

**Reading *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois* in Pre-Reformation England: Incarnation, Tradition and the Authority of Rome**

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## ABSTRACT

In the fifteenth century, an anonymous author translated portions of a thirteenth-century French text, the *Bible en françois*, into Middle English. Because only the biblical and legendary narratives were translated, the resultant work, *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois (ME Bible)*, is shorter and more unified than its prototype and places more emphasis on the story of St. Veronica and the Siege of Jerusalem. This dissertation examines the *ME Bible* to elucidate its meaning in pre-Reformation England, a period of religious turmoil and theological uncertainty.

A comprehensive interpretative process recognises that a text is created and disseminated under certain conditions and with an audience in mind. To establish the *ME Bible's* meaning in pre-Reformation England, I read the text within several overlapping contexts. In particular, I investigate the state of religion and theology in late fifteenth-century England, the history of the Veronica motif in history and literature, the history and literature surrounding *The Vengeance of the Savior*, and the *ME Bible's* specific literary features. I argue that the text is a defense of conventional teaching and tradition, a warning to Reformers and even an assertion of Rome's hegemony—all organized in terms of and giving expression to an incarnational sensibility.

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## Introduction

### *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en français*

#### *1.1 The Backstory of a Unique Text*

The *Bible en français* is a typical example of a didactic work from thirteenth-century France (ca. 1260-1270). Phyllis Moe, who has studied the text, describes it as “written to instruct a literate laity in sacred history and the essentials of Christian doctrine.”<sup>1</sup> The narrative comprises biblical, legendary, apocryphal and expository texts that range from discourses on the mystery of the Trinity to a dialogue between father and son.<sup>2</sup>

This *Bible en français* also includes the *Vengeance de Notre-Seigneur* narrative. Based on a Latin apocryphal tale from the eighth century, the *Vindicta Salvatoris*, it tells story of Veronica and the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> The *Vindicta* was translated into several vernacular languages, including Old French and, later, Middle English.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Phyllis Moe, ed., *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en français*, Middle English Texts 6 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1977), 8.

<sup>2</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 8.

<sup>3</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 8.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen C.E. Hopkins, “Vengeance of the Savior,” NASSCAL North American Society for the Study of Christian Apocryphal Literature, June 2017, <http://www.nasscal.com/e-clavis-christian-apocrypha/vengeance-of-the-savior/>.

In the pre-Reformation period (ca. 1470), an anonymous author translated portions of the *Bible en françois* into Middle English.<sup>5</sup> Titled *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois (ME Bible)*, it is shorter and more unified than the French prototype because only the biblical, legendary and apocryphal narratives were translated.<sup>6</sup> That only specific chapters were translated could be the redactor's choice or the unavailability of a complete French text. Nevertheless, the result is a work that emphasizes the legend of Veronica and the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>7</sup>

Although it is impossible to know definitively why the author translated only specific sections of the *Bible en françois*, it is possible to make observations, proposals and conclusions about this text by looking at the religious and theological climate in pre-Reformation England when the *ME Bible* was published.<sup>8</sup> The issue is not so much whether the author chose and arranged the material according to a predetermined plan, or whether an incomplete copy was involved; rather, what is important for my study is that these efforts result in a unified text and an autonomous literary object from around 1470.<sup>9</sup> It must be interpreted on its own terms, even and especially because it appears in a much different context from the original.

In addition to there being only one extant copy, the *ME Bible* is a unique document in several other respects: Roger d'Argenteuil has never been confirmed as authoring either the

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<sup>5</sup> I use the general term author to mean producers of literature, including redactors, commentators, editors, writers, compilers, and translators.

<sup>6</sup> Moe lists the manuscript contents as a translation of chapters 5 to 23 of the *Bible en françois*, an abridged text of the poem *Brut*, and lines from *Cur mundus militat*. Moe, *ME Bible*, 8-10.

<sup>7</sup> "The unknown fifteen-century English translator of the *Bible*, whether by choice or by reason of an incomplete French text, omitted the expository chapters and translated only the biblical and legendary narratives. By this omission he not only achieved a shorter and more unified text, but also placed proportionally greater emphasis on the legend of Veronica and the destruction of Jerusalem than existed in the original." Moe, *ME Bible*, 9.

<sup>8</sup> Even so, in the concluding chapter, *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois: A Matter of Choice or Accessibility?* I suggest that the author chose to translate specific chapters only of the *Bible en françois*.

<sup>9</sup> Moe used textual, source and redaction criticisms to produce the sole print version of the handwritten manuscript (*editio princeps*). See Moe, *ME Bible*, 8-43.

French prototype or its Middle English version. Rather, the author's identity remains unknown. To my knowledge, it is also the only Middle English manuscript in prose to append the *Vengeance* narrative. Apart from Moe's edition and reviews of same, notations in bibliographies of Middle English literature, and mentions, the *ME Bible* has been under-researched.<sup>10</sup>

The *ME Bible*'s significance has not yet been understood. Its mixture of biblical, legendary and apocryphal stories could be considered as a mere jumble of popular material. My point is, however, that to read and then accept it at face value overlook the information it has to offer on the theological and religious climate of the period. Hence, in this study, I demonstrate that the *ME Bible* is a coherent text with relevance to the time in which it appears, late fifteenth-century England.

I undertake this original research project to augment and enhance studies on the religious and theological climate in England prior to the Reformation. As such, I read the *ME Bible* as a text produced in a specific historical period, as a work of literature. Along with the foregoing, my task is to identify what in the *Bible en françois* speaks to the religious and theological situation two-hundred years later, in a different country and in a different language.

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<sup>10</sup> For reviews of Moe's edition of the *ME Bible*, see E.G. Stanley, "Moe, Phyllis. *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois*," *Notes and Queries* 223 (December 1978): 543-546, <https://academic-oup-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/nq/article/CCXXIII/dec/543/8606789>. N.F. Blake, "Moe, Phyllis (ed.), *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois*," *Medium Ævum* 39, no. 2 (1980): 352-353, <https://www-jstor-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/stable/i40145156>, and Diane Speed, "Phyllis Moe (Ed.), *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois*," (Book Review), *AUMLA: Journal of the Australasian Universities Modern Language Association, Melbourne* 0, no. 51 (May 1979): 111. For mentions of the *ME Bible*, refer to pages 14 and 17 in Starr Hoffman, *Passionate Transformation in Vernicle Images*, Master's thesis, University of North Texas, 2004 (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2004), <https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc4701/>, page 135 in Susanna Fein, "Mary to Veronica: John Audelay's Sequence of Salutations to God-Bearing Women," *Speculum* 86 (2011): 964-1009, and page 135 in Maria Luisa Maggioni, "Devotional Practice and Emotional Response to the Veronica in Middle English," *Reading Medieval Studies* 47 (2021): 131-151. As well, James Morey's *Book and Verse: A Guide to Middle English Literature* summarizes the *ME Bible*'s contents, including line or page numbers, events, names, illustrative quotations and biblical citations. See James H. Morey, *Book and Verse: A Guide to Middle English Literature* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 118-119.

## 1.2 Research Hypothesis

An anonymous cleric in late fifteenth-century England chose a work from thirteenth-century France and, intentionally or not, produced a text that highlights the story of St. Veronica and the siege of Jerusalem.<sup>11</sup> Even though it is impossible to determine the reasons for the choice, it is possible to assess their consequences. I add an additional dimension to the current area of scholarship on such texts by bringing attention to their theological meaning and function.

In 1470, the English Catholic Church's influence was declining. More importantly, it was a "hinge of history" moment, a turning point in England's spiritual life. Was it coincidental that the *ME Bible* appeared just as English religious and theological life was beginning to undergo profound shifts in significance and practice? Would a reader in that time and place consider it as reflecting and responding to the prevailing climate, or would it be considered solely as a collection of edifying and entertaining stories from a bygone age? We simply don't know. Even so, based on the evidence stemming from my study of pre-Reformation England, I believe we can make reasonable proposals.

I will argue that the meaning is as follows: Rome's definition of the seminal Christian doctrine, the Incarnation, is incontestable; those who challenge it will suffer severe consequences; and Rome is the legitimate religious centre of Christianity. To convey this meaning, the *ME Bible* uses biblical stories, legends and apocrypha that support holy images and the Eucharist, two issues that for Reformers epitomized the malaise affecting the English Church. In this thesis, I examine how the two issues point to the Incarnation, and how the

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<sup>11</sup> In the concluding chapter, *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en français: A Matter of Choice or Accessibility?* I examine options related to whether or not the author of the *ME Bible* had access to a complete *Bible en français* to translate.

narratives in the *ME Bible* reiterate the theological meaning of the Incarnation as articulated by the Church of Rome.

To defend this claim, I will study several overlapping contexts—literary, historical and theological—to establish an adequate background in which to interpret the meaning of this text as it arises in the interplay of its form and content.

### *Nexus of History, Literature and Theology in Pre-Reformation England*

In pre-Reformation England, when the *ME Bible* appeared, the veneration of holy images and the cult of the Eucharist, both of which had ecclesial authorization, were vociferously contested. For Reformers, Church teachings on these topics was not only absurd, but also distorted the right relationship between humanity and God. Whether explicit or implicit, objections became increasingly widespread in the sermons, refutations and polemics of the period. Read in its totality, the narrative of the *ME Bible* provides an implicit defense of holy images and the Eucharist, both of which follow from Christian faith and doctrine concerning the Incarnation.

The *ME Bible* is a work of narrative literature, of a type that is common from the twelfth to fifteenth centuries. Written in the vernacular, these literary works often supplemented stories from the canonical (Vulgate) Bible with quasi-biblical, extrabiblical or biblically-based material, sometimes considerably expanding the biblical text.<sup>12</sup> As noted, they commonly include such diverse material as biblical, legendary and apocryphal material conveyed in commentaries, glosses and paraphrases. They have no official status or aspiration to be canonical. Scholars refer

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<sup>12</sup> Refer to Appendix A for a listing of the biblical and non-biblical sources of the *ME Bible*.

to them as the medieval popular Bibles.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, the *ME Bible* is not a Bible *as such* but, rather, a medieval popular Bible.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout the *ME Bible*, the reader finds explicit and implicit allusions to the Incarnation. They begin with the opening reference to the *imago Dei*, then move to the legend of Veronica and the destruction of Jerusalem, and conclude with a meditation on the Eucharist. These motifs anchor the work. Each has an incarnational dimension which I argue holds together multiple and apparently disparate sub-narratives into a cohesive whole. And embedded within are arguments that support the use of holy images and the cult of the Eucharist as manifesting the Incarnation in history and in sacrament. As I will demonstrate, these motifs converge to convey the *ME Bible's* meaning.

### ***1.3 Methodology: The Worlds In, Behind and in Front of the Text***

A comprehensive interpretative process recognises that a text, or story, is created and disseminated under certain conditions and with an audience in mind. Thus, to distinguish the various dimensions of meaning, I use features of Paul Ricoeur's "Three Worlds of the Text" hermeneutical approach, which distinguishes and relates the historical, literary and received bodies of meaning; a full understanding of meaning must include the text's background, the text itself, and the world in which it is understood, theirs and ours. Each of these "worlds" has multiple contexts.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Such works are "a memorable, accessible and popular body of biblical material" consisting of an "eclectic choice of biblical stories and the liberal synthesis of those stories with legend and apocrypha." Morey, *Book and Verse*, 86.

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter 3, English Literary Culture, the Medieval Popular Bible and *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois*.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, trans. Peter McCormick et al. and ed. Lewis S. Mudge (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1980).

To establish the *ME Bible's* meaning and relevance in pre-Reformation England requires that I read it within a framework of overlapping contexts. A full understanding must include the text's background, the text itself, and the world in which it is understood, theirs and ours. Each of these "worlds" has multiple contexts.

Several contexts converge uniquely in the *ME Bible*, but each is distinct in its own way: they include biblically based literature, anti-Semitism against the backdrop of the Vengeance motif, the Veronica in theology, literature and material culture, heresy and the pre-Reformation religious and theological debates relative to holy images, the Eucharist and transubstantiation. In turn, these contexts converge to shape the meaning of the text, and my analysis takes place at the nexus of this convergence.

An example is the Veronica cloth. It is an artifact with a history and a popular subject of literature and art. In the world of the *ME Bible*, it is an agent of evangelization, healing and conversion. Finally, in the audience's world, which is interpretive, it is an expression of the Incarnation. Still, the interconnectedness within the worlds enables me to interpret the cloth as a physical artifact, a literary motif, partly historical yet of mysterious provenance, partly fictional or legendary, but all deeply religious and significant.

### *The World Behind the Text*

A first world, the one behind the text, refers to the particular time and place in which a text is produced. A text cannot be understood in isolation from its historical context. In fact, these contexts are multiple. In terms of religious culture, there was a shift from medieval Scholasticism, which emphasized philosophical analysis, to a theological stance that emphasized the Incarnation and its material manifestations. As I describe, Church teaching and tradition

related to this seminal doctrine of Christianity often revolved around holy images and the cult of the Eucharist, especially the pontificate of Pope Innocent III (r. 1198–1216).

At the same time, movements of reform are starting in England. It is a time when the Reformer and theologian, John Wycliffe (c. 1328–1384), was promoting a concept of Church as all people predestined for salvation, rather than members of the Church of Rome.<sup>16</sup> In addition to challenging ecclesial authority, the theologian opposed the veneration of holy images and the Eucharist and is perhaps most responsible for making these the contested issues because they are not explicitly biblical.<sup>17</sup> His followers, the Lollards, also condemned non-biblical devotions and practices, like those described in the *ME Bible* (e.g., veneration of images and eucharistic practices). These and other theological divergences during the period have an impact on the historical-theological context of the *ME Bible*.

### *The World of the Text*

A second world must also be recognized in the literary artifact. The relationship between a text and its prototype must also be included here. In what follows, I take a synchronic approach to interpreting the *ME Bible*, recognizing that “a final redactor has produced a final version of a text and the text itself supplies the primary evidence for discovering the author’s theological purpose.”<sup>18</sup> In his article on vernacular theology, Vincent Gillespie describes the religious works that appeared in late-medieval England as innovative, instructive and intellectually challenging. He claims that complex tasks and rigorous methodology were needed to translate

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<sup>16</sup> Kevin Madigan, *Medieval Christianity: A New History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 390.

<sup>17</sup> See Chapter 6, The Pre-Reformation Period and the English Church.

<sup>18</sup> W. Randolph Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 182. See Chapter 3, English Literary Culture, the Medieval Popular Bible and *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d’Argenteuil’s Bible en français*.

religious texts into medieval vernaculars.<sup>19</sup> Taking note of his assessment, I analyze the *ME Bible* as a coherent text and an independent work.<sup>20</sup>

The *ME Bible* must be analyzed on its own terms. This analysis can draw for confirmation and evidence from the original Old French. Hence, I look to the historical background of the Old French prototype to confirm my arguments. In thirteenth-century France the Catholic Church had power and influence in the West, and papal authority was absolute. The themes, especially in the *Vengeance*—holy war, chivalry, knighthood and pervasive violence—evoke a distant era and sit differently just as Rome’s authority is being questioned. These two different historical circumstances are both relevant to and affect the meaning of the *ME Bible* in late fifteenth-century England.

The *ME Bible*’s author translated only the biblical and legendary narratives from the *Bible en françois* and omitted the expository chapters. By omitting them, the *ME Bible* allocates more space to the legend of Veronica and the destruction of Jerusalem than existed in the original. A superficial reading appears to indicate that the *ME Bible* is constituted of two discreet parts—biblical material on the one hand and a *Vengeance of the Saviour* narrative on the other. My study, however, reveals that these two sections are linked through language and narrative elements held together by a conception of the Incarnation.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> “[Translating] invariably involve[s] complex editorial acts of selection, reordering, lexical choice, and responsiveness to the needs and abilities of a real or imagined audience. Issues of manuscript context, genre, register, and style are often as important as issues of content or theology.” Vincent Gillespie, “Vernacular Theology,” in *Middle English*, ed. Paul Strohm, Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature (Oxford University Press, 2015), 402, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199287666.013.0025>.

<sup>20</sup> In Chapter 3, *English Literary Culture, the Medieval Popular Bible and The ME Prose Translation of Roger d’Argenteuil’s Bible en françois*, I provide my reasons for examining the *ME Bible* as a discrete entity.

<sup>21</sup> See Chapter 8, *Unveiling the Incarnation*.

### *The World in Front of the Text*

A third world pertains to the reader as such, then principally, but also now. The stories have more in common with late-medieval Europe, but they are set in first-century Jerusalem and Rome. This narrative juxtaposition results in a number of historical anachronisms, but a medieval audience would encounter familiar literary themes, including faith, heroism, redemption, chivalry as well as sin, betrayal, cowardice and war.

Plausibly, a reader could have made connections between the Jews, whom the *ME Bible* depicts as anti-Christian heretics, and the early English Reformers who were deemed as undermining ecclesial teaching and tradition. The Jewish characters deny Jesus as the Incarnation of the Word, and the Lollards deny holy images and the Eucharist, which both presuppose Incarnation.<sup>22</sup> The claim is not that both are heresies in the same way, or that they are identical as heresies; one can classify heresy without needing the various types to be identical in all respects.

Texts also have contemporary meaning. Taken together, the anachronisms and their untangled meanings and the blend of biblical, legendary and apocryphal material make it difficult to decipher the meaning of the *ME Bible*. To manage this complex literary landscape, I interpret this text in part by distinguishing several discrete contexts conveyed in the text. On this basis, I propose a typological reading of two characters—St. Peter and Vespasian—as key to extracting the *ME Bible*'s meaning.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Haley Wells describes how anti-Semitism was conveyed through literature. Examining the Venerable Bede's homilies, Gerald of Wales' books and chronicles, Chretien de Troyes' Grail narrative, and *The Ballad of Hugh of Lincoln*, she demonstrates "the antisemitic attitudes and anxieties that were widespread among the ruling classes, the clergy, and ordinary citizens," and "how they recorded and affected the antisemitic attitudes found in England (and France) during the Middle Ages." Haley Wells, "From Homilies to Little Saint Hugh: Antisemitism in Medieval Literature," *Vulcan Historical Review* 27, no. 15 (2023): 75.

<https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/vulcan/vol27/iss2023/15>.

<sup>23</sup> See Chapter 9, Connecting the Threads.

By my efforts, I am working to establish that this neglected work can be read as a reiteration of the doctrine of the Incarnation as articulated by the Church, a warning to those who challenge it and even an assertion of Rome’s hegemony. It is commonplace to consider late medieval England as intellectually sterile and without “any superior works of philosophy or theology.”<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, this era produced several important intellectual principles and narratively sophisticated works like the *ME Bible*.<sup>25</sup>

### *Challenge*

The *ME Bible* is a typical medieval popular Bible except for the appended *Vengeance* narrative.<sup>26</sup> As a result, it appears to comprise two parts: biblical material liberally sprinkled with legend followed by the apocryphal *Vengeance*. For a work to be cohesive and comprehensible, its individual parts must illuminate the whole, the whole must elucidate the individual parts, and the different parts must relate to each other. The main challenge of this study is to identify the connections, and their significance, between the biblical material (chapters 5 to 17), and the *Vengeance* section (chapters 18 to 23).

There are several obvious linkages—for example, the siege is a direct response to Christ’s death, and some characters are common to both.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, the stories, language, images and allusions all point to the Incarnation. A specific way of understanding the historical significance of the Incarnation holds them all together. Hence, expressions referring to the

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<sup>24</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica, “United Kingdom – England in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century,” *Britannica Online*, March 19, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Kingdom/England-in-the-15th-century>.

<sup>25</sup> For example, the principle termed Occam’s Razor, is attributed the English theologian, logician and Franciscan friar, William of Ockham (ca. 1285-1348). His maxim, “Plurality must never be posited without necessity” remains a foundational principle in scientific reasoning, philosophical debate and critical thinking and is an example of the intellectualism of the era. y

<sup>26</sup> See Chapter 3, English Literary Culture, the Medieval Popular Bible and *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d’Argenteuil’s Bible en français*.

<sup>27</sup> See Chapter 5, *The Vengeance of the Saviour: Proclaiming Rome’s Superiority*.

Incarnation, and how it is manifested in holy images and the Eucharist, unify the biblical material and the *Vengeance* section.

#### ***1.4 Literature Review***

There are many lenses from which to interpret the *ME Bible*, including history, literature and theology. These subjects, however, have been widely discussed and analyzed so that there is a significant body of scholarly work currently available. Conversely, and as I have mentioned, the *ME Bible* has received little attention. Hence, I undertake this study to fill a research gap and contribute to future studies of biblically-based literature from the pre-Reformation period, especially in England.

Of necessity, this study of the *ME Bible* covers a wide range of topics, but at the same time, I concentrate on those areas of scholarly discussion that bear on my interpretation of the text. In the present study, I weave together ideas from scholarly writings on late-medieval religious thought, practice and writings.<sup>28</sup> For the most part, these sources are not likely to cause disagreement. If they do, I highlight the particular perspective or “lens” that the source is using. I have organized the writings under broad headings while recognizing that they address a wide range of topics.

#### *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois*

As stated, Phyllis Moe's edition of the *ME Bible* is the only scholarly work on this text. Working with the Cleveland manuscript, she used textual, source and redaction criticisms to develop the print version of the handwritten manuscript. She describes the text's contents, layout

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<sup>28</sup> For a complete inventory of texts consulted, please refer to the Bibliography.

and format, translation method, paleographic and linguistic patterns, and her editorial method.<sup>29</sup> Her version is a comprehensive work of codicology; she does not address, however, the text's historical, theological or literary contexts. Her task, rather, is a presentation of the manuscript itself and its history.<sup>30</sup>

Moe also penned an article about the legend of Veronica and the destruction of Jerusalem as it appears in the *ME Bible*.<sup>31</sup> In it, she argues that the legend as written in the *ME Bible* is from the *Bible en françois*, which contains the last version of the Veronica story, and not from any other text.<sup>32</sup>

### *The Bible and Biblical Literature*

Henry Kelly's *The Middle English Bible: A Reassessment* challenges the common scholarly opinion that Archbishop Thomas Arundel censured the Wycliffe Bible at the Council of Oxford in 1407.<sup>33</sup> Rather, as Kelly notes, it was the most popular work of any genre in English during the Middle Ages, and was frequently copied and quoted by preachers during the Mass. I describe how, simultaneously, texts like the *ME Bible* circulated that imparted biblical knowledge to lay persons.

Richard Marsden's "The Bible in English" contributes to our understanding of the early

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<sup>29</sup> See Moe, *ME Bible*, 11-13 and 31-43.

<sup>30</sup> A digitized version of the manuscript is available at <https://cplorg.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p4014coll9/id/3015/rec/1>.

<sup>31</sup> Phyllis Moe, "Cleveland Manuscript W Q091.92-C468 and the Veronica Legend," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 70 (1966): 459-470.

<sup>32</sup> "The Cleveland text is, in fact, a translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's *Bible en françois*, a little-known French work probably written about 1300 [Moe later revised the date to be between 1260 and 1270], which records, among other things, an account of Veronica considered by Dobschütz to be the last version of the Veronica legend." Moe, "Cleveland Manuscript," 463. Here, Moe refers to Ernst von Dobschütz' *Christusbilder: Untersuchungen zur christlichen Legende* a study of the images of Christ that originated in Christian legend and apocrypha. See the chapter "Belege zu Kapitel VI, A. zur Legende von Paneas" for von Dobschütz' investigation into the Veronica legend and images of Christ, <https://archive.org/details/ChristusbilderDobschutz/page/n567/mode/2up?q=Die+Veronica>.

<sup>33</sup> Henry Ansgar Kelly, *The Middle English Bible: A Reassessment*, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

availability (eighth to fourteenth centuries) of biblical texts in English.<sup>34</sup> This study traces the evolution of biblical literature from early verse paraphrases of key biblical narratives and English glosses of Latin texts, to straightforward translations of biblical books from both Testaments, and then to English biblical versions of all genres, produced between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries, including the *ME Bible's* precursors.

*An Introduction to The Medieval Bible*, by Franciscus van Liere, reassesses the exegetical tradition and didactic function in Middle English Bibles.<sup>35</sup> In disputing the notion that “common” folk did not read the Bible in the Middle Ages, he describes how biblical texts and texts with biblical material circulated widely in keeping with the Church’s aim to spread the Gospel and encourage lay piety. He argues that since at least the fourth century biblical texts translated into vernacular languages had fostered biblical literacy to persons illiterate in Latin. He also contends that the gradual evolution of vernacular religious writings was concomitant with a rise in literacy that in turn stimulated a demand for vernacular works. My exploration of the *ME Bible's* genre makes use of van Liere’s discussion of single-narrative books that could be called “Bibles,” and which often include non-biblical material.

James Morey’s *Book and Verse: A Guide to Middle English Biblical Literature* itemizes which parts of the Bible appear in Middle English, and where.<sup>36</sup> He argues for the Bible as *the* template for the content, style and standard of all medieval literature. He explains how authors

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<sup>34</sup> Richard Marsden, “The Bible in English,” in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*, eds. Richard Marsden and E. Ann Matter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 217-238, <https://www-cambridge-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/core/books/new-cambridge-history-of-the-bible/bible-in-english/9C9B8F9C71BFE81C0FB5AF0755E6C5BB>.

<sup>35</sup> Franciscus A. van Liere, *An Introduction to the Medieval Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), <https://www-cambridge-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/core/books/an-introduction-to-the-medieval-bible/2CC31257221458382CCDA69E00B24D91>. Van Liere credits the following studies for renewing interest in the medieval Bible: Ceslas Spicq’s *Esquisse d’une histoire de l’exégèse latine au Moyen Âge* (1946), Beryl Smalley’s *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (1952) and Henri de Lubac’s *Exégèse médiévale. Les quatre sens de l’écriture* (1959-1964) concentrate on medieval hermeneutics. Van Liere, *Medieval Bible*, 1.

<sup>36</sup> See note 10 above.

freely reshaped biblical material into legends and apocryphal stories that were read by literate lay people and used in preaching. These “hybrid” texts were designed to be doctrinally relevant; but, the issue of authority had to be addressed in that such synthesized material was not Scripture *per se*. In the end, he claims the practice was justified in light of the biblical precedent of having one text appeal to another. He also describes how Latin phrases were inserted to underscore key passages from Scripture, a practice followed in *ME Bible*.<sup>37</sup>

Elizabeth Salter’s *Nicholas Love’s “Myrroure of the blessed lyf of Jesu Christ,”* contributes considerably to my effort to situate the *ME Bible’s* in the tradition of English devotional literature.<sup>38</sup> Like “Life of Christ,” the *ME Bible* borrows the styles and approaches of secular genres, uses prose as opposed to verse, incorporates a variety of material from legendary and apocryphal sources, and loosely paraphrases the biblical text by augmenting with doctrinal, homiletic and legendary matter. I also draw from Salter’s review of French and Anglo-French literature, which includes texts like the *ME Bible* that were translated into English between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries.

### *Medieval French Biblical Literature*

Margaret Hoogvliet’s “The Medieval Vernacular Bible in French as a Flexible Text: Selective and Discontinuous Reading Practices” provides a significant historical background on the vernacular popular Bible.<sup>39</sup> Concentrating on works from the late thirteenth to the fifteenth century, Hoogvliet describes these vernacular texts as collections of biblical stories, homilies, the

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<sup>37</sup> Appendix B references Latin text in the *ME Bible* and its Middle English translation.

<sup>38</sup> Elizabeth Salter, *Nicholas Love’s “Myrroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ”* (Salzburg: Institut Für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1974), 67-68.

<sup>39</sup> Margaret Hoogvliet, “The Medieval Vernacular Bible in French as a Flexible Text: Selective and Discontinuous Reading Practices,” in *Form and Function in the Late Medieval Bible*, eds. Eyal Poleg and Laura Light, Library of the Written Word – The Manuscript World (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 283-306, <https://brill-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/display/title/23760>.

Gospels, and biblical quotations with moral guidelines. Her contention that that the Church endorsed these compilations to foster biblical literacy is germane to my investigation into the theology expressed in the *ME Bible*.

Jeanette Patterson's *Making the Bible French: The Bible historiale and the Medieval Lay Reader* provides the background to Guyart des Moulins's *Bible historiale*, the predominant French translation of the Bible between the thirteenth and the sixteenth centuries.<sup>40</sup> In it, Patterson describes how Guyart enhanced his translation with scholastic literary techniques, vernacular preaching, and secular fiction, to produce one of the most popular and widely copied French-language texts of the later Middle Ages. These studies give insight into key factors in the development and background of the *Bible en francois* (the *ME Bible*'s prototype).

In *Medieval French Literature: An Introduction*, Michel Zink discusses the medieval view of prose literature.<sup>41</sup> He maintains that in medieval literary culture, prose was considered straightforward and related to truth. Conversely, it was believed that verse could deceive and, therefore, was unsuitable for conveying God's truth. Zink argues for a literary culture in which prose is considered the sole literary means to convey God's plan. I reference Zink's discussion of prose in my exploration of genre.

### *The Legend of St. Veronica*

*The European Fortune of the Roman Veronica* is the published proceedings of the 2014 *Roman Veronica Conference* in Milan. Within, it features articles by scholars from such varied disciplines as history, literature, liturgical studies, art, manuscript studies and textual

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<sup>40</sup> Jeanette Patterson, *Making the Bible French: The Bible historiale and the Medieval Lay Reader* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022), <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ottawa/detail.action?docID=6876662#>.

<sup>41</sup> Michel Zink, *Medieval French Literature: An Introduction*, trans. Jeff Rider (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995), 70.

interpretation.<sup>42</sup> Throughout my work, I reference several articles from the collection, including ones consider the Veronica's status in medieval England.

Barry Windeatt's article "'Vera Icon?'" traces the Veronica tradition from Anglo-Saxon times to the thirteenth century.<sup>43</sup> This study of the medieval literary and artistic development of the vernicle in England shows that the tradition is defined by variations in detail, including different stories about its origins. Although the emphasis is on manuscripts, "'Veronica' Images and the Office of the Holy Face in Thirteenth-Century England" shows how information (images in this case) was transmitted during the period. Author Nigel Morgan proposes that English Veronica images were not original; rather, he submits, they were derived from the Holy Face in the *Sancta Sanctorum* in the Lateran Palace, which were copied into English manuscripts.<sup>44</sup>

One cannot research the historical, ecclesial or liturgical aspects of the Veronica cult without coming across Pope Innocent III, who is central to my interpretation of the *ME Bible*. Hence, Rebecca Rist's chapter, "Innocent III and the Roman Veronica: Papal PR or Eucharistic Icon?" in the *European Fortune*, was invaluable to my work. In the article, Rist details Innocent's promotion of the Veronica cult and pilgrimage to Rome; his effort to improve papal-public relations; and his reform measures. Rist also sees a link between Innocent's devotion to the Veronica and his emphasis on the Eucharist as the centre of Catholic life, as articulated during the Fourth Lateran Council.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Amanda Murphy, Herbert L. Kessler, Marco Petoletti, Eamon Duffy and Guido Milanese, eds., *The European Fortune of the Roman Veronica in the Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017).

<sup>43</sup> Barry Windeatt, "'Vera Icon?' The Variable Veronica of Medieval England," in Murphy, et al., *The European Fortune*, 58-71.

<sup>44</sup> Nigel Morgan, "'Veronica' Images and the Office of the Holy Face in Thirteenth-Century England," in Murphy, et al., *The European Fortune*, 85-101.

<sup>45</sup> Rebecca Rist, "Innocent III and the Roman Veronica: Papal PR or Eucharistic Icon?" in Murphy, et al., *The European Fortune*, 115-124.

“*Signatis ... vultus tui*” sees parallels between the Veronica-*imago Dei*, and early-medieval imprinted items, including coins with Christ’s image and the surface of the Host.<sup>46</sup> Author Eden Kumler suggests the Christ-image implicitly signifies the *imago Dei*, which is a theme relevant to my investigation into the interconnectedness of incarnational motifs.

Starr Hoffman’s master’s thesis, “Passionate Transformation in Vernicle [Veronica] Images” (2004), examines the iconography of late-medieval Veronica images.<sup>47</sup> Hoffman’s research examines the change in images of Christ’s face from “iconic representations [...] toward the graphic imagery of Christ’s suffering during the Passion,” which she claims were influenced by the Roman Veronica, affective piety and the Mass.<sup>48</sup> My work benefits from Hoffman’s discussion of the Veronica as a visual “stand-in” for the Host, especially when the Eucharist was available only annually.

The focal point of Hans Belting’s *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art* is the medieval cult of holy images.<sup>49</sup> He describes icons like the Veronica that have “privileged” status because of what he calls the “ontological relation between likeness and model” based on authenticity (i.e., the true image).<sup>50</sup> He also explores the “desire to see the face of God” that underpins both the *mandylion* of the Abgar legend and the Veronica, the two *acheiropoieta* (images made without human hands) that I investigate in this study.

In *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany*, Jeffrey Hamburger claims that the Veronica encapsulates many of the characteristic expressions

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<sup>46</sup> Aden Kumler, “*Signatis ... vultus tui*: (Re)impressing the Holy Face before and after the European Cult of the Veronica,” in Murphy, et al., *The European Fortune*, 102-113.

<sup>47</sup> J. Starr Hoffman, *Passionate Transformation in Vernicle Images*, Master’s thesis, University of North Texas, 2004 (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2004), <https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc4701/>.

<sup>48</sup> Hoffman, *Passionate Transformation*, 1.

<sup>49</sup> Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>50</sup> Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 47.

of late-medieval piety (e.g., religious individualism, contemplation, focus on Christ's Passion, lay movements, pilgrimage and relics) and theology.<sup>51</sup> Hamburger's discussion on eucharistic theology and the Veronica is important to my argument that the *ME Bible* positions the Veronica and the Eucharist as expressions of the Incarnation.

Katherine Brown's *The Legend of Veronica in Early Modern Art* is innovative in interpreting the Veronica legend through the lens of Franciscan spiritual practices, including the Stations of the Cross and affective contemplation.<sup>52</sup> One chapter, "The Sudarium Relic as Material Object in the West," focuses on the Veronica and its ability to adapt and respond to prevailing circumstances, while "Via Crucis" unpacks the at times confusing history of the Stations of the Cross.

#### *The Vengeance of the Saviour Tradition and the Jews*

Various scholarly works deal with the *Vengeance* theme. As well, there are many contemporary studies on the representation of the Jews in Middle English literature about the fall of Jerusalem. Those that I have listed below are specialized in that they mostly confine their discussions to England and the Jews.

Beatrice Groves' *The Destruction of Jerusalem in Early Modern English Literature* demonstrates the ubiquity of the theme in writing and performances throughout the medieval and

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<sup>51</sup> Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), <https://hdl-handle-net.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/2027/heb30552.0001.001>.

<sup>52</sup> Katherine T. Brown, *The Legend of Veronica in Early Modern Art*, Routledge Research in Art and Religion (New York: Routledge, 2020), <https://www-taylorfrancis-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/books/mono/10.4324/9780429242922/legend-veronica-early-modern-art-katherine-brown>.

early modern period.<sup>53</sup> I gained from Groves' discussion of the major shifts in English attitudes towards Judaism as reflected in the era's cultural and theological writings.

Stephen Wright's *The Vengeance of Our Lord* documents the *Vengeance* tradition from its inception to the late Middle Ages.<sup>54</sup> Wright claims that medieval writers used anti-Semitic stereotypes and recast history in "efforts to define the problematic relationships between political history and salvation history and between the Christian present and the non-Christian past."<sup>55</sup> Of particular interest is Wright's investigation into how the strategies used by medieval playwrights to transform the distant non-Christian past in such a way as to address the concerns of contemporary Christian audiences.

In her article, "*The Siege of Jerusalem and Biblical Exegesis: Writing About Romans in Fourteenth-Century England*," Suzanne Yeager bemoans the paucity of scholarly studies on medieval portrayals of ancient Romans, while noting the abundance of studies on the role of the Jews in such texts.<sup>56</sup> Ultimately, she assesses "the cultural fiction of their [the Romans'] Christianity" as making it improbable that they could possibly represent "any Roman group before the time of Constantine."<sup>57</sup> Even so, the Romans could be identified as first-century Christians, if it were clear that they were purely a literary creation. In other words, in *Vengeance* literature, Rome's religious affiliation is identified with Christianity centuries before Constantine legalized the faith and, later, declared it the new religion of the Empire.

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<sup>53</sup> Beatrice Groves, *The Destruction of Jerusalem in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), <https://doi-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.1017/CBO9781316286289>.

<sup>54</sup> Stephen K. Wright, *The Vengeance of Our Lord: Medieval Dramatizations of the Destruction of Jerusalem* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1989).

<sup>55</sup> Wright, *Vengeance*, 10.

<sup>56</sup> Suzanne M. Yeager, "*The Siege of Jerusalem and Biblical Exegesis: Writing About Romans in Fourteenth-Century England*." *The Chaucer Review* 39, no. 1 (2004): 70-102, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cr.2004.0019>.

<sup>57</sup> Yeager, "Writing About Romans," 72.

In *England and the Jews: How Religion and Violence Created the First Racial State in the West*, Geraldine Heng's original research describes the connection between religiosity, violence, and economic conditions and anti-Judaism which, in turn, led to the first racial state in the West (i.e., England).<sup>58</sup> Her discussion on English Jews and finance shows how money lending could be lucrative (they could lend money at interest), it often led to resentment and violence against the moneylenders.

### *Pre-Reformation Period*

Eamon Duffy's *The Stripping of the Altars* challenges the prevailing opinion that the pre-Reformation Church in England was corrupt, worldly and ripe for change.<sup>59</sup> Rather, his discussions on English liturgical and devotional practices prior to the Reformation indicate that late-medieval Catholicism was popular and theologically viable. Relevant parts of Duffy's research emerge in my discussion of the pre-Reformation and the English Church.

Kathleen Kamerick's *Popular Piety and Art in the Late Middle Ages* is a comprehensive resource for understanding lay religious beliefs and practices related to holy images during the pre-Reformation period in England.<sup>60</sup> She examines contradictory opinions about images, and shows that arguments were based on the attitude toward the "simple laity," who had no input in the debates. She also examines the Middle English work, *Dives and Pauper*, which uses Latin theological treatises to provide rational and doctrinally sound defenses of image veneration. That work acknowledges problems (e.g., idolatry and improper devotion) but insists they are solvable

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<sup>58</sup> Geraldine Heng, *England and the Jews: How Religion and Violence Created the First Racial State in the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

<sup>59</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England (c. 1400 to c. 1580)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

<sup>60</sup> Kathleen Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art in the Late Middle Ages*, *The New Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

through education. I examine these two positions and their importance to the late-medieval debates on the religious uses of art.

In *What is a Lollard? Dissent and Belief in Late Medieval England*, Patrick Hornbeck contends that Lollard challenges to the late-medieval Church were varied and dynamic, not set in stone.<sup>61</sup> I am indebted to Hornbeck's in-depth examinations of Lollard beliefs related to holy images, the Eucharist and ecclesial hierarchy.

In the article "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409," Nicholas Watson claims that Arundel's *Constitutions* were part of a larger attempt, which included the Oxford debate on Bible translation, to limit religious writing in the vernacular.<sup>62</sup> I cover the *Constitutions* and related sanctions to provide background on the type of pragmatic religious writing that escaped censure and could even be promoted by the ecclesial hierarchy.

*Medieval Christianity: A New History* by Kevin Madigan examines traditional themes, such as papal power, heresy, veneration of the saints and pilgrimage, and the break between Rome and the Reformers.<sup>63</sup> It also describes how, as Christianity coalesced in Europe from the eleventh to fifteenth centuries, relations with its Jewish citizens deteriorated. Jews were a tolerated minority but over time became a group "that was increasingly marginalized, libeled, discriminated against, expelled, and massacred."<sup>64</sup> This background is indispensable for understanding the *Vengeance of the Lord* within the broader context of early anti-Semitism.

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<sup>61</sup> J. Patrick Hornbeck, *What is a Lollard? Dissent and Belief in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>62</sup> Nicholas Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409," *Speculum* 70, no. 4 (1995): 822-864, [https://www-jstor.org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/stable/2865345?sid=primo&origin=crossref&seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www-jstor.org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/stable/2865345?sid=primo&origin=crossref&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents).

<sup>63</sup> See note 14 above.

<sup>64</sup> Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 343.

### *1.5 Overview of Argument*

In Chapter 2, I trace a path from early translations, including St. Jerome's Latin translation of the Vulgate, to the texts of reconfigured biblical material in Middle English produced prior to the Reformation era. I discuss how in early-and late-medieval England knowledge of the Bible was imparted to the faithful via biblically-based literature. I explore Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* as an example of a translated text augmented to challenge explicitly the critiques of Church teaching and tradition by reform-minded Christians. Later, I will argue that the *ME Bible* contains similar messaging, albeit implicitly.

Chapter 3 begins with a high-level review of literary culture in medieval England, followed by an examination of biblically-based literature produced from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries. I concentrate on texts known as the medieval popular Bible in terms of their function as vehicles for disseminating biblical knowledge to lay persons. Specifically, I examine two literary works, Peter Comestor's *Bible historiale* and the *Bible en françois*. Like the *ME Bible*, those two texts were translated from earlier sources and they include canonical and extrabiblical material. I compare them to the *ME Bible*, and argue that although similar, they are didactic works appropriate to their time and place; in contrast, the *ME Bible* is a response to the religious turmoil and theological uncertainty in fifteenth-century England.

Then, in Chapter 4, I survey the history of the Veronica cloth and the story's expression in literature, including its treatment in the *ME Bible*. I examine the Veronica's status as an object of veneration in Rome since the eleventh century and the only "true image" to receive papal endorsement. I explore the Veronica's place within pilgrimage and indulgences, as well as the Stations of the Cross. I also consider Pope Innocent III's Office of the Veronica and his emphasis

on a Eucharist-centred devotion and faith that stemmed from the Fourth Lateran Council (Canon 1). To support my claim that the Veronica is a symbol of Rome's hegemony, I argue that the cloth evokes and involves an incarnational sensibility that is connected to Rome and the papacy.

In Chapter 5, I identify reasons for the *Vengeance's* inclusion in the *ME Bible*. I explore the characterization of the Jews and seek to decode their function in medieval Christian culture. This study is informed by scholarship on the problematic relationship between Christians and Jews that features so prominently in medieval literature. I explore the language and the episodes in the *Vengeance* that convey support for Rome's hegemony. I offer the possibility that historical characters and events from the late Middle Ages are imagined in the first-century world depicted in the *Vengeance*. I also argue that the *Vengeance* is a flexible text that can be interpreted in light of conflicts, especially those of a religious or theological nature.

To give a sense of the criticisms of holy images and the Eucharist, I look in Chapter 6 at the writings of John Wycliffe and his followers, the main dissenters in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England. I argue that the *ME Bible* implicitly defends the use of holy images and the cult of the Eucharist and, by extension, the Incarnation. I examine the reasons behind dissenters' rejection of holy images and the cult of the Eucharist in the period under study, in light of the Church's promotion of same.

In Chapter 7, I examine pre-Reformation written denunciations of English Reformers, including texts by John Mirk (d. 1403), Roger Dymmok (1370-1400) and Nicholas Love (d. 1424) that uphold ecclesial teaching and tradition related to holy images and the Eucharist. I demonstrate how the three clerics connect the Reformers' rejection of Church teaching and tradition with heresy. After reviewing the texts, I compare them to assess the consistency of their

messaging. I argue that, like the *ME Bible*, the clerics' responses are underpinned by a defense of the doctrine of the Incarnation.

Next, in Chapter 8, I investigate the *ME Bible* to show that an incarnational sensibility connects the biblical and biblically-based stories and the *Vengeance*. I situate the *ME Bible* as a work originating in pre-Reformation England, when Reformers expressed concerns about holy images and the Eucharist. I demonstrate how words and linkages in the text bring to mind the Incarnation in answer to those concerns. In opposing image veneration and the cult of the Eucharist, English Reformers were accused of undermining the theological meaning of the Incarnation and defying ecclesial teaching and tradition.

In Chapter 9, I draw together the various threads enumerated in previous chapters by examining the St. Peter and Vespasian characters as they appear in the *ME Bible*. I chose them because, as the *ME Bible* describes, they installed Christianity in Rome. Using a typological interpretation, I argue that the Vespasian character evokes Constantine, the first Christian emperor, and the St. Peter calls to mind Pope Innocent III, the defender of images and the Eucharist. If my interpretation is correct, then the insinuation is that the Church of Rome has headed Christianity since the first century, which includes its teaching and tradition.

To conclude this dissertation, I return to Phyllis Moe's question about whether the author had access to a complete or an incomplete manuscript of the *Bible en françois* to translate. I examine the possibility that the author did have a complete text and, hence, chose to translate specific sections. I argue that the contentious issues the *ME Bible* addresses are in line with the religious and theological climate of late fifteenth-century England.

### ***1.6 The ME Bible: A Validation of Teaching and Tradition***

In the years after the Reformation, Middle English devotional literature was considered “unserious,” most likely due to the mingling of biblical with biblically-based material (e.g., legends and apocrypha). Now, however, scholars are reassessing the biblical exegetical tradition and didactic function in works like the *ME Bible*.

Thus, I establish that the narratives therein uphold the theological meaning of the Incarnation and its implications for holy images and the Eucharist. In my interpretation, the *ME Bible* is an attempt to reiterate the doctrine of the Incarnation as articulated by the Church of Rome, a warning to those who challenge it and even an assertion of Rome’s hegemony.

## Chapter 2

### Biblical and Biblically-Based Literature in the Vernacular

#### 2.1 *The Bible: Christianity's Central Religious Text*

The Bible was the most important book in the Christian world throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup> Holy Writ was at the centre of society and culture; as such, it influenced medieval literature in the Christian West. In this introductory section, I consider the importance of *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois (ME Bible)* as an object of study and the types of literature relevant to its understanding.

Contemporary scholars are reassessing the tradition of medieval biblical interpretation and the didactic, or teaching, function of the medieval Bible. Even so, existing studies within systematic and historical theology still tend to focus mostly on the canonical Bible and pay little attention to the value and theological role of quasi-biblical literature.<sup>2</sup> The *ME Bible*, which

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<sup>1</sup> “The religious and cultural influences of this work are clearly found in every remnant of medieval life that has come down to us.” Robert E. McNally, *The Bible in the Early Middle Ages* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005), 7.

<sup>2</sup> *The New Cambridge History of the Bible, Volume 2: From 600 to 1450*, edited by Richard Marsden, examines the influence of biblical texts on the literary and visual arts, drama and law in the Latin West and the Greek East; *An Introduction to The Medieval Bible*, by Franciscus van Liere, discusses the principles of medieval hermeneutics and the formation of the Latin Bible. Henry Ansgar Kelly's *The Middle English Bible: A Reassessment* is an historical reassessment of the origins of the Wycliffe Bible. For details on the foregoing titles, see the attached Bibliography.

appeared approximately in 1470, is an example of quasi-biblical literature.<sup>3</sup> Little is known, however, about its theological meaning or function.

Arguably, recent interest in vernacular theology has been concerned not so much with theology, but more with the textual (e.g., identification of sources, redaction, translation and adaptation) and historical aspects of the Bible during the pre-Reformation period.<sup>4</sup> Another possible reason for scholarly indifference to texts like the *ME Bible* is the pre-eminence of the Wycliffe Bible. One hundred years before the former appeared, John Wycliffe's followers produced the first complete translations of the Bible in English, known as the Wycliffite (Lollard) Bible, which was significant enough to have overshadowed lesser literary developments.<sup>5</sup>

Alternatively, it could be that the *ME Bible* has gone unrecognized because it is not readily accessible (there is only one extant copy), or because its somewhat unusual blend of biblical, legendary and apocryphal material has deemed it unworthy of academic study. Even so, late-medieval literary works like the *ME Bible* were important as one of the means "whereby a lay person in France or England could derive considerable biblical knowledge."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Phyllis Moe, ed., *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois*, Middle English Texts 6 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1977).

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Watson credits Ian Doyle, in his 1954 thesis, "A Survey of the Origins and Circulation of Theological Writings in English in the 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and Early 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries with Special Consideration of the Part of the Clergy Therein," with coining the term "vernacular theology" to classify religious instructional and contemplative writings from the late Middle Ages. Eventually, the term evolved to include texts written in the vernacular that were not explicitly religious. In Watson's 1995 article, "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late Medieval England" defined vernacular theology as "any kind of writing, sermon, or play that communicates theological information to an audience." Watson's definition collapses the boundaries between literary and non-literary texts and broadens the area of research into Middle English devotional literature. Nicholas Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409," *Speculum* 70, no. 4 (1995): 822-824, [https://www-jstor-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/stable/2865345?sid=primo&origin=crossref&seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www-jstor-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/stable/2865345?sid=primo&origin=crossref&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents).

<sup>5</sup> James H. Morey, *Book and Verse: A Guide to Middle English Biblical Literature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 1-2.

<sup>6</sup> James H. Morey, "Peter Comestor, Biblical Paraphrase, and the Medieval Popular Bible," *Speculum* 68, no. 1 (1993): 25, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2863832>.

The *ME Bible* is worthy of study, especially considering that it appeared in pre-Reformation England, a time when the theological status of quasi-biblical literature was unclear and contested. Hence, I will examine how it develops and conveys theological meanings. This undertaking involves a process of extracting and deciphering several overlapping but discrete contexts.<sup>7</sup>

Literary works are not written in isolation and cannot fully be understood in isolation; rather, they build on what has gone before. Understanding a text requires identifying its place within a larger literary tradition. Knowing the type of biblical literature that preceded the *ME Bible* can provide insight into its meaning and significance. Hence, this chapter considers the significant milestones beginning with early translations of the canonical Bible to the major types of biblically-based literature in Middle English. I do this to establish an initial context in which we can begin to perceive the *ME Bible's* place in Middle English biblical literature and its meaning.

### *A Survey of Biblical Literature in English*

I begin this chapter by recalling biblical and biblically-based literature that typify the works available in pre-Reformation England.<sup>8</sup> One can begin with St. Jerome's fourth-century translation of the Bible, which arguably represents a key moment in the beginning of work to render sacred Scripture into an accessible form. We can then trace a path to Middle English reconfigurations of biblical texts, which circulated prior to the Reformation era. Contrary to the somewhat justified, but ultimately erroneous belief that the Church prevented access to the Bible,

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<sup>7</sup> In Chapter 8, Unveiling the Incarnation, I discuss the theology expressed in the *ME Bible*.

<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, I consider biblically-based literature as texts with biblical, apocryphal, legendary, paraphrase, and commentary source material.

biblically-based literature was increasingly accessible to the laity.<sup>9</sup> As stated, such literature was the primary means by which the faithful gained knowledge of the Bible.

Literary expansions of the biblical text were included to support the Christian message in a way that could be understood by and, hopefully, appeal to the audience. And as I will establish throughout this thesis, the stories in the *ME Bible* are in support of Church teaching and tradition, particularly those related to Christianity's central doctrine—the Incarnation.

This initial review is a necessary starting point for further explorations of the text. It allows me to establish the *ME Bible's* place within the tradition of biblically-based literature. I hope to add an additional dimension to the current scholarship on writings like the *ME Bible* that have been mostly neglected by scholars.

### *Augmenting the Biblical Text*

The final words in the Gospel of John state, “there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.”<sup>10</sup> Recognizing that these words also apply to the entire canon of Scripture, authors of Middle English biblical literature reshaped sparse biblical material into cohesive and readable texts.<sup>11</sup> In the process, writers assumed various “intertwined and flexible” literary roles and functions.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> “Before Wyclif, and indeed even as late as the sixteenth century when the Reformation was in full force, it is widely assumed that the Bible was largely unknown to lay folk because of the relentless suppression by the Catholic Church of any attempt to spread the Word in the vernacular.” Morey, *Book and Verse*, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 182.

<sup>11</sup> “Poets, paraphrasers, and commentators felt compelled to reshape the biblical narrative because the bare text of the Bible did not always make sense. It demands interpretation, and there were known to exist various texts and traditions which could explain the ambiguities and aporias.” Morey, *Book and Verse*, 12.

<sup>12</sup> Ian R. Johnson, “The Late-Medieval Theory and Practice of Translation with Some Special Reference to Some Middle English Lives of Christ,” PhD diss., Explore Bristol Research, 1990, 407-408, <https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/34493983/342121.pdf>.

So too, authors used extrabiblical sources, which could include apocryphal, legendary, homiletic, didactic, meditative and expository material to compensate for gaps in the biblical narrative and to harmonize versions.<sup>13</sup> For example, one element of a story (e.g., character, setting, or plot) could be reimagined to underscore a doctrinal point.<sup>14</sup> James Morey notes that, while the featured episodes appear to have been randomly selected, authors strove to include the most important elements of biblical history.<sup>15</sup>

This textual practice, however, would be challenged in the pre-Reformation period with the insistence that, contrary to ecclesial teaching and tradition, the Word of God conveyed in Scripture was the sole religious authority.<sup>16</sup> Reform-minded Christians demanded that “nothing is to be believed or done that is not explicitly taught in Scripture.”<sup>17</sup> Clearly, Reformers could not or would not approve of works like the *ME Bible* that included canonical writings alongside stories with “liturgical significance” and “picturesque and memorable qualities.”<sup>18</sup> We must thus seek to articulate the meaning of the *ME Bible* in this significant period (i.e., late fifteenth-century England) and how it is communicated.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> A significant influence, especially works produced in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century France and England, was Peter Comestor’s encyclopedic Latin work, *Historia scholastica* (ca. 1170). Morey, “Peter Comestor,” 6.

<sup>14</sup> “Some stories that were popular then (Moses killing and burying the Egyptian, the Lord’s attempt to kill Moses) are not popular now; some obscure stories were fleshed out into apocrypha (Heavenly Rebellion and Fall of the Angels and the Harrowing of Hell).” Morey, *Book and Verse*, 9.

<sup>15</sup> “The authors of these works, in prose and verse, often take pains to achieve some kind of completeness and coherence[.]” Morey, *Book and Verse*, 2.

<sup>16</sup> “Authority’ means not sheer power but legitimate power. Authority exists only insofar as those who submit to it do so by acknowledging the legitimacy of those who are in a position to use institutional or other power and/or to speak authoritatively.” Daniel Patte, “Authority in/of the Church” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, ed. Daniel Patte (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 88.

<sup>17</sup> “Scripture Principle,” in *Cambridge History of Christianity*, 1139.

<sup>18</sup> Morey, “Peter Comestor,” 6.

<sup>19</sup> As stated in Chapter 1, my research revolves around extracting the *ME Bible*’s meaning: Rome’s articulation of the Incarnation, is incontestable, those who challenge it will suffer, and Rome is the legitimate religious centre of Christianity. The *ME Bible* communicates it via biblical stories, legends and apocrypha that support holy images and the Eucharist.

## ***2.2 The Bible and Biblical Literature from the Fourth to the Twelfth Century***

The Bible's importance for Christian faith and life has motivated efforts over the centuries to communicate it in a way that the faithful can understand.<sup>20</sup> As I will now relate, the Church encouraged translations of biblical text into the vernacular as a way to teach the Bible's literal and historical meanings and to cultivate biblical literacy.<sup>21</sup> Most translations into the vernacular, however, were gradual, incremental, and unsystematic, thereby requiring explanatory text to be added.<sup>22</sup>

### *Early Translations of the Bible*

Efforts to make the Bible more accessible began in the late fourth century, when Pope Damasus engaged the biblical scholar, Jerome (ca. 347–420), to provide a standard version of the Bible from Greek and, as necessary, Hebrew texts.<sup>23</sup> Jerome's translated text, the Vulgate, was the Bible used by the Latin Church throughout the West, including England, from the sixth century and into the Reformation period.<sup>24</sup> It also provided the base text for many translations of

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<sup>20</sup> Whereas this thesis is chiefly about texts, I direct readers interested in biblical literature and orality to Werner Kelber's "The History of the Closure of Biblical Texts." Werner H. Kelber, "The History of the Closure of Biblical Texts," *Oral Tradition* 25, no. 1 (2010): 115-140, [https://journal.oraltradition.org/wp-content/uploads/files/articles/25i/09\\_25.1.pdf](https://journal.oraltradition.org/wp-content/uploads/files/articles/25i/09_25.1.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> "It is a common misconception, especially in Protestant circles, that people (or, at least, the 'common' people) in the Middle Ages did not read the Bible. Biblical literacy was restricted, so it is believed, to the very small intellectual elite of monks and priests, who did everything they could to safeguard this monopoly." Franciscus A. van Liere, *An Introduction to the Medieval Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 188, <https://www-cambridge-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/core/books/an-introduction-to-the-medieval-bible/2CC31257221458382CCDA69E00B24D91>.

<sup>22</sup> "In the earlier Middle English period, only the Psalms circulated in complete and continuous translations (as well as individually and in numerous small selections), but these, too, were rarely without additional explicatory material of some sort." Richard Marsden, "The Bible in English in the Middle Ages," in *The Practice of the Bible in the Middle Ages: Production, Reception & Performance in Western Christianity*, eds. Susan Boynton and Diane J. Kelly (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 285.

<sup>23</sup> Centuries later, reformers "would point out that Latin itself was once simply a vernacular into which the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures had of necessity been translated to allow direct access." Marsden, "The Bible in English," 273.

<sup>24</sup> For a list of Jerome's translations of the sixth century Vulgate, see Henry Ansgar Kelly, "Bible: Translations and Adaptations," in *The Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature in Britain*, vol. 1, eds. Siân Echard, Helen Fulton, Robert Allen Rouse, Geoff Rector, Jacqueline A. Fay (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, Ltd., 2017), 291-295, <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/browse/book/10.1002/9781118396957/title?startPage=&alphabetRange=m>.

the Bible into vernacular languages. The Vulgate was also used by the followers of John Wycliffe to translate the Bible into Middle English in the late fourteenth century.<sup>25</sup>

Earlier that century, archbishop Ulfilas (ca. 310-383) translated the Greek Bible into Gothic, the language spoken by Germanic people from southern Scandinavia.<sup>26</sup> What is noteworthy about Ulfilas' translation technique is that he was scrupulous at rendering every word in the Greek text by a corresponding word in the Gothic language.<sup>27</sup> Ulfilas is credited with translating the entire Bible, save the books of Samuel and Kings, which he considered too violent "for the already war-prone tribe of the Goths."<sup>28</sup> In Frans van Liere's estimate, Ulfilas' work was part of a broader effort to Christianize the Goths.<sup>29</sup>

In time, Germanic-speaking tribes, including the pagan Anglo-Saxons who settled in England in the fifth century, began to migrate from their areas of origin.<sup>30</sup> By the end of the sixth century, missionaries from Rome and Ireland, including St. Augustine of Canterbury (d. 604), were preaching about faith to these illiterate pagans and establishing Christian communities.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> "'Lollard Bible' does not imply that the English text itself had any partisan verbal translations, quite the contrary: it was a very good English translation of the Vulgate." Margaret Deanesly, "The Significance of the Lollard Bible," in *The Ethel M. Wood Lecture, University of London, London, March 12, 1951* (London: The Athlone Press, 1951), 3, <https://www.bible-researcher.com/wyclif6.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Ulfilas' work foreshadows the English tradition of translating the Bible into the vernacular.

<sup>27</sup> "It would be incorrect to criticize Ulfilas for the slavish literalness of his translation, since he was merely following a system of imitation which in his time was imposed by respect for the sacred text. Moreover it is precisely this literalness of rendering which facilitates the task of reconstructing the Greek underlying text and therefore adds so much to the value of the Gothic Version." M. J. Hunter, et al., "The Vernacular Scriptures," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. G. W. H. Lampe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 343.

<sup>28</sup> Van Liere, *Medieval Bible*, 181.

<sup>29</sup> "[Ulfilas] composed an entirely new alphabet to render the Gothic sounds into a new writing system, based on Greek, Latin, and Futhark (also called runic) letters." Van Liere, *Medieval Bible*, 181.

<sup>30</sup> The Anglo-Saxon period is considered as beginning in the late fifth and ending in mid-eleventh century with the Norman Conquest. Joanna Story, "Anglo-Saxon England and the Continent," in *Anglo Saxon Kingdoms: Art, Word, War*, eds. Claire Breay and Joanna Story (London: The British Library, 2018), 24.

<sup>31</sup> "A general statement can be made that the Bible was translated piecemeal into the vernacular wherever Christian missionaries preached or taught. Most of these survivals are in Old English and Middle English, including homilies of Ælfric (d. 1010), Middle English sermon cycles, and also, in the fifteenth century, in biblical stage plays, notably the cycles of York and Chester." Kelly, "Bible: Translations and Adaptations," 291.

They used Gospel books, also called *Evangelitaria*, which were “compact, partial Bibles that incorporated the Epistles and the Gospels.”<sup>32</sup>

A famous example is *The Gospel Book of St. Augustine* (ca. 500-599), found in the manuscript collection in the Parker Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. Tradition says that Pope Gregory the Great sent the Gospel Book to Augustine to use in evangelizing the English.<sup>33</sup> By the end of the seventh century, the manuscript was in Canterbury where various additions were made, including texts from several tenth-century Anglo-Saxon charters that were copied between the texts of the Gospels of Matthew and Mark.<sup>34</sup>

At this time, full literacy was mostly confined to the clergy, especially monks.<sup>35</sup> Clerics produced most of the manuscripts, which were then housed in monastic libraries.<sup>36</sup> As well as writings intended for clerics, there were “charters in cases of dispute, royal writs, legal pronouncements, sermons, pastoral letters, and of course poetry” that would be read aloud to assemblies of legal experts and lay administrators.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Gospel books, also called *Evangelitaria*, are compact, partial Bibles containing the Epistles and the Gospels; they were “the most frequently adapted for liturgical use.” Van Liere, *Medieval Bible*, 27-28.

<sup>33</sup> Stanford Libraries, “Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 286: Gospels of St. Augustine,” Parker Library on the Web, Manuscripts in the Parker Library at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, July 20, 2021, <https://parker.stanford.edu/parker/catalog/mk707wk3350>.

<sup>34</sup> “CCCC MS 286 is the earliest surviving Gospel Book with figure illumination: although most of it has been lost, with only a picture of Luke as a scribe under an arcade, and a page of Gospel images in a grid. In the later Middle Ages this manuscript was probably kept on the altar at St Augustine's, Canterbury, where Thomas of Elmham describes a number of manuscripts associated with Augustine being kept. In recent years it has continued to play a role outside the library: since the Second World War it has been used in the enthronement of archbishops of Canterbury, and in 1982 it was put in the place of honour between Pope John Paul II and Archbishop Robert Runcie during the first papal visit to England since the Reformation.” Stanford Libraries, “Gospels of St. Augustine.”

<sup>35</sup> Even so, illiterate persons had access to the most important parts of Bible by listening to sermons and having biblical passages and commentaries read to them.

<sup>36</sup> “The majority of extant manuscripts from this period were made by clerics and housed in monastic and ecclesial libraries.” Alison Hudson, “Religion in the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms,” British Library, Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms, October 2015, <https://www.bl.uk/anglo-saxons/articles/religion-in-anglo-saxon-kingdoms#>.

<sup>37</sup> Malcolm R. Godden, “Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England,” in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, ed. Richard Gameson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 590, <https://www-cambridge-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/core/books/cambridge-history-of-the-book-in-britain/literacy-in-anglosaxon-england/A73E55DD3435F42375D6A30473F5259B>.

The conversion of the Germanic peoples led to an increased production of literature in Old English, including poetry with biblical themes and religious material, biblical paraphrases, and hagiography.<sup>38</sup> The heroic themes featured in the Bible (e.g., good and evil, honour, courage, revenge, bravery, deliverance) were not dissimilar from those found in pagan poetry (e.g., *Beowulf*), and therefore could be adapted to accommodate Christian concepts.<sup>39</sup> Such adaptations were a way to appeal to a culture fascinated by stories of gods and heroes.<sup>40</sup>

### *The Venerable Bede and Biblical Commentary*

Van Liere describes Bede (ca. 673-735) as “probably one of the most learned men of his time.”<sup>41</sup> A Benedictine monk, Bede lived his entire adult life in the monastery of Jarrow, Northumbria. His literary output includes works that explain biblical chronology, computation, and world history.<sup>42</sup> In his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (*Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*), Bede credits Cædmon as authoring the *Hymn*, a work in praise of God and the

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<sup>38</sup> “As pastoral care of the laity became a more important part of the life of the Church across the Middle Ages, and the spirituality of the laity was fostered by new movements, biblical literature in English also became popular [...] [L]arge parts of the Bible were available in the vernacular, whether in Old English (readable well into the twelfth century), Anglo-Norman French (the language of most of the ruling class from 1066 until the late thirteenth century), or Middle English.” Daniel Anlezark, “Introduction,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Bible in English Literature*, eds. Rebecca Lemon, et al. (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons Inc., 2010), 42.

<sup>39</sup> “The Christian elements of *Beowulf* are dyed so deeply in the poem’s fabric, then, that they cannot well be explained as the work of a reviser or interpolator, as was once thought. Whether they extend as far as self-conscious religious allegory is another question, one that has been debated energetically and with great thoroughness.” Robert E. Bjork, R. D. Fulk, Frederick Klaeber, and John D. Niles, *Klaeber’s Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), lxxxvi, <https://books-scholarsportal-info.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/en/read?id=/ebooks/ebooks2/utpress/2013-08-26/1/9781442688445#page=1>.

<sup>40</sup> “[T]he fallen Satan in Genesis—B, with his loyal band of followers, is described in terms that would suit a Germanic chieftain. Abraham’s rescue of Lot and the fight at the opening of the *Elene* are told in the phrases of the old battle poetry. Moses leading the Israelites is called ‘the glorious hero.’” R.K. Gordon, ed. and trans, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London: JM Dent and Sons Ltd., 1976), ix.

<sup>41</sup> Van Liere, *Medieval Bible*, 145.

<sup>42</sup> “A native of Northumbria who lived his entire adult life in the monastery of Jarrow, Bede wrote numerous biblical commentaries, as well as works that explain biblical chronology, computation, and world history.” Van Liere, *Medieval Bible*, 145.

first Christian poem.<sup>43</sup> He also reports that Cædmon was taught to sing in a dream.<sup>44</sup> Although Cædmon might not be the actual poet, Bede's story "must preserve an authentic tradition that Cædmon was the first vernacular Christian poet, and testifies to a corpus of Old English scriptural verse circulating in the early eighth century."<sup>45</sup>

Chiefly remembered for writing the *Historia*, Bede was actually a prolific writer of biblical commentaries, a form of biblical exegesis.<sup>46</sup> In an autobiographic note in the *Historia*, the monk identifies his main task as "to abbreviate selections from patristic exegesis and add such things as help to clarify sense and meaning."<sup>47</sup> His commentaries were addressed to his brethren as well as "to a broad audience of professional churchmen," some of whom he describes as "idiotæ" because they knew English only, not Latin, which could be an indicator that knowledge of the latter was declining.<sup>48</sup>

Bede was building on a tradition of biblical exegesis that had been established during the first three centuries of Christianity.<sup>49</sup> There was also an urgent dimension to his efforts to

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<sup>43</sup> "The hymn is a work in praise of God. It grabs the reader from its opening word 'Nu', meaning 'Now', making the poem feel immediate. From there it proceeds to celebrate all of creation in a mere nine lines. Like all Old English verse, it uses musical alliteration. It closes, powerfully, with the word 'allmectig', 'Almighty', in praise of God." Gwynna Fuller, "The Story of Caedmon's Hymn," British Library, Discovering Literature: Medieval Collection Items, September 12, 2019, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-story-of-caedmons-hymn>.

<sup>44</sup> "According to Bede's narrative, Cædmon sang, at different times, of the Creation of the world and all the history of Genesis, of the departure of Israel out of Egypt, and many other histories; of the Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection and Ascension of Christ, of the coming of the Holy Ghost and the preaching of the apostles; also of the terror of Judgement, the horror of hell and the delights of heaven." Van Liere, *Medieval Bible*, 367.

<sup>45</sup> "Whether or not any surviving biblical verse might be attributable to the illiterate Cædmon himself is impossible to say." Anlezark, "Introduction," 42.

<sup>46</sup> Bede wrote allegorical commentaries on Samuel and Kings, Ezra and Nehemiah, Tobit, Proverbs, and Song of Songs, and most of the New Testament, but also on select passages from the Bible, such as the first chapters of Genesis, the description of the tabernacle in Exodus, the temple in Kings, and the canticle of Habakkuk for clerical use. Van Liere, *Medieval Bible*, 146.

<sup>47</sup> Roger Ray, "What Do We Know about Bede's Commentaries?" *Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale* 49 (1982): 10.

<sup>48</sup> Ray, "Bede's Commentaries," 10-11.

<sup>49</sup> "Early modes of interpretation were established to challenge heretical interpretations, to settle theological disputes with Jews (especially related to interpreting the Old Testament) and to nurture the faith of the Church. The early Fathers, Clement and Origen, followed the Alexandrian method of allegorical interpretation, while Irenaeus and Tertullian advocated the "rule of faith" approach. The fourth century saw an increase in exegetical endeavours, including those of the Antioch school, which preferred to establish the literal, historical sense of the text as a way to

illuminate Scripture: he believed that the native population's conversion to Christianity would hasten the second coming of Christ.<sup>50</sup>

While much of his work can be said to be indebted to the Fathers, including Augustine and Jerome, Bede went beyond editing and synthesizing their writings by adding his own interpretations.<sup>51</sup> His work is important for providing insight into biblical exegesis during the early Anglo-Saxon age. It also anticipates, to some extent, the medieval practice of including and using biblically-based writings as interpretive tools.

### *Psalters: Early Bilingual Books*

Michael Kuczynski writes, "The Psalms had pride of place in medieval liturgical practice and were habitually drawn upon by preachers; they also formed the central focus of medieval exegesis."<sup>52</sup> He is, of course, referring to the Psalter—the collection of biblical Psalms and related biblical canticles essential to the clerical devotional and monastic educational systems.<sup>53</sup> Later, Psalters were the basis for the medieval Book of Hours, and "early forms of the *horae* were often attached to Psalters."<sup>54</sup>

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extract its spiritual meaning. Augustine, Chrysostom and Jerome drew on the typological and allegorical work of earlier Christian interpreters. Later that century inaugurated a new period of orthodoxy whereby, in response to heresies, the rule of faith was given over to decisions of conciliar bishops. Exegesis flourished in the medieval monasteries and in the universities, away from episcopal control. Much of the work centred on commenting on Patristic interpretation of Scripture. For medieval exegetes, Scripture had a four-fold sense: literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical." John K. Riches, "History of Biblical Interpretation," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, 115.

<sup>50</sup> "Bede was also influenced by his personal understanding of biblical history and the interpretation of scripture which regarded the conversion of the gentiles as a necessary precursor to the second coming of Christ." Joanna Story, "Anglo-Saxon England and the Continent," in *Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms: Art, Word, War*, 23.

<sup>51</sup> "Still, his commentaries were not mere digests. Even though Bede aimed to follow in these commentaries the exegesis of the Fathers, at times he felt compelled to add interpretations of his own, carefully noting in the margins what came from where." Van Liere, *Medieval Bible*, 146.

<sup>52</sup> Michael P. Kuczynski, ed., *A Glossed Wycliffite Psalter: Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 554*, Early English Text Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), viii.

<sup>53</sup> "The use made of the Psalter at this time shows how unclearly liturgical prayer and private devotion were distinguished. The Psalms had, of course, their regular weekly place in the monastic offices. But many holy men recited the Psalter daily and knew it by heart and used it as a devotional manual." Hunter, et al., "The Vernacular Scriptures," 370.

<sup>54</sup> "The Book of Hours is a private devotional text, frequently commissioned by a wealthy secular patron, which

More than a dozen Psalters of Roman and Gallican text, with a continuous gloss in Old English, survive.<sup>55</sup> Possibly the best known is the *Vespasian Psalter*, an early copy of a Latin revision of the *Romanum* Psalms associated with St Jerome.<sup>56</sup> Written in the south of England in the second quarter of the eighth century, an Old English interlinear gloss was added to the Latin text in the mid-ninth century, which makes it the earliest surviving biblical text in English.<sup>57</sup>

The twelfth-century *Eadwine Psalter* is an ambitious work with multiple versions of St. Jerome's translations of the Psalms, including the *Gallicanum* of the *Utrecht Psalter*, the *Romanum*, and the *Hebraicum*, "a translation made directly from the Hebrew that was never used liturgically."<sup>58</sup> Above the *Hebraicum* text is an interlinear translation into Anglo-Norman French, and above the *Romanum* version is an interlinear translation, *verbatim*, into Old English.<sup>59</sup> These textual enhancements facilitated "a confluence of scholarship both contemporary and ancient, thereby permitting the fullest possible understanding of God's word and its import."<sup>60</sup>

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contains a condensed version of the Divine Office that an individual might use to pray throughout the week." British Library, "Liturgical manuscripts—Books for the Divine Office," British Library, Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts, <https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/TourLitDiv.asp>.

<sup>55</sup> English glosses, which explained difficult-to-understand words, were provided to enhance understanding. For an account of the Latin texts and glossed Psalters available in Anglo-Saxon England, see Celia Sisam and Kenneth Sisam, *The Salisbury Psalter, Edited from Salisbury Cath. MS 150*, Early English Text Society 242 (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 47–52.

<sup>56</sup> James Freeman, "Through Many Hands: the Vespasian Psalter," British Library, Medieval Manuscripts Blog, November 8, 2018, <https://blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2018/11/through-many-hands-the-vespasian-psalter.html>.

<sup>57</sup> Freeman, "Through Many Hands."

<sup>58</sup> Van Liere, *Medieval Bible*, 89.

<sup>59</sup> Kathleen Doyle, "The Eadwine Psalter," in *Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms: Art, Word, War*, 350.

<sup>60</sup> Kuczynski, *A Glossed Wycliffite Psalter*, lxxxix.

## *The Gospels and Heroic Poetry*

English explanatory texts together with the decline of Latin prepared the way for the emergence of biblical material in the vernacular. The epic poem, *Heliand* (ca. 830), in Old Saxon conflates the Gospels and reconfigures them “in a Germanic heroic style.”<sup>61</sup> Its presentation is similar to Tatian’s *Diatesseron*, a second-century harmonization of the canonical Gospels (ca. 170).<sup>62</sup> During the fifth century, Augustine of Hippo had similarly “compared, contrasted and reconciled” the four Gospels in his seminal work, *On the Harmony of the Gospels (De consensu evangeliorum)*.<sup>63</sup>

*Heliand* builds on the Gospel harmony and elaborates on biblical sources to “fill in the gaps.”<sup>64</sup> In the poem, Christ is imaged as an heroic Germanic chieftain, which implies that the poem was written for recently converted Saxons who valued courage and strength over humility.<sup>65</sup> This epic poem was “intended to bring the Gospel home to the Saxons in a poetic environment in order to help the Saxons cease their vacillation between their warrior-loyalty to the old gods and to the ‘mighty Christ.’”<sup>66</sup>

Christ is similarly portrayed in *The Dream of the Rood*, from the late tenth century Vercelli Book, which R.K. Gordon describes as “the most beautiful of Old English religious

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<sup>61</sup> Ciaran Arthur, “The *Heliand* in Tenth-Century England: Translation, transmission and Turbulence,” *Journal of Medieval History*, 47 (4-5), 509-525. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03044181.2021.1975645>.

<sup>62</sup> For a discussion on *Heliand*’s relationship to the *Diatesseron*, see William L. Petersen, *Tatian’s Diatessaron: Its Creation, Dissemination, Significance, and History in Scholarship* (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1994), 107–108.

<sup>63</sup> Johnson, “Late-Medieval Theory and Practice,” 8.

<sup>64</sup> For example, Christ rewards his *begns* (retainers) with arm rings; Herod’s feast includes a drinking contest; and, the Wedding at Cana is set in a mead hall. J.E. Luebering, “Heliand: Old Saxon epic,” in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, May 24, 2007, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Heliand>.

<sup>65</sup> “[P]erhaps the most difficult practical problem (in converting the Saxons) was the translation of Christian concepts, as the pre-Christian Saxon conception of the world and of behavior in it were at considerable odds with the message of Christianity.” James E. Cathey, *Héliand: Text and Commentary*, Medieval European Studies II (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2002), 12.

<sup>66</sup> G. Ronald Murphy, *The Saxon Savior: The Germanic Transformation of the Gospel in the Ninth-Century Heliand* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), xvi.

poems.”<sup>67</sup> Penned by the poet, Cynewulf, it uses poetic ornamentation to transform the Cædmonian method of direct scriptural content into a work of sophisticated, religious verse.<sup>68</sup>

Like *Heliand*, the *Dream* aims to provide a framework in which to resolve the tensions between Germanic heroic ideals and Christian values, and reveals the paradox that underpins the Crucifixion narrative.<sup>69</sup> The poem recasts the Gospel accounts to tell the Crucifixion story from the perspective of the tree used to construct the cross (the “rood” of the title). It uses imagery to join seemingly irreconcilable opposites: the relationship between Christ’s human and divine natures, and the emphasis on heroic courage that evokes compassion in the reader.<sup>70</sup> These heroic poems are examples of how Gospel stories could be reconfigured to resonate within a specific cultural milieu, and presented in such a way to promote vernacular translations of Scripture. They also count as early analogues to the literary assemblage that is the *ME Bible*.

### *King Alfred, “the Necessary Books,” and Translations of the Bible*

The Anglo-Saxon king, Alfred of Wessex (849-899), brought literacy out of the monasteries and into the public domain. In his judgment, learning allowed one to live wisely and virtuously in accordance with God’s will.<sup>71</sup> To support education, he chose English as the language of his court, and encouraged his sons, courtiers, clergy and all young freemen of

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<sup>67</sup> R.K. Gordon, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 235.

<sup>68</sup> “Cynewulf, probably a Midland poet of the early ninth century, a bookish, thoughtful writer, well-read in Christian Latin literature, was less concerned with biblical narration than with the expression and exercise of piety.” Hunter, et al., “The Vernacular Scriptures,” 369.

<sup>69</sup> “The poet not only embraces the central paradox of the Crucifixion—that God should die—but intensifies this by presenting Christ as a victorious hero. The silence of the young warrior who strips himself and submits to death in battle contrasts with the tortured narration of the cross, which reproaches itself for having slain its Lord.” Anlezark, “Introduction,” 45.

<sup>70</sup> “He strips *himself* (“Ongyrede hine”), and, as throughout the poem, his own active intention and volition are emphasized (“he wolde”). The lines here also play with the paradox of Christ’s dual nature as both man (“geong hæleð,”) and God (“God ælmihtig”). Similarly, throughout the poem, the paradoxical meaning of the cross is explored as it shifts from a symbol of suffering and shame (for example, the “gallows”) to an icon of triumph and glory, adorned with treasure.” Catherine A.M. Clarke, “Old English Poetry,” in *Blackwell Companion*, 79.

<sup>71</sup> Dorothy Whitelock, “Alfred,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, August 4, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Alfred-king-of-Wessex>.

“adequate means” to become literate in the language.<sup>72</sup> His dedication to learning motivated him to invite scholars to the court, including the Welshman, Asser, who taught the King to read Latin and later wrote Alfred’s biography.<sup>73</sup> Alfred was keen to learn Latin so that he could help with translating books into English for his subjects who, by then, had little, if any, knowledge of the language of Rome.<sup>74</sup>

The king’s preface to the Old English version of *Pastoral Care*, written by Gregory I, announces a translation program of the books “most necessary for all men to know”—that is to say, books that lead to wisdom and virtue.<sup>75</sup> Most often, scholars cite the following writings as the necessary books that were translated into Old English, either by Alfred himself or under his supervision: Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, the *Seven Books of Histories Against the Pagans*, by the fifth-century theologian, Paulus Orosius, the already mentioned *Pastoral Care* and Augustine’s *Soliloquies* “to which [Alfred] added material from other works of the Fathers of the church, discussed problems concerning faith and reason and the nature of eternal life.”<sup>76</sup>

As a champion of English, Alfred also laid a foundation for partial translations of the Bible into Old English, including a standalone version of the four Gospels in the West Saxon dialect. Known as the *Wessex Gospels* (ca. late tenth century), it is the oldest translation of the

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<sup>72</sup> Christopher Brooke, *The Saxon and Norman Kings* (Glasgow: William Collins and Sons Co., 1988), 113.

<sup>73</sup> Brooke, *Saxon and Norman Kings*, 112.

<sup>74</sup> Whitelock, “Alfred.”

<sup>75</sup> In the preface, Alfred bemoans the dearth of vernacular translations of “the necessary books.” He then explains the significance of books and the importance of understanding them. Latin books are not being used and wisdom is being lost over time. In response, he decides to translate the Pope’s treatise into Old English. Jennifer Tran, “Alfred the Great: Preface to Pastoral Care,” *An Open Companion to Early British Literature*, PB PressBooks, <https://earlybritishlit.pressbooks.com/chapter/alfred-the-great-preface-to-pastoral-care/>.

<sup>76</sup> Whitelock, “Alfred.” In contrast, Daniel Anlezark argues that the phrase “books most necessary to know” is ultimately derived from Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine* (*De doctrina christiana*) and the books in the title refer to the books of Scripture. See Daniel Anlezark, “Which Books are ‘Most Necessary’ to Know? The Old English Pastoral Care Preface and King Alfred’s Educational Reform,” *English Studies* 98, no. 8 (2017): 759-780.

Gospels into English from Greek and not Latin.<sup>77</sup> Around the same time, the abbot, Ælfric of Eynsham (died ca. 1010), “who built on the inspiration of King Alfred a century before,” made several biblical translations.<sup>78</sup> Similar to Alfred, Ælfric was attentive to education and wanted to make Christian teaching available via “‘an authoritative body’ to those who could not read Latin.”<sup>79</sup>

Early on, Ælfric was hesitant to translate any scripture whatsoever into English, but he eventually collaborated on a project to translate Genesis into Old English.<sup>80</sup> This project resulted in the *Old English Heptateuch*, which included Ælfric’s translation of Genesis up to the story of Abraham and Isaac.<sup>81</sup> Notably, Ælfric was concerned to translate the sacred writings according to the letter, even though he acknowledges that it is next to impossible.<sup>82</sup>

In the late tenth century, additions were made to the *Lindisfarne Gospels* (ca. 715–720), which “represents the earliest surviving translation of the four Gospels into any form of the English language.”<sup>83</sup> Aldred (ca. 970), the administrator of a monastic community just north of Durham, added an interlinear, word-for-word gloss in Old English to aid clerics not conversant with the Latin text of the Vulgate.<sup>84</sup> By doing this work, Aldred was implicitly acknowledging

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<sup>77</sup> The use of Greek text, instead of text from the Latin Vulgate, is noteworthy because it foreshadows later attempts by reformers to return to the sources (*ad fontes*) in the study of biblical manuscripts.” Ryan M. Reeves and Charles E. Hill, *Know How We Got Our Bible*, Know Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 120.

<sup>78</sup> Ælfric’s partial rendering of the Bible is typical, in that “no complete versions in English were made during the Anglo-Saxon period.” Rather, the four Gospels, Psalms and excerpts from the Old Testament were translated several times; the most common approach, however, was to include Old English glosses between the lines of the Latin text. David Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 44.

<sup>79</sup> Daniell, *Bible in English*, 48.

<sup>80</sup> Andrew Scheil, “Ælfric of Eynsham,” Oxford Handbooks Online: Scholarly Research Reviews, September 2014. 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935338.013.54.

<sup>81</sup> Richard Marsden, *The Text of the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 405.

<sup>82</sup> “[W]hile he does try to keep to a strictly ‘word for word’ translation, he knows full well that he must substitute English syntax if the translation is to make ‘sense,’ which is the prime object.” Marsden, “Bible in English,” 281.

<sup>83</sup> Janet Backhouse, *The Lindisfarne Gospels* (London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1981), 17.

<sup>84</sup> “The term *gloss* denotes both a short explanatory note to a text, and a commentary added in the margin or between the lines of a text. Glossing was a reading exercise: glosses were intended to explicate the text, give grammatical or stylistic analysis, offer a translation, or supply further commentary and references to authors and other texts, in the course of reading. Collections of these glosses could exist either as additions to the biblical text written on the same

Latin's decline among the English clergy.<sup>85</sup> Like Bede before him, Aldred's gloss went beyond simple translation and could include several Old English alternative words for one Latin word.<sup>86</sup> As such, the gloss "may function as something of a thesaurus of Old English."<sup>87</sup>

Thus, from at least the late fourth century, there were efforts to expand the Bible's accessibility. The Vulgate, a translation itself, provided the base text for vernacular translations, including partial translations into Gothic and Old English. Following the Christianization of the Germanic tribes in England, translators, who were for the most part clerics, rendered biblical text and literature with biblical themes into vernacular dialects. The translations carried out at King Alfred's court were key to enhancing biblical literacy and promoting English as a language of scholarship. As literary culture evolved, translators began to take on larger and more ambitious projects including compilations of religious literature.

### *MS Junius 11 and the Biblical Compilation*

A literary and publishing innovation occurred around 1000 when several Old English poems of biblical paraphrase and extrabiblical material were copied into a single collection. Known as Junius 11, or the Cædmon Manuscript, it was attributed to the above-cited poet, Cædmon, but that provenance is unlikely.<sup>88</sup> Carl Kears calls the manuscript unique because its

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page (either in the margins or between the lines, as an 'interlinear gloss'), or gathered independently of the text, as 'glossae collectae' ('gathered glosses')." Van Liere, *Medieval Bible*, 151.

<sup>85</sup> "In the ninth century, the knowledge of Latin was declining among the clergy in England. The likely reason for this was the continuous attacks and plundering by Viking raiders, who caused a significant decline in the flourishing monastic culture that had existed in the century before." Van Liere, *Medieval Bible*, 187.

<sup>86</sup> "Some of the glosses in these commentaries were purely linguistic and gave word explanations, often in the vernacular. Linguistic vernacular glossing of the Bible was to remain common in England until well into the eleventh century, when Old English word glosses were often added to older Bibles." Van Liere, *Medieval Bible*, 152.

<sup>87</sup> Thijs Porck, "Reading between the lines in early medieval England: Old English interlinear glosses," Thijsporck: Scholar of Old English, Tolkien, and Early Medieval England (blog), May 18, 2022, <https://thijsporck.com/2017/10/30/reading-between-the-lines/>.

