

“HOW THEY WILL SUFFER PAIN”:
DEATH AND DAMNATION IN THE HOLKHAM BIBLE

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“HOW THEY WILL SUFFER PAIN”:
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A Thesis

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Liberal Arts Master's Program

Abstract
of
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This study examines the understanding of death and damnation in late medieval England, as seen in the Holkham Bible, and various examples of medieval imagery. It suggests that lay society was not only aware, but held a heightened sense of urgency for an in-depth understanding of death and the consequence of sin.

The thesis first looks at the initial Christian understanding of death and the afterlife, reflected in the works of the church fathers, Ambrose and Augustine, and the transformation of this understanding into the medieval period. The thesis then looks at the primary methods used to disseminate doctrine to the laity in the late Middle Ages and their reception of that information. The study then approaches an in-depth examination of the Holkham Bible, a fourteenth-century Anglo-Norman manuscript that in particular reflects the attempt to portray death in a manner that the populace would understand and identify with. The study concludes with an examination of various pieces of late medieval imagery and the representation of death and lay interpretation.

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Dr. Candace Gregory-Abbott

Date

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband Kevin for his continued support, motivation, patience, and love. This project would not have been possible without him.

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Chapter 1

DEATH AND THE AFTERLIFE IN THE MIDDLE AGES

An important feature of late medieval thought was the popular understanding of death and eternal and purgatorial punishment. Established by the first Christian fathers of the church, by means of a complete examination of scripture, interpretation and then doctrine was set forth. Centuries later, with the new wave of philosophical learning from rediscovered classical works, the church fathers of the high Middle Ages continued the tradition, establishing more complex ideas regarding death and the afterlife. The early figures, such as Saint Ambrose of Milan (d. 397) and Saint Augustine of Hippo (d. 430), impacted every aspect of Christianity throughout the Middle Ages. Their conclusions regarding scripture, theology, and philosophy penetrated the thoughts of the church and clergy, including prominent theologian Saint Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274). The medieval comprehension of death, hell and the penalty of sin were gained throughout the centuries, beginning with Ambrose and Augustine and culminating in the sermons and warnings of individual monks and preachers, alongside the influence of his cultural surroundings. The following works introduce the foundation for the understanding of death, beginning with the works of Ambrose and Augustine; the evolution of these teachings and the influence of philosophy in the late Middle Ages, seen in the works of Thomas Aquinas; and finally, the teaching of these ideas, as disseminated through preaching, illustrated in the sermons and homilies of the clergy. The medieval understanding of death is examined, taking into consideration these influences, as well as the examination of the social, political and physical climate of late medieval England.

DEATH ACCORDING TO AUGUSTINE AND AMBROSE

For Christian theologians and philosophers, the examination of death seeks to determine few absolutes – whether death is to be perceived as evil, what is the state of the soul after death and the actuality of resurrection, what can be said of the punishments of hell, and what is the reality of purgatory? What was already considered by the early theologians as “truth” – that only through Christ can one avoid hell – was not central to their discussion, as it had previously been established. The theologian simply sought the understanding of what need be avoided, if not for the means to teach others, possibly to satisfy their own curiosity. Ambrose and Augustine both deemed Doctors of the Church were both highly influential in the establishment of early doctrine, yet these men differ in their understanding of the nature of death.

In Saint Augustine’s extensive work, *City of God*, the theologian and philosopher expounded upon the important topics of early Christianity and the establishment of what would become the “medieval church.” As an authority on scriptural interpretation and understanding, it is not surprising that in regards to death and perdition, he is also highly looked upon. It is suggested by Jacques Le Goff that Augustine’s views on death narrowed in part due to the impact of the sack of Rome in 410, leading many to fear not only the end of the Roman Empire, but for the end of days as well.¹ Like his contemporary Saint Ambrose, Augustine’s works reflect that in order to fully comprehend the rewards for the belief in Christ, one must also have a firm grasp of the

¹Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 68.

punishments of denying Him. If the end was near, it was vital to vocalize his concern for his fellow man. Early in his discussion on death, Augustine establishes that death is indeed evil and is the final punishment for sin. In *City of God* (book 13), he explains that death was not from God, but because man first sinned, death was the consequence of evil.² He acknowledges though, that even the good must suffer death, but that what is penalty for the sinner is reward for the righteous. Thus, death is the payment for sin, “purchased by sinning...[while] righteousness is fulfilled by dying.”³ This wholly contradicts the teaching of Ambrose, who believed that death was not evil because it was a haven from despair and the evils of the world, at least for those followers of Christ.⁴ And although he does not directly address the damned, it can be assumed that if death is a refuge for the redeemed, then it is a prison for the wicked, and this aligns with Augustine. In both arguments, death can only be glorified by those who acknowledge Christ’s authority. The benefit to this acknowledgement is the resurrection of the body, while the punishment is the destruction of the soul. In this distinction, the theologians are in agreement.

The state of the soul after death was one of the most discussed topics amongst the early church fathers, a lingering nod to the classical writings of Plato and Aristotle, both of whom wrote numerous works regarding the soul, as well as foreshadowing of late

² Augustine, *City of God, Book 13.3*, trans. Marcus Dods, from *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 2*, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight, <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120113.htm>>, accessed 28 July, 2009.

³ Augustine, *Book 13.4*. Augustine drew this conclusion from Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death. But the grace of God, life everlasting, in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

⁴ Ambrose, *On the Death of Satyrus, Book 2:35-39*, eds. H. de Romestin, E. de Romestin and H.T.F. Duckworth, from *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 10*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1896) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight, <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/34032.htm>>, accessed 28 July, 2009.

medieval thinkers, who used classical philosophy to engender their own interpretation of Christian philosophy. For both Augustine and Ambrose, death meant the separation of the soul from the body; however each man interpreted this separation in very different, although equally complex ways. For Augustine, the death of the soul occurs when God forsakes the soul. The death of the body occurs when the soul forsakes the body. When the soul forsakes the body and God forsakes the soul, this is the death of the whole man.⁵ Augustine suggests that the body of the wicked can retain a dead soul, one that will feel eternal punishment, for the soul of the wicked remains not for pleasure, but solely for pain.⁶ While death, or more accurately dying, is bad for all, what transpires after death is Augustine's concern – for the righteous death is good, for the wicked it is bad. For after death, the souls of the righteous will be with God, while the souls of the wicked will experience torment. Augustine says, “The souls have their own death, in the shape of irreligion and sin, the death died by those referred to by the Lord when he says ‘Let the dead bury their own dead,’ that is “let those who are dead in soul bury those who are dead in body (Matthew 8:22).”⁷ Augustine is again bringing attention to the necessity of Christ; for only because Christ died, can they eternally live.⁸

Christian doctrine supports the contradictory concept set forth by Christ, that to die in Him is to live. Ambrose would have been considered a heretic by the Church if he denied this. And his examination of death begins with that very concept. His understanding of death is that it is threefold, the first death being in which man dies to

⁵ Augustine supports this claim with Romans 10:28, “And fear ye not them that kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him that can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

⁶ Augustine, *Book 13.2*.

⁷ Ibid., *Book 20.6*.

⁸ Reference to John 5:24, John 11:25-26, etc.

sin, but lives in God. The second death is the physical death, when the soul is set free from the tie to the body. The third death, spiritual death, he describes as the death of punishment.⁹ For even Ambrose, who claims the purpose of death is not punitive, acknowledges that the wicked will experience punishment either eternally, or until recompense has been satisfied. And like Augustine, the righteous fear not eternal torment, but can retain hope in the resurrection. Ambrose asks, “What grief is there which the grace of the Resurrection does not console? What sorrow is not excluded by the belief that nothing perishes in death?”¹⁰ For Ambrose insists that death is not to be feared, but welcomed. And like Paul, Ambrose is torn between the necessity to glorify Christ in life, and the desire to be with Him.¹¹

What is certain however is that neither Augustine nor Ambrose desired a complete knowledge of the happenings of hell. Both men acknowledged its existence, both recognized the punishment that was present, but neither illustrated what specifically occurred in hell. This would be left to later authors, such as Dante. What Augustine did say was enough to make clear that hell was an everlasting reality and it should be every man’s desire to avoid it at all cost. Over a number of books and many chapters in *City of God*, Augustine provides a clear picture of the punishment that will be endured for those lost souls. He claims, “For that day is properly called the day of judgment, because in it there shall be no room left for the ignorant questioning...true and full happiness shall be the lot of none but the good, while deserved and supreme misery shall be the portion of

⁹ Ambrose, *Book 2:36-37*.

¹⁰ Ibid., *Book 2:3*.

¹¹ Philippians 1:23-24.

the wicked, and of them only.”¹² And in this portion, the wicked will burn eternally and corporeally for their sins. Augustine dedicated much time considering the afterlife and the nature of hell. Ambrose on the other hand focused on the reward, looking little at the actual castigation. He does however refer to those, the wicked, who will be resurrected in the body to face judgment and if necessary, punishment.¹³

AUGUSTINE AND AMBROSE ON PURGATORIAL FIRE

The punishment of sin extended past the notion of hell and the early church leaders recognized a need for further exploration. The question previously looked at – what happens to the soul between death and resurrection – naturally led to another question: can the souls of some sinners be saved? The notion and eventual doctrine of Purgatory would become significant to late medieval thought. Yet the early church fathers, including Augustine and Ambrose, recognized the unanswered questions. They did not assign a name to it, but the idea was established, awaiting further development.¹⁴ Although the physical place of purgatory cannot be supported by scripture, Augustine and Ambrose interpreted Paul’s allusion to cleansing fires in 1 Corinthians, that “if any man’s work abide, which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work burn, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.”¹⁵ In *City of God*, Augustine discusses an ancient theory of fire, expressing the Stoic belief that “fire...is one of the four material elements of which this visible world is composed, was both living and intelligent, the maker of the world and of all things contained in it—that it

¹² Augustine, *Book 20.1*.

¹³ Ambrose, *Book 2:52*.

¹⁴ Augustine’s discussion on hell and purgatorial fires is not limited to *City of God*. It is first mentioned in his *Confessions* and also expanded upon in *Enchiridion*.

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 3:13-15.

was in fact God.”¹⁶ Le Goff points out that although purgatory became dominant in the Middle Ages, it has a much longer history in ancient mythology, religion, and philosophy, which associated fire with divinity.¹⁷ Augustine adapted this into his Christian philosophy, as the idea that fire is God, could be applied to the purgatorial fires quite well. Ambrose is less direct; he does not attribute the fire to be God. He says, “Before the resurrected lies a fire, which all of them must cross. This is the baptism of fire...in the Holy Ghost and the fire, it is the burning sword of the cherub who guards the gate of heaven...for all who want to return to heaven must be tried by fire.”¹⁸ It can be argued that although Ambrose did not establish the purgatorial fires to be God, they can certainly be seen as an agent of the divine. Ambrose’s assertion that one must physically pass through the fires before entering the gates of heaven brings to light the problem of the physicality of purgatory. Does Purgatory exist on a material level? As stated, this will be solidified in the thirteenth century, but the theologians of the late Middle Ages drew this conclusion from the views of Augustine and Ambrose, recognizing its long history and tradition.

Augustine, whom Le Goff identifies as the “True Father of Purgatory,”¹⁹ approached the physicality of purgatory by discussing the various levels of hell. Augustine’s ideas may be considered precursory to Dante’s elaborate distinction of sinners and their respective sins, Augustine attempts to distinguish between the godless, who are destined for hell eternal, and those minor sinners, the saints and martyrs, who

¹⁶ Augustine, *Book 8.5*.

¹⁷ Le Goff, 10.

¹⁸ Ibid., 59, quoted from Ambrose’s, *In Psalmum CXVIII, sermo 20, PL, 15*.

¹⁹ Ibid., 61.

will surely ascend to Heaven, but only after a brief purgation.²⁰ But in between those that are certainly damned and those that are certainly saved, Augustine distinguishes two more categories of sinner, those neither altogether good nor altogether bad. The latter will still descend to hell, but Augustine believed it would be a less “hellish” hell. And those not completely good, are given the opportunity to purge their sins; of course even this is not guaranteed.²¹ In short, Augustine is suggesting that all sinners, even the saintly, will go to hell, and only through the purgatorial fires might they be cleansed in preparation for heaven.

In a similar manner, Ambrose too makes distinctions in punishment. But his are not reserved for those in hell. He instead distinguishes between different kinds of purgatorial fires. In his treatise, *On the Good of Death*, Ambrose discusses the dwelling places of the soul, in which he notes that sinners will await their judgment, or trial. He suggests the fire is refreshing for the righteous, torture and punishment for the wicked, apostate, and sacrilegious, and for those in between, it is an instrument of purification, in which the pain corresponds to the severity of their sins.²² Both theologians, although expressing slightly different views, held the same objective. This is expressed best by Augustine near the end of *City of God*, when he explains that only with Christ as the foundation with which man builds his life, can he attain salvation, and avoid destruction, temporal or eternal.²³ These theories by Augustine and Ambrose would not be lost on the great writers of the late medieval period. In fact, the doctrine of Purgatory is an ideal

²⁰ Augustine, *Book 21.13 and 21.26*.

²¹ Le Goff, 69.

²² Ibid., 59.

²³ Augustine, *Book 21.26*.

example of the aforementioned influences on popular thought and those that will follow. The continued examinations of Holy Scripture, the teachings of the church fathers like Augustine and Ambrose, their medieval successors as an authoritative source, and the inheritance and adaptation of classical philosophy could not support the binary system that Christianity adhered to.²⁴ The foundations established by Augustine and Ambrose would become more complex as medieval thought expanded. For late medieval theologians, the traditional twofold system fractured and it is from this point that the emergence of a physical purgatory is confirmed, the “third-place.”

SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS: THE BEGINNING OF MEDIEVAL DEATH

Like Augustine before him, Saint Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) is considered to be among, if not the, greatest Christian philosopher and theologian. His ideas permeate medieval Christianity, influencing doctrine and popular understanding. Yet the worlds between Augustine and Aquinas were quite different. Augustine was writing in response to the pagan culture that still lingered at the end of antiquity, fully immersed in Platonism, while Aquinas was contributing to the systematic assimilation of the rediscovered philosophies of Aristotle. While Augustine developed his Christian framework utilizing the philosophy of Plato, Aquinas examined the rediscovered classical ideas of Aristotle and molded them into his own Christian framework. Although Aristotle lived three centuries before the birth of Christ and did not believe in the Hebrew God, Aquinas suggests that the philosopher held some understanding of a higher being and Aquinas developed his philosophies keeping this in mind. Both Aristotle and

²⁴ Binski, 182.

Aquinas believed that the superior purpose for man was philosophical contemplation.

Aquinas simply added that intellectual contemplation on God was greater still.

Many of Aristotle's works discuss the nature of the soul and its existence in relation to the body. The importance of these concepts has been established as essential to Christian thinking, thus it is not surprising that Aquinas would utilize his newfound interest in Aristotelian philosophy to discuss his views on the soul. Unfortunately for Aquinas, the philosopher did not follow the Platonic model in proving the immortality of the soul. In *De Anime* (On the Soul), Aristotle claims that the soul is inseparable from the body, not a substance of its own, but united with the body.²⁵ In the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas responds to an objection that states, after death, souls are not assigned to particular places because once separated, they are indifferent to all places, completely removed from corporeal settings.²⁶ He argues however, that they are not indifferent, but can share characteristics in two ways, (1) by sharing a similar quality, such as heat, or (2) relating proportions between the corporeal and spiritual world. He explains, "The Scriptures speak of God as the sun, because He is the principle of spiritual life, as the sun is of corporeal life. In this way certain souls have more in common with certain places: for instance, souls that are spiritually enlightened, with luminous bodies, and souls that are plunged in darkness by sin, with dark places."²⁷ In this, Aquinas is

²⁵ Aristotle, *De Anime*, trans. J.A. Smith, internet resource developed by Christopher D. Green (York University, Toronto, Ontario), <<http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Aristotle/De-anima/index.htm>>, accessed 30 July, 2009.

²⁶ Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas, Supplement, question 69, article 1*, Second and Revised Edition, 1920, Literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Online Edition Copyright © 2008 by Kevin Knight, <<http://www.newadvent.org/summa/5069.htm>>, accessed 30 July, 2009.

²⁷ Ibid.

asserting that after death, the soul is not absent because it is not corporeal, but it is instead in holding, designated to a place while awaiting judgment. Aquinas notes the importance of the soul after death because whether it is somatic or not, the punishment that will be endured in hell or through purgatorial fires is indeed corporeal. He states that the fire that torments the separated souls and the bodies of the damned is physically experienced, for in order to punish bodily, the punishment itself must be bodily, meaning real tangible fire.²⁸ Thus, Augustine, Ambrose and Aquinas all sought to enlighten others of the very real, very physical, nature of hell and purgatory and the great need for salvation. In fact, in the same years Aquinas was compiling his thoughts on the nature of the afterlife, the Church was establishing doctrine that would effectively change the popular understanding of death and absolution.

