

A PRAYER OF PICUS MIRANDULA UNTO GOD

O holy God of dreadful majesty,
Verily one in three and three in one,
Whom angels serve, Whose work all creatures be,
Which heaven and earth directest all alone,
We Thee beseech, good Lord, with woeful moan,
Spare us wretches and wash away our guilt,
That we be not by Thy just anger spilt.

In strait¹ balance of rigorous judgment
If Thou shouldst our sin ponder and weigh:
Who able were to bear Thy punishment?
The whole engine² of all this world, I say,
The engine that endure shall for aye,
With such examination might not stand
Space of a moment in Thine angry hand.

Who is not born in sin original?
Who doth not actually sin in sundry wise?
But thou, good Lord, art he that sparest all,
With piteous mercy tempering justice:
For as thou dost reward us device³
About our merit / so dost thou dispense
Thy punishment far under our offence.

More is thy mercy far than⁴ all our sin,
To give them also that unworthy be,
More godly is and more mercy therein,
Howbeit worthy enough are they pardee,⁵
Be they never so unworthy, whom that he
Chooses⁶ to accept, which where so ever he taketh,
Whom he unworthy findeth, worthy maketh.

Wherefore, Good Lord, that always⁷ merciful art,
Unto thy grace and sovereign dignity,
We silly⁸ wretches cry with humble heart

¹ "In collocation with narrow, especially in phrase straight and narrow path, a course of conventionally moral and law-abiding behavior" (OED).

² As noted, "engine" can mean "a snare, wile; also, in weaker sense, an appliance, means" (OED). Here More means the temptations or snares of the world.

³ "Device" means "the action of devising, contriving, or planning; the faculty of devising, inventive faculty; invention, ingenuity" (OED). In context, 'God does reward us, planning on our merit.'

⁴ "Far than" replaces the original "farre then."

⁵ "Pardee" is a variant of "pardie," which means "a form of oath:= 'By God!'; hence as an asseveration: Verily, certainly, assuredly, indeed" (OED).

⁶ "Chooses" replaces the original "list."

⁷ "Always" replaces "ay."

⁸ The original word is "sely," which is a variant of "seely." Seely can mean "spiritually blessed, enjoying the blessing of God. Said of persons, their condition, or experiences." Or it can mean "silly," as in "deserving of pity or sympathy; pitiable, miserable, 'poor';

Our sin forgot and our malignity,
With piteous yes of thy benignity,
Friendly look on us once,⁹ thine own we be,
Servants or sinners whether it liketh thee.

Sinners if thou our crime behold certain,
Our crime the work of our uncourteous¹⁰ mind
But if thy gifts thou behold again,
Thy gifts noble, wonderful, and kind,
Thou shalt us then the same persons find,
Which are to thee and have be long space,¹¹
Servants by nature, children by thy grace.

But this thy goodness wringeth¹² us alas,
For we whom grace had made thee children dear,
Are made thy guilty folk by our trespass,
Sin hath us guilty made this many a year,
But let thy grace, thy grace that hath no peer.
Of our offence surmount all the preace,¹³
That in our sin thine honor may increase.

For thou, thy wisdom though thy sovereign power,
May otherwise appear sufficiently,
As things which thy creatures every hour,
All with one voice declare and testify,
Thy goodness: yet thy singular mercy,
Thy piteous heart thy gracious indulgence
No thing so clearly showeth as our offence.

What but our sin hath showed that mighty love,
Which able was thy dreadful majesty,
To draw down into earth from heaven above,
And crucify god, that we poor wretches we,
Should from our filthy sin cleansed¹⁴ be,
With blood and water of thine own side,
That streamed from thy blessed wounds wide.

Thy love and pity thus, O heavenly King,
Our evil maketh matter of thy goodness,

helpless, defenseless. See also silly” (OED). The second meaning fits best, although the first cannot be ruled impossible. Perhaps More meant to pun upon both senses.

⁹ “Once” replaces “onys.”

¹⁰ The original word is “uncorteyle” for which I can find no definition. More might have meant “uncourteous,” which is an adjective that means “wanting in courtesy; discourteous: of persons” (OED). He might also have written a variant of “uncourtly,” which means “not adapted or suited to Court; especially, not sufficiently polished or refined” (OED). Such an adjective was used in regard to persons or their attributes.

¹¹ “Have be long space”=have been for a long time.

¹² According to the OED, “wring” could be another of More’s neologisms; the first recorded use of this word, at least, comes from More’s “Dialogue” (1528). “Wring” means “to incline or dispose (a person); to bend or divert to something” (OED).

¹³ Campbell and Reed suggest “trim, fighting condition” for “preace.”

¹⁴ The original word is “iclensed,” which is probably an obsolete variant of “cleansed.”

O love, O pity, our wealth ay providing,
O goodness serving thy servants in distress,
O love, O pity, well nigh now thankless
O goodness mighty gracious and wise,
And yet almost now vanquished with our vice.

Grant I thee pray such heat into mine heart,
That to this love of thine may be egall:¹⁵
Grant me from Sathanas¹⁶ service to astart,¹⁷
With whom me rueth¹⁸ so long to have be thrall,¹⁹
Grant me good Lord and creator of all,
The flame to quench of all sinful desire,
And in thy love set all mine heart afire.

That when the journey²⁰ of this deadly life
My silly²¹ ghost hath finished and thence
Departed must without his²² fleshly wife
Alone into his lord's high presence
He may thee find: O well of indulgence,
In thy lordship not as a lord: but rather
As a very tender loving father.

Amen.

¹⁵ "Egall"= "equal" (OED).

¹⁶ "Sathanas" is probably a variant of "Satanas," which meant "Satan" (OED).

¹⁷ "Astart" means "to start off, get away, escape. b. To remove, withdraw, desist" (OED). In context, then, the line reads: "Grant me from Satan's service to escape."

¹⁸ Obsolete form of "ruth," which means "contrition, repentance; remorse" (OED).

¹⁹ "So long to have be thrall"=So long to have been enslaved.

²⁰ There is no entry for the original "iornay," but it is probably and obsolete variant of "journey," especially in its figurative sense: "the 'pilgrimage' or passage through life" (OED).

²¹ "Silly" as in pitiable. The original word is "syly." See note 164.

²² "His" refers to the "ghost" or "soul" of the speaker. So the use of the third person pronoun should not lead us to believe More is speaking about a wife other than his own.

