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Examining One's Conscience: A Survey of Late Middle English Prose Forms of Confession.

Philip Durkin

The subject of the present study is the genre of the model confession in later Middle English prose; following established practice, I use the term 'form of confession' to denote such texts throughout. I provide a comprehensive listing of all such texts extant which corrects omissions and mistaken identifications of texts in earlier listings,¹ as well as supplying for the first time a broad classification of the texts, within which the more distinctive characteristics of each are discussed briefly.

Most of the forms of confession discussed here are very similar in structure. Confession in the seven deadly sins is common to most later medieval discussions of the method and procedure of confession, and is common to nearly all of the texts considered here, as are sections, usually shorter, dealing with the ten commandments, the five senses, and the five works of mercy, the latter two often also in their spiritual manifestations.² The structures of the forms of confession discussed here are described only where they diverge significantly from this pattern.

Section i. below comprises texts intended for the use of a priest in the administration of general confession prior to communion, in most instances annual communion on Easter Day. They are designed for public recitation by priest and congregation, and all presuppose that a private confession of any mortal sins has been made by each member of the congregation in accordance with the requirements of the pastoral constitution *Omnis utriusque sexus* of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215.³ This need is directly addressed by the texts considered in section ii., intended for the use of parish priests in administering to laymen in the context of private confession heard, in the words of John Bossy, 'in the not-so remote presence of a large number of neighbours'.⁴

A number of the texts considered in sections iii. and iv. are concerned with frequent confession, and with self-examination as a part of the daily devotional life of

the penitent, and should perhaps be considered in the context of a wider trend towards interiorization of the penitential process discernible in the later medieval period.⁵ Several of these texts are presented either wholly or in part in the form of a prayer, sometimes without any reference to a confessor, and may be compared with the advice given in Robert Copland's translation of Quentin's *Manner to live well*,⁶ that while the reader should confess to his priest once a week if possible, he should confess daily directly to God any sins which he knows that he has done that day.

The texts examined in section v. are all addressed to lay penitents, chiefly of high social rank and – as appears from frequent and detailed discussions of using false weights and measures, buying and selling for profit, and usury – predominantly mercantile. One (text 37) shows a concern with the implications of guild oaths. Most are preserved in manuscripts which are likely to have been in clerical ownership, the texts being used either as model confessions to be read to lay penitents, or as guides to framing penitential interrogations.

The texts in section vi. demonstrate the close association between confession and Lenten instruction in the basic elements of the catechism.⁷

It should be noted that these classifications are broad, and that some texts show indisputably 'mixed' characteristics, without any entirely consistent adaptation to the requirements of any particular category of user.

The material in all of these texts is highly formulaic, and verbal similarities can often be detected in cases where there is no reason to suspect any textual relationship. In addition to the influence of numerous confessional manuals in Latin, in English, or in Continental vernaculars, one should consider also the influence of countless 'real-life' confessions in disseminating common patterns of words and even phrases.

i. General confessions for public reading by a priest.

1) London, British Library, MS Sloane 1584 (s.xvi in.), fols 46r-54v.⁸ (*Jolliffe C.3; MWME B.*)

An address by a parish priest to his parishioners prior to annual general confession and the receiving of communion on Easter Day, headed **Breuis exortacio ad populum in die Pasche**, and falling into two halves of roughly equal length, the first introductory and the second a brief but compendious model confession. In the introductory section the necessity of full and particular confession of mortal sins is

demonstrated by an exemplum describing the divine vengeance visited upon an unrepentant sinner who received communion unshriven of mortal sin.⁹ At the end of the introductory address any of the congregation remaining in a state of mortal sin are called upon to confess it aloud and without shame before approaching the altar, and then the priest will await them when the mass is ended. The confession is of venial sins only, and presupposes that a full private confession of mortal sins will have been made. (This need is addressed by another text in the same manuscript: see text 10 below.) The section on the deadly sins displays a concentration upon their social manifestations, while the subsequent sections do little more than specify the headings under which confession is to be made. The text is frequently abbreviated, with whole words and even groups of words being omitted. It is immediately followed by a form of absolution in Latin (fol. 55r).

2) London, British Library, MS Sloane 1584 (s.xvi in.), fols 7r-12r. (*Jolliffe* E.10 (fols 7r-10r), C.34 (fols 10r-12r); *MWME* VII, p. 2524 [88] (fols 7r-10r), EE (fols 10r-12r)).¹⁰

Intention for public recitation prior to communion is indicated by directions to a plural audience which immediately precede a short but compendious form of confession. This follows a series of preparatory interrogations addressed to different categories of penitent, presumably intended for use by a priest in hearing individual confession of specific sins. (A general set of questions is followed by questions addressed to a husbandman, a married woman, a servant man or woman, and a single woman respectively: the role of confession as an instrument of resolving social disputes and conflicts within the parish is evident throughout.) The confession is followed by a form of absolution in Latin, and by advice to the audience that this general confession is intended for confession of venial and not mortal sins. There are concluding remarks specifying how penitents should behave after receiving communion, and enjoining a Pater Noster, Ave Maria and Creed as penance.¹¹

3) Durham, University Library, MS Cosin V.iv.2 (s.xv ex.), fols 159r-60v.¹² (*Jolliffe* C.21; *MWME* A.)

Headed **Confessio generalis die Pasche**, with an opening address making clear intention for public recitation prior to communion. This is followed by the **Benedicite** and the **Dominus** in Latin, and then the English general form of confession. The confession is compendious but cursory in its treatment of each topic,

giving penitents little scope for reflective self-examination. Concludes with a Latin form of absolution.

4) Oxford, Trinity College, MS 86 (s.xvi in.), fol. 48r-v. (*Jolliffe C.41; MWME D and LL; IMEP VIII*, p. 100 [22].)¹³

A brief form of confession with directions for a plural audience to repeat aloud after a priest, occurring among a series of items of practical use to a priest.

5) London, British Library, MS Harley 2383 (s.xv in./med.), fols 60v-61r.¹⁴ (*Jolliffe C.11; MWME H.*)

An address by a priest to a congregation prior to communion (beginning fol. 60v **Good men and women**) concluding with a very brief general form of confession with directions for public recitation after a priest.

6) Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 803/807, fragment 53 (s.xv). (*MWME KK.*)

A fragment consisting of the opening of the confession and the beginning of a list of topics in which confession is to be made; it is uncertain whether this list constitutes the full treatment of each topic or whether a more detailed discussion under each head is to follow. An introductory address makes clear intention for public recitation after a priest. The contents of the fragment are transcribed in full in V. M. O'Mara, 'A Checklist of Unedited Late Middle English Sermons that Occur Singly or in Small Groups', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 19 (1988), p. 147. The contents of the recto suggest that it may be part of a sermon on the eucharist. If so, the material on both the recto and the verso could form part of a single text similar to text 1 above.

7) Cambridge, University Library, MS Additional 2829 (s.xv. ex.), fols 284r-85v.

A brief form of confession incorporated within a text intended for reading aloud by a priest to a congregation prior to communion. Both the preceding address to the congregation, which is couched in highly figurative language, and the following verse penance are discussed and summarized by O'Mara.¹⁵

ii. Texts intended as practical aids for a priest in hearing individual confession.

8) Lincoln, Cathedral Library, MS 210 (s.xv **in.**), fols 85v-87r (henceforth *Linc.*); London, British Library, MS Harley 2383 (s.xv **in./med.**), fols 57r-60r (*Ha.2383*); Cambridge, University Library, MS Ee.1.18 (s.xv **med.**), fols 175v-76v (*Ee.*). (*Jolliffe C.27; MWME X.*)

9) London, British Library, MS Harley 1288 (s.xv **med./ex.**), fols 76r-81v (*Ha.1288*). (*Jolliffe C.15; MWME L.*)

Linc. and *Ha.2383* contain broadly the same confessional formula, although the ordering of topics in the confession varies in each. *Ee.* has an incomplete copy of the same text.¹⁶ *Ha.1288* incorporates a good deal of common material, in a different order again, into an otherwise quite different model confession.¹⁷

The common material appears to be addressed to a lay male penitent, as seen from a discussion in the section dealing with lechery of sexual relations with one's wife other than for procreation. However, while the treatment of the seventh commandment seems from its discussion of false weights and measures to be addressed to a secular audience, this is followed in *Linc.* by a passage censuring false pardons and selling the sacraments of holy church which would seem appropriate only to one in orders. The reference to selling the sacraments also occurs in the equivalent passage in *Ha.1288*, while the same clause in *Ha.2383* and *Ee.* shows **mysvsyng** in the place of **selling**, perhaps showing adaptation of this material to make it more appropriate to a lay audience. Unlike the discussion of lechery in the section dealing with the seven deadly sins, the discussion of the fourth commandment makes no reference to wedlock in any of the manuscripts, further suggesting that the discussion of the ten commandments, if no more of the text, may derive from a source intended for an audience which may be either clerical or lay, which has been modified to a lesser or greater degree in each of the surviving witnesses.¹⁸

The material which is unique to *Ha.1288* is addressed clearly to a lay audience, although the gender is less certain. The section dealing with lechery deals first with adultery, in a passage where the penitent is assumed to be male, and then its treatment of incest allows for either a father's or a mother's confession of incest with a son or daughter. The discussion of the seven sacraments makes no mention of the sacrament of holy orders.

