

Learning to Love

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of
English in the Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

This study examines medieval edification in all of its rich senses: moral improvement, the building up of community, and the construction of a city or edifice. Drawing from medieval literature, religious writing and architectural sources, my dissertation investigates virtue formation and explores what kinds of communities nourish or hinder those virtues. The Christian virtue of love stands at the center of my project. Drawing from the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, I show that medieval Christians learn the craft of love in a lifelong process into which they are initiated as apprentices to those who teach the craft in the Church. For parishioners in late medieval England, apprenticeship in the craft of love entails participation in sacramental practice, particularly in the sacrament of penance.

Chapter one considers *Jacob's Well*, a fifteenth-century penitential manual written by an anonymous author that uses architectural allegory to describes the penitential process. I argue that the author, a self-proclaimed "man of craft" apprentices the reader into sacramental practice. The author is both an exemplar to the reader and apprenticed to Christ. In chapter two, I explore the role of the narrative exempla in *Jacob's Well*. The exempla often resist the paradigm set forth in the allegory of the well. My chapter shows that learning to read these stories trains the reader to recognize forgiveness and sin in others and then to use this recognition to evaluate one's own story. Chapter three considers William Langland's richly complex fourteenth-century poem *Piers Plowman*.

The horrible failures of the sacrament of penance in this poem cause the Church to crumble. The allegorical Wille is left within this Church with the enjoinder to “learn the craft of love.” For Wille to learn the craft of love means more than learning to forgive and to be forgiven – it means learning to be charitable. For Langland, a charitable Church is yet to be practiced, yet to be constructed. My last chapter examines *Pearl*, a late fourteenth-century apocalyptic allegory written by an anonymous poet. The poem opens with a jeweler lamenting the loss of his pearl in a garden. As the poem progresses it becomes clear that the jeweler is a father who mourns the death of his infant daughter. In a dream vision, his daughter appears to him as a Pearl Maiden, one of the 144,000 virgins from the Book of Revelations. In an inversion of the usual parent-child relationship, the Pearl Maiden teaches the jeweler to recognize that their interlocking narratives stem from the same Christian tradition, although his particular narrative is one of penitential practice and hers is one of grace. The *Pearl* poet’s architectural allegory focuses on the completed City of New Jerusalem rather than on the upbuilding or crumbling of the Church.

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INTRODUCTION

In *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre has shown that man is essentially a story-telling animal and that the telling of stories plays a key role in educating us into the virtues.¹ This narrative concept of selfhood has two requirements. First, each person is understood to be the subject of a narrative that runs from birth to death. As such, that person must be accountable for the actions and experiences that compose a narratable life.² The second correlative requirement is that the storyteller must recognize one's own narrative in relation to the stories of others:

I am not only accountable, I am one who can always ask others for an account, who can put others to the question. I am part of their story, as they are part of mine. The narrative of any one life is part of an interlocking set of narratives. Moreover this asking for and giving of accounts itself plays an important part in constituting narratives. Asking you what you did and why, saying what I did and why, pondering the differences between your account of what I did and my account of what I did, and *vice versa*, these are essential constituents to the very simplest and barest of narratives.³

In other words, MacIntyre argues that engaging in this type of story-telling and accounting for one's story in relation to others means asking two questions: "what is the good for me?" and "what is the good for man?" Moral enquiry aspires to answer these

¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, repr. 2003), 216.

² MacIntyre, 217.

³ *Ibid*, 218.

questions both theoretically and practically. The systematic asking of and the attempt to answer these questions in word and in deed provides the moral life with its unity. The unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest. This quest is an education in self-knowledge and as to the character of that which is sought. Without the virtues, this quest would be fruitless:

The virtues therefore are to be understood as those dispositions which will not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve the goods internal to practices, but which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good, by enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which we encounter, and which will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good.⁴

The enquirer who wishes to achieve the good relies upon the virtues to sustain the practices necessary for the relevant quest. But one cannot learn how to move towards a particular telos, towards the good, without first having acquired some of the same virtues about which one inquires. So the enquirer faces a paradox: only so far as a person already has within the self the potential for moving towards and achieving the relevant theoretical and practical conclusion can one embark upon the quest for virtue.⁵ But, as MacIntyre notes, one navigates this paradox by relying on a teacher to help actualize the learner's potential.⁶ That is, the enquirer must enter into an apprenticeship in the virtues.

⁴ Ibid, 219.

⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 62-63.

⁶ Ibid, 63.

Through practice and participation, the apprentice learns what it is about oneself that must be transformed, which vices need to be amended and which virtues need to be cultivated.⁷

This model of education into the virtues through storytelling provides a rich entry point into late medieval English literature. Medieval Christians understood the human life to be a quest for the good, a quest for salvation. The virtues were those dispositions which not only sustained the sacramental practices that enabled Christians to enjoy the goods internal to those practices, but which also sustained them in the relevant quest for salvation. Most germane to my project are the theological virtues, especially the virtue of love. In medieval England, love was not just an emotion one person felt for another, though it certainly could and should be that. Loving one's neighbor was an important way to become friends. Love also had important theological implications – loving God meant learning to forgive others their trespasses and to be forgiven for one's own trespasses. Learning to love also meant learning to be charitable. Charity was the supreme virtue that comprised affection, devotion, benevolence, kindness, mercy, and gratitude between God and man and between people.⁸ Jesus Christ was the perfect embodiment of love, an embodiment that was fully present for Christians in the sacrament of the altar. The love of God for man was embodied in Christ as a divine gift

⁷ Ibid, 63.

⁸ This definition of charity is from the Middle English Dictionary, entry 1a). See "*The Middle English Compendium*," The University of Michigan. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/mec/> (accessed January 18, 2010).

that could never be repaid fully. Standing in stark contrast to virtue, and particularly to love, is what MacIntyre calls the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions that the enquirer encounters along the way. A medieval Christian would call these perilous obstacles sin, resistances to which the human being is inextricably bound.⁹ Sin was understood to be so debilitating that one could not escape it without help. The medieval Christian must first seek and then rely upon the sacramental resources of the Church. How, then, does a medieval Christian learn to remedy the devastating wounds caused by sin? How does one learn to love?

To learn to love, one must be apprenticed into the craft of love by a master of the craft who excels at it. This apprenticeship requires practice and participation in the community, sacramental practice and participation in the Church. My study focuses primarily on the sacrament of penance. The sacrament of penance in late medieval England is a process that requires contrition, confession, and satisfaction. Confessing one's sins can be thought of as telling one's story. To tell one's story, the person who is confessing must remember his or her previous actions. This remembrance is twofold. Not only should the sinner remember his or her own sins, but this person also should

⁹ For my understanding of the devastating consequences of sin, see David Aers, *Salvation and Sin: Augustine, Langland and Fourteenth-Century Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009).

remember Christ and the sacrifice he made to atone for human sin. Jesus Christ, love embodied, is the master of the craft of forgiveness.¹⁰

There are layers of apprenticeship in the craft of love. Ordained priests are apprenticed to Christ in the craft and lay people, in turn, are apprenticed to a cleric who is apprenticed to Christ. Ideally from the Church's point of view, a priest will be more fully formed and capable of helping a parishioner to see what must be transformed, which sins must be amended and which virtues must be cultivated. To do this, a priest examines the conscience of a penitent and then imposes an appropriate penance. So judgment is an important part of the process of forgiveness. Although the priest judges the penitent's actions in order to assign penance, God's judgment is also a relevant concern to the person confessing. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, justice and love come together in response to human brokenness in the sacrament of penance:

For in retributive justice redress follows the decision of a judge, not the will of the offender or the one offended. In Penance, however, the scales are righted in accord with the will of the sinner and the judgment of God against whom he sinned. For here not only is the restoration of the balance of justice sought, as in retributive justice, but above all reconciliation in friendship. This takes place when the offender makes amends to suit the good pleasure of the one offended.¹¹

¹⁰ I return to this model in greater detail in my first two chapters. Drawing on MacIntyre's model of apprenticeship, L. Gregory Jones describes the craft of forgiveness as a lifelong learning process into which Christians are apprenticed by the master of the craft, Jesus Christ. See L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), xii.

¹¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol 60 (3a. 84-90) trans. Reginald Masterson O.P. and T.C. O'Brien O.P. (Washington D.C.: Blackfriars, 1966), 167. As the Blackfriars edition notes, this shows that penance is not an impersonal tribunal but a setting for loving reconciliation; it is a personally responsible reply to God's invitation to love.

The hope is that the penitent will redirect one's will away from sin and towards God. One way to do this is to make amends, to pay what one owes to one's neighbor and to God, and then to amend one's sinful habits. But because sin is habitual, the struggle against sinful enchainment is an ongoing one. The medieval Christian goes through the penitential process at least once a year during Lent in preparation to receive the sacrament of the altar.¹² Perfect love and forgiveness are never fully realized in this life but rather are located in eschatological time among the communion of saints.

The three primary texts in my dissertation, *Jacob's Well*, *Piers Plowman* and *Pearl*, share in common this educational model of virtue formation. All three writers use architectural allegory to represent the moral formation of the individual and of the community.¹³ The building up of a forgiving self and community is likened to

¹² For a description of the sacrament of penance and the catechetical concerns of the Church in late medieval England, see Eamon Duffy, "How the Plowman Learned his Paternoster" in *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400- c.1580*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 53-76.

¹³ *Jacob's Well*, *Piers Plowman* and *Pearl* might also be thought of as examples of "vernacular theology." Although he was not the first to use the catchphrase "vernacular theology," Nicholas Watson's widely read article, "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409" made the phrase well-known. According to Watson, scholars of fourteenth-century contemplative writing tended to assume that the divide between fourteenth and fifteenth-century culture was simply a given. Watson argues for a more nuanced picture in which the transformation of "vernacular theology" shortly after 1400 is not a coincidence but a result of specific historical occurrences. Watson's account focuses on Arundel's Constitutions in 1409, a piece of ecclesiastical legislation that sought to limit catechetical instruction, control unlicensed preaching and ban vernacular translation and commentary without approval from the episcopate. This legislation drastically limited the production of theological texts that were being produced both for clergy and for the lay person from 1410 until the sixteenth century. Watson claims that analyzing the Constitutions shows an aftermath in which "all but the most pragmatic religious writing could come to be seen, by the early fifteenth century, as dangerous: a perception that led inexorably to a by and large successful attempt to inhibit the further composition of most kinds of vernacular theology," 823-5. See Nicholas Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409" *Speculum* 70 (1995): 822-864. Vincent Gillespie points out that Watson focuses on

construction of an edifice. But just as there are sometimes difficulties in the building process so too can there be difficulties with the penitential process, a progression that is disrupted by the ravages of sin. These writers differentiate the site of the building process, the practice of penance in the Church, from the completed edifice, the perfect performance of the virtues. In the pages that follow, I use Augustine's ecclesiology in the *City of God* to differentiate the practices of the community in the Church militant from the completion of the virtues in the Church triumphant, though both models are understood to be part of the City of God.¹⁴

To me, one of the most intriguing aspects of these allegories is that by showing examples of sin and by guiding the reader through the penitential process, the texts encourage one to engage in careful self-reflection, an engagement that is critical for

a limited chronological period and on a restricted range of texts that were written for reading. Gillespie shows that Watson excludes most homilies and all drama, both of "which afford particularly clear evidence of lively and challenging theological work being performed in the vernacular and in very public environments." Gillespie acknowledges that Watson's work has encouraged broader debate about the intellectual and spiritual capacities of the laity, a conversation also taken upon in work on Lollardy. However, Gillespie quite rightly says that this emphasis has "led to a privileging of the lay perspective over the clerical, and a downplaying of the continuing agency of the orthodox clergy in the production and dissemination of vernacular texts. But the socio-political tension between continued clerical agency and growing lay self-determination remains a key issue in exploring the contested rise of vernacular theology," 406-7. See Vincent Gillespie, "Vernacular Theology," in *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature*, ed. Paul Strohm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 406. This tension between clerical agency and growing lay self-determination is particularly evident in *Jacob's Well*. Although Nicholas Watson mentions *Jacob's Well* in his discussion of vernacular theology, he grossly misdescribes it as one in a list of "simpler works of pastoralia" that "tend to simplify their sources," 833. My first chapter shows that *Jacob's Well* should be understood as a lively and challenging example of theology that was deeply concerned with sacramental practice and performance in fifteenth century England. Furthermore, it is evidence of the continuing agency of orthodox clergy in the dissemination of vernacular texts.

¹⁴ I use the following translation in the pages the follow: Augustine, *City of God: Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 1972).

medieval confession and conversion. Though he refers specifically to the work done by William Langland's great fourteenth-century poem, *Piers Plowman*, David Aers' description of the process of the poem also holds true for the processes of *Jacob's Well* and for *Pearl*. The major concerns are unfolded in these complex works, whose processes are dialectical:

So our reading must recognize how the [text's] own processes are intrinsic to [its] theology. Moreover, positions receive powerful advocacy but are later, often much later, subjected to further interrogation and superseded. Supersession is not, however, the same as forgetting. Furthermore, positions ascribed to Christ or the Holy Spirit have a kind of authority lacking from other figures, although these may be able to foreshadow or articulate what is fulfilled in and by Christ.¹⁵

This type of reading practice requires one to remember what one has read in order to trace strands of thought that are woven through the text, strands that might be set aside but are that are not forgotten. This reading practice, I suggest, mirrors the type of careful self-reflection a medieval Christian must do in confession, a reflection that leads one to recognize the authority of Christ. So reading these texts provides an important type of training for the medieval reader, a training in memory and in paying careful attention to detail. My project takes seriously Aers's methodology by tracing strands of thought through each text as well as across the texts. While I hope that each chapter can be read independently, the goal of the larger project is to build from one chapter to the next. Because strands of thought are set aside but not forgotten, I hope that my dissertation

¹⁵ Aers, *Salvation and Sin*, 84.

invites the reader to remember in much the same way that the medieval texts are meant to do.

My first chapter shows that the anonymous author of the fifteenth-century penitential text, *Jacob's Well*, apprentices his reader into the craft of forgiveness.¹⁶ This self-proclaimed “man of craft” guides the reader through the penitential process by likening it to the construction of a well. The ninety five chapters are meant to be read from Lent to Pentecost. When the reader reaches the end of the text, the end of the penitential process, the hope is that he or she will understand the role of the Church and the importance of the sacraments in the craft of forgiveness. That is, the reader knows how to build well. But even the author of *Jacob's Well* does not leave the reader with such a stable, ordered edifice.

My second chapter explores the narrative exempla in *Jacob's Well*, stories that are included at the end of each chapter. If we think about the allegory of the well as a text that teaches the reader to tell one's story, to confess sin, then placing the allegory into conversation with the stories of other people provides an important role in educating the reader into the virtues. I argue that reading the stories in *Jacob's Well* forms the character of the reader by encouraging comparisons between the stories and the model of forgiveness that is developed in the allegory. Ideally from the author's point of view, the reader will learn to identify with examples that adhere to his model and to oppose those

¹⁶ I borrow the term “craft of forgiveness” from L. Gregory Jones, whose Christian model of apprenticeship grows out of Alasdair MacIntyre's version of apprenticeship in the virtues. See L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), xii.

that do not. Many of the stories show people resisting the paradigm of forgiveness set out in the allegory of the well, thereby representing the resistance of sin to the penitential process. Learning to recognize sin in these stories helps the reader to recognize sin in the self. Reading narratives about forgiveness is not the same thing as forgiving or being forgiven. However, I suggest that reading does play an important role in apprenticing one into the craft of forgiveness because practices cannot be separated from the languages that constitute them.

Early in the C-Text of William Langland's late fourteenth-century poem *Piers Plowman*, the allegorical Wille turns to Holy Church and asks her to tell him how he may save his soul. This inquiry sets up Will's understanding of his own salvation as a teachable and learnable craft, as something he could potentially enact with proper practice. To redirect the Wille from sinful habituation to forgiveness involves much more than his ability to confess well. Over the course of this richly complex allegorical poem, Wille learns that he cannot save his own soul. He must depend upon the sacramental resources of the Church for salvation. But my third chapter shows that one of the central resources for forgiveness, the sacrament of penance, is a terrible failure in this poem. Often, current criticism about penance in *Piers Plowman* is framed with a social history of penance or with relevant ecclesiological arguments concerning Wycliffites or friars in late fourteenth-century England. While these have been fruitful studies of the poem, I read it dialectically and immanently to see that the many renderings of forgiveness, from advocating it to seeking it to embodying it, show medieval agents apprenticed in the craft

of forgiveness, agents who are inadequate in different ways. Learning to distinguish among these inadequacies is critical to following the poem's process, one which provides a way of recognizing the difficulty of agency in learning to forgive and to be forgiven.

Pearl, an alliterative and apocalyptic allegory written by an anonymous poet in the late fourteenth century, develops a different model of apprenticeship. As the poem progresses, it becomes clear that the jeweler lamenting the loss of his pearl is a father mourning the death of his daughter. Inverting the typical parent-child relationship, the Pearl Maiden, one of the 144,000 virgins in the City of New Jerusalem, appears to him in a dream vision to teach him about salvation, to apprentice him into the Christian faith. My argument resists popular strands of historicist and materialist criticism that fully secularize the poem. I develop a form of historicism that seeks to incorporate materialist concerns within a religious context. To do so, I focus on a learning model that is primarily concerned with language acquisition. The *Pearl* poet's linguistic precision invites us to think about language acquisition and language use in the poem. I draw from Stanley Cavell's excursus of Wittgenstein's grammatical picture that shows a relationship between word and world.¹⁷ For Cavell, learning a language does not just depend upon the ability to name things but requires participation in shared forms of life. In *Pearl*, the dreamer is initiated into learning the language of love because he wishes to follow his teacher, the Pearl Maiden. I argue that he begins the poem with the knowledge of human

¹⁷ For Cavell's excursus on Wittgenstein's vision of language, see Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 177-178. Wittgenstein and Cavell are in keeping with MacIntyre's model of apprenticeship in the virtues. I use Cavell in my final chapter because he is particularly concerned with learning a language, a concern shared by the *Pearl* poet.

courtly love and learns the language of theological love, the language of virtuous speech, from what the Pearl Maiden says and does. The painful reality at the end of the poem, for the dreamer and for the medieval reader, is the realization that full initiation into the forms of life shared by the Maiden and her community is not possible because her world is not theirs. Though he is formed by and through her friendship, the dreamer remains a member of the Church militant, still dependant upon sacramental practice, and the Maiden remains a member of the Church triumphant. The *Pearl* poet provides a more extended vision of the Church triumphant than we see in *Jacob's Well* or *Piers Plowman*. Rather than using architectural allegory to show the upbuilding and crumbling Church militant, he uses it to represent the already-completed Church triumphant in an image of the City of New Jerusalem.

CHAPTER ONE

Building Community: The Allegorical Structure of *Jacob's Well*

I begin my study of *Jacob's Well* with a retelling of its foundational scriptural passage: Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4: 1-42.¹ Jesus leaves Judea for Galilee when he hears that the Pharisees had learned that he was making more disciples and baptizing more than John. On his long journey back to Galilee, Jesus goes through Samaria. Weary from travel, he rests on a plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph: the site of Jacob's well. A Samaritan woman comes to draw water from the well and Jesus asks her for a drink of the water. She does not understand how Jesus, a Jew, could ask her, a Samaritan, for a drink. Jesus answers her by saying, "If thou didst know the gift of God, and who he is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou perhaps wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water" (John 4:10). The problem here is the woman's inability to recognize Jesus – because she lacks recognition, she does not know to ask him for living water. Instead, the woman asks him where he gets that living water, for he has no bucket and the well is deep. She also asks him if he is greater than her ancestor Jacob, who gave them the well from which she and her

¹ All scriptural references are from the revised Douay Rheims translation of the Vulgate by Richard Chandler, *The Holy Bible* (Rockford: Tan Books, 1989).

ancestors drink. Jesus tells her that “whosoever drinketh of this water, shall thirst again; but he that shall drink of the water that I will give him, shall not thirst forever. But the water that I will give him, shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up to eternal life” (John 4: 13-14).

The woman asks Jesus for this water so that she will not thirst and will not have to return to the well to draw water. Jesus tells her to call to her husband and then to come back to the well, but she does not understand what he says because she does not have a husband. He tells her that she does not have a husband because she has had five husbands and the one that she has now is not her husband. At this moment, she recognizes him as a prophet. She says that Jesus tells her to worship at Jerusalem though her ancestors tell her to worship at the mountain. Jesus tells her that the hour is coming when she will worship the Father in neither Jerusalem nor at the mountain. For, he says, you “adore that which you know not: we adore that which we know; for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, when you shall neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, adore the Father” (John 4: 22-24). She responds by telling him that she knows the Messiah (who is called Christ) is coming and that when he does, he will proclaim all things to the Samaritans. Jesus says to her, “I am he, who am speaking with thee” (John 4: 26).

Augustine’s homily on John 4 shows one way that this passage might be interpreted for a congregation. He tells his listeners that, with the help of God, they will hear “in such wise that [they] will be reviewing what [they] already know, rather than

learning what [they] know not.”² Unlike the Samaritan woman, Augustine’s hearers already know this story because they have attended Mass before and have heard it read during Lent. Augustine reminds the audience of the knowledge that comes from God by reviewing it, though he tells them that this recapitulation still demands their attention because the things spoken in the chapter are “great mysteries” and the “similitudes of great things” such as feeding the hungry and refreshing the weary soul (100). After a brief discussion of the preliminary circumstances of Jesus’s journey to Galilee, Augustine turns to the passage where Jesus comes “near to the parcel of ground which Jacob gave to his son, Joseph. Now Jacob’s fountain was there” (100). He says that “it was a well” and then goes on to differentiate between a well and a fountain; every well is a fountain yet every fountain is not a well. A fountain flows from the earth and offers itself on the surface to those who draw from it. A well, on the other hand, is “deep and far down” but in such a manner as to not lose the name of fountain (100). I draw attention to this exegesis because it magnifies two important details in the description of the well in John 4: the parcel of ground and the water. At no place in the scriptural passage, nor in Augustine’s account of it, does there appear any image of the physical well itself. We have no details about the material goods used to construct it and no details about its size or shape. What we do know is that the well goes beneath the earth rather than just being on the surface of it.

² Augustine, “St. Augustin: Homilies on the Gospel Of John, Homilies on the First Epistle of John, Soliloquies,” in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. VII, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 100. All further quotations to this sermon will be cited parenthetically with reference to page number.

Instead of locating the Church within the structure of the well, Augustine develops it within the people at the site. He discusses forgiveness through a meditation upon Jesus's weariness. The weakness, he says, comes from the flesh so as to nourish the weak. The dual nature of Christ as both strength, God, and weakness, man, provides for Christian salvation: "The strength of Christ created thee, the weakness of Christ created thee anew. The strength of Christ caused that to be which was not: the weakness of Christ caused that which was should not perish" (100). It was, he writes, the weakness of Christ that makes us strong (101). Jesus's embodied humanity causes him to feel physical thirst, while his Godly strength provides his thirst for the salvation of the Samaritan woman. Augustine turns to an allegorical reading of the Samaritan woman so that his congregation will identify with her. He tells us that when she approaches Jesus, she is the "Figure of the Church not yet justified, but now about to be justified: for this is the subject of the discourse" (101). In that woman, he tells his church members, let us hear ourselves and acknowledge ourselves and in her give thanks to God for ourselves because she "first showed forth the figure and became the reality" (102). To recognize themselves in the figure of the woman is to recognize themselves as aliens, for "while this Heavenly City, therefore, is on pilgrimage in this world, she calls out citizens from all nations and so collects a society of aliens, speaking all languages."³ But though the Church is yet to be justified, it will indeed be justified, "And therefore, it leads what we

³ Augustine, *City of God: Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans* trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 1972), XIX.17, 878. This and all subsequent references are to book, chapter and page number.

may call a life of captivity in this earthly city as in a foreign land, although it has already received the promise of redemption, and the gift of the Spirit as a kind of pledge of it...”⁴

The Samaritan woman, the Church yet to be justified, misunderstands the water in the well as being water which was in the fountain rather than living water. She asks Jesus how he is going to give her the living water without an instrument with which to draw it. At this point, she does not know how to think allegorically: “Understanding another thing and taking it carnally, she does in a manner knock, that the Master may open up that which is closed. She was knocking in ignorance, not with earnest purpose; she is still an object of pity, not yet of instruction” (102). The woman reads literally, takes her understanding carnally, due to her ignorance and her lack of instruction. This is about to change. By keeping in mind Augustine’s association of the Samaritan woman with the church members, his listeners are invited to rethink what they “already know” as they learn what they “know not.” The woman asks Jesus if he is better than her ancestors who dug the well. Jesus tells her that everyone who drinks of Jacob’s well shall thirst again but that his water will become a fountain springing up into everlasting life. Augustine points out the discrepancy in their thinking: “What more evident than that it was not visible, but invisible water, that He was promising? What more evident than that He was speaking, not in a carnal, but in a spiritual sense?” (102).

⁴ Augustine, *City of God*, 877.

Augustine relocates the woman's carnal misunderstanding to the image of the well. Since the water in the well "is the pleasure of the world," men draw it "with the vessel of lusts" (103). Once a man reaches these lusts, he will doubtless thirst again for them. But those who drink of the spiritual water will never thirst because they will be satisfied "with the good things of Thy house" (103). The good things of which he speaks relate "neither to the pleasure of the ears, nor to the eyes, nor to the smell, nor to the taste, nor to the touch; by the mind alone are they received, by the understanding alone are they drawn up" (103). Augustine moves from a carnal reading of the well to a spiritual one -- the sensory pleasure being drawn up by lust becomes salvific water being drawn up by understanding. The subject of his discourse, the justification of the Church, depends on a shift in understanding for the Samaritan woman and in turn for the listeners in the congregation. Jesus says "I thirst, give me to drink" in order to "work faith in her, and to drink of her faith, and to transplant her into His own body, for His body is the Church" (107). This transplant represents a moment of conversion where those from outside of the Church come to Christ and believe through this report.

Just as it was familiar to Augustine's listeners, Jesus and the Samaritan woman would have been as familiar to members of the late medieval English church. As Leo Carruthers notes, John 4: 1-42 was part of the Gospel reading assigned to the Friday within the octave of the third Sunday of Lent.⁵ Parishioners would associate the Gospel

⁵ Leo Carruthers, "The Liturgical Setting of *Jacob's Well*," *English Language Notes* 24 (June 1987): 9.

reading with the lesson for the day based on Numbers 20: 6-13.⁶ In this passage, the congregation of Israel gathers against Moses and Aaron while in the wilderness of Zin. The people rebel against Moses's decision to lead them out of Egypt to a place where no vegetation grows and where there is no available water. The issue of rebellion, of the wish to reject the covenant and return to Egypt, is important. Like the people in the story, the Christian pilgrim always rebels in one's wilderness or while on one's journey. But the Lord does not leave them to rebel. He appears to the two men and tells them to assemble the congregation and command the rock before their eyes to yield its water: "Thus you shall bring water out of the rock for them; thus you shall provide drink for the congregation and their livestock." The lesson and Gospel reading for the day would bring together the idea of living stones (1 Peter 2:5) – rocks yielding living water to provide salvation to those in need – with the penitential practices of Lent. For a rebelling Christian, Lent is a special time of repentant reflection, a time to think about one's rebellion and one's rejection of the covenant.

The sole surviving manuscript of *Jacob's Well*, MS Salisbury Cath. 103, is housed in Salisbury Cathedral. It is most likely the work of a copyist as opposed to being the original text.⁷ The author of text is anonymous.⁸ *Jacob's Well* expands the Biblical

⁶ See *The Sarum Missal in English*, trans. A.H. Pearson (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1868), 88.

⁷ Leo Carruthers, "Where Did *Jacob's Well* Come From? The Provenance and Dialect of MS Salisbury Cathedral 103," *English Studies* 71 (August 1990): 335.

narrative of the well from Jesus and the Samaritan woman into an extended allegory spanning ninety five chapters about practicing forgiveness in hopes of salvation. Using the right tools, the “skeet” or scoop and “skavel” or shovel – contrition, confession and satisfaction -- a person can cleanse one’s shallow pit of corrupt water by removing the layers of muck (sin) to arrive at the solid ground (virtue) beneath. Reaching solid ground provides the penitent with an opportunity to dig even deeper into the firm earth in search of living water, water understood to be the gifts of the Holy Spirit. At this point, the shallow pit becomes a pure well, and now the building begins. One must construct the walls of the well with the stones of faith and good works. The aim is not just to construct a pure well but to climb back out of the well to reach the high hill of heaven. The final stage of building requires a new form of construction using new materials. The ladder, charity, has one stake on each side, love of God and love of his neighbor, with many rungs, the Ten Commandments, in between. Climbing the ladder of charity will help one to find mercy and to ascend to heaven.

⁸ As Vincent Gillespie has shown, anonymity is the norm in late medieval devotional writing. “In this world,” writes Gillespie, “especially in the suspicious and sometimes sinister intellectual climate of anti-Lollard polemic and the premature Counter Reformation inaugurated by the Councils of Pisa (1409), Constance (1414-1418), and Basle (1431-49), anonymity was both a political weapon (as the studied and sustained absence of named Lollard authors suggests), a potential escape from culpability, and a defense against the misuse of one’s writings that might result from Lollard interpolation (considered by the hierarchy and their agents to be one of the defining strategies of the heresy), or from inappropriate selection and juxtaposition.” See Vincent Gillespie, “Anonymous Devotional Writings,” in *A Companion to Middle English Prose*, ed. A.S.G. Edwards (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 127-8. While there is no direct evidence of this, it is interesting to think that the *Jacob’s Well* author could have chosen to remain anonymous as a way to defend his writing from Lollard interpolation.

While the reference to the well and the genre of penitential writing unique to this author, he distinguishes his work through a precise and extended arrangement of the elements within the image of the well. The manuscript contains a table of contents with a Latin heading for each chapter that provides a visual summation of the text's catechetical program. In "Allegory and Bible Interpretation: The Narrative Structure of a Middle English Sermon Cycle," Leo Carruthers reproduces the table of contents to show how the narrative structure develops. The Arabic numerals refer to the author's chapter numberings, while the divisions and subheadings are from Carruthers. I combine Carruthers' summary of the table of contents with his separate descriptive analysis of the allegorical structure (in parenthesis) to indicate where the tools, mud, well and ladder are located within the larger framework:

- I. Introduction (chapters 1-10: the pit and the skeet)
 - 1. Introduction and explanation of themes
 - 2-9. Articles of canon law and excommunication
 - 10. Confession: release from excommunication

- II. Treatise of Vices (chapters 11-36: the stinking mud)
 - 11-24. The seven deadly sins
 - 25-33. Penance
 - 34-35. The five senses
 - 36. Circumstances of sin

- III. Treatise of Virtues (chapters 37-93: the six spades are 37-64, rebuilding the well is 65-73, the ladder of charity is 74-93)
 - 37-60. The seven virtues, fruit of the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, remedies for sin
 - 61-65. The four cardinal virtues
 - 66-70. The three divine virtues: (i) faith and good works
 - 71-73. The seven sacraments
 - 74-77. The three divine virtues: (ii) charity

78-79. The three divine virtues: (iii) hope
80-88. The Ten Commandments
89. Corporal and spiritual mercy
90-93. Prayer

III. Recapitulative Conclusion (chapters 94-95: Jacob's Well)

94. The seven gifts of the Holy Ghost; Beatitudes
95. Recapitulation of the entire work⁹

This visual condensation encapsulates issues that are essential to my chapter. First, it mirrors the author's practice of employing a structural image as a plan to show the development of forgiveness and community formation. It also shows that *Jacob's Well* is, in Elizabeth Salter's terms, a diagrammatic allegory.¹⁰ Perhaps as important, however, is that it also allows me to represent the detailed, almost obsessive, complexity of the layers involved in the medieval writer's ordering and development of the allegory. This organization and attention to minute particulars places stringent demands upon the reader of this text. One must learn to patiently read and to remember what one has read if one is to complete the entire work.¹¹ And only by such a patient reading will one arrive at an

⁹ Leo Carruthers, "Allegory and Bible Interpretation: The Narrative Structure of A Middle English Sermon Cycle," *Literature & Theology: An International Journal of Theory, Criticism and Culture*, Vol. 4 (1990): 4-5.

¹⁰ Although Salter writes about allegory in *Piers Plowman*, this classification is helpful for understanding *Jacob's Well*. Diagrammatic allegory is similar to a medieval moral treatise that uses images, often of a tree that is divided into branches, leaves and fruits, to schematize the virtues and vices. Allegorical buildings were also used. "For like the didactic illustrations of the period," notes Salter, the diagrammatic allegory "is static, precise, and formalized: what it lacks in evocative power it makes up in faithful accuracy of communication." See *Piers Plowman* ed. Elizabeth Salter and Derek Pearsall (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), 15.

¹¹ As Mary Carruthers notes, the image of a building was the foundation for a tradition of monastic memory-building: it "became the authority for a fully-developed mnemonic technique, using the *planus* (and sometimes the *elevatio*) of a building laid out in one's mind as the structure for allegorical and moral meditation, the 'superstructures' (*superaedificationes*) of *sacra pagina*." See Mary Carruthers, *The Craft*

understanding of forgiveness. Only then, retrospectively, will one be able to grasp the author's method by which the reader has been led.¹² Much as is the case with the fourteenth-century poem *Piers Plowman*, this text requires dialectical reading practice.¹³ The author includes images and strands of thought that are put down but not forgotten. They are remembered, reimagined and sometimes replaced "later, often much later," in the prose. As is the case with *Piers Plowman*, our reading must recognize that the process of the text is intrinsic to its theology.¹⁴

Remembering what one has read in *Jacob's Well* is also critical for understanding its ecclesiology. The author's model of the Church is reminiscent of Augustine's *City of God*. Augustine represents the Church as a thoroughly mixed body in its earthly pilgrimage, a body that will only be purified, without spot or wrinkle, in the perfect

of Thought: meditation, rhetoric and the making of images, 400-1200 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 17. A building plan (the English translation of the Latin "planus") is a drawing that shows the horizontal projection of a building to scale and might show an exterior of an object as seen from above, as in a roof plan. An elevation (English translation of the Latin "elevatio") is an accurate geometrical projection, drawn to scale, of a building's façade or other visible external or internal part on a vertical plane (ninety degree angle) to the horizon. *A Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), s.v. "plan," "elevation."

¹² This might be one reason that there is so little criticism written about this lengthy work. Until 1998, the only edition of the text was the EETS version which only included the first fifty chapters.

¹³ In this chapter references to the poem are to *Piers Plowman: The C Version* eds. George Russell and George Kane (London: Athlone Press, 1997). All references will be cited parenthetically with reference to Passus and line number.

¹⁴ I use David Aers' language, "later, often much later," to describe the process of dialectical reading. For a discussion of dialectical reading in *Piers Plowman*, see David Aers, *Salvation and Sin* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 83-4.

communion of saints.¹⁵ The reader joins the author in remembering – both in terms of memory, relating one’s patient dialectical reading practice to liturgy and to church practice, and in terms of re-membering the broken members of Christ’s body – to replace and reconstruct the intermingled church as it is on earth in hope of reaching the City of God as it will be in heaven (Eph. 4: 17-32, 5:1). This places the author, the medieval reader and the whole of the Christian community into a master-apprentice model where they practice forgiveness together. The author sets out this model in the first five lines of the text:

Whann a man of craft wyll werkyn ony great werk, þat askyth long labour, dyscretly he ymagyth and castyth be-form in his herte how he wyll makyn it, & endyn it. Þer-for sires, I purpose here-after gostly to makyn a great werk, þat is, of a schelde pytt to makyn a depe welle. And þis may noȝt be don with-oute long labour, but it must haue manye a day werk, er it be endyd & made.¹⁶

The author, a self-proclaimed man of craft, apprentices the reader into the craft of forgiveness, a great work that requires long labor over the Lenten period. In the recapitulative final chapter, he returns to this opening and redefines the “work” as a “process” through which he has led the reader over two and half months: “In rehersyng

¹⁵Augustine, *City of God*, XX.9, 914-18. For my understanding of Augustine’s ecclesiology, see David Aers, *Salvation and Sin*, 6-8.

¹⁶ *Jacob’s Well* is available in two printed editions. The first fifty chapters are in *Jacob’s Well*, ed. Arthur Brandeis, EETS 115 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co, 1900). The last forty five chapters have been edited by Clinton Atchley in his unpublished dissertation, “The ‘Wose’ of *Jacob’s Well*: Text and Context” PhD. Diss, University of Washington, 1998). Following the lead of Moira Fitzgibbons, I use “i” and “ii” to distinguish between the two editions. See Moira Fitzgibbons, “*Jacob’s Well* and Penitential Pedagogy,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 27 (2005), 213 note 2. This quotation is from Brandeis, 1. All further references to *Jacob’s Well* are cited parenthetically by page number.

schortly all þe proces þat I haue seyð & schewyd 3ou þis hoo tweyne monythys & more”

(ii.537). In *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis*, L. Gregory Jones

describes the “craft of forgiveness” as a lifelong learning process into which Christians are apprenticed:

The craft of forgiveness involves the ongoing and ever-deepening process of unlearning sin through forgiveness and learning, through specific habits and practices, to live in communion – with the Triune God, with one another and with the whole Creation.¹⁷

To learn forgiveness as a craft means participating in shared practices. As a practice, forgiveness is a mutuality rooted in sacramental participation. Christians perform this mutuality in relation to one another and in relation to the master of the craft, to forgiveness embodied: Jesus Christ. This catechetical paradigm identifies the process of learning to embody forgiveness, a difficult progression that is compellingly articulated in *Jacob’s Well*.

The predominant strand of scholarly criticism of *Jacob’s Well* emphasizes these opening lines alongside the final line in order to think about the genre of the text. In “The Liturgical Setting of *Jacob’s Well*,” Leo Carruthers examines the structure of the work in order to “deal with the question of whether or not JW was designed for oral delivery to an audience or for private reading and meditation.”¹⁸ He compares the text to

¹⁷ L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), xii. Jones’s understanding of the craft of forgiveness emerges from Alasdair MacIntyre’s version of apprenticeship in the virtues. I discuss MacIntyre’s learning model in my introduction.

¹⁸ Carruthers, “Liturgical Setting,” 12.

medieval sermons as well as to other treatises and manuals to argue that *Jacob's Well* is divided into chapters that are “cast in sermon form, ostensibly for oral delivery since most of the sermons follow the example of the first in concluding with the standard preaching formula, “Ad quod nos perducatur & c.”¹⁹ Carruthers claims that because the author uses direct address, harangues the audience and warns against leaving church during the boring parts, the text must not be intended for private consultation.²⁰ He maps the putative sermons onto specific days within a specific liturgical period so that the homilist would read one sermon a day for two and a half months beginning with Ash Wednesday and ending with the Vigil of Pentecost.²¹ After mapping the sermons onto the liturgical calendar, he concludes that chapter 41 should be called the “Easter sermon” because resurrection/regeneration is of such importance in this sermon.²² Very important is Carruthers’ recognition that *Jacob's Well* is a text associated with Lenten practice and even more specifically with the period from Ash Wednesday to Pentecost.

In his dissertation, “The ‘Wose’ of *Jacob's Well*: Text and Context,” Clinton transcribes the final forty five sermons that were not included in Arthur Brandeis’s 1900

¹⁹ Ibid, 13.

²⁰ Ibid, 14.

²¹ Ibid, 18.

²² Ibid, 21.

EETS edition. His transcription of *Jacob's Well* makes possible my extended treatment of the text, a reading that could not have been made before 1998 without direct access to the manuscript. In addition to completing this monumental task, Atchley writes three critical introductory chapters about *Jacob's Well*. His second chapter picks up where Carruthers leaves off with a discussion of the text's liturgical setting. Atchley begins by stating that the "subject matter of the allegorical well-building, is, for the most part unremarkable..." based as it is upon John 4.²³ What is notable about this text, he tells us, is "the author's overall design for the sermon cycle and his use of tone and subject matter within the allegory to function within the constraints of canon law to preach sermons on certain topics on certain days."²⁴ That these "sermon cycles" in *Jacob's Well* were originally intended for oral presentation "seems beyond serious question."²⁵ The aim of Atchley's criticism is to reorganize Carruthers' numbering system so that we take "Sermon 45 as the Easter sermon" rather than "Sermon 41."²⁶

Atchley identifies the chapters as sermons where the author "generally opens with a direct address, sums up the previous day's theme, connects it with his present theme, delivers a relatively short exposition of the theme normally followed by two exempla,

²³ To distinguish between Atchley's transcription of the text and his critical commentary, I place all references to his criticism in footnotes. Atchley, 41.

²⁴ Ibid, 41.

²⁵ Ibid, 46.

²⁶ Ibid, 51-66. I return to this reorganization later in my discussion of chapter 41.

and ends with a very brief conclusion and exhortation.”²⁷ Atchley rightly recognizes a pattern in each chapter where the author breaks down the components of the chapter’s topic, discussing each topic “methodically and thoroughly” by subdividing each category into additional subsets.²⁸ Atchley identifies two of the major themes of the sermons: “to love one’s neighbor” and “contrition, confession and absolution of sin.”²⁹ These are doubtlessly two subjects of the written discourse in *Jacob’s Well*. As Siegfried Wenzel notes, English speakers tend to conflate the subject of discourse with the theme of a sermon which is, strictly speaking, a grammatical phrase from the Bible.³⁰ This blurring of terms, I think, leads critics to misclassify *Jacob’s Well* as a sermon cycle. As an alternative, I wish to return to an important possibility that Carruthers raises but does not pursue. He acknowledges that this sort of book might be “put to different uses during its lifetime” and suggests that after the addition of the index in 1470, its owner may no longer have been using it as “a series to be preached or read from beginning to end,” but

²⁷ Ibid, 41.

²⁸ Ibid, 41.

²⁹ Ibid, 32, 43.

³⁰ For a discussion of a proper “thema” and its divisions in a sermon cycle see Siegfried Wenzel, “Medieval Sermons,” in *A Companion to Piers Plowman*, ed. John A. Alford (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 160. All references to the *Middle English Dictionary*, hereafter *MED*, are to “*The Middle English Compendium*,” The University of Michigan. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/mec/> (accessed January 18, 2010). Also relevant are the *MED* definition of “teme” 1a) The subject of written or spoken discourse, the topic; esp. the theme of a sermon (usu. a quotation from the Bible or other moral authority, which begins the sermon and serves as its theme) and 1b) a written composition.

rather as a “source book” for religious instruction.³¹ Siegfried Wenzel has suggested to me that *Jacob’s Well* is more likely a source book for sermon composition or a private devotional manual than a sermon or sermon cycle. This accounts for the lack of a proper theme in each chapter. If it was used as a source book, then the responsibility of creating the theme would fall on the preacher who was reading *Jacob’s Well*. If it was being used as a private devotional manual, the reader could use the index to pull out examples of a particular sin or of a particular virtue. Interestingly enough, this is the way that the majority of critics use *Jacob’s Well* today – they pillage it for examples for use in discussing another text.

I wish to suggest another option: *Jacob’s Well* is a penitential manual meant to be read in its entirety over the Lenten period from Ash Wednesday to Pentecost. Confessional manuals were ubiquitous in late medieval England because of the catechetical preoccupation of the Church. In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council imposed a new religious obligation on lay people to perform annual confession to their parish priests. Canon 21 requires a parishioner to confess prior to receiving the sacrament of the altar on Easter:

All the faithful of either sex, after they have reached the age of discernment, should individually confess all their sins in a faithful manner to their own priest at least once a year, and let them take care to do what they can to perform the penance imposed on them. Let them reverently receive the sacrament of the eucharist at least at Easter unless they think, for a good reason and on the advice

³¹ Carruthers, 14.

of their own priest, that they should abstain from receiving it for a time. Otherwise they shall be denied a Christian burial at death.³²

The edict was intended to edify the Church: “in principle, this ruling put into the hands of the parish clergy an immensely valuable pastoral and educational tool, for the priest in confession could explore not only the moral condition of his parishioners, but also their knowledge of Catholic faith and practice.”³³ This obligation placed new demands on both the confessor and the penitent. The penitent needed to know how, what and when to confess and the priest needed to know how to distinguish between serious and trivial confessions in order to assign suitable penances. Assuming that he had the requisite education, there was still agreement that the average parish priest was ill-equipped to perform this task. As a result, there are a large number of vernacular penitential manuals produced during this time period in order try to remedy the situation. While this literature would have been written primarily for preachers and catechists, it would have also been available for the consumption of parishioners as a means for preparation for confession. The manuals instructed the priest on how to elicit confession by working

³² The original Latin reads as follows: “Omnis utriusque sexus fidelis, postquam ad annos discretionis pervenerit, omnia sua solus peccata confiteatur fideliter, saltem semel in anno proprio sacerdoti, et iniunctam sibi poenitentiam studeat pro viribus adimplere, suscipiens reverenter ad minus in pascha eucharistiae sacramentum, nisi forte de consilio proprii sacerdotis ob aliquam rationabilem causam ad tempus ab eius perceptione duxerit abstinendum; alioquin et vivens ab ingressu ecclesiae arceatur et moriens Christiana careat sepulture.” Both the Latin original and the translation are from *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner S.J. (London : Sheed & Ward ; Washington, DC : Georgetown University Press, 1990), I: 245.

³³ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400- c.1580*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 54.

through the Ten Commandments, the seven sins, the corporal works of mercy, and the five bodily senses.³⁴

In a discussion of confessional manuals for the “confessor-teacher and instructions addressed to the penitent-student,” Marjorie Curry Woods and Rita Copeland affirm that *Jacob’s Well* achieves such “rhetorical complexity as to challenge the generic distinction between instructions to priests and guides to lay persons.”³⁵ Drawing from Woods and Copeland but focusing on the education of lay people in the text, Moira Fitzgibbons argues that *Jacob’s Well* falls within what Anne Hudson calls the “grey area” between orthodoxy and heterodoxy.³⁶ While placing it in this “grey area,” Fitzgibbons at the same time carefully avoids labeling the text as Lollard writing. “To be sure,” she writes, “the *Well* writer’s competing responsibilities do not allow him to develop a fully realized alternative pedagogy like the Lollards’: he never, for example, tells his audience to seek God’s truth in texts, scriptural or otherwise. He does, however, uphold the value of critical inquiry at the end of his text, and implies that this must go on outside the confines of the mind or the parish.”³⁷ Strangely enough, this critical inquiry at the end of the text, one that must go on outside of the parish, somehow also goes on within the

³⁴ Duffy, 58.

³⁵ Marjorie Curry Woods and Rita Copeland, “Classroom and confession,” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature* ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 399.

³⁶ Moira Fitzgibbons, “*Jacob’s Well* and Penitential Pedagogy,” 216.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 216.

Church: “as we shall see, poor instruction *within* the Church becomes his primary target by the end of the text. In response, the *Well* writer ultimately offers his listeners a conception of parish life defined by shared intellectual engagement.”³⁸ Her insistence on the “grey area” causes this contradiction, a contradiction that leads her to claim that the text functions as an “alternative form of education – one well removed from the violence of actual schools.”³⁹ What remains unclear to me is where this alternative education occurs – it is at once within the parish, outside of the confines of the parish, outside of the schools but not in a fully realized (Lollard) alternative. I agree with Fitzgibbons that *Jacob’s Well* upholds the worth of critical inquiry, not only at the end but throughout the text. However, this affirmation of critical inquiry does not necessarily place the author in the grey area between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Critical inquiry does not require a fully realized alternative pedagogy that must somehow go on outside of the confines of the Church – we see critical inquiry going on from within the crumbling Church in *Piers Plowman*. Much like Langland, who is very aware of the pressures on the church from outside as well as from within, the author of *Jacob’s Well* encourages and practices critical inquiry from within the orthodox Church.

Though very briefly, Nicole Rice points out that the author encourages the reader to seek knowledge under clerical supervision and that while the text hints “at possibilities for practical and intellectual overlap between clerics and laypeople, spiritual guidance

³⁸ Ibid, 220.

³⁹ Ibid, 235.

puts these hints into practice. Dialogue offers a literary technique for keeping clergy and laity in cooperative conversation.”⁴⁰ Thinking of *Jacob’s Well* as a literary dialogue that puts spiritual guidance into practice is extremely helpful. It is important, I think, to specify that this practice is sacramental practice, specifically penitential practice. In my language, *Jacob’s Well* guides one through the penitential process, thereby apprenticing the reader into the craft of forgiveness. Learning to patiently read and remember what one has read is an important type of Lenten reflection, a practical form of participation in the Church. This is not to say that reading about forgiveness is the same thing as forgiving or being forgiven. But it is to say that for lay people in late medieval England, private devotional reading intersects with community practice in important ways. For example, Eamon Duffy has shown that the purpose of the Book of Hours was to “offer lay people a suitably slimmed down and simplified share in the Church’s official cycle of daily prayer, it was not so much a rival to the religion of the official church as an aspect of it, cementing the lay devotee more closely to the institution by encouraging him or her to participate in its formal worship.”⁴¹ For lay people, reading provided an interiorizing of religion that encouraged communal participation. While *Jacob’s Well* is surely not slimmed down or simplified, I do think that the manual functions in a way that is comparable to Books of Hours because it brings together reading and practice. It guides

⁴⁰ Nicole R. Rice, *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 51.

⁴¹ Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and their Prayers, 1240-1570* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 59.

the reader through the penitential process, thereby cementing the devotee more closely to the Church by encouraging sacramental participation. This type of reading is part of the process of learning to forgive and to be forgiven, of learning to replace the filthy pit of sin with the living water of the Holy Ghost.

In the introductory chapter of *Jacob's Well*, the author “images” and “casts” the whole work of his well – he provides an overview of his scheme and how it shall be worked (i.4).⁴² The pit of the body is so lacking in “kynde,” he tells the reader, that it has no “kyndely spryng to receyve þe water of grace” (i.1). This body lacks kindness which is normally understood to be an activity of the will.⁴³ But this body also has the more conventional five bodily wits, the five senses, through which the “artycles of the gret curse” enter (i.1). Located in the body and surrounded with the corrupt water of the great curse, the soul “nedyth to cry in-to god: Saluum me fac, domine, quoniam intrauerunt aque vsque ad animam meam.’ Saue me, þou god, fro drenching, for watyrs of cursing han entryd my pytt to my soul” (i.2). Drawing from Psalm 68, “Save me, O God: for the waters are come even unto my soul,” here the soul recognizes a lack, a need, and then calls out for help. But crying out for salvation is not enough for the soul. After the cry, the author’s instruction and the reader’s work in the process begins: “what þise wattris of cursyng be, & how it muste be cast out of youre pytt with a scope of penaunce, þis schal

⁴² He forms a mental picture of his writing, of his architectural allegory. In the *MED*, “caste” means to make, build or construct; write or compose; to arrange in a certain way. See definition 25 a) and b).

⁴³ The author clarifies the interrelations between body and soul later in the text. I return to this issue in my readings of chapter 28 and chapter 35.

be my labour to teche 3ou here-after” (i.2). His role, as the master of the craft of forgiveness, is to apprentice the reader into penitential activity by teaching him or her about how penance helps to remove sin.

The cleansing of the pit does not end here – the descent moves even deeper into the pit, to the “deep wose be-nethe, þat is, the vij. dedly synnes, in which þe soule styketh sumtyme so faste þat he may no3t out, but schulde peryssche” (i.2). The soul that has already cried for grace to escape original sin is now in great danger of perishing, of getting stuck fast in deadly sin. Augustine describes the soul being stuck fast in sin because of the enchainment of the will:

The enemy had a grip on my will and so made a chain for me to hold me a prisoner. The consequence of a distorted will is passion. By servitude to passion, habit is formed, and habit to which there is not resistance becomes necessity. By these links, as it were, connected to one another (hence my term a chain) a harsh bondage held me under restraint. The new will, which was beginning to be within me a will to serve you freely and to enjoy you, God, the only source of pleasure, was not yet strong enough to conquer my older will, which had the strength of old habit. So my two wills, one old, the other new, one carnal, the other spiritual, were in conflict with one another, and their discord robbed my soul of all concentration.⁴⁴

The enchainment of sin renders the emerging spiritual will not yet strong enough to conquer the older, carnal will. This harsh bondage leaves Augustine under restraint with a damaged soul, a soul in need of help. Just as the soul must cry to God for help from drenching in corrupt water, it too has “gret nede to seyn to God ... lord, deliuere me out of þis wose of dedly synne, þat I styke no3t therein to be peryssched!” (i.2). Deliverance

⁴⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 140.

from the woes of deadly sin first depends upon recognition of need and then upon graceful help from God. But after this initial cry for help, the author's edificatory role emerges again: "My werk & labour schal be to tellyn what is þise wose of þe vij. dedly synnes, & how 3e schul caste out þis wose, ffirst wyth a skeet of contricioun, and after wyth a skauell of confessioun, and þanne shouelyn out clene þe crummys, wyth the schouele of satisfaccoun" (i.2). Before his teaching can be efficacious, the soul must first be moved to cry for grace. The author plays a role in teaching his reader the penitential process, one that understands his instruction to be subservient to and subsequent to God. But the author does not call attention to himself or to his role as teacher again until the end of the chapter. This marks an important shift in agency in terms of the process of salvation.

After cleansing the pit from the water of the curse and the seven deadly sins, the five watergates, the five wits, "must be stoppyd" so that the water and muck does not enter again (20) Moreover, because the pit is not "depe in in perfeccoun" but "schelde in frelte and in febylnes," it "must be dolven deppere" with the spade of cleanness (i.2). The author's use of the passive voice introduces the verb "to be" with the result that the main verb is changed from an actual process to a finished process. Also, because of the use of the passive, the actor has been removed. The agency involved in the stopping and

the delving is not clear and the action seems to already be completed.⁴⁵ So the author turns to a new tool to complete the next step in the process. But as opposed to the tools used so far, the spade of cleanness does a new kind of work because it serves two purposes. First, a person uses it to cast out the circumstance of sin, the gravel beneath the wose of sin. Next, the person reuses the spade to “delve down ... depe in þe ground of vertewys, contrarye to þe vij. dedly synnes, tyl þou find vij. sprynges of watyr of grace, þat is, vij. 3iftes of þe holy gost”(i.2). This is where the text begins training the reader in remembering. As I will show in the discussion that follows, the re-use of the spade of cleanness depends upon the reader’s acquisition of knowledge to this point. The reader must remember the process he or she has gone through, digging deep into the ground through the layers of muck, in order to replace the corrupt water and mud with the springs of the water of grace. This remembrance and “contrary” movement through the double-use of cleanness signals the beginning of a transformative process in the reader. Now the soul that was formerly in danger of peril begins to cultivate the virtues.

This spade of cleanness leads the reader to the conventional site of the well, “þi ground of þi welle be-neth,” as discussed above in John 4 and in Augustine’s sermon (i.3). The author’s description of the well is unique because he uses architectural allegory to build the churchly community upon the foundation of the well. He places the “corbels” of “the articles of the faith” upon the ground of mercy after leveling it with the

⁴⁵ My understanding of the agentless passive (when the verb “to be” is introduced to a passive ending in –ed) is from Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress, *Language as Ideology* 2nd edition (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 26, 131, 134-5. It is also important to notice the author’s use of the modal “must.”

level of equity. These ornamental projections of stone jut out from the wall in order to support the weight of the structure above.⁴⁶ Next, comes the re-remembering. Combine sand, that is “mynde of your sin” with lime burnt in fire, that is “crist, whyzt as chalk, wyth-outyn synne, brent in his passioun, wyth fyir of tribulacyoun” and “medle hem togedere wyth watyr of wepyng” (i.3). Let this amalgamation be the mortar – this cement holds together the materials of the well.⁴⁷ Here the allegory abstracts Christ’s passion from the rest of his life and from the resurrection. As David Aers has shown, late medieval orthodoxy in England does just this – it concentrates on the passion, crucifixion and tortured body of Christ by sidelining other historical aspects of his life and the Resurrection. This making of the late medieval body of Christ and the incitements to imitate that body reflect and maintain the flow of power in the Church.⁴⁸ Though the author of *Jacob’s Well* does eventually teach the reader about the Incarnation and Resurrection, it is worth noting that he places a much greater emphasis on the Crucifixion, the only aspect of Christ’s life mentioned in the introduction. To complete the construction of the well, the reader should use the plumb of the line of truth, lay the

⁴⁶ This definition of “corbel” is 2a) in the *MED*.

⁴⁷ Interestingly enough, a “mortar” is also a bowl used for grinding and mixing ingredients in preparing food or medicaments (*MED*). In this way, the mortar provides a place to combine the necessary ingredients (memory, Christ’s body, and tears of contrition) to produce the salve, or medicine, used in curing the wounds of sin. Langland’s *semyuief* needs a sacramental salve to cure his wounded body after Faith and Hope flee him. See Langland, *Piers Plowman, A New Annotated Edition of the C-Text* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2008), Passus XIX, lines 81 & ff.

⁴⁸ David Aers and Lynn Staley, *The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 1996), 37-42. All of chapters one and two are relevant.

“corbels of faith,” then the “morter” of memory, and finally the “stonys of þe werkys of þi feyth”(i.3).

After the completion of the well, the soul “must haue a laddere to styin vp by, out of þi depe welle in-to heuen. Þe ladder muste be charity”(i.3). Leo Carruthers notes that the discussion of charity is the only point in the text where the author does not incessantly return us to the image of the well. As I show below, this supersession reflects a change in the author’s conception and representation of the churchly community. Although the ladder extends from the well made of stone, the author gives us clues to signify the construction of Jacob’s ladder as a different sort of edifice that emerges from the well. The ladder of charity has two sides: love of God and love of your neighbor. The construction of Jacob’s ladder only ascends vertically – there is no need to dig any deeper down before building back up. The “nethyr stake” is dread of doom, while the “ouyr stake” is hope of bliss. So the lowest point on the ladder is dread of doom and the highest is hope of bliss.

