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The Moral Teaching of *Everyman*: an Original Synthesis of Rigorous Dogmas and Popular Spirituality

Corina-Petronela Untea

Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes- Sorbonne

La pièce de théâtre *Everyman*, montre à son auditoire comment mener sa vie. A travers les personnages mis en scène dans la pièce, l'auteur dramatise la réaction de l'homme universel devant la mort et la solution donnée par la religion chrétienne à ce conflit. Son récit prend parfois la forme de leçons de catéchisme adressées à un public peu sophistiqué. Le spectateur peut être amené à penser que l'auteur se limite à une présentation de la doctrine catholique dans la vision officielle de l'Eglise car certains dogmes, comme ceux du Purgatoire, et divers sacrements sont cités. Cependant, est-ce bien le cas ? Après avoir identifié les dogmes religieux sur lesquels l'histoire de *Everyman* s'appuie, j'ai analysé si, plus qu'une lecture stricte de la doctrine officielle catholique, il ne s'agissait pas plutôt de traditions empruntées à la piété populaire ou même à des principes précurseurs de la Réforme. Voici un exemple de mon étude : Le personnage principal, *Everyman*, cherche à éviter le Purgatoire par la pratique de l'auto-flagellation. Bien que le Purgatoire appartienne à l'enseignement de l'Eglise, l'auto-flagellation est une pratique qu'elle condamne. La pièce met aussi en évidence une des facettes de la pensée populaire et de ses traditions qui ont tendance à s'appropriier les hérésies en leur donnant une place dans les sacrements, puisqu'ici la flagellation apparaît comme le moyen d'acquérir le pardon divin après la confession. Ce qui est hérétique selon l'Eglise fait pourtant consensus dans la société mise en scène par l'auteur. A la veille de la Réforme, la pièce a le mérite de présenter une synthèse originale entre la doctrine catholique, la Réforme et la sagesse populaire.

It is known that in the Middle Ages the main source of inspiration for artists was Christian faith. One theme of great importance for Christian believers, the means of salvation, is explored by the author of the English morality play *Everyman*. While the theme of salvation is essential to Christian faith, it is understood in specific ways by different belief systems. By examining the play's account of salvation we are able to identify the forms of Christian faith which influenced its author. Was it the dominant Catholic faith, or a synthesis between the official faith and some popular ideas of that time? I will point out the doctrinal elements in the text of *Everyman* and consider whether they strictly follow Catholic dogmas or are mingled with popular piety or even with the early ideas of the Reformation.

I will argue that rather than an "Orthodox teaching on the matter of man's salvation"¹ the play contains an interesting blend of Catholic dogmas and popular piety, in the form of heresies and early Reformation ideas.

¹ Lawrence Ryan, "Doctrine and Dramatic Structure in *Everyman*", *Speculum*, 32 (1957), 722-735, p. 725.

The play starts with the monologue of God who, while looking down on earth, sorrowfully observes how people have forsaken him and his work of salvation. It is interesting to note that the author does not present a dogmatic account of God's work of salvation; he merely emphasizes what the ordinary people would have known: the Passion of Christ. But, as the Council of Ferrara² states (session 8 on the 22nd November 1439), the official Catholic account of man's salvation starts with the Incarnation of the Son, which is the first step toward human sanctification: God becomes human; he takes on man's flesh to raise it to its original grace. And, while the aforementioned council insists on the mystery of the union of divine and human being in the one person of Jesus Christ, and only briefly mentions the Passion, the play speaks solely about how much God suffered for mankind.

Maybe if our anonymous playwright had mentioned the mystery of the union of the two beings in one person, it would have been difficult for the audience to understand. He only implies it when he says that Christ suffered in his human body: "shedyng of my blode rede"³ (line 30), "with thornes hurt was my heed"(line 33).

