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“Piers Plowman B” in its contemplative context

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University of Washington, 1989

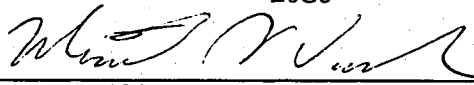
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PIERS PLOWMAN B
in its
Contemplative Context

by
Linda J. Clifton

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

PIERS PLOWMAN B in its
Contemplative Context

by Linda J. Clifton

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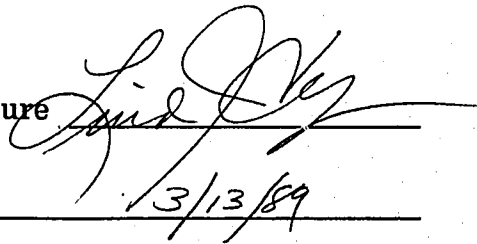
This dissertation places *Piers Plowman B* in the context of a group of late medieval works which describe the psychology of and methods for practicing contemplation. These works include St. Bernard's sermons on contemplation, Bonaventure's *Mind's Road to God*, Richard of St. Victor's *Benjamin Minor and Benjamin Major*, *Deonise Hid Diuinite*, several works by the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and, especially, a group of works on contemplation found in the Vernon manuscript with an A-text of *Piers Plowman*.

The dissertation summarizes the commonalities underlying these various views of contemplation and then demonstrates how knowledge of such commonalities affects a reading of *Piers Plowman B*. In other words, how might a reader familiar with the *Ego dormio* tradition, which employs the image of sleep as a metaphor for the contemplative process, and familiar with the descriptions and arguments found in contemplative literature read *Piers Plowman B*?

In answering this question, the dissertation clarifies how *Piers Plowman B* is indeed concerned with mysticism though it does not demonstrate the achievement of the Dreamer's union with the "hid divinity." It argues that the Dreamer's sleeps may be read as a series of attempts to practice contemplation, that the Dreamer struggles, with increasing success, to focus his will upon patient attention to the instructions his dreams bring and to quell his tendencies to "jangle" (that is, to employ argumentation) as he strives for "kynde knowynge." Will's swoon at the beginning of Passus XVI marks the moment of the Dreamer's inner conversion, revealing that the Dreamer is depicted as achieving, through grace, the first two stages of the contemplative process—purgation and illumination—though never the third—union. He does, however, achieve an illuminative vision of Christ and the reconciliation of the Four Daughters of God.

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Contents

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| Introduction | 1 |
| Chapter I: The Medieval Context | 33 |
| Chapter II: Contemplation by Degrees | 75 |
| Chapter III: Knowing the Self | 105 |
| Chapter IV: Illumination and Concealment | 157 |
| Chapter V: The Legitimacy of Vision | 200 |
| Works Consulted | 218 |

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INTRODUCTION

Most modern critics of the fourteenth century English poem *Piers Plowman* express some feeling of disjunction between what they can explain about the poem and what they perceive as its inexplicable contradictions and difficulties. Of the three versions of the poem we have, *Piers Plowman B* seems to excite critical attention most, and most particularly because it seems the most disjointed, the most unreconciled version of the three, and, at the same time, the most mysteriously powerful. Bloomfield points out, for instance, that it may be a poem about grace, about charity, about justice, but that it does not seem finally to focus clearly on any of these as its absolute center. For Mary Carruthers, the poem evolves a meaning "finally unsusceptible of a structured statement.... The condition of the poem is fluidity, lack of cohesion, the ultimate rejection of any single structure, however comprehensive" (172). Thus to many critics, like Priscilla Martin, for example, the poem seems arbitrary and disjunctive and, at the same time, cryptically coherent, with a coherence they find themselves unable to characterize or satisfactorily explain. One of these, Anne Middleton, explores the poem's frequent association in

the manuscripts with "works of historical narration and synthesis" ("Audience" 104) and its constant self-questioning, and concludes the poem is a "*speculum historiae christianae*" in which "the comprehensive display of Christian faith and moral teaching is given, at a shifting and indeterminable angle of refraction, as to 'myself in a mirour'"(123), a risky creation of a fiction constantly susceptible to "misprision" by its audience. And some, like Elizabeth Salter, Edward Vasta, A.V.C. Schmidt and Joseph Wittig, attempt to establish a coherence in the poem or in some of its parts by exploring connections between certain details in *Piers Plowman* and various texts which deal with contemplation. None of these, however, has explored such a relation fully.

In fact, ever since Morton W. Bloomfield stated flatly that *Piers Plowman* was not written by a mystic—an opinion he largely based on comparing the style and intensity of the poem with that of the writings of the fourteenth century English mystic Richard Rolle (*Apocalypse* 38-39) and on what he considered the lack of the poem's concern with perfection or the mystic union of the soul with God—critics have generally rejected the contention that the poem takes the point of view of a mystic or upholds the Contemplative Life as the most worthy choice for a Christian. They have found themselves unable to equate Dowel, Dobet and Dobest with any trifold schema, such as that of the Active, the Contemplative and the Mixed Life discussed by Christian thinkers of the Middle Ages, and have generally concluded that the poet is most interested in social controversies, such as the issue of poverty, or in apocalyptic prophecy of destruction for a

doomed society, rather than in attempting to exemplify the essential aspects of a spiritual religious life focused on perfection of the soul. As Schmidt says, "Langland is not a devotional, let alone a mystical poet, despite affinities with both these important contemporary traditions" ("Inner" 32).

A number of critics of *Piers Plowman* seem united in agreeing that the successions of wakings and sleepings in the poem, while unusual and therefore interesting, form no pattern in themselves which reveal any explicit allegorical significance. R.W. Frank explains the plurality of dreams as a series of visions, each of which is a thematic unit. He sees the use of dreams within dreams, which he notes as a "particularly striking innovation" (3) in dream poetry, as a method the poet employs to treat a topic different from, though related to, the problem being discussed at that point in the poem. Anne Middleton sees the dream linkages as "loosely sequential" ("Narration" 95) and the text as a series of "discontinuities and changes of direction" of which she says, "What we learn by following the literal level, noticing the nature of the appearances we are explicitly urged to see *through*, is not what Langland set out to display, a conception of truth or of Christian well-doing, but his idea of 'making'" (94). I will return to this issue of "making" in Chapter Five, to show that while the problem of making fiction is important to the poem, it does not account for the poet's using a *series* of dreams. And while Frank's introduction cites Gerould's statement that "'each new dream marks the beginning of a new stage in the long search for divine wisdom'" (Frank 3), he concludes that "the poet's artistic

vision is moralistic rather than raptly prophetic, realistic rather than mystical" (118).

Robertson and Huppé, Vasta, Clopper, Wittig, Harwood, Schmidt and Salter, on the other hand, see in the poem some emphasis on the spiritual quest for salvation, while David Lawton detects in the poem's visions of the Crucifixion and the Harrowing of Hell an example of the "*via positiva* of lay piety that was strong in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries" (*Subject* 25). Lawton wants to see in the poem a struggle connected with the "discursive connection between power and mysticism." He says, "[T]he *via positiva* is the mysticism of the politically underprivileged, the marginal," while the *via negativa*, "the way of silence, denial and unknowing" has hierarchical privilege and authority (28). He thus wants to claim for the poem a connection with mysticism while preserving a sense of opposition and disjunction. Salter, in her *Piers Plowman—An Introduction*, sees sleep in the poem not only as a "state of privilege to which the dreamer would not normally, in waking life, attain," but also as having "added force: it represents a state of grace" (61). Still, she explicitly insists that "the revelations made to Langland's dreamer as he 'sleeps to the world' are not identical with those high intimations of 'heavenly fairhead' made to the mystic" (61-2). She thus fails to clarify what connection might obtain between the dream visions in *Piers* and either the *via positiva* or the *via negativa* of the contemplative literature.

Schmidt views the inner sleep in Passus B X as emphasizing "the primacy of inner conversion." He says further, "In its structure and tone it is indebted to the devotional tradition of 'Ego dormio, et cor

meum vigilat' " ("Inner" 32), but he applies this connection only to the inner dream, concluding, as we saw above, that this poet is not mystical. Further, Schmidt's primary interest in this article is in the C-text, so his discussion of the B-text does not explore the full implications of the relations of this inner dream to its context in B. Thus, although Schmidt connects *Piers* with the contemplative literature, he argues that the poet's familiarity with the tradition of meditating on the Passion and with devotion to the Holy Name can still lead to his conclusion, noted above, that "Langland is not a devotional, let alone a mystical poet, despite affinities with both these important contemporary traditions" ("Inner" 32). Harwood's primary interest is to assert Will's desire to know "kyndely" and to explore the meaning of that term but whether the Dreamer achieves a "kynde knowyng" is "not for discussion here, since it would involve us in the formidable task of identifying the action of the poem" ("Quest" 255).

Piers Plowman has, however, to paraphrase Machery (Middleton, "Narration" 94), a declared rather than concealed surface. This narrator has slept, repeatedly, and dreamed, repeatedly. The critics' error is to disregard this literal surface in attempting to discern in what ways the poet may be using his understanding of contemplative materials as he composes his poem. Most critics, like Rosemary Woolf, consider the literal level of the poem unimportant or, like Spearing, simply classify the poem generically as a dream vision while recognizing that it presents a series of such visions and thus differs from others in this "genre." Schmidt views the poem as Will's quest, and the "interplay between sleep and waking [as giving] dramatic urgency

to the dreams themselves" with their "immediate thematic concerns —Meed, the Deadly Sins, Patience, Charity" (xxi, xxv). And while Lawrence Clopper does see a reference to the contemplative's epistemology in the structure of the poem's divisions into *Visio*, with its presentation of the literal world and *Vita*, with that *Vita's* subdivisions into three parts which he equates with tropological, allegorical and anagogical meanings, he flatly states that :

... there is no reason to suppose that the Dreamer in *Piers* engages in any form of contemplative activity; on the contrary, he is a wanderer and idler, one who has, for whatever reasons, visions visited on him. He does seem to progress and grow in understanding in the poem, but some question remains about whether he has actively reformed the way in which he lives; in particular, there is the question of whether he has made adequate restitution that would allow him to enter Unity. When he goes toward Unity, we are told that he gets there through Contrition and Confession, but we are not told that he has made restitution, and even though Kynde commands him to "lerne to loue," we have no firm conviction that he has done so before he awakens at the final moment. ("Matrix" 25)

Lawton, considering this same question, and referring to Will's sleep during the Mass, concludes, "I am loath to enter an irresolvable debate about whether this shows a special degree of grace or a grave spiritual fault" (23). Wittig frames his discussion of Passus IX through XII as a comparison with a "commonplace program of spiritual ascent" (212) which he identifies with the writings on contemplation of the Victorines and St. Bernard, but he does not "elaborate the relationship of the present interpretation of Passus 9-12 to the rest of the

poem" (280). Each of these critics, then, either remains puzzled by the shape of the entire work, or refrains from applying to the work as a whole a comparison with the contemplative tradition which they find illuminates the part of the poem they examine.

Vasta tries to argue a connection between the poem's whole content and the contemplative life, attempting to "view *Piers Plowman* as fundamentally concerned with individual perfection in the Unitive Life rather than with the broad catch-all problem of salvation" (*Spiritual Basis* 21). Vasta maps the poem against the mystical theology of St. Bernard, relying heavily on a correspondence between Bernard and the speech of Holy Church early in the poem. His work has generally been disregarded. Bloomfield gave it a scathing review in which he called it "singularly unsatisfying and unconvincing both as to method and argumentation" ("Review" 205). His major objection is that Vasta fails to establish convincingly that the poem demonstrates a union with God on the part of the Dreamer :

Nor am I going to be convinced by a writer who doesn't seem to know what union with God means. Apparently Mr. Vasta is under the illusion that if one can visualize the Passion and the first Pentecost one has therefore attained to the beatific vision or its correspondence in this world. This is certainly an easy way to join the ranks of the mystics. Even I could become one. . . . I admit there are some mystical parts of *Piers*, but they do not seem to me to be other than sincere Christian feelings. The ecstasy and fire of the true mystic, the dark night of the soul, the purgative and illuminative way, the union with God, seem remarkably hidden in the poem. They must be brought to light if skeptics are to be convinced. (206-207)

Vasta's work presents two major difficulties. The first is his heavy reliance on Bernard alone. The second he shares with the rest of the critics, since none of these—not Vasta, Clopper, Lawton nor Wittig, who come the closest—has turned concerted attention on the possible implications that are suggested by the terminology used in contemplative literature several of them cite. This terminology, as they point out, speaks of sleeping and waking. Thus the surface of the poem, Will's literal dreamings and wakings, fails for them all as an aid in clarifying the relation between the process by which the poem unfolds and the content of its vision.

Even Robertson and Huppé, who do consider the significance of Will's sleeps, call it at first "spiritual slumber" (48) and then "contemplative vision" (173) without explaining how the same activity on the part of a character in the poem can be interpreted in two such opposite ways in a single text. They see the poem as an exegesis on the *sentence* of Scripture (3), and for them the interest of the poem inheres in its tropological, allegorical and anagogical meanings; its literal surface—the wakes and sleeps of Will—are for them a mere "device" rather than a pattern related to the mystical quest for perfection. Of course, in one sense, any poem's shape and contents are merely a "device" for the poet's purposes. But when they see the character Will as "merely a device by means of which the poet may set off the actual against the ideal in the poem and so develop his major theme" (240) which is the contrast between "the actual and the ideal" (242), and when they interpret Will's successive sleeps first as signs of "spiritual slumber" (48) and finally, in Passus XVI, as "the

sleep of the contemplative, isolating himself from the world so that he may enjoy the vision of Christ" (193), they fail to resolve satisfactorily the contradiction resulting from their identification of sleep and dream with spiritual sloth in the beginning of the poem and with contemplation and visionary insight as the poem progresses. Instead, they claim that Will's search is merely that search for salvation appropriate to every Christian, contemplative or not, and conclude that "fundamentally, Will is a device by means of which the poet may reveal what he considers to be the need of the church for guidance by Piers Plowman" (35). Their claim, which finds the center of gravity in the poem to be its harsh critique of the church, rests on their characterization of Will's early sleeps and dreams as "spiritual slumber," by which they mean spiritual sloth, followed by their unexplained shift to interpreting sleep later in the poem as contemplation.

Their error lies in too narrow an examination of the literature contemporary with and antecedent to *Piers Plowman B*, which leads to their consequent failure to account consistently for the poem's use of its literal surface of sleeps and wakings. But a close comparison of the literal acts of the Dreamer's progress in *Piers Plowman B* with the processes of meditation and contemplation described in the literature on contemplation written before or around the time that *Piers Plowman B* was produced reveals that sleep may indeed be read throughout the poem as a metaphorical image of the practice of those acts which will, with the help of grace, lead the seeker to the full bliss of contemplative union.

Many medieval writers on contemplation used the term "sleep" to denote "contemplation." Included in these were the *Benjamin Minor*, *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, *The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, *A Ladder of Foure Ronges*, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, *Deonise Hid Diuinite*, and some writings of the Victorines, St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, Walter Hilton, and various minor writers associated with Richard Rolle. The explicit purpose stated in many of these texts is to instruct the reader in techniques for reaching spiritual perfection, and subsequently salvation, through contemplative union. The texts frequently gloss the verse *Ego dormio et cor meum vigilat*, from the Song of Solomon, and often use the image of the waking sleep as a figure for characterizing meditation and contemplation. For instance, *The Cloud of Unknowing* advises that one "sit full styll, as it were in a slepyng slei3t" (Hodgson 83). The same author in *The Book of Privy Counselling*, says that the state of sleep to the world is not only most desirable, but most safe from the fiend :

For, as Salamon seiþ in þis processe, "3if þou slepe" in þis blynde beholdyng from al þe noise & þe steryng of þe fel fende, þe fals world & þe freel flessche, "þou schalt not drede any peril" ne any deceyte of þe feende . . . for "þou schalt gracyously rest" in þis louely onheed of God & þi soule; "& þi sleep schal be ful softe". (Hodgson, *Cloud* 147-148)

Similarly, Walter Hilton explains :

Thus the same grace that turns the soul from sin . . . makes the soul perfect as well. . . . And this grace is also *the waking sleep of the*

spouse, of what Holy Scripture says, "*Ego dormio, et cor meum vigilat*" (Canticle of Canticles 5:2). That is, I sleep, but my heart is awake. That means, I sleep spiritually when, through grace, the love of the world is slain in me. . . . The more I "sleep" to outward things, the more "awake" I am in the knowing of Jesus and inward things.

I cannot "wake" to Jesus unless I "sleep" to the world, and therefore, the grace of the Holy Spirit, shutting flesh-governed eyes, puts the soul to "sleep" to worldly vanity and opens the spiritual eyes. . . . The more that the eyes are "shut" to the appetite for earthly things in this kind of "sleep," the sharper is the inner sight in the love-filled contemplation of Heavenly beauty. Love effects this "sleeping" and this "waking" through the light of grace in the soul of the lover of our Lord Jesus (Del Mastro, *Stairway* 315-316).

To consider this contemplative literature is therefore to place *Piers Plowman B* more firmly in its contemporary context than has hitherto been done, and to add a dimension to our consideration of the meanings and methods the poem employs. By placing the poem in context of contemporary considerations of meditation and contemplation, we can discuss certain features of the text without having to privilege these as constituting the "real" meaning of *Piers Plowman*. Instead, they provide us with a frame for interpretation which permits several formulations to be at work simultaneously in the poem, just as medieval interpretive theory describing the levels of allegory allows several interpretations to be operative within one text without requiring that any one (e.g., the tropological) be regarded as more essential than another (e.g., the anagogical), nor that any one be consistently interpretable throughout every word and line of the entire text. In other words, medieval allegorists did not require that

each of the four levels of allegorical interpretation incorporate each detail of the entire text, nor need we. As Lawton says, "we do not have to choose between, say, apocalypse, dream-vision, sermon, or pilgrimage of life; no reading is quite as exhaustive as it sounds, because the poem contains many sets, sometimes conflicting, of different generic indications" (*Subject* 13-14). Further, as we place *Piers Plowman B* in this context, we add aspects of significance within the poem which allow us to examine anew those tensions in the text we sense as we read.

As long as the dreams are regarded as dreams, those phenomena of sleep's seeing we all experience, *Piers Plowman B* will continue to appear arbitrary in its arrangement and a strange, anomalous struggle expressing, in Mary Carruthers' words, the "partialness and inadequacy" of language in its "anguished premise" (173). If we continue to ignore the connection made in some of the dream vision literature between dreams and grace, we will fail to read this metaphor fully as it applies to *Piers Plowman B*. In *Pearl*, for instance, a "slepyng-sla3te" (line 59) is identified directly with the spirit's being "gon in Godez grace" (63) to a place the dreamer cannot identify: "I ne wyste in þis worlde quere þat hit wace" (l. 65), this last being a direct verbal parallel to the passage in *Piers Plowman B* in which the Narrator describes his first sight of the field of folk: "That I was in a wilderness, wiste I nevere where" (Prol. 12). If we do not consider the process these dreams enact, we will be unable to account for the ways that, as a number of critics have noted, *Piers Plowman* differs from other medieval dream visions: the dreams are interspersed

among wakings; the dreams often seem more earthly than the dreams in such dream visions as *Pearl*; there are dreams within dreams; the figures who appear in the dreams sometimes continue from one level of dreaming to another or even appear in what are supposed to be full waking moments, as Need appears to the Dreamer in Passus XX. The poem seems at times apocalyptic, at times sermonic. Now it seems to follow the liturgy, now the penitential manuals. But, if the process of waking and sleeping the Narrator describes is compared with the literature regarding meditation and contemplation, the seemingly arbitrary sequence of dreams and wakings can be seen to enact the progress of a Dreamer learning meditation and contemplation. The literal dreamings and wakings the Dreamer experiences do not symbolize but literally *are* the acts of one Christian as he discovers, more and more fully, through the process of meditation and contemplation, the meanings inherent in Creation.

If we follow the interpretation I suggest and take the act of sleeping throughout *Piers Plowman B* as a figure for engagement in contemplation, as we have shown many medieval contemplative writers used the figure of sleeping, the poem then becomes an *exemplum* of a method of finding truth despite the corruption of the church and the possible imminence of apocalypse. Thus, any shifts in the nature of that sleep are shifts in the consciousness of a contemplator as he gains experience and knowledge of the process of contemplation itself as well as the lessons it brings. The poem would, in this scheme, enact an answer to the problem of corruption in the church, demonstrating to the reader how he can seek spiritual

resolution rather than continuing to fight in the world, just as Piers will cease to "be to busy aboute the worldes blisse" (VII 126). As Pearsall says, the dreamer will find his answer "in the refounding and reforming of the inner life of the individual, rather than of society, as in the *Visio*" (C-Text 174n). The practices of contemplation provide the means by which these visions come and, as these practices constitute actions in the Dreamer's life, they are reformations in how he leads that life. In addition, as we shall see in Chapter Four, within the process of experiencing this series of contemplative practices, the Dreamer will resolve the dilemmas with which he begins, the questions of how to reconcile his understanding of justice with his understanding of God's mercy, of how to reconcile his desire to write with his sense that his writing is mere foolishness, of how he is to feel Christ's gift of salvation in his deepest self. His writing will become his act of charity, a gift of love to the reader who, by contemplating its quest, may come to his or her own understanding of the path to be followed toward truth.

To establish these points, let us examine the Dreamer's progress, comparing it closely to the contemplative practices described by the medieval contemplative writers. This comparison will allow us to set next to the contents of the poem's visions its literal demonstration of the difficulties attendant upon the individual's search for salvation. That literal commentary proceeds by an enactment of the means by which a seeker after salvation may search within himself "as in a mirour" for spiritual perfection, including an enactment of the function of grace in achieving progress in that search. Medieval

writers and readers were fully capable of seeing in the structure of a text an enactment of experience. For example, St. Bernard explicates a passage from the *Song of Songs* in precisely this way :

How shall I explain so abrupt a beginning, this sudden irruption as from a speech in mid-course? For the words spring upon us as if indicating one speaker to whom another is replying as she demands a kiss. . . . How delightful a ploy of speech this is, prompted into life by the kiss, with Scripture's own engaging countenance inspiring the reader and enticing him on, that he may find pleasure even in the laborious pursuit of what lies hidden, with a fascinating theme to sweeten the fatigue of research. Surely this mode of beginning that is not a beginning, this novelty of diction in a book so old, cannot but increase the reader's attention. It must follow too that this work was composed, not by any human skill but by the artistry of the Spirit, difficult to understand indeed but yet enticing one to investigate.
(Walsh 3-4)

In other words, for Bernard the text's provocative opening with its plea for the kiss of the mouth mimes in its drama the search the reader must make for the kiss of meaning, and thus stimulates the reader to make that search himself. Similarly, according to Anne Middleton, *Piers Plowman B* utilizes formal syntax to enact in its very form the allegorical point to be made. Interpreting the terms "Dowel," "Dobet," and "Dobest," she writes,

Since the key to their mystery has been regarded as an act of translation, of one-for-one substitution of terms, the problem has been that the number of possible translations multiplies according to no apparent principle. What is required, however, is not a translation but

a means of decipherment in order to understand how and why Langland uses the terms as a major structural device. . . . I propose that the allegorical meaning of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest lies in the words we have, not the translations we seek, since their "meaning" is not referential, but purely formal. ("Infinities" 171)

Thus, she concludes, "[T]he poet's task is not to convert unbelievers with exemplary tales of virtue rewarded, but to body forth in prophetic speech 'for them that believe' the eternal form of the objects of their faith. . . . The key to the 'bouste' of Dowel lies where Will least expects to find it: not in a magic word or arcane formula, but in all 'commune speche'" (188). To find such bodying forth in the Banquet scene indicates that *Piers Plowman B* can indeed proceed by enactment, as Bernard says language can do in the *Song of Songs*. As *Piers Plowman* proceeds by enactment in this way, then, the literal level of the poem itself provides a commentary on the Narrator's experiences of his dreams and wakings which reveals, first, that the struggle proceeds through the process of meditation and contemplation and, second, that a crucial question faced by the Narrator in that struggle addressed his function as a writer and his right as a married man who is neither priest nor monk to devote himself to poems and visions and then to assume authority to speak the knowledge gained in his dreams.

In exploring this comparison, I will use the term "contemplative process" to denote the full scope of practices designed to lead the soul toward perfection or union with God, as these practices are described in the literature on contemplation. While the term "contemplation" is

used by some of these medieval writers to mean the entire process and by others to mean only the final and desired state of union, I will use the term "contemplation" to denote the entire striving toward the perfection of union and not merely that part of the process denoting union itself. Unfortunately, the terminology used by modern scholars studying mystic practices interchanges "contemplation" and "meditation," using both terms to denote focusing one's thoughts, particularly on spiritual matters, so when I quote from this modern research I will be forced temporarily to equate the two. Except in this instance, however, I will use "meditation" to refer to an exercise in guided imagining which is used by contemplatives as part of their practice and which is designed to bring the practitioner to the state of humility necessary for advancement toward perfection. The various medieval contemplative manuals I will use for comparison with *Piers Plowman B* contain numerous lists and images to be used in such meditations.

Literally, *Piers Plowman B* is the recounting, some time after the fact, of a series of dreams and wakings experienced by a Dreamer who is introduced as "Will" to Wit by Thought at the end of Passus VIII and who later, in Passus XV, tells Anima "my name is Longe Wille." The dreams begin when the Dreamer falls asleep by the side of a brook "as I lay and lenede and loked on the watres" (I 9) and they continue through an apparent forty-five years of the Dreamer's life. In the course of the events recounted by the Narrator—that is, the Dreamer recounting his experiences now that they lie in his past—"Will" sees and encounters a long series of images, figures and

personages, from Holy Church to Lady Meed to the Tree of Charity to Christ clothed as Piers the Plowman.

The Dreamer begins his education in a way that seems accidental. "Wery forwandred" (Prol. 7) from seeking "wondres to here" (Prol. 4), he has turned from his travels to lie gazing at the water of the little brook which lulls him asleep. He is so ignorant of the practice into which he has unwittingly been drawn that he believes it is a "ferly, of Fairye me thoghte" (Prol. 6). What he may in objective fact have experienced, however, from the point of view of twentieth century rationalism, is an accidental falling into a meditative state. Such a state is described by modern psychologists as a condition in which "the primary effect can be considered as a a central state evoked by the process of repetition" (Naranjo 162). In this state, in which visual attention to the external environment decreases (165), the electrical potentials emanating from the brain change in pattern to what is called the "alpha rhythm." This rhythm occurs both in subjects asked to gaze fixedly at a blank field or "ganzfeld," and in subjects gazing at a stabilized image which, because it is stabilized, disappears and becomes a blank (167). The "electrophysiological studies of meditation... indicate that meditation also is a high alpha state" (167). In various literatures, meditation is shown to involve both a blank state and a visualizing state. As Naranjo says, "The distinction between ideational versus non-ideational is only one of the many contrasting interpretations of the practices called meditation" (7). In the medieval literature, meditation tends to be the ideational practice contained within the larger field called contemplation whose goal is the non-

ideational oneing with God. That the Dreamer, in his early dreams, is experiencing some sort of repetitious behavior, such as listening to the birds calling, and thus entering a state in which he has visions, suggests that, viewed from the point of view of modern investigators of these practices, he is like some of the subjects of one alpha experiment which found that "individuals with high alpha EEGs were more susceptible" to the effects of the ganzfeld (Naranjo 166). As Georgi Lozanov points out, "Many patients from the psychiatric clinics fall spontaneously into hypnotic states. But people who are sound in body and mind can also spontaneously fall into such states without suggestion" (Glasscoe 1982 159). The Dreamer thus may be experiencing what could be called "auto-hypnosis," though modern religious practitioners would call it, if it were deliberately invoked, meditation. Medieval writers, as we shall see, refer to this state by a variety of terms, calling it "meditation" when it is induced by focusing on a visualizing exercise, "thinking" or a "slepyng slei3t" when it focuses on projecting the will of the seeker toward the will of God and "contemplation" when it induces an intense experience of oneness with God.

This parallel between hypnosis and religious practice is drawn by Daniel Rogers, an anaesthesiologist studying the control of pain, in his discussion of psychotechnical approaches to the experiences described by the *Cloud* author and Julian of Norwich. Rogers says that "for all the differences in purpose and motivation, medical authorities recognize a similarity between the state of someone practising prayer in accord with the *Cloud* author's direction and the state of one

experiencing the relaxation response when using one or another clinical technique" (Glasscoe, 1982 146). He quotes Williams on the details of religious practice that pertain to this: "Much that is conducive to self-hypnosis in religious practice will similarly pass unnoticed. Consider the darkened interior of the church, the hush, the brightly illuminated altar as a point of fixation, the nature of the music—these and the oftentimes monotonous chant of the priest or minister, together with other factors, furnish ideal conditions for the trance" (Glasscoe, 1982 160). He abstracts the following features common to hypnotic induction: "1) concentration on a neutral or pleasant device; 2) a sense of quietude; 3) muscular relaxation; 4) decreased defensive awareness or passive cooperation; 5) therapeutic suggestions" (Glasscoe, 1982 154). In the Prologue of *Piers*, the brook's merry swaying provides the first item in this list, while the Dreamer's lying down in a desire to rest provide the sense of quietude, the muscular relaxation, and the passive cooperation in what will come. Rogers points out that this view of religious experience does not preclude inclusion of grace, nor undercut its "authenticity and significance," saying about Julian of Norwich's visions, "I found, in short, that hypnosis may well have assisted Julian both to dispose herself for God's grace-filled action and to cooperate in that divine activity as it progressed" (Glasscoe, 1982 154).

It is significant that after his first dream, the Dreamer begins deliberately to engage in activities similar to those of more conventional religious practice, like the repetitive prayer suggested in his "babbling" on his beads. That grace is seen as operating in his being

drawn toward this activity can be concluded from the fact that at the end of his long process, he begins to see the universe as continuous, not separated into phenomena and significance, but a seamless whole; thus Need appears to the knowledgeable Dreamer's waking self. The world has become God's sign.

The Dreamer, then, has stumbled upon what the twentieth century would call meditation and what the fourteenth century included in the process called contemplation. As he is caught up in the power of the visions, he begins more actively to engage himself with them than with his waking life and we find him actively practicing contemplation: "I lay down longe in this thoght, and at the laste I slepte" (XIII 21). After his encounter with Ymaginatif, Conscience, the faculty of man in which Grace dwells as if in a building, comes to him, as Christ wills, and his real progress toward perfection begins.

The main point to be made here is that the poem deals with this issue of the value of meditation and contemplation by enacting and not by arguing it. In other words, the poem operates by the mode of exemplification. The poem demonstrates by its form rather than by its content its commitment to meditation and contemplation and to the dreams experienced within this endeavor as valuable for teaching the answer to Will's request: "tel me this ilke—/How I may save my soule" (I 83-4). Indeed, the value of the first sleep and the opening vision of the Dreamer's experience of this process, has been to prompt him to ask that very question.

So, if the literal level of the B-text is examined as an enactment of the stages of the contemplative process, that process is performed

by a Dreamer who first achieves an insight by the gracious accident of falling into what modern researchers call the meditative state and whose will subsequently begins to seek insight, struggling with its own nature to achieve the quietness, the surrender of its own willfulness necessary for the operation of Kynde Knowyng and Grace. The figure named Will is the will of this Dreamer as the Dreamer undergoes this contemplative process. We learn of his progress by means of the Narrator, who is the Dreamer some time after the fact of the events related in the poem. The Dreamer is the whole man of whom the Narrator tells, learning to distinguish within himself his will, his conscience, and his soul, and learning to discipline his will with patience, reason and conscience. Will is that aspect within the Dreamer's self which must be disciplined thus so that it can focus the whole self of the Dreamer on moving toward perfection and salvation. Will is the internal perception of the self, the Dreamer's self-identifying faculty. He is the faculty which makes the self act, the locus of choice and individuation, one of the three faculties by which man is the image of God. He is the faculty of the Dreamer which makes him seek to know and which desires to know "kyndely," that is, experientially. Paradoxically, he is the faculty which, as long as it asserts itself, prevents the deepest knowing.

It is the Dreamer who sleeps and wakes, and who begins the search with his walk out onto the Malvern Hills sometime in the Narrator's past. In his sleeps, he experiences his will's receipt of the instructions necessary to help his whole self move toward perfection. Because part of that instruction is the will's recognition of its own

existence, the poem's distinction between Dreamer and Will, especially in the earlier sections, is sometimes elusive. I will use the appellation "the Dreamer" when denoting the whole person undergoing the process described in the poem, and especially in those early sections before the distinction made by awareness of the existence of his will has occurred. I will use the appellation "Will" to denote that faculty within the Dreamer which most desires perfection and most needs to learn focus through patience and humility if perfection is ever to be achieved by the Dreamer.¹ That "Will" is a faculty within the Dreamer/Narrator's person is a well-established interpretation. As Robertson and Huppe say, the poem exemplifies the education of the Dreamer's will: "When the name Will is first introduced... in the poem, it is accompanied by a play on its meaning as the faculty of will. This play on the name of the dreamer and his character as it is developed in the poem together suggest that the dreamer is representative of the faculty will rather than any individual person. The function of the dreamer in the poem is to seek Piers Plowman so that he may learn and be instructed in the ways of perfection" (34).² The Dreamer and Will exist in the poem's past, while the Narrator speaks to us in the poem's present. The difference between Dreamer and Will

¹ One way to visualize the relationship between the Dreamer and Will might be to picture the relationship of a compass needle to its magnetic quality which turns its point toward the north.

² I disagree that Will is the whole dreamer, as I have stated, because unless a distinction is made between whole and part, one cannot account for the relationship to Will of such figures as Reason, Patience, Anima and Conscience, which represent other aspects of the Dreamer's consciousness.

is thus experiential, while that between the Dreamer and Narrator is chronological. The Dreamer's life, which includes the experiences undergone by his will, is described in past tense by a Narrator speaking of himself in present tense. I will therefore distinguish between ideas the Narrator reports as what he thought "then" and declarations the Narrator makes in present tense as truths he espouses now, now that he has benefited from the instructions provided by the entire process he experienced as the Dreamer and which his present words recount. This instruction, he tells us, took the form of Will's encounters with figures outside of the Dreamer's self such as Holy Church and Scripture, encounters with various aspects of the Dreamer himself such as Anima, Conscience, Patience and Reason, and, as Will gains discipline through his association with Patience, encounters in visions with central mysteries of Christian faith. This Dreamer whose will has been instructed and chastised has become more wise as a result of his visions, and now, as Narrator, he shares with his readers the knowledge of the struggle he experienced in his dreaming.

It is this struggle which the literal level of the poem enacts. This struggle is identical to the central struggle the Christian contemplative undergoes in the exercise of contemplative practices according to the contemplative texts, as we shall see in Chapter One. Viewed as a literal movement of the Dreamer through a series of meditations, the B-Text maps the progress of one Christian soul, a soul which, by the end of the poem, has seen and seeks grace, but has not yet achieved its full "lightnyng." As *The Book of Privy Counselling* puts it,

[T]his exercise is properly compared with sleeping, for just as in sleep the use of the bodily intellect is suspended, so that the body may have complete rest, so that man's bodily nature may be nourished and restored, just so in this spiritual sleep the vagrant questionings of man's ungovernable spiritual intellect, its imaginative powers, are tied fast and completely emptied, so that the simple soul may softly sleep and rest in its loving regard of God as He is, so that man's spiritual nature may be fully nourished as restored. And therefore tie your intellect fast, offering up your naked, blind feeling of your own being. (Colledge 176)

The literal level of *Piers Plowman B* enacts this struggle to sleep and at last offer up the blind naked feeling of the Dreamer's own being.

In the process of undergoing this series of instructive dreams, the Will, and the Dreamer, who will become the Narrator when the dreams end, gain successive insights into the meaning of what the Dreamer is shown, as we will see in Chapters Two, Three and Four below. Piers, for example, is at first a mysterious, rather argumentative figure, who tears what seems to be a legitimate pardon, much as Moses breaks the tables of the Law; the Dreamer is so confused by this anger and troubled by his confusion that his meditation is broken by his emotional state. Later, as the Dreamer's Will learns to listen rather than argue, Piers' nature is clarified until he is able to learn that Piers is the human form in which Christ appears in the world. In the same way, other themes, other questions, repeat and repeat, as each time the Dreamer is instructed again—about the nature of Dowel, Dobet, Dobest, for instance—to learn more fully what the answer to each question might imply. Each time instruction is

appropriate to the instructor—the several meanings of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest, for example, are appropriate to the figure instructing Will in their meaning—and each time what Will learns is a function of the state of the will's development in being receptive to study or thought or the more dramatic visualizations of the dreams within dreams. Will learns patience by the acts of Patience rather than through instruction; in this passage the poem within itself demonstrates in brief how its full structure operates. And as the will learns, other capacities of the Dreamer—his patience, his reason, his conscience—begin to accompany his will and his search is rewarded with deeper understanding. His attitude toward his dreams shifts: where at first he kept them in mind for pondering because they puzzled him so, now he writes them down as if he now understands their value for himself and for potential readers. In Passus VII he says, “Many tyme this metels hath maked me to studie/Of that I seigh slepyng—if it so be myghte” (VII 144-145). By the end of Passus XVIII, after his vision of Christ and the Harrowing of Hell, he “wakede,/And called Kytte [his] wif and Calote [his] doghter” (XVIII 428-429) and directly, as if impelled by this same zeal to share his perception of the might of the cross, he “wroot what I hadde ydremed” (XIX 1). Finally, in Passus XX, he dreams a psychomachia, the struggle of all the faculties of the Dreamer to come into Unity, or the perfect union with God of which Hilton and *The Cloud Of Unknowing* speak. The poem's ending demonstrates the difficulty of achieving that unity, since union is beset by so many forces which distract the focus necessary to achieve it. Still, the poem ends in possibility rather than despair as Con-

science, which *The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost* calls the home of grace in the created being, cries after Grace while the will, finally chastened of its fleshly desires by Elde, waits. As Hilton says in *The Stairway Of Perfection* :

Seek then what you have lost, so that you may find it. I know well that if anyone could once have interior vision, however short, of the honour and the spiritual beauty which the soul had by nature and will have by grace, he would in his heart hate and despise all the joy, the pleasure and the beauty of this whole world, as if it were the stench of carrion, and he would never wish to perform any other act by night or day—allowing only for the weakness and the sheer necessities of human nature, than long, mourn, pray and seek how he could attain to that state again. (Colledge 229)

So the Dreamer, having seen Christ as Piers and having seen the Paraclete, at the end of the poem longs by means of his conscience to attain to grace, while his will waits, quiescent, as *The Book of Privy Counselling* has said it should.

It is important to reiterate here that, rather than regarding the dreaming-waking structure of the poem as its central theme or meaning, it is more fitting to regard this aspect as only one of its several levels of meaning, one which serves as a sort of instruction to the poem's readers to demonstrate to them the means by which they can come themselves to "kynde knowynge" and grace. The poem itself thus becomes an object upon which the reader can meditate, and to read it becomes not only an instruction in the contents of its visions but an instruction in the process of visioning.

