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## 1. Resisting the Fantasy of Identification in Robert Mannynge's Handlyng Synne



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## Resisting the Fantasy of Identification in Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne*

Robert Mannyng's well-known but seldom-studied early fourteenth-century penitential manual, *Handlyng Synne*, capitalizes on mainstream believers' taste for the sensational and the miraculous. Amidst his seemingly straightforward doctrinal statements, Mannyng weaves in some of the most vivid and entertaining exempla in Middle English literature, including, as I will discuss below, a crucifix coming to life in order to kiss a knight and the Eucharist transforming into the mutilated body of the baby Jesus on the altar. Given its often sensational content, it may be surprising that *Handlyng Synne* is, as I will argue, one of the earliest texts in Middle English to challenge the simplistic eucharistic ideal of perfect identification between Christ and believer.

Mannyng uses a quintessentially pastoral literary form—the penitential exemplum—in order to discuss the importance of the Eucharist to lay salvation.<sup>1</sup> As many scholars have noted, a surge in vernacular literary production

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1. In this way, my argument is similar to Joyce Coleman's reading of the manual insofar as she argues, on the basis of its interest in the Eucharist, that Mannyng used the text to garner donations for his own Gilbertine order. Joyce Coleman, "Handling Pilgrims: Robert Mannyng and the Gilbertine Cult," *Philological Quarterly* 81 (2002): 311–26.

Although *Handlyng Synne* is well known, the poem has attracted very little scholarship, and most of that is descriptive rather than analytic and interpretive. Fritz Kemmler, *Exempla in Context: A Historical and Critical Study of Robert Mannyng of Brunne's 'Handlyng Synne'* (Tübingen, DE: Narr, 1984); Derek Pearsall, *Old English and Middle English Poetry* (London: Routledge, 1977), 108; D. W. Robertson Jr., "The Cultural Tradition of Handlyng Synne," *Specu-*

in England arose following the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215; in response to the most well-known conciliar decree, *omnis utriusque sexus*, requiring yearly confession, many writers began to produce works of pastoralia designed to help lay readers prepare for confession by encouraging self-examination and teaching the basics of the Christian faith.<sup>2</sup> And so, beginning in the late thirteenth century, Middle English texts begin to appear that discuss the Eucharist in ways ranging from sensational to thoughtful.<sup>3</sup> Mannyng's text is a particularly sophisticated example of such early English pastoralia.

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lum 22 (1947): 162–85; R. A. Shoaf, “Mutatio Amoris: ‘Penitentia’ and the Form of the Book of the Duchess,” *Genre* 14 (1981): 163–89. A notable exception is Mark Miller, “Displaced Souls, Idle Talk, Spectacular Scenes: Handlyng Synne and the Perspective of Agency,” *Speculum* 71 (1996): 606–32.

Some scholars have implicitly acknowledged *Handlyng Synne's* textual complexity but have limited their discussions to Mannyng's seven “original” exempla, the exempla that do not appear in Mannyng's source, the thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman *Manuel des Pechiez*. Scholarship that focuses on the original exempla includes John M. Ganim, “The Devil's Writing Lesson,” in *Oral Poetics in Middle English Poetry*, ed. Mark C. Amodio with Sarah Gray Miller (New York: Garland, 1994), 109–23; Carl Lindahl, “The Re-Oralized Legends of Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne*,” *Contemporary Legend* 2 (1999): 34–62; Anne M. Scott, “For lewed men y vndyr toke on englyssh tonge to make this boken: *Handlyng Synne* and English Didactic Writing for the Laity” in *What Nature Does Not Teach: Didactic Literature in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods*, ed. Juanita Feros Ruys (Turnhout, BE: Brepols, 2008), 377–400.

2. Leonard E. Boyle, “The Fourth Lateran Council and Manuals of Popular Theology,” *The Popular Literature of Medieval England*, ed. Thomas J. Heffernan (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 30–43; Alastair Minnis, “1215–1349: Culture and History” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Mysticism*, ed. Vincent Gillespie and Samuel Fanous (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011), 69–89. Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1977).

3. Many medievalists incorrectly date the serious discussion of eucharistic theology in the vernacular to the last third of the fourteenth century with the rise of Wyclif and the Lollard movement. For example, Margaret Aston even goes so far as to state that, prior to the end of the fourteenth century, the discussion of the doctrine of the Eucharist in the vernacular was “as impossible as it had seemed undesirable.” However, some of the texts that we know definitively to have been produced before the emergence of the Lollards include: *The Southern Passion* (c. 1275–1285), the *Lay Folks Mass Book* (late thirteenth century), William of Shoreham's “De Septem Sacramentis” (early fourteenth century), and *Meditations on the Supper of our Lord* (c. 1315–1330). Margaret Aston, “Wyclif and the Vernacular” in *From Ockham to Wyclif*, ed. Anne Hudson and Michael Wilks, *Studies in Church History*, Subsidia 5 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 303. Guides to the mass include F. J. Furnivall, ed., “How to Hear Mass,” in *The Minor Poems of the Vernon Manuscript, Part 2*. EETS o.s. 117 (London: Kegan Paul, 1901), 493–511; *The Lay Folks Mass Book*, ed. Thomas Frederick Simmons, EETS o.s. 71 (London: Oxford UP, 1968). For lyrics, see Rossell Hope Robbins, “Levation Prayers in Middle English Verse,” *Modern Philology* 39 (1942): 131–46. Passion meditations include *Meditations on the Supper of our Lord*, and *the Hours of the Passion*, ed. J. Meadows Cowper, EETS o.s. 60 (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1875); *The Southern Passion*, ed. Beatrice Daw Brown, EETS o.s. 169 (London: Oxford UP, 1927);

Throughout *Handlyng Synne's* doctrine and exempla, Mannyng presents the eucharistic sacrifice as the solution to all sorts of predicaments—from mining accidents to purgatory—and argues that this sacrifice is essential to lay devotion and salvation.<sup>4</sup> By engaging with both scholastic and vernacular discourses on the nature of Christ's presence in the host, Mannyng reveals that the exemplum genre itself reflects and informs his understanding of the Eucharist. Rather than simply illustrate moral principles, exemplary narratives persuade by demanding audience identification. However, such identification can only ever be partial and Mannyng exploits this aspect of the exemplum in order to argue that both the Eucharist and the exemplum center on failed identification, particularly the failure of the lay reader to identify with the divine. Although popular belief and vernacular narratives often imply that the Eucharist offers an opportunity for individual union with Christ, for Mannyng, the fleeting union with Christ that the Eucharist offers believers simultaneously demands they seek a deeper devotion through recognition of their own distance from the divine.

I offer my argument in four stages. First, I show how Mannyng's decision to write about the Eucharist in vernacular narrative reflects his particular interest in exploring the fraught nature of the laity's access to the divine. Next, I place Mannyng's text in the context of pre-fourteenth-century scholastic debates about the Real Presence, debates that I argue reveal an internal contradiction: although medieval theologians insisted that Christ's presence in the consecrated host was physical and immediate, at the same time they also suggested that that very presence had to be perceived through some form of mediation, whether that mediation was the appearance of the host or doctrines that told believers what they ought to think when they saw the host elevated at Mass. I then contrast this scholastic tradition with later medieval vernacular texts and lay devotional practices that encouraged lay believers to imagine the Eucharist as providing direct contact with Christ's suffering, sacrificial body. Finally, drawing primarily on four of Mannyng's exempla, I show that *Handlyng Synne* uses the exemplum genre to bridge the scholastic and vernacular discourses on the Eucharist and invites its lay readers to reflect on the roles of both mediation and physical presence in their worship of the divine.

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William of Shoreham, "De Septem Sacramentis," in *The Poems of William of Shoreham*, ed. M. Konrath, EETS e.s. 86 (London: Kegan Paul, 1902), 1–78.

4. It is worth noting that, although the predicaments may vary drastically, the solution is often the same mundane one. Family members and friends must pay for masses in order to have their loved one released, whether from purgatory or a collapsed mine.

## VERNACULAR NARRATIVE AND LAY SALVATION

Mannyng writes *Handlyng Synne* in English because he regards lay salvation as important and the laity's theological education as vital to that salvation; one of the primary ways in which he explores this issue of lay access to the divine is through an insistent focus on the Eucharist—a sacrament that he believes both invites and refuses direct contact with Christ. *Handlyng Synne* aims to engage its primarily lay audience in theological thought through its use of both narrative and the vernacular, two aspects of the text that Mannyng views as interdependent. By choosing to translate the thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman *Manuel des Pechiez* into the vernacular, Mannyng imagines an uneducated lay English audience that is distinctive by virtue of its thirst for narrative entertainment. For Mannyng, English is not only the language of the people but also the language of narrative.<sup>5</sup> He begins *Handlyng Synne* by presenting lay piety as inadequate, a problem in which vernacular narrative plays an important role. His prologue laments that the laity are unknowingly falling into sin for two distinct reasons: doctrinal texts are not widely available in the vernacular and lay people prefer entertaining tales to sermons. He therefore ambitiously sets out to remedy the situation:

For lewed men y vndyr toke  
 On englyssh tonge to make þis boke,  
 For many beyn of swyche manere  
 Þat talys & rymys wyle bleþly here  
 Yn gamys, yn festys, & at þe ale.

(43–47)<sup>6</sup>

By interspersing penitential doctrine with entertaining exempla, he hopes that his text will compete with popular forms of entertainment. Instead of insisting that his lay readers must entirely renounce their old habits, such

5. As Anne Scott notes, *Handlyng Synne* is a “self-consciously English text.” Scott, “For lewed men,” 383. As recent scholarship on vernacular theory has shown, a medieval English author's decision to write in the vernacular is not just an indicator of that author's desire to communicate across the range of professions and social classes; many medieval writers argued that English had a particular symbolic value and unique method of creating meaning. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor, and Ruth Evans, eds., *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280–1520* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1999). On the relationship between Middle English and Anglo-Norman, see Nicholas Watson and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, “The French of England: The *Compileison, Ancrene Wisse*, and the idea of Anglo-Norman,” *Journal of Romance Studies* 4 (2004): 35–58.

