

Chapter 4

Sacred Space, Memory, and Materiality in *St Erkenwald*

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The late fourteenth-century miracle narrative *St Erkenwald* features one of the most dynamic, and disruptive, depictions of church-building in Middle English literature. The pagan temple, on which site Old St Paul's is being re-founded, is 'abatyd & beten doun and buggyd efte new' by a team of busy builders and merry masons whose endeavours unearth a marvel:

Mony a mery mason was made þer to wyrke,
 Harde stones for to hewe wyt eggit toles;
 Mony a grubber in grete þe grounde for to seche
 þat þe fundement on fyrst shuld þe fote halde.
 & as þai makkyd & mynyd a meruayle þai founden.¹

(Many a merry mason was made to work there, hewing hard stones with sharp-edged tools; many a digger in the earth sought the ground, so that the foundation from the first should have a firm footing. And as they made and mined, a marvel they found.)

Digging deep into the ground to secure the foundations for the new cathedral reveals a tangible embodiment of the Christian church's pagan past that demands to be recognised. Inside a 'ferly [wondrously] faire toumbe' (46) lies the uncorrupted body of a righteous pagan judge whose presence, miraculous reanimation, and conversation with Bishop Erkenwald throws the community into turmoil. This dramatic encounter raises fundamental questions about the relationship between Christian sacred space, history, and materiality, and it does so through its focus on the preeminent sacred site in medieval London, Old St Paul's cathedral. St Paul's becomes a representative sacred space for examining the complex history of Christianity in Britain but at the same time, the *Erkenwald*-poet uses the miracle narrative to reflect upon the cathedral's particular sanctity and status in late fourteenth century London.

In his essay 'Of Other Spaces', Michel Foucault argues that 'in the Middle Ages there was a hierarchic ensemble of places': 'sacred places and profane places; protected places and

open, exposed places; urban places and rural places'.² Terrestrial places were understood in opposition to celestial and supercelestial places, and Foucault concludes that 'it was this complete hierarchy, this opposition, this intersection of places that constituted what could very roughly be called medieval space: the space of emplacement'.³ This hierarchic ensemble of places is crucial to the liturgical creation of sacred space, which relied upon its differentiation from quotidian and profane space in the consecration ritual, as I will explain below. But in *St Erkenwald*, St Paul's cathedral also operates as what Foucault calls a 'heterotopia', a space that allows multiple, potentially conflicting sites to exist simultaneously.⁴ The pagan and Christian, sacred and profane, intersect and the St Paul's of the poem thrives on the narrative energy that this opposition and tension creates. Ruth Nissé has described *St Erkenwald* as a 'strikingly anxious work' and this anxiety is especially evident in the poem's treatment of the conversion of pagan temples to Christian churches in the opening of the poem.⁵ But while questions are raised about the integrity of a sanctity built on pagan foundations, ultimately St Paul's sacred identity is strengthened by bishop Erkenwald's successful resolution of the profane challenge posed by the presence of the pagan judge.

In the first part of this chapter I will introduce the poem, its context, and the concept of medieval sacred space that the poem both exploits and destabilises. I will show how the heterotopic nature of St Paul's enables the cathedral to embody and exploit multiple time-frames, from the Anglo-Saxon time of its narrative setting to the late fourteenth-century time of the poem's composition. St Paul's is both a sacred space and a memory architecture, a structure into which the poet can place Christian history in order for it to be categorised, examined, and – in the case of disruptive memories – resolved. Here I have recourse to the work of Mary Carruthers and her suggestion that the medieval church is 'a tool, a machine for thinking'.⁶ In *St Erkenwald*, St Paul's is instrumental in enabling the poet to think through Christian history, to cast light on the present state of the cathedral in the fourteenth-century

urban context, and to re-establish the close relationship between the building, its community, and the saint.

As attested by its lively depiction of church-building, much of the poem's imaginative energy goes into its exploration of materiality, from the pagan temples with their rejected idols to the depiction of the judge and his elaborate tomb. Anne Schuurman argues that *St Erkenwald* is 'very much concerned with the relation of material to spiritual reality' and in the second half of this chapter I will analyse what is at stake for the cathedral when the sanctity of its material form is called into question.⁷ I will begin with the poem's ambivalent representation of the conversion of the pagan temples before moving on to the pagan judge as an example of Jonathan Gil Harris' 'untimely matter', 'a trace of the then in the now'.⁸ I will argue that the discovery of the profane body, both out of place and out of time, paradoxically provides an opportunity for the present sanctity of St Paul's to be reinforced and its heterotopic nature to be resolved. The miraculous baptism of the pagan judge might not solve the knotty theological problem of the righteous heathen once and for all but the narrative focus on Erkenwald's role as bishop does promote the efficacy of the church's liturgical practice in sustaining the sanctity of the cathedral and protecting its community. *St Erkenwald* begins by asking us to question the sustainability of a sacred space with a pagan past but it ends by showing us how such an antagonistic history might be redirected to a sacred purpose in the hands of the cathedral's saintly bishop.

