  

(18)  
Caste þe not to couetys,  
3e þat ry³twys werryours be,  
But loke where ri³t querel lys;  
Chastise þe rebelle in charite.

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9... who have (i.e. ‘drynke’) and who can (i.e. ‘drynke’)  
10 Be mindful of the place (i.e. in society) God has accorded you.
According to/Following your deeds you may afterwards expect your reward

I.e. Responsibility for the people’s spiritual welfare or for a diocese

Shapes others in accordance with his (i.e. the bishop’s) works
IX WITH GOD OF LOUE AND PES 3E TRETE

Pey preue hem self fooles in werks,

174 Wiþ holy water nele no parischen wete. 
Casti away Antecrist merkis,
Goþ wiþ God of pes to trete.

(23)

177 Now sumwhat y haue 3ow sayd 
What is salue to 3oure [sore].
To sau3ten wiþ God, holde 3ow payed,14
And arraye 3ow wel þerfore
To rescuyue God, 3oure soules store,
His body in forme of bred o whete,
And kepe hym. So 3e nede no more
Eft of pes wiþ hym to trete.

(24)

180 Whan þou hast told al þy greuaunce,
Holde wel þy penaunce;
Repentaunce, for3ete þat nou3t.
183 Whan 3e wiþ loue God han lau3t,
Neuere fro 3ow hym 3e lete.
God brynge 3ow to his angels sau3t,
Pere neuere nys nede o pes to trete.

NOTES

1 Robbins (1975, p. 1420) has ‘Evils in the state’.
2 ‘From the exhortation to do penance (l. 9) it follows that the holy time mentioned in the first line is Easter, the time of shrift and penance’ (Kail, p. xv). The reference must be to l. 4, rather than l. 9.
3 I.e. during the forty-day period before Easter (Lent), especially in the last week (Holy Week).
4 Cf. VII.98, Þou wynnest not Goddis mercy wiþ fi3t.
5 OED s.v. beat v.(1) sub 10.a signals the meaning ‘to overcome’ from early 17th c., with transitory meanings from late 15th c. onwards, but l. 14 demonstrates that beten was understood as ‘overcome, get the better of’ as early as the first quarter of the 15th c., as recognized by MED s.v. beten v.(1) sub 3.
6 pes] Inserted, following Kail.
7 In the MED citation s.v. o (prep.(2)) sub 5.b(a), for treated read treted.
8 The syntax is difficult. I have assumed that (contracted) math is missing before stomblen.
9 See Ps.103:15–16, ‘As for man, his days are as grass ... For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone’ for a comparable meaning, but with ‘grass’ as the symbol of transitoriness rather than the wind.
10 Kail glosses ‘kind’ for kynde. I have adopted ‘obedient’ as in MED s.v. kind(e) (adj.) sub 4.(a), as

14 I.e. By Christ’s redeeming death
consequent upon the *counenaut to God.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

143 Cf. III.111, *Whoso fi33eþ, God dop he dede*, and XIII.111, *God dop batayle, and not 3e*.

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

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

169 *bye* i.e. the *prestis* of l. 162.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TEXT

(1)

Many man is loþ to here
Repref of vices and werkis ylle;
3 For pride hem þenkeþ hem Goddis pere,
Þat welde þis worldis wele at wylle;
At a sarmon wil bid a frere:
6 Make it short, or ellys be stytle.
Hym þat is loþ good to lere,
He shal, wheþer he wole or nylle.
9 We fareþ as knaue þat takeþ his hyre byfore,
Serue his mayster wel þe worse þerfore.
Richesse and hele makeþ men vnkynde,

wealth; indifferent [to God]

12 Þat Goddis seruyce is out of mynde;

So that; to God; forgotten

For graceles and gostly blynde

who lack [God's] grace; spiritually

Þe flesch distroyeþ soules store.

treasure

(2)

15 God seiþ: man, y made þe of nou3t,

nothing

And put the into paradys,

created

Of erþely þynge þat y wrou3t

what you need; eyes (i.e. judgement)

18 To neme þat neded to þyn eys.

I lent þe fre wil and þou3t,

Warnyng of foly, to be wys;

21 At þe tre of wysdom foly þou sou3t,

tree

And 3af for an appyl þe most of prys.

core

Þe same mouþ þat þe appyl gnewe,

highest; price/prize

24 In þat mouþ þe holy croys grewe,

ate from

Wheron y dyed for 3oure gylt.

grew

Þurgh þe herte and þurgh þe mylt

spleen

27 I hadde þe poyn, and 3e þe hylt;

ennough

3oure heritage y bou3t 3ow newe.

 eternal; life; peace

(3)

3e þou3te 3e had not ynow:

3e braken my þyddyn, 3e benden a bow,

ate of; pierced

3e boten an appyl þat þirled my brest.1

33 Wiþ water, for synne, þe world y slow,

destroyed

Saue seuene, and Noe þat was my gest.

strong

My loue to man it was so tow,

break

35 Hit lasted forþ and nolde not brest.

love for mankind

For mannys loue I come fro blisse to pyne.

to pay the fine [for his trespasses]

Man was so pore, he had not to fyne.

pained; grievously

39 3oure gyltes greued God so sare,

bore/endured

3oure gyltes on my bak y bare,

þat God my fader nolde me not spare

Tyl he had 3euen my lyf for þyne.

(4)

My puple, where greued y 3ow or pyne.

grieved; pained

But ladde 3ow þurgh þe see so rede,

Didn’t I; red

With Aaron and Moyses, myn owen hyne,

servants

And alle 3oure enemys y drowned to dede.

1 I.e. You wounded me by forfeiting paradise, you wounded me again on the cross
For 3e shuld kepe lawe myne,
In wildernes y made 3oure stede,
To 3ow y planted myn owen vyne,
And fourty 3eer fed 3ow wiþ angels brede.

Wiþ loue I dede, 3ow my lawe to teche,
Bycom a man, to be 3oure soule leche.
Wiþ a spere 3e shed myn herte blod;
Pe pore 3e harme, and do no good;
3eue I chastyse, 3e calle me wood.
And but 3e mende, y wol take wreche.

In order that
Incarnated; healer
If; mad
Unless; mend [your ways]; vengeance
Ever think of
Cruel
Free from
Harassed hell
Was[n’t] I obedient
If
Put; outside
Took away from me
Enjoys the favour of
disgrace
Trouble
Yet; dear to me
Compassion; pity
Frequent (v.); live; up to this time
Know; deserve
Ask; how shameful!
Do your bidding
Your ungrounded presumption of salvation takes precedence over your understanding/common sense.

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

To insult me by taking my name in vain.

Man, thou to my lawe art knyt; bound
Why holdest thou warre agayns me, wage war
My worldis goodis in hord to pyt store up
Fro pore þat þy breperen be. [Away] from
Art þou not warned by holy writ.
I made and bouȝte hem as dere as þe. them (i.e. the poor)
Hit is wanhope golip byfore 3oure wit.² vain hope; understanding
Þat 3e hyde, ful bryȝt y se. What; see
For þe pyne y dede for 3ow dryȝe, suffered
tée þyn herte, wiþ teres of þyn eyȝe. tears
Repente sore for þy trespass.
So lyȝdy myȝt þou come to gras, easily; grace
To heuene, to þat worȝty plas,
To byȝe to þe on rode gan dyȝe.

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

To greue me, men þenke it game cause grief; amusing
To breke þe lawe þat y þe bed, contempt; swear profanely
In despyt forswere name⁴ hold in high esteem; disgrace (v.)
By woundis y had in handis and hed. inflicted; death
Mirre and galle to drynke wiþ grame.

² Your ungrounded presumption of salvation takes precedence over your understanding/common sense
³ You make a fool of yourself, and consort with evil devils
⁴ To insult me by taking my name in vain
X     A GOOD STERYNG TO HEUENWARDE

120 I 3eue þe my body in fourme of bred.
   3e fare wiþ me as gest his yn dop borwe,\textsuperscript{5}
   Resceyue to day, and put me out to morwe.

123 Agayn to synne whan 3e go,
   Shamely 3e put me 3ow fro.
   And 3e desyre I be 3oure foo,
126 3e gete but wreche and dowble sorwe.

(10)
   And 3e defoule my holy place,
   Pat turneþ þe chyrche out of his gyse:
129 Holy chyrche is spirytuall grace,
   Þe duwe dette: deuyne seruyse.
   Þey calle me as he þat no God was.
132 Þat cure of soules don despise,
   Fro hem y wolde turne my face,
   And calle hem as fooles out casten fro wyse.
135 Þat sellen soules for temperal getyng,
   Þey maken skourges to here owe betyng;\textsuperscript{6}
   Here good dayes ben wastyng,
138 And þey, to helle hastyng
   To be wiþ fendis chastyng,
   Fulfille on hem my thretyn,

(11)
141 My swerde is fyre þat brynneþ bry3t,
   Shal shede þe ri3t fro þe wrong.
   I brenne sheldis and swerdis in fy3t,
144 As whirlewynd y skatre þe fals þrong.
   No kynge shal be saued by his my3t,
   Ne þe geaunt, be he neuere so strong.
147 Þat y am God 3e shal knowe ry3t;
   Nes non bot I, endeles long.
   3e may not serue two lordis to plese,
150 Fede fatte shep in greceles lese.
   Þat plesen me, 3e holde hem nys;
   Þat gyleþ þe world, 3e holde hem wys.
153 3e may not wynne wiþ 3oure delys,\textsuperscript{7}
   Here and in heuene boþe, 3oure ese.

\textsuperscript{5} You treat me as a guest who may use his room just for a time
\textsuperscript{6} They make whips with which they will themselves be beaten
\textsuperscript{7} Ll. 153–54: Your pleasure-seeking [way of life] will not gain you / Peace of mind, either in this life or in heaven
(12)
In this world, to folk ful fele
156 Goddis wordis þis myȝt be: 8
Man, þou serued me not in þi wele,
Why shulde y knowe þi pouerte.
159 þou loued me not in þi helo,
In syknes why shulde y rewe þe.
Fro my commaundement, þou dede stеле
162 Of hem þou serued, fong þy fee.
Æt o God, þe fader of blysse,
ðe Holy Gost salueþ soule syknesse.
165 Þou loued me not in þi hele,
Mercy mouþ þe manhed,
For loue of his breþered,
168 Þeue mercy to mekenesse.

(13)
3if man ligge long in synne,
And wilfully fleeþ fro grace,
171 To sharpe my wreche y wole bygynne,
Take vengeaunce for his trespas:
His enemys I wole leten hem ynnne,
174 As bestes in forestes 3ow to chas,
For drede 3e shal nowhere wynne,
But fynde my wraþþe byfore here face.
177 I saued Moyses in þe rede see,
Ionas in whales wombe dayes þre;
Pre children in þe fyre so rede.
180 Dauyd slow Golyas to dede.
Do 3e þe lawe þat y hem bede,
And 3e shal haue þe same degre.

(14)
183 Man, I can do þe erþe to shake,
Wiþ flood and drowtes destroye 3oure wele.
I chastise erþe, 3e sample take;
186 I may sle, 3eue lyf and hele,
Fyre and thonder fro heuene make;
Nes non fro my strokes may stele.
189 At domesday do 3ow alle quake,
Whan 3oure owen werks wolþe 3ow apele;
Þanne knaue, beggere, pore broþelyng.

8 May well hold this for God's word

people; many
have regard for
when in good health
take pity on you
Against
receive; payment
one
heals
sin against
[God’s] forgiveness; changes; mankind
brotherhood
[those who live in] affliction/wretchedness
obstinately/deliberately
sharpen/increase; retribution
precedes them (i.e. the enemies)
red
[high] rank/position
make
[as a] warning
Nobody; blows; can; escape
tremble [with fear]
accuse
good-for-nothing; [any] worthless person
May apere wiþ pape and wiþ kyng; appear [before me]; pope
Þere shal non reuerence haue, nobody; enjoy respect
Ne mercy, þou3 þey wolde craue; beg for it
Here dedis shal hem deme or saue; account [for their deeds]
Pan alle to me shal þelde rekenyng.

(15)
Man, þe worldis good is myn;
How þou it spende tak good hede.
Hit is myn, and not þyn,
No more þan þou hast of nede;
Not to fostre þe as a swyn,
Þy foule flesche in fylþe to fede,
And leue þe pore in hunger and pyn,
And fynde hem noþer foode ne wede.
And pore folk on þy defaute dy3e.
Wiþ diues in pyne þou shalt ly3e.
For þou shuld þeue God dede þe sende;
Tak kep how þou it spende,
For þat leueþ þe byhende
Þow mon rekene or þe aby3e.

NOTES

3 hem] between penkeþ and Goddis omitted by Kail.
14 Cf. IX.181 where the ‘soules store’ is said to be embodied in God. See also Matt. 6:20–21, ‘But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven .... For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also’. Similarly Luke 12:33–34.
22 MED s.v. yeven (v.) sub 2a.(c) interprets 3ef... þe most of prys as ‘gave up the highest prize’, but ‘paid the highest price’ is equally possible. Implied in both interpretations is that man, by eating of the forbidden fruit, forfeited eternal life.
24 According to legend, the wood of the holy cross originated from the tree of life in paradise, a seed of which was placed in Adam’s mouth upon his death by his son Seth. The legend was recorded in 1260 by Jacopo de Voragine, bishop of Genoa, in the Golden Legend, a popular collection of the legendary lives of saints.
27 I.e. I, Christ, bought [through my redeeming death on the cross] your heritage [of the kingdom of heaven] in a new covenant [with God, which replaces the Old Testament covenant between God and man that held out the promise of the kingdom of heaven].
31 3e benden a bow] Punning on ‘you bent a branch’ (to grasp the apple), and ‘you sought a new experience’ (the current meaning). The expression derives from Ps. 11:2, ‘the wicked bend their bow’. See Ps. 35:22, ‘Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee’, and Isa. 53:4, ‘Surely he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows’. The reference is also to Christ carrying the cross (of our
guilt) on his back on the way to Golgotha.

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

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


53 blood] Kail blood.

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

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

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

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

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

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


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

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

209 MED quotes this line s.v. byhende sub 4.b with the general meaning ‘for that leaves you at a disadvantage’, an illogical inference in the context of the last four lines of the poem, which warn the rich man to keep account of what he has still not shared with the poor of everything God granted him.
An Easter eulogy on the reunion of God with man through Christ’s redeeming death and resurrection, which set man free from Adam’s original sin. Freedom was also achieved for the souls of the righteous dead in hell by Christ’s ‘harrowing of hell’, uniting them with the angels in heaven. Thirdly, unity between man and man can be achieved by man himself, if sought in mutual love, humility and peace. A fourth source of unity with God lies within the heart of man, if only he will open his heart to God’s permanent offer of reconciliation. And, finally, oneness of God with man becomes possible if and when tearful repentance meets with God’s mercy.

God, the all-powerful creator, gave man stewardship of the world, promising heaven for good governance, but hell after misrule. Man has a free will, so the choice is his. He all too soon tired of Christ’s love, allowing him too short a time on earth. But the joy of Easter has come, and God and man are once more united. Love me and obey my laws, God says, and you will prosper and have nothing to fear from your enemies. I do this just for my love of you, asking nothing in return.
To amende here foly, God so wys,
Wiþ fals Iewes let hym slon.
Here raunsom was his blod o prys;¹
So was God and man at on.

(3)
And 3it a ferly more byfelle,
Pat God dede þurgh his grete myȝt:
De soules he loued he fet fro helle
To paradys, among his angels bryȝt.
Hem þouȝte þat was a wonder syȝt,
Among here frendes brynge here foon.
Al on wrong God made riȝt;
So made God angels and man at on.

(4)
De þridde sawþtenyng mowe þe proue:²
When posteles stryuen for hiȝe degre,
God spak to hem a word of loue,
And seyde: pes wiþ þow be,
But þe wille in my gates gon.
So God bond man in charite,
Byddis man and man be wel at on.

(5)
The þerþe sawþtenyng God vs tauȝte,
Pat best may kepe eche in state:
Let body and soule to gydre be sauȝte,
Kepe God wiþyn 3oure yynere 3ate.
For who so loueþ þere God doþ hate,
Is berselle to his owen flon.
We ben vnkynde wiþ God debate,
Foreuere he profreþ to ben at on.

(6)
The fyuþe sawþtnyng: synne refuse,
Let eche man haue þat shulde ben his.
On mannys syde repentaunce doþ rise,
And on Goddis syde mercy is;

¹ I.e. With his precious blood he paid the price for their deliverance [from their state of sin]
² Thirdly, there is a harmony you can bring about yourself
45 Þay treteþ of pynes and of blis.³
   Repentaunce makeþ wepyng mon.
   When repentaunce and mercy kys,
48 Pan is God and man at on.

(7)
   Thow made not þy self; God dede þe make,
   Put soule of resoun in flesche so frele.
51 God can leue, God can take
   Richesse, strengþ, fayrnesse and hele.
   He is victorye in batayles fele,
54 Can sle soule, blod and bon.
   Nes non fro his strokes may stele.
   Glade in God, 3e ben at on.

(8)
57 God 3af erþe to mankynde,
   And heuene to hem þat wole be wys,
   Þat holden his lawe, haue hym in mynde,
60 And helle to hem þat wole be nys.
   In oure fre wille þe choys it lys
   Heuene or helle to haue, that on.
63 In heuene and 3e wole haue delys,
   Let body and soule be wel at on.

(9)
66 To rescuyue me ymydde here brest;
   On morwe þey put me out a3ayn;
   In my palays þey made þe fendis nest.
69 To lityl whyle y was here gest.
   My loue y loste, y make my mon.
   Let God now lengere wiþ 3ow rest,
72 Now God and man is wel at on.

(10)
75 Now are þey fayre angels pere,
   As shynyng sune in Goddis sy3t.
   3e haue rescuyed 3oure God of my3t,
³ [God and man] came to terms, with repentant anguish [on the part of man] and [merciful] bliss [on the part of God]
78 Ayþer in œþer 3oure wille is on.⁴
3oure hertys were heuy, þey may be liȝt;
Glade in God, 3e ben at on.

(11)
Man, and 3e holde my lawe,
All þyn enemys shal þe drede;
And þou stonde of me non awe,
[But] if; in awe
∧yn enemys outeray þe in dede.
For þere as I my frendis lede,
Þey shal not sporne at stok ne ston.⁵
In alle here werkis þey shal wel spede,
3if God and man be wel at on.

(12)
Myn enemys y shal reue here syȝt,
3eue syknes and drede, pouert and wo;
My frendis y 3eue syȝt and myȝt,
Richesse, strenȝbe ouer here foo.
Hem thar not drede where þey go,
Here wele and worship, in euery won.
Sip 3e be syker, kepe 3ow so.
Now God and 3e are wel at on.

