RICE UNIVERSITY

TEMPORAL STRUCTURES IN PIERS PLOWMAN

by

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ABSTRACT

Langland pictured himself as existing both in time, in fourteenth-century England, and out of time, as part of a grand divine scheme. *Piers Plowman* is fitted into a Biblical and world-historical frame, the pattern of which is the figural interpretation of history. This implies that every occurrence, in all its everyday reality, is simultaneously part of a world-historical context through which it is related to every other occurrence, and thus is to be regarded as being of all times or above all time. The purpose of this thesis will be to further penetrate *Piers Plowman* in an effort to discern Langland's sense of man's temporality and place, which generates the magnificent view of man—in history—found in the poem.

Chapter I treats the lifetime of the fictional pilgrim, Will the dreamer, in his interludes between dreams, attempting to show that the temporal progression reveals a spiritual growth. At the same time, it summarizes the themes of each vision to establish that the content of the visions is directly related to the temporal progression and spiritual growth of the dreamer. Chapter II concentrates on the typological structure of the poem, which might be considered the central contribution of the thesis, by showing how the poem recapitulates the pyramidal pattern of Christian historiography in the story of Piers. Chapter III returns to fourteenth-century English contemporaneity to explain how Langland resolved the apparent paradox of presenting actual events in all
their uniqueness while, at the same time, relating them to a highly-structured Biblical world-historical framework.
Here, as I pause and stay
Motionless and alone,
The centuries fall away
And, resting on this stone,
I partly understand
The map of Time and know
How poets of this land
Two thousand years ago
Stood here perhaps one day
Reflecting upon Time
And on the endless flow
Of water in the bay,
Translating into rhyme
All that I ever planned
But lacked the skill to say.

John Press

And I say to thee, thou art Peter,
and upon this stone I will build my Church...

Matthew xvi. 18

Petrus, id est, Christus.

Piers Plowman (B. XV, 206)
# Table of Contents

**Introduction**

Notes

**Chapter I: The Time of Will the Dreamer: The Fiction of Spiritual Biography**

Notes

**Chapter II: The Time of Piers the Plowman: The Pyramidal Pattern of Christian History**

Notes

**Chapter III: The Time of the Fourteenth Century: The Fusion of Figural Pattern and Contemporary Actuality**

Notes

**Conclusion**

**List of Works Consulted**
INTRODUCTION

Following Will the dreamer through Piers Plowman can be a hectic experience for the modern reader. Even though the poem is firmly embedded in fourteenth-century England, the reader moves backward and forward along a continuous time-line bounded only by the Creation and the Last Judgment. After being confronted, for example, by Abraham, Moses, and the Good Samaritan—all within the space of a few lines—he is suddenly placed on the streets of Jerusalem (A.D. 33) to be a witness (through the dreamer's eyes) of the historic Crucifixion, Harrowing of Hell, and Coming of the Paraclete. The fusion of historical, universal, biblical, apocalyptic, seasonal, and liturgical times—blended with the personal lifetime of the poem's persona, Will the dreamer (who represents the will of every man)\(^1\)—has contributed no small bit to the poem's unjustified reputation for chaotic formlessness. The combination in a single poem of events which took place in the most diverse times and places (without bothering about verisimilitude) is, however, not due to the author's naïveté, or carelessness, but rather to his concept of time. Interpreted in the universal framework of medieval historiography, the poem emerges beautifully structured, with Langland in complete command at all times.
Langland pictured himself as existing both in time, in fourteenth-century England, and out of time, as part of a grand divine scheme. *Piers Plowman* is fitted into a Biblical and world-historical frame, the pattern of which is the figural interpretation of history. This implies that every occurrence, in all its everyday reality, is simultaneously part of a world-historical context through which it is related to every other occurrence, and thus is to be regarded as being of all times or above all time. 2

Time for men of the Middle Ages was neither a substitute for space nor a formal condition of thought. In the architecture of medieval duration, everything rested upon two principles: the continuous creation which established the permanence of the creature and of his substantial activity; and the divine concourse which allowed him to realize himself in time. 3

...time was not a mode of duration absolutely different from permanence. It was only permanence incomplete, still in the process of achievement, and guided toward completion by the forms inherent in being....But in order for this action to become act and for this existence to become time, it was necessary not merely that they should be possible. In order to wedge themselves into actual time, they still had need of fresh help from God. All becoming in the natural order, as in the spiritual order, required a determination direct from God....Time had a direction. Time finally carried the Christian toward God. 4

The purpose of this thesis will be to further penetrate *Piers Plowman* in an effort to discern Langland's sense of man's temporality and place, which generates the magnificent view of man—in history—found in the poem.

Chapter I treats the lifetime of the fictional pilgrim, Will the dreamer, in his interludes between dreams, attempting to show that the
temporal progression reveals a spiritual growth. At the same time, it summarizes the themes of each vision, not only so that the reader may quickly review the whole sweep of the poem, in preparation for the detailed treatment of its parts in the chapters which follow, but mainly so that it may be established that the content of the visions is directly related to the temporal progression and spiritual growth of the dreamer.

Chapter II, which concentrates on the appearances of Piers the Plowman, as dreamed and discussed by Will the dreamer, treats what one might consider the central contribution of this thesis, the typological structure of the poem. Recapitulating the pyramidal pattern of Christian historiography in the story of Piers, the poem is also internally oriented towards his transformation. This chapter concentrates on the appearances of Piers the Plowman—Christ the Knight—Peter the Pope in Passus VI-VII, Passus XVI-XVIII, and Passus XIX, and pays attention to the anticipatory foreshadowings in Passus V, XIII, and XV.

Chapter III again returns to the whole poem, this time as a reflection of fourteenth-century English contemporaneity, focusing especially on references to the Norman Wars, the Great Schism, and the Black Death and recurrent plagues in an attempt to explain how Langland resolved the apparent paradox of presenting actual events in all their uniqueness and at the same time relating them to a highly-structured Biblical world-historical framework.
INTRODUCTION


4. Poulet, p. 5.
CHAPTER I

The B-text of *Piers Plowman*, on which this thesis is based, is divided into two parts:

- a) William's Vision (Visio) concerning Piers the Ploughman (Prologue through Passus VII):

- b) The Vision concerning the Vita or Life of Do-wel (Passus VIII-Passus XIV), Do-bet (Passus XV-Passus XVIII), and Do-best (Passus XIX-Passus XX).

The Visio deals primarily with *temporalia*, "the provision of food and clothing and all those major occupations which absorb most of the energies of men in civil society...the facts of life to which Holy Church refers in Passus I." Its subject is the reform of society, which must learn to regard money or worldly goods solely as the means to man's true reward, the happiness of Heaven, rather than as an end in themselves. The subject of the Vita is the spiritual life, a growth in charity such that the Church and the individual will at last be equipped to struggle with Antichrist; this spiritual pilgrimage of the Vision is set in motion by the dreamer's bewilderment over the failure of Piers to reform the natural man in the Visio.

Langland structures his poem around a series of ten dream-visions (including two dreams within dreams), which are used as a framework for the poet's ideas.
The repetitive pattern of activity achieved by having the dreamer relate how he falls asleep, awakes, and then falls asleep again, is a unifying structural device in the poem. A careful analysis of these transitional interludes, however, also reveals a steady, horizontal advance in time, which parallels, in general, the last part of the dreamer's life. Through this time sequence, Langland lets us actually watch Will mature, not only chronologically but spiritually as a result of his visions, and is able to communicate aesthetically the tortuous sense of weariness and, sometimes, seeming purposelessness of one man's arduous search for the truth. Unlike Bunyan's Christian, who makes a pilgrimage in space, from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, Langland's dreamer makes a pilgrimage in time.

The Visio comprises two dreams. The dreamer who, at the beginning of the Prologue, sets out in search of marvels is spiritually unsanctified as he stumbles by mistake into the dream-world of experience. The world, as Will the dreamer sees it in the Prologue, is a comic stage where men madly pursue their own affairs, regardless of the Tower and the Dungeon which stand so close to them. Men of every profession are bent on making money, blind to the needs of others.
Before long the crowd clears, and the dreamer suddenly sees a dramatic episode representing the setting up of the State, the making of the original social contract, intended to regulate human conduct by law and order. With the inconnection of a dream, this episode dissolves into a mock-heroic council of rats and mice, scheming to hold in check a troublesome cat; parodying the proceedings of the House of Commons in his own day (see Chapter III), Langland here presents a facetious picture of the futility of political strife. In spite of all the debates in the Rat-Parliament, the royal cat continues his frolics unchecked; countless lawyers plead at the bar, while the people remain lawless; and the field of folk passes again before the dreamer's eyes in a confused hub-hub of speeches, songs, and street-cries.

The Lady Holicherche, who comes in Passus I to interpret the dreamer's vision, is the perfect heavenly Church, the daughter of God, and the final reward of the just; and it was she who first received Will the dreamer at the font: "I vnderfonge the firste . and the feyth tau3te" (I, 76). Though she calls him "Sone" (I, 5), he does not recognize her until she tells him who she is; and then, recalling the baptismal grace which he has lost, he bows before her and asks the crucial question from which the action of the poem springs: "...telle me this ilke/ How I may saue my soule..." (I, 83-84). Her reply is a simple summary statement of the ideas underlying the whole Christian system, especially distinguishing "Treuthe" from "Fals." When the dreamer asks to know Falsehood, the scene shifts from the quiet serenity of Holicherche's sermon back into
the hub-hub of fourteenth-century England, as she shows him the deception that lies at the heart of English society in the person of Meed, the woman who has usurped her own position both in the Church and State. In the following allegory, Meed represents cupidity, or the inordinate love of temporal goods for their own sake; and her marriage with Fraud signifies the wedding of payment or reward to bribery and corruption, forces which dominate English society. The King himself, who also represents the human will, is not entirely corrupted, but he is surrounded by courtiers, priests, and judges who seek Meed's favors; and it is only when Conscience appears in Passus III that the full extent of the evils of Meed is revealed to him. The tide begins to turn against Meed after this appearance, but the rule of law is impossible without the support of the whole realm (the reform of the State depends upon the reform of individual wills); and the dreamer awakes as Reason goes off to preach to the people and bring them all to confession and repentance.

At the end of the dreamer's first vision, the field of folk have rejected Meed, and harmony has been established by the concord between the king, his counselors, and the commons in the political realm, and by the reconciliation of will, reason, conscience, and the lower faculties in the psychological realm. The dreamer goes but a "fourlonge" (V, 5) before he falls asleep again to begin the second dream of the Visio. In it, the field of folk indicate their change of will in the famous confession of the seven deadly sins in Passus V, after which, led by Piers the Plowman, they begin the pilgrimage to Truth, union with God. In Passus VI, the
pilgrimage is transformed into the plowing of the half-acre, in which the field of folk attempt to fulfill the promise to amend their lives. Their lower faculties gain control again, however, and they are threatened with death in the person of Hunger. They are saved in Passus VII when Truth sends a pardon; Piers and the priest debate about its meaning and awaken the dreamer, who then comments upon the main themes of his second vision.

The first two dreams, or the Visio, not only form an obvious artistic whole; they also have unity of time and place. The action of these first two dreams takes place within a single day. Dressed like a hermit ("In habite as an heremite, vnholie of workes," Prol., 3), Will the dreamer falls asleep on a May morning, with the sun in the east: "As I bihelde in-to the est, an hiegh to the sonne" (Prol., 13). He awakens for a very short while, dreams again, and wakes up from the second dream in the late afternoon: "And seighe the sonne in the south, sitte that time" (VII, 140). Falling asleep in the Malvern Hills at the beginning of the first dream, he awakens there, "meteles and moneles" (VII, 141), when the second has ended; and we hear no more of the Malvern Hills in the poem. After the second waking, Will the dreamer meditates about the significance of his dreams, referring back to Scripture for a figural justification:

Many tyme this meteles hath maked me to studye
Of that I seigh slepyng, if it so be my ste,

Ac I haue no sauoure in songewarie, for I se it ofte faille;
This figural mode of thought, the appeal to a Biblical event as type of a contemporary one, is the most interesting time structure in the poem, and will be fully treated in the following chapters of this thesis.

The Vision concerning the Vita of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest, is made up of six further dreams and two dreams within dreams. Dreams III, IV, and V are concerned with Dowel (Passus VIII-XIV); dreams VI, VII, and VIII with Dobet (Passus XV-XVIII); and dreams IX and X with Dobest (Passus XIX-XX).

The third dream (VIII-XII), the first part of Dowel, is essentially concerned with the movement of the mind into itself, a kind of psychological exploration; as Lawlor says: "The author of the Vita de Dowel may with justice be regarded as one of our greatest poets of the activity of thought, in all its arbitrary and non-consecutive movement. Langland, in this great section of the poem, admits us to thought in its very context, not its ordered expression: as we read we are thinking, caught in the ebb and flow of his mind...."

For this reason, perhaps, the poem only moves
a few months in time ("al a somer sesoun") in this third dream.

Still robed in russet, Will roams about trying to find Dowel in the world, asking everyone he meets "what man he mìste be" (VIII, 5). No one can tell him anything, until he meets two Minorites on a Friday, whose smug answer is: "Amonge vs...that man is dwellynge/ And euere hath...and euere shal here-after" (VIII, 18-19). Their jumbled parable (VIII, 27-56) doesn't satisfy Will at all, and he decides to search for Dowel by himself. He soon falls asleep and meets Thought, who says: "I haue suwed the this seuene 3ere . say thow me no rather?" (VIII, 75).

Even though the dreamer is much older here, Thought's statement that he has followed Will for seven years, if not meaningless, could possibly refer to the beginning of intellectual activity and moral responsibility at the age of seven.⁸ Since, according to all the spiritual writers, coming to know oneself is a principle feature of beginning the spiritual life proper, Will's meeting with Thought at the beginning of his search for Dowel is most significant.⁹ At this point, Will is without intellectual direction; concomitantly, the untutored will is without grace. Thought, therefore, may represent those ideas concerning the way to achieve Truth of which Will is at the moment capable, describing Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest in terms of externals, with no suggestion of the necessary preparation of the will for good action through faith and grace. ¹⁰

Trying to rely only on his intellectual faculties, Will doesn't get far in this dream. In arid, and sometimes quite tedious, intellectual discussions, he meets Witte (Intelligence), Study and Clergye (Learning),
but is only interested in them if they can help him find where Dowel dwells in the world. In other words, attracted to the idea of learning, he does not seek the fruits of thought and study for their own sake. Submitting to Study only too readily, he rushes to pursue Clergye; and after hearing the hypocrisy of the learned attacked, especially those in religious orders, and discussing whether good works are necessary for salvation, he exasperatedly delivers a long harangue to his teachers, in which he comes to the conclusion that learning is merely a hindrance to salvation, and that men are predestined either to Heaven or to Hell.