Jacob’s Well offers considerable attention to the building materials used for the ladder. The ladder has many “stakes” (i.3). Each stake, “presumably wooden,” would be placed in the earth for a particular purpose; the wood, of course, would be “a cutting from the limb of a tree.”⁴⁹ The use of the “stakes” invites the reader to make associations with other types of familiar wooden structures. In Book XV of the *City of God*, Augustine

⁴⁹ *MED* definition for “stake.”

aligns Noah's wooden ark with the wood used to make the cross: "It was to Noah that God gave instructions to make an ark in which he was to be rescued from the devastation of the Flood Without a doubt this is a symbol of the City of God on pilgrimage in this world, of the Church which is saved through the wood on which was suspended 'the mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.'"⁵⁰ The wood in each case represents the Church and its salvation. The building of the ladder of charity represents a continued attempt to create interplay between architectural fact and symbolic image as a way to explain this process.⁵¹ There are numerous stakes piled upon one another in this ladder. First, there are the Ten Commandments, then the seven deeds of bodily mercy followed by the seven deeds of ghostly mercy. Next, the parishioner adds praisings and thankings to God and prayers, the greeting of Our Lady, and finally, the seven highest stakes in the ladder of love must be the seven petitions in the Pater Noster.

When the well and the ladder are complete, the reader must have a windlass, a rope and a bucket in order to drink of the spring of grace. The windlass is a person's mind which might be turned about, upward and downward. Reminiscent of the Trinity, the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, are a threefold rope together in one. The windlass and the rope allow the sinner to draw up a bucket, the ghostly desire to

⁵⁰ Augustine, *City of God*, XV.26, 643.

⁵¹ For a discussion of the relationship between the cross, the church and Noah's ark, see V.A. Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), 297-358. For a related image, see the Tree of Charity in Passus XVIII of *Piers Plowman*. Will asks Liberum Arbitrium of "what wode" the three "shoriares" holding up the Tree of Charity are made. In *Piers Plowman*, the three planks betoken the Trinity. See Langland, *Piers Plowman: The C Version* eds. George Russell and George Kane (London: Athlone Press, 1997), 563-582; here lines 24-26. For a full account of Langland's very different treatment of the image, see my third chapter.

goodness so as to drink the water of salvation. The author finishes the list of materials by returning to the image of the well: “Per-fore, 3e schul drawe watrys, in ioye, of þe wellys of 3oure saveoure, þat is, of 3oure bodyis, þat arn the wellys of god” (i.4). This line produces a preliminary incorporation of Christian “bodyis” into the body of Christ, the Church. This communal body, present after the penitential process, is a different body than the singular one from the beginning of the introduction that was filled with waters of the great curse.

In the final paragraph of the chapter, the author tells us that he has “ymagyd and cast all [his] hool werk of þis welle” which he shall labor to us for ninety four days “ere it be performyd” (i.4). The author clearly recognizes his work as a process that requires practice. It has not yet been performed because it is “incomplete,” not yet put into practice, and “imperfect.”⁵² Be “þis shewyd now,” he says, before you shall better know and understand “what I mene” whan “I schewe more of þis werk” (i.4). The language that he uses here of constructing an “understanding” based upon authorial “meaning” through the analysis of “showings” resembles the language of Julian of Norwich.⁵³ She

⁵² *MED* definitions for “performyd.” This language of performance also refers directly to the completion of a building: 3 (a) To make or construct (a building, wall, statue, etc.), build; complete construction of (a building, bridge, etc.)

⁵³ Julian of Norwich, *The Showings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. Denise Baker (Greensboro: W.W. Norton & Co., 2005), 3-5. See, for example, Revelation I, chapter 1: “This is a revelacion of love that Jhesu Christ, our endless blisse, made in xvi shewynges,” 3; chapter 2: “This was my meaning, for I would after be cause of that shewyng have the more true mynd in the passion of Christ,” 5; chapter 86: “And fro the tyme it was shewde, I deseyrde oftyn tymes to wytt in what was oure Lord’s menyng. And xv yere after and mor I was answeyrd in gostly understanding...,” 124.

attributes the beginning of her book to “Goddys gyfte and his grace,” but tells us in the final chapter that the work “is nott yet performyd as to my syght.”⁵⁴ The author of *Jacob’s Well* takes a different approach -- he tells his reader to look in the beginning of every work that one does “how it schal be perfourmed, & what schall be þe ende!” (i.4). His “showing” to the reader, as opposed to what Jesus shows Julian, can be performed once the reader acquires an understanding of his authorial meaning. This performance takes place as the reader patiently makes his way through the text in order to gain understanding. Medieval Christians perform this penitential work with the hope that it leads to “the end,” to salvation, to the ultimate work which “is not yet performed.”

Before examining some relevant aspects of *Jacob’s Well*, I wish to comment upon the complexity and multiplicity of readings that this allegory produces. As I hope is evident from my account of the introductory chapter, this author develops material images with an almost painstaking attention to detail. In the remaining chapters, he provides exact measurements for each stone, assigning to it a particular aspect of faith or belief, and then subdividing each stone to define its breadth, width and depth. Sometimes he even allegorizes one image, for example, the ground, with an array of possibilities: the ground of mercy, the ground of humility, the ground of friendship, etc. A training in patient attentiveness, reading *Jacob’s Well* provides the reader with many strands of thought to follow. Though there are doubtless many others, here I trace one strand

⁵⁴ Julian of Norwich, 124.

through four stages that he guides the reader through in order to develop an understanding of the author's paradigm of forgiveness. The first stage explains excommunication, and the second gives an account of sin. I pay particular attention to envy, the sin against the Holy Ghost in this text.⁵⁵ I focus on envy because the author emphasizes the gifts of the Holy Ghost as being central to reconciliation in the church. Third, I write about penance as a practical salve for envy – correctly performing penance allows the sinner to remedy envy with forgiveness. My final section begins with the double function of the scoop of cleanness. This double-duty signals a transformation in the body of the text which leads to the possibility of constructing a unified community through a remembrance of the body of Christ.

I. Excommunication: The “Great Curse”

After the introduction, *Jacob's Well* moves into an explanation of the “articles of the great curse.” Curates are to show these articles to the parishioners and least quarterly each year.⁵⁶ This showing is the first representation of church practice that we encounter in the text. The articles should be shown solemnly with the cross standing, bells ringing, and candles burning. The author gives the formula for the reciting of the articles of the great curse as a definition of what results from excommunication (Latin *ex*, out of, and *communio*, communion or the body of Christ):

⁵⁵ In chapter three, I discuss the sin against the Holy Ghost in *Piers Plowman*: unkindness, or murder.

⁵⁶ This is the first reference to the liturgical calendar. The author specifies the acceptable days upon which to read them: the Sunday following the feast of Michael, the first Sunday of Advent, the first or third Sunday of Lent, the Sunday following Whitsunday, and the Sunday after Lammas.

Be þe auctoryte & powere of almyȝty god, fadyr & sone & holy gost, and of þe glorious mayde marie, modyr of god, oure lord ihesu crist, & of seynt Myȝhel archaungyl, & of alle archaungelys & aungelys; be þe auctoryte of seynt Johun baptyst, & of alle holy patriarkys & prophetys, and of þe holy apostlys Petyr & powle, & of seynt Johun þe euangelyst; be þe auctoryte & powere of þe blessed marterys, Steuen, Laurence, & seynt Tomays, & of alle holy marterys, & of alle holy confessourys; be þe auctoryte & powers of þe blyssed maydenys Katerine, Cristine, & Margarete, & of alle holy maydenys, & of alle holy sayntes, þat is for to seye, be þe auctoryte & power of all holy church in heuen & in erthe, we denounce & schewe acursyd in þe sentence of the gret curs, þat is to say, we schewe hem dampnyd & departyd fro god, and fro alle prayerys & suffragys of holy church, and from alle þe sacramentys. And we schewe hem to be takyn to þe powere of sathan, þe fend, to deth, & to dampnacyoun of body & of soule, tyl þei come to amendement by verry penaunce & ben asoyled (i.14).

Characteristic of medieval liturgy, this list invokes the sense of past as present and the Church as universal, a dense community of holiness.⁵⁷ Only a person who has already become a part of the Christian community through baptism can undergo excommunication. The author focuses on excommunication because it is about the sanctity of the Church being sustained in the world. The “great curse” means a falling away from God resulting in a deprivation of the Church, being deprived the body of Christ as evident in the sacraments.⁵⁸ This form of punishment is the loss of churchly community. The penalty, however, is ultimately more medicinal than punitive -- it provides for the possibility of returning to the Church through penance. This instruction

⁵⁷ The opening prayer in the Canon of the Mass, one where the priests prays for strength through protection, is a familiar example of this type of list. See the *Sarum Missal*, 310.

⁵⁸ For an account of evil as deficiency, a “falling away from God,” see Augustine, *City of God*, XII.9, 481.

aims to help the person to avoid future culpable acts and to help make amends for those sinful acts that have already been committed.

How does a member become severed from the Church? The author gives a range of examples from witches, to heretics, to usurers, to false tithers, to those who intimidate members of a church tribunal. He pays special attention to those that destroy or pollute the material church: “And alle þat robbyn, brekyn, or brennyn, holy cherche violently, or chapel, or place relygyous, or opere placys halwyd or priuylegyd, or brekyn crosses, awterys, or ymagys, in dyspyzt & violence” (i.16); “And alle paryshcenys þat hewyn doun violently, or stubbyn, pullyn, or schredyn, or croppyn, ony treen in cherche-zerde” (26); “And alle þo þat vsurpyn of newe tyme þe kepyng or þe amonicyoun of ony cherche in tyme of voidance & occupye þe godes”(i.28); “And alle þo þat in vyolence wastyn, breken, peryschen, dystroyen, occupyen, stelyn, beryn, ledyn away, or do ledyn away, þe godys þat longyth ... of ony opir men of holy cherche....”(i.56). The repetition of the wasting, breaking, perishing, destroying and stealing of the material church composes a cacophony of violence. The act of dismembering the church, relentlessly repeated in the allegorical description, becomes a habit. These members sever themselves from the community and become “members of the feend” (i.31). Those that privilege material wealth over the well-being of the community sound like members of Augustine’s earthly city who justify criminal, violent acts by privileging material wealth and dominion over

all else.⁵⁹ It may seem that a difference exists between the members of the earthly city and those destroying the church in *Jacob's Well* -- the latter are already in the church but have turned away from God. This author uses a particular language to identify these acts as being articles of the "great curse," acts that might have the potential to lead to "ex-communico," or being outside the body of the church.

We might expect this sort of community to exist solely in places outside of the church, in the earthly city, rather than within the church, within Christ's body, within the City of God. But we should remember that the city of God exists on earth, not without spot or wrinkle, as well as in the future exaltation in heaven. Augustine describes the present state of the city of God as being a mixture of the elect and reprobate in the church:

In this wicked world, and in these evil times, the Church through her present humiliation is preparing for future exaltation. She is being trained by the stings of fear, the tortures of sorrow, the distress of hardship, and the dangers of temptation; and she rejoices only in expectation, when her joy is wholesome. In this situation, many reprobates are mingled in the Church with the good, and both sorts are collected as it were in the dragnet of the gospel; and in this world, as in a sea, both kinds swim without separation, enclosed in nets until the shore is reached. There the evil are to be divided from the good; and among the good, as it were in his temple, 'God will be all in all.'⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Augustine, *City of God*, II.20, 71. Their main concern "is that [they] should get richer all the time, to have enough for extravagant spending every day," regardless of the means necessary to acquire this accumulation of wealth.

⁶⁰ Augustine, *City of God*, XVIII.49, 831.

Fear sorrow, hardship and temptation reside within the city of God as present on earth. Here, the reprobate sit side-by-side with the good. The division between them occurs in future exaltation, in the city of God as it will be in the communion of saints. The reprobate, one condemned by God and excluded from future exaltation, acts as a bad intermediary between members of the church community. A “demon,” this bad intermediary, “separates friends,” which is very different from the good intermediary, who “reconciles enemies.” The reason for so many bad intermediaries is that

the multitude of the blessed is made blessed by participation in the one God, and the multitude of evil angels – wretched because deprived of participation in him – rather opposes our approach to blessedness than interposes to help us thither, and even by its very multitude makes a kind of uproar designed to make it impossible for man to reach that one good which can bring us happiness – that good for which we needed not many mediators, but the one Mediator who could lead us to it.⁶¹

Bad intermediaries create an uproar, through wasting, breaking, perishing, destroying and stealing, in hopes of making it impossible to reach happiness. Those who are excommunicated, “wretched because deprived of participation in him,” impede an “approach to blessedness.” In a sense, excommunication reflects the choices already made by those excommunicated with the aim of reincorporation. The one Mediator capable of manuduction, of “lead[ing] us to it,” is Jesus Christ; “participation in the one God” guides the elect from the City of God on earth to the City of God in heaven. For the author of *Jacob’s Well*, cleansing the body, the pit, of the waters of the great curse is

⁶¹ *City of God*, Book IX, Chapter 15, 360-1.

the first step in this participatory practice. Once the reader understands excommunication and recognizes the role of false mediators, he or she can choose to turn away from them.

After recognizing these false mediators, how does a Christian choose to turn away from them? That is, what sort of practice allows a member of the community to remember the Church, to turn from the bad intermediaries to join with the One True Mediator? For this author, as for other late fourteenth and early fifteenth century theologians, the answer lies in the sacraments. He weaves the sacraments (baptism, marriage and the sacrament of the altar in particular) into the overarching allegory of the sacrament of penance. Penitential practice requires repetition. The water of the great curse has many streams through which to infect the body and to drench the soul. Therefore, the parishioner needs, in ghostly labor, to scoop out this corrupt water with the scoop of penance. The scoop must be “deep and hool,” deep enough to receive water of contrition and deep in one’s heart to sorrow for one’s curse (i.65). It must also be “hool, wyth a hole purpose, neuere to trespacyn aȝen in þat curse” (i.65). This wholeness means that the scoop is intact, in good condition and not broken. Punning on holy, it also suggests health, delivery from sin, moral uprightness and spiritual salvation.⁶² For if the

⁶² The following definitions of “hool” from the *MED* are relevant: 1. (a) Of a person, animal, the body, part of the body: healthy, cured, healed, free from disease or defect; also *fig.*; maken ~, to heal. 1. (b) Morally healthy, upright; spiritually saved; al ~; maken ~, to deliver (sb. from sin); rectify (vices). 3. (a) Of persons, animals, or parts of the body: safe, unharmed, uninjured. 4.(a) Of things: not broken, intact; not damaged, in good condition. 5.(a) All in one piece, undivided, whole.

scoop is broken, by confessing to more than one priest or by not confessing all sins, then the water of the curse “fallyth a3en in-to þe pit of þi conscience through þe broken scope of þi broken penauns” (i.65).

Broken penance leads to the act of the curse becoming a habit. Even if the head of the scoop is deep in contrition and whole in confession, a person must have a handle with which to hold the scoop, the handle of satisfaction. One must hold the handle of satisfaction “in þin hands, þat is in þin werkys” (i.65). Performing the work of satisfaction means practicing forgiveness in the churchly community, reconciling with those against whom you’ve sinned: “per-to sette þin handys, to make amendys for þi wrongys. Paye to holy church, to qwyke & to dede, þat þou owyst for þe wrongfull harmys þou hast do to hem....” (i.65). Broken penance, that is, decisively impedes the performances which are intrinsic to individual and collective sanctification, to “holy church.”

II. Envy: The Sin Against the Holy Ghost

For God created man incorruptible, and to the image of his own likeness he made him. But by the envy of the devil, death came into the world. Wisdom 2.23-4.

Drawing from the Book of Wisdom, the author of *Jacob's Well* describes envy as that sin which destroys the roots of love, the image of God's likeness. The author allegorizes Envy as the spouse of the devil:

þe modyr is Enuye, here two dowterys arn ioeye of þin neyghbourys harme & sorwe of þin neyghbourys good. þise two dow3terys enuye conceyvyd of þe devil, for the feend is here fadyr, for he wolde þat alle men weryn evylle, & þat no man were good. þefore, thurgh his enuye, deth of dampnacyoun entryd into mankynde. sapiencia primo 'Invidia diaboli mors intrauit in orbem terrarum.' þefore, þei þat enioyen of wyckydnes, & sorwyn of goodness in here ney3boure, arn verryly dowterys of þe feend, for þei folwyn hise condycyouns (i.82).

This allusion to Wisdom 2 introduces the idea that envy undoes God's good creation through the work of the devil. The outcome is the breaking down of the community, the destruction of joy in neighbors.

Envy works against the goodness of God's good creation, a working against that is described as "contrary." All sins are contrary, but envy is the worst:

Enuye is werst of alle synnes. why? for for oþer synnes arn contrarye to on vertew, as pride is contrarye to lownesse, leccherie is contrarye to chastity, coueytise is contrarye to largenesse, & so of oþere synnes. but enuye is contrarye to alle vertuys & to alle goodnessis (i.82).

In destroying the goodness of God as well as the cardinal and theological virtues, envy corrupts "alle". It causes a man to find comfort in another's sorrow and to feel sorrow for another's prosperity. The author's goal is to help to correct the all-encompassing contrariness, the envy in the heart of the reader: "þat is to seyne, puttyth away enuye out of 3oure herte, & enioyeth no3t of oþeres harm, ne sorwyth no3t of oþeres welfare; but

enjoyeth of oþeres welfare & beth sory of here dyssese!” (i.83). This syntactical inversion early in the chapter prefigures the work that his chapter hopes to accomplish: to reconcile the contrariness of envy. Before making this correction, however, the reader must know that there are three corners of envy: “wose” in the heart, “wose” in the mouth, and “wose” in the deed (i.83). Verbalizing envy, “wose” in the mouth, is a “sowing of dyscord” that causes strife among neighbors so that they become “verryly þe chylderin of þe fende, & þei ben contrarye to crist...” (i.83). In *Piers Plowman*, William Langland emphasizes language in the confession of Envy. Clothed in “kene wordes,” Envy’s chief livelihood is “Chidyng and chalengyng” (VI.65-8). He confesses to using biting words that curse work contrary to Christ:

Or thorw myhte of mouthe or thorw mannes sleythes
 Venged me vele tymes other vrete myself withynne
 Lyke a schupestares sharre and shrewed myn euencristene
 Aȝens þe consayl of Crist, as clerkes fyndeth in bokes:
*Cuius maledictione os plenum est & amaritudine; sub lingua eius
 labor & dolor.
 Filij hominum dentes eorum Arma & sagitte & lingua eorum gladius
 acutus* (VI.73-6).

The dressmaker’s shears produce an inward gnawing that works against neighbors and against Christ. With this kind of envious speech, the tongue becomes a weapon. For the author of *Jacob’s Well*, envy goes well beyond breaking community and causing harm to human beings. Envy is “contrarie to þe holy gost, & þe synne þat god most hatyth” (85). God most hates sinning against the Holy Ghost because it makes Christian forgiveness impossible.

As L. Gregory Jones suggests in *Embodying Forgiveness*, a Trinitarian identification of God is crucial for a Christian understanding of forgiveness: "... what God is in God's very being – namely, the trinitarian communion of self-giving love – human beings are called to grow into in response to the costly forgiveness of Christ. Such growth occurs through the guidance of the Holy Spirit as Christians unlearn habits and patterns of domination and diminution of others, of sin and evil, and learn to embody habits and practices of Christian communion."⁶³ For Jones, as well as for the author of *Jacob's Well*, sinning against the Holy Spirit precludes the unlearning these patterns and behaviors. Envy traps the sinner in the habit of sin. It might cause the sinner to misidentify God's mercy as "ouyr-large" and his righteousness "as no3t" (i.85). In this case, even though the sinner is capable of unlearning the envious pattern, he or she believes that "god wyl no3t lose you," so she continues with envious activities rather than taking the steps to unlearn the behavior (i.85). Or, the sinner becomes so full of "wanhope" as a result of the repeated act, that he "trustyst no3t in þe mercy of god; for [he] thynkest þat god may no3t forgive [his] sin" (i.85). Here the habit of envy traps the sinner in sin because he or she has insufficient faith in God's mercy. This despair denies to the sinner the promise of salvation and of divine forgiveness.⁶⁴

⁶³ L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, xv.

⁶⁴ The *MED* provides both definitions of "wanhope" The first is (c): an ungrounded presumption of salvation, overconfidence in God's forgiveness, false hope; also, theological error, heresy. The second is (a): The theological error or sin of insufficient faith in God's mercy, despair that denies the promise of salvation and divine forgiveness; despair of salvation, grace, etc.

The author of *Jacob's Well* advises the reader to “cast out of þi pit” the wose of envy in order to “forsake discord” and to “haue mercy of god” (i.84, 86). These sins “bynden a man so faste” that the writer has difficulty finding a sinner that will “grauntyn þat þese been synnes” in confession or “be repentant of hem” (i.86). In order to unlearn envy, first the sinner must recognize that it is a sin and then be repentant of it. However, because so few sinners are capable of recognizing this, “it is selden seen þise synnes for₃euyn” (i.86). The sinner is thus locked in a terrifying circle of compulsive habits in which even the seeds of remorse become confirmation of the habit. The author repeatedly tells the reader to recognize that this sin binds the sinner fast in order to delve this wose of envy out of the pit. However, the sinner cannot overcome this sin without the help of God; for “who-so styketh faste in wose of enuye, he may euyl out but god help hym. Þerfor Daudid seyth, Draw me lord out of þis wose, þat I styke no₃t faste therin!” (i.87). Still dependant, a sinner can help himself by delving deep into his pit with the scoop of penance. This, along with help from God, will help the repentant person to “fynde & fele a syker grownd, þat is frenschyp, þat is love . . . þe trewe ground of love to þi neighbor” (i.87).

III. Finding Forgiveness: The Secure Ground of Friendship

As we remember from the introduction, the sinner removes the muck of sin in hopes of reaching secure ground upon which to build his well. A person needs to use three tools in order to cast out the ooze of deadly sin: the skeet of contrition, the skavel of confession and the shovel of satisfaction (i.168). Going step-by-step through this

process enables a person to replace the destructive image of neighbor fighting neighbor, envy, with the construction of community through forgiveness. The ground of friendship sits between the two and demarcates them.

The author repeatedly transitions from one chapter to the next by beginning with some variation of the phrase, “the other day I showed you that...” Frequently, however, he addresses his audience directly as “syres” or “frendys.” Critics argue that his use of “syres” adheres to the formal mode of address when preaching, whereas “frendys” suggests the presence of a lay audience.⁶⁵ While this explanation is certainly plausible, I would like to suggest another possibility. The first time the author directly addresses the readers as “syres” occurs in chapter 10. Structurally, this chapter follows the articles of excommunication in order to formally introduce confession as a release from the great curse. He does not use direct address again until the beginning of Chapter 26. This chapter follows the long exegesis on the seven deadly sins and the first chapter on contrition of heart. Importantly, he changes his mode of address – he identifies his audience now as “frendys.” Understanding the importance of this moment, I think, demands dialectical reading and memory. During the discussion of envy at the end of Chapter 13, the author tells us that in conjunction with the help of God, penance will allow the sinner to “fynde & fele a syker grownd, þat is, frenschypp, þat is loue” (i.87). If we think about reading as a form of practice, then by this point in the text, the reader

⁶⁵ See Carruthers, “Liturgical Setting,” 14; Atchley, 28; H. Leith Spencer, *English Preaching in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press ; New York : Oxford University Press, 1993), 373 note 62.

has started the process of seeking friendship, has started to learn to love, through penance by understanding contrition. In this single word, “frendys,” the author marks an important transformation in the reader -- this signifies the beginning of the readerly incorporation into a community of friends.⁶⁶

Before reaching this ground of friendship, however, the sinner must cast out the ooze of deadly sin. The first tool to be used is the “skete” of contrition which is “sorwe of herte” for sin. The sinner should feel sorrowful for turning from the likeness of God into a fouler likeness of the devil (i.170). To work against the perpetual amnesia caused by sin, the author emphasizes the importance of memory in contrition. He tells the reader to have “forthowȝt in thynkyng of þi synnes be-forn, wyth a full vysement, to brynge hem to þi mynde” (i.170). He encourages careful deliberation and reflection prior to confession so that sins will be brought to mind with full prudence. While the skeet of contrition is the first tool needed to cast out the ooze of sin, it must be quickly followed by use of the skavel of confession to cast out the “hard wose” of sin (i.178). The author describes the relationship between contrition and confession as being different remedies for a wound, one more efficacious than the other:

for, þowȝ deed flesch be kut out of a wounde, wyth a scharp corryzie, þi wound þowȝ, nedyth to be pourgyd, wyth a drawyng salue; ellys it wolde rotyn & festryn aȝen. Ryȝt so, þowȝ þi dedly synne be kut out, wyth sorwe of herte, from þe pyt of þi conscyens, ȝit þi conscyens nedyth to be pourgyd, wyth a drawyng salue of clene schryfte, & ellys þe wounde of dedly synne rotyth & festryth aȝen in þi soule (i.179).

⁶⁶ I will return to this language again in my discussion of chapter 41, “De Amicicia.”

This image of a wounded man in need of salve is also present in Langland's reconfiguration of Jesus's parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10.25-37) in passus XIX of *Piers Plowman*. Accompanied by Faith, Hope and the Samaritan, Wille walks through a wild wilderness, a place where they come across a wounded man who has been bound by thieves. The man cannot help himself because he is *semyuief*, or half-alive, because of the debilitating effects of sin (XIX, 54-58). The two theological virtues, Faith and Hope, cannot help the man. But the Samaritan, the figure of Christ or love embodied, recognizes that the wounded man is greatly in need of help. He picks up *semyuief*, anoints his wounds (XIX.69-70), bandages him and leads him into the Church, to *lavacrum-lex-dei* (XIX.71). Much like *semyuief*, the reader of *Jacob's Well* depends on sacramental practice to heal the festering wounds of sin.⁶⁷ While sorrow of heart is an important first step in the process, the reader must not allow his wounds to fester. To purge the rotting and festering wounds from the soul, the author directs the reader be examined by a priest: "go & schryue þe to a priest!" (i.179).

Confession is a complex process in *Jacob's Well*. The skavel of confession has two parts, a shoe and a head. The shoe is the iron edge of the wooden shovel blade, and it comes before the handle.⁶⁸ Before confessing, the reader must have first the shoe, that

⁶⁷ *Semyuief*'s sacramental participation is through baptism and in partaking in the sacrament of the altar (XIX.88-90). For the haunting image of *semyuief*, see David Aers, *Salvation and Sin*, 83-131; esp. 89-101.

⁶⁸ *MED* definition for "sho" is as follows: 3) The iron edge of a wooden shovel-blade; also *fig.*; ~ almes, in *fig.* context: alms given as part of a penance for sin; ~ almes-dede.

is “a-forn-recordyng, a-forn-rehersyng, a-for-syzt, a-forn-stodyng, a-forn-avysement þat þow mowe knowe þi synnes in þi mynde” (i.179). Picking up on his earlier directions about forethought and contrition, the author continues to emphasize the importance of training one’s memory in preparation for confession. After this careful preparation, the reader is ready to progress from the shoe to the handle of the skavel of confession. The handle has six parts: explicitness, accuracy, timeliness, weeping, repetition of confession and spontaneity (i.183).⁶⁹ The penitent should use the “handle of weeping tears” by redirecting it from a false carnal appearance to a true spiritual cleansing. Weeping should not be “lezhing chere in herte, in face, in ey3, but as Marye mawdelen dede, wasche þou þe feet of crist, þat is, his manhood, wyth wepyng terys in þi confessioun, & crist schal cache out of þe vij. feednys, þat is, vij. dedly synnes, as he ded out of marye mawdelen. & þanne schalt þou haue forzeuenesse & mercy, as sche hadde....” (i.185). Weeping should not be a false outward performance, a “lying chere,” of tears.⁷⁰ Instead, true

⁶⁹ I focus here on weeping and repetition of confession. We remember from the introduction that the “water of weeping” resurfaces later as an ingredient in the mortar used to build the well. Here, we see the first use of the spade of cleanness in “repeated confession.”

⁷⁰ Three definitions of “chere” in the *MED* are relevant here: 1a) The human face; casten ~ upon, look at (sb.); the face or presence (of God). 2a) The face as expressing emotion, attitude, or character; facial expression, mien; glad of ~, with glade ~, etc.; (b) maken chere, make a (certain) face, assume or display a (certain) mien or expression; maken cheres, make faces, grimace. 3(a) A gesture or act indicative of an attitude or intention; (b) outward appearance or show; display (of emotion); insincere show of affection; feined ~; frend of ~, insincere friend. A “lying cheer” would particularly apply to the human body, especially to the human face. It would be a false performance because it would be a lying “outward appearance” that does not adhere to the true inner emotion. Such a “lying cheer” would align the false penitent with Simon in Luke 8: 44-46. The penitent woman is forgiven and Simon is not.

penitential tears, those like Mary Magdalen's, become spiritual by cleansing the feet of Christ's body.

As Katherine Jansen has shown, Mary Magdalene was the exemplar of perfect penance.⁷¹ *Beata peccatrix*, blessed sinner, was the most common title for Mary Magdalen in medieval sermons, a rich phrase that suggests her conversion from sinner to saint.⁷² Tears were one of the most salient attributes of the Magdalen and for "medieval people – preacher and penitent alike – 'tears were the witnesses of sorrow.'"⁷³ Mary Magdalen's tears were what Jansen calls a "multi-vocal symbol" because they represented the state of contrition -- sorrowful, painful and bitter -- at the same time that they could signify baptism and rebirth as a form of water that washes away sin.⁷⁴ Following the perfect exemplar of penance by weeping will prepare the reader of *Jacob's Well* to allow Christ to draw out the festering wounds of sin.

Tears are a multivalent symbol in *Jacob's Well*. Not only are they the water that washes the feet of Christ and the water by which Christ draws out sin from the sinner, but tears also become the water for which Christ thirsts on the cross. For weeping is the "watyr þat ihesu desyreth to drynken, *secundum* doctores, after whiche watyr of wepyng he thyrsted on þe cros & seyde, 'I haue thyrst,' þat is, for helth of mannys soulse, for

⁷¹ Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 199-244.

⁷² Jansen, 206.

⁷³ Jansen, 207. Jansen quotes Augustine's *de penitentia*.

⁷⁴ Jansen, 209.

wepying of mannys synne” (i.185). Augustine’s sermon describes Jesus’s thirst and his request for drink as a way for him to “work faith in [the Samaritan woman], and to drink of her faith, and to transplante her into His own body, for His body is the Church.”⁷⁵

Similarly, the author of *Jacob’s Well* understands Jesus’s thirst on the cross to be a figure for his weeping tears in John 4.6:

ffigure here-of Iohannis iiii. crist restyd him be þe pyt & þe welle of samarye, þat is, be þe synfull body, sory of his synne. & crist askyd watyr of þe woman samaritan, þat is, he askyth watyr of wepyng terys of synfull soul for his synnes (i.185).

It is important to note that this is the first of only two times that the author refers to the parable out of which his extended allegory is built. In this version of the story, Christ asks the Samaritan woman for water, a request that is allegorized into a request for repentant tears. This request for tears is a request for conversion as exemplified in the Magdalen, a conversion not only of the Samaritan woman but also of the sinful soul of the reader.

After the spiritual cleansing of confession, the penitent must then use the shovel of satisfaction. While contrition draws out the dead flesh from the wound of sin and confession makes the wound clean as a “drawynge salve,” the wound still needs to be healed with the “healing salve” of satisfaction (i.188). It is in satisfaction that justice and forgiveness come together because “þow 3 god be mercyfull, he is also ry3tfull. þerfore, he for3euyth no3t so synne but þat he askyth peyne. As he for3euyth by his gret mercy in

⁷⁵ Augustine, “St. Augustin: Homilies on the Gospel Of John, Homilies on the First Epistle of John, Soliloquies,” 107.

sorwe & in schryfte, so he askyth penaunce & amendys in satysfaccyou of his gret
 ryztwysnes” (i.188-9). The author’s configuration of justice is worth noticing –
 righteousness is likened to God asking for pain. This might suggest that God requires a
 punishment for disobedience or that justice is meant to inflict some sort of physical pain
 or suffering. Also possible though is that the author wants the reader to recognize the
 judgment given by a priest, the suffering endured in penance, in relation to the agony
 suffered by Christ on the cross for the forgiveness of sins.⁷⁶ What is clear is that God’s
 righteousness requires the sinner to make amends. This amends-making stands in stark
 contrast to the opening descriptions of the articles of excommunication: “Satysfaccyou
 in to fulfyllen þi penaunce enioyned of þe preest, & to pay þi dettys to qwyke & dede & to
 holy cherche, & to restore þat þou hast falsely get, to makyn amendys for þi wrongys &
 þe harmys þat þou hast don, & no more to turne aʒen to þi synne” (i.189).” To break
 from the enchainment of sin, the sinner must make payment for the plundering and
 breaking of bonds that was shown earlier in the text, bonds that were broken by harm

⁷⁶ The following definitions of “peyne” from the *MED* are relevant: 1a) The action of punishing, punishment; execution; (b) that which is imposed or suffered in punishment; a punishment for a fault, crime; etc.; ben in ~, to be punished; putten to peines, punish (sb.); (c) withouten (ani) ~, unpunished, exempt from punishment; (d) the punishment Christ suffered for mankind; (e) the punishment or vengeance of God; a punishment decreed or exacted by God. a) Physical torture inflicted upon someone in persecution, imprisonment, etc.; suffering endured in penance or mortification; an instance of physical torture; (b) dien in (the) ~, to die by torture; sleien with the ~, torture (sb.) to death; (c) *sg.* & *pl.* the pains or agony suffered by Christ; Christ's Passion; also *fig.*; (d) in oaths and asseverations: bi godes ~, for cristes ~, etc.; (e) ~ takinge, repentance or penance.

done to neighbors and to the Church. The repeated use of the conjunction shows the difficulty with and complexity of fully paying what one owes.⁷⁷

Even after making satisfaction, after paying what one owes to neighbors, to the Church and to God, the resistances of sin will still re-enter. After cleansing the wose of sin from the pit, the reader must “stoppyn the watyr-gatys,” stop his five bodily senses, to prevent the curse and sins from returning (i.216). The water of wickedness may not re-enter the reader’s body if he or she blocks the gates with cleanness and goodness (i.219). How to do this depends upon the sense – one should shut one’s eyes to vanity, stop one’s ears from hearing flattery so that they are open to God, and shut one’s mouth from enjoying delicacies (i.217). To avoid any lustful feeling that might occur with the mouth in kissing, the hand in groping or with any other member of the body in touching, one should wear a sharp hair shirt next to one’s naked body (i.219). More unusual is the author’s advice for how to stop the gate of the nose: “þerfore stoppe þe gate of þi nase in thynkyng how foul þou were in þi concecyoun and in þi berthe! what art þou in þi flesch? stynche & dunge! what schalt þou be in þi graue? stynkyng frowdes-mete!” (i.218). The author uses two striking images to mortify the body: a pile of dung and frog’s meat. What is now a pile of dung will be incorporated into a frog – it will be meat for the frog to eat that then becomes the meat on the frog’s body.

⁷⁷ William Langland describes proper amends-making in the phrase “redde quod debes.” See my third chapter for this phrase and for Langland’s version of amends-making in *Piers Plowman*. See chapter four for the issue of just payment in *Pearl* as described in the Parable of the Vineyard.

As it turns out, the concern with the entrance of sin into the dung pile through the five bodily wits is not just about the body but also about its entrance into the soul through the inward senses. In chapter 35 on the “inder-warde senses,” the author clarifies the relationship between the body and the soul, between the inner and the outer. The bodily wits and the inward sense are interrelated. For example, when the bodily eyes are open to vanities,

þanne þi soule settyth his ey3e of vnderstondyng to þe vanytes which þi bodily ey3e seeth, & þanne entryth watyr of lustys & wose of synne thru3 boþe the gatys, þat is, thru3 þi bodily ey3e & thru3 þin vnderstondyng in-to þi soule (i.223).

The watergates of the five senses are bodily and spiritual openings that allow sin to enter not just the body but also the powers of the soul. When sin enters the eye, it enters both the body and the intellect. It is the entrance through the intellect, through reason, that allows sin to enter the soul. Correspondingly, “wyll & consent is the felyng of þe soule” and “mynde is þe nase & þe smellyng of þe soule” (i.223). The importance of touch and smell becomes lucid when we understand that the author relates the senses to the working of the will and the memory. Of particular interest to this author is memory. It makes sense that a writer so concerned with process of remembering would use memorable images like the dung hill and the frog’s meat because of the connection he makes between smell and the mind. The reader must learn to stop the flow of sin through the senses in order to close the “bodily & ghostly wyttes” to corruption (i.227).

IV. The Double-Scoop of Cleanness: Transforming the Body

After digging through the layers of corruption and sin, the reader reaches the gravel of idleness in chapter 37. This gravel “is no ground to settyn on [his] stonwerk; wherfore [he] nedyth to takyn a spade,” the spade of cleanness, to “deluyn out þis grauel & sande” (i.230). Clean thoughts are the shovel of cleanness, clean words are the head, and clean works are the handle. The author tells the reader that in order to look to clean thoughts, the shoe of the spade should be a clean heart:

lete þin herte delue depe & scharpe to thynk what sharp peyne & deth crist sufferyd for þe. thynke how he made þe to his lyknesse, & bouzte þe wyth his precious blood. þinke what peyne he sufferyd for þe. think how he fedyth & sauyth þe. & how he schal rewarde þe in endless blys, 3if þou loue hym & worschipe hum. thynk how fals & unkynde þou art to hym. þou dredyst, louyst, seruyst & worshepyst, more þi body, þe world, þi rusty money, þi rotyn muk, þe feennd & synne, þan þou doost þi god (i.233).

This passage turns a moralistic exhortation to have a clean heart into a Christocentric meditation, one which points towards the divine agent who enables conversion. The reader should repeatedly “think” about Christ’s suffering and death on the cross. As we remember from Wisdom 2, Christ makes man to his likeness, but the unkind sinner turns away from this loving relationship by worshipping the world more than God. If the Christian loves Christ, then he or she should meditate on the painful sacrifices he made on the cross to allow the sinner to turn from the world back to him. The painful suffering links the atonement, Christ’s buying forgiveness through shedding precious blood, with Christian salvation. The sustenance that he provides in the sacrament of the altar feeds and saves the converted sinner. This type of active thinking, active remembering works against idle thoughts. Drawing from Proverbs 25:4, the author tells

the reader to “Do oute þe ruste of ydell thouztes fro 3oure herte & it schal be a clene vessel of God” (i.234). Using the spade of cleanness to rid oneself of idleness allows the reader to reach the clear ground beneath (i.235).⁷⁸

The spade of cleanness allows the reader to reach the secure ground of mercy. But in chapter 40, the author tells the reader to “delve down depe” in mercy “tyl þe watyr of grace spring, þat is the 3ift of pity” (i.248). The author informs the reader that “mercy is contrary to envie,” and the reader remembers that envy, the sin that God hates most, is contrary to the Holy Spirit (i.248, 85). To access the second gift of the Spirit, the gift of pity, the reader must practice forgiveness: “whanne þou mercyfully for3euyst þi wrongys, wyth-oute wrecche & rankure in herte, þat is mercy. Eph. Ij. ‘Estote benigni, misericordis, donantes inuicem,’ Beeth to-gedere benyngne, mercyfull & iche of 3ou for3yue oper. Gal. vj.” (i.251). Mercy means forgiving the wrongs of others without rancor of heart. When each person forgives the other, then a community of forgiveness “beeth to-gedere” in benignity and mercy.⁷⁹ At the end of the chapter, the author places the forgiving individual, and the forgiving community, into the figure of Christ in the Ascension:

⁷⁸ The first “secure ground” that the reader reaches is humility. He must reach humility with regard to oneself (244), humility with regard to God (245) and humility with regard to one’s neighbor (245). The ground of mercy that I discuss is the second ground that the reader encounters.

⁷⁹ This community of forgiveness is the community the author tries to build in the allegory of the well. In my second chapter, it is this model of forgiveness against which I place the narrative exempla in *Jacob’s Well*.

ffigure here-of: Cryist stey fro þe mount of olyuete to þe hyl of heuene. Cryist on englysh is for to seyne anointed, Olyuete is for to seyne mercy, Heuen is the hy3e hyll. 3if þou be in þe ground of mercy þou art in olyuete; þanne art þou crist, þat is to seyne, anoyntyd, þat is, wyth grace, wyth þe gyft of pyte þat spryngeth in mercy. þou crist, þat is, anointed with grace of pyte, þat on the hyl of olyuete, þat is, in hye mercy, schalt in þe ende styin vp to þe hy3e hyll of heuen (i.252).

If the reader is in the ground of mercy, then he “is Christ,” that is to say, he is anointed with grace, with the gift of pity that springs in mercy. This is an extraordinary claim. The reader is Christ. This being, however, is not an embodied one – the spring of mercy does not relate to the passion. Likewise, the movement from Olivet to heaven does not occur until the future. At this point in the ext, the Passion still seems abstracted from the Resurrection because the reader has not yet reached the formation of the body of Christ, the Incarnation, in the text. Through the anointment of grace, the reader might eventually ascend, climb up, to the high hill of heaven.⁸⁰ But the way to achieve the ascension is not entirely clear. Immediately after this passage, the author reminds the reader that he or she still stands on the ground of lowness. He loops the reader back into being bound by sin, bound by envy. The reader should re-use the spade of cleanness to “delue depe” in this “grond of lowness” until finding the spring water of grace, that is until he or she “for3euen enemies & haue pyte on þe nedefull” (i.252). Then the pit of lusts shall turn to a well of life, in which grace shall spring to the worship of God, “to helpe of þi ne3boure,

⁸⁰ This climbing to the high hill of heave prefigures the reader’s use of the ladder of charity.

& to saluacyoun of þi soule” (i.252). This finding of the well of grace still only exists for the reader as a future possibility.

Chapter 41 is a pivotal chapter in *Jacob’s Well*. Leo Carruthers refers to this chapter as “the Easter sermon” because of its ritual representation of purification, penitence and special attention to resurrection/regeneration.⁸¹ Clinton Atchley emphasizes the Lenten aspects of this chapter. He argues that Easter marks a replacement of Lent with a celebration of Christ’s death and resurrection. For Atchley, this chapter anticipates the coming of Easter through the continued observance of Lent rather than representing Easter itself.⁸² The aim of my engagement with this line of critical discourse is not to definitively assign this “sermon” to a liturgical day. Rather, I wish to consider the line of thought that the chapter produces in Carruthers and Atchley as readers of the text: to think about the “work” that the chapter does by encouraging the practical application of liturgical references. Both readers identify liturgical practices and then attempt to apply these references to sermons, to modes of instruction and community formation. I want to think about the ways in which this chapter begins to perform the community of holiness that the author points to in the articles of excommunication. Through liturgical references, the author invokes the sense of past as present and the Church as universal. This chapter begins, that is, to edify the church.

⁸¹ Carruthers, “Liturgical Setting,” 21-23.

⁸² Atchley, 53-54.

As Leo Carruthers notes, the early part of the chapter summarizes St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians by developing "the idea of man's brotherhood in Christ, the head of the Mystical Body."⁸³ I include relevant passages here:

One body and one Spirit; as you are called in one hope of your calling.
One Lord, one faith, one baptism (Eph 4: 4-6).

But doing the truth in charity, we may in all things grow up in him who is the head, *even* Christ: From whom the whole body, being compacted and fitly joined together, by what every joint supplieth, according to the operation in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in charity (Eph. 4: 15-16).

Wherefore putting away lying, speak ye the truth every man with his neighbor; for we are members of one another (Eph. 4: 25).

Let all bitterness and anger, and indignation, and clamour, and blasphemy, be put away from you, with all malice. And be ye kind to one another, even as God hath forgiven you in Christ (Eph. 4: 31-2).

In chapter 41 of *Jacob's Well*, the author invokes St. Paul as a powerful corrective to the earlier sins that break the bonds of community. It fills the void from the last chapter with Christ's body and the Church. Within the body of the text, he locates these correctives on the latter end of the double-scoop of cleanness.

He tells the reader to delve deep into the ground of mercy where he or she finds the ground of friendship and the gift of pity (253). He gives the reader seven reasons

⁸³ Carruthers, "Liturgical Setting," 21. He cites Ephesians 4:4-6, 15, 25.

“whi we schuldyn louyn”: we all have a father in heaven, who made us to his likeness, therefore “we owyn” to be friends as brethren; we are christened in one baptism, and bought by one price, “be o monye,” that is Christ’s blood; we have all one truth and we are all bound by one law; we have all one Lord, that holds us, body and soul, “under his schylde”; we are all fellows in God’s host, that each day fight “as his kny3tes,” and we all “abyde on warysoun”; for we are all of one spirit to live ghostly as we live here bodily. Through that spirit we are chosen God’s children; for we are all limbs of one body. “The body is holy cherche,” the “heued is crist” and “we are þe lymes.”⁸⁴

First I should note that he uses the plural pronoun “we” to address the Christian community. This form of address also brings the reader into the participatory aspect of the text. He tells us that because God makes humans in his likeness, they ought to be friends, and they owe this friendship to one another and to God. This language revisits the language of reparation in the section on the articles of excommunication. Excommunicated people owe debts to God and to other humans, but they either cannot or do not repay them because they are outside of the body of Christ. Here, Christians become one in baptism and are bought by one price, by one money, so that many become one through Christ’s blood, the sacrament. They have one Lord who holds their body and soul together “under his shield.” The invocation of God’s shield echoes and supersedes the pit’s lack of kindness, its “schelde of kinde” in the introductory chapter. Additionally, the author invokes Ephesians 4: 15-16 in order to dismiss any prior

⁸⁴ This is my gloss of Brandeis, 253-254.

representations of body/soul dualism. This Pauline language brings together the Christian body and soul: “that spirit” Christians are chosen “God’s children,” and they are all limbs of one body. In turn, he uses this conventional bodily image to place each parishioner within the body of the Church, within the body of Christ: “The body is holy cherche,” the “heued is crist” and “we are þe lymes.” This image of incorporation is developed throughout this chapter.

In the second section of the chapter, the author defines the seven qualities of friendship: innocence, benignity, obedience, charity, pity, righteousness and perfect love. He situates the qualities of friendship within his image of the unified body of Christ. These descriptions work against the description of the broken, destructive body in the articles of excommunication and against the harming of neighbors in the description of envy. For example, he tells the reader that innocence is “non harmynge, non to deryn oþer, no more þan þe lymes of oo body, for ech-on is leef” (i.254). In this instance, the author uses the conventional image of the tree to define innocence -- it means not harming other limbs of the one body because each limb is an extension of the tree. This image of the living body as a tree points ahead to the crucifixion as well as to the ladder of charity. He tells the reader that he should live in perfect love, that he should put himself in peril to save another man from harm, as do the limbs of the body (i.255). For if “on smyte at þin heued, þin hand is redy to defendyn þin heued. In þis fote brede of frenschip cryist 3af his lyif for us” (i.255). Christ gave his life in perfect love by saving another man from harm, and the reader should do the same through the formation of

friendship (1 John 3:16). In addition to gesturing ahead to the crucifixion once again, this sentence also refers to the role of the church militant: to defend the head, the Church, from an outsider, to defend it from one who smites at it.

The author does not leave the reader to infer the connection between repetitive jousting and penitential practice. If there comes a new quest, a new felony of sin to damn the reader, then he or she should read the psalm: “haue mercy on me, lord vp-on þi gret mercy” (i.257). The author points to the efficacy of reading, for if one “rede wel þis vers of mercy, þou schalt be sauyd for þi clergie, & be put to bysschopys prisoun of heuen, þat is, into purgatorye” (i.257). “Reading well” coupled with penitential practice allows the jousting knight in the church militant to go to purgatory. Afterwards, the reader will be purged out of purgatory with the prayers of priests and of all holy Church (i.257). These prayers are even more efficacious if the reader obeys the prelates, for if “we be obedient to our prelatys, & curatys, god shal obeye hym to our prayers” (i.257). Obedience here closes any potential gap between the Church and God – the possibility of the Church being subject to God collapses and the inverse is suggested, thereby affirming the power of the prelacy. Surely this disruption of hierarchy is meant to be disturbing and disruptive. But for now the issue of obedience is set aside and the reader is returned to what to do after committing sin before being arrested with death. The sinner should flee to the church and “kepe [him] þere xl. dayes & after þat take þe croys & forswere the kynges londe & kepe the kynges weye” (i.257). The sinner should keep himself in church for 40 days, presumably during Lent, and then take the cross to keep the king’s

way. In what sounds like the language of crusade, the knight takes the cross to keep the way, to avoid being arrested with death. But, again, the church militant turns back to habitual sin. And again, the author, in his usual obsessive manner, repeats his lesson and then tells the reader why he should follow it:

Perfore fle to holy church, þat is, to þe sacrament of penaunce, & kepe þe þere xl. dayes in lentyn of þi penaunce. Ffor clerkys seyn, In xl. days þe chyld in þe wombe hath ful schap of alle his bodily membrys, & in þe xl. day god puttyth þe soule & lyif in-to þe body of the chyld. Vnde veritas: ‘Quadraginta diebus edificatum est templum corporis pueri.’; Ryȝt so, þou in dedly synne, dysfyguryd & dysformyd in all þi gostly & bodily membrys in al þe longe ȝere before, & deed wythoute lyif of grace in þi soule; hast graunt in holy cherche xl. dayes in lentyn, þat þi membrys, ded be-fore in synne, dysfyguryd & dysformyd myȝten encresyn & reformyn aȝen in-to here ryȝt schap be penaunce & grace (i.257).

This passage shows knights here who receive grace in the “right shape” because it brings together images of embodiment and penance. The author begins by repeating his instruction to flee to holy Church, this time to keep Lent and perform penance. What initially seemed to be the language of crusade now becomes Church practice. He then develops a strikingly complex image within the forty days of Lent. It takes 40 days, he says, for a child in the womb to have all of his bodily members. In 40 days God puts the soul and life into the body of the child.

Paul Minear describes the New Testament image of the Messiah’s mother in relation to the church: “Associated with this image of the local church as mother is the reference to its members as her children and to another congregation as her sister (I Peter 5:13). Blended in this phrase [the elect lady] are two common ideas: that of the church

as the elect and that of the Messianic community as a woman bearing children.”⁸⁵ In the passage in *Jacob’s Well*, the body the child, the body of Christ, forms within the womb of the mother, the Church, during Lent. The edification of the temple in the body takes forty days to complete. This edification refers to the building of the church community through the unification of the individual members, as well as to the instruction of the church community through the practice of penance. Holy Church provides forty days in which to turn from habitual sin, to “increase and reform” what was “disfigured and disformed” in the long year before (image of the broken body/ broken Church) into the “right shape” through penance and grace. The child is at once the reforming individual penitent and the developing churchly community, the body of the Christ. The image of generation and regeneration provides the survival of the soul, it increases the promulgation of the church elect and the members of the body of Christ.

The author tells the reader that using bodily members (eyes, ears, mouth, nose and feet) to work against sin and to work towards mercy by keeping the forty days of Lent helps the body of the penitent to come together with the body of Christ on Easter Day. Just as he does with the developing child in the womb of the mother, on Easter, “god schal puttyn in-to [the penitent’s] body lyif & soule, þat is, hym-self in þe sacrament, þat is, god & man, flesch & blood, body & soule. As þi soule is lyif of þi body, so is god lyif of [the penitent’s] soule” (i.258). For the author, full bodily reformation occurs on Easter

⁸⁵ Paul Sevier Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 54.

Day in the sacrament of the altar. The author tells the reader that after this reformation, the priest shall place the cross of penance in his hands and shall send the parishioner on the way to the Ten Commandments. The reader must keep the Ten Commandments and the cross of penance to avoid turning again to sin.

In chapter 45, the author reconfigures his representation of the Ascension from chapter 40. Because this description follows the Incarnation, because the body of Christ is now present in the text, the author now provides the reader with the process leading to ascension: obedience. First, he gives an account of Luke 24.50 and then interprets it by placing the reader into the subject position of the apostles:

Cryst ledde his apostlys out of Bethanye, and blyssed hem & thane he stey to heuen. Bethania interpretatur domus obediencie, þat is, to bethanye wyth equitye. whan crist hath brou3t þe from wretthe to obediencie, þat is to Bethanye & equitye, þanne he blysseth þe wyth his hand, þat is, wyth his 3ift of kunnyng for to knowe þe-self to gouerne þe in vertuys, to stye vp fro Bethanye to heuen, þat is, in obedyens & equitye to styen vp to endles blys (i.277).

Now the reader realizes that Christ leads him from wrath to obedience through equity.

Ascending up from equity to heaven sounds much like the earlier version of the Ascension where the reader should stand from the ground of mercy to the high hill of heaven. However, there is an important detail here that shows the reader how to do this. Christ gives the reader the gift of knowing by blessing him or her with his hand – the

body of Christ is fully present here. Christ's manuduction, the gift of knowing, is what guides the reader's ascension to endless bliss.⁸⁶

After his account of the Incarnation and the Ascension, the author returns again to the Passion in chapter 45. He reminds the reader that those who lust in sin, who turn repeatedly to love worldly muck, have hearts that are hard in obstinacy (i.280). Their hearts are "hardere þan stonys of grauel, for in þe passion of criste hard stonys brostyn o-sunder, but [sinners'] hertys arn so harde in loue of þe world, and in sleuth to god ward, in loue of þe flesch, in lust of synne" that their hearts "mowe noȝt brestyn ne supplyn to goodness" (i.280). The hard stones of gravel burst asunder in the Passion of Christ. But the author says that the sinner's heart may not burst to life or supply to goodness while in worldly sloth. In order to change his heart into a living stone, the sinner cast out obstinate thoughts by remembering Christ's Passion. The reader must "thynke how crist made þe, & fedyth þe & sufferyd deth for þe, and how he was buffetyd, woundyd, betyn, scorgyd, pricked to þe brayes, nailed to þe cros, stungyn to þe herte & swete water and blood, and fed wyth eysill & gale" (i.283). Remembering the Passion in this passage is different for the reader than in chapter 37 where the reader first encounters the spade of cleanness. Now the reader's understanding of the body of Christ has been fully formed during the forty days of Lent. The description of the "peyne he sufferyd" in chapter 37 becomes much more detailed here. He was buffeted, wounded, beaten, scorged, pricked

⁸⁶ For manuduction as a leading by the hand, see Peter Candler, *Theology, Rhetoric, Manuduction, or Reading Scripture Together on the Path to God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 100.

to the brains, nailed to the cross and stung in the heart. But this is not just an example of inattentive authorial repetition because it signals an acquisition of knowledge in the reader. The author only tells the reader once to think about the many details of the crucifixion. Remembering the details of the dismembering Passion causes the hard hearts of sinners to burst asunder as Christ's does. Accordingly, this transformation allows the author to build the well in the reader, to build the community of living stones on the solid ground of mercy: "Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5).

V. Building the Well, Edifying the Church

Before building the well, the author tells the reader that the ground must be even. When stonework stands on plain ground and the stones are laid evenly, then the "werk is trost syker & steadfast," but if the ground is uneven and the stones are laid unevenly, the "werk is lyke to falle & faile" (ii.221). This work, he says, "is mankynde. for he is the temple of god" (ii.221) In order for mankind to be on even ground, the reader must be on even ground "in his heart" by being in accord with his neighbor (ii.222) Once the ground is even, the author begins to lay the "foundement" of the well. These "curblys must be beleue." He guides the reader through first eight articles of faith in chapter 66. He returns the reader to the image of the woman's womb in what he calls the first article belonging to the manhood of Christ: "I beleue þat he was conceuyed of þe holy ghost &

born of þe mayde marie” (ii.240). As opposed to the reader’s initial encounter with the image of the woman’s womb, this reference is specific with regards to the Trinity and to Mary. He emphasizes that when Jesus Christ entered the “clene glas of þe maydenys wombe sche was neuere þe fouler, but þe clener mayde” (ii.241). He emphasizes cleanness in relation to the Holy Ghost. The conception does not defoul her and does not take her maidenhood.

After laying the foundation of the first eight articles of belief, the author moves to chapter 67 where he discusses the four articles in the Creed. He starts with what Saint Matthew set in the Creed: “I beleue in al holy cherche & comounnyng of seyntyngs” (ii.250). It is at this point in the text, in the section where the reader is building the well, where he lays out his ecclesiology. Here, he says, “vs muste beleue þat holy cherche is in thre partys // Oo part is þe world” (ii.250). Although worldly, this part of the church is not like Augustine’s “earthly” city. Instead, it is the city of God as presently manifest on earth: “Alle men & women in þis world þat schulle be sauyd be þe mercy of god and be here good lyuyng to þe blysse of heuene arn oo part of holy cherche” (ii.250). This church “shall be saved” by good living here and by the mercy of God. But as is the case in Augustine’s *City of God*, this church does not exist without struggle: this “part is clepyd *Ecclesia militans*. þe chyrche fy3tyng, for þei fy3ten & stryuen here in here lyue wyth armure of penaunce a3ens thre enemyes. þe feend, þe world, þe flesche. and be helpe of god my3tyly wythstondyn synne” (ii.250). This passage might cause the reader to wonder why the author waits for sixty seven chapters to succinctly define the church

militant. Why does he wind the reader through seemingly endless circles of sin and penance before building his version of the city of God as manifest on earth? My argument is that he guides the reader through the penitential process as a means of edification, as a way to instruct and build community. He enchains the reader in sin so that the reader knows what it feels like to inhabit the church pew next to the devil. He forces the sinner back to the same sin over and over again so that the reader understands that sin is habitual. Then he teaches about sidelining accountability, about what forgiveness without penance feels like and what it accomplishes. Only then does he develop the image of the child growing in the maiden's womb, only then does he grow the reader's understanding of the importance of embodiment. He also insists that the reader remember, remember Christ and the passion. The reader must also remember the penitential process that he has undergone in his reading. Only then can the Christian fully understand the church militant, the clean knight. Then the parishioner can understand that the church's struggle against the fiend, the world and the flesh is an ongoing battle that can only be won through penance and by the help of God. But even though the reader now understands the church militant, understands the body of the well, he or she still does not have the tools necessary to climb out of the well.

