

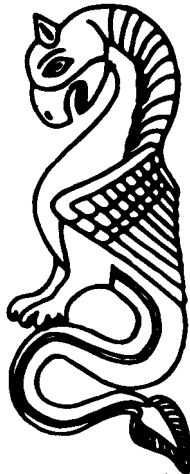
# Leeds Studies in English

**Article:**

Susan Powell, 'John Mirk's Festial and the Pastoral Programme',  
*Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 22, (1991), 85-102

**Permanent URL:**

[https://ludos.leeds.ac.uk:443/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object\\_id=121848&silos\\_library=GEN01](https://ludos.leeds.ac.uk:443/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=121848&silos_library=GEN01)



*Leeds Studies in English*  
School of English  
University of Leeds  
<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/lse>

## John Mirk's *Festial* and the Pastoral Programme

Susan Powell

Within a century of John Mirk's writing his sermon collection, the *Festial*, it had been copied in whole or part many times, it could be found in two separate versions as well as a major revision, and it had been printed by Caxton as his first sermon collection. Indeed, it was to remain in print until 1532 and to retain its popularity even later. This paper will demonstrate that Mirk's original aim, that the work should serve as the preaching component of a programme of pastoral publication, remained relevant throughout the various metamorphoses of the *Festial*.<sup>1</sup>

### *John Mirk and the Festial*

From its first appearance, probably in the 1380s,<sup>2</sup> the *Festial* seems immediately to have become popular amongst priests,<sup>3</sup> and a recension soon took place which resulted in a rearrangement of material to provide a separate *Temporale* and *Sanctorale*.<sup>4</sup> Textual variants are minor and it was purely a practical, rather than ideological, recension, with the aim of making the *Festial* a more useful preaching tool. It was this recension which Caxton used for his first edition of 30 June 1483 and which remained the basis of later editions until 1532.<sup>5</sup> However, a further recension exists which does show a significant reorientation of the original collection. It is found in complete form in two British Library manuscripts, Harley 2247 and Royal 18 B XXV, and in incomplete or imperfect form in two other manuscripts, Gloucester Cathedral Library 22 and Trinity College Dublin 428.<sup>6</sup>

John Mirk was an Austin canon and later prior at Lilleshall in Shropshire.<sup>7</sup> As such he was a monk-priest – indeed, it has recently been plausibly suggested that he preached at St Alkmund's, Shrewsbury.<sup>8</sup> He wrote three works, a Latin *Manuale Sacerdotis*, an English *Instructions for Parish Priests*, and the *Festial*.<sup>9</sup> The first

two are manuals for the guidance of the priest in performing his duties to both God and his congregation, and there is some reason for thinking he wrote the Latin manual later in life;<sup>10</sup> the last is a collection of ready-made sermons to assist in performing one of the most important duties, the preaching to the people in the vernacular. Mirk's motivation in the two vernacular works, the *Instructions* and the *Festial*, is clearly announced in both, for example, in the *Festial*:

By myne owne febul lettrure Y fele how yt faruth by othur that bene in the same degre that hauen charge of soulus and bene holdyn to teche hore pareschonus of alle the principale festus that cometh in the 3ere schewyng home what the seyntus soffreden and dedun for Goddus loue, so that they schuldon haue the more deuocion in Goddus seyntys and with the better wylle com to the chyrche to serue God and pray to holy seyntys of her help. But for mony excuson ham by defaute of bokus and sympulnys of letture, therefore in helpe of suche mene clerkus as I am myselff, I haue drawe this treti sewyng owt of *Legend Aurea* [sic] with more addyng to. So he that hathe lust to study therein, he schal fynde redy of alle the principale festis of the 3ere a schort sermon nedful for hym to techym [sic] and othur for to lerne.

(British Library MS Cotton Claudius A II, fol. 1v)

The *Instructions* express the same intention,<sup>11</sup> and Mirk clearly saw himself providing, in the *Instructions* and the *Festial*, two vernacular teaching aids for the inadequate priest. Indeed, the two works are found together in two manuscripts, British Library Cotton Claudius A II and Bodleian Library Douce 60, and it would seem significant that the Cotton manuscript is in fact the earliest of the extant manuscripts.

#### *The Fourth Lateran Council, Pecham, and Thoresby*

The immediate impetus behind such attempts to educate the clergy was Archbishop Thoresby of York's 1357 instructions to the clergy of his province. These in their turn were based on the 1281 Lambeth Constitutions of Archbishop

Pecham of Canterbury.<sup>12</sup> Their origin is in the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, which had been summoned by Innocent III in an attempt to remedy, amongst other things, the ignorance of priests.<sup>13</sup> Pecham's and Thoresby's decrees are clearly just the official implementation for each province of what was carried out on a local or individual basis throughout the country from 1215 on. The aim is the adequate preparation for heaven of every Christian soul, and in this aim teaching and confession are the most important offices of the priest. A minimum requirement of six basic Christian tenets was to be known by the parishioner and therefore had first to be understood and taught by the priest – the fourteen articles of the faith, the ten commandments of the Old Testament and the two precepts of the Gospel, the seven deeds of bodily and spiritual mercy, the seven deadly sins, the seven virtues, and the seven sacraments.<sup>14</sup>

As an example of the writing which the Lateran Council directly or indirectly instigated, one may cite the *Fasciculus Morum*, which depends structurally on the seven deadly sins and their corresponding virtues but deals with all the Lateran council material, as well as extra tenets such as the Paternoster and the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, which became important additions to the official list. Written at the beginning of the fourteenth century, it was used by priests all over the country well into the fifteenth century and was in fact used in the revision of the *Festial*.<sup>15</sup>