<sup>88</sup> "Even if the poet Caedmon did write several poems on religious themes, it is unlikely that any of the texts in the tenth-century Codex Junius 11 can be ascribed to him." Van Liere, *Medieval Bible*, 186.

individual poems, *Genesis (A and B)*, *Exodus*, *Daniel*, and *Christ and Satan*, were systematically arranged into a single long narrative “with an overarching scheme that corresponds roughly to the cycle of salvation history as it was understood in early medieval England.”<sup>89</sup>

The poems draw from biblical, apocryphal and commentary traditions; they are early examples of the “stitching together” literary technique common in the Middle English period. Van Liere describes them as examples of the “fluency between biblical and apocryphal materials [that] was quite common in vernacular translations.”<sup>90</sup> In Catherine Clark’s estimate, the interface between the biblical text and extrabiblical sources results in “rich and challenging poems that have provoked hugely divergent critical evaluations.”<sup>91</sup> The *ME Bible* is also assembled from diverse material. What I have discovered, and what I argue, though, is that a narrative frame with an incarnational flavour shapes the text.

### *Biblical Literature in the Vernacular*

Later that century, the Norman-French army under William of Normandy invaded England and established hegemony which, in turn, led to social, cultural and political upheavals in England, including “a general displacement of English by Anglo-Norman French speakers in the upper ranks of the Church and government.”<sup>92</sup> In this Anglo-Norman period (1100-1350), Norman-French culture dominated language and literary culture and language in England.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Carl Kears, *MS Junius 11 and Its Poetry*, York Manuscript and Early Print Studies (Suffolk: York Medieval Press, 2023), 6:3, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=3376505&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>90</sup> “The Genesis story, for example, included a lengthy account of the rebellion of Lucifer, and other materials were taken from the *Life of Adam and Eve*. The poem *Christ and Satan* is based on the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus.” Van Liere, *Medieval Bible*, 186.

<sup>91</sup> Clarke, “Old English Poetry,” 66.

<sup>92</sup> “The Norman Conquest of 1066 brought in its wake a general displacement of English by Anglo-Norman French speakers in the upper ranks of the Church and government.” Anlezark, “Introduction,” 45.

<sup>93</sup> See Elizabeth Salter’s lectures on the literary culture of England in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in Chapter 1, “Cultural patterns in twelfth-century: Norman and Angevin,” and Chapter 2, “Culture and Literature in earlier thirteenth-century England: national and international,” in Elizabeth Salter, *English and International: Studies in the*

Throughout the period, Latin remained the language of the Church and of scholarship. Anglo-Norman was used mainly for courtly literature, although there were other translations of biblical material into that language.<sup>94</sup> For instance, during the twelfth century, the Psalter was translated several times, including the aforementioned *Eadwine Psalter* and the Oxford and Cambridge psalters, Samson de Nanteuil translated *The Proverbs of Solomon (Les Proverbes de Salemon)* into verse with commentary; and Robert of Greatham wrote *The Sunday Gospels (Miroir ou Evangiles des domnees)* for a noble patron.<sup>95</sup>

Within one century, however, Anglo-Norman was replaced by Middle English, a language that blended Old English with the French dialect of the Normans.<sup>96</sup> Concurrently, literacy was expanding to a group of newly influential people who had benefited from urban

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*Literature, Art, and Patronage of Medieval England*, eds. Derek Pearsall and Nicolette Zeeman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>94</sup> One difference between continental French/Anglo-Norman religious literature and English works is that “the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 led to an outpouring of doctrinal and devotional works for the laity in England not paralleled in France, which perhaps explains the fact that in the early periods England was often in advance of the Continent in the development of new literary forms.” Dominica Legge, “Anglo-Norman literature,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, September 21, 2011, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Anglo-Norman-literature>.

<sup>95</sup> See Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Thelma Fenster and Delbert W Russell, *Vernacular Literary Theory from the French of Medieval England: Texts and Translations, c. 1120-c. 1450* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2016), for editions and translations of these texts.

<sup>96</sup> “‘Middle English’—a period of roughly 300 years from around 1150 CE to around 1450—is difficult to identify because it is a time of transition between two eras that each have stronger definition: Old English and Modern English. Before this period, we encounter a language which is chiefly Old Germanic in its character—in its sounds, spellings, grammar and vocabulary. After this period, we have a language which displays a very different kind of structure, with major changes having taken place in each of these areas, many deriving from the influence of French following the Norman Conquest of 1066.” David Crystal, “Middle English,” British Library, *Discovering Literature: Medieval*, January 2018, <https://www.bl.uk/medieval-literature/articles/middle-english>.

For a discussion on the decline of Anglo-Norman, see W. Rothwell, “The Role of French in Thirteenth-Century England.” *Bulletin, John Rylands Library* 58 (1975): 445–466; for information on the transition from Old English to Middle English, see Marsden, “The Bible in English in the Middle Ages,” 283–284.

growth, expanded trade and manufacturing, especially the wool and woollen cloth industries.<sup>97</sup> In turn, these literate citizens became readers of religious and devotional texts in the vernacular.<sup>98</sup>

During the Germanic settlement of England, the Church encouraged translations of biblical text into the vernacular, in this case Old English, to help convert the Anglo-Saxons. Versified religious literature, which blended pagan traditions with biblical themes, inspired and educated the populace. Verbatim translations eventually included explanatory text (i.e., biblical commentaries) to foster popular understanding of the Bible.

Throughout the period of Norman rule, biblical literature in Old English endured and gave solace to the conquered English. In Morey's view, such literature provided moral and spiritual guidance and promoted national unity when Anglo-Norman culture was in ascendancy.<sup>99</sup>

### ***2.3 Religious and Devotional Literature from the Twelfth to Fifteenth Century***

During the late medieval period, before the Reformation, we begin to see writings aimed at fostering piety and spiritual growth. Many texts were translated from Latin or French thereby facilitating their availability to audiences beyond the monastery. These works reflect a growing lay readership and changing forms of devotion that was often Christo-centric.

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<sup>97</sup> For a survey of the English wool and woollens sector, starting with the introduction of the broadloom in the later-twelfth century, through England's domination of the continental market, and until the mid-sixteenth century when lighter cloths began to dominate the market, see John Oldland, *The English Woollen Industry, c.1200–c.1560* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

<sup>98</sup> A result of the growing merchant and manufacturing class was rising literacy. The growth of these literate urban classes created a new demand for devotional texts in the vernacular. In consequence, Bibles, and Bible-related materials began to be produced in much greater quantities. Van Liere, *Medieval Bible*, 180.

<sup>99</sup> In addition to providing moral/spiritual guidance in one's own native language, biblical literature in the vernacular also promoted national identity. Morey writes, "in response to Anglo-Norman culture, English was reasserting itself." Morey, *Book and Verse*, 58.

## *Early Middle English Literature (1100-1300)*

In the early Middle English period, texts with religious themes and moral teachings continued to dominate literary production. For the most part, literature was written in verse, but prose writing was beginning to gain importance.<sup>100</sup>

### *Ormulum*

The almost-two-thousand-line poem, *Ormulum* (ca. 1180), is an early example of Middle English religious and devotional literature. Written by the English-speaking cleric, Orm, the poem is a collection of homilies derived from the four Gospels and excerpts from the Acts of the Apostles, with commentary.<sup>101</sup> The work was innovative in that, instead of following the liturgical calendar, as was common, the homilies are chronologically arranged around the Gospel versions of Christ's life.<sup>102</sup> *Ormulum*'s recapitulation of the events of Christ's life is an early example of what evolved into Life of Christ narratives.<sup>103</sup>

In Orm's Dedication to his Augustinian colleague, "broþerr Wallterr, broþerr min," he indicates his desire to provide an accessible English text for the spiritual benefit of his flock, and states that he expanded and augmented the text to support biblical learning:

3iff Enngliſſh folc, forr lufe off Criſt,  
Itt wolde 3erne lernenn,  
& foll3henn itt, & fillenn itt

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<sup>100</sup> On prose writing, see Chapter 3, English Literary Culture, the Medieval Popular Bible and *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en français*.

<sup>101</sup> "Instead of following the liturgical calendar, like most homiletic collections, Orm follows the life of Christ (often called a Gospel harmony)." Carla Maria Thomas, "Ormulum," in *The Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature in Britain*, vol. 1, eds. Siân Echarad et al. (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2017), 292, <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/browse/book/10.1002/9781118396957/title?startPage=&alphabetRange=m>.

<sup>102</sup> "The Ormulum," in *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., eds. Margaret Drabble, Jenny Stringer, and Daniel Hahn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199214921.001.0001/acref-9780199214921-e-4562>.

<sup>103</sup> The "Life of Christ" borrows the styles and approaches of secular genres, including using prose as opposed to verse, incorporating material from legendary and apocryphal sources and augmenting the biblical text with doctrinal, homiletic and legendary matter. Salter, *Love's Myrroure*, 67-68.

Wiþþ þohht, wiþþ word, wiþþ dede.<sup>104</sup>

Robyn Dietrich applauds Orm's ability to "balance the simultaneous needs of his two audiences: his native Norman French-speaking Augustinian brothers reading his homilies, and a non-literate English-speaking audience listening to them."<sup>105</sup> Her assessment, however, does not consider that some members of Orm's lay audience might have been literate and, therefore, would have been able to read the poem.<sup>106</sup> The issue of literacy is important because as more lay people became literate, they could read the Bible and biblical texts for themselves, rather than depend on ecclesial interpretations.<sup>107</sup>

### *Franciscan Spiritual Writings*

I include several texts ascribed to St. Bonaventure (d. 1274), because his works provide background on the "special literary and devotional genre particular to the Middle Ages," that evolved from the Gospel Harmony to a continuous narrative of the life and death of Jesus.<sup>108</sup> Those I discuss, below, were translated eventually from Latin into English.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Robert Holt, ed., "The *Ormulum* with the Notes and Glossary of R.M. White," University of Michigan, *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse*, vol. 2, page unnumbered, 19-22, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/AFW5744.0001.001/1:4?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>.

<sup>105</sup> Robyn Dietrich, "Spellenn: Orm's Act of Faith," in *The English Languages, History, Diaspora, Culture* 6, 1, <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/elhdc/article/view/35885>.

<sup>106</sup> "It is now widely accepted that many of the English laity were either literate or involved in literary activities between 1100 and 1300, and it is likely that the number grew significantly during the period." Nicholas Orme, "Lay Literacy in England, 1100-1300," in *England and Germany in the High Middle Ages*, eds. Alfred Haverkamp and Hanna Vollrath (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 35.

<sup>107</sup> In Chapter 3, English Literary Culture, the Medieval Popular Bible and *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois*, I discuss the impact of lay literacy in fifteenth-century England.

<sup>108</sup> "[B]y the late eleventh century two things had happened: the four Gospels had been expressed as a whole, and the events of Christ's life had been established as a framework for the liturgy and ritual of the Church year." Salter, *Nicholas Love's Myrroure*, 58. For a comprehensive review of the genre, see "Medieval Lives of Christ," in Salter, *Love's Myrroure*, 55-118.

<sup>109</sup> Between the mid- to late fifteenth century, *Lignum Vitae* was translated into Middle English as the *De passioun of oure lord. Vitis Mystica* can be linked to the fourteenth-century *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, which Nicholas Love later translated into Middle English as the *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*. I discuss the latter work below and in Chapter 7, Three Clerics Defend Holy Images and the Eucharist.

The narratives responded to the growing interest in Christ's humanity as a subject of meditation and contemplation.<sup>110</sup> Eventually, accounts went beyond the seminal works to include a wider range of extrabiblical sources to express the gospel story creatively.<sup>111</sup> These devotional writings encouraged individual spiritual growth through reading, prayer and meditation.<sup>112</sup> A dimension of so-called "affective piety," literature served to encourage love and compassion for Christ in his humanity and intense longing for union with God.<sup>113</sup> As the devotion evolved, it came to focus on Christ himself, emphasizing especially his suffering and Passion.<sup>114</sup> To evoke Christ's final days on earth, Christians were exhorted to meditate on the Passion through literature and art (images, statues, windows, etc.).<sup>115</sup>

Thirteenth-century Franciscan spirituality centred on the Passion fostered an intensity of devotion to Christ's suffering humanity. In Thomas Bestul's estimate, Bonaventure's literary works exemplify the spiritual practices of the period: "The chief literary products of this

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<sup>110</sup> "The growing emotive element in Christianity, which is first properly apparent in the tenth century in the West, meant that increased attention was turned to the Humanity of Christ, and his life fixed as a central subject for meditative activity." Salter, *Love's Myrroure*, 59.

<sup>111</sup> Salter lists Gospel Harmony, composed solely of biblical narrative; expanded Gospel Harmony, with biblical narrative and comment/interpretation; and, Gospel-based Life of Christ with patristic and legendary comment and meditative and didactic Life of Christ that focusses on Christ's sacred humanity. "No matter the format, however, all Lives of Christ have a common theme—the narrative of Christ's Life as a basis for moral instruction and meditation." Salter, *Love's Myrroure*, 99

<sup>112</sup> In Western Christianity, the heroic, sovereign Christ gradually gave way to the crucified, suffering (human) Christ—the focal point of affective piety. Various theories have been put forward to explain the phenomena, including the rise of individual self-consciousness and monastic spirituality. For the origins of affective piety, see John C. Hirsh, *The Boundaries of Faith: The Development and Transmission of Medieval Spirituality* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 11-30.

<sup>113</sup> *Cur Deus homo*, by the Benedictine, Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), and the *Epistles and Sermons on the Song of Songs* by the Cistercian, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), are credited with systematizing the devotion. Barbara Zimbalist, "Medieval Affective Piety and Christological Devotion: Juliana of Mont Cornillon and the Feast of Corpus Christi," in *Illuminating Jesus in the Middle Ages*, ed., Jane Beal, Commentaria, vol. 12 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2019), 204.

<sup>114</sup> Crusaders' attempts to recover the sites related to Christ's earthly life, and a growing insistence on his bodily presence in the Eucharist, were also factors in stimulating popular interest in Christ's humanity.

<sup>115</sup> Chapters 13 and 14 of the *ME Bible* are given over to Christ's Passion. While they do include affective descriptions, in my judgment, their function is to show the Jews' culpability for the Crucifixion. As well, the holy cloth is both a focus of affective piety and indirectly responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem. I discuss the St. Veronica story and the *Vengeance* tradition in Chapter 4, *The Vera Icona: Looking Upon the Face of God* and Chapter 5, *The Vengeance of the Saviour: A Handbook on Managing Religious Dissent*.

devotion [to Christ's suffering] were written by Bonaventure (d. 1274), whose work had a profound and lasting influence, not just on Franciscans but on all later medieval authors who wrote on the Passion."<sup>116</sup> Of these, Bestul singles out Bonaventure's *Tree-of-Life (Lignum Vitae)*, from between 1257 and 1267, and the *Passion of Our Lord (Vitus Mystica)*, circa 1263.<sup>117</sup>

The *Tree-of-Life* is a "Life of Christ" within a narrative framework. Grounded in the Gospel accounts, "Christ is seen as the Tree-of-Life on whose branches blossom such virtues [fruits] as humility piety, patience, constancy and justice."<sup>118</sup> The prologue begins with St. Paul's words "With Christ I am nailed to the cross" (Galations 2:19), thereby stipulating that one must embark on this spiritual journey through Christ crucified.<sup>119</sup> The exposition exceeds the affective response by encouraging the reader to participate in "the Pascal mystery of death and resurrection and so into a contemplative union with God in Christ."<sup>120</sup>

The Franciscan's emotive and intimate *Mystical Vine (Vitis Mystica)* is an allegorical reading of John 15:1 "I am the true vine." The graphic descriptions of the seven sheddings of Christ's blood evokes vivid mental pictures of the Passion in order to prompt deeper love for Christ. Bonaventure exhorts the reader to merge with the Crucified One:

Finally, through the door of his lanced side, we enter that humblest of all hearts, the heart of Jesus the most high. Here without any doubt lies the ineffable treasure, the love for which we have ever longed. There, too, we shall find that devotion whence the grade of

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<sup>116</sup> Thomas H. Bestul, *Texts of the Passion: Latin Devotional Literature and Medieval Society*, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 43, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ottawa/detail.action?docID=3442567>.

<sup>117</sup> "His two great treatises on the Passion are the *Lignum Vitae*, a meditation on the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and the *Vitis Mystica*, or *Tractatus de Passione Domini*. Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 43.

<sup>118</sup> Ewert Cousins, ed. and trans., *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St. Francis*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), from book jacket.

<sup>119</sup> Cousins, *Bonaventure*, 21.

<sup>120</sup> Patrick Francis O'Connell, "The 'Lignum Vitae' of Saint Bonaventure and The Medieval Devotional Tradition (Spirituality, Franciscans)," PhD diss., Fordham University, 1985), ETD Collection for Fordham University, <https://research.library.fordham.edu/dissertations/AAI8521412>.

tears is drawn, and from which we may learn gentleness and patience in adversity and sympathy with all who are afflicted.<sup>121</sup>

Other Passion-centred writings imitated Bonaventure's "mysticism, his vivid descriptions, and his fervent expression of love for Christ."<sup>122</sup> Of the foregoing is the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes vitae Christi*, described as "the single most influential devotional text written in the later Middle Ages."<sup>123</sup> Consisting of a series of devotions arranged according to the Gospel narrative of Christ's life, this fourteenth-century work also includes several apocryphal episodes.<sup>124</sup> Organized according to the canonical hours, the text served to foster affective piety by involving the reader with episodes from the Gospels, which were augmented with extrabiblical elaborations.

We have indicated that diminished competence in Latin, combined with rising rates of English literacy, led to an audience for religious writings in the vernacular. Latin works were translated into vernacular languages—in England, they were translated into Anglo-Norman and French and, later, into English.<sup>125</sup> Ian Johnson observes that most medieval English literature is a translation; that fact, along with the growing prestige and use of the vernacular, characterizes the literature of the later Middle Ages.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Bonaventure, *The Mystical Vine*, trans. A Friar of the Society of St. Francis (London: A.R. Mowbray and Co. Limited, 1955), 62.

<sup>122</sup> Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 48.

<sup>123</sup> Sarah McNamer, "The Origins of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*," *Speculum* 84, no. 4 (2009): 905. <https://www-journals-uchicago-edu.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/doi/pdfplus/10.1017%2FS0038713400208142>.

<sup>124</sup> "The *Meditationes* comprises a series of devotions arranged according to the Gospel narrative of the life of Christ, but also includes a few apocryphal episodes, such as the "Debate of the Four Daughters of God" to decide the appropriateness of the Incarnation and death of the second person of the Trinity as the means of the redemption of human kind, or those of the occupations of Mary and the Apostles on the eve of the Resurrection, and of Christ's appearance to his mother first on Easter morning, before any of the appearances recorded in scripture." Michael G. Sargent, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Full Critical Edition*, Routledge Revivals, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 9.

<sup>125</sup> Johnson, "Late-Medieval Theory and Practice," 1.

<sup>126</sup> Johnson, "Late-Medieval Theory and Practice," 1.

Elizabeth Salter describes how English authors supplemented the French and Anglo-Norman texts, which included borrowing the literary techniques of secular genres to appeal to a broader audience.<sup>127</sup> So, too, they went beyond the seminal writings to include a wider range of sources (e.g., apocryphal stories and legendary material), to express creatively the Gospel story. The *ME Bible* is not part of this trend—it neither augments the *Bible en françois* nor includes additional sources. Rather, the *ME Bible* is a truncated version of the *Bible en françois*.<sup>128</sup> As I will argue, the author translated only the biblical and legendary narratives to produce a text tailored to address the religious and theological climate in fifteenth-century England.

#### *Late Middle English Literature (1300-1500)*

Late Middle English literature is characterized by a movement to the vernacular, in this case, Middle English. Devotional texts in Latin or French continued to be translated into English as were texts in diverse literary genres (e.g., chivalric romance).<sup>129</sup>

#### *Cursor mundi*

The Middle English *Cursor of the World* (*Cursor mundi*) was written around 1300.<sup>130</sup> Of between 25,000 and 30,000 lines (depending on the manuscript), *Cursor mundi* is a poem of biblical paraphrase designed to provide religious instruction. Morey writes, “First, knowledge of

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<sup>127</sup> “So, the tendency of French and Anglo-French authors to widen the appeal of their material by making use of the styles and approaches of secular genres is even more marked in English. The movement from the verse productions of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries to the large-scale prose texts of the 15<sup>th</sup> is common to French and English. But whether we are considering French, Anglo-French or Latin source material, English Lives of Christ are frequently as impressive for their determination to mould and innovate as they are for their capacity to reflect the range and variety of their original models.” Salter, *Love’s Myrroure*, 67.

<sup>128</sup> See the discussion on both texts in Chapter 3, English Literary Culture, the Medieval Popular Bible and *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d’Argenteuil’s Bible en françois*.

Salter lists Gospel Harmony, composed solely of biblical narrative; expanded Gospel Harmony, with biblical narrative and comment/interpretation; and, Gospel-based Life of Christ with patristic and legendary comment and meditative and didactic Life of Christ that focusses on Christ’s sacred humanity. Salter, *Love’s Myrroure* 54.

<sup>129</sup> In addition to the *Vulgate*, the *ME Bible’s* prototype comprised texts translated from Latin; in turn, the *ME Bible* comprised portions of the Old French.

<sup>130</sup> *Cursor Mundi* is translated as “the ‘Cursor of the World’—that is, the text ‘runs over’ the history of the world.” Marilyn Corrie, ed., *A Concise Companion to Middle English Literature* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 35.

biblical literature contributes to the general religious education of the faithful and thereby enhances their chances for salvation. Second, knowledge of apocrypha, myth, and legend contributes to an understanding of natural history and of the physical world.”<sup>131</sup>

The anonymous poet wrote the verse for the benefit of the English people, which implies a demand for didactic works in the vernacular.<sup>132</sup>

Efter hali kirkes state  
þis ilke boke es translate,  
unto engliss tung to rede  
For þe luve of engliss lede, Englis lede of meri ingeland  
For þe comen to unþerstand.<sup>133</sup>

Inset with a Life of Christ, *Cursor mundi* augments the biblical text with apocryphal, mythical and legendary material to articulate the divine plan of salvation.<sup>134</sup> Salter suggests that the quantity and range of extrabiblical material “could have been of strong appeal to a public with an appetite for romance literature[.]”<sup>135</sup> Portioned into the seven ages of the world, the poem expresses “the unfolding of God’s plan for His people [as described] in Holy Scripture itself.”<sup>136</sup>

The first six ages cover much of the Old and New Testaments, while the seventh

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<sup>131</sup> Morey, *Book and Verse*, 101.

<sup>132</sup> *Cursor mundi* belongs to a body of vernacular literature that conveyed moral instruction and religious teachings in thirteenth-century England and France. Called the didactic movement, it “received its primary stimulus from the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. The century is characterized by a succession of theological, homiletic and liturgical documents designed to educate first the clergy, then the laity in the doctrines of the Church.” Ernest G. Mardon, *The Narrative Unity of the Cursor Mundi*, PhD diss., UOResearch, 1928, 24, <https://ruor.uottawa.ca/handle/10393/20997>.

<sup>133</sup> Mardon, *Narrative Unity*, 3, 231-236, <https://ruor.uottawa.ca/handle/10393/20997>.

<sup>134</sup> “This vast religious epic, which describes the history of salvation, is unquestionably the work of a single resourceful poem who drew liberally from a variety of English, French and Latin sources.” Mardon, *Narrative Unity*, 88.

<sup>135</sup> Salter, *Love’s Myrroure*, 88.

<sup>136</sup> “St. Augustine of Hippo was the first to expound the theory that just as the world was created in seven days, so there would be seven ages of the world itself.” In Appendix B, Medieval Concept of History, Mardon describes the seven ages of the world—which begin with Creation and conclude with Judgment Day—as they appear in *Cursor Mundi*. Mardon, *Narrative Unity*, 15.

describes “an eternal sabbath, a seventh age when time will be fulfilled.”<sup>137</sup> The poem has an apocalyptic tone, which includes narratives on the fifteen signs of the Last Judgment, a description of the coming of the Antichrist and of the last Judgment.<sup>138</sup> It is clear that the author is most interested in Jesus’ earthly life, which is divided into two ages—the fifth, which begins with prophecies and Mary’s genealogy, followed by Jesus’ childhood; then, the sixth, which begins with Jesus’ Baptism to the finding of the cross.<sup>139</sup>

The *Bible en françois* (the *ME Bible*’s prototype) is similar to *Cursor mundi* in that both are typical of didactic works produced in the thirteenth century.<sup>140</sup> The *ME Bible*, however, material commonly found in didactic works as only the biblical and legendary narratives were translated. From my standpoint, and as I will argue, the author omitted the expository chapters to convey a meaning of relevance to fifteenth-century England.

### *Stanzaic Life of Christ*

Several Middle English Lives of Christ, in verse or prose, were also produced in the late medieval period.<sup>141</sup> Of note is the *Stanzaic Life of Christ* (ca. 1400) a poem of 10,840 lines in English.<sup>142</sup> The work has been described as belonging “to the genre of vernacular verse

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<sup>137</sup> John J. Thompson, *The Cursor Mundi: Poem, Texts and Contexts* (Exeter: Short Run Press, 1998), 2.

<sup>138</sup> For an overview of apocalyptic themes in Middle English literature, see Robert Boenig, “The Apocalypse in Medieval England,” in *A Companion to the Premodern Apocalypse* 64 (2016): 297–330.

<sup>139</sup> “The only portion of world history that is treated consecutively, as we have noted [on page 18], deals with the life of Christ which is the pivotal point.” Mardon, *Narrative Unity*, 20.

<sup>140</sup> See Chapter 3, English Literary Culture, the Medieval Popular Bible and *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d’Argenteuil’s Bible en françois*.

<sup>141</sup> “Late mediaeval England produced relatively few lives of Christ, at least as biography. Rather, Christ’s life was made known, usually with a number of apocryphal additions, in sermon cycles and in meditations, in prayers and in spiritual handbooks, in glass, in wood, and in stone.” John C. Hirsh, “The Metrical Life of Christ: ed. from MS BM Add. 39996 by Walter Sauer,” *Medium Ævum* 48, no. 1 (1979): 148. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43628438>. In contrast, for Ian Johnson, Middle English Lives of Christ had “a central and authoritative position in medieval English culture, as is witnessed by the fact that some twenty-four Middle English Lives survive in a plethora of manuscripts and Early Printed Books.” Johnson, “Late Medieval Theory and Practice,” 2.

<sup>142</sup> “The Stanzaic Life of Christ” in *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., eds. Margaret Drabble, Jenny Stringer, and Daniel Hahn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199214921.001.0001/acref-9780199214921-e-5819>.

paraphrases of sacred and legendary material.”<sup>143</sup> As the story goes, a monk from the Abbey of St. Werburgh’s, Chester, wrote the poem to honour a request for an English version of the Nativity story:<sup>144</sup>

A worthy wyght wylned at me  
Sertayn þyngus for to showe,  
Pat in Latyn wrytun saw he,  
In Englissh tonge, for to knowe

Of Ihesu Cristes Natiuite  
And his werkus on a rowe,  
To the whiche by good Auctorite  
He myghte triste & fully knowe.<sup>145</sup>

The monk composed *Stanzaic Life* in response to the request, which he augmented with episodes from two popular and ubiquitous Latin texts: *Legenda aurea* (ca. 1260), by the Italian chronicler and Archbishop, Jacobus de Voragine, and *Polychronicon* (ca. 1377-99) by the English cleric Ranulf Higden (also from St. Werburgh’s).<sup>146</sup> From the two sources, the author “made a careful and focused selection of material, which was then organized by the framework of Christ’s life.”<sup>147</sup> Unlike other writings from the period, however, *Stanzaic Life* is noteworthy for its restrained narrative tone. Unlike the affective literary works associated with Franciscan

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<sup>143</sup> David Mills, *Recycling the Cycle: The City of Chester and Its Whitsun Plays* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 46.

<sup>144</sup> “This might suggest a lay readership. A view reinforced by the almost formulaic practice in the poem of quoting Latin and immediately rendering the text in English for the ‘lewed.’” Mills, *Recycling*, 46.

<sup>145</sup> Frances A. Foster, ed., *Stanzaic Life of Christ Compiled from Higden's Polychronicon and the Legenda Aurea*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 11, 9-16, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2147723346/Z200433154/1?accountid=14701&sourcetype=Books>.

<sup>146</sup> The *Legenda aurea* is famous for saints’ lives (hagiography); it also includes episodes, however, from Christ’s life, including “the Incarnation, Visitation, Nativity, Circumcision, Epiphany, Purification, Massacre of the Innocents, Boyhood, Passion, Resurrection, Ascension and Pentecost, as well as events commemorated during the liturgical season.” Kathleen Ashley, “Accounts of Lives,” in *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture c.1350–c.1500*, ed. Peter Brown (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 443. Like *Cursor Mundi*, *Polychronicon*, is a compilation of the knowledge of the age (a universal history from the Creation to the late 14<sup>th</sup> century). “Although marred by recordings of miracles and supernatural events, the work provides a significant indication of 14th-century historical, geographic, and scientific knowledge. The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Ranulf Higden,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, March 8, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ranulf-Higden>.

<sup>147</sup> Ashley, “Accounts of Lives,” 443.

spirituality, it does not explicitly evoke ardent love, yearning, pity or compassion; rather, *Stanzaic Life* is a straightforward exposition of the major events in Jesus' life.<sup>148</sup>

### *Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ*

This versified work from the second half of the fourteenth century is a reflection without a formal arrangement or division into days or liturgical hours.<sup>149</sup> Instead, it is “representative of the lyric treatment of the life and passion of Christ [whereby the poet] draws from each incident of his narrative, subject-matter for devout meditation[.]”<sup>150</sup> Apart from the Bible, probable sources include Richard Rolle's *Incendium amoris* and *Meditatio*, Hugh of St. Victor's *De laude Charitatis*, and the *Orison of the Passion*.<sup>151</sup>

*Meditations* begins with a hymn of praise to the Virgin Mary, followed by stanzas given over to Christ's life from his birth to the Last Supper; then, the Passion takes its place as the main theme.<sup>152</sup> The Passion scenes feature the heroic Christ figure from Anglo-Saxon religious literature. The poet uses imperial imagery, including the thorn and the reed as symbols of kingship, the cross as symbol of triumph, and Christ as chivalrous knight, victorious military leader, Old Testament hero and Prophet. In this literary exposition of the Passion, Christ is both victim and vanquisher whose suffering is mitigated by the honour he has brought to humanity.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> “[*Stanzaic Life*] has none of the Franciscan empathy of works such as Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Life of Christ*, but offers a plain style that deals primarily in narrative and exposition and holds the audience at a contemplative distance from the account.” Mills, *Recycling the Cycle*, 47.

<sup>149</sup> “The events which form the subject of the meditations are often introduced out of their chronological order; or, again, some topics, such as the Crucifixion, are treated several times in different parts of the poem.” Charlotte D'Evelyn, ed., *Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ, from British Museum Addit. Ms. 11307, by Charlotte D'Evelyn*, London, Pub. for the Early English Text Society, by H. Milford, 1921 (New York, Kraus Reprint, 1971), xv.

<sup>150</sup> “In various parts of the poem the author conceives the Passion as a contest between Christ and Love, in which Love is the conqueror.” D'Evelyn, *Meditations*, xxxiii.

<sup>151</sup> D'Evelyn, *Meditations*, xxxiv.

<sup>152</sup> The poet underscores the significance of Christ's singular act of sacrifice by providing four separate meditations on the Passion. D'Evelyn, *Meditations*, xix.

<sup>153</sup> D'Evelyn, *Meditations*, xviii.

### *Metrical Life of Christ*

The *Metrical Life of Christ*, which is dated to the first quarter of the fifteenth century, is a text of 5519 lines in short rhymed couplets preserved in a single manuscript.<sup>154</sup> In addition to the Bible, probable sources include the above-cited *Legenda aurea* and common narrative elements from medieval legend, which the poet drew from memory.<sup>155</sup> Within the context of late-medieval religious narratives in English, however, *Metrical Life* is not unique; rather, its general framework and story elements point to a comprehensive narrative of the most memorable events of Christ's life in "a continuous, chronologically arranged poem."<sup>156</sup> In other words, it is a conventional Life of Christ.

I include the foregoing texts to give a sense of the religious and devotional literature popular during the Middle English period. Standard Lives of Christ appeared alongside the passionate and mystical writings about Christ's life by Franciscans. Like the *ME Bible*, these texts were assembled from a variety of sources. They aimed to impart knowledge of the Bible and encourage love for Christ. In the next chapter, I argue that the *ME Bible*—a work that contains the biblical, legendary and apocryphal material from the *Bible en françois*—does not conform to any of these literary patterns but, rather, is a text unique to Middle English biblical literature.

But for the moment, I discuss a celebrated Life of Christ which, unlike its prototype, includes polemics aimed at the most significant threat to Church authority in fifteenth-century

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<sup>154</sup> "The *Metrical Life of Christ* has suffered from inadequate scholarly attention [...] the *Metrical Life of Christ* (MLC) has come down to us in a unique copy, MS British Museum, Additional 39996, also known as The American Testimonial MS." Walter Sauer, ed., *The Metrical Life of Christ: Ed. from MS BM Add. 39996*, Middle English Texts Series (Heidelberg: Carl Winter-Universitätsverlag, 1977), 5, 6-7.

<sup>155</sup> "With the exception of biblical topics, it is seldom possible to assign definite sources. On the whole, the proportion of material recounted freely from memory appears quite considerable." Sauer, *Metrical Life*, 27.

<sup>156</sup> Sauer, *Metrical Life*, 19.

England—the religious beliefs expressed by the followers of John Wycliffe, derisively called Lollards.<sup>157</sup>

*The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Para-Mystical Text*

Around 1410, the Carthusian prior, Nicholas Love, translated the previously cited *Meditationes Vitae Christi* (*Meditationes*) from Latin into Middle English.<sup>158</sup> The text's English title is the *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* (*Mirror*).<sup>159</sup> Like the *Meditationes*, the *Mirror* was popular and widely disseminated; it survives in forty-nine manuscripts and nine early print versions.<sup>160</sup> Michael Sargent considers the *Mirror* “the most prominent non-biblical translation of biblical material in late medieval England.”<sup>161</sup> When McNamer describes the work as “a complex site of contest and conflict,” she is referring to the challenges posed to ecclesial authority by the Lollards.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> In Chapter 7, Three Clerics Defend Holy Images and the Eucharist, I explore the *Mirror*'s doctrinal arguments that respond to Lollard views on the Eucharist.

<sup>158</sup> All quotations are from Sargent's edition of *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*. Sargent divided his edition into two sections: an introductory essay (pages 1-163) and Love's text (pages 1-240). To differentiate between the two, I cite Sargent's essay as follows: Sargent, “Introduction,” page; I cite Love's text as follows: Love, *Mirror*, page, line(s). The *Mirror* is also discussed in Chapter 7, Three Clerics Defend Holy Images and the Eucharist.

<sup>159</sup> For Love's sources and his redaction methodology, see Sargent, *Mirror*, “Introduction,” 38-54. For the relationship of Love's *Mirror* to other Middle English versions of the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes Vitae Christi* (particularly the *Speculum Devotorum*), and Love's *Mirror* in late medieval English dramatic texts, see Sargent, “Versions of the Life of Christ Nicholas Love's *Mirror* and Related Works,” 39-71, *Academia*, 1995, [https://www.academia.edu/44870519/Versions\\_of\\_the\\_Life\\_of\\_Christ\\_Nicholas\\_Loves\\_Mirror\\_and\\_Related\\_Works](https://www.academia.edu/44870519/Versions_of_the_Life_of_Christ_Nicholas_Loves_Mirror_and_Related_Works).

<sup>160</sup> “Love's work exists in more manuscripts than any prose Middle English religious work other than the Wycliffite Bible, and it enjoyed many early prints.” Ian R. Johnson, “From Nicholas Love's *Mirror* to John Heigham's *Life*: Paratextual Displacements and Displaced Readers,” in *Discovering the Riches of the Word: Religious Reading in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Ian R. Johnson, et al., *Intersections*, vol. 38 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2015), 191.

<sup>161</sup> Michael G. Sargent, “Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*,” in *The Wycliffite Bible: Origin, History and Interpretation*, ed. Elizabeth Solopova (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 389.

<sup>162</sup> “Nicholas Love's Middle English translation of the [*Meditationes*] has long been recognized for the varied roles it served in the religious and cultural conflicts of fifteenth-century England.” McNamer, “The Origins of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*,” 909. See also Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture, and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London: Routledge, 1993), 60-66.

A monumental work in prose, the *Mirror* comprises a series of devotions arranged according to the Gospel accounts of Christ's life, augmented with apocryphal episodes.<sup>163</sup> And similar to other Lives of Christ, the graphic depictions of the violence of the Passion and direct appeal to the reader's emotions is in keeping with the Franciscan model of piety.<sup>164</sup> Like its prototype, the *Mirror* encourages clerics and lay readers alike to insert themselves into the Gospel narrative, the focus of affective and moral reflection and teaching.<sup>165</sup> Nicholas Watson avers that Love also desired to remind the laity that clerics were best placed to answer any questions on ecclesial teachings.<sup>166</sup>

The *Mirror* divides the meditations into days and canonical hours.<sup>167</sup> The temporal division shows the liturgical influence on the Life of Christ genre, especially in the Passion

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<sup>163</sup> "The *Meditationes* comprises a series of devotions arranged according to the Gospel narrative of the life of Christ, but also includes a few apocryphal episodes, such as the "Debate of the Four Daughters of God" to decide the appropriateness of the Incarnation and death of the second person of the Trinity as the means of the redemption of human kind, or those of the occupations of Mary and the Apostles on the eve of the Resurrection, and of Christ's appearance to his mother first on Easter morning, before any of the appearances recorded in scripture." Sargent, "Introduction," 9.

<sup>164</sup> "The most characteristic feature of the mysticism, which stems from S. Francis and owes much to his example, is its devotion to the person of the incarnate Christ and its self-identification with him, especially in his sufferings. The climax of Francis' own spiritual pilgrimage, and the starting-point for that of his disciples, was the mountain-top of La Verna, when his whole being was rapt in contemplation of the passion of Christ, and his desire to share in it was rewarded by the imprint of the Stigmata. Throughout his life the goal of Francis' endeavour was not only an outward imitation of Christ whereby men might see him reflected in his faithful servant, but also a personal closeness to Jesus, the Son of Man, in his joys and in his sorrows, in which the soul of man can in some way share. To this end all the characteristics of Francis' own life—renunciation and poverty, humility and self-abasement, the complete conquest of self-love and self-interest—were made to contribute. And those who came under his influence did the same, concentrating their contemplative love upon the historical facts of Christ's earthly life seen in terms of human feelings and emotions." John R. H. Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order from its Origins to the Year 1517* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 256.

<sup>165</sup> "The purpose of these episodes, as of the imaginative presentations of the events of the Gospel narrative, is not to supplant the words of scripture, but rather to increase the devotion of the reader or hearer of the book by presenting not merely the story of Christ's life, but even the basic doctrines of Christianity in such a way that they can be held in the mind's eye and recalled at will." Sargent, "Introduction," 9.

<sup>166</sup> "Moreover, many of his strategies (for example, his interpolation of Gospel narrative with "devoute ymaginations" of what might have been done or said, or his omission of most of Christ's actual teaching) seem to be designed to divert lay readers from doctrinal inquiry and to remind them of their childlike dependence on clerics who think for them." Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change," 853.

<sup>167</sup> The meditations begin on Monday with the Nativity up to the presentation in the temple; Tuesday, the flight into Egypt through to Jesus' baptism; Wednesday, Jesus' temptation in the desert and his public ministry; Thursday, the miracle of the loaves and fishes to the Last Supper; Friday, the Passion and burial; Saturday, the descent into hell; Sunday, Jesus' post-Resurrection appearances, the Ascension and Pentecost. Then follows the final chapter, "Treatise on the Sacrament." Sargent, "Introduction," 97-98.

episodes.<sup>168</sup> But it also underlines the situation whereby, in fifteenth-century England, material of religious instruction and edification was no longer confined to the monasteries.<sup>169</sup> Love's *Mirror* gave lay persons access to the affective form of devotion originally the purview of noviciates and women.<sup>170</sup> The foregoing, however, necessitated that he significantly alter his translation to strike a balance between his mixed readership.<sup>171</sup>

Sargent suggests that the *Mirror's* primary audience are the laity, English-speaking "symple soules," whom Love addresses in the following passage:

And þus shortly we passen ouere here miche processe of þe gospel & many chapitres of þe forseid boke of *Bonaventure*, for þe litel edificacion of hem as it semeþ nedeful to symple soules, to whеч þis boke is specialy writen in english'. as it haþ oft be seide here before.

And so leuyng þis processe in many places'. we shole onely telle þe notabilitees þere vpon shortly to edificacion.<sup>172</sup>

Here, Love declares that he omitted sections of the Gospels and chapters of the *Meditationes* to focus on texts that enhance lay understanding of "þe notabilitees" (i.e., the things most critical for salvation). So, for example, Love writes extensively on the Eucharist, including transubstantiation which, as I will describe, the Lollards rejected. Similarly, the *ME Bible's* omission of the *Bible en françois'* expository chapters, results in a text that endorses Church teaching and tradition.

Sargent also considers Love's mention of "comune peple, & symple soules" in contrast to "gostly folk" (i.e., clerics) as evidence that he is writing specifically for the laity:

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<sup>168</sup> "The influence comes indirectly through Latin literature, which had early connected the narrative of the Passion with the liturgical hours as a convenient form for meditation." Salter, *Love's Myrroure*, 98.

<sup>169</sup> "[T]he predominant impression left by the alterations Love has made is that he is seeking to provide the devout, literate laity with meditational material with which to enrich their devotional life, without either violating the contemplative prerogative of the religious orders, or offering his audience only a literal exposition of the life and words of Christ." Sargent, "Introduction," 54.

<sup>170</sup> "What Love's *Mirror* thus offered was an extension to the laity of a form of devotion originally intended for religious novices and women, but not a restructuring of the contemplative life itself." Sargent, *Love's Mirror*, 54.

<sup>171</sup> Sargent, *Love's Mirror*, 54. For details on Love's alterations to the core text, see Sargent, "Introduction," 38-54.

<sup>172</sup> Love, *Mirror*, 86, 17-23.

Of þis matere seynt *bernard*, in diuerse places makeþ faire processe & deuout, þe which for als miche as it longeþ & is pertynent specialy to gostly folk, & also as I hope is written sufficiently in diuerse tretees of contemplacion'. we passen ouere here, as we done in many oþere places sech auctoritees of him, lest þis processe of cristes blessed life sholde be tedyouse to comune peple, & symple soules, to þe which it is specialy written.<sup>173</sup>

On the other hand, Sargent calls attention to two references—the first to the solitary life (“þou þat art solitarye”), and the second to vegetarianism (“And as clerkes seyn we fynde not þat oure lord ete flesh in alle his life, bot onely at þis tyme in etyng of þat lambe more for mistery þan for bodily fode”)—which, he believes, imply that Love’s Carthusian brethren ere also among his immediate audience.<sup>174</sup>

The *Mirror* is an example of a text translated into the vernacular to address the spiritual needs of lay persons. It is also important because it was not prohibited under the *Lambeth Constitutions* of 1409; instead, Archbishop Arundel promoted it.<sup>175</sup> In his submission, Love declared that he wrote the text *ad fidelium edificacionem, & hereticorum siue lollardorum confutacionem* (“for the edification of the faithful and the confusion of heretics and Lollards”).<sup>176</sup> Whereas Love explicitly identifies the heretical Lollards, I will argue that the *ME Bible* implicitly critiques them.

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<sup>173</sup> Love, *Mirror*, 76, 29-35.

<sup>174</sup> “A Carthusian reader would have found this addition particularly appropriate, for members of that Order, like hermits but unlike monks, friars, seculars or the laity, dwelt and ate in the solitude of their cells,” and “The Carthusian Order were virtually alone in medieval Christianity in successfully defending their practice of strict vegetarianism.” Sargent, “Introduction,” 51.

<sup>175</sup> The *Lambeth Constitutions* were promulgated by Archbishop Thomas Arundel in 1409 largely in response to Lollard biblical translations; they sanctioned unlicensed preaching, vernacular books and scriptural translations, and preaching and teaching. The *Constitutions* are examined more fully in Chapter 7, Three Clerics Defend Holy Images and the Eucharist.

<sup>176</sup> Sargent, “Introduction,” 36. In Chapter 7, Three Clerics Defend Holy Images and the Eucharist, I discuss Love’s reference to heretics and Lollards and how it relates to the *ME Bible*.

## 2.4 Eleven Centuries of Biblical Access

Centuries before the followers of John Wycliffe produced a complete translation of the Bible, authors were busy rendering texts from the canonical Bible (i.e., the Vulgate) into the vernacular. In keeping with the Church's goal to spread the Gospel, convert the pagans, and encourage lay piety and biblical literacy, works of biblical material were available in areas where Christianity was emerging. Throughout the period covered in this chapter abbeys were still the main centres of literacy and learning.<sup>177</sup> Even so, literary culture was moving in a direction that included lay people.

Next to early vernacular translations of biblical texts (and pedagogical tools such as biblical commentaries), were imaginative retellings of the biblical story for the edification of literate and semi-literate commoners and nobles as well as lay religious persons and clerics. Eventually, the Church did monitor the production of translations of biblical text, but it was gradual and largely in response to the Lollard translations of the Bible and the *Lambeth Constitutions*.<sup>178</sup> Nevertheless, the number of extant biblical translations, paraphrases and homilies described in this chapter indicates that lay people in England had access to the Bible and biblically-based texts before the Reformation period.<sup>179</sup> Germane to my analysis is that

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<sup>177</sup> “The image we have of monks toiling away quietly illustrating books is, in fact, largely true. They were the only educated class in medieval society. With an almost total collapse of civil order and culture in the ninth and tenth centuries, it was the monasteries that preserved a sense of stability and allowed art and learning to continue developing.” Michael Collins and Matthew A. Price, *The Story of Christianity: 2000 Years of Faith* (New York: DK Publishing Inc., 2003), 94.

<sup>178</sup> Studies of the *Northern Homily Cycle* indicate that manuscripts eventually included less biblical material, in either Latin or English, and some copied only the *exempla* (i.e., totally omitted the Gospel passages), which were originally used by a preacher into to emphasize a moral or to illustrate doctrine. Morey, *Book and Verse*, 40.

<sup>179</sup> The situation on the Continent was more restrictive than that in England. There, translators were sometimes persecuted, biblical access could be confined to specific Latin texts, or officials might prohibit translations and accessibility. And “there were other, perhaps in response to a local situation, official prohibitions by councils. An accumulation of papal letters and conciliar decrees inhibited lay access to biblical material on the Continent.” Morey, *Book and Verse*, 37.

biblical stories like those in the *ME Bible* evolved to include arguments that addressed the religious and theological issues at play in fifteenth-century England.

Scholarly work on canonical writings co-existed with creative reconfigurations of the biblical text. As Johnson has shown, authors used two contrasting, but complementary, approaches to a biblical text: at one end a literalistic glossing and at the opposite end the liberal amalgamation of biblical and biblically-related material.<sup>180</sup> In keeping with the *métier* of medieval literary craftsmanship, both approaches were pedagogically appropriate and theologically justified.<sup>181</sup> The *ME Bible* is an example of the latter approach. It is also an example of literature that gave Reformers grounds to disagree with the Church's position on such theological issues as holy image veneration and the cult of the Eucharist. In turn, Reformers would be accused of denying the incarnational aspects of holy images and the Eucharist.

Reconfiguring biblical material for vernacular works has a different trajectory from that of canonical texts. Still, it does not preclude the above-cited instructional and interpretive religious writings from being theologically relevant. And this is precisely the point that has been misunderstood, perhaps since the Reformation period. Biblical texts, whether read or heard, imparted or sought to raise knowledge of the biblical text, of Christ's life, and of salvation history.<sup>182</sup> They were a practical way to enhance one's appreciation for the Word of God.

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<sup>180</sup> "What mattered was taking [what medieval exegesis considered] authoritative sources, single or composite, from Latin, Anglo-French or French culture and remoulding them into cultural reconstructions for real audiences." Johnson, "Late-Medieval Theory and Practice," 399.

<sup>181</sup> "Whether the translator [author] chooses, at one end of the spectrum, a quasi-interlinear, gloss-type Englishing or operates at the other end of the spectrum, by substituting an elaborated sentences for the literal sense, together with large-scale excerpions, transpositions, additions, simplification of materials, stylistic/generic shifts, alterations of emphasis and even divergence from the original, both methods are authentic translation, according to the medieval understanding of the process." Johnson, "Late-Medieval Theory and Practice," 399-400.

<sup>182</sup> "Most reading took place aloud in groups and even the literate preferred hearing books as opposed to reading them oneself." Andrew Taylor, "Authors, Scribes, Patrons and Books," in *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory: 1280-1520*, eds. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor, Ruth Evans (University Park: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 356.

In upcoming chapters, I examine religious texts that participate in then-contemporaneous discussions about ecclesial teaching and tradition, especially those related to holy images and the Eucharist. This sphere includes vernacular prose writings, like the *ME Bible*, that include biblical, legendary and apocryphal material to state their case; others, like Love's *Mirror*, use an affective devotional framework augmented with anti-Lollard polemic; and, finally, I explore several straightforward rebuttals penned by clerics.<sup>183</sup>

In the next chapter I examine English literary culture, then centre on medieval texts that functioned as Bibles and, finally, the *ME Bible* and its place within Middle English biblical literature. Within this discussion, I also make reference to two French works of quasi-biblical material because they pertain to the *ME Bible* and are examples of works that in the popular imagination could be considered Bibles: the *Bible historiale* by Peter Comestor and the *Bible en françois* attributed to Roger d'Argenteuil.

It bears mentioning that both of the above-cited writings were published in thirteenth-century France when the Catholic Church was in ascendance. Conversely, the *ME Bible* appeared when Reformers were challenging Church teaching and tradition. These two different historical circumstances are both germane to and affect the meaning of the *ME Bible* in late fifteenth-century England.

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<sup>183</sup> In Chapter 7, Three Clerics Defend Holy Images and the Eucharist, I examine Love's *Mirror*, Dymmok's response and Mirk's *Festial*.

## Chapter 3

### English Literary Culture, the Medieval Popular Bible and *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en François*

#### 3.1 Middle English Biblically-Based Literature

In the previous chapter, I pointed out the abundance of biblical and biblically-based literature in the vernacular that was produced prior to the English Reformation. I described how, over the centuries, scholarly endeavours such as translating canonical texts and writing biblical commentary, took place alongside innovative retellings of biblical narratives. *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en François (ME Bible)*, which augments biblical stories with legend and apocrypha, is part of the tradition of reconfiguring biblical material for vernacular works.

Prior to arguing my claim that the *ME Bible* includes a defense of Church teaching and tradition, I identify its status within the body of Middle English biblically-based literature. I concentrate on texts that “contained those stories which, partly because of their liturgical significance and partly because of their picturesque and memorable qualities, formed a provisional ‘Bible’ in the popular imagination.”<sup>1</sup> I investigate these works in terms of their function as vehicles for disseminating biblical stories and meanings to lay persons.

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<sup>1</sup> James H. Morey, “Peter Comestor, Biblical Paraphrase, and the Medieval Popular Bible,” *Speculum* 68, no. 1 (1993): 6, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2863832>.

Before moving on to the *ME Bible*, I examine the *Historia scholastica*, by Peter Comestor, and the *ME Bible*'s prototype, the *Bible en françois (Bible)*, attributed to Roger d'Argenteuil. Like the *ME Bible*, these texts were translated from earlier sources; they include canonical and extrabiblical material (including the story of Veronica healing the emperor), and they are instances of what James Morey calls the "medieval popular Bible."<sup>2</sup>

As part of the process to articulate the meaning of the *ME Bible* in pre-Reformation England, I consider the historical and cultural contexts that surround the text. I begin with a review of English literary culture to identify the *milieu* and then concentrate on biblically-based literature from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, including French devotional works germane to the *ME Bible*.

### **3.2 Literary Culture**

This section centers on the following elements of English literary culture in the period under discussion: manuscript production, lay literacy and readership, and vernacular theology. As I demonstrate, in various ways these elements contributed to the production of texts that transmitted biblical knowledge to the laity.

#### *Manuscript Production*

Before the printing press, manuscripts were written and copied by hand by one or more anonymous scribes—for the most part, monks working in a *scriptorium*.<sup>3</sup> Copying texts required

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<sup>2</sup> Morey, "Peter Comestor," 6.

<sup>3</sup> "The technology of printing with movable type was not introduced into Europe until the second half of the fifteenth century, and not established in England until 1476." Julia Boffey, "From Manuscript to Modern Text," in *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture c.1350–c.1500*, ed. Peter Brown (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2007), 107, <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/doi/book/10.1002/9780470996355>.

skill and training, and writing each copy by hand was physically and mentally taxing.<sup>4</sup> Scribes would write the manuscript text on parchment made from animal skin; then, an artist, or illuminator, might add additional decoration, illumination or illustrations (miniatures).<sup>5</sup> Because of the time-consuming and painstaking process, each book was unique and unlikely to be mass produced.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, there are more extant Middle English religious manuscripts than any other type of literature from the period.<sup>7</sup> The abundance of religious manuscripts that survive is the result of innovations in manufacturing (e.g., thinner parchment) coupled with an increased production of such texts.<sup>8</sup>

Beginning in the eleventh century, English monasteries were engaging scribes to copy texts. This innovation effectively took manuscript publishing out of the monasteries and into the public realm, and increased the number of texts available to the laity. By the thirteenth century, the book industry was expanding; in Oxford and Cambridge, booksellers provided textbooks for

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<sup>4</sup> The Middle English poet, Thomas Hoccleve, declared that “scribal work was not some sort of game; it was arduous labor, as ‘we stoop and stare upon the sheep’s skin.’” Michael Clanchy, “Parchment and Paper: Manuscript Culture 1100-1500,” in *A Companion to the History of the Book*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2019), 221, <https://onlinelibrary-wiley.com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/doi/epdf/10.1002/9781119018193.ch15>.

<sup>5</sup> For discussions on medieval manuscript production, see R.J. Lyall “Materials: The Paper Revolution,” Kathleen L. Scott, “Design, Decoration and Illustration,” and Mirjam J. Foot, “English Decoration Bookbindings,” in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain*, Cambridge Studies in Publishing and Printing History, eds. Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). For information on paleography, codicology and illumination, see Raymond Clemens and Timothy Graham, *Introduction to Manuscript Studies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> “After all, medieval books were unique objects, many of them made of a material (parchment) whose variations in size, texture, and quality itself demanded that a book’s scribes and decorators (none of whose styles were quite alike either) deal with every project in a slightly different way.” Andrew Taylor, “Authors, Scribes, Patrons and Books,” in *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory: 1280–1520*, eds. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor, Ruth Evans (University Park: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 353.

<sup>7</sup> “Taken as a whole, there are many more works of religious inspiration preserved in Middle English than are represented in any other category of literary production in English in the high and late Middle Ages. Individually, as well, these works were often transmitted in many more manuscripts than most other Middle English texts.” Richard Newhauser, “Religious Writing: Hagiography, *Pastoralia*, Devotional and Contemplative Works,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Literature 1100-1500*, ed. Larry Scanlon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 37.

<sup>8</sup> Clanchy, “Parchment and Paper,” 219-220.

students and religious works for lay devotional reading, many of which were collaborations between artisans working under supervision. The open market continued to expand, and by the early fourteenth century, scribes and booksellers in London were collaborating on the production and sales of books.

By the mid-fifteenth century manuscript contents and lay-outs had been standardized.<sup>9</sup> Yet, every manuscript is unique. Hence, the *ME Bible*'s physical characteristics do not provide information to allow for locating the *ME Bible*'s place in Middle English biblically-based literature.<sup>10</sup> My point is that, yes, the *ME Bible* (like every manuscript) is unique, but its physical properties are not—they are standardized. Therefore, its physical form does not help us to identify the text's specific place within Middle English biblically-based based.

### *Lay Literacy and Readership*

Malcolm Parkes defines three classes of lay literacy in England, ca. 1400: professional readers, cultivated readers and pragmatic readers.<sup>11</sup> According to Parkes, lay literacy arrived in the twelfth century with Anglo-Norman aristocrats.<sup>12</sup> Many texts were Latin works originally translated and produced for the Anglo-Norman upper class, cultivated readers with the financial

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<sup>9</sup> Taylor, "Authors, Scribes, Patrons and Books," 355-359.

<sup>10</sup> A manuscript's physical characteristics include material, number of leaves, collation, size of leaves, size of the written area on an average page, number of lines per page, type of script, decoration and binding. Clemens and Graham, *Manuscript Studies*, 130. For details on the *ME Bible*'s physical characteristics, see Phyllis Moe, ed., *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en français*, Middle English Texts 6 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1977), 10-11.

<sup>11</sup> Parkes describes "the professional reader, which is the literacy of the scholar or the professional man of letters; that of the cultivated reader, which is the literacy of recreation; and that of the pragmatic reader, which is the literacy of one who has to read or write in the course of transacting any kind of business." Malcolm B. Parkes, *Scribes, Scripts, and Readers: Studies in the Communication, Presentation, and Dissemination of Medieval Texts* (London: Hambledon Press, 1991), 275.

<sup>12</sup> Parkes, *Scribes, Scripts, and Readers*, 85-86.

means to afford manuscripts.<sup>13</sup> Latin literature translated into French became a popular source for English translators, “presenting as they did texts already adapted to lay readers’ needs.”<sup>14</sup>

Popular among female readers were the personal prayer books, or Books of Hours, that were modelled on the liturgical books used by the clergy.<sup>15</sup> In light of Parkes’ definitions, Andrew Taylor describes how practical reasons (e.g., business and administrative responsibilities) led to the rise of pragmatic and professional literacy. Over time, these literate lay persons became more cultivated, increasing the demand for reading material in the vernacular.<sup>16</sup>

Vincent Gillespie describes how during the later Middle Ages, the audience for devotional literature like the *ME Bible* expanded from clerics to lay persons.<sup>17</sup> Certainly, lay readers included women who, by the fifteenth century, included aristocrats and gentlewomen.<sup>18</sup> By the fifteenth century when the *ME Bible* was published, the laity had access to the type of devotional material that two centuries earlier was intended mostly for a monastic or clerical

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<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Salter, *Nicholas Love’s “Myrroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Chris”* (Salzburg: Institut Für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1974), 187.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Anlezark, “Introduction,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Bible in English Literature*, eds. Rebecca Lemon, et al. (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons Inc., 2010), 50, <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/doi/10.1002/9781444324174.ch4>. Chapter 2, Biblical and Biblically-Based Literature in the Vernacular: From Anglo-Saxon to Middle English, includes a review of French biblically-based literature translated into Middle English.

<sup>15</sup> Clanchy, “Parchment and Paper,” 220. See also Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and Their Prayers 1240-1570* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), Chapter 1, A Book for Lay People.

<sup>16</sup> Taylor, “Authors, Scribes, Patrons and Books,” 362.

<sup>17</sup> “At the end of the fourteenth century, ‘the literate laity were taking the clergy’s words out of their mouths.’” Vincent Gillespie, “Vernacular Books of Religion,” in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain*, 317.

<sup>18</sup> For studies on women’s reading practices in medieval England, see Annette Gris , “Women’s Devotional Reading in Late-Medieval England and the Gendered Reader,” *Medium  vum* 71 (2002): 209-255, [https://ocul-uo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=cdi\\_chadwyckhealey\\_abell\\_R03399365&context=PC&vid=01OCUL\\_UO:UO\\_DEFAULT&lang=en&search\\_scope=OCULDiscoveryNetworkNew&adaptor=Primo%20Central](https://ocul-uo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=cdi_chadwyckhealey_abell_R03399365&context=PC&vid=01OCUL_UO:UO_DEFAULT&lang=en&search_scope=OCULDiscoveryNetworkNew&adaptor=Primo%20Central), and Mary C. Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

audience.<sup>19</sup> Eamon Duffy claims that increasing literacy led to “the growth of a well-instructed laity in fifteenth-century England.”<sup>20</sup>

Throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, manuscripts, for the most part accessible to members of religious communities, became available to literate lay persons for devotional reading, whether for personal reading or for reading aloud. By the time the *ME Bible* appeared in the late fifteenth century, the English book trade was evolving into a commercial enterprise populated with professional scribes and book sellers thereby allowing more books to be produced and sold.

The late Middle Ages was a period of dynamic literary activity, during which writing, producing and promoting religious and devotional material escalated. Literary production and literacy, previously under the stewardship of the monasteries, emerged into the public realm; nonetheless, the focus remained on religious texts, or texts that treat theological themes.

### *Vernacular Theology*

In 1953, Ian Doyle uses the term “vernacular theology” to characterize Middle English religious literature.<sup>21</sup> In the 1990s, Nicholas Watson defines vernacular theology as “any kind of writing, sermon, or play that communicates theological information to an audience.”<sup>22</sup> Watson’s broad definition collapses the boundaries between literary and non-literary texts and expands the

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<sup>19</sup> Gillespie, “Vernacular Books of Religion,” 321.

<sup>20</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 68.

<sup>21</sup> Doyle describes texts of Middle English religious literature as having “little or no original thought in the vernacular.” Nevertheless, his comments drew attention to such texts in terms of their contribution to understanding ecclesiastical and social history. A. I. Doyle, “A Survey of the Origins and Circulation of Theological Writings in English in the Fourteenth, Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries, with Special Consideration of the Part of the Clergy Therein,” PhD diss. (Cambridge University, 1953), 5, in Vincent Gillespie, “Vernacular Theology,” in *Middle English*, ed. Paul Strohm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 401, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199287666.013.0025>.

<sup>22</sup> Nicholas Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel’s Constitutions of 1409,” *Speculum* 70, no. 4 (1995): 822, [https://www-jstor.org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/stable/2865345?sid=primo&origin=crossref&seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www-jstor.org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/stable/2865345?sid=primo&origin=crossref&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents).

area of research into Middle English devotional literature. Eventually, the term evolves to include texts written in the vernacular that were not explicitly religious, but which contained elements, or overtones, of religiosity (e.g., *Piers Plowman*, *Pearl*, *Cleanness*, *Patience* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*).

Watson's work has motivated scholars to reassess the biblical exegetical tradition in and didactic function of vernacular writing in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England. For example, Vincent Gillespie describes the works of vernacular theology that appeared in fourteenth-century England as innovative and "challenging both in their intellectual ambition and in their potential threat to the authority and power of the clerical institution with their espousal of 'lewed clergie' (lay learning)."<sup>23</sup>

In pre-Reformation England, religious writing in the vernacular transmitted theological information to lay persons, and enhanced their understanding of Scripture.<sup>24</sup> Bernard McGinn suggests that vernacular theology is the third strand of medieval theology, and takes its place alongside scholastic and monastic theology.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Gillespie, "Vernacular Theology," 403.

<sup>24</sup> Canon 9 from the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) recognizes the importance of providing religious and spiritual guidance in the vernacular. It reads in part, "Since in many places peoples of different languages live within the same city or diocese, having one faith but different rites and customs, we therefore strictly order bishops of such cities and dioceses to provide suitable men who will do the following in the various rites and languages: celebrate the divine services for them, administer the church's sacraments, and instruct them by word and example." *Quoniam in plerisque partibus intra eandem civitatem atque dioecesim permixti sunt populi diversarum linguarum, habentes sub una fide varios ritus et mores, districte praecipimus ut pontifices huiusmodi civitatum sive dioecesum, provideant viros idoneos, qui secundum diversitates rituum et linguarum divina official illis celebrant et ecclesiastica sacramenta ministrant, instruendo eos verbo partier et exemplo.* Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Volume One: Nicaea I to Lateran V*, trans. Jesuits of the British Isles (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 238-239.

<sup>25</sup> "I would argue that the research of the past generation is also making it increasingly clear that we can no longer think of medieval theology just in terms of these two main intellectual and sociological strands—the monastic and the scholastic— but that we must now also recognize a third dimension or tradition of theology beginning in the thirteenth century, one that I think can best be described as the vernacular theological tradition." Bernard McGinn, ed., *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg and Marguerite Porete* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 6.

Notwithstanding that the above discussion is fairly broad, it gives a sense that the literary culture that produced works like the *ME Bible* was ever evolving. But the factors that contributed to the era's dynamism also fomented discontent with the ecclesial *status quo*. One repercussion was that Scripture was translated into English—an event so impactful that the Middle English Bible has become synonymous with the Wycliffe Bible. The production of the Wycliffe Bible, remains an outstanding achievement.<sup>26</sup> As Henry Kelly observes, “Nowadays the Middle English bible (MEB) is almost always referred to as the Wycliffite Bible (WB), and it is usually assumed that it was always thought to be Wycliffite.”<sup>27</sup>

### ***3.3 The Medieval Popular Bible***

Well before the Wycliffe Bible appeared, other writings that nurtured biblical literacy and Christian faith integrated non-biblical material with the biblical text.<sup>28</sup> These texts, which neither had official status nor aspired to be canonical, provided the foundation for the medieval popular

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<sup>26</sup> Redaction and translation are complex tasks that require specialized knowledge and creativity. For a discussion of the process, see Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishers Ltd.), xxvii.

<sup>27</sup> Henry Ansgar Kelly, *The Middle English Bible: A Reassessment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 1.

<sup>28</sup> “Vernacular treatments of the Bible, whether in verse or in prose, typically drew on many sources aside from the Vulgate. Some were oral, such as preached sermons. Others included commentaries by Church Fathers, notably Augustine and Jerome; patristic and medieval glosses on the Bible (especially, starting in the twelfth century, the *Glossa ordinaria*); medieval Latin paraphrases of the Bible, such as the *Aurora* by Peter Riga in the twelfth century; apocryphal material on the life of the Virgin, the infancy of Christ, and Christ's descent into hell (for example, the Gospel of Nicodemus); other apocryphal narratives, such as the Acts of St Andrew and St Matthew; liturgical texts and commentaries; works of medieval theology on the incarnation, the Trinity, the Virgin and other important topics; texts attempting to integrate biblical narrative into world history, such as the *Historia scholastica* of Peter Comestor in the twelfth century; and, starting in the thirteenth century, Jacobus of Voragine's *Legenda aurea* about the saints, Christ and Mary, structured around the feasts of the Christian year. In general, poets were not so much paraphrasing the Bible (in rare cases they may not have consulted it directly at all) as recreating it in their own voices, making its narratives and its teaching, as they saw it, available to others.” Evelyn Birge Vitz, “Medieval Verse Paraphrases of the Bible,” in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 2, eds. Richard Marsden and E. Ann Matter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 286, [https://www-cambridge-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/7F32EF6B52F9EA60CE6A1EF79B8A6CBF/9781139050555c43\\_p835-859\\_CBO.pdf/medieval\\_verse\\_paraphrases\\_of\\_the\\_bible.pdf](https://www-cambridge-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/7F32EF6B52F9EA60CE6A1EF79B8A6CBF/9781139050555c43_p835-859_CBO.pdf/medieval_verse_paraphrases_of_the_bible.pdf).

“Bible.”<sup>29</sup> As I describe, the authors of biblically-based literature strove to communicate faithfully and conscientiously the Word of God. One must nevertheless ask, prior to exploring the *ME Bible* and its antecedents, how did authors of biblically-based works ensure that the biblical message remained intact? This question brings us into the significant interpretive challenges presented by these texts and requires us to untangle them.

### *Respecting Biblical Accuracy*

Ian Johnson defines *sententia* as “meaning, teaching, deeper understanding.”<sup>30</sup> It is the judgment of William of Conches (ca. 1090-1154) that providing commentary was essential to accessing *sententia*.<sup>31</sup> Though William was referring specifically to commentary, he was acknowledging the importance of literary tools in illuminating Scripture’s deeper meaning.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, he recognized that commentary itself is already a form of textual augmentation.

When augmenting canonical text, the uppermost authorial concern was “to communicate without corruption the *sententia* originating in and latent in the Gospels and demanding to be expounded.”<sup>33</sup> Responsibility went well beyond the literary in that authors had a duty to spread the Gospel in line with “obedience to Holy Church and to orthodox teaching.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, any and

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<sup>29</sup> Such works are “a memorable, accessible and popular body of biblical material” consisting of an “eclectic choice of biblical stories and the liberal synthesis of those stories with legend and apocrypha.” James H. Morey, *Book and Verse: A Guide to Middle English Biblical Literature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 86.

<sup>30</sup> Ian R. Johnson, “The Late-Medieval Theory and Practice of Translation with Some Special Reference to Some Middle English Lives of Christ,” PhD diss., *Explore Bristol Research*, 1990, 403, <https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/34493983/342121>.

<sup>31</sup> Johnson, “Late-Medieval Theory and Practice,” 71.

<sup>32</sup> William also could have been referencing Peter Lombard’s *Book of Sentences*, the standard theological text from the twelfth through the fifteenth century. A collection of doctrinal statements by the Fathers, many famous medieval scholastics, including Stephen Langton, Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas, produced commentaries on the *Sentences*. See Chapter 2, Thirteenth Century: Age of the Commentary, in Philipp W. Rosemann, *The Story of a Great Medieval Book: Peter Lombard’s Sentences* (North York: Broadview Press, 2007), 53-136.

<sup>33</sup> Here, Johnson is referring to Life of Christ literature; it also applies, however, to other writings of canonical and biblically-based literature. Ian R. Johnson, “Late Medieval Theory and Practice,” in *The Pseudo-Bonaventuran Lives of Christ: Exploring the Middle English Tradition*, Medieval Church Studies, eds. Ian R. Johnson and Allan F. Westphall (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2013), 24:10.

<sup>34</sup> Johnson, “Late-Medieval Theory and Practice,” 49.

all extrabiblical material utilized had to draw from the Word of God and support the Christian message.<sup>35</sup>

Why was it so important? Because for medieval Christians, the threat of damnation was real and constant. A sermon by the fourteenth-century Dominican preacher, John Bromyard, describes what awaits those who are damned to hell:

I trow ther is no man that leveth, and he wold consider ynwardly what peyn is ordeynt for synnes in hell. I trowe a wold drede hym sore and full sone amended him. I shew this by ensamupll. Iff ther were here a towne [tun] so ordeynt that it were full of nayles longe and sharpe, the poyntes beyng inward, and that all these nayles were fure hote, I trow ther is no man that wold be rolled a myle wey in this tonne for all the reame of ynglonde.<sup>36</sup>

Authors integrated biblically-based instruction with the meaning of salvation; hence, they strove to make religious literature instructive and accessible to increase the possibility of salvation and decrease the chance of damnation.<sup>37</sup> The task was especially critical during crises like the Great Famine (1315-1317) and the Black Death (1347-1351), both of which had catastrophic rates of mortality.

### *Filling in the Gaps*

Given the medieval love of storytelling, authors commonly fleshed out their narratives with legends and apocrypha. Such elaborations, however, were not interpretations; rather, they were based on close readings of the biblical narrative.<sup>38</sup> Authorial focus on including engaging

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<sup>35</sup> “The Word of God is the base text, and the main points of the stories are faithfully reproduced, but extraordinary in these works are the highly imaginative commentaries, moralizations, and figures used to illumine the biblical significances.” Morey, *Book and Verse*, 18.

<sup>36</sup> John Bromyard, *Summa Predicantium*, MS. Roy. 18. B. xxiii, fol. 134 b et seq., quoted in G.R. Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England: An Introduction to Sermon Manuscripts of the Period c. 1350-1450* (New York: Russell and Russell Inc., 1965), 336-337.

<sup>37</sup> Morey writes that “their [authors’] didacticism cannot be ignored, but it is didacticism geared directly to salvation.” Morey, *Book and Verse*, 16.

<sup>38</sup> “The Bible was undeniably the central text which shaped the medieval idea of storytelling. On a stylistic level, the influence of biblical phraseology and narrative on individuals who probably had the Psalter memorized and who read the bible daily must have been considerable. With regard to content, Middle English biblical paraphrasers were close readers par excellence. Nothing in Holy Writ is superfluous, and economical reading meant that everything is

content gave rise to the critique that medieval works were unoriginal because they were derived from earlier sources. The truth is that producing quasi-biblical literature in the vernacular required an author to redact and translate extrabiblical material that would illuminate the sacred text without corrupting its meaning. Johnson describes an “academic literary sensibility” that governed medieval English literary culture to ensure that authoritative sources maintained their authenticity throughout the process.<sup>39</sup> Clearly, authors needed diligence coupled with creativity to reshape often sparse biblical material into cohesive and readable texts.<sup>40</sup>

Medieval authors could look to the rich tradition of rabbinical biblical interpretation and commentary as models for their work.<sup>41</sup> Martin McNamara describes *Midrash* as an interpretive method that seeks to fill in information gaps in the Torah. He notes that *Midrash* is often considered Jewish and rabbinic; he views it, however, as a method common to both Hebrew Scripture and New Testament writings.<sup>42</sup> For example, he detects “midrash-type features or techniques” in apocryphal and traditional Christian commentary literature.<sup>43</sup>

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potentially useful. The narratives may seem free-associative, but readings are always grounded in the text: any particular turn or explanation can be traced back through a linked sequence of details.” Morey, *Book and Verse*, 10.

<sup>39</sup> Johnson, “Late-Medieval Theory and Practice,” 50.

<sup>40</sup> “Poets, paraphrasers, and commentators felt compelled to reshape the biblical narrative because the bare text of the Bible did not always make sense. It demands interpretation, and there were known to exist various texts and traditions which could explain the ambiguities and aporias.” Morey, *Book and Verse*, 12.

<sup>41</sup> Morey cites Peter Comestor’s influential *Historia scholastica* (see below), and the anonymously authored Middle English *Canticum de Creatione* and *Iacob and Iosep* as texts that include midrashic legend. Morey, *Book and Verse*, 6, 124 and 158. For an overview of Jewish biblical commentary, see Dieter Mitternacht, “Jewish Bible Commentary: A Brief Introduction to Talmud and Midrash,” *Theology and Life* 33 (2010): 35-70, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233987770\\_Jewish\\_Bible\\_Commentary\\_A\\_Brief\\_Introduction\\_to\\_Talmud\\_and\\_Midrash](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233987770_Jewish_Bible_Commentary_A_Brief_Introduction_to_Talmud_and_Midrash).

<sup>42</sup> “[*M*]idrash is a many-sided affair and [...] some of its concerns and techniques are already very much part of biblical literature, both of the Old and of the New Testaments.” Martin McNamara, “Midrash, Apocrypha, Culture Medium and Development of Doctrine. Some Facts in Quest of a Terminology,” *Apocrypha* 6 (1995): 159, <https://www.brepolonline.net/doi/10.1484/J.APOCRA.2.301110>.

<sup>43</sup> “Some midrash-type features or techniques are examined and these are seen to be found also in apocryphal and traditional Christian commentary literature. In the light of this there is a consideration of the reflection on the afterlife in Irish apocrypha and Irish theological treatises.” McNamara, “Midrash,” 127.

So it is nothing new if, for centuries, authors used extrabiblical sources to compensate for gaps in the biblical narrative and to harmonize versions.<sup>44</sup> Occasionally, the biblical text can be enigmatic or implausible and requires interpretation. In those cases, authors could call upon extrabiblical texts to explain ambiguities.<sup>45</sup> Although the featured episodes can appear to have been randomly selected, they were not simply pulled out of thin air. Rather, authors and editors selected episodes from both Testaments and augmented them with complementary literature to express what Morey calls “the larger history of Christian salvation.”<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, and as I will describe going forward, the biblical, legendary and apocryphal stories in the *ME Bible* are not superfluous. Rather, they communicate a message of relevance to religious turmoil and theological uncertainty in pre-Reformation England.

### *Questions of Authority*

Notwithstanding the foregoing, the issue of ecclesial and interpretive authority had eventually to be addressed. Authors were altering the text of the ultimate authority, the Bible, with extrabiblical material which was not Scripture *per se*. Johnson calls the principles that governed such work as the principle of security through *auctoritas* and the principle of security through intention.<sup>47</sup> Morey explains that refashioning the text was justified in light of the biblical

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<sup>44</sup> A significant influence, especially works produced in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century France and England, was Peter Comestor's *Historia scholastica*. Morey, “Peter Comestor,” 6.

<sup>45</sup> Morey, *Book and Verse*, 12.

<sup>46</sup> “To read the Bible discontinuously and apply extrabiblical material is for the authors an indication that the larger history of Christian salvation subsumes the history of both Testaments and of the world. The selection of texts was never random.” Morey, *Book and Verse*, 20.

<sup>47</sup> Johnson uses “In rendering the part of the Bible which was the ultimate in *auctoritas*, the most dangerous, most powerful, and the most necessary, the translators had two golden rules: firstly, the principle of security through *auctoritas* [...] In other words, we have something like an [...] *anxiety of not being properly influenced*, an anxiety of authority. This is complemented by the second golden rule, the principle of security through a good and morally pure intention[.]” One paragraph later, Johnson explains “the dominant conception of authoritative translation in the later medieval period [is that] it was seen as being akin to commentary or exposition.” In this way, medieval translation theory acknowledged that the primary goal of all literary roles, whether translation, commentary or exposition, was to illuminate the *sententia*. “Late-Medieval Theory and Practice,” 10-11.

precedent of having one text appeal to another.<sup>48</sup> Medieval exegetes could point to Christianity's ancient hermeneutical principle that the New Testament is hidden in the Old Testament and the Old Testament is fulfilled in the New Testament, thereby allowing for both texts to be read as one.<sup>49</sup> As important as the supposedly "literal treatment of the Word of God," in light of the biblical precedent of having one text appeal to another, the interpretive history also includes the possibility of spiritual, allegorical and anagogical meanings.<sup>50</sup>

Morey suggests that a more subtle hermeneutic was also in play, an "aesthetic and moral principle," whereby authors strove to ensure that their work did not in any way infringe on the "divine genius inherent in the Word of God."<sup>51</sup> There is no question of a long history of

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<sup>48</sup> "One explanation for [the authors'] willingness to adapt the biblical narrative and to apply diverse materials is that one text's appeal to another has biblical precedent. The typological reading of the Old Testament in the New was the medieval version of intertextuality, which was extended to the available writings of doctrinal significance." Morey, *Book and Verse*, 19.

<sup>49</sup> Origen of Alexandria, ca. 185-253, established the foundations of biblical authority: "He regarded the whole of the Old Testament as a continual prophecy of Christ, a foreshadowing of the New Testament. It was as though the Old Testament was a strangely fashioned glass, and by peering through it the New Testament acquired increased depth and meaning. All history vanishes; time stands still; there is only Christ, that short space of thirty years which seems to leap out of history altogether." Robert Payne, *The Holy Fire: The Story of the Fathers of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1957), 54. A century and a half later, Augustine of Hippo (354-430) is alleged to have said that the New Testament is concealed in the Old Testament and the latter is revealed in the former. "Christian hermeneutics has its origins in the Bible itself; the NT is, in large part, an interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, e.g., through typological readings whereby figures or typical events in the OT are seen as prefigurements of figures and typical events in the NT [...] the greatest hermeneutical scholar of the West, Augustine of Hippo, was trained in classical thought and developed, in *On Christian Doctrine*, a semiotics, or theory of signs, distinguishing between "natural" signs and "given" signs, i.e., divinely revealed signs in the words of Scripture and requiring careful interpretation [...] Augustine finally depends on the judgment of the rule of faith within the church." David Jasper, "Hermeneutics," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, ed. Daniel Patte (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 508-509.

<sup>50</sup> The Church Father, Origen of Alexandria (185-254), is important as an early practitioner of biblical exegesis. In *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture According to Origen*, Henri de Lubac delves into Origen's methodology related to the sense of Scripture, or the three levels of meaning: body, soul and spirit. Ultimately, and as de Lubac argues, at the centre of Origen's interpretation is Christ the Word: "The 'Verbum abbreviatum' [abbreviated Word] that gathers into his personal unity all the 'verba' uttered up until him [*sic*] transcends them all by fulfilling them. Through him, 'the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.'" Henri de Lubac, *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture According to Origen*, trans. Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 506-507.

<sup>51</sup> Morey relates his discussion on hermeneutics to Umberto Eco's writings on the *Schedula diversarum artium* from the eleventh century: "[Man] discovers his need for beauty both by chance and by reflection [...] by practice and endeavour he develops his artistic powers. He finds in the Scriptures a divine commandment on art where David Sings 'Lord, I have loved the beauty of Thy house.'" Here, Eco declares that the highest artistic achievement is in amalgamating human creativity with the Word of God, and thereby reconciling the human and the divine. Morey, *Book and Verse*, 19.

allegorical or spiritual interpretations of Scripture, sometimes highly sophisticated. But with the accretion of centuries of various such readings, it becomes necessary, unsurprisingly, to return eventually to the original text and give it some priority. This approach will happen with the rise of sixteenth-century Protestant hermeneutics. But the possibility that medieval Bibles also contain highly developed and elaborate meanings founded on Scripture also remains, even if these developments no longer seem plausible or convincing.

As I describe in the following section, the medieval popular Bible was an important resource for transmitting the meaning of Scripture and, in the case of the *ME Bible*, for communicating support for ecclesial teaching and tradition in fifteenth-century England.

### *Lay Spirituality and the Medieval Popular Bible*

As I related in the previous chapter, authors saw the value in enhancing the biblical text to foster biblical literacy, spread the essentials of Christianity, and lead to conversion and, ultimately, salvation. Part of their method was to produce works that would instruct and entertain.<sup>52</sup> Extrabiblical material was seamlessly integrated with the biblical text so much so that, before literacy became widespread, it could be difficult to know whether or not a text was in the canonical Bible.<sup>53</sup> Even so, none of these texts was considered “official” translations, and few *aimed* to translate accurately the entire Bible; rather, this body of literature supplemented but did not replace official teaching.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> “[L]yrics could stir the heart, while biblical narratives, often augmented by apocryphal legend, could entertain and moralize.” Anlezark, “Introduction,” 42.

<sup>53</sup> It is especially the case for the medieval popular Bible, which Morey identifies as the main vehicle for disseminating knowledge of the Bible in the vernacular. Morey, *Book and Verse*, 85-86.

<sup>54</sup> “[A] quantity of vernacular material in prose and verse existed from the twelfth through fourteenth centuries whereby a lay person in France or England could derive considerable biblical knowledge.” Morey, “Peter Comestor,” 25.

Still, the medieval popular Bible gave a variety of lay readers access to the Word of God. And the Roman Church encouraged readership of such works as a way to advance spiritual and devotional life.<sup>55</sup> A specific goal of the Fourth Lateran Council, which was convened in 1215 by Pope Innocent III, was to increase lay spiritual literacy and practice.<sup>56</sup> And, in the decades after the Council, there was a noticeable increase in the production of the type of biblically-based literature that taught the essentials of sacred history.<sup>57</sup> As I describe below, the *ME Bible's* prototype, the *Bible en françois*, belongs within this category of literary works.

### 3.4 The Bible in France

Just prior to the production of the *Bible en françois*, the first complete translation of the Bible in French was published. It established the foundation for future translations of the Bible into French and shaped the development of vernacular Bibles like the *Bible en françois*.

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<sup>55</sup> See the discussion in Chapter 2, Biblical and Biblically-Based Literature in the Vernacular: From Anglo-Saxon to Middle English, on vernacular translations of the canonical Bible and reconfigurations of the biblical story.

<sup>56</sup> Canon 11 states in part, "Zeal for learning and the opportunity to make progress is denied to some through lack of means. The Lateran Council therefore dutifully decreed that 'in each cathedral church there should be provided a suitable benefice for a master who shall instruct without charge the clerics of the cathedral church and other poor scholars, thus at once satisfying the teacher's needs and opening up the way of knowledge to learners.' This decree, however, is very little observed in many churches. We therefore confirm it and add that not only in every cathedral church but also in other churches with sufficient resources, a suitable master elected by the chapter or by the greater and sounder part of it, shall be appointed by the prelate to teach grammar and other branches of study, as far as is possible, to the clerics of those and other churches. The metropolitan church shall have a theologian to teach scripture to priests and others and especially to instruct them in matters which are recognized as pertaining to the cure of souls." *Quia nonnullis propter inopiam et legend stadium et opportunitas proficiendi subtraehitur, in Lateranensi concilio pia fuit institutione provisum, ut „per unamquamque cathedralem ecclesiam magistro, qui clericos eiusdem ecclesiae aliosque scholares pauperes gratis instrueret, aliquod competens beneficium praeberetur, quo et docentis relevaretur necessitas et via pateret discentibus ad doctrinam“. Verum quoniam in multis ecclesiis id minime observatur, nos praedictum roborantes statutum, adicimus ut non solum in qualibet cathedrali ecclesia sed etiam in aliis, quarum sufficere poterunt facultates, constituatur, magister idoneus a praelato, cum capitulo seu maiori ac saniori parte capitula eligendus, qui clericos ecclesiarum ipsarum et aliarum gratis in grammaticae facultate ac aliis instruat iuxta posse. Sane metropolitana ecclesia theologum nihilominus habeat, qui sacerdotes et alios in sacra pagina doceat et in his praesertim informet, quae ad curam animarum spectare noscuntur.* Tanner, *Decrees*, 239-240.

<sup>57</sup> Morey lists "summaries of the Creation and Fall, Gospel harmonies, Lives of Christ, Passion narratives [and] Epistle paraphrases of the Epistles" as belonging to the body of literature produced after the Fourth Lateran Council. Morey, *Book and Verse*, 2.

### *The “Old French Bible”*

Between 1220 and 1260, the Old French Bible was produced. Comprising the books of the thirteenth-century Paris Vulgate, it was the first complete Bible translation in western Europe. Some books, notably Genesis, are substantially glossed, many have no gloss, while others, including Psalms and the Gospels, are moderately glossed. Most likely, more than one translator completed the project; even so, they had the same goal: to translate the Vulgate into “a clear Old French prose which respected the register and style differences between Bible books and was generally accessible to readers.”<sup>58</sup>

### *French Vernacular “Bibles”*

Whereas the Old French Bible followed the Latin, work continued simultaneously on vernacular “Bibles” and biblically-based biographies and histories. For medieval Christians, the Bible was a sequence of writings that conveyed the message of salvation. As Clive Sneddon notes, vernacular Bibles were also considered Bibles in a broad sense.<sup>59</sup>

Margaret Hoogvliet’s study of French vernacular Bibles describes their important role in spreading biblical literacy, and believes that the large number and variety of these works suggests that they had as much prestige and readership as did the canonical Bible. As well, the multiplicity of extant texts challenges the contradictory assumptions that the Church either promoted a “watered-down” version of the Bible, or prohibited its ownership.<sup>60</sup> Rather, she

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<sup>58</sup> Clive R. Sneddon, “The Bible in French,” in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*, eds. Richard Marsden and E. Ann Matter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 256, <https://www.cambridge-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/core/books/new-cambridge-history-of-the-bible/bible-in-french/17C681EDE12FD725CC8D0FC59BD621EF>.