'In his tyme in þat toun': The Place and Time of St Paul's

St Erkenwald is a complex and subversive poem that both collapses and materialises time and space. Although written in a Northwest Midlands dialect of Middle English, it is clearly a London poem, focusing on St Paul's and its Anglo-Saxon bishop, Erkenwald. The poem may have been written in the 1380s to coincide with bishop Braybrooke's efforts to

reinvigorate and develop the cult of St Erkenwald at the cathedral and this would explain the poem's saintly representation of the bishop and the efficacy of his liturgical and sacramental practice, as I will discuss below.⁹ Erkenwald was a seventh-century bishop of London and the action of the poem is anchored in his time and place in the opening lines: 'in his tyme in þat toun þe temple alder-grattyst | was drawn doun þat one dole to dedifie new' (5-6) [in his time in that town the greatest temple was pulled down in part to dedicate it anew]. But the rebuilding of St Paul's is described by the poem as the 'New Werke' (38), a phrase which in fact refers to the thirteenth-century building work at the cathedral, not to the poem's seventh-century narrative time.¹⁰ The description of London as 'New Troie' (25), however, places the city in the late fourteenth-century, the time of the poem's composition, during the reign of Richard II when this sobriquet was popular.¹¹ The seventh, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries are telescoped together and made to co-exist simultaneously. Meanwhile, the pre-Christian past of St Paul's reappears in the shape of the tomb which emerges from substrata of the cathedral during the excavation into the foundations. The elasticity of earthly time in the poem contrasts sharply with the freeze-frame effect of sacred time as the judge's body remains immune from the normal processes of decay due to his righteous conduct. Sanctity is embodied and materialised as the poem's multiple timeframes and spatial identities coalesce in its representation of St Paul's.

The concept of sanctity that I am drawing on here comes, appropriately, from two timeframes: the modern theoretical work of Mircea Eliade and the medieval liturgical ritual for church consecration. Both foreground a sanctity that is tangible, performative, communal, and established in opposition to the profane. Eliade argues that in order to be made visible and to operate in the world, sanctity must be made manifest and he terms such a manifestation a 'hierophany': 'an irruption of the sacred that results in detaching the territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different'.¹² A miracle creates a sacred

space by marking out the place in which it occurs as ‘qualitatively different’ to the quotidian space that surrounds it and in *St Erkenwald* the miracle takes two interrelated forms, firstly the discovery of the miraculously uncorrupted body at St Paul’s and secondly, the miraculous baptism of the judge which secures his salvation. The uncorrupted body is not straightforwardly sacred, however, because rather than being the body of a saint, the *Erkenwald*-poet destabilises the hagiographic trope and identifies the body as a pagan. Eliade argues elsewhere for the fundamental ‘ambivalence’ of the sacred, suggesting that it is at once ‘sacred and defiled’ and this ambivalence is embodied by the pagan judge.¹³ As a heathen, he should be expelled from the sacred space of the church: profane matter has no place in the house of God on earth. Indeed, in the literature of pastoral care, the bodies of the sinful dead are often violently expelled from sacred space.¹⁴ And yet, although the judge’s body is profane as a result of his pagan status, his virtuous conduct means that he is not inherently sinful. His body is miraculously preserved and sanctified in order to make his virtue known and to provide an opportunity for bishop Erkenwald to address the conflict between pagan identity and righteous behaviour, and to espouse the merits of conversion. When the judge is baptised, his profane bodily form disintegrates but his soul ascends into the most sacred of spaces, heaven itself (341-9). The profane is contained in the judge’s material form, which crumbles to dust, and his sanctity resides in his soul, which transcends the confines of its imprisonment in hell and enters heaven. The presence of the judge is therefore an opportunity for St Paul’s to be rebuilt on miraculous and sacred foundations and for the church to fulfil its role as both the house of God on earth and the gate of heaven (Genesis 28. 17), even for an individual who appears to have no hope for salvation.

This visible, active, and performative model of sanctity is also deeply rooted in the medieval liturgy for church consecration. The ceremony established a church as a sacred space in three primary stages: firstly, the ritual procession around the walls of the building, lead by

the bishop and clergy, which marked out the church as a separate space; secondly, the performance of cleansing and purification rites to convert profane space to sacred space (including the expulsion of devils, the purification of the material building and its liturgical objects, and the deposition of the relics in the altar); and finally, the incorporation of the lay community into the church by the performance of a mass and the preaching of a sermon by the bishop.¹⁵ The consecration ritual not only transformed the building into a sacred space, it established a new church community housed within it, binding together the individual believer and the temple of God (c.f. I Corinthians 3. 16-17) through the ministrations of the bishop. The congruence between body and building has been discussed by Dawn Marie Hayes who argues that the aspersion of the building with holy water replicates the sacrament of baptism which incorporates the individual into the church community.¹⁶ St Erkenwald's baptism of the judge facilitates his entry into the heavenly community and, simultaneously, purifies St Paul's and its community from the contamination of profane, pagan matter. The procession at the end of the poem, when the church bells ring out over the city, reunites the community in celebration of the miracle and establishes St Paul's as the sacred centre of the medieval city (351-2). The consecration ceremony creates an ideal sacred space, entirely pure in its material form and housing a harmonious community, but as *St Erkenwald* and the situation at St Paul's makes clear, the reality of church history is far more messy and complicated.

Foucault's concept of the heterotopia is a productive lens through which to examine the representation of the medieval cathedral here. He defines the heterotopia in opposition to the utopia, a site 'with no real place' which represents society in a 'perfected form'.¹⁷ The ideal church as sacred space would be such a utopia, admitting no imperfections or possibility for desecration. But the heterotopia, by contrast, is a real place 'formed in the very founding of society', a kind of 'counter-site' in which 'the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted'.¹⁸ *St Erkenwald's*

depiction of St Paul's embodies this kind of heterotopic simultaneity because it is both pagan temple and Christian church, pagan burial place and Christian miracle site. St Paul's is therefore 'capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are themselves incompatible'.¹⁹ This extends to the poem's depiction of the layered material incarnations of the cathedral, from the Anglo-Saxon rebuilding to the thirteenth-century 'New Work', as well as its juxtaposition of pagan and Christian space. The heterotopia is a dynamic and active space in which 'real sites' are 'represented, contested, and inverted' and in the poem, this also includes the socio-political reality of St Paul's at the end of the fourteenth century. Thinking about St Paul's as a heterotopia, in which past history and present conflict can be worked through, enables us to recognise that the lived experience of sacred space is far more complex and entangled than the blueprint for the ideal church established by the consecration ritual.