FOURTEENTH CENTURY CONTEXT

It has been suggested that the medieval understanding of death was delivered primarily through the church. Outside the church walls however, the livelihood of the people was greatly dependent on the environment surrounding them. This extends from the political and social climate to the physical weather they endured. The beginning of the fourteenth century in England was marked by instability in various ways. The reign of King Edward II of England was plagued by incompetent governing, failed military protection and advancement, as well as fighting within the royal house. Edward's failure to effectively control his kingdom and maintain what his father gained contributed to the distrust of his people. Both contemporary and modern historians agree that Edward's

²⁸ Aquinas, *Supplement*, question 97, article 5.

military ineptness led to the disastrous state of the Scottish border, one his father successfully maintained.²⁹ When Edward was not abandoning his defenses but led armies to the north, he was ineffective and in the summer of 1314 was defeated at Bannockburn, thus losing control of the border and allowing Scots to pillage unchecked through the northern parts of England.³⁰ As war is damaging to an economy even when successful, Edward's blunders were a threat to his people and their welfare.

The satirical *Poem on the Evil Times of Edward II* provides insight on the plight of medieval society. Possibly written by a clergyman with firsthand knowledge of the poor, the poem attacks the many ills of England and its incompetent king.³¹ The military failures were not the only calamity England faced. At the same time Edward was waging war with Scotland, wars that spilled into Ireland and threatened Wales, England was severely beaten down by terrible weather conditions, causing the Great Famine:

For when God saw that the world was so over proud,
He sent a shortage on earth and made it hit full hard.

.....

And then they turned pale, those who had laughed so loud,
And they became obedient, those who were before so proud.
A man's heart might bleed for to hear the cry
Of poor men who lamented, 'Alas! Because of hunger I die up right!'³²

The Great Famine (1315-1322) that hit northern Europe reduced its people to the most extreme measures of survival in the face of hideous death. The dearth left the people starving, dying, and desperate. With the severe shortage of cattle and grain, worsening

²⁹ John Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse: Confronting Famine, War, Plague, and Death in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 43.

³⁰ Aberth, 43.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

³² *The Political Songs of England, from the Reign of John to that of Edward II*, trans. and ed. Thomas Wright (Reprinted with permission of The Royal Historical Society, Johnson Reprint Corporation: New York, 1968), 341, lns. 391-401. My own translation.

weather conditions, and the ingestion of spoiled food, disease was rampant. Most deaths are now attributed to disease rather than starvation, but the poor and dying people looked to their king to provide food and end their misery.³³ A chronicle account of the famine tells of stories where “in Northumbria dogs and horses and other unclean things were eaten.”³⁴ Other accounts give gruesome details of people eating the flesh of the dead and mothers eating their own children.³⁵ Mothers were forced to limit the amount of mouths to feed, thus infanticide was widespread. Panic and fear breed chaos, and thus crime was irrepressible. Expressions that would become common-place during the Black Death were first spoken during this crisis; society acknowledged that “there [were] not enough living to bury the dead” and lament over the futility of burial because people died faster than could be buried.³⁶

The famine, like the death it caused, did not heed social distinction, but sliced across all classes. Rich men became beggars and the cities were rampant with peasants, old and new, and the piling of dead bodies. The drastic change in social order was rarely seen from the bottom of the social ordering upward; the poor remained poor, while the upper classes plummeted. Even with society changing around them, the peasant class persistently condemned the king for their mistreatment. This neglect is reflected in another section of the poem, in which the peasant complains of the disproportionate weight the poor shoulders from the king’s taxes:

³³ Aberth, 15.

³⁴ *The Life of Edward the Second by the So-called Monk of Malmesbury*, trans. N. Denholm-Young (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons., Ltd., 1957), quoted in *Medieval England, 1000-1500: A Reader*, Emilie Amt, trans. (University of Toronto Press, 2003), 306-7.

³⁵ Aberth, 13.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

And if the king taxes his land,
 And every man is set to a certain rate,

 A man of forty pounds in goods is taxed at twelve pence;
 And also much pays another that poverty has brought to the ground,
 God's curse on them! Let it be set and sworn,
 That the poor are thus robbed, and the rich forborne.³⁷

Unfortunately for Edward II, this natural crisis erupted right in the middle of his already turbulent reign. And although the people interpreted the famine as being sent from God for the wickedness of England, their faith in the goodness of God would not allow the blame to fall to Him, but instead placed it on the man who was God's representative on earth. For the dying poor, Edward II was simply at fault. Aberth notes that the king and his Parliament attempted to ease the plight of the people and implemented a number of measures to alleviate the famine, but the efforts were inadequate. He suggests that it is probably unreasonable to expect the medieval government to aid in what the modern world calls "disaster relief," especially considering the idea that the government should take this responsibility is a recent notion.³⁸ Sadly for Edward, the medieval people did not see this point of view.

MEDIEVAL SOCIETY AND DEATH

Political instability, disastrous weather conditions, and a starving, dying population set a somber tone for the beginning of the fourteenth century. Only two decades later, the Black Death would mark this period as one exemplified by death, making it an inescapable reality and very present fear. Yet, if the dramatic affect the Black Death unleashed on Europe was not the pivotal point in manipulating medieval

³⁷ *The Political Songs of England*, lns. 301-311. My own translation.

³⁸ Aberth, 55.

society's conception of death, what was? Phillipe Ariès suggests that the common language and understanding of death did not abruptly change in the Middle Ages, rather, it underwent "subtle modifications [that] gradually gave a dramatic and personal meaning to man's traditional familiarity with death."³⁹ As man became more aware of himself as an individual, recognizing his own personal responsibility in this life, the understanding of death shifted, provoking recognition that this life would affect his next. One example that Ariès provides is the individualization of sepulchers, or burial vaults. Looking first at the ancient Romans, numerous burial inscriptions have been discovered. The Romans, even of the low social classes, desired to preserve identity after death. As the Christian church became the authority in all matters including death, it was common that the deceased be handed over for care by the local church. Tombs, and cemeteries in general, were almost entirely anonymous. Those "sleeping" Christians were under safe-keeping until the return of Christ and the Resurrection.⁴⁰ This anonymity lasted for centuries. It was not until the thirteenth century that burial inscriptions began to reappear. They first emerged on the tombs of figures of great importance – saints, or those associated with saints and royalty. Expanding from brief inscriptions, effigies became popular, eventually leading into attempts to reproduce the qualities of the person. And then finally in the fourteenth century, a realistic portrait of the person was taken to the level of creating a death mask.⁴¹ This increase of personalization reflects the development of a previously unknown relationship, that between the "death of each individual and his

³⁹ Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1974), 27.

⁴⁰ Ariès, 46-7. The dead are referred to as "sleeping" in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-16.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 47-48.

awareness of being an individual.” Ariès quotes contemporary historian M. Pacault, suggesting that between the eleventh century and the middle of the thirteenth, an important historical change took place. Ariès accedes that the medieval thought process and the perception of people’s surroundings radically evolved; they became more perceptive and more reasoned.⁴² As medieval society identified with their own individuality, they thus recognized the significance of their own death. Ariès suggests that this recognition illuminated their understanding of life; this paper suggests this awareness also revealed to them the importance of what would happen in the next life.

The late medieval theologians surpassed the early Christian notion of a black and white world: heaven and hell, light verses dark, salvation verses damnation. The average person in fourteenth century Europe however, was not as enlightened. Reality for medieval society was still very much black and white. The loftiest example is the opposing figures of God Satan. Both figures dominated Christian thought. One was prayed to, the other prayed against; one the sole force of good, the other representing everything evil. Doctrine of course recognized Satan not as God’s equal, but as a hopeless creature, a fallen angel.⁴³ Satan was the decisive example of failure. Yet man feared his very existence. He dreaded the moment Satan would show his face, when he would succeed in his temptations and lure him to hell. Man was the ultimate prize for both God and Satan, each hoping his grip would hold; he “was not only the object between God and the devil, but...on [man’s] death, he was the object of a final, decisive

⁴² Ibid., 51.

⁴³ Jacques Le Goff, *Medieval Civilization, 400-1500*, trans. Julia Barrow (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, Ltd., 1988), 160.

contract.”⁴⁴ Le Goff further illustrates this with the example of medieval artists, who often portrayed the moment of man’s death by depicting the soul being torn between Satan and Saint Michael.⁴⁵ Again, man perceived his life and his death as twofold – righteous or wicked, redeemed or damned.

The origins of medieval Christian thought on death began with theologians and philosophers. Additionally, the cultural and political climate contributed to the overall attitude of medieval society. What has not been discussed are the methods used to spread church doctrine. The church employed various modes of dissemination that directly and indirectly educated the populace and molded their understanding of death and the afterlife.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 160.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 162. Le Goff also notes the significance that God sends his second in command, Michael, to deal with Satan, suggesting that Satan rarely rates God’s full attention.

Chapter 2

REACHING THE MASSES: THE LAY UNDERSTANDING OF DEATH

One day in a village, a soldier learned that his wife had committed adultery with the village priest. Not wanting to believe the story, and being a cautious man, the soldier decided to verify the accusation before denouncing his wife and the holy man. In a nearby village, he was told of a person who was possessed by a wicked demon. This possession allowed for the person to reveal sins which had not been cloaked by a true confession. He asked the priest to join him in a meeting, where, unbeknownst to him, the possessed person would reveal the priest's sin. They reached the village, and the priest, concerned by his guilt, and fearful of the possessed person's abilities, found the soldier's servant and begged him to hear his confession. The servant heard his confession and instructed the priest to inflict the same penance upon himself that he would impose on another priest in the same situation. When the priest entered the presence of the person possessed, the wicked demon was unable to reveal the sin, thus, no crime was divulged to the husband. After confirming this in the soldier's own tongue however, the possessed person said in Latin, "He was justified in the stable."⁴⁶

This story, told by twelfth century prior, Caesar of Heisterbach, reveals a number of things. Caesar used these tales for instruction to his novices. He explains that the demon could not speak to the soldier in his vernacular, lest he would comprehend the demon and the truth, but the demon could also not remain silent; thus he spoke those final words in Latin to assure the priest the virtue of his confession. The lesson of this tale

⁴⁶ Caesar of Heisterbach, "Tales of Confession: By Confession a Guilty Priest Escaped Exposure," *Dist. III*, Cap. II (Vol. I, pp 112-13), "Medieval Sermon Tales," <http://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/346serm.html>, accessed 10 September, 2009.

conveys the importance of confession as deliverance from exposure, and ultimately, damnation. Yet, this story reveals more than the core Christian message of redemption. It exposes some essential elements of medieval understanding and answers a critical question: how did the laity receive the information the church was providing? This story uncovers a number of answers; foremost, Caesar's message was used as a tool for preachers. It is one example of material used for sermons, known as sermon-stories or sermon-tales.⁴⁷ It also emphasizes the necessity of confession and penance, not only for the laity, but for the clergy as well, who were expected to confess more often than the populace. And finally, the work itself is important; it reveals that medieval texts were not limited to Scripture and biblical tales, but could be used to directly influence the laity.

This chapter will examine four modes of acculturation, the most important methods being preaching and penitential confession. It will also consider the effect of religious drama on late medieval Europe, and close with why texts, although limited, were valuable as well. Each method is significant because they not only offered a means of instruction, but allowed for the laity's own interpretation; this includes the popular understanding of death and damnation.

ACCULTURATION

When Christianity first emerged, the process of transforming the existing culture into something new may be better deemed as "conversion." But as Christianity became the dominant force in the early medieval period, conversion itself transformed into something more complex; those teaching and those learning underwent a change as well.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Christianity was not a passive or static religion.⁴⁸ Secular rulers embraced it, allowing the church to expand its power, as well as continuously redefine the content. Like the church, the laity was not submissive. John Arnold emphasizes the importance of popular interpretation and involvement. He argues that the laity did not receive messages or images passively, with automatic obedience, but emphasizes the “importance of activity and practice, as much as reflection and comprehension...and the possibilities of lay interpretation of the ecclesiastical message of sin, salvation and obedience.”⁴⁹

The core tenets of Christianity remained constant and universal – creation and an end time; the Final Judgment; humanity’s birth into sin since Adam; Christ’s sacrifice and resurrection; the afterlife; the soul’s eternal survival in heaven or hell - but beyond these absolutes, answers were ambiguous. A clear message for the whole of Christianity was not available to the populace. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) attempted to resolve this and in many ways was successful. Pope Innocent III implemented an outline for conformity, a template for beliefs and the mechanisms to implement these beliefs.⁵⁰ Fourth Lateran marked a dramatic change in the spread of the Christian faith and promoted an upsurge of enthusiastic mendicant preaching. Evangelism and confession reached its climax in the thirteenth century, simultaneous to immense population growth and the development of cities, a rise in wealth, education, and increasing hostility between secular rulers and the church. As the church attempted to increase its power, its efforts to control the populace increased as well. Some historians argue that the methods

⁴⁸ John H. Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), 28-29.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 32, 65.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

by which the church spread its doctrine were attempts at social control.⁵¹ There is some evidence to support the claim, but if Arnold's suggestion that the laity was interpreting the messages for themselves, the idea of mass social control loses plausibility. And because local clergy men held more in common economically and culturally with their parishioners than the episcopacy,⁵² it is likely that the messages often took on a more personalized tone, depending on circumstances of the community. Additionally, since Fourth Lateran called for bishops to clearly explain spiritual requirements to the priests, they were then able to communicate them to their congregation in the vernacular,⁵³ again diminishing the idea that ecclesiastical authority sought mass social control. The new wave of preaching in late medieval Europe directly to the laity in their own tongue begs the questions, what was the content of the sermons and what was the lay response to them?

PREACHING AND MEDIEVAL SERMONS

“How are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?”⁵⁴

As this Scripture suggests, evangelism was twofold: preachers had to spread the Word and the people needed to listen. Enthusiasm at a local level was present in both the preaching and the audience. As suggested, religious understanding in medieval Europe during the twelfth through fourteenth centuries underwent a gradual transformation. Prior to this period, the church's expectations of the laity were nominal. Some may have

⁵¹ Arnold, 39.

⁵² Ibid, 33.

⁵³ Ibid, 37.

⁵⁴ Romans 10:14-15.

been taught the Creed, but did they really understand what they were saying? The salvation of the laity was essentially a task assumed by the monks, through prayer. The twelfth century witnessed the beginnings of a new trend; the church began to consider the laity's active involvement in their own salvation. An example of this shift may be seen in the doctrine of Purgatory. A number of historians, most forcefully Aaron Gurevich, have argued that the understanding of an intermediary place, not heaven or hell, but a more digestible destination was a creation by the early medieval laity, not the clergy.⁵⁵ He suggests the severity of a binary view, such as salvation or damnation, to be too harsh and non-negotiable. An alternative like Purgatory instilled hope. It is reasonable to assume the papacy wanted to gain control over this from spreading among the laity without restriction – if they can place limitations on the concept, for example, allowing only venial sins to be purged and not mortal – it precluded the laity from seeing Purgatory as a safety net. The church would not tolerate its people sinning because there is no longer the repercussion of damnation. The church had to gain the upper hand. Thus, according to Gurevich, the church adopted the doctrine and the clergy, primarily the mendicant preachers, spread the belief through preaching. For instances such as this, as well as standard doctrine, the thirteenth century church implemented systems to educate and mold the people, and finally in the fourteenth century, results emerged of an individual and personal spirituality.⁵⁶

The church closely guarded the power to preach. Its acceptance of the mendicant friars hugely impacted the spread of the Christian faith. Preachers traveled across Europe

⁵⁵ Aaron Gurevich, "Popular and Scholarly Medieval Cultural Traditions: Notes in the Margin of Jacques Le Goff's Book," *Journal of Medieval History* 9 (1983): 71-90.

⁵⁶ Arnold, 37.

educating their flock. What then can be said about the audience? As their enthusiasm and interest increased, their desire for knowledge did as well. Alain de Lille's (d. 1202), *Art of Preaching*, available to preachers throughout the late Middle Ages, reveals audiences of various social positions: soldiers, cloistered monks, married parishioners, widows, virgins, men and women, often with sermons directly associated with their social status.⁵⁷ The most common division however, was literacy. Preachers recognized the need to deliver messages to audiences at different levels of understanding. The illiterate were often presented with stories or anecdotes, much like the one presented at the beginning of this chapter. Content is difficult to fully examine though. There are extant sermons and sermon-tales, but historians argue over the veracity of them, stating that the exact transcriptions of the sermons may be flawed.⁵⁸ In other words how accurately was what was performed, written down? A preacher's handbook might suggest that anecdotal messages would leave a more lasting impression on the illiterate. These stories may change from one presentation to another though. The preaching manuals at least divulge what was expected of preachers to deliver to their audience, offering general advice on content and delivery. One such handbook, a fourteenth century compilation by Francesc Eiximenis, encourages preachers to keep sermons "short, simple, and funny."⁵⁹ Some messages however were not meant to be light-hearted and humorous, but were meant to frighten and remind parishioners the price of sin.