The *Fasciculus* is an early work and is written in Latin. The production of English manuals treating the basic tenets only really burgeoned in the second half of the fourteenth century after Thoresby in 1357 had not only issued Latin constitutions, as of course Pecham had done, but had also provided a vernacular translation. It is this translation, generally known by the fey and inaccurate Early English Text Society title, *The Lay Folks' Catechism*, which gave official encouragement to the vernacular pastoral manual in the second half of the fourteenth century and provided too an official model for it.<sup>16</sup> From then on we have such influential works as the *Speculum Christiani*,<sup>17</sup> the *Memoriale Credencium*,<sup>18</sup> the *Pore Caitiff*,<sup>19</sup> the *Speculum Vitae*,<sup>20</sup> as well as many individual treatises dealing with, for example, the Pater Noster (a common version is incorporated in the so-called Lollard version of the *Lay Folks' Catechism*)<sup>21</sup> or the seven deadly sins (e.g. Richard Lavynham's *Litil Tretys*).<sup>22</sup> The *Instructions for Parish Priests* itself provides all the guidance a priest needs, together with detailed instructions on confession, and, as preparation for confession, it supplies material on the Paternoster, Ave, Creed, articles of the faith, sacraments, commandments, sins, and virtues, to be taught by the priest and learnt by the people.<sup>23</sup>

It has already been said that Mirk's aim in his writing was to provide a programme of instruction for the priest. By itself the *Festial* in fact contains relatively little teaching on the tenets of the Lateran Council, though we have seen that the *Instructions* treat them in detail. It would seem that the two works were complementary – the sermons provide instruction on ritual (from John Beleth's *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*), information on the feast days (from Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*), exempla (from the *Gesta Romanorum* and elsewhere), but little, except in passing, on the tenets, which are restricted to other occasions of teaching and catechism and dealt with in the *Instructions*. We have already noted that, though the *Instructions* are only twice found together with the *Festial*, in one case this is in the earliest extant manuscript, Cotton Claudius A II, while in the other case, Douce 60, the manuscript is also early, mid-fifteenth-century.<sup>24</sup>

From the *Lay Folks' Catechism* on, these tenets became more and more important, till they form by far the bulk of material of religious instruction in the fifteenth century. It is in this context that we need to study the *Festial* revision in the Harley, Royal, Gloucester and Dublin manuscripts.

### *The Festial revision*

There is ample evidence that the priest who revised the *Festial* saw his work as a preaching aid for other priests, just as Mirk had done, even though Mirk's prologue was probably not known to him (it survives today in only one of the manuscripts of the recension which the reviser used).<sup>25</sup> The work underwent various alterations<sup>26</sup> which would seem to render it suitable for a more learned priest than Mirk had envisaged, addressing a congregation socially and educationally superior to Mirk's. The *Legenda Aurea* was reused for all the sermons and virtually retranslated for the saints' legends. Material was added from other sources, for example, the *Fasciculus Morum* and other works by the author of the *Legenda*, his sermons and biblical *distinctiones*. *Narrationes* disappear, particularly in the *Sanctorale* section, the populist tone is modified, the text is often rephrased. Nevertheless, it is still recognisably the *Festial*. The most startling difference lies in the expansion of the collection by a large number of new sermons.<sup>27</sup>

To the sixty-two sermons in his exemplar, the reviser added another thirty, all but four to the *Temporale* section, and in those thirty additional sermons we find extensive use of all the basic tenets which had by that time become the backbone of

the preaching technique, the sins, their corresponding virtues, the commandments, the three cardinal and four divine virtues, the deeds of mercy, the articles of the faith, the Paternoster, the gifts of the Holy Ghost with their rewards based on the Beatitudes.<sup>28</sup> Above all, the emphasis on confession, which was supplied by Mirk in his *Instructions*, is apparent throughout these sermons added to his *Festial*, with the importance of penance (often mentioned in its three parts, contrition, confession and satisfaction) stressed in ten sermons,<sup>29</sup> and with one passage in an Ash Wednesday sermon dealing with the form of confession in just the terms in which Mirk had dealt with it in the *Instructions*.<sup>30</sup>

The significance of these new sermons is therefore that they supply the *Festial*, for long divorced from its complementary *Instructions*, with the basic preaching tenets which had evolved from the Fourth Lateran Council and had received more recent impetus from the *Lay Folks' Catechism*. As has already been suggested, Mirk's use of these tenets in the *Festial* is rare and desultory – he often refers to sins which are numbered amongst the seven deadly ones, but rarely gives the full number or points out that they belong to the category of deadly sins; he mentions once, in his Advent sermon, the seven deeds of mercy; in his version of the Old Testament reading for the fourth Sunday in Lent he repeats the ten commandments as given to Moses; on the Eve of Pentecost he refers to the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost; the Paternoster appears in a sermon outside the *Temporale/Sanctorale* run as the duty of the priest to expound to his congregation 'ones oþer twyse yn þe zere'; the five joys of Mary are dealt with in the sermons for her Annunciation and Assumption and the Ave in a separate sermon, 'De salutacione Beatae Mariae'. This is the extent of the *Festial's* reference to these tenets.

Where the reviser came across these references, he did not in general alter them in any substantial way.<sup>31</sup> In only one case does he seem to have felt that Mirk's treatment of a tenet was wholly inadequate. This is the material on the ten commandments in the sermon for the fourth Sunday in Lent, and it is significant that here the reviser not only elaborates Mirk's material but does so with reference to some of the most important material on the ten commandments available at the time, all of which occurs in texts I have already mentioned, the *Lay Folks' Catechism*, the *Speculum Christiani*, and a tract, 'The Ten Vengeances of God', which circulates independently and is also found in the *Memoriale Credencium*. But this is a single instance and otherwise it is true to say that the reviser included his pastoral material in the form of new sermons rather than by significant addition to the *Festial* text.