6. All quotations of *Handlyng Synne* are taken from: Robert Mannyng of Brunne, *Handlyng Synne*, ed. Idelle Sullens (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1983).

as storytelling, *Handlyng Synne* asks them to integrate greater piety into the practices in which they already engage. Although Mannyng aims to entertain, he does not use the literary form of the exemplum in order to simplify his doctrine. On the contrary: the exemplum demands that readers recognize themselves in the narratives' characters. Mannyng uses this generic feature in order to make his complex discussions of theology personally relevant to his lay readers. Through this complex and strategic use of exempla, *Handlyng Synne* participates in what Ralph Hanna has recently identified as an early fourteenth-century tradition of vernacular texts that conceive of their audience as "responsible religious agents."<sup>7</sup>

Mannyng consciously writes in the vernacular specifically for the laity. Recognizing that there are not enough religious texts available to lay readers, he writes *Handlyng Synne* in order to enrich lay piety and make lay salvation possible. To the best of our knowledge, the Gilbertine canon Robert Mannyng of Brunne only produced two written works, both of which are highly ambitious vernacular projects: the 12,638-line *Handlyng Synne* begun in 1303 and *The Chronicle*, a 24,304-line history of England completed in 1338. Mannyng composes both his texts "not for þe lerid bot for þe lewed."<sup>8</sup> Many scholars have suggested various immediate audiences for *Handlyng Synne*: the Gilbertine novices, the lay brothers, pilgrims, preachers, wealthy patrons, the lower classes, or parish congregations.<sup>9</sup> Although we will probably never know for certain, it is clear that he imagines a broad readership, a readership that only understands English and that engages in secular distractions, such as going to taverns and attending jousts. He directs particular exempla to people who would likely not have been in holy orders, such as parents and wives. Given the lack of exempla aimed solely at exhorting proper behavior for priests and canons, it is highly unlikely that Mannyng's primary audience was would-be Gilbertine canons unless his goal was to provide them with material for preaching to the laity. It is therefore clear from Mannyng's discussions of secular affairs and lay modes of worship that the 'lewed' readership he imagines was primarily the laity.

One of the primary ways in which *Handlyng Synne* grapples with the problem of lay access to the divine is through its focus on the Eucharist. The

7. Ralph Hanna, *London Literature, 1300–1380* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), 212.

8. Robert Mannyng of Brunne, *The Chronicle*, ed. Idelle Sullens (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1996), 91.

9. Coleman, "Handling Pilgrims"; Ruth Crosby, "Robert Mannyng of Brunne: A New Biography," *PMLA* 57 (1942): 15–28; Kate Greenspan, "Lessons for the Priest, Lessons for the People: Robert Mannyng of Brunne's Audiences for *Handlyng Synne*," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 21 (2005): 109–21; Lindahl, "Re-Oralized Legends"; Idelle Sullens, "Introduction," in *The Chronicle* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1996), 17.

Eucharist is central to *Handlyng Synne*; the section devoted to the Eucharist is roughly one thousand lines of the twelve-thousand-line poem. One of the most significant changes Mannyng made when translating the *Manuel des Pechiez* was to double the length of the section on the sacraments, with the majority of the additions occurring in the section on the Eucharist.<sup>10</sup> Mannyng's text has discrete sections—the Ten Commandments, the Seven Deadly Sins, sacrilege, the Seven Sacraments, and confession—but Mannyng's discussion of the Mass's power permeates the other sections of the poem, as well. In one exemplum, included under the section on sacrilege, a deacon sees the Holy Spirit descend onto the altar in the form of a dove during the consecration (8820). In the section on covetousness, an exemplum condemns executors whose chief fault is neglecting to have Masses said for the dead man's soul (1179–80). Many exempla encourage the laity to purchase and participate in Masses for their loved ones because the Eucharist has the power to free slaves, rescue buried miners, send souls to heaven, and release prisoners. Mannyng examines how the transformation of the host into the body and blood of Christ particularly benefits the laity through its assurance of the immediate presence of the divine.

Though Mannyng participates in an already vigorous vernacular discourse on the Eucharist, his treatment of the sacrament is distinctive because of his emphasis on a paradoxical relationship between the Eucharist and the laity: the Eucharist promises direct contact with the body of Christ, but the laity must be cautious to approach it precisely because of the immediate contact it provides. In his prologue, Mannyng presents sin as something tangible, something that each believer literally handles “wyþ honde” (83). According to Mannyng, regardless of one's best intentions, one sins every day. The good Christian must not deny his sinful nature but instead learn to handle his sins properly through penance. For the laity, the Eucharist, in contrast to penance, was a sacrament that was completely untouchable. Since lay people typically only received the host once a year at Easter, the Eucharist was often an entirely visual experience. By the Carolingian period, the church began anointing priests' hands at ordinations and only the priest's specially anointed hands

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10. Mannyng increases the length of this section from roughly 869 lines to 1,809 lines. He increases the length of the subsection on the Eucharist from roughly 415 lines to 919 lines. These observations are based on my own examination of the two manuscripts of the *Manuel* that are generally thought to most closely resemble the texts from which Mannyng translated: London, British Library, MS Harley 273 and London, British Library, MS Harley 4657. E. J. Arnould also notes Mannyng's expansion of the section on the sacraments. See E. J. Arnould, *Le Manuel des Péchés: Étude de Littérature Religieuse Anglo-Normande* (Paris: Librairie E. Droz, 1940), 298.

ever touched the host.<sup>11</sup> When a lay person did receive the host, he had to receive it directly in his mouth because his hands were not worthy. Mannyng highlights this intangibility in his introduction to his section on the Eucharist. Mannyng prays, “Forȝyue me to day, lord, my synne, / Þat y þys wrþy sacrament mowe begynne, / And wrshypfully þer of to speke / Þat we neure þe beleue breke” (9903–6). This trepidation does not appear in the introductions to any of the other sections of *Handlyng Synne*. Mannyng suggests that it is dangerous to approach the Eucharist, even if only through speech. Although the Eucharist ostensibly brings Christ’s body into close contact with the faithful by bringing it down to earth in the form of bread, the Eucharist does not ultimately make Christ’s presence into something that the laity could ever approach without fear, let alone dare to handle. By asking his readers to contemplate the Eucharist, Mannyng also asks them to contemplate this paradoxical intangibility of Christ.

## MEDIATION AND EUCHARISTIC THEOLOGY

In order to examine how Mannyng negotiates this disjunction between Christ’s immediate physical presence in the Eucharist and his divine intangibility, it is essential to explore at some length the specific historical and theological framework from which his thinking about the Eucharist arose and in which he directly engages: theological definitions of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.<sup>12</sup> From the early Middle Ages on, even Latin theological treatments of the Eucharist struggled to explain this apparent conflict. By the fourteenth century, theologians often attempted to overcome the paradox by relying on the idea that the human experience of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist must always be mediated: both in the sense that Christ’s physical presence can only be perceived indirectly through the physical appearance of bread and in the sense that individual believers ought to submit to the church hierarchy’s definition of transubstantiation rather than rely on their own intellects. This strategy only masked the paradoxical nature of Christ’s presence.

The Eucharist was a highly volatile subject throughout the Middle Ages, but virtually every theologian who engaged in debates about the Eucha-

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11. Mitchell, *Cult and Controversy*, 66–128. See also Ronald Knox, “Finding the Law: Developments in Canon Law during the Gregorian Reform,” *Studi Gregoriani* 9 (1972): 419–66.

12. Since records of Gilbertine libraries and education are few, it is difficult to define precisely the nature of Mannyng’s theological training and knowledge. However, the theologians whom I discuss in this overview were highly influential figures, and it is almost a certainty that Mannyng would have been familiar with their versions of eucharistic theology.



rist acknowledged the centrality of the sacrament to Christian worship and Christian life. From the eleventh to the early fourteenth century, the belief that Christ was truly present in the Eucharist was required for orthodoxy; the recognition of Christ's "Real Presence" in the host was not up for debate. However, what became a focus of debate was what exactly constitutes a "real" presence: What did it mean to say that Christ was present in a piece of bread when it was impossible to taste, touch, smell, or see him? The precise definition of Christ's Real Presence in the Eucharist was highly important because the very definition of the relationship between humanity and the divine was at stake. If Christ was physically present in the host, then there was the distinct possibility that humans had the power to harm Christ's body by eating it. If Christ was only spiritually present in the host, then it was possible that Christ lied when he said, "This is my body," during the Last Supper. Many theologians struggled to find ways to describe Christ's presence that made him accessible without being vulnerable, and omnipotent without being unapproachable.

As theologians became more Ambrosian in their understandings of the Eucharist by focusing on the literal physical presence of Christ's historical body in the host, they found it increasingly challenging to explain how Christ's body could remain impassible in the consecrated host.<sup>13</sup> As I discussed in my introduction, the first major victory for the Ambrosian understanding of the eucharistic presence came during the Berengarian controversy in the eleventh century; however, this victory also resulted in theological models that threatened to undermine Christ's impassibility. This threat arose from the oath that Berengar was forced to sign, which affirmed that "the bread and wine which are placed on the altar are, after consecration, not only a sacrament, but are the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. And they are sensibly, not only in a sacrament, but in truth, handled and broken in the hands of the priest, and crushed by the teeth of the faithful."<sup>14</sup> Berengar's oath was widely accepted as a statement of orthodoxy, but the literal and cannibalistic nature of it suggested the disturbing possibility that believers have the power to literally tear Christ apart during the Mass.<sup>15</sup> The oath implies that Christ

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13. On the distinction between Ambrosian and Augustinian approaches, see my introduction.