In discussing the medieval texts which describe this process, I will first explore the general description of the contemplative process which can be delineated from their pages, and then demonstrate how the text of *Piers Plowman B* reflects both this generalized procedure and specific instructions contained in various of the texts, and then focuses on concerns peculiar to the B-text's particular sensibility. Schmidt and Wittig in particular have drawn connections between *Piers Plowman B* and the contemplative writers. Schmidt, as we've seen, links the inner dreams with Rolle's Holy Name devotion in the *Form of Living* and with his *Ego dormio* and St. Bernard's *Sermons on the Song of Songs* ("Inner" 32). Wittig demonstrates that the author of *Piers Plowman* knew at least two "syncretistic compilations" of these traditions, for he quotes from the *incipit* of one at the beginning of Passus B II. Further, Wittig links Passus B IX-XII with the "commonplace program" of spiritual devotion, based on the writings of St. Bernard and the Victorines, developed by the time the poem was written. How commonplace this program was is revealed by the number and popularity of such texts in English. Among these texts are the writings found with a copy of *Piers Plowman A* in the Vernon manuscript.

The Vernon manuscript, a large compendium of religious and contemplative tracts was compiled in over a period of some time in the early 1380s—as late as 1384 (Doyle 11)—from earlier texts. Its language localizes its enscribing in the southwest Midlands, from South Staffordshire, south Shropshire, or north Worcestershire (Doyle 11), which is an area of England near the "Malverne hilles" named as

the site of the Dreamer's experience in *Piers Plowman B*. The manuscript contains Hilton's *Stairway of Perfection* and *Of Mixed Life*, *The Mirror of St. Edmund*, part of the *Ancren Riwele*, Rolle's *Prick of Conscience*, his *Ego dormio* and *The Form of Perfect Living*, Hilton's translation of Bonaventure's *Stimulus Amoris*, "A talkyng of þe loue of god," *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* and *The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost*. Linguistic affinities exist between *Piers Plowman* and other contents of the Vernon manuscript. For example, "A talkyng of þe loue of God," written as prose in alliterative long lines, contains several "peculiar" words such as *daunselen* found also in *Piers* (Horstman II 345). Structural similarities also exist. For instance, in the unfolding personification allegory of the progress of Conscience toward perfection in *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* and *The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, one finds a number of elements which appear in *Piers Plowman B*, one of the most fully developed of these being the debate of the four daughters of God. While this debate is found in a number of medieval texts, only the *Abbey* texts and *Piers* show the debate as occurring after the fact of God's decision to send Christ to mankind. In the other versions, the debate occurs as part of God's deliberations. The *Abbey* treatise, like several of its companions in the Vernon manuscript, including Hilton's treatise on the mixed life, is addressed not to religious but to laity:

A dere brethir and systirs, I see þat many walde be in religyone bot pay may noghte, owthir for pouerte or for drede of thaire kyne or for band of maryage, and for-thi i make here a buke of þe religeon of þe herte, þat es, of þe abbaye of the holy goste, that all tho þat ne may

noghte be bodyly in religyone, þat þay may be gostely. . . . (Horstman I
321)

Thus in at least one manuscript, an early version of *Piers Plowman* is found associated with treatises describing the contemplative process. Further, material from one of these, *The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, turns up included in *Piers Plowman B* at the same point in the progress of the subject toward salvation, that is, after the initiation of Christ's passion. And in both, the writer evinces concern with lay people seeking salvation. I do not seek to trace *Piers Plowman B* directly to this manuscript, nor to any specific source text, but merely to show that, in the aggregate, contemplative texts circulating at the time *Piers Plowman B* was written, and localized to that region of England in which the poem has its setting contain among them a considerable number of directives and ideas incorporated in the poem. Moreover, the manuscript is a contemporary witness placing *Piers*, while its versions were still in formulation, in the context of contemplative writing in English, and the contents of the Vernon manuscript display particularly interesting points of comparison with *Piers Plowman B*. I will not confine my comparison of *Piers Plowman B* to this single source, however, but view the Vernon manuscript as a representative of the "commonplace program of spiritual ascent" (Wittig, "Design" 212) developed over the course of several centuries.

Chapter One will explore the common points of the program, drawing from texts found in the Vernon manuscript, from reports of

their mystical experiences by Richard Rolle, Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, from such instructional manuals as *A Ladder of Foure Ronges*, and from the writings of Walter Hilton, St. Bernard and St. Bonaventure, and from treatises explaining the psychology of contemplation such as *Benjamin Minor*.

No one of these will provide a perfect match either for the process described in *Piers Plowman B* nor for any other of these reports or descriptions. Instead, we will find that each describes its author's unique view of the contemplative process, often clearly based on personal experience but sometimes appearing to summarize commonplaces of this widely practiced discipline. We will find no standard terminology, though we will find a number of correspondences from text to text,³ nor will we find a single definitive process described, though we will find recurrent general patterns among them as each describes the means of progressing toward perfection. All the texts to be examined, with the possible exception of Margery Kempe's, are widely accepted as contemplative texts; the differences among them do not label any of them as suspect because each makes clear the personal nature of the connection between the writer and process or vision being described. In fact, the very differences among the texts

³ This can be true even of a single author. Colledge points out that for Hugh of St. Victor "mystic" means "allegorical" or "symbolical" and that he uses "contemplation" to mean "what we call 'mysticism'" or the "foretaste of blessedness" (48), though Hugh also uses "contemplation" in *De Arca Noe Morali* II.iv to mean "merely 'acquired contemplation' or 'speculation'" (49).

indicate that a number of these writers are attempting to share unique personal experiences, and some of the texts say precisely that. As St. Bernard wrote in his sermons on contemplation,

Today the text we are to study is the book of our own experience. You must therefore turn your attention inwards, each one must take note of his own particular awareness of the things I am about to discuss . . . I think that nobody can grasp what it is except the one who receives it.
(Walsh 16)

Some texts, like the *Benjamin Minor* analyze the process more generally. Comparing texts, as we will do in Chapter One, will reveal areas of common ground.

Thus, while we may find no single source which contains all the elements of *Piers Plowman B* in much that same form, we may not therefore conclude that the poem does not refer to the contemplative process as a central issue. Rather, we may see *Piers Plowman B* as an attempt to demonstrate through the creation of a fiction the author's view of the process the poem enacts. Chapters Two, Three and Four will examine that enactment, demonstrating further the parallels between the poem's events and the descriptions of meditation and contemplation in the various contemplative texts. Chapter Five will conclude by exploring the implications of and the tensions created by using visions and fictions for didactic religious purposes.

CHAPTER I

THE MEDIEVAL CONTEXT: MEDITATION AND CONTEMPLATION

S.S. Hussey sums up the rejection of *Piers Plowman* as a poem concerned with the mystic's quest for perfection when he says:

Langland, in the *Vita de Dobet*, does not stress this side of contemplation [i.e., Hilton's view of contemplation as a "growing awareness of the life of sanctifying grace within the soul"] whereas it is the predominant aspect with Hilton. Moreover, there is in Langland nothing about the "lightsome darkness" and the "rich nought" of *The Scale of Perfection* or of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, still less of the sensuous imagery of Rolle. (Vasta, *Interpretations* 245)

Here, Hussey posits three signs which a work must exhibit in order to be regarded as mystical. First, it must demonstrate "a growing awareness of the life of sanctifying grace within the soul" (Vasta, *Interpretations* 245). Second, it must speak of the "lightsome darkness" of the *via negativa*. Third, it may speak in sensuous terms, such as Rolle used, of the effects of experiencing that "rich nought," the implication here being that the "noughting" experience necessarily

results in delight such as Rolle's *calor*, *canor*, *dulcor* (burning, song, sweetness). Or, as Lawrence Clopper says, "Although it has been argued that the *Dobest* represents the unitive stage of the contemplative *accessus*, this view has not gained favor among scholars. The *Dobest* is in no way comparable, for example, to the last stanzas of *Pearl*, during which that dreamer is rapt into the heavens and has some sight of the New Jerusalem and the mystic Lamb" (25). We should note here that this rapturous vision in *Pearl* is not the blissful union beyond vision of the *via negativa*. Therefore to grant *Pearl* the status of a mystical work on this basis of the vision of the New Jerusalem while denying such status to *Piers Plowman* because none of its visions show us the heavenly city is to privilege one kind of vision over another without sufficiently grounding that choice in the authority of the mystic writers themselves. Among contemporary scholars of mystic writings, such a definition of a work by the content of the vision is suspect. As Wohrer points out in his discussion of scholarship concerning *The Cloud of Unknowing*:

Albrecht agrees with most scholars in mysticism that the unitive experience is only a rare or even a unique event in the life of a mystic, but unlike many other scholars he categorically denies that the experience of union is the ultimate criterion for a spiritual apprehension to be accepted as genuinely mystical. For him the difference between unitive and non-unitive mystical experience is merely one of intensity, but not substance. All forms of spiritual apprehension of the "all-encompassing" in the states of "sunkeness" and "ecstasy" are thus equally genuine instances of mystical experience. (Glasscoe, 1984 122)

Here, the more telling, though still controversial, signs of mystical experience are "sunkeness," "ecstasy," and the "all-encompassing" nature of the event, rather than the sensuous signals, the specific vision of the New Jerusalem, or the unitive oneness of the *via negativa's* "lightsome darkness."

Still, if we grant these signs to which the critics of *Piers Plowman* refer, we must indeed agree that *Piers Plowman* is not a work which speaks in what appear to be the characteristic terms and style of English mystic theology. As Bloomfield says, "The great figures of German and Flemish mysticism as well as those in England, Dame Julian of Norwich, Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, and the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* were not fundamentally social thinkers. They were primarily concerned with the perfection of self and the union with God" (*Apocalypse* 99), implying that the author of *Piers* does not share this concern.

Before accepting these conclusions, however, we might examine more closely the words of those concerned with the practice of mysticism in the fourteenth century and try, through a comparison of terminology, to determine what contemporary witnesses meant by *theologica mystica*, meditation, contemplation, the contemplative process, and the contemplative life. What were the signs and shape of a life led "mystically"? Does the attempt to reach mystic perfection preclude concern for mercy and justice, peace and truth on earth? Is a life led "mystically" known as such only by its ending in union? In other words, is it legitimate to limit the definition by achievement of

the goal, especially when that achievement is held by all the writers who discuss it to be a gift of grace, not a result of individual action?¹

I would argue it is not, and that it will be more instructive to examine the contemplative process which is held by medieval writers to lead toward perfection and mystical union in order to define what characterizes the mystic. The medieval writers on mysticism themselves emphasize the process of contemplation as constituting a sign of mystical attention, not identifying mysticism as union *per se* but stressing the action and method of seeking that union as the hallmarks of a life led mystically. They recognized that not all who desired this experience of God or Christ were so capable as a mystic like Rolle of achieving such intense experience as he reports. The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* acknowledges differences in mystical abilities when he says,

Goostly freende in god, þou schalt wel vnderstonde þat I fynde, in my boistous beholdyng, foure degrees & fourmes of Cristen mens leuyng; & ben þese: Comoun, Special, Singuler, & Parfite. Pre of þese mow be bigonnen & eendid in þis liif; & þe ferþe may bi grace be bigonnen here, bot it schal euer laste wip-outne eende in þe blis of heuen. (Hodgson, *Cloud* 13)

¹ I have put quotation marks around the word "mystically" to emphasize my point that the definition of such a life is a controversial matter. For me, the terms "contemplative," "contemplation," and "contemplative practice" emphasize a definition focused on the process and the actions of the individual seeker, while the terms "mystic," "mysticism," and "mystically" emphasize a focus on achievement of the goal sought in pursuing that process, that is, on achievement of union with God.

He then directs his instruction to one who "in a trewe wille & by an hole entent, purposed him to be a parfite folower of Criste, not only in actyue leuyng, bot in þe souereinnest pointe of contemplatife leuing þe whiche is possible by grace" (Hodgson, *Cloud* 2). In other words, one can truly seek, and by that seeking be regarded as a "parfite folowere" without achieving that fourth degree, perfection or union. What matters is that one focus with "a trewe wille & by an hole entent" on the process of contemplation. In the rest of this chapter, I will discuss first the process prescribed by a number of writers on contemplation for reaching wisdom or perfection or union and, second, their explanation of the faculties within the pysche which act as the agents by which union occurs when God's grace allows.

The medieval guides to the contemplative process exhibit a lack of strict uniformity in description and of standard usage in terminology in describing both their subject of union and the means of its achievement, though close examination of their writings reveals considerable common ground. Still, just as modern scholars disagree in identifying genuine mystical events or writers, there is disagreement among the medieval mystics about the manifestations of the experiences other mystics report. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, for example, is quite critical and sceptical of burnings and visions such as Rolle's, stating that such "madness" is wrongly done "'interior' work":

For they turn their actual physical mind inwards to their bodies, which is an unnatural thing, and they strain as if to see spiritually with their physical eyes, and to hear within with their outward ears, and to smell and taste and feel and so on inwardly in the same way. So they pervert

the natural order, and with this false ingenuity they put their minds to such unnecessary strains that ultimately their brains are turned. And at once the devil is able to deceive them with false lights and sounds, sweet odours and wonderful tastes, glowing and burning in their hearts or stomachs, backs or loins or limbs.

In all this make-believe they imagine they are peacefully contemplating their God, unhindered by vain thoughts. (Wolters 122-123)

Hilton's "Letter to a Hermit" is absolutely blunt in warning his zealous correspondent of the dangers of trusting his own ecstatic feelings:

Anyone striving for a spiritual goal is in great danger of being deceived, either by a false illumination of the mind, which gives rise to heretical beliefs and opinions, or by delusion and imagination which kindle the affection. So you should bring every thought which lifts its proud head against the faith under the yoke of simple and as it were stupid faith, lest you be deceived by conjectures, phantasies and perverse doctrines. (Russell-Smith 234)

The *Cloud* author elsewhere distinguishes between potentially false and true experiences, between "acquisition" and "infusion," saying that when "sweetness and consolations" come from within our bodies, "rising and springing out of an abundance of spiritual joy and true spiritual devotion . . . we need not suspect such sweetness and consolations . . . But, I beg you, do not trust all the other consolations, melodies, rejoicing and sweetnesses that enter you suddenly from outside, from you have no idea where. They may be good, they may be evil" (Colledge 61). Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, on the

other hand, both experience visions which form the foundation of their deeper senses of union with God. Despite her being convinced of the truth of her visions, however, Julian herself puts emphasis on the process of seeking, saying of her vision of the discoloring of Christ's face as he suffered:

This vision was a lesson to my understanding that the continual seeking of the soul for God pleases him greatly. For the soul may do no more than seek, suffer and trust, and this disposition is wrought in the soul that has it by the Holy Spirit.

Finding God in clarity is a gift of his special grace and comes when he wills. The seeking of him with faith, hope and charity pleases our Lord; the finding of him pleases the soul and completely fills it with joy. Thus was my understanding taught that seeking is as good as seeing, during the time God allows the soul to labor in distress. (Del Mastro, *Revelations* 99)

So, for her, the vital element in mysticism, from the point of view of the human soul, is the seeking, because God controls the finding.

What, then, is this process of seeking? For Julian, it involved intense and lengthy concentration upon the desire for "a vision in which I might have more knowledge of the bodily pains of our savior, and of the compassion of our Lady" (83), which vision she had when she lay in a sickness so severe she believed she would not live until morning. Margery Kempe's visions seem to have resulted from the intensity of her feelings, and persisted despite the opprobrium she suffered from her contemporaries and even in the face of her own doubts, doubts which led her to Julian of Norwich to ask if there were

“any fraud” in the “revelations” she had experienced (Colledge 285). For many of those seeking mystic experience, the process was more conscious than for these two, and more complex. For all these concerned about the process and meaning of meditation and contemplation, a number of manuals and descriptions of contemplation were prepared. Among these were those often discussed by modern critics: *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Walter Hilton’s *The Stairway of Perfection*, *The Mirror of St. Edmund* and, earlier but still in use in the fourteenth century, the writings of the Victorines (especially the *Benjamin Minor*), Saint Bonaventure and the Pseudo-Dionysius. To these we can add some less well known to us: *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, *The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, and *A Ladder of Four Ranges*. All these writings deal with the *mystica theologica*, the “hid diuinite,” the study of the way to the Absolute. *The Mirror of St. Edmund*, *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, some writings of Walter Hilton, and *The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost* will deserve particular attention, as explained in the Introduction, since they appear in the Vernon manuscript of 1382 with a version of *Piers Plowman* itself.

By examining the methods for study that these writings suggest, it will be possible to lay out a schema of the process one following contemplative practices would attempt to use in the effort to ready the self for union to occur if grace so allowed. First, I will examine their descriptions of this process as an increase in understanding of the self, of the created world, and of God in three stages called purgation, illumination, and union. Second, I will examine their

descriptions of the process from the perspective of the inner workings of the faculties of the self. Here, the process involves focus of the will upon the desire for union, silence of the will's curiosity, development of its detachment from the world, and emphasis upon the conscience as the grounds for receipt of grace.

George Wood Tuma, in his *The Fourteenth Century English Mystics: A Comparative Analysis*, constructs a conceptual field for purgation, illumination, and union — the three phases of the contemplative life—by comparing the words of each of the mystics he examines, their “main informing concepts and words, phrases, and ideas which cluster around each concept” (14). Not only does he examine the words of Rolle, the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, but he also compares their writings with “the general intellectual and religious atmosphere of the fourteenth century within which the English mystics thought and wrote ... the writings produced by the reform movement of the thirteenth century, particularly the religious handbook tradition, mystical and contemplative treatises in the fourteenth century other than the major English mystics, and other religious literature of the fourteenth century” (13-14). By so doing, he attempts to construct a meaning for each of the major terms examined, illustrating by each conceptual field the “general meaning underlying a particular concept or idea” (11).

Tuma finds the following points structure the conceptual field for the term *purgation*:

(1) man's initial desire for purgation; (2) his denial of the world and fleshly desires; (3) the nature and function of God's grace, love and mercy during the purgational process; (4) the *nosce te ipsum* theme within purgation; and (5) man's purification during purgation which results from an awareness of and participation in Christ's suffering and passion. (127)

The initial desire for purgation is essential if one would move toward perfection, and this desire is manifested in the will. As the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* says,

Alle thi liif now behoueth algates to stonde in desire, 3if thou shalt profite in degre of perfeccion. This desire behoueth algates be wrou3t in thi wille, bi the honde of Almi3ti God & thi consent (CU2.15). (Tuma 128)

To concentrate on this desire requires denial of the world; this denial includes not only, as Julian says, that "we be fully nougthed of our deadly flesh and of all our inward affections, which are not very good" (Tuma 134), but also that we give up our love for ourselves. The author of *The Cloud*, for example, states, "& therfore breek doun alle wetyng & felyng of alle maner of creatures; bot most besily of thi-self..." (CU 43.82) and "...nakyn, spoyle & vtterly vnclithe thi-self of al maner of felyng of thi-self, that thou be able to be clothid with the gracyous felyng of God self (BPC 156)" (Tuma 137-138).

In rousing this human desire for perfection, the action—"the honde"—of God must intervene. Here Tuma cites Hilton who says that God's love is the fire which "burneth and wasteth all fleshly

loves and likings in a man's soul . . . this love filleth full the might of my soul, as mind, reason and will, of grace and ghostly sweetness, as marrow filleth full the bone . . . (SP I.31.69)" (Tuma 139). Hilton goes on:

And upon this manner wise may this image of sin be broken down in thee and destroyed, by the which thou art forshapen from the kindly shape of the image of Christ. And thou shalt be shapen again to the image of Jhesu man by meekness and charity; and then shalt thou be fully shapen to the self image of Jhesu God, here living by a shadow in contemplation, and in the bliss of heaven by full soothfastness (SP I.91.219). (Tuma 141)

He insists that this shaping occurs only by grace, no matter how much the individual strives to lead a perfect life: "But, I believe, that grace is not in every perfect soul, but only where our Lord wills" (Del Mastro, *Stairway* 278). Richard of St. Victor, in the *Benjamin Minor*, which was widely read in England, says of the difficulty of achieving union, "Rachel [i.e., the search for wisdom] knows that this task [of achieving wisdom] is beyond her powers, yet she is not able to modify either her effort or her desire. For never does the mind attain to this grace by its own activity. This gift is from God and not of man's deserving" (Kirchberger 111). The author of the *Cloud* emphasizes the role of God's grace even more strongly, assigning to that grace alone both the entry into the contemplative life and the progress each seeker makes in that life (Tuma 142).

Part of the process of knowing the self, and rejecting the self to

become "shapen to the self image of Jhesu God" is to understand the nature of one's sin. Hilton says that "this image if thou behold it wittily, is all belapped with black stinking clothes of sin, as pride, envy, ire, accidie, covetise, gluttony and lechery (SP I.52.126)" (Tuma 144). Seeing this filth attached to oneself leads to humility through understanding of God's sacrifice on behalf of so filthy a sinner. Julian of Norwich describes how this "gracious knowing" leads to a shame that is not despairing but that lets us know "that God were wroth with us for our sin, and then are we stirred of the Holy Ghost by contrition unto prayer and desire for the amending of our life with all our mights, to slacken the wrath of God, unto the time we find a rest in soul and a softness in conscience (RDL 40.81-82)" (Tuma 145). For Julian, at least, knowing the self allows comparison of human nature with God's, and thus "enables man to understand with greater insight the actual state of his soul and, consequently, his need for contrition, repentance, and eventual renewal" (Tuma 146). But for all the fourteenth century mystics Tuma discusses, knowledge of the self is necessary for the sense of humility, or meekness, which leads to the cry for that grace of God needed for progression towards perfection.

Last, at least for Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, "identification with and participation in the suffering and passion of Christ will necessarily produce a form of purification or purgation which will enable them to progress in the contemplative life" (Tuma 147). These visions of Christ's sufferings work to transform "man's present, sinful image" (Tuma 148). As Julian says, "... and in as much as it is hard and grievous by reason of the sin beheld, which sheweth in our sense-

soul, our good Lord Jesus reformeth it by the working in our sense-soul of mercy and grace through the virtue of his blessed passion, and so bringeth it to the rightfulness (RDL 45.94)” (Tuma 149). Julian and Margery are not the only ones to stress the efficacy of dwelling upon Christ’s passion, however. Meditation after meditation proposed by such writers as Aelred of Rievaulx and Stephen of Sawley and St. Edmund concentrate upon the image of the suffering Christ, as does this passage from Aelred’s *Rule for Anchoresses*:

See how He stands before the judgement seat, head bowed, eyes cast down, face calm, saying little, ready for insults, prepared for blows. Now I know that you can endure no more, you cannot bear to watch how His delicate back is torn with scourges, His face slapped, His adorable head crowned with thorns, His right hand which holds up heaven and earth made ludicrous with a reed. . . . (Colledge 34)

In fact, meditation is distinguished from contemplation by some medieval writers precisely because of this imaging function performed by the process of meditation. Meditation focuses on visualizing of the spiritual, not of the earthly. It is a spiritual exercise consisting of “highly emotional reconstructions and amplifications of the Gospel narrative in which [the meditators] are urged to regard themselves as participants” (Colledge 34). The image evoked in this exercise is not always that of Christ’s Passion. Stephen of Sawley, for instance, directs the meditator as follows (in this paraphrase by Colledge):

Whenever one is in solitude and at leisure, one must drive out of the heart all corporeal imaginations and lift one’s spirit up to one supreme

principle, the Creator of all things, God, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, not seeking to understand by a laborious use of the intellect but to love by faith, giving thanks to Him for all His benefits... and thanking Him for what He is in Himself... One should remember the blessedness of man's first state... and then one's own particular shortcomings, one's individual sins against God. Let each man by such meditation move himself to tears, bewailing his offences and looking to God for mercy... In his second meditation, let him in confidence approach the throne of the Mother of Mercy; and in his third, let him consider how gloriously the city of Jerusalem is set on high and the joy and happiness of delighting in the presence of God... and these meditations are to be performed not with intellectual subtlety (*curiose*) but "sweetly and simply," looking above all to God and to the Blessed Virgin for help. (43-44)

Meditation is clearly labeled the first step on the way to perfection in *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, where the writer says, "This es begynnyng of all perfeccione whene mane settis and stabylls in herte in depe thynkyng on god & on his werkes; ffor ofte es better a gud thoghte in haly meditacyone þan many wordes sayd in prayere, ffor þe holy thoghtes in meditacione cryes in goddes eris" (Horstman I 331). Meditation, according to this writer, is "in gud thoghtes of god, & of his werkes, and of his wordes, and of his creaturs, and of his paynes þat he tholede, and of his grete luf þat he had and hase to þame for whayme he tholede" (Horstman I 331). As the beginning step to perfection, meditation becomes the storehouse of the grain to be made into the "gud brede; þat es called Ihesu Criste" (Horstman I 332). The result of such meditation is "gastly Ioye" and knowledge of God's "heuenly priuatyse þat es hide fro þame þat folowes fleschely

desyris and gyffes þame-selfe alle to þe wysedome of þe worlde and his fantasyse, and so enflawmes þam with þe blysse of his lufe þat þey taste somedelle & fele how swete he es, how god he es, how luffande he es . . ." (Horstman I 333). *The Mirror of St. Edmund* describes this last set of meditations as exercises in the "þridde degre of contemplacion" (Horstman I 254ff). The first degree, he says, contemplates God's creatures, and the second, holy writ (Horstman I 244ff).

Meditation thus functions to bring about purgation, to ready the meditator for the further steps of illumination and union. It is usually distinguished from contemplation as being a lesser or prior step to the fuller experience labeled contemplation, though the spheres of meaning for the two terms overlap somewhat from writer to writer. Rolle, for instance, distinguishes the two, calling meditation the category of "love wounded and insuperable," contemplation "love binding and inseparable," and jubilation "love, unsatisfied except by love, and singular" (Colledge 58). He takes these categories from Richard of St. Victor's *Four Degrees of Passionate Charity*, but leaves off Richard's last category, the highest, "'love of compassion,' insatiable and unsatisfied even in love" (Colledge 58). For both writers, however, meditation is clearly the first, and lowest, of the degrees of love, and is that degree of love in which purgation is experienced. St. Edmund Rich sees meditation as an important step toward contemplation, saying, "To þe knowyng of þy-self mai3t þou comen wiþ ofte þenkyng; to þe knowyng of God: wiþ clene contemplacion" (Horstman I 241). That the word "þenkyng" means "meditation" is made clear in a reference in Ms Cambridge Dd V.64, which reads, "Þou sal syt þat

thynkyng and meditacioun er bath ane" (Horstman I 82). The meditations he suggests contain reflections on the self: "Denk inwardliche and ofte what þou art, what þou were, and what þou schalt ben. Furst as to þi bodi, after as to þi soule. As to þi bodi; þou art vilore þen a dongehul" (Horstman I 241-242)). One then continues to think of the method by which one was created, with a fair body come from this dunghill, and with parents who were only the conduit for God's action. "Loue him þenne ffrom whom alle goodes comen; and loue alle men gostliche, and stunte herbi-forward to louen fleschliche" (Horstman I 243). Once meditation has brought the seeker to this point, one can proceed to contemplation, says St. Edmund:

Preo Maners ben of Contemplacion: þe ffurste is in Creatures, þe secunde in Holy writ, þe þridde in God self and in his kuynde. Contemplacion nis non oper þing but siht of þe godnesse of god.
(Horstman I 244)

St. Edmund describes a full series of objects of contemplation in each of the first two degrees (Horstman I 246ff). In describing the third, he proceeds to a careful outline of meditations, hour by hour, of the religious day (Horstman I 254ff).

St. Bonaventure makes a similar distinction between meditation and contemplation, seeing meditation as only one step in a process of ascent toward God:

Therefore he who wishes to ascend to God must, avoiding sin which deforms nature, exercise the above-mentioned natural powers for regenerating grace, and do this through prayer. He must strive toward purifying justice, and this in intercourse; toward the illumination of

knowledge, and this in meditation; toward the perfection of wisdom, and this in contemplation. Now just as no one comes to wisdom save through grace, justice, and knowledge, so none comes to contemplation save through penetrating meditation, holy conversation, and devout prayer. (Boas 10)

Hugh of St. Victor, in his *Didascalion* “teaches that there are four steps or degrees which prepare the soul for future blessedness—study, prayer, meditation, and works—and a fifth, in which we have as it were a foretaste of that blessedness, which he here calls ‘contemplation’” (Colledge 48). And the author of *A Ladder of Foure Ronges*, a Middle English translation of the *Scala Paradisi*, places meditation just above study in his list of four steps to perfection:

... foure gostly werkes comme soon to my mynde, that is to sey:— lesson, meditacion, orison, and contemplacion. This is the ladder of cloysterers, & of opere Goddis lovers, by the which they clymbe from eerth into heuyn. This is a longe laddir and a meruelous thou3e it haue but foure stavis, for the oon ende stonddith on the grounde and the othere ende thrillyth the clowdys and shewith to the clymber heuenly pryvetees. (Hodgson, *Deonise* 101)

Meditation, then, constitutes, with study, the means by which the first step in the three-fold mystic way toward blessedness or perfection is taken.

Illumination, the next step, is a revelation of the nature of God. Hilton distinguishes it this way in *The Stairway of Perfection*:

... the love of God operates in three ways. All are good, but each is

better than the one before it.

The first comes through faith alone, without grace-filled imagination or the spiritual knowing of god. This love is in the least soul who is reformed in faith and is in the lowest degree of charity. And it is good, for it suffices for salvation. (Del Mastro, *Stairway* 274)

This would be the faith of the ordinary good Christian. He goes on:

The second way of loving is what a soul experiences through faith and by imagining Jesus in his manhood. This love is better than the first, when the imagination is moved by grace, because the spiritual eye is opened in this beholding of our Lord's manhood.(274)

This would be the imaging done in meditation described above, which leads through purgation to illumination. Hilton then describes the third stage of knowledge, knowledge of a different order from that which can be achieved by the imagination:

The third way of loving is what the soul experiences through the spiritual sight of the godhead in the manhood of Jesus. This love, as can be seen here, is best and most worthy, and it is perfect love. A soul does not experience this love until it has been reformed in experience.

Souls at the beginning, or just profiting from grace, do not have this love, for they do not know how to meditate on, nor love Jesus as God. . . .

Nevertheless, to such souls as do not know how to meditate spiritually on the godhead, so that they may not err in devotion but that they may be comforted and strengthened by some kind of inward contemplation of Jesus to forsake sin and the love of the world, our Lord Jesus tempers the invisible light of His godhead. He clothes it

under a physical image of His manhood and shows it to the inner eye
of the soul. . . . (275-276)

Hilton thus distinguishes between meditation which is an act of the imagination — the visualizing we spoke of above — and “spiritual contemplation of the godhead in Jesus” (275). The former “occurs principally in the imagination and little in the understanding” while the latter “is principally experienced in the understanding when it is comforted and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and little in the imagination” (281). For Julian, on the other hand, “This is a revelation of love which Jesus Christ, our endless bliss, made in sixteen showings” (81), the visions inextricably bound with the knowing. For both Hilton and Julian, the more powerful experience is a receptive one, given rather than taken. The imagination, in Hilton’s schema, readies the individual for such receptivity. The imaging, in Julian’s description, is not her own imagining of the passion, but a much deeper vision that is part of the gift of love to which she became open by her intense desire to know the pain of Christ:

This creature had desired beforehand three gifts of God by his grace. The first was to enter into the spirit of Christ’s passion. The second was bodily sickness in youth, at thirty years of age. The third was to have from God the gift of three wounds. (Del Mastro, *Revelations* 83)

Thus, when Tuma lays out five concepts for this conceptual field—“(1) the knowledge of God and/or Christ made known during the illuminative phase; (2) the changes within the individual during illumination;

(3) the function of God's grace, love, and mercy; (4) the nature of visions and revelations occurring during illumination; and (5) the general and specific effects of visions and revelations upon man during the illuminative phase" (153)—he encounters problems within the texts of making clear distinctions that can be compared from text to text. As he says in attempting to describe the conceptual field for the first point—the knowledge of God or Christ acquired during the illuminative phase—there is “no real attempt to describe God's nature from a systematic point of view within the illuminative phase” (158). Two difficulties present themselves here. First, for the *Cloud* author explicitly, and for the others less directly, knowledge of God is inexpressible, the result of entering a “cloud of unknowing,” and therefore to explicate what is perceived within the stage of illumination would present them with a paradox. Second, Tuma is unable to distinguish clearly between the knowledge of God gained in this second stage of illumination and that to be gained in the third stage called union, though his discussion tends to assign to the illuminative stage those references to a knowledge which reveal God as “‘full sweet and full loving’ or ‘full gracious and full merciful’” (156), and to assign to the unitive stage references which emphasize a more extreme affective result, a ravishment and “onehead of love” (184). The problem is not Tuma's alone, but lies in his sources as well, where, for example, “the words and phrases used by Hilton to describe the knowledge of God bear a strong resemblance to Rolle's descriptions of visions during the illuminative phase” (192). Further, because of this lack of agreement among the mystic writers them-

selves, assignment of visions to the illuminative phase alone is impossible; for Julian, as we've said, the visioned experience is integral to her perception of being oned with God. For *Cloud*, on the other hand, union is not vision at all, but the suppression of vision in a "strong, deep sorrow of spirit" (Wolters 111) which, when genuine, is full of holy longing. All must be trampled "down deep under the cloud of forgetting" (110). The result of this "hidden demonstration" (116) is to ready the soul for unity with God:

... by seche a hid schewyng bryng thee oute of the boistouste of bodely felyng into the purete & depnes of goostly felyng; & so forthermore at the last to help thee to knit the goostly knot of brennyng loue betwix thee & thi god, in goostly onheed & acordyng of wille (CU47.88). (Tuma 160)

The distinctive quality of the illuminative phase, then, is found more clearly in the effects upon the individual during this phase. The result of illumination is preparation to receive the grace of union. According to Tuma, the "end result and most important part" of this illumination is "the individual's reformation in 'faith and feeling'" (159). For Hilton, this "reforming in faith" has results in behavior; he says, "you, who, through grace, are reformed in faith, do not, henceforward, conform yourself to the ways of the world, in pride, in greed, and in other sins, but be reformed in the newness of experience" (280). For Rolle, the result is "high sweetness, inward delights, and full great sweetness" (Tuma 159). *The Cloud of Unknowing* associates this stage with readiness for unity with God.

Such union is not a necessary result of readiness, however, nor is it even certainly identified with specific observable experience. As Hilton points out:

One can say the same thing about other kinds of feelings that are similar to these bodily ones—for instance, the hearing of delightful music or the feeling of a comforting heat in the body, or the seeing of light or the sweetness of physical savors. These are not spiritual experiences, for spiritual experiences are felt in the powers of the soul, chiefly in the understanding and in love, and little in the imagination. But these experiences are in the imagination and, therefore, are not spiritual experiences. *Even when they are best and most true, they are still only outward signs of the inward grace which is experienced in the powers of the soul.* (Del Mastro, *Stairway* 278; italics mine)

Achievement of this “gift,” union, is generally referred to as being “oned or knitted” with God (Tuma 306). *Benjamin Minor* says it is not the same contemplation of God as achieved by “the Son of man who is in heaven” (Kirchberger 112), but it is the highest degree of understanding of God available to humans without God’s action:

For God may be seen in one way by faith, known by reason in another and discerned quite differently in contemplation. The first, second and third ways belong respectively to the three heavens: the first is below reason, the third is above reason. Men may indeed ascend to the first and second heavens of contemplation, but they will never attain to the third, which is above reason except when they are rapt away above themselves in ecstasy of mind. (Kirchberger 113)

One “will have risen to the deep heart” (114), and, though one sees

Christ transfigured in a "divine shewing" (118), the rest of one's understanding "leaves the narrow limits of human reasoning" (121):

... the depth of the intelligence cannot expand to take in the secrets of the divine inspiration... There Rachel dies so that Benjamin may be born ... the same thing is signified by Rachel's death and by the case of the disciples, except that a three-fold failure occurs in the three disciples, that of the senses, the memory and the reason. When the mind is carried away above itself and raised to supernal heights, then the bodily sense, the outward memory and the human reason are cut off. (121)

Even though this state is ineffable, however, each of the mystics attempts to describe it. The *Book of Privy Counselling*, by the *Cloud* author, says, "It chargeth not now in thee bot that thi blynde beholdyng of thy nakid beyng be gladli born up in listines of loue, to be knyttid & onid in grace & in spirit to the precious beyng of God in him-self only as he is, with-uten more (BPC 139)" (Tuma 184). For Rolle, this "beatifica uisio" (Tuma 192) is ecstatic:

Qwhils the mynde truly of sayntis, to lufe endles, vnabyll to be lowsyd, is knyttyd, and swetnes of heuenly lyfe, thof all it wer als rauyschyd, with melody before felt as wer in that is gladynd (FL I6.55). (Tuma 185)

The *Cloud* author, who specifically rejects vision and any other sensory perception of union in his description of the *via negativa*, refers to "goostly onyng to his loue in the souereyn poynte of thi spirit, spoylid of thi-self & nakidly clothed in hymself as he is,

vn clothed & not lappid in any of thees sensible felynges be thei neuer so sweet ne so holy that mowne falle in this liif (BPC 169)" (Tuma 186). Julian refers to this "blissful beholding" as "that blissful sight the end of all manner of pain to the loving soul, and the fulfilling of all manner of joy and bliss (RDL 72.175)" (Tuma 187). Hilton also talks of this grace in visual terms: "this ghostly sight is nought else but the sight of Jhesu (SP II.42.440)" (Tuma 192) seen by "the ghostly eyes (SP II.41.425)" (Tuma 192). What is seen in this way is "seen 'that they are' or in such general terms as 'endless might,' 'wisdom and goodness,' 'holiness and mercy,' 'unchangeable being,' and 'sovereign might'" (Tuma 193). *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* is similarly unspecific, saying:

And th[us] gyffes [þam], at þe begynnyng meditacione, þat es plente of teris and deuocyon þat men consaynes in medytacyone; and after þe wyne of swete teris than sendys he þe oyle of consolacione þat gyffes þame sauour & lyghtnes [þaire] knaweliggyng, and schewes to þam of his heuenly priuatyse þat es hide from þame þat folowes fleschely desyris and gyffes þame-selfe alle to þe wysedome of þe worlde and his fantasyse, and so enflawmes þam with þe blysse of his lufe þat þay taste somedelle & fele how swete he es, how gud he es, how luffande he es—bot noghte alle fully. I wote wele þat none may fele it fully bot if his herte sholde bryste for lykyng of loye. (Horstman I 333)

In this passage we find too an example, neatly rationalized, of the tension expressed by many of these writers, Hilton and Richard of St. Victor among them, as they attempt to speak of a complete and deep knowledge of God while retaining a sense that God's fullness is and must be beyond any comprehension of human beings while they live

on this earth.

The result of union is more than bliss. In union “the ‘soul sleeps from worldly unity’ (SP II.40.425) and ... man is urged to shape himself ‘for to be arrayed in his likeness, that is in meekness and charity’ (SP I.51.123)” (Tuma 199). Thus, paradoxically, to leave the world through the process of contemplation is, if one achieves the goal, to return to the world, but with a new detachment from worldiness, with “‘peace and restfulness of heart’... ‘made free from all fleshly thoughts and affections’ (SP I.25.57)” (Tuma 199), and with a new, deep and genuine charity.

Meditation and contemplation can, then, be seen as parts of a three-step process of purgation, illumination and union. According to the medieval writers, this process is made possible by the operations of the faculties of the created soul in a series of actions or exercises, practices to be performed, like meditation, which will lead that soul to the proper readiness for receiving grace. St. Bonaventure, Richard of Saint Victor, Walter Hilton, St. Edmund, the sermons of St. Bernard, and the authors of *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, *The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, *A Ladder of Foure Ronges*, and *Deonise Hid Diuinite* discuss the various faculties of the human self which they hold to be the important operatives in the process. They lay out, to some extent, actual sequences of activities to be performed. I will trace the commonalities in their descriptions, not to identify specific sources for particular practices or concepts but to reveal that a common ground of understandings existed in the fourteenth century among those seeking mystical union

themselves or writing to guide others in the attempt concerning how the soul operated in the process of seeking perfection.