The revision of the *Festial* is not an isolated case but part of a policy of

promotion of Thoresby's tenets. Again and again, we find material of religious instruction copied or bound with sermons.<sup>32</sup> *Festial* sermons, for example, are found together with the *Instructions* twice,<sup>33</sup> with the *Speculum Christiani* four times,<sup>34</sup> with Lavynham's *Litil Tretys* twice,<sup>35</sup> with the Great Sentence of excommunication three times,<sup>36</sup> with church statutes,<sup>37</sup> with *exempla* taken from Nicholas Bozon's *Contes Moralisés*,<sup>38</sup> or from the *Gesta Romanorum*,<sup>39</sup> or from the *Fasciculus Morum*,<sup>40</sup> with liturgical material,<sup>41</sup> often with other sermons, and with individual tracts on the basic tenets.<sup>42</sup>

The majority of the manuscripts would appear to be priests' books, of which the most interesting is Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson A 381 which contains the Great Sentence (the sentence of excommunication to be pronounced on chronic offenders), meditative material known generally as the *Counsels of Saint Isidore*, the *Festial*, the standard exposition of the ten commandments, and finally a common version of the seven deadly sins.

### ***The Quattuor Sermones*<sup>43</sup> and MS Rawlinson A 381**

It is convenient at this point to introduce another text, one which is based on the *Lay Folks' Catechism* and contains all Thoresby's tenets (articles, commandments, sacraments, deeds of mercy, virtues, sins), together with other material. As well as using the *Lay Folks' Catechism*, it also draws on some of the same popular material found in manuscript combination with the *Festial*, viz. the *Speculum Christiani* and Lavynham's *Litil Tretys*.<sup>44</sup> It places a strong emphasis on the three parts of confession and is nearly always printed together with the Great Sentence and with material on Sunday prayers, entitled 'The Bedes on the Sondag'. It is in fact a priest's handbook, written by a priest and for priests to use in teaching the people.<sup>45</sup> Its material is directly comparable to what we find in Mirk's *Instructions* or used to augment the *Festial* in its revision or copied with it in a manuscript such as Rawlinson A 381. This work is the *Quattuor Sermones*. No manuscript has been discovered, but it was printed by Caxton probably in 1483, the same year as the *Festial*, and indeed in nearly every printing is issued together with the *Festial*. Though Caxton originally set up the two works independently, after Wolfgang Hopyl had printed them with one set of signatures in 1495 they were more often than not printed together.

There are basically two ways to incorporate material into a text – one is to

revise the text, the other is to copy or bind the material with it. From the 1470s copying or binding can of course become printing or binding, and the incorporation of the *Festial* with the *Quattuor Sermones* shows that throughout the *Festial*'s history it was seen as part of a programme for priests, a sermon collection which needed to be complemented by the basic tenets of the Lateran Council, whether those tenets were supplied by the addition of the *Instructions* (Mirk's original intention), by the amalgamation of new material (the reviser's aim), by the copying or binding of the *Festial* with suitable works (as in the Rawlinson manuscript), or, later, by its printing or binding with the *Quattuor Sermones*.

Norman Blake in his edition of the *Quattuor Sermones* raises the question of its relationship with the *Festial* but concludes that there can be none, other than that they were both printed by Caxton and from 1495 several times printed together. While admitting that the *Quattuor Sermones* is 'in some ways complementary with' the *Festial* (p. 12), he asserts that 'the two works are quite diverse in origin' (p. 12) and 'the main reason [for linking them together] must have been simply that both were available in print' (p. 13). On the basis of the comments above, it might be argued that, whether the works are diverse in origin or not (and Blake's substantiation of this is not convincing) is irrelevant. It is the fact that they complemented each other (the one providing sermons and the other pastoral instruction) which is important and which was the main reason for their being linked together so often in print.

Indeed, a similar conjunction of sermons and pastoral instruction occurs from Caxton's *Festial* edition of 1491 on, when the *Festial* is first set up with a text very similar in content and intention to the *Quattuor Sermones*, the *Hamus Caritatis*.<sup>46</sup> The *Hamus* is based on the ten commandments and the two precepts of the Gospel. Its subtitle reveals that it was intended for pastoral instruction by a priest ('A shorte exhortacyon ofte to be shewed to the peple for in this specyally resteth the welle of man and woman'). The importance of the basic tenets is emphasised in the following passage: 'Teche thenne thy seruauntes and also thy chyldern theyr byleue and the lawes of God. And vse this that as soone as they begynne to speke that they rendre custemably a worde or two of theyr Pater Noster, Aue Maria and Credo dayly or thou gyue themy brede' (Caxton, 1491). Since the *Hamus* is always printed with the same signatures as the *Festial*, often beginning on the same folio as the last of the *Festial* sermons, it was clearly seen as complementary to the *Festial* and cannot be impugned, as Blake impugned the relationship of the *Festial* and the *Quattuor Sermones* on the grounds that their originally separate signatures reflect the lack of



relationship between the works. On the contrary, this is clearly another case of the publication of a more comprehensive pastoral programme than the *Festial* alone could provide.

A further point made by Blake is that 'the evidence of the manuscripts is that the two texts were not linked before the rise of printing' (p. 13), that is, not one of the *Festial* manuscripts contains a copy of the *Quattuor Sermones*. Since no manuscript of the *Quattuor Sermones* has been discovered at all, the significance of this evidence is perhaps open to query. Nevertheless, it has already been pointed out that the Great Sentence was printed by Caxton at the end of the *Quattuor Sermones* (and continued to be so printed in nearly every following edition). Moreover, I have already suggested the importance of MS Rawlinson A 381 as a typical priest's manual, containing, amongst other material, the *Festial* and the Great Sentence. In his study of the Great Sentence, Oliver Pickering has shown that the version of the Sentence in the Rawlinson manuscript is the closest of all to the version printed by Caxton together with the *Quattuor Sermones*.<sup>47</sup> Though Blake had noticed the closeness of the two texts, he seems not to have attached importance to it,<sup>48</sup> perhaps because he did not realise that the Rawlinson manuscript also contained the *Festial*.

