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TRAVELERS TO TRUTH  
IN *PIERS PLOWMAN* 1)

*Abraham*

Imaginatif in *Piers Ploman* agrees with St. Paul:

Feith, hope, and charitee and alle ben good,  
And sauen men sundry tymes, ac none so sone as charite.  
(B.XII.31f)<sup>2</sup>

*Piers Plowman*, a vast and complex poem in three different texts (the B. version, considered here, is c. 1377), is in many ways the ideal complement to Chaucer's work, just as Langland, its author, is apart from Chaucer the greatest Middle English poet whom we know by name. Chaucer the greatest Middle English poet whom we know by name. Chaucer is urbane, witty, civilized, sophisticated; Langland is earnest, dedicated, hard-hitting. Where the former is largely (but not entirely) concerned with man's earthly life, *Piers Plowman* sees man's existence as a pilgrimage, a preparation for the life hereafter.

The poem takes the form of several dreams experienced by its persona, Will, in which he sets out on a quest (a standard medieval motif) to find God, Who is symbolized in several ways, such as by Truth, and Will is hindered or helped by the usual mixed allegorical crew of good or evil characters. His particular guides are the 'Peter the Ploughman' of the title and the Good Samaritan, who come to represent Charity, the greatest of the theological virtues. Faith and Hope, as embodied in the figures of Abraham and Moses, also have their part to play, and this essay explores some of the ways in which these 'travellers to truth' are presented to the reader. In this sense

1. An Adaptation of chapter three of my University of the Witwatersrand M.A. dissertation, *Characterization and Personification in Piers Plowman* (Johannesburg, 1975).

2. All references are taken from *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman in Three Parallel Texts*, 2 vols., ed. Walter W. Skeat (Oxford, 1886, repr. 1924).

the poem might be said to be an imaginative expansion of Paul's resounding words in I Cor. 13. It is an intriguing, often perplexing example of the powerful creative stimulus that Scriptural texts can give to a subtle mind, steeped also in Roman Catholic theology, philosophy and liturgy. (This backdrop is taken as read in order to tackle the poem on its own terms, though clearly this writer could take issue with the theology at several points.) This poem is perhaps the most consistently and thoroughly Christian one in English, if by 'Christian' we understand the Catholicism of the time.

Will, like *Humanum Genus* in *The Castle of Perseverance*, is an ordinary Christian, often stumbling and making mistakes, but doggedly and sometimes triumphantly drawing nearer to the goal he seeks. The poem was undoubtedly intended for the edification and encouragement of its own Christian readers, for the more Will fixes his eyes on the embodiments and ministers of grace, the surer his steps become. It is when he is misled by figures of sin and evil that he has to make several exhausting detours.

So Faith (Abraham) and Hope (Moses) both lag behind the Samaritan, who with Piers confidently leads the way to Truth. The Ploughman himself is characterized as one who profoundly exercises the theological virtues, the three God-centered stages of the journeys Langland's people undertake. Langland<sup>3</sup> could have done no better in taking two mighty personages from Old Testament history, one from the very words of Jesus, and one from the strength of English tradition, to illustrate this journey.

In his presentation of Faith, Langland probably had such theological points in mind as the theory that faith is beholden to charity for its effect,<sup>4</sup> and that its object is God, who infuses it and makes it known, together with

3. The most recent attempt to prove that there was more than one author is no more convincing than the others. See Sr Francis D. Covella, 'Grammatical Evidence of Multiple Authorship in *Piers Plowman*', *Language and Style*, 9 (1976), pp. 3-16.

4. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *The 'Summa Theologica' literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province*, 22 vols., second and revised edition (London, 1920 onwards), II (second part), Q.IV, A.3 (vol. 9, p. 62) and Q.XXIII, A.8 (*Ibid.*, p. 278).

Hope and Charity. Moreover, faith is an act of the intellect.<sup>5</sup> Along with hope, it implies 'a certain imperfection; since faith is of things unseen, and hope, of things not possessed.'<sup>6</sup> Such 'imperfection' is in the poem qualified by the auspicious nature of Midlent Sunday, an oasis in the Lenten fast,<sup>7</sup> which leads us to expect a transcending of this limitation.<sup>8</sup>

Abraham, an actual historical figure, represents Faith, a seeker and traveller, who is shown to be motivated by a sensitivity to supernatural reality. Since Abraham's position in the liturgy is 'one of very decided pre-eminence',<sup>9</sup> it is little wonder that he deals with the Trinity in the poem as a man 'with direct experience of God', and in 'the language of quiet certainty.' Seen first as an ordinary, hospitable mortal, he takes on stature until we realize he is in charge of 'the great company that awaits release'.<sup>10</sup>

Because Abraham seeks and proclaims, there is no point in introducing him before the dreamer is mature enough to identify with his search and accept his proclamation.<sup>11</sup> Will has reached this stage by B.XVI.167, where he is in a similar state of (spiritual) heaviness to that experienced in Lent; this sorrow over the loss of Fiers (*ibid.* 168, 171) is to be relieved on a day when Lenten observances are traditionally somewhat relaxed. 'And thanne mette [Will] with a man ....' (172); as C.S. Lewis observes of the fairy damsels in *Paradise Regained* II, who are 'met in forest wide', 'met' is the operative word: such encounters are not accidental.<sup>12</sup> Will does not just

5. See the *Summa* II (first part), Q.LXII, A.1 (vol. 7, p. 148), and II (second part), Q.IV, AA. 1 and 2 (vol. 9, pp. 57,61).

6. *Ibid.* (first part), Q.LXII, A.3 (vol. 7, p. 152).

7. '... restrained rejoicing mingled with a certain amount of sadness', *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (CE), 15 vols., ed. Charles G. Herbermann et al. (New York, 1907-12), vol. VIII, pp. 737f. See also *The Catholic Encyclopaedic Dictionary* (CED), general ed. Donald Attwater (London, 1931), p. 296.

8. However, Robert Adams, 'Langland and the Liturgy Revisited', *Studies in Philology*, 73 (1976), pp. 266-284, warns against exaggerating the influence of the church year on Langland.

9. See CE vol. 1, pp. 54ff, and cf. *The Lay Folks Mass Book*, ed. Thomas Frederick Simmons (1879, repr. London, 1968), p. 108.