First, these writers agree that the will is crucial in achieving union. As Bernard says:

The union of God and man is brought about not by confusion of natures, but by agreement of wills. Man and God, because they are not of one substance or nature, cannot be called "one thing" ("unum," like Father and Son); but they are with strict truth called "one spirit," if they adhere to one another by the glue of love. But this unity is effected not by coherence of essences, but by concurrence of wills. God and man, because they exist and are separate with their own wills and substances, abide in one another not blended in substance but consentaneous in will. (Butler 167)

Likewise, according to Dom Butler, St. Thomas says that this loving of God "is in its essence a simple intuition of truth, terminating in an affection of the will" (Butler xxxiii). Butler says, too, that:

... it is the constant burden of the *Cloud* and of its companion *Epistle of Privy Counsel* that they are a work in which the will, or the soul, is industriously at work: "a naked intent stretching unto God," "a longing desire evermore working". (xxxiv)

The English version of the *Benjamin Minor*, somewhat differently, says, "two mi3tes ben in a mans soule, 3ouen of þe Fader of heuen, of whome alle good comiþ, þe tone is reson, þe toþer is affeccioun or will... ri3t so mans soule, þorow li3t [of] knowyng in person & swetnes of loue in þe affeccioun, is spousid vnto God" (Hodgson,

Deonise 12). Here, we should note, while will is vital to the process, reason becomes the final means to union. The entire process, however, is driven by desire:

...ri3t so when þi soule brenniþ in þe loue of God, þat is when þou felist contynowely þin herte desire after þe loue of God, þan by þe li3t of his grace þat he seendep in þi reson, þou maist hope see þin vnworþines, & his greet goodnes... þan byginniþ þer a maner of cleerte of þe li3t of God for to schyne in þi soule, and a maner of sonnebeme þat is gostly to apere before þi goostly si3t... (43-44)

For Walter Hilton too, desire, which he names will, is crucial. As a seeker, he says, you must “humble yourself in your will and by your reason... And so by the grace of Jesus Christ you will greatly reduce the stirrings of pride, and the virtue of humility, which first was only in your will, shall be turned into affective feeling. Without this virtue either in a true will or in feeling, whoever disposes himself to serve God in the contemplative life will stumble about like a blind man and never attain his object” (Colledge 213). You must, he says, believe in all the articles of the Faith and the sacraments “with all the will of your heart” (214), and “all your will and all your desire must be only to please God” (216). He explains that “Man’s soul is a life, made of three powers, recollection, reason, and will, made in the image and likeness of the Blessed Trinity... And the love and the will were made pure, burning upwards towards God, without the animal desires of the flesh or for any creature, by God’s sovereign goodness, and so it has the likeness of the Holy Spirit, Who is blessed love” (227). This

operation of the will must become such a burning desire for God that "it expels, as it were by violence, every desire and remembrance of the world and of the flesh, so that they can find no place in your heart" (230). It is by such desire that the seeking soul is able to achieve the mental concentration necessary to distance itself from the world.

This distancing is described by *Deonise Hid Diuinite*, a work which operates as a meditation, a "reverse imagination," in which the meditator, rather than imagining what God is, as would be done in a visualizing exercise, focuses the mind upon what God is not. Thus, the author says, "We put away first from God þing þat is withoutyn substaunce, and al þing þat is not, begynnyng fro þe moost fer" until "we . . . seyen þat he is neiþer soule, ne aungel, ne he haþ fantasie, ne opinion, ne resoun ne vnderstondyng; ne he is reson, ne vnderstonding; ne he is seyde, ne vnderstonden" (Hodgson, *Deonise* 9). What is clear throughout the work is that the discipline necessary to achieve this "doing away of alle þinges on þis side God" (2) is driven by desire. Hilton agrees that when the will operates in this way, then you are "indeed seeking Jesus" (Colledge 230).

The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* not only asserts the importance of the will but defines it and the relationships among the various faculties of the soul as it strives toward perfection. He writes:

The faculty of *Mind*, generally speaking, does no work by itself, whereas Reason and Will, like Imagination and Sensuality, are faculties that do. All these four faculties are held and embraced by mind . . . *Reason* is the faculty by which we distinguish evil from good, . . . good

from better, . . . better from best . . . *Will* is the faculty by which we choose good after it has been approved by reason, and by which we love God, desire God, and, ultimately, with complete satisfaction and consent, dwell in God . . . *Imagination* is the faculty by which we can picture anything, past as well as present . . . *Sensuality* is the faculty of our soul which affects and controls all our bodily reactions, and through which we know and experience the physical creation, both pleasant and unpleasant. (Wolters 137-139)

He calls Reason and Will "major faculties" because they "work on their own in all spiritual matters" while Imagination and Sensuality are minor faculties, which "work in all forms of animal and physical life, whether reason and will are present or not" (137). His calling these "mi3tes" (Hodgson, *Deonise* 115) or "faculties" or "powers" of the soul reflects a development in psychology which began in the early thirteenth century, according to Vernon Bourke:

First of all, there was a gradual movement toward a faculty psychology, under the influence of the new translations of the psychological writings of Aristotle. The notion that the human soul is the immediate agency of all its actions (Augustine's *voluntas*) is replaced in many thinkers by the view that specifically distinct functions of man are to be attributed to a plurality of operative potencies. (61)

Most of the fourteenth century contemplative writers seem to adhere to this view, speaking as we have seen they do of separate functions of mind, reason, conscience, recollection, reason, affection, and will. And *Piers Plowman B*, presenting as it does such separate figures as those called Will, Conscience, Ymaginatif, Reason, and Anima within the

Dreamer's perception of his dreams, seems to share this perception at least in part.

For Bonaventure, to follow the road to God we can rely on "six stages of the soul's powers by which we mount from the depths to the heights, from the external to the internal, from the temporal to the eternal—to wit, sense, imagination, reason, intellect, intelligence, and the apex of the mind, the illumination of conscience (*Synteresis*)" (Boas 9). Intelligence, he says, is the "offspring" of memory (26) and from "memory and intelligence is breathed forth love, which is the tie between the two. These three—the generating mind, the word, and love—are in the soul as memory, intelligence, and will" (26). Will thus becomes a crucially important faculty of the soul, that faculty, the "power of choice," which leads "to the highest goodness" (26). Bonaventure further stresses the need for the operation of the will when he states unequivocally that the only road to God is "through the Crucified... one cannot enter into the heavenly Jerusalem through contemplation unless one enter through the blood of the Lamb as through a gate. For one is not disposed to contemplation which leads to mental elevation unless one be with Daniel a man of desires" (4). Here it is clear that desire—that function of the will—is the first requirement.

Bonaventure then tells his reader how to awake that desire: "But desires are kindled in us two ways: by the cry of prayer, which makes one groan with the murmuring of one's heart, and by a flash of apprehension by which the mind turns most directly and intensely to the rays of light" (Boas 4). He immediately warns, however, that his

directions are for "those predisposed by divine grace" for without that readiness, you may "by chance . . . fall into the lower pit of shadows from the contemplation of those rays [of wisdom]" (5). Once assured we are ready, our first step, he says, is prayer. Such prayer instructs us "about the knowledge of the stages in the ascension to God" (8). Next, we must "enter into our minds, which are the eternal image of God" until we "pass over into that which is eternal, most spiritual, and above us" (8). We must, of course, avoid sin, "which deforms nature" (10), and "strive toward purifying justice, and this in intercourse; toward the illumination of knowledge, and this in meditation; toward the perfection of wisdom, and this in contemplation" (10), and all this is come to "through penetrating meditation, holy conversation, and devout prayer" (10).

Our beginning on "Jacob's ladder" means that we must "place the first rung of the ascension in the depths, putting the whole sensible world before us as a mirror" (Boas 10), and, as we mount, we pass through several modes of understanding, reasoning and contemplating:

In the first mode, the aspect of one contemplating, considering things in themselves, sees in them weight, number and measure—weight, which directs things to a certain location; number, by which they are distinguished from one another; and measure, by which they are limited. And so one sees in them mode, species, and order; and also substance, power, and operation. From these one can rise as from the traces to understanding the power, wisdom, and immense goodness of the Creator.

In the second mode, the aspect of a believer considering this world, one reaches its origin, course, and terminus. For by faith we believe

that the ages are fashioned by the Word of Life; by faith we believe that the ages of the three laws—that is, the ages of the law of nature, of Scripture, and of Grace—succeed each other and occur in most orderly fashion; by faith we believe that the world will be ended at the last judgment—taking heed of the power in the first, of the providence in the second, of the justice of the most high principle in the third.

In the third mode, the aspect of one inquiring rationally, one sees that some things merely are; others, however, are and live; others, finally, are, live, and discern. (11)

As we move on in this process, first we apprehend the sensible world with our five sense, then we delight, and then we judge (16-17). As we begin to “apprehend the rhythmical, delight in rhythmical proportions, and through the laws of rhythmical proportions judge irrefragably” (20), we “are led to seeing God in His traces” (20) by these “signs divinely bestowed” (20).

Next, Bonaventure directs that you must “enter then into yourself[f] and see” (Boas 22) and in so doing, considering your powers of “the generating mind, the word, and love—[which] are in the soul as memory, intelligence, and will” (26) you will be able to “see God in yourself[f] as in an image, which is to see through a glass darkly” (20). At this point, “Jesus Christ, Who is as the tree of life in the middle of Paradise” (29) must become the mediator (28), and by this, our faith, hope and charity, our senses are transformed into spiritual sense. Now, the soul which believes “can sing like the Bride a Canticle of Canticles, as was done on the occasion of this fourth stage of contemplation, which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it. For it occurs in affective experience rather than in rational consideration.

On this level... the soul is disposed to mental elevation through devotion, wonder, and exultation" (29). Here, "the soul is stamped by... perception, deliberation, self-impulsion, ordination, strengthening, command, reception, divine illumination, union" (30), and, for this stage of contemplation "there is especially and outstandingly added as a support the consideration of Holy Scripture divinely issued, as philosophy was added to the preceding" (31). From this point, the soul can mount to "contemplation of the invisible and eternal things of God" (34), and "fix [its] gaze upon Being itself" (35) and "the divine emanations [of the Trinity]" (39). Only at this point does one experience "mental transport by example rather than by word" in which "all intellectual operations should be abandoned, and the whole height of our affection should be transferred and transformed into God. This, however, is mystical and most secret, which no man knoweth but he that hath received it" (44). In this, Bonaventure states that he follows Dionysius (45), identifying, like him, the final state of union with the *via negativa* or the knowledge of God as that which is not what is known and can be named.

From this summary of Bonaventure's schema, it is possible to lay out a generalized set of practices. First, he implies that these begin with prayer. Though he mentions a "flash of apprehension" (Boas 4), he does not dwell on this means of achieving illumination. He then lays out a hierarchical succession of exercises in focusing the attention, first on the world of sensation, on its measure and number, on its value, on its place in divine history; second, on the "microcosm" (14) of the world in our own souls, achieving apprehension, delight,

and judgment, until we "enter into" ourselves and see God in ourselves "as in an image"; third, on Christ as mediator until we are "clothed... in the three theological virtues" (29) which bring us to mental elevation within which we exult in our devotion and wonder. The contemplations prescribed by St. Edmund Rich constitute a quite similar series.

In none of these books is the soul made ready for the attainment of grace by the operation of will or desire alone. All of them, as did Bonaventure, assign functions to various faculties of the mind and soul in describing the search for perfection. *Benjamin Minor*, for instance, outlines a detailed exposition of the relationships between Reason, Imagination, Affection, and Sensuality, and how they, with God's grace, beget Dread of Pain, Sorrow of Sin, Hope of Forgiveness, Love of "ryhtwisnes," Joy of Inward Sweetness, Hatred of Sin, "Ordaynde schame," Abstinence, Patience, and Discretion (Hodgson, *Deonise* 15). Here Discretion, as it is the means by which goodness is recognized, gotten and adhered to and by which "vertewe be syngulerly loued, wipoutyn whiche no vertewe may be had, ne gouerned" (39), seems to be equivalent to conscience. At last, through the desire-driven operation of these faculties, the soul attains the long-sought perfection or "contemplacioun of God, þat is to sey, to bryng forþe soche a childe þat men clepyn in þe story Beniamyn, þat is to seye, si3t of God" (45).

One fourteenth century set of English treatises perhaps less familiar to modern scholars of *Piers* than those discussed above are *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* (*Abbey* hereafter) and its companion

The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost (Charter hereafter). These, like the *Benjamin Minor*, delineate allegorically the faculties of the soul which operate in the search for perfection. The abbey in these works is "the abbaye of Saynte Spirite" and its ground is "in a place that es callede consyence" according to the Thornton manuscript (Horstman I 321). The Vernon manuscript reads, "Heer beginnep a tretis þat is clept þe Abbey of þe holy gost, þat is, Conciencie of Monnes herte schule ben in þis abbey most" (Horstman I 321). This abbey is the best place for founding the "religeon of þe herte" for "whare may þis abbay beste be funded and þis religione? Now certis, nowhare so wele als in a place þat es called Consyence" (Horstman I 321).

Abbey describes the need to cleanse the conscience, and the means for so doing by the operations of "Rightwysnes" and "Luffe of Clennes" (322). Then Meekness and Poverty make the place "pure in spyrite" (322). The abbey is set on a river of tears and this "clenses goddis cite, þat es mannes soule þat es goddes cite" (322-323). Thus the ground is prepared. Then "Bowsomnes" and "Miserecorde" raise the abbey walls. The building blocks are good works of charity bound with "qwyke lyme of lufe and stedfaste byleue" (323). "Sufferance" and "Forte" raise the pillars (321). Once the abbey is built, the soul must "halde þe with-Ine þe cloyster" so that nothing can make "in-gate in the" (324). Built thus through the work of charity, love, faith, obedience, and humility, the abbey then begins to fill with its nuns: Shrift, who is "chapter," Preaching who is in charge of the refectory, "Oracione," in charge of the chapel, and "Contemplacione" the

“dortoure,” the “deuote rysynge of herte with byrnyng lufe to god to do wele” (324). “Rewfulness” comes to run the infirmary, “Deuocione” takes charge of the cellar, and “Meditacion,” who is “gernere” (325), shelters the good thoughts of God, his works, his pains, his love (331), through which all the “gud ladyse of þe howse may hafe paire sustenance” (331) and:

[T]his es begynnyng of all perfeccione whene mane settis and stabylls his herte in depe thynkyng on god & on his werkes; ffor ofte es better a gud thoghte in haly meditacyone þan many wordes sayd in prayere, ffor þe holy thoghtes in meditacione cryes in goddis eris. (331)

Other nuns gather—Wisdom, Meekness, Discretion, Prayer, Jubilation, Devotion, Penance, Atemperance, Soberness, Pity, Mercy, Honesty, Courtesy and “Symplese,” Reason, “Lewte” and “Largesse,” Dread who is the porter at the door to keep out evil, and Charity the prioress (326-329). Charity, then, directs the works of the abbey, but the book constantly stresses the importance of Meditation as well, the garnerer who keeps the wheat, red without and white within, which is Jesus Christ (332). It is through meditation and devotion that comfort —“petance” and “consolacione”—gives the soul “sauour & lyghtnes [paire] knoweliggyng, and schewes to þam of his heuenly priuatyse” (333).

One more nun is vitally important in bringing the Holy Ghost to the abbey, and this is “Geloyse,” the “wakyre,” who “sall kepe þe orloge [the clock]... þes es orloges in relegione, of contemplacione. And this es of this holy religyone þat es fundede of þe haly gaste, and

bis es Ielosity, and this es sauoyre of perfeccione" (335). This jealousy is not, as it is for us, sexual suspicion, but, according to the *Middle English Dictionary*, "zeal, fervor; love, devotion" (5: 378). Jealousy, or zeal, therefore, in the abbey, takes the same role assigned to will in the other works discussed above; it is the burning love which focuses the soul on perfection. This love wakes "goddes gostely seruandes" before earthly bells wake them. At this point the book draws the conventional medieval analogy between contemplation, waked by zeal, and the waking sleep:

A, dere breper and syster[s], sely ar tho sawles þat þe lufe of God and longyng till him wakyns, and slomers noghte ne slepis noghte in slowthe of fleschly lustes: For-thi he sayse in Canticis: [*Ego*] *dormio et cor meum uigilat*, þat es at saye: "when I slepe bodily my flesche for to ese & ryste, my herte es ay wakyre in gelosity and in lufe-þernynge to godes."(335)

Conscience is thus the primary vehicle for the receipt of grace, but desire is the vital operative, and the state achieved is the "waking sleep."

But throughout, will is the necessary faculty in preparing the soul for grace. Similarly, in *A Ladder of Foure Ronges*:

Lesson is a besy lokyng vpon Holy Writte with intencion of the wille and in the witte. Meditacion is a studious inserchyng with the mynde to knowe that ere was hydde thurwe wischyng of propir skylle. Prayer is a deuoute desiryng of the hert for to gete that that is good & to fordoo þat is eville. Contemplacion is a risyng of hert into God that tastith sumdele of heuenly swettnesse & savourith. Lesson sekyth,

meditacion fyndeth, orison askith, contemplacion felith. (Hodgson, *Deonise* 101)

But in this process knowledge is not enough. Desire is necessary: "to this witte it is not to opyn the eere but the herte. This witte is hidde from wyse men of the worlde, & shewid & openyd to lowe & meke sothly to vndirstande & fele" (109). And even love is no guarantor that grace will come, for "the more þat a man susteyneth his meditacion theron, the more of mornynge he fyndith" because the gift he seeks is one "þat cummyth from above" (109). So, again, will prepares the ground, though it does not bring the desired result by its action alone. And for St. Edmund, "Connyng, Pouwer and Will" are the three virtues which allow us "to knowen god, hauen him and louen him" (Horstman I 249). All this is achieved not by man's but by God's will: "Whene he will he opynis his handes and lyghtenes þam [his chosene] with heuenly gladnes" (334).

While the process outlined here seems linear, both the *Abbey* and the other contemplative writings make it clear that actual progress will be recursive, and that even the attainment of union is an impermanent state. St. Edmund, for example, prescribes contemplation of God's self as a continual occupation rotating through the hours of the day and the seasons of the year:

Off his Monhede, þou schalt þenke þreo þinges: Pe Mekenesse of his Incarnacion, and þe swetnesse of his Conuersacion, and þe charite of his Passion. But þou mai3t not don þis at ones: þerfore I haue distynktet hem by [þe] houres of þe day þat þou syngest at Chirche; þat non houre þe passe þat þou ne haue þin herte occupyed. Pat to don,

pou schalt witen þat eueri houre haþ double þenkyng: on of þe Passion,
anoþer of oper seson. (Horstman I 254)

Further, none of the manuals asserts its procedure as an absolute formula to be followed mechanically, as the Vernon manuscript version of Hilton's *Mixed Life* points out:

... a liutel I schal telle þe, nou3t þat pou schalt vse þe same forme alwei as I say, but þat pou schalt haue þerbi, 3if ned be, sum wissyng forto rule þe in þin ocupacion. For I may not, ne i can not, telle þe fulli what is best euer for þe for to vse. But i schal sei to þe sumwhat as me pinkep. (Horstman I 283)

Moreover, grace can withdraw, as it does in the *Abbey*: "...and whene he will, he closis his handis and withdrawes þe lykyng & þe comforthe fro þame" (334). Here, *Abbey* agrees with Walter Hilton. Hilton goes on to say that the soul may feel loss, since,

... you have found Him a little, though not yet Him as He is, but only His reflection. . . . Therefore it occurs to you to ask yourself what it is that you have lost and what you are seeking, lift up the desire of your heart towards Jesus, even though you may be blind and cannot see Him at all, and say that it is He Whom you have lost and Whom you wish to have, and nothing else. (Del Mastro, *Stairway* 230)

Still, Hilton advises, "[N]evertheless, it often happens that grace partially withdraws on account of the corruption of human frailty and allows the soul to fall back on itself into the flesh-governed state he was previously in. Then the soul is in sorrow and pain . . ." (317). But

“you must not be amazed that the experience of grace is sometimes withdrawn from a lover of Jesus . . . when I fall down into my frailty, then grace withdraws . . . And I cried with all my heart, *‘Revertere dilecte mi!’* . . . but at last, when He wills, He comes again . . . and He visits the soul who languishes in desire, seeking for His presence with love” (318). Similarly, in *Abbey*, once the abbey is built and filled with nuns, a reversal occurs, as the Devil plants his four daughters, Pride, Envy, “Gruchynge” and False, within its walls. The nuns gather to fight off this attack and, by Discretion’s advice, pray for the “vesetour,” the Holy Ghost, who does come to cleanse and restore the abbey (Horstman I 336-337).

In the Vernon manuscript, the *Abbey* treatise continues with *The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, an exposition of how the abbey was chartered even before its building in the individual soul began. This section says “þe abbeye of þe holy gost þe whiche shulde be foundid in clene conscience . . . han many false enemyes þe whiche wolde distroye here abbeye & byreue hem of her possessiones” (Horstman I 337-338) and proceeds to explain how it is established, destroyed and rebuilt, and how the four daughters of God come there. This “preciouse place þat is Clepid conscience, þat liþ in here soules by-twixen a place þat is clepid Resoun, þe whiche knoweþ good & wykke, on þat o sydde, and a place þat is I-clepid Synderisys, þe whiche steriþ a man to good & grucchiþ agens wykke, on þat opere sydde; whos on ende is fastened be þe grace of god, þaron whiche euerey man may don wel 3if he wylle; & þe oper ende liþ in ioye & merþe of þe soule” (338-339), has been “confermed” by God to Adam

and Eve and their heirs. Adam and Eve, of course, lose the charter by their Fall. Though they consult their conscience, and Wit explains the meaning of their eating the apple (341-342), they cannot be restored until Christ finds the abbess and her convent "hangyng on þe rode-tree . . . [and] mayd a3en the abbeye of þe holy gost, betere þan euere hit was" (345). Christ comes because of the cries of David, the moans of Solomon, the pleas of Isaiah, and the weeping of Jeremiah (347-348). Christ's life is explained as a process of finding the lady nuns of the abbey (Cleanness, Poverty, Wisdom, Dread, Contemplation, Jubilation, and finally, on the Cross, Charity) (348-361). Part of the importance of Christ's action is demonstrated by the debate of the Four Daughters of God—Truth, Mercy, Rightfulness, and Peace—which is inserted in the center of this account of the restoration of the abbey's charter. Their debate argues God's decision to send Christ to reestablish the abbey in man's soul as it was before (349ff). After Christ's Passion they are reconciled to peace with each other and with God's action, just as they are in *Piers Plowman B*, Passus XVIII. The result of following the directive of *Abbey*, and of the charter promised in *Charter*, is therefore to establish perfection in the soul in the persons of Wisdom and Jubilation, reconciliation in Heaven in the accord of Truth, Mercy, Rightfulness and Peace, and right action in the form of Charity on the earth.

Thus, in examining various texts current in England in the fourteenth century, including at least one group associated with *Piers Plowman* directly, we can see certain common elements which all of them share. First, they generally agree that meditation is a beginner's

move toward contemplation and thus a part of the life of perfection, and that contemplation often ends in union, or at least provides the closest approach to perfect union with God the soul can come this side of death. Second, they emphasize the role of will or desire or zeal in achieving perfection. Third, they agree that perfection is not achieved by man's will, which only prepares the ground, but by God's grace. Fourth, they see the result of the vision of Christ's passion as the establishment of Charity in the soul and an understanding of the reconciliation of the virtues of truth, peace, mercy and justice by means of that passion. Fifth, they agree that contemplation is not a permanently achieved state but involves a recursive process in which the soul in its imperfection can fall away from bliss and have to cry for grace to reach it again, if God wills. Sixth, each uses an individualized terminology, often with explicit reference to personal experience, as is true in the writings of Julian of Norwich, Richard Rolle, and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

Having laid this groundwork, in Chapters Two, Three, and Four I will parallel the approach toward perfection discussed by the contemplative writers—their practices, rather than their intended goals, and their identifications of the faculties of the soul which operate in the search for perfection—with the experiences of the Dreamer in *Piers Plowman B* so that we can observe how the dreams and wakings in the poem enact the progress of a soul toward perfection.

CHAPTER II

CONTEMPLATION BY DEGREES

As outlined in the contemplative literature, a complex process is thus at work in the search for perfection. First, through God's grace, the soul undergoes conversion and purgation, its will becoming more and more zealous for grace. Remembrance of Christ's Passion and realization of one's sinful nature rouse the will toward this zealoussness. At the same time, the will is necessary to focus the seeker on the Passion and purgation; remembrance and realization help strengthen the will to persevere toward God and away from the things of the world. In the process, the soul's will, reason and conscience cause the individual seeker to practice penance, to study, pray and meditate, to develop "Sufferance," "Forte," meekness, obedience, wisdom, and other virtues, to be governed by Charity, and to experience, at least briefly, if grace allows, jubilation. Thus, when the will, acting by God's grace, prepares the soul, grace allows illumination and finally, perhaps, union.

Will in *Piers Plowman B* exemplifies this process taking place in the Dreamer,¹ as told us by the Narrator, who is the Dreamer some time after the occurrence of the events related in the poem. As the poem opens, this unnamed Narrator describes how “on a May morwenyng on Malverne hills” he encountered “a ferly, of Fairye me thoghte” (Prol. 6). This “ferly,” a “merveillous swevene” (Prol. 11), came upon him, he tells us, as he lay and leaned and looked on the water and “slombred into a slepyng” because the water “sweyed so murye” (Prol. 10).² As we pointed out in the Introduction above, this first slumber, from a rationalist point of view, displays many of the essential features of auto-hypnosis, an accidental lapsing into a meditative or alpha state under the influence of “concentration on a neutral or pleasant device” coupled with “a sense of quietude” and relaxation of the muscles (Glasscoe, 1982 154). From the point of view of a theologian, this occurrence, if it leads to true visions, must be the result of grace. Since, as *The Cloud of Unknowing* says, even

¹ I discussed both the interpretation that “Will” is a faculty within the person of the Dreamer/Narrator and the distinctions among Will, Dreamer and Narrator in the Introduction above.

² The word “sweyed” does not appear in this line in all the B-text manuscripts, replaced by such variants as “sweuenyd” in BM Harley 3854 and “sweyued” in Oxford Bodleian MS Laud Misc. 581 (Schmidt, *Vision* 1). In his textual notes to his edition, Schmidt defines “sweyued” as “flowed,” calling it “perhaps a scribal variant of ‘sw(e)yed,’” equivalent to “swi3ede” in the A-text, meaning “sounded” (265). “Sweyen” does indicate a movement to and fro, as in “sway and fall,” and is found with this meaning in the line “sweyes in a swounyng” (716) in the *Alliterative Morte*, reprinted in Mosse. Interestingly, the entire line referring to the water disappears in the C-text.

the initial search for Truth comes by grace and "it is only God that sterith thi wyl & thi desyre, pleynty by himself, with-outen mene outhur on his party or on thi (CU 34.70-71)" (Tuma 142), nothing the Dreamer has done or can do can certainly be identified as the cause of the vision. Still, the Dreamer himself began his progress toward this state by his wanderings "as an heremite," though "unholy of werkes" (Prol. 3). His slumber into a sleeping which is a vision might be therefore regarded as the response of grace to this act of the Dreamer's will, which does seek, though ignorantly and without doing proper works. As Julian of Norwich said, "Finding God in clarity is a gift of his special grace and comes when he wills. The seeking of him with faith, hope and charity pleases our Lord" (Del Mastro, *Revelations* 99). The Dreamer's seeking here may demonstrate only hope, not faith nor charity, but perhaps that alone has been enough to "please our Lord" and bring the Dreamer his first instruction. That the poem does not claim grace forces the reader to engage in the question of the graciousness of the visions for him or herself, and therefore to trace the Dreamer's quest with him and supply independently the authority of those visions.

The Dreamer now finds himself in a wilderness which he does not recognize, though it is peopled by folk he does recognize—"all manere of men, the meene and the riche" (Prol. 18). Some work, wander, plow, sow, or waste what they have, while others, like "ancre and heremites" (Prol. 28), "in preires and penaunce putten hem manye,/Al for the love of Oure Lorde lyveden ful streyte" (Prol. 25-26). Though, as Szittyá suggests (250), there may be an order of oppositions

informing this description, the tone here is that of a nonjudgmental reporter, one who simply watches and says what he sees. As we shall see, this openness to his vision is the attitude he should properly have.

He sees some making mirth like minstrels, and "geten gold with hire glee," (Prol. 34), and others, "japeres and jangeleres," less worthy, who "feynen hem fantasies, and fooles hem maketh/And han wit at wille to werken if they wolde" (Prol. 36-37). This whole passage, more judgmental than the earlier observations, reads like a gloss on a passage from the Vernon manuscript's *Qui Habitat*, a work on contemplation ascribed to Walter Hilton. In distinguishing between the contemplative man and those busy in the world, Hilton says, "but þou, louever of god, whiles oþur men ren/nen out and fihten and striuen, sweren and be-gylen, *Iapen and/Ianglen, pleyen & syngen*, holde þe stille in þi tabernacle,/& þou schalt ben in þes" (Wallner 36, italics mine). This reference in *Piers Plowman B* distinguishes carefully between kinds of foolery, playing, and singing, whereas Hilton condemns all such activity. Whether we see here direct cross-reference between Hilton and the poem or not, the two passages certainly illustrate the poem's aligning the Dreamer's idleness with loving God, and the field of folks' busyness with ignoring Him. In Chapter Three I will trace the poem's entire argument on "janglyng" and in Chapter Four show how the distinction between "janglyng" and "pleyng" becomes crucial in Passus XVIII when Peace arrives "pleyng" (167) and bearing Love's patent of salvation.

But at this point in the Prologue, as the poem becomes more

judgmental, it slips from past tense description of what the Dreamer saw to present tense declarations of the Narrator speaking to us and concerned with what "it semeth to oure sight" (Prol. 32). The Narrator speaks here with authority he borrows from Paul's preaching and "*Qui loquitur turpiloquium*" (Prol. 38-39) to clinch his argument quickly and return to his narrative. He reports the presence of all kinds of churchmen guilty of misdeeds, not least the "freres, alle the foure ordres,/Prechyng the peple for profit of [the wombe]" (Prol. 58-59), and again he judges: "But Holy Chirche and hii holde bettere togidres/The mooste meschief on molde is mountynge up faste" (Prol. 66-67). The Dreamer at this point is entirely naive, watching the parade across the field of folk, until he notices the corruption "in Cheker and Chauncelrie" (Prol. 93). Now *he* feels he knows enough to make a discriminating judgment:

I parceyved of the power that Peter hadde to kepe—
 To bynden and unbynden, as the Book telleth—
 How he it lefte with love as oure Lord highte
 Amonges foure vertues, most vertuouse of alle vertues,
 That cardinals ben called and closynge yates
 There Crist is in kyngdom, to close and to shette,
 And to open it to hem and hevne blisse shew.
 Ac of the Cardinals at court that kaughte of that name
 And power presumed in hem a Pope to make
 To han the power that Peter hadde, impugnen I nelle—
 For in love and in lettrure the eleccion bilongeth;
 Forthi I kan and kan naught of court speke moore.

(Prol. 100-111)

It is this perception of "the power that Peter hadde" in relation

to what he sees which begins to move the Dreamer to consider the meaning of what he is seeing. The cause of this questioning in the Dreamer is the sight of something he understands, the sight of corruption in London, the King's court, and the election of popes, which, being remote from his own faults, is easier for him to perceive than any flaw in his own life and soul. He does not, in other words, understand the nature of his own sin, a perception vital to purgation, but he does at least understand, now, that this tumultuous busy world he sees is flawed. The Narrator, speaking to the reader in present tense in this passage, refuses to condemn these cardinals—"impugnem I nelle"—nor will he state to whom the election belongs, a point to which we will return. That the Dreamer's understanding is quite limited, however, becomes apparent when Kynde Wit appears, not to talk to him but to advise the king, and when a "lunatik" exhorts the king to protect the kingdom "so leaute thee lovye,/And for thi rightful rulyng be rewarded in heavene!" (Prol. 126-127).

This plea, in English, the Dreamer understands, but he does not seem to understand the angel's answering admonition in Latin :

*"Sum Rex, sum Princeps"; neutrum fortasse deinceps!
O qui iura regis Christi specialia regis,
Hoc quod agas melius—iustus es, esto pius!*
(Prol. 132-134)

What the angel has said is "[You say] 'I am King, I am ruler;' you may perhaps be neither in future. O you who administer the sublime laws of Christ the King, in order to do better what you do, as you are

just, be godly!" (Schmidt, *Vision* 6n). The angel thus makes a connection between godliness and right action in which godliness is primary, a connection mysterious to the Dreamer at this point. He can understand the lunatic, who sees godly reward as resulting from right action, but not the angel, who sees reward as incidental to the essential issue of the king's acting out of godliness. So he merely watches and reports, without comment, as the action of the Rat Parliament begins. He does, however, approve "a mous that muche good kouthe, as me tho thoughte" (Prol. 183) when that mouse urges "late the cat worthe" (Prol. 187) because the kingdom needs a ruler who is not a child since "ye kouthe nought rule yourselve" (Prol. 201). That the Dreamer's opinion is labeled as what he thought *then*—when he was ignorant—makes doubtful acceptance of it as a good opinion *now*. The fact that the Narrator refuses to judge even now as he tells us of his dream—"(what this metels bymeneth, ye men that ben murye,/Devyne ye—for I ne dar, by deere God in hevene)!" (Prol. 209-210)—parallels his earlier refusal to impugn the cardinals. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, for us to judge whether, as the mouse says, the cat is the necessary scourger of evil which we need because we cannot rule ourselves, or whether the mouse should be doubted because ultimately we must all be responsible, with the help of grace, for our own progress toward salvation.

These judgments concern a controversy that will continue to be an issue for the Dreamer and for Will throughout the course of the poem. Those phrased in present tense proceed from the vantage of one who has experienced all that will be described as it happened to

him when he was the Dreamer, that is, from the Narrator who can distinguish between right and wrongful use of talents. Since reformation in faith and feeling (Tuma 159) is the first fruit of illumination, the Narrator's exercise of his powers of discretion, while the Dreamer could make no such distinctions, is thus the first mark we see of the illuminative value, and therefore of the authority, of this "ferly," this wonderful dream he relates. The Narrator, having gone through the entire experience he will relate, has reformed in faith and feeling and thus gained discretion, as neither the Dreamer nor Will has at this stage in the poem. As we shall see in Passus XI, he has in fact been granted specific permission by Lewtee to speak such judgments, as long as they repeat what he has already been shown to be true and are done without envy:

"Wherfore lourestow?" quod Lewtee and loked on me harde.

"If I dorste [amonges men," quod I], "this metels avowe!"

"Yis, by Peter and by Poul!" quod he . . .

"It is *licitum* for lewed men to [l]egge the sothe

If hem liketh and lest—ech a lawe it graunteth;

Except persons and preestes and prelates of Holy Chirche :

It falleth noght for that folk no tales to telle—

Though the tale were trewe—and it touched synne.

"Thyng that al the world woot, wherfore shouldestow spare

To reden it in retorik to arate dedly synne?

Ac be neveremoore the firste the defaute to blame;

Though thow se yvel, seye it noght first—be sory it

 nere amended.

No thyng that is pryve, publice thow it nevere;

Neither for love loove it noght, ne lakke it for envye.

(XI 85-87; 96-106)

When the Narrator refuses to pass judgment on these central issues of the pope's authority and the king's, his action obeys the stricture not to judge what in the behavior of others marks their being called or not called. His obedience in this matter, his leaving the judgment alone, is another indication that the process he has begun to describe having undergone has reformed him in faith and feeling. He will, as he should, having heard and understood, describe so that we too may learn, but he will not, when he has no authority to do so, judge. Later, when the Narrator speaks in what one might call a prophetic voice—that is, the voice of one who knows essential truth and will speak it for the good of those who may hear—as when he responds to Lady Mede's offer to decorate the church and build a cloister for the friar who hears her confession in return for her reward, he speaks by authority of all he has learned in all of his visions. Specifically, when the Narrator calls this action "shameless, I trowe" (III 44) and tells us that God forbids all such engraving of windows "for God knoweth thi conscience and thi kynde wille... Forthi I lere you lordes, leveth swiche w[rityng]les" (III 67-69), he speaks on the very same issue of endowments which Lewtee told him, in his chronologically earlier experience in Passus XI's dream, he might condemn.

Earlier in the Prologue, speaking of minstrels who earn money by their singing, the Narrator has judged them "[gilt]less I leeve" (Prol. 34). In this judgment on the minstrels we see the effect on the Narrator's discretion of the Dreamer's exchange with Ymaginatif and his final resolution of his doubts about his writings after his vision of

the harrowing of Hell in Passus XVIII. In Passus VII, after Piers receives Truth's letter with its promise of salvation, the Narrator again speaks prophetically to put on notice those who take gifts of the innocent, distort justice, beg falsely, and otherwise fail to perform the deeds of mercy obligated upon them by Truth's pardon (VII 40-104). He speaks here, however, not by his own authority but by that of "Caton" and "the Clerc of the Stories" (VII 71) and Gregory (VII 74) and "the Book" (VII 83). That the Narrator invites us to interpret the Rat Parliament for ourselves follows Lewtee's stricture that no one may ultimately judge another without the prior authority of a clear statement condemning the behavior in question, since judgment is the province of God, a point also stressed by the angel in regard to the action and fate of the king. There has been no clear statement regarding the issue involved in belling the cat anywhere later in the poem, though there have been clear condemnations, at several points, of the jangling the Narrator earlier criticized. Further, the Narrator's refusal to judge in this instance works to throw the reader on his or her own devices for understanding this issue, and for learning not to judge.

This issue of judgment is a point emphasized by the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. In *The Book of Privy Counselling* he warns his reader,

What-so-euer þou be þat þis writyng schalt ouþer rede or here, & namely in þis place where I make a difference bitwix hem þat be clepid to saluacion & hem þat ben clepid to perfeccion, / þat of wheþer partie þat þou fele is þi clepyng, loke neiþer þat þou deme ne discusse in þe

dedes of gode ne of man, ferþer þen only þi-self—as whom he sterip & clepeþ to perfeccion & whom he clepiþ not; or of þe schortness of tyme, whi he clepiþ hym rapen þen hym. 3if þou wilt not erre, loke not þat þou deme; bot onys here & understonde. (Hodgson, *Cloud* 161)

The *Cloud* author here is most concerned with the arrogance that may proceed from a successful pursuit of contemplation which has convinced the contemplator that he is indeed called to perfection. These acts by the Narrator, judging and refraining from judgment, therefore demonstrate the Narrator's use of discretion as *Benjamin Minor* describes it and not the sort of judgment which *The Book of Privy Counselling* warns against.

We will return to this question of judgment in relation to the issue of authority and the position in which the reader is placed by the Narrator's judging and withholding judgment in Chapter Five, but for now let us simply note that the poem invites our active participation in interpreting where authority lies and whether the mouse is right in his claim that "bette is a litel los than a long sorwe" (Prol. 191). We are allowed no time for this reflection, however, as the assembly crowds in of "alle kynne lybbynge laborers" (Prol. 223).