As preaching grew in popularity, the laity's involvement did as well, from attending church multiple times per week, to devoting their time and finances, and

⁵⁷ Arnold, 45.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 42.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 46-47.

gaining from the clergy a greater understanding of not only their faith, but of life, and as will be shown, a clear understanding of death. The laity began to seek knowledge extending beyond the dichotomy of life and death. In part, chapter one stressed the importance on the nature of the soul after death, with little regard to the significance of the body. It has been briefly mentioned that for the wicked, the body will sustain corporeal torment and the faithful will await resurrection. Yet from the mid-thirteenth century forward, an emphasis on the body emerged. The doctrine of transubstantiation, also adopted by Fourth Lateran and reinforced by the Council of Lyons in 1274, altered the way medieval man would view the body, and essentially, death. In the *Summa*, Aquinas discusses this doctrine at length and establishes the body of Christ as sacred, along with its relationship to salvation.⁶⁰ For Aquinas, and the medieval church in general, the transformation of bread into the body of Christ was not only accepted, but revered, overlooking the negative aspects of death and decay. This reached its apex in the Corpus Christi cycles, religious dramas celebrating Christ's body, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Historian Paul Binski suggests that Christianity was the first "exclusive and universal" religion to venerate the body and use its symbolism and physicality to articulate numerous important ideas.⁶¹ He comments however, that the conception of the body as a central symbol, typically Christ's body, is profoundly associated with the macabre.⁶² Although the presence of the macabre becomes fully represented after the Black Death, it can be seen earlier in medieval Europe in response to

⁶⁰ See *Summa Theologica, Part Three*.

⁶¹ Paul Binski, *Medieval Death* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 123.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 123. Binski accepts Johan Huizinga's notion of the macabre, from *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, stating it "stood as a metaphor of change in an entire culture: the imagery of death and decay represented a deeper decline" in the Middle Ages (Huizinga, 164).

declining cultural conditions. The macabre appeared at a time “when symbolism and transformation of the body, especially the redemptive body of Christ, marked a positive means to salvation; but the macabre offered a negative mirror image to this symbolism of transformation.”⁶³ The representation of death underwent a transformation and the association with mortality provided the means for previously inarticulate ideas to be newly articulated. These ideas were expressed in the lives of medieval man, disseminated through the preaching and, as will be discussed in chapter four, widely represented in art.

In his extensive works on preaching in medieval England, G.R. Owst suggests that before the macabre became popular in England, it was the pulpit that sought to claim man’s imagination by depicting death in a most grim manner.⁶⁴ Likewise, Johan Huizinga argues that with the rise of the popular preacher, the preoccupation of death rose to its highest level. Sermons and images were the primary means of expression. He suggests that the late medieval mind could see no other aspect of death than decay.⁶⁵ He suggests that ecclesiastical thought during the Middle Ages was twofold: the lament over dying, the loss of power and glory, and decay, as opposed to the joy over the saved soul.⁶⁶ Huizinga’s argument may represent extremes and be too harsh as a generalization, but it certainly lends credibility to the assumption that medieval thought was overly concerned with death and damnation.

⁶³ Binski, 126.

⁶⁴ G.R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England: A Neglected Chapter in the History of English Letters & of the English People* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961), 531.

⁶⁵ Johan Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, trans. Rodney J. Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch (The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 156.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 172.

The following examples of English medieval preaching – sermons on the torments of hell, the consequence of sin, and a warning before death – are just a few cases of preaching in the vernacular to the lay audience. In this first example, the preacher condemns those who oppress the poor with little regard; the evil princes who are bound by greed and lust, the false wise men who for bribes sell God and heaven and purchase hell, the usurers, false merchants, and wicked ecclesiastics, all who abuse their station to suppress the peasants that depend on them. John Bromyard⁶⁷ admonishes them in his compiled book for preachers:

Their souls shall have, instead of palace and hall...the deep lake of hell... In place of a soft couch, they shall have a bed more grievous... than all the...spikes in the world...their body shall have a throng of worms and their soul a throng of demons... Instead of riches, poverty; instead of delights punishment...*and in place of the torment which for a time they inflicted on others, they shall have eternal torment.*⁶⁸

This passage may have initially instilled great anger and passion for the peasant class to act against those who oppressed them, but it also gave them a very real description of the punishments that would be inflicted upon those who sinned against God. This example also illustrates the indiscriminate consequence of sin, for all classes, from prince to peasant; all will endure punishment if sin is pursued. In another warning delivered to a congregation the churchgoer is reminded that to simply swear by Christ or blaspheme His

⁶⁷ Owst, 224. Owst uses sermons from John Bromyard's compilation, *Summa Predicantium*. Bromyard, an English Dominican, compiled the Mendicant sermons in England throughout the fourteenth century, and possibly earlier.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 293-4, emphasis original.

name may lead to the tragic end of a sinner by a sudden death.⁶⁹ The preacher instilled fear, suggesting to his congregants that time may not be on their side and that immediate repentance is required.

Fear was a practical and much used tactic for the medieval preacher. Owst notes that when preaching on the topic of hell, the medieval preacher abandoned the mundane illustrations he was obliged to relay, and instead delivered terrifying sermons with serious messages. Like the modern horror movie, sermons with dramatic and terrifying content kept viewers engaged and interested. Owst says that “if all else fails to carry the day,” the sermon on the horrors of hell certainly will not:

I know there is no man that levethe, if he would consider inwardly what pain is ordained for sins in hell, I know it would concern him greatly and completely amend [his behavior]...If there was a town built...full of nails long and sharp, the points being upward, and that all these nails were very hot...there is no man that would be rolled a mile in this town for all...of England. Yet this is a glimpse of [the pains of hell].⁷⁰

Medieval preaching was the most expansive method for the communication of doctrinal information, expectations and consequences between the church and the laity. Sermons were without doubt, the most important instrument used to educate the people on faith matters.⁷¹ They were however, not the sole means of propagation.

⁶⁹ Owst, 423.

⁷⁰ G.R. Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England* (Cambridge: University Press, 1926), 336-337. Translation by Dr. Candace Gregory-Abbott.

⁷¹ Arnold, 50.

MEDIEVAL RELIGIOUS DRAMA

While Owst suggests that the concept of the macabre pervaded medieval preaching, he also notes the influence the pulpit, including the theme of death, had on medieval drama. Historians have suggested that in the same manner that miracle plays developed from Liturgy, the same can be said for morality plays and medieval preaching.⁷² This is in part due to the dramatic elements of medieval preaching. Owst points out that while bards of the aristocracy sang the tragic deaths of heroes past and Latin poets created mournful verses for an equally limited audience, it was the preachers, speaking to large public masses of all social status, who declaimed stories of “universal calamity and decay,” teaching “ordinary men and women to see life as one continuous drama.”⁷³ The significance of medieval preaching’s impact on drama lies in the content of the plays. Before approaching content however, the development of medieval religious drama must first be examined.

The emergence of religious drama is first seen in the Liturgy of the tenth century. It is because the medieval mass was so dramatic itself that the line between ritual and theater is difficult to define.⁷⁴ As in the case of preaching, the transformation was gradual; from religious drama to the theatrical play cycles of the late Middle Ages. The Liturgy had theatrical qualities: singing, chanting, the celebration of the Eucharist delivered on a “stage,” the altar, which was raised above the audience. While key elements of theater existed in the Liturgy, the main difference is found in the worship, as opposed to entertainment or instruction. The shift in the tenth century, beginning with

⁷² Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*, 526.

⁷³ Ibid. , 533.

⁷⁴ Arnold, 65.

Amalarius, bishop of Metz, began with simple performances of the life of Christ, delivered to the church audience.⁷⁵ Amalarius was the first to really encourage this form of expression and excited crowds flocked to see the performance of the Eucharist, awed by the Host being raised in the air, changing into the body and blood of Christ. In a period where life was difficult and entertainment limited, the performance at the local parish, already the center of medieval life was enjoyed and valued.

The next stage of progression is reflected in the increasingly theatrical performances of the Easter celebration, and eventually Christmas celebration. Both Passion Week and Holy Week celebrated Christ with more intensity. Multiple performances over a week's time required more creativity by the clergy. These occasions allowed for the clergy to elaborate on dramatic methods without losing the veracity of the ritual. This contributed to the growth of Liturgical drama and eventually plays.⁷⁶ The clergy began "role-playing" but were committed to displaying only the truth about Christ when performing. Assuming the role as actor, the clergy encountered opposition by the more conservative members. There was also some hostility towards clerics performing outside of the church building; dramatizing part of the Liturgy was mildly acceptable, but plays external to the ritual mass were admonished.⁷⁷ Between the twelfth and early fourteenth centuries, there appears to be lull in the progression from Liturgical drama to theater; the conflict within the clergy may have contributed to the decrease in momentum. During his period, the clergy continued to experiment within the Liturgy, becoming more inventive, as well as expanding subject matter. In the twelfth century, there is evidence

⁷⁵ David Bevington, *Medieval Drama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975), 4.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 229.

of special plays extending beyond Easter and Christmas; plays depicting popular stories from the Bible, stories of the lives of saints, as well as plays about the Second Coming of Christ, the Last Judgment and the Antichrist, were often performed in the vernacular. This was a new experience for a lay audience who may have heard the stories of Adam and Eve or Noah, but had never seen them. This visual experience was a more effective means of conversion or instruction, but still the overall intention was to create works of worship and piety.⁷⁸ It was in the late fourteenth century however, that medieval drama finally emerged with the aim to educate the laity of doctrine and practice.

After the Black Death swept over Europe, faith in God and the church was weakened. It was during this depression that the English play cycles emerged. The Corpus Christi plays, Saint Plays and Morality plays were the culmination of a very slow transformation. David Bevington argues against the claim that the reason for the rapid growth of these plays was “secularization.” He points out that Liturgical drama did not simply outgrow the church mass, abandoning clerical influence to embrace civic control.⁷⁹ Rather, the church maintained its involvement, authoring and supporting the guild-produced plays. The content was still biblically based and required the knowledge of clerical scholars to be accurate. The guilds producing the plays were closely tied to the church. They also solved the problem of clerical actors by providing the cast for the performances. The emergence of plays in the vernacular does not imply that they became secular plays; it simply allowed for the guild actors to participate and the lay audiences to not only understand the message, but to interpret it. As Bevington highlights, Liturgical

⁷⁸ Bevington, 77.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 228.

drama excluded most of the plays that were included in the Corpus Christi cycles.

Although the Christmas and Easter performances were detailed and sophisticated, the mystery cycles included far more biblical stories, including illustrations of Lucifer, Christ's Temptation, and the Last Judgment.⁸⁰ The cycles however excluded many of the plays common to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the story of Daniel and stories of numerous saints. Liturgical drama was not a direct *source* for the civic performances of the late Middle Ages, but it was quite influential.

Liturgical drama certainly impacted the play cycles of the late medieval period, but the content of the plays support Owst's assertion that a primary influence derived from sermons. Preaching in itself is a performance; the content would translate easily to the play cycles. And while the plays maintained the integrity of the church, the content was intended for a lay audience. Owst emphasizes the importance of the macabre on the pulpit; the same can be said for medieval drama. The content used from medieval sermons to influence the plays is steeped in death. The plays depict the dramatic treatment of human life, relationships, and humanity; the common themes of man's greed, earthly wealth and desire, the emptiness of worldly friendships and the waning of familial care at death, all illustrate the anxiety related to mortality.⁸¹ There is more than warning and pessimism in the pulpit's approach and the plays representations of death, but a real sense of genuine tragedy; simply put, the medieval preacher is grieved by the

⁸⁰ Bevington, 228.

⁸¹ Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*, 528.

state of humanity.⁸² This grief was present in sermons, presented through dramas and thus, divulged to the laity.

The following two examples, both from the Wakefield Corpus Christi cycle, are typical in that they are performances about Christ. Instead of scenes from His life though, they both occur after His death. The first, the Harrowing of Hell,⁸³ is an apocryphal story, accepted in medieval Christianity because it answered an important question: what happened to the righteous souls before the time of Christ? It was Christ who ultimately atoned for the fall of mankind, therefore the Old Testament figures, even the patriarchs, underwent spiritual hardship in Limbo of the Fathers.⁸⁴ Limbo, deriving from *limbus*, meaning the outer edge of hell, was a temporary residence for the Old Testament figures, where they suffered from the absence of God, but not the physical and eternal torments of hell. Bevington suggests that Christ's deliverance of the souls in Limbo brings to conclusion a circle of events that began with Adam's fall.⁸⁵ It also concludes the struggle between Satan and Christ, until Satan would be released at the end of days. Satan is shown in contrast to the divine presence of Christ; the devil is a schemer, evil, and outwitted by his own plotting.⁸⁶ Jesus descends into Limbo and breaks open the gate to free God's people. He encounters Satan, rebukes him and they combat:

JESUS. Devil, I command thee to go down

Into thy seat where thou shalt sit! [*Satan physically is cast into hell*]

⁸² Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*, 527.

⁸³ The Harrowing of Hell comes from the Gospel of Nicodemus. It is apocryphal, but theologians to the following Scripture as possible sources: Acts 2:27, 31; 1 Peter 3:19-20; 1 Peter 4:5; Isaiah 24:21-22.

⁸⁴ Bevington, 594.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

SATAN. Alas, for fate and sorrow!

I sink into hell pit!⁸⁷

Jesus then leads his followers from Limbo and onto joy and eternal bliss. The struggle presented in the story is good against evil, with Christ always victorious.

Another important piece, not seen in Liturgical drama, was the performance of the Last Judgment. This too is a contrast between good and evil, but also emphasizes the ultimate consequence of sin, damnation. The play represented the completion of God's ultimate design. The play cycles often began with creation and concluded with God's final separation of the saved from the damned. The Last Judgment plays, similar to medieval art, offers satire and comedy; popes and bishops, kings and merchants, are all exposed in hell, with torments being inflicted in a humorous manner.⁸⁸ Jesus again confronts demons, but claims victory for those who He will lead to heaven.

JESUS [*to the good*]. My chosen children, come to me!

With me to dwell, now shall you go

Where joy and bliss ever shall be....

[*to the wicked*]. You cursed beings, from me you flee,

In hell to dwell without end!

There shall be nothing but sorrow,

And you will sit with Satan the fiend [*While Christ leads the good to*

heaven, the demons heard the wicked to hell like a team of animals].⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Bevington, 606. *The Harrowing of Hell* (Wakefield), lns. 356-360. My own translation.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 637.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 654. *The Last Judgment* (Wakefield), lns. 524-531.

Bevington notes that if this performance “gives more attention to the frightening comedy of evil than to the consoling harmonies of a restored heavenly grace, such obsession with death and damnation is typical...in late medieval Europe.”⁹⁰

The morality plays, a genre differing slightly from mysteries in their approach, also present the message of sin and damnation. Rather than showing a battle between Christ and Satan, the moralities show the struggle between good and evil abstractly, with a representative Christian dealing with everyday battles – Despair, Fear, Vice, contending with Hope and Faith, for example. The “cult of death” was manifest in these plays, developing from the inescapable presence of the Black Death in Europe.⁹¹ Death permeated all forms of medieval art because it so drastically permeated life. Historians debate over whether medieval society was truly obsessed with death; evidence from the methods used to reach them suggests they were.

PENITENTIAL CONFESSION

Preaching and drama were both a means to educate the lay populace in regards to church doctrine, practice, and faith. Both of these methods however, were quite public. They were experienced by large groups and the message was directed to a mass audience. The messages therefore were to a general audience, not specific to individuals. Fourth Lateran introduced another key element to the acculturation of medieval society – increased confession. Prior to the twelfth century, confession was more often public, meaning the penitent would offer contrition, confess, and their penance would be external – fasting, scourging, or a pilgrimage. These practices did not disappear in 1215, but as

⁹⁰Bevington, 637.

⁹¹ Ibid., 794. Bevington refers to the “cult of death” as the general preoccupation with death in late medieval thought.

the laity began to recognize a personal responsibility in their salvation, penance took on a private, inner-reflective purpose. Alain de Lille suggested that confession should not just be about the individual sins (though all mortal sins must be confessed at least once to avoid damnation), but that those confessing should also practice a more general confession. This was to cover the sins they were unaware of or even had forgotten. If they cannot understand the full meaning of their sin, better to have them confess over many possibilities and be protected.⁹² Whether the confession was public and general or private and introspective, they served the same purpose – penitential confession in life eliminates hell and reduces one's suffering in Purgatory, just as penitential suffering in Purgatory eliminates hell and secures salvation.

Little is known about private confessions because they were just that, private. The punishment for a confessor revealing confession was removal from office and possibly given penance, while confined in a monastery. What is known comes from sermon-stories that include tales of confession and confessor's manuals, or penitentials. Like the preacher's handbooks, penitentials provide for historians what was expected of confessors. The Anglo-Saxon Penitential is a compilation of documents in the vernacular. It includes with the penitential, confessional prayers, liturgies, homilies, law, and clerical letters.⁹³ It is an extensive list of sins, ranging from the smallest to the gravest, each with an associated penance. The manual also advises on penance for other clergymen. These penitentials reveal the severity of sin, as considered by the church. All sin was to be purged; if not in this life, than in death. The laity did have an understanding

⁹² Arnold, 174.