14. "panem et uinum, que in altari ponuntur, post consecrationem non solum sacramentum, sed etiam uerum corpus et sanguinem Domini nostri Iesu Christi esse, et sensualiter, non solum sacramento, sed in ueritate, manibus sacerdotum tractari, frangi, et fidelium dentibus atteri." Original and translation from: Levy, *John Wyclif*, 139.

15. Indeed, the oath was so widely accepted as orthodox that it was included in the twelfth-century collection of canon law, the *Decretum Gratiani*. On the legacy of the oath, see Gary Macy, "The Theological Fate of Berengar's Oath of 1059: Interpreting a Blunder Become Tradition," in *Treasures from the Storeroom: Medieval Religion and the Eucharist* (Collegeville, MN:

is a vulnerable, weak God, powerless against the actions of his subjects, and undermines the long-accepted argument that Christ is impassible—unchanging and indestructible—in the host. Unwilling to accept this description of Christ's body as completely accessible and vulnerable to every believer, many major theologians, ranging from Alger of Liège to Peter Lombard, scrambled to find ways both to affirm the orthodoxy of Berengar's oath and to confirm the impassibility of Christ's body in the Eucharist.<sup>16</sup> As a result of the controversy, theologians often struggled with the challenge of understanding how Christ could be really present in the host and still not be subject to the control of the faithful.<sup>17</sup>

At the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, the church began narrowing the definition of Christ's eucharistic presence and affirmed the necessity of priestly mediation to an experience of that presence. The Council's first canon, *Firmiter*, used the term *transubstantiatio* to describe the change that the bread undergoes during the consecration, a change that it argued could only be effected by a duly ordained priest. At the time, "transubstantiation" had been in use for about seventy years, but there was no agreement on the precise meaning of the term; it could encompass a whole range of explanations for the nature of eucharistic transformation.<sup>18</sup> Indeed Pope Innocent III, in his own writings on the Eucharist, never posited the precise nature of eucharistic transformation as a matter of faith.<sup>19</sup> Instead, he had called the Council partly in response to the Cathar and Waldensian heresies, heresies that contested the power structure of the church and the efficacy of the sacraments. As such, the Council never set out to define the precise nature of the eucharistic presence but only to affirm that there was some sort of eucharistic presence in the first place. What was important to the Council was asserting that believers could not experience that presence without the mediation of church authority.

In contrast to Lateran IV, Thomas Aquinas had a much more rigid understanding of transubstantiation, and his definition helped to shape the Eucharist into a sacrament that could only be understood through submission to church authority. When he wrote the *Summa Theologiae* in the later thirteenth century, Aquinas defined the transformation of the host into the body of Christ in a way that was to become the orthodox understanding of the

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Liturgical Press, 1999), 36–58. Originally published in *Interpreting Tradition: The Art of Theological Reflection*, ed. Jane Kopas (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), 27–38.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Macy, *Theologies of the Eucharist*, 69.

18. Goering, "Invention of Transubstantiation," 147–70; Macy, "Dogma of Transubstantiation," 81–120.

19. Levy, *John Wyclif*, 172–75.

Eucharist for centuries. He used the term *transubstantiatio* in a very specific way to describe the transmutation of the host into Christ, and he proclaimed that all other definitions of the eucharistic transformation were heterodox. Aquinas based his definition of transubstantiation on Aristotelian metaphysics. According to Aquinas, the process of eucharistic conversion is properly called “transubstantiation,” and he used the documents of Lateran IV as evidence for the support of his particular definition.<sup>20</sup> During this process, the accidents of the bread and wine stay the same, but their substance is transformed into the body and blood of Christ, and none of the substance of the bread and wine remains. He argues that “there is no other way in which the body of Christ can begin to be in this sacrament except through the substance of the bread being changed into it.”<sup>21</sup> Only transubstantiation can account for Christ’s presence, and therefore the process of substantial conversion is essential to a belief in Christ’s real presence. At the time that Aquinas proposed the model of conversion, there were two rival models to explain the real presence: annihilation and consubstantiation. The annihilation model suggested that the substance of the bread was destroyed and then replaced by the substance of Christ. Consubstantiation was the belief that the substance of Christ coexisted with the substance of the bread. Prior to the work of Aquinas, all three models could be classified as transubstantiation. Aquinas considered consubstantiation and annihilation both heretical and impossible.

After Aquinas, the parameters of orthodox eucharistic belief began to get much narrower and more rigid. Aquinas’s understanding of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist is distinctly Ambrosian in the sense that it focuses on the Eucharist as an object that is consecrated rather than a communal event to be celebrated. However, Aquinas does not conceive of the Eucharist in a graphic, physical sense. Instead, his use of Aristotle’s definition of “substance” allows him to conceive of Christ’s presence as both a physical reality and something that is completely beyond the senses. Drawing on both Augustine and a reinterpretation of Berengar’s oath, Aquinas argues that the faithful do not physically chew Christ’s body; they chew only the accidents underneath which Christ is really present.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, Christ remains impassible. Aquinas argues that, when believers claim to see a child or a piece of bloody flesh in place of the host, such visions are not reality but merely representations of the truth.

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20. Levy, *John Wyclif*, 182–90.

21. “relinquitur quod non possit aliter corpus Christi incipere esse de novo in hoc sacramento nisi per conversionem substantiae panis in ipsum.” Latin text and English translation are taken from Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, v. 58, 62–63 (3a.75, 2). All citations of the *ST* are from volumes 58 and 59.

22. *ST* 3a.77, 7

As Steven Justice explains, “Beholders may feel they now see Christ’s body unmediated, but in fact, a new layer of mediation has been added: the appearance of bread still conceals the substance of Christ’s body but now is itself concealed under the miraculous apparition.”<sup>23</sup> Aquinas claims that one can only see Christ’s natural form in heaven and, therefore, God forms such visions in the eye of the beholder, and they do not take place in the sacrament itself.<sup>24</sup> God does not intend for humans to have an unmediated view of the body of Christ; such a connection with God can only take place in the afterlife. Aquinas contends that sacraments correspond to faith and faith, by nature, has to do with unseen realities.<sup>25</sup> Christ is really, physically, substantially present in the Eucharist but one can only sense that presence through the intellect and through faith, both of which ought to be dependent upon official church doctrine.

After Aquinas, several theologians—notably including Duns Scotus and later William of Ockham and Thomas of Strasbourg—began to argue that the only correct way to understand the eucharistic presence was through the mediation of church authority.<sup>26</sup> At the turn of the fourteenth century, the Franciscan theologian Duns Scotus presented a view on the Eucharist that challenged the role of human reason in theology by suggesting that, although transubstantiation was illogical, it must be the true explanation of the eucharistic transformation because the church had decreed it to be so. Scotus contradicted Aquinas and argued that transubstantiation was not the only possible explanation for the eucharistic presence. In fact, transubstantiation was not even particularly logical. According to Scotus, consubstantiation was the simplest and most scripturally sound explanation. Failing that, even annihilation was less complicated and therefore more logical. But Scotus ultimately decided that transubstantiation was the only orthodox belief with regard to the eucharistic presence because he interpreted the *Firmiter* canon of the Fourth Lateran Council as endorsing Aquinas’s definition of transubstantiation as the only possible explanation of the Real Presence.<sup>27</sup> To explain why the church would accept transubstantiation as dogma when the words of scripture could be satisfied in a simpler and apparently truer way, Scotus argues: “I reply that Scripture is expounded by the same Spirit by which it was created; and so we

23. Steven Justice, “Eucharistic Miracle and Eucharistic Doubt,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 42 (2012): 316.

24. *ST* 3a.76, 8.

25. *ST* 3a.75, 1.

26. McCue, “Doctrine of Transubstantiation,” 403–7.

27. David Burr, *Eucharistic Presence and Conversion in Late Thirteenth-Century Franciscan Thought* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1984), 76–98; Levy, *John Wyclif*, 191–98; McCue, “Doctrine of Transubstantiation,” 403–7.

must suppose that the Catholic Church has expounded these matters by the same Spirit by which the faith is handed on to us, taught, that is, by the Spirit of truth, and has chosen *this* understanding of things because this is the true understanding.”<sup>28</sup> For Scotus, the doctrine of transubstantiation became more a question of the authority of the postapostolic church than of an understanding of the Eucharist. Essentially, he conceded that the dogma had no purpose and no support other than the authority of the church. Aquinas’s theology emphasized that all human knowledge begins with sense perception, but Scotus found that he could only agree with Aquinas’s explanation of the eucharistic presence by suspending his own knowledge in favor of church authority. After Scotus, it became common for theologians to appeal to Lateran IV as the ultimate authority on the mode of eucharistic change.<sup>29</sup>

At the beginning of the fourteenth century, the mode of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist became a touchstone for orthodoxy not because alternate beliefs indicated a misunderstanding of the nature of God but because they indicated an unwillingness to submit to the will of the church. Even for the scholastics, mediation became an intrinsic part of the experience of the Eucharist because nothing an individual possessed—from physical sense to the intellect—could help one understand Christ’s presence. For Scotus and those that followed him, an understanding of the Eucharist necessitated a recognition that the Eucharist was actually beyond any individual’s understanding; the only true understanding came from the authority of the church.

## VERNACULAR NARRATIVE AND CHRIST’S SACRIFICIAL BODY

In contrast to late medieval scholasticism, which defined eucharistic reception as a mediated experience of Christ’s presence, the vernacular narratives about the Eucharist increasingly centered on physical contact and identification with Christ’s sacrificial, suffering body. As the theologians’ definitions of the Eucharist became more Ambrosian, the structure of the Mass itself shifted away from Augustine’s understanding of the Eucharist as a celebration of the entire Christian community to an Ambrosian understanding of the Eucha-

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28. “dico, quod eo spiritu expositae sunt Scripturae, quo conditae. Et ita supponendum est, quo Ecclesia Catholica eo Spiritu exposuit, quo tradita est nobis fides, Spiritu scilicet veritatis docta, et idea hunc intellectum eligit, quia verus est.” Latin text and translation are from McCue, “Doctrine of Transubstantiation,” 406–7.