<sup>59</sup> Sneddon, “The Bible in French,” 255.

<sup>60</sup> “Instead of some form of centralized censoring that controlled textual production, the great variety of texts rather suggests that multiple authors wrote for different groups of readers who demanded personalized books.” As well, the authors were mostly members of the church (i.e., clerics), who produced text in response to consumer demand—readers who commissioned the manuscripts. Ultimately, these Scripture-based texts aimed to disseminate the biblical text (albeit in a different form) and encourage religious reading through references to the biblical (source)

argues the availability of biblical texts and material allowed for “a selective and discontinuous consultation of the Bible” with a focus on popular texts (e.g., biblical pericopes, Life and Passion of Christ, and moral guidelines).<sup>61</sup> Eventually, increased literacy meant that readers *could* identify anomalies and diversions from the canonical Bible in these “quasi-biblical” texts—in turn, “tampering” with the biblical text would become a flashpoint for religious dissent beginning at least in the fifteenth century.

### *The Bible moralisée*

Possibly the earliest French vernacular Bible is the *Bible moralisée* (ca. 1220-1230), an elaborately-illustrated work with images arranged in columns. To the left of each image is text (in either Latin or French) that provides typological and moral interpretations of the Bible. Maureen Boulton describes the *Bible moralisée* as “essentially a picture book with a minimal amount of biblical text.” She adds that the copies “must have been immensely expensive, and all are associated with the French royal Family.”<sup>62</sup>

### *The Bible historiale*

Another example of a medieval vernacular Bible is the *Bible historiale* (1291-1295). Jeanette Patterson describes it as a composite text of diverse subjects such as “Christian religious practice; biblical exegesis; moral, political, and natural philosophy; historiography; translation; art; and narrative aesthetics.”<sup>63</sup> The *Bible historiale* is important to this discussion because, like

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text. Margaret Hoogvliet, “The Medieval Vernacular Bible in French as a Flexible Text: Selective and Discontinuous Reading Practices,” in *Form and Function in the Late Medieval Bible*, eds. Eyal Poleg and Laura Light, Library of the Written World, vol. 27 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2013), 306.

<sup>61</sup> Hoogvliet, “Medieval Vernacular Bible,” 304.

<sup>62</sup> Maureen Boulton, ed., *Literary Echoes of the Fourth Lateran Council in England and France, 1215-1405*, Papers in Mediaeval Studies 31 (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2019), 13-14, <https://books-scholarsportal-info.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/en/read?id=/ebooks/ebooks4/upress4/2019-05-23/1/9781771104005#page=23>.

<sup>63</sup> Jeanette L. Patterson, *Making the Bible French: The Bible historiale and the Medieval Lay Reader* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022), 61, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ottawa/detail.action?docID=6876662>.

the *Bible*, the *ME Bible*'s prototype, it belongs to a large collection of instructional works produced in medieval France. The *Bible historiale*'s contents converged with the medieval practice of consulting the Bible for guidance and instruction.<sup>64</sup> And including stories that were also entertaining helped engage the reader's attention.

In 1291, the cleric, Guyart Desmoulins, began an ambitious project to combine extensive selections from the *Historia scholastica* (ca. 1170), a work of biblical paraphrase by Peter Comestor, with the first complete translation of the Bible into French—the *Bible du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*.<sup>65</sup> Desmoulins, whom Morey calls “the single most important figure in Old French biblical paraphrase,” finished his work on the *Historiale* in 1295.<sup>66</sup> One year later he added a prologue in which he states his desire to support lay understanding of Scripture. One cannot help but notice that understanding is indeed the goal of hermeneutics.<sup>67</sup>

The *Bible historiale* was the most popular and copied French translation of biblical material for several centuries.<sup>68</sup> Van Liere reports that wealthy citizens, nobles, and even royalty

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<sup>64</sup> “Its contents are in line with the medieval method of consulting the Bible for theological, moral, historical, and even scientific truth value, while maintaining interest in its literariness.” Patterson, *Making the Bible French*, 3.

<sup>65</sup> Saralyn Daly's description of Comestor's work as a compilation text of world history and biblical commentary brings to mind *Cursor mundi*: “[Comestor's] interpolation of pagan incidents chronologically parallel to Scriptural events from Genesis through the Gospels resulted in a ‘world history’ as well as a literal Biblical commentary.” Saralyn R. Daly, “Peter Comestor: Master of Histories.” *Speculum* 32, no. 1 (1957): 70, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2849246>.

<sup>66</sup> Morey, “Peter Comestor,” 21. For details on the textual elements of “this early and important vernacular translation,” see Morey, “Peter Comestor,” 21-22.

<sup>67</sup> Guyart describes his intention to “faire laies personnes entendre les histoires des escriptures anciennes” Patterson, *Making the Bible French*, 4. In other words, he wants the reader to understand as much as he and his writings need to be understood by the reader. More than five centuries later, Friedrich Schleiermacher, the “Father of Hermeneutics,” advocates a similar model of understanding: “To found hermeneutics on the phenomenon of understanding indicates that understanding itself has become a matter for concern. It presupposes, or rather, acknowledges an initial difference or distance between persons: one wishes to communicate to another and the other wishes to understand the message.” Friedrich Schleiermacher and Heinz Kimmerle, *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, trans. James Duke and Jack Forstman (Missoula: Scholars Press for the American Academy of Religion, 1977), 13.

<sup>68</sup> With at least 144 extant manuscripts and over twenty early print editions, the *Bible historiale* was the most widely disseminated and influential French-language translation of biblical material for over two hundred years. Patterson, *Making the Bible French*, 4. For a complete list of manuscripts of the *Bible historiale*, see Eléonore Fournié, “Les manuscrits de la *Bible historiale*. Présentation et catalogue raisonné d'une œuvre médiévale,” L'Atelier du Centre de recherches historiques, Revue électronique du CRH, 2009, <https://journals.openedition.org/acrh/1408?lang=en>.

commonly owned a copy. Its popularity spread to other Western European countries, including England where it could be read by members of the nobility who still spoke French.<sup>69</sup> Morey describes its status as a complex work with multiple versions “which resist generalization” that disseminated the vernacular Paris translation (*BXIII*) as well as Comestor’s biblical text, legend, and commentary.<sup>70</sup>

The *Bible historiale* is instructive, but also entertaining because of the later addition of apocryphal texts.<sup>71</sup> These “fantastical” stories are included in one manuscript, but whether or not Guyart translated them is not known.<sup>72</sup> Patterson describes eight folios of apocryphal stories, including the lives of Julian the Apostate, Pilate, and Judas.<sup>73</sup> Interestingly, inserted into the Pilate narrative is the tale of Veronica healing the emperor with the holy cloth.<sup>74</sup>

It is noteworthy that the *Bible historiale* devotes a few lines only to the Veronica story, where the *Bible* and its Middle English translation accord it five chapters. The latter, however,

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<sup>69</sup> “It was quite common for wealthy burghers, noblemen and -women, and even royalty to possess such a Bible. Nor was its influence restricted to France; the nobility of England was still Francophone, and its use was common there as well. Also, the concept was imitated in other regions of Europe. We find history Bibles in languages as diverse as Dutch, German, Castilian, Czech, and even Old Norse.” Franciscus A. van Liere, *An Introduction to the Medieval Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 195, <https://doi-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.1017/CBO9780511843051.195>.

<sup>70</sup> Morey, “Peter Comestor,” 24.

<sup>71</sup> “Guyart’s compilation included, in order: a two-part prologue (Guyart’s and his translation of Comestor’s), Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1–4 Kings, Proverbs (abridged), “Petit” (abridged) Job, Tobit (or Tobias), Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel (sometimes titled separately “Susanne” and “Daniel”), Judith, Esther, 1–2 Maccabees, John Hyrcanus (intertestamental material from Flavius Josephus via Comestor), a Gospel harmony (Comestor’s *Historia evangelica* intercalated with extracts from all four Gospels), Acts and a set of apocryphal narratives derived from *The Golden Legend* and Latin legends of the True Cross.” Patterson, *Making the Bible French*, 29. See also Morey, “Peter Comestor,” 23–24.

<sup>72</sup> One unique manuscript, Royal MS 19 D III “includes several apocryphal stories such as a Life of Judas and of Pilate apparently translated by Guyart des Moulins, but not included in any other known copy of the text.” The Royal project team, “Bible Historiale, Royal MS 19 D III,” Medieval Manuscripts, August 9, 2011, <https://blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2011/08/bible-historiale-royal-19-d-iii.html>.

<sup>73</sup> Patterson describes the contents of the eight folios as follows: 1. *La vie Julian l’Apostat, le mauvais empereur, rennyé chrestian, et comment le signe de la croix a grant vertu* (fols. 552v–553r); 2. *Comment Adam envoya Seth son filz en paradys terrestre a l’ange* (fols. 553r–555r); 3. *Une autre oppinion de la vraie croix que je trouvai en autres anciens livres* (fol. 555r); 4. *la vie du mauvais Pylate qui crucifia Nostre Sire Jhesucrist* (fols. 555r–558r); and 5. *la vie du tres mauvais Judas qui trahi Nostre Sire Jhesucrist* (fols. 558r–558v). Patterson, *Making the Bible French*, 75.

<sup>74</sup> It does not, however, include the narrative of the emperor’s destroying Jerusalem after being healed.

lacks the instructive material from the *Bible* with the result that the story of Veronica and the destruction of Jerusalem is further emphasized. It is with the aforesaid in mind that I will argue that the featured stories communicate support for Church teaching and tradition in light of critiques of holy images and the Eucharist.

*Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois*

In *Life in France in the Middle Ages*, Charles-Victor Langlois uses the term *livres de Sapience* to describe literary works, like the *Bible historiale*, that were produced in the aftermath of the Fourth Lateran Council. Such didactic, or instructive, works were disseminated in collections of tracts and treatises, which, Langlois notes, were often compilations sourced from earlier texts.<sup>75</sup> Manuscripts could contain saints' lives, episodes from Jesus' life, Christian apocrypha, romantic and courtly literature, rules of etiquette, scientific and philosophical writings, and historical chronicles.<sup>76</sup>

The *Bible en françois*, like the *Bible historiale*, is typical of didactic works produced in late-medieval France.<sup>77</sup> In her critical edition of the *ME Bible*, Moe describes the *Bible en françois*, as “written to instruct a literate laity in sacred history and the essentials of Christian doctrine.”<sup>78</sup> It includes episodes from the Vulgate, legendary and apocryphal material and expository treatises. Appended to the biblical material is a narrative in the form of a *chanson de*

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<sup>75</sup> « ‘Livres de Sapience’ est le terme générique qui, en français d'oïl, a servi, depuis le XII<sup>e</sup> siècle, à désigner tous les ouvrages didactique d'édification : recueils et traités (qui, eux-mêmes, n'étaient, parfois, que des compilations). » Charles V. Langlois, *La Vie Spirituelle : enseignements, meditations et controverses d'après des écrits en français à l'usage des laïcs*, La Vie en France au Moyen Âge : de la fin du XII<sup>e</sup> au milieu du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle (Paris: Librairie Hachette), 8, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bd6t53771329/f22.item>. The *Bible historiale* would also qualify as a *livre de Sapience*.

<sup>76</sup> The following website features three *livre de Sapience* manuscripts on microfilm: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/services/engine/search/sru?operation=searchRetrieve&version=1.2&query=dc.subject%20adj%20%22livre%20de%20sapience%22>.

<sup>77</sup> For an overview of biblical-paraphrase texts and narrative works of biblical text, see Guy Lobrichon « Un nouveau genre pour un public novice : la paraphrase biblique dans l'espace roman du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle » in *The Church and Vernacular Literature in Medieval France*, ed. Dorothea Kullmann (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 87-99.

<sup>78</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 8.

geste.<sup>79</sup> Called the *Vengeance of the Saviour* (*Vengeance de Nostre-Seigneur*), it is based on the Latin *Vindicta Salvatoris*, an apocryphal tale from the eighth century which describes the first-century Roman siege of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple in retaliation of Jesus' execution.<sup>80</sup> Early on, the Latin text was translated into several vernacular languages, including Old French and, later, Middle English.

The multiplicity of subjects covered and the change in tone from narration to exposition could result in a fragmented and disjointed text, according to Moe. The Christian plan of salvation, however, is the unifying theme.<sup>81</sup> Thus considered, the *Bible en françois*' author produced a work in line with similar texts of the period which strove to articulate the central message of Christian faith, from God's creation to humanity's redemption in Christ. The way to salvation is also a concern in the *ME Bible*; an important step is to follow the Church of Rome's

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<sup>79</sup> The *chanson de geste* "was a politically engaged genre, exploring through its narratives contemporary concerns: the relationship between lord and vassal, and the conflict and contact between Christian and Muslim in various geographical theatres. While many *geste* would address only one or other of these concerns, a number brought the two thematic strands together: conflict and tension between Christians assuredly affected the Christian conflict with the religious Other." Marianne Ailes, "The Chanson de Geste," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the Crusades*, ed. Anthony Bale, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 25, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/cambridge-companion-to-the-literature-of-the-crusades/chanson-de-geste/4DD46F31E65A706495A30141BA0BC31D>. The most celebrated *chanson de geste* is *La Chanson de Roland*, which "dates from the turn of the eleventh and twelfth centuries at the time of the First Crusade. Loosely based on the historical massacre of Charlamagne's rearguard at Rencesvals in 778, the poem narrates the defeat of the Saracen king Marsilie, then the great army of the emir Baligant who arrives to reinforce the Spanish Muslims, and finally the punishment of Ganelon, who is tried and gruesomely dismembered as befits a traitor. The Roland narrates all this with intense and highly emotive lyricism." Simon Gaunt and Karen Pratt, eds., *The Song of Roland and Other Poems of Charlemagne*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 8. Elizabeth Salter writes about "the famous Albani manuscript and the Oxford text of the *Chanson de Roland*" as indicating "that literary tastes and needs on either side of the Channel were not remarkably different." Elizabeth Salter, *English and International: Studies in the Literature, Art, and Patronage of Medieval England*, eds. Derek Pearsall and Nicolette Zeeman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 10.

<sup>80</sup> "*Veng. Sav.* recounts a somewhat garbled rendition of the 70 CE Siege of Jerusalem, taking its title from the main action in its plot." Stephen C.E. Hopkins, "The Vengeance of the Savior," NASSCAL North American Society for the Study of Christian Apocryphal Literature, June 2017, <https://www.nasscal.com/e-clavis-christian-apocrypha/vengeance-of-the-savior/>. I examine the *Vengeance* story in Chapter 5, "*The Vengeance of the Saviour*: A Handbook on Managing Religious Dissent."

<sup>81</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 8-9.

teaching and tradition concerning the Incarnation and its implications for holy images and the Eucharist.

### *Manuscripts*

In an article from 1890, Paul Meyer mentions three known copies of the *Bible en françois*: one in the thirteenth-century La Clayette manuscript, and two fourteenth-century copies, one in Brussels and one in Paris.<sup>82</sup> Almost one-hundred years later, however, an unnamed person (possibly Moe) identified seven unabridged manuscripts of the *Bible en françois*, including one from the late thirteenth century, four abridged versions, including one from the thirteenth century, and five excerpts containing the Veronica legend.<sup>83</sup> The foregoing could be a measure of the *Bible*'s popularity; it might indicate extensive textual redactions, or even lost or missing pages or sections.<sup>84</sup> Partial or complete loss of a medieval manuscript can be caused by a number of factors, including scribal error and emendation, degradation and loss of text, and *mouvance* and variance. Thus, many texts do not survive in complete versions.<sup>85</sup>

### *Genre*

Following Langlois, Moe also describes the *Bible en françois* as a “thirteenth-century didactic work in prose, a ‘livre de sapience.’” She describes its contents as follows:

Nearly two-thirds of the Bible (Chapters 4-24 of B.N. n.a. fr. 13521) consists of narrative drawn from the Old and New Testaments and from legendary and apocryphal tales: the story of Adam and Eve, a summary of the important Old Testament figures, the legend of the cross, the story of Veronica, and the destruction of Jerusalem by Vespasian. The remaining third (Chapters 1-3 and 25-35 of B.N. n.a. fr. 13521) is largely expository: an

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<sup>82</sup> Paul Meyer, « Notice sur deux anciens manuscrits français ayant appartenu au marquis de La Clayette, » in *Des Notices et Extraits des Manuscrits de la Bibliothèque nationale*, de la première partie, Tome xxxiii, (Paris: Institut national de France, 1890), 71, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bd6t5380411g/f15.item#>. Translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>83</sup> For the list of manuscripts, see Moe, *ME Bible*, 13-14.

<sup>84</sup> See Moe *ME Bible*, 17-19 for details on the contents of the Middle English translation and the French manuscripts.

<sup>85</sup> President and Fellows of Harvard College, “Textual Instability in a Manuscript Culture,” Harvard’s Geoffrey Chaucer Page, Harvard University, 2025, <https://chaucer.fas.harvard.edu/textual-instability-manuscript-culture>. See also Chapter 6, “Encounters with Damaged Manuscripts,” in Clemens and Graham, *Manuscript Studies*.

explanation of the mystery of the Trinity, two chapters on the nature of the sun and moon, a discussion of the sacraments of baptism, communion, and confession, a listing of the fifteen signs of the Last Judgment, a description of the coming of Antichrist and of the Last Judgment, models of confession and prayer, and finally, a concluding dialogue between father and son.<sup>86</sup>

A century earlier, Meyer's article had characterized *Bible en françois* as a prose

“summary” or “compilation,” but definitely not as a Bible. He writes:

*Summary of holy history*, in prose, by Roger d'Argenteuil. The author was pleased to give his compilation the name *Bible en françois*. We cannot keep this title because it is misleading in regards to the contents of the work. It is not a Bible, and M.S. Berger was justified in excluding it from his *Bible française au Moyen Âge*. Instead, it is a compilation of small sections from the Old and New Testaments, large portions of apocryphal stories, and a few chapters on cosmography and theology for the laity.<sup>87</sup>

In his study of medieval French Bibles, Pierre-Maurice Bogaert includes the following description of the work:

In 1890, Paul Meyer identified a prose compilation entitled the *Bible en françois...* it consists of several small extracts from the Old and New Testaments and many diverse texts, many of which are apocryphal, including the story of Saint Peter and Vespasian. There are also chapters on cosmography and theology for the use of lay people. The statement from one of the witnesses appears to name the author, an otherwise unknown Roger d'Argenteuil. He wrote in Paris during an unspecified period, but before the oldest of the three witnesses was alive, which is from the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>88</sup>

Bogaert, Meyer and Moe diverge somewhat in defining the genre—Bogaert and Meyer describe it as a compilation text in prose, where Moe, like Langlois, uses “livre de sapience.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 8.

<sup>87</sup> « Abrégé d'histoire sainte, en prose, par Roger d'Argenteuil. Il a plu à l'auteur de donner à sa compilation le nom de *Bible en François*. Nous ne pouvons conserver ce titre qui induirait en erreur sur le contenu de l'ouvrage. Ce n'est point une Bible, et c'est avec toute raison que M.S. Berger s'est abstenu de faire figurer ce livre dans sa *Bible française au Moyen Âge*. C'est un compilation pour laquelle un petit nombre de morceaux de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament ont été mis à contribution, mais où des récits apocryphes tiennent un grande place, et qui admet aussi quelques chapitres contenant des notions de cosmographie et de théologie à l'usage des laïques.” Meyer, « Notice sur deux anciens manuscrits, » 71.

<sup>88</sup> « Paul Meyer a fait connaître en 1890 une compilation en prose intitulée *Bible en François...* comportant un petit nombre d'extraits de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament et beaucoup d'éléments divers, apocryphes en particulier, ainsi une rencontre entre saint Pierre et Vespasien. On y trouve aussi quelques chapitres contenant des notions de cosmographie et de théologie à l'usage des laïcs. L'explicit d'un des témoins paraît bien nommer l'auteur, un Roger d'Argenteuil inconnu par ailleurs. Il écrivait à Paris à une date non précisée, mais antérieure au plus ancien des trois témoins, qui est de la fin du XIII<sup>e</sup>s. » Pierre-Maurice Bogaert, *Les Bibles en français. Histoire illustrée du moyen âge à nos jours (Turnhout: Brepols, 1991)*, 25.

<sup>89</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 8.

Nevertheless, the difference between a *livre de Sapience* and a compilation is negligible considering that both assemble texts from different sources, usually ones that previously appeared in other literary works.<sup>90</sup> Rather, from my standpoint, the most important issue is that the *Bible en françois* is not a Bible. Hence, to conclude this part of the discussion, I turn to Moe's assessment:

The title of Roger's compilation is somewhat misleading, for his Bible is a compilation of stories from the Old and New Testaments, of material on cosmology and theology, and of the legend of Veronica and the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>91</sup>

### *Authorship*

According to Meyer, the Brussels manuscript's author is unknown, but, he notes, the Paris manuscript includes an *explicit* that identifies the author as the clerical scholar, Roger of Argenteuil (d'Argenteuil).<sup>92</sup> Meyer proposes that "[t]hese terms seem to identify the author and not a simple copyist. In any case, until now, Roger d'Argenteuil has not been known in our literary history."<sup>93</sup> Bogaert agrees that the author seems to be "an otherwise unknown Roger d'Argenteuil." Conversely, Moe suggests:

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<sup>90</sup> Langlois writes that *livres de Sapience* can also be compilations (« eux-mêmes, n'étaient, parfois, que des compilations »). Unlike compilations, however, *livres de Sapience* include non-biblical material (e.g., romance, courtly literature, etiquette). Michael Sargent defines compilations as works of religious devotion, "in origin derivative," which "in many cases, have been translated from a Latin original." Michael G. Sargent, "Minor Devotional Writings," in *Middle English Prose: A Critical Guide to Major Authors and Genres*, ed. A.S.G. Edwards (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984), 147.

<sup>91</sup> Phyllis Moe, "Cleveland Manuscript W Q091.92-C468 and the Veronica Legend," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 70 (1966): 463. Here, Moe is asserting that the amount of non-biblical material (e.g., legend, apocrypha, adage, scientific treatise) in the *Bible en françois* rules out its having the same authority as Scripture.

<sup>92</sup> « On connaît de cet ouvrage deux autres manuscrits : l'un anonyme, a Bruxelles (Bibl. roy. de Belg., n° 10578 <sup>(1)</sup>, XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle); l'autre, à Paris (Bibl. nat. fr. 1850, de la même époque), ou l'ouvrage termine par cet *explicit* : Explicit divina Scriptura abbreviata quam magister Rogerus Dictus de Argentolio, clericus scolarius, Parisius, fecit. Orate pro eo . . . » Meyer, « Notice sur deux anciens manuscrits, » 71.

<sup>93</sup> « Ces termes paraissent bien désigner l'auteur et non pas un simple copiste. Quoi qu'il en soit, Roger d'Argenteuil es jusqu'ici un nom inconnu dans notre histoire littéraire. » Meyer, « Notice sur deux anciens manuscrits, » 71.

Meyer (1889-90: Pt. 1, 71) attributed the *Bible* to Roger d'Argenteuil, whose name appears in the *explicit* of B.N. fr. 1850[.] Although Meyer believed that the *explicit* referred to authorship, it can also be interpreted as a reference to the scribe.<sup>94</sup>

As it stands currently, the author's name is not known; just as additional manuscripts were discovered decades after Meyer wrote, however, it is possible that a future researcher could uncover the identity of the *Bible en françois*' author.

### *A Work in Prose*

Bogaert, Meyer and Moe agree that the *Bible en françois* is a work in prose.<sup>95</sup> Michel Zink traces the beginning of prose literature in France to the medieval romances, specifically the Grail romances.<sup>96</sup> The Grail romances featured quasi-biblical themes and subject matter; hence, they qualified as religious literature, and so romancers modelled their writings on religious vernacular texts originally in Latin.<sup>97</sup> Zink describes the relationship between Latin and prose as follows:

In Latin, moreover, the sacred was always expressed in prose. Prose was the language of exegesis and preaching. It was the language of the Bible, the language not only of the New Testament and the historical books of the Old, but of and all Holy Scripture since Isidore of Seville's extension of the term *prosa* to everything not composed according to classical Latin metrics. This meant that even the Latin translation of the Bible's poetic texts, the Psalms or the Song of Solomon, could be grouped in the category of prose. Prose, in sum, was the language of God.<sup>98</sup>

In medieval literary culture, prose was considered straightforward and related to truth. Conversely, verse, with its contrived rules and ornamentation, could be deceptive.<sup>99</sup> The latter,

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<sup>94</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 19.

<sup>95</sup> "In its broadest sense, the term [prose] is applied to all forms of written or spoken expression which do not have a regular rhythmic pattern." William Harmon et. al., *A Handbook to Literature*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009), 419.

<sup>96</sup> Michel Zink, *Medieval French Literature: An Introduction*, trans. Jeff Rider (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995), 70.

<sup>97</sup> "The only models of French prose available to the romancers were religious texts: sermons, edifying treatises, saints' lives translated from Latin." Zink, *Medieval French Literature*, 71.

<sup>98</sup> Zink, *Medieval French Literature*, 71.

<sup>99</sup> "It was commonplace among prose authors in the Middle Ages to declare that prose was truer than verse and that, unlike verse, it made no sacrifice to ornament." Zink, *Medieval French Literature*, 72.

therefore, was not an appropriate vehicle for conveying God's word. Zink shows that this literary culture rejects the notion that "God's word should bend to the frivolous laws of poetry" and, instead, upholds prose as the only possible literary means to convey God's plan.<sup>100</sup> Zink considers the relationship between God and prose exemplified in the latter's presumption of ultimate veracity.<sup>101</sup>

Zink's observation has a bearing on the appended *Vengeance* narrative, specifically as related to its genre, the *chanson de geste*. Generally, the *chanson de geste* was composed in verse; in the *Bible en françois* and its Middle English translation, however, it is in prose.<sup>102</sup> With prose, the *Vengeance* matches the style of the preceding chapters; more important, however, prose imparts an air of divine authority—"prose held the place, and stood as a sign, of God's prose."<sup>103</sup>

### **3.5 The ME Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois**

In fifteenth-century England, an anonymous author translated portions of the *Bible en françois* into Middle English. Known as *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois* (*ME Bible*), it comprises chapters 5 to 23 of the *Bible en françois*. Like its prototype, the *ME Bible* is typical of vernacular reading material aimed at an increasingly literate laity in Western Europe during the late Middle Ages.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Zink, *Medieval French Literature*, 72.

<sup>101</sup> "Everywhere it appeared, and as soon as it appeared, however, prose began to manifest its uniform claim to tell the truth." Zink, *Medieval French Literature*, 76.

<sup>102</sup> "The *chansons de geste* narrative poems (sometimes known in English as Old French Epic), which vary in length from under 1,000 lines to over 30,000, flourished from the twelfth to the fourteenth century. The genre can be identified both formally and thematically. It used a particular form of versification, that of *laissez*, strophes of irregular length constructed on a single rhyme or assonance." Ailes, "Chanson de Geste," 25.

<sup>103</sup> Zink, *Medieval French Literature*, 72.

<sup>104</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 8.

It is not known whether the author had a complete manuscript of the *Bible en françois* to translate, or an incomplete one.<sup>105</sup> Regardless, I will argue that the truncated text communicates a message with relevance to the religious and theological situation in pre-Reformation England. In other words, we must ask: What was in the *Bible en françois* that spoke to the religious and theological climate of pre-Reformation England? Apart from the question of access, nothing is known of the manuscript's early history or the author's identity. And there is only one extant copy of the text. It is possible, though, that these issues could be resolved at some future point.<sup>106</sup>

The *ME Bible* has received little notice from scholars. The *Vengeance*, however, has been extensively studied, especially in terms of its medieval versions. Certainly, the *Vengeance* was a popular story in England, where it was translated into the vernacular.<sup>107</sup> It is also an example of what Morey calls "self-standing" in that it could circulate independently.<sup>108</sup>

Like the *Bible en françois*, the *ME Bible* is a prose work. At the same time, there are differences between the French original and its Middle English translation: the latter lacks almost six chapters on theology and cosmology (i.e., the expository chapters), but retains the biblical, legendary and apocryphal stories, including that of Veronica and the destruction of Jerusalem (i.e., the *Vengeance*).

Moe wonders whether it was by choice or whether it was a question of textual availability (the aforementioned lost or missing contents) to account for why the author translated only the biblical and extrabiblical narratives.<sup>109</sup> Possibly, lost or missing portions could explain why the

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<sup>105</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 9.

<sup>106</sup> As noted above, previously unknown manuscripts of the *Bible en françois* were discovered in the twentieth century.

<sup>107</sup> There are four Middle English versions of this narrative. See Chapter 5, *The Vengeance of the Saviour: A Handbook on Managing Religious Dissent*.

<sup>108</sup> Describing historiated Bibles, Morey writes, "Whereas a great deal of legendary material is integrated into Genesis and Exodus, later additions tend to be self-standing. For example, a "Pety Job" takes the place of the Book of Job, and the *inventio crucis* legend appears as a piece." Morey, "Peter Comestor," 24.

<sup>109</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 9.

Middle English version comprises only the biblical, legendary and apocryphal stories from the *Bible en français*.<sup>110</sup>

### *Thirteenth-Century France in Contrast to Fifteenth-Century England*

The era in which the *ME Bible* appeared differed substantially from the world of thirteenth-century France when the *Bible en français* was published. The former was a period of natural and man-made instability, challenges to religious and ecclesial authority and political strife. Conversely, in thirteenth-century France, the Catholic Church dominated French society, politics and culture. It was a time of unparalleled papal authority, especially during the tenure of Pope Innocent III. That France and the papacy were key allies is epitomized by the close relationship between Pope Innocent and King Philip II (1165-1223), and the canonization of King Louis IX (1226-1270) by Pope Boniface VIII (1230-1303).<sup>111</sup> This alliance, however, also obliged the French crown to aid in the suppression of heretics, including the Albigensian Crusade which targeted the Cathars in the Languedoc region.<sup>112</sup> Even so, the Cathars had been virtually eliminated twenty years before the *Bible en français* appeared and the Avignon Papacy was still decades away.<sup>113</sup>

Innovations in architecture and engineering enabled the construction of Gothic churches at Chartres, Amiens, Reims, Paris, Bourges, Strasbourg, as well as Sainte Chapelle, which was

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<sup>110</sup> Once again, I refer the reader to Chapter 6, “Encounters with Damaged Manuscripts,” in Clemens and Graham, *Manuscript Studies*.

<sup>111</sup> “Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) called Philip Augustus (1180-1223) his ‘favourite son’. Louis IX (1226-1270), the archetype par excellence of the good king was sainted by Boniface VIII a few years after his death (1294-1303).” Blandine Chelini-Pont, “Catholicism in France from Monarchical Hegemony to Secular Competition: A Turbulent Story,” May 21, 2020, 2, [<sup>112</sup> “This rather-too-close relationship also displayed a darker side. As the military arm of the Church, the French king obeyed the papal call to ‘crusade’ against the heretics in his own kingdom. Waldensians in Languedoc, Cathars in the vicinity of Toulouse and Albi, were hunted down by the forces of the king and the Inquisition, led by the Abbot of Cîteaux Arnaud Amaury.” Chelini-Pont, “Catholicism in France,” 2.](https://amu.hal.science/hal-02614610v1/document#:~:text=By%20the%20thirteenth%20century%2C%20France,2014:%20155%2D168), HAL Open Science.</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

<sup>113</sup> See the discussion in Chapter 6, The Pre-Reformation Period and the English Church.

consecrated in April 1248.<sup>114</sup> Two great religious orders were founded in the thirteenth century: the Franciscans in 1212, and the Dominicans in 1216. By the middle of the century, “they had infused new life throughout the Catholic world.”<sup>115</sup> The eminent theologian, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), wrote several treatises on the Eucharist, including the formulation of transubstantiation and the Real Presence, which had been championed by Pope Innocent III and ratified at the aforementioned Fourth Lateran Council. By the time the *ME Bible* was published in England, however, Reformers had rejected these eucharistic teachings which, in turn, threatened to erode ecclesial authority.<sup>116</sup>

As a work of moral and spiritual edification, the *Bible en françois* is in line with the religious climate and ecclesial confidence of thirteenth-century France. But the *milieu* of pre-Reformation England was one of religious turmoil and theological uncertainty which, as I will demonstrate in upcoming chapters, is addressed tacitly in the *ME Bible*.

### ***3.6 A Brief Summary of the Text***

I have outlined the *ME Bible*'s backstory, including how it diverges from the Old French text. Now I will describe the main story lines of chapters 5 to 23 in preparation for subsequent analysis and interpretation.

#### *Old Testament and the Prophets*

The *ME Bible* begins with a paraphrase of the *imago Dei* narrative from Genesis in Latin—the language of ecclesial authority—and Middle English.<sup>117</sup> Whether or not it was chosen

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<sup>114</sup> Frederic Harrison, “A Survey of the Thirteenth Century,” *Fortnightly Review* 50, no. 297 (September 1891): 343, <https://login.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/his243>.

<sup>115</sup> Harrison, “A Survey,” 334.

<sup>116</sup> I discuss these issues in Chapter 6, The Pre-Reformation Period and the English Church.

<sup>117</sup> At critical moments in the narrative, particularly ones involving Jesus (e.g., the Annunciation, the entrance into Jerusalem and the betrayal) short, Latin inserts from the Gospels accompany the Middle English text. In Morey's

specifically, this pericope describes the unfolding relationship between God and humanity.<sup>118</sup> It is followed by three short chapters that summarize several Old Testament events and characters, including Adam and Eve, Noah and the Flood, and the patriarchs and prophets. Although the chapters brush over these iconic stories, they prepare the reader for the story of Jesus' life, Passion and its aftermath.

### *"Life of Christ"*

Next, episodes from the Gospels are merged into a Life of Christ.<sup>119</sup> In this truncated narrative, a mere two chapters are given over to the Annunciation, the Slaughter of the Innocents and Herod's death, Jesus' baptism, and the Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes, with none being noted at any length. Oddly, at this point in the telling, there is no description of the Last Supper; rather, it is mentioned as part of Jesus' post-Resurrection appearances (see below). In contrast, the Passion narrative, also told in plays across England during the Middle Ages, is detailed.<sup>120</sup> Following the events in the Garden of Gethsemane, including the betrayal, Caiaphas and the other "false and wicked" Jews conspire to have Jesus executed on charges of sedition. Pilate is sympathetic and asks to hear about Jesus' family. Ironically, the Jews, not Jesus, relate the stories of Jesus' birth, preaching, miracles and healings.

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view, including Latin with Middle English, "invests the work with authority and contributes to a certain degree of leveling between the languages." Morey, *Book and Verse*, 25.

<sup>118</sup> "It is sufficient [...] to point out that both French and English translators [of medieval *Lives of Christ*] preface their work with a statement of comprehensive aim." Salter, *Love's Myrroure*, 67.

<sup>119</sup> For a discussion on the Life of Christ genre, see Chapter 2, The Evolution of Biblical and Biblically-Based Literature in the Vernacular: From Anglo-Saxon to Middle English.

<sup>120</sup> Medieval plays in England "give major prominence to the story of Christ's Passion and Resurrection. As the drama of man's salvation reaches its climax, the action grows more intense and the playing area becomes more crowded with characters. From the moment of Christ's entry into Jerusalem, he is caught up in an incessant tumult of events: the conspiracy of the Jews with Judas, the Last Supper, Christ's agony on the night before he is taken, the betrayal and arrest, the trial before the chief priests Caiaphas and Annas, Judas' suicide, the first trial before Pilate, the trial before Herod, the resumption of the trial before Pilate, the torments on the road to Calgary, and so on." David M. Bevington, ed., *Medieval Drama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), 477.

## *The Passion*

Before describing Jesus' suffering and crucifixion, the narrative switches to Pilate's domestic life. While the Governor converses with the Jews, his wife sends a servant to say that she dreamt of Jesus' torture and death, and his Resurrection, post-Crucifixion appearances and Ascension.<sup>121</sup> She also dreamt that the Roman emperor sacked Jerusalem and brought the Jews to slavery.<sup>122</sup> Although Pilate pleads with the Jews and relays his wife's fears, they demand that he deliver Jesus to them. Pilate has no choice but to acquiesce and wash his hands of the situation.<sup>123</sup>

In the scenes that follow, Jesus is portrayed as a piteous creature whom the Jews torment. While much of the narrative is derived from the Gospels, there is also an abundance of legendary material, including the *inventio crucis* legend and the legend of Veronica and the cloth imprinted with Jesus' image.<sup>124</sup> The subsequent scene at the foot of the cross features the *Planctus*, or extended Marian lament, which was a standard feature of late-medieval literature and art associated with the Passion.<sup>125</sup> Then, Gospel excerpts on Jesus' death, deposition and burial are interspersed with apocrypha, including the Harrowing of Hell cited in the Apostles' Creed, and the story of the Roman soldier who pierces Jesus' side with a spear.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> The dream of Pilate's wife is in Matthew 27:19.

<sup>122</sup> These details are not in the Gospel.

<sup>123</sup> Matthew 27: 24-26 is the primary text detailing Pilate's hand washing.

<sup>124</sup> See Chapter 4, *The Vera Icona: Looking Upon the Face of God*, for a review of the Veronica story.

<sup>125</sup> "To see the Passion through Mary's experience of it was commonplace in the spirituality of this period." Barry Spur, *See the Virgin Blest: The Virgin Mary in English Poetry* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 75.

<sup>126</sup> The phenomenal events that occur at Jesus' death are augmented with a one-line reference to the apocryphal Harrowing of Hell. "[...] and that the Holi Gost was descended into helle & had drawn out fro þens the soulis of his frendis." The story of the Roman centurion is found in John 19:33-34. The ME Bible's version is based on the medieval legend of Longinus, which reads soon after, "Ioseph of Barmathie" and "Nichodemus the smyth" bring the "aunciant knight þat hiȝt Longues" to the foot of the cross and ask him to verify that Jesus is dead. Longinus "percid the side of oure Lord so þat the blode ranne down vpon the spere vnto his hand. And he felt it hote & thought that it was of Goddis sonne whom he had desired gretly to se." Then, he wipes his eyes and his blindness is cured. Longinus is then baptized.

Moe, *ME Bible*, 64, 65.

### *The Resurrection and the Ascension*

The segment on Jesus' post-Resurrection appearances includes two eucharistic narratives: the road to Emmaus story followed by the institution of the Eucharist.<sup>127</sup> The *ME Bible's* "biblical" narrative concludes with a four-sentence synopsis of the so-called Great Commission, the Ascension and Pentecost.

### *The Vengeance of the Saviour*

The final section is given over to the aforementioned Middle English version of the *Vengeance of the Saviour (Vengeance)*. As described, the Roman emperor's brother, Vespasian, suffers from facial cancer. Hearing about Jesus' miracles and healings, Vespasian asks St. Peter, now in Rome, if he knows of a relic that Jesus touched. Peter tells him about Veronica and the cloth imprinted with Jesus' image. Veronica brings the cloth to Rome and relinquishes it to Peter. Next, Peter processes through Rome bearing the image aloft for veneration and, arriving at the palace, cures Vespasian with the cloth. The entire court is baptized and the veil is enshrined in Rome.

Vespasian subsequently journeys to Jerusalem with an army to avenge Jesus' execution. After destroying Jerusalem, putting the inhabitants to the sword and stealing their wealth, Vespasian returns to Rome and is crowned emperor. He supports saints Peter and Paul when they preach and teach in Rome, and lives an exemplary Christian life, which includes venerating the Eucharist.

### ***3.7 The ME Bible: A Unique Manuscript***

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<sup>127</sup> In Chapter 6, *The Pre-Reformation Period and the English Church*, I discuss the cult of the Eucharist.

Following some brief comments on genre, my attention turns to the *Vengeance's* function in the *ME Bible* and its shift from a narrative of triumph in thirteenth-century France to an ecclesial doctrinal defence in pre-Reformation England.

The *ME Bible* is not a Bible *per se*. Neither is it a *livre de Sapience* because, unlike its prototype, it has no expository material.<sup>128</sup> Rather, the *ME Bible* is modelled on the type of biblical texts in prose popular in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—the Middle English vernacular, or popular, “Bible,” as indicated above.<sup>129</sup> Gillespie describes the literary fashion, popular in the fifteenth century, to reconfigure religious texts from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—in other words older literary models.<sup>130</sup> Michael Sargent describes the *ME Bible* as an unoriginal minor work sourced from earlier writings, often in another language.<sup>131</sup>

In the foregoing regards the *ME Bible* is not unique. It does, however, have a singular quality that sets it apart from other Middle English religious texts: it is the only currently known Middle English text of biblical literature in prose that appends the *Vengeance*. The other Middle English versions are in verse, and they circulated independently under eponymous titles: *Siege of Jerusalem* and short and long versions of the *Destruction of Jerusalem*, or *Titus and Vespasian*.

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<sup>128</sup> Noteworthy in the *Bible* is the instructive dialogue between father and son, *C'est dou pere qui son filz enseigne*), which “preaches the value of baptism, faith, good works, confession, and prayer.” Moe, *ME Bible*, 21. Huw Grange’s article “Engaging in Dialogue: Roger d’Argenteuil’s *Bible en françois* and *Le Dyalogue Dou Pere et Dou Filz*” explores how this French text from the 1260s serves as a basic introduction to Christian doctrine. Huw Grange, “Engaging in Dialogue: Roger d’Argenteuil’s *Bible en françois* and *Le Dyalogue Dou Pere et Dou Filz*,” *Cultura Neolatina* 77, nos.3-4 (2017): 365-382, <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:6dec88dc-bf33-42e2-904c-a5d95339a630>.

<sup>129</sup> Brian Murdoch describes the *ME Bible* as an example of a medieval popular Bible. He writes, “Text-types which provide evidence of the medieval popular Bible include the following (editions with source-notes are cited): vernacular presentations of Biblical stories such as the German *Historienbibeln*; moralizing treatises containing Old and New Testament plus legendary narratives (such as *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d’Argenteuil’s Bible en françois*, ed. Phyllis Moe, 1977).” Brian Murdoch, “Bibles (Popular),” in Albrecht Classen, ed., *Handbook of Medieval Studies: Terms–Methods–Trends. 3 Volumes* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 1642, <https://doi-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.1515/9783110215588>.

<sup>130</sup> Vincent Gillespie describes a “lay assimilation of techniques and material of spiritual advancement, [that were] previously the purview of the clerical and monastic orders. Texts for the latter readers were adapted, translated and quarried to supply the needs of a wider clerical and lay audience and classics of spirituality from 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> had a new lease on life in the 15<sup>th</sup>.” Vincent Gillespie, “Vernacular Books of Religion,” 317.

<sup>131</sup> Sargent, “Minor Devotional Writings,” 147.

Meyer, Moe and Bogaert specifically mention the *Vengeance*, as it appears in the *Bible en françois*. First, Meyer informs his readers that he has provided a one and one-half page summary of the story of Veronica and the Roman expedition to destroy Jerusalem:

I also thought it would be useful to give an extract from a legend that recounts the capture of Jerusalem by Vespasian. Various texts in Latin, French and Provençal refer to this legend: but none of them, apart from this version [in the *Bible*], feature Vespasian in the company of Saint Peter.<sup>132</sup>

Similarly, Moe suggests that readers are captivated by “the most interesting section of the *Bible [en françois]*, the story of Veronica whose cure of Vespasian’s leprosy resulted in the Roman expedition to destroy Jerusalem.”<sup>133</sup> And from the many “diverse texts, many of which are apocryphal,” Bogaert singles out the tale of the meeting between St. Peter and Vespasian, which resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>134</sup>

In thirteenth-century France, this *chanson de geste* could be read as Christianity’s triumph over Judaism. But it would yield a different meaning in fifteenth-century England when Church teaching and practice were under fire. It is the latter that I seek to explicate as part of a larger effort to elucidate the work’s meaning.

Moe identifies the *Bible en françois*’ unifying theme as the divine plan of salvation. Still, the circumstances surrounding the *ME Bible*’s appearance, especially the religious and

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<sup>132</sup> « J’ai cru aussi utile de donner un extrait d’une partie très légendaire qui raconte la prise de Jérusalem par Vespasien. On a signalé divers textes en latin, en français, en provençal, qui se rapportent à cette légende <sup>(2)</sup> : dans aucun Vespasien n’est mis, comme ici, en rapport avec saint Pierre. » Meyer, « Notice sur deux anciens manuscrits, »71.

<sup>133</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 22. Here, Moe is referring the *Bible*; however, her assessment applies equally, or even more so, to the *ME Bible*.

<sup>134</sup> « [La compilation de Roger d’Argenteuil] comportant un petit nombre d’extraits de l’Ancien et du Nouveau Testament et beaucoup d’éléments divers, apocryphes en particulier, anise une rencontre entre saint Pierre et Vespasien. » Bogaert, *Les Bibles en français*, 25. The meeting between Peter and Vespasian is an historical anachronism. In Chapter 9, Connecting the Threads, I address the foregoing and I examine the two characters as they appear therein.

theological climate, are dissimilar; hence, its focus is different. What I will argue is that the *ME Bible*'s has a meaning that serves another agenda.

### ***3.8 Proceeding to the Next Stage***

In these preliminary chapters I have articulated my claim and arguments relative to the *ME Bible*; I investigated the historical progression from biblical translations to biblically-based Middle English literature; I examined the literary methods (e.g., biblical paraphrase) authors used to impart knowledge of the Bible in their writings; and how such literature communicates theological meaning. Then, I identified the *ME Bible* as being singularly unique in Middle English religious literature.

I devote the next two chapters to the interrelated St. Veronica legend and the *Vengeance* narrative because they comprise the largest part of the narrative. And, as I will argue, understanding their significance is key to extracting the *ME Bible*'s meaning. In addition to defending ecclesial teaching and tradition and warning those who challenge it, I will argue that these stories, in tandem with the rest of the *ME Bible*, assert Rome's hegemony during a time of religious turmoil and theological uncertainty.

## Chapter 4

### The *Vera Icona*: Looking Upon the Face of God

#### 4.1 A Symbol of Roman Sovereignty

In the previous chapter, I identified *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois (ME Bible)* as an example of a literary work that disseminates biblical stories and meanings to lay persons. I concluded that the *ME Bible* is the only currently known Middle English text of biblical literature in prose that appends the story of St. Veronica and the destruction of Jerusalem narrative (i.e., the *Vengeance*).

I also indicated that Paul Meyer, Pierre-Maurice Bogaert and Phyllis Moe single out the *Vengeance* and comment on it separately from other stories in the *Bible en françois*. Clearly, these scholars identify something compelling about the *Vengeance* narrative within the context of the *Bible en françois*. Defining that “something,” and relating it to the rest of the *ME Bible*, are crucial to understanding the work’s function and relevance within the context of late fifteenth-century England.

In this chapter, I continue to draw out the meaning embedded in the *ME Bible*. I argue that the Veronica legend has a symbiotic relationship with Rome and the papacy, exemplified by the cloth’s status as an authentic relic of Christ’s Passion under the control of the Catholic Church. Each reinforces the authority of the other.

## 4.2 *The Legend of St. Veronica: The World Behind the Text*

We will now examine the Veronica legend, including the cloth's purported biblical and miraculous origins, its history—with a focus on the thirteenth-century, Pope Innocent III and popular devotions—and its expression in literature.

### *Origins*

The cult of the saints, which reached its apex in the fifteenth century, was an integral feature of medieval Christianity in the West. Images of the saints adorned private homes, were engraved on cups and bowls, painted in manuscripts and on wood, carved on public buildings, and adorned stained-glass windows and rood screens.<sup>1</sup> The miracles and heroism found in tales of saints' lives were read by the literate members of the laity and clergy, and were heard by those in Church on a saint's feast day.<sup>2</sup>

A popular story concerned Veronica, keeper of the miraculous cloth bearing Jesus' image.<sup>3</sup> According to one version, or tradition, Veronica gave Jesus her veil, or cloth, to wipe his face while he carried the cross on the *Via Crucis*. When Jesus returned the cloth, Veronica saw that his image had been imprinted on it. Eventually, the cloth and the woman became so closely associated that both were known as Veronica (*vera ikona* or True Image).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England (c. 1400 to c. 1580)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 155.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Swan, "Remembering Veronica in Anglo-Saxon England," in *Writing Gender and Genre in Medieval Literature: Approaches to Old and Middle English Texts* (Cambridge: DS Brewer, 2002), 19.

<sup>3</sup> "This image, ubiquitous in the late Middle Ages, is the Vera icon (Latin *sudarium*), variously known as the Veronica, the Veil of Veronica, or the Holy Face, a piece of cloth revered in Rome as a precious relic that was believed to show Christ's face." Ann Marie Rasmussen, *Medieval Badges: Their Wearers and Their Worlds*, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 41, <https://www-degruyter-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/document/doi/10.9783/9780812299687/html>.

<sup>4</sup> Alvin Ford questions the idea that the name is from the Latin *vera* (true) and the Greek *eikon* (image). Rather, he suggests that the cloth was instead named after its keeper; he proposes that the Veronica story was originally written in Greek and later transcribed into Latin. It follows then that the Greek name *Berenike* (bringer of victory), or *Prounike* or *Berenice*, was the saint's original name—"so, any of these Greek forms of her name could have been Latinized into *Veronica* without any reference to her possession of the Holy Veil, the *vera ikona*." Alvin E. Ford, ed., *La Vengeance de Nostre-Seigneur: The Old and Middle French Prose Versions: The Version of Japheth*,

The New Testament does not include the story, but it will come to be associated with the Gospel narratives.<sup>5</sup> According to Alvin Ford, the Veronica character is an amalgamation of women who met Jesus or who participated in his ministry, the women on the road to Calvary and those who may have stood at the foot of the cross. And, because many of these women are not named in the Gospels, the Veronica character conveniently filled the void.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, the most popular candidate for the Veronica character is the woman in the Synoptic Gospels whom Jesus cured of a twelve-year flow of blood—the *Haemorrhissa*. All of these dimensions of the legend have a literary history, the most important of which is perhaps the teaching of Addai.<sup>7</sup>

### *The Teaching of Addai*

The theme of the miraculous image of Jesus' face on a cloth belongs to a genre known as *acheiropoietos*, a Greek word meaning not made by human hands.<sup>8</sup> An early example of the *acheiropoietos* theme appears in *The Teaching of Addai (Doctrina Addai)*, which is purported to have taken place during the reign of Emperor Tiberius.<sup>9</sup> In the story, King Abgar of Edessa sends emissaries on a mission to Palestine. Upon returning, the envoys tell the king about Jesus'

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Studies and Texts 63 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 8-9, [https://books-scholarsportal-info.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/en/read?id=/ebooks/ebooks0/gibson\\_crkn/2009-12-01/7/420458](https://books-scholarsportal-info.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/en/read?id=/ebooks/ebooks0/gibson_crkn/2009-12-01/7/420458).

<sup>5</sup> While not found in Scripture, the story reflects the Old Testament theme of humanity's desire to see the face of God. The Old Testament beseeches God to shine his face on the righteous (Numbers 6:25-25, Psalms 4:6, 31:16, 67:1, 80:19, 119:135, 102:2) and exhorts the faithful to constantly seek his face (1 Chronicles 16:11, Psalm 105:4).

<sup>6</sup> Ford, *La Vengeance: Version of Japheth*, 4-5.

<sup>7</sup> Addai, also known as Thaddeus, was a disciple of Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> Ian MacGregor and Erika Langmuir, *Seeing Salvation: Images of Christ in Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 84.

<sup>9</sup> "The earliest reference, in fact, to a picture of Christ at Edessa (modern Urfa in Turkey) occurs in a Syriac work known as the *Doctrina Addai*, which in its present form seems to date from about AD 400." Averil Cameron, "The History of the Image of Edessa: The Telling of a Story," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 7 (1983): 81, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41036083>. Studies on the legend of King Abgar include Sebastian P. Brock "Syriac Studies Transformations of the Edessa Portrait of Christ," *Syriac Studies*, March 28, 2016, The American Foundation for Syriac Studies, <http://syriacstudies.com/2016/03/28/transformations-of-the-edessa-portrait-of-christ-professor-sebastian-brock-oxford-university/>; the above-cited "Image of Edessa," 80-94; Hans J.W. Drijvers, "The image of Edessa in the Syriac Tradition," in *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, eds. Herbert L. Kessler and Gerhard Wolf (Villa Spelman Colloquia 6: 1998), 13-31; and Ernst Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954): 83-50, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1291064>.

miracles and healings.<sup>10</sup> Although Abgar wants to visit Jesus, he cannot “because he could not pass over a district of the Romans which was not his, lest this occasion should provoke bitter enmity.”<sup>11</sup> Instead, Abgar sends a letter to Jesus with his archivist, Hanan, requesting help for an unspecified illness and offering him a place to live to escape the Jews. Jesus is moved by the letter; he tells Hanan that he cannot visit, but will send his disciple, Addai, to Edessa to cure the ailing king.<sup>12</sup> Without being prompted, Hanan takes the following initiative:

When Hanan the archivist saw that Jesus had spoken this to him, he took and painted the portrait of Jesus with choice pigments, since he was the king’s artist, and brought it with him to his lord King Abgar. When King Abgar saw the portrait, he received it with great joy and placed it with great honor in one of the buildings of his palaces. Hanan the archivist told him everything which he heard from Jesus since his words had been placed by him in written documents.<sup>13</sup>

With time, Addai arrives, cures the king and preaches to the entire populace of Edessa. Abgar, the court and the entire city subsequently convert to Christianity and the king asks Addai to have a church constructed.

In *Ecclesial History* (*Historia ecclesiastica*), Eusebius tells the story in much the same way.<sup>14</sup> There is a significant difference in his version, however, in that there is no image involved; rather, Jesus writes a letter to Abgar, which he entrusts to the courier, Ananias. Eventually, references to an image of Jesus’s face—known as the *Image of Edessa* or the

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<sup>10</sup> This synopsis is from *The Teaching of Addai*, Texts and Translations 16, Early Christian Literature Series 4, trans. George Howard (Ann Arbor: The Society of Biblical Literature), vii-viii.

<sup>11</sup> Howard, *Teaching of Addai*, 7.

<sup>12</sup> “The apocryphal correspondence between Jesus and Abgar Uchama [. . .] king of Edessa in eastern Syria (4 BCE–7 CE and 13–50 CE), is first mentioned in Eusebius (*Eccl. Hist.* 1.13.5). Eusebius claims to have found the letters in the archives of Edessa and to have translated them literally from their original Syriac into Greek.” Bart D. Ehrman and Zlatko Pleš, eds. and trans., *The Apocryphal Gospels: Texts and Translations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 413.

<sup>13</sup> Howard, *Teaching of Addai*, 9-11.

<sup>14</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesial History*, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1890), Book I, Chapter XIII, 100-102, <https://archive.org/details/selectlibraryofn18901scha/page/100/mode/2up>.

*Mandyllion*—replaces mentions of a letter.<sup>15</sup> In 544 CE, the image was allegedly discovered when a cloth bearing the facial features of a man was found hidden in the wall above one of the city gates.<sup>16</sup>

### *The Mandyllion and the Sudarium*

A divine image of Jesus that healed an ailing emperor who then converts to Christianity is a theme common to the Abgar and Veronica stories. Indeed, at least two references from the thirteenth century also make a connection between the *Mandyllion* and the *sudarium* (i.e., the Veronica).<sup>17</sup> Hans Belting describes another episode from the thirteenth century wherein a Syrian monk identifies the Veronica with Abgar's cloth.<sup>18</sup>

These facts raise the question of whether the two stories are variations on a single theme. In Ford's estimate, the Abgar story, along with Eusebius's description of two bronze statues to be examined shortly, led medieval Europeans to request more information on both the Veronica cloth and Veronica the woman.<sup>19</sup> For his part, Belting acknowledges that the Veronica legend

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<sup>15</sup> The apocryphal *Letter of Lentulus Describing Christ* was allegedly discovered in the fifteenth century. Written by the Roman official and Jesus' contemporary, Lentulus, to the Roman Senate, the letter "gives a detailed description of the physical presence and general bearing of Christ, as well as the impression he made upon those who came into his presence." Cora Lutz describes the letter as demonstrating "the persistent tradition of an authentic portrait of Christ made during his lifetime." Cora E. Lutz, "The Letter of Lentulus Describing Christ," *The Yale University Library Gazette* 50, no. 2 (October 1975): 91, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40858588?seq=1>.

<sup>16</sup> Cameron, "Image of Edessa," 84.

<sup>17</sup> "[T]here are two interesting literary citations from the thirteenth century [. . .] which create a link between the story of King Abgar and the Roman Veronica. The first, conserved in the *Bibliothèque nationale* de France (MS Lat. 8229), is a version of the tale of King Abgar. The anonymous author, who was perhaps working near Rome, concludes that: 'The Veronica, then moved to Rome, is placed in the oratory of the Holy Mother of God inside the basilica of the prince of the apostles [Old St. Peter's].' In the second text, a long poem [*Veronica*] written for Cardinal William de Braye by Boniface of Verona, Veronica is identified as the widow of King Abgar; after the apostasy of their son, she was exiled to Jerusalem and took the Holy Image with her." Raffaella Zardoni, Manuela Bossi and Amanda Murphy, "The Iconography of the Roman Veronica," in *The European Fortune of the Roman Veronica in the Middle Ages*, eds. Amanda Murphy, Herbert L. Kessler, Marco Petoletti, Eamon Duffy and Guido Milanese (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 294.

<sup>18</sup> Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 218.

<sup>19</sup> Alvin E. Ford, ed., *La vengeance de Notre-Seigneur: The Old and Middle French versions: The Mission of Volusian, the Vindicta Salvatoris and the versions found in the Bible en françois of Roger d'Argenteuil or influenced by the works of Flavius Josephus, Robert de Boron and Jabocus de Voragine*, Studies and Texts 115 (Toronto:

appropriates elements from the Abgar story, but notes that the Abgar story “was not linked to a relic in Rome.”<sup>20</sup> Karl Pearson, however, is more declarative:

Now the images of Christ from ancient times are either of Byzantine origin or are in the Byzantine style. Furthermore, they are painted on cloth [...]. These images have their origin in the East, in Constantinople. An image brought from there to Rome would probably have been known as εικόνα του Ιησού Χριστού [image of Jesus Christ] and, once authenticated by Roman clerics, it would quickly have become known, among the people, as a *vera hignonía*, a True Image.<sup>21</sup>

Mark Guscín argues that the Abgar and Veronica narratives differ fundamentally, however: Veronica was a normal woman who encountered Jesus in person, while Abgar was a man, a sovereign who never met Jesus. In later versions of the Veronica story (including the *ME Bible* and its prototype), the cloth is connected with the Passion, which is not the case in the Abgar story. Finally, in the former, the sacred object is always an image, while in the latter it is first a letter, then an image. Accordingly, Guscín writes, “In the end, we could argue that all that the two images have in common is a possible desire to explain the existence of a piece of linen cloth with an image of Christ imprinted thereon.”<sup>22</sup> Whether or not the two stories are variations on a theme remains unsettled. In any case, the legend of Abgar has a long history in the self-understanding of ancient traditions of Syriac and Armenian Christianity.

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Pontifical Institute for Mediaeval Studies, 1993), 9,  
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ottawa/reader.action?docID=3255923#>.

<sup>20</sup> Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 218.

<sup>21</sup> „Nun sind die aus ältester Zeit bekannten Bilder Christi entweder von byzantinischer Arbeit oder tragen doch den byzantinischen Typus. Uebrigens sind sie auf Tuch gemalt. Im Osten also, in Konstantinopel, haben diese Bilder ihren Ursprung. Ein von dort nach Rom gebrachtes Bild würde wahrscheinlich εικόνα του Ιησού Χριστού überschrieben oder benannt worden sein, und von der römischen Priesterschaft einmal für echt erklärt, würde sich dasselbe als *vera icon* schnell bei dem Volk eingebürgert haben.“ Karl Pearson, „Die Fronica: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Christusbildes im Mittelalter“ (Cambridge University Press, 2010) 9, <https://archive-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/details/diefronicaeinbei00pearuoft/page/8/mode/2up?q=vera+ignonía>.

<sup>22</sup> Mark Guscín, “The Tradition of the Image of Edessa,” PhD diss., (University of London, 2014), 246, [https://pure.royalholloway.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/24278014/MARK\\_GUSCIN\\_PhD\\_THESIS\\_05.03.15.pdf](https://pure.royalholloway.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/24278014/MARK_GUSCIN_PhD_THESIS_05.03.15.pdf).

## *The Roman Veronica*

While the Mandylion and other cloths claim authenticity (e.g., *Volto Santo* of Lucca, Veil of Manoppello), the one currently in Rome's possession is the most celebrated.<sup>23</sup> Purportedly, this ancient cloth was stained by Jesus' blood and sweat, but it was not considered a likeness. Eventually, however, the cloth began to be revered as a portrait of the Saviour.<sup>24</sup>

Ian Wilson and Katherine Brown date the holy cloth's presence in Old St. Peter's Basilica to the eighth century.<sup>25</sup> Belting, however, dates the Roman Veronica to the thirteenth century.<sup>26</sup> In any case, it is clear that from the thirteenth century on, the Veronica was housed in Old St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. These dates conflict with the *ME Bible's* version which has Veronica and the cloth leaving Jerusalem and settling in Rome in the first century. Thus, according to the *ME Bible*, Rome has been the centre of Christianity and religious authority since the apostolic age.

### *4.2.1 The Thirteenth Century: Pope Innocent III and the Veronica*

From the thirteenth century on, Veronica is the image, *par excellence*, affiliated with the Passion and with Rome. The Veronica story gained prominence during the tenure of Pope Innocent III, who publicly displayed the cloth, instituted an annual procession and composed a

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<sup>23</sup> Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 218.

<sup>24</sup> After the *sudarium* was identified as a portrait, and became associated with the *Via Crucis*, it became revered as an important relic of the Passion. MacGregor, *Seeing Salvation*, 92.

<sup>25</sup> Ian Wilson suggests that the Veronica was in Rome during the pontificate of "the Greek Pope, John VII, in the years 705–707." Ian Wilson, *Holy Faces, Secret Places: The Quest for Jesus' True Likeness* (London: Corgi Books, 1992), 67. Katherine Brown concurs with Wilson's dating: "the earliest recorded mention of Veronica's veil as a physical object appears in the late tenth century when a chronicler mentioned that Pope John VII (papacy 705–707) had ordered the construction of an oratory dedicated to Mary "ubi dicitur Veronice" (in the place called Veronica) in Old Saint Peter's basilica, where the Pope had planned to be interred. Katherine T. Brown, *The Legend of Veronica in Early Modern Art*, Routledge Research in Art and Religion (New York: Routledge, 2020), 31. Brown also asserts "The veronica is historically and thematically associated with an earlier icon in Rome, probably dating from the fifth or sixth century, which also was considered an *acheiropoieton*." Brown, *Legend of Veronica*, 30.

<sup>26</sup> Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 218.

prayer in its honor. Even so, it was also known beyond Rome as affirmed in the writings of several English religious figures.

### *English Accounts of the Veronica*

In *Works: Mirror of the Church (Opera: Speculum ecclesiae)* VI, from around 1215, the archdeacon, Gerald of Wales (*Giraldus Cambrensis*), who had visited Rome between 1198 and 1203, describes two images of Jesus. He states that St. Luke painted the first one, the Uronica, on a wooden panel after the Resurrection and at Mary's request. Later, the painting was covered in gold and silver and sent to the Archbasilica of St. John Lateran where it remains today.

The second image, the Veronica, was made when Jesus encountered Veronica near the Temple, pressed her garment to his face and his image was imprinted on the cloth. Gerald adds that the cloth belonged to "that woman, as it is read, who touching the fringed border of the clothing of Jesus had been cured of [a] flow of blood."<sup>27</sup> Gerald also describes the Veronica, as "a true icon, that is, a True Image," although, he adds, it is obscured by veils.<sup>28</sup>

In *Otia imperialia*, composed between 1214 and 1218, Gervase of Tilbury is the first to mention an image on the Veronica, which he describes as "a true picture of the Lord, according to the flesh, [depicted] from the chest on up."<sup>29</sup> The cleric writes that most believe that the

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<sup>27</sup> Brown, *Legend of Veronica*, 12. Latin translation: *Hæc autem illa, ut legitur, mulier fuit, quæ tangens fimbriam vestimenti Jesu a sanguinis profluvio curata fuit.* J.S. Brewer and James F. Dimock eds., *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera, Rerum Britannicarum medii ævi scriptores* 21 (London, 1873), 4: 278–279, quoted in Brown, 25, note 56.

<sup>28</sup> "And some say that Veronica is a play on words [*vocabula alludentes*], meaning the true icon [*veram iconiam*] or the True Image [*imaginem veram*]." J.S. Brewer and James F. Dimock eds., *Giraldi Cambrensis*, 278–279, quoted in Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 542.

<sup>29</sup> *Est ergo Veronica pictura domini vera secundum carnem repraesentans efigiem a pectore superius*, in Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia: Recreation for an Emperor*, S. E. Banks and J. W. Binns, eds. and trans. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), Book III, Chapter 25, 607, quoted in Alexa Sand, *Vision, Devotion, and Self-Representation in Late Medieval Art* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), note 29, 304, [https://ocul-uo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=alma991047489662005161&context=L&vid=01OCUL\\_UO:UO\\_DEFAULT&lang=en&search\\_scope=OCULDiscoveryNetworkNew&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine&tab=OCULDiscoveryNetwork&query=any,contains,Vision%20%20Devotion%20%20and%20Self-Representation%20in%20Late%20Medieval%20Art%20&sortby=rank&mode=basic..](https://ocul-uo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=alma991047489662005161&context=L&vid=01OCUL_UO:UO_DEFAULT&lang=en&search_scope=OCULDiscoveryNetworkNew&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine&tab=OCULDiscoveryNetwork&query=any,contains,Vision%20%20Devotion%20%20and%20Self-Representation%20in%20Late%20Medieval%20Art%20&sortby=rank&mode=basic..)

image was brought to Rome by Veronica; for him, however, “we have proved from very ancient texts that in truth she was Martha . . . who was cured of a twelve-year issue of blood by touching the hem of the Lord’s robe.”<sup>30</sup> Gervase also comments that a veil usually covered the image.<sup>31</sup>

Written between 1245 and 1250, the second volume of *Chronica maiora*, by the St. Alban’s monk and chronicler, Matthew Paris, includes a popular and widely copied reproduction of the Veronica.<sup>32</sup> According to Hans Belting, the image, which was the Benedictine monk’s interpretation of the Roman Veronica, was designed as a prayer tool for private devotion.<sup>33</sup> Diana Webb, however, proposes that Paris’ copy, which circulated in Europe to some extent, might have whetted people’s appetite for seeing the original in Rome.<sup>34</sup>

In “[t]he first chapter, off the number of the Revelations” from 1373, the English mystic, Julian of Norwich, invokes Rome’s authority to validate her revelation:

It [the vision of Christ’s face] was a figure and likenes of our foule dede hame [skin], that our faire, bright, blissid Lord bare for our sins. It made me to thinke of the holy vernacle of Rome which He hath portrayed with His owne blissid face whan He was in His herd passion wilfully going to His deth and often chongyng of colour.<sup>35</sup>

What is significant for my analysis is that these interrelated images and legends and historical

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<sup>30</sup> S. E. Banks and J. W. Binns. eds. and trans., *Otia Imperialia: Recreation for an Emperor*, Oxford Mediaeval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), quoted in Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 541. Apart from the foregoing, I am not aware of any other texts that mention Martha in conjunction with the veil; Belting, however, writes, “This [identification] gave rise to countless legends, in which, as they developed, the sick woman was called either Martha, the sister of Lazarus, or Berenice, and finally became Veronica.” Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 40.

<sup>31</sup> Sand, *Vision, Devotion*, 32.

<sup>32</sup> For a study of Matthew Paris and the Veronica image in thirteenth-century England, see Nigel Morgan, “Veronica’ Images and the Office of the Holy Face,” in *The European Fortune*, 85-98.

<sup>33</sup> “The chronicler included in his text a picture conveying his own idea of the Roman original, to be shared by the many who themselves would pray to the Veronica.” Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 220.

<sup>34</sup> As per Webb, venerating a facsimile (i.e., copy) of the Veronica during private devotion, “cannot necessarily be taken as a specific reference to or reminiscence of the experience of actually seeing it in Rome.” Diana Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage, c.700 - c.1500* (London: Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2002), 162-163, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ottawa/detail.action?docID=3027497>.

<sup>35</sup> Georgia Ronan Crampton, ed., *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich, Part 1*, Teams Middle English Series (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994), 1, 10, 373-377, <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/crampton-shewings-of-julian-norwich>.

references end up shaping the religious imagination and practice in the thirteenth century and thereafter.

### *Pope Innocent III and the Veronica*

Pope Innocent III is known for his devotion to and promotion of the Veronica. Stephen Perkinson claims that Innocent advanced the Veronica to exalt it over the innumerable holy images and relics brought to the West as plunder by knights who had fought in the Crusades.<sup>36</sup> Others have noted that his motivations were more strategic: Alexa Sand proposes that Innocent's goal was to assert Roman and papal supremacy.<sup>37</sup> And Rebecca Rist describes Innocent's promotion of the Veronica as an attempt to encourage penance through pilgrimage to Rome and increase papal-public relations (i.e., to advance his pontificate).<sup>38</sup> Rist also notes that the pope highlights the Eucharist as the center of Catholic life and that it featured among the topics of discussion during the significant Fourth Lateran Council.<sup>39</sup> It can be said that Innocent's emphasis on the Eucharist in some way goes alongside his devotion to the Veronica.

Sand claims that this devotion to relics and icons may have "given impetus to the idea of a True Image of the Holy Face at a moment particularly receptive to images that could be

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<sup>36</sup> Stephen Perkinson, *The Likeness of the King: A Prehistory of Portraiture in Late Medieval France* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 76.

<sup>37</sup> "What Innocent in fact made visible was not so much the Veronica itself as Rome's ownership of the Veronica, and the theological implications of the object." Sand, *Vision, Devotion*, 32.

<sup>38</sup> Rebecca Rist, "Innocent III and the Roman Veronica: Papal PR or Eucharistic Icon?" in *The European Fortune*, 120.

<sup>39</sup> The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) authorized the term "transubstantiation" to explain the process that leads to Christ's Real Presence in the Eucharist. Rist, "Innocent III," 121. Canon 1 states in part, "There is indeed one universal church of the faithful, outside of which nobody at all is saved, in which Jesus Christ is both priest and sacrifice. His body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine, the bread and wine having been changed in substance, by God's power, into his body and blood, so that in order to achieve this mystery of unity we receive from God what he received from us." *Una vero est fidelium universalis ecclesia, extra quam nullus omnino salvatur, in qua idem ipse sacerdos et sacrificium Iesus Christus, cuius corpus et sanguis in sacramento altaris sub speciebus panis et vini veraciter continentur, transsubstantiatis pane in corpus et vino in sanguinem potestate divina, ut ad perficiendum mysterium unitatis accipiamus ipsi de suo, quod accepit ipse de nostro.* Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Volume One: Nicaea I to Lateran V*, trans. Jesuits of the British Isles (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 230.

understood both as unique (e.g., a self-generating likeness of Christ) and infinitely reproducible within the contemplative frame of devotion.”<sup>40</sup> In any case, papal sponsorship of the Veronica and its cult ensured that the image was possibly the most revered relic in Western Christianity between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>41</sup> It is difficult to overestimate either the religious or the literary value of these developments on the popular imagination of the period.

### *The Annual Procession*

In 1208, Innocent instituted an annual procession of the Veronica on the first Sunday after Epiphany (the Feast of the Wedding at Cana) from a chapel in St. Peter’s through the streets of Rome to the *Santo Spirito* Hospital.<sup>42</sup> Those who participated in the procession and gave alms were granted a forty-day indulgence.<sup>43</sup> As background Innocent explained, “Jesus and his disciples went as guests to the wedding at Cana in Galilee . . . [therefore] we institute that the image of Jesus Christ be carried down from the basilica of blessed Peter by the canons to the said hospital.”<sup>44</sup> Rist proposes that the choice of destination (i.e., the hospital) would evoke an association between the Veronica and the pope’s charitable acts.<sup>45</sup> One might also notice an implicit reference to the healing in the Gospel story.

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<sup>40</sup> Sand, *Vision, Devotion*, 32.

<sup>41</sup> “The prominence of Veronica’s veil increased in Rome during the first quarter of the thirteenth century when its fame was launched as one of the relics most worthy of veneration in Western Christendom.” Brown, *Legend of Veronica*, 32.

<sup>42</sup> *The Deeds of Pope Innocent III* states, “Moreover, [Innocent] established at the same hospital [*Santo Spirito*] the solemn station for the first Sunday after the Epiphany, on which the Christian people flocked there to see and venerate the *sudarium* of the Savior that they carry in procession with hymns and canticles, palms and torches, from the basilica of Saint Peter to that place.” Anonymous, *The Deeds of Pope Innocent III*, James M. Powell, trans. (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 259, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt284xfp>.

<sup>43</sup> Gerhard Wolf, “From Mandylion to Veronica,” in *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, eds. Herbert L. Kessler and Gerhard Wolf, Villa Spelman Colloquia, vol. 6 (Bologna: Nuova Alfa Editoriale), 168.

<sup>44</sup> *Quia vero Jesus cum discipulis suis ad has nuptias in Cana Galileae, ubi mater ejus erat, legitur invitatus, idcirco rationalibilter instituimus ut efigies Jesu Christi a beati Petri basilica per ejusdem canonicos ad dictum hospitale ... deportetur*, in Jaques-Paul, Migne, ed., *Innocent III*, Patrologia Latina 215, col. 1270, quoted in Sand, *Vision, Devotion*, 304, note 29.

<sup>45</sup> Rist, “Innocent III,” 121.

Jeffrey Hamburger suggests that scheduling the feast on the second Sunday after Epiphany, rather than during Holy Week (the image's traditional association with the Passion), liturgically related it to the Incarnation.<sup>46</sup> Belting too detects an affiliation with the Incarnation—where pagan images depicted mythical or legendary persons, the Veronica depicted a real person and, therefore, could be used to refute heresy and to testify to the reality of the Incarnation.<sup>47</sup> And Sand describes the evolution of the Veronica from “a by-product of a lesser miraculous event to a universally significant representation of the central, redemptive mystery of the faith, which is the Incarnation.”<sup>48</sup> Whatever its theological status “a miraculously generated image not made by human craft, was to become one of the most popular magnets for pilgrims to Rome over the thirteenth century.”<sup>49</sup> This religious practice and the references to the Veronica, Rome and the papacy would not be lost on a reader of the *Bible en françois*, although its significance will have a different meaning in fifteenth-century England.

### *Indulgences*

Gerhard Wolf observes that the annual papal procession eventually led to the Veronica's status as the first holy image linked to an indulgence.<sup>50</sup> In Joseph Koerner's estimate, “the *sudarium* at Rome was the earliest and most important indulgenced image in Christendom.”<sup>51</sup> But he also notes that indulgences from devotion to the Holy Face (i.e., the Veronica) were basically “practical rewards.”<sup>52</sup> MacGregor proposes that this innovation (i.e., linking an

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<sup>46</sup> Jeffrey Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 322–323.

<sup>47</sup> Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 224.

<sup>48</sup> Sand, *Vision, Devotion*, 57.

<sup>49</sup> Sand, *Vision, Devotion*, 30.

<sup>50</sup> “This institution [i.e., the procession] could be understood as an indulgence for the veneration of the Veronica.” Wolf, “From Mandyllion to Veronica,” 168.

<sup>51</sup> Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 86.

<sup>52</sup> Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture*, 86.

indulgence with an image, however implicitly) was a factor in the Veronica's popularity.<sup>53</sup>

Kathleen Kamerick cites the tradition that the Veronica had been created by Christ as legitimizing its status as an image worthy of indulgences.<sup>54</sup>

Prior to Innocent III's pontificate, receiving an indulgence was confined mostly to those who had participated in a Crusade, or who attended a church dedication.<sup>55</sup> The pope himself was reportedly keen to limit rather than to expand the practice.<sup>56</sup> All the same, from 1063 on, gaining an indulgence was a motivator for enlisting in a Crusade or going on pilgrimage.<sup>57</sup> If these practices have obvious meaning in thirteenth-century France, they will be even more contested in fifteenth-century England.

#### *The Holy Office of the Veronica*

Innocent is also credited with composing the Holy Office of the Veronica in response to an alleged incident following the annual procession of 1216. In *Chronica maiora*, Paris reports that on *Omnis terra* Sunday, the image apparently reversed and then re-righted itself. According to Paris, the pope was so alarmed that "he composed an elegant prayer in honor of this image called the Veronica" (*Quod nimis abhorrens dominus Papa, credidit illud in triste sibi praesagium evenisse, et ut plenius Deo reconciliaretur, consilio fratrum, in honore ipsius efigiei, quae Veronica dicitur, quondam orationem composuit elegantem*).<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> MacGregor, *Seeing Salvation*, 92.

<sup>54</sup> Kathleen Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art in the Late Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 136.

<sup>55</sup> Wilson, *Holy Faces*, 75.

<sup>56</sup> Sand, *Vision, Devotion*, 42.

<sup>57</sup> John Cannon and Robert Crowcroft, eds., *A Dictionary of British History*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), <https://www-oxfordreference-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780191758027.001.0001/acref-9780191758027-e-1811>.

<sup>58</sup> H.R. Luard, ed., *Matthaei Parisiensis, Monachi Sancti Albani, Chronica Majora*, 7 vols., Rolls Series 57 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1876; reprinted Wiesbaden: Kraus, 1964), vols. 3, 7, quoted in Sand, *Vision, Devotion*, 308, note 73. Rist provides the following English translation: "This filled the Lord Pope with dread, for he believed that this was an ill omen for him and so to make full reconciliation with God upon the advice of his fellows he composed an elegant prayer in honor of this image called Veronica." Rist, "Innocent III," 118.

Innocent's "elegant prayer" included associated readings (Holy Office) to which he attached an indulgence of ten days for those who prayed the Holy Office, regardless of whether or not they travelled to Rome or prayed before the image.<sup>59</sup> Even so, the Holy Office implicitly identified the Veronica, not Rome, with the indulgence. It was therefore only a matter of time before copies of the image were made and circulated.<sup>60</sup> Still, travelling to Rome was attractive in that it also provided many opportunities for the faithful to obtain an indulgence.<sup>61</sup>

The Holy Office opens with words from Psalm 4:6: "Let the light of your face shine on us O Lord," followed by text from the Psalms. It concludes with a salutation to the Holy Face:

Lord, you have left behind for us, who are marked by the light of your face, the image imprinted on the cloth of Veronica as your memento. Grant, for the sake of your Passion and the cross, that we, as we now adore and venerate this on earth in a mirror and parable, shall one day see you face to face as judge on the good side.<sup>62</sup>

Hamburger notes "the Office ... compares the Veronica with the *speculum in enigmatē*, the darkened glass through which we see now, 'but then face to face' (1 Corinthians 13:12)."<sup>63</sup>

In time, the value of the indulgence increased, and the indulgence-granting prayers that followed the Holy Office contributed to the Veronica's appeal. Thus, Pope Innocent IV (1243–1254), who may or may not have composed *Hail Exalted Face (Ave facies praeclara)*, granted a

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<sup>59</sup> "[The] ten days of pardon were tied to the prayer itself, with no exclusive or necessary tie to a particular depiction." Robert N. Swanson, *Indulgences in Late Medieval England: Passports to Paradise?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 257.

<sup>60</sup> "[T]his second indulgence was not tied to a trip to Rome, a factor that led to the *mediatisation* of the image. A pilgrimage culminating in a collective ritual encounter with the Veronica and an individual's privation of it were thus two sides of the same coin in the cult history of the Holy Face in the medieval West." Wolf, "From Mandylion to Veronica," 168-169.

<sup>61</sup> "By the fourteenth century the Vernical [Veronica] was publicly exhibited at St. Peter's every Sunday, and pilgrims who had crossed the sea stood to gain 12,000 years of remission for every hour they gazed at it." Frederick J. Furnivall, ed., *The Stations of Rome* (London, 1867), 3, quoted in Barry Windeatt, "'Vera Icon'? The Variable Veronica of Medieval England," in *European Fortune*, 65.

<sup>62</sup> *Deus qui nobis signatis lumine vultus tui memorial tuum ad instantiam Veronice sudario impressam ymaginem relinquere voluisti. Per passionem et crucem tuam tribue nobis quaesumus ut nunc in terries per speculum et in enigmatē adorare venerari et honorare ipsam imaginem tuam valeamus ut facie ad faciem venientem iudicem te secure super nos videamus.* Nigel Morgan, "'Veronica' Images," 98.

<sup>63</sup> Hamburger, *Visual and Visionary*, 355-358.

forty-day indulgence to those who recited the prayer in front of the Veronica.<sup>64</sup> A century later, Pope John XXII (1316–1334) promised an indulgence of at least ten-thousand days for praying *Hail Holy Face (Salve sancta facies)* in front of a Veronica, or a representation.<sup>65</sup> The introduction of prayers attests to the cloth’s representation in word and image and its status as story and object.<sup>66</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Popular Piety and the Veronica

Even today, the Veronica is closely associated with pilgrimage and the Stations of the Cross. These two devotional practices, which were especially popular during the late Middle Ages, allow the faithful to walk in Jesus’ footsteps and gain some sense of his suffering and death.<sup>67</sup>

#### *Pilgrimage*

Robert Swanson detects a democratic thread running through an increased joining of indulgence-granting prayers and specific devotional images.<sup>68</sup> Wolf states that the mass production and circulation of Veronica images began during the Holy Year of 1300 and ramped

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<sup>64</sup> “[T]here is no evidence beyond an anecdote connecting Innocent IV to *Ave facies praeclara*, thought to be a work of the fourteenth century, based on its metrical scheme, which was not one ever employed by Innocent IV.” Sand, *Vision, Devotion*, 42.

<sup>65</sup> John Oliver Hand, “Salve Sancta Facies: Some Thoughts on the Iconography of the ‘Head of Christ’ by Petrus Christus,” *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 27 (1992): 14, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1512931>.

<sup>66</sup> Word and image merge in the *Portrait of a Young Man* by the Dutch painter, *Petrus Christus*, which is dated to the 1450s. The painting shows a young man holding a prayer book in front of an image of the Veronica under which is printed *Salve sancta facies*. Hand, “Salve Sancta Facies,” 12-13.

<sup>67</sup> At an early stage, the meeting between Jesus and Veronica, traditionally Station VI, was part of the Stations. In 1991, Pope John Paul II omitted Station VI as he wanted the Stations to be more faithful to the biblical accounts of the Passion.

<sup>68</sup> “The tying of prayers to convey indulgence with particular devotional images was especially potent after 1350. Unlike episcopal indulgences rewarding devotion to specific images at specific places, these pardons applied to a generic image, which might appear in any medium—painted on a church wall, as freestanding sculpture, woodblock print, manuscript illumination, or illustration in a printed primer.” Swanson, *Indulgences*, 257.

up with the Holy Year of 1350.<sup>69</sup> The mass production of images ensured availability of indulgences regardless of where or when one prayed in front of a Veronica.<sup>70</sup> For religious Reformers, however, venerating images was idolatry; hence, linking mass-produced images to indulgences would result in increased access to both, thereby leading more and more of the faithful into error.<sup>71</sup>

MacGregor notes that the Veronica's fame was not confined to Rome; rather, it spread beyond the city in the fourteenth century, "[a]nd from now on, wherever the Roman Church went, the Veronica would go with it."<sup>72</sup> As a result, the scores of pilgrims who travelled to Rome to see the Veronica were probably familiar with the image (as they had viewed a copy), or at least knew the legend.<sup>73</sup> Koerner claims that up to one million pilgrims visited Rome during the Jubilee Year of 1350 and the image was frequently displayed to vast crowds.<sup>74</sup> In the next century, the guide book, *Mirabilia Romae*, included woodcuts of the Veronica being exhibited.<sup>75</sup> For example, the 1475 edition shows the Veronica during one of its regular Friday public showings, while an image from a later edition shows it being held by angels and Pope Sixtus IV (1471-1484). So, by about 1500, the Veronica was the symbol of *Roma Christiana* throughout the Christian world in the West. In more than one sense, Rome was the keeper of the True Image.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> "The mass diffusion begins with the celebration of the Holy Year of 1300, or even more firmly, with that of 1350. Now we begin to hear of the *pictores Veronicarum* in the paradise of St. Peter's, where a schematic isolated face of Christ (usually without a nimbus) represented on a cloth or simply painted on white paper was sold." Wolf, "From Mandylion to Veronica," 172-173.

<sup>70</sup> Swanson, *Indulgences*, 258.

<sup>71</sup> I discuss image veneration and idolatry in Chapter 6, The Pre-Reformation Period and the English Church.

<sup>72</sup> MacGregor, *Seeing Salvation*, 92.

<sup>73</sup> Alexa Sand proposes that the Veronica drew "pilgrims to Rome over the course of the thirteenth century, perhaps even spurring the inauguration of the Papal Jubilee by Boniface VIII in 1300." Sand, *Vision, Devotion*, 30.

<sup>74</sup> Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture*, 86.

<sup>75</sup> Guidebooks also gave figures on the number of indulgence days allotted for visiting the Veronica in Rome. Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage*, 163.

<sup>76</sup> Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 221.

