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# Medieval Eloquence

Studies in the  
Theory and Practice of  
Medieval Rhetoric

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# Punctuation, or Pause and Effect<sup>1</sup>

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PUNCTUATION is one of the medieval contributions to literate civilization. In ancient times most manuscripts seem to have been written in *scriptura continua*,<sup>2</sup> although among the very few surviving fragments of Latin manuscripts from the first century we find not only *apices* (points inserted between words) but also isolated examples of other signs which reappear later as marks of punctuation.<sup>3</sup> Punctuation was developed when it became necessary for people to acquire Latin as a learned language, a situation in which aids to the reader became very important.

It is often assumed that medieval punctuation was essentially bound up with pronunciation. Evidence to support this view can be found in medieval sources. In the sixth century Cassiodorus defined punctuation as 'clear' (or in later manuscripts 'apt') 'pausing in

1. This paper has grown from a lecture given to various audiences, and I am indebted to them for stimulating questions and discussions. I am grateful to Dr P. Chaplais, Dr R.W. Hunt, Dr N.R. Ker, and Professor A.G. Rigg who have read drafts of this paper at various stages and who have made valuable criticisms and suggestions. Dr Hunt and Dr A.B. Scott have kindly checked my translations from the Latin. I must also thank Miss R. Zim who helped me to clarify both my thought and my prose in the final draft. I am solely responsible for the errors, omissions, and for the views expressed.

2. For observations on the reading of texts written in *scriptura continua* see W.G. Rutherford, *A Chapter in the History of Annotation, Scholia Aristophanica*, iii (London, 1905), 47 ff.

3. The best account of punctuation in late antiquity is by R.W. Müller, *Rhetorische und syntaktische Interpunktion: Untersuchungen zur Pausenbezeichnung im antiken Latein* (Tübingen, 1964). This work seems to have been unknown to the writer of the most recent account: E.O. Wingo, *Latin Punctuation in the Classical Age* (The Hague, 1972). For a brief general account of punctuation, see the article 'Punctuation' by T. Julian Brown, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th edition, (1974).

well-regulated pronunciation'.<sup>4</sup> In the ninth century Hildemar, writing to Bishop Ursus of Benevento about the art of reading, emphasized the relationship between punctuation and accentuation. He said that prose is split up by three points, adding

Non ergo miremini, quod in medio sensu notam acuti accentus fecerim, quoniam ut ab eruditis didici viris, his tribus punctis tres aptantur accentus: id est usque ad medium totius sententiae sensum gravis; in medio quoque tantummodo sensu acutus; deindeque usque ad plenum sensum circumflexus.

Do not be amazed that I have placed a sign of an acute accent in the middle of the sense, since, as I have learned from learned men, to these three points three accents are appropriate: the grave as far as the middle of the *sensus* of the whole *sententia*, the acute only in the middle of the *sensus*, and then the circumflex up to the full *sensus*.<sup>5</sup>

The fact that Hildemar expected the Bishop to be amazed suggests that perhaps the system described was already unfamiliar, or obsolescent. However, Hildemar also incorporated this letter into his commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict,<sup>6</sup> where it forms part of the exposition of Chapter 38 which prescribes and regulates reading aloud to the community in the refectory. Hildemar, therefore, seems to be referring to reading aloud in special circumstances and not to reading in general. Later, the thirteenth-century writer, Bonus of Florence, in that section of the *Candelabrum* which deals with punctuation, ridiculed the notion that punctuation should attempt to reflect pronunciation:

Nam si iuxta prononciationum modos puncta scripturalia volumus variare, antiphonarium videbitur.

4. *Cassiodori Senatoris Institutiones*, ed. R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1937), II, i, 2. The earliest manuscripts of the first recension read *aperta*. The later recensions  $\Phi$  and  $\Delta$ , recorded mainly in mss of saec. xi and later, read *apta*. This later variant may reflect changes in the nature of punctuation—the adoption of the ecphonetic system. See further M.B. Parkes, 'Medieval Punctuation: a Preliminary Survey', *Codicologica*, vi, ed. A. Grujjs & J.P. Gumbert, which is to appear in the series *Litterae Textuales*.

5. Printed in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae*, v, 320. On Hildemar, possibly a monk from Corbie, see W. Hafner, *Der Basiliuskommentar zur Regula S. Benedicti*, Beiträge zur Geschichte des alten Mönchtums und des Benediktinerordens, xxiii (1959), pp. 96 and 146.