(13)
Man, y aske noþyng of þyn.
For loue, my loued in helle y souȝt.
3eue me þy loue, þy soule is myyn;
Or 3eue it hym þat [it] derrere bouȝt.
Suffre[d] pyne for þe; me nedid nouȝt
In hed, in hand, in foot ne ton.
3oure gyltis y bare in herte and þouȝt,
I made my fadir and 3ow at on.

(14)
Sum of my kyndenes 3e myȝte me quyte,
Do þre wordis of my comandement:
My name, my pyle take not in despite,
Rule wel þy selue in good atent.
Thow nost how sone be after sent,
To 3elde rekenyng of Goddis lon.

⁴ I.e. God and man are both filled with the same spirit
⁵ They will stumble over nothing (i.e. their path will be made smooth)
XI     GOD AND MAN BEN MADE ATTE ON 141

111 The rolles of rerage þe fendis han brent, records of indebtedness; burnt
    For god and man is wel at on.

(15)

    And þou me loued, þou wolde me leue, if; have faith in/believe

114 And do my lawe, and holde it trewe.

    How myȝtest þou me more repreue renounce
    þan leue my lawe, and tak[e] newe. reject/relinquish

117 Þy vyces wole make þy soule to rewe: wickedness; cause; regret [them]
    In derkenes neuere sonne shon;
    Vertues shyne bryȝt of hewe. in bright colours

120 Holde Goddis lawe, 3e ben at on.

NOTES

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

GOD KEPE OURE KYNG AND SAUE THE CROUNE

SUMMARY

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

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

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

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

TEXT

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

¹ *Rejoice in God, renew your loyalty* (i.e. to the king)/faith (i.e. in God)
To letten fooles of here res,
Stonde wiþ þe kyng, mayntene þe croun.

What doþ a kynges crowne signyfye,
Whan stones and floures on sercle is bent?
Lordis, comons and clergye
To ben all e at on assent.
To kepe þat crowne take good tent,
In wode, in feld, in dale and downe.
Þe leste lyge man, wiþ body and rent,
He is a parcel of þe crowne.

What signyfyeþ þe stones aboute?
Richesse, strengbe, and gret bounte,
Oure townes and castels, þe reme wiþ oute,
Þey are oure stones of gret pouste.
In pes þey kepe alle þis contre,
Holynes, contemplacioun.
God, let hem neuer skaterid be,
And saue þe kyng, and kepe þe crowne.

By 3onde þe see and we had nou3t,
But alle oure enemys so ney3e vs were,
Þou3 alle here gold were hider brou3t,
I wolde set hit at lytyl store.
Oure enemys wolde coke þerfore
Wynne þat, and wel more:
Oure landes, oure lyues, þe reme, þe crowne.

3if we among oure self debate,
Pan endeþ floure of chyualrie.
Alle òfþere londis þat dôþ vs hate,
Oure feblenes wolde aspye.
On eueri syde þey wolde in hye,
Þe stilworpþ cast þe feble adoun.
3if þey wiþ my3t haue mastrye,
Fro þe ri3t heire wolde take þe crowne.
3if sercle, and floures, and riche stones
Were eche a pece fro oþer flet,
Were þe crowne broken ones,
Hit were ful hard a3en to knet.
Auyse 3ow er 3e suffre þat fit;
Amende, 3e þat mende mown.
3e þat ben wysest, cast 3oure wyt;
Stonde wiþ þe kyng to kepe þe crowne.

To kepe þe crowne God graunte 3ow grace,
And let it neuere be to broken.
For word of wynd lityl trespase,
Non harm nys don, þou3 word be spoken.
Let wysdom be vnloken,
Apert and preuyly to rowne.
For non euylle wille no man be wroken,
But stonde wiþ ri3t, mayntene þe crowne.

A man my3te be forborn
Fer fro a kynges place,
Wolde make a kyng to be forsworn
To lette þe lawe, it most not passe,
And make hym wene þat he grace,
And holy in condicioun,
And mayntene hym in his trespass,
While he pykeþ þe stones out of þe crowne.

A kyngdom must be gouerned by ri3t,
To chastyse false þat ar aspyed.
Falsed and trouþe to gydre wole fi3t,
Til oon þat oþer haþ distroyd.
Til trouþe be fro treson tryed
Shal neuere be pes in regyone.
In all kyngdomes þat man haþ gyed,
To þe place of vertues God geueþ þe crowne.

If [from] segment/part; be separated once mend
Bethink yourself; misfortune are able to take thought
God’s grace broken to pieces violates the law set free
Openly; privately; make deliberations is intended; avenged sides with; just cause
cause; perjure himself violate; happen fancy; [enjoys] God’s favour disposition stiffen; criminal conduct justice punish; wrongdoings; discovered against each other separated realm governed

2 I.e. Since empty talk is hardly a violation of the law
(10)

Thou3 falsed trouþe defame, 
Trouþe secheþ non hernes to shewe his speche;
75 Trouþe of his craft þenkeþ no shame;3
He is bold alle folk his craft to teche.
And euer by trouþe stondes wreche,
For wreche is Goddis champioun.
Or wreche smyte, God be leche,
And saue þe kyng, and kepe þe crowne.

(11)

81 Loke of þyng þat 3e bygynne,
Caste before how it wole ende,
Gostly, bodely, what mowe 3e wynne.
84 Eche man destroy3e his best frend:
So dede Flaundres; how dede it wende?
Of noblay þey han lore þe sown.
87 Pray we God his bowe of wrath þenkeþ no shame;
And saue þe kyng, and kepe þe crowne.

(12)

90 As a God, in erþe a kyng haþ my3t.
Holy writ byd: blissed be he
In alle tymes þat demeþ ry3t.
93 Men do in derk, God seeþ in ly3t.
Synne, morþere, derne tresoun,
Not may be hyd fro Goddis sy3t,
96 To ry3twys luge God 3eueþ þe crowne.

(13)

That lord loueþ lityl hym selue,
Þat 3eueþ his blisse for sorwe and woo.
99 For þe loue of ten or twelue
Make alle folk his foo,
And lese þe loue of God also,
102 For fawte of perfeccyone.4
Þou3 he had no vauntage but of þo,5
He my3te were a symple crowne.

3 Truth is not ashamed of his moral strength
4 Because of his moral shortcomings
5 Ll. 103–104: If he owed his success only to those [few], / His crown would be a modest one indeed
(14)
105 Eche a kyng haþ Goddis power
Of lyf and leme to saue and spille.
He muste make God his partener,
And do not his owen wille.
110 For God rescuyeþ eche pore mannys bille,
And of here playnt God hereþ þe sowne.
111 Sette 3oure [domes] in euene skille,
Counseile þe kyng to kepe þe crowne.
114 Chastyse wiþ 3erde, and bete hit sore.
So after, þe fadyr þe 3erde wole brenne,
When child is wys, and takeþ to lore.
117 We han ben Goddis 3erde 3ore,
Chastysed kyngdom, castell and towne.
Twyggis of oure 3erde we haue forlore.
120 God saue þe kyng, and kepe þe crowne.

(15)
The fadir þe wanton child wole kenne,
Chastyse wþ 3erde, and bete hit sore.
So after, þe fadyr þe 3erde wole brenne,
When child is wys, and takeþ to lore.
117 We han ben Goddis 3erde 3ore,
Chastysed kyngdom, castell and towne.
Twyggis of oure 3erde we haue forlore.
120 God saue þe kyng, and kepe þe crowne.

(16)
Englische men dede maystry3es make;
Þur3 all þe world here word it sprong.
123 Cristen and heþen þey mad to quake,
Tok and slowen kynges strong.
God, let neuere werre be vs among,
126 To lese þat blo of gret renowne,
Ne neuere oure ri3t be turned to wrong.
God saue þe kyng, and kepe þe crowne.

(17)
Among oure self 3if fi3t be raysed,
Þan stroye we oure aven nest;
132 So many good men ben lest.
3it is better bowe þan [brest].
Eche man is bounden to reson;
3e þat ben wysest take þe best;
Conseile þe kyng, mayntene þe crowne.
The common people are soon brought to ruin
May easily see his fortune/wealth shrink
And a kyng wiþoute rent
My3t li3tly trussen his tresour.7
For comons mayntene lordis honour,
Holy chirche, and religyone;
For comouns is þe fayrest flour
Pat euere God sette on erþely crowne.

Notes

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

6 The feudal arrangement of a vassal and his liege lord.
7 Here, as well as in l. 51, Kail (p. xvi) reads an allusion to a plot by former followers of the deposed Richard II, ‘spreading rumours that the deposed King Richard was still alive, and would come before long to drive away the usurper’. St. (13) is ‘most probably aimed at the Duke of Albany, who had harboured the individual bearing a resemblance to Richard II’ (p. xvii).
8 þe Robbins (1959, p. 45) þo, but there is no good reason here to deviate from the manuscript reading.
10 floures Possibly an allusion to the ‘flowers’ in the actual crown of Henry V, in fact of all Plantagenet kings, namely the French ‘fleurs-de-lys’, symbolic of the Plantagenets’ claim on the crown of France.
11 comons Kail, Robbins (1959, p. 45) comouns, but there is no reason for an emendation of the MS reading.
12 at Added in a different hand.
19 þe Robbins (1959, p. 45) þo. The same remark applies as against l. 8.
25 I.e. in France.
28 lytel Kail, Robbins (1959, p. 46) lytel. But see again the remark against l. 8.

6 The common people are soon brought to ruin
7 May easily see his fortune/wealth shrink
45 *fit* Kail glosses ‘shock, blow’.

51 Quoted in *OED* s.v. *wind* n.(1) sub 15.(a). Cf. XIII.127.

57 According to Robbins (1959, p. 271), St. (8) seems to refer to Henry V’s leniency to Oldcastle, the nobleman who chose the side of the Lollards.

72 *vertues* Probably the four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude.

73 St. (10): cf. III (1).

81 *of* Robbins (1959, p. 47) emends (?)or (= before).

81–82 Proverbial. See Whiting, E84, ‘Look at the end’.

91–92 See Ps. 106:3, ‘Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times’.

99 *For þe loue of ten or twelue* The same phrase occurs in I.11.

109 *bille* Kail glosses ‘bill, account’, but in the context (*playnt* [l. 110], *counseille* [l. 112]), *MED*’s rendering s.v. *bille* (n.) sub 3(a): ‘a formal written petition’, is more appropriate.

111 *[domes]* restores the metre. With the insertion the line is identical with XIII.71. Robbins inserts *assise*.

133 Proverbial. See Whiting, B.484, ‘Better bow than break’. *brest* MS *berst*

137 *comons* Robbins (1959, p. 49) *comyns*.

147–48 Cf. XVI.63–64.

149 *repe[n]tance* MS *repetance* (no nasal stroke above the second e, unless the scribe treated as such the backward slant of the downstroke of the y immediately above).
Parliament is there to correct abuses in the realm, but quite often it is too lenient, which invites others who notice this to persist in their wrongdoings. Contrary to other countries, the English judicial system is corrupt, and unstable because of the frequent changes in the law.

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

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

Text

(1) Whanne alle a kyngdom gadrid ysse
    In Goddis lawe, by on assent,
  3 For to amende þat was mysse,
     Þerfore is ordayed a parlement.
Trouþe wiþ glad chere þeder went,
  6 And falsed stondis ay in drede

---

[Proper] action produces [positive] results
For ferd of ry3twis iugement,
For to be demed after his dede.

(2)
9 In doom of parlement ofte is fauour,
That afterward it harmeþ grete;
Make opere bold take þerof sauour,
12 To mayntene falsed for be3ete.
Slouþe vntyme eft mon swete
When it is hot, and gloweþ as glede.
15 Stonde wiþ trouþe, and Smyte an hete,³
Þat God þonke 3ow for 3oure dede.

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

(4)
In alle kyngdomes here lawe his wryten;
27 In Engelande, as alle men wyten,
Lawe as best is solde and bou3t.
Eche 3eer newe lawe is wrouþt,
30 And cloþe falsed in trouþe wede.
Fern3er was lawe, now nes it nouþt.
We ben newe fangyl, vnstable in dede.

(5)
33 To stonde wiþ comons in her ry3t,
Is hyþest poynyt of charite.
To quyte þat dede no man my3t,
36 Saue onely God in Trynyte.
Þou3 þe comons vnkonnyng þe,

² Ll. 13–14: i.e. Negligence to eradicate such treacherousness soon makes it necessary [for Parliament] to double its efforts when treason runs rampant
³ Stand on the side of loyalty and strike down [treacherousness] with fervour
⁴ The common people may be unaware [of your stance on their side] (see l. 33)
God 3eueþ 3ow neuere þe lasse mede.⁵

39 êat mede askeþ so heyþ degre,  
Nes non bot God may quyte êat dدة.⁶

(6)

Set o wysdom mot 3e lere,
Most profyt, and heyest honour:  
3oure tenauntes playntes 3e mot here,  
For þey kepen alle 3oure tresour.  
3e are holden to ben here socour.
Non wiþ wrong oþer mysbede;  
Forþy God made 3ow gouernour,
In Goddis ryþt to deme þe dدة.⁶

(7)

Lordis þat han castels and toures,  
Alle folk stonden of 3ow awe.
Þe puple is Goddis, and noþt 3oures,  
Þey paye 3oure rente to gouerne lawe.
Body ne catelle hem mysbede.
Who dop so, God sayþ in sawe,
He shal haue heuene for þat dدة.

(8)

Þe lord þat wole haue good loos,  
Stonde fast in trouþe, waxe not faynt.
Let trouþe gon out of cloos,  
Þat alle folk may here his playnt.
Let treson be shamely ataynt,  
Grante hem no mercy, ne take no mede,
For mede wiþ poysôn sotyly is maynt,
Mercy myþt cherische hem in here dدة.

(9)

3if a man wolde þe ouertylt,  
Caste þy deþ for to kille,  
Let not anoþer byþe his gylt,  
Pat neuere in dede dدة þe ylle.
Dampne no man for non euyl wille  
To do þe gytleles blod to blede.

⁵ God’s reward is not the less for it
⁶ To pass judgement on the [people’s] conduct according to God’s law
Sette 3oure domes in euene skille.

72 In drede of God 3e deme 3oure dede.

(10)
Who skorneþ hem þat telleþ hem wit,\(^7\)
is contemtuous of; gives; sound advice
Is rebell to God þat repreueþ reson.
Who; who; it (i.e. wit)

75 Þat loueþ hym most þat hateþ hit
A3enst Goddis counseill cast acheson.
To worshipe hym, þere wit is geson.
In the absence of; good will; force; guide

78 For fawte of grace, vertue ben gyde.
To chastysse fooles is ay in seson,
To worschip or shame, after þe dede.
Respect; according to; their; [mis]deeds

(11)
81 Syngulerte is sotyle þefte.
Personal gain; vile
Pe calle hit custom trouþe to blende.
blindfold (v.)
Whan Trouþe wole reherce þat efte,
divulge; afterwards

84 Þan God wil vengeance wiþ trouþe sende,
Shamely falsed to shende,\(^8\)
spread
Drede and stryf among hem shede.

87 To preue who is Goddis frend,
To preue who is Goddis frend,
Comons be witenes of here dede.
find out

(12)
Putte fro court þat chericheþ vys,
Banish from; vice
Pat place of vertues wolde shende.
Who; revile/mock
Nedeles delys and nedeles gys
Extravagant; luxuries; clothing
Pe wastours out of worship spende.
wastrels/spendthrifts; dishonourably

93 Wiþ wit and vysemant alle amende;
sense and prudence; put right
Lete werk be witnes 3e can 3oure Crede.
deeds; know
Wiþ corage and hardynes 3oure reme defende,
resolution; realm

96 In Goddis querelle 3e do 3oure dede.
cause; perform your task

(13)
A trewe man reccheþ neuere a dell,
honest; cares; not at all
Þou3 alle þe world his werks aspy3ed.
If; see
And falsed, for he dop not welle,
But
He wolde trouþes tonge were ty3ed,
tied

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

\(^8\) To put falsity to disgraceful shame
So that even the most impetuous of them were scattered far and wide

Thus; support
securely put
condemn

Empty talk has never made an end to war

Their; hottest; far and wide
did battle; decides; outcome

Whanne 3e han made pes wiþynne,
All 3oure reme in vnyte,
Vtteremore 3e mot bygynne,
Strength 3oure marche, and kepe þe see.
Ofte haue 3e made 3oure fomen fle,
Here hatest blod o brod to spede.9
God dop batayle, and not 3e;
Þou3 3e fau3t, God dop þe dede.

To Fraunce kyng Edwarde had queryle,
Hit was his kynde heritage;
And 3e han þe same style,
Wip armes of þe selue parage;
And 3it 3oure querelle dede neuere aswage,
Pat God haþ shewed in 3oure manhede.10
On see, on land, in eche vyage,
In dent of swerd, God demed 3oure dede.11

Stuffle 3oure castels in eche coost,
Warnestor and folk þeder sende;
So mow 3e abate 3oure enemys bost,
But not in trete, in wast to spende.
Wheþer 3e assayle or defende,
On see or land, God 3ow spede.
Wip word of wynd mad neuere werre ende,12
But dent of swerde endid þe dede.

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

---

9 So that even the most impetuous of them were scattered far and wide
10 This God has instilled in your nature/character
11 Through the force of [your] sword, God has passed judgement on your deeds
12 Empty talk has never made an end to war
They would do better by keeping themselves (morally) clean.

In dede of armes wonnen prys.

When glower and flater on tapetis trede,

For wynnyng þey counseled to cowardys.

Man wan neuer worship by here dede.

(18)

Als ofte as 3e trete,

3oure enemys ordynaunce þey di3t.

While 3e trete, ay þey gete;

3e trete 3oure self out of 3oure ri3t.

Pere lakkeþ conscience of kny3t,

Lete falsed growe tyl he sede.

Ordre of kny3t was mad to fy3t,

In Goddis ri3t to ende þe dede.

(19)

Ordre of kny3t hardest is,

On see, on lond, on sholde and depe.

He passeþ relegous ywis,

Þou3 þey preye and faste wepe.

Ofte wiþ ful wombe relegous slepe,

He passeþ relegous ywis,

Þou3 þey preye and faste wepe.

Ofte wiþ ful wombe relegous slepe,

Whan kny3tes han hunger, and moche in drede.

Þe beter in clene lyf þey au3t hem kepe,

As Goddis kny3t to don here dede.

(20)

On of two 3e mot chese,

On lond or see, o[n] shippes bord,

Wiþ fi3t 3e wynne, wiþ trete 3e lese.

3oure enemys han þat eure in hord,

Þat þey wynne wiþ word

3oure townes and castels in lengþe and brede.