In *Ha.2383* the form of confession concludes with an address using second

person plural pronoun forms enjoining penance after confession. The opening of this passage makes clear that it is intended to follow the form of confession and to be used in conjunction with it. In this context, the form of confession as preserved in *Ha.2383* may thus be intended for public reading like those discussed in section i. Alternatively, this passage may be intended for public reading by the priest after individual confession has been heard, and such an interpretation better explains the copying immediately after this text of text 5 above, most easily explained as a brief general confession to be recited prior to communion after individual confession of particular sins has been made using the present text as a guide.

10) London, British Library, MS Sloane 1584 (s.xvi in.), fols 55v-62r. (*Jolliffe C.16; MWME M.*)

A guide to hearing individual confession, incorporating the opening of a confessional formula followed by a long series of interrogations to be read to the penitent. Copied immediately after text 1, probably as a companion text, and like texts 1 and 2 showing the same stress upon those aspects of confession most closely related to the regulation of the communal life of the parish and the resolution of disputes within it.

11) London, British Library, MS Harley 2391 (s.xv in.), fols 134r-38v. (*MWME AAA.*)¹⁹

Opens with directions to the priest in Latin. The penitent is to say the **benedicite**, to which the priest is to reply with the **dominus** followed by an exhortation to confession **per verba salutaria**, for which a form of words is given.²⁰ The priest is then to hear the penitent until he reaches the end of what he wished to confess, when the priest is to address him thus **in lyngua materna** (fol.134v):

Son perauerter þer comis nomor to þi mynd, & þerfor I schall
touche dyuenser poyntys vnto þe; & if þu fynd þe gylte in any of
þam, I pray þe to excuse þe noht.

There follows a guide to self-examination and confession under the headings of the seven deadly sins, to be read by the priest to the penitent. A reference to pride **of wyfe or of chyld** suggests intention for a lay male penitent. At various points Latin directions for the priest occur, specifying what the priest is to say if the penitent confesses a particular sin, and during the section dealing with avarice questions to be

asked directly of the penitent occur. This treatment of the seven deadly sins is followed immediately by a shorter confessional formula in the first person dealing with the ten commandments (fols 137v-38r), and brief summaries of sins concerning the twelve articles of the faith and the bodily and spiritual works of mercy, again in the first person. There are no further directions to the priest after the change to first person forms, and the text ends simply **explicit bona confessio pro salute humani generis**, perhaps indicating conflation of different exemplars. As it stands, the later parts of the text would require some modification, if only to verbs and pronoun forms, if they were to be used consistently with the earlier parts of the text.

A short fragment, probably from a form of confession, also occurs in this manuscript on fol.238v (*Jolliffe* C.45; *MWME* PP); there is no indication of the intended audience or function.

12) Oxford, Trinity College, MS 86 (s.xvi in.), fols 1r-19v. (*Jolliffe* C.29; *MWME* D and Z; *IMEP* VIII, p. 9 [1].)²¹

A lengthy confession in a first-person, 'confessional' voice interspersed with rubricated passages in a third-person, 'editorial' voice. The latter make clear intention for use as a guide to making a full, private confession of specific sins in accordance with the requirements of Lateran IV, and it is tempting to regard the rubricated passages as an attempt to adapt for such use an existing general confession. In support of this, it should perhaps be noted that in the section on the fifth commandment the more literal, and serious, manifestations of manslaughter and murder are confined to 'editorial', rubricated material, although such a clear distinction is not evident elsewhere in the text. Some topics, such as simony, are introduced only in the third-person passages. Both rubricated and unrubricated material have a rather 'omnium-gatherum' character, with the rubricated passages in particular containing some material addressed specifically to a layman and some addressed specifically to a priest. In the first-person material there is an unusual stress upon the social and spiritual responsibilities of the penitent towards his fellow Christians, as in confession of not correcting their faults and praying for their amendment, of neglecting internal and external promptings to do good, and of failing to give the needy the best one has and making them beg for what they are to receive. A male penitent is assumed throughout.

iii. Forms of confession addressed to those in regular orders.

13) London, British Library, MS Cotton Nero A.iii (s.xv. **med.**), fols 135v-37r.²² (*Jolliffe C.42, O.45; MWME MM; IPMEP 136.*)

Headed **A compendius forme of dayly confessions** and dealing in turn with: sins against love of God and one's fellow Christian; not keeping the principal vows of regular religious and the other statutes of a religious order; the seven deadly sins; the bodily and spiritual works of mercy; the sacraments; forgotten sins and forgotten penance; the articles of the faith; the bodily wits. The content of each section is carefully addressed to the needs and experience of one in regular orders. At the end of the confession the reader is referred by the note **quere ante folio vii'** to a Latin form of absolution which occurs on fol. 130v.

The form of confession is followed immediately by a short text on frequent confession (fol. 137r-v) with the heading **Alia nota de confessione**, advising that when a person is accustomed to confess daily or often, he should make his confession short and deal principally with those matters with which his conscience is most grieved, especially mortal sins, or those sins about which he is in doubt whether they are mortal or venial, after which he should make a general confession of venial sins. (Cf. text 14 below.)

14) London, British Library, MS Harley 494 (s.xv **ex./xvi in.**), fols 94r-96r.²³ (*Jolliffe C.25, O.25; MWME V.*)

A note on frequent confession related textually to that which follows text 13 is here found appended to another form of confession intended for regular religious, headed **Here foloweth a shorte confessionall for religious persons of eueryday' synnes aftir Bonaventure.**²⁴ The confession shows an unusual structure, being divided into eight numbered sections dealing in turn with: failings in saying divine service; inobedience to the ten commandments and to the vows of regular religious; misspending one's time; unkindness and lack of gratitude to God; negligence in one's spiritual duties; sins of the heart and mind; sins of the mouth; sinful deeds. It is addressed throughout specifically to one in regular orders.

15) Cambridge, Trinity College, MS O.1.74 (s.xv **med./ex.**), fols 60r-65v. (*Jolliffe C.28; O.26, MWME Y; IMEP XI, p. 83 [12].*)²⁵

16) Cambridge, Trinity College, MS O.1.74 (s.xv med./ex.), fols 65v-70r. (*IMEP* XI, p.83 [13].)

Text 15 is headed **Here bigynneþ a maner of a confessioun for religious persouns**, and is concerned with transgressions from the vows of one in regular orders. Intention for women religious is shown by a discussion of talking in times or places where one should have kept one's silence with **my sistren or with religious men or wom'en, or with secler men or women**. While text 16 is firmly focussed upon the concerns of the contemplative life, it does not contain any explicit reference to the particular circumstances of one in regular orders; this could be purely accidental, or could show intention for a wider variety of penitents, such as those leading a 'mixed' life. Short gaps occur in the copying of both texts: one of the space taken by about twelve letters in text 15, and one of two lines and one of one and a half lines in text 16. L. R. Mooney in *IMEP* notes the first two of these, and speculates that the first is 'perhaps for individual additions' and the second '(?) for individual to name number or type of sins'. However, in all three instances the copying breaks off and resumes in mid clause, and the gaps do not occur at points where individual additions could reasonably be made; in each case, illegible material in the exemplar would seem a more likely explanation.

17) Cambridge, St John's College, MS D.27 (s.xv in.), fol. 49r.²⁶ (*Jolliffe* C.35; *MWME* FF.)

The opening of an English confessional formula embedded in directions for the hearing of individual confession in the chapter-house after Prime on Sundays.

18) Cambridge, Emmanuel College, MS 229 (s.xvii).²⁷ (*Jolliffe* C.38, O.29; *MWME* II.)

Addressed to a woman in religious orders. Discussions of obedience (the ten commandments) and continence (the seven deadly sins) are followed under the head of wilful poverty by a more miscellaneous selection of practical and spiritual failings in her profession which may have befallen the penitent. Briefer sections on the seven works of mercy, the five bodily wits, the seven sacraments (dealing in particular with those received by the penitent: baptism, confirmation, penance, and the eucharist), the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, the seven spiritual works of mercy, and the four cardinal virtues are followed by a concluding prayer. The remainder of the roll is

occupied by a summary of the twelve articles of the faith and of how one may have failed in one's belief, with brief discussions of superstition and desperation.