At this point, a "lovely lady of leer in lynnyn yclothed/Cam doun from [the] castel and called me faire" (I 3). This lady, whom we will learn is Holy Church, offers the Dreamer a means of understanding what he "seigh slepyng" (Prol. 231), as the Narrator tells us she will do (I 1-2). Her first words are a question: "Sone, slepestow?" (I 5). Robertson and Huppe take this as a reprimand of the Dreamer's

spiritual sloth (37ff). However, Holy Church has addressed him "faire," not angrily, and, contrary to Robertson and Huppe's claim that the Dreamer has approved the corruption he sees, it is clear that he has merely observed it, and some of it has prompted his doubt in its rightness. More important, in light of the "exegetical commonplace" (37n) which equates sleep with spiritual blindness, is the fact that the equation of sleep with spiritual union is a commonplace in the contemplative literature as well, and the basic metaphor cited by the contemplatives in their exegesis of their favorite text from the Song of Solomon. Further, within the context of the poem itself, Holy Church does not bid the Dreamer to wake. Instead, she asks if he sleeps and then immediately begins to instruct him on what he should see, sleeping. What he should see, moreover, and she so instructs him in her very next statement, without telling him to wake, is that no one else in the field of folk is sleeping. They are not, as Robertson and Huppe would have it, "in spiritual slumber" (38), but, she says, "how bisie they ben aboute the maze" (I 6). And that, she says, is the fault they exhibit, that they are busy and "wilne no bettre;/Of oother hevene than here [worship in this world] holde thei no tale" (I 8-9). As Walter Hilton points out in *Mixed Life*, "bisynesse" and contemplation are opposites: "Contemplatif liyf aloone longeþ to siche men and women þat, for þe loue of god, forsaken alle open synnes of þe world and of here flesch, and alle *bisynesse*, charges and gouernaunces of wordli godes" (Ogilvie-Thomson 12-13, italics mine).

At this point the Dreamer responds, as he should if he is to progress toward salvation, by asking her, "Mercy, madame, what [may]

this [be] to meane?" (I 11). His "mercy" is his first recognition of his need for grace, however brief the reference, and his action puts him on the right path to move as he should toward truth. In other words, the Dreamer now stands where he should according to *The Cloud of Unknowing*: "in desire, 3if thou shalt profite in degre of perfeccion. This desire behoueth algates be wrou3t in thi wille, be the honde of Almi3ti God & thi consent" (Tuma 128). The appearance of Holy Church, the work of "the honde of Almi3ti God" elicits a response from the Dreamer which indicates his consent. At this point in the poem, the Dreamer does not yet understand that it is his will which has consented, something of which he will become cognizant only later in his progress, but his action conforms to that described in the *Cloud*, whether he realizes it or not.

Holy Church immediately begins to tell him where Truth resides, in "the tour upon the toft" (I 13), and what Truth desires of him, which is to live "in mesurable manere" (I 19) because "measure is medicine" (I 35). In addition, she warns him that the world will betray him "for the fend and thi flesh folwen togidere" (I 40). While this is a lesson he will not learn until Age attacks him, and while he next asks a question which is naive, one which reveals him still interested in the world rather than the spirit, wishing to know who owns the treasure of the world rather than asking about the treasure of the spirit, his asking does demonstrate that his will is turned, as it should be, toward desiring truth. As Julian of Norwich said of her visions, "the continual seeking of the soul for God pleases him greatly... seeking is as good as seeing" (99). As a number of texts cited in

Chapter One demonstrate, this seeking is an act of the will; *The Cloud of Unknowing*, for instance, says, "Will is the faculty . . . by which we . . . desire God" (Wolters 138).

His seeking is naive because he has not yet encountered Reason or Conscience, nor learned how to listen to either, nor has Kynde Wit spoken to him though he has appeared in his dream. Holy Church directs him first to the Gospel, where he may find her lesson, which is to "pay your debts." Here, she couches that advice in the context of the Dreamer's worldly question, saying "*Reddite Cesari . . . that Cesari befalleth, / Et que sunt Dei Deo, or ellis ye don ille*" (I 53-4). Embedded in her Latin, however, is the injunction to pay one's debts to God, the lesson to which the poem will, as Szittyá points out, continually return. She accompanies this advice with the directive to be ruled by Reason and let Kynde Wit keep Will's treasure (I 54-5). The Dreamer is so focused still on the things of the world that, rather than asking how to find Reason and Kynde Wit, he beseeches her to tell him about more of what he sees, the "dungeon in the dale that dredful is of sighte" (I 59). After she tells him it is the castle of Care, he wonders "in my wit" (I 71) who this woman is, a statement which marks the first time the Dreamer has begun to distinguish any internal faculties in himself at all. Her answer reveals just how dull his "wit" has been, as she says, "[T]hou oughtest me to knowe. / I underfeng thee first and feith taughte. / Thow broughtest me borwes my bidding to fulfille, / And to loven me leely the while thi lif dureth" (I 75-8). He has failed to remember his own pledges to her.

His response is at last what it should have been from the

beginning: "Teche me to no tresor, but tel me this ilke—/How I may save my soule, that seint art yholden" (I 83-4). This shamed plea, even though its wording—"I may save"—indicates he thinks he can save his own soul, does at least demonstrate the desire for salvation which constitutes the necessary step toward purgation. So, within this marvelous "sweven", part of "al this I seigh slepyng, and sevene sythes more" (Prol. 231), the Dreamer's will acts for him as it should if he is to be saved. Further, it is within the meditation, not in his waking life, that his will begins to act as it should. Reformation through the contemplative process has begun.

But he has much more to do and learn before he approaches salvation. He has not denied the world nor fleshly desire, he does not see his own sin, he has not begun to consider Christ's passion, nor does he know himself.

If he did know himself, he would realize Holy Church has already answered his question, before he asked it. In asking how to save his soul, he has just "cried hire of grace/And preide hire... kenne me kyndely on Crist to bileve" (I 79-81). But she has already told him that Reason and Kynde Wit shall rule him, guard his wealth, and be "tutour of youre tresor" (I 54-55), that is, Truth, which is God. Had he understood, he would not have had to ask her to "kenne me kyndely;" he would have recognized that she has already told him that to know "kyndely" is to be tutored about one's treasure—that is, the truth—by one's Kynde Wit. In other words, all one need do is attend to the image of God within oneself that one already possesses naturally and which is by its nature the guardian of the treasure he seeks. Here I

obviously disagree with Harwood's contention that the Dreamer knows from the outset precisely what he seeks and that "where he says that he wishes to know God so that he might obey the Law, they tell him to obey the Law so that he might know God" (*Quest* 242). In fact, as I have shown in the case of Holy Church, he has been told how to know as well as what to know, but has not been able to understand the information because his will is still focused on the things of the world and because he does not know himself. His reply to Holy Church demonstrates this limitation when he says, "Yet have I no kynde knowynge" (I 138).

What is this "kynde knowynge" he lacks, and desires? To know "kyndely" is to know with one's "Kynde Wit" or with "Kynde Knowynge," an equation which the poem itself makes in Passus XII, 130-137, as Randolph Quirk points out. This equation leaves us enclosed within its circle, however. Sister Mary Clement Davlin identifies "kynde knowynge" with

... a range of meanings [which] reaches from the polite 'kindly to know' through 'real and thorough knowledge' to a genuine ME equivalent for the *gnosis* of Scripture and the Fathers, the loving knowledge of monastic and scholastic tradition; and thus this meaning, 'wisdom', is resonant with the other operative meanings of *kynde knowynge* - experiential knowledge; intimate and loving knowledge; personal thorough knowledge; knowledge as if by second nature; committed knowledge; natural knowledge. ("Wisdom" 15)

In other words, this kind of knowing is experiential, not theoretical, and affective rather than intellectual. It is found sitting in one's own

heart, in one's own self, ready to be known, if grace permits, precisely as Holy Church instructs Will: "It is a kynde knowynge that kenneth in thyn herte/For to love thi Lord lever than thiselve" (I 142-143) and "for to knownen it kyndely—it comseth by myght/And in the herte" (I 163-164). It is "a knowledge available to humans only because we share the *nature* of God through the incarnation and grace," an understanding of love, which is God ("Wisdom" 11-12). This knowledge of God comes through knowing our own nature, which is the image of God. And, once we have found it, it leads us to charity, *caritas*, caring for those who share the world with us. As Piers says in Passus V, "And if Grace graunte thee to go in in this wise/Thow shalt see in thiselve Truthe sitte in thyn herte/In a cheyne of charite, as thow a child were" (605-607).

At least one mystic writing in the fourteenth century has articulated this same equation. In the Vernon manuscript, alongside an A-text of *Piers Plowman*,³ *The Mirror of St. Edmund* discusses what makes men holy: "Two þinges wiþ-uten mo makeþ mon holi, þat is to witen Knowynge and Loue, Knowynge of soþness, and Loue of godnesse. But to knowyng of god þat is soþnesse, ne mai3t þou not comen but þorw knowynge of þi-self" (Horstman I 241). St. Edmund explains that "to þe knowyng of þy-self mai3t þou comen wiþ ofte

³ Most of the contemplative texts in Vernon are found in Part IV with *Piers*. The entire section was prepared by one scribe, and the first section of Vernon contains a life of St. Bernard, missing in the corresponding section of the Simeon manuscript (Doyle, endsheet; 14).

penkyng; to þe knowyng of god: wiþ clene contemplacion" (241). In the Thornton manuscript of this text, this process called "penkyng" is identified: "this maner of consederasyone es callede medytacyone, [and] by þis maner of knawynge of þi-selfe & by þis maner of medytacyone sall þou come to þe knaweynge of gode by haly contemplacyone" (Horstman I 222). As he continues to describe the means by which one comes to "þat oþer wiþ-uten ende . . . þat is to witen: to knowen god, hauen him, and louen him" (Horstman I 249), he finally uses the very terms we have been discussing and that *Piers Plowman B* employs. He says, "Be-leeue makeþ vs haue knowyng of god; and þat knowinge seeþ to vs þat he is wonderlich corteis . . . and of þat be-leeue comeþ Hope; and of þat *knowynge* þat he is god, comeþ þi þridde vertue, þat is Loue, ffor whi? eueri þing loueþ *kyndeliche* þe goode" (Horstman I 249, italics mine). That is, St. Edmund says, it is our nature which knows good and therefore loves good, which recognizes and therefore loves God. Love results from our "kyndeliche knowynge." As Aelred of Rievaulx said, the memory of God lies "hidden, not entombed, in the rational mind, and you should understand that this is nothing new added to you but something old restored to you" (Colledge 110). So, when Kynde, as Will's final advisor in Passus XX, tells him to go "into Unitee" and "Lerne to love" (XX 204-208) and Will heeds him at last, what the reader is witnessing is the result of this long process of contemplation as St. Edmund describes it. Will's ability to heed is the fruit of his progress, by means of contemplation, through the endeavor of knowing himself. It demonstrates that he knows with his whole self, not merely by

intellectual understanding. It also represents his choosing to withdraw from the world's busyness, now that he has no ability to continue in those few worldly obligations to which he had tied himself.

The Dreamer's requests of Holy Church thus constitute the earliest part of his turn toward "penkyng" and contemplation, as he is led to these first steps by the apparent grace of falling asleep and into a vision in which he may begin to change. That he badly needs this turn is indicated by his failure to recognize the connections St. Edmund delineates. Holy Church tells him "Treuthe is the best./I do it on *Deus caritas* to deme the sothe" (I 85-86). But he protests, even though he has seen Kynde Wit, that he has no "kynde knowynge" (I 138) which will allow him to teach truth as she bids him. (He does, at least, recognize that only "kynde knowynge" can legitimize his teaching.) He fails, as well, to understand the connections among *Deus caritas*, "kynde knowynge," and his own learning to love. Thus when Holy Church tells him "It is a kynde knowynge that kenneth in thyn herte,/for to loven thi Lord levere than thiselve,/No dedly synne to do, deye theigh thou sholdest—/This I trowe be truthe" (I 142-145), he still does not realize he has seen this figure already and could establish his own relationship to it. Holy Church tells this "doted daffe" to learn Latin—his need to know it we've already observed—and then she embarks on a peroration describing Truth as "triacle of hevene . . . the plante of pees . . . portatif and persaunt as the point of a nedle" (I 148ff). She concludes with her equation of truth with love and her repetition of the same point the *Cloud* author makes (Tuma 142) regarding the relation of grace to understanding: "And for to

knowen it kyndely—it comseth by myght,/And in the herte, there is the heed and the heighe well./For in kynde knowynge in herte ther [coms]eth a myght—/And that falleth to the Fader that formed us alle” (I 163-166). This reference to “kynde knowynge” is immediately followed by the exhortation to charity, for faith with “feet” (I 186), which is the same conclusion as that reached by St. Edmund, that the result of the “kynde knowynge” attended to during contemplation is love, the “leche of life” (I 204). Here, Holy Church says the lock of that love is “*Date, et dabitur vobis*” (I 201), which might, taken by itself, imply that charitable deeds are all that are needed. In the context of her full speech, however, knowing what to give is a result of attending to “kynde knowynge,” and faith comes before the “dedes folwe” (I 187). Similarly, St. Edmund follows his description of the role of knowing “kyndeliche þe goode” (Horstman I 249) with his delineation of the “foure opure vertues, þat ben vertues cardinals, [by which] is al a Monnes lyf gouerned in þis world; þat ben: Qweyntise, Right, Strenþe, and A-temprenesse” (Horstman I 249).

While the Dreamer is unable fully to understand the connections Holy Church’s speech establishes, his response does parallel St. Edmund’s description of the operation of one of the cardinal virtues. St Edmund says, “for twey þinges letten mon to don wel, þat is to seyen, worldus weole, þat decyueþ mon wiþ fals swetness... aþeyn weole þou schalt haue Mesure, þat þou beo not to mucche houen and hei3 and deceyued wiþ fals swetnesse, and þat vertu is clept A-temprenesse” (Horstman I 249). The Dreamer has also missed this lesson in his unreadiness, as he has disregarded the call of Holy

Church to live "in mesurable maner" (I 19), nor will he heed it until he is much, much further along in his progress. This failure should be no surprise to readers of St. Edmund since he clearly places "kynde knowynge" of love before achievement of the virtues of "mesure."

At the end of Holy Church's speech, then, though he asks no more about Kynde Wit, the Dreamer does fall to his knees as she announces she will leave and pleads with her to stay and teach him to know the false. Thus he exemplifies the need Richard of St. Victor identifies in those who are beginning contemplation, the need to know the concrete before he can recognize the abstract. As Richard says: "Everybody knows how difficult or almost impossible it is for the carnal mind still untaught in spiritual studies to raise itself to the understanding of unseen things and fix its eye upon contemplating them. For so far it knows nothing but bodily things... it desires to consider incorporeal things but dreams of the images of corporeal things only" (Kirschberger 91-92). Nicholas Love, translating Bonaventure's *Meditations on the Life of Christ* put it this way: "Ffor as seynte Gregori seip. þefore is þe Kyngedom of heuence be visible: & þat man kyndeli knoweþ gosteli þinges se be stired & rauyched to loue & desire gosteli unuisible þinges þat he kyndeli knoweþ not" (Love 4r).⁴ This is St. Edmund Rich's first degree of contemplation, the contemplation of created things. So Holy Church responds in the Dreamer's first degree of contemplation by showing him St. Edmund's "fals swetnesse," the figure of Mede the maid.

⁴ Transcribed by me from a microfilm of Ms. Cam.U. Lib. Mm V.15.

Holy Church, who appears in the sleep brought on by the Dreamer's weariness after wandering, is thus the agent by which he begins to find answers in his search for perfection. This search is more than the cleansing of the soul from sin through grace in order to achieve salvation in Heaven. It is also the search for "kynde knowynge," through which an experience of the "unimpaired vision of God" (Del Mastro, *Stairway* 383) may be made possible. From this point in the poem, the narrative becomes a demonstration of the progress of a will learning to be zealous for truth, learning what sin is and learning how to align itself with reason, conscience and patience until truth becomes more important than any of the things of the world.

The first sign of this zealousness is the Dreamer's reaction upon waking from Holy Church's demonstration concerning Mede the maid. His first feeling on waking is "wo... /That I ne hadde slept sadder and yseighen moore" (V 3-4). As if in response to this desire, "feyntise" takes him, and he "sate softly adoun and seide my bileve,/And so I babled on my bedes, thei broughte me aslepe" (V 7-8), to a sleep in which he has more visions. Here we see again the interaction between the desire of the individual Christian and the workings of grace; the Dreamer desires his dream and performs an action which will bring him to sleep, but a "feyntise" not of his making brings his wanderings to the rest in which he prays himself asleep. The action he performs is the very one prescribed in the contemplative literature as a means of seeking perfection. Hilton specifically advises the use of repetitive prayer as a means of

stimulating a vision of God, especially when one feels estranged from one's meditations :

And þerfore I halde hit þen most syker to þe for to say þi Pater noster or Pin Aue or elles þi matyns, or for to rede on þi sauter, ffor þat is euermore a syker standart and wol not fayle, who so wole cleue þerto he schal not erre, and 3if þou may be preying gete deuocion, þan, 3if þis deuocion be only in affeccion, þat [is] in a gret desyre to god wiþ gostli dilyt, hold forþ þi saying, brek not li3tli of, ffor ofte hit fallip þat praying wiþ mouþe geteþ & kepeþ feruour of deuocion, & 3if a mon cese of saying deuocion vanisscheþ a-way. Neuerþeles 3if deuocion of preyer bringe to þin herte a gostly þou3t of [þe] Monhede of vr lord, or of eny oþur before-seid, and þis þou3t schulde be letted be þi saying, þen mai þow cese of þi saying & ocupies þe in meditacion, til hit pas a-wai. (Horstman II 289-290)

This is a method still used by meditators, the repetition of a chant or mantra in order to quiet and focus the mind to evoke the alpha state. Schmidt cites J.A.W. Bennett as seeing this parallel in this very passage, saying that Bennett "sees *bedes* 'prayers' (cf. 401) as 'rosary-beads'. But Will says the Creed, the muttered clauses presumably acting like the *swaying* of water in Prol. 10 to 'bring him asleep'" (*Vision* 315n). Here, then, both in medieval and in modern terms, we see the Dreamer engaged, on the literal level of the poem, in an activity to induce meditation.

Babbling on his beads brings him back to what *The Mirror of St. Edmund* in the Vernon text calls the first and second degrees of contemplation, that of God's creatures (Horstman I 244). In the first degree, one considers the idea that "þorw his Miht, ben all þinges

formed, þorw his Wisdam ben wonderliche ordeynet, þorw his Goodnesse ben eueri day Multipliyede" (Horstman I 244). In this first degree of contemplation, one is meant to see not only the beauty and order and measure of creation, and the nature of each thing, but one is to "þenk also þat Mon is worþe gret confusion þat wol not liuen as his condicion askep in his degre" (Horstman I 245) and then to consider how the world itself is made "ffor vre chastyng, ffor vre amending, ifor vre teching" (Horstman I 245), and that punishment and chastisement are "a gret Merci" (Horstman I 245) of God. The purpose is so that "We ben amendet whon we þenken þat al þis is comen vs þorw vre sunne" (Horstman I 245). In the second degree, one considers holy writ, whether by reading it, by hearing "a comuyne preching or in priue seyinge" (Horstman I 245). First, one shall "witen and knowen w3uche ben þe seuene dedliche synnes, & heore Braunches" (Horstman I 246). Thus the Dreamer returns to the field of folk to hear Reason preach that "pestilences were for pure synne" (V 13) and define the relations of chastisement among the orders of human living. The immediate effect of Reason's words is that those hearing his sermon—Pernele Proud-herte, Lechour, Envye, Wrathe, Coveitise, Gloton, Sleuthe and Roberd the Robbere—are moved to weep and confess themselves to Repentance (V 61-478). While it is reported that a character named "Wille" weeps too (V 61), this figure neither kneels nor repents; in fact, there seems to be no recognition by the Dreamer of "Wille," or of these repentant sins, as possibly related to himself in any way. In other words, as a neophyte, he still sees the sins of the world more clearly than he sees his own, and can

understand their need for repentance and meekness as he cannot yet understand his own. This taking on his own meekness and humility is what the contemplative literature says he should be trying to learn by contemplation; obviously, he has not yet learned it. So he watches as Repentance prays for grace on behalf of "alle synfulle" (V 480) and as "a thousand of men tho thrungen togideres,/Cride upward to Crist and to his clene moder/To have grace to go [seke Truthe]" (V 510-512).

That this prayer is efficacious for the Dreamer himself as well as for those peopling his dream, even though he has not yet seen himself as meek and repentant, is dramatized by the next event in the poem. Repentance's prayer is immediately followed by the first appearance of Piers the Plowman, the guide to Truth. The Dreamer is thus accorded an advance in the search for Truth even though he holds himself apart from the confessions of sin and repentances he witnesses. The poem exemplifies in the Dreamer's distancing of himself from what he sees part of what lack of "kynde knowing" truly is; it is the estrangement of the self from self-recognition. The Dreamer is not entirely estranged from knowledge, however, as he does continue to watch and try to understand, and this continued attention may be the reason he is allowed to see and hear Piers.

Piers exercises the same function in this dream as Christ does in the visions of Julian of Norwich. He is the agent of instruction about the mysteries of creation, the means by which the Dreamer is led to understand the workings of grace in creation. Piers knows Truth's "corsaint" (V 532) "as kyndely as clerke doth his bokes" (V 538), having

learned from Conscience and Kynde Wit, who showed Piers the way to Truth's "place" and took his pledge to "serven hym for evere" (V 539-540). Piers immediately begins an elaborate set of instructions for finding Truth's place. His instructions, an outline of the commandments as if they were places along the road, parallel the contemplation of "þe ten Comaundemens and of heore Sufficiency" (Horstman I 247) in *The Mirror of St. Edmund*. Other places along Piers' road to Truth—Bileef and Prayer and Amende-yow—are found in the chapters of *The Mirror* which discuss the matter "of seuene vertues and of heore Sufficiency" (Horstman I 248) and the Pater noster. Bileef is named specifically, prayer is commanded, and "Amende-yow" is described as the means by which one achieves "A-tempreness" (Horstman I 249). Attending Truth in the poem are seven sisters in a listing similar to that part of the contemplation of holy writ which St. Edmund calls the seven blessings of the evangelists: Largenesse ("3iuyng wípe gode herte to pore men"), Chastity, Abstinence ("mesure"), Humilite ("studefast mekeness"), Pees ("li3t herte in godes seruise and in alle goode dedes"), Charite ("Ioye in herte of opur mennes welfare... and loue to alle men"), and Patience ("suffring and symplenes") (Horstman I 247). When you achieve the goal, Piers says, "If Grace graunte thee to go in in this wise/Thow shalt see in thiselwe Truthe sitte in thyn herte/In a cheyne of charite, as thow a child were" (V 605-608). St. Edmund concludes similarly:

3if thow liue aftur þis teching, þenne shaltou liuen honorabliche—
[&] þat is þe furste parti of vre sarmoun þat we toucheden at þe

biginnyng. /After þis, þou schalt studien to liuen Amiabliche, as a-
nentes þi broþur. And þat to don, þou schalt 3iuen al þin entents and
al þi strengþe forte louen and to be loued. Pou schalt louen alle men in
god.... After þow schalt fynden to lyuen Mekeliche. Pow schalt
vnderstonen and witen þat þer beon twey Maners of Makynge: On
comeþ of Soþnesse, anoþer of Charite. Pe ffurste þou may3t han þorw
knowynge of þi-self: ffor þow mai3t not seon þi-self soþliche w3uch
þow art, þat þou ne schald be Meked. Pe secounde Maner þou mai3t
seon and han, 3if þou þenke ofte of þe Mekenesse of Iesu Crist, how he
Meked him þat neuer synne dude; and þis Makynge comeþ clanliche of
Charite. Now þou wost what is to liuen Honorabliche, Amyabliche, and
Mekeliche; and þat is, liuen Parfyliche. (Horstman I 261)

Thus, says St. Edmund, by knowing oneself through the three degrees of contemplation, one understands meekness. If one becomes meek by knowing one's own heart, one comes to the meekness of Christ, and to Charity. By these means, one comes to live perfectly—that is, in the perfection brought by contemplation and grace. The poem says that in the center of knowledge of self is Truth, enclosed in perfect love, which is Charity. Once one has come to Truth, then, as St. Edmund says, one finds Charity through which one comes to perfect life.

But this lesson is exceedingly hard to learn. Unlike Julian, whose whole desire was bent toward Christ before the visions began, the Dreamer is still detached from what grace is allowing him to see. Piers' sermon is for the field of folk, as the Dreamer sees it, and not for the Dreamer himself. And the field of folk also proves difficult of instruction. No sooner have they begun to prepare the journey to Truth by helping Piers plow his half acre than is their work interrupted by some who play and waste and begin to beg off work,

which angers Piers. The wrangling ends with another demonstration of the scourging of sin by the things of the world, this time by Hunger, as the Dreamer is accorded a vision in the first degree of contemplation of how God "wole chastisen vs now in bodi, þat we beo not wiþ-outen ende punissched in soule" (Horstman I 245). While the Dreamer is not yet converted to humility by understanding his own likeness to these folk, which is the reason his meditations are so recursive, the Narrator's interjection at the end of Passus VI indicates that he, at least, has understood the function of Hunger in chastising men toward salvation.

Now Piers receives Truth's pardon and his letter which reviews the obligations that pardon entails: to help the sick, mend "wikkede weyes," repair broken bridges, care for maidens, the poor and the prisoners, school young boys, and support religion (VII 23-46). St. Edmund calls a similar list the "seuene dedes of Merci," which he includes as part of the series of contemplations in the second degree. He says, "Affter þow most witen w3uche ben þe dedes of Merci. Þe ffurste is: 3iuen þe hungri mete. Þe secunde, 3ive drynke to þe þhrustfol. Þe þridde is cloþen þe nakede. Þe ffeorþe is herborwe þe housles. Þe ffyfþe, visyten þe prison neode. Þe sixte, cumforte þe seke. Þe seuenþe is, to burie þe dede" (Horstman I 250). While the two lists are not identical, they similarly proceed from the search for truth. Truth's letter concludes with a promise to "sende youre soules in sauftte to my Seintes in joye" (VII 36). Similarly, St. Edmund follows his list with the assurance that "and þat haue þe pore of spirit, ffor as Ihesu seiþ in þe Ewangelie, 'heoren is þe Ioye of heuene'" (Horstman

I 250).

The passage in the poem ends, disturbingly, in a priest's challenge to the authenticity of Piers' pardon. Piers' response is to retreat from an active to a contemplative life, to cease to be so "bisy" about his "bely joy" (VII 119) and "about the worldes blisse" (VII 126), but to go, by the authority of the Gospels, and live like the birds in the field, making his prayers and penance his plow. Piers' decision rouses the ire of the priest, who, rather than denying the rightness of Piers' choice, questions his authority to quote scripture and to speak what he understands. Carruthers explains how this episode may be understood by the reader as "a type of the change from the Old Law to the New" so that Piers' tearing of the pardon can be seen as a parallel to Moses' breaking of the Tablets of the Law. In neither angry action does the destruction of the object invalidate what is written upon it, nor impugn the insight of its destroyer. Thus, says Carruthers, "the fact that Piers' response puzzles Will is Will's own fault" (71-72). No matter how this event in the poem is interpreted by later readers, however, its effect so disturbs the Dreamer that he "thorogh his wordes awook" (VII 140) to find himself on the Malvern hills.

What has forced him from his dream is the Dreamer's own crisis over how to understand what he sees. He does not know what to believe, nor whom, the priest or Piers. What is the pardon, and who has the power to grant it? As long as his mind muddles over such judgments, as long as he grasps for understanding of the powers God has granted, knowledge will elude him. One needs to bend, not reach —as St. Bernard said,

The heartfelt desire to admit one's guilt brings a man down in lowliness before God, as it were to his feet; the heartfelt devotion of a worshiper finds in God renewal and refreshment, the touch, as it were, of his hand; and the delights of contemplation lead on to that ecstatic repose that is the fruit of the kiss of his mouth. (Walsh 23)

One bends, says St. Edmund, by seeking to know oneself first rather than straining after knowledge of God:

Pe soule wolde fayn sen god þorw Contemplacion in his owne nature, but hit may not: and þenne hit turneþ to his oune degres bi w3uche hit may mounten to þe Contemplacion of God, þat hit may furst seon and knowen his oune nature, and after þe nature þat is abouen hit. But 3if þi þou3t be þorw worldlich þou3tes sprad wyde, hit may neuere him-self nor his kuynde wel seken, ffor whi? as felle [foule] þou3tes as he is lad wiþ, [wiþ] so fele stoppynges he is blent. (Horstman II 259)

This pattern will recur several times in the rest of the poem, as the Dreamer grasps after understanding only to find the deep understanding of "kynde knowynge" he seeks eluding him. It will begin to come to him only when he recognizes his own nature and when he learns the patience to wait and learn humbly rather than to question as we see him doing as he wakes.

CHAPTER III

KNOWING THE SELF

Awake and alone on the Malvern Hills, the Dreamer senses his visions are deeply significant; in fact, he says, "many tyme this metels hath maked me to studie/Of that I seigh slepyng . . . /And for Piers the Plowman ful pencif in herte" (VII 144-146). His belief in their significance he asserts in a long passage citing the Bible's support of the significance of dreams (VII 149-201). But all he has seen has not yet brought him to humility, understanding, nor joy.

According to the contemplative writers, he can achieve these only through developing his ability to "don [God's] will in erþe" (Horstman I 252), which means he must become more humble and more patient. In Passus VIII through XV, labeled as the "*vita de dowell*" by the manuscripts (Schmidt, *Vision* 85n)¹, we will see the Dreamer develop

¹ Robert Adams doubts the authenticity of the rubrics, arguing that "in all likelihood the rubrics are not only useless for interpretation but also inauthentic, the wrong-headed offspring of some medieval editor rather than of the author himself" ("Rubrics" 209). Where rubrics appear, however, according to Adams' charts (215-231), their division of the text, in all manuscripts except G, Y, and F, coincides with the first three movements I identify as shifts in the Dreamer's understandings and actions; W, Hm, the marginal rubric in L, and R agree with me in the fourth division as well.

(continued, next page)

in humility and patience as the second major movement of the poem progresses. The first movement, the *Visio*, functioned to bring the Dreamer to attend upon the question of salvation. This second movement, as we shall see, functions as the Dreamer's purgation and thus parallels the first of the three stages the contemplative moves through in the quest for union. *The Cloud of Unknowing* characterizes this movement, the work of a "trewe wille" (Hodgson, *Cloud* 63), as

... not elles bot a trewe knowyng & a felyng of þi-self as þou arte, a wrecche & a filþe, fer were þen nou3t: þe whiche knowyng & felyng is meeknes. & þis meeknes deserueþ to haue God himself mi3tely descenyng to venge þee of þine enemyes. (67)

John Bowers emphasizes how this move is an action of the will: "The will had to turn toward the good and act upon it" (2). In order to accomplish this move, says Bowers,

From Augustine onward, it was understood that love (or desire) resulted when the soul, dominated by the action of the will, engaged in a violent meditation upon some image gathered by senses from an exterior bodily form. (84)

More important than this general agreement between the manuscripts' divisions of the poem and mine is the fact that the rubrics mark divisions which, if they do not represent authorial intent, do mark the sense of one reader or more that the poem moves as I claim. As Schmidt says, the divisions "certainly point up recognizable concentrations of interest in character and theme" (*Vision* xxi) and "may go back to authorial rubrics" (xxi), though he characterizes those concentrations somewhat differently from my descriptions of them.

Though the seeker must recognize and activate his own will in this process, by so doing he can only make himself ready for grace, not guarantee its coming, as *A Ladder of Foure Ronges* advises: "thou3e the fre wille of man may not make grace in man, netheles he may doo that in hym is—caste oute the olde dowe, which is the olde corruptible synne þat withdrawith man from grace, and so make hym redy þat he may receyve this grace" (Hodgson, *Deonise* 103). The entire *Visio* demonstrates this development in the Dreamer from a recognition of his own sins and his subsequent shame to the alliance of his will with patience and thence to the point in the very last lines of the poem where his conscience cries to be avenged and goes off to seek grace.

Because his dream in the *Vita* constitutes a vivid series of images of the world, framed by the explanation provided by Holy Church and offering the mysteriously saintlike figure of Piers as a focus, the Dreamer's resolve to study his dream constitutes a move toward meditation upon "some image gathered by senses from an exterior bodily form" (Bowers 84). Though the content of this study does not yet parallel what readers find in *A Ladder of Foure Ronges*, where study, of Scripture, is the first of the four rungs to contemplative truth, the Dreamer's concentration upon this dream of earth, church and the directions for finding truth is an act of study and certainly a change away from his mere wandering in search of marvels toward seeking the good. His study of his dream in Passus VII, while not yet of Scripture, is an action like that in *Ladder*, therefore, as he attempts to discover whether his dream has validity—"if it so be

myghte" (VII 145)—and to ponder what sort of meaning Piers' pardon had and "how the preest impugned it with two propre wordes" (VII 148). At the opening of Passus VIII, puzzled, and robed now in russet, he commits himself "for to seke Dowel" (VIII 2). He seems unable to dream further, finding himself "meteles" (VII 142), a pun which can mean both "foodless" as a result of Hunger's scourgings in his dream and "dreamless," or no longer in the state of contemplation.

At this point, the Dreamer's state bears a marked similarity to that which Walter Hilton describes in the Vernon manuscript of his *Epistle on Mixed Life*, where he speaks of the fluctuations in one's ability to see "gostly þinges" in one's devotion:

Pi wille and pi desyre þat þou hast to god, hit is as hit were a luitel cole of fire in þi soule, ffor hit 3iueþ to þe sumwhat of gostli hete & of gosti li3t; but hit is ful liutel, ffor ofte hit waxeþ cold & turneþ to fleschli rest, & sum-tyme in to idelnes . . . a-byd & suffre a while, & go blowh at þe fuire, þat is, ffurst do þi werkes and go þen al-[one] to þi preyers & þi meditacions. (Horstman I 277)

He responds to the crisis which expelled him from his dream, as Hilton suggests, by seeking Dowel. But he goes further and leaps to the conclusion that "Dowel indulgences passed . . . and passeth all the pardon of Seint Petres cherch" (VII 170-173). He neither returns to his dreams, nor does he pray. So, at the end of his first vision, he is reformed enough to pursue the search for truth in a more directed way, though his recognition of the faculties in his own nature which will help him find it, and his achieving the meekness which will help

him feel it, still lie in the future. Bonaventure lays out what he must do, and what he has not yet done:

Enter then into yourselves and see, for your mind loves itself most fervently. Nor could it love itself unless it knew itself. Nor would it know itself unless it remembered itself, for we receive nothing through the intelligence which is not present to our memory. And from this be advised, not with the eye of the flesh but with that of reason, that your soul has a threefold power. Consider then the operations and the functions of these three powers, and you will be able to see God in yourselves as in an image, which is to see through a glass darkly. (Boas 22)

David Aers traces this image of introspection as a means of seeing Christ back to “the notion that the Soul is made in the image of God (Genesis 1.26), a notion classically developed by St. Augustine in his *De Trinitate*. In Augustine’s view it is by the image of God in man’s soul that the mind becomes able and powerful to cleave to God whose image it is. Self-understanding thus has a special and necessary role in spiritual development” (*Allegory* 85). A number of writers on contemplative practices specifically denote self-understanding as a practice in the process of contemplation and use the mirror trope in discussing it. Bonaventure connects such understanding with contemplation when he calls “the point of entering into ourselves” the third part of contemplation (Boas 22). Similarly, *Benjamin Minor* says, “trewly bot 3if it so be þat we vse us besyly & longe in goostly trauayles, wiþ þe whiche we ben lernid to knowe oure-self, we mowen not be reisyd to þe knowyng & contemplacioun of God. . . . And wite it wel þat he þat desireþ to se God, hym behouep to clense his soule, þe which is as a

mirour" (Hodgson, *Deonise* 42-43). As the Dreamer advances, he will come himself to precisely this realization in Passus XV, where he says, "Clerkes kenne me that Crist is in alle places;/Ac I seigh hym nevere soothly but as myself in a mirour" (XV 161-162).

Desirous of understanding, then, but not understanding himself nor praying for answers, the Dreamer goes wandering and questioning "ful ofte of folk that I mette/If any wight wiste wher Dowel was at inne" (VIII 3-4). Thus he seeks, as according to St. Edmund he should, by asking those who appear to be wise. No one can direct him to Dowel until he meets two friars, men of apparent wisdom. As St. Edmund says, he has questions to ask, "ma[t]lere of spekyng to Clerkes ben þey neuere so wyse, and to lewede, ben þei neuere so boystes. Whon þou spekest to wyse, meue summe of þese materes, and aske. . . . For whi? Þou hast inou³ whereof to speken, and hou þou schalt þin owne lyf leden & opure amenden" (Horstman I 254). In other words, it is proper to seek Dowel by questioning others. The Dreamer is too quick to argue and to judge, however, immediately reacting to the friars' claim that Dowel dwells with them with his own "*Contra!*" and his posing an argument "as a clerik" (VIII 20). He does not tell us how he learned clerikly argumentation, but perhaps that has been one result of this time of seeking. Its effect, however, is so to catch him up in his dispute with their claim that he fails to hear their message. They tell him that Dowel is "charite the champion" (VIII 45-46) and that God "yaf thee to yeresyyve to yeme wel thiselwe — /And that is wit and free will, to every wight a porcion . . . /Ac man hath moost therof, and moost is to blame /But if he werche wel

therwith, as Dowel hym techeth" (VIII 53-57). He simply responds that he has "no kynde knowyng... to conceyve alle thi wordes" (VIII 58), though he does muster enough humility to promise he will "go lerne better" (VIII 59).

The Dreamer has thus mistaken the outward signs of the way of the friars, and their proprietary claim that Dowel dwells with them, for the inner truth they have been willing to share. His wit and free will are his gift from God, just as they tell him. But he prefers the assertion of his own powers of disputation to a humble attending to truth despite its being offered by friars. Moreover, because as yet he does not know his own will and wit, he cannot understand the application of their message to his own situation. He thus does as St. Edmund bids, but because he has yet to understand his own nature and to learn humility, he cannot comprehend what he hears. He therefore disputes them and then wanders "widewher, walkyng myn one, /By a wilde wilderness" (VIII 63-64) until the "blisse of the briddes" make him stop and the "murthe of hire mouthes made me ther to slepe," bringing him "the merveillouseste metels... That ever dremed [dr]ight in [doute], as I wene" (VIII 68-70). In this dream, invoked by his concentration upon the repetitious song of the birds, he begins to learn himself.

The first agent of this knowledge is Thought. *Piers Plowman B* makes Thought the figure who first identifies Will as Will:

Thanne Thoght in that tyme seide thise wordes:
 'Wher Dowel and Dobet and Dobest ben in londe

Here is Wil wolde wite if Wit koude teche . . .
 (VIII 125-127)

Who is this "Thought" who begins the process by which the Dreamer comes to know himself? Spearing argues in *Medieval Dream Poetry* that "'Thought', as we have seen, is the term used by Chaucer in *The House of Fame* to mean 'memory', the faculty that has inscribed in his brain the events of his dream; and Langland's 'Thought', which has been following him for seven years (a number we need not take literally), is presumably one of the faculties involved in the creation of his poem so far" (148). Since Thought is identified as one who has followed Will "this seven yeer" (VIII 76), it is possible to assign him the role usually taken by memory. If we do agree with this identification of Thought and memory, when Thought introduces the Dreamer as "Wil" to Wit, we see the poem juxtapose Bonaventure's three agents of contemplation: memory (Thought), intelligence (Wit), and will (the aspect of the Dreamer now identified as "Wil"). For Bonaventure, memory, intelligence and will are the trinity through which the mind rises to the "contemplation of the Blessed Trinity" (26).