6. The letter is incorporated in the copy of the commentary now preserved in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 12637 (from Dijon): see Hafner, *Der Basiliuskommentar*, p. 26. Mr David Ganz kindly examined the manuscript for me.

If we wish to vary the points in our writing according to the manner of pronunciation, it would look like an antiphony.<sup>7</sup>

It is possible to overemphasize the relationship between medieval punctuation and pronunciation,<sup>8</sup> particularly since a change in reading habits took place during the course of the Middle Ages,<sup>9</sup> a change which is reflected in changes in the appearance of books.<sup>10</sup>

Other evidence indicates that punctuation or the indication of pauses was regarded primarily as an aid to the understanding of a text. Jerome tells us that he introduced the system of laying out the text *per cola et commata* into his translations of *Isaiah* and *Ezekiel* for the convenience of readers, to give a clearer understanding of the sense.<sup>11</sup> Cassiodorus elsewhere in the *Institutiones* stated that *positurae* or *puncta* (the punctuation marks)

quasi quaedam viae sunt sensuum et lumina dictionum, quae sic lectores dociles faciunt tamquam si clarissimis expositoribus imbuantur.

are, as it were, paths of meaning (*sensus*) and lanterns to words, as instructive to readers as the best commentaries.<sup>12</sup>

For Cassiodorus reading meant reading aloud to bring out the sense

7. Printed by C. Thurot, 'Extraits des divers manuscrits latins pour servir à l'étude des doctrines grammaticales du moyen âge', *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Impériale*, xxii (1868), part 2, p. 415.

8. As, for example, by P. Clemoes, *Liturgical Influence on Punctuation in Late Old English and Early Middle English MSS* (Cambridge, 1952), who seeks to relate the use of *positurae* to intonation patterns.

9. For example, the change from the monastic *lectio* to the scholastic *lectio*. On the habit of reading aloud in the early Middle Ages (the monastic *lectio*) see J. Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* (New York, 1961), pp. 19 and 89; also J. Balogh, 'Voces Paginarum', *Philologus*, lxxxii (1926-7), pp. 84-109, and 202-240 (and especially the evidence from patristic writings cited on 202-5). On silent reading and reading aloud in the monastery see Lanfranc's *Monastic Constitutions*, ed. D. Knowles (London, 1951), p. 3. On the more ratiocinative scrutiny of the text required in a scholastic context see M.-D. Chenu, *Introduction à l'étude de S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris, 1954), pp. 118-9.

10. For the effect of changes in reading habits on the appearance of books see M.B. Parkes, 'The Influence of the Concepts of *Ordinatio* and *Compilatio* on the Development of the Book', *Medieval Learning and Literature: Essays presented to R.W. Hunt*, ed. J.J.G. Alexander and M.T. Gibson (Oxford, 1976), pp. 115-141.

11. In the prologue to *Ezekiel* Jerome observes that '... per cola scriptus et commata manifestiorem legentibus sensum tribuit'. (printed *Patrologia Latina* accurate J.P. Migne, 28, 939); and in his prologue to *Isaiah* '... nos quoque utilitati legentium providentes, interpretationem novam, novo scribendi genere (i.e. *per cola et commata*) distinximus' (printed *Patrologia Latina*, 28, 771).

12. *Institutiones*, I, xv, 12.

for oneself and not for oratorical delivery. In the thirteenth century Roger Bacon remarked that

quia non servatur punctatio recta, mutatur ordo rectus sententiae, et sensus perit cum litera.

(when) correct punctuation (*punctatio*) is not observed the true order of the *sententia* is changed and the sense perishes with the letter.<sup>13</sup>

Because punctuation was primarily an aid to the understanding of the text, it received a good deal of attention from those who were responsible for correcting manuscripts. The importance of the corrector in a scriptorium, especially up to the second half of the twelfth century, must be emphasized: he was a specialist reader whose activity reflects not only literacy but learning, and frequently his additions and corrections to the punctuation left by the original scribe indicate a conscious interpretation of the text according to a specific point of doctrine. In the rest of this paper I wish to suggest, albeit tentatively, some of the ways in which punctuation was used as an aid to the elucidation of prose texts.<sup>14</sup>

The general repertory of medieval punctuation marks grew out of the combination of elements drawn from different systems of aids

13. *Opus Tertium*, printed in *Rogeri Baconi opera quaedam hactenus inedita*, 1. ed. J. S. Brewer. Rolls Series (London, 1859), 250.