To underscore its exalted position, the image was inscribed on the badges of pilgrims who had travelled to Rome to honour the Veronica and earn an indulgence.<sup>77</sup> Coins and tokens were also stamped with the Veronica image. The etched hardware facilitated the spread of the Veronica cult throughout Europe, was used for commercial purposes and encouraged lay participation.<sup>78</sup>

Throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Veronica images were included in cathedral architecture and altarpieces and were replicated in statuary, paintings, woodcuts, engravings, tapestries and manuscripts.<sup>79</sup> In fact, the image was copied and distributed so extensively that “by the end of the fifteenth century there was an agreed likeness of Christ” that most Europeans could recognize.<sup>80</sup> So even though the Veronica was replicated and disseminated throughout Europe, the image’s association with Rome remained intact.<sup>81</sup>

Centuries before Rome became an important pilgrimage destination, Christians had travelled to Jerusalem to immerse themselves in the important events in Jesus’ life and death.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> For information on medieval religious badges and the medieval cult of the saints, see “Badges and Pilgrimage,” in Rasmussen, *Medieval Badges*, 119–154. As well, in her article “The Pardoner’s Vernicle and the Image of Man in *The Pardoner’s Tale*,” Theresa Colletti sees a connection between the vernicle (Veronica) Chaucer’s Pardoner wears on his cap as “richly suggestive as an image of Christ—the God made man [i.e., the Incarnate One]. In this respect, it calls to mind a central axiom of Christian doctrine: that man is made in God’s image.” Theresa Colletti, “The Pardoner’s Vernicle and the Image of Man in *The Pardoner’s Tale*,” *The Chaucer Newsletter* 1, no. 1 (1979): 10, <https://cdn.ymaws.com/newchaucersociety.org/resource/resmgr/newsletters/oldsitenewsletters/ncs--vol1-1-win1979.pdf> <https://doi.org/10.1353/cr.2004.0019>. In Chapter 8, *Unveiling the Incarnation*, I discuss the *imago Dei*, and the Veronica in view of the Incarnation.

<sup>78</sup> Aden Kumler, “*Signatis ... vultus tui*: (Re)impressing the Holy Face before and after the European Cult of the Veronica,” in *The European Fortune of the Roman Veronica*, 104.

<sup>79</sup> Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture*, 88.

<sup>80</sup> MacGregor notes that images of the Veronica eventually outnumbered written texts so much so that “by the end of the fifteenth century there was an agreed likeness of Christ” that most Europeans could recognize. Neil MacGregor, *Seeing Salvation: Images of Christ in Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 93.

<sup>81</sup> “It seems a reasonable contention that artists, patrons and spectators of these images knew about the Veronica’s Roman associations, which were especially strongly emphasized when the cloth, with or without Veronica herself, was represented flanked by [saints] Peter and Paul.” Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage*, 163.

<sup>82</sup> “The events described in the Gospels had taken place only three centuries before; they had happened, moreover, in a land under Roman dominion. It was possible, therefore, to offer the pilgrim a sense of unbroken contact with Jesus.” Carsten P. Thiede and Matthew d’Ancona, *The Quest for the True Cross* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000), 39.

Pilgrim traffic only increased following the Empress Helena's alleged discovery of the True Cross.<sup>83</sup> Helena had sent a significant portion of it ahead to the Sessorian Palace in Rome, where she resided.<sup>84</sup> Carsten Thiede and Matthew d'Ancona are of the view that Helena chose Rome, instead of Constantinople, her son's new capital, to bring Christianity back to its apostolic origins.<sup>85</sup> Helena, too, ended her days in Rome, "the city of Peter's and Paul's glory in martyrdom, the city which at her time had begun to claim supremacy over all other bishoprics in the Empire."<sup>86</sup>

Eventually, Rome rivalled Jerusalem as a center of pilgrimage.<sup>87</sup> The latter's distance and expense could be deterrents to European pilgrims; travel to Rome, "the hub of the Catholic world," became an attractive alternative.<sup>88</sup> Jean Sorbella explains that pilgrims found Rome easier to access than Jerusalem, and the city had been home to many venerable Christians, including saints Peter and Paul, for whom Emperor Constantine had erected monumental basilicas.<sup>89</sup> Rome's impressive collection of holy relics, like the Veronica, could draw the faithful themselves nearer to saintliness.<sup>90</sup> If a pilgrim could travel to Rome, why would he or she undertake a possibly dangerous, and definitely expensive and time-consuming, journey to Jerusalem?

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<sup>83</sup> "The attribution to Helena of the discovery of the Cross is late and not based on historical evidence. The name of Helena does not occur in any of the fourth-century sources in which the True Cross is mentioned." Jan Willem Drijvers, *Helena Augusta: The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of Her Finding of the True Cross* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), 81.

<sup>84</sup> Thiede and d'Ancona, *The Quest*, 58.

<sup>85</sup> "In the first century, Peter and Paul had arrived from Jerusalem to establish the Church in the imperial city. And here they were martyred, St. Peter—according to tradition—in Nero's Vatican Gardens, St. Paul, the Roman citizen, at a place now called Tre Fontane." Thiede and d'Ancona, *The Quest*, 64.

<sup>86</sup> Thiede and d'Ancona, *The Quest*, 64.

<sup>87</sup> "Pilgrims flocked to Rome, as they had earlier to the Holy Land. One of their goals was to visit the Veronica and to take home a reproduction as a souvenir or amulet." Koerner, *Image and Likeness*, 221.

<sup>88</sup> Swanson, *Indulgences*, 53.

<sup>89</sup> In fact, artwork from the later medieval period shows Veronica displaying the holy image flanked by St. Peter and St. Paul.

<sup>90</sup> Jean Sorabella, "Pilgrimage in Medieval Europe," in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/pilg/hd\\_pilg.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/pilg/hd_pilg.htm).

Alternatively, given the availability of Veronica copies, the faithful could also evoke the Roman experience to a certain extent without ever leaving their parishes. Perhaps most importantly, Jerusalem had vestiges of Jesus' final days while Rome possessed actual artifacts that had been in contact with his body during the Passion.<sup>91</sup>

The image on the cloth is arguably the most important memorial of Jesus' time on earth. Hence, identifying Rome as owner of the True Image, as in the *ME Bible*, credits that city as surpassing Jerusalem as the seat of Christianity, which would include honouring papal claims to authority. These real-world relationships between Rome and Jerusalem matter, in part, because they form the backdrop against which the literary motifs of Rome and Jerusalem will be understood in the *ME Bible*.

### *The Stations of the Cross*

Barry Windeatt attributes the mass replications of Veronica souvenirs to the image's popularity not only as a Roman pilgrimage destination, but also as a Station of the Cross.<sup>92</sup> The fourteen Stations of the Cross begin and end with Gospel stories of Jesus' Passion, but also include apocryphal stories like the meeting between Jesus and Veronica (Station VI).<sup>93</sup> This station, situated between the Simon the Cyrene episode and Jesus Falls the Second Time, firmly place Jesus' devout friend into the middle of the Passion.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Along with the Veronica, niches in St. Peter's Basilica house a fragment of the True Cross, a splinter from the lance of Longinus and the head of St. Andrew. Brown, *Legend of Veronica*, 35.

<sup>92</sup> Windeatt, "'Vera Icon'?", 64.

<sup>93</sup> For studies on the Stations of the Cross, see Herbert Thurston, *The Stations of the Cross: An Account of their History and Devotional Purpose*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Burns and Oates, 1914), <http://www.archive.org/details/stationsofcrossa00thuruoft>, "Via Crucis," in Brown, *Legend of Veronica*, 46–74, and "Fabricated Jerusalem: Franciscans and Pious Mountains," in Annabel Jane Wharton, *Selling Jerusalem: Relics, Replicas, Theme Parks* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 97–144.

<sup>94</sup> Brown credits St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) with stimulating interest in the Passion, via the Stations, through "emotionally charged letters and sermons that encouraged readers to ponder Jesus' the suffering and death." Brown, *Legend of Veronica*, 50. In addition to St. Bernard, Ford adds St. Francis of Assisi (1182–1226), whose writings "did much to reorient western Christian thought to an interest in the sufferings of Jesus." Ford, *La Vengeance: Version of Japheth*, 13.

The earliest Stations of the Cross were at the Church of San Stefano in Bologna, which dates from the fifth century.<sup>95</sup> As Andrea Molinari states, devotion to the Stations increased substantially in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries “when knights who had visited the important holy places related to Jesus’s trial, execution, and death in Jerusalem returned home from the Crusades.”<sup>96</sup> With respect to a specific interest in, and devotion to, Station VI, Ford credits the Crusaders—specifically Philip II of France, who had actually seen the Veronica or one of its copies—to have “helped spread enthusiasm for information about it.”<sup>97</sup> In fact, ever since the First Crusade, Christians had returned to Europe with relics from the East; those, like the Veronica, that had a connection with the Passion would have been especially valuable.<sup>98</sup>

Later, in 1342, Pope Clement IV (1190-1268) designated the Franciscans—known for their devotion to the Passion—custodians of the important holy sites in Jerusalem, including the Stations.<sup>99</sup> Eventually, the Stations, like the Veronica, were replicated locally.<sup>100</sup>

In the early fifteenth century, le Seigneur de Caumont writes about seeing in Jerusalem the house of Veronica, owner of the eponymous cloth in Rome.<sup>101</sup> The Englishman, William

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<sup>95</sup> “St. Petronius, Bishop of Bologna, to whom the construction of S. Stefano is attributed, lived in the fifth century.” Thurston, *Stations*, 8.

<sup>96</sup> Andrea L. Molinari, “St. Veronica: The Evolution of a Legend, *Priscilla Papers* 28, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 13.

<sup>97</sup> Ford, *La Vengeance: Version of Japheth*, 13.

<sup>98</sup> Anne Lester describes lists of “textile relics” that Crusaders amassed from the Levant and Byzantium and sent or brought to the West throughout the Fourth Crusade (1202-1204). She writes, “The abundance of cloth relics coming into the West underlined the power of the divine presence. Whereas the intimacy promised by cloth—material made, touched, worn, soiled, and carried by the hands of others—brought the Holy Land and the physical realities of Christ’s life and Passion into the heart of western Europe.” Anne E. Lester, “Intimacy and Abundance: Textile Relics, the Veronica, and Christian Devotion in the Aftermath of the Fourth Crusade,” *Material Religion* 14, no. 4, 532, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17432200.2018.1539577>.

<sup>99</sup> “On November 21 of the same year [1342], Pope Clement VI released the papal bulls ‘Gratias Agimus’ and ‘Nuper carissimae’ establishing the Franciscans as Guardians of the Holy Places in the name of the Roman Catholic Church.” Terra Sancta Museum, “Spain and the Custody of the Holy Land,” June 13, 2019, <https://www.terrasanctamuseum.org/en/spain-and-the-custody-of-the-holy-land/>

<sup>100</sup> In the fifteenth century, when the Franciscans began to build outdoor shrines in Europe, “the spiritual devotion of the stations was introduced into Franciscan monasteries and friary chapels, and this eventually spread to parish churches. Molinari, “Evolution of a Legend,” 13.

<sup>101</sup> « Et premièrement en allant du Saint Sepulchre au mont d’Olivet, nous passasmes par devant la mayson de la Veronique laquelle voyant Nostre Seigneur qu’on menoit crucifier, elle luy bailla ung beau drapeau blanc pour netoyer sa face qui estoit toute deffigurée des playes et ordures que les faulx tirans avoyent gectez contre luy. Et en

Wey, recalls seeing where Veronica accepted the Jesus' image on [a piece of] linen.<sup>102</sup> And in 1476, the Dominican theologian, Felix Fabri, writes about visiting the home of Veronica (*domus sanctae foeminae Veronicae*). In a lengthy text, Fabri recalls the story of Jesus, Veronica and “the image itself, printed on a cloth, left by the same testament to Pope Clement and his successors, is visited even now in Rome by the faithful of Christ in the temple of the blessed Peter with the greatest religion.”<sup>103</sup> Fabri also comments that Jesus had cured Veronica of a twelve-year flow of blood.<sup>104</sup>

This brief historical study shows that the Veronica cult was complex, popular and far-reaching. Legends about a miraculously-created image and later reports of the relic kept in Rome developed into a cult that flourished during the pontificate of Innocent III.<sup>105</sup> The pope's devotion to the Veronica was the beginning of the cult's overwhelming success throughout Europe.

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mettant ledict Drapeau contre sa dicte face, sa propre figure y moura. Et est à present la dicte Veronique à Romme, moult précieusement et chèrement gardée. » Seigneur de Caumont, *Voyage de la Sainte Cyté de Hierusalem*, C. Schefer, ed. (Paris: Ernst Leroux, 1882), 75, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6535648p/f135.item.texteImage>.

<sup>102</sup> *6<sup>o</sup>. ubi Veronica accepit faciem Christi in lintheo*. William Wey, *The Itineraries of William Wey, Fellow of Eton College. To Jerusalem, A.D. 1458 and A.D. 1462; and to Saint James of Compostella, A.D. 1456. From the Original Manuscript in the Bodleian Library*, in Albert Way, Bulkeley Bandinel, and George Williams, eds., *The Itineraries of William Wey, Fellow of Eton College: To Jerusalem, A.D. 1458 and A.D. 1462; and to Saint James of Compostella, A.D. 1456. From the Original Manuscript in the Bodleian Library* (London: Nichols and Sons, 1857), 96, <https://archive.org/details/cu31924013279462/page/n135/mode/2up?q=Veronica>.

<sup>103</sup> *Dei constituens perseveravit. Ipsa autem imago panniculo impressa, Clementi Pontifici et successoribus ab eadem ex testamento derelicta, nunc usque Romae in beati Petri templo a Christi fidelibus maxima cum religione invisitur. Sacrum autem sudarium nomen mulieris retinuit usque in hodiernum diem, et dicitur Veronica*. Felix Fabri, *Fratris Felicis Fabri Evagatorium in Terrae Sanctae, Arabiae et Egypti*, “*Domus sanctae foeminae Veronicae*,” 1: II, Konrad Deitrich Hassler, ed., Project Gutenberg, [https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/search/?query=Felix+Fabri&submit\\_search=Go%21](https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/search/?query=Felix+Fabri&submit_search=Go%21).

<sup>104</sup> *Deinde progressi in descensu venimus ad locum Veronicae, quae dicitur fuisse mulier illa sanguine fluens XII annis, et ad tactum fimbriae vestimenti occultum fuit curata, quam Dominus filiam vocavit, fidem ejus plurimum commendans, ut habetur Matth. Fabri, Fratis Felicis Fabri*, 9.

<sup>105</sup> In Chapter 9, *Connecting the Threads*, I argue that the St. Peter character represents Pope Innocent III.

### 4.2.3 Biblical and Apocryphal Versions and References

The story of the Veronica and the miraculous image on the cloth originated primarily with apocryphal texts and pious customs, although it has a tangential connection to the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>106</sup> These narratives and traditions established a relationship between the Veronica and the centre of the papacy. The *ME Bible* explores the cloth's status as Roman relic, object of public devotion and symbol of papal authority.

#### *The Woman with the Issue of Blood*

Like Fabri, the early Christian texts described below identify a woman with chronic blood flow, known as the *Haemorrhissa*, from the Synoptic Gospels. In the story, the woman had been bleeding for twelve years and not one of the many physicians she had consulted was able to cure her. Not only had her condition worsened, but her financial resources had been depleted. When Jesus was in the area, the woman, having heard of his miracles, touches the tassels on his prayer shawl as he passes by.<sup>107</sup> When Jesus senses that someone has touched his garment, he asks who it was. The woman then comes forward to say what had happened and Jesus says that her faith had healed her and tells her to go in peace.<sup>108</sup>

An early narrative of what would later evolve into the Veronica legend is included as an appendix to the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus (Gesta Salvatoris)* from the fourth century.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> See Matthew 9:20-22, Mark 5:25-34 and Luke 8:43-48.

<sup>107</sup> The tassels on a Jewish prayer shawl are called *tzitzit*. See Shraga Simmons, "Tzitzit: Meaning, Symbolism, & How To," Aish, April 7, 2026, <https://aish.com/tzitzit-2/>.

<sup>108</sup> The meeting between Jesus and Veronica reveals similarities with the Synoptic accounts of the healed woman, which may explain why early narratives connected the two. For example, the Synoptic accounts of the meeting feature an omniscient narrator who provides readers with privileged information; an unaccompanied and uninvited woman who approaches Jesus; a focus on the meeting between a male and a female character at the exclusion of other characters; private moments in a public space; an immediate miracle that arises from touching cloth; a foreshadowing of future miracles; and, elements of female discipleship.

<sup>109</sup> For an overview of the Veronica story, see Molinari, "Evolution of a Legend," 10-36.

Called *Acts of Pilate* (*Acta Pilati*), it mentions a woman who testifies during Jesus' trial that he healed her of the condition.<sup>110</sup> The text reads as follows:

And a certain woman named Bernice said: "I had been bleeding for 12 years, and I touched the hem of his garment, and the flow of my blood stopped." The Jews said, "We have a law that a woman may not serve as a witness."<sup>111</sup>

In this passage, the Greek name *Beronikē* (bringer of victory), which Ford identifies as Veronica, is given to the woman with the issue of blood.<sup>112</sup> Here, as in other fourth-century apocryphal texts, forenames are assigned to previously unnamed figures from the canonical Gospels.<sup>113</sup>

In *History of the Church* (*Historia Ecclesiastica*), Eusebius describes a woman of Paneus, also cured of a blood flow, who commissions a bronze statue of herself and one of Jesus to commemorate the healing. He writes:

For they say that the woman with an issue of blood, who, as we learn from the sacred Gospel, received from our Saviour deliverance from affliction, came from this place [Paneus], and that her house is shown in the city, and that remarkable memorials of the kindness of the Saviour to her remain there. For there stands upon an elevated stone, by the gates of her house, a brazen image of a woman kneeling, with her hands stretched out, as if she were praying. Opposite this is another upright image of a man, made of the same material, clothed decently in a double cloak, and extending his hand toward the woman. At his feet, beside the statue itself, is a certain strange plant, which climbs up to the hem of the brazen cloak, and it is a remedy for all kinds of diseases. They say that this image is an image of Jesus. It has remained to our day, so that we ourselves also saw it when we were staying in the city.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> *Acta Pilati* is part of a diverse body of literature derived from the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. Known as the Pilate Cycle, they focus on the character of Pilate, and maintain "textual and thematic links" to the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. Some, like *Acta Pilati*, are fully integrated with the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. See Zbigniew Izydorzycyk, ed., *The Medieval Gospel of Nicodemus: Texts, Intertexts, and Contexts in Western Europe*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 158 (Tempe: Arizona State University, 1997) 6–9, <https://books-scholarsportal-info.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/en/read?id=/ebooks/ebooks5/ia5/ebooks/oca4/38/medievalGospelof00izyduoft>.

<sup>111</sup> *Et mulier quaedam nomine Ueronica dixit: 'Sanguine fluens eram XII annis, et tetigi fimbriam uestimenti eius, et stetit fluvius sanguinis mei.'* *Discunt Iudaei: 'Legem habemus mulierem in testimonium non uenir.'* Hack C. Kim, ed., *The Gospel of Nicodemus*, Toronto Medieval Latin Texts (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1973), 22, VII, lines 1-5.

<sup>112</sup> "In terms of unraveling the origin of the legend of Veronica, this initial association of the Greek given name Bernice with the anonymous woman with a hemorrhage from the synoptic Gospels comprises an important confluence and development." Brown, *Legend of Veronica*, 6.

<sup>113</sup> Brown, *Legend of Veronica*, 6.

<sup>114</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book VII, Chapter XVIII, 304, 1-4, <https://archive.org/details/selectlibraryofn18901scha/page/304/mode/2up>. Beneath the text is a note that states the

The *Report of Pontius Pilate (Anaphora Pilati)*, is an apocryphal work written sometime between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries. The *Report* claims to be an account of Jesus' trial, execution and Resurrection that Pontius Pilate wrote and submitted to Emperor Tiberius.<sup>115</sup> The story is similar to the *Acts of Pilate*; it contains additional details, however, including the failure of medicine to cure the woman and a reference to Paneus:

There was also a woman who had experienced a flow of blood for many years; this discharge of blood was so severe that her entire skeletal frame was visible and was as transparent as glass. No doctor could heal her; she was written off as a hopeless case. For she indeed had no hope of finding a cure. But once Jesus was passing by she touched the hem of his garments from behind, and at that very instant the vigor of her body was restored, and she became well, as if she had nothing wrong with her. And she began to run at full speed back to her city, Paneas [Paneus].<sup>116</sup>

It is worth noting that in the *History* and the *Report*, the woman is described as a resident of the city of Paneus, also called Caesarea Philippi. According to the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 16:13-17, Mark 8:27-29, Luke 9:18-20), while visiting the district of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus revealed his divine identity to his disciples. In Matthew's version, however, the story is expanded to include Jesus' identifying Peter as the rock upon which he will build the Church (Matthew 16:18). Without overestimating the foregoing considerations, one can note that the Paneus reference seems connected with images (the statues), Jesus' divine nature (the disclosure) and the papacy (Peter, the rock of the Church).

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following: "This account of the statue erected by the woman with the issue of blood is repeated by many later writers, and Sozomen (*H. E.* V. 21) and Philostorgius (*H. E.* VII. 3) inform us that it was destroyed by the emperor Julian. Gieseler remarks (*Eccles. Hist.*, Harper's ed. I. p. 70), 'Judging by the analogy of many coins, the memorial had been erected in honor of an emperor (probably Hadrian), and falsely interpreted by the Christians, perhaps on account of a σωτήρι [Saviour] or θεῶ [God] appearing in the inscription.' There can be no doubt of Eusebius' honesty in the matter, but no less doubt that the statue commemorated something quite different from that which Christian tradition claimed. Upon this whole chapter, see Heinichen's Excursus, in vol. III. p. 698 sq."

<sup>115</sup> Ehrman and Pleše, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 491.

<sup>116</sup> Ehrman and Pleše, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 497, 4.

#### 4.2.4 Middle English Versions and References

I include the following texts because they describe the impact and effects of the cloth's relocation to Rome, a motif that is important to my interpretation of the *ME Bible*.

##### *The Healing of Tiberius*

In time, Rome and the emperors also assume important roles in the Veronica story. The early medieval *Healing of Tiberius* (*Cura sanitatis Tiberii*), from the eighth century, “is often hailed as the earliest textual source for the Veronica story and the first to call the woman with the hemorrhage Veronica.”<sup>117</sup> In the story, the gravely ill emperor, Tiberius, learning of Jesus' miracles, sends an official, Volusianus, to bring Jesus to court. When Volusianus arrives in Jerusalem, he hears that Jesus has been crucified, but that a woman named Veronica, whom Jesus cured of a blood disorder, had painted an image of Jesus.

A mid-fourteenth century Middle English translation of the Latin text describes the scene as follows:

Than Volusyan enquired with a gret desyr yf he myght knowe by any maner of man yf any purtrature wer made aftyr the semblaunce of Jhesu. Than cam forth a man named Marchus, whych knew the pryuyte of a goode woman, and seyde to Volusyen: “Yt ys thre yere passed that Jhesu heled a woman of the course of bloode. And, whan sche was heled of her seeknes, sche made to peynte an ymage to the semblance of Jhesu whan he was on lyue.” Than seyde Volusyen: “Tel me what ys the womannes name.” He seyde, “Her name was Veronyca.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Brown, *Legend of Veronica*, 7.

<sup>118</sup> E. M. Thompson, “Apocryphal Legends,” *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 37 (3): 250, <https://www-tandfonline-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/doi/pdf/10.1080/00681288.1881.11888281?needAccess=true>. The Latin text reads: *Et exinde cepit Volusiannus cum magno desiderio querere, ut per aliquam similitudinem eum agnosceret. Et ecce quidam miles, Orchius nomine, quasi delator venit ad Volusianum et dixit ei: “Ante hosannos quam crucifigeretur Iesus, quandam mulierem curavit ipse a fluxu sanguinis. Quam, ut multi dicunt, quadam die ipse Iesus fatigatus ex itinere venit ad eam cum discipulis suis et petiit ab ea unum lintheum, ut absturgeretur sibi sudorem de facie sua. Quo accepto, dum in faciem sibi apposuisset lintheum illud, totam figuram vultus sui in eo depinxit, deditque eum illi mulieri et precepit ei ut diligenter illud custodiret; que vere eum habere scitur.” Dixit ei Volusianus: “Indica mihi nomen mulieris.” At ille ait: “Veronissa dicitur.”* Thompson, “Apocryphal Legends,” 246.

Volusianus returns to Rome with Veronica and the image. Tiberius prays to the image and is cured—he is so grateful that he converts to Christianity. Even though the *ME Bible* identifies the cured emperor as Vespasian, not Tiberius, the important point is that from early days a foundation is laid for making the cloth a holy relic associated with Rome.

### *The Vengeance of the Saviour*

In time, the Roman material was enhanced to include the motif of imperial vengeance whereby the emperor and his army destroy the city and people of Jerusalem and punish Pilate in retribution for Jesus' death. This augmented version is found in the apocryphal *Vengeance of the Saviour (Vindicta Salvatoris)*.<sup>119</sup>

In the *Vengeance*, King Tyrus is cured of facial cancer simply by hearing about Jesus' miracles, including the curing of "[a] woman suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years, Veronica, by name, who came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment."<sup>120</sup> Following his baptism, Tyrus, renamed Titus, travels to Jerusalem with Vespasian to avenge Jesus' execution. In Jerusalem, an envoy named Volusianus finds Veronica, whom he claims had painted the image, and brings her to Rome where the portrait heals Emperor Tiberius' leprosy and inspires him to be baptized.<sup>121</sup>

An episode of interest to the story's evolution occurs when Veronica, on board the ship heading for Rome, scolds Volusianus for concealing the image. The exchange between the two paraphrases dialogue from the post-Resurrection meeting between Mary Magdalene and Jesus in

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<sup>119</sup> For an overview of the *Vengeance* tradition, see Ford, *La Vengeance* (1993), 1-34, Stephen C.E. Hopkins, "Vengeance of the Saviour – *Vindicta Salvatoris*," NASSCAL North American Society for the Study of Christian Apocryphal Literature, June 2017, <https://www.nasscal.com/e-clavis-christian-apocrypha/vengeance-of-the-savior/> and Izydorzycyk, *Medieval Gospel of Nicodemus*, 1-21.

<sup>120</sup> Ehrman and Pleše, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 543.

<sup>121</sup> "Given the difficulty that medieval doctors must have experienced in identifying illnesses with closely-related [sic] symptoms, it is not surprising that the emperor's affliction is in certain texts called cancer, in others leprosy." Ford, *La Vengeance: Mission of Volusian*, 7.

the Gospel of John, which provides a tentative link to the Passion.<sup>122</sup> Soon after, Veronica says to those grieving her imminent departure, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me but for yourselves, and weep for your daughters.”<sup>123</sup>

Molinari considers the reference to Luke 23:28 as an implicit linkage between Veronica and the Gospel tradition of Jesus’s carrying the cross on the road to Calvary.<sup>124</sup> It also augments the New Testament reference to the woman with the chronic blood flow that earlier sources and stories identified as Veronica. Hence, as the story evolves it accumulates details that relate it to the Gospels and, eventually, to the Passion.

### *The Golden Legend*

Around 1260, the Italian chronicler and Archbishop, Jacobus de Voragine, compiled a “collection of pious hagiography, written as a helpful aide for priests and preachers with the intention of providing a ready source of edifying materials on a large selection of saints so as to enrich sermons and catechesis.”<sup>125</sup> Titled the *Golden Legend (Legenda aurea)*, it draws from and expands earlier stories of Jesus and Veronica.<sup>126</sup> In 1483, William Caxton “Englished” and printed de Voragine’s work.

“The Passion of the Lord” chapter describes how the royal emissary, Volusian, seeking a physician to cure Emperor Tiberius, encounters “an old woman named Veronica which had been

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<sup>122</sup> Gospel of John 20:11-18.

<sup>123</sup> Ehrman and Pleše, *Apocryphal Gospels*, 553.

<sup>124</sup> “Veronica’s use of Luke 23:28 is particularly striking in that it represents the first time Veronica is associated with the passion of the Lord. Even more importantly, by using this particular saying of Jesus, the figure of Veronica is linked essentially with those Gospel traditions associated with Jesus’s carrying of his cross. Simply stated, this literary ‘moment’ is the first time the character of Veronica is connected with the exact ‘place’ she will eventually come to occupy in sacred tradition.” Molinari, “Evolution of a Legend,” 12.

<sup>125</sup> Molinari, “Evolution of a Legend,” 12.

<sup>126</sup> Anne Clark considers “the *Legenda Aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine (c. 1260) [. . .] with its more than 1,000 manuscript copies [as] unquestionably the most widespread version of the Veronica story.” Anne L. Clark, “Venerating the Veronica: Varieties of Passion Piety in the Later Middle Ages,” *Material Religion* 3, no. 2 (2007): 170.

familiar and devout with Jesu Christ.” The woman tells him how about the holy cloth and how it came to be made:

My lord and my master when he went preaching, I absented me oft from him, I did do paint his image, for to have alway with me his presence, because that the figure of his image should give me some solace. And thus as I bare a linen kerchief in my bosom, our Lord met me, and demanded whither I went, and when I told him whither I went and the cause, he demanded my kerchief, and anon he emprinted his face and figured it therein.<sup>127</sup>

Volusian brings Veronica and the cloth to Rome. At the royal court, Volusian tells Tiberius about Jesus’ Crucifixion and “the image of Jesus, the which if thou with good heart and devoutly wilt behold, and have therein contemplation, thou shalt anon be whole.” After the emperor honours the image on the cloth “he was all guerished and whole.”<sup>128</sup>

### “*Lives of Christ*”

Lives of Christ interweave a continuous narrative, most often in verse, based on the Gospel accounts and augmented with extra-biblical stories.<sup>129</sup> The following are excerpts from two popular Middle English Lives of Christ that cover the story of the holy cloth.<sup>130</sup> I have included them because they demonstrate how authors integrated the Veronica story into narratives with a biblical foundation to impart an aura of verisimilitude.

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<sup>127</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints*, “The Passion of the Lord,” trans. William Caxton, The Temple Classics (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1931), 4, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/goldenlegend/GoldenLegend-Volume1.asp#The%20Passion%20of%20our%20Lord>.

<sup>128</sup> De Voragine, “The Passion of the Lord,” 4.

<sup>129</sup> See the discussion on Lives of Christ, in Chapter 2, “The Evolution of Biblical and Biblically-Based Literature in the Vernacular: From Anglo-Saxon to Middle English.”

<sup>130</sup> Although not strictly a Life of Christ, the previously discussed *Cursor mundi* briefly mentions both Veronica and the cloth in a description of Jesus: “Louely & blessed vs to wyn / Studfaste his loke & symple ay / His eȝen clere & somdel gray [...] / Like his modir was þat childe / wiþ faire visage & mode ful mylde / Sene hit is bi þe verony / And bi þe ymage of þat lady.” Richard Morris, ed., *Cursor mundi (The Cursor of the World). A Northumbrian Poem of the XIV<sup>th</sup> Century in Four Versions* (London: Trübner & Co.), 325, 1848-1862, *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse*, <https://name.umdl.umich.edu/ajt8128.0001.001>.

### *The Stanzaic Life of Christ*

In the fourteenth-century poem, *Stanzaic Life of Christ*, Veronica is heading to commission a portrait of her beloved friend, Jesus, for consolation and contemplation during his absence. She describes the meeting with Jesus as follows:

So to a payntour forthe I went  
Hys ymage to paynt apertely,  
That wat tyme Ihesu wer absent  
I might haue a comfort therbi.

And as I went so theder-ward  
to seche the payntour, sothe to say,  
my lorde Ihesu come me to-warde  
and asket whider I was in way.

When that I told hym myn entent  
that to the payntour I wolde goo,  
my keuerchaf of my hede he hent  
and layde hit on hys visage tho.

Anone his liknesse verrayli  
schowet hym on my waile oright,  
glad and ioyful thenne was I  
and thenket God with al my might.<sup>131</sup>

As before, Veronica brings the cloth to Rome by which to cure the emperor who is unnamed; he venerates the image and is healed.<sup>132</sup>

### *The Metrical Life of Christ*

The following verses from the fifteenth-century *Metrical Life of Christ* describe a woman's encounter with Jesus while on her way to order a painting of "þat Lord ful of might."<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Frances A. Foster, ed., *Stanzaic Life of Christ: Compiled from Higden's Polychronicon and the Legenda Aurea, Edited from MS. Harley 3909*, The Early English Text Society (Oxford: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1926), 225, 6625-6640,

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2147723346/Z200433154/1?accountid=14701&sourcetype=Books>.

<sup>132</sup> In the manuscript margin of line 6552, someone wrote "Veronica the Painter" in reference to Veronica's promise to bring to Rome "that ymage forto schew in sight." Foster, *Stanzaic Life*, 6552.

<sup>133</sup> Veronica is not named in the *Metrical Life*; the cloth, however, is called the "vernycle," which could be a substitute for the name Veronica.

For I haue no grace  
To se þat Lord in no place,  
For to se his figure verray  
Were to me ioye for alway.  
At þe woman þe cloth he toke,  
As it telleþ in þe boke.  
He layde hit on his dere face.  
Er he stired out of þat place.  
Þe self lere, þe self likenesse  
þat his owne face wes,  
Was on þe cloth wiþout doute,  
As he went quyk about.<sup>134</sup>

Several lines later, the poem refers briefly to the cloth's healing "þe Emperoure sone, Vaspasian."<sup>135</sup>

These Middle English works include various traditions about Veronica and the cloth, yet allow for variations, including the nature of the portrait, which emperor is cured, and whether or not the emperor exacts vengeance for Jesus' death. Without exception, they feature a woman named Veronica who possesses an image of Jesus on a cloth that cures a Roman emperor of a serious illness, which results subsequently in converting the Roman Empire to Christianity. These episodes can be understood in reference to the theological meaning of the Incarnation as affirmed by the Church of Rome.

### *The History of the Holy Grail*

In the foregoing examples, Jesus gives Veronica the cloth when they meet on a street in Jerusalem.<sup>136</sup> According to Molinari, Veronica's relationship with the Passion first appears in the

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<sup>134</sup> Walter Sauer, ed., *The Metrical Life of Christ: Ed. from MS BM Add. 39996*, Middle English Texts Series (Heidelberg: Carl Winter-Universitätsverlag, 1977), 74, 3760-3771.

<sup>135</sup> Later, the poem describes the healing of Tiberius and of Vespasian, and the destruction of Jerusalem. See Chapter 5, *The Vengeance of the Saviour: Proclaiming Rome's Superiority*.

<sup>136</sup> For a reading of the meeting between Veronica and Jesus in Jerusalem, see Laura Katrine Skinnebach, "'the solace of his image': Images and Presence in Late Medieval Devotional Practice," in Henning Laugerud and Laura Katrine Skinnebach, eds., *Instruments of Devotion: The Practices and Objects of Religious Piety from the Late Middle Ages to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2007), 189-207.

*History of the Holy Grail (Estoire del Saint Graal)*, from around 1200 and attributed to Robert de Boron.<sup>137</sup> I include the following excerpt because, decades later, the *Bible en françois* (ca. 1260-1270) similarly describes the event, as does the *ME Bible* two centuries later.<sup>138</sup> Here, Veronica describes how she came to possess the cloth with the miraculous image:

I will tell you and will recount to you how it was made. I had a piece of linen made and I wore it on my arm when I met the prophet on my way. His hands were tied behind his back, tied by a strap. When they met me, the Jews begged me in the name of Almighty God to lend them my linen and wipe the face of the prophet. The laundry in hand I wiped it well because it sweated so much that his whole body was soaked. I continued on my way and they took him away, beating him and beating him. They treated him ignobly, but he did not complain. Back home, I looked at my laundry and I found this image as it was drawn.<sup>139</sup>

The Veronica portion of the story concludes: “Veronica’s Holy Face of Christ was taken to Rome to heal the emperor’s son.”<sup>140</sup>

We can now say that there are two main versions of the Veronica story: in the first, Veronica meets Jesus on her way to the painter’s studio, and the image is created when he presses his face upon the cloth; in the second, the image is created during the Passion on the road to Calvary.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Molinari, “Evolution of a Legend,” 13.

<sup>138</sup> “After the d’Argenteuil *Bible* (1300) [sic] the Passion was a permanent addition to the Veronica narrative.” J. Starr Hoffman, *Passionate Transformation in Vernicle Images*, Master’s thesis, University of North Texas, 2004 (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2004), 17, [https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc4701/m2/1/high\\_res\\_d/thesis.pdf](https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc4701/m2/1/high_res_d/thesis.pdf).

<sup>139</sup> Robert de Boron, *Le Roman de Estoire del Saint Graal*, in *Merlin and the Grail: Joseph of Arimathea, Merlin, [and] Perceval: The Trilogy of Arthurian Romances Attributed to Robert de Boron*, Arthurian Studies XLVIII, trans. Nigel Bryant (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 28.

<sup>140</sup> Bryant, *Merlin and the Grail*, 29.

<sup>141</sup> Paul Carus identifies the two main traditions as follows: in the first tradition, Veronica desires to have a painted image of her beloved friend. When she meets Jesus on the way to the painter’s workshop, he takes her cloth, presses it to his face and his image is left on the cloth. In the second tradition, which is the most well-known (today), Veronica meets Jesus on the road to Calvary and gives him her cloth to wipe his face and his image is imprinted on the cloth. Paul Carus, “The Vera Icon, King Abgar, and St. Veronica,” *The Open Court* 1908, 11: 3, 676-677, [https://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2302&=&context=ocj&=&sei-redir=1&referer=https%253A%252F%252Fscholar.google.ca%252Fscholar%253Fhl%253Den%2526as\\_sdt%253D0%25252C5%2526q%253Dst%252Bveronica%252Band%252Bcatholic%252Btradition%2526btnG%253D#search=%22st%20veronica%20catholic%20tradition%22](https://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2302&=&context=ocj&=&sei-redir=1&referer=https%253A%252F%252Fscholar.google.ca%252Fscholar%253Fhl%253Den%2526as_sdt%253D0%25252C5%2526q%253Dst%252Bveronica%252Band%252Bcatholic%252Btradition%2526btnG%253D#search=%22st%20veronica%20catholic%20tradition%22).

### 4.3 The Veronica Story in the ME Bible: The World of the Text

It is now time to describe the Veronica narrative as recounted in the *ME Bible*. But, before that, I provide the *Bible en françois*' account of the cloth's miraculous creation. It reads:

Lors passa Nostre Seigneur pardevant une sainte fame qui avoit a non la Veronique. Et portoit un quevrechief pour vendre au marchié. Et quant elle vit Nostre Seigneur ainsi villainement mener, si en ot moult grant dueil et commença a plorer. Et li bailla le ceuvrechief et li dit: "Sire qui me garicites dimenche qui passa d'une maladie que je avoie, moult sui dolente de cest martire que vous souffrez / sanz raison. Mez or tenez cest cuervechief et en essuiez vostre visage." Et Nostre Sire le prinst tantost et en essuia son visaige. Et lors fu le visages Jhesu Crist en cel cuervechief ausi comme c'il fust en char et en os. Lors li bailla le cuvrechief arriere et li dit que elle le gardast bien car il avroit encore moult grant mestier a maint malade garir. Et tantost la fame s'en retourna en sa meson et atoucha le ceuvrechief au visage et as cors de son seignor qui gisoit en lengueur. Et il fu gueriz et ce leva sainz et haitiez, et rendi grassez a Dieu. Et furent maint malade gari par l'atouchement de cel saint cuvrechief.<sup>142</sup>

The episode as it appears in *ME Bible* is much the same:

Than þere went toforn oure Lord a holi woman called Veronica, þat bare a couerchif to selle at the cheping [market]. And when she saugh oure Lord so foule brought and [vilanously], she made gret sorou and wepid and toke him the couerchif and seid, "Jesu, that hel'e'dist me upon Sunday last past of a gret sekenesse that I had, I am right sory of this martyrdom þat thou suffrist without reson. But hold this couerchif and wipe away the swet and the blood from thi blissid visage." And so he did. And therwithall sodeinly was the visage oure Lord purtraied in the couerchif as like as it had ben his said visage fleishly. And than oure Lord toke to Veronica hir couerchif ageyn and bad hir that she shuld kepe it wele, for it shal hele many sekenissis. And anone Veronica turned home to hir hous ageyn, and there was a woman there by hire that lay in a sekenesse; and she touchid hir with the couerchif, and anon she was hole and thankid God. And in the same wise many other were helid.<sup>143</sup>

The next mention of the holy cloth is when St. Peter, now in Rome, recommends it to the emperor to cure his brother, Vespasian, of a foul disease. Peter's account of the cloth calls to

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<sup>142</sup> Roger d'Argenteuil, *Bible en françois*, quoted in Ford, *La Vengeance: Version of Japeth*, 6-7.

<sup>143</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 62, 12-28. *Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ* uses similar language to describe the image's creation, albeit in four lines only: "Þanne comeþ þer forþ a good woman / And reuþe haþ of þat ryztful man. / Wiþ a cloþ his face sho wipte / Þe forme þer-of þe cloþ him clipte." Presumably, this précis would be sufficient to evoke the story of Veronica and the holy image. D'Evelyn, *Meditations*, 47, 1775-1778.

mind Veronica's earlier description: "And anon bi the vertu of God the visage of him was purtraied and as apparishant as it were in þe fleish and bones."<sup>144</sup>

The emperor then instructs Pilate, who is in Jerusalem, to seek Veronica and "the couerchif that she hath, wheryn is purtraied a visage."<sup>145</sup> Pilate's people find her, and request that she bring "the couerchif on þe which is purtraied a visage that helith seke folke" to heal Pilate's "botche [swelling] in his throte." Veronica brings the cloth to Pilate's location "[a]nd whan thei alle had sene the ymage of oure Lord, thei were all fulfilled with ioye." Soon after, Veronica, "the holi couerchif purtraied with the ymage of Iesu Crist," and an entourage leave for Rome.<sup>146</sup>

When Veronica joins Peter in Rome, she shows him the cloth and "he bigan to wepe of pite ful sore."<sup>147</sup> She gives him custody of the cloth and then, in a quasi-liturgical procession, they process the cloth through the streets of Rome on the way to the palace.<sup>148</sup> When the procession passes a temple, the "foule mametis [images] and ydols of the paynems, they fil down to the erth and were al to-brused and broken."<sup>149</sup>

The episode is similar to an incident described in *The Gospel of Nicodemus*:

As Jesus entered, while the standard bearers were holding the standards, the images at the tops of the standards bowed forward and worshiped Jesus. When the Jews saw how the images on the standards bowed and worshiped Jesus, they cried out loudly against the standard bearers. Pilate said to the Jews: "Aren't you amazed at how the images bowed down and worshiped Jesus?" The Jews replied to Pilate, "We saw how the standard bearers bowed and worshiped him." The governor summoned the standard bearers and said to them, "Why did you do this?" They replied to Pilate, "We are Greek men and

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<sup>144</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 71.

<sup>145</sup> In this second telling of the Veronica story, neither the emperor nor Pilate is of consequence; the emperor is not named and Pilate is the means by which the Roman nobles find Veronica and the cloth. Rather, their function is to extend the plot.

<sup>146</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 72-73.

<sup>147</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 73.

<sup>148</sup> "Liturgical processions are defined in this article as the ceremonial movement of persons from place to place as an integral part of a service of Christian worship in Western countries during the Middle Ages." Richard W. Pfaff, "Liturgical Processions," *Oxford Bibliographies*, December 29, 2020, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780195396584/obo-9780195396584-0118.xml>.

<sup>149</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 74.

temple slaves. How could we worship him? While we were holding the images they bowed down by themselves and worshiped him.”<sup>150</sup>

Upon arrival, Peter and Veronica enter the royal residence. When Peter displays the cloth in front of Vespasian, the tearful noble cries out, “Here is the ymage of the gret God þat euer shal last, that is called Iesu Crist that made alle thing, to whom I besech of myn helth and my sa‘l’aucion.”<sup>151</sup> Peter drapes the cloth over Vespasian and blesses him in the name of the Trinity; Vespasian is healed “thurgh the vertu and might of almighty God and bi the miracle of that holi veile of Veronica.”<sup>152</sup> The reference to the miraculously-created image on the cloth and its identification with “Iesu Crist” adds another layer of meaning to the narrative, as well as a level of symbolic value.

After Peter baptizes the court and the citizens of Rome, the cloth floats to the ceiling. At Evensong it descends into Peter’s hands:<sup>153</sup>

And bicause that alle the peple desired gretly to se the ymage of Iesu Crist and Seint Petre might not endure to shew it to them alle for the multitude that was so þicke about him, the holi ymage bi miracle liftid himselue up into the ayer on high that alle the peple might se it, & thidir was brought much seke peple, which were all helid by the wille of God. And the holi couerchif abode ther stille in the ayere til euensong and then descendid into þe handis of Seint Petir.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> *Ingressus autem Iesus et a signiferis qui ferebant signa curuata sunt capita signorum ex se et adorauerunt Iesum.* “Now when Jesus entered in, and the ensigns were holding the standards, the images (busts) of the standards bowed and did reverence to Jesus.” Kim, *Gospel of Nicodemus*, 15, I, 5: 1-15. Flavius Josephus also writes about the time Pontius Pilate had images of the emperor brought into Jerusalem; there is no mention of an image of Jesus, however. See Carl H. Kraeling, “The Episode of the Roman Standards at Jerusalem,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 35, no. 4 (1942): 263-289, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1508359>.

<sup>151</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 74.

<sup>152</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 74.

<sup>153</sup> In Jerusalem, only one person—the Roman Centurion—is converted. In Rome, however, the entire imperial court along with the citizens of Rome are converted, thereby implicitly pointing to Rome as the “home” of Christianity, or the place where the faith flourishes.

<sup>154</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 75, 3-11.

The emperor orders a reliquary for “that holi couerchif in gold and in siluer ... at Rome and is shewid euery yere ones to the peple.”<sup>155</sup> The narrator reveals that the Veronica has remained in Rome since that time and that Veronica herself founded St. Peter’s Basilica:

And that holy woman, Veronica, that brought it from Ierusalem duelt stille at Rome, and oure Lord did many miracles for hir. And there she lyued long holily and then died; and there is she enteerid, and lete found and make the temple þat is called the ministre of Seint Petre. And aftir were þere made churchis and chapellis in the name of oure Lord Iesu Crist. And Seint Petir went preching by alle the cuntree & teching the peple, and bi him ther was conuertid and baptisid much peple for the miracles that oure Lord did for hym.<sup>156</sup>

The portion of the *ME Bible* treating the Veronica story ends, and we hear no more of Veronica or the cloth. That being said, having been healed by the cloth, Vespasian vows to avenge the Jesus’ death by destroying Jerusalem. “How that Vaspasian bisegid and destrued Ierusalem” will be the subject of the next chapter.<sup>157</sup>

#### ***4.4 Looking Upon the Face of God: The World in Front of the Text***

I will now propose an interpretation of the Veronica story as conveyed in the *ME Bible*. My elucidation is dependent on the knowledge, imparted in hindsight, that the Catholic Church attempted unsuccessfully to halt the English Reformation.

In my reading, the cloth with the image triumphs over the images and idols—it is a harbinger of Christianity’s ascendance and displacement of Roman paganism. Relevant to my upcoming claims and arguments, there is a critical difference between the episode in the *ME Bible* and the one in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*: in the former the pagan images and idols fall down even though Jesus is absent. As such, the image on the cloth evokes Jesus’ presence (and

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<sup>155</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 75. The *Stanzaic Life* also cites Rome as the Veronica’s final resting place: “And that ymage in-to thys day / in Rome I rede men to se / and after that wommon, in gode fay / Veronica callet as rede we.” *Stanzaic Life*, 6677-6680.

<sup>156</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 75, 15-23.

<sup>157</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 75.

power) in spite of his physical absence. In turn, the pagan artifacts prostrate themselves in front of the image on the cloth, Jesus' stand-in, in recognition that they are in the divine presence.<sup>158</sup>

That the story of the cloth is central to the *ME Bible* is evidenced by its reiteration and expansion in this final section. How the various characters describe the cloth are noteworthy: Those who believe (e.g., Peter and Veronica) describe it in divine terms, including the “ymage of oure Lord Iesu Crist,” or the “ymage of the gret God þat euer shal that is callid Iesu Crist,” while those who have not yet converted (e.g., the emperor and Vespasian) describe it in less exalted terms, including the “couerchif [...] wheryn is purtraied a visage,” or the “couerchif on þe which is purtraied a visage that helith seke.” After his conversion, however, Vespasian is able to speak of the “ymage of the gret God þat euer shal last, that is called Iesu Crist.”<sup>159</sup> For an unbeliever, the cloth contains an image of a face, for a person of faith the cloth reveals the face of God.

The text also implies that the cloth is a kind of Christological receptacle for both human and divine natures: “the visage of him [Jesus Christ] was purtraied and as apparishant as it were in þe fleish and bones,” and “therwithall sodeinly was the visage of oure Lord purtraied in the couerchif as like as it had ben his said visage fleishly.”<sup>160</sup> Vespasian is healed “thurgh the vertu and might of almighty God and bi the miracle of that holi veile of Veronica.”<sup>161</sup> The descriptors encourage the reader to believe in the holy cloth's divine origin and its power to heal those who believe, while the reference to its enshrinement in Rome, and its annual exposition, adds an element of historical veracity.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> The act of prostration, known as *proskynesis*, is “a formal way of expressing deference and subordination towards an Emperor.” Stanislav Doležal, “Some Remarks on the Origin of ΠΡΟΣΚΥΝΗΣΙΣ at the Late Antique Imperial Court,” *Byzantion* 79 (2009), 136, <https://www-jstor-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/stable/pdf/44173173>.

<sup>159</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 71-72.

<sup>160</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 71-72.

<sup>161</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 74.

<sup>162</sup> Many relics were moved from Jerusalem to Rome; the most popular one, however, was “the *sudarium* of Veronica in Saint Peter's Basilica.” Brown, *Legend of Veronica*, 75.

In my interpretation of the Veronica legend in the *ME Bible*, the holy cloth reveals the Face of God and, as I will claim, facilitates the restoration of the *imago Dei*.<sup>163</sup> The message of the Veronica is embedded in the stories of Abgar, Tiberius, Titus and Vespasian who all had disfigured faces, but were cured and transformed by looking upon the face of Christ—the True Image of God and man.

The ending is typical of medieval Catholic texts, “which tended to conclude on a triumphant note, as both the Temple treasure and an important new relic (the Vernicle) were relocated to Rome from Jerusalem.”<sup>164</sup> Like the holy cloth, Christianity, which was founded in Jerusalem, has moved to Rome with Peter.

#### ***4.5 The Veronica, Rome and the Papacy: The Three Worlds of the Text***

In both the *ME Bible* and its French prototype, the St. Peter character replaces St. Clement (14-37 CE), hero of the *Curing of Tiberius* and *Vengeance of the Saviour*, whom Peter allegedly consecrated as pope during the final years of the first century.<sup>165</sup> Like St. Clement in the earlier versions, St. Peter takes guardianship of the cloth and brings it and Veronica to the court, heals the ailing noble, preaches to the assembly and baptizes them. Whereas St. Clement sealed the cloth in the altar of St. Symeon’s Church, near Aleppo, Syria, in the *ME Bible*, the emperor keeps it near his palace in Rome. The cloth’s geographical relocation accounts for its presence in the Eternal City.<sup>166</sup> St. Peter (traditionally the first Bishop of Rome) thus takes over

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<sup>163</sup> See Chapter 8, Unveiling the Incarnation.

<sup>164</sup> Beatrice Groves, *The Destruction of Jerusalem in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 16, <https://www-cambridge-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/core/books/destruction-of-jerusalem-in-early-modern-english-literature/destruction-of-jerusalem-in-early-modern-english-literature/48DCE7B86C7DE7A98E7C0BF1B1161EDF>.

<sup>165</sup> “Clement: Generally regarded as the fourth pope, having been preceded by Sts. Peter, Linus, and Cletus. It is thought he reigned as Bishop of Rome from 88 to 97, that is, after the events of this narrative.” Ford, *La Vengeance: Version of Japeth*, 43, note 27.

<sup>166</sup> Locating the Veronica in Rome negated any other claims to be the True Image. See Moe, *ME Bible*, 27.

the role normally assigned to Veronica, thereby providing “a new addition to the legend and one of its distinctive features.”<sup>167</sup>

Framing this final section of the *ME Bible* within an historical context imparts a flexibility that also allows the reader to consider and interpret events in their own then-contemporary context.<sup>168</sup> So, for example, Peter, Pilate, the emperor and Vespasian are historically verifiable figures who freely interact with non-historical persons like Veronica.<sup>169</sup> Despite the mingling of history and fiction, its semblance of truth encourages the reader to reflect on Rome’s significance as the “spiritual center of western Christendom” and the papacy as keeper of the True Image.<sup>170</sup>

The descriptions of the cloth are suggestive of the Incarnation.<sup>171</sup> Hence, it is reasonable to conclude that with the cloth’s relocation from Jerusalem to Rome, a connection between the Incarnation and the papacy is manifested.<sup>172</sup> Additionally, the Veronica’s relocation to the capital of the empire “embodies the charisma that has passed from Jerusalem to Rome.”<sup>173</sup>

In the imperial city, St. Peter assumes custody of the cloth, processes it through Rome, and uses it to heal the emperor and convert the court. Any misgivings about the cloth’s rightful owner are put to rest when the suspended cloth descends and lands in Peter’s waiting hands.

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<sup>167</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 26. I discuss the significance of the character switch in Chapter 9: A Typological Reading of the *ME Bible*.

<sup>168</sup> It is equally true for the *ME Bible*’s prototype, the *Bible en françois*, which circulated two centuries earlier.

<sup>169</sup> Peter is a Christ-like figure who baptizes, heals the sick and performs miracles, Pilate is the means by which the Romans gain access to Veronica, the emperor is the might of Rome and Vespasian is the pagan royal who undergoes conversion and baptism

<sup>170</sup> Suzanne M. Yeager, “*The Siege of Jerusalem* and Biblical Exegesis: Writing About Romans in Fourteenth-Century England,” *The Chaucer Review* 39, no. 1 (2004): 72, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cr.2004.0019>.

<sup>171</sup> Descriptions include “And anon bi the vertu of God the visage of him was purtraied and as apparishant as it were in þe fleish and bones,” “the ymage of oure Lord,” and “the holi couerchif purtraied with the ymage of Iesu Crist.”

<sup>172</sup> “Through Veronica’s veil and other relics from Jerusalem, the poem shows a Rome enriched by its spoils from the Holy Land; even the fixtures of the Temple, the religious center of Jerusalem, are packed up and moved to Rome, leaving nothing of the Temple behind.” Yeager, “Writing About Romans,” 73.

<sup>173</sup> Groves, *The Destruction of Jerusalem*, 17.

Innocent III continued to emphasize the Veronica's special relationship with the papacy by publicly venerating the cloth and self-identifying with Peter.<sup>174</sup>

#### ***4.6 The Veronica: From Haemorrhissa to Roman Relic***

The legend of Veronica is complex and has many trajectories. I provide the following summary as a reference point for discussion in upcoming chapters. I began this study of the Veronica's history and expression in literature with the relic's status within cult of the saints. Neither Veronica, the saint, nor Veronica, the cloth, is mentioned in the New Testament, yet some stories identify Veronica as the woman with an issue of blood from the Synoptic Gospels. The Veronica legend could have a connection with the King Abgar story via the *acheiropietos* motif.

In the thirteenth century, several English ecclesiastical historians describe a cloth, the *vera ikona*, located in Rome. Still in that century, Pope Innocent III's promotion of the Veronica contributed to Rome's rivalling Jerusalem as a popular pilgrimage destination. With the mass production of Veronica images throughout the West constituted a devotional link with Rome, thereby enhancing Rome's hegemony in the ecclesiastical realm.

Early stories identified Veronica as Beronikē, the woman whom Jesus healed of a blood disorder. Narratives then began to connect the woman and the cloth with St. Peter and Rome and, later, with Rome's sack of Jerusalem in retaliation for Jesus' death. The medieval period included two main versions of the cloth's origins: in the first, Jesus and Veronica meet in Jerusalem and he presses his face upon the cloth thereby creating the image; in the second, the image is created during the Passion on the road to Calvary. Eventually, the latter version gained

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<sup>174</sup> See Chapter 9: A Typological Reading of the *ME Bible*.

popularity and writers identified Veronica as the woman gifted with the miraculous image on the road to Calvary. With the introduction of the Passion, the religious imagination could connect Rome and the Veronica to first-century Jerusalem and the woman to whom Jesus gave the cloth. The foregoing places Veronica within physical proximity to Jesus's Crucifixion, thereby enhancing Rome's status as legitimate custodian of the cloth.

Next, I explore the *ME Bible's* account of the fall of Jerusalem, which follows from the story of St. Peter, Veronica and Vespasian. Based on the early medieval Latin text, *Vindicta Salvatoris*, it describes how after converting to Christianity, Vespasian leads an army to Jerusalem in retaliation for Jesus' execution. Whereas some may claim that the narrative serves to justify the Crusades by drawing a parallel to the fall of Jerusalem, I examine it relative to the Veronica story and its significance in this enigmatic text.

## Chapter 5

### *The Vengeance of the Saviour: Proclaiming Rome's Superiority*

#### *5.1 A Narrative of Roman Superiority*

In the previous chapter, I described how Veronica story is incorporated into the tale of St. Peter in Rome, and the healing, baptism and conversion of Vespasian and the Romans. We saw that the narrative gradually shifts to a story of Vespasian leading the siege of Jerusalem and destroying the Temple in retaliation for Jesus' execution.<sup>1</sup> Based on the previously mentioned *Vindicta Salvatoris*, this narrative is a largely fictitious version of the historical siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For information on sources and manuscript editions, see Phyllis Moe "'Titus and Vespasian': A Study of Two Manuscripts," PhD diss. (New York University, 1963), ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/302127318?parentSessionId=As%2BsmSIbEeYOUXPKSvnQXW1liPn%2Bc7mGZ2he0FrK2yw%3D&pqorigsite=primo&searchKeywords=Titus+and+Vespasian':+A+Study+of+Two+Manuscripts&accountid=14701&sourcetype=Dissertations%20&%20Theses>; the previously referenced "Cleveland Manuscript W Q091.92-C468 and the Veronica Legend." *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 70 (1966): 459-470; "The French Source of the Alliterative 'Siege of Jerusalem.'" *Medium Ævum* 39, no. 2 (1970): 147-154, and "On Professor Micha's 'Vengeance De Notre Seigneur, Version II.'" *Romania* 95, no. 380 (4) (1974): 555-560. See also Alvin E. Ford, *La Vengeance de Nostre-Seigneur the Old and Middle French Prose Versions: The Version of Japheth* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), Stephen K. Wright, *The Vengeance of Our Lord: Medieval Dramatizations of the Destruction of Jerusalem*, Studies and Texts 89 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1989) and Michael Livingston, ed., *Siege of Jerusalem*, TEAMS Middle English Texts (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004), <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/livingston-siege-of-jerusalem-introduction>.

<sup>2</sup> *Vindicta Salvatoris* was translated into several vernacular languages, including Old French and Middle English; the latter includes the alliterative *Siege of Jerusalem* (1390-1399) and the couplet romance the *Destruction of Jerusalem*, also called *Titus and Vespasian* (1375-1400). There is also a short excerpt of 398 lines embedded in the *Metrical Life of Christ*. Related texts are *Acts of Pilate*, *Healing of Tiberius*, *Death of Pilate*, *Epistle of Pilate to Tiberius*, *Epistles of Pilate and Herod*, *Epistle of Tiberius to Pilate*, *Handing Over of Pontius Pilate*, *Narrative of Joseph of Arimathea*, *Report of Pontius Pilate* and Rufinus' translation of Josephus' *Jewish War*. Stephen C.E.

Scholars have classified it as a romance, or a *chanson de geste* (tale of great deeds), a story based on historical events and overlaid with Christian imagery and characters and legendary material.<sup>3</sup> It is a story designed to appeal to an audience or readership familiar with epic tales. Similarly, experience with siege warfare would have been familiar to persons who had been involved in wars on the continent, in the Crusades, or had family members who had done so.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the siege, which Malcolm Hebron calls “the most common kind of military engagement of the time,” was a popular theme in medieval literature.<sup>5</sup> In addition to warfare manuals, chronicles and poems, we find narratives about the famous sieges of history: the Trojan War, Rome’s destruction of Jerusalem and the Crusades in the Holy Land and in Europe.<sup>6</sup> Hebron observes, “Sieges thus featured extensively in the medieval imagination, illustrating and in turn affecting attitudes to such subjects as chivalry, history, and spiritual growth.”<sup>7</sup>

As I continue to draw out the *ME Bible*’s meaning in late fifteenth-century England, I now look at the appended *Vengeance of the Saviour (Vengeance)*. Understanding the language and the episodes in the *Vengeance* is necessary for understanding the *ME Bible* as a text that

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Hopkins, “Vengeance of the Savior,” NASSCAL North American Society for the Study of Christian Apocryphal Literature, June 2017, <http://www.nasscal.com/e-clavis-christian-apocrypha/vengeance-of-the-savior/>. In this chapter, I use the terms *Vengeance* literature or *Vengeance* tradition to refer to the various Middle English texts written about the fall of Jerusalem.

<sup>3</sup> The *chanson de geste* contains many of the features of the literary epic, which are also found in the *ME Bible*: an imposing hero of superhuman courage (Vespasian); a setting that is vast in scope (Jerusalem and Rome); descriptions of deeds of great valour; catalogues of armaments, uniforms and armies; and supernatural elements (the Veronica). For the definition of the literary epic, see C. Hugh Holman, *A Handbook to Literature*, 12<sup>th</sup> ed. (Indianapolis: The Odyssey Press, 2010), 194.

<sup>4</sup> “The *Siege* poet portrays his Romans with characteristics that would have had special resonance to an audience who had participated in campaigns in the Holy Land or France, or, by the same token, who were being actively recruited for that purpose.” Suzanne M. Yeager, “*The Siege of Jerusalem* and Biblical Exegesis: Writing About Romans in Fourteenth-Century England.” *The Chaucer Review* 39, no. 1 (2004): 73, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cr.2004.0019>.

<sup>5</sup> Malcolm Hebron, *The Medieval Siege: Theme and Image in Middle English Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 1, <https://books-scholarsportal-info.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/uri/ebooks/ebooks2/oso/2012-10-01/1/9780198186205>.

<sup>6</sup> Hebron, *The Medieval Siege*, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Hebron, *The Medieval Siege*, 2.

conveys support for Rome's hegemony. But before dominance can be asserted, superiority must be established. Hence, and as I will argue, the *Vengeance* is a proclamation of Rome's superiority, a result of the Empire's conversion to Christianity.

To begin, it is worth recalling the historical fall of Jerusalem and its consequences in order to perceive the distance between how the *ME Bible* expresses it and the historical reality. After that I consider early references to and medieval interpretations of Jerusalem's destruction and how the event is imagined in the *ME Bible*, including promotion of Roman superiority and major themes.

## ***5.2 The Siege of Jerusalem and the Destruction of the Temple: The World Behind the Text***

This section considers the historical context surrounding this event, including its impact on Jewish-Christian relations, the status of Jews in medieval Europe and Christian interpretations of Jerusalem's fall.

### *Historical Background*

Most of the information available on the historical fall of Jerusalem is from Flavius Josephus' work, *The Jewish War*, written under the patronage of Emperor Vespasian.<sup>8</sup> In February 67, Emperor Nero, infamous for his persecution of Christians, sent nearly sixty thousand men under the command of Vespasian and his son, Titus, to put down a Jewish rebellion; the latter led the expedition after his father was recalled to Rome and proclaimed emperor in 69.<sup>9</sup> Under Titus, the Roman reinforcements eventually surrounded Jerusalem,

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<sup>8</sup> *The Jewish War: A Biography* surveys Josephus' work, beginning with its composition in Greek for a Roman audience to its long-standing impact on Jews and Christians. Martin Goodman, *The Jewish War: A Biography*, Lives of Great Religious Books (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> In the *ME Bible*, Titus is emperor and Vespasian is his brother; in truth, however, Vespasian was Titus' father and Titus led the siege after his father was recalled to Rome. Alvin E. Ford, *La Vengeance de Nostre-Seigneur the Old*

largely because the Jewish faction was weakened by internecine struggle, famine and constant assault.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, in the summer of 70, the Roman troops breached the walls, destroyed the Temple and massacred many of its defenders. When the victorious Titus returned to Rome, he and his father displayed the treasures of the Temple as trophies.<sup>11</sup> Stephen Wright identifies the end of Jewish nationalistic hopes as the ultimate decline of the Sadducees and the dominance of the Pharisees, which he considers “the triumph of rabbinical Judaism.”<sup>12</sup>

The historical reality is that the Romans besieged Jerusalem to quash the Jewish insurgency, not to retaliate for the Crucifixion. Nevertheless, Wright claims that “[i]n response to the Church’s increasing expansion throughout the empire, the redactors of the canonical gospels came to exonerate Pilate and the Roman authorities and place the responsibility for the Crucifixion squarely on the Jews themselves.”<sup>13</sup>

### *Understanding the Parting-of-the-Ways*

Scholars have interpreted the shifting of blame for Jesus’ death in several ways, which I will enumerate briefly. Timothy Gabrielson posits that, to some extent, the fall of Jerusalem contributed to the “parting of the ways” between Judaism and nascent Christianity.<sup>14</sup> While Jews

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*and Middle French Prose Versions: The Version of Japheth* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 7.

<sup>10</sup> Kate Lohnes, “Siege of Jerusalem,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, August 29, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Siege-of-Jerusalem-70>.

<sup>11</sup> “The poetic *Siege of Jerusalem* offers a narrative which at once justifies and authenticates Rome’s position as a holy city, for as Jerusalem is destroyed, Rome is enriched through the acquisition of its relics.” Yeager, “Writing About Romans,” 77.

<sup>12</sup> Many pro-Roman Sadducees died during the siege. The Romans abolished the Sanhedrin and the high priesthood and forbade worship in the destroyed Temple, thus obliterating Judaism’s political and spiritual center. Judaism was fractured with the decline of the Sadducees and a concomitant rise of the Pharisees, who adhered to purity laws and ritual observances, and insisted on the validity of the non-scriptural rabbinic tradition in addition to the Mosaic Law. As a result, rabbinical Judaism filled the gap caused by the destruction of the Temple. Wright, *The Vengeance*, 16.

<sup>13</sup> Wright, *The Vengeance*, 17.

<sup>14</sup> “Often [the parting of the ways] is associated with a onetime, global break that occurred by the end of the second century, particularly over one or more theological issues. This model has been challenged as being too tidy. Other

looked to fill the abyss left by the destruction of their Jerusalem-centred faith and culture, Christians began to define themselves in ways that sometimes included differentiating themselves from Jews.

Abel Bibliowicz, however, posits that there was never a parting of the ways.<sup>15</sup> Rather, he claims, the destruction of Jerusalem and the Bar Kochba revolt of 135 CE meant that the Jews became largely absent in Judea, and to such an extent that “the Jesus movement” was no longer a factor in Jewish life. For his part, Daniel Boyarin entertains the possibility that by late antiquity Christians and Jews, and their respective faiths, had become autonomous entities.<sup>16</sup> He maintains that the two faiths gradually separated because of orthodox theologians, or heresiologists, who promoted a theological understanding of their particular faith by a process of mutual exclusion.<sup>17</sup> Initially, orthodox Christians established top-down boundaries as a way to differentiate themselves from Jews.<sup>18</sup> In response, orthodox rabbis began “to transform Judaism into a Church . . . with its orthodoxy and its heresy, supported in large part by rules of faith, that is, practices of

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images have been offered, most notably that of ‘rival siblings’, but the ‘parting’ model remains supreme. Consensus has shifted in other ways, however. The ‘parting’, or better, ‘partings’, is now understood to be a localized, protracted, and multifaceted process that likely began in the second century and continued into or past the fourth century.” Timothy A. Gabrielson, “Parting Ways or Rival Siblings? A Review and Analysis of Metaphors for the Separation of Jews and Christians in Antiquity,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 19, no. 2 (February 2021): 178, <https://journals-sagepub-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/doi/epub/10.1177/1476993X20970435>.

<sup>15</sup> “As to the ‘parting of the ways’ between the Jewish followers of Jesus and the Jewish mainstream, most scholars have argued for 80–120 CE. I am inclined to suggest that there was no parting of the ways.” Abel M. Bibliowicz, *Jewish-Christian Relations: The First Centuries* (Jacksonville: Movement Publishing, 2016), 184.

<sup>16</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 5, <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812203844>.

<sup>17</sup> In Chapter 2, “Justin’s Dialogue with the Jews: The Beginnings of Orthodoxy,” of *Border Lines*, Boyarin identifies the Christian apologist, Justin Martyr, and the orthodox rabbi, Akiva, as early designers of what evolved into border lines between Christianity and Judaism.

<sup>18</sup> “Groups that are differentiated in various ways by class, ethnicity, and other forms of social differentiation become transformed into “religions” in large part, I would suggest, through discourses of orthodoxy/heresy. Early Christian heresiology, whatever else it is, is largely the work of those who wished to eradicate the fuzziness of the borders, semantic and social, between Jews and Christians and thus produce Judaism and Christianity as fully separate (and opposed) entities-as religions, at least in the eyes of Christianity.” Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 2.

discourse expressed both in language and in action that serve to set the bounds of who is in and who is out of the religious group.”<sup>19</sup>

Paul Maier describes the fall of Jerusalem as a catastrophic event with serious repercussions for Jews and Christians going forward. To the parting-of-the-ways thesis, he adds the claim that the Temple-based Jewish faith was eventually replaced with a synagogue-based regional system, which embroiled the Jewish homeland in sectarian struggles and foreign domination for the next two-thousand years.<sup>20</sup>

Jean-Miguel Garrigues’ historical analysis of Christianity’s emergence within the context of Second Temple Judaism (ca. 513 BCE-70 CE) argues that Jesus and the Apostles, all Jews, had no intention of creating a new religion to replace or supplant Judaism.<sup>21</sup> Rather, in the spirit of reconciliation, he advocates for revisiting the historical roots of the two faiths in consideration of the Jesus of the apostolic faith and the Law given to Israel. He also observes that some Christians and Jews consider themselves part of a whole which, in turn, could foreshadow a harmonious future for the two faiths: “But God has not finished, neither with Israel, nor with the Church.”<sup>22</sup> Jean-Dominique Bruneel sees the results of the misinterpretation that Garrigues

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<sup>19</sup> Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 29.

<sup>20</sup> The Jewish sage, Johanan ben-Zakkai, “virtually re-founded Judaism in a rabbinical school established at Jamnia near the Mediterranean. The previous central authority of the Temple was now transformed into the regional authority of the synagogue—a tradition that has remained to the present day.” Paul L. Maier, “Not One Stone Left Upon Another,” *Christian History Magazine* 97, Christian History Institute, <https://redeemtv.com/magazine/article/not-one-stone-left-upon-another>.

<sup>21</sup> « Au risqué de contredire le titre du livre célèbre de Charles Harold Dodd, *Le Fondateur du christianisme, mieux on comprend Jésus dans le context religieux de l’Israël de la fin du Second Temple* et plus on voit avec une évidence croissante que Jésus, non seulement n’a pas fondé une autre religion, mais n’a rien dit ou fait que pourrait laisser penser qu’il a voulu le faire. Non que le thème de la nouveauté soit absent du Nouveau Testament, mais il s’inscrit toujours dans la ligne des promesses faites par Dieu à Israël. » Jean-Miguel Garrigues, *L’impossible substitution : Juifs et Chrétiens (I<sup>er</sup>-III<sup>e</sup> siècles)* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2024), 35.

<sup>22</sup> « Le spectaculaire rapprochement entre juifs et chrétiens auquel nous assistons ne permet-il pas de tels rêves, peut-être prémonitoires ? Il est en effet inévitable qu’en revisitant, dans un contexte apaisé de réconciliation fraternelle, les racines historiques de ce qui fut leur première immanence réciproque, certains chrétiens et certains juifs veuillent connaître de l’intérieur et expérimenter personnellement les richesses spirituelles de l’autre. Si, comme nous croyons l’avoir montré, le Jésus de la foi apostolique n’est pas contradictoire avec la Loi donnée à Israël. Il n’est pas si surprenant que certains, issus de chrétiens ou de juifs, se sentent appelés par Dieu sous des formes diverses et à des degrés divers, sinon d’appartenance, du moins d’immanence bilatérale. Cela doit être considéré

identifies as extracting Jesus and his message from its Jewish roots and presenting him, instead, as founding Christianity, a new religion in conformity with Greek thought, and contradistinctive to Judaism.<sup>23</sup>

While these scholars variously describe the impact of the fall of Jerusalem as resulting in, contributing to, gradually eroding, or misinterpreting Jewish-Christian relations, they agree that this cataclysmic and traumatic event marked the beginning of a divergence between Judaism and Christianity. Nevertheless, the separation has historical and theological implications: Christians accept Jesus as the Messiah while Jews do not. As for its literary implications, it is a major theme in medieval literature, including the *ME Bible*.

### *Social and Religious Implications*

Other specific actions also had consequences for Jewish-Christian relations. Rome imposed a special tax on Jews who lived in Roman territories, for example, and prohibited the revival of the Temple cult (including rebuilding the Temple).<sup>24</sup> Christians were also affected detrimentally—the center of their relationship with Jerusalem was destroyed and they became alienated from Jewish religious communities, many of which included friends and family members.

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comme un cheminement personnel, exceptionnel mais qui peut être authentique et peut-être prophétique d'un avenir qui n'appartient qu'à Dieu. Mais Dieu n'en a pas fini, ni avec Israël, ni avec l'Église. » Garrigues, *L'impossible substitution*, 230.

<sup>23</sup> « On aurait ainsi contribué à déraciner la personne et le message de Jésus d'un substrat sémitique et concret, puis assez vite à le présenter comme fondateur d'une nouvelle religion idéale, plus conforme à la pensée grecque, et finalement d'une Église qui se contre-distingue d'Israël, se présentant indûment comme suffisante et déjà réalisée en plénitude (p. 115, 121, 124). Ceci ne manque pas d'interroger, et demanderait sans doute des approfondissements, tant dans le cadre des « nouvelles perspectives » sur Paul vis-à-vis du judaïsme, que concernant l'histoire de la « séparation » progressive des courants qui deviendront les deux religions, juive et chrétienne. » J-D Bruneel, « Jean-Miguel Garrigues, *L'Impossible substitution. Juifs et Chrétiens (Ier-IIIe siècle\*)*, » *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 2024/1 Tome 108, 202, <https://doi-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.3917/rspt.1081.0201>.

<sup>24</sup> For details about the system of poll and property taxes that Rome applied to the Jews, see Michael Ginsburg, "Fiscus Judaicus," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 21, no. 3 (January 1931): 281-291, <https://www-jstor-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/stable/pdf/1451523>.

Rome's destruction of Jerusalem began a gradual process that saw the emergence of a religion somewhat independent of Judaism and sometimes antagonistic toward it. Markus Tiwald points to an asymmetry in the relationship. Judaism is autonomous from Christianity while Christianity is dependent on the former. He concludes, "[t]he fact is that Judaism as a religion of its own does not necessarily need the link to Christianity. Instead, Christianity will always need its Jewish roots—cutting these off would be an act of theological self-destruction."<sup>25</sup> Bonnie Millar attributes Christian anti-Judaism to Christianity's dependence on Judaic beliefs.<sup>26</sup> She argues that Jews' "strong sense of identity . . . seemed to pose a threat to Christianity, a challenge to its integrity."<sup>27</sup> Gerard Sloyan, less commonly, adds resentment, "that ugliest of human vices," of Jewish intelligence, skills and success as feeding into Christian hostility.<sup>28</sup>

In Charles Cohen's estimate, Christianity's later "elevation within the Roman Empire connected the faith to state power in ways that would inform the statement of its core theological premises, amplify divisions within the Church, and configure the course of Jewish-Christian relations."<sup>29</sup> James Carroll cites Jewish recalcitrance as being a threat to Christian expansion throughout the Roman Empire. He writes, "Christians were in a position to do something about

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<sup>25</sup> Markus Tiwald, "Christians and Jews, 01: Parting of the Ways," in *Brill Encyclopedia of Early Christianity Online*, eds. David G. Hunter, Paul J.J. van Geest, Bert Jan Lietaert Peerbolte, [http://dx.doi.org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.1163/2589-7993\\_EECO\\_SIM\\_00000624](http://dx.doi.org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.1163/2589-7993_EECO_SIM_00000624).

<sup>26</sup> In my reading of the *ME Bible*, I detect criticisms of the Jewish religion and character; hence, I use the term "anti-Judaism" to describe Christian antipathy toward the Jewish religion, and "anti-Semitism" to describe the aversion toward the Jews as a racial group, which would include their religion. Jeanne Favret-Saada writes, "that this distinction induces one to ignore the churches' actions in the process that led from the invention of the word anti-Semite in 1879 to the destruction of the Jews by the Nazis." Jeanne Favret-Saada "A Fuzzy Distinction: Anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism (An excerpt from *Le Judaïsme et ses Juifs*)," trans. Eléonore Rimbault, *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4, no. 3 (2014): 335, <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/epdfplus/10.14318/hau4.3.021>.

<sup>27</sup> "From the very beginning Christian thinkers expended a great deal of energy in rationalising the Jewish position as wrong. Christians tried to prove that they themselves were the true followers of God and that most followers of Judaism before Jesus and all of those subsequently were inferior and the adversaries of Christendom." Bonnie Millar, "A Study of the Siege of Jerusalem in its Physical, Literary and Historical Contexts" (PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, 2000), 142-143, <http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/11992/1/313223.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> Gerard S. Sloyan, "Christian Persecution of Jews over the Centuries," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 11, <https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/20070119-persecution.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> Charles L. Cohen, *The Abrahamic Religions: A Very Short Introduction*, A Very Short Introduction Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 41.

[the Jews' rejection of the Gospel], since their program of expansion was sponsored by the emperor whose army marched behind that spear with its transverse bar."<sup>30</sup>

Responding to Judaism's rejection of Christianity, Rome gradually increased sanctions against Jews beginning with Constantine's edict, which prohibited Jews from proselytizing, to the later decree that made practicing Judaism a capital offense.<sup>31</sup> The requirement for theological orthodoxy, advanced by the alliance between church and state in the fourth century, inaugurated "a bloody tradition that has repeatedly marred Christian history until recent times."<sup>32</sup>

In whatever way it is interpreted, the fall of Jerusalem had considerable consequences for Christians and Jews alike. The former lost the city and framework at the centre of their faith, and Christianity became increasingly separate from its Jewish roots. Nonetheless, the ramifications were more serious and long lasting for the Jewish people, who became displaced religiously, socially and spatially with the destruction of the city and the Temple. The centuries of *Judenhass* ("Jew Hate") that some argue began with some of the earliest Christians accelerated when "the Jews of western Europe began to suffer new indignities as the Crusades came on."<sup>33</sup>

### 5.2.1 *The Jews in Medieval Europe*

While Christianity coalesced between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, Europe's relations with its Jewish citizens deteriorated. Members of Jewish communities could be subject to legal restrictions, negative attitudes and violence. Jews went from being a tolerated minority to

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<sup>30</sup> James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 177.

<sup>31</sup> Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, 177.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Collins and Matthew A. Price, *The Story of Christianity: 2000 Years of Faith* (New York: DK Publishing, Inc., 1999), 64.

<sup>33</sup> Sloyan, "Christian Persecution," 7.

a group “that was increasingly marginalized, libeled, discriminated against, expelled, and massacred.”<sup>34</sup>

Sloyan identifies “an indirect line,” which began in the mid-second century, whereby Christians interpreted “the intra-Jewish polemic” in the New Testament writings as anti-Judaic. The interpretation entered the sermons and writings of the Church Fathers, thereby laying the groundwork for the anti-Semitism of the Middle Ages.<sup>35</sup> And, he notes, as the Crusades began, Christians to brutally persecute the Jews in western Europe.<sup>36</sup>

### *The Crusades*

The violence and brutality of the Crusades are contrary to the fundamental Christian ethic: love of neighbour and love of God. Jews, however, were considered by some to be the enemies of Christ and the Church. Hence, it can be argued that they were omitted from what Jonathan Riley-Smith describes as the medieval notion of crusading as an expression of love of one’s neighbour and love of God, not love of one’s enemy.<sup>37</sup> As an example, Riley-Smith references Innocent III’s papal bull, *Quia maior* (1213), which advocates that love be reserved solely for Christians living in Muslim-occupied territories, not the Muslims themselves.

Riley-Smith writes:

Now, the striking thing about these references to love is that they are one-dimensional and therefore not truly Christian. Love of neighbour was always treated in Crusade propaganda in terms of fraternal love for fellow-Christians, never in terms of love shown

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<sup>34</sup> Kevin Madigan, *Medieval Christianity: A New History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 343.

<sup>35</sup> “The theological anti-Judaism of the Church fathers, repeated endlessly in medieval and Renaissance-Reformation preaching, was the far greater culprit. It was the continuing rationale for the indefensible Christian conduct of the Middle Ages onward that was xenophobic and angry at Jewish resistance to absorption into the cultural mainstream. There was resentment, that ugliest of human vices[.]” Sloyan, “Christian Persecution,” 11.

<sup>36</sup> “The Jews of western Europe began to suffer new indignities as the Crusades came on. The Muslims were the “infidel” targets in the attempted recapture of the holy places in Palestine. However, the pillage and slaughter committed by Christian mobs against Jews on the way linger long in Jewish memory.” Sloyan, “Christian Persecution,” 7.

<sup>37</sup> Jonathan Riley-Smith, “Crusading as an Act of Love.” *History* 65, no. 214 (1980): 177-178, <https://doi-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.1111/j.1468-229X.1980.tb01939.x>. I will have more to say about this ethical contradiction <https://doi-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.1111/j.1468-229X.1980.tb01939.x> in Chapter 8, Unveiling the Incarnation.

for enemies as well as friends. And this one-sided view of love did not properly reflect Christian teaching in the past or at the time.<sup>38</sup>

Thomas Madden notes that the Crusades were not launched to kill Jews. He further argues that popes, bishops, and preachers made it clear that the Jews of Europe were to be left unmolested. Nevertheless, in the early stages of the First Crusade (1095-1096), groups of Christian peasants slaughtered and attacked Jews throughout the Rhineland. The violence persisted during the Second Crusade (1146-1149) after German Christians were exhorted to carry out a pogrom; the massacre, however, was “partly mitigated by [Bernard of Clairvaux’s] arguments that Jews should not be killed because ‘they are living tokens to us, constantly recalling our Lord’s Passion.’”<sup>39</sup>

By the time of the Third Crusade (1189-1192), Jews were being murdered in London, and in 1190 the entire Jewish population of York was obliterated.<sup>40</sup> Often violence was related to Jews’ being stereotyped as corrupt money-lenders to whom Christians were indebted.<sup>41</sup> The notion of usurious Jews exploiting innocent Christians led to several episodes of violence against Jews, including one when as many as 10 to 15 percent of English Jews were accused of, and executed for, shaving down metal coins. Geraldine Heng writes, “Money is a dangerous sign-system in the Middle Ages, and a community with a metonymic association with money endures risks accruing from money’s symbolic as well as pragmatic functions.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Riley-Smith, “Crusading as an Act of Love,” 185.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas F. Madden, *The Concise History of the Crusades* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), 18.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas H. Bestul, *Texts of the Passion: Latin Devotional Literature and Medieval Society* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 75, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt16nzg17>.

<sup>41</sup> “Rendered as unnatural socioeconomic upstarts, [the Jews] are tellingly likened by [William of Newburgh’s chronicle] to ‘princes’ living in abundance and luxury in large houses comparable to royal palaces, and are condemned as ‘tyrants’ who oppress Christians by the ‘cruel tyranny’ of usury[.]” Geraldine Heng, *England and the Jews: How Religion and Violence Created the First Racial State in the West*, Cambridge Elements (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 47. Heng also mentions state laws and statutes that “appear to have suggested that “English Jews and all their possessions belonged to the king.” Heng, *England and the Jews*, 21.

<sup>42</sup> Heng, *England and the Jews*, 40.

In 1290, England officially expelled its Jewish citizens as mandated by King Edward I's Edict of Expulsion. Even so, and as Sherri Lynn Wise describes, they continued to be represented in English literature from the late medieval period to early modernity.<sup>43</sup>

### *The Canons of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215*

The decline in the status of Jews in the Christian West finds written expression in the last four canons of the Fourth Lateran Council. In the judgment of the Hebrew scholars, Richard Gottheil and Hermann Vogelstein, canons 67 to 70 “inaugurated a new era of ecclesiastical legislation in regard to the Jews, and reduced them virtually to the grade of pariahs.”<sup>44</sup> Canon 67 adopted measures against Jews who “extort oppressive and *excessive* interest [usury] from Christians.” And, Jews with houses or landed property “shall be compelled to make satisfaction to churches for tithes and offerings due to the churches, which the churches were accustomed to receive from Christians for houses and other possessions, before they passed by whatever title to the Jews, so that the churches may thus be preserved from loss.”<sup>45</sup>

Canon 68 required Jews and Saracens to adopt a dress code, “because it sometimes happens that by mistake Christians join with Jewish or Saracen women, and Jews or Saracens with Christian women.”<sup>46</sup> Gottheil and Vogelstein believe that the Canon's actual goal was to

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<sup>43</sup> “Despite their expulsion from England in 1290, Jews continue to figure prominently in English literature.” Sherri Lynn Wise, “Cursed Companions: The Literary Representation of Jews in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods in England” (PhD thesis, York University, Toronto, 2017), ii.

<sup>44</sup> Richard Gottheil and Hermann Vogelstein, “Church Councils,” in *JewishEncyclopedia.com: The unedited full-text of the 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia*, <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/4379-church-councils>.

<sup>45</sup> *Ac eaden poena Iudaeos decernimus compellendos ad satisfaciendum ecclesiis pro decimis et oblationibus debitis, quas a christianis de domibus et possessionibus aliis percipere consueverant, antequam ad Iudaeos quocumpue titulo devenissent, ut sic ecclesiae conserventur indemnes.* Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Volume 1: Nicaea I to Lateran V*, trans. Jesuits of the British Isles (Georgetown: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 265-266.