19) Yale, University Library, MS Beinecke 163 (s.xv med.), fols 179r-83v. (*MWME* VV.)²⁸

A brief discussion of the five bodily senses is followed by a detailed treatment of the seven deadly sins (incorporating under sloth a discussion of the works of mercy), the ten commandments, and the seven principal virtues. Intention for a user in holy orders is shown by such characteristics as sins against **my rewle & holy customys of my ordre** being found under pride, not saying divine service under sloth, or simony and usury under avarice, while passages during the sections on pride and sloth clearly indicate that a female penitent is intended. An unusual characteristic during the discussion of the principal virtues is condemnation of questioning the tenets of the faith and giving credence to new, presumably heterodox, beliefs.

20) Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng.theol.e.181 (s.xiv ex.), fol. 11r-v.²⁹

A fragment of a form of confession, comprising the opening and the following sections: **Of Godis seruyse; Of myspendyng of tyme; Of unkyndenesse**. The first of these (which contains material dealing with **myssayng** of divine office) strongly suggests intention for one in orders, and the second perhaps one in regular orders. At the end of the first section a temporary shift of voice from first to second person occurs with a set of supplementary interrogations, beginning **Also ȝif þu hast said**; no such interrogations occur at the end of the second section, while the third ends incomplete. There is no evidence as to the gender of the intended penitent.

21) Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 60 (s.xv med.), fols 213r-27v; London, Society of Antiquaries, MS 687 (s.xv in.), pp. 359-81.³⁰ (*Jolliffe* C.17, O.20; *MWME* N. On MS Douce 60 see *IMEP* IV, pp. 28-29 [7].)

A lengthy model confession in English introduced by directions to the priest in Latin, and interrupted at various points by further Latin directions on how to guide the penitent during the confession. Discussion of failing to perform the divine office and of breaking silence **in chirch and in quer and in oþer places of rule . . . ayenst myn obedience and obseruance of my religioun** strongly suggest intention for one in regular orders, as does discussion under pride of inobedience to **the rule of my**

order and of my profession. There follow summaries of the fourteen articles of the faith and the seven principal virtues, linked to the model confession by a note which immediately follows the summary of the virtues:²¹

Hit is to knowe that euery man or woman that is sinfull may sey his shrift in this maner as byfor is written, adding mor or lesse as him lyketh and after he hath grace of God, begynnyng with þe wordes as byfor is written

The remainder of the text is occupied by: a brief discussion of how confession should be administered; a commentary on the text of the Latin **Confiteor**; a discussion and enumeration of the circumstances of confession (which would seem to derive, directly or indirectly, from one of the penitential summas); a list of **ambicions þat God hateth**.

22) Oxford, St John's College, MS 94 (s.xv in./med.), fols 144va-50va. (*Jolliffe C.4; MWME C. IMEP VIII*, pp. 88-89 [16].)

A lengthy text headed **Heer begynneth þe trety þat perteyneth to confession**, and unusual in giving explicit instructions as to how it is to be used. The penitent is informed that if he knows the **Confiteor** he should say it, with the text being given as far as **quia peccauit in multis**; if he does not know the **Confiteor** in Latin, he is to say it in English, and a translation of the same material is given. The penitent is then further instructed that he should use the model confession selectively in making his own confession, passing over material in which he does not consider himself guilty, **for heer is generally for sengul or weddeth, prest or religius**. In spite of this disclaimer, the subsequent model confession contains a good deal that is tailored to the circumstances of regular religious, and only a very little (a brief passage on sins within wedlock during the section on lechery) that would be of relevance only to a lay person.

A further unusual characteristic is the citing of ample authorities in both English and Latin throughout both the introduction and the confession.

A passage on performing the bodily works of mercy which is incorporated into the section on sloth refers the user back to an earlier discussion of the ten commandments, presumably the treatise on this subject which occurs earlier in the manuscript (fols 120ra-27va), for further information. It is thus possible that the form of confession (or at least, this part of it) is the composition of the scribe of the

manuscript, the Dominican anchorite of Newcastle-upon-Tyne John Lacy,³² or that both texts have been copied from the same exemplar.

23) London, British Library, MS Harley 172 (s.xv ex.), fols 11r-19r.³³

Discussion of **myministracyon** of the sacraments implies intention for a priest or at least for one in minor orders assisting a priest in administering the sacrament. The treatment of avarice likewise shows a concentration upon desiring worldly goods in general, lacking the references to sins associated with mercantile activity that are common in texts addressed to laymen, and also includes an unusual reference to giving money to entertainers. The sections dealing with lechery and with the sixth commandment contain no reference to lawful sexual intercourse within wedlock, again suggesting a clerical audience. Neither of these sections specifies the gender of the penitent, while the discussion of pride includes references to pride in both lordship and ladyship. However, the section on the ninth commandment, after stating the commandment in terms addressed to both male and female penitents, assumes a male penitent in a subsequent passage in the first person. Unusual characteristics are confession during the section on the fourth commandment of failing to honour one's godparents, and a passage on entering places forbidden by the laws of the state or of the church. A section dealing with sins against the seven cardinal virtues is followed by a summary of each of the fourteen articles of the faith, in which the confessional format is temporarily abandoned, and where a function of conveying religious instruction is clear.

iv. Texts with devotional associations.

24) York, Minster Library, MS Additional 2 (s.xv med.), fols 1r-4r, 209r-10v.³⁴ (*Jolliffe* C.32; *MWME* CC. *IMEP* VI, pp. 61-62 [1].)

A brief and compendious model confession, probably intended as a memorial guide to the pattern of a confession, rather than as an aid to extensive examination of conscience. The text is incomplete, breaking off in the middle of a section dealing with the spiritual works of mercy. In the treatment of coveting another's spouse during the section on the tenth commandment (fol. 3v), a second hand has inserted the word **husbond** above **wyfe** in the original hand, implying adaptation of the text for use by a woman, or perhaps for both men and women.³⁵

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25) Bristol, Central Reference Library, MS 14 (s.xv in.), fol. 2r.³⁶ (*Jolliffe C.22; MWME S.*)

A fragment of a form of confession (copied in a different, fifteenth-century hand) preceding a Book of Hours, consisting of the opening (in which there is no indication of any topics to be dealt with apart from the seven deadly sins), a section on pride, and the beginning of a section on envy. The fragment breaks off in mid sentence at the base of the recto, and it would appear that copying was never completed.

26) The Schøyen Collection, MS 1371 (Oslo/London), fols 206r-09r (s.xv med.).

A form of confession following a Latin Psalter (s.xiii med.). In *IMEP X*, 31-32, I. Taavitsainen regards this material as forming four separate forms of confession (texts [1] to [4]) dealing with: the seven deadly sins; the ten commandments; the five bodily senses; the seven bodily works of mercy. I have been unable to consult this manuscript in person, and the tightness of the binding makes photographic reproduction impossible. However, the incipits and explicits supplied by Taavitsainen strongly suggest that this is in fact a single text on the pattern of most others examined in the present study. (Cf. also the description of this manuscript in Sotheby's sale catalogue for June 18th, 1991, pp. 192-95, lot 121.) Taavitsainen compares fols 206r-07v with *Jolliffe C.24* (text 46 below) and *C.32* (text 24), and fols 207v-08r with *Jolliffe C.27* (text 8); I have been unable to investigate these comparisons.

27) Ipswich Town Library, MS 7 (s.xvi in.), fols 282v-87v. (*MWME SS.*)

Copied towards the end of a long series of devotional items in English and Latin, including the Hours of the Virgin. M. R. James suggests that the manuscript was 'written for a private person, probably a woman, living in London',³⁷ probably on the basis of the presence of a prayer **for wommen travelyng of childe**, fol. 79v, and the inclusion of a number of London feasts in the Calendar, fols 1r-6v. There is no sign in the form of confession of adaptation for female use, with the sections on lechery and on the tenth commandment assuming a male penitent.

28) Cambridge, University Library, MS Additional 3042, fols 79r-80v (s.xv in./med.).³⁸ (*Jolliffe C.10, O.12; MWME G.*)

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A text showing the unusual characteristic of opening in the form of a prayer (fol. 79r):

Good lorde, that knowest all thyng, whom I offende fro day to
day, thy *mercy* zette on me spring. And my defautes to knowe
allway to thi *mercy* be I meke, ay in full hope to haue it with all
my mende. Thus I preye to thyn owne loue, make thu me knyht.

This characteristic is not maintained in the remainder of the text, which shows the usual address to a confessor in the conclusion. The reference in the conclusion to St Augustine may imply intention for use by a member of one of the Augustinian orders, and this should be compared with an earlier reference to **obseruaunces of religioun**.