No positive conclusions can be drawn, but it would seem wise not to dismiss an earlier linking of the two texts as summarily as Blake has done. The Sentence seems to have been a part of Mirk's programme from the start since it is found together with the *Instructions* in the earliest manuscript, Cotton Claudius A II, and even incorporated within the *Instructions* text in MSS Douce 60 and 103 in a version which Pickering suggests was 'written "for" the *Instructions*'.<sup>49</sup> MSS Cotton Claudius and Douce 60 also contain the *Festial*, as of course does the Rawlinson manuscript. As has been demonstrated, the Sentence was also perceived as an integral part of the *Quattuor Sermones/Festial* editions. It may be that the *Index of Middle English Prose* will at some future date cast more light on the relationship between Mirk's pastoral programme and the *Quattuor Sermones*.

### *Conclusion*

It has been argued in this paper that the development of the *Festial* from Mirk's version of the 1380s, through the revision of the fifteenth century, to Wynkyn de Worde's final printing in 1532, when the *Quattuor Sermones*, the Sentence and the

Bedes were seen as an integral part of the *Festial*, was entirely in line with Mirk's original intention that the sermons should form part of a comprehensive pastoral programme. In the absence of Mirk's original *Instructions*, the basic tenets of Thoresby's decree, which were essential to that programme, were supplied in other forms, by the new sermons of the revision, by the various texts found in *Festial* manuscripts such as MS Rawlinson A 381, and lastly, by the *Quattuor Sermones*.

1532 would seem to represent the final date in this evolution. Although manuscripts of the *Festial* show that it was still being read in Elizabeth's reign,<sup>50</sup> there has until now been no evidence of its having been preached at so late a date. However, ecclesiastical records have recently revealed that as late as the 1580s a preacher was using the *Festial* for just the purpose for which Mirk had intended it (though in this case, an unlicensed preacher and, given the date, with unfortunate results). A collection of documents among the Cause Papers produced in the Court of High Commission at York comprises seven charges brought in 1589 by the parishioners of East Drayton in Nottinghamshire against John Minet. The accusations cover atheism, sorcery and brawling in church, and the final charge accuses Minet, officially only a lay reader, 'for takinge vpon him to preach in the church and for preacheinge of fals and erroneus doctrine'. Indeed, a transcript survives of an offending sermon, which he had preached on the feast day of John the Baptist (24 June) some years earlier. That sermon is a version of the *Festial* sermon for that day.<sup>51</sup> Two centuries after Mirk wrote it, the *Festial* was still being used for the purpose for which he had intended it, by an uneducated preacher to inform his congregation. Despite the seeming seriousness of the charges, it is comforting to learn that Minet's punishment was light.<sup>52</sup>

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper, entitled 'John Mirk's *Festial*: The Evolution of a Sermon Collection', was read in 1988 at the Twenty-Third International Congress on Medieval Studies in Western Michigan University.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Powell, 'A New Dating of John Mirk's *Festial*', *N&Q*, n.s. 29 (1982), 487-89, shows that 'the *Festial* may now fairly confidently be dated between 1350 and 1390, probably towards the later end of that time-scale' (pp. 488-89), and Alan J. Fletcher, 'John Mirk and the Lollards', *Medium Ævum*, 56 (1987), 217-24, would narrow the date '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' (p. 218).

<sup>3</sup> At the present count, forty manuscripts contain *Festial* sermons in some shape or form (see note 6 below).

<sup>4</sup> This rearrangement was the foundation for Martyn F. Wakelin's division of the *Festial* manuscripts into Groups A and B ('The Manuscripts of John Mirk's *Festial*', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 1 (1967), 93-118). The grouping proved to be based on more than the *Temporale/Sanctorale* division, and there are further groupings within both Group A and Group B manuscripts, but the basic division holds. For further material, see Alan J. Fletcher and Susan Powell, 'The Origins of a Fifteenth-Century Sermon Collection: MSS Harley 2247 and Royal 18 B XXV', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 10 (1978), 74-96 (especially pp. 75-77); Susan Powell, 'A Critical Edition of the *Temporale* Sermons of MSS Harley 2247 and Royal 18 B XXV' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, 3 vols, University of London, 1980), II, pp. 7-28, and Susan Powell, *The Advent and Nativity Sermons from a Fifteenth-Century Revision of John Mirk's Festial*, Middle English Texts, 13 (Heidelberg, 1981), pp. 22-25.

<sup>5</sup> A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave, *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland and Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad 1475-1640*, second edition by W. A. Jackson, F. S. Ferguson, and Katharine F. Pantzer, 2 vols (London, 1976-86), II, 17957-75. The second edition of 1491 was not set up from the first edition but was still based on a Group B manuscript.

