DRAMA
The Cure of the Blind Man from the Chester Cycle
(ca. 1531–75)

Contributed by Kurt Schreyer

Introduction

The Cure of the Blind Man takes place during the first part of Play 13 of the Chester Cycle, which was performed by the Glovers’ Guild and which also stages the raising of Lazarus. Declaring, “Ego sum lux mundi [I am the light of the world; Latin],” Jesus opens the play with a self-introduction that echoes Deus’ first lines at the very beginning of the cycle: “Ego sum alpha et omega [I am the alpha and omega; Latin].” By declaring himself “the light of this world” (l. 1) in this way, Jesus foregrounds both the importance of being in communion with the Father and the play’s use of the metaphors of light and darkness, seeing and blindness as powerful ways of understanding that relationship. Before he can “goe to Betheynye” (l. 16) and cure Lazarus, a boy enters leading a man who is “blynd and never did see” (l. 41) and whom the play identifies only as “Caecus,” or “Blind Man.” David Mills’s suggestion that the pair would very likely have approached the pageant wagon through the crowd cannot be understated if we consider the remarkable immediacy of the play’s meditation on the community’s responsibility toward the blind. The Blind Man is as much a contemporary citizen of Chester as he is a figure from the biblical past. Jesus thus cautions both his followers and the audience against equating physical blindness with sin: “Hit was neither for his offence, / neither the synne of his parentes, / or other fault or negligence / that hee was blynd borne” (ll. 51–54). We would do well, therefore, to follow Joshua Eyler’s suggestion that—rather than imposing our own models of disability, whether religious, cultural, or medical—we allow them to emerge organically from medieval texts themselves. Though he is promptly healed by Jesus, Caecus must still endure the cross-examination of his fellow citizens and the Pharisees. The Glovers’ play is carefully attentive to the biblical account in John 9:1–41, yet it has a poignancy which Chester audiences must have felt, as when Jesus stands side by side with the Blind Man under the scornful gaze of the Pharisees, enacting the promise that “My light to them shall well appeare / which clewe to mee alwaye” (ll. 65–66).

Bridging familiar Nativity and Passion episodes, The Cure of the Blind Man and Christ and the Leper (discussed below) must perform the crucial task of succinctly encapsulating Jesus’ public ministry. And both pageants do so brilliantly—emphasizing again and again that the Christian community must reach out to and include all people, not only those who rank high and low, but especially those who are spiritually and physically in need of “almes” and “charitie” (l. 40). Indeed, there is a very real sense in which Jesus’ encounter with the Blind Man suggests that membership in the community—that is to say spiritual health—is conditioned precisely by a person’s ability to treat those with disabilities as “your owne neighbour and of your owne kynd” (l. 39). As Jesus explains, his “Fathers workes” is “to heale the sicke and restore the blynd to sight” in order “that there may be one flocke and one sheppard” (ll. 23–24, 28).

If this sounds rather romantic, the Glovers’ play dramatizes a community that is in
fact as friable as it is fractious, quite prone to indifference if not the sneering rejection of its disadvantaged members, and we witness several characters—not only religious authorities but ordinary citizens—who willfully denigrate the Blind Man and Jesus. But they do so, the play further suggests, at the peril of alienating themselves. Most conspicuously, when Primus and Secundus Judeus (First and Second Jew) attempt to stone Jesus, they—and we, the audience—undergo a kind of blindness as he “suddenly disappears from sight” (“et statim evanescit Jesus,” l. 284 stage direction). Whether or not this remarkable theatrical vanishing (the play itself says that it is “Quyntly” or cleverly done) serves as a warning against spiritual blindness and loss of communion with Jesus and the Father, the play rather disturbingly impels us to share the same loss of vision which the callous Primus and Secundus Judeus undergo. As a community, therefore, we are all in danger, the Glovers’ play suggests, of failing to recognize the Blind Man as “your owne neighbour and of your owne kynd” (l. 39).

Bibliography


JESUS “Ego sum lux mundi. Qui sequitur me non ambulat in tenebris sed habebit lumen vitae.”

Brethren, I am Filius Dei, the light of this world.

Hee that followeth me walketh not in dearknes but hath the light of life; the scriptures so recorde; as patriarches and prophets of me bearen wytnes,° both Abraham, Isaack, and Jacob in there sundrye testimonies, unto whom I was promised before the world beganne to paye there° ransome and to become man.