The following verse, "I coude do no more than I dyde, truely;" (line 34), is a confirmation that the theological elements are reduced to human understanding. While the official Catholic faith holds that God is almighty and can do whatever he wishes, in this line God seems to be saying what a man might have said after trying in every way to solve a problem. The entire monologue of God has the shape of human reasoning. I do not question the dramatic and didactic value of this monologue, but, when theologians describe God, they either say that no human category is fit to portray him, or, if they give him some human attributes, they are presented in the superlative degree.⁴ This limitation of God to a human-like way of thinking is probably the result of popular culture which tended to give human characteristics to animals as well as to gods.

In the lines following these we may note that the virtue which, in God's perspective, is most lacking is the virtue of love. After observing the lack of love among people, God expresses his hope about the salvation of man.

² For the complete text of the council see Council of Ferrara part nine on the internet site <http://www.dailycatholic.org/history/17ecume9.htm>, 10 January 2009.

³ *Everyman*, edited by A. C. Cawley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961), Old and Middle English Texts 1, available at <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/conditions.html>.

⁴ R. G. Swinburne "God" in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Oxford University Press 2005. *Oxford Reference Online*, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t116.e1015> 13 January 2009.

The reference to salvation immediately after his mentioning the virtue of love points to a statement made during the Council of Florence (session 19 on 7th September 1434), to the effect that without love there may be no salvation.⁵

The following line concludes that although God offered them all the possibility of salvation, men refused it. Wanting to bring them back on the track of salvation, God sends his messenger to Everyman. We wonder why he chose Death as messenger. God has very many angels around him, but he chose to send Death instead. However, there is an internal coherence in this because, in an earlier line, the sins of man were seen as the origin of the loss of the company of angels. So for the insensible man fallen in deadly sins the presence of angels is something he is unable to apprehend through his senses. But for a man who lives without fear (“I must do iustyce, / On euery man lyuyng without fere.” lines 61-62) the most appropriate messenger is Death, a messenger that will make him fear the justice of God (“They fere not my ryghtwysnes, the sharpe rod.” line 28).

Another argument for the choice of Death as messenger could be that angels bring good news, while in this case, the announcement of death and of the need for reckoning is not joyfully received by Everyman (“O wretched caytyfe, wheder shall I flee, That I myght scape this endles sorowe?” lines 171-172). Nevertheless, in the Christian tradition we often read in the lives of saints that it is God, saints or angels who announce a holy man’s death⁶ because his death means transfer to the happy life of heaven. It is interesting to note that the character of Death does not reappear at the end of the play, when Everyman approaches his grave. This time Knowledge sees a cortege of angels singing and receiving the soul of Everyman (“Me thynketh that I here aungelles synge” line 891). Not only is Everyman welcomed by angels, but we witness Angel speaking to him. We understand from the Angel’s monologue that the purification and good deeds of Everyman have enabled him to enter the heavenly sphere where he will be in the company of angels and saints.

The message that Death conveys to Everyman is that he must undergo a pilgrimage in which he ought to bring with him a reckoning book of all his

⁵ Council of Florence SESSION 19, 7 September 1434, part three <http://www.dailycatholic.org/history/17ecume3.htm>.

⁶ Life of St Maximus the Confessor “After three years, the Lord revealed to St Maximus the time of his death (August 13, 662).” <http://ocafs.oca.org/FeastSaintsViewer.asp?SID=4&ID=1&FSID=100249> and Life of Saint Seraphim of Sarov “The Most Holy Virgin conversed at length with the monk, [...]. Concluding the conversation, She said to him: ““Soon, My dear one, you shall be with us.””, <http://ocafs.oca.org/FeastSaintsViewer.asp?SID=4&ID=1&FSID=100008>, 1 January 2009.

deeds. The playwright associates the moment of Everyman's death with a one-way journey. This is not an element of dogma, but a popular way of seeing death as a journey without return. In fact it seems to be a universal element of folklore around the world: from the Greek myth of crossing the river Styx into the kingdom of death, to the Romanian rites of alms-giving preparing the dead person for a long travel, or the Indian tribes believing that the dead make a journey to the Land of the Dead.⁷

When Death announced the pilgrimage Everyman must make and the book of reckoning that he has to take with him, Everyman wants to avoid it by bribing him. But Death answers "I set not by golde, syluer, nor rychesse,/ Ne by pope/emperour/kyнге/duke, ne prynces;" (lines 125-126). The enumeration of these positions of power that from a human standpoint might influence death includes even the Pope. We know that the Pope, the Vicar of Christ on earth, is infallible in his function. His inclusion in the enumeration might be an early Reformation critique of his authority. So, the author was to show that, because of Adam's sin every creature must die, no matter their function or social position.