<sup>6</sup> Lillian L. Steckman first brought the revision to general attention in 'A Late Fifteenth-Century Revision of Mirk's *Festial*', *Studies in Philology*, 34 (1937), 36-48. Derek Brewer has written on the Gloucester manuscript in 'Some Observations on a Fifteenth-Century Manuscript', *Anglia*, 72 (1954), 390-99. The *Temporale* section of the revision and the seven Advent and Nativity sermons have been edited by Powell (1980, 1981: see note 4 above). Apart from these recensions, the *Festial* was frequently abridged and excerpted. Of the twenty-seven genuine manuscripts listed by Wakelin, two are extracts only (British Library MSS Harley 1288 and 2250)

and two contain *Festial* homilies incorporated with others (British Library MS Royal 18 B XXIII and Bodleian Library MS Hatton 96), while Cambridge University Library MS Ff.2.38 contains three sermons only. Alan J. Fletcher, 'Unnoticed Sermons from John Mirk's *Festial*', *Speculum*, 55 (1980), 514-22, adds ten manuscripts to Wakelin's list, six of which (including the Gloucester and Dublin manuscripts of the revision) show abridgement, excerpting or rewriting. In addition, Wakelin has now added to the list Hatfield House Cecil Papers MS 280 (thirty-four sermons) and Veronica O'Mara has added British Library MS Arundel 279 (part of a Rogation Days sermon) and Borthwick Institute York H. C. C. P. 1590/5 (a sermon for St John the Baptist's Day). *Index of Printed Middle English Prose*, edited by R. E. Lewis, N. F. Blake and A. S. G. Edwards (New York and London, 1985) cites all except the last two manuscripts (pp. 248-49, no. 734).

<sup>7</sup> See the colophon to the *Festial* ('Explicit tractus . . . per fratrem Iohannem Mirkus compositus, canonicum regularem monasterij de Lulshull . . .') and to the *Instructions* ('Explicit tractatus . . . per fratrem Iohannem Myrcus, canonicum regularem monasterij de Lylleshul . . .') in MS Cotton Claudius A II, and the colophon to the *Manuale* in MS Jesus College Oxford 1 ('Explicit libellus . . . secundum Iohannem Marcus, priorem abathie de Lilyshel').

<sup>8</sup> Fletcher, 'John Mirk and the Lollards', pp. 220-22.

<sup>9</sup> The *Manuale* has been edited by M. Washburn in 'The *Manuale Sacerdotis* of John Myrc: An Edition' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Chicago University, 1974) and a published edition is planned by James M. Girsch. It survives in thirteen manuscripts, which are described by Alan J. Fletcher, 'The Manuscripts of John Mirk's *Manuale Sacerdotis*', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 19 (1988), 106-39. The *Instructions* has been edited from three manuscripts in *The Instructions for Parish Priests* by E. Peacock, EETS, os 31 (London, 1868), revised by F. J. Furnivall in 1902, and more recently from seven manuscripts in *John Mirk's Instructions for Parish Priests* by G. Kristensson (Lund, 1974). The *Festial* has been edited from a Group A text in *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies by Johannes Mirkus (John Mirk)* by Th. Erbe, EETS, os 96 (London, 1905) and from a Group B text by M. F. Wakelin in 'An Edition of John Mirk's *Festial* as it is Contained in the Brotherton Collection Manuscript' (unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Leeds, 1960). An edition of the Group B text is planned by Susan Powell, originally in collaboration with Dr Wakelin who had made considerable progress in the work before his unhappy death in 1988.

<sup>10</sup> Fletcher, 'John Mirk and the Lollards', p. 222, suggests that, since the reference to Mirk as prior occurs in a manuscript of the *Manuale* where Mirk's dedicatee may have been a vicar appointed in 1414, the *Manuale* is likely to be a late work.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Cotton Claudius A II, fol. 129r (Kristensson, *John Mirk's Instructions*, pp. 67-68, ll. 1-20):

God seyth hym-self, as wryten we fynde,  
That whenne þe blynde ledeth þe blynde,

In-to'þe dycþe þey fallen boo,  
For þey ne sen whare-by to go.  
So faren prestes now by dawe;  
They beth [so] blynde in goddes lawe,  
That whenne þey scholde þe pepul rede  
In-to synne þey do hem lede.  
Thus þey haue do now fulle ȝore,  
And alle ys for defawte of lore.  
Wharefore þou preste curatoure,  
[That wolt] plese thy sauoure,  
Ȝef thou be not grete clerk,  
Loke thou moste on thys werk;  
For here thou myȝte fynde & rede.  
That þe be-houeth to conne nede:  
How thou schalt thy paresche preche,  
And what þe nedeth hem to teche,  
And whyche þou moste þy-self be,  
Here also thou myȝte hyt se . . .

<sup>12</sup> Both are conveniently printed by T. F. Simmons and H. E. Nolloth at the foot of their texts of *The Lay Folks' Catechism*, EETS, os 118 (London, 1901).

<sup>13</sup> See M. Gibbs and J. Lang, *Bishops and Reform 1215-1272* (Oxford, 1934), especially pp. 94-179; L. E. Boyle, 'The *Oculus Sacerdotis* and some other works of William of Pagula', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, V (1955), 81-110; R. M. Haines, 'Education in English Ecclesiastical Legislation of the Later Middle Ages', *Studies in Church History*, 7 (1971), 161-75; V. Gillespie, '*Doctrina* and *Praedicacio*: The Design and Function of Some Pastoral Manuals', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 11 (1980), pp. 36-50, and Jonathan Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries: Religion and Secular Life in Late Medieval Yorkshire* (Southampton, 1988), Chapter 3, pp. 127-73. There are useful synopses by Leonard Boyle and Judith Shaw in *The Popular Literature of Medieval England*, edited by Thomas J. Heffernan (Knoxville, 1985), pp. 30-43 and 44-60 respectively.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Pecham's canon 'Ignorantia sacerdotum': 'In quorum remedium discriminum statuendo precipimus ut quilibet sacerdos plebi presidens, quater in anno, hoc est, semel in qualibet quarta anni, die una sollempni vel pluribus, per se vel per alium exponat populo vulgariter, absque cuiuslibet subtilitatis textura fantastica, quatuordecim fidei articulos, decem mandata decalogi, duo precepta evangelii, scilicet, gemine caritatis, septem etiam opera misericordie, septem peccata capitalia, cum sua progenie, septem virtutes principales, ac septem gratie sacramenta. Et ne quis a

