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"Women ben purifyid of her childeryn"
THE PURIFICATION OF WOMEN AFTER CHILDBIRTH
IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

by

Becky R. Lee

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Centre for the Study of Religion
University of Toronto

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**“Women ben purifyid of her childeryn”
THE PURIFICATION OF WOMEN AFTER CHILDBIRTH IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND**

by
Becky R. Lee
Doctor of Philosophy, 1998
Centre for the Study of Religion, University of Toronto

This study of the purification of women after childbirth in medieval England undertakes two tasks. First, it recovers and documents the rite of post-partial purification, and the customs surrounding it, as it was practised in England, from the earliest extant references to it originating in the twelfth century, to the publication of the second Edwardian Book of Common Prayer published in 1552. It then examines the ways in which this rite both reflected the communities in which it was practised, and contributed to the shaping of those communities.

In order to document the rite, the extant versions of the medieval rite of post-partial purification found in English liturgical books are presented and compared. A variety of non-liturgical sources provides information regarding the customs associated with this rite not recorded in the liturgical books.

Informed by three fields of study, the study of popular religion, ritual studies, and gender history, this study then identifies and examines the interactions between and among the various individuals and groups involved in the development and perpetuation of this rite, and the customs surrounding it. First, the relationship between the feast of the Purification and the rite of post-partial purification is examined, illuminating the role this rite played in the ritual life of the community. Then the involvement and investment of various groups within the community is explored. The interaction between clerical perceptions of the rite of purification, and women's own perceptions is examined. In

England, not only women in recognised marriages, but the mothers of illegitimate children also participated in this rite. Their participation allows an examination of medieval attitudes towards them. Heads of households are also shown to have contributed towards, and benefited from, this rite and the customs surrounding it. Finally, this study returns to the community as a whole, examining the role the revenues generated by the rite of post-partial purification played in medieval English parish politics.

Nine appendices provide excerpts relating to the medieval English practice of post-partial purification from unpublished clerical accounts, churchwarden's accounts, ecclesiastical court records, liturgical books, inquisitions post mortem, and manuals of confession and pastoral care.

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ABBREVIATIONS

<u>BCP</u>	<u>The Book of Common Prayer</u>
BL	London, British Library
<u>BMK</u>	<u>The Book of Margery Kempe</u> . Edited by Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen. EETS, o.s., 212. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940.
CCCM	Corpus Christianorum, continuatio mediaevalis
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, series latina
<u>Councils and Synods</u>	<u>Councils and Synods With other Documents Relating to the English Church</u> . Edited by F.M. Powicke and C.R.Cheney. Vol. 2. Oxford: Clarendon, 1964.
CPL	<u>Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland</u> . Edited by W.H. Bliss, and others. 18 vols. London: HMSO, 1894-.
EETS, e.s.	Early English Text Society, Extra Series
EETS, o.s.	Early English Text Society, Original Series
EETS, s.s.	Early English Text Society, Special Series
ERO	Chelmsford, Essex Record Office
HBS	Henry Bradshaw Society
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationer's Office
IPM	<u>Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem and Other Analogous Documents Preserved in the Public Record Office</u> . Edited by J.E.E.S. Sharp, and others. 20 vols. London: HMSO, 1904-95.
Maskell, <u>Monumenta</u>	<u>Monumenta Ritualia Ecclesiae Anglicanae: The occasional Offices of the Church of England according to the old use of Salisbury the Prymer in English and other prayers and forms with dissertations and notes</u> . Edited by William Maskell. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon, 1882.

OED	<u>Oxford English Dictionary</u> . 2nd ed. 1989.
PL	<u>Patrologiae cursus completus</u> , series latina
PRO	London, Public Record Office
RS	Rerum Britannicarum medii aevi scriptores (Rolls Series)
VCH	The Victoria History of the Counties of England

INTRODUCTION

In the towns and villages of medieval England it was not unusual to see a mother, recently delivered of her child, kneeling at the door of the local church accompanied by a cohort of women bearing candles. She was there to receive the blessing accorded newly-delivered mothers, known in that day as “the purification of women after childbirth,” more commonly referred to today as “churching.” Although this rite, and the customs surrounding it, was an integral part of medieval English life, it has only recently come to the attention of scholars. Historians of early modern England have led the way. Most notably, David Cressy and Adrian Wilson, drawing upon the relatively abundant documentary evidence engendered by the religious debates of the late-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, have recovered many of the customs and practices surrounding the rite of post-partial purification, and explored various aspects of its significance in early modern England.¹ Gail McMurray Gibson has extended the examination of this rite, and

¹ See: David Cressy, “Purification, Thanksgiving and the Churching of Women in Post-Reformation England,” Past and Present 141 (1993), pp. 107-46. A revised version of this essay is published as chapter nine, “Purification, Thanksgiving, and the Churching of Women,” of his Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 197-229. Adrian Wilson, “Participant or Patient? Seventeenth-Century Childbirth from the Mother’s Point of View,” Patients and Practitioners: Lay Perceptions of Medicine in Pre-Industrial Society, ed. Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 129-44; and “The Ceremony of Childbirth and Its Interpretation,” Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England: Essays in Memory of Dorothy McLaren, ed.

the customs surrounding it, back to the fifteenth century as it is illuminated by late medieval literature.² Yet, the rite of the purification of women after childbirth was celebrated as early as the twelfth century in England. This study addresses that lacuna, recovering the rite of post-partal purification, and the customs surrounding it, as it was practised in medieval England, and exploring its significance in the life of medieval English communities.

Three fields of study, the study of popular religion, ritual studies, and gender history, intersect in, and inform, this examination of medieval English post-partal purification.

Although the rite of the purification of women after childbirth was regulated by the clerical hierarchy, it was shaped by popular practice.³ Initially, the study of popular

Valerie Fildes (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 68-107. Also of note are: Walter von Arx, "The Churching of Women after Childbirth: History and Significance," Liturgy and Human Passage, ed. David Power and Luis Maldonado, trans. Sarah Twohig, Concilium, 112 (New York: Seabury, 1979), pp. 63-72; William Coster, "Purity, Profanity, and Puritanism: The Churching of Women, 1500-1700," Women in the Church, ed. W.J. Sheils and Diana Wood, Studies in Church History, 27 (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 377-87; Peter Rushton, "Purification or Social Control? Ideologies of Reproduction and the Churching of Women after Childbirth," The Public and the Private, ed. Eva Gamarnikow and others (London: Heinemann, 1983), pp. 118-31; Susan C. Karant-Nunn, "Churching, a Women's Rite," The Reformation of Ritual: An Interpretation of Early Modern Germany, Christianity and Society in the Modern World (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 72-90. I am grateful to Prof. Karant-Nunn for having shared this essay with me prior to its publication. For a discussion of the secondary literature see, Cressy, "Purification, Thanksgiving and the Churching of Women," pp. 108-11, esp. n. 6.

² Gail McMurray Gibson, "Blessing from Sun and Moon: Churching as Women's Theater," Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt and David Wallace, Medieval Cultures, 54 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 139-54. I am grateful to Prof. Gibson for having shared this essay with me prior to its publication, and for her many helpful suggestions regarding this project.

³ See Wilson, "The Ceremony of Childbirth and Its Interpretation," p. 91; and von Arx, pp. 65-9.

religion focused its attention on what distinguished popular religious practice from official religion. In the past two decades that focus has shifted to the examination of religion as the site of complex processes of inculcation, appropriation, competition, assimilation and rejection between and among the various groups involved in its development and perpetuation.⁴ The work of Natalie Zemon Davis was influential in that development. Davis advocated that scholars change their focus from popular religion to religious cultures. This underscored the dynamic nature of religion: religious cultures “are not merely inherited or imposed; they are also made and remade by the people who live them.”⁵ According to Davis, the study of religious cultures should be “contextual and comparative.” It should also be “relational.” That is, “we do not want just to compare peasants with their priests, pastors, landlords, and judges; we want to see them interacting with each other through religion.”

Contemporary ritual theory suggests that a rite such as post-partial purification is the ideal vantage point from which to examine the members of medieval English communities “interacting with each other through religion.” According to Catherine Bell,

⁴ E.g., see R.W. Scribner, “Is a History of Popular Culture Possible?,” History of European Ideas 10 (1989), p. 182. Regarding the history of the study of popular religion, see John Van Engen, “The Christian Middle Ages as an Historiographical Problem,” American Historical Review 91.3 (1986), pp. 519-52.

⁵ Natalie Zemon Davis, “From Popular Religion to Religious Cultures,” Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research, ed. Steven Ozment (St. Louis, MO: Center for Reformation Research, 1982), pp. 331, 323. The development of Davis’ thought is evident in “Some Tasks and Themes in the Study of Popular Religion,” The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion, ed. Charles Trinkaus and Heiko A. Oberman, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, 10 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), pp. 307-36; and “Anthropology and History in the 1980s: The Possibilities of the Past,” Journal of Interdisciplinary History 12.2 (1981), pp. 267-75.

ritual is “a strategic arena for the embodiment of power relations.”⁶ Those relationships of power are “nuanced, . . . characterised by acceptance and resistance, negotiated appropriation, and redemptive reinterpretation of the hegemonic order.” Mary Collins puts it a little more simply:

Ritual acts are fundamentally traditional. But they are always the actions of some particular people gathered in a particular place and time who use the available ritual forms for their own purposes. So a “universal” ritual is always local and contemporary in performance. Participants are touched and shaped by the rituals they celebrate, but they also interpret and elaborate the received tradition as they participate in it.⁷

In other words, a rite such as post-partial purification serves to legitimise the present order while, at the same time, also providing a forum in which that order is constantly being renegotiated. Although post-partial purification was reserved to women, members of the whole community, women and men, laity and clergy, commoners and aristocrats, upright citizens and sinners, participated in this rite and the customs surrounding it. The recovery of this rite sheds light upon those groups and the interactions, the nuanced relationships of power, between and among them.

The rite of post-partial purification was a women’s rite. In recovering it, not only are facets of medieval women’s lives, previously inaccessible to historians, illuminated, but new insight into their communities is gained. As Gisela Bock adroitly observes, “the search for women in history is not simply the search for some object which has previously

⁶ Catherine Bell, Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 170, 196. Bell examines in detail the major developments in ritual theory in, Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁷ Mary Collins, “Critical Ritual Studies: Examining an Intersection of Theology and Culture,” The Bent World: Essays on Religion and Culture, ed. John R. May (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1981), p. 131.

been neglected. Instead, it is a question of previously neglected relations between human beings and human groups.”⁸ Joan Wallach Scott has argued that the fact that women have been largely omitted from the writing of history “suggests not only that history as it is is incomplete, but also that historians’ mastery of the past is necessarily partial.”⁹ Writing women into history calls for reconceptualisations of women and men and the discipline itself.¹⁰ Therefore, examining medieval English communities through the prism of this women’s rite offers a new perspective from which to view those communities, hence new insight into them.

Just as light is fractured into glittering shards when it passes through a prism, this examination of the rite of post-partial purification and the customs surrounding it illuminates several facets of medieval English life rather than presenting a coherent whole. Having been a very ordinary aspect of women’s lives, post-partial purification has left little documentary evidence. Although the rite of purification can be traced back to

⁸ Gisela Bock, “Women’s History and Gender History: Aspects of an International Debate,” Gender and History 1.1 (1989), p 15.

⁹ Joan Wallach Scott, “Women’s History,” New Perspectives on Historical Writing, ed. Peter Burke (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1992), pp. 51-2, 55. According to Scott, “gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power,” these two propositions being integrally related. See “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” American Historical Review 91 (1986), p. 1067.

¹⁰ Susan Mosher Stuard, “Introduction,” Women in Medieval History and Historiography, ed. Susan Mosher Stuard, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), pp. xiv-xv, echoes that sentiment: “In the last analysis, the study of medieval women attracts contemporary readers because the surviving records of women’s acts surprise us. The deeds of men in Europe’s heroic age surprise as well, but even when those acts seem larger than life, men’s deeds seldom require us to make a thoroughgoing re-examination of our assumptions about human nature, about history, and the course of Western civilization itself. Medieval women’s acts and deeds often place that necessity upon us. . . . Because medieval women surprise, they test the assumptions of the composers of history, and the last three centuries of historiography provide no easy guarantee that the primary concerns of historical writing necessarily channel attention towards women.”

the twelfth century in England, it only came to be a topic of discussion in the last half of the sixteenth century.¹¹ Among pre-Reformation documents most references to post-partial purification are only coincidental to the matter under discussion. Consequently, evidence of this rite and the customs surrounding it is thinly scattered among many classes of documents, each with its own peculiarities. This poses several challenges for the researcher. Not only is the data base small but one must wrestle with the significance of the data for a topic they were never intended to address. Added to that is the perennial challenge historians of women face. Information about this women's rite is mediated primarily by educated male clerics and their institutions, making it necessary to search for the unrecorded voices of women, and men from the lower stratas of society, between the lines of their records.

Contradictions are bound to surface when the silences in the records constitute a significant part of the evidence. The complexity of the interactions between and among medieval women, men, laity and clergy, and the fragmentation of the sources presents several seemingly contradictory realities. For example, it can be argued that women played a significant role in the development and perpetuation of post-partial purification because it had the potential to subvert prevalent gender roles and stereotypes. Yet, at the same time, the male heads of households appear to have had a vested interest in some of the customs surrounding it. Among women, purification served different functions. For

¹¹ In 1572 John Field and Thomas Wilcox published "An Admonition to Parliament" which, among other accusations of Jewish and popish remnants in the Book of Common Prayer, claimed that the "churching of women after child-birth smeeth of Jewish purification" (quoted in Cressy, p. 122). Cressy, pp. 122-44, traces this discussion from the 1570s to the 1680s "when the issue was allowed to die down" (p. 144).

women in recognised marriages, purification occasioned celebration, while for the mothers of illegitimate children it served a disciplinary function. And, although an obviously gendered activity, much of the interactions and tensions pertaining to the rite of purification which made their way into the historical record were related to issues of jurisdiction and prerogative between and among the clergy and the laity.

Some of these apparent contradictions are no doubt attributable to the limitations of the sources. However, I would suggest their presence is also indicative of the complexity of medieval folk and their communities. Their lives, no less than ours, were subject to contradictions between belief and action, experience and understanding; their communities, no less than ours, were comprised of individuals and groups with disparate and sometimes conflicting interests. To present too coherent a picture would do violence to the sources, and to the women and men behind them.

I am indebted to the early-modernists. Their discussions of post-partal purification in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England have provided clues as to where to begin to look for medieval evidence. Their recovery and analysis of this rite also provides a foil against which to examine medieval practice. In order to avoid duplicating their work, this study examines the liturgical rite of post-partal purification, and the customs surrounding it, as it was practised in England from the earliest extant references to it originating in the twelfth century, to the publication of the second Edwardian Book of Common Prayer in 1552. For, although the first Edwardian Book of Common Prayer, published in 1549, signalled the beginning of the Protestant reformation of worship in England, eradicating most of the feast days of the liturgical calendar and the sacramentals, the rite of purification it contained was an English translation of the

medieval rite. Only in 1552 were the rubrics of this rite changed to reflect Protestant sensibilities.¹²

This study begins by recovering and documenting the liturgical rite of the purification of women after childbirth, and the customs surrounding it, as it was practised in medieval England. Chapter two examines the role played by this rite in the ritual life of the community. Chapters three to five explore the involvement and investment in this rite, and the customs surrounding it, of various groups within the community, including the clergy, women in recognised marriages and women who were not, and male heads of households. Chapter six returns to the community as a whole, examining the role the revenues generated by the rite of post-partial purification played in parish politics.

¹² In particular, the name of the rite was changed from “The Ordre of the Purificacion of Weomen” to “The Thankesgeving of Women after Childebirth, Commonly Called the Churchynge of Women;” the place where the rite takes place was changed from “some conveniente place nygh unto the quier doore” to “the place where the table standeth;” rather than being spoken of as “the woman that is purifyed,” the new mother became “the woman that cometh to geve her thanks;” and the offering of the chrisom was omitted.

CHAPTER 1

"At the door of the church"

THE RITE OF POST-PARTAL PURIFICATION: LITURGIES AND CUSTOMS

In 597 CE, Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People tells us, Augustine of Canterbury inquired of Pope Gregory I how soon after having given birth to a child a woman could enter church.¹ Gregory responded that if a woman were to enter a church and return thanks in the very hour of her delivery she would do nothing wrong. It is tempting to read into these words an allusion to the rite of post-partal purification that was to become such an integral part of medieval English life.² Nevertheless, while Bede

¹ Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English People, trans. Leo Sherley-Price, revised by R.E. Latham (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1990), p. 83. There has been some debate as to whether this interchange occurred between Augustine of Canterbury and Gregory I in the sixth century, or should be attributed to Theodore of Canterbury, or someone associated with him, in the seventh. Th. Mommsen, "Die Papstbriefe bei Beda," Neues Archiv 17 (1892), pp. 390-91, 395-6, discusses this controversy and the authenticity of the letter. For a more recent discussion see Paul Meyvaert, "Les 'Responsiones' de S. Grégoire le Grand à S. Augustin de Cantorbéry," Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique 54 (1959), pp. 879-894.

² A few have done so. A. Villien, The History and Liturgy of the Sacraments, trans. H.W. Edwards (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1932), pp. 60-1, while acknowledging that there is no documentary evidence to support his thesis, argues that Christian adaptations of Mosaic observances can be traced from the sixth century onward. Since the Levitical tradition prescribes that a new mother's re-entry to the church be accompanied by a sacrificial offering and a special prayer by the priest (see Leviticus 12, and Luke 2: 22-24), one might conclude that as early as the sixth century Christian women celebrated their return to church after childbirth similarly. Dirk Symoens, "Le sacral et la mentalité actuelle un exemple: Les relevailles," Paroisse et liturgie 9 (1966), p. 694, concurs with an early date, asserting that the first vestiges of the purification rite in the West were part of a proliferation of blessings developed by Christians to replace, what they considered to be, the magical rites of the pagan peoples in newly converted lands. See also Adrian Wilson, "The Ceremony of Childbirth and its Interpretation," Women as

attests to the fact that women refrained from attending church for a period of time after having delivered a child during the early middle ages, the earliest documentary evidence that women marked their return to church with a recognised liturgical rite dates from the eleventh century on the Continent, the twelfth century in England. Although that rite was regulated by the clerical hierarchy, local practice included customs not recorded in the liturgical books.³ Therefore, in order to recover the rite of post-partial purification as it was practised in medieval England it is necessary to examine not only liturgical books but a variety of non-liturgical sources. I will begin with the liturgical sources.

The Liturgical Sources

According to Adolph Franz, whose work is still definitive in this regard, the earliest extant western liturgical formulae for the rite of purification of women after childbirth date from the end of the eleventh century.⁴ However liturgical evidence of this rite in England can be found no earlier than the fourteenth century.⁵ Although these

Mothers in Pre-Industrial England: Essays in Memory of Dorothy McLaren, ed. Valerie Fildes (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 92. But Adolph Franz, Die kirchlichen Benediktionen im Mittelalter, 2 vols. (1909; rpt. Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1960), 2:209, points out that the earliest sacramentaries of the Latin church do not contain a blessing formula for post-partial women. Walter von Arx, "The Churching of Women after Childbirth: History and Significance," Liturgy and Human Passage, ed. David Power and Luis Maldonado, trans. Sarah Twohig, Concilium, 112 (New York: Seabury, 1979), p. 65, concludes that although women had to wait for a period of time before returning to church after giving birth, before the eleventh century "this first visit to church was not accompanied by any special liturgical celebration."

³ See Wilson, "Ceremony of Childbirth," p. 91; von Arx, pp. 65-9.

⁴ Franz, 2:223.

⁵ A survey of the published editions of the extant English liturgical documents confirms this assertion, including: Two Anglo-Saxon Pontificals (the Egbert and Sidney Sussex Pontificals), ed. H. M. J. Banting, HBS, 104 (London: 1989); The Durham Collectar, ed. Alicia Corrêa, HBS, 107 (London: 1992); Ordinale Exon, ed. John N. Dalton with G.H. Doble, HBS,

formulae are late, the conservative nature of liturgy would suggest that they reflect earlier practice.⁶ This is borne out by the sources which predate the liturgical books discussed later in this chapter.

Prior to the Reformation, liturgical practice in England was marked by regional diversity. Although conformity to Roman liturgical practices was established at the Synod of Clovesho in 747, local customs in each diocese grew into separate Uses, or “ways of saying and singing in churches.”⁷ The preface to the 1549 Book of Common

37-8, 63, 79 (London, 1909, 1926, 1940); The Winchcombe Sacramentary, ed. Anselm Davril, HBS, 109 (London: 1995); Pontificale Lanaletense, ed. G. H. Doble, HBS, 74 (London: Harrison and Sons, 1937); The Customary of the Benedictine Abbey of Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk, ed. Antonia Gransden, HBS, 99 (Chichester: Regnum, 1973); Missale ad usum percelebris ecclesiae Herfordensis, ed. William G. Henderson (1874; rpt. Leeds: Farnborough, 1969); Missale ad usum ecclesie Westmonasteriensis, ed. John Wickham Legg, HBS, 1, 5, 12 (London: Harrison and Sons, 1891-97); The Sarum Missal Edited from Three Early Manuscripts, ed. J. Wickham Legg (Oxford: Clarendon, 1916); Rituale Ecclesiae Dunelmensis, ed. J. Stevenson, Surtees Society, 1 (London: J.B. Nichols and Son, 1840); The Manuscript Irish Missal Belonging to the President and Fellows of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, ed. Frederick E. Warren (London: Pickering, 1879); Officium ecclesiasticum abbatum secundum usum Eveshamensis Monasterii, ed. Henry Austin Wilson, HBS, 6 (London: Harrison and Sons, 1893); The Missal of Robert of Jumièges, ed. H. A. Wilson, HBS, 11 (London: Harrison and Sons, 1896); The Pontifical of Magdalene College, ed. Henry A. Wilson, HBS, 39 (London: Harrison and Sons, 1910); The Benedictional of John Langlonde, Bishop of Lincoln, ed. Reginald M. Woolley, HBS, 64 (London: 1927); Ordinale Sarum sive directorium sacerdotum, ed. Christopher Wordsworth, HBS, 20, 22 (London: 1901, 1902).

⁶ See Éric Palazzo and Ann-Katrin Johansson, “Jalons liturgiques pour une histoire du culte de la Vierge dans l'Occident latin (v^e-xi^e siècles),” Marie: Le culte de la Vierge dans la société médiévale, ed. Dominique Iogna-Prat, Éric Palazzo, and Daniel Russo (Paris: Beauchesne, 1996), p. 26.

⁷ Preface to the 1549 Book of Common Prayer. See F.E. Brightman, The English Rite, revised 2nd ed. (London: Rivingtons, 1921), 1:36. Philip Baxter, Sarum Use: The Development of a Medieval Code of Liturgy and Customs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 5, provides a more comprehensive definition of “Use”: “all that concerns a cathedral's organization of staffing, finance, and customs, as well as services.” For the history of the development of the variety of English Uses see Baxter, pp. 6-7; The Use of Sarum, ed. Walter Howard Frere (1898-1901; rpt. Farnborough, England: Gregg, 1969), 1:xxii-xxxvi; Henry B. Swete, Church Services and Service-Books Before the Reformation (London: SPCK, 1896), pp. 7-14; Christopher Wordsworth and Henry Littlehales, The Old Service Books of the English Church (London: Methuen and Co., 1904), pp. 4-15.

Prayer lists five Uses operative at that time: the Salisbury Use, the Hereford Use, the Use of York, and the Uses of Bangor and Lincoln.⁸ Modern scholars have also found evidence of the existence of distinct liturgical customs for St. Asaph, Ripon, Lichfield, Exeter, Wells, Winchester, and St. Paul's, London.⁹ Evidence of the rites of post-partial purification associated with the Sarum and the York Uses has survived.

The Sarum formula for the rite of post-partial purification is found in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuscript copies of the Sarum Manual, as well as the many printed editions published between 1497 and the death of Mary Tudor.¹⁰ Parish Manuals are liturgical books for parish priests developed as a result of the pastoral reforms of the thirteenth century¹¹ containing the Occasional Offices or the non-eucharistic rites associated with baptism, marriage, visitation of the sick, and burial.¹²

⁸ Brightman, 1:36. "Salisbury," not "Sarum" is employed in the 1549 preface.

⁹ Maskell, Monumenta, 1:lxii.

¹⁰ The Henry Bradshaw Society published its critical edition of the Sarum Manual in 1960: Manuale Ad Usum Percelebris Ecclesie Sarisburiensis from the edition printed at Rouen in 1543 compared with those of 1506 (London), 1516 (Rouen), 1523 (Antwerp), 1526 (Paris), ed. A. Jefferies Collins, HBS, 91 (Chichester: Moore and Tillyer, 1960). Hereafter cited as Collins, Sarum. The Sarum rite of purification has also been published in Maskell, Monumenta, 1:38-9, where it is collated with the York rite and that found in the 1610 Douai edition of the Manual, and in Manuale et processionale ad usum insignis ecclesiae Eboracensis, ed. William G. Henderson, Surtees Society, 63 (Edinburgh: Andrews and Co., 1875), p. xix. Hereafter cited as Henderson, York. According to Collins, Sarum, pp. vii-viii, Maskell drew his formula from the 1543 Rouen printed edition of the Manual, and Henderson, in turn, copied Maskell. Brightman, 2:880-4, also reproduces the formula from the 1543 Rouen edition. The Annotated Book of Common Prayer, ed. John Henry Blunt, 7th ed. (London: Rivingtons, 1876), pp. 304-6, reproduces the Sarum formula from an unspecified 1498 edition of the Manual. See Collins, Sarum pp. ix-x, for a discussion of the manuscript sources; pp. xx-xxiv for his discussion of the printed editions.

¹¹ Pierre Marie Gy, "Collectaire, rituel, processional," Revue des sciences philosophique et théologique 44 (1960), p. 460; Collins, Sarum, p. viii.

¹² Swete, pp. 122-71; Wordsworth and Littlehales, pp. 213-18; and Collins, Sarum p. x, n. 20, describe Manuals. Maskell, Monumenta, 1:ccxxxvi-ccclvi, discusses the development of the Manual and manual services in England. Cyrille Vogel, Medieval Liturgy: An Introduction to the Sources, trans. and revised by William Storey and Neils Rasmussen, NPM Studies in Church

Some printed editions of the Sarum Missal dating from the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries also contain the rite of purification.¹³ Although the marriage rite and other rites conducted at the door of the church were found in the Missal before the development of the Manual,¹⁴ the rite of post-partial purification does not appear in the manuscript copies of the Sarum Missal.¹⁵

The York rite of post-partial purification is found in the York Manual. Although there is at least one fourteenth-century manuscript Manual extant, and several from the fifteenth century, the rite of post-partial purification is to be found only in the sixteenth-century printed editions.¹⁶

There are also two manuscript Pontificals which contain a purification rite. By the fifteenth century, Pontificals contained, in principle at least, the rites for all the sacraments and sacramentals reserved to a bishop, unlike the Manual and Missal which were used by parish priests.¹⁷ One of the Pontificals containing the rite of purification is

Music and Liturgy (Washington, D.C.: Pastoral, 1986), pp. 257-65; and Gy, pp. 460-64, provide a more generic discussion of Rituals and their development.

¹³ See Missale ad usum insignis et praeclarae ecclesiae Sarum, ed. Francis Henry Dickinson (1861-83; rpt. Farnborough: Gregg International, 1969), p. 849*. Hereafter cited as Dickinson, Sarum Missal. The Sarum Missal in English, ed. Frederick E. Warren, The Library of Liturgiology and Ecclesiology for English Readers (London: De La More, 1911), pp. 164-5, provides an English translation of the Sarum Missal based upon the printed editions, as does The Sarum Missal Done Into English, ed. A. Harford Pearson (London: Church Printing, 1884), p. 560.

¹⁴ Gy, p. 462.

¹⁵ See Legg, Sarum Missal.

¹⁶ Henderson, York, p. 23. See pp. xiii-xiv for a discussion of the extant sources.

¹⁷ Vogel, Medieval Liturgy, p. 257. See pp. 225-56 for a succinct discussion of the development of the Pontifical. The Offices belonging more properly to the Missal and Manual, like post-partial purification, when inserted for convenience' sake in a Pontifical, are those of the Use of the diocese. See Liber pontificalis Christopher Bainbridge archiepiscopi Eboracensis, ed. William G. Henderson, Surtees Society, 61 (Edinburgh: Andrews and Co., 1875), p. viii.

attributed to Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury (1414–43).¹⁸ The other is an early fourteenth-century pontifical currently held at the Bodleian Library, Oxford: MS Tanner 5.¹⁹ On a blank page at the back of this manuscript a formula for the rite of post-partial purification has been added in a later and much more informal hand, probably dating to the fifteenth century. Both of these Pontificals reflect the Sarum rite of purification but present some notable differences from the rite contained in the Sarum Manual.

Having identified the four extant versions of the purification formulae, we can now examine the rite(s) they contain.

The Rite of Post-Partial Purification

The four extant versions of the rite of purification are presented in parallel columns in Appendix A to illustrate the similarities and differences discussed here.

All four versions of the rite of purification available to us present the same basic elements. A priest, and possibly one or more assistants, proceeds to the door of the church where the recently-delivered mother waits. He, with his assistants if they are present, recites Psalm 120 which begins, “I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains, from

¹⁸ Henderson, *York*, pp. 213–14. Henderson reproduces Cambridge, Trin. Coll. MS B. XI. 9. Franz, 2:228–9, has copied this rite from Henderson. British Museum Add. 6157 is very similar to the Trinity College manuscript. See J. Brückman, “Latin Manuscript Pontificals and Benedictionals in England and Wales,” *Traditio* 29 (1973), p. 419.

¹⁹ Bodleian, MS Tanner 5, fol 276. Henderson, *Liber pontificalis Christopher Bainbridge*, p. xlii, suggests that this may represent the Hereford rite, describing the pontifical in which it is found as “almost identical in all the strictly Pontifical Offices of Lacy’s” who was bishop of Exeter c. 1420, and bishop of Hereford 1417. But Brückman, p. 455, referring to W.H. Frere, rules out Exeter provenance, asserting it is probably a fifteenth-century “sarum type.”

whence help shall come to me,"²⁰ and goes on to extol God's mercy and invoke God's protection. Following that, the prayer which begins: "Glory be to the Father" is recited. Then, from the penitential rite of the mass is repeated: "Lord have mercy on us," "Christ have mercy on us," "Lord have mercy on us," followed by the "Our Father." Then follows, what appears to be a series of versicles and responses calling upon God's help and protection for the woman, including:

O God save your hand-maid. My God I hope in you.

Be for her a tower of strength. In the presence of her enemy.

Send to her the help of your holy one. And from Sion look down upon her.

Lord, hear my prayer. And call me to come to you.

The Lord be with you. And with your spirit.²¹

The priest then continues with these or similar words:

Let us pray. O God who have delivered this your hand-maid from the dangers of childbirth, make her to be devoted in your service, so that having been faithful, at the end of this life you will regard her with all mercy, and lead her to peaceful eternal repose. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.²²

²⁰ The numbering of the psalms used here is according to the Vulgate. All psalms quoted are from the Douay-Rheims Bible.

²¹ None of the pre-Reformation texts of this rite contain the verse and response annotations *per se*. See Warren, *Sarum Missal*, 1:x. However, the 1549 BCP uses a verse/response format, as do sixteenth-century Roman Missals. See Brightman, 2:882, 884; and *Missale Romanum Mediolani, 1474*, ed. Robert Lippe with H.A. Wilson, HBS, 17, 33 (London: Harrison and Sons, 1899, 1907), 2:326.

²² "Oremus. Deus qui hanc famulam tuam de pariendi periculo liberasti et eam in seruito tuo deuotam esse fecisti : concede vt temporali cursu fideliter peracto sub alis misericordie tue vitam perpetuam et quietam consequatur. Per christum dominum. etc." See Collins, *Sarum*, p. 44.

Then the priest sprinkles the woman with holy water, after which he leads her into the church by the right hand saying: "Enter into the temple of God, so that you may have eternal life, and live for ever more. Amen."²³

Although all four extant versions of the rite share the basic elements just discussed, the rites included in the two Pontificals differ significantly from those included in the Manuals. As I indicated earlier, Pontificals contained the rites for all the sacraments and sacramentals reserved to a bishop, while Manuals were used by parish priests. I suspect the variations found in the two Pontificals reflect the privileged status of both the bishop who presided at these celebrations, and the women who would warrant his presence at their purifications. According to Walter Ullman, in the late middle ages it was customary for the archbishop to officiate at the purification of a queen.²⁴ Noble and aristocratic women may also have been honoured with the presence of a high-ranking cleric, such as a bishop, officiating at their purifications. That would explain the inclusion of these formulae in fifteenth-century Pontificals.²⁵ It would also explain the elaborate nature of the rites.

The first part of the formulae follows the pattern I outlined above: in both Pontificals, the celebrant, vested appropriately and accompanied by assistants, is to proceed to the door of the church, where the new mother is waiting. There he and his

²³ "Ingredere in templum dei vt habeas vitam eternam et viuas in secula seculorum. amen." See Collins, *Sarum*, p. 44.

²⁴ *Liber regie capelle*, ed. Walter Ullman, HBS, 92 (London: 1961), p. 19.

²⁵ The rite of purification was one of the Offices belonging more properly to the Missal and Manual. See Henderson, *Liber pontificalis* Christopher Bainbridge, p. viii. It is also possible that this rite was exclusive to the queen, and was included in pontificals used by other than the archbishop because other prelates assisted at the queen's purification and would therefore have some need to be familiar with the rite.

assistants are to recite Psalm 120, followed by the prayers and responses described above.

After sprinkling the woman with holy water the celebrant is to lead the woman into the church saying:

Enter into the temple of the living God, and pray to the Son of the virgin Mary, who gave you fecundity to bring forth children, that he will grant you eternal life, and you may live forever and ever. Amen.²⁶

Having led the woman into the church, the bishop is instructed to proceed with his assistants to the altar where he is to celebrate a solemn mass. Inserted into the prayers of that mass is a repetition of the rite performed at the door. This time Psalm 127 is recited. It begins: "Happy are they who fear the Lord," and goes on: "Your wife shall be a fruitful vine." This is followed by the same prayers and responses as had been said earlier, except the prayer of thanksgiving, which speaks of the woman having been saved from the perils of childbirth, is replaced by the following prayer:

All powerful eternal God, humbly we entreat your majesty, that just as your only begotten son who took on our flesh was presented in the temple, mercifully allow this woman, who has been purified after giving birth, into your presence to be presented to you. Through Christ our Lord.²⁷

At the end of the mass, before the final blessing and dismissal, the priest is to bless bread and give it to the woman.²⁸

²⁶ "Ingredere in templum Dei vivi, et ora Filium virginis Mariae, qui dedit tibi fecunditatem prolis pariendae, ut concedat tibi vitam aeternam et vivas in saecula saeculorum. Amen." Henderson, York, p. 213.

²⁷ "Omnipotens sempiterne Deus, majestatem tuam suppliciter exoramus, ut sicut unigenitus Filius tuus cum nostrae carnis substantia in templo est praesentatus, ita mulierem istam post partum purificatam tibi clementer morte devicta facias praesentari. Per Christum." Henderson, York, p. 214.

²⁸ "Deinde procedens ad mulierem det sibi panem, et data benedictione sua, recedant omnes in pace." Henderson, York, p. 214. It was customary for all to receive blessed bread at the end of the mass. See Miri Rubin, Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 73-4. See also, Maskell, Monumenta, 1:cccxvii-cccxxi. Several blessings for bread can be found in Dickinson, Sarum Missal, pp. 33*-

While these formulae are more elaborate than those in the Manuals, they contain the same elements and present many of the same themes. According to Kay Staniland,

Medieval kings [and queens] took full advantage of the rituals usual for any arriving or departing soul, manipulating and embellishing them to create a specially distinctive ceremonial for members of the royal family, a ceremonial which would preserve and exalt their rank and dignity.²⁹

She goes on to point out that while noble families elaborated upon traditional rituals, persons of lower social status are known to have imitated those elaborations.³⁰ If the purifications of royal women are essentially more elaborate versions of general practice, we may also gain some insight into the rite by examining the liturgical evidence of them available to us.

The Liber regie capelle

The Liber regie capelle, the Book of the Royal Chapel, is a fifteenth-century liturgical book compiled for, and used exclusively by, the clergy in special attendance upon the king, whose responsibilities included the performance of divine service, liturgical functions, and other ceremonies directly and indirectly connected with ecclesiastical duties.³¹ The book is a Manual which, besides the daily religious services

35**, 849*-50*. I suspect this rubric indicates that the woman being purified should be the first to receive.

²⁹ Kay Staniland, "Royal Entry into the World," England in the Fifteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1986 Harlaxton Symposium, ed. Daniel Williams (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 1987), p. 300.

³⁰ Staniland, pp. 311-12. She cites Christine de Pisan's disapproval of commoners attempting to imitate the grandeur of their betters. This dynamic is not unknown in our day. Witness the "Princess Di" phenomenon of the last decade. Staniland, pp. 307-8, points out, however, that post-partial purification offered fewer opportunities for display and embellishment than did baptism.

³¹ See Ullman, pp. 1-9.

and the coronation service, contains the rubrics for the baptism of a prince, the purification of the queen, and the burial service of the king and queen.³² It follows the Sarum Use with some variations, but more attention is paid to the ceremonial details including the decoration of the church, attire and roles of the participants, etc.³³

The purification rite in the Liber regie capelle is entitled, “Forma et solennitas purificationis regine.”³⁴ It specifies that the queen should be purified sixty days or so after giving birth.³⁵ Attired resplendently, she is to be helped up out of an ornate bed in her chambers by two dukes, and accompanied by them to the chapel in a procession including numerous lords, ladies and nobility. A duke is to carry an ornate candelabrum before her. A duchess is to follow her carrying the prince’s chrisom cloth, the cloth wrapped around a newborn at baptism,³⁶ which she has ceremonially received from the hand of the midwife. The rest of the lords and noblemen are to precede the queen, the ladies following after, to the door of the church as the choir chants Nunc dimittis and Lumen ad relevacionem gentium, “as for the feast of the Purification of Mary.” There the prayers and blessings contained in the Sarum Manual are said by the archbishop assisted by his co-bishops and abbots. After being sprinkled with holy water, while the choir sings “some other antiphon of the blessed Virgin,” the queen is to be led by the hand of the archbishop into the chapel where the mass of the Holy Trinity is to be offered. At the

³² Ullman, pp. 7, 18-19.

³³ Ullman, p. 19.

³⁴ The rite is found in Ullman, Liber regie capelle, pp. 72-3. Staniland, pp. 307-8, also describes it in detail.

³⁵ Although Staniland, p. 307, n. 60, suggests that a shorter confinement seems to have been the normal practice.

³⁶ OED, s.v. “chrisom.”

offertory of the mass the queen is to process up to the altar accompanied again by the two dukes where she is to make an offering of the candelabrum, gold, and the prince's baptismal chrisom cloth. The other ladies are to follow according to their rank and station, making similar offerings. At the conclusion of the mass the procession is to reassemble and return to the queen's chamber where her reinstatement to court life is celebrated.

These rubrics add some elements not found in the other purification formulae: the queen is accompanied by a retinue comprised of women and men who are active participants in the proceedings. The midwife is present, and has a role to play. Candles are used in the ceremony, as is the chrisom cloth. An offering is made by the woman being purified and her party. And there are direct allusions to the Purification of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Although it cannot be assumed that the ceremony tailored for a privileged woman reflects general practice, it is likely, as I have discussed above, that traditional elements of the rite of purification have been elaborated upon and embellished rather than startling innovations devised. Even if there are innovations, it is possible that they became assimilated into the general practice of the rite over time.

The Non-Liturgical Sources

If one goes beyond the liturgical sources it is possible to recover some of the details of the practices surrounding the rite of purification not elucidated in the liturgical formulae. Such information is thinly scattered among a number of classes of documents over a wide geographical and temporal span. This makes it difficult to distinguish

between local practices and those that were more universal, for silence is not necessarily an indication that a particular practice was not known, for the commonplace is often unremarked.

A collection of customs of the diocese of Salisbury recorded sometime before 1256 indicates that it was not only noble women who processed to the church door on the day of their purification. New mothers are directed to "approach the church with lighted candles with the matrons accompanying them following behind carrying the chrisom cloth."³⁷ Contrary to the Liber regie capelle, it seems that a company of women customarily attended those being purified.³⁸ In the middle of the fourteenth century a Warwickshire man recalled the birth of an heir to crown land some twenty years earlier

³⁷ See Appendix F/A/5. The background of this collection of customs is provided by F.M. Powicke and C.R. Cheney, ed., Councils and Synods, p. 510. Synodal statutes are discussed in chapter six of this study.

³⁸ John Carmi Parsons asserts that the male hierarchy appropriated English medieval queens and their roles through the rituals surrounding their coronations and burials. See John Carmi Parsons, "Ritual and Symbol in the English Medieval Queenship to 1500," Women and Sovereignty, ed. Louise Olga Fradenburg, *Cosmos*, 7 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), pp. 60-77; and "Never was a Body Buried in England with Such Solemnity and Honor": The Burials and Posthumous Commemorations of English Queens to 1500," Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe, ed. Anne Duggan (Boydell Brewer, 1997), pp. 317-37. He implies that the presence and roles of men in the churching rite may also have served to reinforce a queen's subordinate place in the hierarchy when he states that the queen's role in the rites surrounding childbirth, "however prominent, was almost entirely passive (as in her churching, for example)." See John Carmi Parsons, "The Pregnant Queen as Counsellor and the Medieval Construction of Motherhood," Medieval Mothering, ed. J.C. Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Garland, 1996), p. 49. However we must consider that in this rite too it is possible that "the queen could find ample opportunity to seek her goals through manipulation of the same rituals and symbols by which the community emphasized her modesty and submissiveness," Parsons, "Ritual and Symbol," p. 69. I am grateful to John Parsons for having made several of these essays available to me prior to their publication, as well as for his advice and critique of some of the ideas expressed in this chapter. Caroline Shenton, in an unpublished paper, entitled "Four Weddings, Twelve Churchings and a Funeral: Edward III's Celebrations of Dynasty, 1327-1355", presented at the University of Leeds, 1997, suggests that purification celebrations of Philippa, wife of Edward III, served a familial rather than a dynastic purpose; baptisms served that purpose better. The purifications asserted her position as wife and consort of the king which were being severely undermined by Isabella, the queen-mother.

because his wife had been at church with the heir's mother "making offerings on the day of her purification."³⁹ And Margery Kempe speaks of "þe women wheche comyn to offeryn wyth þe women þat weryn purifijd"⁴⁰ in the fifteenth century. A fifteenth-century alabaster altar-piece, which may reflect contemporary practice, depicts the Virgin kneeling before a cleric holding a candle in one hand and blessing her with the other while two women bearing candles look on.⁴¹

Although the Liber regie capelle makes special mention of the midwife and her role in the proceedings, I have found no more references to her role.

The will of Elizabeth Browne proved in Ripon, Yorkshire in 1458 attests to the fact that, at least in that locality, women wore a veil at their purifications, for she bequeaths a veil to the altar of St. Stephen in the Church of SS. Peter and Wilfrid, Ripon, for "the women being purified from there."⁴²

The alabaster mentioned above depicts Mary kneeling to receive the blessing of the priest. The York rite, and the Bodleian Pontifical also indicate that women knelt

³⁹ IPM 12/87.

⁴⁰ BMK, bk. 1, ch. 82, p. 198/28-9.

⁴¹ W.L. Hildburgh, "Folk-Life Recorded in Medieval English Alabaster Carvings," Folk-Lore 60 (1949), p. 253, discusses English alabasters and their depiction of fifteenth-century religious practice. Hildburgh discusses this alabaster in "Folk-Life," p. 263; and "Notes on Some English Alabaster Carvings in Germany," The Antiquaries Journal 5 (1925), pp. 56-8. A photograph of this altar-piece is found in A. Rostand, "Les albatres Anglais du XV^e siècle en Basse-Normandie," Bulletin monumental 87 (1928), p. 294.

⁴² "j coopertorium pro mulieribus exinde purificandis." Acts of Chapter of the Collegiate Church of SS. Peter and Wilfred, Ripon, A.D. 1452 to A.D. 1506, ed. J.T. Fowler, Surtees Society, 64 (Durham: Andrews and Co., 1875), p. 75. More accurately, the moveable property of a testator is bequeathed in a testament; a will was the document in which lands were disposed. See Carol M. Meale, "'... alle the bokes that I haue of latyn, englich, and frensch': Laywomen and Their Books in Late Medieval England," Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500, ed. Carol M. Meale, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 17 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 146, n. 8.

during the rite. Evidence of this is also found in a will proved in 1499. One William Frere bequeathed "To the Ch. of S. Marg. Southw^k ij cusshones of arras worke for childe wife to sitt & knele vpon."⁴³ There are similar items found in four church inventories. The earliest was taken in the first quarter of the fifteenth century in Little Waltham, Essex. It is recorded that "Thoma[s] Berneston p[ar]son of lytell Waltham gaf a cloth for worschepe to purifye women y[n] ye worschepe of oor lady."⁴⁴ Included in an inventory of church goods of the parish church of St. Dunstan's near Canterbury dated 1500 is "a coverlett for chyld-wyffe."⁴⁵ "A Clothe of Tappestry work for Chirchyng of wives lyned with Canuas in Ecclesia"⁴⁶ was among the goods of St. Mary the Great in Cambridge in 1504. And in 1552 the church of Great Bardfield, Essex, owned "a clothe to sett before women at the daie of their purification."⁴⁷

⁴³ Published in the OED, under "childwife" from PRO MS Prerogative Court of Canterbury, Prob. 11/11.37 Horne, fols. 298r-v. Abbot Gasquet, Parish Life in Medieval England, 2nd ed., the Antiquary's Books (London: Methuen, 1907), p. 193, concurs that women being purified would have knelt upon these pillows and carpets. A "child wife" is defined in the OED as "a woman in childbed, or who has lately borne a child."

⁴⁴ Brian S. Smith, "Little Waltham Church Goods, c. 1400," Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society 1, 3rd series (1961-1965), p. 112.

⁴⁵ J.M. Cowper, "Accounts of the Churchwardens of St. Dunstan's, Canterbury, A.D. 1484-1580," Archaeologia Cantiana 16 and 17 (1886-7), 16:315. According to Watkin, Inventory of Church Goods temp. Edward III, ed. Dom Aelred Watkin, Norfolk Record Society, 19 (Norfolk Record Society, 1948), p. lxiv, the term, "coverlett," refers to covers or spreads of material and often appears to mean the frontal. However he does warn that it is an ambiguous term whose meaning must be determined by the context in which it is used (p. lxiv). He also notes a coverlet used as a carpet at Faversham parish church, Kent, in the early sixteenth century (p. lxv, n. 12).

⁴⁶ Churchwardens' Accounts of St. Mary the Great, Cambridge from 1504 to 1635, ed. J.E. Foster, Cambridge Antiquarian Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1905), p. 8.

⁴⁷ William Chapman Waller, "Inventories of Church Goods 6 Edward VI," Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society, n.s., 11 (1911), p. 91.

The rubrics of the York rite of purification direct that rather than being blessed at the door of the church as is prescribed by the Sarum rite, the woman be greeted at the door and then be led into the church to be blessed at the altar steps. She is then to go to the place where she ought to stay or sit (*sedere*) until the end of the mass.⁴⁸ In the church of St. Mary, Dover, that place was a “chyldewyffes pue.” In the 1538/9 churchwardens’ accounts of St. Mary, Dover is recorded:

Paid for the pullynge downe of the chyldewyffes pue of saynt Martyns Churche and for the bryngyng of hit home . . . iij d.⁴⁹

There is an even earlier record of a “chirchyng pew” among the churchwardens’ accounts of St. Andrew Hubbard parish in Eastcheap (London). In 5 Edward 4 (1465/6), 8d. was paid “for makying of the chirchyng pew.”⁵⁰ It would appear, as G.W.O. Addleshaw and Frederick Etchells have concluded from the existence of the St. Mary’s, Dover record, that “churching pews were known before the Reformation.”⁵¹ The churching pew most likely served as a reserved seat for the women being purified and their attendants, for the actual blessing took place at the church door or, in the case of the York rite, at the altar

⁴⁸ “Tunc surgat, et eat ad locum ubi sedere debeat usque post Missam: peractaque Missa surgat et reveniat ad eundem locum ubi prius, videlicet ad gradus altaris.” See Henderson, *York*, p. 23.

⁴⁹ BL Egerton MS 1912, p.12. This is transcribed in: J.C. Cox, *Churchwarden's Accounts from the Fourteenth to the Close of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Methuen, 1913), p. 194. Preceding this entry is the entry: “Itm paid to holand for the takyng downe of the puyes in Saynt Martyns Church . . . vid.” The next year there is no mention of St. Martyn’s where previously rent had been paid to the Lord of Maxton for the church lands of St. Martyn, suggesting this chapelry had been closed down.

⁵⁰ Guildhall Library, London MS 1279/1, fol 19v. This record is described in Henry Littlehales, ed., *The Medieval Records of a London City Church (St. Mary at Hill, A.D. 1420-1559)*, EETS, o.s., 125 and 128 (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1905), pp. lxxiv-lxxv.

⁵¹ G.W.O. Addleshaw, and Frederick Etchells, *The Architectural Setting of Anglican Worship* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), p. 84, n. 3.

steps. According to Addleshaw and Etchells, after the changes in the rite instituted in the 1552 Book of Common Prayer, where rather than kneeling at the church door, as had been the custom, the woman is instructed to “come into the churche, knele down in some conuenient place nighe vnto the place where the table standeth,”⁵² it became customary in some places for women to be blessed while kneeling in the churching pew, or childwife pew.⁵³

There is also evidence of some other paraphernalia associated with the purification rite. Listed in the St. Dunstan’s inventory mentioned above is “a clothe staynyd for the purificacion off women.” This ornamented cloth could have been either a banner or an altar frontal.⁵⁴ It is not stated with what scene or image it was painted. It is possible that it depicted the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the act these women were understood to be emulating.⁵⁵ Another accoutrement to the rite, a “candelstyke to stonde afore childwyfes”⁵⁶ is listed in the inventory of St. Andrew Church, Canterbury.

⁵² Brightman, 2:881.

⁵³ Addleshaw and Etchells, pp. 84-86.

⁵⁴ Cowper, 16:314. According to the OED, a “stained” cloth would be “ornamented with pictures or designs in colour.” This is most likely an altar frontal. See n. 45 above. According to Daniel Rock, The Church of Our Fathers as Seen in St. Osmund's Rite for the Cathedral of Salisbury with Dissertations on the Belief and Ritual in England Before and After the Coming of the Normans, new edition in 4 volumes (London: John Murray, 1905), 1:185, n. 58, a frontal was “the movable ornamental front, whether of metal, wood, or loose silk, put close to the fore-part of the altar, reaching from the table, or upper surface, down to the ground. The frontals should be of the same colour with the vestments of the festival,” and could be ornamented.

⁵⁵ The relationship between the feast of the Purification and the rite of purification is discussed in chapter two of this study.

⁵⁶ Churchwardens' Accounts of the Parish of St. Andrew, Canterbury, ed. Charles Cotton. Reprinted from Archaeologia Cantiana 32 (London: Mitchell Hughes and Clarke, 1916), 1:8; also in Cowper, 17:151.