29) *St Brendan's Confession*: Cambridge, University Library, MS Hh.1.12 (s.xv **med.**), fols 52r-59v; London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 541 (s.xv **in.**), fols 150v-65r; London, British Library, MS Harley 1706 (s.xv **ex.**), fols 84r-88r; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 322 (s.xv **med.**), fols 98r-100r, 101r-v (incomplete); Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Anglais 41, (s.xv **med.**), fols 162v-76r (*IMEP* VII pp. 4-6); Oxford, Queen's College, MS 210 (s.xv **med.**), fols 1r-11v (*IMEP* VIII p. 81); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson C 699 (s.xv **in./med.**), fols 162v-79v; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 1288 (s.xiv **ex./xv in.**), fols 112v-30r. (*Jolliffe* C.31; *MWME* BB; *IPMEP* 311.)³⁹

Throughout this lengthy text there is an emphasis upon the private, devotional aspects of confession, which accords well with its occurring chiefly alongside other devotional material. There is no mention of a confessor at any point, and the form of a prayer is maintained throughout. There are highly affective passages, in which both allegory and simile are employed. The devotional potential of the traditional topics of a confession is explored, as in the section dealing with the bodily wits, where sinning in misuse of one's sight is defined as failing to look upon the goodness of God and his works.

30) Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson C 699 (s.xv **in./med.**), fols 88v-92r.⁴⁰

A text making no mention of a priest at any point, in which the potential of confession as a devotional tool and as a means of summarizing information upon a variety of devotional topics is exploited. The confession opens with a treatment of the

spiritual manifestations of the ten commandments, which are not separately enumerated or otherwise distinguished from one another. There follow very brief summaries of the seven deadly sins and the five bodily and spiritual senses, followed by a commentary on the seven bodily works of mercy (where, in place of the more usual reference to the book of Tobit, sinning in the seventh work of mercy is explained as being understood in the third, as a failure to acknowledge that one is in the spiritual death of sin). During this brief text scripture is cited frequently, and Augustine twice.⁴¹ The text ends somewhat abruptly, and may be incomplete.

31) Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS F.4.13 (s. xvi in.), fols 123v-35r.⁴² (*MWME RR.*)

A lengthy text headed **A deuoute prayer to God the fathur of heuyn, & therwith a good forme of confession sumwhat generall**, and maintaining throughout the form of a prayer. The text opens with a lengthy preamble in which the sinner describes himself as unworthy to be called God's simplest and lowest servant, and remembers that God has not saved Lucifer and his company, **heuenly spiritys & moste clere aungellys**, on account of their **oone only thoughte & sodayne synne of rebellyon**. Against this is set scriptural authority that God does not desire the everlasting death of a sinner, but rather that he should be **conuertid** from his sin.

The confession proper begins with an unusual account of sin by misuse of the feet, knees, thighs, the **secrette & pudende membris**, the sides, back and neck, shoulders, arms, hands, mouth, tongue, heart, ears, nostrils, eyes, head, and again the heart. This is followed by sections on the seven deadly sins and the ten commandments in which there is little stress upon the social manifestations of the sins. During the section on lechery sins against nature, homosexuality, and effeminacy are discussed in Latin.

There follow sections on sins against the seven spiritual and bodily works of mercy, the twelve articles of the faith, the seven sacraments, the seven virtues theological and cardinal, the seven gifts and twelve fruits of the Holy Ghost, and the beatitudes. An affective register is maintained throughout, with occasional use of simile. There is little indication of the intended users of the text, although the section on the seven sacraments states that the penitent should both honour and keep the sacrament of matrimony, but only that he should honour the sacrament of the priesthood. At two points there are appeals to **þe blessid confessor saynt Gylys**.

32) Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 131 (s.xv in.), fols 136v-39r.⁴³ (*Jolliffe*

C.33; *MWME* DD.)

Intention for use by layfolk is indicated by a reference in the section on lechery to performing deeds for purposes other than procreation, and perhaps also by a reference under sloth to being slow in hearing, rather than saying, divine service on workdays and holidays. Unlike several of the texts in this section, the confession is here addressed to a confessor, whether real or imaginary. However, the emphasis on the communal life of the parish noted in texts discussed in parts 1 and 2 above is here entirely absent, and while the passage quoted by J. Hughes in his discussion of this text is not entirely typical of the whole,⁴⁴ it is true that a devotional, reflective emphasis is discernible.

v. Texts addressed to a lay audience.

33) Yale, University Library, Beinecke MS 317 (s.xv ex.), fols 34v-35r.⁴⁵

A text preceded by a brief discussion of the necessity of confession (fol. 34r), supported by a number of biblical and patristic quotations and paraphrases. The form of confession opens with a statement that it is **a fourme of a generall confessyoun þat euery crysten man & woman is bownde to kunne & knowe**. The treatment of pride is much fuller than that of the other deadly sins, which are simply enumerated, perhaps suggesting abbreviation of an exemplar with a fuller treatment of each. The text ends with a note that **this confessyoun, here rehercyd generally, owyth to be declaryd mor opynly yef a man wolle clerly be shryven**, referring the user for a **mor opyn declaracyoun of the many horyble & abhomynable vyces** which lie under each of the deadly sins to **þe tretyse next befor**, presumably the second part of the *Lay Folks' Catechism* which immediately precedes the note on confession and in which many of the topics listed in the present text are dealt with at greater length. This suggests that at least this concluding passage of the form of confession has been written especially for the context of this manuscript, or alternatively that this text has been copied from an exemplar which has both this text and the *Lay Folks' Catechism* in the same order. It is also of interest that the user is not referred to the subsequent much fuller form of confession on fols 42v-50v (text 34), suggesting that these two texts have been copied from different sources.

34) Yale, University Library, Beinecke MS 317 (s.xv ex.), fols 42v-50v.

A very extensive form of confession addressed to layfolk, presented, at least in part, in the form of a prayer. The text has the heading **Confessio generalis ac specialis** and opens with Psalm 6, verse 3, **Miserere mei Domine, quoniam infirmus sum sana me**. There follows a lengthy introductory discussion of the spiritual plight of the penitent, in which the parable of the Good Samaritan is used as the basis of a complex allegory of the penitent's position. The allegorical framework is maintained in the opening of the confession proper, where the outward and inward senses are identified as the gates of the soul, by which three robbers or enemies have entered the three powers of the soul, – Reason, Will and Understanding, – robbing them of their natural powers and goods of grace. The seven links in the chain of sin⁴⁶ which binds the soul to the tree of despair are then described in detail, followed by the five branches of this tree, constituting the five branches of sin against the Holy Ghost: presumption, despair, impugning known truth, despising God's grace, and obstinacy. The allegory of the wounds inflicted by the three enemies of the soul is continued in the following section, dealing with the ten commandments. There follow sections dealing with the seven deadly sins, sins against the articles of the faith (including a condemnation of non-Christian practices and prognostication from the stars), the three theological and the four cardinal virtues (including a condemnation of heresy), and the seven sacraments (including a condemnation of sinning in not fully believing in transubstantiation, and a highly orthodox discussion of the divine authority vested in a priest).

The model confession in effect incorporates in its treatment of these topics a highly compendious devotional manual, setting out in frequently striking and affective language many of the central tenets of Christian belief. The peroration makes clear the didactic function of the text, stating that the confession is intended to remedy **yn especyall . . . þe gret ignorance contynuall reygnyng yn me**.

In the section on avarice, the word **husbonde** has been deleted, perhaps showing adaptation of a text originally intended for the use of a married laywoman for a user belonging to a different category. (The deletion is simply by striking through and cannot be dated.)

35) Oxford, Trinity College, MS 86 (s.xvi in.), fols 56v-69r. (*Jolliffe C.7; MWME D; IMEP VIII*, p. 100 [27].)⁴⁷

A lengthy general confession, beginning with directions that the penitent should say the Latin **Confiteor** as far as the words **Ideo precor sanctam Mariam** (presumably

stopping after **mea maxima culpa**), at which point he should make a full confession of any specific sins requiring confession, and then read (presumably under the supervision of a priest) the English general confession given here, followed by the remainder of the **Confiteor** from **Ideo precor** onwards. The confession is unambiguously addressed to a lay penitent (although a section on the seven sacraments does include a very brief passage intended for one who intends to become a priest), and by implication to one of some wealth and social standing (the section on pride deals with pride of **blode & kyne** and of **rychesse, golde, syluer, lyuelode, honoure, dignite, clothng and aparel**). There is no consistent address to a penitent of either gender. A primary intention of conveying a large amount of basic religious knowledge is shown by the following topics which take up a little under half of the confession: the theological virtues (including in the section on faith a lengthy summary of the articles of the faith); the cardinal virtues; the seven sacraments; the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost; the Beatitudes. A concern with the devotional life of the penitent is evident: during the treatment of the third commandment **redyng of goode bokys** is recommended, while in the section on the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, the contemplative life is described as **holy prayeris, redyng and meditacyoun**.⁴⁸

36) Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 142 (s.xv **med.**), fols 107v, col.2-10v, col.2. (*Jolliffe C.30; MWME AA.*)

Intention for the male head of a lay household is indicated by a passage on teaching in the section dealing with the seven spiritual works of mercy, and also by subsequent passages on counselling and chastisement. A reference to failing to pay tithes and offerings to the Church in the section on pride perhaps also suggests an intention for a lay audience. In this context the sections on the sixth commandment and on lechery are somewhat surprising in their general censure of sinful relations with both married and single women without any reference to lawful sexual relations within wedlock. Rather than indicating multiple exemplars, this may perhaps be explained as a result of the stress on the spiritual life and the suppression of worldliness to be found throughout this text; one should also note in this context an unusual condemnation of hearing worldly fables during the discussion of the bodily senses.

37) Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Miscellany 210 (s.xv **in.**), fols 157r-65r; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 1286 (s.xv **in.**), fols 252r-60v (see *IMEP IX*, pp. 46-47 [8]); Marquess of Bath, Longleat House, MS 29 (s.xv **in./med.**), fols 24v-29v and 31r; London, British Library, MS Harley 4172, fols 116r-22v (s.xv **ex.**; incomplete). (*Jolliffe C.20; MWME Q.*)

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A text addressed to the male head of a household. Unusual passages occur in all four witnesses during the sections on the fifth and eighth commandments dealing with areas in which the obligations of oaths of crafts, guilds, or brotherhoods could conflict with the law of the Church. The treatment of the sixth commandment contains a similarly unusual reference to failing to honour a vow of chastity within wedlock.⁴⁹

An edition of this text based on Longleat House MS 29 with variants from all known manuscripts is given in S. J. Ogilvie-Thomson, 'An edition of the English works in MS Longleat 29, excluding *The Parson's Tale*', Oxford University D.Phil. Thesis (1980), 232-83. As Ogilvie-Thomson notes (p. 234), in MS Harley 4172 first person forms have been consistently erased and second person interrogatory forms inserted in their place, effectively converting the text into a set of confessional interrogations, probably for use by a priest.⁵⁰

38) London, British Library, MS Royal 18.A.x (s.xv in.), fols 55v-60r. (*Jolliffe* C.43; *MWME* NN.)

Incorporates a section on the seven deadly sins related textually to that in text 37,⁵¹ preceded by a brief section dealing with preparation for confession, and followed by sections on: the bodily senses; misuse of goods temporal and spiritual; the ten commandments; the bodily and spiritual works of mercy. The text is addressed to a laywoman, and, as would appear from material not paralleled in text 37 in the section on avarice, one who has considerable financial dealings.

39) London, British Library, MS Royal 18.A.x (s.xv in.), fols 60v-61v. (*Jolliffe* C.9; *MWME* F.)

A brief confession in the form of a prayer, attributed to St Edmund of Canterbury.⁵² Immediately follows text 38.

40) London, British Library, MS Harley 6041 (s.xv in.), fols 97r-102v.⁵³ (*Jolliffe* C.8; *MWME* E.)

Appears from a discussion of sins within wedlock to be addressed to a layman. Opens with directions to the penitent on preparation for penance, recommending that he should review his past conduct in a private place, and that he should say **wyþ grete deuocion and with contricion of herte** the Latin hymn *Veni creator spiritus*, of which the full text is given. Psalms 25 and 43, (24 and 42 in the Vulgate), *Ad te*

domine levavi and *Iudica me dominus et discerne*, are also recommended and the opening words of each given in Latin, implying that the user either knows these psalms by heart or has access to a Psalter for the full text. The confession proper includes a lengthy treatment of the seven deadly sins, and much shorter sections on: sins of speech; unshriven sins; sins of omission; the sacraments; the ten commandments; the deeds of bodily mercy; the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost; the principal virtues; the **virtues þat been clepid gratuite and virtues of diuinite**; the seven virtues which are remedies against the seven deadly sins; sins of all parts of the body; falling under the sentence of cursing pronounced in the church.

41) The Hopton Hall manuscript (MS Chandos-Pole-Gell) (s.xv in.), fols 1r-3v. (*Jolliffe* C.13; *MWME* J).

The opening of a form of confession, consisting of an introduction and confession in the seven deadly sins, ending without any formal conclusion. The section on avarice seems to be addressed to a wealthy lay audience, with condemnation of deceiving others in buying and selling, of using false weights and measures, and of withholding **þe hyre of werke men**. There is also criticism of withholding goods from the needy, and giving them instead to those who have no need and to minstrels, while condemnation of minstrelsy is found also in the section on gluttony. The text is followed immediately on fol. 2v without any clear division by a version of the *Lay Folks' Catechism*,⁵⁴ which is followed in turn by a discussion of sin occupying fols 9v-13r which at two points incorporates material in a confessional format on fols 11r and 11v-12r.⁵⁵ The second of these gives a detailed discussion of sins of mouth, heart, and deed.

42) Leeds, University Library, MS Brotherton Collection 501 (s.xv med.), fols 82r-86r. (*Jolliffe* C.39; *MWME* JJ; *IMEP* VI, p. 9 [5].)

The opening of the text specifies a particular context and function for the form of confession (fol. 82r):

**O þu my brothyr þat art yong of age, qwiche kanst not
confesse thiself onto thy gostly fadyr, þerfor Y shal
wryghte to the how þu shalt haue the in thy confession.**

O. S. Pickering notes the address to the singular **brothyr** here and in similar

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rubricated passages and marginal annotations in this text and elsewhere in the manuscript, and shows that this address to a singular audience has at many points been supplemented with rubrics and annotations addressed to a plural audience, in which the use of **frater** or **fratres** as forms of address makes the members of a religious community likely as users of this manuscript.⁵⁶ In this context it is interesting to note that outside these rubricated passages the form of confession is apparently addressed to a lay audience, with the discussions both of lechery and of the first commandment making reference to the penitent's wife and children, and with no evidence of adaptation to a clerical audience. The educational implications of the opening rubric are, however, borne out by the main part of the text, where the treatment of the first commandment includes an elaborate summary of the articles of the faith, and this perhaps explains the choice of such an exemplar in the present instance.

43) London, British Library, MS Cotton Caligula A.ii (s.xv ex.), fols 69v-70r. (*Jolliffe* C.18; *MWME* O.)

A brief form of confession found among a collection of **domestitia** for family use.⁵⁷ The text is somewhat unusual in dealing first with sins against the ten commandments, followed by the seven deadly sins and the bodily senses, and is immediately followed by penitential verses (*IMEV* 1701).

vi. Texts with educational associations.

44) London, British Library, MS Additional 60577 (s.xv ex.), fols 159v-79v. (*MWME* ZZ.)⁵⁸

Occurs at the end of a long series of catechetical items in English preceded by a cross-row. A similar catechetical function for the form of confession is suggested by its compendious yet cursory nature, and further by the brief summary of topics covered by the text which occurs on fol. 179r, for which a mnemonic function seems likely.

45) Paris, Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève, MS 3390, (s.xv in.), fols 52v-57r. (*IMEP* VII, pp. 26 [6]; not listed in *Jolliffe* or *MWME*.)

Ends with a general statement of the creed, again suggesting a function as a summary of a course of Lenten instruction, as does the simple but comprehensive nature of the preceding confessional material.

Philip Durkin

46) London, British Library, MS Additional 37075 (s.xv **med./ex.**), fols 39v-40v. (*Jolliffe C.24; MWME U.*)

A brief form of confession copied roughly in a slightly later hand (s.xv **ex.**) in a collection of grammatical and educational texts for school use, perhaps associated with St Anthony's School in London.⁵⁹

47) London, British Library, MS Additional 37787 (s.xv **in.**), fols 3r-11v; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS eng.poet.a.1 (s.xiv **ex.**), fols 366r-67r; London, British Library, MS Additional 22283 (s.xiv **ex.**), fol. 170v (incomplete). (*Jolliffe C.21; MWME R; IPMEP 309.*)⁶⁰

A confession in the seven deadly sins, ten commandments, seven bodily works of mercy, and five bodily senses, followed by an **exposicion** of each of these topics with the addition of the spiritual works of mercy, in which substantially the same material as is found under each of these heads in the confession is presented in a question and answer format. Ends with a Latin note that the confession is to be used selectively.

48) Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 596 (s.xv **in.**), fols 31v-34r.

Opens with substantially the same treatment of the seven deadly sins as text 47, although with a great deal of variation in phrasing and some minor differences in content. The subsequent section on the ten commandments is highly unusual, including the material from text 47 dealing with the first, second, fourth, sixth, eighth, and ninth commandments only, with the following passage inserted between the sixth and eighth commandments (fol. 33v):

Also I cry God mercy þat I haue nought do to myne emcristen
like as I wolde they dede to me, and ferthermore I haue take othir
thingis thanne my owen azen the wil of hem þat owed it.
Wherfore I crye God almyty mercy.

Thus, the third, fifth and tenth commandments are omitted entirely, while the seventh commandment is given an unusual treatment. None of the commandments is here numbered, and it is just possible that material has been omitted by error, although this seems unlikely in the case of such basic material as the decalogue. There follow the

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section on the seven bodily works of mercy from text 47 with housing the homeless and burying the dead both omitted, and the section on the bodily senses complete. The text ends with a brief prayer.

49) Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 322 (s.xv **med.**), fol. 17r-v; London, British Library, MS Harley 1706 (s.xv **ex.**), fols 17v-18r.⁶¹

The opening part of text 47, consisting of confession in the seven deadly sins, with the heading **these ben the seuyn dedely synnes**.

50) Bristol, Central Reference Library, MS 6 (s.xvi **in.**), fols 134r-37v.⁶² (*Jolliffe C.21; MWME R.*)

A confession in the seven deadly sins related textually to that in text 47 (although with quite different sections on sloth and lechery), followed by sections on: the ten commandments; the seven bodily and spiritual works of mercy; the articles of the faith (with the number unspecified); the sacrament of the altar; the four cardinal and three high virtues (wisdom, temperance, prudence and strength; faith, hope and charity); the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost; the five spiritual and bodily senses.

The treatment of lechery is addressed to a female penitent, which N. Matthews suggests reveals that the text is intended for the use of female penitents at the Hospital of St Mark at Bristol.⁶³ There is nothing elsewhere in the text to rule out such an interpretation, although it should be noted that masculine pronouns are used throughout in referring to the penitent. The only explicit link with the Hospital of St Mark in this text is in the closing words, **Sancte Marce ora pro nobis**.⁶⁴

vii. Miscellaneous Texts.

51) Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 59 (s.xv **med.**), fol. 130v. (*Jolliffe C.14; MWME K; IMEP IX, p. 3 [7].*)

A fragment consisting of the opening of a form of confession with the heading **The morow off screfte**, copied in a fifteenth-century hand other than that of John Shirley, the scribe of the remainder of the manuscript. Only the top quarter of the leaf remains, with the lower part possibly removed to make use of blank space on the recto, where the copying of part of the *Three Kings of Cologne* seems to have been left off

incomplete by Shirley. The fragment consists only of the opening formula (consisting of a brief confession of sinning in the ten commandments, seven deadly sins, five senses, and in misusing God's gifts) and the beginning of a section on the first commandment. Although material has clearly been lost where the lower part of the leaf has been removed, there is no indication as to whether copying of the text was ever completed.

52) London, British Library, MS Harley 7578, fol. 1r-v (s.xv ex.).⁶⁵ (*Jolliffe C.44; MWME OO.*)

A fragment copied in two columns, preceded by a verse summary of the ten commandments (*IMEV 3687*). Much of the recto is illegible. The fragment of the form of confession consists of the opening and sections dealing with pride, wrath, sloth, avarice and gluttony. The text appears to be addressed to a layman. The section dealing with sloth is the longest, and includes brief discussions of the works of mercy and the bodily senses, perhaps implying that no separate sections on these topics were to follow.

53) Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Tanner 201 (s.xv in.), fol. 1r. (*Jolliffe C.36; MWME GG.*)

An extremely brief form of confession, which Jolliffe regards as a fragment. However, the text constitutes a complete confession in itself, and there is no evidence of copying having been broken off. It is copied in a very small, current Secretary hand, and occupies only the upper sixth of the leaf.

54) London, British Library, MS Sloane 774 (s.xv), fols 40v-45v.⁶⁶

In addition to material extracted from *The Clensyng of Mannes Soule*, a further prose form of confession occurs here with the heading a **compendyos general confessioun**. The structure and content of this text are described by W. Everett.⁶⁷ However, in the context of the large number of texts considered in the present survey which contain similar formulaic expressions, the common phrases cited by Everett should be disregarded as evidence for any textual affiliation between this text and *The Clensyng of Mannes Soule*.

55) Oxford, Trinity College, MS 86 (s.xvi in.), fols 69r-71v. (*Jolliffe C.19; MWME P; IMEP VIII pp. 100-01 [28].*)

Follows in the same hand immediately after text 35 above, with the heading **A lytyl addicioun for more perfyte serche of confession**. However, what follows is a series of sentences and phrases apparently taken from a longer confessional formula, ending with a lengthy peroration which it would be difficult to accommodate within the structure of text 35. The material preceding this is diffuse and does not show any obvious structural principle, and shows a mixture of material suitable only for a priest with material more suitable for a layman. It can probably best be explained as a series of extracts or recollections from a text of the 'omnium gatherum' sort, thus standing in relation to text 35 not as an extension to the previous text but as a series of notes to be used by an experienced confessor in assisting a penitent in making a confession of individual sins before reading the general confession offered by text 35.

56) Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 789 (s.xv in.), fols 105r-108v. (*Jolliffe C.26; MWME W.*)

Jolliffe lists as a form of confession 'conflated with another tract at the end'. Opens in a confessional format with acknowledgement of sins in specifically spiritual manifestations of the ten commandments, after which there occur summaries of the seven deadly sins and the five bodily works of mercy. This is followed by a warning to the audience to think upon the Day of Judgement, after which the text concludes with a lengthy account of the seven bodily works of mercy in which the confessional format is not maintained. The text as it stands is coherent as an examination in the spiritual life, and there is no reason to think that conflation has in fact occurred.

57) London, Public Record Office, MS E.101/185/1 (s.xv). (*Jolliffe C.6.*)

A fragment found on a narrow parchment strip reinforcing the outer edge of the third paper quire of the manuscript. The fragment consists of two lines which are probably from a prose form of confession. However, they yield little information as to the possible structure or content of this text.

58) Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS Pepys 2125 (s.xiv ex./xv in.), fols 56v-60v.

A discussion of the manner in which confession is to be made, followed by a very brief model confession which is abbreviated at many points (cf. text 1 above), followed in turn by a detailed exposition of the seven deadly sins and each of their branches which is not presented in a confessional format. The text is identified in the recent catalogue of college manuscripts, following Jolliffe and Raymo, as being from *The Clensyng of Mannes Soule*.⁶⁸ However, this is denied by W. Everett,⁶⁹ and the two texts are indeed independent.

Rejected manuscripts.

a) Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson C 285 (s.xv in.), fols 60v-61r. (MWME WW.)

A short treatise on the visitation of the sick, here attributed to St Anselm (*Jolliffe*, L.6, N.12).

b) London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 559 (s.xv in.), fols 45r-47v. (MWME TT.)

The second in a series of three penitential prayers; the latter part is in the form of a confession.

c) Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 246 (s.xv in.), fols 4r-10v (MWME XX), fol. 58v (MWME UU).

A Primer in English (*IPMEP* 135), preceded by a quire of four leaves containing tables for calculating Easter Day and English translations of the *Credo*, *Misereatur* and *Confiteor* (fols 1r-4r). Fol. 4v is blank, while fols 5r-10v contain a Calendar. Fol. 58v contains Psalm 137, **Confitebor tibi Domine**.

d) Cambridge, University Library, MS Ii.6.2 (s.xv in.). (MWME YY.)

A brief text on the importance of confession, containing no material in a confessional format.

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MS Douce 60	21
MS Douce 246	c
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York.

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ii) France.

Paris.

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iii) Norway.

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iv) United States.

New Haven.

Yale, University Library:

Beinecke MS 163

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33, 34

NOTES

¹ The lists given in P. S. Jolliffe, *A Check-list of Middle English Prose Writings of Spiritual Guidance* (Toronto, 1974: henceforth *Jolliffe*) section C and by R. R. Raymo in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1500*, ed. by J. B. Severs and A. E. Hartung (New Haven, 1967-: henceforth *MWME*), vol. VII pp. 2562-63 (text [211]) are both in need of expansion, and both show in their groupings of texts an over-reliance upon incipits. Where appropriate, I give for each text a reference to the classifications of *Jolliffe* (in the form of the lettered section followed by the number of each text within that section) and to *MWME* (for texts from VII [211], simply the letter assigned by Raymo to each 'version'), and also to the numbered sections of *The Index of Printed Middle English Prose*, ed. by R. E. Lewis, N. F. Blake, and A. S. G. Edwards (New York and London, 1985: henceforth *IPMEP*) and the Handlists so far published of *The Index of Middle English Prose*, ed. A. S. G. Edwards *et al.*, Handlists I-XI (Cambridge 1984-1996: henceforth *IMEP*). In the case of references to *IMEP*, it should be noted that useful amounts of the texts discussed are given in the form of incipits and explicits; headings and very brief incipits are also given in *Jolliffe*. Forms of confession preserved in printed books are not considered here, nor are the small number of verse forms of confession (listed in *MWME* VII, [211]), nor the Scottish prose form of confession incorporated into a longer treatise on confession in the Asloan manuscript, fols 1r-32v (see W. A. Craigie, ed., *The Asloan Manuscript, A Miscellany in Prose and Verse*, I, *The Scottish Text Society* n.s. 14 (1923), pp. 65-80). The much more extensive treatment of material in a confessional format in *The Clensyng of Mannes Soule* (see note 67 below) and in Chaucer's *Parson's Tale* are also outside the scope of this study, as are confessional manuals which do not include forms of confession (on which see most recently E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (New Haven, 1992), pp. 58-60) and the quite distinct genre of guides to the visitation of the sick.

