

# A Penitential Prayer

## Introduction

This prayer is contained in a Pontifical written in Germany, into which no fewer than thirteen English scribes penned confessional formulae, the Paternoster and Apostles' Creed, Lenten advice, and a homily for the dedication of a church, as well as the prayer below.

A Pontifical is a liturgical volume containing such texts as are used in rites performed by a bishop (*pontifex*). These include the ordination of deacons, priests, bishops, abbots, and abbesses, as well as the consecration of churches, but the manuscripts often contain additional rites often performed by bishops, such as baptism. The volume's association with bishops offers a tentative clue as to the identity of the scribes and audiences of the scribbles, and yet one can hardly suppose that thirteen different English bishops took notes in one and the same German manuscript. Perhaps it is more likely that it lay unused, and thirteen individuals independently concluded that this amounted to a waste of valuable parchment.

## Manuscript

London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius C. i, fols. 159v–160r (1070x1100)

## Text

(1) Ic bidde ðe, min drihten, on ðæs acennedan Godes naman (2) þæt ðu mid þinre mildheortnysse on me beseoh, (3) and þæt ðu onsend and getryme on mine heortan gedefe hreowe, (4) and þe andetnysse eallra minra synna (5) ðæra ðe ic æfre gefremede wið þinne willan and wiþ minre sawle þearfe, (6) wið weras oþþe wið wif oþþe wiþ ænine man, (7) wordum oþþe weorcum oþþe on geðancum, (8) þæt þu drihten on mine heortan getryme þine soðfæstnysse, and rihtne gelefan, (9) and þinra beboda lustfullunga and symle getruwunga on ðe.

## Notes

- 1 *acennedan*: From *acennan* “conceive,” the participle means “incarnate” when applied to God. When modifying *sunu* “son” it can be indistinguishable in form from *ancenned* “only-begotten,” but that confusion does not apply here.
- 4 This clause lacks a verb, but one or both may be carried over from (3). For this to work, *þe* has to be read with a long vowel and taken with the object “*andetnysse*” as “confession to you.”
- 8 *þæt*: A clause starting with this word may be either a **purpose clause** (“in order that”) or a **result clause** (“so that”). In Latin, both are typically introduced by *ut* and take the subjunctive; in OE, the purpose clause takes the subjunctive while the result clause need not.
- 9 This clause too lacks a verb, but it may be carried over from (8) in a manner analogous to that recommended for (4) above.

## Lessons Learned

- Unlike its modern reflex, *wif* nearly always has an adversarial sense “against.”
- In order to translate a *þæt*-clause correctly, we need to determine whether it expresses purpose (“in order that”) or result (“so that”).