The B-text, however, treats Thought as a rather limited source of knowledge. In Passus II the word "thought" is the verb denoting the Dreamer's mode of perceiving his dream: "how Mede was ymarried in metels me thoughte" (II 53). While the phrase "me thoughte" might simply mean "it seemed," the poem does use the specific verb "thoughte" to denote the act of seeing "in metels" in this line. As we

saw earlier, this vision was focused on worldly manifestations of "the false" (II 4) since the Dreamer seemed as yet unable to understand the treasure of Truth Holy Church had just shown him in Passus I. A vision that is the result of an act of thought is thus a limited vision. In Passus VIII, Thought's explanation of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest defines only modes of behavior in the world. For him, Dowel is the laborer for whom virtue means avoidance of gluttony and avarice. Dobet's virtues are humility, help of those in need, and avoidance of arrogance. Dobest bears a bishop's crosier and practices virtue by putting down wickedness. Here Thought admits he reaches his limit, for he cannot give the Dreamer the "kynde knowynge" he "coveite[s] to lerne—/How Dowel, Dobet and Dobest doon among the people" (VIII 111-112). Because Thought realizes he cannot answer this request, he introduces Will to Wit. Wit is identified as a figure who cannot be made by any means to "jangle" (VIII 121), unlike Thought, who has been arguing with Will for three days together (VIII 115-116), a point to which we will return later in this chapter. For now, let us just note that Thought is more limited than Wit both in what he can contribute to Will's "kynde knowynge" and in his being willing to "jangle" while Wit is not. Wit immediately begins to instruct Will on the nature of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest, and through him, Will is introduced to Study.

An examination of the contemplative texts reveals the name Thought as one of the modes of the "wyrkings of cristen mans saule" (Horstman I 82). An anonymous fourteenth century fragment of the *Benjamin Major* in Ms. Cambridge Dd V.64 says "A grete clerk pat

men calls Ricard of Saynt Victor" identifies these workings as "Thought, Thynkyng, And contemplation. And þat a man may witerly know ilkane by þaim-self, He tells qwat differens es by-twyx þam thre. He says þat thought es wyth-owten trauayl & wyth-owten froyte, And thynkyng es wyth trauayle & wyth froyte. Þou sal wyt þat thynkyng and meditacioun er bath ane" (Horstman II 82). If we examine the fuller text of the *Benjamin Major*, we find the following distinction drawn:

Contemplation is a free and clear vision of the mind fixed upon the manifestation of wisdom in suspended wonder . . . Meditation however, is an industrious attention of the mind concentrated diligently upon the investigation of some object . . . But thinking [Kirchberger's translation of the Cambridge manuscript's "Thought"] is the careless glance of the soul prone to restless wandering. (Kirchberger 138)

Here it seems clear that "Thought" of the Cambridge text is quite limited as a mode for use in any search for perfection. However, Richard of St. Victor goes on in the same chapter to discuss the utility of even such "vain and frivolous considerations, throwing off the bridle of discretion to interfere or rush headlong into everything" by saying "[y]et it often happens that in the wanderings of our thinking, the soul meets with something which it passionately desires to know and presses on strongly towards it. But if the mind satisfying its desire applies itself with zeal to this kind of investigation it already exceeds the bounds of thinking by thinking, and thought passes over into meditation" (Kirchberger 138-139).

The Dreamer's encounter with Thought in Passus VIII involves just such a disregard of discretion as the Dreamer roams about wondering about the truth of his dream and disputing about the meaning of Dowel. This time with Thought bears definite fruit for the Dreamer, however, in the form of an advance in knowledge of himself. The first fruit of this vision, the beginning of knowledge of himself, appears almost despite the Dreamer's sojourn with Thought "dispuyt-
ing upon Dowel day after oother" (VIII 116). The Dreamer has asked all the wrong questions, seeking outside himself for Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest, and receiving what answers his untrained meditations can give him, all descriptions of the social roles and behaviors observable of the three. Even these he disputes, active in the wrong way in trying to come to knowledge, and Thought, who, in contrast to Wit, will "jangle," argues back. Still, the Dreamer does ask Thought for "more kynde knowynge" (VIII 111), signalling a recognition that he is aware that he is still failing to find what he seeks, and, "er we war were, with Wit gonne we mete" (VIII 117). Thus even though Thought and the Dreamer are engaged in an argument which distracts them both ("er *we war were*"), together they travel the road by which they encounter Wit. Now Thought, who earlier told the Dreamer his "kynde name" (VIII 72)—in a passage which did not reveal that information to the reader—declares "Here is Wil wolde wite if Wit koude teche" (VIII 127), advancing him in the knowledge of self he must have if he is to progress toward perfection. In action, then, this episode functions just as Richard of St. Victor describes the fruitful proceeding of "Thynkyng" from the vagaries of Thought. Thought,

though he engages in an apparently fruitless disputation with Will, does function as the figure who finally names the Dreamer to himself. The action of the poem thus demonstrates clearly that the Dreamer is in a process of self-discovery through meditation, the very process St. Edmund and Bonaventure have been describing and advocating. The process works just as the Vernon manuscript of *The Mirror of St. Edmund* suggests when it says, "To þe knowyng of þy-self mai3t þou comen wip ofte þenkyng" (Horstman I 241). Here, no distinction is made between thought and "þenkyng," but all forms of introspection seem to coalesce in this one term, as they do in the Vernon manuscript's version of Walter Hilton's *Epistle on Mixed Life*, which seeks to make no such distinctions but says, "Þer are moni maner of þenkynges, w3uch are best to þe I can not say" (Horstman I 284).

I would argue, then, that Thought is not the Dreamer's faculty of memory which he encounters within his meditative dream, but the personification within that dream of the activity which leads him toward self-knowledge despite its limitations. The sum effect of this episode is thus to move the Dreamer by means of the limited meditative action called "thought" toward the self-knowledge required in the contemplative process and thus to take a crucial step in purgation as the soul attempts to progress toward perfection.

This movement toward self-knowledge will prove an increasingly difficult travail, full of disputation, false starts, numerous questionings, visions which offer more puzzles than answers, and answers the Dreamer misapprehends. His constant refrain—"I have no kynde knowyng"—marks his continued difficulty, and the very existence of

such difficulty marks his process as the travail of meditation. But, we may ask, why does the Dreamer encounter such problems? Are these interior struggles of Will, these intellectual wanderings within his visions reminiscent of his physical wanderings in this waking life, indicators of his having succumbed to the sin of Sloth, as John Bowers would have us believe? Bowers' thesis is that Will in the poem is guilty of the sin of Sloth, Sloth who is "no3t lured wip loue" (84). Sloth in the theological tradition, says Bowers, "had been an eremitic and monastic vice that expressed itself in a host of spiritual symptoms—somnolence, boredom, nervousness, sorrow, despair—as well as the rarer complaint of spiritual dryness experienced by mystics after periods of intense contemplation" and thus much more than its "physical aspects, such as laziness, sleeping too much, a reluctance to work, wasting of material goods, and even a man's refusal to serve his king" (63), the aspects emphasized from the twelfth century onward. I believe Bowers is right in bringing attention to the relationship between the progress of Will in the poem and the fact that "if sloth was a sin, then it must involve a perverse movement of the will and therefore stem from a volitional defect. But *acedia* was unique among the seven deadly sins because it could result from no movement of the will at all" (63). Initially the Dreamer displayed a passive, or at least unfocused, will, wandering about and falling into vision rather than passionately desiring God as, for example, Julian of Norwich does. For both the Dreamer and Julian, their visions constitute an encyclopedic gathering of Christian truth about the nature of the moral universe and the human search for salvation within it. For Julian, however,

travail occurred before the visions began and their appearance constitutes balm for that struggle. For the Dreamer, on the other hand, travail is beginning now as his own struggle intensifies in focusing his will upon truth and accepting as his own "kynde knowynge" the truth he's being shown. Thus, after his first vision, his wandering constitutes a seeking to return to vision, and his intellectual vagaries result from ignorance rather than *acedia*. His actual progress in the poem demonstrates his learning to focus his will and, with the help of grace, to defeat those sins of which he has indeed been guilty.

As the Dreamer struggles for such discipline, then, his problem is to fight off Sloth's attacks upon his will, and the aspects of Sloth which concern him are precisely those which beset the desert fathers and later contemplatives. Wenzel describes Cassian's early characterization of *acedia* thus:

It instills in its victims abhorrence of the place, disgust of the cell, and contempt for the brethren. The [solitary desert] monk becomes disinclined to any work within the cell. He deems his life spiritually useless and imagines that he could make better progress elsewhere. If he does not leave the place, he might even forego his salvation. The slackness of his body, hunger, and the heat make him unquiet and confused in mind. He begins to think it better to go out and perform some deed of mercy: visiting the sick or bringing comfort to a brother. Then the monk either sinks into slumber or leaves his cell and looks for consolation in other people's company. If flight becomes a habit, the monk will soon give up his profession altogether (*Inst.*, X, 2-6). (*Sloth* 19)

Here, actions which take one away from one's contemplative practices are identified as signs of sloth just as are the more obvious laziness or slumber. Wenzel's book demonstrates that later centuries emphasized wandering and laziness as the major hallmarks of Sloth. But the Vernon text of *The Mirror of St. Edmund*, in its instruction about the knowledge of the seven deadly sins which those who would live the life of perfection must have, includes distracting busyness in its description of Sloth, declaring, "Off Accidie waxen: heuinesse, Malice, Whonhope, Necligence aboute godes comaundemens, bisi pouht aboute pinges defendet" (Horstman I 246). It is this last of which Will has been guilty in his intellectual busyness, his disputes with the friars and with Thought. Busyness, not sleep, is the enemy of perfection here. Busyness is, paradoxically, the form of Sloth most dangerous to contemplatives, making them restless when their devotion should be to remain in solitary focus on spiritual things (Wenzel, *Sloth* 31). Sloth is the "ambiguous" vice (Bowers 61), both lazy and busy, despairing and overzealous, marked by frantic activity and marked by sleep. This sleep of Sloth, says Hilton in his *Mixed Life*, is the "flesschli reste" that occurs when will and desire for God grow cold and that leads "sumtyme to ydelnesse," not the "reste in deuocion" associated with "goosteli swetenesse in deuocioun and contemplacion" the contemplative should seek (Ogilvie-Thomson 31-36). As Bowers demonstrates, busyness and overzealousness are the aspects of Acedia most dangerous to contemplatives; the Thornton manuscript version of *The Mirror of St. Edmund* says that not only does Acedia make "manes herte hevy and slawe in gude dede," it also "makes mane to yrke in

prayere or halynes, and puttes man in wykkednes of wanhope, for it slokyns þe lykynges of gastely lufe" (Horstman I 224-225); the Vernon manuscript, in this same place in the text, blames "bisi þouht" (Horstman I 246). Busyness has delayed the Dreamer's understanding the lessons of Holy Church. Busyness has distracted his attention away from hearing that wit and free will are his "yeresyve" from God, and moved him instead to dispute with the friars who gave him that news. Busyness has almost prevented his meeting with Wit, and thus nearly prevented his learning his own name.

Busyness takes various forms in *Piers Plowman*, most of them the apparently benign occupations of ordinary secular men, the "settyng and sowynge" and "werchyng and wandryng as the world asketh" (Prol. 19-21), what Wyclif calls "bysynesse of worldly ocupacion" (Sisam 127). But some forms of busyness are condemned as soon as mentioned, and the first of these is the business of "japeres and jangleres, Judas children" who "feynen hem fantasies, and foolen hem maketh,/And han wit at wille to werken if they wolde" (Prol. 35-37). Each time janglers and japers are mentioned in the poem, they are condemned. Later in the Prologue, the Dreamer describes the angel's descending to speak in Latin and explains that "lewed men ne koude/Jangle ne jugge that justifie hem sholde,/But suffren and serven—forthi seide the aungel" (129-131). This statement might appear to praise jangling as disputing and discriminating arguments to vindicate themselves, as A.V.C. Schmidt's note puts it (*Vision* 5n). In context, however, disputation and judging stand condemned when the angel's words are challenged by "a goliardeis, a gloton of wordes"

(Prol. 139) and the angel's words sink beneath the babble of the Rat Parliament.

Jangling and judging are further condemned in Passus II, where "Glotonye he gaf hem ek and grete othes togidere,/And al day to drynken at diverse tavernes,/And there to jangle and jape and juggle hir evencristen" (91-93). This gluttonous action leads directly to "Sleuthe and sleep... And thanne wanhope" (99-100), in the same progression of deadly sins noted by Bowers. In Passus IV, Waryn Wisdom "wynked upon Mede/And seide, 'Madame, I am youre man, what so my mouth jangle" (154-155); here jangling is clearly identified with false or misused speech since Waryn Wisdom's pledge of loyalty is made to the false Lady Mede. The king soon condemns such false disputation, angrily telling the lawyers defending Mede, "I wole have leaute in lawe, and lete be al youre jangling" (IV 180). Not only does jangling defend the false and therefore undermine "leaute," but it corrupts marriage and the community. In Passus IX, the marks of an "uncomly" marriage are "jelousie joyeless and janglynge on bedde" (166) which bring forth the fruit of "[manye] foule wordes" (168) rather than children. Jangling corrupts the religious community too, preventing its proper issue. The confession of Wrathe in Passus V reveals: "I was the prioresse potager and other povere ladies,/And maad hem joutes of janglyng... Of wikkede wordes I Wrathe hire wortes made,/Til 'Thow lixt!' and 'Thow lixt!' lopen out at ones/And either hitte oother" (155-162). This jangling is clearly connected with disruption of religious devotion, since Wrathe is pictured as a friar who, by introducing mendacity to the preaching friars and jangling

gossip to the convent, causes them to argue about "spiritualite" (V 147) rather than follow the true intent of their vows.

Jangling becomes the occupation of those diverted from simple necessity, as the well-fed workman, despising the poor food he appreciated when Hunger was his master, now "ayeins Catons counseil comseth . . . to jangle;/*Paupertatis onus pacienter ferre memento*" (VII 314-315). He thus forgets to bear patiently the burden of poverty as he should do, and the sign of his forgetting is his jangling. Wit, of whom the Dreamer says he "dorste meve no matere to maken hym to jangle" (VIII 121), preaches against jangling, as does his wife Dame Study. This criticism occurs just after Thought and Will have spent their three days arguing so that Wit came upon them unawares. Wit's sermon may thus be read as Will's new understanding that his being occupied in wrangling with Thought has been a misuse of his time. Wit criticizes Christians by pointing out that "a Jew wolde nocht se a Jew go janglyng for defaute . . . and he amende it myghte" (IX 82-83), stating that if Jews, "that we jugge Judas felawes" (IX 85) prevent jangling, surely Christians in their more enlightened state should do the same.

Wit moves on to analyse right use of speech. He praises him that "dooth best that withdraweth hym by daye and by nyghte/To spille any speche or any space of tyme;/*Qui offendit in uno, in omnibus est reus*" (IX 97-98). He calls speech "that spire . . . of grace" (101), which makes jangling a spilling of speech, a waste of grace, even if that jangling is a complaint against poverty rather than the wasted speech of false lawyers, wrathful gossipers, Jews who refuse to recognize

Christ, or Judas, Christ's betrayer. Even to spend the "spire . . . grace" in speaking of good things may be unnecessary and therefore blameworthy. As Richard Rolle's translation of Psalm 139 says, "if a man say soth withouten nede he is a iangelere" (*MED* 5:370). Dame Study speaks more directly, heartily condemning "japeris and jogelours and jangleris of gestes" (X 31) and launching herself into an impassioned condemnation of all such "vile harlotrye" and "lecherie, losengerye and losels tales" (X 45-49). When she says this jangling and japery will prevent these harlots from receiving "to his yeresyyve the value of a grote" (X 47), her word choice reminds us of the friars' telling the Dreamer in Passus VIII that his "yeresyyve" was free will and wit (54). The Dreamer has now been introduced to his will and his wit, and his disputatious jangling is interfering with his progress in enjoying the fruits that should come of that gift. When Dame Study includes in these harlotries the behavior of those who prefer to "carpen of Crist" (X 51), she anticipates Will's further struggles, such as those we will see in the banquet in Passus XII. "God is muche in the gorge of thise grete maistres," she says, "Ac amonges meene men his mercy and hise werkes" (X 66-67). Thus, as Wit and Study suggest, jangling is a serious interference with grace. Later, in Passus XVI, Jews are portrayed as denying grace by jangling when they object to Christ's being called "leche of lif and lord of high hevене" (118). Here their jangling and judging are definite signs of their fault: "Jewes jangled therayein that juggede lawes" (XVI 119). In this same way, jangling is a sign of his fault when Judas "jangled thereayein" (XVI 144) in denying falsely that he will betray Jesus. Both Judas and the

Jews, therefore, misuse speech by denying Christ, and this misuse is called “janglyng.”

In the manuscripts of the contemplative writers as well, jangling appears as a specific danger to the contemplative life, and is so identified in text after text. *A Ladder of Foure Ronges* says that one of the signs that a soul has turned from “pryvy abydyng of the Holy Gost” and been “cast to wyckyde thow3tys and to vanite” is the tongue’s indulgence in “ianglyng” (Hodgson, *Deonise* 117). This text goes on to speak of what draws man down from the ladder, that is, “vanyte of this worlde . . . It is not semely that . . . the tunge þat a litel before . . . hath tillyd hir spouse to hir bowre . . . by oon and by oon turnyd into vanite & to fowle speche, to wryyng & to forsweryng & to other ianglyng” (Hodgson, *Deonise* 116-117). In *Benjamin Minor*, one’s reason must have “refreinid þe greet jangelyng of þe ymagynacioun, & . . . put hir to be vnderloute to God” (Hodgson, *Deonise* 26) if the soul is to progress toward contemplation. This jangling imagination, says the treatise,

... criep so vnkunnyngly in þe eres of oure hertes, þat for ou3t þat reson hir lady may do, 3it sche may not stille hir. And þerfore it is þat oft-tymes whan we schuld praye, so many diuerse fantasies of yuel þow3tes crien in oure hertes þat on nowise we mowne by owre owne my3tes to driue hem away. And þus it is wel prouid þat Bala [Imagination] is a foule jangler. (Hodgson, *Deonise* 13)

The Vernon manuscript of Walter Hilton’s *Qui Habitat* condemns jangling in nearly identical language to that employed by the Narrator

in the Prologue of *Piers Plowman*. Hilton, commenting on the phrase “*Non accedet ad te malum: & flagellum non appropinquabit in tabernaculo tuo,*” says, “But, þou, louere of god, whiles oþur men rennen out and fihten and striuen, sweren and be-gylen, *Iapen and Ianglen*, pleyen & syngen, holde þe stille in þi tabernacle, & þen schalt be in pes, sikerliche huled with þe schadewe of vr lord from þe knotte of þis scharpe scourge” (Wallner 36, italics mine). He identifies such jangling, even though it seems mere playfulness, with “þe bigininge of all synne. ffor anon as a mon leoneþ to him-self, þen entreþ in him al vuel sturinges of veyn dredes & vein likynges of passaunt þinges and drawn him doun to þe vanite of þe world” (Wallner 32-33). What a man should do instead is “sech vre lord in þi þou3t . . . So þat þou mai freliche & *restfuliche* þenken on him with swete affeccions of loue meltynge in þi soule” (Wallner 33-34, italics mine). Jangling is thus a sign of misdirection and an activity which perpetuates the inclining away from understanding.

Richard Rolle, too, finds jangling antithetical to meditation and perfection. His version of the Psalter translates Psalm 139’s “*uir linguosus*” as “Man iangelere” who “sall nocht be righted in erth . . . Jangelere is he til whaim spekyng is lust, and lufis leghis, and behaldis nocht what he says” (*MED* 5:370). In the *Form of Perfect Living*, he writes, “A foule litchory it is to hafe lykyng & delit in mannes wordes . . . If we be aboutward to hyde vs fro Iangelyng & louyng of þo worlde, god will schew vs til his loueyng & our Ioy” (Horstman I 8-9). Clearly, for Rolle jangling is any misspending of the “spire . . . of grace.” His translation of Psalm 118.11 reads “discipline

of silence is goed, that we auyse vs or we speke and be noght mykill ianglande" (*MED* 5:369). Elsewhere he writes, "when þi hert feles delyt in Criste, þe will not liste to speke ne jangell bot of Criste" (*MED* 5:369). Here jangling seems permissible if it is of Christ. More usually, however, jangling constitutes specific danger. In Psalm 11.3, it is "thaire ianglyngis & tresons what will make thaim to be lost" (*MED* 5:371).

In Rolle's *Our Daily Work*, a work "of the same kind as Bonaventura's *Speculum disciplinae ad novitios* . . . and similar works of Hugo de St. Victore, St. Bernhard &c . . . but . . . not written for monastic life" (Horstman I 137n), jangling is clearly a useless spilling out of something precious. In *Our Daily Work* Rolle says each man needs three things: honest work without wasting time, work done with a "fredome of spirite," and honesty and fairness in doing what one does for the love of God and by God's direction. The goal is a great reward by God's grace: "til mikel his mede þurgh goddis grace helpand" (Horstman I 137). The manuscript then draws a connection between wrong use of time, "bisynes," "iangelynge," and the mispending of speech in the following passage:

Wonder it ware þat man þat gifs him to bisynes of þe werld mare þen nedis: had na lettyng in praier, in rest of hert, in sothefastness of worde, in perfeccione of gode werks, in lufe to god & all cristen men. for-þi hali men bifore þis tyme þat knew þir lettyngs: þai fled þe werld with all þe vanities as it had bien cursid . . . Thre maners of ocupaciouns are, as sere ianglyng & mikil, Raykyng aboute, mikil trauailing aboute werldli thinges. Agayn mikil iangling: sais Salomone: *Qui dimittit aquam: caput est iurgii*. "Late þe water oute": is late þe tunge

flete oute in langlinge. Bot to pe knowyng of god ne of him-selfe mai nane come: þat latis his hert flete oute with mikil vnnaite speche; for he makis waie to þe fende in him-selfe. (Horstman I 140)

Immediately following this passage, Rolle contrasts the silent rest that is desirable with the wrongful flowing out of wasted speech:

Agayn þas þat eauer rakis aboute to fede þaire wittis with vanitees and lustis: is þe leryng of þe angel how he lerde þe hali Abbote Arsenius & said: "Arseni flee þe werld & his 3ernyngs, hald þe in reste, bridil þi tonge": þat it flete nocht oute in langlynge ne idel speche. (Horstman I 140)

So, not only is jangling fatal to the soul, except when a man spares to "speke ne jangell bot of Criste" (*MED* 5:369), but the desired state is to "hald þe in reste" and turn one's back on the busyness of the world. This is as true for the lay person, who is the audience for *Our Daily Work*, as for the religious, says Rolle.

The Cloud of Unknowing, which criticizes mystics transported in dramatic manifestations of joy in Christ that seem reminiscent of Rolle's mystic transports, speaks as Rolle does of the dangers of jangling. First, the *Cloud* author says his book must be kept from "Fleschely ianglers, opyn preisers & blamers of hem-self or of any oper, tiping tellers, rouners & tutelers of tales, & alle maner of pinchers: kept I neuer þat þei sawe þis book." The book is only for one who "in a trewe wille & by an hole entent purposed him to be a parfite folower of Criste" (Hodgson, *Cloud* 2). Second, the *Cloud* author condemns the appearance of contemplation without its sub-

stance and "nice corious contenaunces in bodily bering" who look as if they are meditating, who go "waggyng wiþ þeire fete," tossing their arms about, or "euermore smyling & leiþing at iche oþer worde þat þei speke, as þei weren gigelotes & nice japyng jogelers lackyng kontenaunce" (99). And he sees such unseemly behavior, if they "ben gouernors of þat man þat doþ hem" as "tokenes of pride & coryouste of witte" (99), in other words, as signs of the evil results of the voice that jangles. Last, he warns against voices that jangle of Christ. Speaking of the attempt to push oneself to think of God, he warns,

For paraventure he wil bryng to þi minde ful feire & wonderful pointes of his kyndnes, & sey þat he is ful swete & ful louyng, ful gracious & ful mercyful. & 3if þou wilt here him, he coueiteiþ no beter; for at þe last he wil þus jangle euer more & more til he bring þee lower to þe mynde of his Passion. & þere wol he lat þe see þe wonderful kyndenes of God. (27)

But this result is actually a scattering, a sweet meditation, but not the desired piercing of the cloud of unknowing (27-28). The agent of this jangling which misdirects, he says,

... a scharp & a clere beholding of þi kindly witte, preentid in þi reson wiþ-inne in þi soule... good in his kynde... a beme of þi licnes of God. bot þe vse þerof may be hope good & iuel. Good, when it is openid bi grace for to see þi wrechidness, þi Passion [etc.]... iuel, when it is swollen wiþ pride & wiþ coriouste of moche clergie & letterly conning as in clerkes. (30)

He then connects this kind of jangling devotion, even when it is good,

to active life, "troublid & trauailid aboute many þinges: bot contem-
plative sitteþ in pees wiþ o þing" (31).

In all these passages, the contemplative writers identify jangling as a distraction from contemplative practice and thus from the wordless union with God toward which these practices aim. Similarly, *Piers Plowman B* condemns jangling consistently. This condemnation appears most vehemently just after Will and Thought nearly ignore Wit because of their disputation. Further, the entire series of visions begins by characterizing busyness as ignoring a better heaven than this world:

... Sestow this peple—
How bisie they ben aboute the maze?
The mooste partie of this peple that passeth on this erthe,
Have thei worship in this world, thei wilne no bettre;
Of oother hevene than here hold thei no tale.

(I 5-9)

The chief enemy of the Dreamer's search therefore emerges as that aspect of Sloth which manifests itself as busyness and jangling, the distraction from the quiet focus of the will which allows it to approach the will of God.

Even this distraction, however, may present an occasion which has its gracious fruits. According to *Benjamin Minor*, for instance, while Bala, the imagination is a "foule jangeler," as a man learns to restrain his imagination he learns what he needs to advance along the contemplative path:

[P]us it is semely in a mans soule for to be, þat fro þe tyme þat

reson haue refreined þe greet janglelyng of þe ymagynacioun, & hap put hir to be vnderloute to God, & makip hir to bere sum frute in helpyng of hir knowyng, þat ri3t so þe affeccioun refreyne þe lust & þe prist of sensualyte, and make hir to be vnderloute to God, & so to bere sum frute in helpyng of hir felyng. (Hodgson, *Deonise* 26)

These fruits, it turns out, are abstinence and patience (27), after which "discrecioun & contemplacioun risen in þe resoun" (39). In *Piers Plowman B*, we see the Dreamer struggle through this same progression from jangling to patience as his will moves from disputation with Thought, to listening to Wit who cannot be moved by Will to jangle (VIII 121), to receiving instruction from Dame Study, Scripture and Ymaginatif, until finally he heeds Patience's admonition to "be stille" rather than, as Will wishes, to "jangle to this jurden with his juste wombe" (XIII 83-85). For a moment at least, Will obeys and sits "still as Pacience saide" (XIII 98) but all too soon lets his tongue loose again, since Patience's lesson is so hard for him to learn. Thus in the poem, as in the *Benjamin Minor*, the fruits for the Dreamer of this long process are the appearance of Patience and Conscience as "discrecioun & contemplacioun" begin their struggle to rise in his understanding. And, as in so many of the contemplative texts, the process is a series of advances and backslidings as Will's attempts at obeying Patience demonstrate.

Part of this progress toward "discrecioun & contemplacioun" in Will occurs as he receives Wit's instruction. In answer to Will's desire to know where Dowel, Dobet and Dobest many be found, the sermon begins straightforwardly enough with the figural description of the

dwelling of "Sire Dowel" in the "castel that Kynde made," guarded by Inwit and his five sons, the right uses of the five senses, in which dwells Anima with "hire damyselle" Dobet and a "bisshopes peere," Dobest who is Anima's guide (IX 1-24). Will misses that he has been instructed to seek within himself for Dowel, and asks instead "What kynnes thyng is Kynde?" (IX 25). Wit answers, but returns soon to his initial point by stating bluntly the meaning of his allegory: "the castel that Kynde made, *Caro* it hatte,/And is as muche to mene as 'man with a soule'" (IX 49-50). He then instructs Will at length on the proper use of Inwit. This move is reasonable both because Will's own discernment seems so weak and because for the salvation of the soul "after the grace of God, the grettest is Inwit" (IX 59) and "muche wo worth the man that mysruleth his Inwit" (IX 60). If Inwit is, as Quirk says, "the *agens* aspect of *intellectus* in Thomist terms," it is "concerned with the apprehension of truth" and thus "with the distinction between true and false, good and evil" ("Use of Kind Wit" 167). If Inwit, as Kaulbach says, "personifies moral 'awareness' not in the context of '*agens intellectus*' but in a much more concrete context" ("Refinements"⁷ 104), Inwit is "a highly technical term for the act of 'ratio superior' taking 'consilium' from Nature (or God), specifically from the eternal and immutable truth evidenced in the working of Nature" (106). If we follow Quirk's definition of Inwit, we would expect Wit's sermon to describe in sweeping terms how man can distinguish true from false. If we follow Kaulbach's, we would expect Wit to describe how Nature demonstrates in its workings the distinctions between good and evil.

We get neither. Instead, Wit first distinguishes Inwit from Anima, thus emphasizing his point that one must enter the castle of Caro to seek Dowel. Inwit is "in the heed" and Anima "in the herte" (IX 56-57), with Inwit dominant over Anima by leading her "at his wille" (IX 58). Then, rather than describing how Inwit should properly lead Anima, Wit seemingly drops this picture altogether to turn abruptly to an indictment of "glotons glubberes—hir God is hir wombe" (IX 61). Wit does call such gluttons "fooles that fauten Inwit" (IX 67) but the weight of his remarks falls upon the wrongfulness of gluttony, and then, as we saw earlier, upon the misuse of speech, "that spire . . . of grace" (IX 101). He then moves to praise of "trewe wedded libbynge folk" as examples of Dowel (IX 108) and condemns at length "fals folk feithless" (IX 119) among whom the worst, judging by the length of his remarks condemning their actions, are "wrecches out of wedlok" (IX 120) and those who marry "unkyndely" (IX 157), both of whom he allies with the issue of Cain. He warns, "alle that come of that Caym come to yvel ende" (IX 123).

Why this focus upon gluttony and concupiscence? It seems a digression, perhaps a surrender to Will's inability to see any issue except those outside himself. The placement of these particular concerns within Wit's sermon may seem more logical, however, once we note the parallel connection made in *Benjamin Minor* between the achievement of abstinence and progress toward perfection. In *Benjamin Minor* the process works this way: first, reason shuts down "þe greet jangelyng of þe ymagynacioun" and makes her "vnderloute" to God. The immediate result of this action is to "refreyne þe lust &

þe þrist of sensualyte" (Hodgson, *Deonise* 26). The issue of this restraint is abstinence (27), the quieting of bodily thirst so that the soul may concentrate on its spiritual thirst: "so it is wel seyde þat abstynence in þe sensualite is selynes in þe affeccoun. For whi, euer þe les þat þe sensualite is delityd in hir lust, þe more swetnes felip affeccoun in hir loue" (27). The connection between gluttony in physical eating and drinking and drinking and spilling of speech as misdirected appetites is clarified by Jill Mann in her essay "Eating and Drinking in 'Piers Plowman'" where she says about the "two functions of the mouth," eating and speaking:

In the Middle Ages the two functions of the mouth were much more commonly related to each other . . . we have only to think of Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale* (which the Pardoner cannot tell until he has had a drink), and its use of the mouth (the Pardoner's flow of rhetoric) to castigate the sins of the mouth (gluttony and oaths) to see the strength and integration of the tradition . . . a perversion in eating and drinking leads to a perversion in words and vice versa. (34)

Moreover, this connection between eating food and ingesting words extends to mystical understanding. In support of this point, Mann quotes Leclerq as follows:

To meditate is to attach oneself closely to the sentence being recited and weigh all its words in order to sound the depths of their full meaning. It means assimilating the content of a text by means of a kind of mastication which releases its full flavor . . . to taste it with the *palatum cordis* or *in ore cordis*. (35)

A Ladder of Foure Ronges confirms this view of study and meditation as a proper kind of eating: "Lesson puttyth as it were hole mete to þe mouth; meditacion chewith and brekith it; prayere fyndith savoure; contemplacion is the likyng swettnes that so myche comforteth" (Hodgson, *Deonise* 101). Since Wit cannot seem to direct Will to introspection, he will instead instruct him on the proper control of three of his most basic urges, for food, for sex, and for speech.

Wit's sermon is thus a demonstration in three ways of the need to make Will's attention properly "vnderloute" to God. First, Will—the Dreamer's capacity to desire—must be restrained from sensuality in eating and drinking. Second, sensuality in expression of one's sexual desire must be contained within true marriage. Last, the jangling outflow of his speech must be closed off so that words may be properly ingested rather than spilled. As Mann points out, "the image of eating is actually *contained* in the desire to know, since it is an *appetite* (*'appetitus sciencie'*) . . . The union of God and man in 'kynde' means that they are united in their thirst for knowledge. The appetite for knowledge which drove man to sin drives God to redeem him, since it sends him down to earth to become flesh and die" (40-42). In *Benjamin Minor*, a similar point is demonstrated by assigning the role of Jacob, the father of all these children, including abstinence and contemplation, to God. It is therefore God's desire for all this issue that brings it into being. Thus, as Wit's sermon demonstrates, if man would reapproach God, he must redirect his desires from a thirst for sensuality and knowledge, including the sensual pleasure of speech and the drive to question what he hears, to a proper obedience

“vnderloute to God.” The result will be, finally, the coming of Dobest who “bryngeth adoun the mody—/And that is wikked wille that many werk shendeth,/And dryveth away Dowel thorough dedlich synnes” (IX 205-207). Improper desire is thus transformed to proper will.

This connection of the exercise of patient restraint of the desire to know with avoidance of gluttony on the one hand and with the approach to wisdom on the other is reiterated later in the poem in Anima’s sermon, which quotes St. Bernard as follows:

And right as hony is yvel to defie and englymeth the mawe,
 Right so that thorough reson wolde the roote knowe
 Of God and of his grete myghtes—hise graces it letteth.
 For in the likynge lith a pride and licames coveitise
 Ayein Cristes counseil and alle clerkes techynge—
 That is *Non plus sapere quam oportet sapere.*

(XV 64-69)

In this warning which cites one of the contemplative writers, the admonition to avoid the pride of desire for too much knowledge is connected with gluttony by a pun on “likynge” and “licking” (Schmidt, *Vision* 178n) in the English text and a pun on *sapere*, which means both “to be wise” and “to taste” in the Latin text. The danger of such gluttonous desire is in its obstruction of God’s grace. Wit’s advice thus proves a difficult lesson for this Dreamer to learn and must be repeated more than once. Dame Study, in fact, objects to his being given so much knowledge. Wit has gone too far, she says, and told Will too much of “wisdomes” (X 5). That she is right in characterizing Will

as one of those "sottes" (X 8) who do nothing but "dryvele" upon the "margery perles" cast before them (X 8-11), Will continues to demonstrate in his repeated inability, even later, after he meets Patience, to benefit by all these lessons and stop his mouth. Study's words thus support the contention just developed above that there is much more substance in Wit's sermon than an assertion of standard arguments against gluttony and concupiscence.

In this section of the poem then, with the beginning of the *Vita*, we are seeing the Dreamer move from being a naive wondering observer mulling over a "ferly" to a more engaged learner struggling with his own nearly uncontrollable desire to assert his own questions in incessant jangling. He is in the process of coming to self-knowledge, starting to identify what within himself drives him. He has begun to seek out help from Thought. Whatever grace led Thought and the Dreamer to Wit, who appears "er we war were" (VIII 117), has prevailed, and the Dreamer has advanced through this travail to the self-knowledge of learning that it is his Will that constitutes the active agent of his search for truth: "where Dowel and Dobet and Dobest ben in londe/Here is Will wolde wite if Wit koude teche" (VIII 126-127). Wit leads the Dreamer's will to Study, and this encounter with Study leads him to Clergy and to Scripture and finally to his first interior vision.

In this sequence, the Dreamer's search begins to follow the path for contemplatives described in *A Ladder of Foure Ronges*. The first step in the progress toward contemplation, according to *A Ladder of Foure Ronges*, is "Lesson, a besy loking vpon Holy Writte with

intencion of the wille and in the witte" (Hodgson, *Deonise* 101). The text continues, "Lesson sykyth, meditacion fyndith, orison askith, contemplacion felith... sekyth redyng, and 3e shalle fynde holy meditacion/ thynkyng... Lesson is in the first grounde that gothe before & ledyth furth into meditacion" (101). This activity consists of "redyng and herkenyng of the dedys of holy Faderys" but it is only efficacious "if we them breke or chewe thurwe meditacion... and send it to the hert, so þat we may fynde & by them vndirstonde oure owne defautys, and aftir such knowyng þat we infors vs so warly to werke þat we may wynne to þe vertuys that in them were" (102). In other words, Lesson, which is a proper "eating" of knowledge, functions as the first part of a long climb, a very necessary part. In *Piers Plowman B*, the appearance of Dame Study begins the Dreamer's scaling of this section of the ladder as Will progresses toward his self-understanding and his purgation. Study functions first as an instruction to Wit and then, once both Wit and Will are attending her—"lokyng... with intencion of the wille and in the witte" (Hodgson, *Deonise* 101)—as an introduction to Clergy and Scripture.

Study directs her angry sermon against drivelers, harlots, japers, and janglers to Wit, not to Will. Using the same imagery of eating we find in *A Ladder of Foure Ronges*, she warns Wit against the misuse of the Bible and the words of saints like Bernard, and she warns him against those who "gnawen god with gorge whanne hir guttes fullen" (X 57). Instead of seeking to "wite why that God wolde/Suffre Sathan his seed to bigile" (X 119-120), each right-directed person, she says, "bileveth lelly in the loore of Holy Chirche/And preie hym of pardon

and penaunce in thi lyve,/And for his mucche mercy to amende yow here" (X 121-123). In other words, she says, as does *A Ladder of Foure Ronges*, that the seeker should study to believe and thus to understand his own defects, rather than study to question God's purposes. Wit, stupefied by her sermon, draws aside and will not speak (X 138-139). Will urges him to speak, but Wit only "louted and loked upon Studie/In signe that sholde bisechen hire of grace" (X 143-144). Will, too, bows (X 144), beginning to become "vnderloute" (Hodgson, *Deonise* 26) as he must if he is to progress. In this manner, the intention of the will and the action of the wit come together as Will enacts the Dreamer's beginning to use his wit to come humbly to study as *Ladder* says he should. Dame Study then focuses that attention upon seeking Clergy and Scripture, specifically directing Will to religious study if he would "knowe what is Dowel" (X 217). Clergy and Scripture then, the objects of Will's attention, become his "Lesson."