What happens to a person who does not find the necessary resources to climb out of the well in this life? In Book XX, Chapter 9 of *The City of God*, Augustine describes the existence of a place for those who die without baptism or who do not have recourse to reconciliation prior to death. He says that the "pious dead are not separated from the

Church, which is even now the kingdom of Christ.... And therefore their souls, even though not yet with their bodies, already reign with him while those thousand years are running their course.”⁸⁷ For Augustine, the pious dead are still a part of the City of God even though their bodies are not yet part of the community of saints. The author of *Jacob’s Well* identifies these souls in purgatory as belonging to the Church: “the secunde part of holy cherche is soulys in purgatorye þat ben þer abydyng þe greate mercy of god tyl þei ben fulle pourgyd of all here synnes. for whiche synnes þei did not fulle penauns here in earth in here lyue. Beleue þat þis part of þe cherche whanne þei be purgyd schul comounnyn wyth seyntes in heuen” (ii.256). The part of the church with souls in purgatory, abiding between living on earth and communing with saints in heaven, may be called “ecclesia dormiens,” or the church sleeping. Although he makes it clear that there is a connection between purgatory and the communion of saints, he does not directly describe the means through which a soul in purgatory moves from the church sleeping to the church triumphant. The author tells the reader that souls in purgatory belong to the church sleeping because they rest and abide in “goddys prisoun of purgatorye” and are “deliueryd fro alle dyssey3ys, and temptacyouns of his three enemies” (256-7). Souls in purgatory depend upon outside agents for delivery from God’s prison. Their escape from disease and temptation lies in the future and does not depend directly upon their own actions because they are at rest. This sleepy purgatory, a resting place free from disease,

⁸⁷ *City of God*, Book XX.9.916. In a seminar discussion, David Aers pointed to this passage as being a place where Augustine hints at purgatory.

stands in direct contrast to the pain suffered by souls in *The Pricke of Conscience*:

“Wharfore þe payn þat þe saul þer hentes / Er mare bitter þan alle þe tourmentes / Þat alle þe marters in erthe tholed, / Sen God was for us bought and sold.”⁸⁸ In *Jacob’s Well*, purgatory is not nearly as painful as it is in *The Pricke of Conscience*. Intercessory prayer might speed a soul’s escape, but the ultimate delivery from prison depends upon God.⁸⁹

Finally, the author tells the reader that the third part of the church is “heuene, as crist þat is heed of alle holy church & our lady, aungellys, and all seyntys, in heuen, þis is clepyd þe cherche ouercomyng. *Ecclesia triumphans*” (ii.257). The author explains that the communion of saints in heaven is called the church overcoming because this church has fully overcome all three enemies and is fully free from all diseases. Although the author describes the three part of church separately, he says that they will all come together at the day of doom. He tells the reader to believe that “all gode lyuerys in erthe & alle soulys in purgatory & alle seyntes in heuene schulle ben a to gyder in heuene after þe doom & comounyn to gydere in euer lasting ioye wyth crist our heed” (ii.257). Each part communes with the others by taking part in each other’s goodness. Saints in heaven commune with and comfort souls in purgatory with their prayers and good livers

⁸⁸ This fourteenth century poem, once attributed to Richard Rolle, is now thought to be the work of an anonymous author. Any soul that is not perfectly cleansed of venial sin goes to purgatory, 74. The author describes in detail the pains of purgatory, pains that in one day are as bad as a year of penance on earth, 75. See *The Pricke of Conscience (Stimulus Conscientiae): A Northumbrian Poem by Richard Rolle de Hampole*, ed. Richard Morris (Berlin: A.Asher & Co, 1863), 74-90.

⁸⁹ For a discussion of intercessory prayer, see Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 346 & ff.

commune and comfort these souls with their prayers and with almsgiving (ii.257). Until the day of doom, the three parts share Christ as their head and interact through acts of goodness such as prayer and almsgiving.

One must remember that the author places this edifice, this segment of the well, upon the “curble of belief” that Christ took flesh and blood truly from a clean maiden. He tells the reader to “couch [his] stones” of works on top of this belief by thinking about Adam and Christ (ii.295). He directs us to think that by the sin of Adam, “as Austyn seyth, we weryn but erthe & asschys and we in malice excededyn all oþere creaturys & in a manere more vnreasonable þan oxe or asse, more vwytty þan bryddes in þe eyre lesse of prise þan dede stonys & in folwyng þe wyckydnes of addrys, we weryn clepyd chylderyn of þe deuyll” (ii.295-6). The dead stones, the children of the devil, are given new life. The author tells the reader, “our frail kynde” is “reformyd aȝen” to worship when Christ comes “into our kynde” and raises human beings above all other creatures (ii.296). Another “curble of belief” upon which the reader should couch his stones of good works is that “ihesus suffryd peyne vndyr Pylate of pounce and don on the croys. & deed & beryed” (ii.298). This is the section of the Creed that brings a human being, Pontius Pilate, into the beliefs of the church. Christianity has a particular claim about God’s revelation in and through the contingencies of history, of embodied life. The author says that since Christ suffered pain for him, the reader should undergo penance for Christ. This account of the crucifixion is long and gruesome in the particularity of its detail:

he swette watyr & blood. betrayed of Iudas, boundyn his handys behynden hym as a th theef, falsely accusyd. wyth false wytnessys, for pullyd for drawyn. Throtyd spytted in face, blyndfeld, bobetyd, smett in þe necke. Scourgyd woundyd prikkyd wyth thornys to þe braynes. alle nakyd. wyth his bloody woundys in þe colde frost. sow³te his clothys & dede hem on dampnyd to þe deth. bar[e] an huge heuy cros . on his sore woundyd bak, gronyng for peyne stode wepyng for heuy berynge pantynge & ny wyndles for weryhed, a twyxen two theuys as he had ben a mayster theef. þe clothys bakyn in þe cold blood faste to his body weryn dyspytously drawyn of hym. wyth skyn & flesche hangynge þeron. & he all rawe as he hadde be flayn, freschly bledynge in all hise woundys . . . þanne he was boundyn heed & foot to gydere rownd as aballe and alle nakyd & raw woundyd and bloody he was rollyd & steryd to & fro in scharpe grauel stonys, and þan wyde opyn throwyn on þe cros. and armys & legges drawyn owt so streyte wyth cordys tyl alle þe synewys & ioyntys brostyn a sunder, and þan he was nailed foot & hand on þe cros, and þe cros wyth his body was set vp on ende & let falle þe nethyr ende depe down in to a morteyns & in þat rewly falling, alle veynes ioyntys & senywys of his precyous body brostyn asundre. þat no membre of hym was onhurt (ii.299-300).

In this version of the crucifixion, the author goes into excruciating detail about Christ's bodily pain. Rather than focusing upon the salvific nature of the Passion for the reader as he does in the two previous representations, here the author expands his description of the human acts of torture: binding his hands, spitting on him, rolling him through sharp gravel, throwing him on the cross, nailing him hand and foot, etc. He also identifies humans in the description. Judas betrays Christ and Christ, as if he had been the "master thief," is situated between the two thieves. These details work to implicate the reader in the text. By recognizing that human beings are responsible for his torture, the reader should also consider her own responsibility for sinful acts.

It is also important to notice the emphasis that the author places upon material objects used in the crucifixion. These objects are similar to the one the reader should use later when constructing his ladder and his well: a huge heavy cross (wood used in the ladder), sharp gravel stones (stones in the well), cords (the rope which allows the reader to draw up his bucket), joints (similar to stakes in the ladder), and mortar (memory to hold the well together). Again, the reader begins to assimilate the list of materials from the introduction with the materials in this passage, thereby recognizing oneself as one of the humans using and constructing these materials. This recognition works much in the same way as it does for an audience member viewing the York Corpus Christi play – the reader realizes that he or she participates in the performance.⁹⁰ The author gives the reader a method to “reconstruct” the self later in the text by putting these same destructive details to good use. The reader must remember, however, where the materials come from. For example, the reader recognizes the language of “delving deep” (the cross delves “deep down” into the mortice) from the scoop of penance. One must learn to reconcile this penitential language with the function of mortar in the well because it acts as the amalgamation of memory of sin and weeping tears. This memory of the passion holds the new edifice together. Finally, the author emphasizes the “bursting asunder” of Christ’s body. The reader remembers from the previous account that this bursting transforms dead stones into living ones.

⁹⁰ My understanding of the role of the audience, the actors and the materials used in the York play comes from Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relations and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), esp. 53-55.

After laying the stone of good works in his well on the “curbles of faith” in belief in the “articles of þe godhed & þe manhood of crist,” the author moves on to lay the next transformative stone: the stone of good works on the curble of the belief in sacraments. He methodically works his way through baptism, paying close attention to the Christian child’s reception of gifts from the Holy Ghost (ii.312-314). He also describes confirmation and marriage before moving on to the sacrament of the altar. In the medieval church, Christ himself became present in the sacrament of the altar, “body, soul, and divinity, and his blood flowed once again, to nourish and renew Church and world.”⁹¹ The author tells the reader that the the Christian must “belevyst verryly þat it is goddys flesche and his blood in foorme of breed and wyn after þe consecracyoun of þe preest” (ii.317). David Aers has shown that the dominant form of Eucharistic ritual in the late medieval Church was organized around a version of Christ’s presence in the sacramental sign:

At the words of consecration, words spoken by a duly ordained priest, the body of Jesus that had lived in Galilee became present under what had become the appearance of bread and wine lacking their proper substance. The body now present was the tortured, torn, bleeding sacrificial, and life-giving body crucified on Calvary. Such was the presence of Christ elevated in the priest’s hands for the faithful to gaze at in adoration, the presence processed through the streets of medieval towns on Corpus Christi Day and around the church on Palm Sunday.

⁹¹ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 91. In *Corpus Mysticum*, Henri de Lubac notes that in a large number of texts, “the subject who receives the sacrament is no longer the individual soul, even envisaged as a member, but the Church itself.” Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, trans. Gemma Simmonds CJ with Richard Price and Christopher Stephens, ed. Laurence Paul Hemming and Susan Frank Parsons (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 174. Also helpful in thinking about the Eucharist is John Bossy’s important essay, “The Mass as a Social Institution, 1200-1700,” *Past and Present* 100 (1983), 29-61.

In the words of Thomas Aquinas, himself the author of the office for Corpus Christi, the Church proclaimed that in the sacramental sign which sanctified the Christian people the “whole Christ” was present, “not only the flesh, but the whole body of Christ, that is, the bones and nerves and all the rest [non solum caro, sed totum corpus Christi, id est ossa et nervi et alia hujusmodi].”⁹²

The author of *Jacob's Well* instructs his reader to truly believe that the body of Jesus became fully present under what had become the appearance, “the foorme” of bread and wine. In his orthodox teaching, the whole body of Christ is present in the sacrament: Christ is “al hool vndepartyd god man, body & soule flesch & blood and in euery crumme of þe host whanne it is brokyn & in euery drop of blood in the chalys” (ii.318).

Read alone, one clause might seem to echo a Lollard understanding of the sacrament, one in which the blood of Christ does not displace the wine: in the “chalys þou receyuyst but watyr or wyne” (319).⁹³ Left on its own, this clause might sound like the author might deny the presence of Christ's Galilean blood in the chalice, saying instead that the wine is a sign of the blood. But this should not be extracted from the sentence before or from the clause that follows: “In þe host þou lewd men receyuyst goddys flesche & blood togydere. but in þe chalys þou receyuyst but watyr or wyne for to swelwe in þe eselyere þe sacrament” (319). Non-clerical men receive the Galilean flesh and blood together in the form of bread. The wine is used to help with ease in swallowing the sacrament. Mentioning “lewd men” receiving the sacrament in this way

⁹² David Aers, *Sanctifying Signs: Making Christian Tradition in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 2.

⁹³ For John Wyclif's sacramental theology, see David Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 53-65.

maintains a difference between priest and laity, a differentiation that the orthodox Church sought to maintain. The author goes on to say that this helps the reader to avoid chewing the host too much with teeth – it should be stirred around to and fro in the mouth until it can be cleanly swallowed so that “no parcel hange in [one’s] teeth ne in non oþer part of thy mowth” (ii.319).

Parishioners in late medieval England would not often worry about getting the host stuck in their teeth. “In most parishes everyone went to confession in Holy Week and received communion before of after high Mass on Easter Day,” writes Eamon Duffy, so “for most people, most of the time, the Host was something to be seen, not to be consumed.”⁹⁴ This is reflected in the author’s advice to his reader in *Jacob’s Well*: “euery cristen man & womman whan he comyth to 3eres of dyscrecyoun owyth onys in þe 3ere at estern in charyte in clene lyif receue þis chary sacrament and oftere 3if he be dysposyd þerto and haue deuocyoun in þe peryl of syknes of deth” (ii.318). Although the reader only needs to receive communion once a year on Easter, the lay person should attend Mass on Sundays. The author says that “principally on þe someday euery man owyth to here dyuyne seruyse 3if he may and princepally þe masse for drede of dedly synne. for no3t only þe preest receyuyth goddys body but alle trewe beleuerys also þat deuoutly heryn here masse receyuyn þe sacrament” (ii.318-319). When a parishioner went to “hear mass,” it did not necessarily mean that he or she understood the words

⁹⁴ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 95. He notes that frequent communion, as seen in Margery Kempe’s weekly reception, was the “prerogative of the few,” 93.

being spoken. The priest would stand with his back to the congregation and deliver the service in Latin. Because the chancel was separated from the nave by a rood screen, hearing mass and seeing the elevation of the host could be difficult.⁹⁵ Parishioners were alerted to the elevation of the host by the ringing of a sacring bell.⁹⁶ The author of *Jacob's Well* tells the reader that “all men and women” receive the sacrament who “heryn here masse & se þe sacrament in þe preestys handys” (ii.320).

After receiving instruction on the sacraments, restoring the broken bonds of community, the author tells the reader that “our pyt is now made clene” and is now “oure welle” is deep enough that it will “stande & dure in grace & no3t falle” (ii.341). Now the author joins the reader in the process signaled by a shift in pronouns. “Oure soul,” he writes, needs to have a long ladder “to gon vp by out þe depe well of oure body in oure ende to þe hye hyll of heuene” (ii.349). Whereas in his description of Ascension Day, the author completely leaves out the role of the body in salvation, here he incorporates it – but only after giving his reader an account of the body of Christ in the crucifixion and the in the sacrament of the altar. The author gives the reader a concrete image of the ladder as a tool to use in the ascent from the hill of Olivet, the ground of mercy, to the high hill of heaven. The ladder that makes ascension possible “muste be charyte” (ii.341). The ladder of charity has two sides: “þou schalt love þi lord god” and “þou schalt love þi ney3bore as þe self” (ii.341). Charity is love wherein God is loved for

⁹⁵ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 110-111.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 97.

himself and wherein thy neighbor is loved for God or in God. He tells the reader that one must love God and his neighbor in times of tribulation as well as in prosperity. Loving God and the neighbor only in wealth is but a feigned love and inordinate love because it means loving the gift more than the giver

The first side of the ladder, love of God, also operates in the other direction: God's love for man. In chapter 75, the author tells the reader that the ladder of charity extends over a long duration of time. God showed love to man through Jesus from his Incarnation when he "come doun fro heuene to erthe to take þe kynde of man" through his suffering of "dyssepe peyne & deth for man" to when he "3elden his soule to his fadyr" for man (ii.349). Part of the sacrifice that Christ makes is through embodiment, an embodiment that the author links to the depth of the ladder of charity. But the embodiment involves more than the "taking of kinde." For love of man, Christ also "dwellyth wyth man in the sacrament of þe awtere. His verry body flesch & blood. body & soule god & man and wyth his owyn body fedyth vs to be oure comfort in þis sorrwefulle werde" (ii.352). The first side of the ladder of love clearly involves communal reception of the sacrament of the altar. By this point in the text, the reader knows to link his "verry body flesch & blood" to the crucifixion.

According to the author, this love that Jesus shows to man was not only long, but it was also broad, large and wide. He tells the reader that "signe of þis ladder of loue crist schewyd on þe cros" (ii.353). The author says that in the spreading out on the cross his arms broad on both sides, it was a sign to man that Christ's love to man was broad

and wide. The author uses the language of “showing” and “signs” in relation to the ladder. It is something that the reader must learn to read and recognize. Christ’s arms, and the arms of cross, serve as “signs” of God’s love to man. This image of his arms, his members, being extended of the cross visually depicts the vertical plank. The author tells the reader that the “length of [Christ’s] love was betokenyd þat he hyng a long in his body in þe lengthe of þe cross...” (ii.354). Immediately after emphasizing the height, length and width of the cross in visual images, the author invites the reader to be rooted in charity, that is to “understonde parfytely & se gostely what is þe brede þe lengthe þe depthe of þis ladere of loue in god to man” (ii.354). Reading the sign of the ladder means to understand and see God’s love to man. At this point, however, the reader’s understanding is not yet fully formed: is this “ladder of love in God to man” the cross that Christ hangs on, or is it the ladder that the reader should be constructing in order to reach the high hill of heaven? The author depends upon the reader’s memory to bring the two images of wooden edifice together. This image association produces a mental “taking of the cross” in order to reuse it in constructing the ladder of charity.

The author, who hitherto pays meticulous attention to the measurements of the well, describes the ladder of charity as being beyond measure -- it is “higher than heaven,” “deeper than hell,” “longer than earth” and “broader than the sea” (ii.353). Given the all-encompassing scope of the ladder, it is not surprising that the “suballegory

of the ladder” supersedes “the allegory of the well” in this portion of the text.⁹⁷ While references to the ladder do exist in the text (through the images of wood and the cross discussed above), the author does not make explicit the relationship between Christ, the cross and the ladder until mid-way through chapter 75 when he directly refers to Genesis 28:12: “*Jacob sey3 a laddere standing on þe erthe & þe ouer ende touchyd heuene and he sey3 god fastenyd to þis laddere & aungelys gon vp and doun on þat laddere. Gen 27.15. þis laddere is loue in whiche cryist is fastenyd & teyid to for he was neuere los fro loue*” (ii.354-355).⁹⁸ The author makes interesting choices in his depiction of Jacob’s ladder, choices that are clear when this passage is placed into conversation with the scriptural narrative.

In Genesis 28, Jacob leaves Beer-sheba and goes towards Haran. He comes to a certain place and stays there for the night because the sun goes down. “And when he was come to a certain place, and would rest in it after sunset, he took of the stones that lay there, and putting under his head, slept in the same place. And he saw in his sleep a ladder standing upon the earth, and the top thereof touching heaven: the angels also of

⁹⁷ While he does not use the language of supersession, Leo Carruthers notes that this is the only point in the text where the “well disappears, at least in any explicit form”...” and “its place is taken by the suballegory of the ladder, itself standing in the well.” See “Allegory and Bible Interpretation,” 4.

⁹⁸ Carruthers and Atchley do not include this “sermon” in their discussions of the liturgy. It is worth noting this passage, Genesis 28, would be the first reading for the common dedication of a church. For a discussion of church dedication and the organization of the main elements in Jacob’s revelation as a model for Gothic building projects (particularly in relation to the nave at St. Denis), see Ann R. Meyer, *Medieval Allegory and the Building of the New Jerusalem* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003), 84-86.

God ascending and descending by it.”⁹⁹ In his writing against the Manicheans, Augustine interprets Genesis 28:

This Jacob saw, who in the blessing was called Israel, when he had the stone for a pillow, and had the vision of the ladder reaching from the earth to heaven, on which the angel of God were ascending and descending. The angels denote the evangelists, or preachers of Christ. They ascend when they rise above the created universe to describe the supreme majesty of the divine nature of Christ as being in the beginning with God, by whom all things were made. They descend to tell of His being made of a woman, made under the law, that He might redeem them that were under the law. Christ is the ladder reaching from earth to heaven, or from the carnal to the spiritual: for by his assistance the carnal ascend to spirituality; and the spiritual may be said to descend to nourish the carnal with milk when they cannot speak to them as to spiritual, but to carnal. There is thus both an ascent and a descent upon the Son of man. For the Son of man is above as our head, being himself the Saviour; and He is below in His body, the Church. He is the ladder, for he says, “I am the way.”¹⁰⁰

Augustine’s image of Christ as the ladder is striking because it links the carnal and the spiritual as well as earth and heaven. Christ, for Augustine, is the way between them.

The author of *Jacob’s Well* uses the image of Jacob’s ladder in much the same way.

Unlike Augustine, the author does not identify the angels “come down to comforte man” (ii.355) but the up and down motion should bring to mind the author’s earlier references to “styin vp” from Mt. Olivet to the high hill of heaven. Earlier in the allegory, the language of binding reminds the reader of his own sin and of Christ being bound and tied to the cross. But now there is a different image at work. The cross has

⁹⁹ Genesis 28:11-12.

¹⁰⁰ Augustine, “Contra Faustum Manichaeum, Libri XXXIII,” in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff. Vol. 4. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 192.

been transformed into the ladder and Christ is now bound in love. This shift in linguistic imagery reflects the transformation that the reader has undergone in learning about penance. The author's aim is to teach the reader to recognize the cross as a vital component in the construction of charity. This detail returns the reader to the author's ecclesiological structure and to his description of Ascension Day. Now the reader knows that the movement between the church fighting and the church triumphant depends on Christ as the way. It is through this embodied structure that the reader of *Jacob's Well* will ascend to the high hill of heaven.

We remember from the introduction that the ladder of charity has two sides, love of God and love of the neighbor, with many rungs between. Here I focus on the "highest rungs" of the ladder, on the finishing touch of this new edifice: the Pater Noster. The author divides the Pater Noster into the seven petitions and constructs one rung from each petition. He describes know the Pater Noster as Christocentric knowledge. Christ knew which "prayer was most pleasau[n]t to his father" and which was most "needful & spedeful to man," so he taught it to his apostles, who it turn pass it along to the Christian community (ii.509). Reciting the Pater Noster, then, is a practical performance of this knowledge. The author places the language of prayer within his larger scheme of penance and forgiveness. He interprets the words "for3eue vs our[e] dettys, as we for3evyn our[e] dettourys" to mean "for3eyue vs our synnes of herte mowth & ded of of thou3tys woordys and werkys" (ii.526). "Our debt" for Christians is great because there are many layers of sin, not just sinful acts or "werkys." He reminds the reader of all of

the layers of muck that must be passed through in order to be prepared to seek forgiveness. In addition there is a progression in his model of forgiveness. First the reader must forgive others, must reconcile with neighbors, and only then is the reader prepared to receive divine forgiveness (ii.526). Prayer is bound up with practicing forgiveness. A person who prays for forgiveness but who does not forgive is a fool who prays for his “own[e] harme” and for his “own dampnacyou[n]” (ii.526). The practical, repeated act of prayer allows the reader to perform what she has learned from reading the text. If the text is successful, it will act as a powerful corrective to the opening scene of church destruction and dismemberment by reconciling friends in a community of love.

The author tells us that in his last chapter, he will be “rehersyng schortly all þe process þat I haue seyde & schewyd þis hool tweyne monythys & more” (ii.537). He goes on, in one chapter, to retell the entirety of his text. At this point, the reader probably wonders why he went to such great pains to develop his text in minute detail spanning ninety five chapters if he has the ability to show his model in just a few pages. The reason, I think, is that he understands his text to be more than just words on a page – it is a process. He teaches the reader to perform penance and to embody forgiveness through practicing to read. The reader has a different mode of understanding in the final pages and the author has a different mode of writing. Together, the master and the apprentice are learning to read, are learning to forgive. When they reach the final, completed edifice of the well, the second reference to John 4, the reference is much more legible: “þis welle is þe well of Iacob. Þat is of hym þat doth penaunce on which c[rist] sytteth &

restyth him, and byddyth þe wom[m]an, þat is man[n]ys soule 3yuyn hi[m] dryknyn of þis wat[er] of vertewys in þis welle” (ii.543). Christ no longer asks for weeping tears from sinful souls as he did in the first direct reference to the scriptural source. Now Christ rests on the well of penance and bids the soul to give him virtuous living. The virtues, it turns out, are the living water for which Christ thirsts at the end of the penitential process

CHAPTER TWO

Representing Resistance: The Narrative Exempla in *Jacob's Well*

I was raised a bricklayer. Actually, that is not quite true. I was raised to labor for bricklayers. I eventually learned to lay brick, but not with the skill of my father who was a master craftsman. In truth I was a better laborer than I was a bricklayer because to be a master craftsman requires years in the trade. It is important to remember, however, that while the laborer may not have the skill of the bricklayer no one can become a bricklayer, at least a bricklayer who is a craftsman, who has not learned to labor. For to lay brick well requires that you have learned subsidiary skills such as how to chop (mix) mortar. Bricklaying, like all significant tasks involves a hierarchy of tasks requiring that those who would practice the craft learn those skills in appropriate order.¹

Stanley Hauerwas begins his chapter about Christian education into the virtues by telling his own story, or at least by telling a part of it. This is notable because for Hauerwas, an apprentice can only become a master by learning the language of a trade, by locating one's life in and through the stories that have shaped one's training. Hauerwas draws from the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, who teaches us that man is essentially a story-telling animal and that the telling of stories plays a key role of educating us into the virtues. The storyteller must learn to recognize one's own life in relation to the stories of others, to recognize that the narrative of any one life is part of an interlocking set of

¹ Stanley Hauerwas, "Carving Stone or Learning to Speak Christian," *The State of the University: Academic Knowledges and the Knowledge of God* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 108.

narratives.² By beginning his article with his own story and then telling the stories of others, Hauerwas recognizes his own life as one in an interlocking set of narratives.

After giving us a brief account of his own life, Hauerwas recounts *The Stone Carvers: Master Craftsmen of Washington National Cathedral*, a story told by Marjorie Hunt about two Italian American master stone carvers – Roger Morigi and Vincent Palumbo.³ Both of the men were born into families of stone carvers. For them to be a stone carver, writes Hauerwas, was to “be made part of a tradition whose habits of memory, the stories of carving stone, were inseparable from the stories of the family.”⁴ To carve stone is to contribute to an ongoing tradition of narratives that give purpose to the craft. They describe their learning to become stonecarvers as “coming up,” which Hauerwas names as an indication of the long process required to work through apprenticeship to finally become a master of the craft.⁵ The long process of apprenticeship does not just entail copying a master’s work but rather developing something of the apprentice’s own.⁶ To do so requires using different tools and learning to adjust to the particular stone that one carves.⁷ The constant need to rethink and adjust

² Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, reprinted in 2003), 216.

³ The story Hauerwas retells is from Marjorie Hunt, *The Stone Carvers: Master Craftsmen of Washington National Cathedral* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999).

⁴ Hauerwas, 109.

⁵ Ibid, 111.

⁶ Ibid, 111.

⁷ Ibid, 112.

one's approach means also that the apprentice learns to be a stone carver through talk, through story-telling.⁸ Learning to speak the language of stone cutting is not just learning to tell stories but learning to do the work itself.⁹ Hauerwas takes the example of Roger and Vincent learning the language of stone carving to describe Christians learning the language of faith. "But," he notes, "as we saw in the case of Roger and Vincent the language must be constitutive of the work to be done. It is not as if the language is a means to do the work, but the language is the work to be done. What we say as Christians cannot be separated from the practices of a people called Church."¹⁰

Jacob's Well, a fifteenth-century penitential manual written by an anonymous author, apprentices the reader into the Christian tradition, into what I call in my first chapter the craft of forgiveness.¹¹ This tradition requires habits of memory, particularly the remembrance of the body of Christ. As is the case with Roger and Vincent, the

⁸ Ibid, 112.

⁹ Ibid, 113. Hauerwas's account draws from Ludwig Wittgenstein's example of "slab" in *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 19-21.

¹⁰Hauerwas, 120.

¹¹As I note in my first chapter, *Jacob's Well* is available in two printed editions. The first fifty chapters are in *Jacob's Well*, ed. Arthur Brandeis, EETS 115 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co, 1900). The last forty five chapters have been edited by Clinton Atchley in his unpublished dissertation, "The 'Wose' of *Jacob's Well*: Text and Context" PhD. Diss, University of Washington, 1998). Following the lead of Moira Fitzgibbons, I use "i" and "ii" to distinguish between the two editions. See Moira Fitzgibbons, "Jacob's Well and Penitential Pedagogy," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 27 (2005), 213 note 2. All references to *Jacob's Well* are cited parenthetically by page number.

reader's apprenticeship is a long process, an education in learning to build well that takes ninety five days to complete and that must be repeated every year. But this is where my first chapter leaves off, with a paradigm of the craft of forgiveness. I begin my second chapter with an extended retelling of Hauerwas's stories because it describes the role of storytelling in being apprenticed into any tradition. Language cannot be separated from work, and in the case of the Christian tradition, from the practices of the Church. To do this work, a Christian must use different tools. In *Jacob's Well*, the reader does not just need the ability to read the allegory but also the ability to read the stories. The narrative exempla in *Jacob's Well* are important tools for learning to speak the language of forgiveness because they require the reader to re-think and adjust his or her approach to the craft. As I show in chapter one, the allegory of the well guides the reader through the process of how to confess, how to remember and then tell one's own story. The reader practices telling the story and gets more adept at doing so as he or she proceeds. But at the same time, the reader compares his or her own story to the narrative exempla at the end of each chapter. In this way, *Jacob's Well* can be thought of as a set of interlocking narratives.

In medieval England, an exemplum is a "story which teaches a lesson; a nature fable or parable; an instructive instance or narrative from Scripture, history or the classics."¹² It is a story used to edify the reader or listener. When the exemplum

¹² All references to the *Middle English Dictionary*, hereafter *MED*, are to "*The Middle English Compendium*," The University of Michigan. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/mec/> (accessed January 18, 2010). This is definition 3 for "ensample."

represents a human being, the edification occurs in one of two ways; either the reader interprets the character as virtuous and the narrative as something to be imitated or as vicious and the example as something to be avoided.¹³ Due to the didactic nature of exemplary narratives, medieval homilists often employ this form in sermons to instruct their parishioners on moral behavior, inviting positive identification and suggesting negative avoidance.¹⁴ Rather than relying on the parishioner to interpret the story, however, the homilist glosses the story and then allegorizes it. The expectation is that the parishioner will remember the story and apply it in future decision making.

In *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative in Chaucer and Gower*, J. Allan Mitchell describes this type of case-based reasoning in relation to reading narrative exempla. Mitchell suggests that the typical focus that historical scholarship places on what texts mean versus what they do leads us to miss the “multiple ways texts are practiced.”¹⁵ Mitchell resists the impulse to think about the reader as being a passive consumer of morality. Instead, he claims, the exemplary text preserves individual agency and autonomy at the same time that it promotes practical guidance for the moral agent in

¹³ MED definition 4a of “ensample”: Of persons: (a) a model, either good or bad, likely to be imitated; a model of virtue or vice; taken example of (bi), to imitate; (b) an example to be avoided, a deterrent or terrifying example; taken example at (bi), to learn from, be warned by.

¹⁴ See G.R. Owst *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), 149 & ff.

¹⁵ J. Allan Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative in Chaucer and Gower*. (Cambridge [England] ; Rochester, NY : D.S. Brewer, 2004), 3.

regards to future action.¹⁶ He addresses the potentiality of future moral action in a certain form of practical reception: what he calls “reading for the moral.” In its extreme form, reading for the moral has a tropological function – this implies the potential for a conversion, a turning of the text and of the reader, as a fully realized reader response. In order to do this, the reader must utilize case-based reasoning to resolve ambiguous or marginal cases by evaluating them against an existing genus.¹⁷ This, in turn, modifies the existing paradigm for ethical practice.

The author of *Jacob’s Well* likely recognizes the reader’s inclination to use case-based reasoning when considering the exempla as “marginal cases” against the larger paradigm of the allegory of the well, against one’s own story. In this way, reading for the moral becomes an important activity in the reader’s quest for virtue. However, the exempla in this text often represent impediments, or resistances, to the potential of conversion. Very aware of the resistances inherent in a sinful human being’s search for virtue, in the human (in)ability to read for the moral, the author often provides explanatory glosses for the reader. What remains unclear in the greater part of the allegory is whether or not the author includes the glosses because he foresees a reader’s incapacity and purposefully holds it up as error or whether he expects these shortcomings to emerge as unanticipated inabilities. Furthermore, the reader likely wonders about the author’s self-awareness of his own error as writer and reader. The author leaves this

¹⁶ Mitchell, 9.

¹⁷ Mitchell, 24.

issue unacknowledged until the very end when he finally locates himself in the story as a human being who lacks, who also seeks the theological virtues.

The author of *Jacob's Well* compiles his stories from a variety of sources, not all of which are Christian. He generally cites the sources for his story at the beginning of each narrative. For example, he refers to works by Bede, Helinandus, Caesar of Heisterbach, Gregory the Great, Jacques de Vitry, and Arnold of Liège. However, as Joan Young Gregg shows in her source-study of the first forty chapters of *Jacob's Well*, the author most likely draws the majority of his exempla from a Latin manuscript of Arnold of Liège's *Alphabetum Narrationum*.¹⁸ Gregg argues that the author was thoroughly familiar with his source book and was not using an abridged version of it. One quarter of the exempla in the first half of *Jacob's Well* are to be found under the most obvious headings in the example book. The Latin rubrics match the main points of the English chapter in which the author employs the narrative. For other exempla, the author "went beyond the obvious rubrics and sought out exempla alphabetized under more specific headings, locating these through the use of the cross-references provided."¹⁹ Gregg also emphasizes the polarized categorization of the characters in the stories. She claims that the tales tend to be about those who are suffering the pains of hell or are hagiographical accounts: "these exempla are simplistic in their categorization of people

¹⁸ Joan Young Gregg, "The Narrative Exempla of *Jacob's Well*: A Source Study with and Index for *Jacob's Well* to *Index Exemplorum*" (PhD diss. New York University, 1973), 261.

¹⁹ Gregg, 261.

into saints and sinners, sometimes tedious in their repetition of moral points, usually halting because of their didactic interruptions.”²⁰ The categorization of people into saints and sinners aligns with the general aim of an exemplum as discussed above: to encourage the reader to imitate the actions of a saint and to avoid the actions of a sinner.²¹ Although Gregg does not directly address this issue, her categorization points to what I see to be a glaring absence in many of the exempla. The author primarily includes tales of sinners and tales of saints, but he rarely includes an account of the role of the Church in the outcome of the tale.

Given the author’s concern with structure and process in the allegory of the well, I expected the exempla to follow an identifiable pattern that would build from beginning to end so that the actions of the characters in the story would parallel the reader’s character formation. That is, I expected the chapters about sin to show sinful characters and the chapters about virtue to show saints. But the stories do not follow an identifiable pattern. The only structural principle that the author employs in his narrative arrangement occurs through repeated narratives. There are three tales that he uses more than once, and they often appear at an extreme distance from one another. Because so many of the tales do not show the Church or the sacraments, which means they largely depart from the

²⁰ Gregg, 287.

²¹ The underlying assumption that I make here is that readers share an understanding of what is “good,” of what constitutes a saint and what is “bad,” what constitutes a sinner. The author writes for baptized Christians inhabiting a shared culture. As Eamon Duffy explains, it was “a Christianity resolutely and enthusiastically orientated towards the public and the corporate, and of a continuing sense of the value of cooperation and mutuality in seeking salvation.” Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400- c.1580*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 131.

allegory of the well, it is important to notice those that adhere to its teachings. There are two that stand out as showing examples of characters practicing the craft of forgiveness. The placement of these stories is very significant because they are located in chapters that are vital for the formation of the reader. The first occurs in chapter 41 when the author replaces the broken body of the Church from the articles of excommunication in the opening section with the striking image of the Incarnation, with the presence of the body of Christ. The second time the Church and sacraments are fully present in the exemplum is in chapter 68, the chapter where the reader begins to make ready sand and lime to hold together the stonework in the well. Sand is “mynde of our synne” (ii.267).

Remembering sin is critical for proper confession, for properly telling one’s story. But as I show in my first chapter, in order to properly remember one’s sin, the reader must remember Christ, must “thynke on” Christ’s sacrifice on the cross for the forgiveness of sin (ii.276). After the author guides the reader through this Christocentric meditation, after the reader properly remembers, he shows the reader an example of a character apprenticed in the craft of forgiveness.

Before the reader practices this type of Christocentric meditation, he or she must first recognize the presence of Christ’s body in the text that occurs in chapter 41. This chapter on friendship is about reincorporating sinful Christians into the body of Christ, for the author reminds the reader, “we arn alle lymes of o body. þe body is holy cherche, þe heued is crist & we arn þe lymes” (i.234). The author is very much aware that these limbs are members of the Church fighting. He tells the reader that we are all bound by

one law, we have one lord that holds us, body and soul, under his shield and we are all fellows in God's host that each day fight as his knights (i.254). The author justifies this language of crusade by saying that Christ gave his life in friendship, so no one man should avoid putting himself in peril to save another man from harm (i.255). This image of the Church fighting reemerges after the exemplum. As Leo Carruthers notes, "this turns out to be rather different from the run-of-the-mill hagiographical or cautionary narrative found in most other chapters."²² This exemplum is an architectural allegory within the allegory of the well that uses a dream vision to describe the houses of the Four Daughters of God. As Hope Traver has shown, the story of the Four Daughters usually depicts a debate among the sisters. The early version found in Hugo of St. Victor (1097-1141) shows the daughters debating the reason for man's creation. The majority of writers follow Bernard of Clairvaux's (1091-1153) later elaboration of the story in which the debate shifts to man's redemption.²³ Traver says that the *Jacob's Well* writer likely had a general familiarity with Clairvaux's version because man's redemption is the topic.²⁴ However, unique to *Jacob's Well* is that there is no strife among them.²⁵ I would

²² Leo Carruthers, "The Liturgical Setting of *Jacob's Well*," *English Language Notes* 24 (June 1987): 2.

²³ Hope Traver, *The Four Daughters of God: A Study of The Versions of this Allegory with Especial Reference to those in Latin, French and English* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Co, 1907), 11, 14. The version in Bernard of Clairvaux is then picked up in the first chapter of Nicholas Love in what he calls the "great council of heaven for restoring man." See his *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* ed. Michael G. Sargent (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004), 9-19. I return to Love's version below. I discuss William Langland's version of the story in chapter 3.

²⁴ Traver, 159.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 158.

add that because there is no strife, there is also no need for reconciliation in this version.

The one common feature that this story shares with other English versions is the character that Peace gives to Mercy – that she is evermore ready to help all wretches who cry for her help.²⁶

In this story, a wicked scholar roams through a field in a storm. Seeking shelter, he flees to a house and calls for help. But the woman who answers the door, Righteousness, will not let him in because he is contrary to justice. He then proceeds to cry for help at the house of Truth and the house of Peace. But again his entrance is denied. Peace advises the scholar to find the house of Mercy and appeal to her for help, which he proceeds to do. The woman who answers his cry is Mercy:

I for-sake non þat me louyth, me seruyth, and to me clepyth for helpe. þou clepyst now to me, but þou hast not seruyed me, ne louyd here-be-forn in dedys & in seruyse of mercy & mekenes. But be-cause þou clepist to me for helpe, I schal helpe þe. go þi wey saaf fro þis tempeste, and serue me, & loue me in dedys of mercy & of mekenesse. be mercyfull to þin enemyes & to oþere þat do þe wrong, help þou poure, & þanne schalt þou haue mercy þat am mercy of god (i.256).

Although the scholar has not acted mercifully in the past, all is not lost. Recognizing that he is need of help and calling out for it is enough for Mercy to help him. It is this type of recognition of previous sins and of the need for help to change that is so crucial to proper confession.

²⁶ Ibid, 159.

Sarah Beckwith has helpfully pointed out that the issue of recognizing lack is central to the morality play *Mankind*.²⁷ Early in the play, Mercy warns Mankind to avoid the other five allegorical figures, Mischief, Noght, New Guise, Nowadays and Titivillus, by doing his labor and avoiding idleness (164, line 307). The audience would likely associate the allegorical figure of Mercy with the priesthood because of his speech acts that resemble preaching and confession, though the play only describes him as the allegorical figure.²⁸ Despite Mercy's admonitions, however, Mankind falls into the snares of the villains and misdirects his plead for mercy to the wrongdoers (175, lines 657-8). It appears at this point in the play as if Mercy has abandoned Mankind. While in the snares of the sinners, Mischief nearly leads Mankind to despair by providing him with a rope and a tree to commit suicide (180, lines 801-803). But Mercy reappears and provides him with an alternative -- to be full dear to Mercy. While Mankind recognizes his own corruption, he still thinks himself unworthy to desire the solace of Mercy.²⁹ Eventually, Mercy instructs Mankind to sin no more and to be repentant (183, line 865). After making confession, Mankind asks Mercy (referring to him as "fader") to bless him and for God to send us all plenty of his mercy (184, lines 898-900). The play ends with Mankind's recognition of lack and his cry for Mercy. The point is that the priest and the

²⁷ The page and line references are to *The Macro Plays*, ed. Mark Eccles (London: Oxford University Press, 1969). All references are cited parenthetically with reference first to page and then to line number. Sarah Beckwith discusses *Mankind* in her forthcoming book on forgiveness.

²⁸ For a discussion of Mercy as priest, see Sister Mary Philippa Coogan, *An Interpretation of the moral play, Mankind* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1947), 6 & ff.

²⁹ For Mercy's supplication, see *The Macro Plays*, p. 181, line 816 and for Mankind's repeated doubts, p. 181, lines 813, 822, 831-833, 858-860.

Church can only be a dispenser of Mercy to a man who learns to recognize his lack, to recognize he is in need of it. The play works on the subjectivity of the viewer because it encourages him to identify with Mankind's plight.

The author of *Jacob's Well* uses the story of the Four Daughters of God to work on the subjectivity of the reader in much the same way. The reader is meant to identify his or her own lack of desire for mercy and to set out on a search for the virtues. Once the reader recognizes this lack and begins the quest, he or she is ready to receive the gift of Mercy as dispensed by the Church in sacramental practice. But the author does not leave the reader to make these connections. He glosses the narrative so that the connections between the story and the allegory of the well are clear. Just as the clerk appealed to the house of Mercy, so too should the reader appeal to the court of Mercy, which is penance, contrition, confession and satisfaction (i.256). Changing the house of mercy into the court of mercy allows the author to bring together forgiveness and justice in the image of the court. The reader should go to the judge of God, that is should go to the priest, and confess one's sins (i.256). This judge will clothe the reader in the armor of clean penance so that the reader will be ready to slay the fiend, the world and the flesh (i.256). So even though the author is describing the Church as the court of mercy, it is important to notice that judgment goes on in this court in the figure of the priest. This image of the armor of clean penance revises the language of fighting to do be done by the limbs of the body. Returning to sin means slaying one's own soul, so the reader should flee to holy Church, that is to the sacrament of penance, and keep oneself there for the

forty days of Lent (i.257). Then the reader, previously disfigured and deformed by sin, will increase and reform again into the right shape through penance (i.257).³⁰ It is important for me to give a full account of how the author reads this allegory for the reader. He connects the Four Daughters directly to the Church and insists that the reader should seek mercy, seek forgiveness through penance. The reader should remember this interpretation because the author reconfigures the story about the Four Daughters of God into a narrative quest for the theological virtues in the final exemplum. But the author does not name his second reference to the Four Daughters of God – the reader must connect the reference to this story. Remembering the story of the Four Daughters of God as well as how the author interprets it should provide the reader with the resources to know how to go on later in the text.

The second story that adheres to the allegory of the well and that includes the Church and the sacrament of penance is situated about two thirds of the way through the manual in the allegorical reconstruction of the well and the building of three divine virtues. Placed at the end of chapter sixty eight, this tale shows the bending of the will, first away from God to the devil and then away from sin to virtue again through the sacrament of penance. It begins with a servant who loves the daughter of his great lord. A wicked man helps the servant appeal to the prince of fiends so that the daughter will love the servant. The fiend tells the servant that in order to “do [the fiend’s] wylle” the

³⁰ The idea of reincorporation leads to a striking image of the Incarnation: “ffor clerkys sayen, In xl. dayes þe chyld in þe moderes womb hath ful schap of alle his bodyly membrys, & in the xl. day god puttyth þe soule & lyif in-to þe body of þe chyld” (i.257). I discuss this image and its relation to the allegory of the well at length in chapter one.

servant must write a letter in his own hand in which he forsakes his God, his baptism and all of his Christian faith (ii.279). “Bynde þe,” the fiend instructs the man, “to be my seruau[n]t and w[yth] me to be dampnyd” (ii.279). It is important to note that the fiend does not do the binding -- the servant chooses to bind himself to the devil. As I note in my first chapter, the author of *Jacob’s Well* has a detailed account of the habitual resistances of sin, an account that is reminiscent of Augustine’s version in his *Confessions*. Here I return to Augustine’s description of his bending of the will away from God and his enchainment in sin:

I sighed after such freedom, but was bound not by an iron imposed by anyone else but by the iron of my own choice. The enemy had a grip on my will and so made a chain for me to hold me a prisoner. The consequence of a distorted will is passion. By servitude to passion, habit is formed, and habit to which there is no resistance becomes necessity. By these links, as it were, connected one to another (hence my term a chain), a harsh bondage held me under restraint.³¹

As is the case with Augustine, the servant in this story is bound by the iron of his own choice. The fiend has a grip on his will and makes a chain to hold him prisoner, but this enchainment is a product of the servant’s own choice to forsake the Church and to bend his will away from God. The servant “granted þerto and wrot þat letter[e]” and takes it to the fiend (ii.279). The “granting” signals the beginning, the first link, of the man’s enchainment because he chooses to allow the fiend to have a grip on his will. After he receives the servant’s letter, the fiend stirs the heart of the maiden to love the servant; she

³¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 140.

tells her father that she wants to marry the servant. The father had intended for her to be wedded to God in chastity so that he might be saved by her prayers. Sorrowfully, the father allows her to marry the servant. After the wedding, the servant chooses a life without the church: he “wente to no cherche, he herde no s[er]uyse, he blyssed hym no3t. ne neu[er]e was schryuyn” (ii.279). The repetition of the man’s lack, no church, no service, no blessing, and no confession, signals to the reader that this is vicious behavior, an example to be avoided.

It was told to the wife that her husband is not a Christian man. When she asks him if he is a “hethen out of crystene feyth,” the servant answers “nay” (ii.280). The servant’s answer should cause the reader to pause for a moment. His answer is true. He is not a heathen because baptism is indelible. However, his one-word answer is also misleading because he lives outside of the Christian faith. Binding himself to the devil produces this moral ambiguity – while it does not make him a heathen, it does produce a habitual turning away from the body of Christ. The wife’s reply invites him to turn back to the Church. She tells him that the next day they will go “to church[e] to gydere” and that then she will believe that he is not a heathen living outside of Christian faith (ii.280). The language of living outside of the Christian faith, outside of the body of Christ, and the language of reincorporation, the invitation to return to the church, likely will remind the reader of the manual’s opening description of excommunication. The potential ramification of choosing to live outside of the body of Christ, excommunication, can be remedied by the sinful person bending the will back to God. As the reader has learned

over sixty eight chapters in the manual, this conversion occurs through the practice of confession.

As L. Gregory Jones observes, confession involves the remaking of the self in relation to God, to one another and to the whole of creation. A Christian needs “the support and challenge from others within the Christian community, including those who know the particularities of [his life] – including [his] tendency toward self-deception and toward either prideful self-righteousness or shameful self-abasement (or both) better than any ordained person does.”³² In this example, the wife is the person who knows the particularities of the servant’s life and tendencies best. She at once supports him and challenges him about his vicious tendencies by inviting him to reincorporate himself into the community. However, in the medieval Church, this interpersonal interaction is not enough for reincorporation. The penitent must confess to a priest.

After hearing her response, the servant takes the first step to reincorporate himself into the community by telling “here all[e] to gydere” what he has done (ii.280). This form of confession to the members of the community marks an important moment in the servant’s acquisition of forgiveness because in communicating his wrongdoing to others, he begins to take accountability for his actions. He still has not, however, confessed his sins to a priest. Again, his wife inserts herself in to the situation by weeping and then going to the bishop to tell him the man’s confession (ii.280). Again, the woman acts as a supportive intermediary for the man – her tears prefigure the man’s contrite tears and her

³² L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1995), 185-186.

confession prefigures his confession of his sin.³³ At this point, another important intermediary intervenes. The bishop asks the man whether or not he “wolde turn aȝen to his god,” whether he would redirect his will to God. This recollects the role of the clergy after the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. The priest assumes responsibility for examining the conscience of the penitent by asking him questions to promote proper confession.³⁴ I draw attention to the role of the woman and to the role of the bishop in helping the man to redirect his will because it displays the medicinal function of the churchly community in relation to God. In *The City of God*, Augustine notes the close tie between loving God and loving one’s neighbor:

Now God, our master, teaches two chief precepts, love of God and love of neighbour; and in them man finds three objects for his love: God, himself and his neighbour; and a man who loves God is not wrong in loving himself. It follows, therefore, that he will be concerned also that his neighbor should love God, since he is told to love his neighbour as himself: and the same is true of his concern for his wife, his children, for the members of his household, and for all other men, so far as possible.³⁵

The wife and the bishop both relate to the servant as being an appropriate object for their love because of their concern that he should love God. It is this concern for other members that builds Christian communities. This communal, charitable love eventually replaces the cupidity that the man obtains through his contract with the devil. However,

³³ I discuss the role of tears in contrition and confession in my first chapter.

³⁴ See chapter one for Canon 21, the Fourth Lateran Council decree requiring annual confession as it relates to *Jacob’s Well*.

³⁵ Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 2003), Book XIX, Chapter 14, 873.

before this conversion can fully occur, the man must first recognize his need for this type of love and must choose to redirect his will to God.

The servant confesses to the bishop his sinful choice of forsaking God and points to the difficulty of amending himself: “I wolde but I may no3t. for I haue p[ro]fessyd me to þe devil & forsake crist and made a letter[e] of my professiou[n] and of my forsaking & took it to the feend” (ii.280). The agency in the first line is critical. Although the sinner might want to redirect his will to God, although he might will it, he may do so without help. The reader will likely remember the alternative choice from the fourth chapter of the allegory of the well in the portrait of the obstinate sinner who, because of his obstinate will, is not amended: “Swyche are þe memberys of þe feend, for þei be so euyll wyllled & so obstynat in malice, þat þey no3t be amendyd, tyl þei, wyth þe feend, ben in helle” (i.31). Being evil-willed and obstinate removes the sinner’s ability to choose to amend himself. The passive construction of “not be amended” reflects this inability. But the servant here makes a different choice, the choice to amend before he goes with the fiend to hell. However, even though he is not so evil willed, so obstinate, that he might not be amended, he realizes that his agency is not great enough to amend himself. Once again, this is where the loving churchly community comes in. The bishop, as intermediary, hears the man’s confession and tells him that God is “good and mercyable & wyl take þe repentant to hys grace” (ii.280). The bishop’s words describe a revised version of the agency of amendment so that the sinner does not amend himself,

but rather, when a sinner chooses to repent, God will amend him by taking the repentant to his grace.

After hearing the confession, the bishop assigns the first part of the man's penance. He tells the servant to "haue mynde wyth a heuy herte alwey of his horrible sy[n]ne and also to haue mynde of his god. whiche he forsook. What peynfull[e] deth he sufferyd for man. and how my3tfull[e] graceful & m[er]cyfull[e] god is to man" (ii.280). Here, the reader will likely recognize the bishop's words to the servant as a gloss of the author's words to the reader earlier in the text. The author tells the reader to think, to have mind, of Christ's suffering in relation to his own sin:

thynk what sharp peyne & deth crist sufferyd for þe. thynke how he made þe to his lyknesse, & bou3te þe wyth his precious blood. þinke what peyne he sufferyd for þe. think how he fedyth & sauyth þe. & how he schal rewarde þe in endless blys, 3if þou loue hym & worschipe hum. thynk how fals & unkynde þou art to hym. þou dredyst, louyst, seruyst & worshepyst, more þi body, þe world, þi rusty money, þi rotyn muk, þe feennd & synne, þan þou doost þi god (i.233).

From the allegory of the well, the reader knows that after making confession, the first step in the process of seeking forgiveness is remembering sin and thinking about it in relation to Christ's suffering.

The role of the Church in leading the penitent to salvation becomes central again when the bishop makes the "signe of the crosse" and closes the man in a "closett for forty days" (ii.280). The bishop assigns the man penance to help him to escape his habitual sin, to unloose the enchainment of the devil. The image of the man in the closet reminds the reader of passage in chapter 41 of the allegory where the author tells the

reader to flee to holy Church and keep penance for forty days: “Perfore fle to holy church, þat is, to þe sacrament of penaunce, & kepe þe þere xl. dayes in lentyn of þi penaunce” (ii.257). The servant stays in the church closet for forty days and thinks about his horrible sin, weeps bitterly for sorrow that he forsook God and thinks about God’s grace and mercy. These thoughts, this remembering, cause the servant to have a bodily reaction, when out of his eyes burst “terys of swete deuocyou[n] and w[yth] fyir of bre[n]nyng loue his whyzt chalston god ws brent in his herte” (ii.281). The material details in this description, the combination of tears of devotion with fire of burning chalkstone, return the reader to the function of remembering in the first chapter of *Jacob’s Well*. The author instructs the reader in building the well to combine sand, that is “mynde of [his] sin” with lime burnt in fire, that is “crist, whyzt as chalk, wyth-outyn synne, brent in his passioun, wyth fyir of tribulacyoun” and “medle hem to-gedere wyth watyr of wepyng” (i.3). The author tells the reader that he should let this amalgamation be his mortar – this cement holds together the materials of the well.

While in the closet, the servant combines the same elements in order to arrive at his own mortar. “In his mynde” the servant tempers together the “watyr of swete deuocyou[n]” with the “wepying for his sin” and the lime that “is his god brent in fyir of loue” so that “in good morter[e] wher[e] wyth two stonys” (ii.281). The servant’s weeping for his sin supersedes the woman’s earlier tears as his contrition is now wholly his own. The reader recognizes this process as the completing of the well from the introduction. Using the plumb of the line of truth, the author tells the reader to lay the

“corbels of faith,” then the “morter” of memory and finally the “stonys of þe werkys of (his) feyth” in order to complete the construction of the well (i.3).

From here, the narrative develops the allegory of the well to show the outcome of the servant’s penance. In the exemplum, the two stones are the “two soulys of hym & his wyif” that are laid and couched in the “wall[e] of the cyte of heuene & soudyd ioyned & knytt to God” (ii.281). The narrative departs from the allegory of the well where the stones are the “curblys of faith” to this representation where the stones become part of the future city of heaven. This new image of the two stones as the two souls coming together is important because it emphasizes the construction of churchly community. In this part of the story, the reader recognizes the exemplum as providing a new case in relation to the main text. The author includes the detail about the outcome of the servant’s penitential practice because it might encourage the reader’s mind to draw a probable conclusion about the futurity of his own ethical decisions. If the reader recognizes the servant as being a positive example and takes the same steps in his penitential practice that the servant takes in the story, then the reader will likely hope for a positive outcome based upon his or her own actions.

However important this departure might be in the formation of the reader, it is perhaps even more important that the story does not end here. It returns to the man’s enclosure in the closet. The servant hears the screams of the fiends but they cannot touch him. By recollecting his sin and remembering Christ, the man has undergone the process whereby he begins to exist separately from the devil. This remembering is crucial

because the recollection of sins alone leads to despair. While there are still audible traces of his wrongdoings, he is no longer a member of the devil. When he emerges from the closet, the bishop leads him into the church space before the community “a for all[e] the clergye & þe peple” (ii.281). This visual description of the bishop leading the servant by the hand serves to show the unbinding of the will from the devil and the redirection of the will to the Church. The fiend appears in the Church and tries to draw the man out of the bishop’s hand. The servant cries “help me holy fadyr” (ii.281). In calling for help, the man recognizes and verbalizes his own lack – he needs help in order to fully escape the grasp of the devil. This act recollects the description the author gives the reader in the introductory chapter of the state of the sinful soul in need of help: “wo to hym þat gaderyth in his pyt of his body a3ens his soule þe wose of dedly synne, for he hath gret need to seyn with Daudid: ‘Eripe me de luto, vt non infigar!’ lord, deliuere me out of þis wose of dedly synnes, þat I styke no3t þerin to be peryssched” (i.2). The servant needs help beyond that which even the bishop and the Church can provide for him. The fiend says that the bishop wrongfully claims the servant and presents the letter to the bishop as evidence that the man submitted to the will of the devil of his own volition. The bishop then “prayed to God” and the letter bursts out of the fiend’s hand into the air “in all[e] mennys sy3t” and lands in the hand of the bishop (ii.281). The detail about the bishop’s prayer shows the reader that although he plays an important role in helping the servant, the bishop is also a man who lacks. He too needs help from God and must ask for it before receiving it. After the intercessory prayer, the letter lands in the bishop’s hand, he

breaks the letter and brings the man to his wife. The exemplum ends with this reconciliation.

This story shows an example of a man learning to practice the craft of forgiveness as the author constructs it in the allegory of the well. The component parts, including the material details as well as the church and its sacramental resources for salvation, are fully present. The author, then, needs only to draw from the details in the example to provide the reader with an ethical interpretation of the story to apply to his sinful state:

þou þat forskyst god in þi synne take sande and lyme. þat is mynde of þ[i] synne and mynde on þi god & tempere hem to gyder[e] w[yth] wepyng of sorwe & w[yth] wepyng of deuocyou[n] and make þis morter[e] redy for to ley wyth þi stonework þe next day (ii.281-2).

The author places the reader, the person who forsakes God in sin, in the subject-position of the servant in the story. Just as the servant combines lime with his tears during his time in the closet to redirect his will to God, so too should the reader combine sand, that is mind of sin, and lime, that is mind of God, with weeping tears of contrition.