At this crucial point, when the impasse between Will and Scripture and Clergye, arising because of his scepticism about learning and morality, must be resolved, Will falls into the first inner dream of the poem (XI, 5-396). Triggered off by Scripture's rebuke that, "There are many who know much, and themselves do not know" (XI, 2a), Will falls into a deep retrospective swoon:

And in a wynkyng wrath. wex I aslepe.
A mereuellouse meteles. mette me thanne,
That I was rauisshe riȝt there. and Fortune me fette,
And in-to the londe of Longynge. allone she me brouȝte,
And in a myroure that hiȝt Mydlerd. she mad me to biholde.

(XI, 4-8)

Will easily gives in to Fortune and her maids (Concupiscencia-carnis, Coueuytise-of-eyes, and Pryde-of-parfyte-lyuynge), who follow him in a life of pleasure (without morality and learning) for "fourty wynter. and a fyfte more...Tyl I forȝat 3outhe. and 3arn in-to elde" (XI, 46-59). When he begins to grow old within the dream, however, he sees that Fortune and the friars desert him; and that Lewte (Loyalty, Good Faith) appears
to advise him; and his fears for his own salvation are eased by that of Trajan, the pagan emperor who is seen to have been released from Hell for his good works and faith. After Kynde (Nature) has shown him all the wonders of creation, and Reason appears to rebuke him for his presumption in questioning God's will, Will awakens from his first inner dream in shame and confusion to find Imaginatyf (creative reflection) standing by. Whereas it is admittedly possible to regard this inner dream as a projection into the future, it becomes much more forceful when interpreted as the retrospective meditations of a man in his middle years.

At this point in the poem, Will is still not really sincere and is trying to evade his responsibility. When he awakens from the inner swoon, therefore, Imaginatyf exhorts him to again think about his final judgment and repent while there is yet time:

'I am Ymagynatyf, quod he. 'idel was I neuere, Thou3e I sitte bi my-self. in sikenesse ne in helthe. I haue folwed the in feithe. this fyue and fourty wyntre, And many tymes haue moeued the. to thinke on thine ende, And how fele fern3eres are faren. and so fewe to come, And of thi wylde wantounesse. tho thow 3onge were, To amende it in thi myddel age. lest mi3te the faylled In thyne olde elde...

Amende the while thow my3te. thow hast ben warned ofte With poustees of pestilences. with pouerte and with angres; And with thi3e bitter baleyses. god beteth his dere childeren....

(XII, 1-12)

In the following psychological action, Imaginatyf defends intelligence and learning and the moral action to which they lead; and his last words, before he vanishes and the first dream of Dowel ends (Dream III), are words of praise for wit and wisdom (XII, 290-293).
The third and fourth dreams, those introductory to Dowel, have focused on one activity of the intellectual soul, the activity of knowing, with concentration on showing how man knows the good. The next dream (Dream V) reveals how man does the good. Many years pass in the waking interlude which serves as a bridge between these dreams. Changing his hermit's robes for those of a mendicant, Will wanders about "wites nerehande" but still "fre" (he has not yet submitted himself to any regular discipline), and considers the lesson of the visions he has just experienced:

\begin{verbatim}
And I awaked there-with . wites nerehande,
And as a freke that fre were.. forth gan I walke
In manere of a mendynaunt . many a 3ere after,
And of this metyng many tyme . moche thou3t I hadde.
First, how Fortune me failled . at my most nede,
And how that Elde manaced me . my3t we euere meten;
And how that freris folwed . folke that was riche,
And folke that was pore . at litel prys thei sette,

And how that lewed men ben ladde . but owre lorde hem helpe,
Thorugh vnkonnynge curatours . to incurable peynes.
And how that Ymagynatyf . in dremeles me tolde,
Of Kynde and of his connynge . and how curteise he is to bestes,

And sithen how Ymagynatif seyde . vix iustus saluabitur,
And whan he had seyde so . how sodeelynlich he passed.
\end{verbatim}

(XIII, 1-20)

Dream V begins when Will, still in pursuit of Dowel, is invited to dinner by Conscience to meet Clergye, who had withdrawn from Will's company when he had shown impatience (Passus X). Will can now see the earthly Church in its true perspective, since conscience, as a mental activity, acts as mediate between the practical intellect and will, bringing evidence of right action from the intellect to the will. This entire fifth dream is controlled by Conscience, who contrives in the banquet scene to
show the difference between true and false use of knowledge. In addition to Will, the guests at the banquet include a pompous Master of Divinity and his man, Clergye, and Patience who appears quite unexpectedly "in pilgrymes clothes" (XIII, 29) and begs food as a hermit. The master's covetousness is immediately made evident when Scripture serves him a meal "Of Austyn . of Ambrose . of alle the foure euangelistes" (XIII, 39), and he and his man prefer instead: "mete of more coste . mortrewes and potages/ Of that men mys-wonne . thei made hem wel at ese" (XIII, 41-42). In contrast, Patience and Will, seated away from the main table, are offered scraps of Scripture, directed towards Will's moral reformation. The central point on which all the banquet contrasts rest is that knowledge should be a means to further spiritual development—otherwise it is prostituted. Langland abhors the purely intellectual approach to matters of faith, as exemplified by Wit and the Doctor. After dinner, Will finally poses his question to the Doctor of "what is Dowel" but receives a very shallow answer, which points up the divine's vacuousness. When posed the same question by Conscience, Clergye declines to answer, replying that he must wait for Piers Ploughman to "preue this in dede" (XIII, 132), and Patience answers with a riddle, saying that he possesses a powerful charm containing Dowel. Moved by Patience's words, and over the protests of the others, Conscience goes forth with Patience as a pilgrim. They soon meet Haukyn, or Activa Vita, the key character of this dream, who represents the field of folk dreamed about in the Visio; he is also the tarnished mirror of Will's soul, and, by examining his past spiritual life,
prepares Will for the encounter of Anima, his own soul, in the next dream.

Will the dreamer wakes after Haukyn's confession (Passus XIV), and the interlude in the real world which opens Dobet (Dream VI) shows Will half insane because he still lacks the knowledge of Dowel which he has been seeking:

Ac after my wakyng. it was wonder lange,
Ar I couth kyndely. knowe what was Dowel.
And so my witte wex and wanyed. till I a fole were,
And somme lakket my lyf. allowed it fewe,
And leten me for a lorel. and loth to reuerencen
Lordes or ladyes. or any lyf elles,
As persones in pellure. with pendauntes of syluer;
To seriauntz ne to suche. seyde nou3te ones,
'God loke 30w. lordes!'. ne louted faire;
That folke helden me a fole. and in that folye I raued,
Tyl Resoun hadde reuthe on me. and rokked me aslepe....
(XV, 1-11)

Professor Frank feels that the talk about Dowel in the interlude seems intended to prepare for the definition of charity by Anima, which gives the Dreamer at last his "kynde knowynge" of Dowel, and he attributes his strange behavior and irreverence for the rich to his intense desire to know the good.¹⁴ Professors Huppe and Robertson, however, offer another interpretation:

The episode of the Friar and Hawkin demonstrated the weakness of the church militant....When Will awakes at the end of Passus XIV, therefore, he has still not learned Dowel perfectly. He has learned not to be deceived by externals of dress and worldly status, but his knowledge does not yet extend to a reasonable behavior with regard to those who glorify temporal clothing around him. In his confusion, he gives the impression of being a fool, until Reason has pity on him and puts him to sleep for further instruction. Since to know Dowel 'kyndely' the whole man is required, Will meets Anima,
a combination of mind, memory, reason, the senses, love, and the spirit, all various aspects of the soul. With these faculties, Will is able to see in one glance the laws of God and the imperfect reflection of those laws in the world; he can evaluate the world in the perspective of eternity.\(^{15}\)

Passus XV, the first of the sixth dream, is that in which finit

Dowel, et incipit Dobet; its concentration on the covetousness which has crowded out charity in every last corner of Christian society is reminiscent of the Prologue and prophetic of the attack of Antichrist in Passus XIX-XX; its insistence that charity must be discovered in the dreamer's own soul prepares him for temporally abandoning his society for the contemplative life (Passus XVI-XVIII), which strengthens him for that final onslaught. There is a marked difference in atmosphere in Passus XV: the action is simple, direct, and uncomplicated by argument, interruption, or multiplicity of figures. Instead the dreamer draws into himself, listening to the voice of his own soul, Anima.

In the first of this dream's four parts (1-67a), Will is shown to have only partially understood the teaching about patient poverty in the previous dream; and his first encounter with Anima shows him persisting in intellectual curiosity about spiritual forces rather than reforming himself for their reception. His attitude is characteristic of his society, as we see in the second part (68-144), where Anima pictures the covetousness of the contemporary clergy. In the third part (145-385), Anima teaches Will the correct understanding of patient poverty while answering his question, "What is Charite," proving that the latter is nowhere to be found in contemporary Christianity because the covetous clergy neglect their commission to spread His message, and advising Will that he must
search for it within himself. In the fourth and last part (386-601a), Anima concludes the searching analysis of fourteenth-century society and shows that while the Saracens have faith in God and the Jews hope in a Messiah, they lack the third theological virtue, charity, just as the Christians do, and for that very reason. It is these three virtues, in addition to the life of Christ, these being the standard topics of the contemplative life, upon which the dreamer will meditate in the last two passus (XVI and XVII) of this dream.

Anima's mention of Piers' name in the disclosure that charity is a tree growing in the garden of the human heart, which is cared for by the human will under the supervision of Piers Plowman (XVI, 15-17), sends Will into another deep swoon, which begins the second inner dream (Dream VII) of the poem. In contrast to the first dream within a dream, this is an apocalyptic vision—functioning in the poem in a figural sense, as fulfillment of Repentance's prophecy in V, 488ff., and foreshadowing the great drama in XVIII. While Will is in this swoon (XVI, 18-166), Piers shows him the roots of the tree of charity, figuratively the three persons of the Trinity, and explains their combined action in fighting the world, the flesh, and the devil for the tree's fruit (just men), particularly by their manifestation in Christ, the one just man, whose life is briefly surveyed.

Upon waking from this inner dream, Will no longer seeks Dowel but Piers; and, now back in Dream VI, he meets Abraham (Faith) who instructs him (XVI, 167-275) about the Trinity and the Redemption through
analogies and typological events of his own life as described in *Genesis*,
and tells him that even just men cannot be saved until the coming of the
Redeemer, whom he himself has returned to earth to seek. In Passus
XVII, Will meets Moses (Hope) and the Good Samaritan (Charity), who
complete the analogical presentation of the Trinity, foreshadow the action
of the Redemption, and instruct Will in the practical and moral application
of their teachings. In this whole section of Dobet, comprising dreams
six and seven, there is no reference to the field of folk or to the spiritual
conditions of contemporary society, making it unlike every other part of
the poem. It is concerned, instead, with instructing Will about the two
traditional Christian mysteries: the Trinity and the Redemption (the *Vita
Christi*: Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection).

Will awakens from this first dream of Dobet, covering Dreams VI
and VII in the poem, as the Good Samaritan rides off toward Jerusalem
where, in Dream VIII (Passus XVIII), he will uncover Christ in Piers' flesh.

Wolleward and wete-shoed. went I forth after,
As a reccheles renke. that of no wo reccheth,
And 3ede forth lyke a lorel. al my lyf-tyme,
Tyl I wex wery of the worlde. and wylned eft to slepe,
And lened me to a lenten. and longe tyme I slepte;
And of Crystes passioun and penaunce. the peple that of-rau3te,
Reste me there, and rutte faste. tyl ramis palmarum....
(XVIII, 1-7)

No longer dressed as a hypocrite, in shepherd's clothing with the wool
outside, Will is now a penitent, the wool turned toward his skin to in-
dicate that he is truly reckless of worldly woe. He is no longer an
idiote; as a result of his meeting with Faith and Hope and his instruction
by Charity, Will is now prepared to encounter, with something approaching understanding, the full contemplation of the Redemption. He is called "lorel," literally a lost one, because he has not yet found salvation; that is to come in the Redemption. Weary of the world, he begins to reflect on the liturgical services connected with Palm Sunday.

Since Will's meeting with Abraham on "a Mydlenten Sondaye" (XVI, 172), the poem's action has developed within the rhythm of the liturgical year; at the beginning of this sixth dream, he tells us that he "lened me to a lenten" (XVIII, 5), and his dream begins with Palm Sunday. As the seventh dream, Passus XVIII, the last of the mental pilgrimage, begins, the reader soon realizes that the setting is the streets of Jerusalem (A.D. 33). As O'Grady points out, "Into the temporal narrative, Langland introduces the timeless story of the life of Christ, the center of the contemplative or meditative life, and through an evocative recreation of its historical moment, impresses its permanent meaning upon Will the Dreamer."17 Shortly after Will falls asleep, the events of Christ's passion and death are presented under the figure of a tournament; and tourney suddenly becomes journey as Christ the Light glides toward the gates of Hell, and Will, like Dante before him, descends there, only to view the Harrowing of Hell. After the victory of Christ, the fulfillment of Book's prophecy, Will creeps on his knees to honor the cross whose meaning he has finally understood. Having moved through Lent to Easter, the eighth dream closes on a note of hope as Easter morning dawns (going from the darkness of Hell into the daylight of the Resurrection), and, in
a brilliant use of time, Will, having just contemplated the significance of the historical Holy Week in Jerusalem, has awakened on Easter morning in fourteenth-century England.

Tyl the daye dawed, this damaiseles daunced,
That men rongen to the resurexioun, and ri3t with that I waked,
And called Kitte my wyf, and Kalote my dou3ter—
'Ariseth and reuerenceth, goddes resurrexioun,
And crepeth to the crosse on knees, and kisseth it for a Iuwel!

(XVIII, 424-428)

He has reached the plenitude of his own life, but is now hopeful, because he has followed the Apostle's injunction that the spiritual development of each man in Christ should follow the course of Christ's development to the point that he reaches the plenitude of His adult age. In contemplating the Crucifixion, Will has really seen his own past, because he now realizes that "once for all" Christ died for him. He is now ready to participate in the Eucharist, the sacred time par excellence of Christianity.

As the new year and Will's new life begin, he dresses himself "derely" and goes to church to receive holy communion. His "dere" clothes are interpreted by Huppe and Robertson as spiritual garments which have been cleansed by the Redemption: "The purity of his robe of faith has been restored: he is dressed as a true wedding guest in charity. In this condition he is able to go to church 'to here holy the masse and to be houseled after.' That is, having been penitent for his sins, he is able to receive the eucharist and to benefit by the powers of Dobest." In the middle of the Mass, however, he falls asleep and begins his first dream of Dobest (Dream IX). The essential point about the ninth and tenth dreams, the *Vita de Dobest* (Passus XIX and XX), is that Will, after his lengthy
meditation on the meaning of the theological virtues and the mysteries of the Trinity and the Redemption, once again returns to active life and dreams about contemporary society. With the model of Christ Himself before him, having finally begun to learn the meaning of loving his neighbor (a subject with which most of the practical instruction of the Dobet section was concerned), he dreams of Antichrist leading an attack on the field of folk which is now seen as the mystical body of the Church.