Ego et Pater unum sumus° my Father and I are all on,° which hath me sent from the throne sempiternall° to preach and declare his will unto man because hee loveth him above his creatures all as his treasure and dearlinge most principall— man, I say agayne, which is his owne elect, above all creatures peculiarlye select. Wherfore, deare brethren, yt is my mynd and will to goe to Bethenye that standeth here-bye, my Fathers hestes° and command mentes to fulfill. For I am the good sheppard that putther his life in jeoperdy to save his flocke, which I love so tenderlye;

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Puer Boy Caecus Blind Man Petrus Peter Primus Vicinus First Neighbor Secundus Vicinus Second Neighbor Primus Pharaseus First Pharisee Secundus Pharaseus Second Pharisee Nun-tius Messenger Mater Mother Pater Father Primus Judeus First Jew Secundus Judeus Second Jew Ego sum...vitae “I am the light of the world. Whoever who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” [Latin; John 8:12] wytnes witness there their Ego et Pater unum sumus “I and the Father are one” [Latin; John 10:30] on one sempiternall everlasting hestes wishes
as yt is written of mee—the scripture beareth wytnes—
"bonus pastor ponit animam suam pro ovibus suis."™
Goe we therfore, brethren, while the day is light,
to do my Fathers workes, as I am fully mynded;
to heale the sicke and restore the blynd to sight,
that the prophecye of mee may be fulfilled.
For other sheepe I have which are to me commyttred.
They be not of this flocke, yet will I them regard,
that there may be one flocke and one sheppard.
But or° we goe hence, printe these sayinges in your mynd and harte;
30 recorde them and keepe them in memory.
Contynue in my worde; from yt doe not departe.
Therby shall all men knowe most perfectye
that you are my disciples and of my familie.
Goe not before me, but let my word be your guide;
then in your doinges you shall alwayse well speede:"™
"Si vos manseritis in sermone meo, veri discipuli mei eritis, et cognoscetis veritatem, et veritas liberabit vos."™
PUER (ducens Caecum”) If pittie may move your jentyll° harte,
remember, good people, the poore and the blynd,
with your charitable almes this poore man to comforte.
Yt is your owne neighbour and of your owne kynd.
CAECUS Your almes, good people, for charitie,
to me that am blynd and never did see,
your neighbour borne in this cittie; helpe or I goe hence.
PETRUS Maister, instruct us in this case
why this man borne blynd was.
Is it for his owne trespas or elles for his parentes?
JOHN Was synne the cause oryginall,
wherin we be conceived all,
that this blynd man was brought in thrall°?
JESUS Hit° was neither for his offence,
neither the synne of his parentes,
or other fault or negligence
that hee was blynd borne;
but for this cause spetiallye:"™
to sett forth Goddes great glorye,
his power to shewe manifestlye,
this mans sight to reforme."™
While the daye is fayre and bright,
my Fathers workes I must worke right untyll the comminge [of] the night that light be gonne awaye.
In this world when I am heare,
I am the light that shyneth cleare.
My light to them shall well appare
which creeve to mee alwaye.

**bonus pastor...suis** "A good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep" [Latin; John 10:11]  
**speede** prosper  
**Si vos manseritis...vos** "If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" [Latin; John 8:31–32]  
**ducens Caecum** leading a blind man [Latin]  
**jentyll** gentle  
**in thrall** slavery, bondage  
**Hit** it specially  
**reformente** restore  
**Tunc Jesus...dicat** Jesus then spits on the ground and makes clay, and rubs the eyes of the blind man with his hands; after which he says [Latin]
and give to God the prayse.

_Then Caecus quaerit aquam et abut Jesus._

**CAECUS** Leade me, good child, right hastily
unto the water of Siloe.

_Then lavat, et postea dicat._

Praysed be God omipotent
which nowe to me my sight hath sent.
I see all things nowe here present.
Blessed be God alwaye.
When I had donne as God me badde,
my perfect sight forthwith I hadde;
wherfore my hart is now full gladde
that I doubt where I am.

**PRIMUS VICINUS** Neighbour, if I the trueth should saye,
this is the blynd man which yesterdyae
asked our almes as we came this waye.
Yt is the verye same.

**SECUNDUS VICINUS** No, no, neighbour, yt is not hee,
but yt is the likest to him that ever I see.
One man to another like may bee,
and so is hee to him.

**CAECUS** Good men, truely I am hee that was blynd, and nowe I see.
I am no other verelye;
enquire of all my kynne.

**PRIMUS VICINUS** Then tell the trueth, we thee praye,
how this his happened to us saye—
that even yesterdyae
couldest see no yeartly thinge,
and nowe seest so perfectly.
No want of sight in thee we see.
Declare therfore to us truelye
without more reasoninge.