The lesson they offer is exceedingly difficult for Will to understand. "This is a longe lesson," he will say to Scripture as it ends, "and litel am I the wiser" (X 369). Clergy has told him "it is a commune lyf... on Holy Chirche to bileve" (X 230), and "thus it bilongeth to bileve to lewed that willen dowel" (X 246), apparently advising Will to stop asking questions and content himself with simple faith. On the other hand, such common belief is not the "kynde knowyng" that this Dreamer is so persistent in seeking but is instead an acceptance of exterior authority. Further, Clergy advises that Dobet is "to suffre for thi soules helthe" (X 257), and "thanne is

Dobest to be boold to blame the gilty" (X 257), as long as "thow seest thiself as in soule clene" (X 257), implying there is more to the belief the Dreamer seeks than simple acceptance of the words of Holy Church. He further confuses the issue by addressing "yow" (X 267) — presumably Will and Wit—as "ye correctours" (X 281) and "yow religiouses" (X 314), implying they, and therefore the Dreamer, since they are part of him, are not simply the "lewed" of "commune lyf." Their task, he says, is to correct themselves first (X 281). Will's response demonstrates his complete confusion, since he asks whether Dowel and Dobet are "*dominus* and knyghthode" (X 328) as if he has forgotten Clergy's early identification of Dowel with believing and Dobet with suffering. His confusion may well be shared by the reader since there has been no clear indication to this point in the B-text that Will, or the Dreamer, is a religious. Clergy's remarks therefore seem misdirected for his apparent audience. Scripture attempts to clarify, but Will prefers to argue rather than to listen. "*Contra!*" he cries again (X 341), as he did with the friars, and when Scripture answers his objection, he argues back, belittling her lesson and lecturing her for over one hundred lines. These conclude, ironically, by making her point and agreeing with Clergy's, that the poor and unlearned attain heaven more easily than the rich in wealth and the rich in learning (X 369-472). Will is here so self-assertive that he dares to say, "Forthi I counseille yow clerkes, of Holy Kirke the wrightes, /Wercheth ye werkes as ye sen ywrite, lest ye worthe nought therinne!" (X 409-410). His examples reveal knowledge of Scripture, since he refers to the salvation of the thief on Good Friday, St. John

the Baptist, Adam, Isaiah, the prophets, David, Mary Magdalene, and Paul the Apostle. He places all except the thief in Hell, however, and seems to know nothing of the Harrowing of Hell,² which is apocryphal, not scriptural, though quite early it became "doctrine and dogma of the Church" (Hulme lxiii). In the process of Will's pursuing this argument and asserting his own view of who will be saved, Clergy's emphasis on the need for a clean soul is lost.

Scripture's response is to scorn him and "lakke" him with an admonition that squarely identifies the reason he understands nothing he is told. "*Multi multa sciunt,*" she says, "*et seipsos nesciunt*" (XI 3). This quotation from a pseudo-Bernardine contemplative text, reiterates the constant refrain of the contemplative writers, that understanding will come only when the seeker understands himself. Her rebuke causes a dramatic reaction in Will, and it is the reaction desired by the contemplative writers. He weeps: "Tho wepte I for wo and wrothe of hir speche" (XI 4). This weeping sends him into a deeper sleep (X 5), where he sees "in a mirour" (XI 9) a vision of the world and his own ordinary life in it, ruled by Fortune. In this dream, he finally begins humbly to quiet himself and listen, as the dream shows him how his soul can be utterly betrayed by Fortune. In other words, for the first time in the poem, the Dreamer, by means of his will, begins to confront the image of his own life and its betrayals of

² Later, in Passus XVIII, this gap in his knowledge will be filled, a point to which we will return in Chapter Four.

truth whereas before his eye had always been focused upon the betrayals of truth by those around him. Wittig puts it this way:

In the first part of the inner dream [in Passus XI], Will the pilgrim saw in the person of Will the dreamer a dramatization and extension of his own attitudes. He saw how in fact he was wont to view the world and was invited to reflect on the many oversights of such an attitude. In this last part, the pilgrim sees the dreamer observing the world as he ought; thereby he is invited to see that the world is not generally so observed—mankind is below, beneath the beasts. The two parts of the inner dream are quite an impetus toward self-knowledge. . . . [Scripture's preaching] gives him a vividly imagined moment where Dowel, as Witte presented it, can begin—in a personal, affective response. The dreamer has been made to look at himself as a sinner who must reform. ("Design" 242)

He begins, in effect, to consider his own cleanness of heart and, as *A Ladder of Foure Ronges* advises, "to chewe it & breke it with skylle or reson, and sekith besily howe he may comme to this clenness" (Hodgson, *Deonise* 107-108). In this meditation, the *Ladder* author advises, he should realize that he "shulde not thynke of a woman or of a virgyn" and "cast not his eyen on that thyng þat my3te make after fowle love to ryse & to fordoo the clenness of the hert" (108). Thus, in this dream, he sees the damaging relation to his own soul of "*Concupiscencia Carnis*," "Coveitise of Eighes," and "Pride of Parfit Lyvyng" (X 14-15). The first two of these, which identify the dangers to him of his concupiscence and his lustful misuse of his eyes, parallel the warnings of *A Ladder of Foure Ronges* that the contemplative must not think of women nor cast his eyes in "fowle love." The third,

a warning against taking pride in the way he has been living, indicates clearly that the Dreamer has been both practicing the form of perfect living—that is, following the forms of contemplative practice—and been guilty of pride in so doing. Passus X thus confirms by its parallel with the advice of *Ladder* the notion that the Dreamer's literal acts constitute an enactment of an attempt to lead the life of perfection, that is, of contemplation.

The results of his attention to this dream of Fortune are the appearance of Lewtee, further instruction by Scripture, and finally the lesson taught by Troianus, whose story of release from Hell through the intercession of Pope Gregory is part of the “dedys of holy Faderys” which *A Ladder of Foure Ronges* identifies as part of “Lesson” (102). That Will has undergone affective change, marked by his outburst of weeping, is further demonstrated by his responses to Lewtee, Scripture and Troianus. He does not question his dream of Fortune nor defend himself against its implied criticism, but asks permission to “avowe” the dream publicly (XI 86). Lewtee grants this and Scripture reappears to confirm this permission (Schmidt, *Vision* 334n). She then preaches matter so troubling that Will says, “if lewed men it knewe,/The lasse, as I leve, lovyen thei wolde/The bileve of Oure Lord” (XI 109-110). Her theme is that many will be called, but few will be chosen. Here again, Will's reaction demonstrates deep changes in his attitude. He does not argue but “al for tene of hir texte trembled myn herte,/And in a weer gan I wexe, and *with myself* to dispute/ Whether I were chose or noght chose” (XI 115-116, italics mine). In other words, he begins to examine the beam in his own eye

and to turn his opposition against himself rather than blame those he encounters. He concludes by recognizing that Reason and Conscience will reckon with the errant Christian and put him "in arerage" unless "Contricion wol come and crye by his lyve/Mercy for hise mysdedes with mouthe or with herte" (XI 135-136). Here he finally recognizes the need for contrition. Scripture ratifies this conclusion, saying "That is sooth" (XI 137).

A Ladder of Foure Ronges indicates, however, that Scripture is not the whole study to which the contemplative must attend, and in *Piers Plowman B*, Scripture's words do not solve the problem which troubles the Dreamer at this point. He is wrestling with the apparent contradiction between God's mercy and God's justice. How can some be saved and others damned, many called, but few chosen? If Aristotle is wise—"who wissed men bettre?" (X 380)—how can he be in Hell? What good are works, if they do not save? And what are the proper roles of learning and of "lewed" faith? This last question seems particularly crucial at this juncture in the poem because Will is engaged at this moment in study, so if he finds he must reject learning, he will have to reject what seems to have been necessary to his progress. *The Cloud of Unknowing* demonstrates the proper place of study in a passage clarifying the relations of "Lesson, Meditacion & Oryson... [or, as] þei mowe be clepid: Redyng, Pinkyng & Preiing," for "pinkyng may not goodly be getyn wiþ-outyn reding or heryng comyng before" (Hodgson, *Cloud* 71). The Dreamer's understanding is not yet far enough advanced to comprehend this, but he has made sufficient progress that he is, for the moment, no longer quarreling

with others. His progress is rewarded by the sudden appearance of Trajan, "saved, as ye may see, withouten syngynge of masses,/By love and by lernyng of my lyvyng in truthe" (XI 150-151).

Trajan tells Will he must "thenke" (XI 158) on this, to learn from the *Legenda Sanctorum* "more largere than I yow telle... [that] love and leautee is a leel science" (XI 160-166). That is, Will must meditate on his lessons just as *A Ladder of Foure Ronges* advises (Hodgson, *Deonise* 102). Love, says Trajan, solves all these dilemmas because love, as "Jesu Crist of hevne... pursueth us evere" (XI 184-185). "Thanne," he says, "is bileve a lele help, above logyk or lawe" (XI 218). Will makes no reply. He just watches. "Slepyng I seigh al this... sithen cam Kynde" (XI 320) and, as Wittig explains, calls him by name and takes him to the top of the mountain of Middle-earth to see and understand the patterns of creation. Now he sees the reason in those patterns, but, troubled that Reason "rewarded and ruled alle beastes / Save man and his make" (XI 368-369), he rebukes Reason. Again, his self-assertion proves his undoing, for Reason tells him to rule his tongue better since "it falleth noght to lakke/The shap ne the shaft that God shoop hymselfe/For al that he wrought was wel ydo, as Holy Writ witnesseth" (XI 394-396). Will catches "colour anoon and comsed to ben ashamed,/And awaked therwith" in woe, realizing he might have learned more (XI 403-405). Shame is exactly what he must feel if he is to progress, says *Benjamin Minor*: "And for-þi þat men oft-tymes fallen greuously in þoo same synnes þat þei moste hate, þefore after hateredyn of synne springiþ ordeynde schame in a mans soule" (Hodgson, *Deonise* 36).

Ymaginatif continues his self-accusation and thus advances his purgation. First, he accuses Will of his lack of patience: "Haddestowe suffred . . . slepyng the thow were, /Thow sholdest have knowen that Clergie kan and conceyved moore thorough Reson/For Reson wolde have reherced thee right as Clergie seide, /Ac for thyn entremetyng here artow forsake" (XI 411-414). It is worth noting here that, if Will had used patience, he would in his sleeping have learned that which Clergy can know, and understood even more through Reason. Sleeping is thus marked as an occasion for knowing, and lack of patience as the impediment. Ymaginatif condemns Will's "rude speche" (XI 418) which has prevented his learning what he might from Reason. Will does understand, but uncertain of his perception, insists on confirming it, saying, "Why ye wisse me thus . . . was for I rebuked Reson" (XI 436). While Ymaginatif confirms Will's interpretation, he begins to leave, by this action reproving Will's inability to suffer his learning in silence. Ymaginatif thus enacts what he has just told Will, that one should "lat a dronken daffe in a dyk falle, /Lat hym ligge, loke noight on hym til hym liste aryse" (XI 425-426). So he will leave Will, until Will arises and goes after him and prays his name (XI 439).

Once Will does seek him, Ymaginatif continues Will's inspection of himself, accusing him of wasting his time. "Thow medlest with makynges," he says, "and myghtest go seye thi Sauter, /And bidde for hem that yveth thee breed; for ther are bokes ynowe /To telle men what Dowel is, Dobet and Dobest bothe, /And prechours to preve what it is, of many a peire freres" (XII 16-19). Here Will must confront not only the issue of his jangling argumentation, but also his leading the

Dreamer to jangling as a minstrel. He has almost no defense to offer, only citing the example of holy men who “pleyden, the parfiter to ben” (XII 24). He claims that “if ther were any wight that wolde me telle/What were Dowel and Dobet and Dobest at the laste,/Wolde I nevere do werk, but wende to holi chirche/And there bidde my bedes but whan ich ete or slepe” (XII 25-28). He does not cite worldly work as the proper alternative to his “makynge” but instead sees telling over his beads in church, which is one of the contemplative practices, as his proper occupation. This is not the answer of one accused of stealing effort from work in the world, one accused of being a “wastour,” but that of one who seeks perfection in the contemplative life.

It is also the response of one who imperfectly understands the nature of that contemplative life. It is true that contemplatives were advised to play, in the sense of diverting oneself from the rigors of work, as a counter to the *tristitia* and *acedia* arising from the rigors of religious practice. Roger Bacon, for example, writes in his *Moralis philosophia* :

Since according to Scripture 'the body, when it becomes sick, burdens the soul, and the earthly dwelling place depresses a mind that thinks much,' it is necessary for the mind's tranquillity that our human weakness sometimes turn away our mind from its attention to inner and outer cares and turn it toward comforts and recreations that are necessary for our body. . . . Therefore the greatest saints sometimes unbent from spiritual cares to comfort. (Wenzel, *Sloth* 51-60)

Such comfort, or play, does not mean secular song or frivolous recreation, as Will seems to interpret it here. Play means variety of activity, as in Aelred's advice to a recluse:

[I]f the psalms become burdensome, change to reading; if this begins to bore you, get up for prayer; when you are tired of these activities, take up some manual work, so that by healthy alternation you may refresh the mind and drive away *acedia*. (Wenzel, *Sloth* 32)

Play can refer to holy song and contemplative bliss, as it does when *The Cloud of Unknowing* advises:

Actyues, actyues! make 3ow as besi as 3e kan in þe first partye & in þe secound, now in þe tone & now in þe toþer; & 3if 3ou list ri3t wel & fele 3ow disposid, in boþe two bodely. & medel 3ow not of contempla-tyues. 3e wote not what hem eyleþ. Lat hem sit in here rest & in here play, wiþ þi þrid & þe best partye of Marye. (Hodgson, *Cloud* 55)

Will's connecting Cato's *gaudia* with the play of holy men indicates that he is attempting to classify the Dreamer's "makynge" as activities that will help him "the parfiter to ben." We will return to this question of the value of his "makynge" in Chapter V.

Ymaginatif, having been asked properly by Will and gained Will's shamed attention, advances somewhat Will's understanding of Dowel. "*Fides, spes, caritas*" are Dowel, he tells Will (XII 28-29), though Will's deep understanding of these will come much later in the poem. He seems to clarify the relation between learning and grace for "God is so good, I hope that siththe he gaf hem wittes / To wissen us wyes

therwith, that wisshen to be saved, / (And the bettre for hir bokes to bidden we ben holden) / That God for his grace gyve hir soules reste — / For lettred men were lewed yet, ne were lore of hir bokes” (XII 270-274). He asserts that clergy and kynde wit are “neighe cosynes bothe to Oure Lord” (XII 93-95), but then undercuts the value of both by asserting the higher value of love: “For the heighe Holy Goost hevене shal tocleve, / And love shal lepe out after into this lowe erthe, / And clennessē shal cacchen it and clerkes shullen it fynde” (XII 140-142). His behavior echoes Will’s earlier jangling—“‘*Contra!*’ quod Ymaginatif thoo” (XII 278)—as he argues with Will over the issue of who shall be saved. In this way, at least, he seems to be Bala the jangler of whom the *Benjamin Minor* speaks. If we examine the function of imagination as the *Benjamin Minor* describes it, however, even though imagination is a great jangler, she is necessary to the process of coming to contemplation for “ri3t so mans soule, þorow li3t of knowyng in þe reson & swetnes of loue in þe affeccioun, is spousid vnto God... [and] wipoutyn ymaginacioun reson may not knowe” (Hodgson, *Deonise* 12-13). So, even though Ymaginatif leaves Will confused, “witless nerhand,” wandering “as a freke that fey were” (XIII 1-2), Will has learned something from this long dream, and from Ymaginatif’s part in it. He has learned to look at his own life and to consider “how Fortune me failed at my mooste nede, / And how that Elde manaced me, myghte we evere mete; his konnyngē... / And sithen how Ymaginatif seide, ‘*Vix iustus salvabitur*’ (XIII 5-19).

And out of this dream and his encounter with Ymaginatif come long thinking. “I lay down longe in this thoght, and at the laste I

slepte; / And as Crist wolde ther com Conscience to conforte me that tyme" (XIII 21-22). That is, in the midst of a meditative "sleep," grace comes. In Conscience's court Patience appears, just as the *Benjamin Minor* says patience will come after the action of imagination. Patience teaches Will another lesson in suffrance, and once again the poem enacts how recursive is this process of coming to perfection. As *A Pistle of Discrecioun of Stirings* says, "I knewe neuer 3it no synner þat mi3t come to þe parfite knowing of himself and of his inward desposicioun, bot if he were lernid of it before in þe schole of God, by experience of many temptaciouns and by many fallynges and risinges" (Hodgson, *Deonise* 64). And as the *Benjamin Minor* says, explaining why shame is needed, sins recur. Thus Will has learned enough to voice his early objections to the doctor "to myself so Pacience it herde" (XIII 63), but the more disturbed the doctor makes him, the more he desires to "jangle to this jurdan" (XIII 83). But Patience "preynte on me to be stille" (XIII 85). In other words, since his lessons from Study, Clergy, Reason and Ymaginatif have aroused the Dreamer's patience by demonstrating to him how his lack of this quality has prevented his learning what he seeks, now his own patience helps Will hold his tongue. This stay proves only momentary, however, as the doctor's actions "in that ye eten the puddyng... and we no morsel hadde" (XII 106-107) rouse Will's anger at this hypocrisy. Will may be moved by gluttony as well, and certainly by pride as he declares to the doctor that he himself is "in point to dowel" (XIII 110). This time, both Conscience and Patience quell Will's talk: "Thanne Conscience ful curteisly a contenaunce he made, /

And preynte upon Pacience to preie me to be stille" (XIII 111-112). The two of them now briefly question this doctor and then turn to Clergy to "carpe us what is Dowel" (XIII 118). Clergy speaks mystery: "that Dowel and Dobet arn two infinites, / Whiche infinites with a feith fynden out Dobest, / Which shal save mannes soule—thus seith Piers the Plowman" (XIII 127-129). Conscience says he will pass over this "til Piers come and preve this in dede" (XIII 132). Patience advises that the answer to the question of Dowel's nature is "*Disce, . . . doce; dilige inimicos . . . / Disce, and Dowel; doce, and Dobet; / Dilige, and dobest—do thus taughte me ones / A lemman that I lovede—Love was hir name*" (XIII 136-139). Finally, he says, "*Pacientes vincunt*" (XIII 172). Here is the answer to the Dreamer's search for Dowel once again, as Carruthers points out, saying "the search for Dowel often seems to go around in circles in these passus" (89). She says this occurs "not because the content of the explanations Will is given is wrong, but because the form in which they are cast is wrong. One doesn't explain Dowel, one does well" (89). Actually, however, Patience has framed his answer as three verbs, three actions that do well, better, and best, but Will does not understand, because he is not yet ready to understand. He does understand he must try to be silent, however, and, as he should, he continues attending as Conscience and Patience leave together, having promised to seek Clergy again later. As Will watches they meet, "as me tho thoughte" (XII 221), with the minstrel Haukyn, also called *Activa Vita* (XIII 224).

Will's thinking and his submitting to Conscience and Patience

thus lead him to a direct meditation upon the life of one ordinary Christian. Will pays close attention—

I took greet kepe, by Crist, and Conscience bothe,
 Of Haukyn the Actif Man, and how he was yclothed.
 He hadde a cote of Cristendom as Holy Kirke bileveth;
 Ac it was moled in many places with manye sondry plottes—
 Of pride here a plot, and there a plot of unbuxom speche,
 Of scornynge and of scoffynge and of unskilful berynge
 (XIII 271-276)

—and closer yet—

And he torned hym as tyd, and thanne took I hede (318)

—and again closer—

I waited wistloker. (342)

Carruthers points out:

In seeing Haukyn, Will should be able to see much of himself. . . . Like Will, Haukyn is a minstrel and a rather unsuccessful one at that. Like Will, he is quick to condemn the clergy for their faults while living comfortably with every manner of sin in himself. And, like Will, he believes himself to be "singular" and is consequently disobedient. . . . There is one other important trait which Haukyn shares with Will. His confession to Patience climaxes in shame . . . a moment which closely parallels Will's earlier shame. . . . And Haukyn's shame, like Will's results from a self-knowledge gained through a mirroring

process. Thus Will can perceive that Haukyn is undergoing a process quite similar to his own earlier experience with Imaginatif. (115-116)

To see Haukyn is thus to see himself as he must for the process of purgation to be complete. As we saw in Chapter One, the center of purgation is *nosce te ipsum*, which leads to weeping, contrition and conversion. Haukyn's behavior as he realizes his own sins is dramatic; he "wepte water with hise eighen and weyled the tyme/That evere he dide dede that deere God displesed / Swouned and sobbed and siked ful ofte" (XIV 325-326). As *Activa Vita* "wepte and wailed" (XVI 332), the Dreamer awakes, undone by what he has seen:

Ac after my wakyng it was wonder longe
 Er I koude kyndely knowe what was Dowel.
 And so my wit weex and wanyed til I a fool were;
 And some lakked my lif—allowed it fewe—
 And leten me for a lorel and looth to reverencen
 Lordes or ladies or any lif ellis—
 As persons in pelure with pendants of silver;
 To sergeaunts ne to swiche seide noht ones,
 'God loke yow, lordes!'—ne louted faire,
 That folk helden me a fool; and in that folie I raved.

(XV 1-10)

This raving is the second time the Dreamer has waked from his dream to wander and rave. After Ymaginatif challenged his making of poetry, he woke "witlees nerhande" to wander "as a freke that fey were" (XIII 1-2). *The Cloud of Unknowing*, when it cautions that a seeker working toward perfection will be in danger of madness as he

confronts his own true nature, makes clear why the Dreamer's response is to rave:

...ne were it þat a soule were sumwhat fed with a maner of counforte of his ri3t worching, elles schuld he not mow bere þe pyne þat he haþ of þe wetyng & felyng of his beyng...for he findeþ euermore his wetyng & his felyng as it were ocupied & fillyd wiþ a foule stinkyng lumpe of him-self, þe whiche behoueþ alweis be hatid & be dispisid & forsaken, if he schal be Goddes parfite dissiple, lernid of hym-self in the mount of perfeccion—as ofte he goþ ni wood for sorow. (Hodgson, *Cloud* 84)

So the Dreamer's visions, rather than bringing him to contrition and confession and peace, have undone him. But the *Cloud* advises that "þou schalt be ware in þe tyme of þis sorow þat pou neiþer to rudely streyne þi body ne þi spirit, bot sit ful styllle, as it were in a slepyng slei3t, al forsobbid & for-sonken in sorow" (83). The poem proposes a similar solution for the Dreamer as "reson hadde ruthe on me and rokked me aslepe" (XV 11).

In this subsequent sleep, the Dreamer's will encounters the Dreamer's own soul, Anima, who tells Will, "Thanne artow imparfit... and oon of Prides knyghtes" (XV 50) because his desire to know is entirely misdirected toward "all the sciences under sonne and alle the sotile craftes" (XV 48). Here, in the willful busyness of knowing, is the Dreamer's central fault, as it was Adam's and Eve's:

Coveitise to konne and to knowe science
Putte out of Paradis Adam and Eve:

*Sciencie appetitus hominem immortalitatis gloriam
spoliavit . . .*

For in the likynge lith a pride and licames coveitise
Ayein Cristes counseil and alle clerkes techynge—
That is *Non plus sapere quam oportet sapere.*
(XV 62-69).

Here Anima takes the position of the *Via negativa* which says, in the words of *A Ladder of Foure Ronges*, “the philosopherys thurwe prevyng of ther skylle founde what thyng was the goodnes of God . . . [but] that studye of mannys witte 3afe not them the spirite of wysdom” (Hodgson, *Deonise* 109). As *Deonise Hid Diuinite* itself says, “A man schal rise in þis hid deuinite bi doing away of alle þinges on þis side God” (Hodgson 2), and these things to be put away include the “bodely wittes (as heryng, seyng, smelling, taastyng, & touching), and also þi goostly wittes, þe whiche ben clepid þin vnderstandable worchinges” (3) and all understandings which proceed from both. Instead, one should be “drawen up abouen mynde in affeccioun to þe souereyn-substancial beme of þe godliche derknes, all þinges þus done away” (3). It will be a long time before the Dreamer learns this lesson, or begins to turn his will as *The Cloud of Unknowing* advises, to:

... lift up þin herte vnto God wip a meek steryng of loue; & mene hime-self, & none of his goodes. & þerto loke þee lope to þenk on ou3t bot on hym-self, so þat nou3t worche in þi witte ne in þi wille bot only him-self... euen acording to one only steryng þat is wip-inne þe principal worching mi3t of þi soule, þe whiche is þi wille. (Hodgson, *Cloud* 16-18)

A Ladder of Foure Ronges advises prayer for one in this situation (110-111). So “longe Wille” (XV 152) or “Perseverance itself” as Schmidt translates it (*Vision* 181n), first asks to know Charity, and then prays: “By Crist! I wolde that I knewe hym... no creature levere!” (XV 195). To this, his soul responds with a long instruction which concludes with the Apostles’ Creed and, like a prayer, with “Amen” (XV 611). Last, Will promises to “travaille... this tree to se, twenty hundred myle, / And to have my fulle of that fruyt forsake al other saulee” (XVI 10) because this tree will tell him “what charite is to mene” (XVI 3). He thus promises the work to which the prayer advised in *A Ladder of Foure Ronges* refers where it says, in part, “I haue sou3t and thou3t with alle my pore herte; and, Lorde, in my meditacion the fyre of desire kyndelyth for to knowe the, not only the bytter barke withoute, but in felyng & tastyng in my sowle” (Hodgson, *Deonise* 111). Will, as we shall see in Passus XVI, seeks to savor the fruit of this tree, and his behavior begins to look like that described in *The Book of Privy Counselling*, which says,

Pis is it þat settiþ þee in silence as wele fro þou3tes as for wordes.
 Pis makip þi preier ful schorte. In þis þou arte lernid to forsake þe
 woreld & to dispise it. & þat more is, in þis þou arte lernid to forsake
 & dispise þin owne self. (Hodgson, *Cloud* 154)

That his purgation is completed is betokened by a swoon, the same climax that marked Haukyn’s conversion (XIV 326). Will hears the name of Piers the Plowman and “al for pure joye / That I herde nempne his name anon I swowned after, / And lay longe in a lone

dreem" (XVI 18-19). Thus, as Passus XV declares "*finit dowe!*" and Passus XVI offers the "*primus de dobet*" (Schmidt, *Vision* 176, 198), Will enters with a swoon a vision of Piers and the third major movement of his quest for truth.

CHAPTER IV

ILLUMINATION AND CONCEALMENT

Will's swoon as Passus XVI opens begins the series of visions which constitute the third and fourth movements of *Piers Plowman B*, marked by rubrics as the vitae of Dobet and Dobest.¹ In the third movement, Dobet, the Dreamer's will attends with increasing patience to a series of visions different from those preceding the swoon. In the fourth movement, Dobest, the Dreamer begins to display in his waking actions the effects of the knowledge gained in his dreams.

Will's swoon is not the first we've seen in *Piers Plowman B*. The first was Sloth's. At the end of his confession, he admitted he'd led a fruitless life and Repentance asked him "Repentedestow the noght?" (V 443). "Right with that he swowned," after which *Vigilate* wet Sloth's face with water from Sloth's eyes and then "sat sleuthe up and seyened him swithe / And made avow tofore God for his soule sleuthe" and promised to seek truth (V 443-460). The second swoon is

¹ See note above, page 105, regarding the authority of the rubrics.

Haukyn's, again immediately following confession. He "sory gan wexe,
/ And wepte water with hise eighen and wyled the tyme / That evere
he dide dede that deere God displesed— / Swouned and sobbed and
siked ful ofte / . . . and cride mercy faste" (XIV 323-331).

These swoons, each of which marks the confessed person's break from sin by contrition, greatly resemble the swoonings found in medieval romances and tales. In these narratives, a swoon marks a very dramatic change in the person who swoons. In Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, for example, Troilus is entirely unable to take the initiative until, overcome by emotion in Book III, "doun he fel al sodeynly aswowne" (1092). 'After that adawe, And bet gan mynde and reson to hym take" (1120-1121), and soon "he hire in armes faste to hym hente" (1187), able to do what he had intended. Similarly, in *The Physician's Tale*, Virginia "fil aswowne anon, / And after when hir swownyng is agon / She riseth up and to hir fader sayde, / 'Blissed be God that I shal dye a mayde'" (245-248), accepting what she has opposed. In *The Legend of Good Women*, Thisbe "gan hirselve to turmente, / And how she lyth and sowneth on the grounde, / And how she wepe of teres ful his wounde" ("Thisbe" 871-873); apparently she cannot weep until the swoon releases that blocked emotion in her. In *King Horn*, Remenhild "waked of hire swo3ning" (474) to promise Horn her previously withheld aid. In *Guy of Warwick*, Guy asks for God's help, then "adoun he fel a-swounie; / & when he gan to dawei / 'to þe court,' he seyde, 'ichil go, / Be it for wele or for wo: / to þe court ichil, what so betide / Þei gret strengþe me do abide'" (557-562). In other words, after his swoon he wakes resolved to do what he has had

to ask God's help for the strength to do. Somehow, in the swoon, the asked-for strength has appeared.

In Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, swooning frequently betokens collapse resulting from excruciating emotional pressure. These swoons usually do not mark revival from the causative emotion but rather its intensification. In Book I, for instance, Paulina swoons almost to death after confessing to her husband how the Duke has raped her by his guile. In Book II, Constance lies "swounende ded for fere" (846) when she wakes beside the murdered Hermengyld. Later, she faints "for joie" (II 1347) when she hears news of her long lost son. In Book V, Procne swoons when she learns what happened to her sister, then wakes and agonizes at length and with great emotion before she decides on action. And in Book VIII, Apollonius swoons for sorrow to wake in a mourning of deep despair rather than in a healing resignation. Sometimes the swoon demonstrates urgent need so clearly that those who see it are moved to help as, when Iphis swoons, the gods are moved to pity and turn her to "a Ston" (IV 3636). When the mothers in Book II's "Tale of Constantine and Silvestre" swoon because their children will die, Constantine takes pity and spares them. But Canace's swoon does not move her father from his wrathful melancholy (III 223), and Medea's swoon after pledging her love to Jason results in his lifting her up and into his bed (V 3647-3649), which action continues rather than redirects their motion toward each other. Somewhat differently, in Book V the swallow Procne lies "swounynge" (V 6006) through the winter darkness to reappear with spring's new light.

All these swoons occur in the tales Genius tells the protagonist Gower as exempla to aid his confession. At the end of this long process, Gower himself swoons as well, and here both context and result differ significantly from all the swoonings in the tales. The goddess Venus tells Gower he is old. His recognition that this is true quenches his fire with sorrow, upon which, he tells us:

... swoune I fell to grounde.
 And as I lay the same stounde,
 Ne fully quik ne fully ded,
 Me thoghte I sih tofor myn hed
 Cupide with his bowe bent.
 (VIII 2449-2453)

In this "stounde" (2450) or "trance" (2813) he sees a vision of Cupid's parliament of lovers which brings "revelacion" (2806), and, as Venus applies a healing salve, he reconciles himself to what he has learned:

And thus thenkende thoghtes fele,
 I was out of mi swoune affraied,
 Wherof I sih my wittes straied,
 And gan to clepe hem hom ayein.
 And whan Resoun it herde sein
 That loves rage was aweie,
 He cam to me the rihte weie,
 And hath remued the sotie
 Of thilke unwise fantasie,
 Wherof that I was wont to pleigne,
 So that of thilke fyri peine
 I was mad sobre and hol ynowh.

(VIII 2858-2869)

In this episode, then, Gower has faced and known his true nature, fallen into a trance, and seen a revelation which brings him out of the trance changed as the goddess would have him changed. So changed is he, in fact, that he feels "schame" (2872), asks "absolucion" (2892) of Genius, and receives his pardon. That "swoon" and "trance" and "stounde" and "revelacion" and "schame" refer to religious conversion (though the religion is that of secular love rather than Holy Church) is underscored by their use in the context of the formal catechism and confession that constitutes the entirety of the *Confessio Amantis*, by the specific identification of Genius as a "Prest" (VIII 2893), and by the use of such terms as "absolucion" from the vocabulary of religion. In this passage, then, we see demonstrated what happens within a swoon of conversion such as Sloth's or Haukyn's. Further, Gower's *Confessio Amantis* demonstrates that not all swoons are alike, but that some, at least, are "stoundes" within which one may receive "revelacion."

Similarly, in *Piers Plowman B*, all swoons are not alike. Sloth and Haukyn swoon, like Gower, at the moment of self-recognition and contrition. In Passus V Wrathe scorns his aunt, a nun and abbess, because "[h]ir were levere swowe or swelte than suffre any peyne" (V 152); the significance of her swooning remains undefined except for the fact that it inspires wrath. In Book XVIII, as Christ dies on the cross, he "comsede for to swoune" (59), the swoon marking the moment of translation from his earthly form. But Will swoons

differently, not for pain but “al for pure joye / That I herde nempne his [Piers’] name anoon I swowned after” (XVI 18-19). For Will at this point in the poem, the name of Piers has been associated with Christ, since Anima has told him that Piers is the only way to know charity and “*Petrus, id est, Christus*” (XV 212); Will’s swoon is thus connected with a name of Jesus *he* knows, just as for Rolle and his followers ecstatic joy comes from repeating the Holy Name of Jesus. Prompted by Piers’ name, then, Will, like Gower, sees a vision, reporting that he “lay longe in a lone dream; and at the laste me thoughte / That Piers the Plowman al the place me shewed” (XVI 20-21). This swoon for joy is the love swoon to which Richard of St. Victor refers when he says,

Would ye hear of the swoon of love and that which causes it? ‘My soul fainted for thy salvation but I have greatly hoped in thy word!’ For love causes swooning and sickness: love has its chains and love wounds.
(Kirschberger 214)

Will’s swoon for joy takes the Dreamer into a “stounde” like that described in *A Ladder of Foure Ronges*:

[God] abidyth not tulle the prayer be fully eendyd, but he Percyth in the myddis of the brennyng desire of that thirsty sowle, and wyth a deerne halywey of heuenly swetnes softyth þe sowle and comforyth it, and makith it so oueretaken wyth likyng and ioye that alle erthly thyng it for3etyth as in that stounde, and makith it to lese on a wondyr wyse, as if it were ded, from knowyng of himself. (Hodgson, *Deonise* 111)

Just as the “stounde” in *A Ladder of Foure Ronges* follows upon

“knowyng of himself,” so in *Piers Plowman B* Will’s swoon for joy follows upon the will’s encounter with Anima, the Dreamer’s own soul. Just as the “stounde” in *A Ladder of Foure Ronges* is an advance up the “steyer of contemplacion” (111) and just as Gower’s swoon allows the vision which moves him toward the reasonableness the goddess desires of him, so Will’s swoon begins a series of visions different in character from those preceding this change in him. Will’s swooning thus identifies for the reader what R.W. Southern labels “a kind of interior conversion from a ‘formal’ to an ‘effective’ religion” (Neaman 22). With this swoon, Will brings the Dreamer into a new phase of progress toward perfection. The Dreamer turns his full desire, his will, toward these visions of Piers and the Trinity rather than toward “Pride in Parfit Lyvinge” (XI 15) as he had earlier done.

A.V.C. Schmidt describes quite vividly the contrast in tone between the inner dream following the swoon and the visions, including the first inner dream, which precede it:

The emotional state of the Dreamer just before this [second inner dream in B] has been one of perplexity (“yit am I in a weer”, XVI.3), but Langland has allowed us to perceive only the outer covering of intellectual uncertainty; underneath... he is lost “in the vaile of restles mynd”. . . . [W]hat Will is looking for is love. Anima’s answer to his question, “Where does the Tree of Charity grow?”, has been couched almost in terms of a riddle. . . . The key that unlocks the riddle is the name of Piers, and the joy that overcomes Will is “pure” in a double sense—it is “sheer, unmixed” and it is “refined, spiritual”. Will is now ready to recognize in Piers the embodiment of all that he values most: his swoon recalls that of a lover in a romance hearing the name of his lady. The ecstatic tone even suggests the way in which a mystic

like Richard Rolle speaks of the name of Jesus. ("Inner" 29)

This affective and dramatic difference, says Schmidt, demonstrates vividly "the primacy of inner conversion" ("Inner" 32). Speaking of its character, he says, "In its structure and tone, it is indebted to the devotional tradition of 'Ego dormio, et cor meum vigilat'" ("Inner" 32). Of the love-imagery of this tradition, Schmidt writes,

The setting of Chapter V of the *Song of Songs*, from which the *Ego dormio* verse comes, is an apple orchard (V.1), where the lover waits for the beloved, asleep, but awake in heart. The rational waking self (*ego*) is stilled in order that the imagination and *affectus* (which, we may note, operate in dreams) may keep a vigil, open to the revelation of spiritual mysteries. We may, if we wish, call Langland's inner dream, without Macrobian authority, but in a term contemporaries would surely have understood, a *somnium cordis*, a dream of the heart. It occurs at a deeper level than the surrounding dream of Anima. ("Inner" 32)

Here Schmidt insists upon discounting the obvious conclusion that a sleep described in the imagery of the *Ego dormio* tradition may be the sleep of contemplation referred to in that tradition, but his description of that sleep makes clear the difference in its character from the earlier sleeps before this conversion. Moreover, following this affective conversion, says Schmidt, Will is changed:

In the rest of the poem, he protests no more; and when Kynde counsels him . . . he obeys and comes to Unity Holy Church by the way of penance. Taken all in all, Will's reaction to the lessons Kynde

teaches him . . . stands in the strongest possible contrast to his earlier reaction to Kynde's first attempt to teach him, in the inner dream of the Third Vision. ("Inner" 33)

The content of the two inner visions differs as much as does their tone. In the earlier interior dream, the Dreamer's contrition opened him to a vision of Middle Earth and deepened understanding of worldly fortune. In this new interior dream, following his swoon of conversion, he has been opened to a vision of the mystery of the Tree of the Trinity. As Schmidt points out, in the earlier dreams, "Will's wonder at creation, not being a genuine religious awe, does not lead him to humble acceptance of the existence of evil in the world as part of an ultimately loving divine plan. The disorder that characterizes human as opposed to animal society causes him to question the operation of the divine Reason in the world" ("Inner" 33). It has been his drive to question all, the lack of patience we noted in Chapter 3 above, that has led him to challenge divine purpose. Now, following his humiliation and his learning his own nature, he has been made ready to begin to see the mysterious answer to his rational question.

The answer lies not in arguing, but in perceiving. As Schmidt says,

Plainly the question of *why* man was made of 'swich a mater' must remain unanswerable in terms of human reason. . . . The poem will go on to show that if there *is* an answer to the problem of why God 'suffers' evil, it must lie in the possibility that God can also, in a more literal sense, 'suffer'. The Fifth Vision, and particularly its inner dream . . . attempts to meet this dilemma by conceding that the *suffraunce* of God (in both senses) cannot be *understood* rationally but is a mystery that can be *approached*, if only through imagination and feeling.

("Inner" 34)

Through his long series of dreams, which I contend are meditations, the Dreamer has begun to experience in his will the suffering—the patience—necessary to understand this mystery. He has begun to understand the relation of suffering to Dowel, and to demonstrate in his actions what once he only mouthed as words—"To se muche and suffren moore . . . is Dowel" (XI 410)—and this suffering permits him the vision of the Tree of Charity.