<sup>46</sup> *Unde contingit interdum, quod per ut nulla differential discernantur. Unde contingit interdum. Quod per errorem christiani Iudaeorum seu Saracenorum et Iudaei seu Saraceni christianorum mulieribus commisceantur. Ne igitur tam damnatae commixtionis excessus per velamentum erroris huiusmodi excusationis ulterius possint habere diffugium, statuimus ut tales utriusque sexus in omni christianorum provincial et omni tempore, qualitate habitus publice ab aliis populis distinguantur[.]* Tanner, *Decrees*, 266.

differentiate Jews from Christians. The Jewish badge and hat exposed the Jews to scorn and ridicule, and their complete abasement dates from this time. Because many Jews were said to parade in their best clothes during Holy Week (in which the Feast of the Passover usually falls) on purpose to mock the Christians, the Jews were not thenceforth allowed to leave their houses at all during those days.”<sup>47</sup>

Because “[i]t would be too absurd for a blasphemer of Christ to exercise power over Christians, Canon 69 disqualified Jews, described as “very hostile to Christians,” from holding public office. Then, as an afterthought, “We extend the same thing to pagans.”<sup>48</sup> Canon 70 prevented Jews who converted to Christianity “from observing their old rite, so that those who freely offered themselves to the Christian religion may be kept to its observance by a salutary and necessary coercion. For it is a lesser evil not to know the Lord’s way than to go back on it after having known it.”<sup>49</sup>

For the most part, canons 67 to 70 are directed at the Jews; even so, the mention of Saracens in Canon 68, and pagans in Canon 69, brings to mind the *ME Bible*’s reference to “the payenymys and the Sarazins and the publicans and othire euyl linagis that ben out of the Cristen feith.”<sup>50</sup> Whether or not the narrative intends to evoke a connection, a number of ecclesiastical “provinces” in Europe had some of these prohibitions or requirements in place prior to the

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<sup>47</sup> Gottheil and Vogelstein, “Church Councils.”

<sup>48</sup> *Cum sit nimis absurdum ut Christi blasphemus in christianos vim potestatis exerceat, quod super hoc Toletanum Concilium provide statuit, nos propter transgressorum audaciam in hoc capitulo innovamus, prohibentes ne Iudaei officiis publicis praeferantur, quoniam sub tali praetextu christianis plurimum sunt infesti.* Tanner, *Decrees*, 266.

<sup>49</sup> *Quidam, sicut accepimus qui ad sacri undam baptismatis coluntarii accesserunt, veterem hominem omnino non exuunt, ut novum perfectius induant, cum prioris ritus reliquias retinentes, christianae religionis decorum tali commixtione confundant. Cum autem scriptum sit : Maledictus homo qui terram duabus viis ingreditur, et indui vestis non debeat lino lanaque contexta, statuimus, ut tales per praelatos ecclesiarum ab observantia veteris ritus omnimodo compescantur, ut quos christianae religioni liberae voluntatis arbitrium obtulit, salutiferae coactionis necessitas in eius observatione conservet ; cum minus malum existat, viam Domini non agnoscere, quam post agnitam retroire.* Tanner, *Decrees*, 270.

<sup>50</sup> Phyllis Moe, ed., *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d’Argenteuil’s Bible en françois*, Middle English Texts 6 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1977), 47.

Council; however, the Council's demand for enforcement throughout the Catholic world ensured that Jews could be further segregated from Christians and legally persecuted on a broader scale.

### ***5.3 Early References and Medieval Interpretations***

In the following section, I describe how, from early days and up to and including the medieval period, authors interpreted the Roman victory over the Jews in the fall of Jerusalem story as an indication of Christianity's ascendance over Judaism.

#### *The Teaching of Addai*

In the previous chapter, I explored the Abgar legend with reference to its relation to the Veronica. But there is also a connection between the legend and the fall of Jerusalem story, a relationship that needs to be covered. The previously mentioned *Teaching of Addai* includes several references that might have influenced medieval readings of the *Vengeance*, especially in terms of its allusions to Rome.

The following selections from *The Teaching of Addai* contain important references to Rome. In the first, the king desires to have a glimpse of Jesus:

Abgar wished that he himself might cross over and go to Palestine and that he might see with his own eyes everything that the Messiah was doing. But because he could not pass over a district of the Romans which was not his, lest this occasion should provoke bitter enmity, he wrote a letter and sent it to the Messiah by Hanan the archivist.<sup>51</sup>

Later, when Abgar has a vision of Jesus' disciple, Addai, he declares:

“Truly you are the disciple of Jesus, that mighty man, the Son of God, who sent to me saying ‘I will send to you one of my disciples for healing and for salvation.’ Addai replied: ‘Because at first you believed in the one who sent me to you, because of this I have been sent to you. Again because you believe in him, everything which you believe will come to you through him.’ Abgar returned: ‘I have so believed in him that against those Jews who crucified him I wish that I might lead any army myself and might go and

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<sup>51</sup> *The Teaching of Addai*, Texts and Translations 16, Early Christian Literature Series 4, trans. George Howard (Ann Arbor: The Society of Biblical Literature), 7.

destroy them. But because that kingdom belongs to the Romans I have respect for the covenant of peace which was established by me as by my forefathers with our lord Caesar Tiberius.”<sup>52</sup>

Because Abgar “could not pass over into a country of the Romans to enter Palestine and kill the Jews” he instead writes the following in a letter to Emperor Tiberius:

King Abgar to our lord Tiberius Caesar, greetings. Although I know that nothing is hidden from your majesty, I write and make known to your powerful and great rulership, that the Jews under your authority who live in Palestine have gathered together and crucified the Messiah who was unworthy of death [. . .] Your majesty knows, therefore, the right command he should give concerning the Jewish people who have done these things.<sup>53</sup>

Tiberius replies that he is aware of “that which the Jews did with respect to the cross” and promises “to make a legal charge against the Jews who have acted unlawfully.”<sup>54</sup> True to his word, Tiberius “sent and killed some of the rulers of the Jews who were in Palestine.”<sup>55</sup>

Apart from the Veronica connection, these excerpts from *The Teaching of Addai* are important because they locate the beginning of Syriac Christianity to the Apostolic Age and to Jesus himself. Significant too is the connection established between Edessa and Rome, thus linking the Edessa Church to Christianity in the Roman Empire. These excerpts also contain the basic elements of the Veronica story—a noble who yearns to see Jesus and converts to Christianity and the Jews culpability in Jesus’ death—that are expanded and augmented in the *Vengeance*. Clearly, writers in the fourth and fifth centuries were interested in establishing links between the Jews’ rejecting and executing Jesus and the historical fall of Jerusalem.

#### *The Fall of Jerusalem in Medieval Culture and Literature*

The ideas that Jews had rejected Jesus and that Christianity had superseded Judaism

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<sup>52</sup> *The Teaching of Addai*, 13.

<sup>53</sup> *The Teaching of Addai*, 77.

<sup>54</sup> *The Teaching of Addai*, 77-79.

<sup>55</sup> *The Teaching of Addai*, 81.

could lead to antisemitism in medieval times. Robert Rouse believes that the story of Rome's slaughter of the Jews and the destruction of the Temple speaks "too clearly to medieval antisemitism."<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, the vengeance theme in all its medieval versions was extremely popular. Alvin Ford writes, "Verse versions, prose versions, *chansons de geste*, mystery plays, book-length documents and one-page résumés, all attest to the widespread diffusion of the apocryphal *Vengeance of Our Lord* throughout the medieval Christian world."<sup>57</sup> Wright states, "The first and perhaps the most surprising fact to be noted about these early history plays is that they were extremely popular."<sup>58</sup> According to Beatrice Groves, "[The *Vengeance*] was recounted by travel writers, pored over by scholars, expounded by poets, enjoyed by the semi-literate audiences of puppet shows and ballad-pedlars, preached from Paul's Cross in the heart of London and played out on the stages which peppered the suburbs."<sup>59</sup>

Medieval interpretations of the fall of Jerusalem could consider it as a sign of Christianity's superiority over Judaism that assured Rome's victory.<sup>60</sup> Hence, the stories promoted the belief in a destiny of Christianity to extend its sphere of influence and spread the faith, thereby factoring into the story's popularity in the Middle Ages.<sup>61</sup> This type of medieval hermeneutic reflects the supersessionist view that the Christ event rendered the Law obsolete and resulted in Christianity's supplanting Judaism.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Robert Rouse, "Romance and Crusade in Late Medieval England," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the Crusades*, edited by Anthony Bale, ed., Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 219, doi:10.1017/9781108672832.015.

<sup>57</sup> Ford, *La Vengeance*, 1.

<sup>58</sup> Wright, *The Vengeance*, 1.

<sup>59</sup> Beatrice Groves, *The Destruction of Jerusalem in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 5, <https://doi-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.1017/CBO9781316286289>.

<sup>60</sup> "This imaginary history created by the *Siege* thus provides an authenticating narrative for Rome's title as spiritual capital of Christianity." Suzanne M. Yeager, "Writing About Romans," 73.

<sup>61</sup> "That is, the destruction of Jerusalem came to symbolize the failure of the Old Law of the Jews and the triumph of the New Law of the Christians." Livingston, *Siege of Jerusalem*, 6.

<sup>62</sup> "Supersessionism [is the] view according to which Christianity supersedes or replaces Judaism, since Christ is the complete and final revelation that not only fulfilled but ended the purpose of the Law." "Supersessionism," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, Daniel Patte, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1198.

Initially, some Christian writers concluded that the event was to be understood as God's punishment of the Jews for rejecting Jesus and, later, as the story evolved, for his execution.<sup>63</sup> Livingston credits the *Vindicta Salvatoris* (c. 700), an anonymous text of Latin prose, as connecting the siege with the Crucifixion.<sup>64</sup> Discussions about Jesus' death revolved around whether Pilate was responsible or the Jews, as if they operated as a united front. Suzanne Yeager describes the *Vindicta* as "fictional Christianization" wherein Titus and Vespasian convert to Christianity and seek revenge for the Crucifixion, promising to "do with the Jews as the Jews had done to Christ."<sup>65</sup>

The story's flexible framework allowed for varying interpretations. For example, Yeager detects an apocalyptic sensibility that could make sense of this turbulent and unstable historical period.<sup>66</sup> She writes, "[i]n my reading of the [*Siege of Jerusalem*], the vengeance trope serves up the first-century siege of Jerusalem as an apocalypse in miniature, and a kind of dress rehearsal for the final performance."<sup>67</sup> Hebron suggests that the story's popularity may be due to the presence of familiar genres and tropes, such as "legend, miracle, history, and Roman chivalry."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> "The destruction of Jerusalem was a just war: a divine justice, a punishment for the death of Christ that prepares for the peace of His Second Coming." Livingston, *Siege of Jerusalem*, 29.

<sup>64</sup> "Around the year 700, the healing of an ill Titus by the Vernicle (and his subsequent conversion) is incorporated into *Vindicta Salvatoris*, along with the explicit portrayal of the siege as vengeance for the Crucifixion." Therefore, "[f]or this reason, the various literary works (e.g., poetry, prose and drama) centering on the story are known as the 'Vengeance of Our Lord.'" Livingston, *Siege of Jerusalem*, 7.

<sup>65</sup> Yeager, "Writing About Romans," 79.

<sup>66</sup> "The late fourteenth century would have seen repeated outbreaks of the Black Death, bouts of famine and crop failure, the Peasants' Revolt, the Great Schism, and the previously mentioned Hundred Years War, among other hardships." Suzanne M. Yeager, "Jewish Identity in 'The Siege of Jerusalem' and Homiletic Texts: Models of Penance and Victims of Vengeance for the Urban Apocalypse," *Medium Ævum* 80, no. 1 (2011): 61, <https://doi.org/10.2307/43632465>.

<sup>67</sup> "In addition to a literary tradition of apocalyptic narrative thriving in England during the time of the *Siege*'s circulation, a wide range of apocalypse commentaries was composed or copied there . . . *The Siege of Jerusalem* may have shared similar audiences and eschatological interpretations alongside these diverse works." Yeager, "Jewish Identity," 61.

<sup>68</sup> "The material provided a combination of legend, miracle, history, and Roman chivalry, as well as opportunities for vivid description of siege warfare in the East; the triumph of Western Christendom in the form of the Roman army must have provided a pleasing contrast to the present situation in the Holy Land at a time when the recapture of Jerusalem was still the dream of monarchs. While the combination of the religious and the chivalric, crusading elements in the story of the siege and the events leading up to it contributed to its popularity, the matter of Jerusalem also contains deeper resonances concerning the pattern of history." Hebron, *The Medieval Siege*, 112.

The anachronistic motif of Christianity's victory over Judaism in the first century, however, could result in violence and discrimination against the Jews. It is now worth stating that the Second Vatican Council began the process to ameliorate the Church's historical perspective on Jews and Judaism. Notably, on October 28, 1965, the Council adopted "The Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," *Nostra Aetate*. Section 4 of the document repudiates the idea that the Jews and their descendants continue to be responsible for the Crucifixion (i.e., the "blood curse"), stresses the religious heritage shared by Jews and Catholics, and denounces hatred.<sup>69</sup>

Mark Kinzer applauds the Council for rejecting the charge of deicide and for affirming the Jewish heritage of Jesus and his disciples and the Church's Jewish beginnings as seminal in promoting a positive relationship between Christians (Catholics) and Jews. Similar to Garrigues, he proposes "a broader framework of convictions that includes both *Nostra Aetate*'s affirmation of Jewish covenantal identity and the Church's ancient creedal heritage," that identifies and recognizes Jesus Christ as having fulfilled the Covenant.<sup>70</sup> While Kinzer welcomes this reconciliatory approach, it brings attention to how in Christianity Jesus has often been uprooted from his Jewish heritage.

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<sup>69</sup> "Moreover, the church, which condemns all persecutions against any people, mindful of its common inheritance with the Jews and motivated not by political considerations but by the religious charity of the gospel, deploras feelings of hatred, persecutions, and demonstrations of anti-Semitism, directed against the Jews at whatever time and by whomever." *Praeterea, ecclesia, quae omnes persecutiones in quosvis homines reprobat, memor communis cum Iudaeis patrimonii, nec rationibus politicis sed religiosa caritate evangelica impulsata, odia, persecutiones, antisemitismi manifestationes, quovis tempore et a quibusvis in Iudaeos habita, deplorat*. Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Volume Two: Trent to Vatican II*, trans. Jesuits of the British Isles (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 971.

<sup>70</sup> Mark S. Kinzer, *Searching Her Own Mystery: Nostra Aetate, the Jewish People, and the Identity of the Church* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2015), 23. Also of interest is Kinzer's work with the aforementioned Jean-Miguel Garrigues, which he describes as follows: "For me personally, one of the greatest fruits of the Roman Catholic-Messianic Jewish Dialogue Group has been my friendship with Fr. Jean-Miguel Garrigues of Toulouse, France. Fr. Jean-Miguel is one of the most respected Catholic theologians in France. In particular, he has written extensively on the Catholic theology of the Jewish people." Kinzer, *Searching Her Own Mystery*, 37. For his part, Garrigues describes Kinzer as his dear friend (« ami très cher ») and colleague. Garrigues, *L'impossible substitution*, 230.

## *Middle English Vengeance Literature*

Scholars have mixed views about how the Jews are represented in Middle English literature about the fall of Jerusalem. Anthony Bale avers that after the expulsion anti-Semitism increased including the production of literature intolerant of Jews.<sup>71</sup> Groves argues that medieval readers could interpret Rome's victory as foreshadowing Jerusalem's reverting to Christian hegemony during the Crusades. In that scenario, the Jews were "a people righteously destroyed within a Romano-Christian narrative."<sup>72</sup> Conversely, for Yeager, the Jews are "unparalleled models of suffering" eligible to seek redemption up until the final moments of the destruction.<sup>73</sup> While Elise Narin van Court recognizes the anti-Judaism of the poem she also sees "a competing sympathetic narrative strand that complicates what has been considered a straightforward and brutal poetic."<sup>74</sup> In this reading, rather, a "profound confusion about Jews, and Christians, and violence" both animates and underpins the text.<sup>75</sup>

Wright puts forward that Jewish stereotypes in *Vengeance* literature could represent "efforts to define the problematic relationships between political history and salvation history, and between the Christian present and the non-Christian past."<sup>76</sup> Bestul calls the representation of the Jews "an embarrassment to Catholic historians of spirituality," and traces the decline of

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<sup>71</sup> "Following the expulsion of the Jews, antisemitism, unlike Judaism, did not disappear; rather it prospered. Old themes were sustained and embellished (ritual murder, the mocking image of the Jewish nose) and new themes emerged (in particular surrounding the Jews' imputed abuse of the eucharistic wafer). Such discourses permeated Latin chronicles, theological treatises, sermons, vernacular poems, ecclesiastical art and architecture, drama and marginalia[.]" Anthony Bale, *The Jew in the Medieval Book: English Antisemitisms, 1350-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 16.

<sup>72</sup> Groves, *Destruction of Jerusalem*, 30.

<sup>73</sup> "While they are ultimately damned, the writer portrays them as open to possibilities of redemption up until the final moments of the siege. This depiction conflicts in some ways with then-contemporary views of divine foreknowledge, but the logic of the world of the poem, whereby the possibility for redemption is offered time and again, is invoked here, just as the promise for deliverance is held out in spite of scriptural prophecies of Jewish destruction." Yeager, "Jewish Identity," 58.

<sup>74</sup> Elise Narin van Court, "'The Siege of Jerusalem' and Augustinian Historians: Writing about Jews in Fourteenth-Century England," *The Chaucer Review* 29, no. 3 (1995): 229, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25095890>.

<sup>75</sup> Van Court, "'The Siege of Jerusalem,'" 244.

<sup>76</sup> Wright, *The Vengeance*, 10.

Jewish standing to the latter half of the eleventh century. Christians became hostile and aggressive, and Jews were insulted and subjected to violence.<sup>77</sup>

#### ***5.4 Vengeance in the ME Bible: The World of the Text***

Thus far, I have reviewed the *Vengeance* motif through an historical lens, including medieval Christian culture and literature. Now I examine the story's presentation in *ME Bible* which, I claimed previously, is the only currently known Middle English text of biblical literature in prose that appends the *Vengeance*.<sup>78</sup>

##### *Overview*

As mentioned, Phyllis Moe considers the *Vengeance* “the most interesting section of the *Bible*” for modern readers.<sup>79</sup> Certainly, its plot, style and tone set it apart from the *ME Bible*'s preceding chapters. Still, there are connections with the *ME Bible* as a whole, including the reappearances of St. Peter, Veronica, Caiaphas and Pilate. Certainly, the fact that these characters have a second appearance indicates their importance to the development of the plot.

Framing this final section of the *ME Bible* within an historical context imparts a flexibility for medieval audiences to reflect on and interpret events in their own context.<sup>80</sup> So, while St. Peter, Vespasian, Pilate and Caiaphas are historical figures, in late-medieval literature their characters are frequently exaggerated to emphasize certain traits, and they freely interact with non-historical persons like St. Veronica. For example, St. Peter is a quasi-divine figure who baptizes in the name of the Trinity, heals the sick and performs miracles; Vespasian

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<sup>77</sup> Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 69.

<sup>78</sup> For details, refer to Chapter 3, English Literary Culture, the Medieval Popular Bible and *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois*.

<sup>79</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 22.

<sup>80</sup> See *The Fall of Jerusalem in Medieval Culture*, above.

is the hero, with superhuman courage and strength, who avenges Jesus' death and becomes the secular spokesman for Christianity; Pilate is a repentant (and easily intimidated) sinner who tries to save Jesus, and Caiaphas is a vain, greedy and villainous sadist who takes pleasure in Jesus' suffering.

### *In Rome, Vespasian is Healed by the Veronica*

As set forth in the previous chapter, following Jesus' death, St. Peter and, later, Veronica and the cloth travel to Rome.<sup>81</sup> Upon seeing Peter, Veronica hands him the cloth, which he processes through Rome on the way to cure the emperor's brother, Vespasian.<sup>82</sup> After he heals Vespasian, Peter preaches the Gospel and baptizes the entire royal court, including the emperor and Vespasian. Suddenly, the cloth miraculously floats up for all to see, and remains suspended until Evensong, when it descends into Peter's hands. The Veronica story proper ends with both Peter and the holy the cloth remaining in Rome and Veronica founding St. Peter's Basilica.

### *The Siege and Destruction of Jerusalem*

Next, Vespasian, the "wurthery knight," embarks for Jerusalem with his army "to avenge the deth of Iesu Crist, which deth he suffrid of the fals Iuwes & and the miscreantis."<sup>83</sup> He also demands that the Jews be baptized, and that "they bring hidir to me with hem the busshop Cayphas and Pilat the prouost with alle the other maistirs of the law by whom my saueour Iesu Crist receyued deth. And I shal take vengeance by the counseil of my barons and do right iugement."<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> The relocation of Veronica's cloth from Jerusalem to Rome "foreshadows the imminent mass pillaging of such treasures, as the relics of Jerusalem are appropriated for Christian worship in Rome." Yeager, "Writing About Romans," 73.

<sup>82</sup> Livingston calls the story of St. Veronica and the cloth "[o]ne of the first accretions to the basic history [of Jerusalem's destruction]." Livingston, "Introduction," 7.

<sup>83</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 75, 30-31.

<sup>84</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 76, 28-31.

In a twist, the Jews refuse Vespasian's offer. Instead, they strip the Romans of their armour, shave their heads and beards, blacken their skin, smear their faces with meat broth and hang cheese around their necks:

[T]hei toke the .xij knightis and shaued away alle the here of their hedes and of their berdis & toke away alle their armures and their other arry and lad hem by alle the cite, and than toke .xij. gret staues and made to despoile the seid knightis al nakid into their lynnou clothis and than bound fast theyre handis behind hem with the gret staues and so vyllan'ou'sly put hem out of the yatis of the cite, and anyntid their visagis with colis and hangid upon eche of hem a chese at their necke[.]<sup>85</sup>

The Jews release the Roman hostages, who then head to Vespasian's tent where the imperial banner has been assembled:

[He] made there forthwith to dresse up his standard and sette themperial baner aboue with the dragon of gold [cast] aboue thappul of gold, and in his throte .xij. arrows, and held vndir his fete a swerd with the harneis of foure enamails of his diuisis of the .iiij. parties of the world."<sup>86</sup>

Vespasian's tent is adorned with a statue of a bejewelled golden dragon:

And the hede of this dragon turnid toward the cuntre and remeued him not tille themperoure had wonne the cuntre of by appointment of peas or were. And than was the hede of this dragon, richely coround, towardis Rome.<sup>87</sup>

The following day, the Jews arrive on the battlefield:

And then thei brought out their olyuantis camelles, and dromadories, with their bastellis, gunnes, and engines, tribiettis, quillyers, shildis, targis, rivaudis, garetis, speris, paveis, axis, springaldis, and al maner of opir habilementis for the werre.<sup>88</sup>

Next, Caiaphas, arrives at the site in grand style:

And tofore that sate Cayphas the busshop and maistre of their lawe in a cheire alle of fine bourned gold, garnissid with charbuncles, rubies, diamantis, saphirs, baleis, emeraudis and gret perlis orientals, and with much other riche perree, and about his body a riche mantel of cloth of gold, riband by al þe bordirs ful richely of perree. And in the myddis of hys brest he had a plate of the finest gold of Arabie garnysshid with .xij. precious stones ful passingly riche and of feire entaile. And vpon his hede ekehad this busshop Caiphas a corone of gold with .ij. short hornes & sharp aboue his eris. And it was curiously and

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<sup>85</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 77, 13-20.

<sup>86</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 78, 30-36.

<sup>87</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 79, 23-27.

<sup>88</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 80, 4-8.

richely wrought with many riche precious stones, and in his hand the boke of Moises and radde the stories of [Ioseph] and of Pharao.<sup>89</sup>

The other “maistirs of the lawe,” accompany Caiaphas while singing “the loovingis [psalms] of king Daud.”

On the battlefield, the Romans fight bravely but Caiaphas and his followers try unsuccessfully to escape. Vespasian devises a particularly gruesome death for those who “made our Lord Iesu Crist be passiond and put to peynful dep vpon the cros in the mount of Caluary at Ierusalem upon Good Friday for the saluacion of alle Cristen soulis.”<sup>90</sup> After flaying the Jewish leaders, the Romans soak them in honey and hang them upside down for animals to fight over. Left hanging on the gibbet from three until “euensong,” the Jewish leaders are taken down, drawn and quartered, burned in brimstone and their ashes scattered.

Despite the fact that the leaders have been killed, the Romans continue to besiege the city, which includes starving its citizens, razing the buildings and slaughtering the babies and children.

[They] brent and destrued and bete it alle down, the temples, the toun, and þe wallis into the har erthe so that ther left not one stone upon another: *Quia non relinquetur lapis super lapidem.*<sup>91</sup>

Then, in a final act of retribution, Vespasian sells some Jews for thirty pieces of silver—Judas’ fee for betraying Jesus to the authorities—while those who stay are cursed to wander throughout the world:

And so they shulle into þe ende of the world in remembraunce of their fals beleue and the outrageous enuye and falsnes that þey did to Iesu Crist, which descended from heuen to be incarnate of oure blissid Lady Seint Marie and be born veray God and man to suffer deth for the sa‘l’uacion of alle mankynde.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 81, 5-18.

<sup>90</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 84.

<sup>91</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 88, 15-18.

<sup>92</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 88, 33-36; 89, 37-39.

The *ME Bible* then concludes with a reflection on Emperor Vespasian's commitment to Christianity:

And aftir þat Vaspasian lyued long in good estate and held thempire of Rome aftir the dethe of Cezar themperoure his brothir, and he was a wurthy man in all his lyuyng and true Cristen and much encrestid Cristendom and our lawe. And when the holi appostlis Seint Petir and Poule were in Rome, preching and teching the Cristen feith on Cristis behalue, he supportid hem by the ordinaunce of God þat there was taught and done the feith and the seruice of God, and the rule of holy church, and masse and othire divine obseruancis of the holy sacrament on the auter of the precious bodi of oure Lord Iesu Crist and of the remembraunce of his passion, and for the remission of Cristen mennes synnes of the oste there consecrate of brede and wine and water, because þerof is þe substance of mannes life, and in the same wise the soule cumfortid spiritually whan that holy host of sacrament ys shewid vnto the peple.<sup>93</sup>

The various storylines inaugurated in the first two-thirds of the *ME Bible* are resolved at the conclusion. Christianity's enemies are defeated and the Christian nation flourishes under the champion of orthodoxy and defender of the faith, Emperor Vespasian.

### ***5.5 Roman Superiority: The World in Front of the Text***

There is a sense throughout the *Vengeance* that the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple were inevitable in light of Rome's superiority, which is attributed to Christianity. As I describe, the inescapability of Jerusalem's destruction is foretold by prophecies in this final portion of the *ME Bible*.

Medieval writers and, in turn, audiences interpreted the words "the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down," as anticipating God's vengeance against the Jews for rejecting and executing Jesus.<sup>94</sup> Ford writes, "when it came time to create or modify a text about the destruction of Jerusalem," authors turned to the

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<sup>93</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 89, 20-32; 90, 33-35.

<sup>94</sup> Jesus' predicting the Temple's destruction appears in Matthew 24:1-3, Mark 13:1-4 and Luke 21:5-7.

authority of the Bible.<sup>95</sup> Despite this, he notes no literary text (including some written after the historical event) describes or interprets the destruction's impact on the development of the early Christian Church.<sup>96</sup> Instead, Christian apologists composed apocryphal texts that augmented stories about the historical event that Josephus had described. First, the siege was interpreted in terms of divine vengeance and, later, the avenging Romans were reimagined as converts to Christianity.<sup>97</sup> This fictional scenario of Romans as champions of Christendom "locates Rome within salvation history from almost the first years of the Christian era."<sup>98</sup>

In addition to the "not one stone" reference, the cataclysm is foreshadowed several times earlier in the text: "Nabugodonosor king of Babiloine" destroyed the First Temple and forced the Jews into servitude; there was warfare "betuene hem [the Jews] & the Sarazins" that was resolved when "thei submitted hem to Cezar that was emperoure of Rome and hapid to haue gret peas."<sup>99</sup> Pilate's wife dreamed "þat the emperoure of Rome cam into this cite & bete it doun & slou3 much peple of the Iuwes & lad may of hem to Rome with him, where he put hem in prison."<sup>100</sup> And the authorities accuse Jesus of boasting "þat if the temple of Ierusalem were broken doun he shuld make it up ayen withyn .iij. daies."<sup>101</sup>

Including these earlier prophecies could imply that the Jews had opportunities over the centuries to repent and convert, but did not. But the prophecies are also a kind of evidence that Rome's destiny was fulfilled in the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple.

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<sup>95</sup> "The predictions of this cataclysmic moment in Jewish history were known to them from the Old Testament prophets and from the sayings of Jesus as recorded by the New Testament Gospellers." For a compilation of the writings, see Ford, *La Vengeance*, 18-19.

<sup>96</sup> Ford, *La Vengeance*, 29.

<sup>97</sup> Ford, *La Vengeance*, 18.

<sup>98</sup> Yeager, "Writing About Romans," 80.

<sup>99</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 50, 5-8.

<sup>100</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 58-59. At the same time, the foregoing passages promote Roman superiority in the secular realm and, by extension, its hegemony in the religious realm.

<sup>101</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 55. See also John 2:19.

According to Livingston, “[t]his great ‘triumphal march of destiny,’ through which the superiority and inevitability of the Christian faith was evidently played out in the historical events of the destruction, lent itself to the accretion of legendary materials, especially those of a religious nature.”<sup>102</sup>

### *5.5.1 Vespasian and Caiaphas*

In this section, I investigate the main characters around whom the *Vengeance* revolves, Vespasian and Caiaphas. As I outline, Vespasian represents Rome and Christianity while Caiaphas is emblematic of Jerusalem and Judaism. Following that discussion, I look at the ambivalent relationship between Christians and Jews, both in history and in the text.

#### *Vespasian: Roman Knight and Christian Emperor*

As time went on, stories about Vespasian and his army were overlaid with a chivalric veneer.<sup>103</sup> Hence, in the *ME Bible*, Vespasian is a heroic character and his soldiers are gallant, noble, courageous, victorious, faithful and divinely sanctioned. The prince’s affiliation with the golden dragon locates him within the tradition of iconic figures of medieval Christianity like St. Michael the Archangel and St. George.

The imperial banner and the golden dragon are emblematic of Rome’s might. The banner symbolizes Rome’s military dominance and the gold dragon proclaims Rome’s sovereignty. In other words, Vespasian is proclaiming Christianity’s ascendance over Judaism under the auspices of the Roman Empire.

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<sup>102</sup> Livingston, *Siege of Jerusalem*, 6.

<sup>103</sup> “[T]he romance entitled *The Siege of Jerusalem* began to circulate in England, dramatizing the events of the first-century siege, and embellishing these happenings with chivalric trappings.” Yeager, “Jewish Identity,” 56.

Vespasian is confident that he and his soldiers were divinely assigned to be God's avengers; thus, he commands his soldiers to "go upon hem in Goddis behalve ayens his enemyes, and he shal beoure help."<sup>104</sup> When Vespasian addresses "his chivalrous host of Romaynes," he explicitly connects Rome with the duty to defend Christianity:

Feir sirs, we be comen hidir from the noble cite of Rome by the comaundement of that excellent prince, my brother themperoure, to avenge the cruel deth of Iesu Crist by the fals enuye of thees fals Iuwes, which descendid from heuen into this erthe for the sa'l'uacion of the world and suffrid paynful passion of dethe & martird of these felonious and myscreantz Iuwes that here be com now so proudly ayens us out of this cite.<sup>105</sup>

The inclusion of "large homiletic sections" encourages the reader to engage positively with the Romans.<sup>106</sup>

Essentially, the Romans are transformed into the Christian knights of medieval romance.<sup>107</sup> The description of Vespasian and his army as western courtly knights leads Yeager to conclude that they are a literary construct—a hybrid of Christian narrative and medieval romance. To lend verisimilitude to the narrative required identifying Rome as a Christian Empire over two hundred years before the fact.<sup>108</sup>

Yeager assesses "the cultural fiction of their [the Romans'] Christianity" as making it improbable that they could possibly represent "any Roman group before the time of

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<sup>104</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 82.

<sup>105</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 81, 25-32.

<sup>106</sup> Millar, "A Study of the Siege," 208.

<sup>107</sup> "Moreover, the fictitious element introduced through the chivalric framework in which they act, removes the Romans of the poem [*Siege of Jerusalem*] one step further from actual Romans, for the courtly tropes enacted by the Romans of the poem did not exist until long after the fall of the Roman Empire. One is left, then, with a kind of Roman character composite derived from Christian narrative and medieval romance." Yeager, "Writing About Romans," 71.

<sup>108</sup> "The portrayal of the Romans as western European courtly knights makes ancient Rome suddenly familiar. Moreover, by providing courtly detail, which is purely anachronistic, the poet portrays the Romans as a monolithic, western Christian force, described using the rhetoric of crusade romances." Yeager, "Writing About Romans," 73.

Constantine.”<sup>109</sup> Even so, the Romans could be identified as first-century Christians, if it were clear that they were purely a literary creation.<sup>110</sup> In other words, in *Vengeance* literature, Rome’s religious affiliation is identified with Christianity centuries before Constantine legalized the faith and, later, declared it the new religion of the Empire.<sup>111</sup>

Nevertheless, portraying first-century Romans as God’s avengers erroneously identifies Rome with Christianity almost from the faith’s inception—it is an historical fiction to identify Vespasian and the Romans with any Roman group in the first century or, even, as per Yeager, prior to the legalization of Christianity in the fourth century.<sup>112</sup> All the same, the result is a fictional symbiosis between early Christianity and the Empire.

Vespasian is associated with healing and salvation through conversion and baptism. Undergoing this transformative journey allows him to subdue and conquer the city of Jerusalem, apparently signalling, in this context, Rome’s and Christianity’s superiority over Judaism.

In contrast to his portrayal in the *ME Bible*, the historical Vespasian (Emperor 69-79) was no champion of Christianity; rather, he served an Empire that was notorious for brutalizing Christians. He was considered mediocre in his role as public works manager in Rome, and was accused of demeaning and humiliating those he considered subservient. There were rumours that

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<sup>109</sup> “Moreover, the fictitious element introduced through the chivalric framework in which they act removes the Romans of the poem one step further from actual Romans, for the courtly tropes enacted by the Romans of the poem did not exist until long after the fall of the Roman Empire.” Yeager, “Writing About Romans,” 72.

<sup>110</sup> “In order to examine the Romans in the poem as specifically Roman, that is, not as a typological substitution for any other group, one must consider them as a group constructed by an English author to create a fictitious historical past.” Yeager, “Writing About Romans,” 72.

<sup>111</sup> In Chapter 9, *Connecting the Threads*, I argue that the Vespasian character in the *ME Bible* evokes the historical Constantine the Great.

<sup>112</sup> “This fictive tradition of first-century Roman Christianity pre-dated the poem and its source by almost one thousand years, and here in the romance the poet follows suit, weaving together a tale whereby the Roman leader, Vespasian, lays siege to Jerusalem and destroys the Temple to avenge Jesus’ death, rather than for any other political activity.” Yeager, “Writing About Romans,” 72. There is, however, the story of the first Christian soldier, St. Maurice, who along with his men, were martyred after defying Emperor Maximian’s (285–305 CE) order to offer sacrifices to the Roman gods. CopticChurch.Net, “Saint Maurice and the Theban Legion,” <https://www.copticchurch.net/synaxarium/saints/maurice.html#>.

his political progress was due to nepotism. In 66, Emperor Nero sent Vespasian to Judea to put an end to a rebellion against Roman rule. In 67-68, he conducted campaigns close to Jerusalem, but after Nero's death in 70 he returned to Rome. Vespasian's son, Titus, who had been a legate in his father's army, assumed the command in Judea.<sup>113</sup> Therefore, and unlike the narrative in the *ME Bible*, the son, not the father, razed Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple.

#### *Caiaphas: Evil Villain and Master of the Law*

Because the heroic must be contrasted with the wicked, Caiaphas and the Jews were assigned the villainous role. Caiaphas (or a Caiaphas-like figure) appears in all four Gospels, although he is not named in either Mark or Luke.<sup>114</sup> In the Gospel of John, he is described mostly in terms of his religious function, but he is also described as exploiting the council's fears of a Roman crackdown.<sup>115</sup> The Gospel of Matthew names Caiaphas as one of the Jewish leaders who plot Jesus' death, and identifies him as leading the session of the chief priests and council where testimony is given against Jesus. Later, Caiaphas asks Jesus, under oath, whether he is the Messiah. When he hears the reply, he accuses Jesus of blaspheming, a crime punishable by death. Matthew's version of the story is closest to that in the *ME Bible*.

Within the text, Caiaphas is depicted as wilfully blind and stubborn, cowardly and treacherous, vain and outwardly pious, but inwardly without belief. He presides over the descendants of "the payenyms and the Sarazins and the publicans and othire euyll linagis that ben

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<sup>113</sup> Barbara Levick, "Vespasian: Rise to Power," in Anthony A. Barrett ed., *Lives of the Caesars* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2008), 131–132, <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/doi/pdf/10.1002/9781444302950.ch6>.

<sup>114</sup> Both texts initially reference "chief priests and teachers of the Law" (Mark 14:1b and Luke 22:2a) who seek Jesus' death. As the story proceeds, both refer to members of an unspecified group who bring Jesus to the house of the high priest (Mark 14:54 and Luke 22:54).

<sup>115</sup> "Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish" (John 11:49–50).

out of the Cristen feith.”<sup>116</sup> He arrives at the battlefield dressed sumptuously, seated on an opulent throne and reading from the Torah—he revels in worldliness while feigning piety. There is excess even in the type and variety of animals that serve alongside the Jews. Millar proposes they could represent “spiritual dangers” or “inward moral corruption.” Either way, she proposes, their presence usually indicates “that something is amiss.”<sup>117</sup>

Caiaphas’ posturing is matched by that of his soldiers. A case in point is when they handle meat and dairy, which contravenes Jewish dietary rule as described in the Torah.<sup>118</sup> The insinuation is that humiliating the Romans is more important than following the Law. Millar believes that the scene shows the Jews as cruel and barbaric in contrast to Vespasian’s “honour and dignity.”<sup>119</sup>

The historical Caiaphas officiated as high priest in Jerusalem throughout Pontius Pilate’s tenure. In this role, he was the chief authority in the Jewish high council called the Sanhedrin. He was most likely a Sadducee, “a Jewish sect concerned with the temple cult in Jerusalem.”<sup>120</sup> Caiaphas’ incumbency was the longest of any high priest’s during the first century, which might indicate a passable relationship with the Roman authorities. He was deposed in 36, the year that Pilate was ordered back to Rome.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 47.

<sup>117</sup> Millar, “A Study of the Siege,” 40.

<sup>118</sup> “Meat boiled in milk [is most probably prohibited] because it is somehow connected with idolatry, forming perhaps part of the service, or being used on some festival of the heathen. I find a support for this view in the circumstance that the Law mentions the prohibition twice after the commandment given concerning the festivals ‘Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord God’ (Exod. xxiii. 17, and xxxiv. 23), as if to say, ‘When you come before me on your festivals, do not seethe your food in the manner as the heathen used to do.’ This I consider the best reason for the prohibition.” Wendy Ann Wilkenfeld, *Food Regulation in Biblical Law*” (A Paper Submitted in Satisfaction of the Written Work Requirement of Harvard Law School, 1988), <https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/8846735/wwilkenfeld.html?sequence=2&isAllowed=y>.

<sup>119</sup> Millar, “A Study of the Siege,” 41.

<sup>120</sup> Frank F. Judd, “Caiaphas,” in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, vol. 1, eds. Roger S. Bagnall, Kai Brodersen, Craig B. Champion, Andres Erskine and Sabine Hunter (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2013), 1, <https://doi-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.1002/9781444338386.wbeah05037>.

<sup>121</sup> Judd, “Caiaphas.”

The narrative continuously contrasts the noble Romans under Vespasian's leadership with the willfully blind and stubborn Jews, led by the tyrannical Caiaphas. Where Vespasian's power is divinely bestowed, Caiaphas' comes from wealth and the support of "þe maistirs of the lawe," moneyed hypocrites who read from the book of Moses, recite the Psalms of David, and relate the stories of Joshua and Judas. They are repeatedly described as "fals Iews" whose religion is based on "fals beleue" (i.e., error). Rome's triumph indicated that God was on the Empire's side, while the Jews' defeat proved them to be accursed.<sup>122</sup>

### 5.5.2 Jews and Christians: An Ambivalent Relationship

In time the Jewish role in the Passion was expanded to include responsibility for the Crucifixion itself. In this fictive interpretation, which makes its way into the *ME Bible*, the Jews are a violent and recalcitrant people who reject and execute Jesus. Accordingly, in the context of medieval Christianity, it was appropriate that Jesus' death be avenged by noble, courageous, faithful and divinely sanctioned Roman soldiers against a hypocritical, proud, treacherous and cowardly enemy without true faith.<sup>123</sup>

Still, at times the text appears to distinguish between ordinary Jews and the Jewish religious leaders, for whom it reserves the most severe condemnation.<sup>124</sup> In the *Vengeance* story the Jews are both Jesus' tormentors and his ethnic group, they are responsible for his death, yet

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<sup>122</sup> David M. Olster, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response, and the Literary Construction of the Jew* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 32, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt17mvh2v>.

<sup>123</sup> "Through representation of and comparison to these 'others' [e.g., the Jews], societies and the subjects who comprise them can attempt to establish those qualities by which they wish to be defined." Asa Simon Mittman and Susan M. Kim, "Monsters and the Exotic in Early Medieval England," <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2008.00606.x>

<sup>124</sup> "Anti-Judaism is fundamentally an antipathy which was expounded in doctrinal terms by the Church Fathers, such as Augustine, and which later became the basis of legal restrictions on the Jews and was developed into a popular, more virulently antagonistic form. This more extreme manifestation developed into the anti-Semitism of the later Middle Ages as a result of social, political, and economic pressures and is evident in the wild accusations levelled at the Jews from the end of the twelfth century, such as that they perpetrated blood ritual murders, and that they were inherently evil." Millar, "A Study of the Siege," 131.

sometimes there is sympathy for them, they are damned, but there is hope for their conversion to Christianity. This uncertainty can be attributed to Christianity's historical ambivalence towards Judaism due in part to the close connection between the two faiths: Christianity emerged from Judaism but was simultaneously dependant on it.<sup>125</sup>

This text reflects this ambivalence, especially in the descriptions of violence perpetrated on individual Jews like the episodes of the cannibalistic mother and the slaughtered children and babies. In the former, a woman devours her child, an episode that Josephus includes in *The Jewish War*.<sup>126</sup>

*Erant multi fame perientes et quodam mulier ex famis radeo suum puerum deuorauit: moche peple perished by hungir, and a woman ete hir child by wodenesse [madness] of hungir.*<sup>127</sup>

The second instance, wherein the Romans slaughter Jewish babies and children, calls to mind Herod's "massacre of the innocents":

And alle the little yong children that were founden alyue, [and] he made take hem by the leggis and armes and bete their hedis and þer bodies ayens the wallis and brak their bones and bete out their braynes.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> For Karma Ben Johanan, the term ambivalence allows us "to understand the essential theological dynamic which characterizes Christian thought on Jews (including its most dangerous expressions). Thus, the question is neither about positivity nor about negativity, but about the Jews occupying a liminal, ever unstable space between Self and Other." Continuing on, she writes "At the heart of this 'orthodox' Christian ambivalence towards Jews stands the inclusion of the Old Testament in the Christian canon. In this inclusion the New does not only replace the Old, as implied in the word 'supersessionism' it never completely negates the Old, rather it redeems it, transforms it, while inviting all to be transformed by it." Karma Ben Johanan, "Conflicting Catechisms: Christian Ambivalence and the Antisemitism Debate," *Political Theology* 25, no. 7 (2024), doi:10.1080/1462317X.2024.2430763.

<sup>126</sup> In her essay, Wendy Love Anderson relates how early rabbis "connected the curse of child eating (Leviticus 26:29; Deuteronomy 28:53-57) with the description of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem [and the First Temple] in Lamentations (2:20 and 4:10) and the Roman destruction of the Second Temple. Wendy Love Anderson, "Parents Eating their Children – The Torah's Curse and Its Undertones in Medieval Interpretation," *TheTorah.com* (2018), <https://thetorah.com/article/parents-eating-their-children-the-torahs-curse-and-its-undertones-in-medieval-interpretation>.

<sup>127</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 86.

<sup>128</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 88, 21-24. At the same time, it could be a reference to the blood curse in Matthew 27:25 that is transmitted through the generations.

It is unclear whether the author is making a point about the Romans' brutality, or about the heinous nature of the crime (i.e., the Crucifixion), which required severe punishment. Regardless, it suggests ambivalence: while there is some sympathy for the plight of ordinary Jews, spiritual blindness and failure to embrace Christianity will not be tolerated.<sup>129</sup>

### ***5.6 From Jerusalem to Rome***

In the *Vengeance*, the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple are attributed to Rome's superiority, a result of the Empire's conversion to Christianity. Themes that appear within are Christianity's ascendance and inevitable victory, the importance of defending the faith and the power of divine justice. The text warns that any resistance to Rome will be met with force. At the same time, the Jews' execution of Jesus is a determining factor. As evidence, Vespasian confirms that vengeance against the Jews for their treatment of Jesus is the theme of this final part of the story.<sup>130</sup>

Hebron regards *Vengeance* literature's popularity as due partially to the various generic elements therein. Hence, the flexible framework and general themes made it possible to interpret the fall of Jerusalem in terms of contemporary situations.<sup>131</sup> The themes in the *Vengeance* tradition are general enough to evoke various historical conflicts, especially ones of a religious or

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<sup>129</sup> Millar, "A Study of the Siege," 29.

<sup>130</sup> "Given this central emphasis on direct physical retribution for the rejection and execution of Christ, especially in the context of its framing accounts of conversion, it is worth noting that the text is animated by a strong anti-Semitic strain." Hopkins, "The Vengeance of the Savior."

<sup>131</sup> Hebron cites stories about Western Christianity's ascendancy as providing a welcome diversion from failed military expeditions to the Holy Land. Hebron, *The Medieval Siege*, 112.

theological nature, whether in first-century Jerusalem, thirteenth-century France, or in fifteenth-century England.<sup>132</sup>

In the next chapter, I explore the situation in pre-Reformation England, wherein ideas that opposed ecclesial teaching and tradition were filtering into lay consciousness. Concurrently, Roman Christianity's extra-biblical teachings were being scrutinized by literate Christians who, when they read the Bible in the vernacular, found little to support certain of the Church's teaching and tradition, including "holy images" and the cult of the Eucharist, specifically "transubstantiation," and the doctrine of the Real Presence.

The *Vengeance's* concluding paragraph contains vestiges of those debates: the final image describes a priest elevating "the oste there consecrate of brede and wine and water" within the sight of the faithful. In 1470, when the *ME Bible* appeared, the elevation would have taken place to signify that the priest had consecrated the bread and wine to become the Body and Blood of Christ (i.e., transubstantiation). As I will describe, this image in the *ME Bible* can be understood as a response to the English Reformers' rejection of transubstantiation.<sup>133</sup>

The *Vengeance* is interested in communicating, albeit fictitiously, the major events in the aftermath of Christ's life and death, including the eradication of Christianity's enemies (the Jews) and the establishment of the Church in Rome.<sup>134</sup> Given that the *ME Bible* appeared in fifteenth-century England, I will argue that the Jews—"the original and quintessential dissenters"—in the *ME Bible* represent the religious dissenters who challenged ecclesial teaching and tradition.<sup>135</sup> Whereas in thirteenth-century France Rome's enemies were, for the most part,

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<sup>132</sup> In the next chapter,

<sup>133</sup> See Chapter 8, Unveiling the Incarnation.

<sup>134</sup> "Through the Christianization of the early Romans the poet relocates Christian genealogy, moving it from the East to the West; throughout the narrative the poet's revision implies that nascent Christianity grew up in Rome, not Jerusalem." Yeager, "Writing About Romans," 73.

<sup>135</sup> Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, 317.

religious heretics like the Cathars, in pre-Reformation England Rome's adversaries were the reform-minded Christians.

## Chapter 6

### The Pre-Reformation Period and the English Church

#### *6.1 Conflicting Ideas in Pre-Reformation England*

In the previous chapter, I engaged with literary renditions of the Roman expedition to destroy Jerusalem (the *Vengeance*). Earlier, I had noted that the narrative's inclusion in the *ME Bible* makes that work unique in Middle English biblical literature in prose.<sup>1</sup> I also argued that the narrative extols Rome's superiority which it attributes to the Empire's conversion to Christianity.

As I continue to study and interpret the meaning of *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois (ME Bible)*, I now look at the status of holy images and the cult of the Eucharist—the two issues that elicited the most contested religious and theological questions, and undermined confidence in the pre-Reformation English Church. I undertake this task to support my claim that the *ME Bible* contains an implicit defense of holy images and the cult of the Eucharist as expressed in Church teaching and tradition.<sup>2</sup> This effort is part of a larger attempt to articulate the meaning of the *ME Bible*.

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 3, "English Literary Culture, the Medieval Bible and *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois*."

<sup>2</sup> This conventional understanding has implications on the theological meaning of the Incarnation for Christian faith.

This chapter both acknowledges and benefits from the many scholarly studies on the pre-Reformation period in England. Still, many of my claims also depend on a direct study of texts from the period, when opposition emerged to traditional teaching and practice. I especially look to the writings of the religious dissident, John Wycliffe, and those of the Lollards, his followers from the lay-piety movement in the 1380s.<sup>3</sup>

The Lollard movement emerged in late fourteenth-century Oxford (ca. 1390). Like Wycliffe, Lollards railed against ecclesial corruption; they also believed that clerical privilege was unjustified and that lay people needed the intercession of neither clergy nor Church. They stressed the supremacy of Scripture. They wrote religious tracts in English, including a translation of the Bible, a Gospel commentary and sermons, all of which are “distinguished by their academic erudition.”<sup>4</sup> For the Reformers, non-biblical teaching and tradition, including venerating holy images (e.g., the Veronica) and the cult of the Eucharist, epitomized the evils and corruption infecting the Church.

Fifteenth-century England has been described as devoid of deep thought and “[n]either were there any superior works of philosophy or theology.”<sup>5</sup> As I will show, however, the “radical” ideas expressed by John Wycliffe and his followers paved the way for the Protestant Reformation and had a lasting influence on the history of Christianity. At the same time, these ideas led to new forms of religious expression that rejected established teaching and tradition.

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<sup>3</sup> “From the first a term of opprobrium, the word [Lollard] was coined in the late fourteenth century. Certainly, Wyclif’s followers were insulted by it. The preferred to be called “good men.” Kevin Madigan, *Medieval Christianity: A New History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 393.

<sup>4</sup> Derrick G. Pitard, “Lollardy,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, ed. Daniel Patte (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 737.

<sup>5</sup> “United Kingdom – England in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century,” in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, October 7, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Kingdon/England-in-the-15th-century>.

## *A Period of Instability*

In the decades leading up to the Protestant Reformation, “human and natural disasters,” including famine and plague, had a devastating impact on the economic, social and political realms in England.<sup>6</sup> The great famines (1315-1322) and the Black Death (1348-1349) halted the economic expansion of the previous two centuries and threatened political stability.<sup>7</sup> In 1349 and again in 1351, the crown issued the *Ordinance and Statute of Labourers* to fix maximum wages, which had risen to address the labour shortage resulting from the plague; in turn, these regulations were a factor in the Peasants Revolt (1381).<sup>8</sup>

Yet, for “a considerable proportion of the shrunken population,” increased wages had led to “a higher standard of living”; as a result, citizens had the time and money “to develop new skills, to move around the country and to challenge the accepted orders.”<sup>9</sup> In Parliament, a nascent House of Commons provided a voice for middle-class interests while English was becoming the preferred language of “entertainment and enlightenment but also as the language of business and politics.”<sup>10</sup>

Additionally, some Christians came to see that religiosity was ineffective against natural and man-made calamities.<sup>11</sup> A chasm was widening between the Catholic Church and the laity to

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<sup>6</sup> Colin Platt, *King Death: The Black Death and its Aftermath in Late-Medieval England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 14.

<sup>7</sup> W. Mark Ormrod, “England: Edward II and Edward III,” in *The New Cambridge Medieval History: Volume 6*, ed. Michael Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), vol. 6, 273, [https://www-cambridge-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/6E507B237F9CE6BFE638E0A82461BE77/9781139055741c13a\\_p271-296\\_CBO.pdf/england\\_edward\\_ii\\_and\\_edward\\_iii.pdf](https://www-cambridge-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/6E507B237F9CE6BFE638E0A82461BE77/9781139055741c13a_p271-296_CBO.pdf/england_edward_ii_and_edward_iii.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> The Peasants Revolt was a popular uprising in response to the poll tax levied on every adult, “heads of population rather than households,” without taking into account income or resources. Ormrod, “England: Edward II and Edward III,” 283-284.

<sup>9</sup> Caroline Barron, “The Reign of Richard II,” in *The New Cambridge Medieval History: Volume 6*, 298, <https://doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521362900.015>.

<sup>10</sup> Barron, “The Reign of Richard II,” 298.

<sup>11</sup> This skepticism was partially fuelled by the increase in lay literacy, which Eamon Duffy calls “the crucial factor in the growth of a well-instructed laity in fifteenth-century England.” Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400–1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 68. Margaret Aston adds

which the Protestant Reformation would respond in a way that changed Christianity forever. The days when the pope exercised extensive power in the religious and secular realms (i.e., Church and State) were now numbered. And yet, still at this time, “the finger of the papacy lay on every living pulse in the Church.”<sup>12</sup> The Ring of the Fisherman was about to be dislodged.

The Church in pre-Reformation England also faced growing criticisms related to its teaching and tradition, especially those related to holy images and the Eucharist. Too, there was a desire for religious reform, coupled with a new perspective on faith and authority. In this chapter, I describe how the problem-plagued Church was poised for a shift.

## ***6.2 Political Strife and Papal Power***

Papal power and influence culminated during the tenure of Pope Innocent III. He expanded papal authority over Church and State, but his interference into secular matters would lead to hostile relations. The Pope had a complex relationship with England and the Crown characterized by political and religious manoeuvrings. The English chronicler, Matthew Paris, documented and sometimes criticized the Pope’s efforts to assert papal supremacy and influence English politics.

### *Innocent III: Combater of Heresy*

Pope Innocent III was the exemplum, *par excellence*, of papal power in the late medieval period.<sup>13</sup> Ambitious and energetic, he worked on renewing and expanding papal authority,

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“In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries more people, including those who had no intention of embarking on a religious or priestly career, were finding it desirable or necessary to learn to read or write (or reckon) for business reasons, sometimes with motives that seem similar to those of today.” *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval England* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1984), 101.

<sup>12</sup> Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 110.

<sup>13</sup> Innocent III’s pontificate “marks the golden age of the mediaeval papacy and one of the most important eras in the history of the Catholic Church. No other mortal has before or since wielded such extensive power. As the spiritual sovereign of Latin Christendom, he had no rival. At the same time, he was the acknowledged arbiter of the political

reforming the *Curia* and eradicating heresy, including Catharism, which had taken hold in southern France since the second half of the twelfth century.<sup>14</sup>

In 1208, Innocent launched a Crusade against the Cathars, which became known as the Albigensian Crusade.<sup>15</sup> This Christian heretical sect challenged ecclesial authority and advocated for a personal relationship with God without clerical intervention. In addition to violence and force, Innocent used the legal tool at his disposal—Canon Law—to anathematize every heresy “against the holy, orthodox and catholic faith,” condemn heretics and excommunicate persons who supported or defended heretics.<sup>16</sup>

Even so, religious dissent was not the only challenge facing Innocent. The pope’s belief in his authority over the secular world inevitably led him into the political realm.<sup>17</sup> A typical episode took place in 1208-1209 in a dispute involving two German princes vying for the title of Holy Roman emperor. Innocent inserted himself into the altercation—he crowned Otto IV of

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destinies of Europe from Constantinople to Scotland.” Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 36, [https://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/history/5\\_ch05.htm#\\_edn1](https://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/history/5_ch05.htm#_edn1).

<sup>14</sup> Kenneth J. Pennington, “Innocent III,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Innocent-III-pope>.

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 9, A Typological Reading of the *ME Bible*, for a discussion on Innocent and the Albigensian Crusade.

<sup>16</sup> Canon 3 from the Fourth Lateran Council, states in part, “We excommunicate and anathematize every heresy raising itself up against this holy, orthodox and catholic faith which we have expounded above. We condemn all heretics, whatever names they may go under. They have different faces indeed but their tails are tied together inasmuch as they are alike in their pride. Let those condemned be handed over to the secular authorities present, or to their bailiffs, for due punishment.” *Excommunicamus et anathemizamus omnem haeresim extollentem se adversus hanc sanctam, orthodoxam, catholicam fidem, quam superius exposuimus, condemnantes universos haereticos quibuscumque nominibus censeantur, facies quidem habentes diversas, sed caudas adinvicem colligates, quia de vanitate convenient in idipsum. Damnati vero saecularibus potestatibus praesentibus aut eorum balivis relinquuntur, animadversione debita puniendi, clericis prius a suis ordinibus degradatis, ita quod bona huiusmodi damnatorum, si laice fuerint, confiscentur, si vero clerici, applicentur ecclesiis, a quibus stipendia perceperunt.* Tanner, *Decrees*, 233.

<sup>17</sup> “Innocent III involved himself in political actions to a greater extent than previous popes, in the sense both that he issued more instructions about secular affairs (whether it was to obey the Crown in England or Hungary or to make peace in France) and that he pursued policies such as the recuperation of papal lands, the exercise of the regency in Sicily and intervention in the imperial election. To speak of ‘political’ action is to use a modern term, but it corresponds to the impression formed by contemporaries. The question is whether these features were the reflection of a new theory of papal supremacy, or of the application of accepted doctrine in a new political situation.” Colin Morris, *The Papal Monarchy: The Western Church from 1050 to 1250* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 430, <https://doi-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.1093/0198269250.001.0001>.

Bismarck emperor, but after a falling out, excommunicated him and removed his imperial title. He then crowned Frederick II, who was the son of the previous emperor. Kevin Madigan observes, “[i]n the eleventh century, emperors had appointed popes without consulting any Roman prelate. Now the pope had chosen an emperor.”<sup>18</sup>

### *Innocent III and England*

In the early years of the thirteenth century, Innocent also quarrelled with King John of England (1166-1216), who had contested the Roman Church’s practice of electing the Archbishop of Canterbury. Specifically, the king became embroiled in a dispute with the monks of Christ Church, Canterbury, whom Rome had authorized to elect the archbishop. The king, however, was not pleased with their choice of Reginald, a fellow monk, and tried to impose his preferred candidate, John de Grey, bishop of Norwich, upon the position. The monks urgently requested that the pope reign in the king, and he did, but not in the way they had expected—Innocent rejected both candidates and instead appointed the English cardinal, Stephen Langton, as archbishop.<sup>19</sup>

When John refused to accept Innocent’s choice, the pope threatened, and then imposed, a papal interdict in 1208.<sup>20</sup> One year later, Innocent augmented the interdict by excommunicating the king. Four years later, however, John gave his allegiance to the pope and the dispute was

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<sup>18</sup> Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*,” 290.

<sup>19</sup> “An appeal was made by both parties to Rome, Reginald [the monks’ choice] appearing there in person. After a delay of a year, Innocent set aside both elections and ordered the Canterbury monks, present in Rome, to proceed to the choice of another candidate. The choice fell upon Stephen Langton, cardinal of Chrysogonus. Born on English soil, Stephen was a man of indisputable learning and moral worth.” Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 39.

<sup>20</sup> “The interdict at once took effect, casting a deep gloom over the nation. The church bells remained unring. The church buildings were closed. The usual ministrations of the priesthood remained unperformed. The great doors of the monasteries were left unopened, and worshippers were only admitted by secret passages. Penance was inflicted upon the innocent as well as the erring. Women, after childbirth, presented themselves for purification outside the church walls. The dead were refused burial in consecrated ground, and the service of the priest was withheld.” Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 39.

settled.<sup>21</sup> Even so, the king's power was eroded during the process and England basically became a papal fiefdom required to pay, in perpetuity, funds to the Apostolic See. It seems as though the event and its conclusion harmonized with Innocent's vision of "the subjection of the entire Christian world to the Roman pontiff," which "seemed to be near realization."<sup>22</sup>

### *Matthew Paris and the Chronica maiora*

In England, particularly, Innocent's victory led to enmity and encouraged resistance to the papacy. The aforementioned Matthew Paris was particularly outspoken in his criticism of those whom he called "Romans"—members of the papal court who arguably used their influence largely for self-gain.<sup>23</sup>

One particular target of Matthew's ire was the papal nuncio, Otto, who visited England during the reign of Henry III; when he departed in 1241, Paris likened him to a wild boar who had ravished the vineyard and left it barren. Generally speaking, he viewed Otto and other cardinals visiting from Rome as "ravagers of the church and of the land, who made a mockery of English traditions and customs, connived to undermine the authority of English barons to secure their own authority as the King's chief advisors, and scavenged the land for any and all monies that they could possibly gather."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> "The interdict was revoked in 1214, after having been in force more than six years." Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 39.

<sup>22</sup> Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 37.

<sup>23</sup> Paris describes "Roman" greed thusly: "Master Bernard de Nympha, native of the suburbs of Rome, died suddenly about the same time. He was a crafty and wealthy man, had been a clerk of Richard earl of Cornwall, and had extorted money from the Crusaders on various specious pretexts. Amongst his goods was found in a coffer choose one of blank sheets sealed with the bull [the most important papal seal], which might be filled up at pleasure and applied to any misuse, such as fraudulently extorting money from the poor as if by authority of the pope." J.A. Giles, trans., *Matthew Paris's English History: From the Year 1235 to 1273*, Bohn's Antiquarian Library, vol. 3 (London: Henry G. Bohn), 295.

<sup>24</sup> Matthew Phillpott, "The Compilation of a Sixteenth-Century Ecclesiastical History: The Use of Matthew Paris in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*." *The Medieval Chronicle* 7 (2011): 211, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48579286>.

It is, therefore, unsurprising that in his *Chronica maiora*, Paris refers to England's financial arrangement with Rome as the "detestable and lamentable charter" (*carta detestabilis quam lacrimabilis memoriae Johannes infeliciter confecit*), and describes the power struggle as bringing about "the turbulent state of the English realm" (*statum regni Angliae talibus turbinibus exagitaret*).<sup>25</sup>

Later, in the sixteenth century, historians who advanced the notion of a Protestant England used medieval chronicles, including Paris', to interpret or reinterpret English ecclesiastical history. Reformers like the Jesuit, John Bale, describe Paris as "a skilled and wise historian who 'painted' the 'avarice, fraud, lies, deceit, pomp, shamelessness, tyranny, and blasphemy' of the Bishop of Rome for all to see."<sup>26</sup> And the historian, John Foxe, used Paris's critiques of the Roman Church "as exempla to use against the papacy and its allies."<sup>27</sup> Foxe also held the "ideological belief that the Antichrist had been unleashed on the world in the eleventh century and had corrupted the papacy."<sup>28</sup>

Over the next two centuries, the charter that Paris had railed against continued to foment resentment to papal rule in England. In 1365, Pope Urban V (r. 1362-1370) demanded that England resume paying the levy, which had been in abeyance for 35 years. In his writings, the Oxford theologian, John Wycliffe, had decried the abuse of ecclesiastical authority, including Urban's threats against the king and citizens of the realm. The king, Edward III (1312-1377),

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<sup>25</sup> According to Alexa Sand, it is impossible to verify whether Paris is reporting factually on "this untoward event," or whether it ever happened, given that he is the only person to write about it. As well, Paris' hostility to "Innocent III's condemnable role in manipulating the equally unsteady King John into signing off on a *carta detestabilis* (most hateful charter) that submitted the English crown to papal authority in Church matters" may have coloured his perspective. Alexa K. Sand, *Vision, Devotion and Self-Representation in Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 44, <https://doi-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.1017/CBO9781139424769>.

<sup>26</sup> Phillpott, "The Compilation," 206.

<sup>27</sup> Phillpott, "The Compilation," 205.

<sup>28</sup> Phillpott, "The Compilation," 207.

asked Parliament to develop a response on behalf of the crown and members decided unanimously to reject the pope's demand.<sup>29</sup>

A superficial reading of the situation, in England and other Catholic countries in Europe, could suggest that the growing divide between Church and State was over bureaucratic and financial decision-making; the reality, however, was that under the surface the two entities were in a power struggle, clashing over who held ultimate authority—pope or king.<sup>30</sup>

### ***6.3 Challenges to Papal Supremacy***

In the centuries following Innocent's reign, papal power and influence began to dwindle. In the section that follows, I cite the Avignon Papacy and the Papal Schism (the latter resolved by the Council of Pisa), as two critical events that exemplify the strife within the Church and the related erosion of its authority.

#### *The Avignon Papacy*

The Avignon Papacy (1309-1377) exemplifies in another way the growing struggle for supremacy between religious and secular powers.<sup>31</sup> In 1309, the French pope, Clement V, moved

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<sup>29</sup> "The Pope intimated that not only should the annual tribute be resumed but all arrears be paid as well and should King Edward III of England refuse to do this he would be summoned to appear before the Pope to answer for stubborn disobedience to the Papacy." "John Wycliffe: Morning Star of the Reformation," Lineage, <https://lineagejourney.com/read/john-wycliffe-morning-star-of-the-reformation>.

<sup>30</sup> Whether coincidental or not, two seminal documents were published in 1215—the Magna Carta, which placed limits on the powers of the state (e.g., the king and his government), and the Canons of the Fourth Lateran Council, which dealt with ecclesial reform, the sacraments, and heresy. Possibly, these documents heralded the inevitable separation of Church and State as represented in each one's stance on law and reform within separate jurisdictional domains. For an analysis of the documents, see Kenneth J. Pennington, "Reform in 1215: Magna Carta and the Fourth Lateran Council," *Medieval Canon Law* 32, no. 97 (2015): 97-125, <https://scholarship.law.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1929&context=scholar>.

<sup>31</sup> This period is also called the "Babylonian Captivity," a term the Italian poet, Petrarch, used. In a treatise of 1520, Martin Luther writes, "Hence we see how angry God is with us, in that he has permitted godless teachers to conceal the words of this testament from us, and thereby, as much as in them lay, to extinguish faith. And the inevitable result of this extinguishing of faith is even now plainly to be seen – namely, the most godless superstition of works. For when faith dies and the word of faith is silent, works and the traditions of works immediately crowd into their place. By them we have been carried away out of our own land, as in a Babylonian captivity, and despoiled of all our precious possessions. This has been the fate of the mass. It has been converted by the teaching of godless men

his court from Rome to Avignon in response to accusations that he favoured and patronized high-ranking members of the French clergy. The Catholic world was shocked, and Clement's critics charged that the papacy was not divinely established and, thus, the Church was not inerrant—in other words, secular power does not derive its authority from the papacy. The notion of excluding religion from public affairs was gaining traction, with some even demanding that the papacy relinquish all claims to temporal authority.<sup>32</sup>

In Avignon, Clement was criticized for imposing taxes to pay for his luxurious lifestyle and building projects. Instead of refuting the condemnation, the papacy created bureaucracies tasked with collecting taxes, hiding or destroying incriminating records and calling in favours from benefactors.<sup>33</sup> After Clement, six more French popes ruled from Avignon until September 1376 when Pope Gregory XI (1329-1378) and his court vacated Avignon for Rome. Papal prestige and authority were repeatedly worn away during the sojourn in France, and continued with even greater ferocity with the onset of the Papal Schism (1378-1417).<sup>34</sup>

### *The Papal Schism*

The Schism occurred when two, and later three, popes claimed to be Peter's successor. In 1378, following the re-establishment of the papal court in Rome, an Italian—the papal chancellor for Pope Gregory XI—was elected Pope Urban VI (1318-1389). A contingent of French

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into a good work, which they themselves call an *opus operatum* and by which they presumptuously imagine themselves all-powerful with God. Thereupon they proceeded to the very height of madness, and having invented the lie that the mass works *ex opere operato*, they asserted further that it is none the less profitable to others, even if it be harmful to the wicked priest celebrating it. On such a foundation of sand they base their applications, participations, sodalities, anniversaries and numberless other money-making schemes." Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, A Prelude 1520, Jesus*, Robert E. Smith, Wesley R. Smith and Lucas C. Smith, eds., Project Wittenberg, 2.62, <http://www.lutherdansk.dk/web-babylonian%20captivitate/martin%20luther.htm>.

<sup>32</sup> While some critics complained about the pope's luxurious lifestyle, they did not want to abolish the papacy, but rather to "conform the church to the model of the early church." Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), 43.

<sup>33</sup> Benefactors were largely members of the French nobility and royalty. Lindberg, *Reformations*, 44.

<sup>34</sup> "Ironically, the end of the Babylonian captivity led almost immediately to the western schism." Lindberg, *Reformations*, 44.

cardinals, in fear of an Italian takeover, declared his election invalid and identified the Swiss-born Clement VII (1478-1534) as pope.<sup>35</sup>

Clement moved to Avignon, while Urban remained in Rome, leaving the bulk of Western Christians bewildered about which pope to obey. Loyalties were divided along national lines—while some countries supported Urban, others favoured Clement. Clearly, the competing claims were politically, if not theologically, motivated. The rival popes dug in for the long term with neither giving up his claim to be St. Peter’s successor: “The sorry spectacle of pope excommunicating pope, and vice-versa, would continue for nearly forty years.”<sup>36</sup>

### *The Council of Pisa*

In 1409, “cardinals, bishops, hundreds of theologians, and representatives of almost every western country” met at the Council of Pisa to resolve the schism.<sup>37</sup> Both popes, who had refused to attend, were subsequently deposed “as notorious schismatics and heretics.”<sup>38</sup> A new pope, Alexander V (1339-1410), was elected; the deposed popes refused to step down, however, so there were now three rival popes. Following Alexander’s death in 1410, John XXIII (1370-1419) held the papal office for five years until he was deposed by the Council of Constance which, ironically, he had convened in 1414 to address the schism.<sup>39</sup>

Within two years, all papal rivalries were dissolved in favour of a new pope, who took the name Martin V (1369-1431) after St. Martin on whose feast day he was elected.<sup>40</sup> Although now there was only one pope based in Rome, the schism damaged the papal office more than any

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<sup>35</sup> Francis Oakley, *The Western Church in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 71.

<sup>36</sup> Lindberg, *Reformations*, 44.

<sup>37</sup> Lindberg, *Reformations*, 48.

<sup>38</sup> Lindberg, *Reformations*, 48.

<sup>39</sup> Lindberg, *Reformations*, 49.

<sup>40</sup> The Council’s ability to depose the three popes and elect a new one was based on the concept of Conciliarism, which held that a general council of the church had greater authority than the pope. Lindberg, *Reformations*, 46.

other previous historical event. The clear days of absolute loyalty to the pope, God’s vicar on earth, were gone, and the papacy could not easily reclaim ultimate sovereignty over spiritual and temporal matters.<sup>41</sup>

#### ***6.4 The Pre-Reformation Period in England***

The English theologian, John Wycliffe, emerged in the midst of the ecclesial mayhem.<sup>42</sup> He worked to make the Bible accessible in English and promoted understanding God through Scripture. His critiques of papal authority, ecclesial corruption and Church teaching and practice led to his condemnation as a heretic. After examining Wycliffe more closely, I will then turn my attention to his followers, the Lollards, who continued Wycliffe’s reforming work and spread his teachings.

#### *John Wycliffe: “The Morning Star of the Reformation”*

Montagu Burrows writes, “To wiclif we owe, more than to any one person who can be mentioned, our English language, our English bible, and our reformed religion.”<sup>43</sup> Wycliffe laid

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<sup>41</sup> Lindberg, *Reformations*, 49.

<sup>42</sup> “John Wycliffe, Wycliffe also spelled Wycliff, Wyclif, Wicliffe, or Wiclif, (born c. 1330, Yorkshire, England—died December 31, 1384), Lutterworth, Leicestershire), English theologian, philosopher, church reformer, and promoter of the first complete translation of the Bible into English.” John Stacey, “John Wycliffe: English Theologian,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Wycliffe>. I spell the name Wycliffe in text that I wrote, and maintain the form used by others when quoting their text.

<sup>43</sup> Burrows then unpacks his claims; he writes, “It means nothing less than this:—that in Wiclif we have the acknowledged father of English prose, the first translator of the whole bible into the language of the English people, the first disseminator of that Bible amongst all classes, the foremost intellect of his times brought to bear upon the religious questions of the day, the patient and courageous writer of innumerable tracts and books, not for one, but for all the different classes of society, the sagacious originator of that whole system of ecclesiastical reformation, which in its separate parts had been faintly shadowed forth by a genius here and there, but which acquired consistency in the hands of the master. By him and by those he had trained that Reformation was so firmly planted that it took deep root in the land, and after giving the impulse to similar and later movement on the continent, issued at last in the great system under which we live[.]” Montagu Burrows, *Wiclif’s Place in History: Three Lectures Delivered Before the University of Oxford in 1881* (London: Wm. Isbister, Limited, 1882), 6-7, [https://www.google.ca/books/edition/Wiclif\\_s\\_Place\\_in\\_History/C8IEAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=Wyclif’s+Place+in+History&printsec=frontcover..](https://www.google.ca/books/edition/Wiclif_s_Place_in_History/C8IEAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=Wyclif’s+Place+in+History&printsec=frontcover..)

the groundwork for the Protestant Reformation in England.<sup>44</sup> In his lifetime, his critiques undermined the Church's attempts to restore credibility. His advocacy for the authority of Scripture, ecclesial reform and re-interpretation of the sacraments, evoked the ire of popes and prelates alike. Almost forty years after his death, he was condemned during the Council of Constance (1414-1418). Censuring Wycliffe several decades after his death indicated that the challenges to ecclesial authority had not abated and that the Church would continue to defend its teaching and tradition.

### *Ecclesial Egalitarianism*

The Reformer's concept of Church as "the congregation of all the predestined" held that God is sovereign over all creation and that righteous persons have direct and immediate contact with him.<sup>45</sup> He thus considered himself justified in seeking to limit papal power, including claims to universal authority.<sup>46</sup> Essentially, Wycliffe's view of "dominion" was that "the Roman Church ought not to hold secular or jurisdictional authority, much less civil dominion, which involved

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<sup>44</sup> In the second edition of *The Stripping of the Altars*, Eamonn Duffy has a different perspective on John Wycliffe and the Lollards: "Wycliffe has often been accorded the pious and honorific title 'morning star of the Reformation,' and historians have conventionally credited much of the early success of the Reformation to expectations and attitudes planted by a continuing tradition of Lollardy in early Tudor England. By contrast, I believe that the impact of Lollardy on fifteenth- and early sixteenth- century religious awareness has been grossly exaggerated. The mainstream of fifteenth-century piety was indeed conventionally censorious of heresy, but not in my view greatly affected, much less shaped, by reaction to it, while the overwhelming majority of early Protestant activists were converts from devout Catholicism, not from Lollardy." Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England (c. 1400 to c. 1580)*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), "Preface to the Second Edition," IV, <https://fish eaters.com/srpdf/The%20Stripping%20of%20the%20Altars%20by%20Eamon%20Duffy.pdf>.

<sup>45</sup> Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 390.

<sup>46</sup> Wycliffe had articulated these ideas in *On Divine Lordship (De dominio divino)* and *On Civil Dominion (De civili dominio)*. In summary: God, as sovereign, provides temporary loans of items (e.g., dominions—property or lands—and power) to righteous persons; therefore, authority is not connected to a function or a person, whether they be a king or a pope. Rather, God grants loans to the righteous which meant, for the church, that any cleric in a state of mortal sin must relinquish claims to ecclesiastical areas of dominion and power. Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 388.

the holding of property and the management of revenues.”<sup>47</sup> Instead, the Church should leave jurisdictional and civil authority to secular rulers.<sup>48</sup>

In his writings and sermons, Wycliffe argued that papal claims to temporal power had no biblical warrant and he appealed to the English government to reform the English Church (he had worked for the crown and claimed that the state could deprive corrupt clergy of their endowments).<sup>49</sup> Similar to Matthew Paris’ earlier critique of papal overreach in domestic affairs, Wycliffe maintained that neither the papacy nor the Church had any business interfering in matters that were rightly under the purview of the crown and lay officials. In *On Civil Dominion* (*De civili dominio*), he writes, “England belongs to no pope. The pope is but a man, subject to sin, but Christ is the Lord of Lords and this kingdom is to be held directly and solely of Christ alone.”<sup>50</sup> Accordingly, in Wycliffe’s taxonomy, secular rulers and governments are dependent on and subservient to the Kingdom of God.<sup>51</sup>

### *Wycliffe and Papal Authority*

The undignified papal manoeuvrings of the late fourteenth- and early-fifteenth centuries led Wycliffe to declare “the only earthly expression of the eternal ideas inherent in God [were] in the word of scripture.”<sup>52</sup> Having found no scriptural justification for the papacy, he questioned

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<sup>47</sup> Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 390.

<sup>48</sup> Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 390.

<sup>49</sup> Lindberg, *Reformations*, 45.

<sup>50</sup> Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 388.

<sup>51</sup> “The relation of universal to particular defines Wyclif’s conception of how God’s *dominium* causes all instances of *dominium* in creation. Divine *dominium* is ‘the standard prior to and presupposition of all other *dominium*; if a creature has *dominium* over anything, God already has *dominium* over it, so any created dominium follows upon divine *dominium*’ (*De Dominio Divino* I, ch. 3, p.16.18–22).” Stephen Lahey, “John Wyclif’s Political Philosophy,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Archive*, Spring 2014, ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/wyclif-political>.

<sup>52</sup> Jeremy Catto, “Currents of Religious Thought and Expression,” in *The New Cambridge Medieval History: Volume 5*, 57, [https://www-cambridge-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/AE4879655399E6C66BB025E93B4B23A6/9781139055741c3\\_p42-65\\_CBO.pdf/currents\\_of\\_religious\\_thought\\_and\\_expression.pdf](https://www-cambridge-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/AE4879655399E6C66BB025E93B4B23A6/9781139055741c3_p42-65_CBO.pdf/currents_of_religious_thought_and_expression.pdf).

the legitimacy of the office. In the theologian's *On the Power of the Pope (Tractus de potestate papae)* from 1379, he acknowledged the pope as the visible head of the worldly institution; if the pontiff was greedy, power-hungry, or lived ostentatiously, however, he was unfit for office. In truth, a simple believer would make a better leader.

Even more radical was his calling into question over one millennium of tradition by declaring that the papacy was a man-made institution founded by Emperor Constantine.<sup>53</sup> Ultimately, he was disputing the tradition of apostolic succession, which is to say those occupying Peter's Chair are "heretics":

But here Antecristis clerkis wole preve bi manye weyes, þat þe pope, þat is vikir of Crist and of Petir, haþ power in þis Chirche to do what he wole, siþþe Crist biheizte to Petir þat what he byndiþ in erþe schal be bounde in hevene, and so what he unbyndiþ. Ho may denye þis bileve but 3if he be an heretik?<sup>54</sup>

Rather, he saw a papacy comprised of fallible human beings who "many men trowen not ne supposen þat þei ben man of holi Chirche, but supposen þat þei ben lymes of þe fend."<sup>55</sup> In the tract, *On the Schism of the Roman Pontiffs (De pontificum romanorum schismate)*, from approximately 1382, he identifies the ecclesial hierarchy with the Antichrist:

And now in oure dayes, out of þe nest of Antecrist is come an hard maundement, and seiþ to men in sentence, þat hoso confermeþ Antecristis ordeynance in dowynge of þe Chirche, and lettþ Cristis ordynance, he is fully soylled, and wendiþ strizt to hevene wiþouten ony peyne her or in purgatorie. And ho-evere lettþ þis decre, and holdþ on Cristis side, he is deplyche cursid and pursued wiþ Antecristis clerkis.<sup>56</sup>

As for papal inerrancy, he notes the absence of any secular or ecclesial legal tool "to import any such attribute to erring man."<sup>57</sup> On this point, he observes:

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<sup>53</sup> Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 390–391.

<sup>54</sup> Arnold, *Select English Works*, 250.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas Arnold, ed., *Select English Works of John Wyclif: Volume 1, Sermons on the Gospels for Sundays and Festivals* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, M C=DCCC LXIX), 44, [https://oll-resources.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/oll3/store/titles/1473/0743-01\\_Bk.pdf](https://oll-resources.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/oll3/store/titles/1473/0743-01_Bk.pdf).

<sup>56</sup> Arnold, *Select English Works*, 246.

<sup>57</sup> Wilson, *John Wycliffe*, 5.

But here schulde þe fendis children lerne here logyk and her phylosophie, þat þei ben noȝt heretikis in falce undirstondinge of þe lawe of Crist. Soþ it is þat Crist hiȝte to Petir þis power, and to oþire apostlis, by suche manere of wordis, and to alle here successouris in persone of hem.<sup>58</sup>

The word heretic is the Church's preferred way to describe those who question its authority.

When Wycliffe calls the popes "heretikis," he is expressing his belief that Scripture, not the Church, is the ultimate authority in matters of religion and theology.

### *Proposed Reforms*

Wycliffe's faith in humanity's intrinsic dignity led him to insist that Scripture be available in the vernacular for the faithful to access in a language they could understand.<sup>59</sup> That, coupled with his desire for a more egalitarian society, could only be realized by making God's will, as revealed in Scripture, better known.<sup>60</sup> Translating the Bible into Middle English, therefore, became a central goal for Wycliffe and for those whom he inspired. As Maynard Smith explains, Wycliffe was convinced that "simple men" could understand the salient parts of the New Testament and benefit from "the words of the Gospel according to his simplicity."<sup>61</sup> In 1382 or thereabouts, Wycliffe's goal was realized when his followers translated the Bible into Middle English.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Arnold, *Select English Works*, 250.

<sup>59</sup> Stephen E. Lahey, "Wyclif (Wycliffe), John," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, 1336. As I argue in Chapter 2, "A Review of Biblical and Biblically Based Literature in English," biblical literature was accessible to lay readers centuries before Wycliffe's time. In this context, however, Wycliffe is referring to the availability of the biblical canon in the vernacular.

<sup>60</sup> H. Maynard Smith, *Pre-Reformation England* (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1963), 270.

<sup>61</sup> Smith, *Pre-Reformation England*, 271.

<sup>62</sup> "John Wycliffe Bible 1382," Textus Receptus Bibles, <https://textusreceptusbibles.com/Wycliffe>.

## *The Council of Constance*

Pope Gregory XI (1329-1378) condemned Wycliffe's radical ideas and summoned him to appear before an assembly of bishops in London. But, because the theologian was "protected by powerful figures," including John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster (d. 1399), the meeting was called off.<sup>63</sup> Wycliffe's written and verbal fulminations led to his condemnation by the Council of Constance (1414-1418) and by synods of the English Church.<sup>64</sup> The Council's Session 8, which took place on 4 May 1415, condemned forty-five of Wycliffe's propositions, including his views on transubstantiation as well as his writings (books, treatises, works and pamphlets). It reads as follows:

This holy synod, therefore, in the name of our lord Jesus Christ, in ratifying and approving the sentences of the aforesaid archbishops and of the council of Rome, repudiates and condemns for ever, by this decree, the aforesaid articles and each one of them in particular, and the books of John Wyclif called by him *Dialogus* and *Trialogus*, and the same author's other books, volumes, treatises and pamphlets (no matter what name these may go under, and for which purpose this description is to be regarded as an adequate listing of them). It forbids the reading, teaching, expounding and citing of the said books or of any one of them in particular, unless this is done, as has been said, for the purpose of refuting them. It orders, moreover, that the aforesaid books, treatises, volumes and pamphlets are to be burnt in public, in accordance with the decree of the synod of Rome, as stated above.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 388-389.

<sup>64</sup> Lindberg, *Reformations*, 45.

<sup>65</sup> *Propterea in nomine domini nostri Iesu Christi haec sancta synodus sententias praedictorum archiepiscoporum ac concilii Romani ratificans et approbans, praedictos articulos et eorum quemlibet, libros eiusdem Dialogum et Trialogum per eundem Iohannem Wicleff nominatos, et alios eiusdem auctoris libros, volumina, tractatus et opuscula, quocumque nomine censeantur, quos hic haberi vult pro sufficienter expressis, hoc perpetuo decreto reprobatur et condemnat, eorumdem librorum et cuiuslibet ipsorum lectionem, doctrinam, expositionem et allegationem, nisi ad eorum reprobationem, omnibus Christi fidelibus prohibendo : inhibens omnibus et singulis catholicis sub anathematis interminatione, ni de cetero dictos articulos, aut ipsorum aliquem audeat publice praedicare, dogmatizare vel tenere, sive libros ipsos docere, approbare et tenere, vel quomodolibet, nisi ad eorum reprobationem, ut dictum est, allegare : iubens illos libros et tractatus, volumina et opuscula praelibata publice concremari, prout decretum fuerat in synodo Romana, sicut superius est expressum.* Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Volume 1: Nicaea I to Lateran V*, trans. Jesuits of the British Isles (Georgetown: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 414-415.

The Council pronounced the then-deceased Wycliffe as a heretic, condemned his memory and exhumed and burned his bones.<sup>66</sup> Still, Wycliffe's followers, the Lollards, ensured that the Reform movement continued forward.

### ***6.5 Holy Images and the Eucharist***

According to Patrick Hornbeck, between 1381 and 1521, 236 persons were charged with heresy related to eucharistic heterodoxy, which made “the sacrament of the altar numerically the most contested theological concept of the period.” Differing opinions against the use of holy images came second, with approximately 220 appearances before ecclesiastical courts.<sup>67</sup>

I will now explore the controversies in pre-Reformation England about the aforesaid traditional practices. I also include Reformers' writings that criticize these practices. This discussion is the background for my later presentation of the *ME Bible* as a defense of holy images and the Eucharist which, I will argue, point to a fundamental Christian doctrine, the Incarnation.

#### ***6.5.1 Reformers and Holy Images***

Even before reform-minded Christians challenged ecclesial practices and traditions, venerating holy images was controversial. In eighth-century Byzantium, for example, disputes over the use of images erupted into violence. And when the issue resurfaced in pre-Reformation England, idolatry, or giving precedence to things over God, was the main objection.<sup>68</sup> While

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<sup>66</sup> Arabella Milbank, “Wyclif,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. Andrew Louth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), <https://www-oxfordreference-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780199642465.001.0001/acref-9780199642465-e-7836>.

<sup>67</sup> J. Patrick Hornbeck, *What is a Lollard? Dissent and Belief in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 68.

<sup>68</sup> In his treatise on the Ten Commandments, *De mandatis divinis* Wycliffe interpreted the first and second commandments—prohibitions against worshiping false gods and idols—as applying first, to the ancient Jews who

idolatry could be a concern, Wycliffe and those who followed him also believed that the human person, made in God's image (*imago Dei*), was more worthy of veneration than were holy images.