The present survey is extracted from my unpublished University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis (1994) 'A study of Oxford, Trinity College, MS 86, with editions of selected texts, and with special reference to late Middle English prose forms of confession', where editions will be found of texts 4, 12, 35, and 55 below, and transcriptions of texts 1, 2, 10, and 34; see also note 17 below.

My thanks are due to the owners and custodians of all manuscripts consulted in this study for permission to consult the manuscripts in their possession or keeping. My thanks are also due in very large measure to Professor Anne Hudson and Professor Malcolm Parkes, who supervised the research on which this article is based, and to my examiners Dr Vincent Gillespie and Dr Oliver Pickering for their generous advice, and especially to the latter for having read a draft of this article and suggested a number of valuable improvements.

² On the development of such a structure, see J. Goering and P. J. Payer, 'The *Summa Penitentiae Fratrum Predicatorum*: a thirteenth-century Confessional Formulary', *Mediaeval Studies*, 55 (1993), 16-20.

³ The practice of making a general confession of venial and forgotten sins is itself in large part a result of medieval controversy as to whether confession of venial as well as mortal sins was required by *Omnis utriusque sexus*, and of the confusion prevalent in attempts to distinguish clearly between mortal and venial sins. See further: Lea, *Auricular Confession*, II pp. 239-44, 264-75; M. W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (Michigan, 1952), p. 43.

⁴ 'The Social History of Confession in the Age of the Reformation', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series 25 (1975), p. 24.

⁵ For an investigation of this topic see: R. M. Ball, 'The Education of English Secular Clergy in the later Middle Ages, with special reference to the manuals of instructions', Cambridge University Ph.D. thesis, 1977.

⁶ Often, like several of the texts considered here, found alongside the Hours of the Virgin: see further M. Erler, 'The *Maner to Lyue Well* and the Coming of English in François Regnault's Primers of the 1520s and 1530s', *The Library*, 6th series 6 (1984), 229-43.

⁷ A link discernible already in Quivel's *Summula* (F. M. Powicke and C. R. Cheney, *Councils and Synods, with Other Documents Relating to the English Church* (Oxford, 1964) II pp. 220-26, 1061-62); see further J. Shaw, 'The Influence of Canonical and Episcopal Reform on Popular Books of Instruction', *The Popular Literature of Medieval England*, ed. by T. J. Heffernan, (Knoxville, 1985), pp. 44-60, and, on examination in basic religious knowledge during confession, J. Hughes, 'The Administration of Confession in the Diocese of York in the Fourteenth Century', *Borthwick Studies in History 1, Studies in Clergy and Ministry in Medieval England*, ed. by D. M. Smith, (York, 1991), pp. 87-163. Cf. also John Drury's *tractatus de modo confitendi* (ed. by S. B. Meech, 'John Drury and his English Writings', *Speculum*, 9 (1934), 76-79).

⁸ The collection of John Gysborn, canon of the Premonstratensian house of Coverham in Yorkshire, and also at some stage curate of Alyngton, a Lincolnshire parish belonging to the Premonstratensian house of Newbo. A note (fol. 87v) recording a debt owed by one canon of Newbo Priory to another would seem to suggest a link with the house at Newbo itself; for Gysborn to have performed a pastoral role in the parish of Alyngton while resident in the house at Newbo would have been in accordance with the regular practice of the Premonstratensian order.

⁹ Such an exemplum is not recorded in F. C. Tubach, *Index Exemplorum: A Handbook of Medieval Religious Tales*, *FF Communications*, no. 204 (Helsinki, 1969).

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¹⁰ In both *Jolliffe* and *MWME* regarded as two separate texts.

¹¹ The reasons for the copying of texts 1 and 2 in the same manuscript are uncertain. Text 2 may be intended for use on occasions other than Easter Day; however, it should be noted that text 10 below is also paralleled by a further incomplete confessional manual ending with a series of confessional interrogations (fols 63r-79r), suggesting that the apparent redundancy of some the material in this collection may arise simply from a particular interest in penitential material on Gysborn's part.

¹² A collection of materials in English and Latin chiefly of practical use to a parish priest, including an abridgement of *Fasciculus Morum*. (I am grateful to have been given access to a draft description from a catalogue of medieval manuscripts in Durham University Library in preparation by A. I. Doyle.)

¹³ Raymo in *MWME* classifies fols 1r-21r, 48r-v, and 56v-69r as a single text, version D, and then again separately classifies fols 1r-19v as version Z and fol. 48r-v as version LL.

¹⁴ Copied consecutively with text 8 below.

¹⁵ 'A Middle English Versified Penance Composed of Popular Prayer Tags', *Notes and Queries*, 231 (1986), 449-50; see also 'Checklist of Unedited Late Middle English Sermons', p. 150, where the incipit and explicit are given, and the text identified as an Easter Day sermon.

¹⁶ The text breaks off in mid clause half way down fol. 176v during the section on sloth (itself only the fourth of the deadly sins in the order adopted in this text).

¹⁷ *Ha.2383* has material in the order: ten commandments; seven deadly sins; seven works of bodily mercy; five bodily senses; seven spiritual works of mercy; five spiritual senses. *Linc.* has: ten commandments; seven deadly sins; seven works of bodily mercy; seven spiritual works of mercy; five spiritual senses; five bodily senses. In the passages it shares with this text, *Ha.1288* has: ten commandments; seven works of bodily mercy; five bodily senses; five spiritual senses; seven spiritual works of mercy. It is impossible from the surviving evidence to reconstruct the relationships of the manuscripts with any certainty, and therefore no assumptions can be made concerning which of the manuscripts represents most closely the original state of the text. For a transcription of the text from *Ha.2383* collated against the other manuscripts, see Durkin 'Trinity College, MS 86' vol. I, Appendix B.

¹⁸ There are also close verbal similarities between parts of this section of the text and a tract on the ten commandments preserved in the St Albans, Cathedral Library manuscript. For discussion of this text see G. R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1961), *passim*.

¹⁹ The bulk of the manuscript is taken up by Mirk's *Festial*.

²⁰ On evidence for the procedure of the opening of a private confession see A. E. Nichols, 'The Etiquette of Pre-Reformation Confession in East Anglia', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 17 (1986), 145-63.

²¹ See note 13 above.

²² Several of the items in this part of the manuscript relate to the Carthusian order.

²³ Several of the texts in the main hand of the manuscript, including the form of confession, contain references to St Bridget, suggesting that the collection was copied for the use of a member of the Bridgettine house at Syon. *A Catalogue of the Harleian Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London, 1808) speculates that the Anne Bulkeley whose name appears on fols iv and 1r was abbess either of Syon or of Barking; however, the name does not appear in lists of abbesses of either house, nor in fraternity lists. C. F. R. de Hamel, *Syon Abbey: The Library of the Bridgettine Nuns and their Peregrinations after the Reformation* (Roxburghe Club, 1991) mentions the manuscript only on p. 144, n. 109, as being possibly the work of a scribe who had copied other material for a Syon nun.

²⁴ On the attribution to Bonaventura, see *MWME* IX, p.3102.

²⁵ Raymo in *MWME* regards fols 60v-70r as a single text, and also lists a further form of confession as occurring on fol. 1r, where *The Counsels of St Isidore* begins.

²⁶ Edited by the Abbess of Stanbrook and J. B. L. Tolhurst as *The Ordinal and Customary of the Abbey of St Mary York*, The Henry Bradshaw Society, 73, 75 and 84 (1936, 1937, and 1951).

²⁷ A seventeenth-century parchment roll containing a copy of a late Middle English text: see J. Martin, 'Edmund Lynold and the Court of High Commission', *Lincolnshire Architectural and Archaeological Society, Reports Papers*, 5 (1953), 70-74. If the parchment roll mentioned in Lynold's will is indeed the exemplar of the present manuscript (see Martin *op. cit.*), this raises interesting possibilities concerning its use, perhaps as a highly portable aid to a confessor.

²⁸ B. A. Shailor (*Catalogue of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University*, I, (New Haven, 1984), p. 221) states that this text 'appears to be an abbreviated version' of text 34 below. Closer examination of the two texts in fact reveals there to be no relationship between the two texts beyond the generic similarities common to all model confessions.

²⁹ The hand is similar to but different from that of the quire of ten leaves which makes up the main part of the manuscript (see A. Hudson, 'The Lay Folks' Catechism: A Postscript', *Viator*, 19 (1988), 307; B. Barker-Benfield, *The Bodleian Library Record*, vol. 12, no. 6 (April, 1988), 489-90.), as is the *mise en page*, but both the colour of the ink and the style of decoration are quite different. There is thus no strong reason for considering that this leaf has a common origin with the other ten leaves.

