Faculty of English

Love and *Drede*: Religious Fear in Middle English

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ABSTRACT

Several earlier generations of historians described the later Middle Ages as an 'age of fear'. This account was especially applied to accounts of the presumed mentality of the later medieval layperson, seen as at the mercy of the currents of plague, violence and dramatic social, economic and political change and, above all, a religiosity characterised as primitive or even pathological. This 'great fear theory' remains influential in public perception. However, recent scholarship has done much to restitute a more positive, affective, incarnational and even soteriologically optimistic late-medieval vernacular piety. Nevertheless, perhaps due to the positive and recuperative approach of this scholarship, it did not attend to the treatment of fear in devotional and literary texts of the period. This thesis responds to this gap in current scholarship, and the continued pull of this account of later-medieval piety, by building an account of fear's place in the rich vernacular theology available in the Middle English of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It takes as its starting point accounts of the role of fear in religious experience, devotion and practice within vernacular and lay contexts, as opposed to texts written by and for clerical audiences. The account of *drede* in Middle English strikingly integrates humbler aspects of fear into the relationship to God. The theological and indeed material circumstances of the later fourteenth century may have intensified fear's role: this thesis suggests that they also fostered an intensified engagement with the inherited tradition, generating fresh theological accounts of the place of fear.

Chapter One begins with a triad of broadly pastoral texts which might be seen to disseminate a top-down agenda but which, this analysis discovers, articulate diverse ways in which the humble place of fear is elevated as part of a vernacular agenda. Here love and fear are always seen in a complex, varying dialectic or symbiosis. Chapter Two explores how this reaches a particular apex in the foundational and final place of fear in Julian of Norwich's *Revelations*, and is not incompatible even with her celebratedly 'optimistic' theology.

Chapter Three turns to a more broadly accessed generic context, that of later medieval cycle drama, to engage in readings of Christ's Gethsemane fear in the 'Agony in the Garden' episodes. The N-Town, Chester, Towneley and York plays articulate complex and variant theological ideas about Christ's fearful affectivity as a site of imitation and participation for the medieval layperson.

Chapter Four is a reading of *Piers Plowman* that argues a right fear is essential to Langland's espousal of a poetics of crisis and a crucial element in the questing corrective he applies to self and society. It executes new readings of key episodes in the poem, including the Prologue, Pardon, Crucifixion and the final apocalyptic passus, in the light of its theology of fear.

C‍ONTENTS P‍AGE

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ABBREVIATIONS

ST   *Summa Theologiae*
PL   *Patrologia Latina*
MED   *Middle English Dictionary*
OED   *Oxford English Dictionary*
YLS   *Yearbook of Langland Studies*
MLR   *Modern Language Review*
ELN   *English Language Notes*

INTRODUCTION

I.   LOVE AND DREDE

For þe right way þat lyggys til blys

And þat ledys a man theder es thys

Þe wey of mekenes principaly

And of drede and luf of God almyghty,

Þat may be cald þe way of wysdom.[1]

This collocation, 'love and drede' is extremely widespread in Medieval English

literature to describe the dual aspects of a single 'emotional posture' in the relation of

the Christian person to God.[2] We find it here near to the opening of the *Prick of*

Conscience, the Middle English pastoral poem that exists in vastly more manuscripts

than any other.[3] In the *Prick* the forming of a right *drede* comes to be synonymous

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[1] *Richard Morris's Prick of Conscience: a corrected and amplified reading text*,
prepared by Ralph Hanna and Sarah Wood, EETS 342 (Oxford: Oxford University
Press, 2013), 'Entre', ll.139–43, p.6.

[2] Paul Megna, 'Dread, Love, and the Bodies of *Piers Plowman* A.10, B.9 and C.10',
YLS 29 (2015), 61–88 (p.61). For example, Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine
Love*, ch.74 in *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. by Nicholas Watson and
Jacqueline Jenkins (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006),
p.357; Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Second Nun's Tale', *Canterbury Tales* in *The
Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
1987; repr. 2008), pp.264–69, l.155 (p.264).

[3] See Introduction, *Prik of Conscience*, ed. by James H. Morey (Kalamazoo, MI:
Medieval Institute Publications, 2012), p.1.

with the poem's didactic and penitential enterprise. The way of loving and fearing

God in harmony is the *via* (road) to blessedness. In this text's 'entre' or gateway, love

is swiftly dealt with: creedally inspired as proper adoration due to the creator and the

redeemer, it is only 'kynde' or natural for man who has wit and will, reason and

volition, to love God as a response to these gifts. However, it is fear that articulates

and limns the developing conscious relation of the penitent to God that soon becomes

the emphasis of the poem. 'Drede' articulates the actual distance of the unreformed

and fallen self from God's purposes, and unveils the eternal consequence of human

action. If love best expresses that which should exist between the human being and

God *qua* eternity, fear is an essential aspect of its present face. It has an actualising,

temporal, stimulating and developing aspect. The title itself evokes the association,

since Augustine, of fear as the 'stimulus' or 'needle' (one sense of 'prick', a pointed

object such as a needle)[4] which draws the soul through towards perfection. The poem

seeks to perform or enable this prick by bringing its reader to two forms of knowledge

that are preliminary to 'drede'. First, self-knowledge of distance from the creator

through sin:

> Bot som men has mykel lettyng,
>
> Þat lettes þam to haf right knawyng
>
> Of þamselfe, þat þai first suld knaw,

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[4] *MED*, 'prik(e (n.)', 1.

Þat þam til mekenes first suld draw.

That fyrst to mekenes shulde hem lede.[5]

Secondly, the knowledge of the doctrines of purgatory, hell and heaven:

And lere to knaw and thynk wythalle

What sal after þis lyf falle.

For knawyng of þis shuld hym lede

And mynde wythalle til mekenes and drede.[6]

To come to these forms of 'knowyng' requires, the poet asserts, much more than sheer wit. It is necessarily done through a process of learning, one achieved through the mediation the text offers, its exposure to sin and its consequence. And this learning about the self and of things eternal, as the quotations above all variously suggest, is synonymous with coming to 'drede'. Here, to read and to *dreden*, to learn and to fear, text and terror, are intimately wedded.

Later-medieval religiosity in Middle English was unabashed in treating *drede* as a component of the affections which lead to God. This thesis begins with the contestation that fear has, despite its prominence in texts of pastoral instruction and performative and poetic devotion, been relatively neglected in the contemporary

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[5] *Prick of Conscience*, ed. Hanna and Wood, ll.237–241, p.9.
[6] *Prick of Conscience*, ed. Hanna and Wood, ll. 227–230, p.9.

richness and subtlety of studies of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Middle English religiosity and affectivity. This is despite the shift, especially by literary scholars, to recount the development and sophistication of the textual expression (devotional, moral, doctrinal and philosophical) in Middle English that we might term 'vernacular theology'.[7]

There are two contexts to be aware of in the light of this apparent neglect. The first is now primarily historical, but can be seen to have a certain continuining influence, especially evident in public perceptions of medieval religiosity. This is rooted in the attitude towards medieval piety of the *Annales* school of historians, which gave medieval fear a deeply negative valency. This view accorded with a pre-revisionist understanding of a primitive and pathological Middle Ages and a deep suspicion of medieval religion, elevating a coercive and negative fear as virtually the characteristing feature of medieval piety. Whilst this view was prominent especially in the 1970s, it can nonetheless be found in what is still the most recent monograph devoted to fear as a cultural historical object, Peter Dinzelbacher's *Angst im Mittelalter,* and an assumption of fear's negative valency also governs some essays gathered in the recent volume *Fear and its Representations*.[8]

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[7] A concise summation of which is given in the cluster on 'vernacular theology' in the special edition of *English Language Notes* devoted to 'Literary History and the Religious Turn', *ELN* 44.1 (2006), pp.77–137. See also pp.33–34 and footnotes on those pages.

[8] Peter Dinzelbacher, *Angst im Mittelalter* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1996); *Fear and its Representations in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. by Anne Scott and Cynthia Kosso (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002).

In more recent, and especially more literary, studies, the underpinnings of this monolithic understanding have been substantially revised and displaced. There has been a new appreciation of the incarnational positivity of the post-eleventh century turn towards experience and affectivity, with fresh study of this facet part of a wider 'affective turn'. Given that scholars concur in fronting the importance of emotion in late medieval England 'steeped in affective, incarnational devotion' religious fear seems overdue a more exclusive reconsideration.[9] However, this earlier portrayal of the dominant role of fear in later medieval lay piety has yet to be countermanded by a revisionist study of fear's actual place in later medieval literary expressions of this spirituality. In fact, this focus on a more 'positive', incarnational, and in some places reformist and soteriologically optimistic theology being articulated in Middle English may itself have been an element in the apparent neglect of fear. The commonplace consensus that the later Middle Ages emphasised compassion and suffering alongside Christ has often been seen in contradistinction to a fearful attitude towards God, as in Rachel Fulton's masterful study *From Judgement to Passion*.[10]

My thesis, taking vernacular writings as its focus, treats fear as an integral aspect of later medieval devotional affectivity, demonstrating how its centrality was being explored, examined and reasserted in a number of key texts in Middle English. Hence in this introduction we will argue that both positions are due for a reappraisal, reviewing the serious limitations of the 'great fear theory' of the historians of the

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[9] Shannon Gayk, *Image, Text and Religious Reform in Fifteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.8.
[10] Rachel Fulton, *From Judgement to Passion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

earlier twentieth-century and then the absence of treatments of fear within more recent, literary, studies of later medieval piety and 'affectivity'.

I.   THE 'GREAT FEAR THEORY'

What has been called the 'great fear theory'[11] sought to characterise much of the medieval and early modern period, with a special emphasis on the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as a time of multiple and overwhelming fears which amounted to a more general climate of pervasive fear, disquietude and unease. As Bouwsma claims,

> Europeans of the fourteenth century and for some time after, were … both profoundly anxious and at the same time frightened by almost every aspect of experience.[12]

This conception of an 'age of fear' or 'age of anxiety', especially predominant amongst medieval historians of the 1970s and 1980s, is not without grounds. This 'age of fear' was understood, on the one hand, as a product of external material factors of insecurity.[13] These clearly delineable factors of dramatic historical change

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[11] Penny Roberts and William G. Naphy, 'Introduction' to *Fear in Early Modern Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp.1–8 (p.1).
[12] William J. Bouwsma, 'Anxiety and the Formation of Early Modern Culture', in *After the Reformation: Essays in Honour of J.H. Hexter*, ed. by Barbara C. Malamen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), pp.215–46 (pp.222–23).
[13] Roberts and Naphy, p.1; Bouwsma, pp.223–24; Jean Delumeau, *La Peur en Occident: XIVe–XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Fayard, 1978), pp.20–21.

are present in the England this thesis covers and in Europe more widely. First, the

biological/environmental and demographic shift that includes the Black Death and its

effects;[14] secondly, the large-scale religious trauma of papal schism and the local

incidence and accusation of heresy; thirdly, political upset, including in England two

royal depositions and the ongoing Hundred Years' War, and, fourthly, socioeconomic

shifts that include monetization and the rise of markets, decreased peasant land-

ownership and urbanisation.[15] The 'age of fear' has also or concurrently been

understood in terms of medieval Christian experience. This emphasizes fears more

associated with faith, such as the fear of sin, fear for the soul at the point of death, the

fear of judgement, purgatory, hell, and related elements such as devils and

punishments, and looks, especially in the most important work of Jean Delumeau, to

shifts in confessional practice and theology to delineate fear's crescendo.[16]

However the negative valency of the historians' characterisation of a medieval

'age of fear' went hand in hand with the long revised, yet still influential, portrayal of

the Middle Ages as the negative counterpart to all that is associated with modernity:

affectively and culturally primitive, pre-technological, pre-rational and incapable of

sustaining a desirable progress.[17] This view tends to understand fear as a rationally or

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[14] See Bruce M. Marshall, *The Great Transition: Climate, Disease and Society in the Late-Medieval World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[15] For a form of this list, see Roberts and Naphy, p.1.

[16] Peter Dinzelbacher, *Angst im Mittelalter* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1996); Delumeau, *La Peur en Occident* and *Sin and Fear: The Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture: 13th–18th centuries*, trans. by Eric Nicholson ([1983] New York: St Martin's Press, 1990).

[17] Robert Muchembled, *Popular Culture and Elite Culture in France 1400-1750*, trans. by Lydia Cochrane ([1978] Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press,

emotionally inadequate response to material pressures, and to existence and experience *per se*, which a superior modern outlook would disdain or find redundant. Especially in some *Annales* historians, religious fears are understood as imaginary sublimations of 'real' fears in lieu of technological or intellectual 'solutions'.[18] This reduces 'inner' fears or the existential concerns of the mental and spiritual life to forms of 'material' or 'outer' fears. Religious fears have been viewed by some medievalists and historians as products of a collective 'neurosis' or even 'psychosis': a series of structuring fantasies that both contribute to and are symptomatic of the 'age of fear'.[19] The association of religious fear with the pursuit of institutional power provides a powerfully 'sufficient' explanation of its role.[20] The 'age of fear' is concatenated with the 'age of belief' in such a way as to view the religious outlook itself as a pathology related on the one hand to these allegedly isolable material sources of terror and, ultimately, to these same alleged medieval inadequacies.

By this wholesale denigration of the place of fear in medieval orthopraxy and orthodoxy, and the tendency to explicate medieval religion *through* fear, scholars deprived the medieval outlook of any serious philosophical or existential engagement.

1985), esp. ch.1. Robert Mandrou, *Introduction to Modern France*, 1500-1640, trans. by R.E. Hallmark ([1961] London: Edward Arnold, 1975), pp.70–72, 239–41.

[18] Muchembled, ch.1 'A world of insecurity and fears'; Lynn White, jr, 'Death and the Devil', in *The Darker Vision of the Renaissance: Beyond the Fields of Reason*, ed. by Robert S. Kinsman (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), pp.37–44; Stuart Clark's brilliant critique of the *Annales* school, 'French Historians and Early Modern Popular Culture', *Past & Present* 100 (1983), 62–99 (pp.68–74).

[19] Dinzelbacher, p.17; White, pp.25–46 (p.40); Piero Camporesi, *The Fear of Hell: Images of Damnation and Salvation in Early Modern Europe*, trans. by Lucinda Byatt ([1987] Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p.vii.

[20] Dinzelbacher, p.20.

The underlying historical positivism of this approach relied on associating medieval fear with subjection to ignorance, violent passions, and blind institutional obedience. Hence such fear is directly opposed to, and negatively defined against, the supposed triumph of reason and liberty in the Enlightenment, and of the self and its pleasures in Freudian psychology. Post-modernity and post-secularism has yet to answer the particular question of how we redress our account of the 'age of fear' against fresh realisations about the positivistic bias of our historiography and outlook hitherto.

The briefest analysis discovers that medieval fears of material loss and lack are interwoven with existential fears in the particular forms they took in the context of the rich ontological and theological narratives of the age. The fear of plague, sickness and death also entailed fear for the fate of the soul, fear of judgement, purgatory and hell. These were more than elaborations on the threat of suffering, since, even down to the detailing of punishments, they entailed penetrating fears for oneself and for others over what might constitute the personal and communal seeking of both intermediate and ultimate goods. The fear of schism and heresy entailed fear (and a degree of *hope*) for the advance of the powers of evil and the end of the world. The fear of marketization and urbanization was bound up and spiritually inflected by the fear of the loss of mutual charity, the decline of love itself – and hence every variety of eschatological and soteriological fear. The more complex theological position this thesis will go on to argue for is that fear, as Aquinas had said, is always the record of

love: so many medieval fears are in this sense a positive record of complex and

transcendent medieval desires.[21]

The depiction of an infantilised and 'primitive' Middle Ages entrapped in a

structurally determining, negative fear can already be seen in the work of Johan

Huizinga, who views the later-medieval period as violently ricocheting between

affective responses, and hence dominated by a 'feeling of general insecurity'.[22]

Deeply-felt fear is one source of this less specific anxiety: in speaking of an

'oscillation between despair and distracted joy'[23] or 'between hellish fears and the

most childish jokes', Huizinga denigrates both medieval fear and medieval joy as

erratic and instinctual, 'primitive' engagements with experience.[24]

The emphasis of the *Annales* school of French historians on the history of the

longue durée drew valuable attention to popular and religious culture and the role of

thought and religion in shaping history. However, its totalising and positivist

presuppositions led to an account of a long Middle Ages shackled by a structurally

determining mentality of fear. Stuart Clark paraphrases this view critically:

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[21] Aquinas, *ST*, II.II.125.2. All future references taken from *Summa theologiae*, ed. by Thomas Gilby and T.C. O'Brien, 60 vols (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964–73; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[22] Johan Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, trans. by Rodney J. Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch ([1919] Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.27.

[23] As translated in the older (Huizinga-approved) version: *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, trans. by F. Hopman (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1928, repr. 1968), p.10.

[24] Huizinga, *Autumn* p.24. Clark notes the influence on Huizinga of Edward Tylor, founder of cultural anthropology (p.90).

Physical and mental insecurity gave rise to emotional trauma. Preoccupied with surviving in hostile, mysterious surroundings, lost in a world of which they had only imprecise knowledge, simple men became victims of severe, even psychotic anxiety.[25]

For *Annales* historians such as Robert Muchembled and Robert Mandrou religious fear appears – at best – as a functionalist bulwark, sublimating the anxieties particular to the age (famine, plague, war) in the absence of technological 'solutions' to come. Muchembled's account of the 'climate of anxiety' of late medieval France summates this tendency, arguing this is generated by an 'incapacity to dominate the physical world'.[26] Devotional fears and the 'illusion' of control they give are understood as the outlet for otherwise unmanageable primitive passions.[27] This assigns religious fear a limited consolatory function, but negatively views it as multiplying the sources of fear in fantastical, unproductive directions.

Lynn White's article 'Death and the Devil' characterises the entire period between 1300 and 1650 as 'the most psychically disturbed age in European history'; its iconography and the textuality around death 'necrophilia', and even particoloured clothing an indication of probable 'schizophrenia'.[28] Denigrating the importance of religious fears, this draws an external, rationally-biased line between the real-material and the imaginary-magico-religious. If medieval fear of death constitutes a psychosis,

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[25] Clark, p.69.
[26] Muchembled, pp.15, 30.
[27] Mandrou, pp.56–57,145.
[28] White, pp.26, 31, 33.

the implied ideal is either neo-Stoic or neo-Epicurean, preferring the suppression of apprehension of death through the victory of either rational philosophy or pleasure.

This line is sustained if anything even more extremely into the most recent (although now two decades old) monograph on medieval fear, Peter Dinzelbacher's *Angst im Mittelalter*. Dinzelbacher sustains a vision of a medieval 'psychopathology of fear', of primitive and pre-rational terror. He views medieval religion as entirely a fear-construct, directly applying the psychoanalyst Oskar Pfister's account of fear's domination of Catholicism to the Middle Ages he examines:[29] 'Public and private religiosity is shot through with fear – conceptions and symbolic acts, both born out of fear and designed to assuage it'.[30] Dinzelbacher also delivers a negative and unnuanced account of the medieval Church and its alleged functional and coercive deployment of terror tactics.[31]

By contrast, William Bouwsma views the age of fear not as a product of pre-modern irrationality but of post-high-medieval decadence. Unlike White, Bouwsma acknowledges the timeless role of fear and anxiety, in which the experience of death is 'the nameless horror behind every particular danger'.[32] He relates what he also considers a late-medieval 'age of special anxiety' directly to the loss, perhaps due to the pace of change sparked by urbanization, of the high-medieval unity of outlook, with its assertion of ontological truth and a cosmos of symbolic participation.

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[29] Pfister was heavily criticized by Carl Jung, 'Letter to Fritz Buri', *Letters*, ed. by Gerhard Adler, trans. by Richard Francis Carrington Hull, 2 vols (London: Routledge, 1973), I, pp.398–401.
[30] Dinzelbacher, p.17.
[31] Dinzelbacher, p.20.
[32] Bouwsma, p.220.

Bouwsma, uniquely, sees the management of this anxiety into the early-modern and

Enlightenment period as itself a sublimation: the secularisation or deflation of fear

into the mundane and immediate anxieties of daily life.[33] He suggests we remain post-

medieval, the age of anxiety continuing into the present day, since the ever-more

relativized moral and cultural landscape inevitably provides only relative solutions.

This has found more recent support in the work of Paolo Virno who argues for fear as

one of the sentiments of modern disaffection that has perversely been absorbed as a

necessary and even desirable element of the capitalist workplace and market, no

longer 'put in its place'.[34]

Jean Delumeau is the most important and subtlest historian of fear in the West.

However, he is also responsible for promulgating the most powerful account of

medieval and early modern Christianity as a religion of morbid fear. Delumeau at

times leans towards the kind of 'sublimation-theory' of religious fear we have

discussed in Muchembled and Mandrou.[35] Both as a natural instinct and as an element

of faith, Delumeau acknowledges the potential positive place of fear. He nonetheless

argues that religion constantly courts the danger of regression to an overemphasis on

fear, a danger he views the Church as succumbing to for at least four centuries of its

life. The defining thesis of his *Sin and Fear* is that there was a morbid intensification

of what he terms the 'fear of self' and of sin at the dawn of the modern age. This

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[33] Bouwsma, p.238;

[34] Paolo Virno, 'The Ambivalence of Disenchantment' in Paolo Virno and Michael
Hardt, eds, *Radical Thought in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,
1996), pp.13–16.

[35] Delumeau, *La Peur*, p.27.

surculpabilisation was consequent on a *pastorale de la peur*, a pastoral approach

emphasizing fear imposed on the laity by (themselves fearful) clergy and

churchmen.[36] This Delumeau traces from an Augustinian pessimism and early church

contemptus mundi through monastic ascesis and self-examination and its spread in the

wake of the extension to the laity of annual, proscriptive and detailed confession after

the Fourth Lateran Council.[37] Delumeau subsumes even what have been viewed as the

high points of theological anthropology in the twelfth-century renaissance into his

relentless narrative, even denying any golden age of the sort Bouwsma suggests.[38]

However, he does nuance his account with acknowledgement of medieval interest in

balancing, dispelling or lightening the burden of fear, though in his view the

distinctions that ought to (and so might have) obtained, between, on the one hand, a

requisite sense of sin and reverential fear and, on the other hand, pathological terror of

God and morbidity of guilt, increasingly failed over the course of the Middle Ages.

Delumeau was writing in the context of the theology of the Second Vatican Council:

at times his rejection of the dark Catholic pre-modern appears to require that we see

the God of love as a complete reinvention *ab nihilo* by Pope John XXIII.

It would be implausible to deny that the increasing juridification of the

Church, especially the establishment of compulsory individual confession, not to

mention the delineation of the doctrine of purgatory, was causative of anxieties –

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[36] Delumeau, *La Peur*, pp.9–10.

[37] Delumeau, *Sin and Fear*; on confession extending to childhood see John Bossy, *Christianity in the West* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp.48–49.

[38] Delumeau, *Sin and Fear*, p.18.

anxieties not reflected in the Christian East, which does not hold these beliefs and did

not have a Reformation. Nor can we deny that the 'twelfth-century Renaissance' was

both a culmination of the legacy of the Fathers and contained the seeds of the

codification of religious thought and moral theology, all of which may have created

'more to fear' in terms of specific anxieties.

Certain late-medieval theological developments might also be seen as

causative of fresh fears. The mid-twentieth-century idea of a monolithic 'scholastic

theology' espousing an arbitrary divinity of absolute will has been revised, especially

by William Oberman. However more recent work, as recognised by William

Courtenay, to some extent restates the possibility of a freshly fearful divinity.[39] There

were indeed theological developments in late-scholastic thought that imagined a more

remote God of absolute will, even if it was not as widespread as once claimed. Some

fourteenth-century theologians, including Duns Scotus, modified an originally

twelfth-century distinction between the absolute and ordained aspects of divine

power, where the latter was reliably secured by divine-human covenant, to emphasise

the possibility of the suspension of the ordained in favour of the reserved absolute

capacity, by analogy to a canonistic distinction applied to papal or regal power.[40] Also

potentially anxiety-inducing were the 'nominalist' developments of the *via moderna*

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[39] The controversial history of interpretation of the *potentia absoluta/potentia ordinata* distinction, is helpfully summated in Courtenay, 'The Dialectic of Divine Omnipotence in the Age of Chaucer: A Reconsideration', in *Nominalism and Literary Discourse: New Perspectives*, ed. by Hugo Keiper, Christoph Bode and Richard J. Utz (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), pp.111–21.

[40] See also Govert Buijs, 'The Theological Background of Sovereignty', in *Sovereignty in Transition*, ed. by Neil Walker (Oxford: Hart, 2002), pp.229–60 (pp.250–52).

that further stressed an absolutely contingent because arbitrary ordained order, always shadowed by a potential alternative divine imposition. Since this order is grounded only upon the divine will, or else upon an absolutely inscrutable divine simplicity (as for William of Ockham) it does not necessarily communicate anything about inherent eternal goodness or a stable divine nature.[41] Philip Rosemann demonstrates that this development was significant enough to provoke an eventual backlash and return to a more 'classical' approach.[42]

However, it may be that 'medieval' fear, rather than climaxing with decadent medieval Catholicism, instead comes to its pinnacle in Reformed theology's development of late-scholastic theology and one strain of medieval Augustinianism. Delumeau's version of the *longue durée* in fact emphasizes the still darker Renaissance and Reformation, from which, we should note, the bulk of his evidence comes. This suggests the acceleration and intensification of fear and its systematic pastoral application is, at least partly, a product of the theological extremes of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation when 'the accusation of man and the world reached its climax in Western civilisation'.[43]

In fact, Protestant polemic itself promoted this dark, fear-ridden version of the Middle Ages, characterising the Catholic past as an age of fear which the Reformers

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[41] See Stephen Penn, 'Literary Nominalism and Medieval Sign Theory' in *Nominalism and Literary Discourse*, pp.157–89 (pp.158–9).
[42] See Phillip W. Rosemann, *The Story of a Great Medieval Book: Peter Lombard's* Sentences (Peterborough, Canada: Broadview, 2007), pp.137–93.
[43] Delumeau, *Sin and Fear*, p.27

had cast out.[44] In denying the doctrine of purgatory, for example, Reformed writers characterised the promulgation of this belief as an infantile inducement through terror.[45] And yet the development of Reformed theology both gave reason for further fear and continued, or even intensified, the homiletic promulgation of a salutary fear.[46] Hence Reformed polemic around purgatory also included the accusation that the pre-Reform Church caused moral libertinism by *under*selling the fear of hell against the relative ease of a manageable and deferrable purgatorial punishment.[47] Protestant theology hardened some late-medieval theologians' stress on the *potentia absoluta* of God, which in later Calvinist predestinarian developments would lead to an undeniably extreme soteriological anxiety.[48] But even before this the corollary to the perfect assurance of salvation brought by faith alone is the interior assertion of human depravity and the degeneracy of original sin: this is Luther's *anfechtung*, the ordeal of total terrified despair as the predisposition necessary for the acceptance of divine grace, and with it surety and the totalized expulsion of fear.[49] This derogation of human reason, will and natural capacity to make space for a radically independent divine grace, goes further than anything in medieval theology, and has itself been

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[44] Bouwsma, p.221; Delumeau, *Sin and Fear*, pp.306, 493–94; Peter Marshall, 'Fear, Purgatory and Polemic in Reformation England', in *Fear in Early Modern Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp.150–66 (p.158).

[45] Marshall, p.153.

[46] Delumeau, *Sin and Fear*, ch.19, pp.493–504.

[47] Marshall, p.155.

[48] Delumeau, *Sin and Fear*, ch.21, pp.536–54; Alistair McGrath, *Iustitia dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification,* 3rd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.150–58; *T&T Clark Companion to Reformation Theology*, ed. by David M. Whitford (London: T&T Clark, 2014), pp.59–63.

[49] Berndt Hamm, *The Early Luther: Stages in a Reformation Reorientation*, trans. by Martin J. Lohrman ([2010] Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), pp.41–45.

called a 'theology of despair'.[50] The admittedly compensating assurance of free grace

regardless of merit which relieved Luther's own anxiety did not always have this

effect: anxiety over one's elect status and fear of backsliding from faith could

engender an much intensified despair, now lacking the recourse of devotional or

ethical remedy.[51]

However, this is not the only story about fear that can be extracted from the

teaching of the Fathers, medieval texts and practice of pastoral care – or, the focus of

this thesis, the later-medieval vernacular theorization, performance and narration of a

theology of fear. As we shall see, the vernacular writers assessed here have a more

complex understanding of the dialectic of fear and love in the relationship to the

divine, and fear's complex role in salvation as part of human nature that is both fallen

and redeemable.

Centring on the later medieval period provides an especially powerful moment

to take a sounding on the place of fear. This is a period pre-Reformation, yet

associated – depending on the account – with both 'decadence' and 'proto-reform':

the 'breakdown' of the medieval world-picture or the growing pains of transition to

modernity. The diversity of the picture we can present of the role and place of fear in

texts of this period may furnish alternatives to the extreme positions of, on the one

hand, a late Medieval and Reformed voluntarism that can be called a 'theology of

despair' and, on the other, the extremes of Catholic piety that seem to flow from the

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[50] Delumeau, *Sin and Fear*, pp.27–28.
[51] See John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination: English puritanism and the literature of religious despair* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

crude overemphasis on the actions of the human will at the expense of the transforming effects of mercy and grace.

II.   QUESTIONING THE GREAT FEAR THEORY

There have been a handful of more recent explicit historical and interdisciplinary responses to the historic characterisation of fear's primitive, pathological, or excessively guilt-inducing and primary place in medieval religiosity. Roberts and Naphy assert the constancy of some amount of fear throughout history and attending to 'concrete' instances of its promulgation. This more measured perspective permits sophisticated work to be done under its umbrella, but continues to understand 'nuance' in terms of instances of the lessening or management of fear:

> What emerges is an altogether more rational society that approached its problems, whether they were of an everyday or exceptional nature, in an organised, disciplined and preconceived way...day to day fear was a respected but not invincible enemy.[52]

Thus this alternative historians' perspective still tends to privilege the modern ideal: the containment of fear by the reason.

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[52] Roberts and Naphy, p.7.

Keegan Brewer perpetuates the account of a consciously pedagogical and coercive fear seen in Delumeau and Dinzelbacher, seeing it as 'a useful mechanism for belief control through operant conditioning'.[53] Brewer devises a freshly functionalist account of the role of fear as an evolutionarily desirable surival mechanism, and continues to associate medieval fear with factors that allegedly limit reason, including rural isolation and monasticism. However, Brewer does nuance earlier claims by illuminating the relationship between fear and wonder, detailing neutral responses to alleged fear-triggers such as monsters, describing techniques for the allaying of fear, and unfolding internal homilectic evidence that suggests hearers of *exemplae* were alert to the risk of being emotionally waylaid by terrifying tales.[54]

Historians of pastoral theology and care have shed light on the role of fear in the medieval confessional or at the side of the dying.[55] Eamon Duffy stresses the counter-emphasis on comfort and mercy in his account of the rich dimensions of lay medieval orthodoxy, depicting popular religiosity as far more than a neurotic death-cult or fear-construct.[56] Medieval attention to, including fear of, death, is shown to be richly integral to medieval communality and mutual charity.[57] Thomas Tentler's work on Latin pastoral texts' account of the role of fear in contrition, repentance and salvation also argues for a complex depiction, in which the role of fear is generally

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[53] Keegan Brewer, *Wonder and Scepticism in the Middle Ages* (Oxford; New York: Routledge, 2016), p.50.

[54] Brewer, ch.3, pp.46–78.

[55] Amy Appleford, *Learning to Die in London*, 1380–1540 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), pp.122–26.

[56] Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c1400–c1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), chs.9–10, see pp.346–47.

[57] Duffy, pp.301–10.

relativized along lines provided by Christian tradition.[58] He notes that the texts which

have a more generous attitude to the role of fear, viewing it as sufficient for

repentance and ultimately salvation, often overall have a less threatening outlook and

a less pessimistic view of human capacity.[59] This crucially suggests that admitting the

positive potential of fear is tied both to a more generous view of the role of human

capacities and to an emphasis on the compensatory adequacy of the mercy channelled

through the sacrament.

In a recent volume of essays the editors Anne Scott and Cynthia Kosso cite

Delumeau's hint that 'there were religious writings, dramatic works, poetry, and

secular genres … that contextualised fear in a different way, as a salutary "call to

being" that was "creative of being" rather than destructive of it'.[60] The authors

gathered in this volume are diverse in their approaches, however, and it does not

represent a wholesale comprehensive intervention towards a re-assessment of fear's

positive contribution. Some contributions continue to extend elements of the 'great

fear theory', and most still view fear as unalloyedly negative, or view its positivity as

instrumental.[61] However, Stephen Loughlin's assessment of Aquinas' view of fear

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[58] See Ch.1 of this thesis, pp.21–30.

[59] Thomas Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp.239–43.

[60] *Fear and its Representations*, p.xxii, citing Delumeau, *Sin and Fear*, p.555.