14. It is not possible to discuss the punctuation of verse adequately here, as a large number of plates would be necessary to illustrate the principal variations in layouts. In the earliest surviving codices containing both prose and verse scribes deployed features of layout to indicate the major divisions of a text, and marks were gradually introduced to indicate pauses within these divisions. From late antiquity, therefore, layout and marks function together as punctuation in the widest sense of the term. In the Middle Ages a distinction arose between the punctuation of prose and that of verse. In prose, layout was used to indicate the beginnings and ends of chapters and paragraphs, and marks were used to indicate pauses within those divisions—to identify the *sententiae* and to elucidate the *sensus*. In verse, both layout and marks were used to indicate the metrical form. According to the grammatical theory transmitted to the West by Isidore of Seville each *versus* formed a *periodus* ("Totus autem versus periodus est": *Etymologiae* 1, xx; printed *Patrologia Latina*, 82, 96). In most manuscripts each *versus* was placed on a line of its own. Sometimes each line was followed by a mark, but more frequently the layout alone was sufficient to indicate the metrical form, and in such cases a mark (such as the *punctus elevatus*) was placed at the end of a line only if the *sensus* was incomplete. Marks were frequently placed at the ends of lines to indicate the ends of stanzas or verse paragraphs, but in manuscripts produced from the thirteenth century onwards it became customary to place a paragraph mark in the margin at the beginning of a new stanza or paragraph. Marks were used within a line of verse to indicate a *caesura*. Where verse was written continuously marks were used to indicate the end of each *versus*, or, in vernacular verse, a corresponding metrical unit. Elaborate verse forms were often indicated by elaborate layouts.

to the reader.<sup>15</sup> Some of these systems were handed down from antiquity and modified in the process of transmission; others were evolved during the course of the Middle Ages. All these systems, and the general repertory which emerged, set out to distinguish *sententiae* as well as other units of the *sensus*. These units were separated from each other by means of graded pauses in order to achieve greater clarity or to indicate differences of emphasis. The terms *sensus* and *sententia* are medieval ones which are not necessarily equivalent to the modern English 'sense' and 'sentence'. Moreover, the terms could mean different things at different times during the Middle Ages. In the twelfth century Hugh of St. Victor defined *littera*, *sensus*, and *sententia* as follows:

Littera est congrua ordinatio dictionum quam etiam constructionem vocamus. Sensus est facilis quaedam et aperta significatio quam littera prima fronte praefert. Sententia est profundior intelligentia quae nisi expositione vel interpretatione non invenitur.

The letter (*littera*) is the proper arrangement of words which we also call construction. The sense (*sensus*) is a straightforward and open interpretation which the letter offers at first sight. The sentence (*sententia*) is a deeper understanding which is discovered in no other way except by exposition or interpretation.<sup>16</sup>

Behind this lies the distinction made earlier by William of Conches between the *sententia* and the *continuatio litterae* in his definition of the differences between a 'gloss' and a 'commentary':

Commentum enim est solum sententiam exequens, de continuatione vel expositione litterae nihil agit. Glosa vero omnia illa exequitur.

A commentary only considers the *sententia*, but has nothing to do with the syntactical structure (*continuatio*) or explanation of the literal text. Indeed a gloss considers all these things.<sup>17</sup>

In such circumstances the pointing of *sententiae* could be related more to the interpretation of doctrinal content than to syntactic structure. However, in the fourteenth century Nicholas of Lyra

15. On the development of the general repertory of punctuation marks see M.B. Parkes, 'Medieval Punctuation: a Preliminary Survey'. See also the Appendix, below, p. 139.

16. *Didascalicon*, iii, 9 (*Patrologia Latina*, 176, 771). The first sentence recalls Priscian, *Institutiones Grammaticae*, II, 15 'Oratio est ordinatio dictionum congrua, sententiam perfectam demonstrans'.

17. See E. Jauneau, 'Deux redactions des gloses de Guillaume de Conches sur Priscien', *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale*, xxvii (1960), 212-247 (especially p. 225).

distinguished between the *sensus literalis* of scripture, which is that signified by the words of the text alone, and the *sensus spiritualis*, which is more obscure because the words designate things which are themselves significative (that is to say signifying other things, qualities or principles). Following Aquinas, he lays great stress on the importance of the *sensus literalis*:

. . . necessarium est incipere ab intellectu sensus literalis: maxime cum ex solo sensu literali, et non ex mystico, possit argumentum fieri ad probationem.