This clearly positive example, where the reader learning to embody forgiveness should want to emulate the embodiment shown by the character in the narrative, seamlessly contributes to the author's edifice of forgiveness. There is little doubt in the reader's mind about the role of the Church and the sacraments in the process of salvation. However, this is not the case in the majority of the narratives where the manual's representation of forgiveness is strained at best. Rather than showing sinful people turning to the Church to mediate salvation through penitential practice, most of the

examples show a practice of forgiveness where the Church and the sacraments are entirely absent or where they are more problematic than salvific. What remains in these cases is a portrait of sin that threatens to rupture the structure of the well. These potential ruptures not only represent the habituation of sin, but they also leave one to read against the grain of the narrative in order to connect it to the building of the well.

In several exempla in *Jacob's Well*, demons inhabit church space next to parishioners and clergy alike. One striking image occurs in an exemplum embedded in the discussion of the articles of the great curse (i.32)³⁶ Pope Silvinius, while still a monk, does homage to the devil in order to reach a high estate. The devil helps him first to be an archbishop and then to be Pope. When Silvinius asks the fiend how long he will live, the devil tells him that it will be until he sings a mass in Jerusalem. Relieved by this answer, Silvinius thinks he will live a long life by never saying Mass in Jerusalem. In Lent afterward, he says a mass in Rome, in a church called Jerusalem. After he had sung mass, he hears a great din of fiends. He asks the people for the name of the church, and they tell him it is called "Jerusalem" (i.32). Then he knows well that the death was near and that the fiends were coming for him. After that, he does not despair but trusts in God's mercy and weeps and cries and confesses openly to all the people. "And after þat he dede smyten of fro his body alle hym membrys, oon after an-oþer, wherwyth he had

³⁶ For a discussion of the tradition of this narrative, see Joan Young Gregg, "The Narrative Exempla of *Jacob's Well*," 51-57. Gregg shows that this exemplum relies primarily upon *Alphabetum Narrationum* as a source. *Jacob's Well* follows this text in abbreviating Sylvinius's learning and rise in the Church, omitting his adventures in Spain and Europe, and focusing on the incidents leading to his death, dismemberment, and burial. The details about the draught animals are particular to this source.

worschepyd þe feend” (i.32). Then he had the stock of his body placed in a cart and carried off by beasts -- he wanted his body to be buried wherever they stopped. The beasts roam with the cart to “þe cherche þat is cleped seynt Johun þe lateran & þere þey dede abyde, and þere is his body beryid” (i.32).

Although this exemplum is not original to *Jacob's Well*, it fits into his representation of excommunication. Though clearly still a baptized Christian, the Pope severs himself from the community when turning to the devil for help in raising his position within the church. Importantly, however, the Pope chooses to turn away from the devil and back to God through confession. This confession precedes an inverted dismemberment -- he severs all of his bodily members associated with worshipping the fiend. Left only with the stock of his body, Silvinius is placed within a cart and carried by beasts to his final resting place: the church. This image is quite striking because the Pope's reformed body is incapacitated, is a dying stump. The author tells the reader that the Pope deceived the fiend with penance and that the reader should do so as well. This story might lead the reader to wonder how to exist in a church where the fiend has enough power to infect even the Pope. One way to make sense of this story is to recognize it as a version of the remnants of the principalities and powers already spoilt by the resurrected Christ:

Blotting out the handwriting of the decree that was against us, which was contrary to us. And he hath taken the same out of the way, fastening it to the cross: And

despoiling the principalities and powers, he hath exposed them confidently in open shew, triumphing over them in himself (Col. 2:15).³⁷

For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood; but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places (Eph. 6:12).

For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8: 38-9).

Another striking story of a devil in church is situated at the end of chapter seventeen, a chapter on sloth. As Sarah Beckwith shows in her forthcoming book on forgiveness, a discrepancy between the ritual words that were spoken and the intention of those who utter them was common in discussions of ritual speech. The efficacy of the sacraments was not compromised by the intent of a priest because the intention of the church could compensate for the shortcomings of the cleric. Beckwith retells the story of a figure called Titivillus who monitors accountability for words. He collects words uttered carelessly during the liturgy in his sack. In later versions of the story, he also records all idle words on a long scroll. Beckwith notes that the words he records fall under the category of “sins of the tongue,” such as back-biting, jangling, and gossip, “all words that break the bonds between people.” Additionally, she notes that medieval penitential

³⁷ All scriptural references are from the revised Douay Rheims translation of the Vulgate by Richard Chandler, *The Holy Bible* (Rockford: Tan Books, 1989).

theology anticipates ordinary language philosophy here by understanding words as making and breaking community.

The author of *Jacob's Well* includes both versions of the story of Titivillus in his text. The fiend gathers verses that skipped over by clerics and as verses and psalms that they fail to say properly. His gloss speaks to the possibility that this text was not just being read by lay people but also by priests: “fforsothe, þanne I trowe þe feend hath a gret sacche full of ʒoure ydell woordys, þat ʒe iangelyn in cherche in slowthe” (i.115). Though he addresses this to his readers, one also wonders if this gloss might serve as a form of confession, the author signaling an awareness of his own use of idle words in the liturgy. The author then moves on to describe Titivillus recording the words of the lay people in church. A holy man sees the fiend do this and asks the fiend why he does so. The fiend’s response brings together speech and story-telling: “I wryte þise talys of þe peple in þis cherche, to recordyn hem a-fore god at þe doom for here dampnacyoun, and my book is to narwe to wryten on alle here talys; þei say so manye. þefore I drawe it out braddere, þat none of here talys schulde be vnwrettytyn” (i.115). Church is a location of interlocking narratives. But the reader needs to learn to differentiate between types of language, between types of tales. The reader should not listen to all of these tales because some of them are idle speech, words that break bonds between people. “Leue such talys for dreed of god,” warns the author (i.115). This idle speech stands in contrast to the language of confession, speech that repairs the broken bonds caused by sin. It is the type of tale-telling recorded by Titivillus that the sinner should avoid at all costs

during confession: “ne telle no3t in þi schryfte flateryng iapys & talys, ne oþere processe þat longeth no3t to þi schryfte; but symplely late þine herte & þi tunge acorde in one, & rehearse in þi schryfte no process but þat nedyth. For summe in schryfte schal tarye þe preest wyth sleueles talys þat no-thing longth to schryfte” (i.181). Perhaps the tales that Titivillus records are not just those told among lay people during church but also are stories told to the priest in confession. The reader must take care in choosing the words in confession because tales do important work and have serious consequences for salvation.

Many of the stories in *Jacobs' Well* more obviously go against the grain of the allegory. The author includes one story that looks like an example of a knight embodying forgiveness by resisting a chivalric urge for violence. Cesarius tells a story of a knight who kills the father of another knight. The son of the father meets the other knight and draws his sword to slay him. The murderer falls down on his knees and pleads to the son, “Syre kny3t, I pray þe for loue of him þat deyid on crosse to 3yue mercy to mankynde, haue þou mercy on me” (i.252). Strikingly, the sinner prays to the other knight, for the love of Christ, to have mercy on him. He does not confess to the murder. Nor does he show any sign of contrition. The sinner does not have to dig through the muck of his pit - - apparently, he does not need any tools. He simply asks for mercy. The author tells the reader that “in þise woordys þe oþer kny3t was steryd to mercy, & in þat mercy sprang þe watyr of grace, þat is, þe 3yfte of pyte” (i.252). These “words” are tools enough to stir the other knight to mercy so that the spring of pity emerges. The spring of pity, however,

does not emerge in the sinner. The wronged knight lifts the other knight up with his hands and says, “lo, for þat mercy & fir þat pyte þat ihesu hadde in vs, I wil haue mercy & pyte on þe. I for3eue þe my faderys deth, & I kysse þe in tokene of loue” (i.253). This seems to be an example of a knight embodying forgiveness as Jesus did on the cross. But where is the Church in this model of forgiveness? There is no priest; there is no penance; there is no restitution. Thinking about this story alongside the allegory of the well should make the reader wonder about these absences, should make the reader ask questions. The consequences of the answers could be great if the reader decides to follow the example as a guide for practical action. If the reader takes the knight’s story as his or her own, it would mean that the reader would not need the Church and would not need to confess to a priest. In this scenario, as long as the reader does not evade responsibility, he or she will be forgiven. The story then jumps to the “Good Friday afterwards”:

On good fryday aftyrward, þei wentyn to-gedyre to crepyn to þe crosse.
whanne þe kny3t kissed þe crosse, þat for3af his faderis deth to þe oþer
kny3t, þe crucyfixe halsyd hym abowtyn his necke & seyde, ‘þou for3yue
þis kny3t þi faderis deth for my loue, & kissed hym; þer-fore I for3yue þe
alle þi synnes & kysse þe (i.253).

Clinton Atchley suggests that “the interesting point of this [exempla], aside from the cross becoming animate and Christ speaking through it as in *The Dream of the Rood*, is that it anticipates the coming of Good Friday and the veneration of the cross.”³⁸ Another

³⁸ To differentiate between his edition of *Jacob’s Well* and his critical commentary, I cite Clinton Atchley’s criticism in footnotes. Atchley, 59.

interesting point, I think, is that now the knight has not only received mercy from the other knight but also from Christ without penitential practice, without paying what he owes.

In *Embodying Forgiveness*, L. Gregory Jones discusses the case of Diterich Bonhoeffer, a German theologian who struggles against the “twin dangers of cheap forgiveness and the eclipse of forgiveness in the midst of the Nazi terror and the anemic responses to that terror offered by Christians in Germany.”³⁹ Bonhoeffer insists upon the theological primacy of Christology and its practical significance. For him, embodying forgiveness cannot be achieved without sustaining a common life in Christ. These convictions lead him to polemicize against the trivialization and privatization of Christian life. For Bonhoeffer, these tendencies converge in what he calls “cheap grace” – “the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession.”⁴⁰ As Jones notes, “cheap grace denies any real need for deliverance from sin since it justifies the sin instead of the sinner. As such, cheap grace offers consolation without any real change of life, without any sense of either dying or rising in Christ. Indeed, cheap grace does not require any embodiment...”⁴¹ Jones uses this paradigm of “cheap grace” to identify problems with forgiveness in therapeutic culture. It enables the

³⁹ Jones, 7.

⁴⁰ Jones quoting Bonhoeffer, 13.

⁴¹ Jones, 13.

wrongdoer to achieve forgiveness without taking responsibility for past actions, which in turn, causes difficulty in avoiding wrongdoing in the future.⁴²

The passage with the two knights creeping to the cross qualifies as an example of “cheap grace.” Not only does it trivialize and privatize Christian life, but it also clearly represents forgiveness without repentance. The first wrongdoer does not openly confess at all – he “confesses” directly to another person, another person who is not ordained. Furthermore, neither of the knights show any sign of contrition. The first asks for mercy without apology and the second does not even verbalize his wrongdoings. Most strikingly, it offers consolation “I forgive thee all thy sins,” without any real change of life. Richard Kaeuper has shown that variants of this story appear in multiple collections from the thirteenth through the fifteenth century. The question of how knights “balanced charity and mild forbearance with hot-blooded vengeance and worldly victory remains a question. Clerical authors sometimes praised knights swinging their swords, even against fellow Christians, as agents of divine wrath; at other times they urged *caritas*.”⁴³ The author of *Jacob’s Well* is caught in the paradox that Kaeuper describes. While the author derides violence in the allegory of the well, he condones it in the exemplum.

To my mind, one of the most disturbing trends in this type of tale is the author’s repeated representation of punitive violence that seems to directly contradict his

⁴² In the allegory of the well, the author of *Jacob’s Well* warns the reader against evading responsibility like Adam did by blaming Eve for eating the apple (i.260-1).

⁴³ Richard Kaeuper, *Holy Warriors: The Religious Ideology of Chivalry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 16.

commitment to building a community of embodied forgiveness. The author tells the story of Justice Herkenbald at the end of chapter fourteen, the chapter about wrath, and then again at the end of chapter sixty five, the chapter about using the level of equity. In chapter fourteen, the author teaches the reader that, according to Saint Thomas, there are two manners in which a man may forgive his enemy:

In o manere is þis, to puttyn away his wretthe & þe rancoure out of his herte which þat he hadde aʒens hym, & þis is euery man boundyn to don of lawe of charyte, ʒif he wyll be sauuyd; for crist seth, Mat. vj., ʒif ʒe forʒeue not ʒoure neyghbours here synnes, þe fader of heuen schal noʒt forʒeue ʒou ʒoure synnes. ... In an-oþer manere is þis, for to fallyn away fro þe quarrel þat he hadde to his aduersarie; and þis is he noʒt bounde to do as for his saluacyoun, but ʒif he do it, he is þe more perfyʒt & schal haue þe more mede þefore (i.91).

In both manners, the author describes loving an enemy, or forgiving one's neighbor, with the language of moving away. The first involves a putting away of wrath and the second entails a falling away from the quarrel. The author employs the language of awayness to describe the necessity of struggling against the hatred and rancor of heart that arises as a result of being wronged. As Gregory Jones notes, feelings of hatred and vengeance might surface for the victim of a crime, but they need to be struggled against: "For the habit of hatred and the desire for vengeance not only perpetuate the cycles of violence; they also constrict and there by distort the vision of the hater."⁴⁴ In the main part of the

⁴⁴ Jones, 263.

text, the author encourages the reader to put away his wrath, to turn away from conflict, for just this reason: in hopes of altering habitual perpetuation of violence.

But what happens when the wrongdoing is so great that the victim cannot simply “put away” his anger towards the sinner or cannot “fall away” from the quarrel? That is, are there situations that merit some form of punishment? For Jones, there are instances that justify disciplinary action, such as murder, where punishment expresses the community’s valuing of every life. He also notes the appropriate purpose of such punishment: it should never be “to create, perpetuate, or exacerbate disparities of power and domination (though this has too often been the case); the goal must remain the hope of reconciliation and new life.”⁴⁵ For Jones, accounting for necessary forms of punishment poses the greatest challenge to creating a coherent account of Christian forgiveness. This difficulty pervades the narratives of *Jacob’s Well*. While the main body of the text sets up the paradigm of hope of reconciliation and new life as being the Christian goal, the exempla, specifically the repeated story about Justice Herkenwald, shows the realities of problems inherent to punitive violence: the creation, perpetuation and exacerbation of disparities of power and domination. The form of the narrative opens the door to the possibility of the language of forgiveness becoming bad faith, becoming another form of violence.

⁴⁵ Jones, 273.

The writer describes Justice Herkenbald as being a “gret iustyse” and a mighty man in his judgments because he shows equity to all men (i.95).⁴⁶ He spares no man for love, for dread or for wrath but does equity in his deeming. As Herkenbald lies sick in his deathbed, he hears a woman cry from the next chamber. He asks what the noise is but no man dares to tell him, so he commands one of his sons to find out why the woman is crying. The son returns and tells his father that the woman cries because his nephew “wolde haue leyn be þat womman” (i.96). Herkenbald follows what the law dictates in assigning the nephew punishment. He tells the knights to “goth & hangyth hym for his trespace, as þe lawe wyll!” (i.96). This punishment shows that the justice is, indeed, equitable because he assigns his nephew the same punishment that he would assign to any other person under the law. In Jones’s terms, Herkenbald’s sentence shows the “boundaries of the community” in terms of identifying acceptable behavior and behavior that is not. In order to uphold these boundaries so that members can live peacefully, disciplinary action must clarify inappropriate attitudes, judgments, and behaviors of the individual members.⁴⁷ At this point, the reader likely begins to wonder about the relationship between orthodox Christian teachings on forgiveness and the punitive violence of the death penalty.

⁴⁶ Brandeis, 95. There are two exempla at the end of this chapter. The first is about a virtuous young woman who is full of wrath. After she dies, her body is exhumed. The lower part is found to be whole because of her virtue but the upper part is burned and wasted away with fire because of her wrath. The moral is that wrathful souls shall be burned with fire. The author tells the reader, therefore, to cast out wrath and take the ground of equity, for it helps the soul, 95.

⁴⁷ Jones, 270.

However, the story here separates the judge's order from the violence being carried out. Rather than killing the nephew, the knights tell him to absent himself from the sight of his uncle. As opposed to the wife in the first example, these knights do not challenge the man about his vicious tendencies or encourage him to seek reconciliation – they simply tell him to avoid his uncle. Five days later, when the nephew thinks that his uncle “hadde forȝetyn his defaute,” he returns to the chamber of the justice (i.96).

However, Herkenbald had not forgotten. When he sees his nephew, he appeals to the nephew with fair words and draws him onto the bed to sit by him. Then Herkenbald “helde his necke wyth his oon arme, & wyth his oþer hand drewe his knyif & kutte his throte, & slewe him. & alle men wondredyn of þat dede” (i.96). In gruesome step-by-step detail, this graphic description shows the bloody death of the nephew at the hands of his uncle. Far from simply illustrating theoretical problems with retributive punishment in relation to the paradigm of forgiveness (as it does earlier with the justice's command to hang his nephew), here the exemplum actually depicts the retributive killing in action.

We remember the definition of manslaughter as the fifth depth of sinful wose from earlier in the allegorical chapter:

þat is, ȝif ony man be þe hath be slayn, or hurt in body, or harmyd in name or in his godys; or ȝif be þe ony persone hath ben enpoysound, or only chyld hath ben oppressyd, dystroyed, or slayne, be drynkes or oþer craftys, or be ony oþere dedys; or be þe, in fals enprisonement, or fals qwest, or false dome, ony mon hath be deed or maymed (i.93).

Herkenbald's killing falls under this category. We recognize the severity of his act when we remember that there are also lesser degrees of manslaughter that a person might

commit. The passage goes on to talk about defamation as a type of manslaughter and that a person slays Christ again when he falsely defames another. “þou sleest hym” also when you withdraw ghostly teaching from the people and “whanne þou 3euest oþer wykked example, & in þin open synnes & euyll werkys. Þerfore caste out þis wose!” (i.93). This seems to suggest that Herkenbald not only commits manslaughter by killing his nephew but that he also slays Christ by being a wicked example. Why, without examination, would the writer include an exemplum that upholds a commitment to unleash punitive violence in a text meant to build community?

Showing this type of violence in an exemplum risks the narrative taking on a life of its own because it puts to question teachings on Christian virtues. It potentially raises more problems than it solves. Of pressing concern would be how the reader is to account for this extreme violence in relation to Christ’s teachings in Matt. 5 – 7:

You have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you not to resist evil: but if one strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him also the other: And if a man will contend with thee in judgment, and take away thy coat, let go thy cloak also unto him. And whosoever will force thee one mile, go with him other two. Give to him that asketh of thee and from him that would borrow of thee turn not away. (Matt. 5: 38-42).

You have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thy enemy. But I say to you, Love your enemies: do good to them that hate you: and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you: That you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven, who maketh his sun to rise upon the good, and bad, and raineth upon the just and the unjust. (Matt. 5: 43-45).

For if you will forgive men their offences, your heavenly Father will forgive you also your offences. But if you will not forgive men, neither will your father forgive you your offences. (Matt. 6: 14-15).

Judge not, that you may not be judged. For with what judgement you judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why seest thou the mote that is thy brother's eye; and seest not the beam that is in thy own eye? Or how sayest thou to thy brother: Let me cast the mote out of thy eye; and behold a beam is in thy own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thy own eye, and then shalt thou see to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye (Matt. 7: 1-5).

One would think that the justification of Herkenbald's killing would require a serious engagement with these teachings, especially because the author incorporates Matthew 5 into his allegory in chapter fourteen.⁴⁸ Far from engaging in such an investigation, however, the story takes on a life of its own through the community's bland response: “& alle men wondredyn of þat dede.” Of course the men wonder at the deed. But this is the extent of the community's engagement with the graphic manslaughter. It does, in turn, leave the reader to wonder because the community does not worry for the state of his soul.

The reader remembers from the introductory chapter of the allegory that in order to receive the sacrament and to be forgiven, the judge would need to “caste out þis wose of þe vij. dedly synnes” with “a skeet of contricyoun, and aftyr a skauell of confessioun, and þanne shouelyn out clene þe crummys, wyth þe schouele of satisfaccyoun” (i.2).

⁴⁸ “Who-so is wroth wyth his brother, he is gylty to þe dome, for he is worthy to be somounnyd to apere in þe dome a-fore þe hy3e iuge &, as he þat is gylty, to standyn at his answe, & þis is drede” (i.90).

This threefold process of embodying forgiveness, of course, depends upon a priest as intermediary who hears the confession and assigns satisfaction. When his death approaches, the bishop arrives to administer the sacrament, “to whom this lord was schryuen wyth wepyng & gret contrycyoun of all his synnes, saaf of þat mansley3t” (i.96). The bishop recognizes this partial confession as being obviously problematic, so he examines the penitent’s conscience by asking him why he does not confess the murder. Herkenbald replies, “it was no synne & þefore I aske no mercy; for I did it no3t for wretthe & vengeaunce, but I dyd it for equite of ryghtfull deeming” (i.96). Again, even though Herkenbald confesses to the killing, “I did it,” he does not recognize it as a sin, and therefore does not ask for mercy. He even makes a point of qualifying his motivation as being an equitable retaliation. In his mind, he has done nothing that would require the bishop’s judgment about appropriate satisfaction.

Herkenbald goes on to further justify the murder by saying that “by equite of [his] lawe & of [his] office” he might not free the nephew, so he commanded the two knights to slay him. Since the knights would not do it, Herkenbald slays the nephew himself. The reader here might recognize that a problem with this formulation is that Herkenbald’s actions do not fall within the boundaries of a judge – his job is to assign punishment based upon the law and based upon the crime, not to commit retributive violence, especially with his own hands and in his private chamber. This opposition between the judge’s office and his role as a member of the Christian community points to the difficulty of practicing forgiveness and assigning punishment in both ecclesial and

secular political contexts.⁴⁹ One might expect the author to draw a distinction between the office of the judge and the office of the executioner, but he does not make the differentiation. Had he made it, he might have shown what it means for the judge to contradict his office by describing the possible motivations behind making such a decision, such as wrath or pride.

I qualify my preliminary observations about the problems with Herkenbald's response by approaching it from within medieval culture, by turning to medieval commentary on Matthew 5: 38-42.⁵⁰ As we remember from above, this is the scriptural passage about just retaliation, about an eye for an eye. In his *Catena Aurea*, St. Thomas includes these interesting, and to my eyes quite surprising, ruminations from Augustine:

This law, *Eye for eye, tooth for tooth*, was enacted to repress the flames of mutual hate, and to be a check on their undisciplined spirits. For who when he would take revenge, was ever content to return just so much harm as he had received? Do we not see men who have suffered some trifling hurt, straightway plot murder, thirst for blood, and hardly find any evil enough that they can do to their enemies for the satisfying of their rage? To this immeasured and cruel fury the Law puts bounds when it enacts a *lex talionis*; that is, that whatever wrong or hurt any man has done to another, he should suffer just the same in return. This is not to

⁴⁹ While it is certainly central to this discussion, the complex overlapping of Christian politics of forgiveness with the secular political context of punishment largely lies beyond the scope of this chapter. For one mode of thinking about punishment and the politics of forgiveness, see Jones, chapter 8.

⁵⁰ Although he does not directly address Herkenbald, Richard Kaeuper diagnoses my response to medieval violence in this story: "It will be apparent in the people studied in the pages that follow both valued and feared physical violence. The story might be more palatable and hopeful to modern sensibilities had the medieval folk only regretted violence and sought in all ways to reduce and repress it; but they seem – in company with many people at other times – truly to have enjoyed it, even while worrying about the order and stability that make settled life possible in a network of increasingly complex social relationships," xi. See Richard Kaeuper, "Introduction," in *Violence in Medieval Society*, ed. Richard Kaeuper (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2000), ix – xiii. It would have been much more palatable, I think, had Herkenbald regretted his violent act and had he sought instead a way to reduce or repress it.

encourage but to check rage; for it does not rekindle what was extinguished, but hinders the flames already kindled from further spread. It enacts a just retaliation, properly due to him who has suffered the wrong. But that mercy forgives any debt, does not make it unjust that payment has been sought. Since then he sins who seeks an unmeasured vengeance, but he does no sin who desires only a just one; he is therefore further from sin who seeks no retribution at all. I might state it yet thus; It was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not take unequal retaliation; But I say unto you, Ye shall not retaliate; this is a completion of the Law, if in these words something is added to the Law which was wanting to it; yea, rather that which the Law sought to do, namely to put an end to unequal revenge, is more safely secured when there is not revenge at all.⁵¹

I expected Augustine to read this passage as calling for “no revenge at all,” to emphasize the importance of not retaliating to completion of the Law. And he does this. But what surprises me about this commentary is that he also says that someone who has done harm to another man should suffer “just the same” in return. Retaliation is acceptable as long as the vengeance is not “unmeasured.” So while the person who seeks no vengeance is further from sin, the person who desires a just vengeance “does no sin” as long as it is measured. Read alongside Augustine’s understanding of measured justice, Herkenbald’s response that he did it not out of vengeance but out of equity for rightful deeming makes more sense. From his point of view, he “does no sin” because the retaliation is not unequal, not unmeasured.

The bishop does not consent to Herkenbald’s attempt to separate intent from action and occupation from act. He tells Herkenbald that he cannot receive the sacrament without confessing all of his sins, without confessing to manslaughter. This time,

⁵¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, vol.I part I of *Catena Aurea: commentary on the four gospels collected out of the works of the Fathers*, ed. John Henry Newman (Southampton England: Saint Austin Press, 1997), 196-7.

Herkenbald brings together his intent, his office and his belief system to justify his actions: “I slowe him noȝt for rankure of herte, ne for hate, but for loue of equyte, & for ryght of the lawe & for dreed of god. ȝif ȝe wyl noȝt ȝeue me my god, I betake my soule to god” (i.96). Choosing to act for love of equity, right of the law and dread of God would usually be a virtuous decision -- in the paradigm, this is the language of forgiveness. However, it sidelines the Church and the penitential process by suggesting that when combined with a reverence for God, performing just acts enable one to have the agency to take one’s soul to God. That is, this formulation removes Herkenbald’s need, his lack and replaces it with an individual ability to will his own salvation.

Herkenbald identifies the bishop’s withholding of the sacrament as a willful decision that precludes him from receiving his God rather than recognizing it as a part of the bishop’s office. So rather than depending upon the bishop to perform his office, Herkenbald says that he will assume agency and take his own soul to God. Of course, the reader remembers from the manual that in order to receive grace, the sinful soul, “in þis pytt of corrupte watyr, nedyth to cry in-to god: ‘Saluum me fac, domine, quoniam intrauerunt aque vsque ad animam meam. Saue me, þou god, fro drenching, for watyrs of cursyng han entryd my pytt to my soule” (i.2). The reader expects that the soul does not save itself from the drenching water of sin as the judge suggests, but instead must cry to God for the gift of grace.

When the bishop starts to leave without administering the sacrament, Herkenbald calls to him and tells him to look in his box for host, but the host is gone. Herkenbald

explains the disappearance: “Lo, bishop, þou woldyst no3t 3yue me my god, þerfore my god is come to me a3ens þi wyll. here in my mowth se þe host þat was in þi box” (i.96). Herkenbald places the bishop’s will in opposition to God’s will with the result being that the body of Christ miraculously relocates itself from the bishop’s box into the judge’s mouth. This story raises serious questions about the efficacy of the clergy in relation to the salvation of souls. Why would the author include a story about a man who achieves redemption despite his refusal to perform the penitential process? The answers to these questions are likely to be located in the erring will of the bishop. Despite his attempt at proper discernment, the bishop mistakenly identifies Herkenbald’s actions as being sinful and withholds the sacrament. However, Herkenbald did not sin. The jumping host, therefore, acts as a miraculous corrective to the bishop’s misperception. The author moralizes the story for the reader by encouraging him or her to act as Herkenbald did. Each of you, he writes, “in 3oure office, kepyth equite, & castyth out þe wose of wretthe! & þanne schal 3oure god entryn 3oure soulys, as he dyde in-to þe lord. And so he schal 3yue you grace here, & blysse in 3oure ende!” (i.97).⁵² Herkenbald clarifies in the story that he did not act out wrath or vengeance. It might seem strange for the author to use the story as an example of the reader’s need to cast out wrath as Herkenbald did. But not

⁵² It is important to note that the reader has not yet reached chapter forty four where the author defines equity. This means that the reader would likely try to think about Herkenbald as being a positive example of equitable action. It is also interesting that the directive comes from a somewhat voiceless version of the author because it does not include a pronoun. This distinction becomes clear when we get to the second version of this story.

being a born and perpetual saint, Herkenbald will have had an urge for wrath, one that he must have already cast out. The reader, in one's own office, should do the same.

When the author reuses the narrative at the end of chapter sixty six in the section about the virtues, he modifies the details of the story as well as his glossing of it. The first alteration comes in the opening description of Herkenbald, who "was a gret lord & mighty & euen[e] in doom" (ii.231). There is no mention of his office as judge. We are left to infer his office from the description of his just practice. He spares no person, high nor low, but gives an "even doom" to all as he had deserved. If a high man and a low man trespass, the high should have like and even pain as the low because Herkenbald "dempte euen peyne for euen[e] trespas" (ii.231).⁵³ As opposed to the first account, here the author does not label Herkenbald's actions. He says that the judge gives even pain for even trespass as the wrongdoer deserves, but this is not identified as equity.⁵⁴

The tale continues as it does the first time around. Herkenbald sits on his deathbed, hears the cry of a woman and asks what is wrong. When he hears that the

⁵³ The problem with the line between the judge's office and the role of executioner remains. It still is not the judge's role to inflict "pain" for trespass. The use of this term draws attention to Herkenbald's mistaken inability to distinguish between the two.

⁵⁴ By this point in the text, the reader has learned that equity reconciles reason and will for the profit of the soul: "equite in wyll makyth wyll to acorde wyth resoun in loue, þat is, to loue no-thinge but þat profyt³th his soule...And ...equyte in wyll acordyth to resoun, for he dredyth no-thing but þat is a₃ens his soule" (i.273). Equity affords seven kinds of mental powers: to examine one's conscience, to evenly govern one's body in measure, to avoid undue wealth, to see clearly "gode lyuerys & take exauple of hem, & do wel," to see clearly misdoers so as to "besyly fle here synne," to recognize and avoid the devil, and to see God clearly about thee (i.273-4). This is an important detail because it suggests that in order to follow a good example or to avoid a bad one, a person must be equitable. Intent is also important in equity, for if equity fails in intent, the virtue turns to sin. Equity with right intent is to do good works only for love (i.274). This shared language of Christian equity, of course, was not available to the reader in the first version of the narrative so the scope of understanding is now different.

woman cries because his nephew tries to lay by her, he orders his knights to hang the nephew. But they tell him to leave the sight of the lord. After five days, the nephew thinks the lord has forgotten his wrongdoing, so he returns to the chamber. The lord draws the nephew to his bed, holds him with one hand, and with his other hand cuts his through and slays him. The description of the judge unleashing punitive violence on the nephew is the same, but the community's reaction is different: "and all[e] his howshold[e] wonderyd & weryn aferde þ[er]of. His sykenesse moryd faste" (ii.232). Although the communal response to the manslaughter is still remarkably bland, it is important that they respond with wonder as well as with fear. What continues to be unclear is whether they fear him or whether they fear for him because of his deed. On a literal level, his physical illness quickly overcomes his body. My view is that this is meant to be taken literally and allegorically. In the allegorical sense, the detail about his sickness quickly taking root suggests that they fear for his soul.⁵⁵ Allegorically, his spiritual or moral malady quickly fastens to him, quickly enchains him.⁵⁶

His death draws near and the bishop comes with the sacrament. Herkenbald is shriven with great contrition and with weeping for all of his sins, save of the slaying of the nephew. When the bishop asks him why he does not confess to it, Herkenbald provides a succinct response: "It was no synne. & I helde it no synne. I wyll[e] aske of god no m[er]cy þerof" (ii.232). This response differs greatly from the first version where

⁵⁵ In the *MED*, "taking root" is the primary definition for "moryd."

⁵⁶ "Fasten to" is the secondary definition for "moryd" in the *MED*.

he says that he did not commit the killing out of wrath or vengeance but rather for equitable deeming. Here, he says that it was not a sin and that therefore he will ask no mercy. But he adds the detail about not perceiving it or comprehending it to be a sin (ii.232). The reader likely identifies with Herkenbald at this point in the narrative because it makes sense that he would not confess to a sin that he, in his mind, did not commit. Of course, the reader also probably recognizes that his lack of recognition, this resistance, results from sinfulness. Because “it was assumed that the priest would have to help the majority of his parishioners to make a full and coherent confession,” the reader likely expects the bishop to examine the man’s conscience as he does in the first version of the narrative.⁵⁷ But rather than performing his office, the bishop tells Herkenbald that he will not receive God’s body and turns homeward with the sacrament (ii.232). The judge asks the bishop to abide and tells him why he killed his nephew: “I ded it for no rancur[e]. but for dreed of god. & for love of ry3tfulness[e]. and for to don equyte of þe lawe” (ii.232). In the first version, the story says that the judge commits the act for love of equity, for right of the law and for the dread of God. Here the language is reconfigured. The judge does it for the dread of God and then for the love of righteousness and for equity of the law. The redefinition qualifies the earlier version because it places dread of God, a reverence of God, before love of justice and equity. He says that he did to his nephew for his trespass what he would have done to a stranger

⁵⁷ Duffy, 58.

guilty of the same trespass. Even though the Christian judge might see a lack of equity and cruelty in the rules of torture, he still must follow them.

The final striking difference between the two versions occurs with the language used to describe the miracle. Herkenbald tells the bishop, “3e denye my god fro me, but I take my soule to hym” (ii.232). There is no suggestion here that the bishop’s withholding of the sacrament places his will in opposition to God’s will. Nor is there any mention of Herkenbald’s will. Instead, the language of willful giving becomes the language of denial and refusal to deny. Herkenbald tells the bishop to look in the box, but the bishop finds nothing there. The justice says to the bishop, “3e denyed god fro me, but hym self denyed no3t hym fro me. her[e] se my god in my mowth” (ii.232). Herkenbald does not suggest that God appears in his mouth against the bishop’s human will. Instead, when the bishop sees the host, he “was glad” and “dede þat miracle be publyssched” (ii.231). Removing the language of the will places more emphasis on the miracle of God than it does on the activities of the human.

Although this version of the exemplum still ruptures the paradigm of forgiveness by leaving many of the same questions unanswered for the reader, the author’s elimination of details allows him to connect it more smoothly to the larger paradigm. The author’s gloss of the text in this chapter produces a very different interpretation from the first. We remember that the first gloss suggests that God enters Herkenbald’s soul because he keeps equity, suggests that he was saved because of his actions. The author tells the reader to keep equity and cast out wrath and God will enter the reader’s soul as

well. Now, the gloss tells the reader that the “leuel of equyte had made euen[e] his grou[n]d & pleyn. in euen[e] doom. And þat sauyd hym. & made þat grace goddys body to spryngen in his mowth” (ii.233). This gloss does not pulverize the text in the same way that the first one does. Because of the placement of the story, the author is less concerned with sin and more concerned with virtue. Herkenbald is not saved here because of his actions, because he casts out wrath. Now the agency is shifted – the level of equity makes his ground even and he is saved as a result. There is no longer as much tension between the author’s gloss and Herkenbald’s account of his story. The issue of wrath is set aside in the gloss as it is in the story and the focus is on equitable practice.

Before moving to the final exemplum, I turn to a narrative that not only shows extreme violence within the Church but that also affirms retributive punishment. This exemplum is located in chapter thirteen, a chapter about casting out envy. The story is taken from St. Gregory’s *Dialogues*. In the *Jacob’s Well* version, a hermit named Florencius dwells alone in his cell with six sheep for sustenance. He prays to God to send him a creature to dwell with him to keep his sheep safe from devouring beasts. After his prayer, he finds a bear at his gate inclining to him with the sign of worship. He tells the bear to drive his sheep to pasture, to keep them from wild beasts, and then to return at the end of the day. This wild beast does his bidding. From this deed, this doing, the man’s holy name springs all over the country. Four monks of another holy man, Euthicius, envy Florencius – they think that he must be holier than Euthicius because of this bear. Therefore, they privately slay the bear to hinder his good name. When the bear

does not come home as usual, Florence seeks him, finds him dead and knows who killed him. He weeps more for the envious monks than he does for the death of his bear. Then he says, “I hope in God that those who did this deed shall have hardship for their envy.” Hastily, the four monks become foul lepers, their bodily members rot from the bone and they die a foul death. The moral of the story is that the envious, “but þei amenden hem,” shall have a foul end (i.87).

In the New Testament, the picture of the flock appears nine times in six different writers. The sheep often refer to the human community or to the disciples (Luke 12:32; John 10:16). Paul Minear notes that “God is ultimately the shepherd-ruler of this flock; Jesus is the chief shepherd; Jesus appoints undershepherds, but the flock throughout remains God’s possession (1 Peter 5: 2-4).⁵⁸ The image of the sheep in the first line of this story brings to mind the associations of the flock with the Church and of Jesus as the Lamb of God, particularly because these sheep provide Florencius with sustenance. Without the sheep, Florencius will perish, so he prays for protection and receives a miracle (i.87). The story does not place culpability with the other holy man, Euthicius. He does not feel envy because of Florencius’s bear – his apprentices, who are less perfectly formed, do (i.87). They commit a violent act by slaying the bear, thereby leaving the sheep alone to fend off the wolves. This should be concerning: “Jesus’s own concern for the lost sheep was made clear by his own vocation (Matt. 10:6), by his

⁵⁸ Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1952), 84-9.

feeding of the multitude (Mark 6:34), by his eating with the publicans and sinners (ch.2: 15-17), by his commissioning of the apostles (John 21:15), and climactically by his offering of his life for them (Matt. 26:31).⁵⁹ But the author sets aside any concern for the sheep. In a text about practicing forgiveness, the reader might expect to see the monks confess to their envy or even to see Florencius forgive them regardless of whether or not they confess to a priest. Instead, however, he prays for vengeance and the monks die stinking deaths (i.87). This story completely and problematically contradicts the teachings in the allegory of the well. This deeply troubling story leaves me to wonder why a cleric would include it in his text. To my mind there is not good explanation for his decision to include the story. The only explanation I can think of is that the author uses such an extreme story to illustrate what to his mind is the worst of all sins: the sin against the Holy Ghost.

This story is not unique to *Jacob's Well* – it is also used as an example of envy in Robert of Brunne's *Handlyng Synne*.⁶⁰ In Brunne's version, Florencius and Euthicius live alone in a hermitage until the abbot from the nearby abbey dies. Euthicius becomes the new abbot and Florencius goes off to live on his own. In great affliction, Florencius prays for God to “sende hym sum felaurede” and God sends the bear, a gracious gift for

⁵⁹ Minear, 86.

⁶⁰ *Robert of Brunne's "Handlyng Synne," with those part of the Anglo-French Treatise on which it was founded, William of Wadington's "Manuel des Pechiez"* ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS, O.S. 119 (Berlin: Asher & Co, New York: C. Scribner & Co; Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co, 1901), 136-40.

which Florencius thanks him.⁶¹ Florencius loves the bear, a miracle and a great marvel, without fail because “a bere þurgh kynde shulde ete shepe.”⁶² This miraculously “kynde” bear is very unnatural because it does not do so. When the four monks slay the bear in Brunne’s version, Florencius has a different response, one spoken directly to Euthicius after he comes to comfort Florencius:

Yn God truly y tryst so,
þat veniaunce shal on hem take
Yn þis lyfe for my sake
Of Ihesu Cryst þey had no drede,
To sle þat helpe me yn my nede,
Felunlyche, as for enuye,
And he ded no man folye;
He was me sent, þurgh Goddys grace,
To be myn helpe and my solace;
þat God wulde hym me 3eue,
why wuld þey not suffre hym lyue?
God almy3ty shal do hys wyl
wyþ hem, and mo, þat do so yl.⁶³

This formulation differs from the condensed version in *Jacob’s Well*. A parallel is made between the bear and Jesus: both are sent as gracious gifts to help the person in need but are nonetheless slain. The question that Florencius asks about his bear could be asked about Christ : why would God give him to be a help and a solace and then not allow him to live? Although Florencius trusts that God will take vengeance, here he leaves it up to God’s will. His is less directly a prayer for vengeance and more an exploration of the

⁶¹ Furnivall, 137.

⁶² Ibid, 138.

⁶³ Ibid, 139.

human condition, of an attempt to understand that which is beyond human reason. Like *Jacob's Well*, Brunne uses it to teach the same lesson: “Parfore þe pope seynt Gregory / Tellyþ þys tale, resun why, / þat enuy ys a cursed synne, / Any man to falle þer-ynne” (140). Despite its depictions of violence, the story appears to be commonly used to describe the problems with envy.

I turn now to the final exemplum, to the story told in the author's recapitulative chapter. The aim of the recapitulative chapter, the author says, is to shortly rehearse “all þ[e] p[ro]ces þ[at] [he has] seyð & schewyd” the reader over the past two months and more (ii.537). That is, the final section summarizes and teaches the process of what he says, the allegory of the well, and what he shows, the narratives, to the reader.⁶⁴ We remember from my first chapter that the last step in the process of constructing the edifice of forgiveness is the construction of the ladder of charity. For

in hym þat hath þis ladder[e] of loue charyte in his welle m[er]cy & truth metyn hem to geder[e]. þat is. þe mercy of god forȝeuyng synne and þe truth of man condempnyng hym self be trewe doom for his synne./ And in þis man ryȝtfulnes & pees kyssen. hem to geder[e]. þat is. ryȝtfulnes of man repentaun]t in sorwe of herte. and pees of god receyuyn man repentaun]t in to hys chylde (ii.545).

The ladder of charity provides the structure through which the forgiving God and the self-condemning man, who judges himself truly for his sin, converge. It is in this contrite, repentant man that equity and the peace of God receive him into the body of Christ, the

⁶⁴ *MED* primary and secondary definition for “rehearse.”

sacrament of the altar, the Church. Hope Traver most certainly did not have access to the second half of the manuscript of *Jacob's Well* because this is clearly the coming together of the Four Daughters of God in the ladder of charity. In Nicholas Love's version, the debate among the sisters is handed over to Reason, who decides that the person of the son is most convenient to perform reconciliation and the most skillful remedy to make satisfaction for man's folly.⁶⁵ Reason hands this verdict over to the Father:

þe fadere seide it was his wille þat it shuld be so, þe son ʒaf gladly his assent þerto, & þe holigost seide he wolde wirche þerto also. And þan fallyng done all þe [holy] spirites of heuen & souereynly þankyng þe holi trinyte, þe foure sisters foreside weren kissed & made acorde, & so was fulfilled þat þe profete dauid seid, *Mercy & soþfastnes metten louely to gedere. Riʒtwisnes & Pees hauen kissed.* And þus was termynet & endet þe grete conseil in heuen for þe restoryn of man & his sauacion.⁶⁶

In Love's version, the coming together of the Trinity prefigures the coming together of the Four Daughters of God. The author of *Jacob's Well* draws from this version but complicates it because the coming together of the Four Daughters in a kiss of peace takes place within the "man repentant" who has sorrow of heart. The image becomes even more complicated, and more explicitly linked to the earlier version of the Four Daughters in chapter 41 where the story leads the reader into Church to do penance for xl. days and then into the Incarnational image: "ffor clerkys sayen, In xl. dayes þe chyld in þe moderes womb hath ful schap of alle his bodyly membrys, & in the xl.day god puttyth þe

⁶⁵ Love, 19.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 19.

soule & lyif in-to þe body of þe chyld” (i.257). Now, at the end of the Lenten reading, the Four Daughters come together in the repentant man because God “receyyn man repentau[n]t in to hys chylde.” So what seems at first to be a coming together in the repentant man is actually located in the man’s reception into God’s child, that is in the reconciliation of the man into the body of Christ. These lines act as a salve for the ruptures produced earlier in the text because it is a gift and a reception of gift that is made possible through the sacramental resources of the Church.

Directly following this reconfiguration of the Four Daughters, the final exemplum acts as a culmination of the problems and issues shown in the previous examples. At this point in the text, it is still unclear as to whether the author foresees readerly incapacity and holds it up as error or whether the shortcomings emerge as unanticipated shortcomings. Furthermore, the reader still likely wonders about the author’s self-awareness of his own error as reader and writer. I believe this to be one of the functions of the exempla -- they raise these questions for the reader and leave them unanswered until the end. Paradoxically, the final story stabilizes the subject position of the author and the reader in relation to the larger paradigm of the work by defining the human condition as being one of instability and lack.

The last story is about a peddler in a market who has six baskets full of fish to sell (ii.545). The first he calls God’s curse, the second Sin, the third Falseness, the fourth Truth, the fifth Charity and the sixth he calls Mercy. The peddler decides to place the three baskets of Truth, Charity and Mercy beneath the stall because they contain the most

precious fish. He places the other three baskets, God's curse, sin and falseness above on the stall. So many rich men come along that they buy up all of the fish in the first three baskets. The other three baskets, Truth, Charity and Mercy, were stolen away so that after the rich men were served with enough fish, the poor failed and might not have any. After recognizing that the three baskets are gone, the peddler, who makes "myche mone þat it were stolyn away" decides to run "abowtyn to enqueryn aft[er] his 3 panyerys of fysh[e]." ⁶⁷ This marks the beginning of the peddler's search for what he lacks: for Truth, Charity and Mercy. ⁶⁸

The peddler begins by coming into the Pope's palace, and the palace of Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops. He asks if "truth charyte and m[er]cy com[e] ow3t þer[e]," but all of the men, both great and small, say that there "kom[e] non swyche her[e]i[n]ne" (ii.546). When he approaches the households of the archdeacons, parsons, vicars, secular colleges, secular priests, and abbots, he asks them the same question, but they all reply that they "knewe non swyche" (ii.546). This search is reminiscent of the end of *Piers Plowman* where Wille disintegrates inside the imploding body of the Church (XX.183-213). Much like Langland's Church, one infiltrated by the fiend, the Church here has no knowledge of the virtues (XXII.58-73). Unlike in *Piers Plowman* where the friars are corrupt, however, in *Jacob's Well* they seem to be the only religious men with any

⁶⁷ This is my gloss of Atchley, p. 545-546 with the final quotations taken from p.546.

⁶⁸ His search for the virtues echoes the scholar's search for help in the storm at the same time that it represents the quest of the wandering Christian who reads this text.

contact with the virtues -- they “hadden þe saver[e] of hem, but it smellyd so strong on hem, þat þey leeten all 3 . . . pacyn forth be her[e] gate” (ii.546). After a fruitless search within the Church, the author of *Jacob’s Well* leads the peddler outside of the Church into the court. In an inversion of Wille’s progression from the King’s court to the Church, the *Jacob’s Well* peddler leaves the Church to search the court and then to the commons. He enters the courts of “*emp[er]ourys & kynges. & princes dukys er erlys. lordys baronys knyghtes & sqwyerys*” and asks after Truth, Charity and Mercy (ii.547). But they say that no such virtues come among them. The peddler runs to “ryche & pore and to alle þe comou[n]s” and asks after them, and they say “alle to gyder[e]” that among them come never Truth, Charity or Mercy (ii.547). So it isn’t that the virtues are only absent in the Church but that they are absent in all human institutions.

The story goes on to represent this condition and to situate the author and the reader within it. The author places his linguistic construction of truth, charity and mercy into conversation with the language from the narrative:

Ry3t so syres. þe stonwerk of gode werkys and þe artycles of c[ri]stene feyth þat clepe I truth in our[e] welle. þe ladder[e] I clepe charyte þe stakys of þis ladder[e] I clepe mercy. whyl grete ryche men and werdly coueytous lyuerys and fleschly lyuerys byen vp þe fysch[e] þat han her[e] dely3t and her[e] lust in þe panyerys of goddys curs. of sy[n]ne & of falsness. þerwhyl is stolyn away out of our[e] welle þe fysch[e] þat is dely3t & desyir of truthe charyte & m[er]cy (ii.547-8).

This is an entirely new mode of narration and glossing. As usual, the gloss weaves together the allegory and the story, but it goes one step further because the author

connects the two by situating himself in the model. He acknowledges his authorship with the repetition of the phrase “I clepe.” He seems quite self-conscious of the inadequacy of the language he constructs. He calls good works and articles of faith “truth,” he calls the ladder “charity,” and he calls the stakes “mercy.” This “calling” points to the limits of the efficacy of human language to represent virtues that Christians can never fully understand, much less name, because of the consequences of sin. He gives a portrait of the human condition represented by the covetous men buying up the fish of God’s curse: sin and falseness. While they are buying up those fish, the fish that are “delight and desire” of Truth, Charity and Mercy are stolen out of “our well.” The fish that is stolen from the well is the “delight and desire” for the virtues. The problem is, then, not that the individual penitent does not possess the virtues, but that one ceases to desire them. The author wants the reader to recognize this absence because in order to seek Truth, Charity and Mercy, a person must first desire to do so.

The author then turns from a lack of desire to what it means to search for the virtues. He, too, is a person engaged in the difficult search for these virtues: “þat I drede me sore þow3 we sekyn þat þer[e] aftyr in ony astate of holy cherche or of temp[or]alte. eythir in hey3 or lowe. poore or ryche grete or smale. it is wol hard to find hem” (ii.548). The search for Charity, Mercy and Truth is difficult, “it is hard to find them,” when the search takes place within inherently flawed human institutions. After introducing the difficulty of the search, the author reinvokes the strong scent of the fish and applies it to the reader’s condition as well as to his own by referring to the human’s incapacity to

enjoy them: “it is wol hard to fyndyn hem. ffor þe fysch[e] of truthe of charyte and of m[er]cy smellyn so stronge vp on vs. þat we mowe nouȝt sufferyn þe sauour þerof. but puttyn hem away fro vs” (ii.548). Humans cannot suffer the smell or taste of the fish because it is too strong, so “we” push it away. This is another figuration of sinful Christians struggling to bear penance, of the difficulty with finding virtue.⁶⁹ It is important to note that the author describes these men as “us,” again bringing himself and the reader into the text.

His next move is to stabilize his own subject-position. It is here, at the end of the text, where he signals a self-awareness of his own error as reader and writer. He acknowledges that he, too, is engaged in this mode of seeking as opposed to having complete mastery of the process. He acknowledges his own lack of understanding, situates it within his building project, and then advises the reader about what to do with this information:

But ȝif I wyste wher[e] þat I myȝt fynde þis fysch of truthe charyte & m[er]cy. I wolde gladlyche byggen þerof. And be my cou[n]seyl enquiryeth and aspyeth þerafter. ȝyf ȝe mowe wyte wher[e] it is. byeth þerof (ii.548).

The author uses “if” to signal his own lack of knowledge about where to find the virtues. This conditional sentence construction places him, as flawed human being, in the same

⁶⁹ The *MED* definition of “sufferyn” is relevant: 3(a) To undergo hardship or affliction without succumbing, endure, hold out; be able to bear a medical treatment or regimen or a penance.

subject position as the seeking reader.⁷⁰ He says that if he knows where to find these virtues, he would gladly “byggen” them. The author would buy some of those virtues if he knew how to do so. But “byggen” also might be a punning echo of “biggen,” thereby bringing to mind several pertinent definitions in the reader’s mind: to reside, to build, to establish or found, to form or create, and to further edify.⁷¹ This pun suggests that if the author knew where to find these virtues, he would gladly build the community, would gladly edify the church thereof.

In some sense, then, his project of constructing the allegory of the well is necessarily incomplete because of his human condition, because of his incapacity. The best that he can do is to show the reader his work in hopes that it will encourage the reader to do the appropriate seeking. We are meant, I think, to put this recognition into conversation with his self-conscious advice to the reader (and to himself as writer) at the end of the first chapter:

Be þis shewyd now, be-fore 3e schull knowe & vnderstonde here-aftyr better what I mene, whanne I schewe more of þis werk. lokyth in þe begynnyng of euery werk þat 3e do, how it schal be perfourmyd & what schall be þe ende! (i.4).

⁷⁰ The paradigm and the final exemplum become linked by the notion of not knowing where to find the fish of Truth, Mercy and Charity at the same time that the reader and the author become linked to one another.

⁷¹ *MED*: 1. (a) To dwell or live (in a place, among people), reside; inhabit (the Earth); ben bigged, have lodging; (b) ~ bour, to establish (head)quarters; *refl.* establish oneself (in a location); (c) to stay or remain (in a place); reside (in sb.); (d) ~ in pais, remain peaceful. 2.(a) To build (a house, a bridge, etc.); erect (a tent); lay out or build (a city); bigged, of a country: built up; (b) ~ ayen, ~ neue, to build again or anew, rebuild; (c) *ppl.* as *n.*: a builder; (d) bigged of, formed by or consisting of (sth.). 3.(a) To establish or found (a city, a kingdom, an organization, etc.); ~ first; (b) to create (sth.). 4.(a) To form or create (sth.); (b) to further or edify (sb., the mind).

At the end of the text, the reader knows and understands better what the means as he shows the work, especially what he means by representing resistance in the exemplary narratives. He expects for the reader to compare her own story with the stories in the exempla. The aim of his work, “the end,” is for the reader to desire to seek Truth, Mercy and Charity. He counsels the reader, in fact, to “enquyreth and aspyeth þerafter” (ii.548). And he finally opens up the possibility of the reader overcoming his incapacity, the possibility that he “mowe wyte wher[e] it is” and if he finds this knowing, the author tells him to “byeth þerof” (ii.548). This language, of course, picks up on the language of buying fish from the last exempla. The advice to “buy thereof” suggests that the reader acquire this knowledge through hard work and secure salvation through penitential practice.⁷² More notable, however, is that the language of buying ultimately invokes Christ. He is the only one with the capacity to buy mankind’s redemption, the only one capable of building the Church, the only one capable of complete authority, of mastering the process.⁷³

After this advice, the author returns the reader again to the allegory of the well. He reminds the reader to delve his well deep enough with the truth of good works, to lay the corbels with truth in his faith, and to lay the stonework in the works of faith (ii.548).

⁷² *MED* definitions for “byeth”: 1a. (a) To purchase (sth.), acquire by purchase; 2.(a) To acquire (sth.) by effort or work (b) to acquire, earn, or merit (salvation, fame, wisdom, etc.); secure (salvation for sb.).

⁷³ *MED* definition for byeth: 6.*Theol.* Of Christ: (a) to redeem or save (mankind, etc.); ~ ayen, ~ fre; (b) to free or save (man from damnation, hell); -- with from, (out) of phrase; (c) to restore (man to the joys of heaven): to restore (sth.); -- with (un)to, til phrase.

With charity, the reader should make his ladder, make the stakes of it with charitable deed and with charity, turn the windlass of the mind from sin to virtue (ii.548). This turning from sin to virtue is from the fiend to God with mercy on the reader's soul (ii.548). But the reader cannot do this without the Church. The reader should lift his body up to penance with the rope of hope of Mercy (ii.548). The sacrament of penance, dispensed by the Church, allows one to recognize a lack of desire and teaches one to search and to hope for Mercy. It is ultimately the rope of love that lifts one's soul to God so that one's "bucket of desire mowe be fylled her[e] wyth watyr of grace" (ii.547-8). The water of grace that comes from penance replaces a sinful lack and fills the emptiness of desire. This filling then leads the reader to the end of the text and the end of the penitential process to partake in the sacramental body of Christ: in one's "ende wyth wyne of ioye" (ii.549).

CHAPTER THREE

The Formation of Forgiveness in *Piers Plowman*

Mid-way through *Jacob's Well*, a fifteenth century penitential manual, the anonymous author includes an exemplum that shows two knights embodying forgiveness.¹ At the end of chapter forty, one meant to be read during Lent, the author tells a story of one knight that had killed the father of another knight. The son meets the killer, draws his sword and should have slain him. The knight that slew the father fell down on his knees and says, "sir knight, I pray you for the love of him that died on the cross to give mercy to mankind, have mercy on me."² In these words the other knight was stirred to mercy, and in that mercy sprang the water of grace, that is, the gift of pity. And so, in that pity and in that mercy, the son lifts up the man with his hands and says, "lo, for that mercy and for that pity that Jesus had in us, I will have mercy and pity on you. I forgive you my father's death and I kiss you in token of love."³ On Good Friday afterward, they went "to-gedyre," reconciled with one another, to creep to the cross. When the forgiving knight kisses the cross, the crucifix embraces him about the neck and

¹ *Jacob's Well*, ed. Arthur Brandeis, EETS OS 115 (London, 1900), 252-3.

² Brandeis, 252.

³ Brandeis, 253.

says, “you forgave this knight your father’s death for my love, and kissed him; therefore I forgive all your sins and kiss thee.”⁴

Immediately following this extraordinary example, the author provides a gloss to teach his reader to imitate the merciful knight. Christ spoke through the Crucifix, he explains, and forgave that knight his sin. Saying nothing more about the miraculous coming to life of the cross, the author does make clear that Christ’s embodiment of forgiveness on the cross makes this reciprocity possible.⁵ The author understands that the knight’s act of forgiveness not only results from Christ’s graceful forgiveness of “us” during the crucifixion but that it is also rewarded by it through the remission of the knight’s own sins. While the “us” obviously refers to the two knights, it also invites the reader to inhabit the story.⁶ The author, a self-proclaimed “man of craft” glosses the story for the apprenticed reader: “so do 3e mercy, þat grace of pyte sprynge in 3ow, wherby 3oure synne may be for3ouyn. And þe watyr of grace in 3oure welle mowe flowe 3oure soule vp to heuene.”⁷ By reading the example, the author hopes to initiate

⁴ Brandeis, 253. This miraculous personification of the cross is reminiscent of the Anglo Saxon *Dream of the Rood*. The poem’s personification, however, is much different because it famously describes the agony of the crucifixion from the point of view of the cross. For the poem, see *Eight Old English Poems*, ed. John C. Pope (New York: W.W. Norton & CO., 2001).

⁵ Although we assume that the creeping to the cross occurs in a church, it is worth noting that the institution and the priest are completely sidelined in this example of penitential practice.

⁶ Eamon Duffy notes that creeping to the cross on Good Friday was central to lay piety and penitential activity in late medieval England. See Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England .c 1400-c.1580* (1992; repr., New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 29.