[61] See Kimberly Rivers, 'the Fear of Divine Vengeance: Mnemonic Images as a Guide to Conscience in the Late Middle Ages', pp.66–91; Susan Taylor Snider 'Orthodox Fears: Anti-Inquisitorial Violence and Defining Heresy', pp.92–104; Elizabeth McLuhan, *'Evangelico mucrone: With an Evangelical* Sword: Fear as a Weapon in the Early Evangelization of Gaul', pp.107–124; Steven Fanning, 'Mitigations of the Fear of Hell and Purgatory in the Later Middle Ages: Julian of Norwich and Catherine of Genoa', pp.295–310.

corresponds to my account in emphasising fear's place as an element in man's redeemed condition. Janet Robson shows that the later medieval tradition negotiated the over-emphasis on fear in its warnings agaisnt despair. C.E. Banchich supports my project in recounting the role of a positive fear in Julian, a position I will extend to further stress its foundational role in her theology.[62] This volume and the appearance of two articles in the last four years, one devoted to the development in Thomas Aquinas of Peter Lombard's treatment of fear, and one tracing the development of varying 'affective theologies' of love and fear in *Piers Plowman* Passus IX, speak of a growing interest in this topic in medieval theology and medieval literature's theological expression.[63]

This study will not deny the undoubted medieval abuses of the place of fear, or deny the powerful role of religious fear, sin and guilt in the Latin West. However, it will assert the incongruity of characterising the Middle Ages as an 'age of fear' from the modern perspective of fear's near-totally negative valency. In modern usage there has been a lexical 'splitting-off' of the aspects of fear we have retained positively into other words, such as 'awe' or 'reverence': this romanticises and aestheticizes certain aspects of fear whilst reviling others. I am arguing that many more holistic accounts of *drede* in Middle English are strikingly different in integrating humbler aspects of fear into the relationship to God. The theological and

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[62] Stephen Loughlin, 'The Complexity and Importance of *timor* in Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*, pp. 1–16; Janet Robson, 'Fear of Falling: Depicting the *Death of Judas* in Late Medieval Italy, pp.33–65.
[63] Robert Miner, 'Thomas Aquinas's Hopeful Transformation of Peter Lombard's Four Fears', *Speculum* 92.4 (2017), 963–975; Megna, 'Dread, Love, and the Bodies of *Piers Plowman*'.

indeed material circumstances of the later fourteenth-century may have intensified fear's role: this thesis is original in suggesting that they also fostered an intensified engagement with the inherited tradition, generating fresh theological accounts of the place of fear. We will now turn to the more recent context of literary and cultural work on medieval affectivity, to ask questions about fear's relative lack of treatment in that context.

III.   FEAR AND THE AFFECTIVE TURN

Every scholar who writes more sensitively, positively and creatively about later medieval lay piety and theological expression has indirectly contributed to countermand the 'great fear theory,' insofar as it depended on a reductionist account of the variety and sophistication of later medieval vernacular piety. We might include amongst the most prominent names instrumental in this C. David Benson, Lee Patterson, Nicholas Watson, David Aers, Sarah Beckwith, Elizabeth Robertson, Elizabeth Salter, Bernard McGinn, Vincent Gillespie, Anne Hudson, Nicolette Zeeman, James Simpson, and Fiona Somerset.[64] Recently, Cristina Maria Cervone, Jessica Brantley and Nicole Rice have made significant interventions stressing the interpenetrating theological and literary sophistication of Middle English texts and

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[64] See bibliography.

emphasising the ambition of medieval readers to chart their own contemplative pathways.[65]

There has also been, in literary-cultural studies from the late 1980s onwards, a very significant push to assess and document the 'affective' cast of late medieval piety, with its emphasis on identification with the human figure and passion of Christ. This scholarship has paid new attention to the freshly embodied, experiential and emotive cast of devotion and piety viewed as emerging across the eleventh and twelfth centuries after Anselm, Bernard of Clairvaux and the Victorines, and further stimulated especially by Francis of Assisi and later Franciscans.[66] Overall, this scholarship has tended to emphasise the positive connotations of the 'affective' shift, as empathetic, materially and bodily affirmative, sacramental and incarnational. The historian Rachel Fulton's recent *From Judgement to Passion* enrichens without explicitly challenging this account, describing a movement from penitential anxious prayer in judgement fear to compassionate prayer in suffering sympathy; she identifies its causes with millennial disappointment, on the one hand, and a new emphasis on Mary's co-suffering in exegetical work on the other. Nicholas Watson and Giles Constable have stressed paradox and the overlap of currents in the earlier period, with a severe soteriology juxtaposed with this 'affective' tendency. In the

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[65] Nicole Rice, *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Jessica Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness: private devotion and public performance in late-medieval England* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
[66] From R.W. Southern at least. See *The Making of The Middle Ages* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953) See, for exampler, Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and their Religious Milieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p.90.

earlier period the affective coexists with a theology that includes a severe doctrine of judgement which might lead us to associate it more with fear, but Watson's work on affectivity and vernacular theology has emphasised a shift in the development of this originally latinate affectivity, when it emerges in later lay practice and vernacular texts, towards a more 'generous' soteriology.[67] Sarah McNamer's original account of the history of affective spirituality continues an assessment of its empathetic positivity, but separates it more definitely from the earlier tradition. Claiming a female authorship for the foundational *Meditationes vitae Christi*,[68] McNamer lays stress on the cultural influence of conventual and then lay female spirituality. Affective texts teach their readers to 'feel like a woman'.[69]

Major work in this field has stressed the positive and incarnational aspsects of late medieval devotion and practice. Caroline Walker Bynum's groundbreaking studies of female asceticism, miracles, and the doctrine of the resurrection of the body make the powerful claim that even ascetic practice shows that late medieval theology viewed physicality as 'less a barrier than an opportunity',[70] and that the paradox of

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[67] See Nicholas Watson, 'Conceptions of the Word: The Mother Tongue and the Incarnation of God', *New Medieval Literatures* 1 (1997), 85–124 and 'Visions of Inclusion: Universal Salvation and Vernacular Theology in Pre-Reformation England', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27 (1997), 145–87.

[68] Sarah McNamer, 'The Origins of the *Meditationes vitae Christi*', *Speculum* 84 (2009), pp.905–955.

[69] Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

[70] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p.194; *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone Books, 2011).

medieval spirituality is found especially in its intensely numinous materiality. Gail

McMurray Gibson, engaging with vernacular drama, argues that late medieval

incarnationalism bespeaks a 'growing tendency to see the world saturated with

sacramental possibility and meaning and to celebrate it'.[71] In *Christ's Body* Beckwith

powerfully affirms medieval material spirituality, insisting on the role of Christ's

body as a focus of a range of intense emotional responses accessible not just to those

in orders and the clergy, but also the laity at large. This has not been an unnuanced

account, including in Bynum and Gibson themselves, but there have also been explicit

contestations. David Aers and Lynn Staley in the *Powers of the Holy* address some of

the problems associated with the affective turn, in particular a tendency to deploy the

term in monochrome, parroting the historian's account of the shift and viewing the lay

religion of the later middle ages as entirely consumed by affectivity.[72]

     However, within this affective turn, fear, despite its still prominent role in late

medieval spirituality, has not been subject to a proper assessment. The main ground

for the lack of an engagement with fear in 'affective spirituality' is the tendency we

have described to understand the later-medieval turn as one *away* from a judgement

spirituality and a fearful soteriology. Affectivity has come to be associated with a

range of broadly positive notions of empathy, identification and love. Marital and

sensual-erotic devotional scripts, as well as an interest in sexuality and subjectivity,

have ensured impressive attention to desire. The identification with Christ's Passion

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[71] See Beckwith, *Christ's Body*, p.110.

[72] David Aers and Lynn Staley, *Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 1996), pp.17–19.

and suffering at the heart of affective meditation leads to an emphasis on pity and compassion. Sarah McNamer, has recently acknowledged the risk of ignoring or neglecting other emotional casts in her work connecting the study of emotion within the affective turn to a wider cross-disciplinary emphasis on feeling. McNamer recommends analysis of diverse Middle English texts as seeking to shape and form emotion and enable its ritual performance, but her own exemplary studies do not touch on fear.[73] Whilst Beckwith does not explicitly mention fear in her account of affectivity, there are suggestive hints in her account of *imitatio dei,* when she stresses the extent to which the human figure of Christ is a spur to a recognition of similitude and difference. This seeds an affective model of attraction and rebuff which whilst it 'stresse[s] the continuity of the soul with God' also 'require[s] and inspire[s] an awareness of sin and the reformation of the soul'.[74] Cervone's treatment of the literary expression of the theology of incarnation makes the point, important also for my treatment of fear, that fourteenth-century piety was not exclusively or monolithically 'affective'.[75] If we understand fear in the way Beckwith's brief sortie suggests, as powerfully related to the similitude and difference proper to relating to the *imago dei* and the figure of Christ, after all, this raises certain questions about the continued interplay of 'speculative' distance, the acknowledgement of divine contradistinction, within 'affective' intimacy. Cervone draws attention to the fact that

[73] Sarah McNamer, 'Feeling' in *Middle English*, Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature, ed. by Paul Strohm, pp.241–257 (p.244).
[74] Beckwith, *Christ's Body*, pp.48–49.
[75] Cristina Maria Cervone, *Poetics of the Incarnation: Middle English Writing and the Leap of Love* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

texts and authors were not uniformly stressing visualisation and emotional identification with a suffering Christ, for example, to the detriment of an intellectual and poetic engagement with paradoxes like that of the divine and human.

I hope to complement this more 'diverse' approach to later medieval 'affectivity'; the emphasis on fear, since it evokes distance alongside compassion, trembling alongside pity, directs us towards this. From an affective standpoint, fear is an element in co-suffering with Christ that continues to hold his humanity and divinity in the paradoxical tension that is the very circumstance of redemption. The idea that Christ is now only the 'suffering' and not the 'victorious' or 'judgment' Christ does not quite correspond to, for example, the Christ in *Piers Plowman*. I show that Langland's Christ is more fundamentally a Christ of victorious redemptive power, albeit a power caught up in his own human capacity to fear and fear on behalf of humanity. The relative scholarly neglect of fear bears some relationship to the narrative of a later medieval emphasis on embodiment and experience. However, this thesis will throughout assert that this 'positive' incarnational theology itself underwrites a more important role for the natural, human affect of fear. At the same time, especially in Langland and Julian, it also argues that the role for fear in relation to sin and judgement renders their soteriological optimism less 'casual' than Nicholas Watson has occasionally termed it.[76] In Chapters Two and Four I will show how love and fear are consciously and carefully held in paradoxical interrelation and mutual dependence in these writers. Chapter Three, looking at Christ's fear medieval drama,

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[76] Nicolas Watson, paper given to the Cambridge Medieval English Graduate Seminar, 21st February 2013.

will draw significant new attention to its positive affective valency there whilst again stressing the paradox the texts embrace. Chapter One examines a number of Middle English texts for lay catachesis and devotion that do not slot simply into an 'affective' category. They illustrate diverse vernacular revisions and re-appropriations of devotional and catachetical material from Christian tradition, all of which redefine and reassert the place of devotional *drede.*

IV. TEXTS AND CHOICES: VERNACULAR THEOLOGY

The texts of this thesis are neither the texts of the theologians *de timore* nor what Barbara Rosenwein has called the 'scary sources' preferred by Delumeau and Dinzelbacher.[77] The soundings I make, through close-textual readings, are not in Middle English sources which might primarily stimulate fear, but rather those where the place of fear in religious experience appears to be discussed, queried and nuanced. Hence I will not be dealing directly with purgatory visions (such as the *Visio Tnugdali* or *St Patrick's Purgatory* or the descriptions in Guillaume de Deguileville's *Pelerinage de l'ame*), the more gruesome exemplae (although some of these are found in *Jacob's Well*, one of the texts discussed in Chapter Two), judgement episodes from the cycle plays, or the imagery of hell and punishment that can be found, for example, in parish church wall paintings. Instead I will be dealing with the explicit and implicit discussions of fear's place in devotion that could be understood as forming a

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[77] Barbara Rosenwein, 'Worrying about Emotions in History', *American Historical Review*, 107.3 (2002), 821–45 (p.831).

necessary apparatus to take into account *when* approaching these 'fearful' texts and image-texts. There continued to be in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Middle English writings a sustained religious and existential attempt to deal with fear, not simply to exorcise, but to understand, inhabit and find a redemptive path through it.

The vernacular theological discourses I deal with here present distinct positions without being hermetically sealed from theological teaching in Latin. Whilst I concur with Nicholas Watson's account of the originality and distinctiveness of the vernacular voice, I differ from his claim that 'vernacular theology' is entirely distinct from theology in Latin, as well as his account of the foreclosure of this vernacular creativity with the 1409 Constitutions of Bishop Arundel.[78] Here I prefer Bernard McGinn and Vincent Gillespie's accounts of Latin–vernacular interpenetration and exchange, of 'constant and creative dialogue'.[79] Through the liturgy, homiletics and catachesis, the most vernacularized layperson, whether by reading or being read to, would be a little Latinate; equally, even the most Latinate clerical author would be 'vernacularized', communicating and receiving the products of that textual culture in its multilingual whole. My treatment of these writings throughout assumes an indirect communication between 'high' and 'low', learned and disseminatory, discourse; but it

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[78] Nicholas Watson, 'Censorship and Cultural Change in Late Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409', *Speculum*, 70.4 (1994), 822–64; see Vincent Gillespie, 'Vernacular Theology', in *Middle English,* Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature, ed. by Paul Strohm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp.401–20 (p.403).
[79] Bernard McGinn, *Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200-1350)* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), pp.19-24 and *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechtild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete* (New York: Continuum, 1994), pp.1–14. Watson, 'Conceptions of the Word' and 'Visions of Inclusion'; Gillespie, 'Vernacular Theology', pp.405–406.

also assumes that, precisely by the multiplicity and lack of rigidity of authors' and audiences' engagement with *theologia sacra*, the vernacular theology of fear is a distinct recombination of elements received from the scriptural, patristic and scholastic traditions.

'Vernacular theology' in the fourteenth century is associated most definitively with the outstanding creativity and depth of thought in Julian of Norwich and William Langland, whose accounts of fear are treated in Chapters Two and Four of this thesis. However, it is also increasingly applied to the allegedly more homogenous vernacular pastoral tradition, what Doyle called the vernacular having 'little or no originality', represented here by the texts discussed in Chapter One.[80] Following the recent example of Nicole Rice, I find it possible to juxtapose such texts of 'spiritual guidance' with more inventively theological and literary texts as addressing common questions of what place fear has in the good life. The narrative-imaginary genre of drama on which Chapter Three focuses is even less commonly considered under the rubric of vernacular theology,[81] but I shall argue we find vernacular reflections there too.

Chapter One begins by laying the scriptural, patristic and scholastic inheritance that is the backstory to this thesis, before going on to illustrate how this

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[80] A. I. Doyle, 'A Survey of the Origins and Circulation of Theological Writings in English in the 14th, 15th and Early 16th Centuries with Special Consideration of the Part of the Clergy therein', 2 vols (unpublished PhD dissertation, Cambridge, 1953), I, pp.5–7.
[81] Gillespie, 'Vernacular Theology', p.406; however, one attempt to rectify this is Kate Crassons, 'Performance Anxiety and Vernacular Theology', *ELN* 44.1 (2006), 95–102.

emerges in three texts of Middle English spiritual guidance—*Speculum vitae*, *Contemplations of the Love and Dread of God*, and *Jacob's Well*. All three co-opt and transform the received inheritance. *Speculum vitae* experiments with variations on 'septenary' schemes to explore the paradoxical height of humble fear as a gift of the spirit. This engagement intriguingly parallels the low-high paradox associated with the place of the vernacular in this text, associating the significance of fear with its case for a sapiential and experiential as opposed to latinate and clerical ideal. In *Contemplations of the Dread and Love of God* the continuous role of fear throughout its articulation of a lay *via* characterises this text's re-assertion of classical and patristic models of holiness, over against the spiritualisation of the Christian ideal to be found in emphasis on degrees of contemplative remove in Richard Rolle. In *Jacob's Well*, I demonstrate how critical fear is to its governing allegorical conceit, illuminate the particularity of its account of the hierarchy of love-fear, and show how the interaction of its account of fear and attached *exemplum* exploit the potential social subversion proper to the fear of God. Throughout, the role of fear is understood as fundamental to the love towards which it leads.

This sets the scene for Chapter Two, a study of Julian of Norwich's *Revelations* which makes the original argument that a dialectic of fear and love is fundamental to her 'optimistic' theology. I will argue that she consciously embraces a way of fear as the kenotic and Christological perfection at which she aims, and that moments of personal fear for herself but also for her 'evencristen' become sites for her most profound and paradoxical theological reflection. Overall, Julian subverts the

hierarchical taxonomy whereby fear falls below love of God by arguing for the dual, dialectical presence of love and *drede* from the humblest stage to heaven itself.

Chapter Three explores the exemplary and theologically exceptional nature of Christ's fear in the Gethsemane episodes of the York, Towneley, N-Town and Chester plays, which have never been given the extensive comparative theological treatment advanced here. These plays are sites for diverse presentations of Christ's fear that also permit performative therapeutic participation of that fear. They also comment on and model fear's role in the transformative 'theatre' of the liturgy, suggesting the Eucharist as a site for alignment with Christ's redemption of fear.

Chapter Four concludes by offering a reading of the vernacular theological masterpiece *Piers Plowman* as a poem that espouses a salutary fear as part of its apocalyptic spirituality. I argue that its central concern to discern the crisis of self and society and to bring to light the reality of justice and judgement within the frame of a divine mercy also constitutes an extended reflection on the necessity of fear.

This thesis will look into the heart of medieval literary and vernacular culture itself in a period centred on fourteenth-century England to find places, both expected and unexpected, where fear is being spoken about, described and even assessed as a human experience, a psychosomatic totality that also has a theological and spiritual backstory, with which medieval readers, who are also religious practitioners, can interact.

CHAPTER ONE: FEAR IN *CONTEMPLATIONS OF THE DREAD AND LOVE OF GOD*, *JACOB'S WELL* AND *SPECULUM VITAE*

I. INTRODUCTION

This introduction will briefly survey the common inheritance behind the treatments of fear in the three texts this chapter will consider. I will outline the paradoxical scriptural inheritance on fear, identify the key patristic texts for the later Middle Ages, give a longer treatment of Augustine's influential account, and in conclusion briefly recount the scholastic treatment, through Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas.

The later Middle Ages inherited the patristic and early medieval tradition of theological reflection on fear, and its harmonization of scriptural reference points. Throughout the Old Testament, fear of the Lord ('timor Domini') defines and identifies the people of God and is the basis of adherence to the law (Deuteronomy 10.12–13, Leviticus 19.14, 32; 25.17, 36).[82] A gift of the God, it characterizes the personal relationship of covenant he makes with his people (Jeremiah 32.39–40). This fear concurrently expels other, lesser fears, as God and his messengers come with the reassurance of salvation, 'fear not' ('nolite timere') (Exodus 20.20; Isaiah 43.1; 1 Samuel 12.20–24). The sapiential books and the Psalms elevate fear of the Lord, described as 'the beginning of wisdom' (Proverbs 1.7, 9.10; Psalms 110.10), and even

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[82] Latin from *Biblia sacra vulgata*, 4th edn (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994).

as equatable to wisdom (Job 28.28); it is the universal precept (Ecclesiastes 12.13) without which justification is impossible (Ecclesiasticus 1.28); and it 'endures forever' (Psalms 19.19). However, with the New Testament and the incarnation as the transformative fulfillment of the covenanted divine-human relation comes a text like 1 John 4:18: 'perfect love casts out fear [timorem]'). Augustine celebratedly reduced the distinction between Old and New Testaments precisely to that between fear and love.[83] Paul contrasts a fearful spirit of the past to life in Christ: 'you have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear [timor], but you have received the spirit of filial adoption by which you cry, "Abba, Father"' (Romans 8.15).

Yet the truth of the Hebrew Bible was not considered to be annihilated but rather fulfilled in the New (Matthew 5.17). The last voice of the Old Testament, Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, sings of being 'without fear [*sine timore*], liberated from the hand of our enemies, serving him in holiness and righteousness' (Luke 1.74–75), whilst the first voice of the New, Mary, can still sing 'His mercy be on those that fear him [timentibus eum]' (Luke 1.50). In the Gospels, Acts, Epistles or the Book of Revelations fear continues to define God's people (Acts 9.31, 10.35, 13.16) and retains a place: in the perception of divine difference and eventual judgement (Matthew 10.28; Luke 12.5; Hebrews 4.1; Revelations 14.7, 15.4); in awed consciousness of the divine action of creation and redemption (Matthew 28.8; Hebrews 12.28); and in the rejection of sin that brings the needful dynamism of

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[83] Augustine, 'The Catholic Way of Life and the Manichean Way of Life'*,* in *The Manichean Debate*, ed. by Boniface Ramsey (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2006), p.21.

transformation for a fallen world (Hebrews 4.1; Philippians 2.12; Ephesians 6.5; 2

Corinthians 7.1).[84]

Moreover, fear as a human emotion has a key place in incarnational

deliverance: Christ himself, as I explore more fully in Chapter Three, in inhabiting the

human condition undergoes fear that is both visceral and reverential (Matthew 26.37;

Mark 14.33; Hebrews 5.7). Paul shows this as fundamental to the self-offering of

discipleship in his own fearful suffering ('timore et tremore', 1 Corinthians 2.3). The

articulation of the fear of God in the Psalms, which retain an exceptional status –

'perfeccioun of dyvyn pagine [containing] al þe lare of þe ald testament and of þe

new' as Richard Rolle puts it – keeps fear at the heart of the prayer of the Church.[85]

In the early Church Fathers, fear of God continues to express the relation

between creator and created. Clement of Alexandria defends the place of fear against

Greek philosophy's anxiety about the perturbation of the reason by emotion. Fear is a

pedagogue of the law, itself tutor to the ways of Christ: an essential consequence of

faith, it prepares for repentance and eventual salvation. Clement uses the Stoic term

for perfected feeling to class this rational fear as *eulabeia* (caution) and, towards God,

deos (awe or reverence).[86]

In the *Conferences* of John Cassian, which transmit the spirituality of early Christian

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[84] 'Timor' is the word used in the Vulgate here except for Philippians 2.12 where it is 'metus'. These are close synonyms, 'timor' more common and hence general, 'metus' more emphatic.

[85] Richard Rolle, 'Prologue', *The English Psalter*, in *English Writings of Richard Rolle*, ed. by Hope Emily Allen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931), p.6.

[86] Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, II.5–9, ed. by Otto Stählin (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1960); trans. by John Ferguson (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1991), pp.170–90.

desert monasticism, fear of God describes the desired state of the ascetic, alongside, conducive or even synonymous with receptive awareness and contemplative closeness generating spiritual fruit of joy and comfort, whose contrary is *acedia* and spiritual dryness. Cassian introduces central paradoxes and typologies of fear. On the one hand, fear of God (*timor domini*) can be understood is an imperfect and intial stage, associated with faith of the three theological virtues, here gradated, and eclipsed by charity. On the other hand, it cannot be imperfect as a right state before God and is rather corresponds to a grade of perfection and a variety of blessedness. Cassian also typologises fear, as does Augustine, into servile, or penal fear inspired by punishment, and filial, perfect, fear of the loss of love associated with fear as a 'gift of the spirit'.[87]

Augustine's account of fear begins in the *City of God*, where he rails against the Stoics and states that the Christian view of the passions, including fear, must be as potential aids to virtue, not inevitable vices: their good use relies on reason, so that the Christian question is 'not whether one fears but what one fears' ('Nec utrum timeat sed quid timeat').[88] In Augustine's scriptural commentary and homiletic he crafts a long-influential typology of the progression from lesser to higher fear, reconciling fear with love. His ninth homily on the first epistle of John is a classic text for the later theology of fear, harmonizing the scriptural inheritance and establishing long-

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[87] John Cassian, *Conferences*, 11.7–13, in *Collationes XXIII*, ed. by Michael Petschenig (Vienna: Verlag der Osterreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2004); ed. and trans. by Boniface Ramsey (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), pp.412–21.

[88] 'Nec utrum timeat sed quid timeat'. Augustine, *De civitate dei*, 9.4-6, ed. by Bernard Dombart and Alphons Kalb, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, 47, 48 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1955), pp.251–255 (p.254).

running problematics.[89] At no point does Augustine deny the role of fear in love, even as he distinguishes between what is a truly loving fear, or a fearful love.

Fear ('timor') Augustine argues, is indeed the beginning of wisdom, an initial step towards the perfection of charity. It must give way to desire for God, but at the same time it is fear itself which makes possible the transformation this must entail. Augustine uses the image of a needle and thread: fear must prick for love to enter.[90] Fear is a surgeon's knife, the healing wound, the 'medicine' whilst love is the 'health'.[91] Both these images could suggest the instrumentality and eventual mutual exclusivity of love and fear. Hence Bede and Abelard argue that fear has no eschatological reality, but is entirely subsumed or cancelled by charity. On the other hand, Augustine himself, along with John Cassian, Hugh of St Victor and Thomas Aquinas, continue to argue for the possibility of eschatological fear, somehow purified.[92] Augustine here and elsewhere argues that fear as *initium* must be reconciled with a purified fear which knows no end: 'the fear of the Lord is eternal, lasting forever' (Psalms 19.19). In order to do so, he categorises fear into that of punishment and that of separation, using the example of a loving and unloving wife's

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[89] Augustine, Tractatus IX, *In johannis epistulam ad parthos tractatus decem*, ed. by John William Mountain and Daniel Dideberg, trans. by Jeanne Lemouzy, Bibliothèque Augustinienne 76 (Paris: Institut d'Etudes Augustiniennes, 2008), pp.358–393.

[90] 'Timor quasi locoum praeperat caritati … Si autem nullus timor, non est qua intret caritas. Sicut videmus per saetam introduci linum quando aliquid suitur; saeta prius intrat, sed nisi exeat, non succedit linum'. Augustine, Tractatus IX.4, p.370.

[91] 'Timor dei sic vulnearat quomodo medici ferramentum: putredinum tollit et quasi videtur vulnus augere…Timor medicamentum; caritas sanitas'. Augustine, Tractatus IX.4, p.370.

[92] Hugh of St Victor, *Sacraments of the Christian Faith* 13.5, ed. by Roy J. Deferrari (Cambridge, MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1951), p.459.

attitude to adultery: 'the one says, I fear to be condemned, the other says, I fear to be forsaken'.[93] Augustine's categories of 'initial' ('timor intialis') and 'chaste' ('timor castus') are joined in his writings by another, for him essentially synonymous, highly influential form of the distinction, that of 'servile' versus 'filial' fear ('timor servilis' versus 'timor filialis'), based on Christ's words to his disciples:

> I will not now call you servants: for the servant knows not what his lord does. But I have called you friends. (John 15.15)[94]

These categories, seen also in Cassian, are adopted by Bede,[95] amongst others, and standardized for the later Middle Ages in Peter Lombard's *Sentences* and through the *Glossa ordinaria.* Peter Lombard identifies 'timor initialis' with an intermediate fear, somewhat servile, somewhat chaste, acknowledging in this the subtle transmutation of fear into love according to Augustine's developed argument. He also describes a 'worldly fear' ('timor mundanus') taken from Cassiodorus, that of earthly loss and pain and a 'natural fear' ('timor naturalis'), the neutral form of this vicious fear, which is how he understands Christ's fear in the Garden of Gethsemane.[96]

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[93] 'Illa: Timeo ne damner; illa dicit: Timeo ne deserar'. Augustine, Tractatus IX, p.376.

[94] Augustine, *In Johannis evangelium tractatus CXXIV*, ed. by Radbod Willems (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954), pp.539–540; *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 85.3, trans. by John W. Rettig, *Fathers of the Church* 90 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1994), pp.138–39.

[95] Bede, *In proverbia Salomonis*, I.7, in *Bedae venerabilis opera: opera exegetica*, ed. by D. Hurst, CCSL 119B (Turnhout: Brepols, 1983), pp.21–163 (p.25).

[96] Peter Lombard, *Sentences*, I.III.34, trans. by Giulio Silano, 4 vols (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2006–10), pp.136–44.

Augustine's homily on 1 John also adumbrates a Christological theology of

fear. Augustine parallels the harmonization of the two 'flutes' of love and fear with

that of the reconciliation of human and divine he draws out of the text 'Let us love,

because he first loved us' (1 John 4.19). The incarnation's outpouring of love

reconciled the ugliness of sinful humankind and the beauty of God.[97] But this

beautifying, and beatification, is paradoxically accomplished by Christ's assumption

of 'unloveliness', taking on the 'form of a servant' in humble humanity. By this

Christ's humanity, synechdocally his 'ugliness', re-oriented to perfection, becomes

the new face of beauty and love.[98] Christ's nature on earth is both ugly and beautiful,

both human and divine, the form of a servant and the son of God, 'servile' and 'filial'.

But Christ is also one, in that his humanity and 'unloveliness' are also the expression

of his divine love; his enfleshment has transformed the capacities of the flesh. The

incarnation is the site of non-substitutionary mystical exchange, the co-dwelling of

humanity and divinity that holds out a promise for the redemption of humankind. This

reconciliation is the exemplar-type, and metaphysical basis, for the kind of

transformation of fear to love Augustine has just described. Just as Christ's

assumption of human nature is not an instrumental step, but changes its potentialities,

so fear is not simply instrumental to love, but transformed that it might become love,

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[97] 'Et quales amavit nisi foedos et deformes – non ideo tamen ut foedos dimitteret, sed ut mutaret et ut ex deformi pulchrum faceret?' *Tractatus in Johannis epistulam*, IX.9, p.384.

[98] 'Quia vero carnem suscepit, quasi foeditatem tuam suscepit, id est mortalitatem tuam, ut aptaret se tibi et congrueret tibi et excitaret te ad amandam intus pulchritudinem'. *Tractatus in Johannis epistulam*, IX.9, p.384.

the 'timor castus' that is the double face of pure love-longing. The very nature of fear is transformed when it is put at the service of God.[99]

In Thomas Aquinas' account fear assumes a discrete role that reflects his theology's stress on the essential, though disordered, goodness and capacity of humanity. Fear, 'timor', refracting humanity's metaphysical condition – created, fallen and redeemed – retains its deep importance for the Christian life.[100] As a natural capacity, fear directs humankind to withdraw from the unsuitable.[101] As a passion, fear is dependent on the quality of love, but can be directed towards expelling virtue and instilling vice.[102] Aquinas follows Aristotle in dismissing both undue and inadequate fear in discussing the virtue of fortitude.[103] As regards the redeemed condition, fear aids us to withdraw from all that prevents us drawing closer to God. Here Aquinas adopts the four central Augustinian categories of worldly, servile, filial and initial fear;[104] Christ experienced natural fear as well as perfect filial fear in this life.[105] The more the fear that is felt before God comes to regard God himself, the more it brings us into proper relation to the divine.

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[99] 'Tu autem totam intentionem tuam in illum dirige, ad illum curre, eius amplexus pete, ab illo time discedere ut sit in te timor castus permanens in saeculum saeculi. *Nos diligimus quia ipse dilexit nos'*. Augustine, *Tractatus in Johannis epistulam*, IX.9, p.386.

[100] Stephen Loughlin, 'Timor in Aquinas' *Summa theologiae'*, in *Fear and its Representations*, pp.1–16.

[101] Aquinas, *ST*, I.II.41.3.

[102] Aquinas, *ST*, I.II.24; 42.1.

[103] Aquinas, *ST*, II.II.123.3.

[104] Aquinas, *ST*, I.II.67.4, 2; II.II.19.2.

[105] Aquinas, *ST*, III.15.8.

In later systematic theology, fear is discussed in treatises on the passions; in discussions of penitence (especially in the light of post-Gregorian reform advocating more 'personal' and psychological attention to intentionality, circumstance and contrition); [106] in accounts of the incarnation and Christ's humanity; in writings about the virtues, especially fortitude; and in descriptions of fear ('timor') as a 'gift of the spirit', the final attribute listed in the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 11.1–3: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety ('pietatis' but translating fear, 'yirah', in the Hebrew, as with the final gift) and fear ('timor').

Bonaventure's important treatment of the gifts has an emphasis on the cultivation of wisdom and holiness as a response to the new self-sufficiency of Aristotelian philosophy. [107] Here the gift of fear ('donum timoris') , alongside the other gifts and the virtues, is a souce of 'strengthening grace', complementing the healing grace of the sacraments and preparing for the perfecting grace of the beatitudes. Bonaventure's poetic account describes fear as a 'beautiful tree', perfected in reverence, but also shaping itself to every stage of advancement in wisdom. Hence wisdom's extrinsic cause is servile fear ('timor servilis') of the pain and suffering of punishment; its intrinsic cause is the intermediate stage of fear of divine punishment

[106] Leonard Boyle 'The Fourth Lateran Council and Manuals of Popular Theology', in *The Popular Literature of Medieval England* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), pp.30-43 (p.33); and 'The *Summa confessorum* of John of Freiburg and the Popularization of the Moral Teaching of Thomas and Some of His Contemporaries', in *St. Thomas Aquinas:1274–1974*: *Commemorative Studies*, ed. by Armand A. Maurer, 2 vols (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies, 1974), pp.245–68; also Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, pp.239–43.
[107] Michael Robson, 'Saint Bonaventure', in *The Medieval Theologians*, ed. by G.R. Evans (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp.194–96.