29. Macy, “Dogma of Transubstantiation”; McCue, “Doctrine of Transubstantiation,” 411–12.

rist as sacred object. Over the course of the Middle Ages, the laity became estranged from the action of the Mass.<sup>30</sup> During the liturgy, they prayed silently and had no spoken responses to make. Greater attention to the Real Presence ultimately led to the withdrawal of the cup from the laity, largely out of fears of spillage.<sup>31</sup> In addition, lay reception of the host typically occurred only once a year at Easter, because, from a clerical perspective, limiting the number of times that lay people received the Eucharist both shielded the laity from further sin and protected the host from any contamination.<sup>32</sup> The canon of the Mass was often inaudible to the laity and in a language they did not understand; it was sometimes not even a particularly clear visual experience since screens obscured the high altar.<sup>33</sup> For the laity, the Mass was typically an experience of various barriers between Christ's body and oneself, not the least of which was a doctrine of transubstantiation that told believers that their physical senses were not to be believed.

The barriers that clerics erected between the laity and the consecrated host seem to have heightened the lay desire to see Christ in the host and increased the importance of Christ's physical presence to lay devotion. Alongside the theologians' development of complex theologies of the Real Presence, the laity developed an increasingly fervent cult of the Eucharist that reached its height in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>34</sup> In the first decade of the thirteenth century, in order to prevent the laity from engaging in idolatry by adoring an unconsecrated host, church officials decreed that the host ought to be hidden until just after the consecration, when it should be elevated to be seen and worshipped by the congregation.<sup>35</sup> Since they received the host so infrequently, the elevation quickly became the height of the Mass for many lay people. By the thirteenth century, we find stories of people attending Mass only to see the moment of elevation.<sup>36</sup> Seeing the host was understood as a form of reception, a form that did not involve the risk of mortal sin.

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30. John Harper, *The Forms and Orders of the Western Liturgy: From the Tenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 40–41; Joseph A. Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development*, trans. Francis A. Brunner, vol. 1 (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1951), 117.

31. Mitchell, *Cult and Controversy*; Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 72.

32. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 73.

33. John Bossy, "The Mass as a Social Institution, 1200–1700," *Past and Present* 100 (1983): 29–61; Harper, *Forms and Orders*, 119.

34. J. I. Catto, "John Wyclif and the Cult of the Eucharist," in *The Bible in the Medieval World: Essays in Memory of Beryl Smalley*, ed. Katherine Walsh and Diana Wood, *Studies in Church History*, Subsidia 4 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 269–86.

35. V. L. Kennedy, "The Moment of Consecration and the Elevation of the Host," *Medieval Studies* 6 (1944): 121–50.

36. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast*, 55.

Narratives that insisted on the literal presence came to substitute for hands-on participation in the liturgy. In sermon collections and legendaries, miracle tales abounded that assured believers that Christ's body was literally physically present in the consecrated host and that they were therefore in direct contact with Christ when they saw it.<sup>37</sup> Vernacular descriptions of the Eucharist in late medieval sermons and manuals of religious instruction typically favored direct modes of devotion, preferring to promise believers a direct visual encounter with Christ.<sup>38</sup> For example, the thirteenth-century *Lay Folks Mass Book* tells its readers to imagine Christ's crucifixion during the consecration and instructs them to behold the moment of elevation "for þat is he þat iudas salde, / and sithen was scourged & don on rode, / and for mankynde þere shad his blode."<sup>39</sup> Likewise, in an early fourteenth-century poem, William of Shoreham urges his readers to believe that, in the host, "þat hys swete ihesu cryst / Ine flesche and eke ine bloude, / þat þolede pyne and passoun, / And diap opone þe roude."<sup>40</sup> Such texts invite worshippers to imagine the sight of the Eucharist as a personal vision of Calvary. Though these texts, like *Handlyng Synne*, often highlight alienation from the divine alongside identification with it, they do suggest that worshippers should strive to identify with Christ on an intense emotional level.

From the thirteenth century until the end of the Middle Ages, many vernacular texts—especially guides to the Mass, prayers in books of hours, and sermon collections—highlighted Christ's immediacy by describing the Eucharist itself in the language of blood sacrifice.<sup>41</sup> However, such direct access to

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37. For a comprehensive study of the various types of eucharistic miracles and the texts in which they appear, see Peter Browe, *Die Eucharistischen Wunder des Mittelalters* (Breslau: Verlag Müller & Seiffert, 1938).

38. As is well known, the late Middle Ages witnessed a new focus on Christ's Passion. The Franciscans in particular encouraged lay affective devotion through writings and teachings that suggested that people could bypass complex theology and Latin learning through personal identification with the wounded, suffering Christ. For the Franciscans, the pain and suffering of Christ was a devotional tool perfectly suited to the laity's desire to understand and personally engage in the Christian faith. Late medieval Passion devotion and eucharistic devotion were virtually indistinguishable because both focused so intently on imagining Christ's suffering body. R. N. Swanson, "Passion and Practice: the Social and Ecclesiastical Implications of Passion Devotion in the Late Middle Ages," in *The Broken Body: Passion Devotion in Late-Medieval Culture*, ed. A. A. MacDonald et al. (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1998), 1–30.

39. *Lay Folks Mass Book*, B.407–9.

40. William of Shoreham, "De Septem Sacramentis," 25.

41. Even one of the most popular verses for vernacular doctrinal instruction on the Eucharist, which begins with the line "Hyt semes quite and is red," implies a bloody sacrifice by imagining Christ's true body as red and bloody rather than whole and impassible. Rossell Hope Robbins, "Popular Prayers in Middle English Verse," *Modern Philology* 36 (1939): 344. A few illustrative examples of the sacrificial language in vernacular treatments of the Eucharist include the

Christ's body is necessarily mediated by the text itself. Such devotional literature often invited its readers to imagine the host as a particularly gory, bleeding Christ in order that they might more fully understand the Eucharist. Across Europe, miracle tales and sermon exempla abounded in which hosts bled or turned into fingers, and such tales frequently encouraged worshippers to pity Christ by portraying him as a suffering, helpless infant, rather than a willing adult victim.<sup>42</sup> Since such devotional literature was almost always written by clerics and—especially in the case of sermon collections—written for priests as a resource for preaching to the laity, these texts do not provide definitive proof that the laity themselves were primarily interested in descriptions of sacrifice. However, the dominance of sacrificial imagery in these texts certainly indicates that clerical authors perceived that such imagery was or should be one of the laity's preferred ways of thinking about the Eucharist.

The interest in sacrifice is typically much more pronounced and literal-minded in texts intended for the laity than it is in the works of most medieval theologians. Most theologians tended to view Christ's sacrifice on the cross as unique and the Eucharist as a sacrifice in a commemorative and representative sense. Along with Aquinas, most theologians claimed that the "Eucharist is at once a sacrifice and a sacrament."<sup>43</sup> However, they rarely elaborated on its sacrificial nature.<sup>44</sup> In contrast, many sermon exempla implied that the Eucharist was an actual repetition of Christ's sacrifice. For example, in a late-fourteenth/early-fifteenth-century sermon on the Eucharist, John Mirk relates two bloody exempla: one in which the host begins to bleed profusely and one in which it turns into a chunk of flesh.<sup>45</sup> Although he never says that Christ is mutilated on the altar, his narratives persuade his audience by suggesting exactly that. Such tales imply that priests reperform Christ's slaughter at every

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following: Carl Horstmann, ed., "De Festo Corporis Cristi," in *Minor Poems*, 168–97; Robbins, "Levation Prayers," 138–39; Siegfried Wenzel, ed., *Verses in Sermons: Fasciculus morum and its Middle English poems* (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy, 1978), 162. For a more comprehensive treatment of the sacrificial language associated with the Mass, see Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 302–10.

42. Examples of such widely circulated tales and exempla can be found in such texts as Arnulf of Liège's fourteenth-century *Alphabetum Narrationum* and Caesarius of Heisterbach's thirteenth-century *Dialogus Miraculorum*. Miri Rubin provides a comprehensive examination of collections of eucharistic miracle tales and exempla. See Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 108–29.

43. "hoc sacramentum simul est sacrificium et sacramentum." *ST* 3a.79, 5.

44. Francis Clark, *Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Reformation* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1960), 225; P. J. Fitzpatrick, "On Eucharistic Sacrifice in the Middle Ages," in *Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology*, ed. S. W. Sykes (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990), 129–56; Jungmann, *Mass of the Roman Rite*, 181–82.

45. John Mirk, "De Solempnitare Corporis Cristi," in *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies*, ed. Theodor Erbe, EETS e.s. 96 (London: Kegan Paul, 1905), 168–75.



Mass and sacrifice Christ in much the same way that Old Testament priests sacrificed animals. Most medieval theologians—from Thomas Aquinas to Nicholas of Cusa—did not accept that bloody visions at the consecration were visions of reality,<sup>46</sup> but it was tales of such bloody visions and the promise of direct contact with Christ’s sacrificial body that seem to have fueled much of the popular desire for the Eucharist.

Although there was no official doctrine that explicitly claimed that the Mass was a literal blood sacrifice, the church tacitly encouraged the laity to hold such a view by urging them to buy Masses. It depicted the offering of Masses as a good work that worked like a repeatable blood sacrifice in the sense that its repetition automatically exerted an influence on God. The practice of paying priests to offer Masses as sacrifices in satisfaction for sins was one of the most significant ways in which the laity could participate in the Mass. Indeed, the lay desire to offer the Mass as a sacrifice is fundamental to the way in which we understand religious practices of the Middle Ages. As John Bossy argues, “The devotion, theology, liturgy, architecture, finances, social structure and institutions of late medieval Christianity are inconceivable without the assumption that the friends and relations of the souls in purgatory had an absolute obligation to procure their release, above all by having masses said for them.”<sup>47</sup> The Mass as sacrifice was integral to lay medieval piety, and vernacular texts often depict that sacrifice in terms of a visual and affective identification with the mutilated body of Christ.