The existence of churching pews and special church paraphernalia suggests that the rite of purification took place in conjunction with the mass. The rubrics of the York rite of purification indicate that this was so, as do the rubrics of the two Pontificals. But those of the Sarum Manual do not. In a testimony regarding an heir to crown land, known as a proof-of-age, a Lincoln man testifies that in 1383 he “heard mass at the church on the day that the heir’s mother was purified.”⁵⁷ And in 1542, a curate was brought before the archidiaconal court of Colchester because “the day off purificacion off women, the said curat wyll not tarey for them, bot say messe or thei come, all though he doy [doth] knowe off yt; contrarey to the usage off other curates.”⁵⁸ Also supporting this suggestion that the rite of purification took place in conjunction with the mass are the churchwardens’ accounts of Saffron Walden, Essex, which record the offerings received for women’s purifications by date over the course of several years between 1441 and 1476. Most of the purifications took place on Sundays, probably in conjunction with the regular Sunday liturgy,⁵⁹ although occasionally they took place on other days.⁶⁰ However, the clerical accounts of Scarborough Parish, 1423-27, 1434-42; and those of All Saints, Northampton, 1545-7, 1549-52, which also record the offerings received for women’s purifications by date, indicate that purifications took place on any and every day

⁵⁷ IPM 19/158. These documents are discussed in chapter five of this study.

⁵⁸ William Hale, A Series of Precedents and Proceedings in Criminal Causes (1475-1640) (London: FandJ Rivington, 1847), p. 119, #368.

⁵⁹ See Appendix B, fols 17r-v, 30r, 93r-94v, 102r-103r.

⁶⁰ E.g. Thursday, see Appendix B, fol 102r; Wednesday, see Appendix B, fol 103r.

of the week in those parishes.⁶¹ That does not preclude them having also taken place in the context of the mass however, for many parishes provided daily mass.⁶²

The Liber regie capelle and the Bodleian Pontifical describe an offering being made by the woman being purified and her attendants. This appears to have been customary throughout the medieval period at every level of society. The collection of customs from the diocese of Salisbury which dates to the first half of the thirteenth century, mentioned above, directs the women accompanying the new mother to carry the chrisom cloth, which is to be left at the church and put to some appropriate use.⁶³ Around 1345, the borough of Torksey in Lincolnshire issued this guideline:

When a woman is [purified], she ought, with those who are with her, to offer 2½d. at most, if she is able : that is, the woman ought to put 1d. in the parson's candle and offer it to the priest, and three women ought each to offer ½d. at most.⁶⁴

A fifteenth-century cleric characterises the offering as “a candel a peny and a clowte,”⁶⁵ but, in fact, the offering varied from place to place, and over time. In the thirteenth century there was a proliferation of synodal statutes regarding the uses to which chrisom cloths should be put, suggesting that the offering of the chrisom cloth was widespread.⁶⁶ A statute of Bishop Gilbert of St. Leofric for the Diocese of Chichester,

⁶¹ See Appendices C and D.

⁶² See A. Hamilton Thompson, The English Clergy and their Organization in the Later Middle Ages (Oxford: Clarendon, 1947), pp. 124-5; Eamon Duffy, The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580 (London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 98-100.

⁶³ See n. 37 above.

⁶⁴ Mary Bateson, ed., Borough Customs, Selden Society, 18, 21 (London: Professional Books, 1972), 2:210.

⁶⁵ For text see chapter four, note 9.

⁶⁶ See Councils and Synods, p. 427, #18: Durham; p. 518, #12: Ely; p. 988: Exeter; p. 1087, #29: Chichester.

issued in 1292, informs us that the usual offering made to the priest for officiating at purifications in that diocese was one penny.⁶⁷ And as we saw in the borough customs of Torksey, a woman being purified there was to offer a penny's worth of wax to the priest, while her companions were to offer half a penny each.

Record of the offerings made at women's purifications in the fifteenth century is found in clerical accounts, the records of income and expenditures kept by parish vicars, curates or chaplains for their rectors or appropriators.⁶⁸ These records vary in their detail and consistency. Some provide annual or quarterly totals, while others record each purification. In at least two parishes it would appear that the women accompanying the new mother to her purification made offerings with her, as in Torksey.⁶⁹ In Scarborough Parish between the years of 1423 and 1442 the offerings for a woman's purification range from 1d. to 17½d. In All Saints, Northampton, between 1545 and 1547, offerings range from ½d. to 10d. This changes in All Saints, Northampton in 1549/51 when 1d. is collected at most purifications, suggesting that the previous figures combined the new mother's offering with those of the women "offering with her." The next year, the customary offering at All Saints, Northampton went up from 1d. to 1½d.

Several other parishes record smaller variations in the amount collected per purification: from 1d. to 4d. These may also include offerings made by those attending

⁶⁷ See Appendix F/A/7.

⁶⁸ See Peter Heath, ed., Medieval Clerical Accounts, St. Anthony's Hall Publications, 26 (York: St. Anthony's Hall, 1964), pp. 3-25, for an introduction to these records. The administration of parishes is discussed in more detail in chapter six of this study.

⁶⁹ See Appendices C and D.

the new mother. Or, another possibility is that they reflect some sort of sliding scale in the offering.⁷⁰

Other parishes had standard offerings. One parish, Kirkby Malham, West Yorkshire, in its 1545/5 accounts stipulates that ½d. is to be paid when a child is baptised, and 2d. offered when the mother is purified.⁷¹ In Hornsea, East Yorkshire between 1481 and 1493, 1½d. was customarily offered at a woman's purification.⁷²

Some parishes record the chrisom cloth as part of the offering, including: Kirkby Malham, West Yorkshire, 1444-5; Blunham, Bedfordshire, 1534-9; and All Saints, Northampton, 1547-52,⁷³ while the 1510 accounts of Helmingham, Suffolk indicate that a candle and a chrisom were customarily offered there.⁷⁴

In Saffron Walden, Essex, the statutes of the Corpus Christi guild, recorded in 1389, stipulate that poor women with child who came into the town were to be given a chrisom cloth and a penny to offer at their purification.⁷⁵ More information about the purification offerings made in Walden is found in the churchwardens' accounts from that

⁷⁰ Blunham, Bedfordshire, 1534-5, 1538-9: from 1d. to 3d. See Nicholas H. Bennett, "Blunham Rectory Accounts," *Bedfordshire Historical Record Society* 69 (1990), pp. 145-6, 161-3. St. Peter's, Old Walsingham, Norfolk, 1539: from 2d. to 3d. See PRO E 101/519/30. All Saints, Little Walsingham, 1541-2: from 2d. to 4d. See PRO E 101/518/36.

⁷¹ BL Additional Roll 32957.

⁷² The clerical accounts for this parish are transcribed in Heath, *Medieval Clerical Accounts*. Entries regarding women's purifications are found on pp. 28-9, 35-6, 42-3.

⁷³ See BL Additional Roll 32957; Bennett, "Blunham Rectory Accounts;" and Appendix D.

⁷⁴ BL Additional MS 34786, fols 7r and 8r.

⁷⁵ PRO C 47/39/59: "Item: si aliqua pauper mulier pregnans aduenerit ad dictam villam de Waleden', et si non habuerit de propriis, tunc habeat de sumptibus dictorum fratrum vnum crismum et vnum denarium ad offerendum in die purificationis eius."

town. These cover the years 1439 to 1488.⁷⁶ Along with the more usual parish receipts and expenditures, these accounts record the fees received by the parish church for women's purifications over the course of the year for each of seventeen years. For three of those years they are listed individually. The majority of women paid one penny. Some paid half a penny. And the wife of one Thomas Colle paid nothing "because they were poor."⁷⁷

Although the 1549 Book of Common Prayer marked a "radical discontinuity with traditional religion,"⁷⁸ eradicating most of the feast days of the liturgical calendar and the sacramentals, the rite of purification was maintained with very few changes. The rubrics in the Book of Common Prayer are more detailed than in the earlier Manuals and confirm some of the details revealed by the non-liturgical sources considered here. The title given to the rite is an English translation of that found in the Sarum Manual and Chichele's Pontifical: "The ordre of the purificacion of weomen."⁷⁹ It prescribes the posture of the two main participants: the woman is instructed to kneel down in some convenient place "nygh unto the quier doore" where the priest shall stand by her and say the prayers. And, after the prayers are said "the woman that is purifyed, must offer her crisome, and other

⁷⁶ These are held at the Essex County Record Office, Chelmsford, MS D/DBy Q18. They are discussed by L.R. Poos, A Rural Society after the Black Death (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 123-4.

⁷⁷ ERO MS D/DBy Q18 fol 102r: "nichil quia pauper." Purification fees are listed individually for 1439/40, 1474/5, and 1475/6. The churchwardens' accounts of St. Mary At Hill, London, have an isolated entry of a purification offering. Under the casual receipts of 1524-5 is listed: "Receued at the chirchyng of Richard Stauners wyff, ijd." See Littlehales, The Medieval Records of a London City Church, p. 329.

⁷⁸ Duffy, p. 464. He discusses the discontinuities on pp. 464-6, and provides a bibliography regarding the history of the BCP on p. 464, n. 36.

⁷⁹ This rite is found in Brightman, 2:880-4.

accustomed offerynges.” While the distribution of blessed bread had been abrogated, the woman is instructed to receive holy communion if it is offered.

It is not only possible to ascertain the details of the customs associated with the rite of purification but also what births warranted a woman’s participation in this rite. The accounts of the Great Wardrobe reveal that between 1330 and 1348, Philippa, wife of Edward III was purified of at least seven of the twelve children to which she gave birth, both male and female.⁸⁰ The sources considered in this chapter indicate that medieval English women of lesser status also participated in this rite after the birth of several, most probably, every child, both male and female. Twenty-two of the eighty-five testimonies regarding the heirs of crown land, or proofs-of-age, dating between the late thirteenth and the mid fifteenth centuries, which mention the rite of purification, attest to the purifications of the mothers of female children.⁸¹ Heirs to crown land were not necessarily the eldest child, as they sometimes inherited their rights from elder siblings or distant relatives. Further, these same testimonies provide a late thirteenth-century example of a mother having undergone a purification for each of two children born several years apart.⁸²

Clerical accounts, which include the names of the women from whom purification offerings were collected, are even more helpful in this regard. The records from All

⁸⁰ Shenton, “Four Weddings, Twelve Churchings and a Funeral.”

⁸¹ See IPM 3/430; IPM 3/431; IPM 3/432; IPM 3/484; IPM 6/188; IPM 7/169; IPM 7/245; IPM 7/251; IPM 7/540; IPM 7/544; IPM 9/63; IPM 9/670; IPM 10/334; IPM 10/336; IPM 13/60; IPM 13/66; IPM 14/346; IPM 19/665; IPM 19/781; IPM 20/844; PRO C 139/31/72; PRO C 139/61/52.

⁸² The mother of the Wiltshire sisters Eleanor and Mary de Mohun was purified after their births in 1280 and 1282 respectively. See IPM 3/431 and IPM 3/430.

Saints, Northampton, which cover five years out of the seven between 1545 and 1552, present eight women having been purified three times, and twelve women having been purified twice.⁸³ The Hornsea, Yorkshire accounts show eleven women having undergone two purifications between 1481 and 1485.⁸⁴ It must be noted that complicating any attempt to determine any one woman's purification history from these sources is the fact that most women are identified as the wife of so-and-so. Several men

⁸³ See Appendix D:

3 Purifications:

Blakeshaw's wife:	19 Nov 1546; 2 Feb 1551; 19 April 1552
Robert Brown's wife:	1 Aug 1547; 14 June 1550; 1 Oct 1551
William Chamberlyn's wife:	6 Feb 1547; 19 Oct 1549; 11 Dec 1551
William Goodwen's wife:	8 June 1546; 26 Feb 1551; 9 Apr 1552
John Gross's wife:	18 Mar 1546; 2 May 1551; 14 Aug 1552
John Long's wife:	20 Feb 1546; 24 July 1547; 15 Oct 1549
Samuel Smyth's wife:	18 Feb 1546; 6 Sept 1547; 14 June 1550
Thomas Wonley's wife:	6 Mar 1546; 30 Nov 1550; 8 July 1552

2 Purifications:

Myles Blomer's wife:	19 June 1547; 22 Apr 1551
John Felypse's wife:	3 Oct 1550; 6 May 1552
Ralph Freman's wife:	8 Nov 1548; 28 Sept 1550
William Freman's wife:	6 Sept 1547; 28 Feb 1551
John Grene's wife:	30 May 1547; 17 May 1550
Thomas Grene's wife:	4 Aug 1547; 18 Dec 1550
Richard Grey's wife:	19 May 1551; 5 July 1552
John Haresun's wife:	4 July 1547; 12 Mar 1550
Thomas Oplyn's wife:	1 Aug 1546; 17 Sept 1551
Margery Samuell:	21 Jan 1546; 10 May 1550
John Townyshend's wife:	30 Oct 1549; 22 Aug 1551
Thomas Wyte's wife:	10 Dec 1545; 2 Dec 1546

⁸⁴ See Heath, Medieval Clerical Accounts, pp. 28-9, 35-6, 42-3:

James Bagley's servant	c. 2 years between purifications
John Bell's wife	c. 1 year between purifications
Richard Calyngerth's wife	c. 1 year between purifications
William Elwold's wife	c. 3 years between purifications
Gregory's wife	c. 1 year between purifications
William Hall's wife	c. 2 years between purifications
John Laneroke's wife	c. 3 years between purifications
John Maior's wife	c. 1 year between purifications
Richard Skelton's wife	c. 1 year between purifications
John Watson's wife	c. 1 year between purifications

may share the same name. This is most likely the case in the Hornsea accounts which list two offerings made at separate times for the purification of "John Sanderson's wife" in 1485, one for 1d., the other for 1½d. It is also possible that John Sanderson had two wives (serially) during the period under question. Occasionally, a woman is identified by her own name. For example, in the All Saints records, John Weston's wife was purified on December 28, 1550; in 1552 one Anna Weston was purified on August 26. It is impossible to ascertain if these are the same person. Nevertheless, even after eliminating dubious records, there is enough evidence to suggest that women were not just purified after the birth of their firstborn, and they were purified after the birth of both female and male children.

And finally, the period of time between a woman's having given birth and her purification can be ascertained in the proofs-of-age.⁸⁵ These records routinely indicate the day the heir was baptised, which was often the day of birth or shortly thereafter. More haphazard is any reference to the day or date of the mother-of-the-heir's purification. The thirty records that give some indication as to the time of the mother's purification suggest that there was little consistency in the period of time a woman waited to return to church after having given birth. Appendix E presents that information in chart form. Fourteen of the records indicate a period of twenty-seven to thirty-six days, or approximately a month. But the other sixteen records range from eleven days to one hundred and twenty-seven. The small size of this sample precludes making any but the most general of conclusions. It would appear that there was some flexibility around the length of time

Thomas Wheytley's wife

c. 1 year between purifications

⁸⁵ Clerical accounts are of no help here because no offering was recorded for baptisms.

women waited to return to church after the birth of a child. Also, there is no apparent correlation between the sex of the child and the length of time a woman refrained from attending church.⁸⁶

This examination of the liturgical books and related documents has revealed the words, gestures and actions which comprised the rite of the purification of women after childbirth as it was practised in England between the thirteenth century and the promulgation of the second Edwardian Book of Common Prayer in 1552. Something else these sources demonstrate is that the rite of post-partial purification was celebrated frequently in medieval English parishes. The clerical accounts of Scarborough parish and All Saints, Northampton, and the churchwardens' accounts from Saffron Walden, Essex, indicate that in those parishes the rite of purification was celebrated in the parish church anywhere from twenty-three to fifty-four days of the year.⁸⁷ As David Cressy observes, the rhythms and messages of routine religious observances "were made familiar through frequent reiteration."⁸⁸ What are the messages the rite of purification communicated and reinforced? Post-partial purification, like all rituals, both defined its participants and their world, and gave them an opportunity to re-define themselves and their world as they

⁸⁶ This is despite the fact that the Penitentials prescribe a set period of days according to the sex of the child, and the pastoral literature which replaced them discusses the theological and scientific reasons behind those prescriptions. Penitentials and pastoral literature are discussed in chapter three of this study.

⁸⁷ Scarborough: 1423-4: 24 days; 1424-5: 30 days; 1425-6: 27 days; 1426-7: 42 days; 1434-5: 54 days; 1435-6: 50 days; 1438-9: 35 days; 1441-2: 23 days. See Appendix C. Saffron Walden: 1474-5: 30 days; 1475-6: 35 days. See Appendix B. All Saints, Northampton: 1545-6: 24 days; 1546-7: 31 days; 1549-50: 40 days; 1550-1: 39 days; 1551-2: 49 days. See Appendix D.

⁸⁸ David Cressy, "Purification, Thanksgiving and the Churching of Women in Post-Reformation England," Past and Present 141 (1993), p. 106.

interpreted and elaborated the rite.⁸⁹ Because the participants in this rite were primarily women, its words, gestures and actions have been examined by scholars of early-modern history for what they reveal about the image and roles of women. This discussion has been organised around the question: Was the rite of post-partal purification primarily a rite of transition, thanksgiving or purification?⁹⁰ The sources which have been discussed in this chapter reveal elements of transition, thanksgiving and purification interwoven within the medieval rite of post-partal purification.

A Rite of Transition, Thanksgiving or Purification?

There are some obvious elements of transition, or re-integration, evident within the liturgical rites of post-partal purification. As was indicated at the beginning of this chapter, this rite usually marked a new mother's return to church after a period of

⁸⁹ See Catherine Bell, Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice, (New York Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 204-11; Mary Collins, "Critical Ritual Studies: Examining an Intersection of Theology and Culture," The Bent World: Essays on Religion and Culture, ed. John R. May, (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1981), p. 131; Cressy, pp. 106-7; Gail McMurray Gibson, "Blessing from Sun and Moon: Churching as Women's Theater," Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt, and David Wallace, Medieval Cultures, 9 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 144.

⁹⁰ E.g. von Arx, pp. 67-9; and Swete, p. 147, argue for purification. William Coster, "Purity, Profanity, and Puritanism: The Churching of Women, 1500-1700," Women in the Church, ed. W.J. Sheils and Diana Wood, Studies in Church History, 27 (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 382-3; Cheryl Kristolaitis, "From Purification to Celebration: The History of the Service for Women after Childbirth," Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society 28.2 (1986), p. 59; Susan C. Karant-Nunn, "Churching, a Women's Rite," The Reformation of Ritual: An Interpretation of Early Modern Germany, Christianity and Society in the Modern World (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 82-5; and Adrian Wilson, "Participant or Patient? Seventeenth-Century Childbirth from the Mother's Point of View," Patients and Practitioners: Lay Perceptions of Medicine in Pre-Industrial Society, ed. Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 129-44, argue for transition. Franz, 2:229-30; Cressy, p. 119; and Gibson, "Blessing from Sun and Moon," p. 146, argue for thanksgiving or blessing.

absence. All the extant liturgical rites begin at the door of the church where the priest leads the new mother by the hand across the threshold while reciting the words: "Enter into the temple of God." Those rites, which place post-partal purification in the context of the mass, direct that the new mother be ceremonially offered the blessed bread at the end of the mass. Even more explicitly, the Bodleian Pontifical includes a prayer restoring the purified woman "to God and to the sacraments of the church." The purification of a queen restored her not only to the worshipping community but to public life. The Liber regie capelle directs that at the conclusion of the mass the procession is to reassemble and return to the queen's chamber where her reinstatement to court life is celebrated.⁹¹

But if transition was the primary focus of the rite of purification, the transition it signalled or effected was from a state of isolation from the worshipping community due to her pregnant and post-partal state, to a restoration to that community via ritual purification. William Coster and Adrian Wilson note that there is a direct connection between the rite of post-partal purification and the pre-eminent Christian rite of transition, baptism. According to Coster, the introduction of the new mother into the church by the priest parallels the practice, described in the Sarum Manual, of passing a child to its godparent over the threshold of the church in baptism. Wilson notes that the new mother returns her child's chrisom cloth, the cloth wrapped around her newborn at its baptism, as part of her offering.⁹² At her child's baptism, the chrisom cloth was understood to signify

⁹¹ Ullman, Liber regie capelle, p. 73: "Ibique, si placet serenitati regie, sermone cum ipsa habito accedit postea Regina ad prandium, in qua Regina statum tenet cum dominabus et domicellis suis in magna gloria et honore. Omnibus rite antea preparatis que ad tantum festum pertinent, conuiuioque solenniter finito et potu in fine cum speciebus pro statu Regine sub pallio aureo pausantis ministrato, Regina in interiorem cameram cum dominabus deducitur, reliquis ad propria iuxta placitum remeantibus."

⁹² Coster, p. 383; Wilson, "Ceremony of Childbirth," p. 80.

“how the little one has been cleansed from sin, its whiteness representing life eternal and future resurrection.”⁹³ It most likely held similar connotations at her purification. As Cheryl Kristolaitis remarks, a woman when pregnant and newly delivered seems to have acquired the status of an “‘unbaptized’ baptized person.”⁹⁴ And indeed, all but the York rite direct that the new mother be sprinkled with holy water. In Christian liturgies, asperges commemorates baptismal cleansing. Although the York rite of purification does not include asperges, it, and the Bodleian Pontifical, include a prayer of absolution at the end of the mass.

A statute issued by Richard Poore, bishop of Salisbury, sometime between 1217 and 1219 further confirms the new mother’s perceived state of impurity when it decrees that although new mothers may receive the blessed bread at their purifications, they may not receive sacramental communion unless they go to confession first.⁹⁵ Susan Karant-Nunn suggests the new mother was considered a danger to the community; the German liturgical practice whereby the cleric extended his left hand or the left-hand (sinister) end of his stole for the new mother to grasp in her right hand (dexter)⁹⁶ signified the priest’s power to purify and to protect others from the dangers she posed in her unpurified state. In England the priest extended his right hand to lead the new mother into the church. This may have held similar connotations.

⁹³ *Councils and Synods*, p. 427, #18: “Panni etiam crismales in usus seculares nullatenus convertantur, cum sacro font renovati munditiam significant qua ablutus est parvulus a peccatis, in cuius candor vita eterna et futura resurrectio figuratur.” See also p. 988.

⁹⁴ Kristolaitis, p. 57.

⁹⁵ See Appendix F/A/1.

⁹⁶ Karant-Nunn, p. 77.

In the last quarter of the sixteenth century, it was customary for the new mother to wear a white veil to her purification. According to some commentators at the time, "it was suggestive of the white garment worn in penance."⁹⁷ As indicated earlier, I have found only one pre-Reformation reference to a veil, and its colour is not indicated.

Given this focus on purification, there are surprisingly few references to the Virgin Mary in the liturgical rites, and only one reference to her purification. That is found in the Liber regie capelle. Rather than purification, John Carmi Parsons suggests that the Marian imagery employed in the rites around royal childbirth afforded "Christological allusions for future kings," that is, created a parallel between the Trinity and the royal family.⁹⁸ Although there are few references to the Virgin Mary in the liturgical sources, medieval English sermons and didactic literature discuss the Purification of the Virgin in some detail. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the post-partial woman's impurity is not emphasised there either.

Although many elements found in the rite of purification reinforce an image of the post-partial woman as impure and dangerous, the psalms and prayers included in the rite are ones of petition and thanksgiving for fecundity and deliverance from the perils of childbirth. Psalm 120 is common to all four extant rites.⁹⁹ It begins, "I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains, from whence help shall come to me," and goes on to extol God's mercy and invoke God's protection. Psalm 127, "Blessed are all they that fear the Lord,"

⁹⁷ Cressy, p. 133. Cressy, pp. 132-40, discusses the late-sixteenth- and seventeenth-century controversy over the wearing of veils. See also Coster, pp. 383-4.

⁹⁸ See Parsons, "Ritual and Symbol," pp. 66-7.

⁹⁹ The numbering of the psalms used here is according to the Vulgate. All psalms quoted are from the Douay-Rheims Bible.

which is included in all but the York rite, seeks God's continued blessing upon this fruitful woman and her descendants.

The rite found in Chichele's Pontifical incorporates two additional psalms. Psalm 24 which begins: "To thee, O Lord, have I lifted up my soul," invokes God's mercy: "For thy name's sake, O Lord, thou wilt pardon my sin; for it is great" (11); as well as extolling it: the one who fears the Lord "shall dwell in good things: and his seed shall inherit the land" (13). Psalm 66, "May God have mercy on us, and bless us," just like Psalms 127 and 24, focuses on God's mercy, and mentions fecundity: "Let the people, O God, confess to thee: let all the people give praise to thee: the earth hath yielded her fruit" (6-7).

The prayer common to all the extant versions of the rite, which I have reproduced above, on page 15, also focuses on fecundity and God's mercy in delivering the new mother from the perils of childbirth. The two Pontificals add a prayer at the end of the mass entreating the "all powerful eternal God" to "mercifully allow this woman who has been purified after giving birth and mercifully preserved from death be presented to you," just as Christ was presented in the temple. They also elaborate upon the invitation to "enter into the temple of the living God," admonishing the new mother to "pray to the Son of the Virgin Mary, who gave you fecundity to bring forth children."

Elements of thanksgiving, purification, and transition are all interwoven within the extant medieval English rites of post-partal purification. But where did the emphasis lie for medieval folk? David Cressy asserts that "the ecclesiastical ceremony, . . . had different resonances and implications according to the religious viewpoint, authority, role

and gender of the parties involved.”¹⁰⁰ Yet, in the same essay he also insists “there are three separate issues here, three distinct activities with different meanings and different histories.”¹⁰¹ There is a tendency among modern commentators, although they acknowledge a complex interaction of forces at work, to present the three intertwining themes of thanksgiving, purification and transition evident in this rite as competing or somehow incompatible with one another. The medieval evidence does not support that conclusion. Rather, whatever the source of information or social group examined, all three themes are in evidence and at play, suggesting that while the isolation of those three themes may aid analysis of the rite of post-partial purification, and the customs surrounding it, doing so is a modern preoccupation not necessarily shared by the medieval participants and observers of this rite. The complex intertwining of the themes of transition or integration, purification and thanksgiving in the medieval sources will become more evident in the next chapter which examines how these same three themes were interwoven within the celebration and explication of the feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary. Let me illustrate my point here with the childwife pew.

As I indicated earlier, prior to 1552 the childwife pew most likely served as a reserved seat for the women being purified and their attendants. After having been welcomed at the door of the church and led over the threshold, the new mother most likely processed with her company to the childwife pew. From there she would have offered her gifts, proceeded to the altar steps to receive the blessed bread, and, perhaps,

¹⁰⁰ Cressy, p. 107. Karant-Nunn, p. 88, speaks of the rite of purification as being “multiply symbolic,” different groups having their own perceptions of the rite, their own “structures of signification.”

¹⁰¹ Cressy, p. 107.

processed out at the end of the mass. As Susan Karant-Nunn observes, "churching provided one of the two occasions when a woman was prominent in the public eye," the other being her first marriage.¹⁰² The new mother was conspicuously reintroduced into the worshipping community which joined her in prayers of thanksgiving for her safe delivery, and petitioned God for her continued safety in this life and the next.

Gail McMurray Gibson notes that "childbirth until the most recent time was as perilous as it was ordinary."¹⁰³ While the whole community joined the new mother in her prayers of thanksgiving for a safe delivery, it is likely that the women among whom she sat and who shared those same perils, were particularly mindful of her absence, and accorded her special attention upon her return to their midst.

At the same time that the childwife pew served as a place of honour, it also signified the new mother's impure or dangerous state, isolating her from the community. In her comprehensive essay on women and church seating, Margaret Aston observes that,

taboos relating to blood and semen, the ritual laws of pollution derived from the Levitic code, operated strongly in the medieval Church. Though Gregory the Great argued tolerantly that menstruation was a natural infirmity, and that women could make up their own minds about receiving the Sacrament at such times, the sense of need to protect sacred ground and holy rites went on making fences against the female sex.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Karant-Nunn, p. 85.

¹⁰³ Gibson, "Blessing from Sun and Moon," p. 146. Roger Schofield, "Did the Mothers Really Die? Three Centuries of Maternal Mortality in 'The World We Have Lost'," The World We Have Gained: Histories of Population and Social Structure, ed. Lloyd Bonfield, and others (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 231-60, demonstrates that prior to 1750, mortality rates in childbirth averaged 10 per 1000 live births, whereas the maternal mortality rate in England and Wales in 1980 was 0.1 per 1000 live births.

¹⁰⁴ Margaret Aston, "Segregation in Church," Women in the Church, ed. W.J. Sheils and Diana Wood, p. 244.

Childwife pews could certainly have served as such fences, segregating the impure hence dangerous woman.¹⁰⁵ Aston documents the long history of the segregation of women and men in church which was “one separation among others.”¹⁰⁶ It became customary to position the congregation from east to west according to age, vocation, and sex, women being grouped in the west, “farthest from the altar, chancel, and holiest part of the building.”¹⁰⁷ When church seats made their appearance in England they were first occupied by women, the aged and the infirm.¹⁰⁸ And later, when the more permanent pews came into vogue, they were erected first on the women’s side of the nave,¹⁰⁹ reifying the segregation of the sexes and gender stereotypes that underlay it.

This description of the rite of the purification of women after childbirth in medieval England, and the examination of its elements suggests that it was a rite of

¹⁰⁵ Although Aston, p. 259, notes that “as the medieval centuries wore on, fear of sexual encounters in church seems to have loomed larger than fear of female pollution of the altar.”

¹⁰⁶ Aston, p. 238.

¹⁰⁷ Aston, pp. 238-42. In England the women were usually seated on the north side, men on the south. See J. Charles Cox, Bench-Ends in English Churches (London: Oxford University Press, 1916), pp. 17-18. Aston argues that this parallels the east/west division of the early church.

¹⁰⁸ Aston, p. 259. According to J. Charles Cox, English Church Fittings Furniture and Accessories (London: J.J. Kiliher and Co., 1923), p. 103, the original seats of the church were of stone, and formed part of the structure. Examples can be found from as early as the sixth and seventh centuries. Those needing seats were also permitted to bring mats and stools to sit upon. See Cox, Bench-Ends, p. 2. Aston, pp. 251, 252, 260, includes several illustrations of women sitting on stools.

¹⁰⁹ Aston, p. 264. See also Katherine L. French, “Local Identity and the Late Medieval Parish: The Communities of Bath and Wells,” Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1993, p. 180; and Cox, Bench-Ends, p. 10. Cox, English Church Fittings, p. 104, states that fixed seats in the body of the church were introduced about the end of the 14th century, although a dispute over seats in church recorded in the statutes of a synod in Exeter in 1287 indicates that there was designated seating in church nearly a century earlier. See J. Charles Cox and Alfred Harvey, English Church Furniture, The Antiquary’s Books (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1907), p. 283; Councils and Synods, pp. 1007-8; W.J. Hardy, “Remarks on the History of Seat-Reservation in Churches,” Archaeologia 53 (1892), p. 96.

transition, thanksgiving and purification. As such, it conveyed an equally multi-dimensional, or complex, image of its women participants.

In order to study the dynamics of a liturgical rite such as post-partial purification, Natalie Zemon Davis suggests we must try to understand it as doctrine: that which is prescribed; metaphor: "those features of language, gesture, and movement which make statements about human relationships;" and performance: "the actual event, as close as we can get to it, as experienced by worshippers in a given time and place."¹¹⁰ Such an understanding requires that we go beyond the liturgical formulae to study the contexts in which they were performed, compare the roles and understandings of the various persons involved in their performance, and analyse the interaction among those persons.¹¹¹ Those tasks will occupy the rest of this study. We will begin by examining the role played by the rite of post-partial purification in the ritual life of the community.

¹¹⁰ Natalie Zemon Davis, "From Popular Religion to Religious Cultures," Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research, ed. Steven Ozment (St. Louis, MO: Center for Reformation Research, 1982), pp. 331-2.

¹¹¹ Davis, "From Popular Religion," pp. 323-4.

CHAPTER 2

**“She thought in her soul that she saw Our Lady being purified.”
THE PURIFICATION OF SAINT MARY AND THE MEDIEVAL RITE OF
POST-PARTAL PURIFICATION**

When Margery Kempe saw women “being purified of their children,” she tells us, “she thought in her soul that she saw Our Lady being purified.”¹ For Kempe and her contemporaries the rite of post-partal purification and the feast of the Purification of Saint Mary were closely intertwined. Their relationship was a complex one, shaped over centuries during which significant social, intellectual and theological developments occurred. There is abundant medieval commentary regarding the feast of the Purification. Sermons and didactic literature instruct regarding its origins, celebration and significance. Scriptural exegesis provides its theological underpinnings. And alabaster altar-pieces, stained-glass windows, and the mystery plays give it figure and form. Interwoven within this commentary are both explicit and implicit references to the rite of purification which together shed light upon the role played by this rite in the ritual life of the community, as

¹ BMK, bk. 1, ch. 82, p. 198/24-9: “Sche had swech holy thowtys & meditacyons many tymes whan sche saw women ben purifyd of her childeryn. Sche thowt in hir sowle þat sche saw owr Lady ben purifjd & had hy contemplacyon in þe beheldyng of þe women wheche comyn to offeryn wyth þe women þat weryn purifjd.”

well as some of the ways it may have both reflected and influenced the perception of the women participating in it.

The Sources

The extant sermons, scriptural exegesis, didactic literature, iconography and mystery plays pertaining to the feast of the Purification as it was celebrated in medieval England span eight centuries, have their origins in England and the Continent, and are recorded in Latin and the vernacular. Despite this diversity, there is a remarkable consistency in the themes expounded and the authorities cited in these sources. David L. d'Avray suggests that the durability of the themes associated with a particular feast day make sermons "good sources for comparative history."² By tracing a theme through the sermons of different periods it is possible to uncover the continuities and innovations in the social attitudes relating to that theme, as well as significant areas of silence.³ In this chapter I adapt d'Avray's insight, tracing the themes associated with the feast of the Purification through sermons, but also through the scriptural exegesis, didactic literature, iconography and mystery plays related to them.⁴ I confine myself to the eight centuries

² David L. d'Avray, "Method in the Study of Medieval Sermons," Modern Questions about Medieval Sermons: Essays on Marriage, Death, History and Sanctity, ed. Nicole Bériou, and David L. d'Avray, Biblioteca di Medioevo Latino, 11 (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi Sull'Alto Medioevo, 1994), p. 5.

³ See d'Avray, "Method," pp. 5, 25.

⁴ Works regarding the study and analysis of medieval English sermons which inform this study include: David L. d'Avray, The Preaching of the Friars: Sermons diffused from Paris before 1300 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985); and "Method," pp. 3-29; H. Leith Spencer, English Preaching in the Late Middle Ages (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993); Siegfried Wenzel, Macaronic Sermons: Bilingualism and Preaching in Late-Medieval England (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994); and Preachers, Poets, and the Early English Lyric (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); J.W. Blench, Preaching in England in the Late Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries: A Study of English Sermons 1450-c.1600 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964).

during which these sources were composed, compiled and created, for they saw marked social, intellectual and theological developments which altered and nuanced the understanding and celebration of the feast of the Purification, and contributed to the development of the rite of purification and the perceptions of its female participants.

D'Avray also suggests that "we may find in sermons a representative distillation of social attitudes present in a more diffuse way in the atmosphere of their time."⁵ It is true that the views expressed in sermon manuscripts, as well as exegetical works and didactic literature, are those of the educated clergy; and this literature is didactic in nature, intended to form rather than reflect its audience's views. But because the core concepts of that literature were reiterated year after year, century after century, we can assume that this literature did influence and shape, and ultimately reflect, popular assumptions. Also, H. Leith Spencer reminds us that we cannot know "what kind of compromise was reached between forming the audience's views and conforming to their expectations."⁶ Besides that, educated clerics were not immune to the thought and values of their day.⁷ Modern

The pastoral constitutions of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) led to a systematic campaign on the part of the church to instruct the laity in the essentials of the faith. Although sermons and pastoral literature played an important role in that campaign, the visual arts, especially church decoration, and the mystery plays were closely related to the catechetical enterprise. See Leonard E. Boyle, "The Fourth Lateran Council and Manuals of Popular Theology," The Popular Literature of Medieval England, ed. Thomas J. Heffernan, Tennessee Studies in Literature, 28 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), pp. 30-43; Richard Marks, Stained Glass in England During the Middle Ages (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 78; Meg Twycross, "Books for the Unlearned," Themes in Drama 5: Drama and Religion, ed. James Redmond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 65-110; David Mills, "Medieval and Modern Views of Drama," The Revels History of Drama in English: Volume 1 Medieval Drama, ed. A.C. Cawley and others, (London and New York: Methuen, 1983), pp. 84-6.

⁵ D'Avray, "Method," pp. 4, 26. Spencer, p. 88, concurs.

⁶ Spencer, p. 91.

⁷ See d'Avray, "Method," pp. 6-7, 9-10, 26; Spencer, pp. 80-91.

commentators suggest that medieval English alabaster carvings, stained-glass windows, and mystery plays allow us even closer access to the commonplaces of the time, as they were largely commissioned by lay patrons, and created for lay audiences.⁸

The themes woven through the medieval textual and iconographic commentaries on the feast of the Purification are many and intertwining, revealing a complex relationship between the feast of the Purification and the rite of post-partial purification. In order to contextualise this discussion I will begin by outlining the origins of the feast and its development in England.

Origins of the Feast of the Purification

The Purification was the first Marian feast celebrated in the West. Its presence there can be documented from the first half of the seventh century, although it may have been observed even earlier.⁹ However, the earliest evidence of this feast comes from the East. On her pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Egeria witnessed in Jerusalem, sometime between 381 and 384, an unnamed liturgical celebration held on the fortieth day after the Epiphany (February 14), during which,

⁸ As W.L. Hildburgh, "Folk-Life Recorded in Medieval English Alabaster Carvings," *Folk-Lore* 60 (1949), pp. 253, puts it: "In the alabasterman's art, as in the mystery plays, the warp was provided, more or less directly, by the church; but the woof, with its glow of local colour, was English." Regarding stained glass see Marks, *Stained Glass in England*, pp. 3-27, 78; and for mystery plays see David Mills, "Drama and Folk-Ritual," *The Revels History of Drama*, pp. 122-151; and William Tydeman, "An Introduction to Medieval English Theatre," *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. Richard Beadle, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 9, 20, 26.

⁹ See, Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (London and New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), pp. 1, 142; Kenneth W. Stevenson, "The Origins and Development of Candlemas: A Struggle for Identity and Coherence?," *Time and Community*, ed. J. Neil Alexander (Washington, DC: Pastoral, 1990), pp. 56-7.

all the presbyters preach[ed] first, then the bishop, and they interpret[ed] the passage from the Gospel about Joseph and Mary taking the Lord to the Temple, and about Simeon and the prophetess Anna, daughter of Phanuel, seeing the Lord, and what they said to him, and about the sacrifice offered by his parents.¹⁰

Cyril of Scythopolis attests that around 450 this feast was known as "Hypapante," meaning "the meeting," referring to the encounter between Simeon and Anna, and the Christ. He also notes the introduction of candles, symbolic of the journey towards that encounter, at that time.¹¹ By the sixth century, the feast had appeared at Constantinople. According to Theophanes' Chronographia, Justinian introduced it in response to the outbreak of plague in October 534, while Theophylactus Simocatta describes it as having originated with Emperor Maurice, in response to a riot in 602.¹²

There is some dispute as to how the Marian feasts, including Hypapante, were introduced to the West. Until recently it was thought that Pope Sergius I (687-701) introduced them to Rome whence they spread throughout the West, for the principal evidence for their introduction in Rome is found in the Liber pontificalis which attributes to him this liturgical innovation:

that on the days of the Annunciation of the Lord, the falling asleep and Nativity of the ever-virgin Mary, the holy Mother of God and of St. Symeon, which the greeks call ypapante, a procession should be made from St Hadrian's.¹³

¹⁰ Quoted in Stevenson, p. 50.

¹¹ See, Stevenson, pp. 51, 53; also Éric Palazzo and Ann-Katrin Johansson, "Jalons liturgiques pour une histoire du culte de la Vierge dans l'Occident latin (V^e-XI^e siècles)," Marie: le culte de la Vierge dans la société médiévale, ed. Dominique Iogna-Prat, Éric Palazzo, and Daniel Russo (Paris: Beauchesne, 1996), p. 23.

¹² See, Stevenson, p. 51.

¹³ Quoted in Stevenson, p. 57.

Hilda Graef has challenged that assumption, asserting rather a gradual adoption and development in Rome of the Marian feasts brought from Jerusalem by migrating monks in the seventh century.¹⁴

Whatever the case may be, as the feast known as Hypapante was assimilated by the West, Mary's purification assumed a more prominent role than it was given in the East. Less than a century after Sergius I's reference to the feast as "Hypapante," liturgical documents began referring to it as the Purification of Saint Mary. Both titles are to be found in the western sacramentaries until the first decades of the eleventh century, after which the feast is almost universally identified as the Purification of Saint Mary.¹⁵ During that same period of time, blessing of the candles held in the procession was introduced into the liturgical celebration of the feast. This is a western innovation.¹⁶ Although the blessings were initially addressed to Christ, in the tenth and eleventh centuries they increasingly reflected Marian symbolism.¹⁷

The Feast of the Purification in England

The Anglo-Saxons were slow in adopting the Marian focus of this feast. Between 750 and 900 it was referred to as "Hypapante" in England and Ireland, and its focus was

¹⁴ Graef, p. 142. See also Mary Clayton, The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 29; Palazzo and Johansson, p. 23; Marina Warner, Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), p. 66.

¹⁵ See, Stevenson, pp. 58-62; Palazzo and Johansson, p. 23.

¹⁶ Stevenson, p. 60; Palazzo and Johansson, p. 27. This was introduced in the Carolingian period beginning in the late ninth century.

¹⁷ Palazzo and Johansson, pp. 27-8.

Simeon's encounter with Christ.¹⁸ This has led Raymund Kottje to postulate that this feast made its way to the British Isles directly from Byzantium before it had arrived at Rome and taken on a Marian focus.¹⁹ Nevertheless, most scholars agree that all four Marian feasts identified by Sergius I were introduced to England via Rome,²⁰ and that it took almost two centuries for them to become firmly established there.²¹

Bede provides the earliest evidence for the knowledge in England of the candlelight procession held in honour of the "blessed mother and perpetual virgin" in Rome on February 2 (the feast of the Nativity was fixed on December 25 during the late fourth century):

But the christian religion rightly changed this practice of expiating when in the same month on the feast day of St Mary all the people together with their priests and ministers with devout hymns went in procession through the churches and suitable places in the city, and all carried in their hands burning wax candles given by the pope. With the growth of that good custom, he instructed that they do it also on the other feasts of the same blessed mother and perpetual virgin, not by any means for the five-yearly expiation of the earthly empire, but in perennial memory of the heavenly kingdom.²²

Bede would prove to be very influential in the understanding and celebration of this feast throughout the middle ages.

¹⁸ Clayton, p. 40.

¹⁹ Raymund Kottje, Studien zum Einfluss des alten Testaments auf Recht und Liturgie des frühen Mittelalters (6.-8. Jahrhundert), Bonner Historische Forschungen, 23 (Bonn: Ludwig Röhrscheid Verlag, 1970), p. 88.

²⁰ See, Clayton, pp. 26-30; Graef, p. 142; Stevenson, pp. 57, 66.

²¹ Clayton, p. 38.

²² Bedae Venerabilis opera didascalica: De temporum ratione liber, ed. C.W. Jones, CCSL, 123B (Turnhout: Brepols, 1977), p. 323. Quoted and translated by Clayton, p. 37, n. 45.

The extant English liturgical books reveal a common pattern in the liturgical celebration of the feast, with some regional differences.²³ Before mass, the candles were blessed with a series of blessing prayers during which they were sprinkled with holy water and incensed. They were then distributed among those gathered, who then processed around the church and churchyard, candles lit, singing Simeon's prayer, the Nunc dimittis, and a selection of anthems addressed to Christ and Mary. During the mass, the gospel narrative from Luke 2 was read, and a thematic homily delivered. The prayers of the mass, including the gradual, secret, communion and postcommunion prayer, either referred to the feast specifically, or were taken from a mass of the Blessed Virgin. There may also have been a sequence specific to the feast.

Margery Kempe allows us to glimpse this feast as it was celebrated in fifteenth-century East Anglia:

On þe Purificacyon Day er ellys Candilmesse day whan þe sayd creatur be-held þe pepil wyth her candelys in cherch, her mende was raueschyd in-to beholdyng of owr Lady offeryng hyr blisful Sone owr Sauyowr to þe preyst Simeon in þe Tempyl, as verily to hir gostly vndirstondyng as 3yf sche had be þer in hir bodily presens for to an offeryd wyth owr Ladys owyn persone. þan was sche so comfortyd be þe contemplacyon in hir sowle þat sche had in þe beholdyng of owr Lord Ihesu Crist & of hys blissyd Modyr, of Simeon þe preyste, of Ioseph, & of oþer personys þat þer weryn whan owr Lady was purifyd, & of þe heuynly songys þat hir thowt sche herd whan owr blisful Lord was offeryd up to Symeon þat sche myth ful euyl beryn vp hir owyn candel to þe preyst, as oþer folke dedyn at þe tyme of offeryng, . . .²⁴

²³ See Stevenson, pp. 61-5, for a detailed discussion of the liturgical books. The regional variations include: the number of candle prayers (from one to seven); the kind of vestments worn (festal or penitential); the placement of the Nunc dimittis; the number and kind of anthems sung; the addition of the blessing of the new fire; the altar at which the candles were blessed (main or Mary); the presence of stations at which the procession paused; the themes of the stations, prayers, and anthems.

²⁴ BMK, bk. 1, ch. 82, p. 198/1-15. Kempe describes a custom not found in the liturgical rubrics but common practice in late medieval England. According to Eamon Duffy, The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580 (London: Yale University

Although the feast of the Purification assumed a Marian focus in the West, Kempe's account attests to the fact that this was not to the exclusion of the Christological. As Kenneth W. Stevenson points out, the gospel narrative upon which it is based "is too complex for one theme to dominate. Luke's narrative is both purification and presentation, it is both meeting with Simeon, and Anna, and an encounter between the believer and the Christ."²⁵ This complexity did not escape the feast's medieval commentators who attempted to explicate its intertwining themes and their significance by discussing the three names by which it had come to be known: Candlemas, the Presentation of the Lord, and the Purification of Saint Mary.²⁶ I will follow their example here.

Candlemas

Eamon Duffy asserts that the distribution of blessed candles, "and the empowerment of lay people against hostile and evil forces which they represented, tended to override every other aspect of the feast in popular consciousness."²⁷ So, let us begin there.

Press, 1992), p. 16, "every parishioner was obliged to join in [the procession], carrying a blessed candle, which was offered, together with a penny, to the priest at Mass. The candles so offered were part of the laity's parochial dues, and were probably often burned before the principal image of the Virgin in the church."

²⁵ Stevenson, p. 47.

²⁶ "Hoc festum beate Marie tribus nuncupatur nominibus. Dicitur enim purificatio beate Marie, dicitur et candelaria, dicitur etiam Ypapanti Domini." Johannis Beleth, Summa de ecclesiasticis officiis, ed. H. Doutel, CCCM, 41A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1976), pp. 148-9.

²⁷ Duffy, pp. 17-8.

The twelfth-century Paris master Johannis Beleth acknowledges, "We have no authorities to tell us why this feast is called Candlemas, rather, it was derived from the customs of the ancients."²⁸ He goes on to describe how the Christians in ancient Rome turned a candlelight pagan procession around the city, known as "amburbale," into "a feast of praise and veneration for the Blessed Virgin Mary." Durandus (1230-1296) and Jacobus de Voragine (c.1230-c.1298), author of the Golden Legend, repeat and expand upon this explanation of the institution of the feast by Pope Sergius I as a remedy to pagan superstition.²⁹ Yet, medieval Christian practices associated with this celebration were not themselves free of, what the modern mind would classify as, superstitious elements.

By the twelfth century, the practice of blessing the candles carried in the procession was well established in the West, including England.³⁰ This practice, according to Stevenson, "doubtless expressed and fulfilled a pastoral need as the feast, with its Mass prayers and its procession, embedded itself in northern Europe."³¹ In the process, the candles assumed apotropaic powers. "People took blessed candles away

²⁸ Beleth, Summa de ecclesiasticis officiis, p. 149: "Quare autem candelaria uocetur, ab aliqua auctoritate non habetur, sed potius ab antiqua gentiliū consuetudine. Erat enim antiquitus consuetudo Rome, ut circa hoc tempus in principio Februarii lustrarent urbem ambiendo eam cum processionibus deportantes singuli cereos ardentes uel candelas, et uocabatur illud amburbale. Et ab illa consuetudine illud, quod fiebat a gentilibus in indiscretos usus, a Christianis fit modo in festo beate Marie ad laudem et uenerationem ipsius."

²⁹ See, William Durandus, Rationale divinorum officiorum (Venice: M. A. Zalterius, 1599), 7.7.14-15; Jacobus de Voragine, The Golden Legend (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1941), pp. 151-2. See also, Theodor Erbe, ed., Mirk's Festial, EETS, e.s., 96 (1905; rpt. New York: Kraus Reprint, 1975), pp. 59-60.

³⁰ Stevenson, pp. 65-6, documents the presence of candle blessings in the British liturgical books from the eleventh century onwards.

³¹ Stevenson, p. 61.

from the ceremony, to be lit during thunderstorms or in times of sickness, and to be placed in the hands of the dying.”³² Eamon Duffy asserts that the focus on the apotropaic power of the blessed wax, and the emphasis placed upon the annual procession with candles was characteristic of popular lay consciousness, as opposed to clerical consciousness, in medieval England.³³ Yet, an exemplum supplied for clerics in preaching manuals, and which, in Duffy’s estimation, was “almost invariably included in Candlemas sermons,”³⁴ seems to affirm and reinforce such a focus: A certain woman of noble birth, unable to attend mass on the feast of the Purification, fell asleep as she knelt sorrowing before the altar of Our Lady. She dreamed that she was in church with a company of people led by the Virgin Mary. After candles were given out, Christ, dressed in the vestments of a priest, began to celebrate mass. At the offertory all the people followed Mary in offering their candles to Christ, but the woman refused to do so. The Virgin sent a messenger to take the candle from her. They struggled for possession of the candle until it broke in half, at which time the woman awoke to find a piece of the broken candle still in her hand. “And afterwards she cherished the candle as a most precious relic; and whosoever touched it was cured of every ill.”³⁵ Similar powers are attributed to

³² Duffy, pp. 16-7.

³³ Duffy, pp. 16-18.

³⁴ Duffy, p. 17. Regarding exempla see Jacques Berlioz, “‘Exempla’ as a Source for the History of Women,” Medieval Women and the Sources of Medieval History, ed. Joel T. Rosenthal (Athens, GA and London: University of Georgia Press, 1990), pp. 37-50.

³⁵ The Golden Legend, p. 153. See also Edward H. Weatherly, ed., Speculum sacerdotale, EETS, o.s., 200 (1936; rpt. New York: Kraus Reprint, 1971), pp. 27-9; John Small, ed., English Metrical Homilies from Manuscripts of the Fourteenth Century (Edinburgh: William Paterson, 1862), pp. 160-3. This series of vernacular sermons was composed in the north of England, and became widely distributed during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Also, Theodor Erbe, ed., Mirk’s Festial, EETS, e.s., 96 (1905; rpt. New York: Kraus Reprint, 1975), pp. 60-1; Frances A. Foster, ed., A Stanzaic Life of Christ Compiled from Higden’s

the candles in the first of five prayers of blessing over the candles at the celebration of the feast of the Purification of Saint Mary recorded in the Sarum Missal:

wherever the wax shall be lit or set up, the devil may flee away in fear and trembling with all his ministers, out of those dwellings, and never presume again to disquiet your servants.³⁶

As Robert Scribner has pointed out, there was no hard and fast boundary between medieval clerical and lay religion.³⁷ Both medieval clerics and laity viewed the functioning of the material world in terms of divine agency, wherein religious ritual

'Polychronicon' and the 'Legenda aurea' edited from MS. Harley 3909, EETS, o.s., 166 (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), pp.102-6. This vernacular poem was compiled at Chester in the fourteenth century. Also, Beverly Boyd, ed., The Middle English Miracles of the Virgin (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1964), pp. 109-10. According to Boyd, this exemplum is extant in at least three versions in sixteen middle English manuscripts.