Passus XIX (Dream IX) is a transitory one and is explicitly labelled: Passus xix, et explicit Dobet et incipit Dobest. Will dreams that he sees Piers covered with blood and carrying a cross, and Conscience tells him it is Christ, "conqueroure of Crystene." At his request, Conscience explains the meaning of the name "Christ" and connects it with the concept "conqueror," the power to bind and loose all men's sins, a power which He places in the keeping of Piers the Plowman, now to be understood as Christ's reeve, Peter the Pope. While Conscience is still instructing Will about Christ and the cross, he witnesses the Pentecost miracle as Grace descends to dispense Christ's graces to the field of folk in preparation for the coming clash with Antichrist, which is predicted. The first attack on the Church follows: Pride attempts to destroy the roots of the cardinal virtues by coloring them with sophistry, but is overcome by the field of folk's contrition. No sooner does the Church seem safe, however, than four of its members (a brewer, a vicar, a lord, and a king) sophistically mislead the others.

Awakening from the ninth dream just before the appearance of the
allegorical figure Need, who joins them, Will comments upon it; and the whole mood of the poem has suddenly changed:

Thanne as I went by the way. whan I was thus awaked, Heuy-chered I 3ede. and elynge in herte; I ne wiste where to ete. ne at what place. And it neighed nyeghe the none. and with Nede I mette, That afronted me foule. and faltour me called. (XX, 1-5)

Will, who has now witnessed and understood God's scheme of salvation for mankind, is terribly depressed by the revelation of the overwhelming corruption of the people through worldly interests. The optimistic mood with which Will, as a whole man, healed by his vision of the Redemption, went to church on Easter morning has disappeared. It is also a critical point for him because, growing old, it is nearing "the none" or the Day of Judgment, as well as generally for the folk since they live in the Last Age. 20

Falling into his tenth and last dream, Passus XX, Will views the second attack on the Church in which Antichrist is assisted by Fortune and the seven deadly sins and every other vice, while Conscience calls on Kynde, Elde, Deth, and Clergye in a vain attempt to make the field of folk repent and save itself from destruction. Will, still the representative of the field of folk, recounts his own tribulations and his perseverance through following Kynde's counsel of love, poverty, and repentance in the following unforgettable picture of the dreamer's old age:
And Elde anone after me. and ouer myne heed 3ede,
And made me balled bifoire. and bare on the croune,
So harde he 3ede ouer myn hed. it wil be seen eure.
'Sire euel-ytau3te Elde,' quod I. 'vnhende go with the!
Sith whanne was the way. ouer mennes hedes?
Haddestow be hende,' quod I. 'thow woldest haue asked leue!
'3e! leue lordeyne!' quod he. and leyde on me with age,
And hitte me vnder the ere. vnethe may ich here;
He buffeted me aboute the mouthe. and bette out my tethe,
And gyued me in goutes. I may nou3te go at large.
And of the wo that I was in. my wyf had reuthe,
And wisshed ful witterly. that I were in heuene.

And as I seet in this sorwe. I say how Kynde passed,
And Deth drowgh niegh me. for drede gan I quake,
And cried to Kynde. out of care me brynge.

'3if thow wilt ben ywroken . wende in-to Vnite,
And holde the there eure. tyl I sende for the,
And loke thow conne somme crafte . ar thow come thennes.'
'Conseille me, Kynde,' quod I. 'what crafte is best to lerne?'
'Lerne to loue,' quod Kynde. 'and leue of alle othre.'

(XX, 182-207)

At the poem's end, with Piers having disappeared just as suddenly as he first appeared at V, 544, Will the dreamer's Conscience resolves to

"walken as wyde as al the worlde lasteth, / To seke Piers the Plowman..."

(XX, 379-380).
CHAPTER I


3. For the interpretation of the poem as an autobiography of the poet's spiritual life, see Otto Mensendieck, Characterentwicklung und ethisch-theologische Anschauungen des Verfassers von Piers the Plowman (London, 1900); E. Talbot Donaldson, Piers Plowman: The C-Text and Its Poet (New Haven, 1949); Robert Worth Frank, Jr., Piers Plowman and the Scheme of Salvation (New Haven, 1957); and Howard Meroney, "The Life and Death of Longe Wille," ELH 17 (1950), 1-55.


6. Frank, Piers Plowman and Scheme of Salvation, p. 19.


8. Frank, Piers Plowman and Scheme of Salvation, p. 50.


16. Robertson and Huppé, pp. 211-212.

17. O'Grady, "Piers Plowman and Penance," Ch. VI, p. 88.


20. Robertson and Huppé, p. 228.
CHAPTER II

All Christian theology, in its innermost essence, is Biblical history because God reveals Himself at a point on a straight line of an ordinary process in time, and from that line He controls not only the whole of history, but also that which happens in nature. This history is also completely Christocentric, since, as soon as the historical work of Jesus of Nazareth was regarded as the full expression of the divine revelatory action, the necessity inevitably resulted of combining all remaining divine revelatory action with it on one unified Christ-line to present a single "Biblical history." Unless it is realized that Christ has existed "from the beginning," the magnificent unity of this whole time-line would be destroyed. We cannot begin to speak of Christ only at some fixed point, as though previously we could speak only of God, without reference to Christ: "The Pre-existent One, the One who yesterday was crucified, he who today exercises hidden lordship, he who returns at the turn of the ages—they are all one; it is the same Christ, but in the execution of his functions in the successive stages of time in the redemptive history,"¹

Langland automatically presupposed this unified interpretation of redemptive history; it gave meaning to all that he said in Piers Plowman. He regarded the time of the Creation entirely from the position of Christ:
But criste kingene kynge. kni3ted ten,
Cherubyn and seraphin. suche seuene and an-othre,
And 3af hem my3te in his maieste. the muryer hem thou3te;
And ouer his mene meyne. made hem archangeles,
Tau3te hem bi the Trinitee. treuth to knowe,
To be buxome at his biddyng. he bad hem nou3te elles.
(I, 105-110)

He later tells us that "Clerkis kenne me that Cryst is in alle places"
(XV, 156); and doubting Thomas gives final witness to Christ's omni-
temporality when he acknowledges that Christ "laste shalt euere" (XIX,
170).

This unique Christocentric interpretation of history demanded
that all events be regarded as either prefiguring or commenting upon the
historical life of Christ. Immersed in the figural concept of history, the
medieval Christian saw events as taking place not only in a pattern of suc-
cession—one after another, but in a pattern of simultaneity—one in another.
This inhering of one historical event in another helped to illuminate both,
revealing at the same time the pattern of God's activity in the world; for
every future model, though incomplete as history, is already fulfilled in
God and has existed from all eternity in His providence. 2

Jewish law and Jewish history, interpreted Christologically, were
regarded as phenomenal prophecy prefiguring Christ and His works in the
New Testament. The two testaments were never considered as two sepa-
rate books, but, as de Lubac describes them, "deux 'Economies,' deux
'Dispensations,' deux 'Alliances,' lesquelles ont donné naissance à deux
peuples, à deux régimes, établis par Dieu l'un après l'autre pour ordonner
les rapports de l'homme avec lui." 3 Even though the first exists in order
to prepare for the second, this does not account for their respective titles:

Le Nouveau Testament ne tire pas son nom du seul fait qu'il vient en second dans le temps; il n'est pas seulement 'moderne'; il est le dernier, au sens absolu: novissimum; novum et æternum. Il est définitif, éternel .... 'Alors que l'Ancien Testament ne connaît jamais de présent que par référence à l'avenir, le Nouveau connaît, lui, un présent réel, que rien ne saurait mettre en question .... La Nouvelle Alliance ne se répète pas; elle est conclue une fois pour toutes.'

In other words, the essential facts of the entire past process from the Creation onwards, as reported in the Old Testament, remain unchanged but are completely reinterpreted. The Creation story handed down in Genesis, for example, continues to hold its place as a revelation of God; to the facts reported there, nothing is added and nothing is taken away. The new feature consists exclusively in the fact that in Christ we are told that this entire event of the Creation is to be interpreted from that mid-point. As Paul writes (II Cor. iii.14), a veil lay over the books of Moses as long as this understanding was not revealed; in Christ this veil is lifted, for it is now possible to read and understand Moses from that center in Christ.

De la Parole de Dieu, consignée dans la Bible, il faut obtenir l'intelligence spirituelle.... En elle (cette intelligence qui pénètre sous la lettre) nous trouvons le repos de la lumière intérieure, en elle seule nous admirons toute la beauté et nous goûtons toute la saveur de la révélation.... L'esprit n'est pas séparé de la lettre, il est contenu et d'abord caché en elle. La lettre est bonne et nécessaire, parce qu'elle conduit à l'esprit.... Si, dans l'ancien Israël, le pontife portait deux tuniques, c'était pour signifier aux générations à venir cette double acception de la Loi divine, selon la lettre et selon l'esprit. L'intelligence spirituelle vient ôter le voile de la lettre, ou le voile qu'est la lettre, afin d'en dégager l'esprit....
As a result of the tentativeness of events in this figural interpretation, all history remains open and questionable, and points to something still concealed. These figures are not only tentative, fragmentary reality, but—the tentative form of something that has always been and always will be—they are also veiled eternal reality. The purest picture of this simultaneity of prophecy in history (the concretely present, the veiled and tentative, the eternal and supratemporal elements contained in the figures) is presented in the Eucharist, the sacrament of the sacrifice, the Paschal Lamb, the figura Christi. This sacrament of the Passover, symbol as well as figure, having existed historically since the first Exodus was established in the Old Covenant, is fulfilled historically in the Last Supper, which is also the figura of Christ's historical crucifixion and resurrection—and anticipates final fulfillment in the Messianic Banquet which Christ will eat with his people in the Kingdom of God after the Parousia.

The use of this figural time structure allowed Langland's chronology a primal-eschatological sweep, and produced some magnificent Messianic prophecies. The prophetic image of the Priest-King who reconciles man with God and introduces him into the divine Kingdom is evoked early in the poem.

I Conscience knowe this . for kynde witt me it tau3te,
That resoun shal regne . and rewmes gouerne;

.......................... .......................
Ac kynde loue shal come 3it . and conscience togideres,
And make of lawe a laborere . suche loue shal arise,
And such a pees amonge the peple . and a perfittrewthe,
That Iewes shal wene in here witte . and waxen wonder glade,
That Moises or Messie . be come in-to this erthe,
And er this fortune falle, fynde men shal the worstes,
By six sonnes and a schippe, and half a shef of arwes;
And the myddel of a mone, shal make the Iewes to torne,
And saracenes for that si3te. shulle synge gloria in excelsis, etc.,
For Makomet and Mede. myshappe shal that tyme....

(III, 282-327)

The "myddel of a mone" refers, of course, to the Easter full moon. The

gist of this prediction of the state of the world at the millenium is that,

before the Kingdom shall come, the gospel must be preached to the entire

world. The idea of a millenium, derived from Apocalypse (xx. 1-3) in

which Satan is bound for one thousand years, had existed in Christian

thought since its beginning—and was frequently interpreted in the Middle

Ages as covering the whole period between the First and Second Advents. 8

The following prophecy concerning the clergy can also be inter-

preted either literally or eschatologically. Because the poem bears wit-

ness to Langland's feeling that the clergy had forfeited their God-given

responsibility, however, it is possible that the following prophecy directly

concerns their final judgment:

Ac there shal come a kyng, and confesse 30w religiouses,
And bete 30w, as the bible telleth, for brekyng of 30wre reule,
And amende monyales (nuns), monkes and chanouns,
And putten hem to her penaunce...

And thanne shal the abbot of Abyndoun, and alle his issu for euere
Haue a knokke of a kyng, and incurable the wounde.
That this worth soth, seke 3e, that oft ouer-se the bible...
Ac ar that kynge come. Cayme shal awake.
Ac Dowel shal dyngen hym adoune, and destruyen his my3te.

(X, 317-330)

Crystallizing around the historical life of Christ, this medieval

theology of history structured all events like a pyramid—leading up to and

away from this crucial mid-point in historical time. And, since the

essence of Christian doctrine is that we must all be recapitulated in Christ,
this typology came to be analogously applied to the actions of every man, forming the basis of the *imitatio vitæ Christi*.

Containing some foreshadowings of the life of Christ in its early passus, then leading up to His coming, death, and resurrection in Passus XVIII, and finally returning to the fourteenth-century field of folk in the last two passus, *Piers Plowman* seems to be organized in accordance with medieval typology and its counterpart, the analogous recapitulation of the time line of redemptive history in the life of the individual and his society. We witnessed, in the previous chapter, the recapitulation of this pyramidal pattern in the dreamer's spiritual progress, when Will reached his plenitude in the contemplation of Christ's passion in Passus XVIII, and then reported and commented upon his visions of fourteenth-century English society in the last two passus. Langland's society, however, when viewed in the context of simultaneity mentioned above, becomes a more complex matter, because any contemporary medieval situation could be, and indeed often was, seen as happening not only, linear-historically, in the era of the New Law, but as analogously recapitulating the whole pyramid of history: Old Law, Coming of Christ, New Law. This kind of interpretation was almost necessitated since, while Christ's fulfillment of the Old Law had been perfect, that of His followers could not be. Thus sinning medieval man or society could be looked upon as forfeiting the grace of Baptism and reverting to the Old Law; after confession (the Coming of Christ in that it depended on His action in history at this moment), the man or society, having received grace, was once
again living according to the New Law. This fundamental analogy must be understood so that the irony of the last two passus in the poem can be fully appreciated. Historically, that is temporally, the fourteenth-century field of folk was living in the New Law. Yet, they are depicted through Passus XV as a society in sin, a society which has not yet realized the meaning of Christ's coming, and has, analogously, reverted to the Old Law. Although Will the dreamer, one sinful member of fourteenth-century society, undergoes a change of heart and passes over to the New Law, creeping toward Christ's cross and kissing it "for a Iuwel" (XVIII, 428) on Easter Sunday morning (after envisioning Christ's passion and death in Passus XVI and XVIII), Passus XIX and XX return to a sinful fourteenth-century society for which the meaning of the cross has been destroyed. The inherence of simultaneity no longer intersected with the movement of succession, the Coming of Christ, the way of salvation, has not inaugurated a New Law, but has been used by the clergy as a way of reestablishing the Old Law, the way of personal gain.