Thereafter, persuaded that he cannot postpone his journey, Everyman looks for company in his voyage. This is a very common way of traveling, with a companion. In the spirit of *devotio moderna*, one would follow Christ's advice that if you are asked to accompany someone for a given distance you should go for twice the length asked.⁸ However, Everyman does not go to Fellowship assuming that he would apply this Christian percept, but knowing that Fellowship was always by his side "in sporte and playe" (line 201). In the end, Fellowship, the character symbolizing any terrestrial friend, lets him down. He does not accept to accompany Everyman in spite of his promises. This truly reflects a popular saying and wisdom: if someone claims to be your friends in times of happiness, but does not stand by your side in times of sorrow that person is not a friend. Everyman refers to the saying "a friend in need is a friend indeed"⁹, when he says "It is said, in prosperity men friends may find, Which in adversity be fully unkind."

⁷ Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, "The After-Life in Indian Tribal Belief", *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 83 (1952), pp. 37-49, pp. 39, 42 and 43.

⁸ "And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." Matthew 5, 41 in *Bible Works*, v. 5, KJV.

⁹ "Friend" in *A Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, edited by Elizabeth Knowles (Oxford University Press, 2006). *Oxford Reference Online*, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t214.e2774> 11 January 2009.

Another popular saying guides Everyman in appealing to the help of riches because “it is sayd euer amonge/That ‘money maketh all ryght that is wronge.’” (lines 412-413). Unfortunately, this popular saying proves not to be true for him. While money has power in this world, it is useless in the other world, where a just God, who cannot be bribed, rules. This might be a critique of the practice of indulgences, which by means of certain payments ensured the salvation of man¹⁰. Everyman wants to take his goods with him in order to buy his entrance into heaven, but as we observe, it is not possible.

The next scene shows Good Deeds advising Everyman to follow Knowledge, who leads Everyman to Confession. This character Confession is rather ambiguous to me. He appears at first as a cleansing river, then as a person living in the “house of salvation”, a metaphor for the Church. We guess that the man one can find in the house of salvation is the priest. However, a priest does not live in the Church; he just celebrates the Church services. The one that really lives in the house of salvation is Jesus Christ who is always present in the bread and wine in the tabernacle. The implication that Confession is not a priest, as if Everyman is confessing directly to God, is very important for our understanding of the play.

The fact of confessing directly to God without an intermediary is a practice that was condemned by the Church in the Council of Constance almost a century before the writing of the play. However, if we think that the Dutch *Elckerlijc* was written around 1470 and that *Everyman* might be a translated version of the Dutch original, it is possible that it was influenced by the heresies condemned by the Council. These ideas going against the official belief held that it was not necessary to go to a priest for Confession¹¹, as each of the sins made through bad words, deeds or thoughts could be forgotten after repenting in word, deed or thought. These wrong beliefs do not quickly vanish from people’s mind.

¹⁰ Indulgence is “the cancelling by the Christian Church of the temporal punishment still owed for sins after they have been forgiven. [...] They could be obtained by saying certain prayers or by performing specified good works, such as helping the needy, taking part in a Crusade, or giving money to churches. It was through the connection with money payments that indulgences were most open to abuse, and that they became a focus for criticism by Martin Luther and others during the Protestant Reformation.”; “indulgence” in *A Dictionary of World History* (Oxford University Press, 2000). Oxford Reference Online, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t48.e1807>, 5 January 2009.

¹¹ “If a person is duly contrite, all exterior confession is superfluous and useless for him.”, Council of Constance, SESSION 8 - 4 May 1415, <http://www.dailycatholic.org/history/16ecume2.htm>.