('timor filialis'); and its completion is filial reverence ('timor filialis reverentiae'). Fear originates in the acknowledgement of divine power, knowledge and judgment, and this true fear generates security; not to fear God is to be in fear of everything else.[108]

The later Middle Ages continued to critique an instrumental fear of punishment and pain whilst maintaining the place of fear within love, with some accounts including a perfected form of fear even in heaven. The gift of fear played its role amongst the order of gifts, virtues and vices that texts might use to express the interrelated workings of grace and nature in the pursuit of a good life. In Middle English, as in the Hebrew of the Old Testament (*yirah*), the Greek of the New (*phobos*), and the usual word in the Latin of the Vulgate, (*timor* or occasionally its synonym *metus*) there is a single word, *drede*, that is used almost universally in the treatment of devotional fear: with modifications and collocations, *drede* encompasses positive and negative, lower and higher fear in the various hierarchies and more or less narrative taxonomies. This contrasts with the contemporary differentiation of fear and reverential awe, which reflects a modern denigration of lower fears and the post-romantic aestheticization of awe and trembling. By contrast, in medieval vernacular taxonomies, lower forms of fear are often either instigators, or coincident with, higher forms of fear. Despite this relatively uniform vocabulary, in the late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century texts to be considered here, this common heritage is turned to strikingly different ends.

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[108] Bonaventure, 'On the Gift of Fear', trans. by Zachary Hayes, *Collations on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (St Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2008), pp.59–80.

II.   Fear and vernacular consciousness in *Speculum vitae* (c.1348–c.1375)

A. Introduction

Despite its Latin title, *Speculum vitae* (which names itself internally the *Myrour of Lyf*) is a widely-promulgated moral verse treatise ambitious for vernacular holiness: both for the uses of Middle English literature and for the practices of lay piety. In the *Speculum* the paradoxical scriptural and patristic inheritance of fear's initial and final place in perfection takes its place as part of a larger dialectic of the humble and the elevated.

    The *Speculum*, written in Northern England in the third quarter of the fourteenth century, is the most popular Middle English adaptation of elements of the thirteenth-century *Somme le Roi*, itself an 'international religious classic'.[109] The *Somme* is a compendium: an exposition of the virtues, vices and spiritual gifts, prefaced by the sacraments, commandments and creed, written in aristocratic French for the young Philippe IV of France by his confessor Frère Laurent d'Orléans, the Dominican ex-prior of St-Jacques in Paris .[110] The *Somme* can be seen as a guide to

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[109] Ralph Hanna, '*Speculum vitae* and the Form of *Piers Plowman*', in *Answerable Style: the Idea of the Literary in Medieval England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013), pp.121–139 (p.122).

[110] Here he was close colleague of Thomas Aquinas, then composing the moral part of his own *summa*. See Leo M. Carruthers, 'Lorens of Orleans and *The Somme le Roi* or

the dissection of the self; however to think of it only as a 'preparation for confession' presents too narrow a vision of its scope – in fact Laurent, assembling the *Somme* using material from the earlier *Miroir de l'omme*, removes that text's 'Traité de Confession'. Secondly, Laurent names his work a *summa*, suggesting a manual of guidance that aspires to be complete and sufficient. The *Somme* itself may be an early outrider of the move Leonard Boyle traces away from the simple extirpation of vice to the rich cultivation of personal virtue.[111] Although Laurent conforms to an older practice of treating virtues before vices (inverting that of his source), he then doubles the attention he pays to virtue with a final treatise. This final fifth of the *Somme*, where Laurent treats the *Paternoster* and then the spiritual gifts, becomes the structural basis for the anonymous *Speculum vitae*. *Speculum* integrates this thirteenth-century material into an ancient model, adapting and applying to the seven petitions of the 'Our Father' further 'septenaries' of vices, virtues, and beatitudes, including material on the vices and virtues that is separated in the *Somme*.[112] This recombination suggestively underscores the conceptualisation of revelation, prayer, virtue and gift and suggests a rich interweaving of the roles of nature and grace, of

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The Book of Vices and Virtues', *Vox Benedictina: A Journal of Translations from Monastic Sources* 5.2/2 (1988), 190–200; Brian Davies, *Aquinas* (London: Continuum, 2002), p.5.

[111] Boyle, 'Fourth Lateran Council', p.36

[112] Augustine, 'Commentary on the Lord's Sermon on the Mount', I.4, trans. by Denis J. Kavanagh (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1951), pp.27–30; *Glossa ordinaria* on Matthew 6:8, *PL* 114, cols 89b–90d. Septenary catachesis became a common post-Lateran IV mode of transmitting pastoral knowledge; see Thomas Lentes, 'Counting Piety in the Late Middle Ages', in *Ordering Medieval Society: Perspectives on Intellectual and Practical Modes of Shaping Social Relations*, ed. by Bernhard Jussen, trans. by Pamela Selwyn (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), pp.55–91.

pre-given habit, disposition and devotional exercise, in merit and perfection. Some

critics have considered the *Speculum* to be an example of the flat, didactic tenor of

'catachetical texts' in the wake of the Fourth Lateran Council, disseminating a thin

kind of instructional content Ralph Hanna has called the 'what' without the 'how'.

However, this is a text which, as Hanna acknowledges, forms the context for the next

generation of more sophisticated reflection on spiritual and devotional questions in,

for example, *Piers Plowman*.[113] Other scholars have argued *Speculum* articulates a

more sophisticated pedagogy: Kathryn Vulić argues that this apparently prescriptive

teaching model provides a training, through its rich catenation of the petitions of the

paternoster, in the principles of textual interpretation and exposition, providing the

basis for future creative manipulation of theological ideas and language by the

listening or reading devotee.[114]

B. *Speculum*'s Prologue: Vernacularity, Humility and Fear

Fear's importance in *Speculum* is prepared for by the paradox of high and low that

governs the vernacular positioning of the text. The association of fear with the

neophyte is as old as the Church Fathers and takes new form in the Middle Ages in

association with the humble and the lay.[115] Fear's association with the foundational –

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[113] Hanna, 'Speculum vitae', in *Answerable Style*, pp.126–29.

[114] Kathryn Vulić, 'Speculum vitae and "Lewed" Reading', in *Devotional Literature and Practice in Medieval England*, ed. by Kathryn Vulić, Susan Uselmann and Annette C. Grisé (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), pp.61–84.

[115] John Cassian, *Conferences*, 11.9, p.415; Jerome, Homily 6 on Psalm 66, Homily 38 on Psalm 111, in *Homilies of St Jerome* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of

and hence also 'high' – virtue of humility enables its integration into the paradoxes of

the humble but aspirant status of vernacular expression and the layperson.[116]

The *Speculum* opens on a doxological prayer that references human, earthly

finitude with a play on first and last: textual incipit and human explicit—death and

judgement:

Spede vs now at þis bygynnyng

And graunt vs alle good endyng (ll.5–6) [117]

These termini, 'bygynnyng' and 'endyng', refer doubly, both to the limits of the

textual object, first and last page, and the limits of the human existence of the book's

lector and auditor, deploying the common metaphor of life itself as a book of

judgement or reckoning.[118] This formulation is not unique to the *Speculum*; different

forms occur across the development of this evolving fourteenth-century northern

literary prologue expressing and valuing the status of the vernacular.[119] However the

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America Press, 1964) pp.48, 281; *Glossa ordinaria*, Isaiah 11.1, 'And he will delight
in the fear of the Lord': 'Spiritualiter propter parvulos qui timore indigent, quem foras
mittit perfecta charitas', *PL* 114, col.1250c; Delumeau, *La Peur en Occident*, p.4.
[116] Watson, 'Conceptions of the Word', pp.110–22.
[117] All references to *Speculum vitae: a reading edition*, ed. by Ralph Hanna using
materials assembled by Venetia Somerset, 2 vols, EETS 331, 332 (Oxford: Oxford
University Press, 2008).
[118] See Daniel 7.10, Revelations 20.12 and Eric Jager, *The Book of the Heart*
(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), esp. pp.113–17.
[119] *Northern Homily Cycle*, Prol.115–18, ed. by Anne B. Thompson (Kalamazoo, MI:
Medieval Institute Publications, 2008), p.19; *Cursor mundi*, ll. 269 –70, ed. by
Richard Morris, 3 vols, EETS 57, 59, 62, 66, 68, 99, 101 (London: Kegan Paul,
Trench, Trübner, 1874–93), I, p.23; *Prick of Conscience*, ll.7–8, ed. by Ralph Hanna
and Sarah Wood, EETS 342 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.3.

Speculum-author deploys it resonantly against an overall structural and intellectual concern with theological paradoxes of hierarchy: beginning and ending, first and last, primacy and ultimacy. Recalling the 'ending' at the beginning', collapsing the one onto the other, the last in the first, evokes the text's enterprise: to convey through the petitions of the *paternoster*, in one sense initiatory and neophytic, in another perfect and final, the fullness of salvific knowledge, of *sapientia* understood here as the perfection of experiential and devotional knowing.

A concern with the humble, low-status and initial as also the final, essential and soul-determining forms the governing dialectic of the text and its 'vernacular consciousness', an awareness of what it is to write in English. A low-high paradox establishes authorial, literary, religious, and indeed linguistic authority. The author's humble posture dissociates the speaker from worldly authority in order nonetheless to recommend the text in the highest terms. The poet's devotional content is at once both quotidian, lowly and 'nedful' – prepared for the most general audience 'man and womman, mayden and wyf'—and at the same time it has the highest salvific content, concerning 'saul and lyf' (ll.34–55).

Speculum's defence of the Middle English vernacular enlarges this dialectic to associate the low-status with the sapiential. Hanna suggests the text neither denigrates nor vaunts the English tongue, recommending rather its universality. In fact, however, it defends the English vernacular as the universally most natural and intimate tongue, subtly associated with devotion, feeling and interiority. Whilst the use of French and Latin is associated with concrete, external institutional places, 'court' and 'skole', the 'kynde langage' of English is associated with the interior process of comprehension.

Notably the writer uses primarily the verb 'connen' for Latin and French, but 'undirstonden' for 'Inglisch', as if the former were for outward projection, and the latter for inward absorption and the deeper knowledge with which 'undirstonden' can be associated.[120] The 'inglisch' speech, precisely by being common to 'lered and lawed, alde and yhunge' (l.79), is the only fitting language for the (most elevated and yet most humble) deep work of salvation.

The development of this thematic continues in the vaunting of the Our Father as the sufficient 'text' for the kind of devotional learning the writer associates with perfect sapience, playing with the combined languages of devotion and clerical, scholastic discourse. The paternoster is God's primary and sufficient 'lessoun', and it, too, continues the dialectic of humblest and highest, both initial and eternal. It is, quite literally, as basic as the ABC: the first text of a child's primer. Yet rather than an instrumental step to be cast off, it has an eternal role and significance:

> þe Pater Noster first men leres,
>
> For it is heued of alle prayers.
>
> It es a prayere mast sufficiaunt
>
> Till alle þa þat it will haunt,
>
> And mast siker, whareso þai ga,
>
> For þis lyf and þe tothir alswa.
>
> (ll.115–24)

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[120] *MED*, 'cŏnnen, v.', 3, 4, 5; 'undirstonden, v.', 3.

The resolution of this seeming paradox is the scriptural truth that humility and childishness are themselves the highest treasures (ll.137–38), an elevation of humility that as we shall see connects directly to the thoroughgoing treatment of fear.

A series of paradoxes complement the poet's central dialectic of the neophytic and the sophisticated, the initial and the final: the brief *paternoster* has 'lang sentence', easy in the praying, it is 'sotill' in the comprehending (l.187). Crucially, a dichotomy of knowing the 'naked letter' versus an 'understanding' associated with 'swettenes' and 'deuocioun' vernacularizes the distinction between *scientia* and *sapientia*, as the evocation of the Latin pun on 'to know' and 'to taste' (*sapere*) suggests (ll.143–50, see ll.2389–90). The work of the intellect and of theology is less denigrated than redefined. Callings active and contemplative share a *telos* in the devout internalization of a spiritually rich wisdom, requiring its own attentiveness, 'grete bisynes and study' (l.190) that is nonetheless accessible through the simplest of known forms, the words of the prayer and the virtues and habits, introduced through the gifts themselves, which this text can 'reflect'. Hence the prayerful hearers or readers of this text can aspire to be both masters of and without clerical scholarity: '…verray skolers right/ Of oure wyse mayster Godde of myght' (ll.139–40). The devotional and indeed theological work demanded of the laity is not a diluted version of higher scholarship, but a life's work of realisation and comprehension completing the scholar's labours. This is to be achieved through prayer understood as the gateway to both rational understanding and sapiential wisdom.

C. The Paternoster Structure: Fear as First and Last

The *Speculum*'s main body, after the prologue and further prefatory material described below, consists in its lengthy individual treatment, over the petitions of the Our Father, of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. These gifts and petitions, associated in reverse order, are also made to correspond to a series of other septenaries: that of the seven 'Hede-synnes' or Deadly Sins; that of the 'seven manere of Blissedhedes'— the beatitudes of Jesus' sermon on the mount (ll.2321–2330); and that of the seven virtues, 'medes', or rewards (ll.3369–70).[121] Hence the gift of fear is associated with the last petition of the Paternoster, the *libera nos a malo* (deliver us from evil), which corresponds to the virtue of humility, expels the vice of pride but also introduces the first beatitude, poverty of spirit (Matthew 5.3). After the prologue proper, this main body of the text is further prefaced by a section focused on the invocation, the 'Pater / Noster / qui es / in celis', again divided so as to contain additional material basic to

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[121] Table of Gifts, Petitions, Virtues, Vices and Beatitudes *Speculum vitae* (author's)

Fear	Piety/Pity	Knowledge	Fortitude	Counsel	Understanding	Wisdom
But deliver us from evil	Lead us not into temptation	Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us	Give us this day our daily bread	Thy Will Be Done on earth as it is in heaven	Thy Kingdom Come	Hallowed be thy name
Humility	Friendship	Righteousness	Fortitude	Mercy	Chastity	Temperance
Pride	Envy	Wrath	Sloth	Avarice	Lust	Gluttony
Blessed be the poor in spirit	Blessed be the meek	Blessed are those that sorrow	Blessed be those that hunger and thirst after righteousness	Blessed be the merciful	Blessed be the pure in heart	Blessed be the pure of heart

faith, including discussion of the commandments, creed and sacraments (ll.239–2364). Between this invocation and the main body of the text are two initial itemizations of the petitions of the Our Father, the second of which begins to develop some of the septenary 'contents' to follow (ll.2365–3602) and which together suggest a rhythm of repeated prayer.

The gift of fear is given unique place in the *Speculum* in that its treatment is tripled across the text's structure: placed at the beginning, in the main body and at the end of the text. This structure is important, because it integrates divergent septenary traditions with different attitudes to the 'high' and 'low' status of fear. Scripturally, fear is at the end of the list of gifts in Isaiah 11.2–3; 'last' or perhaps culminatory, since in the Hebrew text there appear to be seven gifts with the last, fear of the Lord, mentioned twice. However, Augustine's reading of the beatitudes as also discussing the gifts, in a different form, correlates the first beatitutde, *beati pauperis spiritu* (blessed are the poor in spirit), with *timor*, the last of the gifts, arguing that the lists are in opposed ascending and descending order. Hugh of St Victor and Bonaventure's septenary schemes follow Augustine's in rendering the spiritual gift of *timor* initial, in Hugh connected to the first petition of the Our Father, *Sanctificetur nomen tuum* (blessed be your name): it is first, therefore, but it is also a 'high' petition in its invocation of God.[122] However there is another shift, found in the Carolingian Paschasius Radbertus and the twelfth-century Anselm of Laon, to invert the whole

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[122] Bonaventure, *Collations*, ed. by Hayes, pp. 43–45; Hugh of St Victor, *De quinque septenis*, in *Six Opuscules Spirituels*, trans. and ed. by Roger Baron, Sources Chrétiennes 155 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1969), pp.100–119 (pp.110–11).

list, so that fear is associated with the final petition, *libera nos a malo*.[123] The shift

itself suggests the paradoxical place of *timor*, humblest, yet foundational to and hence

closely identified with the culminatory gift of wisdom. Aquinas recognises the

possibility that fear could be seen in Isaiah as the most perfect of the gifts, before

going on to distinguish it as the foundation of the perfection of all the others: so that it

indeed has a form of elevation through being primary, although not 'most

excellent'.[124]

    Speculum synthesizes these traditions to place fear at the beginning, middle,

and close of its text, acknowledging the paradoxical place of the spiritual gift in the

commentary tradition. The poet attaches his first treatment of *drede* to the initial

expounding of the word *pater* in the prayer's invocation, as describing the attitude

necessary to approach God. Effectively, this retains the association of spiritual fear

with the initial attitude of the devotee suggested by its attachment to the first lines of

the *paternoster* in the Augustinian tradition. *Speculum* then follows *Somme* and the

later tradition in associating the 'lowest' gift of fear with the final petition of the

paternoster, the *libera nos a malo*. However, the treatment of the invocation is

followed by another evocation of the prayer, whereby the poet briefly runs the Our

Father petitions twice through in forward running order (ll.2365–3309; ll.3357–492),

before commencing, as a medieval 'paternoster' of prayer beads can be run through

the hands in any direction, the final, *reverse* itemization that makes up the main body

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[123] Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), pp.155–58.
[124] *ST*, I.II.68.7, *ad* 1.

of the text. Hence fear is in many ways both first and last, final and initial, the hinge

on which the structure of the *Speculum* turns in its elaboration of the gifts. What is

more, the poem's envoy, at the very close of the poem's 16,000 lines, recapitulates

just this one petition, the *libera nos a malo,* so that the text has a recursive structure,

returning once more to fear (ll.15993–16016).

D. EXPLORATIONS OF *DREDE*

The intital treatment of fear in *Speculum* comes as an element in the consideration of

right attitudes towards God: 'Luf and Drede and Obedience/ Seruyse, Honour and

Reuerence' (ll.373–74). Here, fear is not explicitly a gift of the Spirit: although as we

shall see the *Speculum*-author theorizes even servile fear as a proto-gift or a ground

for that gift. Here the *Speculum* explores the soul's relation to the creator as a

relationship at once cognisant of difference and seniority and loving and personal.

The poet vernacularizes 'timor filialis' and 'timor servilis' as 'sones drede' and

'carles drede'. The latter, 'carles drede', 'serf's' or (more pejoratively than the Latin

term) 'knave's fear', is dread of the consequences of divine displeasure, 'payne of

helle' or 'vengaunce of synne' (punishment for sin), whereas 'sones drede' denotes a

loving and empathetic relationship with God, whose own sorrow and anger must be of

all things displeasing to his children (ll.309–410). Servile fear is also here further

distinguished from the higher filial fear by the term 'ferdnes'—a creative use of a

then considerably less common word for fear which suggests a more visceral terror.[125]

This vernacular usage underlines a real distinction between a more somatic, perhaps

instinctive, quaking, and the richly productive basis for perfection that is the knitting

of love and fear in 'sones drede'. However, at the same time the emphatic claim is

again made, as we saw in Augustine, that, whilst the better fear is 'thurgh luf', the

lower kind itself has a crucial initiating role:

> Bot first thurgh ferdnes may Drede bygyn
>
> Anely for vengeaunce of synne,
>
> Thurgh whilk men may bygynne do wele
>
> And afterward a swete luf fele,
>
> Þat þe Haly Gast with Drede sal knyt
>
> In þair hertes to stable þair witte.
>
> Drede mas a man synne forsake,
>
> And Luf mas a man gode vertus take.
>
> (ll.417–24)

The text espouses a 'habituation' account of how fear perfects to love that we will

find elsewhere in vernacular theology. Lowly *ferdness* enables humankind to begin to

drede, although in an initial manner, turning away from the negative quantity of sin

for fear of punishment; however, this avoidance of sin is itself 'do[ing] wele'.

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[125] MED, 'fērdnes(se) (n.)'.

Righting the ship of the self through this habitual turning away from evil redirects the

soul to feel 'swete luf'. This suggests a Thomistic emphasis on the retention of the

natural inclination to the good of the will and the reason, despite disorder and

weakness introduced by the fall. The consequent introduction of the Holy Spirit

(l.421) suggests the *Speculum* accords with contemporary understanding of the gifts

of the spirit as gracious and rectifying aptitudes or dispositions subsequent on the

virtues.[126] Aquinas had added the idea that the gifts correspond to a specifically

superhuman mode of human existence, through the establishment of which the Holy

Spirit continues to act to dispose humankind for her supernatural destiny.[127] However

the identification of 'ferdnes' with 'drede' also suggests a survival of the prior

understanding of the gifts as themselves dispositional for virtue, since *ferdnes* appears

as a kind of prototype for *drede*. Finally, the *Speculum*-author admits not an expulsion

of fear for love, but the weaving together of 'Luf' and 'Drede' as coexistent balancing

forces, inspiring the rejection of the bad and desire for the good, restoring equilibrium

to the unbalanced reason or 'witte' (ll.422–24).

In the *Speculum*'s source text, the *Somme le roi*, and hence in its more direct

Middle English translation, the *Book of Vices and Virtues*, the first occurrence of the

spiritual gift of fear ensues on the fall, when Adam and Eve hide from God in the

garden (Genesis 3.8–10). Here fear is a call into self-awareness, the invitation,

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[126] From the early thirteenth century they had been understood as prior or primary
dispositions, seeds for the flourishing of the virtues. See Edward O'Connor,
'Appendix Three' in *St Thomas Aquinas: Summa theologiae 24: The Gifts of the
Spirit* (London: Blackfriars, 1974), pp.99–130.
[127] O'Connor, 'Appendix Four,' pp.110–40.

catalysing the disposition, to enter into the clear-sighted knowledge of the state of sin indissociable from a human capacity for regeneration.[128] The author of the *Speculum* similarly suggests that even 'ferdness', the most basic level of fear, anticipates and prepares for fear as a spiritual gift, the disposition to receive the action of the Holy Spirit in such a way as to introduce and perfect love-fear. It is the reception of this divine instinct, higher than 'witte' or reason, made possible by the gift's enabling disposition, which will become the context for further virtue. 'Luf' with which fear is balanced is the theological virtue of charity: a prevenient infused disposition higher than moral virtue. The author of the *Speculum* presents an account that elevates lower lessons in fear to a dispositional context for the reception of the highest spiritual gifts, the flourishing of the highest theological virtue, and the balance of the corrected reason that will permit all further development of virtue and perfection.

The next treatment of fear comes in the second run-through of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer following the invocation, in which the particular sins to be cast out and beatitudes to be achieved are placed alongside their respective gifts, leading into the main body of the work. The final petition, *libera nos a malo*, is described as appealing for the Gift of the Spirit through the exorcism of all perils: paradoxically, *drede* is the antidote to the wrong or lesser kinds of fear. The fear of God dismisses earthly fears, as well as the spiritual fear of sin, 'perils of saul and of body' (ll.3260–65).[129] Fear is placed last because Pride, the deadliest of sins, tends to visit precisely

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[128] *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, ed. by Francis W. Nelson, EETS 217 (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), p.127.
[129] Bonaventure, 'On the Gift of Fear', II.21, p.80.

the virtuous person who imagines herself secure: hence she who has received all the other gifts still requires fear: a point that reinforces a culminatory understanding of the order of the gifts (ll.3259–72).

In the next run-through of the petitions, where the 'Gift of Drede' opens the main body of the text, the emphasis is on the paradox of Pride's expulsion by fear. The sin cast out by fear is also that which comes first in the history of the fall and is most powerful in human sinfulness: Pride, the queen of the vices, 'mast perillous malady' of the Devil's own vintage (ll.3542, 3558, 3581). Lowly fear has the high calling of acting as antidote to the greatest sin:

> …þe Gift of Drede þat we aske last
>
> þe first and þe mast synne may cast
>
> Out of þe hert þar it is inne
>
> (ll.3507–509)

In casting out the highest sin, *drede* also prepares the way for humility, or 'Mekenes'—a virtue we saw praised at the outset, itself deeply paradoxically, 'of alle vertues þe hede' (l.3878). This virtue brings with it an apparently unparalleled 'blissedhede', the beatitude of *paupertatis spiritus* which, far from being a gift of the only newly initiated, is associated with perfection:

> þe parfyte blissedhede
>
> þat es to say of Gastly Pouert

> þat comes of a parfyte hert
>
> > (ll.3482–84)

Its 'mede', merit or reward, is precisely sanctification and the attainment of heaven. The paradox of high and low is drummed home:

> At þe lawest vs bihoves bigynne
>
> Ar we may to þe heghest wynne—
>
> …
>
> þat Drede of Godde in hert to halde
>
> Es þe bigynnyng of Wisdom called
>
> > (ll.3499–500, 3505–506)

As first and last fear's valency remains potentially 'high': 'last' has a positive connotation of finality, 'bigynning' a positive connotation of primacy. Already alongside this lowest gift is evoked the highest, Wisdom. In fact, Wisdom and Fear are sister-gifts, firmly twinned and rendered periodically equivalent throughout the text, as in the scriptural identification of fear and wisdom (Job 28.28).

Speculum's close, like the prologue, consciously revisits the northern literary tradition in drawing on the close of the *Prick of Conscience*.[130] The penultimate lines

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[130] *Prick of Conscience*, 9482–621 pp.259–62.

of *Speculum* conclude the account of the Gift of wisdom by deliberately recapitulating

the place of fear, cementing the twinning of wisdom and fear, low and high:

> And bot we first bigynne at Drede,
>
> We may noght wele of Wisdom spede
>
> Forwhy Drede of Godde, when it wil com,
>
> It es þe bigynnyng of Wisdom,
>
> Als þe wyse man in boke shewes vs
>
> And also I first talde, þat says þus:
>
> Inicium sapiencie est timor Domini. [rubricated text]
>
> þise twa giftes haldes þe tothir fast;
>
> Godde sende vs bathe þe first and þe last.
>
> (ll.16007–6012)

The close of the *Prick of Conscience,* the text we visited in the introduction, gives as

its final purpose 'to stirre lewed men til mekenes/And to make þam luf god and drede'

(ll.9595–96), re-invoking in this its initial desire to 'prick' the conscience: a prick

which may in fact be a direct reference to Augustine's love-drawing needle of fear.

However, *Prick* much more directly associates this fear's invocation with sheer

cognisance of the facts of death, hell, judgement and punishment. The 'external' prick

and an 'external' body of knowledge assumes a blunt confrontation with outer

particularities of the life to come, and 'to know' and 'to fear' are rendered effectively

synonymous:

No wondur is though they ne drede.

What they shulde drede knowe they nought

Therefore of drede have they no thought

Alle is for lak of good knowying

That shulde hem to drede bring.

(*Prick of Conscience*, ll.266–70)

By contrast, the *Speculum*'s subtle association of devotional lowliness and humility in *drede* with the height of being 'goddis skoler' in sapience distinguishes a holy and virtuous 'knowing' that is more internal and experiential.

In the *Speculum vitae* the paradoxical place of fear locates itself within a vigorous apologia for the 'lowly' status of basic teachings in *pastoralia* and for the vernacular language. Fear's glorious submission is an appropriate theological reflection for a text produced for the *commune*. *Speculum* begins to suggest that by this dialectic *drede* has a particularly key place in vernacular theology: not as an element of fear enforced on a subjugated laity by an overbearing social or religious hierarchy, but rather through an identification of lay and vernacular humility with the reality of the human situation before God. This elevates lay calling by its embedding of humble fear within descriptions of the highest spiritual aspirations.

III. Fear challenging the mystics in *Contemplations of the Dread and Love of God*

A. *Fervor Amoris* or *Amor Dei*

Contemplations of the Dread and Love of God is a late fourteenth- or early fifteenth-century Middle English prose text, a 'schorte pistel' addressed to a comprehensive audience, including those within and without the religious life, that gives an account of stages of affection towards God that order the soul for salvation.[131] As with *Speculum*'s treatment of vernacularity, *Contemplations* valorizes what might be seen as 'lay' devotion as in fact a shared spirituality, whose experiential, moral and practical holiness it gives a theological height. *Contemplations* displays a particular interest in situating itself, initially, within the historical development and current state of the contemplative life as articulated by Richard Rolle. It describes the 'new contemplation' of contemporary mystical writing and experience, and then articulates its own degrees of love through an abecedarian structure bookended by two short passion meditations. I shall argue that this account of the development and perfection of love, rather than either emulating or subordinating itself to Rolleian spirituality, claims to be an alternative, and sufficient, hierarchy of salvation. It casts doubt on both the exclusivity and the claimed high status of the fearless and intensely detached

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[131] *Contemplations of the Dread and Love of God*, ed. by Margaret Conolly, EETS 303 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp.xlii–iii. *Contemplations* has an A–Z structure, and references will be made in letter/line number format.

charity of the *perfecti* as formulated by Rolle. The different and yet complete 'scale'

of the *Contemplations*, applicable to both the active and contemplative life, offers a

narrative of perfection through lived experience in all its affective and humble

degrees, at every stage integrating fear into its account of devotion. The

Contemplations-author refuses to accept that perfection is synonymous with the high

degrees of love claimed by contemplatives such as Rolle, arguing rather that these are

eschatological stages; the author thus detaches perfection from the specific forms of

contemplative practice and the eremitical life privileged by Rolle. *Contemplations*

reverts to the idea that perfection can be compatible with 'ordinary' forms of affective

spirituality, including imaginative devotion and ordered attachment to things of the

world.

Ironically, *Contemplations'* extensive awareness of and borrowings from Richard

Rolle meant that for many decades it was inserted into the Rollean canon. Its format,

which provides a categorization of the progressive stages of love for God similar to

the ladders and scales of Hilton and Rolle, consciously inserts itself into that tradition.

Moreover, the writer begins by summarizing the degrees of love described in Rolle's

Ego Dormio (here, though not in Rolle, termed fervent, more fervent and ending with

a burning love of which Rolle does speak); the writer then summarizes those in

Emendatio Vitae and *Form of Living* (in Rolle, not *Contemplations*, called

insuperable, inseparable, singular).[132] But the *Contemplations*-author also announces

that his added hierarchy is, in opposition to these 'hie degres of love', a 'simple

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[132] *Richard Rolle: Prose and Verse*, ed. by S.J. Ogilvie-Thomson, EETS 293 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp.16, 26–33.

knowyng how þei schull loue God' (A/33). Despite this humble presentation, the author is doing more than soldering some lower rungs onto the *scala amoris* of Rolle, whose higher degrees were always specifically reserved for those removed from the world and practising high contemplation.[133] The *Contemplations* is neither a popularization nor a lay adaptation of the Rollean mystical life of the higher affections. Although Douglas Gray terms it an 'instruction in the highest degrees of love, so that the laity may equal the fervour of the religious',[134] the *Contemplations*-author clearly specifies that he does not seek to instruct in the highest degrees of devotion—or at least not as the contemplative writers perhaps experienced, thought, and wrote of them. Whilst the *Contemplations*-author does indeed open up its devotional practices to a wider potential field, very much including the non-professed laity, this is not as the deferential emulation of Rolle that Gray implies. Rather the author dissociates these degrees from any *via* for which instruction can be provided, opening to all the possibility of a universal perfection that involves the complete *scala* crowned by grace and finally surpassed by eschatological 'parfitness' (S/5–13).

Describing past world-fleeing contemplatives, such as the Desert Fathers, the author says 'we finde not by Godis hest þat we schul liue so' (B/4–5, *cf* B/8–9). Whilst human frailty may be what prevents latterday contemplatives from the achievements of their predecessors, this frailty, he suggests, is perhaps itself evidence of the divine plan. Gordon Mursell has read this as an example of a rejection of

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[133] Nicholas Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.59–72.
[134] Douglas Gray, *Later Medieval English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.271.

auctoritas that reflects fresh confidence in the historical present; however, the

Contemplations-author is also questioning the 'new' contemplatives, on whom he

casts some suspicion (B/45–56), and in his stream of allusions to the writings of

Augustine and Gregory I suggest he is crafting a very traditional alternative.[135] His

critique of the 'men of riȝte late time', the new contemplatives, is in accord with this

narrative: 'bicause mankind is now and euer þe lengur more fieble, or percas more

unstable, þerfore unneþis schul we finde now a sad contemplative man or woman'.[136]

Although a brief outline is then given of how to seek solitude for contemplative

purpose, the *Contemplations*-author devotes the main body of the text to an

alternative sufficient hierarchy, and one with its own forms of 'perfection'. God's will

can be done, he says, by adherence to the perfection of living out one's status,

'stonding treweliche in here degre as men and women of þe world' (B/84–6). For the

author love's 'hie degres' correspond more to intention and will than outer *habitus*,

and are finally in God's grant. The decline of natural capacities for contemplation

does not lessen the divine gift – indeed, perhaps even the reverse. However, the

ground of reception for such perfection of love is the embrace of a humble and

modest virtue, and one associated with fear and *mekenes*:

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[135] Gordon Mursell, *English Spirituality: From Earliest Times to 1700* (London: SCM Press, 2001), p.239, n.14.