³⁶ "Benedic domine ihesu christe hanc creaturam cere . . . ut quibuscumque locis accensa siue posita fuerit. discedat diabolus et contremiscat et fugiat pallidus cum omnibus ministris suis de habitationibus illis. nec presumat amplius inquietare seruientes tibi." In, Francis H. Dickinson, ed., Missale ad usum insignis et praeclarae ecclesiae Sarum (1861-83; rpt. Farnborough: Gregg International, 1969), column 697. Translated by Duffy, p. 16. The Dickinson edition of the Sarum Missal was compiled from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century printed editions. The prayer is identical in John Wickham Legg, ed., The Sarum Missal Edited from Three Early Manuscripts (Oxford: Clarendon, 1916), p. 247, which was compiled from thirteenth- and fourteenth-century manuscript sources.

One of the explanations of the origins of the celebration of this feast proffered by medieval commentators may reflect, and, perhaps, have contributed to the attribution of apotropaic powers to the Candlemas candles: The Liber exemplorum ad usum praedicantium, ed., A.G. Little (1908; rpt. Westmead, Hants.: Gregg, 1966), p. 21, a collection of sermon helps compiled by an English Franciscan around 1275-1279, describes the feast as having originated with Justinian who had an image of Mary carried around Constantinople in an attempt to remedy a great plague. This proved successful, so, it is reported, Justinian "declared that a new feast in honour of the Purification of Mary, who liberated the people from all disaster, should be celebrated." "Dum ymago beate Virginis portatur per civitatem, ubicumque advenerat, meritis et precibus Marie fugiebat omnis infirmitas et messis rediit atque fertilitas. Tunc statuerunt fieri festum purificationis beate Marie per quam liberabantur ab omni clade: quod festum antea non fiebat." See, pp. vi-xv, of this volume for a description of the work. This same explanation of the feast's origins is found in the fifteenth-century Speculum sacerdotale, ed. Edward H. Weatherly, EETS, o.s., 200 (1936; rpt. New York: Kraus Reprint, 1971), pp. 25-6.

³⁷ R.W. Scribner, "Ritual and Popular Religion in Catholic Germany at the Time of the Reformation," Journal of Ecclesiastical History 35 (1984), p. 74.

could be seen to provide spiritual order in the world through its liturgical function of making spiritually efficacious what was indicated corporeally. It also provided natural order by invoking divine blessings on the world and by its apotropaic power of banishing the demonic spirits who provoked disorder.³⁸

Scribner identifies an ambivalence among churchmen about the kind of efficacy involved in the ritual blessings conducted by the Church, including that of Candlemas candles. For example, in Germany, it was acceptable to light the candles blessed during Candlemas at a death bed, and to carry them behind the bier at funerals. They could also be used during family devotions in Advent, and at All Souls. But it was forbidden to light them during bad weather as protection against storms, or for the protection of a mother and child during labour.³⁹

Scribner categorises ritual blessings such as that of the Candlemas candles as “magical rituals.” These “inhabited a twilight zone shading from a purely spiritual, ecclesiastically sanctioned notion of ritual efficacy through to an instrumental, magical view, not far removed from practices explicitly prohibited by the Church.”⁴⁰ He observes that “the Church hierarchy, as an ordained priesthood, tried to assert itself as the sole agent of spiritual and natural order attained through ritual. However, what made sacramentals such a difficult area to supervise was the high degree of lay participation they allowed.”⁴¹ The limits and criteria established by theologians and the hierarchy in

³⁸ Scribner, p. 70.

³⁹ See, Scribner, pp. 68, 62.

⁴⁰ Scribner, p. 71.

⁴¹ Scribner, p. 71. Aron I. Gurevich, Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception, Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture, 14 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 62, expresses similar sentiments: “To the majority of the population the difference between amulets, which were strictly forbidden by the clergy, and holy relics was not clear. Why was it considered sinful to use potions, but recommended to toll the bells against a storm? Priests condemned the remedies used by soothsayers and sorcerers for

regards to the use and efficacy of such sacramentals often got blurred in practice at the local level.

In their attempt to eradicate “popish superstition,” the English reformers, while keeping the feast in the liturgical calendar, abolished the blessing and bearing of candles at Candlemas in 1548, although there is evidence that these practices persisted into the 1560s and 1570s.⁴²

The Presentation of the Lord

Margery Kempe’s account of the celebration of the feast of the Purification demonstrates an understanding of its significance on the part of the medieval participants beyond that of the magical powers which may have been attributed to the candles. While attending the candlelight procession, Kempe describes being transported, in “hir gostly vndirstondyng,” to the temple, experiencing Mary’s presentation of her son to the priests as if she were really there. Such identification with the biblical events was in keeping with the piety of her day. As Gail McMurray Gibson explains:

healing the sick but agreed that dust from the altar or a pouch of earth taken from a saint’s grave possessed healing properties. Magic was admitted by the church into its practices and rituals; the border dividing Christian magic from what was condemned as maleficium was indefinite and surely unclear to the parishioners.”

⁴² See, Duffy, pp. 459, 589. The blessing and bearing of candles on Candlemas Day was abolished by an order of Council in January 1547/8, along with the blessing of palms on Palm Sunday, and the imposition of ashes on Ash Wednesday. See James Gairdner, The English Church in the Sixteenth Century from the Accession of Henry VIII to the Death of Mary (London: 1902), p. 254. It was restored under Mary, only to be suppressed again under Elizabeth in 1559. See Henry Gee and William John Hardy, ed., Documents Illustrative of English Church History (London: 1896), pp. 458-9.

The Candlemas processional drama was both in and out of time; it linked the streets or aisles through which the candlelit procession moved and the altar that was the culmination of the journey; it telescoped Old Testament types of Mary's miraculous purity with New Testament story and conjoined the saints of the ancient past with the present body of believers.⁴³

The symbolic re-enactment of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple occasioned a complex interaction between past and present, laity and clergy, collective and individual.

"The Candlemas procession," The Golden Legend tells us, "is a symbol of the procession of Mary, Joseph, Simeon, and Anna, when they presented the Child Jesus in the Temple."⁴⁴ The saints of the past, in turn, were understood to represent the contemporary community of believers in all its diversity. Early commentators in England discuss the "symbolic inclusiveness of the Temple procession"⁴⁵ in terms of the three states of life, mirroring and reinforcing the doctrinal understandings and preoccupations of their day. Aelfric, archbishop of York (1023-1051) explains:

There are three states which bear witness of Christ: that is maidenhood, and widowhood, and lawful matrimony. A maiden is the mother of Christ, and in maidenhood John the Baptist continued, who testified of Christ, and many others besides him. This Anna, of whom we before spake, was a widow. Zacharias, the father of John, was a married man; both he and his wife prophesied concerning Christ.⁴⁶

⁴³ Gail McMurray Gibson, "Blessing from Sun and Moon: Churching as Women's Theater," Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt and David Wallace, Medieval Cultures, 9 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 142. See also Duffy, pp. 19-22; and E. Salter, "Nicholas Love's 'Myrrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ,'" Analecta Cartusiana 10 (1974), pp. 56-118, regarding affective piety.

⁴⁴ Golden Legend, p. 152. See also Durandus, Rationale divinarum, 7.7.11; The Stanzaic Life of Christ, pp. 99-100; Lawrence F. Powell, ed., The Mirroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ (Oxford: Clarendon, 1908), p. 61; Speculum sacerdotale, pp. 26-7.

⁴⁵ Gibson, p. 140.

⁴⁶ Benjamin Thorpe, ed., Aelfric: 'Sermones catholici' in the Original Anglo-Saxon with an English Version, 2 vols. (1844; rpt. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1983), 1:149. See also Edward Meyrick Goulburn and Henry Symonds, ed., The Life, Letters, and Sermons of Bishop Herbert de Losinga, 2 vols. (Oxford and London: James Parker, 1878), 2:87-9; Richard Morris

Aelfric goes on to note: "These three states are agreeable to God, if men righteously live in them." This reflects the movement of social, intellectual and theological developments of Aelfric's century that would culminate in the sacramentalisation of marriage and, hence, married sexuality.⁴⁷ I will return to this point in the discussion of the third name or focus of the feast, the Purification of Saint Mary, below.

Later commentators describe the temple procession in terms of the civic order, a late medieval preoccupation displayed and reinforced in the Candlemas processions of their day.⁴⁸ This is exemplified in Nicholas Love's fifteenth-century Mirroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ:

Afterward they 3eden in manere of processiou towarde the auter with the childe; the whiche processiou is represented this day in alle holy chirche with li3t born to goddis worschippe. And than they wente in this manere: firste tho tweyne worschiful olde men Joseph and Symeon. . . . After hem foloweth the blissed moder and mayden marye berynge the kyng of heuene Jesu; and with hir on the one side gothe the worschiful wydewe Anne with gret reuerence and vnspekeable ioye louynge and preisyng god. This is a solempne and a worschiful processiou of so fewe persones bot grete thinges bytokenynge and representynge for there ben of all states of mankynde some that is to saie of men and wommen olde and 3onge maydenes and wydewes.⁴⁹

The candles were also multivalent, representing both Christ and the believer, as well as serving as a vehicle by which to teach and reinforce doctrinal truths and moral

Richard, ed., Old English Homilies of the Twelfth Century, EETS, o.s., 53 (1873; rpt. New York: Krause Reprint, 1973), p. 48.

⁴⁷ See chapter three of this study.

⁴⁸ This is discussed in detail by David Mills, "Religious Drama and Civic Ceremonial," The Revels History of Drama, pp. 152-60. See also Duffy, pp. 16, 20-1.

⁴⁹ The Mirroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ, pp. 61-2. This middle English adaptation of the Meditationes vitae Christi, erroneously attributed to Bonaventura, was disseminated by Love, prior of the Charterhouse of Mount Grace, in 1410. It was intended for a wide audience including those in contemplative life, secular clergy and the laity. See Salter, pp. 46-54.

teaching. Aelfric informs his audience: "it is appointed in the ecclesiastical observances, that we on this day bear our lights to church, and let them there be blessed; . . . for on this day was Christ, the true Light, borne to the temple."⁵⁰ Four centuries later, the Speculum sacerdotale informs us, the tapers carried in procession still "figurid and bytokened Ihesu Crist"⁵¹ for those who carried them. Within this symbol, the Speculum instructs, are embedded the basic Christological truths. The wax signifies the flesh that Christ took on in the virgin's womb; the flame signifies his divinity; the wick, the divinity hidden in the flesh.⁵²

The candles also signified the believers, both providing a symbol by which to represent themselves individually and collectively before the Lord, and serving as a vehicle of instruction regarding the Christian life. An early twelfth-century sermon

⁵⁰ Aelfric, Sermones catholici, p. 151.

⁵¹ Speculum sacerdotale, p. 27. According to E.H. Weatherly, the editor of this volume, p. xl, this fifteenth-century collection of sermones temporale and sermones de sanctis was compiled in the West Midlands to furnish a book of instruction in matters of church observance and legend in the vernacular for the use of parish priests.

⁵² See Speculum sacerdotale, pp. 24-5, 26-7. This is a common theme found throughout the medieval discussions of this feast. See also: Old English Homilies, pp. 46-8; Belet, Summa de ecclesiasticis officiis, p. 149; Durandus, Rationale divinorum officiorum, 7.7.12; Liber exemplorum ad usum praedicantium, p. 21; English Metrical Homilies, pp. 153-4; The Stanzaic Life of Christ, p. 99. "The Killing of the Children," from the Digby cycle plays, which was already being performed in the fourteenth century, portrays Simeon leading a procession of virgins bearing tapers around the temple, and proclaiming the Christological symbolism of the wax, the wick, and the flame. See F.J. Furnivall, ed., The Digby Plays, EETS, e.s., 70 (1886; rpt. Bungay, Suffolk: Richard Clay, 1967), p. 20/477-92. For a discussion of the Digby plays see John C. Coldewey, "The Non-Cycle Plays and the East Anglian Tradition," The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre, pp. 189-210. The N-Town play of the Purification depicts Joseph presenting candles to Mary, Simeon and Anna, but does not explain their purpose or symbolism, perhaps because of their multivalence. See The N-Town Play: Cotton MS Vespasian D.8, ed. Stephen Spector, EETS, s.s., 11 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 186/163-6. For a discussion of this play cycle see Alan J. Fletcher, "The N-Town Plays," The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre, pp. 163-188.

attributed to Herbert of Losinga, the first bishop of Norwich (d.1120), makes explicit both of these aspects and their interconnection:

It is in the candles of the hearts that God delights, and in those [hearts] which are lightened by the true Light. . . . Flee then from defrauding and false swearing. God hates the exchanges wherein you deal falsely, and wherewith you snare the simple. Let no lust have dominion over you, because fornicators and adulterers God will judge.⁵³

In the thirteenth century Durandus continued the theme of the lighted candle representing the heart of the believer, warning, “there are many who carry shadows in the depths of their hearts, though exteriorly they appear to shine.”⁵⁴ Rather than detailed admonishments regarding Christian behaviour however, he uses the analogy of the candle to instruct more generally regarding the necessity of faith and good works if one is to gain salvation:

The lighted candle that is carried in the hand also signifies faith with good works. For just as one says a candle without a light is dead, and that the light cannot shine by itself and apart from the candle, but appears to be dead, the same is true of works without faith, and faith without works; they are considered to be dead.⁵⁵

Using the same analogy, the Golden Legend highlights the corporate nature of the individual's quest for salvation:

⁵³ Losinga, Life, Letters and Sermons, p. 89. This sermon was recorded in Latin.

⁵⁴ Durandus, Rationale divinarum officiorum, 7.7.13: “Sunt in multi habentes intus tenebras, licet extra lucere videantur.” Timothy M. Thibodeau, “Les sources du ‘Rationale’ de Guillaume Durand,” Guillaume Durand évêque de Mende (v.1230-1296): Canoniste, liturgiste et homme politique, ed. Pierre-Marie Gy, Actes de la Table Ronde du C.N.R.S., Mende 24-27 mai 1990 (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1992), pp. 143-53, discusses the sources, content and wide influence of this thirteenth-century work. He describes it as an encyclopaedic manual about all that was known about liturgy.

⁵⁵ Durandus, Rationale divinarum officiorum, 7.7.13: “candela in manu accensa est fides cum bona operatione, nam sicut candela sine lumine mortua dicitur, & lumen per se absque candela non lucet, sed mortuum esse videtur, sic & operatio sine fide, & fides sine operatione mortua esse dicitur.” This analogy is also found in The Stanzaic Life of Christ, p. 100; and Speculum sacerdotale, p. 27.

For the lighted candle signifies faith with good works. And the wick which is hidden in the wax represents the right intention of which Saint Gregory speaks when he says: "Let your works be visible to all, but let your intention be hidden; so that we may give the example of good works to our neighbours, and yet ever desire that our virtues be unknown, by the intention we have of pleasing God alone."⁵⁶

The candlelight procession commemorating the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple signalled much more than belief in the protective powers of the blessed candles. It served to make the biblical past part of the medieval present, inserting the Christian community and the individuals who comprised it into salvation history. At the same time, it served as a vehicle by which to instruct the community regarding that history, reinforcing its Christological doctrines and moral teachings.

The Purification of Saint Mary

In her essay "Blessing from Sun and Moon: Churching as Women's Theater," Gail McMurray Gibson observes that the medieval parish celebrations of Candlemas, which conflate the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple and Mary's Purification, appear incongruous to us in the twentieth century:

No one has conceded the incongruity at the heart of those late medieval Candlemas processions and pageants encompassing as they did all believers, male and female. For the feast of Candlemas conflated, we must recall, the epiphanal recognition of the light of the Christ child "to all Gentiles" with commemoration of the Virgin Mary's submission to the Hebrew ritual requirement of women's purification after childbirth, a Liturgical ritual that was the Old Testament type and exemplar of the continuing prescribed, and noninclusionary medieval rite of churching, the female ritual of purification of the womb after childbirth.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Golden Legend, p. 152.

⁵⁷ Gibson, p. 142-3.

Her examination of late medieval, and early modern sources suggests that it did not appear so to medieval folk, however. For them, Gibson demonstrates, there was an intimate connection between Simeon and Anna's recognition of Christ's redemptive presence among humankind and the Virgin's humble submission to the Old Testament law requiring a woman's purification after childbirth. Gibson concludes that this connection allowed medieval women and their communities to view their emulation of the Virgin's purification as "not only empowering the female body and the body of females who both submitted and presided in the ceremony but bestowing dignity and degree on the very church itself."⁵⁸

Although she is not the first to challenge the previously widely-held assumption that post-partial purification served primarily to reinforce negative female stereotypes, Gibson is the first to address the relationship between the communal celebration of the Purification of the Virgin and the rite of purification in this regard. An examination of the sermons, scriptural exegesis, and didactic works of earlier centuries supports her conclusion, and sheds some light upon the evolution of this development.

The first western homily specifically composed for the feast of the Purification was written by Bede (c.720).⁵⁹ This sermon and his scripture commentaries informed the understanding and explication of this feast throughout the middle ages.⁶⁰ For Bede, the

⁵⁸ Gibson, p. 151.

⁵⁹ See Clayton, p.15, 212; and Lawrence T. Martin and David Hurst, ed., Bede the Venerable: Homilies on the Gospels, Book One, Cistercian Studies, 110 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1991), p. xi.

⁶⁰ See Martin and Hurst, pp. xi, xiv. According to Martin and Hurst, p. xii, it is far from certain that Bede's homilies were ever preached. In their present form they were "surely meant to be read, probably on a yearly cycle." A century after they were composed, they took a prominent place in the office of readings of the Night Office (p. xiv). Pierre Salmon, The Breviary Through

connection between the Presentation and the Purification is the humility exhibited by Jesus and his mother: "They who owed nothing to the law made themselves subject to the fulfilment of its legal decrees in everything."⁶¹ Based on the Vulgate version of Leviticus 12:2 which reads: "If a woman having received seed shall bear a male child, she shall be unclean seven days, according to the days of the separation of her menstruation,"⁶² Bede explains that Mary was exempt from the Old Testament law concerning post-partial purification because, unlike other women, she conceived her son without having received a man's seed. Nevertheless, she "who by a singular privilege was above the law, . . . did not shun being made subject to the principles of the law for the sake of showing [us] an example of humility,"⁶³ just as her son put himself under the law by becoming human. Mary's example is for the whole Christian community; her offering of a pigeon and a turtledove is described as symbolic of the simplicity and chastity required of all those seeking entrance into the heavenly Jerusalem.⁶⁴ Bede's is a relatively inclusive vision of the Christian community. He explains that Simeon and Anna are described in the gospel story as greeting the Lord because he appeared as the redeemer of both sexes.⁶⁵

the Centuries, trans. Sr. David Mary (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1962), p. 67, concurs. Salmon traces the history of the breviary, demonstrating that the sermons included in the divine office were read in communal celebrations of the office, and later, privately, by a large cross-section of the English clergy from the eighth century onwards. Bede's writings were also incorporated into the great exegetical compilations of the twelfth century. Bede's exegesis of Luke 2 is found in: D. Hurst, ed., Beda's Venerabilis Opera: Pars II: Opera exegetica 3, CCSL, 120 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1960), pp. 60-5.

⁶¹ Bede, Homily 1.18, in Martin and Hurst, p.179.

⁶² "Mulier, si suscepto semine peperit masculum, immunda erit septem diebus juxta dies separationis menstruae."

⁶³ Bede, Homily 1.18, in Martin and Hurst, pp. 179-80.

⁶⁴ See Bede, Homily 1.18, in Martin and Hurst, pp. 181, 182.

⁶⁵ See Bede, Homily 1.18, in Martin and Hurst, p. 183.

These themes were reiterated in sermons, exegesis and didactic works pertaining to this feast throughout the middle ages. However, as the social, intellectual and theological climate changed so did the gloss put on them.

Bede notes that Simeon and Anna represented the Christian community which is comprised of both the sexes. I noted earlier that his was a relatively inclusive vision of the Christian community, in that he included both women and men. However, Simeon and Anna were both aged, and presumably celibate, widows. As Bede's main concern was the spiritual meaning of the gospel stories for the spiritual life of monks and nuns, this is not surprising.⁶⁶ Three centuries later, when the nature of, and jurisdiction over marriage was becoming an issue of debate among churchmen and legislators,⁶⁷ Aelfric, archbishop of York (1023-51), adds to the persons numbered in the gospel account in order to expand the community they represent, asserting that not only celibate men and women bear witness to Christ but that "there are three states which bare [sic] witness of Christ: that is maidenhood, and widowhood, and lawful matrimony."⁶⁸ He explains that

⁶⁶ See Martin and Hurst, p. xi; Graef, p. 163.

⁶⁷ This is discussed in chapter three of this study.

⁶⁸ Aelfric, *Sermones catholici*, p. 149. According to Milton McC. Gatch, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England: Aelfric and Wulfstan* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1977), Aelfric's *Sermones catholici* were written c.991-2. Gatch, pp. 53-4, points out that it is possible the vernacular *Sermones catholici* were composed for preaching to the lay-folk as Aelfric was a mass-priest at Cernel, or conversely, that they were intended for the monolingual of the school and community of Cernel or Winchester for use as *lectio divina* at meals. He concludes that they were intended primarily for use in instructing the laity at the Prone, a vernacular sermon which was separable from the mass, and could include translation and explanation of the gospel, catechetical instruction, and announcements.

Similar comments are made in a Latin sermon on the Purification attributed to Herbert of Losinga (late eleventh-early twelfth century). See, Losinga, *Life, Letters and Sermons*, pp. 83-7. Also in a Purification sermon included in a twelfth-century collection of vernacular sermons. See *Old English Homilies*, p. 48.

the mother of Christ is a maiden, Anna was a widow, and Zacharias, the father of John, was a married man. Aelfric continues, "These three states are agreeable to God, if men righteously live in them."

With the inclusion of married people in the community represented by the gospel procession, different qualities of the Virgin became emphasised for Christian emulation, and the connection between the Presentation and the Purification took on a different focus.⁶⁹ For example, Bede notes that the Virgin's offering of a pigeon and a turtledove is symbolic of the simplicity and chastity required of all those seeking entrance into the heavenly Jerusalem, but he emphasises Mary's humility as the virtue Christians are to emulate.⁷⁰ In the twelfth century, a vernacular sermon originating in Essex follows Bede in exhorting believers to follow Mary's example in submitting to the law, but rather than focusing on her humility, it focuses on the gifts she offered in observance of that law.⁷¹

⁶⁹ According to Georges Rupalio, "La Vierge comme 'système de valeurs'," *Marie: Le culte de la Vierge dans la société médiévale*, ed. Dominique Iogna-Prat, Éric Palazzo, and Daniel Russo (Paris: Beauchesne, 1996), p.5, "The slow elaboration of the multiform figure of the Virgin, or rather, the history of the configuration of her functions, was made by the interactions between religious and secular ideas, more subtly between the medieval present and classical antiquity, and finally between the masculine and feminine positions within the societies being considered. The Virgin represents, as it were, a "value system" in perpetual rearrangement." He goes on to point out that between the seventh and the twelfth centuries as the clergy were assuming control of societal structures Mary is presented as a figure bridging the spiritual and the temporal (pp. 10-12).

⁷⁰ See Bede, Homily 1.18, in Martin and Hurst, pp. 181, 182. Homily 17 in Lewis E. Nicholson, ed., *The Vercelli Book Homilies: Translations from the Anglo-Saxon* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991), p.112/35ff, also emphasises Mary's humility. These homilies were compiled, or authored, in the last half of the tenth century.

⁷¹ See *Old English Homilies*, Homily 8, pp. 46-50. Although it is recorded in Lev. 12:6 that the required offering was a one-year-old lamb for a holocaust, and a young pigeon or turtledove as a sacrifice for sin, and Luke 2:25 records that Mary and Joseph offered two turtledoves or two young pigeons, this author states that "This was the law [observed] in olden times, and this gift offered our Lady Saint Mary. And three gifts were offered to our Lord, and every man must understand what each gift signifies. The first is a lamb, the second is a

According to the author, Mary offered a lamb, a turtledove, and a dove. The lamb signifies an innocence of thought, word and deed that only the Virgin herself, and “holy men of religion” are capable of offering. In comparison, the gift signified by the turtledove is “easily obtainable.” That gift is chastity, for “the turtle[dove] will have no mate but one, and after that none.” “All those may offer purity who live a chaste life in maidenhood, or in marriage, or in widowhood, and no other.” This same shift in emphasis is evident in the Summa de ecclesiasticis officiis of Johannis Belet, the influential twelfth-century Paris master: “We carry candles, imitating the holy virgins of whom the Blessed Virgin is the head, so that we may deserve to enter the temple of glory, to the true bridegroom, with her with our torch of chastity alight.”⁷² Mary’s worthiness to enter the temple overshadows her humility here. The candles carried in procession have come to signify not only Christ, but the purity of the Virgin and the chastity of the believer. As de Voragine rather emphatically states:

To impress her purity upon the minds of all, the Church ordered that we should carry lighted candles, as if to say: “Most blessed Virgin, thou hast no need of purification; on the contrary, thou art all light and all purity!” Such indeed was Mary’s innocence that it shone forth even outside of her, and quelled any urgency of the flesh in others.⁷³

turtle[dove], and the third is a dove. Let each of us endeavour to offer for himself one of these three gifts” (p. 48).

⁷² Belet, Summa de ecclesiasticis officiis, p. 149/24-7: “Vel ideo candelas portamus, ut per hoc imitemur sanctas uirgines, quarum beata uirgo est caput, ut accensa in nobis lampade castitatis cum ea templum glorie ad uerum sponsum ingredi mereamur.” This image is reiterated in Durandus, Rationale divinarum officiorum, 7.7.16; and the Speculum sacerdotale, p. 25/25-30.

⁷³ Golden Legend, p. 152. See also Durandus, Rationale divinarum officiorum, 7.7.16; The Stanzaic Life of Christ, p. 97.

In the streets of Chester, Joseph, in the Blacksmith's Play of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin, offered Simeon a taper of "virgin wax," instructing him, and his fifteenth-century audience:

A signe I offer here alsoe
 . . .
 in tokeninge shee hase lived oo
 in full devotion.
 And, syr Simeon, leeve well this:
 as cleane as this waxe nowe is,
 as cleane is my wife, iwys,
 of all corruption.⁷⁴

All of the late medieval English purification plays follow suit in emphasising Mary's purity. In most, Simeon and Anna not only recognise and proclaim Jesus as the Christ in accord with the gospel narrative, but they also recognise and proclaim Mary as the Virgin Mother.⁷⁵

Although Aelfric, and those after him, validates marriage, he also reflects the ambivalence toward married sexuality that pervaded medieval thought. According to Aelfric, virgins, men and women, shall have from God "a hundredfold meed in the everlasting life;" widows, sixtyfold; and "those who hold their marriage vow, and at

⁷⁴ R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, ed., The Chester Mystery Cycle, EETS, s.s., 3, 9 (London: Oxford University Press, 1974, 1986), pp. 209/142-210/150. For a discussion of this play cycle see David Mills, "The Chester Cycle," The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre, pp. 109-33.

⁷⁵ See Richard Beadle, ed., The York Plays (London: Edward Arnold, 1982), pp. 154/324-31, 354-7; Lumiansky and Mills, The Chester Mystery Cycle, pp. 205-8; Spector, N-Town Play, p. 184/123-6; In the Weaver's Pageant of Coventry, and the Towneley Purification play, it is the angel Gabriel who apprises us of her exalted status. See Hardin Craig, ed., Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays, EETS, e.s., 87 (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 45/367-92; and Alfred W. Pollard, ed., The Towneley Plays, EETS, e.s., 71 (1897; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 185/136-40. For a discussion of the Towneley cycle see Peter Meredith, "The Towneley Cycle," The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre, pp. 134-162.

permitted times, and for procreation of children, have carnal intercourse, shall have a thirtyfold meed for their discretion.”⁷⁶ Later, Herbert de Losinga, bishop of Norwich (1050-1119), repeats that “virgins, widows, and married people all publish the Advent of the Saviour, because by that Birth preparation is made for the salvation of all the elect, be they virgins, or chaste widows, or wedded people.”⁷⁷ But he warns wedded people against the snare of “the bird-lime of adultery, since it is God who knits the bond of holy wedlock.” Even more explicit is the fourteenth-century exegete Nicholas of Lyra’s reiteration of the commonly held belief that “legitimate marriage acts can be engaged in without sin, however they are frequently accompanied by inordinate passion,” and are therefore occasions of sin.⁷⁸ But despite the suspicion of married sexuality, and the emphasis placed on Mary’s purity, the community is not, as one might expect, exhorted to sexual abstinence so much as to chastity, a virtue that can be emulated by married and

⁷⁶ Aelfric, *Sermones catholici*, p. 149.

⁷⁷ Losinga, *Life, Letters and Sermons*, p. 85.

⁷⁸ *Biblia sacra cum Glossa ordinaria, et postilla Nicolai Lyrani, additionibus Pauli Burgensis ac Matthiae Thoryng* (Paris: Franciscus Fevardentium, 1545-1603), Lev. 12, col.1013: “ROGABIT PRO &C. & SIC MUNDABITUR scilicet a culpa, quae non contrahitur in partu, sed in conceptu, in quo de communi cursu est aliqua libido inordinata: licet enim actus matrimonialis possit exerceri sine peccato, frequenter tamen contingit ibi inordinatio.” Henceforth, references to the postilla of Nicholas of Lyra, and to the *Glossa ordinaria* are taken from this work. Hugh St. Cher, *Opera omnia in universum Vetus, & Novum Testamentum* (Venice: Nicolaum Pezzana, 1732), Lev. 12, p. 1:113/SIVE TURTUREM PRO PECCATO, expresses this slightly differently: “the passion of concupiscence would be sin were it not excused by the good of marriage.” “Pro peccato, idest, pro libidinea concupiscentia, quae esset peccatum, nisi per bonum matrimonii excusaretur.”

For an introduction to the *Glossa ordinaria* see Margaret T. Gibson, and Karlfried Froehlich, “Introduction,” *Biblia latina cum Glossa ordinaria: Facsimile Reprint of the Editio princeps, Adolph Rusch of Strassburg 1480/81*, 4 vols. (Turnhout: Brepols, 1992), 1:vii-xi. Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), pp. 269-74, discusses the postilla of Hugh St. Cher and Nicholas of Lyra.

celibate alike.⁷⁹ The emphasis on Mary's purity serves to regulate rather than abnegate married sexuality, reflecting and reinforcing a new social reality wherein marriage was becoming institutionalised under the jurisdiction of the church.

There is a tension between this validation of marriage and the negative female stereotypes which are evident in these same discussions of the feast of the Purification. Their starting point is the Virgin's immunity from Eve's legacy. As it is explained in the Glossa ordinaria, Eve was the source of original sin: "Eve was seduced by way of disobedience. Disobedience attaches filth and impurity to us."⁸⁰ She, and all women after her, are responsible for the transmission of the stain of original sin: it is "she who begets who perpetuates the sin" which is transmitted through Adam's seed.⁸¹ From Bede onward, every commentator begins by pointing out that the Virgin was exempt from the Old Testament law prescribing post-partal purification because she did not conceive her

⁷⁹ C. Muessig, "Paradigms of Sanctity for Thirteenth-Century Women," Models of Holiness in Medieval Sermons: Proceedings of the International Symposium, Kalamazoo, 4-7 May, 1995, ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzle, and others, Fédération Internationale des Instituts d'Études Médiévales: Textes et Études du Moyen Âge, 5 (Louvain-La-Neuve: Brepols, 1996), pp. 85-102, finds a similar dynamic in the sermones de sanctis of Jacques de Vitry.

⁸⁰ Glossa ordinaria, Lev. 12, column 1011/DIE OCTAVO &C.: "inobedientiae causa Eva seducta fuit. Inobedientia autem immunditiam nobis sordemque contraxit."

⁸¹ Glossa ordinaria, Lev. 12, column 1013/CUMQUE EXPLETI FUERINT: "AUGUSTINUS Nunquid peperisse peccatum est? An huic ostenditur illa propago ex Adam, . . . non ergo id quod natum est, purgari dicit scriptura, sed quae peperit ad ipsam unde origo trahebatur." This is one of the key concepts behind medieval misogyny. According to Jaroslav Pelikan, Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 42-44, Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons (c.140-200) formulated the parallel between Eve and Mary. Once introduced into the vocabulary, this dialectic "took on a life of its own." The disobedience of Eve and the obedience of Mary produced extensive psychological comparisons of the two women. Eve was portrayed as vulnerable, irrational, emotional, erotic, living by the experience of the senses rather than by the mind and reason and thus easy prey for the wily tempter.

son by receiving a man's seed as other women do.⁸² The Lord did not "deflower the hospitality of the sacred womb by his birth," Bede tells us. "Christ proceeded from the closed womb of the Virgin like a bridegroom from his marriage bed."⁸³ Such sentiments not only reinforce a negative valuation of women as the daughters of Eve, but derogate married sexuality.⁸⁴

The Purification play from the York cycle articulates those sentiments in the language of the pageant wagons. Mary has informed Joseph that forty days have elapsed since the birth of Jesus, and it is time for her to go to the temple to be purified. Joseph

⁸² E.g.: The Vercelli Book Homilies, Homily 17, p. 112/22-39; Losinga, Life, Letters and Sermons, p. 83; Belet, Summa de ecclesiasticis officiis, p. 149/7-15; Glossa ordinaria, Lev. 12, column 1011/MULIER SI SUSCEPTO SEMINE: PROCOPIUS; and Luke 2, p.131/TULERUNT ILLUM: BEDA; Durandus, Rationale divinarum officiorum, 7.7.7; Nicholas of Lyra, Luke 2, p. 131/ET UT DARENT HOSTIUM &C.; and Lev. 12, column 1014/MULIER SI SUSCEPTO SEMINE PEPERERIT; Hugh St. Cher, Opera omnia, Lev. 12, p. 1:112/MULIER SI SUSCEPTO SEMINE, &C.; and Luke 2, pp. 6:143f./ET POSTQUAM, &C., and ADAPERIENS VULVAM; Golden Legend, p. 150; English Metrical Homilies, p. 154; Bonaventura, Opera omnia, ed. Adolphe Charles Peltier, 15 vols. (Paris: L. Vives, 1864-71), 10:269; The Stanzaic Life of Christ, pp. 72/2153-6, 76/2261-4, 2273-4; Mirk's Festial, pp. 57/7-10, 36-58/3; Speculum sacerdotale, p. 24/5-9; The Mirrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ, p. 60; Pamela Gradon, ed., English Wycliffite Sermons, vol.2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 2:244-6.

⁸³ Beda's Venerabilis opera, pp.62/1714-63/1720, exegesis of Luke 2:23: "Itaque quod ait, adaperiens uulvam, consuetae natiuitatis more loquitur non quod dominus noster sacri uentris hospitium quod ingressus sanctificarat egressus deuirginasse credendus sit iuxta hereticos qui dicunt beatam Mariam uirginem usque ad partum non uirginem esse post partum, sed iuxta fidem catholicam clauso uirginis utero quasi sponsus suo processisse de thalamo."

⁸⁴ Regarding medieval misogyny see: A History of Women in the West II: Silences of the Middle Ages, ed. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), esp. Chiara Frugoni, "The Imagined Woman," pp. 336-422; Jacques Dalarun, "The Clerical Gaze," pp. 15-42; Carla Casagrande, "The Protected Woman," pp. 70-104; and R. Howard Bloch, Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991). Also Warner for a more general discussion of Mariology and the image of woman. These authors all acknowledge the ambivalent effect the representations of the Virgin Mary had on the medieval image of woman. As Pelikan, p. 44, asserts, the same works of patristic and medieval thinkers that equate woman with Eve, "present a counterpoise to the [negative] stereotypes in their even more extensive interpretations of woman as embodied in Mary."

contests this because his “spowse and madyn clene” has not conceived her child as other women do:

Mary my spowse and madyn clene,
 This matter that thowe moves to me
 Is for all these women bedene
 That hais conceyved with syn fleshely
 To bere a chylde.
 The lawe is ledgyd for theme right playn,
 That they muste be purified agayne,
 For in mans pleasoure for certayn
 Before were they fylyd.⁸⁵

Christian ambivalence regarding human sexuality is as old as Christianity itself.⁸⁶

As Clarissa Atkinson points out, the positive regard for marriage which culminated in its being named the seventh sacrament in the thirteenth century “did not necessarily imply a

⁸⁵ Beadle, *The York Plays*, p. 154/200-8. For a discussion of this play cycle see R. Beadle, “The York Cycle,” *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, pp. 85-108.

The Weavers’ Pageant from Coventry goes even further, presenting some comic scenes of domestic strife between Joseph and Mary reminiscent of the tales of wicked wives. Mary first sends Joseph off to find two doves for the temple sacrifice. After grouching about that, he returns with them only to be hurried off to the temple. At which point he complains to the audience:

Loo! fryndis, here ma you knoo
 The maner of my wyff ys soo,
 Thatt with hyr nedis mvst I goo,
 Wheddur I wyll or nyll.
 Now ys nott this a cumburs lyff?
 Loo! sirs, whatt ytt ys to haue a wyff!
 Yett had I leyuer, nor to live in stryff,
 Apply evyn to hir wyll.

See Craig, *Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, p. 51/565-72. Although this play cycle may have played as early as the 1380s, these episodes of domestic strife are part of a later redaction found in a manuscript copy dated to 1535. See Craig, *Two Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, p. xxv; and R.W. Ingram, ed., *Coventry: Records of Early English Drama* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1981), p. xvii.

⁸⁶ Clarissa W. Atkinson, “‘Precious Balsam in a Fragile Glass’: The Ideology of Virginity in the Later Middle Ages,” *Journal of Family History* 8 (1983), pp. 131-43, traces its history.

new attitude toward sex."⁸⁷ Nevertheless, when references to the rite of purification begin to appear in the discussions of the feast of the Purification, they do not focus on the rite as a female ritual of purification. Rather, they draw parallels between the rite and the community celebration on Purification Day.

References to the rite of purification began to appear in the discussions of the feast of the Purification around the same time that married folk were being included in them. The twelfth-century vernacular sermon from the collection originating in Essex mentioned above begins:

To-day each man may hear, whoso will, what rites there were pertaining to women under the Old Law with respect to three things: the first is childbed, the second is churching [*chirchgang*], and the third the offering.⁸⁸

Although this sermon relies heavily on earlier commentators for its content, its organisation of the gospel events into the rites of childbed and churching is innovative.⁸⁹ During the rites of childbed, which later came to be known as "lying-in," Mary, we are informed, "came not out of her house nor handled anything except the meat she herself did eat; for all that she touched until she went to church was considered defiled."⁹⁰ When she went to church on the fortieth day "her company was found to be according to the friends she had; and she brought the child with her into the temple and presented an offering for him as was convenient to her."

⁸⁷ Clarrisa W. Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), p.153.

⁸⁸ *Old English Homilies*, Homily 8, p. 46.

⁸⁹ Richard Morris, the editor of this collection, (p. ix) notes that many of the homilies were most likely translated from Latin, but some appear to be original compositions.

⁹⁰ *Old English Homilies*, Homily 8, p. 46.

Even though these are described as rites pertaining to women, all are exhorted to follow Mary's example:

We ought also to follow her good example, and as she bare [sic] her holy royal child spiritually in her heart and bodily in her hands, so ought we to obey our Lord Jesus Christ in our hearts, fide et dilectione, through a right faith and true love to God and to man, and to bear in our hands burning candles, taper or candle; each denoteth this rite.⁹¹

In the thirteenth century Durandus makes more explicit reference to the rite of purification in his discussion of the feast of the Purification. He states that in some places women imitate the Blessed Virgin by coming to the church and making an offering forty days after giving birth. By imitating the Virgin in this life, they will enter with her into life eternal.⁹² But again, he situates the rite of purification within a broader, inclusive context. This is part of a discussion explaining that the child was presented in the temple on the fortieth day "to imply that those deserve to enter into the heavenly temple who have observed the ten precepts of the decalogue along with the law of the four gospels."⁹³

Even more illustrative in this regard is Mirk's Festial, compiled in the fifteenth century. It presents the gospel narrative of Mary's purification, the contemporary practice of ritually blessing a newly-delivered mother at the door of the church, and the parish Purification Day celebrations as mirroring one another:

⁹¹ Old English Homilies, Homily 8, p. 46.

⁹² Durandus, Rationale divinarum officiorum, 7.7.8: "Mulieres igitur in hoc beatam Virginem imitantur, cum in quibusdam locis post partum transactis 40 diebus, ecclesiam ingrediuntur, significantes, quod si virginem ipsam fuerint imitatae, post vitam praesentem ingredientur cum ea aeternam."

⁹³ Durandus, Rationale divinarum officiorum, 7.7.8: "quare praecepit Dominus die 40. puerum in templum offerri . . . ad insinuandum, quod illi merentur coeleste templum ingredi, qui decem praecepta decalogi cum fide quatuor evangeliorum observaverunt."

Then when our lady come toward þe tempull wyt hor sonne, þe Holy Gost warnet þys Symeon and þys Anne; and þay þen wyth mecull ioye 3ode a3eynes hom, and broght hom ynto þe tempull. . . . Wherfor, 3et yn mynde of þys processe, when a woman cometh to þe chyrche-dyrre tyll þe pryst come and cast holy watyr on hyr, and clansup hur, and so takyth hyr by þe hond, and bryngyth hur to þe chyrche, 3euyng hur leue to come to þe chyrch, and to goo to hur husbandys bed. . . . þerfor holy chyrch maketh mynde þys day of candels offryng. 3e seen, good men, þat hyt ys comyn vse to all crysten men forto come to þe chyrche þys day, and bere a candyll yn processyon, as þagh þay 3edyn bodyly wyth oure lady to chyrch, and aftyr offyr wyth hyr yn worschip and high reuerens of hur.⁹⁴

This same interconnection is echoed in two English alabasters.⁹⁵ One depicts Mary approaching the high priest followed by Joseph, Anna, Simeon, and two women, all carrying candles. Unlike earlier representations of the feast, neither the child nor the birds appear. Rather than the gospel narrative, this scene presents Mary undergoing “a sort of churching,”⁹⁶ conflating the gospel narrative with the Candlemas procession and the medieval rite of purification. The second identifies the feast of the Purification and the rite of purification even more closely, depicting the Virgin kneeling before a cleric holding a candle in one hand and blessing her with the other while two women bearing

⁹⁴ Mirk's Festial, pp. 58/30-2, 58/36-59/4, 6-10. According to Edward H. Weatherly, editor of the Speculum sacerdotale, p. xl, Mirk's Festial and the Speculum sacerdotale were authored in the West Midlands, around the same time (the fifteenth century), for the same purpose: to furnish a book of instruction in matters of church observance and legend in the vernacular for the use of parish priests.

⁹⁵ Dorothy C. Shorr, the author of the definitive survey, “The Iconographic Development of the Presentation in the Temple,” The Art Bulletin 28 (1946), p. 28, notes that the idea of purification in a wider sense, encompassing the whole community, becomes evident in fourteenth-century pictorial representations of the Purification of the Virgin. See also Gertrud Schiller, Iconography in Christian Art, trans. Janet Selligman, 2 vols. (London: Lund Humphries, 1971), 1:90-4. W.C. Hildburgh discusses these alabasters in “Folk-Life,” p. 263; and “Notes on Some English Alabaster Carvings in Germany,” The Antiquaries Journal 5 (1925), pp. 56-8. A photograph of the first carving discussed is found in “Notes,” Plate 5, p. 56. A photograph of the second is found in A. Rostand, “Les albatres Anglais du XV^e siècle en Basse-Normandie,” Bulletin monumental 87 (1928), p. 294.

⁹⁶ Hildburgh, “Notes,” p. 57.

candles look on. Similar images are found in the windows of the church in East Harling, Norwich, and at Malvern Priory.⁹⁷

As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, Margery Kempe also connects the rite of purification with the parish celebration of the feast of the Purification. Directly following her description of the spiritual raptures she experienced during the Purification Day procession, Kempe recounts having similar “holy thowtys & meditacyons many tymes whan sche saw women ben purifyd of her childeryn.”⁹⁸ The company of women accompanying the new mothers reminds her of that first procession accompanying the Virgin, just as the parish celebration does.⁹⁹

While these works make reference to a ritual specific to women that is patterned after the Purification of the Virgin, they present the rite of purification as embodying the same doctrinal realities as the communal parish celebration on Purification Day. Rather than marginalising women, this rite, which was celebrated in the midst of the parish community throughout the year, may well have served to reflect and reinforce the same social and doctrinal realities as the parish celebration, the women participants representing the whole community.

This analysis of the themes associated with the feast of the Purification that weave their way through the sermons, scriptural exegesis, didactic literature, iconography and

⁹⁷ These are discussed and reproduced in Sally-Beth MacLean, “Marian Devotion in Post-Reformation Chester: Implications of the Smiths’ ‘Purification’ play,” *The Middle Ages in the North-West*, ed. Tom Scott and Pat Starkey (Liverpool: Leopard’s Head for Liverpool Centre for Medieval Studies, 1995), pp. 244-5.

⁹⁸ *BMK*, bk. 1, ch. 82, p. 198/24-5.

⁹⁹ *BMK*, bk. 1, ch. 82, p. 198/26-9: “Sche thowt in hir sowle þat sche saw owr Lady ben pruiifjd & had hy contemplacyon in þe beheldyng of þe women wheche comyn to offeryn wyth þe women þat weryn purifjd.”

mystery plays of medieval England reveals a close interconnection between the feast of the Purification of Saint Mary and the rite of post-partal purification in medieval parish life. References to the rite of purification began to appear in these sources in the twelfth century. By the fifteenth century it appears that the rite of purification served many of the same functions that the celebration of the feast of the Purification served, reflecting and reinforcing the same social realities and doctrinal teachings. This suggests that although this rite was exclusive to women, it did not necessarily marginalise them. Rather, it allowed women to be perceived, and to perceive themselves, as being representative of the community.

When we turn our attention to various groups within the parish community, an even more varied and complex picture of the understanding of, and attitudes towards, the rite of post-partal purification and its women participants surfaces. In the next chapter, the manuals of confession and pastoral care, which proliferated in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, shed light upon the interaction between clerical perceptions of the rite of post-partal purification, and women's own perceptions.

CHAPTER 3

**“If out of reverence they should wish to abstain for some time,
we do not believe their devotion to be inappropriate.”**

CLERICAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE RITE OF POST-PARTAL PURIFICATION, AND WOMEN’S OWN PERCEPTIONS¹

In the second quarter of the thirteenth century Bishop Roger Niger found it necessary to issue a statute in the archdeaconry of London regarding the rite of the purification of women after childbirth. It had come to the bishop’s attention that women were seeking this sacramental in parishes other than their own. They were fleeing their home parishes out of “hatred or fear of the curate, or in order to avoid injury or scandal” after having become pregnant.² A case that might have engendered such hatred and fear is cited by Robert Grosseteste of Lincoln Diocese in a statute issued in 1239. Apparently in that diocese some priests were extorting funds from new mothers who were reputed to have engaged in sexual intercourse before their purification by forcing them to “bring an offering to the altar” at all the purifications that occurred in the parish.³

¹ An earlier, abbreviated version of this chapter has been published as: “The Purification of Women After Childbirth: A Window Onto Mediaeval Perceptions of Women,” *Florilegium* 14 (1995-96), pp. 43-55. Reprinted by permission.

² See Appendix F/A/4.

³ See Appendix F/A/3

These statutes suggest a complex interaction between male clerical perceptions of the rite of post-partial purification, and women's own perceptions. It is those perceptions and their interaction I wish to explore here.

Manuals of confession and pastoral care proliferated in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in response to the pastoral reforms incorporated into the constitutions of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215).⁴ Having been written by clerics educated in the theological and law schools for the instruction and reformation of the clergy, they shed light upon the understanding and attitudes of those educated clerics concerning the rite of post-partial purification. But their usefulness does not end there. Generally speaking, these were practical books designed to assist priests in carrying out their pastoral duties as confessors to the faithful. As such, they attempt to address the issues being encountered by priests at the parish level, hence allowing insight not only into the attitudes, values, and practice of an educated clerical elite but also those of the lower ranks of the clergy and the people to whom they ministered.⁵ According to F. Broomfield this is particularly

⁴ See Leonard E. Boyle, "The Fourth Lateran Council and Manuals of Popular Theology," The Popular Literature of Medieval England, ed. Thomas J. Heffernan, Tennessee Studies in Literature, 28 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), pp. 30-43; Joseph Goering, William de Montibus (c.1140-1213): The Schools and the Literature of Pastoral Care, Studies and Texts, 108 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1992), chapter 3; "Introduction," Thomae de Chobham 'Summa confessorum', ed. F. Broomfield, Analecta Mediaevalia Namurcensia, 25 (Louvain and Paris: Nauwelaerts, 1968), pp. xi-xiii; W. A. Pantin, The English Church in the Fourteenth Century, Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching, 5 (1955; rpt. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), p. 191; Thomas N. Tentler, Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 32.

⁵ See Jacqueline Murray, "The Perceptions of Sexuality, Marriage, and Family in Early English Pastoral Manuals," Ph.D. thesis (University of Toronto, 1987), pp. 2, 60; also her "Thinking about Gender: The Diversity of Medieval Perspectives," Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women, ed. Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), pp. 7-8; Peter Biller, "Marriage Patterns and Women's Lives: A Sketch of a Pastoral Geography," Woman is a Worthy Wight: Women in English Society c.

true of the English penitential literature which was “rich in the application of theology and law to daily affairs.”⁶ Evidenced in these manuals is a complex understanding of the rite of post-partial purification.

The manuals of confession and pastoral care treat post-partial purification in their discussion of sexual abstinence between married partners. In order to gain insight into these thirteenth- and fourteenth-century prescriptions regarding sexual abstinence, we must go back to their roots in the penitentials of the sixth to the twelfth century.

The Penitentials

The penitentials are collections of canons that were compiled as practical guides for the priest-confessor as the practice of penance shifted from the public to the private forum.⁷ The largest single category of behaviour treated by the penitentials is sexual offences.⁸ Concerns regarding clerical celibacy, monastic chastity, concubinage and

1200-1500, ed. P.J.P. Goldberg (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1992), p. 64. Biller is most helpful regarding how to approach these sources: “The fundamental and first interpretation of these texts must be . . . their author’s aim, their position in a tradition of instruction and reform [of the clergy], and their dissemination among friars and parish priests,” (p. 61). But we must be mindful that these authors, hence their works, were shaped by their particular milieus, in particular, the law and custom of their regional churches (pp. 63-4). As well, evidence of the language, culture, customs, professions, and political communities of the laity among whom these authors lived will have “seeped” into their work (p. 64).

⁶ Broomfield, p. xx.

⁷ For an introduction to the penitentials see Allen J. Frantzen, The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983). Pierre J. Payer, Sex and the Penitentials: The Development of a Sexual Code 550-1150 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), pp. 3, 5, 12-3, 119-20, is particularly insistent that these were widely used practical books of reference. Although they tend to be characterised as lists of sins and penances, many penitentials also instructed the confessor in his role as “spiritual physician,” and counselled him to consider the subjective disposition of the penitent (p. 8). See also Broomfield, p. xii, n. 3.

⁸ James A. Brundage, Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 153.

adultery, as well as questions about the institution of marriage, and indeed the effort to convert the peoples of Europe possessed of very different sexual ethics, contributed to a preoccupation with questions of sexual behaviour in early medieval Christianity.⁹

The treatment of sexual abstinence found in the penitentials perpetuates traditions inherited from the church Fathers as well as adding to them.¹⁰ True to that heritage, which James Brundage shows combined Gnostic, Stoic and Levitical elements, the penitential authors were concerned primarily with ritual purity issues in their treatment of marital sex.¹¹ Periods of sexual abstinence in the penitentials are determined according to two major sets of criteria, one linked to the calendar and liturgical seasons, the other to the female physiological cycle.¹² These two categories are illustrated in the Penitential of Bede, of early eighth-century English origin:

Let a married man restrain himself 40 days before Christmas and Easter, and all Sundays, the fourth and sixth weekday, and from the time conception is discovered until after the birth of the child, 30 days for a boy, 40 for a girl. But if he has intercourse at the time of menstruation then let him do 40 days penance, if on Sunday, 7 days.¹³

⁹ Payer, Sex and the Penitentials, p. 4.