predictis per ignorantiam se excuset, que tamen omnes ministri ecclesie scire tenentur, ea perstringimus summaria brevitare' (*Councils and Synods with other documents relating to the English Church, A. D. 1205-1313*, edited by F. M. Powicke and C. R. Cheney, 2 vols [Oxford, 1964], II, 900-01). The passage is translated by Margaret Deanesly in *The Lollard Bible and Other Medieval Biblical Versions* (Cambridge, 1920), p. 196: 'As a remedy for which peril we command and enjoin that each parish priest, four times in the year (that is, once in each quarter of the year), upon one or more holy days shall himself or by his deputy explain to the people in the vulgar tongue . . . the fourteen articles of the faith, the ten commandments of the decalogue, the two precepts at the gospel, the seven works of mercy, the seven mortal sins, the seven principal virtues, and the seven sacramental graces. And, lest any man should excuse himself from the aforesaid things through ignorance, since all the ministers of the Church are bound to know them, we here give them in a brief summary.'

<sup>15</sup> For information on the *Fasciculus*, see Siegfried Wenzel, *Verses in Sermons: Fasciculus Morum and its Middle English Poems* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978). Wenzel calls it (p. 26) 'somewhat of a best seller in its category, the moral handbook' and 'a clergyman's book' (there are twenty-eight extant manuscripts). The work has been edited and translated by Wenzel in *Fasciculus Morum: A Fourteenth-Century Preacher's Handbook* (University Park and London, 1989). It was used both for the new sermons added to the *Festial* in its revision and also in revising Mirk's original sermons (Powell, 'A Critical Edition', I, pp. 108-12 and II, p. 46; Powell, *The Advent and Nativity Sermons*, pp. 28, 33-39).

<sup>16</sup> My comment here is a paraphrase of Vincent Gillespie, '*Doctrina and Praedicacio*', p. 43, who writes of the *Lay Folks' Catechism*: 'Thoresby's instructions are not remarkable for their contents which are commonplace and rudimentary, but because they mark a significant stage in the evolution of the vernacular pastoral manual by conferring official approval on and encouraging the circulation of a vernacular version of his Latin original'. Simmons and Nolloth in *The Lay Folks' Catechism* present *en face* texts of the work from the York Register and MS Lambeth Palace Library 408. The version in the Thornton manuscript has been edited by G. G. Perry, *Religious Pieces in Prose and Verse*, EETS, os 26 (London, 1867), revised edition (London, 1913), and by N. F. Blake, *Middle English Religious Prose* (London, 1972), pp. 73-87. See *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1500*, Vol. VII, edited by Albert E. Hartung, (New Haven, 1986), pp. 2270-71 [19]. This is one of currently eight volumes in the revision of J. E. Wells, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1400* with 9 supplements (New Haven, 1916-52) (hereafter referred to as Wells), which will be referred to from now on as *Wells Rev*. I employ the title *Lay Folks' Catechism* reluctantly and only because it is that by which the work is best known. It was devised by Simmons as a parallel to his edition of *The Lay Folks Mass-Book*, EETS, os 71 (London, 1879) and the edition of *The Lay Folks' Prayer Book* by H. Littlehales, EETS, os 105,

109, (London, 1895, 1897), but the work was written for the priest and is not at all a catechism for the people. An alternative but less familiar title is 'John Gaytryge's sermon', used by Perry, *Religious Pieces*, and by Blake, *Middle English Religious Prose*. This has more authority than Simmons' and Nolloth's, since some version of the name Gaytryge is attached to four manuscripts, two of which call the work a 'sermon'/sermo'. It is my intention to publish on the *Lay Folks' Catechism* in the near future.

<sup>17</sup> The *Speculum Christiani* is a pastoral manual dating from c. 1400. It has been edited in *Speculum Christiani* by G. Holmstedt, EETS, os 182 (London, 1933). See *Wells Rev*, VII, pp. 2265-67 [15], and P. S. Jolliffe, *A Check-List of Middle English Prose Writings of Spiritual Guidance* (Toronto, 1974) [I. 38] and [I. 27] (hereafter referred to as Jolliffe). However, the most authoritative research on the *Speculum* is that of Vincent Gillespie. In addition to '*Doctrina and Praedicacio*', see especially 'The Evolution of the *Speculum Christiani*', pp. 39-62 in *Latin and Vernacular: Studies in Late-Medieval Texts and Manuscripts*, edited by A. J. Minnis (Woodbridge, 1989).

<sup>18</sup> The *Memoriale Credencium* is an English compilation, based largely on William of Pagula's *Oculus Sacerdotis*, which was also Mirk's source for his *Manuale* and *Instructions*. It deals mainly with the commandments and sins but includes other tenets too. The edition is *Memoriale Credencium* by J. H. L. Kengen (Nijmegen, 1979). See *Wells Rev*, VII, p. 2268 [17], and Jolliffe [A. 4].

<sup>19</sup> The *Pore Caitif* consists of tracts on the Creed, the Pater Noster and other material prepared specifically for the poor. It has been edited by Sister M. T. Brady in 'The *Pore Caitif* Edited from MS Harley 2336 with Introduction and Notes' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Fordham University, 1954). See *Wells*, Chapter XII, p. 482 [74] (the appropriate section of *Wells Rev*. has not yet been published), and Jolliffe [B].