⁷ Brandeis, 253.

the reader into the craft of forgiveness so that Christ's grace will spring in the reader and so that by forgiving others, the reader's sins will also be forgiven.⁸

Beginning my chapter on *Piers Plowman* with a narrative example from *Jacob's Well* might risk producing a reading in which Langland's poem would be indistinguishable from the manual. This could happen by separating Langland's doctrine from the forms and processes of the poem or by making the poem's symbols produce a predetermined reading shaped by the forms of image in *Jacob's Well*.⁹ So I pay careful attention to the progressive form and allegory that Langland employs to represent his distinct models of forgiveness and his particular version of the late medieval Church. Langland's use of allegorical mode reflects his representation of the embodiment of forgiveness and his ecclesiology. We might expect to see more examples of embodied forgiveness as the allegorical modes change in the poem. However, rather than being a building-up, or a progressive penitential model showing characters learning to forgive as the allegorical modes become more complicated, Langland emphasizes human resistances to forgiving others and being forgiven as a result of sin. It is only through the humanity of Christ that Langland shows what it means to embody forgiveness. That the allegory does not end with the Four Daughter's kiss of peace or with Christ's Resurrection is significant. Langland ends his poem by returning to, and leaving off

⁸ I give a full account of the craft of forgiveness in chapter one and two.

⁹ David Aers warns against these problems in *Piers Plowman and Christian Allegory* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), 73, 93. For the problem with predetermined critical reading of symbols, see p. 73 & ff. For allegory as intimately tied to process, see p. 93 & ff.

with, an account of the extreme pressures placed on the Church and on the sacrament of penance in late medieval England. That is, he leaves Wille in the church fighting, still hoping to learn the craft of love.

Although Langland's allegorical form is my main concern in this chapter, it is important to note the multigeneric scope of his richly complex poem including his use of dreamvision, sermons, penitential literature, exempla, and *vita Christi*. If asked the seemingly simple question of what the poem is about, critics would likely produce a range of answers. The points of entry into *Piers Plowman* seem to be inexhaustible: government, law, social issues, education, the Church, Christology, theology, politics, or the market economy to name a few. When reading Langland's poem, we must not try to extract any of these from the others – his writing works against this type of separation. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I will read this poem as being an exploration and an unfolding of the question that the main allegorical figure, Wille, asks Holy Church in the first Passus of the poem: “Teche me to [no] tresor but telle me this ilke, / How y may saue my soule, þat saynt art yholde.”¹⁰ Wille asks Holy Church to educate him, to teach him how to save his soul. This question sets up Wille's understanding of his own salvation as a teachable and learnable craft, as something he could potentially obtain with proper practice. By asking her to “teche” him, Wille thinks that Holy Church as master

¹⁰ Unless otherwise noted, all citations of the poem are to *Piers Plowman: The C Version* eds. George Russell and George Kane (London: Athlone Press, 1997), 217, I, 79-80. All further quotations will be cited parenthetically with reference to Passus and line number. I also consult Derek Pearsall's most recent edition: *Piers Plowman, A New Annotated Edition of the C-Text* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2008).

of the craft can either show him by example or that she can morally guide him on how to obtain forgiveness.¹¹ The remainder of the poem shows formulations and reformulations of this theologically dense question, one that has serious repercussions for the sacrament of penance in the late medieval English Church.

Wille's word choice in this question is significant. In the lines leading up to it, he kneels down, cries for grace and prays for Holy Church to pray for him "to amende" and for her to "kenne [him] kyndly on Christ to beleve" (l.76-8). At this early point in the poem, it is unclear as to what this amendment means to Wille and how he thinks it relates to his kind knowing of, and belief in, Christ. What is clear is that he uses "amend" as a verb, as a word that suggests some sort of action, some sort of change or redirection.¹²

¹¹ See the following relevant definitions of "teche" in the Middle English Dictionary: 1) a) To speak with the manner of a teacher, lecture; also, speak with authority, preach; also, deliver a sermon; (b) to share knowledge with (sb.); guide (sb.) toward learning or wisdom; (c) in proverbs and prov. expressions. 5(a) To give formal instruction; also, hold an academic discussion (of a topic); (b) to educate (sb.) formally; give instruction in (a topic, discipline); also, educate. 5b a) To give training in the methodology or techniques of (a science or craft); -- also with inf. as obj.; train (sb.) in (a science or craft); train (sb. to argue, farm, steal, etc.). 6 a) To show (sth.) by example, demonstrate; -- also with clause as obj.; provide (sb.) with a model of (chivalry, patience, etc.); demonstrate to (sb. how sth. happens, that sth. is so, etc.). 7a) To show (sth.) by example, demonstrate; -- also with clause as obj.; provide (sb.) with a model of (chivalry, patience, etc.); demonstrate to (sb. how sth. happens, that sth. is so, etc.). All references to the Middle English Dictionary, hereafter *MED*, are to "*The Middle English Compendium*," The University of Michigan. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/mec/> (accessed January 18, 2010).

¹² The *MED* gives multiple definitions for "amend," many of which are of central importance to Langland: 1. (a) To remedy (a lack, a fault, a bad situation); correct, rectify, right (a wrong, an injustice, an error); 3.(a) To restore (sb.) to health, make well; cure (a disease, etc.); 4. To relieve (suffering, grief); 5. To make amends for (an offense, injuries, etc.), make restitution; 6. (a) To get better; improve in quality, skill, etc.; improve in wealth or welfare, prosper; 10. To change or alter (sth.), esp. for the better; 11. *Ethics* (a) To mend one's ways; ~ lif, ~ maners; ~ of, turn away from (sin); -- refl. or intr.; (b) to reform or convert (sb.); 12. *Theol.* (a) To save (souls, mankind); god mamende, (thamende), so help me (you) God!; (b) to free or absolve (sb. from sin); forgive (sins); (c) to make amends or atone for (sin). Each of these definitions unfold as the poem progresses. At this point, it is not clear which of these definitions Wille has in mind. His language does seem to suggest that he has in mind some sort of reformation or change for the better

That this formulation directly precedes Wille's request for Holy Church to teach him to save his soul suggests that he already makes a connection between amendment, believing in Christ and his salvation. At this early stage in the poem he also seems to identify at least one obstacle to overcome if he hopes to realize this amendment: treasure.

Located on his left hand side, opposite Holy Church, and among such figures as False and Fauel, Wille sees a woman who visually recollects treasure. Wille describes the woman as being "wonderly yclothed" in lavish fur and jewelry (II.9). Her clothing is so rich that he nearly loses the words to describe her array: "Her robynge was ryhere þen y rede couthe; / For to telle of here atyer no tyme haue y nouthe. / Here aray with here rychesse raueschede my herte..." (II.14-16). Although it obviously refers to her attire, Langland's word choice produces a pun on robing/robbing, one that he follows up and reinforces with the reference to the woman's "ravishing" of Wille's heart.¹³ After she devastates his heart, Wille turns to Holy Church because he wants help in identifying

and that it does involve forgiveness and salvation. Nor is Wille's understanding of the agency involved in this change clear.

¹³ While feminist critics tend to emphasize that with "ravish," Langland evokes "rape" in what Lady Meed does to Wille's heart, I think that the primary definition of the word is equally important in characterizing her. I draw attention not only the idea of her stealing his heart, but to the violence involved with this form of plundering and robbing. 1. (a) To steal (sth.), take away; seize on (the kingdom of heaven); also *fig.*; -- also without obj.; seize upon (the words of sb.); appropriate (an infinite course of time), undertake; plagiarize (the writings of sb.); arrogate (honor to oneself); ~ awei; godes ravished, stolen goods; (b) to commit robbery, take money, steal; rob (sb.), plunder, assault; rifle (a house), ransack; devastate (a country), lay waste. Langland picks up the pun on robing and robbing again and reconfigures it to describe Patient Poverty: "Ac wel worth Pouerte! for he may walke vnrobbed / Among pilours in pees, yf pacience hym folowe" (XIII.1-2).

her, in deciphering whose “wyf a were” and “what was here name” (II.17). Although Wille’s move to identify her in relation to a man might raise the eyebrows of today’s feminist critic, this would have been the formulation of a medieval victim of crime if it was committed by a woman.¹⁴ Elizabeth Fowler describes the function of a marriage contract in medieval England as one in which the woman undergoes a civil death. This means that the will of the husband covers the will of the wife so that her will becomes void in contract law. But in the legal expression of unity of person, the woman becomes “representative” of her husband’s will. Fowler describes the agency relationship:

At a semiotic cultural level her interests are displaced (“voided”) in the identity of his acts and her will, and precisely the *representative* quality of his identity becomes invisible: his actions are sufficient in themselves, without referring to her will. In contrast, her actions always make reference. In cases where she acts on her own behalf, she is construed as acting on behalf of him, his person, his will.¹⁵

Fowler argues that when Mede appears before Will, he wants to know whose wife she is so that he knows how to interpret her social meaning.¹⁶ While this is undoubtedly the

¹⁴ For example, in an argument about gender and economy, Clare A. Lees says that Mede’s “worth, her worthy dress, is linked to the question of ownership and expressed by the grammar of possession: ‘whose wif she were’ (119). See “Gender and Exchange in *Piers Plowman*,” in *Class and Gender in Early English Literature*, eds. Britton J. Harwood and Gillian R. Overing (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 112-13.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Fowler, “Civil Death and the Maiden: Agency and the Condition of Contract in *Piers Plowman*.” *Speculum* Vol 70, No. 4 (1995), 773.

¹⁶ Fowler points out that this search becomes a driving force of the plot and that the first question asked about a mysterious man would probably not be whose husband he is. Although the male is a “prominent part of how to read the female’s social meaning (she is, as it were, ‘Mrs. Him’), she is an invisible, trivial part of the interpretation of the male (he is, as it were, a self-referential ‘Mr. Him’),” 774. Also useful when thinking about Mede’s agency is James Simpson’s point that she must be considered in relation to

case, after just being ravished by a woman, Wille may also be seeking to identify the agent accountable for the robbery.¹⁷

Holy Church tells Wille that the woman is “mede þe mayde” and that regardless of her contradiction of Holy Church’s teachings, Mede is in the king’s court, in the commons and even in the Pope’s palace (II.22-3).¹⁸ Wille sees Mede’s presence among the “many manere men” that are her kin: knights, clerks, jurors, summoners, sheriffs and their clerks (II.57-62). So many men, in fact, that Wille cannot “rykene þe route þat ran

institutions that shape social relations so that the institution at once thrives because of her and produces her. See his *Piers Plowman: An Introduction to the B-Text* (London: Longman, 1990), 50 & ff.

¹⁷ Myra Stokes acknowledges the ambiguity of the word “mede” and then immediately provides three distinct senses of what it means: 1) It can be used in a neutral sense, without derogation, to mean ‘reward.’ This could be compatible with virtue, as is the case when God gives Meed to Truth (II.120). 2) The word can also have a perjorative sense which refers to *munera*, or money corruptly taken. More generally, it refers to those who govern their actions by desire for profit rather than principle. Stokes glosses this as ‘bribery.’ 3) The word could also connote the agreed upon price for goods or services rendered. Stokes likens this sense to ‘pay’ or ‘wages,’ 119-20. Although I ultimately resist Stokes’s three-pronged model as an example of the dangers of misidentifying Mede (Stokes makes the same mistake that the King does at III.134), it does provide me with an important starting point. Particularly useful to my own thought is Stokes’s term “false meed” and her argument that Theology understands Mede to be definition (1) and (3), 129; 123. However, the reading fails to take into account the issues of agency and of institutional power. See Myra Stokes, *Justice and Mercy in Piers Plowman: A Reading of the B-Text* (London: Croon Helm, 1984), 119-120, 123, 129.

¹⁸ For an attempt to identify Mede as a particular, historical aristocratic woman (Alice Perrers) with great influence over the king, see Stephanie Trigg, “The Traffic in Medieval Women: Alice Perrers, Feminist Criticism and *Piers Plowman*” *The Yearbook of Langland Studies* 12 (1998), 5-29. This rather unconvincing argument tries to argue against Fowler’s understanding of Mede as reflecting the agency of men. Trigg argues for Mede’s agency by trying to show that she is not just an object of exchange but that she is a giver of gifts and an advisor to the king. For what has been a highly influential historicist account of Mede that links her to “bastard feudalism,” to the overly-powerful nobility and to Mede’s role in war, see Anna P. Baldwin, *The Theme of Government in Piers Plowman* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1981). For a helpful critique of Baldwin’s account, see David Aers, “Class, Gender, Medieval Criticism and *Piers Plowman*,” in *Class and Gender in Early English Literature*, ed. Britton J. Harwood and Gillian R. Overing (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1994), 59-75 (esp. 64-66).

aboute mede” (II.59). As David Aers points out, Langland stresses that Mede is as much a common prostitute, “as comyn as þe cartway” available to all men, “to knaues and to all” as she is a noble woman available to the ruling class (III.169).¹⁹ In addition to these descriptions, Langland uses dramatic allegory in this section of the poem to formally illustrate Mede’s expansive reach. This mode threads allegorical figures into the undefined crowds of the medieval world to show Mede’s pervasiveness among men and among institutions.²⁰

Holy Church attempts to drive a wedge between herself and the maid by giving an account of Mede’s allegorical genealogy in relation to her own.²¹ Whereas Holy Church is the daughter of Truth, she tells Wille that Mede is “a bastard” and that “One fauel was her father,” one who seldom tells the Truth (II.25-26). We should keep in mind that Holy Church’s genealogy is only partial – she never identifies Mede’s mother for Wille. Rather, she continues on to say that the apple does not fall far from the tree, so fathered by deceit or fraud, Mede is “manered aftur hym” (II.27).²² Again, Fowler’s point about

¹⁹ Aers, “Class, Gender, Medieval Criticism and *Piers Plowman*,” 68.

²⁰ This description of dramatic allegory is from Elizabeth Salter’s Introduction to *Piers Plowman*. The language of threading the personifications through undefined crowds is hers. See *Piers Plowman*, eds. Elizabeth Salter and Derek Pearsall (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), 10-13.

²¹ Despite the fact that, as Aers notes, Mede’s networks are “unievocally located in the agents, institutions, practices and relationships of the Catholic Church,” it is not hard to imagine that the Holy Church would want to make a case for separating herself from Mede. Aers, “Class, Gender, Medieval Criticism and *Piers Plowman*,” 66.

²² Derek Pearsall glosses “fauel” as deceit or fraud and notes that Langland uses patterns of family relationship as allegorical symbols of moral status. Pearsall, *Piers Plowman: A New Annotated Edition of the C-Text*, 55 note 24.

Mede's actions making reference to others rather than standing for themselves comes into play – even if Mede lies, she does so in reference to Favel because she does it in the same manner that he does. Holy Church tells Wille that Favel, her deceitful father, has enchanted Mede and that Liar has arranged for her marriage to False on the following day (II.42-44). Before leaving Wille alone to see the marriage, Holy Church commends him to Christ and reminds him not to damage his conscience by coveting Mede (II.54). This reminder, a moment when Holy Church tries to “teche Will to no treasure,” links Mede directly with sinful behavior. This encourages the reader to think of the negative connotations of Mede such as bribery or false compensation.

The links between Mede and the seven deadly sins become even more apparent in the marriage charter brokered by Favel. In exchange for their service, Favel enfeoffs Mede, false and their followers with the land of six of the seven deadly sins such as the “county of covetousness,” as well as other related wrongdoings such as the “borough of theft” (II.86-100, here 93, 95). It is by following and believing falseness in this form of life, this false “felawschipe,” (106) that they go to Sloth, only to awake with “wanhope and no wille to amende” (107). If this happens, after death they will dwell in days without end under the lordship of Lucifer (110). The marriage of Favel and Mede, which would lead to the impossibility of forgiveness, provokes a strong theological response.

Theology tells Simony that this marriage might lead to the wrath of Truth, “For mede is moliere, amendes was here dame; / Althow fals were here fader and fikel tonge her belyre / Amendes was here moder by trewe menne lokynge, / And withouten her

moder amendes mede may [nat] be wedded (II.123-126).²³ Theology legitimates Mede's genealogy by filling in the void left by Holy Church about the identity of Mede's mother: Amendes. If we follow Fowler in thinking that Mede does not have agency in and of herself but that she acts in relation to others, then this is an important detail. Amends, after, all is the reparation or retribution paid for an offense, a crime or harm done.²⁴ It is important that Langland chooses Amends, a noun, to be the mother of Mede. He could have chosen, for example, amendment. This would suggest some sort of action of amending either as a process or as a completed change. Or he could have chose "amende" as her mother – the verb, or the act itself. These choices might have invited the reader to think of the term outside of the market economy, an invitation to the theological. But Langland does not do this. He uses the noun. Standing alone, amends is morally neutral.²⁵

²³ Canon law in late medieval England only required the willing consent of two eligible persons for a legal marriage. See Fowler, 766.

²⁴ *MED* entry for "amends": 1a). Theologically, Amends refers to an act of penance or to Christ's atonement.

²⁵ These lines are also an expansion/revision from the B version where Theology's warning to Simony and Civil is very different: "For Mede is muliere of Amendes engendred / God graunte[d] to gyue Mede to truþe, / And þow hast gyuen hire to a gilour, now god gyue þee / sorwe!" (II.119-122). In the B version, then, Theology's claim for the genealogy either directly opposes or entirely replaces Holy Church's earlier claim because "engendered" suggests begotten by the male (*MED*). The B versions also strangely puts Church and Theology at odds with one another so that only one option could be the correct one. In the C version, however, Langland revises his concept of Mede so that she is a coming together of false and amends. The difficulties in and with these genealogies, I think, shows that Langland was working through how to represent Mede and how to think about amends/amendment. My aim here is not to come to any conclusion about Mede and amendment but rather to show the complexity of Langland's thought around these issues. Langland makes one other critical revision from the B version around "amends." In the B version, Christ uses "amendes" as a noun twice in the Harrowing of Hell. In the first, He says to Satan, "lo! here my soul to amendes" (XVIII.327) and in the second, "And al þat man haþ mysdo I man wole

After hearing of the marriage proposal and calling for the punishment of False and his entourage, the King orders for Mede to be delivered to his court. Now alone after the others have scattered, Mede the Maid is brought before the King. He makes a decision about how to handle her: “Y shal asaye here mysulue and sothliche appose / What man of this world þat here [were leuest]. / And yf she worche wisely and by wys men consayl / Y wol forgyue here alle gultues, so me god helpe” (III.5-7).²⁶ This is the first potential moment in the poem where we might see a person embodying forgiveness, where the king thinks of forgiving Mede for her wrongs. Mede has not shown any remorse and has she asked for forgiveness. She has not yet spoken in the court. The reader should wonder about why the king thinks Mede is forgivable when just a few lines earlier, he was so ready to hang her accomplices without examination (II.210).

The king does not summons Mede for over a hundred lines, giving her, as Pearsall notes, ample time to do her characteristic work.²⁷ Clerks come in to comfort her and she gives them rich gifts (III.24) and promises to purchase benefices (III.32-33). Never do we see these clerks counseling Mede or trying to help her amend. Then a confessor

amende. / Membre for membre [was amendes by þe old lawe], / And lif for lif also, and by þat law I clayme / Adam and al his issue at my wille herafter” (XVIII.341-4). The important distinction in the C-Text is that Langland removes the noun from Christ’s speech and only uses it in the first four passus of the poem. All references to the B Text are to *Piers Plowman: The B Version. Will’s Visions of Piers Plowman, Do-Well, Do-Better and Do-Best*, eds. George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson (London: The Athlone Press, 1975).

²⁶ I have great difficulty with assessing the agency in the second half of line 6. Pearsall’s edition reads, “What man of this world þat here leuest hadde.” George Economou follows Pearsall in his gloss: “Which man in the world she’d most like to have.” See *William Langland’s Piers Plowman: the C version: a verse translation* trans. George Economou (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 23.

²⁷ Pearsall, 80 note 1-8.

dressed as a friar enters her chamber and asks her for a bribe. Even though she has lain with lewd men and has been supported by falsehood for forty winters, this friar says “Y shal assoyle the mysulue for a seem whete / An 3ut be thy bedman and brynge adoun Conscience / Amonge kynges and knyhtes and clerkes, and the lyke” (III.42-44).

Obviously corrupt, this friar does not seem to care about Mede’s interactions with lewd men as long as she pays him off with a horseload of wheat. Also notable is that the itinerant preacher does not take her confession in a church.

A point of contention between friars and clerics at this time arose around this issue because there was some question as to whether or not an itinerant preacher with no ties to the community, and who did not know the penitent personally, could exact a confession as well as a local parish priest. In John Myrc’s *Instructions to Parish Priests*, in the section on how to hear confession, it says that parishioners can confess to someone other than a parish priest for reasons such as fear that the sin will be revealed. But it also says that if penitent confess to someone other than their parish priest, they should go afterward “To here owne curatour, / And schryue hem newe to hym bo / And take he penauance newe also.”²⁸ Because the friar’s language of absolution, “y shal assoyle the mysulue” sounds very much like the king’s decision only a few lines before to examine Mede, “Y shal asay here mysulue,” it invites comparison between the two modes of

²⁸ John Myrc, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, ed. Edward Peacock (London: EETS, 1868), 26-27. I am aware that this instruction manual is written for parish priests rather than for friars. It does give some sense of the reason friars were so often criticized for assigning easy penance because it so clearly delineates the steps a parish priest was expected to follow.

forgiveness. Again, Mede is going to receive absolution and she has not yet confessed her sins and has not yet asked for forgiveness. In addition, the language of “myself” signals the friar’s corruption. The sacrament of penance in late medieval England is meant to be a communal endeavor that depends entirely upon Christ’s sacrifice. Without Christ, no human being could be forgiven, nor could a person absolve, or forgive, another.

When Mede hears that the confessor will absolve her, she kneels down “[And shrof here of here synne, shameless y [trowe]” (III.46). Even Wille knows, as an outside observer, that Mede feels no sorrow for the sins she confesses. Rather than examining her conscience as a good confessor was meant to do, he listens to a tale she tells him, takes a noble from her and absolves her of her sin (III.47-50). This is nearly the opposite of what Myrc’s Instruction manual tells confessors to do. It says that if a penitent is “full contrite” and “wepeþ faste and ys sory” and asks for mercy, then penance should be abridged. But if a penitent is stiff of heart, his penance should be more severe but such that he will still perform it.²⁹ This friar does not assign any penance – he just grants absolution. When he does speak again, he describes part of the priory to her: ““We han a wyndowe awurchynge wol stand vs [wel] heye; / Wold 3e glase þe gable and graue ther 3oure name / In masse and in mataynes for mede we shal singe / Solempneliche and softlyche as for a suster of oure ordre” (III.51-54). The friars are in the process of

²⁹ Myrc, 50. For examples of the questions a good confessor asks a penitent during an examination of the conscience, see 24-46.

“awurchynge,” of rebuilding their church. The friar asks Mede to fund the process because of the high cost of glazing the window gable.

Caroline Bruzelius describes this type of mendicant building process in “The Dead Come to Town: Preaching, Burying and Building in the Mendicant Orders.”³⁰ She explains the mendicant religious structures as reflecting their “culture of incompleteness,” a culture in which the construction of the churches was often left incomplete to act as a visible sign of need, as a means for friars to continue seeking lay patronage.³¹ She describes the friars’ construction as a “process” rather than a “project”: “the churches of the friars, as we see them today, were often the result of an additive and incremental process of additions and extensions that responded not only to the growth of the communities, but also (and perhaps above all) to the pressures of lay patrons, including the third-order confraternities tightly associated with most mendicant houses.”³² That the friar asks Mede, a lay patron, for funding to complete the glass gable that is “awurchynge” makes it sound as if this priory is in the middle of the building process. In exchange for the funding, the friar promises to sing masses for Mede. Bruzelius notes that friars would often take contributions for building projects in exchange for burying

³⁰ Caroline Bruzelius, “The Dead Come to Town: Preaching, Burying and Building in the Mendicant Orders,” in *The Year 1300 and the Creation of a new European Architecture*, ed. Alexandra Gajewski & Zoë Opačić (Turnhout, Belgium : Brepols, 2007).

³¹ Bruzelius, 203.

³² Bruzelius, 203. See too 216.

patrons in the church and following the burial with prayers for their souls in purgatory.³³ This friar only promises to sing masses for Mede, perhaps because Mede is far from dead in this culture.

Mede tells the friar that she will never fail him as long as he “loves well,” presumably by assigning easy penance, to lords and ladies who love lechery.³⁴ If the friar does this for the lecherous, Mede will go above and beyond his request for aid in the construction process: “And y shal cuere ȝoure kyrke and ȝoure cloister make; / Bothe wyndowes and wowes y wol amende and glase / And [do] peynten and purtrayen ho payede for þe making / That euery seg shal se y am sustre of ȝoure ordre” (III.64—67).

It seems conventional that after having confessed her sins, a penitent would look forward to future actions, to the ways in which she intends to amend, or change, her behavior.

While Mede does tell the friar her intended future course, what she “shall” and “will” do, her amendment take a very different form than we might expect. However tempted we might be to think that Mede might change, might be capable of amending her ways, Langland uses her genealogy to remind us that Mede is not converting. Mede does intend to “amend” the building, specifically the windows and glass, for the priory.³⁵ But we are meant to recognize this reparation as corrupt bribery, as a type of false amends. It allows

³³ Bruzelius, 204-211.

³⁴ This is another reference to Mede’s open body as Aers describes it in “Class Gender and Medieval Criticism,” 68.

³⁵ *MED*: Amend: 2(a) To repair (a building, etc.), mend (clothes, etc.); (b) to make (sth.) ready, adjust.

Mede and her lecherous followers to be absolved of their sins without making any real reparation, not to mention that it uses ill-gotten goods to build the church.³⁶ Langland does not leave the reader to wonder about how to interpret this scene. Whether it is the voice of the poet or the voice of some other authority, there is a distinct voice apart from the penitent and her confessor that moralizes the exchange by associating writing in windows with painting pride (III.70) and covetous chattel (III.72) and by telling the reader that in the gospel, God does not allow such window engravings (III.74), so lords should leave off from them (III.73).

When the king finally emerges from counsel and summons Mede, he faults her because she loves guile and because she wanted to be wed without his leave. When she arrives before him, the King addresses her directly and returns to his language of forgiveness:

... ‘Unwittiliche, womman, wro[uh]t hastow ofte
And monye a gulte y haue the forgyue and my grace graunted
Both to the and to thyne in hope thow shost amende;
And ay the lengur y late [the] go the lasse treuthe is with the,
For wors wrouhtest [thow] neuere then tho thow fals toke.

³⁶ The author of the Wycliffite *Pierce the Plowman's Crede* picks up this language of amendment and incorporates it into the friar's promise to the narrator, a potential patron of his building: "For we buldeth a burwgh – a brod and a large -- / A chirche and a chapaile with chambers a-lofte, / With wide windowes y-wrought and walles well heye, / That mote bene portreid and paynt and pulched ful clene, / With gaie glittering glas glowing as the sonne. / And myghtestou amenden vs with money of thyn owne, / Thou chuldest cnely bifore Crist in compas of gold / In the wide windowe westwarde wel nighe in the myddell, / And seynt Fraunces himself schall folden the in his cope, / And present the to the trynitie and prairie for thy synnes" (lines 118-127). Here, if the patron amends with money of his own, his image will be inscribed in the window with Frances and Christ. If the narrator "amends" their building, the friar "schal asoilen" him despite the fact that the speaker "conne nought [his] Crede" (lines 132, 131). These lines are from *The Piers Plowman Tradition*, ed. Helen Barr (London: Everyman's Library, 1993), 61-97.

But y forguye þis gult; godes forbade eny more
Thow tene me and treuthe; (III.134-140).

The king can see that Mede's actions are habitual, that they are "many a gulte" that she commits "ofte." Before moving on to think about the remaining lines, it is useful to put this passage next to the same passage from the B-text. This is one moment in the poem where Langland's revisions are critical to his understanding of forgiveness and amendment:

'Unwittily, [wye], wroȝt hastow ofte,
Ac worse wroȝt [þ]ow neuere þan þo þow Fals toke.
But I forgyue þee þ[e] gilt and graunte þee my grace;
Hennes to þi deef day do [þow] so na moore (III.106-109).

In the B version of the text, the habituation of Mede's activities is less developed. The king describes her actions as often being unwise ones, "ac" that her decision to take False is much worse than the others. "But" despite the severity of this act, the king still generally forgives her "the" guilt (not "this guilt), grants her his grace and commands her to change her ways, to do "so na moore."

In the C version, the king begins by denouncing her habitual wrongdoing and then adds that he, in turn, has forgiven her many times. In some sense, the king enables Mede and sees hers as being a forgivable offense. This should cause the reader to stop and wonder why the king forgives Mede at all, especially because Langland so rarely shows one character forgiving another. The second part of the line qualifies his forgiveness – he forgives Mede in hopes that she will amend. Again, as opposed to the B text, the king's

motivation here is not entirely clear. Does he use “amend” to mean that he hopes she changes her actions, or does he recognize her amendment as being necessarily false? Also added from the B-text is that the longer the king lets Mede go, that is the longer he continues to forgive her and grant her grace without change but only in hopes of it, the further she gets from Truth. “Yet,” even after realizing all of this and his implication in the process, he still forgives her this guilt, the action of taking false. Much more extreme than the B version where the king tells her to do so “na moore,” here the king says “God forbade any more” that she harm the king or Truth. It sounds as if the king starts to lose hope that she will amend in the revision – God must forbid her from returning to her habituation. The king would, I think, agree with Fowler’s understanding of Mede’s referential actions and passive responsiveness to agents around her. That is, that she cannot be moral or immoral on her own.³⁷ So his first solution to her problem is to threaten to isolate her from her agents by putting her in an anchorhold (III.141-2).

Rather than pursuing this possibility, the king decides to marry her to Conscience and she readily agrees.³⁸ Conscience, however, refuses and delineates the problems with Mede. Most central to my concerns are the accusations that he makes which will be taken up again in the trial between Peace and Wrong: that county sheriffs would be lost without Mede (III.173), she pays the price to get prisoners out of jail by giving jailers money to unfetter the false so that they may flee (III.173-5), she bends the law as she

³⁷ Fowler, 779.

³⁸ Fowler suggests that Mede lacks a Conscience and that this is partially why she is judged, 779.

likes and sets lovedays at will (III, 196) and any city that permits her suffers from war or wicked law and covetous customs that destroy the community (III.203-206).³⁹

Conscience tries to show that Mede corrupts institutional forms of justice and thereby perpetuates cycles of violence or crime. That she sets lovedays at will is a particularly powerful example of his concerns with Mede. A medieval loveday served as a form of keeping the peace through alternative dispute resolution.

When a civil court granted a loveday, litigants were allowed to take a recess from the case until the next meeting of the court in hopes that the arbiters would forgive one another and settle the case amicably out of court.⁴⁰ Although the term “loveday” was primarily used in civil courts, the clergy used the analogous term “dies amoris” and canon law provided for the settlement of disputes by mutual agreement.⁴¹ Ideally, a loveday would provide neighbors with a chance to love one another (Matthew 22:39) and to embody forgiveness. Near the end of his Prologue to the *Confessio Amantis*, John Gower describes a loveday in relation to heaven and hell: “In hevене is pes and al acord, / Bot helle is ful of such discord / That ther may be no loveday. / Forthi good is, whil a

³⁹ Anna Baldwin suggests that it was difficult for sheriffs to be impartial because although they represented the king in the county, they also paid their own wages out of the fines and fees that they collected. Furthermore, they usually owed their position to a local patron. As a result, there were often accusations that sheriffs imprisoned men falsely, either to obtain heavy fees for their release or to suit the needs/desires of their patron. These examples of false fees would be a form of meed. See Anna Baldwin, *The Theme of Government in Piers Plowman* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1981), 28.

⁴⁰ Josephine Waters Bennett, “The Mediaeval Loveday.” *Speculum* 33 (Jul, 1958): 354 -5.

⁴¹ Bennett, 357.

man may, / Echon to sette pes with other / And loven as his oghne brother; / So may he winne worldes welthe / And afterward his soule helthe.”⁴² For Gower, a loveday promotes accord between neighbors, and this type of love leads to worldly wealth and salvation. He locates peaceful accord, reconciliation and harmony, in heaven as a model for lovedays and as a destination resulting from them. However, as Josphine Bennett shows, rather than promoting forgiveness and accord, actual lovedays often “broke down in troubled times” because they were “even more open than the law courts to bribery, intimidation, and injustice.”⁴³ Geoffrey Chaucer paints the portrait of such a medieval loveday in the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*. Friar Hubert, a confessor known to be an “esy man to yeve penance” (223) because he assigns “plesant” (222) absolution also participates in medieval lovedays: “In love-days ther koude he muchel help, / For ther he was nat lyk a cloysterer / With a threadbare cope, as is a povre scoler, / But he was lyk a maister or a pope” (258-261).⁴⁴ Just as Friar Hubert makes the penitential process “esy” so too does he provide “muchel help” in facilitating lovedays. Each case shows an example of the corruption of the craft of forgiveness as the “master” corrupts parishioners.⁴⁵ Conscience condemns this sort of corruption, a loveday set at will by

⁴² John Gower, “Prologue” to *Confessio Amantis*, ed. Russell A. Peck Vol. 1 (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 2000), 96, lines 1045-1052. Chaucer’s eagle in the *House of Fame* also uses musical language to describe the lovedays that take place in the House: “Mo love-dayes and acordes / Then on instruments be cordes.” See *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), 356, lines 650-1.

⁴³ Bennett, 364.

⁴⁴ From the “Prologue” to the *Canterbury Tales*. See *The Riverside Chaucer*, p. 27.

Mede rather than by Peace and Justice. Instead of reconciling the broken community, these corrupt lovedays permit and promote covetous customs and discordant behavior.

After listening to Mede defend herself against Conscience's sharp criticisms, the King tries to instigate a sort of loveday between them at the beginning of Passus IV. He orders them to "cessyth" (IV.1) because he can "soffre" (IV.1) them no longer. He tells them that they "shal sauhtene, forsothe," (IV.2) shall truly reconcile and make peace, and that they shall come together to "serue me bothe" (IV.2). He gives stage directions for the performance of forgiveness by calling for a kiss of a peace when he tells Conscience to "Kusse here" (IV.3). But a successful loveday, and indeed a successful paradigm of forgiveness, depends on the mutual agreement of the parties involved. It does not appear that Conscience or Mede wants to make amends, that either party has accepted responsibility for wrongdoing, or even that the two are reconcilable. With a startling locution in response to the king's request for reconciliation, Conscience refuses "by Christ!" (IV.4) and says that he would rather leave off service or even die than forgive Mede unless Reason tells him otherwise.

⁴⁵ Medieval lovedays are also condemned in a Wycliffite sermon on Matthew 17:15: "Þe þridde part of þis gospel telliþ how ofte men shulden forȝyve. And men shulden forȝyven þeir wrongis as ofte as men synne in hem; but God wole nevere forȝyve his wrong, but ȝif men maken aseþ to God. And to seie opynli þat þou forȝyvest þis synne in God, is an open blasfemye, but ȝif God telle þee þat he doiþ so, and bidde publishe Goddie wille, þat God himsilf forȝyve þis synne. And þus love daies of many damages ben comunli aȝens þis gospel, for man should forȝyve freely þe harm þat is done aȝens him, and entirmete not of Goddis injurie; for God oonli mai forȝyve þis. And so, as Austyn notiþ, ech þat synneþ in maundement of God synneþ boþ aȝens God and aȝens ech of his breþeren." For the full sermon, see John Wyclif, *Select English Works of John Wyclif*, ed. Thomas Arnold, Vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1871), 77.

The King, forced to revise his order, commands Conscience to bring Reason to his council. Interrupting the conference between Reason and the King, Peace enters with a petition against Wrong for his criminal, violent behavior bringing the narrative back into the question of the efficacy of secular reform of the polity. Peace complains of Wrong's violence against women, "he raueschede Rose the ryche wydewe by nyhte," (IV.47) and robbery, "Bothe my gees and my grys and my g[r]as he taketh" (IV.49). In addition to larceny, Peace also identifies Wrong with criminal bands – he fears that Wrong will know which way he goes to Saint Giles Down and that he will "robbe" (IV.54) him or "ruyfle" (IV.54) him if he rides slowly.⁴⁶ Even worse than Mede, who compensates men prior to doing work, who "geueth before the doing," (III.292), Wrong sidesteps work entirely.⁴⁷ He borrows boldly and then "baddelych he payeth" (IV.55). Far from feeling contrition for harming his neighbor, Wrong never considers asking Peace for forgiveness or changing his ways. Instead, he employs Wit and Wisdom to defend himself, along with Mede, to try to win the King's mercy with money (IV.73,

⁴⁶ In *Crime and Public Order in England in the Later Middle Ages*, John Bellamy notes that most of the crimes committed in late medieval England were either assault or larceny. Robbers often frequented places where there was a good chance of ambush (see 37-46 for a discussion of larceny and highway robbery). As Langland suggests, the road leading to and coming from the Fair would be an ideal location. Bellamy also suggests that because most men carried weapons of some sort in late medieval England, the armed attacker had less of an advantage over his victim than the modern criminal, so counterparts were more necessary and criminal bands were more common (see p. 69-88 for a discussion of criminal bands). Bellamy, *Crime and Public Order in England in the Later Middle Ages*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 37-46 and 69-88.

⁴⁷ Conscience uses this language to differentiate between Mede and Mercede. Mede, he says, gives reward before it is due/deserved (III.292), whereas Mercede pays when the deed is done and the day ended (III.303). Piers's description of Truth's payment in draws upon this distinction to show a model of due payment (VII.190 & ff).

78).⁴⁸ Just as he immediately reacted to Mede, here the King unwaveringly decides to punish Wrong, to put him in shackles for seven years.

Mede intervenes to undo King's decision. She meekly seeks mercy by offering Peace a present of pure gold (IV.90-91). Echoing Christ's words at the Last Supper, Mede offers herself to Peace to make amends for Wrong: "Haue this, man, of me," quod she, 'to amend thy scathe / For y wol wage for wrong; he wol do so no mare' (IV.92-93).⁴⁹ Mede the Maid offers gold as payment for Wrong at the same time that she guarantees that he will amend, that he will redirect himself and do no further harm. Mercifully, Peace interceded and "preyed the king / To haue mercy on þat man" that "many tymes hym greued" (IV.95-96). Although Peace recognizes Wrong's habituation, he never shows concern for the possibility of Wrong slipping back into his misdoings. Peace does not show much concern for his own future well-being or that of other potential victims. Peace's intercessory prayer comes about not because he forgives Wrong but because he receives monetary compensation. This lack of forgiveness becomes even more apparent when we compare this revision with Peace's prayer in the B-Text: "For he hap waged we wel as wisdom hym tauzte / I forgyue hym þat gilt wiþ a

⁴⁸ Derek Pearsall notes that "Wysdom and Wyt are terms for intelligence (*Wyt*) and the knowledge acquired by intelligence (*Wysdom*) which are used here and elsewhere ... to describe morally neutral and therefore corruptible human faculties," 91 note 72.

⁴⁹ 1 Cor 11:24: "And giving thanks, broke and said: 'Take ye, and eat: this is my body, which shall be delivered for you: this do for the commemoration of me.' All scriptural references are from the revised Douay Rheims translation of the Vulgate by Richard Chandler, *The Holy Bible* (Rockford: Tan Books, 1989).

good wille” (IV.100-101). Langland chooses to remove Peace’s embodiment of forgiveness – in the C version, he never shows good will to Wrong. Instead, Peace omits the language of forgiveness and continues on to tell the king that Wrong “wages hym wel” as Wisdom teaches and he wishes to quit his claim because Mede “makes [his] mendes”(IV.96-97). Here we see Mede in full-blown action. This is an important moment in the poem where Langland provides a model of fraud or deceit (Fauel) coming together with Amends to show Mede’s genealogical activity, her amends-making.⁵⁰

Reason clarifies this genealogy when he later describes the realm that he would rule, a realm without Wrong or Mede:

That y were kyng with c[r]oune to kepe [a] reume,
Shulde neuere wrong in this worlde þat y wyte myhte
Be vnpunished in my power for perel of [my] soule
Ne gete my grace thorw eny gyfte ne glosynge spe[ch]e
Ne thorw mede mercy, by marie of heuene! (IV.135-139).

In this clear call for justice and punishment of wrong, Reason also provides an important detail to consider when thinking about Mede and her genealogy. Not only does she try to “get grace” and “mercy” for Wrongdoers by giving “gifts,” but she also uses “glosynge speche.” This glossing speech, this “smooth or deceitful talk,” of course comes from Fauel her father, and is another reason that Mede ceases to be morally neutral.⁵¹ By the

⁵⁰ Although the trial takes place in the king’s court, it is not a stretch to think about this form of bribery in relation to Conscience’s objections to lovedays.

⁵¹ Glossing the gospel was one of the criticisms lodged against the friars in the Prologue (58). Covetousness also uses “glosynges and gabbynges” as weapons to guile the people in XXII.125. This link, I think, helps to make the connection between the corrupt confessors, Mede and Covetousness.

end of Passus IV, Reason contextualizes the morality of Mede by putting her into conversation with love and “lewte”: “Loue lette of Mede tho lyhte and Leutee 3ut lasse” (IV.156). Both important aspects of Christian forgiveness (Matthew 5: 43-44), Love values Mede only lightly and Loyalty values her even less. As Patricia Kean notes in “Love, Law and Lewte in *Piers Plowman*,” Law is paired with Love to counteract Mede in order to insure that the state performs its function. While many writers in medieval England use “lewte” as a part of law to describe loyalty or justice, Langland employs it in the Aristotelian and Thomistic sense of a virtue of justice in relation to one’s neighbor.⁵² Reason and Conscience help the King to realize that “hit is ful hard” (IV.177) to have a realm with “leutee for [his] lawe” (IV.174) where “Mede shal nat maynprise” (IV.173) the community without the help of the commons.

Before moving on, I think it is useful to pause for a moment to think about the potential models of forgiveness Langland produces in the Mede sequence. Over and over again, he sets the stage for what might blossom into an allegory of forgiveness. But just as relentlessly, he shows us that when located in the market economy and when driven by Mede, forgiveness fails. The one time in the C version that Langland shows forgiveness, when the King forgives Mede, it is performed without her requesting it and without her undergoing a conversion or change. Only the King hopes for her amendment. These

⁵² Patricia Kean, “Love, Law and Lewte in *Piers Plowman*,” *The Review of English Studies*, 15, (Aug. 1964): 256.

limitations are not unrelated to the widespread abuses produced by false reward. By setting up so many potential narratives of forgiveness and then blocking them at this early point in the poem, at a point where Wille has not yet seen Christ and where the Church is in the background, Langland shows the limitations of secular reform.

After showing the shortcomings of the secular realm and the market economy as resources for amendment through the figure of Mede, Langland redirects Wille in his hope for embodied forgiveness.⁵³ When a contrite Wille, weeping and wailing and sighing for his sins, goes to church to honor God, he falls asleep and returns to Reason's instructions for reform. Reason advises the king to love his "commune," the king's greatest treasure (V.180)⁵⁴. Reason also calls for communal participation, for the "commune[r]s to acorde in alle kyn treuthe" so that they will hold "in vnite" with "o wit and o wil" and not be parted by "kyne consayl ne couetyse" (V.183, 189, 185, 184). Although Reason tells the community members and the king what to do, to avoid covetousness and to seek unity, he does not tell them how to do it. Instead, he prays to the Pope to have pity on Holy Church and to not grant grace until there is "good loue"

⁵³ Langland signals this shift through Wille's confession and conversion. No longer bound by Mede through "ytynt tyme and tyme myspered," Wille finds the hope "to haue of hym þat is almyghty / A gobet of his grace and bigynne a tyme / That alle tymes of my tyme to profit shale turne" (V. 93, 99-101). That is, Wille hopes to seek Christ as an alternative resource for forgiveness. My understanding of this passage is greatly influenced by David Aers' account of Wille's confession as a moment where he acknowledges being a waster, one who mispends time, and also a moment of conversion where he receives the gift of hope, one of the crucial theological virtues which lead the recipient to Christ the giver. See David Aers, *Salvation and Sin* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 110-111.

⁵⁴ Reason revisits and criticizes many aspects of Passus I-IV that relate to Mede: wasters for squandering time (V.126-7), fanciful dress (V.128,133), covetous members of religious orders (V.151), leaders at lovedays (V.158) and lords who buy up land and give it to their heirs but show no concern for the poor (V.163-166).

among all kings over Christian people (V.192). He continues by asking the Pope to command all of the kings' confessors to "enioyne hem pees for here penaunce and perpetual forȝe[ue]nesse / Of alle maner actions and eche man loue other" (V.195-196). This assignation of peace and perpetual forgiveness might seem to be a strange form of penance. But it provides an important revision to the king forgiving Mede in Passus III. Here the king is not only the one who forgives but also becomes the one seeking forgiveness through penitential practice. This model depends upon the king's amendment in addition to the amendment of the community. To further remove Mede from the process, Reason insists upon the confessor assigning a penance of peace rather than simply absolving the king in exchange for a payment. Achieving peace and perpetual forgiveness in a kingdom of love would indeed be a most difficult form of penance for an earthly king.

Reason's language of covetousness provides a segue from the world of the market economy into the confessions of the sins.⁵⁵ When Covetousness confesses himself, he describes his sinful practices through his apprenticeships to merchants: he weighs wickedly for Sim at the Stile (VI.207), he measures falsely for clothmakers (VI.215-220), and he craftily sells impure ale as his wife, Rose the retail trader, teaches him to do

⁵⁵ Elizabeth Salter would, I think, classify the confession of the sins as dramatic allegory because, as he does in the Lady Mede sequence, Langland combines personifications with vivid real figures to develop the narrative. While this might be the case, it seems to me that we need a new classification for describing the work done in Passus VI-VII. Rather than moving from one identifiable plot to the next, like we see with Mede's marriage and then the trial of Peace and Wrong, the confessions of the sins force the narrative into an allegorical stasis in order to reflect the debilitating effects of sin. The narratives tend to fold in upon themselves and must depend upon Repentance to keep moving from one to the next.

(VI.225-233). At this point, Langland posits the potential for a differentiation between Mede's "shameless" confession and this one. The difference not only relates to reformulation of the penitent but also to the confessor, Repentance. As a good confessor should, Repentance interjects to examine the penitent's conscience: "Rependest [thow e]uere," quod repentaunce, "[or] Restitucioun madest?"(VI.233-4).⁵⁶ As John Alford astutely notes, Repentance asks the two questions as if they are the same thing, thereby bringing together the idea of contrition and restitution.⁵⁷ Although it is unclear as to why, Covetousness separates them out again and only addresses the second question: "3us!

⁵⁶ Just as one must make amends, one must make restitution. This, of course, is the phrase Repentance uses in his question. Restitution: 1(a) The restoration of goods, lands, etc. to a former owner; repayment of a sum of money; restoration of one's good name; return of a captive or hostage; haven ~ of, to obtain the return of (sb. or sth.); maken ~, return something unjustly taken; maken ~ of, return (sth.) to a former owner; also, return (sth. to sb.); ~ makeinge; (b) the making of reparations or amends for a crime, debt, an injury, etc.; also *fig.*; maken ~, to make amends or reparations; maken ~ of, make amends or reparations for (a crime, an injury, etc.); (c) the reinstatement of somebody in a former position; a restoration to favor; (d) the re-establishment of something, restoration to an original state; maken ~ of, to restore (sth.); (e) an instance of restoration of something to a former owner.

⁵⁷ John Alford, "The Figure of Repentance in *Piers Plowman*." In *Suche Werkis to Werche: Essays on Piers Plowman*, ed. Míceál F. Vaughan (East Lansing: Colleagues Press, 1993), 12. Alford asks where restitution lies in the sacrament of penance, whether Langland thinks it belongs with contrition or satisfaction. He convincingly shows that restitution concerns one's debt to another person and satisfaction concerns one's debt to God, 14. The difference, one Langland is astutely aware of, is in the sinner's ability to repay his debts. While a human being is capable of restoring stolen goods from his neighbor, he must depend upon Christ to help pay his debt to God. Langland uses the language of restitution to refer to the former and "redde quod debes" to refer to the latter. Alford uses a quotation from *Jacob's Well*, "to fulfyllen þi penaunce enioyned of þe preest . . . & to restore þat þou hast falsely gett" to show that many penitential treatises treat restitution as a part of satisfaction. He should have, I think, included the entire quotation because it is much more rich than his excerpt shows and because it aligns closely with what I see to be Langland's understanding: "Satysfaccyou is to fulfyllen þi penaunce enioyned of þe preest, & to pay þi dettys to qwyke & dede & to holy churche, & to restore þat þou hast falsely gett, to makyn amendys for þi wrongys & þe harmys þat þou hast don, & no more to turne aȝen to þi synne. for a wounde or a sore often hurte is ful hard to makyn hole" (Brandeis, 189). As does Langland, the author of *Jacob's Well* clearly associates paying one's debts, restitution and making amends as being economic parts of satisfaction. I return to this quotation later in the chapter in relation to the Samaritan.

Ones y was herberwed,' quod he, 'with an heep of chapmen; Y roes and ryflede here males when the[y] areste were" (VI.235-6). Perhaps he only answers the second question because he does not feel contrite for robbing and rifling his neighbors. Or perhaps Covetousness does not understand the difference between contrition and restitution, as his answer implies. Regardless of the motivation behind it, however, his response produces a series of puns and associations: he rose (Rose the retail trader) and rifled (Covetousness, who "lerner among Lumbardes" might have confused the French "rifle" with the Italian "rifare," to restore or make amends), their pouches while they were at rest (punning on restitution).⁵⁸ The problematic language of Covetousness encourages the reader to begin to consider the difficulty with understanding what restitution means as well as the difficulty of actually making it.⁵⁹

Repentance interjects to tell Covetousness that his restitution was wretched (VI.237) and that even the Pope will fail to absolve him without proper restitution (VI.257).⁶⁰ One might expect this to promote some sense of sorrow for his actions even

⁵⁸For the confusion between rifle and rifare, see the entry for "riflen" in John A. Alford's *Piers Plowman: A Glossary of Legal Diction*. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer: 1988), 136. Derek Pearsall points out the pun on restitution and questions whether or not the confusion is purposeful. The language in these two lines also reminds me of the charges brought against Wrong: ravishing Rose, robbing and rifling.

⁵⁹ A few lines later, Covetousness admits to using "Gyle and glosynge" to gather his goods (VI.259).

⁶⁰ This is a revision from the B version, where Repentance tells him that it was "no restitucion ... but a robberis þefte..." (V.232). Furthermore, Covetousness explains his pun on restitution in the B version as a means to justify his theft: "I wende riflynge were restitucioun for I lerner neuere rede on boke, / And I kan no frenssh ..." (V.234-236). Langland's revisions leave the string of puns to stand on its own and leaves the reader trying to sort out the confusion. I should acknowledge that I am making a textual choice here. The lines read as follows: "For þe pope with alle his pentauncers power hem fayleth / To assoyle the of this synne *sine restitucione./ Numquam dimittitur peccatum, nisi restitutar ablatum*" (VI.256-257). Here I quote the Latin from Pearsall's edition rather than from Russell and Kane, who replace "nisi restitutar

if it takes the form of attrition. However, Covetousness shows no such inkling and continues to confess numerous abuses against his neighbor, such as stealing animals (VI.262) and pinching land (VI.271), without ever mentioning remorse, regret or the desire for forgiveness. Covetousness is the only sin that never even gestures towards seeking mercy or making amends. In fact, he tells Repentance that even when he is in church on a holiday, he never has the will to “byseche / Mercy for [his] mysdedes” that he never mourned for afterwards (VI.272-3).⁶¹ Covetousness’s admission that he has never performed penance or said the Pater Noster (VI.283) without his mind being more on his goods (VI.284) than on the grace of God (VI.285) proves to be too much for Repentance to hear. “Now readily,” he tells Covetousness, “y haue reuthe of thy lyuyng” (VI.287). Perhaps because Covetousness never feels “reuthe” of his own living, Repentance momentarily assumes it for him. Just as quickly, however, Repentance says that “were [he] a friar,” he would not take a meal from Covetousness “ne our kyrke mende” with his chattel (VI.287-88). He makes this move to differentiate the pity he feels for Covetousness because of his sinful living from absolving him of his

ablatum” with & c. I do this because a majority of manuscripts include the entire quotation and because this is what Robert the Rifler looks upon as the “reddite” later in this passage. Russell and Kane likely omit the second part, I think, because the choice makes the absence of goods that makes Robert weep literally absent from the line.

⁶¹ This is even more extreme than Mede, who does (regardless of how corrupt the seeking might be) beseech mercy on behalf of Wrong.

sin, from providing him with false amendment. Repentance's word choice of "mending" also shows a precision in language that separates building repair from amendment. The last thing Repentance directly says to Covetousness sets him clearly apart from Mede's friar:

Thow art vnkynde creature; y can the nat assoile
Tilt how haue ymade by thy myhte to alle men restitucioun (VI.294-5).⁶²

Repentance accuses Covetousness of being "unkind," unnatural, of lacking natural concern for his kin. Until Covetousness makes restitution to "alle men," until he starts to rebuild the broken bonds of community that result from his rifling and robbing, Repentance will not absolve him and his soul will be in danger.

Langland slightly shifts the mode at the end of Covetousness's confession and before Glutton speaks by invoking allegorical exemplarity.⁶³ At once within his

⁶² This, the second time Langland uses the term "vnkynde" in the C version, picks upon on the words of Holy Church from Passus I in her description of chastity without charity: "Aren none hardore ne hungriore then men of holy chirche, / Auerous and euel willed when þei ben avaunsed, / Vnkynde to here kyn and to alle cristene, / [C]hewen here charite and chiden aftur more / And ben acombred with coueytise: thei can nouȝt [out crepe] / So harde haþ auaryce yhapsed hem togederes" (I.187-192). Her description of unkindness shows that those (even men of Holy Church) who are enchained by covetousness sin against their neighbor, against their kin. After these lines, Repentance goes on to talk about the doom of the type of priest Holy Church describes, who will help pay the debt of Covetousness in purgatory for taking his ill-gotten tithe now (VI.298-308). Repentance also says that a whore can tithe better than a usurer can, reminding the reader of Mede's relation to Covetousness (VI.306-7).

⁶³ My understanding of exemplary allegory differs slightly from Elizabeth Salter's. For Salter, Langland's exempla do not make use of personification and are not diagrammatic. They occur within the speeches of allegorical characters in the form of narratives within narratives, especially in parable form. Salter describes the friars' story of the man in the boat at the beginning of Passus X as an example of this type of allegory, 17-18. I want to think about exemplary narratives much in the same way as I do in my second chapter on *Jacob's Well*: as stories that represent apprentices practicing the craft of forgiveness with varying levels of skill. These stories are meant to edify the reader by showing models to be imitated alongside models to be avoided.

confession and directly opposed to it, the two exemplary characters function as counter-examples to the extreme resistance of Covetousness because however imperfect they are, they do show sorrow and recognize a lack in human agency by asking for mercy.⁶⁴

Langland names the first of these two allegorical figures, a “wonderly sory” Welshman, for his practice: “3euan-3elde-a3en-yf-y-so-moche-haue- / Al-þat-y-wikkedly-wan-sithen-y-witte-hadde” (VI.309-310). In the same way that Rechelessness’s name matches his speech and behavior, Evan’s name reflects his. Langland does not name this figure “restitution,” even though yielding again what he has wickedly won certainly counts.

The difficulty and complexity of the name reflects the difficulty with practicing restitution, with actually giving back that which has been taken. There is a limitation to Evan’s restitution contingent upon his knowledge, “sithen-y-witte-hadde,” that would automatically prevent him from ever making the perfect restitution that Repentance

⁶⁴ Ralph Hanna III describes the “penitential inertia” created in Covetousness’s “continuing resistance” and in his “insistence in repeating who he is” in relation to what he calls Langland’s “doubling” of Robert the Rifler and 3euan the Welsh: “This treatment suggests that one might consider the primary doubling in the passage that very disparity between Couetyse’s inaction, his repetitious concentration in his sinful past, and whatever mysterious force constructs conversion – makes 3euan and Robert (who have no discernable biographies) perform the actions which cannot be described in what constitutes the ostensible center of this passage, Couetyse’s (over-)confession,” 92-3. Hanna’s larger argument is to show that the scene produces doublings, or evasions of the conversion of a repentant sinner. Langland, he thinks, “‘dramatizes’ ... penitential deadlock” so that Robert and his companions substitute for Couetyse’s failure to repent,” 91. See Ralph Hanna III, “Robert the Ruyflare,” in *Literature and Religion in the Later Middle Ages: Philological Studies in Honor of Siegfried Wenzel*, ed. Richard G. Newhauser and John A. Alford (Binghamton: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1995), 91-3. While I agree with Hanna about the penitential inertia in this passage, he leaves unexamined some important subtleties in the confession. I think Hanna’s “mysterious force” is a shift in allegorical mode that is signaled by Repentance’s jarring use of the term “unkind.” It’s more useful to think about what Hanna calls “conversion” or non-conversion as showing different stages of penitential apprenticeship. Langland uses 3euan and Robert, however flawed they may be, to show examples of people practicing restitution more successfully than covetousness because they recognize their lack, their need for grace.

demands from Covetousness “to all men.” Nevertheless, Evan says that “eche man shal haue his” before he dies even though he “lyflode lakke[s]” (VI.312, 311).⁶⁵ At the very least, he desires to amend his ways. Evan so fears losing “lyf and soul” to damnation that he would rather “lyue as a lorel begge” than to live in comfort and be damned (VI.314, 313). It becomes clear that this point that Evan feels attrition -- his wonderful sorrow arises out fear of punishment for his actions rather than out of a contrite remorse for harming his neighbors. However morally embryonic his apprenticeship in amendment might be, Evan does show a different model of penitential practice than Covetousness does because he feels sorrow and intends to change his ways.