It is necessary to start from an understanding of the literal sense: especially since only from the literal sense, and not from the mystical, can an argument be adduced for proof.<sup>18</sup>

Clear pointing of the *sensus literalis* is therefore important, and Lyra continues:

Sensus literalis a quo est incipiendum, ut dictum est, videtur multum obfuscatus diebus modernis: partim scriptorum vitio . . . , partim imperitia aliquorum correctorum, qui in pluribus locis fecerunt puncta, ubi non debent fieri; et versus inceperunt, vel terminaverunt, ubi non debent incipi et terminari: et per hoc sententia literae variatur.

The literal sense (*sensus literalis*) from which one should begin, as has been said, seems to be much obscured in modern times: partly through the errors of scribes . . . , and partly through the lack of skill of some correctors who have made points in many places where there ought not be any, and who have begun or ended verses where they ought not to have been begun or ended: and through this the profound meaning of the literal text (*sententia literae*) is subject to variation.<sup>19</sup>

A corrector who followed the principles of Nicholas of Lyra is likely to have used punctuation to emphasize the literal sense. Moreover, what Nicholas of Lyra here calls the *sententia literae* is closely related to the syntactical structure (called the *continuatio litterae* by William of Conches) whereas that which William and Hugh of St. Victor had called the *sententia* is not. In such circumstances the *sententiae* indicated by punctuation from the fourteenth century onwards are likely to be different from those indicated by twelfth-century punctuation.

Thus different factors are likely to govern the use of punctuation at different periods within the Middle Ages. Even within a given

18. *Postilla*, second prologue, quoted here from the text printed in *Biblia Sacra cum Glossa Ordinaria . . . et Postilla Nicolae Lirani . . .* (Antwerp, 1634).

19. *Ibid.*

period of time other factors are also important—the nature of the text to be pointed; the different ways in which the text was read and understood by different scribes, correctors and readers; and the way in which the text was used.

One of the functions of medieval punctuation, especially in manuscripts up to the end of the twelfth century, is to emphasize the *sensus* as an aid to the interpretation of the doctrinal content. Different methods of pointing a particular passage from the Bible reflect different readings of the *sensus* of the passage in the light of commentaries and glosses on it; hence, even the divisions into *sententiae* differ. My examples are from manuscripts chosen at random. The first two passages I have chosen are from the beginning of John's Gospel. The first is from an eleventh-century manuscript; the second is from a manuscript of about 1160:

A. In principio erat uerbum. Et uerbum erat apud deum et deus erat uerbum.<sup>20</sup>

B. In principio erat uerbum. et uerbum erat apud deum t et deus erat uerbum.<sup>21</sup>

Example A is divided into two *sententiae* whereas B is pointed as a single *sententia*. As a result, in A the word *uerbum* occurs once in the first *sententia* and twice in the second, but here the word *deus* also occurs twice. In B, however, since the passage is pointed as a single *sententia*, the word *uerbum* occurs three times whereas *deus* occurs only twice. In this example it seems that the punctuation places more emphasis on the word *uerbum*.

If we turn to the gloss on this passage we observe that one of the *auctoritates* is drawn from Augustine:

The Greek word 'logos' signifies both Word and Reason. But in this passage it is better to interpret it Word; as referring not only to the Father, but to those things created by the operative power of the word.<sup>22</sup>

Thus Augustine places more emphasis on *uerbum* than on *deus*, and it seems to me that this emphasis is brought out in the punctuation of B.

Lest this appear too fanciful let us look at the treatment of the fifth verse. One manuscript has

20. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 155.

21. London, British Library, Additional MS 17738.

22. This translation is based on the gloss printed in *Biblia Sacra cum Glossa Ordinaria* (Antwerp, 1634).



- C. Quod factum est in ipso uita erat † et uita erat lux hominum. Et lux in tenebris lucet † & tenebrae eam non comprehenderunt.<sup>23</sup>

putting a major medial pause after *erat* and concluding the *sententia* at *hominum*. But in the gloss Augustine has quite a lot to say about this passage:

The passage can be punctuated thus: *What was made in Him was life.* If the passage were read in this way, then the whole universe is life: for what was there not made in Him? He is the Wisdom of God, as is said, 'In Wisdom hast Thou made them all'. All things therefore are made in Him, even as they are by Him. But, if whatever was made in Him is life, the earth is life, a stone is life. We must not interpret it so unsoundly, lest the sect of the Manicheans creep in upon us, and say, that a stone has life, and that a wall has life; for they do insanely assert so, and when reprehended or refuted, appeal as though to Scripture, and ask, why was it said, *That which was made in Him was life?* Read the passage then thus: make the pause after *What was made*, and then proceed, *In Him was life.*<sup>24</sup>

In D (from the same manuscript of 1160 as B above) we see the scribe pointing this passage according to the precept of Augustine:

- D. Quod factum est † in ipso uita erat. Et uita erat lux hominum † et lux in tenebris lucet. Et tenebrae eam non comprehenderunt.

The third example

- E. Quod factum est in ipso uita erat et uita erat lux hominum, et lux in tenebris lucet. et tenebrae non comprehenderunt.<sup>25</sup>

is less committed to any one reading and allows the reader greater freedom of interpretation.<sup>26</sup>

Alterations and additions to existing punctuation can indicate the pointing of a later reader in the light of his reading of a particular

23. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct. D. 2. 15.

24. From the gloss printed in *Biblia Sacra cum Glossa Ordinaria* (Antwerp, 1634).

25. Oxford, Keble College, MS 20, fol. 522, a thirteenth-century Bible produced in France, with the order of books and the chapter divisions commonly found in manuscripts produced there at that time, and with the common set of 64 prologues (cf. N.R.Ker, *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*, i [Oxford, 1969], p. 96).

26. In the earliest surviving copy of the Vulgate Gospels (St Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, HS 1395) the first five verses of John's Gospel are treated as a single *kapitulum*. An annotator contemporary with the text (on whom see B. Bischoff, 'Zur Rekonstruktion der ältesten Handschrift der Vulgata-Evangelien und der Vorlage ihrer Marginalien', in his *Mittelalterliche Studien*, i [Stuttgart, 1966], 101-111) uses the term *kapitulum* in a marginal note on page 95 of the manuscript to refer to the equivalent of the modern verse *Matthew*, 23, 14.

commentary or gloss. This is borne out by the evidence of manuscripts like Oxford, Keble College, MS 22 where alterations to punctuation occur most frequently in passages to which a gloss has been added (see plate). These alterations are often in the same ink as the added gloss.

The examples from *John* 1 have illustrated the way in which punctuation as a form of exposition has stressed the different interpretations of the *sensus* of a passage in the context of its doctrinal content. The next set of examples, from the beginning of Paul's *Epistle to the Romans*, illustrates that there are yet other ways of reading an identical text:

- F. Paulus seruus cristi iesu uocatus apostolus · segregatus in euangelium dei. Quod ante promiserat per prophetas suos in scripturis sanctis de filio suo . qui factus est ei ex semine dauid secundum carnem. Qui predestinatus est filius dei in uirtute · secundum spiritum sanctificationis . ex resurrectione mortuorum iesu cristi domini nostri · per quem accepimus gratiam & apostolatam ad obediendum fidei < > in omnibus gentibus pro nomine eius. in quibus estis et uos uocati iesu cristi ; omnibus qui sunt rome dilectis dei uocatis sanctis Gratia uobis et pax a deo patre nostro et domino iesu cristo;<sup>27</sup>
- G. Paulus seruus cristi iesu. uocatus apostolus. segregatus in euangelium dei. quod ante promiserat per prophetas suos. in scripturis sanctis. de filio suo. qui factus est ei ex semine dauid. secundum carnem. qui predestinatus est filius dei in uirtute secundum spiritum sanctificationis ex resurrectione mortuorum iesu cristi domini nostri. per quem accepimus gratiam. 7 apostolatam. ad obediendum fidei. in omnibus gentibus pro nomine eius in quibus estis et uos uocati iesu cristi domini nostri [.] omnibus qui sunt rome. dilectis dei. uocatis sanctis. gratia uobis et pax a deo patre nostro. et domino iesu cristo.<sup>28</sup>

I wish to comment on two features only. First, there is a fundamental difference between F, where the scribe's division of the passage into three *sententiae* indicates that he regarded it as containing three points of doctrinal significance, and G, where the passage is seen primarily as the protocol, or *superscriptio*,<sup>29</sup> in which the whole forms

27. Oxford, Keble College, MS 22 (s. xi ex.). See below Note to the Plate, p. 140.

28. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct. D.4.20 (s. xii-xiii).