10. John Lawlor, *Piers Plowman: An Essay in Criticism* (London, 1962), pp. 156f, 261

11. The parallel C text, XIV.5, is more concerned with poverty than proclamation.

12. *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge, 1964), p. 130.

simply come across Abraham: the latter arrives at exactly the right time to instruct and soothe him. Furthermore, Abraham is “As hore as an hawethorne’ (173), which alludes both to the white blossom of the shrub, which appears in the English spring, and to his venerable nature; the promise of new life is combined with the experience of age. While Abraham, too, is on a journey,<sup>13</sup> likewise searching for ‘a segge that [he] seigh ones’ (178), his destination is at least certain and he displays befitting confidence (cf. 176). His resonant proclamation establishes his credentials as a herald: one who recognizes and judges knights by their coat-armour and proclaims the victors.

Such a one is the novice knight of line 179, who bears the distinctive blazon of ‘Thre leodes in o lith’ (181). Abraham’s description of the Trinity employs appropriately feudal metaphors (187, 191) and reveals a profound knowledge of the subject (184–190). Abraham simply expounds the plan of salvation : God

Sent forth his sone as for seruaunt that tyme,  
To occupien hym here til issue were spronge,  
That is, children of charite and holicherche the moder.  
(195–197)

The poignancy of these words lies in their direct application to Abraham himself, the leader of Christ’s ‘issue’, who is soon to be set free.

Abraham confidently continues expounding the Trinity in clear-cut terms of matrimony (202ff) and comments lucidly on the paradox of the Incarnation (215). Then, with the precision we might expect of an act of the intellect, he concludes

So is the Fader forth with the Sone and fre wille of bothe;  
Which is the Holygoste of alle and alle is but o god.  
(223f)

It says much that Abraham is chosen as the vehicle of such doctrine; but if he has revealed the Trinity more than himself previously, the tone and attitude of these lines now rights the balance:

13. In fact, most of the characters are going somewhere (those that are not, like Holy Church, generally have already arrived); it is their *motives* and *destinations* that are significant.

Thus in a somer I hym seigh as I satte in my porche;  
 I ros vp and reuerenced hym and ri3t faire hym grette;  
 Thre men to my sy3te I made wel at ese,  
 Wesche her feet and wyped hem and afterward thei eten  
 Calues flesshe and cakebrede and knewe what I thou3te;  
 (225–229)

The overtones of this passage, with its immediate apprehension of spiritual reality, are many. The reader expects a new beginning on seeing the word 'somer' – the third one of the entire poem. In this account of his visitors Abraham unconsciously reveals his warm hospitality, courtesy and charity. With keen hindsight he recalls the limitations of normal perception ('to my sy3te'), and his very action in line 228 is a reminder of that of Christ (cf. Jn 13:5f). The statement that his guests ate with him is juxtaposed with the startling comment in the last half-line, and both are said almost matter-of-factly.

Abraham has an air of having been so long in touch with the supernatural that nothing now surprises him; throughout, his absolute trust in God keeps him 'ful syker', even when commanded to kill his son (231–234). His firm belief (238) culminates in one of the poem's central declarations on mercy, an answer to Will's earlier doubt (242). And such affirmation issues in worship, as when it falls to Abraham to celebrate the archetypal Eucharist.<sup>14</sup> In this, as in his founding and defence of the faith (245f), Abraham figures forth Christ,<sup>15</sup> and his voice takes on a prophetic note as he recounts the promise of John the Baptist (149–252).

Will is impressed by Abraham's words and his 'wyde' clothes (253), the adjective suggesting the all-encompassing care Abraham has for those who lived before Christ (256). Will's curiosity awakens the concern of Abraham, who asks two rapid questions, reminiscent of the priest examining a penitent (257).<sup>16</sup> Faith reveals the great treasure he is entrusted with, and does

14. A conflation of Gen. 14:18 and 18:1ff.

15. That is, his actions and character will be fulfilled in those of Christ, the antitype, of whom Abraham is the type or figure. See A.C. Charity, *Events and their Afterlife* (London, 1966). *passim*.

16. See John Myrc, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, ed. Edward Peacock and rev. F.J. Furnivall (1902, repr. New York, 1969), pp. 30ff.

not withhold any truth, however sombre (261), for his faith makes him certain that Christ will come and have him and his wards out of the thrall they are in (262ff); Will, with much less faith, is sadly affected by the power of sin (270–272).

But he refuses to commit himself to Faith, still less to Hope, 'wordyng' with both (B.XVII.47), even though Abraham supports Hope's veracity (*ibid.* 19). And at this moment all three see the Samaritan, riding in the same direction as they are, but faster (48f); a most important difference. All happen on the injured man at the same moment (52), and Will records, a little gloatingly,

Feith had first si3te of hym ac he flegh on syde,  
And nolde nou3t neighen hym by nyne londes lengthe.

(57,58)

Faith not only cannot help, he passes by at the greatest possible distance. Here in the position of the priest of Lk 10:31, he is superseded by the Samaritan, who fulfils the prophetic and priestly functions Faith and Hope cannot.

But Langland does not simply reject these two out of hand: he sets up a dramatic tension between the negative Will, who informs on Faith and Hope (87–89), and the optimistic Samaritan, who demonstrates that they are only inadequate because they lack the power of 'the blode of a barn borne of a mayde'. (93) In three days they will come into their own; enabled by the resurrection of Christ, Faith will be appointed to his rightful position of guide and forester, showing the way to Jerusalem — the route taken by the Samaritan (109–114). Christ's resurrection will lead to Faith's continuous fulfilment of his rôle, that of figuring forth Truth.

In addition, Will is to pattern himself after Abraham (131), whose faith is the example for that of every Christian. The figure of Christ is greatly enhanced by having so dedicated and mighty a follower, who is yet no more than a precursor of, and subordinate to, Charity (see below).

Abraham's final appearance is as the herald of the Lord. All the tension of his long years of awaiting comes to a head in his triumphant cry, *a! fili David!* (B.XVIII.15) In the next line the jousting imagery becomes explicit and the visual and dramatic quality of the scene puts across a sense of concrete actuality, of quickening heartbeat. To Abraham the nobility, the 'gentrice', of Jesus is paramount, for it causes Jesus to joust in the coat-armour of Piers (22). Abraham, with clear insight, makes a very nice distinction between the two.