**CAECUS** The man which we call Jesus,
that worketh miracles daylye with us and whom we finde so gratiouse,
anoyned my eyes with claye.
And to the water of Siloe
he bade me goe immediatelye
and wash my eyes, and I should see;
and thyder° I tooke my waye.
When the water on my eyes light,
immediately I had my sight.

**SECUNDUS VICINUS** Where is hee nowe, we thee praye?

**CAECUS** I knowe not where he is, by this daye.

**SECUNDUS VICINUS** Thou shalt with us come on this waye
and to the Pharrasyes these wordes saye.
But yt thou would these thinges denye,
yt shall helpe thee right nought.

**SECUNDUS VICINUS** Looke up, lordinges and judges of right!

**PRIMUS VICINUS** Declare to them,
thou wicked wight,
who did restore thee to thy sight,
that we may knowe anonright°
of this matter the trueth.

**CAECUS** Jesus annoyned my eyes with claye
and bade mee washe in Siloe,
and before I come awaye

**PRIMUS PHARASEUS** This man, the trueth if I should saye,
is not of God—my head I laye°—
which doth violate the saboath daye.
I judge him to be madd.
SECUNDUS PHARASEUS I cannot enter into my thought that he which hath this marveyle wrought should be a synner—I leave° yt nought; hit is not in my creede." Saye what is hee that did thee heale.

140 CAECUS A prophet hee ys, withowt fayle.

PRIMUS PHARASEUS Surely thou arte a knave of kynde° that faynest° thyselfe for to be blynde; wherfore nowe this is my mynde, the trueth to trye indeede. His father and mother, both in feere," shall come declare the matter heere, and then the trueth shall soone appeare and we put out of doubt. Goe forth, messinger, anon in hye," and fetch his parentes by and by.° This knave can nought but prate and lye;° I would his eyes were out.

150 NUNTIUS Your byddinge, maister, I shall fulfill and doe my dutye as is good skill° for this daye hither I knowe the will, and I shall spie them out.

Tunc circumspectat, et adloquitur eos.° Syr and dame, both in feare, you must afore° the Pharasyes appeare. What there° will is, there shall you heare. Have donne and come your waye.

160 MATER Alas, man, what doe we heere? Must we afore the Pharasyes appeare? A vengeance on them farre and neare; they never did poore men good! PATER Dame, here is no other waye but there commandment wee must obeye, or elles they would without delaye course° us and take our good." NUNTIUS Here I have brought as you bade me these two persons that aged bee. They be the parentes of him truely which sayd that he was blynde.

170 PRIMUS PHARASEUS Come neare to us both too," and tell us truely or ere wee goe whether this be your sonne or noe looke noe descent° we fynde. PATER Maysters, we knowe certaynlye our sonne hee is—we cannot denye—and blynd was borne, undoubtedly, and that we will depose." But whose restored him to his sight we be uncertayne, by God almight. Wherfore of him, as is right, the trueth you must enquyre.

180 MATER For he hath age°° his tale to tell, and his mother-tonge to utter hit° well; although hee could never bye nor sell, lett him speake, we desyre. PRIMUS PHARASEUS Give prayse to God, thou craftie knave, and looke hereafter thou do not rave° nor saye that Jesus did thee save and restored thee to thy sight. SECUNDUS PHARASEUS Hee is a sinner and that wee knowe, deceavinge° the people to and froe. This is most true that wee thee showe. Beleave us as is right.

CAECUS If he bee sinfull I doe not knowe, but this is trueth that I doe showe.
When I was blynd and in great woe,
hee cured me, as yee see.

PRIMUS PHARASEUS What did hee, thou lither swayne°?

CAECUS I tould you once; will you here hit° agayne?
Or his disciples will [you] become, of all your sinnes to have remission°?

SECUNDUS PHARASEUS O cursed caytyffe,° yll moote thow thee°! Would thou have us his disciples to bee? No, no! Moyes disciples binne wee,° for God with him did speake. But whence this is, I never knewe.

CAECUS I marvayle° of that, as I am trewe—
that you knowe not from whence hee should bee
that me cured that never did see—
knowinge this most certaynlye: God wyll not sinners here.

But hee that honoreth God truely, him will hee here° by and by° and grant his askinge° gratiously, for that man is to him deare.

And to this I dare be bould, there is noe man that ever could restore a creature to his sight that was blynd borne and never sawe light.