¹⁰ Payer, Sex and the Penitentials, p. 24.

¹¹ See James A. Brundage, "Allas! That Evere Love Was Synne': Sex and Medieval Canon Law," Sex, Law and Marriage in the Middle Ages. Collected Studies Series, 397 (Aldershot, Hampshire: Variorum, 1993), p. II/10. Regarding this heritage see also Brundage, Law, Sex and Christian Society, chapters 1-3.

¹² See Jean-Louis Flandrin, Un temps pour embrasser: Aux origines de la morale sexuelle occidentale (VIe-XIe siècle), ed. Jacques Julliard and Michel Winock, L'Univers Historique (Paris: Seuil, 1983), p. 12; Brundage, "Allas!," p.II/10.

¹³ For a discussion of this penitential see: Medieval Handbooks of Penance: A translation of the principal 'libri poenitentiales' and selections from related documents, ed. John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), pp. 217-21. This excerpt is found in Appendix G/C/1.

Upon first glance it would appear that the periods of abstinence associated with menstruation and post-partal purification are both linked to female physiology. The proscriptions against intercourse with menstruating and post-partal women can be traced back to Levitical law.¹⁴ There a menstruating woman is considered unclean for seven days. During that time she contaminates everything she touches, including any man who would lie with her.¹⁵ This is so serious an offence that both parties could be banished for doing so.¹⁶ A post-partal woman is also considered unclean for seven days "as at the time of her menstruation"¹⁷ if she bears a son, fourteen days if she bears a daughter. Plus she is banished from the sanctuary, and from touching "any holy thing"¹⁸ for another thirty-three days after the birth of a boy, sixty-six after bearing a girl. At the end of this period she is to take a burnt offering and a sin offering to the priest so that he can make an "atonement on her behalf."¹⁹ This ritual is not unique to post-partal women but is prescribed for all those who have had an unclean discharge. It is described as the means

¹⁴ For discussion of Levitical menstrual and post-partal proscriptions see Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, "Menstrual Blood, Semen, and Discharge: The Fluid Symbolism of the Human Body," in The Savage in Judaism: An Anthropology of Israelite Religion and Ancient Judaism (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 177-94; and Leonie F. Archer, "In thy blood live': Gender and Ritual in the Judeo-Christian Tradition," Through the Devil's Gateway: Women, Religion and Taboo, ed. Alison Joseph (London: SPCK, 1990), pp. 22-49.

¹⁵ Leviticus 15:19-24.

¹⁶ Leviticus 18:19; 20:18; Ezekiel 18:6; 22:10.

¹⁷ Leviticus 12:2. Scripture quotations in this section are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

¹⁸ Leviticus 12:4.

¹⁹ Leviticus 12:8.

by which the people of Israel shall be kept “separate from their uncleanness, so that they do not die in their uncleanness by defiling [God’s] tabernacle that is in their midst.”²⁰

Echoes of these practices are evident in the penitentials. Menstruating women are to do penance if they should enter a church or receive communion,²¹ as are women who do so “before the purging of blood after childbirth.”²² Men who have intercourse with women at these times are also penalised.²³ However, there are some notable differences between the Levitical prescriptions for post-partal women and those in the penitentials. One is the period of time couples must abstain from intercourse after a woman has given birth. While the Book of Leviticus prescribes seven and fourteen days abstinence after the birth of a boy and girl respectively, the penitentials expect couples to abstain for the whole time of purification. Jean-Louis Flandrin observes that the main concern of Levitical law in dealing with post-partal and menstruating women is the sanctity of the temple, whereas the authors of the penitentials were more concerned with the defilement men incurred through sexual commerce with them.²⁴

²⁰ Leviticus 15:31.

²¹ See Canons of Theodore 1.14.17 (Appendix G/B/1); Penitential of Cummean 2.30 (Appendix G/A/1); Old Irish Penitential 2.36 (Appendix G/H/1).

²² See Excarpus of Cummean 3.15 (Appendix G/E/1); Penitential of Cummean 2.31 (Appendix G/A/2); Canons of Theodore 1.14.18 (Appendix G/B/2); Penitential of Egbert 7.1 (Appendix G/D/1).

²³ See Canons of Theodore 1.14.19 (Appendix G/B/3); Penitential of Bede 3.37 (Appendix G/C/1); Excarpus of Cummean 3.16 (Appendix G/E/2); Old Irish Penitential 2.36 (Appendix G/H/1). Of the penitentials I surveyed two mention women in this regard but there is no penance assigned, only an admonition to abstain. See Penitential of Egbert 7.1 (Appendix G/D/1); and the Bigotianum 2.9.3 (Appendix G/G/1).

²⁴ Flandrin, p. 82.

That defilement in the case of post-partal women is only loosely connected with vaginal bleeding. Unlike the menstrual proscriptions which are determined by the duration of the menstrual flow, the prescribed period of abstinence after childbirth varies from penitential to penitential.²⁵ Some fix the period at forty days, others vary it according to the sex of the infant.²⁶ From this Flandrin concludes that post-partal abstinence does not belong to the category of abstinences linked to female physiology, but rather it is connected to "la vie du culte."²⁷ Following Flandrin's lead, Brundage asserts that this suggests that although the birth process itself and normal postpartum bleeding may have been understood to contribute to ritual pollution, the ultimate source of the ritual contamination resulting from childbirth, in the eyes of the authors of the penitentials, is not blood but sexual pleasure.²⁸ He bases this assertion upon a letter attributed by Bede to Pope Gregory I (590-604) which in explaining why women should be allowed to enter church freely after having given birth states:

The fault lies in the bodily pleasure, not in the pain; the pleasure is in the bodily union, the pain is in the birth. . . . If then we forbid a woman who is delivered of a child to enter church, we make this penalty into a sin.²⁹

²⁵ See Flandrin, p. 12. The penitentials prescribe abstinence "menstruo tempore". See Appendix G selections A/1, B/1, and C/1.

²⁶ More than half of the penitentials studied by Flandrin fix this period at forty days. See Flandrin, p. 17. Of those I surveyed, the Excarpus of Cummean, the Canons of Theodore, the Penitential of Egbert and the Bigotianum prescribe a forty-day period, whereas the Penitential of Cummean prescribes thirty-three days abstinence after the birth of a boy, sixty-six for a girl; the Penitential of Bede thirty and forty respectively; the Old Irish Penitential twenty and thirty.

²⁷ Flandrin, pp. 12, 17. Brundage, Law, Sex and Christian Society, p. 157, suggests that the longer periods of continence prescribed after the birth of a girl implies that the writers of the penitentials "considered female sexuality itself to be a source of greater impurity than male sexuality."

²⁸ Brundage, Law, Sex and Christian Society, pp. 156-7; Flandrin, pp. 78-81.

²⁹ Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English People (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1990), p. 83, 1.27 question 8.

While Brundage convincingly demonstrates that the forces shaping the early medieval stance towards post-partial abstinence went beyond Levitical blood taboos, Gregory I's influence was minimal in the penitentials.³⁰ It was not until the Responsa Gregorii were incorporated into Gratian's Decretum in the first half of the twelfth century that Gregory's stance would become widely accepted and disseminated.³¹ Even the reform canonists Burchard of Worms (965-1025) and Ivo of Chartres (1040-1115) subscribed to the purity rules of the penitentials when it came to post-partial purification and menstruation. For example, in Burchard's Decretum it states:

A woman must wait 33 days after bearing a male child, 56 days after bearing a female for the purification of blood after childbirth before entering a church. If she should enter a church before the prescribed time, she ought to do penance on bread and water for as many days as she ought to have abstained from entering the church. He who has sexual intercourse with her during these days ought to do ten days' penance on bread and water.³²

³⁰ Flandrin, p. 81. Several scholars conjecture as to why this is so. Payer, Sex and the Penitentials, pp. 35-6, points out that the stance taken toward post-partial purification in Gregory's letter and that in the Canons of Theodore are antithetical. Theodore prohibits church entry for forty days after childbirth (1.14.18), and forbids intercourse during that time (1.14.19). Payer goes on to suggest that depending on which was authored first, Gregory's replies could have been a refutation of Theodore's regulations, or conversely, the compiler of the Canons of Theodore could have knowingly departed from Gregory. This hinges on the authenticity of Gregory's letter. If it is authentic, Gregory's letter would presumably have been available to Theodore. If it was authored later by someone else, the Canons of Theodore could have been known to that author. See p. 8, n. 1, of this study regarding the controversy over the authorship of this letter. Günther Kehnscherper, "The 'Churching of Women'. Leviticus 12 and Luke 2:21-24: The Law of Purity and the Benediction of Mothers," Studia Patristica: Papers Read at the 1983 Patristics Conference, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone, 18 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 1989), pp. 382-3, suggests that the proscriptions of the penitentials were "a pretext for power politics." Contrary to Gregory's syncretistic stance, the penitentials were one of the Roman church's tools of suppressing local legal and cultural traditions in order to impose its own.

³¹ Adolph Franz, Die kirchlichen Benediktionen im Mittelalter, 2 vols. (1909; rpt. Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck- U. Verlagsanstalt, 1960), 2:217.

³² See Appendix G/F/2, also selection F/1. Ivo of Chartres' Decretum 15.151, is almost identical to Burchard's except he prescribes forty-six days abstinence after the birth of girl. See PL 161.891.

Gratian refers to Gregory I's statement regarding post-partial purification to support his teaching that natural law (which he identifies with divine command "contained in the Law [of Moses] and the Gospel") can change, and that the Old Testament prohibitions are no longer strictly applicable in a Christian society. In contrast to the Old Testament law, women are not now prohibited from entering a church immediately after giving birth, nor are menstruating women prohibited from entering church or receiving communion.³³

Gratian's was an innovative approach to marital abstinence. Drawing upon the recently rediscovered principles of Roman Law,³⁴ he shifted the emphasis from the concern with sin found in the penitentials to questions of legal rights and obligations, subordinating the purity rules of the penitentials to the primacy of the marriage relationship.³⁵ This was to have a profound effect upon the writers of the manuals of confession and pastoral care, in particular in the reduction of the periods of sexual abstinence they required, and the prominence of sexual abstinence in their treatment of marriage.³⁶

³³ See Gratian, The Treatise on Laws (Decretum DD. 1-20) translated by Augustine Thompson: with the Ordinary gloss, translated by James Gordley; and an introduction by Katherine Christensen, ed. Augustine Thompson, James Gordley, and Katherine Christensen, *Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Canon Law*, 2 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1993), pp. xxi-xxiii, 16. According to Christensen, p. xxi, Gratian's identification of natural law with divine law is drawn from the seventh-century encyclopedist Isidore of Seville.

³⁴ See Broomfield, xii; Christensen, "Introduction," Gratian, The Treatise on Laws, pp. xi, xiii.

³⁵ James A. Brundage, "Better to Marry than to Burn?: The Case of the Vanishing Dichotomy," Sex, Law and Marriage, p. III/205; Brundage, "Allas!," p. II/11.

³⁶ See Brundage, "Better to Marry," p. III/205. According to Pierre J. Payer, The Bridling of Desire: Views of Sex in the Later Middle Ages (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), p. 99, "Although Gratian ignored the penitential sources, the authorities he adduced [Jerome,

Gratian's approach to the issues relating to marriage and sexuality reflected a larger movement of social, intellectual and theological developments taking place in the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the same impetus which gave birth to the manuals of confession and pastoral care.³⁷ One of the more remarkable of these was the change in attitude towards marriage. Key to this change, according to Michael Sheehan, was the effort by canonists to give structure to this institution.³⁸ At the centre of this was the shift from a coital to a consensual model of marriage, making the relationship between the spouses of prime importance.³⁹ By incorporating this new attitude towards marriage, the writers of the manuals of confession and pastoral care shift perceptibly from

Ambrose, and Augustine] supported the regulations found in those sources. Gratian's commentators were left with the task of providing some guidance as to the proper interpretation of the regulations." See also pp. 97, 110.

³⁷ See Brundage, Law, Sex and Christian Society, p. 234; Joseph Goering, "The 'Summa' of Master Serlo and Thirteenth-Century Penitential Literature," Mediaeval Studies 40 (1978), p. 290; Tentler, Sin and Confession, p. 32.

³⁸ Michael M. Sheehan, "Marriage Theory and Practice in the Conciliar Legislation and Diocesan Statutes of Medieval England," Mediaeval Studies 40 (1978), p. 457. This reorganisation of marriage, according to Brundage, Law, Sex and Christian Society, p. 183, was, in part, an attempt to "bring marriage under the exclusive control of Church courts and in so doing to replace customary marriage law with ecclesiastical law." Tentler, Sin and Confession, p. 220, asserts that the system of sexual morality incorporated into the manuals of confession as a result of this shift had disciplinary functions related to the stability of marriage, the legitimisation of offspring, and the regular transference of property. It also served to reinforce clerical supremacy in that "the casuistry of sins of desire, when applied to sexual impulses, provides opportunities for the imputation of guilt that none of the other deadly vices can match. That guilt must be cured by the absolution of priestly confessors."

A related reform occurring at this time which was bound to influence clerical attitudes toward sex and sexuality was the effort to abolish clerical marriage, eliminate clerical concubinage and establish clerical celibacy as the norm. See Brundage, Law, Sex and Christian Society, pp. 182-3. This effort is visible in a 1225 decree promulgated in Canterbury denying priests' concubines Christian burial, the kiss of peace and the blessed bread at mass, and the right to post-partial purification until they have denounced and repented their way of life. See Appendix F/A/2.

³⁹ Sheehan, p. 458; Brundage, Law, Sex and Christian Society, pp. 234, 269, 273-4.

the penitentials in their approach to the sexual abstinence associated with post-partal purification.

The Manuals of Confession and Pastoral Care

Chobham's Summa confessorum (c.1216) exemplifies this shift.⁴⁰ Chobham makes reference to the purification of women after childbirth in his discussion of sexual abstinence between married partners, which he situates under the rubric of the sin of lust (luxuria). Robert Grosseteste succinctly defines luxuria as "defilement of the soul stirred by seeking illicit carnal pleasures."⁴¹ Generally speaking, during the time period I am considering married couples could commit this sin if they engaged in sexual intercourse at inappropriate times (including feast days and fast days, as well as during menstruation, pregnancy and after the birth of a child) or in inappropriate places (such as church buildings and church yards), for reasons other than the three legitimate ends of marriage (procreation, mutual affection, or to prevent extra-marital intercourse), or in ways contrary to nature (generally those which were thought to prevent conception or evoke inordinate passion).⁴²

⁴⁰ Broomfield provides the text of this treatise and a detailed introduction to it.

⁴¹ "Luxuria est turpis animi motus illicitas carnis delectationes affectans." See Siegfried Wenzel, ed., "Robert Grosseteste's Treatise on Confession 'Deus est'," Franciscan Studies 30 (1970), p. 281.

⁴² E.g., John of Kent gives a rather fulsome list of how one could commit this sin. See Appendix H/C/1. The Manipulus curatorum explicates the three ends of marriage. See Appendix H/F/1. Grosseteste asserts that one fornicates whenever one cannot hope to produce offspring or if too much passion is involved in the act. See Appendix H/B/1. See Payer, The Bridling of Desire, pp. 84-131, for a discussion of late medieval thought regarding marital sexual relations.

Although Chobham, in accord with the penitentials, considers it a mortal sin for a married couple to have intercourse before the new mother has been purified, he asserts that the woman should render the marriage debt if she fears her husband is in danger of stumbling, that is, committing adultery.⁴³ Even if she is still suffering post-partial bleeding she should immediately seek purification in order to render the debt.⁴⁴ His justification for subordinating the purity rules inherited from the penitentials to the primacy of the marriage relationship is Gratian's reiteration of Gregory I's statement: "If a woman should enter church the same hour in which she has given birth in order to give thanks she does not sin."⁴⁵

⁴³ "Verumtamen sciendum est quod si vir petat debitum ab uxore sua puerpera et ipsa timeat de lapsu viri, consilium est ut statim accedat ad purificationem et statim reddat debitum." See Appendix H/A/2.

⁴⁴ "statim accedat ad purificationem et sic debitum reddat. Non enim est certum tempus institutum mulieribus purificandis, sed quando voluerit se potest purificare." See Appendix H/A/3.

Jacqueline Murray, "Thinking about Gender: The Diversity of Medieval Perspectives," Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women, ed. Jennifer Carpenter, and Sally-Beth MacLean (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), p. 11, agrees that Chobham elevated marital and domestic life. But in another essay, "The Absent Penitent: The Cure of Women's Souls and Confessors' Manuals in Thirteenth-Century England," Women, The Book and the Godly: Selected Proceedings of the St. Hilda's Conference, 1993, ed. Lesley Smith and Jane H.M. Taylor, 2 vols. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995), 1:22, Murray interprets his stance toward post-partial purification more negatively than I have here: "Even the blood taboo which required couples to abstain from intercourse from birth until purification could be bent to accommodate a husband's libido. Chobham advises that a woman seek purification as soon as possible, rather than waiting the traditional forty days, in order to render the conjugal debt to a husband who might otherwise seek his pleasures elsewhere. Somehow, the man's desires and well-being again intrude on the woman's physical recuperation, her ability to observe social and religious norms, and perhaps also her desire for continence." She suggests in "Thinking about Gender," p. 13, that Grosseteste better exemplifies the shift in focus to the mutual support and partnership of the marital relationship.

⁴⁵ "si mulier eadem hora qua genuerit ecclesiam introeat gratias actura, nullo pondere peccati gravatur" See Appendix H/A/2.

Pagula's Summa summarum (1319), offers similar advice.⁴⁶ Menstruating and post-partal women ought not to be prohibited from church, although "if a post-partal woman should wish to abstain from church for some time out of devotion, she does well."⁴⁷ And married couples ought to abstain from sexual intercourse at these times because "from such coitus are born sickly and leprous children."⁴⁸ In the case of post-partal women they ought to abstain until the woman is purified and the child is weaned.⁴⁹ If a woman should seek the marriage debt at this time her husband should refuse her unless he fears she will fall into fornication. If a husband should seek the debt when his wife is menstruating she should refuse and explain why.

John de Burgh's Pupilla oculi (1384) and Guido de Monte Rocherii's Manipulus curatorum (c.1475) go further in that they do not consider intercourse at this time to be a

⁴⁶ See Appendix H/D/1, for the full text. For an introduction to Pagula and the Summa summarum see: Leonard E. Boyle, "The 'Summa summarum' and Some other English Works of Canon Law," Pastoral Care, Clerical Education and Canon Law, 1200-1400, Collected Studies (London: Variorum Reprints, 1981), pp. XV/420-31, 455-6; also "The 'Oculus sacerdotis' and Some Other Works of William Pagula," p. IV/83, in the same volume; and Pantin, pp. 196, 218.

⁴⁷ "An mulier statim post partum poterit licite ingredi ecclesiam? Dic quod sic, tamen si aliqua mulier ex devotione voluerit per aliquod tempus se abstinere, benefacit, quia bonarum quippe mentium est ibi timere culpam, ubi nulla culpa reperitur."

⁴⁸ "ex tali coitu nascitur morbosus et leprosus."

⁴⁹ Pagula defines weaning: "tempus post partum quando mulier habundat nimis lacte et nisi extraheretur per puerum oporteret ipsam infirmari." See Appendix H/D/1. The same definition is found in the gloss of D.5 c.4 of Gratian's Decretum. It is unclear to me if this indicates that a woman cannot engage in sexual intercourse the whole time her child is nursing, which could be two to three years. See Dorothy McLaren, "Marital Fertility and Lactation 1570-1720," Women in English Society, 1500-1800, ed. Mary Prior (New York: Methuen, 1985), pp. 27, 46. Or if it refers to the time of engorgement of the breasts which occurs within the first days post-partum. Payer, The Bridling of Desire, p. 105, suggests that in Gregory I's responsa weaning and purification are related. A new-born is not to be given over to a wet-nurse until after purification. See Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English People, 1.27 question 8, pp. 82-7. James A. Brundage, Law, Sex, and Christian Society, p. 508, asserts that there was a surprising resurgence of the "old rule against intercourse during lactation" toward the end of the fourteenth century.

mortal sin, “provided that,” as the Manipulus curatorum states, “the limits of matrimony are not transgressed,”⁵⁰ although they still counsel abstinence unless fornication is feared.

Post-partial purification is found in a discussion of the marriage debt in Book Eight of the Pupilla oculi which treats marriage.⁵¹ According to de Burgh, it is not a mortal sin for a man and wife to have intercourse before the wife has been purified after childbirth even if the canons in Gratian’s Decretum appear to suggest otherwise.⁵² In de Burgh’s estimation, they give advice, not law. The man who, having been asked by his wife, renders the debt at this time does not sin. However, in light of those canons he should not do so unless fornication is a grave threat.

Guido de Monte Rocherii’s Manipulus curatorum⁵³ includes post-partial purification in its discussion of marital sexual abstinence and the sin of lust. Guido asserts that it is not a mortal sin for a man to know his wife on fast days, holy days, communion days, or after she has given birth provided that they have intercourse in order

⁵⁰ “Non tamen credo quod in isto casu sit peccatum mortale, dum tamen non tra[n]sgrediatur limites matrimonii.” See Appendix H/F/1. See also Appendix H/E/1.

⁵¹ See Appendix H/E/1, for the text. The Pupilla oculi is discussed by: Pantin, pp. 213-4; Boyle, “Oculis sacerdotis,” pp. IV/81-4, 94-5.

⁵² These include: D.5 c.4: “Ad eius uero concubitus uir suus accedere non debet, quousque qui gignitur ablactetur.” Corpus iuris canonici, ed. A. Friedberg (Leipzig: 1879), 1:8. C.33 q.4 c.4: “Si causa procreandorum filiorum ducitur uxor, non multum tempus concessum uidetur ad ipsum usum, quia et dies festi, et dies processiois, et ipsa ratio conceptus et partus iuxta legem cessare usum carnis debere his temporibus demonstrant.” Corpus iuris canonici, 1:1248. C.32 q.4 c.5: “. . . Nichil est fedius quam uxorem amare quasi adulteram. Certe, qui dicunt se causa reipublicae et generis humani uxoribus iungi, et filios procreare, imitentur saltim pecudes, et post, quam uenter uxoris intumuerit, non perdant filios, nec amatores se uxoribus exhibeant, sed maritos.” Corpus iuris canonici, 1:1129.

⁵³ For discussion of this treatise see: Tentler, Sin and Confession, pp. 37-8, 30-1; Leonard E. Boyle, “The ‘Summa confessorum’ of John of Freiburg and the Popularization of the Moral Teaching of St. Thomas and Some of his Contemporaries,” Pastoral Care, Clerical Education and Canon Law, 1200-1400, p. III/267, and n. 179. Biller, p. 97, describes this work. See Appendix H/F/1, for the text.

to procreate, render the debt, or avoid fornication (although this last is a venial sin). Nevertheless, they are to be admonished to abstain after the woman has given birth, as is counseled in Gratian's Decretum.

Facilitating this more flexible attitude toward post-partal abstinence in the penitential literature was the greater attention being paid to the disposition of the penitent in the wake of the pastoral reforms of these centuries.⁵⁴ In his discussion of sexual abstinence Chobham states:

Moreover, in all such things fixed penances should not be set but should be imposed according to the judgement of the wise and discreet priest. In all these things the contributing circumstances should be inquired into, and the reasons for danger and scandal brought to light so that the husband and wife will be frightened away from such things.⁵⁵

Adolph Franz asserts that Gregory I's stance was responsible for liberating Christian thought regarding menstruating and post-partal women from Levitical blood taboos, especially after it was adopted by Gratian, and through him, Innocent III (1198-1216), whose summary of that stance was reiterated wherever the rite of post-partal purification was discussed from the thirteenth century onward:

⁵⁴ See Goering, "The 'Summa' of Master Serlo," p. 296; Boyle, "Fourth Lateran Council," pp. 31-4. Goering, p. 301, points out that the changes in the treatment of luxuria, under which post-partal purification was usually discussed, were attitudinal rather than due to any speculative or legal developments.

⁵⁵ "In omnibus autem talibus non sunt certe penitentie assignate, sed secundum arbitrium discreti et prudentis sacerdotis sunt imponende, et in omnibus istis inquirende sunt circumstantie impulsive, et ostendende sunt cause periculi et cause scandali, ut absterreantur vir et uxor a talibus." See Appendix H/A/2.

If women should wish to enter the church at any time after giving birth to give thanks no great sin is attached to it nor is access to the churches to be denied them; their pain should not be turned back on them and seen as the cause of sin. If, however, out of reverence they should wish to abstain for some time, we do not believe their devotion to be inappropriate.⁵⁶

According to Franz, Gregory's was an "encouraging advance in the assessment and high estimate of Christian women."⁵⁷ However, alongside this flexibility regarding post-partal abstinence in the manuals of confession and pastoral care are strong prohibitions against sexual commerce with post-partal women. For example, Chobham insists that it is dangerous to sleep with a menstruating woman because from such a union leprous offspring are born, and it is "most shameful" to lie with a puerperal woman while she suffers a "flow of menstrual blood" because hers is an issue of "impure humour."⁵⁸ William of Pagula in his Summa summarum asserts that intercourse while a woman is nursing breeds infirm and leprous offspring.⁵⁹ John of Kent's Summa de penitentia (c.1220) warns that intercourse with an unpurified woman can cause bad things to happen to the couple, including infertility and weakness.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Innocent's canon issued at Lateran in 1198 is included in Liber Extra 3.47.1. and summarizes Gratian: "... si mulieres, post prolem emissam acturae gratias ecclesiam intrare voluerint, nulla proinde peccati mole gravantur, nec est ecclesiarum eis aditus denegandus, ne poena illis converti videatur in culpam. Si tamen ex veneratione voluerint aliquamdiu abstinere, devotionem earum non credimus improbandam." See Corpus iuris canonici, 2:652.

⁵⁷ Franz discusses this on pp. 2:215-17. "... einen erfreulichen Fortschritt in der Würdigung und Hochschätzung der christlichen Frau" (2:216).

⁵⁸ "Similiter periculosum est dormire cum menstruata, quia inde nascitur partus leprosus. Similiter turpissimum est iacere cum muliere iacenti in puerperio dum laborat profluvio menstrui sanguinis, quia puerpera diu habent fluxum immundi humoris." See Appendix H/A/2.

⁵⁹ "ideo autem prohibetur illis temporibus commisceri eis quia ex tali coitu nascitur morbosus et leprosi" See Appendix H/D/1.

⁶⁰ "Sic caue, quia consimilis casus in aliquibus potest contingere, ut in extinctione seminis, et infirmitate parentum, et prohibicione legisque transgressione." See Appendix H/C/2. The Summa de penitentia is comprised of three books. The third book provides confessors with directions for hearing confessions and assigning appropriate penances. It is a practical guide,

These fears and beliefs were not new to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; they can be dated to the first centuries of Christianity as evidenced in the canons of the first Nicene Council (325) where it is stated:

For husbands it is not allowed that they approach their wives during menstruation, so that their bodies and their children will not manifest the effects of elephantiasis and leprosy; in fact that type of blood corrupts both the body of the parents as well as that of their children.⁶¹

But these fears and beliefs found reinforcement in the new information on reproductive biology which became available in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries through the recovery and translation into Latin of Arabic and Greek texts.⁶² The works of Aristotle and Galen in particular shaped late medieval thought regarding menstruating and post-

modelling the questions a confessor should ask in order to elicit the necessary details regarding the seven deadly sins in order to assign appropriate penances, the answers he might receive, and the appropriate responses. In this third book John of Kent discusses post-partial purification, which comes up in his treatment of lust, as a subcategory of sex during menstruation. The priest is to broach this subject by first asking if a woman has had sex at an inappropriate time. Following that he is to continue: "Did such a thing happen to you before you were purified?" If the answer is "yes," he is to warn her: "Take care. Bad things can befall you, such as infertility and weakness of the parents, and also transgression of the Law." For a discussion of this work see Joseph Goering, "The 'Summa de penitentia' of John of Kent," Bulletin of Medieval Canon Law, n.s., 18 (1988), pp. 13-31.

⁶¹ Quoted in Ottavia Niccoli, "Menstrum Quasi Monstrum': Monstrous Births and Menstrual Taboo in the Sixteenth Century," Sex and Gender in Historical Perspective, ed. Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero, trans. Margaret A. Gallucci (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 10. This appears to have been a Christian innovation. These proscriptions go beyond Levitical blood taboos. In the Hebrew Scriptures there is no mention of leprosy or other infirmity resulting from intercourse with menstruating or post-partial women. See Niccoli, pp. 9-10; Flandrin, pp. 74-5; Brundage, Law, Sex and Christian Society, p. 156. The Natural History of the elder Pliny speaks of the dangers menstruating women pose to the people and things around them including souring wine, tarnishing mirrors, making dogs go mad, and killing men who have intercourse with them at certain phases of the moon, but it does not mention danger to the foetus. See Flandrin, pp. 73-4; Brundage, Law, Sex and Christian Society, p. 156; Payer, The Bridling of Desire, pp. 106-7.

⁶² Brundage, Law, Sex and Christian Society, p. 421; Joan Cadden, "Medieval Scientific and Medical Views of Sexuality: Questions of Propriety," Medievalia et Humanistica, n.s., 14 (1986), p. 158; Claude Thomasset, "The Nature of Woman," A History of Women in the West II: Silences of the Middle Ages, ed. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 44-6; Franz, 2:218.

partial women.⁶³ Aristotle considered menstrual blood to be formless matter, semen to be pure male form.⁶⁴ Conception occurred when semen imposed its form upon menstrual matter, creating a foetus in its pure male image. If intercourse occurred when the menses was less fresh and less sensitive to form, females, Aquinas's "defective males," would be conceived. If conception occurred at the end of the menstrual cycle during which menstruation occurred, when the menstrual matter was considered to be severely compromised, grotesquely defective forms could be spawned. Here was a scientific rationale for the received proscriptions against intercourse during menstruation and the post-partial period.⁶⁵

Galen attributed a more active role to the female in conception, determining that a child was formed from a mixture of male and female seed, which was then nourished in the womb by menstrual blood. But both he and Aristotle agreed that menstrual blood was diverted to the breasts and became milk after the child was born.⁶⁶ This connection between menstrual blood and breast milk also reinforced the inherited proscriptions

⁶³ See Thomasset; Eleanor Commo McLaughlin, "Equality of Souls, Inequality of Sexes: Woman in Medieval Theology," Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in Jewish and Christian Traditions, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), pp. 215-16; Charles T. Wood, "The Doctor's Dilemma: Sin, Salvation and the Menstrual Cycle in Medieval Thought," Speculum 56 (1981), p. 715; Jane Fair Bestor, "Ideas about Procreation and Their Influence on Ancient and Medieval Views of Kinship," The Family in Italy from Antiquity to the Present, ed. David I. Kertzer and Richard P. Saller (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 150-167.

⁶⁴ I owe this explanation of Aristotelian biology to Wood, pp. 715-16.

⁶⁵ Wood, p. 716.

⁶⁶ Patricia Crawford, "Attitudes to Menstruation in Seventeenth-Century England," Past and Present, 91 (1981), p. 52; Clarrisa Atkinson, The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 58-9.

against intercourse during the post-partal period.⁶⁷ But rather than concern for ritual purity, sexual abstinence is prescribed for scientific reasons. For “it was thought that copulation would drive the menstruum back to the womb, and so deny sustenance to the child at the breast.”⁶⁸

And although the manuals of confession and pastoral care surveyed here make no mention of a prescribed period of time a woman must wait before being purified, other sources from this period attempt to explain the Levitical prescriptions in scientific terms. The Glossa ordinaria, quoting Aristotle’s History of Animals, asserts that the Levitical law commanded that a woman not enter the temple for forty days if she had given birth to a male child, eighty days in the case of a female, “because this is the number of days that the male embryo is not alive before the infusion of the soul, whereas the corresponding period of the female foetus is eighty days.”⁶⁹

Eleanor Commo McLaughlin asserts that the adaptation of Aristotelian biology and androcentric anthropology by Aquinas and his contemporaries gave a scientific basis to the antifemale tradition inherited from the church Fathers making it even more androcentric.⁷⁰ And indeed the authors of the manuals of confession and pastoral care

⁶⁷ Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages, trans. Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), p. 72; Atkinson, p. 60.

⁶⁸ Crawford, p. 52.

⁶⁹ Gratian, The Treatise on Laws, p. 16; also p. 89, n. 52.

⁷⁰ McLaughlin, p. 216. Similarly, Helen Rodnite Lemay, ed., Women's Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus's 'De Secretis Mulierum' with Commentaries (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1992), pp. 35-49, speaks of “the development of scientific misogyny” in this period. Jacqueline Murray, “The Perceptions of Sexuality, Marriage and Family,” p. 216, more positively suggests that the churchmen of this era, as evidenced by the manuals of confession and pastoral care, sought in these scientific texts reasonable explanations for an inherited blood taboo. Payer, The Bridling of Desire, pp. 105-6, 110, concurs. Although in a later work Murray asserts that the authors of the manuals of confession and pastoral care not only reflected the

being considered here perpetuate inherited blood taboos with scientific rationalisations.⁷¹

Yet, as we have seen, they do not adhere rigidly to those taboos, subordinating them to the primacy of the marriage relationship. But was this beneficial to women as Franz asserts, or deleterious as McLaughlin suggests?

The extant sources we have suggest that the liturgical rite of the purification of women after childbirth crystallised somewhere around the eleventh century, the same time the concept of marriage was shifting.⁷² While Walter von Arx attributes this to the notions of ritual and moral impurity of the puerperal woman propagated by the penitentials,⁷³ Susan Karant-Nunn suggests “the introduction of churching may correspond in complex ways to a deterioration in women’s position in society, to the triumph of Catholicism within a heavily folk milieu, and to the expansion of the cult of the Virgin.”⁷⁴ The examination of the connection between the feast of the Purification and the rite of post-partial purification in the last chapter confirms a link between the

values of their times by reducing women to their sexual and reproductive functions but went even further to marginalise women within the order of salvation. See Jacqueline Murray, “Gendered Souls in Sexed Bodies: The Male Construction of Sexuality in Some Medieval Confessors’ Manuals,” Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages, ed. Peter Biller and A. J. Minnis, York Studies in Medieval Theology, 2 (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill: forthcoming 1998).

⁷¹ Jonah Steinberg, “From a ‘Pot of Filth’ to a ‘Hedge of Roses’ (and Back): Changing Theorizations of Menstruation in Judaism,” Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion 13:2 (1997), pp. 13-5, demonstrates that twelfth-century rabbinic commentary also made use of “apparently contemporaneous medical wisdom” in support of the Torah’s purity laws. Their “references to medicine seem aimed to vindicate the earlier rabbinic sources that attach deleterious power to menstruation” (p. 14).

⁷² See chapter one of this study.

⁷³ Walter von Arx, “The Churching of Women after Childbirth: History and Significance,” Liturgy and Human Passage, ed. David Power and Luis Maldonado, trans. Sarah Twohig, Concilium, 112 (New York: Seabury, 1979), p. 65.

⁷⁴ Susan C. Karant-Nunn, “Churching, a Women’s Rite,” The Reformation of Ritual: An Interpretation of Early Modern Germany, Christianity and Society in the Modern World (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 74.

expansion of the cult of the Virgin and the introduction of the rite of post-partial purification. What of Karant-Nunn's suggestion that there is a link between the deterioration in women's position in society and the appearance of the rite of post-partial purification?

The Role of Women in the Development of the Rite of Post-partial Purification

Historians of women have demonstrated that the new focus on the primacy of the marriage relationship that occurred in the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries subjected women to new political, legal, economic and social disadvantages.⁷⁵ There has been a tendency among modern scholars to interpret the rite of post-partial purification as reflecting and reinforcing the negative stereotype of woman that accompanied those changes, and to assume therefore that it was imposed upon women from above.⁷⁶ But women, no less than men, respond to their environments by conforming to, manoeuvring

⁷⁵ See Susan Stuard, "The Dominion of Gender: Women's Fortunes in the High Middle Ages," Becoming Visible: Women in European History, ed. Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koonz, and Susan Stuard, second ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 153-72; Atkinson, p. 201; McLaughlin, pp. 225-9; Paulette L'Hermite-Leclercq, "The Feudal Order," A History of Women in the West II, pp. 213-20, 226-9; Silvana Vecchio, "The Good Wife," A History of Women in the West II, pp. 105-35; Judith M. Bennett, "Public Power and Authority in the Medieval English Countryside," Women and Power in the Middle Ages, ed. Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Athens, GA and London: University of Georgia Press, 1988), pp. 18-36; also Women in the Medieval English Countryside: Gender and Household in Brigstock Before the Plague (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), esp. p. 7; David Herlihy, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?: A Reconsideration," Women, Family and Society in Medieval Europe: Historical Essays, 1978-1991, ed. Anthony Molho (1985; rpt. Providence, RI: Beghahn, 1995), esp. pp. 52-55; also Medieval Households (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 7-111.

⁷⁶ David Cressy, "Purification, Thanksgiving and the Churching of Women in Post-Reformation England," Past and Present 141 (1993), p. 109, n. 7, provides a bibliographical survey.

within and resisting the constraints placed upon them.⁷⁷ While the rite of post-partial purification may be seen as reflecting and reinforcing negative gender stereotypes, women may also have found this rite to be empowering and liberating. Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb have questioned the tendency of modern scholars to ignore the possibility that menstrual taboos and pollution beliefs could enhance rather than suppress women's influence and power, and suggest that women themselves may have been responsible for originating them in some societies to serve their own interests.

To assume that prohibiting women from working--or, in the case of menstrual seclusion, from having contact with men--is always a form of suppressive discrimination against women is rather limited. . . . Taboos against women working, cooking, having sex, and so on can as easily be interpreted as boons to women as means of suppressing them.⁷⁸

Even in those societies where women did not originate menstrual taboos and pollution beliefs, those taboos and beliefs could at least be manipulated by women toward their own ends. Viewed from this perspective, it is possible that the development of the rite of post-partial purification was not driven from above by a male clerical hierarchy, but rather the product of negotiations between clergy and laity in which women played a large role.

In suggesting this I take my lead from the early modernists. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries also imposed constraints upon women as restrictive marriage laws were enacted, female guilds dwindled, and the gap between domestic space and

⁷⁷ Natalie Zemon Davis and Arlette Farge, "Women as Historical Actors," A History of Women in the West III: Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes, ed. Natalie Zemon Davis and Arlette Farge (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press., 1993), pp. 1-7; R. W. Scribner, "Is a History of Popular Culture Possible?," History of European Ideas 10 (1989), p. 182.

⁷⁸ Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb, "A Critical Appraisal of Theories of Menstrual Symbolism," Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation, ed. Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 13-4.

productive labour widened.⁷⁹ Despite its “popish” origins and potentially derogatory focus on purification, women in the post-Reformation period in England continued to seek purification after childbirth.⁸⁰ Adrian Wilson, drawing upon an insight of Natalie Zemon Davis, suggests that the attraction of this rite for women lay in the way it, as part

⁷⁹ See Lyndal Roper, The Holy Household: Women and Morals, in Reformation Augsburg, Oxford Studies in Social History, ed. Keith Thomas (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989); P.J.P. Goldberg, Women, Work, and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy: Women in York and Yorkshire c.1300-1520 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), pp. 261, 276-8, 331; Natalie Zemon Davis, “Women in the Crafts in Sixteenth-Century Lyon,” Women and Work in Pre-Industrial Europe, ed. Barbara Hanawalt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 167-97; also “City Women and Religious Change,” Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays by Natalie Zemon Davis (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975), pp. 88-9; Merry E. Wiesner, “Women's Response to the Reformation,” The German People and the Reformation, ed. R. Po-Chia Hsia (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 148-71; also Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 82-114; Judith M. Bennett, “Medieval Women, Modern Women: Across the Great Divide,” Culture and History 1350-1600, ed. David Aers (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), pp. 147-75. Joel F. Harrington, Reordering Marriage and Society in Reformation Germany (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), affirms this suggestion, concluding that Protestant reforms “represented the final reception of a holy, indissoluble, and consensual ideal of marriage” promulgated in the twelfth century. Other authors, including: Diane Willen, “Women and Religion in Early Modern England,” Women in Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe, ed. Sherrin [Wyntjes] Marshall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp. 140-65; Miriam Usher Chrisman, “Women and the Reformation in Strasbourg, 1490-1530,” Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte 63 (1972), 143-68; Amanda Porterfield, “Women's Attraction to Puritanism,” Church History 60 (1991), 196-209; argue that the Reformation's focus on the family offered women a new prominence and authority. However, when examined, it is informal or indirect power they are speaking of, the power to influence family members, rather than legal, economic or political power. Thomas Max Safley, Let No Man Put Asunder: The control of Marriage in the German Southwest: A comparative study, 1550-1600 (Kirksville, MO: The Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1984), pp. 170-80, also argues that marriage conferred status and power on women in early-modern society, but acknowledges that women's vocational options were severely limited, and further, that women had little power in the domestic sphere to which they had been relegated. Nevertheless, Safley argues, in this era there was a new sensitivity to the plight of women who increasingly turned to the courts to gain and exercise the rights marriage did accord them.

⁸⁰ William Coster, “Purity, Profanity, and Puritanism: The Churching of Women, 1500-1700,” Women in the Church, ed. W.J. Sheils and Diana Wood. Studies in Church History, 27 (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 386; Peter Rushton, “Purification or Social Control? Ideologies of Reproduction and the Churching of Women after Childbirth,” The Public and the Private, ed. Eva Gamarnikow, and others (London: Heinemann, 1983), pp. 118-31, p. 127; Cressy, pp. 122-3, 125, 127.

of the "ceremony of childbirth," reversed gender relations.⁸¹ Early modern sources show that at the time of confinement and lying-in a new mother was surrounded by a company of women.⁸² Within that company the midwife's authority superseded that of the husband, and that of the attending women regardless of their social status. Gail McMurray Gibson points out that medieval midwives, in fact, had a "quasi-clerical status" in that they were empowered by episcopal license to baptise dying infants, and canon law required that they be instructed in the words and form of baptism.⁸³ The husband, excluded from the birthing process, was expected to assume his wife's household responsibilities during the lying-in period, allowing the new mother much-needed time to rest and recuperate. As well, his conjugal rights were suspended, freeing her from the obligations of the marriage debt. According to Wilson, the individual wife would not have been able to make her husband conform to these expectations "since he held the final sanction of the law: but collective action could wrest back for women certain rights and victories."⁸⁴

The final act of the company of women was to accompany the new mother to the door of the church on the day she was to participate in the rite of purification. Even while

⁸¹ See Adrian Wilson, "The Ceremony of Childbirth and its Interpretation," Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England: Essays in Memory of Dorothy McLaren, ed. Valerie Fildes (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 85-93; Natalie Zemon Davis, "Women on Top," Society and Culture in Early Modern France, p. 145.

⁸² See Wilson, "Ceremony of Childbirth," pp. 70-83, for a description of early-modern English birthing practices; also Cressy, pp. 111-17.

⁸³ Gail McMurray Gibson, "Blessing from Sun and Moon: Churching as Women's Theater," Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt and David Wallace, Medieval Cultures, 9 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 150.

⁸⁴ Wilson, "Ceremony of Childbirth," p. 96.

this rite signalled the end of the time a woman spent in this exclusively female society occasioned by her pregnancy and delivery, it validated that society and the roles women played within it in the public forum.⁸⁵

Medieval birthing practices were similarly the reserve of women. This is illustrated in the iconography of the period that depicts birthing scenes populated solely by women, and is emphatically asserted in the introductory remarks of a fifteenth-century English woman's handbook of obstetrics and gynaecology:

And therefore, in helping of women I wyl wright of women prevy sekenes the helpyng, and that oon woman may helpe another in her sykenesse & nought diskuren her previtees to suche vncurteys men.⁸⁶

As is attested by Robert Grosseteste's statute of 1239 with which I began this chapter, and the evidence discussed in chapter one of this study, by the second quarter of the thirteenth century it was already a well-established custom in England for a company of women to accompany new mothers when they were purified. Although it may appear to us that this act reflected and reinforced medieval women's internalisation of negative gender stereotypes, just as it can be argued that early-modern women may have perpetuated the practice of post-partial purification because it served their own interests, it is possible that

⁸⁵ Wilson, "Ceremony of Childbirth," p. 92. Gibson, "Blessing from Sun and Moon," p. 149, concurs: "And it is important to note that the awesome Latin psalms and blessings, the holy water and burning candles, sanctified not only the female body but the body of attending women in a corporate sense." She goes on to suggest, contrary to John Parsons (see ch. 1, n. 38, of this study), that "even on those occasions when the father or other male attendants were present (as they tended to be, for example, in royal ceremonies) the men remained literally marginal, on the outskirts of the ceremony and its meaning."

⁸⁶ Quotation is from: Medieval Woman's Guide to Health: The First English Gynecological Handbook, ed. Beryl Rowland (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1981), p. 58. Iconography is found in: Georges Duby, ed., A History of Private Life II: Revelations of the Medieval World (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 81, 221, 248, 540. See also, Jean Donnison, Midwives and Medical Men: A History of Inter-Professional Rivalries and Women's Rights (London: Heinemann, 1977), p. 3.

this rite crystallised in the eleventh and twelfth centuries through the efforts of women in reaction to the political, legal, economic and social disadvantages they were experiencing.

Of course many factors contribute to the development and perpetuation of a rite such as post-partial purification. It would be a gross oversimplification to suggest either that this rite derived purely from a female effort to subvert gender stereotypes and roles or a male hierarchy's attempt to impose them. Grounded in Levitical blood taboos and the patristic ambivalence towards sex, shaped by the penitentials, and influenced by the intellectual and theological developments of the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the clerical understanding of post-partial purification evidenced in the manuals of confession and pastoral care is complex, both subverting and reinscribing the gender stereotypes they had inherited.⁸⁷

Although the evidence regarding lay women's understanding of this rite is much more circumstantial, I hope to have demonstrated that it was no less complex. I do not dispute Karant-Nunn's assertion that "women absorb the valuation that society places upon them," and certainly agree with her assessment that medieval and early-modern women were most likely "not 'feminists', women seething with frustration at a culture that so hedged them about with negative judgements and limitations on their prerogatives."⁸⁸ However, as I said earlier, women, no less than men respond to their environments by conforming to, manoeuvring within and resisting the constraints placed

⁸⁷ Murray, "Thinking about Gender," examines this complexity by comparing the works of Chobham and Grosseteste. She concludes that the authors of the pastoral manuals "reflect a more complex and sophisticated understanding of gender than that articulated by the discourse of misogyny" (p. 16).

⁸⁸ Karant-Nunn, p. 85.

upon them. Besides, as Adrian Wilson warns, we do women an injustice if we attribute them with a homogeneous point of view.⁸⁹ Subscribing to, and elaborating upon inherited blood taboos and purification beliefs surrounding childbirth may have signalled some medieval women's conformity to prevailing gender stereotypes.⁹⁰ However, we cannot ignore the fact that the rite of the purification of women after childbirth also provided an opportunity to subvert prevailing gender roles.

⁸⁹ Adrian Wilson, "Participant or Patient? Seventeenth Century Childbirth from the Mother's Point of View," Patients and Practitioners: Lay Perceptions of Medicine in Pre-Industrial Society, ed. Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 130, 142-4, warns against assuming a "shared 'women's view'" of the ceremonies of childbirth, for although "the childbirth ritual was a collective female event and a collective female product, it was a structured process comprising different roles," (p. 144). Carroll Smith-Rosenberg in "Hearing Women's Words: A Feminist Reconstruction of History," her introduction to Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 42, elaborates upon this same theme: "Nineteenth-century women lived in a world rich with distinctive female rituals, shaped by the needs and tempos of women's bodies. Many of these rituals spanned class lines, unifying women's experiences across religious, ethnic, and economic distinctions, sharply distinguishing women's lives from those of same-class men. Yet the values, experiences, and needs of women differed sharply along class lines. Women thus existed simultaneously as a unique caste within a male world; as active participants in the dominant male class structure; as male-constructed symbols of class distinctions. They confound the social-structural categories we bring to their analysis."

⁹⁰ Marcia Westcott, "Feminist Criticism of the Social Sciences," Harvard Educational Review 49.4 (1979), pp. 422-31, warns against equating consciousness and activity when considering women's behaviour in a society where they are limited in their ability to implement their consciousness through activity. Westcott suggests that "women's unique interpretation of their own conforming behaviour affects that behaviour in ways that are intelligible only through reference to women's consciousness itself" (429). Rushton, p. 130, points out that "the culture of churching, sustained by women over the centuries" is both enabling and restricting. It is restricting in that by "practising a kind of pollution taboo that has kept them apart after childbirth" women may have "unwittingly reinforc[ed] their subordination." Gail Kern Paster, The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Discipline of Shame in Early Modern England (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 181-197, 195, suggests that because the medical literature of the early modern period articulates "a widespread cultural definition of the fluids emanating from the childbearing woman as highly unstable in quality and effect—capable of harm and good," "the ceremony's popularity among women may argue just as forcefully for their internalisation of shame and embarrassment as for their pride, relief and self-congratulations; indeed, the two affects may be inextricable in explaining the survival of the practice."

Just as women's perspectives vary, their circumstances differ as well. As the next chapter will demonstrate, the rite of post-partal purification held markedly different implications for women deemed guilty of sexual impropriety than for their neighbours in recognised marriages.

CHAPTER 4

"It is a fair joy that we most tend to you for a candel a peny and a clowte."

THE RITE OF POST-PARTAL PURIFICATION AND WOMEN DEEMED GUILTY OF SEXUAL IMPROPRIETY

In 1475 Johanna Talbot was brought before the commissary court of London for having left her parish without having been purified after giving birth to an illegitimate child.¹ According to Adolph Franz, this would never have happened in Continental Europe. There, he asserts, "the rite of purification was a privilege granted to mothers living in legitimate marriages,"² not the mothers of children born as the result of sexual

¹ William Hale, A Series of Precedents and Proceedings in Criminal Causes (1475-1640) (London: FandJ Rivington, 1847), p. 10, #41: "Matfellon: Johanna Talbot peperit absque matrimonio, et recessit a loco ubi peperit non purificata; comparuit xvi die Novembris, et habet 3 dominicis precedere processionem nudis pedibus, in Kirtela capite flammiola nodata cooperto, in parochia sancti Dionisii."

Similarly, Joan Agas fled her Norfolk parish of Barningham in 1499: Bernyngham: (fugam fecit) Johanna Agas notatur quod puerpera est & nescitur penes quem & propter huius delictum fugam fecit. See Lambeth Palace Library MS Register of Archbishop John Morton, vol. 2, fol 111v. This case is described in Christopher Harper-Bill, "A Late Medieval Visitation—the Diocese of Norwich in 1499," Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology 34.1 (1977), p. 40.

² Adolph Franz, Die kirchlichen Benediktionen im Mittelalter, 2 vols. (1909; rpt. Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck- U. Verlagsanstalt, 1960), 2:231. Paula Rieder, "Churching in France," unpublished paper read at Kalamazoo, MI, (1995), p. 1, suggests a more complex relationship between marriage and the rite of purification existed in medieval France than Franz acknowledges. There, women who conceived and gave birth outside of marriage could participate in the rite of purification if they obtained "purification permission" from the rural dean or some higher cleric. See Appendix F/H/1,2. Purification appears to have been more a privilege than an obligation for women guilty of sexual impropriety in France. While the purification of priests' concubines was legislated in England, I have found no evidence of

indiscretions such as Johanna was. This does not appear to have been the case in England. The records of English ecclesiastical courts, diocesan and archidiaconal visitations, and diocesan synods reveal that the mothers of children born of sexual indiscretions were not generally refused this sacramental there. In fact, quite the opposite seems to have been true. Rather than a privilege, for women guilty of sexual improprieties post-partial purification was an obligation, a form of public penance wherein the tensions, quarrels and disrepute occasioned by the disordered sexual relationship resulting in the birth of an illegitimate child could be resolved.