This complexity is foregrounded in the language used to describe the tomb and its location which gestures towards many of the debates in which the medieval church was embroiled in the late Middle Ages, from the status of its visual and material culture to the role of its ministers. The 'ferly faire toumbe' made of stone and marble 'wyt gargeles garnysht' (48) [decorated with gargoyles] is reminiscent of fourteenth-century tombs, attesting to enthusiastic lay belief in the efficacy of burial in sacred space and the power of masses for the dead to save the individual's soul.²⁰ But the gargoyles, the 'roynyshe' [mysterious] writing that cannot be deciphered (52), and the description of the body as a 'quontyse strange' (74) [a strange curiosity], invokes Lollard critiques of elaborate church decorations which warn that intricate and curious designs distract the laity from their devotions and endanger their salvation.²¹ The discovery of the tomb certainly preoccupies and diverts the community at St Paul's but, once bishop Erkenwald returns, the poem's focus on his liturgical practice and the sacramental miracle that results reinforces the role of the church hierarchy in interpreting and

controlling sacred space and its material objects. The mysterious tomb recedes into the background of the story as the salvation of its righteous occupant takes centre stage. The community's inability to read the tomb becomes irrelevant as their bishop, who is inspired by the Holy Spirit, will solve the problem for them through efficacious sacramental practice.²²

The poem's use of the word 'sayntuare' is important here because it encapsulates the multiple anxieties that arise from the judge's presence. When the tomb is opened to reveal the body, permission is granted by the 'sextene þe sayntuare þai kepten' (66) [sexton who kept the sanctuary]. 'Seintuarie' is used to refer both to Christian sacred places and pagan temples in Middle English, thereby signalling the heterotopic duality of St Paul's, but it also refers to the legal right of sanctuary, a place in which 'a fugitive from justice could take refuge and be immune from arrest'.²³ This is especially significant in the case of the judge who, despite his righteousness, needs to claim the sanctuary of St Paul's if he is to have any chance of saving his soul. As Frank Grady has shown, however, in the late fourteenth century the sanctuary protection of London churches was less than secure. Sir Robert Tresilian, the chief justice of the King's Bench, was condemned *in absentia* by the Merciless Parliament of 1388 and despite seeking sanctuary at Westminster, was dragged out and executed regardless of this legal right.²⁴ Grady comments that 'evidently there was more than one story circulating at this time about a royal justice unexpectedly discovered in a venerable London church', but unlike in Tresilian's case, the pagan judge's claim to sanctuary is upheld and ultimately saves his soul.²⁵

St Paul's in particular was associated with London legal practice. Serjeants at law were assigned a pillar in the cathedral as a place to conduct their business, and their inauguration ceremonies included a procession to the shrine of St Erkenwald.²⁶ The sanctity of the cathedral acted as a powerful guarantee of truth and integrity when conducting legal business. The cathedral was 'a very civic, or secular space', as Caroline Barron has argued, but it was not always a harmonious one.²⁷ St Paul's, its churchyard and precinct, were frequently embroiled

in social disturbances such as fights and acted as the location for less than sacred activities, such as wrestling or football and, in the early modern period, as Callan Davies' essay in this volume demonstrates, commercial theatre performances.²⁸ Bishop Braybrooke famously attempted to cleanse the cathedral in his 1385 letter which promised excommunication for anyone caught desecrating the house of God by buying and selling goods, shooting at birds and damaging the stained glass, playing ball games, or defiling the cathedral or churchyard by defecation.²⁹ Christine Chism even goes so far as to characterise St Paul's in this period as a 'site of urban chaos rather than a sanctified space'.³⁰ In this context, *St Erkenwald* offers an ideal, utopic vision of the cathedral whose rowdy civic community is ultimately unified by the performance of a miracle that restores St Paul's to its status as a sacred space.

The poem clearly cares about the contemporary state of the cathedral, and the potential threat to its sanctity that its heterotopic operation might pose, and it employs an unusual amount of proximal deixis to repeatedly anchor the narrative to its geographical location and to create a close relationship between reader and place. This is part of the poem's strategy to create a sense of urgency and relevance, that the issues at hand matter here and now to the reader who is placed in grammatical proximity to the cathedral. This may be because the poem was written for the cathedral's guild of St Erkenwald, as Eamon Duffy has argued, or it could be an attempt to construct a closer relationship between the London population and the cathedral at a time when, as evidence from wills and the increasing popularity of parish fraternities suggests, the laity had stronger ties to their parish churches than to St Paul's cathedral.³¹ The use of proximal deixis makes sure that we understand what is at stake for the cathedral when the body is discovered. When the mayor tells Erkenwald about the discovery of the judge, he says: 'suche a lyche *her* is | has layn loken *here* on logh' (147) [such a body is here, that has lain locked up here below]. The mayor directly links burial in St Paul's with the honour of a place in communal memory: 'queþer mony porer in *his* place is putte into graue | þat merkid is in oure