[136] Figures such as Richard Rolle and Walter Hilton, but perhaps also English Augustinian William Flete, celebrated hermit with Catherine of Siena at Leceto, and the 'Monk of Farne'.

Neþeles whateuer þou be þat redist or herest þis, be neuer þe loþer to trauaile,

for yif þi desir be set feruentliche and loweliche, holding þe unwerþi to haue

so hie a gosteliche yift bifore anoþer man, and puttest þi desir in Godis

disposicion, trusteliche he wol dispose þat ys best for þe. (B/56–61).

The main body of the *Contemplations* is then given over to its alternative hierarchy

and its degrees of 'ordeigne, clene, stedefast and parfit' love. Their source in Bridget

of Sweden suggests they are far from being merely initiatory: in her 'allegory of the

four cities' these are the characteristics of the denizens of the *civitas gloriae* which is,

like Augustine's City of God, the continuity between the membership of the Church

in this world and the next. Hence these are also the qualities required of love to reach

that city, and correspond to the perfecting remedies needed for the disordered and

imperfect loves of the earthly, purgatorial and hellish cities.[137]

The achievement of divine love does have a certain 'fervour', a favoured word

over the course of the treatise. And yet the 'ardour' which the *Contemplations*-author

recommends to his reader is located more in the strength of desire than in some

particular state of spiritual consciousness. It is nothing less than the desire for the love

of God, the *amor dei* that is an alternative manuscript's ascription of a title for the

work.[138] The *Contemplations* thus represents a return to a more democratic access to

the life of perfection, possibly an 'anti-contemplative' account, and certainly one

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[137] *The Liber celestis of St Bridget of Sweden,* III.28, ed. by Roger Ellis, EETS 291 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp.239–40.
[138] *Contemplations*, p.102.

which redraws the boundaries of action and contemplation. Whereas contemplative authors such as Rolle and the *Cloud*-author address those already either enclosed or, at the broadest, in secular orders, and Hilton's *Mixed Life* extends itself to masters of households, *Contemplations* defines the calling to the love it expounds as encompassing all men and women of any degree whose inclination and affection stirs them to need it: 'men and women…of good wil and … holy desire (A/27)[139]

The text places in question any subordination of the *vita activa* to the *vita contemplativa*, since its hierarchy synthesizes the two by a perfect application to both. In *Contemplations*, perfection of love is the ordering of affections in life, rather than their negation or denigration. Union with God is represented in gradual stages of increasingly steadfast and perservering affection and intolerance for all that is not of God. The affections are to be ordered, vice and sin are to be avoided, and a state of devotional fervour is to be maintained, without loss of reverence, and with stability of body and will. Perfection is simply to continue in this stability, patience, perseverance and endurance (S/44–51).[140]

Further contemplative delights, as we have seen, are gifts of God's grace rather than 'badges' in the spiritual swimming lane. Incarnational affective meditation is not denigrated in the way it is in the *Cloud*-author, or made an initiatory step as in Rolle. Rather than pursuing perfection by fleeing the world, the reader is recommended to the challenging labour of discerning and choosing, fostering virtue and banishing

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[139] *Contemplations*, p.5.
[140] Quoting the patristic author Julianus Pomerius, *De vita contemplativa*, *PL* 59, cols 415–518 (col.508); see *Contemplations*, pp.23–24.

vice. Robert Boenig calls the author's way one of 'moral perfection', referring presumably both to its emphasis on the insertion of the discerning conscience and affections into a fully lived, non-enclosed or vowed life, and its stress on accompanying deeds. [141] The *Contemplations*-via has neither the cataphatic sensual extremes of knowledge and love of God as in Richard Rolle, nor the apophatic way of the *Cloud*-author: it is a way of affirmation that synthesizes morality of the lived life with devotion in its understanding of perfection.

B. DREDE IN THE *CONTEMPLATIONS*

The *Contemplations*-author's depiction of a positive, democratic, moral and active via to salvation results in fear re-emerging as a fundamental and continuous component of the holy life. Fear finds a role in each degree of love described, including in final, 'parfit' love, and its place is reinforced by reference to Christ's Passion as a site of suffering fear.

It is instructive to contrast this with the displacement of fear in Rolle's writings on contemplative perfection, which declare the possibility of moving beyond both the penitential role for fear and to a certain extent beyond the intermediary role of Christ's humanity – a Christological de-emphasis suggested by Nicholas Watson but not hitherto linked to a discussion of fear.[142]

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[141] *Contemplations of the Dread and Love of God: (1506): a facsimile reproduction with an introduction by Robert Boenig* (Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1990), pp.7–8.
[142] Watson, *Richard Rolle*, pp.19, 56.

Rolle's affective use of fear in his early writing for priestly instruction, the *Judica me*, implies its role in the spiritual life.[143] However as his later thought makes clear, he views the role of fear pejoratively, as initiatory.[144] As Nicholas Watson remarks, Rolle treats the *mediocriter boni* as those whose spirituality is 'mainly negative, centred on avoidance of mortal sin'.[145] Ironically, it is precisely this lowly status for religious fear, seen as playing a crude part in ridding the potential *perfecti* of their religious attachments, that causes Rolle to use it as a purgative blunt instrument when writing for a wider audience, producing a rhetoric of terror. In *The Form of Lyvyng* Rolle's first chapter is crammed with warnings and terrors, references to the 'drede of hell', the wretchedness of Margaret Kirkby's hypothesized sinfulness, and the traps of the devil. Rolle believes that only by horror of the things of the world and their avoidance in terror can the sinner be purged and readied for contemplation, and yet his repugnance for this stage is matched by a lack of interest in the human and material as such, so that he turns swiftly to accounts of extended beatific serenity.

Overall, Rolle's immanentizing of the life and experience of heavenly bliss, its heavenly harmony and anticipations of *visio dei*, causes him to associate the stages of earthly perfection with the elevation to supreme confidence and imperviousness. So for him the advanced degree of love is fully fearless:

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[143] *An Edition of the* Judica me Deus *of Richard Rolle*, ed. by John Philip Daly (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik et Americanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1984), pp.83–89.

[144] *Incendium amoris*, 28, ed. by Margaret Deanesly (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1915), p.223.

[145] Watson, *Richard Rolle*, p.226; see also p.214.

eo enim amor tui est nobilior, quo impetuosior, quia nec racione restringitur,

nec metu concutitur, neque iudicio temperatur.

for this your love is more noble, where more vigorous, because not restrained

by reason, nor alarmed by fear, nor tempered by judgment.[146]

Fear, especially worldly fears and the corporeal fears relating to judgement and hell,

are pushed out of the firmament in which Rolle soars in his later works. The advanced

mystic, in his equality with the angels, becomes appropriately impassive to the details

of human emotion. This position is consistent with Rolle's denigration of the human

and the embodied. The minimal or reduced place for fears associated with penitential

self-awareness, and even the awe and reverence of divine presence, are consonant

with the minimal place he allows for sin and spiritual struggle; for Rolle it is less the

case that the self grows through its humanity and tribulations than that it advances

simply by discarding struggles.[147] In her perfected state, according to Rolle, the

human person is effectively free of sin, as all sin is immediately purged: 'sed ne

aliquid peccatum in ipso duret quod non statim igne amoris adnihiletur' (but no sin

long remains in this same that is not destroyed by the fire of love).[148]

However, even Rolle does allow a place for fear in the watchful will of the

perfect(ing) contemplative while he lives in this life. Rolle integrates wariness into the

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[146] *Incendium amoris*, 17, ed. Deanesly, p.194.
[147] Watson, *Richard Rolle*, pp.55–60.
[148] *Incendium amoris*, 22, ed. Deanesly, p.208.

strength, action and mobility of the ardour of charity and desire to conform to God's will:

> Solicitudinem ac timorem non amittat dum hic vivit; quia quo quis melior et Deo accepcior, eo amplius in caritate ardet, et ad instancius ac forcius operandum ea que quo statui ac vite congruunt, eciam ipsis stimulis amoris excitatur. Ac per hoc semper sollicitus est. [149]

> It [the will] does not put aside wariness and fear while it lives here; because the better and more acceptable to God someone is, the more he burns with charity, and is excited by the same spurs of love to perform all the more urgently and vigorously the deeds which befit his status and life. And due to this he is always wary.

Fear, here, somewhat disrupts and questions the *stasis* of spiritual perfection Rolle aims to describe elsewhere, its 'joyful standstill', where the soul reaches the level of the angels, beyond acts of charity or even collective liturgical worship.[150] Watson's reading of the passage somewhat understates the place of fear, understanding the *stimuli amoris* as *replacing* what he terms the 'bit of fear'.[151] However, the 'pricks of love' in fact refer to the wariness of fear itself, imagined since Augustine as a 'needle'

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[149] *Incendium amoris*, 36, ed. Deanesly, p. 251.
[150] Watson, *Richard Rolle*, p.79.
[151] Watson, *Richard Rolle*, p.138.

which introduces love. Fear, which had been only a preventative for sin, is now a stimulus to love—without losing its 'prick'. The underlying paradox is that of God as justice and reward, the only true object of fear as of love.

What is in Rolle an anomalous insertion to make his vision 'fit' with Christian humility, is in the *Contemplations*-author foundational. Fear is part of its way of perfection in root and branch. Before the description of the first stage of 'ordeigne love', A–D detail the preliminary factors that at once underpin and transcend the hierarchy. The author's initial evocation of God's *dure* love plays on homonyms, meaning both 'dear, precious, excellent' and 'hard, difficult'. Difficulty and intensity as characteristic of Christ's own love are introduced in the opening micro-meditation on the passion, 'A', which establishes the cause of love for God in human response to Christ's completion on the cross of his self-outpouring in our creation and sustainment (A/19–23). Letters C and D define and describe how the foundational devotional attitude for life lived before God mingles the titular 'Drede'('C') and 'Charity' ('D'): the exchanged initials themselves prefiguring their inextricability from one another as elements in the devotion directed to God, as well as fear's foundational place.

In 'C', the *Contemplations*-author extrapolates the definition of 'drede' from the classic scriptural reference point, Psalm 111.10– 'I rede þat þe drede of God is the biginning of wisdom' (C/1). However, whilst fear is here described as the preliminary to love, the melding and sliding from one to the other suggests not simply the subordination of fear to love but rather its assimilation into an affection increasingly perfected precisely by its beginning in fear: 'how þou schalt drede for loue, and how

þow maist comme to loue thoru drede of God' (C/59–60). The *Contemplations*-author, acknowledging further possible categories, gives a classic view of the grades of fear based on Peter Lombard's central triad: 'dred of man or drede of the world' is the Latin *timor mundanus* of undesirable fear of material suffering and loss; 'drede of servage' is *timor servilis*, a fear poor in love which may nonetheless provide the grounds for 'chast or frendliche drede': *timor castus* or *timor amicabilis*. This final fear, as well as including the fear of the loss of heaven sometimes termed 'mercenary fear', is that wherein the two responses to the divine become indissociable, sometimes called filial fear, but here given the names 'chaste' or 'amical' (used by Augustine and Peter Lombard, respectively) that suggest the purification of fear towards love.[152] This shift from imperfect to perfected fear is a central crux of the *timor* question as theologians addressed it, since a degree of substantial continuity elevates the status of the lower fear. In *Contemplations* the intermediate fear is 'profitable', but not sufficient for salvation, which in pentitentially-focused texts it sometimes is. At the same time, the description of the process of its metamorphosis into love is suggestively fluent. The type of fear of God which is the apprehension of pain and judgment leads to avoidance of sin, and this very withstanding of evil cannot but lead to and even become a desiring of the good: 'Whan þou wiþstondist wickednesse, þou bigynnest to desire goodnes' (C/33–4). As we saw in the *Speculum*, this is the idea that good acts, even without good intents, can transform the will by a kind of

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[152] See above, pp. 35–39.

habituation which constitutes a substantial metamorphosis.[153] In Bridget of Sweden

the idea that, as the Middle English translation puts it, 'drede drawes þe herte to

grace' is illustrated by the parable of the Goldsmith and the Coalman. God, whose

charity is the gold, nonetheless finds coal—the good deeds of humanity, however they

may be motivated—suitable and serviceable for his metalwork, his craft of love.

Since his only currency is gold (love or charity), this is what we receive in return for

our coal in a relationship of just and yet perpetually non-equivalent exchange. Hence,

to sow in virtuous actions, even if imperfectly motivated, is to reap in the love which

alone has the power to convert the nature of the motivation. Through fear, which can

discourage from sin, a person 'disposes hymselfe to grace' and moves towards the

actions done for love.[154]

It is in describing the conversion to the highest fear that the *Contemplations*-

author, partly quoting Augustine on John 1, grows closest to describing the Rollean

ascent from base feelings into a sensual and yet immaterial experience.

þe more loue encresithe in þe, the more drede goþ fro þe, so þat yif þou haue

grace [to] come to a feruent loue, þou schalt bote litel þinke on drede, for þe

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[153] On habit and habituation see Aquinas *ST*, II.II.49–89; also Katherine Breen, *Imagining an English Reading Public: 1150-1400* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), *passim*; Stanley Hauerwas, 'Habit Matters: the Bodily Character of the Virtues', in his *Approaching the End: Eschatological Reflections on Church, Politics and Life* (London: SCM Press, 2014), pp.158–75; *A History of Habit: from Aristotle to Bourdieu*, ed. by Tom Sparrow and Adam Hutchinson (Lexington: Lexington Books, 2015), esp. Chs 1-3, pp.19–88.
[154] *Liber celestis*, IV.81, pp.329–30.

swetnesse þou schalt haue in þe loue of Crist. But yet be thou neuer so parfit,

it ys nedful that thou drede discretliche as long as thou art in this world. (C,64)

Similes of warmth and sweetness here suggest Rolle's *dulcor* and *ardor*. However 'discrete', prudent or proportionate, fear remains in all earthly stages of perfection.[155]

Overall, *Contemplations'* intial account of degrees of *drede* stands outside the sequence of degrees of love precisely as its 'sad [sober] grounde', hence relevant to every degree. It also describes in itself a complete *scala*, an *ascent* from worldly fear of temporal loss and this-worldly suffering, through servile fear which avoids sin by dreading punishment of pain, to chaste fear which is the obverse of the strength of the desire to be with God. In 'C' the author traces the full growth in perfection within the context of the *operatio* of this perfecting fear: contrition provoked by fear leads to a forsaking of sin that opens the way for humility; as vice is put out, virtue takes its place; the resultant clean heart is ready for 'ful possession of þe holi loue of Crist' associated with 'feruent love'. This is then ascribed in growing degrees to the three stages of contemplative perfection which the *Contemplations*-author describes, and to the perfection which the highest of his own three categories hopes for.

Throughout the fourfold development of perfection in love in the text, the *Contemplations* never loses sight of *drede*, just as it does not turn away from human turmoil and sinfulness, but rather describes a process of continual development in the ordering of loves, the expulsion of sin and the perseverance in this life of goodness

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[155] See Bridget of Sweden, *Liber celestis* IV.36, p.288.

and truth. This is already evident in the description of Charity and the ensuing category of 'ordeigne' love (D and E). Whilst Rolle's ordering of affection is concerned with a rejection of the former objects of desire, in order to empty itself out in infinite love directed towards God, the *Contemplations*-author is concerned with the maintenance of those good aspects of our friendships and temporal loves and virtues in the *ordinatio caritatis*. The 'drede' upon which such ordering is founded roots and grounds this process and practice, enabling the nice discernment and constant perserverance in distinguishing the order of loves it requires. The second degree of 'clene love' described in sections 'K' to 'M' is powerfully enabled by the fear of sin, whose constant expulsion of sin ensures love's purity (M/9–10). In the third degree of 'stedefast' love, rather than abandoning *drede*, the human mind and spirit is especially called to recall itself to 'þe worschip and þe drede of God' (O/14). It is most especially in virtue that there is the danger of overconfidence, and God requires not just actions but an underlying attitude of natural affection: the person is 'unkynde þat is ful of vertues & dredeþ not God' (P/5): humility and meekness here are the penultimate point of perfection. Finally, 'parfit love', described from 'T' to 'Z', is the reward of continuity and perseverance in all the above points, rather than their cancellation or erasure.

The *Contemplations* closes not at 'Z' but with an 'AB' section, an affective meditation on the Passion. This confounds linear progression, returning to the beginning to mirror 'A', the initial reflection on the Passion.[156] As a script to situate

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[156] *Contemplations*, p.4.

the devotee starkly within the drama of the Crucifixion, this meditation models Christ's own love and fear, as he is brought, 'chivering and quaking' to the cross where he will enact the victory of love (AB/26). This visceral description of a body moved by fear conveys a naked, emotional humanity as much, if not more, than the running blood and scourged flesh, with their more immediate eucharistic resonance. Whilst Christ's fear can be, as it is in Aquinas and Peter Lombard, located in an additional morally neutral category of 'natural fear',[157] here its cause is left unspecified, potentially including the fear of pain, of torment, of the sacrifice itself, of the loss of life and love. Christ's example is the supreme context in which to shape one's behaviour, and, as the means of all men's redemption and the apotheosis of sanctification, his life falls outside any degree—for all the degrees should rightly be *imitatio Christi*. This visceral fear is with Christ even as he submits himself in the humility of amical fear and its associated obedience: 'how mekeli þan he goeþ to þe cross' (AB/43–44). Through this passion meditation strength can be seen to bring with it weakness, and even lowly fear is drawn into Christ's victory: love of the cross as the place where humanity is glorified and transformed through the offering of Christ. Hence proper love-drede conquers fear at the Crucifixion as death is conquered by death. There is an analogy between the way in which death's nihilistic essence is negated in its fulfillment—when death and sin, here, die—where death, fully suffered, *is* life, and the manner in which fear, associated with the repelling and

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[157] In Aquinas, *ST*, III.15, this is not idolatrous worldly fear but the body's desire for its own preservation; in the Lombard a recoil from death and pain that is part of the non-culpable inheritance of original sin; *Sentences*, III.34, p.144.

avoidance of evils, finds its calling too on the cross where dread, fully suffered, *is* love.

The prayer on the passion which follows is marked by a contrition that illustrates the 'fearful' burning tension of the watchful will. Its petitions alternate the greatness of God with the 'unstabilnes*s'* of the penitent. However, before the cross, this fear of the sinning self discovers the fullest sense of that passion as a *passio*, a suffering, which can be offered and so participate in Christ's self-offering. So the recognition of the self in fear corresponds to fulfillment in bliss and glory, a link made clear by the text's assonance on *dredful* and *medful*:

> Ful beter þei be þese temptacions and ful greuous to suffre, but þau3 þei ben dredful y wot wel þei schul afturward be medful to my soule. (AB/94–95)

This final gesture climaxes an account of fear as awareness of self and God, apprehension and consciousness of evil and sin as well as awareness of surpassing goodness, and very fully woven into the fabric of perfection. The *Contemplations* offers an incarnational and universal alternative to the deiotic but finally fear- and sin-eschewing modus of Rolle, offering instead a 'moral' life of balanced 'love and drede' towards God.

III. FEAR IN *JACOB'S WELL*

Jacob's Well is an East-Anglian early fifteenth-century vernacular homilist's series of ninety-five sermons, designed as a daily resource for the late-medieval preacher over the penitential and Easter season to Pentecost.[158] Although it is not clear how far this text was disseminated, this was written, like *Speculum*, as an accessible text for the laity. The potential of a vernacular sermon compendium as a text for oral and public performance, as well as for private devotional reading, gives us some access to late-medieval commonplace theology concerning the proper place of fear, as it might have been received by illiterate and literate alike. Through its creative allegory of the action of grace and nature in the self, as well as its reflection on the gift of fear in sermon and attached *exemplum* form, *Jacob's Well* provides further evidence of the vitality, and even the subversive quality, of spiritual *drede*. It offers a programme of perfection, covering much of the Pecham-syllabus of sins, vices and the penitential process to rid sin through the control of the five senses, contrition, satisfaction and restitution. A series of post-Easter sermons detail the spiritual gifts, virtues and perfections. Much of the doctrinal material may be derived from the *Speculum vitae* (and hence *Somme le Roi*) with some input from *Pore Caitiff*; and the narrative material of the illustrative *exempla* from the *Alphabetum narrationum*. A third and as yet undiscovered source for the material on fear is a Franciscan compilation, the

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[158] *Jacob's Well: An Englisht Treatise of the Cleansing of Man's Conscience*, Part 1, ed. by Arthur Brandeis, EETS 115 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co, 1900). All future references will be to this edition. This text contains only the first 50 sermons of the 95-sermon cycle. The remaining 45 have been edited in Clinton Atchley's PhD Dissertation 'The "Wose" of Jacob's Well: Text and Context' (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Washington, 1998). The final chapter has been edited by Leo Carruthers, 'And what schall be þe ende': An edition of the final chapter of Jacob's Well', *Medium Aevum* 61 (1992), 289–97.

Dietae salutis.[159] The author assembles these materials within a highly creative overarching allegory of the excavation of the *Fons jacobi*. The perfection of the self is allegorized as the construction of a well, dug from the pit of concupiscence. The text enlivens 'þis hool tweyne monyths & more' with a series of vivid, sometimes humorous, often gothic tales for each day's homilectic content: a talkative small girl's corpse is dismembered; a witch is carried out of her chain-bound leaden coffin by devils; a man hangs above a boiling cauldron and below a thread-strung sword to replicate judgment terror.[160] However the *Jacob's Well*-author also provides a meta-reflection on the fear these inspire, articulating the proper place of fear in devotion.

'Jacob's Well' refers to a scriptural well located on the land bought by Jacob on his arrival in Canaan and hallowed by his erection of an altar there dedicated to the one God (Genesis 29). With this powerful covenantal association, it is the site in John's Gospel of Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman, where Jesus compares its ability to quench thirst and to sustain life to the mystical 'well of life' of his own being and teaching (John 3.6–26). As Jesus presents himself as fulfilling the promise of salvation given in the Old Testament, 'Jacob's Well' has the potential here also to operate as a typological title for Christ.

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[159] For a summary of the sources see Leo Carruthers 'Where did Jacob's Well Come From? : The Provenance and Dialect of MS Salisbury Cathedral 103', *English Studies* 71 (1990), 335–40, and 'Allegory and Bible Interpretation: the Narrative Structure of a Middle English Sermon Cycle', *Literature and Theology*, 4 (1990), 1–14; for *Pore Caitiff* see Moira Fitzgibons, 'Poverty, Dignity and Lay Spirituality in *Pore Caitiff* and *Jacob's Well*', *Medium Aevum* 77 (2008), 222–40; for the *Alphabetum narrationum* as a source see Joan Young Gregg, 'The Exempla of "Jacob's Well": A Study in the Transmission of Medieval Sermon Stories', *Traditio* 33 (1977), 359–80.
[160] *Jacob's Well*, 95, p.292.

In the logic of the allegory, described in the first chapter, the reader or auditor both *is* the well-to-be and shares in its digging with the preacher—excavating the self as the shallow, ooze-filled pit (Psalm 40.2) which must be deepened to the level of the springs of grace that it might find the life-giving source within. This is a theotic understanding of spiritual perfection, a unique way of expressing the balance of the work of penitence and virtue and the reception of grace as access to the graced nature that lies in the human *imago dei*:

þer-fore, ȝe schul drawe watrys, in ioye, of þe wellys of ȝoure saveoure, þat is of ȝoure bodys, þat arn þe wellys of god. (1, p.4)

The stages of first draining, then clearing and digging the well down to the water-level correspond to penitence for original sin. Clinton Atchley describes a 'journeyman's' approach to the spiritual task: specific tools: *shovele*, *skavell* (spade), *scope* and *skeet* (long-handed shovel) clear the 'watrys of cursing', the effluent *wose*, *gravell* and *crummys* of vice and fleshly resistance (1, p.2)[161]. As deadly sin is expunged by contrition, confession and satisfaction, the good ground of virtue is reached, below which bubble the springs of grace. Spiritual cleansing is both this shovelling out of the dirt of sin and a deepening in humility as the pit deepens. Constructive self-work is thus framed not as a vertical architecture or *scala* but as a

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[161] Clinton Atchley, 'The Audience of Jacob's Well: problems of interpretation' (Henderson State University, 2001), p.3, retrieved from https://www.hsu.edu/academicforum/2001-2002/2001-2AFTHE%20AUDIENCE%20OF%20JACOB.pdf.

sounding of depths, resonating with the thematic of glorious humility in *Speculum vitae*. Such humility, with a certain basis in fear, is the prerequisite for the bubbling up of the spiritual gifts and beatitudes within the well, which themselves commence with that of 'dreed'—traditionally the 'lowest' of the gifts or 'spirits' listed in Isaiah. This again corresponds to the later theology of the gifts, described above, which are further perfections and fresh dispositions perfecting the virtues and rendering the human person amenable to divine grace.[162]

The shape of the allegory plays against the sometimes programmatic content of its individual sermons. Figuring spiritual gifts as 'springs' within the human person suggests they in some sense the result of human effort and also in a more mysterious, gratuitous relation to it. Grace and nature are interwoven, as the infused gifts well up from below, from within, to fill the person's being—always ripe for discovery in his very ground and yet at the same time gushing forth unknown, sudden, and from an earth whose appearance is rocky, dry, apparently barren.

This preparatory excavation is followed by the further reinforcement of the Christian self. The well is 'lined', its bricks bound with tears of affective identification with the passion. It is provided with a ladder whose bottom rung is fear, its top, love—with rungs representing creeds, commandments and prayers of the Church. Up this ladder moves a bucket 'of desyre', the will, held by a rope fast-twisted from the three theological virtues of hope, faith and charity. This movement also suggests the power of vision or imagination, made possible by the informing of

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[162] See above, p.42; Aquinas, *ST*, I.II.68.

belief: the apparatus offers the believer a Dantesque imaginary spectrum, its rope 'so long þat it reche to helle, to erthe, & to heven':

> late þus þe wyndas of ʒoure mynde turnyn dounward to thynken of deth, and,
>
> in þe roop of ʒour belief, seth þe doom & peynys of helle to þe dampnyd.
>
> (1, p.5)

This allegorical frame implies effort in the practice of penance and virtue develops a habituated self who acts to 'release' grace. So equipped, the human person fulfils a destiny to be the 'apparatus' of her own salvation.

Within this apparatus fear remains integral to the progress of perfection, and yet by that progress it is also transmogrified. The first exemplum of the text, 'Alexander's Stone' deals with fear: a prince is compared to a weighty precious stone that, once scattered with earth (figuratively, in the grave), has no weight. Death will level, and the fear of God, death and judgement should lie at the beginning of the spiritual progress that the work will outline: through this fear, sin is diagnosed, penance is made, virtue is exercised and heavenly reward is won (1, pp.4–5). Drede is the 'nethyr stake' or bottom rung of the ladder of charity, but it is only by sending the well bucket *down* that the living love of grace is fructified in the person. The well-allegory is ideal for the high-low paradox of fear: in the operation of the well, the depths must be regularly sounded and humility re-adventured to access the life-giving water which is 'dreed of God'. Drawn up through penance, this fear transmogrifies into the hope of mercy and exercise of virtues so that the water of grace has been,

Cana-like, transformed into the 'swete wine of ioye' (1, p.5). The allegory vivifies a less-common scriptural reference point of Proverbs 14.27: 'Timor domini *est fons vite*', fear of God is the source, or well, of life.

Fear is the foundational subject of the first exemplum, and a recurrent rhetorical technique; but as a 'gift of the spirit', its full treatment is at Sermon 38 ('de humilitate & timore filiali'). Here, in the logic of the allegory, the *Jacob's Well*-author reaches the 'water-level' of his digging with the welling of the first gift of the Spirit, 'dreed'. Carruthers concludes that the sermons follow a 95-day cycle from Ash Wednesday to Pentecost.[163] If the preacher gave these sequentially from Ash Wednesday, including Feast Days—to fit in all ninety-five before Pentecost—then this sermon would fall just before Holy Week.[164] As Lent draws to a close, the allegory describes the soul opening itself to the spiritual gifts; these, according to the Thomistic tradition on which it seems this text draws, make the human person 'amenable' to perfection and prepared for grace, something the 'natural' virtues which proceed from human reason cannot do alone. The author emphasizes the affinity between fear and the virtue of humility:

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[163] Leo Carruthers, 'The Liturgical Setting *of Jacob's Well'*, *ELN*, 24.4 (1987), 11–24.
[164] This is corroborated by Sermon 41's discussion of the benefit of Lent and Easter Communion, alongside an allegory of the reconciliation Four Daughters of God, associated, as in *Piers Plowman* B.XVIII, with the redemption of Christ's resurrection, and Sermon 47's detailed listing of sins to confess to coincide with Easter Sunday's 'houseling'.

What is this grace? Dreed. That is the first gyfte of grace of the holy gost. This

grace springeth in the ground of lownesse.[165]

He then indeed quotes 'Thomas de Veritate': 'Timor expelleit superbiam', fear expels

pride, evoking another tradition whereby the spiritual gifts were 'cures' to the

vices.[166]

The author further cites 'Thomas' in outlining a sixfold taxonomy of fear, [167]

distinguishing the divine gift of *dreed* from morally noxious fear and then subdividing

the gift itself. However his taxonomy is in fact more extensive than that of Aquinas,

as he subdivides categories of fear that are there connected.[168] The six types are

'dreed of kynde' (natural fear, neither good or ill), 'drede of losing thi lyf' (sinful fear

of death for the body), 'worldly dreed' (also sinful fear of losing worldly goods),

'dreed of hel…pene' (fear of punishment, roughly pure servile fear), 'bigynnyng

drede' (the mixed fear which is the better side of servile fear) and, finally, 'love-dreed

& sone-dreed'. It is onto the fifth of these categories, 'bigynnyng drede', that the

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[165] *Jacob's Well*, 38, p.239.

[166] Meaning Aquinas' *Summa [de veritate catholicae] contra gentiles*: in fact it is a citation in Aquinas' *Summa theologica*, II.II.19 as found in Gregory's *Moralia,* II.49; trans. by Brian Kerns (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2014), p.177.

[167] The choice of authority could point to a Dominican connection, and the *Alphabetum narrationum* from which his exempla are drawn is also Dominican in origin. However, see note below.

[168] A fresh source for this entire passage may be the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Dieta salutis* (The Regimen of Salvation/Diet of Health), in fact the work of the Franciscan William of Lavicea (d. before 1310). As well as the itemization of the full six 'kinds' of fear, an otherwise untraceable reference is common to both texts: both attribute 'timor castus' to one 'Tullius'. See *Jacob's Well*, p.242; and *Dieta salutis a beato Bonauentura ultimate emendatum ac parisius nouiter impressum* (Paris: Barbier, 1518), fol.71r.

author maps the gift of fear: here fear is still a mixed emotion, but the fear of

punishment is involved with the love and desire for God's pleasure and presence: it is

with this, and the perfection it draws to, that the author is primarily interested. Whilst

all the texts discussed here conclude that the fear of pain and suffering is inadequate

on its own, the *Jacob's Well* sequence explicitly admits of the possibility of mixed

motivation.

For this initial fear, *Jacob's Well* uses the Augustinian analogy of the needle

and thread, also used by the *Dieta*. As a needle pulls thread through fabric, removing

itself to leave only thread, so fear introduces love. However, *Jacob's Well* rather

typically earths the metaphor in a more particular context of craft knowledge. The

needle becomes a cordwainer or shoemaker's 'brystell': a stiff pig's hair to which

waxed linen was spiral wound before it was pushed through punched holes, securing

the soft leather halves of the shoe.[169] Earlier in *Jacob's Well* this initial fear was

allegorized as the bitter stuff put on the mother's breast to wean the child onto more

nourishing food. This kind of fear is—as both images suggest—instrumental. *Jacob's*

Well seeks to distinguish and delineate 'good' from 'bad' fear, presenting a guide to

reading that puts the terrors it elsewhere presents in a distinctly inferior and yet

constructive place. These accounts are edging towards finding a real place for the

complex mechanics of human repulsion and attraction: in refusing to exclude even

visceral terror from the pursuit of human perfection. Such ugly feelings are to be

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[169] Martha Carling, 'Shops and Shopping', in *Money, Markets and Trade in Late Medieval Europe: Essays in Honour of John H. A. Munro*, ed. by Lawrin Armstrong, Ivana Elbl and Martin M. Elbl (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp.491–537 (p.495).

reoriented and reshaped towards more suitable objects. The body's contraction away from pain, like bodily attraction to physical beauty, is not bad 'in itself'. This understanding of fear is the shadow side of a eudaimonistic understanding of love and desire. As Augustine emphasises, the object of fear, or the object from which the fear constrains us, is part of what determines the action—and even more so the orientation of the person responding to it. Where, in the needle exemplum, this fear is wound round with the more nourishing 'gift' of the fear of God, and where, in the weaning exemplum, it is a training-ground for it, the fear becomes an essential way-station for our discovery of what the author thus calls 'love-dreed'.