Evan’s speech stops here and is followed by “Robert þe ruyflare” looking on “reddite” and weeping sorely (VI.316) because there was “nat wherewith,” nothing with which to make restitution (VI.317).⁶⁶ Robert does not weep tears of contrition out of real sorrow for his wrongdoing but because of his inability to make amends. Rather than falling into despair because of his lack, Robert prays:

Crist, þat on Caluarie on þe crosse deyest
 Tho dysmas my brother bisouhte [þe] of grace
 And haddest mercy vppon þat man for *memento* sake,
 So rewe on Robert þat reddere ne haue

⁶⁵ Although his impulse to turn to begging because he lacks livelihood (in addition to his wickedly-won goods) might tempt us to think of Evan as a prefiguration of a waster, who chooses to beg rather than to work (VIII.136-40), we should keep in mind that Piers has not yet entered the poem so Wille has not yet been taught about wasters.

⁶⁶ Robert the Rifler’s name has been revised from the B version where Langland calls him “Roberd the Robbere” (V.461). The *MED* makes clear that Robert as a proper noun refers to robbers or pillagers. Langland’s choice to change the name reduces redundancy.

Ne neuere wene to wynne with craft þat y knowe;
For thy mochel mercy mitigacioun y biseche:
Dampne me nat at domesday for þat y dede so ylle (VI.318-324).

Again, we see Robert's attrition, his fear of damnation at Doomsday. But as Siegfried Wenzel notes, the main purpose of this passage is to emphasize Robert's need, not of making restitution, but of Christ's mercy.⁶⁷ Robert brings to mind the example of Dysmas beseeching and receiving grace from Christ on the cross and applies it to his own situation. He recognizes his own lack of agency and knows that his crafts will never make up for his ill doings nor be enough to win him redemption. With this realization, he beseeches Christ's mercy and maintains hope for grace.⁶⁸ Robert's situation is particularly problematic because he appeals to a resource that is not yet fully present for in the poem for Wille. Wille has not yet witnessed Christ's death on the cross and has not yet remembered Dysmas.⁶⁹ Perhaps this is the reason that the speaker "cannot fayre

⁶⁷ Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 144. For a good discussion of relevant criticism around Robert, see p.142-147. I should note that Wenzel writes about the B version where Robert appears at the end of sloth's confession. Wenzel says that while it is possible that Robert represents multiple sins, it is logical that he follows sloth because the B version passage expresses a harmonious psychological sequence: "from the confession of sloth to the promise of amendment, including the restitution of wickedly won goods, and thence to the possibility of despair, which is warded off by the saving thought of Christ's mercy," 144.

⁶⁸ The recognition of human lack and the search for Mercy are central teachings in penitential literature. See my first chapter for a discussion of this recognition in *Jacob's Well* and the morality play *Mankind*. Although Robert recognizes his need for mercy, he does not amend his ways and does not redirect his will.

⁶⁹ Even when Wille witnesses the Crucifixion in Passus XX, he sees a different version of the thieves on the cross than this representation from the Gospel of Luke: "T[w]o theues tho tholed deth þat tyme / Vppon cros bisyde Crist; so was þe comune lawe. / A cachepol cam [forth] a[nd] craked ato he[re] legges / And here arme[s] aftur of e[ither] of thos theues" (XX.73-76).

shewe” what happens to “this feloun,” cannot yet moralize the story (VI.325).⁷⁰ What the speaker does know is that Robert weeps, kneels again to Christ for mercy, and does penance by polishing Repentance’s pikestaff anew (VI.326-329). Repentance tells him that by trusting in Christ’s mercy Robert still “might be saued” (VI.333) and then uses the example to moralize the story for all sinners: “...so doth alle synnes / Of alle manere men þat [mid] goode wille / Confessen hem and cryen hym mercy; shal neuere come in helle” (VI.336-338). Although the example and the gloss both stop short of showing forgiveness, they do point forward to the possibility of mercy through Christ.

After all of the sins have confessed themselves, Repentance beseeches mercy for all sinners in a communal prayer. His prayer may echo that of the celebrant and his assistants said at the altar at the beginning of Mass. In mutual fashion, the celebrant says a brief confession followed by the assistants’ absolution, after which the assistants say the confession and the celebrant offers absolution: “God Almighty have mercy upon you and forgive you all your sins; deliver you from every evil; confirm and strengthen you in goodness; and bring you to everlasting life.”⁷¹ His prayer might be thought of as his version of a request for God’s forgiveness following the confession of the sins. “Y shal byseke for alle synnfole,” he prays, “oure sauior of grace / To Amende vs of our

⁷⁰ It is not entirely clear who the “I” is that cannot fair show what befalls the felon. Also unclear is whether “this felon” refers to Dysmas or to Robert.

⁷¹ This interesting point comes from John Alford, “The Figure of Repentance,” 23. The quotation is from “The Ordinary of the Mass” in *The Sarum Missal in English*, translated by A.H. Pearson. (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1868), 292.

mysdedes, do mercy to us all” (VII.120-121). It is in these lines that the agency of Amendment first becomes clear. Repentance beseeches the grace of Christ to amend “us,” the Christian community for “our” communal misdeeds, to provide the same mercy Robert the robber was seeking for “all” sinful souls. For Repentance, there is no separation between sin, the Incarnation and amendment: God became “man of a mayde mankynde to amend” (VII.127). The act of Christ’s forgiveness is not located only in the Incarnation but in all of salvation history. That is, for Repentance, creation and redemption are inseparable and located in “Verbum caro factum est” (VII.142).⁷² It is through this embodiment of forgiveness that Repentance finds the security to “bid and biseche” God for mercy: “And sethen oure sauour, and seydest hit with thy tonge / That what tyme we synnefole men wolden be sory / For dedes that we han don ylle, dampned sholde we ben neuere, / Yf we knowlecheded and cryde Crist þer-fore mercy” (VII.145-148). With contrition as a necessary element, forgiveness depends upon the communal recognition of the “if” as well as communal knowledge and beseeching of Christ for mercy.

When the community recognizes its lack by the end of the prayer of Repentance, Hope arises and blows his horn of “deus tu conuersus viuificabis nos” (VII.151). This horn signals a shift from potential sinful despair, the sound of perpetual discord, to the hope for forgiveness with the harmonious sound of “Beait quorum remise sunt iniquitates

⁷² For Repentance’s Christocentric prayer in relation to later passus, see Aers, *Salvation and Sin*, 110.

et quorum / tecta sunt peccata” (VIII.153-4). It is in response to the sounding of Hope that “A thousand of men tho throngen togyderes” to engage in a communal prayer within the prayer of Repentance (VII.155). They “Criede vpward to Crist and to his clene moder / To haue grace to go to treuthe; god leue þat they mote,” only to have their hopes frustrated again because there was none so wise there that knew “the way” (VII.156-158).⁷³ Blundering forth as beasts, the community of pilgrims is in need of a spiritual guide to lead them to Truth. An apprentice to Truth, Piers says that he has learned “alle kyne craftes . . . Profitable as for þe plouh” and that Truth is the “presteste payere þat eny pore man knoweth” (VII.191-2, 195). Piers’s labor is clearly differentiated from the activities of figures like Robert and Truth provides a different model of compensation than we see earlier with Covetousness or Mede. When the pilgrims ask the plowman to lead them to Truth, they “profrede Peres mede,” which he vehemently rejects: “Were hit itolde treuthe þat y toke mede / A wolde loue me þe lasse a long tyme aftur” (VII.200, 203-4). After this rejection, he provides the pilgrims with a map, showing the way through the Ten Commandments to the Castle of Truth.⁷⁴

The opening description of this castle begins as a diagrammatic allegory: a static image from which the reader could draw a picture of the edifice and label its

⁷³ For a full account of the pilgrims blundering forth as beasts and not knowing “the way” and the manner in which this desire and search develops in the poem, see David Aers, *Salvation and Sin*, 103.

⁷⁴ For the pilgrimage to Truth, see Elizabeth Salter [Zeeman], “Piers Plowman and the Pilgrimage to Truth,” *Essays and Studies* 11 (1958): 1-16. See too David Aers, *Sanctifying Signs: Making Christian Tradition in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 36-7.

components.⁷⁵ The moat, normally used as a defensive device to protect the architectural structure and its inhabitants from invasion, is of Mercy (VII.233). Rather than keeping outsiders away, this mote is designed to provide safe passage. The walling, made of wit, is supported by the buttresses of believe-or-you-shall-not-be-saved (VII.235).⁷⁶ Unlike the friar's structure, the roof here is made of love and loyal speech (VII.237). The bridge of prayer leads to the pillars of penance and prayers to the saints and the gates hang on the hooks of alms (VII.239-242).⁷⁷ After the static description of the inhabitants, Piers begins to introduce to the pilgrims the inhabitants of the castle: "Grace hatte þe gateward, a goed man for sothe; / His man hatte amende-Ʒow, many man hym knoweth" (VII.243-4). Grace, the keeper of the castle of Truth, is truly a good man, a good man for speaking the truth. Wille encounters here another manifestation of amendment, this time as an imperative: Amend-you.

It is not the mote of Mercy that potentially could keep out the pilgrims – they must pass by this man, Amend-you, to get to Grace. And Amend-you is the only figure to whom the pilgrims must speak. Piers tells them exactly what to say: "Y am sory [for] my synnes, and so [shal y] euere, / And parformed þe penaunce þat þe priest me hihte"

⁷⁵ Elizabeth Salter describes diagrammatic allegory as being like the didactic illustrations of the period: static, precise and formalized. She says that "like the maps and diagrams of medieval religious art," the passage to St. Truth "is not meant to be visualized *in depth*" but is a blue print for action rather than action itself. See the "Introduction" to Pearsall and Salter's edition of the B Text, 15.

⁷⁶ This description of this building is also an example of the type of structure Mary Carruthers describes as providing a mental map to one's memory. See Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 42.

⁷⁷ Taken literally, a pillar is a source of support for a building. The pillar is also the post to which Christ was bound during the Scourging. These are definitions 1a) and 1f) from the *MED*.

(VII.246-7). Nearly another confession, these lines lead to amendment, an equally important aspect of the sacrament of penance. If, after amending and making amendment, Grace allows the pilgrim to go in this way, he will see “treuthe sitte in thy sulue herte” and should “charge charite a church to make / In [his] hole herte to herborwe alle trewe” (VII.255, 258-259). These lines provide a very different model of church construction when considered in relation to Mede’s mending -- here charity makes the church. But the church that charity makes is not necessarily the physical building we might expect. Despite the direct reference to penance, the pilgrims do not complete the sacramental practice by seeing the sacrament of the altar in the visible church. That is to say, Piers’s directions do not lead to what the pilgrims might anticipate, to amendment in the body of Christ and the visible church. Instead, it turns out, Amend-you leads back to the self, leads the pilgrims inward into their own hearts.⁷⁸

Much later in the poem, Piers’s language of truth, charity and the heart of man is taken up again and superseded by the Tree of Charity. Until this point, the closest Wille

⁷⁸ I borrow this observation from David Aers, *Sanctifying Signs: Making Tradition in Late Medieval England*, 36-38. For a related discussion of the inwardly self-observing practices of moral and penitential life in relation to externalized action, see Nicolette Zeeman, *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 83-84, 99-100, 174-178. For an interesting description of the spatial relations and movement in the pilgrimage passage (she emphasizes actions and verbs in the passage as opposed to Salter’s reading of stasis), see Mary Clemente Davlin, O.P., *The Place of God in Piers Plowman and Medieval Art* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 100-103. She notes that Langland imagines a union with God not with a kiss as St. Bernard or Richard Rolle do, but as finding God within oneself or as a participation with God in a community in public, social places (p. 100). Sister Davlin also rightly describes the realization that one is actually within “thyn herte” after moving through the exterior building as a startling shift (102). In addition, she includes in her description of the heart as an important symbol in the fourteenth century a photograph of the “Heart” in the west window of the York Minster, making explicit the link between the heart and church architecture (p.103).

has come to seeing Charity or Christ is when he looks within his own heart. But when Wille asks his teacher to tell him and teach him to believe in charity at the beginning of Passus XVIII, Liberum Arbitrium leads Will forth with tales into *cor hominis*, in the middle of which grows a grafted tree called *ymago dei* (XVIII.1-8). Liberum Arbitrium tells Wille that the tree is called “true loue,” that the “trinite hit sette,” that its blossoms are called “benign spech” (XVIII. 9,11).⁷⁹ Langland’s description of the Tree of Charity begins as a diagrammatic allegory that looks like a static image of a tree. This type of image would be familiar to readers of moral treatises and penitential texts because it was often used to schematize man’s life in relation to God by formally dividing the tree into branches, leaves and fruits.⁸⁰ Liberum Arbitrium explains that from these blossoms of benign spech come good fruit, which men call works, “the whiche is *Caritas* y kald, Cristes oun fode, / And solaceth alle soules sorwful in purgatory” (XVIII.12-15). Although the allegorical mode remains diagrammatic as Liberum Arbitrium continues the naming process that helps Wille to see, this image differs from the Castle of Truth in an important respect: the Eucharistic reference in relation to salvation. Not only is charity the food that provides Christ with sustenance but it is the food he provides for the

⁷⁹ Like the true speech in the castle, the benign spech stands in contrast to the language of Covetousness, language that the sin covets.

⁸⁰ This description of the conventional image of a tree of virtue and vice is from Elizabeth Salter’s “Introduction,” 14.

salvation of souls.⁸¹ After thanking Liberum Arbitritum for taking him to the Tree of Charity, Wille looks again and “thenne toek [he] hede” that the Tree has “schoriare to shuyen hit vp, three shides of o lenghe / And of o kyne colour & kynde” (XVIII.19-20). Although they are somewhat analogous to the pillars of Truth’s castle because they provide support for the Tree (XVIII.47), these props also produce movement and charitable activity, they shove it up. Perhaps Wille notices this movement because “moche merueyled [he] on wha more thei growede” and asks from what wood they are made (XVIII.23-25). Liberum Arbitritum explains that the planks betoken the Trinity and that he uses them to keep the fair fruit away from the wicked winds, the World, the Flesh and the Devil.⁸²

The Fiend tries to destroy the tree’s fruit by setting a ladder to the tree (XVIII.44), shaking it (47) and waiting for Old Age to fell the fruit. For when Old Age has any fruit down, the devil was ready “and gadered hem alle togyderes, both grete & small” (110-111). This gathering bestirs anger in *magestate dei* so that *libera voluntas dei* lifts the middle “shoriare” and hits after the fiend (XVIII.119). Despite the apparent risk and

⁸¹ This idea is picked up again in line 104 when Wille says that he would be glad to “assay what sauour” the plant has, punning on savior.

⁸² David Aers pointed out in a seminar discussion that Will looks initially at the tree and sees a diagrammatic image but that he notices more when he looks again and that the image itself grows. In *Piers Plowman and Christian Allegory*, Aers provides a useful critical summary of scholarly work, including critiques of the Tree of Charity that follow the Robertson-Huppé model of thinking of Langland’s allegory using the fourfold method, 72-3. For his description of the growth and movement of the allegorical tree and its complicated time scheme (from the wicked winds forward), see 91 & ff. This is where Langland’s image of charity departs from ladder of Charity in *Jacob’s Well*, where one side is love of God, the other is love of one’s neighbor, and the rungs are the Ten Commandments. In this model, the motion depends entirely upon the soul climbing the ladder of charity and the angels descending down it (see chapter 1). In Langland’s version, Charity itself grows and moves.

uncertainty involved in hitting after the fiend, the *Filius* by the Father's will flies together with the *spritus sanctus* to "go ransake þat ragman and reue hym of his apples / That thorw fals biheste and fruyt furste man disseyed" (XVIII. 121-2). The Trinity, that is, comes together to ransack the Fiend and rob him of his apples because he gathers them through deception. A prefiguration of the Harrowing of Hell, these lines also point back to Mede and Covetousness, those that falsely acquire goods through deception. The struggle over the fallen fruit of the Tree of Charity does not end here. The decision of who "shuld fecche this fruyt, the fende or iewes suluen" will be decided when "iewes sholde iouste ... by iugement of Armes" (XVIII.128). Gesturing forward again, this time to the Crucifixion, this mention of jousting might bring to mind an association between the swinging of the "Shoriare" and Jesus' "judgment of Armes," both as defensive measures taken against the fiend.

This language of jousting appears in the midst of another description of the Incarnation and signals the beginning of a narrative of the Life of Christ. This account, located in the Tree of Charity, recounts the miracles related to Jesus's life beginning with the Incarnation (XVIII.124-137), the healing of lepers (XVIII.140-142), the conversion and cleansing of common women (XVIII.143) and the raising of Lazarus (XVIII.144-145). The miraculous raising of Lazarus causes some to say that Jesus is the Son of God and causes others to say that he uses sorcery to perform the miracle through the might of

Mohammed and misbelief (XVIII.149-150)⁸³. This accusation elicits a response from Jesus that picks up the language of miraculous food and savor/savior:

‘Thenne is saton ȝoure saueour, quod iesus, & hath ysaued ȝow ofte.
Ac y saued ȝow sundry tymes and also y fe[d] ȝow
With [two] fisches and [fyue] loues, fyue thousen[d] at ones,
And left baskets ful of Broke mete, bere away hoso wolde.
Vnkynde and vnkunynge! quod Crist, and with a roep smoot hem
And ouerturnede in þe temple here tables and here stalles
And drof hem out, alle þat þer bouhte and solde,
And saide, ‘this is an hous of orysones and of holynesse
And when þat my will is y wol hit ouerthrowe
And ar thre dayes aftur edefye hit newe’” (XVIII.151-160).

It is Jesus who says that he fed the five thousand with fishes and loaves and left “broke mete,” a Eucharistic reference that also refers to his broken body on the cross. It is Christ, however, who angrily accuses the misbelievers of being unkind and unknowing because despite his salvific abilities, they still savor Satan.⁸⁴ Those that are unkind and unknowing, we find, are also those covetous merchants who buy and sell in the house of

⁸³ Liberum Arbitrium describes the enchantment and misbelieve taught by Mohammed, a false mediator (XVII.159-186).

⁸⁴ Although Langland’s use of both “Jesus” and “Christ” here might seem inconsequential, it is worth noting. Not only is this a revision he makes from the B version where he only uses “Jesus,” but Faith uses the two proper names to explain to Wille that Jesus Christ is fully human and fully divine: “That this Iesus of his gentrice shal iouste in Pers armes, / In his helm and in his haberion, *humana natura*; / That Crist be nat yknowe for *consummatus deus*, / In Pers plates the plouhman this prikiare shal ryde, / For no dount shal hym dere as *in dietate patris*” (XX.21-25). Conscience explains that his first name was Jesus and that he is called Christ because it means conqueror (XXI.62-161).

prayer and holiness.⁸⁵ In the Johannine version of the overturning of the temple, Christ uses a scourge of cords to drive out the merchants prior to upending their tables (John 2:14-15). While the change is slight, Langland reverses the order so that the merchants witness Christ's great might in upsetting the tables with a rope before being driven out.⁸⁶ Watching his toppling of smaller structures would likely bring greater force to his promise to overthrow the temple itself and to rebuild it in three days time.

There are multiple ways to interpret this exemplary narrative. In his *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, John of Caulibus understands it to be a moment where Jesus shows great wrath because the merchants dishonor his Father in a location where great honor was due. He glosses the story as a warning for the reader:

Watch him closely, and pity him, for he is filled with the anguish of compassion. At the same time, be fearful: for if we, who have been assigned to the very temple of God by his great and special grace, should entangle ourselves in worldly business just as they were doing, when we ought to be intent on praising God at all times, rightly then, we can and ought to fear his indignation and expulsion.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Langland is making interesting selections in his representation here. From this point, he primarily uses the Johannine version. The three other accounts, Matthew 21:12, Mark 11:15-18 and Luke 19:45-48, include other relevant details: that in addition to buyers and sellers, there are "money changers" at the stalls (Mt. and Mk) and Jesus calls the temple a "den of thieves" (Mt, Mk and Lk). Langland does not need to include these details, I think, because the work his poem does in the earlier passus encourage the reader to associate Mede and covetousness with this passage. In the B-version, he makes the connection to Mede and covetousness much more explicit when he knocks down the stalls of those who "chaffareden or chaungeden any moneie" (XVI.129).

⁸⁶ In the B version, Jesus does not drive the money changers from the temple, but he does beat and knock on the merchants with a cord and casts down their stalls (XVI.127-128).

⁸⁷ See John of Caulibus, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, trans. and eds. Francis X. Taney, Sr., Anne Miller, O.S.F., and C. Mary Stallings-Taney (Asheville: Pegasus Press, 2000), 139. Written by a Franciscan friar for a poor Clare in the late fourteenth century, this text was intended to teach the female reader to meditate on the life of Christ by trying to insert herself into the story, by putting herself in the presence of Jesus as if she saw it with her own eyes and heard it with her own ears (p. xviii).

John of Caulibus focuses on the expulsion from the temple. It is this threat of excommunication that Christians should particularly fear, especially if they become “entangled” in covetousness, become bound by sin. This warning works to redirect this type of behavior by encouraging the reader to locate him/herself in the example.

Nicholas Love also uses this example to warn men, specifically curates and men of Holy Church, of the perils of covetousness:

Pis process ... is ful dredful to al cristen men, bot namely to prelates & curates & oþer men of holi chirch, & specialy we religiouse þat bene sette in goddus temple fort serue him continuely in deuout praire, & oþer gostly exercises. if we 3ife vs to coueitise & vanities, & medle vs ouere nede with worldly occupaciones & chaffarynges, as þei diden. we mowe skilfully drede þe indignacion of Jesu, & his casting out fro grace in þis life, & after departing fro his blisse euerlastyng.⁸⁸

Following John of Caulibus, Nicholas Love allegorizes this passage so that it applies it to the Christian reader. For Love, the temple becomes a prefiguration of the church and the men of Holy Church are in the same danger of putting worldly occupation before devout prayer and service. Love uses the language of covetousness to make his figural interpretation: it hinders proper Christian service and puts the soul at risk of being cast from the temple, at risk of losing grace and salvation. Both of these glosses hinge on the

⁸⁸ Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, edited by Michael G. Sargent (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004), 115-116. Written in the early fifteenth century as a translation of the *Meditations of the Life of Christ for Archbishop Arundel*, Love’s translation of the *Meditations of the Life of Christ* played a major role in Archbishop Arundel’s attempt to combat Wycliffite heresy. Love’s text was meant to span the liturgical calendar from Advent to Pentecost and was intended to be read over the course of seven days. This passage falls within the prescribed reading for Thursday.

Johannine lines that follow the literal reading of Christ's claim that he could rebuild in three days what it took them forty six years to erect: "But he spoke of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen again from the dead, his disciples remembered, that he had said this, and they believed the scripture, and the word that Jesus had said" (John 2: 20-21). For a medieval Christian, this "temple of his body" not only refers to Christ's resurrected body, but also to the Church and to the community comprised of all of its individual members (1 Corinthians 12:12).⁸⁹

So Langland's version, where Christ promises to overthrow the temple and three days after "edefye hit newe" leads the reader to anticipate a new edifice and a new edification, a new form of teaching, that is to be located in the Church and in the body of Christ.⁹⁰ But the Gospel teaching that he was speaking of the temple of his body does not occur. The Jews tell the justice what Jesus said and Langland adds an abbreviated explanatory gloss: "Ac þe ouerturnynge of the temple betokened his resureccioun" (XVIII.162). The omission of the Johannine gloss here is significant because it mirrors

⁸⁹ Jesus actually casts down stalls in the Church in the B-version: "And knocked on hem wiþ a corde, and caste adoun hir stalles / That in chirche chaffareden or chaungeden any moneie" (XVI.128-9). Perhaps Langland has in mind here markets such as those held inside of St. Paul's cathedral.

⁹⁰ Michael Henry Frost also notices Langland's use of the verb "edify" in this passage as one that indicates Christ's role as teacher of the New Law and his role of builder of the Church. He also turns to John 2:21 to think about the temple as the body. But he fails to notice that the "temple of the body" reference is absent. Rather than thinking about the absence and why it might be there, Frost fills in the blank. p. 138-142. Although he is generally concerned with the same topic that I am, edification in *Piers Plowman*, he traces each building image and body image through the B-version. In his extensive exploration of church buildings, he does touch on many of the same passages that I do: Mede and covetousness, 54-62; forgiveness and restitution, 64-65; the Samaritan and unkindness, 145-147; and the Harrowing of Hell/Four Daughters, 149-153. He does not, so far as I can tell, think about the liturgy or sacramental culture in any sustained way. See his unpublished dissertation: Michael Henry Frost, "Symbolic Buildings in *Piers Plowman: A Reading*" (PhD diss., New York State University, 1984), 54-65; 132-153.

the absence of Christ's body at this point in the poem. Langland's choice to anticipate and then defer the edification of the Church reflects the particular attention he pays to the liturgy in relation to sacramental practice. This Gospel reading of John 2:13-25 is assigned to the Monday following Mid-Lent Sunday.⁹¹ Langland's revision of the B version reflects his attention to liturgical positioning, his understanding that this reading is meant to be associated with Lenten practices rather than with the sacrament of the altar.

The C version of the life of Christ in the Tree of Charity is much-abbreviated from the B version. It moves swiftly from the overturning of the temple to Judas's betrayal and then to the leading of Jesus to the justices (XVIII.164-178). The clamor and noise in this passage causes Wille to frantically awaken prior to seeing Christ embodying forgiveness on the cross (XVIII.178). This is an important revision from the B-text which takes Wille through Good Friday, when for mankind's sake Christ jousted in Jerusalem: when the "cros vpon Caluarie Crist took þe bataille / Ayeins deef and þe deuel; destroyed hir boþeres myȝtes, / Deide and dee[b] forðide, and day of nyȝt made" (XVI.164-166). In the B version, Langland extends the life of Christ to Good Friday and closely associates the destruction of the temple with the destruction on the cross. In the C version, Wille does not yet see the body of Christ on the cross. Instead, he wakes up to find that *Liberum Arbitrium* has delivered him to, and left him alone on "myddelento[n] sonenday" (XVIII.178-181).

⁹¹ See *The Sarum Missal*, 91.

At the moment when he lacks *Liberum Arbitrium*, Wille is led forth by Faith, Abraham, and Hope, Moses, towards the Easter liturgy. Wille learns important lessons from Faith and Hope. Faith teaches him that the Lord promised him and his children mercy for their misdeeds as many times as they ask for it with mouth and heart (XVIII.258-259). Although clearly an Old Testament figure, Faith also prefigures Christ and the Eucharist: “And sethe a sente me to seyn and saide that y sholde / Worschipe [the Lord] with wyn and with breed bothe / At ones on an auter in worschipe of th[e] trinite” (XVIII.260-262). However, because Wille has not yet witnessed Christ in the poem, the salvific resources embodied in the sacrament of the altar remain unavailable. Hope also teaches Wille the law as it is written in hard rock: to love all manners of men as much as himself and to love and believe in one Lord almighty (XIX.11-41, esp. 13). But however useful the teachings of Faith and Hope may prove to be for Wille, they fall short when it comes to providing the resources to save an injured soul. As Wille proceeds with Faith and Hope and discusses the perplexingly “wonderful” doctrine of the Trinity and their hopeful search for the “newe lawe” it promises to bring, a Samaritan comes riding along on a mule on his way to a joust in Jerusalem (XIX.24, 32-39, 47-50).⁹²

When Wille, Faith, Hope and the Samaritan meet in a “wild wilderness,” a place that sounds suitable for blustering beasts, they find a disrobed man who has been

⁹² Although my concerns are slightly different from his, my understanding and account of the Samaritan come from David Aers’ account in *Salvation and Sin*, 88-119.

“ybounde by thieves” and who cannot help himself because he seems *semyuief*, or half-alive (XIX, 54-58). When Hope and Faith see this helpless, bound up man, they both withdraw and leave the man there. But the Samaritan, love embodied, recognizes that the wounded man, in danger of dying, is greatly in need of help. So he picks up *semyuief*, anoints his wounds (XIX.69-70), bandages him and leads him forth into the Church, to *lavacrum-lex-dei*, a grange (XIX.73), which is six or seven miles beside the new market (XIX.74).⁹³ No longer situated within the temple, the new market now rests beside the Samaritan’s grange. The Samaritan gives money to the Inn Keeper to care for *semyuief* and promises to return after the joust. Faith, Hope and Wille all follow after the Samaritan but Wille points out to the Samaritan that the others were afraid and left the wounded man. Far from blaming the two for abandoning the wounded man, the Samaritan forgives their shortcomings and encourages Wille to do the same. ““Haue hem excused,” says the Samaritan, because their “helpe may nat avail” due to the severity of the man’s wounds (XIX.83-85). *semyuief* must depend upon sacramental practice for his salvation. First the man must be “embaumed and ybaptized” in the blood of a barn and then he must partake in the sacrament of the altar by eating “al þe barn and his bloed drunken” (XIX.88, 90). Entry into the church and consuming the body of Christ is not enough. *Semyuief* must also be plastered with patience when temptations arise, for the Samaritan teaches, there was never a man who went “this way þat he ne was here

⁹³ The *MED* defines “the grange” in *Piers Plowman* as being a group of farms or a small village. Interestingly, a grange could also be a granary or a barn, which is what the Church becomes in Passus XX, the Barn of Unity.

yruyflēd / Saue mysulue soethly and such as y louede” (XIX.91-93). The Samaritan’s teaching supersedes Covetousness’s attempted restitution and Robert the Rifler’s confession. Rifling now becomes something that happens to everyone who passes through the wilderness rather than something that happens only to Robert’s victims while they rest.

After his teaching on the salvific “lycame” of the child, Wille asks the Samaritan about the Trinity. The Samaritan reconfigures the *semyuief*’s wounds, the wounds of those who have been rifled, of those who sit in darkness and cannot see. Just as the wick and fire make warm those who sit in the dark, so too do the Father and Son console men through forgiveness. The Father will “forȝeue folke of mylde hertes / That reuffulliche repenten and restitucion make, / In as moche as thy mowen amenden and payen” and mercy will make good “the remenaunt” (XIX.204-207). The Samaritan picks upon on Repentance’s teachings and clarifies that folks of mild heart should make restitution, should amend and pay, “as much as they may” and that mercy will make up the rest. “As much as they may” is why Robert the Rifler and others like him “might be saved” as long as he does all that he can to make amends. The remnant will be made up by Christ if men recognize their lack and call for his help: “So wol Crist of his cortesy, and men crien hym mercy, / Both forȝeue and forȝete and ȝut bidde for vs / To þe fader of heuen forȝeueness to haue” (XIX.211-213). Christ both forgives men and asks for their forgiveness. The Samaritan’s words refer to the Crucifixion in Luke 23: “And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, they crucified him there; and the

robbers, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. And Jesus said: Father, forgive them for they know not what they do” (Luke 23: 33-34). In this praying for us, Christ forgives sinners for not knowing. The blindness caused by sin is not unforgivable.

But the Samaritan clarifies that not every sin is forgivable -- what kindness does, unkindness undoes (XIX.257). Unkind Christian men, “as this corsede theues,” slay a man out of “coueytise and enuye” and destroy that which the Holy Ghost keeps, “the which is lyf and loue, the leye of mannes body” (XIX.257-261). Unlike Robert the Robber or even the thieves on the cross, there is a type of thieving that is unforgivable -- unkind murder, the assent to destroy out of covetousness that which Christ dearly bought, is never to be forgiven (XIX.268-269). The Samaritan then phrases the Holy Ghost’s rejection of forgiveness as a question: “How myte he aske mercy or eny mercy hym defende / That wikkedliche and wilfulliche wolde mercy anyente?” (XIX.270-1). The question shows the difficulty of a man asking for mercy, defending mercy and/or having mercy defend him, if he willfully destroys it. The Samaritan believes that the Lord in the end will never love that life that “loue and Charite destruyeth” (XIX.278). Consenting to that which destroys the Holy Spirit ultimately destroys the possibility of building a loving community because it devastates the gifts of love and forgiveness that Christ buys and gives.

After hearing the Samaritan’s teaching, Wille wonders about the efficacy of penitential practice. He sets up a hypothetical situation in which he sins against the Holy Ghost, is about to die, and is sorry for his sin (XIX.279-280). He wonders if he

confesses, cries for God's grace and mildly asks for mercy "myhte y nat be saued?" (XIX.281-282).⁹⁴ The Samaritan tells him that although seldom seen in such an extreme case, the redirection of the Wille is indeed a possibility in such a case if he "myhte repent" and through that repentance righteousness "myhte turn" to mercy (XIX.283). Discussing what might and might not happen, of course, leaves open the possibility of salvation and in so doing provides hope even for the worst sinners. The dread coming from an absence of hope, from extreme despair, could potentially drive grace away, but God "is ful of myhte / To amende al þat amys is" (XIX.296-297). So even though men suffer from the sickness of sin, God might amend their wounded condition. The Samaritan leaves Wille with words of hope for the possibility of love and amendment:

For þer is sike ne sory ne non so moche wrecche
 That he ne may louye, and hym lyke, and lene of his herte
 Goed wil, goed word bothe, wischen and wilnen
 Alle manere men mercy and forȝeuenesse
 And louye h[e]m yliche hymself [and his lyf] amende (XIX.330-
 334).

The Samaritan leaves Wille with the possibility of constructing a loving community. In it, each member has the might to love and to wish for mercy and forgiveness for all men. The Samaritan explains that this loving practice means loving his neighbor as himself. It is this type of love that amends lives, that not only allows the sinful man to amend his own life but that also amends the life of his neighbor for the better. So the Samaritan

⁹⁴ This, of course, is the same locution that Repentance uses with Robert the Rifler, that if he trusts in mercy, he "might be saved."

emphasizes again that although it is possible for all men, it is not unconditional and is not without communal participation. It is with this hopeful paradigm of Christ-like non-violence that the Samaritan, forgiveness embodied, leaves for the Wille at the end of Passus XIX.

Immediately returning to resistance, Passus XX begins with the wool-shirted and wet-shoed Wille recklessly wandering through his life, now practicing penance but still without sorrow (XX.1-4). He blusters forth until he grows weary of the world and lies down until Lent, sleeping a long time. Wille sees one who resembles the Samaritan and Piers Plowman riding bootless on an ass without spears or spurs. Faith cries forth when he sees the jousting ride by and explains to Wille that it is Jesus who will wear Piers's armor, human natura, to joust with Death in Jerusalem (XX.13-23). Then comes Pilate with the community and the justices who call "Crucify!" loudly.⁹⁵ Then the accuser steps forth to announce the formal charge against Jesus:

‘This iesus of our iewene temple iaped and despised,
To fordoen hit on a day, and in thre dayes aftur
Edefien hit eft newe – here he stant þat saide hit –
And ȝut maken hit as moche in alle manere poyntes,
Both as lone and as large aloofte and o grounde
And as wyde as hit euere was; this we witnesseth alle’ (XX.40-45).

Langland makes very deliberate linguistic choices to represent this moment. The accuser, a political authoritative figure, loosely and selectively retells the story that Wille has already heard from the mouth of Jesus in the Tree of Charity. The accuser does not

⁹⁵ In some sense, this trial is a reconfiguration of the dispute between Wrong and Peace.

announce why Jesus despises and destroys the temple and wishes to edify it anew in three days. He leaves out the details about the corrupt market practices going on in the space intended for prayer and worship. The accuser then attributes his retelling of the original story to Jesus – here stands the man who said it. After designating Jesus as author, the accused adds his own detailed glosses to the story and in so doing interprets it for the crowd. He fixates on his literal interpretation of “edify it anew” as referring to rebuilding the temple, rebuilding a physical edifice with the same dimensions as the original building. At issue here is the temple of Christ’s body, the edification of the Church. But the accuser replaces Jesus’s reading of the overturning of the temple as betokening the resurrection with his own interpretation. He adds details about height, length and width, showing either his fixation on the architectural meaning in or his willingness to be a false witness.

Following the Gospel of Matthew, Langland places the language of edification into the mouth of the accuser and figures it as the first and most expanded indictment against Jesus. Nicholas Love puts these words in the mouth of the blaspheming thief who hangs next to Jesus on the cross: “Vaath þis is he þat destrueþ þe temple of god, & makeþ it up azeyn in þre daies.”⁹⁶ By placing the words into the mouth of a thief who figures it as a “making it up again,” Love not only reduces the seriousness of the charge but also minimizes the miracle of the temple of Christ’s body. The nameless members of

⁹⁶ Nicholas Love, 176.

the crowd launch the same accusation against Jesus while he hangs on the cross in John of Caulibus's version: "They are unsparing in their revilings even for oen so sorely besieged. Some blaspheme, saying 'Hah! You who destroy the temple of God (Mt 27:40);' others, 'He cannot save himself (Mt 27:42).' From still others comes a stream of invectives, and even the chief priest exclaim, 'If he is the Son of God, let him come down from the cross, and we will believe him (Mt 27:42).'"⁹⁷ This version, meant to emphasize the frenzied stream of accusations, only cites Jesus's destruction of the temple. It is cut short of relaying his promise to rebuild it again. Placing the partial accusation within a laundry list gives it a comparatively marginal role to the one it plays in Langland's version.

It is the accuser's resistance to, or flattening out of, allegorical interpretation that spurs the officer of the court in *Piers Plowman* to again scream "crucify." The description of Christ's tortured body, notably reserved when considered as a dominant icon for affective piety in this culture, describes the placing of the crown of thorns on his head (XX.48-49), the reed shot into his eyes (XX.50) and the three nails used to nail him naked upon the rood (XX.51).⁹⁸ The faceless and voiceless "they" then lodge the remaining complaints against him, using the conditional to express their doubt: "yf he

⁹⁷ John of Caulibus, 254.

⁹⁸ For a helpful discussion of Christ's humanity and Langland's representation of the Passion in relation to other texts intended for affective piety, see David Aers's commentary in David Aers and Lynn Staley, *The Power of the Holy: Religion, Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 69-73. All of chapter 2 is relevant.

sotil be hym sulue now he wol helpe” and “yf thow be Crist and [kynges] sone come adoun of th[e] rode; Thenne shal we leue that lyf þe loueth and wol not late the deye” (XX.54-56). They express these conditional demands, of course, as they commit a most serious offense: unkindness. Just as notable as Langland’s reserved version of the torture is the moment of Christ’s death:

‘*Consummatum est*,’ quod Crist and comsed for to swoene.
Pitousliche and pale, as [a] prisoun þat deyeth,
The lord of lyf and of liht tho leyde his eyes togederes (XX.57-59).

Mary Davlin argues that the swoon, the piteous pale countenance and the closing eyes are balanced by the phrase “lord of lif and light” in order to arrive at a Johannine depiction of the crucifixion that emphasizes the sense of glory by limiting the bodily contortions.⁹⁹

While this certainly is one plausible explanation of the representation, I would argue that Langland does not limit Christ’s bodily contortions but rather that he locates them in the temple of Christ’s body, in the building of Unity in Passus XXI and again in the Church militant in Passus XXII. *Consummatum est* overthrows the temple as soon as the “sonne” becomes dark: “The wal of the temple tocleyef euene [a] to peces; The hard roch al toroef and riht derk nyght hit semede” (XX.61-63). In one day the temple literally crumbles, comes down leaving din and darkness.

Wille sees a young, mild, benign woman called Mercy walking out of the West and looking hellward (XX.116-119). Out of the East comes her sister, Truth, a creature

⁹⁹ Mary Davlin, “*Piers Plowman and the Gospel and First Epistle of John*” *The Yearbook of Langland Studies*. 10 (1996): 120.

comely and clean (XX.120-123). When the maidens meet, each asks the other about this “gret Wonder,” of the din and darkness, and how the day dawned and a light lay before hell (XX.125-127). Mercy says that joy is its meaning and that Christ, what now eclipses the sun, will draw man out of murkiness (XX. 140) and overcome death (XX.144). Truth calls her a liar and argues that a thing once in hell will never come out (XX.152).¹⁰⁰ As the dispute continues, a woman called Peace enters, clothed in Patience and in rich garments (XX.175-178). Peace explains that she has come to welcome those that she could not see because of murkiness of sin but now can, for Jesus has jousted well (XX.180-184). Peace introduces the fourth daughter, Righteousness, into the conversation in relation to herself and to Mercy through a letter written by Love: “That mercy, my sustur, and y mankynde sh[olde] saue / And þat god hath forgyue and graunted to mankynde / Mercy, [my sustur], and me to mayprisen hem alle / And þat Crist hath conuerted the kynde of rihtwesnesse / Into pees and pyte of his pure grace” (XX.186-190). But while still in the murkiness, this ideal model does not hold up. Righteousness, hardly converted, interrupts and asks if Peace raves or if she is just drunk (XX.193). After Adam and Eve go against God’s command and eat the apple, she argues, they were thrown into hell, where their pain will be perpetual and no prayers will help them (XX.197-205). The debate continues on as what appears to be an irreconcilable argument among the daughters, or at least to be one that they have trouble settling on their own. Langland’s choice to situate the debate between the Crucifixion

¹⁰⁰ We know this is not the case because of figures like Trajan (XII.73&ff).

and the Harrowing of Hell is unique, and the terms are picked back up by those in hell who also wonder about the meaning.¹⁰¹ Viewed from the point of view of hell, however, the meaning of the light causes wonder and debate.

Introduced by a voice ordering them to open the gates of hell, Satan responds by acknowledging that light fetched away Lazarus and that if the king comes in, he will fetch mankind and easily bind Satan (XX.275-8). On the defensive, he orders Belial to bar the gates and chain up hell to stop the light from entering and arms his squadron to pour brimstone on and shoot at the intruders when they approach (XX.285-294). Lucifer intervenes and says that he knows this lord and this light and that he should beware of the dangers: “Yf he reue me my rihte A robbeth me [by] maistrie / For by riht and by resoun þ[e] renkes þat ben here / Body and soule beth myne, bothe gode and ille” (XX.299-301). Picking up on Righteousness’s line about perpetual damnation, Lucifer argues for the devil’s rights to man and suggests that this “right” is something that God must respect, that not doing so would be a form of robbery. That is, he argues that man is his possession and should rightly remain in hell.¹⁰² Satan quickly rejects this pre-Anselmian theology of the Devil’s rights by reminding Lucifer that he acquired man with

¹⁰¹ For the history of the allegory of the Four Daughters of God, see Hope Traver, *The Four Daughters of God: A Study of The Versions of this Allegory with Especial Reference to those in Latin, French, and English* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Co., 1907), 5; 147. Traver notes that Langland’s version is “peculiar in that it is made the prelude to the Harrowing of Hell” (147). Rather than thinking of it as a prelude to the Harrowing, I suggest that the Four Daughters frame the Harrowing. This means that the terms of the daughter’s conversation carry over into the mouths of the devils and then are corrected by Christ, which in turn, amends the argument among the sisters.

¹⁰² See C.W. Marx, *The Devil’s Rights and the Redemption in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995), 105, 13-15.

beguilement and treason (XX.313, 319). Satan recognizes that Lucifer's pride caused the angels to fall from heaven, when they "losten" blisse, and that they have also "ylost" their lordship over land and in hell because of his deception (XX.345-349). Even Satan differentiates between loss and robbery and thinks that fleeing is their only option (XX.343).

With Christ's one breath, "helle braek with belialles barres" and the devils are blinded from the light of love that pours forth into hell (XX.364-369). Christ declares the right to save sinful souls for "myne they [be] and of me," so despite being sentenced to death, mankind is not sentenced to perpetual damnation (XX.374-375). Just punishment for man, then, comes through death not through eternal damnation. Rather than hanging a felon twice (XX.421), Christ shows mercy because man fell as a result of guile (XX.380-383): "*Ergo*, soule shal soule quyte and synne to synne wende / And al þat man mysdede, y man to amenden hit / And þat deth fordede my deth to releue" (XX.388-390). Christ's amendment is not, as Lucifer claims, a power play that robs him of his rights but is his fulfillment of the law "Bot [by] riht and [by] resoun" to "ransom" mankind (XX.393-395). The ransom that Christ pays to release mankind from perpetual damnation because of the boldness of this sin is both righteous and merciful (XX.431).¹⁰³ Robbery is here replaced by Christ's ransom. Christ locates righteousness in hell and mercy in heaven (XX.439-440) and says that he would be an unkind king (XX.441) if he

¹⁰³ Christ's ransom supersedes Mede's secular payment when she offers herself in the trial of Wrong and Peace.

did not help his kin if they ask for it when in need (XX.441-442, picking up on Repentance's teaching at VI.336 and the Samaritan's at XIX.296-297). With that, Christ enchains Satan in hell and "lede forth which hym luste," those whom he loves and who believe in his coming, and "leue which hym likede" (XX.44-449).

A moment of hopeful exultation for Christ and his believers, Langland ends the Harrowing of Hell with a scene of hopeful, harmonious accord. Many hundreds of angels sing together, "*Culpat Caro, purgat Caro, regnat deus dei Caro*" followed by Peace's piping out a note of poetry, "*Clarior est solito [post maxima nebula phebus]; / Post inimicicias Clarior est & Amor*" (XX.450-451). For peace, neither love nor friendship is more pleasing than when love and peace are masters (XX.462) and stop war and wicked envy. Perhaps following Peace's mastery of love and friendship at this moment, Truth practices reconciliation by calling "Trewes" and suggesting an embrace in covenant through a kiss of peace (XX.461-462). Peace continues that she does not want any people to "parseyue þat [the sisters] chydde, / For inpossible is not thyng to hym þat is almyhty" (XX.264-5). The dispute and separation of the Four Daughters occurs prior to the Harrowing because it represents what seems to be, given human linguistic and conceptual limitations, irreconcilable aspects of God: mercy, peace, righteousness and truth. Initially separating them to expose the limitations of human perception and language, Langland's allegory brings the sisters back together to signify the possibility of reconciliation. Righteousness agrees that Peace says the truth and reverently "her custe," and Peace kisses her, reverently reconciling (XX.464). In a true medieval loveday,

Langland unifies what previously were perceived to be conceptually irreconcilable aspects of God. No longer disparate because of Christ's sacrifice, the four daughters show an example of forgiveness and reconciliation signified by a kiss of peace:

"Misericordia & veritas obuiauuerunt sibi; Iusticia & pax osculate sunt" (XX.464).¹⁰⁴

This reconciliation generates harmony and carols that lasts through the night and into the morning of Christ's resurrection.¹⁰⁵

One of the most hopeful and touching of Wille's waking episodes occurs when the singing in heaven delicately merges with the sound of Easter bells. At the end of Passus XX, the music awakens Wille and he and calls to his wife and daughter to observe and celebrate Easter Sunday:

Til þe day dawed thes damoyseles caroled
That men range to þe resureccioun and riht with þat y wakede
And calde kitte my wyf and Calote my douhter:
'Arise and go reuerense godes resureccio[n]
And crepe to þe croes on knees and kusse it for a iewel
And rihtfollokest A relyk, noon richore on erthe.
For godes blessed body hit baer for oure bote
And hit afereth th[e] fende, for such is þe myhte

¹⁰⁴ The connection between the kiss of peace and a medieval loveday is more explicitly made by Mercy in the Mary Play from the N. Town Manuscript: "Now is þe loveday mad of us fowre fynialy, / Now may we leve in pes as we were wonte:/ *Misericordia et Veritas obviauerunt sibi, / Iusticia et Pax osculate sunt.*" See *The Mary Play from the N. Town Manuscript* ed. Peter Meredith (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997), 72 lines 1247-1250.

¹⁰⁵ Langland's musical description here is worth noting. In addition to playing the trumpet as Hope does in Passus VII, Truth sings "*te deum laudamus*" and Love lutes "*Ecce quam bonum & quam iocundum & c*" in a loud note (XX.465, 467). What I find interesting is that Love's lute draws from Psalm 132:1: "Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell in unity," Langland replaces the lines about brothers dwelling in unity with a "& c." Perhaps he does this because he expects the reader to know that unity follows or perhaps he does it to discourage us from associating this moment with the House of Unity in Passus XXI. For a similar but more extended version of singing the song of love, see *Pearl* ed. E.V. Gordon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 32, lines 877-900; 40-41, lines 1093-1128.

May no grisly goest glyde þer hit shaddeweth' (XX.467-475).

In his examination of this passage in light of the medieval liturgy of Easter, Raymond St.-Jacques makes multiple observations that are worth relaying in some detail.¹⁰⁶ St.-Jacques shows that that because he mentions the dawn (line 467) before the creeping to the cross (line 471), Langland's readers would have likely "associated the ringing of the bells with the *Elevatio Crucis* performed on Easter morning before matins and mass" which was also accompanied by creeping to the cross.¹⁰⁷ The elevation of the cross, especially a jeweled cross like the one here (XX.471), would have been familiar to medieval readers because (as the Sarum Ordinal specifies) crosses carried in the procession from the time of Easter until the feast of the Ascension would have been made of beryl.¹⁰⁸ The Easter liturgy draws together for Wille what he has just witnessed in his dream and what his Church teaches and practices in his waking world as proof of Christ's Resurrection.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, because he urges his wife and daughter to participate in the

¹⁰⁶ Raymond St.-Jacques, "Langland's Bells of the Resurrection and the Easter Liturgy," *English Studies in Canada* 3 (1977): 129-135.

¹⁰⁷ The other option for bell-ringing would have been with the Easter vigil mass to announce the tidings of the Resurrection. In this scenario, the bells would have been silenced after the chanting of the *Gloria* on Maundy Thursday until Easter Sunday to represent the Apostles who remained silent and fled during the Passion. Despite this other possibility, I find St.-Jacques explanation of Langland's representation to be completely convincing. The emphasis St.-Jacques places upon the raising of the cross is even more evident in the C-version where Langland adds the line about the cross as a rich relic. This is an important moment of anti-Lollard commentary. St.-Jacques, 130.

¹⁰⁸ St.-Jacques also notes that Lenten crosses were wooden and painted red without the figure of Christ and on Palm Sunday a silver cross was carried, 133-4.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 130.

Easter celebration, Wille moves away from a preoccupation with his own salvation and take part in a communal act of worship. In this “artistic triumph” and the “climax of the entire work,” St. Jacques argues that rather than a heavy-handed elaboration of the Resurrection, Langland chooses a “subtle evocation of the mystery through brief allusions to several of the most stirring Easter ceremonies in which Will, his family, and indeed all the faithful participate.”¹¹⁰ Developing further St.-Jacques’ rich reading of the text in relation to liturgical practice, the waking episode shows Wille as an exemplary apprentice learning and practicing the craft of forgiveness after having seen it first in Christ as master (Passus XIX and XX) and then again in the coming together of the Four Daughters (Passus XX). Langland’s example shows another level of mastery. It is then Wille who calls for communal participation in revering Christ’s risen body by creeping to the cross and kissing the relic as a means of emulating and practicing the kiss of peace. It is through participation and emulation that Wille and his family come together on Easter morning in the hopeful expectation of the Resurrection, of receiving the sacrament of the altar.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 135.

¹¹¹ It is interesting to think about the differences between this example and the opening exemplum from *Jacob’s Well*. Both show examples of the community practicing forgiveness. However, the knights forgive one another and then are miraculously forgiven (and embraced) by the cross. Wille does not call for his family to creep to the cross and kiss it as a relic until later in the liturgical cycle. This shows, I think, Langland’s insistence on the debilitating effects of sin. Rather than having the cross embrace Wille, Langland shows Wille and his family adoring the cross that bore Christ’s body.

Passus XXI opens with Wille dressing himself and going to take communion. Prior to receiving the sacrament of the altar, however, he falls asleep and calls to Conscience, who explains that he who comes bloody is Christ with the cross, conqueror for Christians. Christ comes with the cross of his passion, says Conscience, to “wissen vs þerwith, þat when we ben ytempted / Therwith to fihte and fende vs fro falling into synne / And se bi his sorwe þat hosoueth ioye / To penaunce and to pouerte he mot putte hym suluen” (XXI.64-67). No longer just a jeweled relic, Christ now instructs the church to use the cross of his passion as a weapon with which to fight. Evocative of the “schoriars” in the Tree of Charity and the joust itself, the cross provides the community with a material to fend off the fiend. However, if the defender falls into sin, he still might put himself to penitential practice.

Conscience’s version of the Life of Christ takes Wille beyond the crucifixion. After the death of Christ, Caiaphas and others bury the body and bade armed knights to guard it because prophets had told them that the blessed body should rise and go to Galilee to gladden the apostles and Mary (XXI.143-148). Before the day sprung, angels and Archangels “Comen knelyng to þ[e] Cors and songen / *Christ [rex] resurgens*, and hit aroos aftur, / Verray man bifore [hem] alle, and forth with hem ȝede” (XXI.150-153). Superseding the caroling in heaven and the Easter bells, the angels kneel to Christ’s body to sing and the “true man,” a brief affirmation of the doctrine of Transubstantiation, rises before all of them. In addition to the community seeing the elevation of the host, it is here that Christ overturns the temple, which as we remember from the Tree of Charity,

betokens the resurrection (XVIII.162). It is here that Christ begins to edify it anew.

Christ edifies the community by providing it with the gift of the Church and with a mediator to be present within it. Here, another sacramental sign of Christ's grace, is the gift of penitential practice and forgiveness:

And 3af Peres power and pardoun he graunted
To alle manere men, mercy and for3euenesse;
3af hym myhte men to assoyle of alle manere synnes
In couenant þat they come and knoleched to pay
To Peres pardoun þe plouhman *Rede quod debes*.
Thus hath Peres power, be his pardoun payed,
To bynde and unbynde both here and elles
And assoile men of all synnes, saue of dette one (XXI.183-190).¹¹²

Christ lives and dies to give all manner of men mercy and forgiveness. He also gives Piers, as the figure of Peter and the Pope, the power to absolve sins (Matthew 16:18-19). But this absolution is contingent upon making proper restitution, upon *Rede quod debes*. This paying what one owes means not only making amends and paying debts to neighbors but also to God. Christians enter into a covenant, an agreement among one another and with God, and acknowledge not only their sins but also their debt. If Piers's pardon is paid in this way, then he has the power to absolve men of all sins. The one debt that Piers cannot absolve is the one, unforgivable sin of unkindness.¹¹³

¹¹² This quotation is from Derek Pearsall's edition. In the Russell Kane edition, line 183 reads "And 3af [peres pardoun] and [power] he graunted [hym]." I have chosen to follow Pearsall's edition because he follows the majority of the manuscripts and because the Russell Kane line suggests that Christ grants power and pardon to Piers (rather than giving Piers the power to pardon others).

¹¹³ James Simpson argues that "dette one" refers to full absolution. Full absolution "involves not merely the contrition and confession of the sinner, but also the satisfaction of good works – the 'dette' that remains

Wille watches the Pentecostal moment when the *Spiritus paraclitus* descends upon Piers and his followers. Fearing and not understanding the meaning, Wille listens to Conscience's advice to welcome Grace, Christ's messenger with worship and song. Grace goes with Piers and tells him to summon the commons, the community, because he will provide them with gifts, with "Tresure to lyue by to here lyues ende / And wepne to fihte with þat wol neuere fayle" because Antichrist will grieve the world with covetousness and unkindness (XXI.216-217, 219-224). Foreseeing the battles to be fought by the church militant, Grace provides Piers and his followers with gifts of livelihood and defense. Grace edifies the Church, gives each member of the community a craft with which to guide himself in the face of idleness, envy or pride (XXI.227-229). Grace provides a variety of gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4), crafts ranging from the priesthood to tilling the earth to carving and measuring to strong-armed men riding and recovering what was unrightfully won. All of these crafts do come as gifts of the Holy Spirit, but Grace also calls for all men to practice the one communal craft shared by all: "An al he lered to be lele, and vch a craft loue oþere, / Ne no boest ne debate be among hem alle" (XXI.250-251). If each craft loves his neighbors (XXI.254) and there is not boast or

even after absolution," 362-3. Simpson arrives at this reading because, as the quotation shows, of the great importance he places upon good works. See James Simpson, *The Oxford English Literary History*. Vol. 2 *1350-1547: Reform and Cultural Revolution*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 362-3. The syntax of the line suggests that "debt one" is a sin, not satisfaction. More convincing is David Aers' understanding of "dette one" as being the one, unforgivable sin of unkindness. See Aers, *Sanctifying Signs*, 50, 148 along with *Salvation and Sin*, 205 note 9.

debate among them, then the market economy would not be corrupt and there would be no dominion or violence in the community. In this model of sanctification, work will be brought into love that flows from the work of Christ through Grace. However, this version of the Church where each craft loves the other with mastery and mild bearing (XXI.255) is far from a reality and is, rather, something yet to be practiced (XXII.207-208).

Grace also gives Piers the gifts of the cardinal virtues, seeds that when properly cultivated with the Old and New Law, might destroy vices and grow love (XXI.274-319). Grace tells Piers that he must have a place to store these ripe grains of virtue once they are cultivated and instructs him to ordain a house for this purpose (XXI.317-318). But Piers cannot construct this house on his own. He cries for help, for Grace to provide timber and to ordain the house before he leaves (XXI.319-320). Grace uses material elements from Christ's passion to ordain the church, to edify it anew:

And grace gaf hym þe cros with [the garland] of thornes
That Crist vpon Caluary for mankynde on peyned.
And of his bapteme and bloed þat he bledde on rode
He made a mortar and mercy hit hihte.
And þerwith grace bigan to make a good fo[un]dement
And wateled hit and walled hit with his paynes and his passio[n]
And of all holy writ he made a roef aftur
And calde þat hous vnite, holy chirche an englich (XXI.321-329).

Grace uses the cross and the crown of thorns, from which Christ bled, as materials for constructing the church. It is here, in the edification of the church, that Langland locates Christ's bloody body in pain. This bloody body is not just Christ's bloody body, but is

the bloody body of the entire Church and of each member within it: for “as the body is one, and hath many members; and all the members of the body, whereas they are many, yet are one body, so also is Christ. For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free; and in one Spirit we have all been made to drink. For the body also is not one member, but many” (1 Cor 12: 12-13). Grace uses the blood and the cross, the central icon of the body in pain, to make a mortar called mercy.¹¹⁴ With this mortar of mercy, Grace begins to make a good foundation. In one sense, the foundation of the Church is the Pentecostal ordination, is the beginning of the institution of the Church. Additionally, the foundation of an edifice is the substructure, or the ground upon which the building is constructed. That is, without a solid foundation, a building is likely to crumble. The walls of Christ’s pain and passion sit upon the strong foundation of mercy. The roof, made of Holy Writ, shelters the interior and prevents the building from being exposed to the elements.¹¹⁵ The final step is converting the house of unity in to the vernacular, into the holy church in English.