martilage his mynde for euer' (153-4) [although many poorer people are put into their grave here, whose remembrance is marked in our burial register for ever]. But communal memory is precisely what has failed the judge because its Christian parameters do not admit the possibility of pagan virtue in 'þis place'. Deictic language, as Russell West-Pavlov explains, is 'the linguistic means by which a speaker anchors utterances in the concrete place of enunciation'.³² Proximal deixis in particular creates a relationship of familiarity and intimacy between speaker, listener, and place, and medieval preachers often exploited this relationship in sermons, referring to 'þis chirche' when they wanted to cement the bond between the congregation and their sacred space.³³ In *St Erkenwald*, the placement of the judge's body here in this place is troubling, because 'here' is precisely where it should not be. This anxiety goes on to permeate the exchange between Erkenwald and the judge which is full of deictic reference. Erkenwald commands him to 'answare here to my sawe [command]' and explain 'how long þou has layne here' (184, 187), the deixis reinforcing the judge's need to explain and defend his presence. He does this by reiterating his behaviour in 'þis londe' (200) in which he was 'iuge here enioynyd in gentil lawe' (216) [a judge appointed here in pagan law]. He was 'made a mayster mon here' (201) and 'deputate & domesmon [deputy and judge] vnder a duke noble | & in my power þis place was putte al-to-geder' (227-8). The judge 'iustifiet þis ioly toun' for forty winters (229) [administered justice in this youthful town]. His linguistic claim to a close professional relationship with St Paul's based on virtuous actions in the church and city could not be clearer. But deixis, as West-Pavlov argues 'never ceases to remind one of one's debts to the place in which one stands' and the judge's inability to pay the Christian debt to the newly consecrated sacred space of St Paul's is made all the more apparent when he describes the location of his soul in hell through the repeated use of the contrasting, distal deixis of 'there' and 'that'.³⁴

When Christ harrowed hell, the judge laments, 'þou laftes [left] me þer! | & þer sittes my soule' (292-3). He is exiled from 'þat soper so, þat solempne fest' in heaven (303) because

his soul sits ‘þer in sorow & sike ful colde | dymly in þat derke dethe– þer dawes never morowen’ (305-6) [there in sorrow and sighs with distress, dimly in the darkness of death, where days never dawn]. The judge’s soul is distanced from his body, from heaven, and from the reader, suffering in that dark pit of hell. The presence of the judge’s body in St Paul’s creates a connection to hell but the distal deixis keeps that profane place at arm’s length. When the judge is baptised and saved by bishop Erkenwald, proximal deixis of time is used to anchor the conversion in the contemporary moment: ‘ryȝt now to soper [supper] my soule is sette at þe table’ (332). This echoes the repeated use of ‘now’ in the poem’s opening depiction of post-conversion Britain: ‘now’ temples of Apollo are dedicated to St Peter (19); ‘now’ London is renamed New Troy (25); ‘now’ bishop Erkenwald is ‘of þis Augustynes art’ (33). This ‘now’ is framed as a time of successful transformation that extends to the audience’s present now as they read the poem. But if we examine the opening of the poem in more detail, it becomes clear that it is not so easy to turn pagan temples into Christian churches without retaining a ‘trace of the then in the now’.³⁵ And that trace, as we shall see, is not only preserved in the temples themselves but it is materialised in the ‘untimely matter’ of the judge’s body.

Sacred Space and Profane Matter: Transforming Pagan Temples and Bodies

St Erkenwald famously begins with the conversion of the British to Christianity by Augustine, a primary strategy of which was the Christianisation of pagan temples as described in Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*.³⁶ Rather than building new Christian churches as alternative sites of worship, Pope Gregory advised his missionaries to appropriate pagan sacred sites to the new faith, thereby capitalising on existing veneration for those sites and smoothing the path to conversion.³⁷ The *Erkenwald*-poet appears at first to present this as an uncomplicated process that is easily accomplished, but a closer look at the vocabulary raises questions about the integrity and success of the conversion.

He [Augustine] turnyd temples þat tyme þat temyd to þe deuell
 & clansyd hom in Cristes nome & kyrkes hom callid;
 He hurlyd owt hor ydols & hade hym in sayntes
 & chaungit cheuely hor nomes & chargit hom better.
 þat ere was of Appolyn is now of Saynt Petre,
 Mahon to Saynt Margrete oþer to Maudelayne,
 þe Synagoge of þe Sonne was sette to Oure Lady,
 Iubiter and Iono to Iesu oþir to Iames.
 So he hom dedifiet & dyght alle to dere halowes
 þat ere wos sett of Sathanas in Saxones tyme. (15-24)

(He turned the temples, which at that time were controlled by the devil, and cleansed them in Christ's name and called them churches; he hurled out their idols and brought in images of saints, and promptly changed their names and charged them to be better. That which had previously been Apollo's is now St Peter's, Mohammed changed to St Margaret or the Magdalene, the synagogue of the sun was allotted to Our Lady, Jupiter and Juno to Jesus or to James. So he dedicated and prepare all for the dear saints, that in Saxon times were the seat of Satan)

Temples quickly become churches through a process of arbitrary renaming. Margaret or Mary Magdalene, Jesus or James, the name itself is merely an alliterative signifier of Christian status, swiftly applied before Augustine moves on to the next church. This quickfire list is preceded by the violent expulsion of idols as Augustine hurls them out of the temples and replaces them with the saints; a move which, as Chism points out, chimes a little too easily with Lollard critiques of imagery of the saints.³⁸ How different from idols are such images, the poem seems to ask, if they can be substituted so easily? The seemingly arbitrary renaming of churches and replacement of idols subtly undermines the conversion process.