⁹³ Old English Penitential, Laud 482, Y41.03.00, *The Anglo-Saxon Penitential*, trans. Allen J. Frantzen, <http://www.anglo-saxon.net/penance/history.html>, accessed 14 September 2009.

of this. Yet some of the lay populace did not attend confession annually in preparation for Easter, as Fourth Lateran had requested. The simple answer to this is the human condition – fear, pride, shame. Some were certainly embarrassed to share their misdeeds with another individual. Fear of reprisal was especially present for women. Arnold tells of a woman who was evicted by her husband after her confessor informed him of her adultery.⁹⁴ There is also evidence of confessors taking advantage of the secrets female penitents shared, blackmailing them, seducing them or requiring sexual favors for silence. For the medieval woman, revealing her darkest secrets to a man of power would have most definitely been intimidating. Men too though experienced fear and shame and thus many lay folk awaited their deathbed for a final confession.

Illuminating evidence about the power of confession can also be seen in sermon-stories. As earlier discussed, these were often used as material for preachers. Some shed light on the importance of confessing as well. It was a popular medieval understanding that demons could physically attack individuals, and even possess the body. Confession was one means to releasing the physical grasp a demon held over a person. In the example at the beginning of the chapter, a demon's ability to reveal sin was removed by confession. Two more examples also reveal the power confession can yield over demons and the devil. The first by Étienne de Bourbon, tells of a demon assuming human form to tell the bishop of a clerk's grievous sins.⁹⁵ Fearful, the clerk made confession and when the devil rolled out his record of the clerk's sin, he found that all had been erased. The

⁹⁴ Arnold, 177.

⁹⁵ Étienne de Bourbon, "Tales of Confession: Through Confession the Devil's Record Blotted Out," *Anecdotes Historiques, Légendes et Apologues tirés du recueil inédit d'Etienne de Bourbon*, No. 176 (pp. 155-156), "Medieval Sermon Tales," <http://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/346serm.html>, accessed 14 September, 2009.

devil then vanished. Étienne then comments that the clerk privately narrated all the events to the bishop, thus securing his forgiveness.

Another story by Caesar of Heisterbach exposes the limitations of confession. He tells of a heretic that was condemned to be burnt. He was told, “Do penance and confess your sins, lest after the burning of the body, which is only momentary, hell-fire burns your soul eternally.”⁹⁶ The man complied and was released. Upon returning home, his wife told him he betrayed his faith and that he was to recant his confession. Caesar tells that God, aware of the man’s true crime, tortured the hand of the man and his wife and that the burn penetrated their bones and they were both cast into the fire and were burnt to ashes. This story suggests many things. It warns against heresy and the severe consequences of dissent; it reveals the power of the man’s confession, only to also depict an angry God, willing to inflict punishment on a man who ignored the divine favor bestowed. In a sermon, this would certainly strike fear into the audience and encourage them to attend their annual confession. Again, fear was often a motivating factor, employed by the church. Arnold posits that “the sense of external threat may have been strengthened by the various late medieval depictions of hell.”⁹⁷ Preaching, drama, the implied severity of confession, all sought the same result – the lay response of a desperate need for Christ and salvation.

MEDIEVAL TEXTS

A stereotype exists that suggests religious textual resources were wholly reserved for the church. This cannot be entirely true. It is true that texts in Latin were rare for lay

⁹⁶ Caesar of Heisterbach, “Tales of Confession: A Heretic Healed by Confession Relapsed and was Burnt,” *Dist. III*, Cap. XVII. (Vol. II pp. 133-134), accessed 14 September 2009.

⁹⁷ Arnold, 155.

use because of illiteracy. There were however, some Bibles available in the late Middle Ages. The Vernacular Bible was not available until the fifteenth century, but there are earlier examples of translations of religious texts in the vernacular. The number of individuals that owned books increased dramatically between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, as paper became more readily available and thus books were less expensive.⁹⁸ Arnold links the translations of religious texts in the later period with the increasing enthusiasm of the laity.⁹⁹ Additional religious texts, stories of martyrs, saints' lives, miracle stories, and pilgrimage guides, all contributed to textual resources available to an eager lay audience. There is even some evidence of literate clergymen reading to their illiterate parishioners.¹⁰⁰ Various sermon-stories have also been found to be in the possession of the lay class. In the High Middle Ages, these texts were primarily owned by the nobility. In the late medieval period however, ownership extended to the bourgeoisie mercantile class as well. This is very important to the discussion in the following chapter, regarding the Holkham Bible. This manuscript is an illuminated Bible, written in the vernacular of fourteenth century Anglo-Norman England, in Old French. It is unique in its production, but like the methods of acculturation discussed in this chapter – preaching, drama, and penance – it too emphasizes the reality of a populace desperately clutching to the promise of salvation and avoidance of damnation.

⁹⁸ Arnold, 58.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. Arnold discusses the experiences of Margery Kempe and her many efforts to increase her spiritual knowledge.

Chapter 3 THE HOLKHAM BIBLE: A FOURTEENTH CENTURY MANUSCRIPT

Textual sources were scant among the laity in the late Middle Ages. Historians agree on this point, but are unable to solidify just how rare books were among popular society. The Holkham Bible¹⁰¹ is one example that clearly reveals the lay class had at least occasional access to written religious materials. As a mode of dissemination facilitated by the church, texts certainly would have been a weak effort considering the rate of literacy. The Holkham Bible however, was not produced by the church. It was possibly administered by the church, a point that will be examined shortly, but it was undoubtedly created by a lay artist, quite possibly more than one.

The Holkham Bible is thus not only unique because it belongs to the rarest category of instructional tools, but also because it is an anomaly within said category. In either case, it served the same purpose – to represent doctrine to a lay audience. This chapter will examine this extraordinary manuscript and just a few of its many images. Who created and why? How was it of use to the laity in late medieval England? Why are the text and images so unique? Additionally, this chapter will continue to look at the lay understanding of death and damnation, in this case as learned from the Holkham Bible. These questions will be considered, keeping in mind that like the other methods discussed in the previous chapter, texts, in this case one with over 230 images, underwent a transformation as well.

Preaching, penance, drama, all determined to have gradually transformed in the late medieval period. Europe was evolving and the church with it. It is reasonable to

¹⁰¹ Here also referred to as *Holkham*.

assume that its methods of representation evolved as well, including books. Books of all types were in increasing demand. One distinct characteristic about the Holkham Bible is that it contains far more images than text. For Holkham, the artist was significantly more regarded than the textator. This will be closely examined later in the chapter, but in regards to the production of books in the late Middle Ages, it is relevant.

Beginning in the fourteenth century, the sphere of the artist shifted; it became public, a performance in the streets, rather than one locked away in a monastery. The artist, really a skilled artisan at this time, became prominent and respected. Artisans were often commissioned in advance by wealthy patrons. Books were in high demand: formal liturgical books for mass and divine office; portable breviaries and pocket Bibles for the religious orders; universities required textbooks; tomes for the Church Fathers and the philosophies for the college libraries; students began to want their own copies of books; and noble families desired personal books for pleasure and prestige, illuminated romances and histories.¹⁰² All were desired and requested from the artisan.¹⁰³ Found in a mortuary roll, the following statement reveals the true value of texts:

Man's flesh is viler than the skin of sheep.

When sheep are dead, their skin still has some use,

For it is pulled and writ upon, both sides.

But with man's death, both flesh and bones are dead.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Michael Camille, *Master of Death: The Lifeless Art of Pierre Remiet, Illuminator* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 25.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 26-27.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. Translated by Michael Camille from *Rouleaux des morts du IX au XVe siècle recueils et publiés pour la Société de l'histoire de France* (Paris 1866).

THE HOLKHAM BIBLE: INTRODUCTION TO THE MANUSCRIPT

The Holkham Bible is an excellent piece of evidence for study because it provides various elements to be examined: images, text, doctrinal and apocryphal content, style, use of color, theme, and the list can go on.¹⁰⁵ It reveals a wealth of information about late medieval England, some of which will be analyzed here. With such little work being done on Holkham, historians generally agree on the historical context in which the book was created. Discussions on the meaning, purpose, and function of the book have been touched on, but little has been solidly confirmed.

Holkham was created in the early fourteenth century, around 1327 in London. Historians offer numerous pieces of evidence to support this date and location. Michelle P. Brown, editor of a recent facsimile reproduction, states that there are clues suggesting the political environment at which the book was created. Lady Fortune is depicted as a queen standing center and turning her wheel of fortune. She has a king on either side, above her and below her. Brown suggests a possible allusion to Queen Isabella.

Disrupting the political stability of England, Isabella deposed her husband, Edward II, with her lover Mortimer in 1327. It is also speculated that Mortimer arranged the murder

¹⁰⁵ It is important to note that previous study of the Holkham Bible has been quite limited. This is one reason it is such a fascinating piece to study. Four serious examinations have been conducted on the manuscript, each building upon the other. None however, thoroughly examine the individual images beyond the context of the image, for example the image of God creating the universe follows with simple explanation of what the image literally represents. The first study is by M.R. James, "An English Bible Picture-Book of the Fourteenth Century (Holkham MS 666)," *The Walpole Society*, II (1922-1923), pp. 1-27, pls 1-19. James gives a basic introductory synopsis, providing some background information and limited commentary. W.O. Hassall's, *The Holkham Bible Picture Book* (1954) provides a much more detailed examination of the manuscript. He draws much attention to the merchant class, a point that will be further examined in this chapter. In *The Anglo-Norman Text of the Holkham Bible Picture Book*, Anglo Norman Text Society 23 (1971), F.P. Pickering looks solely at the text of the manuscript. He suggests that although Holkham focuses on the use of images, the text is an important work to be studied in its own right. The final and most recent study, completed in 2007 by Michelle P. Brown of the British Library, *The Holkham Bible: A Facsimile*, offers a complete version of the manuscript in color. She provides a detailed commentary, again on the book as a whole with brief explanation of the images and text.

of the king. If the story were true, the images may mean the following: the deceased Edward I, without a crown, is under the queen's feet; Edward II falling, his crown and scepter being thrown aside to her left; Mortimer, or possibly Edward III, her son, at the apex; and either Edward III or his heir, ascending, to her right. This follows the text: "I shall reign, I reign, I reigned, I am without a kingdom."¹⁰⁶ Other stylistic elements also support the dating; similarities to the Luttrell Psalter (ca. 1330), hairstyles seen in sculptures of this period among the royalty, and some visual suggestions to Thomas of Lancaster, executed in 1322 for rising against Edward II.¹⁰⁷ The purpose intended for Holkham among the laity will be discussed shortly; it will be important to recall that the political volatility during this period contributed to the everyday life and thought of medieval man.

Holkham opens with an image of an artist, wearing a layman's cap to distinguish him from a clergyman. He is seen looking over his shoulder to a Dominican friar standing over him, an authority figure in stance and detail. Part of the inscription on the opening page reads: "In this book are portrayed many miracles that God has made...how Jesus was born...his Passion...and his Resurrection. And of how he suffered death... Those who believe in Him will know joy."¹⁰⁸ Upon first looking at this opening page, one might assume that a friar of the Dominican order commissioned or supervised the production of the manuscript. This is likely, however, Brown points out that there are

¹⁰⁶Michelle P. Brown, *The Holkham Bible: A Facsimile* (London: The British Library, 2007), 31; fol. 1v.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 30.

some irregularities in the interpretation of the chosen scenes.¹⁰⁹ This, along with an atypical selection of images, including apocryphal scenes from Jesus' childhood and the death of Cain, may suggest that a clergyman did not oversee the work.¹¹⁰ It at the very least suggests that whoever supplied the captions or transcribed the text was not highly literate or theologically learned.

Historian W.O. Hassall suggests that the artist, textator, and colorist were different craftsmen. He suggests that the employment of a colorist to complete the pictures and a separate scribe to complete the captions shows that the artist's was the chief skill sought.¹¹¹ The artist was likely allotted the most time to complete his task. F.P. Pickering agrees that the artist and the textator were undoubtedly different men.¹¹² He states, "The text does not describe the pictures in anything approaching the detail which the art historian would wish. It tells us, on the other hand, more about the themes as these were apprehended by the contemporary textator, possibly indeed by all members of the group of workers involved."¹¹³ The textator may have simply been unfamiliar with some stories. The popular stories however do have detailed and accurate commentary according to doctrine. It is clear that the artist's intention was to portray as accurately as he could, his understanding of the valued stories of doctrine and moral standards.

¹⁰⁹ Some examples: the ark is stated as 100 cubits long, instead of 300; the time between Adam and the flood is incorrect, possibly an error in transcription; and that Enoch, rather than Enos was the father of Cainan.

¹¹⁰ The historians that have worked on Holkham all mention the odd choice of scenes used and those not used. Typical stories, such as the raising of Lazarus and popular stories from Christ's ministry are missing, while apocryphal stories of his childhood are included.

¹¹¹ W.O. Hassall, *The Holkham Bible Picture Book* (London: Dropmore Press, 1954), 11.

¹¹² F.P. Pickering, "The Anglo-Norman Text of the Holkham Bible Picture Book," *Anglo-Norman Texts XXIII* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), ix.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, xi.

THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY ARTIST

Hassall suggests that Holkham is a precursor to Chaucer, representing the commonplace of medieval society.¹¹⁴ Brown too, states that Holkham represents the artist's take on contemporary culture. Who then is the artist or artisan of the Holkham Bible? Most, when thinking of the Middle Ages, envision the great cathedrals, the stained-glass windows, sculptures, murals, paintings, embroideries, and more. The medieval period was a time full of artistic representation. Art historian Enrico Castelnovo suggests that the medieval artist was quite different than those that preceded and followed him. The Romans and great artists of the Renaissance shared something the medieval artist did not, identity. Castelnovo argues that anonymity was unique to the medieval period, with humility overcoming pride and ambiguity removing fame and notoriety.¹¹⁵ The church's influence upon society may have contributed to this. With pride as a cardinal sin, even a great artist would avoid it. Not only were his works ambiguous, his role in society was undefined as well. The artist had yet to achieve a specified profession or status. Like all forms of expression in medieval Europe, this model did evolve. In the late medieval period, artists began to be recognized for their works. This became fully realized in the early Renaissance.

The artist of Holkham however remains anonymous. He produced the book during a time when anonymity was still part of the formula, and since it was possibly commissioned by a clergyman, he had little hope at gaining notoriety from the work.

Historians do believe however, that he left subtle clues within the images as to his

¹¹⁴ Hassall, 47.

¹¹⁵ Enrico Castelnovo, "The Artist," in Jacques Le Goff, ed., Lydia G. Cochrane, trans., *Medieval Callings* (The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 211-212.

identity. Hassall speculates that the author may have been named John due to the emphasis in the book on John the Baptist. Brown takes this further, stating that the author drew a self-portrait in a scene with John the Baptist. The same portrait can also be found in another image where the artist is hiding behind five men, suggesting the surname “Fifthide.” She says there was indeed a John Fifthide living in London at the time Holkham was made.¹¹⁶ John’s occupation as a draper lends her to believe this man was the artist, suggesting that the elements of the images often appear similar in design to textiles or embroidery.¹¹⁷ M.R. James also suggests the artist may have been unaccustomed to painting in books, noting that the color was applied in a similar manner to draperies, in which he may have been quite skilled.¹¹⁸

HOLKHAM’S SOURCES AND INFLUENCES

After the images were drawn and then colored, the manuscript was given to the scribe to insert the captions. A number of things are learned from the text: the knowledge of the scribe, the sources for the commentary, and the audience the book was intended for. As Brown pointed out, the errors in the interpretation of some of the images suggests that a scholar did not oversee the work. The incorrect statement that *Messiah* means God in Hebrew (fol. 21) suggests that the textator was likely not educated. Hassall suggests he may have been only transcribing and not composing the commentary.¹¹⁹ The

¹¹⁶ Brown, 19. She notes that this is just speculation. There were a number of other Johns living in London at this time, assuming the artist was in his twenties or thirties, all of whom could have produced the book.

¹¹⁷ From an interview with Michelle P. Brown titled, “Michelle P. Brown talks about the Holkham Bible. Available online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8t83rliPuFU>, accessed 23 September, 2009.

¹¹⁸ M.R. James, “An English Bible-Picture Book of the Fourteenth Century,” *The Eleventh Volume of the Walpole Society* (Oxford, 1923), 2.

¹¹⁹ Hassall, 18.

sources used for the commentary clearly require some level of education, further supporting the scribe's task solely as transcription.

In the mid-thirteenth century, Guiart des Moulins translated what would be the most read French Bible in the Middle Ages. He translated and compiled numerous summaries from the Vulgate Bible, with additional commentaries and glosses, and Peter Comestor's twelfth century sacred history, *Historia Scholastica*.¹²⁰ Pickering suggests, contrary to Hassall, that the influence of this translation, called the *Bible Historiale*, suggests that the assistance of a learned cleric is likely.¹²¹ At the very least, someone with a knowledge that extended beyond the memory of oral tales was involved. Holkham does at times follow very closely with Comestor's work, but deviates as well. Holkham draws from all of the methods used by the church to reach the laity; it contains evidence from sermons, religious drama, and other works of art. Where most medieval Bibles were produced by religious scholars, Holkham is a perfect example of lay craftsmen utilizing their knowledge of doctrine. Their comprehension of this information, given to them by the church through the various methods mentioned, is represented in the work.