<sup>20</sup> The *Speculum Vitae* is one of several versions of and works derived from Lorens d'Orléans' *Somme le Roi* of 1280 (see *Wells Rev*, VII, pp. 2258-62, [4]-[9]). It includes material on the ten commandments, the articles of the faith, the seven sacraments, the seven virtues, the seven works of bodily and spiritual mercy, the seven petitions of the Pater Noster, the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, the seven deadly sins, the seven virtues, the seven beatitudes and their seven rewards. (A version of its seven petitions of the Pater Noster is found in the second sermon for the Rogation Days added to the *Festial* revision [Powell, 'A Critical Edition', I, pp. 284-93].) The *Speculum* has been edited by Venetia Nelson in 'The Middle English *Speculum Vitae*: A Critical Edition of Part of the Text from Thirty-Five Manuscripts' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Sidney, 1974). Nelson has also edited the abridged prose version, *A Myrour to Lewde Men and Wymmen*, Middle English Texts, 14 (Heidelberg, 1981).

<sup>21</sup> *Wells Rev*, VII, pp. 2279-80 [33]. I use the epithet 'so-called' in the light of Anne Hudson's

article, 'A New Look at the *Lay Folks' Catechism*', *Viator* 16 (1985), 243-58, in which she provides ample evidence that 'the description of it as a "Lollard version of the *Lay Folks' Catechism*" should be abandoned' (p. 257).

<sup>22</sup> *A Liitil Tretys on the Seven Deadly Sins*, written by the Carmelite friar and Oxford theologian Richard Lavynham at the end of the fourteenth century, was a popular source of sermon and pastoral material for the priest. See *Wells Rev.*, VII, pp. 2305-06 [106], and Jolliffe [F. 2].

<sup>23</sup> The *Instructions* was based on all three parts of William de Pagula's influential Latin pastoral manual, *Oculus Sacerdotis*, which dates from the early 1320s. See Boyle, 'The *Oculus Sacerdotis*'.

<sup>24</sup> Wakelin, 'The Manuscripts', dates MS Cotton Claudius A II to 1425-50 (p. 94) and MS Douce 60 to the mid-fifteenth century (p. 104). The Cotton manuscript would seem still to be the 'älteste und beste Hs.', as Horstmann, though with far fewer manuscripts available, found in 1881 (*Altenglische Legenden*, Neue Folge [Heilbronn], p. CXII).

<sup>25</sup> Mirk originally provided the *Festial* with both Prayer and Prologue. The Prayer and/or Prologue is found in most of the Group A manuscripts (the Prayer in one of two versions), but the only one of the Group B manuscripts to contain them is Durham University Library MS Cosin V.III.5. See Powell, 'A Critical Edition', III, Appendix 7, 8, 9, 10.

<sup>26</sup> For the fullest discussion of these alterations, see Powell, 'A Critical Edition', II, pp. 36-54. Details are also provided by Steckman, 'A Late Fifteenth-Century Revision', pp. 40-41 and Powell, *The Advent and Nativity Sermons*, pp. 20-22 and 27-32.

<sup>27</sup> It is conceivable that these sermons were the work of the reviser himself. They survive independently but, since two of their sources, the *Legenda Aurea* and the *Fasciculus Morum*, are those used by the reviser in his reworking of the *Festial* sermons, it is possible that he was responsible for both revised and additional sermons. Whether so or not is anyway immaterial to my argument, the relevant point being that the reviser clearly felt such material was needed to augment and improve the *Festial*.

<sup>28</sup> The second sermon for Easter Day specifically details the tenets necessary for the Christian, cf. Harley 2247, fol. 98r-v: 'Perfite bileve and stedfast feith is to beleve in þe blesfull Trynnye and/ to kepe perfiteþe þe x commaundementes of God, to fle þe vij dedely synnes, and to fulfill þe dedis of mercy bothe bodily and gostely . . .'. The sermon for Septuagesima Sunday mentions the ten commandments, the three divine virtues, the twelve articles of the faith, the seven deadly sins and corresponding virtues, the seven deeds of bodily mercy; the first sermon for the first Sunday in Lent expounds the three divine and four cardinal virtues and mentions the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost; the second sermon for Rogation Days deals with the seven petitions of the Pater Noster, the seven deadly sins, the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, the seven rewards deriving from seven of the Beatitudes, and so on. Such material often occurs in the glossing of a biblical passage, and in particular the gospel reading for the day and its interpretation play a much more important role in



these sermons than in Mirk's.

<sup>29</sup> Advent (the second sermon), Nativity, Septuagesima, Quinquagesima, Ash Wednesday (both sermons), the second Sunday in Lent, the third Sunday in Lent, Easter Day (first two sermons).

<sup>30</sup> The second sermon for Ash Wednesday is structured on a four-fold division, each division treating one of the four requisites of confession, that it must be complete, prompt, honest and contrite. The third division includes the *Gesta Romanorum narratio* of the emperor who showed mercy when an outlaw told him three truths. In the exposition of the *narratio*, the emperor is interpreted as Christ and the truths as contrition, confession and satisfaction. Christ the emperor has set up a 'discrete confessoure' as judge over man who must tell him three truths. The first is confession: 'First þou maiste say as þis owtelawd did, "I knowlege to þe, my lorde, emperoure of hevyn, þat I haue bene/ a synner and broke þi preceptes and commaundementes and not kept thi lawes." And þen tell þi gostely fadir, þat is Goddes iustice þat must be mene betwix God and þi soule, how þou haste synned in pride, envye, wrath, glotony, slouth, couetise, and lechery, how oft, with whom, whan and where þou haste synned, accusyng þiself and no man elles, with all þe circumstaunce of synne. And þis is þe first trewth, which is confession' (MS Harley 2247, fol. 52r-v). This is directly comparable with the material in the *Instructions* on securing confession of deadly and venial sins (Kristensson, *John Mirk's Instructions*, pp. 124-47, ll. 973-1398) and the investigation 'quis, quid, vbi, per quos, quociens, quomodo, quando' (pp. 147-55, ll. 1399-1554).