¹¹⁴ Christiana Whitehead observes that these elements correspond with an affective empathy in medieval devotion, particularly the appearance and sensations of Christ’s body at the crucifixion. What is less convincing is her claim that their inclusion in this architecture suggests that Langland “found the practice of affective devotion spiritually superior to the intricate catechetical structures espoused by the homilists.” See Christina Whitehead, *Castles of the Mind: A Study of Medieval Architectural Allegory* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), 108. I suggest instead that Langland emphasizes Christ’s body in relation to the sacrament of the altar and to the Church. Rather than finding affective devotion superior, Langland uses the conventional image of affective devotion within a catechetical structure to teach the Wille to learn the craft of love by showing a powerful example of it.

¹¹⁵ The house of Unite supersedes the priory in Passus III and the Castle of Truth in Passus VII. Because Grace is the master builder of the Church, the body of Christ, it is much stronger than the Castle of Truth, which needs multiple support systems (buttresses and pillars) to bear its weight. Here, the strength of the foundation and the walls of the passion are, at least temporarily, sufficient.

When the edifice is complete, Grace assembles a cart called Christendom, led by the workhorses Contrition and Confession, to “carie hoem” Piers’s cardinal virtues (XXI.332-333).¹¹⁶ Grace also helps Piers to use his cart to till the Truth beyond home, when he extends the missionary church as “wyde as the worlde” (XXI.333-335). After this extension, Grace presumably leaves Piers to do his work: “Now is [Peres] to the [plouh]; Pryde hit aspiede / And gadered hym a gret oeste” intended to injure Conscience and the virtues (XXI.335-336). At this point, Holy Church has only been standing for six lines and Piers has just been left alone to plow for one line when Pride spies it. The sin sends forth his messengers to prophecy the breaking of the community, of unity. This foretelling of despair in the Church, a broken community akin to Mede’s with its usury and wasting on wel-fare (XXI.351, 354), certainly stands in contrast to Grace’s bringing together of different forms of work in the Christian community.

But it is important to keep in mind that the Church militant and its members will never be free from the attacks of vicious behavior and sinful activities. John Mirk reminds his congregation of this in the sermon he preaches for the Dedication of a Church:

Furst hit was halowet for hur owne clansyng; for þe chyrch ys a place ordenyt þat cryston pepull schull come togedyr yn charyte, forto worshyp hor God yn rest and yn pees, ych on wyth othyr. Then ys God fayn of hom, and cometh to hom, and ys wondyr fayn of hom, and dwellyth wyth hom, whyl þay ben yn rest an ys pes, ych wyth othyr. But when þe fend seyth this, þen ys he sory, and schoweþe all hym malice forto asay, 3if he

¹¹⁶ To understand Passus XXI, it is important here to mention that Grace only gives Piers the workhorses of contrition and confession. Grace stops short of providing him with satisfaction, with amendment.

mow by hymself, oþer by any oþer of hys dyscopyles forto bring hom out of charyte, and make debate and dycencyon among hom, and so forto dryve God away from hom ... Then, for our holy fadyrs knew hy maners and his malice, þey ordeynet þe chyrch to be halowet; and so, by holy prayer and halowyng, scho ys clanset of þe fende and of hys malice, and he hath no power aftyr forto come ynto þe chyrch, but hit so be þat some wykkyd lyuer þat ys belafte wyth þe fende, bryng hym ynto the chyrche wyth hym; for als longe as a man oþer woman ys out of charite, þe fende ys yn hym and haþe power ouer hym.¹¹⁷

The fiend and his sinful disciples draw Church members out of charity and cause strife among them. It is for this reason that a church must be ordained and hallowed, because it cleanses the fiend from the Church. Just as Langland shows the House of Unity being ordained and then almost immediately infiltrated by sin, Mirk tells his parishioners that even after being ordained and hallowed so that the fiend has no power to enter the church on his own, a person living out of charity can bring the fiend in. As Wille has already learned, Lent is the primary liturgical period for cleansing of the self and cleansing of the community. But here Lent is already over and Pentecost has just occurred.

Raymond St.-Jacques cites a sermon by Leo the Great that explains the liturgical function of Ember Days. Instituted under the direction of the Holy Spirit and situated four times throughout the year, during Lent, in the week following Pentecost, in September and again in the winter, these days of fasting were to provide the Church with multiple opportunities for cleansing. Concerned with Pentecostal Ember Days, St.-Jacques notes a sermon by Guillaume Durand in which the homilist says that the Apostles

¹¹⁷ John Mirk, Sermon 68, "De Dedicacione Ecclesie Sermo Breuis" in *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies by Johannes Mirkus*, ed. Theodor Erbe (1905 repr.; London: EETS, 1997), 278.

fasted immediately after the descent of the Holy Ghost to show that they had turned away from carnal pleasures. As a result, many Christians observed this “summer Lent” in the week following Pentecost.¹¹⁸ St.-Jacques notes several examples of spiritual renewal being described in military terms that resemble Langland’s (213). He points, for example, to the Collect for Ember Friday: “Grant, we beseech Thee, merciful God, that when Thy Church is gathered by the Holy Spirit, she may in no manner be hurt by the assault of her enemies.”¹¹⁹ The approach of Pride and his followers, enemies of Holy Church, elicits a similar prayer from Conscience: ““my consayl is [to] wende / Hastiliche [in]to vite and holde we vs there. / Preye we þat a pees were in [Peres] berne [þe Plohman] / For witterly, y woet wel, we be nat of strenghe / To goen agayn pruyde bute grace were with vs” (XXI.355-360).

Understood in relation to Mirk’s sermon and to the liturgical function of Ember Days, Conscience’s command for Christians to delve a ditch and construct a moat around Holy Church to make it stronger and to defend it from enemy attack sounds like good advice (XXI.362).¹²⁰ After delving the ditch, all “kyne cristene saue commune women / Repenteden and [forsoke] synne, saue thei one” and a summoner and juror who lied under oath in exchange for silver (XXI.367-371). Back into the world of the early passus

¹¹⁸ Raymond St.-Jacques, “Conscience’s Final Pilgrimage in *Piers Plowman* and the Cyclical Structure of the Liturgy,” *Revue de l’Universite d’Ottawa/University of Ottawa Quarterly* 40 (1970): 210-23. Here I draw from 212-213, note 5.

¹¹⁹ See *The Sarum Missal*, 216.

¹²⁰ This image of the defensive moat around the Barn of Unity supersedes the Castle of Truth which had a moat of mercy and a bridge welcoming the freshly-confessed pilgrims.

in the poem, some people have chosen to exclude themselves from the community – common women and those who accept bribes, both groups reminiscent of Lady Mede. However, there are enough people who produce tears of repentance, “watur for wikked werkes,” through penitential activities that the community manages to fill the moat (XXI.375-378).¹²¹ The cleanness of such community members and clean-living clerics “Made vnite holi churche in holinesse stande” (XXI.380). So despite the dangerous infiltration of Pride, there are those within the church who continue to live charitably and to support church holiness/wholeness. However, Langland does not leave off with the image of Holy Church standing in Unity nor does he show the clean members of the community taking communion. Instead, he returns to an ecclesiological model of the church militant to show a community besieged by sin and struggling with penitential practice.

Seemingly aware that Pride is already within Unity (XXI.381), Conscience hopes that Lenten practices will hinder the lord of lusts (XXI.382). He calls to the practicing Christian community, those who have “labored lelly al this lenten tyme,” to dine on the body of Christ, the “bred yblessed and godes body þervnder” (XXI.383-385) once a month (XXI.388) or as often as they need (XXI.389).¹²² But this extraordinary offering

¹²¹ These charitable activities include praying, pilgrimage, private penances and alms-giving (XXI.375-376). I discuss weeping and contrition in chapter 1.

¹²² Aside from the extraordinary case of Margery Kempe, Conscience’s account of the availability of the host for frequent consumption would have been exceedingly rare. Most lay people in late medieval

of God's healing, salvific power does not come freely for those who need it. Conscience reminds the community of the important contingency of the sacramental gift of penance that allows Piers the power to bind and unbind. He reminds them that pardon does not come without cost, that it is only available to those "þat hadden payden / To [Peres] pardon þe [plouhman] *Redde quod debes*" (XXI.389-390). Conscience encourages the community to embody Grace's sacramental gift by participating in penitential practice.¹²³ Not only would this require forgiving one another's debts but it would also require paying what one owes to one's neighbors and to God. This process in conjunction with Christ's sacrifice provides for the possibility of building a forgiving community, one which Piers could provide with pardon.

England would consume the host once a year at Easter and would otherwise receive it visually. See Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 95-97.

¹²³ In the phrase *redde quod debes*, Conscience invokes Matthew 18:15-31, the parable of the lord and the servant: the gospel reading for the Tuesday after Oculi (the Tuesday after the third Sunday in Lent). See *The Sarum Missal*, 85. The parable tells the story of a king who forgives a servant of his debt of ten thousand talents after the servant asks for pardon. The same servant, however, insists upon payment of one hundred pence from his fellow servant. When the fellow asks for pardon, the servant refuses, mercilessly sends the fellow to prison and demands that he pay what he owes. The other servants, disturbed by what they see, bring the issue before the lord for arbitration. Angry, the lord reminds the servant that he forgave him his debts and asks if the servant should not have done the same for his fellow. The lord then delivers the servant to the torturers until he pays the ten thousand talents. The parable is meant to teach the reader to embody forgiveness, as the gloss makes clear: "So also shall my heavenly Father do to you, if you forgive not every one his brothers from your hearts" (Matthew 18:35). The gloss encourages the reader to emulate the actions of the lord rather than following the temptation to refuse forgiveness and demand payment of wrongdoers. In his commentary on Matthew 18:23-35, Thomas Aquinas emphasizes the embodiment of forgiveness in relation to the spoken expression of it: "It is better that you should cry out with your mouth, and forgive in your heart, than that you should speak smoothly, and be unrelenting in your heart." See his *Catena Aurea*, ed. John Henry Newman (Southampton: The Saint Austin Press, 1997), I; 647. See too the sermon on Matthew 18 in Woodburn O. Ross, *Medieval Sermons* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960) p. 36-45. This sermon understands the king to be God, the servant man and the ten thousand talents to be the Ten Commandments.

Rather than practicing restitution as a means of embodying forgiveness, the community members resist the model set forth by Conscience. At first, the resistance takes the form of repeated uncertainty: “‘How?’ quod all þe commune; ‘thow conseylest vs to 3elde / Al þat we owen eny wyhte or we go to hosele?’” (XXI.391-392).

Reminiscent of the search for “the way” at the end of Passus VII, here the community knows that it needs to pay what it owes, but it does not know how to re-create broken bonds of community before consuming the host. Conscience affirms that he and the cardinal virtues, those that inform practical action, advise making restitution. Then he glosses this counsel to make it applicable to the individual: “Or vch man for3eue oþer, and þat wol þe paternost[er]: / *Et dimitte nobis debita nostra & c.* / And so to ben assoiled and sennes be hoseled” (XXI.393-395). Derek Pearsall reads Conscience’s advice here as an alternative form of eucharistic preparation for those who have no debts to pay.¹²⁴ While this might be the case, I would add that Conscience’s directions attempt to address the confusion around the concept of communal yielding. He explains the process of one individual forgiving another as being the first step in the larger formation of a loving community. Conscience tells “each man” to forgive the other so that through the pater noster “we” may communally seek forgiveness of “our” debts prior to absolution and communion.

Conscience’s call for communal forgiveness in the pater noster and the practical resistance to his model shown by members of the community sounds much like

¹²⁴ See Pearsall, 357 note 394.

Augustine's account of peace and conflict in Book XIX of *The City of God*. Augustine differentiates between the City of God on pilgrimage and the City of God in future exaltation. The peace of God's servants here and now, he explains, affords men solace for wretchedness rather than the joy of blessedness:

Our righteousness itself, too, though genuine, in virtue of the genuine Ultimate Good to which it is referred, is nevertheless only such as to consist in the forgiveness of sins rather than in the perfection of virtues. The evidence for this is in the prayer of the whole City of God on pilgrimage in the world, which, as we know, cries out to God through the lips of all its members: 'Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.' And this prayer is not effective for those whose 'faith, without works, is dead' but only for those whose 'faith is put into action through love.' For such a prayer is needed by righteous men because the reason, though subjected to God, does not have complete command over the vices in this mortal state and in the 'corruptible body which weighs heavy on the soul.' In fact, even though command be exercised over the vices it is assuredly not by any means without a conflict. And even when a man fights well and even gains the mastery by conquering and subduing such foes, still in this situation of weakness something is all too likely to creep in to cause sin, if not in hasty action, at least in a casual remark or a fleeting thought.¹²⁵

This passage eloquently expresses the formation of forgiveness through an ecclesiology that understands the struggles involved with leading a virtuous Christian life. The Christian does not pray for forgiveness as a means to perfect virtuous living but rather prays because he does not have control over the vices and so must seek forgiveness for sin. The appeal for divine help is not effective for those who do not practice forgiveness but only for those who put faith into action through love, for those who practice the craft

¹²⁵ Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson. (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 892-3.

of love. But for Augustine, the community that puts faith into action through love is not peaceful. Instead, he emphasizes the struggle inherent in the practice of forgiveness: it is assuredly not without conflict. Even when a man masters the craft of love, when he fights well and conquers the enemy, his mastery is not complete and is not permanent. Sin creeps back in to the City of God on pilgrimage and the struggle continues.

In part, the final passus of *Piers Plowman* explores the ecclesiastical institutions that are meant to uphold penance but that contribute to its breakdown. Elizabeth Fowler has shown the ways that Chaucer's pardoner sidelines penitential mutuality.¹²⁶ As we see with Chaucer's pardoner, Langland's church intends to uphold penance but instead insulates people from the mutuality that the poem calls for.¹²⁷ This resurgence of sin occurs in the final passus of *Piers Plowman*. Reformulated as members of an army, the seven sins wage a war against Conscience and Unity (XXII.215) with the help of their leader, Antichrist, who enters the poem in the form of a man (XXII.52).¹²⁸

¹²⁶ See Elizabeth Fowler, *Literary Character: The Human Figure in Early English Writing* (Ithaca: University of Cornell Press, 2003), 32-87.

¹²⁷ A relevant debate around penance at this time was about the role of the friars in hearing confession. Papal bulls allowed for mendicants to preach and to hear confession, thereby placing them into competition with secular clergy. For friars and *Piers Plowman*, see Penn R. Szittyá, *The Antifraternal Tradition in Medieval Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), esp. chapter 7; Wendy Scase *Piers Plowman and the New Anticlericalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 247-287; Lawrence M. Clopper, "*Songes of Rechelesnesse*": *Langland and the Franciscans* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997).

¹²⁸ Langland's use of the term "Antichrist" has led many critics to consider Langland's apocalypticism. My own understanding of Antichrist as the figural foe to the embodiment of forgiveness most closely aligns with Frank Robert Worth's account of the final passus: "True, there are apocalyptic overtones to this vision, but in spite of its disasters, warning and brave hopes it is not a vision of the Last Judgment. Although doctrinally the appearance of Antichrist was a sign of approaching Doomsday, by the fourteenth century 'Antichrist' had become a mere term of abuse. That is how the poet uses Antichrist here. He says

Antichrist, the embodiment of sin, stands in stark contrast to the wholly absent embodiment of forgiveness. We should remember that this community has resisted the perfection of virtue by rejecting the embodiment of forgiveness, the sacrament of the altar, and so now must contend with the embodiment of sin. Moreover, this rejection leaves the community to penitential practice with an imperfect master of the craft of

nothing about Doomsday. Antichrist suggests an enemy within the Church, and the poet's Antichrist heads an army composed of the sins allied with evil churchmen, religious, and the friars." See his *Piers Plowman and the scheme of salvation; an interpretation of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 112. Although I generally agree with his reading, it is important to notice that Antichrist is more than a "term" of abuse because it is embodied in the form of a man. Morton Bloomfield's influential reading suggests that the poem is about social regeneration and that the figure of "Antichrist is actually evidence for renewal and fundamentally a hopeful sign." For Bloomfield, Langland is a millenarian poet who did not expect the end of the world but rather expected a "new or reformed age or just a reconstitution of the Church in its primal purity." See his *Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth-century Apocalypse* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1962), 125; 216-217. Although Langland's final passus is most certainly a call for Church reform, I think it emphasizes his ecclesiological model of the church militant without offering an account of a "new reformed age," whether in the form of Bloomfield's millennial society or as the Church triumphant. Responding to Frank and Bloomfield, Richard Emmerson situates Langland's final passus within the traditional pattern of last-day events in *Antichrist in the Middle Ages: A study of Medieval Apocalypticism, Art and Literature* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981), 200-3. For Emmerson, Antichrist is not merely a term of abuse but is the eschatological Antichrist who comes at the end of Church history. However, Emmerson disagrees with Bloomfield's more optimistic reading of the end of the poem to say that what follows impiety and sin for Langland is not a millennial society but rather the Last Judgment: "Antichrist in *Piers Plowman* is the final leader of evil in the last days, who attacks the church and forces the individual Christian to decide with whom he will stand. Like the homilists before him, Langland depicts Antichrist at the conclusion of his poem to emphasize the significance of the times, to remind his readers that time is short, and to force Will – and by inference every Christian – to make a decision to withstand Antichrist and prepare for Doomsday," 202-203. To evaluate his reading of Langland, it is interesting to turn to Emmerson's own account of Augustine's model of Antichrist: "On the one hand, he explains in the *City of God*, 20, how Antichrist will come during the final eschatological crisis. The passage includes many of the standard features of the tradition: Antichrist is Satan's agent, the great false prophet of the beast (the godless city), the leader of the devil's final persecution of the faithful. In his sermons on the Johannine epistles, on the other hand, Augustine develops the second expectation of multiple Antichrists already living. ... anyone who is against the word of God, even the individual sinner, is an Antichrist. The church is therefore currently filled with Antichrists – those who, even while wishing to be Christians, deny Christ by their own actions," 65. While Emmerson locates Langland's Antichrist within the former description, I would find his argument more convincing if he acknowledged the insinuations of the former but emphasized the latter.

forgiveness: the Constable Conscience.¹²⁹ Wille encounters Conscience as the constable of the house of Unity by following the counsel of Kynde at the end of his life. Fearing death, Wille begs Kynde to bring him out of care (XXII.201) and Kynde advises Wille to “wende into vnite” and to hold himself there until Kynde sends for him (XXII.204-205). But while he waits, Wille must be sure to “conne som craft” before he comes thence (XXII.206). Wille, not content with the direction to know some craft, asks Kynde which craft is best to learn. Following the Pentecostal language of Grace (XXI.250-251), Kynde defines for Wille the best craft to learn: “Lerne to loue” and leave all the others (XXII.208). Kynde’s counsel redirects the Wille to penitential practice. That is, through the counsel, Wille comes to roam “Thorw contricion and confessioun til y cam to vnite” (XXII.212-213). It is important that the counsel of Kynde to learn the craft of love only takes Wille through contrition and confession until he comes to Unity. It does not, that is, take him to satisfaction but leaves him in the Church where he will have access to the sacramental gifts.

It is upon coming to Unity that Wille encounters the Constable. Standing against Antichrist and the sins to save Christians (XXII.214), Conscience at once recognizes his own inability. He calls to the clergy for help so that he does not fall through imperfect

¹²⁹ The *MED* defines “constable” here as follows: 5 (a) An officer of the king's peace (as of a county, hundred, or town); justice of the peace, constable; ~ of the laue; chef ~; (b) *fig.* For Langland, Christ is the king of peace, the true master of forgiveness. Although Langland sets up the possibility of the peaceful kingdom repeatedly in the poem, he relentlessly returns to the struggles of the church militant. As a result, the poem ends with Conscience as the justice of the peace, the one trying to help the community to gain mastery over Antichrist and the sins.

priests (XXII.228-229). The friars hear Conscience's call and come to help him, but he forsakes their help because they "couthe nat wel here crafte" (XXII.231).¹³⁰ Despite their shortcomings, however, eventually the desperate Conscience comforts the friars and welcomes them to Unity provided that they hold themselves there, give up their logic and "lerneth for to louye" (XXII.250). Although Conscience recognizes their potential to practice the craft of forgiveness by administering the sacrament of penance, he also realizes that the friars are apprentices in the craft. More closely associated with sin as the followers of Antichrist (XXII.58) than with the ability to cure souls (XXII.234), the friars pose more difficulties for Conscience as the Constable of peace than they solve. To practice their craft well, Conscience tells the friars to prioritize learning to love over logic, but envy prompts them to resist (XXII.295).

At the same time that Conscience directs the friars about how to learn their craft, he faces relentless assaults posed to him by Covetousness, the bold sin that is "kene to fihte" as long as his "bagge lasteth" (XXII.141-2) and Unkindness (XXII.296). Conscience holds himself in "vnite holy church" and makes Peace the porter to pin the gates against tale tellars (XXII.299). Here we see Covetousness, Unkindness and false speech from earlier in the poem coming together in a united assault. Hypocrisy begins to fight hard at the gate and "wounded wel wykkedly many a wyse techare / That with Consience acordede and cardinal vertues" (XXII.302-303). Again seeing the breakdown of peaceful accord and virtuous living, Conscience calls for a "leche þat couthe wel

¹³⁰ This brings to mind Meed's confessor – the friar that brings down conscience (III.42-4).

shryue” to help with the wounds inflicted by hypocrisy (XXII.304). Much as *semyvief* depends upon the Samaritan to provide salve for his wounded incapacitated state, Conscience knows that the wounded members of unity need a salve, so he gives the clerk directions: “Go salue tho þat syke [ben] and thorw synne ywounded” (XXII.305).¹³¹ Shrift shapes a “scharp solve” and makes “men do penauns[e]” for the misdeeds they had done and that “Peres pardon were ypayd, *redde quod debes*” (XXII.306-307). Langland makes it clear that this sharp confessional salve would best be administered by those who “sholde þe peple shryue,” a parson or parish priest called a curator because of his ability “to knowe and to hele” (XXII.280). The parishioners who confess to their parish priest, to this type of doctor, will “be aschamed in here shrift” and will have proper “penaunes enioyned” (XXII.282).¹³² The proper penance includes, of course, *redde quod debes*.

Still resistant to the call for amendment and this type of restitution, however, some members of the church start to look for an alternative, softer salve than this hard confession (XXII.309-310). These are the community members who prefer to “fle to þe freres” in Westminster for easy confession and who ask friends for money to go and then

¹³¹ Langland locates the wounded body of Christ, the one often shown in the Crucifixion, here in the church militant.

¹³² The author of *Jacob's Well* uses language similar to Langland's to describe the danger of the festering wound of sin and the necessity of a sharp salve administered by a priest: “for þat skauel of clene schryfte muste nedys folwe sorwe of herte, 3yf þou mowe haue a preest, & ellys þou art out of þe weye of saluacyoun. for, þow3 deed flesch be kut out of a wounde, wyth a scharp corryzie, þi wounde, þow3, nedyth to be pourgyd, wyth a drawyng salue; ellys it wolde rotyn & festryn a3en. Ry3t so, þow3 þi dedly synne be kut out, wyth sorwe of herte, fro þe pyt of þi conscyens, 3it þi conscyens nedyth to be pourgyd, wyth a drawyng salue of clene schryfte, & ellys þe wounde of dedly synne rotyth & festryth a3en in þi soule.” Brandeis, 178-9.

“biddeth frendes / 3erne of for3euenesse or lengore 3eue” (XXII.284-286) in lieu of *redde quod debes*. After hearing the protests of some who seek softer treatments (XXII.309-314), Contrition himself begins to soften and tells Conscience to invite the “Friar Flatterer” (XXII.315) to Unity because many men there are hurt by hypocrisy (XXII.317). At first, Conscience insists that the community has no need for a friar because he knows no better curator than “person oþer parsche prest, pentyauncer or bischope” other than Piers Plowman who has “power ouer alle” and may grant indulgences unless debt prevents it (XXII.318-321). Likely worn out from the battle to defend Unity however, Conscience shows the first sign of softening when grants Contrition’s request and admit the friars: “Y may wel soffre,” sayde Consience, ‘sennes 3e desiren, / That frere flaterare be fet and fisyk 3ow seke” (XXII.322-323). Showing signs of distress, Conscience recognizes that he may well suffer, may well undergo affliction at their entry. But to say that he might “suffer” is also to suggest that he might patiently endure, that he might bear a regimen of penance, if the friar is admitted.¹³³

After hearing this, the friar quickly moves for approval from a lord to hear confession in the parish as if he were a parson and then seeks the bishop’s permission to hear confession in the countries he comes into (XXII.324-328). Peace, the porter of Unity, hastily unpins the gate and asks the friar his will (XXII.330-331). When the friar introduces himself as *sire penetrans domos*, Peace immediately recognizes him and

¹³³ Christ suffered through patient endurance on the cross.

refuses his entrance into Unity because he knows no craft. Not only has the friar failed to learn to love, but according to Peace, he does not know any craft at all and so is not welcome in Unity (XXII. 341-2).¹³⁴ After the refusal, Hende speech, crafty/skillful language, intervenes on behalf of the friar to convince Peace to open the gates by appealing to the possibility of churchly accord:

Hende speche heet pees, ‘opene the gates
Lat in þe frere and his felawe and make hem fayere chiere.
He may se and here here, so may bifalle,
That lyf thorw his lore shal leue Couetyse
And be adrad of deth and withdrawe hym fro pruyde
And acorde with Conscience and kusse here ayther oþer’ (XXII.348-353).

Crafty, noble speech appeals to Peace’s hope about what “may” befall if he allows the friar to enter and if the friar’s teaching is effective: that Conscience may finally embody forgiveness through a kiss of peace with a sinless life.¹³⁵ The possibility of a masterful Conscience overcomes Peace, and he allows the friars to enter without considering the problem with Hende speech’s formulation. What must be an overwhelming hope for peaceful accord prompts Peace to overlook the impossibility of life leaving Covetousness and withdrawing itself from pride without sacramental practice and without grace.

When the friar enters Unity, Conscience welcomes him and presents to him his wounded cousin, Contrition, who suffers from sores (XXII.356-358). Conscience explains that the parson’s plasters “b[it]en to sore,” that the parson leaves them on

¹³⁴ The friar’s craft is not among those given by Grace (XXI.227-229).

¹³⁵ We might expect to hear crafty, noble speech in the King’s court in passus III.

“ouerlonge,” and that he is slow to “chaungen” them so that from “lente to lente he lat his plasters byte” (XXII.359-361). The parson’s salve is not inefficacious. The objection is that he leaves it on for too long and changes it too slowly. The friar takes up Conscience’s temporal language and uses it for his own purposes:

‘That is ouerlonge,’ quod this lymytour, ‘y leue; y schal amenden hit!
And goeth gropeth contricion and gaf hym a plastre
Of ‘a pryue payement and y shal preye for 3ow
And for hem þat 3e aren holde to al my lyf tyme
And make [of] 3ow [memoria] in masse and in matynes
[As] freres of our fraternite for a litel suluer’ (XXII.362-367).

Presumably the friar intends to amend what he believes to be an overly long length of time for the parson’s salve. But he loses control of his crafty speech. The friar’s promise to ‘amenden hit’ brings to mind the Samaritan’s insistence upon restitution in amendment (XIX.204-207) and Christ’s explanation of the incarnation: “y man to amend hit” (XX.388-390). What was problematic at the beginning of the poem, a model of amendment that depends upon privy payment and a little silver, is now undoubtedly corrupt and destructive. Rather than encouraging the penitent to fully remember and recount his sin and to remember Christ’s sacrifice, the friar’s version of shrift “gedereth and gloseth” until Contrition “hadde clene for3ete to crye and to wepe” (XXII.369-370). Again, recognizing his lack, Conscience calls to clergy for help and bids contrition to keep the gate (XXII.375-376). But Peace tells Conscience that Contrition, now enchanted by the friar’s salve, cannot help because it causes him, along with many others,

to sleep (XXII.377-378). In the hands of the friars, the sacrament of penance has become an enchantment for the community that masks the painful wound rather than drawing it out with an effective salve, for “doth men drink dwale; [they] drat no synne” (XXII.379-380).

Despite the bleakness of the situation, Conscience, not falling into despair, recognizes his own lack and seeks help in the final lines of poem:

‘By Crist!’ quod Conscience tho, ‘y wol bicom a pilgrime
And wenden as wyde as þe world re[n]neth
To seke [Peres the Plouhman], þat pruyde myhte destruye,
And þat freres hadde a fyndyng þat for nede flateren
And contrepledeþ me, Conscience; now kynde me avenge
And s[e]nde me hap and hele til y haue [Peres Plouhman].’
And sethe he gradde aftur grace tyl y gan awake (XXII.380-386).

The poem ends with a still-struggling Conscience who opposes the friars’ findings with his own seeking. A member of the City of God on pilgrimage, Conscience pledges to go as wide as the world runs to seek the help of Piers. Conscience has not yet mastered the craft of forgiveness, he still does not embody it. Nor does Wille, who is left within the imploding house of Vnite to follow the advice of kynde: learn the craft of love and leave all the others (XXII.207-208). Kind’s advice is to practice the craft of love, to learn to live in mutuality and forgiveness. Rather than according with Life in a kiss of peace, however, Conscience returns to resistance and calls for kynde to “me avenge” (XXII.384). This unkind call fundamentally denies what it is to be human. It is only after this denial that Wille finally begins to awaken to Conscience’s recognition of his own lack, to his cry for grace (XXII.386).

CHAPTER FOUR

Al Songe to Loue þat Gay Juelle: Telling the Tale of Virtue in Pearl

In Book IX of his *Confessions*, Augustine describes his overwhelming grief following the death of his mother, Monica. Despite his faith that she is not in a miserable state and is not suffering extinction after dying, Augustine's inward struggle causes him great agony and places pressure upon his heart. In a deeply touching acknowledgment of his human vulnerability, Augustine describes the attack of sadness that sweeps over him: "And because it caused me such sharp displeasure to see how much power these human frailties had over me, though they are a necessary part of the order we have to endure and are the lot of the human condition, there was another pain to put on top of my grief, and I was tortured by a twofold sadness."¹ How to endure this twofold sadness, an unbearable grief coupled with the frail lot of the human condition, is the profoundly difficult question facing the dreamer in the late fourteenth-century poem *Pearl*.²

¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 174-175.

² While my project is not to explore the poet's representation of loss and mourning, these issues are central to this poem. David Aers discusses the poem's ability to evoke the "crushing pain we experience in the loss of those we love, pain that is replete with complex psychological and theological implications which *Pearl* sets out to explore." See David Aers, "The Self Mourning: Reflections on *Pearl*," *Speculum* 68 (Jan. 1993): 54-73, esp. 58. On mourning, loss and the limitations of the dreamer's perspective, see

In this poem, a jeweler losing his pearl in a garden becomes an allegory for a father who mourns the death of his infant daughter. His daughter, one of the redeemed virgins from the Book of Revelations, draws him forth with ecclesial imagery to a vision of the City of New Jerusalem, a city that appears to him on the other side of a river. This river maintains the boundary between his world and hers so that when he tries to cross it at the end of the poem, he awakens. Located in a single manuscript in the British Library, Cotton Nero A.x, *Pearl* is one of four poems believed to have been composed by the same anonymous poet. The alliterative verse, written in a north west Midlands dialect, is plainly the product of a highly educated man familiar with courtly culture.³ Much attention has been given to the meticulous structure of the poem: it is 1212 lines long and divided into 20 stanza groups. Each stanza follows a rhyme scheme of

Elizabeth D. Kirk, "The Anatomy of a Mourning: Reflections on the *Pearl* Dreamer," in *The Endless Knot: Essays on Old and Middle English in Honor of Marie Borroff*, ed. M. Teresa Tavormina and R.F. Yeager (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995), 215-225.

³ Unless otherwise noted, all references to *Pearl* are from *Pearl* ed. E.V. Gordon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953). All quotations will be cited parenthetically with reference to line number. I also consult the following edition: *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript: Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, eds. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron (Exeter, University of Exeter Press, 2007). Two of the poems in the manuscript, *Cleanness* and *Patience*, show the poet's familiarity with the Bible, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* shows his intimate knowledge of the court. In his "Introduction," E.V. Gordon discusses the manuscript, sources, the author, date and dialect of *Pearl*, ix – xli. While he notes that there is no solid proof that *Pearl* was written by the same author of the other three poems, he also says that "most of those who have studied the poem in detail have come to the opinion that they are by the same author," xli. There are also critics who suggest that the same poet may have composed *St. Erkenwald*. For an account of the historical situation of Cheshire in relation to London in the late fourteenth century, see the first chapter of Ad Putter's *An Introduction to the Gawain-Poet* (London: Addison Wesley Longman, 1996), 24-37. For the links between aristocracy, alliterative poems, questions of authorship and manuscript, see Elizabeth Salter, *Fourteenth-Century English Poetry: Contexts and Readings* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983).

ababababbcbc and links to the next by concatenation.⁴ In the final group of stanzas, the closing phrase “princes pay” points back to the opening line of the poem, thereby formally representing a perfect circle: the shape of a pearl.⁵

As with *Jacob's Well* and *Piers Plowman*, this allegory never separates the formation of individual virtues and the resistances of sin from the practices of the community. But the edification in this poem takes a different form from the communal versions of penitential practice in the other texts. The building of bliss in *Pearl* is not entirely bound up with the processual building up of forgiveness through the sacrament of penance. The architectural allegory in this poem does not delineate the upbuilding of a forgiving community through the penitential process, the scooping out of polluting sin and the building up of a pure well, as it does in *Jacob's Well*. And unlike Langland, the Pearl Poet does not delineate the debilitating effects of sin, effects that are so polluting that the sacrament of penance might buckle beneath the weight of them. Far from being a “Pelagius redivivus,” the Pearl Poet largely sets aside the sacrament of penance, a key sacrament in his Church, to imagine the already-completed gift of grace.⁶ *Pearl* is as

⁴ As Gordon notes in his appendix to the poem, the linking fails at line 721, but the gap is thought to be textual corruption, 88.

⁵ For two extremely helpful introductions to *Pearl* see Patricia Kean, *Pearl; An Interpretation* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1967) and A.C. Spearing, *The Gawain Poet; A Critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970). Also helpful are the essays in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, ed. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997).

⁶ Though he is writing about *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, David Aers calls the poet a “Pelagius redivivus.” See his “Christianity for Courtly Subjects: Reflections on the Gawain-Poet,” in *A Companion to the Gawain Poet*, eds. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997), 101.

much about God's graceful gift to human beings as it is about a human being's (in)ability to merit salvation. The poem provides an extended account of the Resurrected body of Christ, a city with no need for the church, no need for human penitential activity and no need to build up a forgiven and forgiving community. It already is one.

To receive a vision of the completed city in the latter part of the poem, the resistant dreamer within the Church of the sacraments must become apprenticed to his redeemed daughter, the Pearl Maiden, when she appears to him in a dream vision as a member of the communion of saints. An inversion of the typical parent-child relationship, the Maiden teaches the dreamer about grace, thereby providing him with important resources for how to think and live and go on without his daughter. As the poem progresses and the two relate to one another through storytelling, the dreamer becomes increasingly aware of his shared history with the Maiden because of his growing concern with linguistic precision.⁷ What starts out as his desire to not offend the Maiden grows into a friendship in which she helps him to better assess the form of life that they share as Christians.

This is not, however, to suggest that the sacrament of penance is absent from the poem. For an attempt to liken the poem to a penitential manual, see Gregory Roper, "Pearl, Penitence and the Recovery of the Self," *The Chaucer Review: A Journal of Medieval Studies and Literary Criticism* 28 (1993): 164-186.

⁷ For a discussion of narration in *Pearl*, see A.C. Spearing, *Textual Subjectivity: The Encoding of Subjectivity in Medieval Narrative and Lyrics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 137-173. Spearing discusses the narrator's homodiegesis (same-narrating) as a type of storytelling that does not give expression to a unitary narratorial consciousness but rather that causes a disjuncture between what he calls the "experiencing I" and the "narrating I," see especially 147-159. Although storytelling is critical in my chapter, I am less concerned with the temporality of the "narrating I" than I am with the function of the interlocking stories of the dreamer and the Maiden in shaping the unity of narrative in the poem.

By tracing the forms of life described in *Pearl*, the two models of Christian salvation alongside one another, my methodology resists two recent strands of *Pearl* criticism. The first locates the poem within a particular historical moment. John Bowers tries to show that *Pearl* was written by a royalist, clerical poet from Cheshire with ties to the court of Richard II and to London.⁸ Bowers suggests that the poem is an elegy written for “a young woman crowned in Heaven,” and that this young woman is Richard II’s “Queen Anne, who died at the age of twenty-seven in 1394.”⁹ He makes this claim about the death of the young woman even after acknowledging one page earlier that in the poem, the Pearl Queen dies as an infant, as one who “lyfed not two 3er in oure þede” (483). Bowers ignores the difference between a two year old infant and a twenty-seven year old queen by suggesting that numbers “are notoriously unreliable in medieval texts because they often resulted from misreadings of Roman numerals” and that “‘in oure þede,’ or ‘in our country’ does not require a metaphorical meaning and can be understood literally: she lived in our country, presumably having come originally from another country.”¹⁰ These claims are made without an explanation of how the Roman numeral for two might be misread as twenty seven and without acknowledging that the poem

⁸ John M. Bowers, *The Politics of Pearl: Court Poetry in the Age of Richard II* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001).

⁹ Bowers, 154.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 154.

never mentions that the Pearl Maiden previously lived in another country.¹¹ Unlike Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, a poem likely written to commemorate the death of Blanche, the Duchess of Lancaster and the wife of John of Gaunt, the historical occasion for the writing of *Pearl* remains unknown.¹²

Perhaps more problematic is Bowers' attempt to understand the City of New Jerusalem at the end of *Pearl* as a rewriting of fourteenth-century London. He claims that the Cheshire poet "invokes the stupendous spectacle of New Jerusalem to glorify the English capital by overwriting or subtly revision so many of the familiar flaws of real, everyday London."¹³ Claiming that the poet represents the New Jerusalem as a reconstruction of fourteenth century London fails to recognize that unlike in *St. Erkenwald*, in *Pearl* the poet never mentions the city of London much less its flaws. According to Bowers, chief among these flaws that the poet wished to revise was the issue of urban sanitization. He acknowledges that the poet's description of the river running through the city draws from John's description in the Book of Revelation where the river provides sustenance for the Tree of Life: "And he shewed me a river of water of

¹¹ Bowers goes on to account for the infant reference by suggesting that the "child-queen of heaven" might be suggested by Richard's decision to marry Isabelle of France shortly after Anne's death in 1396. He notes that in Richard's marriage to Isabelle there were elements meant to recall Queen Anne and that these "gestures signaled a process of transfer, translation and transformation. The images of elegiac remembrance were drawn into the center of the marriage celebration as signs of continuity." Bowers, 182-3.

¹² For the occasion of the *Book of the Duchess*, see *The Riverside Chaucer* ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1987), 329. Ian Bishop notes the difficulty of reconciling the historicity of *Pearl*'s autobiographical information with its elusive allegorical presentation. See *Pearl in Its Setting: A Critical Study of the Structure and Meaning of the Middle English Poem* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), 6-9.

¹³ Bowers, 120.

life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street thereof, and on both sides of the river, was the tree of life, bearing twelve fruits, yielding its fruits every month, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:1-2).¹⁴ But then Bowers goes on to claim that “*Pearl’s* celestial river does not function as irrigation. It is instead conceived specifically as a means for keeping the streets free from refuse.”¹⁵ Though he notes it later in the same chapter, here Bowers forgets that the City of New Jerusalem is inhabited by souls, souls that would not produce refuse to be cleared from the already clean streets.¹⁶

Also problematic is a recent strand of materialist criticism. In “*Pearl* – or ‘The Jeweller’s Tale,’” Helen Barr claims that the narrative strategy of *Pearl* can be seen as an example of late fourteenth-century social concerns and practices.¹⁷ She argues that by casting the Dreamer as a jeweler, the poet “establishes a material consciousness right at the heart of the poem” and that “attending to the saturation of social reference in *Pearl* shows us that, in wrestling with issues of eternity, the poem continuously reattaches itself to the material world.”¹⁸ Barr claims that she does not want to set aside the poem’s

¹⁴All scriptural references are from the revised Douay Rheims translation of the Vulgate by Richard Chandler, *The Holy Bible* (Rockford: Tan Books, 1989).

¹⁵ Bowers, 122.

¹⁶ Bowers later remembers that the inhabitants are souls, 140.

¹⁷ Helen Barr, “*Pearl* – ‘The Jeweller’s Tale,’” in *Socioliterary Practice in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 40-62.

¹⁸ Barr, 61. A jeweler, Barr reminds us, works with or trades in precious stones and gems, lives in an urban center and depends upon wealthy clientele, and has contact with but does not belong to the

theology -- she is “not trying to argue that we should cease to think of *Pearl* as a poem which discusses a tricky point about salvation in a consummately aesthetic fashion.”¹⁹

But by insisting upon the poem’s reattachment to the material world, she trivializes the poem’s theology, what she calls its “tricky point” about salvation.

This setting aside is most apparent in her reading of the Parable of the Vineyard, a story about a lord who hires laborers to work for a penny. Regardless of the length of time spent working in the vineyard, all of the laborers receive the same reward at the end of the day. Barr says that the use of the link word “date” in the parable relates to two ways of reckoning time: Merchant’s time and Church time. Drawing from Paul Strohm’s summary of Jacques LeGoff, she defines Merchant’s Time as the secularized basis of productive effort that provides a way of measuring use and productivity. Church Time relates to eternity, from which it is borrowed, and its sole possession by God makes it unavailable for measurement, mortgage or profitable use.²⁰ She uses Merchant’s time to talk about payment by the hour, a form of payment that began after the invention of the mechanical clock. “With clock time,” she writes, “secular hours, as distinct from canonical hours could be bought and sold. The Maiden’s telling of the parable of the

aristocratic social group, 42. Barr’s description draws heavily from another materialist account of the poem: Felicity Riddy, “Jewels in *Pearl*,” in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, ed. Derek Brewer and Jonathon Gibson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997), 142-155.

¹⁹ Barr, 61.

²⁰ Barr, 60.

Vineyard negotiates between the feudal, and the emergent mercantile understanding of time.”²¹ She focuses particular attention on the laborer’s complaint about the pay structure as being time computed in hours: “More haf we serued, vus þink so, / Þat suffred han þe daye3 hete, / Þenn þyse þat wro3t not houre3 two” (553-5).²² For Barr, this dispute arises because the initial agreement to work for a penny a day, what she calls created time, is challenged by calculating payment by the hour, mechanical time. From these lines she concludes that the diction of parable situates the commercial right at the heart of the feudal and the eternal.

To make her case, Barr includes selective readings of both LeGoff and Strohm. As she notes, Jacques LeGoff locates the secularization of the church alongside the change from Church’s time, time measured by clerical hours in an agrarian society, to Merchant’s Time, time measured by the mechanical clock and by church bells to better measure labor in an emerging mercantile economy.²³ However, in her attempt to secularize the poem, Barr does not acknowledge his repeated warnings about making too much of this distinction in the fourteenth century: “Once again, however, in spite of the importance of the change, we should be careful not to make too bald a distinction between secular and religious time”; “Again, it is important to avoid exaggeration. For a

²¹ Barr, 60.

²² Barr, 61.

²³ Jacques LeGoff, *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 29-52.

long while to come, a time associated with natural rhythms, agrarian activity, and religious practice remained the primary temporal framework.”²⁴

Paul Strohm echoes LeGoff’s sentiments about avoiding exaggeration: “This being said, we must nevertheless note the obvious fact that merchant’s time was not the sole possession of merchants . . . and that church’s time did not belong to the church alone”; Most members of the upper and middle strata habitually juggled *both* ideas about time”; “Different domains of activity were saturated by different conceptions of time, and we need not insist that the merchant held a single attitude whether on the quays or at prayer, the aristocrat whether planning a pilgrimage or investing in the wine trade.”²⁵ If different domains of activity were saturated by different conceptions of time, then it seems possible that an agrarian worker could just as easily complain about two hours worth of work as a merchant depending upon a mechanical clock. Furthermore, it is worth repeating that while Merchant’s time was likely emerging at the time *Pearl* was written, as LeGoff emphasizes, a time association with agrarian activity and religious practice remained the primary temporal framework.

I empathize with Barr’s desire to avoid juxtaposing the heavenly and earthly and figurative and literal in the poem.²⁶ However, turning to a distinction between Merchant’s time and Church time to avoid a closed hermeneutic system becomes less

²⁴ LeGoff, 48-49.

²⁵ Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 124-5.

²⁶ Barr, 41.

necessary if we consider the function of eschatological time, a time clearly represented in *Pearl*. Although he writes about Augustine's ecclesiological model, David Aers makes clear that an account of eschatological time inherently resists simple dichotomies:

Just as Augustine's language resists dichotomization of visible and invisible Church so it resists any simple, unqualified identification of the city of God and the Catholic Church. The Church both already is the city of God and is not yet the city of God. This is a structure of theological reflection pervading Christian understanding of the relations between the kingdom of God already revealed in Christ and the kingdom of God prayed for and awaited, an eschatological event.²⁷

This model of the City of God is very present in *Pearl*. The Maiden already is a member of the City of God and the dreamer still awaits the kingdom of God, the eschatological even that he briefly glimpses. Taking into account the poem's eschatology breaks down a simple dichotomy between heaven and earth, between the figurative and the literal.

To avoid the types of historicist and materialist criticism that seek to secularize the poem, I turn instead to a learning model that is intrinsic to it. Because of his striking linguistic precision, I am particularly interested in the *Pearl* poet's model of language acquisition. For the *Pearl* dreamer, learning the language of grace from the Maiden resembles a child learning to speak. Particularly useful for thinking about linguistic apprenticeship is Stanley Cavell's excursus on Wittgenstein's vision of language:

In learning a language, you do not merely learn the pronunciation of sounds, and their grammatical orders, but the "forms of life" which make those sounds the words they are, do what they do – e.g., name, call, point, express a wish or

²⁷ David Aers, *Salvation and Sin: Augustine, Langland and Fourteenth-Century Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 7.

affection, indicate a choice or an aversion, etc. And Wittgenstein sees the relations among *these* forms as ‘grammatical’ also.

Instead, then, of saying either that we *tell* beginners what words mean, or that we *teach* them what objects are, I will say: We initiate them, into the relevant forms of life held in language and gathered around the objects and persons of our world. For that to be possible, we must make ourselves exemplary and take responsibility for that assumption of authority; and the initiate must be able to follow us, in however rudimentary a way, *naturally*...; and he must *want* to follow us.... “Teaching” here would mean something like “showing them what we say and do”, and “accepting what they say and do as what we say and do”, etc.; and this will be more than we know, or can say.²⁸

Cavell’s grammatical picture shows the relationship between word and world so that learning a language does not just depend upon the ability to name things but rather requires participation in shared forms of life. In *Pearl*, the dreamer is initiated into learning the language of love because he naturally wishes to follow his teacher, the Pearl Maiden. He begins the poem with the knowledge of human courtly love and learns the language of theological love, virtuous speech, from what the Pearl Maiden says and does. The painful reality at the end of the poem, for the dreamer and for the medieval reader, is the realization that full initiation into the forms of life shared by the Maiden and her community is not possible because her world is not theirs. Though he is formed by and

²⁸ Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 177-178. Cavell is in keeping with Alasdair MacIntyre’s model of apprenticeship in the virtues. I choose to use Cavell here because his main concern is with language acquisition, a concern shared by the *Pearl* poet. Also relevant, however, is MacIntyre’s understanding that man is essentially a storytelling animal and that the telling of stories plays a key role in educating us into the virtues. The two models work well together because to tell a story, of course, one must first learn to speak a language. See Alasdair MacIntyre, Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, reprinted in 2003), 216.

through her friendship, the dreamer remains a member of the Church militant, still dependant upon sacramental practice, and the Maiden remains a member of the Church triumphant.

Reminiscent of Augustine's inward struggle, *Pearl* opens with a jeweler lamenting the loss of his singularly-set pearl in a garden. Invoking the language of erotic human love, "luf-daungere," this judger of gems situates himself firmly within a courtly culture (11).²⁹ The jeweler's thronging heart and the swelling of his breast suggest a split in unity, not only from his pearl but also within the self (17-18).³⁰ Finding solace in singularity and silence, he never thinks "so swete a sange / As styлле stounde let to [him] stele" (19-20). This inward turn, a moment in which he converses with no one and seems to exist independently of others, only provides him with momentary relief, a seemingly sweet song, because soon his reason tries to make sense of her death (51). But his intellectual faculty does not provide him with the ability to think through this unintelligible loss -- even his "fyrce skylle3 that faste fa3t" do him no good (54). Although he has been taught to find comfort in the kindness of Christ, his wretched will

²⁹ Gordon glosses lines 11-12 as follows: I am pining away, grievously wounded, through the power of my love for my own pearl, that had no flaw," 46. On the tradition of courtly culture and the term "luf-daungere," see Aers, 57-58.

³⁰ *Pearl*, lines 17 – 18. The entry for "throng" (adv) is "grievously, painfully." Also relevant is the entry for "throngen" (v): (a) To press (sth.), crush; (b) to force one's way (into a melee); crowd (around sb.); (c) to run (sb.) through, pierce. All references to the *Middle English Dictionary*, hereafter *MED*, are to "*The Middle English Compendium*," The University of Michigan. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/mec/> (accessed January 18, 2010).

is so wrought in woe that, understandably incapacitated, he does not turn outside of the self to seek the sacramental resources of the Church (55-6).³¹

In this state of grief-stricken hopelessness, the exhausted dreamer falls asleep in the garden.³² While his body remains dreaming in the garden, the dreamer receives God's gift as his "goste is gon in Gode's grace" (63). A central preoccupation is set forth here that resurfaces later in the poem in various forms: what is the relationship between the dreamer's wretched will and God's grace? At this point, the issue of agency concerns the dreamer's ability to find comfort within the self. As the poem develops, however, this issue grows into larger questions about how much agency a person has in achieving salvation and about the role of the sacraments and the Church in Christian salvation history.

³¹ In other words, the dreamer does not yet recognize his faith, the virtue that elevates the light by which the intellect knows the truth. Like faith elevating the intellect, love and hope elevate the will's inclination toward the good at its end. The dreamer does not recognize his faith because his wretched will has not yet been infused by love and hope. As Michael S. Sherwin notes, "Faith elevates the light by which the intellect knows truth, while charity and hope elevate the will's inclination toward the good as its end. We are dealing here with the virtues: they are habitual dispositions that incline the intellect and the will to act, but they are not themselves the acts of these powers," 55. For my understanding of the virtues in relation to knowledge in human action, see Michael S. Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*. (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 152-163.

³² There is an important demarcation between the dreamer in *Pearl* and Langland's *Wille*. The dreamer's will is wholly consumed by grief and although he is aware of the resources of the Church, his wretched will is unable to seek them. In *Piers Plowman*, *Wille* might not know "the way," but the poem begins with him setting out to search. The *Pearl* dreamer is reminiscent of *semyuief*—half alive, half dead and completely dependant upon outside help. All references to *Piers Plowman* are to Langland's final revision of the poem: *Piers Plowman: The C Version*, ed. George Russell and George Kane (Berkeley: Athlone Press, 1997).

When the dreamer opens his eyes, he does not recognize his surroundings: “I ne wyste in þis worlde quere hit wace” (65). No longer in a recognizable space, the dreamer can not appeal to his intellect to locate himself within the unfamiliar. He finds himself amidst a glistening, adorned set of crystal cliffs and sees indigo trees with silver leaves (74-7). Indeed it is as if he has “awakened from his sleep inside a manuscript illumination.”³³ When he sees a river with pools of water reflecting the pebbles/gemstones at the bottom, he does not do what we might expect a jeweler to do: to take the gems from the river and craft them into jewelry (109-120). Instead, he allows the landscape to work within him: “The dubbement dere of doun and dale3, / Of wod and water and wlonk playne3, / Bylde in my blys, abated my bale3, / Fordidden my stresse, dystryed my pane3” (121-4). This is a very different model from *Jacob’s Well* where the author encourages the reader to use materials like wood and limestone to build a well as a means turn outside of the self in search of the virtues. The Pearl dreamer allows the materials to work upon him, to build bliss within. This building not only arouses joy but it also promotes Christianity within, remedies ills and provides a foundation for his faith.³⁴ The reception of this bliss allows him to turn from the self. He begins to think less about his pain as he looks across the river and starts to hope that Paradise might be located on the other side (137).

³³ I borrow this language from A.C. Spearing, *Textual Subjectivity*, 159.

³⁴ *MED* definitions 4 and 5 for “bylde.”

This hopeful searching leads the dreamer to a vision of the Pearl Maiden. Critics of *Pearl* often emphasize the dreamer's visual description of her (161-240). Importantly, his recognition of her grows as he looks at the details of her figure from across the river; looking allows him to realize that he "knew her wel, [he] had sen hyr ere" and then that she was more near to him "þen aunt or nece" (164, 233). That is, his visual reception of her allows him to associate her with his lost pearl, with his deceased daughter. Equally significant is that the poet frames the visual description with sound – a "nwe note" leads the dreamer to the Maiden and her "speche" moves him back out of the visual mode and into his first narrative (155, 235). Picking up on and revising the earlier juxtaposition of silent song, the dreamer now hears but one note of a new song, one in a series of musical tones.³⁵ This new note leads him to look to the Maiden. After his visual reception of her, she speaks to him for the first time:

Ho proffered me speche, þat special spece,
Enclynande lowe in womman lore,
Ca3te of her coroun of gret tresore
And haylsed me wyth a lote ly3te (235-8).

³⁵ In addition to describing a musical quality of a voice, a singular "note" is one in a series of musical tones. See the *MED* definition 1 and 2. The dreamer encounters the "new song" of the communion of saints later in the poem. Here he only hears one note because he only recognizes the singularity of the Pearl Maiden. Several entries for "note" in the *MED* are useful here: 1 e) the musical qualities of a voice, 2) one of a series of musical tones, 3) notice; attention, 5) an abstract token or indication of essential form. We encounter the "new song" later in the poem when the dreamer no longer holds the Pearl Maiden singularly in singular as he does at the beginning (8).

As would befit a courtly Maiden, she properly puts herself forth in speech and greets him with a light gesture.³⁶ This speech act, the Maiden's "lote ly3te," provides a rich meaning when unpacked: a gesture, virtuous behavior and a word, speech or talk. The Maiden, as a new note, is put forth to the dreamer as virtuous speech.³⁷ She expresses joy lightly, with great ease, because she speaks the language of grace, the language of divine light.

Her speech leads him to wonder if she is the one for whom he longs, if she was the gem that glided away from him into the grass (241-5). This coming together of the Maiden with his lost pearl from the opening of the poem provides him with a recognition that then leads into his first attempt to speak about her state of grace: "Pensyf, payred, I am forpayned, / And þou in a lyf of lykyng ly3te, / In Paradys erde, of stryf vnstrayned" (246-7). The dreamer first clearly articulates his thoughtful pain and then tries to use language that he has not mastered because he is a human being. To successfully speak the language of grace would mean sharing the forms of life known to those in Paradise. The first words that the Maiden speaks to the dreamer are important. As an exemplary figure, the Pearl Maiden assumes authority by teaching him that he has mistold his story: "Sir," she says, "3e haf your tale mysetente" (257). She corrects his misuse of language

³⁶ Although I emphasize "lore" as being proper conduct for a woman, the *MED* entries show that it also has interesting and relevant linguistic and edificatory connotations: 1) the action or process of teaching, instruction, education, 3) a command, bidding, 4) advice, counsel, 5) a field of learning: a science or craft 6) a) a narrative story, b) a pronouncement or statement 7) the language of a people or land.

³⁷ Here I draw from the *MED* definitions of "lote" in relation to her greeting: 1) a gesture, 2) virtuous or vicious behavior and 3) a word, speech or talk.

because “to say” that his pearl is all away is mistaken – his speech does not match her form of life (258). What he has lost, she tells him, was but a rose that flowered and failed but that proved to be a pearl of great price (262-72).

After the Maiden corrects his language, the dreamer asks “to be excused” for his mistake and then expresses his joy at finding the Maiden: “I trawed my perle don out of dawē3. / Now haf I fonde hyt, I schal ma feste” (282-3). The dreamer rejoices in his first finding, in his recognition of the gift of divine grace through the revelation of the Maiden. This finding seems to mark the end of a quest for him, the end of his seeking: “And wony wyth hyt in schyr wod-schawē3, / And loue my Lorde and al his lawē3/ Þat hat3 bro3t þys blys ner. / Now were I at yow by3onde þise wawē3 / I were a ioyful jueler” (284-8). The jeweler stumbles into a distorted glimpse of God’s good and gracious teleology for humans, one that seems to exclude divine judgment. The Maiden does not react gently to this misuse of language: “Þre worde3 hat3 þou spoken at ene: / Vnavysed, for soþe wern all þre. / Þou ne woste in worlde quat on dot3 mene; / Þy worde before þy wytte con fle” (291-3). More biting than an admonishment to think before he speaks, the Maiden tells him that his words are truly unadvised, unadvised for speaking truth. The danger in not speaking the truth lies in the rupture of word from truth.

Following what seems to be an extraordinarily harsh response to his joy at finding her, the Pearl Maiden introduces an intimate link between salvation history and the Word of God:

I halde þat iueler little to prayse
Þat leue3 wel þat he se3 wyth y3e,

And much to blame and vncortayse
 Þat leue3 oure Lorde wolde make a ly3e,
 Þat lelly hy3te your lyf to rayse,
 Þa3 fortune dyd your flesch to dy3e.
 3e setten hys worde3 ful westernays
 Þat leue3 noþynk bot 3e hit sy3e.
 And þat is a poynt o sorquydry3e,
 Þat vche god mon may euel byseme,
 To leue no tale to be true to try3e
 Both þat hys one skyl may dem (301-12).