### MANNYNG’S EUCHARISTIC EXEMPLA

In *Handlyng Synne*, Mannyng recognizes the disjunctions between and within the scholastic understanding of the Eucharist as mediated and the apparent lay desire for Christ’s immediate presence. He engages with both these discourses in his effort to show how Christ’s intangibility in the host ought to lead the lay believer to personal reform. Although Mannyng does conceive of the host as an object that ought to be worshipped, he argues that Christ’s mediated presence in the host should encourage believers to live more virtuous Christian lives within their own immediate communities.

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46. One notable exception is Duns Scotus, but even the majority of Franciscans tended to agree with Aquinas. Caroline Walker Bynum, “Seeing and Seeing Beyond: The Mass of St. Gregory in the Fifteenth Century,” in *The Mind’s Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouché (Princeton, NJ: Department of Art and Archaeology, 2006), 208–40.

47. Bossy, “Mass as a Social Institution.”

*Handlyng Synne* embraces many conventional aspects of lay eucharistic devotion, including the popular conception of the Mass as sacrificial. Mannyng explains that, during the Mass, “Þe sone ys offred to fader in heuene / For þo soules þat þe prest wyl neuene” (10505–6). To emphasize its sacrificial nature, he begins his section on the Eucharist with a description of the Last Supper. Assuming his readers know the story, Mannyng glosses over the narrative to highlight what he considers essential: the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper is indistinguishable from the pain Christ suffers on the cross. He begins by explaining “For whan hys passyoun neyher nye, / To hys dyscyplys þat were hym bye / He 3af hys body hem to fede” (9913–15). Instead of explaining that Christ gave his body to his disciples in the form of bread, Mannyng marks the event as cannibalistic by describing how Christ simply gave them his body to eat. When Mannyng later uses the phrase “ful vyle deþ & pynyng wo,” he describes both Christ’s experience on the cross and how Christ feels when he gives his disciples his flesh to eat (9920). It is the Eucharist’s status as a bloody and painful sacrifice that assures its continual efficacy. Mannyng explains that every single Mass aids the salvation of souls in purgatory “for no þyng may hem so moche auayle / Of here peyne and here trauayle / As þe sacrament of þe autere / Ne makþ hem of peyne so clere” (10321–24). The second half of the section on the Eucharist focuses on the Mass’s sacrificial efficacy, supported by four successive exempla, all illustrating the same teaching: saying Masses for a person, whether living or dead, has a tangible effect on that person’s well-being and salvation.<sup>48</sup> As in many vernacular discussions of the Eucharist, *Handlyng Synne* unites the Eucharist with the Passion in order to show the sacrament’s inherently sacrificial nature.

However, Mannyng carefully places this sacrificial and physical understanding within a Thomistic framework that insists on the necessity of both sensory and intellectual mediation. In his introduction to the section on the Eucharist, Mannyng explains the eucharistic transformation in the newly orthodox terms of transubstantiation: to consecrate is to “chaunge þe lyknes / Yn to a nouþer þyng þat es: / Þe lyknes of brede & wyne, / Yn flesshe & blod to turne hyt ynnē” (9977–80). Demonstrating his understanding of the distinction between substantial and accidental change, Mannyng carefully points out that “hyt semeþ brede as by syght, / And as brede sauer haþ ryght. / Noþer þy

48. In the first exemplum (10327–86), a dead man appears to a priest and asks him to say six Masses so that the man’s sins may be forgiven and he may finally enter heaven. In the second (10405–95), a man in purgatory appears to his wife and convinces her to purchase private Masses so he can enter heaven. In the third (10527–718), a knight is captured and enslaved, but because his brother the abbot says a Mass for him every day, no one is able to bind the knight in fetters, and he is therefore freed. In the fourth (10733–806), a buried miner survives for a year in a collapsed mine because his wife has a Mass said for him every day.

syghte no þy felyng / Hast þou on no certeyn þyng” (9995–98). Mannyng stays within the bounds of scholastic orthodoxy by affirming the imperceptibility of Christ’s presence in the host.

However, Mannyng also emphasizes that reception of the Eucharist is a tangible experience when he describes the physical properties of the host itself (10089–164).<sup>49</sup> He suggests that, since a person who receives the host ought to be free from sin, believers ought to imitate the physical properties of the host rather than directly imitating Christ’s sacrifice. Readers ought to become like the altar bread; he names seven properties of the host that signify the ways in which Christians should stand against the Seven Deadly Sins. For example, Christians ought not to be prideful because “Þou wost weyl þat þe vbble / Ys but a lytyl þyng to se. / So shul we be lytyl yn wyl, / Lytyl & meke wyþ outen yl” (10091–94). Likewise, since the host is white, Christians should not fall into the blackness of lechery (10143–46). Mannyng’s explanation urges Christians to imitate the physical properties of the bread itself, rather than the person whom the bread signifies. At first glance, this explanation of the significance of the properties of the host might seem to confuse substance and accidents by aligning the physical accidents of the bread with Christian virtues.

On the contrary, Mannyng expands transubstantiation to include not only the transformation of bread but also the transformation of believers themselves into the body of Christ. Mannyng explains that Christ is not present in hosts made of sour dough because sourness signifies envy and “Parfore makþ he noun herbergerye / Þere he fyndes byfore enuye” (10113–14). Christ will not dwell in bread that represents envy through its sourness, just as he will not be present in an envious person. Recipients of the host must commit to being like the host so that they too might experience substantial conversion. Through reception of the Eucharist, Christ transforms the believer’s substance into his own while leaving the believer’s accidents intact. Mannyng’s exposition of the host’s physical nature broadens his focus from the Real Presence in the host to include the mystical body of Christ, the whole community of believers.

By focusing on the physical attributes of the host—while recognizing that they are not indications of Christ’s presence—Mannyng endorses host devotion as a vital albeit indirect method of worshipping Christ. Mannyng foregrounds host devotion as a mediated experience. He does not claim that seeing the host is identical to seeing Christ face to face. However, Mannyng

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49. An analogous passage also occurs in the *Manuel*, with slightly different descriptions and ordering. Although the content of Mannyng’s explication of the properties of the host is not markedly different from that which appears in the *Manuel*, the historical context—particularly the new emphasis on the orthodoxy of transubstantiation—significantly alters the implications of the passage.

still regards the Eucharist as essential to salvation. The mediation that the bread's accidents and the rituals of the church provide helps to increase the believer's faith and commitment to a life free from the seven deadly sins. Even though the ostensible purpose of the Eucharist is the conversion of the soul and communion with Christ, Mannyng insists that that purpose must be achieved through mediation. The intangibility of Christ's presence in the bread is not a detriment to the faith, but is actually an essential part of it.

According to Mannyng, the sacrifice of the Mass has many benefits, but it does not provide the individual believer with direct contact with the divine. It is in his four exempla that portray encounters with the suffering body of Christ—two that depict him as an adult and two that depict him as a mutilated infant—that Mannyng most clearly contests the possibility of personal union with the sacrificial body of Christ. These exempla will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter. Only one of these exempla directly supports a doctrine on the Eucharist, but all four are eucharistic. All four narratives and their surrounding commentary develop arguments about identification with Christ, the desire to incorporate Christ's identity into one's own; all four directly deal with the individual believer's relationship to Christ's body, a relationship most frequently associated with the Eucharist. Only one of these four exempla is original to Mannyng.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, he makes all of them distinctly his own through a particular focus on the process of identification, accomplished mainly by marked increases in both the amount of direct discourse and narrative detail.

Through this insistent focus on identification, he draws on the exemplum's intrinsic generic resources. As recent scholarship has recognized, exempla are rarely if ever passive vehicles of church doctrine. On the contrary, as the scholarship of Elizabeth Allen, Mark Miller, Susan Phillips, Catherine Sanok, and Larry Scanlon shows, exemplary narratives often exceed the general rule they purport to exemplify and highlight the psychologically contingent nature of moral choices. That makes individual subjectivity central to the exemplum's narrative function,<sup>51</sup> a function upon which Mannyng extensively draws. In

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50. The "Bloody Child" exemplum does not appear in the *Manuel*, but does have a few analogues. See Frederic C. Tubach, *Index Exemplorum: A Handbook of Medieval Religious Tales* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1969), 386, no. 5103 (misnumbered as no. 5013).

51. Although their approaches and arguments often differ considerably, all of the following scholars emphasize the role of the audience and individual psychology in making meaning: Elizabeth Allen, *False Fables and Exemplary Truth in Later Middle English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Miller, "Displaced Souls"; Susan E. Phillips, *Transforming Talk: The Problem with Gossip in Late Medieval England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2007), 13–63; Catherine Sanok, *Her Life Historical: Exemplarity and Female Saints' Lives in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Larry Scanlon,

these four exempla, he presents encounters with the presence of Christ as fundamentally alienating because the individual believer can never fully identify with Christ.

Mannyng's theological point is straightforward: sin keeps believers from recognizing themselves in the image of God. The exemplum is an ideal form for discussing the limits of identification because, rather than simply illustrate moral principles, exemplary narratives persuade by demanding audience identification. As Larry Scanlon argues, "The exemplum expects the members of its audience to be convinced by its *sententia* precisely because it expects them to put themselves in the position of its protagonist's moral success, or avoid his or her moral failure."<sup>52</sup> In Mannyng's four exempla, there are two levels of identification at work. Firstly, the narrative invites readers to recognize themselves in the main characters' sinful behavior and to empathize with their difficulties. Perhaps more importantly, however, these exempla depict Christians who attempt to make that same identificatory connection with Christ. They want to label Christ as a part of themselves, just as they would incorporate him into their bodies through eating the consecrated host. In these four exempla, such attempts at identification are never complete in and of themselves. Encounters with Christ remind the sinner and the reader of their own sins and their own need for reform, rather than lead them to an ecstatic union with Christ. These four exempla challenge sacrificial models of eucharistic piety by contesting the idea that direct visual encounters with the crucified Christ can provide affective union with him.