Schmidt summarizes the answer that this second inner vision provides to the Dreamer's objections in the first inner vision thus: "In the second inner dream, Will comes to accept that God's power will ultimately prevail over the Devil's 'mastery' even though the prevalence of evil—in himself, in society, and in the world—seems to indicate that it will *never* be overcome" ("Inner" 36). As in the advice and experience of many mystics of this period, in this poem "the chief access-route to such understanding is a profound, transformative immersion in the Passion of Christ" ("Inner" 36). It is the vision of Christ's passion rather than any argument posed by the will or the intellect that answers dilemma with mystery. Such vision begins once the Dreamer is soothed to sleep, paradoxically, by Reason's rocking (XV 11). The poem thus asserts that one's reason brings one to the sleep within which, if one has learned to suffer—that is, to be patient—one comes to the vision which solves the problem one's reason is able only to pose but not to answer. In making this assertion, *Piers Plowman B* reiterates the advice of the author of the *Meditations on*

the Life of Christ, who says,

You must know that there are three kinds of contemplation. . . . Two are for the perfect: they are the contemplation of the majesty of God and the contemplation of the celestial court. The third is for the beginners, those who are not perfect in the contemplation of the humanity of Christ, on which I write for you in this little book. And therefore you must begin from this [the contemplation on the life of Christ] if you wish to climb to the highest; otherwise you could not rise so high but would fall. (Ragusa 260)

The *Meditations* cite Bernard who says, "There are two things that we must purge within us, that is, the intellect and the affection: the intellect so that one may understand; the affection so that one may will. . . . But Christ illuminates the intellect; Christ purges the affection" (Ragusa 263). The Dreamer has a long climb to traverse here; his will has spent vision after vision asking the wrong questions before he could learn to let patience control him enough to come to a meditation on Christ's life. This is why it is possible to assert a mystic search in *Piers Plowman B* despite the lack of a vision of God's majesty or of the celestial city—this Dreamer is so much a beginner that we are watching his progress through the discipline of his will toward a state of soul in which he can perceive deeply—can know "kyndely"—the meaning of Christ's passion. Just as her "shewyngs" solved for Julian the mystery of sin by the perception of love, ("Inner" 36), so his will's swoon into this inner dream begins for the Dreamer of *Piers Plowman B* a series of visions of love quite different from his earlier visions of Fortune and the field of folk.

The need for further visions arises from the fact that the Dreamer still needs to learn more in order to fully experience the knowledge this mystery offers. His will has made real progress, as we can see by Will's refraining from questioning Piers after Piers says, "I have told thee what highte the Tree: the Trinite it meneth" (XVI 63). Will wants to ask, but "egrelich he loked on me, and therefore I spared / To asken hym any moore therof" (XVI 64-65). But his restraint is short-lived, for as soon as Piers tells him what the three fruits of the tree are, he "preide Piers to pulle adoun an appul, and he wolde, / And suffren me to assaien what savour it hadde" (XVI 73-74). Much better had he kept still, for Piers begins to shake the tree and the poor fruits cry, and drop into the Devil's hands. Will's request to taste the apple, to assay the vision he should simply accept, thus brings woe into this vision, just as Adam's eating his apple brought woe into the world. And, as woe brings the Passion into Christian history, so woe—and Piers' response to woe by calling up the powers of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost—brings a vision of the birth and life of Christ into this dream. Christ's death at Calvary is all the Dreamer can see at this point, for at this death his will "awaked therwith, and wiped [his] eighen" (XVI 167). Later he will see more, and understand more. But for now, Will wanders, still in a meditative dream, "as an ydiot" (XVI 170), seeking Piers and finding, in turn, Faith, Hope, and Charity, in the persons of Abraham, *Spes*, and the Samaritan. In other words, the Dreamer's will's surrender to the swoon and his vision of the Trinity and Christ's life lead directly to discovery of faith, hope and charity within the Dreamer's self.

From this point on, Will's encounters elucidate in a series of showings and vividly imaged sermons the mysteries evoked in the vision of the Tree of Charity with its fruits that fall to the Devil and then the mysteries of how justice can be reconciled with mercy and truth with peace and how grace and salvation are related to good works. Each vision readies Will for the next so that the Dreamer's cognition of these truths deepens. As more knowledge opens to his sight, his visions show him the harrowing of Hell, the Passion, and the Paraclete.

Finally, his vision makes him understand that Elde will take from him this body he has always loved, and this insight brings him to hear at last the message he has sought from the beginning. Thus, when Kynde tells him to learn to love, and to do so by leaving everything else behind, he obeys, taking himself "[t]horogh Contricion and Confession til I cam to Unitee" (XX 213).

First, Faith appears to Will in the shape of Abraham, who explains that he seeks "[t]hre leodes in oon lyth" (XVI 181), these three being the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Faith continues by explicating the relations of matrimony, widowhood and virginity to the Trinity, thus explicating for Will the answer to his desire to assay the savour of the three fruits of the Tree of Charity in the vision just concluded. Faith states that "either is otheres joye in thre sondry persones . . . / And bitokeneth the Trinite and trewe bileve" (XVI 207, 210), implying that all three fruits offer equally sweet savour. Last, Faith shows Will that which he holds in his lap: "a lazar lay therinne / Amonges patriarkes and prophetes playinge togideres" (XVI

255-256). Will keeps silent until Faith asks him, "What awaitestow . . . and what woldestow have?" (XVI 257); only then does Will say, "I wolde wite . . . what is in youre lappe" (XVI 258). Faith lets him see, and his next words make clear that this leprosy is the stain of sin by whose agency all of us will "ligge thus ever / Lollynge in my lappe, til swich a lord [i.e., Christ] us fecche" (XVI 268-269). Will realizes that "synne so longe shal lette / The myght of Goddes mercy, that myghte us alle amende" (XVI 270-271), and he weeps.

Will's tears, which betoken his deep-felt understanding of the relations of human sin to God's mercy, immediately bring *Spes*, the spy who is Hope or Expectation. Will finds *Spes*'s words hard to accept, and challenges his idea that a new law is needed. In fact, Will says, "It is ful hard for any man on Abraham bileve, / And wel away worse yit for to love a sherewe. / It is lighter to leeve in thre lovely persones / Than for to love and lene as wel lorels as lele" (XVII 43-46). Again, Will takes one step forward in beginning to understand the Trinity while taking one backward in his next lesson which is the injunction to love his neighbor. The underlying sense of this pair of encounters, that faith and hope are not enough to bring the Dreamer to salvation, is underscored immediately by the next event of the poem, when the conversation between Will and *Spes* is interrupted by the appearance of the Samaritan, who arrives just in time to meet Faith and Hope at a place "[w]here a man was, wounded, and with theves taken" (XVII 55). Only the Samaritan helps this man, and Will forsakes Faith and Hope to run after the Samaritan and ask to be his servant. This action results in the Samaritan's clarifying for Will what

he is to believe about the Trinity by revealing to him the parables of the hand, the torch, and the wife, the rain and the smoke. The vivid images of his sermon conclude:

... the smoke and the smolder that smyt in oure eighen,
 That is coveitise and unkyndenesse, that quencheth
 Goddes mercy,
 For unkyndenesse is the contrarie of alle kynnes reson;
 For ther nys sik ne sory, ne noon so mucche wrecche
 That he ne may lovye, and hym like, and lene of his herte
 Good wille, good word—bothe wisshen and wilnen
 Alle manere men mercy and foryifnesse,
 And lovye hem lik hymself, and his lif amende.

(XVII 344-351)

Having delivered this lesson, which returns from the Trinity to the issue of loving one's neighbor, the Samaritan spurs off to Jerusalem, and Will awakes.

By means of his will, the Dreamer has now progressed from the joy which provoked his swoon to realization that he must weep for sin, not just his own sin but all human sin. He has thus progressed along the path toward contemplation outlined by the *Benjamin Minor* where joy of inward sweetness (Hodgson, *Deonise* 30) comes just before hatred of sin (33), “[f]or þe felying of goostly ioie techiþ a man what synne harmiþ þe soule; and after þe harme in a soule is felt, moche or lytyl, þerafter is þe hatereden mesurid vnto þe harmyng” (33). Joy is short “for þe corrupcioun of flesche” (34) caused by sin; our response, says the *Benjamin Minor*, should be to love our fellow

Christians but hate the sin (34). Thus the leper shelters in Faith's bosom, and Will weeps for him. Thus Hope instructs him in loving his neighbor. Will has not learned measure in his response, however. Just as the *Benjamin Minor* warns, his "vntempred hateredyn of synne is woodnes" (38) and the Dreamer wakes, his will still undisciplined in its response, to wander:

Wolleward and weetshoed wente I forth after
 As a reccheless renk that [reccheth of no wo],
 And yede forth lik a lorel al my lif tyme,
 Til I weex wery of the world and wilned eft to slepe,
 And lened me to a Lenten—and longe tyme I slepte.

(XVIII 1-5)

We see in this waking behavior both his madness—his recklessness—and his disregard of his neighbor in his reckoning of no woe (if we accept Schmidt's amendment of the line based on several manuscript readings). We see also his abandoning his visions for what may be a considerable length of time—"al my lif tyme"—until he wearies and longs for sleep.² If we do accept Schmidt's gloss of these lines, we must read even the longing for sleep as the laziness of an idle wanderer, for Schmidt interprets "lened me to a Lenten" as "idled

² In Chapter Three, we examined the parallel between this madness of the Dreamer's and the dangers to the reason experienced by those intently working at their contemplative practices, and noted that the remedy advised was to put oneself again into a "slepyng slei3t."

until Lent" (*Vision* 219n). If we agree with this interpretation, we must discount the notion that the Dreamer has learned anything substantial from his conversion and the subsequent visions, since he backslides so completely. The *Middle English Dictionary*, however, glosses this phrase as "lie down until Lent" (5:820), thus eliminating the pejorative sense that the Dreamer is idling. In this reading of the line, while he wanders distract, he returns perhaps more seriously to the behavior which brought his earlier dreams.

Under the entries for "lent" in the *Middle English Dictionary* we find an association with fasting, as in *Piers Plowman's Creed*: "þe lengþe of a Lenten, flech moot y leve" (*MED* 5:835). Here a "lent" means any fast for forty days; the *MED* definition for the section citing the *Creed* as its example reads: "a period of fasting prescribed by any faith or religious order," for example, the forty-day fast of St. Martin before Christmas. If we take "a lenten" in *Piers Plowman B* XVIII 5 as the *Creed* uses it, "lened me to a Lenten" would mean "turned my attention to a forty-day fast."³ And such a fast may indeed be implied, for in Passus XX fasting is praised indirectly when the reader is presented with the negative example of Sire Leef-to-lyve-in-lecherie who lies groaning when he must fast merely for a Friday (XX 312-313). Further, such fasting would return the Dreamer to his path at an earlier point from which he left it, practicing abstinence as a step toward patience and then toward insight, as the *Benjamin Minor* outlines. This retracing of his steps is made necessary by his

³ This fast could occur for the Lent before Easter, of course, as the rest of the poem's chronology implies.

backsliding as he woke from his dream. Whether fast or rest, however, this action is not idling, and its result, the Narrator reports, is that “longe tyme I slepte . . . [and] gretly me dremed” (XVIII 5-7).

His great dream reveals to him

Oon semblable to the Samaritan, and somdeel to
 Piers the Plowman,
 Barefoot on an asse bak bootles cam prikye,
 Withouten spores other spere; spakliche he loked,
 As is the knyde of a knyght that cometh to be dubbed,
 To geten hym gilte spores on galoches ycouped.
 (XVIII 10-14)

Faith explains what this sight is and what it shall mean:

This Jesus of his gentries wol juste in Piers armes,
 In his helm and in his haubergeon—*humana natura*.
 That Crist be noght biknowe here for *consummatus Deus*,
 In Piers paltok the Plowman this prikiere shal ryde;
 For no dynt shal hym dere as *in deitate Patris* . . .
 Deeth seith he shal fordo and adoun brynge
 Al that lyveth or loketh in londe or in watre.
 Lif seith that he lieth, and leieth his lif to wedde
 That, for al that Deeth kan do, withinne thre daies to walke
 And fecche fro the fend Piers fruyt the Plowman,
 And legge it ther hym liketh, and Lucifer bynde,
 And forbete and adoun brynge bale-deeth for evere:
O Mors ero mors tua!
 (XVIII 22-26; 29-36)

Now Will sees Christ's suffering and death on the cross. Immediately

Faith "gan . . . felly the false Jewes despise" (XVIII 92), and, "for feere of this ferly and of the false Jewes" (XVIII 110), Will "drow [him] in that derknesse to *descendit ad inferna*" (XVIII 111) where he sees, "*secundum scripturas*" (XVIII 112), Mercy, Truth, Justice and Peace enter to debate. In other words, the clearest vision he has yet had of Christ's passion precipitates a deeper meditation in which he is allowed to perceive, after all his struggles to resolve this mystery, after all the instructions by such teachers as Trajan, how Christ's passion reconciles Mercy with Truth and Justice with Peace.

The vision first demonstrates the dilemma: Justice and Truth assert that Hell is perpetual while Mercy and Peace assert that Christ's death on the cross destroys Hell. Since all four sisters are equally important in God's creation, their disagreement must somehow be resolved, and their argument is interrupted by the appearance of a "spirit" bidding the gates of Hell to open (XVIII 258-261). In other words, at the literal level of the poem, the conflict within the Dreamer between his senses of justice and mercy and his desires for truth and peace is interrupted and resolved by the vision of Christ harrowing Hell. In a larger sense, the tensions among these four virtues in the world are resolved by God's sending Christ as redeemer. Now the Dreamer's will perceives the answer to his puzzlement over how Trajan could be brought to Heaven, how mercy can save regardless of works, as he sees and hears:

. . . the light bad unlouke, and Lucifer answerde,
'*Quis est iste*:

What lor artow?' quod Lucifer. The light soone seide,
 'Rex glorie,
 The lord of myght and of mayn and alle manere vertues—
Dominus virtutum.
 Dukes of this dymme place, anoon undo thise yates,
 That Crist may come in, the Kynges sone of Hevene!
 And with that breeth helle brak, with Belialles barras . . .
 And tho that Oure Lord lovede, into his light he laughte,
 And seide to Sathan, 'Lo! here my soule to amendes
 For alle synfulle soules, to save tho that ben worthi . . .
 Although reson recorde, and right of myselve,
 That if thei ete the appul, alle sholde deye,
 I bihighte hem nocht here helle for evere.
 For the dede that thei dide, thi deceite it made;
 . . . And al that man hath mysdo, I, man, wole amende it.'
 (XVIII 315-322, 327-329, 331-334, 342)

This debate of the virtues is hardly original with *Piers Plowman* B. Its history, according to Hope Traver in her monograph *The Four Daughters of God*, extends back through the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, Grosseteste, Bonaventure and Bernard to the Rabbinical *Midrash* (7-13). Its introduction "into Christian theology is closely connected with the rise of mysticism" (Traver 11). Traver reports four general classifications for the allegory:

In the first and third classes is treated the strife of the Four Daughters, arrayed two against two, concerning the redemption of man, a strife which is appeased when the Son of God offers to take man's place and suffer in his stead. In the second class, which [Heinzel] calls the 'Processus Belial,' is introduced the additional motive of a dispute with the Devil. The fourth class differs from the others in making the

Four Daughters engage in controversy over the question of man's creation, not of his redemption. (5)

This debate, based on Psalm 74.11, became so extraordinarily popular that "it became almost a mediaeval commonplace" (5). The mere fact of the allegory's appearance in *Piers Plowman B* therefore constitutes no *ipso facto* proof of connection between the poem and mystic tradition. Two points must be made here, however. First, closer comparison of the specific version of the allegory as it appears in this poem with its other versions reveals a unique parallel with the contemplative text called *The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost*. Second, the internal dynamics of the allegory as it is presented in *Piers Plowman B* put a peculiar emphasis on a set of terms which have specific contemplative reference.

On the first point: *The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, as the introduction of this work pointed out, is an allegorical retelling of the history of the Creation, the Fall, and the Passion which appears in the Vernon manuscript with a copy of the A text of *Piers Plowman*. The *Charter* and *Piers Plowman B* turn out to be the only two versions of the allegory of the Four Daughters in which God's decision to save humankind through Christ's birth and death is not influenced by the argument among Mercy, Truth, Peace and Justice. As Traver says, "[I]n the *Charter* the discussion as to which person of the Trinity should redeem man has been transferred to near the beginning of the allegory, thus giving rise to the debate between the sisters rather than concluding it as usual" (135). In the *Charter* God simply

declares, "...þer was no þing þat mi3te delyuere hym but 3if it were god; & þerfore who schulde do þat dede he most be boþe god & man" (Traver 133), all part of his announcement to his council of what he intends. In *Piers Plowman B*, the four daughters meet and argue not about what *will* be but about what has already *been*. In both, the sisters' debate illustrates the difficulty of reconciling the four virtues to history rather than the difficulty God might face in creating that history. In all other versions of the allegory, as Heinzl pointed out above, God hears the four daughters out, and then offers Christ's death, and sometimes promises human contrition as well, in order to win the daughters' reconciliation to the dilemma His creation of humankind has engendered. It is therefore suggestive of a significant connection between these two anomalous versions, one definitely contemplative and the other problematically so, that these two, so close in time and space, share as well a unique employment of this "medieval commonplace."

Second, this external suggestion of a contemplative connection based on the *Charter* finds internal support in this section of the text of *Piers Plowman B* itself, as it departs from all its sources and parallels. Traver admits puzzlement:

The question of the sources of this scene in the *Vision of Piers Plowman* is a vexed one. . . . Professor Skeat . . . says that the sources for the Passus in which the debate scene appears are the Bible, Grosseteste, and the Gospel of Nicodemus. He adds, "Besides these, the author constantly shows that he had in mind some actual representation of the circumstances; so that the reader must throughout consult

the Coventry mysteries." . . . But I have found it impossible to discover pronounced likeness to Grosseteste or indeed to any other version of the altercation of the sisters. The occasion is wholly different; the sisters meet just after Christ's crucifixion and dispute concerning his proposed release of His followers from hell. In this respect it faintly suggests the opposition of Satan to the harrowing of hell which is the occasion of the "Processus Belial" described in the fourth chapter, but there is no similarity in treatment. (149-150)

Traver here overlooks the parallel between *Piers* and the *Charter* outlined above, but her delineation of the allegory's placement emphasizes the way in which *Piers Plowman B* identifies the argument of the four virtues even more emphatically as a problem of human understanding of the meaning of the crucifixion rather than of a problem for God in determining how virtue will be reconciled with the fact of human sin. *Piers Plowman B* has thus reworked the allegory of the daughters of God to underscore once again the struggle this entire poem emphasizes. In Christian history, as in the poem's debate, creation, fall and crucifixion have already occurred. The problem for the Christian, as for Truth, Justice, Mercy and Peace in this scene, is to accept that they have occurred and to perceive their meaning, to reconcile godly virtues with God's creation.

The specific words used to dramatize the allegory here serve as subtle demonstrations of the means suggested for reaching such reconciliation. First, Will sees this vision by drawing himself into darkness, the darkness created by Christ's death, the darkness Faith has promised will be ended: "For be this derknesse ydo [by this champion], Deeth worth yvenquished . . . for Lif shal have the

maistrye" (XVIII 101-102). Will asks no questions and thus, at last, he sees "soothly, *secundum scripturas*" (XVIII 112). This is the darkness of "hid diuinite" described in the "Seinte Deonise Preier" to the "vnbigonne & euerlastyng Wysdome" which precedes the text of *Deonise Hid Diuinite*:

I beseche þee for to drawe us up in an acordyng abilnes to þe souereyn-vnknowen and þe souereyn-schinyng hei3t of þi derke inspirid spekynges, where alle þe pryue þinges of deuinytee ben kouerid and hid vnder þe souereyn-schinyng derknes of wisest silence, makyng þe souereyn-clerest souereynly for to schine priuely in þe derkyst. (Hodgson, *Deonise* 3)

Will's withdrawal into darkness therefore constitutes far more than a reference to the darkness which covered the world at Christ's death. It enacts for the reader who knows the language of "hid diuinite" that withdrawal into darkness necessary for understanding to shine in the mind, "souereynli fulfillyng wiþ ful fayre cleertes alle þoo soules þat ben not hauyng i3en of mynde" (Hodgson, *Deonise* 3). And, just as the prayer of St. Denis asks, the withdrawal of Will into darkness quickly brings into this vision the light of Christ.

Though this allegory of the Four Daughters of God as *Piers Plowman* presents it reflects certain contemplative language, this fact alone does not necessarily support any particular means, such as meditation, of reaching the perception of light achieved in the vision. The contrast this scene presents among the Four Daughters, and particularly the appearance of Peace and the words of her patent both

tip the balance toward the contemplative way as the means of understanding. Peace arrives "pleyng, in pacience yclothed" (XVIII 167). Her being clothed in patience is underscored four lines later when she approaches "in pacience yclothed" (XVIII 171) and Justice reverences her for her rich clothing (XVIII 172). Throughout *Piers Plowman B*, clothing oneself in patience by one's actions has led to understanding, not least in this very scene where Will's unquestioning withdrawal into the covering of darkness has brought the light of this vision. Truth and Justice are pictured in this very scene as more rigid, argumentative and busy than Mercy and Peace. Truth calls Mercy's report of the history Mercy has already witnessed "a tale of waltrot" (XVIII 142); Truth's ignoring the truth Mercy tells because of Truth's fixation on another "sothe," that "that is ones in helle, out cometh it nevere" (XVIII 148), presents a strong irony undermining Truth's position. Justice comes "rennyng" (XVIII 164), like the busy "bidders and beggares [who] faste aboute yede" in the Prologue (40), to accuse Peace that she is raving or must be "right dronke" (XVIII 187). Her anger in asserting reason and her frantic activity and high emotion belie her assertion that reason supports her contentions. Mercy, on the other hand, has seen Jesus' birth and death, and reports the truth of its meaning: "[T]hat is cause of this clips that closeth now the sonne,/In menyng that man shal fro merknesse be drawe" (XVIII 135-136). Her position is supported by the Christian reader's agreement that she speaks historical truth. Similarly, the Christian reader would agree that Peace's statement that "Jesus justede wel, joye bigynneth dawe" (XVIII 180) and the sisters should

dance (XVIII 179) is a correct view, and that therefore Peace speaks truth as did Mercy. The allegory thus emphasizes perception of truth, which Peace and Mercy offer, over the insistence upon logic in argument made by Truth and Justice.

Moreover, Peace brings with her a patent sent her by Love “[t]hat Mercy, my suster, and I mankynde sholde save, / And that God hath forgyve and graunted me, Pees, and Mercy / To be mannes meynper-nour for everemoore after” (XVIII 182-184). The words of this patent reveal that the contemplative way is the way to understand truth for it says, “*In pace in idipsum*, / And that this dede shal dure, *dormiam et requiescam* [‘In peace in the selfsame,’ and that this document shall always be valid, ‘I will sleep and I will rest’]” (XVIII 185-186; Schmidt, *Vision* 225n). These words explicitly emphasize, as did the passages on jangling and business, that sleeping and resting rather than waking and acting ensure the peace of salvation. Peace’s patience and her patent have accorded her the knowledge that “hadde thei wist of no wo, wele hadde thei nocht knowen; / For no wight woot what wele is, that nevere wo suffrede” (XVIII 204-205). This is the knowledge that will reconcile the paradox, and it is proven valid by the appearance of Book who bears witness, as did Mercy who is paired with Peace, to the birth and death of Christ and then by the appearance of the spirit who breaks the gates of Hell. After Christ appears, the poem returns once again to the issue, reiterating yet one more time that “Pees, thorough pacience, alle perils stoppede” (XVIII 417). The response of the others demonstrates in their accord the efficacy of her patience and her patent:

'Trewes!' quod Truthe; 'thow tellest us sooth, by Jesus!
 Clippe we in covaunt, and ech of us kisse oother.'
 'And lete no peple,' quod Pees, 'parceyve that we chidde;
 For impossible is no thyng to Hym that is almyghty.'
 'Thow seist sooth,' side Rightwisnesse, and reverentliche
 hire kiste,

Pees, and Pees h[i]re, *per secula seculorum.*

*Misericordia et Veritas obviaverunt sibi; Iusticia et
 Pax osculate sunt.*

Truthe trumpede tho and song *Te Deum laudamus*;
 And thanne lutede Love in a loud note,
 'Ecce quam bonum et quam iocundum &c.'
 Til the day dawed thise damyseles carolden,
 That men rongen to the resurexion. (XVIII 418-427)

The weight of the argument as the action of *Piers Plowman B* presents it therefore falls to Peace, patience, the patent to sleep and rest, and therefore to the *Ego dormio* tradition of patient contemplation.

Within that tradition, the poem has just let us witness illumination following conversion. The purpose of illumination, as Chapter One explained, is a change in perception which will lead to a change in action. The mystic will, by illumination, understand more of God's design and be led to practice true charity. If the Dreamer's vision is legitimate illumination, then, he should be led by his vision to charitable action in the waking world. And such action immediately occurs. The Dreamer wakes to take several right actions:

... rightwith that I wakede,
 And called Kytte my wif and Calote my doghter:

'Ariseth and reverenceth Goddes resurexion,
 And crepeth to the cros on knees, and kisseth
 it for a juwel!⁴

For Goddes blissede body it bar for oure boote,
 And it afereth the fend—for swich is the myghte,
 May no grisly goost glide there it shadweth!

Thus I awaked and wroot what I hadde ydremed,
 And dighte me derely, and dide me to chirche,
 To here holly the masse and to be housled after.

(XVIII 428-XIX 3)

For the first time since the poem began, he turns to those closest to him—those toward whom, by medieval lights, he bears responsibility for direction and guidance—in a concern for their salvation as well as his own. For the first time in the poem, he behaves as most would agree a Christian should, dressing respectfully and leaving his wandering to go obediently to church, leading his family there. Last, he writes what he has dreamed not, as before, to question it nor ponder over it as a strange wonder, but to record it, to place it where hearts can find it again.

With this new obedience and patience, according to the rubric, the third movement of the poem ends and the fourth begins: "*Rubric Passus xixus: explicit dobet et incipit dobest*" (Schmidt, *Vision* 235n). Immediately "[i]n myddes of the masse, tho men yede to offryng, / I fel eftsones aslepe" (XIX 4-5). Many critics point to this sleep as evidence that the Dreamer is an incorrigible "lorel," a wastrel who

⁴ It is worth noting here that he bids his wife and daughter to creep and not to run to worship (XVIII 430), to move slowly like Peace rather than to run like Justice.

cannot learn discipline. Certainly his sleep in the middle of the offertory suggests a possible return of sloth, sending him into sleep rather than giving of himself or his substance. The patent of Peace in the last vision, emphasizing sleep and rest as it does, should lead a reader to reconsider this interpretation, however, as do the words of St. Bernard concerning falling asleep during devotion. Bernard says,

The sick man has had his food and drink; what should he do now but take his ease and let the sweat of his labors dry while he enjoys the quiet of contemplation? Falling asleep in the midst of his prayer he dreams of God; what he sees is a dim reflection in a mirror, not a vision face to face. However, although it be but a vague apprehension and not an actual vision, a fleeting glimpse of the sparkling glory as it passes, utterly delicate in its impact, yet he burns with love. . . . A love like this is full of zeal. (Walsh 138)

Bernard thus validates sleep during devotion as an act in loving God rather than a slothful disregard or rejection of Him. While a substantive difference between "devotion" and the offertory during mass might be argued, the fact remains that Bernard in this passage justifies sleep as an extension of devotion rather than a counter to it. Bernard also clarifies in this passage the kind of contemplation such a sleep represents: this is not the deepest contemplation of mystic union, this is not "Benjamin;" his is the contemplation of a pilgrim somewhere in the middle of his journey. This sleep of the Dreamer during mass thus constitutes yet another demonstration that he is a relative beginner progressing along the contemplative path.

One might ask why the author would choose to present this

information in a form so easily misread as criticism of a slothful Dreamer. All through this poem, however, the “foolish” have been revealed to have wisdom, those who are “pleyinge” have held the patents of salvation, while those who deal well in the world constantly twist truth away from real understanding. Here, perhaps, the poem’s form functions to conceal from readers who are simply worldly, those interested only in its social messages, the deeper message it reserves to those interested in the mystics’ path, hiding the gnostic in the cloak of its language just as the world hides gnosis in the cloak of its phenomena. Perhaps we see here the same reserve about sharing knowledge as that expressed by the *Cloud* author when he warns his reader to keep this book from all except those who are “(by þi supposing) in a trewe wille & by an hole entent, purposed him to be a parfite folower of Criste” (Hodgson, *Cloud* 2).

We need not depend on extra-textual evidence wholly, however, in considering the import of this sleep during the mass. Seconding the notion of the sleep as contemplation rather than sloth is the content of the dream which ensues. The Dreamer sees Christ himself, in Piers’ arms, and learns once again, this time from Conscience, what Dowel, Dobet and Dobest mean. His conscience bids him kneel

... and thanne cam, me thoughte,
 Oon *Spiritus Paraclitus* to Piers and to hise felawes.
 In liknesse of a lightnyng he lighte on hem alle
 And made hem konne and knowe alle kynne langages.
 I wondred what that was, and waggede Conscience,
 And was afered of the light, for in fires liknesse

Spiritus Paraclitus overspradde hem alle.
(XIX 201-207)

Because despite his fear, he kneels and sings and calls by Conscience's prompting "Help us, God of grace!" (XIX 213), Grace appears and he is allowed to witness Grace's grant to humankind of "tresor, / And wepne to fighte with whan Antecrist yow assailleth" (XIX 226-227). He sees Grace grant to Piers all he needs for the tilling of truth: the plowing team of the four gospels, the harrowing team of the four church fathers, the seeds which are the four cardinal virtues, the materials for building the barn of Unity-Holy Church which include the cross, the crown of thorns, the passion, and Holy Writ, and "a cart highte Cristendome, to carie home Piers sheves" (XIX 332). This vision, so hopeful at first, as Piers and Grace leave to walk "as wide as the world is . . . to tilie trithe" (XIX 335), degenerates, like all the others except that of the Harrowing of Hell, into jangling and chaos as corrupt living disrupts the tilling of this gracious harvest and corrupts the virtues for limited human ends. The Dreamer "awakned therwith and wroot as me mette" (XIX 485), again recording without questioning the significance of what he has seen, and by this act transmitting this vision to others just as he earlier transmitted his new zeal to his wife and daughter by calling them to go to reverence the resurrection when he woke at the end of Passus XVIII. His vision has therefore once again resulted in charitable action in the world, an action which by its charity lends credence to the validity of the vision.

His acceptance is not free from emotion, however, as "[h]evy

chered I yede, and elenge in herte" (XX 2). His consciousness is so changed by his meditations that Nede, an allegorical figure, appears to his fully waked self. As *The Cloud of Unknowing* says, "[B]y vertewe of þis werk sinne is not only distroied, bot also vertewes ben getyn" (5). The effects of following the contemplative way are such that one's entire life is affected by its virtue:

For & it be treuly conceyuid, alle vertewes scholen be sotely & parfitely conceyuid & felid comprehendid in it, wiþ-outen any medeling of þe entent. & haue a man neuer so many vertewes wiþ-outen it, alle þei ben medelid wiþ sum crokid entent, for þe whiche þei ben inparfite.
(Hodgson, *Cloud* 39)

That there is such a continuity between his visions and his life, and that this continuity results in more perfect virtue is demonstrated by the content of his argument with Nede. In the vision from which he has just waked, he watched three of the seeds of grace corrupted by human sin. The brewer and his fellows defy Justice and Conscience (XIX 399-400), and lords and kings distort *Spiritus Intellectus*, *Spiritus Fortitudinis*, and *Spiritus Justicie* to their own purposes (XIX 462-479). Now Nede defies these three virtues and challenges the Dreamer to distort the meaning of the fourth virtue, *Spiritus Temperancie*, himself, to justify his taking whatever he needs, asserting that "nede ne hath no lawe" (XX 10). Thus the attack on virtues begun by the estates of society in a dream in Passus XIX now moves to involve the Dreamer personally, and in his waking state. The deep changes in the Dreamer become apparent both in this move of signification into the

Dreamer's waking world and by his refusal to accept Nede's argument to corrupt virtue himself. Instead, he responds by falling asleep once more to dream "ful merveillously that in mannes form / Antecrist cam thanne" (XX 52-53).

The events of this last dream are usually read as prophetic apocalypse; certainly they indict clearly and severely the corruption within the body of the medieval church, indictments rehearsed so often by so many critics I will not rehearse them here. They are also read as an echo of the vision of Fortune and Middle Earth of Passus XI, with the earlier vision seen as focused on the secular world and this later dream as focused on the world of the church. Certainly the two do form such a pair. Additionally, they pair by constituting two views of the Dreamer's life. The dream of Fortune is prospective, showing the Dreamer what following Fortune will make of his life. This later dream of "Antecrist" is, on the other hand, retrospective, demonstrating what he has made of the life he passed when "[w]olleward and weetsloed went I forth... /And yede forth like a lorel al my lif tyme / Til I weex wery of the world and wilned eft to slepe" (XVIII 1, 3-4). So, if the pattern made by the literal events thus far in the poem does indeed enact an attempt by the Dreamer to follow the contemplative path, as this thesis has tried to demonstrate, then on that literal level "Unitee" as the place in Passus XX into which the will must enter means something other than joining the body of Christians as a Christian in the Church. First, the Dreamer has already done that in Passus XIX at the end of "Dobet" when he went "derely dight" to church. Second, the vision of Passus XIX in

which Grace grants Piers the means to till and harvest truth designates the cart as Christendom (XIX 332). "Dobest" and Unitee within the Dreamer must mean one step more.

In fact, this use of the image of a church echoes the words of *Benjamin Minor* which state,

And perfore whatso pou be þat coueytest to come to contemplacioun of God, þat is to sey, to bryng forþe soche a childe þat men clepyn in þe story Beniamyn, þat is to sey, si3t of god: þan schalt pou use þee in þis maner. Pou schalt clepe togeders þi þou3tes & þi desires, and make of hem a chirche, & lerne þee þerin for to loue. (Hodgson, *Deonise* 45)

Benjamin Minor describes this church as being built of both "þou3tes and desires" and "in this oneheed of studies & of willes" (46). Unitee Holy Church is just such a structure, built within the Dreamer through his long series of visions out of his studies of the Gospels, the Church fathers, the Old Law and the New, and out of his hard-won understanding of the cardinal virtues within himself and in the God-made ordering of the world. Furthermore, when Will asks Kynde to bring him "[o]ut of care" (XX 201), and then what craft he is to learn, Kynde's answer confirms by its echo of *Benjamin Minor* that Will is to follow the contemplative path. "[W]end into Unitee," Kynde says, "And hold thee there evere, til I sende for thee; / And loke thow konne som craft ere thow come thennes" (XX 204-206). If Unitee meant only the body of the earthly, institutional church, this would be useless advice since the Dreamer has already gone willingly into Unity in this sense in Passus XIX. "Lerne to love," he continues, "and leef

alle othere" (XX 208), echoing the very words of *Benjamin Minor* cited above and thus making clear the new meaning of Unitee as that place within the Dreamer where contemplation, or Benjamin, can be born. Will's entry into Unitee in Passus XX therefore brings the Dreamer from his vision of Unitee as the exterior church granted by Grace to Piers and all humankind, including himself, to a sojourn in the church within himself within which he may learn to love. In this way, entry into Unitee in Passus XX constitutes a further advance along the contemplative path for the Dreamer. The fourth movement of the poem, "Dobest," thus exemplifies the Dreamer's attempt to move from illumination to the grace of union.

The first action within this final dream connects its events with the Dreamer's personal struggle. Antecrist turns the crop of truth "up-so-doun, and overtilte the roote, / And made fals sprynge and sprede and spede mennes nedes" (XX 54-55). This labeling of need as the crop raised by Antecrist demonstrates that the Dreamer has been right to ignore Nede, and that the struggles pictured in the Dreamer's visions are his own struggles, not merely those he observes around him. This notion is reinforced when he is not allowed merely to watch the battle between the forces of Antecrist and those of Kynde fighting on behalf of Conscience. As Elde attacks Lif, says the Narrator, "over myn heed yede; / And made me balled bifore and bare on the croune" (XX 183-184). His protests make Elde turn on him more savagely, leaving him deaf, toothless, arthritic and impotent. His pain drives him to cry out to Kynde to bring him out of care and to avenge his pain (XX 201-203). Kynde tells him, as we just saw, to go into Unitee

and learn to love.

In Passus XX Love is defined by its opposition, as Conscience makes clear when he tells the friars that they can hold themselves in Unity if they "leve logik and [lerne] for to lovye" (XX 250). Love is thus identified as an opposite to rational means of knowing. Love is to know deeply, to know from the deepest heart. This is the same lesson we saw exemplified in the debate of the Four Daughters of God in Passus XVIII. When Conscience now cites the examples of Francis and Dominic who left land and school "for love to be holye" (XX 252), he further divides loving from both learning and possessing. A few lines later, Envy reconnects them, thus illustrating how love becomes corrupted, when he "heet freres go to schole/And lerne logyk and lawe—and ek contemplacion—/And preche men of Plato and preve it by Seneca" (XX 273-275). Under Envy's advice, then, friars, by adding logic and law to their contemplation, which thus becomes a poor third sister in their activities, distort the mystic lesson taught by the founders of their order. The negative example of how contemplation is corrupted presented here by Envy buttresses by contrast the positive view of Dominic, Francis, Bernard, Benedict, and other contemplatives presented by Anima in Passus XV when he says to Will :

Ancrez and heremytes and monkes and freres
 Peeren to Apostles thorough hire parfit lyvyng.
 Wolde nevere the feithful Fader that his ministres sholde
 Of tiraunts that teneth trewe men taken any almesse,
 But doon as Antony dide, Dominyk and Fraunceys,
 Beneit and Bernard bothe, which hem first taughte

To lyve by litel and lowe houses by lele mennes almesse.
 Grace sholde growe and be grene thorough hir goode lyvyng.
 (XV 415-422)

Not only does Anima thus divide perfect living, or the contemplative way, from possessive living, but in speaking of Bernard, he also asserts contemplation over logic as a means of knowing. He quotes Bernard in indicting scholastic means of knowing, saying,

Coveitise to konne and to knowe science
 Putte out of Paradis Adam and Eve:
Sciencie appetitus hominem immortalitatis gloriam spoliavit
 [The longing for knowledge deprived man of the glory
 of immortality],
 And right as hony is yvel to defie and engleymeth the mawe,
 Right so that thorough reson wolde the roote knowe
 Of God and of his grete myghtes—his grace it letteth.
 (XV 62-66; Schmidt, *Vision* 178n)

Contemplation is thus specifically singled out by the poem, and logic specifically called inadequate, as the means for perfect knowing. Thus when Kynde echoes the very words of the *Benjamin Minor* in telling Will to enter Unity and learn to love, he implies, to those who understand the contemplative view of how one comes to knowledge, that he is bidding Will to devote himself even more fully to the contemplative means of knowing “in þis chirche of þou3tes and desires, & in þis oneheed of studies & of willes” (Hodgson, *Deonise* 46).