29. The formulae used at the beginning of a document or similar instrument, as distinct from the text which contains the subject-matter. The formulae comprise the names, titles, and qualities of the person from whom the document originates, those of the persons to whom the document is addressed, and the greeting or salutation. See further P. Chaplais, *English Royal Documents 1199-1461* (Oxford, 1971), p. 13.

a single *sententia*. Secondly, this difference of attitude is reflected in the medial pauses of G, which do not occur in F. The points after *dilectis dei* and *uocatis sanctis* suggest that these two phrases were seen as if they were titles of the persons addressed and treated as such, like other lists, or nouns in apposition.<sup>30</sup>

The beginning of I *Corinthians* is more straightforward than that of *Romans* as the scribes seem to have been agreed that it contained little of doctrinal import. Most of the scribes have seen it as the protocol ending with a salutation clause. Nevertheless it presented them with difficulties and was often corrected. For this reason it is a useful example to introduce problems of punctuation in other, non-biblical texts. The insertions in the manuscripts are indicated by bolder marks.

In the first passage the scribe, sensing the difficulties, has left out almost all the punctuation:

- H. P(aulus) uocatus apostolus cristi iesu per uoluntatem dei et sostenes frater ecclesie dei que est corinthi sanctificatis in cristo iesu uocatis sanctis cum omnibus qui inuocant nomen domini nostri iesu cristi in omni loco ipsorum et nostro. Gratia uobis et pax a deo patre nostro et domino nostro iesu cristo.<sup>31</sup>

However, this is not common, and the other examples are all punctuated:

- I. Paulus uocatus apostolus cristi iesu per uoluntatem dei • & sostenes frater ecclesie dei que est corinthi. sanctificatis in cristo iesu uocatis sanctis cum omnibus qui inuocant nomen domini nostri iesu cristi. in omni loco ipsorum & nostro † Gratia uobis et pax a deo patre nostro & domini iesu cristo.<sup>32</sup>
- J. Paulus uocatus apostolus iesu cristi per uoluntatem dei [.] & sostenes frater • ecclesie dei que est corinthi • sanctificatis in cristo iesu † uocatis sanctis. cum omnibus qui inuocant nomen domini nostri iesu cristi in omni loco ipsorum et nostro † gratia uobis & pax a deo patre nostro & domino nostro iesu cristo.<sup>33</sup>
- K. Paulus uocatus apostolus cristi iesu per uoluntatem dei . 7 sostenes frater † ecclesie dei que est corinthi. sanctificatis in cristo iesu † uocatis sanctis. cum omnibus qui inuocant nomen domini nostri iesu cristi in

30. See also N.R. Ker, *English Manuscripts in the Century after the Norman Conquest* (Oxford, 1960), p. 47.

31. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Barlow 26 (s. xii in.).

32. Oxford, Keble College, MS 22 (s. xi ex.).

33. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct. E. inf. 2 (s. xii med.).

omni loco ipsorum. 7 nostro. Gratia uobis et pax a deo patre nostro et domino nostro iesu cristo.<sup>34</sup>

- L. Pavlv̄s uocatus apostolus cristi iesu per uoluntatem dei. 7 sosthenes frater ꝛ ecclesie dei que est corinthi. sanctificatis in cristo iesu. uocatis sanctis cum omnibus qui inuocant nomen domini nostri iesu cristi. in omni loco ipsorum 7 nostro. Gratia uobis et pax a deo nostro. domino iesu cristo.<sup>35</sup>

Again I wish to comment on two features only. In I we see the first instance at which confusion may arise in this text. The epistle is from both Paul and Sosthenes to the Church at Corinth, but by placing a point after *dei* and omitting the point after *frater* the scribe allows the reader to construe *ecclesie* as a genitive instead of a dative, and thus the sense is altered drastically from 'Paul and Sosthenes to the Church at Corinth' to 'Paul and Sosthenes of the Church at Corinth to those sanctified'. In J the corrector has erased the point inserted by the scribe after *dei* in order to emphasize the point after *frater*. In K the corrector has added a *punctus elevatus* after *frater*, indicating a greater pause than that after *dei*, and this is the punctuation followed by the thirteenth-century scribe of L. Another instance at which confusion can arise can be seen in J and K where the original scribes placed a point between *uocatis sanctis* and *cum omnibus qui inuocant nomen*. In both examples the corrector has converted the *punctus* preceding *uocatis sanctis* into a *punctus elevatus*. This had become necessary because without this greater pause the reader could have been misled into thinking that *cum omnibus qui inuocant . . .* was part of the address (i.e., 'to the Church at Corinth . . . together with all those who call on the name of Christ') whereas the corrected punctuation and the punctuation of the other examples suggest that it was to be read 'called saints with (i.e., as are) all those who call . . .'.