He is also cognizant of the character of Jesus's opponents, a veritable

rogues' gallery; he can recognize them at a glance, as any competent herald should (28ff). At the same time Abraham's speech, with its quickening pace and climactic cry, *O mors, ero mors tua!* (35), betrays his own longing for final release. And he struggles with the paradox that the faithlessness of his own people nevertheless brings about his heart's desire, and it is a mark of his own nobility that he charges them, and not Longinus, with his lord's death, once again using chivalric terms: '... kni3thod was it neuere/To mysdo a ded body by day or by ny3te.' (96f).

With clairvoyant insight he sees Lucifer, 'champioun chiualer', yielding himself up to Christ elsewhere at that very moment (99f), and he now joyously proclaims the *losers*; as a true Jew he tells the false Jews '3owre good dayes ar done' (108); but *he* has come into his promised inheritance because of his confidence in Truth, who faithfully rewards such as he.

Abraham cannot help but reveal his reasons for the hope that is within him. He is set very firmly in the world of the poem as a type of Christ and Charity, as well as the Spirit (he too encourages many burdened souls: B.XVI.1980,248); their actions echo his, and are their logical fulfilment. He is also deeply rooted in 'real' time, as the founder of the history of the Jews, and has the privilege of disclosing that the 'Law that presses so hard upon man is to be fulfilled by One who shares man's nature.'<sup>17</sup> In the poem Abraham stands at the intersection of a completed history and one which is to begin, and for which he will act as a mighty exemplar.

#### A gift of God

Hope has two elements, 'desire and expectation, involving, however, the consciousness of difficulty of attainment.'<sup>18</sup> In heaven one's desires and expectations have been realized, and in hell they never will be; hence 'It is on *earth* that this virtue takes place.'<sup>19</sup> A remark of St Thomas's sums up the position of Langland's figure of Hope, relative to the Samaritan: 'The

17. Lawlor, *op cit.*, p. 164.

18. *A Catholic Dictionary* (CD), ed. William E. Addis, further revised with additions by P.E. Hallett, fifteenth edition (London, 1951), p. 409, which cites Phil 2:12. See also CE, vol. VII p. 465, and the *Surma* II (first part), Q.XL, A.7 (vol. 6, pp. 465ff)

19. CD p. 409 (my italics).

same good is the object of charity and of hope: but charity implies union with that good, whereas hope implies distance therefrom.<sup>20</sup> Hope *cannot* catch the Samaritan, who is Charity, he cannot reach his goal, before Christ dies and rises.

St Thomas also sheds light on Will's character when he comments, 'Hope of its very nature is a help to action by making it more intense.' Hope is not the most characteristic feature of Will, and he is loath to act; unlike the Ploughman, Will does not know that 'It is written (I Cor. ix.10) that *he that plougheth should plough in hope ... to receive fruit.*'<sup>21</sup> Is this perhaps why Will is unmoved by Hope's failure?

Hope's actions catch our eye at the end of Passus XVI, where he is behind Will and Faith but bids fair to pass them. Here he is Moses, the great lawgiver, and from his first mention in this poem (B.I. 149) Moses is a type of Christ, who is there seen as love, the antithesis of law. The name Moses thus evokes 'a complex of ideas centring on redemptive love' and recalls Moses's functions as ruler and mediator, foreshadowings of Christ.<sup>22</sup>

Another character called Hope blows a horn (very unlike Glutton's) after Repentance's prayer (B.V. 514–516) and sounds joyous notes of renewal and forgiveness, which signal the chaotic beginning of the pilgrimage; there are echoes of Biblical trumpets such as those of Revelation 8 to 11 or I Corinthians 15, the effects of which are equally striking to those who hear. And so the path is laid for *Spes* to run on.

It is Hope who enters hastily upon the scene: and we are reminded vividly of time past in this poem when we are told that the warrant of Hope lies in obedience to Law and that neither document nor seal is needed as evidence ...  
It is the truth of the 'pardon' scene once again .....<sup>23</sup>

20. See the *Summa* II (second part), Q.XXIII, A.6 (vol. 9, p. 274).

21. *Ibid.* (first part), Q.XL, A.8 (vol. 6, pp. 466, 467).

22. P.M. Kean, 'Langland on the Incarnation', *The Review of English Studies*, 16 (1965), pp. 351, 359.

23. Lawlor, *op. cit.*, p. 157.



*Spes* introduces himself breathlessly as a seeker in a hurry, the vanguard of many who will, rather like Abraham, 'spire after a kny3te' (B.XVII.1). Like Piers, he bears a most important document which, he remarks simply, he has with him (*ibid.* 3). He seems to be used to such commissions, since he is not awed by the implications of this document 'To reule alle rewmes', and has a real, 'disarming modesty'.<sup>24</sup> The reader — could he divorce himself from the urgency informing the poem at this stage — might well ask 'Why the haste? Is the parchment not valid?' But it is *not*. It lacks the seal of the Knight which, once impressed, will signal the end of Lucifer's rule (5–8); Hope really should not stay. But he has a didactic function to fulfil.

The actual patent, Hope reveals to an interested Will, is a rock engraved with those precepts of Christ which enjoin the utmost charity and on which the whole Law depends (9–13). The 'harde roche' itself brings the tablets of Sinai to mind, as well as Christ and St Peter, the 'rocks' of the Church (cf. I Cor. 10:4). The bearer of such a document is most worthy of respect.

Like Abraham, Hope is of the Old Testament, but transcends it with a quiet trust. So far as the time scheme of the poem is concerned, the new dispensation wrought by Christ is here about to begin, and while both figures thus still lack fulfilment, they exercise a praiseworthy confidence:

And who so worcheth after this writte I will undertaken,  
Shal neuere deuel hym dere ne deth in soule greue.  
(15,16)

Hope's attitude reflects his name, and is not illusory; Faith quite agrees with it.

But Will is unimpressed by Hope who, he maintains, 'tellethe nou3te of the Trinitee' (33); Will is not only unfair, expecting Hope to be just like Faith, but also downright rude:

'Go thi gate,' quod I to *Spes*, 'so me god helpe!  
To that lerneth thi lawe wil litel while vsen it!  
(45,46)

24. *Ibid.*, p. 213; see also p. 158.