The most obvious example in Piers Plowman of this pyramidal structure of redemptive history is realized in the life of Piers, the central character of the poem. When Piers makes his first appearance in the poem, he is described as Truth's "folwar al this fifty wyntre" (V, 549); and we find that he is not only a plowman, but a digger, a tailor, and tinker as well. Later in the poem he appears as a knight and a priest, illustrating Langland's social vision of the oneness of all men in Christ. Piers as the representative of Christ in every man, is everyman. When
Christ dons Piers' armor, *humana natura*, in Passus XVIII to joust with the devil, however, Piers also symbolizes the humanity which Christ assumed in order to adopt man and make him a child of God. The whole movement of the poem, through the pattern of Piers' development, recapitulates this pattern of medieval typology. The following detailed analysis will show that Piers foreshadows, or prefigures, Christ in Passus VI-VII; that Christ, in Passus XVIII, takes on Piers' body, *humana natura*; and, as the result of Christ's death in Piers' body, the Piers in Passus XIX-XX becomes an imitator of Christ and, as Christ's "procurator and reve" (XIX, 253), goes through the world to dispense the grace of Christ's pardon. The various appearances of Piers in the poem are strategically timed to emphasize this transformation; and internal anticipatory hints orient the poem towards these appearances.  

Langland's imaginative use of the plowing imagery also helps to clarify the change in character, and points to the title of the poem.

The structure of the poem, then, is greatly clarified if the reader will regard, according to medieval typology, the Piers of Passus V-VII as an Old Testament type figure of Christ; like Moses, for example, he is a good man, the leader of the people, and yet a sinner (VI, 255ff.). Although living in the fourteenth-century, as the many topical allusions attest, he is a type of Christ before the Coming. In Passus XIX, Piers is still a fourteenth-century man, but he is now an imitator of Christ after the Coming. As a priest, the power of the continual and perpetual Coming—grace—is in his hands (XIX, 253).  

The best illustration of
this conversion can be found in the contrast between Passus VI and Passus XIX. Piers, the good plowman who is still living in the Old Law because he has not yet realized the full meaning of Truth's pardon, agrees to provide food for "alkyn crafty men" who know how to "lyuen in treuthe"—except Jack the juggler, Janet of the stews, Daniel the dice-player, Doll the bawd, Friar Rogue and his ilk, and Robin the ribald with his bawdy jokes (VI, 72-75). Piers the Pope, however, as mediator of the New Covenant, has truly comprehended the meaning of Christ's sacrifice:

Riȝte so Piers the Plowman. peyneth hym to tulye
As wel for a wastour. and wenches of the stuwes,
As for hym-self and his seruauntz. saue he is firste yserued;
And trauailleth and tulythe. for a tretour also sore
As for a trewe tydy man. al tymes ylyke."
  (XIX, 432-436)

Piers' plowing of the half-acre in Passus VI and VII is a type, or foreshadowing, of Piers the reeve's cultivation of the fields of Holicherche in Passus XIX; and Piers' tearing of the pardon in Passus VII is a type of Christ's death in Passus XVIII. As the leader of his people in Passus VI, Piers is the literal dispenser of food in this society, analogous to his office of dispensing the merits of the pardon in Passus VII, and a type of his function as procurator and reeve in Passus XIX (253), where he distributes the Eucharist to the field of folk (383). Through his offer to feed those who help him "plow the half-acre" in Passus VI, Piers emerges as the Messianic figure of the unique faithful Servant, Truth's "olde hyne" (VI, 133), gathering together and saving in himself the multitude. Piers' advice to the pilgrims in VI to "plow the half-acre" is simply another way of expressing "to do what Treuthe hoteth" (V, 555),
the Christian's duty whether he is sower, tailor, digger or tinker; Piers is helping "eche man to knowe his owne" (Prol., 122) and "to tilie and travaile as trewe lyf asketh" (Prol., 120). In Passus XIX (222), Grace gives each man a "grace," or calling, "That ydlenesse encombe hym nou3t . envye, ne pryde" (223). And in Passus XX, we learn that the best of all crafts is love:

> 'Conseille me, Kynde,' quod I. 'what crafte is best to lerne?'
> 'Lerne to loue,' quod Kynde. 'and leue of alle othre.'
> 'How shal I come to catel so. to clothe me and to fede?'
> 'And thou loue lelly,' quod he. 'lakke shal the neure
> Mete ne worldly wede . whil thi lyf lasteth.'

(XX, 206-210)

Vanishing after the pardon scene, Piers reappears in Passus XVI, in the inner dream, as Will's guide to Charity; his appearance there, however, is anticipated. Clergye indicates in Passus XIII that neither he nor his seven sons—the seven arts—can define Dowel, and suddenly introduces the name of Piers Plowman for the first time since the pardon scene:

> For one Pieres the Ploughman . hath inpugned vs alle,
> And sette alle sciences at a soppe . saue loue one,
> And no tixte ne taketh . to meyntene his cause,
> But dilige deum . and domine, quis habitabit, &c.
> And seith that Dowel and Dobet . aren two infinites,
> Whiche infinites, with a feith. fynden oute Dobest,
> Which shal saue mannes soule . thus seith Piers the Ploughman.

(XIII, 123-129)

Conscience reacts to Clergye's words with this prophecy:

> 'I can nou3t her-on' quod Conscience . 'ac I knowe wel Pieres;
> He wil nou3t a3ein holy writ speken . I dar wel vndertake;
> Thanne passe we ouer til Piers come . and preue this in dede.

(XIII, 130-132)
In Passus XV, Will is instructed by his own soul, Anima, who is also omnitemporeal:

'I am Crystes creature,' quod he. 'and Crystene in many a place, In Crystes courte i-knowe wel. and of his kynne a partye. Is noyther Peter the porter. ne Poule. with his fauchoune, That wil defende me the dore. dynge ich neure so late. At mydny3t, at mydday. my voice so is yknowe, That eche a creature of his courte. welcometh me fayre.'
(XV, 16-21)

When Will asks Anima how he should come to know charity, his soul replies:

There-fore by coloure ne by clergy. knowe shaltow hym neuere, Noyther thorw wordes ne werkes. but thorw wille one. And that knoweth no clerke. ne creature in erthe, But Piers the Plowman. Petrus, id est. Christus.
(XV, 203-206)

When Will gains self-knowledge at the end of the mental journey, Piers significantly makes his second appearance as the guide who explains the meaning of charity, which will be found growing in the dreamer's heart where "Liberum Arbitrium hath the londe to ferme" (XVI, 21 ff.).

And the Piers Plowman on whom Will meditates in this and the following passus is Christ in man's nature. The instruction which Will receives in this dream within a dream (XVI, 18-166) is divided into two parts: that which deals with the roots of the tree, the Trinity which protect the fruits, just men (18-99), and that which deals with the life of that member of the Trinity who seizes one of the roots as a weapon and goes off to win His fruits back from the devil who has unjustly stolen them (90-166).

This double theme, the Trinity and the life of Christ, is the key to the structure of the whole Vita de Dobet: the charity which Will seeks in his soul is present eternally in the life of the Trinity and historically in the
life of Christ.

When Piers is asked by Will to describe the tree's fruits (XVI, 65 ff.), what he calls "my fruit" are the just men from all states of life. Yet when they fall to the ground, Will sees that:

For euere as thei dropped adown the deuel was redy,  
And gadred hem alle togideres bothe grete and smale,  
Adam and Abraham and Ysay the prophete,  
Sampson and Samuel and seynt Iohan the baptiste;  
Bar hem forth boldely no body hym letted,  
And made of holy men his horde in lymbo inferni....

Thus, in a superb use of flashback, Langland quickly transforms the fruit into those who lived before Christ, clearly making the point that no man can be saved without the death of Christ—that Faith and Hope are helpless without Charity. Will is suddenly caught up in the divine eternal plan and beholds the working out of salvation in historical time. Piers, the manifestation of the Trinity in history, seizes "o pile" and goes to save man after the devil has seized his fruit (86-89). Will is then given a brief glimpse of the life and meaning of Christ: the personality in whom Truth, Charity, and Dowel all inhere.

The presentation is divided into three parts: His birth (90-102), His miracles (103-135), and His passion (136-166). This part of the inner dream is filled with the sense of recapitulation; the number of references to the "fulness of time" testify to this feeling of anticipation:

And thanne spakke Spiritus Sanctus in Gabrieles mouthe,  
To a mayde that hizte Marye...  
'That one Iesus, a Iustice sone moste Iouke in her chambre,  
Tyl plenitudo temporis fully comen were,  
That Pieres fruit floured and fel to be ripe.  
And thanne shulde Iesus Iuste there-fore bi Iuggement of armes,  
Whether shulde fonge the fruit the fende or hymselue.'

(XVI, 90-96)
And in the wombe of that wenche was he fourety wokes,

                         ................................................
Tyl he wex a faunt thorw her flesshe and of fyttyng couthe,
To haue y-

                           3te with fende ar ful tyme come.
(XVI, 100-102)

The medieval Christian believed that if Christ had been born into the world at any other time, the world would not have been able to receive him.12

The person of Jesus cannot be discussed apart from his work. Since the New Testament knows only a Christology in which the work and person of Christ are connected, the significance which the historically unique "once for all" events of the years 1 to 30 have in relation to salvation cannot be overemphasized.13

The birth is recounted in a jousting metaphor, introducing Christ as "Charite the champioun" who, in Passus XVIII, will fight the devil for the fruit of His tree:

And thanne shulde Iesus Iuste there-for bi Iuggement of armes, Whether shulde fonge the fruit the fende or hymselue.
(XVI, 92-96)

The meaning of "Pieres fruit" is more fully explained by Abraham when he continues the tree image in the third part of the passus:

So god that gynnyng hadde neure but tho hym good thou3te, Sent forth his sone as for seruaunt that tyme, To occupiuen hym here til issue were spronge, That is, children of charite and holicherche the moder. Patriarkes and prophetes and aposteles were the children And Cryst and Crystenedome and Crystene holycherche. (XVI, 194-199)

The last lines are reminiscent of the fruit of Piers' tree in the first half of the inner dream: "Adam and Abraham and Ysay the prophete" (XVI, 81).

The miracles are described in the image of "lechecrafte" or healing
which becomes central in the telling of the Good Samaritan parable in the next passus. Christ first learned to cure his own body, humana natura:

And Pieres the Plowman. parceyued plenere tyme,  
And lered hym lechecrafte. his lyf for to saue, 
That though he were wounded with his enemye. to 
warisshe hym-self.  

(XVI, 103-105)

Then He cured the sick—the blind, the crippled and the mute—and finally He called forth Lazarus from the dead. After the birth and miracles comes the brief section on Christ's passion, concluding with a statement of His victory over the devil in the joust at Jerusalem:

On a Thoresday in thesternesse. thus was he taken Thorw Iudas and Iewes. Iesus was his name;  
That on the Fryday folwynge. for mankynde sake Iusted in Jerusalem. a loye to vs alle.  
On crosse vpon Caluarye. Cryst toke the bataille, A3eines deth and the deuel. destroyed her botheres my3tes,  
Deyde, and deth fordid. and daye of ny3te made.  

(XVI, 160-166)

With that the dream within the dream ends; and Will, having been instructed about the Trinity and the Vita Christi, goes off to seek Piers the Plowman. This is the beginning of the great scenes of anticipation which follow.

Piers, however, is not to be found yet. In a brilliant flash of simultaneity, Langland converges his Old Testament past and psychological present of Will's dream with the center of all human time, the week of Christ's passion. Symbol and figure, history and prophecy begin to merge as Will meets three figural types of Christ: Abraham (also named Faith), Moses (Hope), and the Good Samaritan (Charity), all of whom are coming to witness this plenitudo temporis. This is the moment all history has awaited; and the pace quickens in Passus XVI and XVII to heighten this
sense of anticipation.

On a "Mydlenten Sunday," the herald Abraham, "hore as a hawthorne" (XVI, 173), joins Will in seeking the "ful bolde bacheler" (XVI, 179). After he has shown Will that the events of his own life have foreshadowed the New Testament revelation of the Trinity and the Redemption, Abraham says that he has returned at this time to seek Christ because John the Baptist, a recent arrival in _lymbo inferni_ (XVI, 82-84), has:

"Seyde that he seigh here . that sholde saue vs alle; Ecce agnus dei, etc." (XVI, 252). _John i. 29_ recurs during the Harrowing of Hell scene in Passus XVIII when:

\[
\text{Patriarkes and prophetes . populus in tenebris,} \\
\text{Songen seynt Iohanes songe . 'ecce agnus dei.'} \\
\]

(XVIII, 321-322)

The last part of Abraham's instruction (XVI, 225-269) centers in those events of his life recorded in _Genesis_ which traditionally were seen as foreshadowing the coming of the Redeemer, and leads to a statement of his faith in his future salvation through Christ's incarnation and passion. These three events, Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, the circumcision of his son, and the bread and wine offered to him by Melchisedech (here arranged in the inverse order in which they appear in _Genesis_) traditionally foreshadowed Christ's death on the cross, and the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist, which derived from it.

At the conclusion of the passus, and looking forward to the Harrowing of Hell, Abraham says:
Oute of the poukes pondfolde. no meynprise may vs fecche,  
Tyl he come that I carpe of. Cryst is his name,  
Thatshal delyure vs some daye. out of the deueles powere,  
And bettere wedde for vs legge. than we ben alle worthy,  
That is, lyf for lyf. or ligge thus euere  
Lollynge in my lappe. tyl such a lorde vs fecche.  
(XVI, 264-269)

His conclusion is the same as the one given at the end of the vision of  
the tree in the inner dream; "holy men" lie "in derkenesse and drede"  
(XVI, 83-84) until Piers will take his pile and "hitte after hym" that  
holds them there. The passus ends with Abraham and Will still looking  
for the knight Christ, Piers. Will's concluding remark again calls our  
attention to the simultaneity of the Christian economy in the dream:

'Allas!' I seyde, 'that synne. so longe shal lette  
The my3te of goddes mercy. that my3t vs alle amende!'  
(XVI, 270-271)

The Redemption not only saves those who come before Christ, but those  
who come after; each Christian (and here Will makes the practical moral  
application of Abraham's instruction to himself and his contemporaries)  
must work out his own salvation, and recreate the passion in his own  
(life) time by putting on Christ and putting off sin.

