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THE VIRTUOUS PAGAN IN MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE

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THE VIRTUOUS PAGAN IN MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE

by

Cindy Lynn Vitto

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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aspects of the Harrowing, Piers Plowman closes with emphasis on the negative. As the turning point of divine history, the Harrowing ushered in a period of grace which is now drawing to a close. The final Harrowing, or Doomsday, is imminent, and the Church will be found wanting.

The epilogue of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde raises the question of Troilus as a virtuous pagan. Several elements of the poem, though, suggest that Troilus is a parody of the virtuous pagan figure: he sidesteps Boethius' reasoning on free will, and he is liberated from the "hell" of his desires to reach the false heaven of Criseyde's arms. Troilus also fares poorly when compared to the virtuous pagans of legend. However, Chaucer leaves Troilus' fate shrouded in the mysteries of Christ's mercy. Indeed, ultimately all three poems conclude that, whatever the role of man's efforts in salvation, the workings of grace are indisputable and yet unknowable--the only answer the medieval mind could devise for the paradox of the virtuous pagan.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Pamella Lovern, who believed in my abilities and in this project as a worthwhile endeavour during the dark hours when I did not. Her loving friendship has made me a better, stronger person in many ways.

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Introduction

During the Middle Ages a primary concern was salvation. What was necessary to ensure the soul's eternal bliss? Within the Christian church, the guidelines were quite clear: baptism, observance of the sacraments, an attempt to put into practice the teachings of Christ. But a theological debate arose on a corollary issue, the possibility of salvation for those outside the Church. These non-Christians fell into two basic categories: those who had been offered the Christian faith and had refused it, and those who had lived as virtuously as possible in light of their circumstances. Two categories of these "virtuous pagans" who received special attention were the classical poets and philosophers of Greece and Rome and the Old Testament patriarchs. It seemed especially unfair that these two groups should be damned eternally.

From the first through the fourteenth centuries, a succession of solutions to the problem of these virtuous pagans evolved. For the early Church, an attractive solution was that Christ descended into Hell to convert the souls He found there. After Augustine refuted this idea, the early Middle Ages developed in some detail the idea of Limbo as an intermediate state between bliss and punishment. Aquinas sanctioned the concept of Limbo, and Dante expanded and schematized an elaborate cosmological framework in which most of the classical pagans resided there. Aquinas had also, however, given the impetus to the fourteenth century's emphasis on the salvation of pagans during their lifetime. If a man ignorant of Christianity followed the natural virtues as closely as possible, God could lead him to the faith necessary for his soul's

salvation. God also had the power to select those He wished to save, regardless of their beliefs or actions.

Complicating this matter was the question of the prerequisites for salvation. Theologians tended to divide between those who valued the role of reason in attaining faith (thus making salvation a distinct possibility for pagans, especially the classical philosophers) and those who emphasized faith alone (thus effectively closing the door to non-Christians). An ancillary problem developed in relation to the necessity for baptism, and on what constituted baptism.

Although the issue of the virtuous pagan generated disagreement from its first appearance in the early Church, by the fourteenth century a full-scale debate was underway; speculation about the fate of the virtuous pagan appeared in secular as well as theological writings. These secular works reflected varying theological solutions of the problem but generally agreed that the virtuous pagan could indeed be saved--not through divine whim but through the pagan's extraordinary justness which justified his becoming a part of God's plan. This was a conservative view compared to the extremes to which many theologians had carried the issue; and, in effect, this was a pastoral or didactic approach opposed to the scholastic.

As we shall see, each author presented in this study used the issue of the virtuous pagan to suit his own purpose, but the intent in each case was clearly didactic--not primarily to shed light on this issue per se, but to relay an important message applicable to the Christian audience. In St. Erkenwald, the poet tells the story of a virtuous pagan whose soul was deliberately left behind during the Harrowing. When Erkenwald, acting as Christ's surrogate, "harrows" this soul through a

miraculous baptism, the onlookers are strengthened in their appreciation of grace (made possible by Christ's victory in Hell) as the agent of salvation. At the same time, the miracle of the poem becomes a figurative imperative for the fourteenth century Church to continue, in a more conventional way, the work of "harrowing" Hell by spreading baptism and faith to unbelievers. In the Dowel section of Piers Plowman, Langland's dreamer seeks to understand (among other things) the place of baptism and knowledge of doctrine in salvation, important factors in determining the fate of virtuous pagans. At the same time, the poem utilizes the episode of the Harrowing as its thematic climax, for this event determines the distinguishing characteristics of the Old Testament frame in the Visio, the New Covenant in Dobet, and the impending apocalypse in Dobest. In addition, the Harrowing stands as a type of a second Harrowing, the Judgment, which gives urgency to the dreamer's quest and to the situation of the Church Militant. Finally, in Troilus and Criseyde, Chaucer portrays Troilus as a not-so-virtuous pagan who participates in a parody of the Harrowing; in a passage laden with relevant Biblical allusions, Troilus is liberated from the "hell" of his frustrated desire for Criseyde when Pandarus leads him to the "heaven" of her bed. The ironies in Book III call into question Troilus' supposed salvation in the Epilogue, which Chaucer seems to have left deliberately vague. Chaucer's message is aimed at the individual Christian rather than the Church: excessive love for the things of this world leads to damnation for both pagan and Christian. Yet by leaving some doubt as to the ultimate fate of Troilus' soul, he ends by reminding the audience of the mystery of Christ's sacrifice, which makes mercy possible and confounds human judgment in a case such as Troilus'.

To this point, no study has been conducted to examine the interplay of the theological and literary treatment of the virtuous pagan in fourteenth century England. Several works have dealt with the overall question of pagan salvation, tracing its development historically and theologically; for example, R. V. Turner's article "Descendit ad inferos: medieval views on Christ's descent into hell and the salvation of the ancient just"¹; Louis Capéran's Le problème du salut des Infidèles²; and Mario Frezza's Il problema della salvezza dei pagani (da Abelardo al Seicento).³ J. Monnier's La descente aux enfers: étude de pensée religieuse, d'art et de littérature and Gaston Paris' La légende de Trajan are more specialized but related studies.⁴ In addition, the question of the virtuous pagan as it played a role in the medieval debate between grace and works, God's will and man's, has been examined by Gordon Leff and Janet Coleman, as well as by historians of the fourteenth century Church.⁵ Almost all other works are limited to a consideration of a single author's treatment of the issue of the virtuous pagan.⁶ (However, although the theme of the virtuous pagan is unmistakable in both St. Erkenwald and Piers Plowman, no one--as far as I can determine--has yet considered Troilus as a possible candidate for this distinction by comparing his actions with the characteristic actions of his legendary counterparts.)

Only one study, John F. McNamara's "Responses to Ockhamist Theology in the Poetry of the Pearl-Poet, Langland, and Chaucer," examines the use of prominent theological concerns by the most important secular authors of the fourteenth century.⁷ As his title indicates, though, McNamara deals with the larger concerns of which the issue of the virtuous pagan forms a part. And, because of his broader scope, he

includes all the known works of the Pearl-poet (to whom he also ascribes St. Erkenwald) and, besides the Troilus, several of the Canterbury Tales. This range of material forces him to a certain superficiality in dealing with the literature. Thus, although our studies are in some ways similar, the present work has two major differences: (1) It is restricted to a significant but subordinate issue (the question of salvation for the virtuous pagan) in the overall debate between Augustinian and Ockhamist theology; (2) although the theological background provides an indispensable backdrop, the main emphasis falls on a deeper comprehension of the literature. It is my contention that an analysis of the issue of the virtuous pagan will yield rewarding insights in our study of St. Erkenwald, Piers Plowman, and Troilus and Criseyde.

Notes

¹R. V. Turner, "Descendit ad inferos: medieval views on Christ's descent into hell and the salvation of the ancient just," Journal of the History of Ideas, 27 (1966), 173-194.

²Louis Capéran, Le problème du salut des Infidèles (Toulouse: Grand Séminaire, 1934).

³Mario Frezza, Il problema della salvezza dei pagani (da Abelardo al Seicento) (Napoli: Fiorentino, 1962).

⁴J. Monnier, La descente aux enfers: étude de pensée religieuse, d'art et de littérature (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1905); Gaston Paris, La légende de Trajan (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1878).

⁵Gordon Leff, Bradwardine and the Pelagians (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957); Janet Coleman, "Sublimes et Litterati: The Audience for the Themes of Grace, Justification and Predestination, Traced from the Disputes of the Fourteenth Century Moderni to the Vernacular Piers Plowman," Diss. Yale University 1970. Two especially helpful books for general background of the fourteenth century Church are William Pantin's The English Church in the Fourteenth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955) and J. A. Robson's Wyclif and the Oxford Scholars (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966).

⁶For a study of the issue of pagan salvation in Dante, see the following: Gino Rizzo, "Dante and the Virtuous Pagans," in A Dante Symposium. In Commemoration of the 700th Anniversary of the Poet's Birth (1265-1965), ed. William DeSua and Gino Rizzo, University of North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, #58 (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), pp. 115-140; F. Ruffini, "Dante e il problema della salvezza degli infideli," Studi danteschi, 14 (1930), 79-92.

The following deal with the theme of the virtuous pagan in Piers Plowman: R. W. Chambers, "Long Will, Dante, and the Righteous Heathen," Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association, 9 (1924), 50-69; Greta Hort, Piers Plowman and Contemporary Religious Thought (New York: MacMillan, 1937); T. P. Dunning, "Langland and the Salvation of the Heathen," Medium Aevum, 12 (1943), 45-54; G. H. Russell, "The Salvation of the Heathen: The Exploration of a Theme in Piers Plowman," Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute, 29 (1966), 101-116; Denise N. Baker, "From Plowing to Penitence: Piers Plowman and Fourteenth Century Theology," Speculum, 55 (1980), 715-725.

Chaucer's attitude toward and use of classical paganism is explored in three works: John Frankis, "Paganism and Pagan Lore in Troilus and Criseyde," in Essays on Troilus and Criseyde, ed. Mary Salu (Cambridge:

D. S. Brewer, 1979), pp. 57-72; A. J. Minnis, Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982); John M. Steadman, Disembodied Laughter: Troilus and the Apotheosis Tradition: A Reexamination of Narrative and Thematic Contexts (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

⁷ John F. McNamara, "Responses to Ockhamist Theology in the Poetry of the Pearl-Poet, Langland, and Chaucer," Diss. Louisiana State University 1968.

Theological Background

The Early Church

The issue of the virtuous pagan is frequently linked with the event of Christ's descent into Hell during the three days between His burial and resurrection. This results from the fact that, strictly speaking, all men were pagans before the Christian era commenced with the Incarnation. Accordingly, it was commonly believed that until the Incarnation all souls descended into Hell at death. This belief can be traced to the Judaic concept of Sheol, an immense pit under the earth, where all the dead were re-united in an elementary form of existence, recognizable shades of themselves.¹ The idea that all the dead of the Old Testament were confined to Hell is confirmed by the words of such men as Jacob ("Descendam ad inferos lugens filium meum" and "Deducetis canos meos cum dolore ad inferos" [Genesis 37:35 and 42:38]), Job ("Infernus domus mea est, et in tenebris stravi lectulum meum" [Job 17:13]), David ("Deus redimet animam meam de manu inferi, cum acceperit me" [Psalms 48:16]), and Ezechias ("Ego dixi: In dimidio dierum meorum vadam ad portas inferi" [Isaiah 38:10]).² There was New Testament support for this idea as well. Chapter 11 of Hebrews, after listing several Old Testament characters who pleased God through their faith, concludes by saying that they did not receive "the promise" but awaited something better (Christ): "et hii omnes testimonio fidei probati non acceperunt repromissionem / Deo pro nobis melius aliquid providente ut ne sine nobis consummarentur" (Hebrews 11:39-40).³ Thus all those who had lived--from Adam up to Christ's lifetime--were housed in Hell. This made Christ's descent into Hell very important, for the effect of His actions on these non-Christians provided a clue to the fate of those

pagans who would live and die after the Incarnation. In addition, Christ's actions in Hell might help Christians determine the criteria necessary for their own salvation. Accordingly, two questions arose which the early Church attempted to answer: (1) Did Christ actually descend into Hell? (2) What was the purpose of His descent? The Bible, the Apocrypha, and the first- and second-century Fathers generally agreed that Christ had indeed descended into Hell, but several possibilities were advanced as to His purpose there. Also, although it was generally understood that Christ had liberated souls from Hell, the Fathers disagreed about which souls He freed.

On the first matter, the actual occurrence of the Descent, various passages in the Old and New Testaments support the idea. The text which appears to have been cited most often is Hosea 13:14: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction."⁴

The Descent figures even more prominently in Apocryphal literature. Here, besides an affirmation of the event, we find three major interpretations of Christ's purpose in Hell: to preach to the souls He found there, to battle the devil and establish divine sovereignty, or to baptize those in Hell.

The Apocryphon of Jeremiah, which supports the theory that Christ descended to preach, is quoted by the Church Fathers Justin and Irenaeus: "The Lord God remembered His dead, the saints of Israel that have fallen asleep in the tomb, and He went down unto them, to proclaim the good news of the salvation He was bringing to them."⁵ Although this passage indicates that Christ preached only to those who had anticipated His coming, we shall see that Clement and Origen later expanded this

concept in the belief that Christ preached to all the souls in Hell.⁶

The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, on the other hand, emphasizes Christ's conflict with the devil and the subsequent deliverance of Hell's captives. This aspect is also prominent in the Testament of Levi (IV, 1): "The rocks are rent, and the sun quenched, and the waters dried up the invisible spirits mourn, and Hell is despoiled through the Passion of the Most High."⁷ The Gospel of Nicodemus, perhaps the most detailed account of the Descent, vividly presents the dramatic battle between Christ and Satan.⁸ The theatrical appeal of the Descent's cosmic battle was not overlooked by the medieval mystery playwrights; the Harrowing of Hell was granted a separate scene in each of the four English cycles.⁹ The scene deserves closer examination, for it introduces two other aspects of the Descent as well, the idea of Adam as the first freed from Hell and the concept of Christ's deceiving the devil.

In this gospel, Satan and Hell are two separate characters who discuss the imminent reception of the Man dying on the cross. Satan rejoices in the defeat of an enemy who has cheated him by healing many and even stealing some of the dead, but Hell is wiser and fears Jesus' power. When a voice rings out commanding the gates of Hell to open, all attempts to bar the doors prove futile. "Then did the King of glory in his majesty trample upon death, and laid hold of Satan the prince and delivered him unto the power of Hell, and drew Adam to him unto his own brightness."¹⁰ Thus, according to tradition, Adam is the first to be delivered from Hell.

The character of Hell reproaches Satan in words which introduce another aspect of the Descent, the deliberate deceit practiced on a gullible Satan:

[T]hou oughtest first to have sought out matter of evil in this Jesus: Wherefore didst thou adventure without cause to crucify him unjustly against whom thou foundest no blame, and to bring into our realm the innocent and righteous one, and to lose the guilty and the ungodly and the unrighteous of the whole world?¹¹

In other words, by taking on human form, Christ has caused Satan to overstep his bounds and subsequently lose those in his power.

The Gospel of Nicodemus also indirectly supports the idea of baptism as an essential purpose of the Descent (and hence as a requirement for salvation). Although Christ does not literally baptize those He leads out, He does make the sign of the cross over them.¹² This idea is echoed in another apocryphal work, The Epistle of the Apostles, in which Christ first preaches and then baptizes in Hell in order to ensure fair judgment:

[S]o shall the judgement be accomplished with strictness For to that end went I down unto the place of Lazarus, and preached unto the righteous and the prophets, that they might come up into that which is above; and I poured out upon them with my right hand the water of life and forgiveness and salvation from all evil, as I have done unto you and unto them that believe on me.¹³

Ode XLII of the Odes of Solomon, an early second century work, also refers to Christ's baptism of those that appealed to Him in Hell: "And I heard their voice; / And my name I sealed upon their heads: / For they are free men and they are mine."¹⁴

Finally, the Gospel of Nicodemus ties up many loose details from the Biblical account, although these matters continued to provide a puzzle for later writers. For example, the gospel explains the fate of Enoch and Elijah, who never suffered death (Enoch was "translated" into heaven for his righteousness, and Elijah was taken to heaven in a chariot

of fire); the robber who Jesus promised would be with Him in Paradise; and those whose graves were opened and their bodies resurrected at the time of the crucifixion (Matthew 27:52-53). The saints, following Christ out of Hell, find Enoch and Elijah waiting for them in Paradise, along with the thief, who had been instructed by the angel at the gate to wait for Adam.¹⁵ The resurrected ones (about 12,000, according to the Latin B version of the gospel)¹⁶ had gone over Jordan for three days, received baptism, and had then risen to Paradise.¹⁷ In addition, the Latin B version introduces the possibility that some saints could have been left behind accidentally during the Harrowing:

Then all the saints of God besought the Lord that he would leave the sign of victory--even of the holy cross--in hell, that the wicked ministers thereof might not prevail to keep back any that was accused, whom the Lord absolved. And so it was done, and the Lord set his cross in the midst of hell, which is the sign of victory; and it shall remain there for ever.¹⁸

Thus both the Bible and the Apocrypha supported the idea of salvation of the Old Testament Fathers, although some question existed as to whether Christ descended to preach to them, deliver them by force, or baptize them (or--in the unconventional belief of Tertullian, to be discussed below--to allow them to partake of His flesh).¹⁹ In addition, some question remained as to whether the patriarchs were immediately liberated from Hell or merely promised a future deliverance.

Less sure, though, was the fate of the virtuous classical pagan. Without the Judaic expectation of a Messiah, philosophers and poets had nevertheless attained impressive truths. In addition, all known Christian philosophers from Aristides (136-161) to Clement of Alexandria (c. 185-211 or 215) were themselves converts from paganism and trained philo-

sophers--and therefore naturally sympathetic to the idea of a philosophized Christianity.²⁰ But Christianity was not assumed to be the same as philosophy; rather, Christianity was the fulfillment of philosophy.

Clement describes this relationship between the two:

For God is the cause of all good things; but of some primarily, as of the Old and New Testament; and of others by consequence, as of philosophy. Perhaps, too, philosophy was given to the Greeks directly and primarily, till the Lord should call the Greeks. For this was a schoolmaster to bring the Greek mind to Christ, as the law brought the Hebrews. Philosophy, therefore, was a preparative, paving the way for him who is perfected in Christ.²¹

This view of the concurrent value of philosophy and Christianity has been labeled the "double faith theory."²² It was an opinion held by the majority of the Fathers, notably Justin, Clement, and Origen, and it evidently disposed them toward a favorable view of the salvation of classical thinkers.²³

Justin was especially interested in the ties between philosophy and Christianity and most impressed by the truths of the Platonists, whom he believed to have most nearly approached Christianity. In fact, he supposed Plato to have been influenced by Moses; according to Plato's biographer he had at one time visited Egypt and had either read a copy of the Pentateuch or had at least made contact with its learned commentators.²⁴ In addition, Justin felt that salvation was possible for those who had died before the Incarnation: the rational truths attained by men sufficed for their Christianity, since all rational beings share in the universal Logos or Reason Who is Christ. Thus both Abraham and Socrates were Christians,²⁵ although those alive before Christ could see the truth only indistinctly.²⁶

Clement, as we have seen, likewise acknowledged the imperfect but

nevertheless compatible truths of philosophy.²⁷ Also like Justin, he acknowledged the participation of each man in the Logos, although he did not go so far as to say that this constituted Christianity.²⁸ He agreed as well on the matter of the probable salvation of Socrates (a model of integrity for Christian martyrs in their resistance of political tyranny) and other Greek philosophers.²⁹

Clement was the first to hold that a conversion was produced in Hell by Christ.³⁰ He asks:

If, then, he [Christ] preached the gospel to those in the flesh in order that they might not be condemned unjustly, how is it conceivable that he did not for the same reason preach the gospel to those who had departed this life before his coming?³¹

As a secondary point, he introduces the possibility that Christ may have preached only to the Jewish souls and left the others for the apostles, a concept based on a passage in the Shepherd of Hermas.³²

Clement's pupil, Origen, concurred with the belief that through the exercise of reason, man participates in the eternal reason of God and thus attains truth.³³ In his Contra Celsum, replying to Celsus' charge that Christians have nothing new to contribute compared to classical philosophy, Origen uses this argument in favor of Christianity. Since every man has an innate awareness of truth, the congruity of philosophy and Christianity confirms the truth of the Christians. At the same time, however, Origen asserts the necessity of salvation through Christ; natural morality is not enough.³⁴ Therefore, Origen agrees as well with Clement's belief that Christ's descent was made to convert souls in Hades:

[W]hen he became a soul unclothed by a body he conversed with souls unclothed by bodies, also converting those of them who were willing to

accept him, or those who, for reasons which he himself knew, he saw to be ready to do so.³⁵

Both Clement and Origen differed from the traditional view of Hell and maintained the Neoplatonic doctrine of the purification of souls and their eventual reunion with God. Origen states:

The process of purification and instruction begun on earth is continued after death. The good, clothed in a refined spiritual body, enter 'paradise,' or 'a certain place of education, an auditorium or school of souls.' Now are solved for the spirit all the problems which have been presented here in nature, history, and faith.³⁶

This belief eventually led to the condemnation of Origen as a heretic, for in 229 Origen disputed at Athens with Candidus on the related point of Satan's salvation (apocatastasis). Origen contended that the devil fell through his will, not his nature, and therefore even his redemption was possible.³⁷

Thus these three Fathers--Justin, Clement, and Origen--all applauded the confluence of philosophy and Christianity. The early Fathers did not, however, hold all philosophers equal. Platonism seemed most congenial to Christianity. But Epicureans had been questioned as atheists even by pagan philosophers, Stoics did not concede the incorporeality and providence of God, and Aristotle was held as an excellent guide on the terrestrial level but unreliable otherwise.³⁸ Even in the case of Platonism, the Church Fathers held philosophy as the mere handmaiden of faith, a relationship symbolized by the figures of Hagar and Sarah.³⁹

Not all Church Fathers, though, conceded the value of philosophy or the salvation of the classical philosophers. Opposed to the "double faith" theory acknowledging the merit of philosophy was that of "single faith," expressed most forcefully by Tertullian. To him, faith unadorned

by reason is best, as illustrated in two famous quotes: "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?"⁴⁰ and "I believe it because it is absurd."⁴¹ Not surprisingly, Tertullian denied that classical philosophers had attained Christian truth. Using Socrates as an example, he asserts:

It is therefore not to be wondered at, if even in his person . . . he, in the face of death itself, asserts the immortality of the soul by a strong assumption such as was wanted to frustrate the wrong [they had inflicted upon him]. So that all the wisdom of Socrates, at that moment, proceeded from the affectation of an assumed composure, rather than the firm conviction of ascertained truth. For by whom has truth ever been discovered without God?⁴²

Tertullian is also noteworthy for his distinctive interpretation of the Descent. Whereas the other Church Fathers primarily associated the Descent with liberation of the Old Testament patriarchs or the conversion/baptism of souls in Hell, Tertullian gave the Descent a eucharistic interpretation: "Nor did he ascend into the heights of heaven before descending into the lower parts of the earth, that He might there make the patriarchs and prophets partakers of Himself."⁴³ This idea would not be revived until the twelfth century by Rupert of Deutz.⁴⁴

In the late fourth and early fifth century, Augustine reversed the emphasis of the early Church on Christ's conversion of the souls He found in Hell, and he introduced the idea of a bi-level Hell with different degrees of suffering. At the same time, he did retain many of the earlier opinions. For example, he allied himself with the "double faith" theory by asserting that philosophy contained truths which Christians should accept:

If those who are called philosophers, and especially the Platonists, have by chance said things that are

true and in harmony with our faith, we are not only not to shrink from them, but to claim them for our own use from those who are, as it were, their illegal possessors.⁴⁵

He also accepted the possibility of salvation for those alive before the Incarnation---not, however, through the truths of philosophy, but through faith in the coming Saviour:

Sacramentum porro regenerationis nostrae manifestum esse voluit manifestatus Mediator. Erat autem antiquis justis aliquod occultum, cum tamen et illi eadem fide salvi fierent, quae fuerat suo tempore revelanda. Non enim audemus fideles temporis nostri praeferre amicis Dei per quos nobis ista prophetata sunt, cum Deum Abraham et Deum Isaac et Deum Jacob, ita se Deus esse commendat, ut hoc dicat suum nomen in aeternum (Exod. iii, 15). Quod si circumcisio antiquis sanctis pro Baptismo fuisse creditur, quid respondebitur de his qui antequam hoc praeceptum esset, Deo placuerent, non tamen sine fide? Sicut autem illi, quando idem Sacramentum occultum erat, credebant Christi incarnationem futuram, sic et nos credimus factam: et a nobis autem et ab illis futurus expectatur ad iudicium ejus adventus.⁴⁶

On the matter of the Descent itself, Augustine evidences some confusion. In his sermons on the Creed, he stated that Christ descended to free Adam, the patriarchs and prophets, and all the just who were guilty only of original sin:

Descendit ad inferna, ut Adam protoplastum, et Patriarchas, et Prophetas, omnesque justos, qui pro originali peccato ibidem destinebantur, liberaret; et ut de vinculis peccati absolutos, de eadem captivitate et inferni loco, suo sanguine redemptos, ad supernam patriam et ad perpetuae vitae gaudia revocaret. Reliqui qui supra originale peccatum principalem culpam commiserunt, ut asserit Scriptura, in poenali tartaro remanserunt, sicut in persona Christi dictum est per prophetam, Ero mors tua, o mors; id est, morte sua Christus humani generis inimicam mortem interfecit, et vitam dedit. Ero morsus tuus, inferni (Osee xiii, 14). Partim momordit infernum pro parte eorum quos liberavit: partim reliquit, pro parte eorum qui pro principalibus criminibus in tormentis remanserunt.⁴⁷

Further, he postulated two regions in Hell: a lower region where the damned are punished and the resting place of the just, the "bosom of Abraham" or "paradise" (from the story of the beggar Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16:19-31 and from Christ's words to the repentant thief on the cross in Luke 23:43).⁴⁸

However, in a letter to Bishop Evodius answering his questions about I Peter 3:18-20, Augustine contradicted himself and denied that the bosom of Abraham formed part of Hell.⁴⁹ This puts him in perplexity, then, about why Christ descended into Hell, as Scripture clearly states. He is forced by church tradition to believe that Christ freed Adam from Hell,⁵⁰ and it seems certain that He must have saved others as well, but he cannot conjecture whom:

Sed quia evidentia testimonia et infernum commemorant et dolores, nulla causa occurrit, cur ille credatur venisse Salvator, nisi ut ab ejus doloribus salvos faceret; sed utrum omnes quos in eis invenit, an quosdam quos illo beneficio dignos judicavit, adhuc requiro.⁵¹

In contrast to the early Fathers, though, Augustine was sure that Christ did not preach to those in Hell, and that those after the Resurrection lacking knowledge of the Gospel would not have the opportunity of salvation by hearing of Christ in Hell. This would lead to the absurd conclusion that the Gospel should not be preached so that all could be saved after death:

aliud sequitur absurdius, ut hic non sit Evangelium praedicandum, quoniam omnes utique morituri sunt, et sine ullo reatu contempti Evangelii venire ad inferos debent, ut eis prodesse possit, cum ibi crediderint: quod sentire, impiae vanitatis est.⁵²

At the same time, he realized the attractiveness of believing that Christ freed all He found in Hell, especially those classical writers admired

by himself and his contemporaries. But this cannot be, since their good acts were futilely directed toward human glory rather than devotion to God:

Si enim omnes omnino dixerimus tunc esse liberatos, qui illic inventi sunt, quis non gratuletur, si hoc possimus ostendere? praesertim propter quosdam qui nobis litterario labore suo familiariter innotuerunt, quorum eloquium ingeniumque miramur; non solum poetas et oratores, qui . . . aliquando etiam unum Deum verumque confessi sunt . . . verum etiam illos qui haec non cantando vel declamando, sed philosophando dixerunt: multos etiam quorum litteras non habemus, sed in illorum litteris didicimus secundum quemdam modum laudabiles vitas. Quae quidem omnia quando non referentur ad finem rectae veraeque pietatis, sed ad fastum inanem humanae laudis et gloriae, etiam ipsa inanescunt quodammodo, steriliaque redduntur.⁵³

In the same letter, Augustine radically altered the traditional gloss of I Peter 3:18-20, which states that Christ preached to the "spirits in prison"--the men of Noah's time, who were generally assumed to be suffering in Hell.⁵⁴ Since he did not believe that Christ descended to convert souls, Augustine decided that Peter was speaking not of the time after Christ's death but of the time of the Deluge as an analogy to the time following Christ's ascension. Thus those who refuse to believe in the Gospel during the construction of the Church (the ark) are the spirits in prison, shut up in ignorance. And as Noah and his family were saved by water, so believers are saved by baptism.⁵⁵ In effect, then, Augustine denied a literal interpretation of this passage. Although the East did not accept this view, Western theologians did throughout the Middle Ages.⁵⁶

In explaining this passage, Augustine again shows his confusion by contradicting himself. Although he had earlier seemed to deny salvation to the pagan philosophers, here he asserts that from the beginning of the

human race Christ has been on earth in the spirit if not in the flesh, so that some believed to their salvation. Although he apparently has the people of the Old Testament in mind, he does not exclude others. Thus Christ came "vel ad consolandos bonos, vel ad utrosque admonendos, ut alii ad salutem suam crederent, alii ad poenam suam non crederent, ipse utique non in carne, sed in spiritu veniebat."⁵⁷

From this short summary, we can see that Augustine was (as indeed he admitted to Evodius) unclear about many points relating to Christ's descent. Overall, this matter seemed beyond human comprehension: "Quod si de omnibus acceperimus, manet quaestio, quare Petrus eos tantum commemoravit, qui tunc increduli fuerunt cum fabricaretur arca."⁵⁸ However, Augustine definitely ruled out the earlier concept of conversion in Hell and evolved the idea of divisions in Hell.

Augustine's views were generally upheld by Gregory the Great in the sixth century. Like Augustine, he taught that the Hebrew Fathers were saved by their expectation of a Messiah. (He did not, however, subscribe to the "double faith" theory as Augustine had; he contended that faith which is supported by reason has no merit.)⁵⁹ He used the description of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem to illustrate the salvation of those before the Incarnation:

Sed qui praeibant et qui sequebantur clamabant:
Hosanna. Praecessit quippe Judaicus populus,
secutus est gentilis Hosanna autem Latina
lingua, salva nos dicitur. Ab ipso enim salutem et
priores quaesierunt, et praesentes quaerunt; et
benedictum qui venit in nomine Domini confitentur,
sequentium populorum. Nam sicut illi exspectata
passione ac resurrectione ejus sanati sunt, ita nos
praeterita passione illius ac permanente in saecula
resurrectione salvamur.⁶⁰

Also like Augustine, Gregory firmly rejected the notion that Christ

descended into Hell to preach there. In his Epistola XV, Ad Georgium Presbyterum, he reproved two officers of the church at Constantinople for teaching that Christ released from Hell all who acknowledged Him as God. He informed them that Christ released only those who in their fleshly existence had exercised faith and (as an addition to Augustine's teaching) good works: "descendens ad inferos Dominus illos solummodo ab inferni claustris eripuit quos viventes in carne per suam gratiam in fide et bona operatione servavit."⁶¹ Whether this criterion included pagans as well as Jews is left uncertain.

In summary, we see that Christ's descent into Hell was accepted by almost all of the Church Fathers. (One notable exception was John Chrysostom, who believed that Christ's breaking down the doors of Hell signified His triumph over death, nothing else.)⁶² Although not all agreed with them, Clement and Origen were influential in teaching that Christ (or his apostles) descended to Hell to preach to those who had died before the Incarnation. This left the door open for universal salvation, so that the classical philosophers these theologians admired could be admitted to heaven; made the new religion more palatable to its converts, since their deceased loved ones had been offered the opportunity for salvation; and generally reflected the prominent concern of the early Church, conversion.⁶³ By Augustine's time, these emphases had shifted. Augustine's views on the Descent were generally accepted as authoritative by the later Church: Christ did not descend to convert, but He had liberated souls from Hell; to understand His timing or His choice, though, was beyond man's domain. From this standpoint we turn to the re-opening of the issue in the twelfth century.

The Middle Ages - Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries

In the twelfth century, a revival of interest in the ancient Greeks and Romans led to a revival of the debate over their spiritual fate. During this century and the next, the Descent itself was generally accepted, although Abelard questioned it as a literal happening and imparted to the crucifixion itself a controversial meaning.¹ The primary focus of interest, however, centered on identification of those who had been freed from Hell. As in the early Church, theologians tended to divide between those who held to the "double faith" and "single faith" theories. Proponents of faith alone were more likely to believe that Christ descended to liberate the Old Testament Jews who had anticipated the coming of a Saviour. These more conservative theologians (although not all were "single faith" adherents) included Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter the Lombard, Hugh of St. Victor, and Alain of Lille. On the other hand, two men who markedly stressed the value of man's reason extended the possibility of salvation to pagans as well. Abelard and Aquinas (followed by the comparatively minor Alexander of Hales) led the way to the formula "facere quod in se est" (to those who did their best, God would not withhold grace), which would play an important role in fourteenth century thinking.² Another development of twelfth and thirteenth century thought was a greater interest in the "waiting room" of paradise. Whether it contained only Jews or the just pagans as well, hypotheses were advanced as to its location and the conditions there.

Let us turn now to a more detailed examination of these points, beginning with those theologians who upheld the position that, since faith was a prerequisite for salvation, only the Old Testament patriarchs were liberated from Hell at Christ's descent.

Bernard of Clairvaux, a strong opponent of the double faith theory, felt that faith should be unsupported by miracles or by attempts to demonstrate its rationality. "Faith is a voluntary and certain foretaste of truth which has not yet been made manifest" ("Fides est voluntaris quaedam et certa praelibatio necdum propalatae veritatis").³ Bernard's method of conversion was rhetorical, not intellectual.⁴ Therefore, he overtly attacked his contemporary Abelard for his boldness in applying his mind to anything on heaven or on earth: "Qui dum omnium quae sunt in coelo sursum, et quae in terra deorsum, nihil, praeter solum Nescio, nescire dignatur."⁵ In the same vein, Bernard writes:

Irridetur simplicium fides, eviscerantur arcana
 Dei, quaestiones de altissimis rebus temerarie
 ventilantur, insultatur patribus, quod eas magis
 sapiendas, quam solvendas censuerint Ita
 omnia usurpat sibi humanum ingenium, fidei nil
 reservans.⁶

In his teaching on the Song of Songs, though, he made clear his stand. He was not opposed to reason and to learning, but they were not necessary for salvation. Thus reason and faith are two separate entities for Bernard, not complementary as for the "double faith" theologians.⁷

But Bernard was convinced of the salvation of those who had believed in Christ's coming even before the Incarnation.⁸ They waited in Abraham's bosom, safe from the tortures of Hell, as Bernard asserts in answer to a question posed by Abelard:

Deinde infert: "Nunquid etiam pauperem illum, qui in sinu Abrahae requiescebat, sicut et divitem damnatum, diabolus cruciabat; aut etiam in ipsum Abraham dominium habebat, caeterosque electos?" Non: sed habuisset, si non liberati fuissent fide venturi Propterea jam tunc sanguis Christi rorabat enim Lazaro ne flammam sentiret: quod et ipse credidisset in eum qui erat passurus. Sic de omnibus electis illius temporis sentiendum, natos quidem et ipsos, aequae ut nos, sub

potestate tenebrarum, propter originale peccatum:
sed erutos antequam morerentur, et nonnisi in sanguine
Christi.⁹

Those who waited in Abraham's bosom enjoyed a place of quiet and refreshment, separated from the punishment of Hell, until Christ led them from this region to the throne of heaven.¹⁰ Although Bernard does not explicitly discuss the fate of the classical pagans, we can assume that he would not credit their philosophical systems with the ability to reach Christian truth.

Peter Lombard followed in Bernard's steps on the subject of Christ's descent and its implications for the salvation of pagans. His Quatuor Libri Sententiarum, a collection of questions about Christian beliefs with quotes from pertinent authorities, became a seminal work for the medieval period.¹¹ Under the heading "De fide antiquorum," he discusses the necessity of belief in a Mediator for those living both before and after the Incarnation:

Est autem quaedam fidei mensura, sine qua nunquam potuit esse salus nec ante adventum, nec ante legem videtur hoc suffecisse, quia sine fide Mediatoris nullum hominem, vel ante, vel post, fuisse salvum sanctorum auctoritates contestantur.¹²

This belief, however, was not the same for all. The prophets possessed a clear understanding; the masses of people had a "veiled" faith, accepting the teachings of their leaders as contemporary Christians accept the Creed without understanding it:

Dici potest nullum fuisse justum vel salvum cui non esset facta revelatio vel distincta, vel velata, vel in aperto, vel in mysterio. Distincta, ut Abrahae et Moysi, aliisque majoribus, qui distinctionem articulorum fidei habebant, velata, ut simplicibus quibus revelatum erat ea esse credenda, quae credebant illi majores et docebant, sed eorum distinctionem apertam non habebant.¹³

Thus for the Lombard, understanding and faith are separate capacities, understanding being a dispensable element unnecessary for salvation.

To prove that faith in Christ, though, was an absolute prerequisite for salvation, the Lombard uses the illustration of Cornelius the centurion from Acts 10. He believed in one God and the coming of the Saviour, but he did not know whether this Saviour had yet come. Pleased with his faith, God sent St. Peter to instruct Cornelius in the details of Christ's coming. Peter Lombard concludes:

Sed si posset sine fide Christi esse salus, non ad eum mitteretur architectus Ecclesiae Petrus. Attende quid ait, sine fide Christi non posse esse salutem; et tamen Cornelium exauditum antequam crederet in Christum. Quod ita potest intelligi, scilicet antequam sciret Christum incarnatum, in quem credebat in mysterio.¹⁴

This story, then, demonstrates the possibility of direct revelation for those who please God by their faith, despite their imperfect knowledge of the details of that faith.