<sup>31</sup> The most substantial alteration is in the Septuagesima Sunday sermon, where Mirk refers to six of the deadly sins in some detail (though he does not label them deadly sins): 'But now more harme ys þat solempnite and holynes ys turned ynto fulþe of synne and sekene of soule – ynto *pryde* by dyuerse gyses of cloþyng; into *couetyse* wylnyng worschyp on byfor anoþer vnskyllfully; into *envy*, for on ys arayde bettyr þen anoþer; in *gloteny* by surfet of dyuerse metys and drynkes; into *lechery* þat seweth alway gloteny; into *slouþe* of Goddys seruyce liyng yn þe morow-tyde long yn bedde, for owtrage wakyng ouer nyght, in rawtyng, in reuelyng, and playes of vanyte, in iapys makyng of rybawdy and harlottry . . .' (edited from Bodleian Library MS Gough Eccl. Top. 4, f. 38r, by Erbe, *Mirk's Festial*, p. 63, ll. 14-23, but my punctuation). The recension does not differ greatly, but the revision condenses most of this material in a blanket reference to the important tenet: 'But nowadays þat solempnyte is turned to syn and vnclennes, not oonly in pride but in all þe vij dedely synnes, as in owtrage, waking, drynkyng, riotyng, playyng vayn playes with all rebawdry and all harlotry' (MS Harley 2247, fol. 31r).

<sup>32</sup> A useful article on the contents of manuscripts containing manuals of religious instruction is C. A. Martin, 'Middle English manuals of religious instruction' in *So meny people longages and tonges*, edited by M. Benskin and M. L. Samuels (Edinburgh, 1981), pp. 283-98.

<sup>33</sup> British Library MS Cotton Claudius A II and Bodleian Library MS Douce 60.

<sup>34</sup> British Library MSS Harley 1288 and 2250, Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 133, and

Bodleian Library MS Greaves 54.

35 British Library MS Harley 1288 and Bodleian Library MS Douce 60.

36 In both *Instructions* manuscripts and in Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson A 381.

37 In MS Lincoln Cathedral Library 133, even with Pecham's *Ignorantia sacerdotum* in British Library MS Lansdowne 379.

38 British Library MS Harley 1288.

39 Gloucester Cathedral Library MS 22 and Bodleian Library MS Greaves 54.

40 Bodleian Library MS Greaves 54.

41 Leeds University Library, Brotherton Collection MS 502 and Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 133.

42 For the contents of *Festial* manuscripts, see the manuscript descriptions in Wakelin, 'The Manuscripts', and the material in Fletcher, 'Unnoticed Sermons'.

43 The *Quattuor Sermones* has been discussed by Norman F. Blake and L. Reffkin in 'Caxton's First Edition of "Quattuor Sermones"', *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* (1974), 77-82, and has been edited by N. F. Blake in *Quattuor Sermones*, Middle English Texts, 2 (Heidelberg, 1975). Some of the statements in the earlier article would seem to have been altered or modified in the edition to which I shall consequently refer throughout. It should be said that, despite Blake's work, there is a need for further research into the *Quattuor Sermones*, on which I intend to publish in the near future.

44 I base this statement on Blake, *Quattuor Sermones*, p. 15.

45 There is ample evidence of this, e.g. Blake, *Quattuor Sermones*, p. 43, ll. 37-39 ('And yf men say wel of you", sayth he, "seeth that your werkis bere wytnes to the same." And thys is for vs preestys.') and p. 63, ll. 1-2 ('On Sunday that last was I informyd you in homely wyse of the worthynes of mannys sowle . . .').

46 Though Pynson's 1493 edition does not contain the *Hamus*, it is to be found in all the later manuscripts I have consulted.

47 O. S. Pickering, 'Notes on the Sentence of Cursing in Middle English: or, A Case for the Index of Middle English Prose', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 12 (1981), 229-44 (pp. 236-37).

48 Blake, *Quattuor Sermones*, p. 16: 'A manuscript of some interest is Bodleian Library Rawlinson A 381 of the fifteenth century, for not only does this contain material similar to the main part of [the *Quattuor Sermones*], but it also has on folios 1-2v a General Sentence which apart from a few omissions is identical with that found in [the *Quattuor Sermones*]. The omissions show that this manuscript cannot have been the one Caxton used'.

49 Pickering, 'Notes on the Sentence of Cursing', p. 230. Kristensson, *John Mirk's Instructions*, edits the *Instructions* from the Cotton MS but incorporates the Sentence in the Douce position and using the Douce text.

50 For example, the marginalia in MS Harley 2247 includes subject heads, comments, revisions

and corrections ('pope' is consistently cancelled). Several personal names, place names and dates are given in sixteenth-century hands, the latest date being a reference to 1575. See Powell, 'A Critical Edition', I, pp. 9-10.

<sup>51</sup> For these details I am dependent on Veronica O'Mara, 'A Middle English Sermon Preached by a Sixteenth-Century "Atheist": A Preliminary Account', *N&Q*, n.s. 34 (1987), 183-85. O'Mara is currently planning further work on the sermon.

<sup>52</sup> For a brief but illuminating discussion of Minet's case, see G. E. Aylmer, 'Unbelief in Seventeenth-Century England', in *Puritans and Revolutionaries: Essays in Seventeenth-Century History presented to Christopher Hill*, edited by Donald Pennington and Keith Thomas (Oxford, 1978), pp. 22-46, especially pp. 31-32. Unfortunately Mirk's sermon on the St John's Day bonfires seems to have been used by Minet to encourage not only bonfires but also a public holiday on the day. It was probably the socially disruptive as much as the doctrinally heterodox nature of his preaching which landed him in trouble, as is suggested by the relatively light punishment of public penance in three local churches.