We understand from the text of the play that Everyman sees two different persons in his quest for salvation. At first he meets Confession and later he meets the priest offstage. When Everyman meets Confession he utters a long prayer through which he asks God to be forgiven for his “greuous offence” (line 587) and afterwards he makes satisfaction through the scourges given by Confession. Only after Confession may one receive Holy Communion. This is why after confessing on stage, Everyman goes to a priest to receive Holy communion and the sacrament of extreme unction. Although Everyman does not confess a particular sin, he mentions the sinful condition of mankind, which correlates with his universal vocation of representing universal humanity. So, Everyman’s Confession may be seen as a general confession, in which he cannot enumerate all the sins that man could commit, or else it would transform the play into something else. Instead of enlisting all the possible sins that human beings could commit, he merely asserts the sinful condition and the grievous offence, a phrase bringing together all human sins.

Those who argue that Everyman goes to the priest to receive the sacrament of penance offstage¹² do not make a clear distinction between sacraments. After confessing on stage, we do not see why Everyman would need to confess again offstage to the priest. Maybe he would need to receive the formula of absolution. However, there is no reason to believe that he confesses again or receives the formula for absolution which is not included in either of the two sacraments that take place offstage (sacrament of communion and the sacrament of extreme unction). When we hear Everyman’s words:

O blessyd God-heed, electe and hye deuyne,
Forgyue me my greuous offence [...] and
Though I be a synner moost abhomynable,

Yet let my name be wryten in Moyses table. (lines 586-587 and 595-596)

we may venture a further argument, namely that he is truly making a confession onstage. In the Middle Ages there existed the practice of public penance for public sins¹³ and because we see Everyman on the stage begging for forgiveness in front of the audience, we may consider this as a public confession, followed by the public penance of scourging or self-flagellation.

¹² Julie Paulson, “Death’s Arrival and Everyman’s Separation”, *Theatre Survey* 48:1 (May 2007) 121-141, p. 123.

¹³ Jean Longère “Confession” in *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*, ed. André Vauchez (James Clarke & Co, 2001).
<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t179.e676>, 14.01.2009.

Regarding self-flagellation¹⁴, the practice appeared in the 13th century and was at first accepted by the Church as a means of penance but later condemned as heresy and around 1480 the last flagellants were burnt. However, their way of penance survived in popular devotional practice and we find it in *Everyman*. Its inclusion could also have been influenced by the *devotio moderna* movement that incited Christians to imitate Christ in their lives.¹⁵ Further, the character Confession makes a clear reference to the imitation of Christ's Passion when Everyman is advised to suffer penitence through scourges

Here shall you receyue that scourge of me,
Whiche is penaunce stronge that ye must endure,
To remembre thy Sauyours was scourged for thee
With sharpe scourges, and suffred it pacyently;
So must thou or thou scape that paynful pylgrymage. (lines 561-565).

The fact that the playwright puts the act of self-flagellation on stage, rather than making it implicit, highlights his desire to touch the audience, to awaken the people to the seriousness of the matter of salvation. And, as Lawrence V. Ryan remarks, the scourging is here indeed the third element of the sacrament of penance, together with penance and confession¹⁶, completing the sacrament of Confession and enabling the Good Deeds of Everyman to have value. "Now is your Good Dedes hole and sounde, / Goyng vpryght vpon the grounde." (625-626).

Another theological element that raised interest in this scene of scourging is Everyman's final motivation for accepting this pain: "Now of penaunce I wyll wade the water clere, / To saue me from Purgatory, that sharpe fyre." (lines 617-618). Finally, Salvation is seen by the author of *Everyman* as the negation of Purgatory, the intermediate state between Heaven and Hell where it is thought that souls become purified in fire until the Final Judgment.¹⁷ By this time, the Purgatory has become a Catholic dogma and had been relatively recently strengthened by the Council of Florence in 1439. The Purgatory was the point of departure for the

¹⁴ Article "Flagellants" written by Raoul Vanegem for *Encyclopædia Universalis* 2008, accessed on line 12.01.2009.