Hugh of St. Victor basically agrees with the Lombard's views; those born before Christ merited salvation through faith in the Saviour to come, although they did not actually understand this belief:

Sic ergo intelligendum putamus quod dicit beatus Augustinus, quod eadem fides mediatoris salvos justos faciebat antiquos, pusillos cum magnis Alii quidem quae ventura erant, sicut ventura credentes et cognoscentes; alii vero non quidem cognoscentes, sed credendo et desiderando, cognoscentibus et credentibus adhaerentes.¹⁵

Likewise, it was possible for the ancient just to partake of the sacraments, although again not all could penetrate their symbolic meaning:

[I]n ipsis eandem redemptionem suam, quasi in umbra et figura portaverunt sacramenta passionis ejus, omnes quidem per fidem portaverunt,

sed non omnes per cognitionem, quod portaverunt
intelligere meruerunt.¹⁶

Alain of Lille's De Fide Catholica: Contra Haereticos, Valdenses, Iudaeos et Paganos was a completely different type of work from the Lombard's textbook. Composed between 1185 and 1200, it seems to have been designed as a systematic handbook in which the user could look up refutations of points raised by heretics.¹⁷ Each group is treated separately in a book of its own, and so the presentation of the doctrine of the Descent receives different emphasis in each book. Alain believes that in earlier times the use of reason could lead heretics to Christ; at the time of his writing, however, heretics (specifically, the Albigensians) had let their imaginations run unbounded by reason, not recognizing that their perceptions are limited by their senses:

[T]amen propter novos haereticos novis, imo veteribus et novissimis haeresibus debacchantes, philosophicis speculationibus deditos, sed sensuum speculis destinatos; cogor disertis rationibus de fide rationabili reddere rationem, qui in hoc ab antiquis haereticis differunt, quod illi humanis rationibus fidem nostram expugnare conati sunt; isti vero nulla ratione humana vel divina freti, ad voluntatem et voluptatem suam, monstruosa confingunt.¹⁸

Alain alternates reason with authority so that the user of his book can employ whichever form of proof is appropriate in a particular case.

Since the heretics he addresses accept some authorities, he primarily restricts himself to these and explains how they have been misinterpreted.¹⁹

In the first book, Alain outlines one heretical belief of the Albigensians: they deny Christ's descent into Hell and teach that all those in Hell (among whom they include John the Baptist) will remain there eternally:

Dicunt etiam Christum ad inferos non descendisse,
nec animas ab inferno liberasse; quia asserunt animas
omnium illorum qui ante adventum Christi decesserunt,
aeternaliter damnatas esse dicunt Joannem
Baptismam ideo damnatum, quia dubitavit de adventu
Christi ad infernum.²⁰

Alain refutes their view by citing passages from the New Testament, which the Albigensians accepted, proving that John the Baptist recognized Christ as Saviour.²¹ Indeed, "Ipse etiam in utero matris exsultavit in adventu Virginis."²² He quotes passages which point to Christ's descent into Hell (Luke 11:21-22 and Ephesians 4:8-9), includes the formula "Descendit ad inferos" from the Creed, and asks, "Sed si descendit ad inferos, ad quid descendit, nisi ut captivos liberaret? non enim gratia sui meriti descendit, sed ad liberandum eos quos diabolus in inferno injuste detinebat."²³ Further, he asserts that those who were freed did not go to the earthly paradise, for this is a corporeal rather than a spiritual region.²⁴

Later in Book I, Alain must counter the heretics' belief that the Old Testament Fathers deserved eternal punishment for their sins, which he enumerates. Even Enoch, in their argument, is damned because of his enormous sins.²⁵ Alain begins with the general argument that the Mosaic law was good because it came from God and that those who fulfilled it with love merited eternal life: "lex Mosaica a Deo data fuit, et bona, ita illi qui eam ex charitate impleverunt, vitam aeternam meruerunt."²⁶ He then presents verses of Scripture which prove the goodness of Moses, Abraham, Jacob, Noah, Enoch, and the other patriarchs.²⁷ Incidentally, he mentions his belief about the nature of Abraham's bosom ("per sinum Abrahae intelligitur requies") and the existence of an intermediate waiting place for the blessed ("Enoch . . . in paradysum terrestrem aut

alium locum nobis occultum, a Deo ductus est").²⁸ More important, he implies that ignorance ameliorates wrongdoing, so that some otherwise shameful acts should not be held against the patriarchs: "Si Noe vini virtutem ignorans, inebriatus est, quae culpa in eo?"²⁹

Thus Alain concludes that the Old Testament Fathers descended to Hell not for their sins, as the Albigensians wrongly believed, but because of original sin. But, like St. Bernard, Alain feels they were not actually punished and that they did not descend to the lowest regions of Hell: "Ad horum quoque in infernum descendebant, ubi non puniebantur materiali poena, sed carentia visionis Dei, felici spe consolati; nec ad profundum inferni descendebat."³⁰ This meant that Christ did not free all of those ensnared in Hell; those who did not fulfill the Mosaic law were left behind:

Mortuus enim est ut eos qui detinebantur in tenebris pro effectum peccati originalis, liberaret . . . In hoc omnes, secundum Apostolum, maledicto legis fuerunt subjecti (Gal. iii), quia nullus omnia implevit, et ita, quilibet spirituali legis opprobrio subjectus fuit.³¹

In the third book, refuting the heretical beliefs of the Jews, Alain had to prove that all those who had died before Christ's birth descended into Hell. Citing several passages from the Old Testament (which, of course, the Jews accepted as authoritative), he concludes: "Nemo ergo in coelum ascendebat, sed omnes qui tunc moriebantur descendebant ad infernum."³² None could have escaped this fate due to the taint of original sin: "Non est immunis a peccato infans cujus vita est unius diei super terram."³³ For this reason, Christ's sacrifice was necessary: "Mors itaque Christi, peccati originalis apud Patrem hostia et propitatio fuit."³⁴ Alain then cites the traditional passages

which refer to the Descent, Luke 23:43 and Hosea 13:14. In this book, then, Alain intended to demonstrate to the Jews that Christian doctrine did provide for the salvation of their Fathers.³⁵

We have seen that Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter the Lombard, Hugh of St. Victor, and Alain of Lille conservatively associated the Descent with the liberation of Old Testament patriarchs without directly speculating on the fate of the classical pagans. Peter Abelard and Thomas Aquinas, however, ventured to do so.

Both proponents of the "double faith" theory, Abelard and Aquinas made strong appeals to the use of reason in understanding the Christian faith. Reason, in Abelard's view, was a necessary adjunct to faith, not a dispensable and separate entity. For example, in his Dialogus, a discussion between a Christian, a Jew, and a philosopher, the philosopher rejects the others' religious beliefs because they refuse to give intellectual proofs.³⁶ This illustrates Abelard's contention in the Introductio that we must offer more proof than "Deus id dixerat": "Nec quia Deus id dixerat, creditur, sed quia hoc sic esse convincitur, recipitur."³⁷ Furthermore, reason is the mark by which man is particularly compared to the image of God, and therefore reason is perhaps used most appropriately to investigate God Himself:

Unde etiam cum per insigne rationis imaginis Dei specialiter homo comparetur, in nihil aliud homo pronius eam figere debuerat, quam in ipsum, cujus imaginem, hoc est expressiorem similitudinem, per hanc obtinebat, et in nullam fortasse rem percipiendam pronior esse credenda est, quam in eam cujus ipsa amplius adepta sit similitudinem.³⁸

On the other hand, Abelard does not place reason higher than faith: "Nolo sic esse philosophus, ut recalcitrem Paulo. Non sic esse Aristoteles, ut secludar a Christo."³⁹ In addition, he recognizes that

mere intellectual acceptance is not sufficient for salvation but must be infused with charity:

At nunquam si fidei nostrae primordia statim
meritum non habent, ideo ipsa prorsus inutilis
est judicanda, quam postmodum charitas subsecuta,
obtinere quod defuerat.⁴⁰

To refute Gregory the Great's apparent adherence to the "single faith" theory, Abelard reinterpreted Gregory's statement that faith for which human reason gives proof has no merit ("Nec fides habet meritum, cui humana ratio praebet experimentum"). Abelard insists that Gregory means faith gained by reason alone, without divine authority, has no merit, and not that faith and reason are incompatible:

Qui nec etiam dixit, non esse ratiocinandum de
fide, nec humana ratione ipsam discuti vel
investigare debere, sed non ipsam apud Deum
habere meritum, ad quam non tam divinae
auctoritatis inducit testimonium, quam humanae
rationis cogit argumentum.⁴¹

As a final clarification of Abelard's assessment of reason and faith, we know that he believed some gift of divine grace was necessary for a man to study philosophy:

Quantocunque enim tempore in ejus doctrine
desudaveris, laborem inaniter consumis, nisi
mente tua arcani tanti capacitatem coelestis
gratiae munus effecerit. Caeteras vero scientias
quibuscumque ingeniis potest exercitii diuturnitas
ministrare; haec autem divinae gratiae tantum
adscribenda est.⁴²

Given the high place accorded to reason in Abelard's writings, it comes as no surprise that he believed many of the classical philosophers attained Christian truths. As an example, he cites Hermes Trismegistus,⁴³ identifies the Platonic and Christian Trinities (even claiming that the Platonic World-Soul is the same as the Holy Spirit),⁴⁴ and points to the prophecies of Virgil's Fourth Eclogue⁴⁵ and the Sibyl.⁴⁶

Abelard seems to attribute the classical achievement of truth to a combination of reason and natural law. He goes so far as to say that the Gospel is nothing more than a reformation of the natural law followed by the philosophers: "Si enim diligentur moralia Evangelii praecepta consideremus, nihil ea aliud quam reformationem legis naturalis inveniemus, quam secutos esse philosophos constat."⁴⁷

Since these philosophers, in Abelard's opinion, could reach an understanding of Christianity, he felt assured of their salvation as well. Two chapters in his Sic et Non are devoted to the question of those delivered from Hell by Christ's descent. In Quod Adam salvatus sit, et contra, he cites various authorities who affirm that Adam was saved. There are no contra arguments on this point.⁴⁸ In another chapter, Quod Christus descendens ad inferos omnes liberavit inde, et contra, Abelard cites arguments for and against Christ's liberation of all souls in Hell.⁴⁹ Although Origen and Ambrose (actually Ambrosiaster) are presented in the affirmative, the majority of authorities cited taught that only those who had anticipated Christ's Incarnation were saved. This seemed to assure the salvation of the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets, but left the position of the classical philosophers vague.

Whereas Augustine had passed over this question, Abelard undertook to prove the salvation of the pagan philosophers. In his Theologia Christiana, he asserted that faith and justice were sufficient before Christ's advent and that the ancient philosophers fulfilled these requirements:

Ne quis post legem etiam datam usque ad adventum
Christi, de salute fidelium Gentilium desperet,
si sine perceptione sacramentorum sobrie ac

juste vixerint: inter quos quidem philosophi
tam vita quam doctrina claruisse noscuntur.⁵⁰

But while affirming the possibility of salvation of the classical philosophers, Abelard does not directly link it to Christ's descent. In fact, in the Dialogus the Christian argues against a literal interpretation of the Descent:

The Old as well as the New Testament seem to suggest what they said of hell should be understood mystically rather than corporeally. For instance, just as the bosom of Abraham, where the soul of Lazarus is received, is to be understood as spiritual and not corporeal, so hell is to be understood as that spiritual torment where it is related that the soul of the rich man is buried.⁵¹

In addition, Abelard does not link the salvation of the classical philosophers with the salvation of heathen alive after the time of Christ. Under the New Law, baptism and faith are necessary. Thus the soul of Trajan (a pagan Roman emperor of the late first and early second centuries) may have been drawn out of the place of torture, as tradition and legend held. However, his soul was not necessarily received into heaven.⁵²

Overall, then, Abelard attempts to prove that reason is an essential complement to faith, although not an adequate substitute for it; however, the use of man's highest reasoning powers--as in philosophy--is necessarily attended by divine grace. Therefore, the classical philosophers had certainly received salvation.

Like Abelard, Aquinas accords reason a prominent position. In fact, his Summa Theologica stands as a monument to the role of reason in interpreting the Christian faith. Christianity and philosophy are interwoven almost inextricably: knowledge of the first principles has been implanted in us by God,⁵³ while the goal of all right thinkers is

the contemplation of God ("Omnes qui recte sensuerunt posuerunt finem humanae vitae Dei contemplationem").⁵⁴ At the same time, however, there is a clear difference between the theologies of the philosophers and sacra doctrina, which "differt secundum genus."⁵⁵ Sacred doctrine is not mere knowledge about God but an invitation from God to attain beatitude: "Ille qui credit habet sufficiens inductivum ad credendum; inducitur enim auctoritate divinae doctrinae miraculis confirmatae, et quod plus est, interiori instinctu Dei invitantis."⁵⁶ This invitation does not nullify the value of reason but perfects it. Abelard had earlier responded to Gregory's charge that "fides non habet meritum cui humana ratio praebet experimentum" by changing the interpretation of the statement; Aquinas forthrightly retorts, "fides non destruit rationem, sed excedit eam et perficit."⁵⁷

Aquinas also goes beyond Abelard by making clear that this faith is available to those without the benefit of exposure to Christian teaching, even after the Incarnation. He poses the case of a person reared in the wilderness or among wild animals:

Si enim aliquis taliter nutritus, ductum naturalis rationis sequeretur in appetitu boni et fuga mali, certissime est tenendum quod ei Deus vel per internam imperationem revelaret ea quae sunt ad credendum necessaria, vel aliquem fidei praedicatorem ad eum dirigeret, sicut misit Petrum ad Cornelium, Act. X.⁵⁸

Thus doing one's best will open the way to whatever is necessary for salvation: "si nos fecerimus quod in nobis est, ut scilicet ductum naturalis rationis sequamur, Deus non deficit nobis ab eo quod nobis est necessarium."⁵⁹

Peter Lombard had used the story of Cornelius primarily to emphasize the necessity of faith; however, Aquinas mentions it to emphasize God's

willingness to provide the means to faith. Before the Incarnation, He even provided for the Gentiles several avenues leading to salvation, ranging from implicit faith to direct revelation:

[I]deo sufficiebat eis habere fidem de Redemptore implicite, vel in fide Prophetarum, vel in ipsa divina providentia. Probabile est tamen multis generationibus mysterium redemptionis nostrae ante Christi adventum gentilibus fuisse revelatum, sicut patet ex sybillinis vaticiniis.⁶⁰

As a final proof that at that time explicit faith was not necessary for salvation, Aquinas cites the case of John the Baptist, who doubted Christ's descent into Hell, one of the articles of the Creed:

Joannes Baptista . . . non tamen oportebat quod explicite crederet omnia quae post Christi passionem et resurrectionem tempore gratiae revelata explicite creduntur; non enim suo tempore veritatis cognitio ad suum complementum pervenerat, quod praecipue factum est in adventu Spiritus sancti.⁶¹

God even provided sacraments, necessary for salvation, to those alive before Christ's coming. These sacraments pointed to the Saviour's advent:

[S]acramenta necessaria sunt ad humanam salutem Et ideo oportebat ante Christi adventum esse quaedam signa visibilia quibus homo fidem suam protestaretur de futuro Salvatoris adventu. Et hujusmodi signa dicuntur sacramenta.⁶²

Since these sacraments were contained in the Mosaic Law, the Jews of the Old Testament were certainly provided for by God. Therefore, it is not surprising to find Aquinas discussing their liberation from Hell on the occasion of Christ's descent. Their assignment to Hell was based on original sin, nothing else, so that Christ's sacrifice set them free.⁶³ (After the Descent, baptism sufficed to erase original sin.)⁶⁴ Not all were freed from Hell, though. Those without faith in Christ's passion and those with faith but without love were left behind:

Illi autem qui erant in inferno damnatorum, aut penitus fidem passionis Christi non habuerant, sicut infideles; aut si fidem habuerent, nullam conformitatem habebant ad charitatem Christi patientis; unde nec a peccatis suis erant mundati.⁶⁵

In addition, children without the capacity for faith and free will, and souls undergoing the purification of purgatory, were left behind.⁶⁶ However, no virtuous pagans would be left behind, for the truly virtuous would receive God's grace. In fact, if any man did not use his free will to prepare himself for grace, he was guilty of the sin of omission. Thus for Aquinas none in Hell are guilty only of original sin:

[N]on est possibile aliquem adultum esse in solo peccato originali absque gratia; quia statim cum usum liberi arbitrii acceperit, si se ad gratiam praeparaverit, gratiam habebit; alias ipsa negligentia ei imputabitur ad peccatum morale.⁶⁷

Aquinas also tackled the question of where the virtuous had awaited Christ's descent. Solving Augustine's confusion over whether the bosom of Abraham was in Hell, Aquinas acknowledged the two to be identical. The souls were in the bosom of Abraham to the extent that they were free from punishment, but they were in Hell to the extent that they desired divine peace.⁶⁸ In terms of location, they waited in a limbo which formed a higher part of Hell.⁶⁹

In summary, then, Aquinas holds traditional views on the subject of Christ's descent, but his emphasis on the role of reason and the sufficiency of implicit faith, available to Jews and Gentiles alike before the Incarnation, opens the way to salvation for the classical poets and philosophers.

Aquinas' stand was upheld by Alexander of Hales, who posited the case of a child imprisoned by Saracens. He concludes that if, upon reaching adulthood, the captive did all that he could to live righteously,

God would illumine him by secret revelation, either by angel or man. ("Si facit quod in se est Dominus illuminabit eum par occultum inspirationem aut per angelum aut per hominem.")⁷⁰ In the same way, man's intelligence can prepare itself to receive an interior voice which will reveal the Christian mysteries: "De incarnatione et redemptione si aptet intellectum suum quantum in se est, vocabitur vocatione interiori, etsi non exteriori."⁷¹ Because of these beliefs, Alexander of Hales contended that a revelation had been granted to the philosophers before Christ. As Job and his friends had been enlightened, so had less-instructed pagans.⁷²

The Fourteenth Century

The belief in the harmony of reason and faith, whereby God rewarded the efforts of man's natural intelligence, did not continue into the fourteenth century.¹ In 1277 Étienne Tempier, Bishop of Paris, condemned 219 propositions which smacked of Averroism, or pure rationalism. Gordon Leff sees in this action "a turning-point in the use of Aristotle to support theology, expressing the hostility felt towards associating God and His ways with physical operations in this world."² Both Duns Scotus and William of Ockham contributed to this split between reason and faith. Duns increased the list of revealed truths which a Christian should believe but cannot prove, while Ockham held that natural reason could prove nothing about God, not even His existence.³ This stance invalidated such arguments as Anselm's well-known "ontological proof" of God's existence⁴ and the systematic syntheses of faith and reason developed by both Augustine and Aquinas.

This divorce of reason and faith was largely due to an exaggerated

emphasis upon the two orders of God's power, His potentia ordinata (by which the world was governed) and potentia absoluta (which enjoyed absolute freedom and could override the potentia ordinata as God willed.⁵ Most fourteenth century thinkers split into two opposed extremes on the issue of potentia absoluta, with the controversy primarily centered about the relationship of man's free will and God's all-powerful will. Could a man rely on unaided free will to help him achieve salvation, or was supernatural grace necessary to give man any merit in God's eyes? This issue pertains to the salvation of the virtuous pagans as well, since it seemed that many of the classical philosophers and poets deserved divine recompense for their efforts to reach a knowledge of God. In addition, the infinite possibilities open to God's potentia absoluta meant that God could grant salvation as He wished; the pagans were not necessarily damned if they lacked faith (explicit or implicit) in Christ.

William of Ockham, Robert Holcot, Thomas Buckingham, and Adam of Woodham were among those known as "Pelagians," a name borrowed from a heresy Augustine had fought against centuries before.⁶ Ockham and Holcot accorded to man the power to perform good acts by virtue of his own will; God's potentia absoluta allowed Him the freedom to accept such acts as worthy of divine sanction. Buckingham and Woodham, however, placed even greater emphasis on God's potentia absoluta: God's will alone determines the value and consequence of man's acts. In effect, this nullified traditional morality, for God's will could transform mortal sin into a meritorious act; this belief also made reason of no avail for salvation. The Pelagians' chief opponent, Thomas Bradwardine, also denied reason any spiritual efficacy, but for a different reason:

he opposed the Pelagian belief in man's ability to do good of his own will. For Bradwardine, divine grace was necessary before man could perform any act of merit.

Before examining these major positions in more detail, we should briefly consider the opinions of Gregory of Rimini and Richard FitzRalph, noteworthy for their moderation on this issue. Gregory of Rimini conceded God's prerogative and ability to deviate from His ordained laws but contended that this did not make Him unknowable. His potentia absoluta could apply to His creation, but not to His own nature.⁷ Richard FitzRalph basically agreed. Duns had introduced the possibility of God's potentia absoluta being used to free man from the necessity of grace for salvation; FitzRalph held that all meritorious actions must be informed by God's grace and justice.⁸ However, he did allow man's free will some scope in determining its own destiny.⁹

Opposed to the moderate approaches of these two men were, as we have seen, those who took the concept of potentia absoluta to its two opposite extremes. Ockham was in the forefront of those speculating upon the consequences of God's potentia absoluta. In 1326, 51 articles from his Sentences were condemned at Avignon; the first four invoked God's potentia absoluta as capable of otherwise unthinkable feats:

1. Man can of his own will perform an act worthy of God's grace.
2. God can accept a man without grace into eternal glory and can damn a man who has not sinned.
3. Charity is not necessary for divine acceptance.
4. God can remit sin without the sinner first needing grace.¹⁰

Although these four articles were labeled Pelagian, Ockham disagreed. His views, he argued, were the opposite: whereas Pelagianism held that

God was bound in justice to reward a good act, Ockham's beliefs set Him free to act as He would:

Item errorem Pelagius posuit quod si aliquis habet actum bonum ex genere: deus necessitatur ad conferendum sibi vitam eternam, et non mere ex gratia sua, ita quod necessario foret iniustus si sibi non tribueret vitam eternam Ego autem pono quod nulla forma nec naturalis nec supernaturalis potest deum sic necessitare.¹¹

Robert Holcot agreed that God's potentia absoluta allowed Him to dispense with grace and grant beatitude to natural acts of good:

Dico tunc istam conclusionem: quod deus potest acceptare ad vitam eternam omnes actus naturales alicuius hominis: et facere omnes actus liberos atque indifferentes aut non meritorios dicendo quod actus naturalis sit meritorius si deo placet: et hoc quia eque libere posset illum acceptare ad vitam eternam.¹²

Furthermore, Holcot contended that God reveals Himself to all who seek Him: "sed quicumque ad Deum innocenter se habent et rationem naturalem exercent studendo . . . Deus eis sufficienter sui communicabit notitiam sic quod eis sufficiant salutatem."¹³

Thomas Buckingham and Adam of Woodham carried this even farther. For Buckingham, God's potentia absoluta could overturn all order; for example, a man without grace could be saved at the moment of death:

Ad idem arguo sic: non est inconueniens quod aliquis per totam vitam suam fuit in peccato mortali et sine gratia et nunquam in gratia et tamen in instanti mortis est sine peccato et salvatus.¹⁴

In effect, God's will is so powerful in Buckingham's scheme that human will does not have to strive for good. However, man's will is able of its own accord to keep him from sin: "Concedo preter tamen charitatem est una naturalis iustitia qua creatura rationalis potest esse iusta et recta sine charitate."¹⁵

For Adam of Woodham, God's potentia absoluta exists for the purpose of overriding His ordained power ("frustra videtur mihi distinguerent doctores de potentia dei ordinata et absoluta nisi aliter posset facere et disponere de rebus quam disposuit de facto").¹⁶ Therefore, only His will imposes values of good and bad upon men's actions, and His absolute will is arbitrary, not bound by any rules: "Respondeo quod rectitudo est quod vult et rationale est omnino quod fiat sibi."¹⁷ Woodham goes even beyond Buckingham on this issue. Buckingham felt that sin could be supplanted by grace at God's will; Woodham asserts that grace and mortal sin can coexist.¹⁸ As Leff sees it, "The importance of such an attitude cannot be overstressed: it is to destroy the traditional order by which God moves and men are moved, it devaluates all hitherto accepted standards of good and evil; and it removes any constant criteria by which anything may be judged."¹⁹

Like these men, Thomas Bradwardine separated faith and reason, although from the opposite angle. Buckingham and Woodham (and, to a lesser extent, Holcot and Ockham) believed that God was unknowable and that His potentia absoluta was unpredictable. But they also allowed man's free will great autonomy, believing that man could use a disposition to do good as a moral claim to grace. (This became known as merit de congruo.)²⁰ Bradwardine agreed that reason could not lead to a knowledge of God. Indeed, the highest truth in philosophy is that we cannot by ourselves know God: "Sapiat ergo sobrie quicunque philosophus et etiam veritatem pro maxima Philosophia agnoscat, nihil citra Deum posse cognoscere plene Deum nisi forte per eum."²¹ But Bradwardine, far from granting man the possibility of merit de congruo, contended that faith alone led to justification in God's eyes: "Sequuntur enim

opera iustificatum, non praecedunt iustificandum, sed sola fide sine operibus praecedentibus sit homo iustus."²² Furthermore, man could not be sure of his status ("Nescit homo utrum amore, an odio dignus sit"),²³ but to follow free will was the path to sin since man could do no good of his own accord:

Nam usus creaturae, si non referatur in Deum, est usus illicitus; ergo peccatum, vel saltem non est recte factum: ergo illa intentio non est recta; nec alicuius intentio sine charitate et gratia gratuito super omnia fertur in Deum.²⁴

Thus according to the Pelagians, as Bradwardine branded his opponents, all men could merit grace by using their free will to do good works. Bradwardine, on the other hand, argued that men could do no good without a supernatural infusion of grace, granted by God as He wills, not as man deserves.²⁵

A different solution altogether was proposed by Uthred of Boldon, a Benedictine monk in the University of Oxford in the 1360's. Uthred advanced the idea that salvation ultimately depended on a clara visio of God at the moment of death. This was granted to all men, not just Christians, so that all are offered the opportunity of accepting or rejecting salvation.²⁶

The fourteenth century had a special interest in the subject of pagan salvation due to their ongoing dealings with another category of pagans, the Moslems. (Similarly, with the discovery of America two centuries later, the question of the fate of adult infidels would again arise.)²⁷

R. W. Southern sees the fall of Acre to the Moslems in 1291 as essentially the end of a rational world view of Islam.²⁸ Up to that time, men such as Raymond Lull (1235-1316) had worked for the conversion of

Moslems, viewing them practically as a sect of Christianity with a common philosophical basis. After the fall of Acre, a new attitude favoring their destruction arose for a short time, and the idea of beatitude reserved exclusively for Christians re-appeared in the universities.²⁹ But this attitude was reversed during the fourteenth century, for missionary efforts are recorded in the early 1300's. The last recorded Franciscan mission to the East was somewhere in Tartar lands in 1373-74,³⁰ but in the 1390's many Lollards (including Chaucer's friend Sir Lewis Clifford) joined the Order of the Passion to resist the advance of the Turks. Because of their Lollard bent, they may well have set out with conquest and conversion in mind rather than conquest and destruction.³¹ Thus for most of the fourteenth century, an appreciation of Moslems and a desire to convert them were evident.

This blurring of distinctions between Christianity and Islam, and the renewal of the conversion effort, point to the century's interest in the salvation of non-Christians of all epochs. As we have seen, this question of the salvation of virtuous pagans was of considerable importance from the first through the fourteenth centuries. With the supposedly apostolic sanction of the concept of Christ's descent into Hell, the salvation of Adam and the Old Testament Fathers became almost universally accepted. But from the first and second centuries, Church leaders were divided on the role of man's reason in attaining salvation. Those who acknowledged reason as a prerequisite and/or adjunct to faith tended to look favorably on the salvation of the classical thinkers they admired. Although these philosophers had not possessed faith in Christ, it seemed likely that God had made provision for them in some way. Several possibilities were thus entertained, with changing emphasis

depending on the intellectual climate of the time. In the early Church, the idea that Christ or His apostles had converted those in Hell was prominent, perhaps because the early Church itself was occupied with winning converts. Augustine rejected this view but confessed his inability to determine who had been liberated from Hell. Abelard, making reason almost the equal of revelation, was convinced that the classical philosophers had been saved. Aquinas added his voice to others who felt that implicit faith had been sufficient for salvation before the Incarnation. Although the great masters Augustine and Aquinas had both viewed reason and faith as compatible, this approach was discredited by the fourteenth century, which saw proponents of faith and of reason argue for the exclusivity of one or the other, with only a few voices of moderation heard. The controversy, which seemed to center around the relative powers of and relationship between God's will and man's, relates directly to the question of the salvation of virtuous pagans. If, as the fourteenth century "Pelagians" believed, man's free will enabled him to avoid sin and to do good works, his merit de congruo entitled him to God's grace. This opened salvation to all. In addition, God's potentia absoluta could make anything possible; if even mortal sinners could be saved, surely virtuous pagans could as well.

The controversies involving religion vs. philosophy, grace vs. works, God's will vs. man's, were not confined to theological circles but found their way into secular literature as well. The following chapters will discuss three of these works--not primarily to illuminate the theological issues, but rather to demonstrate how an awareness of these issues can yield a deeper understanding of the literature itself. First, however, we must examine the earliest detailed study of these

issues in a vernacular work, Dante's Divina Commedia, and examine the best-known legend of pagan salvation, that of the Emperor Trajan.

Notes

The Early Church

¹J. Monnier, La descente aux enfers: étude de pensée religieuse, d'art et de littérature (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1905), p. 7.

²I have presented a few of the Old Testament passages which Alain of Lille refers to while presenting this argument in his work De Fide Catholica: Contra Haereticos, Valdenses, Iudaeos et Paganos. See Patrologia Latina (hereafter referred to as P.L.), vol. 210, cap. xix, col. 418.

³Biblia Sacra Vulgata, ed. Robertus Weber (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1969).

⁴The Vulgate version reads, "De manu mortis liberabo eos, de morte redimam eos; ero mors tua, o mors, morsus tuus ero, inferne." For other Biblical references to the Descent, see Psalms 23:7-9, Zachariah 9:11, Matthew 12:39-40 and 27:52-53; Acts 2:29 and 2:27-31; Romans 10:7, Ephesians 4:9-10, Colossians 2:15; I Peter 3:18-20 and 4:6.

⁵See Justin, Dial. LXXII, 4; and Irenaeus, Adv. haer. III, 20:4; IV, 22:1, 33:1, 33:12; V, 31:1. From Jean Daniélou, The Theology of Jewish Christianity, trans. John A. Baker (Chicago: H. Regnery Co., 1964), p. 235.

⁶See pp. 14-15.

⁷Daniélou, pp. 239-240.

⁸Although this gospel was actually composed in the early fifth century, it is evidently a compilation of older material. See Johannes Quasten, The Beginnings of Patristic Literature, Vol. I in Patrology (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1951), p. 116.

⁹See Karl Young, The Harrowing of Hell in Liturgical Drama (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1910).

¹⁰M.R. James, The Apocryphal New Testament (1924; rpt. Oxford: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1945), p. 136. Chapters 17-27 of the Gospel of Nicodemus, "Descensus Christi ad inferos," purport to be the report of two eyewitnesses, the sons of Simeon. Although this document exists in three forms, the majority of manuscripts present "Latin A" (James, p. 119), and its account is followed here except where noted.

¹¹James, p. 137.

¹²James, p. 139.

¹³James, p. 94.

¹⁴Quasten, p. 167. The Shepherd of Hermas, however, taught in his Ninth Similitude that the apostles and teachers, not Christ, preached and baptized in Hell after their death.

¹⁵James, p. 141.

¹⁶James, p. 122.

¹⁷James, pp. 140-143.

¹⁸James, p. 139. Another possible interpretation is that Christ may pardon sinners in Hell and deliver them by virtue of His cross (a concept which may be applied in the cases of Trajan and the pagan judge of St. Erkenwald).

¹⁹See p. 16.

²⁰H. A. Wolfson, Philosophy of the Church Fathers (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 11.

²¹Stromata 1.5.28.1-3. From Jaroslav Pelikan, The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition, Vol. I of The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 63.

²²Wolfson, p. 122.

²³The likelihood of such salvation was strengthened by the early Church's idea that Christ descended to convert the souls He found in Hell. Of course, this concept also made Christianity more attractive to prospective converts of the early Church by allowing for the salvation of ancestors.

²⁴Henry Chadwick, Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 13-14.

²⁵Apologia I, 46. From Chadwick, p. 16.

²⁶Apologia II, 13. From S. Harent, "Infidèles--Salut des," Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique, Vol. VII, col. 1808.

²⁷See also his appeal to his philosophical colleagues to complete their world view by accepting Christ: "That which the chief of philosophy only guessed at, the disciples of Christ have both apprehended and proclaimed." Protrepticus, II. 112.2. From Pelikan, Vol. I, p. 46.

²⁸See Stromateis V. 133, 8-9; I. 10.4; Protrepticus 117. Chadwick, p. 39.

²⁹Stromateis V. 133-134, 141. Chadwick, p. 45. Socrates' fate became a popular topic in the Middle Ages, acquiring many fanciful accretions to bring Socrates within the pale of Christianity. A. J. Minnis (Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity [Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982], p. 51) summarizes the treatment of Socrates by William of Conches, William of Aragon, Nicholas Trevet, and Jean de Meun.

³⁰Stromata VI, vi. S. Harent, "Infidèles," col. 1814.

³¹Patrologia Graeca (hereafter referred to as P.G.), vol. 9, lib. VI, cap. vi, col. 274C. Passage translated by R. V. Turner, "Descendit ad inferos: medieval views on Christ's descent into hell and the salvation of the ancient just," Journal of the History of Ideas, 27 (1966), 174.

³²S. Harent, "Infidèles," col. 1815.

³³De Principiis, I, 1, 1. From William A. Banner, "Origen and the Tradition of Natural Law Concepts" in Dumbarton Oaks Papers, No. 8 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 73.

³⁴De Principiis III. 1. 17; Contra Celsum III. 81. Chadwick, p. 105.

³⁵P.G., vol. II, lib. II, cap. xliii, col. 863-866. From Turner, p. 174.

³⁶De Principiis, II, 11, 4, 5. From Reinhold Seeberg, Text-Book of the History of Doctrines, trans. Charles E. Hay (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1952), I, p. 159.

³⁷Chadwick, p. 99. Apocatastasis was condemned during the Second Council of Constantinople in 553, and until the sixteenth century the prevalent stress was on the punitive purpose of God's judgment. For more information on the subject of apocatastasis, see C. A. Patrides, "Salvation of Satan," Journal of the History of Ideas, 28 (1967), 467-478.

³⁸Wolfson, pp. 84-89. On the medieval issue of Aristotle's salvation, see A. H. Chroust, "Contribution to the Medieval Discussion: 'Utrum Aristoteles sit salvatus,' " Journal of the History of Ideas, 6 (1945), 231-238.

³⁹Wolfson, p. 97.

⁴⁰De Praescriptione Haereticorum 7; Apologeticus 46. From Chadwick, pp. 1-2.

⁴¹De Carne Christi 5. From Chadwick, pp. 1-2. This attitude in some ways parallels that of gnosticism, a belief condemned as heretical because of its teaching of pure revelation of the elect and total depravity of the damned, with no criteria of rational judgment (Chadwick, p. 9). The gnostic Marcion, according to Irenaeus, went so far as to assert that Christ descended to save Cain, Esau, and all who had turned away from the God of the Jews and had left behind Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, and Solomon (S. Harent, "Infidèles," col. 1819).

⁴²Tertullian, De Anima, in The Writings of Tertullian, Vol. II. Vol. XV in the Ante-Nicene Christian Library, ed. Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1870), pp. 411-412.

⁴³Tertullian, p. 530.

⁴⁴C. I. Smith, "Reply to 'Descendit ad inferos: medieval views on Christ's descent into hell and the salvation of the ancient just,' " Journal of the History of Ideas, 30 (1969), 250.

⁴⁵De doctrina christiana II, 40, 60. From Wolfson, p. 128. In Latin, this passage reads: "Philosophi autem qui vocantur, si qua forte vera et fidei nostrae accommodata dixerunt, maxime Platonici, non solum formidanda non sunt, sed ab eis etiam tanquam injustis possessoribus in usum nostrum vindicanda" (P.L., vol. 34, cap. XL, col. 63).

⁴⁶De Praesentia Dei Liber, seu Epistola CLXXXVII, P.L., vol. 33, cap. II, col. 833-834.

⁴⁷Sermo de Symbolo, P.L., vol. 40, cap. VII, col. 1194.

⁴⁸De Praesentia Dei Liber, seu Epistola CLXXXVII, P.L., vol. 33, cap. II, col. 833-834:

Si ergo secundum hominem quem Verbum Deus suscepit, putamus dictum esse, Hodie mecum eris in paradiso, non ex his verbis in coelo existimandus est esse paradisos: neque enim ipso die in coelo futurus erat homo Christus Jesus; sed in inferno secundum animum,

in sepulcro autem secundum carnem....Restat igitur ut, si secundum hominem dictum est, Hodie mecum eris in paradiso, in inferno intelligatur esse paradisos.

Utrum autem sinus ille Abrahae, ubi dives impius cum in tormentis esset inferni, requiescentem pauperem vidit, vel paradisi censendus vocabulo, vel ad inferos pertinere existimandus sit, non facile dixerim. De illo quippe divite legimus dictum esse, Mortuus est autem et dives, et sepultus est in inferno; et, cum apud inferos in tormentis esset. In pauperis autem morte vel requie non sunt inferi nominati; sed, Contigit, inquit, mori inopem illum, et auferri ab Angelis in sinum Abrahae. Deinde ardenti diviti dicit Abraham, Inter nos et vos chaos magnum firmatum est (Luc. xvi, 22-26): tanquam inter inferos sedesque beatorum.

⁴⁹Epistola CLXIV, P.L., vol. 33, col. 711:

Sed quonam modo intelligatur Abraham, in cujus sinum pius etiam pauper ille susceptus est, in illis fuisse doloribus, ego quidem non video Quanquam in his ipsis tanti magistri verbis, ubi ait dixisse Abraham, Inter vos et nos chaos magnum firmatum est, satis, ut opinor, appareat non esse quamdam partem, et quasi membrum inferorum, tantae illius felicitatis sinum.

⁵⁰P.L., vol. 33, cap. III, col. 711:

Et de illo quidem primo homine patre generis humani, quod eum inde solverit, Ecclesia fere tota consentit; quod eam non inaniter credidisse credendum est, undecumque hoc traditum sit, etiamsi canonicarum Scripturarum hinc expressa non proferatur auctoritas.