Religious drama is one example of the additional influences upon Holkham. It is seen throughout the manuscript in various ways. Holkham was produced during the period where the Liturgy was expanding in content and performance. The height in popularity of the mystery play cycles historically follows Holkham, yet it may also be one of the earliest indications of the English plays to come. Hassall notes:

¹²⁰ Guiart des Moulins, *Bible Historiale*, The Getty Museum Online, <http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artObjectDetails?artobj=1715>, accessed 25 September 2009.

¹²¹ Pickering, *xviii*.

The fundamental thematic unity of the whole composition in which anti-types are not arranged schematically opposite their types in the moralising manner which was frequent in medieval art but comes in their proper historical sequence where they are imbued with the force of dramatic irony.¹²²

The influence of religious drama is also seen in the script, resembling stage direction and the interludes of comic relief, seen in the apocryphal stories. James notes the presence of two additions in the Holkham manuscript that are also present in the York cycle mystery plays: the stretching of Christ's limbs when He is nailed to the cross¹²³ and the binding of Mary's kerchief to her Son's body revealing her bare head (fig. 2).¹²⁴

Brown argues that the presence of dramatic influence is "palpable," apparent in the captions and speech bubbles that often communicate the sense of a narrator and performers.¹²⁵ This is reinforced by the numeric and alphabetic additions used to signify the order of speech in some scenes, such as the conversation between Jesus and the devil (fol. 11v). With liturgical drama flourishing in London at this time, it is likely the artists would have been familiar with many of the scenes in Holkham. Brown suggests that for historians, Holkham is the closest they can get to a visual record of the mystery play cycles

¹²² Hassall, 34.

¹²³ Fol. 31v

¹²⁴ James, 6; Holkham fol. 32v. These additions are drawn from The Dialogue of Saint Anselm, as referenced by Brown, *Dialogus S. Anselmi cum B.V. Maria*, *Patrologia Latina*, 159, pp.272ff.

¹²⁵ Brown, 22.

performed in late medieval London.¹²⁶ The most significant evidence supporting this is seen in the visual references to various trades, possibly an identification for guild members as to what their responsibilities were for performing specific sections in the drama. As mentioned, the emphasis on trade and the merchant class in Holkham is important in understanding the intended audience.

LANGUAGE AND AUDIENCE OF HOLKHAM

The language used for the commentary in Holkham suggests it was intended for a lay audience; however, even this is anomalous. The laity was preached to in the English Vernacular and the clergy performed in Latin. Holkham was transcribed in Anglo-Norman French, with an occasional use of Latin and only one reference in the English Vernacular, accompanying the image of the Shepherds (fol. 13). The use of this language is significant because it is the language of the upper-class laity. James, Hassall and Brown are quick to point out that Holkham was not intended for the nobility, evidenced by the lack of heraldry and the use of vernacular sources for some of the images.¹²⁷ The intended audience to receive Holkham was likely wealthy craftsmen and merchants.

Historian Aron Gurevich argues that prior to the thirteenth century the merchant was a pariah among medieval society.¹²⁸ The fact that he acquired merchandise at one price and sold it to make a profit was seen as dishonest and unjust by the church. Sermons, often used as a platform for social commentary, condemned anyone who strayed from the strict principles of Christian ethics. The church claimed that the sin of

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ James, 3; Hassall, 31; Brown, 4.

¹²⁸ Aron Ja. Gurevich, "The Merchant," in *Medieval Callings*, 247.

the merchant crept into the business of buying and selling. Beginning in the thirteenth century however, the church was forced to change their narrow opinion. As the mendicant orders began to relocate from the country to the city, the clergy embraced their need of commerce, while maintaining their prejudice towards it.¹²⁹ To counter their loose acceptance of business, the new orders challenged the wealthy to recognize that while a part of the Earthly Kingdom, only those who denied accumulation and greed would be accepted into the Heavenly Kingdom. The Holkham Bible may have been one attempt the church instigated to remind this social class of their dire need for salvation.¹³⁰

Whether the book was initiated by a wealthy merchant seeking a book for private study, or if the book was commissioned by a cleric, the individual was aware that the most effective means to educate this level of society was to create a book using language and images they would understand. With that, the scenes emphasize skilled workers and their use of tools; the hard-working men would have appreciated the technical accuracy in which their tools are depicted. Holkham appeals to variety of positions, including: a carpenter,¹³¹ lawyer,¹³² fisherman,¹³³ smith,¹³⁴ midwife,¹³⁵ collector,¹³⁶ and a pilgrim¹³⁷ with occupations such as ploughing and reaping, wood cutting, and wine pressing.

Continuing his claim that Holkham had the same appeal as Chaucer's tale of genuine people, Hassall suggests Holkham represents medieval life and work in England, where

¹²⁹ Ibid., 248.

¹³⁰ It may also be argued that this was another attempt by the church to control lay practice and livelihood.

¹³¹ Fol. 31.

¹³² Fol. 23v.

¹³³ Foll. 22, 37.

¹³⁴ Fol. 31.

¹³⁵ Fol. 20v.

¹³⁶ Fol. 25.

¹³⁷ Fol. 36.

all the phases are crowded together, joy and sorrow, youth and death, where “the theme throughout is man’s salvation.”¹³⁸

Furthermore, Hassall points out that the merchant class was prosperous and would not have been offended by the apparent class division in folio 40. The image reveals the common anxiety regarding the End Times and the return of Christ. The inscription reads: “How the great folk will battle against themselves on Judgment Day, through pride [and] envy...How the common folk will all rise against one another...through power-lust.”¹³⁹ The language, consistent thematic elements appealing to skilled craftsmen, and the previously mentioned connection to the civic play cycles produced by guilds, all support the claim that Holkham was intended to reach a lay audience; not quite nobility, but also not the peasant’s lower-class. They were comfortably educated and able to interpret the doctrine and moral lessons represented in the images.

IMAGES OF HOLKHAM: DEATH AND DAMNATION

The following section will examine four images from Holkham – the suicide of Judas, the Crucifixion, the Harrowing of Hell, and the Last Judgment – and the artist’s representation of doctrine and morality as pertaining to death and damnation. These topics were central to many sermons, dramas, and art of the late medieval period. Owst’s assertion that preachers would draw the attention of parishioners with a sermon on the horrors of hell applies to the depictions in Holkham as well. The scenes emphasize a

¹³⁸ Hassall, 32.

¹³⁹ Brown, 86; fol. 40.

veristic¹⁴⁰ portrayal of death and show the suffering of Christ in a manner that may have been shocking to viewers. Brown suggests,

The viewer becomes totally absorbed and identifies with both the victim-hero and with the other characters whom he loves and saves; he or she is thereby encouraged to become more Christ-like and is brought to a recognition of the full enormity of the personal need for salvation, and of what it has cost the Redeemer to achieve.¹⁴¹

Each image, although differing in the context of death, sought to impart the same message to the audience of Holkham – their desperate need for salvation.

THE DEATH OF JUDAS

During the Middle Ages, the representation of Judas' betrayal and suicide reached its apex. The image became popular and widely used by artists, playwrights, and preachers. With sin, punishment, and death central themes in medieval thought, authors and artists used the story of Judas and his betrayal as the ultimate example of sin and its consequence. Judas became the arch-sinner, the epitome of the unrepentant damned. In the early Middle Ages, the image of Judas was often depicted juxtaposed with the Passion scenes, emphasizing the dichotomy between the perfection of Christ and the fate of mankind without Him. In the late medieval period, the image of Judas was removed from the side of Jesus and was instead separated, transforming the image into a

¹⁴⁰ The theory that a rigid representation of truth and reality is essential to art and literature, and therefore the ugly and vulgar must be included.

¹⁴¹ Brown, 2.

representation of isolation and despair.¹⁴² In Holkham, he is the personification of vice, sin, and betrayal. Judas is not juxtaposed with a crucifixion scene, revealing an interesting possibility for interpretation. What would have the lay middle-class of late medieval England thought of the image of Judas hanging from a tree, disemboweled?

The artist of Holkham was familiar with the typical depictions of Judas (fig. 1).¹⁴³ He included Judas returning the silver to the Jewish elders, his face turned away in shame. Judas holds his hand to his face, possibly a motion to cover his expression of regret and disgrace. From this scene, the emotion that leads Judas to take his life is undoubtedly remorse and despair. This image also relays the widespread anti-Jewish sentiment in late medieval England. With the edict by Edward I expelling the Jews passed less than thirty years before Holkham was produced, anti-Semitism was rife in London. According to fifth century theologian Arator, the thirty coins came to represent a symbol of Jewish failure.¹⁴⁴ The Jews depicted in the scene are deformed, with animalistic features and distorted and exaggerated hands. Brown suggests that elsewhere in Holkham, the “prejudices of a metropolitan populace of the day pervade the book in its reference to ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Jews.”¹⁴⁵ This may be a reflection of society or simply the artist’s own prejudice.

The image then shows Judas clutching to the rope around his neck, possibly hinting at a last-minute change of mind. It is less complicated to imagine Judas as a repentant man than a faithless betrayer. Nonetheless, he rejected Christ and damned

¹⁴² Norbert Schnitzler, “Judas’ Death: Some Remarks Concerning the Iconography of Suicide in the Middle Ages,” *The Medieval History Journal* 3 (April 2000): 106.

¹⁴³ Fol. 30.

¹⁴⁴ Schnitzler, 105.

¹⁴⁵ Brown, 2.

himself for eternity. Many medieval depictions, Holkham included, show both accounts of the manner in which Judas died. Matthew tells of his hanging and Luke describes his fall and disembowelment.¹⁴⁶ The gospel account of Luke is careful to align Judas and Satan, giving Jesus both a demonic and human adversary. Satan works through Judas, compelling him to betray Christ (Luke 22:3-6) confirming that Jesus cannot be defeated by just a human. Although it may appear that Luke is lessening Judas' responsibility, he is adamant that Judas is deserving of his punishment, even though he was aided by the devil.¹⁴⁷ This punishment is clearly reflected in Holkham. Judas is seen completely disemboweled, his soul, small, naked, and bound, being carried away by the devil. His expression is Norbert Schnitzler notes that in Jacob de Voragine's, *Legenda Aurea*,¹⁴⁸ it is said that Judas' soul was taken from his body through his bowels because his throat was strangled and his mouth was sealed because of the kiss he laid on Jesus' cheek.¹⁴⁹ In Holkham, a slight variation is shown. Judas' soul is removed through his bowels, but instead of his mouth being sealed, the inscription tells that his tongue was carried off, not to perish because it touched the mouth of God. This may indicate the Judas did repent, but because he committed suicide, according to medieval Christian doctrine, he was still damned. It may also suggest agreement with the *Legenda Aurea*, that Judas' mouth was unable to release his soul because it encountered God and his soul will not. In either case, the message of his punishment was clear to any viewer.

¹⁴⁶ Matthew 27:1-5 and Acts 1:16-20.

¹⁴⁷ Kim Paffenroth, *Judas: Images of the Lost Disciple* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2001), 21.

¹⁴⁸ The Golden Legend.

¹⁴⁹ Schnitzler, 107, 109.



Figure 1

Judas returns the thirty pieces of silver; the death of Judas; Christ before Pilate and before Herod,
The Holkham Bible, f. 30

The last point to be made regarding this image is its juxtaposition with another image – not Christ’s crucifixion, but his trial. A common theme among images of Judas is a court scene. Subsequent to the death of Judas, Holkham’s next scene shows the Jewish authorities bringing Jesus before Pilate, who passes them on to the judgment of Herod. The images were meant to invoke feelings of justice; while Christ was unjustly tried by Herod, ultimately being sentenced to death, Judas was deserving of his death, even though he never faced a court.¹⁵⁰ The underlying message to the audience being that Christ conquers all worldly authorities, while Judas will suffer eternally for betraying divine authority.

THE CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST

The death of Christ is without doubt one of the most widely used depictions in the Middle Ages. In a single image, the significance of Christianity is revealed. The image of the crucified Christ was not always one of agony and sorrow. In Ellen M. Ross’ extensive study on the image of the Suffering Christ, she begins by acknowledging that between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, theological texts increased in their examination of the nature and effects of Christ’s Crucifixion.¹⁵¹ In the work, Ross argues a number of points that are relevant to the study of Holkham. First, she suggests that the “search for the meaning of piety was an attempt to comprehend the mercy of the Divine manifest in the suffering of Jesus Christ.”¹⁵² The medieval Christian sought to reconcile

¹⁵⁰ Schnitzler notes that later in the Middle Ages, gallows substituted the hanging tree, further suggesting the justified punishment of the criminal Judas, 118.

¹⁵¹ Ellen M. Ross, *The Grief of God: Images of the Suffering Jesus in Late Medieval England* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 3.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 5.

the difficult truth that a God of unimaginable power would take human form and die for mankind: “I say boldly that there have been thousands of people that could not imagine in their heart how Christ was done on the cross, but like I, learned it from seeing images of [Him by] painters.”¹⁵³ The medieval artist portrayed the perfection of Christ, revealing the mercy of God as tangible and possible.

Ross continues with the suggestion that crucifixion scenes were meant to flood the viewers’ senses with intense portrayals of anguish to evoke a significant response.¹⁵⁴ She states that “empathetic reflection was a cornerstone of medieval religious life: in sermons, drama, art, and literature, the suffering Jesus invited medieval Christians to remember actively the events of his death...to weep and mourn in imitation of his first-century followers.”¹⁵⁵ Christ’s bleeding body was intended to stir up feelings of compassion and sorrow. These emotions remind believers of the culpability of their sins, for which Christ was sacrificed to absolve. Ross supposes that the medieval believer desired a personal experience with the Divine and that through recognition of their own sin for which Christ suffered, they would seek absolution.¹⁵⁶

Holkham is not unique in its attempt to portray Christ’s death; it includes the typical iconographies of medieval crucifixion scenes, as well as showing Christ in a gruesome and literal manner. It is however, special in the elaborate detail of the crucifixion scene and its adherence to Scripture. Pickering notes that Holkham does not require “any fundamental revision of our ideas concerning devotional life, art, and

¹⁵³ Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*, 146. My own translation.

¹⁵⁴ Ross, 6.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 7.

literature in the late Middle Ages, for it is, in a way, freakish.”¹⁵⁷ He continues stating that Holkham is a late example of a return to a very literal and historical representation of Scripture. This devotion to Scripture is best represented in the crucifixion scene.

The Holkham Bible has not one, but three crucifixion scenes, a clear allusion to the Trinity.¹⁵⁸ The artist uses this scene as the center and apex of the manuscript, clearly revealing his desire to emphasize the sacrifice Christ accepted for all mankind. Each scene provides great detail in imagery and the story of Jesus’ death. The intention of the artist was to portray the agony and suffering of Christ on the Cross. The first image, entitled, “The Crucifixion,” (fig. 2) depicts Christ on a green painted cross, symbolizing the living wood of the tree of life.¹⁵⁹ Ross suggests that a common iconographical detail such as the Living Tree reveals to the viewer, the reality of Jesus’ divine presence, making tangible the doctrine that claimed God became human.¹⁶⁰ Additional elements are included, strictly following Scripture: a bearer lifts a sponge of hyssop dipped in vinegar to Christ’s mouth, as he is taunted by the nearby crowd;¹⁶¹ on each side of Christ are the two thieves, one bluish in color, looks away from Christ in anguish, while the other looks upon Him and asks to join Him in Heaven;¹⁶² below Christ, are John the

¹⁵⁷ Pickering, *xvii*.

¹⁵⁸ The structure of Holkham also alludes to a Trinitarian theme. The book is divided in three parts: Creation through the Flood, the Ministry and Resurrection of Christ, and the Last Judgment.

¹⁵⁹ Brown, 77; Holkham fol. 32.

¹⁶⁰ Ross, 6. Ross notes that the Crucifixion is also alluded to in an early image in Holkham, “The Creation” (fol. 3v). In the image, God, along with Adam and Eve, points to the Tree of Life, making clear the viewer does not miss the message: whereas the other trees in the garden have a single bird atop them, the central tree has a pelican, pecking at itself so its blood flows into the mouths of the chicks nesting below. The artist is making a point to acknowledge the promise of Christ from the beginning of time. Ross, 50.

¹⁶¹ John 19:29.

¹⁶² Luke 23:39-41.