In the exemplum of the forgiving knight, Mannyng argues that direct, visual encounters with Christ are central to an understanding of popular devotion, but such encounters ought not to be ends in themselves. In this narrative, included in the section on wrath, two knights are at war because the older one has killed the younger one's father. On Good Friday, after having been trapped in his castle for a year, the older knight decides to go to church to ask for God's mercy. When the younger knight sees the older knight leave his castle, he intends to kill the older knight, but the older knight begs for mercy in the name of him that "suffrede deþ on þe rode tre / Þys day to saue boþe me and þe / and forzaf hem þat hys blode spylte" (3845–47). Their shared recognition of Christ's Passion provides them both with reason enough to demonstrate Christian forgiveness. The younger knight kisses the older knight, and they go to church together. When the younger knight kneels down to kiss the crucifix, the image of the crucified Christ leans down and kisses the knight instead. The

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*Narrative, Authority, and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994).

52. Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power*, 35.

miracle leads to widespread changes in both lay and clerical behavior: “Eury man þer of gan telle, / Prestes yn prechyng þer of gun spelle, / So þat eury man yn þe cuntre / Leuede weyl þe more yn charyte” (3897–900). The visual encounter with Christ is what spurs the bystanders into greater belief and to lead more Christian lives.

For Mannyng, unlike the wondering churchgoers, the miraculous element of the story is secondary to the personal transformation that the younger knight undergoes as a result of reading Christ’s actions figurally. Mannyng introduces the narrative by describing the relationship between Christ and the individual believer as one of fundamental similarity; the most significant difference between the two is sin. He explains that “God louyþ eury creature / Þat he furmede to hys fygure. / But þe synne þat ys wroght, / Þat louede he neure noght” (3779–82). In the context of the exemplum, his use of the word “fygure” is provocative. In addition to conveying that man is formed in the physical likeness of God, the term “fygure” suggests that God endows each creature with figural significance, and that sin thwarts a person’s ability to signify God. This claim thus offers an important variation on the mode of exegesis made famous by Erich Auerbach, wherein a believer hears about a particular event in Christ’s life and then considers how to act in a given situation based on Christ’s actions.<sup>53</sup> Reading Christ as a figure for one’s own life was simultaneously a fulfilment of Christ’s teaching in the present day and a reference back to the historical life of Christ. As Mannyng suggests, when one sins, one’s actions no longer have this same sort of figural significance because sin has severed the love relationship between God and the self. Once the older knight invokes Christ’s crucifixion, the younger knight reflects on Christ’s forgiving actions and decides to directly imitate that loving forgiveness by kissing the older knight. The younger knight encounters Christ in the crucifix because he read his own actions figurally.

The exemplum’s central moral action is the younger knight’s decision to imitate and identify with Christ rather than his earthly father. In the beginning of the tale, the knights’ wrath makes them indistinguishable. In other exempla, Mannyng sometimes names his characters, but he deliberately confuses these knights’ identities by leaving them unnamed. His frequent use of the pronouns “he” and “hys” forces his readers to work hard at distinguishing one knight’s actions from the other. When the younger knight kisses the older one, he imitates Christ’s forgiveness and refuses to engage in his father’s feud; he thus shifts his identification and imitation to Christ and away

53. Erich Auerbach, “Figura,” in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 11–76.

from a human knightly community based on wrath. From this point on, the *exemplum* ceases to confuse the two knights, but instead blurs the distinction between the younger knight and Christ. The knight's merciful actions—actions he performs explicitly, “For Ihu loue þat dere vs boghte” (3856)—are an imitation of Christ's love and sacrifice on the cross. However, when the crucifix kisses the knight, it imitates the knight's own action even as it signifies Christ on the cross. After the crucifix kisses the knight, Mannyng remarks, “Y trowe yn hys herte were moche blys” (3892), but he never makes it clear whether Christ or the knight is the antecedent of “hys.” Over the course of the *exemplum*, Christ and the knight become figures who signify each other. The forgiving knight makes a radical shift from pursuing vengeance in the name of his earthly father to imitating Christ's forgiveness. In doing so, he recovers the “figure” of Christ within himself.

In this *exemplum*, the ordinary churchgoers miss this complex model of identity transformation because they overemphasize the importance of the miraculous encounter with the image of Christ. For them, the miraculous takes precedence over the knight's conversion of heart and the knowledge of Christ's sacrifice. Although they had all been reflecting on Christ's Passion and all witnessed two warring parties achieve peace on account of Christ's sacrifice, these things do not affect their actions. Witnessing the suffering body of Christ in action, however, affects the way they talk and changes the way they interact with their broader social world; everyone there repeats the story and “alle men þe sunner forþaue / Here wraþþe þat þey to ouþre dede houe” (3901–2). The faith community is only able to fully understand the significance of the crucifixion when they see the crucifix in motion and then “þey saye hyt alle & weyl hyt wyste” (3886). The image of the bleeding Christ had to be very immediate in order to be effective in inspiring their charity and forgiveness.

Mannyng certainly hails the churchgoers' immediate visual contact with Christ's body as a powerful sign, but he also asks his readers to question the necessity of such encounters. The animation of the crucifix is a confirmation of Christ's infinite mercy and power, and Mannyng encourages the reader to consider this animated crucifix as an instance of a real, physical encounter with the body of Christ by referring to it as the “creatour” (3874). In contrast to the churchgoers, Mannyng's readers do not encounter an affective image. The idea of Christ's suffering is present throughout this *exemplum*, and the characters witness Christ on the cross, but Christ's pain goes unmentioned. The churchgoers in the narrative are reflecting on Christ's Passion, but the narrative itself focuses on their process of reflection, rather than encouraging readers to make their experience of reading parallel the churchgoers' act of worship. Although the members of the parish only believe that they must live

more mercifully once they have seen the physical presence of Christ on the cross, Mannyng encourages his readers to see proof of Christ's sacrifice in the merciful works of others. One of this exemplum's most pointed critiques is of the predominantly lay modes of worship that value miraculous visions over learned Christian truths and the good works of other Christians.

Mannyng launches a similar critique in his story of Fr. Carpus. In this exemplum on the sin of sloth, he argues that visual encounters with Christ can be profoundly alienating. This narrative examines to what extent a devotional focus on the image of Christ's wounded body can bridge the distance between Christ and the believer. At the start of the tale, a priest named Carpus converts a Saracen to Christianity, but this Saracen soon turns away from his newfound faith. Carpus dreams he sees the Saracen crossing an unstable bridge over hell and prays that the Saracen will fall into the pit with the devils. Carpus looks up to heaven in prayer and sees Christ on the cross with "hys woundes al bloody" (5287). Christ speaks directly to him:

"Carpus," he seyde, "se wyþ þyn yne  
 What y suffrede for mannes pyne.  
 Man to saue y lete me slo  
 Why wst þou dampne hym to wo?  
 Why hast þou hym so moche wyþ yll  
 And for mankynde y lete me spyll?  
 Wyþ pyne and hard passyoun,  
 My blode y 3af for hys raunsoun.  
 Why wst þou he hadde helle fere,  
 Syn y haue boght hym so dere?

(5289–98)

Christ offers his own bleeding body as proof of the Saracen's worth. Since Christ was willing to suffer such torture for every individual's chance at salvation, the Saracen's soul is of great importance to God. According to Christ, in condemning the Saracen's soul, Carpus is also devaluing Christ's body.

Christ makes this argument primarily through the immediacy of vision, telling Carpus to look "wyþ þyn yne" on his suffering body. Carpus's faith can no longer be a purely intellectual or theological reflection; his eyes must encounter the real physical presence of Christ's pain. Through vision, Christ blurs the distinction between the individual and the community by suggesting that damning this one Saracen would be equivalent to damning all humankind and therefore render Christ's sacrifice worthless. Christ's wounds and blood are therefore a reflection of every person's worth. In the image of Christ's Pas-



sion, the identity of the human and divine intermingle. The wounds belong to Christ's body and to all of humanity. To have a vision of Christ's body is also to envision one's own salvation.

However, sin keeps the identities of Christ and believer from folding into each other. The exemplum makes this point by shifting the reader's identification at key moments. It first asks readers to identify with Carpus, then with Christ, and finally with both Carpus and the Saracen on the basis of their shared sin. This narrative is the final one in the section on sloth, a section that primarily condemns believers who neglect to live out their faith because of apathy and laziness. When the tale begins, readers are ready to identify with Carpus. After all, Carpus has done his Christian duty very diligently and has put a great deal of effort into educating and converting this Saracen; when the Saracen falls back into his former faith, it is easy to label his sin as sloth and condemn him, just as Carpus does. However, the tale does not make this easy judgement. It moves quickly to a detailed description of the Saracen's perilous journey over the bridge on which Carpus sees him:

Yn ful gret perel and kare,  
 And eure yn point to mys fare.  
 Yn poynt he was to falle adown  
 Of hys heued formest þe crown.  
 Þe fendes þat were yn þe pytte  
 Smote vþward 3yf þey myghte hym hytte,  
 And addres bete hym by þe fete.  
 (5269–75)

This description evokes sympathy for the Saracen's position and makes Carpus's prayer that the Saracen suffer "dampnacyoun wyþ outen ende" seem particularly cruel (5250). When Christ appears, he demands that readers identify with him, and recognize him as the true victim. After Carpus thanks God for this revelation, Mannyng exhorts his readers to resist sloth, "For þat he loueþ vs alle so dere," creating a distinction between "he" and "us" based on humanity's sinful disinclination to love one's enemy (5317). Mannyng places all his readers in the position of Carpus and the Saracen, both of whom need divine forgiveness because both gave up on believing in and actively imitating Christ.