⁵¹P.L., vol. 33, col. 712.

⁵²P.L., vol. 33, col. 714.

⁵³P.L., vol. 33, col. 710.

⁵⁴H. Quilliet, "Descente de Jésus Aux Enfers," Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique, vol. IV, col. 591. The verses are as follows in the King James version:

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;

Which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the

ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.

The Vulgate version reads: "Quia et Christus semel pro peccatis nostris mortuus est, iustus pro iniustis, ut non offerret Deo, mortificatus quidem carne, vivificatus autem spiritu. / In quo et his qui in carcere erant spiritibus veniens praedicavit, / qui increduli fuerant aliquando, quando expectabant Dei patientiam in diebus Noe cum fabricaretur arca, in qua pauci, id est octo animae salvae factae sunt per aquam."

⁵⁵P.L., vol. 33, col. 715:

Considera tamen ne forte totum illud quod de conclusis in carcere spiritibus, qui in diebus Noe non crediderant, Petrus apostolus dicit, omnino ad inferos non pertineat; sed ad illa potius tempora quorum formam ad haec tempora transtulit . . . ut ii qui modo non credunt Evangelio, dum in omnibus gentibus aedificatur Ecclesia, illis intelligantur esse similes, qui tunc non crediderunt cum fabricaretur arca: illi autem qui crediderunt, et per Baptismum salvi fiunt, illis comparentur, qui tunc in eadem arca salvi facti sunt per aquam.

⁵⁶Quilliet, "Descente," col. 594.

⁵⁷P.L., vol. 33, cap. IV, col. 716.

⁵⁸Epistola CLXIV, P.L., vol. 33, cap. IV, col. 714.

⁵⁹"Nec fides habet meritum, cui humana ratio praebet experimentum."
Homil. in Evang. XXVI, P.L., vol. 76, col. 1197C.

⁶⁰Homilium in Ezechielem, lib. II, P.L., vol. 76, col. 985C-986A.

⁶¹P.L., vol. 77, col. 869B-870A.

⁶²Harent, "Infidèles," col. 1817.

⁶³John of Damascus narrowed the requirements for salvation, asserting that only those who had practiced natural virtue without having received the light of faith were saved (from De fide orthodoxa, I. III, c. xxix; Quilliet, "Descente," col. 598), while St. Philaster imposed the criteria that poets, philosophers, and other non-Christians could be saved if they had believed in God and had not practiced idolatry (from De haeresibus, cxxv; Quilliet, "Descente," col. 600).

The Middle Ages - Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries

¹See p. 32 for a discussion of Abelard's view of the Descent. Abelard was also instrumental in imparting a new meaning to Christ's crucifixion, which had undergone a changing interpretation through the years. Using the analogy of Greek and Roman slaves who purchased their freedom, Paul had declared that by Christ's blood we were freed from sin. Irenaeus, Origen, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Ambrose elaborated on this view to explain the redemption as a ransom due the devil (Quilliet, "Descente," col. 603). From this idea the concept of outwitting the devil developed. The "Ransom Theory" was accepted by Augustine and remained authoritative for almost a thousand years. Anselm of Canterbury modified this view in the eleventh century. He saw Christ's death not as a payment due the devil but due God, whose majesty had been injured by Adam's sin (Cur Deus Homo? I. 7; P.L., vol. 158, col. 367ff; also Medit. XI, col. 764). Abelard used Anselm's arguments but did not see Christ's death as payment of a debt to God or the devil. Instead, Jesus came to reveal the path of righteousness: "True charity would no longer be afraid to endure anything for his sake" ("Nil jam tolerare ipsum vera reformidet charitas"; Epist. ad Romanos, II. 3; P.L., vol. 178, col. 836B). Against Abelard's exemplarist theory, Bernard of Clairvaux defended the traditional view of Christ's death as a ransom for man:

Non requisivit Deus Pater sanguinem Filii, sed
tamen acceptavit oblatum; non sanguinem sitiens,
sed salutem, quia salus erat in sanguine. Salus
plane, et non, sicut iste [Abelard] sapit et
scribit, sola charitatis ostensio.
(Contra Quaedam Capitula Errorum Abelardi; P.L.,
vol. 182, cap. xxii, col. 1070C)

²Janet Coleman, "Sublimes et Litterati: The Audience for the Themes of Grace, Justification and Predestination, Traced from the Disputes of the Fourteenth Century Moderni to the Vernacular Piers Plowman," Diss. Yale University 1970, p. 12.

³De Consid. v. 3.6. P.L., vol. 182, col. 791.

⁴J. G. Sikes, Peter Abailard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), p. 35.

⁵Epistola CXC, 1, 1. P.L., vol. 182, 1055A.

⁶Epistola CLXXXVIII. P.L., vol. 182, col. 353A.

⁷Sermones in Cantica, Sermo xxxvi. P.L., vol. 182, col. 967C:

quantos enumerat Apostolus in Epistola ad Hebraeos,
factos dilectos, non in scientiam litterarum, sed
in conscientia pura et fide non ficta (Hebr. xl).

Omnes placuerunt Deo in vita sua, vitae meritis,
non scientiae.

⁸Epistola Seu Tractatus, De Baptismo . . . P.L., vol. 182, col. 1041A.

⁹Contra Quaedam Capitula Errorum Abelardi. P.L., vol. 182, cap. vii, col. 1068AB.

¹⁰Sermo IV, De sinu Abrahae. P.L., vol. 183, col. 472AB.

[S]ed providerat eis Dominus in inferno ipso locum quietis et refrigerii, chaos magnum firmans inter sanctas illas animas, et animas impiorum. Quamvis enim utraeque in tenebris essent, non utraeque erant in poenis; sed cruciabantur impii, iusti vero consolabantur Hunc ergo locum, obscurum quidem, sed quietum, sinum Abrahae Dominus vocat.

In hunc ergo locum Salvator descendens, contrivit portas aereas, et vectes ferreos confregit, eductosque vinctos de domo carceris, sedentes quidem, hoc est quiescentes, sed in tenebris et umbra mortis, jam tunc quidem sub altare Dei collocavit.

¹¹Students who intended to attain a mastership in theology spent an entire year preparing lectures (delivered the following year) on this work. Thus the views of Peter Lombard are those officially sanctioned by the Church.

¹²Sententiarum, Lib. III, dist. xxv, De fide antiquorum. P.L., vol. 192, col. 809.

¹³P.L., vol. 192, col. 809-810.

¹⁴P.L., vol. 192, col. 810.

¹⁵De Sacramentis, Lib. I, Pars X, cap. vii. P.L., vol. 176, col. 340.

¹⁶P.L., vol. 176, col. 340.

¹⁷G. R. Evans, Alan of Lille, The Frontiers of Theology in the Later Twelfth Century (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 117.

¹⁸De Fide Catholica . . . , Prologus. P.L., vol. 210, col. 307AB.

¹⁹Evans, pp. 131-132. Evans points out that Aquinas likewise recognizes the division between reason and authority. But since he is addressing the pagan, not the heretic, in his Summa Contra Gentiles, he begins with reason and works his way up to the authorities.

²⁰P.L., vol. 210, cap. xv, col. 319B.

²¹P.L., vol. 210, cap. xvi, col. 319C.

²²P.L., vol. 210, cap. xvi, col. 319D.

²³P.L., vol. 210, col. 320AB.

²⁴P.L., vol. 210, col. 320C.

²⁵P.L., vol. 210, cap. xxxvii, col. 341B-342B.

²⁶P.L., vol. 210, cap. xxxviii, col. 342B.

²⁷P.L., vol. 210, col. 342B-344D.

²⁸P.L., vol. 210, col. 343CD.

²⁹P.L., vol. 210, col. 343D.

³⁰P.L., vol. 210, col. 344CD.

³¹P.L., vol. 210, col. 344CD.

³²P.L., vol. 210, cap. xix, col. 418C.

³³P.L., vol. 210, cap. xix, col. 418D.

³⁴P.L., vol. 210, col. 419B.

³⁵Turner, p. 187.

³⁶P.L., vol. 178, col. 1615.

³⁷P.L., vol. 178, col. 1050D.

³⁸Introductio, III. P.L., vol. 178, col. 1086C.

³⁹Epistola xvii. P.L., vol. 178, col. 375C.

⁴⁰Introductio, II, 3. P.L., vol. 178, col. 1051A. Abelard was not unique in this distinction between types of faith. Augustine likewise speaks of his "unformed faith" before baptism in De Bapt. III. 16, 21 (P.L., vol. 43, col. 149). Anselm of Canterbury also makes a distinction between valueless or loveless faith and meritorious faith possessing charity (Monolog. 77, P.L., vol. 158, col. 219C). Aquinas makes the same distinction between fides informis and fides formata (In Romanos, I, lect. 6, VI. 18; also Summa Theologica II-II, IV, IV and XIX, V).

⁴¹Introductio, P.L., vol. 178, col. 1050CD. The six underlined words are omitted from the P.L. text but supplied by Balliol Ms. CCXCVI, folio 29. Sikes (p. 52) points out that their addition alters the traditional interpretation of this passage and makes Abelard's position more tenable.

⁴²Dialectica. Taken from Sikes, p. 59.

⁴³Introductio, I, 16. P.L., vol. 178, col. 1010-1011.

⁴⁴Introductio, I, 18. P.L., vol. 178, col. 1024B.

⁴⁵Introductio, I, 21. P.L., vol. 178, col. 1031A. Theol. Christ. I, 5. P.L., vol. 178, col. 1163B.

⁴⁶Introductio, I, 21. P.L., vol. 178, col. 1031B. Theol. Christ. I, 5. P.L., vol. 178, col. 1162C.

⁴⁷Theol. Christ. II. P.L., vol. 178, col. 1179D.

⁴⁸P.L., vol. 178, cap. LVIII, col. 1427C-1428A.

⁴⁹P.L., vol. 178, col. 1468D-1471D.

⁵⁰Theol. Christ. II. P.L., vol. 178, col. 1172.

⁵¹A Dialogue of a Philosopher with a Jew, and a Christian, trans. Pierre J. Payer, Medieval Sources in Translation, #20 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1979), pp. 151-152.

⁵²Theol. Christ. II. P.L., vol. 178, col. 1204C.

- ⁵³Contra Gentiles, I, 7, 2.
- ⁵⁴In I Sent., Prol., q. I, a. I.
- ⁵⁵Summa Theologica, I, I, I, ad 2m.
- ⁵⁶Summa Theologica, II-II, II, IX, ad 3m.
- ⁵⁷Quaestiones Disputatae, De Veritate, Quaestio XIV, De Fide, X, ad 9m.
- ⁵⁸Quaestiones Disputatae, De Veritate, XIV, XI, ad 1m.
- ⁵⁹Quaestiones Disputatae, De Veritate, XIV, XI, ad 2m.
- ⁶⁰Quaestiones Disputatae, De Veritate, XIV, XI, ad 5m.
- ⁶¹Quaestiones Disputatae, De Veritate, XIV, XI, ad 6m. The first authentic mention of the Descent in a Catholic creed comes from Rufinus (d. 395), reporting the activities of his church in Aquileia and pointing out that this formula is found neither in the Roman nor Eastern creed. After Rufinus, though, the formula descendit ad inferos appears in many places. (See Quilliet, "Descente," col. 568-570.) The insertion of this credal formula probably became irrevocable by the ninth century, when it appeared in the Ordo romanus during the time of Pope Nicholas I, 858-867. At that time, the legend revived that the twelve apostles had each brought an article to the creed. This formula was attributed to St. Thomas or St. Philip and thus took on apostolic authority (Quilliet, "Descente," col. 572).
- ⁶²Summa Theologica, III, LXI, III.
- ⁶³Summa Theologica, III, LII, V:
 Per hoc autem sancti patres detinebantur in inferno,
 quod eis ad vitam gloriae propter peccatum primi
 parentis aditus non patebat. Et sic Christus
 descendens ad inferos, sanctos patres ab inferis
 liberavit.
- ⁶⁴Summa Theologica, III, LII, V, ad 2m.
- ⁶⁵Summa Theologica, III, LII, VI.
- ⁶⁶Summa Theologica, III, LII, VII and VIII.

⁶⁷Quaestiones Disputatae, De Veritate, XXIV, XII, ad 2m.

⁶⁸Summa Theologica, III Supp., LXIX, IV.

⁶⁹Summa Theologica, III Supp., LXIX, V.

⁷⁰Summa Theologica, II, CXIII, m. VIII cas. I.

⁷¹Summa Theologica, II, CXIII m. VIII cas. I.

⁷²Summa Theologica, III, LXIX a. 3.

The Fourteenth Century

¹Etienne Gilson's Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954) documents the growing opposition between the proponents of faith on the one hand and reason on the other.

²Gordon Leff, Bradwardine and the Pelagians (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), p. 4. J. A. Robson (Wyclif and the Oxford Scholars [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966], p. 19) succinctly characterizes this period:

In brief, Augustinian neoplatonism was criticised for confounding God and man in a single metaphysical system, for excessive determinism, and for depreciating unduly the play of divine and human will. Against this the new philosophers placed the transcendence of God (and the impossibility of knowing him except in so far as his nature was expressed in the world of being), the primacy of his will, and the radical contingency of all divine and human acts.

³Gilson, pp. 85-87.

⁴Anselm, who formulated the famous "credo ut intelligam," proves the existence of God by assuming a name for Him which makes necessary the statement "God exists." In the beginning of Proslogion 2, Anselm states that God is "aliquid quo nihil cogitari possit." For a fuller explanation, see Karl Barth's Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum, trans. Ian W. Robertson (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1960).

⁵Leff, pp. 130-131.

⁶For a complete treatment of this subject, see J. Ferguson, Pelagius: A Historical and Theological Study (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956). Briefly, the controversy between Augustine and Pelagius turned upon the meaning of grace. Augustine emphasized "special grace" (effected by Christ's crucifixion and mediated through baptism); Pelagius, "general grace" (God's endowment of human nature which enables us to do His will). Ferguson (pp. 172-175) summarizes:

Thus Augustine lays his stress upon the divine initiative, Pelagius upon the human response Augustine won in part because the Church, seeing how God is greater than man, and the divine initiative greater than the human response, felt that his emphasis was right.

⁷Gordon Leff, Richard FitzRalph, Commentator of the Sentences (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1963), p. 8.

⁸Leff, FitzRalph, p. 158, n. 5. "Perdita iustitia que est instrumentum volendi non potest ipsa voluntas istam velle nisi per gratiam reddatur" (II, Q 3, 164va).

⁹Leff, FitzRalph, p. 16.

¹⁰Leff, Bradwardine, pp. 189-192. Also see A. Pelzer, "Les 51 Articles de Guillaume Occam censurés en Avignon en 1326" in Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique, XVIII (1922), pp. 240-271.

¹¹Leff, Bradwardine, p. 197, n. 2. Bk. I, dist. 17, q. II and M.

¹²Leff, Bradwardine, p. 217, n. 3. Bk. I, Q. 4, art. 4D.

¹³Sap. Lect. 155, MS Balliol Coll. 27 fol. 231 ab-a. From Coleman, p. 150. For a more complete discussion of Holcot's resolution of the dialectic of God's potentia absoluta and potentia ordinata, see H. Oberman, "Facientibus quod in se est Deus non denegat gratium: Robert Holcot OP and the Beginning of Luther's Theology," Harvard Theological Review, LV (1962), 317-342.

¹⁴Leff, Bradwardine, p. 233. Sentences, Bk. I, dist. 17, q. 6.

¹⁵Leff, Bradwardine, p. 229, n. 2. Sentences, q. 6.

¹⁶Leff, Bradwardine, p. 242, n. 1. Sentences, Bk. I, dist. 17, q. 3, ms. b.

¹⁷Leff, Bradwardine, p. 147, n. 3. Bk. I, dist. 17, q. 1, ms. a.

¹⁸Leff, Bradwardine, p. 246. Bk. I, dist. 17, q. 3, ms. a.

¹⁹Leff, Bradwardine, p. 246.

²⁰Leff, Bradwardine, p. 74.

²¹Leff, Bradwardine, p. 120, n. 3.

²²Leff, Bradwardine, p. 83, n. 2.

²³Leff, Bradwardine, p. 84, n. 2.

²⁴Leff, Bradwardine, p. 76, n. 1.

²⁵Another extreme determinist was John Wyclif, who paid Bradwardine the compliment of borrowing the term "Pelagians" for those he opposed. Wyclif differed from Bradwardine in emphasizing God's knowledge, not His will, but agreed that no man could perform a meritorious act without the initial act of divine grace working in him (Robson, pp. 201, 211). Wyclif's stand eventually led him to a full predestinarianism, whereby a man's acts were totally irrelevant to his damnation (Robson, p. 212).

²⁶See M. D. Knowles, "The Censured Opinions of Uthred of Boldon," in Proceedings of the British Academy, 37 (1951), pp. 305-42. Also, see G. H. Russell, "The Salvation of the Heathen: The Exploration of a Theme in Piers Plowman," Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute, 29 (1966), 101-116, for Uthred's possible influence on Piers Plowman, especially in relation to baptism, which becomes irrelevant in Uthred's scheme.

²⁷Quilliet, "Descente," col. 1894.

²⁸R. W. Southern, Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 68.

²⁹Coleman, pp. 146-147.

³⁰Coleman, p. 171.

³¹Coleman, pp. 158-159.

The Virtuous Pagan in Legend and in Dante

While philosophers and theologians speculated on the limitations of reason and the possibility of salvation for virtuous pagans, the issues caught the popular imagination as well. This is evidenced by a few widespread legends of miraculous salvation, proving that the general tendency was toward sympathy for those who had been denied the benefits of revelation or baptism.¹ Since much of the literature presupposes a familiarity with these traditions, it will be helpful to conduct a brief survey of them. In general, these legends fall into three categories: those focusing on baptism, those involving prayers for the dead, and those uniting the pagan past to the Christian present. In addition, Dante's treatment of the issue of pagan salvation is important, for his Divina Commedia, a kind of summa of medieval Catholicism, is the first vernacular work to make a detailed study of the subject. At the same time, Dante both draws upon and expands the traditional legends of virtuous pagans.

Many of the legends involve the question of baptism. Ambrose gave theological justification for the idea of salvation without baptism when he attempted to comfort the sisters of the Emperor Valentinian, who had died as a catechumen without the opportunity of baptism.² Perhaps the earliest legend, though, dates from c. 203 in the story of St. Perpetua, who had a vision of her little brother Dinocrates. He had died of ulcers in the face, and when she first saw him he was suffering from the same affliction. She observed him trying to reach a fountain that was far too high for him. After she prayed for him, she had another vision of him drinking from the fountain, now at his waist-level, and

running away in good health and joy. The fountain, of course, signified the baptism which his sister's prayers enabled him to receive.³

St. Patrick was credited with two instances of miraculous baptism. In one case, Patrick raised from the dead a pregnant woman and baptized both the mother and the child in her womb.⁴ Probably better known was the tale of Patrick's encounter with a giant:

Once, as Patrick was travelling in the plains of the son of Erc, namely in Dichuil and Erchuil, he beheld therein a huge grave, to wit, a hundred and twenty feet in length. The brethren asking ut suscitaretur, Patrick then brought to life the dead man who was hiding in the grave, and asked tidings of him, namely, when and how he got there, and of what race and of what name he was. He answered Patrick, saying: "I am Cass, son of Glass; and I was the swineherd of Lugar, king of Iruata, and Macc Con's soldiery slew me in the reign of Coirpre Niafer. A hundred years have I been here to-day." Patrick baptized him, and he went again into his grave.⁵

Not all legends emphasized baptism; many involved the question of the efficacy of prayers for the dead. For example, one legend widely accepted in the West relates the story of Falconille, a young girl who after her death appeared to her mother and asked her to pray to St. Thècle. As a result of the saint's intercession, Falconille was received into heaven.⁶ Aquinas, in a discussion of whether the souls of the damned can profit by the efforts of the living, quotes a story found in a sermon by John Damascene. The tale tells how St. Macharius found a skull which identified itself as having belonged to a pagan priest whose soul was now damned in Hell. Macharius' prayers rescued the priest from his damnation.⁷ Another legend purports that prayer could also suffice for deliverance from Purgatory. Roger of Wendover, the supposed author for the Chronica from 1189-1235, tells the story of Roger de Thony, "vir nobilis et miles strenuus," under the date of 1228.

When Roger died, his brother asked him in the name of God to speak. The corpse replied by saying that his punishment could be mitigated by the performance of good works, masses, and alms.⁸

Perhaps the most significant legends, though, are those which make a deliberate effort to illustrate the unity of the pagan and Christian worlds. The Scandinavian sagas, for example, often use the theme of the virtuous pagan as a way of reconciling pagan tradition with Church teachings. Lars Lönnroth characterizes this treatment as follows:

. . . a pagan hero is shown in a situation where he appears to be a sort of precursor, or herald, of Christianity, at the same time retaining enough of the pagan ethics to emphasize the difference between the old and the new religion. It is, however, essential to the theme that the hero should never have been in close contact with the Christian faith--it is primarily his natural nobility, in combination with his good sense, and a half-mystical insight into the workings of nature, that makes him act as if he were already on the verge of conversion.⁹

Lönnroth's statement should remind us of the hero preserved in Anglo-Saxon manuscript, Beowulf, and the ongoing attempt to define the poem and its protagonist as primarily Christian or pagan.¹⁰

As the sagas attempted to bring together primitive paganism and the new Christian religion, myths were formed to bridge the gap between Christianity and the more civilized paganism of Rome as well. Favorite writers such as Virgil, Cicero, Seneca, Lucan, and Pliny were allegedly converted to Christianity during their lifetimes; from Jerome to Petrarch men thought that letters had been exchanged between Seneca and St. Paul. It was speculated that Cicero, who strongly believed in immortality, had translated the prophecy of the Erythraean Sibyl and announced the coming of the Saviour. Virgil's Fourth Eclogue was read as a prophecy of the

Incarnation; some even believed him to be aware of the full import of his words. In the mystery plays, especially those connected with the Nativity, Virgil often appeared with the Sibyl and the Hebrew prophets; "his presence implied that Rome as well as Israel had longed for the new dispensation."¹¹

Other pagans anticipated the birth of Christ as well. Bradwardine tells of the opening of a pagan's tomb, in which was found a golden blade beside the corpse. On the blade was written "Christ will be born of the Virgin Mary, and I believe in Him." Christ's birth was also prophesied in a book discovered by King Ferrandus of Castile which told the history of the Jews, the Greeks, and the Romans in three languages. Finally, Bradwardine mentions the case of the three wise men from the East, who correctly understood the appearance of the star of Bethlehem as the sign of Christ's birth.¹²

A deliberate fusion of Christian and pagan elements is also evident in historical views. For example, in the Mirabilia, a compilation of Roman legends and descriptions of the city's monuments, the account of the appearance of the goddess Cybele to Agrippa is followed by the story of the appearance of Mary with her Child to Augustus.¹³ In addition, the historian Orosius singled out Rome as guided by God's special providence. He cites a series of examples to prove divine intervention in Roman history, but the most significant is his assertion that when Jesus Christ was born, a spring of oil flowed into the Tiber, signifying the divine anointing of Rome's pagan power.¹⁴ Dante follows Orosius' lead, although he limits his own list of miracles to pagan times. In Chapter V of the fourth book of the Convivio, he celebrates the divine origin of Rome, which was "uplifted not by human but by divine

citizens, into whom was inspired not human but divine love, in their love of her. And this could not or might not be, save for some special end, purposed by God in so great an infusion of heaven."¹⁵

It is not surprising, then, that the best-known legend of a virtuous pagan involves Trajan, Roman emperor from A.D. 98 to 117.¹⁶ Because this legend is an analogue for St. Erkenwald and in Piers Plowman plays a role in the discussion of the requirements for salvation, we will examine this tradition in more detail.¹⁷

The story of Trajan falls into two separate parts, although the first episode serves to justify the second. Historically, Trajan's "justness" grew into a Christian legend based on his letter to Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor around A.D. 112. Pliny had written the emperor concerning the secret society of Christians in his region; Trajan's response, one of moderation and justice, was to avoid a general persecution of the illegal sect.¹⁸ By legend, however, Trajan's name was specially connected with an episode which demonstrated his sense of justice and humility. As he prepared to ride off to battle, a widow approached him and asked for justice for her son, who had been unjustly killed. Trajan, anxious to join the battle, promised that he would satisfy her claim when he returned. "What if you do not return?" the woman insisted. Trajan replied, "My successor will satisfy you." The widow responded, "What will it profit you if another does good?" The emperor descended from his horse, tended to the woman's case, and then rode off to war.¹⁹

The episode is important for several reasons. First, it was employed as a stock example of humility; Dante, for instance, places a sculpture of the scene between Trajan and the widow in the first terrace of

Purgatory as an inspiration of humility for those doing penance for their excessive pride (Purgatorio X:74-93). In addition, Trajan's intervention in the affairs of a humble subject serves as a reminder of God's power to intervene; if the hierarchy of medieval society reflected that of heaven, appeals in both realms were not in vain.²⁰ And, since Trajan revealed himself capable of practicing such virtues of justice, mercy, and humility, it is easy to see why tradition accords him a miraculous salvation.²¹ Finally, the episode is important because it places an emphasis upon good works. Each man is accountable for his own actions; leaving justice to another avails nothing.^{21a}

Trajan's legend underwent some interesting variations as time passed. Probably around the middle of the twelfth century, the legend acquired an additional aspect: on another occasion, the emperor's own son murdered the son of a poor woman. This afforded an opportunity to further embellish Trajan's justice, for he now must punish his own offspring. In a Spanish version, the emperor insists on justice although the woman asks for mercy for the emperor's son; in several German chronicles and the Mirabilia, the woman asks for the emperor's son in place of her own; in one French version, the woman loses not only her son but also her only possession, a chicken, and Trajan allows her to choose between his son's death or his substitution for the dead boy. Yet another version, by the German Enenkel, does away with the woman's son altogether and substitutes a daughter, whom Trajan's son dishonors. At the woman's request, the emperor spares his son's life but blinds him. He shares in the punishment, though, so that father and son each lose one eye.²² In all versions of the legend, the one constant factor is an insistence on the importance of the emperor's just actions, as well

as the fact that he accepts responsibility for taking action rather than postponing it or leaving it to another.

This emphasis on works in the first part of the legend is nicely balanced by an emphasis on grace in the second. This portion of the legend tells how Gregory, passing through the forum of Trajan and remembering the emperor's good deeds, wept and prayed for him. Gregory's prayers were heard, and Trajan's pagan soul was released from Hell.²³

As with the first episode, many variations of the legend appeared. Three are especially persistent: (1) Because Gregory prayed for a damned soul, he had to suffer. In the Kaiserchronik of the twelfth century, he agrees to cut short his own life in order to have his prayers answered; in the Legenda Aurea, he must choose between constant sickness until his death or two days in purgatory. (2) Many versions tell of the opening of a tomb (often unidentified), revealing Trajan's skull with an intact tongue which asks for the Pope's prayers.²⁴ (3) In some cases (as in the versions of Aquinas and Guillaume d'Auxerre) Trajan's soul re-enters his body long enough for Gregory to baptize him.²⁵

In addition, some dispute arose as to Trajan's ultimate fate. Johannes Diaconus (whose version is presented by the Chronica Majora and Flores Historiarum) specifies that Trajan did not actually go to Heaven but to Paradise, the region of Hell in which he would be free from pain.²⁶ Aquinas implies that Trajan is one of many who may have been damned in order to be later recalled to life; on the other hand, Trajan's punishment may not have been dismissed but merely suspended until Judgment Day.²⁷ Finally, in the Legenda Aurea, Jacobus de Voragine concludes his re-telling of the tale by giving a convenient summary of the various speculations on Trajan's fate:

Cujus rei (ut ibidem dicit) testis est oriens omnis et occidens. Super hoc dixerunt quidam, quod Trajanus revocatus fuit ad vitam, ubi gratiam consecutus veniam meruit et sic gloriam obtinuit nec erat in inferno finaliter deputatus nec sententia definitiva damnatus. Alii dixerunt, quod anima Trajani non fuit simpliciter a reatu poenae aeternae absoluta, sed ejus poena usque ad tempus, scilicet usque ad diem judicii fuit suspensa. Alii, quod poena quo ad locum vel modum aliquem tormenti sub conditione fuit taxata, donec orante Gregorio per Christi gratiam locus vel modus aliquis mutaretur. Alii ut Johannes dyaconus, qui hanc legendam compilavit, quod non legitur orasse, sed flevisse; et frequenter dominus misertus concedit, quod homo quamvis desiderans petere non praesumit, et quod ejus anima non est ab inferno liberata et in paradiso reposita, sed simpliciter ab inferni cruciatibus liberata. Valet enim (ut dicit) anima et in inferno existere et inferni cruciatus per Dei misericordiam non sentire. Alii, quod poena aeterna consistit in duobus, scilicet in poena sensus et in poena damni, quod est carientia visionis divinae. Poena igitur aeterna quantum ad primum est sibi dimissa, sed quantum ad secundum retenta.²⁸

As is evident from even this brief summary, the story of Trajan's salvation raised some of the same questions the fourteenth century theologians were wrestling with: Can a man be saved by his own works? (Although Gregory must act as intercessor, the story does have a basic element of Pelagianism in its implicit assumption that Trajan deserves salvation.) Is baptism necessary for salvation? Can a pagan actually be received into heaven, or must he accept a lesser reward? We find these questions taken up again in Dante's great work, the Divina Commedia. Because the theme of the virtuous pagan appears in all three books, we shall examine each sequentially.²⁹

Reading the Inferno alone, one could conclude that Dante denied salvation to all pagans. Even Virgil, whom Christian tradition regarded as a prophet of Christ's birth, is consigned to Hell. Dante, however,

like Aquinas, envisions a "Limbo" in which suffering is reduced to a minimum. Aquinas designates Limbo as the habitation of unbaptized children and (before the Harrowing) the Old Testament Fathers; Dante places in Limbo unbaptized children (glossed over with the one word "infanti" in Inferno IV. 30) and adult pagans. (Inferno IV. 55-61 confirms that the Fathers also resided in Dante's Limbo until the Harrowing.) We can see, then, a basic disagreement between Aquinas and Dante:

. . . both Dante and Aquinas think that the infidels failed to attain the light of Revelation. Aquinas, however, sees in this failure a personal sin of omission to be added to original sin, and thus must exclude pagans from Limbo. Dante, on the other hand, represents this failure as the inability of human nature to attain Revelation without the help of divine grace, and thus confines his pagans to Limbo.³⁰

Not all pagans are in Limbo, however; a high proportion of the souls actually named in the remaining levels of the Inferno (32 out of 116) are pagans.³¹ Later, in the Purgatorio (VII. 35-36), Virgil explains to Sordello that the adults in Limbo did practice all the natural virtues; obviously those in torment did not.

Virgil himself remains the most puzzling case in the Inferno. Dante presents him sympathetically; his Fourth Eclogue (as interpreted in the Middle Ages) would seem to prove his implicit faith in a Redeemer; in Purgatorio XXII Statius reveals that Virgil's writings led him to an acceptance of Christianity.³² Yet despite all this, we learn as early as the second canto that Virgil resides in Limbo.³³

We leave the Inferno, then, with no indication that pagan salvation is possible. Even Plato and Socrates, who were perhaps closest in their beliefs to Christianity, are specifically mentioned as inhabitants of

Limbo (Inferno IV. 134). This conservative depiction of Limbo does serve at least two purposes, though. Theologically, it illustrates the chasm between the very pinnacle of human reason and Christian revelation.³⁴ And, artistically, Dante may have used his acceptance by the greatest poets of Limbo to mark his own worth as surpassing theirs because it was dedicated to the service of God (as Augustine recognized the worth of the pagans but condemned them because their works were directed to personal fame, not to God's glory).

With the fate of the Inferno pagans in mind, then, we are surprised to find Cato as the guardian of the shores of Purgatory. Not only a pagan but also a suicide, his presence in Purgatory indicates an eventual salvation.³⁵ Cato's situation has tantalized commentators of the Purgatorio, but no definitive answer for his selection has been found.³⁶

Important for our purposes, though, is the fact that the appearance of Cato offers an alternative fate for pagans. This theme is subtly highlighted as the travelers progress through the terraces of Purgatory, on which classical and Biblical representations are paired. Indeed, Paul Renucci notes that "there are more connections made between the laws of the pagans and of the Christians than between the Old Testament and New Testament."³⁷

The apparent salvation of Cato, plus the linking of pagan and Christian in the art of the terrace walls, prepares us for the final presentation of the virtuous pagan theme in the Paradiso. In Canto XVIII, Dante ascends into the sphere of Jupiter, mythological ruler of the gods, and watches as a multitude of souls--rulers themselves while on earth--spell out the words "diligite iustitiam qui iudicatis terram" (XVIII.

91-93) and then proclaim with one voice, "For being just and merciful I am here exalted" ("Per esser giusto e pio / son io qui essaltato" [XIX. 13-14]). The final "M" of the formation then transforms itself into an eagle, symbol of the Roman Empire. The words formed and spoken by the blessed souls, their common voice, and the eagle symbol point unmistakably to two linked concepts: justice and unity. In a realm which apprehends Divine Justice without a veil ("che 'l vostro non l'apprende con velami" [XIX. 30]), and reminded of the unity of all mankind, Dante appropriately turns to a long-held question, the fate of pagans. Does divine justice condemn a man born on the banks of the Indus who has never heard of Christ (XIX. 30-78)?³⁸

The question itself is set between two assertions, one negative and one positive, about God's accessibility to the human mind. In XIX. 40-63, the souls sing of God's transcendence: we can penetrate the workings of Eternal Justice in the same way that our eyes can penetrate the sea--the bottom of the sea exists, but its great depth prevents us from seeing it. At the same time, from the shore we can see the bottom, but it is a false perception of the water's depth (XIX. 58-63). Therefore the pilgrim is presumptuous in questioning God's justice, for he is in no position to gauge the depth of that justice. At the same time, however, the spirits declare that all the goodness known to man radiates from the Supreme Good (XIX. 86-90), and thus man can understand God, but only to a limited degree.³⁹

All of this, of course, does not directly answer Dante's question; however, it does caution him (and us) that he may not fully understand the answer he receives, which is as follows: "To this kingdom none ever rose who did not believe in Christ, either before or after He was nailed

to the tree" ("A questo regno / non salì mai chi non credette 'n Cristo, / vel pria vel poi ch'el si chiavasse al legno" [XIX. 103-105]). This orthodox maxim is not in itself surprising, but its application mystifies Dante when he realizes that two "pagans" are among the stars forming the eagle's eye and eyebrow. Furthermore, they span the centuries, so that they illustrate both points of the maxim, belief in Christ both before and after the crucifixion.

Dante's choice of virtuous pagans is interesting. He follows tradition by specifying one of them as Trajan; in accordance with one version of the legend the spirits tell Dante that Trajan returned to the flesh long enough to become a Christian (XX. 112-117). Less comprehensible is Dante's choice of Ripheus, a victim of the Trojan War described briefly in the Aeneid: "Ripheus, too, falls, foremost in justice among the Trojans, and most zealous for the right" ("Cedit et Ripheus, iustissimus unus / Qui fuit in Teucris, et servantissimus aequi").⁴⁰

Dante has thus wisely chosen the two virtuous pagans in the Paradiso. One's salvation was almost universally accepted by tradition; the other was so obscure that no one could raise objections.^{40A} In addition, both were renowned for their extraordinary justness and, according to the souls in Jupiter's sphere, possessed an explicit faith in Christ. Thanks to Gregory's intercession, Trajan was reanimated so that his will could be moved, while God revealed to Ripheus the coming Messiah: "The other [Ripheus] . . . set all his love below on righteousness; therefore from grace to grace God opened his eyes to our coming redemption" ("L'altra . . . tutto suo amor là giù pose a drittura; / per che, di grazia in grazia, Dio li aperse / l'occhio alla nostra redenzion futura" [XX. 118, 121-123]). The fact that both Trajan and Ripheus had an explicit belief in Christ

may explain why so many pagans have been left behind in Limbo, despite the fact that medieval theology allowed for salvation by implicit faith as well.⁴¹

Another characteristic shared by Trajan and Ripheus is their devotion to the Roman Empire.⁴² Positioned next to each other, these two souls oppose the soul of Constantine in the formation of the eagle's eye. Trajan had expanded the Empire's boundaries to the Persian Gulf but had preserved Rome as the capital city; Ripheus had fought the Greeks and died in the battle to repel them. In contrast, Constantine had given in to the enemy by moving the capital from Rome to Byzantium, diminishing the heritage of the Caesars. Thus, although Dante is obliged to place Constantine in heaven (Constantine did, after all, institute Christianity as the official religion of the Empire), he symbolically positions him at the extreme eastern ("Oriental") point of the eagle's eye, opposite two of the Empire's champions.⁴³

Dante's choice of Ripheus also serves as the last stage of a gradual enlightenment on the question of baptism. In Limbo, Virgil had explained that the souls there had not sinned but lacked baptism (*ch'ei non peccaro; e s'elli hanno mercedi / non basta, perchè non ebber battesimo / ch'è porta della fede che tu credi* [Inferno IV. 34-36]). The simple explanation suits Dante's limited understanding at the outset of his journey. In the Purgatorio, however, Virgil modifies his former explanation and states that he abides "with those who were not clothed with the three holy virtues but without sin knew the others and followed them every one" (*"con quei che le tre sante / virtù non si vestiro, et senza vizio / connober l'altre e seguir tutte quante"* [Purgatorio VII. 34-36]). The issue of baptism seems here to be omitted entirely. The

salvation of Ripheus, however, ties these two passages together, for in Paradiso XX, we learn that Ripheus was baptized by the three ladies--Faith, Hope, and Charity--that Dante had seen standing by the right wheel of the chariot in the Earthly Paradise (Purgatorio XXIX, 121-129). These allegorical figures "stood for baptism to him more than a thousand years before baptizing" ("Quelle tre donne li fur per battesimo / che tu vedesti dalla destra rota, / dinanzi al battezzar piu d'un millesmo" [Paradiso XX. 127-129]). Thus literal baptism is not necessary, but a figurative baptism by the three theological virtues is an absolute prerequisite for salvation. This gradual unfolding of the meaning of baptism is paralleled by the progression of the pilgrim himself; Dante progresses from natural understanding to divine revelation when he crosses the river and is presented to Beatrice by the three theological virtues. This symbolizes his own "baptism" by Faith, Hope, and Charity.⁴⁴ Dante's view of baptism is not eccentric; Aquinas and Augustine had also sanctioned the idea of salvation without literal baptism.⁴⁵

In summary, we can see that for Dante the issue of salvation for pagans was a significant concern. Dante follows Aquinas in his understanding of baptism, but he is surprisingly conservative in his estimation of the means of grace for pagans. Setting aside the doctrine of implicit faith, he seems to insist on explicit faith for salvation, which (at least in the cases of Trajan and Ripheus) required miraculous divine intervention. At the same time, however, Canto XX of the Paradiso stresses the ultimate unknowability of the ways of God; man cannot presume to fathom His judgments. Perhaps for this reason the salvation of Cato remains inexplicable; he seems to fall into a different category altogether from the pagans of the Paradiso.