¹⁵ "This consideration of the Scriptures was intended to achieve a profound identification with Jesus, especially in his suffering and death on the cross." See J. Huls, "The use of Scripture in *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis", *Acta Theologica Supplementum* 8 (2006), 63-83, p. 65.

¹⁶ Lawrence V. Ryan, "Doctrine and Dramatic Structure in *Everyman*", p. 729

¹⁷ "Purgatory", *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. E. A. Livingstone (Oxford University Press, 2006).

<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t95.e4775>,
15 January 2009

development of indulgences, strongly opposed by Reformers. It is interesting to notice that the word is mentioned only once in the play. However, the whole text is pervaded by the presence of the dreadful Pilgrimage of Death. What makes death so frightening is the fear of Purgatory. It only becomes less dreadful after the purification through penance, a purification that enables one to enter directly into Heaven. If at the beginning of the play Everyman asks about the possibility of coming back again into this world (“Sholde I not come agayne shortly?” line 149), after his purification the only thing he wishes for is never to come back, because what awaits him after his transformation through the sacraments is not Purgatory but Heaven.

Frendes, let vs not tourne agayne to this lande,
Not for all the worldes golde; [...] and (lines 790-791)
In this worlde lyue no more we shall,
But in heuen before the hiest Lorde of all. (lines 798-799)

After receiving the sacrament of penance, we see that in order to stay away from sin, Everyman must wear the garment of contrition. And to complete his transformation, to prevent himself from returning to his old habits, Everyman gives all his goods as alms. In this way Everyman’s goods become Good Deeds.

In almes / halfe my good I wyll gyue with my handes twayne
In the way of charyte with good entent,
And the other halfe styll shall remayne
In queth, to be retourned there it ought to be. (lines 699-702)

In these words we recognize the tax collector’s gospel words that marked his conversion, and we can suppose that this is another influence of *devotio moderna* which used texts from Scripture as models for Christian morals.

The so called “digression on priesthood”, is begun with Everyman on stage, participating in the first part of the discussion on the merits of the priests. After his departure toward the priest the debate continues, raising doubts about priests’ morals. This doubt and critique of the priesthood has been identified with the sign of the *devotio moderna* reform¹⁸ in the Catholic Church, which, seeking to improve morals from within, criticized priests who didn’t follow Christian morals, thus failing in the exemplary life which their role in administering sacraments imposed upon them.¹⁹

¹⁸ *Devotio moderna* recommended a more individual attitude towards belief and religion and was especially prominent in cities in the Low Countries during the 14th and 15th centuries. It is regarded sometimes as a contributing factor for Lutheranism and Calvinism. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devotio_Moderna, 20 december 2008.

¹⁹ Murdo William McRae, “Everyman’s Last Rites and the Digression on Priesthood”, *College Literature*, 13:3 (1986), 305-309, p. 305.

The purposes of the Council of Constance (1414-1417) also consisted in reforming the Church from within and to eradicate the heresies of John Wycliffe in Britain. The text of the Council cites 260 of them. One that is of particular interest to us is the assertion of John Wycliffe that a priest committing a deadly sin is no longer a priest by grace, but only in name. In the discussion between Five Wits and Knowledge on the priesthood, they mention the possibility that Everyman may encounter a sinful priest, but hope that he will find an honest one. This hope might imply the heretical supposition that a sinful priest cannot help people to approach God. We do not know what kind of priest Everyman did meet, but we guess that, since he is purified, it must have been a good priest; otherwise, the meeting of a sinful priest might have hindered Everyman's salvation.