Although affective reflections on the suffering of Christ open up the possibility to emotionally identify with him, this exemplum suggests that such reflections also reveal the sharp divide between Christ and the self, forcing the believer to recognize the ways in which he cannot fully identify with Christ. The ultimate result of Carpus's vision is that he realizes he is not as Christ-like

as he had once thought. In Christ's initial speech to Carpus, he uses highly accusatory language, asking three questions beginning with "why" (5292–94; 5297–98). The questions demand no response, suggesting there is no justification possible for Carpus's actions. Christ repeatedly uses the words "y" and "þou" in order to create a sharp contrast between their two positions. Christ's wounds prove that he is superior to Carpus because Christ allows himself to be open to betrayal and pain while Carpus does not. When Christ describes his crucifixion, he describes it as an act of will rather than suggesting that he was passively acted upon. He exclaims, "Man to saue y lete me slo" and "for mankynde y lete me spyll" (5291; 5295). Christ allows himself to be continually open to bear the sins of others in a way that Carpus simply does not tolerate. However Christ-like Carpus had thought himself to be before his vision, Christ's ever-bleeding body forces him to recognize the vast gulf his sin has created between Christ and himself.

The exemplum's concentration on Carpus's experience as a primarily visual one encourages readers to gain a critical distance on the affective encounter with Christ's sacrificial body. Christ tells Carpus, "But y haue shewed hym so moche yn ded / Wyþ my woundes þat þou seest blede, / Þat y þarfore ne wlde nocht / Lese þat y so dere haue boght" (5301–4). Christ expresses his investment in humanity in particularly visual terms; his own crucifixion is a "shewing." Although Carpus has presumably spent much time contemplating the meaning of Christ's suffering during his duties as a priest, Christ suggests that Carpus can only truly understand the Passion and its meaning by viewing Christ's actively bleeding wounds. Mannyng uses the visual as a way to show the self-evident nature of Christian truth and the immediacy of Christ, but his readers do not access the same immediacy of this visual register. Instead, the narrative form mediates the image of Christ's bleeding wounds for the reader. This mediation invites the reader to think critically about the purpose of the vision, rather than regard the vision as an end in itself. Ultimately, Carpus experiences a call to inner conversion not through an intense emotional connection with Christ but through reflection on the impossibility of a total connection. Focusing on the visual register, a register that readers can only imagine and not directly experience, encourages readers to recognize their own distance from the bleeding body of Christ so that they too can see their own need to reform.

Both the exemplum of Fr. Carpus and the exemplum of the forgiving knight encourage reflection on the necessity of the immediacy of Christ's body to devotion. Both affirm the value of a visual encounter with Christ's body, but ask readers to place that encounter within a broader context. Seeing Christ's crucified body is not an end in itself. The forgiving knight must imitate the

model of Christ's suffering, and Carpus must recognize his own sin. These two exempla ask their audience to think critically about the ways in which the sacrificial body of Christ demands that believers enlarge their devotional focus.

Mannyng becomes most critical of the devotional focus on the sacrificial body when his discussion of it is most eucharistic. In his discussion of the second commandment—"swere nat goddes name in ydylnes" (607)—Mannyng tells a tale that evokes horror at sacrificial imagery. The exemplum of the bloody child focuses on a rich man who swears excessive oaths. One night, after falling ill, the rich man hears a woman moaning:

Pat yche womman com hym before  
 Wyþ a chyld yn here armys bore.  
 Of þe chyld þat she bare yn here armys  
 Al to drawe were þe þarmys.  
 Of handys, of fete, þe flesh of drawyn,  
 Mouþ, e3ynn, & nose were al tognawyn,  
 Bak and sydys were al bloody.  
 (699–705)

Although it becomes clear later in the tale that the child is Christ and the woman is Mary, Mannyng never names the child. Mannyng intends for his audience to initially imagine this child as just that: a child. Many medieval Christians were accustomed to eucharistic images of the mutilated Christ child on the altar, but this tale deliberately unsettles its readers by asking them to imagine a nameless, innocent infant whose body has been torn apart in almost every way imaginable.<sup>54</sup> Mannyng keeps the idea of pain in the forefront of readers' minds by using the word "sor" repeatedly throughout the tale and his introduction to it. Christ's wounds are not a demonstration of his mercy and generosity as they are in the story of Fr. Carpus. Mary angrily explains to the rich man, "Al hys flesh þan þou teryst / Whan þou falsly by hym sweryst" (725–26). In this narrative, the appearance of a familiar eucharistic image—the mutilated Christ child—is not evidence of Christ's loving and benevolent sacrifice but is instead only proof of sin.

The tale's insistence on the visual brings the reader's attention to the nature of sin and not union with Christ. Mary presents proof of the rich man's sins in particularly visual terms when she says, "Hys manhede þat he toke for þe, / Pou pynyst hyt, as þou mayst se" (716–17). Since Christ is an infant and muti-

54. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 135–39.

lated beyond all recognition, he cannot and does not speak for himself; the only way to understand his pain is through vision. Mary asks the rich man to undertake an impossible task: to understand the immediate physical pain of a body quite distinct from his own through entirely visual means. Neither the rich man nor the reader can fully identify with the bloody child; they must instead primarily understand Christ's pain and sacrifice through watching Mary watch Christ. When the rich man first sees Mary and the child's mutilated body, but before Mary speaks and identifies herself, "Pys womman soriful and sory, / Pys man for here wax sor agreysyn" (706-7). The narrator twice describes the rich man's response to Mary's emotional pain and outrage as "sor," blurring the distinction between physical and emotional pain (707; 734). Although he cannot understand Christ's pain through vision alone, he can understand Mary's because he can identify with her act of viewing.

For the sinner, expressions and experiences of suffering are indirect; one experiences pain through watching another experience it or, in this case, watching one person witness another's pain. This section on the second commandment raises the breakdown of identity boundaries as a goal of personal reform, suggesting that readers should learn that "euery man vnto oþer, / Þe pore to þe ryche ys broþer" (771-72). For holy people, like Mary and Christ, identity categories need not be rigid. Mary interprets sins against her son as offences against her, and Christ feels the same way about sins against Mary. For example, Mary does not suggest that the rich man will be damned or that Christ will condemn him. Instead, Mary threatens the rich man that, if he does not give up swearing false oaths, she will cease to pray for him because, since the man is so cruel to her son, "How shulde y þan be meke to 3ow?" (732). A large part of the rich man's anguish in this exemplum is his recognition that his sin created boundaries between himself and Christ. The text constructs distinct divisions between the rich man and Christ so that it is possible for him to see Christ's pain but not to claim any of it as his own.

The horror and Mary's response to it alienate both the reader and the rich man from Christ's physical experience. For an exemplum that centers on Christ's mutilated body, the narrative is surprisingly unconcerned with the eventual fate of the Christ child. In fact, despite all the generous descriptions of the blood and gore, the narrator never describes the child crying or the child's pain; as far as the reader is concerned, the child may as well already be dead, but the narrative does not even provide that important detail. Although Mannyng prefaces this tale by saying that those who swear false oaths dismember Christ (668), he does not suggest that repentance will heal Christ's body. Mary herself even seems to forget about the bloody infant she is holding

and gives a speech on the conditions of her own intercession.<sup>55</sup> She then walks away “wyþ her chylde” (757), but the narrator does not describe the state of the child himself.

This exemplum encourages readers to recognize their own sins in the wounds of Christ. According to Mannyng, the second commandment forbids both swearing false oaths and misinterpreting theology because both are defamations of Christ’s true nature. For example, he explains, “3yf þou trowst þat god was nat before / Ar he was of þe maydyn bore / . . . / Hyt ys azens þys comaundement” (647–52).<sup>56</sup> Since many Christians, particularly the ill-informed readers that Mannyng imagines, could easily be ignorant of complex theological concepts like Christology, many readers could see their own sins in the representation of Christ’s wounds. Instead of recognizing their shared dignity in Christ’s divinity, Mannyng encourages readers to recognize their faults in his mutilation. Mannyng hopes that his readers will recognize their need to remove the sin that keeps the identity categories of self and God so distinct.<sup>57</sup> The identification that the rich man experiences is his recognition of his own sins in Christ’s wounds.

The sight of the child’s mutilated body is both horrifying and implicitly eucharistic. Mannyng’s use of the word “tognawyn” to describe Christ’s disfigurement not only suggests that Christ’s body is torn apart but also that it has been literally gnawed upon. Mary accuses the rich man of cruelly forcing Christ to repeatedly undergo the suffering of the crucifixion: “Þyn oþys doun hym more greuussnesse / Þan al þe Iewys wykkydnesse. / Þey pynyde hym onys

55. “3yf þou wylt of oþys blynne, / þan wyle y preye for þy synne / þat þey may be þe for3eue / And do þy penaunce whan þou art shreue. / For alle men þat hauntyn grete oþys, / To helpe hem at need, certys me loþys” (747–52).

56. Mannyng details various blasphemous beliefs in this passage:

Or 3yf þou trowyst þat he was noght  
 Before or þe world was wrought  
 Hyt ys azens þys comaundement.  
 God was euer wyþ outen bygynnyng  
 Ar the worlde, or man, or ouþer þyng.  
 3yf þou trowyst þat hys manhede  
 Haþ no powere with þe godhead,  
 Repente þe, þou art yn synne,  
 For ydylnes hast þou hys name ynne.  
 (649–58)

57. Literary scholars have often remarked on the relationship between the construction of the self and confessional literature. Katherine C. Little, *Confession and Resistance: Defining the Self in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006); Karma Lochrie, *Covert Operations: The Medieval Uses of Secrecy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).