Even so, Margaret Aston notes, Wycliffe "did not deny the value and legitimacy of images and endorsed the traditional medieval view of them as books for laypeople."<sup>69</sup> In what Aston views as his moderate and pragmatic estimate, images could be used for religious instruction and inspiration. To mitigate the possibility of idolatry, however, Wycliffe recommended that knowledgeable priests instruct the laity in the proper veneration of images; and the Lollards asserted "the pedagogical superiority of preaching and reading to the purely visual form of instruction represented by images."<sup>70</sup>

Nonetheless, Wycliffe included the following important caveat: any Christian who venerated an image in and of itself was ignorant and superstitious and, therefore, guilty of idolatry.<sup>71</sup> In contrast to the human person, as made in God's image, images were man-made or manufactured. Hence, we honour God by treating our fellow humans with dignity, respect and compassion. In a tract attributed to Wycliffe, we read:

If we wil verreyly worship Goddis ymage, doing wel to a man, honor þe very ymage of God in him. In ilk man forsop is þe vmage of God, but þe similitud of God is not in alle, but were þe sowle is beninge, and to mynd pure. Þerfor if ze wil verily worschip þe ymage of God, we opun to zow þis þat is verrey, þat ze do wel to a man þat is maad to þe ymage of God, and zeue him honor and reuerens; zeuit meyt to þe hungry, drink to þe þristy, cloþis to þe nakid, minstring to þe meek, herbarow to þe straunger, and necessarijs to þe prisouner.<sup>72</sup>

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were prone to idolatry, and second, because God had not yet assumed human form in the Incarnation, thereby sanctifying human form. Jones, "Lollards and Images" 29.

<sup>69</sup> Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, 140.

<sup>70</sup> Jones, "Lollards and Images," 36.

<sup>71</sup> "When properly used to excite the religious affections and raise the mind of the worshiper to God, they were acceptable and good. When the dead image was itself the object of veneration, however, the Christian was guilty of the pagan sin of *idolatria*." Jones, "Lollards and Images," 30.

<sup>72</sup> James Henthorn Todd, ed., *An Apology for Lollard Doctrines, Attributed to Wicliffe. Now first printed from a manuscript in the library of Trinity College, Dublin. With an introduction and notes by James Henthorn Todd.*

By virtue of being in God's image, every human being deserves to be treated with care and dignity, no matter how much the image has been distorted by sin, poverty or illness.

Then, the author further refines the argument by referring to the Decalogue:

Wat honor of God is þis, to ren a bout bi tre, and stone, and formis, and honor as God veyn figeris, and wiþ out soule, and despice man, in wam is verily be ymage of God. But and beþ certeyn, þat if ani do mansleing [murder], spowsbrekyng [adultery], or ani þing of wrong to man, in þis þing þe ymige of God is sylid [tainted or befouled].<sup>73</sup>

Persons dishonour God by venerating images of wood and stone “wiþ out soule” when what is required is to honour God by honouring “man, in wam is verily be ymage of God.”<sup>74</sup>

Furthermore, the text insists, worshipping inanimate images is equal to murder (“mansleing”) and adultery (“spowsbrekyng”).

Lollards were harsher in condemning image worship than was Wycliffe.<sup>75</sup> Images were “blynde stockys” and “dede stonys” with no efficacy or ability; their inanimate nature made them unworthy of devotion.<sup>76</sup> Such soulless artifacts deserved no more adoration than a piece of wood or a stone. While some Lollards conceded that images might have an educational function as “signs and tokens,” the main concern was they were inanimate objects. Only God can grant the gift of life; therefore, “attributing life to anything made by human beings defined the essence and evil of idolatry.”<sup>77</sup> They also associated images with pilgrimages and the cult of the saints, both devotional practices which they opposed.<sup>78</sup>

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(London: John Bowyer Nicols and Son, 1842), 88–89, <https://archive-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/details/anapologyforloll00wycluft/page/n5/mode/2up>.

<sup>73</sup> Todd, *An Apology*, 89.

<sup>74</sup> Todd, *An Apology*, 89.

<sup>75</sup> “A literal reading of the Decalogue provided the Lollards with a compelling weapon against the adoration of graven and painted images, and they seized upon it.” Jones, “Lollards and Images,” 32.

<sup>76</sup> Jones, “Lollards and Images,” 33.

<sup>77</sup> “Images have neither the miraculous powers of God, nor the sovereignty of a king, nor the ability to perform the simple acts of charity that any human being can do.” Kathleen Kameron, *Popular Piety and Art in the Late Middle Ages*, *The New Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 23–24.

<sup>78</sup> The debate over religious images could be and often was associated with other doctrinal and liturgical matters, such as pilgrimages and the cult of the saints[.] W.R. Jones, “Lollards and Images: The Defense of Religious Art in

Instead, they called for image veneration to be replaced by devotion and aid to “fellow human beings . . . truly created in God’s image.”<sup>79</sup> The certainty that man was the true image of God, led the Lollards to assert that the most appropriate form of worship was “alms-giving and other socially beneficial works of charity.”<sup>80</sup> They urged people to redirect their devotion and funds to the “quick” or living images of God—their fellow human beings.<sup>81</sup> Unlike manufactured statues and paintings, the poor were truly created in God’s image—hence, money and gifts lavished on images should instead be redirected to poor relief.<sup>82</sup>

One Lollard tract repudiating images and pilgrimages contrasts the “deade ymagis” and “dede stones and rotun stokkis” to the “quicke ymagis of God þat ben pore folc.” The writer excoriates those “lewid fold” who believe that images perform miracles or are the saints themselves.<sup>83</sup> A later Wycliffe-inspired text, *Wycklyffes Wycket*, asserts that even lavish and costly images are ineffective: “And agayne he sayethe ye shall not thynke that God lyuyng is not lyke to golde, syluer, ether any grauen thyng, or paynted by crafte, eyther aught of man, for God despisethe the tyme of the vnknowen thynges.”<sup>84</sup> That is to say, the monies spent on gold, silver and paint would be better spent on the poor.

In 1395, the Lollards articulated a comprehensive statement of their positions—the *Twelve Conclusions*—on the Eucharist, confession, clerical responsibilities, religious orders,

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Later Medieval England,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 34, no. 1 (1973): 31, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2708942>.

<sup>79</sup> Kamerick, *Popular Piety*, 25.

<sup>80</sup> Jones, “Lollards and Images,” 36.

<sup>81</sup> “The superficiality of conventional acts of devotion produced, it was said, both error and waste: ‘riche men clothen dede stockis & stonys with precious clothis, with gold & silver & perlis & gaynesse to the world & suffren pore men goo sore a cold & at moche meschefe.’” Jones, “Lollards and Images,” 36.

<sup>82</sup> Kamerick, *Popular Piety*, 25.

<sup>83</sup> Kamerick, *Popular Piety*, 24.

<sup>84</sup> William Tracie, ed., *Wycklyffes Wycket Whyche He made in Kyng Rycards Daye the Second in the Yere of our Lorde God M. CCCC V*, <https://www.proquest.com/books/wycklyffes-wycket-whyche-he-made-kyng-rycards/docview/2240897336/se-2>.

images and pilgrimages. During the parliamentary session of that year, they posted the *Twelve Conclusions* on the doors of Westminster Hall, St Paul's Cathedral and, possibly, Westminster Abbey. Most probably, they were not presented in Parliament; however, “they were seen by contemporaries, particularly since they were posted in English, as an attempt to arouse the support of those attending and of the populace.”<sup>85</sup>

Regarding holy images, *Conclusion Eight* states:

þe viii. conclusion nedful to telle to þe puple be gvlid is þe pilgrimage, preyeris, and offringis made to blynde rodys and to dede ymages of tre and of ston, ben ner of kin to ydolatrie and fer fro almesse dede. And þow þis forbodin ymagerie be a bok of errour to þe lewid puple, zet þe ymage usuel of Trinite is most abhominable. Þis conclusion God opinly schewith, comanding to don almesse dede to men þat ben nedy, for þei ben þe ymage of God in a more liknesse þan þie stok or þe ston, for God seyth nout, *Faciamus lignum ad ymaginem et similitudinem nostrum aut lapidem*, but *faciamus hominem* etc. For þe heye worchipe þat clerkis clepin *latria* longith to þe godhead alone, and þe lowere worchipe þat is clepid *dulia* longith to man and to aungel and to lowere creatures.<sup>86</sup>

The *Eighth Conclusion* criticizes the “doctrinal and liturgical” practices associated with images.<sup>87</sup> The reference to the “bok of errour to þe lewid puple” challenges the Church’s common rationale—the *libri laicorum*—for defending images.<sup>88</sup> Of all the images, “þe ymage usuel of Trinite is most abhominable” because, the Reformers asserted, it tricked people into “thinking of the Father as an old man and the Holy Spirit as a bird.”<sup>89</sup>

The text reiterates the belief that the poor are closer to God’s likeness than are images of stick or stone, because God said he made man, not wood and stone, to his image and likeness.

W.R. Jones assesses this “rhetorical juxtaposition of humanity and the physical objects of

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<sup>85</sup> Anne Hudson, “Dymoke [Dymock], Roger (fl. 1370-c. 1400), prior of Boston and theologian,” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, September 2004, <https://www-oxforddnb-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca>.

<sup>86</sup> Harry S. Cronin, “The Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards,” *The English Historical Review* 22, no. 86 (April 1907): 300, <https://www-jstor-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/stable/550569>.

<sup>87</sup> Jones, “Lollards and Images,” 31.

<sup>88</sup> Pope Gregory I is said to have equated images as books for illiterate people with books for literate people (*liber erroris populo laicali*). Kamerick, *Popular Piety*, 21.

<sup>89</sup> Kamerick, *Popular Piety*, 34.

worship,” as expressing the Lollards’ “explicitly humanitarian standards of Christian piety based on humanity’s being in God’s image.”<sup>90</sup> The references to *latria* and *dulia* refer to Thomas Aquinas’ classifications of the different types of worship.<sup>91</sup> Here, Lollards distinguish between *latria* (worship appropriate to God alone) and *dulia* (reverence allowed to others).<sup>92</sup>

### 6.5.2 Reformers and the Eucharist: The Real Presence and “Transubstantiation”

The “Real Presence” is a theological term that refers to Christ’s actual presence in the Eucharist; “transubstantiation” is a philosophical term that expresses an understanding of *how* that reality occurs, via the change in substance without a corresponding change in accidents. Transubstantiation was declared a dogma of the Roman Catholic Church at the Fourth Lateran Council.<sup>93</sup>

Miri Rubin describes it thusly: “At the centre of the whole religious system of the later Middle Ages lay a ritual which turned bread into flesh—a fragile, small, wheaten disc into God.”<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, she notes, denouncing holy images permeated many of the critiques about the Eucharist in pre-Reformation England.<sup>95</sup> Reformers also reiterated their criticisms of images in rebuttals of eucharistic theology. For example, both were non-biblical, idolatrous and valued

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<sup>90</sup> Jones, “Lollards and Images,” 35.

<sup>91</sup> In *Summa theologica*, Aquinas listed three varieties of devotion: *latria* (III, q. 25, a. 3-4), *dulia* (II-II, q. 103, a. 1-3, and *hyperdulia* (II-II, q. 103, a. 4). *Latria*, the highest form of devotion, is reserved for Christ and the cross, while the human Jesus and the saints are due lesser degrees of veneration (*hyperdulia* and *dulia* respectively). Jones, “Lollards and Images,” 44.

<sup>92</sup> For the interpretations of *latria* and *dulia* in pre-Reformation England, see Kamerick, *Popular Piety*, 32-34.

<sup>93</sup> “Transubstantiation,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, ed. Daniel Patte (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1244.

<sup>94</sup> Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1.

<sup>95</sup> “Criticism of images informed many of the dissenting views about the eucharist, and it achieved perhaps the most articulate and clear formulations in Wycliffite and Lollard positions.” Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 324.

specific religious practices at the expense of “the image of God that exists in all human persons, especially the material poor.”<sup>96</sup>

Reformers specifically targeted transubstantiation and the Real Presence.<sup>97</sup> Notably, early in Wycliffe’s career (prior to 1391), he did not oppose the doctrine and had even taught it to his students at Oxford.<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, his studies of metaphysics led to skepticism about transubstantiation’s doctrinal validity.<sup>99</sup> Wycliffe contended that transubstantiation was a recent addition to canon law and, therefore, was neither based in Scripture nor referenced in the creeds; rather, it was a “modern invention.”<sup>100</sup> This “modern invention” was not benign; rather, it was dangerous in that it fostered idolatry.<sup>101</sup> Consequently, in Wycliffe’s estimate, transubstantiation was the Catholic Church’s most “heretical infection”—it was cunning, hypocritical, deceptive and turned the faithful into idolators.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Patrick Hornbeck, Mishtooni Bose and Fiona Somerset, eds. *A Companion to Lollardy*, Brill’s Companions to the Christian Tradition, vol. 67 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 74.

<sup>97</sup> “According to the eucharistic doctrine of transubstantiation, when the priest consecrates the bread and wine, the whole substance of the bread and wine are converted into the body and blood of Christ. The ‘accidents’ of bread and wine, however, remain present on the altar.” Patrick Toner, “Transubstantiation, Essentialism, and Substance,” *Religious Studies* 47, no. 2 (June 2011): 217, [https://www.jstor.org/stable/23013382?searchText=&searchUri=&ab\\_segments=&searchKey=&refreqid=fastly-default%3A91d58a9c870264c2a1ab2acef15d568b&initiator=recommender](https://www.jstor.org/stable/23013382?searchText=&searchUri=&ab_segments=&searchKey=&refreqid=fastly-default%3A91d58a9c870264c2a1ab2acef15d568b&initiator=recommender) doi:10.1057/ajp.2008.22.

<sup>98</sup> Johann Loserth, ed., *Iohannis Wyclif De eucharistia tractatus maior* (London: Trübner and Company, 1892), 4, [https://lollardsociety.org/pdfs/Wyclif\\_de\\_Eucharistia.pdf](https://lollardsociety.org/pdfs/Wyclif_de_Eucharistia.pdf).

<sup>99</sup> “Wyclif’s reasons for rejecting contemporary doctrines of the Eucharist, for rejecting the doctrine of transubstantiation and the belief in Christ’s bodily presence beneath the appearance of bread, are both complex and manifold. No doubt the particularities and peculiarities of his own metaphysics had conspired to make him think that the whole idea was nonsensical. His reading of scripture and the Church Fathers had convinced him that the notion of bodily presence was a new and misguided idea developed in 1059, in the aftermath of an earlier round of eucharistic controversy. Even the nature of eucharistic adoration throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the growing desire to see the host during mass and the popularity of Corpus Christi festivals and processions may have played a part in convincing him that the religious beliefs and practices of his fellow Christians had gone seriously off-track.” Dallas G. Denery, “From Sacred Mystery to Divine Deception: Robert Holkot, John Wyclif and the Transformation of Fourteenth-Century eucharistic Discourse,” *Journal of Religious History* 29, no. 2 (2005): 132.

<sup>100</sup> *Sed tercio principaliter replicatur per hoc quod novella ecclesia ponit transsubstanciacionem panis et vini in corpus Christi etsanguinem; hoc autem non posuit ecclesia primitiva, ergo in sententia contradicunt.* Loserth, *De eucharistia*, 47.

<sup>101</sup> *Ulterius quoad ydolatriam patet quod populus est instruendus ne credat illud accidentatum quod sentit esse ydemptice corpus Christi.* Loserth, *De eucharistia*, 53.

<sup>102</sup> Loserth, *De eucharistia*, 3.

Critics saw idolatry too in the faithful's response to the sight of the Host elevated during the Mass and *Corpus Christi* processions.<sup>103</sup> In consequence, Wycliffe denounced the public adoration of the Host and averred that God's body can only be received through faith.<sup>104</sup> He required that transubstantiation "conform to the demands of the senses and reason." In other words, if the consecrated Host looks like bread, then it must be bread. In *De eucharistia* (c. 1379-1381), he writes, "Nor is the fiction of the transubstantiation or conversion of the bread into the body of Christ valid, since the body of Christ receives neither material nor substantial or accidental form from the corrupted bread."<sup>105</sup>

Wycliffe's animosity was an offshoot of his critique of the Church in that transubstantiation reinforced ecclesial authority—only an ordained cleric could "transform" the bread and wine—and debased the notion of the *imago Dei*. The idea that "a priest could 'make God' appeared blasphemous to Wyclif . . . first, because it ascribes to the priest an unnatural power by which a creature gives being to his Creator, it is degrading to God to say that he can be created every day and the Holy Sacrament is profaned when the Host is worshipped. Idolatry takes place when the Host is not only worshipped, but openly adored."<sup>106</sup>

Wycliffe's understanding was that Christ is truly present in the Eucharist, but symbolically, not physically; it was impossible for him to be present in the flesh or in any material sense.<sup>107</sup> He proposed replacing transubstantiation with remanence, which "minimized

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<sup>103</sup> "The host itself was there for all to see, transformed by the priest's words, elevated at the moment of consecration, accompanied by wafts of incense and the ringing of bells, all working together to proclaim the truth of faith and of a divinely instituted order." Denery, "From Sacred Mystery to Divine Deception," 135. <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1467-9809.2005.00296>.

<sup>104</sup> [A]nime ex fructuosa fide secundum quam nutritur spirital noster in in Domino. Loserth, *De eucharistia*, 17.

<sup>105</sup> *Nec valet ficticia de transsubstanciacione vel conversione panis in corpus Christi, cum corpus Christi nec accipit materiam nec formam substancialem vel accidentalem a pane corrupto.* Loserth, *De eucharistia*, 55.

<sup>106</sup> Loserth, *De eucharistia*, 6.

<sup>107</sup> Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 391.

the difference between human and sacramental being.”<sup>108</sup> Remanence held that in the celebration of the Eucharist, the bread and wine “are not transubstantiated in the sense that they lose their own substance for another; instead they receive a new spiritual import, making them the signs for Christ’s sacramental presence.”<sup>109</sup> Wycliffe’s principle therefore repudiated the eucharistic doctrine, whereby the bread and wine are transubstantiated into Christ’s flesh and blood.

Up to this point, Wycliffe had avoided being punished for his unorthodox opinions, because he was protected by secular rulers who, in many ways, supported him. Even so, Madigan concludes, any good will that Wycliffe had garnered evaporated because of his views on the nature of the Eucharist.<sup>110</sup> In 1381, his controversial views on the sacrament of the altar finally forced the theologian to leave the University of Oxford.<sup>111</sup>

Most Lollards were skeptical that transubstantiation occurred during the eucharistic celebration.<sup>112</sup> Rather, they alleged that the notion of transubstantiation led to idolatry because it deceived people into adoring the communion wafer—a mere piece of bread in their understanding.<sup>113</sup> And, like Wycliffe, Lollards agreed that man was a more suitable representative of God than either the Eucharist or holy images.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Hornbeck, *What is a Lollard?* 73.

<sup>109</sup> Gordon Leff, “Ockham and Wyclif on the Eucharist,” *Reading Medieval Studies* (1976), 2:8, [https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/84233/1/RMS-1976-01\\_G\\_Leff%2C\\_Ockham\\_and\\_Wyclif\\_on\\_the\\_eucharist.pdf](https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/84233/1/RMS-1976-01_G_Leff%2C_Ockham_and_Wyclif_on_the_eucharist.pdf).

<sup>110</sup> “As daring as all of Wyclif’s teaching had been, his views on the Eucharist were the ones that would eventually bring him misery in the form of an episcopal inquest. The also cost him the support of the friars, the court party, and his main sympathizers at the University of Oxford.” Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 291.

<sup>111</sup> Hornbeck, *What is a Lollard?* 68.

<sup>112</sup> Hornbeck acknowledges that “most of those who followed in Wyclif’s footsteps [rejected transubstantiation].” At the same time, however, he lists “the diverse range of eucharistic theologies that Lollards articulated,” including “that in the eucharistic elements there are both bread and Christ’s body and wine and Christ’s blood” and “the few sermons that “teach that the eucharist is Christ’s body in only a figurative sense.” Hornbeck et al., *Companion to Lollardy*, 123. John Thomson concurs: “[The Lollards] did not reject the [Eucharist] completely. Some at any rate of the more articulate heretics had an alternative view of it, as a commemoration service with the host as a figure of Christ’s body.” *John A.F. Thomson, The Later Lollards 1414–1520* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 246–247.

<sup>113</sup> Since the eighth century, the Latin rite has used unleavened bread in its communion wafers. Johannes H Emminghaus, *The Eucharist: Essence, Form, Celebration*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1997), 162.

<sup>114</sup> Jones, “Lollards and Images,” 35.

An anonymous Lollard work from the late fourteenth-century, *Jack Upland*, chastises clerics for believing in transubstantiation:

Frere, whi sclandre ye trewe preestis [i.e., Lollards] and othere trewe meke men of the sacrament of Goddis bodi, for thei seien that the holi breed duli sacrid is Goddis bodi in foorme of breed, and ye seien that it is an accident with-uten subject, and not Goddis bodi.<sup>115</sup>

In the passage, the author describes transubstantiation as an “accident with-uten subject,” which was the main argument against the doctrine.<sup>116</sup> Simply put, it is impossible for the priest’s words of consecration to transform the material into Christ’s sacred body—therefore, bread remains bread.<sup>117</sup> Aston sees the clerical role diminished because “no priest has power to make God’s body in the sacrament of the altar.”<sup>118</sup>

The Wycliffe-inspired text, *Wycklyffes Wycket*, describes transubstantiation as “of al they make vs beleue a false law that they haue made vpon the secret hooste, for the most falsest belef is taughte in it. For where fynde ye that euer Christ or any of hys disciples or apostels taught any man to worshype it.”<sup>119</sup> The anonymous author asserts that a priest cannot claim to make God:

Now answerest thou that saiest euery day that thou makest of bread the bodye of the lorde fleshe & bloud of Iesu Christ god and mā. Forsoth thou answerest greatly agaīst reason by these wordes that Christe spake at hys supper on Serethursday at night that Christ toke bread & blessed it & brake it & gaue it to his disciples & apostles, & said, take ye, and eate ye, this is my bodi which shalbe geuē for you And also he takīg the cuppe & did thākes, & gaue to thē & saide. drinke ye al hereof, thys is my blod of the newe testamēt whiche shalbe shede oute for many into the remissiō of synnes, as saythe Luke. whan

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<sup>115</sup> James M. Dean, ed., “Jack Upland,” in *Six Ecclesiastical Satires* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1991), ll. 320-323. <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/dean-six-ecclesiastical-satires-jack-upland>.

<sup>116</sup> “‘Accidents’ were not thought to have any reality in themselves, but were thought to be inherent qualities of ‘substances’, based in subjects in such a way that the mind, by perceiving the accidents, could intuitively know the presence of the underlying subject. In the case of a consecrated host, however these accidents could not be inherent in the substance of Christ’s body, unless people were prepared to say that Christ was small, round, and white. As they were not inherent in the bread (which had been transformed into Christ’s body), the accidents were left hanging. And this was impossible according to the Aristotelian physics which provided the terms of the discussion.” Richard Rex, *The Lollards, Social History in Perspective* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 44.

<sup>117</sup> Many Lollards “are not recorded as holding any views on the subject beyond the basic rational one that material bread remained even after the words of consecration[.]” Thomson, *The Later Lollards*, 246.

<sup>118</sup> Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, 61.

<sup>119</sup> Tracie, *Wycklyffes Wycket*.

Iesu had takē bread, he gaue thākes and brake it to them & sayde, take ye, eate ye, thys is my bodye that shalbe geuen for you do ye thys in the remembrance of me.<sup>120</sup>

For the author, transubstantiation “does not effect Christ's presence at all, nor was it ever intended to; it instead calls to mind Christ's earthly ministry and passion and inspires its recipients to perform deeds of charity.”<sup>121</sup>

The *Fourth Conclusion* also considers transubstantiation damaging:

þe ferthe conclusiun pat most harmith le innocent puple is þis, þat þe feynid miracle of þe sacrament of bred inducith alle men but a fewe to ydolatrie, for þei wene pat Godis bodi þat neuere schal out of heuene be uertu of þe prestis wordis schulde ben closid essenciali in a litil bred, þat þei schewe to þe puple. But wolde God þat þei wolde beleue þat þe doctour euangelicus seyth in his *Trialoge, quod panis materialis est habitualiter corpus Christi*. For we suppose þat on þis wise may euery trewe man and womman in Godis lawe make þe sacrament of þe bred with outin oni sich miracle.<sup>122</sup>

Here, the author describes transubstantiation as “þe feynid miracle of þe sacrament of bred” which tricks the laity into adoring the “litil bred,” elevated during the Mass. Referring to the *Doctor evangelicus*, the author then quotes from Wycliffe’s treatise, *Trialogus*, which argues against transubstantiation and reiterates the view that Christ’s body is present spiritually, not bodily, in the Eucharist. Furthermore, the text implies that “euery trewe man and womman in Godis lawe” (i.e., every faithful Christian) “could make the body of Christ in the sacrament.”<sup>123</sup>

Rejecting the holiness and efficacy of physical artifacts (e.g., holy images and the eucharistic bread), Wycliffe and his followers characterized man, made in God’s image, as a more suitable object of devotion.<sup>124</sup> Such devotion included what today one might call “social justice.” Reformers looked to society’s needy and disenfranchised and exhorted the Church to respond with mercy and justice. Hornbeck observes that Lollard tracts encouraged all community

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<sup>120</sup> Tracie, *Wycklyffes Wycket*.

<sup>121</sup> Hornbeck et al., *Companion to Lollardy*, 123.

<sup>122</sup> Cronin, “The Twelve Conclusions,” 297.

<sup>123</sup> Cronin, *Twelve Conclusions*, 297.

<sup>124</sup> Jones, “Lollards and Images,” 35.

members to denounce injustice, “even when to do so is to invite opposition and persecution,” and that injustice was “a sin in itself.”<sup>125</sup>

## ***6.6 Tradition versus Innovation***

Understanding the historical context of the *ME Bible* is central to extracting its theological meaning. These arguments and events I have described underlie the disenchantment felt by Reformers toward Church authority, including its hierarchy, teaching and tradition. Early on, heretical groups like the Cathars, who openly challenged ecclesial authority, were suppressed; discontent, however, did not abate. Pope Innocent III’s perceived papal overreach and the Avignon Papacy were two factors that further eroded the faithful’s confidence. The resistance to Innocent’s efforts to insert himself into the changing landscape of English politics was a harbinger of later, and more serious, responses.

Around a century before the *ME Bible* appeared, John Wycliffe and his followers advocated for limiting papal power, and even questioned the necessity of the office. Reformers also considered traditions, especially those concerning image veneration and the cult of the Eucharist, as idolatrous. Instead, they advocated for treating fellow human beings with dignity and respect instead of paying homage to what they considered dead images of wood and stone and morsels of bread. They perceived that Church-sanctioned teaching and tradition encouraged idolatry and eroded the image of God, the *imago Dei*, which gives every person dignity and value.

Against the religious and theological *status quo*, Wycliffe and his followers were prescient: their spirit of religious inquiry prepared the way for later Protestant Reform

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<sup>125</sup> Hornby, *A Companion*, 72–73.

movements and religious freedom. They envisioned a future based on the authority of Scripture, not the authority of the pope or the Church. In contrast, the Church continued to operate as it had for centuries—in other words, as if it was still the most powerful entity in the Christian world.

In the next chapter, I examine selected texts by John Mirk, Roger Dymmok and Nicholas Love, which were written decades before the *ME Bible* appeared. These works respond explicitly to Reformers' critiques of practices related to holy images and the cult of the Eucharist, the two flashpoints in pre-Reformation England

## Chapter 7

### Three Clerics Defend Holy Images and the Eucharist

#### *7.1 Traditional Responses to Critiques*

In the previous chapter, I explored the controversies around holy images and the cult of the Eucharist in pre-Reformation England. I looked at writings by John Wycliffe and his followers that criticized the use of holy images as idolatry and rejected the cult of the Eucharist, especially transubstantiation. That analysis is important because it forms the background theological context in which the *ME Bible* appears, and is thus read and understood.

In this chapter, I study writings by John Mirk, Roger Dymmok and Nicholas Love. These three clerics respond to criticisms of images and the cult of the Eucharist and link their arguments to the question of the Incarnation. The works date from the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries, when the English Reformation was gaining traction, and provide insight into then-contemporary theological and religious debates. These texts are important for the present study because they are connected to the *ME Bible* through a shared goal: to uphold the theology of the Incarnation, as defined by the Church, and its implications for holy images and the Eucharist.<sup>1</sup> I will examine individually the aforementioned texts, and then identify their common arguments.

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<sup>1</sup> In Chapter 8, *Unveiling the Incarnation*, I discuss the ways in which the *ME Bible*'s organizing logic points to a view of the Incarnation and its historical relevance.

First, however, I will examine sanctions designed to counter the Lollards' heretical assertions. In the rest of the chapter, I will consider Mirk's *Festial* (the homilies for Trinity Sunday and *Corpus Christi*), selections from Dymmok's response to *The Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards* (Conclusions Four and Eight) and relevant sections of Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*.<sup>2</sup> As well, and as appropriate, I make connections between the aforementioned writings and *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois (ME Bible)*.

## 7.2 Secular and Ecclesial Sanctions

Beginning in the third quarter of the fourteenth century, Rome began to pressure the ecclesiastical hierarchy in England to address the Lollard heresy. Letters from the pope to all Catholic bishops warned that not only the Church, but the entire social structure, were imperilled by heretical teachings.<sup>3</sup> For the thirty or so years between 1382, when Reformers disseminated their translations of the Vulgate, and 1415, when the Council of Constance condemned John Wycliffe, there were several significant ecclesial and secular condemnations of Wycliffe and his writings. These censures were part of a broader program, which included rebuttals like those I describe below, to address heresy.

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<sup>2</sup> I use the following primary texts in this chapter: Theodor Erbe, ed., *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies by John Mirk* (London: Trench, Trübner & Co.), Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/mirksfestialcoll01mirkuoft/page/164/mode/2up>; Harry S. Cronin, "The Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards," *The English Historical Review* 22, no. 86 (April 1907): 297, <https://www-jstor-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/stable/550569>; and Michael G. Sargent, ed., *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*: As indicated in Chapter 2, Biblical and Biblically-Based Literature in the Vernacular: From Anglo-Saxon to Middle English, Sargent divided his edition into an introductory essay (pages 1-163) and Love's text (pages 1-240). To differentiate between the two, I cite Sargent's essay as follows: Sargent, "Introduction" page; I cite Love's text as follows: Love, *Mirror*, page, line(s).

<sup>3</sup> "There can be no doubt, from the views expressed on both sides of the matter, as to whether contemporaries were aware of the social and political implications of Wycliffe's teaching. From the first admonitory papal missive there appeared in official documents a number of solemn warnings that it was the whole of society, and not the church alone, whose position was at stake." Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion*, History Series 22 (London: The Hambleton Press, 1984), 2.

### *Blackfriars Council*

In 1382, the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Courtenay, a supporter of papal authority, convened a clerical assembly at the Blackfriars (or Dominican) house in London to condemn Wycliffe and his followers as heretics.<sup>4</sup> The Council denounced Wycliffe's teachings and writings, and Courtenay "pursued a massive publicity campaign" to ensure the "siren condemnation of Wycliffite heresy" was posted on every church door within the bishopric.<sup>5</sup>

The Council's importance for my claims in this chapter is that the condemned heretics were identified as "Lollards" even though in 1382 few, if any, people actually knew what the appellation meant.<sup>6</sup> Still, the term was used so often in "legal, literary, and chronicle discourse" that it became singularly associated with the Wycliffites.<sup>7</sup> In keeping with this association, Mirk, Dymmok and Love also use the term Lollards, with the expectation that readers would know to whom the moniker referred.

### *De heretico comburendo*

Publishing ecclesial pronouncements, like those emanating from Blackfriars Council, is not the same as implementing them—"enactment is not enforcement."<sup>8</sup> Almost twenty years later, it was obvious that the situation had changed. In 1401, Parliament enacted the statute *De heretico comburendo* (*On Burning Heretics*), which Margaret Aston describes as "the death penalty for relapsed and impenitent heretics."<sup>9</sup> Delivered before Parliament, the law refers to the

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew Mills, "Courtenay, William," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. Andrew Louth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), <https://www-oxfordreference-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780199642465.001.0001/acref-9780199642465-e-1838>.

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Cole, *Literature and Heresy in the Age of Chaucer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 25, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ottawa/detail.action?docID=355468#>.

<sup>6</sup> Cole, *Literature and Heresy*, 46.

<sup>7</sup> Cole, *Literature and Heresy*, 46.

<sup>8</sup> Cole, *Literature and Heresy*, 4.

<sup>9</sup> Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, 41.

Lollard movement as deceitful usurpers who espouse “new doctrines and nefarious heretical and erroneous opinions.”<sup>10</sup> The statute forbade unlicensed preaching, teaching or doctrines contrary to ecclesial teachings, in addition to heretical conventicles, confederacies or schools. The ecclesial courts had authority to imprison and fine heretics for refusing to recant their beliefs and opinions. The unrepentant included the Wycliffite priest, William Sawtre, and the layman, John Badby, who denied transubstantiation; both were turned over to the secular authorities for execution.<sup>11</sup>

### *Arundel’s Constitutions and Vernacular Translations of Biblical Texts*

In 1407, at a synod in Oxford, Archbishop Thomas Arundel established the *Constitutions*, which were articles that established regulations around aspects of the preaching and teaching life of the Church in general and the University of Oxford in particular. Promulgated in 1409, following the translation of Wycliffe’s Bible, the *Constitutions* limited theological discussion in the schools, sanctioned unlicensed preaching, vernacular books and scriptural translations, and preaching and teaching. It also stipulated that using or distributing the translation made in Wycliffe’s time or in any subsequent time required licensing by the diocesan bishop or provincial council.<sup>12</sup> Theological literature deemed acceptable could be licensed for publication.<sup>13</sup>

Nicholas Watson describes the *Constitutions* as “one of the most draconian pieces of censorship in English history, going far beyond its ostensible aim of destroying the Lollard heresy and effectively attempting to curtail all sorts of theological thinking and writing in the

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<sup>10</sup> Cole, *Literature and Heresy*, 21.

<sup>11</sup> Cole, *Literature and Heresy*, 104.

<sup>12</sup> Nicholas Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel’s Constitutions of 1409.” *Speculum* 70, no. 4 (1995): 827, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2865345>.

<sup>13</sup> Sargent, “Introduction,” 57.

vernacular that did not belong within the pragmatic bounds set by earlier legislation [.]”<sup>14</sup> He also contends that the *Constitutions* undermined the religious and intellectual life of fifteenth century England, and maintains that they resulted in changes in the production of theological works in the vernacular.<sup>15</sup>

Watson argues that the *Constitutions* aimed chiefly to censor attempts to promote theology in the vernacular and translations of the Bible and biblical texts.<sup>16</sup> In Margaret Deanesly’s estimate, however, Arundel’s condemnation is partially explained by western Christianity’s hostility towards the issue of translations—itsself a holdover from Roman times. Deanesly writes, “the real reason for the universal use of a Latin Bible and Latin services in the fourteenth century was the existence of Latin as a universal language in the western Roman empire in the fourth.”<sup>17</sup> Perhaps there is another way to interpret the *Constitutions*’ prohibitions against vernacular translations of the Bible. The articles could be attributed to the desire to ensure the integrity of the biblical text and, simultaneously, to address the religious and theological upheaval in England in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, if the *Constitutions* was enacted to discourage production of the Wycliffe Bible, it was unsuccessful. Rather, throughout the fifteenth century and later, the English

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<sup>14</sup> Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change,” 826.

<sup>15</sup> Watson considers the *Constitutions* as “a broader attempt to limit religious discussion and writing in the vernacular.” Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change,” 824.

<sup>16</sup> Watson describes the *Constitutions* as an attempt to resolve “the Oxford debate on Bible translation—over the nature of vernacular theology and its readers.” Watson, “Censorship and Cultural Change,” 824.

<sup>17</sup> Margaret Deanesly, “Arguments against the Use of Vernacular Bibles, Put Forward in the Controversy over their Lawfulness, 1400-1408,” *The Church Quarterly Review* CLXXXI (October 1920), <http://www.bible-researcher.com/wyclif5.html>. Both Watson and Deanesly cite translation of biblical texts as an important concern in the *Constitutions*. As I argued previously, authors were careful to ensure that any translations of biblical and biblically-based texts mirrored in all the essential elements to the biblical canon. See the discussion in Chapter 3, English Literary Culture, the Medieval Popular Bible and *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d’Argenteuil’s Bible en françois*.

<sup>18</sup> “Arundel objected not to the act of translation itself, provided they were supervised and approved by ecclesiastical authorities.” Christopher J. Kshyk, “Thomas Arundel’s Constitutions and the Condemnation of Wycliffe’s Vernacular Translations (1382-1415),” *Inquiries Journal / Student Pulse*, vol. 7, no. 5 (2015): 2, <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=1043>.

translation of the canonical Bible became the most popular text in Middle English; simultaneously, the production of less-contentious religious writings increased, including texts like the *ME Bible*.<sup>19</sup> In consequence, two types of theological texts were produced during this period: Wycliffite literature and literature they had issue with.<sup>20</sup> It requires little prompting to suspect that the *ME Bible's* amalgamation of freely-interpreted biblical stories would fall into the latter category.

### 7.3 *Literary Expressions*

These above-listed restrictions and sanctions indicate opposition to challenges that threatened to further undermine ecclesial authority. In this context we can better understand writings by John Mirk, Roger Dymmok and Nicholas Love, which defend holy images and the Eucharist. I will examine these writings in particular in light of their understanding of the Incarnation and its implications.

#### 7.3.1 *John Mirk's Festial*

The most favoured collection of vernacular sermons in late-medieval England was *Liber Festivalis (Festial)* by the Augustinian canon and priest, John Mirk.<sup>21</sup> It could be because

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<sup>19</sup> “If the primary aim of the Lambeth Constitutions concerning vernacular theology was to put an end to Wycliffite translation of the Bible, then it was precisely in this aim that they failed. Further, not only did the Wycliffite Bible become the most popular single text in Middle English, so far as we can measure by manuscript survival, but, on the other side, probably the most prominent orthodox form of religious writing in English in the fifteenth century was the production of translations and didactic compilations of earlier Latin theological writing, as well as saints’ lives, sermon collections and religious drama.” Sargent, “Introduction,” 75.

<sup>20</sup> “Vernacular theological writing in England in this period was characterized by a polarization that involved both the continued spread of Wycliffite literature on the one side, and, on the other, by a closing of ranks around precisely those kinds of literature to which the Wycliffites most objected.” Sargent, “Introduction,” 75.

<sup>21</sup> “Based on the quantity of surviving manuscripts and the number of printed editions, the most widely read vernacular sermon collection of late-medieval England seems to have been John Mirk’s *Festial*.” Judy Ann Ford, *John Mirk's Festial: Orthodoxy, Lollardy and the Common People in Fourteenth Century England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), 9.

sermons were a primary source of Christian knowledge during the later Middle Ages.<sup>22</sup> Mirk is an enigmatic character as there is scant information about his personal life apart from his occupation as first canon, and then prior, of Lilleshall Abbey in the final two decades of the fourteenth century.<sup>23</sup>

Alan Fletcher dates *Festial* to “between 1382 and 1390, probably at the latter end of those years, on the grounds that Mirk knew something of the activities of the Lollards.”<sup>24</sup> Basically, *Festial* is a template of sermons for priests to read aloud during Mass throughout the liturgical year. It comprises theologically simple texts of one or more stories that encompass the theme of the feast day.<sup>25</sup> Notable, too, is that *Festial* encourages lay understanding of religion while discouraging “efforts to acquire that understanding through reading the Bible.”<sup>26</sup> Rather, Mirk’s non-clerical audience would acquire religious knowledge by listening to sermons. In this way, Mirk provides a compressed but comprehensive view of Christian teaching that “privileges oral tradition over written (biblical) texts.”<sup>27</sup>

Generally speaking, priests who preached pre-made sermons “were probably rectors of poor parishes, or stipendiary priests or clerks hired to serve in those parishes considered marginal

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<sup>22</sup> “Non-aristocratic lay persons were instructed about religion haphazardly through art, plays and pageants; sermons typically constituted their only source of religious instruction offered by a member of the clergy, so it was through them that common people acquired much of their knowledge about how the institutional church defined Christian theology, spirituality and morality.” Ford, *Mirk’s Festial*, 8.

<sup>23</sup> Ford, *Mirk’s Festial*, 10.

<sup>24</sup> Alan Fletcher, “John Mirk and the Lollards,” *Medium Ævum* 56, no. 2 (1987): 218, <https://www-jstor-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/stable/43629105?sid=primo&origin=crossref>. Earlier, Susan Powell, suggested a date for the *Festial* as between 1350 and 1390. Susan Powell, “Lollards and Lombards: Late Mediaeval Bogeymen?” *Medium Ævum* 59, no. 1 (1990): 133, <https://www-jstor-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/stable/43629290?sid=primo>.

<sup>25</sup> Ford, *Mirk’s Festial*, 13. And, like many other works discussed, *Festial* is indebted to de Voragine’s *Golden Legend*.

<sup>26</sup> *Festial* could be a tool to persuade “the ordinary parishioners of late-medieval England that they belonged to a tradition that embraced illiterate commoners and excluded both the highly literate and the rebellious [whether or not they were Lollards]. Moreover, the *Festial’s* compelling images of lay agency functioning within established orthodoxy could serve as a ballast against an heretical ideology which set lay agency and clerical authority in opposition. Mirk’s approach was not a heavy-handed condemnation of Lollardy or rebellion. Instead he offered an attractive presentation of a version of Christianity that excluded only those whom he saw as enemies of the church.” Ford, *Mirk’s Festial*, 150.

<sup>27</sup> Ford, *John Mirk’s Festial*, 113.

by religious houses or by priests who held multiple benefices.”<sup>28</sup> As Mirk explains in the prologue, he is writing for clerics who were afflicted with “defaute of bokus and sympulnys of letture.”<sup>29</sup>

### *Discouraging Heresy*

Mirk, Judy Ann Ford writes, used “an avenue of vernacularity, lay agency, and participatory ecclesiology within the orthodox church” to counter the Lollards’ promotion of Christian egalitarianism.<sup>30</sup> Fletcher speculates that part of Mirk’s goal was to counteract Wycliffe’s popularity.<sup>31</sup> Susan Powell, however, counters that were it mainly a rebuttal of Lollardy, Mirk would have made direct condemnations. Even so, she acknowledges that “its widespread and central circulation, its orthodoxy, and Mirk’s explicitly-expressed intention that it should be used as preaching material lend credence to its having at least a tacit role in countering the Lollard threat.”<sup>32</sup>

### *Mirk’s Line of Reasoning: Trinity Sunday as a Prelude to Corpus Christi*

These assessments are supported by Mirk’s statement that Trinity Sunday, a feast established in 1264 by Pope Urban IV, is celebrated “for heretykes hegh confondyng.” He describes how a “counseyle of heretykes” had convinced the Roman emperor to ban the books

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<sup>28</sup> Ford, *John Mirk’s Festial*, 12. Mirk’s biblical teaching from the pulpit would ensure that his congregation, many of whom were illiterate, would have access to the Word of God.

<sup>29</sup> Fletcher, “Mirk and the Lollards,” 218. In other words, the clerics were illiterate and had no books.

<sup>30</sup> Ford, *John Mirk’s Festial*, 14.

<sup>31</sup> “There may be nothing quite so effective as the scent of heresy to precipitate the orthodox establishment into motion, and perhaps we should suggest, without at all denying the more straightforward ‘defaute of bokus,’ that he was also conscious of a need to help arm the Church against a spiritual threat.” Fletcher, “Mirk and the Lollards,” 218.

<sup>32</sup> Susan Powell, *The Medieval in the Sixteenth Century: The Post-Reformation History of a Fourteenth-Century Sermon Collection* (Salford: European Studies Research Institute, University of Salford, 1998), 27.

“of holy churche fayþ,” which include “þe story of þe Trynyte.”<sup>33</sup> By Mirk’s time, however, the ban (if there ever was one) had long been rescinded, as Mirk describes in the following passage:

But aftyr hit felle soo þat for malyce of heretykes þat ryson so þekke, þat Saynt Gregory þe holy doctor sozt vp þis story of þe Trinite, and ordeynet hit to be halowet in holy chyrche, and þe story songen in confusyon of heretykes þat berket azeyne þe Trynyte. Soo, by halowyng of þys fest and by þe seruyce þat ys don þys day in holy chyrche, þe fest of þe Trynyte ys worscheput and leuod in cristen pepull.<sup>34</sup>

Mirk reiterates the necessity of “confondyng heretykes, and forto destrye þe fals oppynyons þat þayholden azeynes þe holy Trinite,” which applies equally to the heretics in the days of the Roman Empire as well as to Mirk’s current religious environment.<sup>35</sup> His use of the word “confounding” implies that heretics are theologically illiterate simpletons who are easily confused. But they are also duplicitous. Like heretics over the centuries, “Lombardes” use the language of deception, “smeþe wordes and plesyng,” to attack the Trinity, the Trinitarian faith and the faith of Holy Church.<sup>36</sup>

In the same way that the early heretics persecuted the Church, so do the Lombardes:

Wherfor ryzt as heritykes yn þe begynnyng of þe holy chirch pursuet holy popes, martyres, and confessores to þe deth, ryzt so now þes Lombardes pursuen men of holy chirche, and ben about forto vndo horn in all þat þay mow, yf þay myzten haue hor purpos forth.<sup>37</sup>

In this passage, Mirk identifies the Lombardes (i.e., Lollards) as the latest in a long line of heretics who persecute men of the faith of Holy Church (i.e., the ecclesial hierarchy). Although

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<sup>33</sup> Erbe, *Mirk's Festial*, 163.

<sup>34</sup> Erbe, *Mirk's Festial*, 165, 12-19.

<sup>35</sup> Erbe, *Mirk's Festial*, 164.

<sup>36</sup> Here, Mirk appears to compare the language used by the “Lombardes” with the type of seductive words that Satan used to tempt Adam and Eve. Fletcher argues that the term “Lombardes” refers to Lollards. Fletcher writes that Mirk was familiar with Lollard opinions and teachings and, hence, would not call them “Lombardes.” When copying Mirk’s sermons, however, scribes misspelled or misread “Lombardes” for Lollards. The error subsequently made its way into Erbe’s critical edition. Powell, however, maintains that the scribe deliberately used the term “Lombardes” to describe those “familiar bogey-men who might reasonably be blamed for a multitude of sins.” See Fletcher, “Mirk and the Lollards,” 218-291, and Powell, “Lollards and Lombards,” 136. Fletcher’s argument is fact-based and, in my estimate, makes more sense than Powell’s speculations.

<sup>37</sup> Erbe, *Mirk's Festial*, 164, 23-27.

he does not identify the exact nature of their malevolence, in comparing them with the homicidal heretics of the past “he insinuates that their hostility might also take even that extreme form.”<sup>38</sup> Mirk’s reference to the murderous heretics of the past is consistent with the *ME Bible*’s representation of the Jews as violent, recalcitrant and heterodox. But it could also serve as a warning to religious dissenters that non-compliance with ecclesial teaching and tradition would be met with violence.

*Corpus Christi: Cristis body in þe auter*

Miri Rubin writes, “At the centre of the whole religious system of the Middle Ages lay a ritual which turned bread into flesh—a fragile, small, wheaten disc into God.”<sup>39</sup> As I have laid out, transubstantiation was rejected by the Lollards and was a major point of contention with the Catholic Church.

In the medieval liturgical calendar, the feast of *Corpus Christi*, or the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, celebrated Christ’s Real Presence in the Eucharist.<sup>40</sup> It was scheduled on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday; thus, Mirk’s *Corpus Christi* homily immediately follows his Trinity Sunday homily. Mirk credits Pope Urban IV (1195-1264) as having “ordeynet þis fest forto be halouet þis þursday, next after þe fest of þe Trinite.”<sup>41</sup> He immediately makes a connection between love for the Trinity and belief in the Eucharist:

For ryzt as eche cristen man and woman þat wol be saued mot nede haue perfite charite in þe Trinite, ryzt so mot he haue ful fayth and beleue in þe sacrament of Cristis body þat

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<sup>38</sup> Fletcher, “Mirk and the Lollards,” 219.

<sup>39</sup> Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 1.

<sup>40</sup> The feast, which was influenced by the visions of Juliana of Liège, was established by Pope Urban IV in 1264. See “Liège—the Birthplace,” in Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 169-181.

<sup>41</sup> Mirk, 168.

is made in þe auter by vertu of þe holy wordys þat þe prest sayed þer, and by worchyng of þe Holy Gost.<sup>42</sup>

The Lollards saw no scriptural basis for eucharistic practices; any counter argument had to be based only on the Gospel. Rubin explains: “[T]he Last Supper was orthodoxy’s support, the link between its central ritual of mediation and Christ’s own life and words.”<sup>43</sup> Defenders would point to Jesus’ words of institution in the Gospels, as does Mirk in the following description:

Then schul 3e know well þat oure Lord Ihesu Crist on Chere þursday at n3yt, when he had sowput and w3st how þat he schul in þe morow suffre deth and so passe out of þis world vnto his Fader, he ordeynet a perpetual memory of his passion forto abyde wyth his pepul. Thus he toke bred and wyne, and made hit his owne flessch and his blod, and 3af hit to his discyples, and bade hem ete hit and drynk hit in mynde of hym.<sup>44</sup>

Concerning the Lollards’ dispute of the sacerdotal role in performing the sacrament, Mirk asserts:

And so 3af hit to hem and to al oþyr prestes, 3e and to al oþyr prestes, power and dignite forto make his body of bred and wyne yn þe auter, so þat eche prest haþ of Cristis 3eft power forto make þis sacrament, be he bettyr, be he wors.<sup>45</sup>

Mirk implies the priestly role is so sacrosanct that even bad priests can perform the sacrament.<sup>46</sup>

Then, perhaps to circumvent outrage at the idea of Christ legitimizing evil priests, he adds that the latter will eventually “haue a perpetual confusion of fendys in helle, and be vndur hem in euerlastyng payne.”<sup>47</sup> In the present world, however, the most important thing is that the Eucharist is celebrated by an ordained priest.

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<sup>42</sup> Erbe, *Mirk’s Festial*, 168, 26-30.

<sup>43</sup> Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 299.

<sup>44</sup> Erbe, *Mirk’s Festial*, 169, 5-11.

<sup>45</sup> Erbe, *Mirk’s Festial*, 169, 12-15.

<sup>46</sup> Mirk could be alluding to the fourth-century Donatist belief that “the belief that the validity of sacerdotal acts depended on the presence of the Holy Spirit in the minister and that a minister who was not in a state of grace could not administer a valid sacrament.” The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Donatist,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, July 20, 1998, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Donatists>.

<sup>47</sup> Erbe, *Mirk’s Festial*, 169.

*A Defense of Holy Images and the Real Presence*

In the *Corpus Christi* homily, Mirk reflects on the value of holy images which, he notes, the Lollards reject:

For as Saynt Austyn sayde: “þe mynde of Cristis passion is þe best defence aȝens temptacions of þe fende.” Herefor ben roodes sett on hey in holy chirch, and so by syȝt þerof haue mynd of Cristis passion. And þerfor roodes and oþyr ymages ben necessary in holy chirch, whateuer, þes Lollardes sayn; for yf þay nade ben profitable, goode holy faders þat haue be tofore vs wold haue don hem out of holy chirch mony a ȝere gon.<sup>48</sup>

Fletcher argues that Mirk identified the Lollards’ disrespect for images, as “their distinctive error—in fact, the only heretical belief by which he distinguishes them.”<sup>49</sup> Conversely, Ford sees a disregard for ecclesial tradition and submits that Mirk draws attention to the Lollards disrespect for images because “it was the part of the Lollard program most likely to be unacceptable to illiterate Christians.”<sup>50</sup> Certainly, Mirk is aware of, and does acknowledge, the importance of images to illiterate lay persons:

For, as Ion Bellet tellet, ymages and payntours ben lewde menys bokys, and I say bo[l]dyly þer ben mony þousaund of pepul þat couþ not ymagen in her hert how Crist was don on þe rood, but as þai lerne hit be syȝt of ymages and payntours.<sup>51</sup>

In addition, even though Mirk does not explicitly mention the word, he implicitly defends the Real Presence throughout the *Corpus Christi* homily. As evidence, he frequently juxtaposes the words “God” and “body” to describe the Eucharist: “forto make Godis body,” “verray Godis body,” “sacramewt of Gods body,” “take here Godis body,” “worschyppeþ Godis body,” “toke Godis body,” “feche Godis body,” “warre of Godis body,” “worschyppet Godis body.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Erbe, *Mirk’s Festial*, 171, 15-21.

<sup>49</sup> “The feast of Corpus Christi, too, which highlighted the theology of the Eucharist, might be expected to provide the orthodox with an apt occasion to censure the Wycliffites. Yet, curiously, it is not their dissentient views on the Eucharist that Mirk singles out, but their opposition to images. It is interesting that disrespect for images, which was to become one of the commonest Lollard hallmarks, is presented here by Mirk, at so early a date, as their distinctive error - in fact, the only heretical belief by which he distinguishes them.” Fletcher, “Mirk and the Lollards,” 291.

<sup>50</sup> Ford, *John Mirk’s Festial*, 147.

<sup>51</sup> Erbe, *Mirk’s Festial*, 171, 25-29.

<sup>52</sup> Erbe, *Mirk’s Festial*, 169, 171-175.

Mirk's description of Christ's blood shed during the Passion recalls the meditation on Christ's shed blood featured in the *ME Bible*:

Then as Crist þat day schedde his blod on þe crosse in helpe of al mankynd, so ȝet eche day in þe masse he scheddet his blod in heȝe mede to al þat þis beleuet; for wythout þis beleue þer may no man be sauēt.<sup>53</sup>

He relates the sacrament directly to the Incarnation:

On is forto se þe sacrament of Godys body, and receyue hit knolechyng þat he beleueth stedefastly þat hit is þe same flessch and blod þat Crist toke in mayden Mary, and was borne of hyr verray God and man[.]<sup>54</sup>

Mirk also gives accounts of eucharistic miracles, which Rubin characterizes as key to promoting understanding of sacramental faith and countering accusations by doubters and heretics.<sup>55</sup> In one such miracle, a cleric did not “beleue þat Crist schedd his blod in þe masse.” The bishop prays for the cleric and during Mass, “when he had made þe fraction as þe maner is, he saȝe þe blod drop doun from þe ost fast into þe chalice.” When the cleric sees the blood, he cries:

Be þow blesset, man, þat has þis grace þus to handul Cristis body! We beleue now fully þat þis is verray Godis body, and his blod þat dropet þer into þe chalis. But now pray to hym þat þou hast þer in þi hondys, þat he sende no vengauwce vpon vs for oure mysbeleue! and so þe sacrament turnet into his forme of bred as hit was befor.<sup>56</sup>

He also tells the story of the Mass of St. Gregory—an amalgamation of eucharistic and incarnational themes that illustrate the Real Presence.<sup>57</sup> As told, when St. Gregory prepared to give “Godis body” to the woman who baked the bread used at Mass, “she smylut” because it was

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<sup>53</sup> Erbe, *Mirk's Festial*, 170, 26-29.

<sup>54</sup> Erbe, *Mirk's Festial*, 170, 4-8.

<sup>55</sup> Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 113.

<sup>56</sup> Erbe, *Mirk's Festial*, 170, 6-10.

<sup>57</sup> Dymmok, *Liber contra*, 99. The legend of St. Gregory and the Doubting Matron describes the time a doubting woman saw a bloody finger materialise on the altar where St. Gregory was saying Mass. Michael Heinlen writes, “Broadly speaking, [the image] asserted Christ's presence in the host at a time when the church was actively debating eucharistic doctrine. Moreover, it did this by exploiting a topos, the eucharistic miracle, that was widely used in the eleventh and twelfth centuries to assert the validity of the real presence.” Michael Heinlen, “An Early Image of a Mass of St. Gregory and Devotion to the Holy Blood at Weingarten Abbey.” *Gesta* 37, no. 2 (1998): 55, <https://doi.org/10.2307/767212>.

ridiculous to believe that her bread had become Christ's body.<sup>58</sup> At the altar, however, a miracle occurs:

Gregory ȝode to þe auter, and fonde þe ost turnet into raw flessch bledyng; þe which he toke and schowet þis woman. Then sche cryet and sayed: "Lorde, now I beleue þat þou art Crist, Godys Sonne of Heuen, in forme of bred!" Then bade he þe pepul pray eft sones þat hit muste turne aȝen into þe lykenes of bred, and so hit dude.<sup>59</sup>

### *Evaluating Mirk's Arguments*

Strictly speaking, the origins of Trinity Sunday and *Corpus Christi* are not in Scripture. Hence, to impart theological authority, Mirk's homilies state that the papacy (Pope Gregory and Pope Urban) had earlier established both feasts. And neither are holy images or, to a lesser extent, Real Presence, "biblical." Rather, venerating holy images is grounded in tradition while, as stated, Real Presence was defined in Canon 1 of the Fourth Lateran Council, convened by Pope Innocent III in 1215.

To reiterate and uphold doctrine and tradition against Lollard anti-ecclesial charges, Mirk appealed to the past, including referencing writings by St. Augustine ("St. Austyn") and Jean Beleth ("Ion Bellet") and tradition. While his homilies reflect the concerns of the late medieval English Church, he did not address the criticisms brought forward by the Reformers. Yes, he wrote in English, not Latin, but, in actuality, he "championed ideas that looked to the past rather than to the future."<sup>60</sup> It could be that Mirk's searching the past for answers has parallels with the *ME Bible's* recalling a (largely fictional) past wherein Christianity triumphs over Judaism.

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<sup>58</sup> In the fourteenth century, both the legend and the image became standardized: Christ as the Man of Sorrows, accompanied by the Veronica, miraculously appears in place of the Host on the altar. This image directly connects Christ and the Veronica with the transformation of the eucharistic elements; therefore, the Veronica could be understood in relation to the Real Presence of Christ on the altar and the Eucharist as the center of the Mass. Mirk, however, does not mention the Veronica.

<sup>59</sup> Erbe, *Mirk's Festial*, 172-173.

<sup>60</sup> Ford, *John Mirk's Festial*, 148.

### 7.3.2 Roger Dymmok's *Liber Contra XII Errores et Hereses Lollardorum*

Just over a decade later, in 1395, the Dominican friar and theologian, Roger Dymmok (c. 1370–1400), wrote a comprehensive refutation, in Latin, of the *Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards*.<sup>61</sup> His *Liber Contra XII Errores et Hereses Lollardorum* (*Liber Contra*), provides detailed responses to each of the conclusions. To deconstruct the Lollard arguments, Dymmok expands each conclusion into a set of three to ten opposing conclusions.<sup>62</sup>

Dymmok identifies clerics as authoring the *Twelve Conclusions* and derides them for writing in the vernacular (Middle English) and targeting the laity.<sup>63</sup> Yet, according to Fiona Somerset, he attempted to reach beyond a clerical audience by addressing the king, Richard II, and “through and beyond him to the widest possible public.”<sup>64</sup> Possibly, this wider audience consisted of the “lesser nobility and gentry in service at court.”<sup>65</sup>

Somerset wonders if Dymmok’s detailed explanations of his methodology indicate that his work targeted a non-academic audience.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, she writes, “it is clear finally that Dymmok has little interest in exposing himself to any broader public judgement.”<sup>67</sup> In Kathleen Kamerick’s assessment, Dymmok’s text “was intended for a wide audience, which it did not receive.”<sup>68</sup> Even so, if Dymmok’s intent was to reach a broad audience, why did he use Latin at a

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<sup>61</sup> The Lollards posted the text at Westminster, on the door of the Regal Chamber during the session of Parliament. Dymmok was especially perturbed that the “infamous *libellus*” was posted “in the sight of all prelates, dukes, nobles, and the whole of the people of this realm.” Fiona Somerset, *Clerical Discourse and Lay Audience in Late Medieval England*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 106.

<sup>62</sup> Somerset, *Clerical Discourse*, 126.

<sup>63</sup> “[Dymmok] ascribes the writing and publication of the *Twelve Conclusions* solely to clerics, disparaging their address to the laity as evidence of ingratitude to the church that has educated them and their use of English as revealing how little they gained from that education.” Somerset, *Clerical Discourse*, 105.

<sup>64</sup> Somerset, *Clerical Discourse*, 110.

<sup>65</sup> For evidence of Dymmok’s audience, see Somerset, *Clerical Discourse*, 112-115 and 128-131.

<sup>66</sup> Somerset, *Clerical Discourse*, 128.

<sup>67</sup> Somerset, *Clerical Discourse*, 133.

<sup>68</sup> Kathleen Kamerick, *Popular Piety and Art in the Late Middle Ages: Image Worship and Idolatry in England 1350-1500* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 28

time when knowledge of the language was waning?<sup>69</sup> Also, to what extent would a work that was available in five manuscripts only reach a broad audience?<sup>70</sup> Just as there are several unknowns related to the *ME Bible*, there are questions around Dymmok's text. While they cannot be answered at present, they do not prevent the text from being analysed.

### *Dymmok's Reply to the Fourth Conclusion of the Lollards*

The *Fourth Conclusion* describes the Eucharist as “þe feynid miracle of þe sacrament of bred” that “þei [priests] schewe to þe puple.”<sup>71</sup> These words encapsulate the Reformers' rejection of Christ's Real Presence in the Eucharist, and their belief that the notion reinforced clerical authority (i.e., a priest is needed for the bread and wine to be transformed). Believing in the Real Presence “inducith alle men but a fewe to ydolatrie.”<sup>72</sup>

The cleric counters that it is the *Fourth Conclusion* itself, not the Eucharist, that is harmful because it “tends to remove all faith in the efficacy of the sacrament and therewith all desire to use the means of grace.”<sup>73</sup> It also erodes “respect for all law and authority, human and divine,” and could lead to fragmentation, blasphemy and “disruption.”<sup>74</sup> By inserting secular

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<sup>69</sup> “For most of the minority who could read, the preferred textual language was probably English, even if textual contacts on the whole (and so, for everyone) were primarily through Latin texts mediated orally into English, or from English words mediated into a Latin text (as in witness statements in the church courts). Latin was a subsidiary language, encountered and recorded chiefly as an official or textual language.” Richard Ashdowne and Carolinne White, “Introduction,” in *Latin in Medieval Britain*, Proceedings of the British Academy, eds. Richard Ashdowne and Carolinne White (London: University Press, 2017), 116, <https://books-scholarsportal-info.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/uri/ebooks/ebooks3/oso/2017-09-07/1/upso-9780197266083>.

<sup>70</sup> “However, Dymmok's ostensible purpose of convincing a universal audience could not have been accomplished either, for the actual dissemination of his text was very limited. Along with the presentation copy presented to the king there are records of only four other manuscripts that include his text.” Somerset, *Clerical Discourse*, 111. To access a digitized image of the presentation copy, refer to Roger Dymmok, *Contra Lollardorum (MS 17)*, University of Cambridge Digital Library, <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-TRINITYHALL-00017/35>.

<sup>71</sup> Cronin, “The Twelve Conclusions,” 297. To “schewe” the host refers to the portion of the liturgy wherein the priest elevates the consecrated bread within sight of the congregants. As a result, the host became an object of adoration and “came to be seen as possessing some sacramental efficacy.” Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 63.

<sup>72</sup> Cronin, “The Twelve Conclusions,” 300. The “fake” miracle refers to the belief in the Christ's Real Presence in the Eucharist, which, as mentioned was defined at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215.

<sup>73</sup> Roger Dymmok, *Liber Contra XII Errores et Hereses Lollardorum*, ed. Harry S. Cronin (London: The Wycliffe Society, c. 1922), 90. Dymmok's text is in Latin; Cronin provided the commentary text of which I make use.

<sup>74</sup> Dymmok, *Liber Contra*, 91.

politics into his critique, Dymmok suggests that the Lollard's recalcitrance could "destroy respect for all law and authority, and thereby to undermine the unity of the state."<sup>75</sup>

Dymmok supports his arguments by referencing the great Christian theologians of history, including Ambrose, Lanfranc, Theophylact, Chrysostom, Jerome, Theophilus, Hilary, St. Paul, St. Gregory, Hugo of St. Victor, Eusebius and Augustine. By and large, however, he appealed to the work of Thomas Aquinas, named the "Doctor of the Eucharist," who explained the mystery of the Eucharist and classically formulated the doctrine of the Real Presence.<sup>76</sup> Aquinas has also been credited with composing the prayers, hymns, Mass sequences and versicles for the Feast of *Corpus Christi*, first celebrated in 1264.<sup>77</sup> Whatever the case, "Aquinas' eucharistic theology has seeped into the medieval consciousness through these hymns."<sup>78</sup>

Aquinas considers the Eucharist the most eminent sacrament because it contains Christ's actual substance; thus, all the other sacraments are ordered toward it.<sup>79</sup> Reinhard Hütter describes

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<sup>75</sup> Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, 14.

<sup>76</sup> "Indeed, Thomas is so well known for his writings on the Eucharist that in addition to the title 'Universal Doctor,' and 'Angelic Doctor,' he is also named the 'Doctor of the Eucharist.'" John J. Goyette, "St. Thomas Aquinas on the Eucharist as Spiritual Food," Thomas Aquinas College, 2017, <https://www.thomasaquinas.edu/a-liberating-education/why-we-study/st-thomas-aquinas-eucharist-spiritual-food>.

<sup>77</sup> "Many in the Catholic world have studied the thought of Thomas Aquinas, often alas, in forms he would have repudiated, but many more have sung his prayers: The *Adoro Te* and the *Pange Lingua*, which includes the *Tantum Ergo*. These come from the Office, Mass, Sequence, and hymns for the Feast of Corpus Christi, first celebrated in 1264. It is said that Urban IV agreed to establish this feast to honor Christ's presence in the Blessed Sacrament at the urging of Thomas Aquinas." Mary T. Clark, ed., *An Aquinas Reader*, rev. ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), 13. Recently, scholarly reviews of source materials have led to questions about whether Aquinas actually wrote the *Corpus Christi* Office. For a discussion on the Office's possible authorship, see Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 185-189.

<sup>78</sup> Andrew Dawson, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eschatological Ecclesiology of the Eucharist in Piers Plowman*, 2, Academia, 2015, [https://www.academia.edu/27198370/Corpus\\_Mysticum\\_The\\_Eschatological\\_Ecclesiology\\_of\\_the\\_Eucharist\\_in\\_Langlands\\_Piers\\_Plowman](https://www.academia.edu/27198370/Corpus_Mysticum_The_Eschatological_Ecclesiology_of_the_Eucharist_in_Langlands_Piers_Plowman).

<sup>79</sup> "Absolutely speaking, the sacrament of the eucharist is the greatest of all the sacraments, as is evident in three ways. First, because it contains Christ himself substantially. While the other sacraments have a certain instrumental power that is a participation in Christ's power [. . .] Second, this becomes evident when we examine how the sacraments are related to one another, for all the other sacraments seem to be directed to this one as to their end. Clearly, the sacrament of Order is directed to the consecration of the Eucharist, and the sacrament of Baptism to the reception of the Eucharist; while man is perfected by Confirmation to remove the fear of approaching this

the *mysterium fidei*, as it appears in Aquinas' sacramental theology, as "Christ's real, corporeal, and hence personal presence in the sacrament of the Eucharist"<sup>80</sup> Dymmok's arguments accord with this line of thought which also implies that the Church is the custodian of Christ's Body in the Eucharist, a motif I explore in the next chapter.

### *The Eucharist and the Incarnation*

Dymmok adheres to the Thomist model by rejecting the idea that Christ's body is present only spiritually in the Eucharist. Using terminology drawn from Aquinas and Aristotle, he explains the doctrine of the Real Presence in terms akin to transubstantiation:

The material bread becomes the body of Christ [*corpus Christi*]; it retains, however, its proper accidents, which cannot be also the accidents of Christ's body: these accidents, therefore, remain *sine subiecto*, which has been removed. Such a change is required by the nature of a sacrament and the presence of accidents without their proper substance need present no difficulty to those who realise the power of God.<sup>81</sup>

Dymmok points out that God can change any and all things, which he did "when Jesus said to his disciples "this is my body." Still, he cautions, "these words must not be taken figuratively."<sup>82</sup> Rather, "[t]he change—a real change—is wrought by the words of Christ."<sup>83</sup> He identifies the Holy Spirit, "as in the incarnation," as overseeing the transformation "under the form of bread and wine [where] we honour the body and blood of Christ."<sup>84</sup> And, just as "Christ remained with the Father whole at the Incarnation. He remains with the Father in the Eucharist."<sup>85</sup> And, like

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sacrament. Penance and Sacrament of the Sick prepare man to receive the body of Christ worthily. And Matrimony, at least in its signification, affects this sacrament in that it signifies the union of Christ with the Church, and of this union the Eucharist is a figure[.]” Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1911-1925), III, q. 65, a. 3, c.

<sup>80</sup> Reinhard Hütter, *Aquinas on Transubstantiation: The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 2, <https://muse-jhu-edu.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/pub/16/monograph/chapter/2297911/pdf>.

<sup>81</sup> Dymmok, *Liber contra*, 96.

<sup>82</sup> Dymmok, *Liber contra*, 94-95.

<sup>83</sup> Dymmok, *Liber contra*, 95.

<sup>84</sup> Dymmok, *Liber contra*, 94-95.

<sup>85</sup> Dymmok, *Liber contra*, 97.

Mirk, Dymmok provides examples of eucharistic miracles, including the aforementioned case of St. Gregory and the Roman matron, as analogous to the Real Presence and the Incarnation.

In *Summa theologica*, Aquinas writes, “in our pilgrimage, [Christ] does not deprive us of his bodily presence, but unites us with himself in this sacrament through the truth of his Body and Blood.”<sup>86</sup> Dymmok concurs that Jesus would not have left an unworthy “parting gift” to the Church. Instead, the Eucharist ensures that the faithful “may still perceive the love of their Absent Lord (Eusebius), love in the bread and wine of the Eucharist.”<sup>87</sup> David Aers claims that “[o]nly the doctrine of transubstantiation could secure this kind of presence, and only this kind of presence would be an adequate sign of Christ’s love.”<sup>88</sup> Anna Wierzbicka agrees when she describes the Eucharist as “the Sacrament of love: it signifies love, it produces love.”<sup>89</sup> One could say that the *ME Bible*’s concept of transubstantiation as “þe substance of mannes life” also recognizes the profound mystery of divine love.

### *The Eucharist, the Priesthood and Transubstantiation*

In contrast to the Lollards, Dymmok upheld the priesthood’s unique qualification to celebrate the Eucharist, as declared in Canon 1 of the Fourth Lateran Council:<sup>90</sup>

How does such a view agree with our Lord’s words who told the apostles and their successors “to do this in remembrance of Me”? —words, which the Church has

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<sup>86</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, III, 75, 1, c.

<sup>87</sup> Dymmok, *Liber contra*, 101–103.

<sup>88</sup> David Aers, *Sanctifying Signs: Making Christian Tradition in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 7.

<sup>89</sup> Anna Wierzbicka, “The Semantics of Eucharistic Miracles,” *Cognitive Semantics* 9, no. 2 (2023): 219, <https://doi.org/10.1163/23526416-bja10047>.

<sup>90</sup> Canon 1 states in part, “Nobody can effect this sacrament except a priest who has been properly ordained according to the church’s keys, which Jesus Christ himself gave to the apostles and their successors.” *Et hoc ungue sacramentum nemo potest conficere, nisi sacerdos, qui fuerit rite ordinatus secundum claves ecclesiae, quas ipse concessit apostolis et eorum successotibus Iesus Christus*. Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Volume One: Nicaea I to Lateran V*, trans. Jesuits of the British Isles (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 230.

interpreted of priests, to whom as the highest in rank this highest privilege is rightly confined.<sup>91</sup>

The ability to change the eucharistic elements into Christ's body and blood is the priesthood's most sacred function. Through the power of the Holy Spirit and the priest's repeating Jesus' words of consecration the substance of the bread and wine changes into Christ's actual body and blood.<sup>92</sup> Jesus had conferred the sacrament on the Apostles and, in turn, they conferred the eucharistic celebration on the Church:

[T]he form of celebration is due to James, our Lord's brother and Basil, though Peter, not James, may have celebrated the first mass: Other details have been arranged by popes, bishops and councils with the greatest care.<sup>93</sup>

Dymmok's connecting three major figures in Christianity with the eucharistic celebration, and then referring immediately to popes, bishops and councils, appears to be an attempt to validate the rite *and* Church hierarchy and governance.

Dymmok concludes his response with an uncharacteristic emotional appeal—an exhortation to the faithful to ignore any condemnations of ecclesial teaching and practices. Heed the Church, he counsels, and “[b]elieve the fact, though you do not understand the way in which the fact comes about.”<sup>94</sup> Fundamentally, Dymmok is urging people to believe in the Real Presence as a matter of faith, not reason.

#### *Dymmok's Reply to the Eighth Conclusion of the Lollards*

England during the late fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries was also a site of vigorous debates over the religious use of holy images. In Eamon Duffy's words. “Where early medieval

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<sup>91</sup> Dymmok, *Liber contra*, 108-110.

<sup>92</sup> The fact that only a priest can effect the change (through the words of consecration) elevates the sacerdotal role and authority within the Church. Their function is essential to the Eucharistic celebration and the reception of Christ's real presence.

<sup>93</sup> Dymmok, *Liber contra*, 106.

<sup>94</sup> Dymmok, *Liber contra*, 111.

devotion to the saints was focused on their relics, late medieval devotion focused on images [. . .] [a]ll over England minor cults, originally no more than a parish devotion, established themselves round such images.”<sup>95</sup> The Lollards’ *Eighth Conclusion* describes the devotion to holy images as consisting of “pilgrimage, preyeris, and offringis made to blynde rodys and to deue ymages of tre and of ston.”<sup>96</sup>

### *Are Images Idols?*

As with the Eucharist, the Lollards believed that promoting and using holy images induced idolatry and, therefore, violated the First Commandment. Dymmok’s argument that images “may be justified by the portrait of Himself, which Christ sent to Abgarus, or the portraits painted by St. Luke,” displays his cultural knowledge.<sup>97</sup> The aforementioned images “testify to the reality of the Incarnation” by portraying a real person—the historical Jesus—and can be used as examples to refute heresy.<sup>98</sup> Anna Eörsi agrees when she describes the legends of St. Luke painting the Virgin and Child and the Abgar portrait as connoting the Incarnation.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 167.

<sup>96</sup> Dymmok, *Liber contra*, 189.

<sup>97</sup> Dymmok, *Liber contra*, 182. As discussed in Chapter 4, The *vera icona*: Looking Upon the Face of God, the apocryphal story of the image of Jesus’ face imprinted on a cloth is associated variously with Abgar, King of Edessa, and St. Veronica. Like the Veronica story, the legend of St. Luke painting the Virgin has no basis in Scripture. It is, however, “mentioned in Greek texts as early as the sixth century and in the Latin West by the twelfth century.” Clifton Olds, “Jan Gossaert’s ‘St. Luke Painting the Virgin’: A Renaissance Artist’s Cultural Literacy,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 24, no. 1 (1990): 89, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3332857>.

<sup>98</sup> Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 224. Belting is describing the Veronica image, but his words apply equally to all images of Christ.

<sup>99</sup> “The early Virgin and child representations are about the Incarnation, the Virgin being merely an attribute of the Word made flesh. The existence of the picture and Incarnation mutually presuppose each other. This also applies to the *akheiropoiotos*, too, but the alternative of the Luke-the-painter legend was necessary because the latter – by depicting the child – shifts the stress from the divine origin of the picture to the Incarnation itself. I can imagine that it was in a dispute about the dual nature, among the arguments in support of the authenticity of Incarnation, that St. Luke had also painted the infant Jesus in his human nature.” Anna Eörsi, “The Incarnation of the Word and the Form: Some Thoughts about St. Luke the Painter, and about Some Painters of St. Luke,” *Acta Historiae Artium* 44, no. 1-4 (2003): 47.

Dymmok also accuses the Lollards, who were known for cultivating scriptural literacy, of misinterpreting the intent of the First Commandment:

Reverence paid to the image is, in reality, paid to the person, it represents [. . .], and should be such as is due to him. *Latria* is due to Christ; therefore, also to His image, from which it were to him.<sup>100</sup>

Accordingly, because Christ is to be adored with *latria*, so too are his images.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, the honour paid to an image passes to its prototype, the one who is imaged (“as it were to him”).<sup>102</sup> Hence, people do not honour the material image, but honour who or what the image evokes.

He notes that God commanded the Jews to carve images on the Ark of the Covenant, but prohibited images of the invisible God because “the visible representation of the Divine had to wait until the Incarnation.”<sup>103</sup> Thus, because God assumed human flesh and entered into human history, he could be represented in bodily likeness. Kamerick adds that “[f]or most image defenders [. . .] the crucial argument centered on Christ’s Incarnation. Images of Christ show the historic fact of God made man, and thus teach the doctrine of the Incarnation.”<sup>104</sup>

The cleric also rejects the declaration that man made in the image of God would be a more suitable representative:

They are also wrong in thinking that man, made in the image of God, would be a more suitable representative of Him than dead creatures, for (1) to man, in any case, is due some honour and (2) he would not understand, that the worship paid was paid not to him, but to God, and would fall into pride.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Dymmok, *Liber contra*, 183. Here, Dymmok states that *latria* is due to Christ *and* his image, thereby failing to distinguish between *latria* and *dulia* (veneration properly given to saints, angels and holy images).

<sup>101</sup> The Veronica was the pre-eminent image worthy of *latria* because Christ’s face had touched the cloth and stained it with his sweat and blood. Kamerick, *Popular Piety*, 58.

<sup>102</sup> Dymmok, *Liber contra*, 183.

<sup>103</sup> Dymmok, *Liber contra*, 184.

<sup>104</sup> Kamerick, *Popular Piety*, 30.

<sup>105</sup> Dymmok, *Liber contra*, 187.

He counters that human nature is worthy of merit, but not of *latria* because it does not lead to honouring God. Also, *latria* directed to the image “completely rebounds to what is imaged [i.e., the wood or stone].”<sup>106</sup> In consequence, one who assigns *latria* to a person is guilty of idolatry and the recipient is guilty of pride.”<sup>107</sup>

### *Early Defenses of Holy Images*

*The Teaching of Addai* (ca. 400) also describes the relationship between images and

#### Incarnation:

As I said to you, therefore, some things that are made and created, which are called gods in name only, but are not gods by their nature. Draw near to the one who by his very nature is God from everlasting to everlasting, who, unlike your idols, is unmade. He was neither created nor formed, like the images in which you glory, because, though having put on this body, his is God with his Father.<sup>108</sup>

*Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, written by John of Damascus (676-749) during the Iconoclast Crisis, augments the support for holy images expressed in *The Teaching of Addai*.<sup>109</sup> When detractors insisted that, in light of the second Commandment, venerating holy images was idolatry, John argues that Scripture and tradition authorize religious images.<sup>110</sup> In addition, the prohibition was confined to images of God, who is “incorporeal and formless, invisible and uncircumscribable.”<sup>111</sup> And, neither, John avers, did he make “a likeness of God, nor of anything

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<sup>106</sup> Kamerick, *Popular Piety*, 32.

<sup>107</sup> “The conclusion, which grated against the Lollard sense of the high value of human beings is clear: Images of God deserve the highest honour of *latria* and human beings do not.” Kamerick, *Popular Piety*, 32.

<sup>108</sup> *Teaching of Addai*, 55.

<sup>109</sup> “Among the defenders of icons and their veneration at the outbreak of iconoclasm, the most distinguished was Saint John Damascene.” John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images*, Popular Patristics Series, Andrew Louth, trans. (New York: St. Vladimir’s Press, 2003), 9.

<sup>110</sup> According to John, God prohibited image-making because Israel had become idolatrous, providing gold for an “ox-headed image, in which demons dwelled.” But, God also commanded them to carve items (e.g., Ark of the Covenant, including cherubim, tabernacle) that were not idols, but earthly elements used for divine purposes. John of Damascus, *Three Treatises*, 2, 8-9, 64-65.

<sup>111</sup> John of Damascus, *Three Treatises*, 2, 5.

else as God” nor did he “worship the creation instead of the Creator.”<sup>112</sup> Similarly, Addai exhorts his readers to “acquire a new mind which worships the maker, not the thing made[.]”<sup>113</sup>

### *Images and Incarnation*

John bases his support for holy images on the Incarnation.<sup>114</sup> Using words similar to defenders of the Eucharist, he writes:

For the nature of the flesh did not become divinity, but as the Word became flesh immutably, remaining what it was, so also the flesh became the Word without losing what it was, being rather made equal to the Word hypostatically. There I am emboldened to depict the invisible God, not as invisible, but as he became visible for our sake, by participation in flesh and blood. I do not depict the invisible divinity, but I depict God made visible in the flesh.<sup>115</sup>

Christ, the incarnate Son, redeemed humanity and creation (including matter), both of which are created by God. Therefore, matter also is good and has been sanctified for holy use.<sup>116</sup> Even so, John is compelled to respond to the accusation that devotion to holy images is worshipping matter:

Of old, God the incorporeal and formless was never depicted, but now that God has been seen in the flesh and has associated with human kind, I depict what I have seen of God. I do not venerate matter, I venerate the fashioner of matter, who became matter for my sake and accepted to dwell in matter and through matter worked for my salvation, and I will not cease from reverencing matter, through which my salvation was worked. I do no reverence it as God[.]<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> John of Damascus, *Three Treatises*, 2, 9.

<sup>113</sup> *Teaching of Addai*, 61

<sup>114</sup> “[E]ven if the veneration of images was forbidden in the Old Testament (which, he maintains, it is not), because God has no visible form, this situation has changed as a result of the Incarnation.” John of Damascus, *Three Treatises*, 11-12.

<sup>115</sup> John of Damascus, *Three Treatises*, I, 4, 12.

<sup>116</sup> John’s examples of salvific matter include the wood of the cross, the place of the skull, the holy tomb, the book of the Gospels and the “body and blood of my Lord” (I, 16).

<sup>117</sup> John of Damascus, *Three Treatises*, I, 16, 28.

## *Evaluating Dymmok's Defense*

Dymmok benefits from a venerable tradition of writings on the divine authority of images, which had developed over centuries.<sup>118</sup> Like the Church Fathers, and earlier image defenders like Origen and Augustine, Dymmok lays out an intellectual analysis of the appropriate forms of adoration given to an object.<sup>119</sup> Yet, the seminal doctrine of the Incarnation overlays Dymmok's defense of holy images and the Real Presence. The legends he references and his insistence that Christ's body and blood are truly present in the Eucharist have an incarnational dimension.

For the most part, Kamerick observes, Dymmok did not address "the practices that enraged the Lollards, including encouraging histrionics and obscuring Christian truths." Thus, she continues, Dymmok ignores and therefore is not concerned with pastoral care and "common sense truths of the Lollards."<sup>120</sup> Rather, Dymmok blames erroneous lay interpretations of images on scriptural illiteracy:

The image may be misunderstood but what may not? Is not Scripture itself a mine for heretics? Can we err if we follow Scripture in using the best means in our power to express truths, which transcend expression[?]<sup>121</sup>

I read Dymmok's remark as reiterating the importance of the priestly function: a priest, not the laity, is "the best means" for correctly interpreting scriptural truths.

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<sup>118</sup> "Idolatry was irrelevant to Christian devotion and tradition arguments supporting image devotion (Patristics on) was than the honour paid to an image was transmitted to the prototype." Kamerick, *Popular Piety*, 34.

<sup>119</sup> "Dymmok's arguments again repeated those elaborated in previous conflicts over images. As early as the third century, Origen had distinguished between honour and veneration, and Augustine himself had clearly defined the difference between *latria*, due only to God, and the respect owed to men." Kamerick, *Popular Piety*, 33.

<sup>120</sup> Kamerick, *Popular Piety*, 34.

<sup>121</sup> Dymmok, *Liber contra*, 199.

### 7.3.3 Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*

The Lollard movement was active when Mirk and Dymmok penned their defenses of the two issues that were of concern to the Lollards: holy images and the Eucharist. Hence, I argued that given the historical context, their use of the monikers “heretykes” and “Lombardes” most likely referred to the Lollards. In 1410, when the Carthusian monk, Nicholas Love, augmented his *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* (“*Mirror*”), the Lollard movement was at its height and a crackdown on dissent was in full force.<sup>122</sup> Into this anti-Reform environment Love also engaged with those whom he addressed as “heretics” and “Lollards.”

Michael Sargent classifies the *Mirror* as a para-biblical text because it is an emotional retelling of Christ's life supplemented with exegetical material, especially from Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons.<sup>123</sup> Originally, Love intended to highlight the *Mirror's* affective-piety elements for an English audience.<sup>124</sup> While the text is famed for its affective elements, Love augmented his work with a polemic against the dissenters.<sup>125</sup> Sargent notes that Love included “a number of topical references to the besetting sins of contemporary society, including arrogant

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<sup>122</sup> In Chapter 2, *Biblical and Biblically-Based Literature in the Vernacular: From Anglo-Saxon to Middle English*, I discuss the *Mirror's* affective and devotional elements.

<sup>123</sup> “[The *Mirror*] is what might be thought of as para-biblical because it is in fact a version of the *Meditationes vitae Christi*, an affective retelling of the Gospel narrative based on the biblical life of Christ, but greatly augmented with exegetical material drawn primarily from the sermons of St Bernard of Clairvaux.” Michael G. Sargent, “Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*,” in *The Wycliffite Bible: Origin, History and Interpretation*, ed. Elizabeth Solopova (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 389.

<sup>124</sup> Under the heading of “affective piety,” scholars have classified a form of Christian devotion focused on love for Christ in his humanity, compassion for his suffering, and intense longing for union with God. This form of devotion, based on the Franciscan devotion to the crucified Christ, encouraged Christians to reflect on literature and art to convert “looking into feeling.” In other words, the goal of affective piety was to elicit an emotional response to Jesus' human suffering, especially during the Passion, the pre-eminent devotional focus in the late medieval period. Eamon Duffy writes, “Behind such affective devotion was a Christology which traced itself back at least to Anselm [whose seminal work, *Cur Deus Homo*, describes Christ's sacrifice as the recompense for humanity's sinfulness], and which found in Christ's suffering not merely a theme for grateful and penitent reflection, but the ultimate manifestation of his human nature, and therefore his credentials as Saviour of humankind.” Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 235.