And þat 3e wynne, 3e wynne wiþ sword,

Þe better in clene lyf þey au3t hem kepe,

As Goddis kny3t to don here dede.

(21)

God 3eue 3ow grace þis reme to 3eme,

To cherische þe goode, and chastyse þe nys.

And also serue God to queme,

Þat 3oure werkis preue 3ow wys.
And it lies with you to be the means
14

Do so now, 3e wynne 3ow prys,
And heuene blisse for 3oure dede.

Amen.

NOTES

title Robbins (1975, p. 1421) takes for a title ‘Maintain law and Henry’s foreign policy’.
4 Cf. XIV.57–58, there with reference to justice instead of parliament.
14 gloweþ as glede] Proverbial. See Whiting, G 152, ‘To glow like a gleed’.
34 For the signification of charite see the note to III.3.
37 ‘The passage ... seems to include a reproof of the “cunning” lords who used to cheat the Commons by changing the text of their petitions’ (Kail, p. xviii). Yet Kail glosses ‘unskilled’ for vnkonnyng, where ‘ignorant/unaware of’ seems more appropriate.
45 socour] ‘Protector’, in view of St. (7), which describes the traditional role assigned to the bellatores as defenders of the laboratores.
51 Cf. III.131–32, Þe peuple ... nys not 3oures, / Al is Goddis.
63 by3e] Aphetic form of abien.
71 XII.111 is identical (but see the note there).
73–76 Concisely summarized in XVI.19, And hate hem þat telle hym so.
81 Cf. I.4, [Eche man be war ... of ...] synguler profit by fals assent, and XVI.59, For defaute of Iustice, and singulere to wynne.
94 Crede] See also the note to IX.39. 
110 hates] A Northern feature.
111 Cf. III.111, Whoso fi3þe, God dop þe dede, and IX.143, God dop batayle and not 3e.
113 Edwarde = King Edward III (1327–1377), Henry V’s great-grandfather.
115 3e = King Henry V (1413–1422).
127 Proverbial. See Whiting, W.638, ‘Word made never war’s end, but sword ended the deed’.
130 [hat/] Follows Kail.
154 on shippes bord] MS or, but illogical after see.
168 ‘Amen’ is struck through in red ink; but whether it is meant to be erased or not, is doubtful’ (Kail, p. 60, n.). See the note to Amen (also struck through in red) at the end of poem I.

14 And it lies with you to be the means
SUMMARY

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

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

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

TEXT

1 The herrere degre, þe more wys;  The higher the rank
þe gretter worschip, þe noblere fame. importance; illustrious
3 þe herrere degre, þe more nys; foolish
þe gretter foly, þe more blame.
After foly folweþ þe shame.
6 Repreued of frendis and scorned of fo, Rejected; held in contempt
After þy dede ressayue þy name.
Eche man be war, er hym be wo. In accordance with; reputation
(2)
9 If you be king’s counsellor,
Keep the crown whole in state;
If you be king’s counselere,

12 Loke no stones thereof abate.
If other would make the king he hate,
Or false other trouble go,

15 Tak thy leave, and kisse the 3ate.
Eche man be war, er hym be wo.

(3)
On a mountayne a sete may not be hyd,

18 Ne lordis werkis in no degre.
A lordis werkis wiþ comouns is kyd,
That he doþ most in preuete.

21 Gouernour of kyngdom or Cyte,
After þey lyue men deme so.
For eche a werk God 3eueþ a fe.

24 Eche man be war, er hym be wo.

(4)
A symple prest wole syng his masse
While his lyuyng is but smal.

27 As summe encrese, serue God þe lasse,
Wiþ benefices ten my3te lyue wiþal,¹
And fynde þere noþer houshold ne halle,

30 Ne serue þe parische, but take hem fro.
Er God suche rekenyng calle,
Be tyme be war, er þey be wo.

(5)
33 Man, do resoun þou þou be riche,
Ouer cite or town hast gouernaunce.
Loue al crafty folk yliche,

36 Mayntene no party in distaunce.²
Sette mendis for trespass in euene balaunce;
For a penyworth of harm tak not two.³

39 Rule wel mesure and sustenaunce.⁴
Eche man be war, er hym be wo.

¹ Ten people could easily live on [his income from] benefices
² Do not take sides in a dispute
³ I.e. Do not impose a heavy penalty for a light offence
⁴ Set proper rules for measures and foodstuffs
(6)
Be wyseman his sone forbode nota [should] forbid

42 Masoun craft and alle clymbyng,
To practice the craft of masonry
And shipman craft, for peril of dede,
death
And preuey in counsel be ney3 no kyng.

45 For his mysryulyng þou my3t hyng,
[To practice] the craft of masonry
Þat shep my3te grese vnder þy to.
[So] that; sheep; graze; toe
to3; trust; wings
To fli3e to hy3e treste not þy wyng.

48 Eche man be war, er hym be wo.

(7)
Þou3 þy kyng be fre to 3yue,
[It would] make the living [conditions] for other people worse
Be þou not gredy to craue;
[To practice] the craft of masonry
Make opere folk þe worse to lyue,5
[greedily] importunate; ask
For synguler profyt þou wolde haue.
Because of; selfish gain
Er drede and repre þy berde shawe,6
[shame]
Asese of Couetys and say hoo.
Desist from
The man þat wolde his worship saue,
ihonour
Be tyme be war, er him be woo.

(8)
For to amende þat was mys,
eviltwong
Þerfore is ordeyned eche Iustice.
For that purpose; created; law
Lat eche man haue þat shulde ben his,
Ne contryue tresons þere trouþ lys,
[treasonably] conspire; loyalty; is due
In tyrauntrie to robbe and slo.
[outrageously] kill
Er 3oure werkis preue 3ow nys,
Before; foolish
Eche man be war, er hym be wo.

(9)
3if 3e wole haue pes of 3ong and old,
among
Let eche man haue þat is ry3t.
rightfully his
Let comon lawe his cours hold,
have its proper course
Euene mesure, mett and wy3t.
Correct; measure; size; weight
Man, þou3 þou be moche of my3t,
may possess great power
Mende fawtes er þou make mo.
mistakes; more
For þat 3e hid God seþ in sy3t.
what; conceal; clearly
Eche man be war, er hym be wo.

5 [It would] make the living [conditions] for other people worse
6 I.e. Before fear and shame get too close for comfort
(10)

Eche lord knoweþ his astate,
Lyue on þat God hym lent.

75 Pat borweþ moche, he geteþ hate,
Spende waste, passyng his rent;
For suche a kyngdom haþ ben shent.

78 Stryeþ wiþ comons, threp and thro,
To brynge þat in amendement,
Eche man be war, er hym be wo.

(11)

81 Whanne holichirche suffreþ symonye,
And is wiþ hym enchaunted,
And lawe of land suffreþ vsurye,

84 Vnkyndely synne, and shameles haunted,
And vicious folk auaunsed and dawnted,
And vertues flemed fro eche a wro:

87 In þat kyngdom God haþ vengeaunce graunted.
Eche man be war, er hym be wo.

(12)

In a kyngdom what makeþ stryf;

90 No man standes of oþer awe:

93 And holy chirche rebell to Goddis sawe.
To kepe his commaundement þey say no.
Fro þat kyngdom God his loue wil drawe.

96 Eche man be war, er hym be wo.

(13)

99 Pulle vp þe stakes and breke þe styles,7
Leþe hem no more styke so faste.

102 Kepe 3ow wel fro deþes flo,
Fro costage, and be no more agaste.
Eche man be war, er hym be wo.

---

7 I.e. Abandon your position
(14)

105 Þe flesch haþ many frele frendis:
Richesse, strengþe, fayrnesse, and hele;
Whan it is mysvsed, þe soule it schendis.  

108 Richesse, raunere of worldis wele,
Take fro þe nedy, to þe nedeles dele,\(^8\)
And wylde recheles as a roo.  

111 Er 3oure synnes 3oure soules apele,
Eche man be war, er hym be woo.

\[\text{unstable/transitory}\]

\[\text{beauty; health}\]

\[\text{corrupts}\]

\[\text{thief/plunderer; wealth}\]

\[\text{becomes unruly; reckless(?ly); roe deer}\]

\[\text{accuse}\]

Notes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

53 *thy berde shawe* Proverbial. See Whiting, B 119, ‘To shave one’s beard’.

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

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

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

106 *fayrnesse* Kail: *fayrenese*.

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\(^8\) Takes from the needy, gives to those not in want
The core argument in this piece is the overriding importance of harmony between the social classes within the realm, on pain of its disintegration. The argument takes the familiar form of an analogy of the body politic and the human body, frequently found in the medieval philosophy and literature of the estates.\footnote{For a detailed discussion of the subject, with reference to the present poem, see Mohl (1933, pp. 109–10, 263–64).} The main theme is introduced by an enumeration of the four elements: earth, water, fire and air, that combine to form the bodily humours, and of the three elements that constitute the rational soul: life, feeling and reason. What follows is a detailed comparison of parts of the human body and the estates of the realm. Just as the human limbs and organs work together to make the body as a whole function properly, so the estates must work together to make the realm operate as an organic whole.

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

**Text**

1 Where of is mad al mankynde.
Of seuen þynges, and it be souȝt:
if: examined
 Erþe and water, fyre and wynde,
air
þerof is þe body wrouȝt;
made
þe soule of þre, þat hæp þe mynde,
posseses; consciousness
6 Of lyf, felyng and of þou3t.
Pe soule fro þe body vnbeende,
Whan on of þese lkkeþ ou3t.

(2)
9 Pe heued y likne to a kyng,
For he is lord souereyn of al.
Haþ foure to his gouernyng:
12 Mouþ and nose and eyen wiþal,
Eryn fayre to his heryng,
To serue þe brayn, is pryncypal
15 Chef of counsel ymageynylng,
To caste before, er after fal.

(3)
I lykne þe nekke, moche of my3t,
18 Pat body and heued to gydre kny3t,
To a Lustice þat demeþ ry3t;
For þurgh it comeþ all
12 If a man take ordre of kny3t,
De coler in þe nekke het;
And feloun forfete in þefte or fy3t,
24 De iugement in þe nekke set.

(4)
Now I lykne mannys brest
[To] presthod in good degre,
27 Most in peril, lest in rest,
For besynesse in spiritualte;²
In penaunce and in pryer prest,
30 Meke of spirit in pouertye,
Holde hospytal to Goddis gest,
And fede þe pore in charyte.

(5)
33 Pe shuldres and þe bakebon
I likne to lordis of þe lond;
Pe armes to kny3tles, to fende fro fon.
36 Pe squyers I likne to þe hondes;
Pe fyngres to 3emen þat byfore gon,
Wiþ bent bowes and bry3t brondes.

² I.e. Dedicated to a spiritual way of life
While alle þys lymes arn wel at on,
þe body in good plyt it stondes.

(6)
Mannys rybbes y likne now –
Flesch and skyn in body hydes –
To men of lawe, is to alow
þat kepes in loue boþe sydes.
Rybbes to resoun þou3 þey bow,³
So lawe dop, ofte in fauour bydes,
Tyl ground be sou3t þere lawe dop grow,
Ende in charite, þat no man chydes.

(7)
I likne þe thies, flesch and bon,
þat beren þe body quantite,
To marchaundes, in perilide ride and gon,
Bryngen wynnyng, gold and fee,
Make hi3e houses of lym and ston,
Mayntene burgh, toun and cyte,
Welpe and worschip in here won,
And good houshold of gret plente.

(8)
Mannys leggis likne y may
To alle craftes þat worche wiþ handes,
For al þe body beren þay,
As a tre þat bereþ wandes.
þe feet to lykne y wole assay
To alle trewe tylyers of landes,
þe plough, and alle þat dygge in clay;
Alle þe world on hem standes.

(9)
The toes of þe mennys feet,
þo y likne to trewe hyne,
þat trauyyle boþe in drye and weet,
In þurst, in hungere and in pyne,
In het, in cold, in snow and slet,
Many hi3e none er þey dyne,
And wiþ good mete selde met;
But after howsel, þey drynke no wyn.

³ Just as the ribs bend to the extent that is reasonably required
(10)
Toes helpeth man from fall to rise;
He may not stand that hath no tool,

75 Lepe ne renne, ne ryde in syse,
Wrestle ne fy3te, ne put þe ston.
3if seruant þe maystere refuse,
78 Þe seruant lyuyng sone were gon.
And maystres, þou3 þey ben wyse,
Wiþ out seruant lyue not alon.

(11)
I likne þe wombe, and þat wiþ ynne,
To botemeles purs, þat moche dop take;
To couetous no wyket pynne;
78 To glotoune þe garner wyd open make.
Þe wombe preyed þe mouþ to blynne:
81 I likne þe wombe, and þat wiþ ynne,
To botemeles purs, þat moche dop take;
To couetous no wyket pynne;
84 To glotoune þe garner wyd open make.
Þe wombe preyed þe mouþ to blynne:
87 To slepe, quod þe ey3e, we may not wynne
Þe wrecched wombe so dop vs wake.

(12)
We dulle of heryng, quod þe ere.
90 We dase for dronken, quod þe ey3e,
I wende but o mone þere were,
And me þou3te two y sey3e.
93 Quod þe handis: fro mouþ may we not vs were.
Quod þe mouþ: y drank while y my3te drye.
Allas, quod þe feet, alle we bere,
96 And 3oure bargayn dere abye.

(13)
The handes and feet þe mouþ gan preye:
Let vs thre dayes reste,
99 Wiþ alle þyn opere lymes pleye,
Wiþ felaschip, frend and geste.
þe mouþ in anger he dede saye:
102 Þes þre dayes do 3our best.
Al þat tyme, ny3t ne daye,
No mete ne drynk come in my brest.

(14)
105 Thre dayes the mouþ dede faste,
Tyl wombe calde þe mouþ vnkynde.
Vn[b]lynde thyn handes, are þey faste.
108 Stere, and lete þe myle grynde.
Quod þe eren: oure heryng is at þe laste.
Quod eyen: we dase, and waxe blynd.
111 Quod handes and feet: oure strengþe is paste.
Quod brayn and herke: vs wantes mynde.

(15)
Quod þe mouþe: 3e playne whyle y ete,
114 And while y faste 3e make gret doel.
Quod hondes and feet: also we gete
Pat þou spendest ech a deel,
117 We may play, swynke and swete,
While mouþe in mesure makenþ his mele.
For mesure keþ þynde, herte,
120 And al þat tyme we fare wele.

(16)
I likne a kyngdom in good astate
To stalworþe man, myþy in hele.
Nota bene

123 While non of his lymes Þþer hate,
He is myþy wiþ anoþer to dele.
3if eche of his lymes wiþ Þþer debate,
126 He waxþ syk, for flesch is frele.
His enemys wayte erly and late,
In his feblenesse on hym to stele.

(17)
129 And hed were fro þe body stad,
Noþer partye were set at nouþt,
And body wiþoute armes sprad.
132 Were armes wiþ ouþe handis ouþt?
Ne handis but þey fylings had?
Wiþoute fyngeþ what were rþowþt?
135 þes lymes makenþ hed ful glad,
And al þe body, and it be souþt.

(18)
3if a man hurte þy fynger or too,
138 But þou make deffens o ferre,
Leg or arm may take þe fro,
To body or hed auntre hym herre.

---

4 Unless you keep your distance in defending yourself
5 He may venture higher, to the body or the head
141 Ensample to kyngdom y set this so: If
   And oure frendis be distroyed by werre,
   If
   Pan kepe þe wisely fro þy foo;
144 For wip alle his myȝt he wolde come nerre.

(19)
God saue þis man is so deuysed:
   may save; [who]; formed
Hed and body, alle lymes in kynde.
   in their natural state
147 But þere as vertues ben despy sed,
   if on the other hand
To preye to God þey waste here wynde.
   breath
God leue þat synne may be refused,
   grant; got rid of
150 And of dedly synnes vs vnbynde,
   release
And eche stat in his kynde be vsed.
   according to; nature; employed
God of his mercy haue vs in mynde. Amen
   may remember us

Notes

title  Robbins (1975, p. 1421) has the title ‘The state compared to man’s body’.
1–7  For a discussion of the medieval view of the faculties which the human body and soul exercise, see Lewis (1964, pp. 152–74).
2  and it be souȝt metrical filler; see also l. 136.
14  pryncypal] Treated as a noun in MED s.v. principal, but clearly adjectival to chef. This line and the following are punctuated accordingly, which finds support in the way these lines are quoted in MED s.v. imagininge (ger.).
24  I.e. to be beheaded or hanged.
26  To] MS In. Kail also has To, but does not mark it as an emendation.
29  prest] Kail glosses ‘ready’, which is hardly plausible in this context.
55  Cf. XI.94: Here wele and worship, in euery won.
107  Vnbynde] MS Vnkynde does not make sense. Kail does not emend, but adds the note: [? for Vnbynde]. There seems little doubt that the close similarity with immediately preceding vnkynde must have caused the scribal error. Vnbynde fits the context perfectly.
126  Proverbial. See Whiting, F 272, ‘The flesch is frail’. Echoes Matt. 26:41, ‘... the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak’.

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6 I use this as an illustration of a kingdom, as follows
7 And each estate [of the body politic] may function as it was ordained by nature
As the note to the title explains, the principal motive for this poem is the assassination in 1419 of the Duke of Burgundy and Flanders, although nowhere in the poem is there any explicit mention of the murder itself. What is discussed at length are the duke’s follies, their immediate consequences for Flanders and the Flemish themselves, as well as the general lessons to be drawn from these mishaps for the benefit of the author’s public.

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

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

\[A \text{ reflection on fifty-two foolish acts}\]
I.e. Without legal justification they went in mad pursuit of wealth,

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

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

3 The glosers skulked away out of embarrassment of (the baseness of) their souls
And he that mesure wole forsake,

36 And nedles put hym self in drede,
Of mannys deþ haue no rouþe,
But hate hem that tellen hym trouþe,

39 Loue hym that cherische hym in synne,
And suche games bygynne
Where that he wot he may not wynne,4

42 But besyen hym in slouþe.

(4)
He is a fool that no good can,
Ne non wolde lere, but slow in deder.