Dante, of course, was not alone in his concerns. Besides the surviving legends and traditions already mentioned, other evidence exists of a growing tolerance for the idea of pagan salvation.⁴⁶

M. E. Thomas notes that a "humanitarian" view of salvation which would include all virtuous souls (both Christian and pagan) spread across a wide spectrum of society in the fourteenth century, from mystics such as Rulman Merswin of Strassburg and Juliana of Norwich to the orthodox churchman Sacchetti to the cynical author of Mandeville's Travels.⁴⁷ As the following chapters will prove, at least three authors of secular Middle English literature were also intrigued by the idea of salvation for the virtuous pagan.

Notes

¹A wide interest is also indicated by Ockham's complaint in his Opera politica that laymen and old women badgered university lecturers with their views on necessity, contingency, and the limits of God's power. J. A. Robson, Wyclif and the Oxford Schools (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 33, n. 1. (According to Robson, this point was first noticed by Beryl Smalley in the Journal of Ecclesiastical History, 9 [1958], 94.)

²Ambrose was following in the footsteps of other churchmen, such as Bernard, Cyprian, and Augustine, in asserting that baptism could be supplied, in necessity, by faith, hope, and charity. Louis Capéran, Le Problème du Salut des Infidèles, Essai Historique (Toulouse: Grand Seminaire, 1934), p. 181.

³George Every, Christian Mythology (New York: Hamlyn, 1970), p. 108. Every notes that in St. Augustine's time the story was used as an argument against his doctrine that unbaptized babies must be in Hell. Augustine replied that there was no evidence Dinocrates had not been baptized and that, regardless of baptism, the boy was old enough to distinguish between right and wrong. Thus Augustine allowed for the possibility of a virtuous pagan but saw no innate morality in infants which would justify their salvation, although their suffering might be reduced to a minimum.

⁴The Tripartite Life of Patrick, with Other Documents Relating to That Saint, ed. and trans. by Whitley Stokes (London, 1887), I, p. 135. Cited by Paul F. Reichardt, "The Art and Meaning of the Middle English St. Erkenwald," Diss. Rice University 1971, p. 20.

⁵The Tripartite Life of Patrick, p. 123; cited by Reichardt, p. 30.

⁶Capéran, pp. 49-50.

⁷Henry L. Savage, ed., St. Erkenwald: A Middle English Poem (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926), p. xx. See Summa Theologica, III (Supp.), LXXI, V, IV.

⁸Savage, p. xix.

⁹Lars Lönnroth, "Noble Heathen: A Theme in the Sagas," Scandinavian Studies, 41 (1969), 2.

¹⁰See, for example, the following articles as representative of this critical debate:

Charles Donahue, "Beowulf, Ireland, and the Natural Good," Traditio, 7 (1949-51), 263-278, and "Beowulf and Christian Tradition: A Reconsideration

from a Celtic Stance," Traditio, 21 (1965), 55-116; Morton Bloomfield, "Patristics and Old English Literature: Notes on some poems," Comparative Literature, 14 (1962), 36-43 (esp. 39-41); L. D. Benson, "The Pagan Coloring of Beowulf," in Old English Poetry: Fifteen Essays, ed. Robert P. Creed (Providence, R.I.: Brown University Press, 1967), pp. 193-214; Charles Moorman, "Essential Paganism of Beowulf," Modern Language Quarterly, 28 (1967), 3-18; K. P. Wintersdorf, "Beowulf: The Paganism of Hrothgar's Danes," Studies in Philology, 78 (1981), 91-119. In addition, several essays in An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1963) discuss this issue: F. A. Blackburn, "The Christian Coloring in Beowulf," pp. 1-22; Marie Padgett Hamilton, "The Religious Principle in Beowulf," pp. 105-136; Margaret E. Goldsmith, "The Christian Perspective in Beowulf," pp. 373-386.

¹¹Charles T. Davis, Dante and the Idea of Rome (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), p. 14. See, for example, the First Shepherds' Play in the Towneley Cycle.

¹²A. J. Minnis, Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982), pp. 48-49.

¹³Davis, pp. 14-15.

¹⁴Davis, p. 63. Orosius also tells his readers that when Hannibal was at Rome's gates, God sent the hailstorm which defeated him, and that under Claudius a civil war was averted by miraculous intervention.

¹⁵David Thompson, "Dante's Virtuous Romans," Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society, 96 (1978), 154. Dante's and Orosius' view of Rome contrasts with that of Augustine, who emphasizes Rome's secular achievement and virtue. As Thompson puts it (pp. 155-156), for Augustine, "God granted them empire to recompense and publicize their deeds, which were accomplished through secular, natural virtues. For Dante, however, the Romans' deeds are not a cause of divine favor, but rather evidence of 'celestiale infusione' . . . at work in Roman history."

¹⁶One rare vote of disbelief in this legend comes from Nicholas of Trevisa, who in his translation of Higden's Poly-Chronicon 5.7 calls the story of Trajan an idiot's tale: For so greet riȝtwisnesse it semeþ þat Seint Gregorie wan his soule out of helle. Trevisa. So it myȝte seme to a man þat were worse þan wood, and out of riȝt bileve." Minnis, p. 55.

¹⁷Much of what follows is indebted to Gaston Paris, La Légende de

Trajan (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1878), which remains the most comprehensive study of the Trajan legend.

¹⁸The following is a summary of Trajan's letter given by W. H. C. Frend in Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1967), p. 164:

Trajan's reply upheld Pliny's actions including the form of tests applied, and allowed him discretion, albeit within the framework of the Emperor's general policy of restoring strict law and order to the province. "It is not possible to lay down any general rule which can be applied as the fixed standard in all cases of this nature." There was, therefore, no general edict proscribing Christians, and it was not intended to pronounce one. If Christians, however, were denounced, and proved to be such, they were to be punished. But, at the same time, they were to be given the chance of repentance and recantation, "that is, by worshipping our gods," and they were not to be sought out (conquirendi non sunt). Moreover, anonymous accusations were not to be accepted. These were not consistent with the spirit of the age ("nec nostri saeculi est").

¹⁹The earliest records of this legend exist in a Latin vita of St. Gregory written by a monk of Whitby about A.D. 713. It was followed by vitae from Paulus Diaconus about 787 and Johannes Diaconus in the ninth century (Savage, pp. xvii-xviii). For the text of the two latter versions, see Paris, pp. 261-62. For this portion of the legend, I shall rely on the redaction of John of Salisbury's Policraticus (1159), which draws on both versions and was a popular source for the tale in the Middle Ages (Renucci, p. 400, n. 778). The Policraticus reads as follows:

Quum [Trajanus] jam equum adscendisset ad bellum profecturus, vidua, apprehenso pede illius, miserabiliter lugens sibi justitiam fieri petiit de his qui filium ejus, optimum et innocentissimum juvenem, injuste occiderant. Tu, inquit, Auguste, imperas, et ego tam atrocem injuriam patior?--Ego, ait ille, satisfaciam tibi quum rediero.-- Quid, inquit illa, si non redieris?--Successor meus, ait Trajanus, satisfaciet tibi.--Et illa: Quid tibi proderit si alius bene fecerit? Tu mihi debitor es, secundum opera tua mercedem recepturus. Fraus utique est nolle reddere quod debetur. Successor tuus injuriam patientibus pro se tenebitur. Te non liberabit justitia aliena. Bene agetur cum successore tuo si liberavit se ipsum. His verbis motus imperator descendit de equo et causam praesentialiter examinavit et condigna satisfactione viduam consolatus est. (Paris, p. 264)

Paris (p. 292) believes that this tale was probably suggested by a

bas relief no longer extant which showed a female figure, symbolizing a province, on her knees before Trajan and his soldiers. In addition, the anecdote actually involved Hadrian, as reported by Dion Cassius (Paris, p. 288). Paul Renucci (Dante, Disciple et Juge du Monde Gréco-Latin [Paris: Société d'Édition les Belles Lettres, 1954], p. 400, n. 778) suggests that the anecdote was attributed to Trajan because he was more popular than Hadrian and the person for whom the forum (containing the bas relief) was named. Thus the legend "was born perhaps around the third century from a 'telescoping' of an historical anecdote and a Roman bas-relief."

²⁰Patrick Boyde, Dante, Philomythes and Philosopher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 224.

²¹Aquinas reinforces this with his affirmation in the De Regimine Principum that a just prince merits a far higher reward than others. (See Edmund G. Gardner, Dante's Ten Heavens: A Study of the Paradiso [London: Archibald Constable and Co. Ltd., 1904], p. 164.)

^{21a}Joseph Wittig ("Piers Plowman B, Passus ix-xii: Elements in the Design of the Inward Journey," Diss. Cornell University 1969), pp. 66-67.

²²Paris, pp. 267-276. The Legenda Aurea (ed. Th. Graesse [Osnabruck: Otto Zeller, 1965], p. 196) simply reports:

Fertur quoque, quod cum quidam filius Trajani
per urbem equitando nimis lascive discurreret,
filium cujusdam viduae interemit, quod cum
vidua Trajano lacrimabiliter exponeret, ipse
filium suum, qui hoc fecerat, viduae loco filii
sui defuncti tradidit et magnifice ipsam dotavit.

²³Paris, pp. 278-279, again gives both versions of the episode, by Paulus Diaconus and by Johannes Diaconus.

²⁴This variation recalls the story relayed by Aquinas of Macharius' finding of a skull; see p. 60.

²⁵Paris, pp. 279-285. Aquinas explains that as long as Trajan's soul remained in Hell, he could not be moved to repent or to will good: "Obstinata voluntas nunquam potest flecti nisi in malum. Sed damnati homines erunt obstinati sicut et daemones. Ergo voluntas eorum nunquam poterit esse bona" (Summa Theologica III, Supp., XCVIII, I).

²⁶The passage reads as follows (from P.L., vol. 75, col. 105D-106A):

Et notandum quia non legitur Gregorii precibus
Trajani anima ab infero liberata, et in paradiso
reposita, quod omnino incredibile videtur propter
illud quod scriptum est: Nisi quis renatus fuerit

ex aqua et spiritu sancto non intrabit in regnum coelorum (Joann. iii, 3); sed simpliciter dicitur, ab inferni solummodo cruciatibus liberata. Quod videlicet potest videri credibile quippe cum ita valeat anima in inferno existere, et inferni cruciatus per Dei misericordiam non sentire.

²⁷The relevant passage is from Summa Theologica, III, Supp., LXXI, V, ad 5:

Vel dicendum, secundum quosdam, quod anima Traiani non fuit simpliciter a reatu poenae aeternae absoluta; sed eius poena fuit suspensa ad tempus, scilicet usque ad diem iudicii. Nec tamen oportet quod hoc fiat communiter per suffragia; quia alia sunt quae lege communi accidunt, et alia quae singulariter ex privilegio aliquibus conceduntur.

²⁸Legenda Aurea, ed. Graesse, p. 197.

²⁹Gino Rizzo, "Dante and the Virtuous Pagans," in A Dante Symposium. In Commemoration of the 700th Anniversary of the Poet's Birth (1265-1965), ed. William DeSua and Gino Rizzo, University of North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, #58 (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), p. 139, points out that the gradual unfolding of the issue of the virtuous pagan matches the pilgrim's own enlightenment. "The theme of the virtuous pagan represents therefore an essential element of Dante's itinerarium mentis in Deum, giving substance and structure both to his spiritual experience and to the pattern of his vision."

³⁰Rizzo, p. 19.

³¹Kenelm Foster, The Two Dantes and Other Studies (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1977), p. 187.

³²Statius likens Virgil to a man who carries a light behind him to illumine the way for them, with no benefit to himself (Purgatorio XXII. 67-73). This image makes clear the function of the light of Limbo enclosed in darkness, "un foco ch'emisperio di tenebre vincla" (Inferno IV. 68-69); see Rizzo, p. 132.

³³Inferno II. 52, "Io era tra color che son sospesi."

³⁴Rizzo, p. 130.

³⁵Virgil also indicates as much when he refers to Cato's vesture which will be so bright one day: "la vesta ch'al gran di sarà sì chiara"

(Purgatorio I. 75). Also, Cato indicates in ll. 89-90 that he was delivered from Hell during the Harrowing.

³⁶Two persuasive interpretations are Renucci's claim (pp. 307-308) that as Cato died for liberty, it is appropriate to find him on the shore of liberty, and Rizzo's explanation (p. 124) that

. . . Dante himself, both in the Convivio (IV, v, vi, and xxvii) and in the De Monarchia (II, v), had seen in the stoic death of Cato a sacrifice made on the altar of his political commitment and moral freedom; . . . both Augustine and Aquinas had indeed condemned suicide, but "except when inspired by a divine instinct to show forth an example of fortitude," very much as in the case of Christian martyrs; and finally . . . in the Convivio (IV, xxviii), the poet had found no other man more worthy of signifying God than the Roman Cato.

³⁷Renucci, p. 117.

³⁸We have seen that Aquinas and Alexander of Hales posed similar questions; see pp. 33-36.

³⁹Foster, p. 146, concludes, "In fine, Dante is saying, not that God's ways are wholly beyond our discerning, but rather that our discernment of them is extremely limited, although real as far as it goes."

⁴⁰From Aeneid II, 426-427. C. H. Grandgent, ed., La Divina Commedia by Dante Alighieri, rev. Charles S. Singleton (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 802. Grandgent observes that "Nowhere, before Dante, do we find any suggestion that this Trojan prince attained Heaven, nor that he was of particular importance."

^{40a}T. P. Dunning, "Langland and the Salvation of the Heathen," Medium Aevum, 12 (1943), 54.

⁴¹Both Rizzo (p. 136) and Foster (pp. 185-186) point out Dante's emphasis on explicit faith. Foster observes that, at least in these two cases, this required the working of miracles, so that the method of salvation for pagans is extremely exceptional. In addition, he notes that the pagans' lack of saving faith is represented not as a moral defect but as an intellectual one.

⁴²Indeed, Gardner believes that "Dante's main objective . . . is clearly to indicate that the men whom he regards as the ancestors of the Roman People were not without divine light" (p. 168).

⁴³A. Pézard, "Riphée ou la naissance d'un mythe," Revue des Études Italiennes, 25 (1979), 18. Renucci (p. 321) agrees with this symbolic alignment of Trajan and Ripheus diametrically opposed to Constantine. Pézard discounts two patterns of the eagle's eye proposed by other critics and explains his rationale for conceiving of the eye as a perfect circle around which the souls are located at regular intervals. Thus he sees Ripheus and Trajan on the upward curve leading to Ezechiel at the highest point; Constantine and Guillaume are found on the declining curve of the circle (pp. 9-22). We should also remember that for Dante, many of the evils of the Church derived from the "donation of Constantine," whereby the Church received its first secular endowment. (Constantine gave the Lateran in Rome to the Papacy in gratitude for recovering from a dire illness.)

⁴⁴See Charles Singleton, Journey to Beatrice, Vol. II of Dante Studies (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954).

⁴⁵For Aquinas' views, see Summa Theologica III, LXVI, XI; LXVIII, II. Augustine's opinion can be found in De Baptis. contr. donat., IV, XXII.

⁴⁶We should note, however, that for one group of non-Christians, the Jews, little tolerance existed at any time in England during the Middle Ages. Esther Panitz reports that "Among simple Christian folk it was commonplace to assume that Jews poisoned wells, helped spread the Black Death, desecrated the Host, and slaughtered Christian children for arcane religious purposes" (The Alien in Their Midst [East Brunswick, N.J.: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1981], p. 25). The Jews were accused of ritual murders, first of William of Norwich in 1144 (Edward Calisch, The Jew in English Literature [1909; rpt. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1909], p. 38), with other accusations following in 1181, 1192, and 1234. Then in 1255 came the most sensational of all, the death of the boy-martyr Hugh of Lincoln (Montagu F. Modder, The Jew in the Literature of England [1939; rpt. New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1960], p. 11). Massacres of Jews occurred in 1189 and at the coronation of Richard II (Calisch, p. 20), and decrees were passed in 1222 and 1275 compelling Jews to wear badges on their breasts (Modder, p. 7). Finally, on July 18, 1290, the Jews were ordered to leave England by All Saints' Day of that year; nominally and legally there were no Jews in England until Cromwell's time, 365 years later (Calisch, 41). This animosity, however, was directed only toward "modern" Jews; those who had lived before the time of the Incarnation were regarded with respect and reverence, as evidenced in the mystery plays (Calisch, p. 19).

⁴⁷M. E. Thomas, Medieval Skepticism and Chaucer (New York: William-Frederick Press, 1950), p. 67. Merswin, a Jewish banker who had been converted to Christianity (c. 1350), advanced an idea similar to the clara visio of Uthred of Boldon:

. . . thus when God findeth a very righteous, good
heathen or a very righteous, good Jew, what doth
God then? I will tell thee: God, who cannot give

up His joyous love and His boundless mercy, cometh to his help. I will tell thee: God findeth many secret ways so that these well-wishing, God-fearing men not be lost, at whatever end of the wide world they are When this good heathen or this good Jew cometh to his last, then cometh God ever to his aid and enlighteneth him with the Christian faith to such an extent that he longeth for it with all his heart I will tell thee what God doth then: God goeth and baptizeth him on account of his good desire and his bitter death. Thou shalt know that many of these good heathens and good Jews are in eternal life, all of whom came there in such a way. (Thomas, p. 67)

Julian of Norwich, clinging on one hand to the view that the heathen are necessarily damned, on the other hand believed in God's promise to her in a vision: "That, that is unpossible to thee, is not unpossible to mee; I shall save my word in all things, and I shall make all thing well." For Juliana, God's words portended universal salvation:

For in mankind that shall be saved, is comprehended all; that is to say, all that is made, and the Maker of all; for in man is God, and in God is all, and he that loveth thus, he loveth all.
(From XVI Revelations of Divine Love, quoted by Thomas, pp.

68-69).

Sacchetti rejected outright the damnation of the righteous heathen:

Can a man who happens to live and to have been born a pagan or a Saracen be saved, if he has not received baptism? I answer yes, if he lives reasonably and justly, doing to others what he would have done unto him I say to you that faith and good will make all men worthy of salvation.
(Thomas, p. 67)

Finally, Mandeville showed a broad-minded sympathy for the virtuous pagan when he said the following of the people of Synople:

I beleve that God loveth their service to gree, as he did of Job that was a Paynim, the which he held for his true servant and many other. I beeleve well that God loveth al those that love him and serve him mekely and truely, and that despise the vaine glory of the world as these men doe, and as Job did.
(Thomas, pp. 69-70)

As Thomas sees a "humanitarianism" in the acceptance of salvation for virtuous pagans, so Foster sees the theme as an indication of humanism in Dante, representing "a point of transition between the scholastic culture which so largely formed Dante and the humanist culture which followed it and which Dante in some ways . . . prepared and foreshadowed" ("Religion and Philosophy in Dante," in The Mind of Dante, ed. U. Limentani [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965], p. 54).

St. Erkenwald's Harrowing of Hell

Although St. Erkenwald has been hailed as "much the best saint's legend in Middle English,"¹ some question exists as to its actual genre.² This is not the typical saint's life of loosely connected episodes but a tightly constructed narrative in which a pagan, not the saint, receives primary emphasis. Paul Reichardt justifies this work as a saint's life by establishing two modes of hagiographic writing: the episodic structure of an entire life and the cultivation of a single episode. These forms are further distinguished by a difference in purpose:

In the saint's life, the aim is to portray a model of Christian virtue and human perfection which may be imitated; the method is to accumulate exemplary incidents and actions. The hagiographic tale, on the other hand, is designed to present a single action or event in the life of a saint, and its aim is to extract a particular moral lesson from this one event.³

Clearly, St. Erkenwald fits under the rubric of hagiographic tale, which necessitates a definition of the moral lesson it conveys. That lesson, the theme of the poem, is a subject of critical disagreement.

Three primary interpretations of the poem's message exist. Larry Benson, pointing out the unusual periphrases for God as Judge of man, sees the major theme as God's justice.⁴ In a related vein, Lester Faigley reads the poem typologically, seeing in the pagan a judge under the "Old Law" of strict justice, contrasted with St. Erkenwald as a judge under the "New Law" of mercy.⁵ Vincent Petronella points to transformation as the poem's main theme: the church, the pagan judge, the rowdy people are transformed through the miracle.⁶ Finally, Arnold Davidson, T. McAlindon, and Paul Reichardt argue for the poem's contrast between the limitations of human reason and the miraculous power of God.⁷

As Reichardt and Russell Peck indicate, this contrast is shown by the number symbolism of the poem as well. For example, the clerks search their libraries for seven days to determine the corpse's identity. Their failure symbolizes the limitations of man and this present life, which the number seven represents. On the eighth day, St. Erkenwald receives the answer to his prayers and baptizes the corpse. This is appropriate, for eight, associated with transformation and renewal, became known as the baptismal number.⁸

One element of the poem which has not been explored is the relationship between the salvation of the pagan judge and Christ's descent into Hell.⁹ As we saw in the first chapter, these two issues are closely related, for some theologians (especially the early Church Fathers) speculated on the possibility that Christ had harrowed not only the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets but also the virtuous pagans. Indeed, as we have seen, many medieval theologians (in particular, Aquinas and the fourteenth century "Pelagians") would not necessarily relegate the poem's upright judge to Hell. Erkenwald himself is obviously surprised to learn of this soul's damnation, as his comments indicate:

He þat rewardes uche a renke as he has riȝt servyd
 Myȝt evel forgo the to gyfe of his grace summe brawnche;

 Forþi say me of þi soule, in sele quere ho wonnes,
 And of þe riche restorment þat raȝt hyr oure Lorde!¹⁰

In light of the general expectations of the time, then, St. Erkenwald can be read as the tale of a virtuous pagan deliberately left behind during the Harrowing to serve as an object lesson for later Christians.¹¹ It is this lesson, which may be examined in three parts, which is the purpose of the work as a hagiographic tale.

First, the poem reminds us of the essential characteristics of the

Harrowing. This event is of central importance as the great turning point in divine history from justice to mercy. The poet reminds us of his poem's link with the establishment of Christendom, for this miracle occurs shortly after the Crucifixion (l. 2)--a deliberate telescoping of chronology for thematic emphasis. In addition, we are reminded that the Crucifixion began the era of the New Covenant, the New Law of mercy which Christ introduced, by the poet's choice of terms: the characters of this tale live in "New Troy" and are engaged in building a "New Werke."

These terms have, of course, other connotations as well. For example, referring to London as "New Troy" is a reminder of Britain's legendary link with the Roman Empire. We remember that Dante especially stressed the importance of the Roman Empire in God's plan, for divine providence created the conditions under which the Incarnation would take place. Thus "New Troy" should remind us of God's all-knowing providence which, as the poem proves, comes into play again. "New Werke" also has an historical basis; Savage notes that the term is an anachronism, though, for at the time the poet wrote, St. Erkenwald's tomb was located in the "New Work" begun in 1251.¹² Reichardt suggests a thematic interpretation for this term, pointing out that the phrase implies the "new creation" which results from conversion to Christianity, the process the judge will undergo. He links this to the scriptural metaphor of the temple to signify the human body, which is cleansed by baptism as this temple is being purged of paganism: "Pen was hit abatyd and beten down, and buggyd efte new" (l. 37).¹³ In any event, it seems likely that the poet was aware of the scriptural connotations of the word "new" and appropriately chose to make use of them in the tale of a pagan who was damned under the Old Law but received mercy under the New.

The poem also reminds us of an important consequence of the Harrowing, the establishment of Christ's sovereignty over Hell. In this regard, the temple's name, the Triapolitan (which has no known historical basis), may refer to the three-tiered universe of heaven, earth, and hell which would be familiar to the medieval mind. For example, the King James version of Philippians 2:10 tells us "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth." Earth was pictured as the center of the universe, with hell below and heaven above it. The corpse himself indicates this cosmological scheme: "Al hever and helle . . . and erthe bitwene" (l. 196). The poem's masons, then, are properly engaged in seeking the foundations of the church (ll. 41-42), for unless this is rebuilt they cannot proceed with the New Werke. In the same way, the New Work of the Church could not proceed until Christ descended to the foundation of the universe, Hell, and made Himself master there. This correlation is enhanced by the information in ll. 27-30 that the Triapolitan was previously owned by a "maghty devil," "the dryghtyn derrest of ydols praysid." Faigley points out the nice similarity between the human and the divine schemes: "The pagan judge is discovered in the foundation of an old temple that the 'New Werke' is to be built upon, which is precisely the relationship of the Old and New Laws--the New Law supplementing instead of supplanting the Old Law."¹⁴

We saw that in one version of the Gospel of Nicodemus Christ left His cross behind in Hell in order to save any souls inadvertently left behind, or perhaps to enable special pardons. It is tempting to put the judge into the category of souls rescued after the Harrowing by virtue of that cross, for he makes clear that he was an eye-witness to the Harrowing but

not a participant in it:

I was non of *pe* nombre *pat* *pou* with noy boghtes
 With *pe* blode of thi body upon *pe* blo rode;
 Quen *pou* herghedes helle-hole and hentes hom *peroute*,
*P*i loffyng, oute of Limbo, *pou* laftes me *per*. (ll. 289-292)

The corpse leaves ambiguous the fate of other pagans, but his words give us the sense that he feels abandoned, a solitary sufferer "dwynde in *pe* derke dethe" (l. 294). Yet his soul seems to dwell in Abraham's bosom, or paradise (the upper region or "waiting room" of Hell), since he suffers separation from God but does not mention any positive punishment.

The periphrasis "*pe* Prince *pat* Paradis weldes" reminds us that Christ rules even here, and the poem demonstrates this when Erkenwald, acting as a surrogate of Christ, harrows this soul as a bishop empowered by Him. Through this act, the universal sovereignty of Christ is confirmed. He remains Master of Hell, for He can remove souls at will from Satan's domain; He remains Master of Earth, for He is served by men such as Erkenwald who turn to Him in times of crisis; He remains Master of Heaven, for the judge's soul talks of its reception into that glory.

As a corollary of this, the poem confirms Christ as Minister of the Sacraments. Reichardt points out that in the scene of the baptism, the bishop is referred to as a "lede," a diminution of his earlier stature in the poem. For example, in ll. 105-108 he is referred to as "bischof," "primate," and "Ser"--words which emphasize his superior station in life.¹⁵ The term "lede" implies that Erkenwald is simply a member of the human species, indistinguishable from the "pepul."¹⁶ The scene serves as a refutation of the Donatist heresy against which Augustine battled. Augustine argued that Christ, not the human agent,

is the real minister of the Church sacraments; thus sacraments administered by impure priests retained their efficacy.¹⁷ Here the opposite point is made: even one of the best of priests, a man worthy to follow in the footsteps of Gregory and Augustine, is helpless to save the soul which he pities. The tears he sheds are mere drops of water, but the names he invokes--"I folwe *pe* in *pe* Fader nome and his fre Childes / And of *pe* gracious Holy Goste (ll. 317-318)--work a miracle.

The poem's second major lesson involves the illustration of the function and presence of each Member of the Trinity. (In this respect, the "tri" of the name Triapolitan may refer to the three members of the Godhead.)¹⁸ The judge, living under the Old Law before the Incarnation, is himself judged with strict severity and consigned to Hell as a result of original sin. This function of uncompromising justice was traditionally associated with God the Father, the Yahweh of the Old Testament. With the Incarnation, Christ ushered in a new era of mercy and charity. This was signaled by the Harrowing of Hell, for the deliverance of these souls was the first effect of the Crucifixion. Thus the specific reference to the Harrowing, the actual harrowing of this soul, and the compassion evoked in Erkenwald and the spectators witness to the presence of Christ as the second Member of the Trinity. Finally, the presence of the Holy Spirit is proven by the efficacy of Erkenwald's tears and the references to the heavenly supper awaiting the soul released from Hell. Through the action of the Spirit, water becomes spiritually cleansing, and bread and wine become body and blood. The Spirit is also present in the corpse's very act of speaking. Although the runes on the coffin could not be deciphered, even by clerks "with crownes ful brode" (l. 55), the corpse speaks in the language native to the onlookers. This is reminiscent of

the Spirit at Pentecost, which enabled the apostles to speak in unknown tongues.¹⁹ The poet even tells us that the corpse speaks "Purghe sum lant goste lyfe of hym *pat* al redes" (l. 192). With these references to the Holy Spirit in mind, we can appreciate the relevance of the special mass celebrated earlier by St. Erkenwald. The opening words, "Spiritus Domini" (l. 132), identify this as the Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit, emphasizing praise to the Spirit for grace.²⁰

The third and most significant lesson of the work, however, is directly related to the issue of the virtuous pagan. The judge's plight brings to mind the religious controversies of the fourteenth century which we examined earlier, with the emphasis here on the Bradwardinian view that human achievement can never merit salvation. The "Pelagians" of the time would have expected this soul to be in heaven, for the judge had done his best to live a virtuous life. This is amply attested to by the honors with which he was buried and by God's intervention to preserve his body as a token of unusual virtue. Yet this was natural virtue, apparently sufficient to preserve his flesh but not his soul. As soon as the judge receives supernatural grace, his body rots--an indication of its relative importance in the divine scheme. As Ruth Morse puts it,

It is a splendid touch that salvation is immediately followed by bodily dissolution: everyone had thought that the preservation of the 'ferly' was the miracle, but the true miracle was the salvation of the heathen, to which the wonder was the means.²¹

This soul, left behind during Christ's Harrowing, seems to have been singled out by God for His special purposes. This is true whether we think of the judge as one pagan rescued from a crowded Limbo or as one pagan somehow left behind in a deserted Limbo. The poet, however, seems

to indicate the latter possibility, which makes emphatic the Bradwardinian view: not that only the most righteous pagan could be rescued from Hell, but that even the most righteous pagan could in all justice be left behind because of the taint of original sin. The judge knows that he was left behind because he lacks the "medecyn" for original sin, "P at is fulloght in fonte, with faitheful bileve" (l. 299). Since none of the souls in Limbo would have received baptism before the time of the Harrowing, this implies that Christ descended to baptize those He would deliver. Somehow, the judge intimates, he was overlooked; yet he neither berates Christ for passing over him nor questions why he was singled out to be left behind. This is in keeping with his reputation as "pe kidde kynge of kene justises" (l. 254): in all justice, he has no claim to salvation. Although he had no opportunity to learn of Christ (as he reminds us in a prayer of mild protest in ll. 285-288), he realizes that the blame rests on Adam, "pat ete of pat appulle / P at mony a plyztles pepul has poysned for ever" (ll. 294-295), not on Christ. Erkenwald's sermon, which stresses the chasm between human reason and divine revelation, also indicates the powerlessness of man before original sin:

Bot quen matyd is monnes myzt, and his mynde passyde,
 And al his resons are torent, and redeles he stondes,
 P en lettes hit hym ful litelle to louse wyt a fynger
 P at alle pe hondes under heven halde myzt never. (ll. 163-166)

Thus the poet underlines the poem's primary message, man's absolute necessity of grace, in two ways. First, it is not the judge's own merit which saves him if his companions have already been delivered from Hell; rather, he is saved through grace alone. In addition, the poem brings together the most just and the most holy of men, but neither the judge's

good works nor the bishop's pity can suffice for salvation. Instead, we are forced to recognize that, in the words of the Pearl-poet, "the grace of God is gret innoghe."²² Furthermore, that grace must be received by baptism, in accordance with God's potentia ordinata.²³

The lessons of the poem are further reinforced by the symbolism of the numbers three and eight. The presence of the Trinity in the climactic scene, as well as the implicit and explicit references to the three-tiered universe, suggests the importance of the number three. Three and eight are linked, for, besides one, eight is the only cube (a number raised to the third power) among the primary numbers. Thus the Trinity (three in one) leads all the characters in the poem to the cleansing and renewal signified by the number eight. In addition, the poem's second most dominant motif, justice, is also associated with eight; the cube, with its equal sides and surfaces, was seen as a model of equability.²⁴ And baptism, performed in the name of the Trinity, usually took place in an octagonal baptismal font, here provided by the shape of the poem itself (eight alliterative quatrains followed by an exposition of the miracle in eighty stanzas, the whole poem being eighty-eight stanzas long).²⁵

In conclusion, St. Erkenwald is a poem which demonstrates that a pagan can be saved, but not through his own merit. An absolute essential is grace, signified here by baptism. This grace was made possible by the Harrowing, which established Christ's sovereignty over all levels of the universe and made possible the transition from the Father's justice to Christ's mercy, still accessible to man through the Holy Spirit. Thus the poem can be seen as a reminder and celebration of the New Covenant (or "New Work") which, thanks to Christ's sacrifice, is

offered to all--those living before the Incarnation as well as after. The poem's miracle, the "harrowing in miniature," recalls the great division between justice and mercy in Christian history and holds up faithful priests such as Erkenwald who carry on the Church's new ministry of charity. (As we shall see, Piers Plowman emphasizes the same temporal divisions, but with a decidedly less optimistic view.)

In addition, the poem serves as a message to the fourteenth century Church. Except for the judge, no one in St. Erkenwald is actually converted to Christianity; rather, they are steadied and strengthened in their faith. This is signified by the change in the people from an unruly crowd that "suche a cry aboute a cors crakit evermore" (l. 110) to the orderly, loving procession of the final quatrain. With this in mind, we can view the poem as delivering an imperative to the Church: Christians must continue the work of harrowing, or bringing souls out of Hell, a directive which is true in at least two senses. If, as the poem teaches, neither good works nor reason alone is sufficient for salvation, then the Church must spread baptism and faith to unbelievers. Furthermore, the Church must cleanse itself, both collectively and individually, of all elements which would hinder the "New Work" effected by Christ's intervention on man's behalf. In short, the miracle vivifies the need for divine aid on behalf of individuals and the Church as a whole; man's tears are as useless as the judge's righteousness if not supplemented by the efficacy of grace. The poet uplifts his audience, however, by showing that Christ's bishops, as exemplified by Erkenwald, are holy, worthy men and that Providence--which can even hold a soul in reserve for a special purpose--can be trusted.

Notes

¹T. McAlindon, "Hagiography into Art: A Study of St. Erkenwald," Studies in Philology, 67 (1970), 472.

²The questions of authorship and source have also been primary. Larry Benson gives his arguments against, as well as a summary of the case for, the Pearl-poet's authorship of the poem in his article "The Authorship of St. Erkenwald," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 64 (1965), 393-405.

The question of source is also complicated. Many analogues of the work exist, but none is an exact counterpart. For example, St. Macharius was reputed to have discovered the head of a pagan priest who was delivered from Hell by prayer (see p. 60). This story, however, lacks the detail of the miraculously preserved body and its mysterious identity. In another analogue, St. Patrick was credited with restoring to life and baptizing a pregnant woman and her unborn child, and (in a separate incident) a giant swineherd (see p. 60). But these figures lack the majesty of the pagan judge in Erkenwald, and an actual deliverance from torment is not implied. Instead, they seem to have waited dormantly for St. Patrick's arrival. Henry Savage, editor of St. Erkenwald: A Middle English Poem (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926), points out that the Chronica Majora reports several discoveries of undecayed bodies, both Christian and (in the case of Pallas, from the Aeneid) pagan (pp. xxii-xxiii). Again, however, the analogues are not exact. Perhaps the closest analogue--certainly the best known one in the Middle Ages--is the story of Trajan and Pope Gregory which we examined in the previous chapter. The tale is recounted or mentioned in several medieval works. (See, for example, the Chronica Majora, Flores Historiarum, Speculum Historiale, Policraticus, Polychronicon, and Summa Praedicatorum. Savage [p. xvii, n. 9] gives a more complete list.)

Along with the framework of the popular Trajan legend, two other threads probably contributed to the writing of St. Erkenwald. One is the Belgian legend of Erkenbald, first recounted in the Dialogus Miraculorum of Caesarius of Heisterbach about 1222 and later in the Alphabetum Narrationum and the Dialogus, collections of medieval exempla. According to the tale, Erkenbald, "vir nobilis et potens, erat tantus amator iustitiae, ut nullam in iudiciis respeceret personam." He lived up to his reputation on his deathbed by killing his nephew, who had attacked a maiden of the household. When the priest consequently refused to give him the Last Sacrament, Erkenbald showed him the Host already on his tongue as a sign of God's approval of his justness. (See Laura A. Hibbard, "Erkenbald the Belgian: A Study in Medieval Exempla of Justice," Modern Philology, 17 [1920], 670-671.) The similarity of name and the association with extraordinary justness may help explain why the pagan judge's fate depended on St. Erkenwald rather than another holy man.

The other factor which probably contributed to the work was the discovery of either a corpse or a head in St. Paul's, which we know was built on the site of an ancient Roman cemetery (Hibbard, p. 137). This event was mentioned by Friar Nicholas Philip, OFM, in a sermon dated 1431; concluding an exemplum on chastity, Friar Philips writes, "Pro quo nota historiam de homine mortuo reperto integro in ecclesia sancti

Pauli post diem sepelicionis sue per annos multos" (Siegfried Wenzel, "St. Erkenwald and the Uncorrupted Body," Notes and Queries, 226 [Feb., 1981], 13). A casual reference to the event was also made by John de Bromyard in the Summa Praedicatorum: "Nota de iudice cuius caput Londoniis in fundamentum ecclesiae Sancti Pauli inventum fuit" (Hibbard, p. 136).