Evangelist and the three Marys, they stand grieving and in supplication.¹⁶³ Above Christ is the *titulus* tablet reading, *Ihesus Nazarenus rex iudeorum*.¹⁶⁴

The second and third scenes in Holkham's Crucifixion story also include the typical details. In figure 2, Christ is seen looking towards the sky in agony, as He gives up his Spirit; the sun and moon are eclipsed.¹⁶⁵ The two thieves' legs are broken by soldiers; the bad thief is in great distress as he denies Christ, while the good thief is sustained by fixing his gaze on Him.¹⁶⁶ The Virgin has removed her headscarf and is wrapping Jesus in it, leaving her head bare. The inscription reads: "How the mother of Jesus wrapped her headscarf around his limbs."¹⁶⁷ Jesus is depicted in this image scourged, broken, bleeding, his bruised body intending to make the viewer cringe. Ross suggests that the bleeding flesh of Jesus functions to convey his healing power, a popular belief in medieval Christianity.¹⁶⁸ The presence of Longinus in the scene is intended to demonstrate "the miraculous powers of the suffering and dying Jesus."¹⁶⁹ Longinus, the blind soldier who thrust the spear into the side of Christ, only to have his sight returned when Jesus' blood fell on him, is depicted below Christ, the blood dripping down the length of his spear.¹⁷⁰ The image reflects both the literal healing of the soldier's loss of sight, as well as the allegorical healing of his spiritual blindness.¹⁷¹ The viewer is meant to be reminded of the power of Christ's death.

¹⁶³ John 19:25.

¹⁶⁴ Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.

¹⁶⁵ Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44-45.

¹⁶⁶ Brown, 77-78; John 19:32.

¹⁶⁷ Holkham, fol. 32v. This is found in the *Meditations* by Bonaventura.

¹⁶⁸ Ross, 51.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ John 19:34-37.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 52.

The final element in the second scene of Christ's death is the figure under the Cross, collecting the blood of Christ in a chalice. The image may have intended to direct the audience towards the Sacraments; a plausible notion if the work was indeed commissioned by a cleric. Medieval manuscripts often contained images leading viewers toward confession and the Eucharist.¹⁷² Ross emphasizes the connection between Jesus' body and his divine presence.¹⁷³ The chalice of Christ's blood may represent the source of the Eucharistic wine, bringing the Crucifixion of Christ to the center of the liturgical ritual, reinforcing the power the practice held. Ross points out that this figure is often depicted as Adam and less often as Mary. Historians of Holkham have differed in this assertion; James suggests the image is of a young Adam, while Brown believes the image to be a woman, with loose flowing hair, possibly Mary Magdalene.¹⁷⁴

The chalice depicted below Christ may be of particular importance for an image produced in medieval England. In figure 3, Christ's limp body is removed from the cross by Nicodemus, with St John and the three Marys at his side.¹⁷⁵ An elderly man at the bottom of the page is labeled 'Joseph' – unlikely his father, since his father was said to be dead long before this. The elderly Joseph is different in appearance to that of Joseph of Arimathea, who is seen in the bottom corner, beseeching Pilate for permission to bury Christ.¹⁷⁶ Brown notes that Joseph of Arimathea was of particular importance in Britain, for he was credited with bringing the Grail – the chalice used at the Last Supper and to collect Christ's blood at the Crucifixion – to Glastonbury. Legend in London even

¹⁷² Ibid, 48.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 49.

¹⁷⁴ James, 23; Brown, 78.

¹⁷⁵ Holkham, fol. 33.

¹⁷⁶ John 19:38.

suggested that he brought the Cross itself to Britain, erecting it at Caerleon in South Wales, where it floated away and was discovered in the Thames and erected as the Rood of the North Door at St. Paul's Cathedral.¹⁷⁷ Whether the chalice is meant to evoke pride from this legend or instill a desire to repent and partake in the Eucharist, Holkham's Crucifixion scenes portrayed the human frailty of Christ at his death in contrast to the unsurpassable power of His divinity.

THE HARROWING OF HELL: CHRIST'S DESCENT INTO LIMBO

In chapter two, the Harrowing of Hell was introduced as part of the mystery cycles in late medieval England. The tradition of this story begins earlier in medieval art. The Harrowing of Hell is a dramatization of the promise of resurrection, emphasizing two central themes: Christ's liberation of the righteous souls, including Adam and Eve; and Christ's defeat over Satan and Hell.¹⁷⁸ The typical Harrowing iconography includes: Christ, fully bearded, wearing a long robe; He holds the *vexillum* or banned cross-staff in his right hand as a sign of triumph while he stands upon the prostrate Satan. Christ's "left foot rests on the devil's head to fulfill the prophecy of Genesis 3:15 that the seed of Eve would bruise the head of the serpent, a typology that is reinforced as he takes the First Man by the hand and becomes the Second Adam undoing the sin of the first."¹⁷⁹ For the medieval viewer, he would have seen a victorious Christ, rescuing lost souls and conquering death; offering the hope of redemption and resurrection. Christian theologians examined this account, considering its validity. Ambrose and Augustine were both firm

¹⁷⁷ Brown, 78.

¹⁷⁸ Christ's descent to hell is vaguely found in Matthew 27:52-53 and 1 Peter 3:19-20, and primarily comes from the Gospel of Nicodemus.

¹⁷⁹ Karl Tamburr, *The Harrowing of Hell in Medieval England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2007), 14.

in the veracity of Christ's descent. The Descent as doctrine provided for the medieval mind a resolution; it was a literal example of how Christ's death saved mankind and rescued the righteous generation that lived before his time, as well as ending the theologian's problem of the fate of the Patriarchs.¹⁸⁰ The Apostles' Creed declares: "He descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; He ascended into Heaven [to sit] at the right hand of God...He shall come to judge the quick and the dead."¹⁸¹

A significant element to this image is the nature of Christ. In complete contrast to the suffering Christ of the crucifixion scenes, the Christ in the Harrowing is a warrior-king, victorious in battle and unwavering in the presence of Satan. Karl Tamburr emphasizes this characteristic, noting that in *De Fide*, Ambrose uses military language and tone to describe Christ's ascent into Heaven after defeating Satan; he refers to Him as the "conquer with new spoils" with the "cross as his trophy."¹⁸² As Christ enters Heaven, the angels at his side command: "Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up...[so] that the King of glory may come in...The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle... The Lord Almighty – He is the King of glory."¹⁸³ In this context, the portrayal of Christ as a warrior-king is appropriate after his defeat of Satan and victory over death. It is the acknowledgment of Christ the Messiah, historically the anointed king in the line of David.¹⁸⁴ Christ as the King of Kings becomes an important figure, central to the medieval liturgy of the celebrations of Advent and Easter.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 18-19.

¹⁸¹ Alice K. Turner, *The History of Hell* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1993), 69.

¹⁸² Tamburr, 15.

¹⁸³ Psalm 24:7-10.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 28. Additional emphasis on Christ's line from David is seen in Holkham. There are two images depicting Jesse Trees (foll. 10 & 10v) referring to Isaiah 11:1, "Christ descends from "the shoot of Jesse."



Figure 3



Figure 4

The Covering of Christ's loins and Christ's side pierced (fig. 3); The Deposition (fig. 4)
The Holkham Bible, f. 32v and 33



Figure 5

The Harrowing of Hell; Joseph and Nicodemus imprisoned and rescued,
The Holkham Bible, f. 34

The depiction of the Harrowing of Hell in the Holkham Bible shares much of the iconography typical to the story, as well as closely reflecting the Gospel of Nicodemus. Christ is seen descending into hell, freeing the naked souls of Adam and Eve (fig. 5). He is triumphant, reflecting Jesus as God, not Jesus the Lamb. He holds a foliate cross-staff in his right hand while freeing additional souls with his left. Christ has used the staff to break, or harrow, the gates of hell. He is not seen standing atop a defeated Satan, but appears to chase away a hair-covered demon with his staff. The trapped souls in Limbo are huddled in a fortification; the structure appears to be constructed in architecture contemporary to Holkham's artist, with demons atop the parapet or rampart, wielding weapons and horns. Behind the fortress, the souls of the wicked are boiling in a cauldron, held in a gabled oven,¹⁸⁵ which is suspended above the hell mouth, a popular motif in medieval depictions of hell. The mouth of hell is typically represented as a vicious monster with sharp, jagged teeth, all but clamping down on his victims. The inscription explains that Christ delivered the good folk, while the wicked were "left there to dwell in perpetual pain."¹⁸⁶ The artist is careful to reveal that while the righteous are saved, the damned will only encounter pain and suffering.

Another feature that is sometimes depicted alongside the Harrowing, typically when it follows closely the Gospel of Nicodemus, is the imprisonment of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. This scene is included with Holkham, possibly because the Gospel of Nicodemus was well-known, or possibly to again highlight the recognition of Joseph

¹⁸⁵ A similar image is seen earlier in the apocryphal story of Christ's infancy, where He turns the Jewish children into pigs after their fathers hide them in a gabled oven (fol. 16). Brown suggests this image signifies that Christ saved the gentiles, as well as the Jews who were prevented from believing in Him by their teachers, 52.

¹⁸⁶ Holkham, fol. 34.

as an important figure to medieval England. The scene continues with seven doctors of law and knights forcing Joseph and Nicodemus into a prison turret, an order given by Pilate in an attempt to stop them from stealing Christ's body, leading to His resurrection.¹⁸⁷ The story includes the prayers of the two men for Christ to rescue them. Their request to Christ is not clearly depicted in Holkham, but the next scene shows him lifting the building they are imprisoned in so they can climb out to freedom. Tamburr suggests that this scene may emphasize the parallel between Joseph and Nicodemus' escape from prison and Christ's flight from the grave.¹⁸⁸ He also suggests that the freeing of the souls from Limbo is symbolic for the freeing of Christ's followers from spiritual imprisonment. The text accompanying the images makes the connection clear: the first, as mentioned describes the freeing of the souls from their imprisonment; the last scene tells "how the soul of Jesus delivered Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, bringing them up out of the depths of imprisonment."¹⁸⁹ In the case of Holkham, the Harrowing of Hell is representative of the liberation of Christ's followers, whether the imprisonment is earthly or infernal.

THE LAST JUDGMENT

The belief in a final judgment, one to end the complex struggle between good and evil and vindicate the righteous is widely believed in Christianity, and has sustained for millennia. The Old Testament, Jewish Apocalyptic literature, and the New Testament all look to a future where a "definitive validation of the moral imperative to do good and

¹⁸⁷ The principle source of this story is the Gospel of Nicodemus.

¹⁸⁸ Tamburr, 133-134.

¹⁸⁹ Holkham, fol. 34; Tamburr, 134.

avoid evil” will be realized.¹⁹⁰ This final analysis, on the Last Judgment scene in the Holkham Bible is a very brief reflection on a very immense topic. Apocalyptic eschatology during the Middle Ages was widely debated by the church and fiercely believed by the laity. The Holkham Bible reveals the significance of Last Judgment doctrine for the medieval laity.

Christianity holds four events that make up the apocalyptic scenario: the *parousia*, or the Second Coming of Christ, the resurrection of the body, the last judgment, and the end of the world.¹⁹¹ The events also include the ultimate condemnation of the wicked and the defeat of the Antichrist for a thousand years. Theologians have debated the particular aspects based on numerous passages of Scripture; John’s account in the Book of Revelation is the most commented upon of the New Testament books regarding Christ’s return and judgment upon mankind: “Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead...standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.”¹⁹² Apocalyptic literature is often thought of as terrifying and dark, but for the medieval Christian, it also emphasized the joy and freedom achieved from judgment; it offered a message of hope encouraging the down-trodden to look forward to a promised security. That is to say, it offered this to the

¹⁹⁰ Bernard McGinn, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism: Volume 2, Apocalypticism in Western History and Culture* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 362.

¹⁹¹ McGinn points out that these are not to be confused with the later medieval “four last things:” death, judgment, heaven, and hell, 396, note 1.

¹⁹² Revelation 20:11-12. This is one of many passages that allude to or describe the Second Coming of Christ; other accounts are found in the Books of Isaiah, Daniel, Zechariah, 1 Thessalonians, and Matthew.

righteous. It was equally utilized as a message to instill fear; fear from sin and from damnation.

Augustine established much of the dogma regarding the last judgment in *City of God*. He stated that although Jesus Christ is not specifically named in the prophecies, it is known he will return because “although the Father will judge, it is through the coming of the Son of Man that he will execute judgement.”¹⁹³ When considering the last judgment, the bodily resurrection of the dead must also be kept in mind. Augustine fully believed in the physical resurrection of the dead. He maintained that the resurrection included material continuity; “not a hair will perish,”¹⁹⁴ meaning that the body will be in no way deformed or altered.¹⁹⁵ His primary critique on theological understanding of the last judgment was the attempt to literally interpret the scripture instead of seeing it as mostly symbolic. Augustine also discouraged the efforts to define a specific date for the events to occur, which became common throughout history. The attempt to reveal the end of the world became increasingly popular in the Middle Ages, the most common effort made by Christian mystic, Joachim de Fiore in the twelfth century.

Less than a century later, theologians, including Thomas Aquinas would be more conservative in their discussions regarding the end times and last judgment. Aquinas asserts, “[God] knows certain things which are unknown to any mere creature...Such is the end of the world when the day of judgment will come. For the world will come to an end by no created cause, even as it derived its existence immediately from God.

¹⁹³ Augustine, *City of God*, Henry Bettenson, trans., (London: Penguin Group, 1972), 961, chapter 20.30.

¹⁹⁴ Luke 21:18; Luke 21:5-37 is another scriptural reference to the end of time.

¹⁹⁵ Augustine, 1060; Resurrection of the body found in chapter 22.19-21.

Wherefore the knowledge of the end of the world is fittingly reserved to God.”¹⁹⁶

Aquinas was careful to acknowledge the difference between what can be learned by reason and what can only be revealed through divine revelation. Like Augustine, the theologian was important in establishing the recognized doctrine for the last judgment. This doctrine was relayed to the laity through art, sermons, and drama.

The depiction of the Last Judgment in the Holkham Bible accurately reflects the church’s doctrine (fig. 6).¹⁹⁷ It reinforces the fact that the message of Holkham is Paradise lost and then regained. The image shows Christ, enthroned under an architectural arch, with three cusps, again alluding to the Trinity. He is displaying all the wounds he received during the Crucifixion. He is flanked by two angels, one bearing the spear and crown from the Passion, the other holding the Cross and the nails. The righteous kneel at his right hand, while the wicked are led in bondage to hell by the devil. The wicked are comprised of a bishop, a king, and multiple monks. The bottom images show the righteous being ushered into the City of God by angels, one with a trumpet. Conversely, the wicked souls are being pushed in a wheel barrow by a devil. The juxtaposition of the saved and the damned closely follows scripture: “The Son of Man comes in his glory...the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory...he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.”¹⁹⁸ While Christ

¹⁹⁶ Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas, Supplement, question 88, article 3*, Second and Revised Edition, 1920, Literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Online Edition Copyright © 2008 by Kevin Knight, < <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/5088.htm#article3>>, accessed 07 October, 2009.

¹⁹⁷ Holkham, fol. 42v.

¹⁹⁸ Matthew 25:31-33.



Figure 6

The Last Judgment; the Blessed and the Damned, *The Holkham Bible*, f. 42v

shepherds his flock, the devil leads the wicked, with a cleric attached to his back. Behind him, two demons carry a naked man and woman to a boiling cauldron filled with souls. The man is holding a spatula and a weighted balance set to fire, symbolizing his avarice and financial dishonesty; while the woman carries a flaming pot on her head, distinguishing her as a barmaid. Pots were used in this manner to signify a public penance for sexual misconduct.¹⁹⁹ These individuals represent the cardinal sins most common to the working class of London, the mishandling of money for men of the city and the inherent lust of the women.

The inscription serves the purpose of Holkham as an instructional tool, relaying the message that the Son of God, on Judgment Day, will return, showing his wounds to those with souls. Christ says, “You that have served me, come to my Father, and you that have not, go to eternal torment.”²⁰⁰ The artist once again emphasized that while the just will be rewarded, the wicked will face eternity in pain. The final line of the Holkham Bible may serve to end the book on a humorous note; one which Brown suggests would have highly appealed to the city worked of London.²⁰¹ The inscription reads: *E cues que serrént condampnés, coment yl arént peyne E ia rele[f] ne arént pas, un foy[s] [-la] en la cemeyne* (Whilst the damned, how they will suffer pain And will not get relief, even once a week).²⁰² The artist intended to remind the reader of the beginning of time, where God rested on the seventh day, in contrast to the end of time, where the wicked will never achieve rest, bring the book full circle – *Alpha et Omega*.

¹⁹⁹ Brown, 88.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.; Holkham, fol. 42v.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

Chapter 4 DEATH AND THE AFTERLIFE IN MEDIEVAL IMAGERY

This chapter will explore the final and most evident method of dissemination of doctrine to the lay culture, religious imagery. The most recognizable visual representation during the medieval period is that of the Gothic style. This dramatic form of expression became an international movement, originating in mid-twelfth century France, arriving in England first through architecture in the late twelfth century, and is then suggested to have continued to flourish throughout Europe possibly into the sixteenth century, where the Renaissance was gradually surfacing. As an international movement, Gothic art was a significant representation of the transformation of European society, not simply a localized or national reflection of culture. The representation of death in this style of imagery is significant to the understanding of late medieval thought.