Ecclesiastical Court Records

The parents of illegitimate children appeared before the church courts, and hence made their way into the historical record, on charges of fornication.³ Irregular sexual relationships along with matrimonial problems, probate disputes, defamation, heresy,

legislation prohibiting the purifications of other women deemed guilty of fornication or adultery in England.

³ That is, coitus between an unmarried woman and an unmarried man, "solutus cum soluta." See William Lyndwood, *Provinciale seu Constitutiones Angliae* (Oxford: 1679), 2.2. Although, as Ralph Houlbrooke, *Church Courts and the People During the English Reformation 1520-1570* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 76, points out, "In a great many cases it is unclear whether offences were fornication or adultery, and the court books very often fail to tell us whether the individuals concerned were single or married, though amongst those whose status was described, the former greatly outnumbered the latter." Peter Laslett, "Introduction: Comparing Illegitimacy Over Time and Between Cultures," *Bastardy and its Comparative History: Studies in the History of Illegitimacy and Marital Nonconformism in Britain, France, Germany, Sweden, North America, Jamaica and Japan*, ed. Peter Laslett, Karla Oosterveen, and Richard M. Smith, Studies in Social and Demographic History (London: Edward Arnold, 1980), p. 8, notes that "bastards of married women are infrequently to be met with in English records" because "a man seems to have had to accept all his wife's offspring as his legitimate children, except where inaccessibility could be proved, and the conditions under which this was possible were strict." See also Richard H. Helmholz, "Bastardy Litigation in Medieval England," *American Journal of Legal History* 13 (1969), pp. 369-370.

participation in liturgical life, tithes, church fabric, and offerings, as well as offences committed by or against members of the clergy, came under the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical courts.⁴ Often fragmentary and laconic, the records of those courts betray little superfluous detail, "affording only the sharpest glimpse of an individual or a social act, and often leaving many questions unanswered."⁵ Here, as elsewhere, the references to post-partial purification are few and far between. There are however two fifteenth-century records which suggest that the mothers of illegitimate children were accorded the privilege of post-partial purification: In 1435 John West and Beatrice Sharpe were called before the official of the prior and convent of Durham on charges of fornication.⁶ John was not present for the proceedings. Beatrice was assigned a penance of walking around the church three times while being flagellated, for three Sundays. She was to perform this penance after her purification.⁷ And, in 1530 one Ralph Blundell of Stevenage, Hertfordshire (Lincoln Diocese) was called before the bishop's official during a visitation because he had ignored a previous injunction from the commissary to refrain from consorting with Alice Marshe whom he had impregnated. During the hearing he admitted that Alice had been in his house for five days and spent the night there before her

⁴ Houlbrooke, pp. 7-8. See also Rosalind Hill, "Public Penance--Some Problems of a Thirteenth-Century Bishop," *History* 36 (1951), pp. 213-214.

⁵ Before the Bawdy Court: Selections from Church Court and Other Records Relating to the Correction of Moral Offences in England, Scotland and New England, 1300-1800, ed. Paul Hair (London: Elek, 1972), p. 11.

⁶ The official exercised archidiaconal jurisdiction in the churches and parishes appropriated to the Prior and Convent of Durham. See Depositions and Other Ecclesiastical Proceedings from the Courts of Durham, Extending from 1311 to the Reign of Elizabeth, ed. J. Raine, Surtees Society, 21 (London: J.B. Nichols and Son, 1845), p. 26.

⁷ Depositions and Other Ecclesiastical Proceedings from the Courts of Durham, pp. 26-7: "Sancti Oswaldi: Johannes West forn. cum Beatrice Sharpe. Vir est extra. Mulier habet iij fustigaciones circa ecclesiam iij diebus dominicis, post suam purificationem."

purification.⁸ While these couples were indicted and punished for fornication, it does not appear that the women involved were ever in threat of being denied post-partial purification as a result of their impropriety.

In fact, if Johanna Talbot's experience is any indication, quite the opposite seems to have been true. In an earlier record from the same commissary court in London, this one dating from 1471, we are told that a certain woman knelt at the door of her parish church on the day of her purification. Her pastor, rather than welcoming her into the church as was the custom, extinguished the candle she held. During the mass that followed, as he was washing his hands, the priest further expressed his disdain, exclaiming in English for all to hear: "It is a fair joy that we most tend to you for a candel a peny and a clowte [cloth]."⁹ It is likely that this woman's child was also born as the result of a sexual indiscretion. Her experience graphically illustrates why Johanna Talbot may have wished to avoid purification. These events add another dimension to our

⁸ Visitations in the Diocese of Lincoln 1517-1531, ed. A.H. Thompson, Lincoln Record Society, 35 (1944), p. 17: "Stevenage: Radulphus Blundell impregnauit Aliciam Marshe de eadem sed habuit penitenciam sibi iniunctam per commissarium et quod non admitteret eandem ad consorcium suum.

XV^{mo}. die Maij comparuit dictus Radulphus Blundell in ecclesia parochiali de Hychyn et fatetur quod dicta Alicia fuit in domo ipsius quinque diebus et ibidem pernoctabat citra tempus purificationis sue. Cui dominus iniunxit quod ipse propter violacionem iniunccionum alias per commissarium factarum die dominico proximo more penitenti differet candelam in manu sua ardentem ante processionem apud Stevenage. Postea dominus commutauit penitenciam, videlicet quod ipse die dominico proximo offeret candelam ad manus sacerdotis tunc ibidem missam celebrantis et die Veneris proximo jeiunabit pane et aqua." Also found in translation in Hair, Before the Bawdy Court, p. 65, #103.

⁹ Transcribed in Richard M. Wunderli, London Church Courts and Society on the Eve of the Reformation (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1981), p. 151: "Katerine Colman: Dominus Willielmus Flete extinxit candelam cuiusdam mulieris venientis ad purificationem et hoc fecit apud hostium ecclesie et quando lavavit manus suas tempore misse dixit aperte Kessetes in anglie, "Kessetes it is a fair joy that we most tend to you for a candel a peny and a clowte" et publicat confessiones parochianorum suorum. capellanus comparuit 5 die Januarii, negat articulum et continuatur ad diem veneris."

understanding of the role the rite of post-partal purification played in the medieval English community. For the mother of an illegitimate child, to participate in the purification rite was to stand before her community and publicly acknowledge and account for her sexual impropriety.¹⁰ In other words, the rite of purification served as a form of public penance.

A Form of Public Penance

Ralph Houlbrooke discusses the role public penance played in the life of the medieval community in his examination of late medieval church courts. In the cases to which I have made reference, Beatrice Sharpe was assigned a penance of walking around the church three times while being flagellated for her fornication. Johanna Talbot was sentenced to walk before the procession for three Sundays bare-foot in her petticoat with a knotted kerchief covering her head. And for his dalliance with Alice Marshe, Ralph Blundell was ordered by the bishop's commissary to walk before the procession with a lighted candle in his hand the next Sunday at his parish church.¹¹ Such public penances

¹⁰ There is a case recorded in Arthur T. Bannister, "Visitation Returns of the Diocese of Hereford in 1397," English Historical Review 44 (1929), pp. 449-50, that may represent similar feelings on the part of a priest, although there are not enough details given to ascertain why it was the priest refused Amiot Howel purification. The fact that her friends came to her defense suggests that this too was a very public disagreement: "Item dicunt quod prefatus dominus Philippus maliciose, sine auctoritate alicuius superiorum, recusavit ministrare officium purificationis cuidam Amiot Howel post partum, asserendo eam suspensam per commissarium generalem, quod non fuit verum, et quod amici dicte mulieris petierunt ab eo an habuerit mandatum ad hoc, nec aliquod voluit ostendere."

¹¹ Later that penance was commuted to a less humiliating one. Instead of walking in the procession, he was to give a candle to the priest during the celebration of the mass on Sunday, and fast on bread and water on the Friday.

were not uncommon in medieval England.¹² Since the concern of the ecclesiastical courts was the moral life of the community, the penances they enjoined “were theoretically expressions of moral repentance rather than punishments.”¹³ However, Houlbrooke observes that the ritual of public penance also “served to resolve tensions and perhaps to save individuals from the consequences of a more informal popular judgement.”¹⁴ I

¹² See Hill, pp. 213-226; Registrum Hamonis Hethe, Diocesis Roffensis A.D. 1319-1352, ed. Charles Johnson, Canterbury and York Society, 49 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 914; An Episcopal Court Book for the Diocese of Lincoln 1514-1520, ed. Margaret Bowker, The Lincoln Record Society, 61 (Lincoln: J.W. Ruddock and Sons, 1967), p. xxii; Houlbrooke, p. 46. These penances varied however. Temporally, in the fourteenth century flagellation three times around the church was a relatively common penance, but by the early sixteenth century flagellation had disappeared from use in some church courts, especially the higher courts. See Johnson, p. 914; Bowker, pp. xv, xxii. The type and the geographic location of the court may also have made a difference. In his comparison of the church courts in the dioceses of Winchester and Norwich, Houlbrooke, p. 46, records that flagellation was frequently imposed as penance in Winchester, but had practically gone out of use in Norwich by the sixteenth century. Thirdly, one's socio-economic status played a part in determining the penance imposed. Hill, pp. 216-226, points out that persons holding responsible positions were not to be exposed to such humiliation that it would thereafter be impossible for them to exercise their authority. Johnson, p. 914, notes, “penance for the poorer classes usually took the form of corporal punishment[;] . . . persons of greater dignity were bidden to perform pilgrimages, offer candles, and distribute alms to the poor.” Even if they were assigned a public penance, the well-to-do could afford to have them commuted to a fine. See Bowker, p. xxii. Regarding gender, an informal sampling of the cases found in Acts of Chapter of the Collegiate Church of SS. Peter and Wilfred, Ripon, A.D. 1452 to A.D. 1506, ed. J.T. Fowler, Surtees Society, 64 (Durham: Andrews and Co., 1875); Thompson, Visitations in the Diocese of Lincoln 1517-1531; and Act Book of the Ecclesiastical Court of Whalley 1510-1538, ed. Alice M. Cooke, Chetham Society, n.s., 44 (Salford: Charles E. Simms, 1901), suggests that there was little disparity between the penances assigned woman and men for the same offence in any given court at any given time. Wunderli, p. 86, concurs. Nevertheless, Barbara A. Hanawalt, “Rituals of Inclusion and Exclusion: Hierarchy and Marginalization in Medieval London,” 'Of Good and Ill Repute': Gender and Social Control in Medieval England (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 25-7, suggests that there were “subtle gender-biased assumptions” in the treatment of men and women. For example, the public undressing of women more radically “offended expectations for women's normal public posture” than men's, and was therefore more humiliating for women than for men.

¹³ Hair, Before the Bawdy Court, p. 20. See also, Hill, p. 215.

¹⁴ Houlbrooke, p. 46. According to Keith Wrightson and David Levine, Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling, 1525-1700 (New York: Academic Press, 1979), p. 111, “The most powerful of [the spectrum of sanctions that might be invoked against offenders], though those that have left least trace to the historian, were the informal sanctions of gossip, bad reputation, and low credit in the eyes of the neighbourhood in general and of powerful neighbors in

would suggest that a similar dynamic was at work in the purifications of the mothers of illegitimate children. The rite of post-partal purification served as a venue in which to resolve the tensions, quarrels and disrepute occasioned by the disordered sexual relationship resulting in the birth of an illegitimate child, allowing the unwed mother to resume her life within the community.

I am not alone in suggesting that the rite of post-partal purification served to reintegrate a new mother into the community. Peter Rushton, Adrian Wilson, William Coster, and Susan Karant-Nunn have all examined this rite within the framework of Arnold Van Gennep's "rites of passage." Van Gennep suggests that the rites de passage, including birth, social puberty, marriage, parenthood, and death, can be subdivided into "rites of separation, transition rites, and rites of incorporation."¹⁵ He goes on to assert that the medieval "ceremonies of pregnancy and childbirth" incorporated all three types of rites, churching being a reintegrative rite. Rushton, Wilson, Coster, and Karant-Nunn conclude that the rite of purification can be seen to reintegrate a woman into the community on several different levels. At one level, pregnancy was perceived to be a time of enhanced vulnerability and loss of personal control requiring special precautions by the pregnant woman and those around her which separated her from the community. The isolation of the lying-in month served as a period of transition which was followed by the ritual of purification signalling her return to a state of normalcy, no longer in

particular. If these failed, then there might be an appeal to the formal institutions of conflict resolution and social control: the courts."

¹⁵ Arnold van Gennep, The Rites of Passage, trans. M.B. Vizedom and G.L. Caffee (London: 1960), pp. 10-11, 46-7.

danger herself, or a danger to the community.¹⁶ At another level, pregnancy occasioned the gathering of a company of women, an exclusively female society which exempted pregnant and newly delivered women from the "rule of male pre-eminence in society."¹⁷ The purification rite signalled the dissolution of that female society and the restoration of the status quo, returning the mother to the society of men. Purification also signalled a woman's "new status as a mother (after a first birth), or confirmed her status as a breeding woman."¹⁸ However, all four commentators neglect to comment upon how, or if, post-partial purification also reintegrated the mothers of illegitimate children into the community.

Coster does suggest that there is a penitential element present in the rite of post-partial purification which is especially apparent in the cases of illegitimate births. From that he concludes however that purification "was used to reinforce publicly the shame of

¹⁶ Adrian Wilson, "Participant or Patient? Seventeenth Century Childbirth from the Mother's Point of View," Patients and Practitioners: Lay Perceptions of Medicine in Pre-Industrial Society, ed. Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 129-44, outlines the parallels between the "ceremony of childbirth" and van Gennep's stages. See also, William Coster, "Purity, Profanity, and Puritanism: The Churching of Women, 1500-1700," Women in the Church, ed. W.J. Sheils and Diana Wood. *Studies in Church History*, 27 (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 380, 382; Peter Rushton, "Purification or Social Control? Ideologies of Reproduction and the Churching of Women after Childbirth," The Public and the Private, ed. Eva Gamarnikow, and others (London: Heinemann, 1983), pp. 118, 128, 130; Susan Karant-Nunn, "Churching, a Women's Rite," The Reformation of Ritual: An Interpretation of Early Modern Germany, Christianity and Society in the Modern World (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 78, 83, 84, 88.

¹⁷ Karant-Nunn, pp. 82-8; David Cressy, "Purification, Thanksgiving and the Churching of Women in Post-Reformation England," Past and Present 141 (1993), pp. 115, 116; Adrian Wilson, "The Ceremony of Childbirth and its Interpretation," Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England: Essays in Memory of Dorothy McLaren, ed. Valerie Fildes (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 93-97; Rushton, p. 130. This is also discussed in the previous chapter of this study.

¹⁸ Cressy, p. 145.

illegitimate birth.”¹⁹ Yet, an examination of the late sixteenth-century visitation articles and injunctions he cites in order to substantiate his argument reveals that reconciliation was their intent. Most explicit in this regard is an injunction issued by Bishop Cooper of Lincoln Diocese in 1577:

Item, that no woman delivered of any child begotten in fornication shall be admitted to her thanksgiving in the church before she hath publicly reconciled herself in such order and form as by the archdeacon of the place, or other officer to the said Reverend Father, shall be to her prescribed.²⁰

The visitation articles of Archbishop Grindal, promulgated in the province of York in 1571, provided the model from which other similar articles were fashioned.

They describe how that reconciliation was to be effected:

Whether your parson, vicar, curate, or minister do church any unmarried woman which hath been gotten with child out of lawful marriage, and say for her the Form of Thanksgiving of women after childbirth, except such an unmarried woman have either before her childbirth done some penance for her fault to the satisfaction of the congregation, or at her coming to give thanks do openly acknowledge her fault before the congregation, at the appointment of the minister by the Ordinary or his deputy; the same churching to be had always upon some Sunday or Holy day, and upon none other day?²¹

¹⁹ Coster, pp. 384-5.

²⁰ William Paul McClure Kennedy, Elizabethan Episcopal Administration: An Essay in Sociology and Politics, Alcuin Club, 25, 26, 28 (Oxford and Milwaukee: A.R. Mowbray, 1924), 2:44, #11.

²¹ Visitation Articles and Injunctions, ed. W.H. Frere and W.P.M. Kennedy, 3 vols. (London: Longmans and Green, 1910), 3:261, #22. Similar and related visitation articles that appeared at that same time can be found in this volume: 3:270-1, #59; 3:278, #11; 3:308, #21; 3:313, #43; 3:332, #1. See also Kennedy, Elizabethan Episcopal Administration, 2:13, #22; 2:15, #59; 2:48, #20; 2:55, #11; 2:95, #17; 2:115, #17.

This practice perdured into the eighteenth century, as Cressy, p. 132, demonstrates: “The vicar of Knaresdale, Northumberland, was cited in 1611 ‘for churching two women being fornicators’. Thomas Knight of Swavesey, Cambridgeshire, reported to Bishop Wren in 1638 that he never churched ‘any begotten with child in adultery or fornication’ until he ‘received order to purify or give thanks for them’. And as late as 1715 Thomas Tanner advised Dr. Charlett of Oxford, ‘you were right not to use the office of churching to any persons so notoriously guilty of incontinence till she has made satisfaction to the congregation by doing penance’.”

Although an unwed mother most likely experienced shame as she acknowledged her fault before the congregation, this directive suggests that purification was meant to serve as a forum in which the congregation could address her breach of conduct, and give her an opportunity to repair her relationship with the community. Most significantly, unwed mothers were not to be purified until they had made satisfaction to the community. Purification marked, therefore, their re-admittance to that community.

Unfortunately, there are no similar pre-Reformation statements regarding the purification of the mothers of illegitimate children. And care must be taken when drawing parallels between medieval and early modern attitudes towards illegitimacy. Social and demographic historians have argued that sanctions against illegitimacy became harsher in the sixteenth century.²² David Levine and Keith Wrightson attribute this change in attitude toward illegitimacy in early modern England to “a superimposition of harsher attitudes towards the poor and a greater religious hostility to moral disorders upon an existing situation of increasing social and economic polarisation.”²³ Illegitimacy and

²² I. Pinchbeck, “Social Attitudes to the Problem of Illegitimacy,” British Journal of Sociology 5 (1954), pp. 312-316; Keith Wrightson, “The Nadir of English Illegitimacy in the Seventeenth Century,” Bastardy and its Comparative History, p. 179; Martin Ingram, Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640 (Cambridge: 1987), pp. 150-167.

²³ David Levine, and Keith Wrightson, “The social Context of Illegitimacy in Early Modern England,” Bastardy and its Comparative History, pp. 173. An examination of the complex dynamics underlying this change in the attitude towards, and treatment of, illegitimacy is beyond the scope of this study. They are treated in detail in the essays on bastardy in Britain in Bastardy and its Comparative History; and Richard Adair, Courtship, Illegitimacy and Marriage in Early Modern England (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996). Also, Marjorie K. McIntosh, “Finding Language for Misconduct: Jurors in Fifteenth-Century Local Courts,” Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt and David Wallace, Medieval Cultures, 9 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 110-13, outlines the demographic, economic and social changes initiated in the fourteenth century which contributed to the social and economic polarisation. Beat A. Kümin, The Shaping of a Community: The Rise and Reformation of the English Parish c. 1400-1560, St Andrews Studies in Reformation History

its implications of moral laxity became identified with the lower socio-economic strata, and "bastard children . . . were seen as an economic problem, likely to be a drain on scarce communal resources."²⁴ The visitation articles of the sixteenth century were a product of this confluence of religious, social and economic movements.

There has been little discussion of medieval attitudes toward the mothers of illegitimate children with which to compare the work of the early modernists. Rather, medievalists have focused upon the legal rights and disabilities of illegitimate children.²⁵ It was only in the course of the twelfth century that the church enunciated a doctrine on

(Aldershot: Scolar, 1996), pp. 201-255, traces that polarisation at the parish level. Brian Tierney, Medieval Poor Law: A Sketch of Canonical Theory and Its Application in England (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1959), pp. 128-33; Joseph Robson Tanner, Tudor Constitutional Documents A.D. 1485-1603 with an Historical Commentary, 2nd ed. (1930; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), pp. 469-73; and Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, English Poor Law History: Part 1: The Old Poor Law, English Local Government, 7 (1927; rpt. London: Frank Cass and Co., 1963), discuss the development of the secular poor law which shifted poor relief, hence the financial responsibility for illegitimate children, from clerical to lay responsibility, and from ecclesiastical to parliamentary concern. Tanner, pp. 473-94, provides transcriptions of the pertinent statutes. Webb and Webb is decidedly Marxist in orientation. McIntosh, p. 97, documents the growing trend in the fifteenth century for sexual misconduct cases to be heard in secular courts.

²⁴ Alan Macfarlane, "Illegitimacy and Illegitimates in English History," Bastardy and its Comparative History, p. 75, also pp. 73-74, 81-83. See also Levine and Wrightson, pp. 172-4; Wrightson, "The Nadir of English Illegitimacy," p. 179; Peter Laslett, "The Bastardy Prone Sub-Society," Bastardy and its Comparative History, pp. 217-246. Claire S. Schen, "Women and the London Parishes 1500-1620," The Parish in English Life 1400-1600, ed. Katherine L. French, Gary Gibbs, and Beat Kümin (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp. 261-4, documents the stigmatisation of poor women, and the moral judgement placed upon their bearing children who were potential burdens to the community in London.

²⁵ E.g. Michael M. Sheehan, "Illegitimacy in Late Medieval England: Laws, Dispensation and Practice," Illegitimität im Spätmittelalter, ed. Ludwig Schmutge, Schriften des Historischen Kollegs, 29 (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1994), pp. 115-22., and the other essays in this collection; Richard H. Helmholz, "Bastardy Litigation in Medieval England;" and, "Support Orders, Church Courts, and the Rule of 'Filius Nullius': A Reassessment of the Common Law," Virginia Law Review 63.3 (1977), pp. 431-448; Bernhard Schimmelpfennig, "Ex Fornicatione Nati: Studies on the Position of Priests' Sons from the Twelfth to the Fourteenth Century," Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History 2, o.s., 12 (1987), 1-50; Ludwig Schmutge, Kirche, Kinder, Karrieren: Päpstliche Dispense von der unehelichen Geburt im Spätmittelalter (Zurich: Artemis and Winkler, 1995).

illegitimacy. This was an outgrowth of its efforts to establish clerical celibacy as the norm, and the concomitant consensual model of marriage. A legitimate child came to be defined in church doctrine as one born of a couple who were free to marry and had established the bond in a proper manner, that is, publicly and formally so that it was clear that consent was freely given.²⁶ However, as Peter Laslett points out, "it was public opinion and especially the opinion of the local community, the neighbours, which decided whether any particular association could be called a marriage, and not only the church and the law. Public opinion on such matters might vary from place to place and alter with time."²⁷ Although the church introduced its sacramental, indissoluble, monogamous model of marriage in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, even into the fifteenth century children the church may have defined as illegitimate, may not have been deemed so by the community.²⁸ There was, in fact, potential for confusion inherent in the medieval ecclesiastical model of marriage. It was possible to contract a valid marriage clandestinely, that is, without witnesses or clerical mediation. Yet, Michael Sheehan notes, "if the union were brought about in any of those modes that might be considered

²⁶ See Sheehan, "Illegitimacy in Late Medieval England," p. 15; Schimmelpfennig, pp. 26, 45.

²⁷ Peter Laslett, Family Life and Illicit Love in Earlier Generations: Essays in Historical Sociology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 109.

²⁸ Both Richard H. Helmholz, Marriage Litigation in Medieval England, Cambridge Studies in English Legal History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 5; and Michael M. Sheehan, "The Formation and Stability of Marriage in Fourteenth-Century England: Evidence of an Ely Register," Mediaeval Studies 33 (1971), p. 263, agree that the establishment of the church's exclusive control over marriage was still in process during the fifteenth century. In his preface to Bastardy and its Comparative History, p. xiv, Laslett identifies the definition of what constitutes an official marriage as lying at the heart of the discussion of illegitimacy. James A. Brundage, Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 517, states that "the popular belief that simple fornication between unmarried persons was neither a sin nor a crime persisted" into the fifteenth century.

clandestine it was presumed that the bond was invalid and, as a consequence, that the child born of that union was illegitimate . . . [until] the fact of the marriage could be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the ecclesiastical courts.”²⁹ Contradictions between civil and canon law also contributed to diverse understandings of what constituted illegitimacy. Most notable of these is their treatment of children born out of wedlock whose parents subsequently married. “The Church held that a child born before the marriage of the parents was legitimised by their subsequent marriage, provided that they were of a condition to be married when the child was conceived.”³⁰ The civil courts, on the other hand, refused to recognise such children as legitimate heirs to property.³¹

Medieval Attitudes Towards the Mothers of Illegitimate Children

If the definition of, and attitudes towards illegitimate children were multiple and varied, so must they have been regarding their mothers. One of the richest sources of information regarding the mothers of illegitimate children is church court records. At best, however, they give us only a partial picture for, as Laslett notes, “it seems likely that

²⁹ Sheehan, “Illegitimacy in Late Medieval England,” p. 115. See also, Michael M. Sheehan, “Marriage Theory and Practice in the Conciliar Legislation and Diocesan Statutes of Medieval England,” *Mediaeval Studies* 40 (1978), pp. 408-60. A more thorough discussion of this confusion is found in Sheehan’s “The Formation and Stability of Marriage in Fourteenth-Century England.”

³⁰ F.M. Powicke and C. R. Cheney, ed., *Councils and Synods*, p. 198. See also, Sheehan, “Illegitimacy in Medieval England,” pp. 116-118. Such children were called “mantle children” because they were placed under the care-cloth, or mantle, which was spread over their parents at their wedding ceremony. See Frederick Pollock, and Frederick W. Maitland, *The History of English Law Before the Time of Edward I*, 2 vols. (1898; rpt. Cambridge: University Press, 1968), 2:397-8.

³¹ Robert Grosseteste outlines the debate between canon law and civil law in Epistola 23: *Letters of Robert Grosseteste*, ed. Henry R. Luard, Rolls Series, 25 (London: PRO, 1861).

it was the notorious who got themselves into trouble with the church and the law, rather than the unfortunate victims of broken courtships. For it was the representatives of village opinion, the churchwardens, who did the reporting."³² As well, Alan Macfarlane warns that the way the church courts handled this offence, and the degree of severity of the punishment "may have borne little relation to the actual feelings at the local level,"³³ which were no doubt as complex and diverse as those towards the children they bore.

Nevertheless, one can infer from medieval church court records that the mothers of illegitimate children were not accorded singular responsibility and blame for their condition. Richard Helmholz has documented that throughout England when the father of an illegitimate child was known, the church courts "routinely imposed the burden of support on the putative father."³⁴ Not only that but he could also be required to meet the expenses of confinement and purification, and provide the woman with a dowry.³⁵ In Norwich diocese in 1499, for example, John Pynnes of East Dereham, who had impregnated Agnes Redwell, his maidservant, was not only sentenced to public penance and the payment of 5s. to both his parish church and the cathedral, but was instructed to

³² Laslett, "Introduction," p. 49. Brian L. Woodcock, Medieval Ecclesiastical Courts in the Diocese of Canterbury (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 69, agrees that it was "ill fame" that resulted in an appearance in court, but suggests that it was "the inquisitorial activity of the apparitors," or summoners, rather than the churchwardens who brought persons to the attention of the courts. In his study of pre-marital pregnancy 1540-1820, Paul Hair, "Bridal Pregnancy in Earlier England Further Examined," Population Studies 24 (1970), 69-70, also concurs: "We suspect that only a small proportion of brides found their way before a church court, and that they appeared only when their offence was particularly flagrant, or when individual clergy were abnormally strict, or when offenders had incurred the malice of the churchwardens."

³³ Macfarlane, p. 84.

³⁴ Richard H. Helmholz, "Support Orders, Church Courts, and the Rule of 'Filius Nullius'," pp. 438-9.

³⁵ Houlbrooke, p. 77.

maintain Agnes until her purification. He was then to pay her a further 40s., as well as maintain the child from its birth. Agnes, for her part, was assigned a public penance. She was to precede the Sunday procession at her parish church with a lit candle in her hand, which she was then to offer to the priest at the offertory of the mass.³⁶

If the father could not be found or held accountable, sometimes the family was called upon to support an illegitimate child. Helmholz documents two cases from a Rochester court where this occurred. In 1463 the father of a man who had fathered an illegitimate child was "asked and persuaded" to provide for and care for the child. In that same court seven years earlier the sister of the mother of an illegitimate child, and her husband agreed to support and care for the child because neither of its parents could.³⁷ But support for the unwed mother and her child was not always forthcoming. The fathers often went missing, and other family members did not necessarily admit to, or meet such responsibilities, leaving those mothers who could not fend for themselves and their children dependent upon their communities.³⁸ While improper sexual relationships were moral crimes in the eyes of the church hierarchy, it was most likely concern over the

³⁶ See Appendix F/F for the text. This case is described in Harper-Bill, p. 38. A similar case from Lincoln diocese heard in 1530 is found in Thompson, Visitations in the Diocese of Lincoln 1517-1531, 2:15:

Visitation of Barkhampsted deanery, in Huntingdon archdeaconry 1530:

Gaddesden: Thomas Clarke fatetur se carnaliter cognouisse Agnetem Dryvar circiter festum sancti Michaelis et eam impregnasse, set negat se contraxisse cum eadem: cui dominus iniunxit quod ipse videbit puerum nutriri et quamcitius poterit.

Dominus iniunxit dicte Agneti quod ipsa die dominico proximo post Purificationem antecedit processionem more penitenti differendo candelam ardentem in manu sua et tempore offertorij offeret candelam ad manus sacerdotis.

³⁷ Helmholz, "Support Orders, Church Courts, and the Rule of 'Filius Nullius'," p. 444.

³⁸ Sheehan, "Illegitimacy in Medieval England," p. 118; Barbara Hanawalt, The Ties That Bound: Peasant Families in Medieval England (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 251.

support of the illegitimate children they spawned that prompted members of the local community to report such liaisons to the medieval church courts.³⁹ For, although the law legislating community responsibility for the poor, which Levine and Wrightson identify as one of the key contributing factors to the hardening attitudes toward illegitimacy in the early modern period, was enacted by parliament only in the mid-sixteenth century, canon law had enjoined this responsibility upon medieval parishioners from as early as the twelfth century.⁴⁰ While the mothers of illegitimate children may not have been accorded

³⁹ Houlbrooke, p. 76. He notes that approximately 1/3 of sexual incontinence cases came to the attention of the court because a woman had been made pregnant. See also Sheehan, "Illegitimacy in Medieval England," p. 118.

⁴⁰ According to Helmholz, "Support Orders, Church Courts, and the Rule of 'Filius Nullius,'" p. 446, also pp. 434, 447, the Poor Law did not create a new duty it "simply provided a new mechanism for enforcing a duty previously enforced only in the courts of the Church." See also Tierney, pp. 44-97; Michel Mollat, The Poor in the Middle Ages: An Essay in Social History (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 153-7; Joel T. Rosenthal, The Purchase of Paradise: Gift Giving and the Aristocracy, 1307-1485 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 8; Miri Rubin, Charity and Community in Medieval Cambridge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 1-2. Community support of the poor and indigent was carried out by parishes, monastic institutions, guilds, and municipalities. See Webb and Webb, pp. 6-22; and Kūmin, pp. 48, 61-2. Judith Bennett, "Conviviality and Charity in Medieval and Early Modern England," Past and Present 134 (1992), pp. 19-41, discusses ales as a secular as well as parochial mechanism of generating funds for poor relief. The Corpus Christi Guild in Saffron Walden, Essex, included in its list of statutes in the guild returns of 1389, that poor strangers were to be buried at the guild's expense, and poor women with child coming to the town were to be given a chrisom, and a penny to offer at their purification. PRO C 47/39/59: "Item: si aliqua pauper mulier pregnans aduenerit ad dictam villam de Waleden', et si non habuerit de propriis, tunc habeat de sumptibus dictorum fratrum vnum crismum et vnum denarium ad offerendum in die purificationis eius." This certificate is described by H.F. Westlake, The Parish Gilds of Mediaeval England (London: SPCK., 1919), p. 152. Some of these may have been the mothers of illegitimate children fleeing their home parishes. The churchwardens' accounts of this same parish list purification offerings among their receipts. For those years listing the offerings by name there is mention of two poor families but they aren't strangers. In 1474/5 the wife of Robert Gyson offered nothing at her purification, as did the wife of Thomas Colle in 1475/6. See Appendix B, fols 94r; 102r. There is evidence of poor strangers being purified in Blunham, Bedfordshire. On 18 May 1534 a chrisom and a penny were received from the purification of "a strange woman that dyd ly in at Qweperlays." On 28 June that same year, 2d. was received at the purification of "a pore woman off Mogeranger," and 19 July a chrisom and 1d. were offered by "a powre woman" at her purification. See Nicholas H. Bennett, "Blunham Rectory Accounts," Bedfordshire Historical Record Society 69 (1990), p. 145.

singular responsibility and blame for their condition, those who became a financial burden to the community were bound to be regarded with disapproval.⁴¹

Related to these economic considerations, geographic location seems also to have been a determining factor regarding the presence and degree of stigma attached to bastard-bearing. Barbara Hanawalt, in her study of fourteenth-century peasant life, suggests that "the stigma of an illegitimate birth for either the mother or the child need not have been very strong in peasant society" because "children were so important to the economy that a couple wanted to be sure of fertility before entering into marriage."⁴² And indeed, she found no evidence of such stigma. Zvi Razi concurs, ascertaining in his study of the manorial court records of Halesowen in Worcestershire, that "women who conceived and bore children out of wedlock were not stigmatised, as many of them subsequently married" men of equal or higher status.⁴³

Hanawalt comes to a different conclusion in her study of late medieval urban life however. In medieval London she discovered that "a stigma apparently was attached to

⁴¹ Conversely, as Chris Given-Wilson and Alice Curteis, The Royal Bastards of Medieval England (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 54, note, English kings and aristocrats took mistresses with impunity and reared their bastards in public right up to the nineteenth century. See also, Jenny Teichman, Illegitimacy: A Philosophical Examination (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), p. 60; and Pinchbeck, p. 313.

⁴² Hanawalt, The Ties that Bound, p. 196, also pp. 103, 156. She defines peasants: "rural dwellers who possess (if they do not own) the means of agricultural production" (p. 5).

⁴³ Zvi Razi, Life, Marriage and Death in a Medieval Parish: Economy, Society and Demography in Halesowen 1270-1400 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 65. According to Razi's figures, p. 66, twenty-six percent of the women who gave birth out of wedlock subsequently married. He also notes, pp. 66-70, that the majority of unwed mothers came from lower socio-economic strata. Although L.R. Poos and R.M. Smith, "Legal Windows Onto Historical Populations? Recent Research on Demography and the Manor Court in Medieval England," Law and History Review 2 (1984), pp. 128-152, criticise many points of Razi's interpretation of his data, especially his high estimate of illegitimacy levels prior to 1348, they do not challenge this assertion.

women who had premarital sex and bore children out of wedlock,"⁴⁴ for such women are known to have run away, and they were brought before the church courts. Unlike their compeers in the countryside whose children had the potential to be assets, these urban dwellers' children threatened to be a financial burden to the community.

It was not just economic concerns that brought medieval bastard-bearers before the church courts however. Ruth Mazo Karras suggests that the standards of morality that were enshrined in canon law and upheld by the church courts, at least as they pertained to women's sexual behaviour, were accepted by, and imposed from within medieval communities as well as from without.⁴⁵ In fact, she asserts that "the laity accepted the church's standards of behaviour for women far more readily than it did for men."⁴⁶ Evidence of this double standard is found in late medieval moral treatises which, Karras argues, addressed men's behaviour because "people had to be convinced that these things were wrong for men to do; they did not have to be convinced that they were wrong for women."⁴⁷ Church court records, especially defamation cases, also illustrate her point. Karras notes that "women were defamed of sexual offences far more often than men." This suggests, "the ecclesiastical view--chastity outside of marriage, without exception--fitted with popular notions of what women should be like (although not necessarily

⁴⁴ Barbara Hanawalt, Growing Up In Medieval London (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 59.

⁴⁵ Ruth Mazo Karras, "Two Models, Two Standards: Moral Teaching and Sexual Mores," Bodies and Disciplines, p. 131.

⁴⁶ Karras, "Two Models, Two Standards," p. 131.

⁴⁷ Karras, "Two Models, Two Standards," p. 131.

notions of what women were like)."⁴⁸ From this she concludes: "When they did not adhere to that model it was not only the church but also the community at large that called them to task for it."⁴⁹

There is one more piece of evidence pointing to the disciplinary role that post-partial purification played in the lives of the mothers of illegitimate children. The financial accounts of two Yorkshire churches allude to a practice whereby women were purified at the end of their wedding mass.⁵⁰ This is most clearly articulated in the 1454-5 accounts of Kirkby Malham in West Yorkshire. There the offerings for purifications, weddings, and funerals are described and broken down. The offerings listed under weddings include 8d. for the ceremony at the church door, 2d. for each priest in

⁴⁸ Karras does not ignore the complexity of the dynamics underlying medieval and early modern defamation in this article. She rightly points out how the gendered nature of defamatory language reflects gendered attitudes towards sexual behaviour. For an in-depth gender analysis of the language of sexual insult see Laura Gowing, Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996). It should also be noted that the terms 'bastard' and 'whoreson' can be documented as terms of opprobrium from the fourteenth century, indicating that there was some sort of stigma attached to medieval illegitimacy. See 'horeson' in the Medieval English Dictionary; also R.H. Helmholz, ed., Select Cases on Defamation to 1600 (London, 1985), Selden Society, 101, pp. lxxvii, n.3; 23, #22; Lawrence R. Poos, "Sex, Lies, and the Church Courts of Pre-Reformation England," Journal of Interdisciplinary History 25 (1995), pp. 591, 602.

⁴⁹ Karras, "Two Models, Two Standards," p. 132; also Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England, Studies in the History of Sexuality (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 23. Karras is not alone in suggesting a dialectical relationship between the ecclesiastical courts and popular opinion. See also G.R. Elton, England, 1200-1640, The Sources of History: Studies in the Uses of Historical Evidence (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1969), pp. 105-106; Hair, Before the Bawdy Court, pp. 27-28; Houlbrooke, p. 47; Poos, pp. 585-586; Kümin, p. 227; Andrew D. Brown, Popular Piety in Late Medieval England: The Diocese of Salisbury 1250-1550 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 79-80. Charles Donahue, Jr., "Female Plaintiffs in Marriage Cases in the Court of York in the Later Middle Ages: What Can We Learn from the Numbers?," Wife and Widow in Medieval England, ed. Sue Sheridan Walker (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 183-213, presents a case study which illustrates that relationship.

⁵⁰ Peter Heath, ed., Medieval Clerical Accounts (York: St. Anthony's Hall, 1964), pp. 3-25, discusses this class of document.

attendance, 2d. for candles at the altar, and, “at the end of the mass if the woman is purified 1d.”⁵¹ This practice also occurred in the Scarborough parish church. Eight of the thirty-six purifications for which offerings are recorded in 1438-9, and five of the thirty purifications recorded in 1441-2 note that the offering in question was given “for one wedding and the purification of the same.”⁵² This suggests that while some women, including Johanna Talbot, attempted to avoid facing their community by evading purification, others circumvented the disciplinary aspect of purification by legitimising their children, and their sexual relationships, in the eyes of the community before participating in the rite of post-partial purification.

Gender, socio-economic status, geographic location, learned culture, and popular opinion all played a role in determining the parameters of sexual impropriety in late medieval England. Whereas not all women who bore children out of wedlock may have found themselves at odds with their community, those deemed guilty of sexual impropriety did, or Beatrice Sharpe would not have been brought before the church court, Johanna Talbot would not have tried to avoid the publicity of purification, and the unnamed London woman’s pastor would not have felt justified in treating her as he did. While the church courts assigned public penance to the women brought before them who were judged guilty of fornication, it is likely that, as Macfarlane notes, the major sanctions against sexual deviance during the medieval and early modern periods “were

⁵¹ BL Additional Roll 32957: “Item in fine misse si mulier purificatur 1d”. Heath, Medieval Clerical Accounts, pp. 4, 22, describes this document and this record.

⁵² PRO E 101/514/32 fols 25v-28v, 34r-36r: “de unum desponsat’ & purificationem eiusdem.” See the entries marked ‘s’ in Appendix C. Heath, Medieval Clerical Accounts, pp. 3-4, 22, describes this document. This practice was prohibited in France, again, pointing to differences between English and French approaches to this practice. See Appendix F/H/3.

informal--the treatment of past offenders and attitudes to deviance at the local, non-judicial level."⁵³ Many mothers of illegitimate children most probably reconciled themselves with the community outside of the court system. I am suggesting that the rite of purification may have served that purpose.

The Mothers of Illegitimate Children and the Clerical Hierarchy

A statute issued by Bishop Roger Niger of London diocese for the archdeaconry of London in the second quarter of the thirteenth century indicates that the church hierarchy also took advantage of the custom of purification to discipline the mothers of illegitimate children. Apparently, women who had become pregnant in one parish, most likely under circumstances similar to Johanna Talbot's, rather than avoiding the rite altogether, were going to other parishes to be purified "in order to avoid injury or scandal,"⁵⁴ in other words, to avoid facing the community. Niger did not insist that these women attend their home parish, however; rather he advised that they be sent back to their home pastors to receive permission to participate in the rite outside of their home parishes. If that was too difficult to obtain, the archdeacon or his official could approve the change in venue. Niger allows women guilty of sexual improprieties to avoid direct confrontation with their community, but does make them accountable to their pastor or some other church official. While, no doubt, the church hierarchy was concerned with the way illegitimacy disrupted the local community, the control of illegitimacy was also

⁵³ Macfarlane, p. 84.

⁵⁴ See appendix F/A/4.

essential to its efforts to establish a monogamous model of marriage.⁵⁵ Although the dynamic is slightly different, here too purification serves a reintegrative function, re-establishing the wayward woman's relationship with the church.

Priests' Concubines

There was one group of women who were denied post-partial purification in medieval England: priests' concubines. A decree promulgated in 1225 in the province of Canterbury states that the concubine of a priest or cleric who is beneficed and who falls under holy orders must not be purified after having given birth unless she convinces the archdeacon or his official that she will amend her life after her purification.⁵⁶ Such women were also to be denied the kiss of peace and the blessed bread at mass, and also church burial. The reason for the severity of these sanctions, which not only ostracised such women from the community but denied them the hope of attaining eternal salvation,

⁵⁵ See Schimmelpfennig, pp. 26, 45. This reorganisation of marriage, according to Brundage, Law, Sex and Christian Society, p. 183, was, in part, an attempt to "bring marriage under the exclusive control of Church courts and in so doing to replace customary marriage law with ecclesiastical law." Thomas N. Tentler, Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 220, asserts that the system of sexual morality which developed as a result of this shift had disciplinary functions related to the stability of marriage, the legitimisation of offspring, and the regular transference of property. It also served to reinforce clerical supremacy in that "the casuistry of sins of desire, when applied to sexual impulses, provides opportunities for the imputation of guilt that none of the other deadly vices can match. That guilt must be cured by the absolution of priestly confessors."

⁵⁶ "Concubine sacerdotum et clericorum qui beneficiati fuerint vel qui fuerint infra sacros ordines constituti ecclesiastica . . . si pepererint non purificentur, nisi presterint sufficientem cautionem [i.e. nisi sane se correxerint et incolumes] archidiacono vel eius officiali de satisfactione in proximo capitulo post earum purificationem facienda." For full text see Appendix F/A/2. Similar statutes proliferated during the thirteenth century. See Councils and Synods, pp. 25,#4; 62,#9; 117,#34; 132,#40; 180,#60; 187,#35; 229,#5; 428,#22; 440,#7; 463,#59; 486,#5; 645,#55; 1015; 1083,#5.

was not that they had born an illegitimate child, rather it was that they had consorted with a cleric.

According to James Brundage, “abolition of clerical marriage and suppression of all sexual activity among the clergy were major aims of the leaders of the eleventh-century reform.”⁵⁷ The underpinnings of this campaign against clerical marriage were both doctrinal and practical. Doctrinally, because sex was considered impure and sinful, the sexually active cleric “sullied himself and the sacred mysteries.” Practically, married clergy were expensive to maintain, and their offspring compromised the integrity of church property.⁵⁸ Decrees of the First and Second Lateran Councils (1123 and 1139) institutionalised these reforms “transform[ing] clerical marriage from a legally tolerated institution into a canonical crime,” reducing priests’ wives to the status of concubine, and illegitimising their children.⁵⁹ Changing the social realities proved much more difficult. “Clerical concubinage and fornication remained persistent problems throughout the fourteenth century, and priests seem to have lived with their female companions almost as openly and as often as had their eleventh-century predecessors.”⁶⁰ In fact, it would not be until the Council of Trent (1545-1563) with its provisions for seminary education, “which

⁵⁷ Brundage, Law, Sex, and Christian Society, p. 214; Schimmelpfennig, p. 17. I am indebted to Brundage, Law, Sex, and Christian Society, pp. 214-23, 474-77, 567-9; and Schimmelpfennig, for the details of this discussion on concubinage. Regarding clerical concubinage see also: Anne Llewellyn Barstow, Married Priests and the Reforming Papacy: The Eleventh-Century Debates, Texts and Studies in Religion, 12 (New York: E. Mellen Press, 1982); Christopher Brooke, “Gregorian Reform in Action: Clerical Marriage in England, 1089-1135,” The Cambridge Historical Journal 12.1 and 12.2 (1956), 1:1-21; 2:187-188.

⁵⁸ Brundage, Law, Sex, and Christian Society, p. 214; Schimmelpfennig, p. 20.

⁵⁹ Brundage, Law, Sex, and Christian Society, p. 220; Schimmelpfennig, pp. 11, 17, 45.

⁶⁰ Brundage, Law, Sex, and Christian Society, p. 474; Schimmelpfennig, p. 41.

systematically instilled the practice of celibacy into aspirants for the priesthood,"⁶¹ that celibacy would become the norm of clerical life. Throughout the intervening centuries the female companions of priests were subjected to ecclesiastical reproach and discipline more severe than that accorded other women in irregular sexual relationships as a strategy for discouraging clerical concubinage.⁶² Although women bore the brunt of these punitive measures, they were an attempt to control clerical behaviour, not female behaviour.

The clergy were not the only male members of medieval English communities directly involved in, or affected by, the rite of post-partal purification. As will be discussed in the next chapter, male heads of households also had an investment in this rite and the customs surrounding it.

⁶¹ Brundage, Law, Sex, and Christian Society, p. 569.

⁶² Brundage, Law, Sex and Christian Society, p. 405, notes that this eased somewhat after the initial fervour of the thirteenth century.

CHAPTER 5

“That they might have knowledge of the birth of his said heir.”

POST-PARTAL PURIFICATION AND THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INTERESTS OF MALE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS

David Cressy observes that “routine religious observances” such as the purification of women after childbirth,

served as primary points of contact between family and community, centre and periphery, and between men or women and God. Their rhythms and messages were made familiar through frequent reiteration. This framework of uniformity provided recurrent opportunities to challenge as well as to sanction the established order.¹

In a previous chapter I explored the potential of the rite of post-partal purification to challenge the established order. This rite and the customs surrounding it also served to reinforce and display that order. This becomes evident when one examines the participation of the heads of households. Family heads capitalised upon the practice of the purification of women after childbirth to safeguard continued family control over the family estate.

¹ David Cressy, “Purification, Thanksgiving and the Churching of Women in Post-Reformation England,” Past and Present 141 (1993), p. 106.

Proof-of-Age Inquests

The evidence supporting this assertion comes from proof-of-age inquests. These are the records of the legal proceedings conducted in order to ascertain if a feudal heir, that is, an heir to land held in knight-service to the crown, was of age and could therefore take control of her or his estate. As such, these records shed light upon the purification of women as it was practised among the nobility and gentry. Comprised of testimony by men, these documents are particularly revealing about the participation of male heads of households in the events surrounding post-partial purification.

Since there was no official system for recording births prior to the sixteenth century, living memory was called upon to prove the age of heirs to property.² At the end of the twelfth century Glanvill prescribed a jury of neighbours to determine the age of such heirs.³ By the reign of Edward I (1272-1307) it became customary for those juries to include the testimony of the jurors along with their verdict in the records of their proceedings.⁴ These proceedings “were entered on the plea rolls of the King’s Bench and

² Thomas Cromwell ordered parish registers to be kept in 1538. Will Coster, “Popular Religion and the Parish Register 1538-1603,” *The Parish in English Life 1400-1600*, ed. Katherine L. French, Gary Gibbs, and Beat Kümin (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 97, notes that a number of surviving registers antedate Cromwell’s injunction, suggesting that the keeping of registers had already become customary in some localities. On the other hand, Sue Sheridan Walker, “Proof of Age of Feudal Heirs in Medieval England,” *Mediaeval Studies* 35 (1973), p. 323, points out that due to faulty keeping of parish registers, living memory continued to be relied upon into the nineteenth century. Joel Hurstfield, *The Queen’s Wards: Wardship and Marriage under Elizabeth I* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1958), esp. pp. 157-72, also discusses proofs-of-age.

³ *Tractatus de legibus et consuetudinibus regni Anglie qui Glanvilla vocatur*, ed. G.D.G. Hall (London, 1965), 7.9, pp. 82-83. Cited in Walker, n. 7, p. 308.

⁴ Walker, p. 309.

were also returned into the Chancery.”⁵ The testimony of the jurors includes a wide assortment of memories comprising significant events that served to fix the date of an heir’s birth in the jurors’ minds. Some of the events recalled took place around the time of the heir’s birth, such as accidents, historic events, marriages, other births, pilgrimages, appointments to office, etc. Others are events connected with the heir’s birth itself, including presence at the birth, participation in, or witnessing of the baptism, and, of particular interest to this study, attendance at the purification of the heir’s mother.

Of the nine hundred and ninety-nine extant pre-Reformation proofs-of-age found in the Chancery records, ninety-one mention purification.⁶ Those ninety-one records encompass a wide geographic area ranging from Cumberland to Devon, Norfolk to Herefordshire, and span a century and a half from 1288 to 1445.⁷ The view they provide

⁵ Walker, p. 313. The Chancery records are calendared in the HMSO series Inquisitions Post Mortem and Other Analogous Documents (London, 1904-1995).

⁶ Seventy-four of those records are published in the HMSO series of Chancery Records which covers the reigns of: Henry III (1216-1272), Edward I (1272-1307), Edward II (1307-1327), Edward III (1327-1377), Richard II (1377-1399), Henry IV (1399-1413), 1-5 Henry V (1413-1418), and Henry VII (1485-1509). The proofs-of-age recorded during the years: 6 Henry 5 to 2 Richard 3 (1418-1483) have yet to be published. These are held at the Public Record Office, Kew. Among them, seventeen references to post-partial purification recorded between 1418 and 1445 are to be found. Four of these: C 139/7/55, C 139/13/51, C 139/13/52, and C 139/13/55, originating in Essex and dating from 1423-25, are discussed by R.C. Fowler and M.T. Martin in “Legal Proofs of Age,” English Historical Review 22 (1907), pp. 101-2, 526-7. Three of those: C 139/7/55, C 139/13/51, C 139/13/52, plus C 139/31/72 are also discussed by Lawrence R. Poos, A Rural Society After the Black Death: Essex 1350-1525 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 122, and n. 28.

⁷ See Appendix I for a breakdown of the years and locations of the records documenting purification. It must be noted that while the inquisitions date from 1288 to 1445, they record recollections about births which took place at least fourteen years earlier. Knights came of age at age twenty-one, females of that order came of age at age fourteen if married, age sixteen if single. See Walker, p. 307. Hence the practices these proofs-of-age describe date from c.1266-c.1430.