45 A grete fool y holde that man
That of his enemys haþ no drede.

48 Of after perile payer tok non hede.
Hit is worthy he ete bred of bran,

51 And conscience away fliþt,
May brynge a lord, er that he wyt,

(5)
Flaundres was þe richest land, and meriest to mynne;
Now is it wrappid in wo, and moche welþe raft.
For defaute of Iustice, and singulere to wynne,

Peys were rebelle, to ryse craft aþen craft.
Here lord had part of þe foly þey were wounded ynne,
For thy he les his lordshiphe, and here fraunchise raft.5

63 Here enemys lawhen hem to skorne and seyn: for synne,
Of here banere of grace God broken haþ þe shaft.
When prelat is forbode to preche,

66 No trewe man trouþe dar teche,
Encresyng of temperalte
Suspende spiritualte:

69 What land is gouerned in þat degre,
May wayte after wreche.

---

4 Which in the [prevailing] circumstances he knows he cannot win
5 For that he lost his honour, and they were robbed of their freedom
And does not acknowledge his own moral evil-mindedness
And is quick to enter the School for Scandal
And treats with contempt who teach(es) him proper conduct

(6)
I holde hym a fool, þou3 he be wys,
And at his wysdom set no prys,
But skorne hym and don blame;
And he þat telleþ where peryle lys,
And gete no þonk, but harm and shame.
And he þat pleyneþ y holde hym nys,
(7)
He þat my3t thryue, and nel not thee,
Ne his owen harmes knawe,6
Ne serue God for loue ne awe,
Ne gouerne wel his owen degre,
Ne rule hym self in ry3twys lawe,
Whan wyse men fro hym fle,
(8)
Pat freck may wel be holden a fool
Pat wayueþ wit, and worcheþ by wille,
And skippe into sclaundre scol,7
And scornu hym þat telleþ hym skylle,8
And lyue in Lenten as in 3ool
His flesch in foly to fulfille.

6 And does not acknowledge his own moral evil-mindedness
7 And is quick to enter the School for Scandal (i.e. the company in which one learns to act disgracefully)
8 And treats with contempt who teach(es) him proper conduct
Nor delivers a check before he is checkmated himself (i.e. nor delivers a blow before he is attacked himself)  

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

They spare prince ne pore, old ne newe,  

For þey crepe into his cors, and cloþe hem in his wede.  

And endid wiþ oure aunsetres tyl þey to erþe 3ede.  

In the world; faithful  

duties; duly; payment  

comes next  

called  

And bowe to a bekenyng,  
And [makes man]; summons (n.)  

And bryngeþ hem to rekenyng,  

Tyl deþ alle redresse.

NOTES

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

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

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

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

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

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

SUMMARY

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

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

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

TEXT

(1) That ilke man wole lerne wel To loue God wiþ al his my3t, 3 Pat loue in his herte fele. 5 Per God doþ loue, loue þou ry3t; 6 Hate it boþe day and ny3t,
3eue hym noþer mete ne mele,  
But flyt hym fere out of 3oure sy3t.  

(2)

9 Many gret[e] causes is  
To loue God why men ou3te.  
He shop vs lyk ymage his,  
And wip his deþ fro pyne vs bou3t.  
And 3ut, þou3 we don ofte amys,  
For eche a gylt he beteþ vs nou3t;  
Man of loue he haþ besou3t.\(^1\)

(3)

18 For to do a gret office,  
To serue hym wel is þyn atent,  
For thy profyt, but not for his.  
For he fyndeþ þe þy vaunsement,  
By loue vpon þe profyt lys.  
Suche worldly louers are gostly blent;  
Suche loue to God is cold as yse.

(4)

27 Þat loue is worth no parfyt mede:  
Þou [sechest] thy profyt, and not hisse.  
To pyne ne blis take non hede,  
But loue God for good he is.  
Suche loue to God his erande doþ spede,  
And pleþ best to God y wys.  

(5)

36 Herberwe, drynk, cloþe and fed –  
For syngulere profyt, eche a dele,  
For drede of pyne and couetys of mede.  
Loue God ouer alle, for good he is;  
To pyne ne blis take non hede.

\(^1\) He has entreated man for [his] love
(6)
3if þou sette loue in þat degre:
42 To loue God for he þe wrouȝt,
Pan make þou hym as he dede þe,
Pan loue for loue euene is brouȝt.
45 3if þou loue God for he made þe fre,
Pat dyȝed for the, to blisse þou brouȝt,
Pan dyȝe þou for hym, as he dyȝed for þe;
48 3ut heuene blisse þou quytest hym nouȝt.

(7)
3it o thyng þere is byhende,
Man, þat God askeþ of the:
51 Alle worldys delys fro þyn herte wende,
Wiþ alle þyn herte loue þou me.
54 For worldis goodis myn are he.
Loue me gostly, þat am þy frende,
Panne al euylshal fro þe felle.

(8)
57 Pat loue me gostly y can assay,
For gostly loue in herte y souȝt.
Do worldly thyng fro þyn herte away,
60 And haue me principal in þy þouȝt.
Be lorde and haue richesse þou may,
Worldis richesse for man was wrouȝt,
63 Gostly loue, þat is my pray,
But worldly goodis in heuene comeþ nouȝt.

(9)
For gold and syluer and precyous stones,
66 Swetnes of floures, erþely bewte,
Þe shrynys wiþ alle seyntes bones,
In heuene were foul felþe to se.
69 Tyl body and soule aȝen arn ones,
Mad parfyt in claryte,
Saue God hym self, in heuene wones,
72 Þe principal mankynde shal be.

(10)
God, how may y, man, bygynne
Wiþ myn herte to loue þe.
75 Repente, and wylne no more synne,
So mowe [we] frendis be.

Good soule sybbe to my kynne,

For y made it lik to me;

Mankynde y tok, a mayden wiþ ynne,

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

(11)

Who loueþ God, he wil bygynne
For to folwe Goddis lore:
Loke where he dede wrongly wynne,
Make amendis, a3en restore.
3oure loue fro me 3e parten o twynne
For worldis worship, ryches in store;
Heuene 3ates 3e steken and pytynne,
Pat 3e shulde saue 3e haue forlore.

(12)

To gete loue þus bygynne:
Wip clene herte and swete þou3t,
Wip trewe tong, not falsely wynne,
Ne stele, ne flatre, ne ly3e nou3t.
Do ry3twys dede, out and ynne,
Loke þy werkys be euene wrou3t,
Do almes and penaunce, and leue þy synne;
Wip þese þre loue is bou3t.

(13)

God spekeþ to man, and lerneþ lore,
Pe comaundementis and þe Crede.
3eue me þy loue, y aske no more,
Wip al þy herte, in loue and drede.
And þou nylt 3eue it me, warne me byfore,
Sette pris to selle it, loue and bede,
I wole 3eue the my self þerfore.
Where my3test þou haue a beter mede.

(14)

And þou nelt 3eue ne selle it me,
A3ens me þou wilt debate,
Pan wil y gon away fro þe,
And 3elde to þe hate for hate.
My face wip loue shalt þou not se,
But steke þe wipoute heuene 3ate,
Fro alle vertues and charyte,
Wiþ helle houndes, in endeles date.

(15)

Haue y þy loue, so may þou quyte; ²

114 I mad þe lik ymage to me.
And 3if þe þenke þat was to lyte,
Panne þenk y dyed on rode tre.
117 Þou3 þou trespass, y do not smyte,
But byd 3if þou wilt mendid be.
And þou be lost, whom wiltow wyte,
120 Is it long on me or þe.

(16)

Discrecioun of 3ong and old,
Of alle þynge, nouȝt ouȝte;
123 Of alle þat may be bouȝt and sold,
Loue for loue is cuenes bouȝte.³
Whan worldis loue doȝ Payne and folde,
126 Goddis loue fayleþ nouȝt.
Trewe loue makeþ men be bolde,
Wiþ loue felawship to gydre is brouȝt.

(17)

129 For loue God com fro heuene toure,
In mayden Mary tok mankynde.
For oure swete, he drank ful soure,⁴
132 Where myȝt we trewere loue fynde.
His loue passeþ worldis tresoure,
3af syȝt in helle to gostly blynde.
135 And we wole knyte his loue to oure,
For soþe, þat knot shal neuere vnbynde.

(18)

138 Þat loue wole þy soule saue.
Among myn angels haue a sete
141 3if þou nelt, y wol þe þrete

² Ll. 113–14: If I have your love, [then] that is how you may repay the debt you owe me, / [Namely that] I created you in my own image
³ I.e. Receiving love by offering love is the fairest deal
⁴ I.e. We may enjoy the sweetness of God’s forgiveness, because he drank the bitter vinegar and gall on the cross
In helle pyne be fendis knaue.  
Wiþ þy conscience þou trete  
Wheþer is þe leuere for to haue.  

(19)  
And þou madde in þy mood  
To werne me þe loue þou has,  
I wole caste on þe myn herte blod,  
To bere witnesse þou forfetest gras;  
And my vengeance, þat is so wood,  
Wiþ helle houndis in fyre þe chas.  
Þou hast fre wille, knowest euylle and good;  
Chese where wytrow take þy plas.  

(20)  
And þou of þy loue daungere make,  
What may þy loue profyte me.  
And þou3 þou woldest me forsake,  
Out of my lordschipe þou my3t not fle.  
Angels bry3t, and deueles blake,  
In helle and heuene, my lordschipes be.  
Þere be no mo wayes to take,  
Is loue or hate more profyt to þe.  

(21)  
3if þy loue to þy flesch dop bende,  
To greue me þou dost bygynne.  
3if þou loue þe worlde, þat wole make ende,  
Of hym þou shalt more lese þan wynne.  
3if þou be suget, and loue þe fende,  
He wole þe hate, and þeue pyne for synne.  
Loue me, y am God, þy frende,  
And oure loues shal neuere twynne.  

(22)  
Wheþer trewe loue go or sende,  
Hym thar not tary in his dede.  
When mede haþ leue to stande byhynde,  

5 If you withhold your love [from me]  
6 What profits you more, love or hate?  
7 Ll. 169–70: Whether true love goes [forth] or sends [forth] (i.e. to find a friend in need, see l. 174), / He must not tarry in the act  
8 When worldly reward is allowed to stay behind (i.e. is no longer of importance)
XVII  LOUE THAT GOD LOUETH  179

...mission; accomplish...

Invariable; in need...Who; defend against...need not be afraid...

(23)

God sayþ: y haue mercyes to dele;
My mercyes þousandes mo ken fele
His herte blod wrot oure hele,
And Ihesus body þe parchemyn is;
Wiþ trewe loue he prented oure sele,¹⁰

(24)

And by name it haþ no pere,
Is lykned to Ihesus, y may proue:
His handes and feet þe leves were,
Hit makeþ hool al yfere.

(25)

God biddiþ vs do no þynges but two:
Lede þy soule lustes fro,
To lete out trewe loue to his frende.
In that blisse God graunte vs go,

NOTES

title  ll. 4–5 point to the meaning ‘love whom God loves’, rather than ‘love who loves God’.
³ mele] Serves as rhyme tag.
²⁸ sechest] Inserted as in Kail.

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⁹ Ll. 179–80: Thousands are able to feel/enjoy my mercy more/ Than thousands the wickedness of the world
¹⁰ I.e. He confirmed His covenant with repentant man with the seal of His true love.
Of the seven corporal works of mercy, the first six are based on Matt. 25:35–36, ‘For I was an
hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me
in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me’. The
seventh: ‘bury the dead’, is inspired by Tobit 1:17–19. Here, only four of the seven are mentioned.

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

A Wycliffite notion, for which see the eighth of the ‘Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards’

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

The set phrase *loven and beden* (‘asking and offering a price, to bargain’) appears in *MED* s.v. *loven* (v.2) sub 3(a) with the meaning ‘ask a price for’, and s.v. *beden* (v.) sub 1(b), with the meaning ‘to offer (money for sth),
bargain for’. Cf. Dutch ‘loven en bieden’.

Cf. the vision of heaven in *Piers Plowman*, Prov. 14, *I seigh a tour on a toft trieliche
(= choicely) ymaked*, and 1.12: ‘The tour up the toft’, *quod she (= Holy Church), ‘Truthe (= God the
Father) is therinne’.

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

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

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

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

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

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

SUMMARY

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

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

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

TEXT

(1)
Who þat wole knowe condicion
desire (v.); what constitutes
Of parfyt lyf in alle degre:¹
religious orders
God is foundour of religion,
[the rule of] charity
Obedyent to charyte.
[Spiritually] agreeable
Swete þouȝt in deuocion
Goes hand in hand
In brennyng contemplacion,
ardent; religious meditation
Þe hiȝest lyf of spiritualte.

¹ Of a life governed in all respects by religious/monastic vows
I.e. They have very small chance of attaining heaven

What is a religious life as we understand it

He cannot fail to receive his reward with the martyrs (i.e. in heaven)

Vainglory that has come to be held in high regard

Those who live a good life

Engaging in worldly matters

[They] drive matters office

Who; their ways

(2)

9 The good lyueres in spiritualte,
They worldly lyueres hem dop hate;
With occupacion of temperalte

12 Drye relegeon out at þe 3ate,
For besynesse of vanyte,
Vaynglory and hy3e astate.

15 Pat þus chaungen here degre,
Pe þey come to heuene neuere or late.

(3)

What is religion in mynde.

In clene herte is soule o prys,
Out of þraldom doþ vnbynde,
A louter of vertues, a hatere of vys.

21 Eche soule is parfy chef clerk of kynde
In hy3e discrecion, and wys.
Of soules men may no fooles fynde,

24 But assente to þe flesch and make hym nys.

(4)

Religeeon is champion in batayle,
Discomfites hys enemy;

27 If temptacions hym assayle,
þere he hath þe victory.
Religeeon is trewe trauayle

30 In Goddis seruyce, neuere werye.
Haue mede wiþ martyres he may not fayle,
Pat euere is redy for to dy3e.

(5)

33 Werkys wiþ oute discrecion:
Vaynglory in staat is brou3t.
And shrift wiþ oute contricion:

36 In skorne þe sacrament þey sou3t.
And preyere wiþ oute deuocion:

39 Pe lippes turne preyers vp so doun,
Pat spekeþ oþer þan herte þou3t.

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

3 What is a religious life as we understand it

4 He cannot fail to receive his reward with the martyrs (i.e. in heaven)

5 Vainglory that has come to be held in high regard
(6)
Cherishe no vices in 3oure warde,
To sereue God in good atent;
And non wip other be to harde,
Pat ben professed in 3oure couent;6
ðey myȝte forþenke it afterwere
ðey tok þe abyte, and wolde repente;
ðey lese of God a gret rewarde
Whan wille fro religeon is wente.

(7)
A questyon of 3ow y craue –
Resoun assoyleþ it by skille –
Who may here soules saue
To were an abyte, wole or nelle.
ðenk on þy berþe, þenk on þy graue,
By; will they or will they not
Þey myȝte forþenke it afterward
Þey tok þe abyte, and wolde repente;
Þey lese of God a gret rewarde
Whan wille fro religeon is wente.

(8)
Þouȝ þou be of gentyl blod,
ðenk alle com of Adam and Eue.
Gadre not in propre worldis good;8
Pat nes no religeous, but worldis reue.
Þe herre degre, þe mekere of mood.9
Tak no vengeance, þouȝ folk þe areue;
Lat comon lawe stonde as hit stood,
Loke no proude herte þy charyte meue.

(9)
Haue non enuye, day ne nyȝt,
To goode lyuers bet þan 3e,
But auyȝe faste wip alle þy myȝt
To lyue beter þan dop he;
Þan countrefetest þou Goddis knyȝt;
Pat is enuye in charite.
Alle þouȝtes in Goddis doom are diȝt,
And dedes, after þat þey be.

---

6 Who have taken the vows of your monastery
7 Ll. 55–56: i.e. For man has a free will; he has the choice of heaven or to hell
8 Do not gather worldly goods into private possession
9 The higher the position, the humbler the heart
Let fools take the consequences of what they have done.
I.e. Of secular people, whether of noble or common descent
Against an intemperate appetite for choice dishes.

(10)
Tho þat lyuen in fleschly delys,
Fro þat companye remewe;
Loue here bodies, but not here vys,
And cherische hem to good vertue.
And þo þat wil al gate be nys,
Looke þou no3t here maneres sewe.
Go to company þat is wys,
Lete fooles drynke þat þey dede brewe.10

(11)
Religous, be war wiþ whom þe stonde,
Wiþ gentyles or folk þat worldly is,11
Þat þe grype not hand in honde;
When þe take leue loke not þe kys.
Man to man hem that not wonde,
Ne woman to woman no peryle ne is,
But man to woman my3t breke þe bonde,
In towche is susspecioun of mys.

(12)
Suche towches not þe byde,
Wolde buffete þe soule, and wounde wiþ ynne,
Þeue opere cause, þat stonde bysyde,
To wene it were a bargayn of synne.
Towches, in custom, þou3tis hide;
þan sclaundre and shame nylle not twynne.
With conscience sclaundre and shame dop chide;
To shewe opert he wol begynne.

(13)
With mekenesse þe may heuene gete,
Dispyse non in low degre;
Respeyue no worship, ne hy3e sete,
Þat pryde go bytwen God and þe,
Wolde make to hem self for3ete,
War for dronkenesse of drynkes grete,
Fro glotry of metes of gret daynte.12

---

10 Let fools take the consequences of what they have done
11 I.e. Of secular people, whether of noble or common descent
12 Against an intemperate appetite for choice dishes
And keep a record of your deeds, whereby you will be judged

Be on your guard against overindulging in excessive expenditure

I.e. Refrain from speaking, whether you are in or away from the monastery
(18)
In rule of religeon is ordeyned 3ore:
Byȝe no thyng to selle and wynne.
Marchaunt and religeous: on mot be forbore,
Þey may not wone on herte wiþynne.
Ne kepe no jewels ne propre in store;
Pat nes no religeous, but dedly synne
In fleschly delices, and loue it more
To parte þy loue and God atwynne.¹⁶

(19)
That þenkeþ good þouȝt in sylence,
Þey speken to God in specyale.
How mow ȝe lette hem, for conscience,
Calle hem to werkis genera[l]e.
Summe hidden, in vertue of obedience,
Contemplatyf in spirituale;
To religeon they don a gret defence
Pat bryngen hem to werkis temperale.

(20)
Hyȝe astate, ne gentyl blod,
Bryngeþ no man te heuene blisse.
Gret hors, ne iewel, ne browded hood,
Nes no cause of holynesse,  D
But pore of spirit and meke of mood.
3eue God þy soule, and eche man hisse.
Gret lordschipe, ne myche good,
Nes no cause of sykernesse.

(21)
Tonsure, abyte, ne no wede,
Nes no cause of religeon,
Ne wakyng, ne fastyng, ne almesdede,
Ne preyere, ne oreson,
But þe herte þerto take hede,
Wiþ werkys of discrecion.
Deuocion makeþ soules to spede
Wiþ werkys of contemplacion.

¹⁶ To cause separation between God and your love (i.e. love as a means of attaining union with God)
Religeon is most meke
In abyte, of alle vertues floures.