These works were not limited to churches, but were available to the populace in many forms. As the epitome of the medieval visual experience, Gothic art dramatically affected the perception of the viewer.²⁰³ This chapter will first discuss late medieval imagery and how it represented doctrine to the laity. From there it will look specifically at the representation of death and lay interpretation; and will conclude with an examination of the same thematic images previously discussed in chapter 3, as compared to the Holkham Bible. As an excellent example of Gothic illuminated manuscripts, the Holkham Bible offers a vivid reflection of medieval culture and insight into the lay understanding of doctrine. And while it is common in its theme and content, the

²⁰³ Michael Camille, *Gothic Art: Visions and Revelations of the Medieval World* (London: Orion Publishing Group, Orion House, 1996), 11.

Holkham Bible is unique in its availability to the working-class laity and its presentation of doctrine. The last section of this chapter will look at the similarities and difference in other works produced, contemporary to Holkham.

THE GOTHIC MOVEMENT

In the late medieval period, Gothic architecture dominated European landscapes. Massive cathedrals, palaces, and universities were constructed in a manner emphasizing great height, majesty, light, all in an effort to exalt the Christian religion. The structures were designed to fill the viewer with a sense of awe and wonder. The style traveled from France to England and became known as the “French Style,” or *Opus Francigenum*.²⁰⁴ The most extravagant examples are the great buildings across Northern Europe, such as: Notre Dame and Reims Cathedral in France and York Minster and Salisbury Cathedral in England. But it can also be found in the stained glass decorating the walls, the sculptures staring down at the church-goers and in the illuminated manuscripts housed within the churches. The intention of Gothic art was spiritual and devotional and sought to reinforce doctrine and solidify moral standards.

Some historians argue that reinforcing its authority and power was the primary concern for the medieval church in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Methods such as delivering the mass in Latin, a language only the learned would understand, the forbiddance of scriptural translations, and priests turning their backs to the audience during the consecration of the host, allowing only priests to witness it, rather than a shared communion, all lend credence to this suggestion. Derek Pearsall suggests that

²⁰⁴ Marilyn Stokstad, *Medieval Art* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1986), 331.

“orthodoxy must be defined in the most absolute way, not so much because it *matters*, theologically, as because the rooting-out of unorthodoxy, defined as what the church has defined it to be, offers an immediate and practical and generally tolerated means of exercising authority.”²⁰⁵ He states that while the church improved the spiritual condition of the Christian community, it also used these methods to articulate its power over the lay public. As with any enforcement of power, these measures engendered conflict. Saint Francis was concerned with the way his Order was becoming disrupted by the affairs of the university-trained “clerical elite.” The Franciscans became the model for affective devotion and as early as the twelfth century, a new movement was underway.²⁰⁶ Its followers focused Christian thought less on a legalistic mentality and instead emphasized Christ’s sacrifice. They valued human emotion, truth, and were inspired by the theology of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153). Pope Pius XII (r. 1939-1958) said of Bernard:

His study and his contemplation, under the influence of love rather than through the subtlety of human reasoning, Bernard's sole aim was to focus on the supreme Truth all the ways of truth which he had gathered from many different sources. From them he drew light for the mind, the fire of charity for the soul, and right standards of conduct. This is indeed true wisdom, which rides over all things human, and brings everything back to its source...God, in order to lead men to Him.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ Derek Pearsall, *Gothic Europe: 1200-1450* (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), 32.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ *Doctor Mellifluus*, 6. Encyclical of Pope Pius XII on St. Bernard of Clairvaux, The Last of the Fathers. To Our Venerable Brethern, the Patriarchs, Primates, Archbishops, Bishops, and other Local Ordinaries in Peace and Communion with the Apostolic See, <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_pxii_enc_24051953_doctor-mellifluus_en.html>, accessed 22, October 2009.

With this new emphasis, a shift in imagery can also be seen. Images of the Crucifixion began to appear more realistic, as suggested in the previous chapter, with the suffering of Christ being portrayed. This is seen in Holkham as well as other pieces which will be looked at shortly. Art historian O. Elfrida Saunders suggests that the Gothic movement brought the discarding of past conventions. While the subject matter may have been continually determined by the church, the artist approached it with a different motive, objectively depicting the material world with “a love of its actual beauty which made him unwilling to invent an abstract beauty by distortion and elimination.”²⁰⁸ Agreeing with this idea of vanguard realism, Pearsall suggests that this new emphasis on Christ’s humanity stimulated growth in a rising area of devotion, the cult of the Virgin.²⁰⁹ Saint Bernard fostered this devotion, saying: “To this warm love of Jesus was joined a most sweet and tender devotion towards His glorious Mother, whose motherly love he repaid with the affection of a child, and whom he jealously honored...., great was his confidence in her most powerful intercession.”²¹⁰ In the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, images reflect both Mary and Christ more human than divine. The laity found the human attributes of Jesus and Mary more tangible to their own lives. The holy figures as “man” and “mother” were relatable and influential on their daily lives.

THE GOTHIC AUDIENCE

What can be said of the lay audience viewing the great cathedrals, stained glass windows, and images of the Bible in illuminated manuscripts? John Arnold suggests that

²⁰⁸ O. Elfrida Saunders, *A History of English Art in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), 110.

²⁰⁹ Pearsall, 37.

²¹⁰ *Doctor Mellifluus*, 30.

modern encounters with this visual history lack the experience intended for the medieval viewer.²¹¹ With access to every type of information in the modern world, visitors are simply too informed and cannot understand a world where the art on the walls is meant to educate and inform. Most art for the medieval laity was public, seen in the local parish, and was almost exclusively interpreted through a liturgical framework. Images alone could not instruct the viewer of doctrine and moral standards. The images were used in conjunction with the other methods the church employed: preaching, liturgy, and religious drama. They were undoubtedly linked and in support of one another. The primary purpose of the images was to remind the audience of what they had been told in a sermon. They also played a role in directing lay devotion and practice.²¹² The increase in portraying the suffering of Christ, invoking images of his broken and bleeding body, was directly associated with the rising emphasis on the Eucharist and Christ's presence in the Host. Images of the Cross were a reminder of the practice of signing oneself.

Medieval art was visually stimulating and increased lay understanding and submission. Arnold argues that images were directly linked to power; he claims that religious art was not simply a means to educate, but was a controlled effort to condition and sway specific impressions made upon lay thought.²¹³ As late medieval thought transformed into the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and an individual responsibility for one's actions became a common factor in lay spiritual life, images began to prompt reflective piety and art began to be commissioned for private use and more meditative

²¹¹ John H. Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), 51.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 53.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

purposes. As suggested, the Holkham Bible is one possible example of an aid for individual spiritual growth.

The most common instrument for personal devotion during the medieval period was the Psalter. Psalters were the most demanded manuscript in England, illustrating the principles learned from the life of Christ. They contained devotional texts and narrative images from the Old and New Testaments, as well as the psalms for daily meditation. They were typically prefaced with a calendar listing the feast days and concluded with a litany seeking protection from various saints, both local and church-wide.²¹⁴ Because they were often for private use, many psalters survived the Reformation and are in excellent condition for historical analysis. One such example is the *Queen Mary Psalter*, which earned its name after being seized by a customs official and then presented to the queen in 1553, more than two centuries after its production.²¹⁵ The psalters were often quite large manuscripts due to the inclusion of the 150 Psalms; the *Queen Mary Psalter* has over eight hundred images. It is considered “an elaborate production of one artist whose style influenced a very large group of manuscripts made in the second and third decades of the century in the general vicinity of London.”²¹⁶

The *Queen Mary Psalter* is discussed here for its similarities to the Holkham Bible. Historians date the psalter’s production from 1320-1330, the same period attributed to Holkham, as well as the same possible location. The psalter proper has three avenues for linear reading: the half-page fully colored images on the life of Christ; the

²¹⁴ Anne Rudolf Stanton, *The Queen Mary Psalter: A Study of Affect and Audience* (Philadelphia: Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, Vol. 91, Pt. 6, 2001), 58.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 4.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 20.

psalm texts; and the narrative drawings in the margins that present a new episode on every page.²¹⁷ This may or may not have intended to invoke recollections of the Trinity, but one cannot help recall it from any religious text divided into thirds. Similar to Holkham, the psalter reflects the political instability of the period. It has been suggested that the emphasis on the famine of Egypt in the Joseph story parallels the Great Famine in England from 1315-1322. It is also noted that the representation of an unfaithful queen alluded to the scandal between Isabelle and Edward II.²¹⁸ Other similarities include the text of the psalter; the prefatory text is written in Anglo-Norman, using both verse and prose, and contains captions corresponding to the images. The captions commonly start with *ici* or *coment*, a style that occurs in Holkham as well. Unlike Holkham though, the *Queen Mary Psalter* includes many images from the Old Testament from Creation to David and Solomon.²¹⁹ Although they share various stylistic similarities, as well as some content, the *Queen Mary Psalter* and the Holkham Bible were intended for very different audiences. The psalter was likely commissioned for an aristocratic family. Yet, they represent a similar trend in late medieval England – both were likely intended for the private devotion of the laity, each seeking further information regarding their faith, and both using text as well as images to meditate upon.

THE PRESENCE OF DEATH IN GOTHIC IMAGERY

Previous discussion has emphasized the presence of death in medieval thought.

Seen in sermons and dramas, it is equally, if not more, dramatic in visual representation.

²¹⁷ Stanton discusses other methods of reading the psalter, what Michael Camille calls “meditative meandering,” where the reader examines an image and may jump forward or backward based on the image viewed, 2.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 25.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 29-30.

Artists depicted death, hell, demons, and suffering vividly and graphically. Paul Binski suggests the Middle Ages placed death “at the center of its drama of salvation, that of Christ who redeemed the world on the Cross and rose from the dead.”²²⁰ He argues that because death and the afterlife can only be visually represented or written about from the perspective of the living, while keeping in mind their own cultural experience, the depictions equally exposed the living as well as the dead, revealing societal norms, as well as their complexities.²²¹ In the Middle Ages, while the subject of death was a universal topic of interest, it became an issue for not only lay discussion, but also doctrinal support. Therefore, the details of the afterlife and the events surrounding it, were both formal, leaving much still to be defined, as well as imaginative, allowing for the creative imagination to fill in the blanks.²²² This imaginative outlet allowed for the production of late medieval masterpieces, such as Dante’s *Divine Commedia* and Michelangelo’s *The Last Judgment*, as well as the images that will be detailed shortly: the death of Judas, the Crucifixion, and the Last Judgment.

Christianity united the living and the dead in that the living prayed on behalf of their deceased loved ones; yet it divided the body from the soul. This division looks at on one hand, the process of death – the physical nature of it – and on the other, the circumstance of death – the unknown, that which is abstract, theory, or beyond human experience.²²³ Medieval Christians did not look at death simply as the end of mortality; it was either the beginning or the end, the consequence of a life well or ill lived. Because

²²⁰ Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), 9.

²²¹ Ibid., 165-166.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid., 70.

the state of death does not belong to human experience, Binski suggests it is not something that is occasionally represented, but can only be represented.²²⁴ With its only option as an interpreted representation, death can never fully be understood. Artists attempted to depict death in a manner that would relay the message with the most ease, rendering what was beyond even the most learned of human perception. Artists often depicted Death as personified, often in the form of the corpse, skeleton, or in the case of Holkham, the souls of the saved and the damned, maintain their corporeal image, as they are ushered to their final destination.

The artist's efforts to represent that of which was beyond human perception as reliable and substantial emphasized accurate communication of textual discourse through imagery. The artists attempted to establish recognizable patterns and structures, often using symbolism or allegory.²²⁵ The medieval artist would take a concept, abstract and separate from possible human discernment, and transformed it into something concrete and tangible; but he could only accomplish this transformation of reality by depicting that which was not real. For example, because human perception cannot exactly discern the state of a soul in Purgatory, the artist instead represented a typical man or woman in a state of physical suffering in the physical space, identified as Purgatory. Binski suggests that Purgatory is the classic example of medieval culture's failure to produce a common, well-known visual tradition.²²⁶ This failure possibly reflects that "the more concrete an

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid. Dante's *Purgatoria* is the exception to this statement.

institution was in practical terms, and the more it was assimilated into the imaginative order of a culture, the less important its visual manifestation became.”²²⁷

Binski’s argument explains why few medieval illustrations of Purgatory are found. This may be the case of Holkham, as Purgatory is not represented in the manuscript. Instead, images of souls guided into Heaven and Hell are present; the closest representation of Purgatory is seen in the Limbo of the Fathers, where the Patriarchs are held awaiting Christ. The representation of Purgatory may also have diluted the intended message by the artist. An optional “third place” as it is sometimes called may have lessened the impact of the people’s need for salvation. Purgatory was ambiguous; it was never officially or visually described by the church and may have simply disrupted the balance of a black and white world.²²⁸ Arguments can be made on both sides for lay thought – it could have been disregarded as too complex or welcomed as an option that lessened anxiety about death. In either case, it reveals that the living, both clerical and lay, was concerned with death and the consequence for their souls.

SOME EXAMPLES OF DEATH IN MEDIEVAL ART

The illustration of death in this period can be found in countless images and themes. It was present in all aspects of life, represented doctrine, morals, hopes, and fears. This section will look at images of the same content as discussed in the Holkham Bible: the death of Judas, the Crucifixion of Christ, and the Last Judgment. Together these represent the severe consequence and punishment for sin, the desperate need for salvation and the means to receive it. Equal in importance to the writings of the church

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid., 193-194.

fathers and sermons of preachers, art also served to educate medieval man and affect his understanding of death and the afterlife. While the church attempted to control the interpretation of the afterlife by introducing it into doctrine, for example, the doctrine of Purgatory, this did not quell every question, leaving room for the creative imagination to help further interpret. Art was an essential outlet for this and artists took full advantage in their representations of death and damnation. Artists did not attempt to soften the impact of Judas' suicide, the torment of Christ, and the agony of hell. Gothic art presents some of the earliest examples of realism.

Although it is supposed that most illuminated manuscripts have been lost over the centuries for a variety of reasons, numerous examples still exist in excellent condition. From these, historians have been able to examine and interpret the artistic motivation of the period. As noted, manuscript illumination was predominantly religious in theme. The great Bible stories all have been depicted from creation to the end of days. One cannot open a medieval book without finding some visual variation from the Old or New Testament. The following images are commonly found in medieval manuscripts and although style may differ from image to image, the message is often universal.

THE EPITOME OF SIN: THE DEATH OF JUDAS ISCARIOT

The death of Judas reached its peak in imagery in the late medieval period. Present in the Holkham Bible, the image is a compelling example of sin and consequence. Modern audiences often think of Dante when envisioning Judas, whom alongside Brutus and Cassius eternally remains in the center of hell, being gnashed in Satan's mouth. Satan, depicted with three heads, with a sinner in each, is a gross parody

of the Trinity, invoking images of the Eucharist; as believers in God ingest him through the sacrament, the followers of Satan are inversely devoured by him.²²⁹ And while Dante's Judas is a perfect example of Binski's suggestion, that the artist has no limits on representing that which cannot be fully understood, the image of Judas in medieval art does not often venture past the typical iconographic characteristics. Passion plays, which were both influential on and influenced by manuscripts, illustrate the death of Judas in a manner parallel to paintings and sculpture. The plays combine both Luke and Matthew's accounts, making the scene all the more violent and shocking to the audience. In this example, as demons descend to tear at his stomach and steal away his soul, Judas exclaims:

Come, all of you [demons], be here at my death
 my soul is leaving, my neck breaking!
 Oh! I feel my stomach bursting!
 Oh! The devil inside me, tearing up my guts,
 because I was so disloyal and betrayed my master.²³⁰

In this scene, Judas appears unrepentant, but understanding of the reason for his demise.

The depiction of Judas in paintings reveals a similar tone of despair and agony, however, prior to this depiction's hay day, images were less dramatic. An early example of his suicide, from the ninth century Stuttgart Psalter, reveals just this (fig. 7).²³¹ Unlike in Holkham, where Judas clutches to the rope as he not only hangs, but is also

²²⁹ Kim Paffenroth, *Judas: Images of the Last Disciple* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2001), 29.

²³⁰ Ibid., translated from J. Kahn's "Judas Escariot: A Vehicle of Medieval Didacticism."

²³¹ Ernest T. De Wald, *The Stuttgart Psalter, Biblia Folio 23, Wuerttembergische Landesbibliothek, Stuttgart* (Published for The Department of Art and Archaeology of Princeton University, 1930).