At first, the poet reinforces the ability of Augustine to truly convert pagan temples into sacred spaces by his choice of verbs in the passage – ‘turnyd’ (15), ‘clansyd’ (16), and ‘chaungit’ (18) – which testify to the liturgical and sacramental efficacy of his words and actions. In ‘cleansing’ the temples, he performs the ritual purification central to the consecration ceremony and the use of the terms ‘turnen’ and ‘chaungen’ hint at the fundamental change undergone by the buildings. As David Coley has argued, both verbs were used in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to describe the transformation of the Eucharist in which the

accidents of bread and wine remain the same but the substance becomes the body and blood of Christ.³⁹ Despite such language appearing to authorise the transformation that has taken place, the poet then declares that Augustine ‘chargit hom [the churches] better’. Morse glosses ‘chargit’ as to ‘bind by oath’ which at first glance reinforces the legal obligation in Augustine’s pronouncement, the temples are required to be ‘better’.⁴⁰ But the comparative is intriguing because although it acknowledges the improvement in the buildings’ status as a result of their conversion to Christianity, it does not entirely condemn their previous state. The buildings are to be better than they were, not entirely different and it is this lingering similarity that leads Erkenwald to decide to demolish the pagan temple and rebuild St Paul’s on new foundations. The converted churches may be different in substance but their appearance is still enough of a reminder of the pagan past to warrant destruction. The material signifiers of St Paul’s heterotopic history must be demolished.

The ambivalence that the poem creates over the conversion process is crystallised in the description of St Paul’s which was converted from the ‘temple alder-grattyst’ (5). The preeminent pagan temple becomes the most important Christian church in London but, as such, this means that the integrity of its sanctity is even more important. Bishop Erkenwald is clearly uncomfortable with the pagan history of the building and given what his builders unearth, he is right to be so. In the consecration ceremony, devils are expelled by the bishop and the material stonework of the building is aspersed, anointed, and dedicated because it is an integral part of sacred space. But this is the superlative pagan space, presided over by a ‘maghty deuel’ who is ‘dryghtyn derrest of ydols praysid | and þe solempnest of his sacrifices in Saxon londes’ (27, 29-30) [most dear god of the idols that were praised, his sacrifices were the most solemn in the Saxon lands]. Such profane space cannot be cleansed by a superficial renaming, the poem suggests; it must be materially conquered, ‘abatyd & beten down and buggyd efte new’ (37) [demolished and beaten down and built anew]. This is because, as a lively narrative from the

fifteenth-century preaching compendium *The Alphabet of Tales* makes clear, a church's material stonework must be entirely virtuous in order for it to be consecrated as a sacred space. In this exemplum, an apparently fair church has been constructed but, when the bishop and clergy enter the building to consecrate it, they discover a devil sitting on the altar who demands, 'why halows þou my kurk? Sese! for þe iuridiccion [jurisdiction] þeroff longis vnto me'.⁴¹ The building materials were purchased with the ill-gotten gains of a usurer and are thus impure, and so the church meets a destructive end when the devil sets fire to it. Every church building must be entirely free from sin and profane contamination if it is to be properly consecrated as a sacred space. Erkenwald knows this to be the case and in deliberately stripping the pagan temple back to its foundations, he removes the profane stonework before it has a chance to subvert the new Christian life of the building. But in doing so, he then has to confront a far more serious matter, the fate of the building's first inhabitants, represented by the virtuous pagan judge.

St Erkenwald, as Philip Schwyzer argues, is 'a poem about making repairs, and also about making reparations'.⁴² Schwyzer suggests that the miraculous baptism of the pagan judge and his incorporation into the Christian community is a way of the poem making amends for the violence done to the pagans during the conversion process.⁴³ It is significant that as Augustine sweeps his way through Britain, converting 'all þe comunates [people] to Cristendame newe', no mention is made of the individual pagans whose temples are so aggressively transformed. And there is of course no mention of the judge in any of the records or chronicles in the cathedral library, which generates the 'cry aboute a cors' once the body is discovered (110) because it cannot be located within communal memory. The reparation that the poem attempts to make for the colonisation of pagan temples is achieved through the judge's miraculous entry into the Christian community but not before fundamental questions have been raised about the relationship between materiality and sanctity, personal virtue and

salvation. In Christian religious culture, miraculous resistance to decay denotes a sanctity centred upon personal virtue that is not merely based on good works but on strong, active Christian faith. What the poem presents us with is a sanctity that inheres in good works and secular virtue – the judge’s commitment to justice – but due to the judge’s heathen status, his miraculous preservation in a Christian church is incongruous and unsettling. The judge’s body is ‘untimely matter’ because it is a reminder of the pagan ‘then’ in the Christian ‘now’ and because it is insistently material and active in the present narrative. Harris explains that ‘once the past is no longer regarded as having passed but is instead understood to reside in the now, we can start to take stock of its agency’; the past is no longer seen as ‘dead and buried, or even as a spectral visitor from the beyond the grave but as alive and active’.⁴⁴ And what this means is that the material remains of that which has been superseded has the ability to ‘call into question the very progress it is enlisted to facilitate’.⁴⁵ The conversion of pagan temples may have been successful but the Christian church does not merely reside in buildings alone; the temple of God is also to be found in its people, and the poem implies that not all pre-Christian people are automatically worthy of damnation. The body of the judge enables Erkenwald to converse with, and subsequently convert, a representative of the pagan past but until the miraculous baptism takes place, the presence of the pagan body remains a threat to sacred space.