Will is perfectly accurate, since he himself is clearly in no position to exercise hope before the Good Samaritan comes into the picture. He fails to realize this, though, and gladly records that

Hope cam hippyng after that hadde so ybosted,  
How he with Moyses maundement hadde many men y-holpe;  
Ac whan he hadde si3te of that segge a-syde he gan hym drawe,  
Dredfully, by this day! as duk doth fram the faucoun.  
(59–62)

In fact, hope cannot act 'after this writte' any more than another person can, for he is himself only earthly. The Law cannot be fulfilled without the Samaritan's aid, and the very poetry hobbles, illustrating Hope's paralytic limp. The second and third lines quoted run more evenly, but while the *m*'s in the first of these draw it out, the *s*'s of the second pick up speed, contrasting in sound as in sense: we can imagine Hope hurrying to get away. The final line strikingly portrays Hope's excessive fear; his heart has failed him and, for all his earlier speed, he will never catch the Samaritan, try he ever so hard (81, 82).

Nevertheless, the Samaritan graciously indicates to Will that the helplessness of Faith and Hope is only temporary, and they should therefore be excused (90). Both started out well, for they did leave Jericho; but neither could reach Jerusalem unaided. Hope will become 'the hostelleres man' and take care of all those too weak to benefit from Faith, until the Samaritan returns (115–119).

The two virtues are complementary, and Will is advised to heed Hope as well, and love his fellow-Christians as himself (133, 134). In so doing all three will begin to conform to charity, their eventual goal.

#### The Good Samaritan

The messages of Faith and Hope were accentuated by their actions; with the Good Samaritan the 'increasing number of interesting and, in a way, disturbing details'<sup>25</sup> of dress and manner do likewise. Though he is seen in only two passus, he is present — at least in spirit — in most of the others, although the identification with Charity is not explicit, and only slowly becomes apparent.

25. Elizabeth Salter, 'Medieval Poetry and the Figural View of Reality', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 54 (1968), p. 87.

As well as being 'recognizable dramatic "characters"', the Samaritan and Piers are both 'incarnations or figurations of charity, of divine truth immanent.'<sup>26</sup>

The Samaritan is also traditionally identified with Christ as well as being a figure of Charity, a double significance<sup>27</sup> well worth bearing in mind. We have earlier been told that love is incarnated as Christ (B.I. 146, 151ff) and (for example) that Dobet aids all men (B.VIII. 84ff). In such ways the Samaritan is prefigured in the theme of charity, the greatest theological virtue,<sup>28</sup> which recurs many times before its fulfilment.

Probably the closest companions of the Samaritan are Faith and Hope, but his true colleagues are Truth, who is actively expressed in him, Piers and Christ. In fact he is sometimes hardly distinct from the last two, for he is as much part of Langland's positive vision as they. After meeting the separate 'god-given virtues' Will 'falls in with the Samaritan who unites all these graces in the one attribute of Love' and 'in turn dissolves into the person of Piers-Christ'.<sup>29</sup>

Clues to the Samaritan's character include the fact that he 'has an appointment in Jerusalem' just like Hope, yet stops to help, a 'most moving contrast'.<sup>30</sup>

The attentive reader will recall the care the pardoners had for Liar, 'a sardonic echo of the story of the Good Samaritan'.<sup>31</sup> Such interrelated scenes set the Samaritan in sharp relief.

In their employment of 'kynde' words the Samaritan's remarks will expose his character too.<sup>32</sup> He is kin to God, while his early actions are nota-

26. *Ibid.*

27. Ben H. Smith, Jr. *Traditional Imagery of Charity in Piers Plowman* (The Hague and Paris, 1966), p. 93. See also p. 89, and Greta Hort, *Piers Plowman and Contemporary Religious Thought* (London, n.d.), p. 24, together with H.O. Taylor, *The Mediaeval Mind*, fourth edition (1925, repr. London, 1930), vol. II, pp. 79ff. But contrast R.W. Frank, Jr, *Piers Plowman and the Scheme of Salvation* (New Haven and London, 1957), p. 92.

28. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F.L. Cross (1957, repr. with corrections, London, 1966), s.v. 'Charity'.

29. J.F. Goodridge (tr.) *Piers the Ploughman* (rev. ed., 1966, repr. Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 16.

30. Lawlor, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

32. See Sr Mary Clemente Davlin O.P., 'Kynde Knowyng as a Major Theme in *Piers Plowman B*', *RES*, 22 (1971), p. 10, also pp. 4,14.

ble for their compassion: Christ the 'leech' crosses our minds. His generosity with his pence puts all greed in a bad light, and the dreamer, who has long searched for charity, finds in this person one who practises charity, one who is charity (cf. B.XV.160). Indeed, it might be truer to say this person who would never 'wey pens with a peys' (B.V.243), has found him.

The hitherto separate characterization of the Samaritan and Piers becomes a rapid convergence when Anima explains that without Piers no-one will ever see Charity (B.XV.190); even Faith and Hope cannot catch the Samaritan as Charity. And in passus XIX, though there is no Samaritan, the bloody Christ himself is the champion of God, and Piers labours to help all sorts and conditions of men.

The skilful clothing of this abstract virtue shows the poet's use of behavioural as well as visual patterns, continually presented within the governing framework of charity so that we cannot lose ourselves in too many 'interpretations' of this character. The narrative level is crucial, for had the Good Samaritan not been a living man in a hurry we should not have made so much of his human sympathy and immediate practical aid. The Samaritan of the poem is real both because of his existence in the Biblical parable and because of his skilful treatment alongside other, equally real, figures. He partially fulfils the idea of perfect charity in B.XVIII (since though his action there has only local effects, it points to charity's later complete realization in Christ).

The poles here are truly typological, that is separate, yet real and interconnected, and it is the correspondence of the Samaritan's actions with certain other actions,<sup>33</sup> and of his words with certain other words, that confirms him throughout as a type of charity (even if the only direct personification of charity is when he tends the injured man).

The Good Samaritan is introduced immediately after the first two theological virtues have, between them, succeeded only in confusing Will. The dramatic and purposeful galloping of the Samaritan, who interrupts his mission in spite of its importance, is a welcome contrast (B.XVII. 48–51). *He* is no seeker, and his action is introduced with a sharply disjunctive 'Ac' (*ibid.* 63). His concern greatly grows in intensity: he stops, then dismounts, examines the injuries and takes the pulse (64–66). Finally he dresses the wounds and bandages the unfortunate's head (69, 70).