These examples indicate what seems to me to be an important characteristic of medieval punctuation, which is that scribes punctuated and correctors corrected where they thought that confusion was likely to arise in the minds of the readers for whom the text was prepared. The examples also illuminate Roger Bacon's remark 'When correct punctuation is not observed the true order of the *sententia* is changed and the *sensus* perishes with the letter'.

This characteristic can be observed more clearly in the following

34. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct. D.1.13 (s. xii med.).

35. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct. D.4.20 (s. xii-xiii).

examples which are of particular interest, because the first, M, is from an eleventh-century manuscript of Augustine's *De civitate Dei* (xix, 1) and the second, N, is from a fourteenth-century copy made from this exemplar:

- M. Quoniam de civitatis vtriusque. terrenae scilicet et caelestis. debitibus finibus deinceps mihi uideo disputandum ; prius exponenda sunt quantum operis huius terminandi ratio patitur. argumenta mortalium. quibus sibi ipsi beatitudinem facere in huius uitae infelicitate moliti sunt. ut ab eorum rebus uanis spes nostra quid differat quam deus nobis dedit. & res ipsa hoc est uera beatitudo quam dabit ; non tantum auctoritate diuina. sed adhibita etiam ratione qualem propter infideles possumus adhibere. clarescat.<sup>36</sup>
- N. Quoniam de ciuitatis vtriusque terrene scilicet et celestis. debitibus finibus deinceps mihi uideo disputandum ; prius exponenda sunt quantum operis huius terminandi ratio patitur . argumenta mortalium. quibus sibi ipsi beatitudinem facere in huius uite infelicitate moliti sunt . ut ab eorum rebus uanis spes nostra quid differat / quam deus nobis dedit et res ipsa / hoc est uera beatitudo / quam dabit / non tantum auctoritate diuina . sed adhibita etiam ratione / qualem propter infideles possumus (adhibere) clarescat.<sup>37</sup>

The fourteenth-century copyist follows the punctuation of the exemplar except at one place: he omits the *punctus elevatus* after *dabit* in the sixth line. This has been replaced by a *virgula suspensiva* inserted by the scribe (or perhaps a corrector). But the scribe or corrector has added punctuation where confusion is likely to arise in the difficult and confusing part of the *sententia* beginning at *ut ab eorum rebus*. It helps the reader to construe the passage more easily (pointing, as it were, the *sensus literalis* and reflects the fourteenth-century view about the function of punctuation found in Nicholas of Lyra). However, in spite of his concern with the *sensus literalis*, the scribe or corrector has *not* inserted punctuation in the earlier part of the passage.

It seems to me that from examples like those in I to N one might adduce a general principle about medieval punctuation. Medieval scribes and correctors punctuate where confusion is likely to arise (if their Latin is sufficient to recognize the fact) and do not always punctuate where confusion is not likely to arise, even when they are

36. Durham, Dean & Chapter Library, MS B.II.22.

37. Durham, Dean & Chapter Library, MS B. II. 24. On the relationship between the two manuscripts see R.A.B. Mynors, *Durham Cathedral Manuscripts to the End of the Twelfth Century* (Durham, 1939), p. 35, n. 33.

concerned with the *sententia literae*. Because scribes and correctors were also readers; they were concerned primarily with interpretation, especially with elements which might be subject to confusion. Elements which may have a similar syntactic function or convey similar meaning, and which are punctuated in one context, need not be punctuated in another when the context ensures that confusion is not likely to arise. This factor helps to explain why some modern scholars have regarded medieval punctuation as 'irregular'.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, as I have attempted to show elsewhere,<sup>39</sup> many of the punctuation marks were regarded as interchangeable. One is sorely tempted to measure medieval punctuation in terms of units of 'confusibles'.

I suggest that the key to the understanding of medieval punctuation lies not in grammatical theory, nor in the analysis of syntactical or intonation patterns, but in the concern of the scribe or corrector to elucidate the text transmitted to him according to the needs of his own audience. He seems to have realized that he could achieve the desired effect by means of punctuation: that the adroit use of pauses would ensure that his readers followed what the punctuator regarded as his own correct interpretation of the text. This hypothesis is offered tentatively to stimulate further, more detailed investigations of the practices of individual scribes and correctors in medieval manuscripts.