Finally, we know that in 1386 Robert de Braybroke, Bishop of London, issued a pastoral letter establishing the two commemorative feast-days of St. Erkenwald as feast-days of the first class. The poem was thus likely written at a time when popular devotion for St. Erkenwald was at its peak (Savage, pp. lxxv-lxxvi). Hibbard agrees, noting that "It was in this century that the shrine of St. Erkenwald became one of the wonders of St. Paul's, and it was in this period that a monastic writer would have seized most willingly on any suggestion for a new miracle tale concerning Erkenwald" (p. 136; for further information, Hibbard directs us to Sir William Dugdale, History of St. Paul's Cathedral [London: T. Warren, 1658]). To a writer familiar with the earlier tale of Trajan and Gregory, the discovery of pagan remains would likely suggest a repetition of the miracle, and St. Erkenwald would seem an excellent choice as intercessor.

³Paul F. Reichardt, "The Art and Meaning of the Middle English St. Erkenwald," Diss. Rice University 1971, p. 17.

⁴Benson, p. 403.

⁵Lester L. Faigley, "Typology and Justice in St. Erkenwald," American Benedictine Review, 29 (1978), 384.

⁶Vincent F. Petronella, "St. Erkenwald: Style as the Vehicle for Meaning," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 66 (1967), 532-40.

⁷Arnold E. Davidson, "Mystery, Miracle, and Meaning in St. Erkenwald," Papers on Language and Literature, 16 (1979), 41-42; McAlindon, p. 484; Reichardt, pp. 128-129.

⁸Reichardt, p. 150, and Russell Peck, "Number Structure in St. Erkenwald," Annuaire Mediaevale, 14 (1973), 10-12.

⁹Ruth Morse (ed., St. Erkenwald [Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975], p. 37) does mention in passing that "One reason for the pagan's salvation is implicit in the present situation, in which the people of the newly redeemed community need miraculous confirmation of their belief. This also explains why the pagan was left behind at the Harrowing of Hell--not for his own sake but for the sake of others."

¹⁰Lines 275-276 and 279-280 of Savage's edition of St. Erkenwald. Subsequent references to this work will be placed in parentheses within the text.

¹¹This idea is supported by Aquinas, who implied that Trajan was just one of many who may have been damned in order to be later recalled to life:

De facto Traiani hoc modo potest probabiliter aestimari, quod precibus B. Gregorii ad vitam fuerit revocatus, et ita gratiam consecutus sit, per quam remissionem peccatorum habuit, et per consequens immunitatem a poena: sicut etiam apparet in omnibus illis qui fuerunt miraculose a mortuis suscitati, quorum plures constat idololatrias et damnatos fuisse. De omnibus talibus enim similiter dici oportet quod non erant in inferno finaliter deputati, sed secundum praesentem propriorum meritorum iustitiam: secundum autem superiores causas, quibus praevidebantur ad vitam revocandi, erat aliter de eis disponendum.
(Summa Theologica, III [Supp.], LXXI, V, ad 5)

¹²Savage, p. 27, n. 38.

¹³Reichardt, pp. 105 and 107.

¹⁴Faigley, p. 385.

¹⁵Reichardt, p. 61.

¹⁶Reichardt, p. 137.

¹⁷Reichardt, pp. 136-138.

¹⁸Savage, however, endorses Gollancz's explanation that the word signifies a trinity of metropolitan cities (see pp. 24-25, n. 31). Morse (p. 66, note to l. 31) suggests that since London, York, and Canterbury were the three most important ecclesiastical centers in medieval England, the poet may have invented "triapolitanes" to suggest a similar pagan hierarchy.

¹⁹William Hutchings, "'The Unintelligible Terms of an Incomprehensible Damnation': Samuel Beckett's The Unnamable, Skeol, and St. Erkenwald," Twentieth Century Literature, 27 (Summer, 1981), 108-109.

²⁰Morse, p. 69, note to l. 132.

²¹Morse, p. 39.

²²Although their common authorship is far from certain, it is interesting to note that baptism in both The Pearl and St. Erkenwald is an absolute requirement for salvation; neither an infant's innocence nor perfect righteousness will alone suffice.

²³The poet does achieve a balance of sorts between the standpoints of Bradwardine and the Pelagians. Although the judge must receive salvation through divine grace in the sacrament of baptism, the basis of the miracle itself lies in his own merit, his own reputation for justice.

²⁴Peck, p. 13.

²⁵Peck, pp. 21 and 10.

Piers Plowman: Issues in Salvation and
the Harrowing as Thematic Climax

Piers Plowman is a fourteenth century poem which continues to resist all attempts to unlock its design. It does not fit neatly into any medieval genre, and even the goal of the Dreamer's quest--the most basic element of the work--is a matter of debate.¹ Another crux which continues to elicit conjecture is the meaning of the terms Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest which are used to divide the poem into sections. While I do not pretend to possess the key to Piers Plowman, some of its baffling elements can be profitably examined through a study of the poem's climactic scene--the Harrowing of Hell--and the theological discussions which involve such related issues as the fate of pagans, the necessity of baptism, and the efficacy of good works and learning.

Because Piers Plowman is undoubtedly a theological poem (although written in the vernacular and possibly intended for lay as well as clerical audiences),² it seems logical to approach the poem through a study of the theological issues it addresses in light of fourteenth century thought. One attempt to do this is Ruth Ames' The Fulfillment of the Scriptures: Abraham, Moses, and Piers; she reads the work as an exemplification of how the Old Testament is fulfilled by the New, an orthodox view given special emphasis during the Middle Ages through the use of typology.³ Morton Bloomfield, however, sees the poem as the product of an older, monastic tradition, concerned more with social than individual regeneration.⁴ Specifically, he places the poem in the English Franciscan tradition.⁵ Perhaps two of the most valiant attempts to place the poem in its religious context are Greta Hort's Piers Plowman and Contemporary Thought and Piers Plowman and Scriptural Tradition by D. W.

Robertson and Bernard F. Huppé. Both works suffer, however, because they face the near-impossible task of analyzing the entire poem, in all of its diffuse complexity, from a theological standpoint.⁶

Other critics have been more successful by limiting their focus to a specific issue or a specific context of the poem, and it is in their footsteps that my treatment follows. In particular, several studies concentrate on the issue of the virtuous pagan and/or the larger issue of the relative merits of grace vs. works. M. E. Marcett has identified the hypocritical friar of the banquet scene (C. XVI) as Friar William Jordan, who became involved in a controversy with Uthred of Boldon, the espouser of the theory of a clara visio granted each individual at the moment of death.⁷ This theory, although condemned in 1368, solved the dilemma of the fate of those who had died without Christian baptism.⁸ Marcett's identification is accepted by G. H. Russell, who attempts to prove Uthred's influence on Piers Plowman through examining revisions of pertinent passages (especially those relating to baptism) in the A, B, and C texts.⁹ Earlier, R. W. Chambers had become interested in the same theme, pointing out that the B-text plunges into the problems of predestination and the salvation of the righteous heathen which the A-text had left unanswered. Chambers contends that the author abandoned the A-text for fifteen years because he was conscious of his solitary stand on the possibility of salvation for pagans: "He believes that he has against him the opinion of all learned men."¹⁰ Three subsequent studies, however, have proven that the author's concern with the fate of virtuous pagans was part of a larger debate about the roles of grace and good works in salvation.¹¹ As we have seen, the theologians of the fourteenth century were divided on this issue: those who followed Bradwardine

emphasized the primacy of grace and the futility of man's efforts toward salvation; those who opposed Bradwardine, the Pelagians, contended that man could dispose himself to receive saving grace through merit de congruo; and those few who attempted a precarious moderate stand between the two extremes dwelt on the cooperation of grace and works.

Although the present work also deals with the theme of the virtuous pagan in Piers Plowman, it differs from the above studies in some respects. First, it deals almost exclusively with the C-text, accepting it as Langland's final revision and, more importantly, as the text most concerned with the elaboration of theological issues.¹² Second, I am not attempting to examine the influence of a particular figure such as Uthred of Boldon nor to place the poem or its poet in any specific theological camp. Rather, with the given theological climate in mind as the poem's context, I intend to examine the author's use of the idea of the virtuous pagan. This concept is reflected in the poem's discussion of such issues as the importance of baptism and learning for salvation and the idea of different degrees of reward. In addition, a central focus of the poem is Christ's Harrowing of Hell, an event closely associated with the issue of the virtuous pagan since, strictly speaking, those He harrowed were pagans. Christ's mastery of Hell and His deliverance of its captives marked the turning point from justice to mercy, from the hopeless damnation of paganism to the hope of eternal life in Christ. The structure of Piers Plowman reflects the importance of this event by delineating three distinct epochs of divine history: the Old Testament dispensation of strict justice; the time of Christ, especially the action of the Harrowing; and the reign (and impending collapse) of the Church Militant.

Let us begin with an examination of the relevant theological issues debated in the Dowel section of the poem, which depicts the Dreamer's intellectual and psychological progress.¹³ As we shall see, Dowel appears to follow the general method of scholastic argument, so that we are first introduced to two sides of a question and later given a solution which attempts to include and reconcile both sides.¹⁴ (The Harrowing itself does this as it includes and reconciles Old and New Covenants, justice and mercy.) Three important questions posed in Dowel are (1) the importance of baptism for salvation, (2) the place of learning in salvation, and (3) degrees of reward.

Baptism, the first question, is dealt with primarily in Passus XIII, when Scripture recounts the parable of the banquet to which many were called but few chosen. The Dreamer fears for his own soul ("And in a weer gan ich wexe and with my-selue to dispute / Whether ich were chose other nat chose"; XIII. 50-51), but then reassures himself that his baptism irrevocably marks him as one of the chosen: "For thauh a Crystine man coueytede hus Crystendome to reneye, / Ryghtfulliche to reneye no reson hit wolde" (XIII. 59-60). Although a Christian might deserve purgatory, in the "day of dome" he would receive "mercy for hus mysdedes" (XIII. 68-70). Scripture agrees that "may no synne lette / Mercy, that hue nel al amende yf meeknesse here folwe" (XIII. 71-72).

The word "meeknesse" evidently serves as a wedge to introduce Trajan--as we have seen, the virtuous pagan par excellence for the Middle Ages, and reputed for his great humility. But his speech does not show meekness; rather, he interjects a counter-argument on the question of baptism. The Dreamer has just claimed that his Christian baptism will assure him of salvation; Trajan, however, puts forth his own case of

salvation without baptism--indeed, without any specific Christian belief. He merited salvation because he fulfilled the imperatives of the Old and New Covenants--both justice and love: "Loue, withoute leel by-leyue and my lawe ryghtful / Sauede me Sarrasyn soule and body bothe" (XIII. 86-87). Elizabeth Kirk notes that even the form of his name, Troianus, suggests the central quality of truth or troth, indicating that his salvation is not an exception but a principle.¹⁵

Although he must acknowledge Gregory's role in his salvation ("he wilnede wepyng that ich were saued," XIII. 82),¹⁶ his total separation from the sacraments is stressed: "With-oute moo bedes-byddyng hus [Gregory's] bone was vnderfonge, / And ich ysaued, as 3e may see with-oute syngynge of masse" (XIII. 83-84). Langland's version of the Trajan legend is unusual in that it does omit baptism; many analogues of the tale relate Trajan's re-animation; at least long enough to receive baptism.¹⁷ This is, after all, the main point of St. Erkenwald--that even the most upright judge cannot be saved unless he is a baptized Christian.

At this point we have two extreme positions expressed: a baptized Christian must perforce be saved; but, on the other hand, baptism is not a prerequisite for salvation. The scholastic presentation of the issue of baptism, with two opposed extremes, leads us to expect a solution. And in Passus XV Ymaginatif solves the dilemma with two answers, one entirely orthodox and the other verging on Pelagianism. First, Ymaginatif adopts Aquinas' argument that there is more than one kind of baptism: "Ther is follyng of font and follyng in blod-shedyng, / And thorw fuyr is follyng and al is ferm by-leyue" (XV. 207-208).¹⁸ (In other words, Ymaginatif asserts the validity of baptism at the font, through martyrdom, and through the Holy Spirit.)

But Ymaginatif does not stop here. He presents an argument which calls for the salvation of all virtuous men, regardless of their religious beliefs:

Ac treuthe, that trespassed neuere ne transuersed aȝens the lawe,
 Bote lyuede as his lawe tauhte and leyueþ ther be no bettere,
 And yf ther were, he wolde and in suche a wil deyeth--
 Wolde neuere trewe god bote trewe treuthe were a-losed.
 And where hit worth other nat worth the by-leyue is gret of treuthe,
 And hope hongeth ay ther-on to haue that treuthe deserveth.
 (XV. 209-214)

Ymaginatif confirms Trajan's salvation ("Traianus was a trewe knyght and took neuere Crystendome, / And he is saf, seith the bok and his soule in heuene," XV. 205-206), with the implication that he was rewarded because he facit quod in se est, which is clearly the import of lines 209-214, and because of his extreme justness: "uix saluabitur iustus in die iudicii; / Ergo saluabitur" (XV. 203-204). (This may also indicate how Piers learned the way to Truth. His directions to the would-be pilgrims in the Visio show that as a just man, he knew well the meaning of the Ten Commandments but possessed only a dim recognition of Christian truths.)

If the poet's beliefs are voiced through Ymaginatif, we can assume that he uses Trajan to prove that pagans can attain salvation. But he would not, as Chambers believed, have been comforted by familiarity with St. Erkenwald as another tale of pagan salvation.¹⁹ St. Erkenwald illustrates the absolute necessity of baptism for salvation; Langland, if he did not come in contact with that work, was at least familiar with the traditional legend of Trajan and deliberately dispensed with the pagan emperor's baptism.²⁰ His point seems to be that Christian rituals avail nothing without works.

This does not mean that he would have his own non-Christian

contemporaries continue in their ignorance. But he does show a great deal of compassion for them, including them in the overall Christian scheme ("For Crist clepide ous alle come yf we wolde, / Sarrasyns and scismatikes and so he dude the Iewes," XIII. 53-54) and places much of the blame for their condition on the Church itself:

Yf preest-hod were parfit and preyede thus the people sholde amende,
That now contrarien Cristes lawes and Cristendom despisen.
For sutthe that thes Sarasyns scribes, and thes Iewes
Hauen a lippe of oure by-leyue the lightloker, me thynketh,
Thei sholde turne, who so trauayle wolde and of the Trinite
techen hem (XVIII. 250-254).²¹

A related question, the importance of learning in salvation, is taken up in Passus XII, appropriately peopled by such characters as Wit, Study, and Clergy. Two ideas are made clear: learning can be harmful if not accompanied by use of the knowledge acquired; learning alone does not guarantee salvation.

The first idea, the uselessness of learning in isolation, is made clear by Study's rebuke of Wit (XII. 3) and Scripture's scowl upon Clergy (XII. 163-164) for wasting too much time in teaching Will, who shows no disposition to make practical use of the knowledge he so zealously acquires. He seeks knowledge not in a quest for caritas but merely to satisfy his curiositas, and he often becomes sidetracked by irrelevancies.²² His misunderstanding of the proper use of knowledge is obvious from his basic grammatical error: he seeks to find Dowel, ignoring its imperative force and instead seeking for a non-existent substantive.²³ Study brings up Christ's injunction against such seekers: "nolite mittere, 3^e men margerie-perles / A-monge hogges that hauen hawes at wille" (XII. 7-8). Study further deplores the current abuse of learning: "He is reuerenced and robed that can robbe the people / Thorw fallas and false questes and

thorw fykel speche" (XII. 21-22), while "he that hath holy write aye in hus mouthe . . . Lytel is he a-lowed there-fore among lordes at festes" (XII. 31, 34). Interestingly, Study makes a distinction between human and divine knowledge. After listing the various fields she takes responsibility for--logic, music, poetry, grammar, and crafts (XII. 119-128), she admits:

Ac Theologie hath teened me ten score tymes,
The more ich muse ther-on the mystiloker hit semeth,
And the deppere ich deuyne the derker me thynketh hit.
(XII. 129-131)

Then, as the Fathers made a clear distinction between philosophy and faith, she adds: "Hit is no science sothliche bote a sothfast by-leyue" (XII. 132). This is another way of expressing the uselessness of mere scientia, which is of a different order altogether--although, as Ymaginatif later implies, it can be a useful building-block to faith (XV. 193-199).

We saw that, on the question of salvation, the Dreamer became concerned when Scripture informed him that many were called but few chosen. Likewise, in relation to learning, Scripture tells him, "multi multa sapiunt, et seipsos nesciunt" (XII. 165). These words, which drive home the futility of knowledge sought purely for its own sake, catapult the Dreamer into a state of recklessness, embodied by a separate character of that name.^{23a} In this guise, he expresses an extreme position which Ymaginatif will later moderate, the idea that learning avails nothing due to predestination:

Go ich to helle, go ich to heuene ich shal nouht go myn one!
.
For Clergie seith that he seiñ in the seynt euangelie,
That ich man maked was and my name y-entred
In the legende of life longe er ich were.
Predestinat thei prechen prechours that this shewen,
Or prechen inparfit ypult out of grace. (XII. 200, 204-208)

As examples of the futility of learning Rechlessnesse cites Solomon and Aristotle, held by tradition to be in Hell:²⁴

For Salomon the sage that Sapience made,
 God gaf hym grace of wit and of good after,
 Neuere to man so mucche that man can of telle,
 To rewele alle reames and ryche to make,
 And deme wel and wislyche wommen bereth witnesse;
Non michi nec tibi, sed diuidatur.
 Aristotle and he hij tauhten men bothe;
 Maisters that techen men of godes muchel mercy
 Witnessen that here wordes and here werkes bothe
 Weren wonder goode and wise in here tyme,
 And holychurche, as ich huyre haldeth bothe in helle! (XII. 211-220)

If we accept Rechlessnesse as an external embodiment of the Dreamer's state of mind, we see the irony of his choice of examples. As Joseph Wittig puts it, "He seizes upon Solomon and Aristotle, whom tradition has damned, arguing that their knowledge availed them nothing--a point his informants have been desperately trying to get across to him."²⁵

Rechlessnesse goes on to argue that it is even less likely for learned men such as clerics to win salvation, as those that built Noah's ark (a typological symbol of the Church) were lost in the Deluge. To make this point, Rechlessnesse ironically confesses that he himself has tried the path of learning (although, as we see, not for the proper end):

Thus ich, Rechelesnesse, haue rad registres and bokes,
 And fond ich neuere, in faith for to telle treuthe,
 That Clergie of Cristes mouth comended was euere." (XII. 274-276)²⁶

His final conclusion, then, is that

Aren none rathere raueshed fro the ryghte by-leyue
 Cominliche than clerkes most knowynge and connynge;
 And none sonnere ysaued ne saddere in the by-leyue
 Than plouhmen and pastours and poure comune peuple. (XII. 290-293)

Again, we have two opposed extreme positions: Study and Scripture are zealous to guard knowledge from idle curiosity lest it be cheapened,

while Rechlessnesse goes so far as to make learning an actual hindrance to salvation. As before, Ymaginatif provides the solution. And, as before, his views argue for a charitable God who would encourage, not punish, man's efforts to reach Truth:

Ne of Sortes, ne of Salamon no scripture can telle
Whether thei be in helle other in heuene; other Aristotle the wise.
Ac god is so good, ich hope sitthe he gaf hem wittes
To wissen ous weyes ther-with that wenen to be saued,
And the betere for here bookes--to bidden we been holde
That god for hus grace gyue here saules reste;
For lettred men were but lewede men ³ut ne were the lore of tho
clerkes. (XV. 193-199)

In addition, learning can keep a man from falling into wanhope, for "he that knoweth cleregie can sonnere a-ryse / Out of synne" (XV. 111-112).

Finally, a concern related to predestination also arises in Passus XII. Rechlessnesse lists several examples of surprising (at least to human logic) salvations. A thief who died with Jesus, Mary Magdelene who loved lechery, David who murdered to obtain another's wife, Paul who persecuted Christians--all received mercy. Therefore,

By that that Salamon seith hit semeth that no wyght
Wot ho is worthi for wele other for wicke,
Whether he is worthi to wele other to wickede pyne:
Sunt iusti atque sapientes, et opera eorum in manu dei sunt.
(XII. 271-273)

This passage calls to mind the important controversy over grace and works. As Rechlessnesse sees it, grace is all. But in the next passus the Dreamer will be confronted by Trajan, whose works were sufficient for God to accede to Gregory's plea. At the moment, though, the Dreamer is concerned with the precedence of reward, as he indicates in his comments on the thief:

And for he by-knew on the crois and to Crist shrof hym,
He was sonnere ysaued than seynt Iohan the Baptist,
And er Adam other Ysaie other eny of the prophetes,
That hadden leye with Lucyfer meny longe ³eres.

A robber was y-raunsoned rather than thei alle;
 With-oute penaunce other passion other eny other peyne
 He passede forth pacientliche to perpetuel blisse. (XII. 256-262)

Ymaginatif solves this dilemma as well, this time in a thoroughly
 orthodox (even "Dantean") way:

He [the thief] sit nother with seynt Iohan with Symon ne with Iude,
 Ne with maydenes ne with martris ne with mylde wydewes,
 Bote as a soleyne by hym-self and serued vp-pon the grounde.

 Ryȝt as Troianus, the trewe knyght tulde nat deep in helle,
 That oure lord ne hadde hym lyghtliche out so leyueth of the
 theef in heuene.
 For he ys in the lowest heuene yf oure byleyue beo trewe.
 (XII. 143-145, 150-152)

Although the position of the virtuous pagan is not explicitly discussed,
 in light of the liberal attitude Ymaginatif has taken towards those who
faciunt quod in se est, we can infer that they, like the thief, probably
 hold a lower place in heaven.

One other question runs throughout the poem and underlies all three
 of the questions just discussed: the problem of grace vs. works. This
 question directly involves the virtuous pagan, if a pagan's meritorious
 works might justify his salvation. John McNamara concludes that

Langland does not opt for one extreme pole or the
 other in the fourteenth century controversy between
 conservative Augustinians and radical Ockhamists, nor
 does he try to avoid the problem altogether or pass
 it off in a few facile lines. The poem may perhaps
 be read as an extended dialectic in which various
 positions are allowed to present themselves and to
 oppose one another, with the hope that out of this
 opposition would come some resolution of the problem
 of grace and merit.²⁷

While I agree that the poet refrains from adopting an extreme position,
 in general his poem places more emphasis on the value of works. This is
 evident as early as the pardon scene, when Piers learns that man shall be
 rewarded according to his works: "Qui bona egerunt ibunt in uitam

eternam: / Qui uero mala, in ignem eternum" (X. 287). Hort calls the pardon "essentially Pelagian" because "it is based on his confidence in the power of human nature to do that which is good, and thus earns its own salvation."²⁸ The Athanasian Creed from which the pardon is taken verbatim has itself been identified with a semi-Pelagian environment, which explains its emphasis on man's free will and responsibility for his acts.²⁹ This is evident even in the phrase "vult saluus esse" in verses 1 and 28 of the Creed--a phrase that reminds us of Will's words to Holychurche, "How ich may sauy my saule" (II. 80). According to the "damnatory clauses" of the Creed, there is only one avenue to salvation: "Quicunque vult saluus esse, ante omnia opus est ut teneat catholicam fidem" (verse 1); "Haec est fides catholica: quam nisi quis fideliter firmiterque crediderit, saluus esse non poterit" (verse 48).³⁰ The tenets of faith professed in the Creed concern the Trinity (verses 3-28) and the dual nature of Christ as equally God and man (verses 29-37). Both of these points are addressed in Piers Plowman (in Abraham's teachings on the Trinity, XIX. 212-242, and the Samaritan's elaboration in XX. 111-196, and in the image of Christ jousting in Piers' arms in XXI. 21). But these points of correct belief are overshadowed by the necessity of action; accordingly, Langland chose to quote from the Creed a clause relating to deeds, not doctrine.

In Dowel, the Dreamer gravitates to an extreme dependence on grace by seizing on baptism as a guarantee of salvation, by denying any value to learning, and by stressing predestination as beyond human logic, rendering man's attempts to do well futile. As we have seen, Ymaginatif's replies to all these charges emphasize the importance of works: baptism alone is not sufficient; learning put in the service of good is laudable;

the notion of degrees of reward renders some of God's decisions less mystifying and indicates that man's actions do count. Most decisive, however, is the presentation of Trajan as a concrete example of the efficacy of good works, which makes doctrine pale by comparison (which explains Trajan's dramatic lines of entrance, " 'Ye, baw for bookes!' " in XIII. 74).³¹ As mentioned above, Langland alters the legend to omit the possibility of baptism and minimizes the importance of Gregory's intercession, placing the focus squarely on Trajan's works. On the other hand, XVIII. 122-163 is an insert in the C-text which argues against this phenomenon; here, *Liberum Arbitrium* claims that Saracens may be saved, but only "yf thei so by-leyuede, / In the lengthyng of here lyf to leyue on holychurche" (XVIII. 123-124).³²

Given the fact that Trajan insists he did not hold Christian beliefs (XIII. 77, 86), how can we reconcile his position with the statement about the Saracens' salvation? *Liberum Arbitrium* goes on to explain that Saracens may possess charity:

Hit is a kynde thyng, a creature hus creatour to honoure;
For ther is no man that mynde hath that ne meoketh hym and by-secheth
To that lord that hym lyf lente and lyflode him sendeth.
(XVIII. 153-155)

But the same kynde which inclines pagans to charity can also lead them astray: "And when kynde hath hus cours and no contrarye fyndeth, / Thenne is lawe lost and lewete vnknowen" (XVIII. 160-161).

The fact that these words come from *Liberum Arbitrium* reminds us of man's choice in this matter, though; he must not necessarily follow kynde. *Ymaginatif* argues for the hope of salvation for those pagans who "ne transuersed aȝens the lawe" (XV. 209), a feat admittedly difficult but apparently not beyond the scope of man's efforts. And Trajan stands as

the exemplar of a pagan who combined love and law, the necessary combination for salvation: "Loue, withoute leel by-leyue and my lawe ryghtful / Sauede me Sarrasyn soule and body bothe" (XIII. 86-87); later he adds, "For lawe with-oute leaute leye ther a bene!" (XIII. 92). (This echoes Holychurche's sentiment in II. 185, "Chastite with-oute charite worth cheynid in helle.") Thus salvation depends not so much on Christian belief as on the ability to operate under the Old and New Covenants of adhering to moral law and practicing charity.

None, however, would have enjoyed salvation without the introduction of the New Covenant, whose first effect was the Harrowing. Because of its importance in marking the turning point from the Old Law to the New, we can regard the Harrowing (Passus XXI) as the thematic climax of the poem.

With this in mind, let us turn directly to Passus XXI, in which the Harrowing occurs.³³ First, as in St. Erkenwald, the event of the Harrowing serves here to establish divine mastery of the universe. The medieval conception of the three-tiered universe is schematized in the first passus (the tower of truth, the field of folk, the castle of care), and the position of earth is subtly reinforced by the reference to "Myddelerd" when Fortune places Will before a mirror (XII. 170). The name of Jesus is recognized in heaven and on earth; however, the name "Christ" signifies his role as conqueror of Hell and thus master of the entire universe:

Myght no deth hym for-do ne adoun brynge,
That he ne aros and regnede and rauesshede helle;
And tho was he 'conquerour' called of quyke and of dede.
(XXII. 51-53)

Besides establishing God's reign in all levels of the universe--a

spatial concept--the Harrowing in Piers Plowman is also (and primarily) used to establish a demarcation line in the continuum of time. It has long been recognized that the Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest sections deal essentially with different time periods; Henry W. Wells, who first delineated an organized pattern in the poem as opposed to a series of "social vignettes," pointed out that each of these sections is governed by one Person of the Trinity (the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost respectively).³⁴ Later, he took this association one step further to see the poem as (among other things) an historical allegory:

The Life of Dowel deals especially with the heathen or pre-Christian world which believes in God but not in the Trinity. The Life of Dobet is associated with the world during the lifetime of Jesus. The Life of Dobest is the subsequent dispensation of the Holy Spirit after the Ascension and both before and after the poet's own lifetime.³⁵

(This historical progression may have been influenced by the ideas of Joachim of Flora, who divided temporality into three ages.)³⁶ At the same time, of course, we must keep in mind that the Dowel and Dobest sections deal ostensibly with fourteenth century England--one minor example of how richly layered the poem is and why it resists any simple interpretation.

By concentrating on the Harrowing as the climax of the poem, we can better see the resulting divisions of time into three epochs, which are clearly characterized by the terms of the various legal documents which mark off these periods.³⁷ It is fitting here to note the poet's emphasis on legality.³⁸ Langland's God does not use his potentia absoluta to overturn the order of the universe but adheres scrupulously to the law. For example, in his confrontation with Lucifer before releasing Hell's prisoners, Christ asserts that He is merely claiming His due, although

He admits that He used guile (adopting human guise, or "jousting in Piers' arms) to rebut Lucifer's guile (appearing to Eve in the form of a serpent). His sacrifice is offered as payment for man's sins: "And al that man mys-dude ich, man, to amenden hit" (XXI. 392); thus He can say with assurance,

So leyf hit nat, Lucifer that ich aȝeyns the lawe
Fecche here eny synful soule souereynliche by maistrie;
Bot thorgh ryght and reson raunson here myne lige;
Non ueni soluere legem, sed adimplere. (XXI. 396-398)³⁹

A similar concern for legal form is shown in each epoch, characterized by a distinct document.

My arrangement differs somewhat, however, from Wells': I would contend that the Visio deals primarily with an Old Testament outlook, based on the contractual nature of Piers' pardon, "Qui bona egerunt ibunt in uitam eternam; / Qui vero mala, in ignem eternum" (X. 287).⁴⁰ (At the same time, since the poem is circular, the Visio also relates to the Last Judgment.) As we have seen, the Dowel section represents the Dreamer's own intellectual efforts and does not enter the historical progression, which takes up again with Dobet, the period of Christ and the introduction of the New Covenant, "Dilige deum et proximum tuum" (XX. 13).⁴¹ Dobest portrays an imminent Judgment; therefore, this period of time is marked by the warning "redde quod debes" (XXII. 187). Regarding the poem as a sequential movement through divine history reinforces the importance of the Harrowing: "As the speeches of Christ and the devils make clear, it is an event which both looks backward in time to redress the disjunction of man and God caused by the Fall, and looks forward to the end of time in the Last Judgment."⁴²

Further, an examination of the Visio indicates that it can be used

as a guide to sketch the broad outlines of each of these epochs. Piers first enters the poem as a guide to Truth; he is detained to plow his half-acre; then he receives his pardon from Truth. It is significant that although at first he planned to seek Truth (via an allegorical road dotted with signposts of the Ten Commandments), at last Truth sends a message to him. This, in miniature, details the historical progression of the entire poem and helps explain the significance of each document. Piers first directs the repentant folk to seek Truth (God) through the Ten Commandments, issued in the eye-for-an-eye spirit of the Old Testament. But first, the plowing of the half-acre (in other words, the spiritual cultivation of "Myddelerd") takes place, an action which corresponds to Dobet or the Christian dispensation. Finally, through Piers Truth (God) sends His pardon, actually the terms of Judgment.⁴³ This portion of the Visio corresponds to Dobest, which does not actually depict the Judgment but leads up to it. At last, then, Truth finds all men.

Let us now examine each of the documents and their corresponding epochs in more detail. The scene which has provoked the greatest amount of attention occurs in Passus X, when Piers receives the first of these documents, a "pardon" from Truth. In the B-text--the one usually selected for discussion of this passus because of its greater dramatic value--Piers reads the pardon, hears the priest's disparagement of it, and then tears the pardon in "pure tene" (B. VII. 116). This unexpected action has produced several conjectures: that the pardon is invalid,⁴⁴ that this pardon is valid but the action symbolizes a general rejection of paper pardons from Rome,⁴⁵ that the pardon actually becomes a pardon only when Piers rips it,⁴⁶ that Piers is angry at the priest and tears

the pardon as he abandons the Active Life,⁴⁷ that Piers acknowledges the impossibility of meeting the pardon's terms.⁴⁸ Critics have also pointed out that Piers' action is reminiscent of Moses' breaking the stone tablets on his return from Sinai; in each instance, the principal character is angry at an unworthy priest and vents his rage on the nearest object.⁴⁹ Common exegetical tradition interpreted this as a type of the change from Old Law to New.⁵⁰ Another analogue exists in the tearing of the Temple veil, also symbolizing the change from the Old Covenant to the New.⁵¹

In the C-text, however, this scene is considerably scaled down. Piers does not tear the pardon; instead, the Dreamer merely tells us that he awoke when "the preest thus and Perkyn of the pardon Iangled" (X. 292). The omission of the dramatic action of B allows us to focus on the message of the pardon. The text itself, "Qui bona egerunt ibunt in uitam eternam: / Qui vero mala, in ignem eternum," would have been recognized by the poet's audience as coming from the Athanasian Creed.⁵² In this context, the lines clearly refer to the Last Judgment:

qui passus est pro salute nostra, descendit ad
infernā, resurrexit a mortuis, ascendit ad
caelos, sedet ad dexteram Patris: inde uenturus
iudicare uiuos et mortuos, ad cuius aduentum
omnes homines resurgere habent cum corporibus
suis et reddituri sunt de factis propriis
rationem. Et qui bona egerunt ibunt in uitam
eternam, qui vero mala in ignem aeternum.

Haec est fides catholica quam nisi quisque
fideliter firmiterque crediderit, saluus esse
non poterit.

(He suffered for our salvation, descended into
Hell, rose again from the dead, ascended into
heaven, sitteth at the right hand of the Father,
from whence He shall come to judge the quick and
the dead. At whose coming all men shall rise
again with their bodies and shall give account

for their own works. And they who have done good shall go into life eternal, and they who indeed have done evil into eternal fire.

This is the Catholic faith, which except a man shall have believed faithfully and firmly he cannot be in a state of salvation.)⁵³

This is, indeed, no pardon as it stands. However, the last line of this verse ("Qui bona egerunt . . .") would, to a medieval audience, quite likely have suggested its opening lines: the outline of the Passion, Harrowing, Resurrection, and Ascension. This is a pardon, then, but in the time scheme of the poem Christ's sacrifice has not yet taken place. We are reminded of this by the Visio's overall emphasis on the First Member of the Trinity, indicating an underlying Old Testament frame.⁵⁴ In addition, the action involving Piers' half-acre reflects a primitive time, when men could be controlled only by their most basic urge, hunger.⁵⁵ The one court scene we are shown depicts an Old Testament ethic. Wrong must be punished, even if Pees, the injured party, wishes mercy, not strict justice, for his foe. The allegorical characters which figure importantly, Conscience and Reason, are those we would expect to predominate in an Old Testament setting, while Mede, a dangerously ambivalent character, represents an evil which has always existed in opposition to the Church. (Even Cain's murder of his brother sprang from an offering of made to God.) The Seven Deadly Sins also make their appearance, although, surprisingly enough, they do so to confess. Repentance, who hears their confessions, prays for mercy in a speech which recounts the events of Christ's life and His holy mission of saving the sinful. But, within the constraints of this Old Testament setting, no forgiveness is forthcoming. The best that can occur is Hope's blast upon a horn, gathering the folk together to seek Truth

(VIII. 152-157).⁵⁶ And when Piers offers to tell them the way, even he admits his limitations; he has learned the way to Truth not through any specific divine revelation but through Conscience and Kyndewit⁵⁷--and forty years of following Truth.⁵⁸ Although his directions to Truth delineate the way of the Ten Commandments, he warns the folk that Grace and Charity must also be approached (VIII. 254-259). If we identify Truth as God the Father, Charity as Christ, and Grace as the Holy Spirit, we see that no one member of the Trinity can be reached in isolation. Thus, despite Piers' assurance that all are kin to Mercy at Truth's court, the people realize that they need a guide to find their way. But first they agree to help Piers sow his half-acre--an episode which illustrates their need for Truth as Piers struggles to put them to work.

At the end of Passus IX, just before Piers receives his pardon from Truth in the opening of the next passus, we encounter an apocalyptic passage:

Thorwe flodes and foule wederes frutes shullen faile,
 Pruyde and pestilences shal muche puple fecche.
 Thre shupes and a shaft with an vm. folwyng,
 Shal bryng bane and bataile on bothe half the mone.
 And thanne shal deth with-drawe and derthe be Iustice,
 And Dawe the deluere deye for defaute,
 Bote god of hus goodnesse graunte ous a trewe. (IX. 349-355)

Although Skeat interprets this as a mock prophecy satirizing contemporary doom-sayers,⁵⁹ this description can be taken as a prophecy of the signs portending the Last Judgment. As such, we see that in the next passus God does "graunte a trewe" through Truth, who purchases a pardon for Piers and his fellow workers. (The word "purchase," of course, calls to mind the ransom of Christ.)

As we have seen, the actual pardon is implicit; the words which Piers, the priest, and the Dreamer read portray only the harsh terms of

the Last Judgment. If we keep an Old Testament setting in mind, it comes as no surprise then that the Dreamer soon awakens "meteles and moneyles" (X. 295)--Christ has not yet come to offer His body (eucharistically, "mete") as a ransom to purchase mankind.

It may seem that the poet is having it all ways in the Visio--there are undoubtedly contemporary references, the entire Christian story is briefly told, and yet the theological emphasis definitely falls within an Old Testament context, symbolized best by the legalistic terms of the pardon. At the same time, the pardon is introduced by an apocalyptic prophecy, and its place in the Athanasian Creed bespeaks Judgment. All of this is possible because of the nature of Scripture, the elemental belief that the Old Testament is fulfilled by the New. This allows the poet to draw upon all epochs while simultaneously maintaining a pre-dominant Old Testament orientation. The pardon itself, the climax of the Visio, emphasizes the close connection between Old Testament justice and the justice which will be displayed at the Last Judgment. Between these two eras lies man's only real hope for escaping that justice--the Christian dispensation. Without mercy, the folk cannot enter the gate to Truth; likewise, the Church believed that none who died before Christ could enter heaven. (Piers makes this clear in his directions to Truth's court in VIII. 288-291: "Mercy is a mayde there hath myght ouer hem alle; / And hue is sybbe to alle synful and hure sone bothe. / And thorwe the help of hem two hope thow non other, / Thow myght gete grace ther so thow go by tyme.") The most they could hope for was a resting-place in Abraham's bosom, usually figured as the upper portion of Hell.