33. Cf. A.C. Charity, *op cit.*, pp. 109, 136.

Laying him in his lap (truly a gesture of love ranking with that of Abraham for Lazarus), the Samaritan leads the victim forth on his horse to the nearby inn of *lex-christi* (70f). We are immediately made aware that this physician's interests are not only medical, for this is a spiritual establishment. (It is significant that the parallel C passage, XX.71, has *lauacrum lex-dei*, which even more clearly refers to the church and its doorkeeper Peter.) At the same time, the inn's whereabouts on *earth* could hardly be more explicit: 'Wel six myle or seuene, beside the newe market' (72). This detail is just what is needed to give the inn reality, within fourteenth century England. The urgency of his mission (perhaps already partly completed by the rescue of this man) presses hard upon the Samaritan, however, and he may not stop longer (78, 349).

Faith, Hope and dreamer all run after him,<sup>34</sup> but only Will catches up, at which point his offer to become the Samaritan's groom is matched by a counter-offer.

The Samaritan proffers friendship to the lonely Will (85f) — and he is the only one who can make such a gesture, mean it, and carry it out. At the same time he strongly affirms the good of the other two, because they find their fulfilment in him. We do not meet the Samaritan or only remarkably like, 'semblable to' him. It hardly matters, since here Piers, Christ and the Samaritan melt and fuse together.

#### Who is Piers Plowman?

The titular 'hero' has received much attention, with many keen minds having sought to clarify one aspect or another in stressing one or other feature. As Aers remarks, 'Piers is all things to all critics.'<sup>35</sup> We begin with those who assign the least importance to Piers. While there clearly are grounds for saying that Piers is a farmer or labourer (on this identity hinges the effectiveness of the character), a natural and logical growth eventually transcends the figure of the English peasant.

34. Cf. the Collect for Pentecost XIII (Trinity Sunday).

35. David Aers, *Piers Plowman and Christian Allegory* (London, 1975), p. 78.

Piers has been seen as a real ploughman but also as a dream figure, with varying functions, but mainly as a symbol of ultimate unity and of the ideal pope.<sup>36</sup> Or he is said to represent the elevated aspect of mankind assumed by Christ in the Incarnation,<sup>37</sup> the archetype of the soul united with God through charity, and himself the love of God,<sup>38</sup> the 'semi-divine' character of human nature,<sup>39</sup> 'both the way and the goal of Christian perfection,<sup>40</sup> 'a succession of stages in the attitude of the poet to his subject'.<sup>41</sup>

Indeed, Piers's great growth<sup>42</sup> leads to a remarkable cumulation of elements.<sup>43</sup> One school maintains that he represents three lives in turn: the active, contemplative, and mixed or prelatical,<sup>44</sup> a view that is often too rigidly applied. Piers may sometimes be viewed as an ecclesiastic,<sup>45</sup> but

36. See, amongst others, R.W. Frank, *op. cit.*, pp. 13, 25.

37. K.B. Trower, 'The Plowman as Preacher: The Allegorical and Structural Significance of Piers the Plowman in *Piers Plowman*', *Dissertation Abstracts*, 30 (1969), p. 712-A. (This is her view of Piers as he is in *Dobet*).

38. Edward Vasta, *The Spiritual Basis of Piers Plowman* (The Hague, 1965), p. 135. Cf. Elizabeth Zeeman (Salter), 'Piers Plowman and the Pilgrimage to Truth', in *Style and Symbolism in Piers Plowman*, ed. Robert J. Blanch (Knoxville, 1969) p. 125.

39. R.W. Frank, 'The Conclusion of *Piers Plowman*', *JEGP*, 49 (1950), p. 315, taking up a point made by Konrad Burdach. Cf. Donaldson's view that Piers is Christ's human nature, '*Piers Plowman: The Religious Allegory of the C Text*' in *Interpretations of Piers Plowman*, ed. Edward Vasta (Notre Dame, 1968), p. 160.

40. M.W. Bloomfield, *Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth-century Apocalypse* (New Brunswick n.d.), p. 107).

41. George Kane, *Middle English Literature* (London, 1951), p. 242.

42. On this cumulative quality of his being see, for a representative early view, Henry W. Wells (tr.), *William Langland: The Vision of Piers Plowman newly rendered into Modern English* (New York, 1935), p. 299 (Piers in *Dobet* is a progressive symbol for Christ); for a later view see Marshall Walker, 'Piers Plowman's Pardon: A Note'. *English Studies in Africa*, 8 (1965), p. 67.

43. Christopher Dawson, *Medieval Essays* (London and New York, 1953), p. 257.

44. This theory, formulated first by Henry W. Wells and R.W. Chambers, is given later expression by Nevill Coghill in 'The Character of Piers Plowman considered from the B-Test', *Medium Aevum*, 2 (1933), pp. 108-134 *passim*, in his Introduction to Wells, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, pp. xxiii - xxiv, and in his *Visions From Piers Plowman* (London, 1949), p. 11. Modifications of the theory are still current but dying out.

45. As D.W. Robertson, Jr, and Bernard F. Huppé, *Piers Plowman and Scriptural Tradition* (Princeton, 1951), maintain, pp. 75-77, 94. See also Lawlor, *op. cit.*, p. 185, and the abstract by Trower, p. 712-A, which holds that in *Dobest* Piers is Peter in particular and the ministry in general.

not always, since the two poles of his nature determine all the rest: his existence as man, and his activity as Christ.<sup>46</sup> (Dawson sensitively observes of the poet, 'He saw Christ walking in English fields in the dress of an English labourer.')<sup>47</sup> One recent article on the *Petrus* clause<sup>48</sup> defends Piers the 'shape-shifter's' coherence, by arguing that he is the 'whole Christ'. Langland establishes Piers as a good man, then as Christ and God, identities added to his humanity without replacing it.

On top of this comes a shifting identity as Peter, so that Piers does not always and equally represent man, Christ, Peter and others. Where Langland speaks of Piers and Jesus as distinct, there is a parallel with the theological distinction between 'the historical Christ' (Jesus, the head) and 'the mystical Christ' (Piers, as head *and* members). Those incorporated into Christ (who retain their identity are not necessarily those living after Christ: in XVI Piers could represent the Hebrew prophets. In XIX there are some shifts between Piers as Peter, and then as later popes; careful distinctions characteristic of Langland.

#### Piers as a guide

Piers Plowman immediately establishes himself as a trustworthy guide to Truth (B.V.544ff) in contradistinction to the worldly pilgrim of a few lines earlier.<sup>49</sup> Such authority is a corollary of his forty or fifty years of single-minded service. (The Holy Spirit is the one who shall lead Christians into all the truth in Jn 16: 13<sup>50</sup> and who also helps to build the Church, as Piers does later; Piers is not the Spirit, but they act in concert.)