There is no mention of purification among the seventy-six unpublished proofs-of-age dating between 24 Henry 6 (1445/6) and 2 Richard 3 (1484/5), nor among the eighteen published proofs-of-age dating from the reign of Henry VII (1486-1509). See Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem and Other Analogous Documents Preserved in the Public Record Office, Second Series

of the purification of women after childbirth is a very particular one. Only men were permitted to testify, normally neighbours from the county of the heir's birth, although the testimony of women such as midwives was admitted second hand.⁸ Also, their testimony pertains to the purifications of the mothers of feudal heirs, a very select group of women. Jurors were not limited to a particular social stratum however. They came from all walks of life, chosen for their knowledge of the age of the heir in question rather than their social standing.⁹

The capriciousness of human memory and human nature must also be taken into account when considering the evidence provided by proofs-of-age. There are some suspiciously similar testimonies to be found among these records. For example, testimonies from two inquisitions in Somerset, one occurring in 1346, the other in 1349, and an inquisition held in Dorset in 1360 all state that the respondents were present at the purification of the heir's mother where they repaid a debt to the heir's father and received letters of acquittance, and by the date of those letters they know the heir's age.¹⁰ These are most probably stock recollections utilised to give an acceptable form to the proof.¹¹

(London: HMSO, 1898-1955). Cressy, pp. 111-15, demonstrates that the feasts continued well into the seventeenth century. His research suggests that they had changed in nature by the late sixteenth century: "The festivity was considered to be the woman's occasion, even if paid for by her husband and attended by male relations and friends" (p. 113). This may account, in part, for the declining references to purification feasts in the male jurors' testimonies, as may greater reliance upon written records.

⁸ E.g. IPM 6/188: "John le Carpentir, aged 41, says the like [agrees that the heir is of age], as appears certain to him by the statements of Christine her mother and of near neighbours, on the day of the feast of her purification." See also IPM 3/429.

⁹ Walker, p. 314.

¹⁰ See IPM 8/673; IPM 9/244; IPM 10/646.

¹¹ See Walker, p. 320, for other examples. Fowler and Martin impugn the validity of these recollections because of their formulaic nature. Poos, p. 190, agrees that it would be unwise to lend blind credence to the details of such accounts. "Nevertheless, so long as one is concerned

Nevertheless, for the purposes of this discussion, while such accounts may be “quasi-fictional,” they do reveal the kinds of activities normally associated with the purification of the mother of a feudal heir, thus affording some insight into the customs surrounding the purification of women among the English nobility and gentry in the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries.

According to John Carmi Parsons, the male hierarchy appropriated English medieval queens and their roles through the rituals surrounding their coronations and burials.¹² He also suggests that the presence and roles of men in the purification rite as it is described in the Liber regie capelle may also have served to reinforce a queen’s subordinate place in the hierarchy.¹³ Proofs-of-age reveal that men also figured prominently in the events surrounding the purifications of other aristocratic women. However, in this instance it would appear that family heads were capitalising upon the practice of the purification of women after childbirth to safeguard continued family control over the family estate. As Sue Sheridan Walker points out, “since a minor’s succession to a feudal estate in medieval England meant wardship and the family’s loss of

merely with the general plausibility of situations detailed in their testimonies, particularly where these are less stereotypical, there is no reason to reject unreservedly the notion that the vignettes represent experiences actually drawn from everyday life.” Hurstfield, pp. 159-63, concurs.

¹² See John Carmi Parsons, “Ritual and Symbol in the English Medieval Queenship to 1500,” Women and Sovereignty, ed. Louise Olga Fradenburg, Cosmos, 7 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), pp. 60-77; and “‘Never was a body buried in England with such solemnity and honor’: The Burials and Posthumous Commemorations of English Queens to 1500,” Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe, ed. Anne Duggan, (Woodbridge, Suffolk and Rochester, NY: Boydell Brewer, 1997), pp. 317-37.

¹³ For, he states, the queen’s role in the rites surrounding childbirth, “however prominent, was almost entirely passive (as in her churching, for example).” See John Carmi Parsons, “The Pregnant Queen as Counsellor and the Medieval Construction of Motherhood,” Medieval Mothering, ed. J.C. Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Garland, 1996), p. 49.

the profits of the estate, the heir's right to be considered an adult was a matter of the utmost legal, social, and economic significance."¹⁴

Walker goes on to describe how in order to ensure a later successful proof-of-age inquest parents attempted to fix the date of their heir's birth in the minds of potential jurors by presenting them with gifts on the occasion of the birth, writing down the date of birth in a parish service book or chronicle, and planning elaborate baptismal ceremonies. Evidence in the proofs-of-age suggests that at least one more strategy should be added to that list: hosting feasts on the day of the purification of the heir's mother.¹⁵

Purification Feasts

More than half of the references to post-partial purification found among the proofs-of-age relate to purification feasts or banquets, which appear to have been widespread throughout England from the mid-thirteenth to the mid-fifteenth century.¹⁶ John de Vere of Yorkshire testifies that in 1318 "he made a feast with his neighbours" on the day that Margaret his wife was purified.¹⁷ And indeed the impression conveyed by the testimonies found in the proofs-of-age is that purification feasts were an event

¹⁴ Walker, p. 306.

¹⁵ See Walker, pp. 314-17.

¹⁶ See IPM 3/427; IPM 3/430; IPM 3/431; IPM 3/432; IPM 3/483; IPM 3/484; IPM 4/328; IPM 5/113; IPM 5/542; IPM 5/543; IPM 6/62; IPM 6/192; IPM 6/336; IPM 6/754; IPM 6/756; IPM 7/171; IPM 7/174; IPM 7/245; IPM 7/249; IPM 7/251; IPM 7/309; IPM 7/540; IPM 7/544; IPM 9/63; IPM 9/679; IPM 10/262; IPM 10/334; IPM 10/336; IPM 12/381; IPM 12/382; IPM 13/60; IPM 13/290; IPM 14/304; IPM 14/346; IPM 18/665; IPM 19/158; IPM 19/341; IPM 19/349; IPM 19/1000; PRO C 139/31/72. The purification feasts to which they refer date from 1276 to 1411, and took place in 19 counties across England.

¹⁷ IPM 7/544.

planned and presided over by the father of the heir. Most explicit in this regard is the testimony of one Devon man who testified to having received a letter of invitation (litteratorie) to a purification feast from the heir's father.¹⁸ Other jurors in speaking of such feasts refer to them using such phrases as: "the said Robert made a feast," "the said John . . . held a feast," "at the said Philip's feast,"¹⁹ or recollect celebrating with the heir's father: William de Whatcombe of Somerset recalls "feasting with John de Dynham" on the day John's wife Margaret was purified. Robert de Byfield of Oxfordshire relates that he was at dinner with John de Stafford on the day John's wife was purified of his heir, and William Weston of Bedfordshire recollects being "at the feast with Henry Conquest, the father [of the heir]," the day of his wife's purification.²⁰

These feasts were memorable. In 1355, we are told by John Keverney and Eustace Payn, there was such a great feast when Pernell, the mother of Edward, brother and heir of John son of John de Bensted of Hertfordshire, was purified that "the kitchen of the manor was nearly burnt down."²¹ Jurors at several inquisitions recall the wine, ale and victuals provided for such feasts.²² One relates having gone hunting with the father of an heir in order to provide venison for a purification feast.²³ Minstrels were employed, and new robes were worn not only by the mother but also the father of the heir.²⁴ At one

¹⁸ IPM 6/62.

¹⁹ IPM 4/328; IPM 5/113; IPM 7/251.

²⁰ IPM 7/540; IPM 10/334; IPM 18/665.

²¹ IPM 14/304. See also IPM 6/336.

²² See IPM 9/592; IPM 14/346; IPM 19/158; IPM 19/349, and PRO C 139/116/38. There is also reference made to the expenses incurred by such feasts. See IPM 6/336; IPM 7/90; IPM 10/334; IPM 19/1000.

²³ IPM 9/63.

²⁴ IPM 12/382; IPM 7/249; IPM 19/158; IPM 19/349.

such celebration held during a local tournament in Northamptonshire in 1334 it is even reported that one of the guests “pledged the lady,” that is, fought as her champion.²⁵

At another purification feast John Inge of Somerset is reported to have given five of his guests an arrow “that they might have knowledge of the birth of his said heir,” confirming that this was one of the motives behind such gatherings.²⁶ In a similar vein, all the yeomen present at a purification feast in Lincolnshire in 1348 were given a pair of black hose, a gesture at least one of those present remembered twenty-one years later.²⁷ Making this motive even more explicit is an account of John de Forstebury of Wiltshire having asked at least eleven men present at the banquet on the purification day of his wife after the birth of his son in 1286 to testify to the day and year of that son’s birth.²⁸ Similarly, in 1347, Richard Major of Somerset testifies, John le Warre invited him and his wife to a dinner on the day of the purification of his wife, and “then asked him to bear witness to and keep in mind the age of the said heir.”²⁹

²⁵ IPM 10/262. Caroline Shenton, “Four Weddings, Twelve Churchings and a Funeral: Edward III’s Celebrations of Dynasty, 1327-1355,” (paper presented at the International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, July 14-17, 1997), has found evidence of three tournaments held as part of the purification celebrations of Philippa, wife of Edward III, in 1332, 1338, and 1342. Georges Duby, “The Courtly Model,” A History of Women: II Silences of the Middle Ages, ed. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 251, describes this courtly tradition. Gabriel Tetzl, chronicler for Leo of Rozmítal, the Bohemian diplomat, describes the lavish festivities surrounding the purification of Elizabeth Woodville, wife of Edward IV, in 1466 after the birth of Princess Elizabeth. See, The Travels of Leo Rozmítal, ed. and trans. Malcolm Letts, Hakluyt Society, second series, 108 (Cambridge: University Press, 1957), pp. 45-8.

²⁶ IPM 13/60. Similarly, John de Moeles (Dorset, 1326) gave the men who joined him while hunting venison for the purification feast after the birth of his heir “a bow for coming, and that they might have knowledge of the birth of his said daughter.” See IPM 9/63.

²⁷ IPM 12/382.

²⁸ IPM 5/113.

²⁹ IPM 12/259.

Purification feasts not only served to safeguard the future of a family's influence and control over family property by providing a notable occasion to fix the date of their heir's birth in the memory of those male members of the community eligible to testify to it but also appear to have been important social occasions among the men of a community. William de la Haye of Gloucestershire witnesses to the importance attached to such occasions when he is still able to recall twenty-one years later his anger at not being invited to the purification feast put on by Robert de Stallinge in 1283:

William de la Haye, aged 48, agrees, and knows it [the year the heir was born] because on the day that the said Maud was purified the said Robert made a feast for all his neighbours, but did not invite him, at which he was angry.³⁰

It is not unusual for men to attest to having been present at these celebrations hosted by the father of an heir "with other neighbours," or "among others of the countryside."³¹ Who comprised those neighbours is difficult to ascertain however. Most jurors are identified simply by their name, age and distance from the place of birth of the heir in order to establish their competency as jurors, although knights are identified by their rank.³² There are two examples among the proofs-of-age of men who most likely did not belong to the nobility or gentry participating in such celebrations. Richard Barker of Lincolnshire relates having been invited to the purification feast hosted by the Earl of Athol after the birth of his daughter Philippa in 1362 by one of the Earl's household officers who had come to pay his wife for ale.³³ In Herefordshire in 1379 William

³⁰ IPM 4/328. Men recall not attending purification feasts in two other records, one in Wiltshire, the other in Berkshire. See IPM 3/431 and IPM 3/432.

³¹ E.g. IPM 7/251; IPM 12/381; and PRO C 139/13/50.

³² See Walker, p. 313.

³³ IPM 14/346.

Weston recounts having ridden to the feast with the rector as bailiff. He also attended the feast, for William Barker, a servant in the kitchen, remembers serving him there.³⁴ While these men cannot be numbered among the nobility or gentry, it is probable that they were men of substance and influence in the local community. As Judith Bennett notes, "the households of some ale-wives were headed by males who wielded considerable political and economic influence," as did most local officeholders such as bailiffs.³⁵ Those identified as servants, tradesmen and household officers, recount providing services related to these celebrations, not attending them however.³⁶

Lest I give the impression that purification feasts were exclusively male gatherings, mention is also made of women's presence in the proof-of-age records. There was, of course, the mother of the heir.³⁷ Women were also invited as guests to the feast. Several jurors recount attending such feasts with their wives.³⁸ There are also two reports which suggest that unattached women were invited as well. William de Clopham of Kent remembers being with Lady Lora de Ottenham at the purification feast hosted by Sir

³⁴ IPM 18/665.

³⁵ Judith M. Bennett, "The Village Ale-Wife: Women and Brewing in Fourteenth-Century England," *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe*, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 24. See also Anne DeWindt, "Peasant Power Structures in Fourteenth-Century King's Ripton," *Mediaeval Studies* 38 (1976), pp. 236-67. The guests at the purification feast hosted by John de Grey of Oxford in 1300 are described as "abbots, priors and almost all the other good men (*probi homines*) of those parts." See IPM 6/336.

³⁶ Servants: IPM 7/249; IPM 8/536; IPM 12/382; IPM 18/665. Tradesmen: IPM 19/158; IPM 19/349. Household officers: IPM 7/90; IPM 9/592; IPM 19/1000.

³⁷ See IPM 7/249; IPM 19/158; IPM 19/349.

³⁸ See IPM 3/430; IPM 5/542; IPM 7/90; IPM 12/259; and PRO C 139/7/55; PRO C 139/13/51; PRO C 139/13/52; PRO C 139/13/55; PRO C 139/20/48; PRO C 139/36/77; PRO C 139/61/52.

Robert de Hugham in 1293.³⁹ In Cumberland, John de Karlton recalls his mother, probably a widow, having been invited “to a feast at the house of John de Eglesfeld” when his wife was purified after the birth of his daughter, Joan.⁴⁰

It is not surprising that the infant heir was also in evidence at such feasts, especially if one of their purposes was to ensure a later successful proof-of-age inquest. Richard de Boseville of Northamptonshire, for example, attests to seeing Beatrice, heir of Philip de Hastang, in 1309 at the purification feast of her mother. In fact, he recalls Beatrice’s mother making a point of showing her to him at that time.

... and with other neighbours [he] saw the said Beatrice in the chamber after dinner, and her mother then showed her said daughter to him.⁴¹

The Ceremony at the Church

Jurors also attest to having been at the purification ceremony at the church in the proof-of-age records. There is some ambiguity in the language of the testimonies though. In the records discussed above the jurors explicitly state that they were present at the feast when the mother of the heir was purified. Others simply report having been at the purification of the mother.⁴² It is likely that those invited to the feast were also present at the purification ceremony. This is attested in accounts of purifications occurring in three different counties between 1340 and 1379.⁴³ But the celebration of the rite, at least when

³⁹ IPM 5/542.

⁴⁰ See IPM 13/66.

⁴¹ IPM 7/251. See also IPM 5/542; IPM 10/331.

⁴² See IPM 2/697; IPM 3/427; IPM 4/55; IPM 5/544; IPM 6/240; IPM 6/435; IPM 8/536; IPM 8/673; IPM 9/244; IPM 10/274; IPM 10/331; IPM 10/646; IPM 16/1057; IPM 19/665.

⁴³ IPM 10/334; IPM 10/336; IPM 18/665.

conducted in the parish church, appears to have been a much less exclusive affair than was the feast. William Weston and William Barker of Bedfordshire, for example, both attest to having been at the church on the day of the purification of the mother of John Conquest in 1379. However, afterwards, William Weston attended the feast while William Barker, a servant in the kitchen, recounts serving in the hall.⁴⁴

In medieval towns and villages business and entertainment as well as sacramental matters brought people to the parish church.⁴⁵ On any given day it was the centre of much activity as is evidenced by the recollections of the jurors testifying on behalf of one Robert de Walton who was baptized in a Lancashire church in 1379:

John de Sotheworth, forty and more, was at the church for a loveday⁴⁶ between William Robynson and . . . of Kirdale when Robert was baptized.

John del Twys, forty and more, was at the church to hear mass before going to buy fish at Bootle, and was present at the baptism.

Robert de Eld, forty and more, was at the church to hear news from Ireland of the Earl Edmund [of March].

Henry de Penketh, forty and more, was at the church to buy corn from Robert Wilkynson.

Henry de Twys, forty and more, was at the church to hear mass before going to Kirkdale to buy two oxen from Robert Wilkynson of Kirkdale.

⁴⁴ IPM 18/665. See also IPM 8/536.

⁴⁵ See Katherine L. French, "Local Identity and the Late Medieval Parish: The Communities of Bath and Wells," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1993, pp. 1-2. Dorothy M. Owen, *Church and Society in Medieval Lincolnshire*, History of Lincolnshire, 5 (Lincoln: Lincolnshire Local History Society, 1971), p. 105; and J.H. Bettey, *Church and Community: The Parish Church in English Life* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1979), pp. 53-7, also discuss the activities which took place in the church precincts.

⁴⁶ According to the *Middle English Dictionary*, a "loveday" was "a day appointed for a meeting between enemies, rivals, parties to a lawsuit, etc., for the purpose of reconciliation or arbitration; often the meeting so arranged; also the reconciliation or agreement reached at such a meeting."

William Laghok, forty and more, was at the church to hear mass before going to Litherland to see a corpse and wreck on the seashore.

John de Hey, forty and more, was at the church to see John del Hethe.

John de Andern . . . forty and more was at the church for a cockfight between John de Silkes and Robert del Heth.

John de Bugard, forty and more was at the church . . . to see a man from Liverpool.⁴⁷

Women's purifications, even those of the mothers of feudal heirs, were conducted in the midst of that activity. On the day in 1304 that the wife of John Evenyg of Estbourne, Sussex was in the church to be purified, Geoffrey son and heir of William le Bat was also being baptized.⁴⁸ In 1355 John Tymperson of Cumberland relates witnessing the purification of the wife of John de Eglesfeld while he was in the church to bury his mother, and in 1383, John Blyssot testifies, he was at the church to hear mass on the day that the mother of Geoffrey Lotterell was purified.⁴⁹

As I mentioned earlier, there are also several accounts of business being transacted among men present at the purification of the mother of an heir. If the recollections of those testifying on behalf of John de Walton are any indication, this would not have been an unusual occurrence within the church precincts. In three of those accounts, men relate repaying a debt owed to the father of the heir while attending the purification of his wife, and receiving a letter of acquittance from him by which they know the date of the heir's birth.⁵⁰ That this was a deliberate strategy on the part of an

⁴⁷ IPM 18/677.

⁴⁸ IPM 6/756.

⁴⁹ See IPM 13/66 and IPM 19/158.

⁵⁰ IPM 8/673; IPM 9/244; IPM 10/646.

heir's father to fix the date of his offspring's birth in the minds of potential jurors would be difficult to prove, for not just the father of the heir conducted business at such times. In an account from Yorkshire one Robert Warant attests to negotiating the sale of some land with another of the men present at a purification.⁵¹ However, if a man were intent upon ensuring a successful proof-of-age inquest for his heir, a receipt dated on an occasion related to his heir's birth would be a convenient record.

The gathering at the church, like that at the feast, appears to have provided an opportunity for the men of the community to further their interests, both economic and social, interests which were often intertwined. For example, a Lincolnshire man recalls that in 1329 "at the time of the [purification] of the lady of Roos there was proclamation of a tournament, where many magnates were gathered together, on which day he purchased a piece of land in Leyk."⁵²

Although the gathering at the church was less exclusive than the feast, the impression one gets from these men's accounts of their participation in the events surrounding women's purifications is how they served to display and maintain the established hierarchies and orders. Not only did these occasions serve as a means to safeguard continued family control over the family estate, but they also provided a venue wherein the male heads of households could pursue the social and economic interests of their families, a pursuit that tended to sanction the established order.

As we have seen, medieval English men and women, laity and clergy, aristocrats and commoners, upstanding citizens and those deemed guilty of sexual impropriety all

⁵¹ IPM 19/781.

⁵² IPM 9/593.

participated in the rite of post-partal purification, and the customs surrounding it. Its significance and implications varied not only from group to group, but between members of those groups. In the next chapter we return to the parish community as a whole to further consider the interrelationships between and among those groups.

CHAPTER 6

“Even the Blessed Virgin made the offering prescribed by the law.”

POST-PARTAL PURIFICATION AND PARISH POLITICS

In his Summa confessorum Thomas Chobham discusses the offerings parish priests may exact from their parishioners for officiating at women's purifications. Normally, Chobham asserts, parish priests may not exact an offering for officiating at this rite unless it has become customary in the parish for women to present one at this time. Such customs are acceptable, he states, “because even the Blessed Virgin made the offering prescribed by the law: ‘a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons’.”¹ Although the customary offering amounted to a few pennies at most,² it appears to have played a significant role in the politics of medieval English parishes. In the preceding chapters it has been necessary to read between the lines of the historical record to ascertain the ways in which members of the various groups considered reinforced, resisted and renegotiated the status quo through their participation in the rite of post-partal purification. Those dynamics are much more blatant here. Between and among the laity and the clergy the offerings associated with the rite of post-partal purification served as a vehicle of control

¹ “quia etiam beata Virgo fecit oblationes institutas in lege, scilicet ‘par turturum aut duos pullos columbarum’.” For full text see Appendix H/A/1.

² The customary offerings are discussed in chapter one of this study.

and influence.³ Those interactions are recorded in synodal statutes, ecclesiastical court records and chapel petitions.

The Sources

For the clergy, women's purifications, along with marriages and burials, were an important source of revenue.⁴ Although such offerings had originated as free-will gifts, by the thirteenth century they had become, in essence, customary taxes.⁵ Chobham's inclusion of a discussion regarding the offerings made at women's purifications in a

³ As Sarah Beckwith, Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 108, points out: "clerical and bourgeois values are not simply oppositional, but interrelated, and that interrelationship works through the valuation, purchase, economic access to cultural symbols that were also and inescapably religious symbols."

⁴ Parish revenues derived from glebe lands, tithes, and oblations and offerings. See Dorothy M. Owen, Church and Society in Medieval Lincolnshire, History of Lincolnshire, 5 (Lincoln: Lincolnshire Local History Society, 1971), pp. 12-17, for a detailed discussion of these revenues. R.N. Swanson, "Standards of Livings: Parochial Revenues in Pre-Reformation England," Religious Belief and Ecclesiastical Careers in Late Medieval England: Proceedings of the Conference held at Strawberry Hill, Easter 1989, ed. Christopher Harper-Bill, Studies in the History of Medieval Religion, 3 (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 1991), table III, pp. 188-9, and table IV, p. 190, provides detailed information regarding the revenues of Yarmouth rectory for sixteen years between 1441 and 1505. From those figures it can be calculated that the income from oblations and offerings comprised anywhere from approximately 27.5% to 60% of the total parish revenues. Purification offerings comprised approximately 5% to 9% of the income from offerings and oblations, or approximately 1.7% to 4.2% of the total parish income. Figures fluctuated from year to year because the number of purifications, marriages, and burials from which this income was derived depended upon the number of births, deaths, and marriages occurring in the year.

⁵ See Gabriel Le Bras, Institutions ecclésiastiques de la Chrétienté médiévale, Histoire de L'Église, 12 (Belgium: Bloud and Gay, 1959, 1964), p. 409. Peter Heath, The English Parish Clergy on the Eve of the Reformation, Studies in Social History (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 157, explains: "These were in theory free-will offerings--no one was to deny to a parishioner burial, baptism, marriage or any of the sacraments or sacramentals for want of a sum of money--but custom, tact and necessity, as well as the priest's monopoly, qualified this freedom." See also R.N. Swanson, Church and Society in Late Medieval England (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 215-216.

reference book for priests suggests there was some confusion or contention regarding the exacting of offerings for the administration of this sacramental in the thirteenth century. The statutes that were promulgated by English bishops and their diocesan synods indicate that there was indeed both confusion and contention regarding the offerings made at the time of a woman's purification. Like the manuals of confession and pastoral care, synodal statutes were also intended to instruct the parochial clergy in the rudiments of theology and canon law necessary to carry out their pastoral duties.⁶ Having originated in response to local situations, C. R. Cheney asserts that synodal statutes "are [even] more faithful witnesses of the problems which confronted the bishop of an English diocese and of the instruction which was dispensed to the inferior clergy" than are the manuals of pastoral care.⁷ That does not guarantee that they reflect local practice accurately for they primarily reveal "what sort of instruction thirteenth-century prelates thought necessary and desirable for their clergy and people."⁸ However they do illuminate the questions being discussed in clerical circles. As well, because these statutes were widely disseminated among the clergy and the laity,⁹ they also contributed toward shaping local practice.

⁶ C.R. Cheney, "Some Aspects of Diocesan Legislation in England During the Thirteenth Century," in Medieval Texts and Studies (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), pp. 186-7. Cheney, pp. 187-8, suggests that the short and simple instructions in the statutes were much more accessible to the inferior clergy than the "costly," "heavy" and "complicated" "academic books" produced by the likes of Chobham.

⁷ Cheney, "Some Aspects of Diocesan Legislation," p. 200; see also p. 185.

⁸ C.R. Cheney, "Statute-Making in the English Church in the Thirteenth Century," in Medieval Texts and Studies (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), p. 157.

⁹ According to Cheney, "Statute-Making in the English Church," pp. 151-3, not only were copies of statutes multiplied and distributed among the clergy, but in some dioceses they were publicly recited and expounded at chapters of archdeacons and deaneries. Also, at Wells and Exeter the parochial clergy were encouraged to expound some of the statutes to the laity in

The thirteenth century was the chief period of statute-making activity in England.¹⁰ In the following centuries those synodal statutes continued to be copied and re-read.¹¹ They tended to be copied from diocese to diocese and province to province, helping to "diffuse a common custom and discipline within certain limits."¹²

The Parochial Clergy

Among the synodal statutes are denunciations of clerical abuses of the custom of making offerings at women's purifications. In 1292 Bishop Gilbert of St. Leofric of the diocese of Chichester issued a condemnation of priests who were demanding more than the customary offering of one penny for officiating at marriages and the purification of women.¹³ Also in Salisbury Diocese, according to the register of Simon de Gandavo (1297-1315), at least one parish priest was reprimanded for extorting offerings from his parishioners for officiating at the purification of women.¹⁴

Court records show that clerical abuse of customary offerings continued beyond the thirteenth century. In 1446 Roger Bill, the rector of the church of Aspeden in the archdeaconry of Huntingdon, Lincoln Diocese, was brought before the commissary court

the vernacular. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries some statutes were translated into English for lay consumption.

¹⁰ Cheney, "Statute-Making in the English Church," pp. 138, 150.

¹¹ Cheney, "Some Aspects of Diocesan Legislation," p. 191.

¹² Cheney, "Statute-Making in the English Church," p. 141. See pp. 140-8, regarding this diffusion.

¹³ See Appendix F/A/7. According to Powicke and Cheney, the editors of Councils and Synods, p. 1082, this statute probably originated in York in the middle of the thirteenth century and was then brought south by Gilbert when he was translated to Chichester.

¹⁴ See Appendix F/C. See John R.H. Moorman, Church Life in England in the Thirteenth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), p. 228, nn. 5-7, for further examples.

accused of many abuses of his position, and derelictions in his duties and responsibilities. Included among them was the refusal to celebrate the purification of Margaret Darlyng, a poor woman of his parish, unless her neighbours would supply the offering.¹⁵ In 1513 Londoners sent a bill before the Star Chamber to protest against exorbitant clerical exactions, complaining among other things that,

When women do lie in childbed the curate hath every Sunday of some women for the saying of the Gospel one penny or 2d., and at her purification they demand of custom 1d., with the chrism over, and besides the offerings at the Mass.¹⁶

In the past, such evidence has been interpreted as proof of the decadence and amorality of the medieval church and clergy.¹⁷ Today, it is more "generally accepted that many of the church's shortcomings . . . had less to do with negligent clerics than with an institution which failed to provide its members with an adequate living."¹⁸ The records I have just described do not provide enough information to determine the motives behind the actions of the individuals involved. Although indolence, indifference, or greed may have inspired them, recent research into clerical incomes suggests economic pressures played a significant role. The parochial clergy, be they vicar, curate, or chaplain, were, by

¹⁵ "Idem rector noluit celebrare purificationem Margarete Darlyng parochiane sue, mulieris paupercule, nisi convicine cum ea oblacionem facerent." Transcribed in A. Hamilton Thompson, The English Clergy and their Organization in the Later Middle Ages (Oxford: Clarendon, 1947), p. 235.

¹⁶ Transcribed in Susan Brigden, London and the Reformation (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), p. 51. See also A.G. Little, "Personal Tithes," English Historical Review 60 (1945), p. 79, and Margaret Bowker, The Secular Clergy in the Diocese of Lincoln 1495-1520, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 13 (Cambridge: University Press, 1968), p. 151, for other fourteenth- and fifteenth-century examples of priests withholding services for fees.

¹⁷ For bibliographical surveys see: Beat A. Kümin, The Shaping of a Community: The Rise and Reformation of the English Parish c. 1400-1560, St Andrews Studies in Reformation History (Aldershot: Scolar, 1996), pp. 2-6; Giles Constable, "Resistance to Tithes in the Middle Ages," Journal of Ecclesiastical History 13 (1962), pp. 172-4.

¹⁸ Kümin, p. 130.

and large, an “economically depressed group.”¹⁹ The parochial clergy functioned within an economic hierarchy that allocated the major portion of a parish’s revenues to the rector, that is, the cleric holding it as a benefice, or its corporate appropriator, often a monastery.²⁰ The vicar, curate(s), and annual chaplain(s), who provided the pastoral care, worked as paid hirelings. The vicar was most financially secure as he was paid a salary, or a specified portion of the revenues. This often included the offerings and oblations, or some part thereof, including those made by women at their purifications.²¹ Curates and chaplains, in turn, were most often engaged by the vicar and paid out of his portion of the revenues.²² Peter Heath describes their lot as one of “economic pressure, personal insecurity, and social subservience.”²³ While the inequities in the parochial system do not

¹⁹ Swanson, Church and Society, p.62.

²⁰ E.g. see Bowker, p. 140: “Distribution of Income Table.” Parish revenues derived from glebe lands, tithes, and oblations and offerings. See Owen, Church and Society, pp. 12-17. Parish revenues did not necessarily make wealthy men of their rectors or appropriators, for they varied from place to place, and fluctuated with the vagaries of the local economy and population. See Swanson, “Standards of Livings,” pp. 153-4, 162; Heath, English Parish Clergy, pp. 138-72; Bowker, pp. 133-4; Christopher Harper-Bill, The Pre-Reformation Church in England 1400-1530, Seminar Studies in History (London and New York: Longman, 1989), pp. 44-6; Moorman, p. 154; Swanson, “Standards of Livings,” p. 162.

²¹ Thompson, pp. 117-8; Moorman, p. 128. See Owen, Church and Society, pp. 135-9; Little, “Personal Tithes,” pp. 70-72; Bowker, pp. 141-144, for examples of the division of revenues between rector and vicar. In the thirteenth century bishops tried to ensure a minimum annual stipend for vicars of five marks (£3.6s.8d.). See Moorman, p. 134; Le Bras, p. 410.

²² Peter Heath, ed., Medieval Clerical Accounts (York: St. Anthony’s Hall, 1964), p. 15; also English Parish Clergy, p. 25; Swanson, “Standards of Livings,” pp. 157-8. Although arrangements varied. In some parishes the community paid the curate or chaplain. This is discussed below.

²³ Heath, English Parish Clergy, p. 26. Owen, Church and Society, p. 132, refers to the unbeneficed parochial clergy as “the great clerical proletariat.” However, Norman P. Tanner, The Church in Late Medieval Norwich 1370-1532, Studies and Texts, 66 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1984), p. 51, observes: “Wills suggest that it is unlikely that Norwich possessed a large clerical proletariat living at subsistence level.” Also, Swanson, Church and Society, p. 51, notes that the beneficed clergy depended upon the unbeneficed clergy to ease their work load and allow them to reside outside of the parish, therefore, potentially, at least, giving them some negotiating power.

excuse clerical abuses, they do help explain why a cleric might attempt to increase the revenues generated by offerings such as those made by women at their purifications.²⁴

For example, in 1539 one William Peyr, curate at Fanchurche, was brought before the consistory court in London accused of having purified a woman in the home of Bernard de Geen, and also celebrating a private mass without licence of the ordinary. Although he denied the charge, his sacerdotal privileges were suspended. This may have been an attempt to supplement his income.²⁵

Parishioners

For parishioners, women's purifications, along with weddings and burials, occasioned opportunities to express discontent, and assert control within the parochial structure. Synodal statutes indicate that some made their presence felt by withholding, impeding, or limiting the customary offerings made at women's purifications, weddings and burials. Lay people are condemned in the statutes of Bishop Robert de Chaury of the diocese of Carlisle for conspiring to withhold the customary offerings for burials, weddings and the purification of women.²⁶ Similar condemnations were issued by

²⁴ Owen, *Church and Society*, p. 133, concurs.

²⁵ This is transcribed in William Hale, *A Series of Precedents and Proceedings in Criminal Causes (1475-1640)* (London: FandJ Rivington, 1847), p. 111, #345: "Fanchurche: Officium domini contra dominum Willielmum Peyr curatum ibidem.—Ad recipiendum articulos idem Peyr habet, quo die comparuit idem Peyr, quem dominus juramento oneravit, super certis articulis etc; monuit cui, quod purificavit quandam mulierem [blank] in domo Bernardi de Geen; qui respondet et fatetur eundem; addendo quod celebravit missam privatam ibidem, absque licentia ordinarii; et eciam respondet quod recepit litteras denunciatorias ad denunciandum eundem Bernardum suspensum, et quod denunciavit eundem suspensum; et postmodum dominus monuit eundem Peyr ne celebret infra jurisdictionem London, et a celebracione divinorum suspendit."

²⁶ See Appendix F/A/6. According to Powicke and Cheney, ed. *Councils and Synods*, pp. 627-8, this statute, which is also found in the Durham statutes of Kellawe, was remolded from a

Bishop Oliver Sutton of the diocese of Lincoln in 1291,²⁷ and Bishop Henry Woodlock of Winchester diocese in 1310.²⁸ Around the same time (1309) Robert Winchelsey, Archbishop of Canterbury denounced the members of one parish for reducing the offering for purifications and funerals to one penny.²⁹

Dorothy Owen suggests that the incidents underlying these statutes “reflected the general civil discontent of the last years of the thirteenth century, making use of well-established resentments against exactions or personal irritations as an outlet for more generalized unease.”³⁰ Rectors and vicars were prominent members of their communities, and the recipients and administrators of parish revenues. This put them in daily contact with their neighbours. “These contacts could all too easily become conflicts over property or income.”³¹ As neighbours and community members, parishioners and incumbents were subject to interpersonal conflicts of various sorts as well.³² The offerings made at weddings, burials, and women’s purifications were a logical focal point for the expression of parishioners’ discontent, be it general or particular, for it was at those moments that the church and its ministers impinged most closely upon the lives of

statute of William Greenfield, archbishop of York, promulgated in 1306. It was therefore interpolated into the statutes of Robert de Chaury sometime after 1306.

²⁷ See Appendix F/B.

²⁸ See Appendix F/E.

²⁹ See Appendix F/D.

³⁰ Owen, Church and Society, p.141.

³¹ Swanson, Church and Society, p. 63; also “Standards of Livings,” pp. 151-2.

³² See Moorman, p. 83; and Owen, Church and Society, p. 139, regarding the insertion of rectors and vicars into their community. J.H. Bettey, Church and Community: The Parish Church in English Life (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1979), p. 32; Swanson, Church and Society, pp. 36-8; and Le Bras, pp. 410-12, comment upon the similarity in socio-economic status of the parochial clergy and their parishioners.

its lay parishioners.³³ They also afforded parishioners a public forum in which to express their discontent, and a means by which to remove their support quite literally from the church and its ministers by refusing to make the customary offerings, or impeding others from doing so.

Take for example John Ward of Knapwell, "parishioner and layman." He was brought before the consistory court of Ely in 1376 accused of refusing to pay tithes, real or personal;³⁴ impeding the solemnities of marriage, the offices of the dead, and the purification of women performed within the church; and obstructing parishioners from the custom of offering candles to the rector and of giving gifts to the church on the feast of the Purification.³⁵ The records do not reveal the motive behind John's actions, nor if his was an effective protest.³⁶ We do know however that they were disruptive enough to warrant his being brought before the court.

³³ Moorman, p. 83, asserts: "Concerned as many of them are with the great events of family life--birth, marriage, sickness and death--[the occasional offices] provide an opportunity for the work and worship of the Church to impinge upon the intimacies of the home." Previously, scholars asserted that tithes were the focal point of much dispute and ill-feeling between clergy and laity. E.g. Heath, *English Parish Clergy*, p. 149: "Since tithes were annual and affected the living standards of parishioners and clergy alike, conflict arose into which the acrimony of many personal and incalculable disputes and disappointments would be channeled. . . . Between parishioner and incumbent there often existed a state of 'cold war', manifested by obstinacy and prevarication on the one part and by punctilious and zealous collection on the other." See Constable, pp. 172-4, for a literature review. More recently, influenced by Giles Constable, scholars have acknowledged that "rival claims to ownership were . . . far more frequently an obstacle to peaceful collection of tithes than refusal to pay." (Constable, pp. 184-5) That is, tithes occasioned more disputes among the clergy than between clergy and laity. Bowker, p. 151, notes that the fees and dues exacted for the occasional offices "played their part in creating such bitterness as existed between priest and people."

³⁴ See Little, "Personal Tithes," regarding personal tithes.

³⁵ This case is calendared in Marcia J. Stentz, "A Calendar and Study of a Consistory Court Record from the Diocese of Ely, 1374-1382," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1989, p. 111, section 34.35.

³⁶ The record notes that he promised to make peace with the rector. That could have entailed some sort of compromise between the two parties.

Lollards

Customary offerings also played a part in the more concerted effort at clerical reform exerted by the Lollards. Although Wyclif and his followers focused their attention primarily upon the eucharist and confession, their criticisms of the clergy also included complaints regarding the abuse of the customary offerings made at weddings, burials, and the purification of women.³⁷ In particular they “deplored unyielding demands for these [customary offerings] regardless of the circumstances of the payers, and even more decried the use of sanctions such as excommunication and legal processes to obtain them.”³⁸ Some went further, rejecting the custom altogether. William Ramsbury, a Lollard preacher active in Wiltshire in the last decade of the fourteenth century, held that offerings made at burials, weddings and the purification of women should not be paid.³⁹ Similarly, sometime before 1413 John Belgrave of Leicestershire “had risen up in church to argue against offerings.”⁴⁰ In 1428 a group of individuals was brought before Bishop Nevill of Salisbury because they refused to pay such offerings, and encouraged others to

³⁷ See Anne Hudson, The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), p. 290. Shannon McSheffrey, Gender and Heresy: Women and Men in Lollard Communities 1420-1530, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), pp. 9-10, discusses current scholarship regarding the definitions of Lollards and Lollardy concluding: “Specific problems of doctrine are largely beside the point, however, when determining adherence to Lollardy. Lollards’ status as heretics was for the most part self-defined: they rejected the Catholic Church’s claim to authority and held themselves to be outside it.” See also, Hudson, Premature Reformation, pp. 152-3; Lawrence R. Poos, A Rural Society After the Black Death: Essex 1350-1525, Cambridge Studies in Population, Economy and Society in Past Time, 18 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 263.

³⁸ Hudson, Premature Reformation, p. 342.

³⁹ See Hudson, Premature Reformation, p. 293; also Anne Hudson, “A Lollard Mass,” Journal of Theological Studies, n.s., 23.2 (1972), pp. 407-419.

⁴⁰ Hudson, Premature Reformation, p. 155.

do the same.⁴¹ And Richard Belward of Earsham “counselled divers women, that they should not offer in the church for the dead, nor with women that were purified.”⁴²

Even those Wycliffites who allowed for offerings at weddings, burials and women’s purifications counselled that the one making the offering could judge whether it should be given to the parish priest or to the deserving poor.⁴³ Consequently, Thomas Ploman of Sizewell in the diocese of Norwich “admitted in 1430 that he had not paid tithes or offerings for seven years or more, but had given them to the poor as he believed to be legitimate.”⁴⁴ Similarly, Thomas Carter was called before the Lincoln commissary court in 1447 for having obstructed the offerings at women’s purifications “for he said that the greater charity would be to give such offerings to poor people rather than to the vicar or the curate.”⁴⁵ These sentiments had their roots in Wycliffite teaching on evangelical poverty. True priests “shulden be pore men and feble, to do bope þer office

⁴¹ See Hudson, Premature Reformation, pp. 293, 343.

⁴² Quoted in McSheffrey, p. 147.

⁴³ See Hudson, Premature Reformation, pp. 342-3.

⁴⁴ Hudson, Premature Reformation, p. 152.

⁴⁵ Transcribed in Thompson, p. 238: “Thomas Carter de North Merston impedit oblaciones in purificationibus mulierum, nam dicit quod maior elemosina esset dare al[iis] pauperibus huiusmodi oblaciones quam vicario sive curato.” Carter is not identified as a Lollard *per se*. As Poos, p. 263, notes: “Religious nonconformity was an extremely complex phenomenon. Doctrinally it ranged from (at one extreme) the formal theological heresies of John Wyclif, of academics sympathetic to his views in the years surrounding his death in 1384, and of more isolated clerics and writers at a later date, to (at the other extreme) a relatively looser collection of anti-clerical and anti-sacramentarian attitudes at the humbler social levels of the laity. It is precisely this underground quality, as an often only partly articulated belief system, mostly perpetuated in small cells through written texts and by minor unbeneficed clergy or lay people, that makes it difficult to chart its dimensions and clientele for much of the period.” For an earlier example from Lincoln see Owen, Church and Society, p. 141: “In 1424 Walter Atkirk of Welton by Lincoln held meetings of his fellow parishioners, to persuade them to make no offerings to the vicar at funerals and churchings, beyond a single penny called le Mespeny.”

and travaile for þer sustenaunce.”⁴⁶ Such men “mai take þis almes.” But if the parish priest was not such a man, as Thomas Carter testified, “the greater charity would be to give such offerings to poor people.” Whether it was by means of their rejection or their redirection, again we see parishioners expressing discontent, and trying to effect change in the parochial system by means of the customary offerings made at the purifications of women.⁴⁷

I do not wish to imply that the relations between the parochial clergy and their parishioners were primarily contentious. Recent scholarship has shown that in England anti-clericalism was “exceptional and motivated by particular circumstances rather than an endemic feature of the later Middle Ages.”⁴⁸ Furthermore, studies of churchwardens, guilds, and lay devotions have demonstrated that lay collaboration and initiative characterised medieval English parochial life.⁴⁹ In their beginnings English parishes were

⁴⁶ Quoted from a Lollard sermon in Hudson, Premature Reformation, p. 343.

⁴⁷ McSheffrey, p. 147, identifies another motive behind such actions, noting that Lollards explicitly rejected religious rituals associated with women’s life cycle in their attacks of popular devotions to the saints in an attempt to convert women to Lollardy. She also notes however that purification is spoken of approvingly in one Wycliffite sermon found in vol. 2, pp. 244-5, of English Wycliffite Sermons, ed. Pamela Gradon (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988).

⁴⁸ Kūmin, p. 128. E.g. Swanson, Church and Society, pp. 259-60; Constable, p. 184.

⁴⁹ E.g.: regarding churchwardens see: Katherine L. French, “Local Identity and the Late Medieval Parish: The Communities of Bath and Wells,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1993; and Kūmin. Regarding devotions see: Eamon Duffy, The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580 (London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 11-376; Clive Burgess, “‘A fond thing vainly invented’: An Essay on Purgatory and Pious Motive in Later Medieval England,” Parish, Church and People: Local Studies in Lay Religion 1350-1750, ed. Susan J. Wright (London: Hutchison, 1988), pp. 56-84; and “Strategies for Eternity: Perpetual Chantry Foundations in Late Medieval Bristol,” Religious Belief and Ecclesiastical Careers, pp. 1-32; R. Weinstein and D. Bell, Saints and Society: Two Worlds of Western Christendom (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Miri Rubin, Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); R.W. Pfaff, New Liturgical Feasts in Later Medieval England (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970); Barrie Dobson, “Citizens and Chantries in Late Medieval York,” Church and City 1000-1500, ed. Miri Rubin and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 1-32. Regarding

founded by layfolk and funded by the populations they served.⁵⁰ Hence the laity exercised considerable authority over them until the Gregorian reform of the eleventh century which initiated a division between the secular and religious spheres that placed control of parochial life into the hands of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.⁵¹ That division was never absolute however, and by the middle of the thirteenth century shared responsibility for church building and maintenance between rector and parishioners, and the consequent development of the office of churchwarden found their way into synodal legislation.⁵² There was no uniform division of revenues and duties between priest and people however. Rather, "in many parishes parson and people had come to some working agreement."⁵³ Saffron Walden in Essex is a case in point. There, the offerings made by women at their purifications, which would normally have gone to the rector or vicar, are recorded as part of the revenues managed by the churchwardens.⁵⁴ Another isolated record of a purification offering received by the churchwardens is found in the

guilds see: Gervase Rosser, "Communities of Parish and Guild in the Late Middle Ages," Parish, Church and People, pp. 29-55; Barbara A. Hanawalt, "Keepers of the Lights: Late Medieval English Parish Gilds," Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies 14.1 (1984), pp. 21-37.

⁵⁰ Owen, Church and Society, pp. 1-12, Kūmin, pp. 12-15.

⁵¹ "Benefices were attached to specific clerical offices, and priests subjected to the laws of the Church and the ordinary's supervision. . . . Tithes were also effectively reformed. By the thirteenth century their character as dues on gross proceeds was firmly established, payment enforced on pain of excommunication, and lay encroachment eradicated." Kūmin, p. 15.

⁵² See Kūmin, pp. 17-19. Kūmin, p. 20, warns that "the development of the churchwardenship to its final pre-Reformation stage was a gradual process and arguably rather a lay initiative."

⁵³ Moorman, p. 142. He gives examples of various arrangements pp. 140-2.

⁵⁴ See Appendix B.

churchwardens' accounts of St. Mary at Hill, London, 1524-5, listed under "Casuell Receptis": "Receued at the chirchyng of Richard Stauners wyff, ijd."⁵⁵

An inventory of the church goods of Little Waltham, Essex recorded c. 1410-1420 indicates collaboration between parson and people at another level. While in that parish the rector was most likely the recipient of the offerings made at women's purifications, he, in turn, contributed to the practice of this sacramental materially: "Thoma[s] Berneston p[ar]son of lytell Waltham gaf a cloth for worschepe to purifye women y[n] ye worschepe of oor lady."⁵⁶

Beat Kümin notes that "equipped with their own funds and officers, parishioners were able to accumulate a great variety of collective experience," and therefore participate more actively in parish life. Rather than submit to clerical control of their resources, "parishioners started to monitor the behaviour of their priests," insuring the quality of pastoral care. He asserts: "The conscientious performance of spiritual services at an affordable price was one of their top priorities."⁵⁷ Boroughs even issued guidelines limiting clerical exactions. For example, Torksey in Lincolnshire fixed the offerings for women's purifications at 2½ d.⁵⁸ And it became increasingly common for parishioners to

⁵⁵ See Henry Littlehales, ed., The Medieval Records of a London City Church (St. Mary at Hill, A.D. 1420-1559), EETS, o.s., 128 (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1905), p. 329.

⁵⁶ Brian S. Smith, "Little Waltham Church Goods, c. 1400," Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society, 3rd series, 1 (1961-1965), p. 112.

⁵⁷ Kümin, pp. 42-3.

⁵⁸ c. 1345. Mary Bateson, ed., Borough Customs, Selden Society, 18, 21 (London: Professional Books, 1972), 2:210: "When a woman is [purified], she ought, with those who are with her, to offer 2½d. at most, if she is able : that is, the woman ought to put 1d. in the parson's candle and offer it to the priest, and three women ought each to offer ½d. at most." See also A.R. Myers, ed., English Historical Documents, 12 vols. (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1969), 4:729-30, #436: In 1382 the mayor, aldermen and common council of the city of London

provide and support additional clergy for the local parish or outlying chapels, further ensuring that their needs were met, and their interests represented at the parish level.⁵⁹

The Mendicant Orders

Lay patronage and support was an important factor in the relationship between the secular clergy and the mendicant orders.⁶⁰ The mendicants were popular among the laity. They flocked to their sermons,⁶¹ sought them out as confessors and spiritual directors,⁶² requested burial in their churches and cemeteries,⁶³ and left them bequests in their wills.⁶⁴ This was perceived by the parochial clergy as an encroachment upon their pastoral

restricted the offerings parsons could exact or receive for officiating at vigils for the dead, marriages, and baptisms.

⁵⁹ This is discussed at greater length below. See Kūmin, p. 43; also Rosser; Swanson, Church and Society, pp. 51-2, 256-7; D.M. Palliser, "Introduction: The Parish in Perspective," Parish, Church and People, pp. 5-28; Andrew D. Brown, Popular Piety in Late Medieval England: The Diocese of Salisbury 1250-1550 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 74-5, 81.

⁶⁰ Arnold Williams, "Relations Between the Mendicant Friars and the Secular Clergy in England in the Later Fourteenth Century," Annuaire Mediaevale 1 (1960), pp. 22-93; A.G. Little, Studies In English Franciscan History, Historical Series, 29 (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1917), pp. 100-22; and David Knowles, The Religious Orders in England, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948, 1961), 1:133-89, discuss the relationship between the secular clergy and the mendicants in some detail. See also Le Bras, pp. 544-7; Moorman, pp. 390-3.

⁶¹ See Owen, Church and Society, pp. 87-9. According to Margery Kempe: "meche pepyl gadyrd to heryn þe sermown" of a Grey Friar [a Franciscan]. BMK, bk. 1, ch. 60, p. 149/2-3.

⁶² See Owen, Church and Society, p. 89; Little, "Personal Tithes," p. 67. Margery Kempe records seeking spiritual counseling from at least two Dominicans: BMK, bk. 1, ch. 5, p. 17/31; bk. 1, ch. 68, pp. 165/33-166/14; two Carmelites: BMK, bk. 1, ch. 9, p. 22/11-12; bk. 1, ch. 18, pp. 41/2-42/5; and a Franciscan: BMK, bk. 2, ch. 2, pp. 227/29-228/15. For a detailed discussion of Margery Kempe's interactions with friars see Knowles, 2:198-200.

⁶³ Owen, Church and Society, pp. 90-1; Tanner, p. 12.

⁶⁴ Peter Heath, "Urban Piety in the Later Middle Ages: the Evidence of Hull Wills," The Church, Politics, and Patronage in the Fifteenth Century, ed. Barrie Dobson (New York: St. Martin's, 1984), p. 220; Brown, p. 44; Christine Carpenter, "The Religion of the Gentry in Fifteenth-Century England," England in the Fifteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1986 Harlaxton Symposium, ed. Daniel Williams (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 1989), pp. 53-74.

prerogatives, and a threat to parish revenues, creating animosity between the two groups.⁶⁵ Although scholars tend to focus on this animosity, there was also a measure of tolerance and co-operation between the secular and mendicant clergy.⁶⁶ This is illustrated by the numbers of secular clergy who also entrusted their burial to friars.⁶⁷ Some even gave alms, and made bequests to friars.⁶⁸ For the mendicants did provide valuable pastoral care, augmenting that which the secular clergy were able or willing to provide.⁶⁹

Women's purifications, being as they were both a source of revenue, and a parochial prerogative, also contributed to, and reflected the ambivalent relationship between mendicants and the secular clergy. This can be seen in a case heard before the London commissary court. In 1476 a certain Alexander was called before the court because he had not gone to his parish church at Easter time, and further, his wife had been

⁶⁵ According to Williams, p. 22, "Though couched in apocalyptic and eschatological symbolism, the real animus of the seculars was quite material." The activities of the mendicants in the universities prejudiced long-held rights of the secular masters, usurping their privileges and income. They interloped on the parish priests' sacerdotal monopoly, depriving them of canonical dues and donations, as well as bequests, and they were outside of the bishop's control. For specific examples see Owen, Culture and Society, p. 89; Swanson, "Standards of Livings," p. 170; and Brown, p. 45.