If he of God were not, iwis,° hee could never worke such thinges as this.

PRIMUS PHARASEUS What, sinfull knave! Wilt thou teach us which all the scriptures can discusse, and of our livinge be so vertuous?

We curse° thee owt of this place.

JESUS Beleeves thou in God Sonne trulye?

CAECUS Yea, gratious lord. Whoe is hee?

JESUS Thou hast him seene with thy eyee. Hee is the same that talketh with thee.

CAECUS Then I here, I honour him with hart free,° and ever shall serve him untill I dye.

PRIMUS JUDEUS Saye, man that makest such maistrye,° or thou our sowles doe anoye,° tell us here appertly° Christ yf that thou be.

JESUS That I spake to you openlye and workes that I doe verelye° in my Fathers name almightye beareth wytnes of mee.

But you beleive not as you seene, for of my sheepe yee ne beene; but my flocke, withowten weene,° here my voice alwaye. And I knowe them well eychon,° for with me alwaye the gonne;° and for them I ordayned in my owne° everlastinginge life for aye.°

No man shall reave° my sheepe from me, for my Father in majestie ys greater then binne all yee, or any that ever was.

SECUNDUS JUDEUS Thou shalt aby,° by my bone,° or thou heathen passe.° Helpe, fellowe, and gather stones and beate him well, for cockes bones.° He scornes us quiantlye° for the nones°

lither swayne wicked slave here hit hear it remission forgiveness cursed caytyffe miserable wretch yll moote thow thee may evil befall the binne wee are we marvayle marzel here hear by and by soon askinge request iwis truly curse excommunicate free open makest such maistrye displays such power or thou...anoye before you afflict our souls appertly clearly vere-lye truly withowten weene without doubt eychon every single one the gonne they go owne house for aye forever reave snatch aby abide by my bone by my bones, upon my life or thou heathen passe before you go hence for cockes bones by God's bones quiantlye cunningly for the nones for the moment
and doth us great anoye.

Tunc lapides colligunt.°
Yea, stones nowe here I have
for this rybauld° that thus can rave.
One stroke, as God me save,
he shall have soone in hye.°

JESUS Wretches, manye a good deede
I have donne, yea in great neede;
nowe quite you fowle my meede°
to stone me on° this manere.

PRIMUS JUDEUS For thy good deede
that thou hast wrought°
at this tyme stone we thee nought.
Both in word and thought
there thou lyes falselye.

JESUS But I doe well and truely
my Fathers bidding by and by,°
elles may you hope well I lye
and then leeves° you me nought.
But sythen° you will not leve me,
nor my deedes that you may see,
to them beleevinge takes yee,
for nothinge may be soothe°.

Sooe may you knowe well and verey°
in my Father that I ame aye,°
and hee in mee, sooth to saye,°
and eyther of us in other.

Tunc colligunt lapides et statim
evanescit Jesus."°

SECUNDUS JUDEUS Owt, owt, alas
where is our fonne°?
Quyntly° that hee is heathen° gonne.
I would have taken him, and that
anone,"°
and fowle° him all to-frapped.°
Yea, make we never so much mone,"°
nowe there is noe other wonne,"°
for hee and his men everychone°
are from us clearly scaped."°

PRIMUS JUDEUS Nowe by the death I
shall one° dye,
may I° see him with my eye,
to syr Cayphas I shall him wrye"°
and tell that° shall him deare:"°
See I never none, by my faye,"°
when I had stones, sere soone awaye.
But yet no force°! Another daye
his tabret° we shall feare."°
Endnotes

1 The text for this scene from Play 13 performed by the Chester Glovers is based on Hermann Deimling and G.W. Matthews, eds., *The Chester Plays*, Early English Text Society, Extra Series 62 and 115 (Oxford University Press, 1892 and 1916), in consultation with the work of Robert M. Lumiansky and David Mills, *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, Early English Text Society Supplementary Series 3 (Oxford University Press, 1974), vol. 1, pp. 230–42, and Robert M. Lumiansky, ed., *The Chester Mystery Cycle: Essays and Documents* (University of North Carolina Press, 1983). The author (or authors) of the Glovers’ play, as well as the exact date of the play text is unknown, though it was very likely added as a supplement to the guild’s older *Raising of Lazarus* play when the cycle expanded to a three-day production during Whitsun week sometime around 1531. In any case, the *terminus ad quem* is certainly the final performance of the cycle during Midsummer 1575. Footnotes and endnotes have been provided by Kurt Schreyer. Stanza breaks have been removed for ease of publication.