In Passus XVII, Will meets Moses (Hope) and the Good Samaritan  
(Charity), who complete the analogical presentation of the Trinity, fore¬  
shadow the action of the Redemption, and instruct Will in the practical  
and moral application of their teachings. Will meets Moses dressed as a  
"spye" looking "after a kny3te (Christ)" who gave him the writ of law which  
he is bearing (cf. I, 149); the writ, we learn, is dependent on the Redemp¬  
tion. When Will asks him if it is sealed, Spes answers:
'Nay,' he sayde, 'I seke hym: that hath the sele to kepe; And that is, crosse and Crystenedome: and Cryst there-on to hange. And whan it is asseled so: I wote wel the sothe, That Lucyferes lordeship laste shal no lenger.'  
(XVII, 5-8)

Only in the death of Christ will the Law be fulfilled and its spirit confirmed by the giving of a "new" commandment. This transformation of the Old Testament is described by de Lubac as a "brusque passage": 
"...l'Ancien Testament...ne s'étale pas non plus dans la durée: elle survient d'un coup. Ce n'est point une progression par étapes: quoique préparé, c'est enfin un brusque passage, c'est un transfert global... c'est une conversion...de la lettre à l'esprit." 14  This feeling of brusqueness is also brought out by O'Grady's suggestion that Piers' tearing of the pardon might be analogous to Moses' breaking of the stones on which the decalogue was written, a Biblical event which was thought to foreshadow Christ's death on the cross. 15

Will has now met Abraham (Faith) and Moses (Hope), but he still lacks the law of love (Charity); he can see no need for a new law (XVII, 30) and wonders which of the two Old Testament figures he should follow (XVII, 41-46). Langland now introduces the parable of the Good Samaritan which is symbolically interpreted as a foreshadowing of Christ's passion which provided the plaster of penance. When Will mentions that neither Faith nor Hope helped the robbed man, the Good Samaritan replies (recalling Abraham's conclusion in Passus XVI):
'Haue hem excused,' quod he. 'her help may litel auaille; May no medcyn on molde . the man to hele brynge, Neither Feith ne fyn Hope . so festred ben his woundis, With-out the blode of a barn . borne of a mayde. And be he bathed in that blode . baptised, as it were, And thanne plastred with penaunce . and passioun of that babi, He shulde stonde and steppe; ac stalworth worth he neure, Tyl he haue eten al the barn . and his blode ydronke. (XVII, 90-97)

The Good Samaritan also picks up the tone of heightening anticipation:

Ac ar this day thre dayes . I dar vndertaken,
That he (devil) worth fettred, that feloune . fast with cheynes,
And neure eft greue grome . that goth this ilke gate;
O mors, ero mors tua, etc. ....
(XVII, 109-111a)

This theme of the mythical struggle between Lyf and Deth, foreshadowed in the last quoted line, recurs throughout the next passus, and indeed underlines the entire story of Christ's passion. We know the time is approaching. The anticipation has quickened all through Passus XVI-XVII; and now the Good Samaritan continues: "For the barn was born in Bethleem . that with his blode shal saue/ Alle that lyueth in faith, and folweth . his felawes techynge" (XVII, 122-123).

The poem finally reaches its plenitude in Christ's historical fulfillment of redemptive history. In Passus XVIII Will dreams that he is present at the historical Jerusalem where Christ, wearing Piers' (and Will's and the field of folk's) body, *humana natura*, is crucified. The vision begins on Palm Sunday in the streets of Jerusalem (A.D. 33); and the Gospel's Samaritan and the fourteenth-century plowman are temporally transferred and take on a physical union with Christ, "One semblable to the Samaritan and some-del to Piers the Plowman" (XVIII, 10).
At XVI, 196, Abraham had said that Christ's mission would be "To occupyen hym here. til issue were spronge" on the tree of charity; and here, as a herald, he hails Him who comes to joust for "that the fende claymeth Piers fruit the Plowman" (XVIII, 20). When Will asks who it is that comes, Abraham answers that it is Jesus, disguised in Piers' arms, _humana natura_, so that "Cryst be nouȝt bikknowe here":

> 'Is Piers in this place?' quod I. and he preynte on me, 
> 'This Jesus of his gentrice. wolst Iuste in Piers armes, 
> In his helme and in his haberion. _humana natura_; 
> That Cryst be nouȝt bikknowe here. for _consummatus deus_, 
> In Piers paltok the Plowman. this priker shal ryde....

(XVIII, 21-25)

Will's next question is the identity of Christ's opponent; and Abraham introduces the mythical struggle of Lyf and Deth for the first time:

> Deth seith he shal fordo. and adown brynge 
> Al that lyueth or loketh. in londe or in watere. 
> Lyf seyth that he likth. and leyth his lif to wedde, 
> That for al that Deth can do. with-in thre dayes, 
> To walke and fecche fro the fende. Piers fruite the Plowman, 
> And legge it there hym lyketh. and Lucifer bynde, 
> And forbete and adown brynge. bale and deth for euere: 
> _O mors, ero mors tua!_

(XVIII, 29-35a)

This mythical struggle recurs throughout the passus. As Christ uses _humana natura_ in His fight to give life to the fruit, the fruit (human souls) must put on grace, the life which he wins in each encounter with Deth (see XX, 94-104).

After the tortures of the passion are swiftly narrated and Christ is nailed to the cross, the Jews ask Him for proof that He is a "kynges sone," and Will the dreamer beholds the moment when history and prophecy merge and are fulfilled:
The lorde of lyf and of li3te . tho leyed his eyen togideres.
The daye for drede with-drowe . and derke bicam the sonne,
The wal wagged and clef . and al the worlde quaued.
Ded men for that dyne . come out of depe graues,
And tolde whi that tempest . so longe tyme dured.
'For a bitter bataille' . the ded bodye sayde;
'Lyf and Deth in this derknesse . her one fordoth her other;
Shal no wi3te wite witterly . who shal haue the maystrye,
Er Sunday aboute sonne-rysynge' . and sank with that til erthe.
(XVIII, 59-67)

Realizing that this unique mid-point of time occurred in history is essential
for an understanding of Christianity. Each happening in this moment of re-
demptive history had been ordained from the beginning of time. When
Longinus, the blind knight, pierced the dead Christ with his spear ("Maugre
his many tethe . he was made that tyme/ To take the spere in his honde .
and Iusten with Iesus," XVIII, 81-82), and Christ's blood "vnspered" Long-
inus' eyes, we witnessed the first visible effects of the Redemption:

Par le coup de lance du centurion est accompli en vérité
ce que la baguette de Moïse frappant le rocher avait ac-
compil en figure: du côté percé par la lance les fontaines
du Nouveau Testament jaillissent; 'si Jésus n'avait pas été
frappé, si de son côté n'étaient pas sortis l'eau et le sang,
nous subirions tous encore la soif de la Parole de Dieu'....
La voici, éclatante et peinte en rouge, la grande Page qui
sépare les deux Testaments! Toutes les portes s'ouvrent
à la fois, toutes les oppositions se dissipent, toutes les
contradictions se résolvent.' 17

These events had such a powerful impact on Will that, filled with
fear of the Jews who had crucified Christ, he went down to Hell to witness
the real purpose of the "thre dayes." The debate between the four Daughters
of God focuses on the meaning of the "li3te and...leme which lay befor
helle" (XVIII, 124) after Christ's death. Truth and Righteousness are
pitted against Mercy and Peace as they debate whether or not Jesus can
can redeem mankind from sin.
Just when we realize that this conflict of claims is incompatible under the Old Law, Book appears—from the Christian point of view, at the most suspenseful brief period in human history:

Thanne was there a wi3te . with two brode eyen, Boke hi3te that beupere . a bolde man of speche.

(XVIII, 228-229)

Book's speech falls within that unique segment of time between Christ's apparent defeat by Death and the conclusive vindication of Christianity by the Harrowing of Hell in the spiritual world and the Resurrection in the material world. The speech stands about as squarely as possible between the period of the Old Law and that of the New—introduced as it is between the completion of the Atonement with the death of Christ (57-59), and its first fruits as manifested in the Harrowing of Hell (258 ff.). The significance of Book's literal "present"—the transition from Old Law to New—is emphasized by the theme of the witnessing elements, together with its overtones of the change in Laws and in the relative importance of Jew and Gentile.

The theme of the witnessing elements not only establishes Book's identity as the littera of the New Testament, but also epitomizes his self-expressed aim (230) of bearing literal witness of the divinity of Christ and so to the divine authority of the New Law which is to replace the Old. Moreover, the two most obvious contexts of the witnessing elements theme—the Epiphany through tradition, and the Crucifixion mainly by natural association—seem to receive special emphasis as decisive manifestations of Christ's divinity, one occurring near the be-
ginning and the other at the end of His earthly career: Book's speech opens with an extended reference to the familiar Epiphany-motif of the star of Bethlehem (230-239), identifying it as the first manifestation of Christ's divinity (236) and including an allusion to the Magi (232; also see XII, 154; XIX, 78-81); a brief reference to Christ's walking on the water (240-242) presumably represents the testimony of the miracles during His ministry; and the description of the witnessing elements closes with another fairly extended account of the wonders surrounding the Crucifixion (243-248). These two major contexts of the witnessing elements theme, in turn, further emphasize the divinely-ordained break between Old Law and New.

The meaningful past—the period of the Old Law—is reflected in the allusions to the prophetic eighteenth Psalm, one of the most prominent foreshadowings of Christianity. The basic allusion, "Gygas the geault" (250), depends directly on Psalm xviii.6, "Exsultavit ut gigas ad currendam viam"—interpreted unanimously in medieval exegesis as a prophecy of Christ, with emphasis on His indomitability and His twofold nature. The future—the time of the New Law proper—is foretold directly in the rest of Book's speech with its further emphasis on the invalidating of the Old Law:

And I, Boke, wil be brent. but Iesus rise to lyue,
In alle my3tes of man. and his moder gladye,
And conforte al his kynne. and out of care brynge,
And al the Iuwen Ioye. vnoignen and vnlouken;
And but thei reuerencen his rode. and his resurexioun,
And bileue on a newe lawe. be lost lyf and soule.'
(XVIII, 252-257)

Just then Christ, "a voice loude in that li3te" (XVIII, 260), cries
out to Lucifer to "vpynneth and vnlouketh" (XVIII, 261) the gates of Hell. Satan sighs as he recalls that this is the time "Patriarkes and prophetes han parled her-of longe, / That such a lorde and a lyte shulde lede hem alle hennes" (XVIII, 268-269). Lucifer recalls "this li3te" (271) which he knew long ago—probably referring to the time of Creation alluded to in I, 111 ff.—but believes he is safeguarded by God's promise that he should have the souls of all men if Adam ate the apple. Satan and Gobelyn, another devil, however, remind him that the devil's title to men's souls is based on treason, and they fear the coming of Truth. The importance of the life and works of the historical Jesus is once again emphasized:

This thretty wynter, as I wene. hath he gone and preched; I haue assailled hym with synne. and some tyme yasked Where he were god or goddes sone? he gaf me shorte answere. And thus hath he trolled forth. this two and thretty wynter, 

I wolde haue lengthed his lyf. for I leued, 3if he deyede, That his soule wolde suffre. no synne in his sy3te. For the body, whil it on bones 3ede. aboute was euere To saue men fram synne. 3if hem-self wolde. 

(XVIII, 293-303)

Gobelyn sees "where a soule cometh hiderward seyllynge / With glorie and grete li3te"(304-305) and advises that all flee because Truth is about to deprive the Father of Lies of his lordship.

In the Harrowing of Hell, Christ as Knight become King resolves the seemingly conflicting claims of truth and charity as He calls Lucifer's hand in a brilliant projection towards the Parousia and Last Judgment:

Now bygynneth thi gyle. ageyne the to tourne, And my grace to growe. ay gretter and wyder. The bitternesse that thow hast browe. brouke it thi-seluen, That art doctour of deth. drynke that thow madest! For I, that am lorde of lyf. loue is my drynke,
And for that drynke to-day. I deyde vpon erthe.
I fau3te so, me thrustes 3et. for mannes soule sake;
May no drynke me moiste. ne my thruste slake,
Tyl the vendage falle. in the vale of Iosephath,
That I drynke ri3te ripe must. _resureccio mortuorum_,
And thanne shal I come as a kynge. crowned with angeles,
And han out of helle. alle mennes soules.

(XVIII, 359-370)

His final argument concluding on the note of His peculiar relationship of
"bloody brother" to all men, Christ leads forth His loved ones and binds
Lucifer. Heaven's angels harp and sing; and the four sisters are recon-
ciled according to _Psalm_ lxxxiv. 10: "_Misericordia et veritas obuiauerunt_
sibi; _iusticia et pax osculate sunt_" (XVIII, 421a). Truth sings "_Te deum_
_laudamus_;" and Love follows "in a loude note" with "_Ecce quam bonum et_
_quam iocundum est habitare fratres in unum_" (423a), anticipating the founding
of Vnite, or Holicherche, in the next passus. Will the dreamer wakes as
Easter Sunday dawns and calls to his wife and daughter to arise and creep
to the cross "and kisseth it for a Iuwel" (XVIII, 428).

Before Will returns to view the active life of contemporary English
society, Langland attempts to recreate, historically, the beginning of the
new time phase inherent in the Pentecost miracle. Christian theology in-
terprets the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church as a sign of the
fact that the "last days" have dawned. The "post-Easter present" must
be thought of as the final time before the end; because, no matter what its
still undetermined duration may be, the mid-point has already been passed;
it is already the _time of the end_, but is not yet the _end_. 19 It is significant,
then, that when Will goes to be "houseled" (XIX, 2) on Easter morning, he
falls asleep at the offertory—to eventually dream of the descent of the
Paraclete. Pentecost is traditionally regarded as the termination of Eastertide; and the celebration of the Pentecost Mass annually recreates the miracle of the historical descent of the Holy Ghost.

Explaining the name "Christ" to Will, Conscience develops the miracles (which are regarded as "sleightes") in terms of the triad, Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest. By His final "sleighte," the Resurrection, Christ defeated death, and won the power of Dobest—bequeathing to Piers the administration of His power as conqueror. It is at this point in the poem that Piers becomes an imitator of Christ. Just as Christ put on Piers' body, *humana natura*, to fulfill redemptive history, Piers now takes on Christ and, as pope, becomes His representative on earth:

> And whan this dede was done. Dobest he tauȝte,
> And ȝaf Pieres power. and pardoun he graunted
> To alle manere men. mercy and forȝynes,
> Hym myȝte men to assoille. of alle manere synnes,
> In couenant that thei come. and knowleche to paye,
> To Pieres pardon the Plowman. redde quod debes.
> Thus hath Pieres powere. be his pardoun payed,
> To bynde and to vnbynde. bothe here and elles-where,
> And assoille men of alle synnes. saue of dette one.
> Anone after an heigh. vp in-to heuene
> He went, an wonyeth there. and wiþ come atte laste,
> And rewarde hym riȝte wel. that redde quod debet —
> Payeth parfitly. as pure trewe the wolde.
> And what persone payeth it nouȝt. punyssh he thinketh,
> And demen hem at domes daye. bothe quikke and ded;
> The gode to the godhede. and to grete Ioye,
> And wikke to wonye. in wo with-outen ende.