Richesse ne worldis worshipe seke,
But offre to God alle honoures.
Richesse and worshipe make soules syke,

In vaynglory and sharpe shoures.
Make vertues þe wax, deuocioun þe wyke,
To brenne bri3t in heuene boures.

Justice is religeon in sete,
Þat demeþ ri3t in all degre.
And queste is religeon, trouþe to trete;

And of his kyng blameles gete,
Lawe is so gentylle and so fre.

He wole amende and do no moo.
Paraunture þou art in þe same cas,
Or after my3t ben in suche two.17

Loke not þat þou hym chace,
Ne sclaundre hym not to haue shame and wo.
Pray God for3eue hym of his grace,
And kepe þe wel þou do not so.

NOTES

4  See 1 Cor. 14:1, ‘Follow after charity’.
6  neuere or late A common collocation, with variations such as selden or neuer and now or neuere.
56  Proverbial. See Whiting, T 406, ‘Maugre (in spite of) one’s teeth’.
57–58  Echoes the popular rebellious rhyme of the time: When Adam dalf, and Eve span, / Who was thanne a gentilman (Dean, 1996, p. 140).
57  gentyl Kail’s ‘gentle’ does not fit the context. See also ll. 82 and 153.
63  comon laue as administered in the king’s courts.
69  Goddis knyght The archetype of the miles Christi, ‘the soldier of God’ is described in Eph. 6:11–17,
where he is urged to ‘put on the whole armour of God’, comprising ‘the breastplate of righteousness’,

17 Or twice as many in the future
'the shield of faith', 'the helmet of salvation', and 'the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God'. The miles Christi metaphor is thoroughly treated with Jeffrey (1992, pp. 506–509).

80 Proverbial. See Whiting, B 529, ‘As one brews, let him drink’.

82 gentyles] in contrast with ordinary folk, as in ll. 57–58. See also l. 153. Kail’s gloss ‘godly people’ is out of context.

106 serue God in loue and drede] Echoes the stanzaic refrain in I.

123–24 Clearly anti-Wyclif and anti-Lollard. Wyclif held that God alone can forgive sins, since he alone can know the confessor’s state of mind; hence no priest or friar has power of absolution. See Hudson (1988, pp. 294–301).

138 Quoted in MED s.v. winnen sub 3a(d.) with the definition ‘to exact extortionate profits; benefit materially by usurious practices or sharp dealings’. But extortion and usury do not come into it. The clergy was simply forbidden to buy and sell at a profit, which is what this line says.

148 generale] MS generall. See the discussion of scribal crossed ll-variations in section 2.5.3.

153 gentyl] See the notes to ll. 57 and 82.

157 Alludes to Matt. 5:3, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’.

174 shoures] Kail glosses ‘abundance’, but the combination with sharpe points to suffering.

180 A literal rendering of the legal tenet of suum cuique tribuere.
XIX

Summary

The poem is in the ‘Complaint of God’ tradition. God says: ‘I created you in my image, I became man, and redeemed your sins on the cross. All for my love of you. Now, what have you done for me? What have I done or missed, that you refuse to return my love? You turned away from me in anger, submitting to the sins of the flesh. Repent; stop calling good what is bad, and remember that I am not only a merciful, but also a righteous and avenging God. You have a free will and can make your own choice between heaven and hell. It is so easy to please me: just forsake your sinful pleasures, exert yourself to perform the seven acts of mercy, and observe the Ten Commandments and the Creed.’

Text

(1)

[In my conscience I fynde,
And in my soule I here and see,
3 To repreue man þat is vnkynde,
[That]; reprove; rebellious [against God]
Goddis wordis þis may be:
words; these
Man of resoun, haue in mynde,
keep
6 I made þe lyk ymage to me.
Because of
For loue y hadde to mankynde
became man
I toke manhed, lyk to þe.

(2)

9 Mannys loue y 3erned 3ore,
desired; for a long time
þat loue was in myn herte sou3t;
desired
Mannys loue sat me so sore,
troubled
12 Nas neuere bargayn derrere bou3t.¹
purchase (n.)
Man, is þe laft no loue in store.
left (v.); store (i.e. [your] heart)
What is þe cause þou louest me nou3t.
missing; at all
15 Telle me 3if y my3te don more,
What is byhynde þat lakkeþ þe ou3t.

¹ I.e. Never have I paid more dearly for what I did
For by loue y meked me lowe, 
And dyed on þe rode tre. 
Answere, man, and be aknowe, 
Shewe what þou suffred for me. 
For suche seed as þou dost sowe, 
Þerof shal þyn heruest be, 
In heuene or helle to repe and mowe: 
As þou deserued song þy fee. 

Man, to þe y make my mone, 
I bou3t þe fro pyne to blisse; 
Melte þyn herte, as hard as stone, 
Þou3 it be late, amende þy mysse. 
Turne a3ayn, y wol þe kysse. 
To make me frendis of my fon, 
Þerfore y 3af my lyf for hysse. 

Be war, and loue not worldis good, 
To gete wiþ wrong, and calle it thyn. 
Man, haue it in þy mood: 
Þou shalt rekene, for alle is myn. 
Why bou3te y þe on the rood. 
For þou shulde serue, and be myn hyne. 
Make not myn argumentis wood
To caste þe fro blisse to pyne. 

Man, why turmentest þou me so. 
Euere þy synnes don encresce, 
And þy vices waxen moo, 
And þy vertues wanen lesse. 
Thenke good y be thy foo. 
Whanne wylt þou of þy synne ses, 
Haue mercy on þy soule woo, 
Or haue mynde on me, and þeue me pes. 

I.e. Do not make me reason in anger [why I should not]
To suffer death meeked me,
Fro pyne to bliss ye soule to wynne.

51 To me so shuldest thou meke þe,
Leue and forbere þy synne.
Fro my lordschipe myȝt thou not fle,
Heuene ne helle, ne see wiþ ynne,
But where and whenne my wille be
þy body and soule to parte o twynne.

57 Thouȝt thou haue graunted þe grace
To knowe boþe good and ylle,
Wyte þy self in eche a place,
Wheþer thou wilt þy self spille.
Þouȝt þe flesch and world and fend þe tille,
Thouȝt þe myȝt forbere and nouȝt trespas;
I lente þe knoweleche and fre wille.

66 Glade þerynne, and þanke me all.
Þe more þou hast þerof plente,
Þe nerre þe be þanne shalle.
Pan say: Lord, kepe me neyȝþ þe;
At nede here me when þe calle.
Take fro me hele and prosperite,
Rære þan lete me fro þe falle.

75 By my woundes swere no more,
Dysmembre no lymes þat y haue.
By wrong wynnyng aȝen restore,
If þou wilt þy soule saue.
Lete soule be lord, and go byfore,
And make þy body þy soule knaue.

---

3 Hold out temptation to you
4 I.e. Do not profane me by naming parts of my body in oaths
(11)

81 Man, and thou wist how
So lightly my gre to make, if
Thou noldest, for alle þe worldis prow,
would no want; wealth

84 For fleschly lustes me forsake.
In þy lyue besye þe now,
exert yourself
In goode werkis wysely wake;
be diligent

87 In loue [and] drede to me bow,
And fle to me fro synnes blake.
black

(12)

Seuene werkis of mercy, kepe hem welle,

90 þe comaundementis and þe Crede.
Alle þy lyue, as y þe telle,
deserve
3eue me þyn herte in loue and drede.

93 Whyle body and soule to gydre dwelle,
þou myȝt serue pyne and mede.6
When soule is out of flesch and felle,7

96 Shal neuere do synne ne almesdede.
no longer

(13)

Mayntene not wrong to calle it ryȝt.
Persist in
Vengeaunce and mercy neyȝbores ben þo;
they

99 As messageres þey ben dyȝt,
[God’s] messengers; appointed
Mercy to frend, vengeaunce to foo.
clearly

3oure dede in derk y se in syȝt,
judgement; passed/administered
þere nys no þouȝt hid me fro.
are distributed; accordingly

102 Þere nys no þouȝt hid me fro.
judgement; passed/administered
After þy dede þe doom is dyȝt;
are distributed; accordingly
Vengeaunce and mercy departe þem so.

(14)

105 For my doom is riȝtwisnesse,
Rightful(ly); belongs
Riȝtwys longeþ to þe godhede;
And my sones dom is wys,

108 For mercy longeþ to þe manhede.
grants
Þe Holy Gost grace lys,
death
He þeȝþ lyf, he þeȝþ no dede.

111 Overcome my wraþþe and fle fro vys,
Appease
And do þe comaundementis þat y bede.
title  Missing in the manuscript (as also in XX). For a discussion of the missing title and initial capital, see section 2.2. Kail conjectures: ‘God’s Appeal to Man’.

17–18  Cf. Phil. 2:8, ‘he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death on the cross’.

21–22  Proverbial. See Whiting, S 542, ‘As one sows so shall he reap’.

27  Cf. Ezek. 11:19, ‘... and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh’. See also Whiting, H 277.

87  [and]] The set phrase is *loue and drede*, as in l. 92 and throughout the other Poems (see e.g. I.40; VIII.31; XVIII.106).

92  Alludes to Prov. 23:26, ‘My son, give me thine heart’. 
SUMMARY

This poem might be seen as a companion piece of the Complaint of God to Man in the preceding poem XIX.

Here fleshly man complains to God that God’s son Jesus has wooed away man’s beloved, his soul. The complaint reads as a traditional secular love story. The soul, earlier man’s paramour and completely subservient to him, has left him to start a passionate love affair with Jesus. She repudiates contemptuously man’s entreaties, and declares herself completely contrary to anything he suggests. Man is not so much averse to Jesus’ intentions with regard to mankind in general, as his successful efforts to conquer man’s soul with promises of a superb home with him in heaven. She comes to treat man like dirt, accusing him of a wicked, blasphemous and wastefully luxurious life.

Man pleads earnestly with God to be united again with his soul, but Jesus and the soul prove inseparable. He loves her to the extent that he was prepared to die for her on the cross. In her turn she is firmly resolved to stick to Jesus throughout his life, his death and his ascent into heaven, and faithfully to follow his example.

God replies, reproving man for his empty complaints, indeed for his sinful life, and praising the soul for her conduct. God points out that it is not man, but Jesus who has reason to complain, his bountiful love for man remaining unrequited. So there is every reason for man to confess and repent, in return for which God is more than willing to forgive him. In the future, man should take what is coming to him uncomplainingly. Then God will bring him unfailingly to the bliss of his heaven.

TEXT

(1)
The tixt of holy writ, men sayn,
Hit sleeþ, but glose be among.1

3 The spirit of vnderstandyng quykeneþ agayn,2
And makeþ the lyue endeles long.
A fantasie y herde sayn,

1 I.e. Is daunting, unless explanatory comment goes with it
2 The desire to comprehend restores [the soul] again
Thereof me lust to make a song,
How mannis flesch to God dede playn
On Ihesu Crist, had don hym wrong.

(2)

The flesch his playnt þus dop bygynne
To God fader, in heuene on hyȝt:
Ihesu, brother of oure kynne,

Hap bygyled me wip his sleȝt.
He hap parted my soule and me o twynne,
And raft [here] fro me by his myȝt.

Now, ryȝtwys God, let mercy blynne.
On Ihesu, þy sone, do me ryȝt.

(3)

Body and soule þou dede me make
In vnyte to gydre so.3
Now hap Ihesu my soule take,
And þus parted oure loue o two.

My soule hap me [¿now] forsake;
Sum tyme was frend, now is fo;
Byd me go wolward, faste and wake,4

Alle here ioye is of my woo.

(4)

Fro me to þy sone my soule is flet;
Ful ofte þy sone in me here souȝte;
Now here loue to hym so fast is knete,
Away fro hym wol sche nouȝt.

She semes dronken, or out of wit,
Of myn euelfare she has no þouȝt.
Pat sorwe is so in myn herte hit,
I trowe to deȝe y mon be brouȝt.

(5)

Sum tyme my soule was mylde
To my biddying, in hoot and colde,
Synge or playe, or chambres bylde,

Chef seruaunt of myn housholde.
Now Ihesu hap made here made and wylde,
When I want to take [from others], she instructs me to increase [my wealth by my own efforts].

Indeed, to some extent I can agree to this.

---

When I of here counseil craue

Of fleschly lustes to haue my wille,
She calleþ me wod, and seyþ y raue;
She will neure graunte þerille.
She biddeþ me haue mynde of my graue,
Rule me in resoun and skille.
I was mayster, now am y knaue;
In that stat brynge me she wille.

Wolde y be proud, she biddeþ be meke;
Wolde y be gloton, she biddeþ me faste;
Þere y wolde take, she biddes me eke;
Wolde y be lyther, she biddis be chaste;
3if y fy3te, she biddes ley forþ my cheke;
Þere y am slow, she biddis be haste;
To speke to here, my wynde y waste.

Ihesu com fro heuene blisse,
And tok flesch in a mayden fre,
Lowely and most [in] mekenesse,
Hyd vnder flesch oure fraternite.
Now wold take my soule to his,
For he suffred pyne and pouerte.
3it sumwhat y my3te acorde to þis,
But why shulde my soule hate me.

When Ihesu and my soule be met,
Sone my werkis þey aspi3e:
Here wit on me fast þey whet:
In shame and skorne and vylenye
To folwe þy fleschly lustes let,

---

5 When I want to take [from others], she instructs me to increase [my wealth by my own efforts].
6 I.e. She need not look for an answer
7 Indeed, to some extent I can agree to this
Or ellis boþe 3e shal dy3e.
Ps am y vnder and ouer set;
She spettes on me, and dop me fy3e.

(I.e. you and your soul)
from all sides; set upon
spits; expresses disgust of

(10)
Wîþ me my soule he dop þrete,
And makeþ my soule me to hate.
Wîþ plesande wordis he hotêp here gete
In heuene blisse a quenes astate.
Pan comeþ she hom in wrapþeful hete,

Against; warns
causes
promises; to get
position
furious anger
Begs; to let [her] be
quarrels (v.)

(11)
Thanne renneþ she a3en, as she were wood;
To Ihesu, ðy sone, she dop fly3e.
He fedeþ here wîþ his flesch and blood,
Bute þanne here þouþtes mownten hy3e.
She biddiþ me water and bred to food;
As mortkyn forsaken she let me li3e.
She holdeþ me euyll and no þyng good,
But a styngkyng carayne in here ey3e.

(as if; mad
flies
And; ascend to great heights
to live only on
carcase
regards
corpse

(12)
Þus my soule my body slees,
She telles: Ihesu dy3ed for pes;
But fro his skole she is went.8
Bytwen vs werre dop encres,
Here swerd is drawen, here bow is bent.
She sayþ: but fleschly lustes sees,
We mon be dede, and boþe be shent.

castigates
agony
And; ascend to great heights
will; [spiritually] dead; destroyed
came to an agreement; fled from
subdued
condemn
give me a bad reputation
make me suffer
injure me

8 I.e. But she does not practice his teachings (of peace) herself
So much he hated forsaking his love of my soul

She loueþ that don me despyte,
And preyeþ for alle þat don me shame.

(14)

Hye fader, God of ri3twisnes,
Haue mynde of my sorwe sore.
And it be founden Ihesu loued mysse,
If; loved [my soul]; in error

To me my soule a3en restore –
A litil playnt nes no3t þisse,
And alle þat y haue sayd 3ore –
small; request
Pþ y and my soule be frendis and kisse,
And loue as we dede here byfore.
So that

(15)

For my soule Ihesu suffred wo,
Bounden and beten wiþ skourges ynowe,
Crowned wiþ thorn, nayled also
[He was]; many
On croos, tyl deþ dede hym bowe.
could

Wiþ a spere his herte let cleue a two,
Wyde open his loue my3te out flowe,
So loþ hym was his loue forgo;
so [earnestly]; courted
He is worpy be loued þat so dede wowe.

(16)

My soule, y holde, holy [es it],
For she loueþ Ihesu, þat loueþ here wel.
in my regard
But loue were tendere to loue vsed,
Were harder þan ston, and styffere þan stel.
On Ihesu she is amerous and ful auysed;
Unless; gently; made familiar with
What worldly þyng she seeþ or fele,
Al worldly ioye she haþ refused,
more unyielding
And me she loueþ neuere a dele.
quite resolved

(17)

I wante my wille, and euel fare y,
Fro worldly merpe put o syde.
Fro worldis worship she døþ me tary.
am not getting; badly; feel
I may no þou3t fro here hyde.
Þere y blisse, she døþ wary;
am full of joy; complains bitterly
Þere y speke fayre, she døþ chyde.
pleasantly; scolds
She is newe waxen al contrary;
Þere y dwelle, she nyl not byde.
recently; hostile

9 So much he hated forsaking his love [of my soul]
(18)
The speaker reproves her clothing,
And long pyked crakowed shon;
Vpbreyde[p] me my grete oþes,
And sayþ y breke Goddis bone.\(10\)
Pat me is lef, alle she lôpes.
I seye: òpere men so don.
She seyþ: òey go to helle wôpes.
Wole to wende, wiþ hem to wone.\(11\)

(19)
Wiþ Ihesu alway is she,
And now she lyþ wiþ hym in cracche,
Now into Egipt wiþ hym dop fle
Fro Herowdes, lest he hem cacche.
In his moder armes born wol she be,
And sowke wiþ hym, as chylde in tacche.
She folweþ hym in al degre,
And countrefeteþ to ben his macche.

(20)
Wiþ hym dop drynke and ete,
To lerne of his discressioun;
Wiþ hym sche is skourged and bete,
And crucyfyed in his passioun;
She is wiþ hym in helle here,
Wiþ hym in his resurexioun,
And stye into heuene in his fadres set[e],
Þens nolde she neuere come doun.

(21)
Now þe playnt is at þe last.
God answerde wiþ mylde soun:
Flesch, he sayde, þou iangelest fast,
Moche dene and no resoun.
Alle þy wordes þou dost waste;
Wille wiþ oутe disscission;
Þyn awen pleynt þe dop caste;
Þou turnest þy self vp so doun.\(12\)

\(10\) I.e. And says that my behaviour is torture to God
\(11\) Would you want to go [there,] [too,] to live with them?
\(12\) I.e. You put yourself in a state of confusion
(22)
Thou makest maystershepe in al vys, 
And here [turnest] fro my way,  
171 And makest here þral to fleschely delys, 
In vanyte to al worldly play.  
She is ashamed, now she is wys;  
174 Sche lyued in vowtrye so many a day. 
She haþ chosen þe loue most o prys,  
And cast þe fals[e] loue away.  

(23)
177 God seiþ: man, y made þe of nou3t,  
And kyd þat y loued þe dere,  
And soule of resoun in þe wrou3t,  
180 Fayre and wys, angels pere.  
Þou hast defouled þe ymage þat y wrou3t,  
In seruage to fendis and fendis fere.  
183 Sche folwed þy wille in dede and þou3t, 
In alle place, fer and nere.  