Another way of understanding the playwright's choice to send Everyman off stage when the queries about priests were voiced is that if he participated in this doubtful talk about priests, he would probably have lost his faith. For we see a strong faith in the priest when Everyman attests before he leaves the stage that the priest has a power greater than the angels in allowing him to receive communion. It could be suggested from this that it is Everyman's faith that counts in making the sacraments valid not the personal virtue of the priest. But we are left still with the author's idea expressed through Five Wits that Everyman does not find a sinful priest. I would thus hold to this interpretation: the play echoes the heresy of Wycliffe in believing that a priest is no longer a priest if he is a sinner. This is stated rather blatantly when in enumerating the sacraments the author adds the qualifier "good" to "priesthood":²⁰

The blessyd sacraments vii. there be;
Baptym, confyrmacyon, with preesthode good,
And the sacrament of Goddes precyous flesshe & blod,
Maryage, the holy extreme vnccyon, and penaunce. (lines 722-725)

The teaching about sacraments is very limited in the play. We know that they are seven in number, as in the official Catholic doctrine of the Council of Florence. However, why did the author mention all seven sacraments if Everyman is a Christian, not needing baptism or confirmation? We may be sure that it was not for Everyman that the author mentioned all seven sacraments. It might be one of the replies addressed to those who failed to acknowledge all the sacraments, like the early supporters of Reformation. And if the sacrament of penance is mentioned, why does Everyman not go

²⁰ The phrase "priesthood good", might be also a condensed expression for the merits of the sacrament and of the ministration of priesthood.

to a priest but to the character Confession, which does not seem to be a priest?²¹

Perhaps, the fact that Everyman received its final rites on stage means that, as true mysteries, they cannot be shown to the public; they are a matter of intimate relationship between the believer and God. However, the sacrament of penance, as seen above, does take place on stage. For Murdo William McRae, the answer to the question of why the author did not show on stage the meeting of Everyman with the priest is that Everyman could have met either a sinful priest or an honest priest.²² It is interesting to note that Five Wits and Knowledge wish for Everyman to meet an honest priest, but do not actually ask him whom he met and what his encounter was like. And although they promised to be by his side until his death, they encourage him to go alone to the priest. If the last group of friends is indeed the allegory of Everyman's natural characteristics why do they not follow him for the sacraments? This is puzzling in the light of the Christian faith which affirms that man and all his senses are to be sanctified through the Holy Sacraments.

Thus, the universalizing purpose of the play prevent the two concrete possibilities of meeting either a good or a sinful priest from being shown: the author does not want to deceive his readers by suggesting that whenever one goes to see a priest, the priest is either every time a good priest, or a bad priest. But we still wonder why the characterization of the priest makes his appearance on stage impossible. A priest could have appeared on stage and the author could have left the conclusion on the worthiness of the priest for the judgment of God, because no man can know all the deeds of a man and judge him fairly.

When entering back on stage Everyman is welcomed by Five Wits who observes that our main character has made true satisfaction. This term is specific to the Roman Catholic theology and points to a step forward to forgiveness after the utterance of the absolution formula. The satisfaction was conceived as a payment of the debt that man accumulated by offending God.²³ So, this may be a response given by God through the voice of Five Wits to the prayer of Everyman to be forgiven for his grievous offence.

²¹ We cannot exclude the fact that the stage directions of the play can include a priest standing quietly on stage and granting Everyman the absolution.

²² Murdo William McRae, "Everyman's Last Rites", p. 308.

²³ Michel Deneken, "Satisfaction", *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*, <https://access-distant.sciences-po.fr:443/http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t179.e2574>, 4 January 2009.

Finally, reaching his grave, Everyman is ready to enter it and to start his new life in heaven. But his friends, allegories of human attributes, cannot accompany him into the grave. Seeing that they did not keep their promise to accompany him all through the journey, Everyman exclaims, in a formula characteristic of popular spirituality: “Wyll ye breke promyse that is dette?” (line 821). Even at the hour of his death, Everyman does not cease to be a human carrying a popular spirituality. In this way we observe that the path to salvation does not imply the elimination of popular knowledge, but the sanctification of men who become like God, Jesus Christ, and still remain truly human.

The last sentence of Everyman in the play is “*In manus tuas, of myghtes moost/ For euer, Commendo spiritum meum.*” (lines 886-887). These are also the final words uttered by Jesus Christ on the Cross. Through his pilgrimage, Everyman identifies with Christ suffering scourges and friends’ desertion, so that in the end, Everyman comes to a complete identification with Christ. Thus, the *imitatio Christi* preached by the *devotio moderna* as a way of life is put into practice by Everyman, which shows the audience that it is possible to imitate Christ as it is necessary for salvation.