One of the difficulties of holy matter in the Middle Ages was, as C. M. Woolgar argues, ‘the scale and diversity of material that might be involved: anything might become holy’.⁴⁶ In the case of *St Erkenwald*, that ‘anything’ extends to the very stuff that should be in complete antipathy to the sacred: the profane body of a pagan. The judge’s body is not only fundamentally ‘untimely’, it is also unholy and out of place. And yet because the sacred is established in opposition to the profane, this ambivalent matter – sacred because the object of a miracle and profane because non-Christian – creates an opportunity for the sacred order to be

made manifest and to be powerfully reinforced in the cathedral by its bishop. Mary Douglas argues that while the profane pollutes, contaminates, and creates disorder, 'it also provides the material of pattern' and in bishop Erkenwald's encounter with the pagan judge, the sacramental power of the Christian church emerges victorious in the face of pagan profanation.⁴⁷

Just as the buildings were converted from pagan temples to Christian churches, the judge's body transitions from untimely, unholy matter to the object of a miracle courtesy of bishop Erkenwald. Burial of the dead in consecrated space was a crucial strategy in protecting the body and soul of the deceased and signalling their importance in the community as only the ecclesiastical hierarchy and social elite could be buried in the church. The living community promised to pray for the dead, remember them, and ensure that their resting places remained sacred and undefiled. The presence of the judge's body, however, imperils the community at St Paul's, both living and dead, not only because he has been forgotten but because Erkenwald, as bishop, is responsible for the fate of his soul. When he wishes for the judge to be resuscitated long enough to be baptised, he remarks: 'þen þof þou droppyd down dede hit *daungerde* me lasse' (320, italics mine) [then although you dropped down dead, it endangered me the less].⁴⁸ If the judge remained unbaptised, Erkenwald's personal salvation and professional status might be at risk. Erkenwald's ecclesiastical position is stressed throughout the poem as both the narrator and judge refer to him repeatedly as 'bisshop'.⁴⁹ Erkenwald is responsible for the sacred status of St Paul's and its community, just as the bishop played the fundamental role in the consecration liturgy as the representative of Christ himself. The poem's depiction of Erkenwald's response to the discovery of the body foregrounds the vital role that the sacramental performance of the bishop plays in sustaining the connection between the people and St Paul's. This strategy has two interrelated aims: the universal and the local. As Woolgar notes, in general terms 'the interests of the Church were [...] in keeping the holy as far as possible in ecclesiastical hands, and also in establishing itself as the arbiter of what is holy'.⁵⁰

But at St Paul's in particular, as Chism has shown, the ecclesiastical hierarchy wanted to reassert their authority at a time when relations with the London laity were increasingly tense due, for example, to the 1381 Rising and the increase in Lollard activity.⁵¹ The dignified, authoritative, and sacramentally efficacious response of bishop Erkenwald establishes the cathedral as a strong and stable centre of authority.

The discovery of the judge sends the community at St Paul's into uproar and Erkenwald rushes back to the city from his visitation duties elsewhere (109-10). The miracle brings the entire community into the cathedral, from burgesses to apprentices, masters and messengers, representing a microcosm of medieval London society (58-64). 'Mony hym metten on þat meere þe meruayle to tell' (114) [on his mare, many met him to tell him the marvel] but Erkenwald resists being drawn into the fray and instead shuts himself away in his episcopal palace and prays for divine revelation:

'þaghe I be vnworthi,' al wepand he sayde
 Thurghe his deere debonerte, 'digne hit, my lorde,
 In confirmyng þi Cristen faith fulsen me to kenne
 Þe mysterie of þis meruaile þat men opon wondres.'
 & so long he grette after grace þat he graunte hade
 An ansuare of þe Holy Goste, & afterwarde hit dawid
 Mynster dores were makyd opon quen matens were songen. (122-128)

('Although I am unworthy,' he said, entirely weeping in his dear humility, 'Grant this, my Lord, in confirming the Christian faith, help me to understand the mystery of this marvel that men wonder upon.' And so long he lamented and yearned for grace that he was granted an answer from the Holy Ghost, and afterwards the day dawned and the minster doors were opened when Matins was sung.')

It is only after the Holy Ghost has granted Erkenwald an answer that the cathedral doors are opened and he enters St Paul's. Empowered and protected by divine revelation, Erkenwald processes into the sacred space robed as a bishop but, rather than immediately seeking out the tomb, he performs a mass:

Þe byschop hym shope solemply to synge þe heghe masse:
 Þe prelate in pontificals was prestly atyrid.

Manerly wyt his ministres þe masse he begynnes
 Of Spiritus Domini for his spede on sutile wise
 Wyt queme questis of þe quere, wyt ful quaynt notes. (129-33)

(The bishop prepared himself ceremoniously to sing the high mass, the prelate was promptly dressed in his episcopal robes. With his ministers in an appropriate fashion, he began the Mass, the Spiritus Domini, he prayed for his success in a subtle manner, with the pleasant and elegant notes of the choir.)