This last kind of fear, 'love-dreed & son-dreed', is the finest fear of the author's six-fold distinction. It blends without intermediary into the enduring and eternal chaste fear. Chaste fear is the proper and perfect fear of God himself, and as such cannot be dissociated from love. Here the author shows his debt to the Augustinian and Thomistic 'filial' fear: fear has been transformed, transmuted into the dread which grows exponentially with love, where separation appears as 'lesying of his love'.[170] As the point at which human imperfect dread comes to its limited perfection in this life, it is presented as 'specyal dreed, a specyal ȝyft' and understood as essential for all further virtuous action. The biblical citations used all suggest the still contested position that this is a fear with an eschatological reality, with a place even in the perfected soul. As a gift 'tapped' by the excavation of sin, it is a precious stone; Mary among the maidens (Song of Songs 2.2). The final words of this sermon

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[170] *Jacob's Well*, p.242.

return us to the governing allegorical frame: 'Timor domini *est fons vite*' (Proverbs 14.27). The fear of God, first gift of the spirit, first spring of grace, acts as the sermon-cycle's tipping point between the miry pit and the well of life.

The sermon *exemplum* associated with 'love-drede' illustrates the transformative and even subversive effects of a proper fear of God in evacuating worldly fears, including those governed by social and gender subordination. In 'The Lord's Wife Charitable to the Leper' the titular lady attends extravagantly to a diseased pauper, who sleeps in her marital bed whilst her Lord is away hunting. To do so, she puts aside fear of death (the murderous feelings of her husband, discovering another man in his bed), along with fear and revulsion towards the leper's sores. On her (temporal) lord's return, her miraculous reward is the disappearance of the leper, or rather the transubstantiation of his stinking body into beautifully folded bedclothes and a sweet spiced smell: a Resurrection-reminiscent manifestation (John 19.40, 20.7). The implication is a miraculous fulfilling of the Gospel's pronouncement that aid to the sick and needy is aid given to Christ—the lady has entertained her saviour unawares. Her rejection of the ways of the world and the reckless pouring out of her most precious resources—including the endangering of her honour—makes the 'Lord's wife' a type of Mary Magdalene, a saint associated with the idea of Christ as the true spouse. She even enacts the Magdalen's foot-washing: 'for lowenes did waschen here feet, & kissed hem, & louyd hem' (38, p.242). Which 'lord' is her real spouse, when we return to the title?

It is precisely fear of God which causes the lady to act radically against the earthly fears of sickness, and the opprobrium of her husband and the public, and yet

which also ultimately orders and perfumes their bridal chamber. 'Love-drede' inverts the temporal hierarchies of worldly awe through the assertion of heavenly primacy. In charity the woman of the story places herself below only God, freeing her to serve the divine image in all humanity. The importance of 'drede' is this free, filial subjection, which paradoxically conquers all earthly subjections: including, here, that of a servile fear of spousal authority, and of death itself.

Rather than simply wielding fearful narrative and rhetoric to subdue readers under a moralizing regime, *Jacob's Well* first seeks to nuance the place of fear, and then to reveal that fear's perfection in God overturns, rather than working through, the negatively enslaving fears of this life. In this, *Jacob's Well* follows *Contemplations* in challenging the mystical and Rollean understanding of the perfection of fear in its annihilation in contemplative ascent; instead, fear's perfection has an outcome in acts of this-worldly charity: but in a way made even more explicitly democratic and even socially subversive than in *Contemplations*.

IV. CONCLUSION

Each of these fourteenth-century texts inherits from the tradition described at the beginning of this chapter, in that fear's role is understood as a vital aspect of the relation between creator and creature, and that this place is in some sense preparatory to the final love, or love-fear of God. However, there is a striking appropriation of the existing theological paradoxes in these Middle English texts. To assert the importance of fear is associated with a theology sympathetic to shared human capacity and

experience rather than the spiritualizing exceptionality described in more 'advanced' contemplative writings or the rational and systematic emphasis implicit in scholastic schematization. Whilst, as we have seen, they engage with the richness of the existing tradition (see, for example, the understanding of virtue and habituation in *Speculum*), they also proffer transformative enactions of the more static forms of fear 'typology' characteristic of some scholastic Latin theological writing. Throughout, there is a desire to unite a positive vision of human capacity: in *Jacob's Well* through the allegory of the collaboration of nature and grace; in *Contemplations of the Dread and Love of God* through the resistance to an exclusive vision of mystical capacity for high degrees of perfected love; in *Speculum vitae* through the articulation of the universal potential to access to devotional, sapiential knowledge and formation in the virtues enabled by the gifts of the spirit – with a continuation of the scriptural and patristic paradox of a high role for humble fear. The creative elaboration of the place of fear in all these texts accompanies a positive anthropology of human affect which implies the Christological material discussed in Augustine; an explicitly Christological account of fear will come more to the fore in Julian of Norwich and in the drama of Chapter Three. Together, these studies sketch a climate of possibility in Middle English accounts of 'timor Dei' in which to read the greater paradox and innovation of Julian of Norwich's *Revelations*, whose 'optimistic' writing is developed in crucially significant interdependence with her experience, spirituality and theology of fear.

CHAPTER TWO: THE PLACE OF FEAR IN JULIAN OF NORWICH'S *REVELATIONS*[171]

I.   INTRODUCTION

Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Love*, the record of the visions and rich interpretations of a fourteenth-century anchoress, and a deeply original work of vernacular theology, sustains an even deeper paradox of fear. Julian's theology takes both fear and love to their apogee and resolution, and even more definitely re-affirms the glory of the allegedly 'humble' fear we have been tracing throughout these vernacular theological texts. Julian takes what might elsewhere appear as a 'high' form of fear – her 'reverent drede' – as integral to her description of Christian experience. This 'reverent drede' seeks to retain a balance between the perfect surety of salvation and God's unswerving love, 'sekernesse', whilst also involving a robust account of sin, the experience of self-accusation and the knowledge of inadequacy. This discussion of fear in Julian contributes to debate around the place for sin in Julian's writings. Precisely the lesson of love which made her so attractive to modernity has now led scholars to accuse her of risking not taking sin, and especially

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[171] Unless otherwise specified, in-text citations will be to the Long Text (LT) in *The Writings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. by Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), by chapter/line number, page number. Short Text referred to as ST.

the structural habituation of sin, seriously..[172] It also encompasses the fullest spectrum

of humbler fears, both as their *telos*, and, in the light of the hope that Julian describes

as simultaneous, as revelatory of the extent to which divine love covers the distance

between the divine and the human. Unlike with the scholastic taxonomies of degrees

of fear, and their versions in vernacular form, Julian is less interested in hierachalizing

fear by degree than in narrating the simultaneity of love and fear. Importantly, Julian

goes further than any scholastic or vernacular account in her affirmation of the

existence of *drede* in heaven, hence retaining an eschatological continuity for the

mutual interdependence, and subtle distinction, of fear and love. Retaining fear in

heaven, in its perfected form of an eternally trembling desire, affirms Julian's

positivity about this-worldly experience and devotion, with which her heaven is in

substantial continuity. In Julian, the theology of why human fear and suffering

deserves such a high destiny is especially richly developed and integrated with her

original, Christological, anthropology.

It has been suggested that Julian of Norwich's deep counsels of consolation,

her 'much admired serenity', are the last place to look for fear and trembling in later

medieval Middle English literature.[173] Steven Fanning has recently argued that her

'optimism' counters the 'fear-based Christianity' he associates with her age: Julian

'removed the role of fear as the motivating force in the life of the Christian and

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[172] See David Aers, *Salvation and Sin: Augustine, Langland and Fourteenth-century Theology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), pp.133–71.
[173] Watson, *Richard Rolle*, p.4.

replaced it with an awareness of God's love and compassion for humankind'.[174]

Julian's writings indeed contain strikingly minimal mention of the preliminary fears

of judgement, purgatory, damnation or hell—states and places which do not figure in

her visions, something which sometimes itself becomes a matter of concern for her,

especially in relation to the teaching of the Church (44/13–26, p.261). Moreover,

Julian's vision of, and emphasis on sustaining, the certainty of God's love, her

uniquely sympathetic vision of the fall, her reassurance as to the 'behoveliness' of sin,

her figuring of Christ as a kind mother, and the governing motif of restoration, rather

than wrath-quelling satisfaction, in her theology of redemption—all of this comes

together in the four words that she presents as the final cryseallization of all her

showings and reflections: 'love was his mening' (86/14, p.379). It is certainly true

that for Julian, there is something actually unreal, of 'not being', in the anticipation of

that which runs contrary to the purposes of love.

However, fear is not included but redemptively included in Julian's theology.

Fear is foundational to Julian's understanding of the proper attitude of the creature

before God, and is accorded a continuous place within the richly hopeful tenor of the

shewings themselves and her resultant thought, 'a careful scaffold on which the whole

work rests'.[175] Fear, as in the earlier texts and especially *Contemplations,* is associated

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[174] Steven Fanning 'Mitigations of the Fear of Hell and Purgatory in the Later Middle Ages: Julian of Norwich and Catherine of Genoa', in *Fear and its Representations*, pp.295–310 (pp.305, 309).
[175] C.E. Banchich, '"A hevenly joy in a dredfulle soule": Julian of Norwich's Articulations of Dread', in *Fear and its Representations*, pp.311–40 (p.311). This illuminating and excellent short study, lacks my larger comparative arguments about Julian's use of fear, and insertion of it into the wider context of her Christology and theological anthropology.

with self-knowledge: in Julian's theology, as in Augustine's, this is itself always a nexus of knowing oneself and knowing God. Hence fear is proper to the state of the 'creature', in the dual and inseparable awareness of the frailty and the divine 'ground' of the made. As with her theorisation of sin, the experience of fear is articulated as only expanding and deepening the consciousness of the degree of divine loving and redemptive intervention. Whilst the place Julian accords to fear is rooted in the rich diversity of orthodox theological expression, Julian's synthesis remains unique, both in its assertion of the simultaneity of fear and hope and its deep claims for the continuity of fear as an eschatological reality.

The position of Julian's text *vis à vis* lay experience and the vernacular expression with which we have been attempting to engage also entails fresh paradox. Although she clearly intends her revelations as a message to all without degree, Julian's personal holiness gives a certain rarefaction to her experience of herself and of God's love, which can give her text an unintentional exclusivity.[176] Whilst the relative impermeability of her own position regarding fear of sin and judgement sometimes appears to be at odds with the apparently harsher traditional teaching of the Church, it is my argument that via an embrace of this common fear, that of her 'evencristen', it becomes the occasion of her most creative theology, as she delves deeper into the extent of divine love, as in the *shewing* of the Lord and Servant (44/13–26, p.361). Whilst Rolle revels in his high, inaccessible degrees of love that

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[176] As Aers notes, Julian is also capable of crafting, 'aestheticising' and, indeed, intellectualising, her experience in ways which distance the vision of the crucifixion, for example, from an affective import usually assumed for lay devotion. See Aers and Staley, *Powers of the Holy*, p.86–90.

leave behind the experience of sin and fear, Julian's compassionate text turns towards her 'evencristen', to the experience and question of suffering, sin, fear and judgement in order to formulate her messages of reassurance: a reassurance derived from her direct engagement with the fear she *asks* to experience. Her *Revelation of Love* is, I propose, subtly drawn out of an engagement with fear. This turn 'down' is also a turn 'up', towards Christic compassion, as Julian embraces a more specifically Christological kenosis as the ground of her experience and its inscription in her *shewings*. Although Julian experiments, towards the close of both Short and Long Texts, with a traditional taxonomy of fear, the instability of its construction reveals the instrumentality of such a model in contrast with her own subtle and simultaneous understanding of the operation of fear and love.

II.   THE CRUCIFIX EPISODE: FEAR AS THE WAY OF CHRIST

Behind Julian's simultaneous emphasis on hope and fear lies her understanding of divine 'double purpose' for humanity, understood through her twofold theological anthropology of humankind's *substaunce* and *sensualite*, or 'higher and lower perty'.[177] The divine purpose for redemption involves both 'parts': the restoration from exile of the originary and undeparted *substaunce*, and the elevation beyond the fallen state which takes place through Christ's partaking in the *sensualite*. These can also be understood as a *hypostasis* of human nature: its dual relation to the image of

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[177] LT 45–46, pp.261–63, LT 55–63, pp.297–321; compare 'bestly wille' and 'gostly wille', LT 37, pp.235–37.

Christ as *logos* and the incarnation of Christ as man. Julian's ideal of *reverent*, *softe*, *true*, *curtious, holy* or *lovely drede*, which she repeatedly describes as the condition and aim of attaining to the love of God in this life,[178] can be understood as a balance between the awareness of these two *pertys*. It is through the understanding Julian has of the human creature, made and redeemed, perfect and perfectible, as called to a re-union which will surpass originary *oning*, that she accords to the fearful and suffering dimension of human experience a paradoxical height.

Hence Julian's *Revelations* begin with the anchoress herself choosing the fearful and kenotic way of restoration through Christ, rather than the portion of the double purpose that is the soul's substantial unity in creation, at once 'higher' and incomplete. Her confidence in Christ-likeness and existing divine participation through the *substaunce* is balanced with the further possibility for entering into the love of God through the kenotic way of Christ, a way that embraces sin, pain and fear. This glorious telos accorded to the sinful, fearful and painful contributes to explaining the apparent 'regression' of the text in the 'ugly shewing' of Julian's encounter with the 'fiend' (67, pp.333–35), as we shall see later.

Julian begins by describing her fervent, fearless will for empathy with suffering unto death, including its experience in her own body. Her desire for an intense *compassio* reflects the emphasis in late-medieval affective piety on felt recollection of the Crucifixion of Christ. This entails the painful desire for 'mind of the passion' and 'bodily sickness', which opens onto 'thre woundes': 'contrition',

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[178] See 6/57, p.145; 8/20, p.151; 25/17, p.205; 11/3–4, p.163; 37/8, p.235; 41/45–46, p.251; 65/7, p.327. See also 36/6, p.231; 38/23, p.239.

'compassion' and 'wilful longing to God' (2/2–4, p.125). This desire will take Julian into fear, although perhaps not in the expected manner of affective devotion.[179] However, in one sense, Julian's attitude is already fundamentally at one with the scriptural text that 'perfect love casts out fear' (1 John 4.18).

> In this I felt a great louthsomnes to die, but for nothing that was on earth that me liked to live for, ne for no paine ['nothing', ST, 2/8, p.65] that I was afraid of, for I trusted in God of his mercy. But it was for I would have lived to have loved God better and longer time, that I might, be the grace of that living, have the more knowing and loving of God in the blisse of hevene.
>
> (LT 2/5–10, p.131)

Trusting in divine mercy, Julian lacks even a fear of judgement, punishment and damnation. In the face of death, she feels 'a great louthsomnes' to leave life, but only insofar as she desires a further this-worldly perfection of true understanding and adoration of God. We might say that this approaches already the perfection of *love-drede*, whereby material fears are cast out and the only fear left is of separation from God.

The paradox of Julian's text is that it moves from this apparently secure position of a confidently chaste love-drede *back* into the way of fear, *sensualite* and suffering in her request for a kenotic descent into the super-additional gift of sharing

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[179] See p.83, n.139 above.

the experience of Christ's humanity: 'I desired … all the dredes and tempests of fiends' (2/23, p.133). Fear, here, shares the paradox of the incarnation and forestalls any hierarchy of degree by becoming as much additional as subordinate to perfection, ensuing from the height Julian has apparently already reached as an overflowing gift of Christ-identification. Hence, paradoxically, it is Julian's *fearlessness* at death that is the 'first stage' in her initiatory and pedagogic structure. What ensues returns her to the way of fear as the incarnational and Christological pathway, through which an exploration of sin and suffering will discern the overweening degree of divine love.

The importance of this early choice presented to Julian, between the direct ascent to divine union and the mediated way of Christ and the cross, is demonstrated when she revisits LT chapter 19 with a fuller gloss at LT 55. The choice is narrated early on. Julian, ready to die, has a direct intimation of how little there is to fear: of the thinness of the veil between her and heaven but—by the intercession of the Church in the form of the presence of priest and crucifix—she instead looks towards the cross.

> Methought I was well, for my eyen were set uprightward into heaven, where I trusted to come by the mercy of God. But nevertheless I assented to set my eyen in the face of the crucifixe, if I might, and so I dide, for methought I might longar dure to looke evenforth than right up.
>
> (3/20–23, pp.131–33)

The cross is here practically what it is theologically: *conveniens* in Aquinas' sense of fitting or adequate, or 'conveniable' as Julian puts it,[180] placed to accord with what comes naturally to the ailing anchoress.[181] Into the duration of this single gaze will be spooled the primary sequence of 'shewings': Julian's great vision of the bleeding head, the disfigurement of Christ's face, the underwater vision and the image of human hideousness, the vision of the hazelnut-creation, the pains of the passion, God in a 'pointe', the precious blood, the wedding banquet, the 'drying' vision and that of Mary's compassion. It is the gateway to the text.

This initial instant presents the way of the cross as the mixed way of both darkness and light, love and fear. As Julian approaches death at the outset of her *Revelation* there is a sudden, nocturnal darkness over everything except the crucifix held up by the boy assisting the priest who has come to Julian's sickbed to administer last rites. The cross itself glows brightly with a 'comon light'; outside it is all that is 'oglye and ferful … as if it had been mekille occupied with fiendes' (3/24–27, p.133). Sensually experienced, this is already the 'medelur of wele and wo' (1/18–22, p.123; 15, pp.155–57) through which—rather than the 'ease' of the unmediated upward path—she will come to the fullest grasp of divine immanence to the self. This vision is *chiaroscuro*, of comfort and terror. Rather than a light that appears in the darkness,

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[180] 5/1–3, p.169; see Denys Turner, *Julian of Norwich, Theologian* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2011), pp.35–38.

[181] See, for example, Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, 4.54–55; *Liber de veritate catholicae fidei contra errores infidelium*, ed. by Ceslas Pera, Pierre Marc and Pietro Caramello, 3 vols (Turin: Marietti, 1961–7), III, pp.348–58; trans. and ed. by Dominicans of the English Province (London: Burns, Oates &Washbourne, 1923–29), pp.119–218, *passim*.

it is a miracle of darkness that opens Julian's vision to fear, showing all that is not

Christ for what it is, including 'all the dredes and temptestes of fiends' Julian had

requested as part of her second wound (2/23, p.127). In the fearful darkness

surrounding the cross is a manifestation of all that is not the way, to which the

awakened spiritual vision can register a proper fear, discerning and shrinking from

that which also casts into relief the light of Christ, represented by the 'comon light',

kindly, natural, shared daylight. This soft and proportionate light is at once

supernatural, daylight in a spiritual night-time, and even more natural, since it is

appropriate to the actual time of day against the malign, night-like, darkness. Both the

'comon light' and the ordeal of the night belong to the vision of the cross and the

choice Julian has made for the way of common human experience and the *sensualite*.

This horizontal/vertical fork in the road recurs in LT 19:

Than had I a profer in my reason, as it had ben frendely, saide to me: 'Loke

uppe to heven to his father.' And than sawe I wele, with the faith that I felt,

that ther was nothing betwene the crosse and heven that might have dissesede

men, and either me behoved to loke uppe or elles to answere.

(19/4–7, p.187)

This time Julian's response is more consciously willed. She fixes her eyes once again

on the Christ of the crucifix, responding to it with both love and fear: 'Nay, I may not

[look away]! For thou art my heaven' (19/8, p.187) but also 'I wolde have lokede fro

the cross, and *I durst not*' (19/1, p.187). Love and fear are equally involved in this

decision, and the choice for the way of the cross, over against the ease and assurance of direct union with God, is a high point which proves a perennial comfort to Julian (19/14–15, p.189).

This 'profer' is revisited in LT 55, alongside Julian's most explicit account of her unique duality of 'substance' and 'sensualite'. The *substaunce* or 'hyer party' is that which has never been separate from God—not only 'soul', since Julian has a vision of the human person's entelechy, its perfection, as moving through the redeemed union with God that hinges on our embodiment. Nor is the *sensualite* the flesh half of a dualized flesh and spirit, but more like the soul's embodiment or, since Julian never separates it from Christ's redeeming work, the soul's incarnation.[182] Originary union in creation through Christ in the *substaunce* underlies the possibility of restoration to unity, the human person's Trinitarian shape, but it is with the bestowing of *sensualite* that God prepares his dwelling place in the soul, as it is through Christ's assumption of the 'lower perty', going beyond the prior union in creation, that humankind is redeemed (55/10–31, pp.299–300).[183] This description of the turning point frames it as a revelation of *both* 'perties', in Christ and in herself:

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[182] David Aers suggests Julian's distinction migh risk a certain dualism, which Turner has in part refuted. Here teasing out a fully Christological reading of these elements of the human nature even more counters a dualistic reading. See Turner, pp.187–204. See also Watson/Jenkins, note to 55/19–21, p.300.

[183] Julian's term for the atonement is the 'glorious asseeth' (10/42–43, p.161) conveying at once fulfillment, sufficiency – 'asseeth' from Old French *assez*, enough—and superveniency, glory. *MED*, 'assēth'.

> The lower perty, which is sensualite, suffered for the salvation of mankind …
> my body was fulfilled of feling and mind of Cristes passion and his dying:
> and, furthermore, with this, was a suttel feling and a prevy inwarde sighte of
> the hye party. And that was shewed in the same time, wher I mighte not, for
> the mene profer, loke up into heven. And that was for that ech mighty
> beholding of the inwarde life. Which inwarde life is that hye substance, that
> precious soule, which is endlessly enjoyeng in the godhede.
>
> (55/45–49, p.301)

Julian's moment of fundamental choice, the gateway to her revelations, is a vision of mediation itself. To look 'right up' rather than 'evenforth' would be to miss the revelation of a God closer to us than we are to ourselves, and the hallowed *oning* this offers (56/9–13, p.301) through Christ of whom humanity is the image and Christ in whom humanity is redeemed; this is humanity's dwelling in God and his dwelling in humanity, *substaunce* and *sensualite*. From the 'profer' associated with God the Father, and a direct, unmediated sense of spiritual destiny and security, Julian turns to the further unwrapping of the richer truth of a Trinitarian salvation in the salvific 'double purpose' for the self. Her *Revelations* prefer mediation, becoming and existence as the fullest revelation of the divine purpose, a turn that is consciously away from this 'sekernesse' and into the reality of human *sensualite*, sin, suffering and fear as self-knowledge: without which, her theology stresses, the full awareness of the work of divine love is inaccessible.

Julian appears to revisit this understanding of divine illumination in this life when she speaks of the light of faith as 'mesured discretly, nedfully stonding to us in the night' (83/13, p.377). Watson and Jenkins gloss 'stonding to' as an unparalleled 'oblique' usage.[184] However the formulation has the sense of 'stands before', making a clear dramaturgical echo to the circumstances of her initial vision, in which Julian tells us the whole of her *Revelation* is 'groundide and oned' (1/6, p.123).[185] The light of faith stood before her in the night in the form of the cross. The 'mesure' of this light, that is, its earthly limits, but also its proportionality to humanity, is a repeated concern of Julian's. Full light would imply no sin or suffering, union, perfected humanity that wills only the good. Such bliss is a reality which is present to Julian in some sense intellectually and through the union of the 'higher perty' with the lower in creation, but its full *telos* is only in the restoration effected by incarnation and crucifixion. This 'mesured' light is also described as 'a lighte in which we may live medfully [in such a way as to earn reward] with traveyle, deserving the wurshipful thanke of God' (84/3–4, p.377). To live 'medfully with traveyle' suggests Julian's adherence to the increase of reward through perfected knowledge of God, a necessary corollary of her kenotic, incarnational approach and its emphasis on the undergoing process of existence.

To recapitulate: the forms of this episode constitute Julian's exploration of what redemption adds to creation, and what fear might add to her knowledge of God. Julian is, on her deathbed, in a state of apparent 'fearless' relation to God. There

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[184] Watson/Jenkins, n., p.376.
[185] See *MED*, 'stonden, v. (1)', 1b.

ensues a moment of 'crux' between looking 'uprightward' to where she is already

sure of mercy, and looking 'evenforth' where the Crucifixion is presented. In the

different facets on this single choice Julian is given the way, as she says, of 'lernying'

(19/57, p.189); this way, of restoration in time and space, is a fearful way, embracing

'travayle', process and undergoing. In the initial encounter with the crucifix in LT 3,

the grace of the *shewing* permits her to see already in paradoxical *chiaroscuro*: Christ

is love who casts out all that is repellent and terrifies; but Christ is also love that

suffers, 'permits and undergoes', as Bernard McGinn glosses that word, this darker

aspect of experience, which is thus integrated into the redemptive action.[186] Her

second choice in LT 19 involves taking on the fearful in the face on the cross, where

Julian comes to see the fearful as no longer simply outside, as cast out by the light of

Christ, but in the face of Christ itself. Julian goes 'back' to go forward. The further

uniting of the apprehension of what is lovely and what is dreadful perhaps only

happens finally when Julian has the vision of Christ smiling from the cross (21/11,

p.191).

III.   WELE AND WO: FEAR'S DYNAMIC PLACE

Julian understands fear, the recoil before evil in the self or in the world, to have the

potential to operate to enhance rather than to eclipse the apprehension of the endless

love of God, further revealing the degree and extent of hope and salvation. This

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[186] Bernard McGinn, *Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism, 1350-1550* (New York: Crossroads Publishing Company, 2012), p.455.

'double vision' of the extent of vulnerability and security is apparent from the opening hazelnut vision, where the tininess of the nut, 'methought it might sodeynly have fallen to nought for littlenes' (5/11, p.139), is at once the fearful frailty of all that is made and the wonder of its being so perfectly kept and sustained by God's love.

Julian's visions and response throughout emphasize this dynamic oscillation of 'wo' and 'wele', most explicitly dealt with in LT 15. There, she experiences now a sense very near heavenly bliss, from which fear is exiled: 'I was fulfilled of the evyrlasting suernesse, myghtely fastnyd without any paynefulle drede' (15/2–3, p.175), now heaviness, sorrow and pain, an ungraced sensation as if unmoored from divine resources, 'left to themselfe' (15/19, p.177). Yet the lesson of this visitation of contrary feelings is this: 'both is one love' (15/24, p.177). This absence and presence is perceptual, 'in felyng', rather than actual: and nonetheless for Julian the phenomenological is the ground of revelation, through the *sensualite*. Apparent absence itself reveals the surety of God, or rather the *shewing* is unveiled as a lesson in divine fixity conveyed through mortal fluxion, rendered to our *mesure*. It is the motion from passion to passion itself, in all its suddenness, that is the sign of hope: it is participatible and we should realise that 'paine is passng' and imitate the swiftness of its motion by 'sodaynly' passing into the knowledge of the endlessness of Christ's love (15/25–28, p.177). The purpose of 'paynefulle drede' is revelation and entry into the divine purpose of love; it may be 'spedeful' that the soul sometimes be left in its solitude, which is this pain, woe and dread, that it might reveal and unveil the reality and fullness of *wele* as the purpose of *wo* (15/17, p.177).

Divine compassion frequently intervenes to mitigate fear throughout Julian's showings, as when the vision of supreme suffering at the Passion is passed 'in a touch' for God 'wolde nott that the soule were aferde' (27/19–22, p.209). However, elsewhere Julian remains with the potentially fearful, dwelling lingeringly on the flowing blood or drying flesh of Christ with a wondering attentivity that itself resculpts into beauty (16–17, pp.179–85). Julian describes her celebrated vision of the bleeding head dressed with the crown of thorns as 'quyck and lyvely and hydows and dredfulle and swete and lovely' (7/23–26, p.147). Beauty and ugliness, desire and fear are intensely mingled in her response. Moreover, the fearful response remains essential to her wonder: precisely in the possibility of this pain—in Christ's humanity—and the horrified fear felt before this pain—exacerbated by Christ's divine perfection—comes the deepest wondering knowledge of salvation. Here, Julian's 'double vision' is catalysed in direct response to the human suffering and salvific purpose proper to the divine double nature. Christ's hypostasis corresponds to creaturely doubleness of perfect and perfectible, *seker* substance with its access to divine reason; the *sensualite* susceptible to fear, wonder, love and dynamic *minde* (53/30, p.295). As Julian says, 'though this beholding be morning and swemfulle, yet it is glad and mery, for he is God' (71/7–8, p.345).

That Julian's most fearful vision comes towards the close of her *Revelations* reinforces an account of the continuous place of the experience of fear within this dynamic in her thought. This 'ugly shewyng' is a dream-encounter with a sensually overwhelming, hideous and stinking, brick-red fiend (67/1–10, pp.333–35). This is a moment of 'comon light' or democratic vision in another sense—the presence of

fiends at the threshold of death was expected for all, as immediately before individual judgement the forces of dark and light were thought to contest for the soul. There was a debate, for example, over whether the Virgin Mary's exceptionality included her in this deathbed fear.[187] This encounter with substantial terror is the occasion of a supreme revelation of divine indwelling and security for Julian: the clearest vision of the enthroned Christ in the soul as 'his homeliest home and his endlesse wonning' with its words of faith in tribulation: 'thou shalt not be overcome' (68/13, 57, pp.337–39). However, this is immediately followed by further 'dredful' vision, 'to stere me to dispere' (69/6, p.389).

This is a pattern in microcosm which Julian believes operates in macrocosm in the whole of God's action in salvation history, as she makes clear in LT 36. 'Sorrows and anguish and trobil' are followed by 'gret miracles' (36/52–55, p.235). The travail, Julian explains, is 'to meke us and make us drede God, crying for help and grace' (36/49–60, pp.234–35). This pattern is envisaged as a divine drama; God's *shewing* given to every Christian soul. The rhythm is of divine artistry, and the depth of descent is so plotted as to give analogous measure of the height to which hope may soar. This is, crucially, expressed always against the anagogic horizon of salvation and heavenly reward; it is always image and not fulfillment. *Drede* here is an apprehension of distance between the turmoil of human fallenness and the height of divine glory. Fear of God, then, is interchangeable with desire for God insofar as it

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[187]*Prick of Conscience*, ll.2286–91, p.66; 'The Death of Mary', *York Plays*, ed. by Richard Beadle, EETS SS 23–24 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009–13), I.133–4, p.420.

causes a movement of request and appeal. To sense God, even in distance, is to wish for God across a distance that is, for Julian, as we saw, simultaneously sharpened and sweetened by the fall.

IV.   FEAR AND SIN

Julian's celebratedly disarming account of sin is expressed most powerfully in her Lord and Servant parable, where the fall has an accidental quality, emphasizing its consequences for human suffering (51/12, p.275). In dealing explicitly with the theological relation of fear to sin, as she does in LT 73 and 74, building on ST 24 and 25, she distinguishes primarily between *drede* and *dispeyr*. The former is the fear that potentially leads to God and the latter the 'doughtfull drede' that despairs of salvation, risking present and eternal separation from God. This despair is itself a lively anxiety for the anchoress, as she addresses an audience in whom she assumes a hatred of sin.[188] *Wanhope* was a widely recognised danger—confessor's manuals never failed to deal with the danger of doubting the divine mercy.[189]

That Julian is very concerned to avoid despair does not mean, as we shall see, that fear of sin has no place. In fact, we perhaps see Julian herself at her most fearful before the *aporia* posed by the presentation of sinfulness and the apparent

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[188] See ST, 24/5–7, p.115.

[189] From confessor's manuals such as the *Oculum sacerdotis* to alliterative poetry such as *Winner and Waster* and the *Lazarus Play* of the Towneley Cycle the critique of *wanhope* or despair is to be found everywhere in the literature and culture of later Medieval England.

(im)possibility of its reconciliation, and hence humankind's reconciliation, with the God who does not blame:

> I stode beholdyng generally, swemly [fearfully] and mourningly seying thus to oure lorde in my mening with full gret drede: A, good lorde, how might alle be wele for the gret harme that is come by sinne to thy creatures? (29/1–3, p.213)

Here and further on Julian edges towards precisely the 'two sicknesses' of impatience and doubtful dread that she goes on to identify as 'prive', or close-clinging, sins in both the Long and Short Texts.[190]

> Betwene theyse two contraries my reson was gretly traveyled by my blindhede, and culde have no rest, for drede that his blessed presens shulde passe fro my syght, and I to be left in unknowing how he beholde us in oure sinne […] I culde have no pacience for gret feer and perplexite.
> (50/14–16, 20–1, p.273)

Perhaps, more subtly, for Julian as visionary theologian, the real fear here is the fear of *unknowing*, that is, the fear of not being drawn further into the apprehension of God and herself (73/16–29, p.353). In the cancelled passages of the Short Text *Vision*

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[190] ST, 24/56-8, p.115.

this trepidation is very evident, and it remains unresolved at a late stage of her writing, expressed in the great existential cry: 'Whate er we?' (ST, 23.36, p.115).