(XIX, 177-193)

After the Ascension, Will observes the historical descent of the "*spiritus paraclitus*" on "Pieres and his felawes" (XIX, 196), literally marking the birth of the Church and the beginning of the "last days."
The eschatology inherent in the Holy Ghost is evidenced in the forward-looking character of the last two passus. Anticipating, from the beginning, the tension of the "last days" (which permeates Piers Plowman), Grace orders Piers and Conscience to assemble the commons to warn them that they will soon be attacked by Antichrist:

For-thi, ' quod Grace, 'er I go. I wil gyue 3ow tresore, And wepne to fi3te with. whan Antecryst 3ow assailleth. ' And gaf eche man a grace..................
(XIX, 220-222)

To enable men to answer their callings according to the call of the cross, Grace now establishes Piers' stewardship and provides him with the necessary animals, farm implements and seeds to assist them:

For I make Pieres the Plowman. my procuratour and my reve, And regystrere to receyue. redd quod debes. My prowor and my plowman. Piers shal ben on erthe, And for to tulye treuthe. a teme shal he haue.'
(XIX, 253-256)

We now realize how Langland has used plowing imagery through the poem as one means of showing the transformation of Piers. In Passus VI, Piers the plowman literally plowed the fields to feed the field of folk who helped to build the temporal kingdom. Piers, as Truth's representative, was sent a "teme" to "tulyen the erthe" (VII, 2) so that the pardon could be dispensed. Christ, in Passus XVIII, took on Piers' body to feed the people (366-368) and "harrowed" Hell to redeem men's souls. Now, Piers, as imitator of Christ in Passus XIX, has the power to be the provider ("prower") of spiritual food (the Eucharist) for the field of folk if they "redde quod debes," or make restitution of the debt of charity inherent in Christ's redemption.
The plowing imagery is now used to depict the missionary spreading of the gospel. Piers' team consists of four oxen, the Evangelists, and four bullocks, the great Fathers of the Church. Their harrows are the two Testaments, and the seeds, which Grace sows in men's souls, are the cardinal virtues. Continuing the plowing imagery, Grace's final instruction to Piers is to build a barn to store the fruit—and, at Piers' request, Grace provides the materials to construct it. The barn is called "Vnite holicherche on Englisshe" (XIX, 325), but it is not only a barn and a church; its more important aspect is that it defines the spiritual condition in which the Christian must take refuge against the attacks of the Antichrist:

And Grace gaue hym the crosse . with the croune of thornes,
That Cryst vpon Caluarye . for mankynde on pyned,
And of his baptesme and blode . that he bledde on rode
He made a maner morter . and Mercy it hiȝte.
And there-with Grace bigan . to make a good foundement,
And wateled it and walled it . with his peynes and his passioun....
(XIX, 318-323)

When Holicherche is finished, Grace makes Priesthood "haywarde" (XIX, 329) while he and Piers go "as wyde as the worlde is" to "tulye treuthe" XIX, 330).

This Christian universalism, inherent through time in the example of Piers the plowman—Jesus the knight—Peter the Pope, suited Langland's didacticism and lent magnificent scope to the poem, which ends with the continuation of the moral pilgrimage through all time:

'Bi Cryste, ' quod Conscience tho. 'I wil bcome a pilgryme,
And walken as wyde . as al the worlde lasteth,
To seke Piers the Plowman.........................
(XX, 378-380)
CHAPTER II


4. de Lubac, I, 309.


10. The appearances of Piers are, of course, related to those of Christ. Langland uses the quiet serenity of Holicherche's sermon in Passus I to first set the stage of redemptive history and define Christ's appearance on center stage and in the center of time to perform the role of mediator (I, 146-159). Constantly orienting the poem towards this apex of redemptive history, the prayer of Repentance for sinful society, following the confession of the seven deadly sins in Passus V, recapitulates the entire redemptive structure, from Creation through the Harrowing of Hell and the salvation of the just (V, 485-516a).


15. O'Grady, "Piers Plowman and Penance," Ch. VI, p. 66.

16. O'Grady, Ch. VI, p. 77: "Through the recounting of events in the lives of the three men who foreshadowed Christ, there had been the further hint that the three represented the Trinity as well. Abraham, in fact, was traditionally a type of God the Father and Moses a type of Christ; and looked upon in this context, the Good Samaritan, representing charity, the virtue which enlivens the other two, is finally to be understood as a type of the Holy Spirit. Although, like the other two characters, he foreshadowed Christ, the Good Samaritan is also a human type of the divine love of the Trinity."

17. de Lubac, Exégèse Médievale, I, 326.


Medieval historiography has been criticized because of its weakness in critical method. In their anxiety to detect the general plan of history (and their belief that this plan was God's and not man's), men in the Middle Ages tended to look for the essence of history outside history itself, by looking away from man's actions in order to detect the plan of God. Consequently, the actual detail of human actions became for them relatively unimportant.¹ This chapter will attempt to show that Langland was able to avoid this weakness successfully despite his figural interpretation of history.²

Langland was able to bring the everyday and real into his poem by firmly embedding Piers Plowman in contemporary political, religious, and social history. Reflecting the chaos and tension of Langland's fourteenth-century England, the poem has, in fact, been described as "the most important literary document picturing the social and religious agitation of the fourteenth century."³ Historically, this was the age of the Hundred Years War, the Great Schism, and the Black Death; and the poem, even while interpreting them within a Biblical framework of world-historical or figural time, treats these events fully and explicitly. This figural interpretation of history has already been developed in relation to the typological appearances of Piers Plowman within the poem; but, in
order to explain properly the relationship of this world-historical chronological framework to the contemporary events as they appear in all their actuality within the poem, this interpretation of history will have to be explained further. It is in this way that we can show how familiar contemporary events, each one of unique moment, assume an omnitemporality because they are simultaneously interpreted on several levels of reality.

So steeped in the Bible that it was a real language to him, Langland's identification with Biblical history necessarily implied a belief in the reality of time. Langland's God is the Judeo-Christian God of history, and the function of history is a revelation of the pattern of God's past, present and future activity. Langland does not view history as merely an earthly process, a pattern of earthly events, but one in constant connection with God's plan proceeding toward the goal of which all earthly happenings tend. This is to be understood not only in the sense of human society as a whole approaching the end of the world and the advent of the millenium in a constant forward motion (with all history, then, directed horizontally, into the future); but also in the sense that every earthly event and every earthly phenomenon is at all times—inde pendently of all forward motion—so connected with the plan of salvation as conceived by God's Providence, that a multiplicity of vertical links to analogous events, in time past and time future, may be established.

For in God there is no distinction of times since for him everything is a simultaneous present, so that—as Augustine once put it—he does not possess foreknowledge but simply knowledge. One must, then, be very much on one's guard
against taking such violations of chronology, where the future seems to reach back into the present, as nothing more than evidence of a kind of medieval naïveté. Naturally, such an interpretation is not wrong, for what these violations of chronology afford is in fact an extremely simplified over-all view adapted to the simplest comprehension—but this simultaneous over-all view is at the same time the expression of a unique, exalted, and hidden truth of the figural structure of universal history.\(^5\)

Although time (and history), therefore, is not an irrelevant factor, but of the essence of existence, Langland's references to the contemporary political situation can be rather difficult to analyze because he sometimes needed to cloak them in vague, double-edged allegory:

\begin{quote}
The culorum of this cas . kepe I nouzte to shewe;
An aventure it noyed men . none ende wil I make.
For so is this worlde went . with hem that han powere,
That who-so seyth hem sothes . is sonnest yblamed.
\end{quote}


Understood, however, in the context of events at the end of Edward III's reign, the poet's moralizing of history acquires a sharp, editorial-page quality. Langland's art, in fact, is reminiscent of that of the Hebrew prophets, rather than the art of the modern poet: 
"...it is not literature but the utterance of the word that God has put into his mouth."\(^6\) We shall now trace this utterance (outer-ance) as it projects the Norman Wars, the Papal Schism, and the series of plagues which visited Langland's England, and then conclude with some remarks on his didacticism and its \textit{sub specie aeternitatis} perspective.

That the B-text of \textit{Piers Plowman} was written between 1377-1379 seems to Huppe\(^7\) one of the few probabilities about the poem which approaches certainty. And it is within this frame of reference that the
following discussion of the Norman Wars and local political situation will be considered.

The Fable of the Rats and the Mice is inserted into the Prologue (ll. 145 ff.) to set the current political scene before the reader. As long ago as 1912 Miss D. L. Owen pointed out the probable relation of this passage to the sermon preached by Bishop Brunton in May, 1376, in which he speaks of the *fabulos(um) parliament(um) murium et ratonum*; and it is now generally agreed that, in this part of the Prologue, there are allusions to the Good Parliament (1376) which were probably inserted, with ironic intention, at the time of the Bad Parliament (1377) which undid all that the Good Parliament had accomplished. The youthfulness of the young Richard II was certainly a matter for general concern. And Langland reaches back to *Ecclesiastes* x.16 for his Scriptural foundation:

> For I herde my sire seyn. is seuene 3ere ypasse,
> There the catte is a kitoun. the courte is ful elyng;
> That witnisseth holiwrite. who-so wil it rede,
> _Ve terre vbi puer rex est, &c._

(Prol., 189-191a)

The "kitoun" is, of course, Richard; the cat who grieves them all, and whom the rats and mice want to bell, is John of Gaunt. The mouse "that moche good couthe" is perhaps Peter de la Mare, who in 1377 put forward the Commons proposal for a Council to advise the new king Richard. Despite the specificity of these allegorical references, it must be noted that, since providential history treats history as a play written by God, Langland advocates the Christian virtue of patient suffrance (inherent in
knowing one's place in society) as the best solution:

I sey for me, 'quod the mous. 'I se so mykel after,
Shal neuer the cat ne the kitoun. bi my conseille be greued,
Ne carpyng of this coler. that costed me neure.
And thou3 it had coste me catel. biknownen it I nolde,
But suffre as hym-self wolde. to do as hym liketh,

For-thi vche a wise wi3te I warne. wite wel his owne.'
(Prol., 201-207)

The complicated debate between Lady Meed and Conscience in
Passus III, also seemingly abstract, must be interpreted in light of the
contemporary historical situation if it is to achieve its full dimensions.
This interpretation requires that Lady Meed and Conscience each be per-
ceived on at least two levels. In her general allegorical character,
Lady Meed is Venality; historically, for Langland, she represents Alice
Perrers, the hated mistress of the senile Edward III. Conscience is also
perceived on two levels: as a human faculty, and particularized in John
of Gaunt ("a knight late come from the other side"). Huppe' suggests that
the reason why John of Gaunt should be selected as Conscience's "active"
representative should not be hard to find:

Conscience is the executive virtue, the virtue of statesmen...
John was the active head of the English government after 1370
because of the growing senility of his father and the incapaci-
tation of the Black Prince. The full significance of this identi-
fication rests in the political situation in England in 1374 when
Lancaster returned. The struggle between the reactionary and
popular forces for the control of the government had begun, but
John remained an equivocal figure until after the Good Parliament.
He had made a botch of foreign affairs, but his domestic policies
were untried and unknown. Would he align himself with the Black
Prince in supporting the cause of reform or with the profiteers
and the court favorites in the cause of reaction. Would he drive
the hated Alice Perrers from his father's side...? These were
real questions to every thoughtful Englishman, and the public-
spirited must have cherished a strong hope that John would decide
for the right when they remembered that the Black Prince
had had enough confidence in his brother to leave him in
charge of the difficult situation in Acquitaine.¹¹

Conscience begins the attack by accusing Meed of killing Edward II:
"3owre fadre she felled . thorw fals biheste" (III, 126). Lady Meed, as
Venality, thus symbolizes in general what Piers Gaveston represented in
the particular. If Lady Meed, through her particular agent, Gaveston,
led to the downfall of Edward II, she is, no less, guiding the downfall of
Edward III in the person of another particular agent, Alice Perrers. Meed
answers the charge with, "kulled I neuere no kynge . ne conseilled ther-
after" (III, 186), and attacks her accuser by subtly shifting his position
from the general to the particular, identifying Conscience with his worldly
representative, John of Gaunt. She tries to point out, in the following
Norman War passage, that, for all Conscience's talk, she did less harm
comforting the King at home than John did for all his effort. The reference
to the Treaty of Bretigny (III, 206) shows clearly that Lady Meed's ob-
jection to the treaty is not that it failed to bring peace, but that it merely
resulted in loss of worldly meed.

In Normandye was he nou3te . noyed for my sake;
Ac thow thi-self sothely . shamedest hym ofte,
Crope in-to a kaban . for colde of thi nailles,
Wendest that wyntre . wolde haue lasted euere,
And draddest to be ded . for a dym cloude,
And hiedest homeward . for hunger of thi wombe.

.................................................................
I made his men meri . and mornynge lette.
I batered hem on the bakke . and bolded here hertis,
And dede hem hoppe for hope . to haue me at wille.
Had I ben marshal of his men . (bi Marie of heuene)!
I durst haue leyde my lyf . and no lasse wedde,
He shulde haue be lorde of that londe. a lengthe and a brede,
And also kyng of that kitthe. his kynne for to helpe,

Cowardliche thow, Conscience. conseiledest hym thennes,
To leuen his lordeship. for a litel siluer,
That is the richest rewme. that reyne ouer houeth!

(III, 188-207)

Conscience, however, after distinguishing between the two kinds of meed,
proceeds to refute Meed, and does so by citing the example of Saul and
Agag from the past time of Biblical history; true meed, the reward for
doing well, is the grace of God and salvation.

There is an-other mede mesurelees. that maistres desireth;
To meyntene mysdoers. mede thei take;
And there-of seith the sauter. in a salmes ende,

In quorum manibus iniquitates sunt, dextera eorum repleta
est muneribus;
And he that gripeth her golde. so me god helpe!
Shal abie it bitteere. or the boke lyeth!

In marchandise is no mede. I may it wel a-vowe;
It is a permutacioun aperalty. a penyworth for an othre.
Ac reddestow neuere Regum. thow recrayed Mede,
Whi the veniaunce fel. on Saul and on his children?
God sent to Saul. bi Samuel the prophete,
That Agage of Amaleke. and al his peple aftre
Shulde deye for a dede. that done had here eldres.

(III, 245-261)

Instead of completing God's orders, however, Saul "coueyted her catel"
(III, -271) and left the task unfinished. As a result of this disobedience:

God seide to Samuel. that Saul shulde deye,
And al his sede for that synne. shenfullich ende.
Such a myschief mede made. Saul the kynge to haue....

(III, 274-276)

The import of Langland's figural prophecy is that the reverses
which the English armies have met are not to be blamed entirely on John
of Gaunt, but are to be traced back to Edward's own failure. Not only did
he allow the French to deceive him in the Treaty of Bretigny; but, after he saw that he had been deceived, he preferred to remain at ease in the comforting arms of Alice Perrers. God has, therefore, brought punishment on Edward and his seed because, instead of prosecuting the Wars himself, he left this to others who were incompetent. The burden of the entire passage of this complicated debate is criticism of Edward's failure to prosecute the renewed campaigns with his old vigor. Langland believed that if Edward had assumed command, the defeats would not have occurred; and he places the blame for the king's failure to exercise his responsibility on Lady Meed's own agent, Alice Perrers. John of Gaunt was merely suffering for the sins of his father.