‘Spiritus Domini’, as Ruth Morse points out, are the opening words of the Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit.⁵² Votive masses were performed in special circumstances, rather than being linked to the liturgical calendar, and Morse argues that the mass is chosen by Erkenwald for its ‘reliance on the efficacy of the Holy Spirit’ and the relevance of its second lesson from John 14. 23-31. I would argue, however, that the mass is especially potent at this moment in the poem because of its focus on baptism and the descent of the Holy Spirit on the disciples at Pentecost. The first lesson is from Acts 8. 14-17 when Peter and John visit Samaria because, although the people are baptised, the Holy Spirit has not yet come upon them. This looks forward to the moment at which the St Paul’s community are reconfirmed in their faith following Erkenwald’s performance of the miracle through the power of the Holy Spirit. The communion at the end of the mass comes from Acts 2 and describes the moment when the Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost and the disciples began to speak of the wonders of God (Acts 2. 1-11).⁵³ Pentecost is understood to be the birth of the Church community and here Erkenwald’s choice of Mass reminds us of what is at stake in his encounter with the pagan judge. The sanctity and cohesion of the cathedral community hang in the balance but thanks to bishop Erkenwald, only temporarily. The miracle at the end of the poem saves the judge’s soul, purges St Paul’s of profane matter and reconfirms its status as a sacred space, and reunites the community in celebration of a new memory that will be added to the cathedral’s history: the power of the bishop in his church to resolve the ‘cry about a cors’ (110).

Making Memories

In *St Erkenwald*, church-building and poetic composition goes hand in hand. To return to the quotation with which I began, the poet exploits the relationship between material and verbal handiwork when he uses the verb ‘maken’ to describe the builders’ endeavours: ‘as þai makkyd and mynyd [mined] a meruayle þai founden | as 3et in crafty cronecles is kydde [recalled] þe memorie’ (43-44). ‘To make’ in Middle English means to build and to compose, and the poet reminds us that the new story of the miracle at St Paul’s is already held in memory, indeed in the very memory of the poem itself.⁵⁴ Medieval culture, as Mary Carruthers has shown, is ‘fundamentally memorial’ and *St Erkenwald* dramatises the complexities of locating, categorising, and dealing with memories of a past that sits uncomfortably with the present order.⁵⁵ Recollection, Carruthers argues, is never a neutral act of remembering but a re-enactment of the original material and the poem re-enacts the pagan past of St Paul’s at the same time as it tries to forget it. *Erkenwald*’s baptism of the judge represents a personal re-enactment of Augustine’s conversion of the pagan temples and enables the community at St Paul’s to confront and rectify not only the failure of communal memory to recall the judge, but to enact a new memory that purifies the cathedral’s pagan foundations. As Carruthers points out, ‘mere erasure is not a successful means of forgetting’, the past must be replaced with a powerful and detailed present performance.⁵⁶ ‘Crowding’ out memories and ‘overlying’ them with new images means that the undesirable past will be ‘blocked or absorbed by the overlay’.⁵⁷ This is precisely what the poem does when the troubling appearance of the judge’s tomb and body are crowded out by the miracle of the judge’s baptism. *Erkenwald*’s encounter with the judge reanimates the site of the cathedral with a powerful memory of sacramental power and salvation that overlays both the memory of St Paul’s former pagan identity and the problematic miracle of the profane, pagan identity of the uncorrupted body. The reparation due to the pagan past is therefore achieved through the absorption of the judge into Christianity and the

submergence of the cathedral's heterotopic past which, nevertheless, the poem paradoxically commemorates and enshrines.

Church buildings are a site of layered cultural memory – of Christian history, of the histories of individual communities – and they are often, as in the case of Old St Paul's at the end of the fourteenth century, in need of renewal and reinvigoration. In *St Erkenwald*, the conflicted history of British Christianity is materialised in the building and as a result of the liturgical practice of bishop Erkenwald, St Paul's is purged of its profane past and its status as a preeminent Christian sacred space is confirmed. The poem reconfirms the authority of St Paul's, its saint, and its ecclesiastical hierarchy at a time when, as bishop Braybrooke recognised, the house of God was troubled by socio-political upheaval and profane misuse. The cathedral becomes a 'tool, a machine for thinking', in Carruthers's terms, and it enables the *Erkenwald*-poet both to think through the particular heterotopic history of St Paul's and to raise important questions about the relationship between materiality and spirituality, the miraculous and the profane, and how sacred space is defined and preserved in the later Middle Ages.

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This article is dedicated to the memory of Stephanie Dumke (1981-2018), a brilliant scholar and a very dear friend. I would like to thank Johannes Wolf for his feedback on an earlier draft of this chapter.

¹ *St Erkenwald*, ed. by Ruth Morse (Cambridge: Brewer, 1975), lines 39-43. All subsequent quotations refer to this edition by line number. All translations are my own, with reference to Morse's glossary.

² Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', trans. by Jay Miskowicz, *Diacritics*, 16.1. (1986), 22-27 (p. 22).

³ Foucault, p. 22.

⁴ Foucault, p. 24.

⁵ Ruth Nissé, "'A Coroun Ful Riche": The Rule of History in *St Erkenwald*', *ELH*, 65 (1998), 277-95 (p. 277).

⁶ Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 276.

⁷ Anne Schuurman, 'Materials of Wonder: Miraculous Objects and Poetic Form in *Saint Erkenwald*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 39 (2017), 275-96 (p. 276).

⁸ Jonathan Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), p. 29. Cynthia Turner Camp also relates Harris's notion of untimely matter to the uncorrupted body in medieval texts, including *St Erkenwald*, arguing that such a body functions to destabilise 'the supercessionary relationship of present to past', see 'The Temporal Excesses of Dead Flesh', *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies*, 4 (2013), 416-26 (p. 419).

⁹ Eamon Duffy, 'St Erkenwald: London's Cathedral Saint and His Legend', in *The Medieval English Cathedral: Papers in Honour of Pamela Tudor-Craig, Proceedings of the 1998 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. by Janet Backhouse (Donington: Tyas, 2003), pp. 150-67, p. 153.