The Maiden imbeds the word of God, his faithful promise to Christians, in the middle of a stanza about the limitations of human speech. She invokes the dreamer's own language of court and craft from the opening stanza to describe to him the repercussions of believing what he sees. 'Discourteous' is the man who believes that the Lord would 'make a lie'; for "God alone is a truth-teller, while every human being is a liar, so it is written" (Romans 3:4). In his book *Lying: An Augustinian Theology of Duplicity*, Paul J. Griffiths shows that for Augustine, human speech replicates the speech of Diabolus in John 8:41-45:³⁸

... Augustine treats John 8:44-45 as though it applied to everyone and not just to Diabolus. He is the paradigmatic liar, the first to attempt expropriation of speech.

³⁸ John 8:41-45: You do the works of your father. They said therefore to him: We are not born of fornication: we have one Father, even God. Jesus therefore said to them: If God were your Father, you would indeed love me. For from God I proceeded, and came; for I came not of myself, but he sent me: Why do you not know my speech? Because you cannot hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and he stood not in the truth; because truth is not in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father thereof. But if I say the truth, you believe me not.

But when we lie we replicate what he did, we twist and corrupt our speech, so that we cannot speak of or to God, but only of and to ourselves.³⁹

The liar speaks always and only *de suo* (about himself, to himself and from himself).⁴⁰

Speech is a gift freely given by God, and a condition of its use is that it is received as such.⁴¹ This expropriation, this attempt to own and control oneself without reference to God, attempts to turn a freely given gift into what is privately owned by the sinner. The jeweler's attempt to expropriate speech when he tries to "setten hys worde³" inevitably leads him to a lie, to setting the Lord's language askew.⁴² The point of pride, a thing hated by the meek that dwell near the Lord, makes a good man seem evil because he only believes tales that he can discern through his own skill rather than hearing the Word of God (402-3). Being bound to this listening and speaking would leave the dreamer incapable of hearing the Maiden's tale of grace, of hearing the Word of God.

³⁹ Paul J. Griffiths, *Lying: An Augustinian Theology of Duplicity* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Brazos Press, 2004), 89.

⁴⁰ Griffiths, 89.

⁴¹ Griffiths, 93.

⁴² Gordon glosses "westernays" as "askew." Gordon notes that Osgood emended the word to "besternays," meaning "turned round, reversed" and that Bradley and later Gollancz followed this change, believing that the alteration to "w" from "b" was "due to the influence of *west*, since the word was applied to a church which faced west instead of east as was then usual," 57. Although I do not wish to make too much of this because the meaning is unclear, I do think that it is worth noting the possible connection between proper language and proper church construction, especially if we think of Christ's body as the church. The dreamer's pride would set the body of Christ backward with the holiest of holies facing the wrong way. Sister Mary Vincent Hillman suggest another interesting and relevant possibility for glossing that line: "Ye make His words a quite empty pledge." She notes that this would mean that by believing only what you see, "you make what Our Lord promised (hy3te, 305) regarding the resurrection of the body (305-6) a pledge without value. Using language to empty the Lord's language of value would be problematic. See Hillman, "*The Pearl: west ernays* (307); *Fasor* (432)," *Modern Language Notes* 58 (1943): 42-44.

In order to hear the tale, the dreamer must receive language as gift.⁴³ “Speech, properly used, abjures or disowns itself, abnegates itself by returning itself to its giver. The speech-act that does this most fully and perfectly is the act of confession, which is also the act of adoration.”⁴⁴ With growing humility, the dreamer again asks for forgiveness. He asks for the Lord to not be offended by his stumbling discourse and he asks the Maiden to never rebuke him with deadly words (362-7). The deadly words at once refer to her language, to her criticisms of him, and to the deadly language of pride that works against the Lord’s faithful language that saves (306-7). The dreamer confesses that he raves rashly because of the misery in his heart and compares his linguistic outpouring to walled water leaving a well (363-5).⁴⁵ The *Pearl* dreamer confesses his lack of control over his language and meaning, he confesses that he does not possess his own language. His acknowledgment allows him to begin to differentiate between his linguistic ability and the Maiden’s. “Pa3 cortaysly 3e carp con,” he tells her,

⁴³ My understanding of language as gift is similar to Theodore Bogdanos’ version in *Image of the Ineffable: a Study in Medieval Poetic Symbolism* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State UP, 1983), 5. Bogdanos’s main interest “is to highlight the artistic possibilities of analogy and metaphoric process, affirming the centrality of the physical aspect and seeing it in dynamic counterpoise to the spiritual aim of any poetic similitude,” 5.

⁴⁴ Griffiths p. 90.

⁴⁵ *Pearl*, lines 363-365. In *Confessions*, Augustine uses similar language to describe the “overwhelming grief welled into his heart” that “was about to flow forth in floods of tears” after the death of his mother, Monica. After the agony of his inward struggle, Augustine confesses to God and in so doing, experiences a relief: “I was glad to weep before you about her and for her, about myself and for myself. Now I let flow the tears which I had held back so that they ran as freely as they wished. My heart rested upon them, and it reclined upon them because it was your ears that were there, not some human critic who would put a proud interpretation on my weeping. And now, Lord, I make my confession to you in writing. Let anyone who wishes read and interpret as he pleases.” Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 174-5.

“I am bot mol and manere³ mysse” (481-2). He starts to recognize his lack, his missing manners, in relation to her courteous carping. Although “carp” potentially could denote “opprobrious speech” in Middle English, the dreamer’s description of the Maiden’s “courteous carp” makes it more likely that he intends it to mean something like “courteous discourse.”⁴⁶ More interesting is that carp also means to “tell a tale” or to “sing about.”⁴⁷ This significant word choice shows that the dreamer now differentiates between her language and his own speech act. After this newfound humility the dreamer will “bysech” her “wythouten debate” to “say” to him “what lyf [she] lede[s] erly and late” (390-2). This is the first time that the dreamer moves beyond his self-seeking lamentations to ask the Maiden for an account of her narrative. His shift in language pleases the Maiden, his “speche is to [her] dere,” so she invites him to walk with her as she narrates her story (399-400).

She begins her account with what he has already said of her: that she leads a blissful life and that he knows well that she was young when he lost his pearl (409-411). This is the first in an important series of asking for and giving of accounts that leads the dreamer to seek the moral life, to ask what the good is for himself and for man. The tale-telling leads the narrator to recognize the congruencies between his own narrative quest and the Maiden’s while at the same time differentiating between her narrative of grace and his of penance. Taking the two together shows the story of a Christian community

⁴⁶ *MED*, 3c; 1a.

⁴⁷ *MED*, 2a; 2b.

seeking faith together through friendship. The Maiden explains to the dreamer that her “Lorde þe Lombe þur3 hys godhead” took her to marriage and “Corounde [her] queen in blysse to brede / In lenghe of daye3 þat euer schal wage” (413-15). The dreamer does not immediately question the Pearl Maiden’s account of her marriage to Christ, nor does he attend to her version of time and wage.⁴⁸ Instead, he turns to the familiar, to the courtly language of crowning a queen. Not wishing to displease the Maiden with erroneous speech, he draws language from his Christian practice, the Creed and the Ave Maria, to evaluate the truth of her story: “We leuen on Marye þat grace of grewe, / Þat ber a barne of vyrgyn flour / Þe croun fro hyr quo mo3t remwe / Bot ho hir passed in sum fauour?” (421-6). In the first three lines, the dreamer rehearses his belief about Mary’s place in the hierarchy of heaven, one similar to Biel’s teaching: “her place at the right hand of the Son is called the first hierarchy, above the angels and creatures, directly under the Trinity, prepared for her from all eternity, from which she is to rule over empire of heaven and earth.”⁴⁹ The dreamer wonders how the Maiden could be situated in the first hierarchy, how she could pass Mary in favor. But this questioning is not just about the Maiden’s courtly placement. By asking the question, the self-reflective dreamer also

⁴⁸ The discussion of time and wage reemerges in the parable of the Vineyard. For the function of time, especially in the parable of the vineyard, see Lynn Staley Johnson, “The *Pearl* dreamer and the eleventh hour,” in *Text and Matter*, ed. Blanch, Youngerman and Wasserman (Troy, N.Y. : Whitston, 1991,) 3-15.

⁴⁹ Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 311. The Pearl Maiden uses similar language to locate herself within Mary’s empire: “Both my Lady of quom Jesu con spryng, / Ho halde3 þe empire ouer vus ful hy3e; / And þat dysplese3 non of our gyng, / For ho is Quene of cortaysye.” See *Pearl*, lines 453-456.

considers his Christian education, brings into question his own belief and faith. To dispel doubt upon hearing this, the Maiden visually lowers herself by kneeling to the ground and folding up her face to the beginning of grace in the “makele3 Moder” (434-6).

The Maiden affirms the absence of “supplantore3” in heaven and calls Mary the “Quen of cortaysye” (440, 456). This title at once identifies Mary as a courtly ideal⁵⁰ and as being a bestower of a gracious gift of mercy, as she from whom that grace grew. But this language of queenly courtesy brings with it a difficulty: in some sense, every queen is a “supplantor.” To become a queen, that is, means usurping the throne of another. To move away from the problem of earthly power, the Maiden emphasizes Mary’s heavenly courtesy by invoking the language of courtesy Christ in St. Paul:

Of courtaysye, as sayt3 Saynt Poule,
Al arn we membre3 of Jesu Kryst:
As heued and arme and legg and naule
Temen to hys body ful trwe and tryste,
Ry3t so is vch a Krysten sawle
A longande lym to þe Mayster of myste.
Þenne loke what hate oþer any gawle
Is tached oþer ty3ed þe lymme3 bytwyste.
Þy heued hat3 nauþer greme ne gryste,
On arme oþer finger þa3 þou ber by3e.
So are we alle wyth luf and lyste
To kyng and queen by cortaysye (457-468).

Drawing from 1 Corinthians 12, this passage describes what it means to be joined to the

⁵⁰ *MED* entries for “cortaysye”: 1a) the complex of courtly ideals and 2a) refinement of manners. In this sense, the language returns to the courtly language at the beginning of the poem. Also relevant is 5) gracious reward or gift.

‘Master of Myste,’ apprenticed in faith to Jesus Christ.⁵¹ Interestingly, the Pearl Maiden does not use this reference as a conventional link between Christ’s body and the Church.⁵²

This choice becomes more evident by placing her account against the anonymous author’s invocation of the same Pauline passage in *Jacob’s Well*. Embedded in his chapter on friendship, a chapter meant to be read on Easter Sunday, the author identifies eight skills that should “steryn a mannys herte to loue & to shewe frenschippe,” among them that “we arn alle lymes of o body. þe body is holy cherche, þe heued is crist, & we arn þe lymes.”⁵³ For this author, participating in the Church’s sacramental practice stirs a man’s heart to love and grace. It is through Christ’s friendship to men, through his willingness to put himself in peril to save another man from harm, that he provides the possibility for charitable friendship among men. Love, in turn, allows each man to serve another, to be charitable. The plural pronoun makes clear that the author envisions himself and the reader as limbs helping one another in friendship.⁵⁴

⁵¹ This phrase is difficult. Gordon glosses “myste” as “spiritual mysteries (?rendering *spiritalibus* 1 Cor xii.1).” See Gordon, glossary, 143.

⁵² Here she emphasizes that each Christian soul is joined to the body of Christ. The Pearl Maiden does not provide her ecclesiology until after the Parable of the Vineyard, a passage I read as an important discourse on baptismal entry into the Church. It is only after the dreamer recognizes that their narratives interlock at the point of baptism, that they are both Christian members who have entered the Church, that she goes on to explain the relation between the earthly city and the City of New Jerusalem.

⁵³ This and all subsequent references are to *Jacob’s Well*, ed. Arthur Brandeis, EETS 115 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co, 1900), 234.

⁵⁴ In making the comparison between the author of *Jacob’s Well* and the Pearl Maiden, it is important to keep in mind that the anonymous author locates himself within the Church as a member of the Church

Though the Pearl Maiden does not employ plural pronouns to incorporate the dreamer into the body of Christ and into her text, the Pauline reference nonetheless prompts him to believe in her charitable participation in heaven and to consider it alongside his own church practice, alongside his achieving honor by living in penance (470, 477). The dreamer differentiates between her story and what he takes to be his own – he recognizes that the Maiden possesses the virtue of love and that he must practice to improve his disposition. Appealing to church practice, the dreamer questions whether the Maiden could be made Queen in heaven on her first day because she lacks the knowledge of her Pater Noster and her Creed (485-6). He does not believe that God would turn away in such an unjust manner, presumably away from a just path to salvation that in his mind must include certain forms of knowledge and sacramental participation (488). For the dreamer, this is achieved by enduring firmly in the world, by practicing penance (474-5). To show the dreamer that God ordains the truth and that He may do nothing but “riȝt,” the Maiden appeals to something the dreamer has heard before: “As Mathew meleȝ in your messe / In sothfol gospel of God almyȝt / In sample he can ful grayȝely gesse, / And lykneȝ hit to heuen lyȝt” (494-9). The Maiden reminds the dreamer that he already knows the Parable of the Vineyard from Matthew 20: 1-16. As a practicing Christian, he would have heard it before because it is the mid-Lenten reading

militant practicing the virtues whereas she, as a member of the Church triumphant, has already perfected them.

for Septuagesima Sunday. However, the tale that the Pearl Maiden tells does not reproduce the Gospel narrative precisely – she changes the language of the text in important ways.⁵⁵

As mentioned above, the Parable of the Vineyard is the story of a Lord who hires laborers to work in his vineyard for a penny a day. In the evening the Lord comes across workers who stand idle, so he sends them to his vineyard to work. At the end of the day, the early workers and the late comers are paid alike – every worker receives a denarius. Having received their payment for laboring in the vineyard, the early arrivers murmur against the Lord and the Lord responds to their grumbling:

And when evening was come, the lord of the vineyard saith to his steward: Call the labourers and pay them their hire, beginning from the last even to the first. When therefore they were come, that came about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first also came, they thought that they should receive more: and they also received every man a penny. And receiving it they murmured against the master of the house, Saying: These last have worked but one hour, and thou hast made them equal to us, that have borne the burden of the day and the heats. But he answering said to one of them: Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst thou not agree with me for a penny? Take what is thine, and go thy way: I will also give to this last even as to thee. Or, is it not lawful for me to do what I will? is thy eye evil, because I am good? "What I will"... Viz., with my own, and in matters that depend on my own bounty. So shall the last be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen (Matt. 20: 8-16).

The Pearl Maiden makes clear that the dreamer already knows this story: he has heard it before in Mass. But how would the dreamer understand it?

⁵⁵ For the liturgical significance of the parable as the Septuagesima Gospel, see James P. Oakden, "The Liturgical Influence in Pearl," in *Chaucer Und Seine Zeit: Symposium für Walter F. Schirmer*, ed. Arno Esch (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1968), 343-347.

One possibility is to liken entry into the vineyard as entry into the Church through baptism, an association that the Maiden spells out later in the poem when referring to innocents: “As sone as þaye arne borne, by lyne / In þe water of babtem þay dissente: / Þen arn þay boro3t into þe vyne” (626-628). The Pearl Maiden is not the only medieval exegete to liken the vineyard to the Church:

Or; The Master of the household, that is, our Maker, has a vineyard, that is, the Church universal, which has borne so many stocks, as many saints as it has put forth from righteous Abel to the very last saint who shall be born in the end of the world. To instruct this His people as for the dressing of a vineyard, the Lord has never ceased to send out His labourers; first by the Patriarchs, next by the teachers of the Law, then by the Prophets, and at the last by the Apostles, He has toiled in the cultivation of His vineyard; though every man, in whatsoever measure or degree he has joined good action with right faith, has been a labourer in the vineyard.⁵⁶

The Master of the household is Christ, whose house are the heavens and the earth; and the creatures of the heavens, and the earth, and beneath the earth, His family. His vineyard is righteousness, in which are set divers sorts of righteousness as vines, as meekness, chastity, patience, and the other virtues; all of which are called by one common name righteousness. Men are the cultivators of this vineyard, whence it is said, “Who went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.” For God placed His righteousness in our senses, not for His own but for our benefit. Know then that we are the hired labourers. But as no man gives wages to a labourer, to the end he should do nothing save only to eat, so likewise we were not thereto called by Christ, that we should labour such things only as pertain to our own good, but to the glory of God.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea: commentary on the four gospels collected out of the works of the Fathers*, ed. John Henry Newman (Southampton England: Saint Austin Press, 1997), I: 684.

⁵⁷ Aquinas, *Catena Aurea*, 685.

In Gregory's homily, the Lord works in cultivating his vineyard so that the workers in the vineyard can then labor through teaching. In this model of Church, each man labors to join his works, "good action," to faith. In Pseudo-Chrysostom, the vineyard is the unity of virtues, called righteousness, and the laborers toil on the virtues as work that pertains not only their "own good" but also to the "glory of God." The cultivation of the virtues does not earn salvation but is of good action for its own sake. The denarius is something that the workers receive from the Lord for faithful good acts. For Origen, the Lord pays Christian laborers, those who cultivate virtues in the Church, with salvation: "the denarius here I suppose to mean salvation."⁵⁸ Key to Remigius's understanding of work and reward are the virtues of hope and faith: "And that, 'Having agreed with them for a denarius a day,' is well said, to shew that every man labours in the field of the holy Church in hope of the future reward."⁵⁹ If we read the entry into the vineyard as baptism, then it follows to think of the work in the vineyard as sacramental practice, especially penitential practice. This practice should not be done to earn reward but rather to cultivate the virtues, as good action for its own sake.

The invocation of this Gospel narrative, a story deeply concerned with labor and salvation, brings forth theological debates about salvation in relation to Church practice and to grace.⁶⁰ As in Matthew 20, the Lord in *Pearl* instructs the reeve to pay each of the

⁵⁸ Ibid, 685.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 685.

workers alike: “And gyf vchon inlyche a peny.” (545). The Pearl Maiden’s slight shift in language changes the emphasis of payment away from the workers’ reception of the penny (Matthew 20:9) to it being the Lord’s gift (545). This introduces the language of graceful gift that becomes so important for her account of salvation later in the poem. Whereas Matthew’s laborers think that they should receive more, the Pearl Maiden’s workers less humbly and more aggressively “þynk vus o3e to take more” (552). This language of taking more reminds us of the dreamer’s early longing for “more and more,” the link phrase in the third stanza group.⁶¹ It also reintroduces the language of more and less in the discussion of excess and just desert that follows.

The laborers in *Pearl* grumble about the length of their work in the heat as opposed to what the late-comers have “wro3t” in just two hours by invoking the language of service: “More haf we serued, vus þynk so, / ... Þenn þyse þat wro3t not hours two, / And þou dot3 hem vus to counterfete” (553-5). Beginning with the jeweler’s language of more and less, the workers suggest that the late arrives are but counterfeits, false imitations or forgeries, of the early arrivers. This false imitation would presumably be of

⁶⁰ Helen Barr and John Bowers tend to focus on stanzas 42-46. Bowers extracts one line from stanza 47 (line 562, the Lord’s response to the laborers) but otherwise ignores stanza 47 and 48. Likewise, Barr does not engage with stanza 47 or 48. I have not come across a full account of these stanzas – stanzas that mark the end of an important parable.

⁶¹ The concatenation begins at line. 132.

less value.⁶² The word “counterfeit” also contrasts the latecomers with the jeweler’s early description of the Pearl Maiden, a round, spotless gem with smooth sides (5, 6,12). The workers’ insistence upon excess, upon taking more because they have served more, leads them away from linguistic obedience into insolence when they address the Lord using *pou* at the end of the stanza.⁶³

The Lord’s response to the workers adheres to the language of friendship in the Gospel narrative. “Frende,” the Lord responds, “no waning I wyl þe 3ete; / Take þat is þyn owne, and go”(558-559). Rather than encouraging or allowing the early comers to take more as they desire to do, the Lord pays them what he owes. The Lord’s call to friendship and the refusal to give curtailment would be a frightening but just response to an envious plea. But as frightening as the call would be, it is simultaneously a loving one. The Lord’s call is both for justice as well as for reconciliation, a coming together in friendship that for Christians depends upon the sacrifice of Christ. Christ makes known to his disciples this call for love in John 15: 12-16:

This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you.
Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends.
You are my friends, if you do the things that I command you. I will not now call you servants: for the servant knoweth not what his lord doth. But I have called

⁶² The Pearl Maiden adds this word to the gospel account. Counterfeit has the following meanings in the *MED*: 1(a) a metal that is made to resemble another metal, 2(a) of a person: disguised or imitating someone false, 2(b) of a thing: spurious, not genuine, 3(a) Assumed, pretended, 3(b) Deceptive, false, 4) deformed or misshapen. In addition to being a commentary on the purity of gems, this word also relates to the earlier discussion of making a lie and false speech.

⁶³ This observation about insolence is from Gordon, 105.

you friends: because all things whatsoever I have heard of my Father, I have made known to you. You have not chosen me: but I have chosen you.⁶⁴

Importantly, Christ calls for his servants to love one another, a love that requires the setting aside of envy. Christ's call to friendship, the knowledge that moves the disciple from servant to friend, is not without stipulation: if you do the things that I command you. It is such a stipulation that at once calls for friendship and resists envy – “Take that is þyn owne, and go” – to which the Lord holds the servant in the Parable of the Vineyard.

The Lord's language of gift in stanza 48 brings together the virtues of justice and love. Reminding the laborer that the covenant agreed upon was the payment of a penny and then asking him why he shall then ask for more, the Pearl Maiden's Lord describes lawful payment through gift-giving: “More, weþer louyly is me my gyfte, / To do wyth myn quat-so me lyke3?” (565-6). The Lord differentiates ownership, he separates for the workers what is “þyn owne” from what what is “myn.” Gordon and Andrew and Waldron gloss these lines similarly: “Moreover, is my act of giving lawful to me (have I the right), to do as I will with my own?”; “Moreover, is not my giving lawful to me – doing whatever it pleases me (to do) with my own?”⁶⁵ The Pearl Poet's unique spelling of lawful, “louyly” for the usual “lawely,” should not be overlooked because of its

⁶⁴ This is the Douay Rheims translation of John 15: 12-15.

⁶⁵ Gordon, 65; Andrew and Waldron, 80.

theological significance. It brings together in one word the virtues of law and love. The Lord recognizes himself as his own lawful and lovely gift, a gift that he freely bestows as he likes. This configuration makes any attempt to take more than what is given not only impossible but also unlawful and unloving. Any doubt about this being a Christological reference becomes dispelled two lines later when the voice of ‘Kryst’ supplants the voice of the Lord: “Þus schal I”, quod Kryste, “hit skyfte: / Þe laste schal be þe first þat stryke3, / And þe first þe laste, be he neuer so swift; / For mony ben called, þa3 fewe be myke3” (569-72). The Pearl Maiden translates the familiar, “many are called, though few are chosen,” by rendering the Vulgate *electi* as “myke3.” As Gordon and Andrew and Waldron note, *myke3* is an aphetic form of *amike*, or “friend.” Gordon suggests that here “myke3” replaces “electi,” suggesting that the Pearl Maiden likens friendship to the “chosen companions of the Lord.”⁶⁶

The Pearl Maiden does not leave the dreamer to interpret the parable and its language of “myke3.” Instead, she writes her story and the dreamer’s into Matthew’s

⁶⁶ Gordon, 65; Andrew and Waldron, 80. *MED* entry for “myke3”: A friend; *fig.* one of the elect. Though the Pearl Maiden uses the term “myke3” rather than “electi,” the word potentially invokes election, thereby and bringing up complex issues of predestination. It would likely leave the dreamer, and by extension the reader, to wonder whether or not he has been called and chosen. If the Pearl Maiden left off the story here, the dreamer could potentially have a reaction similar to Wille’s in Passus XII of *Piers Plowman* when Scripture allows him to interpret the parable of the marriage feast in Matthew 22: “Al for tene of here tyxst tremblede myn herte / An in a wer gan y wex and with mysulue to despute / Where y were chose; ...” (XII.50-52). Though he does not tremble and dispute with himself, the dreamer does call her tale unreasonable. For a personal and theological account of the role of friendship in relation to justice and Christian practice, see David B. Burrell, *C.S.C. Friendship and Ways to Truth* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), esp. 10, 20 and 53. For an understanding of friendship in Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas, see Paul J. Wadell, *Becoming Friends: Worship, Justice and the Practice of Christian Friendship* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002). Sarah Beckwith provides an account of forgiveness, friendship and justice from medieval to early modern England in chapter two of her forthcoming book.

narrative. She tells the dreamer that she has come into the vine at eventide and that she has been paid fully of her hire (582-3). That is, she gives the dreamer her narrative of salvation -- shortly after baptism the Pearl Maiden died and was saved. However, she admits that there were others who took more time in the vineyard, who toiled and sweated for many years but still have not been paid (586-8). Allegorically, these church members engage in sacramental practice but have not been saved. Still toiling away as a member of the church militant, the dreamer thinks about the Maiden's account for a moment and then declares that he thinks it unreasonable (590). This objection to the Maiden being paid before those who have stood the long day echoes the murmurs of the laborers in the vineyard. Understandably, he wonders how a just God could reward a Maiden who has done the "lasse in werke to take more able?" (590).

The Maiden uses the parable, a story that brings together works and grace, to differentiate her narratable life from the dreamer's while at the same time locating their commonalities within it. She reinvokes Christ's language of gift giving from the parable and connects it to water imagery: "He laueþ hys gyfteþ as water of dyche" (607). This water imagery, picked up from the river and from the words of the dreamer, then becomes a sacramental sign for baptism, a gift of salvation for innocents: "As sone as þay arn borne, by lyne / In þe water of baptem þay dissente: / Þen arne þay borozt into þe vyne" (625-8). An outward sign of grace, the sacrament of baptism signifies God's lavishing of gifts as the child enters the church through the cleansing of sin. The Maiden addresses the dreamer's tendency to think of grace and labor as exclusive in a question:

“Why schulde he not her labour alow, / 3ys, and pay hem at þe first fyne?” The Lord still allows labor in the vineyard, for the grace of God is great enough that it need not be exclusive of labor -- it is great enough to allow it (634-6).

Following the Parable of the Vineyard, the Pearl Maiden provides her account of sin. Mankind was first wrought to perfect bliss, a perfect bliss that “oure forme fader” forfeited when eating the apple (638-40). This forfeiture not only brings to mind Adam’s sinful transgression, his breaking of God’s law, but also it connotes a loss or a deprivation of good.⁶⁷ His breaking of the covenant through eating that “mete” leads to universal damnation: “all wer we dampned” to die and to dwell in the heat of hell without respite (641-3). But “þeron com a bote astyt” (645). This remedy comes straightway in Christ’s life from his incarnation to his crucifixion: “Ryche blod ran on rode so roghe, / And wyne water þen at þat plyt” (646-647). A different configuration of richness and gain from the opening of the poem, here Christ’s blood runs over the rood as a remedy for Adam’s loss. Enough flows from his wounded body, from “þat welle,” that it pays the debt that mankind owes for forfeiture (649). Christ’s blood, that is, “vus bo3t fro bale of helle, / And delyuered vus of þe deth secunde” (651-2). The Maiden associates baptismal water, the water that washes away the guilt in which Adam drowned

⁶⁷ *MED* entries for “forfeiten” are useful here: 1 (a) To transgress, offend, misbehave; to sin; to do damage or injury; to violate (a woman); (b) to break (a law), disobey (a command) 2 (a) To lose or be deprived of (something) as a punishment, to forfeit; (b) ~ obligacioun, to pay the penalty for violation or non-performance of a contract. 3 To deprive (someone of something); to exact (a penalty), collect (a fine), confiscate (goods or property); to fine or mulct (someone).

humanity, with truth-telling: “þe water is baptem, þe truth to telle” (656, 653). Although we might gloss “the truth to tell” as “truly,” the parallel sentence structure also suggests a likening of baptismal water to true speech. Now, she says, there is nothing in the round world “Bytwene vus and blysse bot þat he wythdro3” and even that is restored blessed time (658-9). The Maiden describes sin as the privation of good, as that from which God withdraws. The grace of God is great enough to save through mercy those, like the dreamer, who sin anew and then repent with contrite hearts (660, 670, 661-2, 669).

Although this might give hope to sinners who practice penance in Church, it is also worth noting that the Maiden does not explicitly mention the role of the priest or the role of the Church in these lines. Just as the body of Christ is absent from the rood (she only calls it “that well”), so too is the Church absent from the administration of the free-flowing sacraments in this passage. The reason for this absence might be that it allows her to privilege her narrative of innocents over the familiar story of the penitent sinner.⁶⁸ The innocents who enter the Church through baptism but die before sinning do not rely upon the body of Christ and the sacrament of penance in the same way that an adult does. She makes clear that these repentant sinners are different from the Maiden, from one who is “safe and ry3t” because the innocent “to gyle þat neuer glente” (672, 671). That is, the innocents never slip into guile, never slide into duplicity. These “Harmle3, trwe and undefylde” are the “mylde” ones to whom Jesus calls (725, 721). Truthful friends in

⁶⁸ By “familiar penitent,” I not only refer to the dreamer and to the reader but also to the first three chapters of my dissertation.

Christ, the innocents heed his call and respond to it. When they “þer cnoke on þe bylde,” quickly the gate of bliss shall be unpinned because they are “withouten mote oþer mascle of sulphure synne” (726-8). The innocents entering this building are, like the Pearl Maiden, “withouten mote”: without spot and without the stain of polluting sin.⁶⁹ But the phrase “withouten mote” also brings together the building and its inhabitants. It links the description of the harmless true with the building upon which they knock. A moat, normally used to defend an architectural structure or a walled city and its inhabitants from invasion, is not necessary here because only those who are called may enter. “Mote,” also meaning dispute, has no place within this building or among its charitable dwellers.⁷⁰ These sinless innocents knock on the already-completed building of bliss.

But before the Maiden shows the dreamer the wives of the Lamb in bliss, the 144,000 virgins from the Book of Revelations, she first must retell the crucifixion (785-7). The Pearl Maiden does not provide a portrait of the human beings who persecute Jesus. She does not provide the details of Judas’s betrayal nor does she include the voices of the crowd calling to Jesus to save himself. She does describe the thieves who hang next to him on the cross by bringing in a class dimension – they are “boye3 bolde,”

⁶⁹ Gordon, 144.

⁷⁰ Definition from Gordon, 144. Dispute, whether it means linguistic conflict, a mode of instruction, or a form of reasoning is not necessary in the City of New Jerusalem.

or churlish commoners.⁷¹ Despite the piercing of his hands, the buffeting of his face and the tearing and folding of his skin, Jesus remains silent until the end: “as meke as lomp þat no playnt tolde / For vus he swalt in Jerusalem” (706, 809, 813-15). Here the Maiden draws from Isaiah 53: 6-7: “All we like sheep have gone astray, every one hath turned aside into his own way: and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was offered because it was his own will, and he opened not his mouth: he shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearer, and he shall not open his mouth.” That Jesus has “no playnt tolde” after his intense suffering seems miraculous and stands in stark contrast to the dreamer’s going astray in his opening laments for his loss.⁷² This meekness, this “on dethe ful” makes possible a place where their “hope is drest”: the city of love (860). In this place the inhabitants need not seek anything, for “þur3outly [they] hauen cnawying” (859). They dwell “in companyny gret” (851) where although their “corses in clotte3 clynge,” their “luf con þryf” so that among the inhabitants “comme3 nouþer strot ne stryf” (851, 857, 848). This is the Maiden’s retelling of her own story in relation to Christ’s. It is only after his sacrifice, after his graceful gift, that the story of the Maiden and her loving community of bliss could be told.

⁷¹ *MED* entry for “boye” is churl.

⁷² *MED* entry for “playnt”: 1a) lamentation, mourning and 2a) Complaint, murmuring, grumbling; a complaint, charge, grievance.

Lest the dreamer should believe her account to be false, the Pearl Maiden again turns to scripture to authorize her words (856). She retells St. John's Apocalyptic vision beginning first with what he sees and then moving into what he hears. He views the Lamb standing on mount Sion with 144,000 maidens, each with the name of the Lamb and his Father written on their forehead (867-71). After seeing the Word of God inscribed on the heads of the maidens, St. John's vision begins to blend with his hearing - he hears "a hue," a word denoting both a shade of color and a shout, from heaven (873).⁷³ Much more than providing "innoghe" water for earthly sustenance, this hue is "lyk flode3 fele laden runnen on resse" (874). The torrent of voices coming from heaven produce one "lote," a speech, word or sound that was "showted scharpe" and "ledden loude" (876-8). The language that St. John hears is distinct from, and more intense than, anything the dreamer has heard in the poem – it is the lovely language of community coming to him in one word:

A note full new I herde hem warpe,
 To lysten þat was ful lufly dere.
 As harpore3 harpen in her harpe,
 Þat nwe song þay songen ful cler,
 In sounande note3 a gentel carpe;
 Ful fayre þe mode3 þat fonge in fere (879-884).

Early in the poem, the dreamer hears a singular "new note" that moves his mind, and eventually he learns to listen to this new note's courteous carping (155, 381). But comprised of a loving community of "nwe note[s]," here St. John hears the more

⁷³ *MED* n (1) is color and n (3) is sound.

complex, complete and clear singing of a “nwe song” that notes not only a courteous carp, but a full “gentel” one (155, 879). These strands of music are not just notes that are graciously given but are also notes that are “fonge in fere,” received together.⁷⁴

Practicing the craft of love, here singing the new song, is not a skill known by even the most skilled apprentice, for it requires communal apprenticeship to the Lamb, the “maskele3 mayster” of love (900). No matter how “quoynt” they might be, no human apprentice, for “alle þe crafte3 þat euer þay knewe,” could ever “synge a poynt” of that new song (889-91). Only “þat meyny” that follow the Lamb, those innocents who are “bo3t fro þe vrþe aloynte / As newe fryt to God ful due” might know a point, might participate in the resurrection (892-4). Distinct from the church militant, those earthly Christians who are “membrez of Jesu Kryst” and “temen to hys body ful trwe and tryste” through participating in sacramental practices of the Church, these members of the church triumphant “arn anioynt” to the Gentle Lamb, “As lyk to hymself of lote and hwe” (458, 460, 895, 896). Being like the Gentle Lamb in “lote and hwe,” in speech and tone, necessitates speaking the language of truth: “For neuer lysyng ne tale vntrwe / Ne towched her tonge for no dysstresse” (897-8). Friends of the gentle Lamb, that “moteles meynye” who are free from false and violent language, need not use duplicitous speech

⁷⁴ Leading up the resurrection in *Piers Plowman*, Langland describes this new song of love sung by angels in harmonious accord, “*Cupat Caro, purgat Caro, regnat deus dei Caro,*” followed by Peace’s piping a note of poetry, ““*Clarior est solito [post maxima nebula phebus]; / Post inimicias Clarior est & Amor*” (XX.450-451).

because they will never be “remwe” from the truthful new song of that “makele3 mayster” (899-900).

Realizing that the Pearl Maiden is a friend in Christ, one whom has been “ichose” in friendship to “Kryste3 chambre,” the dreamer thanks the new fruit, his “reken rose,” for her story (904, 901, 906). Understanding that she has been called to Christ’s chamber leads him to “bycalle” to her, to ask her “a thyngge expresse,” about the “noble note” and the “motele3 meyny” who dwell in the “castel-walle” of Jerusalem (913, 910, 922, 925, 927). Returning to a reliance on his sight, he tells her that he “se no bygyng nawhere about” and asks to be taken to the “myry mote” (931, 936). His visual reliance, a “poynt of sorquydry3e” earlier in the poem leads him to misspeak – he asks the Maiden to bring him to a spotted, sinful and defensive city (309). His request prompts the Pearl Maiden to clarify the poem’s ecclesiology.

The Maiden explicates the difference between the Old Jerusalem and the New and in so doing gives an account of the Church militant and the Church triumphant. The dreamer’s meaning, she says, when he refers to the “mote” is “Judy londe,” the city that Lamb suffered in for man’s sake, the same city that she previously describes in her account of the crucifixion (936, 939-40, 805-16). This “olde Jerusalem,” or the “ceté of God” on earth, was the mote where the “olde gulte wat3 don to slake” (941, 952, 942). Not without wrinkle or spot, this is the site of the Church militant.⁷⁵ The dreamer is a

⁷⁵ This ecclesiological language comes from Eph. 5:25-7 and is taken up in Augustine, *City of God: Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans* trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 1972),

member of this body of Christ. The “nwe” Jerusalem, the “Lompe þer wythouten spotte³ blake” is the Church triumphant, the Church in future exaltation: the site of the flock without blemish and the city without mote (945-7). The Maiden explains that by choosing to suffer pain in the Old Jerusalem, the Lamb at once settled “oure pes” that “ay schal laste wythouten reles” (954, 956). Crucial to the portrait of their shared life, this ecclesiological model provides for the dreamer a model for a Christian unity of life. It increases the dreamer’s understanding of his own account as a member of the Church militant in relation to the shared good life: the site of peace. Hearing about the community of love will hopefully sustain the dreamer in his quest for the good life and the same time that it will move him away from a temptation for despair. More hopeful and less wholly consumed by his loss, the dreamer begins to think beyond the self and asks to be brought to that “bygly bylde” -- he wishes to see for himself the Maiden’s “blysfyl bor” (963-4).

The Maiden acquires for the dreamer from the Lamb the great favor of viewing the city, the Church triumphant that requires no upbuilding but is already fully constructed. She warns the dreamer that though he can view the city, God shields entry to the tower (967, 965). Not “clen wythouten mote,” the dreamer may not set foot within the clean cloister (972, 970, 969). At this point in the poem, this detail invites an

914-18. As noted above, for my understanding of Augustine’s model of the Church see Aers, *Salvation and Sin*, 7.

association to be made between the City of New Jerusalem and familiar ecclesial space, whether it be the restriction of the chancel by the rood screen as a space reserved for the use of the clergy or the separation of the cloister/ anchorhold and its inhabitants from the outside world.⁷⁶ But it is important to remember that no matter how reminiscent of stained glass, “glemande glas burnist broun,” or of a reliquary, “foundemente3 twelue” made from “gentle gemme3,” this ecclesial imagery might be, still “Kyrk þerinne wat3 not 3ete, / Chapel ne temple þat euer wat3 set” (990-2, 1061-2). Within the city, the Church is not given, not poured forth as a Pentecostal gift, because there is no need for it and no need for grace – the inhabitants of the City of New Jerusalem have already received it.⁷⁷ This type of human edifice, a chapel or a temple, was never built there. Humans, after all, cannot enter the space.

What the dreamer does see, however, is the City of New Jerusalem as the Apostle John saw it. The Pearl Poet’s representation of the city invites the reader to recognize it as a diagrammatic allegory, one differentiated from an allegorical image that embodies

⁷⁶ For *Pearl* as medieval architecture and poet as builder, see Ann R. Meyer, *Medieval Allegory and the Building of the New Jerusalem*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003. Meyer likens the river to a medieval rood screen and describes *Pearl* as a literary chapel, 149-54 and 155-172.

⁷⁷ Taken together, the *MED* definitions for “3ete” bring to mind the fluidity of water and blood on the cross and the Holy Spirit’s gift of Pentecost: 1a) To pour out (a fluid or liquid) from a container, pour onto a surface or into a receptacle. 2(a) To emit (blood, a fluid, etc.) from the body, shed; (b) To flow, gush, pour out in a stream; of rain: come down in torrents3 (a) To send (sth. immaterial) forth, give out; send (the Holy Spirit, divine blessing, etc. to, upon, or into persons or the soul), impart. It is important to notice that no church therein was “3ete” – the poet sets aside this ecclesial imagery because there is no need for it.

action.⁷⁸ The walls of the city are comprised of the same gems that the dreamer saw at the bottom of the river earlier in the poem (110-119). Again, the dreamer does not act upon the gems nor does he see the building being constructed. Here, however, the dreamer “knew þe name after his tale” (9978) – the dreamer no longer depends solely upon his own visual perception for knowledge but now appeals to scripture, to John’s account. It is John who does the naming and the dreamer who recognizes the naming after the fact. As Sandra Pierson Prior notes, the dreamer does not so much translate the names of the stones as he transliterates them:⁷⁹

As John þise stone3 in write con nemme,
I knew þe name after his tale:
Jasper hy3t þe first gemme
þat I on þe first basse con wale:
He glente grene in þe lowest hemme;
Saffer helde þe seconde stale;
þe calsydoyne þenne wythouten wemme
In þe þryd table con purly pae;
þe emerade þe furþe so grene of scale;
þe sardonysse þe fyfþe ston;
þe sexte þe rybé he con hit wale
In þe Apcalyppe, þe apostel John (997-1008).

In her unpublished dissertation, Rebekah Long notices that this list might initially appear to unimaginatively imitate an illuminated manuscript illumination of the foundation

⁷⁸ I borrow the term “diagrammatic allegory” from Elizabeth Salter’s “Introduction,” *Piers Plowman*, ed. Elizabeth Salter and Derek Pearsall (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), 13-17.

⁷⁹ See Sandra Pierson Prior, *The Fayre Forme3 of the Pearl Poet* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1996), 51. Contrast this allegorical image, for example, with William Langland’s Tree of Charity in Passus XVIII of *Piers Plowman*. Although it begins as a diagrammatic allegory, as David Aers points out, it Charity itself begins to grow and move. That allegorical model is one in which the image embodies the virtue. Here, the Pearl poet separates virtue from the image.

stones of the city or to imitate a medieval lapidary.⁸⁰ But the stanza, she rightly claims, is more notable for its abundance of names than for its image-making. For Long, the “emphasis is not on turning the stones into pictures but on their verbal presence.”⁸¹ This verbal presence, she says, is similar to “what we discover in lapidaries such as the North Midland lapidary of King Philip (Bodl. MS. Add. A 106).” While I agree with Long that the stones do not turn into pictures so much as they emphasize a verbal presence, her observation leads me to wonder about this verbal presence, this naming. What kind of naming is it? To think about what I take to be inactive language, language that names but does not embody virtue, it is worth recounting an aspect of the lapidary that the *Pearl* Poet does not include in the poem and that Long does not engage: the virtues.

The North Midland lapidary, a “buke of precious stones,” is translated from Latin into French “in full consell for loue of yes wyse clerkes.”⁸² The book devises and shows the reader the natural stones of which the Bible speaks and those of which “god hym-self spake”⁸³ For this author, the stones are meant to be understood by the wise man as miraculous virtues:

⁸⁰ Rebekah Long, “Apocalypse and Memory in Pearl” (PhD Diss., Duke University, 2005). In ProQuest Dissertation and Theses, <http://proxy.lib.duke.edu:2067/pqdweb?SrchMode=2&sid=2&firstIndex=0&RQT=511&TS=1263833331&clientId=15020> (accessed January 18, 2010).

⁸¹ Long, 139.

⁸² *English Medieval Lapidaries* eds. Joan Evans and Mary Serjeantson (London : Pub. for the Early English Text Society by H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1933), 39. This text is a translation of the French King Philip lapidary, 38.

⁸³ *English Medieval Lapidaries*, 38.

& moche more oppyn shuld be ye vertus & ye miracles of ye precious stones ne ware ye mysbelefe of ye pepyll & ye vntruth & ye synn; & a wyse man suld not3te mybelefe yt god has no3te set vertus in stones & in herbes & in wordes, & he yt beleues noght yis dose gret synn (38-9).

Misbelief, then, is a matter of not recognizing that God sets the virtues in stones and in herbs and in words – to not believe in this setting is to do great sin. The first example that the author gives of God setting words and virtues in stone is in the naming of twelve stones to Moses for the breast plate of Aaron. The second example is John’s Apocalyptic vision:

Ye Apocolyps beres wyttnes yt god louyd so well saynt John Euangelist yt he was sent by A aungell to se ye priuytes of paradise, as it ware by a vysyon; & he saw paradys huge as cyte & he saw xi stones, ye whyche saynte Iohn named: ye first Iaspe, ye ij Saphire; ye iij Cancydonye, ye iiij Ameraud, ye v Sardane, ye vi Sarde, ye vii Grysolet, ye viij Beryl, ye ix Thopasce, ye x Crisopas, ye xi Iagunce. Huge vertus gafe god to yes stones yt 3e/haue hard named, & mony strengthes & to mony oder; bot ye vertu of ye fornamed stones we suld deuyse vs fyrst, & efterward we suld deuyse vs ye vertus of ye stones which we haue no3te namede.

Now we haue devised ye stones yt god named of his own mouth, & yar vertus, & of thos yt saynt Iohn named, & ye signficaon yt yai signefye appon the nek of Aaron, & ye signficaon of thos yt wer in ye fondiment of paradise.⁸⁴

Speech, or naming, in this Apocalyptic version is a gift received by John that comes out of his miraculous vision of Paradise. But the ability to name is not the only gift associated with these gems – God also gives the stones “huge vertues.” These virtues

⁸⁴ *English Medieval Lapidaries*, 39. Although I focus on this lapidary because of its association of gems with the virtues, there are other possible interpretations for the twelve stones. See, for example, Nicholas of Lyra’s *Apocalypse Commentary* in which the twelve foundation stones are likened to the articles of faith. *Nicholas of Lyra’s Apocalypse Commentary*, trans. Philip D.W. Krey (Kalamazoo, Mich. : Published for TEAMS by Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), 227.

that God gives to the stones are “hard named” -- not only are they difficult to name but they are also permanently named. It is up to “us,” the community of readers to “devyse” the virtues of the stones that were named and then to “devyse” the virtues of the stones which we have not yet named. So this devising means doing something with the virtues that have already been named – it means observing these gems, talking about them, reflecting upon their meanings, and possibly even forming or composing them.⁸⁵ Then it is up to us to know how to go on, to know how to name those that we have not yet named. At stake is the “signification” of these gems. Properly naming the gems means properly embodying the virtues that they signify.

This is a very different model from the Pearl Poet’s version. As Long notes, the Pearl Poet only ascribes the verb “devyse” to John: “In þe Apokalypce is þe fasoun preued, / As deuyse3 hit þe apostel Jhon” (983-984). So the observation, the naming, reflecting upon and forming, of these stones is entirely ascribed to John – the dreamer only recognizes the names of them after the tale. I want to draw attention to what the naming does not do in *Pearl*: it does not liken the gems to the virtues. Instead, it reads as a catalog of gems, a catalog of what I take to be empty names when compared with the lapidary’s version. The Pearl Poet creates a linguistic diagram of the city walls, but he creates a diagram that does not evoke action. It does not function like the virtues in *Jacob’s Well* that are located in the material elements of the building and are meant to be

⁸⁵ These are MED definitions of “devise.”

cultivated by the reader through penitential practice. Nor does it function like Langland's Tree of Charity, an allegorical image that begins as a diagrammatic allegory but that later becomes an embodiment of that virtue. Instead, we might think of this image along the lines of what Mary Carruthers calls *picturae*: "*Picturae* are designed to show the relationships of subject matters in rational fashion: they summarize, they orient, and they help people to comprehend, communicate and be able to work with complex matters." Carruthers also notes that rhetorical pictures often occupy positions at points of change in the poem.⁸⁶ This picture, one familiar to the dreamer because he saw the gems earlier in the poem and because he would already know it from John's vision, helps to orient him and prepares him to view more complex images.

The dreamer suddenly "wat3 war" of the procession of saints, the 144,000 virgins in the same guise as the Pearl Maiden, as they fill the noble city (1095-1110). Mild as maidens seem at mass, the virgins delightfully follow the Lamb, a lamb with seven red-gold horns, towards the throne.⁸⁷ The Lamb draws the delight with him as he, followed

⁸⁶ This image sits in a place of change in the poem because it comes just before the dreamer becomes aware of the communion of saints. However, it would be a mistake to fully classify this image a *pictura* because like Salter's diagrammatic allegory, a true *pictura* functions like a map. Difficult to classify, this image might be a combination of what Carruthers calls an *obscuritas*, a trope inviting meditation that obscures meaning, and a *pictura*, a trope that addresses the need for clarity and organization. As Carruthers notes, *obscuritas* and *picturae* are not always exclusive. See Mary Carruthers, "Allegory Without the Teeth: Some Reflections on Figural Language in *Piers Plowman*," *The Yearbook of Langland Studies* 19 (2005): 27-43.

⁸⁷ This image of the Lamb resists traditional patterns of imagery for Christ. See Long, 208. For Agnus Dei imagery, see David Allan Robertson and Allan Frantzen, *Ecce Agnus Dei: sacrificial imagery of Christ, 1350-1750*. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1994.

by the Maidens, approaches the throne. His approach produces one of the most beautiful stanzas of unity and celebration in medieval English poetry:

Delyt þat hys come encroched
To much hit were of for to melle
Þise aldermen, quen he aproched,
Grouelyng to his fete þay felle.
Legyounds of aungele3 togeder uoched
þer kesten ensens of swete smelle.
þen glory and gle wat3 nwe abroched;
Al songe to loue þat gay juelle.
þe steuen mo3t stryke þur3 þe vrþe to helle
þat þe Vertues of heuen of joye endyte.
To loue þe Lombe his meyny in melle
Iwysse I la3t a gret delyt (1117-1128).

So overcome with delight is the dreamer that he loses speech, “to much hit were of for to melle.” Also overcome, the elders of the Heavenly City at the Resurrection resort to physical prostration to express their joy. The legions of angels cast an incense of sweet smell as they are “togeder uoched,” called together. It is then, after the coming together of the angels in heaven, that glory and glee is uttered anew – a new song is sung. “Al songe to loue þat gay juelle.” In unity, this is the performance of the virtues, the song of love. All sing in order to love that gay jewel and all sing to Love – that Gay Jewel. The sound of the song of love might harrow hell, might strike through the earth to the reach the depths of despair. This joyful song, this harrowing performance of love is sung by the Virtues of Heaven. Indeed, the jeweler has received a great gift, a great delight, to be among those “To loue þe Lombe.”

Despite my hope for the dreamer that his vision might end with this reception of the song of love and the unity of the virtues, he is not perpetually one of the “meyny”

(1145). His mind becomes filled with much marvel as he begins a return to his desire for valuation through reason and human speech. “Best wat3 he,” assesses the dreamer, “blyþest, and most to pryse, / Þat euer I herde of speche spent” (1131-2). His wonderment increases when he realizes that the Lamb’s “loke3 symple” has been greatly complicated, badly wounded: “Bot a wonde ful wyde and weete con wyse / Anende hys hert, þur3 hyde torente” (1134-6). The dreamer uses a simple alliterative formula, “wyde and weete,” to describe the wound.⁸⁸ But although he uses simple words to describe it, the wound causes him to wonder about its cause: “Alas, þo3t I, who did þat spyt?” (1138). Based upon his habituation, we might expect the dreamer to appeal to his own reason to attempt to answer this question. Or we might expect him to ask the question aloud in an attempt to find an answer, even if the answer implicates his own participation in the infliction. But this question elicits a different response from any of the others in the poem: complete silence. As Rebekah Long eloquently notes, this Christ has a conventional wound and is silent, allowing for meditative respite, but is in no way Christ in his suffering humanity as in particular orthodox representations. Long describes various silences that occur as a result of this illegibility:

Every aspect of the Lamb that might seem legible blurs fundamentally – the dreamer refuses to answer his own question but undercuts it as an aesthetic artifice, the Lamb is silent and serene, but a moving manuscript image and also utterly alien, wounded but indifferent to the pain of the wound. Nothing about the moment of viewing can be described as conventional or even comfortable in the sense of following predictable

⁸⁸ It is from A.C. Spearing that I draw this observation about the simplicity of the alliterative language to describe the wound. *The Gawain Poet*, 167.

patterns. All criteria are called into question, foregrounded, and made inadequate. The dreamer does not ask the pivotal question out of ignorance but allows the question to hover for a moment with a stunning energy, then lets it dissolve unanswered, refused, undone.⁸⁹

The dreamer immediately moves into a new stanza, away from the dissolved question and the silent answer. Once a seemingly sweet song, the stillness of sound now has a new resonance.

This viewing, it seems, has left him so disoriented that he clumsily repeats his understated observation that the Lamb “wounde hade” and that “he were hurt” before looking among the “meyny,” presumably for comfort in the familiar (1142, 1145). It remains unclear, however, whether or not he associates the sacrificial “hyde torent,” the bleeding the wound of the Lamb, with the virgins’ overflowing, everlasting life: “þay wyth lyf wern laste and lade” (1136, 1146). The dreamer momentarily finds relief among them when he fixes his gaze on his “lyttel queene,” a fixation that just as quickly drives his mind to a maddening thought: “Þat sy3t me gart to þenk to wade / For luf-longyng in gret delyt” (1151-2). The sight of the Pearl Maiden produces a thinking that acts more like an amnesia, a forgetting that he cannot “pass þys water fre” (299). In a maddening frenzy of delight and desire to be with the Maiden, the dreamer loses his reason, rashly wades into the river and awakens in the arbor (1154-5).⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Long, 215.

⁹⁰ Kean notes that “The Dreamer’s eyes, however, soon leave the Lamb, to focus on his following, and then on one particular figure,” 21, see too 221-2 and 227-30. He experiences a familiar love longing (lines 1147) for what he calls “my lytell queene” (1180) and proceeds to cross the river. Aers notes that the “possessive pronoun and the adjectival diminutive in ‘my lyttel queene’ are certainly terms of ‘affectionate

After waking, the jeweler says that he cherishes the Pearl Maiden's tale, a vision that was a freely given gift. "O perle," says the jeweler, "of ryche renoun, / So wat3 hit me dere þat þou con deme / In þis veray avysyoun!" (1182-3). Her true tale of love becomes dear to him because it allows him to see his own narratable life alongside hers. His recognition of the possibility that her story is a "ueray and soth sermoun" produces and reflects a newfound hope in the jeweler. This virtue sustains him enough to accept his story "in þat doel-doungoun" alongside of hers that is "to þat Prynse3 paye" (1185, 1188). After expressing his gratefulness for the grace that she has shown him, the jeweler expresses regret for his actions:

To þat Prynse3 paye hade I ay bente,
And 3erned no more þen wat3 me gyuen,
And halden me þer in trwe entent,
As þe perle me prayed þat wat3 so þryuen,
As helde, drawen to Godde3 present,
To mo of his mysterys I hade ben dryuen (1189-95).

Now in a fully confessional mode, the jeweler recognizes that the Pearl was a freely given gift and seems to be contrite for not paying what he owes -- this submission would have been to speak the truth, to have true intent. But despite his recognition and confession of a problematic yearning, the jeweler's regret only lasts for a few lines before

intimacy.' But in the contexts established by the poem, they are also expressions of his will to control her form of life, his will to fulfill his own fantasy, and to reverse the long passages in which *he* has been the "lyttel" one receiving catechistical instruction from one of the redeemed, a generous Bride of the Lamb," 15.

it resurfaces and becomes intermingled again with his human desire for “mo.” Although he goes on to acknowledge the futility of striving against the Lord, this stanza shows the dreamer still grappling with the unpleasant answer to the question that the Lorde puts forth to the servants in the Parable of the Vineyard: ““More, weþer louyly is me my gyfte, / To do wyth myn quat-so me lyke3?” (1119, 565-6).

The final stanza again takes up the issue of gift and reconciliation in relation to sacramental practice. The jeweler claims that by paying the Prince, being fully reconciled, “Hit is ful eþe to þe god Krystyin; For I haf founden hym, boþe day and naȝt, / A God, a Lorde, a frende ful fyin” (1201-4). David Aers points out “the strange claim that it is ‘ful eþe’ to be reconciled to God as a good person is made without reference to the Church’s mediation of grace, traditionally seen as central in Christian processes of regeneration and redemption, tradition fiercely defended by a Church under challenge from Lollardy in the late fourteenth century.”⁹¹ The dreamer’s claim would indeed be strange in the way it sidelines the sacramental resources of the Church if he was learning the language of sacramental practice. But the dreamer in *Pearl* already knows that language – it is easy for him to know how to be a good practicing Christian. What has been more difficult for him is his apprenticeship in learning the language of love, an apprenticeship made possible by his finding of friendship. The jeweler now recognizes the Pearl Maiden as a gift that he has received and that he has returned to the giver:

⁹¹ Aers, “The Self Mourning,” 20.

“ouer þis hyul þis lote I laȝte, / For pyty of my perle enclyin/And syþen to God I hit
bytaȝte / In Krysteȝ dere blessyng and myn” (1205-1208). For pity of his loss while he
was prostrate in the garden, the jeweler received a vision, a gracious gift of the Pearl
Maiden’s virtuous speech, her song of love.⁹² And since receiving the gift, the jeweler
has returned it to God through confessional speech. It is this type of virtuous language
that undoes the broken bonds of community and precedes the coming together of
Christian friends in the sacrament of the altar: “Þat in the forme of bred and wyn, / Þe
preste vus scheweȝ vch a daye. / He gef vus to be his homly hyne / Ande precious perleȝ
vnto his pay” (1209-1212). I understand the final lines of the poem to be a prayer that
shows the jeweler’s gratefulness for the reception of Christ’s gracious gifts in the form of
the Eucharistic offering.⁹³ These gracious gifts are given so that the Christian community
of friends may be his graceful servants, may be precious pearls with which He receives
pay.

⁹² Gordon notes that “lote” probably means “lot, fortune or hap,” though it could mean “utterance or song.” If “utterance” is meant, the reference is to the Pearl dreamer but if “song” is meant it would refer to the poem itself. I think it could mean both utterance and song. The word “lote” should bring us back to the stanzas that frame the new song of love – “Þat lote, I leue, watȝ neuer þe les” (876); “And to þe gentyl Lombe hit arm anioynt, / As lyk to hymself of lote and hwe” (895-6). I think the dreamer recognizes the gift he has received as virtuous speech, as a song of love. Through his confession, he has given his Pearl, the gift of virtuous speech, back to the giver.

⁹³ A.C. Spearing describes these final lines as the narrator turning to Christ in the Eucharist, allowing all to become his “homely hyne.” This turning, according to Spearing, shows a shift in his thoughts from the beginning where he is concerned with himself to the end where he is concerned with the community. I read the final lines in much the same way. See Spearing, *The Gawain Poet*, 169-70.

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