Julian's anxiety about humankind's separation from God as a result represents the *drede* she also here critiques: that fearful human over-apprehension of sin may itself be—perhaps the only—obstacle to alignment with God. And yet it is precisely the tension between the knowledge of sin and of salvation, partly a *drede*, whose presence catalyses Julian's reflections which lead through to the conclusion that 'love was his mening' (LT, 86/14, p.379).

The response Julian is given to her fear and anxiety includes her most frequently quoted saying – 'Sinne is behovely, but alle shal be wele, and alle maner of thing shal be wele' (27/9–11, p.209). This is usually lopped of its first half, intruding a shallow optimism into her thought. This is not the cancellation of the reality of sin, but a new understanding of the fitting place of even sin within the landscape of salvation; more valley than chasm, to borrow the setting of her lord and servant parable. The 'drede' which sparked the question to which this response led is not supplanted but converted. Fear of sin for Julian is not a pessimistic mode that is dismissed in favour of optimistic expectation. Rather there is an absorption of the knowledge of humankind's fallen and falling nature into the greater knowledge of 'loue and sekernesse of ghostly kepyng' (37/9–10, p.235). To express this tempering of fear Julian tends to use the metaphor of fear's tendering, as in her original formulation of 'soft drede':

Though oure lorde shewyd me that I shuld synne, by me aloone is vnderstonde

alle. And in thys I conceivid a softe drede; and to this oure lorde answeryd: I

kepe the fulle suerly.

(37/6–9, p.235)

This is synonymous with Julian's reverent dread, but 'softe' conveys, in Middle

English, more even than material yielding, a pleasurable gentleness to the experience

of fear.[191] This near oxymoron sustains the simultaneity Julian wishes to emphasize,

the mingling of the judgement of self and the consciousness of surpassing divinity,

and the wonder and delight in divine intimacy.

Julian takes pains to recognise the place for humanity of sorrow, anxiety and

dread: 'Pees and love is ever in us, being and working, but we be not ever in pees and

in love' (39/34–35, p.243). This is her idea of a two-part 'sothness' corresponding to

'two demes'; the human person's judgement of herself and God's judgement of the

person: 'in the beholding of God we falle not, and in the beholding of oureselfe we

stonde not' (82/24–25, p.375). The lower beholding is associated with fear and

knowledge of the higher with 'gostly solace' – the whole of her *Revelations* are, in

this sense, a response to the wrong kind of fear.

Whilst Julian emphasizes that attention should remain with the 'hygher' not

the 'lower' part, it is not that one is 'true' and the other 'false'. Paradoxically, it is

only by the human person's holding herself between the fearful knowledge of her

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[191] See *MED* 'soft(e (adj.)', 3, 4 and 7.

fallennes as it is and her risenness that ever shall be, that her vision shall finally be more perfectly united. There is a sense, as Nicolette Zeeman has remarked, of a reality almost ontological to these two 'pertys', sometimes understood as – apparently – two wills.[192] Later Protestant solutions might emphasize the necessary grace that intervenes to 'make up' for this moral deficiency, but Julian's theology does not. Rather her working out of a solution to this dilemma is done through her understanding of the real place of sin in the divine plan across LT 35 and 38.

Whilst Julian says that those who are saved have a 'godly wille', she also finds a place for understanding sin as part of the necessary labour which has a heavenly reward. Here sin is like Augustine's martyrs' wounds, which, as with Christ's, appear as surpassingly lovely in their heavenly instantiation.[193] This is the mystery of the Magdalene, to whom Julian explicitly compares herself, that the greatest sinner can be the greatest saint.[194] It is a consequence of Christ's suffering of sin:

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[192] Nicolette Zeeman, 'Willing', in *Medieval Literature: Criticism and Debates*, ed. by Holly A. Crocker and D. Vance Smith (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp.470–79.
[193] *City of God*, 22.19, ed. Dyson, pp.1149–50.
[194] LT 38, pp.237–29. David Aers, *Salvation and Sin*, pp.156–58, claims that Julian's account of sin runs entirely counter to church teaching and scripture, especially Julian's use of David to exemplify the rewarded sinner. However, Julian does not mean that sin becomes glory *without* the penitential suffering or undergoing of its pains. Aers brackets out David's medieval characterisation as, like Mary Magdalene, an example the power of divine mercy. David's life in the *Legenda aurea* is a string of tales of repentance; including a description of his composition of the Psalms in pentitential circumstance. In Dante, *Purgatorio* 10.64–66, David's dancing before the Ark, shamefully in the world's eyes (2 Samuel 6.22) illustrates the virtue of humility; ed. and trans. by Robin Kirkpatrick (London: Penguin, 2007), pp.90–91.

> For all that is good oure lorde doeth, and that is evil oure lord suffereth. I say
>
> not that eville is wurshipfulle, but I sey the sufferance of oure lorde God is
>
> wurshipfulle.
>
>   (35/18–20, pp.230-31)

Julian's use of the verb 'suffer' brings the undergoing of the sin of others and the
experience of sin closer and closer. This suggests human 'suffering' of our own sin
participates in the passion, which is reinforced by sin's depiction as 'scourging'
(39/1–5, p.239).

This suffering is also described as 'noughting', a term whose sense shifts in a
way that models Christic redemptive undergoing:

> [sin is] alle that is not good … the utter noughting that he bare for us in this
>
> life, and his dying, and alle the paines and passions of alle his creatures, gostly
>
> and bodely. For we be alle in party noughted, and we shal be noughted,
>
> folowing our master Jhesu, tille we be fulle purged: that is to sey, till we be
>
> fully noughted of oure dedly flesh, and of alle our inwarde affecions which
>
> be not very good. (27/12–17, p.209)

Julian takes the single word of sin's negativity, 'nought', through its sinful and into its
salvific aspect. The *noghting* that is sin, as a destructive power, was seen in the
continuous denial of Christ's godhead that culminated in the 'utter noughting that he
bare for us' of his suffering and death, intended as a death of ignominy, on the cross.

Sin, for Julian, has 'na manere of substance, na partye of being'; the experience, in suffering, of the absence of the good, felt through the actuality of our bodies and passions, is the only remainder (13/55–56, p. 93). But this can truly be dreadful, 'as we were in perelle of deth and in a party of helle' (72/10–11, p.347). However, when God suffers to be 'noghted' he even transforms that 'noght': 'alle that oure lorde … suffereth is wurshipfulle' (35/17, p.229). Christ's action fulfills and transforms annihilating sin by negating its negation, bringing it to the only existence or participation in the good it could possibly have: 'And this paine, it is somthinge, as to my sight, for a time. For it purgeth and maketh us to know oureselfe and aske mercy' (27/23–25, p.211). Hence to be 'fuly noughted' now becomes the positive purgation of our 'dedely fleshe' and 'inwarde affections', which comes partly through the creative sufferance of fear.[195]

Julian is constantly interested in not just the resolution but the tension of the relation between ways of viewing and ways of feeling, the human person's fearful judgment of herself and God's judgment of the person; joy in God and dread of one's sinful nature. We, like Christ, are those who participate in drawing the non-being of sin into its only possible being; as a victory-wound as Julian describes it in her eschatological depiction of the sins of the saints. All that is evil will tend to annihilation, following itself to its own nothingness, and yet all that is God's word and will shall remain. As 'worship' however—as renown, narrative, knowledge, reward—sin will have some existence. It will exist insofar as it has been suffered in

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[195] For Julian's fearful vision of the carnal self, for example, see 10/25–37, p.159

Christlike manner, noughting the nothing of itself, and been converted into good and the Church as all that is of 'good will'. This affirms the worth of the penitential struggle and the fear of sin which drives it, neither resting in the non-entity of sin and hence over-confidence, nor falling over into the despairing 'doubtful drede': which risk, respectively, failing to take divine love or human responsibility seriously.

V.   TRANSFORMING THE TAXONOMY OF FEAR

Late in both short and long texts, Julian attempts an explicit taxonomy of fear. The chapters that form her 'treatise on fear' follow on from, and in a sense answer, her visitation by the stinking fiend and her questioning of sin's substance with the bravura challenge 'O wreched sinne! What ert thou?' and the more existential angst of her 'Whate er we?'.[196] After her sophisticated work of integration, this anomalous treatise-like chapter suggests a desire to engage with the tradition of a progression of degrees of fear, as cemented in scholastic theology. Even here, Julian's account betrays her underlying preference for a dialectic or simultaneous understanding of how fear can be experienced without pulling apart from the single, natural orientation towards God and the knowledge of divine love. Even more than the vernacular accounts we have looked at in *Speculum* and *Jacob's Well*, Julian's reworking fulfils the potential of the recounting of degrees from fear to love to emphasize a single directionality – towards love – that works against the taxonomical division with its

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[196] ST, 23/23, 36, p.115.

suggestion of discrete 'good' and 'bad' forms. Julian makes clear that she does not

excise mixed motivations from some contribution towards her ideal of reverent drede.

Julian's taxonomy works less by distinguishing the object of fear than the direction in

which it pushes the believer: she is interested in what is fled to rather than what is fled

from. Hence her taxonomy is actually underwritten by the dichotomy of her own

'reverent drede' and its opposite, sinful, 'doubtful drede'. The inclusion of this latter

might seem to darken the love-direction of the taxonomy, but in fact Julian's final

manoeuvre, as with her account of sin, is to subsume even the most negative term

back into the frame of love.

Julian's taxonomy of *drede* occurs within a larger discussion of fear that

directly concludes the shorter text (ST, 24–25) and is expanded in the longer version

(LT, 73–76). Its originality is all the more marked for the traces it bears of Julian's

knowledge of other scholastic and vernacular taxonomies. It arises directly as a

discussion of how to discern when fear becomes 'doughtefulle drede', which Julian

has just identified as one of the sins 'that most travayleth and tempesteth us' (73/11,

p.351): a discernment all the more important in the light of the significance of

'reverent drede' in Julian's theology, and which she had earlier compared to the

difficult 'discernment of spirits', of good angels from evil demons (ST, 25/24–31,

p.119). Here, as we have discussed, she finds that fear of sin has a function;

moreover, whilst sin is nothing, fear has a more coherent and continuous reality since

to know the quantity of evil is to discern the traversal of the distance it presupposes

between God and the sinner. Julian's solution is a discernment of the right spirit of

fear so that 'sekernesse in liking and luffe' may be whole (ST, 24/27–28). Fear,

revealed as fundamentally the means of rightly living and loving through the *aporia* of sin and salvation in our earthly predicament, is a means of calibrating both the attitude towards the self and towards God.

The four fears are 'drede of afray', 'dred of payne', 'doutfulle drede' and 'reverent drede' which is also 'softe' (74/1–17, pp.355–57). 'Reverent drede' is Julian's own ideal of fear, recurrent across her *Revelations*. The first, 'drede of affray,' is unique to Julian: a fear of tribulation or attack that amounts to an awareness of material frailty. In scholastic taxonomies this is closest to *timor naturalis*, the natural fear of the termination of life, and the negative *timor mundanus* (fear of this-worldly pain and loss of worldly goods). However, Julian uniquely emphasizes even this fear's potentially salvific role: seeing it primarily, as with the circumstances of original sin and suffering, in terms of its potential to serve a purgative role (74/1–4, p.355). As she later says, 'alle this living is penance profitable' (77/32, p.365). Next, 'drede of pain,' of 'bodely deth and of gostly enemys' (and of the fires of purgatory, in ST, 25/8), like a jolt waking the body from the sleep of sin (LT, 74/5–6, p.355). This fear of spiritual things in their physical dimension, is something more like a servile or initial fear, the 'goad' or 'prick' familiar from other texts. This appears to be what she elsewhere calls a 'drede that may spede' (63/15, p.321) and despite its apparent effervescent carnality, it prepares the way for reverent fear if suffered patiently. It is the ground, moreover, for fear as a gift of the spirit, which 'abileth us to have contrition by the blisseful touching of the holy gost' (74/9–10, p.355).

Julian's next type of fear, 'doutefulle drede', is not a usual part of taxonomies – instead it echoes medieval discussions, especially in confessional manuals, that

discourage the overplaying of the fear-inducing moral persuasion which might induce the sin of *wanhope* or despair, and encourage striking a balance between this and the equally dangerous presumptive 'overhope'. Doubtful dread 'letteth us by the beholding of ourseself and of oure sinne afore done' (73/28–29, p.353). It is the 'spice of dispaire'—its 'taste' or 'foretaste', turning the human person away from God. However even this undesirable, sinful kind of fear, the result of excessive self-examination which 'makyth so sory and so hevy that vnnethys we can see ony comfort' (73/31–32, p.353), can be transformed by love into love. Without the 'tru knowing of love' this ingredient will remain bitter, but the spice can be mixed into sweet wine if it is rid of the 'unknawynge of love': failure not just in the knowledge of divine love but human charity, the will that brings perfect love to fruition. So Julian imagines and prays that this kind of drede might undergo what sounds like an almost alchemical mutation:

> Dougtfull drede, in as moch as it drawyth to dispeyer, God wylle have it
>
> turnyd in us into love by tru knowyng of love, that is to sey, that the
>
> bytternesse of doughte be turned into swetnes of kynde love by grace, for it
>
> may nevyr plese oure Lorde that his servauntes doughte in his goodnesse.
>
>   (74/11–14, pp. 355–57)

What Julian has recognised at this stage in her thought is how her earlier 'full gret drede' ('A, good lorde, how might alle be wele for the gret harme that is come by sinne to thy creatures', 29/2–3, p.213) might be transformed. As she reflects

elsewhere, we must 'know oure owne febilnesse and mischef that we be fallen in by sinne, to meke us and make us to drede God, cryng for helpe and grace' (36/52–54, p.235). On the one hand she does have a more or less conventional account of the balance between 'recklessness' or 'overhope' and 'despair' or 'wanhope':

> neither on that one side fall over lower, enclining to dispairs, ne on that other side be over rechelesse …but nakidly know oure febilhede … and reverently cleve to God.
>
>   (52/53–56, p.291)

But on the other hand, Julian advocates a different dialectic: a co-contribution of *drede* and joy; the knowledge of human weakness and frailty, the reality of sin and 'unsekernesse' and the 'sekernesse' of divine love, grace and mercy. These converge: to discern capacity for bliss is to discern ever more clearly the degree of distance, and *vice versa*.

Fear remains an important penitential response to the 'twinning' of the human person and God by sin. However, alongside the reassurance of divine love such knowledge of the incapacity of the self becomes the recognition of the extent of divine restoration. When Julian sets out the steps of knowing God, knowing oneself 'by kind and by grace' (in terms of *substaunce* and *sensualite*, in perfect and imperfectly perfectible terms) she follows these with the third synthetic step, whereby those knowledges converge in a wonderful fear that is to 'knowe mekely' (72/43–47, p.349).

It is the consequence of this double vision, 'reverent drede', that is for Julian the 'kinde and gracious and good and true' (74/34, p.357). Julian grounds her devotional attitude on this type of fear throughout the *Revelations*. The paradox of 'reverent drede' and 'mekenes' with 'highe wisdom and truthe' in the Virgin Mary is her foundational devotional ideal (7/2,5,7, p.145). Clare Banchich suggests it also grounds her speaking authority, since this ideal state of Mary's fear was tied closely to the estimation of her ideal and outstanding rhetorical capacity.[197] Julian goes on variously to term the fear: 'softe drede' (11/3–4, 37/8, pp.163, 235), 'lovely drede' (41/45–6, p.251) and 'holy, curtious drede' (65/7, p.327).[198] Reverence, or reverent fear, is for Julian the fear most perfectly compatible with love, and yet retains a distinction even where, in its ideal form, it is not registered as pain or distress. Love and fear of God are 'brethren', two, yet inseparable, as in Augustine's 'God who alone cannot be feared apart from love'.[199] Reverent fear is paradoxical in its effect, for the more we have of it, the less we feel it—hence the sensual motif of its softening.[200] This softening is never dissolution: 'he that loveth, he dredeth, though he feele it but litille' (74/25–6, p.357). This 'reverent drede' uniquely combines elements of *timor servilis*, *timor filialis* and will go on to include perfected *timor castus*:

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[197] Banchich, pp.316–23.

[198] For 'reverent drede', see 6/57, p.145; 8/20, p.151; 25/17, p.205. See also 36/6, p.231; 38/23, p.239.

[199] Augustine, *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, trans. by David L. Mosher, Fathers of the Church 70 (Washington DC: Catholic University Press of America, 1982), 36, p.68.

[200] 74/15–16, p.357.

It longyth to the lordeschyppe and to the faderhed to be dred, as it longyth to the goodness to be lovyd. And it longyth to us that are his servauntes and his children to dred hym for lordshyppe and faderhed. (74/20–23, p.357)

Rather than assuming the negative, slavish, connotations of the servant/lord relationship, Julian sees it as one of loyal fealty and mutual affection, as follows from her parable of the servant and the lord. Moreover, Julian distinguishes the value of fear not purely by its object—which the more technical taxonomies of fear emphasize—but by its *telos*, precisely by its outworking in love. This is clear in her other important maternal image of fear:

That dred that maketh us hastely to fle fro all that is not goode and falle in to our lordes brest as the chylde in to the moders barme, with alle our entent and with alle our minde knowing oure febilnes and oure greate nede, knowyng his everlasting goodnesse and his blisseful love, only seking into him for salvation, cleving to with seker trust—that dred … is kinde and gracious and good and true.

(74/29–35, p.357)

The mother's arms receive the child from wheresoever he flees, accepting what there is of love, not questioning the source of fear.

Behind Julian's apparent hierarchy lurks a distinction at once simpler and more profoundly governing. Elsewhere, she distinguishes between fear of God and

'alle other dredes, [which God] setteth … among passions and bodely sicknesse and imaginations' (65/21–22, p329). Here she separates off the fears which are elements of suffering and of life, which do not directly refer to knowledge of self, sin and God. But as she develops her 'knawyng of love' it transpires that the really important distinction is whether or not fear impedes the turning to the divine: where it does not, it becomes integrated and densely entwined with love: 'as mekille as it longeth to his Godhed to be loved, so mekille it longeth to his grethede to be drad' (25/34–53, p.361).

Julian's account of 'reverent drede' culminates in a uniquely explicit and definite vision of heavenly quaking before God, a fear that will continue into the realms of sanctity and beyond the bounds of history.

> The kynde property of drede whych we have in this lyfe by the gracious werkyng of the Holy Gost, the same shall be in hevyn afore God, gentylle, curteyse, fulle swete. And thus we shall in love be homely and nere to God, and we shalle in drede be gentile and curtesse to God.
>
> (74/36–40, pp.357–59)

Once she has viewed proper fear as having a distinct operation in creaturely relation to the divine, Julian cannot see it as temporary or instrumental. Could she be drawing on some knowledge of the speculative tradition that goes back to Augustine? Augustine, in the *City of God*, discounts a series of other passions as continuing in heaven, but accepts the existence of fear as essential to the understanding of the love

of God. He imagines its possible continuation in a manner whereby the will, whilst it cannot now resist the good, does not for all that renege on its state of being firmly turned from evil. Converted fully to love, it does not lose its 'posture'.

> this chaste fear that endureth for ever and ever is to be in the future life, it will not be a fear that is afraid of an evil which might possibly occur, but a fear that holds fast to a good which we cannot lose.[201]

Aquinas also, equating 'filial fear' with 'chaste fear', admits fear's perfection in charity, but ends his *respondeo* on the question by quoting Augustine's still-cautious account.[202]

Julian's vision of heavenly fear is developed as an exegesis of Job 26.11, 'the pillars of heaven shall tremble and quake', in this possibly directly or indirectly under the influence of Aquinas' use of Gregory of Great.[203] This vision of eternal trembling wonder is the culmination of the simultaneous awareness of creaturely humility and the goodness and love of the creator, with direct verbal echoes of her hazelnut vision, with its simultaneity of relative tininess and 'held' and 'kept' security of the created:

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[201] Augustine, *City of God*, 14.9, ed. Dyson, p.601.
[202] Aquinas, *ST*, II.II.19.11.
[203] Edmund Colledge and James Walsh suggest only Gregory. *A book of showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich*, 2 vols (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1978), II, p.690. Leonard Boyle shows some 'casuist manuals' for confessors made extensive accurate use of Aquinas' pastoral material in *ST*, II.II. It might be that Julian had been somehow exposed to the contents of Aquinas' *quaestio* on the gift of fear.

all creatures shalle have to God so gret reverent drede … dredfully tremelyng

and quakyng for mekehede of joy, endlesly merveylyng of the greatnesse of

God and the littilhede of all that is mede.

(75/22–26, p.361)

Fear's destiny is to be a knowledge of human, material humility that has become

finally indissociable from the full revelation of its high destiny and restoration. In

fact, heaven is actually the *climax* of fear since only in the light of the full greatness

of God is the full difference and distance revealed, precisely at the moment where it is

utterly and completely overcome. Fear is the measure of the real addition this makes

beyond the apocatastatic to the redemptive restoration.

Fear has a crucial, non-instrumental place in salvation and perfection in

Julian's thought. The attitude of 'reverent drede' underpins her theology in its

dialectic of assurance of salvation and knowledge of sin and suffering. Although

'reverent drede' is finally heavenly, it is not only an elevated, later form of fear.

Rather it begins with the basic acknowledgement of creatureliness in Julian's double

understanding of that term: first, substantial unity with the divine in the ground of

created being and a deep-rooted fearlessness of everything that is not God. Secondly,

the *sensualite*, the soul's entry into limited substance, in which both fall and

restoration are effected; hence fearful awareness of sin, distance from God,

participates this restoration through suffering. However, fear is also permitted more

than the limited and temporary profit of sin, as it is based in the positive reality of the

(traversed) distance of creature from creator. Julian's retention of fear within earthly

and even heavenly love maintains dynamic tension in her deiotic theology and spirituality of substantial identity between the human and the divine.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study of Julian of Norwich's *Revelations* has shown how an extremely 'postitive' incarnational theology emphasizing love and soteriologial reassurance can accompany an important and undampened place for fear. The paradoxes of height and lowness, humility and glory we traced in Chapter One find narrative expression in the trajectory of Julian's account of her Christological and kenotic vision and experience. The tendency we saw in vernacular versions of scholastic taxonomies, which point all degrees of fear towards a *telos* in love, or a moral 'ordo timoris', as in *Contemplations*, is uniquely fulfilled in Julian by her emphasis on the simultaneous or iterative experience of degrees of fear and love. Without introducing a shallow optimism into her thought, we can say that Julian has a desire to view fear, as an experience of divine distance, as revelatory of the closing of that gap accomplished through incarnation and redemption.

Turning, in the next chapter, to explicit engagements with Christ's own fear in the cycle plays, this theological material is still in play. Janet Soskice has well commented on Julian's invitation to her reader not simply to read but participate in her journey of love and knowledge and, we might add, fear.[204] This invitation

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[204] Janet Soskice, *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender and Religious Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.155.

becomes even more explicit in the drama, which invites its audience to devotional and ritual participation, exploring the holiness of the affect of fear through the exemplarity of Christ and his disciples, but also situating the medieval layperson theologically in relation to the embodied Christ and the underlying sacramentalism of the drama.

CHAPTER THREE: CHRIST'S FEAR AND THE CYCLE PLAYS

I.   CHRIST'S FEAR IN THE THEOLOGICAL TRADITION

A. INTRODUCTION

Let them blush red with shame who suppose that the Saviour feared death and

that it was in terror of the passion that he said, 'Let this cup pass from me'.[205]

If Christ in Gethsemane had no fear, then his passion is null and void.[206]

That which he has not assumed, he has not healed.[207]

There is a long tradition of anxiety over Christ's vulnerability to fear as he faces his

coming Passion in the Garden of Gethsemane, in the episode often called the 'Agony

in the Garden'.[208] Uncertainty about Christ's fear, as we shall see, can be found in the

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[205] Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, 21.1, trans. by Thomas P. Scheck (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), p.291.

[206] Carl Jung writing to Fritz Buri, author of *The Religious Conquest of Fear*, in *Letters*, p.398.

[207] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Letters*, 101.32, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 7, ed. by Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1894), p.439.

[208] The most complete overview of this debate over Christ's affectivity, from the Patristic period to the Medieval, is Kevin Madigan, *The Passions of Christ in High-Medieval Thought: an Essay on Christological Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Important threads can also be traced in Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), see pp.386–98.

Gospels themselves, is central to early Christological debates, and continues to

exercise the scholastics. It is still under fierce debate in sixteenth-century England,[209]

and continues its controversial role into contemporary theology.[210] An ongoing thread

of trepidation concerning the intimate ascription of fear and trembling to the Son of

God runs as warp to the weft of a sense of the necessity and integrity of this fear to his

salvifically-assumed human nature.

In this chapter I shall be looking first at the early theories of the emotions that

impinge on this issue, tracing their legacy through later theological debates about

Christ's fear. Turning to the Middle English plays, I shall reflect on the conceptual

and devotional potential that derives from their narrative and dramatic form,

comparing them with the later medieval lives of Christ. I will then explore the

treatment of the Agony in the Garden in four different dramatic texts.

B. The Antique Context

Christ's fear was a particular stumbling block for the Hellenic period in which early

Christian thought was emerging. Early Christian thinkers—and their Jewish

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[209] Desiderius Erasmus and John Colet debate Christ's fear in 1499: Colet advocates Jerome's wariness concerning Christ's experience of the passions; Erasmus draws on Ambrose to stress his empathetic humanity. Erasmus, *Disputatiuncula de taedio, pavore, tristicio Iesu* in *Spiritualia and Pastoralia*, ed. by John W. O'Malley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), pp.9–67. Thomas More's final prison work is a poignant meditation on Christ's fear, concluding fear was acceptable for martyrs as for Christ, in *De tristitia christi*, ed. by Clarence H. Miller, *The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, 14 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976).

[210] Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Christian and Anxiety*, trans. by Michael J. Miller ([1976] San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000).

counterparts—were also late antique thinkers, writing under the influence of classical

thought: Middle Platonist and Neoplatonist, Aristotelian and Stoic.[211] Ideals of

eradication (*apatheia*) or management (*metriopatheia*) of the passions in the

philosopher or sage—themselves theological ideas informed by the ideal of

conformity to the impassible divinity in Stoic or Neoplatonic thought—inflect early

anti-Christian polemic and pro-Christian apologetic.[212] Whilst, in different ways,

Aristotle and Plato can be understood as making space for the emotions, the Stoic

position on the moral dubiety of the passions, and the necessity of their therapy as

deficiencies in relation to the rational power, clearly favours an ideal of the

impassible sage.[213] The classical philosophical language of *apatheia* and

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[211] Simo Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004), pp.111–176 and 'Medieval Theories of the Passions of the Soul', in *Emotions and Choice from Boethius to Descartes*, ed. by Henrik Lagerlund (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), pp.49–83; Sorabji, pp.343ff.

[212] Origen quotes the Pagan polemicist Celsus: 'Why then does he utter loud laments and wailings, and pray that he may avoid the fear of death, saying something like this, "O Father, if this cup could pass by me?"' Origen, *Contra celsum*, 2.24, ed. by Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.88. Plotinus' collator Porphyry finds incomprehensible Jesus' words against the fear of death (Luke 12.4) against his prayer against peril (Matthew 26.41; Mark 14.38): 'These sayings are not worthy of God's Son, nor even of a wise man who despises death', 'Opponent of Macarius' in Macarius, *Apocriticus*, III. 2, ed. by Jeremy M. Schott and Mark J. Edwards (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), p.107; Julian the Apostate writes: 'Jesus—a "god"—requires the comfort of an angel as he prays, using language that would be humiliating even for a beggar who bemoans his adversity', 'Fragment VII', *Julian's Against the Galileans*, ed. and trans. by Joseph R. Hoffman (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004), p.144.

[213] See further Knuuttila, *Emotions*, pp.45–51. The tripartite understanding of the soul, in Aristotle after Plato, tended to overlap functionalities and capacities; the affective or sensate could have rational aspects or contribute towards rational ends. Aristotle emphasizes that human virtue emerges as the experience of emotion, with a more ethical angle that values the emotions through its pragmatic, metriopatheic approach; whilst Plato's more telos-oriented take stresses the place of erotic and passionate desire on the path to blessedness. See Plato, *Phaedrus* 246a–256e,

metriopatheia features in the formative stages of Christian theology, in the writings of

the Alexandrian and Cappadocian Fathers, who sometimes suggest that *apatheia*

might be desirable or attainable for monastic and eschatological perfection.[214]

The specific passion of fear is in a number of ways particularly antithetical to

the classical tradition. It is at odds with the heroic virtue of *andreia* (manliness or

courage), although Aristotle has space for fear in measure and circumstance.[215] Fear

of death is seen as anti-philosophical in Plato's *Apology* in its denial of the

metaphysical long-view and the philosophical belief in the eternity of the soul.[216] 'No

pathos was considered more problematic than *phobos* [fear]' for late Stoicism:[217] it is

viewed as uniquely irrational, infantile and ignorant and reviled for its capacity to

disturb a preferred tranquility.[218] Epicurean philosophy promised 'freedom from fear'

Republic 4.435e–444d, *Timaeus* 69e–70b, in *Complete Works*, ed. by John M. Cooper (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997), pp.524–33, 1067–76, 1271. On the emotions in *Phaedrus* see Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp.213–35.

[214] Sorabji, chs 22 and 23, pp.343–71; Knuuttila, ch.3, pp.113ff; Madigan, p.54.

[215] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. by Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), III.6–7, 1115a–1116a, pp.48–51.

[216] Plato, *Apology*, 28e–30b, *Complete Works*, p.27. Plato's attitude to fear is complex. His erotic account of philosophical growth allows space for the trembling aversion that has never been absent from passionate attraction (*Phaedrus*, 250b–251e, 254b in *Complete Works*, pp.527–9, 531). His account of *andreia* is foundational in viewing it as 'right fearing' rather than the absence of fear (*Laches* 191a–196d, pp.676–81). Plato's *Laws* propose a form of good, divine, reverence-fear, 2.671d, p.1362.

[217] Robert C. Gregg and Dennis Groh, *Early Arianism* (London: SCM Press, 1991), p.16.

[218] See Seneca, 13.104, *Letters on Ethics*, ed. by Margaret Graver and A.A. Long (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), pp.52–5, 412–19; Seneca, *De tranquilitate animi* 11; *De constantia sapientis* 5.2, in *Four Dialogues*, ed. by C.D.N. Costa (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1994), pp.82–4, 106–7. See also Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*, 2.44–62, 3.35–54, 6.24–39, trans. by Ronald Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.37, 71, 179–80.

not on the transcendental basis of Platonic or Stoic thought (alignment to the rational

pneuma) or even Aristotelian (for whom virtues are good in their own right) but rather

through the immanentist realization that happiness in this life was all that was worth

seeking.[219]

At the same time, there is another side to the classical understanding of the

place of the passions. Poetry and drama continue to be modes of expression for

philosophers into late antiquity. There is a deep structural relation between Aristotle's

ethical and aesthetic ideas, so that the moderate experience of fear gains its rightness

not *in essentia* but in being exercised 'at the right time, about the right things, toward

the right people, for the right end, and in the right way'.[220] This realm of act is also

the realm of drama in his *Poetics*, where mimesis' ethical mechanism is its production

of the measure of emotive response. Pity and fear are famously valued as the

emotions associated with right response to tragedy.[221] In Aristotle they are defined in

a mutually dependent fashion: pity as what we feel when that occurs to someone else

that we would fear for ourselves; fear as fearing for ourselves what we pity in

others.[222] With caveats to Aristotle's theory of *katharsis*, which implies the

undesirability of excess of either pity or fear, since tragedy 'purges' these emotions,

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[219]See Epicurus, *Principal Doctrines*, 2.10–12; *Letter to Menoeceus* in *The Epicurus Reader*, ed. by Brad Inwood and L.P. Gerson (Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett, 1994), pp.28–33.

[220] Aristotle, *Ethics*, II.6, ed. Crisp, p.30.

[221] Aristotle, *Poetics* 9; 13–14 in *The Poetics of Aristotle*, ed. by Stephen Halliwell (London: Duckworth, 1987), pp.42, 44–46. See also Dana LaCourse Munteanu, *Tragic Pathos: Pity and Fear in Greek Philosophy and Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.70–138.

[222] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 2.5; 2.8, sed. by George A. Kennedy (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp.139–43, 151–55.

the centrality of this mutually dependent pair suggests an understanding of the deep

relation between the passion of fear and the capacity for compassion.

Besides this exception for tragedy, and whilst a strict and universal *apatheia*

remains alien to Christian thought, the later tradition not only inherits the classical

anxiety, but finds deep theological problems related both to the incarnation and to the

atonement in thinking about the role of the passions and Christ's fear.[223] Fear is

necessarily impossible for God as God, and sits uneasily as attributable to the

incarnate Son because it implies antipathy to, ignorance of, and powerlessness before

divine intent. Certain anxieties seem to be apparent already in the New Testament,

and so first we will spend some time detailing the differences found in the scriptures

as the primary sources for the drama.