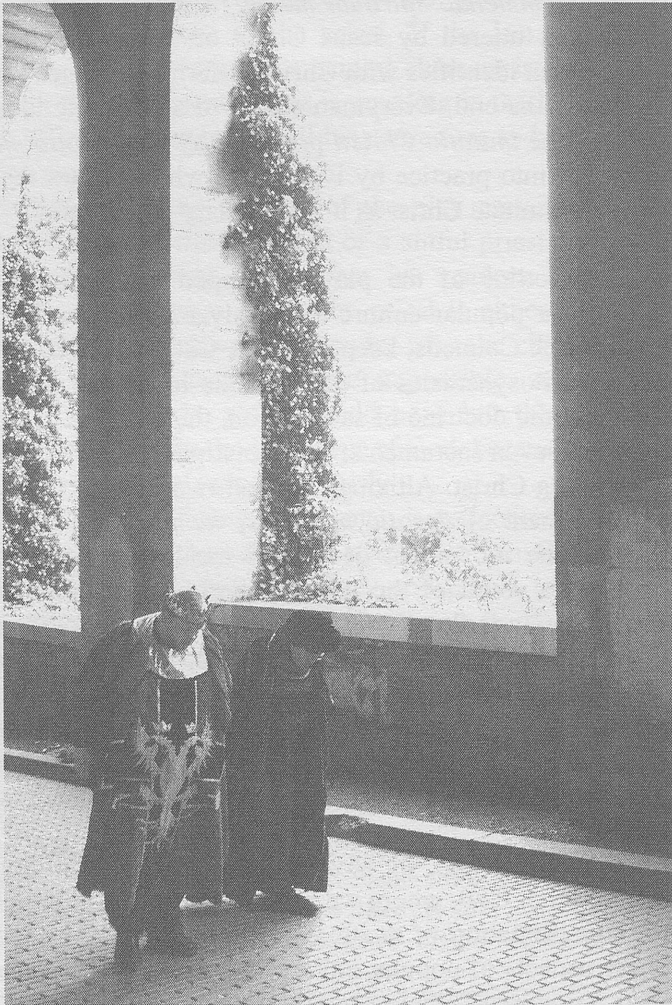
Following the plotline of the play, I stopped each time I found an element of dogma or popular culture and analyzed it within the historical context of the Church Councils, keepers of the Catholic faith. Thus, I have emphasized some idiosyncrasies of the Catholic branch of Christianity in the play. We recall the doctrine of satisfaction, the belief in Purgatory, the enumeration of the seven sacraments, the quotations from Scripture and the principle of imitating Christ. Although the last two elements pertain to the Reformation movement of *devotio moderna*, we may still consider them Catholic, because the movement developed inside the Catholic Church. This is, of course, a result of the major inspiration that medieval artists drew from the Christian faith.

However the artists were not theologians. So, the playwright mingled with the official Catholic faith some heretical features or early Reformation ideas: the critique of the authority of the Pope, the critique of indulgences and of the priesthood and the flagellation. These ideas are a witness of the persistence of wrong beliefs in spite of their official condemnation in Church Councils.

Respecting popular culture, we have found traces of anthropomorphism in the representation of God, whom we perceive to be reasoning like a man, we found the representation of death as a pilgrimage and also the use of proverbs. These aspects of popular culture, especially the use of proverbs, give Everyman an abstract character whereby he embodies the universal

man, but also a more human face, a measure of concreteness. And all through his pilgrimage and spiritual evolution we notice that he does not discard this human-like character, which means that sanctification does not necessarily imply a process of elimination of human features.

The synthesis of orthodox Catholic faith with heretical and popular ideas is a very precious statement about the circulation of ideas at the time, and a proof that their unity may lead to a highly polysemic morality play.



Goods et Everyman, scène du film *The Summoning of Everyman*