46. Cf. C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (1936, repr. New York, 1965), p. 159, n.1; like Coghill's Introduction to Wells, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, p. xxv, he refers to the traditional use of the figure of the ploughman. See also, among many others, G.R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*, second revised edition (Oxford, 1961), p. 572, n. 7, and contrast Vasta, *The Spiritual Basis*, p. 137, who claims (wrongly) that Piers is perfect from first to last.

47. *Medieval Essays*, p. 240.

48. Sr Mary Clemente Davlin, O.P., '*Petrus, Id Est, Christus: Piers the Plowman as "The Whole Christ"*', *The Chaucer Review*, 6 (1972), especially pp. 281, 283, 287f, 290.

49. See Robertson and Huppé, *op. cit.* p. 75.

50. B.S. Lee, 'Antichrist and Allegory in Langland's Last Passus', *Studies in English* (University of Cape Town) 2 (1971), p. 9, identifies Piers, Grace, and the Spirit here.

Even at this early stage Piers has sufficient spiritual perception to be able to give the Seven Sins the benefit of the doubt and offer to lead the whole crowd to Truth. In so doing, he actively exhibits charity (for he refuses all payment), the principal means of achieving perfect love of God. Piers is then a 'forerunner, in the broad sense of model, servant, and source of inspiration, teaching, and example', so that the *spiritual* state of those who see him determines their experience of him.<sup>51</sup> Lawlor believes that 'Adherence to law is the Plowman's sole warrant for guiding humanity',<sup>52</sup> but I would add that his evident faith and hope also move all those who follow him.

Though Piers is not a hero in the sense that he makes frequent appearances in a plot woven about him, he is in a real sense the backbone of the poem. He has an organic and cumulative existence, with different qualities being explored each time he appears, and no matter how long he has been away, it is difficult to forget him. His evolution means that in himself he is both type and antitype; his person and example already contain and guide us to that which he will become. At the end we still follow his example because he has become most like to God (cf. B.IX.31), and exercises justice and mercy on God's behalf, as does Peter (cf. B. Prol. 100–102 and B.XIX. 177ff).

In addition, he is not suddenly deified; we see part of the process,<sup>53</sup> and are thereby heartened. He is always our guide, even when most exalted, because his first identity is always pertinent. The analogy of the blade of corn becoming the ear and then the grain, so that 'one identity becomes successively more and more fruitful while remaining visibly the same',<sup>54</sup> is an excellent one. His deep and complex presentation ensures that he can, in a sense, act as the unifying principle of the poem.

#### His earlier characterization

Whenever we see Piers, he is always involved, coming to grips with his surroundings,<sup>55</sup> unlike the dreamer for instance, or Haukyn, who disap-

51. See Vasta, *The Spiritual Basis*, pp. 136ff.

52. *Op. cit.*, p. 259.

53. See Salter, 'Medieval Poetry and the Figural View of Reality', p. 91.

54. See Coghill, 'The Character of Piers Plowman considered from the B-Text', p. 134, and cf. Mk. 4:28.

55. Cf. David Mills, 'The Rôle of the Dreamer in *Piers Plowman*', in *Piers Plowman: Critical Approaches*, ed. S.S. Hussey (London, 1969), pp. 210, 211.



pears weeping, unable to cope with them.<sup>56</sup> Piers bears God's commission, but (unlike Hope) not from the very beginning. (Perhaps there is a parallel here with the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Christ, confirming his mission.) So Piers 'is always shown in a position of authority' which 'manifests itself through service.'<sup>57</sup> (The life of Christ was also just such a one.)

Hence Piers's reality is most clearly seen in episodes where he serves his fellowmen (just as Christ is most obviously the true Man in such scenes in the Gospels). We cannot assign fixed interpretations to Piers, because he is always leaving them behind as he moves on to different circumstances.

Piers is not even introduced until the fifth passus of the B text. The way is made ready, however, by such scenes as that of the hardworking ploughmen (who are in a minority, 'some') of B.Prol.20. The reader of the C text will come across the 'leel laborer' of IV.350, a good definition of the early Piers.

His dramatic entry follows the mounting tension of the confessions of the Seven Sins and Repentance's heartfelt prayer for their forgiveness. The chaotic activity calms down slightly when the vagabond palmer is sighted, but hopes are raised only to be dashed, and it is at this psychologically ideal moment that Piers puts forth his head and makes just the right claim: 'I shal wisse 3ow witterly the weye to [Treuthes] place.' (B.V.562)<sup>58</sup> We do not doubt his faith for a moment, and on this convincing declaration is based his entire future.

The details of Piers's indignant refusal to accept 'huire' (*ibid.* 563, cf. C. VIII. 199), and his plain description of the hard, dangerous way to Truth, emphasize his sharp realization that salvation cannot be bought, and condemn all who are like Meed. Piers's stress on the Old Law and the power

56. Cf. R.W. Chambers, *Man's Unconquerable Mind* (London, 1939), p. 154.

57. The quotations are from Barbara Raw, 'Piers and the Image of God in Man', in Hussey, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

58. Coghill observes that there is no earlier place at which Piers could have appeared ('The Character of Piers Plowman considered from the B-Text', p. 115).

of the Church, the instrument of the New, to save (568–638), shows he is no *ignorant* ploughman. Clarity is achieved at the expense of poetry here, since Piers and Langland are concerned with truth rather than art. But Piers's deep and clear theological grasp is also demonstrated in his measured description of Grace (604–617) and in his earnest, faster-moving warning concerning 'Wrath-the' (seemingly Satan at the very gates of Truth; 618–626), whose envy and pride will drive out truth.

Against Wrath-the Piers opposes the seven sisters of the succeeding lines while he has preached law, he also sets forth hope. And realizing that it is not enough to make encouraging remarks, he points his flock positively to God and assures them that Mercy and her Son are 'syb to alle synful' (643–645), provided always that his hearers 'go bytyme.' (647) Here the immediate concern of Piers with life here and now is to the fore. What has to be done must be done now in this poem,<sup>59</sup> and the patent authority of Piers causes rebellion (648–651) as lesser authority might have not.

Taking stock, we find that Piers Plowman is so firmly grounded by this record of his faithful work that he is here neither prelate nor symbol. At the same time, the list of his works is greater than any normal man could cope with, and each provides man with basic necessities (548–555). He is not personifying anything since he represents no abstract conceptions; for this reason he has a great, indeed infinite, capacity for growth.