C. Gethsemane in the New Testament

Anxiety about Christ's fear can be traced back to the very first accounts of the night

before Christ's capture, themselves perhaps inflected by the antique context.[224] The

episode of the Agony is absent from the Gospel of John—a gospel that in other

respects lyrically and mystically shows forth Christ's divinity and omniscience.

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[223] Augustine understands Stoic thought to claim that perfected man can and should be free from *all* affect as emotional 'disturbance' (possibly misunderstanding Stoic 'first motions'). By contrast, he stresses the centrality of fear and desire, applied to the right objects, *in peregrinatio civitate dei* and the 'theatre of the world'. In this interim state fear has a proper place and can be a consequence of reason; most perfectly illustrated by Christ's own voluntary, true assumption of emotions: *City of God*, 9.4, 14.9, ed. Dyson, pp.361, 596–602.

[224] Madigan, pp.6, 63–64; Sorabji, p.344.

Instead an extended farewell discourse (John 14–17) and an otherwise unattested final prayer of the Last Supper (John 17) elaborate his foreknowledge and the alignment of Christ's will with the Father. Amongst the synoptics, Matthew and Mark enlarge upon Jesus' affectivity both in words spoken by Jesus and narrative description. Luke's Gospel apparently strips these away; however, in the canonical version this is balanced by a powerful addition, more visual than verbal, which describes Christ's prayer as an intense *agon* or spiritual struggle, in the throes of which he sweats blood and an angel descends to comfort him.

apparuit autem illi angelus de caelo confortans eum et factus in agonia prolixius orabat et factus est sudor eius sicut guttae sanguinis decurrentis in terram.[225]

And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony, he prayed the longer. And his sweat became as drops of blood, trickling down upon the ground.[226]

(Luke 22.43–44)

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[225] Latin from *Biblia sacra vulgata*, 4th edn (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994). Discussions of the original Greek will follow.
[226] English translations are taken from the *The Vulgate Bible: Douay-Rheims Translation: VI: The New Testament*, 6 vols, ed. by Angela M. Kinney and Swift Edgar (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2010–13). I have lightly modernized the archaic verbal forms of this translation.

If the *sudor* is understood as a *hematidrosis*, or bloody sweat, it may itself be a visual shorthand, or symptom, of terror.[227] Whether or not these verses are original to Luke, their presence itself indicates competing accounts of how Christ experienced and dealt with the anticipation of the Crucifixion, and what experience of the passions might be proper to the Messiah.[228]

Both Matthew's and Mark's gospels describe Christ and his disciples going out to the Mount of Olives after the Last Supper has concluded with a hymn and Jesus has prophecied the scattering of his sheep and his resurrection, inducing Peter's bold affirmation of his own steadfastness (lack of fear) and Jesus' prediction of Peter's three denials. Arriving at Gethsemane, Jesus' withdrawal with the three chosen disciples (not specified in Luke) is marked by the commencement of an emotional shift. This is described in the Greek in a way which differs by only one passion-word

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[227] Hematidrosis is associated from Galen onwards with stress and fear; see Robert Mead, *Medica Sacra*, 13, in *Medical Works* (London: C. Hitch et al., 1752), p.630, citing Galen, *Liber de utilitate respirationis*. See also Karl Olav Sandnes, *Early Christian Discourses on Christ's Prayer in Gethsemane* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2016), pp.70–71. A cumulative study of twentieth-century cases also concluded its most frequent causes were 'acute fear and intense mental contemplation'; see J.E. and A. B. Holoubek, 'Blood Sweat and Fear: A classification of hematodrosis', *Journal of Medicine* 27 (1996), 115–33; of fifteen individual case studies made since 2010, a number cite stress or fear as a cause, including fear of death in Jane Manonukul et al, 'Hematidrosis: A Pathologic Process or Stigmata. A Case Report', *American Journal of Dermatopathology* 30 (2008), 135–39 (p.81); see Elvira Mora and Javier Lucas, 'Hematidrosis: Blood Sweat', *Blood* 121 (2013), 1493; B. Varalakshmi et al., 'The Story of a girl weeping blood: childhood depression with a rare presentation', *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* 57 (2015), 88–90.
[228] For evidence of its textual authenticity and Luke's original gospel as 'the most emotionally restrained account that we possess' see Madigan, p.64; Stephen Voorwinde, *Jesus' Emotions in the Gospels* (London, New York: T&T Clark, 2011) pp.143–44.

between the two evangelists, and yet leads to differing accounts of his affectivity in its later rendition.

> et coepit pavere [*ekthambeo*] et taedere [*ademeneo*] et ait illis tristis est anima mea usque ad mortem.
>
> He began to fear and to be heavy. And he said to them: my soul is sorrowful even unto death.
>
> (Mark 14.33–34)

> coepit contristari [*lupeo*] et maestus esse [*ademeneo*] tunc ait illis tristis est anima mea usque ad mortem.
>
> He began to grow sorrowful and to be sad. Then he said to them: my soul is sorrowful even unto death.
>
> (Matthew 26.37–38)

The *coepit*, 'he began to' has, in the afterlife of the passage in Christian thought, a qualifying and diluting function. It is used as corroboration for interpreting Jesus' feelings, originating in the concept in Stoic psychology of the *propassio* or first movement. This was a morally neutral and instinctive first impulse before the moment

of rational assent or dissent understood to be involuntary and, if subsequently
controlled, not culpable.[229]

Matthew and Mark go on to describe three occasions of Christ's prayer and
return to the sleeping disciples against Luke's single representative occasion. This
prayer, similarly worded in each, is a crucial lemma, at once suggesting Christ's
aversion to or fear of his coming Passion, and countering this with his alignment to
the divine will:

Pater, si possibile est, transeat a me calix iste verumtamen non sicut ego volo
sed sicut tu.

My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me. Nevertheless, not as
I will, but as you will.

(Matthew 26.39)

Abba Pater omnia possibilia tibi sunt transfer calicem hunc a me sed non quod
ego volo sed quod tu.

Abba, Father, all things are possible to you: remove this chalice from me; but
not what I will; but what you will.

(Mark 14.36)

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[229] On first movements, stoic and Christian, see Sorabji, pp.65ff, 347ff; Knuuttila,
Emotions, pp.63, 64, n.148, 123. See also below, pp.132–33.

Pater si vis transfer calicem istum a me verumtamen non mea voluntas sed tua fiat.

Father, if you will, remove this chalice from me; but yet not my will, but yours be done.

(Luke 22.42)

Only Matthew's gospel gives specified, and slightly differing, words for the second occasion of prayer, marginally suggesting an evolution of emotional state towards consent to the father's will:

Pater mi si non potest hic calix transire nisi bibam illum fiat voluntas tua.

My Father, if this chalice may not pass away, but I must drink it, your will be done.

(Matthew 26.42)

The words Christ speaks to his disciples, whose sleep is in extreme contrast to his waking anguish, vary again. In Luke the simple injunction to wake and to pray against spiritual peril dominates (Luke 22.40, 46). Matthew and Mark precede 'pray that you may not enter into the time of trial' with a particular reproach addressed to Peter and the words 'spiritus promptus est sed caro infirma' (Matthew 26.41; Mark 14.38). This text, 'the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak', is variously understood over the patristic and medieval period: as elaborating Christ's internal conflict or as a piece of

teaching directed towards the disciples, and inappropriate to Christ's nature, innocent of such frailty.[230]

Just three word forms describe Christ's incipient emotional state in the evangelists' Greek, becoming central to the later understanding of his affectivity. Mark and Matthew share one Greek word amongst the differing pairs they use, *ademeneo*—a word conveying deep distress, be it dejection or affliction.[231] Its relative indeterminacy allows it to take on the coloration of the different word it is paired with in each case. This can be seen from the two different Latin translations, *taedere* and *maestus esse*, used in Jerome's Vulgate but drawing on an older Latin tradition, in Mark and Matthew respectively.[232] Alongside *ademeneo*, Matthew chooses *lupeo*, to sorrow or grieve, to be distressed, the same word used for the earlier feeling of the disciples upon hearing of Jesus' forthcoming betrayal (Matthew 26.22). This also chimes with Jesus' words immediately following, shared by all the gospels, the 'tristis [in Greek *perilypos*, compassed about by *lupos*] est anima mea' (Matthew 26.38).[233] Mark chooses *ekthambeo*, a word that

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[230] See Origen, *Commentary on Matthew,* 90, in Rufinus' translation, ed. by Erich Klosterman, GCS 40 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1933), I, p.206 versus Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, 26.41, ed. by Scheck, p.302.

[231] Greek definitions from *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. by Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, rev. edn Henry Stuart Jones (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[232] *Vetus latina Database*: *Bible Versions of the Latin fathers*, Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2016 < http://apps.brepolis.net/vld/Default.aspx> [accessed 1 July 2016].

[233] Generally speaking, Christ's sorrow is more easily dealt with than his fear. In Jerome, and in Hilary of Poitiers fear can be seen as an extremity of sorrow; see Hilary, *Commentary on Matthew*, ed. by D. H. Williams (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), p.274, and Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, 26.37–38, ed. Scheck, pp.300–301.

elsewhere in his Gospel conveys amazement, alarm and fear. In the words of the angel to the women who discover the empty tomb (Mark 16.8), it is used as equivalent to Matthew's more familiar Greek *phobeo*, fear (Matthew 28.8). In association with the distress and dejection of *ademeneo* this casts it towards the darkest sense of fear and trembling. In the Vulgate translation, Matthew's gospel uses 'contristari et maestus esse' which expresses grief, sorrow and gloom, whilst Mark's 'pavere and taedere' shades towards fear, weariness and disappetence.[234] The various manuscripts of the *Vetus Latina* and the Biblical citations found in the Fathers give striking variations, which sometimes add, perhaps by association, a more fearful cast to Matthew. In the Vercelli codex, the oldest surviving Latin Bible manuscript, we have:

coepit tristis esse, et anxius.

He began to be sad and anxious.[235]

(Matthew 26.37)

Additional words seem frequently required for Mark. From the same version in Mark's gospel comes an expansion upon *ekthambeo* that gives a particular cast to Christ's fear:

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[234] Latin definitions draw on *A Latin Dictionary*, ed. Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879 [1975 printing]).
[235] This same coupling of *tristis* and *anxietas* is found also in the records of the seventh-century Council of Constantinople. See *Vetus latina Database*.

coepit obstupescere, et acediari, et deficere.

He began to be filled with consternation, to fall into a weary torpor and to be

disheartened.

(Mark 14.33)

This is complemented in Brescia Codex, where a form of *anxio* is added as a third

word, describing a portentous and fearful state of mind:

coepit pavere et taedere et anxiari.

He began to be afraid, sick and tired, and to be anxious.

(Mark 14.33)

Ambrose prefers *dubitare* (to be perplexed) as a pair with *taedere*. In the Latin

translation of John Chrysostom made by the Lateran Council of 649, the sentence

arguing that to fear, be perplexed and made anxious about death is proper to the flesh

Christ fully possessed, uses all three words so far applied as versions of *ekthambeo*:

'mortem timere et dubitare et anxiari'.[236] In the later commentary tradition we have a

consistent identification of *pavere* with *timere*, and in the vernacular *pavere* is

often translated with terms for general fear: as *paour* in *Estoire de l'Evangile*, the

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[236] *The Acts of the Lateran Synod of 649*, trans. and ed. by Richard Price (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), p.327.

source of the Northern Passion, and *drede* in the Wycliffite Bible.[237] Fear is a potent

part of the overall picture provided by the three Gospel texts that depict Gethsemane,

and is developed in their exegesis and transmission.

Exegesis of Gethsemane has also included a text from the Epistle to the

Hebrews sometimes taken to refer to Christ's fear in the Gethsemane garden, or

even as an indirect witness.[238] It describes him as a high priest:

qui in diebus carnis suae preces supplicationesque ad eum qui possit salvum

illum ad morte facere cum clamore valido et lacrimis offerens et exauditus

pro sua reverentia [*eulabeia*].

in the days of his flesh offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries

and tears to the one who was able to save him from death and who was

heard because of his godly fear.

(Hebrews 5.7)

This adds vivid detail which will make its way into later medieval expansions of

the episode and constitutes, in its context, an early interpretation of the extent and

nature of Christ's fear. The author of the Epistle identifies Christ's fear with

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[237] *Estoire de l'Evangile*, ll.374, 397–98, in *The Northern Passion: four parallel texts and the French original*, ed. by Frances A. Foster, EETS 145, 147, 183 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913–30), II, pp.102–25 (p.108). Wycliffe Bible, *The Bible in English* (Cambridge: Chadwyck Healey, 1996) <http://collections.chadwyck.co.uk/bie> [accessed 1st June 2016].
[238] Sorabji, p.344.

eulabeia, a word associated with fear's mastery, even as he adds a description of an

outward display of deep distress with no direct parallel in the Gospels. The Greek

word *eulabeia* is variously translated in later Bibles as reverence, reverent

submission, godly fear and simply fear.[239] Significantly, *eulabeia* is the Stoic term for

the *eupatheia* that corresponds to *phobos* (fear): a *eupathethia* being a feeling without

disturbance based on true evaluations permitted to the – possibly hypothetical – sage

as a response to the initial first movement.[240] Its connotations of religious piety or

reverence should be situated within a passage which associates Christ's assumption of

humanity with his high priesthood and sacrificial offering to God.[241]

Just before this verse, the Epistle features a verbal form of *metriopatheia* to

describe Christ's feelings towards the ignorant and straying, a feeling he has 'because

he himself also is compassed with infirmity' (Hebrews 5.2). *Metriopatheia* is used by

the peripatetics and later Christian thinkers to refer, in opposition or contrast to

apatheia, to the mastery of *pathos*.[242] It is commonly glossed as 'moderate' passion;

but Aristotle defines *metriopatheia* as not simply quantitative, but qualitative, as a

subjection to near-aesthetic dictates of circumstantial proportionality: the right feeling

'at the right time, toward the right objects, toward the right people, for the right

reason, and in the right manner'.[243] The Epistle's use of the term is startlingly original

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[239] In the New Revised Strandard Verson, King James Version, New King James
Version and Wycliffe Bibles, respectively.
[240] For the argument that Stoic *eupathoi* appear in the Epistle see Sorabji, p.344.
[241] Elsewhere *eulabeia* is used to describe right religious fear (piety/eulabeia) in
contrast with wrong religious fear (superstition). See *Greek English Lexicon*.
[242] Sorabji, pp.194ff.
[243] Aristotle, *Ethics*, II.6, ed. Crisp, p.30.

in the way it reworks the antique connotations of *metriopatheia* in the light of Christian doctrine. The proportionality of Aristotle is radicalized: rather than a subdued or mastered feeling this *metriopatheia* is a feeling *in measure*, in a relationship of proportion, to that of humanity. Extreme emotion is indeed *in measure* to those on whose behalf it is felt, in this case through Jesus' priestly self-offering.

> unde debuit per omnia fratribus similare ut misericors fieret et fidelis pontifex ad Deum.

> Wherefore it behoved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren, that he might become a merciful and faithful priest before God.
> (Hebrews 2.17)

In Jesus' case there exists no division between what it is to feel alongside humanity and to feel on behalf of humanity. In this light *metriopathein* becomes synonymous with *sympathein* (modern translations use compassion for both), which is used just beforehand in the context of Christ's incarnation of all that is human:

> non enim habemus pontificem qui non possit conpati infirmitatibus nostris temptatum autem per omnia pro similitudine absque peccato.

> For we have not a high priest, who cannot have compassion [sympathein] on our infirmities: but one tempted in all things like as we are, without sin.

(Hebrews 4.15)[244]

Hebrews' understanding of Christ's devout fear, his *metriopatheia*, 'right feeling'

of *eulabeia* is defined, not by degree, but by its devout offering in measure to

human suffering. This resolves the apparent contrast of extremity and the Stoic

word for 'reverent caution'. In Jesus' high priesthood on the behalf of all humanity,

'greet cryis and teeres', as the Wycliffe Bible describes them, are precisely the one

reverent act before God. The Epistle to the Hebrews points to the founding of a

whole new standard of the ethics of emotion, which we are also called to enter into

mimetically, as in Paul's avocation of fear:

> et ego in infirmitate et timore et tremore multo fui apud vos.

> and I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.

> (1 Corinthians 2.3)[245]

D. THE PATRISTIC AND MEDIEVAL TRADITION

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[244] Greek *sympathein* suggests a deeper running coinherence than modern English 'sympathy': used extensively in Stoic cosmology to speak of underlying harmony, topically in Aristotle it refers to a highly physical coaffection, almost beyond the action of the will. *A Historical Dictionary of Ancient Greek Philosophy*, ed. by Anthony Preus, 2nd edn (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015).
[245] See Romans 15.15; 1 Corinthians 9.22; 2 Corinthians 11.29–30.

It has been said that the Agony was 'a plague and embarrassment to patristic and medieval interpretors … inimical to received Christological assumptions'.[246] For the thinkers of the Early Church, Christ's fear as a problem for Christology is bound up with attempts before and after the pivotal definition of the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451) to express the co-presence of his divinity and his humanity, protecting both natures of Christ's person whilst avoiding a too-violent dualism. First in answering Pagan polemic ridiculing a suffering God, then against early Christian heresies, Christ's fear is defensively constrained and, with constraint, defended.[247] Within the broad consensus that Jesus experienced a soteriologically essential fear as part of his full humanity, medieval thinkers elaborated both the degree, kind and object of Christ's fear and the mechanics of its relation to his nature or natures, his faculties and his will, wills or volitions. Consistently, to think about Christ's fear, especially in Gethsemane where his emotions are 'staged' against those of the disciples, is often to imply conclusions about how, or indeed whether, fear is a part of the sum of how humans should feel and act. Later medieval thought on this topic has been admirably covered by Madigan and Gondreau; here I will explore these themes in the writings of some earlier thinkers, finally using the deposit of the *Glossa ordinaria* as the standard

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[246] Madigan, p.43.

[247] Especially Arian, docetic and Apollinarian ideas, threatening respectively Christ as fully human and fully divine rather than as subordinate deity; Christ's humanity as more than mere appearance; and Christ's human soul. For the anti-Pagan polemic, see above, p.2, n.7. On Arianism see Madigan, pp.11–22. Hilary of Poitiers is the main outlier, as we shall see below.

high and late-medieval gloss to point up significant themes relevant to my reading of the English drama.[248]

Among these thinkers, Christ's fear can be reduced to an initial impulse, to a 'natural' animal instinct; or assigned to the point of dualism to the manhood or even the flesh; alternatively, it can be considered as filial fear; or viewed under the banner of derived virtues of humility, awe and reverence;[249] or maintained with limits as a directly or indirectly altruistic emotion. A number of distinct strands emerge, combined with each other in individual commentaries: a 'propassion' solution that limits the depth of his emotional experience; the 'grammatical' solution derived from the Chalcedonian definition of Christ's nature; and an 'altruistic' solution that assigns Christ's fear a distinctly external object. Finally, related especially to these last two but remaining distinct, the 'performative' solution is of particular significance as we move towards the negotiation of Christ's fear in the drama. This is the realm of Christ's 'indirect' altruism, his soteriologically effective performance, assumption, demonstration, or participation in human fear, which has both metaphysical and exemplary implications.

The Chalcedonian definition of the two natures in one person or hypostasis, puts doctrine's weight behind a grammatical solution which speaks about what

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[248] For Christ's fear in the later scholastic period see Paul Gondreau, *The Passions of Christ's Soul in the Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2002).
[249] 'Orat et in valle pingui, monstrans ut et intus/Sit tua mens humilis, stillet amoris adeps' (he prays in the valley of fertility, showing inwardly that /If you are humble of mind, love's fatness may drop); Peter Riga, *Aurora*, ll.2391-2, ed. by Paul Beichner (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), p.517. See also *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, 75, trans. and ed. Francis X. Taney, Anne Miller and C. Mary Stallings-Taney (Asheville, NC: Pegasus Press, 2000), p.239.

Christ did *quasi deum* and *quasi homo*. So it becomes possible to say, for example, that he feared, not because the divinity was afraid, but because the flesh demonstrated fragility.[250] Christ's carnal fear is sometimes understood as only a 'natural fear' of death proper to the body which wishes to retain life (John Chrysostom, John of Damascus),[251] sometimes as a more developed fear proper to the soul in some aspect.[252] For some writers, 'where' to put Christ's fear involves the development of a language of not just two (for his two natures) but three, or even four, 'wills' or volitions in Christ, through which his fear can be kept at a distance from his divine or even rational volition.[253]

Christ's fear is also understood as an initial movement towards emotion without fully elicited passion, a theologized version of the notion of propassion derived from

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[250] 'Non quia trepidaverit deitas, sed quia carnis fragilitatem ostendit'; Anon, *Vetus Latina* Database; Ambrose, *Of the Christian Faith,* II.7.56 in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1896), 10, p.230.

[251] John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith*, III.23, in *Writings*, trans. Frederick Chase, Fathers of the Church 37 (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1957), pp.327–8; John Chrysostom, *De laudibus pauli* 6.3, in *Panégyriques de Saint Paul*, trans. and ed. by Auguste Piédagnel, Sources Chrétienes 300 (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1982), pp.264–67.

[252] Bede, *In Marci evangelium expositio*, IV.14.38 asserting Christ's human soul against the Eutychian heresy, *Bedae venerabilis opera: opera exegetica 3*, ed. by D. Hurst (Turnhout: Brepols, 1960), p.617; Aquinas, *ST*, III.18.6.

[253] The pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes vitae Christi* specifies a *voluntas carnis*, *voluntas sensualitatis*, *voluntas rationis* and the *voluntas divinitatis*: corresponding respectively to revulsion from suffering or 'natural fear'; the fear which causes Christ to react against his fate; Jesus' obedience despite his fear; the will that orders his fate. The author makes space for both the internal conflict and the 'external' conflict, since three of the four are human volitions. See Iohannis de Caulibus, *Meditaciones vite Christi*, ed. by M. Stallings-Taney, CCCM 53 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), p.260; also Hugh of Saint Victor, *De quatuor voluntatibus in Christo, PL*, 176, cols 841b–846c and Boyd Taylor Coolman, 'Hugh of St. Victor on "Jesus Wept": Compassion as ideal *humanitas*', *Theological Studies* 69 (2008), 528–57.

Stoic psychology.[254] Transmitted especially through Jerome's *Commentary on Matthew*, this becomes a common way of explaining Christ's fear without making him subject to 'fully-fledged' passions, his affection firmly subordinated to the rational will.[255] Hilary of Poitiers is the most definite Patristic voice to deny fear in Jesus: 'If he was sad to the point of fear, if weak to the point of pain, if anxious to the point of death, eternity will…become what it was not: sad because of anguish, anxious because of fear, shocked because of grief, and so eternity is changed into fear'.[256]

However, both Hilary and Jerome prefer to assign Christ a different kind of anxiety: purely and proximately altruistic. This is felt on the disciples' and all sinners' behalf, in the light of the upheaval to follow Jesus' death, and especially with the Jews and the destruction of Jerusalem in mind—a 'philosemitic' interpretation that had been current since perhaps the first century.[257]

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[254] In Philo, Origen, Didymus the Blind as well as Jerome; see Richard A. Layton, 'Propatheia: Origen and Didymus on the Origin of the Passions', *Vigiliae christianae* 54 (2000), 262–82.

[255] Aquinas, *ST*, III.15.6, 7. Sorabji and Layton argue that already in Jerome the propassion, as a first stage to sin, is more culpable than the Stoic idea of it had been—hence Christ in undergoing it does undergo something that is a consequence of sin. See above, n.182 and Layton 'From Holy Passion to Sinful Emotion: Jerome and the Doctrine of *Propassio*', in *'In dominico eloquio': Essays on Patristic Exegesis in honour of Robert Louis Wilken* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2002), pp.280–93. The argument for this evolution might be bolstered by thinking soteriologically: it becomes important that propassion be on an authentic spectrum of emotion-to-sin rather than distinct if Christ's experience of it is to be redemptive.

[256] Hilary, *Commentary on Matthew*, p.274; *De trinitate*, Book 8, ed. by Pierre Smulders, CCSL 62–62a (Turnhout: Brepols, 1979–80). pp.311–69.

[257] The 'philosemitic interpretation' is found still in the *Meditationes vitae Christi*, perhaps in the light also of Matthew 23.37. See Origen, *Contra Celsum*, II.26, p.90; Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, trans. Scheck, pp.300–301; *Meditationes vitae Christi*, p.260.

Christ can also be assigned a more indirectly altruistic fear using subtly varying

metaphors and figures of speech that understand Jesus' relationship to the emotion as

one of enaction and assumption, of rhetorical and dramatic performance. This

underwrites the intentional and voluntary character of Christ's fear as emphasized

by Augustine and, later and more technically, by Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas

and other scholastics.[258] The consensus of many from the late antique period

onward is indeed that Christ experienced full and actual fear that he nonetheless

fully willed. The language of *personae* used by Chalcedon was contemporarily

recognized as implying a dramatic metaphor of the *prosopon* or mask.[259]

Augustine, and after him Jerome, uses the metaphor of Christ's vocalization of

humanity: 'for his weak ones, who fear to die, he was their voice'. They also speak

of Jesus' 'signifying in his own person' humanity in its weakness, as Augustine

says 'What was this voice, if not the sound of our own infirmity?'.[260] Gregory the

Great makes explicit these rhetorical possibilities, comparing Jesus to an orator

who 'adopts the words of the weak', despite his own emotional strength, so as to

bring those he addresses along with his progress into confidence.[261] Ambrose,

powerfully restating the importance of the human passibility of Christ, including fear,

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[258] John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith*, III.26, trans. Chase, p.331; Peter
Lombard, *Sentences*, III.15, trans. by Giulio Silano, 4 vols (Toronto: Pontifical
institute of Medieval Studies, 2007–10), III, 57–65; Aquinas, *ST*, III.15.4, see
Loughlin, 'Timor in Aquinas', pp.14–15.
[259] Boethius, *Contra Eutychen* in *The Theological Tractates; The Consolation of
Philosophy*, ed. by H.F. Stewart, E.K. Rand and S.J. Chester (London: Heinemann,
1973), pp.86–7.
[260] Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, 93.15.19; see 21.3.4; ed. by John E. Rotelle,
5 vols (New York: New City Press, 2000), pp.395, 229–30.
[261] Gregory the Great, *Moral Reflections on Job,* 12.14, pp.639-40

makes use of the metaphors of appropriation and substitution too: although 'Christ fears' it is 'as man' and so we can better say that he fears 'my terrors'.

My will, therefore, He took to Himself, my grief. In confidence I call it grief, because I preach His Cross. With me and for me He suffers, for me He is sad, for me He is heavy. In my stead, therefore, and in me He grieved Who had no cause to grieve for Himself.

As being man, therefore, He doubts; as man He is amazed. Neither His power nor His Godhead is amazed, but His soul…As being man, therefore, He speaks, bearing with Him my terrors, for when we are in the midst of dangers we think ourself abandoned by God.[262]

The prepositions multiply (with me, for me, in me) across parallel constructions as Ambrose attempts to express Christ's relationship to human fear.[263] Here it becomes clear that the 'performative' metaphor of 'voicing' or 'signifying' humanity is used in the context of Christ's actual, ontological, substitution or participation, taking us back to the priestly sense of Hebrews: *methexis* not *mimesis*.

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[262] Ambrose, *Of the Christian Faith*, II.7.56, ed. Schaff and Wace, p.230.
[263] John of Damascus writing later, but influencing many including Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas once his work is translated into Latin in the twelfth century, retains Ambrose's preference for interpreting Jesus' Gethsemane prayers as 'enactions' of the experience of humankind: 'He appropriated our appearance [or personality] and impressed what was ours upon Himself'; *On the Orthodox Faith*, III.24, trans. Chase, pp.329; see Gondreau, pp.64–65.

Christ's substitutionary or participative performance can be seen to have a kathartic end for humanity, as Pope Martin I expresses it in 649, echoing Cyril of Alexandria:

> just as he destroyed death by death, so too he destroyed our distress by distress, anxiety by anxiety and fear by fear, and in a word all the natural emotions in us through voluntary emotions'.[264]

Whilst Christ fears as part of his full inhabiting of every aspect of what it is to be human, for the emotions this is expressed less in terms of redemption than 'destruction'—although Pope Martin's more technical division of voluntary versus natural emotions does appear to open the way for the virtue of intentional feeling.[265] Pope Martin echoes Macarius' earlier account stressing Christ's 'performance' of fear as soteriologically necessary to the mechanism of salvation, the bait in the entrapment of the progenitor of evil: 'the unique and only combatant who always conquers and is never conquered faked being afraid, in order that he might lure this one [the Devil] into battle'.[266]

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[264] *Acts of the Lateran Synod*, p.371. The Synod was called to debate the 'monophysite' (one will in Christ) versus 'diphysite' (two wills) positions. This involved much debate on the 'non sicut ego volo sed sicut tu', hence anthologised many of the Fathers' words on Gethsemane and drew key conclusions on the question of Christ's emotions.

[265] Cyril states that dread in Christ frees all of nature from dread, a more 'apocatostatic' and cosmic vision of the consequences of the atonement: *Thesaurus* 24, *Acts of the Lateran Synod*, p.372.

[266] Macarius, *Apocriticus*, 3.9, ed. Schott and Edwards, pp.119–23 (p.121).

However, Christ's fear and Christ's actions in fear can also be given morally didactic significance. Here Christ's 'tropological' and his 'ontological' exemplarity, accomplished by his very nature and by his actions, are closely related. That is to say, what Christ accomplishes 'metaphysically' is also being described as being accomplished 'pragmatically': he provides a moral example of overcoming fear, or, indeed, of *right* fear.[267] So, for example, fear can be seen as instrumental in sending him to prayer or invoking the right attitude for prayer, as in Origen: 'fear of weakness causes us to flee to God's help…just as it encouraged the Lord himself'.[268] The exegetical modes also overlap, so that tropological lessons can be figuratively present. Hence glosses associate the descent into the Valley of Cedron with Jesus' attitude of humility, and elaborate on his humility as a precept to the devout.[269] His fear can also be read as instructing the correct attitude to take on the cusp of judgement.[270] At the same time Christ's adherence to prayer despite his fear, in contrast to the sleep of the disciples, is an object lesson in overcoming the effects of fear with both particular and universal significance.[271] The disciples' sleep, as we shall see in the drama, can be associated with too much *or* too little

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[267] Aquinas, *ST*, III.15.1, 'Christ took our defects that he might make satisfaction for us, that he might prove the truth of his human nature, and that he might become an example of virtue for us'.

[268] Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, 26.36–9, ed. Klosterman, pp.206–207, trans. Sorabji, p.349.

[269] Bede, *In Marcum*, IV.14.32, ed. Hurst, p. 614; Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, 26.39, trans. Scheck, p.301; *Meditaciones vitae Christi*, ed Stallings-Taney, p.256.

[270] *Glossa ordinaria*, Mark 14.33, *PL* 114, col.232d; see *The First Commentary on Mark*, ed. by Michael Cahill (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.108.

[271] See *Glossa ordinaria,* Matthew 26.44, *PL* 114, cols 170c–d. Bede, *In Lucae*, VI.22.39, 41 ed. by D. Hurst, CCCM 120 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1960), p.385.

fear and urgency. The deiotic consequence of Christ's double nature as expressed in Gethsemane is to enable him to take those who imitate him on a trajectory from humanity to divinity.

II. CHRIST'S FEAR IN THE DRAMA

A. LEX LUDENDI, LEX CREDENDI?

With the drama of the later medieval period come entirely fresh hermeneutic possibilities for Christ's Gethsemane fear through a reinvigorated mode of theological expression. The cycle plays and related dramatic survivals, a late record of the kind of public performances whose history stretched back to at least the 1300s, and which were still being staged in the mid-1500s, textually represent a late-medieval biblicism that is constrained neither by the fine abstract distinctions of late scholastic argument nor the coming strictures of Protestant scriptural rigidity. In treating Christ's fear, the medieval cycle drama conveys the mysterious substance of Christian faith in a multifaceted orthodoxy.