<sup>125</sup> In addition to responding to Wycliffism, Love also made attempts at monastic reform in England. See Michael G. Sargent, “Nicholas Love as an Ecclesiastical Reformer,” *Church History and Religious Culture* 96, no. 1-2 (2016): 40-64.

preachers, lax clergy, prideful aristocrats, and, yes, Lollards.”<sup>126</sup> For Andrew Dawson, the work is notable for stating “forceful, and often utilitarian, statements against Lollardy.”<sup>127</sup> Jennifer Sisk considers the text as orthodoxy’s “safe alternative to the Wycliffite Bible” since it enhances the ecclesial “policing of the medieval imagination.”<sup>128</sup> In Zsuzsanna Péri-Nagy’s estimate, the *Mirror* disseminates, “in an enjoyable form,” ecclesial instructions and responses to Wycliffite religious ideology.<sup>129</sup>

Love’s translation of the pseudo-Bonaventuran work testifies to Christian doctrine and, simultaneously, critiques Lollard philosophy.<sup>130</sup> The result is a text that is a devotional aid and part of a broader effort to combat heresy (in this case, challenges to ecclesial authority).

#### *Arundel Approves and Recommends*

In accordance with the *Lambeth Constitutions*, Love presented his text to Archbishop Thomas Arundel for approval. Sargent proposes that Love had no qualms about submitting his work, and was confident that it would be approved and licensed “for Love had altered the text substantially, turning it into a weapon for the archbishop’s campaign.”<sup>131</sup> In the “Memorandum of Approbation,” which accompanied Love’s submission, he declares that he produced the text *ad fidelium edificacionem, & hereticorum siue lollardorum confutacionem* (“for the edification of the faithful and the confusion of heretics and Lollards”).<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Sargent, “Nicholas Love’s *Mirror*,” 403.

<sup>127</sup> Dawson, *Corpus Mysticum*, 5.

<sup>128</sup> Jennifer L. Sisk, “Paul’s Rapture and Will’s Vision: The Problem of Imagination in Langland’s *Life of Christ*,” *The Chaucer Review* 48, no. 4 (2014): 407.

<sup>129</sup> Zsuzsanna Péri-Nagy, “Vox, Imago, Littera: Nicholas Love’s *The Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ*,” (PhD diss.), Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Humanities, 2, <http://doktori.btk.elte.hu/lit/perinagyzsuzsanna/thesis.pdf>.

<sup>130</sup> Kshyk, “Arundel’s Constitutions,” 1.

<sup>131</sup> Sargent, “Introduction,” 57.

<sup>132</sup> Sargent, “Introduction,” 36.

Arundel not only approved Love's text, but decreed that it "be made public to the edification of the faithful and to the confounding of heretics and Lollards."<sup>133</sup> It could be that Arundel was comfortable in supporting the project because, strictly speaking, Love's text was not a translation of the Bible and, therefore, did not need episcopal approval.<sup>134</sup> In the rare instance that Arundel allowed a translation of the Bible, the work was highly regulated "in both theory and in practice."<sup>135</sup>

Sargent is of the view that the *Mirror* enhanced Arundel's campaign against the Lollards.<sup>136</sup> As such, the text was another tool in the effort to eradicate "out of existence the discussion, writing, and preaching by which [Lollardy] was sustained both at its home base in Oxford and elsewhere."<sup>137</sup>

#### *Love's Defense of the Eucharist*

The most consequential Lollard heresy was the attack on eucharistic practices, especially the vocabulary of transubstantiation and the doctrine of the Real Presence.<sup>138</sup> Love's defense of the Eucharist ends with the *Treatise on the Sacrament (Treatise)*.<sup>139</sup> An addendum to the *Mirror*,

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<sup>133</sup> Anne Hudson, "Laicus literatus," in *Heresy and Literacy, 1000-1530*, eds. Peter Biller and Anne Hudson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 234.

<sup>134</sup> "At Oxford at the end of 1407, a council of the bishops and other clergy of the province of Canterbury, meeting under Archbishop Arundel, passed a law [. . .] requiring the approval of one's bishop before making any new translation of any part of scripture, and similar episcopal approval had to be obtained before any translation made from the time of Wyclif could be 'read,' that is, used for teaching. Henry Ansgar Kelly, *The Middle English Bible: A Reassessment*, The Middle Ages (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 4.

<sup>135</sup> Kshyk, "Arundel's Constitutions," 1.

<sup>136</sup> Sargent describes the *Mirror* as a "perfect match" to Arundel's anti-Wycliffite program. Sargent, "Introduction," 57.

<sup>137</sup> Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change," 826.

<sup>138</sup> Sargent notes that most of Love's anti-Wycliffite additions to the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* [. . .], deal with the sacrament of the Eucharist. "The greatest of Love's anti-Wycliffite additions to the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* [. . .], deal with the sacrament of the Eucharist. Lollard positions on this point ranged from simple rejection of the scholastic terminology used to describe the doctrine of transubstantiation, to belief in the 'intentional' or 'memorial' presence of Christ at the consecration, if not in the physical elements of bread and wine, to complete denial that the body and blood of Christ were present in the sacrament of the altar in any but a metaphorical sense." Sargent, "Introduction," 63.

<sup>139</sup> In form, the "Treatise on the Sacrament" is written as an "academic" sermon, opening with the exposition of a scriptural text, proceeding to a series of *divisiones* illustrated with *exempla*, and ending with an invocation [. . .]

the *Treatise* “offers substantial orthodox theological explication of the sacrament, and records several eucharistic miracles explicitly intended to rebut contemporary Lollard beliefs.”<sup>140</sup> As such, Love candidly states his intent to expound on “þe precious sacrament of Jesu body, in þe whiche he is euery day bodily present with vs [. . .] to confort of hem þat truly byleuen, & to confusion of alle fals lollardes & heritykes.”<sup>141</sup>

Like Mirk and Dymmok, Love defends the sacrament. He paraphrases 1 Cor. 11:23-26, which emphasizes the Last Supper as a sacred tradition passed down from Jesus:<sup>142</sup>

[H]e toke brede in his holi handes & lift vp hees eyene to his fadere almiȝty god, & blessed þe brede & seide þe wordes of consecracion þere ouere, by vertue of þe which wordes brede was tumede in to his body, & þen he ȝaf it to hese disciples & seide, *Takeþ & eteþ for sobely þis is my body þat sal be take & ȝiuen for ȝow*. And after in þe same manere takyng þe chalice with wyne seide, *takeþ & drinkeþ alle here of for þis is my blode þat shal be outshedde for ȝow & manye in remission of sinnes*.<sup>143</sup>

#### *The Eucharist, the Priesthood and the Real Presence*

With these words, Jesus instituted the priesthood, and with it the power to effect consecration: “And aftur he ȝaf hem powere of þat consecracion & alle preestes in hem & seide, [þ]is doþ ȝe als oft os ȝe take it in commemoracion & mynde of me.”<sup>144</sup> He then describes how the Real Presence is brought about:

Bot þan was not þat brede as it semede, & as it was before þe wordes of consecracion, nor wyne as it semede in self manere, bot onely þe likenes or þe forme of brede & wyne contynyng verrey cristes flesh & blode as it is seide.<sup>145</sup>

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[Love] considers the sacrament as Christ’s merciful gift in remembrance of his Passion, Resurrection and Ascension to heaven, all of which have been illustrated in the *Mirror*. Sargent, “Introduction,” 67.

<sup>140</sup> Allan Westphall and David Falls, “Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ,” *Geographies of Orthodoxy: Mapping English Pseudo-Bonaventuran Lives of Christ, 1350-1550*, Queen’s University Belfast, June 1, 2010, <https://geographies-of-orthodoxy.qub.ac.uk/resources/?section=corpus&id=10>.

<sup>141</sup> Love, *Mirror*, 220, 37-38 and 221, 4-5.

<sup>142</sup> “Love completely rewrites the chapter [of the *Meditationes*] on the Last Supper, incorporating a defence of the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, and the doctrine of transubstantiation.” Sargent, “Introduction,” 99.

<sup>143</sup> Love, *Mirror*, 149, 13-21.

<sup>144</sup> Love, *Mirror*, 149, 22-24.

<sup>145</sup> Love, *Mirror*, 151, 6-12.

Unbelievers, “wech falsly byleuen & seyene þat be holy sacrament of þe autere is in his kynde brede or wyne as it was before be consecracion [. . .] bene more reprouable as in þat part þan Judas.<sup>146</sup> The reference to the worst, and most famous, betrayal in Christian history identifies the Lollards as heretics seeking to destroy the Church by questioning and even mocking its teachings and practices.

Love refutes the Lollards’ critiques of the Eucharist and provides an extended theological statement in support of the Real Presence:

þe which feiþ is þis in short wordes, þat þe sacrament of þe autere dewly made by vertue of cristes wordes is verrey goddus body in forme of brede, & his verrey blode in forme of wyne, & þouh þat forme of brede & wyne seme as to alle þe bodily wittes of man brede & wyne in his kynde as it was before! neuerles it is not so in sobenesse, bot onely goddus flesh & blode in substance, so þat þe accidentes of brede & wyne wondurfully & myraclesly azeynus mannus reson, & þe comune ordre of kynde bene þere in þat holi sacrament without hir kyndely subiecte, & verrey cristies body þat suffrede deþ vpon þe crosse is here in þat sacrament bodily vnder þe forme & liknes of brede, & his verrey blode vndur likenes of wyne substancially & holely, without any feynyng or deceit, & not onely in figure as þe fals heritike seiþ.<sup>147</sup>

### *Love’s Use of Thomist Terminology*

The terms “form,” “substance” and “accidents” originate in Aristotelian philosophy that Aquinas adapts and which Love references. He explains that the Lollards’ intractable attitude toward the sacrament forces him to respond in kind: “þese termes I touch here so specialy bycause of þe lewede lollardes þat medlen of hem azeynus þe feiþ falsly.”<sup>148</sup>

Love castigates the Lollards for leading the faithful into error by elevating Aristotelian terms over the ecclesial teaching on the Eucharist.<sup>149</sup> He calls the dissenters “þe disciples of

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<sup>146</sup> Love, *Mirror*, 151, 19-30.

<sup>147</sup> Love, *Mirror*, 151, 31 to 152, 1.

<sup>148</sup> Love, *Mirror*, 152, 2-3.

<sup>149</sup> “He points out that these Lollard ‘disciples of Antichrist’ work in two ways: first, prizing the natural reason of Aristotle over the truth of the Church, they refuse to believe in the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist; second, they refuse to believe the miracles that give evidence of the worthiness of the sacrament.” Sargent, “Introduction,” 70.

Anticrist þat bene clepede Lollardes.”<sup>150</sup> In their lack of faith, they “falsly trowene & obstinately seyne þat it is brede in his kynde as it was before þe consecration,” and insist “þe substance of brede is not turnede in to þe substance of goddes body, bot duelleþ stille brede as it was before.”<sup>151</sup> Their rejection of ecclesial teaching and tradition is based on “gostly pride & presumpcion of kyndely witte, in defaut & lakke of lowely drede.”<sup>152</sup> In their arrogance, they are “worse þan Jewes or saracenes for boþe byleuen þat god is almihty.”<sup>153</sup> Love’s eucharistic theology is full of anti-Lollard vitriol; thus, in addition to the foregoing epithets, Love calls them “lewede lollardes,” “fals lollardes,” “fals heritykes” or “fals lollardes & heritykes.” with “fals opinion[s].”

Sixty years later, the *ME Bible* contains similar language to describe the Jews. If my reading is correct, the *ME Bible* implies that English Reformers are as guilty as were the Jews in denying that the Jesus Christ, the Son of God, took on human flesh.<sup>154</sup>

### *The Eucharist and the Incarnation*

In the *Treatise*, Love writes about the symbiotic relationship between the Incarnation and the Eucharist:

For to begynne first at his merueilous Incarnacion.’ loo howe expresse mynde þerof is þis mete þat he ziuēþ to vs in þe sacrament of þe awtere, for herein is he verreyly, & in þat self body þat was so merueilously conceyuede by þe holy goste aboue kynde.<sup>155</sup>

He restates the Christian affirmation that God, who took on human flesh in the Incarnation, is truly present in the Eucharist:

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<sup>150</sup> Love, *Mirror*, 152, 2-3.

<sup>151</sup> Love, *Mirror*, 225, 27-29.

<sup>152</sup> Love, *Mirror*, 225, 31-33.

<sup>153</sup> Love, *Mirror*, 225, 36-38.

<sup>154</sup> I discuss this possibility in Chapter 9, Connecting the Threads.

<sup>155</sup> Love, *Mirror*, 223, 24-28.

Bot in þis gostly mete & sacramentale commemoracion of oure lorde Jesu' he is verreyly & bodily present wiþ vs vnder an oþere forme' bot soþely in his owne propre substance verrey god & man.<sup>156</sup>

The Eucharist fulfills Jesus' promise to remain with his disciples "not onely by þe gostly presence of his godhede.' bot also by þe bodily presence of his manhede." Hence, "he ziueþ to vs in þis forseide mete of his flesh & blode."<sup>157</sup> The meditation is summed up in the following observation, with the caveat that the Eucharist is reserved for those who believe in the Real Presence:<sup>158</sup>

Bus oure lorde Jesus of his grete mercye haþ made a likyng mynde of hees merueiles in þis gostly mete, þe which is moste merueile of alle merueiles, ziuyng þis mete specialy to hem þat dreden him.<sup>159</sup>

In the *Treatise*, Love again references the words of consecration from the Last Supper, to reassure his readership that "in þat byleue þere is no perile of ydolatrie, as þe fals heretyke seiþ, þat we honourene & maken brede oure godde." Rather "we seyen & beleuen, þat in þat holy sacrament brede is turnede in to goddus bodye, by vertue of cristes wordes." Hence, believers do not worship bread "bot god & his blessedde body in forme of brede, þat is to sey in þat likenes of brede þat we seene with oure bodily eyene.' we honouren goddus body þat we seene by trewe byleue in soule with oure gostly eyene."<sup>160</sup> As Watson notes, Love is reiterating the then-standard clerical argument, which is that faith is superior to reason. In other words, Christ's presence can only be understood by faiath—it is a mystery that cannot be fully grasped by reason alone.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Love, *Mirror*, 224, 3-6.

<sup>157</sup> Love, *Mirror*, 224, 6-14.

<sup>158</sup> In other words, one must have faith to receive communion.

<sup>159</sup> Love, *Mirror*, 224, 35-38.

<sup>160</sup> Love, *Mirror*, 226, 12-20.

<sup>161</sup> "After all, as Love states, in advocating unquestioning submission to the orthodox view of transubstantiation, it is safer to abandon one's 'kyndely reson' and believe 'with a buxom drede' what Holy Church teaches, even if it should turn out to be wrong, than to persist in asking doctrinal questions and risk becoming a heretic." Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change," 853.

## *Eucharistic Miracles*

From the thirteenth century, the visual experience of the sacred became a feature of religious life, in both personal devotion and community worship. Holy images, the elevated Host, Mystery plays and relics were focal points for perceiving the divine.<sup>162</sup> As well, eucharistic miracles were visible manifestations that functioned to confirm faith in the Real Presence. Love retells the story of the Roman Matron who saw “þe sacrament turnede in to þe likenes of a fynger in flesh & blode [and] [. . .] she was comunede, & more stifely sette in trewe byleue of bis blessedde sacrament.”<sup>163</sup> Next, the legend of the agnostic priest reports that during the elevation of the Host, “wyne turnede opunly to mannus siht in to blode & brede in to flesh, declaring expressly þe forme & þe soþenes of þat blessedde sacrament.”<sup>164</sup> In both cases, the person was converted by a visual miracle. In the second miracle, however, the bishop commented that it was important to see such a miracle with the physical eye only to those who were incapable of seeing it with truer, spiritual vision in the daily Mass.<sup>165</sup>

He reiterates the symbiotic relationship between the Eucharist and the Incarnation:

Also it is a grete merueile, þat self body of oure lorde Jesu, þat sitteþ in heuen vpon be fadre riht halfe, is verreyly & holely in alle places of þe worlde where þis holy sacrament is tretede, soþely contynede in þat sacrament, in þat self flesh & blode þat was conceyuede of þe holy goste, & born of þe blessedde virgyne Marie, & henge vpon þe crosse for oure sauacion.<sup>166</sup>

In the above passage, Love explains that Jesus instituted the Eucharist for the same reason that the Son of God became incarnate: “for oure sauacion.” At that point, he integrates the Incarnation into the mystery of the Passion, thereby connecting it with the Eucharist. Yet, Love writes, “þis may

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<sup>162</sup> Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages*, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 133.

<sup>163</sup> Love, *Mirror*, 231, 5-14.

<sup>164</sup> Love, *Mirror*, 232, 4-7.

<sup>165</sup> Sargent, “Introduction,” 69.

<sup>166</sup> Love, *Mirror*, 227, 2-7.

not be comprehendet fully by mannus reson.’ bot onely standeb in byleue.”<sup>167</sup> His message is that the Real Presence can be seen only with the eyes of faith. Thus, Love advocates for belief based on faith, not on sight. For the clerical establishment, however, the days of unquestioning belief or conviction were coming to an end.<sup>168</sup>

#### ***7.4 Arguments in Defense of Images and the Eucharist***

Mirk does not discuss, to any significant length, holy images; he does, however, reiterate the argument attributed to Pope Gregory about art as the book of the illiterate, an entirely appropriate argument in view of the audience for Mirk’s sermons was largely rural and possibly illiterate. An academic exercise, Dymmok’s Latin text systematically responds to *Conclusions Four* and *Eight*. Scholarly judgment is mixed as to whether or not he intended his text to reach a wide audience. Whatever the case, his writing in Latin at a time when knowledge of the language was declining possibly resulted in a limited audience. In contrast to both Mirk and Dymmok, Love’s vernacular text follows an affective model of spirituality that urges the faithful to contemplate “the historical facts of Jesus’ earthly life in terms of human feelings and emotions.” While not explicit, the *Mirror*’s “articulations of ‘ymaginacion’ and ‘ymaging’ could hardly have failed to evoke the image controversy.”<sup>169</sup>

Against the Lollard anti-image stance, Mirk, Dymmok and Love declare that images teach the doctrine of the Incarnation and allow the faithful to contemplate Christ in his human nature. And against the charge that Christ’s body is only spiritually present in the Eucharist, the

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<sup>167</sup> Love, *Mirror*, 227, 8-9.

<sup>168</sup> See Chapter 6, The Pre-Reformation Period and the English Church.

<sup>169</sup> “Indeed, the attention to imaginative visualizing is so precise and pervasive as to suggest that the text is intended to be part of the discourse.” Sarah Stanbury, *The Visual Object of Desire in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 173, <https://doi-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.9783/9781512808292>.

three assert that the priest oversees the change from bread and wine into Christ's actual body and blood. This defense of doctrine which is supported by Scripture upholds the priestly ministry.<sup>170</sup>

The three cite eucharistic miracles as examples of the Real Presence. In the miracles described, the Host's transformation into human flesh and blood manifests Christ's presence in a tangible way.<sup>171</sup> Ultimately, Mirk, Dymmok and Love argue that the Eucharist, the sacramental manifestation of the Incarnation, maintains Christ's continuing presence in the world.

### ***7.5 Combing the Past for Answers***

As part of a program to eradicate heresy, the Church increased the accessibility of instructional material "to reach the common believers in a simultaneously attractive and institutionally verified and controlled way."<sup>172</sup> In my interpretation, the three clerics' works (as well as the later *ME Bible* in some ways) support ecclesial teaching and tradition on, among other items, holy images and eucharistic practices. Underlying these attestations is a reiteration of the doctrine at the heart of Christianity—the Incarnation—as articulated by the Church of Rome. Conversely, Reformers' criticisms of holy images and the Eucharist undermine the doctrine of the Word of God in human flesh.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> "Christ's body is less the forum for integration and social cohesion than the forum for social conflict, the very arena and medium of social argument. This is apparent in the arguments around transubstantiation in the late Middle Ages in England. Arguments about transubstantiation were not merely abstract theological debates. They touched the most frictional tensions in late medieval society, for the concerned with vexed issue of clerical monopoly over the handling of Christ's body, and access by the community of the body which it supposedly imaged." Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London: Routledge, 1996), 33, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ottawa/detail.action?docID=235111>.

<sup>171</sup> The *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*, the central panel of the *Ghent Altarpiece*, links Christ, the sacrificial lamb with the sacrament of the Eucharist, "where the bread and wine, offered by the priest during Mass, become the body and blood of Christ." Sally Hickson, "Jan Van Eyck, The Ghent Altarpiece," Smarthistory: The Centre for Public Art History, August 9, 2015, <https://smarthistory.org/van-eyck-the-ghent-altarpiece/>.

<sup>172</sup> Péri-Nagy, "Vox, Imago, Littera," 34.

<sup>173</sup> There is no evidence that Wycliffe or his followers denied the Incarnation; they did, however, critique the Church's interpretation of the doctrine, especially in its presentation via transubstantiation. Indeed, "for Wyclif, the union between the bread and body finds its most appropriate parallel in the doctrine of the Incarnation; just as two natures are there joined in a single person, so also through the words of institution are the substances of Christ's

Also, the language of polemic and conflict that the three clerics use in describing the Lollards—false, treacherous, faithless and heretical—is similar to the *ME Bible*'s portrayal of the Jews, Saracens and others. In an early section of that text, Adam's and Eve's descendants are described as “the payenymys and the Sarazins and the publicans and othire euyl linagis that ben out of the Cristen feith.”<sup>174</sup> Eventually, the *ME Bible* consolidates these various “heretics” into one group upon whom the Roman emperor seeks vengeance.<sup>175</sup>

To conclude, against the Lollards' renewed concept of Christianity—one that promoted literacy, scriptural knowledge and egalitarianism—Mirk, Dymmok and Love made traditional counter arguments. Ford's assessment of Mirk applies equally to Dymmok and Love: “The culture, governments, and economy of early modern Europe came to be controlled by the highly literate, so it can be said that Mirk championed ideas that looked to the past rather than to the future.”<sup>176</sup>

And, almost three-quarters of a century later, support of holy images and the Eucharist as expressed in the *ME Bible*, originated in a text—the *Bible en françois*—that was published in late thirteenth-century France. As I have demonstrated, the prototype's historical context was radically different from that of pre-Reformation England. Then, the Church and the papacy had power and influence in the religious and secular realms, and it is this era that Mirk, Dymmok and Love evoke.<sup>177</sup>

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body and the bread present in the consecrated host.” J. Patrick. Hornbeck, *What is a Lollard? Dissent and Belief in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 75.

<sup>174</sup> Phyllis Moe, ed., *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois*, Middle English Texts 6 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1977), 47.

<sup>175</sup> “In an age marked by aggressive persecution of heresies [third to fourth centuries CE], the original heresy was understood to be derived from Judaism itself.” James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 177.

<sup>176</sup> Ford, *John Mirk*, 148.

<sup>177</sup> See Chapter 3, English Literary Culture, the Medieval Popular Bible and *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois*.

Even so, the three clerics neglected to consider that even back then there were groups who challenged ecclesial authority, including the Cathars, who had rejected Church teaching and tradition. In their own era, they disregarded the decline of theology in the West, the excessive claims to eucharistic realism and the loss of a shared philosophical foundation. And they overlooked the new ideas about human dignity and the faithful's relationship with God. That being said, the clerical writings are important for what they reveal about late-medieval theological and religious debates even if they look to the past, at a time when Reformers were looking to the future.

Against these clerical writings that communicate overtly their support for holy images and the Eucharist and, hence, the Incarnation, in the next chapter I demonstrate that the *ME Bible* expresses implicit support of Church teaching and tradition related to holy images and the Eucharist organized in terms of a somewhat conventional understanding of the Incarnation.

## Chapter 8

### Unveiling the Incarnation

#### 8.1 Introduction

After exploring the legend of St. Veronica and the *Vengeance of the Saviour* (*Vengeance*) narrative, I looked to writings of English Reformers to determine why they condemn the use of religious images and the cult of the Eucharist. Then, I explored clerical writings that respond to those criticisms and link their arguments to the question of the Incarnation. The result is that, so far, I have approached *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois* (*ME Bible*) in small stages, piece by piece.

It is now time to interpret the *ME Bible* in recognition that its full meaning cannot be understood if we do not account for the several chapters of biblical and biblically-based material that precede the *Vengeance* narrative. A guiding principle in exegesis is that the particular illuminates the whole, and the whole illuminates the particular. Hence, in this chapter I look at the *ME Bible* in its entirety to identify connections, and their significance, between the biblical and biblically-based stories and the *Vengeance*. For the most part, my work in this chapter concentrates on the inner workings of the text itself and my reading of it.

Cristina Cervone describes how “writers sought to understand the relationship of God to humanity by encoding the concept of the incarnation within linguistic and rhetorical forms that

point to Christian truths.”<sup>1</sup> In line with Cervone, I will argue, or claim, that the *ME Bible* communicates an incarnational sensibility through repetitive words, phrases and sentences (i.e., semantics). As well, the motifs that frame the narrative are suggestive of the Incarnation: the *imago Dei* at the beginning, the Veronica approximately in the middle and the Eucharist at the conclusion. In my interpretation, these recurring literary devices communicate a conventional understanding of the Incarnation.

The *ME Bible* originated in pre-Reformation England, when the followers of John Wycliffe expressed concerns over the Church’s use of holy images and promotion of Christ’s Real Presence, through transubstantiation, in the Eucharist. As I will argue, the *ME Bible*’s semantic relationships respond implicitly to such criticisms, and arguably defend Rome’s teaching and tradition concerning the Incarnation and its implications for holy images and the sacrament of the Eucharist. Previously, I interpreted the Incarnation as pivotal to the clerical arguments; in this chapter I will demonstrate how the *ME Bible* points to the Incarnation as unifying both sections. First, however, I provide a brief introduction to the theological meaning of the Incarnation for Christian faith.

### *The Word of God Takes on Human Flesh*

As Christians sought to understand the meaning of their faith in Christ in the early centuries, the churches gradually worked out a way of describing his nature and person.<sup>2</sup>

After several centuries of controversy and debate, in 451 the Council of Chalcedon adopted the following statement:

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<sup>1</sup> Cristina M. Cervone, *Poetics of the Incarnation: Middle English Writing and the Leap of Love*, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 3, <https://doi-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.9783/9780812207477>.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Norris’ *The Christological Controversy*, gathers key texts in the controversy and development of doctrine about Christ as true God and true man. Richard A. Norris, ed. and trans., *The Christological Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

So, following the saintly fathers, we all with one voice teach the confession of one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man, of a rational soul and a body; consubstantial with the Father as regards his divinity, and the same consubstantial with us as regards his humanity; like us in all respects except for sin; begotten before the ages from the Father as regards his divinity, and in the last days the same for us and for our salvation from Mary, the virgin God-bearer, as regards his humanity; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation; at no point was the difference between the natures taken away through the union, but rather the property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single person and a single subsistent being; he is not parted or divided into two persons, but is one and the same only-begotten Son, God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ, just as the prophets taught from the beginning about him, and as the Lord Jesus Christ himself instructed us, and as the creed of the fathers handed it down to us.<sup>3</sup>

Stated simply, the Council affirmed that Jesus Christ is one person with two natures, one human and one divine. This Council would establish the authoritative manner in which Jesus Christ is to be understood, which would shape the development of theology in the centuries after Chalcedon and still today.

By and large, the rest of this chapter studies the episodes and semantics in the *ME Bible* that have an incarnational flavour—in other words, the world of the text. At times, it is supplemented by the world behind the text to provide context and coherence. At the chapter's conclusion, I describe the *ME Bible* as an ecclesial defense of the conventional understanding of the Incarnation, the world in front of the text.

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<sup>3</sup> *Sequentes igitur sanctos patres unum eundemque confiteri Filium dominum nostrum Iesum Christum consonanter omnes docemus eundem perfectum in deitate, eundem perfectum in humanitate, Deum vere et hominem vere eundem ex anima rationali et corpore, consubstantiali Patri secundum deitatem et consubstantiali nobis eundem secundum humanitatem, per omnia nobis similem absque peccato, ante saecula quidem de Patre genitum secundum deitatem, in novissimis autem diebus eundem propter nos et propter salutem nostram ex Maria virgine Dei genetrice secundum humanitatem, unum eundemque Christum Filium dominum unigenitum, in duabus naturis inconfuse, immutabiliter, indivise, inseparabiliter agnoscendum, nusquam sublata differentia naturarum propter unionem magisque salva proprietate utriusque naturae et in unam personam atque subsistentiam concurrente, non in duas personas partitum sive divisum, sed unum et eundem Filium unigenitum Deum Verbum dominum Iesum Christum, sicut ante prophetarum de eo et ipse nos Iesus Christus erudiyit et patrum nobis symbolum tradidit.* Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Volume One: Nicaea I to Lateran V*, trans. Jesuits of the British Isles (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 85-87.

## 8.2 Incarnation Promised and Fulfilled: The World of the Text

The opening chapters of the *ME Bible* consist of selected stories from the Old Testament. As I will demonstrate, these narratives lay the groundwork for the *ME Bible*'s centre of interest, the Word made Flesh, by foreshadowing the birth of Jesus Christ.

### *Make We Man to Oure Liknesse*

The world of the text begins to take shape in the opening scene, which is God's creating the first human being. It also draws the reader's attention to the *ME Bible*'s centre of interest, which is the relationship between God and humanity, a relationship most fully realized in the Incarnation.<sup>4</sup>

The opening paragraph, in Latin and Middle English, conflates Gen1:26, the *imago Dei* narrative, and Genesis 2:7, God's creation of Adam:

*Faciamus hominem ad ymaginem nostram vt habeat imperium supra terram, et pro eo vt sedes paradisi vacue repleantur. Tunc formauit Deus Adam primum hominem de limo terre & inspirauit in ipsum spiritum rationis & intellectus, & dedit ei animam vigitatiuam intellectiuam racionabilem & eciam sensitiuam. Et ex costa Ade dormientis formauit Deus feminam Euam in adiutorium similem [viro] : that is to seye, God seith, "Make we man to oure liknesse to haue lordship aboue the creatures of the erthe, and by whom the setis of paradise that ben voide 'maye' be fulfilled." And oure Lord God made Adam his first man and made him & fourmed him to his ymage and liknesse of the slyme of the erthe and inspirid hym with his holy spirit withyn his body and yaue him lif and soule with reson & vndirstonding of good and evill & yaue him rest.<sup>5</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> "The Incarnation sheds light on the *imago Dei* by demonstrating the potential for human beings to be fully realized as God's image. Jesus, as the perfect image of God, reveals the ideal humanity that God intended. Through Jesus, humanity can see a reflection of God's nature and character, and participate in the divine life." Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 21-22.

<sup>5</sup> Phyllis Moe, ed., *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois*, Middle English Texts 6 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1977), 44, 1-14.

Along with being made in God's image, Adam is formed from "the slyme of the erthe." Then, God breathed his spirit into Adam, which "yaue him lif."<sup>6</sup> The narrator is telling us that man is a creature made from above (God's image and spirit) and below (earth).<sup>7</sup>

The Middle English version adds that God gave Adam "vndirstonding of good and evill."<sup>8</sup> To know the difference between good and evil distinguishes human beings from the animals, yet Adam still disobeys God.<sup>9</sup> The theological meaning here, however, is less about Adam's sin and more about God's love for humanity, a love so great that He sent his Son to overturn sin and death and renew the divine image.<sup>10</sup>

### *Paradise and the Serpent*

The ensuing narrative broadly adheres to the Genesis narrative of humanity's first disobedience that brings sin and evil into the world. As written, God has provided Adam and Eve with an idyllic life in "paradise terrestre" provided they "thei shuld not touche ne ete of the apples" of the "appultre," for if they did "thei shuld dye and rot't'e."<sup>11</sup> Soon after, "Lucifer," who was expelled from Paradise "because he wold be liche vnto God his maker," arrives.<sup>12</sup> He asks the woman why God has prohibited her from eating the fruit, and suggests that God has an ulterior motive:

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<sup>6</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 44.

<sup>7</sup> Despite Adam's being in God's image, he is not God; rather, his existence is due to God's transforming the slime of the of dirt into a human being of flesh and bone, body and blood, soul and spirit.

<sup>8</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 44.

<sup>9</sup> At this point in the narrative, Eve is not present.

<sup>10</sup> "Jesus, fulfilled the spoilt promise of Adam and renewed the image of God in the human." Aidan Nichols *The Art of God Incarnate* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1980), 36.

<sup>11</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 44. In the Vulgate, St. Jerome translated the Hebrew word, *peri* (the fruit hanging from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil), as *malum* (apple) "because of an inherent pun on *malum* (with a short "a"), meaning 'evil.'" Robert Applebaum, *Aguecheek's Beef, Belch's Hiccup, and Other Gastronomic Interjections: Literature, Culture and Food Among the Early Moderns* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 194.

<sup>12</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 45.

Wotist 'thou' nat why that God hath defended that ye shuld not ete of thees apples of this appultre? For he wold kepe you in seruage, for if ye eten therof ye shuld anon be liche to God and also to the might of his uertue and ye shuld reigne as God.<sup>13</sup>

Eve, who is “of light corage & coueitous,” pays heed to the serpent’s words and “ranne to þe tre and bote an apple.” She realizes that she has been deceived and looks to blame Adam. So, Adam, also “of light corage,” “toke an apple and bote it.”<sup>14</sup> Immediately, Adam also realizes the deception, and the pair flee and hide beneath a fig tree.

Of note is the juxtaposition of nature’s beauty and bounty (paradise, apple tree) with corruption (death, rotting) and the action verbs (ran, bit) that describe Adam’s and Eve’s rush to eat the apple. In a short sequence, the narrative describes the consequences of human desire and the inability to accept responsibility for one’s actions.

### *The Descent into Earth*

The transgression in the Garden introduces sin and death into the world, resulting in a separation between humanity and God, as well as physical suffering and hardship. Flesh and earth become associated with sorrow, decay and death. Angry at the transgression, God curses the ground and pronounces that Adam and Eve will die and their flesh will wither. The Lord subsequently withdraws the pair’s elevated status and they “descended into the erth.”

As punishment, Eve will bear children “in anguyassh, & in perill of deth” and “lyue in peynes and [...] dye.” For his part, Adam “vsid all his life in laboure of the erth” and “shalt suffer myssese [misery], pouerte, hunger, thirst, & cold and dye and rot’t’e.” As the narrator

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<sup>13</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 45, 10-14.

<sup>14</sup> Upon eating the apple, Adam cries, “‘Alas! soroufully, synnere’, and toke himselue by the throte that the morcelle passid no further. And therefore to many men there semeth such a knoppe vnder the throte in remembraunce of that synne.” Moe, *ME Bible*, 45, 30-33.

observes “the world was lost by synne & couetice of Adam and Eue, his wife.”<sup>15</sup> The term “the world was lost” suggests that all of creation, not only humanity, is affected by the transgression.

### *Flesh Turns to Violence*

Adam and Eve’s sin is transmitted to the next generation. We read that “Caym slough Abel by enuye for cause him thougt that Abel had more grace to lyue than he hadde and that the bestis of Abel profittd more then Caymes.” After the murder, “God cursid Caym and alle his lyne that was like to him, and God cursid the erthe that he labourd.” Cast out from the land, Cain goes to live in the forest where “he lay with the wilde bestis.”<sup>16</sup> Cain’s violence against his brother is a crime against both God and humanity.

God does not directly punish Cain; rather, Cain’s retribution is meted out by another of Adam’s sons who kills him with a hatchet. God refuses to disengage with his creation, however, even in the presence of violence. In a reflection on Cain’s violent end, “God seid, ‘Who that is youen to suerd he shal perissh with the suerd,’: that is to sey, who that sleth with swerd, with ‘þe’ swerd he shal perissh; and who that sleth man, he sleth his soule.”<sup>17</sup> Here, the narrator paraphrases Jesus’ words (Matthew 26:52), but attributes them instead to God as a way of signalling that Jesus and the Creator are the same.

Adam dies from “goute” at “.ix.C. & .xxx. yere” (930 years), and Eve departs for “diuerse cutrees & landis.”<sup>18</sup> Even in Adam and Eve’s absence, the transgression in the garden contaminates their descendants, who are corrupted by “diuerse synnes of lecherie.” The earth has

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<sup>15</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 46.

<sup>16</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 47.

<sup>17</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 47, 14-18.

<sup>18</sup> The catalogue of medical, geographical and architectural elements reflects the prevailing idea of history in the Middle Ages, whereby authors “medievalized” stories from the past. The historian, Geoffrey Ashe, writes, “[w]hen [medieval authors] handled an ancient story they medievalized it, making the characters very much like their own contemporaries.” Geoffrey Ashe, *The Discovery of King Arthur* (London: Debret’s Peerage Limited, 1985), 14.

devolved into a blighted wilderness populated by “payenymys and the Sarazins and the publicans and othire euyl linagis that ben out of the Cristen feith.”<sup>19</sup> The reference to those “out of the Cristen feith” (i.e., non-Christians) augurs the subsequent hostilities between the Romans and the Jews; however, and as previously described, the fall of Jerusalem could also be interpreted in terms of contemporary conflicts of a religious nature.

Even so, identifying non-Christians also assumes that also good people descended from Adam and Eve. They include Noah and later Abraham, with whom God chose to form the Covenant, Abraham’s son Isaac and his grandson Jacob.<sup>20</sup> We read that God sends “a deluge & an outrageous flode of the see that surmountid all þe erth,” but spares “Noe, that was a good man and iuste, and his lyne.”<sup>21</sup> From Noah and his family issue “Abraham, Isac, Iacob, & many othire good men that serued & loued God.” They “stablisshid the circumcision that the Iuwes used,” not as a sign of the Covenant, but to staunch “the synne of lecherie.”<sup>22</sup>

This section captures the tenor of Christianity’s historical ambivalence towards the Jews.<sup>23</sup> While it lauds the Patriarchs’ goodness, it also indirectly identifies them as lecherous, a vice that some Christians believed was common among Jewish men.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 47. As well, the reference to non-Christians augurs the hostilities between the Roman army and the Jews following the Crucifixion.

<sup>20</sup> Both Noah and Abraham descended from Adam and Eve’s third son, Seth. He, however, is not mentioned in the *ME Bible*.

<sup>21</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 48, 1-4.

<sup>22</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 48, 20.

<sup>23</sup> I discuss the issue of Christianity’s historical ambivalence towards the Jews/Judaism in Chapter 5, *The Vengeance of the Saviour: Proclaiming Rome’s Superiority*.

<sup>24</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 48. “[W]hile Jewish men had long been accused of lustfulness, effeminacy and sexual deviance, eighteenth-century culture added to these concerns a unique interest in sexual pathology, borne in part from the growing medical anxiety around venereal disease. Consequently, while Jewish men were still widely condemned for their lechery, they were also increasingly ridiculed for a range of penile and sexual disorders that were believed to make sex unsatisfying, difficult or even impossible. Noelle, Gallagher, “The Jew’s Penis: Circumcision and Sexual Pathology in Eighteenth-Century England,” *Med Humanit* 49, no. 1 (2023): 70-82, doi:10.1136/medhum-2021-012362.

### *Incarnation Foretold*

The first explicit reference to the Incarnation is within the context of anachronistic prophecies of Jesus' birth:

Jeremye, Ysaie, Daniel, 'Ez'chiel & many oþir prophetis seiden and shewden the coming of oure Lord & seid to the peple of Iuwes tofore ere Crist toke fleish in þe Virgine Marie more then .vM<sup>1</sup>. yere.<sup>25</sup>

Another passage mentions two rites of initiation: the blood of *circumcision*, Jesus' shed blood, baptism and salvation:

And thei shedde that blood and that circumcision in the token of holi bapty[m] for al Cristen folk which ben waishen and clensid of alle filthis & synnes, & this sacrifice was wel made in remembraunce of the precious deth of Iesu Crist, of whom the blood was shedde for our saluacion and for to wassh away the ordre of oure synnes.<sup>26</sup>

The listed elements point to the Incarnation as the means by which salvation has been made possible. Therefore, the narrative tells us, salvation is available primarily through faith in Jesus Christ.

The concluding passage of the Old Testament portion of the *ME Bible* refers to the earlier prophecy:

And alighti God remembrid the promisis that he promisid to Abraham, to Moises, to Daid and to the othire good and wise men that he wold uisit & defend hem in this erth and wold saue his peple.<sup>27</sup>

To say that God will visit, defend and save his people is to deal in the language of Incarnation and to take a view on its meaning. Once again, the narrative makes a connection between the Incarnation and salvation. At the same time, the phrase "defend hem in this erth" identifies the Patriarchs and the righteous as being under divine protection.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 49, 17-20.

<sup>26</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 48, 13-18.

<sup>27</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 50, 13-16.

<sup>28</sup> See Chapter 5, *The Vengeance of the Saviour: Proclaiming Rome's Superiority*, for a discussion on Christianity's ambivalence towards the Jews/Judaism.

These extracts from Genesis describe the unfolding relationship between God and humanity, a relationship that begins with promise, but is damaged subsequently by the first sin. Adam and Eve are humanity's prototypes—their weakness and lack of courage in the garden show human frailty, and represent the failings of subsequent human beings. The chosen stories also describe a pattern whereby God punishes human faithlessness, but also shows mercy and forgiveness. The ultimate expression of God's benevolence is expressed in regal language as “the full mighti king [who] descendid & toke mannes flessch in the blissid Virgine Marie.”<sup>29</sup>

Finally, the passage that references the blood of circumcision, Christ's shed blood, and baptism appears to foreshadow an ascendance of Christianity over Judaism—circumcision signifies the Old Covenant; Jesus' blood is shed in the circumcision, but also during the Passion; and, both his blood shed during the Passion and the sacrament of baptism are for the forgiveness of sins. Although the connections are indirect, it is sufficient to say that, even at this early point, the text is interested in arguing a Christianity that inevitably triumphs over its enemies.<sup>30</sup>

### ***8.3 Incarnation Fulfilled***

The chapter, *Hou God descended into þe erþe & of the incarnacion*, is replete with allusions to the Incarnation.<sup>31</sup> In this section, I describe the *ME Bible's* use of language and stories to convey this seminal Christian belief and its implications for God, humanity and their relationship as conventionally understood.

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<sup>29</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 51.

<sup>30</sup> Acts 15:1-20 describes the Council of Jerusalem, wherein Peter avers that salvation is attained by grace through faith, not by circumcision and the law of Moses.

<sup>31</sup> The title alerts readers to the intent, which is to describe God's gift to fallen humanity—the Incarnation.

### 8.3.1 *The Word is Made Flesh*

#### *Annunciation*

The Annunciation *tableau* is largely faithful to the Gospel account in Luke 1:26-38, except that, following the angel's salutation, *Ave, gracia plea Deus tecum*, is a speech ornamented with references to earth, flesh and the Incarnation:

The almiȝti God sedith to thee that he shal descende in 'to' the [erþe] and take mannes flesh and shal become a fleishly man and shall saue the peple, and whan he shal be born thou shal clepe him Iesu Crist.<sup>32</sup>

The angel explains to Mary that her son will be fully human and fully divine in one person—a “fleishly man.” The narrator compares the virgin birth to sunlight filtering through a glass pane without damaging it:

And than that full mighti Lord descended in the same wise as the sonne descendid & smytiþ vpon the glas and withdrawith him ayen without corrupcion or euel doing to the glas, and toke mannes fleish in the ful glorious and blissid Vergine Marie by ful gret vertues.<sup>33</sup>

The author uses a simple, and popular, analogy to explain Jesus' divine origin. The reader may have been familiar with the metaphor from its appearance in the religious art and literature of Western Europe.<sup>34</sup>

The next episode describes the consequences of not heeding “the comaundementis of God.”<sup>35</sup> The Lord strikes down the infanticidal Herod with an illness that mimics an Old Testament plague, or a plague familiar to anyone who had survived the Black Death:

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<sup>32</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 50, 23-26.

<sup>33</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 51, 2-6.

<sup>34</sup> Andrew Breeze studies this medieval metaphor, which was common in devotional literature in various languages throughout the Christian West. Andrew Breeze, “The Blessed Virgin and the Sunbeam Through Glass,” *Barcelona English Language and Literature Studies* 2 (1990): 53-64, <https://raco.cat/index.php/Bells/article/view/98196>.

<sup>35</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 52.

[H]e becam so foule a mezell [leper] þat the bones of his fete and of his handis and the fleish of his body and of his visage brake and rotid that he stank so vileun‘ou’sly þat no man might ‘come’ nigh him.<sup>36</sup>

The description of the evil king’s foul, rotting flesh contrasts with the purity of the Incarnation, set forth in the Annunciation scene. But Herod’s malaise also augurs Vespasian’s illness, which, however, will have a dissimilar outcome.

### *Incarnation and Baptism*

The next episode of interest is Jesus’ baptism, which is the first public manifestation of the Incarnation. Jesus is both human, John’s cousin, and divine, God the Father’s beloved Son:

And oure Lord was baptizid in flum Iordan, and Seint Iohn Baptist cristend him that was his cosin germaine, and þus descendid þe voice of the Holy Gost in the water as he baptizid him, seying pese wurdis: *Hic est filius meus dilectus*.<sup>37</sup>

Without delay, Jesus then lays out the requirements necessary for salvation, which is, first, belief in him, followed by baptism:

And oure Lord seid: *Qui ‘in’ me crediderit et baptizatus fuerit saluis erit*: that is to sey, ‘Who that bileueth in me & is baptizid, he shal be saued.’<sup>38</sup>

The *ME Bible* positions Jesus’ baptism in line with the unfolding history of salvation, according to God’s plan. Nevertheless, “holi bapty[m] for al Cristen folk” must be rooted in belief in “Iesu Crist, of whom the blood was shedde for our saluacion and for to wassh away the ordre of oure synnes.”<sup>39</sup>

After being baptized, Jesus begins his public ministry and performs miracles:

And oure Lord went preching and his apostles and helid the seke of all maladies and made the defe to here, the dumbe to speke, the blynd to see, the crokid to go right, and arerid the deed. And hi miȝt wele do alle this thingis as God as he was.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 52, 3-6.

<sup>37</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 52, 25-28. Jesus’ baptism is recorded in Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; and Luke 3:21-22.

<sup>38</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 52, 32-35.

<sup>39</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 48.

<sup>40</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 52, 35 to 53, 1.

### *Jesus, Incarnate Word*

In Jerusalem, the Jews welcome Jesus and recognize him as the Incarnate Word:

And the peple spradde their clothis in ‘þe’ middis of the weyes to that ende that our Lord might go upon him; and the children of the Iuwes song tofore him and seid: *Osanna filio David; benedictus qui venit in omine Domini; osann in excelsis*; That is to sey, ‘See here the ful mighti son of God that is descended into erth, his peple to saue; honoure be apparaild to him. Amen.’<sup>41</sup>

Once again, there appears to be a contrast between ordinary Jews and their leaders. As we see in the above scene, the latter openly support Jesus. The religious authorities, however, are concerned by Jesus teaching in the Temple, his preaching and his performing healing miracles. They are especially concerned when Jesus raises “Lazare, broþir to Marie Maudleyne, that had benn .iiij daies dede and in the erthe doluen [buried].”<sup>42</sup> Lazarus’ burial (doluen) in the earth both compares and contrasts with Jesus’ living (duelling) on the earth as a “verray fleishly man [for] .xxxij. yeres.”<sup>43</sup> Even so, the miracle is important because it signifies Jesus’ power over death which includes his own Resurrection.

### *8.3.2 The Passion*

The *ME Bible*’s Passion narrative begins with Jesus’ arrest. Initially, the focus is on Jesus’ divine nature, but as the story evolves he is described in increasingly anthropomorphic terms.

#### *Ego sum*

Jesus’ divinity is demonstrated when he identifies himself as *Ego sum* and the soldiers fall to the ground. Their unexpected and dramatic response is precipitated in recognition that I

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<sup>41</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 53, 19-25.

<sup>42</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 53. This miracle is recorded in John 11:1-44.

<sup>43</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 54.

AM is the sacred name of God chronicled in Exodus 3:14 and the first word of the First Commandment. As devout Jews, they know the story of Moses; hence, they fall to the ground recognizing that they are in God's presence.

Violence erupts when Peter draws his sword and severs the servant's right ear. Jesus' repeats God's warning about seeking vengeance and then reiterates his divine mission:

Then seid oure Lord to Seint Petre, *Tolle gladium tuum et pone in vaginam; quia qui gladio percutit, gladio peribit. Ecesse est ut iompleantur quod scriptum est de me per prophetas pro salute humana*: Putte thy swerd into his scawbert, for he that with swerd sleeth with swerd shal be slayne. It is behoueful that Scriptures be fulfilled that þe holi prophetis haue written and prophecied of me for the saluaction of the world.<sup>44</sup>

The two allusions lend themselves to certain connections. In this case, that Jesus and God are one and the same.

Almost immediately, "Cayphas with a gret company of Iuwes" arrives.<sup>45</sup> He then says, "Thou art the sonne of God," which is not a question, but a declaration. Jesus' answer, "I am, þou hast seid: Ego sum, tu dixist," once again evokes God's sacred name.<sup>46</sup> Possibly, Caiaphas is acknowledging Jesus' divinity, just as did the Jews when Jesus entered the city. Henceforward, however, they are hostile to Jesus, which suggests they have been influenced by the religious authorities (i.e., Caiaphas).<sup>47</sup>

Because Jesus has responded successfully to the verbal challenges, the authorities accuse him of boasting "þat if the temple of Ierusalem were broken doun he shuld make it up ayen withyn .iiij. daies."<sup>48</sup> Within the *ME Bible's* context, Jesus' cryptic statement foreshadows

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<sup>44</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 54, 32 to 55, 4. This familiar idiom (live by the sword, die by the sword) originates with Matthew 26:52.

<sup>45</sup> In the Gospels, Caiaphas does not accompany the soldiers to arrest Jesus. His earliest appearance is when Jesus is brought before the Council (see Matthew 26:57 and John 18:24).

<sup>46</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 54, 55.

<sup>47</sup> See Chapter 5, *The Vengeance of the Saviour: Proclaiming Rome's Superiority*, wherein I comment on the ambiguous portrayal of the Jews.

<sup>48</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 55. Jesus' prophecy features in John 2:19.

Vespasian's later destruction of the Temple, but it also refers to Jesus' death and Resurrection, and his role as "the new dwelling-place of the Lord."<sup>49</sup>

The betrayal scene features at a critical point in the narrative—it is the catalyst for Jesus' arrest, interrogation and subsequent Crucifixion. Judas, "ful of couetice & of synne," aligns himself with the "fals cruel Iuwes."<sup>50</sup> At this point, the story emphasizes Jewish participation in the treacherous acts that lead to Jesus' death. Just as Adam and Eve betrayed God in a garden, Jesus, God incarnate, is betrayed in a garden.

### *Earthly King or Son of God?*

In words resembling Caiaphas' declaration, Pilate asks "'Thou art the sonne of God, king of þe Iuwes? *Tu es filius Dei viui rex Iudeorum?*'" which, in the *ME Bible*, is both a question and a statement about Jesus' identity. His reply, "I am as thou has seid," reiterates the I AM motif.<sup>51</sup> He explicitly identifies himself as the one who descended from heaven and assumed human flesh for the salvation of the world:

And oure Lord sei, *Tu non habes potestatem super me nisi datum tibi esset de supra, sed adueni ut [impleantur] quod scriptum est de me per prophetas*: 'Thou hast no powere ouer me but if it were ordeined from heven an high, for I am hidir com & descendid into þe erþe to fulfille the Scripture that the holi prophetis haue writen of me for the sa'l'uacion of the world.'<sup>52</sup>

Against Pilate's protestations, the Jews insist on condemning Jesus to death. They cry out, "'His blood be on us and on our children!'"<sup>53</sup> Akin to the transmission of Adam and Eve's sin to their descendants, this one verse assigns culpability in Jesus' death to the Jews who were

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<sup>49</sup> Beatrice Groves, *The Destruction of Jerusalem in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 19, <https://doi-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.1017/CBO9781316286289>. Also, see the discussion on prophecy in Chapter 5, *The Vengeance of the Saviour: Proclaiming Rome's Superiority*.

<sup>50</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 54.

<sup>51</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 59.

<sup>52</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 59, 20-28. In John 19:11, Jesus tells Pilate that his authority to condemn him is only possible because God has permitted it.

<sup>53</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 60. This phrase, known as the "blood curse," is from Matthew 27:25.

present, their children and the generations that follow. The multiplicity of prior references to God's descent to earth insinuate that the Jews are committing deicide.

Concurrently, the reality of two natures united in one person is thrown into relief: though divine, Jesus is subject to the human condition—he is frightened and vulnerable, sad and distressed. But he is also heroic and compassionate. Thus, while on earth, Jesus experiences the myriad of human feelings and emotions.

### *The vera icona*

As Jesus bears the cross to Calvary, “þere went toforn oure Lord an holi woman called Veronica, þat bare a couerchif to selle at the cheping [market].” She tells Jesus that on the previous Sunday, he healed her of a “gret sekenesse,” and offers her kerchief to wipe away the blood and sweat from his face. He does and “sodeinly was the visage of oure Lord purtraied in the couerchif as like as it had ben his said visage fleishly.”<sup>54</sup> Jesus instructs Veronica to guard the cloth as it will cure many sicknesses:

And anone Veronica turned home to hir hous ageyn, and there was a woman there by hire that lay in a sekenesse; and she touched hir with the couerchif, and anon she was hole and thankid God. And in the same wise many other were helid.<sup>55</sup>

Henceforth, the cloth is the medium by which diseases are healed. It is not Veronica, though, who has the power to heal the “many other.” Rather, it is the cloth that Jesus authorizes to carry on the healing ministry in his stead.

### *Incarnation Fulfilled*

Thereafter, at the foot of the cross, Jesus alludes to his divine origin to remind his mother of his earthly purpose:

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<sup>54</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 62.

<sup>55</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 62, 24-28.

Suete modir, discumfort you not. Think on the wurdis that I haue seid may times, that I haue descended into the erth for to saue the peple and þat therfore it behoueth me to suffre deth bodily for to delyuer þe soulis out of peynes of helle.<sup>56</sup>

Before dying, Jesus positions his mission on earth within the larger context of the messianic prophecies, which he has fulfilled:

And þerfore, dere mopdir, discumfort you not, for it behoueth that Scripture be fulfillid that the holi prophetis haue writen of me for the sa'l'uacion of the world.<sup>57</sup>

The narrator then summarizes the *ME Bible*'s biblical portion:

And in the same wise as the world was lost by synne & couetice of Adam and Eue, his wife, and bi the euel spirit of the deuel that deceyvid hem & made hem die and to ete of thapple ageyns the wille of God; however, it was bought again in the same wise was alle the world bought ageyn & delyuered from the peines of helle by þe holi spirit of God that toke mannes fleish in the blissid Virgin Marie, that was without synne and was verray man in erthe, and aftir suffrid peine of deth upon the cros and his blood there shad for to waish away thordre of our synnes.<sup>58</sup>

About one-third of the preceding passage gives background on why the world was lost. The bulk of it, however, details how the world is regained by “þe holi spirit of God that toke mannes fleish in the blissid Virgin.”<sup>59</sup> Without doubt, in the *ME Bible* the why is not as important as the how. The Incarnation, and a specific understanding of its meaning, plays the central role.

The narrative of God's descent to earth features multiple references to materiality—for example, the Annunciation is described as “God descended into þe erþe” and took “mannes flesh and shal become a fleishly man.”<sup>60</sup> Jesus is “the ful mighti son of God that is descended into erth,” “God that toke mannes fleish,” and became “a fleishly man,” and “verray man in erthe.”<sup>61</sup> And Jesus himself says, “I haue descended into the erth.”<sup>62</sup> Jesus' words and actions

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<sup>56</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 63, 28-31.

<sup>57</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 64, 4-6.

<sup>58</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 66, 35 to 67, 8.

<sup>59</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 67.

<sup>60</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 51.

<sup>61</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 53, 50, 67.

<sup>62</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 63.

disclose him as true God and true man. Flesh and earth, which were formerly associated with sorrow, decay and death, have been redeemed by the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Incarnation.

Preceding his ascension to heaven, Jesus instructs his followers to go into the world and baptize; those who believe in him will be saved:

*Ite docentes gentes per vniuersum mundum, baptizantes eos in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen. Qui crediderit et baptizatus fuerit, saluus erit: þis is to sey, ‘Go ye by alle the world and teche the peple, and baptize hem in the name of the Fadir and of the Sonne & of the Holi Gost. And al tho that bileue in me & don my commaundementis shal be saued.’*<sup>63</sup>

The disciples leave for foreign lands to baptize “in the name of the Fadir and of the Sonne and of Holi Gost.”<sup>64</sup>

#### ***8.4 Incarnation and God’s Presence in the World***

With the conclusion of the biblical portion of the *ME Bible*, the Veronica story is subsumed into that of St. Peter in Rome and the conversion of Vespasian and the Romans. From there, the narrative transitions to the story of Vespasian leading the siege of Jerusalem and destroying the Temple in retaliation for Jesus’ execution (i.e., the *Vengeance*).

##### *Peter Travels to Rome*

The baptismal motif that concludes the biblical portion of the *ME Bible* inaugurates the story of Veronica and the destruction of Jerusalem (the *Vengeance*). It begins when Peter quits Jerusalem for Rome to continue Jesus’ earthly ministry:

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<sup>63</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 69, 11-17. Jesus’ final instruction, called the Great Commission, is in Matthew. 28:19-20.

<sup>64</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 70.

Pan cam Seint Petre into the cite of Rome, and there he tauȝt and prechid the peple the holi Cristen law and baptizid hem in the name of the Fadir and of the Sonne and of the Holy Gost and conuertid much peple into good bileue.<sup>65</sup>

He subsequently meets the emperor, whose brother, Vespasian, suffers from a foul, disfiguring illness that brings to mind Herod's malady:

Than it happind that themperoure of Rome had a brother that was a mezel so that his fleish was roten and broken in many a place of his bodi, and his visage so bolned and knottid that he might but little se, and so he was corrupt that he stanke and was of so foul odour and sauoure that vnneth might eny creature approche or come nygh him.<sup>66</sup>

Peter tells Vespasian about Jesus who "arreside dede men to life ageyn & made the blynd to see, the crokid to go right."<sup>67</sup> Intrigued, the prince asks about a relic associated with Jesus; Peter tells of "a woman in Ierusalem clepid Veronica that hath a gret couerchif wheryn bymage of oure Lord Iesu Crist is purtraied." Then, Peter's description of the holy cloth calls to mind the miracle on the road to Calvary: "And anon bi the vertu of God the visage of him was purtraied and as apparishant as it were in þe fleish and bones."<sup>68</sup>

Vespasian is overjoyed to learn that Veronica and the cloth have been summoned to Rome:

Now I wote wel that God loueth me & that it likid him to think on me and will that I be made hole. And gret honoure he hath done me without deseruyng whan the liknes and the purtrature of his visage he hath sent to me. And I require my lord and bropir themperoure and the princis & barons that here ben that thei wil anon bring me that holi couerchif, for I haue gret trust that I shal be hole as sone as I se it.<sup>69</sup>

### *Vespasian's Cure*

Later, Veronica and Peter meet in Rome and she transfers ownership of the cloth to him; he takes the cloth between his hands and processes it through the streets. As they pass a temple,

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<sup>65</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 70, 7-10.

<sup>66</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 70, 15-20.

<sup>67</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 70.

<sup>68</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 71.

<sup>69</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 73, 25-32.

the “foule mametis [images] and ydols of the paynems, they fil down to the erth and were al tobrused and broken.”<sup>70</sup> Previously, the Jews had fallen when they recognized they were in God’s presence; now the idols and statues fall down in front of the Veronica, the cloth imprinted with Christ’s face, the true image of God.

At the palace, Peter displays the cloth in front of Vespasian, who then makes the following declaration of faith:

Here is the ymage of the gret God þat euer shal last, that is called Iesu Crist that made alle thing, to whom I besech of myn helth and my sa‘l’aucion.<sup>71</sup>

As Peter drapes the cloth over Vespasian and blesses him, the prince is healed:

[T]han Seint Petir leid the holi couerchif upon his bodi and his visage and blissid hem thrice with the signe of þe cros in the name of the Fadir and the Sonne and the Holi Gost. And therwithall in the same houre was Vaspasian made hole thurgh the vertu and might of almighty God and bi the miracle of that holi veile of Veronica. And the mezelry fille away and the scabbe, and his fleish becam as clene and swete as any mannes, and rose up al hole and wele at ease & mighty and light.<sup>72</sup>

The prince, along with the Roman court and citizens, are baptized. The cloth ascends to the ceiling; it remains there until Evensong and then descends into Peter’s hands. The veil is subsequently enshrined near the palace and is exhibited annually:

And then temperoure Cezar lete ordeyn that holi couerchif in gold and in siluer wioth gret solemnite & honoure whils that he lyued, and yit it is at Rome and is shewid euery yere ones to the peple.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 74, 7-9. Possibly, this episode is taken from the Gospel of Nicodemus: *Ingressus autem Iesus et a signiferis qui ferebant signa curuata sunt capita signorum ex se et adorauerunt Iesum*. “Now when Jesus entered in, and the ensigns were holding the standards, the images (busts) of the standards bowed and did reverence to Jesus.” H.C. Kim, ed. *The Gospel of Nicodemus: Gesta Salvatoris*. The Toronto Medieval Latin Texts (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies, 2000. Accessed December 7, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central. 15.

<sup>71</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 74, 16-19.

<sup>72</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 74, 20-28.

<sup>73</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 75, 11-14. “In Vatican City, on the Fifth Sunday of Lent, an extraordinary liturgy takes place at St. Peter’s Basilica: the display of a revered relic known as “Veronica’s Veil.” This relic is deeply tied to the Stations of the Cross, depicting a moment where a woman named Veronica wipes Jesus’ face with a cloth as he carries the cross to Calvary.” Jacob Stein, “The Historical Origins of Veronica’s Veil: Inside the Cloth Relic of Jesus’ Holy Face Wiped on Calvary,” EWTN Vatican, Fondazione EWTN News ETS, March 25, 2024, <https://www.ewtnvatican.com/articles/historical-origins-of-veronicas-veil-inside-the-cloth-relic-of-jesus-holy-face-wiped-on-calvary-2357>.

Veronica also remains in Rome and “there make the temple þat is called the minister of Seint Petre.”<sup>74</sup>

The action has moved from Jerusalem to Rome where Christianity takes root. In Rome, emblems of the Church’s hegemony—the Veronica and the papacy—are enshrined, thereby establishing the city as the centre of the Roman Empire and of Christianity.

### *Vespasian’s Vengeance*

An enraged Vespasian now vows to extract vengeance for the death of God incarnate:

I am comen hidir for to avenge þe deth of Iesu Crist, euerlasting God, which descendid here upon erþe for the sa’l’uacion of the peple and shewid wele that he was God by his holi werkis and miracles and by the doctrines and ensamples that he shewid to the Iuwes.<sup>75</sup>

When preparing his men for their mission, he evokes the Incarnation again:

Feir sirs, we be comen hidir from the noble cite of Rome [...] to avenge the cruel deth of Iesu Crist by the fals enuye of thees fals Iuwes, which descendid from heuen into this erthe for the sa’l’uacion of the world and suffrid paynful passion of dethe & martird of these felonious and myscreantz Iuwes that here be com now so proudly ayens us out of this cite.<sup>76</sup>

In Jerusalem, Vespasian publicly declares his faith; he demands “that by the grace of almighty God, in whos name I am baptizid and by his miracle am helid of the foule and gret sekenesse of mezelry” the Jews and their leaders “take holy baptyem.”<sup>77</sup>

Rather than comply, the “fals” Jews refuse Vespasian’s offer, and instead humiliate the Roman envoys:

[T]hei toke the .xij knightis and shaued away alle the here of their hedes and of their berdis & toke away alle their armures and their other arry and lad hem by alle the cite, and than toke .xij. gret staues [stones] and made to despoile the seid knightis al nakid into their lynnon clothis and than bound fast theyre handis behind hem with the gret staues

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<sup>74</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 75.

<sup>75</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 76.

<sup>76</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 81

<sup>77</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 76.

and so vyllan‘ou’sly put hem out of the yatis of the cite, and anoyntid their visagis with colis [meat broth] and hangid upon eche of hem a chese at their necke[.]<sup>78</sup>

After vanquishing the Jews, Vespasian sells some captives for thirty pieces of silver, an amount equalling Judas’ payment for betraying Jesus; the remaining Jews are cursed to wander throughout the world for their “fals beleue and the outrageous enuye and falsnes that þey did to Iesu Crist, which descended from heuen to be incarnate of oure blissid Lady Seint Marie and be born veray God and man to suffer deth for the sa‘l’uacion of alle mankynde.”<sup>79</sup> Then, the work concludes with Vespasian succeeding his brother as Roman emperor. He oversees a flourishing Christian empire and follows “the rule of holy church,” including Mass and the sacraments, including “that holy host of sacrament [that] ys shewid vnto the peple.”<sup>80</sup>

The *ME Bible*’s version of the *Vengeance* is set against the historical and contextual background of the *Vengeance of the Saviour* tradition.<sup>81</sup> Still, it has connections to the previous accounts, albeit in a different setting. These links include the reappearances of Veronica and the holy cloth, of Peter and, to a lesser extent, of Caiaphas and Pilate. References to baptism and God-made-flesh connect the biblical portion of the *ME Bible* to the *Vengeance*. It invites the reader to recall and reflect on Jesus’ baptism, which inaugurated his public ministry and confirmed his identity as the Son of God.

Vespasian honours the holy cloth because he recognizes that it is imprinted with the image of God.<sup>82</sup> Earlier, the text described how God struck down King Herod with a plague-like

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<sup>78</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 77, 13-22.

<sup>79</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 88, 35-36; 89, 37-39.

<sup>80</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 90.

<sup>81</sup> See Chapter 5, *The Vengeance of the Saviour: Proclaiming Rome’s Superiority*.

<sup>82</sup> Vespasian honours the “holy couerchif,” on which is imprinted the “the ymage of oure Lord Iesu Crist,” the “ymage of the gret God [...] that is callid Iesu Crist.” Moe, *ME Bible*, 75, 81.

illness. Vespasian's illness is similar, but he is cured because he has looked upon the image on Veronica's cloth. Thus, God is revealed in the face of Christ, the image (eikōn) of God.<sup>83</sup>

The cloth has healed Vespasian just as Jesus would have done when he was alive.

Vespasian's reverence for the one who "descendid from heuen into this erthe" contrasts with his loathing of "the fals Iuwes & and the miscreantis" whose religion is based on "fals beleue" (i.e., error). Henceforth, Adam's and Eve's descendants, previously described in generic terms, are now specifically identified as the Jews, "the original heretics."<sup>84</sup>

### *Incarnation in the ME Bible*

In different ways, the *imago Dei*, the Veronica (the holy cloth) and the Eucharist frame the narrative and point to the Incarnation. The *imago Dei* is positioned at the beginning of the narrative, the Veronica in the middle and the Eucharist at the conclusion, so that each motif builds upon the previous one. Incarnation is the interpretive clue that allows us to understand the full meaning of the text, and puts into relief the specific ways it characterizes God's continued presence in the world. It is now time to examine the subtext, the underlying meaning of the Incarnation's significance in the *ME Bible*.

### *The imago Dei*

The term, *imago Dei*, is used in the *ME Bible*'s opening sequence, a paraphrase of Genesis 1:26, which tells of God's creating human beings and bestowing on them a status unique in creation. In theological terms, this relationship is most fully realized in the Incarnation, the

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<sup>83</sup> "There is no better way of seeing the image of God than to look at Jesus Christ. What we see and hear in Christ is what God intended for man." Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 22.

<sup>84</sup> In a section on Constantine and his fraught relationship with the Jews, James Carroll writes "Indeed, in an age marked by aggressive persecution of heresies—one bishop catalogued 156 of them—the original heresy was understood to be derived from Judaism itself." *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 177.

“union of the divine and human natures in the one person of the Word.”<sup>85</sup> Jesus Christ, the Son, is the perfected *imago Dei*.

The reconfigured biblical text expresses what Christian exegetes understood as promised in the Old Testament: the Law and the Prophets fulfilled in Christ. The text describes how the Incarnation was foretold “tofore ere Crist toke fleish in þe Virgine Marie,” and God’s promise “that he wold uisit & defend hem in this erth and wold saue his peple.”<sup>86</sup> These things are possible because God makes humanity in the divine image and assumes human nature in the Incarnation.<sup>87</sup>

The text employs simple language and semantic relationships—divinity, descent, earth, flesh and man—to describe this central tenet of Christianity.<sup>88</sup> A theological interpretation recognizes a reciprocal relationship between the *imago Dei* and the Incarnation: the *imago Dei* prepares the way for the Incarnation, and “the Incarnation confirms the doctrine of the image of God.”<sup>89</sup>

### *The Veronica*

Next, the Veronica, the holy cloth, appears twice in the *ME Bible*—the first is during the Passion and then again in Rome when Peter retells the story to Vespasian. Repeating and

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<sup>85</sup> As formulated in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “The Son of God Became Man,” IV. How is the Son of God Man? The Heart of the Incarnate Word, 483, [http://vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_\\_\\_P1J.HTM](http://vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P1J.HTM). The concept of the *imago Dei* occurs throughout the New Testament (Galatians 4:4, Prologue, John 3:16, 1 John 4:2, 1 John 4:9, Hebrews 10:5), and is reiterated in the creeds.

<sup>86</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 50.

<sup>87</sup> “It was only because man had been created in the image of God that the Second Person of the Trinity could assume human nature.” Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 22.

<sup>88</sup> The text reads “the almiȝti God [. . .] shal descende in ‘to’ the [erþe] and take mannes fleish and shal become a fleishly man,” and “that full mighti Lord descended and toke mannes fleish in the ful glorious and blissid Vergine Marie by ful gret vertues.” Moe, *ME Bible*, 51.

<sup>89</sup> Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 22.

expanding the story underscore its significance, bridge the biblical narrative and help unify the text.

The Veronica materially manifests the *imago Dei*. It is described “as true icon of Christ and therefore as perfect match between image and model, *signum and res*, resemble[ing] the original divine signature on the face of man, as a being made in the image and likeness of God.”<sup>90</sup> There is a similarity between human flesh imprinted with the *imago Dei* and the holy cloth imprinted with Christ’s face.<sup>91</sup> Others see a connection between the Veronica-*imago Dei* and items imprinted with Christ’s face, including coins, tokens and seals and the impressed surfaces of the Host, which they produced, consumed and wore (e.g., pilgrim badges and jewelry).<sup>92</sup>

Both the *imago Dei* and the cloth remind readers of a theological truth: that even though the Fall eroded the image of God in man, it neither could nor did completely destroy it. Rather, and as the text repeatedly makes clear, God sent his Son into the world “to waish away thordre of our synnes,” and renew the promise of salvation.<sup>93</sup>

By highlighting the cloth’s divine origin and healing ability, the *ME Bible* links it to the Incarnation. Although it is neither doctrinal nor sacramental, the cloth bearing Jesus’ image joins human person and divine image, which, in turn, has implications for how the Incarnation is made

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<sup>90</sup> Joseph L. Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 86.

<sup>91</sup> “The legendary Veronica, formed when Christ pressed his face against a handkerchief, could be construed as having been made by a similar process [imprinting wax seals]. Similar comparisons were drawn in elaborations of the Veronica’s doctrinal significance. Man’s flesh was like the wax into which the *imago Dei* had been impressed and to which it would be restored at the end of time.” Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 338.

<sup>92</sup> “[M]edieval people (re)impressed and circulated Christ’s *vultus*, again and again, in a collective, pan-European form of *imitatio Veronicæ*, both before and after the Roman relic burst onto the cultic scene.” Aden Kumler, “*Signatis...vultus tui*,” in *The European Fortune of the Roman Veronica in the Middle Ages*, eds. Amanda Murphy, Herbert L. Kessler, Marco Petoletti, Eamon Duffy and Guido Milanese (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 112.

<sup>93</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 66-67.

present and understood. After Jesus is no longer on earth, the Veronica calls to mind his presence and performs healing miracles in his stead. The text points dramatically to the salvific power of a face-to-face encounter with Christ—like Veronica and Vespasian, those who see the image of God and believe are healed.

### *The Eucharist*

The Eucharist is mentioned twice in the text. The first is during Christ's post-Resurrection appearance to "ij. of his disciples that went from Ierusalem into a castelle clepid Emaux" where he "toke the brede, þe wine, & þe fissh and brak it and blessid it, and than thei knew him."<sup>94</sup> This conflation of the Last Supper and the Upper Room narratives, with elements of Luke 24:13-33 and 42, underscores the relationship between Christ and the Eucharist—he is present in person and in sacrament. Hence, in the *ME Bible's* interpretation, the disciples encounter Christ both in his risen presence and in the Eucharist.

The second reference to the Eucharist is in the *ME Bible's* conclusion, which reads:

[Emperor Vespasian followed] the rule of holy church, and masse and othire divine obseruancis of the holy sacrament on the auter of the precious bodi of oure Lord Iesu Crist and of the remembraunce of his passion, and for the remission of Cristen mennes synnes of the oste there consecrate of brede and wine and watire, because þerof is þe substance of mannes life, and in the same wise the soule cumfortid spiritually whan that holy host of sacrament ys shewid vnto the peple.<sup>95</sup>

For the most part, the conclusion is fairly conventional for a medieval Christian text. The recently-converted Roman emperor upholds Christianity by following ecclesial teaching and tradition, and attending Mass and receiving the holy sacrament.

As we are told, the Veronica is the image of God and the eucharistic bread is the Body of Christ—they are examples of vestiges, or fingerprints, of God. Both proceed from Jesus Christ,

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<sup>94</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 69.

<sup>95</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 89, 27-35. There is no mention of the laity consuming the Host.

the *imago Dei* and, hence, make visible God's continued presence in the world. The *ME Bible* is thus permeated with an incarnational sensibility that plays out in the realm of flesh and earth: the *imago Dei* precedes and anticipates Christ, the Incarnation; in turn, the Veronica and the Eucharist continue to make it present.

### ***8.5 Reiterating Church Teaching and Tradition: The World in Front of the Text***

In the fictional world of the *ME Bible*, historical events shine through. For example, the reference to the liturgical practice of raising the Host invites the reader to recall other parts of the narrative, especially the references to elevating the Veronica. St. Peter's processing the Veronica through the streets of Rome, suggests the annual procession of the Veronica that Pope Innocent III inaugurated in 1208.

The mention of the cloth's annual exposition in Rome could allude to the Fourth Lateran Council's decree that Catholics receive the Eucharist annually at Easter.<sup>96</sup> In this scenario, the Veronica and the elevated Eucharist, both facets of the Body of Christ, would be visible annually to the faithful. Similarly, echoes of the Council's Canon 1, "Confession of Faith," which defines

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<sup>96</sup> "At the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 it was decided that annual communion was both obligatory and sufficient. The majority of Christians, in other words, received the eucharistic Host only once a year, at Easter, after confession, penance and absolution from their sins." Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages, The New Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 140. Canon 21 states in part, "Let [the faithful] reverently receive the sacrament of the eucharist at least at Easter unless they think, for a good reason and on the advice of their own priest, that they should abstain from receiving it for a time. Otherwise, they shall be barred from entering a church during their lifetime and they shall be denied a Christian burial at death. Let this salutary decree be frequently published in churches, so that nobody may find the pretence of an excuse in the blindness or ignorance." [*S]uscipiens reverenter ad minus in pascha eucharistiae sacramentum, nisi forte de consilio propria sacerdotis ob aliaquam rationabilem causam ad tempus ab eius perceptione duxerit abstinendum; alioquin et vivens ab ingressu ecclesiae arceatur et moriens christiana careat sepultura. Unde hoc salutare statutum frequenter in ecclesiis publicetur, ne quisquam ignorantiae caecitate velamen excusationis assumat.* Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Volume One: Nicaea I to Lateran V*, trans. Jesuits of the British Isles (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 245. It could be that congregants considered it sufficient to view the elevated Host and did not receive the Sacrament, or they felt unworthy to partake in Christ's actual body and blood, or, conversely, they were treating the bread and wine as food and drink. Hence, whether one considers annual communion a divine gift or a dangerous decline in sacramentality, the requirement of annual communion "creates a picture of infrequent but fairly consequential communion in this period." Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 64.

transubstantiation and Real Presence, are discernable in the phrase “the holy sacrament on the altar of the precious body of our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>97</sup> Moreover, the eucharistic ending can be seen as refuting the Reformers’ rejection of transubstantiation: the bread and wine are transformed into the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ, not only symbolically. And only an ordained priest, through the words of consecration, can effect the miraculous change.

Rome and the papacy feature prominently in both of these examples. The Catholic Church possesses the Veronica and oversees the practice and theology of the Eucharist, both of which are central to teaching and tradition, and both of which are associated primarily with Rome and the papacy. And both were the main issues of dissent in pre-Reformation England, which, I have argued, the *ME Bible* mirrors.

The *ME Bible* asserts Rome’s ownership of both the Veronica and the Eucharist with the cloth positioned as visual proof of God’s descent to earth, and the latter as the sacramental proof.<sup>98</sup> It is reasonable to suggest that gazing at and reflecting on a Veronica or a consecrated Host during the liturgy are to view the incarnate Christ.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 90. Canon 1 states in part, “There is indeed one universal church of the faithful, outside of which nobody at all is saved, in which Jesus Christ is both priest and sacrifice. His body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine, the bread and wine having been changed in substance, by God’s power, into his body and blood, so that in order to achieve this mystery of unity we receive from God what he received from us.” *Una vero est fidelium universalis ecclesia, extra quam nullus omnino salvatur, in qua idem ipse sacerdos et sacrificium Iesus Christus, cuius corpus et sanguis in sacramento alteris sub speciebus panis et vini veraciter continentur, transsubstantiatis pane in corpus et vino in sanguinem potestate divina, ut ad perficiendum mysterium unitatis accipiamus ipsi de suo, quod accepit ipse de nostro.* Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Volume One: Nicaea I to Lateran V*, trans. Jesuits of the British Isles (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 230.

<sup>98</sup> The interconnectivity among Christ’s incarnate body, the Eucharist and the Veronica reveals that the miraculous cloth contained “a multivalent image that could be used to stimulate a variety of devotional responses.” Alexa K. Sand, *Vision, Devotion, and Self-Representation in Late Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 72.

<sup>99</sup> “The [Veronica] image was a complement to the actual Mass as experienced in the consecrated space of the church or chapel, an extra-liturgical device that recaptures the powerful moment when the host was visible to the lay audience and the hungry soul.” Sand, *Vision, Devotion*, 55.

In its own way, the *ME Bible* inscribes a conventional understanding and endorsement of the Incarnation, which includes veneration of holy images and the cult of the Eucharist. The *imago Dei*, the Veronica and the Eucharist, aspects of the Incarnation, are indicators of God's love for humanity and salvific action.

### 8.5.1 Violence as a Response to Heresy

So, how to make sense of the *ME Bible*'s presentation of the incarnational event in light of the excessive violence in the *Vengeance*? How can a reader reconcile the vengeful God with the loving God who sent his only Son to redeem humanity?

In Jonathan Riley-Smith's estimate, the violence depicted in the *Vengeance* may have been influenced by one of the most influential Christian thinkers in the central Middle Ages, Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (395-396). In his treatise on the Sermon on the Mount, Augustine justified repressing heresy, which was widespread in his lifetime. In the bishop's estimate, for violence to be acceptable required those who used force to have the right intention, which was to correct error. Riley-Smith argues that Augustine can be interpreted as supporting violence enacted on heretics if it was motivated by seeking to correct mistaken ideas.<sup>100</sup>

In Augustine's time heresy included erroneous beliefs "in relation to the teaching of the Apostles, the *catholica ueritas*, the Christian concept of God, the Incarnation of the Son, the Trinity, [and] the resurrection of the body."<sup>101</sup> Against these, Augustine "regarded the Catholic Church, with the Bishop of Rome as the most authoritative guardian of the Church's unity and

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<sup>100</sup> Jonathan Riley-Smith, "Crusading as an Act of Love." *History* 65, no. 214 (1980): 185-186, <https://doi-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.1111/j.1468-229X.1980.tb01939.x>.

<sup>101</sup> Paul J.J. van Geest, "Augustine's Approach to Heresies as an Aid to Understanding His Ideas on Interaction between Christian Traditions," in *World Christianity: Methodological Considerations*, eds. Martha Frederiks and Dorottya Nagy (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 252. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/373867248\\_Augustine's\\_Approach\\_to\\_Heresies\\_as\\_an\\_Aid\\_to\\_Understanding\\_His\\_Ideas\\_on\\_Interaction\\_between\\_Christian\\_Traditions](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/373867248_Augustine's_Approach_to_Heresies_as_an_Aid_to_Understanding_His_Ideas_on_Interaction_between_Christian_Traditions).

wholeness, as the Body of Christ.”<sup>102</sup> His notion of ecclesial integrity led him to condemn regional interpretations of Christianity (e.g., Donatism), that operated on its own authority.<sup>103</sup>

The fifteenth-century English Church experienced heresy and challenges to its authority, both of which were associated with the followers of John Wycliffe, the Lollards. If the *ME Bible* is unintentionally recalling Augustine’s teachings about acceptable ways to correct heresy, then much like Mirk, Dymmok and Love, it also evokes an earlier context for answers to current problems.<sup>104</sup>

In the *ME Bible*, violence is inflicted on the Jews because they reject Christ, the Incarnate God. The text repeatedly describes them as “fals” and their religion is based on “fals beleue” (i.e., heresy). Mirk, Dymmok and Love describe the Lollards as false, treacherous and faithless; they are “fals heretyke” who reject holy images and the Eucharist which, I have argued, are suggestive of the Incarnation. In this reading, the Jews of the *ME Bible* and the Lollards of fifteenth-century England have repudiated the Incarnation—an accusation that few followers of Wycliffe would accept.

In the next and final chapter, I will study the following characters as depicted in the *ME Bible*: St. Peter, the first Bishop of Rome, and Vespasian, the first Christian emperor. Both are historical figures whom the *ME Bible* evokes for answers to the theological and religious issues facing the pre-Reformation English Church. As I will argue, interpreting them is *the* clue to understanding the *ME Bible*’s meaning in fifteenth-century England.

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<sup>102</sup> Van Geest, “Augustine’s Approach to Heresies,” 264.

<sup>103</sup> Van Geest, “Augustine’s Approach to Heresies,” 264.

<sup>104</sup> See Chapter 7, Three Clerics Defend Holy Images and the Eucharist.

## Chapter 9

### Connecting the Threads

#### *9.1 A Brief Summary: Integrating the Three Worlds of the Text*

I have argued that a certain interpretation of Incarnation pervades *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois (ME Bible)*, and it is related to holy images and the Eucharist. The text implies an ecclesial affiliation with the Veronica image and the Eucharist, which I interpret as guardian and arbitrator of correct doctrine related to the Incarnation. I concluded that the *ME Bible* contains an inference that attacks on holy images and the Eucharist are attacks on the doctrine of God made flesh.

In contrast, Reformers' opposition to the Church's teaching and tradition on holy images and the Eucharist was considered to undermine the meaning of the Incarnation. Religious dissidents in pre-Reformation England in this perspective would share features with the Jews and others in the *ME Bible* who are described as rejecting Christ, the Incarnate Word.<sup>1</sup>

Implicit and explicit references to Rome's hegemony fill the text. It also recalls specific canons of Fourth Lateran Council, including the education of clerics and lay persons, the treatment of heretics and Jews, the supremacy of Rome and its pontiff, the articulation of correct

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<sup>1</sup> James Carroll writes, "the original heresy was understood to be derived from Judaism itself." James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews—A History* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 177.

doctrine, and plans for a new Crusade; hence, as I interpret it, part of the *ME Bible*'s meaning in pre-Reformation England is a validation of the papacy and Rome's supremacy.

To tie up these seemingly disparate threads, in this chapter I examine the St. Peter and Vespasian characters—two historical persons whom the *ME Bible* fictionalizes. I have chosen them because, as the *ME Bible* describes, they are responsible for installing Christianity in Rome.<sup>2</sup> I undertake this interpretation because both of these historical persons evoke the Roman Church's glorious past, when it was the centre of authority. I continue to argue that recalling this past is critical.

In this chapter, I integrate the three worlds of the text. I examine the St. Peter and Vespasian characters, historically, textually and typologically to articulate the meaning of the *ME Bible* in pre-Reformation England.

## ***9.2 Vespasian and Constantine***

The Vespasian character in the *ME Bible* evokes the historical emperor, Constantine the Great, who began the process of Christianising the Empire by legalizing the faith. The working intention is to fortify Catholicism by providing a venerable foundation.

### *Vespasian: The First Christian Emperor?*

The *ME Bible* identifies Vespasian as the first Christian emperor in the West and the Romans as early Christians, thereby implying that the faith, which began in Jerusalem, flourished and expanded in Rome under Vespasian.<sup>3</sup> The text describes how, after he is cured

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<sup>2</sup> This final section of the *ME Bible* is bookended by St. Peter and the healing cloth (the Veronica) and Vespasian and the Eucharist.

<sup>3</sup> "Readers witness the utter obliteration of the Holy Land as all of its spiritual and material riches are taken away to Rome; so too are the early roots of Christianity pulled from Palestine and spirited to Italy via the written word. Even the *sudarium* of Veronica, taken from Jerusalem to Rome at the early stages of the poem, foreshadows the imminent mass pillaging of such treasures, as the relics of Jerusalem are appropriated for Christian worship in Rome." Yeager,

and converted, Vespasian is immediately baptized (although in some Middle English works, he puts it off until after the siege).<sup>4</sup> The significance of the foregoing, it seems, is twofold: it is a declaration that the sacraments, especially baptism, are “fundamental to right faith,” and it identifies Vespasian as fully embracing Christianity prior to leaving for, and subsequently conquering, Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> It is a fiction, however, as neither Vespasian, nor many first-century Romans, would have been baptized or followed Christianity. Even so, there were some Christians, especially in the Roman provinces.<sup>6</sup>

As discussed in previous chapters, the *ME Bible*'s version of Jerusalem's destruction also showcases and promotes Rome's superiority, and Christianity's rapid ascendance over a Temple-based Jewish self-understanding.<sup>7</sup> Hence, for Christians writing about the destruction of Jerusalem, the event provided “a new interpretation of the Church's own history, nature and mission.”<sup>8</sup> This new, and as I have indicated, problematic, interpretation is reflected in the *ME*

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Suzanne M. Yeager, “The Siege of Jerusalem’ and Biblical Exegesis: Writing About Romans in Fourteenth-Century England,” *The Chaucer Review* 39, no. 1 (2004): 73, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cr.2004.0019>.