As we saw in Chapter One, contrition and confession are necessary

steps on this path as well as on the noncontemplative path to salvation, and the Dreamer's will accordingly bends himself to go "[t]horough Contricion and Confession til I cam to Unitee" (XX 213). From this entry into Unity until the end of the poem, the action depicts the struggles of the will and the conscience to remain within that loving place. Conscience is attacked by Covetousness, Unkindness and Hypocrisy. More subtly and dangerously, inability to do sharp penance leads Contrition to suggest that Conscience allow an easier penancer, "Frere Flaterere" (XX 316), who is admitted by Conscience's own soldiers Peace and Fair Speech. Once admitted, this false friar disarms Contrition until he "hadde clene foryeten to crye and to wepe / And wake for his wikked werkes as he was wont to doone" (XX 370). As a result, Sloth and Pride renew their attacks upon Conscience. When Conscience cries for help from Clergy and Contricion, Peace tells him they all lie enchanted by Friar Flatterer. This sequence dramatizes the difficulty of remaining impassioned and contrite even though, like the Dreamer, one has felt deeply one's own sinfulness and the grace of Christ's sacrifice. The contemplative texts warn that the contemplative may feel "þat he may not last in felyng of þat goostly joye for þe corrupcioun of flesche, of þe whiche corrupcioun synne is þe cause" (Hodgson, *Deonise* 33-34). Just so, the Dreamer beset by his own pride, sloth, covetousness, unkindness and hypocrisy—all sins we have watched him commit over the course of this long poem—experiences difficulty in remaining in Unity. His struggle continues as his conscience goes off to seek Piers and, the Narrator reports, "siththe he gradde after Grace til I gan awake" (XX

387). The poem thus concludes with Conscience seeking Grace while Will waits and the Dreamer remains suspended within this last of his visions. The existence of the poem indicates, of course, that he finally wakes, to write once more, for we have just read the text of this last vision.

The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost identifies why it is fitting that Conscience, not Will, go off in search of Piers and Grace, for in the *Charter* Conscience is the ground whereon grace builds:

... a lytel precieuse place þat is Clepid Conscience, þat liþ in here soules by-twixen a place þat is clepid Resoun, þe which knoweþ good & wykke, on þat o sydde, and a place þat is I-clepid Synderisys, þe whiche steriþ a man to good & grucchiþ agens wykke, on þat opere sydde; whos on ende is fastened be þe grace of god, þorou whiche euerey man may don wel 3if he wylle; & þe oper ende liþ in ioye & merþe of þe soule, [3if] it be clene out of þe filþe of synne. Pis holy place... in þe whiche he hym-self made a noble hous of religioun, þat is clepide þe abbeye of þe holy gost, in the whyche he put manye gostly ladyes, þat is to seye gode vertues, amonge whiche he made damysel Loue and Charite abbese. (Horstman I 338-339)

The poem's ending thus clarifies once again the relationship between Will, the Dreamer and such figures as Conscience. Will and Conscience dwell within the Dreamer, aspects of his consciousness. Conscience is the means by which he seeks Grace. Will is the zeal which focuses his attention upon his contemplation, which returns him again and again to instructive visions, and which learns the patience necessary to benefit from them. This function of the zealous will is stated in the

Charter when it explains:

A dameselle wyse & wele taghte þat mene calles Gelosye, þat es ay wakyre and besy euer ylyke wele for to do, sall kepe þe orloge, and sall wakkyne þe oper ladyse & make þame arely to ryse and go þe wylylere to þaire seruysse. . . . selly are tho sawles þat þe lufe of god and longyng till him wakyns, and slomers noghte no slepis noghte in slowthe of fleschly lustes! For-thi he sayse in Canticis: *Ego dormio et cor meum vigelat*, þat is at say: "when I slepe bodily my flesche for to ese & ryste, my herte es ay wakyre in gelosy and in lufe-þernynge to gode." That saule þat þus wakes to god, may thynke with hole consyence þat werldly mene thynke, and es this: Ieo ay le quer a-loche, rauayle par amours, þat es at say: "Myne herte es styrte fro me, wakened with lufe". What es this þat mase þe herte fro þe flesche to wake, and for þat es as it were fremde to hyme? witterly, Ieloussye with lufe-teres & murnynge, with lufe-longynge consaruede in deuote vprysynge of herte. (Horstman I 334-335)

Though the use of the *Ego dormio* image differs somewhat from its use in *Piers Plowman B*, zealousness, or the bending of the will toward God, is in both texts an important feature in the soul's crying for God. As Rissanen says, explaining how *The Cloud of Unknowing* sees the role of the will at this final stage of movement from illumination to union, "Something must remain, in this case a sense of purpose, an intention, a consciousness of what one is doing and aiming at. This is what the [*Cloud*] author means by his expression 'a naked intent'" (141). So at the end of *Piers Plowman B* the Dreamer is left, with his will and conscience, crying alone, continuing to bend his intent, his will, upon the search for grace, continuing the love-longing

in love-tears and mourning that may lead to the joining of his conscience to grace if grace so deems.

In this entire sequence, beginning even before Will's swoon, *Piers Plowman B* enacts the progression described by the *Benjamin Minor*. As we observed above, in that text the soul first learns Abstinence and Patience (Hodgson, *Deonise* 26) which lead to Joy of Inward Sweetness (30). The soul is still trapped, however, in "þis deedly body" (32), still needing food, drink and clothing just as Nede reminds the Dreamer he does. Joy of Inward Sweetness precedes Hate of Sin, in which "þe feelyng of goostly ioie techiþ a man what synne harmiþ þe soule; and after þe harme in a soule is felt, moche or lytyl, þerafter is þe hatereden mesurid vnto þe harmyng" (33); sights like the leper in Faith's lap demonstrate this result of the Dreamer's "felyng of goostly ioie" on hearing Piers' name. And, just as the *Benjamin Minor* warns, and we have seen before, joy does not last "for þe corrupcioun of flesche" (34) caused by sin, a pattern repeated over and over for the Dreamer in vision after vision. Through much travail the contemplative finally gains Discretion (39), that is, to "be rewlyd after counsel" (41), and, just so, the Dreamer's will finally learns to listen, to ask Kynde, and to be ruled by his advice. Last, says the *Benjamin Minor*, Benjamin is born who is Contemplation, which is "to know the vnseable þingis of þe spirit of God" (42). The poem shows us some of the dark mysteries, as we saw earlier in the discussion of the debate of the Four Daughters of God, but it concludes within the last dream rather than showing us what more the Dreamer may have seen before he woke to write once more. We therefore are not allowed to know

whether the Dreamer achieved the final state of union or failed to do so.

This very ending, however, according to the *Benjamin Minor*, since it shows us the Dreamer burning, by means of his conscience and his will, in “þe loue of God, þat is when þou felist contynowely þin herte desire after þe loue of God” (43), shows us a Dreamer in the state called “contemplation” since “3if [the soul] hope for to haue þat þat it desireþ, wite it wel þat it hap conceyuid Beniamyn” (44). The poem, ending as it does without destroying such hope, thus allows for the possibility that Benjamin has been conceived, if not yet born. Last, as we’ve seen, *Piers Plowman B* echoes the specific directives of the *Benjamin Minor* which tells the contemplative:

Pou schalt clepe togeders þi þou3tes & þi desires, and make þee of hem a chirche, & lerne þee þerin for to loue only þis good worde Jhesu, . . . And þan, in þis chirche of þou3tes an desires, & in þis oneheed of studies & of willes . . . pacyently abidyng þe wille of oure Lorde, vnto þe tyme þat þi mynde be rauschid abouen itself to be fed wip þe feire foode of aungelles in þe beholdyng of God & godly þinges.
(45-46)

This passage promises what *Piers Plowman B* leaves unstated, that the contemplative “pacyently abidyng þe wille of oure Lorde” (46), in this church made within himself of his thought, his desire, his studies and his will, may indeed achieve the time when the mind will be ravished above itself to behold God. In just these terms, *Piers Plowman B*’s last line depicts the Dreamer’s will patiently abiding

Conscience's finding Grace. What happens next is concealed by silence.

By concealing from the reader both the knowledge of the result of Conscience's search and the vision which success in that search may have brought, the poem forces the reader away from dependence upon its words as a guide, propelling him or her into an individual understanding of the search for personal discovery of truth. The poem thus asserts for the reader the limits of instruction to say that "kynde knowynge" can point the way, but the seeker must follow the path him or herself just as the Dreamer did. Further, by withholding a final vision of union, the poem does not assert knowledge beyond the Narrator's authority. The Narrator does not, for instance, presume to claim grace. He has shown us that Will and Conscience can bring us to a state of readiness for grace, can understand the lesson Kynde teaches us—to learn to love—and he has shown us that Kynde and Conscience cannot keep Will safe in Unity. Finally, the logic of his narrative indicates that the Narrator must have waked from his dream to perform the work of writing this text for his readers, an act we may read as charity in the same way we may read the Dreamer's taking his wife and child to church as a properly charitable act in the world. The existence of the text thus closes the circle uniting the Narrator's contemplative practice with his active life. The circle closes, however, without disclosing to the reader whether or not the Dreamer has found the vision of Piers, the "hid diuinite," the unity and love he sought.

CHAPTER V

THE LEGITIMACY OF VISION

If *Piers Plowman B* is indeed the *exemplum* of contemplative practices I've claimed it to be, why does it conceal the fact rather than reveal it? Why does it speak "in code" as it were, disclosing the *sentence* of its surface only to that reader familiar with the contemplative texts? In this final chapter I will argue that this concealment is occasioned, first, by the problems of ascertaining the godliness of one's visions and of assuming the authority to make fictions, and, second, by the admonitions issued within the contemplative texts concerning claiming authority. Last, I will suggest some of the implications for reading the text that result from its grappling with these problems.

And here we reach the questions with which the Dreamer has struggled from the beginning of the poem: are these visions "ferlies" and marvels, or have they deeper meaning? Are his own writings legitimate work, or mere jangling? If the answer to the first question is that they are mere "ferlies," the answer to the second question is that his writings are merely jangling. The crucial issue in regard to the writings, then, is the authority to decide on the truths of the

visions.

This dilemma of the truth of their visions faced every contemplative, as their histories attest. In general, two challenges could be posed to individual religious experience, challenges not unique to fourteenth century seekers after truth but questions posed regarding religious experience in our own time as well. The first asks whether the experience is holy or evil, of God or of the Devil. The second questions the authority of the experience by questioning the authority of the experiencer. Both questions are raised in the mystic literature of the fourteenth century, where the first is given primacy, and both are raised in the B-text of *Piers Plowman*.

The first challenge is typified by the passage from *The Cloud of Unknowing* discussed in Chapter One above, where the *Cloud* author trivializes intense affective and physical responses to such experiences of unity as those reported by Richard Rolle. In this passage he warns the young disciple against straining for these sorts of dramatic experiences, for, he says, "[P]ei wene it be þe fiir of loue, getyn & kyndelid by þe grace & þe goodnes of þe Holy Goost. Treuly" he warns, "of þis disceite, & of þe brouches þer-of, spryngyn many mescheues: moche ypocrisie, moche heresy, & moche errour" (Hodgson, *Cloud* 86). He cautions that such seeking leads to "an vnkyndely hete of compleccion" and "a fals hete" (86). By using terms so similar to Rolle's *calor*, *canor*, *dulcor*, and by his direct reference to "þe fiir of loue"—Rolle's *Incendium Amoris*—he makes clear the target of his attack.

He explains the reason for his attack in later chapters, where he

emphasizes that what he seeks for his disciple is the "hid schewyng [to] bryng þee oute of þe boistouste of bodely felyng into þe purete & depnes of goostly felyng; & so forþermore at þe last to help þee to knit þe goostly knot of brennyng loue bitwix þee & þi God, in goostly onheed & acordyng of wille" (88). This is done by a passive waiting for God, in which the disciple is directed to "sit ful styлле, as it were in a slepyng slei3t, al forsobbid & for-sonken in sorow" (83), though this must be done with proper measure: "[B]ewar in þis werk, & streyne not þin hert in þi brest ouer-rudely, ne oute of mesure; bot wirche more wip a list þen wip any liþer strengþe" (87). The *Cloud* author, then, because of his focus on the "hid schewyng" or the hidden divinity, seeks to direct his disciple's attention away from physical manifestation of ecstasy and toward complete detachment from the world, detachment even from the possible delights of emotional transport as the soul is ravished by God.

For St. Edmund Rich, too, whose *Mirror* appears in the Vernon manuscript, certain kinds of vision must be transcended if the soul is to rise to God. The first step, he says, is "þat þe soule turne to himself and gedere him all wip-Inne him-self" (Horstman I 259). Then it must "seo what he is whon he is so gedered to-gedere" and, third, "heue hire-self abouen hire-self and enforce hire to sen god hire creatour in his oune kynde. But to hire-self ne mai he neuer-more comen til þat he haue lerned forte 3ein-stonden and wipholden alle Manere of ymaginacions bodili or worldli or heuenely... þat he seo hire-self such w3uch þat he is al wipouten þe bodi" (259). Once one has seen the soul, one then attempts to recognize God's "swet-

nesse, . . . bounte, and . . . his ffeirnesse," which one does by comparison with all good and sweet and beautiful things on earth (260). But then, "whon þou hast in þis Manere se3en þi Creatour in si3t of his creatures, put out of þin herte vche bodilyche ymaginacion, and lift þin on entendement a-bouen alle resun of Mon: [&] þere þou schalt fynden so gret swetnesse, and so gret priuite, þat non may felen but he þat hit hap preued" (260). Here, visions are not so much suspect as inadequate for the full knowing that the mystic seeks and hopes for.

Hilton, on the other hand, provides a test for evaluating extreme physical responses to meditation in which he asserts their true validity. He describes, first, the individualized nature of meditations of men converted to God: "You must understand that in meditation there is no certain, well-established rule every man must always follow. For meditations come from the free gift of our Lord to chosen souls" (Del Mastro, *Stairway* 104). Thus he allows for a variety of manifestations to the experience of grace, and for comparing these experiences to those with Scriptural authority: "This is made clear by what happened to the Apostles on Pentecost . . . they were filled with burning love by the Holy Spirit" (104). By using the same term that the *Cloud* author uses in his criticism of Rolle, Hilton implies his acceptance of such manifestations. He calls this experience "the physical love of God, as Saint Bernard names it" (107), thus linking to Bernard's authority his own assertion that visions of Christ accompanied by extreme emotion physically expressed are holy experiences. Then he says:

When this meditation is made by the Holy Spirit, it is very profitable and grace-filled. You'll recognize His work by this sign.

You are stirred to meditation by God and suddenly your thought is driven from all worldly and fleshly things. You seem to see in your soul the physical appearance of your Lord Jesus as He was on earth. Then you seem to see how He was taken by the Jews, bound like a thief, beaten and despised, scourged and condemned to death. You seem to see how meekly he carried the cross on His back, and how cruelly He was nailed to it. You also seem to see the crown of thorns on His head, and the sharp spear that pierced Him to the heart.

In these spiritual sights, you feel your heart rise up in such great compassion and pity for our Lord Jesus that you moan, weep and cry out with all the powers of your body and soul. . . .

At the same time, nevertheless, you experience so much goodness and mercy in our Lord that your heart rises up with many sweet tears into love and gladness because of him. . . .

When the thought of Christ's Passion or any aspect of his manhood is made vivid in your heart in this way—by such a spiritual sight with devout affection answering to it—then you may be sure that this work is not of your own doing, nor is it done by a wicked spirit, but by grace of the Holy Spirit. For it is an opening of the spiritual eye into Christ's manhood. (106-107)

In this passage, then, not only is the legitimacy of emotional reaction asserted by Hilton's relying on Bernard, but the vision of Christ is asserted as the proof of the legitimacy of the experience.

This vision of Christ becomes crucial in the progress of the soul toward God. First, Hilton says, "no man can come to the contemplation of Christ's godhead unless he is first reformed by the fullness of meekness and charity to the likeness of Jesus in His manhood" (187). In other words, the reform of soul necessary to reach the unity with

God denoted by the word "contemplation" only happens by means of meditations which bring up the vision of Christ and thus allow the seeker to become humble by the "physical love of God." Next, this mediate experience is distinguished from the "lively experience of grace" which "enlivens the soul wonderfully and makes him whole" (315). Visions do not fade away in Hilton's schema, nor are they suspect, as they are for the *Cloud* author, for in this lively state of grace, Hilton says, the soul enters a state of waking sleep:

And this grace is also *the waking sleep of the spouse*, of which Holy Scripture says, '*Ego dormio, et cor meum vigilat*'. That is, I sleep but my heart is awake. That means, I sleep spiritually when, through grace, the love of the world is slain in me, and the wicked movements of flesh-governed desires are dead . . . My heart is made free, and then 'it is awake,' for it is sharp and ready to love Jesus and see Him. . . .

Through this 'sleep' the soul is brought into rest from the noise of flesh-governed lusts, and through 'waking,' the soul is raised up to the sight of Jesus and spiritual things. The more that the eyes are 'shut' to the appetite for earthly things in this kind of 'sleep,' the sharper is the inner sight in the love-filled contemplation of Heavenly beauty. (315-316)

That Hilton, the *Cloud* author, and St. Edmund Rich can differ so from each other, not just from Rolle, on the validity of visions indicates how difficult evaluation of such ineffable experience is, even for those of obvious churchly credentials such as these three. The history of such lay mystics as Rolle, here criticized by clerics as we just observed, and Margery Kempe who battled such skepticism all her life, demonstrates how much more these experiences are doubted

by others when reported by those lacking clerical authority.

The controversies swirling about Margery Kempe illustrate how complex were these issues, involving both the truth of the visions and the authority which their truth might grant:

Once Margery developed an interior life dedicatedly biased on these lines [her revelations], she commanded rapt confessorial attention. Priests were agitated or excited by what she claimed as real spiritual experiences, such as they had only read about in modish treatises. Some of those inclined to accept the validity of her revelations were nevertheless prey to suspicions that she was a pious fraud, suspicions stirred by the oddity of her physical symptoms and the scepticism of colleagues. Some critics were probably scandalised that a married woman, whose past worldliness was notorious in Lynn, laid claim to superior enlightenment, which they considered appropriate only to those who, like Dame Julian at Norwich, were *reclusa*. But the celibate sympathies of other priests were engaged by the dilemmas of wives such as Margery who grieved for their lost virginity and the necessity of fulfilling marital obligations. . . . Clerics' doubts were often reinforced, and their opposition was often provoked, by Margery's suspect facility in quoting and glossing holy writ, and in telling homilies. She threatened to usurp priestly prerogatives and, like [St.] Bridget, denounced priestly faults. (Baker, *Women* 254-255)

Added here to the doubts about her visions are questions involving her marital status and her right as a lay person to speak what she claims she knows. All these doubts, plus a doubt concerning the activity of writing itself, appear in *Piers Plowman B* in the questions the Dreamer raises.

By raising these questions, the poem grapples with the issues of

lay devotion to contemplation and lay discussion of theology that were being argued vigorously in the fourteenth century. Coleman points out that as early as the 1330s "Ockham could complain that laymen and old women bothered Oxford lecturers about the question of free will" (263) and that one of the seven major subjects of complaint in the complaint literature was "complaints against laymen involving themselves inappropriately in theological discussions" (66). These are apart from the "counter-attack of the anti-Lollard literature" (66), she says. In addition to the complaint literature, some of the contemplative literature evidences the controversy of who is to be religious, and how. *The Charter of the Abbey of the Holy Ghost* and *The Cloud of Unknowing* were written for lay readers, not for clerics. Hilton's *Mixed Life*, another Vernon manuscript text, is not, as is often thought, a discussion of how the episcopate should mingle their active lives running the church with their contemplative lives as religious. Instead, the Vernon manuscript says this is a "luitel Boc þat was writen to a worldli lord to teche him hou he schulde haue him in his state in ordeynd loue to god and to his euen cristene" (Horstman II 264). That Hilton does indeed address his remarks to such a lord is made clear when he tells this lord that his obligation to "ruile & gouerne þin houshold, þi children, þi seruauns, þi neiȝebors, and þi tenauntes" (267) must keep him active in the world despite his desire to attend only to "gostly werkes of contemplatyf lyf" (267). In other words, Hilton's book attempts to define for a man living in the world and not in *ecclesia* how he may fulfill his marital and worldly obligations and yet live the life of perfection. His obligation as a

governor of his estates, rather than the issue of his celibacy, was the major problem for Hilton's correspondent.

In *Piers Plowman B*, however, concupiscence and marital sexuality repeatedly interfere with the Dreamer's progress. In the Dream of Fortune in Passus XI, his major distractions from doing God's will are *Concupiscencia Carnis* and Coveitise of Eighes (XI 13-14), who follow him for forty-five years and keep him from Dowel and Dobet both. In the vision of the Tree of Charity, the Devil appears as soon as he asks to savour the three kinds of fruit on the tree, that is, as soon as he seeks to know which of the three states of living—matrimony, continence, or maidenhood—is best (XVI 67ff). His question is never answered, except by extreme indirection when the Samaritan explains that all three aspects of the Trinity, each of which has been associated with one of the three states of living, are interdependent and equal. This question of the relation of marital status to the contemplative life can be traced as an emphasis in Christian tradition back to 240 A.D., at least, where it is exemplified in Origen's commentary on the *Song of Songs*:

The voluptuous descriptions of the courtship of a Near Eastern couple are converted by Origen into an intricate allegory of the bonding of Christ, the Logos as Bridegroom, to the individual soul as Bride, who sometimes stands for the Church. . . . Origen's anti-fleshy interpretation of the Song of Songs was a part of the emphasis on celibacy as a prerequisite for the priesthood and the life of spiritual devotion. . . . The controversy continued for many years and in the late fourth century a Roman monk named Jovinian "cited Scripture as proof that marriage was in no way inferior to virginity and celibacy in the divine

scale of values". ... Marvin Pope describes the extent to which Jovinian's views "incensed the ecclesiastical establishment and in 390 Pope Siricus convened a synod in Rome to have him condemned... Jerome in particular attacked Jovinian's defense of marriage with intense animosity." (Bishop 70-80)

When the Dreamer takes his wife and daughter to mass, his zeal following his vision of the Harrowing of Hell leads him to act without worrying whether his having a wife and child harms or helps his quest. But his dilemma about his marital status is finally solved only by Elde and his wife when Elde attacks him so that

... of the wo that I was inne my wif hadde ruthe,
 And wissed wel witterly that I were in hevene.
 For the lyme that she loved me fore, and leef was to feele—
 On nyghtes, namely, whan we naked weere—
 I ne myghte in no manere maken it at hir wille,
 So Elde and he[o] hadden it forbeten.
 And as I seet in this sorwe, I saugh how Kynde passede,
 And deeth drogh neigh me—for drede gan I quake,
 And cryde to Kynde, "Out of care me brynge!"

(XX 193-201)

In other words, *Piers Plowman B* supplies no answer to the married person seeking the life of perfection except to show that life itself will take away desire, after which one will leave concupiscence and desire unity, leaving the acts of matrimony behind and made free by one's partner to do so because one has lost one's ability to perform. And in this whole argument, the Dreamer is unable to assert clearly for

himself or find in the advice of any of the figures in his dreams any resolution of his married status with a right to continue attention to his visions.

Because the Dreamer sees himself lacking in this way, he also faces the special problem of his authority to make his dreams into writings. The issue here is not the legitimacy of specific visions; it is the legitimacy of the Narrator to claim their meaning. His visions have profound religious implications, but their narrator has no unequivocally identified clerical authority. Furthermore, according to Anne Middleton, in *Piers Plowman* "what is always at issue is the value, autonomy, and cultural authority of personal history as a genre, and the status of a serious fictive work centered upon it.... As a mode of knowing, but perhaps even more fundamentally as the organizing center of a philosophically serious long poem in English, the status of worldly experience, and the cultural authority of what the subject 'makes' of it, is on trial" ("Narration" 103-104). Middleton connects the challenges to institutional authority within the poem to the tension in fourteenth century society over the issue of lay authority:

[In the Pardon scene] the priest's implicit concerns are to assure that interpretation and the public proclamation of Christian truth shall be made only by those with the literacy and learning to do it correctly, and that as a consequence the teaching of doctrine, unlike devotion and witnessing to the faith, shall remain the prerogative of a properly trained clergy. Both concerns were heard frequently as lay piety movements gained adherents in the later Middle Ages. (107)

What is at stake here, however, is more than “the social authority and uses of such literacy” (108), despite Middleton’s claim that “experience as a mode of knowing” is not in question (108). *Piers Plowman B* never clarifies whether the poem is fiction or a report of fact. If it is fiction, it is immediately suspect, and the poet brings this very issue into the poem itself in the scene where Ymaginatif accuses Will that “thow medlest thee with makynges—and myghtest go seye thi Sauter, / And bidde for hem that yveth thee breed; for there are bokes ynowe / To telle men what Dowel is, Dobet and Dobest bothe, / And prechours to preve what it is” (XII 16-19) It is usually assumed that the “makynges” here referenced are the various texts of this poem, probably a good assumption since, even if *Piers Plowman B* is, as it claims, a record of visions experienced, this record has been rendered into alliterative verse. To call such a record “makynges,” however, is to call it a “made tale, a false tale, a fabrication, fiction” (*MED* 6:57), and thereby to undermine the visions it reports as “false creations proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain” (to borrow a phrase from a later century). As a fiction, a poem is classed, according to Lydgate, with “symulacioun” and “deceyt” (*MED* 3:542). Barbara Nolan summarizes the tenuous position of imaginative works in this period thus:

Poetry and poets occupy an uncertain position in medieval theory. Some writers—among them the twelfth-century Platonists, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio—contend that the poet can express truth under the veil of “beautiful lies.” In this well-known argument, the reader is to take the fruit, or sentence, and discard the rhetorical chaff

of the poet's fictive covering. Another, less generous position—put forward by the Parson in *The Canterbury Tales*—refuses to traffic in “fables” at all. In this view, poetry is frivolity, diversion, false consolation; poets, the perpetrators of falsehood. (“Voices” 155)

Furthermore, visions themselves, even if they are not fictions, do not necessarily validate their own authority, as we saw above in the contemplatives' arguments. And by calling his visions dreams, the Narrator throws even more doubt on their validity as visions. A “dream,” according to the *Middle English Dictionary*, while associated with visions and prophecy, is also linked with imagining, with daydream, with speculation, and even with erroneous thinking (I:1298-99). Therefore, if the reader is to accept the *sentence* of *Piers Plowman B*, that *sentence* must be strengthened by either the authority of the Narrator or the action of the poem which some way validates these showings.

The authority of the Narrator is hardly adequate to accomplish this task. First, as we noted above, in *Piers Plowman B* the Narrator has no externally conferred religious authority. In addition, his married state undermines his credibility, a problem he resolves only by infirmity. His authority therefore depends upon his experience as the Dreamer, the recipient of the visions he later recounts as Narrator. As the Dreamer, however, he is shown as ignorant, many times over in each of his dreams. Even worse, few credentialed authorities operate with credibility within the poem. Instead, Conscience and Patience and Thought and Ymaginatif and Anima and Kynde, all aspects of the Dreamer's consciousness, speak the words

that elucidate the visions. One of these, Lewtee, is the agent granting him the right to make his dreams known to others. Even when the Dreamer sees "Christ," Christ is clothed as Piers and the fact that Piers is Christ is explained to the Dreamer by one or another of his own faculties.

Within this closed circle of self-validation, the poem offers the reader one exception. One vision appears unalloyed by external explanation, and this one vision, the debate of the Four Daughters of God, reconciles the central problems with which the Dreamer has been grappling. Here Christ appears, unmediated, as light, and the light itself, unmediated, announces its identity: "*Rex glorie . . . Dominus virtutum*" (XVIII 317, 319). In this one vision, then, the reader sees the Dreamer granted a showing which explains itself, which is a vision of Christ, and which by its existence validates the Narrator's report and answers his early question of whether he sees truly or merely sees "a ferly, of Fairye . . . a merveillous swevene" (Prol. 6-11). Since his long process of instruction brings this true vision which speaks its own identity of Christ, it validates those which preceded it and brought the Dreamer and his will to readiness for its appearance. In this way, the action of the poem within the dreams gives authority to the Narrator's reports.

Last, the waking action of the Dreamer's progress demonstrates that these dreams are to be read with serious attention and that the Narrator's calling them dreams is a disclaimer of his own assumption of more authority than the world might let him claim. If religious experiences are truly of God, they bring with them changes in waking

action, as *A Pistle of Discrecioun of Stirings* explains:

And withouten doute soche grace is neuer getin bi any mene of soche streite silence, of soche singulere faslyng, or of soche only dwellyng þat þou spekist of, þe whiche is causid fro wipouten . . . Bot 3if euer schal þis grace be getin, it behouep to be lerned of God fro wipinne . . . Pen þat same þat þou felest schal wel kun telle þe when þou schalt speke and when þou schalt be stille. And it schal gouerne þee discretly in al þi leuyng withouten any errour, and teche þee mistely how þou schalt beginne and seese in alle soche doinges of kinde wip a grete & souerein discrecioun. (Hodgson, *Deonise* 74-75)

We have traced earlier in this study some of the ways in which the Dreamer-Narrator changes as his dreams progress. Chapter Two delineated how, at the end of his progress, he has become less judgmental, as he should be. Chapter Four detailed how, after his vision of the light of Christ and the Four Daughters of God, he begins to act charitably, to attend mass properly, and to dress obediently. We've noted how his attitude changes toward his writing, which becomes an act done to record for others rather than for himself. Last, we've noted his struggle with Nede, his rejection of easy arguments to assert personal hunger above *Spiritus Temperancie*, and his holding his tongue rather than jangling with Nede in response to this challenge. All these changes lend credence to the notion that this Narrator does finally speak with enough authority that we can learn from his dreams.

Finally, as he closes the circle of his narrative, he leaves us with one last example of discretion which conceals within it the suggestion

that final judgment shall rest with those who themselves have the authority conferred by contemplative practice. This suggestion occurs at the end of the Prologue, where the Narrator disclaims his authority to interpret his dreams:

(What this metels bymeneth, ye men that ben murye,
 Devyne ye—for I ne dar, by deere God in hevne)!
 (Prol. 209-210)

Who are these “murye” men who can judge, when the Narrator does not dare to do so? Of course, they might be those high-spirited enough to commit the folly of judging when they should not. But “murye” could also mean “full of perfect joy, blissful,” as it does in this passage from the last half of the fourteenth century: “He . . . wepte for holy men and murie þat passed weren vp to glorie” (*MED* 5:522). This obsolete meaning of “murye” referring to the joyousness of bliss remained current for only about 200 years according to the *OED*. “A Talking of the Love of God” from the Vernon manuscript uses the term thus in describing a meditation so intense that the seeker feels himself embracing Christ’s bloody feet:

Penne fele I þat blood in þou3t of my Mynde, as hit weore bodilich warm on my lippe: and þe flesch on his feet bifore and beohynde, so softe and so swete to cusse and to cluppe. Heo [Mary] openeþ hire Mantel þat ladi so kuynde, and happeþ vs þer-vnder in þat muri fitte.
 (Horstman II 364)

While “muri” here refers to illumination rather than union, this

passage does link the word with the intense experience sought in contemplative practice. Wyclif uses the term thus when he refers to a man "riche and blesful, that is, myrie" in his translation of *Job* (*OED* VI:363) and elsewhere, in one of his sermons, distinguishes between "blesse of þe soule and blisse of þe bodi" (*OED* I:923). For Wyclif, writing in the 1380s, then, one experiencing the intense joy of the soul is "myrie." If for *Piers Plowman B* as well, "murye" refers to those who have experienced contemplative bliss, the implications of reserving judgment to "murye" men are that the Narrator does not claim to have been so graced, and that "men that ben murye" have the authority by that grace to judge what he cannot. The poem once more conceals by ambiguity as it reveals in double-meaning words how it should be read.

These ambiguities create tension in the reader in the struggle to read past the poem's ambiguities to its *sentence*. In the same way, the Narrator, in his earlier self, the Dreamer, has grappled with the significance of his visions, trying to understand the meaning behind their showings. His struggle has included his wrestling with the right to indulge in the contemplative life and spend his time in the writing of his "makynge." As he comes to believe in and begins to follow fully the search for God about which he learns in his visions, the literal action of the poem achieves resolution by presenting the struggle's enactment as a gift to the reader who may take its *exemplum* as a means by which to learn to engage with his or her own search for truth. In offering his gift this way, the Narrator heeds the warning issued in *The Book of Privy Counselling*:

& of o þing I warne þee. What-so-euer þou be þat þis wrytyng schalt ouþer rede ore here, & namely in þis place where I make a difference bitwix hem þat ben clepid to saluacion & hem þat ben clepid to perfeccion, þat of wheþer partie þat þou fele is þi clepyng, loke neiþer þat þou deme ne discusse in þe dedes of God ne of man, ferþer þen only þi-self—as whom he steriþ & clepiþ to perfeccion & whom he clepiþ not; or of þe schortnes of tyme, whi he clepiþ hym rapþer þen hym. 3if þou wilt not erre, loke not þat þou deme; bot onys here & vnderstonde. (Hodgson, *Cloud* 161)

The Narrator leaves it to us to do the same.

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SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENTS

PhD, English, University of Washington

Co-founder and editor, *Crab Creek Review*

Chairperson, Board of Trustees, Central Washington University

State president, Washington Women United

Delegate, White House Conference on Families

Member, Phi Beta Kappa

EMPLOYMENT

Co-Director, Puget Sound Writing Program, University of Washington,
Seattle, Washington (from 1987):

Instructor, PSWP Summer Institute and Co-Editor, *Addendum*
(from 1983)

Co-Coordinator, Puget Sound Education Consortium/Alliance of
English Teachers (from 1987)

English teacher:

Northshore School District, Bothell, Washington (part-time, from
1984)

Department Chair, Ephrata High School, Ephrata, Washington:
Led team which wrote English curriculum; advised award-winning
yearbook; designed expository and creative writing programs;
debate coach (to 1977); coached debate team to first place state
and national awards; organized "Writer in the School" program
(1966-1984)

Stanwood High School, Stanwood, Washington (1963-1966)

Editor and publisher, *Crab Creek Review*:

Co-found, edit and manage publication of a literary magazine, including all operations from planning to distributing (from 1983)

Waitress and short-order cook (summers only)

Consultantships and Adjunct Positions:

Instructor, University of Washington Continuing Education: "The Creative Writing Process"

Adjunct instructor, Central Washington University: "Writing Across the Curriculum—Using Peer Groups to Teach Writing"; "English Composition"

Consultant and workshop leader, "Teaching Writing"; "Writing Across the Curriculum" Edmonds, Monroe, Everett, Bethel, Clarkston, South Kitsap, Selah, Northshore School Districts, Washington

Adjunct instructor, Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, Washington: "Project T.E.A.C.H."

Supervising teacher for student teachers, Washington State University

PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

Professional Articles:

"Annotated Bibliography," *Roots in the Sawdust*. Anne R. Gere, editor. National Council of Teachers of English, 1985.

"What If the Kids Did It?" *Washington English Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 2, Winter, 1985, and listed as ERIC #ED186-94, abstracted in *Resources in Education*, October, 1980.

"Taking Shakespeare out of the Closet," *Washington English Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Winter, 1984.

"Our Readers Write," *English Journal*, January, 1981. (on teaching *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*)

"The Two Corys: A Study in Inductive Method," *English Journal*, March, 1969.

Recent Poetry and Short Fiction:

- "90 Degrees in the Shade," *Southern Humanities Review*, summer, 1987.
- "Tee Shirts," *Ellensburg Anthology*, 1986.
- "Red Cross Camp: South Mexico," *Calyx*, Vol. 8, No. 1.
- "Friendly Fire," *Visions*, Spring, 1983.
- "On Using Dictation to Teach Parody," *Washington English Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 2, Winter, 1983.
- "What Else Is In The Box?" *Ellensburg Anthology*, October, 1983.
- "Free Zone," *Poetry Seattle*, 1983. Reprinted in *Gold Dust*, 1987.
- "Childhood of the Blind," *Yakima*, Winter, 1981.

Papers, Workshops and Readings:

- "Writing for Real Audiences," Washington Home-School Conference, Seattle, 1988.
- "Editors' Panel," Pacific Northwest Writers Conference, Tacoma, 1988.
- "A Three-way Approach to Literacy," Wyoming English Conference, Laramie, 1987.
- "Words and Wines," King County Arts Commission audience development program featuring David Wagoner, William Stafford, and Maxine Kumin for *Crab Creek Review*, Woodinville, Washington, 1986, 1987, 1988 (renewed for 1989).
- "Invisible Writing: The Revising Processes of Four Tenth Grade Writers," Washington Communications Conference, Seattle, 1985.
- "Narrative Surprise in Chaucer's 'Miller's Tale,'" paper presented at Medieval Association of the Pacific Annual Meeting, Los Angeles, California, 1985.
- "Possible Historical Referents in *Cleanness*," Medieval Association of the Pacific Annual Meeting, Seattle, Washington, 1984.
- "Peer Response and Peer Evaluation: When, Where, Why?" NCTE Regional Conference, Seattle, 1985.
- "English, The Arts and You," First Annual Humanities Retreat, Washington State Superintendent of Public Instruction Office, Port Orchard, Washington, 1985.
- "Issues: The Changing Family," panel moderator, National Journalism Education Association Convention, Seattle, 1985.
- "Developing Students' Assessment Abilities," Pacific Northwest Writing Assessment Conference, Seattle, 1985.

- "What If They Wrote For Each Other? They Do," NCTE regional conferences, various sites, 1980-1983, and Washington State Council of Teachers of English, Seattle, 1982.
- "Peer Editing to Teach Writing and Reading," Washington Organization for Reading Development, Everett, Washington, 1981, and Seattle, 1984, and International Reading Association, Portland, Oregon, April, 1982.
- "PEERing Into a Writing Lab," NCTE national conference, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1980.
- Readings of my own poetry and short fiction in Bumbershoot competition, at Red Sky and Poem People readings, Seattle, 1984 to present, and for the "Castalia" series, University of Washington, 1981-1986.

HONORS AND ASSOCIATIONS

- Puget Sound Writing Program Fellow, 1983-1987
- "Woman of Achievement," Washington State Business and Professional Women, 1978
- Phi Beta Kappa, University of Washington, 1962
- Phi Lambda Theta, University of Washington, 1962

EDUCATION

- 1989 PhD medieval literature, English Department, University of Washington
Dissertation: *Piers Plowman B in its Contemplative Context*
- 1982 MA, medieval literature, English Department, University of Washington
- 1962 BA, *magna cum laude*, University of Washington: major in English, minor in social studies

CIVIC AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

- Northwest Renaissance, Seattle, Washington
- National and Washington State Councils of Teachers of English: Recording Secretary; Conference Program Planner, WSCTE; Editorial Board, WSCTE newsletter; Chair, Program Committee, Washington Communications Conference; Judge, NCTE Literary Magazine contest, Washington State

Washington Women United: State President (1980-1982; tripled membership, reorganized financial base and office supervision, began member-lobby program)

Panel moderator, various public policy issues, for Washington Environmental Council, Ephrata Candidates' Forum, Grant County Citizens Concerned About Nuclear War

Producer and moderator, radio series: "Ballot Issues" for Ephrata League of Women Voters

National, Washington, Northshore and Ephrata Education Associations: State Instructional and Professional Development Commission (1976-79), political action committee, delegate to Uniserv Council, WEA and NEA conventions, local negotiator and president, newsletter editor, political action chair

Political action:

Delegate, King County Democratic Central Committee (from 1989), legislative district and county conventions Candidate, Washington State Legislature (1976, 1978)

Issues Committee, 32nd District Democrats (member and chair of education subcommittee from 1987, chair from 1989)

Board of Trustees, Central Washington University, Ellensburg, Washington: elected chair May, 1977, reelected 1978, 1979

Columbia Basin Allied Arts Board, Moses Lake, Washington (1982-1983)

Organizer, annual Ephrata Writers' Workshop (1974-1983)

Ephrata Chamber of Commerce legislative committee (1974-1981)

Washington State Speech Association: Representative, Executive Council (1973-1978)

National Forensic League (1967-1977): citations of merit for organizing state Student Congress

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