#### APPENDIX

The principal marks of punctuation drawn from what I have called the general repertory of punctuation that emerged during the course of the Middle Ages, and mentioned in this paper are:

The *littera notabilior* was an enlarged letter—usually drawn from square capital, rustic capital, uncial, or a decorative display script—used to indicate the beginning of a new chapter, paragraph, *sententia*, or *versus*.

The *punctus elevatus*, ¶, was used to indicate a major medial pause, the *punctus versus*, ;, was used to indicate the final pause at the end of a statement, and the *punctus interrogativus*, †, was used to indicate the final pause at the end of a question. Variant forms of these marks exist, depending on when and where the manuscripts

38. For example, by R. Priebsch and W.E. Collinson, *The German Language* (London, 1958), p. 430.

39. M.B. Parkes, 'Medieval Punctuation: a Preliminary Survey'.

were copied. These signs (which, in the Middle Ages, were frequently called *positurae*) were all derived from the system of ecphonic notation which originally indicated the appropriate melodic formula to be used in the liturgy (which in different contexts required different melodic phrases). The melodic formulae indicated by the different signs were applied at the various logical pauses in the *sensus* of the liturgical texts. With the development of musical notation these signs lost their neumatic significance, and were absorbed into the general repertory of punctuation. The signs are found in non-liturgical texts from the eighth century onwards.

The *punctus*, ·, originally belonged to the system of *distinctiones*, a system which required that *punctus* be placed at carefully graded heights to indicate the nature of different pauses: a low point to indicate a pause where the *sensus* is incomplete, a medial point to indicate a pause where the *sensus* is complete but the *sententia* is not, and a high point to indicate the completion of the *sententia*. The difficulty of placing *punctus* at the correct height in a minuscule script, and, more important, the difficulty of reading them, led to the abandoning of the system of *distinctiones*. Scribes often used the *punctus* (placed indiscriminately at various heights) to indicate all pauses, but with the development of the general repertory of punctuation it was frequently used in association with marks from other sources, such as the *punctus elevatus* and the *punctus interrogativus*, and the *litterae notabiliores*, which help the reader to identify the significance of the *punctus* in its context: to indicate nouns in apposition, to indicate a minor medial pause, or, when placed before a *littera notabilior*, to indicate a final pause.

The *virgula suspensiva*, /, was often used interchangeably with the *punctus*, but more frequently it was used to indicate a medial pause when the *punctus* was used to indicate a final one.

#### NOTE TO THE PLATE

Oxford, Keble College, MS 22, fol. 58<sup>v</sup>. *Epistolae Pauli cum commentariis*: the plate illustrates I Corinthians, 16, verses 10–17. The manuscript was produced at Salisbury in the second half of the eleventh century (see N.R. Ker, 'The Beginnings of Salisbury Cathedral Library', *Medieval Learning and Literature: Essays Presented to*





R. W. Hunt, ed. J. J. G. Alexander and M. T. Gibson (Oxford, 1976), pp. 34-49, and especially pp. 39, 42).

Note the alterations to the punctuation in lines 11 and 12, which bring the reading of the text into line with the interpretation of the added glosses. The original scribe copied verse 14 'Omnia uestra in caritate fiant' as a *sententia*, beginning it with a *littera notabilior* and placing a *punctus* after it. The glossator has understood this verse as complementing the sense of verse 13, 'Vigilate, state in fide, uiriliter agite, confortamini'. He has therefore added a 'tick' over the *punctus* after 'confortamini' turning the mark into a *punctus elevatus*, and added a 'comma'-shaped stroke below the *punctus* after 'fiant' turning it into a *punctus versus*, thus pointing the whole of verses 13 and 14 as a single *sententia*. This is in accordance with his moral interpretation of the text revealed in his glosses: 'uiriliter agite' is glossed 'et supra fidem bona opera insistite', and 'omnia uestra in caritate fiant' is glossed 'in eo sitis perseuerantes, et cum hec (sic) feceritis, non faciatis propter humanam fauorem'.

Further examples of inserted punctuation in this manuscript are visible on the page reproduced by Dr Ker, plate V, lines 4 and 6, where a *punctus* has been corrected to a *punctus elevatus* in each case.