⁶⁶ It is difficult to ascertain attitudes at the parish level because our information comes primarily from academic disputes between the two groups. See Margaret Aston, "Caim's Castles: Poverty, Politics, and Disendowment," The Church, Politics, and Patronage, p. 50; F.R.H. Du Boulay, "The Quarrel between the Carmelite Friars and the Secular Clergy of London, 1464-1468," Journal of Ecclesiastical History 6 (1955), pp. 156-174; Knowles, 2:63-4, 95-7; Swanson, Church and Society, p. 192. Although, these disputes were sometimes engaged upon in sermons open to the lay public, and found their way into vernacular literature. See Du Boulay, pp. 158, 160; Williams, p. 26.

⁶⁷ Tanner pp. 13-14; Williams, pp. 64, 93.

⁶⁸ Williams, p. 93.

⁶⁹ Williams, p. 93; Knowles, 1:183. From his study of fourteenth-century bishops' registers, Williams, pp. 91-92, notes that the number of persons desiring burial with the friars was not large. Although bequests to the friars were fairly numerous, very few were for great amounts. And new foundations of mendicant orders often paid fines to the local parish as indemnity against loss of revenue. On this last point see also Little, "Personal Tithes," p. 74.

purified in her home by a friar, rather than in the parish church. She did however take the chrisom cloth and a penny to the church the next day.⁷⁰ It would appear that either Alexander and his wife, or the friar in question, attempted a compromise. Although the purification took place outside of the parish church, thereby encroaching upon the parish priest's jurisdiction, his right to an offering was respected.

Monastic Communities

An examination of the relationships between and among the clergy and the laity of medieval England would be incomplete without some consideration of the monastic orders. "In the normal course of their respective activities the interests of the friars, who were neither holders of real property nor landowners with a farming connection, would not collide with those of the monks as they did with those of the secular clergy."⁷¹ Nevertheless, the relationship between these two groups was also ambivalent. A. G. Little identifies a difference in "social ideals" as one of the significant factors in that relationship.⁷² As feudal lords, abbeys exercised not only religious but considerable economic and political control over their tenants. The friars tended to take the side of the laity in the tensions which had always existed between the abbeys and their tenants, and

⁷⁰ Hale, p. 14, #57: "Martin Atwyche.—Alexander defamatus non venit ad ecclesiam suam, tempore Pasche, et uxor ejus non erat purificata in ecclesia parochiali, set in domo sua, per fratrem, et crastino duxit ad ecclesiam crismatorium et denarium: citati fuerunt vir et mulier xx die Septembris viis et modis xxiv die Septembris qui certificarunt quod littera fuerat executi, et continuatur ad diem Martis proximum, quarto die Octobris, quia non comparuerunt vir neque mulier ideo suspensi; comparuerunt vir et mulier septimo die Octobris et continuatur usque ad diem Mercurii proximum, quia non comparuerunt ideo suspensi."

⁷¹ Knowles, 1:191.

⁷² Little, Franciscan History, p. 98.

supported the burgesses in the monastic boroughs as they began to seek self-government and incorporation in the thirteenth century.⁷³ It is not surprising that lay support of the monastic and mendicant orders tended to split along similar lines.⁷⁴ It would be misleading to suggest that the relationship between townspeople and their monasteries was only contentious however. Townspeople were welcomed in some monastery hospitals and chapels. Lay people flocked to shrines of local devotion established by the monasteries, and sought out monks as confessors. And there is evidence that monasteries and townspeople collaborated on civic building projects.⁷⁵

Chapels-of-Ease

Monastic communities also had charge of churches. By the beginning of the fourteenth century approximately one third of English parishes had been appropriated to monastic or collegiate institutions.⁷⁶ "The hand of a conventual proprietor could lie . . . heavily on a parish through the tithes and offerings which it would be reluctant to share with any other claimant, religious or secular."⁷⁷ Chapels-of-ease posed a particular threat

⁷³ Moorman, pp. 286-8, 374-5; Swanson, Church and Society, pp. 204-6; Brown, pp. 36-7; Knowles, 1:192-3; Tanner, pp. 141-58. Knowles lists the other primary issues dividing the mendicant and monastic communities: the new fervor of the mendicant orders attracted members away from the older communities, the mendicant ideal of poverty "involved at least a tacit comparison with the wealthy older orders," "the protection given [the mendicants] by kings or magnates who had been none too favourable to the monks," and the "novel privileges and ready access to the popes" enjoyed by the mendicants.

⁷⁴ E.g. John Walker, "The Motives of Patrons of the Order of St. Lazarus in England in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," Monastic Studies: The Continuity of Tradition, ed. Judith Loades (Bangor: Headstart History, 1990), pp. 171-179; Brown, pp. 32-6; Tanner, pp. 120-1.

⁷⁵ See Brown, pp. 38-43.

⁷⁶ Kümin, pp. 15-16; Knowles, 2:290.

⁷⁷ Owen, Church and Society, p. 74.

to those revenues.⁷⁸ Such chapels were established as satellite churches to meet the needs of parishioners lacking easy access to the parish church on account of age, health, or the topography of the region.⁷⁹ Not only did chapels fragment parish revenues but they also fragmented the worshipping community, or reified existing geographic and, or, socio-economic divisions.⁸⁰ Friction was therefore common between a chapel and its mother church. Disputes tended to revolve around the appointment, attendance, or remuneration of the clergy; maintenance of the buildings; and the frequency, timing, and kind of chapel services.⁸¹ In order to mitigate the frictions some parishes approached the bishop “for a formally registered ‘ordination’, itemising the obligations of all parties.”⁸² Christopher Kitching describes the most common working arrangement:

Chapel-goers [were] to be equally liable with other parishioners to pay tithes and offerings to the parish priest and [were] to contribute an agreed proportion to the maintenance of the mother church, whilst being additionally responsible for the fabric of their chapel. In return, the parish priest committed himself to taking certain services in the chapel, or finding a deputy to do so.⁸³

⁷⁸ Christopher Kitching, “Church and Chapelry in Sixteenth-Century England,” The Church in Town and Countryside: Papers Read at the Seventeenth Summer Meeting and the Eighteenth Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society, ed. Derek Baker, Studies in Church History, 16 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), p. 281; Brown, p. 69. For a detailed discussion of chapels-of-ease see Kitching; also Thompson, pp. 123-8; Moorman, pp. 12-16; Brown, pp. 68-76.

⁷⁹ Kitching, p. 281: “Chapels of ease, properly so called, where a priest attended to administer the sacraments, or such of them as any arrangement with the mother church might permit, had come into being by donation or legacy, by subscription raised among the parishioners themselves or by extension from more limited uses such as free chapels, private oratories or chantries.”

⁸⁰ Kitching, p. 281; Brown, p. 70.

⁸¹ Kitching, p. 282.

⁸² Kitching, p. 282.

⁸³ Kitching, p. 282.

In order to reserve the parish priests' rights to the customary offerings, burials, marriages, baptisms, and women's purifications in the chapels were carefully negotiated.⁸⁴ As well, chaplains were obliged to swear an oath of obedience to the rector annually, promising to respect the rights of the rector to all tithes, oblations, and offerings.⁸⁵

Despite these safeguards, chapelries tended to strive for self-sufficiency in time.⁸⁶ This is evidenced by over one hundred surviving petitions to the pope from English chapelries seeking full parochial rights.⁸⁷ Most petitions seek the right to have all sacraments and divine services performed in the local chapel, giving as their reason the inaccessibility of the parish church. Some specify the desired services, often including the purification of women among them. When this is included, the inaccessibility of the parish church for "pregnant women and other feeble persons" is added to give more

⁸⁴ Kitching, p. 283. These arrangements varied however. For example, in the chapel at Maidenhead, a village between Cookham and Bray, baptisms could not be performed, but women could be purified. The offerings from purifications, other devotions, and major feasts were divided between the vicars of Cookham and Bray. While the two vicars appointed the chaplain, those parishioners attending the chapel were responsible to pay the chaplain's stipend. The chaplain was to swear an oath promising to hand over to the vicars the tithes and oblations. See Dorothy M. Owen, ed., The Registers of Roger Martival Bishop of Salisbury 1315-1330: The Register of Inhibitions and Acts, Canterbury and York Society, 68 (Torquay: Devonshire Press, 1975), pp. 103-6. Further documentation regarding Maidenhead Chapel is found on pp. 98-100. Brown, p. 74, also discusses this arrangement.

⁸⁵ Moorman, p. 13. For example, Bishop Henry Dispenser of Norwich included guidelines for the conduct of all clerks and chaplains in Lynn in his statutes (1373). See Appendix F/G.

⁸⁶ Moorman, p. 12, notes: "If a conscientious priest found himself in charge of a chapel, it would be only natural that he should build up a church life there quite independent of the mother church, which might be several miles away."

⁸⁷ Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland, ed. W.H. Bliss, and others, 18 vols. (London: HMSO, 1894-.). Hereafter cited as CPL. I am indebted to French, pp. 202-4, for much of the information in this paragraph.

weight to the appeal.⁸⁸ While it was often a valid concern, the accessibility of the parish church was only one of a myriad of factors at play. In fact, disputes over chapels mirrored many of the dynamics between and among the clergy and the laity operative in the medieval English church. A dispute over St. Nicholas Chapel in King's Lynn, Norfolk, will illustrate my point.

St. Nicholas Chapel, King's Lynn

The chapel of St. Nicholas was one of two chapels attached to St. Margaret's Church of Lynn. It was served by a secular priest hired by the Benedictine priory of Norwich to which the parish was appropriated.⁸⁹ The first attempt to secure privileges for St. Nicholas chapel occurred around 1375. At that time John Peye, the secular chaplain, "allegedly acting for certain men of Lynn,"⁹⁰ petitioned Pope Urban VI to allow baptisms, weddings, and purifications to be conducted in the chapel. Those privileges were granted in a bull issued in 1378, provided they did not infringe upon the rights of the mother church. It is unclear if John Peye was in fact acting for "certain men of Lynn," or in his

⁸⁸ See CPL, 6:29; 7:57; 7:504; 13:505-6. Purification is also mentioned in CPL, 4:439; 7:441-2; 9:461-2.

⁸⁹ F. Blomefield, and Charles Parkin, ed., An Essay Towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk, 11 vols. (London: William Miller, 1805-1810), 8:494-501; and Owen, Making of King's Lynn, pp. 27-31, discuss the history of St. Margaret's Church. William Page, ed., The History of Norfolk, VCH, 5 vols. (London: Archibald Constable and Co., 1901), 2:328-9, discusses the relationship between St. Margaret's Church and the priory of the Holy Trinity in Norwich.

⁹⁰ Meech and Allen, "Notes and Appendices," BMK, Appendix 3, VII, pp. 372-3. There is mention of this attempt in the 1375/6 account of the prior of Lynn: "Item in diversis expensis factis circa defensione iurium capelle sancti Nicholai tangencium quandam fontem baptismalem nichil hic computatur quia non plene finitur." This is transcribed in Owen, Making of King's Lynn, p. 123.

own interests. Whatever the case, his actions were perceived to infringe upon the rights of St. Margaret's church by some of the community, for the mayor and at least thirty burgesses launched a counter-petition.⁹¹ They protested that Peye had misrepresented the facts. His petition stated that the chapel was far enough away from the church that they have maintained a cemetery, and secular priests have been employed for a long time to supply the sacraments of penance, eucharist, and extreme unction to the sick, baptise infants, solemnise marriages, and purify women lest their souls be endangered. Those living near the chapel were now requesting that a font be erected and their tithes be used to support the chapel and chaplain.⁹² But, according to the mayor and his committee, for as long as can be remembered, the mother church was the sole provider of all these services. Besides, the distance from the chapel to the church is a mere three stadia (3 X 607 feet), and therefore both chapel and church are equally accessible.⁹³ In 1381 a papal delegate visited Lynn to gather evidence and allow both sides to testify. He, with the mayor and another thirty-odd burgesses paced the distance between the church and the chapel, confirming it is scarcely three stadia. John Peye and two supporters failed to appear so the examiner found in favour of the prior and convent of Norwich.⁹⁴

The story does not end there however. Another attempt to secure privileges for the chapel was made around 1426. Margery Kempe provides some of the details of that

⁹¹ See Owen, Making of King's Lynn, p. 135, #126.

⁹² See Owen, Making of King's Lynn, p. 136.

⁹³ See Owen, Making of King's Lynn, p. 137.

⁹⁴ See Owen, Making of King's Lynn, p. 138.

attempt.⁹⁵ In her day, both the chapels attached to St. Margaret's church provided all the sacraments except baptisms and purifications. But some of the parishioners "desyryng to make þe chapelys lych to þe parysch chersch," sent a petition to Rome seeking those privileges too. The privileges were granted to St. Nicholas Chapel, provided there was no derogation to the parish church. Local hearings were held to determine if, in fact, those privileges would infringe upon the rights and revenues of the parish. According to Margery, those in favour of the change were rich and powerful men, wealthy merchants backed by the gentry.⁹⁶ On the other hand, she portrays the Prior as a poor man, bravely standing up to his wealthy opponents with the support of a handful of faithful parishioners, including herself.⁹⁷ Incapable of resolving the issue, the parties resorted to the bishop who suggested a compromise which the group seeking the privileges ultimately found unacceptable, and gave up their quest.

Kempe's portrayal of these events must be taken with a grain of salt on account of her obvious sympathies. Nevertheless, she does help us see some of the dynamics at work in this chapel dispute. Most explicit are the conflicts of interest among the lay

⁹⁵ BMK, bk. 1, ch. 25, pp. 58-60. The papal bull granting the petition can be found in CPL, 7:441-2. Gail McMurray Gibson, "Blessing from Sun and Moon: Churching as Women's Theater," Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt, and David Wallace, Medieval Cultures, 9 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 150-1, discusses Kempe's portrayal of this dispute, suggesting it "offers startling evidence by a fifteenth-century lay witness of the perceived political power and devotional importance of this female ritual [i.e. post-partal purification]."

⁹⁶ BMK, bk. 1, ch. 25, p. 59/12-16: "þe paryschenys which pursuyd weryn rygth strong & haddyn gret help of lordshyp, & also, þe most of alle, þei wer ryche men, worshepful marchawntys, & haddyn gold a-now, which may spede in euery nede, & þat is rewth þat mede xuld spede er þan trewth."

⁹⁷ BMK, bk. 1, ch. 25, p. 59/17-20: "þei he wer powyr, manfully he wythstod hem thorw þe help of summe of hys paryschenys which wer hys frendys & louedyn þe worshep of her parysch chyrch."

parishioners. She describes the group seeking greater autonomy for the chapel as wealthy merchants backed by the local gentry. She does not indicate where the present mayor stood, but a letter sent to the prior in 1431/2 from the "Mayor, Alderman, Burgesses, and Commons of Lynn" requesting once again that baptisms and purifications be allowed in St. Nicholas Chapel suggests that, unlike the first petition, it was the burgesses behind this petition for privileges.⁹⁸ It is also notable that in this instance the gentry appear to have sided with the burgesses against the priory.

Yet, Kempe was herself the wife of a burgess. Her antagonism toward the petition can be explained, perhaps, by the fact that her father was a former mayor numbered among those who contested the petition in 1378.⁹⁹ It goes further than family allegiance however. Kempe, like her father, was a member of the Trinity Guild of Lynn which had a chapel in St. Margaret's Church. It is likely that the revenues and status of this chapel would have been adversely affected by a change in the status of St. Nicholas Chapel.¹⁰⁰ Guild membership, at least in this instance, appears to have been a significant factor in the alienation of burgess from burgess, alignment of members of the gentry with one or other faction of burgesses,¹⁰¹ as well as the division of the parishioners' allegiance between the clerics involved.

⁹⁸ See Meech and Allen, "Notes and Appendices," BMK, pp. 373-4; also Owen, Making of King's Lynn, pp. 140-1.

⁹⁹ See Meech and Allen, "Notes and Appendices," BMK, pp. 359-68, 373.

¹⁰⁰ See Beckwith, Christ's Body, pp. 105-6. See Owen, Making of King's Lynn, pp. 61-3, regarding the Trinity Guild of Lynn.

¹⁰¹ I am not suggesting that the gentry were members of the guild. Generally speaking, the participation of the gentry in medieval fraternities and parochial life was limited. See Colin Richmond, "The English Gentry and Religion, c. 1500," Religious Belief and Ecclesiastical Careers in Late Medieval England: Proceedings of the Conference held at Strawberry Hill, Easter 1989, ed. Christopher Harper-Bill, Studies in the History of Medieval Religion, 3 (Woodbridge,

This dispute pitted a secular chaplain against a monastic appropriator. Earlier, John Peye, the secular chaplain, had attempted to wrest the tithes, and customary offerings associated with weddings, burials, and purifications away from the priory. In 1426 it would appear that some of the wealthy men and merchants of the town instigated the attempt to redirect their tithes and offerings to support the chapel and chaplain rather than the priory. Kempe's depiction of the prior as a poor man is perhaps less than accurate. His parochial functions were performed by a secular priest whose welfare was probably more in jeopardy by this threatened loss of revenue than was the prior's.¹⁰² The only element missing from these interactions between and among the clergy and laity is mention of the mendicants, although we know from Margery Kempe's spiritual autobiography that mendicants were present and active in King's Lynn, and were no doubt consulted in this matter, perhaps even supportive of the burgesses' petition for privileges.¹⁰³

There is yet another chapter in the dispute between St. Margaret's Church and St. Nicholas Chapel. In 1608, after the priory had been dissolved, two farmers of the rectory of St. Margaret's brought a case before the consistory court of Norwich against one John Gribby who was refusing to pay his tithe to them.¹⁰⁴ Witnesses testified that despite Gribby's claims to the contrary, St. Nicholas Chapel had never achieved independence

Suffolk: Boydell, 1991), pp. 135-8; and Carpenter, pp. 60-1. However, as Kümin, p. 170, notes, local initiatives "stood a better chance if they were headed by lords, influential gentlemen, or the more substantial members of the community." This did not prove true here however.

¹⁰² See Meech and Allen, "Notes and Appendices," *BMK*, p. 283, n. 59/2-3; p. 285, n. 60/20-21; pp. 368, 369-72.

¹⁰³ See n. 62, above regarding Kempe's interactions with mendicants.

¹⁰⁴ See Owen, *Making of King's Lynn*, pp. 139-40.

from the parish. Although there was a cemetery to bury in, and eucharist was celebrated there, a baptismal font had never been erected, nor had marriages ever been solemnised there.¹⁰⁵ And, I suspect, women were never routinely purified there.

Women and men, lay parishioners and parochial clergy, monastic communities and mendicant orders, townsfolk and rural dwellers, aristocrats and commoners, are all to be found in the records of the disputes over the offerings made at women's purifications. Their presence there demonstrates not only that the rite of post-partal purification was an integral part of medieval English community life, but also attests that this rite played a significant role in the life of those communities, providing a forum in which those groups and their members defined themselves and their community.

¹⁰⁵ These are two of the distinguishing marks of a parish church. See Christine Lutgens, "The Case of Waghen Vs. Sutton: Conflict Over Burial Rights in Late Medieval England," *Mediaeval Studies* 38 (1976), pp. 175-181, for a discussion of the canon law pertaining to the designation of parish churches.

CONCLUSION

This study adds one more piece to the puzzle that is women's history, recovering and documenting the rite of the purification of women after childbirth, and the customs surrounding it, as it was practised in medieval England. In the introduction to this study I stated that recovering this rite would not only illuminate another aspect of medieval women's lives, but provide a new perspective from which to view the communities in which they lived, allowing a more complete picture of the interactions shaping them than has been accessible to historians. What has this examination of the rite of post-partial purification in medieval England revealed?

This rite played a significant role, not only in medieval English women's lives but in the life of the whole community. The rite of purification served many of the same functions that the celebration of the feast of the Purification served, reflecting and reinforcing the same doctrinal teachings and social realities, while, at the same time, providing a forum in which those social realities were renegotiated. Those dynamics took place at many levels. The custom of making offerings at women's purifications allowed various groups within the parish community to exert influence and control over one another. The public nature of the celebration of the rite provided a forum in which the

community and the church hierarchy could make examples of those deemed guilty of sexual impropriety. At the same time, it allowed those errant members a mechanism by which to become reconciled with the community and the church. For male heads of households the rite of post-partial purification and the customs surrounding it provided a venue in which to pursue their social and economic interests, a pursuit that tended to sanction the established order, while for their wives, it provided an opportunity to subvert the established order.

Viewing medieval folk and their communities through the prism of the rite of post-partial purification has illuminated their complexity. A variety of understandings of, and attitudes towards, this rite and its participants, some of them contradictory and conflicting, are in evidence and at play in every source and social group examined. And those understandings and attitudes cross the boundaries between women and men, clergy and laity, aristocrats and commoners, townsfolk and rural dwellers, demonstrating the permeability of those boundaries.

In illuminating the complexity of medieval English folk and their communities, this examination of the rite of post-partial purification has demonstrated that medieval women were fully integrated and participating members of their communities. In fact, it has been suggested here that the women participants in the rite of post-partial purification may have been perceived, and perceived themselves, as being representative of the whole community. Yet, their diversity is also evident. Through the prism of this rite we have seen that medieval English women conformed to, manoeuvred within, and resisted the constraints placed upon them by the prevailing gender stereotypes and roles. The

complexity of those gender stereotypes and roles has also been demonstrated. Clerical attitudes towards, and understandings of, women have been shown to be multiple and diverse, both reinscribing negative female stereotypes and contradicting them.

In recovering the rite of the purification of women after childbirth, and the customs surrounding it, as it was practised in medieval England, this study has added to our knowledge of medieval women's lives, and revealed new dimensions of the dynamics shaping their communities. But the fragmentation of the sources, and the fact that the silences in the records constitute a significant part of the evidence, suggest that there is still much to learn about medieval English women and the communities in which they lived. By demonstrating some of the ways in which writing women into history enable reconceptualisations of women and men and their communities, it is my hope that this study will also contribute to that ongoing endeavour.

APPENDIX A THE LITURGICAL RITES

SARUM RITE
Translated from the version printed in
A. Jefferies Collins, ed. Manuale Ad
usum percelebris ecclesie
Sarisburyensis, HBS 91, Chichester;
Moore and Tillyer, 1960. 43-4.

THE ORDER OF THE PURIFICATION OF WOMEN AFTER CHILDBIRTH AT THE DOOR OF THE CHURCH

*First the priest and his attendants
shall recite the following psalms:*
ps. I have lifted up my eyes (Ps.120)*
ps. Blessed are all (Ps.127)

Glory be to the Father. As it was [in
the beginning].

YORK RITE
Translated from the version printed in
William G. Henderson, ed. Manuale
et processionale ad usum insignis
ecclesiae Eboracensis. Surtees
Society, 63. Edinburgh; Andrews &
Co., 1875. 23.

ORDER FOR THE PURIFICATION OF WOMEN

*Let the priest come to the door of the
church and taking her by the hand
say to the woman:* Enter into the
temple of God,

After that let him recite this psalm:

I have lifted up my eyes (Ps.120)

with Glory be to the Father. As it was
[in the beginning].

**TRINITY COLLEGE,
CAMBRIDGE,**
MS B.XI.9, fols 241r-242r
Also found with some minor
differences in Henderson, ed.
Manuale et processionale ad usum
insignis ecclesiae Eboracensis. 213-
14.

THE ORDER FOR PURIFYING WOMEN

*First let the bishop vest himself as
for a double feast in the place of his
preparation, and having put his
mitre upon his head and receiving
his crosier, let him proceed to the
door of the church, preceded himself
by holy water and two candle
bearers; and with the same assistants
let him recite the following psalms:*

I have lifted up my eyes (Ps.120)
To thee, O Lord, have I lifted up my
soul (Ps.24)

with Glory be to the Father.

**BODLEIAN MS TANNER 5,
fol 276**

A BLESSING OVER WOMEN AFTER CHILDBIRTH AT THE DOOR OF THE CHURCH

*Let the priest in surplice and stole
proceed to the door of the church
with his ministers in surplices.*

*First let the priest and his ministers
recite the psalm:*
I have lifted up my eyes. (Ps. 120)

with Glory be to the Father.

SARUM RITE

Let it be followed by:

Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy,
Lord have mercy.

Our Father, And [lead] us not, But
deliver [us].

O God save your hand-maid.
My God I am trusting in you,
Be for her O Lord a tower of strength,
In the presence of her enemy,

O God hear my prayer,
And call me to come to you.

The Lord be with you, And with your
spirit,

Let us pray,

Prayer. God, you who have delivered
your hand-maid from the dangers of
childbirth and made her
devoted to your service, grant in your
mercy that she may follow you
faithfully in this world so that she may
be with you in eternal life and peace.
Through Christ our Lord, *etc.*

*Then let the woman be sprinkled
with holy water.*

YORK RITE

Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy,
Lord have mercy.

Our Father, And lead us not,

Save your hand-maid:
My God I hope in you,
Send to her the help of your holy one,
And from Sion look down upon her,

O Lord hear my prayer;
And call me to come to you.

The Lord is with you, And with your
spirit,

Let us pray,

God, you who have delivered this
your maid-servant from the dangers of
childbirth, grant she
be devoted to the service of your
name so that you may regard her
fidelity with mercy at the end of this
life and accompany her to eternal
peace. Through Christ,

TRINITY COLLEGE

And let him add to that:

Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy,
Lord have mercy.

Our Father, And deliver us not,

Be for her, O Lord, a tower of
strength,
In the presence of her enemy,
Save, O God, your hand-maid,
My God I hope in you,
Send to her the help of your holy one,
And from Sion watch over her,

O God [hear my prayer],
And call [to me to come.]

The Lord is with you, And with your
spirit,

Let us pray,

All powerful everlasting God who
have delivered this woman from the
dangers of
childbirth, make her to be devoted to
you in your service, so that having
been faithful, at the end of this life
you will regard her with all mercy,
and lead her to peaceful eternal
repose. Through Christ,

*Then let the bishop sprinkle her with
holy water saying:* In the name of the
Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

BODLEIAN MS TANNER 5.

Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy,

Our Father, And deliver us not,

Save, O God, your hand-maid.
My God I hope in you,
Be for her, O Lord, a tower of
strength,
In the presence of her enemy,

O God [hear my prayer].
And call [to me to come.]

The Lord be with you, And with you,

Let us pray,

All powerful everlasting God who
have delivered this woman from the
dangers of
childbirth, make her to be devoted to
you in your service, so that having
been faithful, at the end of this life
you will regard her with all mercy,
and lead her to peaceful eternal
repose. Through Christ,

*After this, let the priest sprinkle the
woman with holy water and say:* In
the name of the Father, etc,

SARUM RITE

From that place the priest shall lead her with his right hand into the church saying:

Enter into the temple of God so that you may have eternal life and live forevermore, Amen.

YORK RITE

Then let her rise up, and go to the place where she ought to stay until the end of the mass.

TRINITY COLLEGE

Having done that let the bishop lead the woman into the church with his right hand in her hand saying thus: Enter into the temple of the living God and pray to the Son of the virgin Mary who gave to you fecundity to bring forth children, that he will grant to you eternal life and you may live forever and ever, Amen.

Then let the bishop proceed with his assistants, the woman having been led in thus, to the altar where a solemn mass ought to be celebrated; and in the same let him recite with his ministers these psalms:

May God have mercy on us, (Ps. 66)
Blessed are all they that fear the Lord
(Ps. 127) *with* Glory be to the Father.

And let him add to that:

Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy,
Lord have mercy.

Our Father, And lead us not, But
deliver us,

BODLEIAN MS TANNER 5

Then let the priest take the woman's right hand in his right hand and lead her into the church saying: Enter into the temple of the living God and pray to the Son of the virgin Mary who gave to you fecundity to bring forth children. In the name of the Father.

Then let the priest recite: Our Father and Hail Mary.

After the mass or after the commendation of the Blessed Mary let the priest turn to the step where the woman shall kneel, and let him recite the psalm:

Blessed are all, (Ps. 127)
with Glory be to the Father.

Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy,
Lord have mercy,

Our Father,

SARUM RITE

YORK RITE

TRINITY COLLEGE

BODLEIAN MS TANNER 5

Save, O God, your hand-maid; My
God I hope in you.
Send to her the help of your holy one;
And from Sion watch over her.
Be for her, O Lord, a tower of
strength: In the presence of her
enemy.
O God [hear my prayer]; And call [to
me to come.]

The Lord is with you; And with your
spirit.

Let us pray. All powerful eternal God,
humbly we entreat your majesty, that
just as your only begotten son who
took on our flesh was presented in the
temple, mercifully allow this woman,
who has been purified after giving
birth and mercifully preserved from
death, be presented to you. Through
Christ our Lord.

***Then let the bishop proceed with the
mass. Let him bless the bread in this
way:***

Blessed be the Lord,
Bless, O Lord, this creature bread,
just as you blessed five loaves in the
desert, so that all of those partaking of
it through the body might receive
health of soul. In the name of the
Father and the Son and the Holy
Spirit. Amen.

Then pray as above:

[Save, O God, your hand-maid.
My God I hope in you,
Be for her, O Lord, a tower of
strength.
In the presence of her enemy.]

Let us pray. All powerful eternal God,
humbly we entreat your majesty that
just as your only begotten son who
took on our flesh was presented in the
temple, mercifully allow this woman,
who has been purified after giving
birth and mercifully preserved from
death, be presented to you. Through
Christ our Lord.

SARUM RITE

*Note whereas if women should wish to enter the church at any time after giving birth to give thanks they are free to do so as 'purificari' [purified women], and no great sin is therefore attached to it. Nor is access to the churches to be denied them; their pain should not be turned back on them and seen as the cause of sin. If, however, out of reverence they would wish to abstain for some time, we do not believe their devotion to be inappropriate.
From Purification after childbirth, chapter one. [Decretals, III, tit. xlvii]*

YORK RITE

When mass is over let her rise up and return to the same place where she was previously, namely at the altar steps; and there let her kneel so that she may obtain and receive absolution in this way. Let the priest say: May God have mercy, et cetera [Have mercy on us all powerful God and cast down all our sin. Deliver us from all evil, strengthen and preserve us in all good work. And lead us to eternal life,]*

Be absolved from all your sins,

Then let him bless bread and give it to the woman. After which let her go back to her place.

* translated from col. 489, fasc. II, *Missale ad usum Ecclesie Westmonasteriensis*, HBS 5, ed. J.W. Legg (London, 1893)

TRINITY COLLEGE

Then proceeding to the woman let him give the bread to her. And having been given his blessing, let all retire in peace.

Note, whereas if women after giving birth should wish to enter the church at any time to give thanks they are free to do so as 'purificari' [purified women], and no great sin is therefore attached to it. Nor is access to the churches to be denied them; their pain should not be turned back on them and seen as the cause of sin. If, however, out of reverence they would wish to abstain for some time, we do not believe their devotion to be inappropriate.

BODLEIAN MS TANNER 5

After this let the priest take the blessed bread and give it to the woman. After which the woman shall go to the priest and offer the chrisom. After that, let her retire in the name of the Lord. Amen

Absolution: The Lord Jesus Christ absolves you from the pollution of your childbirth, and I absolve you and restore you to God and to the sacraments of the church. In the name of the Father, etc.

APPENDIX B

ACCOUNT BOOK OF THE WARDENS OF WALDEN: Entries Regarding the Purification of Women (ERO MS D/DBY Q18)

fol 3r 17 Henry 6 (1439-40) [the accounting year started at Easter]

From the women who came to the church for purifying.

From the wife of John Draper 1d.

From " " " John Howlotte 1d.

From " " " Robert Baate 1d.

From " " " John Kerver 1d.

From " " " Barker 1d.

From " " " Thomas Kaater 1d.

From " " " Stephen Avenaunt 2d.

From " " " John Colwell 1d.

From " " " Thomas Myller 1d.

From " " " Lek[?] Shepherd 1d.

From " " " Robert Chapman 1d.

From " " " Baker Senior 1d.

From " " " Richard Wynter 1d.

From " " " John Harsherd 1d.

From " " " William Parchyld 1d.

Item: from divers women whose names here not discovered, at various times. 22 ½d.

Sum 3s. 2 ½d.

fol 15r 19 Henry 6 (1441-2)

Item: collected from women who came to the church for purifying. 15 ½d.

fol 17r 19/20 Henry 6 (1442-3)

Item: received for the purification of women in the church on the Sunday next after the feast of St. Bartholemew the Apostle. [added over top this: collected at various times] 6 ½d.

fol 17v (same year)

Item: received from collection in the church for 3 Sundays around the feast of All Saints.

[added: with the purification of women] 5s. 6d.

Item: received from collections in the church from the Nativity of our Lord until the first Sunday in Lent. [added: and the purification of women] 16s.

fol 27v 22 Henry 6 (1444-45)

Item: received from women at the time of purification in the church. 16d.

fol 30r 24 Henry 6 (1446-47)

Item: received from the purification of women and from the parishioners on Palm Sunday. 4s. 6d.

fol 42v 30 Henry 6 (1452-3)

Item: received from the purification of women at diverse times, as well as from the church collection. 15 ½d.

fol 86v 13 Edward 4 (1473-4)

Received from the purifications of all the wives of Walden this year. 4s. 6d.

fol 89v 14 Edward 4 (1474-5)

Received from the wives of Walden in the church at their purifications during the whole year. 5s. 4d.

fol 93r 14/15 Edward 4 (1475-6)

Firstly received the Sunday after Low Sunday from the parishioners in the church.

7s. 3 ½d.

Item: the Sunday next following, for the purification of the wives of Thomas George, 1d., Richard Gylle, 1d., Thurstain Fuller, 1d., John Burgeys, 1d. 4d.

Item: the Sunday next following, for the purification of the wives of William Colwell and John Semer Colermaker. 2d.

Item: received the Sunday next before the Ascension, in church. 6s. 2d.

Item: the following Sunday for the purification of the wives of Thomas Page, 1d., Robert Cade, 1d., Henry Parfite, 1d. 3d.

Item: received on Trinity Sunday in the church. 5s.

Item: the same day for the purification of the wife of [blank] Frace, 1d., and [blank] Fuste, ½d. 1 ½d.

Item: received the Sunday next before the feast of the Nativity of John the Baptist for the purification of the wife of John Rodeland. 1d.

Item: received the Sunday before the feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul in the church. 6s. 2d.

Item: the same day, for the purification of the wife of [blank] Lawney. 1d.

Item: the Sunday after, received for the purification of the wife of John Danbery. 1d.

Item: received on Relic Sunday for the purification of the wife of Simon Tylor. 1d.

fol 93v [continues]

Item: received Sunday, the feast of St. Praxedis for the purification of the wives of [blank] Talbot, 1d., William Taylour, 1d., Robert Gerveys, 1d. 3d.

Item: for the purification of the wife of "le mattmaker" ½d.

Item: Sunday, the vigil of the Assumption of the BVM, for the purification of the wives of Beets, 1d., Stonley, 1d., and Richard Etford, ½d. 2 ½d.

Item: for the purification of the wife of the servant of John Danbery, 'Bocher'. 1d.

Item: received in the church Sunday, the feast of St. Augustine. 4s. 5 ½d.

Item: the same day, for the purification of the wife of William Midelton, 1d., and the wife of Thomas Holt, ½ d. 1 ½d.

Item: the next Sunday, for the purification of the wives of William Adam, 1d., Bate junior, 1d., and John Baron, ½d. 2 ½d.

Item: the next Sunday following, for the purification of the wives of William Alman, 1d., William Corwun, 1d., Thomas Rede, 1d., Stephen Barker, 1d., and Robert Semer, 1d. 5d.

Item: the next Sunday following, for the purification of the wives of John, 1d., and William, 1d., Glover 2d.

Item: received in the church Sunday before the feast of St. Michael 5s.

Item: the next Sunday following, for the purification of the wife of Robert Barbour. 1d.

fol 94r [continues]

Item: for the purification of the wife of John Colwell, jr. 1d.

Item: Sunday before the feast of All Saints for the purification of the wives of Richard Kyng, 1d., William Margete, 1d., and Robert Gyson, nil. 2d.
 Item: received Sunday the feast of St. Bricius with 1d. for the purification of the wife of John Wychebowde. 5s. 2 ½d.
 Item: for the purification of the wives of Neuton jr., 1d., and Gynne, 1d., on the first Sunday in Advent. 2d.
 Item: received in the church on the second Sunday in Advent. 4s.
 And for the purification of the wife of Lyon "laborer" the same day. ½d.
 Item: received the Sunday before the Nativity for the purification of the wife of Sulgrove. 1d.
 Item: received on Circumcision of the Lord in the church. 3s. 10d
 And for the purification of the wife of John Mayhew the following Sunday. 1d.
 Item: for the purification of the wife of Guido Shomaker. ½d.
 Item: received on Sexagesima Sunday in the church by Thomas Semere and Robert Mayhew with the purification of the wife of William Barker, 1d. 5s. 5d
 Item: received for the purification of the wife of Ferour on Quinquagesima Sunday. 1d.
 Item: the first Sunday in Lent, for the purification of the wife of John Spylman. 1d.

fol 94v [continues]

Item: the 3rd Sunday in Lent for the purification of the wives of Parker jr., 1d., Reymond, 1d., and Carter of Goulstrete, ½d. 2 ½d.
 Item: received the 4th Sunday of Lent for the purification of the wives of William Avenount and Webbe de Cobbestolende. 2d.
 Item: received on Passion Sunday in the church. 4s.
 And on Palm Sunday for the purification of the wife of Palfreyman. ½d.

fol 102r 15 Edward 4 (1475-6)

Firstly, received from the wife of Thomas Chopmon for her purification performed on Sunday before the feast of St. George. 1d.
 Item: for the purification of the wife of John Redere on Sunday the feast of St. George. 1d.
 Item: for the purification of the wives of John Fletcher, 1d., Thomas Thoorne, 1d., and George Wareman ½d., on the Sunday before Pentecoste. 2 ½d.
 Item: received on Trinity Sunday from the parishioners in the church. 5s 9d
 And for the purification of the wife of [blank] Lyon, taylour, Trinity Sunday. ½d.
 Item: received the Sunday next before the feast of St. John the Baptist from the parishioners in the church. 4s 6 ½d.
 Item: received the same day for the purification of the wife of Richard Webbe, jr. 1d.
 Item: received the Sunday next after the Nativity of John the Baptist for the purification of the wife of John Lawsalt. 1d.
 Item: received the Sunday next after the feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul for the purification of the wives of [blank] Wykes and [blank] Malyn. 2d.
 Item: received the Sunday next after the feast of St. Kenelan for the purification of the wife of Adam Glasier. 1d.
 Item: received for the purification of the wife of [blank] Stokwyth on Thursday, the feast of St. Margaret. ½d.
 Item: received the Sunday before the feast of St. James for the purification of the wife of William Rafour. 1d.

Item: received Sunday next before the feast called St. Peter ad Vincula from parishioners in the church. 4s. 1d

And for the purification of the wife of Thomes Colle the same day, nil, because they are poor.

fol 102v [continues]

Item: received Sunday, the feast of St. Hipolitus for the purification of the wife of Richard Webbe. 1d.

Item: received the Sunday next before the feast of the Decollation of St. John from the parishioners. 4s. 9d

Item: on the same day for the purification of the wife of [blank] Benyte. 1d.

Item: received for the purification of the wife of Thomas Meller. 1d.

Item: received Sunday the feast of St. Lambert for the purification of the wives of John Ronhum, 1d., and John Carter, 1d. 2d.

Item: received the Sunday next following for the purification of the wife of John Iwayn. 1d.

Item: received the Sunday next before the feast of St. Nichasir [Nicasius] for the purification of the wife of [blank] de Cokkestolsude. 1d.

Item: received Sunday next after the dedication of the church from the parishioners in the church. 5s. 11 ½d.

Item: also for the purification of the wife of [blank] Benyte, jr., the same day. 1d.

Item: received the Sunday next after the feast of St. Luke the Evangelist for the purification of the wife of [blank] Basset. 1d.

Item: received for the purification of the wives of William Sobrook, jr., Robert Grene, and Thomas Wenham on Sunday next after the feast of All Saints. 3d.

Item: received on Sunday, the morrow of St. Martin from the parishioners in church.

4s. 8d.

And also for the purification of the wife of [blank] Wykes.

½d.

Item: received for the purification of the wife of William Midelton, Sunday the feast of St. Linus the Pope. 1d.

Item: received the first Sunday in Advent from the parishioners in the church. 4s.

And for the purification of the wives of [blank] Crowe, 1d., and [blank] Tykesofer, ½d.

1 ½d.

Item: received from parishioners in church on Sunday the Eve of the Nativity. 3s. 4d.

And for the purification of the wives of William Rodeland and Thomas Note the same day.

2d.

fol 103r [continues]

Item: received on St. Stephen's day for the purification of the wife of Nicholas Wryght. 1d.

Item: received for the purification of the wife of Nicholas Barber the Sunday before the Circumcision. 1d.

Item: received on Sunday the feast of St. Agnes the Virgin from the parishioners in the church. 5s. 6d.

And for the purification of the wives of Robert Ayle and Nicholas Chopmon the same day. 2d.

Item: received on Septuagesima Sunday for the purification of the wife of [blank] Sulgrave. 1d.

Item: received on Sexagesima Sunday from the parishioners in the church. 4s. 10d

And for the purification of the wives of John Danbury and Richard Gylle the same day. 2d.

Item: received on Quinquagesima Sunday for the purification of the wives of Thomas Loweney and Thomas Page.	2d.
Item: received for the purification of the wife of Robert Aldebury the first Sunday in Lent.	1d.
Item: received the second Sunday in Lent from the parishioners in the church.	4s
And for the purification of the wife of William Caron the same day.	1d.
Item: received for the purification of the wives of [blank] Cade, 1d., and [blank] Fratte, 1d., the fourth Sunday in Lent.	2d.
Item: received on Passion Sunday for the purification of the wives of Henry Parfay, 1d., and widow Talbot, ½ d.	1 ½d.
Item: received for the purification of the wife of John Bryght on Palm Sunday.	1d.
Item: for the purification of Margaret, wife of John Spilmon, on Wednesday before Easter.	1d.
fol 108v 16 Edward 4 (1476-7)	
Received from the wives for purification for the whole year.	3s. ½d.
fol 111v [no year given 17 Edward 4 (1477-8)?]	
Item: received from the wives for purification.	3s. 1d.
fol 115v 18/19 Edward 4 (1478-80)	
Item: received from the wives for purification.	2s. 7d.
fol 121r 20 Edward 4 (1480-81)	
From the wife of John Swayn, Alice, for purification.	1 ½d
fol 123v 21 Edward 4 (1481-2)	
Item: received for the purification of women for the whole year.	2s. 9d.
fol 126v 22 Edward 4 (1482-3)	
Item: received for the purification of women for the whole year.	3s. 2d
fol 129r 23 Edward 4 (1483)	
Item: received for the purification of women for the whole year.	3s. 1d
fol 131v 1 Richard 3 (1483-4)	
Item: received for the purification of women for the whole year.	2s. 4d.
fol 135v 2/3 Richard 3 (1484-5)	
Item: received for women's purifications for the whole year.	3s. 9d.
fol 140r 1486	
Received for the purification of wives for the whole year.	2s. 8d.
fol 142v 4 Henry 7 (1488-9)	
Item: received from wives for their church goings.	2s. 4d.
fol 146r [no year given; after 1489?]	
Item: received from wife's church goings.	2s. 10d.

APPENDIX C

EXCERPTS FROM THE ACCOUNTS KEPT BY THE PROCTOR OF BRIDLINGTON PRIORY IN SCARBOROUGH PARISH CHURCH (PRO E 101/514/31 & PRO E 101/514/32)

- + guildmass, obits, mortuaries, and/or weddings included in the offerings listed
s marriage and purification of the same woman

PRO E 101/514/31 (1423-27)

1 Henry 6 (1423-4) [fols 47v-50v]									
					Apr.	27	1 purification	3d.	
					May	19	3	"	10.5d.
						31	1	"	3d.
Feb.	5	2 purifications	6d.		July	21	1	"	18.5d. +
	13	2	"	6d.		25	2	"	5.5d.
Mar.	5	1	"	8d.		28	1	"	3d.
	8	1	"	3d.		30	3	"	8d.
	15	2	"	5d.	Aug.	18	2	"	4.5d.
	28	1	"	4d.	Sept.	6	2	"	6d.
	29	3	"	15d.		24	3	"	8d.
Apr.	2	2	"	4.5d. +	Oct.	3	2	"	5.5d.
	17	1	"	10.5d.		11	2	"	6d.
May	2	1	"	2d.		24	1	"	2d.
	22	1	"	16d. +		28	2	"	7d.
	28	1	"	3d.	Nov.	15	2	"	4d.
June	25	1	"	11d. +		25	2	"	6.5d.
July	31	1	"	22d. +	Dec.	3	2	"	5.5d.
Aug. & Sept.	nil	"				11	1	"	2d.
Oct.	3	5	"	28d.		20	2	"	5.5d.
	9	2	"	6d.		31	1	"	2d.
	10	1	"	6.5d.	Jan.	3	2	"	5d.
	23	4	"	15.5d.		14	3	"	10d.
Nov.	9	4	"	17d.		20	1	"	4d.
	28	3	"	12d.		27	1	"	3.5d.
Dec.	8	1	"	17.5d.	3 Henry 6 (1425-6) [fols 17v-21r]				
	10	2	"	6d.	Feb.	12	1 purification	5.5d.	
	31	2	"	17d. +		25	3	"	13.5d. +
Jan.	30	1	"	25s.9d. +	Mar.	7	3	"	6.5d.
Feb.	nil	"				18	2	"	6.5d.
2 Henry 6 (1424-5) [fols 31v-34v]						24	2	"	7.5d.
						29	3	"	9.5d.
Feb.	10	1 purification	3d.		Apr.	7	1	"	2.5d.
Mar.	13	2	"	5d.		21	1	"	3.5d.
	26	2	"	6.5d.		26	3	"	7.5d.
Apr.	7	1	"	2.5d.	May	12	2	"	7.5d.
	9	1	"	3d.					
	22	2	"	5d.					

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May	27	2	purifications	6.5d.		Mar.	21	2	purifications	5.5d.
June	28	2	"	14.5d.	+	Apr.	1	1	"	4d.
	30	1	"	4.5d.			5	2	"	6d.
July & August	nil		"			May	4	2	"	6d.
Sept.	12	3	"	9.5d.			17	2	"	8.5d.
	25	3	"	7.5d.			28	2	"	8.5d.
Oct.	13	3	"	10d.		June	13	2	"	5.5d.
Nov.	6	2	"	7d.			23	3	"	9d.
	11	1	"	4d.		July	20	2	"	6.5d.
	19	2	"	5.5d.		Aug.	3	1	"	3.5d.
Dec.	3	1	"	2.5d.			8	2	"	6.5d.
	8	2	"	4.5d.			13	2	"	5.5d.
	23	1	"	3d.		Sept.	9	1	"	3d.
Jan.	4	1	"	2.5d.			12	2	"	6.5d.
	9	2	"	6.5d.			15	2	"	6d.
	17	1	"	3.5d.			20	1	"	4.5d.
	25	1	"	3.5d.		Oct.	1	1	"	4d.
	28	2	"	5.5d.			5	2	"	5d.
Feb.		nil	"				17	2	"	6.5d.
4 Henry 6 (1426-7) [fols 1v-5v]						Nov.	5	1	"	3d.
Feb.	3	1	purification	1.5d.			11	1	"	3d.
	6	1	"	2.5d.			29	3	"	9d.
	8	1	"	2.5d.		Dec.	8	2	"	7d.
	11	1	"	2.5d.			17	1	"	7d.
	17	1	"	4d.			23	1	"	5d.
	20	1	"	4d.			28	1	"	5d.
	26	3	"	15.5d.		Jan.	5	1	"	3.5d.
Mar.	4	1	"	2.5d.			11	1	"	6d.
	9	2	"	5.5d.			23	1	"	3.5d.
	11	2	"	5.5d.			28	2	"	5.5d.
	20	1	"	2d.		Feb.	3	1	"	3d.
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PRO E 101/514/32 (1434-6, 1438-9, 1441-2)

12 Henry 6 (1434-5) [fols 2v-7r]						May	4	1	purification	1d.
Feb.		nil	purifications				6	2	"	7d.
Mar.	13	1	"	5.5d.	+		16	2	"	5d.
	20	1	"	2d.			25	2	"	3d.
	24	1	"	2.5d.	+		28	1	"	4d.
	28	1	"	9d.	+	June	7	1	"	2d.
Apr.	5	1	"	2d.			13	1	"	3.5d.
	7	1	"	2.5d.			20	2	"	6d.
May	2	2	"	4.5d.			21	1	"	2.5d.
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June	27	1	purification	3.5d.
July	5	1	"	2.5d.
	6	1	"	2d.
	11	1	"	3d.
	14	1	"	2d.
	18	1	"	2.5d.
	23	1	"	2d.
	"	1	"	4d.
Aug.	1	2	"	2s.6.5d. +
	2	1	"	2d.
	7	1	"	11.5d. +
	8	2	"	6.5d.
	11	1	"	1.5d.
	16	2	"	6d.
	17	1	"	2d.
	24	1	"	2d.
	"	1	"	4d.
Sept.	5	1	"	5.5d.
	8	1	"	6.5d.
	25	1	"	2d.
	29	1	"	3d.
Oct.	12	1	"	3d.
	17	2	"	6d.
	20	1	"	3d.
	23	1	"	1.5d.
	25	2	"	6d.
	30	2	"	8.5d.
Nov.	9	1	"	4.5d.
	14	2	"	6d.
	17	1	"	4.5d.
	21	1	"	2.5d.
	25	1	"	2.5d.
	28	1	"	2d.
Dec.	1	1	"	3d.
	14	1	"	2d.
Jan.	2	1	"	3d.
	5	1	"	4d.
	16	1	"	3d.
Feb.	1	1	"	10d. +

13 Henry 6 (1435-6) [fols 13v-19r.]

Feb.	23	1	purification	3.5d.
Mar.	4	1	"	4d.
	11	1	"	3d.
	22	1	"	2.5d.
	24	1	"	4.5d.
Apr.	4	1	"	3.5d.

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April	10	1	purification	3d.
	18	1	"	2.5d.
	19	1	"	4d.
	30	1	"	5.5d.
May	5	1	"	3d.
	10	1	"	3d.
	18	1	"	4d.
	21	1	"	3d.
	24	1	"	5d.
June	4	1	"	5d.
	8	1	"	3d.
	14	1	"	4d.
	19	1	"	4.5d.
	25	1	"	6d.
	27	1	"	2d.
July	6	1	"	4.5d.
	10	1	"	3.5d.
	13	1	"	4.5d.
	15	1	"	2.5d.
	24	1	"	4.5d.
Aug.	3	1	"	3.5d.
	5	1	"	4d.
	25	1	"	2.5d.
Sept.	11	1	"	4d.
	12	1	"	4d.
	19	1	"	6d.
	23	1	"	4.5d.
Oct.	3	1	"	4d.
	5	1	"	6d.
	6	1	"	3.5d.
	8	1	"	3.5d.
Nov.	3	1	"	3d.
	5	1	"	4.5d.
Nov.	6	1	"	5d.
Dec.	1	1	"	4d.
	4	1	"	4d.
	7	1	"	4.5d.
	8	1	"	3.5d.
	14	1	"	5.5d.
	16	1	"	4.5d.
	28	1	"	2d.
Jan.	12	2	"	8d.
	21	1	"	8d.
Feb.	3	1	"	4.5d.