<sup>4</sup> In *Titus and Vespasian*, “Vespasian [like Constantine] chooses to defer his baptism until his imagined victorious return from slaughtering the inhabitants of Jerusalem.” Kara L. McShane, “Christian Imperialism and Antisemitic Violence in *Titus and Vespasian*.” *Viator (Berkeley)* 51, no. 1 (2020): 353, <https://doi.org/10.1484/J.VIATOR.5.127051>.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Livingston, ed., *Siege of Jerusalem*, TEAMS Middle English Texts (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004), 22, <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/livingston-siege-of-jerusalem-introduction#f17>.

<sup>6</sup> “By the 50’s, there were Christian communities in four Roman provinces in present day Turkey and Greece.” Jo Ann Schall, “Constantine’s Effect on Early Christianity,” 6, [https://www.manchester.edu/docs/default-source/academics/by-major/philosophy-and-religious-studies/journal/vi1-2/4-schall.pdf?sfvrsn=acf8862\\_2](https://www.manchester.edu/docs/default-source/academics/by-major/philosophy-and-religious-studies/journal/vi1-2/4-schall.pdf?sfvrsn=acf8862_2). Also, see the chapter “History and Methodology of Early Christian Archaeology,” in Graydon Synder. *Ante Pacem: Archeological Evidence of Church Life before Constantine* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> “Moreover, the destruction of the Jewish Temple retroactively added a religious legitimacy to the new dynasty, since the Roman god Jupiter defeated the ‘powerful’ God of the Jews by means of the Flavian family.” David Gurevich, “Why Did Vespasian and Titus Destroy Jerusalem? The Roman Political Perspective on the Destruction of the City,” *The Torah — com*, <https://www.thetorah.com/article/why-did-vespasian-and-titus-destroy-jerusalem>. *The Torah — com*. <https://www.thetorah.com/article/why-did-vespasian-and-titus-destroy-jerusalem>.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen K. Wright, *The Vengeance of Our Lord: Medieval Dramatizations of the Destruction of Jerusalem*, *Studies and Texts* 89 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1989), 6, [https://books-scholarsportal-info.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/en/read?id=/ebooks/ebooks0/gibson\\_crkn/2009-12-01/7/420482#page=17](https://books-scholarsportal-info.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/en/read?id=/ebooks/ebooks0/gibson_crkn/2009-12-01/7/420482#page=17). See Chapter 5, *The Vengeance of the Saviour: Proclaiming Rome’s Superiority*, where I discuss the impact of the historical destruction of Jerusalem on Jewish-Christian relations.

*Bible's* supersessionist view of sacred history, especially in the *Vengeance* narrative, which asserts Christianity as the replacement for biblical Judaism.

The question remains, however: Why does the *ME Bible* present “an alternative chronology for the first-century Romans by introducing them to Christianity more than two hundred years before the reign of Emperor Constantine”?<sup>9</sup> Specifically, why is Vespasian identified as the first Roman emperor to embrace Christianity, when Constantine was the first to be converted and baptized? As mentioned, the historical Vespasian neither conquered Jerusalem nor destroyed the Temple; rather, his son, Titus (r. 79–81), led the siege.<sup>10</sup>

That being said, Vespasian was emperor (r. 69-79) during the siege and destruction, a critical time for Christianity, which was separating from Judaism and developing an identity. And, finally, unlike Constantine, Vespasian was alive close to the apostolic age and the writing of the Gospels. Hence, a literary reimagining of Vespasian as the first Christian emperor effectively imparts legitimacy, heritage and prestige to the Church of Rome. Unlike the “upstart” Reformers, the Church of Rome has existed from the earliest days of Christianity; therefore, it has legitimacy and moral authority.

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<sup>9</sup> “In political terms, Jerusalem did not become a “Christian” city until the early 4th century CE.” Schall, “Constantine’s Effect,” 1.

<sup>10</sup> Medieval stories of the siege of Jerusalem can vary considerably relative to the Vespasian and Titus characters—sometimes they are father and son and sometimes they are brothers. Alvin E. Ford, *La vengeance de Nostre-Seigneur the Old and Middle French Prose Versions: The Cura sanitatis Tiberii (The Mission of Volusian), The Nathanis Judaei legatio (Vindicta Salvatoris), and the versions found in the Bible en français of Roger d’Argenteuil or influenced by the works of Flavius Josephus, Robert de Boron and Jacobus de Voragine*. Studies and Texts 115 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1993), 7.

*Constantine: The First Christian Emperor*

Constantine, not Vespasian, was the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity and, later, be baptized.<sup>11</sup> His tenure as emperor (306-337) had an extraordinary impact on Christianity, including the promulgation of the *Edict of Milan* (313), which granted religious freedom to Christians, pagans and Jews.<sup>12</sup>

According to Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea (c. 315-340), on the night before Constantine met his rival, Maxentius, in battle, he had a vision of a cross in the sky over which were the words *In hoc signo vinces* (In this Sign Conquer).<sup>13</sup> Interpreting the vision as communicating divine support, Constantine's troops, who were not expected to win, went into battle the next day and were victorious.<sup>14</sup> Constantine subsequently identified the Church as his best hope for unity and reform as it could provide the empire with "a common set of values and the single cult which it so badly lacked."<sup>15</sup> The story signifies the power of divine providence and faith in achieving victory. While Maxentius' defeat was a political victory for Constantine, it was also the beginning of the emperor's conversion and the adoption and spread of Christianity.

From the moment of his accession, Constantine favoured the faith—he appointed and granted civic authority to bishops, who also began to take on diplomatic roles; he gave financial support and property to the Church, and had basilicas, including St. Peter's, built; he had the *Chi-*

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<sup>11</sup> Constantine delayed receiving the sacrament until the end of his life, possibly in recognition that his imperial role involved actions (e.g., killing) incompatible with being baptized.

<sup>12</sup> Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, 182. To read about Constantine's response to the politics and religious controversies in the early Christian Church, see Richard E. Rubenstein, *When Jesus Became God: The Struggle to Define Christianity during the Last Days of Rome* (San Diego: Harcourt Inc., 1999).

<sup>13</sup> "Within a year of Milvian Bridge, Constantine controlled the entire Western empire." Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, 182.

<sup>14</sup> "On the strength of that vision, the emperor became a Christian, so did his army, and, ultimately, so did the empire." Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, 171.

<sup>15</sup> Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 18.

*Rho* symbol applied to his coinage, Roman standards, and military gear (shields and helmets).<sup>16</sup> Also, under his rule he financed the production of new copies of the Bible and ensured that Christian values were included in laws to protect the vulnerable.<sup>17</sup> The emperor's favourable disposition toward Christianity completely altered the relationship between the Church and the imperial government, thereby clearing the way for Christianity to become eventually the official religion of the Roman Empire.

Still, such favouritism could not contain what James Carroll describes as the “seething caldron of contention and rivalry, with doctrinal differences, even schisms, defined by regional loyalties.”<sup>18</sup> Regional differences in Christian belief and practice were long-standing and could be traced to as far back as the Apostolic Age.<sup>19</sup> Closer to Constantine's time, there had been significant dissent, bordering on schism, in North Africa following Emperor Diocletian's (r. 284–305) persecution of Christians.<sup>20</sup> In 311, the Bishop of Carthage, Caecilian, was consecrated by an alleged traitor—a bishop who had given the persecutors copies of the Scriptures. In response, the ecclesial council rejected Caecilian as bishop and instead appointed a rival bishop, Majorinus.

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<sup>16</sup> “This speaks to both the militaristic ‘mood’ of Constantine's Christianity, especially at its origin, and to how the Roman people would have seen the symbol as associated with Constantine's victory and military might.” “Minting a Christian State: Making Heads or Tails of Christian Symbols on Roman Coins,” <https://exhibits.usask.ca/MintingAChristianState/exhibits/show/symbols/chirho#:~:text=The%20Chi%2DRho%20is%20a,this%20sign%20you%20will%20conquer>.

<sup>17</sup> “[Constantine] did, however, give presents, endowments, and property to Christian churches and built several basilicas, including St. Peter's in Rome, used Christian symbols on his coinage and Roman standards, and declared Sunday a rest day, replacing the weekly celebration of Mithras. He financed new copies of the Bible and expressed Christian ideals in the laws he introduced to protect children, slaves, peasants, and prisoners.” Michael Collins and Matthew A. Price, *The Story of Christianity: 2000 Years of Faith* (London: D.K. Publishing, Inc., 1999), 58.

<sup>18</sup> Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, 186.

<sup>19</sup> “For example, often rooted, as in NT times, in the regional differences between, say, an Antioch in Syria or a Corinth in Greece.” Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, 189.

<sup>20</sup> Called Donatists, “[r]igorists denounced as *traditores* clergy who had handed over copies of the Scriptures and viewed them unfit to administer sacraments and ordinations.” Eugene TeSelle, “Donatism,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, Daniel Patte, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 333.

In Constantine's estimate, harmony and consensus in ecclesial matters were essential to a unified empire.<sup>21</sup> Hence, he interceded and ordered a commission of bishops to arbitrate the controversy. After several intrigues and machinations, Constantine decided in Caecilian's favour and against Donatus, who had superseded Majorinus.<sup>22</sup> Augustine spent ten years grappling with the challenge of Donatism. As early as 391, he had judged the Donatist' regional influence to be so great that it jeopardized the unity of the universal Church.<sup>23</sup> After the bishop's death, the Donatists and the Catholic Church finally reconciled in the early fifth century.<sup>24</sup>

I have included this brief discussion to provide examples of what happens when "one single regional interpretation of Christianity declare[s] itself to be the norm."<sup>25</sup> It is a pattern that recurs in fifteenth-century England with the English sect known as Lollards.

Constantine was open-minded about variations in Christian belief and practice as long as they did not threaten the integrity of the Roman Empire, as did some of the early Christian sects.<sup>26</sup> In turning to religious matters, unity, not tolerance, was most important. Hence, in an effort to bring together Church and State, the emperor "assumed a divine mandate to unify the

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<sup>21</sup> Duffy writes, "The providential instrument of human harmony which God had placed in [Constantine's] hand turned out to be itself out of tune." Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 20.

<sup>22</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Donatist," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, July 20, 1998, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Donatists>.

<sup>23</sup> Paul J.J. van Geest, "Augustine's Approach to Heresies as an Aid to Understanding His Ideas on Interaction between Christian Traditions," in *World Christianity: Methodological Considerations*, eds. Martha Frederiks and Dorottya Nagy (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 253, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/373867248\\_Augustine's\\_Approach\\_to\\_Heresies\\_as\\_an\\_Aid\\_to\\_Understanding\\_His\\_Ideas\\_on\\_Interaction\\_between\\_Christian\\_Traditions](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/373867248_Augustine's_Approach_to_Heresies_as_an_Aid_to_Understanding_His_Ideas_on_Interaction_between_Christian_Traditions).

<sup>24</sup> "Augustine insisted on the universality of the church. Against their [Donatists] claim that the sacraments depend on the purity of the minister, he argued that Christ is the principal agent, acting through the sacramental signs and thus bypassing personal failings[.]" TeSelle, "Donatism." 333.

<sup>25</sup> Van Geest, "Augustine's Approach to Heresies," 253.

<sup>26</sup> In addition to the Donatists, there were Docetists and Manichaeans and Arians with their cat's cradle of disputes about ways in which Jesus was man or God, and about the nature, substance, and personality of God." Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, 186.

empire's religion."<sup>27</sup> So if, for example, Constantine wanted to persuade the majority pagans to convert, he knew that Christian affairs had to be organized and unified.<sup>28</sup>

Calculating the date of Easter was one area of dissent, but more serious were the disagreements on the person and nature of Jesus.<sup>29</sup> In particular, Arianism, which denied Jesus' true divinity, threatened Church unity.<sup>30</sup> In early third-century Alexandria, the priest, Arius, was disseminating the heterodox doctrine that God had made his Son from nothing.<sup>31</sup>

For its ecclesiastical opponents, Arianism undermined the mystery of the Incarnation and imperilled its adherents' eternal souls.<sup>32</sup> Constantine's unease was more prosaic, however—he needed consensus on issues that threatened to divide the Church and, hence, the empire.<sup>33</sup> His response was to summon an ecumenical council of bishops to a meeting over which he would participate.<sup>34</sup> It may seem to be taking a step backward in the analysis, but it is worthwhile for my present purposes to flesh out this analogy.

### *The First Council of Nicaea and Unity of Faith*

In response to the invitation, 250 bishops, mostly from the East where Arianism was most pronounced, congregated at the first Council of Nicaea in 325. Two renowned bishops attended the Council: the ecclesial historian, Eusebius of Caesarea, who was also Constantine's

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<sup>27</sup> Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, 187.

<sup>28</sup> "Constantine saw, in other words, that only a unified, sharply defined, and firmly advanced Christianity would overcome paganism." Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, 188.

<sup>29</sup> "Christians could not even agree on how to calculate the date of Easter, much less on how Jesus was God." Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, 188.

<sup>30</sup> "To [the Arians], Jesus was a person of such sublime moral accomplishments that God adopted him as His Son, sacrificed him to redeem humanity from sin, raised him from the dead and granted him divine status. Because of his excellence, he became a model of righteous behavior for us. And because his merit earned the prize of immortality, the same reward was made available to other human beings, provide that they model themselves after him." Rubenstein, *When Jesus Became God*, 7.

<sup>31</sup> "Arius announced, 'If the Father begat the Son, then he who was begotten had a beginning in existence, and from this it follows there was a time when the Son was not.'" Collins and Price, *The Story of Christianity*, 60.

<sup>32</sup> Rubenstein, *When Jesus Became God*, 8-9.

<sup>33</sup> Schall, "Constantine's Effect," 2.

<sup>34</sup> Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, 189.

biographer, and Athanasius of Alexandria—Eusebius supported the Arian cause, while Athanasius was the chief defender of orthodoxy at Nicaea.<sup>35</sup>

Jo Ann Schall describes Constantine as a generous patron and protector of the Church, who convened the Council because he desired ecclesiastical flourishing, which was only possible with unity of doctrinal belief.<sup>36</sup> James Carroll, however, asserts that Constantine’s motives were less altruistic—differences were impediments to power, and he needed a definition of orthodoxy (“right thinking”) for the good of the empire.<sup>37</sup> To ensure that the proceedings went according to his wishes, Constantine personally summoned the bishops, presided over the opening session and took part in the discussions.<sup>38</sup>

The Council is best remembered for articulating and adopting the defining statement of Christian faith—the Nicene Creed—which has also functioned as a standard by which orthodoxy and heresy are defined and evaluated. This confession of faith affirms that the Son of God is “begotten, not made, of the same substance (*homoousios*) as the Father.” The Council also condemned Arius’ teachings; however, the controversy continued for several generations.<sup>39</sup>

Like the early Church in the age of Constantine, the pre-Reformation English Church faced dissent that threatened unity and stability. The major area of conflict was the meaning of the Incarnation. Where Constantine convened the Council of Nicaea to address the situation, the

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<sup>35</sup> Duffy describes Eusebius as “the fluffy-minded Bishop,” and Athanasius as “the greatest theologian of his age.” Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 22–23.

<sup>36</sup> Schall, “Constantine’s Effect,” 2.

<sup>37</sup> Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword*, 189.

<sup>38</sup> “Thus, the now absolute and sole Caesar, demonstrating an authority no one had ever exercised before, summoned the bishops of the church to a meeting over which he himself would preside. He would not let them leave until they had begun to do for the Church what he was doing for the empire.” Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword*, 189.

<sup>39</sup> “Nicaea was the beginning, not the end, of the Arian controversy. The defeated Arians had been frogmarched into agreement by an emperor determined to sew things up quickly. They were silenced, not persuaded, and after the council was over, they regrouped and returned to the attack. Modified forms of Arius’ teachings would win support throughout the Eastern empire for the next three generations, and Constantine’s son and successor in the East, Constantius, himself adopted Arian beliefs.” Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 23.

*ME Bible* expresses its support via stories and semantic relationships that defend Rome’s teaching and tradition concerning the Incarnation.

### *Aligning Church and State*

Although his army was the weaker of two warring parties, Constantine was victorious at the battle of Milvian Bridge, where he fought under Christ’s banner. As he saw it, his victory under Christianity, and subsequent favouring of the faith, brought with it a cohesion that could be extended to secular matters. Hence, Constantine cleared the way for and fostered an alliance between Church and State.<sup>40</sup> In fact, in the fourth century the partnership between the two was so complete that Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (r. 374–397), later used the words “Roman” and “Christian” almost synonymously.<sup>41</sup>

### *Vespasian and Constantine: Two Christian Emperors?*

What do the Vespasian character described in the *ME Bible* and the historical Constantine have in common?<sup>42</sup> What makes Vespasian a suitable stand-in for the first Christian emperor? The most obvious similarities are that both were soldiers who led a Christian army against a non-Christian enemy, Vespasian against the Jews and Constantine against pagan Romans, both ruled a Christian Empire from Rome, and both were baptized and converted to Christianity. Moreover, both conversions were brought about by viewing a relic of the Passion—Vespasian, the holy veil, and Constantine, a vision of the cross. Originally, both relics were in Jerusalem but, eventually,

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<sup>40</sup> J. Jan Pelikan and The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “Christianity: The Alliance between Church and Empire,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, December 5, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Christianity/The-alliance-between-church-and-empire>.

<sup>41</sup> “Constantine completely altered the relationship between the church and the imperial government, thereby beginning a process that eventually made Christianity the official religion of the empire.” Henry Chadwick and The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “Christianity: Theological Controversies of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Centuries,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, December 5, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Christianity/Theological-controversies-of-the-4th-and-5th-centuries>.

<sup>42</sup> The *ME Bible* blends historical facts with fictional and legendary elements to construct the Vespasian character.

migrated to Rome—Veronica brought the holy veil to Rome, and Empress Helena, Constantine’s mother, had a section of the true cross sent there. Having these artifacts housed in the centre of the empire, and venerated by the emperors, enhanced Rome’s and the papacy’s religious significance.

### *Legends in Common*

The *ME Bible* describes a fictitious relationship between Peter, and the fictional first Christian emperor, Vespasian. The *Life of St. Sylvester* purports to describe a relationship between Pope Sylvester I (r. 314-335) and Constantine.<sup>43</sup> As written, the pope miraculously cured the emperor of leprosy, then baptized him, in the same manner as Peter cured Vespasian who was then baptized.<sup>44</sup> In return, the emperor allegedly gave the pope the Donation of Constantine (*Donatio Constantini*), which granted him supremacy over religious matters (e.g., faith and worship), as well as “temporal dominion over Rome and the entire Western world.”<sup>45</sup> Even though the *Donation* was a forgery from the eighth century, it is similar to the type of story (e.g., Jesus’ correspondence with Abgar and the legend of Veronica) that could be used to legitimize Rome’s sovereignty in the religious and temporal spheres.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Around 1438, an anonymous translator, a “synfulle wrecche,” rendered Jacobus de Voragine’s *Legenda auro* into Middle English. Chapter 12 of that book is the *Life of St. Sylvester*. Glasgow University Library, Special Collections Department, Book of the Month, “William Caxton, *The Golden Legend*, Westminster: c. 1483-1484, Sp Coll Hunterian Bg. 1.1,” January 2007, <https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/library/files/special/exhibns/month/jan2007.html>.

<sup>44</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “St. Sylvester I,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, January 1, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Sylvester-I>.

<sup>45</sup> “Most importantly, Constantine gives the pope control of the imperial palace in Rome and all the regions of the Western Empire; this effectively conveys the notion that the pope has the right to appoint secular rulers in the West.” The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Donation of Constantine,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, January 7, 2023.

<sup>46</sup> In the fifteenth century, the literary critic, Lorenzo Vella, demonstrated that the *Donation* was a forgery made sometime during the eighth century. The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Donation of Constantine,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, November 8, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Donation-of-Constantine>.

## *Superseding St. Clement*

Along with Vespasian, saints Peter and Paul are named in the *ME Bible*'s closing paragraph.<sup>47</sup> As for Peter, who was likely martyred sometime between 64 and 68 CE, Catholic tradition has it that he travelled to Rome where he helped spread Christianity to the West.<sup>48</sup> Since then, all subsequent popes trace their succession to Peter, the first bishop of the Roman Church.<sup>49</sup>

Peter is not, however, a character in the *Curing of Tiberius* or in early versions of the *Vengeance of the Saviour*.<sup>50</sup> Rather, Clement, Bishop of Rome (r. 88-99), assumes that role.<sup>51</sup> In these texts, Veronica bequeaths the cloth to Clement who then brings it and Veronica to the court, heals the emperor, preaches to the assembly and baptizes them. As for the cloth it does not remain in Rome with Vespasian, as in the *ME Bible*; rather, it is brought to St. Symeon's Church, near Aleppo, Syria, where it is sealed in the altar.<sup>52</sup>

In both the *Bible en françois* and its Middle English translation, Peter replaces the Clement character of the earlier versions, an innovation that Phyllis Moe considers "one of [the

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<sup>47</sup> The concluding paragraph is the only mention of Paul in the *ME Bible*. Furthermore, even though Paul is often referenced along with Peter as founding the Church of Rome, he was not, nor was he, ever considered a pope; therefore, because part of my argument is that the *ME Bible* is a text that asserts papal supremacy, I do not pursue the story of Paul in Rome. For details on Paul's time in Rome and his impact on early Christianity, see Chapter 1, "'Upon this Rock' AD 33–461, in Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*.

<sup>48</sup> "In all the Gospels [Peter] is the leader, or at any rate the spokesman, of the Apostles." Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 3.

<sup>49</sup> "Peter has special significance to Catholics as the first bishop of the Roman church and the first in the unbroken line of apostolic succession that extends to the present pope." Collins and Price, *The Story of Christianity*, 35. Long before the bishops of Rome claimed to be successors of Peter, the Church of Rome was recognized as "first" due to the witness of the martyr, Peter.

<sup>50</sup> Locating the Veronica in Rome negated any other claims to be the true image. Phyllis Moe, ed., *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois*, Middle English Texts 6 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1977), 27.

<sup>51</sup> Peter supposedly consecrated Clement as pope (an impossibility as he had been martyred by then). Clement then went on to lead the Church during the final years of the first century. Referring to a letter attributed to "the Roman presbyter Clement, generally counted in the ancient lists as the third Pope after St. Peter," the Roman Church sent to the church at Corinth, Duffy argues that Clement did not claim to write as a bishop. Furthermore, "[t]he letter itself makes no distinction between presbyters and bishops, about which it always speaks in the plural, suggesting that at Corinth as at Rome the church at this time was organized under a group of bishops or presbyters, rather than a single ruling bishop." Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 7. The office of bishops as we know it wasn't clearly established until the late second or third century.

<sup>52</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 27.

text’s] distinctive features.”<sup>53</sup> How does one account for the replacement? For one, Peter was an actual apostle and disciple of Jesus while Clement was not. As well, Jesus designated Peter as the “rock” on which he would build his Church—in accord with Petrine primacy, popes inherit authority directly from Peter, not Clement.<sup>54</sup>

The *ME Bible*’s identifying Peter and Rome, not Clement and Aleppo, as owning the cloth, reinforces the papal claim as keeper of the true image (the *vera icona*) and creates linkages among Rome, the papacy and the Veronica. It also gives the cloth a venerable pedigree as an authentic Roman relic that enhances Rome’s religious significance. Finally, it provides a rationale for the Vatican’s approval of the cloth as a genuine relic of the Passion.

### ***9.3 Pope Innocent III: The Apex of Papal Power***

I mentioned St. Peter in terms of his replacing the Pope Clement character in the *ME Bible* (and its prototype). The Peter character also calls to mind the historical Pope Innocent III, possibly the most powerful and influential pope of the medieval period.

#### *The Most Significant Pope of the Middle Ages and the Fourth Lateran Council*

The papacy is an obvious link between Peter and Innocent III (r. 1198–1216) called “the greatest representative of this pinnacle of papal power and influence.”<sup>55</sup> Innocent is remembered for reforming the *curia*, expanding authority over the papal states, launching the Fourth Crusade, combating heresy, developing doctrine of papal power, and presiding over the Fourth Lateran Council.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 26.

<sup>54</sup> This doctrine can be traced to Irenaeus in the second century. From the fifth century on popes claimed to be Peter’s successors.

<sup>55</sup> Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 110.

<sup>56</sup> Kenneth J. Pennington, “Innocent III,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, July 12, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Innocent-III-pope>.

Innocent also concretized the theory of the papal theocracy, thereby anticipating the formal acceptance of papal supremacy and infallibility. The papacy had evolved and established itself as the preeminent authority over the Church and, to a degree, the State. To the papal title “vicar of Christ,” he added “vicar of God.” He overruled decisions made by ecclesial and secular authorities, and tampered with royal affairs.<sup>57</sup> He convened and proposed agenda items for the Fourth Lateran Council.

Eamon Duffy describes the Fourth Lateran Council as “the clearest expression of Innocent’s quest to be the shepherd of Europe’s destiny.”<sup>58</sup> This “largest and most significant of medieval church councils, [it considered] nearly every issue impacting medieval society and religion.” As previously cited, the canons included directives on combatting heresy, segregating Jews (and Saracens to a certain extent), and crusading. By requiring annual communion and confession, the council sought to strengthen Christian practice and reinforce papal authority. It also used the “scholastic word ‘transubstantiation,’” which holds that during the Eucharist, bread and wine become the actual body and blood of Christ.<sup>59</sup> And, at the same time, these canons ensured ecclesial presence in everyday life.

The Council defined Catholic doctrine and practice during a period of religious turmoil similar to the situation in pre-Reformation England. By addressing directly issues like heresy, it laid the groundwork for ecclesial judicial bodies, including the Inquisition, which further consolidated the Church’s influence in Western Europe.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Volume V: The Middle Ages, AD 1049-1294* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 128, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/s/schaff/hcc5/cache/hcc5.pdf>.

<sup>58</sup> Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 151.

<sup>59</sup> Christopher M. Bellitto, “Lateran Councils,” in *Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, 713.

<sup>60</sup> For a discussion on the Fourth Lateran Council and the rise of anti-heretical tribunals, refer to Henry Ansgar Kelly, “The Fourth Lateran *Ordo* of Inquisition Adapted to the Prosecution of Heresy,” in *A Companion to Heresy Inquisitions*, Brill’s Companions to the Christian Tradition, vol. 85 (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2019), 75-107, <https://brill-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/display/book/9789004393875/BP000006.xml?body=pdf-60830>.

Still, none of the Council's directives weakened ecclesial authority; rather, in many ways, they further entrenched the Church in the daily lives of the laity. While this decisive and forceful action would be appropriate in a period of Christian ascendance, such as the world of the *Bible en françois*, efforts to preserve doctrine and fight heresy in fifteenth-century England encountered resistance. It is to the latter situation that the *ME Bible* responds.

### *The First Bishop of Rome and Pope Innocent III*

Innocent identified singularly with Peter, especially with regard to papal primacy a concept that Catholics trace to Jesus' words to Peter as recounted in Matthew 16:18: *Tu es Petrus, et super hanc patram aedificabo ecclesiam meam et tibi dabo claves regni coelorum*.<sup>61</sup> Innocent III was consecrated Bishop of Rome on January 18, 1198, the feast of St. Peter's Chair, a day first mentioned during Pope Leo I's tenure (440-461).<sup>62</sup>

As the anonymous author of *The Deeds of Pope Innocent III* recalls, "On the following Sunday, on which the feast of St. Peter's Chair in Antioch occurred, he was consecrated bishop at St. Peter's and was established on the throne of the same apostle, not without a manifest sign and everyone's admiration."<sup>63</sup> It is entirely feasible that the choice of feast day for Innocent's consecration is a measure of Innocent's self-identifying with the first Bishop of Rome and the foundation of the Church.

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<sup>61</sup> "Thou art Peter and upon this Rock I will build my Church and I will give to Thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven." Jesus speaks these words to proclaim Peter as eminent among the apostles and head of the Church—the latter being a role bequeathed to generations of popes. Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 1.

<sup>62</sup> "We can also assume that the (perhaps earlier) 22 February feast, eventually known as Saint Peter's Chair (*Cathedra Petri*), was also celebrated at Saint Peter's from quite an early period." Rosamund McKitterick, John Osborne, Carol M. Richardson and Joanna Story, eds., *Old Saint Peter's, Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 145.

<sup>63</sup> *The Deeds of Pope Innocent III by an Anonymous Author*, James M. Powell, trans. (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 5, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt284xftp>.

Innocent asserted papal primacy by appealing to faith and tradition, especially by invoking the papacy's connection to Peter.<sup>64</sup> In describing the papal office, he writes:

[Jesus Christ] has established over nations and kingdoms the supreme pontiff of the Apostolic See and Roman church. Through Blessed Peter, he ordained the pontiff as his vicar, conferring upon him the power to root up, to break down, to destroy, and to overthrow, to build and to plant [Jer. 1:10]. The blessed God has established the foundation of the universal church in himself, who is above all things, and has conferred upon Peter, the prince of his apostles, *magisterium* and primacy, saying to him, "You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it, and I give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven."<sup>65</sup>

The document then declares that papal power is not confined to a specific church, but rather to "the whole world and the general church," and that the Lord raised Peter to the fullness of power—*plenitudo potestatis*—when he said to him, "'You will be called Cephas,'" [John 1:42] which means Peter and head, in order to show Peter to be the head of the church."<sup>66</sup> Innocent's use of "plenitudo of power" in relation to the apostolic succession and papal authority reflected his conviction that papal power extended to the temporal realm.<sup>67</sup>

Colin Morris describes Innocent's fervent belief in his "special position between God and man."<sup>68</sup> He was determined to defend the political rights of the Roman Church, effectively creating the papal states and involving papal authority in the internal politics of the empire and of

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<sup>64</sup> Most Christians acknowledged the pope as Peter's successor and head of the Church, which, in turn, fostered a sense of belonging and loyalty to a religious entity free from national boundaries. Kevin Madigan, *Medieval Christianity: A New History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 290–291.

<sup>65</sup> Innocent III, "Response to Kaloyan," quoted in John C. Moore, *Pope Innocent III (1160/61-1216) to Root up and to Plant* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 127–128, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ottawa/reader.action?docID=253655&ppg=128#>.

<sup>66</sup> Innocent III, "Response to Kaloyan," 127-128, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ottawa/reader.action?docID=253655&ppg=128#>.

<sup>67</sup> "Indeed, it is impossible to read this text in any other way than as an assertion of supreme authority in the temporal as well as the religious realm. He made such a claim explicitly in an 1198 letter to the archbishop of Ravenna, opining that ecclesiastical liberty is best preserved 'where the Roman Church has full power in both temporal and spiritual affairs.'" Kevin Madigan, *Medieval Christianity: A New History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 290-291. And Stephen O'Shea is of the opinion that "[f]or Lotario [Innocent], there was little difference in the two positions [Emperor and Pope]—except that the supreme pontiff of Latin Christendom was by far the superior one." Stephen O'Shea, *The Perfect Heresy: The Revolutionary Life and Death of the Medieval Cathars* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, Ltd., 2000), 32–33.

<sup>68</sup> Colin Morris, *The Papal Monarchy: The Western Church from 1050 to 1250* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 450, <https://doi-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.1093/0198269250.001.0001>.

England and other kingdoms.<sup>69</sup> Earlier, I gave the example of Innocent’s quarrel with King John of England over Rome’s electing the Archbishop of Canterbury as the pope’s intrusion into secular matters.<sup>70</sup>

While secular power was eroding, papal authority was gaining strength in line with “Innocent’s ideal for the proper governance of Christendom.”<sup>71</sup> Kevin Madigan, however, suggests that no prince either accepted Innocent’s “exalted theoretical claims,” or agreed with his “full-blown doctrine of the papal ‘plenitude of power.’”<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, Innocent followed the model whereby the Roman Church had a centralized structure with authority resting with the papal *Magisterium* and *Curia*.<sup>73</sup>

Innocent asserted that he inherited the papal fullness of power (*plenitudo potestatis*) from Peter by virtue of his (i.e., Innocent’s) status as “the vicar of Christ.”<sup>74</sup> He declared, “Peter is the only one who was called to enjoy the fullness of power. From him I received the miter of my priesthood and the crown of my royalty; he has established me vicar of Him upon whose habit it

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<sup>69</sup> Morris, *Papal Monarchy*, 450-451.

<sup>70</sup> I discuss this political struggle in Chapter 6, The Pre-Reformation Period and the English Church.

<sup>71</sup> Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 36. As we will see in upcoming chapters, England, once again, provided the setting for challenges to the papacy.

<sup>72</sup> Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 291.

<sup>73</sup> Daniel Patte, “Authority in/of the Church,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, ed. Daniel Patte (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 88.

<sup>74</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux’s *De consideratione ad Eugenium papam tertiam libri quinque*, written from 1148 to 1153 for Pope Eugenius III, is considered the origin of the doctrine of the *plenitudo potestatis*: “The pope is the king of the earth, the lord of the heavens, because the apostolic see is ‘singularly distinguished by divine and royal privileges.’ Christ Himself was supreme priest and king—*summus et sacerdos et rex*—and consequently *regnum and sacerdotium* were united in Him. The pope is His vicar; and hence as the supreme monarch of this universal *civitas sancta* he disposes of kingdoms and empires and presides over the princes, nations and peoples. In short, the pope is *vicarius Christi, christus Domini, deus Pharaonis*. His voice as vicar of Christ rings out over the entire world: *Ipsius vox est hodie per universum mundum*.” Bernard of Clairvaux, *De consideratione ad Eugenium papam tertiam libri quinque*, quoted in Walter Ullmann, *The Growth of Papal Government in the Middle Ages: A Study in the Ideological Relation of Clerical to Lay Power*, vol. 35 (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 430, <https://www-taylorfrancis-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/pdfviewer/>.

is written: ‘King of kings and lord of lords, priest for eternity according to the order of Melchisedech.’”<sup>75</sup>

### *Two Processions, Two Outcomes*

That Pope Innocent III identified with Peter is an historical fact. Even so, does the way in which fictional Peter is portrayed in the *ME Bible* support the argument that he represents the historical Innocent? As mentioned, in the story, Peter travels to Rome after Jesus’ death. When Veronica arrives later, she hands over the cloth to Peter, thereby transferring its ownership. Peter bears aloft the image on the cloth and, reminiscent of Innocent’s annual procession, processes it through the streets of Rome.<sup>76</sup> While Peter’s procession took place without incident, there was a strange occurrence during one of Innocent’s annual processions. Matthew Paris writes:

While Fortune’s dice aggravated the turbulent state of the English realm, Lord Pope Innocent, who had won the care of the Church through vacillation, caused the image of the face of the Lord, habitually called the Veronica, to be carried reverentially in procession from the church of Saint Peter to the hospital of the Holy Ghost. Which being done, this image while being displayed turned all by itself, so that it was upside down: namely, it was positioned with its forehead below, its beard above. This filled the Lord Pope with dread, for he believed that this was an ill omen for him, and so to make full reconciliation with God upon the advice of his fellows he composed an elegant prayer in honor of this image called the Veronica.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Innocent III quoted in Pauline Moffitt Watts, “The Donation of Constantine, Cartography, and Papal *Plenitudo Potestatis* in the Sixteenth Century: A Paper for Salvatore Camporeale,” *MLN* 119, no. 1 (2004): 1073, doi:10.1353/mln.2004.0042. For a discussion on Melchizedek as the model for kingship, including a section on Bernard of Clairvaux’s *De consideratione*, see Evan F. Kuehn, “Melchizedek as Exemplar for Kingship in Twelfth-Century Political Thought,” *History of Political Thought* 31, no. 4 (2010): 557–575, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26224129>.

<sup>76</sup> See Chapter 4, *The Vera Icona: Looking Upon the Face of God*.

<sup>77</sup> *Dum vero fortunalis alea statum regni Angliae talibus turbibibus exagitaret, dominus Papa Innocentius, quem vacillantis ecclesiae cura sollicitabat, efigiem vultus Dominici, quae Veronica dicitur, ut moris est, de ecclesia Sancti Petri usque ad hospitale Sancti Spiritus reverenter cum processione bajulabat. Qua peracta, ipsa efigies, dum in loco suo aptaretur, se per se girabat, ut verso staret ordine; ita scilicet, ut frons inferius, barba superius locaretur. Quod nimis abhorrens dominus Papa, credidit illud in triste sibi praesagium evenisse, et ut plenius Deo reconciliaretur, consilio fratrum, in honore ipsius efigiei, quae Veronica dicitur, quondam orationem composuit elegantem.* H.R. Luard, ed., *Matthaei Parisiensis, Monachi Sancti Albani, Chronica Majora*, 7 vols., Rolls Series 57 (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1876; reprinted Wiesbaden: Kraus, 1964), vols. 3, 7, quoted in Sand, *Vision, Devotion*, 308, note 73.

In contrast, Peter's procession exemplifies Christianity's triumph over paganism. As the *ME Bible* describes it, when Peter displays the Veronica cloth, the pagan idols fall down and are destroyed. At the palace, Peter heals Vespasian with the cloth and then baptizes the entire Roman court. Then, the cloth miraculously floats upward and remains suspended until Evensong when it descends into Peter's waiting hands, its rightful place.<sup>78</sup> Finally, Veronica founds "the temple þat is called the ministre of Seint Petre," and installs "that holi couerchif in gold and in siluer."<sup>79</sup> Whether it be first-century Rome, or fifteenth-century England, the *ME Bible* points to the supremacy of Rome and the papacy through its ownership of the *vera icona*, the image of God.<sup>80</sup>

### 9.3.1 Innocent III and the Crusades

#### *The Fourth Crusade: Killing Fellow Christians*

In the thirteenth century, Innocent was involved in two major Crusades. His first, the Fourth Crusade, involved a Christian force fighting non-Christians for control of Jerusalem, which sounds much like the *ME Bible's Vengeance* narrative.<sup>81</sup> Innocent was said to be preoccupied with retaking the city and surrounding area, which, in Jonathan Smith's opinion, bordered on obsession.<sup>82</sup> As pope, he was responsible for initiating and overseeing "the battle of

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<sup>78</sup> The text's reiterating that Peter holds the cloth in his hands implies possession or ownership of the item.

<sup>79</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 75.

<sup>80</sup> See Chapter 8, Unveiling the Incarnation, for my discussion on the *imago Dei*, the Veronica and the Eucharist motifs and the Incarnation.

<sup>81</sup> After the success of the First Crusade (1099) to recover the Holy Land from Muslim rule, Jerusalem suffered increasing encroachments and finally fell to Saladin, Sultan of Egypt, in 1187. The Second Crusade (1147) and the Third Crusade (1189) failed to secure Christian access to Jerusalem. Pennington, "Innocent III."

<sup>82</sup> "Innocent's passion to free the holy city became the dominant and consuming issue of his pontificate." Jonathan Phillips, *The Fourth Crusade and the Sack of Constantinople* (London: Pimlico, 2002), 5.

Christ” (i.e., the recapture of Jerusalem).<sup>83</sup> He also saw a connection between “the moral reform of (what he regarded as) a sinful society and a successful crusade to the Holy Land.”<sup>84</sup>

In 1198, Innocent issued a call for the Fourth Crusade. As incentive, he promised Crusaders a new papal indulgence, took them under his protection, and imposed a tax on the clergy to help pay for the expedition.<sup>85</sup> Poor leadership and a lack of funding, however, resulted in a four-year delay. The crusading army left only in 1202 and was diverted to Constantinople, (after attacking the Catholic city of Zadar), where it arrived in 1204. After a one-month siege, the troops took control of Constantinople, and then sacked and destroyed it, with the blessing of their military commanders.<sup>86</sup>

The pope had interpreted the diversion to Constantinople as auguring the reunification of the Latin and Greek churches; however, it actually exacerbated the Great Schism of 1054.<sup>87</sup> In consequence, instead of providing a common cause with which to heal relations between East and West, “it has been suggested that the Crusaders’ destruction of Constantinople hurt ecumenical relations more than any other single event or factor.”<sup>88</sup> All subsequent crusading efforts failed: during the siege of Acre in 1291, the Crusaders lost control of the city to the Muslim army; it was then that crusades to the Holy Land ended.<sup>89</sup> The destruction of

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<sup>83</sup> “War against the infidel was ‘the battle of Christ’, and [Innocent] shared the conviction of his predecessors that the recovery of the Holy Land from Muslim rule was the special responsibility of the Pope.” Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 114.

<sup>84</sup> Phillips, *The Fourth Crusade*, 4.

<sup>85</sup> Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 114.

<sup>86</sup> Alexius Angelus IV (ruled 1203–1204) promised the Crusaders a substantial payment, in addition to Greek submission to the Latin Church, if they would oust his father’s usurper. They did—Alexius, however, did not keep his promises and the Crusades plundered Constantinople in retaliation. Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 115.

<sup>87</sup> “The sack of Constantinople in 1204, at the hands of the Venetians and the Crusaders, ended whatever hope there had been of reconciliation. The central orthodox Christian tradition had suffered a schism that still has not been repaired.” Collins and Price, *The Story of Christianity*, 103.

<sup>88</sup> Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 115.

<sup>89</sup> “An expedition that started out in part to help the eastern church accelerated its destruction by Ottoman Muslims in 1453. Latin and Greek Christians now despised each other.” Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 115.

Constantinople undermined efforts toward Christian unification and caused an irreparable separation between the Eastern and Western churches.

Innocent is often blamed for the “disastrous” Fourth Crusade, which never even reached the Holy Land. Duffy assesses the Fourth Crusade as the final “nail in the coffin” for attempts at Christian reunification.<sup>90</sup> Moore judges it as an out-of-control “utter disaster” that sacked one Christian city and then destroyed another.<sup>91</sup> Cheryl White argues that the pope was misled into believing that Constantinople had welcomed the forces, and the ecclesial hierarchy had agreed to reunite with the Roman Church. Later, upon hearing the truth, “he responded with anger, issuing writs of excommunication for many Crusaders who had taken part in the atrocities.”<sup>92</sup>

Finally, as Morris points out, the Fourth Lateran Council encouraged the reunification of the Greek Orthodox Church with Rome, even while restating the latter’s primacy. And in 381, Rome elevated Constantinople to the level of second episcopal see of the Roman Empire, which Morris attributes to Innocent’s dismay with the Fourth Crusade.<sup>93</sup>

The *Bible en françois*, the *ME Bible*’s prototype, which includes the *Vengeance* narrative, was published several decades after the Fourth Crusade. Possibly, it records a memory of the Crusade, albeit with the Jews as the target, not the Orthodox Christians of the East. It is not unreasonable to suggest that the narrative reimagines the Fourth Crusade to demonstrate Rome’s

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<sup>90</sup> “In theory, the schism between East and West was over. In reality, the outrage of the Fourth Crusade permanently poisoned relations between Greek East and Latin West.” Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 114.

<sup>91</sup> “It had now come to its scandalous conclusion, not in the recapture of the Holy Land, but in a frenzy of looting and appropriation in the Christian empire of Constantinople.” Moore, *Pope Innocent III*, 131–132.

<sup>92</sup> Cheryl H. White, “Re-Examining the Record: A Contextual Analysis of Pope Innocent III Letters of the Fourth Crusade,” International Conference on the Shroud of Turin, 2019, 3, [https://www.academia.edu/40898657/Re\\_Examining\\_the\\_Record\\_A\\_Contextual\\_Analysis\\_of\\_Pope\\_Innocent\\_III\\_Letters\\_of\\_the\\_Fourth\\_Crusade](https://www.academia.edu/40898657/Re_Examining_the_Record_A_Contextual_Analysis_of_Pope_Innocent_III_Letters_of_the_Fourth_Crusade).

<sup>93</sup> “In 1215, Canons 4-5 exhorted the Greek Orthodox to unite with Rome, and reiterated papal primacy, Interestingly, Rome now acknowledged Constantinople as the second see of Christendom, ahead of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. This is largely explained by the Fourth Crusade and its disastrous sack of Constantinople in 1204, which put the eastern capital under Latin rule.” Morris, *Papal Monarchy*, 451.

superiority (in this case over the Eastern Orthodox Byzantine Empire). In this scenario, the Fourth Crusade reflects a belief in Rome's supremacy and its religious authority.

*The Albigensian Crusade: The Campaign against Heretical Christians*

In secular matters, Innocent believed in confining papal intervention to areas where sin and error threatened “the fundamental purpose of secular government, which was the protection and furthering of the Church, and the extirpation of heresy.”<sup>94</sup> In a letter to Philip II of France (r. 1180-1223), the pope writes about collaborating with the State “to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right, and to protect with arms the peace of the church.”<sup>95</sup>

During Innocent's reign, Catharism was a popular and widespread heresy, especially in the Languedoc region of southern France. Arguably, the Cathars were the greatest threat to the Catholic Church.<sup>96</sup> Followers of this Christian-gnostic dualist philosophy believed that the material world had been created by a malevolent deity and that matter was evil.<sup>97</sup> The Cathar leaders, called *Perfecti*, led simple and ascetic lives—they “adhered to chastity and to dietary

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<sup>94</sup> Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 111.

<sup>95</sup> Innocent III, Reg. vii. 79 (PL 215.361 CD), May 28, 1204, citing 1 Pet. 2: 14, quoted in Morris, *The Papal Monarchy*, 443.

<sup>96</sup> “Catharism was the greatest heretical challenge faced by the Catholic Church in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The attempt by the Cathars to find an answer to the fundamental religious and philosophical problems posed by the existence of evil, combined with their success in persuading large numbers of Christians in the West that they had solved these problems, shook the Catholic hierarchy to its very core, and provoked a series of reactions more extreme than any previously contemplated.” Malcolm Barber, *The Cathars: Dualist Heretics in Languedoc in the High Middle Ages*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Taylor and Francis, 2017), 1, <https://www.taylorfrancis-com.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/books/mono/10.4324/9781351223980/cathars-malcolm-barber>.

<sup>97</sup> “Catharism asserted belief in two coeternal cosmological forces, one good (the NT loving God) and one evil (the Demiurge, the OT vengeful creator god). For the Cathars, including those with a more moderate dualism (the evil creator god simply fell from the good god's favor), all physical matter was corrupt. Consequently, Cathars did not believe in the Incarnation, although Christ had been sent by the good God to lead humankind to salvation.” Claire Taylor, “Cathars, Catharism,” *Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, 176.

restrictions and fasts.”<sup>98</sup> In contrast, the ecclesial hierarchy of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, was characterized by wealth coupled with a hedonistic lifestyle.<sup>99</sup>

In consequence of rejecting worldly power as illusory, the Cathars did not believe in a divinely sanctioned authority—in actuality, the church epitomized the corrupt world of matter.<sup>100</sup> So, too, the Cathars refused to acknowledge Petrine primacy.<sup>101</sup> Such disregard for ecclesial power structures and contempt for the clergy were dangerous in an era when Rome alone possessed the keys to the kingdom.<sup>102</sup> Clearly, there was going to be conflict between the Cathars and Innocent, especially given the latter’s assertion of apostolic succession.

The essence of Cathar theology was the rejection of anything material as creations of the evil deity, which included denying the Incarnation. Cathar theology posited that God would not have deigned to assume human flesh—rather, Jesus was a spiritual being who inhabited a *simulacrum*, or a mere representation of a human body.<sup>103</sup> The Cathars also rejected the sacraments including the Eucharist and its refinement in the notion of transubstantiation. Following the theological stance that Jesus had no human body, it was impossible to argue that the Eucharist was the body and blood of Christ.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Barber, *The Cathars*, 106.

<sup>99</sup> “The wealth and worldliness of many churchmen and the embedding of the Church in the heart of the European establishment produced waves of revulsion among the devout, which often spun off into heresy.” Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 112.

<sup>100</sup> For the Cathars the Catholic Church was “a false and fraudulent organisation which had prostituted itself for power and ill-gotten wealth.” Barber, *The Cathars*, 2.

<sup>101</sup> “The so-called Petrine commission, by which the pope still claims authority through direct descent from the apostle Peter, could also be ignored. The most fateful pun in Western history—“You are Peter, on this [*petra*] I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18)—failed to edify the Perfect. For them, the pope teetered atop a rickety fiction, his pronouncements a perpetual source of pointless mischief.” O’Shea, *The Perfect Heresy*, 26.

<sup>102</sup> Innocent III is alleged to have said, “To me is said in the person of the apostle, ‘I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.’” Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 290.

<sup>103</sup> “[The Dominicans] Rainer Sacconi and Moneta of Cremona reported that the Cathars did not believe that the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection had literally taken place; rather, Jesus acquired only a semblance of human nature from the Virgin Mary. His entire life was an appearance only.” Barber, *The Cathars*, 103–104.

<sup>104</sup> “They denied all sacraments because of the physical properties contained within them.” William Hemsworth, “Cathars and Their Issues with the Eucharist,” August 25, 2020, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/thepursuitofholiness/2020/08/cathars-and-their-issue-with-the-eucharist/>

Religious images and relics were also on the Cathars' blacklist.<sup>105</sup> Barber quotes the Cistercian, Peter of Les Vaux-de-Cernay, author of *Historia Albigensis*, as reporting that the Cathars considered holy images in churches as idolatry.<sup>106</sup> As Barber explains, "adoring such images was fatuous, since the images themselves were made with axes and other metal tools."<sup>107</sup> Hence, Cathars were forbidden from venerating the cross or images of the Crucifixion or other images of the saints, "since such images were idols."<sup>108</sup> Read a certain way, it seems as though what the Cathars despised or dismissed (e.g., images, the Incarnation and the Eucharist), were what Innocent venerated and defended.

We can thus say that Cathar concerns interfaced in some way with those expressed by the Reformers in pre-Reformation England, including clerical wealth and corruption, apostolic succession, religious images and relics. So too did their beliefs, albeit with the following caveats. Concerning incarnational doctrine, there is nothing to suggest that English Reformers disputed it; as I have argued, however, by rejecting holy images and the Eucharist, the implication was that they undermined it. And the Reformers' dismissal of transubstantiation was based formally on the fact that it is not mentioned in Scripture or in the creeds.<sup>109</sup>

Following the failed Fourth Crusade, Innocent launched the Albigensian Crusade against the Cathars in France and the County of Toulouse.<sup>110</sup> Initially, he was convinced that preaching and reform would be the appropriate tools for rehabilitating the Cathars. Hence, he sponsored

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<sup>105</sup> "Holy images were no more than idols, and relics worse still—mere bits of crumbling bone, wooden splinters or scraps of cloth being picked up any old where, and passed off by a pack of plausible rogues as parts of saints' bodies or other venerable objects. Those who bowed before such objects were adoring matter, and matter was the Devil's handiwork." Zoë Oldenbourg, *Massacre at Montségur*, trans. Peter Green (New York: Pantheon books, 1961), 37.

<sup>106</sup> Barber, *The Cathars*, 106.

<sup>107</sup> Barber, *The Cathars*, 109.

<sup>108</sup> Barber, *The Cathars*, 113.

<sup>109</sup> I discuss reasons for the Reformers' rejection of transubstantiation in Chapter 6, The Pre-Reformation Period and the English Church.

<sup>110</sup> "Efforts to quell this heresy began slowly, but ultimately grew to the use of the crusade and, in its aftermath, the inquisition, which took Papal authority to new heights, and resulted in the near eradication of the Cathars." Kevin

preaching and teaching campaigns, including commissioning Dominic de Guzman and his fellows who, Duffy notes, were skilled preachers and lived austere lives, as did the Cathar faithful.<sup>111</sup> When preaching, described as “the way of charity” (*via caritatis*), produced few results, Innocent called upon his diocesan bishops to identify and pursue the heretics. Once again, the efforts failed and Innocent began to rethink his approach.<sup>112</sup>

In 1208, following the assassination of the papal legate, Peter of Castelnau, Innocent concluded that “the sword had been placed in the hand of the ruler (him) for the protection of God’s truth.”<sup>113</sup> The pope launched a crusade against the heretics and gave the participants full Crusader indulgences and privileges.<sup>114</sup> He encouraged the crusading army to avenge Castelnau’s murder and “attack the followers of heresy more fearlessly even than the Saracens—since they are more evil—with a strong hand and a stretched out arm.”<sup>115</sup>

The Albigensian Crusade was the first military campaign to specifically target Christians, albeit heretics.<sup>116</sup> Philip Schaff describes how Innocent “set Christian against Christian, and by undertaking to extirpate religious dissent by force drenched parts of Europe in Christian

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Krahenbuhl, “The Albigensian Crusade: A Twist in the Story of the Crusades.” *Medieval Warfare* 3, no. 4 (2013): 6, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48578251>.

<sup>111</sup> “Dominic recognised the appeal of the austere life of the Cathar evangelists, and so his preachers too backed their Catholic preaching by dedicating themselves to absolute poverty. And Pope Innocent saw, understood and approved.” Eamon Duffy, *Ten Popes Who Shook the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011) 77.

<sup>112</sup> “In any case events were moving in the direction of force. The Albigensian Crusade was not only a response to an emergency but was rooted in Innocent’s earlier policies. He had begun his pontificate with an indulgence to those who acted against heretics, and he had appealed to Philip Augustus in May 1204 and early 1205 to ‘eliminate heretics from the kingdom of France.’” Morris, *The Papal Monarchy*, 463.

<sup>113</sup> Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 114

<sup>114</sup> “[T]he legates promised the same plenary indulgence for the campaign against heresy as popes traditionally granted for taking part in a crusade against Muslims in the Holy Land. This consisted of a promise to remit all temporal punishment for sin so that no expiation was required in Purgatory.” Rebecca Rist, “Salvation and the Albigensian Crusade: Pope Innocent III and the plenary indulgence,” Special issue - *Crusading and State Building in the Central Middle Ages*, edited by Catherine Léglu 2010 Reading Medieval Studies, XXXVI, 95, <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/17023/>.

<sup>115</sup> Barber, *The Cathars*, 127.

<sup>116</sup> “Heresy was not a new idea. Ever since the official, established church emerged in the first few centuries following Jesus’ death there had been division over what was proper for Christian belief.” Kevin Krahenbuhl, “The Albigensian Crusade,” 6.

blood.”<sup>117</sup> The campaign’s brutality, violence and destruction are expressed in the anecdote concerning the papal legate, Arnald Amaury, who allegedly said, “Kill them all! God will know his own!” (*Caedite eos. Novit enim Dominus qui sunt eius*) when informed that orthodox Catholics were living in Béziers, a city then under attack.<sup>118</sup> Whatever the case, Amaury did nothing to stop the massacre of the citizens.<sup>119</sup>

In his crusade against the Cathars, Innocent also took advantage of ecclesial law and promulgated several canons during the Fourth Lateran Council that targeted heresy.<sup>120</sup>

Canon 1 provided a doctrinal statement that reiterated the Nicene Creed, and excluded the possibility of salvation outside of the Roman Church, and Canon 3, which excommunicated and anathematized “every heresy raising itself up against this holy, orthodox and catholic faith which we have expounded above [i.e., Canon 1].” It also condemned “all heretics, whatever names they may go under” and those who supported them.<sup>121</sup> Presumably, “whatever names they may go under” would include those whom the *ME Bible* describe as “the payenyms and the Sarazins and the publicans and othire euyl linagis that ben out of the Cristen feith.”<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 128.

<sup>118</sup> In August 1209, Amaury wrote to Innocent III about the siege of Beziers: “While discussions were still going on with the barons about the release of those in the city who were deemed to be Catholics, the servants and other persons of low rank and unarmed attacked the city without waiting for orders from their leaders. To our amazement, crying ‘to arms, to arms!’, within the space of two or three hours they crossed the ditches and the walls and Béziers was taken. Our men spared no one, irrespective of rank, sex or age, and put to the sword almost 20,000 people. After this great slaughter the whole city was despoiled and burnt.” William of Puylaurens, *The Chronicle of William of Puylaurens: The Albigensian Crusade and Its Aftermath*, trans. W. A. Sibly, and M. D. Sibly (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), 127-128.

<sup>119</sup> Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 200.

<sup>120</sup> The *Song of the Cathar Wars (Canso de la Crozada)*, is a *chanson de geste* that describes the events between 1208 and 1219 during the Albigensian Crusade. Nearly one-tenth of the 10,000-line poem [laises 143 to 151] is an account of the proceedings of the Fourth Lateran Council related to the southern French nobility and their domains. Carol Sweetenham, “Papal Discussions in a *Chanson de geste*: The Depiction of Crusade, the Lateran Council, and the Split Personality of the *Canso de la Crozada*,” in *Literary echoes of the Fourth Lateran Council in England and France, 1215-1405*, ed. Maureen Barry McCann Boulton (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2019), 125, <https://books.scholarsportal.info/en/read?id=/ebooks/ebooks4/upress4/2019-05-23/1/9781771104005>. For the complete text of the *Song*, see Janet Shirley, ed. and trans., *The Song of the Cathar Wars: A History of the Albigensian Crusade* (London: Routledge, 2000), <https://doi-org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.4324/9781315236995>.

<sup>121</sup> See Chapter 6, The Pre-Reformation Period and the English Church, note 16.

<sup>122</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 47.

Pope Innocent III died in 1216 before the Albigensian Crusade officially ended; nevertheless, even today, he is considered its architect.<sup>123</sup> Yet, it is erroneous to assume that he favoured force and violence over other ways to deal with the situation—rather, he “resorted to the velvet glove as well as to the fist.”<sup>124</sup> He knew that part of addressing the challenges of heresy had to be anchored in ecclesial reform—he therefore embarked on a series of projects “to infuse both clergy and laity with a new set of moral values.”<sup>125</sup> He also supported two new orders of friars—the Dominicans to teach and the Franciscans to care for the poor.<sup>126</sup>

Even so, the pope’s concern for orthodoxy, including the salvation of the faithful, required him, as leader of the church, to take action.<sup>127</sup> He was caught between exercising tolerance, which would encourage the heretics, and suppression, which could alienate the orthodox laity and lead them astray.<sup>128</sup> Innocent’s Crusades represent Rome’s strong desire to achieve and preserve Christian unity, even when fellow Christians suffer the consequences or are considered the enemy.

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<sup>123</sup> “Although the Crusade was officially ended in 1229 with the Peace of Paris, the conflict continued with increasing religious fervour, as it gave rise to the Inquisition in 1233 under Pope Gregory IX, which ultimately eradicated the Cathar heresy.” Krahenbuhl, “The Albigensian Crusade,” 10.

<sup>124</sup> Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 199.

<sup>125</sup> Morris, *The Papal Monarchy*, 444.

<sup>126</sup> “The Pope’s recognition and protection made all the difference to the followers of Dominic, men of the mind, and the followers of Francis, men of the heart, and both movements spread like wildfire. Pope Innocent’s approval gave form and influence to movements that might otherwise had drifted away into mere protest, and within a generation the friars, as they were called, had injected into official Christianity a new intellectual vitality and religious ardour. Absolute power, which might have snuffed them out, had instead been used to create space for the most dynamic religious forces of the Middle Ages.” Duffy, *Ten Popes*, 78.

<sup>127</sup> “Repression of Catharism was not therefore a question of choice, nor was there any option of toleration, for it was a positive obligation upon those charged by God to lead His Church on earth. The principal weight of this obligation naturally fell upon the pope, as the holder of the see of Saint Peter, first of the Apostles and the rock upon which Christ’s Church had been founded.” Barber, *The Cathars*, 2.

<sup>128</sup> “Intolerance could embolden heretics, confound the simple, and perhaps covert the orthodox to heterodoxy, as he [Innocent] said ‘The depravity of heretics must not be tolerated, but at the same time the religion of simple people must not be undermined.’” Madigan, *Medieval Christianity*, 199.

#### ***9.4 Historical Models to Emulate***

At one level, the *ME Bible* describes a confrontation between forces that uphold the doctrine of the Incarnation and those who reject it (i.e., heretics). The conflict takes place between Christians and Jews because the latter reject Christ. The work, however, mirrors differently the theological and religious turmoil of the high- and the late-medieval periods when heretics in the first case and Reformers in the second case were considered to be undermining the meaning of the Incarnation. In this way, they share features with the Jews of the *ME Bible*.<sup>129</sup>

The *ME Bible* describes Vespasian as the first Christian emperor, and intimates that St. Peter was the first Bishop of Rome.<sup>130</sup> In my interpretation, the Vespasian character evokes the historical Emperor Constantine, who brought Christianity to Rome, and the St. Peter character calls to mind Pope Innocent III who asserted the apostolic succession and exemplified the power of the medieval papacy and church.

Both Constantine and Innocent lived during unstable periods in Christian history, both defended the Catholic faith against heresies, including those related to the Incarnation, and both fostered a relationship between Church and State. As such, the two are emblematic of the force of the Roman Church, particularly during times of strife and dissent. The *ME Bible* alludes implicitly to the foregoing by framing the narrative with motifs that evoke the Incarnation and ending with a warning about what happens to those who challenge its doctrine.

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<sup>129</sup> If the *Vengeance* narrative in the *ME Bible* is a memory of the Crusades, the primary goal of which was to recapture Jerusalem from Muslim control, there would be more emphasis on the Muslims. But the *ME Bible* mentions them once, and only indirectly, as “the payenymys and the Sarazins and the publicans and othire euyl linagis that ben out of the Cristen feith.” And, as noted, that group eventually becomes subsumed into those identified as the Jews, the people who rejected God-made-flesh.

<sup>130</sup> The *ME Bible*'s reference to the “ministre of Seint Peter,” and Peter’s association with Rome and the Veronica imply that he was the first Bishop of Rome. By the late fourth century, the title “pope” was used specifically for the Bishop of Rome and was formalized in the eleventh century. Tom Wenger, “A Brief History of the Papacy,” *Modern Reformation*, May 3, 2007, <https://www.modernreformation.org/resources/articles/a-brief-history-of-the-papacy>.

The Council of Nicaea, which Constantine convened, resolved the Arian controversy and codified the doctrine of the Incarnation as expressed in the Nicene Creed. Pope Innocent reaffirmed the doctrine through his devotion to the Veronica and the Eucharist, summoned the first ever Crusade against Christian heretics (i.e., the Albigensian Crusade), and convened the Fourth Lateran Council, which is implicitly referenced in the text.

The *ME Bible*'s meaning in the fifteenth-century, however, is that the Church and the papacy are the guardians of correct doctrine, and that anyone who challenges Rome will be punished severely. Similar to the *apologias* penned by Mirk, Dymmok and Love, the *ME Bible* recalls the past for answers to the present; it is not the first century that the text calls up, however, but the days when Constantine, and later Innocent, declared Rome's authority and punished heretics. In turn, the *ME Bible* considers those historical leaders as models to emulate in late-fifteenth century England. In this way, the *ME Bible* supports and asserts Rome's hegemony as a response to the Reform Movement in late-medieval England.

The next chapter concludes this dissertation. In it, I revisit Phyllis Moe's speculation on the circumstances surrounding the Middle English translation of the *Bible en françois*. I examine her conjecture and give consideration to whether the *ME Bible* came about by "choice or by reason of an incomplete French text."<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 9.

## Conclusion

### **The *ME Prose Translation*: A Matter of Choice or Accessibility?**

#### ***A Text with Historical, Literary and Theological Implications***

*The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois (ME Bible)*, from around 1470, is a translation of a French text written between 1240 and 1260. The work appeared when Reformers were criticizing the use of holy images and the cult of the Eucharist, the two most contested questions in pre-Reformation England. I argued that Reformers' expressions of disapproval undermined the conventional understanding of the Incarnation and its expression in holy images and the Eucharist. Furthermore, embedded in the *ME Bible* is a defense of Church teaching and tradition concerning the Incarnation, a warning to those who challenge it and an assertion of Rome's hegemony.

The *ME Bible* is a unique document in that the identity of the author is not known and there is only one extant copy. The expository material was not translated, thereby resulting in a text comprised of biblical, legendary and apocryphal stories. The narrative ends with a literary interpretation of the first century siege of Jerusalem (known as the *Vengeance of the Saviour*).

In the previous chapter, I maintained that the *ME Bible* conveys the following: Rome is the protector and guardian of correct doctrine and will defend itself against those who challenge its teaching and tradition. It is directed to the followers of the ecclesial Reformer, John Wycliffe,

called Lollards, who were active in late fifteen-century England. In this interpretation, the *ME Bible* is a text that asserts Rome's hegemony.

### ***A Matter of Choice or Accessibility?***

Phyllis Moe's words about the *Bible en françois*' translation process bear recollection:

The unknown fifteenth-century English translator of the *Bible [en françois]*, whether by choice or by reason of an incomplete French text, omitted the expository chapters and translated only the biblical and legendary narratives. By this omission he not only achieved a shorter and more unified text, but also placed proportionally greater emphasis on the legend of Veronica and the destruction of Jerusalem than existed in the original.<sup>1</sup>

Knowing whether the author had a complete or an incomplete manuscript to translate could have a bearing on my interpretation.<sup>2</sup> But I am dealing with the text as it now stands, as a discreet object of study. And Moe does not discount completely the possibility that the author did have a complete text and chose to translate specific sections.<sup>3</sup> If we consider this speculative possibility, especially with respect to its implications, it is in line with my claim that the stories in the *ME Bible* refute the criticisms by English Reformers in fifteenth-century England.

### ***Contextual Framework: Medieval French and Middle English Religious Literature***

As outlined earlier, when the *ME Bible* was published, a considerable amount of English religious literature was translated from French texts. Among the foregoing were vernacular "Bibles," Lives of Christ, biblical paraphrases, and biblically-based biographies and histories.

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<sup>1</sup> Phyllis Moe, ed., *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois*, Middle English Texts 6 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1977), 9.

<sup>2</sup> As I indicate in Chapter 1, *The ME Version of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois: An Assertion of Rome's Hegemony*, my interpretation of the text uses a synchronic approach.

<sup>3</sup> Moe warns against assuming "that the translator chose to translate only Chapters 5-24, thereby discarding the theological and cosmological beginning of the *Bible [en françois]* and the concluding eleven chapters, for it is possible that [the text that was translated] was not a complete text." Moe, *ME Bible*, 34

The *chanson de geste* was also known in England from the epic poems written in Old French.<sup>4</sup> I also concluded that the *ME Bible* is a typical medieval, or vernacular, Bible. It is unique in Middle English biblical literature in prose because of the appended *Vengeance* narrative.

### ***Medieval Manuscript Production***

Prior to the printing press' arrival in England, documents and manuscripts were produced in *scriptoria* enclosed in monasteries. During the period, monasteries were responsible for preserving and transmitting written materials. For the most part, monks were tasked with translating and copying texts, although nuns, cathedral clerics and craftsmen employed by a church could be scribes.<sup>5</sup> Notwithstanding that “[n]othing is known of the early history of the manuscript,” the *ME Bible*—a religious text—most likely was produced in a medieval monastery.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Extant Copies of the Bible en françois***

Moe describes eight unabridged versions of the *Bible en françois*. As well, there are four abridged versions, and five manuscripts containing the legend of Veronica and the destruction of Jerusalem (i.e., the *Vengeance*) from the unabridged version.<sup>7</sup> The abridged version summarizes the biblical and legendary material; hence, if the author had a complete copy of the *Bible en françois*, it would have been unabridged because, as Moe observes, the author “followed his French source faithfully.”<sup>8</sup> And, unlike the abridged version, the unabridged is divided into

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<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 3, English Literary Culture, the Medieval Popular Bible and *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois*, and Chapter 5, *The Vengeance of the Saviour: A Handbook on Managing Religious Dissent*, for an examination on the *chanson de geste* including its Middle English versions.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 2, English Literary Culture, the Medieval Popular Bible and *The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois*.

<sup>6</sup> Moe, *ME Bible*, 11.

<sup>7</sup> For a list of manuscripts of the *Bible en françois*, see Moe, *ME Bible*, 13-14.

<sup>8</sup> “The English text is a fairly close translation of chapters 5 to 23 of the *Bible*. A comparison of two passages hosen from different sections of A [the Cleveland manuscript] with their equivalents in P [B.N. fr. 1850] demonstrates that

numbered chapters as is the *ME Bible*. When compared with the one extant copy of the *ME Bible*, there are eight available unabridged copies that the author could have accessed. The similarities between the *ME Bible* and its unabridged prototype appears to support the argument that the author had access to the latter. It would mean that the author selected specific sections from the unabridged prototype to translate into Middle English.

### ***Literary Responses to Reformers***

I examined several texts that respond to the religious and theological issues of dissent circulating in pre-Reformation England. In addition to the *ME Bible*, which I deem as an implicit refutation, Love's *Mirror*, John Mirk's *Festial*, and Roger Dymmok's response to *The Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards* are straightforward rebuttals. Apart from Dymmok's response, the others are written in vernacular prose, as are Lollard compositions. In my judgment, the *ME Bible* participates in this body of work that uses vernacular prose to critique English Reformers.

### ***A Matter of Choice or Accessibility? Arguments for an Unabridged Text***

Nevertheless, by far, the most compelling reason for arguing that the author edited and translated an unabridged text of the *Bible en françois* is that the resultant work, the *ME Bible*, appeared in a time of religious and theological turmoil in England. The redaction gives the text a specific and new meaning. Having access to an unabridged text means that the redactor edited and then translated it to allocate more space to the biblical material and the *Vengeance* than is in the prototype. Furthermore, and as I have maintained, the *ME Bible*, as a truncated version of the *Bible en françois*, offers a defense of doctrine and a warning to dissenters.

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the translator as is typical of many fifteenth-century English translators, followed his French source faithfully, even reproducing the sentence patterns of the original." Moe, *ME Bible*, 31.

Holy images and the cult of the Eucharist had papal and ecclesial approval; they were also the two most contested issues in the pre-Reformation period when the *ME Bible* appeared.<sup>9</sup> Conversely, from the Church's standpoint, by disavowing the use of holy images and the cult of the Eucharist, Reformers were undermining the doctrine of the Incarnation. The *ME Bible* responds by threading an incarnational sensibility throughout the narrative. Bridging the two main sections, it is expressed in such a way that it would be read as upholding Church teaching and tradition on this seminal Christian doctrine, the Incarnation, via support for images and the Eucharist.<sup>10</sup>

Given the foregoing, I would claim that the author deliberately edited and translated the *Bible en françois* as a response to the reform-minded Christians. Still, because we cannot be certain, I must conclude that its appearance coincides with and assumes a new meaning in the context of the nascent Reform movement in England. We can also state with certainty that the *ME Bible* uses an old and outdated literary model to convey its meaning.

***Reading The ME Prose Translation of Roger d'Argenteuil's Bible en françois in Pre-Reformation England: Incarnation, Tradition and the Authority of Rome***

The *ME Bible* is a text that better reflects late fifteenth-century England than first century Jerusalem and Rome. It looks to the past, when the medieval Catholic Church exercised almost limitless power over the faithful, to address issues in the present.

Despite its being written in vernacular prose, there is little acknowledgment of the changing *status quo*. If the goal of the *ME Bible* was to delay or prevent the English Reformation, then it was unsuccessful. Nevertheless, when read as a rebuttal to the Reform

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<sup>9</sup> See Chapter 8, Unveiling the Incarnation.

<sup>10</sup> As I mention in Chapter 7, Three Clerics Defend Holy Images and the Eucharist, neither that Wycliffe nor his followers denied the Incarnation; they did, however, dispute how the Church presented the doctrine.

movement, it provides insight into this period of religious and theological turmoil, and the contentious issues that eroded confidence in the Church during the pre-Reformation period in late fifteenth-century England.

In my interpretation, the *ME Bible's* meaning is a “vindication” of the conventional understanding of the Incarnation and a warning to those who challenge it—at its core, it is a defense of Rome and the papacy.

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### Appendix A: Biblical and Non-Biblical Sources of the *ME Bible*

Chapter	Event	Biblical Source	Non-Biblical Source
5	“Make we man to oure liknesse” (44); the Prohibition, Temptation, Fall: “Wotist thou nat why that god hath defended that ye shuld not ete of these apples of this appultree” (45); origin of the Adam’s apple.	Gen. 1:26-27; 2:7-9, 15-17; 3:1-7.	Origin of Adam’s Apple
6	“Sir, this made me to do Eue my fellow’ (46); the Curses, Expulsion; Cain and Abel; “aftir thei were corrupt by diuerse synnes of lecherie and lay by her doughtirs” (47)	Gen. 3:8-24; 4:1-16; 6:4	Eve and the branch of the apple tree; Cain’s life and death; Adam’s death; descendants establish castles, cities and towns
7	Destruction of Pentapolis; Noah and the Flood; Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob mentioned; Moses and the Commandments; summary of the Prophets Jeremias, Isaias, Daniel, Ezekiel, David, Solomon; captivity under Nabugodonosor; Esther	Gen. 14:8-9; 19:24-25; 6:5-14; Ex. 20:1-17; Matt. 22:37-39.	N/A
8	Annunciation: “Hough mai this be sith I neuer knew man?” (50); Herald Angel: “peas and good wille be so among men in erth” (51); Magi	Luke 1:28, 34-38; 2:14; Matt. 1:20, 2:11	Mary’s impregnation
9	Slaughter of the Innocents; Christ disputes with Temple doctors; calls Disciples, is baptized: “Who that bileueth in me & is baptizid, he shal be saued” (52); general preaching and healing; feeds five thousand	Matt. 2:16; Luke 2:46-47; Matt. 3:16-17; 14:17-20; 15:34-38; Mark 16:16	Herod’s death
10	Palm Sunday; raises Lazarus; betrayal, arrest; Jesus before Caiphas; Peter’s denials; washes Disciples’ feet	Matt. 21:9; John 11:43; 18:2-11; Matt. 26:47-75; John 13:5	The siblings, Lazarus and Mary Magdalene
11	Christ before Caiaphas and Pilate	John 11:50; Luke 23:1-5	Background on Jesus’ family and life
12	Pilate’s wife’s dream; washes hands; Barabbas: “the blood ... be upon us and upon oure children” (60)	Matt. 27:11, 19-26; John 19:11-12, 15, 18-30; Matt. 27:40-43, 46, 51-53, 62-66; John 10:11	Pilate’s wife’s dream; Pilate’s passionate pleading for Jesus’ life
13	Scourging; carrying the Cross; Veronica	Matt. 27:27-31	Legends of the cross and Veronica’s veil

Chapter	Event	Biblical Source	Non-Biblical Source
14	Crucifixion; Pilate's inscription: "That as I have written is written" (63); Mary entrusted to John; Last Words; marvels at Christ's death; precautions of the Jews	John 19:18-30; Matt. 27:40-43, 46, 51-53, 62-66; John 10:11	Mary's complaint at the foot of the cross ( <i>planctus</i> ); Harrowing of Hell
15	Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus "the smyth" (65); Longinus	John 19:34, 38-42; 10:11	Curing of Longinus
16	Two angels appear to the Marys; bribery of the guards; appearances to Mary and the Disciples; breaks bread; charges Disciples; Ascension	Matt. 28:1-15; John 20:19; Mark 16:15-16, 19; Luke 24:13, 30	Conflated eucharistic narratives
17	Pentecost	Acts 2:3-4	Vespasian and Veronica
18 - 23	Healing of Vespasian; baptism of Roman court; destruction of Jerusalem; death of Caiaphas and Pilate; Vespasian becomes emperor of Rome	N/A	<i>Gospel of Nicodemus / Acts of Pilate / Death of Pilate / Curing of Tiberius / Vengeance of the Saviour</i>

**Note:** Information in the Event and Biblical Source columns is from James Morey's *Book and Verse: A Guide to Middle English Biblical Literature*, 118-119. The text in the Non-Biblical Source column is mine.

## Appendix B: Latin Text in the *ME Bible* and its Middle English Translation

Chapter	Latin	Middle English (ME)	Speaker(s)	Modern (Latin)	Comments
5: Creation of Adam	<i>Faciamus hominem ad ymaginem nostram vt habeat imperium supra terram, et pro eo vt sedes paradisi vacue repleantur. Tunc formauit Deus Adam primum hominem de limo terre &amp; inspirauit in ipsum spiritum rationis &amp; intellectus, &amp; dedit ei animam vigitatiuam intellectiuam racionabilem &amp; eciam sensitiuam. Et ex costa Ade dormientis formauit Deus feminam Euam in adiutorium similem [viro]:</i>	“that is to seye, God seith, ‘Make we man to oure liknesse to haue lordship aboue the creatures of the erthe, and by whom the setis of paradise that ben voide ‘maye’ be fulfilled.’ And oure Lord God made Adam his first man and made him & fourmed him to his ymage and liknesse of the slyme of the erthe and inspirid hym with his holy spirit withyn his body and yaue him lif and soule with reson & vndirstonding of good and evill & yaue him rest.”	Narrator	Let us make man according to our image, so that he may have dominion over the earth, and in order that the empty seats in paradise may be filled. Then God created Adam, the first man, from the mud of the earth, and he breathed into him the spirit of reason and of intellect, and he gave him a soul that is vegetative, intellective, rational, and also sensitive. And from the rib of Adam as he slept, God created the woman, Eve, as a helper who was like the man.	ME translation adds: “reson & vndirstonding of good and evill & yaue him rest.”  ME translation does not mention the description of the soul ( <i>animam vigitatiuam intellectiuam racionabilem &amp; eciam sensitiuam</i> ), or the creation of Eve ( <i>Et ex costa Ade dormientis formauit Deus feminam Euam in adiutorium similem [viro]</i> ).  Modern Latin text provided by Professor Stephen Pelle, University of Toronto, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies
8: Annunciation and Nativity	<i>Ave, gracia plena Deus tecum:</i>	“that is to sey, ‘Virgine pure, ful of grace, God be in thee.’”	Gabriel	Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee	ME translation adds: “The alm3ti God sedith to thee that he shal descende in‘to’ the [erth] and take mannes flesh and shal become a fleishly man and shall saue the peple, and whan he shal be born thou shal clepe him Iesu Crist.”
	<i>Gloria in excelsis Deo et in terra pax hominibus bone voluntatis:</i>	“that is to sey, ‘Ioye be to almighty God in Jeuen aboue, and peas and good wille be so among men in earth.’”	Angels	Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will.	NA
9: Baptism	<i>Hic est filius meus dilectus.</i>	NA	Holy Ghost	This is my beloved Son.	NA
	<i>Qui ‘in’ me crediderit et baptizatus fuerit saluis erit:</i>	“that is to sey, ‘Who that bileuet in me & is baptizid, he shal be saued.’”	Jesus	He who believes in me and is baptized will be saved.	
10: Entrance into Jerusalem and Betrayal	<i>Osanna filio Daud; benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini; osanna in excelsis;</i>	“that is to sey, ‘See here the ful mighti son of God that is descended	Jews	Hosanna (praise) to the son of David; blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.	ME translation includes a meditation on the Incarnation.

Chapter	Latin	Middle English (ME)	Speaker(s)	Modern (Latin)	Comments
		into erth, his peple to saue; honoure be apparaild to him. Amen.’”			
	<i>Quem queritis</i> <i>Ego sum</i>	“Whom seke ye?” “I am he”	Jesus	Who are you looking for? I AM (emphatic).	Paraphrase of John 1:38.
	<i>Quemcumquis osculatus fuero ipse est; tenete eum:</i> <i>Aue rabi:</i>	“Whom that I kisse þat is he; holdith him.” “Al heil, my maistir & my lord.”	Judas	The one I kiss is the same (he); hold him. Greetings, Rabbi.	NA
	<i>Quare sicut ‘ad’ latrones cum gladiis et fustibus venistis ad me? Quid male feci?</i>	“Wherto cum ye to me with glayues and with staues, like as men come to take theues? What eucl haue I done?”	Jesus	Why are you coming to me like robbers with swords and clubs? What wrong have I done?	ME translation adds: “Se ye not me euery day at the temple where I teche the peple and hele the seke and þe tormentid peple? Whi toke ye me not then?”
	<i>Tolle gladium tuum et pone in vaginam; quia qui gladio percutit, gladio peribit. Necesse est ut impleantur quod scriptum est de me per prophetas pro salute humana:</i>	“Putte thy swerd into his scawbert, for he that with swerd sleeth with swerd shal be slayne, It is behoueful that Scriptures be fulfillid that þe holi prophetis haue written and prophecied of me for the saluaction of the world.”		Take your sword and put it into the scabbard; because he who strikes with the sword will perish by the sword. It is necessary that what is written of me through the prophets for human salvation may be fulfilled.	NA
	<i>Ego sum, tu dixisti.</i>	“I am, þou hast seid”:		I am, you have said.	
	<i>Prophetiza quis te percussit.</i>	“Telle who smote thee”:	Jews	Tell us who hit you.	
	<i>Et tu ex illis es:</i> <i>Vere tu de illis es:</i> <i>Vere tu discipulus eius es:</i>	“Thou art of the disciples of Crist.” “Truli thou art of hem.” “Thou are his disciple; thou maist not ageinsey it, for by thy tunge [speech] thou art knowen.”	Servants	And you are one of them. Truly, you are one of them. You are truly his disciple.	
	<i>Petir, antequam gallus cantet hodie in nocte ter me negabis:</i>	“Petir, ere the cok crow this daie by night thou shalt forsake me thries.”	Jesus	Peter, before the cock crows today, you will have denied me three times.	
11: Trial	<i>Manifestum est michi in sompnis quod necesse est ut vnus moriatur pro populo iustus ne gens tota pereat; nunc temtemus de isto si sic forte ille de quo prophete dixerunt:</i>	“It is necessarie that one die for the peple rather than alle folk perish; now lat us assay of this man, for happeli it be he that the prophetis speken of.”	Caiaphas	It is clear to me, from my dream, that just one man die for the people, lest the whole nation perish; let us now examine the situation to see if perhaps he is the one of whom the prophets spoke.	ME translation text adds: “For þis doþ so many miracles that if he syue log he shal conuert al the peple and shal take al oure lordships from us but if we put him to deth. And lat us do it wiseli & subtili þat it be not on an holiday for the force of the peple

Chapter	Latin	Middle English (ME)	Speaker(s)	Modern (Latin)	Comments
					that to-morou shal assemble in this toun for the Sabate and the Pasque. And this daie is Fridaie and now in this toun is but few peple, and therefore I aduise that we deliure hym anon that the multitude of peple take him not away from us."
	<i>Tu es filius Dei viui rex Iudeorum?</i>	"Thou art the sonne of God, king of þe Iuwes?"	Pilate	Are you the son of the living God, the king of the Jews?	NA
	<i>Tu non habes potestatem super me nisi datum tibi esset de supra, sed adueni ut [impleantur] quod scriptum est de me per prophetas:</i>	"Thou hast no powere ouer me but if it were ordained from heven an high."	Jesus	You have no power over me unless it was given to you from above, but I am here so that what was written about me by the prophets might be fulfilled.	ME translation adds: "for I am hidir com & descended into þe erþe to fulfille the Scripture that the holi prophetis haue written of me for the sa'l'uacion of the world."
	<i>Tolle, tolle, crucifige eum. Nisi Iesum qui se regem facit morti tra'di'deris, non es amicus Cezaris: Crucifigatur:</i>	"Take and crucifige him": "But if thou put Iesu to deth that makith himselue king, thou are not frend to Cezar themperouere." "Lat him be crucified."	Jews	Away with him, take him away, crucify him.  Let him be crucified.	NA
13: Passion	<i>Aue rex noster</i>	Hail, our king of Iuwes		Hail, King of the Jews	
14: Crucifixion	<i>Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudeorum</i>	"And that scripture was in Latine, Ebrue and barbarine."	Narrator	Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews	
	<i>Alios saluos fecit, seipsum saluum non potest facere. Si filius Dei es, descende de cruce:</i>	"Other he hath saued, himselue he can not saue": "If thou be Goddis sonne, com down from the cros."	Jews	He saved others, but cannot save himself.  If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.	
	<i>Quia bonus pastor ponit animam suam &amp; dat pro ouibus suis:</i>	"For the good herdeman yeueþ his soule."	Jesus	For the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.	ME translation text adds: "for [to kepe] his shepe from the wulues & euel bestis."
	<i>Mulier, ecce filius tuus, deinde dixit discipulo ecce mater tua; et ex illa hora accepit eam discipulus in suam:</i>	"That is to say, 'Modir, se here Seint Iohn youre sonne,'" and aftir that oure Lord seid to Seint Iohn Euangelist, "Iohn, se here this modir"; and from that houre furth Seint Iohn held hir cumpany al hir lif & serued hir and wurshipt hir whils he lyued."		Mother, behold your son, then said to the disciple, Behold your mother; and from that hour the disciple took her into his home.	

Chapter	Latin	Middle English (ME)	Speaker(s)	Modern (Latin)	Comments
	<i>Scicio: (sic)</i>	“I haue thurst.”		I am thirsty.	NA
	<i>Consummatum est:</i>	“Alle is fulfilled.”		It is finished.	
	<i>Heli, heli lama zabatany: in manus tuas + comendo spiritum meum:</i>	“Think on me, fadir of heuen; I put into thi keping my spirit.”		My God, my God, why have you forsaken me; into your hands I commend my spirit.	
	<i>Et tunc esset nouissimus error peior priore:</i>	“that is to sey, that this error shuld be wurs than the first.”	Jews	And then this error (saying that he rose from the dead) would be worse than the first.	
15: Entombment	<i>Quia bonus pastor aimam suam dat pro ouibus suis:</i>	“this is to sey, the good herdman puttith his bodi oft times in auenture.”	Narrator	The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.	ME translation adds: “for his shepe, hem to defend & kepe from be wulfis and other euel bestis.”
16: Resurrection	<i>Ite docentes gentes per vniuersum mundum, baptizantes eos in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen. Qui crediderit et baptizatus fuerit, saluus erit:</i>	“þis is to sey, ‘Go ye by alle the world and teche the peple, and baptize hem in the name of the Fadir and of the Sonne & of the Holi Gost. And al tho that bileue in me & don my commaundementis shal be saued.’”		Go and teach the nations all over the world, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy spirit. Amen. He who believes and is baptized will be saved.	The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16–20)
22: Siege of Jerusalem	<i>Erant multi fame perientes et quodam mulier ex famis radeo suum puerum deuorauit:</i>	“moche peple perishid by hungir, and a woman ete hir child by wodenesse (madness) of hunger.”		Many people were dying of famine and a certain woman deuoured her child from starvation.	This incident is recorded in <i>The Wars of the Jews</i> , Book VI, Chapter 3, by Flavius Josephus.
	<i>Quia non relinquetur lapis super lapidem</i>	“So that ther left not one stone upon another.”		Because there will be not one stone left upon another.	Paraphrases Matthew 24:2