Langland's use of personal allegory, when properly interpreted, is one of the most forceful characteristics of the poem, and worthy of any medieval pulpit. In trying to analyse the basic causes for the English failures of 1373, the moralizing poet referred back to the Treaty of Bretigny (May 8, 1360) as the initial cause of the series of setbacks suffered by the English. The campaign of 1373 satisfies all the demands of the exact references in the passage, because only this campaign would have loomed large enough in the eyes of the English to have made it possible for them to perceive the double reference, and only this campaign had the finality which was necessary to make the reference back to the Treaty of Bretigny understood. It came as a decisive blow to England's claim to France; and it focused all English criticism of the conduct of the Wars into one body of opinion. Blame was placed on John of Gaunt, but still more heavily on
Alice Perrers, who had so debauched Edward that he was no longer capable of responsible action. 13

For our purposes here, even more important than Langland's use of historical allegory is his use of figural prophecy to imply the interpretation of one worldly event through another; the first signifies the second, the second fulfills the first. Both the war of Edward III and the war of Saul remain historical events; yet both, looked at in this way, still have something provisional and incomplete about them. They point to one another, and both can point to something in the future, something still to come. Thus Langland implies that this revelation of God's pattern of activity may again be repeated in the future whenever God so chooses. The poet's use of this literal-figural-anagogical time structure lends an almost mystical dimension to Piers Plowman at the same time that it is giving it an exact biographical grounding in the fourteenth-century field of folk.

Langland's attempt to apply his allegory to the important events of his times could hardly have avoided the Papal Schism of 1378 (especially since the B-text was probably being written during this time). His references to the Schism are revealing in that Langland the reformer staunchly remains "the most Catholic of English poets." The arrogant presumption of the Avignon cardinals and their pride and self-seeking is attacked, and Urban's war against the schismatics is intensely criticized; but the mission of the Church to proclaim the gospel throughout the world is never questioned: "For-thi I conseil alle creatures. no clergie to dispise" (XII, 123). At no point in the poem does Langland advocate revolution. That the four-
teenth-century English Church was very consciously part of the universal Church, in ecclesiastical government and in its intellectual and spiritual life, is one of the most interesting features of medieval England. 14

The pointed historical references to the Papal Schism are quite useful as dating devices. Margaret Schlauch has said: "Recent studies have tended to reduce the gaps between versions, and to place all three in the 1370's, during the end of the reign of Edward III, and the beginning of Richard II's. This contraction of the span in dating probably strengthens the claim for single authorship of the versions." 15

The first actual reference to the Schism occurs in the Prologue:

Ac of the cardinales atte Courte that cau3t of that name,
And power presumed in hem: a pope to make,
To han that power that Peter hadde: inpugnen I nelle;
For in loue and letterure: the eleccioun bilongeth,
For-thi I can and can nau3te: of courte speke more.
(Prol., 107-111)

The cardinals' presumption obviously disturbs the poet. It was Urban VI's denunciation of avaricious cardinals that provoked the Cardinal of Amiens to organize a rebel group among the French cardinals, who, in September of 1378, proceeded to elect an antipope (Clement VII) of their own nationality, and thus brought about the Schism. 16 There is conceivably an even earlier oblique hint in the Prologue at the effects of the Schism:

But holychirche and hij ('this maistres freris'). holde better togideres,
The moste myschief on molde: is mountyng wel faste.
(Prol., 66-67)

Precise interpretation of these lines is difficult; but it is worth noting that one unhappy effect of the Papal Schism was to create dissension in
the ranks of the friars.

The reference to "Rome-renneres" (IV, 128 ff.) suggests Langland's loyalty to Urban. In January, 1377, Pope Gregory XI transferred his court from Avignon to Rome, remaining there until his death in 1378. His successor, Urban VI, was elected there, and did not leave the city until 1383; throughout the period of the Great Schism, Urban's cause was identified with the Holy City. The Great Schism, on the whole, rather improved Anglo-papal relations: "...the English felt a certain proprietary pride in 'our Urban,' as against the wicked schismatic Frenchmen who supported the anti-pope, while the rather precarious position of the popes made them on the whole anxious to please." 17

The usurpation of Clement is roundly condemned in this reference to the court at Avignon:

'The contre is the curseder that cardynales come inne;
And there they ligge and lenge moste lecherye there regneth:'---
For-thi, 'quod this vicori. 'be verrey god, I wolde
That no cardynal come amonge the comune peple,
But in her holynesse holden hem stille
At Auynoun, amonge the Iuwes...
Or in Rome, as here rule wole the reliques to kepe...
(XIX, 415-421)

That the cardinals, and especially the French cardinals, preferred to live in Avignon is clear from their opposition to Urban V's decision to move the seat of the papacy to Rome in 1367, and to Gregory XI's similar decision ten years later. Indeed, on the second occasion, six remained at Avignon and helped to bring about the Schism in 1378. Langland's mention of the Jews at Avignon needs some explanation. The establishment of the papacy there early in the fourteenth century had brought prosperity to the
As a sincerely religious person, Langland was naturally anxious about the uncertainty brought about by the Schism; but this was only one symptom of the Church's disease. He continually contrasts the ideals and potential of English religion (and, therefore, of the Catholic Church) with the actual division brought about by warring popes and other corruptions from within:

And tho was plent and pees. amonges pore and riche;  
And now is routhe to rede. how the red noble  
Is reuerenced or the rode. receyued for the worthier  
Than Crystes crosse, that ouer-cam. deth and dedly synne!  
And now is werre and wo. and who so 'why' axeth,  
For coueityse after crosse. the croune stant in golde.  

............................................  
For coueityse of that crosse. men of holykirke  
Shul toure as Templeres did. the tyme approcheth faste.  
(XV, 500-509)

The condition predicted in the Prologue, "sith charite hath be chapman.  
and chief to shryue lorde, / Many ferlis han fallen. in a fewe 3eris"  
(64-65), and vividly portrayed in the last two passus of the poem, is already prophesied when the Paraclete descends on Piers and the apostles to mark the Church's beginning:

'For I (Grace) wil dele to-daye. and dyuyde grace,  
To alkynnes creatures. that kan her fyue wittes,  
Tresore to lyue by. to her lyues ende,  
And wepne to fy3te with. that wil neure faille.  
For Antecryst and his. al the worlde shal greue,  

............................................  
And fals prophetes fele. flatereres and glosers  
Shullen come, and be curatoures. ouer kynges and erlis,  
And Pryde shal be pope. prync of holycherche,  
Coueytyse and Vnkyndenesse. cardinales hym to lede.  
(XIX, 210-219)

The time of the Antichrist is, of course, Langland's own; and, here again, we have contemporary events enlivened and made still more meaningful
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to the time by being "placed" in the pattern of Biblical history.

In the Antichrist sections, it is the responsibility of the clergy for the corruption of contemporary spirituality that becomes one of the most persistent themes in the poem; and, here again, the charge is pinpointed by explicit references to the Old Testament. The poet felt that worldly goods had blinded the Church to the needs of its sheep and made mute the mouths which should have warned the flock of the approaching disaster. As a result, the blind pastor accompanied the blind sheep down the road to Hell. In place of spiritual leaders, there were only blind—and mute—mouths.19

Ac it semeth now sothly, to the worldes syght,
That goddes worde worcheth nau3te, on lered ne on lewede,

And the festu is fallen, for 3owre defaute,
In alle manere men, thurgh mansed prestes.
The bible bereth witnesse, that alle the folke of Israel
Byttere abou3te the gultes, of two badde prestes,
Offyn and Fynes; for her couetytise,
Archa dei myshapped, and Ely brake his nekke.
For-thi, 3e corectoures, claweth her-on, and corecteth fy rst
3ow-seluen,
And thanne move 3e saufly seye, as Dauid made the sauter...
And thanne shal borel clerkes ben abasched, to blame 3ow or
to greue,
And carpen nou3te as thei carpen now, and calle 3ow doumbe
houndes....

(X, 274-287)

Langland's figural mind never questioned the reality of this repetitive pattern of providential history. This spiritual chaos, when viewed in the context of providential history, assumed for the poet an alarming urgency; for he truly believed that his society was witnessing the displeasure of God's retributive justice. Langland was striving, in exposing the evil which sur-
rounded him, to exhort his readers—both clergy and laity—to action by focusing on the immediacy of their danger. What he hoped to see was a reform movement within the secular clergy strong enough to refute, through its own example, the charges made against them.

Langland's figural mind also read extrahistorical meanings into the social, economic and natural disasters which severely debilitated England during the fourteenth-century; and *Piers Plowman* must always be read in light of these historical events which helped to shape it. Interpreted as tokens of divine displeasure by men whose recollections of the terror of the pestilence were still keen, plain warnings were read in the skies, and natural portents were big with supernatural importance.

Reason had warned the people:

> He preued that thise pestilences . were for pure synne,  
> And the southwest wynde . on Saterday at euene  
> Was pertliche for pure pryde . and for no poynt elles.  
> Piries and plomtrees . were puffed to the erthe,  
> In ensample, 3e segges . 3e shulden do the bettere.  
> Beches and brode okes . were blowen to the grounde,  
> Tornd vpward her tailles . in tokenyng of drede,  
> That dedly synne at domesday . shal fordon hem alle.  
> (V, 13-20)  

And Imaginatyf had warned Will:

> Amende the while thow my3te . thow hast ben warned ofte  
> With poustees of pestilences . with pouerte and with angres;  
> And with thise bitter baleyses . god beteth his dere childeren....  
> (XII, 10-12)  

But the field of folk were not listening to God's warnings:

> Many a peire sithen the pestilence . han pli3t hem togideres;  
> The fruit that thei brynge forth . aren foule wordes,  
> In Ialousye Ioyeles . and Ianglyng on bedde.  
> Haue thei no children but cheste . and choppyng hem bitwene.  
> (IX, 164-166)
The clergy, moreover, who should have been the first to recognize these signs from heaven, were the worst offenders:

Persones and parisch prestes . pleyned hem to the bischop, 
That here parisshes were pore . sith the pestilence tyme, 
To haue a lycence and a leue . at London to dwelle, 
And syngen there for symonye . for siluer is swete. 
(Prol., 83-86)

Freres and faitoures . han founde suche questiouns 
To plese with proude men . sithen the pestilence tyme, 
And prechen at seint Poules . for pure enuye of clerkis, 
That folke is nouȝte fermed in the feith . ne fre of her goodes.... 
(X, 71-74)

It is because of their sinful neglect that:

Kynd Conscience tho herde . and cam out of the planetes, 
And sent forth his foreioures . feures and fluxes, 
Coughes, and cardiacles . crampes, and tothaches, 
Rewmes, and readegoundes . and roynouse scalles, 
Byles, and bocches . and brennyng agues; 
Frenesyes, and foule yueles . forageres of kynde, 
Hadde yprykked and prayed . polles of peple, 
That largelich a legioun . lese her lyf sone. 
(XX, 79-86)

This concept of interpreting pestilences, in a general sense, as repetitive signs of divine retribution is best illustrated by Langland's connection of the idea of lack of food with the theme of "idleness and abundance," which will be treated at length as the best example of Langland's structuring of contemporary time in a universal Biblical framework, which this chapter has been trying to illustrate.

This particular treatment is primarily centered in Passus VI (the Hunger episode of the Visio) and Passus XIII-XIV (the Haukyn episode of Dowel). Historically, England had experienced an extraordinary dearth in 1370. Haukyn refers to this when he declares:
it is nou^t longe ypased,
There was a carful commune. whan no carte come to toune
With bake bred fro Stretforth. tho gan beggeres wepe,
And werkmen were agaste a litel. this wil be thou^te longe.
In the date of owre dry3te. in a drye Aprile,
A thousande and thre hondreth. tweis thretty and ten,
My wafres there were gesen (scarce). whan Chichestre was maire.'
(XIII, 265-271)

John de Chichestre, according to Skeat, was elected Mayor in 1369 and
remained in office until October, 1370. A dearth also followed the
pestilence of 1376; and this is possibly the reference when Piers tells
Hunger: "...the while the drought lasteth/ And bi this lyflode we mot
lyue. til Lammasse tyme" (VI, 290-291).

But Langland's figural mind easily read extrahistorical meanings
into these historical facts. He saw this lack of food as a way in which
God "beteth his dere children" for the sin of idleness: "Lesyng of tyme,
treuthe wote the sothe!/ Is most yhated vp erthe . of hem that beth in
heuene" (IX, 98-99). Honest work was God's command; and Langland
sincerely believed that if everyone worked, each in his own degree,
famine and starvation would be averted. Just as Piers, the good Christian
plowman in Passus VI-VII, plows his half-acre before he begins his pil-
grimage (VI, 4-6), so must the fourteenth-century field of folk help him
to work in order to retain their membership in the Christian society:

At the dredeful dome. whan dede shullen rise,
And comen alle bifor Cryst. acountis to 3elde,
How thow laddest thi lyf here . and his lawes kepest,
And how thow dedest day bi day. the dome wil reherce....
(VII, 187-190)

Langland's quarrel was that not everyone was doing his job "as God
hoteth." Jack the Juggler, Janet of the stews, Daniel the dice player, and their ilk (VI, 72-75), who gain a false living but do not help Piers to work, are contrasted with Piers' wife, Dame Worche-whan-tyme-is. Holicherche is forbidden to take tithes from them, and Scripture declares that they be excluded from the righteous. Langland's society was a medieval hierarchy, in which each had his own place and duty: "The kynge and the comune. and kynde witte the thridde/ Shope lawe and lewte. eche man to knowe his owne" (Prol., 121-122). Only some "swonken ful harde/ And wonnen that wastours/ with glotonye destruyeth" (Prol., 21-22). Langland went, therefore, to Genesis iii.19 for the Scriptural basis for his philosophy of "idleness and abundance":

'3e, I bihote the, ' quod Hunger. 'or ellis the bible lieth; Go to Genesis the gyaunt. the engendroure of vs alle; 'In sudore and swynke. thow shalt thi mete tilye, And laboure for thi lyflode'. and so owre lorde hy3te.

Kynde witt wolde. that eche a wyght wrou3te
Or in dykynge or in deluynge. or trauaillynge in preyeres,
Contemplatyf lyf or actyf lyf. Cryst wolde men wrou3te.