Appropriately, then, the next epoch the poem deals with achieves its climax in Hell. (I realize that by making this jump I ignore almost

all of Dowel. As noted before, Passus XI through XVII do not enter into the historical progression of the poem but deal with a psychological progression as the Dreamer tries to attain an intellectual grasp of his faith.) After a long period of scholastic questioning over various matters--some of which we have already examined--the Dreamer in Passus XVII at last turns his attention to charity (ll. 284-285), the subject which then occupies the Dobet section of the poem.⁶⁰

In Passus XIX, Liberum Arbitrium responds to the Dreamer's request, "telle and teche me to Charite" (l. 2) by leading him to the tree of Ymago-dei. The conjunction of free will, tree, and image of God (in which man was made) immediately calls to mind the fate of Adam and Eve. But the allegory is more complex. We see the results of the Fall for their heirs; as Elde shakes the tree, the devil lurks nearby to catch the "fruit":

. . . the deucl was wel redy,
And gederide hem alle to-gederis bothe grete and smale,
Adam and Abraham and Ysaye the prophete,
Sampson and Samuel and seynt Iohan the baptist,
And bar hem forth baldely no body tho hym lette,
And made of holy men hus horde in limbo inferni,
Ther is derknesse and drede and the deucl maister. (XIX. 111-117)

As a result of this situation--which obtained up to the time of John the Baptist, traditionally Christ's forerunner even in Hell--another Master had to be established in Hell.⁶¹ In terms of the poem's imagery, we learn "That Iesus sholde Iuste ther-fore in Iugement of armes, / Who sholde fecche this frut the feend other Iesus self" (XIX. 129-130).⁶² But the Dreamer, after seeing a quick succession of scenes from Christ's life, wakes before the "jousting" takes place, on "Mydlentens Soneday" (XIX. 183). Since Lent corresponds to the pre-Christian era, we are not surprised when the Dreamer meets Abraham, or Faith, who teaches him of the Trinity.⁶³

Abraham has another lesson to impart as well, one which harks back to Piers' pardon. Piers had received a pardon "For hym and for hus heyres for euere to be asoiled" (X. 4); likewise, Abraham received a pardon:

For hym-self seide ich sholde haue and myn issue bothe
Lond and lordshup ynow and lyf with-uten ende.
To me and to myn issue more he by-hihte,
Mercy for oure mysdedes as meny tymes
As we wilnede and wolde with mouth and herte asken. (XIX. 257-261)

The terms of each pardon are substantially the same, but neither pardon is yet in effect, as the Dreamer sees when he looks into Abraham's lap: "And ich loked in hus lappe a lazar lay ther-ynne, / With patriarkes and prophetes pleiyng to-gederes" (XIX. 273-274). This is, of course, Langland's version of Abraham's bosom (cf. Luke 16:22), whose inhabitants are the literal equivalents of the "fruit" gathered by the devil. As Abraham informs the Dreamer, they must await Christ, "That shal delyuery ous som day out of the deueles powere" (XIX. 284).⁶⁴ Thus both pardons are valid; they merely remain ineffectual until sealed by Christ's sacrifice.

Earlier we observed that in Passus VIII, after the confession of the Seven Deadly Sins, no forgiveness was forthcoming--but Hope blew upon his horn. In Passus XX, immediately after we learn that those in Abraham's lap have not received mercy (" 'Alas!' ich seide, 'that synne so longe shal lette / The myght of godes mercy that myghte ous alle amende!' " XIX. 288-289), Spes, or Hope, appears again. Spes can also be identified with Moses, for he seeks a knight "That tooke me a maundement vp-on the mounte of Synay" (XX. 2). This reinforces the conjunction of the Old and New Covenants, for in the rigid law of the Ten Commandments there was also Hope--in the projected coming of Christ. With the Incarnation, a new law was instituted, one which did not void the

Decalogue but imparted spirit to its letter: "Dilige deum et proximum tuum." These words, clearly identified with Christ and the way of love, rather than justice, constitute the letter Hope carries. The Dreamer, who does not understand the relationship between the teachings of Abraham on the Trinity and Hope's letter, is now in the same position as the priest in Passus X who did not comprehend Piers' pardon. Piers and the priest "iangled"; Abraham, Spes, and Will "wente in the way thus wordyng of this matere" (XX. 46).

One nice touch is that the poet specifies that Hope's letter is written in Latin and Hebrew (XX. 4), emphasizing the fact that this letter applies to both New Covenant and Old, respectively.⁶⁵ Piers' pardon, with its connotations of the Second Coming, was written in Latin alone, for at last it would apply only to Christians, those who came after the Harrowing. Their predecessors had been judged accordingly and sentenced either to the torments of Hell or to the limbo of Abraham's bosom. In addition, Hope's letter is unsealed, awaiting the Harrowing:

'Nay,' he seyde, 'ich seke hym that hath the seel to kepe,
The whiche is Criste and Cristendome and a croys ther-on to honge.
Were hit ther-with a-seeled ich wote wel the sothe,
That Lucifers lordshup ligge sholde ful lowe.' (XX. 7-10)

However, Piers' pardon arrives with a seal ("Ac vnder his secre seel Treuthe sente hem a lettere," X. 27). This reinforces its apocalyptic import, for in Revelation 5:1-5, we learn of a book sealed with seven seals, which can be opened only by Christ as time draws to a close. The secret seal also has affinities with the Old Testament, as Ames has pointed out: "The seal is secret, that is, hidden from men's eyes, as Christ was hidden in the prophecies of the Old Testament."⁶⁶

When the Samaritan enters the scene, we know that the plenitudo

temporis for the Incarnation has come: Faith and Hope could not heal the injured man if they would, but the Samaritan can. (This reminds us that in XIX. 138, *Liberum Arbitrium* taught Jesus "leche-crafte.") Traditionally, the parable of the Good Samaritan represented Christ's rescue of mankind, so this makes a fitting preface to the actual scene in Hell. But in the poem itself the victory against Satan has not yet been won--a point subtly made when the Samaritan leads his charge to lauacrum lex-dei ("the bath of the law of God," or the baptismal font), located six or seven miles beside the new market (XX. 71-72). If Christ's mission in Hell is unsuccessful, lauacrum lex-dei can be located six miles from the "new market"--perhaps a fanciful indication of the New Covenant⁶⁷--for in medieval numerology the number six represented the six ages of earth, or the extent of human limitations. (An interesting speculation here, although it may stretch the point too far, is that Truth may have "purchased" Piers' pardon at this "newe markett.") On the other hand, if Christ is successful, lauacrum lex-dei will be seven miles from the market, for seven is the number of fulfillment, of things divine.⁶⁸

From the parable, the poem begins to move to the literal description of Jesus' battle with the devil. Faith explains what will happen, again establishing his Old Testament orientation by quoting Hosea 13:14, which was used as the key proof text for the Harrowing:⁶⁹

. . . with-inne thre dayes,
To walke and fecche fro the feonde Peers frut the Plouhman,
And legge hit ther hym lyketh and Lucifer bynde,
And forbete and bringe adoun bale and deth for euere;
O mors, ero mors tua! (XXI. 31-34)

Witnessing the Passion, Faith curses the Jews for their 'vilanye' and prophesies their doom (XXI. 100-114). This is a response suitable

to the Old Covenant, a cry for revenge. But in a master-stroke of dramatic irony, we see the inadequacy of his vituperative response. The Dreamer "drow in that deorknesse to descendit ad inferna" (XXI. 116)--the phrase from the Creed which marks the turning-point from justice to mercy--and witnesses the reconciliation of the Four Daughters of God.⁷⁰ Treuthe and Ryghtwisnesse, like Abraham, expect justice. Thus Treuthe contends that "The thyng that ones was in helle out cometh hit neuere" (XXI. 152), and Ryghtwisnesse adds, "For-thi let hem chewe as thei chose" (XXI. 207). But Mercy and Peace, like the Samaritan, follow the new law of love.⁷¹ The Harrowing portends a different era, as Pees suggests: "And Crist hath conuerted the kynde of ryghtwisnesse / In-to pees and pyte of hus pure grace" (XXI. 190-191). (We should also recall that Mercy is the sister whom Piers suggested the folk call upon; her hope for the souls' liberation from Hell justifies this.) The sisters' dispute is followed by Book's speech, which also predicts Jesus' victory; otherwise, "ich, Book, wole beo brent bote he arise to lyue" (XXI. 266)--in other words, Scripture must be fulfilled or burned.

At last, after so much elaborate preparation, we are shown Jesus standing outside Hell. The account corresponds quite closely to that given in the Gospel of Nicodemus (even in that Satan and Lucifer are two separate characters)⁷² and, as already noted, great emphasis is put on the legality of the Harrowing, which fulfills the Old Testament laws rather than nullifying them:

Dentem pro dente, et oculum pro oculo.
 So lyf shal lyf lete ther lyf hath lyf anyented,
 So that lyf quyte lyf the olde lawe hit asketh. (XXI. 388-390)

Thus the Harrowing can be justified as the climax of Piers Plowman in terms of its thematic use. To this point in the poem, everything

related to the historical allegory has looked forward to this great division in divine history; the Harrowing makes Piers' pardon effectual, since men now have grace to do well, and it seals Spes' letter. Furthermore, no other action in the poem is so richly overlaid with allegory and imagery: the Good Samaritan, or Charity, heals the injured man that Faith and Hope cannot even stop to look at; the Four Daughters of God are reconciled; Jesus jousts with the devil for Piers' fruit; Jesus claims His lawful rights over Hell and the souls imprisoned there.

To some critics, Christ's speech in Hell carries Origenistic tones of universal salvation, not only during the Harrowing (" 'Lo, me her, ' quath oure lorde 'lyf and soule bothe, / For alle synful soules to saue oure beyere right.' " XXI. 373-374), but also in the next Judgment:

'May no pyement ne pomade ne presiouise drynkes
Moyste me to the fulle ne my thurst slake,
Til the vendage valle in the vale of Iosaphat,
And drynk ryght rype most resurreccio mortuorum.
Then shal ich come as a kyng with coroune and with angeles,
And haue out of helle alle menne soules.' (XXI. 412-417)⁷³

Because of his kinship with man, Christ will claim his legal right to exercise mercy:

'Ac to beo merciabile to man thenne my kynde asketh;
.
.
.
For ich were an vnkynde kyng bote ich my kin holpe,
And namelich at such a neode that neodes help asketh.'
(XXI. 420, 443-444)⁷⁴

However, Christ does not lead forth all the souls in Hell during the Harrowing; the poet maintains an orthodox stand by having Christ specify those to be released: " 'Thus by lawe,' quath oure lord 'lede ich wol fro hennes / Alle that ich louye and leyuede in my comynge' " (XXI. 445-446). This criterion would seem to include the patriarchs and prophets, a stock phrase used often in the poem (as, for example, in VIII. 88,

X. 12, XII. 151), but it leaves ambiguous the fate of the non-Jewish pagans. Nevertheless, the fact that some souls are left behind is made clear; the fiends "dorst nat loken on oure lorde the leste of hem alle, / Bot leten hym leden forth which hym luste and leue whiche hym lykede" (XXI. 450-451). This lessens the likelihood of universal salvation at the Last Judgment as well, although admittedly this remains ambiguous:

'And ich, that am kynge ouer kynges shal come suche a tyme,
Ther that dom to the deoth dampneth alle wyckede;
And yf lawe wol ich loke on hem hit lyth in my grace,
Whether thei deye other deye nat dude thei neuere so ille.'
(XXI. 429-432)

This passage is an acknowledgment of the divine potentia absoluta, but it is modified by the conservative phrase "yf lawe wol." This is both a reference to the custom that a king could pardon a criminal if he happened upon his execution,⁷⁵ and a reminder that Christ scrupulously adheres to legal bounds.

As the climactic vision of the Harrowing ends and the Four Daughters of God kiss and dance joyfully, the Dreamer awakes on Easter morning eager "To huyre holliche the masse and be housled after" (XXII. 3). Because communion was commonly given only on Easter during the fourteenth century, this is an especially appropriate response to the visions of Dobet.⁷⁶ The Dreamer, unlike those earlier in the poem who futilely sought repentance, has assurance of forgiveness now that the Passion and Harrowing have occurred. His participation in communion will indicate his membership in the Church Militant, with which Dobest, beginning with this passus, is concerned.

In addition, this makes a smooth transition from the Harrowing, for in Passus VIII Repentance described the descent into Hell in eucharistic terms: "A-bowte midday whanne most lyght ys and meeltyme of seyntes; /

Feddest tho with thi fresshe blod oure for-fadres in helle" (VIII. 133-134).⁷⁷ Thus the Dreamer's partaking of communion links him to those liberated from Hell in the first Harrowing and to those saved from Hell at the Judgment by their belief in Christ and allegiance to the Church.

We have seen that the Visio is characterized by the harshly legalistic pardon Piers received ("Qui bona egerunt ibunt in uitam eternam: / Qui uero mala, in ignem eternum"); Dobet can be associated with Spes' letter, sealed by Christ's crucifixion ("Dilige deum et proximum tuum"); the last section, Dobest, is marked by a repeated imperative which serves as a warning that the time of charity is drawing to an end: redde quod debes ("render what you owe"). The phrase is first introduced during Conscience's recapitulation of Jesus' life:

And [Christ] 3af Peers power and pardon he graunted
 To alle manere of men mercy and for3yuenesse,
 And 3af hym myghte to asoyle men of alle manere synnes,
 In couenant that thei come and kneweliched to paye
 To Peers pardon the Plouhman redde quod debes.

 A-non after an hyh vp in-to heuene
 He wente, and woneth there and wol come atte laste,
 And rewardy him right wel that reddit quod debet,
 Payeth now parfitliche as pure treuthe wolde. (XXI. 183-187, 191-194)

Although redde quod debes--making restitution--does constitute the first step of penance, its significance seems much greater here.⁷⁸ If one follows redde quod debes, one can claim protection under Piers' pardon, and one can rest assured of reward at the Last Judgment. Like the first pardon given to Piers, redde quod debes implies a legalistic sense, the necessity of fulfilling a contract to receive one's due. In a Christian context, it seems clear that as Christ fulfilled the law by offering His life for that of mankind, now Christians owe Christ the

offering of themselves to the Church. As He exemplified charity, so should His followers. And this is precisely what Dobest inversely outlines--the failure of men to render charity to each other. The brewer cheats his customers; the curator exposes the corruption of the Pope and other high church officials; the lord and the king take more than their due from their subordinates (XXI. 398-481). As Conscience attempts to pull Christians together into Unity, or Holy Church, Antichrist attacks from without while their defenses are weakened from corruption within.

Many similarities exist between the Visio and the last two passus, but what was merely an agricultural scene early in the poem (Piers plowing his half-acre) has assumed scriptural significance: now Piers plows with four oxen that represent the Gospels and four bullocks that represent the Latin Fathers, sowing grains of cardinal virtues, with the harvest to be stored in Unity.⁷⁹ The food which was apparently literal in the Visio is here holy, "bred yblessid and godes body ther-vnder" (XXII. 387). In other words, the promise of the Old Testament has been fulfilled; and, with the mention of Antichrist, we become aware that the end of time is near.⁸⁰ Although Langland does not depict the Second Coming, the circular nature of the poem reminds us of Piers' pardon and its terms of judgment: "Qui bona egerunt ibunt in uitam eternam: / Qui uero mala, in ignem eternum."⁸¹ Thus the grim nature of the final passus reminds us that only a short time is left within the Christian era. Since mercy will soon be suspended, the Church must earnestly attempt to carry out redde quod debes; Conscience's vow of pilgrimage to find Piers may be a first step toward this. The effect of the message redde quod debes on the Dreamer is rather ambiguous, but it is interesting that he fell

into this last sleep "In myddes of the masse tho men ~~3~~eden to offrynge" (XXII. 4).⁸² Although the visions of Dobet prompted him to go to mass, his somnolence has already allowed him to avoid making one gesture of redde quod debes. He does, however, wake at an opportune moment, as Conscience "gradde after grace" (XXIII. 386).

In summary, then, the Harrowing can be seen as the focal point around which the entire poem revolves. In terms of the historical allegory underlying the contemporary level of action, the Visio points to a time when confession can be answered by mercy rather than hope, when concern with physical sustenance is overshadowed by concern with spiritual,⁸³ when the context of Piers' pardon is filled in to clarify its function as a true pardon. This fulfillment occurs in Dobet, with attention centered on the Harrowing because Jesus' mastery of Hell commences an era of mercy. Those who believed in His coming but were forced to await Him in Hell are the first beneficiaries of His charity. The new law for Christians becomes "dilige deum et proximum tuum." But Christ's speech in Hell, as the pardon from the Creed, reminds us that another Harrowing is foretold. Until that time, Christians must "redde quod debes," for they will receive justice, not mercy, at the Last Judgment.

The tension between justice and mercy (including such manifestations as truth and charity, law and love, works and grace) is a prominent feature of the poem. Piers' pardon, sent by Truth, is ineffective until Christ, or Charity, pays the ransom for man. In the same way, the text of the pardon is not a pardon until completed by Hope's letter calling for Charity--as the Old Testament is not complete without the New. (Remember Book's statement that he must be burned unless Christ conquers

Hell, the act which reconciles Old Testament justice with New Testament mercy.)⁸⁴ The labor put into the half-acre yields no spiritual harvest until the Christian era of Dobet takes place. And neither pagan nor Christian can achieve salvation without cleaving to both law and love, as Trajan did, and as Christ indicated by claiming that He came to fulfill the law, not destroy it. Even Spes' letter is written on "a pece of an harde roche" (XX. 12), a reminder that love rests on law; i.e., the seal of the Cross will rest on a fragment of the Sinai tablet.

As we have seen, the Harrowing itself is the cosmic act which reconciles these opposites. Those who followed truth waited in Abraham's bosom for the arrival of charity, or Christ. And this act made possible the joining of works and grace, as Ymaginatif (once again, the figure that resolves the dialectic) teaches:

Ac grace is a gras ther-fore to don hem eft growe;
 Ac grace groweth nat til goode wil gynne reyne,
 And wokie thorwe good werkes wikkede hertes.
 Ac er suche a wil wexe god hym-self worcheth,
 And sent forth seint espirit to don loue sprynge
Spiritus ubi uult spirat, et cetera.
 So grace, with-oute grace of god and of good werkes,
 May nat bee, bee thow siker thauh we bidde euer. (XV. 23-29)

This is basically the Augustinian view: grace is needed to move man to good works, which in turn increase grace. And prevenient grace is freely accessible to all, according to Ymaginatif: "He [God] wol no wikkede man be lost bote yf he wol hym-self" (XV. 135).

Thus throughout the poem, despite the Dreamer's attempts to evade responsibility for his soul, the message is clear that all men (even pagans) can achieve salvation--not through pardons, baptism, predestination, or learning, but through a blending of law and love, works and grace. It is appropriate, then, that when we see in Dobest a society corrupted

by the kynde of human nature, the Dreamer cries for grace. Only grace can return this society to a remembrance of redde quod debes--performing charitable works which will stand them in good stead at the Judgment, when they must face the inexorable Old Testament justice of Piers' pardon.

Notes

¹Charles Muscatine discusses the difficulty of placing Piers Plowman in any genre on pp. 73-106 of Poetry and Crisis in the Age of Chaucer (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972). He reaches a summary conclusion:

The obscurity of the larger plan, the seemingly capricious interplay of debate, pilgrimage, and quest, and of mimetics and didacticism; the periodic establishment and collapse of the dream-frame; the shiftiness of space; the paradox of graphic power and pictorial diffuseness; the alternations within a great range of tone and temper; the shiftiness of rhythm--all these produce a curiously homogeneous artistic effect that for lack of a better term I have called surrealistic (p. 106).

Morton Bloomfield (Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth Century Apocalypse [New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1962], pp. 22-23 and 32-33) also tackles this problem by associating the poem with three literary genres and three religious genres.

On the purpose of the Dreamer's quest, critical opinion tends to divide between salvation (most notably, Robert Worth Frank, Jr., Piers Plowman and the Scheme of Salvation: An Interpretation of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest, Yale Studies in English, Vol. 136 [New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1957] and John Lawlor, Piers Plowman, An Essay in Criticism [New York: Barnes and Noble, 1962]) and spiritual perfection (especially Edward Vasta, The Spiritual Basis of Piers Plowman, Studies in English, 18 [New York: Humanities Press, 1965] and Bloomfield, Apocalypse).

Some of the seminal arguments which attempt to organize Piers Plowman through identification of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest are as follows: Henry W. Wells, "The Construction of Piers Plowman," PMLA, 44 (1929), 123-140; Nevill Coghill, "The Character of Piers Plowman Considered from the B Text," Medium Aevum, 2 (1933), 108-135; R. W. Chambers, Man's Unconquerable Mind (London: Jonathan Cape, 1939), pp. 88-171. Wells, Coghill, and Chambers argue that the three "Do's" correspond to active, contemplative, and mixed lives respectively.

Two critics have contended that the three lives are the mystic's purgative, illuminative, and unitive states: Howard Meroney, "The Life and Death of Longe Wille," English Literary History, 17 (1950), 1-35; E. Talbot Donaldson, Piers Plowman, The C-Text and Its Poet (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), esp. pp. 156-161.

In addition, a useful summary of this and other questions can be found in Morton Bloomfield's article, "Present State of Piers Plowman Studies," Speculum, 14 (1939), 215-232. A more recent and more comprehensive review is that of John Raymond McCully, Jr., "Conceptions of Piers Plowman: 1550 to 1970's," Diss. Rice University 1976.

²John Burrow ("The Audience of Piers Plowman," Anglia, 75 [1957], 373-387) contends that, based on the large number of surviving manuscripts, Piers Plowman reached not only a clerical audience but also a new audience of "prosperous, literate laymen" (p. 378). Sister Carmeline Sullivan (The Latin Insertions and the Macaronic Verse in Piers Plowman [Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1932], p. 62) agrees that the poem was designed for laymen as well as clerics, based on the large number of Latin quotations which Langland paraphrased, explained, or translated. Bloomfield (Apocalypse, p. 42), however, urges caution in extending the bounds of the audience: "It is hard to think of a large, popular audience for the work, in spite of John Ball's reference to Piers in his famous letter of 1381. The poem is too difficult and too allusive to have been enjoyed by the common people or by restless, uprooted clerics. The references to Piers and the poems influenced by it all argue for a medium-sized, literate, thoughtful audience."

³Ruth M. Ames, The Fulfillment of the Scriptures: Abraham, Moses and Piers (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1970). For a general introduction of the concept of typology in theology, see Walter E. Meyers, A Figure Given: Typology in the Wakefield Plays (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 1970), pp. 8-13; also, see Erich Auerbach, "Figura," in Scenes from the Drama of European Literature (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1959), pp. 11-76.

⁴Bloomfield, Apocalypse, pp. vii-4.

⁵Bloomfield, Apocalypse, p. 162. See also Mother Catherine Elizabeth Maguire, R.S.C.J., "Franciscan Elements in the Thought of Piers Plowman," Diss. Fordham University 1950. Sister Rose Bernard Donna has tackled the poem in a similar way in Despair and Hope: A Study in Langland and Augustine (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1948).

⁶Greta Hort (Piers Plowman and Contemporary Religious Thought [New York: Macmillan, 1937]) establishes the theological works Langland was most likely familiar with and then attempts to define the poem's stand on the attributes of man, the issue of predestination, and the meaning of the Atonement and sacrament of penance. Taking a completely different approach, D. W. Robertson and Bernard Huppé (Piers Plowman and Scriptural Tradition [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1951]) present a detailed explication of the poem, with an eye to exposing each of the four levels of allegory. Both works have been subjected to rather sharp criticism. Bloomfield (Studies, p. 232, n. 6) accuses Hort of ignoring much of the scholarship on Piers Plowman, resulting in error or duplication. For examples of the negative reactions provoked by Robertson and Huppé's work, see the reviews by Morton Bloomfield in Speculum, 27 (1952), 245-249; Randolph Quirk, Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 52 (1953), 253-255; and T. P. Dunning, Medium Aevum, 24 (1955), 23-29.

⁷M. E. Marcett, Uhtred of Boldon, Friar William Jordan and Piers Plowman (New York: The Author, 1938).

⁸See Chapter 1, p. 41.

⁹G. H. Russell, "The Salvation of the Heathen: The Exploration of a Theme in Piers Plowman," Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute, 29 (1966), 101-116.

¹⁰R. W. Chambers, "Long Will, Dante, and the Righteous Heathen," Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association, 9 (1924), 68.

¹¹Janet Coleman, "Sublimes et Litterati: The Audience for the Themes of Grace, Justification, Predestination, Traced from the Disputes of the Fourteenth-Century Moderni to the Vernacular Piers Plowman," Diss. Yale University 1970; John F. McNamara, "Responses to Ockhamist Theology in the Poetry of the Pearl-Poet, Langland, and Chaucer," Diss. Louisiana State University 1968; and Denise N. Baker, "From Plowing to Penitence: Piers Plowman and Fourteenth Century Theology," Speculum, 55 (1980), 715-725.

¹²Although the authorship controversy is still not definitively settled, it has little effect here. I accept the majority opinion favoring single authorship (especially in light of George Kane's work, Piers Plowman: The Evidence for Authorship [London: Athlone Press, 1965]) and use "Langland" as a convenient designation rather than as an argument for a single author, since biographical details will not enter into my discussion of the poem. The validity of the C-text as the best choice for an examination of the poet's theology is supported by Sister Carmeline Sullivan, who examines the progressive amplification of Latin verses in the A, B, and C versions, concluding of C that "It was Langland's last chance to speak his mind, so he tried to leave nothing untold" (p. 47). Quotations from the C-text will come from Walter W. Skeat's edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1886); references to the poem will be placed in parentheses within the text. I have chosen to use Skeat's edition for the convenience of comparison with the A and B versions; however, I have also compared Skeat's text with that of Derek Pearsall (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979) and have relied heavily on Pearsall's excellent notes.

¹³Sister Mary C. Davlin O.P. ("Kynde Knowyng as a Major Theme in Piers Plowman B," Review of English Studies, n.s. 22 [1971], 3) suggests that the Dreamer's quest for intellectual knowledge in Dowel renders his allusions to kynde knowyng ironical. Given Holychurch's praise of kynde knowyng in l. 142-144, it is conceivable that most, if not all, of the Dreamer's efforts in Dowel are ironic, as he constantly attempts to substitute theory for action. (See, in this regard, John Lawlor's essay "The Imaginative Unity of Piers Plowman" in Style and Symbolism in Piers Plowman, ed. Robert J. Blanch [Knoxville, Tenn.: University of Tennessee Press, 1969], pp. 101-116.)

¹⁴Hort, pp. 39-40. Also see Philomena O'Driscoll, "The Dowel Debate

in Piers Plowman B," Medium Aevum, 50 (1981); O'Driscoll argues that the poem builds up a synthesis between faith and reason in the system-making tradition of Aquinas (pp. 27-28).

¹⁵Elizabeth D. Kirk, The Dream Thought of Piers Plowman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 135, n. 6.

¹⁶In the B-text, Gregory's role is even further minimized:

Nouȝt thorw preyere of a pope but for his pure treuthe
Was that Sarasene saued. (B. XI. 150-151)

¹⁷See Chapter 2, pp. 65-66.

¹⁸Aquinas, Summa Theologica, III, LXVI, XI. Pearsall notes that the concept of baptism by fire (Holy Spirit) provides "an interim answer which accommodates the story of Trajan and softens the ruthless predestinarianism of Bradwardine" (p. 245, n. 208).

¹⁹Chambers, "Long Will," pp. 67-68.

²⁰Russell, pp. 108-109, points out the changes from the B to C texts which make clear Trajan's lack of baptism.

²¹An extended discussion of the topic of conversion can be found in Michael R. Paull's "Mahomet and the Conversion of the Heathen in Piers Plowman," English Language Notes, 10 (1972), 1-8.

²²David Mills, "The Role of the Dreamer in Piers Plowman," in Piers Plowman: Critical Approaches, ed. S. S. Hussey (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd.), 1969, p. 209. Mills also points out the contrast between the Dreamer's thought and withdrawal and Piers' action and involvement in the poem. In addition, see Lawlor, "Imaginative Unity," pp. 101-116.

²³Mills, p. 195. Mary Carruthers (The Search for St. Truth: A Study of Meaning in Piers Plowman [Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1973], p. 89) also points out that "One doesn't explain Dowel, one does well." She goes on to say that "The emergence of Trajan once again brings into focus the difference between name and commandment inherent in Will's grammatical misperception of Dowel. Trajan is a mirror of the life of Dowel, intruding roughly into Will's vision in order to clear away the misunderstandings engendered by an overly intellectual approach to the problem" (p. 97).

^{23a}Donaldson, p. 174.

²⁴A. H. Chroust, "Contribution to the Medieval Discussion: 'utrum

Aristoteles sit salvatus,' " Journal of the History of Ideas, 6 (1945), 231-238.

²⁵Joseph S. Wittig, "Piers Plowman B, Passus IX-XII: Elements in the Design of the Inward Journey," Diss. Cornell 1969, p. 33.

²⁶C. D. Benson, in "Augustinian Irony in Piers Plowman," Notes and Queries, 221 (1976), 51-54, has discovered another irony in Recklessness's diatribe against learning. In XII. 288 he quotes from Augustine's Confessions, "Ecce ipsi idioti rapiunt celum, vbi nos sapientes in inferno mergimur"; however, in context Augustine is not attacking learning but his own inability to put his learning to good advantage (p. 53).

²⁷McNamara, p. 125.

²⁸Hort, p. 63. Langland may have omitted the tearing of the pardon in the C-text to clarify his position on the importance of good works. Many critics of the B-text have seen Piers' action as his realization that without grace, no amount of good effort can avail. As Lawlor puts it ("Piers Plowman: The Pardon Reconsidered," Modern Language Review, 45 [1950], 452), "We see now the measure not of England's corruption only, but the measure of man's best, and its highest soul is infinitely short of Divine Goodness." McNamara agrees: "Any prescription to do good works extracted from the Creed must also allow for the Creed's insistence on grace" (p. 95). Denise Baker goes so far as to see plowing and pilgrimage as representing the views of the Nominalists (man can earn grace through good works) and the Augustinians (grace is necessary to accomplish good works) respectively. Thus, "confronted with the obvious discrepancy between the words of Truth's document and the claim that it is a pardon, Piers is forced to repudiate his previous Nominalist position. The reader, shocked and bewildered by Piers' response, also comes to a realization of his own fallibility" (p. 725).

²⁹J. N. D. Kelly, The Athanasian Creed (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1964), pp. 73 and 119.

³⁰Kelly, pp. 17 and 20.

³¹See Wittig, p. 78; McNamara, pp. 110-117; and Frank, pp. 61-62.

³²Examining the various manuscripts of the poem, Russell finds that several contain a variant reading, "in the lettyng of her lyf"; thus he correlates these lines to Uthred of Boldon's theory of the clara visio at the moment of death (pp. 110-112). Quite likely Langland was familiar with Uthred's views, but I find it hard to believe that we should read these lines as Russell argues. Would Langland have been content to introduce such a concept without elaboration? Even Russell concedes that "Nowhere else in the poem, in any of its versions, can I find a similar proposition advanced" (p. 112).

³³This scene has received much critical attention; for example, Donald Wesling ("Eschatology and the Language of Satire in Piers Plowman," Criticism, 10 [1968], 286) singles out the scene to illustrate structural irony in the poem, since it is juxtaposed with the two final anti-climactic passus. Lawlor (Essay, pp. 300-301) likewise recognizes the structural importance of the Harrowing, characterizing the poem as triangular rather than unilinear because of the peculiar nature of Dobet. In addition, others have recognized this scene as the poem's climax; see, for example, S. T. Knight, "Satire in Piers Plowman," in Piers Plowman: Critical Approaches, ed. S. S. Hussey (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1969), p. 303; Carruthers, p. 139; and Bloomfield, Apocalypse, pp. 123-127.

³⁴Wells, "Construction," p. 12; Frank, p. 16.

³⁵Henry W. Wells, "The Philosophy of Piers Plowman," PMLA, 53 (1938), 129.

³⁶Bloomfield (Apocalypse, p. 66) summarizes Joachim's theory as follows:

The period of the Old Testament was primarily the age of the Father; the period from the time of Jesus down to roughly Joachim's time was that of the Son; and the third age, which is a naturally completing period, should be that of the Holy Ghost, under whose aegis the Saracens and Jews would be converted and about which certain general predictions could be made.

³⁷Mary Carruthers ("Time, Apocalypse, and the Plot of Piers Plowman" in Acts of Interpretation: The Text in Its Contexts, 700-1600: Essays on Medieval and Renaissance Literature in Honor of E. Talbot Donaldson [Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim, 1982], p. 185) has also recognized the Harrowing in this regard but does not make the connection between the terms of the dispensation and the documents in Piers Plowman. She does mention, however, an interesting change in the grammatical texture of the poem which evidences the fundamental significance of the Harrowing:

The sentences describing actions are held together by and and ac and thanne, occasionally interspersed with til. Only in the speeches in which Will is instructed by the various faculties of his soul does one get a forþi. This pattern holds through the Tree of Charity episode, until the poem begins to narrate the life of Jesus Only in Passus 18, when Christ appears in glory at the gates of Hell, does the narrative contain such constructions as thus, so, for, but, and the subordinating constructions, and but x . . . y, or siþen x . . . y. This is a perfect formal narrative expression of what Saint Paul writes

in Col. 3.3-4 . . . Christ's triumph makes
apparent the causes previously hidden.

³⁸See, for example, John A. Alford, "Literature and Law in Medieval England," PMLA, 92 (1977), 941-951; William J. Birnes, "Christ as Advocate: The Legal Metaphor of Piers Plowman," Annuaire Mediaevale, 16 (1975), 71-93; Rudolf Kirk, "References to the Law in Piers Plowman," PMLA, 38 (1932), 322-327; and Anna Baldwin, "The Double Duel in Piers Plowman B. XVIII and C. XXI," Medium Aevum, 50 (1981), 64-78.

³⁹Pearsall (pp. 322-333, n. 299) elaborates on the legalities of the scene, noting that by Langland's time the theory of "devil's rights" was old-fashioned theologically.

⁴⁰Pearsall (p. 174, n. 291, and p. 58, n. 78a) suggests that the legality of the pardon would have been familiar to the poet's audience through the "Charter of Christ," in which the "deed" of redemption is written on the parchment of Christ's skin, with the ink of his blood.

⁴¹The legality of this document is obvious because it is "letters patent"--"an open letter, as from the sovereign, for all to see, recording some agreement or contract" (Pearsall, p. 306, n. 7).

⁴²Carruthers, Search, p. 142. Other progressions in the poem have been noted. Ben H. Smith, Traditional Imagery of Charity in Piers Plowman (Hague: Mouton, 1966), argues that the poem advances from natural law to scriptural law to a period of grace (pp. 84-85). Barbara Raw, "Piers and the Image of God in Man" in Piers Plowman: Critical Approaches, ed. S. S. Hussey (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1969) sees the poem as a gradual restoration of the image of God in mankind (pp. 154-155). In the same way, Elizabeth Kirk (pp. 179-180) sees the poem as three confrontations between man's will and God's. John F. Adams, "Piers Plowman and the Three Ages of Man," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 61 (1962), 23-41, traces in the poem the progressive difficulties, moral and spiritual, each man faces.

⁴³Vasta (p. 133) mentions that Piers oscillates between the individual soul and the Church; when he receives the pardon at the end of the Visio, he symbolizes the Church, the intermediary between God and man. Katherine Trower, "The Figure of Hunger in Piers Plowman," American Benedictine Review, 24 (1973) also sees Piers' actions in the Visio as earning a period of grace for the folk (p. 256).

⁴⁴Frank provides a convenient summary of those critics who feel the pardon is invalid (p. 25, n. 7). Susan McLeod also gives an excellent review of criticism on the pardon scene in "The Tearing of the Pardon in Piers Plowman," Philological Quarterly, 56 (1977), 14-17.

⁴⁵John Burrow, "The Action of Langland's Second Vision," in Style

and Symbolism in Piers Plowman, ed. Robert J. Blanch (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1969), p. 223; J. V. Holleran, "The Role of the Dreamer in Piers Plowman," Annuaire Mediaevale, 7 (1966), 36; Frank, p. 28.

⁴⁶Rosemary Woolf, "The Tearing of the Pardon," in Piers Plowman: Critical Approaches, ed. S. S. Hussey (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1969), p. 30.

⁴⁷John Lawlor, "Piers Plowman: The Pardon Reconsidered," Modern Language Review, 45 (1950), 455; Donaldson, pp. 162-163; Meroney, p. 18; Carruthers, Search, pp. 71-72.

⁴⁸Lawlor, Essay, pp. 282-283; Raw, p. 164.

⁴⁹Mary (Carruthers) Schroeder, "The Tearing of the Pardon," Philological Quarterly, 49 (1970), 10-11; Meroney, p. 18.

⁵⁰See, for example, Rabanus Maurus (Commentaria in Exodum, P.L., CVIII, 224D):

Iratus quidem Moyses videtur tabulas testimonii
digito Dei scriptas, collisisse atque fregisse:
magno tamen mysterio figurata est iteratio
testamenti, quoniam vetus fuerat abolendum, et
constituendum novum.

⁵¹Lawlor, "Pardon," p. 456.

⁵²The Athanasian Creed was regularly used during the service of Prime, and "the whole service of Matins, including Lauds, Prime, and Terce, was most popular in England as a preparation for the Mass" (A. E. Burn, "Creeds," Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, 1913 ed., Vol. IV, p. 241). Kelly (p. 44) confirms that during the Middle Ages the general practice was weekly recitation of the Creed on Sundays at Prime. Pearsall (p. 141, n. 236), however, states that the Creed was recited on some special feast-days in place of the Apostles' Creed. In any case, the lines would have been known to a fourteenth century audience.

⁵³A. E. Burn, An Introduction to the Creeds and to the Te Deum (London: Methuen and Co., 1899), p. 193 (Latin text) and p. 197 (English translation). D. A. Lawton ("Piers Plowman: On Tearing--and Not Tearing--the Pardon," Philological Quarterly, 60 [1981], 420) points out that if we visualize the B-text action so that Piers tears the pardon horizontally in two, he has literally divided "the sheep from the goats" in a forecast of the Judgment.