(24)
On Ihesu þou pleynt dost make,  
186 Sayde he bigyled þe wiþ sley3te,  
And biddest me lete mercy slake,  
And on Ihesu do þe ry3t.  
189 My sone for þe dede deþ take,  
And kydde þe loue most of my3t.  
Þou3 he loue dede forsake,  
192 How woldest þou þis doom were dy3t.  

(25)
Flesch, þy synnes mochil is;  
Þou art cast in þyn awen caas.  
195 Knowleche, repente, and mende þy mys,  
And be in wille no more trespas.  
I nel deme þe in ry3twisnes,  
198 But medle þerwilþ mercy and grace,  
And brynge þy soule to heuene blys,  
Wiþ loue to se me fayre face.  

(26)
201 In ouerhope, be not to bold  
In synne, for to haue mercy.  
Let not wanhope in þe be old,
For my grace is euere redy.
Fro helle pynes hoot and cold
I assoyle þe, and out of purgatory.
At þy deth, or body be cold,
To Ihesu in heuene þy soule shal fleye.

(27)
In good werkis wysely wake,
Playne not on Ihesu, what he sende;
Sykenes, pouerte, mekely take,
Richesse and hele wysely spende,
And helpe alle pore for Goddis sake.
Pan God wole lede 3ow, as his frend,
To ioye of heuene þat shal neuere slake.
Into þat blisse, God graunte vs wende. Amen

Notes

Title Missing in MS. Kail conjectures: ‘How Man’s flesh complained to God against Christ’.
14 [here?] Kail it. ‘The soul’ admittedly is neuter in other Digby poems (see e.g. VIII.91–92, XI.99–100, XVII.77–78), but throughout the present poem the soul is consistently feminine as the beloved of Christ.
21 [now] Follows Kail’s conjectural insertion. An insertion is clearly required, but admittedly almost any other contextually suitable adverb will do.
23 go Wolward My gloss as in MED s.v. wolward (adj.). In addition, MED s.v. wellward (adv.) glosses go Wolward as ‘the act or practice of going to a well to keep vigil for devotional purposes’. MED adduces two quotes for this meaning, both from Dives and Pauper, but neither of them gives convincing textual support.
45 hau mynde of my graue] The traditional memento mori theme.
59 in] makes better sense contextually than Kail’s insertion of.
60 flesch] MS flesch fleschly.
61 Kail unnecessarily inserts he before take.
83 flesch and blood] i.e. the bread and wine of the Eucharist.
121 es it] MS it es. Scribal inversion error, as evidenced by the rhyme scheme.
125 amorous] MED, quoting this line s.v. amorous (adj.) sub 4.(a), glosses ‘devoted to’, but straightforward ‘amorous’ seems preferable, the description of the ‘love affair’ between Christ and the soul bearing overtones of courtly love throughout the poem.
139 Vpbreydeþ] MS Vpbreyde, but should parallel repreueþ in l. 137.
159 sete] MS see.
176 false] MS fals. Emended to restore the metre.
183 Sch[e] Kail Sch[e], but MS Sch[e] is a common variant.
197–98 Echoes I.135, His mercy is medled with his right.
201 St. (26): the same warning, similarly phrased, against ouerhope and wanhope is found in I.(17) and VII.(13).
A LERNYNG TO GOOD LEUYNGE

SUMMARY

Man will be blessed, says Christ, according to eight deserts, and the writer expands in turn on the reasons why Christ’s blessing is pronounced on those who practice each of these virtues. The humble are generous, charitable and wise counsellors. The meek are openhanded, pacifiers and spiritual healers. The sorrowful repent their sins, obey God, restore illicit gains, and aid the poor. Who hunger and thirst for righteousness seek God and man’s fair due and the amendment of sins. The merciful seek no revenge, give to the poor, cheer the troubled and feed the hungry. The peacemakers obey God, want all wars to cease, and the enemies of God to become God’s friends. The pure of heart observe God’s laws, conform to their destined position and conduct in life, and practice charity. The persecuted for righteousness’ sake remain charitable in their oppression, and will find refuge with God.

As an antithesis to, and following each blessing, the author proclaims eternal doom for the sinners whose misdeeds are exactly the reverse of the virtues of the blessed. It should be noted here that the gist of the four curses, or ‘woes’, in Luke 6, where they follow after the four Beatitudes, does not tally with the substance of our author’s curses.

The poem ends, as the corresponding passage in the Gospel, with God’s blessing on all people who speak the word of God, the key to heaven for the people who hate and curse you. So fear God, not the worldly oppressor, and be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

TEXT

(1)
Pore of spirit blessed be,
þou3 he be lord of richesse fele.
3 He bereþ penaunce and pouerte,
That of his good to pore folk dele.
Of þe kyngdom of heuene a lord is he,
6 Þat counseyleþ wel to soule hele,1
And lyueþ in werkis of charyte.
Suche folk to heuene preuLY stele.

1 Who give good advice towards the salvation of the soul
To those who do his will and remain faithful to it
I.e. Till he has lost it again

(2)
9 Siþ God doþ blisse, and graunteþ blis
That don his word, and holde it trewe,²
That þat man cursed is,
12 Þat lyueþ contrarious þat vertue,
That filleþ his herte wiþ ryches,
Nedeles aueryce gadryng newe;
15 For wikkid counseil, helle is his,
Þere neuere nes reste, but euere remewe.

(3)
Blessid be man þat in herte is mylde,
Eager to lerne, and lef to teche,
Shal owe þe erþe, and þeron bylde,
In helpe of mony his rychesse reche,
Of shrewes make Goddis childe,
Of gostly woundes be soule leche,
Make tame to God þo þat were wylde.

(4)
Panne cursed be man in herte ruyde,
That neuere nel lere ne vnderstond.
27 Þou3 he owe erþe, he shal not byde
Til it be out of his hond.³
When conscience his werkis chyde,
30 Þat man shal neuere reioyse lond.
Fro alle vertues þat dop hym hyde,
To alle myscheues he makeþ hym bon[d].

(5)
33 Blessed be he þat morneþ sore
His breþere synnes, his awen mysdede
Repente, and wille to do no more,
36 But holde þe hestes þat God bede,
His wrong wynnyng aþen restore,
And helpe pore þat han nede.
39 He shal be counforted þerfore,
In heuene blisse haue his mede.

² To those who do his will and remain faithful to it
³ I.e. Till he has lost it again
Than cursed be he hap ioye of synne,  
And euere encreseþ mo and mo,  
Boste þerof, delyte þerynne,  
3eue men ensample to do so,  
Heuene 3ates fro hem they pynne,  
Of Goddis frendis make Goddis foo;  
In helle þey purchas here ynne;  
His felaschipe with hym thay go.

Blessed euere mote he be,  
Pat hungren andthursten ry3twisnes;  
He wolde wele in al degre  
Pat God and man echon had his.  
Gostly hunger and thurstes he  
Pat fayn wolde mende þat is mys.  
Ful filled he shal wiþ grete deynte  
At Goddis feste in heuene blisse.

Than cursed is he þat ful is fyld,  
Wip wrong take pore menmys thrist,  
Pat makeþ pore men be [spilde],  
For synguler profyt is sotyle thief;  
Make guiteles folk presoned and kylde,  
Of hous and land make wrongwys gyft;  
Wip hunger and þirst his hous is bylde.  
In helle is sheid euell sponnen wyft.  

Blessid be þe mercyable;  
Mercy and mede of God he fonges.  
In Goddis doom he stondes stable  
Pat wrekþ not alle his owen wronges.  
To pore folk he is profytable  
Pat leueþ his good hem amonges.  
The sorwfulle he gladeþ to synge songes.

I.e. In hell it becomes clear the evil he had done in his lifetime  
Who leaves his possessions with them
But he has reason to fear that he is condemned to hell.

To add even more personal gains to his possessions.

~(10)~

Thanne, how of hem han hertis stoute
Pat rewep non pore pat han penaunce,
75 Han nedeles gold no3t to lene it oute,
But to þe borwere gret greuance;
78 To presone ðym or make destaunce;
But he be cursed it is in dowte;6
Pat hap no mercy, mote haue vengeaunce.

~(11)~

81 Blessed be he þat loueþ pes,
Mekely to Goddis byddyng bende.
He shal be cleped, at Goddis dees,
84 Goddis sone, good and hende.
He wolde alle weree shulde asses,
Of Goddis foon make Goddis frende,
87 Make soule wip ioye to heuene pres,
And sorwe and weree to helle wip fende.

~(12)~

90 Wolde oueralle weree werre and woo,
Eche man wip oþer debate,
Pat shulde be frend, make hem foo.
93 For synguler wynnyng to his astate7
Lede his men oþere to sloo;
He shal be blessed neure or late;
96 His werkis curseþ hym where he go.

~(13)~

The clene of herte blissed be,
Pat lyueþ after Goddis lore;
99 God hym self he shal see,
Þere as blisse is euere more;
And gouerneþ wel his owen degre,
102 And dop þe dede þat he come fore;
Fulfytleþ þe werkis of charyte;
His vertue gadereþ mede in store.

---

6 But he has reason to fear that he is condemned [to hell]
7 To add even more personal gains to his possessions
The herte þat is fyled in synne,  
And sulþe þis soule wiþ spottes of blame,  
Goddis curs he doþ wynne  
þat spyþe þym self and Goddis name.  
His astate he nele not dwelle þer ynne;  
To serue God hym þenkeþ shame.  
Sef God and he departe o twyne,  
In helle he may be meked tame.

That is pursued for riþtwisnes  
Is blessid, where he go or ryde;  
Þe kyngdom of heuene is his,  
Þat querelle to ende in charite byde.  
God wole brynge hym to heuene blis,  
And fro his enemys þere wole hym hyde;  
To helle þey ben here awen gyde.  
Thanne are they cursed in here lyf,  
Þat auaunceþ þe fals, and stroyeþ þe trewe,  
Mayntene fals querelle and stryf,  
Riþtwis men wrongly pursue;  
þat shulde be clene in alle vertue.  
Eche dedly synne is a dedly knyf,  
For he shal repe þat he sewe.  
3e shall be blessid, erly and late,  
By vertue of Gospelle þat 3e preche.  
3e shal be blessid whan folk 3ow hate,  
And cursen 3ow for 3oure speche.  
3oure tonge is kaye of heuene 3ate,  
3oure word þe way to heuene hem teche.  
Folk wiþ 3ow schal debate,  
For me wiþ lesynges 3ow apeche.
(18)
Glade 3e wip ynnen and ioye wip outhe; 8
Soure mede in heuene moche is.
Drede no tyrauntes sterner and sto[w]te
May sle thy body, and take as his.
141 God, þe fader of heuene, 3e dowte,
May bryng þe soule to pyne or blis;
He schal deme alle the world aboute,
144 To heuene for goode, to helle for mys.

(19)
Of erþe 3e ben cleped salt, 9
For salt of wisdom soule saues.
147 Go vp ri3t and be not halt, 10
For mayster of seruaunt his seruice craues.
Þyn astate rekene þou shalt,
150 How þou it gat, how þou it saues.
Fewe ben chosen, þou3 mony ben calt,
Fro Goddis seruyce are worldly knaues. 12

(20)
153 To lanterne 3e ben likned ri3t,
In alle þe worlde 3e shal be kyd.
Soure prechyng shal be candel li3t,
156 Nou3t vnder worldly buschel hyd,
But on a candel styke on hi3t,
Nou3t vnder a chiste, vnder a lyd,
159 In good werkis shyne 3e bry3t,
And lyue 3e so, ri3t as 3e byd.

Notes

title  lernyg  Refers to the Sermon on the Mount in Matt. 5, the first sixteen verses of which the poet faithfully follows. They contain the eight Beatitudes, followed by two equally well-known exhortations: to be the spiritual ‘salt of the earth’ and the ‘light of the world’. Four of the eight Beatitudes are also found in Luke 6, but this version is not reflected in the text of the present poem.
17–19  A direct reference to Ps. 37:11, ‘But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace’.

8 I.e. Rejoice in your soul and show your joy to the world
9 You are called ‘salt of the earth’
10 I.e. Conduct yourself virtuously, not immorally
11 I.e. You will have to give an account of how you have managed the resources entrusted to you
12 [Away] from the service of God [they] are the slaves of worldly matters
32 bond] MS bonde The rhyme requires -d. Word-final -d in the manuscript was flourished as an automatism.

59 spilde] Emendation as in Kail of MS spi3ed, a scribal error, which does not fit the rhyme scheme. MED quotes the line as in MS s.v. spien (v.2), but recognizes the possibility of a scribal error.

60 The line is nearly identical with XIII.81: syngulerte is sotyle þefte.

64 Proverbial. See Whiting, W 571, ‘Evil spun wool (yarn, web, weft) comes out evil’.

113 pursued] MS presued.

128 Proverbial. See Whiting, S 542, ‘As one sows so shall he reap’.

139 stoute] Kail emends stoute (without marking it as such), but stoute is a valid variant spelling.

148 Alludes to Matt. 8:9 and Luke 7:8, ‘and I say to ... my servant, Do this, and he doeth it’.

149–52 The lines refer, in a free interpretation, to verse 13 in the Beatitudes in Matt. 5, but l. 151 refers directly and verbatim to Matt. 20:16 and 22:14, ‘for many be/are called, but few [are] chosen’.

156 busche] A bushel, a vessel for measuring out grain.
XXII

KNOWE THY SELF AND THY GOD

SUMMARY

The poem is an urgent call on man to remain faithful to his creator. Man’s own fleshly origin, as the poet describes in quite graphic language, is nothing to be proud of. Yet God created him in his own image, prepared him for a blissful life in heaven and, becoming man himself, sealed his love for man as with a bond of marriage. Man in his turn is urged to remain unflaggingly faithful to God and his commandments. He has a choice between good and bad, and the record kept will decide whether it is going to be heaven or hell.

We must never forget that God sent his son among us, who suffered on the cross, harried hell, was resurrected, and ascended to his father. From there he will return to pass judgement, whether we shall go to heaven or to hell. With that in mind, we must keep the ten commandments, perform the seven acts of bodily mercy, avoid the seven capital sins, and use our five senses to good purpose. We must do penance, pray diligently, and keep away from the world and all its wickedness.

TEXT

(1)

Thenke hertely in þy þou³t
Of what matere þou dede bygynne.
Of fylthy seed þou were wrou³t,
And wan in at þe wyket of synne.¹
Foulere fylþe knowe y nou³t
6 Þan þou were fed þy moder wiþ ynne;
In a sake ful of filþe þou was out brou³t,
In wrecchednes horyble, and stynkyng skynne.

(2)

9 What þou art, knowe þy self wel.
Þou were conceyued in synne, and born wiþ woo.
Þy moder and þou, on fortune whel,
12 In peril of deþ parted a twoo.

¹ I.e. Entered the womb through the vulva
In pynes of helle what soules fele –
And þou in mynde keped þoo –
15 Hit wolde make þy corage kele,
Whan þou hadde wil to synne goo.

(3)
God made þe of nouȝt, haue in mynde,
18 Wiþ soule of resoun, lyk his ymage.
In heuene wiþ angels aboue þe wynde,
He ordeyned þe endeles heritage.
21 Wiþ more loue he dede þe bynde,
Bycome þy brother in mannys lynage.
He ielous lover and trewest to fynde,
24 Þy soule is spouse to his maryage.

(4)
To God thy wedlok wiþ loue holde,
In brennyng contemptacion,
27 And make nouȝt hym cokewolde,
To loue in formycacion.\(^2\)
On Goddis mercy be not to bolde,
30 To falle in temptacion.
Kepe charite hot, let it not colde,
For quenchyng of deuocion.

(5)
33 Loue alle folk in charyte,
Body and soule in good atent,
As þou wolde þey dede þe;
36 Þat it Goddis comaundement.
Who breke þo hestes, cursed is he
Til þey come to mendement.
39 Þou preyest eueremore in alle degre
Tyl þat þou to synne assent.

(6)
That þou hast don siþ þou were bore,
42 Alle þy lyuyng byþenk þe newe,
Wheþer hast þou more in store
Or of vices or of vertue;
45 And wheþer hast þou folwed more
Good aungel or wykked, for bope þe sewe;

\(^2\) Ll. 27–28: i.e. And do not forsake his love / by courting worldly temptations
They present the other half of the tally, your score,
I.e. Became man in every respect

(7)
Haue mynde, God sente his sone adoun,
Tok mankynde in flesch and felle,
And suffred hard passioun,
Dyed on croys, and heryed helle.
Haue mynde of his resurexioun;
Byleue alle þis trewe gospelle.
Haue mynde on his Assencioun;
On God his fader riþt hond doþ dwelle.

(8)
Penke þou shalt dye, and nost whenne;
Þou art incertayn, þerfore drede.
Fro heuene to eþe God shal come þenne,
Deme euel and good after here dede;
Þe good to heuene blisse renne,
In endeles lyf to haue here mede;
Þe wikked in helle for to brenne,
In endeles pyne deþ shal hem fede.

(9)
The ten commaundementis þou hem kepe;
Þe seuen werkis of mercy wel hem vse;
Þe seuene synnes þou be wepe,
By fyue wittes þe auyse.
Do penaunce, and preye whyle þou schuld slepe;
Þe fend and fals[e] world despie;
No fleschly lustes þe vndercrepe;
Fle alle foly and folwe þe wise.

Notes

1–2 Virtually identical with VIII.1–2.
24 The thought of the tie between Christ and the soul in terms of a courtship is treated in a sustained allegory in XX.

³ They present the other half of the tally, your score
⁴ I.e. Became man in every respect
Alludes to Matt. 7:12, ‘Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them’, and to Luke 6:31, ‘And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise’.

tyl] Kail til.

For the concept of the Harrowing of Hell, see also X.60 (and note) and XI.19–20.

Proverbial. See Whiting, D 96, ‘Death is certain but not the time’. Cf. VIII.97–98: Man, pou wost wel pou shalt dy3e; / What deþ, ne where, pou nost whenne.
XXIII

OF THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTERE

SUMMARY

This poem is a solid, thoroughly orthodox treatise on the meaning and significance of the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Holy Church is the assembly of the faithful, who praise and worship their God day and night, especially in the sacrament of the Eucharist, which feeds the faith of the participants with its life-giving bread, to their everlasting joy. The Eucharist commemorates the institution of the Holy Supper by Christ, on the eve of his sacrificial death and resurrection as a redemption of man’s sins, promising everlasting joy to the truly repentant, who partakes of the bread and wine of the Eucharist in the sincere belief that they are Christ’s body and blood. Not visibly so, but to us as clear and joyful tokens of a miracle not otherwise comprehensible to earthly man. Not what one sees matters, but what the tokens of bread and wine signify when consecrated by the priest. Nor does it matter how many communicants partake of the one bread. Christ’s body remains whole in each of the many pieces of bread, just as Holy Church, being the assembly of no matter how many faithful, is one.