& passyd away, / But þou pynyst hym euery day” (719–22). The tale describes the rich man tearing Christ’s flesh with his mouth daily, an act uncannily similar to reception of the Eucharist. Like the conventional conflation of Passion and Eucharist, Mannyng equates the sacrifice of the crucifixion with the rending of Christ’s flesh through blasphemy. When we swear false oaths, Mannyng explains, we both “dysmembre Ihu” (668) and “vpbreyd hys pyne” that he suffered on the cross (672). He takes the crucifixion out of its historical context by accusing his readers of causing Christ’s wounds. However, he also claims that his readers mock the historical wounds of Christ by explaining how “we eft pyne hym so sore” (680). Contemporary sinners both mock and cause Christ’s wounds. This confusion of causation is evocative of the Eucharist because, in many sacrificial explanations of the Mass, the sacrament is both a remembrance of Christ’s suffering and a reenactment of it.<sup>58</sup> There is no doubt that Mannyng regards the eucharistic sacrifice as spiritually beneficial, but the eucharistic elements of this exemplum are also cruel and repulsive.

In the first exemplum of the Eucharist section, Mannyng directly confronts this conflict between the horror of the sacrificial and its spiritual benefits in the Eucharist. This exemplum, whose ultimate source is a sixth-century story from the *Vitas Patrum*, is one of the oldest and most frequently repeated Eucharist exempla of the Middle Ages. In the story, an old man doubts that the Eucharist is truly the body of Christ. With the encouragement and prayer of two concerned abbots, he prays that God will reveal to him the truth, and after a week of prayer, he attends Mass. As the priest begins to consecrate the host, an angel appears with a small child, and as the priest breaks the host, the angel proceeds to cut the infant into pieces and collect its blood in a chalice. When the priest approaches the old man with chunks of the child’s flesh on the paten, the old man shouts out in horror that he now believes in the Eucharist, and the chunks of flesh appear to be bread once again.

This tale deliberately represents the eucharistic sacrifice as horrific. In the sixth-century Latin version of the tale, the narrator gives the conventional Ambrosian explanation for why humans do not ordinarily see the infant Christ, who is always present in the host: “God understands human nature—that it cannot enjoy bloody flesh—and therefore transforms his body into bread and his blood into wine.”<sup>59</sup> The Latin text thus attempts to make the story slightly more palatable by suggesting that God fully understands that

58. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 210–48; Fitzpatrick, “On Eucharistic Sacrifice.”

59. “Deus scit humanam naturam; quia non potest vesci carnibus crudis, et propterea transformat corpus suum in panem, et sanguinem suum in vinum.” J. P. Migne, ed. *Patrologia Latina, cursus completus*, 1844–55, 73:979. Translation is my own.

the natural reaction to the ingestion of raw human flesh is revulsion. However, Mannyng's version does not try to explain away any of the horror. For readers who have already heard the earlier exemplum of the bloody child, this image of Christ would look very similar except that the butchering of the child takes place within a liturgical setting. It is not sufficient to dismiss this tale by saying that, by the fourteenth century, such images of infanticide had become acceptable within the context of the Eucharist. Nor is it sufficient to suggest that such imagery merely emphasizes the cruelty of Christ's initial sacrifice on the cross. This tale purposefully highlights the horrific and repellent nature of ideas of eucharistic blood sacrifice even as it supports those selfsame ideas. The old man's reaction to seeing the flesh behind the appearance of bread—"on þe pateyn / Morselles of þe child al newe sleyn" (10065–66)—is understandably more a reaction of disgust than of wonder. When the priest is about to give him a chunk of the child's bloody flesh, he does not thank God for allowing him to see this miracle. Instead, he shouts "Mercy, goddes sone of heuene!" (10070). This man achieves a vision of the true nature of the Eucharist, but that vision ultimately portrays the central celebration of Christianity as blood-thirsty and cruel. Mannyng introduces this tale by saying of the Eucharist that "some haue seye hyt bodyly / To whom he shewed hys mercy" (10003–4), but the tale ultimately suggests that it is God's mercy that allows the old man to see the Eucharist as bread; lack of vision is the mercy that humans should desire.

In this narrative, Mannyng positions sight as a powerful conversion tool, but encourages believers not to require visions of Christ's sacrificial body. The tale clearly depicts the old man as a doubting Thomas figure. Like Thomas, who would not believe in the resurrection until he had seen and touched Christ's wounds, this old man is a faithful Christian who fails only in his unwillingness to believe in the miraculous transformation of Christ's body. He imitates Thomas's statement of doubt when "he seyde þat hyt was lye / But 3yf he say hyt wyþ hys ye" (10025–26). In contrast to the biblical story of Thomas, this old man only needs to see Christ's body in the Eucharist, but does not desire to touch it. In the oldest known Latin version of this tale, when the old man goes to receive the Eucharist, the host only transforms from flesh into bread once it is in his hand.<sup>60</sup> However, partly because believ-

60. "Cum autem accessisset senex, ut acciperet sanctum communionem, data est ipsi soli caro sanguine cruentata. Quod cum vidisset, pertimuit, et clamavit, dicens: 'Credo, Domine, quia panis qui in Atari ponitur, corpus tuum est, et calyx tuus et sanguis.' Et statim facta est pars ill in manu ejus panis" *PL* 73:979. (When the old man approached to receive Holy Communion, he alone was given flesh stained with blood. When he had seen this, he became afraid, and shouted, saying, "I believe, Lord, that the bread placed on the altar is your body and the chalice is your blood." And at once the piece in his hand became bread.) Translation is my own.

ers did not receive the host in their hands in the late Middle Ages, the Middle English version only requires the sight of the flesh. The old man only needs to see the priest offer him “a morsel of þe flesshe / Wyþ al þe blod þer on al fresshe” in order to be horrified into believing in the Eucharist (10067–68). As in the story of doubting Thomas—which concludes with Christ’s statement that “blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” (John 20:28)—this tale urges readers to be more faithful than the doubting man. Hearing the story should be enough to convince them of the Real Presence in the Eucharist. Mannyng concludes that, although this tale emphasizes vision as the vehicle for conversion, “alle ouþre beþ þe better / Þat heren þys tale or reden þys lettre” (10081–82). The vision of Christ’s flesh is important for conversion, but belief without vision can be even better.

Mannyng argues that a faith that focuses primarily on visualizing Christ’s sacrifice is one that risks undermining its own belief in the impassibility of God. In order to prove that the Eucharist is a literal blood sacrifice, this tale contests the idea that Christ’s body can survive the consecration. Mannyng describes how all three men perceive “byfore þe prest þat a chyld lay quyk / Yn feyr form of flesshe & blode” (10054–55), emphasizing that the child is alive prior to the consecration. The process of the consecration, in which an angel cuts Christ into pieces, looks very much like murder; the bread is no longer the living Christ but pieces of a dead corpse. This tale implies that, during the sacrifice of the Mass, the priest commits infanticide, and the congregation engages in ritual cannibalism. Rather than suggest that Christ’s sacrifice of himself was perfect and for all time, the tale argues that Christians must reenact this sacrifice again and again in order to achieve salvation. This vision of Christ’s body in the Eucharist threatens to undermine the belief that Mannyng suggests it proves: the presence of an all-powerful God in the host.

Mannyng never rejects sacrificial images of Christ’s body. On the contrary, he uses such images throughout *Handlyng Synne* to encourage deeper devotion in his readers. He affirms that belief in the efficacy of blood sacrifice is orthodox, but insists that it is only a starting point of faith. It is noteworthy that, in a text filled with fantastic tales, Mannyng only uses one miracle tale that involves the literal transformation of the host into flesh. Immediately after this exemplum, Mannyng shifts his audience’s attention to his explication of the physical properties of the host. As his readers become more familiar with doctrines of the Eucharist, he invites them to concentrate on devotional practices that demand a more indirect approach to Christ’s sacrifice. Like Ambrose, Mannyng believes that Christ’s flesh is physically present in the host, but it is better for believers not to see it. The horror of the sacrifice is disgusting to humans and ultimately beyond human comprehension. For



Mannyng, the appearance of bread, the barrier between the believer and the body of Christ, is the ideal way to see the Eucharist.

In these four exempla, Mannyng argues that aiming for a full communion with the crucified body of Christ can be distorting and keep one from personal conversion. For Mannyng, one of the best aspects of eucharistic devotion is that it reveals to the believer his own state of sin. In all four exempla that feature encounters with the mutilated body of Christ, there is a positive spiritual outcome. The crucifix in the exemplum of the forgiving knight inspires greater charity, Fr. Carpus repents his sloth, the rich man gives up swearing false oaths, and the old man publicly declares his belief in the Eucharist. However, none of these outcomes arises from an ecstatic identification with Christ or an entirely positive vision of him. In *Handlyng Synne*, the best faith in the Eucharist occurs when the faithful cannot fully identify with Christ, when their experience of Christ is imperfect and therefore spurs them on to their own spiritual perfection through penance and personal reform.

Throughout *Handlyng Synne*, Mannyng uses eucharistic theology in order to examine lay religious practices. He concludes that the role the laity have been given—either through their own choice or through restrictions that the church has placed upon them—often limits their access to the divine. The very structure of the Mass constantly reminds the laity that they do not have direct access to God; they rarely receive the host, never receive the cup, and the Mass is almost incomprehensible. Perhaps most importantly, despite some believers' claims to see flesh in the consecrated host, most Christians had to settle for gazing upon a white circle of bread. By interweaving scholastic theology and popular devotional practices, Mannyng argues that the barriers between God and the self that the individual believer experiences in the Eucharist provide an indispensable spiritual experience precisely because the Eucharist fails to fulfill the promise of complete connection with the suffering of Christ. The Eucharist helps the laity to achieve salvation by encouraging them to handle the sin that keeps them from experiencing union with God.

For Mannyng, the material appearance of the Eucharist and the process of reading pastoral texts are both important for lay salvation; the transformation of individual identity takes place through a process of rumination and interpretation of both host and text. In the next chapter, I will consider a text that likewise productively explores the individual's inability to identify with Christ in the Eucharist. In *Pearl*, the most formally intricate poem in Middle English, the *Pearl*-poet extends eucharistic poetics beyond the pastoral genre in order to explore the function of the literary and the poetic in shaping the Eucharist and the Christian self.