⁵⁴Carruthers, Search, p. 73, and Kirk, pp. 92-93, point out that the Visio represents the Old Testament not in any true historical sense but

in Piers' psychological state, his contractual conception of religion. As Carruthers puts it, "Any fourteenth-century man who tries to live simply according to law and justice without the sustaining power of grace is a moral type of the ancient Hebrews under the Old Law who also lacked grace" (p. 73). Donaldson (p. 180) further suggests that Piers may, in the anagogical sense, stand for the prophets who waited patiently for the coming of Christ--as on the moral level patience precedes charity.

⁵⁵Schroeder, p. 13.

⁵⁶According to Pearsall (p. 136, n. 152), the horn is the trumpet of salvation mentioned in the Exsultet for Holy Saturday celebrating the Resurrection. Since the Resurrection has not yet occurred in the poem's time scheme, it is appropriate that Hope blows the horn.

⁵⁷See also Randolph Quirk, "Langland's Use of Kynde Wit and Inwit," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 52 (1953), 182-185.

⁵⁸Forty commonly represents a probationary period, a time of trial and testing; for example, the 40-day Deluge (Genesis 7:4), the Israelites' 40 years of wandering (Numbers 32:13), the 40-day period of fasting undergone by Moses, Elias, and Christ (Exodus 32:28, 3 Kings 19:8, Matthew 4:2). Katherine Trower ("Temporal Tensions in the Visio of Piers Plowman," Mediaeval Studies, 35 [1973], 397) believes that the number 40 prefigures the trials Piers will undergo with the folk in plowing the half-acre. However, Piers has already served his 40 years, which makes him eligible to guide the others and to receive Truth's pardon--a pardon which indicates, by its connotations of Judgment, that the time of testing must end.

⁵⁹See Skeat's notes on Passus IX. 349-355.

⁶⁰Donaldson, p. 180 and Vasta, p. 125.

⁶¹Smith points out that this tree probably can be affiliated with the tree of Jesse, used to join matter traditionally connected with the old dispensation to matter traditionally connected with the new (p. 62). This supports the concept of the poem as an historical allegory, moving from the Old Testament epoch to the Incarnation, which takes place within the context of the tree of charity, when "Libera-Uoluntas-Dei lauhte the myddel shoriere, / And hitte after the fende . . . / Filius, by the faders wil flegh with Spiritus Sanctus, / To ransake that rageman and reue hym hus apples" (XIX. 119-122). Trower ("Hunger," pp. 243-256) also relates the Tree of Charity to two parables of fig trees from the New Testament.

⁶²The jousting imagery used throughout in relation to Christ's sacrifice corresponds with the cycle plays, in which the soldiers make a game of nailing Christ to the cross as a knight mounting his horse.

See Wilbur Gaffney, "The Allegory of the Christ-Knight in Piers Plowman," PMLA, 46 (1931), 155-168, who postulates a possible source for the treatment of Christ as knight in Piers Plowman and cites relevant passages for comparison in the Towneley and York plays.

⁶³Ames (p. 87) states that "It was during Lent, as the Church relived each year the events leading up to the Crucifixion, that the account of Abraham in Genesis was read in missal and breviary, the marginal note in the breviary reading 'Abraham de Trinitate.' That Langland was following the liturgical pattern in his recreation of the Passion is clear from the fact that the dreamer meets Abraham on mid-Lent Sunday. In the scheme of the poem, Lent represents the time in the history of the world of the long centuries of Old Testament preparation for Christ."

⁶⁴In the B version, the Samaritan cares for the injured man and then "in his lappe hym layde" (XVII. 70). Smith points out that this contrasts effectively with the description of Abraham's lap in B. XVI. 255-269. "The contrast is the more effective because it is only Christ, typified in the Good Samaritan, who can free those in Abraham's lap from Satan's power" (p. 80).

⁶⁵In the B-text, this is made clear by Anima's statement in XV. 574, "Dilige deum et proximum is parfit Iewen lawe." In C. XX. 15 we are given a brief gloss on Spes' letter, "In his duobus mandatis pendet tota lex et prophete," Christ's words in Matthew 22:40 which make clear the connection between the Old and New Covenants.

⁶⁶Ames, p. 167. In a more restricted sense, however, the secret seal appears to apply only to merchants; hence Pearsall's suggestion that the seal signifies the Church's recognition of the propriety of trade if profits are devoted to charity (p. 162, n. 27).

⁶⁷Pearsall (p. 309, n. 72) sees the new market as symbolizing "the busy world of getting and spending, the world of the Prologue, from which the life of the Christian must be momentarily detached."

⁶⁸See, for example, Augustine's Letter LV, 9, 17 (in which the creation of the world in six days is seen as a token of six earthly ages) and his Reply to Faustus, XII, 8, in which the seventh day is characterized as the rest of the saints. Both the sixth and seventh days will culminate in the Judgment and Eternal Regeneration of the eighth (a number which is absent in this passage because it deals with Christ's mercy, the intermediate stage before Judgment).

⁶⁹Pearsall (p. 321, n. 34a) notes that liturgically, Hosea 13:14 was sung as an antiphon on Holy Saturday.

⁷⁰For a full treatment of this motif, see Hope Traver, The Four

Daughters of God, Bryn Mawr College Monographs, Monograph Series, 6 (Philadelphia, 1907), pp. 147-152 for Piers Plowman; pp. 164-165 for a discussion of the scene's placement.

⁷¹In addition, Holleran notes that the reconciliation between the Daughters is like that between Abraham and Spes; Christ resolves the Daughters' problem as the Samaritan solved the Dreamer's (p. 49).

⁷²Pearsall notes that this is in the exegetical tradition established by Jerome (p. 331, n. 274),

⁷³Chambers, for example, sees a tendency toward universal salvation in the poem (Mind, p. 158); W. O. Evans ("Charity" in Piers Plowman: Critical Approaches, ed. S. S. Hussey [London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1969], p. 277) states that "The poem as a whole would seem to reveal the mind of a man whose inclinations lead him toward Origenism. But he is unsure and tends to draw back from the directly heretical statement." Hort (p. 126) also sees a modified version of universal salvation; Christ has given grace to all men, by which they are able to pay their debt and thus gain salvation. George Kane (Middle English Literature: A Critical Study of the Romances, the Religious Lyrics, Piers Plowman [London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1951], p. 196) asserts, "The striking thing was to find that in his mind there existed side by side with the sternness a deep and gentle tenderness embracing the whole of nature and even erring mankind, so long as misfortune, or the will to amend, or even ignorance excused its unregenerate state."

⁷⁴Pearsall (pp. 338-339, n. 420 and n. 430) points out that the theology of these passages is not entirely heterodox, especially when compared with a work such as the Prick of Conscience.

⁷⁵See Skeat's note on the passage.

⁷⁶See, however, XXII. 387-392, which indicates that Langland either advocated or participated in a more regular communion. The latter possibility may indicate a clerical vocation. The Easter communion would still be of special significance, however, as it is even today. Furthermore, Easter communion was preceded by an annual penance, as decreed by the Fourth Lateran Council; and the sacrament was regarded as a cleansing of the soul through the infusion of the habitus of charity. See Yngve Brilioth, Eucharistic Faith and Practice Evangelical and Catholic, trans. A. G. Hebert (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1930), pp. 91-93.

⁷⁷This seems to be an unusual, but not entirely original, view of the descensus. The concept was first advanced by Tertullian and later by the twelfth century theologian Rupert of Deutz in Book 3, Chapter 20 of De Operibus Spiritus Sancti (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1970, text edited and translated by Élisabeth de Solms). This reference may

also refer to the legend found in St. Patrick's Purgatory that those who have passed through purgatory and wait in the earthly paradise for their summons to heaven are fed once a day by a light shining from heaven (The South English Legendary, ed. Carl Horstmann, EETS 87 [London: N. Trübner and Co., 1887], pp. 216-217). This source was first noted by Mabel Day, "Mele Tyme of Seintes," Piers Plowman, B, V, 500, "Modern Language Review, 27 (1932), 317-318. Pearsall notes the associated image of Christ as pelican, feeding His offspring with His own flesh and blood (p. 135, n. 134) and the frequent representation of sinners as drinking blood from the wound in Christ's side (p. 213, n. 54).

⁷⁸As Pearsall puts it, "Restitution is not to be understood solely or primarily in material terms: it is, in a larger sense, the rendering of the debt of love to God and one's neighbour" (p. 349, n. 187).

⁷⁹The similarities between the Visio and Dobest have been made clear by Raw (p. 146) and Carruthers (Search, pp. 153-156).

⁸⁰I believe that Langland uses the term "Antichrist" in connection with the historical allegory of the poem, thus signaling the impending Judgment. However, Frank ("Pardon," p. 314) notes that by the fourteenth century "Antichrist" was a mere term of abuse: "By Antichrist, therefore, Langland means either the Pope, as the one responsible for this league of ecclesiastics and sins, or else all Christians, but especially churchmen, who by their evil lives or corruptions of doctrine and sacraments lead men to sin rather than to grace." The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics (W. Bousset, "Antichrist," 1913 ed., Vol. 1, p. 581) confirms that "Thus the time came when people saw Antichrist, or the forerunner of Antichrist, in every ecclesiastical, political, national, or social opponent, and the catch-word 'Antichrist' sounded on all sides."

⁸¹J. A. Burrow, Ricardian Poetry (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971) notes that "there is no return to the Malvern Hills. Yet the end of his last dream does carry us back, most readers have felt, to the beginning of the poem This circularity creates an effect very different from the 'endless round' of Pearl. Endlessness in Pearl means eternity; in Piers it signifies the cycle of spiritual growth and decay which will go on until the end of time, both in individuals and in institutions" (p. 66).

⁸²His falling asleep at this point in the mass also explains the fact that the figure he sees resembles both Jesus and Piers (XXII. 4-11), for the Host is first seen in the mass immediately after the offering (Kirk, p. 184).

⁸³Of course, Passus XXII is not the first to include the use of allegorical food. In the banquet scene in Passus XVI, the loaf of contrition and Patience's bread of the Pater Noster are the first instances of this.

⁸⁴Vasta sees Book's purpose as verifying the visions of Dobet as coming from God (p. 131).

Troilus--A Virtuous Pagan?

Because St. Erkenwald and Piers Plowman are theologically oriented works, they make direct use of the theme of the virtuous pagan. Furthermore, placed in juxtaposition with each other, they offer a nicely balanced view of the related debate between grace and works so prominent in the fourteenth century: whereas St. Erkenwald illustrates the absolute necessity of grace, Piers Plowman places emphasis on the value of good works. At the same time, though, each poem acknowledges the opposite element as well. The pagan judge has been singled out because of his exceptional works; the era of grace ushered in by the Harrowing accords value to man's efforts.

Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde is much more difficult to categorize in terms of the virtuous pagan issue, for Chaucer forgoes the straightforward approach of St. Erkenwald and Piers Plowman in favor of irony. He presents us with a sympathetic pagan in the person of Troilus and intimates his ultimate salvation. However, just as we recognize in Troilus a parody of the courtly lover, we must also consider the possibility that he serves as a parody of the virtuous pagan figure. An examination of the poem in light of what we have learned about this tradition suggests that Troilus is not, in fact, as virtuous a pagan as he appears to be.

Chaucer's revisions of the poem indicate the likelihood that he was deliberately working within the tradition of the virtuous pagan. Although he drew upon Boccaccio's Il Filostrato, Chaucer deepened the characterizations and later made revisions which gave the poem a strong philosophical import.¹ The most significant of these revisions, the so-called "epilogue"

to the poem,² bears directly on the question of whether Troilus can be characterized as a virtuous pagan; in addition, the epilogue has aroused much debate in terms of both its artistic merit and its effect on the overall meaning of the poem. At one extreme, Walter Curry has gone so far as to say that the epilogue can be detached from the poem and treated as a separate unit.³ The majority of scholars, however, tend to see the epilogue as an integral part of the poem.⁴ The difficulty lies in their interpretation of its function, based on their determination of the role of Chaucerian irony in the work. Critical opinion generally tends to divide into two camps: (1) the Troilus celebrates earthly love, albeit an imperfect reflection of divine love, for Troilus' faithful devotion to Criseyde is rewarded; (2) the Troilus illustrates the comparative triviality and mutability of all earthly endeavours--even love--as proven by Troilus' knowing laugh from the spheres.⁵ Obviously, choosing between these interpretations is no light matter; our reading of the epilogue determines our understanding of the entire poem and influences our judgment of Troilus. We cannot fail to be moved by the celebration of this love, whose consummation in Book III leads Troilus to a Boethian praise of love as that which binds the universe in order and harmony:

Love, that of erthe and se hath governaunce,
 Love, that his hestes hath in hevenes hye,
 Love, that with an holsom alliaunce
 Halt peples joyned, as hym lest hem gye.⁶

But at the same time we cannot ignore Chaucer's retraction of the work as one of his "translacions and enditynges of worldly vanitees."⁷

In an attempt to understand Chaucer's intention, some critics have turned to an analysis of the epilogue in terms of its analogues and sources. We know, for example, that the direct source for this portion

of the poem was the ending of Boccaccio's Il Teseide.⁸ In turn, Boccaccio most likely drew upon the pagan traditions of Cicero's Somnium Scipionis and Lucan's Pharsalia, in which Scipio and Pompey, respectively, are granted a vision of the earth from a celestial perspective; and the Divina Commedia, in which Dante the pilgrim achieves the same perspective with the benefit of Christian revelation.⁹ Because Chaucer emphasizes the pagan setting of the poem, but ends with the Christian concept of redemption, we should examine another analogue as well: the tradition of the virtuous pagan. (Although linked to the apotheosis tradition of Cicero and Pompey, the virtuous pagan--as the term has been used thus far--achieves a specifically Christian salvation.¹⁰ It is for this reason that I have omitted Chaucer's other pagans such as Theseus of the Knight's Tale or Dorigen of the Franklin's Tale; we have no information relating to their afterlife.

Most critics seem to take for granted the idea that Troilus does achieve salvation at the conclusion of the poem, although they cite various justifications for his reward and do not always clarify whether they view his salvation as pagan or Christian.¹¹ One dissenting view is that of Edmund Reiss, who argues cogently that Troilus' salvation is unlikely:

We must recognize, first, that Troilus did not 'deserve' salvation. He had his heaven on earth--and, as January fears in the Merchant's Tale (E 1673ff.), if one enjoys terrestrial bliss, he will suffer extraterrestrial agony. Second, Troilus in the spheres hardly demonstrates the bliss associated with Christian salvation Troilus in the spheres does not love and praise, and he is hardly at rest, hardly marked by 'pleyn felicite' to which he pays lip service. He is, on the other hand, clearly marked by the 'blynde lust' he speaks against; in fact,

his despite of the world and scorn of the
 mourners show that he is as marked and marred
 by passion as when he was alive. But at least
 when he was alive, his attitude was basically
 one of love, earthly though it was. That love
 seems now, ironically, to have turned to hate.¹²

Although I agree with Reiss that Troilus probably falls short of salvation, I would argue the point on different grounds. Reiss comes to his conclusions primarily by judging Troilus' actions in the light of scriptural and patristic texts; I intend to examine the evidence of the poem itself, supplemented by medieval traditions related to the question of the virtuous pagan.

A good starting-place is the question of Troilus' heavenly location in the epilogue. This alone has generated a great many critical arguments. In Il Teseide, Boccaccio specifies that Arcita rises to the eighth sphere, but only three of the Troilus manuscripts have this reading; the others specify the seventh sphere.¹³ Even if the correct number could be determined, though, there is debate over whether the spheres should be numbered up from the moon, or down from the Primum Mobile, the Stellatum, or the sphere of Saturn. Many scholars have conceded Jackson Cope's point that if the prohemium to Book III names Venus as "the thriddle hevene" (III. 2), then Chaucer was counting up from the moon (as Dante also did).¹⁴ Thus Troilus would be found either in the seventh sphere of Saturn or the eighth sphere of the Stellatum or fixed stars. Although Cope argues for the seventh sphere, basing his assertions on Dante's depiction of the souls in Saturn,¹⁵ Morton Bloomfield presents a more convincing argument for the eighth sphere, or ogdoad (from the Greek word for "eighth"), as a traditional resting-place for the souls of good pagans.¹⁶ Chauncey Wood also argues for the ogdoad but in Christian

terms, seeing it as a kind of purgatory which holds the weak rather than the virtuous.¹⁷

It appears that, despite various conjectures on the subject, we may never have a definitive answer to this puzzle.¹⁸ Two critics, though, have approached the problem from a different angle altogether, using medieval number symbolism rather than medieval astronomy. John Conlee sees a striking similarity between the characteristics of pagan sidereal immortality and the Christian meanings for eight: completion of a cycle or a return to the beginning; purification; immortality, eternity, and eternal salvation.¹⁹ Russell Peck analyzes the symbolism of each numbered stanza of the epilogue as well as the question of which sphere Troilus arrives at. Like Conlee, he believes that Troilus must be in the eighth sphere: "If Troilus arrives at the seventh sphere for a view of the 'litel spot of erthe,' he has not, even in death, completely transcended mutability Unless he is in the eighth sphere, it is hard to understand how he could see 'with ful avysement.'" ²⁰ Peck also points out that the seventh stanza of the epilogue, which uses the anaphoric "Swich fyn" lines, is appropriately placed, for "seven is traditionally a number of judgment, it being the whole measure of man and his earthly life." Likewise, the eighth stanza appropriately turns from judgment to praise of a higher, divine love.²¹

Because both Conlee and Peck assume that Troilus is granted salvation (either in pagan or Christian terms), they argue for the reading of the eighth sphere based on the salvific symbolism of the number eight. But Chaucer, finding the phrase "concavità del cielo ottava" in Boccaccio, may have deliberately altered the line to read seventh. The sheer number of manuscripts containing this reading forces us to entertain this

as at least a possibility. Granting that Chaucer was aware of medieval number symbolism,²² we can conclude that the number itself, rather than its associated planet, may have been the focus of his attention. In that case, we can assume that he may have intended the change to serve as a clue to Troilus' state. Troilus has almost, but not quite, attained salvation; he has enjoyed a glimpse of higher knowledge, but this is no assurance of eternal bliss. Indeed, as Gertrude Drake has pointed out, many critics have become so embroiled in the debate as to which sphere Chaucer meant in line 1809 that they ignore his subsequent lines: "And forth he wente, shortly for to telle, / Ther as Mercurye sorted hym to dwelle" (II. 1826-27).²³ Thus Chaucer does not specify whether Troilus is assigned to eternal reward or punishment, unless we assume that Mercury is merely leading him to his assigned place in the sphere.²⁴ It is just as likely, though, that Mercury leads him to another location, deliberately left ambiguous. In any event, it is improbable that Mercury, the pagan psychopomp, would lead Troilus to the Christian heaven; therefore, it is reasonably safe to assume that, at the most, Troilus would receive a pagan reward after his death.

Chaucer provides other hints throughout the poem which would seem to deny Troilus the hope of a Christian heaven. For example, probably the most extensive addition to the poem is Troilus' speech on the question of predestination and free will (Book IV, lines 958-1078). This is a close paraphrase of Boethius' own argument in the Consolation of Philosophy (Book IV, prosa 3), which Chaucer was translating at about the same time he was working on the Troilus, between 1380 and 1385.²⁵ The Consolation of Philosophy, although conforming to orthodox Christian dogma, is notable in that it does not rely directly upon Christian revelation to

reach its truth. Rather, Boethius--an Everyman figure in the sense that all must face adversity and death--reaches his conclusions with the sole aid of Philosophy, the acknowledged subordinate (or handmaid) of Theology. The only theological premise of the work is that there is a Creator--a premise which we find expressed as well by the pagan characters of the Troilus.²⁶ Boethius reaches his conclusions on predestination and free will, then, through his reason and Philosophy. As a pagan, Troilus should be able to do the same. He repeats Boethius' arguments, but he reaches the opposite conclusion, that man possesses no free will. In fact, he states this at the outset ("For al that comth, comth by necessitee," IV. 958), so that Boethius' arguments are subsequently used to support a directly opposed proposition.²⁷ Ida Gordon has pointed out the further irony that Troilus advances this theory to support his own decision to do nothing about Criseyde's exchange--a decision he reached of his own free will.²⁸ Thus Troilus has deliberately blinded himself to one of the most basic Christian truths, a truth which should have been attainable to a pagan mind explicitly shown to be following in Boethius' tracks.

Other ironies exist in the poem which also signal that Troilus is not the virtuous pagan we would like to imagine him and therefore not worthy of Christian salvation. Peter Dronke has noted the parodic use of liturgy in the poem, especially in Book III, when after the love scene the narrator's words "O blisful nyght" recall the Easter liturgy.²⁹ In addition, critics have noted the ironic connection between this scene, in which Troilus believes he has found "hevene blisse" in Criseyde, and the epilogue, in which he recognizes true heavenly bliss.³⁰ If we look closely at the entire episode, however, we find more here than an

anticipation of the epilogue; Troilus' entry into Criseyde's "heaven" is a parody of the virtuous pagans' liberation from Hell and admission to heaven between the time of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. (As we have seen, Christ's descensus ad inferos was traditionally linked with the fate of the virtuous pagan.)

To begin with, we find Troilus placed within a "stuwe" as he waits for Pandarus, who is busily assigning everyone to proper sleeping quarters. In Filostrato 3.25, Troilo waits "in certo luogo rimoto ed oscuro"; "luogo" (meaning "place" or "room") is a much more general, more neutral term than Chaucer's "stuwe."³¹ Clearly the "stuwe" is also different from a closet, a word which Chaucer uses elsewhere--as, for example, when Criseyde writes a letter in her closet (II. 1215). Root, relying on the NED, defines a "stuwe" as "a small heated room, sometimes specifically a room used for hot air or vapor baths."³² The OED offers a similar definition but, citing this passage in particular, gives an alternate definition of "a heated room; a room with a fireplace." A much more thorough analysis of this word has been made by Hope Phyllis Weissman, who traces the history of the "stuwe" from its denotative meaning of a bathhouse to the negative connotations it assumed as a brothel. She notes:

So familiar, indeed, had the usage become by Chaucer's period that the term stew appears frequently as a dead metaphor. Chaucer's own references to "stews" at the beginning of the Friar's and Pardoner's Tales are probably to be interpreted as simple references to whorehouses, unencumbered by a bathhouse disguise.³³

However, she also points to the less volatile use of the word in the passage at hand as "the apparently straightforward sense of a small heated room (yet not without innuendo)."³⁴

In addition to the apparent connection between Troilus' sexual desires and the "stuwe" as synonym for a brothel, other connotations also exist. While Troilus is concealed in this room, outside a storm rages, with wind "so wonderliche loude, / That wel neigh no man heren other koude" (III. 678-679). This tempestuous setting, which is not drawn from the dark and cloudy night of the Filostrato ("la notte oscura e nebulosa"),³⁵ calls to mind the damnation of the lustful in Dante's Inferno, Canto V. Here reside those who, like Troilus, are "carnal sinners who subject reason to desire" ("i peccator carnali, / che la ragion sommetono al talento").³⁶ Dante describes this place in terms of darkness, noise, and wind:

I came to a place where all light was mute and
where was bellowing as of a sea in tempest that
is beaten by conflicting winds. The hellish
storm, never resting, seizes and drives the
spirits before it; smiting and whirling them
about, it torments them. (V. 28-33)

Within this region of Hell, Dante places another famous pair of lovers, Paolo and Francesca, who were also brought together by a "pander," the tale of Lancelot and Guinevere which they read together: "A Galeotto was the book and he that wrote it" ("Galeotto fu il libro e chi lo scrisse," V. 137). Thus the stormy setting of Book III appropriately recalls the condition of Dante's lustful sinners and suggests the penalty which Troilus will pay for his own desires.

However, Troilus is not in the midst of the storm but in the "stuwe," preparing himself for the "heaven" of Criseyde's bed. At this point we can turn to an alternate set of meanings for the word stew, which (like many symbols) has two radically different sets of meanings. If we think of the stew as a bath, we must consider not only its connection with

lust but also its association with purification, the ideality of the bath which is allied with the ritual of baptism.³⁷ Chaucer may be playing on both associations of the word, for Troilus waits in the stew for Pandarus, the false "go between," who takes on the same function as Christ, the true "go between" for God and man, by leading Troilus to Criseyde's paradise. Pandarus bids Troilus to make himself ready, "For thow shalt into hevене blisse wende" (III. 704). Troilus' response, appropriately, is to pray for grace--although from Venus--in terms which suggest that he is asking for purification from the pagan equivalent of original sin--i.e., malign forces present at his birth over which he had no control:

And if ich hadde, O Venus ful of myrthe,
 Aspectes badde of Mars or of Saturne,
 Or thow combust or let were in my birthe,
 Thy fader prey al thilke harm disturne
 Of grace, and that I glad ayein may turne.
 (III. 715-719)

Once cleansed, Troilus is brought at last to Criseyde's inner chamber, a cozy place safe from the disturbance of the storm outside. Here, in an ironic "paradise," Criseyde means to "every wrong redresse" (III. 1008) and to bestow "of gilt misericorde" (III. 1177)--terms which cannot fail to suggest the Christian heaven and, simultaneously, the ironic implications of this scene.

Other references reinforce this irony by recalling the Easter story and its happy consequences for the pagans released from Hell. Immediately after the allusion to the Easter liturgy in line 1317 ("O blisful nyght, of hem so long isought"), the narrator asks, "Why ne hadde I swich oon with my soule ybought" (III. 1319), evoking the image of Christ's passion as purchasing the souls of all mankind. This is followed by a clear reference to the descensus when Troilus expresses his gratitude to

Pandarus, the pseudo-mediator: "Thow hast in hevene ybrought my soule at reste / Fro Flegiton, the fery flood of hell" (III. 1599-1600).

Even the lovers' aube serves to bring out the ironic differences between this scene of passion and Christ's Passion. Donald Rowe has pointed out the implications of the lovers' invective against light, traditionally associated with spiritual knowledge.³⁸ But when Troilus rails against the "envyous day" (l. 1454), he uses words which recall the Easter morning scene at the tomb: "What hastow lost? what sekist thow in this place" (l. 1455). According to the Gospel of John, Jesus spoke to Mary Magdalene as she turned from the empty sepulchre, asking, "Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?" (John 20:15; in the Vulgate version, "mulier quid ploras quem quaeris").

A final echo of the Easter events occurs in a curious phrase delivered by the narrator. When Pandarus visits Criseyde the next morning, after Troilus' departure, he playfully invites her to "Have here a swerd, and smyteth of myn heed" (III. 1573). The narrator summarizes the action with "I passe al that which nedeth nought to seye, / What! god foryaf his deth, and she also / Foryaf . . ." (III. 1576-78). The phrase "god foryaf his deth" ostensibly refers to the pretended death of Pandarus, but especially to a medieval audience the words would also bring to mind the words of Luke 23:34. Here Jesus prays that His Father will forgive those who kill Him: "Iesus autem dicebat: Pater, dimitte illud; non enim sciunt quod faciunt."

Taken together, these Christian allusions remind us of the comparative inadequacy of the love consummated in Book III. At the same time, they point toward the epilogue, which celebrates a true Paradise, and help to indicate why Troilus is not worthy of that bliss. Accordingly,

we find in Books IV and V numerous references to the hell in which Troilus again finds himself with the loss of Criseyde, proving that the paradise of her arms was an inadequate, transitory one.³⁹

After Troilus leaves the parliament which has decreed Criseyde's exchange, his emotional state is described as follows:

And as in wynter leves ben biraft,
 Ech after other, til the tree be bare,
 So that ther nys but bark and braunche ilaft,
 Lith Troilus, byraft of èche welfare,
 Ibounen in the blake bark of care. (IV. 225-229)

Root points out that lines 225-227 are imitated from Dante's Inferno III. 112-114, in which the damned fling themselves from the shores of Acheron as dying leaves fall from a tree.⁴⁰ He characterizes the following two lines as "a rather violent extension of the preceding simile."⁴¹ It is possible, however, that the entire passage may refer to another section of the Inferno, in which Dante the pilgrim enters a forest of warped, diseased trees without green leaves ("Non fronda verde, ma de color fosco," XIII. 4).⁴² When Dante breaks a branch from one of the trees, he finds that inside the trunk is trapped the soul of a suicide. Since suicide is a likely result of despair, it is appropriate that at this point Troilus is characterized as "ibounen in the blake bark of care." Indeed, in Book V (lines 1716-18) he will seek to die in battle--perhaps a more noble form of suicide, but nonetheless evidence of a suicidal despair.⁴³ In addition, the prohemium to Book IV invokes the Furies (IV. 22-24); in Inferno XIII, the souls of the suicides are tormented by the Harpies (II. 100-102). Although not identical, the Furies and Harpies are similar enough in form and function that we may postulate Chaucer's adaptation of Dante's description of the suicides to portray Troilus' state of mind.

Other references to torment and hell bolster this impression. After

learning that he must part with Criseyde, Troilus imagines that "down with Proserpyne, / Whan I am dede, I wol go in pyne" (IV. 473-474); after he leaves Criseyde's bed for the last time, Troilus' pains, "That passen every torment down in helle" (IV. 1698), cannot be imagined; following her departure, "To bedde he goth, and walwith ther and torneth / In furie, as doth he, Ixion, in Helle" (V. 211-212); his letters inform Criseyde that "myn ese ek woxen helle is" (IV. 1376) and that "to me youre absence is an helle" (V. 1396).

At the same time, we are brought to realize that Criseyde is no longer the paradisaical figure of Book III. The narrator tells us that "Hire face, like of Paradys the ymage, / Was al ychaunged in another kynde" (IV. 864-865). And, unlike Troilus who imagines an immortality in Proserpine's underworld, Criseyde assures him that

Yit in the feld of pite, out of peyne,
That hight Elisos, shal we be yfeere,
As Orpheus with Erudice his fere. (IV. 789-791)

In a poem solidly based in the teachings of the Consolation of Philosophy, this reference to Orpheus and Eurydice recalls Boethius' moral of the classical story (Book III, metrum 12). As Orpheus was too attached to the things of this world, symbolized by the figure of Eurydice, so is Troilus. Thus Criseyde is no longer the catalyst of his virtue, but the object of his obsessive despair, exemplified by the frequent references to Hell.

In Book III, Troilus was led from the hell of his frustration to Criseyde's heaven by Pandarus; in Book V, Troilus is led from his emotional hell to the celestial heavens by Mercury. Both instances serve as false paradigms of the virtuous pagans' liberation from Hell under the aegis of Christ, the true psychopomp. This point is underscored one last time

when Troilus refers to Alceste:

For whan hire housbonde was in jupartye
To dye hym self, but if she wolde dye,
She ches for hym to dye and gon to helle,
And starf anon, as we the bokes telle. (V. 1530-33)

Alceste could not deliver a soul from Hell without dying herself; Orpheus was unable to successfully recover a soul from the underworld; only Christ, "which that right for love / Upon a cros, oure soules for to beye, / First starf, and roos, and sit in hevenc above" (V. 1841-43) offers true salvation from Hell.⁴⁴

This brings us to the question of whether Troilus can be judged as a virtuous pagan whose devoted love for Criseyde, imperfect as we must acknowledge it, brings him to salvation. Chaucer seems to have left the matter deliberately vague, but the available evidence points to the negative. As noted earlier, Troilus is led to his final resting-place by Mercury, not Michael (the traditional Christian guide).⁴⁵ In addition, two stanzas of the epilogue (262 and 265) apparently lament Troilus' fate, using anaphora to reinforce the point. Some critics have interpreted the lines "Swich fyn hath, lo, this Troilus for love! / Swich fyn hath al his grete worthynesse!" (V. 1828-29) in a positive sense, but this is belied by the undoubtedly negative tenor of "Swich fyn hath false worldes brotelnesse!" (V. 1832).⁴⁶ Likewise, lines such as "Lo here, of payens corsed olde rites! / Lo here, what alle hire goddes may availle!" (V. 1849-50) can only be read as an indictment of Troilus' beliefs and customs.

Perhaps most telling, though, is a comparison of Troilus and other virtuous pagans (which Chaucer invites by placing his hero in the apotheosis tradition). We find that Troilus is a misfit when compared

to those who, according to tradition, won either a pagan or Christian reward in the afterlife. Both Cicero and Pompey, who looked back upon earth from a vantage point similar to Troilus', were statesmen who had concerned themselves with "commune profit." Chaucer himself made this point clear in the Parlement of Foules, when the narrator relates what he has read in the Somnium Scipionis:

Thanne telleth it that, from a sterry place,
How Affrycan hath hym Cartage shewed,
And warnede hym befor of al his grace,
And seyde hym what man, lered other lewed
That lovede commune profyt, wel ithewed,
He shulde into a blysful place wende,
There as joye is that last withouten ende. (ll. 43-49)⁴⁷

In the Aeneid, Virgil depicts the inhabitants of Elysium as

The band of heroes
. . . all those whose mortal wounds were suffered
In fighting for the fatherland; and poets,
The good, the pure, the worthy of Apollo.⁴⁸

Although Troilus does die in battle, he seeks death not for the greater glory of Troy but for his own release from despair. Thus it is unlikely that Mercury would lead him to the Elysian fields visualized by Criseyde.⁴⁹

Even more striking is a comparison of Troilus with virtuous pagans thought to be in Christian bliss. Trajan, the most well known of these, was (like Cicero, Pompey, and the Aeneid's Elysians) a statesman. As a provincial governor and a Roman emperor, he was legendary for his justness and humility--qualities which Troilus may have possessed to some extent but did not place in service to the state. Instead, he dedicates himself to Criseyde, so that "he was to hire a wal / Of steel, and sheld from every displesaunce" (III. 481). This is a distortion of the merits of Trajan, renowned for effectively protecting and ruling the state, not for protecting and ruling a woman as Troilus does.

Likewise, Troilus falls short of the stature of Ripheus, his fellow Trojan whom Dante places in Paradise (Paradiso XX. 67-69). We have seen that Ripheus, who fell in battle for his country, was characterized in the Aeneid as the most just of the Trojans,⁵⁰ just as the corpse found by St. Erkenwald possessed a reputation for pure justness. Chaucer gives us no indication that Troilus enjoys a reputation for justness. In fact, we could conclude that Chaucer demonstrates Troilus' distorted sense of justice when he offers to requite Pandarus' services by obtaining for his friend the favors of "Polixene, Casandre, Eleyne, or any of the frape" (III. 409-410).

Thus Troilus does not fit the pattern of other virtuous pagans of the classical or Christian era. Chaucer evidently went to great pains to make the background of his poem authentically pagan;⁵¹ therefore, he could not help but be aware that Troilus did not fit the traditional mold of the virtuous pagan who merited either pagan or Christian salvation. Troilus does refuse to follow Paris' example of ravishing the woman he loves, but even this praiseworthy restraint is based on fear of Criseyde's reaction rather than on political considerations. Speaking to Pandarus, he explains:

. . . it is nat myn entente,
 At shorte wordes, though I deyen sholde,
 To ravyshe hire, but if hire self it wolde.
 (IV. 635-637)

That Troilus is not interested in concerns of the state (unlike the traditional virtuous pagans) is further emphasized by Criseyde's dream in Book II (ll. 925-931). The white eagle which exchanges hearts with her represents Troilus, but the choice of the eagle image is significant. As a royal bird, it befits Troilus' station; but more than that, it

recalls Dante's use of the eagle in Paradiso XVIII and XIX.⁵² Here the eagle represents the sign by which the Roman Empire was known ("signo / che fi i Romani al mondo reverendi," XIX. 101-102). As Troilus later dreams of Diomedes in the form of a boar, symbolizing the Greek family's legacy, so Criseyde dreams of Troilus in the form which would symbolize the Roman Empire, descended from Troy. The eagle, then, represents the greatest civilization known to Dante or Chaucer, but Troilus himself is relatively unconcerned with the larger affairs of Troy. In addition, Dante's eagle is composed of a series of shining stars (souls), among them both Trajan and Ripheus. Each of the souls was a just ruler on earth, a fact emphasized by the words formed before the eagle takes shape: "Dilige iustitiam qui iudicatis terram" (XVIII. 91-93). Again, we see the disparity between these blessed ones' concern for just rule and Troilus' obsession with his own desires. In short, if Chaucer did mean to portray Troilus as a pagan redeemed because of his love for an earthly woman, this would be a radical break from tradition.