The Eucharist is not without engagement. Those who approach the altar unthinkingly, like animals, without devotion and repentance, will be condemned for ever. The good receive eternal life and the salvation of body and soul.

Holy Supper was a watershed. Before, the Israelites ate the sacrificial paschal lamb – as a prefiguration of Christ’s redeeming death – and lived by the Ten Commandments. We, under the new dispensation, live by the life-giving bread of the Eucharist and God’s teachings.

The poem ends with an appeal to God to forgive us our sins and lead us to heaven to enjoy Christ’s festive meal among the saints. To our senses Christ seems just bread, dead, immaterial, of little consequence. In faith, he is alive, both God and man, and greater than any man on earth. Abraham’s sacrifice of his son, the life-giving manna in the desert, the paschal lamb, they are all foreshadowings of Christ’s redeeming death and resurrection, which we commemorate in the Eucharist.
I wole be mendid 3if y say mys.

Holychirche nes noþer tre ne stones:

3 Þe hous of preyers God nempned þys,
Boþe goode men and wiked ressayueþ at ones.
Þere as gadryng of goode men ys,

6 Is holychyrche of flesch and bones.
Prestes are lanterne, hem to wysse
Þe wise weyes to heuene wones.

9 Holychirche, hery3e þy saueour –
Þynk þy hurd, God on hi3t –
Wiþ song and ympnes, tyde and houre,

12 Reioys in hym day and ny3t,
For he is more þan any honour,
For his honour passeþ oure my3t,

15 For we ben his, and he is oure;
Alle þou3tes ben to hym dy3t.

A specyall e tyme of heryeng here:

18 Lyueliche quyk bred is put forþ þis day,
Whych in þe table of þe holy sopere,
Wiþ outen doute was 3ouen oure fay

21 To þe company of twelfe breþeren þere were. (i.e. the twelve disciples); [iobo]
By here ful heryenge ioyed þay –
Wel sowned in here ere –

24 Wiþ ioly herte fayre song to say.

A day is mad of solempnyte,
Of þis table first ordynaunce is worschipful tolde.¹

27 In þis newe kynges table, now knowe we,
Newe Estren endeþ the olde.
Newe thyng dryueþ old þyng fro his degre,

30 Out of mynde, þe lasse of tolde;
So sopfast sunne, by his pouste,
Dryueþ awey shadowe and striþeþ colde.

¹ I.e. When it is devoutly related how this [communion] table was first instituted
For the spiritually blind 
[to lead them] from the shadow of death / To the light of [eternal] life, 
To [become]; bread; salvation; for; here (on earth)

As ly3t li3teneþ ny3t fro derkenes of kynde,
So dede Crist at þe holy sopere;
Bad pertely do so of hym mynde,

[Christian] belief; given
in a worldly sense (what); then
faith; heartfelt; safe
Without; order; [worldly] things; live
token; instituted

Into flesch passeþ þe bred,
As holychinche dop vs kenne,
þe wyn to blod, þat is so red.

[That]; changes
teaches

Þou seest not fleschly þou takest þenne;
By byleue of herte makeþ þe fast fro ded,
Wiþouten ordre of þynge to renne

in plain words: in his memory
divine decree; learn
consecrate; spirit

To an ost of helþe to cristen men here,
To li3t of lyf, to shynen clere.

So ded Crist at þe holy sopere;
Bad pertely do so of hym mynde,

To [become]; bread; salvation; for; here (on earth)

To an ost of helþe to cristen men here,
To li3t of lyf, to shynen clere.

[Christian] belief; given
in a worldly sense (what); then
faith; heartfelt; safe
Without; order; [worldly] things; live
token; instituted

Wiþ outen help of ordre of þyngeis,
Þe bok of oure byleue is lent,

faith; has been given
visible forms (i.e. bread and wine); tokens
by; him (i.e. Christ); instituted
natural; eyes; obscured

Þo3 þe spices fro hym be went,
Not durked ne hyd, but ri3t shynynges,

visible forms (i.e. bread and wine); tokens
by; him (i.e. Christ); instituted
natural; eyes; obscured

Þou3 fleschly sy3t fro hym be blent,
Þe soule haþ ioye and mery synges,

When good byleue seeþ þe sacrament.

Þe blod is drynk, þe flesch is mete,
Ys gostly fode, þe soules delys;
Neuere-þe-lattere, of Crist to trete,

drink; food
soul’s; delight
However; [it is also] to give thought to
is present; both; [visible] forms
communicants
whole; remains
partake; in one sitting
Only; one; precious

He dwelleþ vnnder ayþer spys.
Þe ressayuour counteþ not þat þey ete,
Ne brekeþ it not, but hool it lys.

Communicants
whole; remains
partake; in one sitting
Only; one; precious

Þou3 a thousande take at o sete,
Alone on takeþ as moche o prys.

2 Ll. 39–40: For the spiritually blind [to lead them] from the shadow of death / To the light of [eternal] life, to shine brightly
3 I.e. It is of as much value if only one partakes
While obley in yrnes or boyst ys stoken,
Hit nys but bred, and sengyl bake;
Whanne þe prest to hit Goddis wordis hath spoken,
Crystys quyk body vndir bred o cake,⁴

†ou3 it a þousande peces seme broken,
Nes parted ne wasted, but al holle take.
In byleue of holychirche who wyl hym 3oken,⁵

A3en þis non argument may make.

That ressayeþ: children, man and wyf,
Not al yliche deuocioun.

Summe taken it in synne and stryf,
As bestes wip outen discrucioun.
Þe wikkid rescyeþ a dedly knyf,

And his endeles dampnacioun;
Þe good rescyeþ endeles lyf,
To body and soule saluacioun.

When þou to chirche gost
to rescyeþ God, wisely go.

Breke it, and parte to twenty and mo:
As moche is þe leste cost⁶
As in þe grettest pece of þo.

Deme alle yliche, lest and most;
Quaue not, ne drede not, to sen hit so.

Þou3 þe prest þe sacrament clyue
In a þowsand peces and þre,
Þe state, ne stature, ne myȝt doþ myue,⁷
Ne leseþ ne lasseþ of his pouste.

Þy fleschy syȝt þou shalt not lyue,
But tokene of brekyng makeþ he;

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⁴ [It is] Christ’s living body, beneath the outer appearance of the bread of the Eucharist
⁵ I.e. Who is willing to take upon himself the yoke of the church’s teachings
⁶ Ll. 85–86: i.e. The value of the smallest piece of the host is as great as that of the largest
⁷ Ll. 91–94: Neither its essential character nor its material substance, nor its efficacy changes / Nor does it suffer a loss or weakening of its power. / Do not accept at face value what you see with your eyes, / But [accept] that with the breaking [of the bread] he (i.e. the priest) performs a token (i.e. of Christ’s broken body)
For fleshly skyn no sacrament kan preue,\(^8\) explain

In gostly bylyue shal saued be.

(13)
In old lawe, 3e wyten how
At estren þey eten a lamb al ded, \(^{Easter}\)

Is ouer put in newe lawe now:
At estre we eten quyk bred. \(^{set aside for living}\)
In old lawe, for mannys prow,
God þe comaundementis bed; \(^{spiritual benefit}\)
And oure newe lawe we don allow,
And kepem bope by Goddis red.

(14)
Lete þy mercy passe ryȝt, \(^{outweigh; justice}\)
And for3eue vs oure mysdede.
Þy face wiþ loue to seen in syȝt, \(^{i.e. fully}\)

In lond of lyf þou vs lede. \(^{[eternal] life (i.e. heaven)}\)
Among þy seyntes in heuene on hyȝt, \(^{on high}\)
At þat feste of lif, God, vs fede.
Solþfast bred, God of myȝt, \(^{True}\)
Ihesus, herde, þou vs hede.

(15)
In syȝt and in felyng þou semest bred,
In byleue: flesch, blod and bon; \(^{walk}\)
In syȝt and felyng þou semest ded,
In byleue: lyf, to speke and gon;
In syȝt and felyng: noþer hond ne hed,\(^9\) \(^{hand; head}\)
In byleue: boþe God and man;
In syȝt and felyng: in litil sted, \(^{of little consequence}\)
In byleue: grettere þyng nes nan. \(^{no one}\)

(16)
Whan Abraham of Ysaac his offryng made, \(^{sacrifice; presented}\)
For a fygure he lykned is \(^{As; prefiguration; is compared}\)
To angels bredoure fadres hadde, \(^{angels' bread (i.e. manna)}\)
Þat God fed hem in wyldernes.
Afterwarde God hem bade:
A paske lomb rosted and etep þes. \(^{paschal lamb; that}\)

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\(^8\) I.e. For natural man (fleshly skyn) cannot explain the true nature of the sacrament
\(^9\) noþer hond ne hed] i.e. (without) either deed or thought
In stede of þat, oure soules to glade,
We rescyeue oure houselle, God o blisse.  

**NOTES**

3  See Isa. 56:1, 7, ‘Thus saith the Lord ... mine house shall be called an house of prayer’.
11  *tyde and houre*] The seven times of the day set aside for prayer.
15  Alludes to Ps. 100:5, ‘We are his (i.e. God’s) people’.
26  The institution of holy communion is described in Matt. 26:17–30.
28  Christ’s death on the cross, as a sacrifice for our sins, replaces the sacrifice of the lamb on the eve of Israel’s exodus from Egypt. See the note to ll. 97–100 below. Kail (p. xxii) inferred from this line that poem XXIII was ‘apparently intended to be an Easter poem’. Kail was in error here, not, as McGarry (1936, p. 258) assumed, because he should have misinterpreted the medieval connotations attached to *Estren*, but because the poem is actually an English version of St. Thomas Aquinas’ sequence *Lauda Sion* (c. 1264), which he composed for the mass on Corpus Christi, established especially in honour of the Eucharist (*ibid.*, pp. 258–59).
30  A variation on the saying ‘Out of sight, out of mind’ (see Whiting M 569 and S 307).
38  *ost*] MnE ’host’, the consecrated bread of the Eucharist.
65  *yrnes*] According to McGarry (1936, pp. 24, 25, 261) the reference is to the wafer-irons used for the baking of the sacramental bread. See also *MED* s.v. *iren* (*n.*) sub 2. (h). *boyst* > OFr *boist* = a box or casket in which the hosts were kept for later use in the Eucharist (*ibid.*). See also *MED* s.v. *boist(e* (*n.*) sub 1. (a).
66  *sengyl bake*] *MED* s.v. *baken* (v.) glosses ‘baked once’, whereas s.v. *sengle* (*adj.*) sub 3. (d) the (adverbial) meaning given is ‘simply, just’. Both versions are possible. Kail glosses the phrase as ‘simple bread’, but the single reference to *bake* as a noun in *MED* s.v. *bake(n* (*pt. ppl. as n.*) only carries the meaning ‘a dish baked in pastry, pie’.
71  See Matt. 11:29–30: ‘Take my yoke upon you and learn of me .... For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light’.
77–78  Alludes to 1 Cor. 11:29, ‘For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself’.
94  See Luke 22:19: ‘And he took the bread ... and brake it ... saying, This is my body which is given for you: this in remembrance of me’.
97  *old*] Kail unnecessarily emends *olde*, as also in l. 101. *3e wyten how*] *MED* s.v. *witen* (*v.*(1)) sub 5. (h) interprets this phrase as a rhetorical question, but the context does not support this construction.
97–100  Refers to the Jewish traditional sacrificial lamb as a prefiguration of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. Ex. 12:1–24 relates how the exiled Israelites in Egypt were promised by God that they would be spared his wrath and be ‘passed over’, if they smeared the blood of the sacrificial ‘Passover lamb’ on their doorposts, eventually to be led out of exile and into the promised land. So will the repentant sinner be saved from damnation and eventually go to heaven if in the Eucharist he eats the bread of Christ’s body, and drinks the wine of his blood, in recognition of his salvation through the redeeming death of the ‘sacrificial lamb’ who died in his place.
105  Sts (14) and (15) are directly addressed to God.
107  See 1 Cor. 13:12: ‘For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face’. 
See John 6:33: ‘For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven’.

Refers to Gen. 22:2, ‘And he (i.e. God) said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest ... and offer him ... for a burnt offering’. Isaac is thus a prefiguration of Christ, God’s only and beloved son, who uncomplainingly sacrificed himself.

The daily ‘manna’ God gave to the Israelites during their forty years through the desert on their way to the promised land. A prefiguration of the divine, life-giving food of the Eucharist. See X.50 and note.

Actually the paschal lamb (l. 126) is part of the story of the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, which of course preceded their forty years in the desert, where God provided the manna to sustain them. The paschal lamb is a prefiguration of Christ’s redeeming sacrifice for mankind on the cross.

An encore, with some modification, of ll. 97–100.
XXIV

THE LESSOUNS OF THE DIRIGE

SUMMARY


Each paraphrased biblical text in the poem, as well as the Libera me, Domine passage, is interspersed with, or followed by a few stanzas which elaborate on the same theme.

TEXT

lectio prima: parce mihi, domine

(1)

Almy3ty God, Lord, me spare,
For soþe, my dayes werkys ben no3t.
My wittes on ny3tes wrong y ware,
Þerof longe 3eres mon be wro3t.2
Þenke, man, þou ware born ful bare;
Into þis worlde what hastou bro3t.
Out of þis worlde whanne þou shalt fare,
Þou schalt bere with þe ry3t no3t.

(2)

9 What is man of gret renoun,
That of hym self makeþ aldre mest.3
Why setryst þou þy herte, a3en resoun,4
And sodeynly represse hem mest.
In þe dawenynge þou sou3test hem vpsodoun:
Contrary to Godis hest

1 The first Lesson: spare me, O Lord
2 I.e. Long years are compounded therein.
3 I.e. Who has the highest regard for himself
4 Why do you set your heart [upon him], against [all] reason
15 Thou purchasest thy saule helle prisoun,
For fleshely lust, wormes fest.

(3)
How longe sparedst thou me nought
18 To swolwe my spitel bote it me gryue.
Thou keper of men, alle þyng hast wro3t;
What shal y do to þyn byhyue.
21 What hastou set me, contrarie þy þo3t,
By holy lawe to repropye.
Lord, whenne my werkis mon be so3t,
24 Dyspyce me no3t in my myschyue.

(4)
Ful heuy to my self y am maad withynne;
My werkes on me heuye isse.
27 Why takest þou nought away my synne,
And bere from me my wykednesse.
I slepe in dust, for we ben kynne,
30 For erthe clayme3 me for hisse.
To seche me eerly 3if þou begynne,
I ne may withstonde þe y wisse.

lectio secunda: tedet animam mean" fond of

(5)
33 My soul of my self anoyed isse.
I shal leue my speche a3ens me,
To my soul y wolde speke in bitternesse,
36 And y shal saye to God so fre:
Wyl no3t dampne me fro blisse,
Shew me þe cause, þat wolde I se,
39 Why demestou me þo3 y dede mysse,
Lorde, whethe þe þynke good to þe.

(6)
3if þou chalenge my werk and bere me doun,
Me, that am werk of þy hande,

5 ll. 15–16: You pay with your soul’s imprisonment in hell / For the delectations of the flesh, [to become] food for hell’s creatures
6 That I swallow my spittle only in pain
7 The second Lesson: my soul is weary
8 I will allow my words [to continue] against myself
9 Lord, whilst you consider that to you it is proper
And þou in consayl helpe 3e moun                                                Whilst; counsel [of the wicked]: allow
To wykked men here synnes withstande,
45 Wiþ repentaunce and sorwful soun                                          sounds
   May launce hem from þe deuelys bande;
   To 3erde of loue y moste me boun;                                          cut loose
48 Lord, me chastice wiþ þat wande.                                           rod; bow

(7)
Wheþer þyn ey3en ben fleschlye,                                              Is it the case that; fleshly (i.e. not spiritual)
   Or þou seest as man shal see.
51 Or þy dayes so sone sy3e,                                              pass (v.)
   As other mennys dayes be.
   Or þy 3erys ri3t so hye,                                 years; just; quickly
54 As mennys tymes in here degre, –
   For þou art God, shal neuer dy3e,   according to; [own] nature/condition
   For sorwe and deþ shal from the fle. –

(8)
57 That þou seche my wykkednesse,                                              [So] that; inquire after
   And ransake my synne,                                              search through
   And wyte I haue no3t doun mysse,                                      know; sins
59 Bote hert and soule clene withynne.                                          Truly; is not
   May skape þyn hond, and from the twynne,                          escape from; part (v.)
62 Bote repentaunce and mercy kesse.                                           Unless; kiss [each other]
   Þat now ben frendis, Lord, make hem kynne.                          kindred

(9)
Thy hand made me man of [resoun],                                              [possessing the power] of reason
And shope me al in compas,                                                        formed; all around
   And sodecly þou cast me doun,                                         who
   For knew y no3t what þou was.                                    By; take warning
68 Of me men sample take mowen,                                              footsteps
   Be ware lest þay folwe my tras.                                        power
   I hadde lordship in feld and toun,                                  ordeal
72 Now on a donghille is my pas.                                                    remember

(10)
Haue mynde on me, Lord, and take hede,                                          mud
Of fen of erthe þou dede me make.
75 Into dust a3en þou shalt me lede,
You have curdled [me], as it were, like milk and milk-cheese, / Just like cheese you have firmly
formed me

My soule from þe body take.
My flesch is ful sleper atte nede,
And solpeþ my soule wiþ synnes blake.
Lord God, þy dome y drede;
Whanne þou comest, y mon awake.

(11)
My hert shulde be stedefast:
Þou hast lopred as mylk and slep in þou3t,11
Ri3t as chese þou croddest me fast.

I wyte my synnes þat y wrou3t;
Lorde, alle my synnes away þou cast,
But wiþ my synnes cast me no3t.
Þou knowest how longe my lyf shulde last;
Þou sette my terme, y passe it no3t.

(12)
With bones and synewes made me to gyder;
Lyf and mercy 3af me withyn,
As brotel vessel y stonde slyder.
Þou sechyng haþ kepyd my gost with wyn.

(13)
To deme þe erthe whanne þou wendys,
Fro face of þy wraþþe whyder shal I go.
To hyde me wiþ angels aren Goddis frendys.
And God me hate, þay ben my fo.
And I hyde me in helle among fendys,
In pyne þay wolen tormente me so.
I haue synned ri3t moche, my synne me schendys;
Me thynke þay waxen mo and mo.