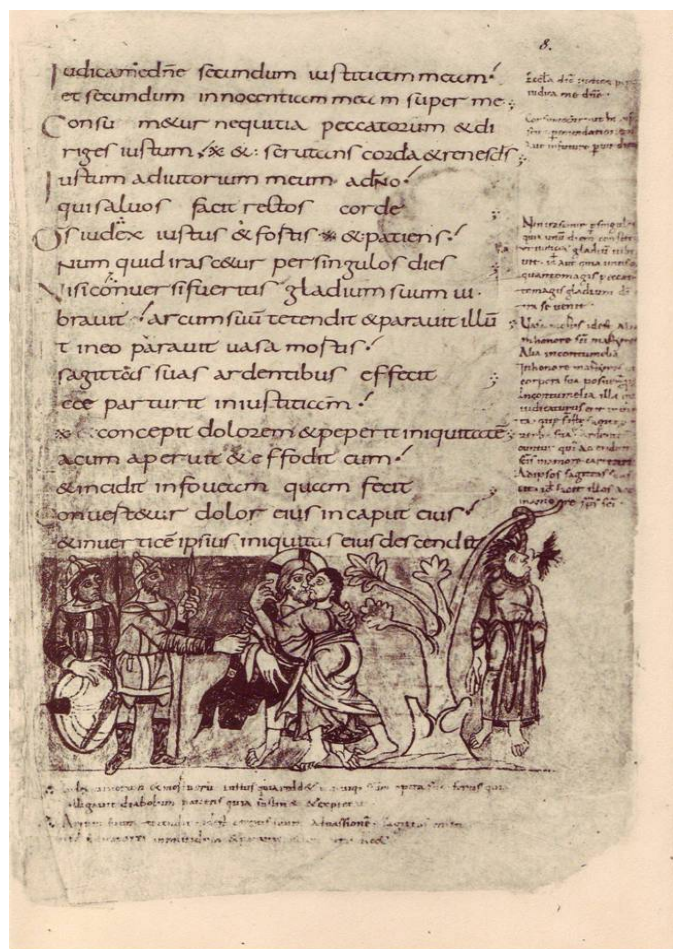


Figure 7

The Betrayal and Hanging of Judas, *The Stuttgart Psalter*, *Biblia Folio 23, f. 8r* (Wuerttembergische Landesbibliothek, Stuttgart)

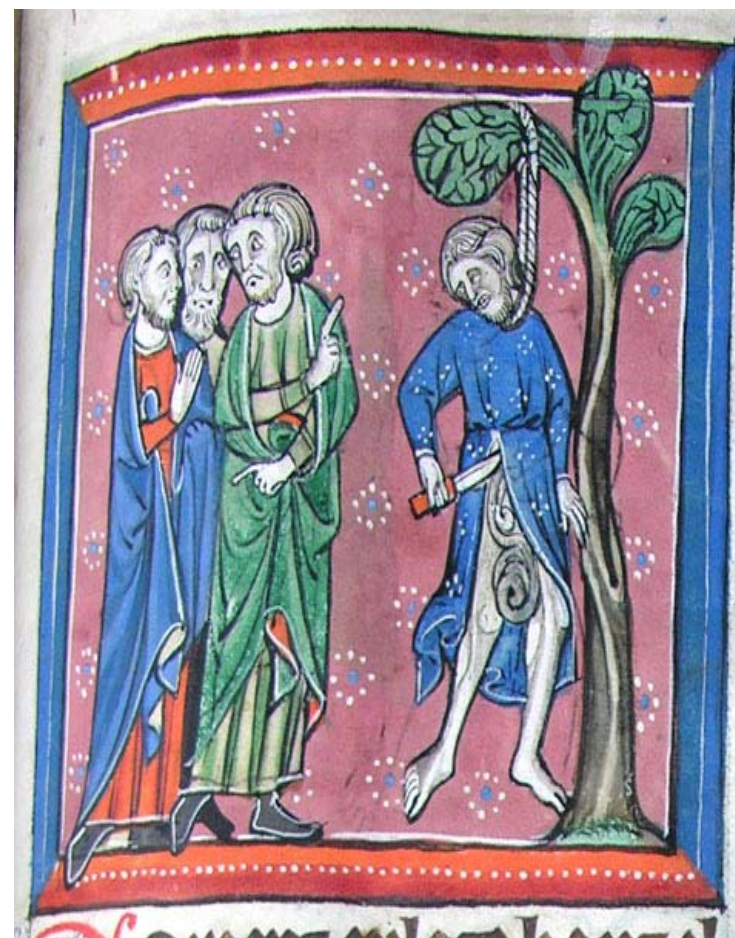


Figure 8

Death of Judas, *Cantica, Hymns, and Passion of Christ*,
Saint Augustine's Canterbury, St. John's College, Cambridge

disemboweled, Stuttgart shows a mild image of his death. Judas simply hangs from a tree, his body turned away from Christ (the image directly next to his hanging is of his betrayal to Christ). He is not being torn apart by devils and his soul is not personified or present at all. A black bird, possibly a crow flies over his head. The text from the page reads, “He who digs a hole and scoops it out falls into the pit he has made. The trouble he causes recoils on himself; his violence comes down on his own head. I will give thanks to the Lord because of his righteousness.”²³² Norbert Schnitzler notes that whereas tousled hair, a feature he designates as a “medieval formula to stand for pathos, analogous to the gesture of ruffling one’s hair” becomes a standard feature in late medieval images of Judas’ suicide, in Stuttgart, Judas’ hair is stiff, leaving no indications of sadness or suffering.²³³

Another image, contemporary with the Holkham Bible reveals the transformation in the representation of Judas’ death (fig. 8).²³⁴ The image, found in a late thirteenth-early fourteenth century manuscript shows Judas hanging from a tree, while disemboweling himself, with what looks like a knife. Judas is turned toward the Jewish elders, while they look away in disgust. Although some of the typical iconography is missing and this image appears quite simple in style, it still sharply contrasts the previous image. Here, Judas is clearly suffering for his sin, going as far as removing his own bowels, possibly

²³² Psalm 7:15-17.

²³³ Norbert Schnitzler, “Judas’ Death: Some Remarks Concerning the Iconography of Suicide in the Middle Ages,” *The Medieval History Journal* 3 (April 2000):107.

²³⁴ Death of Judas, *Cantica, Hymns, and Passion of Christ, Saint Augustine’s Canterbury, late thirteenth-early fourteenth century*, St. John’s College, Cambridge, MS K.21 f. 50r. <http://www.joh.cam.ac.uk/library/special_collections/manuscripts/medieval_manuscripts/medman/A/K21/K21f50r.htm>, accessed 23 October 2009.

indicating repentance. His facial expression clearly expresses agony, whether it is anger, anguish, or sadness. In both images, the artists reveal a pitiable man, deserving of his punishment.

THE EPITOME OF SACRIFICE: THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST

Like the evolution of Judas' death from a simple hanging to a more complex portrayal of sin and betrayal, images of the Crucified Christ changed between the high and late Middle Ages. The emphasis shifted from Christ the divine or conqueror of death to Christ, the suffering man. Michael Camille claims that the cliché that Gothic images "come to life" has some historical truth: "people felt themselves to be in a more direct relationship with the living God because of the imaginative power of newly animated images."²³⁵ Images began to reveal the intense emotionality of the scene. Mary is often shown sobbing, grief-stricken, wringing her hands in despair. The emotions are those of which the audience can identify and empathize with.

Also from the Stuttgart Psalter, the image of Christ's Crucifixion is an example of the earlier style (fig. 9).²³⁶ Christ is crucified with four nails, feet separated, almost appearing to be standing upon the cross. His eyes are wide open, head raised, with arms extended straight out, as if signifying his victory over death. Below Christ, two men are seen holding a garment; the image is accompanied by Psalm 22:18, "They divide my garments among them and for my raiment they cast lots."²³⁷ A lion and a unicorn are also depicted, an unusual addition to the Crucifixion scenes, found in Psalm 22:21, "rescue me

²³⁵ Michael Camille, *Gothic Art: Visions and Revelations of the Medieval World* (London: The Orion Publishing Group, Orion House, 1996), 105.

²³⁶ The Crucifixion, *Stuttgart Psalter*.

²³⁷ Pearsall, 33. He notes that the text in part came from the Vulgate Psalm 21:19. This scene is also found in Matthew 27:35.

from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen.” Also unusual to a Crucifixion scene is the absence of Mary and John. The scene does remain somewhat faithful to scripture, depicting the centurion that claimed Jesus was indeed the Son of God.²³⁸ The absence of the grieving Virgin and the addition of odd images, such as the lion and unicorn, likely intend the viewer to imagine Christ as the triumphant Son of God, who overcame death and will return again.

In later images of Christ’s death, artists began to expose the suffering and anguish of Christ on the cross. In this anonymous piece found in the *Petites Heures de Jean de Berry*, a more emotional scene is revealed, quite similar to the Crucifixion scene found in Holkham (fig. 10).²³⁹ Christ’s body is slumped realistically on the cross in the typical Gothic S-curve, his head lolled to the side, and his feet, more painfully nailed together with a single nail. Mary is seen below Christ, her face covered by her clothing, unable to look at her dying son, as she clings to those around her. Instead of emphasizing the majesty of Christ and his triumph, the artist renders a man and his followers, the pain and anguish of a realistic drama of grief and sorrow.

THE LAST JUDGMENT

Like Crucifixion scenes of the late medieval period, scenes of the Last Judgment took on a new spirit of emotion and intensity. While theologians debated the particulars of the first and second resurrections, bodily restoration, and often the specific point of time in which these events would occur, the lay audience was more concerned with a

²³⁸ Mark 15:39.

²³⁹ The Crucifixion, *Petites Heures de Jean de Berry*, fourteenth century, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, <http://www.biblical-art.com/artwork.asp?id_artwork=14954&showmode=Full#artwork>, accessed 23 October 2009.



Figure 9
The Crucifixion of Christ,
The Stuttgart Psalter Biblia Folio 23, f. 27r



Figure 10
The Crucifixion, *Petites Heures de Jean de Berry*,
fourteenth century, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris

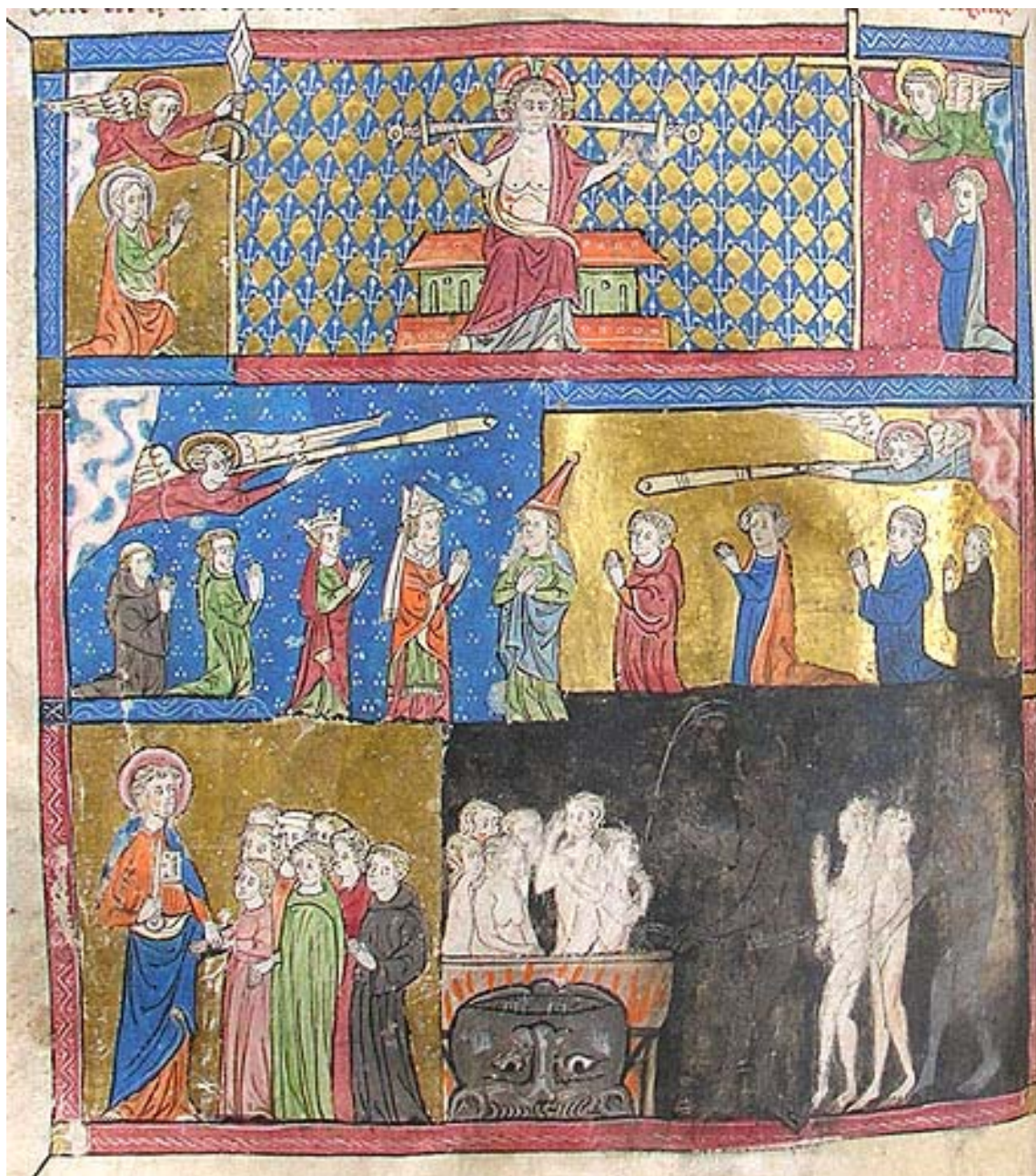


Figure 11

The Last Judgment, a miniature accompanying the text of the *Somme le Roi*, from f.185v of MS B.9, a collection of French works (France, second quarter of the 14th century), St John's College, Cambridge

simple understanding of what occurred after death. Manuscripts detailing the events of the Apocalypse increased in popularity in the late thirteenth century, especially among aristocratic patrons, perhaps because of a surge of curiosity in prophecy. Joachim de Fiore's prediction that the world would end in 1260 possibly fueled much of this interest. John's Apocalypse, or the Book of Revelation, was also increasing in popularity as an exciting book to read and illustrate.²⁴⁰ With interest in the topic growing, images of the Last Judgment became more accessible to lay audiences. They were receiving images of the final hour from sermons, religious drama, and art.

In Holkham, the artist accentuated the separation of the righteous, led into Paradise, from the damned, ushered into the eternal flames. The artist's intention was to clearly portray the final consequence of a life poorly lived. This was the common theme in medieval Last Judgment images. Found in the *Somme le Roi*, or *The Book of Vices and Virtues* (fig. 11), this miniature of the Last Judgment depicts Christ enthroned in the New Jerusalem, flanked by two angels, each with the instruments from the Passion, the cross and nails and the spear and crown of thorns, a motif also seen in Holkham.²⁴¹ With each angel is the Virgin, kneeling before her Son, across from John the Evangelist. Christ is seated with the double-edged sword proceeding from his mouth, referring to Revelation 1:16, "...out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance." The panel below Christ shows two angels

²⁴⁰ Pearsall, 146.

²⁴¹ Miniature accompanying the text of the *Somme le Roi*, showing Christ presiding over the Last Judgement. From f.185v of MS B.9, a collection of French works (France, second quarter of the 14th century), St John's College Cambridge, <http://www.joh.cam.ac.uk/library/special_collections/manuscripts/medieval_manuscripts/medman/A/B9/B9f185v.htm>, accessed 23 October 2009.

blowing the trumpets of the apocalypse, signaling to the line of the righteous below. The artist may have intended to represent specific individuals, but it is likely the figures are standard depictions of a pope, bishop, king, and monks. The series of saved souls corresponds with the righteous in the bottom panel being delivered the key to Paradise by Peter; this is adjacent to the damned, being whipped into a boiling cauldron suspended above a hell mouth, led by demons. This tripartite arrangement may suggest the proximity of earth to both heaven above and hell below. Harvey Stahl argues that the understanding of the afterlife in the late medieval period moved the afterworld literally closer to earth.²⁴² He claims that in principle, the afterworld was accessible immediately after death, as demonstrated in text and images, and was “increasingly formulated as a projection of somatic and affective qualities a person possessed in this world.”²⁴³ He continues suggesting that by the fourteenth century, optics and perception existed in the afterlife, as writers and artists attempted to describe and create the differences between ocular and imaginative visions. The struggle to depict that which is reality and that which is prophecy challenged artists and authors, especially when interpreting scenes from Revelation. The struggle Stahl discusses supports Binski’s claim that the line between the representation of reality and of what was beyond human perception was indefinite. The lay audience likely did not dwell on the unfamiliar and vague references in medieval imagery, but instead focused on the tangible – emotions they empathized with and lessons they applied to their own personal faith.

²⁴² Harvey Stahl, “Heaven in View: The Place of the Elect in an Illuminated Book of Hours,” in *Last Things: Death & the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman, eds. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 232.

²⁴³ Ibid.

These images, found in Holkham and countless other pieces of medieval works of art, offer for the historian a glimpse of the understanding of death and the afterlife for the medieval viewer. Although the modern viewer may lack the emotional experience of a lay medieval merchant or peasant, the message the artists rendered remains universal. The Holkham Bible is an excellent example of the changing mentality of the medieval lay class. By the fourteenth century, personal responsibility of one's salvation was common and the laity was seeking spiritual knowledge through the various methods the church offered. The Holkham Bible, although rare in its style and ownership, reveals the craftsmanship of the medieval artist, the importance of the lay merchant class, and the weight of the medieval church. The comparative images expose the recurrent presence of death in medieval thought, both real and imagined. The nexus of preaching, religious drama, penitential confession, and medieval imagery are undoubtedly essential for understanding medieval society.

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