This brings us again to the ambiguity of Troilus' fate. Why would Chaucer leave such an important element open to question? In this case we cannot ascribe it to carelessness or lack of authorial revision. It is possible, though, that Chaucer intentionally left vague Troilus' final destiny. And it is in this respect that the role of the narrator comes into play.⁵³

In the case of Trajan and the anonymous judge in St. Erkenwald, a Christian intercessor was necessary to effect the salvation of a pagan. In Troilus and Criseyde, we have a series of intercessors. At the lowest level is Pandarus, who, as we have seen, acts as a mediator in malo as he leads Troilus from "hell" to the "heaven" of Criseyde's bed. He, like

the narrator, is relegated to the position of spectator, since in matters of love he "hoppe alwey byhynde" (II. 1107). Bloomfield has stated that the narrator's point of view is similar to God's point of view, since He sees the eternal present.⁵⁴ But we cannot be sure that the narrator shares God's omniscience in relation to this tale, since he does not specify Troilus' fate. We might, however, see the narrator's role as that of intercessor between (1) his pagan tale and his Christian audience, (2) his poem and others of the past and future, and (3) his pagan characters and Christ. Taking account of his role as intercessor might explain the disarray of thoughts which is evident in the epilogue and clarify his curious reference to himself as "I that god of Loves servants serve" (I. 15). This is a reference to the Pope's title, servus servorum dei, used in the introductory greeting of all papal bulls. The Pope, of course, would be the earthly mediator par excellence between God and man.⁵⁵

First, as intercessor between the tale and the audience, the narrator finds himself in an awkward position. He has created sympathetic characters, but they are nevertheless pagans, a fact which we are brought up against sharply beginning with his admonition to "O yonge fresshe folkes" (V. 1835). Despite the Christian reverberations of a term such as "grace," the description of Criseyde's empty house as "shryne of which the seynt is oute" (V. 553), or Pandarus' statement to Troilus that "if thow deye a martyr, go to hevene" (IV. 623), the characters show no knowledge of the Christian God and thus would be expected to dwell in Hell or, at the most, a kind of limbo in their afterlife. As we have seen, even Troilus, despite his ennoblement by love (III. 1786-1792, 1800-1806), does not fit into the mold of the virtuous pagan that a

medieval audience would recognize. But, because of his unquestionable virtues--and because, of all the characters, he comes closest to a Christian conception of the universe (especially in his understanding of the bond of love which holds all things together), the narrator finally leaves Troilus' fate unspecified. Troilus' "double sorwe" on earth may well be repeated in the heavens; his celestial insight may be followed by damnation. However, we cannot be absolutely certain of this.⁵⁶

In like fashion, the narrator cannot be certain of the final fate of his "littel book." He sees it as subject to mutability but forming part of a link between "Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace" (V. 1792) and a future in which he prays that "wherso thow be, or elles songe, / That thow be understonde" (V. 1797-98). Thus he intercedes as well for the fate of his book:

And for ther is so gret diversite
In Englissh, and in writyng of oure tonge,
So prey I god that non myswrite the,
Ne the mysmetre for defaute of tonge. (V. 1793-96)

Later, after his invective against the "payens corsed olde rites" (V. 1849), he is jolted to intercede again on behalf of his work, asking Gower and Strode "ther nede is, to correcte" (V. 1858).⁵⁷

Most important, though, the narrator acts as intercessor between his characters and Christ, the archetypal intercessor. It is this aspect of Christ, His sacrifice and mercy, which the narrator emphasizes in the closing stanzas:

And loveth hym which that right for love
Upon a cros, oure soules for to beye,
First starf, and roos, and sit in hevene above.
(V. 1842-44)

And to that sothfast Crist, that starf on rode,
With al myn herte of mercy evere I preye.
(V. 1861-62)

. . . to thy mercy everichon,
 So make us, Jesus, for thi mercy digne.
 (V. 1867-68)

Although the narrator does not specifically request mercy for his characters, this seems implicit in his prayers for Christ's mercy, coupled with his vague description of Troilus' ultimate destination: "And forth he wente, shortly for to telle, / Ther as Mercurye sorted hym to dwelle" (V. 1826-27). The fact that these lines are immediately followed by the "swich fyn" passage does not bode well for Troilus' soul, but this may be the reason that the next stanza introduces the Christian God, "thilke god that after his ymage / Yow made" (V. 1839-40). We pass from the doom of paganism to the hope of Christianity in just a few lines--from Mercury's justice to the possibility of Christ's mercy. And because that mercy lies beyond human comprehension, neither we nor the narrator can confidently assert Troilus' end.

Because of the variety of intercessions taking place here, along with the conclusion of the story itself, the epilogue becomes a patchwork of different themes.⁵⁸ There may be another reason as well for the apparent disorder. If we accept Bloomfield's premise that the narrator's view is like that of God's eternal present, the various parts of the epilogue would not have to follow in a temporally orderly fashion but could be seen as accumulating haphazardly (at least in our limited view) to form a coherent whole. This can be compared to the spatial quality of many works of modern literature.⁵⁹

We began by arguing that one's reading of the epilogue determines one's reading of the poem itself--either as a celebration of earthly love or as an object lesson of its triviality and mutability. Chaucer seems to have it both ways. Nothing in the poem or epilogue warrants our firm

belief in Troilus' salvation; his omniscient glimpse of earth and his laughter at the mundanity of worldly affairs may be only temporary. Viewed in the tradition of the virtuous pagan, his concern for Criseyde compares poorly with the expected concern for justice and the state. And yet the all-embracing mercy of Christ, a concept introduced at the end of the epilogue by the narrator-intercessor, leaves room for hope for Troilus' soul. Perhaps we would do better, then, to view the poem as neither a condemnation nor a celebration of human love but as an affirmation of the efficacy of divine love, which can (if God so wills) encompass even the misguided efforts of a well-meaning but imperfect pagan. In this way Chaucer again proves himself the diplomat, walking the middle way between the extremes of both Bradwardine and the fourteenth century Pelagians.

Notes

¹For a detailed study of the relationship between the Troilus and the Filostrato, see Sanford B. Meech, Design in Chaucer's Troilus (1959; rpt. New York: Greenwood, 1969); for a study of the philosophical overtones in the Troilus, see Bernard L. Jefferson, Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1917).

²There is some difficulty in delineating the epilogue. John Steadman maintains that "there is room for doubt as to whether Chaucer actually regarded the conclusion of his poem as a formal epilogue" (Disembodied Laughter: Troilus and the Apotheosis Tradition [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972], p. 151). William Provost agrees, noting that there is no manuscript authority for setting apart any of the closing narrative, although "The stanzas are clearly different from the preceding narrative, and also from Boccaccio's Part IX" (The Structure of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde, Anglistica, Vol. XX [Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bogger, 1974], p. 32). R. K. Root points out that one manuscript (H₃, or Harleian 1239) does have the rubric "Lenvoye Du Chaucer" after line 1855 (The Book of Troilus and Criseyde [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1926], p. 405, note to l. 1856).

³Curry's opinion is probably the strongest in this regard; he claims that we need not consider the epilogue at all in interpreting Troilus and Criseyde, for it "suddenly denies and contradicts everything that has gone before in the poem" (Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences [New York: Oxford University Press, 1926], pp. 279-298). John Tatlock ("The Epilog of Chaucer's Troilus," Modern Philology, 18 [1921], 629-659) also sees the epilogue as a contradiction, characterizing it as "a return from the Renaissance to the Middle Ages" (p. 658). Although Elizabeth Salter ("Troilus and Criseyde: A Reconsideration" in Patterns of Love and Courtesy: Essays in Memory of C. S. Lewis, ed. John Lawlor [London: Edward Arnold, 1966], pp. 86-106) does not label the epilogue as a contradiction, she does assert that "Chaucer could never have intended his poem to be seen as a unified whole, except in the crudest narrative sense" (p. 106).

⁴These scholars include R. K. Root, Howard Patch, James Shanley, Alexander Denomy, Thomas Kirby, Kemp Malone, Charles Muscatine, Robert Jordan, and Sanford Meech. A helpful summary of their views can be found in Sister Barbara Gill's Paradoxical Patterns in Chaucer's Troilus: An Explanation of the Palinode (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1960), pp. xi-xii.

⁵Those who believe that Troilus is rewarded for his love include James Shanley, Elizabeth Kirk, Barbara Newman, and Donald Rowe. Even here we find differences of opinion as to which element of his love is efficacious. For Shanley, Troilus merely made the mistake of placing

his hope for perfect happiness in an inherently imperfect vessel ("The Troilus and Christian Love," English Literary History, 6 [1939], 272); Rowe commends him for not ravishing Criseyde (O Love, O Charite! Contraries Harmonized in Chaucer's Troilus [Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976], p. 138); Newman (" 'Feynede Loves,' Feigned Lore, and Faith in Trouthe," in Chaucer's Troilus: Essays in Criticism, ed. Stephen Barney [Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1980], p. 271) and Kirk (" 'Paradis stood formed in hire yen' ": Courtly Love and Chaucer's Revision of Dante," in Acts of Interpretation: The Text in Its Contexts, 700-1600: Essays on Medieval and Renaissance Literature in Honor of E. Talbot Donaldson [Norman, Okla.: Pilgrim Books, 1982], p. 263) point out that Troilus keeps his "trouthe" by loving Criseyde even when her betrayal is certain; as Troilus puts it, "I ne kan nor may, / For al this world, withinne myn herte fynde / To unloven yow a quarter of a day!" (V. 1696-98). On the other hand, critics such as D. W. Robertson and Winthrop Wetherbee emphasize the pathetic contrast between earthly and divine love. Thus Robertson states that Troilus' laugh from the spheres is "the ironic laughter with which Chaucer depicts Troilus' 'wo' from the beginning, a laughter which he, and Troilus from his celestial vantage point, would bestow on all those who take a sentimental attitude toward such love as that between Troilus and Criseyde" ("Chaucerian Tragedy," English Literary History, 19 [1952], 36). Wetherbee, discussing the Dantean parallels in Book III, contends that the love scene "exposes in the most forceful way the emptiness at the heart of Troilus's love" ("The Descent from Bliss: 'Troilus' III. 1310-1582," in Chaucer's Troilus: Essays in Criticism, ed. Stephen Barney [Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1980], p. 314). Alfred David comments on these two opposed critical positions and attributes them to a split on Chaucer's own part "between what his intellect as a medieval moralist tells him ideally should be and what his feelings as a poet tell him actually is true" (The Strumpet Muse: Art and Morals in Chaucer's Poetry [Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1976], p. 30). The fact that Chaucer completed and revised the poem, though, indicates that, if he was indeed conscious of this "split," it was somehow resolved.

⁶III. 1344-1347. All quotations from Troilus and Criseyde are taken from R. K. Root's edition, The Book of Troilus and Criseyde (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1926).

⁷For a summary of critical opinion on the Retraction, see James D. Gordon, "Chaucer's Retraction: A Review of Opinion" in Studies in Medieval Literature in Honor of Professor Albert Croll Baugh, ed. MacEdward Leach (Philadelphia, 1961), pp. 81-96. He notes that "most critics, relying upon the evidence of the manuscripts, have accepted the authenticity of the Retraction" (p. 83). A. C. Spearing concludes from the Retraction that we should not view the Troilus as "substantially an exposition of Christian doctrine" (Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde [London, Edward Arnold, 1976], p. 62).

⁸Curry (p. 313) points out that Chaucer appropriately omitted this ending from his version of the Teseide in the Knight's Tale, "since the question of spiritual values is not raised in this story."

⁹The most complete study of these sources and analogues can be found in John Steadman's Disembodied Laughter: Troilus and the Apotheosis Tradition, especially Chapter 3. Steadman refrains from attempting a definitive reinterpretation of the poem based on his analysis of the epilogue, confining himself primarily to a study of how the poem's ending fits into the apotheosis tradition.

¹⁰A. J. Minnis (Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity [Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982]) has approached the Troilus from a similar angle, investigating the prevalent interest in Chaucer's time in the impressive but limited achievements of pagans. Although I am indebted to his work for much of the information presented here, his historical approach primarily attempts to establish the terms in which Chaucer conceived of pagan antiquity; he devotes relatively little attention to the epilogue and the question of Troilus' salvation (see pp. 104-107 for his discussion of these subjects).

¹¹See, for example, Stephen Barney's "Troilus Bound," Speculum, 47 (1972), 458; Dorothy Bethurum's "Chaucer's Point of View as Narrator in the Love Poems," PMLA, 74 (1959), 519; Walter Curry, p. 296; Peter Dronke's "The Conclusion of Troilus and Criseyde," Medium Aevum, 33 (1964), 48; T. P. Dunning's "God and Man in Troilus and Criseyde," in English and Medieval Studies No. 12, ed. Norman Davis and C. L. Wrenn (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1962), pp. 180-181; Gertrude Drake's "The Moon and Venus: Troilus's Havens in Eternity," Papers on Language and Literature, 11 (1975), 17; Peter Heidtmann's "Sex and Salvation in Troilus and Criseyde," Chaucer Review, 2 (1968), 246; Thomas Kirby's Chaucer's Troilus: A Study in Courtly Love, LSU Studies, No. 39 (University, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1940), p. 282; Davis Taylor's "The Terms of Love: A Study of Troilus's Style" in Chaucer's Troilus: Essays in Criticism, ed. Stephen Barney (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1980), p. 239. Also, see note 5 above for a partial discussion of their different interpretations of Troilus' merits. Patricia Kean (Chaucer and the Making of English Poetry, Vol. I [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972], pp. 163-164) and Monica McAlpine (The Genre of Troilus and Criseyde [Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978], p. 144) both specify that Troilus receives a pagan reward for his dedication to "commune profit"; Steadman suggests that Troilus' apotheosis is the conventional due of a military hero (p. 52).

¹²Edmund Reiss, "Troilus and the Failure of Understanding," Modern Language Quarterly, 29 (1968), 140-141.

¹³According to Root, there are sixteen manuscripts altogether (two of them incomplete), plus two early printed copies which rank with the manuscripts as authorities (p. 11). Despite the fact that most of these

read "seventhe," Root (pp. 560-62) argues for the reading "eighth" and explains "seventhe" as a scribal error.

¹⁴Jackson Cope, "Chaucer, Venus, and the 'Seventhe Spere,'" Modern Language Notes, 67 (1952), 246. Forrest Scott ("The Seventh Sphere: A Note on Troilus and Criseyde," Modern Language Review, 51 [1956], 4) supports this by observing that counting outward was the more common practice of the Middle Ages. Drake points out, though, that we should not necessarily demand consistency of Chaucer; although he counts upwards in the Franklin's Tale 1280, The Astrolabe 1.21.56, and Troilus III. 2, he counts downwards from Saturn in "Lenvoy de Chaucer a Scogan" 9 and in "The Complaint of Mars," 19-21. In addition, in Troilus III. 715 Troilus lists the gods downwards when praying.

¹⁵Cope, p. 246. Dante's seventh sphere of Saturn contains spirits whose lives were dedicated to divine devotion; likewise, "Troilus has become a devoted member of the order of earthly lovers."

¹⁶Morton Bloomfield, "The Eighth Sphere: A Note on Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde V, 1809," Modern Language Review, 53 (1958), 409-410. Bloomfield cites a Greek and Roman tradition which he describes as follows: "The good soul who possessed gnosis attained to the eighth sphere, the ogdoad, beyond the moving spheres, whence he had originally come before birth. Here in a purely spiritual form, freed from every encumbrance of the flesh, he became semi-divine and basked in eternal light. This goal is called the ogdoad (eighth sphere), a concept which had a long history of which no doubt Dante, Boccaccio, and possibly Chaucer had some awareness. Chaucer in wafting his hero to the ogdoad is paying tribute to him as a good pagan."

¹⁷Chauncey Wood, Chaucer and the Country of the Stars (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 189.

¹⁸John Clark ("Dante and the Epilogue of Troilus," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 50 [1951], 1-10) and Alfred Kellogg ("On the Tradition of Troilus's Vision of the Little Earth," Mediaeval Studies, 22 [1960], 204-213) argue for the moon; Drake believes that the moon is a way-station en route to Troilus' final resting-place of Venus. Steadman presents thematic arguments for both the fixed stars and the moon but concludes that the sphere of the moon is more suitable (pp. 39-40). E. J. Dobson ("Some Notes on Middle English Texts," English and Germanic Studies, I [1947-48], 56-62), Gerald Morgan ("The Ending of Troilus and Criseyde," Modern Language Review, 77 [1982], 257-271), C. S. Lewis (The Discarded Image [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964], p. 24), Bloomfield, Dronke, and Wood hold for the sphere of the fixed stars. Cope argues for Saturn; Scott, for Mercury. A more detailed summary of these critical views can be found in pp. 181-187 of Wood's Country of the Stars.

¹⁹John Conlee, "The Meaning of Troilus's Ascension to the Eighth

Sphere," Chaucer Review, 7 (1972), 34-35.

²⁰Russell Peck, "Numerology and Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde," Mosaic, 5 (1972), 28.

²¹Peck, pp. 18-19.

²²This seems to be a safe assumption. Ernest Curtius in his Excursus XV, entitled "Numerical Composition" (pp. 501-509 in European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, trans. Willard Trask [New York: Harper and Row, 1963]), sees in numerical design a medieval alternative to modern concepts of literary coherence and unity (p. 502). Reiss points out that number symbolism in the Middle Ages was "more pervasive and acute than at any other time in Western civilization" ("Number Symbolism and Medieval Literature," Medievalia et Humanistica, n.s. 1 [1970], 161). He cites three instances in which Chaucer indicates a knowledge of number symbolism (pp. 168-169).

²³Drake, p. 15.

²⁴Peter Heidtmann ("Sex and Salvation in Troilus and Criseyde," Chaucer Review, 2 [1968], 248) and Dronke (p. 47) have advanced this view. Unlike the critics Drake charged with overlooking ll. 1826-27 in Book V, Dronke particularly specifies that there are two distinct movements for Troilus, but he sees the second as a movement within the same sphere: "This seems to me the obvious implication--if Arcita or Troilus had been guided back to a different sphere, Boccaccio or Chaucer would surely have mentioned the fact."

²⁵John Fisher (ed., The Complete Poetry and Prose of Geoffrey Chaucer [New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977], p. 814) bases this assumption on the fact that Chaucer's short poem to Adam Scryven links his Boece with Troilus and Criseyde: "Adam scryven, if ever it thee byfalle / Boece or Troylus for to wryten newe" (ll. 1-2).

²⁶Morton Bloomfield ("Distance and Predestination in Troilus and Criseyde," PMLA, 72 [1957], 19) agrees that "They are reasonable pagans who can attain to the truths of natural law--to the concept of a God, a creator, and to the rational moral law." On the other hand, Minnis (p. 174, n. 111) points out that "no neat and strict distinction can be made between pagan monotheism and pagan polytheism in Troilus, since the main characters often refer to an almighty god yet just as often swear by the planet-gods."

²⁷Dunning comes close to making the same point by his observation on Troilus' speech: "While it is carefully motivated by the circumstances of the narrative, its length, on the one hand, and its clearly derived character, on the other, with its stopping short at that very chapter of Boethius which would have explained all Troilus's difficulties, clearly established for Chaucer's audience the limits of Troilus's natural know-

ledge and represented his mistake--of overloading human love with more than it can bear . . . as a natural concomitant of his position as a good pagan" (p. 176). Dunning fails to note that Boethius' arguments do not proceed from a Christian base and therefore should be accessible to an intelligent pagan. Minnis, however, does make this point, noting that because the thirteenth century schoolmen had driven a wedge between philosophy and theology, for Chaucer "the doctrine of De Consolatione Philosophiae pertained to philosophy in the strictest possible sense of the term, a specialist discipline which was grounded on natural reason and in which most of the experts were pagans" (p. 11). Minnis also reminds us that Chaucer seems to have read the Consolation of Philosophy with the aid of Nicholas Trevet's commentary (p. 10 and p. 156, n. 9), which made clear that Troilus' conclusion was for Boethius a dubitacio, an intermediate step in the dialectical process. Chaucer uses this passage to illustrate Troilus' despairing state of mind, since this rigid view of the universe contradicts Troilus' hymn in Book III and contrasts with the high degree of enlightenment found in the pagan work Secreta Secretorum, generally believed to have been written by Aristotle for Alexander (pp. 97-100). Thus Troilus' failure to reach the orthodox Christian view of free will is his own personal failure, not to be excused by the accident of his position in pagan history. Other shortfalls, however, may reflect the inevitable limitations of his paganism. For example, John Frankis ("Paganism and Pagan Love in Troilus and Criseyde," in Essays on Troilus and Criseyde, ed. Mary Salu [Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1979], p. 64) attributes to this Troilus' attempts to identify Cupid and Venus with eternal love. Another subtle indication of the limitations of paganism may be the reference in III. 193-194 to "oon and two," which anticipates the narrator's closing reference to the Trinity as "Thow oon, and two, and three" (V. 1863).

²⁸Ida L. Gordon, The Double Sorrow of Troilus (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 44. John Huber ("Troilus' Predestination Soliloquy: Chaucer's Changes from Boethius," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen, 66 [1965], 125), Charles Owen ("The Significance of Chaucer's Revisions of Troilus and Criseyde," Modern Philology, 55 [1957-1958], 4) and McAlpine (p. 164) point out the same irony. Troilus' speech has also been cited as evidence for his total subjection to Fortune and consequent loss of free will (Robertson, p. 13) and for his moral blindness and despair (Morgan, p. 268).

²⁹Dronke, p. 50. Also see Joseph Jungmann, S.J., The Mass of the Roman Rite, Its Origins and Developments (New York: Benziger Bros., 1959), p. 390. The phrase comes from the Exultet, the deacon's chant in the Easter Vigil: "O truly necessary sin of Adam, which Christ blotted out by his death! O happy fault, that merited the possession of such a great Redeemer! O truly blessed night which alone deserved to know the time and hour when Christ rose from hell. This is the night of which it is written: And the night is become clear as day; and the night is my light in delight. Therefore the hallowing of night puts all wickedness to flight, cleanses sins, returns innocence to those who have fallen, and joy to the woeful."

³⁰Gerry Brenner ("Narrative Structure in Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde," Annuaire Mediaevale, 6 [1965], 7); Chauncey Wood (The Elements of Chaucer's Troilus [Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1983], p. 9); Joseph Mogan (Chaucer and the Theme of Mutability [Paris: Mouton, 1969], p. 122) are among those who have pointed out this irony. Robertson (p. 24) notes the ironic use of the religious imagery of Book III without specifically linking this to the epilogue. Wetherbee (pp. 309-315) examines parallels between the love scene and Dante's experience, especially at the summit of Purgatory. Others have noted additional echoes of religious phraseology in Book III and elsewhere. For example, Gill detects an adaptation of the minor doxology in l. 245 and sees affinities between Troilus' prayer in III. 1254-1273 and Bernard's address to Mary in Paradiso XXXIII. 13-27 (p. 85). Rowe also mentions the letter and claims that "Whether or not Dronke is right that the words 'O blisful nyght' are intended to recall the Easter night service, he is certainly right that throughout the scene recalls the Redemption" (p. 108). Rowe argues, though, for "a genuine contact with the holy" (p. 109) which surpasses the ironies of the scene. Indeed, the very fact that Troilus sings at the end of Book III is "an expression and a reflection of the harmony of God and His creation (p. 78). Mogan sees in III. 1351 a possible allusion to Paul's rapture into paradise in II Corinthians 12:2-4 (p. 122); John McCall (Chaucer Among the Gods: The Poetics of Classical Myth [University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979], p. 25) reads II. 232-238 as a pagan variation on the doxology. In addition, Wood (Country of the Stars, p. 49) points out that the momentous conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter which helps bring the lovers together was also associated with the birth of Christ by Bradwardine.

³¹The Filostrato of Giovanni Boccaccio, trans. with parallel text by Nathaniel E. Griffin and Arthur B. Myrick (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1929), p. 248; translated on p. 249 as "a certain dark and remote spot."

³²Root, p. 474, n. 601.

³³Hope Phyllis Weissman, "Why Chaucer's Wife Is From Bath," Chaucer Review, 15 (1980), 22.

³⁴Weissman, p. 34, n. 33.

³⁵Filostrato, p. 248.

³⁶Inferno, trans. with parallel text by John D. Sinclair (1933; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), Canto V, ll. 38-39. Subsequent references to this work will be placed in parentheses within the text.

³⁷Weissman acknowledges the ambivalence of the bath symbol on pp. 11-12 and p. 36, n. 52. She also notes Chaucer's use of the religious connotations of the bath in the concluding passage of the Wife's Tale.

³⁸Rowe, pp. 102-103.

³⁹Minnis links Troilus' error to Holcot's exegesis on Wisdom 13:2-3, in which Holcot insists that nothing "is more capable of subverting the human heart than concupiscence and love of appearances" (Minnis, p. 103). Since Chaucer was familiar with Holcot's commentary on the Book of Wisdom (Minnis, p. 156, n. 18), we may identify Troilus' basic weakness as an excessive attachment to earthly beauty, which Holcot identifies as a failing characteristic of certain pagans--indeed, as the root of polytheism and idolatry (Minnis, pp. 103-104). This is basically consonant with Robertson's analysis of Troilus as a protagonist whose tragedy results from his cupidity (p. 7).

⁴⁰Root, p. 505, n. to IV. 225-227.

⁴¹Root, p. 505, n. to IV. 229.

⁴²The passage also provides a nice counterpoint to the imagery of Book III, when Criseyde quakes in his arms "as an aspes leef" (III. 1200) and winds her arms about him "as aboute a tree, with many a twiste, / Bytrent and writhe the swote wodebynde" (III. 1230-31).

⁴³In IV. 1184-90 we see undeniable evidence of Troilus' tendency to seek suicide as an alternative to living in a world without Criseyde. When he believes her to be dead, he is ready to kill himself; when he believes her to be faithless, he is willing to allow himself to be killed--perhaps an act of moral cowardice which matches her own.

⁴⁴Minnis (pp. 105-106) mentions another reference in the poem to a pagan entering Hell. When Pandarus calls on Criseyde in Book II, he interrupts the reading of a Theban romance at the point where Amphiorax "fil thorough the ground to helle" (l. 105). I have not included this reference because the idea of mediation does not appear here as it does in the other instances; in addition, at least according to Dante (Inferno XX. 31-39), Amphiorax remained in Hell. The accumulation of allusions to pagans and Hell seems to indicate, though, that Chaucer deliberately included this motif in the Troilus.

⁴⁵Bloomfield makes note of this discrepancy in "The Eighth Sphere," p. 410.

⁴⁶Kirby (p. 282) reads the "Swich fyn" stanza in a positive light, as "Chaucer's final stamp of approval on the conduct of his hero," since its placement indicates that "it clearly refers not to Troilus' death and the end of everything but rather to the event recounted in the immediately preceding lines, the ascent to heaven." Bonnie Wheeler ("Dante, Chaucer, and the Ending of Troilus and Criseyde," Philological Quarterly, 61 [1982], 116-117) interprets this stanza as well as the

"Lo here" stanza as deliberately enigmatic; "each implies condemnation of the world (and of poetry) through forceful repetitio, but each reserves final judgment to the audience." She goes on to suggest that Chaucer's refusal to make this final judgment may reflect his belief that questions of moral and philosophical import are not the appropriate end of poetry and therefore better left unresolved.

⁴⁷The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, 2nd ed., ed. F. N. Robinson (1933; rpt. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961), p. 311.

⁴⁸The Aeneid of Virgil, trans. Rolfe Humphries (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 166.

⁴⁹We should note the difference between Troilus' and Arcita's deaths. Minnis notes that Boccaccio's Arcita, like Troilus, was overly attached to earthly beauty but nevertheless apparently attained Elysium. Therefore, he contends that Troilus was probably taken to Elysium as well (p. 107). But Troilus actively sought death to relieve his misery (an act of despair); Arcita died unwillingly in the valiant attempt to win his lady (an act of hope).

⁵⁰Aeneid II. 426-427 characterizes Ripheus as "iustissimus unus / Qui fuit in Teucris, et servantissimus aequi."

⁵¹This is one of the main thrusts of Minnis' work; he concludes that "Judged by the standards of the day, the extent of Chaucer's antiquarianism is remarkable, as is the consistency with which he deploys it in the poem" (p. 107).

⁵²The choice of the eagle symbol has aroused various conjectures. For example, Meech asserts that the eagle is a perfect symbol for Troilus-- "a royal and mighty fowl and, in its whiteness, pure as well as splendid" (p. 43). Charles Owen ("Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde, II. 925-31," Explicator, 9 [1951], item 26) postulates the opposite view, that the eagle is a symbol of the masterful male Criseyde subliminally wants but which Troilus can never be. Helen Storm Corsa ("Dreams in Troilus and Criseyde," American Imago, 27 [1970], 56-65) cites the dreams as examples of how Chaucer deepened his story by "oedipalizing" it.

⁵³There is some question as to the distinction, if any, between the poet and the narrator. Robert Jelliffe (Troilus and Criseyde: Studies in Interpretation [n.p.: Hokuseido Press, 1956], p. 263) and Robert Jordan ("The Narrator in Chaucer's Troilus," English Literary History, 25 [1958], 253) detect a change in voice from narrator to poet in the epilogue. Indeed, Jordan goes so far as to claim that the true subject of the poem is the narrator, not Troilus (p. 249). On the other hand, Bernard Huppe ("The Unlikely Narrator: The Narrative Strategy of the Troilus," in Signs and Symbols in Chaucer's Poetry, ed. John P. Hermann and John J. Burke, Jr. [University, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1981], pp. 179-194), Murray Markland ("Troilus and Criseyde: The

Inviolability of Ending," Modern Language Quarterly, 31 [1970], 154), S. Nagarajan ("The Conclusion to Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde," Essays in Criticism, 13 [1963], 7), and McAlpine (pp. 42-43) contend that the narrator's voice is the only one we hear throughout the poem. Markland reads the last seventeen stanzas, with their variety of conventional endings, as consistent with the narrator's moral timidity evinced elsewhere in the poem; Huppé sees in the narrator a manipulator of words as Pandarus is a manipulator of fictional events, until at the end the narrator must face the shock of ultimate meaning.

⁵⁴Morton Bloomfield, "Distance and Predestination in Troilus and Criseyde," PMLA, 72 (1957), 22-23. In accord with his general approach to the poem, Minnis postulates that the narrator adopts the stance of the compiling historian, detached from the limited beliefs of his pagan characters (p. 67).

⁵⁵William G. Dodd, Courtly Love in Chaucer and Gower (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1913), p. 192. David suggests that the narrator uses the title because, like a priest, he has no personal experience of sexual love, and because he glosses his tale like a preacher (p. 27). However, this does not account for the fact that this is the Pope's title, not a mere priest's, and that the Pope's role as chief earthly mediator between man and God would be well understood by the medieval audience.

⁵⁶In the same way, we cannot be absolutely certain of the extent of Criseyde's villainy. The narrator intercedes on her behalf as well, as when he claims that "Men seyn, I not, that she yaf hym [Diomedes] hire herte" (V. 1050). He later adds:

And if I myghte excuse hire any wise,
For she so sory was for hire untrouthe,
Iwis, I wolde excuse hire yit for routhe. (V. 1093-99)

⁵⁷No one seems to have a completely satisfactory explanation for the dedication to Gower and Strode; critics cannot even agree on Strode's philosophical stand, although most now identify him with the Ralph Strode who was a fellow of Merton College in 1359-60. (See E. P. Kuhl, "Some Friends of Chaucer," PMLA, 29 [1914], 270-276.) We know that he engaged in friendly controversy with Wyclif on the subject of predestination. Thus Alan Gaylord ("The Lesson of the Troilus: Chastisement and Correction," in Essays on Troilus and Criseyde, ed. Mary Salu [Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1979], 37-38) advances the analogy that "Chaucer is to Troilus-the-character on the subject of free will as Strode is to Wyclif." Howard Patch ("Troilus on Determinism," Speculum, 6 [1939], 241-242) basically concurs: Troilus is responsible for what happens to him in the poem, and thus the dedication is appropriate. Kuhl concludes only that Troilus and Criseyde was dedicated to two members of the King's faction and thus may have had political rather than purely philosophical purposes (p. 276). We do know more about Gower, though, and can speculate as to the significance of his inclusion. Markland takes the reference ironically, seeing an incongruous trinity in Gower, Strode, and Christ (p. 135). This may have been the start of "a jesting exchange," which

could account for Gower's urging Chaucer in the Confessio Amantis to relinquish the service of love:

Adieu, for I mot fro the wende.
 And gret wel Chaucer whan ye mete,
 As mi disciple and mi poete:
 For in the floures of his youthe
 In sondri wise, as he wel couthe,
 Of Ditees and of songes glade,
 The whiche he for mi sake made,
 The lond fulfild is overal:
 Wherof to him in special
 Above alle othre I am most holde.
 For thi now in hise daies olde
 Thow schalt him telle this message,
 That he upon his latere age,
 To sette an ende of alle his werk,
 As he which is myn owne clerk,
 Do make his testament of love,
 As thou hast do thi schrifte above,
 So that mi Court it mai recorde.

(VIII. 2940-57)

On the other hand, we can also take the reference seriously, as Wood does when he states, "That Gower, who said he was blind in the Dedicatory Epistle to Vox Clamantis, is here made the dedicatee of Chaucer's poem with its abundant imagery of metaphorical blindness is probably not coincidental" (Elements of Troilus, p. 162). Wood also points out the relevance to the Troilus of Gower's beliefs that England's social problems resulted from the downfall of justice, caused in turn by the abandonment of righteousness for Venus. (See pp. 284-285 in The Major Latin Works of John Gower, trans. Eric W. Stockton [Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962].) In addition, Gower makes it clear that a knight wins merit only when he bears arms for justice, not for carnal reward as Troilus does. In a passage which bears directly on the question of Troilus' Christian salvation, Gower writes: "Now tell me another thing: what honor shall a conqueror have if a woman's love can conquer him? I don't know what the world will reply to me about that. I do know he will have no praise from Christ" (p. 196 in Stockton's translation).

58

Several critics have discussed the artistic--or inartistic--confusion of the epilogue. Markland concludes that the epilogue reflects an intentional disorder, with several conventionally "right" endings projected to protect the morally timid narrator (pp. 147-154). Wheeler also sees an intentional disorder, possibly reflecting Chaucer's belief that such moral and philosophical questions should be left unresolved (p. 117). Sister Frances Covella ("Audience as Determinant of Meaning in the Troilus," Chaucer Review, 2 [1968], 243-244) hypothesizes that the most obvious disparity in the epilogue, the break into two sections (V. 1751-85 and V. 1786-1869), could be accounted for by two audiences--a courtly audience versed in the literary conventions of the poem, and a lay audience likely to misinterpret the author's intent.

59 Joseph Frank explains this technique in his essay "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," in The Widening Gyre (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1963), pp. 3-62. I am not the first to credit Chaucer with the grasp of modern literary techniques. McAlpine sees the deliberate non-ending of the epilogue--even the detail of Troilus' indefinite abode--as evidence of Chaucer's resistance to the demand for definitive endings in literature (p. 239). Kirk compares the narrative strategy of the ending with that of the Canterbury Tales, although the Troilus utilizes multiple versions of the same event rather than multiple narrators (p. 276). This, of course, also coincides with the multiple perspective supplied in many modern works. (On this subject, see Terrence Doody, "Don Quixote, Ulysses, and the Idea of Realism," Novel, 12 [1979], 197-214.)

Conclusion

The fourteenth century in England was a watershed in theological history, with a decisive split occurring between philosophy and theology, reason and faith. Perhaps the most bitter controversy, however, emerged over the relative importance of grace and works in Christian salvation. Both sides carried their arguments to such an extreme that God seemed a practically incomprehensible Being. For this reason, the question of the virtuous pagan became a popular as well as a theological concern; if the criteria for pagan salvation could be determined, the divine scheme as a whole might well be illuminated.

Both the Bible and tradition taught that, because of the taint of Adam's sin, all men who lived before the Christian era were confined in Hell. By the accident of chronology, they were "pagans"--i.e., non-Christians--even if they had anticipated the coming of a Messiah. Thus Christ's actions when He descended to Hell, and the identification of the souls He harrowed, were significant concerns. From the standpoint of human reason, if God were fair the offer of salvation must be extended to all--hence such theories as Christ's preaching in Hell, the efficacy of implicit faith, even Uthred of Boldon's clara visio.

Most important, however, was the simple act of the Harrowing. By offering Himself as a ransom for fallen man and establishing His sovereignty over Hell, Christ initiated a new era of mercy. Was it conceivable, then, that this mercy could be extended to deserving pagans who had not been liberated during the Harrowing? The popular imagination adduced an affirmative answer in the case of Trajan, and the idea of the virtuous pagan blossomed in legends and secular literature.

Surprisingly, however, the secular authors demonstrate a conservative approach compared to the century's theologians, on the whole achieving a balance between grace and works. The Erkenwald-poet makes clear the value of human merit in the miraculous preservation of the judge's body, but this physical glorification simultaneously illustrates the extent of natural virtue. The spiritual preservation which the judge hungers for comes only through grace, signified in the poem by the bishop's baptismal tears. On the other hand, the Dreamer in Piers Plowman seeks to assure himself of salvation by engaging in fruitless intellectual inquiry, relying on his Christian baptism to satisfy his shortcomings. Ymaginatif, aided by the figure of the unbaptized Trajan, informs him that good works are also necessary. Thus these two poems nicely balance each other on the issue of grace (or baptism) vs. works: neither alone will suffice for salvation.

Even more important than determining the theological orientation of the poems, however, is gleaning new insights about the literature itself by analyzing the use of the theme of the virtuous pagan or the related theme of the Harrowing. In St. Erkenwald, by realizing that the judge has been deliberately left behind during the Harrowing, we recognize Erkenwald as a Christ-surrogate. Erkenwald's own "harrowing" of this pagan soul celebrates the continuing power of Christ's mercy and His continuing reign over Hell. At the same time, Erkenwald's miracle serves as a reminder that it is the duty of the Church Militant to continue to harrow Hell, albeit in more conventional ways.

The Harrowing is an important concept in Piers Plowman as well, where it serves as the thematic climax of the poem read as an historical allegory. The Visio, Dobet, and Dobest characterize respectively the Old

Covenant, the New Covenant, and the impending end of the New Covenant in Judgment. In the poem, as in divine history, all events either look forward to or look back upon the Harrowing, which introduced mercy into the scheme of divine justice. Whereas St. Erkenwald emphasized the positive aspects of the Harrowing, though, Piers Plowman closes with emphasis on the negative. Although the Harrowing did initiate an era of mercy, that time is near an end, and the final Harrowing, or Doomsday, is imminent. Langland's clergy, unlike Erkenwald, are portrayed as unworthy successors of Christ, and the Church as a whole has neglected its duty to redde quod debes.

It is difficult to draw comparisons between these poems and Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde, which at first glance hardly appears to have any relevance to this topic. Chaucer was undoubtedly aware of the struggle between Bradwardine and the "Pelagians," however, as evidenced by the poem's concern with predestination. Troilus' speech in the temple, which leads up to but sidesteps Boethius' resolution of the question of free will, indicates that Troilus' conclusions should be read ironically and that Troilus is refusing to raise himself to the highest levels of pagan philosophy. He is not, in other words, "facit in quod se est." In addition, the consummation of his desire for Criseyde is surrounded by ironic allusions to the Harrowing; Troilus is liberated from "hell" to reach the paradise of his lady's arms. Since the Harrowing is usually linked with a consideration of the merits of virtuous pagans, we find that, evaluating Troilus in the light of a man such as Trajan, Troilus' claim to salvation is tenuous. This may explain the poem's ambiguous epilogue, which has aroused much critical speculation. But as Dante stressed the ultimate inscrutability of God's judgments in the Paradiso,

here Chaucer leaves Troilus' fate shrouded in the mysteries of Christ's mercy.

Ultimately, all three poems rest on the bedrock of divine mystery. Men are certainly accountable for their works--the judge's justness accords him special dispensation in St. Erkenwald, each Christian must redde quod debes in Piers Plowman, and Troilus' actions are subtly derogated by irony. Yet grace allows the judge to partake of the heavenly banquet, Piers Plowman ends with Conscience's cry after grace, and Chaucer commends his hero to the grace of Jesus and Mary. In all three instances, the workings of grace are indisputable and yet unknowable--the only answer the medieval Church could devise for the paradox of the virtuous pagan.

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