(14)
My trespas moche arn blamed,
Bote repentaunce be mendement;
Byfore þe y drede, y am aschamed.
Whenne þou comest to iugement,

11 Ll. 82–83: You have curdled [me], as it were, like milk and milk-cheese, / Just like cheese you have firmly
formed me
Those who are named in the book of life
(i.e. the chosen for eternal life)

The fourth Lesson: how many are mine [iniquities]

In bok of lyf þo þat be named

Lord, do you think [that] this torment [gives me] solace / pleasure, whilst you inflict misery upon me

All weapons will be burnt;

To joy of heaven mon be sent.

Almy3ty God, Lord, me 3eme,

In thy mercy þou me lede.

Whenne my soule is boden out flæm,  
Helpe me, Lorde, atte al my nede.

Whenne þou al þe worlde shal deme,  
Dampne me no3t after my dede.

Whenne þat angels blowen here beme,

Penne alle folk may haue gret drede.

From worldis worschipe y am shoue,

And bro3t abas from al astat.

My skyn is cloþed al on roue,

In pouerte and peyne my wyt is mat.

Lord, chastice me wiþ 3erd of loue,

Wherto wyltou þy maystry proue,

With suchon as I to make debat.

Als many wykkednesse and trespasses

And synnes withoute nombre mo

Shew me, why hydest þy fas

Fro me, and demest me þy fo.

Lorde, þenkes þe solace

This turment, and do me wo.

A drope of thy mercie of oyle of grace,

Lorde, graunte me er y go.

I am slyme of erthe, haue in mynde,

Pore of matere and dedely,
As a leaf is stred with wynde;  
On me thou pouest thy maystry.  

141 Thou pouest thy my3t, and bat I fynde  
O þe stubble, þat is so drye.  
Thou pursuest me, and wylt me bynde,  

144 Wiþ synnes in my þou wylt me stroye.  

(19)  
Lorde, þou pursuest me fast,  
For soþe, a3ens me þou doest wryte:  

147 Bitternesse; bote swete is past.  
I may no3t blenche whenne þou wylt smyte.  
I trowe þat þou wolt me wast,  
With synnes in my 3ouþe do me endite;  

150 Lorde, on me þy wille þou hast.  
My grete synne my self y wyte.  

(20)  
In synne þou settest my fot and hede,  
And alle my werkes hastou so3t,  
And alle steppys y euere 3ede;  

156 3e haue nombred alle my wordes and þo3t.  
And als þou hast taken hede,  
Roten y schal be, wasted to no3t;  
As clothes þat moþþes on hem fede,  

159 So shal my flesch with wormes so3t.  

(21)  
Wo me, so mon y be,  
For y haue don moche synne.  
I, wreche, whyder shal y fle,  
For wrechyd lyf y lyued ynne,  

165 My Lord, my God, no3t bote to the.  
God of mercie, on me mynne.  
Lord, haue mercie on me,  
Let no3t thy loue fro me twynne.  

(22)  
Man, that is of woman born,  

[15] Lord, you do with me as you please  
[16] I.e. You put my deeds and thoughts in [a state of] sin  
[17] The fifth Lesson: man [that is] born
Lyuyng short tyme he is.

171 Er his nauel be knyte and shorn,
    Fulfilde with many wrechidnes.
    Er he fro moder be forborn,
174 In peryl of deth bothe partie es.
    3if flesch be lord, the soule is lorn;
    Bote soule be lord, he leseth his blys.

(23)
177 Man geth out as don floures,
    Corage and strenche, and fayre of hewe;
    Makeþ moche of hym self, sayþe: al is oures,
180 And repeth þat he neuere ne sewe.
    He is defouled be dayes and houres,
    And cleþ as shadow þat neuere grewe;
183 Dwelleþ neuere in þe self stat of ouris,
    Encresceþ mo vyces þan vertew[e].

(24)
186 And þou holdest worthy to open thyn ey,
    To loke on such a wrecche as y,
    And lede hym with the to iugement,
189 Þer al mankynde in company,
    Atte thy general parlement:
    Vertues to heuen ther schul 3e try,
192 The vyces in helle fyre be brent.

(25)
195 Ywhether þou art alone, withoute mene.
    To felowschipe þou hast non nede.
    Short ar mannys dayes sene,
198 And the nombre of hys monthes in thy dede.
    Þou hast sette his terme of fat and lene,
    He passeþ it no3t for no mede.18

(26)
201 A, go away a lytel hym fro,
    In mendement that he mow rest
    Tyl the day he Þerned so,

---

18 He cannot exceed it, however much he would be prepared to pay
A, of harde man come þat is best. hard-working
Lord, haue no mynde to do me wo,
Forber my synnes wolde make me lest. desire

Lord, whenne þou comest to deme so
Al þe world be fyre, boþe est and west,
God, in þy sy3t þy way y go before your eyes

Ry3t ham; in þy fayþ me fest. confirm me

Lord, whenne þou demest alle þyng in ri3t,
Wher mercie shal no3t knawen be, justice

Ry3t leseþ no3t his my3t,
Þou3 mercie be in companye. known
Mercy is euere in þy sy3t, present

For mercie euere þyn ey3en se. judgement; dispensed
Wher euere þy dome is dy3t,
Ri3t claymeþ mercie for his fee. demands; as payment

lectio sexta: quis mihi hoc tribuat

Who 3eueþ to me þat y me hyde
Tylle þy wraþþe in helle be past,
Withouten pyne þy dome to byde,

Tyl body and soule a3en be fast? united
With arguments no3t me chyde;
Þou knowest how longe my lyf shal last.

Lord, lat mercie be my gyde,
And neuere fro þy face me cast.

d (imp.); has been agreed
Remember; prepared
Do you think at all
become; power
settle my account; (i.e. since my birth)
struggle against
remain; what; fled from
sequel [to my life] (i.e. my death); understanding

Lord, þou shalt clepe me,
And I shal answere to þe, werk of þyn hande. your handiwork (i.e. creation)
237 Werk of þy ri3t hand take to þe;
Þou shalt not bynde it in helle bande.
Þou hast noumbred my steppes, how mony þay be,  
fixed the number of
240 How monye y ran, how monye I stande.
Bot spare þou, Lord, to þe synne of me,
Ne wilne no3t demo my werkes 3e fande.  
show forgiveness; for

(31)
243 Deme me no3t after my dede,  
according to
Lorde, I byseche þe,  
[That]; before your eyes
I haue don in þy si3t, and tok non hede;
246 þerfore I praye þy mageste,  
majesty
God, my wikkednesse away þou lede,  
take
Myn vnry3t away wasche 3e.  
wrongdoings
249 Non more. Lord, at my nede,  
No; in
Of alle my synnes clense 3e me.

lectio septima: spirit[us] meus

(32)
250 My gost, shalt þou be made newe,  
spirit
My dayes shulle yshorted be;  
will [surely]
My soule fro þe body mon remewe,  
depart
Alone a graue byleueth to me.
255 I haue non synne, no vices me sewe,  
are visible to me
Myn eyen in bitternesse dwelle y se.  
remain
Deliuere me, Lorde, and on me rewe,  
have pity on me
258 And sette me bysydes the.

(33)
Whos hande þou wolt a3eyn me fy3t,  
If
And þou proue þy stronge hande?
261 My dayes ben passed to withstonde þy my3t,  
are over
I may no3t bere þy litel wande.  
grown feeble; confused; completely
My thou3tes ben wasted, turned in ry3t,  
internally, [my] spirit
264 Turmentynge my herte inwith and ande;
And turnyd day to þe ny3t.  
made my bed
After derkenesse I haue bedded my bed, I fande.

(34)
267 I sayde to stynke and rotenesse:  
stench
My fader and moder arn 3e;  
My thou3tes ben wasted, turned in ry3t,
And to wormes y sayde þysse:

---

20 The seventh Lesson: my soul
My systren and my brethern both be 3e.
And erthe claymep me for hyssse,
Where þen now my bydynge to me.

My felynge þou art, and my God of blisse.
Drede of deth droueth me.

And euer euewe encrees;
Neuere a day blynnynge,
Bote euer vertue [wane les.]

To repente no bygynnyng,
No3t bote gadre synne ay in pres.21
In helle is no wynnyng,

Ne non a3eynbyynge to pes.

My flesches ben wasted, don me refuse,
My bones cleuyn vnto þe skyn;
My lippes arn shronken out of syse,
Aboute my teth arn left atwyn.
Haue mercye on myn werk vnwyse,
Namly my frendes me no3t despyse;
Lordis hande hath towched me more and myn.

Why purs[ue] 3e me, and on me syte,
And arn filled of my flesch and fel.23
Who 3euep to [me], þat wolde y wyte,

Wordes in boke be ered wel,
Or in a plate of led wryten
With an yren poyntel,
Or in a flynt grauen and spyten
By craft of werk, withoute chysel.

I byleue þat soth y say,
Myn a3eynbyere lyuynge isse.

---

21 I.e. Because our sins keep accumulating
22 The eighth Lesson: my skin
23 I.e. And why have you (i.e. the friends) devoured me entirely?
The ninth Lesson: wherefore hast thou brought me forth out of the womb, etc.

I shall arise of the earth my last day,
Bylapped in my flesh and skin wise;
Byholde with my eye two,
Se God, my saviour, in bliss;
Non other eye but these, withouten nay;
I shall arise of the earth my last day,
Bylapped in my flesh and skin wise;
Clothed

The soul is in darkness from ghostly sight.

Lord, may here rest and peace cease
Without end, may here let everlastye never seen.

Then would I have been; this; preserved
That would I have been made corrupt;
Then would I have been uncreated,
Not born from womb to burial,
Where my short days are ended morn.

Our God, my saviour, in bliss;
Non other eye but these, except these; (i.e. beyond a doubt)
This; preserved

The hope in my bosom put up is seen.

A, therefore, Lord, grant me these:
To weep and wail, repent my sin,
Pat y torne no3t a3eun to erthe of derkenes,
To strewes of deþ, be curyd þerynne,
Lond of wrethes and þesternesse
Per is shadew of deþ, noon oþer wynne;
Per wone þerlastynge for hem lyued mysse,
Euere grislyhede, þat neuere schal blynne.

libera me, domine

Delyuere me, Lord, from endless death,
In þat grete dredful day,

333 Where heuenys schullen be styred from erþe breþe,
      Where þou shalt come to deme for ay.
      To heuen or helle, þat on he geþ;
                     [only one [of those two] removed; earthly life]
      To heuen or helle, þat on he geþ;

336 þe word be fyre and grete afray,
      Panne woo to the synful, his soule sleþ,
      And fendys claymen hym for here pray.
                     [that verdict] destroys verdict; terror

(43)

339 That day shal be a day of drede,
      Of wraþþe, and myschyf, and wrechidnesse;
      Þerre may no man opere rede,
                     can; advise spiritual; suffering; misery
      Ne make amendis for his mysse.
      For worldly witnesse of synful ded:
      Þere helpeþ neþer counseil ne med,
                     advice; bribery
      Ech man for hym self, to payne or blysse.

(44)

348 Or what to do, fool and nys,
      Whanne y shal schewe forþ no good dede,
      Byfore so gret iuge and wys?
                     sinful
      Al folk on me woln take hede,
      Wayte after vertue, and fynde vys.
                     wish; pay attention to Search for
      Say: God, mercy, þy dome y drede,

354 For in þe al mercy lys.

(45)

357 We byseche þe, þat come mankynde to saue.
      To bye vs, þou from heuene vs soþt,
      Oure herytage for vs to haue;
                     beg desert [us]
      Þat wern lorn þou hast boþt.
      Wyl boþt dampne in helle kaue
      Thy honde warke þou hast wroþt.
                     came condemn [us]; pit work of your hands

(46)

363 þe brennynge soule in helle hete,
      Withouten ende wepe thoo.
      Allas, oure synnes don vs bete,
                     they get the better of
      Pay say: wo, wo, wo.
      Here is no remedie to gete.
Pay walke in derkenesse to and fro,

De stynk and derkenesse is so grete,

Allas, in þysternes we go.

(47)

God, that art shapere of al,

Of slyme of erthe þou me wroþt.

Wiþ þy blod principal,

Wonderly þou haste vs boþt.

Þouþ my body now rote smal,

My soule to my body shal be broþt.

Out of my graue reyse me þou schal

To lyues man; and fayle noþt

(48)

Blod and boon, flesche and felle.

Here my prayer: in parfitnesse

At domesday comaunde my soule to dwelle

In Abrahamys bosom, in thy blisse,

Whenne þou shalt delyuere me fram syþt of helle.

Þou breke þe 3ates of helle, ywisse,

Þou souþtest helle in peynes felle,

3af lyþt to hem in grete bryþtnesse.

(49)

Alas, y may be schamed sore,27

At domesday stonde in drede;

I, to come so gret a Iuge byfore,

And shewe forþ no good dede,

Bote fardel of synnes gadred in store;

Þe fendes redy my rolle to rede,

Þe countretayle to shewe, þe score,

Þe leste steppe þat euere y 3ede.

(50)

The good aungel on his ryþt syde,

Whenne he hem ladde with merye songe,

And whenne he wolde noþt folwe hy[m], glyde

Out of the waye, he wente wronge;

In vertues he nolde abyde.

Þe good aungel mourned amonge:

26 To [become] a living man [again], and nothing will be lacking

27 Alas! I have cause to feel deep shame
With þe soule nel y chyde; will not argue
402 Y 3eue þe vp for endeles longe. length [of time] (i.e. eternity)

(51)
At domesday no man shal be excusyd, assumed innocent
Lord ne lady, maybe ne knaue;
405 For wykked counsel scholde be refusyd, maid nor servant
And after good counsayle craue.
After warke þat þay vsed,
I shal hem deme or saue.
De sauyd excusyd, þe dampnyd accusyd, desire (v.)
As thay deseryyd echon haue:
Those who are saved everyone gets

(52)
Ech touche and mouynge with hys honde, movement
De leste twynkelynge wyþ his ey3e,
His wronge worke: sitte or stonde,
414 Ryde or go, sitte or ly3e. did not succeed; where; tried
Þou3 he spede no3t þere he dede fonde,
betray
Hys conscience wole hym bewrye;
417 Benefice, auauencement, hous or londe, Gain; promotion
The leste bargayn þat he dede bye. deal; concluded

Notes

title ‘Lessons of the Dirige II’ in the bibliography of Muir (1970, p. 384). Kail in his edition mentions ten, instead of nine, Lessons in the title at the top of each page of the poem. However, the tenth is in fact not a Lesson, but the famous part of the Requiem Mass, as put to music by countless composers.

3 ware] MED s.v. weren (v.(2)) sub (b) glosses ‘employ/use’, but ‘tire out/exhaust’ sub (c) is more apposite here.

11 Without the comma after herte (as Kail has it), aȝen resoun is read as a prepositional adjunct to herte. The line then assumes a negative meaning, whilst the corresponding line in Job 7:17 is positive: ‘What is man ... that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him?’

12, 13 hem] The man of gret renown of l. 9.

20 schal] Kail misprints shal.

30 clayme3] Variant spelling of claymez. See also III.14: ges, as the only other example of 3sg. pres. in -ed/es (rather than -eth/-eþ), occurring not at the end of the line.

47–48 Refers to Prov. 13:24, ‘He that spareth his rod hateth his son; but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes’.

57 That] Starts a consecutive clause (ll. 57–60), subordinate to the main clause in ll. 49–54.

61 Soþes] MS sofer. Follows Kail, who does not mark the amendment. nese] Contraction of ne and es(se) = ‘is not’.

65 resoun] MS þe soun.
72  *pas* Glossed in *MED* s.v. *pas(e (n.1)) sub (g), as 'way of life', but 'predicament/ordeal' sub (h) is more apt here.

82  *lopred* MnE 'hardened/curdled', where the liturgical text of Lesson iii has the opposite meaning of *poured out* (*L. mulsisti, 'milked*). The author ignored the liturgical text at this point and with *lopred* opted instead for the literal translation of the following *coagulasti*, in *sicct caseum me coagulasti* ('Hast thou not ... curdled me like cheese') in the liturgical text. As a result, there is now mention of 'hardened/curdled' three times (including the added mention of slip-cheese), whereas the intended meaning in the liturgical text (as in Job itself) is to illustrate the first lines of Lesson iii: 'Thine hands have made me and fashioned me' with the simile of man’s creation as the 'pouring out as milk', and his formation as the 'curdling as of cheese'.

105  *trespas* Uncommon plural form.

111  *bok of lyf* Referred to several times in Revelation, e.g. in 3:5, 'I will not blot out his name out of the book of life', and 20:15, 'And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire'.

123  *roue* Quoted twice in *MED*, correctly glossed s.v. *rove (n.)* as 'scabby/covered with scabs' (cf. Job 7:5, 'My skin is broken, and become loathsome'), but, erroneously associated with the preceding word *clothed*, as 'something rough/a rough garment' s.v. *rough(e (n.1)) sub (e).

161  Kail unnecessarily inserts *to* between *Wo* and *me*.

184  *vertewe* MS *vertew*.

186  *clayme for rent* God asks back man’s soul as his due. Cf. I.39–40: ... *thy soule is Goddis rent; / Quite that wele in loue and drede.*

200a  *spirit[us]/*MS *spē.*

250–70  A markedly deviating rendering of Job 17:14, where Job calls corruption 'my father', and the worm 'my mother and my sister'. The same 'mix-up' occurs in the prose version of the *Lessons* in the Wheatley Manuscript, betraying that it served as a source for the Digby text (Day, 1921, p. 278).

278  *wanes les* MS *wanels*.

291  *pursue* MS *pursuye*.

314  *me* Inserted emendation unmarked in Kail.

323  *þes* The line is quoted in *MED* s.v. *strife (n.), where an alternative for *þes* is given as ‘[?read: pes]’. Unnecessarily so, as here *thes* ('this') is cataphoric (see *MED s.v. this (pron.) sub (3)'); hence the following colon, introducing the things Job asks of God in the rest of the stanza.

378–79  Run-on lines straddling stanzas 47 and 48.

382  *Abrahamys bosum* Refers to the story of 'Pauper and Dives' in Luke 16:19–26. The beggar Lazarus after his death 'was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom'. The rich man ends in torment in hell and begs that Lazarus 'may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue’. But Abraham points out to the rich man that he enjoyed the good things in his life and Lazarus the evil things, and that their fates are for ever reversed in the hereafter. 'Dives' is also referred to in X.206: *Wiþ dives in pyne jou shalt ly3e.*

397  *hym* MS *hy.*

410  I conclude the description of the proceedings on the Day of Judgement in St. (51) with a colon, to introduce the list of standards by which man will be judged in St. (52).