16 Henry 6 (1438-9) [fols 25v-28v]

Feb.	10	1	purification	8.5d. +
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Feb.	18	1 purification	3.5d.	
	23	1 "	7d.	+
March		nil	"	
Apr.	15	1 "	7d.	+
	27	1 "	5d.	+
May	7	1 "	9.5d.	+
	10	1 "	2.5d.	
	13	1 "	7d.	+
June	1	1 "	2d.	
	5	1 "	4.5d.	+
	13	1 "	2d.	
July	1	1 "	5d.	
	21	1 "	13.5d.	+
	30	1 "	5.5d.	
Aug.	11	1 "	8d.	+
	17	1 "	5.5d.	s
	23	1 "	3s.5.5d.	+
	24	1 "	12d.	+
	30	1 "	13d.	+
Sept.	7	1 "	2.5d.	
	12	2 "	5d.	+
Oct.	8	1 "	2.5d.	
	9	1 "	6d.	s
	11	1 "	8d.	+
	12	1 "	5d.	+
Nov.	9	1 "	6d.	s
	11	1 "	8d.	s+
	12	1 "	4d.	+
	19	1 "	5d.	+
	23	1 "	6d.	s
Dec.	15	1 "	3d.	+
Jan.	15	1 "	13d.	s
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Jan.	19	1 purification	12d.	s+
	31	1 "	4.5d.	s
Feb.	1	1 "	6d.	+
19 Henry 6 (1441-2) [fols 34r-36r]				
Feb.	6	1 purification	5.5d.	s
	8	1 "	1.5d.	
	13	1 "	2d.	
	19	1 "	2.5d.	
Mar.	16	1 "	1.5d.	
Apr.	24	1 "	2d.	
May	1	2 "	3d.	
	15	1 "	5.5d.	s
June	5	1 "	1.5d.	
	8	2 "	2.5d.	
July	6	1 "	4.5d.	s
	18	2 "	3.5d.	
	20	1 "	3.5d.	s
	25	1 "	13.5d.	s
Aug.	14	2 "	3d.	
Sept.	5	3 "	3.5d.	
	20	1 "	2.5d.	
Oct.	3	1 "	2d.	
Nov.	15	1 "	2d.	
	17	2 "	3d.	
Dec.	4	1 "	2d.	
Jan.	9	1 "	1.5d.	
	11	1 "	2d.	
Feb.		nil	"	

APPENDIX D

EXCERPTS FROM THE ACCOUNTS OF THE CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS, NORTHAMPTON (PRO E/101/519/27)

37 Henry 8 (1545-6)

Purification offerings:

November	2	Amiot Hose		1.5d.
	12	John Alward's wife		1.5d.
	19	Wm. Blakeshaw's wife	(1)*	1d. and crysum
	28	Ralph Watson's wife	(2)	2.5d.
December	10	Thomas Wyte's wife	(4)	3.5d. and crysum
	18	Wm. Hett's wife		1d. and crysum
January	21	Margery Samuell	(5)	6d. and crysum
	28	M. Meer's wife		10d. and crysum
February	12	Cleseley's wife		2d. and crysum
	18	Samuel Smyth's wife	(6)	
		and John Gross' wife	(7)	7.5d. and crysum
	20	John Long's wife	(8)	2.5d.
March	6	Thomas Wonley's wife	(9)	3d. and crysum
	9	John Adam's wife		2d. and crysum
	11	John Baly's		
		and John Begenall's		6d. and 2 crysums
	16	John Tommendall's wife		2d. and crysum
June	8	Wm. Goodwen's wife	(10)	2d. and crysum
	27	Richard Garnett's wife	(11)	4d. and crysum
July	8	Edward Jakesun's wife		1d. and crysum
August	1	Thomas Oplyn's wife	(12)	3d. and crysum
	7	Thomas Wagele's wife		2d. and crysum
	10	John Bryghwen		1d. and crysum
	18	Jane Clementt		1d. and crysum
	25	Randall Boydark's wife		1.5d. and crysum
September	28	Wm. Foster's wife		3d. and crysum

38 Henry 8 (1546-7)

October	8	Thomas Bott's wife		
		and Token's wife		7d. and crysum
	10	John Daly's wife		1.5d. and crysum
November	8	Ralph Freman's wife	(3)	4d. and crysum
	?	Christopher Naylor's wife		2d. and crysum
	16	Wm. Grene's wife		2d. and crysum
December	2	Thomas Wyte's wife	(4)	3d. and crysum
	8	Richard Welewed's wife		
		and Nicholas Waren's		4d. and 2 crysums
	30	James Downy's wife		1d.
January	16	Thomas Chottin's wife		4d. and crysum

* numbers in brackets are paired, indicating more than one appearance of that name

January	28	Wm. Sobbyng's wife		2d. and crysum
February	6	Wm. Chamberlyn's wife	(17)	4.5d. and crysum
	21	Margery Washyngton		6d. and crysum
	25	Wm. Hutt's wife		2d. and crysum
March	5	Warley's wife		4d. and crysum
April	6	Richard Lody's wife		4d. and crysum
	12	Marten Wylsun's wife		2d. and crysum
May	20	Wm. Clertum's wife		1d. and crysum
	30	John Grene's wife	(14)	2d. and crysum
June	1	Wm. Hatter's wife		1d.
	19	Myles Blomer's wife	(21)	1d.
	26	Thomas Haresun's wife		1d. and crysum
	29	Catrin Tanner		.5d and crysum
July	4	John Haresun's wife	(22)	2.5d. and crysum
	13	John Oselar's wife		2d. and crysum
	24	John Long's wife	(8)	2d. and crysum
August	1	Robert Brown's wife	(23)	2d. and crysum
	"	John Stun's wife		2d. and crysum
	4	Thomas Grene's wife	(15)	
		and John Sywell's		6d. and 2 crysums
	8	Matt. Boggebe's wife		
		and James Criswell's		6d. and 2 crysums
	21	Gregory Rulat's wife		2d. and crysum
	28	Simon Molsow's wife		1d. and crysum
September	6	Wm. Freman's wife	(13)	
		and Samuel Smyth's	(6)	5d. and 2 crysums
	10	Randall Mowys' wife		
		and Richard Druere's	(24)	5d. and 2 crysums

3 Edward 6 (1549-50)

September	30	Richard Bother's wife		3d. and 2 crysums
		and Robert Totelar's		
October	4	Randall Maw's wife		1.5d. and crysum
	10	John Bozer's wife		1d. and crysum
	15	John Long's wife	(8)	1d. and crysum
	19	Wm. Chamberleyn's wife	(17)	1d. and crysum
	30	John Towunyshynd's wife	(25)	1d. and crysum
November	12	Ralph Watsun's wife	(2)	3d.
December	2	John Ball's wife		2d. and crysum
	26	James Myllar's wife		
		and Thomas Bryl's		3d. and 2 crysums
	28	John Weston's wife	(19)	1d. and crysum
January	7	John Hewyt's wife		1d. and crysum
	18	Ames' wife		2d. and crysum
	25	Maryanne Goodwin	(10?)	1.5d. and crysum
	26	John Sawelar's wife		1d. and crysum
	28	Jane Manley		3d. and crysum
February	4	Thomas Myllar's wife		1d. and crysum

February	9	Thomas Chattins' wife		1d. and crysum
March	12	John Haresun's wife	(22)	1d. and crysum
	17	Amiot Garnett	(11?)	2d. and crysum
	29	Wm. Colyn's wife		.5d. and crysum
	30	Thomas Coll's wife		1d. and crysum
April	12	Richard Burton's wife and Peter Bruer's wife	(26)	2d. and 2 crysums
	25	John Hynd's wife		1d. and 1 crysum
May	8	Wm. Brown's wife and Thomas Wegeley's		2d. and 2 crysums
	10	Margery Samuell	(5)	2d. and crysum
	17	Wm. Bernard's wife and John Grene's wife and Rowland's wife	(14)	3d. and 3 crysums
	23	Warley's wife		1d.
	24	Wm. Sawyer's wife		1d. and crysum
	19	Richard Grey's wife	(18)	1d.
June	14	Samuel Smyth's wife and Robert Brown's and Gilbert Shorall's	(6) (23) (27)	3d. and 2 crysums
	20	Wm. Wood's wife and Wm. Bretyn's		2d. and 2 crysums
	27	Wm. Stanley's wife	(28)	1d. and 1 crysum
	28	Wm. Stomp's wife		1d.
July	2	John Cawker's wife		1d. and 1 crysum
	6	Thomas Hatter's wife		1d. and 1 crysum
	11	John Petman's wife		1d. and crysum
	16	Wm. Sawlwarth's wife		1d. and crysum
August	1	Thomas Colfax's wife		1d. and crysum
September	16	Mark Bogabese's wife		1d. and crysum
	28	Ralph Freman's wife	(3)	1d. and crysum

4 Edward 6 (1550-1)

October	3	John Felypse' wife	(20)	1d. and crysum
	6	Wm. Mcoll's wife		1d. and crysum
	14	Richard Jone's wife		1d. and crysum
	14	Wm. Stanley's wife	(28)	1d. and crysum
	19	Thomas Latham's wife		1d. and crysum
	19	Thomas Marten's wife		1d. and crysum
November	4	Gilbert Shoroll's wife	(27)	1d. and crysum
December	18	Thomas Grene's wife	(15)	1d. and crysum
November	25	Wm. Baker's wife		1d. and crysum
	29	Anna Bryghtwood		1d. and crysum
	30	Thomas Wonley's wife	(9)	1d. and crysum
December	1	Robert Smyth's wife		1d. and crysum
	11	Wm. Eldeatun's wife		1d. and crysum
	27	John Sewly's wife		1d. and crysum

January	3	John Townsdall's wife		3d.
	5	John Marley's wife and John Lewis'		2d. and 2 crysums
February	2	Rendall's wife and Wm. Blakeshaw's	(1)	2d. and 2 crysums
	26	Rafe Watson's wife	(2)	1d. and crysum
	"	Wm. Goodwin's wife	(10)	1d. and crysum
	28	Wm. Freeman's wife and Richard Gryatt's	(13)	2d. and 2 crysums
March	4	Wm. Weser's wife		1d. and crysum
April	2	Jane Glasboro		1d. and crysum
	14	John Sitton's wife		1d. and crysum
	16	Randall Bozear's		1d. and crysum
	22	Wm. Bar__'s and Myles Blomer's wife	(21)	2d. and 2 crysums
May	24	Harry Trott's wife		1d. and crysum
	2	Cateryne Holdame and John Gross' wife	(7)	2d. and 2 crysums
	11	Thomas Coll's wife and John Mareatt's wife		2d. and 2 crysums
	15	Ralph Men__'s wife		1d. and crysum
	18	Richard Warley's wife and Nicholas Tylar's wife		2d. and 2 crysums
	25	Jane Selbe and Margaret Bead		2d. and 2 crysums
	27	Elizabeth Chamberleyn	(17?)	1d. and crysum
	3	Richard Wylkynsun's wife		1d. and crysum
July	5	Richard Grey's wife	(18)	1d. and crysum
	18	Sawnsun's wife		1d. and crysum
	7	Jane Walger	(16)	1d. and crysum
	10	Fryllysber's wife		1d. and crysum
August	22	John Townyshend's wife and Wm. Peby's wife	(25)	2d. and 2 crysums
	24	Wm. Felypse' wife		1d. and crysum
	17	Thomas Opleyn's wife and John Etun's wife	(12)	2d. and 2 crysums

5 Edward 6 (1551-2)

October	1	Robert Brown's wife	(23)	1.5d. and crysum
	1	Wm. Dokytt's wife		1.5d. and crysum
	6	Thomas Begenall's wife		1.5d. and crysum
	8	Thomas Brettyn's wife		1d. and crysum
November	11	John Sorly's wife		1.5d. and crysum
	5	Rafe Watsun's wife	(2)	1.5d. and crysum
	9	John Marley's wife		1.5d. and crysum
	15	John Pyttman's wife		1.5d.
December	11	Wm. Bernard's wife		1.5d.
	11	Wm. Chamberleyn's wife	(17)	1.5d. and crysum

December	16	Edward Bokesoll's wife		1.5d. and crysum
January	7	John Sattun's wife		1d. and crysum
	8	Nicholas Holeard's wife		1.5d. and crysum
	14	Margery Newell		1.5d. and crysum
	29	Richard Burton's wife	(26)	1.5d. and crysum
	30	Richard Fullar's wife		1.5d. and crysum
February	12	Jane Gilbert		
		and Alyce Rendall		2d. and 2 crysums
March	10	Richard Helyer's wife		1.5d. and crysum
	12	Jane Walger	(16)	
		and Caterene Waldan		3d. and 1 crysum
	24	Gilbert Shorall's wife	(27)	1.5d. and crysum
	29	Thomas Coll's wife		1.5d. and crysum
April	1	Druere's wife	(24?)	1.5d. and crysum
	4	Edward Wall's wife		1.5d. and crysum
	5	John Sawllwarthe		1.5d. and crysum
	9	Wm. Goodwyn's wife	(10)	1.5d. and crysum
	11	Richard Bozeare's wife		1.5d. and crysum
	19	Blakeshaw's wife	(1)	1.5d. and crysum
	22	Rowland's wife		1.5d. and crysum
May	6	John Felyp's wife	(20)	
		and D__'s wife		2d. and crysums
	10	Thomas Mannyng's wife		1.5d. and crysum
	25	Wm. Stanley's wife	(28)	1.5d. and crysum
June	20	Mathew the Holyar's		1.5d. and crysum
July	1	Robert Topper's wife		1.5d. and crysum
	8	Thomas Wonley's wife	(9)	1.5d. and crysum
	10	Bernard Alwood's wife		1.5d. and crysum
	17	Peter Auteull's wife		1.5d. and crysum
	18	John Clerk's wife		
		and Wm. Perkins'		2d. and crysums
	20	Anna Peck		1.5d. and crysum
	31	Lawrence's wife		1d. and crysum
August	5	Lawrence Brown's wife		1.5d. and crysum
	9	Richard Wylkynsun's wife		1.5d. and crysum
	14	John Gross' wife	(7)	1d.
	24	Elizabeth Chamberleyne	(17?)	
		and Margaret Grey	(18?)	2d. and 2 crysums
	26	Anna Weston	(19?)	1.5d. and crysum
	28	Amiot Cokyn		1.5d. and crysum
September	2	Elizabeth Croll		1.5d. and crysum
	16	Mark Bogabebe's wife		
		and John Dyer's wife		2d. and 2 crysums
	25	Richard Gyll		
		and Thomas Fletcher's		2.5d. and crysum
	27	Thomas Bray's wife		1.5d. and crysum

APPENDIX E

PROOFS-OF-AGE: The Number of Days Between Baptism and Purification

IPM Volume #, Record #	Year of Birth	Place	Sex of Child	Day of the Week	Number of Days Between Baptism and Purification
3,427	1276	Essex	M	Sunday	12 Nov - 13 Dec = 31
3,429	1276	Northampton	M	"Sunday"	25 Dec - 26 Jan = 32
3,432	1280	Berkshire	F	?	7 Dec - "in Christmas week" = c. 22
5,113	1286	Wiltshire	M	Sunday?	"a month after the said [baptismal] feast [Sunday 11 Aug]" 8 Sept? = 28
5,421	1290	Lincolnshire	M	?	9 Aug - sometime before 29 Sept = <51
5,543	1293	Cumberland	M	Monday	24 Aug - 21 Sept = 28
6,62	1295	Devonshire	M	?	14 Sept - sometime after 24 Sept =>10
6,336	1300	Oxfordshire	M	Wednesday	28 Oct - 30 Nov = 33
7,94	1306	Leicestershire	M	Sunday	20 March - 15 May = 55
8,536	1321	Dorset	M	"Sunday"	3 Feb - 8 March = 33
8,673	c.1324	Somerset	M	"Sunday"	29 Jan - 19 Feb = 19
9,63	1326	Dorset	F	?	31 May - sometime after 12 June =>12
9,244	1328	Somerset	M	"Sunday"	19 June - 14 Aug = 56
10,650	1329	Herefordshire	M	Saturday	1 May - 20 May = 19
10,274	1333	Hertfordshire	M	Sunday	19 July - 15 Aug = 27
9,670	1334	Surrey	F	"Monday"	20 Nov - 19 Dec = 29
10,646	1337	Dorset	M	"Thursday"	12 Nov - 19 March, 1338 = 127
10,336	1340	Wiltshire	F	?	"5 weeks after the day of the...birth"
13,290	c.1351	Devon	M	"Sunday"	28 Nov - 11 Dec = 13
13,66	1355	Cumberland	F	Sunday	2 Feb - 8 March = 34
16,1057	1368	Worcestershire	M	"Sunday"	"Sunday a month after the said Nov 20"
19,341	1384	Yorkshire	M	?	25 April - >18 Aug =>115
PRO					
C 139/7/55	1400	Essex	M	Tuesday	22 June - 20 July = 29
C 139/13/51	1401	Essex	M	Friday	18 Oct - 11 Nov = 25
C 139/36/77	1401	Sussex	M	Thursday	15 Aug - 8 Sept = 24
C 139/13/50	1402	Sussex	M	?	28 Oct - 11 Nov = 14
C 139/13/52	1402	Essex	M	Saturday	16 May - 24 June = 40
C 139/13/55	1402	Essex	M	Friday	14 Aug - 18 Sept = 36
C 139/20/48	1403	Essex	M	Friday	1 Aug - 10 Aug = 10
C 139/31/72	1411	Essex	F	"Monday"	13 Aug - 14 Sept = 33

IPM Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem and Other Analogous Documents Preserved in the Public Record Office. 20 vols. London: HMSO, 1904-1995.

PRO Public Record Office

APPENDIX F

SYNODAL STATUTES AND EXCERPTS FROM BISHOPS' REGISTERS

- A. Councils and Synods With other Documents Relating to the English Church. Ed. F. M. Powicke and C. R. Cheney. Vol. 2. Oxford: Clarendon, 1964.

1) Synodal Statutes of Bishop Richard Poore, Salisbury 1217x1219, p. 80 [63]

Item, quando mulieres post puerperium venerint ad purificationem, sacerdotes eis dent tantummodo panem benedictum, et corpus domini nullo modo eis (proponant), nisi expresse petant et prius confesse fuerint.

2) Decree for the Province of Canterbury 1225, p. 154

Concubine sacerdotum et clericorum qui beneficiati fuerint vel qui fuerint infra sacros ordines constituti ecclesiastica careant sepultura, nisi sane se correxerint et incolumes, vel tanta in extremis appareat earum penitentia propter quam non inmerito debeat cum eis dispensari. Item, nec recipiantur ad osculum pacis nec ad panem benedictum in ecclesia quamdiu tales eas detineant in domibus suis vel publice extra domos suas. Item, si pepererint non purificentur, nisi prestiterint sufficientem cautionem archidiacono vel eius officiali de satisfactione in proximo capitulo post earum purificationem faciendam. Item, sacerdos in cuius parochia concubina alicuius talium moratur, si hoc non ostenderit archidiacono vel eius officiali, suspendatur et priusquam relaxetur gravi penitentiae subiaceat. Item, mulier que convinci poterit quod sacerdos eam carnaliter cognoverit, publicam et solemnem agat penitentiam ac si de adulterio esset convicta, etsi soluta fuerit; si vero desponsata super huiusmodi fuerit convicta, tamquam pro dupplici adulterio puniatur, ne tanti reatus impunitas aliis transeat in materiam delinquendi.

3) Statutes of Bishop Robert Grosseteste for the Diocese of Lincoln 1239?, p. 272 [27]

Audivimus autem, unde non mediocriter dolemus, quod quidam sacerdotes extorquent pecuniam a laicis pro penitentia seu aliis sacramentis ministrandis; et quod quidam turpis lucri plenas iniungunt penitentias: quales sunt quod mulier cognita a viro post partum ante suam purificationem deportet deinceps oblationem ad altare cum qualibet muliere purificanda in eadem parochia; et quod homicida vel qui alterius mortem procuravit, offerat pro quolibet mortuo in eadem parochia. Hec igitur et huiusmodi, quia cupiditate sunt plena, penitus inhibemus.

4) Statutes of Bishop Roger Niger for the Archdeaconry of London 1229x1241, p. 336 [16]

Si mulier inpregneretur in aliqua parochia, et odio capellani sui vel timore ducta, vel ut dampnum vel scandalum vitet, ad aliam parochiam fugerit, non admittatur ad purificationem irrequisito assensu sui capellani a cuius parochia exivit. Qui si difficilem se exhibuerit, licentietur ab archidiacono vel eius officiali, et hoc fiat salvo iure ecclesie sue parochialis.

5) Customs of the Diocese of Salisbury 1228x1256, p. 512 [5]

Mulieres desponsate et mulieres post partum nutrices debent accedere ad ecclesiam cum candelis accensis et ille mulieres sequentes debent offerre crismalia infantium, nec crismalia debent alienari, nec in aliquos usus mitti debent nisi in usus ecclesie.

6) Statutes of Bishop Robert de Chaury for the Diocese of Carlisle 1258x1259 (1306), p. 629 [80]

. . . Coniurationes insuper et conspirationes perversorum, per quas oblationes fidelium subtrahuntur que alias ex devotione in exequiis mortuorum, nuptiis, seu purificationibus mulierum essent viris ecclesiasticis applicande, fieri totaliter prohibemus. . . .

7) Synodal Statutes of Bishop Gilbert of St. Leofric for the Diocese of Chichester 1292, p. 1116 [2]

. . . Quod est hiis temporibus, utinam futuris seculis reservatis, in hac nostra diocesi, proh dolor, ut vulgariter asseritur, invenire, dum quidam maledictionis filii in nubentium solemniis, mulierum purificationibus, et aliis in quibus ipse deus in ministrorum suorum personis oblationum solebat libamine populariter honorari, usque ad unius oblationem denarii devotionem populi restringere sunt molliti, residuum oblationis fidelium suis pro libito vel alienis usibus applicantes. . . .

B. The Rolls and Register of Bishop Oliver Sutton 1280-1299. Ed. Rosalind M. T. Hill. Lincoln Record Society, 48. 8 vols. Hereford: Hereford Times, 1954. 3:149 [October 6, 1291]

. . . Ad nostram auditiam jam pervenit quod nunnulli parochiani ecclesie de Kelstern' tanquam ingrati et degeneres filii laudabilem consuetudinem erga eandem ecclesiam pia devotione fidelium introductam et ibidem ac alibi quasi communiter in decanatu vestro a longissimis retrotemporibus quorum memoria non existit optentam quam ad oblationes in purificationibus mulierum, exequiis mortuorum et consimilibus perperam immutare quasi per conspiracionem seu conjuracionem aut alias excogitatam maliciam totaliter subtrahere, et penitus infringere noviter presumpserunt, et adhuc presumunt nequiter indurati, inito inter eos conducto, statuto seu alias practione illicita, quod de hujusmodi purificationibus et exequiis ac casibus consimilibus nullus offerat nisi unus, in libertatis ecclesiastice prejudicium, animarum suarum grande periculum ac perniciosum exemplum et scandalum plurimorum. . . .

C. Registrum Simonis de Gandavo Diocesis Saresbiriensis A.D. 1297-1315. Ed. C. T. Flower and M.C.B. Dawes. Canterbury and York Society, 40, 41. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934. 1:114 [January 24, 1300]

. . . Gravem parochianorum prebende de Iateministr' nostre dyocesis conquestionem recepimus continentem quod, licet gratis sacramenta et sacramentalia ministrari debent, Henricus tamen Rector ecclesie de Rym' firmarius ejusdem prebende et capellanus parochialis inibi deputatus per eum purificationes mulierum post partum, testamentorum probaciones, eorundem et bonorum decedencium administraciones absque magna et insalta pecunie prestacione quam redempcionem nuncupant fieri non permittunt, ipsos absque causa racionabili alias multipliciter persequentes, ut [per] oppressiones hujusmodi peccuniam indebitam extorqueant ab eisdem. . . .

- D. **Registrum Roberti Winchelsey, Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi.** Ed. Rose Graham. Canterbury and York Society, 51, 52. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956. 2:1105 [March 9, 1309]

... Ad audienciam nostram pervenit quod quidam laici de parochia de Why nostre diocesis, quibus nulla est attributa potestas de rebus ecclesie disponendi, in immunitatem ecclesiastice libertatis suis perversis machinationibus conventiculis et constitutionibus, quin potius destitucionibus, impugnare multipliciter mollientes, quod in singulis purificationibus post partum, sepulturis et exequiis mortuorum vicario perpetuo vel presbitero parochiali in dicta ecclesia unicum denarum offeratur in derogacionem libertatis ecclesiastice, refrigente et procul posita caritate dampnabiliter statuerunt. Nolentes igitur execrabilem presumptionem hujusmodi, si est ita, conniventibus oculis dimittere incorruptam, tibi committimus et mandamus quatinus ne adinvento et constitucio, quin potius destitucio vel destructio, hujusmodi quam decrevimus non tenere a quoquam teneatur, et ne ea occasione oblaciones ex devocione fidelium alias faciendo quomodolibet subtrahuntur, sub pena majoris excommunicationis quam contravenientes poterunt merito formidare, curiosa et operosa diligencia in ecclesia predicta et locis aliis ubi videris expedire publice et sollempniter studeas inhibere. . . .

- E. **Registrum Henrici Woodlock Diocesis Wintoniensis A.D. 1305-1316.** Ed. A. W. Goodman. Canterbury and York Society, 43, 44. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940. 1:487 [October 14, 1310]

... A non nullis rectoribus vicariis et aliis ecclesiasticis personis vestri archidiaconatus grauiter nobis extitit querelatum, quod licet pia in ecclesiis parochialibus fidelium in tantum excreuerit deuocio quod in mulierum purificationibus et anniuersariis defunctorum tam ipsarum ecclesiarum parochiani quam alii fideles quamplurimi in ecclesiis predictis oblaciones suas facere a multis fuerint retroactis temporibus laudabiliter consueti; quidam tamen quorum nomina ignorantur antiqui hostis discipuli gressus suos in semitis iusticie dirigere nescientes fallaciis fraudis artis sue tanto calliditatis studio dictas ecclesias prosequuntur, et per maliciam libertates earundem contra iusticiam adeo contendunt infringere quod ipsi inspiratione statuerunt horribili quod nullus dictarum ecclesiarum parochianus cuiuscumque sit condicionis vel sexus in purificationibus et anniuersariis huiusmodi quicquam offerat in ecclesiis predictis, vno denario quem purificanda mulier vel faciens huiusmodi anniuersarium celebrari habet offerre dumtaxat excepto; . . .

- F. **Register of Archbishop John Morton, sede vacante register for Norwich Diocese, 1499** London, Lambeth Palace Library MS Register of Archbishop John Morton, vol. 2, fol 76v:

"Johannes Pynnes. . . Cui dominus commissarius iniunxit quod solvat septiminatim dicta Agneti. 4d. pro alimentacione eiusdem usque ad partum. Et post partum septiminatim usque ad purificationem eiusdem 8d. Et quod tunc facta purificationem solvat infra triduum eidem Agneti Redwell 40s. et etiam a tempore partus & deinceps alimentet ipsum partum ut pater alimentaret filium. Praeterea dominus commissarius iniunxit eidem Johanni quod die dominica proxime futura vadat nudis tibiis pedibus et capite cum toga curta cum cereo ardente in manu sua more penitentis ante processionem circa ecclesiam Cath. Norwic'. Et tempore alte misse offerat eundem cereum ad manus curati clebrantis altam missam ibidem post offertorium. Et quod exponat causam sue penitencie huiusmodi in ipsa processione. Et ultimo quod solvat Reparacionem ecclesiae Cath. Norwic' 5s. Et habet ad certificandam de penitencia sua peracta die Lune proxime tunc futuro ac eciam quod solvat reparacionem ecclesiae parochialis de Estderham 5s."

"Agnes Redwall serviens supra(?) dicti Johanne Pynnes solutus notatur super crimine fornicacionis cum praedicto Johanne decimo die Julii in ecclesiam Cath. Norwic' Loco consistorii comparuit personaliter et fatebatur crimem. Cui dominus commissarius iniunxit quod die dominica proximo futuro vadat nudis tibiis pedibus & capite cum crinibus solutis ante processionem circa ecclesiam parochialem de Estderham cum candela ardenti in manu sua precii ld. et quod offerat eundem ad manu curati ibidem celebranti altam missam post offertorium."

G. Statutes of Bishop Henry Dispenser of Norwich (1373)

Dorothy M. Owen, ed. The Making of King's Lynn: A Documentary Survey. Records of Social and Economic History, n.s., 9. London: The British Academy, 1984. 134.

"Item statuimus et ordinamus ut singuli capellani annuellarum predicto priori seu custodi qui pro tempore fuerit saltem semel in anno scilicet antequam divina celebrent in dictis capellis et ecclesia obedienciam prestent corporalem et iuratoriam prestent caucionem quod ecclesiam parochialem sancte Margarete Lenne cum capellis annexis quantum in ipsis est omnino conservabunt indempnes nichil penitus quod ad eas seu earum custodis officium spectare debeat percipiendo aut retinendo seu in proprios usus aut alienos convertendo requestum oblaciones candelas seu alia que ad sacerdotem parochialem vel ipsas ecclesias pertineant absque prioris vel saltem parochialis sacerdotis licencia speciali usurpando."

H. French Synodal Statutes

Odette Pontel and Josep Avril, eds. Les Statuts synodaux français du XIIIe siècle. Collections de documents inédits sur l'histoire de France: section de philologie et d'histoire jusqu'à 1610, série in-8°, 9, 15, 19. Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1971-88.

1) 2:134 [17] Statutes of Pierre de Colmieu, archbishop of Rouen, 1238-44:

Quod non purificent focarias presbyterorum. Precipimus puniri sacerdotes qui sacerdotum focarias suorum sociorum vel etiam alias adulteras, seu focarias purificent sine licentia nostra, vel archidiaconi loci vel penitentiarii existentium Rotomagi.

2) 3:102 [1] Statutes of Nicolas Gellent, bishop of Angers, 1260-81:

Qualiter mulieres ad purificationem sunt admittende.—Intelleximus quod nonnullae mulieres, maritorum suorum exigente contumacia, ecclesiastico interdicto supposite, necnon plures ex fornicario coitu, seu de adulterio, aut alio illicito parientes, et purificatione post partum indigentes latenter seu clandestine ecclesias ingrediuntur, postquam sacerdotes missarum solempnia inceperint, se facientes a dictis improvisis sacerdotibus purificari. Propter quod statuimus et prohibemus ne qua mulier ad missam seu purificationem admittatur post partum, nisi per certum nuncium vel saltem in mane diu antequam pulsetur ad missam, vel die precedenti denunciari fecerit sacerdoti se velle venire ad purificationem, ut sic deliberacione habita a sacerdotibus, admittendas admittant et repellendas repellant, et hec denuncient sacerdotes parrochianis suis diebus dominicis et festivis in ecclesiis suis in synodo sibi esse injuncta.

3) 3:78 [7] Statutes of Nicolas Gellent, bishop of Angers, 1260-81:

De purificatione mulierum.—Prohibemus ne, eadem die qua benedictio nuptialis celebratur, mulieres admittantur ad purificationem, cum preposteracio videatur.

APPENDIX G

EXCERPTS FROM THE PENITENTIALS

A. Penitential of Cummean

published in: The Irish Penitentials. Ed. Ludwig Bieler. *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae*, 5. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1963. 108-135.

1) 2.30 (pp. 116-7)

Qui in matrimonio, in tribus xlmis anni et sabbato et in dominico nocte dieque et in duobus legitimis et concepto semine et in menstruo tempore continens fieri debet usque ad modum sanguinis consummandum.

He who is in [the state of] matrimony ought to be continent during the three forty-day periods of the year and on Saturday and on Sunday, night and day, and in the two appointed week days, and after conception, and during the menstrual period to its very end.

2) 2.31

Post partum abstineat, si filius, .xxxiii., si filia, .lxvi.

After a birth he shall abstain, if it is a son, for thirty-three [days]; if a daughter, for sixty-six [days].

B. Canons of Theodore

Published in: (Latin) Die Canones Theodori Cantuariensis und ihre Überlieferungsformen. Ed. P.W. Finsterwalder. Weimar, 1929.

(English) Medieval Handbooks of Penance: A translation of the principal 'libri poenitentiales' and selections from related documents. Ed. John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer. New York: Columbia University Press, 1938.

1) 1.14.17 (Finsterwalder, p. 308)

Mulieres autem menstruo tempore non intrent in ecclesiam neque communicent nec sanctemoniales nec laicae si praesumant tribus hebdomadibus ieiunent.

Moreover, women shall not in the time of impurity enter into a church, or communicate--neither nuns nor laywomen; if they presume [to do this] they shall fast for three weeks. (McNeill & Gamer, p. 197)

2) 1.14.18 (Finsterwalder, p. 309)

Similiter peniteant quae intrat in ecclesiam ante mundum sanguinem post partum id est XL dies.

In the same way shall they do penance who enter a church before purification after childbirth, that is, forty days. (McNeill & Gamer, p. 197)

3) 1.14.19 (Finsterwalder, p. 309)

Qui autem nuberit his temporibus XX diebus peniteat.

But he who has intercourse at these seasons shall do penance for 20 days. (McNeill & Gamer, 197)

C. Penitential of Bede

published in: Die Bussordnungen der abendländischen Kirche. Ed. F.W.H. Wasserschleben. Halle, 1851. 220-230.

1) 3.37 (p. 224)

Uxoratus contineat se XL dies ante natale domine vel pascha et omni dominica, IV et VI feria et a conceptione manifestata usque post natam sobolem, si filius est, XXX dies, si filia XL. Sed et in tempore menstrui sanguinis, nam qui tunc miscerit XL dies primo peniteat, qui dominico, VII dies.

D. Penitential of Egbert

published in: Die Bussordnungen der abendländischen Kirche. Ed. F.W.H. Wasserschleben. Halle, 1851. 231-247.

1) 7.1 (p. 238)

Mulier abstineat se a viro tres menses, quando concepta est antequam pareat, et post partum XL dies.

E. Excarpus of Cummean

published in: Die Bussbücher und das kanonische Bussverfahren nach handschriftlichen Quellen dargestellt. 2 vols. Ed. H.J. Schmitz. Düsseldorf, 1883. 2:611-645.

1) 3.15 (p. 614)

Theodorus. Similiter peniteat, que intrat in ecclesia ante mundum sanguinis post partum, i.e. XL dies peniteat.

2) 3.16

Qui nupserit et his temporibus XX dies peniteat.

F. Burchard of Worms, Decretum

published in: PL 140.1010

1) 19.140

Mulieres menstruo tempore non offerant, nec sanctimoniales, nec laicae. Si praesumpserint, tres hebdomadas poeniteant.

2) 19.141

Mulier quae intrat Ecclesiam ante mundum sanguinem post partum, si masculum generat, XXXIII dies, si foeminam LVI. Si qua autem praesumpserit ante tempus praefinitum Ecclesiam intrare, tot dies in pane et aqua poeniteat, quot Ecclesia carere debuerat. Qui autem concubuerit cum ea his diebus, decem dies poeniteat in pane et aqua.

G. The Bigotianum

published in: The Irish Penitentials. Ed. Ludwig Bieler. *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae*, 5. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1963. 198-239.

1) 2.9.3 (pp. 222-3)

Mulier .iii. menses debet se abstinere a viro quando concoepit ante partum et post tempore purgationis, hoc est xl dies et noctes, seu masculum seu feminam genuerit. Aliter lex purgationis dicit.

A woman who has conceived must abstain from her husband for three months before childbirth and during the period of purgation afterwards, that is forty days and nights, whether she has given birth to a male or female child. The law of purgation says differently.

H. The Old Irish Penitential

Edited by D.A. Binchy. In The Irish Penitentials. Ed. Ludwig Bieler. *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae*, 5. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1963. 258-277.

1) 2.36 (p. 265)

Anyone that lives in lawful wedlock, these are his rules of conduct: continence during the three Lents of the year, and on Fridays, Wednesdays and Sundays, and between the two Christmases and between the two Easters, if he goes to the Sacrament on Christmas Day and Easter Day and Whitsun Day. Also they are bound to observe continence at the time of their wives' monthly sickness, and at the time of pregnancy, and for thirty nights after the birth of a daughter, twenty nights after the birth of a son. They are also bound to go without bacon or fresh meat during the three Lents of the year.

Women do not go to the Sacrament when their monthly sickness is upon them. Anyone who has intercourse with them at such times does penance for twenty nights.

Persons living in lawful wedlock spend forty nights continuously in continence, without eating bacon or fresh meat, before going to the Sacrament, except at Pentecost: then it is only ten days. They live in continence also between the two Christmases and between the two Easters, as well as the Monday after the lesser Easter.

APPENDIX H

EXCERPTS FROM MANUALS OF CONFESSION AND PASTORAL CARE

A. Thomas Chobham, Summa confessorum

published in: Thomae de Chobham 'Summa confessorum'. Ed. F. Broomfield. *Analecta Mediaevalia Namurcensia*, 25. Louvain & Paris: Nauwelaerts, 1968.

1) A.5 D.2 q.2a (p. 277)

Ad alias autem oblationes non possunt compelli parochiani. Quidam tamen ex consuetudine ecclesie compellunt mulieres facere oblationes in purificatione sua et in nuptiis suis, et hoc videntur habere ex veteri testamento, quia etiam beata Virgo fecit oblationes institutas in lege, scilicet 'par turturum aut duos pullos columbarum'. Ista autem satis tolerabilia sunt.

2) A.7 D.2 q.2a cap.3 (pp. 338-9)

Quartus coitus impetuosus est accedere ad pregnantem vicinam partui, quia sepe inde contingit quod mulier oppressa facit abortum. Et constat quod ille qui ad talem accedit ob nihil aliud hoc facit nisi ut expleat libidinem suam.

Similiter periculosum est dormire cum menstruata, quia inde nascitur partus leprosus.

Similiter turpissimum est iacere cum muliere iacenti in puerperio dum laborat profluvio menstrui sanguinis, quia puerpera diu habent fluxum immundi humoris. Peccant autem mortaliter mulieres que in tempore illo viros suos recipiunt, et viri qui in tali tempore debitum exigunt, et debet eis iniungi penitentiae multo maior quam pro simplici fornicatione, de qua postea dicitur.

Item, qui multis videntibus cognoscit uxorem suam graviter et turpiter peccat propter scandalum, quia sicut dicit philosophus, multa possunt honeste fieri que non possunt honeste videri.

In omnibus autem talibus non sunt certe penitentiae assignate, sed secundum arbitrium discreti et prudentis sacerdotis sunt imponende, et in omnibus istis inquirende sunt circumstantie impulsive, et ostendende sunt cause periculi et cause scandali, ut absterreantur vir et uxor a talibus.

Verumtamen sciendum est quod si vir petat debitum ab uxore sua puerpera et ipsa timeat de lapsu viri, consilium est ut statim accedat ad purificationem et statim reddat debitum, quia dicit canon: 'si mulier eadem hora qua genuerit ecclesiam introeat gratias actura, nullo pondere peccati gravatur.'

Verumtamen cavendum est mulieri ne cum aliqua immunditia accedat ad altare. Unde etiam in lege veteri prohibitum fuit sacerdotibus ne in crastino intrarent sancta post illam noctem in qua dormierunt cum uxoribus suis. Iohannes etiam Chrysostomus dicit quod 'vir cum propria uxore dormiens nisi lotus aqua ecclesiam intrare non debet', et hoc semper fuit Romanorum consuetudo. Sed hoc credimus magis esse consilium quam preceptum. Turpe tamen est si aliquis cum fetore concubitus ingrediatur ecclesiam. Verumtamen in veteri lege potius prohibiti sunt sacerdotes ab ingressu sanctorum propter tales immunditias quam propter peccata.

3) A.7 D.2 q.10a (pp. 365-6)

Item, debet interdici mulieribus ne reddant viris debitum in tempore menstruo, quia ex tali concubitu nascitur partus leprosus. In lege autem domini tale crimen, scilicet dormire cum

menstruata, capite plectebatur, et ideo intelligitur mortale fuisse peccatum. Si dicatur quod sicut tenetur reddere debitum in lepra, ita etiam in menstruo, non est simile, quia menstrua transeunt, lepra manet.

Item, prohibendum est ne quis cognoscat uxorem suam in puerperio, sed si vir instanter petat debitum et illa timeat de lapsu eius, statim accedat ad purificationem et sic debitum reddat. Non enim est certum tempus institutum mulieribus purificandis, sed quando voluerit se potest purificare, sicut dicit canon: 'si mulier eadem hora qua genuerit gratias actura introeat ecclesiam nullo pondere peccati gravatur. Voluptas enim carnis non dolor in culpa est. In carnis commixtione voluptas est, in partu proles est gemitus. Unde prime mulieri dictum est: in dolore paries filios. Si itaque enixam prohibemus intrare ecclesiam, ipsam eius penam vertimus in culpam'.

B. Robert Grosseteste, Deus est

published in: Siegfried Wenzel, ed. "Robert Grosseteste's Treatise on Confession 'Deus est'." Franciscan Studies, 30 (1970): 218-93.

1) pp. 283-4

Item de tempore quaerendum, utrum scilicet in sacro vel non sacro, quia non etiam coniugatis licet omni tempore coire. Nam sacrum tempus quandoque impedit et etiam intentio, quia cum scilicet non possit habere spem procreandi prolem, ut si fuerit sterilis vel habens in utero, aut cum non intendat extinguere libidinem vel praevenire fervorem in alterutro, fornicatur. Status etiam impedit, scilicet si menstruata fuerit aut post partum non purgata aut infirma.

C. John of Kent, Summa de penitentia

London, British Library MS Royal 9.A.XIV

1) fols 225vb-226ra

Circa luxuriam queritur cum quot coniugatis ante matrimonium, cum quot post matrimonium habuerit rem. Similiter cum quot solutis ante matrimonium, cum quot post. Vtrum aliquot fuerint de genere uel de cognacione interesse. Vtrum de cognatis uel aliqui de genere suo. Vtrum ante matrimonium uel post. Vtrum aliquot deflorauerit. Vtrum interuenerat paternitas uel filiatio. Vtrum cum natis patris uel filiis patris. Vtrum cum uenialibus meretricibus ubi sunt plurima pericula. Vtrum in sacro tempore uel in sacro loco. Vtrum in tempore menstruum. Vtrum cum religiosis. Vtrum in puerperio ante p[er]urificationem. Vtrum modo indebito extraordinario /226ra/ ut contra naturam brutaliter. Vtrum per mollitie set latenter ut in tractu patet. Vtrum in dormiendo cum alia re quam cum muliere. Vtrum uicio sodomitico uel cum brutis

2) fols 226vb-227ra

(De coitu cum menstruatis)

Fecisti aliquo tempore indebito? **Pe. Mulier.** Quomodo? **Sa.** Vos mulieres scitis melius quam uiri tempus illud quo est maxime abstinendum. Hoc dicitur pro tempore menstruum quia erubescunt cum aperte interrogatur. **Mulier:** Quid est illud tempus domine. **S.** Bene scitis quod aliquando infirmantur mulieres et infirmitatem illam nolunt sciri a uiris suis, et ideo tunc magis debent abstinere ne ipsi percipiant. **Pe. Mulier** dicit, maxime si sit domigerosa: Domine que est illa infirmitas? **S.** Non bene noui quem, set a quibusdam uocatur flores. **Pe.** Domine, ut quid de tam uili re loquaris? **S.** Quia prohibitum est in lege ne tunc accedat. Et tunc tam patri quam matri

periculum est de infirmitate contrahenda que uocatur elefancia, et est periculum puero tunc genito ne uel in uentre pereat, uel si nascatur, morbum contrahat caducum, uel lepram, uel gibbositatem, uel contractionem, uel /227ra/ aliquid tale, ita quod malles eum mortuum quam uiuum, quia potest esse obprobrium toti cognacionis. **Pe.** Bonum est tunc continere et sepe hoc contigit mihi. **Pe. Mulier.** Tunc uiri nostri magis instant nobis nec audemus eis reuelare. **S.** Finge infirmitatem lateris uel capitis, et si nolit dimittere, dicas ei si accedat grauius eum peccatum esse. Et si esset benignus et de te priuatus, posses rei ueritatem timore periculi reuelare. Set tunc temporis quantum potes abstinere, et finge quicquid uerius poteris allegare ut desistas.

<**Sacerdos:** Ante purificationem contigit tibi tale quid? **Mulier,** Ita. **Sa.** Sic caue, quia consimilis casus in aliquibus potest contingere, ut in extinctione seminis, et infirmitate parentum, et prohibicione legisque transgressionem.

D. William of Pagula, Summa summarum

Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 293, fol 149va

1) 3.57

An mulier statim post partum poterit licite ingredi ecclesiam? Dic quod sic, tamen si aliqua mulier ex deuotione uoluerit per aliquod tempus se abstinere, benefacit, quia bonarum quippe mentium est ibi timere culpam, ubi nulla culpa reperitur, Extra, eodem tit., c. unico, et secundum glo., v. Dist., [C.2 'Si muliere'?).

An mulier que menstruum patitur reputatur imunda? Dic quod non, v. Dist., [C.4?].

An vir poterit licite accedere ad uxoris concubitus antequam mulier purificetur vel puer ablactetur? Dic quod non, vel nisi primo transierit tempus purgationis non debet mulier viro suo admisceri.

Et quid si mulier ex consuetudine menstruum patitur, an prohiberi debet intrare ecclesiam? Dic quod non, v. Dist., Ad eius vero.

Quod appellatur tempus ablactationis? Dic quod appellatur tempus post partum quando mulier habundat nimis lacte et nisi extraheretur per puerum oporteret ipsam infirmari, ideo autem prohibetur illis temporibus commisceri eis quia ex tali coitu nascitur morborum et leprosi.

Et quid si mulier petat debitum a viro tempore menstrui vel tempore purgationis, an vir debet reddere debitum? Dic quod non, nisi timeretur eius fornicatio. Item, si vir petat debitum tempore menstrui uxor negabit, et exponet ei causam, v. Dist., Ad eius vero, secundum Glossam.

E. John de Burgh, Pupilla oculi

from: Joannes de Burgo. Pupilla oculi de septem sacramentorum administratione. London, 1516. [Bibliotheca S. Clementis de Urbe (Roma)]

1) VIII, cap. v, E

Item vir cognoscens uxorem suam ante purificationem post partum non peccat mortaliter, et omnia capitula canonis quae videntur facere pro parte contraria ut v. dis., ad eius, xxxiii q. iii, si causa; xxxii q. iii, origo, et similia loquuntur de honestate et consilio. Sed vir qui uxori debitum reddit petenti illis temporibus non peccat: tamen de honestate et consilio est quod non reddatur: nisi timeatur multum de fornicatione ut indicta capitulo, ad cuius. Nota quod mulieres ante purificationem si velint intrare ecclesiam ad agendum gratias deo non peccant: nec sunt prohibende: si tamen ex veneratione uoluerint aliquandiu abstinere non est eorum deuotio reprobanda, liber extra, de purificationem post partum, capitulo unico.

F. Guido de Monte Rocherii, Manipulus curatorum

from: Enchiridion sacerdotum: seu Manipulus curatorum. London: Joan Antonium Bertanum, 1575.

1) fols 197v-198v

Tempore, idest, si in tempore menstruorum cognoscat eam, quia si scienter hoc faceret, peccaret mortaliter. Et in ueteri lege mandabatur interfici. Sed quid de muliere menstruata, numquid peccat sicut uir? Dico quod si uir tempore menstruorum petat debitum sibi reddi ab uxore, ipsa debet quantum potest ei persuadere ne petat, dicendo se esse infirmam, nec esse paratam tunc ad opus illud, non tamen debet dicere se esse in passione illa, nisi constaret ei de co[n]stantia uiri & prudentia seu discretionem eius, quia ipse posset tantum abominationem concipere contra eam, quod dimitteret ipsam, sed si constaret sibi de discretionem & prudentia uiri, posset ei reuelare, /198r/ & si ipse nollet desistere, reddat sibi cum dolore tamen & amaritudine cordis. Tempore, id est, si uxorem cognoscat temporibus ieiuniorum, uel diebus sanctorum, uel diebus communicationis, uel tempore puerperii. Non tamen credo quod in isto casu sit peccatum mortale, dum tamen non tra[n]sgrediatur limites matrimonii, sicut dicitur statim. Licet sint monendi, quod tempore tali abstineant ab actu carnali. Et de hoc habetur 33 q.4, Sciatis, & cap. sequenti. Mente, idest, intentione, potest enim uir accedere ad uxorem tribus modis. Vno modo, ut generet ex ea prolem quaesit ad Dei seruitium & cultum. Alio modo ut reddat debitum quod ab ea exigitur. Et si cum tali mente ad eam accedat, non peccat mortaliter, nec uenialiter, imo meretur, dummodo nihil aliud committeret ibi. Alio modo, causa concupiscentiae carnis, & si talis concupiscentia maneat infra limites matrimonii, scilicet quod nullo modo accederet ad eam nisi esset uxor sua, est solum peccatum ueniale. Si autem ista concupiscentia transgrediatur limites matrimonii, ita quod scilicet non accederet /198v/ ad eam tanquam ad uxorem, sed sicut ad mulierem, ita quod si haberet aliam in promptu ita bene accederet ad eam, iam est peccatum mortale.

APPENDIX I

PROOFS-OF-AGE: TEMPORAL AND GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION

Hearing Date	Place	Purif. Date	Hearing Date	Place	Purif. Date
1288	Buckingham.	1266	1355	Hertfordshire	1333
1297	Essex	1276	1356	Huntingdon.	1335
1297	Northampton.	1276	1356	Oxfordshire	1341
1297	Wiltshire	1282	1356	Wiltshire	1340
1297	Wiltshire	1281	1358	Sussex	1336
1297	Berkshire	1280	1360	Dorset	1337
1298	Suffolk	1277	1360	Herefordshire	1329
1298	Dorset	1282	1366	Warwickshire	1345
1301	Sussex	1280	1368	Somerset	1346
1305	Gloucester.	1283	1369	Cumberland	1346
1308	Wiltshire	1286	1369	Lincolnshire	1348
1310	Bedfordshire	1288	1370	Surrey	1348
1311	Essex	1289	1370	Somerset	1355
1312	Lincolnshire	1290	1370	Buckingham.	1348
1315	Kent	1293	1370	Cumberland	1355
1314	Cumberland	1293	1373	Devon	1351
1315	Kent	1294	1376	Hertfordshire	1355
1316	Devon	1295	1377	Lincolnshire	1362
1319	Wiltshire	1297	1390	Worcestershire	1368
1319	Northampton.	1297	1402	Bedfordshire	1379
1320	Essex	1295	1406	Lincolnshire	1383
1321	Oxfordshire	1300	1407	Yorkshire	1384
1323	Yorkshire	1301	1407	Sussex	1384
1326	Norfolk	1304	1409	Lincolnshire	1389
1326	Sussex	1304	1410	Yorkshire	1395
1327	Dorset	1305	1411	Lincolnshire	1390
1327	Leicestershire	1306	1417	Essex	1395
1328	Essex	1311	1418	Shropshire	1401
1328	Durham	1306	1419	Yorkshire	1397
1328	Southampton	1306	1423	Essex	1400
1329	Essex	1308	1423	Gloucester.	1401
1329	Kent	1307	1424	Essex	1401
1330	Northampton.	1309	1424	Essex	1402
1330	Dorset	1308	1424	Essex	1402
1332	Essex	1309	1424	Sussex	1402
1333	Somerset	1312	1425	Essex	1403
1333	Yorkshire	1318	1427	Essex	1411
1344	Dorset	1321	1427	Essex	1413
1346	Somerset	1324	1427	Norfolk	1405
1347	Dorset	1326	1428	Westmorland	1406
1349	Somerset	1328	1428	Sussex	1401
1351	Lincolnshire	1330	1431	Derbyshire	1415
1350	Lincolnshire	1329	1432	Essex	1417
1351	Surrey	1334	1444	Yorkshire	1424
1354	Nottingham.	1338	1445	Essex	1430
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