(VI, 233-251)

In the allegory of Passus VI, Piers and his pilgrims plow the half-acre ("eche man in his manere") and Piers is pleased, and goes out "at heighe pryme" to see which of the workers should be "huyred ther-after, whan heruest-tyme come" (VI, 116). The eschatological overtones of the agricultural imagery in this passus are never in doubt. When he goes out, he sees "seten somme. and songen atte nale/ And hulpen erie his half-acre. with 'how! trollilolli!'" (VI, 117-118). Piers is furious and warns the sluggards: "3e wasten that men wynnen . with
trauaille and with tene/ Ac Treuthe shal tech 30w. his teme to dryue/ Or
3e shal ete barly bred. and of the broke drynke" (VI, 135-137). As God's
agent, Piers then calls down Hunger (who, in this context, has a very
strong meaning—probably the near equivalent of Famine) to avenge him:

Hunger in haste tho. hent Wastour bi the mawe, 
And wronge hym so bi the wombe. that bothe his eyen wattered; 
He buffeted the Britoner. aboute the chekes, 
That he loked like a lanterne. al his lyf after. 
He bette hem so bothe. he barste nere here guttes; 
Ne hadde Pieres with a pese-lof. preyed Hunger to cesse, 
They hadde ben doluen bothe. ne deme thow non other. 
(VI, 176-182)

Piers has pity on the people and begs Hunger to leave—he thinks they have
learned their lesson. But as soon as the new harvest comes in, and "newe
corne cam to chepyng (market)":

And tho wolde Wastour nouȝt werche. but wandren aboute, 
Ne no begger ete bred. that benes inne were, 
.................................
Laboureres that haue no lande. to lyue on but her handes, 
Deyned nouȝt to dyne a-day. nyȝt-olde wortes. 
.................................
And but-if he be heighlich huyred. ellis wil he chyde,
And that he was werkman wurȝt. waille the tyme,
.................................
He greueth hym aȝeines god. and gruccheth aȝeines resoun,
And thanne curseth he the kynge. and al his conseille after, 
Suche lawes to loke. laboreres to greue. 
Ac whiles Hunger was her maister. there wolde none of hem chyde, 
Ne stryue aȝeines his statut. so sterneliche he loked. 
(VI, 304-321)

The reference to the laborers who demanded high wages refers to the
actual economic situation in England at that time. Again we see that
Piers Plowman must be dual-read not only according to the religio-
historical pattern which shaped the poem, but also in light of the historical
events which shaped Langland's age. After the Black Death (1349), labor
in England was scarce and the laborers demanded higher wages. The Statute of Labourers (1350) compelled the ablebodied laborers to work for hire at recognized rates of pay, but the provisions of the Statute were not kept.23

The poet then steps to the pulpit and prophecies:

Ac I warne 30w, werkemen . wynneth while 3e mowe,  
For Hunger hiderward . hasteth hym faste,    
He shal awake with water . wastoures to chaste.  
Ar fyue 3ere be fulfilled . suche famyn shal aryse,  
Thorwgh flodes and thourgh foule wederes . frutes shul faille,  
And so sayde Saturne . and sent 30w to warne:  
Whan 3e se the sonne amys . and two monkes hedes,  
And a mayde haue the maistrie . and multiplie bi eight,  
Thanne shal Deth withdrawe . and Derthe be iustice,  
And Dawe the dyker . deye for hunger,  
But if god of his goodnesse . graunt vs a trewe.  

(VI, 322-332) 24

Patience refers to the Old Testament when he similarly warns Haukyn that, "the meschief and the meschaunce . amonges men of Sodome/ Wex thorw plente of payn. and of pure sleuthe..." (XIV, 75-76). Haukyn can, therefore, only conclude that:

For may no blyssyng done vs bote . but if we wil amende,  
Né mannes masse make . pees . amonges Cristene peple,  
Tyl pruyde be purelich fordo . and that thourgh payn defaute  
(lack of bread).  
(XIII, 258-260)

Langland's prophecy, quoted above, should not be considered extraordinary. Political and eschatological prophecy was extremely widespread and popular in the later Middle Ages; well-known names like Merlin, Hildegarde, and Joachim, as well as a host of lesser-knowns, occur again and again. Many are interested in political or ecclesiastical events, and others concentrate on Antichrist. Many make use of astro-
logy and astronomy; animals are favorite masking symbols, and numbers and letters follow in bewildering profusion. For example, the conjunction of Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn in 1345 was widely held to have been the cause of the Black Death. In general, the prophecies of the period agree remarkably that the fifties, sixties, and seventies of the fourteenth century are dangerous times and that 1365 in particular is a year to be watched. In that year a conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter and other unusual conjunctions were expected; and these astronomical events presaged misfortunes.

The type of "historical" structure just described lent itself to the poet's didacticism because it offered the range in time which he needed to show the repetitive pattern of providential history. For example, the Black Death was followed by a singular recklessness of conduct on the part of the survivors. Langland, however, attributed this moral malaise to the hasty marriages following the plague, which went against Biblical injunctions; and, accordingly, we have another thundering figural prophecy:

Trewe wedded libbing folk. in this worlde is Dowel;
For thei mote worche and wynne. and the worlde susteyne.
...........................................
Ac fals folke faithlees. theues and lieres,
Wastoures and wrecches. out of wedloke, I trowe,
Conceyued ben in yuel tyme. as Caym was on Eue.
...........................................
And alle that come of that Caym. come to yuel ende.
For God sent to Seem (Seth). and seyde bi an angel,
'Thyne issue in thyne issue. I wil that thei be wedded,
And nouȝt thi kynde with Caymes. ycoupled ne yspoused.'
3et some, aȝe in the sonde. of owre saueoure of heuene,
Caymes kynde and his kynde. coupled togideres,
Tyl god wratthed for her werkis. and suche a worde seyde,
'That I maked man. now it me athynketh (grieves);'
Penitet me fecisse hominem.
And come to Noe anon. and bad hym nouȝt lette:

Tyl fourty dayes be fulfille. that the flode haue ywasshen
Clene awey the cursed blode. that Caym hath ymaked.

And thus thourw cursed Caym. cam care vpon erthe;
And ai for thei rwoȝt wedlokes. aiȝn goddis wille.
For-thi haue thei maugre for here mariages. that marye so
her children;

For some, as I se now. soth for to telle,
For coueitise of catel. vnkyndeliche ben wedded.
As careful concepcioun. cometh of suche mariages,
As bifel of the folke. that I bifoire of tolde.

Whan ȝe haue wyued, bewar. and worceth in tyme;
Nouȝt as Adam and Eue. whan Caym was engendred.
For in vntyme, trewli. bitwene man and womman,
Ne shulde no bourde on bedde be...

And thei that othergatis ben geten. for gedelynges ben holden,
As false folke fondeleynges. faitoures and lyars;
Vngracious to gete goode. or loue of the peoole,
Wandren and wasten. what thei cacche mowe.
Aȝeines Dowel thei don yuel. and the deuel serue,
And after her deth-day. shulle dwelle with the same,
But god gyue hem grace here. hem-self to amende.

(IX, 107-198)

And so in a Biblical-historical, but vivid, manner, Langland warned
backsliding England. The imagery of the Deluge suggested a "hellfire
and brimstone" level which would have impressed the readers the poet
hoped to reach: this was something they could understand. The notion
that Cain's children were exceedingly wicked is frequently alluded to in
the Middle Ages. To be "of Cain's kin" or to be "of Judas' kin" was a
proverbial expression equivalent to the Scriptural expression "sons of
Belial." 28 The command of God to Seth is probably derived from Peter
Comestor; it is not in Scripture. The sons of God who mingled with the
daughters of men are, according to some commentators, the sons of
Seth mingling with the generation of Cain. 29 The admonition to married
couples to "work in time" stems from a curious legend, popular in the Middle Ages, which professed that Cain was born during the period of penitence and fasting to which Adam and Eve were condemned for their breach of obedience. Langland's sinning couple is described in the following manner:

Tyl eytheres wille waxeth kene . and to the werke 3eden,  
As wel in fastyng-days and Frydayes . and forboden ny3tes;  
And as wel in Lente as oute of Lente . alle tymes ylyche,  
Suche werkes with hem . were neuere oute of sesoun.  
(XIII, 348-351)

The detailed analyses in this chapter have attempted, once again, to show that Langland's seemingly chaotic jumps from past to present to future do not reveal the poet's carelessness, or naiveté, but his figural mode of thought. Structuring historical time in this manner fit the poet's didacticism because it gave meaning to life. He was able to firmly anchor Piers Plowman in the fourteenth century, through specific contemporary events, while using the world-historical framework to extend the poem into eternity through all historical time.

This attempt to place his contemporaries in the perspective of eternity finally emerges as the essence of Langland's philosophy; yet, it incidentally indicates a seeming paradox, since the poet exhorts each individual to work hard, on the one hand, since all depends on his work in contemporary time, while, on the other hand, he preaches ne solliciti sitis, dependence on God through the eternal bonds of creation and redemption. But this is not really a contradiction, because Langland is merely trying to show the field of folk that, as Christians, they are too concerned with temporalia and must learn to see themselves in the perspective of
their final end. Holicherche tells Will: "The moste partie of this people
that passeth on this erthe, / Haue thei worship in this worlde. thei wilne
no better;/ Of other heuene than here. holde thei no tale" (I, 7-9). Even
though Langland never loses sight of the individual's earthly existence
(because his life "day bi day" is, finally, the basis of God's judgment and
hence of the eternal condition of the soul), this perspective of eternity in-
volves more than the life of simple well-doing; it also requires a conviction
of the utter helplessness of man: "For we haue no lettre of oure lyf. how
longe it shal dure" (X, 187). And this is what Langland attempts to illustrate
by the doctrine of ne solliciti sitis, an unconcern with worldly values and
acceptance of God's providence.

The following examples from Passus VII and Passus XIV, which are
both structured around the provision of food, offer the best illustration of
Langland's placing of this concern for "lyflode" in its proper context:

I shal cessen of my sowyng; quod Piers. 'and swynk nou3t so harde,
Ne about my bely-iyoye. so bisi be namore!
Of preyers and of penaunces. my plow shal ben herafter,

We shulde nou3t be to bisy aboute the worldes blisse;
Ne solliciti sitis. he seyth in the gospel....
(VII, 117-126)

Though neuere greyne growed. ne grape vpon vyne.
Alle that lyueth and loketh. lyflode wolde I fynde,
And that ynoough shal none faile. of thinge that hem nedeth.
We shulde nou3t be to busy. a-bouten owre lyflode,
Ne solliciti sitis, etc....
(XIV, 28-33)

Although the whole poem is filled with references to the individual's "lyf-
time" in the context of his "deth-day" and final judgment, we are not sur-
prised to find that the pardon in Passus VII (Et qui bona egerunt, ibunt in vitam eternam;/ Qui vero mala, in ignem eternum), a restatement of the Athanasian Creed, triggers off a veritable cluster of death and Judgment Day images, since the pardon reveals God's will to man and teaches that man must consider eternity and that temporal affairs are important only because they determine the eternal end. The following examples illustrate the intensity of Langland's feeling:

At the dredeful dome . whan dede shullen rise,
And comen alle bifor Cryst . acountis to 3elde,
How thow laddest thi lyf here . and his lawes keptest,
And how thow dedest day bi day . the dome wil reherce....

(VII, 187-190)

That god gyue vs grace here . ar we gone hennes,
Suche werkes to werche . while we ben here,
That after owre deth-day . Dowel reherce,
At the day of dome . we dede as he hi3te.

(VII, 197-200)

In this treatment of human activity in terms of man's final end, Langland is making use of the positive dogmatic system promulgated by the Church, dependent upon its history as revealed in the Bible, and accepted by the consciences of the faithful. As St. Gregory says, "To us, the eternal world ought to be in the thought and intent, but the world of time in the use."
CHAPTER III


2. That Langland was able to avoid this weakness is important. Erich Auerbach, for example, thinks this weakness inherent in late medieval Christianity: "Rigid, narrow, and unproblematic schematization is originally completely alien to the Christian concept of reality. It is true, to be sure, that the rigidifying process is furthered to a considerable degree by the figural interpretation of real events, which as Christianity became established and spread, grew increasingly influential and which, in its treatment of actual events, dissolved their content of reality, leaving them only their content of meaning" (Mimesis, trans. W. Trask [N.Y., 1957], p. 104).


4. Erich Auerbach, Mimesis, p. 169.

5. Auerbach, p. 137.


7. Bernard F. Huppe, "Date of the B-Text of Piers Plowman," SP 38 (1941), 34-44.


16. Throughout my following analysis of the pointed historical references to the Papal Schism, I am indebted to the material in J. A. W. Bennett, "The Date of the B-Text of Piers Plowman," 56-64.

17. Pantin, The English Church, p. 91.

18. Bennett, Medium Aevum 12 (1943), 63.


21. There were four pestilences during the reign of Edward III: 1348-49, 1361-62, 1369, and 1375-76 (the first of these is generally known as the Black Death). These plagues proved such scourges that the land was left partly untilled, causing severe famines. The "southwest wynde on Saterday" is an allusion to the violent tempest which occurred on Saturday, January 5, 1362 (W. W. Skeat, ed., The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman in Three Parallel Texts with Richard the Redeless by William Langland, II, 63-64).


24. On this prophecy, see Goodridge, p. 332.


26. Bloomfield (Piers Plowman, pp. 92-93) points out the interesting coincidence that the dates Jean de Roquetaillade, a Franciscan Spiritual, favors for the coming of Antichrist (and he is not alone in this) are 1365, 1378, 1388, dates which (according to some scholars) approximate the composition of the three versions of Piers Plowman. Even though Langland, the orthodox Christian, does not (like many of his contemporaries) date the coming of Antichrist and the Kingdom of God, the prevalent feeling throughout the poem is that the time of Antichrist is at hand.


29. Goodridge, trans., Piers the Ploughman, p. 335.


CONCLUSION

Using the figural interpretation of history to bring order out of the seeming temporal chaos in Piers Plowman generated the additional problem of coping with the rigidity inherent in this particular interpretation of real events. The idea of a figural fulfillment in the beyond tends to discredit the horizontal, historical connections between events and encourages rigidification. As we have seen, however, Langland's ability to firmly anchor the poem in contemporary history preserves the uniqueness of the events he is observing. His remarkable ability to particularize the general transforms the multi-level interpretation of history required by the world-historical framework into vivid reality. Apprehending the divine as reality, for example, through the use of the Saul and Agag "historical" structure, underlines the repetitive pattern of providential history (as Langland saw it) in an unforgettable manner. Through his realism, Langland was able to release the forces of Christian feeling in a magnificent attempt to place his contemporaries in the perspective of eternity. His concept of the end of time is dramatized by his concern that the field of folk are too concerned with temporalia and not content to accept God's providence. Not daring to question God's omnipotence by asking "when" of the Kingdom,
the poem is, nevertheless, hopefully projected into the future with the poet's faith that God's will will be done.
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