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³⁰ In MS Douce 60 two blank pages occur, fols 215v and 216r. There is no material missing at this point, and the omission of these leaves may be explained simply by scribal error. I have chosen to regard the whole of fols 213r-27v as a single text; however, both Jolliffe and Raymo in *MWME* regard the confessional text as ending on fol. 222v, while L. Braswell in *IMEP IV* describes fols 213r-27v as '[*Form of Confession*]; other items, rubricated'. The chief contents of this manuscript are Mirk's *Festial* and *Instructions for Parish Priests*, strongly suggesting that it is a parish priest's collection. The apparent intention of the form of confession for one in orders is thus somewhat odd; it is perhaps conceivable that the manuscript was copied for the use of a member of one of the religious orders which regularly undertook parochial duties, such as the Premonstratensian Canons or Mirk's own Augustinian Canons. In this connection it should be noted that the confession ends with unusual petitions to St Augustine and St Nicholas. Although the Society of Antiquaries manuscript is a collection of a somewhat different character, the presence of the Latin *Speculum sacerdotis* also suggests intention for use by a priest.

³¹ MS Douce 60, fols 224v-25r.

³² On Lacy and this manuscript see further A. I. Doyle, 'Publication by members of the religious orders', in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1375-1475*, ed. by J. Griffiths and D. Pearsall (London, 1989), pp. 109-24. The manuscript has been refoliated; the folios occupied by this text were formerly numbered 142v-48v.

³³ Copied by the same scribe as text 44: for a description of the manuscript see Wilson and Fenlon, *Winchester Anthology*, pp. 39-40.

³⁴ Copied in the available space at both the beginning and the end of the manuscript.

³⁵ If the suggestion that the manuscript was produced for the use of John Bolton, merchant, alderman, and mercer, is correct (see N. R. Ker, *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*, IV, (Oxford, 1991), p. 791), these features may perhaps show the use of the manuscript by his wife or by another female member of his household; cf. an illustration in the body of the Book of Hours (fol. 40v) depicting St Sytha attended by a suppliant woman in blue, perhaps indicating female ownership or use of the manuscript.

³⁶ See Ker, *Medieval Manuscripts*, II, pp. 209-10.

³⁷ 'Descriptions of the Ancient Manuscripts in the Ipswich Public Library', *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and Natural History*, 22 (1934), p. 95.

³⁸ The main contents of the manuscript (s.xv in.) are the Hours of the Holy Spirit in Latin (fols 7r-32v) and the *Meditation B* (fols 36r-78v: see S. J. Ogilvie-Thomson, *Richard Rolle: Prose and Verse*, *EETS O.S.* 293 (1988), pp. xcii-iv). The form of confession is in a hand not found elsewhere in the manuscript, among a series of miscellaneous shorter items in various hands.

³⁹ Printed from Cambridge, University Library, MS Hh.1.12 by R. H. Bowers, 'The

Middle English *St Brendan's Confession*', *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, 175 (1939), 40-49; and, more accurately, from London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 541 by F. Kuriyagawa, *The Middle English St Brendan's Confession and Prayer, Geibun-Kenkyu*, 25 (1968), 1-23. The witness in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 1288 is unnoticed by Jolliffe, while in *IMEP IX* the end of the text is wrongly transcribed as the end of the Primer, and in *MWME* it is incorrectly catalogued as an independent text (QQ), possibly because the text here lacks any mention of St Brendan either in the heading or at the end of the text.

⁴⁰ Regarded as part of the *St Brendan's Confession* by Raymo in *MWME*.

⁴¹ In the second instance employing the same allegory of the iron chain of the seven deadly sins (*Confessions VIII v*) as occurs also in text 34 below.

⁴² A devotional collection compiled by or for Jasper Fylloll, a London Dominican. On probable Syon connections see de Hamel, *Syon Abbey* pp. 119 and 134.

⁴³ Copied by John Morton: see A. I. Doyle, 'Reflections on Some Manuscripts of Nicholas Love's *Myrroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ*', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 14 (1983), 82-93. The form of confession is probably here intended for the use of Morton and his wife Juliana, for whom letters of fraternity with the Augustinian friars in York are recorded in the manuscript, fols 148v-49r: see further J. Hughes, 'Administration of Confession', p. 110.

⁴⁴ 'Administration of Confession', p. 156.

⁴⁵ The hand of this and text 34 is datable on palaeographical grounds to the period between 1470 and 1480.

⁴⁶ See note 41 above.

⁴⁷ See note 13 above.

⁴⁸ On the extent of the literacy implied in lay devotional reading and the possibility of the use of devotional writings by the illiterate, see: V. Gillespie, '**Lukynge in haly bukes: Lectio** in some Late Medieval Spiritual Miscellanies', *Spätmittelalterliche Geistliche Literatur in der Nationalsprache*, 2, *Analecta Cartusiana*, 106 (1984), 1-28; M. B. Parkes, 'The Literacy of the Laity', (revised version), *Scribes, Scripts and Readers* (London, 1991), pp. 275-98; Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 222-23.

⁴⁹ For the limited evidence for vows of chastity by layfolk while both spouses were still living, see: D. Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage, Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton, 1993), p. 9, n. 10; J. C. Ward, *English Noblewomen in the later Middle Ages* (London, 1992), p. 144.

⁵⁰ For an example of this process of adaptation working in the opposite direction, see the adaptation of Grosseteste's confessional questionnaire as a Latin model confession discussed by S. Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth* (Chapel Hill, 1967), p. 84 and p. 229, n. 65.

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⁵¹ The treatment of pride shows substantial variation from that in text 37, perhaps as a result of the conflation of different exemplars. However, it is also possible that the present manuscript shows an earlier stage in the development of this part of the text, from which the common ancestor of text 37 has been adapted, since it shows readings unique to both of the separate branches in the transmission of text 37 identified by Ogilvie-Thomson ('MS Longleat 29', pp. 234-37).

⁵² Printed in W. Wallace, *Life of St Edmund of Canterbury* (London, 1893), p. 362.

⁵³ Copied in a very similar hand but in a different ink and with different dimensions of written space and number of lines per page from the remainder of the manuscript, the Prologue to Passus XI of the A-Version of *Piers Plowman*, followed by Passus XII, line 297, to Passus XXIII of the C-Version: see G. Kane, *Piers Plowman: the A Version* (London, 1960), p. 6.

⁵⁴ See A. Hudson, 'A New Look at the Lay Folks' Catechism', *Viator*, 16 (1985), 243-58.

⁵⁵ Identified as a form of confession in both *Jolliffe* and *MWME*.

⁵⁶ 'Brotherton Collection MS 501: a Middle English Anthology Reconsidered', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 21 (1990), 141-65.

⁵⁷ See J. Boffey and J. J. Thompson, 'Anthologies and miscellanies: production and choice of texts', *Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1375-1475*, p. 297.

⁵⁸ See E. Wilson and I. Fenlon, *The Winchester Anthology: A Facsimile of British Library Additional Manuscript 60577 with an Introduction and List of Contents by Edward Wilson and an Account of the Music by Iain Fenlon* (London, 1981).

⁵⁹ See David Thomson, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Middle English Grammatical Texts* (New York, 1979), pp. 219-32.

⁶⁰ Printed from the first of these manuscripts in N. S. Baugh, *A Worcestershire Miscellany compiled by John Northwood c. 1400* (Philadelphia, 1956), pp. 87-95, and from the second in C. Horstman, *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole, an English Father of the Church, and his Followers* (London, 1895-1896), II, pp. 340-45; on the second and third manuscripts see also: A. I. Doyle, *The Vernon Manuscript: A Facsimile of Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Eng. Poet. a.1* (Cambridge, 1987); 'The Shaping of the Vernon and Simeon Manuscripts', *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, ed. by D. Pearsall (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 1-14. Texts 47, 48, and 49 are taken together in *Jolliffe, MWME, and IPMEP*.

⁶¹ See also text 29 above.

⁶² A collection of texts associated with the Hospital of St Mark at Bristol: see Ker, *Medieval Manuscripts*, II, pp. 203-04.

⁶³ N. Matthews, *Early Printed Books and Manuscripts in the City Reference Library*,

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Bristol (Bristol, 1879), p. 67.

⁶⁴ The subsequent three names, **Ihesus Maria Johannes**, regarded by Matthews as forming part of this text, may well be part of the heading of the subsequent text.

⁶⁵ A single leaf severely trimmed and showing the same dimensions as the following nineteen leaves containing poems by Lydgate, and thus probably brought together with them as a flyleaf prior to the existing binding with other miscellaneous material of various dates.

⁶⁶ Jolliffe takes the whole of fols 1r-45v as a single text, C.5.

⁶⁷ 'The Clensyng of Mannes Soule: An Introductory Study', *Southern Quarterly*, 13 (1975), 278-79.

⁶⁸ *A Catalogue of the Pepys Library at Magdalene College, Cambridge, V, Manuscripts, Part i: Medieval*, compiled by R. McKitterick and R. Beadle (Cambridge, 1992), p. 55.

⁶⁹ 'Introductory Study', p. 265, n. 5.