For the time being, Langland gives us Piers as a conscientious farmer above all else, who is sympathetic to the crowd, but whose half-acre comes first (B.VI.3–6), a question of 'plain duty'.<sup>60</sup> Here his name in all three texts is given its diminutive form, and he swears by St Peter; perhaps an indication that at this point Piers is a lesser Peter, as it were. And from this point the Ploughman does begin to display a larger significance. To occupy the impatient woman he authoritatively sets them to work, again to provide basic necessities (*ibid.* 9–16). He himself undertakes to feed as many as he can 'but 3if the londe faille' (17); Piers is limited, in that he can do nothing about natural calamity.

For the same reason he gratefully accepts the knight's offer of pro.ec-

59. Cf. Rom. 13:11f, for instance.

60. Lawlor, *op cit.*, p. 255; see also Elton D. Higgs, 'The Path to Involvement: The Centrality of the Dreamer in *Piers Plowman*', *Tulance Studies in English*, 21 (1974) p. 13.

tion, which leaves him to do work enough for both of them (22–29). Piers takes the view that each person should do what he or she can do best and the solemnity of the ‘couenaunt’ that he makes with the knight (28; cf. 35, 36) underlines what a ‘mesurable’ and ‘kynde’ view this is. The knight’s actions should be governed, urges Piers, by mercy, truth, meekness, and should be sensible and generous (38–56). Piers meanwhile practices what he teaches, and recognizes his own need to become a pilgrim; his way is involvement with those who need him, and there is nothing out of the ordinary about his patched clothes and essential tools (59–64). The sowing still takes priority (‘sitthenes wil I wende’, 65), for it represents part of his duty to provide for those who help him and live in truth (67–71).

Piers also prepares for his eventual death, having taken leave of his family (80–85), showing he is neither immortal nor a priest. Having made bequests which are charitable in the true sense of the word (89–99),<sup>61</sup> he turns back to his land. So deeply concerned is he for honest work that he even loses his temper, albeit under provocation (117ff, 154ff), and it is a situation with which he *cannot* deal, although he hopes that Truth or the knight can (136,161ff). But Piers has a misplaced confidence in the knight’s excessively courteous methods, which have to be augmented by the violence of Hunger, summoned by a furious Piers (173ff). There is much humour in the frantic activity which follows (186ff); as Will drily notes of the blind and bedridden, ‘sone were thei heled.’ (195)

Piers is understandably, but inexcusably, proud of this (200); actually he has contributed practically nothing to Hunger’s success, and is uncertain how to proceed (206). Piers is not omnipotent, and his pride has quickly evaporated; but while he is still firmly earthbound he is also figural, since he has been able to expound ‘a spiritual mystery, which will only much later be fulfilled, in himself.’<sup>62</sup>

Just for the moment Piers is a little puzzled, for he does not want to harm even the laziest of his ‘bloody bretheren’ (210; cf. B.XI. 193,202): Such a homely vice helps the reader to identify with him, so that the great heights to which Piers rises are seen as not impossible even for one guilty of two Deadly Sins (and of several mistakes), and therefore within the grasp of the reader too.

In the famous pardon scene the increasing intimacy of Piers and Truth is

61. Robertson and Huppé. *op. cit.*, p. 82, see the will rather as a continuing process.

62. Salter, ‘Medieval Poetry and the Figural View of Reality’, p. 87.

at once apparent. Such a pardon (*a culpâ et a poenâ*) 'presupposes the effects obtained by confession, contrition, and sacramental satisfaction.'<sup>63</sup> So this is Piers's healthy spiritual state, and his document is directed to those who obey the creation mandate to subdue the earth (Gen.1:28), which naturally implies honest labour, and it includes all those who live and act truly. In the final analysis they will be 'peres with the apostles' (B.VII. 16), which looks suspiciously like a pun. But the pardon is far less gentle to those who are not of the same calibre as Piers (e.g., *ibid.* 62ff).

It is therefore quite a shock to realize that this comprehensive document is only two lines long, and is simply part of the belief of the Church (111). Its rejection by the priest accords with our feeling of disappointment, and Piers's anger is completely human and totally honest.<sup>64</sup> (Will assures us of the veracity of the report, if assurance were needed, by making a personal appearance.) Piers's considerable learning annoys the priest and the ensuing argument seems to me not unlike a flyting. Because Piers stoutly stands up for a deep study of the Bible (136f), which is consonant with his desire to pray and do penance, and his faith that God will be with him, even in *medio umbre mortis*, he rises in stature again and Will has a new interest in him, as a leader to be followed and mused upon (143ff).

#### Later growth

In the long gap before Langland speaks of Piers again, we forget neither his impetuous, dramatic actions nor his measured teaching. (Patience in C.XVI is described as a pilgrim like Piers, which is not without significance). We gather from Conscience and Clergy in B.XIII that Piers knows the infinite nature of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest (lines 123–129), and will never speak against holy writ (131).

Here Piers is concerned with the spiritual welfare of man, and has grown immensely, for 'at one sweep we rise to the infinity of love, its immeasurable superiority over learning'<sup>65</sup> and in addition learn that priests encourage

63. CE vol. VII, p. 783; see also p. 784 and CED, p. 387.

64. Though I feel that Coghill's 'trustful illiteracy' ('The Character of Piers Plowman considered from the B-Text', p. 117) is a most unfortunate phrase. Alan C. Lupack, in his comment on 'Piers Plowman, B.VII. 116', *The Explicator*, 34 (1975), section 31, feels rather that Piers is angry at the *priest*.

65. Lawlor, *op cit.*, p. 120.

the people to pray the Lord's Prayer 'For Peres the Plowman and that nym profite wayten' (237). The last-mentioned are now clearly the Church Militant and its leader (we learn this from Haukyn, the *Active* man).