¹⁰ See Richard Morris, 'The New Work at Old St Paul's Cathedral and its Place in English Thirteenth Century Architecture', in *Medieval Art, Architecture, and Archaeology in London*, ed. by Lindy Grant (London: British Archaeological Association, 1990), pp. 74-100, and Monika C. Otter, "'New Werke": *St Erkenwald*, St Albans, and the Medieval Sense of the Past', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 24 (1994), 387-414.

¹¹ For the Ricardian resonances of the poem, see Nissé, and Frank Grady, 'St Erkenwald and the Merciless Parliament', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 22 (2000), 179-211.

¹² Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (Orlando: Harcourt, 1987), p. 26.

¹³ Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. by Rosemary Sheed (London: Sheed and Ward, 1958), pp. 14-15.

¹⁴ See Laura Varnam, *The Church as Sacred Space in Middle English Literature and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), pp. 155-59.

¹⁵ See Varnam, pp. 33-60.

¹⁶ Dawn Marie Hayes, *Body and Sacred Place in Medieval Europe 1100-1389* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 3.

¹⁷ Foucault, p. 24.

¹⁸ Foucault, p. 24.

¹⁹ Foucault, p. 24.

²⁰ Christine Chism notes the parallels with the fourteenth-century shrine of St Erkenwald himself in St Paul's, see *Alliterative Revivals* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), p. 58.

²¹ For the Lollard critique of church buildings and decorations, see Varnam pp. 202-3 and 209-16.

²² Chism reads this as a reflection of the desires of the fourteenth-century administration at St Paul's to control an increasingly independent laity and 'manoeuvre them into dependency on the bishop's interpretive power', p. 58.

²³ MED s. v. 'seintuarie' 2b), 2c), 3.

- ²⁴ Grady, pp. 189-91.
- ²⁵ Grady, p. 190.
- ²⁶ Duffy, p. 154.
- ²⁷ Caroline M. Barron, 'London and St Paul's Cathedral in the Later Middle Ages', in *The Medieval English Cathedral*, pp. 126-49, p. 134.
- ²⁸ Barron, pp. 134-137 on the variety of activities taking place at St Paul's from the end of the fourteenth century. See Callan Davies's chapter in this volume on commercial theatre and Benjamin King-Cox and Daniel Starza Smith's chapter on the churchyard as a key locus of the London book trade from the fourteenth century onwards.
- ²⁹ Sir William Dugdale, *A History of St Paul's Cathedral* (London: George James, 1716), p. 24.
- ³⁰ Chism, p. 55 and pp. 54-59.
- ³¹ Duffy pp. 163-65. On wills and fraternities, see Barron, pp. 131-32 and 138-40 respectively.
- ³² Russell West-Pavlov, *Spaces of Fiction / Fictions of Space: Postcolonial Place and Literary DeiXis* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 2.
- ³³ For a discussion of this technique see Varnam, pp. 131-2.
- ³⁴ West-Pavlov, p. 51.
- ³⁵ Gil Harris, p. 29.
- ³⁶ Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. by Judith McClure and Roger Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 56-57.
- ³⁷ The colonial implications of this strategy are discussed by Philip Schwyzer, *Archaeologies of English Renaissance Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 36-59.
- ³⁸ Chism, pp. 50-54.
- ³⁹ David Coley, 'Baptism as Eucharist: Orthodoxy, Wycliffism, and the Sacramental Utterance in *Saint Erkenwald*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 107 (2008), 327-47 (pp. 340-43). Conversely, Chism argues that the vocabulary of turning and perverting echo Lollard critiques of ecclesiastical practice, pp. 52-53.
- ⁴⁰ Morse, p. 87; c.f. *MED* s.v. 'chargen' 10. Here I take line 18 to refer to the renaming of the churches, rather than as a continuation of the fate of the idols which are hurled out of the church in the previous line.
- ⁴¹ *The Alphabet of Tales*, ed. by Mary Macleod Banks, EETS OS 126-7 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, and Trübner, 1904-5), p. 199.
- ⁴² Schwyzer, p. 44.
- ⁴³ Schwyzer, pp. 53-4.
- ⁴⁴ Gil Harris, p. 31.
- ⁴⁵ Gil Harris, p. 31.
- ⁴⁶ C. M. Woolgar, 'What Makes Things Holy? The Senses and Material culture in the Later Middle Ages', in *Sensing the Sacred in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, ed. by Robin Macdonald, Emilie K. M. Murphy, and Elizabeth L. Swann (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), pp. 61-78, p. 70.
- ⁴⁷ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 95.
- ⁴⁸ For a fuller discussion of the implications of 'daungerde' see Frank Grady, 'Looking Awry at *St Erkenwald*', *Exemplaria*, 23 (2011), 105-25 (pp. 106-111). For a more ambivalent reading of *Erkenwald*'s sacramental practice, see Jennifer L. Sisk, 'The Uneasy Orthodoxy of *St Erkenwald*', *ELH*, 74 (2007), 89-115.
- ⁴⁹ E.g. lines 4, 33, 105, 110, 129, 142, 159, 193.
- ⁵⁰ Woolgar, p. 67.
- ⁵¹ Chism, pp. 42-47.
- ⁵² Morse, p. 69, n. 132.

⁵³ *The Sarum Missal in English Part II*, ed. by Vernon Staley (London: The De La More Press, 1911), pp. 59-62.

⁵⁴ MED s.v. 'maken' 2 and 5.

⁵⁵ Carruthers, p. 9.

⁵⁶ Carruthers, p. 54.

⁵⁷ Carruthers, p. 57.