In passus XV we come to realize that Piers is an indispensable guide to charity as well as to truth, owing partly to his compassionate nature and depth of perception (190, 193f). In fact, 'Piers the Plowman, *Petrus, id est, Christus*' (206). Three different names are yoked in this macaronic line, even as three distinct beings are here united, and *Petrus* acts as the catalyst allowing the two other substances to be combined. The undramatic assertion is the high point of Piers's development and here demands an interpretation of him as Christ (and Charity, and Truth).<sup>66</sup> The apotheosis continues in the next passus, where Piers oversees the 'farming' of the human heart by *Liberum-Arbitrium* (B.XVI. 16,17); a 'doctryne' less effective than the dreamer's intense reaction to Piers's name (*ibid.* 18–20).<sup>67</sup> Piers's solemn words on the Trinity, which occur in a deep dream within a dream (20ff), indicate that he is a teacher and experiencer of profound mysteries, while his attack on the robber Devil (86–89) demonstrates that he is still as willing as ever to be actively involved. His righteous anger during this Christ-like action contrasts with the self-centred annoyance of the pardon scene. It is notable that the account of the death of Jesus wakens Will, who miserably sets out to look for Piers (164–171); the two are identical in his sight.

The galloping, knightly, yet unequipped figure of B.XVIII can then be seen to be Christ (not yet tested on the cross) precisely because of his

66. Coghill will only go so far as to say that here Piers stands for Dobet, but on the anagogical plane he is 'associated' with God and Christ ('The Character of Piers Plowman considered from the B-Text', p. 125).

67. Davlin makes the fascinating suggestion that Piers here is a pre-Christian man (*Petrus, Id Est, Christus*, p. 288), which does not however explain the dreamer's reaction. Perhaps significantly, Piers does not appear in this episode in the C text.

resemblance to Piers and the Samaritan, and even more because his mission is to free 'Piers fruite' (line 33), once he has been armed in Piers's harness (22, 25). From here it is but a slight transition to Piers all bloodied in B.XIX.6, and – Langland is quite definite – 'ri3te lyke in alle lymes to owre lorde Iesu' (*ibid.* 8). Conscience calms the dreamer's confusion by reminding him that this *is* Christ, 'disguised' in the armour of Piers, or human nature (12).<sup>68</sup> This differentiation prepares the way for Piers's disappearance in the final passus, for the Christian cannot be said to lose Christ, but can certainly lose sight of this figure who knows the way.

The pardon scene is almost repeated in B.XIX.177ff, except that here the gift of the Spirit is granted 'to Pieres and to his felawes' (*ibid.* 196). Conscience's reminder of Pentecost also clarifies Piers's function at this juncture: he is Peter and the church, the more especially because Grace now goes with Piers (208) and they work together to erect and protect the barn of Unity (314ff). Such an episode shows that Piers is still basically a farmer, with stalwart ploughing and harrowing teams (257ff, 262ff), a sower of the principal virtues in man's soul (269ff), and the procurator and reeve of Grace (253f). For what purpose? To receive all that Grace is owed (254). So Piers's new administrative duties are those of Peter and the popes, and grow naturally out of his earlier activities.

Grace supplies Piers with costly (indeed priceless) timbers and other materials for the house of God on earth, of which Piers as a living stone (cf. I Pet. 2:5) is himself part. (Though there is not necessarily a connexion, one is reminded in these lines (318–325) of the care taken over Solomon's temple (II Chron. 3–4), a type of the Church.) Piers immediately begins to make responsible use of these materials, going 'Now ... to the plow' (331), since Pride and company threaten the crop, and it is not long before all seek shelter in the building (352ff). Inside, the simple vicar gives Piers the dubious compliment of wishing that he were emperor of the world and that all men were Christians (242f).<sup>69</sup> This is much too material a conception of

68. Lawlor, *op cit.* p. 172, comments on this 'immediate return from triumph to continuing war' that 'We leave behind the Jesus of fulfilled promise, and turn to the Christ whose work is yet to be done', an excellent summary.

69. Coghill inaccurately maintains that Piers is unchanged (from 'living' Jesus in the Passion and Harrowing) in XIX. See 'The Character of Piers Plowman considered from the B-Text', pp. 119, 120. Piers actually represents a number of things here, notably Peter and the popes (see Davlin, '*Petrus, Id Est, Christus*', p. 290).

Piers, quite apart from the possibility of sarcasm.

In Piers's final entrance the restitution theme appears again (B.XX. 306), and he is said to be a better 'leche' than any clergyman (*ibid.* 316–318). Piers here could be Peter (who admits folk to heaven on the basis of their 'accounts'), or the pope (greater even than a bishop), or Christ, the doctor of life. There is no need for these to be mutually exclusive, and Conscience seeks Piers, the servant of Truth, at least partly as a healer (cf. 383).

Piers is not simply allegorical, because his signification is different at different stages, and richest at the end, with all the accumulation of the poem — and the poet never explicitly indicates what Piers is supposed to mean.<sup>70</sup> Piers takes part in the providential time-scheme of God<sup>71</sup> as a rounded human being with a whole set of emotions, for regardless of any traditional associations he is no stereotype. In his creation especially, William Langland's 'graphic treatment of human figures' and 'vivid sense of movement, gesture, turn of speech and timing'<sup>72</sup> is greatly in evidence.

Langland did not apply to Piers the nearly perfect and thoroughly appropriate metaphor of the shepherd, as this might have obscured the essential distinction between Christ and Piers, who are like yet unlike, or led to confusion with Will's shepherd's garments of the Prologue. And it is a great pity that Chaucer's ploughman never told us a tale. At least he shares 'pees', 'parfit charitee', and a desire to work — 'Withouten hire'<sup>73</sup> — with Piers, and these characteristics, along with faith and hope, determine Piers the man and are the solid base on which Piers as Christ rests.

Those we have discussed are all Christ-centred, loyal to Truth. They act in conjunction with each other<sup>74</sup> and are brought together by the work of

70. Cf. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, 1957), p. 90, where he notes that poets often indicate how they would like their allegorical figures to be interpreted.

71. As do Dante's characters (see Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca, New York, 1965), p. 28).

72. Lawlor, *op cit.*, p. 109.

73. *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, second edition, ed. F.N. Robinson (London, 1957), I (A), 532, 538 (p. 22).

74. See Mary C. Schroeder, 'The Character of Conscience in *Piers Plowman*', *Studies in Philology*, 67 (1970), p. 13.

Christ. Their lives are examples for Christians to practise unceasingly until that time when Christ comes again; his work will then be completed and these figures of stages on the road to Jerusalem fulfilled;<sup>75</sup> they themselves will have arrived.

75. Priscilla Jenkins, 'Conscience: The Frustration of Allegory', in Hussey, *op cit.*, p. 127, argues that all the 'allegorical' characters are eventually seen as somehow inadequate, and I suspect this is due to their figural nature; they *must* point onward.