Medieval drama's scriptural hermeneutic is distinctive firstly in that it necessarily differs from the abstraction of interpretation as found in commentary, polemic or *scholia* by a presentation that is formally closer to the gospel account: narrative history. It restores the historically incarnated dimension that is properly

inseparable from its doctrinal import.[272] This drama is also more than a 'quick book' both in that its embodiment fulfils the requirements of incarnating belief, participatable in prayer and action by performers and spectators, and by its consequent relationship to ritual reenactment in the liturgy and hence to sacramental presence.[273]

The resultant version is faithfully unfaithful, enacting divine promises of embodiment and presence in the refusal of precise biblical historicity. Never just *mimesis*, religious drama is always embodying and inviting to *methexis*, or participation, in which its players, and its audience—however sinful and removed they may be—each have a place in the universal drama of damnation and salvation it both presents and is itself a part of.[274] The versions of Christ's 'Agony in the Garden' presented through medieval cycle drama do not just present theological 'opinions' on Christ's fear. They present his affective suffering and his terror as revelation and sacrament, sign and substance of his divine being: unveiling and inviting. Medieval cycle drama represents a distinctive late-medieval hermeneutic possibility which, I argue, is based on an understanding of the word as a gateway to understanding and

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[272] 'The Corpus Christi plays of the late Middle Ages understand the sacramental relation between form and grace as *best* realized in theatre. Theater is…the perfectly consonant form for the religion of incarnation'; Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p.59. See also Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), esp. ch.1, pp.1–18.
[273] On the York plays as an extensive meditation on presence see Beckwith, *ibid*. On elevation lyrics in the York plays see Pamela M. King, *The York Mystery Cycle and the Worship of the City* (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), pp.21–28.
[274] Here I differ from King, who prefers a strict division of *mimesis* and ritual re-enactment, pp.88-9.

participating in Christ and the mysteries of Christian life.

In this respect, the 'biblical drama', like the the Pseudo-Bonaventuran Lives of Christ so common in the later Middle Ages, contrasts strikingly with a post-Reformation understanding of the status of scripture as a bounded text.[275] Much has been made of the way in which these texts present a particular and orthodox access to scripture; they also offer relatively open scripts for devotional participation, an openness they themselves model by elaborating on the mysteries of the passion.[276] The medieval titles of these texts—*Mirror of the Blessed Life of Christ*, *Speculum devotorum*, *Meditation on Christ's Passion*, *Privity* [Mystery or Revelation] *of the Passion*—do not suggest that the authors of these texts view them as popular Bibles or vernacularizations of scripture, but rather as means of access to Christian mysteries in themselves. Behind this lies an understanding of scripture which, itself the privileged site of entry, opens a ground which other texts, and imaginations, can freely participate in and independently mirror forth. In the metaphor used by the poet of *Piers Plowman*, the written texts of the gospels are like furrows ploughed in the ground of Truth by the styluses/ploughshares of the four oxen/evangelists. The record they leave of Christ's life renders the soil of Truth fertile, alongside the work of the Fathers, and provides the best ground for the seeds of virtue to grow, but it does not

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[275] For the term 'biblical drama' see Greg Walker, *Medieval Drama: an Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

[276] For the possibilities for improvisatory reading of translations of the *Meditations*, see Ryan Perry, '"Some sprytuall matter of gostly edyfycacion": Readers and Readings of Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*' in *The pseudo-Bonaventuran lives of Christ: exploring the Middle English tradition*, ed. by Ian R Johnson and Allan F Westphal (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp.79–126.

constitute that truth.[277]

By contrast post-Reformation attitudes towards medieval drama suggest a shift towards a more reductive account of scriptural truth, limiting it to the discrete contents of the written text. Alongside a distaste for references to pre-Reformation understandings of the Eucharist or devotion to the Virgin, it was precisely from a suspicion of their unfaithfulness to the Gospels that the cycle plays were banned in the Reformation period. Conversely, in the sixteenth-century Chester Banns it is only insofar as they 'made open showe' of the Bible that they could be praised. The anxieties set out in Chester's Banns, and in the surviving letters concerning York and the plays performed at Wakefield, show that the cycle plays displeased precisely through their tendency to include 'some things not warranted by any writt', or as the Dean of York writes in 1567:

> Disagreinge from the senceritie [purity, correctness] of the Gospell…it shuld not be plaid…thoghe it was plausible XL yeares agoe, & wold now also of the ignorant sort be well liked; yet now in this happie time of the Gospell, I knowe the learned will mislike it.[278]

Chester's 'author' as imagined by the reformers is an avant-garde monk and possible Protestant proto-martyr, whose unveiling of the scriptures in the vernacular was

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[277] *Piers Plowman*, B.XIX.260–76, ed. by A.V. C. Schmidt, *The Vision of Piers Plowman* (London: Dent, 1995), pp.336–37.
[278] *Records of Early English Drama*, ed. by Alexandra F. Johnston and Margaret Rogerson, 2 vols (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979), I, p.353.

achieved in the face of the threat of death.[279] There is no evidence of such persecution in the case of the drama. The most recent historical scholarship has found little evidence of the enforcement of Archbishop Arundel's celebrated *Constitutions*, which condemned vernacular translations of the Bible, with recent research suggesting even the Wycliffe Bible had a much broader ownership than its association with a heretical sect would suggest.[280]

The transmission of truth in the cycle plays is not then best verified by a narrow understanding of its fidelity to the New Testament as a bounded text. The cycle-plays afford a much freer expression that is not limited to the expository, and has a three-dimensional, embodied and affective aspect. We know that some of these cycle plays were performed in the context of a liturgical feast and alongside the presentation of Christ's 'real presence' in the processed host at Corpus Christi, and we can perhaps even accord a higher devotional status to their presentations. It is striking that in Nicholas Love's *Mirror*, the Carthusian feels able to accord devout imaginative meditation the status of spiritual communion:

> that swete & precious memorial that souereynly makeþ mannus soule worþi
>
> & pleisyng to god, also oft as it is dewely receyuede, *ouþere by trewe &*
>
> *deuout mediatcion of his passion, or ells & þat more specialy* in sacramentale

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[279] Chester, 'The Post-Reformation Banns', in *Medieval Drama: An Anthology*, ed. by Greg Walker (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p.201.
[280] Gillespie, 'Vernacular Theology', p.406.

etyng þerof.[281]

This suggests a more capacious sense of how the drama might have been received, pre-Protestant in refusing a dualizing dichotomy of the material and the spiritual, imbued with analogical realism, and fluid in its sense of the interplay between audience members and stage.

This chapter will consider the cycle plays as affording a dramatic equivalent, a *lex ludendi*, analogous to the theological idea of *lex orandi, lex credendi*, which gives a dignity to the discrete and coherent implicit theology of the church at worship as much as to the explicit theology of doctrine. To speak of a *lex ludendi* for the drama is to allege its dignity and its capacity to carry, not simply in its textual remains but in its performance possibilities, a theological record: it shares with the liturgy a devotional and even ritually sacramental aspect, alongside which it affords a potentially expository and even exegetical mode; and its incarnational dimension gives it a unique claim to offer all this performatively. What emerges is a necessarily implicit and emergent as well as diverse account, but one which nonetheless is more than just a footnote to the theological tradition proper.

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[281] Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, ed. by Michael G. Sargent (Exteter: University of Exeter Press, 2005), p.149.

B. CHRIST'S FEAR IN THE PLAYS

There is no late medieval dramatic depiction of Gethsemane in which Christ does not fear. Nonetheless, the versions presented in York, Chester, Towneley-Wakefield and N-Town differ extensively from each other. These records of the cycle drama present fresh and individual accounts of Christ's fear in the Agony in the Garden, each also representing a new lens on fear in spiritual pedagogy. Broadly speaking, Christ's fear, restrained in Chester, is violent and visceral in York, shades towards something we might even recognize as 'depression' in Towneley and, in N-Town, emerges in a eucharistic context which returns us to the analysis of Hebrews in Chapter One. The plays, adopting the kind of free fidelity presented above as a late medieval hermeneutic possibility, go beyond gospel synthesis in the new enactions they put forward.[282] Dialogue is elaborated and the brief gospel account extended, sometimes by reference to other parts of the scriptures, sometimes by free invention. In the literary context of the dramatic presentation of a whole narrative, levels of exegesis overlap and co-exist, just as they do in the scriptures themselves. The resultant plays, complete as dramatic actions, provide exegeses that are in this sense more comprehensive than those polemic, commentary or scholastic traditions have afforded, simultaneously enabling new participations of the *mysteria* of Christian theology. And yet, the vernacular dramatic account of the Gethsemane garden, never

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[282] Compare Clement of Llanthony's *Unum ex quattuor*, Cambridge UL Dd.i.17 and its possibly Lollard vernacular version, *Oon of Foure*, ed. by Paul Smith (Great Britain: The Universities Press, 2015).

a mere 'populist' simplification, does evidence the continuity of certain anxieties that we have traced through Latin theological debates.

Formally, the drama affords the potential for a radicalizing embodiment of the conclusions about Christ's participation of human emotions reached by the tradition, the innate difficulty in expository theology of presenting 'a fully sinless man who is yet alive with intense emotion'.[283] When Jesus Christ appears on stage as a singular subject in the flesh, this clearly poses a challenge to presenting the dualizing account of his humanity and divinity that had constituted one theological solution to the problem of Christ's fear. Nevertheless, there is evidence of dramatic language that locates Christ's fear in his 'manhede' or 'flesh'. Sometimes these plays take the opportunity to 'stage' a further or intensified divine presence separately, with the appearance of God-in-Trinity or an angel effecting in Christ the necessary conversion of will and cessation of fear. But in every case there remains a single, spatiovisually unified and integral, figure taking the place of God-made-man on stage, whose speech and whose gesture still evoke and illustrate the human passion of fear.

At the same time, it is precisely by virtue of analogies of divine twofoldness, including those of disguise or performance, that the unity of divine humanity is opened for participation. In the medieval drama, the metaphor of Jesus' performance of fear, glimpsed in the theological tradition above, is actualized in reverse: a human actor 'puts on' Christ. Insofar as Jesus 'assumes' humanity he offers a part of himself

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[283] Gondreau, p.29.

that can be worn and enacted by mankind.[284] On the medieval stage, Christ's life is

performed by a Christian, quite possibly a non-professional actor.[285] So there is also

something non-figural and indeed super-dramatic occurring, insofar as that performer

– as performer – represents the possibility of the instantiation of Jesus' affectivity.

In narrative form certain distinctions that are explicit and definite in the

theological tradition, such as the distinction of aspects of Christ's psychology and

volition, are reconflated. This makes space for new interpretations of those

distinctions, but also inevitably tends towards narrative descriptions and

dramatisations rather than analytic explications, so that reason and passion are

interwoven rather than appearing as distinct stages, or mutually-limiting opposites.

The Stoic-derived technical distinction of Christ's fear as *propatheia*, incipient

passion only, is thus necessarily absent. At the same time, the plays do stage in

different ways the elusive relation between Christ's apprehension and his assent, his

revulsion and reconciliation. In the Chester version—perhaps the latest—there is a

clearly curtailed, subdued, and temporally limited place for Christ's fear. The York

play gives a radical interpretation in boldly carrying Christ's experience of fear

through his Agony, rather than swiftly resolving a brief instant of vacillation. On the

one hand there is a departure, partly necessitated by form, from the involved

technicalities of the hierarchy of Christ's various forms of volition as explored by the

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[284] Compare *Piers Plowman* B.XIX.5–8, where the dreamer moves between the liturgical-dramatic figurine or actor of Christ 'peynted al blody'– Piers appearing as Jesus – and Jesus dressed as Piers, 'robed in flesh'; ed. Schmidt, *Vision*, p.326.
[285] 'Payd to Robert Cro for pleayng God iij s iiij d'. See V.A. Kolve, *The Play called Corpus Christi* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), pp.23–24.

discursive theologians, with their models of two, three or even four 'wills'. On the other, the dramatic form opens up new possibilities for staging Christ's divided self, through soliloquy or dialogue given to God or an angel.

We saw above the accounts of Christ's fear as a pitying fear, directly or indirectly on others' 'behalf', as either exemplary and pedagogic, or a kind of substitutionary redemptive altruism. The relationship of Christ's fear to that of his disciples is something that the dramatic genre can particularly explore and exploit, discovering tropological and anagogical meanings in it. The mirroring of the disciples' and Christ's affectivities and the exploitation of the eucharistic resonance of the Agony show a significant interest in the subtleties of ontological exemplarity, perhaps even more so than tropological exemplarity.[286] The idea that Christ's fear is a pedagogic choice, in some sense a 'performance' for the disciples' sake, has a particular place, enhanced, as we shall see, by the movements and multiple locations of the scene, which in the dramatic context enable a play on spectatorship and actorship, manhood and godhead.

C. SPECTATOR AND ACTOR: STAGING GETHSEMANE FEAR

The vernacular tradition of Pseudo-Bonaventuran meditations on the life of Christ provides an important backdrop to our material. It is a record of the kind of affective

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[286] For this distinction, see Gondreau, pp.14, 399 and Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), p.91.

devotion that legitimized violent degrees of compassionate feeling with Christ. Its

treatment of Gethsemane occupies the position of a threshold to the Passion proper,

hence possibly opening with Christ as the exemplary practitioner of the first act of

affective devotion. It stages Jesus' human apprehension of his own suffering in a way

that parallels the devotion of the medieval Christian, meditating on and identifying

with his Passion. The most unique contribution of this influential text to the tradition

is its extensive elaboration on Christ's prayer to the Father, rendered as a dense fabric

of emotional pain woven from liturgical psalm texts that, through its devotional

sources, especially constitutes a kind of affective 'script' for the contemplative

identifying with Christ's fear.[287]

So Christ's fear in Gethsemane is interpreted, and most especially in this late

medieval moment, as modelling a desirable mode of prayer and affectivity. At the

same time that perfect model is inseparable from his redemptive self-offering, so that

to imitate this is also to participate in the salvation afforded by his more-than-

exemplar. Christ, in fear, shows himself to be participant in the human drama

because there is a narrative to which he remains in our position of faith and belief. In

his double nature, he is suspended between knowledge and lack of knowledge,

aversion and embrace. One could say that Jesus reveals his interiority to the drama of

human life by the extent to which he remains exterior to his own: apprehensive,

prayerful, projecting and bemoaning his coming Passion. At the threshold of his

Passion we are united to him in expectation and apprehension, and also drawn

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[287] *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, ed. Taney et al., pp.240–41.

towards the soteriological conclusion only possible by his divinity, but in the wake of his Resurrection open to all by their humanity.

When Gethsemane is given dramatic form on the medieval stage, the scenographical possibilities visually and experientially incarnate this fluidity of participation, 'staging' the possibility of identification and participation by breaking down boundaries between spectator and actor. The scenography of the various versions of Gethsemane we discuss here is likely to have been very similar. It would involve a simultaneous staging of at least three *loci*, and a series of boundaries which are in different ways crossed or transfixed. First, there is the Brechtian 'fourth wall' between audience and actors. This is in some sense already pierced by the devotional context of religious drama and the use of known actors. Secondly, as Jesus moves away from the disciples, two, perhaps even three separate spaces emerge on the stage: the place of his prayer and the location of the disciples' sleep, perhaps itself doubled if he has taken the chosen three (Peter, James and John) apart from the rest. In contemporary illuminations Christ is most frequently depicted on a grassy or rocky mound above the seated or recumbent disciples (see figures 1–5). N-Town has the most elaborate rubrics, and there the difference in height is emphasised, as he ascends the 'Mount of Olyvet' whilst the disciples remain 'a lytyl þerbesyde in a place lych to a park'.[288] The creation of these levels entails a mobile relation between the roles of spectator and actor. As Jesus moves away to pray, the disciples, whom the audience would have been watching in their roles as Jesus' followers, now themselves appear

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[288] *The N-Town Play: Cotton MS Vespasian D.8*, ed. by Stephen Spector, 2 vols, EETS SS 11-12 (Oxford: OUP, 1991), I, p.286.

in the role of spectators. In Chester especially the presence of the full complement of

the disciples (minus Judas) still gathered around Jesus as at the Last Supper would

have visually enhanced the sense that they form an extension of the audience. We can

see from manuscript illuminations of the scene that Christ could even be imagined to

enter a separate garden enclosure, so that a palisade divides him from his followers, as

the N-Town rubric appears to suggest (see figure 6).[289] The disciples easily come to

occupy a place as affective doubles of the worshipper: perhaps, as some illuminations

show, turning their backs and thus becoming even more definitely the first row of the

existing audience.[290] When Jesus speaks of his gathered followers in Chester 'on a

rowe' (XV.275) this brings the connotation of a ranked crowd.[291] Their capacity or

incapacity for affective devotion and identification is thus visually analogous to that

of the audience (perhaps themselves sleeping or inattentive!). Jesus' prayerful

attention could then contrast to the disciples' inattention, but be in potential continuity

with the devotional and prayerful watching of the audience, an interpretation a

number of sources from visual culture conspire to suggest. Fra Angelico, in his

fifteenth-century *Agony in the Garden*, already understands the possibilities of this

scene as a reflection on meditation and prayer (figure 9). Three interpenetrating

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[289] The distinction is perhaps between who is truly praying and who is not—who has entered the private *hortus conclusus*. It may also emphasize the identification of Christ with/as the *fons vitae*, the fountain of life, at the centre of a garden which could both exemplify the pure enclosure of Mary's womb and Paradise. It is more usual for iconography to place both Jesus and the disciples within a gated garden, perhaps with the party coming to arrest him visible without. See figure 1.

[290] See figure 7.

[291] *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, ed. by R.M. Lumiansky and David Mills, EETS SS 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p.279. Here referred to by play and line number.

'levels' represent possibilities for participation and imitation of Christ in the scene. In the foreground sit Martha and Mary, divided from the scene in the garden by an interior wall pierced by a single, high and inaccessible window. They are equivalent to our spectators, who might also be readers of the manuscript play, divided even perhaps from the physical depiction of Jesus' suffering. Instead, through prayer and contemplation (Mary reads a book), they are inwardly attentive to this mystery of his progress towards the cross. This interior alertness is in contrast to the sleeping disciples, who are divided only by a low, partial palisade from the green garden in which Christ is fervently praying.[292]

Finally, and crucially, a further theatrical horizon to the heavenly realm opens up as Jesus turns in prayer to the Father: more especially where an angel or God himself speaks or descends. On the stage, this is a different and yet physically accessible realm, an 'incarnational' aspect of the mimesis of staging that is nonetheless theologically communicative. If we imagine that a stage or cart would also be elevated from the audience, themselves perhaps standing, we can see how the movement of the scene would be one of gradually higher progress, with Jesus' mobile body linking heaven to the groundlings as he moves between the place of prayer and divine vision and the location of the disciples at eye level below. This might involve

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[292] The contemporary Taymouth Hours features the Agony as a scene with praying donors, outside the frame of the illumination but in the same posture as Christ. Dozens of small generic portraits of socially diverse medieval men and women are drawn into the scene, perhaps, both as those on whose behalf Christ prays and those who join him in devotional imagination (see figure 4). Another painting of the Agony that includes Louis I, Duke of Orleans in a position of faithful prayer amongst the disciples (see figure 10).

an at least partial turning of the body away from the disciples—so that Jesus might also turn his back on the watching people as he intercedes before heaven.[293] Three or even four 'stages within the stage' thus act as mediating degrees of ascent and descent from the human toward the divine, from the divine toward the human. In the York and N-Town versions, for example, Jesus, like the audience, remains silent until the angel departs. Audience, disciples and Jesus are suggestively unified below this heavenly messenger before whom they are all spectators, or rather perhaps actors before the omniscient eye of heaven, as the boundaries of actor/spectator invert and break down. As Jesus moves back and forth between the disciples and the Mount, there is a staging of mediation that may even have borne a physical resemblance to the movements of the president at the Eucharist.

The very spaces and rhythms of these staging possibilities move beyond any expository text in enacting the compassionate exchange by which Christ's actions are sites of co-feeling and open self-offering. They transform a boundary that might be seen as representing the division of time, or space, or spiritual capacity into the site of theological exposition and transformation. The possibilities of affective transference and identification, first with the humanity of the disciples, then with humanity as it is reflected and assumed in the suffering and fearing figure of Christ, stage *methexis*, theological and theatrico-ritual participation, and depict the dynamism of the mystery of the hypostasis through the embodied 'metaphor' of spectator and actor.

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[293] See figure 8.

D. THE CHESTER VERSION

The Gethsemane episode in Chester is the most restrained of these plays in its depiction of Christ's fear, which nonetheless occupies a clear and significant place in the drama.[294] The account seems strongly influenced by a Johannine Christ, emphasizing his divinity. Jesus' fear is explicitly described, but appears in the context of his willing, and knowing, self-offering and at least partly as the expression of his compassion, fear and sorrow on behalf of his disciples.

The account of Jesus' prayer on the Mount of Olives is itself brief in the Chester version. The Agony forms only a part of Play 15, a pageant of the Last Supper performed by the Bakers' Company, which runs right up to Jesus' arrest.[295] Hence Gethsemane follows straight on from the context of the Christ's last meal with the disciples, a context in which Christ seems to know, and will, the breaking of his body and the pouring out of his blood. Chester goes yet further in this direction by blending material from the conclusion of John's version of the Last Supper into its Gethsemane account. This harmonization of the Johannine and the synoptic tradition allows the foreknowledge and glory of John's more 'divine' Jesus to dominate.

John's Gospel does not describe a period of private prayer in the Garden: the disciples walk to Gethsemane directly into Jesus' arrest. Christ does pray to the Father

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[294] The surviving form of is a product of the early sixteenth century, when it was last performed. See *Chester Mystery Cycle*, I, ix-xxiii (all citations from edition cited above) and David Mills, 'The Chester Cycle', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Theatre*, ed. by Richard Beadle and Alan J. Fletcher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp.125–51.
[295] Play 15 is *Chester Mystery Cycle*, pp.268–83.

(John 17.5–6), but his prayer is not a distressed pleading as in Matthew and Mark.

Rather it occurs in the room of the Last Supper, following his 'farewell discourse', the

extensive final words given to the full cohort of the disciples after the paschal meal

and the foot-washing, and shares with these words an authority and knowledge. It is

an authoritative and cognizant acceptance of Jesus' mission, describing what is to

come in terms of future glory, rather than dwelling on the more immediate need for

endurance of suffering. Here he is hieratic intercessor before the Father, in complete,

priestly, control of his self-offering.

Chester boldly offers a new synthesis with clear consequences for the place of

Christ's fear. It borrows verses from this farewell prayer to replace the initial

Gethsemane prayer to the Father. So the Chester Jesus prays positively for his

glorification and for the salvation of the disciples before he pleads, expressing fear,

for the removal of the suffering to come.

> Father of heaven in majestie,
>
> Glorifie, yf thy will bee,
>
> Thy Sonne, that he may glorifie thee
>
> …
>
> Thy name have I made men to knowe
>
> And spared not thy will to showe
>
> To my disciples one a rowe
>
> …
>
> Therefore, I pray thee especiallye

Save them through thy mercye.

(XV.265–67, 273–75, 279–80)

It is only with the second prayer, enunciated after he comes again upon the sleeping disciples, that the Chester Jesus pleads for the removal of his coming passion. Even here a causal connection is implied: it seems that Jesus prays with urgency and fear for the removal of his burden precisely as a result of seeing his disciples' unpreparedness. His emotional disturbance begins in viewing them asleep, as he transitions from the expository, rational parataxis of his first prayer to the Father to staccato exclamation and question: 'What! Sleep you, brethren all, here?' (XV.281). The ensuing second prayer, which corresponds to the first prayer in Matthew and Mark, then begins. Its version of Jesus' most explicit statement of distress, the *tristis est anima mea* is moved from its scriptural place as an initial statement made to the disciples to this point, where it becomes Jesus' response to viewing them somnolent on the ground. Perhaps influenced by the lack of clarity in Mark's gospel, moreover, in Chester the episodes of Jesus' prayer to the Father are reduced to two: curtailing the space for affective elaboration of his fear. The Chester Agony is also literally bloodless: the *hematidrosis* found in Luke that features in York and N-town is absent. In eschewing this physiological consequence Chester also constrains eucharistic or Crucifixion prolepse or resonance.

At the same time Christ's lack of fear in this play has been overstated. Rosemary Woolf's sweeping account calls Chester's rendition of Gethsemane 'austere', especially by contrast to the marked emotion of York, arguing that here a

sense of calm inevitability, rather than interior crisis, pervades.[296] David Mills has understood the cycle as a whole as less characterised by 'Franciscan', piety: educating 'by information and explication rather than by empathy and catharsis.'[297] As supporting evidence for Chester's affective understatement, Woolf cites Chester's rendition of Christ's declaration of sorrow and aversion as a 'great mislikinge/ for death that is to me comynge' (XV.289) which she finds markedly reticent. However, 'mislikinge', mild to a modern ear, is an extreme enough statement of distress to be used to refer to the state of the disciples after Christ's departure in the York Cycle play of the Last Supper (27.149).[298] A fifteenth-century psalter can give *mislikinge* as the Middle English equivalent for the Latin *indignatio*.[299] 'Great mislikinge' is not, I suggest, bathetic understatement but rather intense emotion. Even Chester's very restraint could be understood as illustrating the passion of fear, which was associated with the loss of the power of speech.[300]

Indeed, Chester Play XVII, the Harrowing of Hell, carries testimony of the doctrinal importance of Christ's fear. It recovers the Gospel of Nicodemus tradition that Satan misunderstands Christ's nature precisely when, overhearing the 'tristis est anima mea', he makes the mistake of not believing that the Son of God could feel human fear:

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[296] Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (London: Routledge, 1973), p.236.
[297] Mills, 'Chester Cycle', p.132.
[298] *The York Plays*, ed. Beadle, p.228.
[299] MED, 'mislikinge (n.)', 1(a).
[300] See Arnold Gréban, *Le mystère de la passion*, ed. by Omer Jodogne, 2 vols (Bruxelles: Academie Royale de Belgique, 1965–83), II, ll.18681–82, p.248; and Aquinas, *ST*, I.II.44.1.

A man hee ys fullye, in faye [truly],

for greatly death hee dread todaye,

and these words I hard him saye:

'My soul is threst to [troubled to the point of] death.'

(XVII.105–108)[301]

Chester also adheres to a clear statement of Jesus' experience of human passions at the other key points where Christ's affectivity is in question— The rubric '*Jesus…flebit*' indicates his wailing or sobbing over Jerusalem (XIV.209; see Luke 19.41–42) and, at the death of Lazarus, a Jewish spectator scornfully recounts his distress (XIII.51–62; see John 11.33–35).

Chester's placement and translation of the 'tristis est anima mea' does work to engineer the hypotactic proximity of Jesus' statement of his distress to his deferring to the divine will ('non sicut ego volo sed sicut tu'), which are separated by actions in the gospel accounts:

My hart is in great mislikinge

For death that is to me commynge.

Father, if I dare ask this thinge,

Put this awaye froe mee.

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[301] *Chester Plays*, p.329.

> Eych thinge to thee possible is;
>
> Nevertheless, nowe in this
>
> At your will I am, iwys.
>
> As thou wilt, lett yt be.
>
> (XV.289–96)

The two poles, of fear and submission to the divine will, are even more starkly opposed here, but also perhaps even more swiftly resolved. The 'as thou wilt, lett yt be', is not followed, as it is in Matthew and Luke, by the later iteration of the same prayer and plea, which gives the Chester version a greater sense of conclusion. Jesus' fear is a genuine, powerful affect but it is also one that is swiftly, and apparently categorically, resolved.

However, one additional expression of affect bridges Jesus' aversion and submission. His plea is expressed with wording chosen to reflect a humility that acknowledges the presumption of the request: 'if I dare ask this thinge' (the 'si possibile est' of Matthew 26.39—the translation intensifying Jesus' acknowledgement of divine omnipotence). This shift echoes Julian of Norwich's 'quiet drede': fear as humble acknowledgement of the distance between the human and the divine. Between Christ's 'great mislikinge'—the admission of fear and aversion to his Passion—and the submission to the divine will, this expression of a more 'filial' fear is a transitional affect, part of the process whereby servile fear is dissolved or resolved in charity. Here, as we saw in Chapter One, *drede* is understood to be proper to prayer: both because it is a humble acknowledgement of divine distance and because it is

associated with spiritual alertness. The emphasis on Jesus' wakefulness in opposition to the sleep of the disciples is especially brought out in Chester by the presence of all eleven of the remaining disciples in the garden with Christ, rather than the three chosen of the gospels: a heap of recumbent humanity whose numbers more than ever suggest the audience with which they blend.

In Chester Christ's fear is dramatized as a brief, but also definite affect, in this following the most mainline interpretation received from the theological tradition. The inclusion of the Johannine prayer on the disciples' behalf implies Christ's altruistic motivation, again supporting a classic reading after Jerome. There is a doctrinal clarity to Chester that both affirms and restrains the fear of Christ.

E. THE YORK VERSION

Christ's Agony as it is recorded in the textual remains of the York Cycle is in striking contrast to the Chester version. York supplies a physically quaking Christ who mentions and re-mentions his fear. This much more viscerally and insistently fulfills the orthodox requirement that Christ, to redeem humanity, embody all that is human, including human fear. It also apparently goes further in appearing to suggest that this fear, rather than being rapidly overcome, accompanies Jesus all the way to the cross: the play in this stretches the tradition, patristic and scholastic, that had preceded it. Furthermore, the pedagogic and didactic aspects of York's exegesis of the Agony in the Garden champion a degree of fear as requisite to all kinds of elements of right devotion and behavior before God.

The playwright sometimes called the 'York realist' is unique in the physiological specificity that he brings to the fear of Christ, which must have had implications for the gestural rhetoric of the actor playing the part. Jesus opens the Agony, here a separate play in its own right, with the demand that his physically quaking body be seen:

Behold, my discipulis þat deyne is and dere

My flesshe dyderis and daris for doute of my dede.

(28.1–2)[302]

This imperative recalls the eucharistic *ostensio*, the 'Behold, the Lamb of God' (John 1.29) used to call worshippers to view the host after its consecration as Christ's body. In so doing it is in concord with the deliberate echoes of Elevation lyrics – lyric-prayers of devotional welcome written to be said at the moment of the elevation of the eucharistic host – found throughout the York cycle. Their presence in the drama as greetings for the infant and adult Christ reinforces the doctrine of real presence by bodily, historical incarnation.[303] Crucially for our purposes, this particular call to look upon Christ's body, given to the disciples by Jesus himself, suggests that the current, fearful, condition of his body is itself powerfully communicative and revelatory.

The binomial pair 'dyderis and daris' in the alliterative long line, which may be made up of dialect words, produces the onamatopoeic effect of a line that itself

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[302] All citations from *York Plays*, ed. Beadle. Play 28 is in volume I, pp.230–40.
[303] King, pp.21–28.

stutters, moving from word to near-embodiment, 'trembling and shivering' with fear.

Christ's opening speech has been understood as an 'anti-boast', in the pattern of, but

subverting, the ostentatious and posturing rhetoric with which characters such as

Herod and Pilate introduce themselves.[304] Christ's *timor* is part of the humility that is

the virtuous antidote to the ultimate sin of *superbia*. And I would argue there is more:

in this very antithesis to their boasting Christ reveals his real power, the power of his

complete assumption of humanity in divinity to enact redemption. York calls attention

to Christ's fear because it forms part of the unveiling of the paradox of the divine

nature. This possibility for the Agony is suggested in Vincent of Beauvais' thirteenth-

century *Speculum Historiale*:

> Et assumpto Petro et duobus filiis Zebedei tanquam secretariis suis *ut quibus*
>
> *ostenderat gloriam suae maiestatis, eisdem, revelaret etiam tristiciam*
>
> *passionis.*

> And having taken Peter, and with two of the sons of Zebedee as they were
>
> intimates of his, *to whom he might show the glory of his majesty, [and] to the*
>
> *same men reveal too the sorrow of his passion.*[305]

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[304] J.W. Robinson, 'Art of the York Realist', *Modern Philology* 4 (1963), 241–51 (p.243).

[305] Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum historiale*, VIII.38. Digital edition, based on MS Douai Bibliothèque municipale 797, Bases Textuelles, Atelier Vincent de Beauvais. < http://atilf.atilf.fr/bichard/> [accessed 31 May, 2015]. My italics and translation.

Again and again in the York cycle's play this ostentatious fear recurs as Christ insistently returns to pleading prayer. The *agon* of Christ's interior struggle is drawn out over the maximum possibilities for prayer suggested by the texts of scripture: three lengthy intercessions. Moreover, the motif of Christ's fear and trepidation is also thrice repeated, an iteration in each prayer that goes far beyond the gospels. As we shall see elsewhere, this affectivity also has an aspect of sorrow ('in sighyng that sattillis full sore'), but it is predominantly fearful.

> My flessh is full dredand for drede
>
> (28.48)

> I fele by my ferdness my flessh wold ful fayne
>
> Be torned fro this turnement and takyn þe untyll
>
> For mased is manhed in mode and in mayne
>
> (28.89–91)

> My flesshe is full ferde and fayne wold defende
>
> (28.105)

The York version has long been marked out for what is variously described as Christ's 'very human fear', a 'real and thoroughly human' Christ whose 'fear of death [is] expressed emphatically and movingly' and which amounts to 'a very solid

impression of the intense human fear of pain and death'.[306] The extension of Jesus'

fear into physiological symptoms defines it strongly as a full passion: something

which was in Thomas Aquinas' adaptation of Aristotle, for example, psychological

but also somatic.[307] However the writer, whilst going out of his way to depict and

illustrate a fully physiological and agonising terror, appears to be also carefully

crafting his text to carry an orthodox account of Christ's two natures, to the extent of

at times appearing to bracket the passions into a distinct 'part' of the figure of Jesus

Christ. Looking back at the quotations above, we can see that the writer is

maintaining certain distinction between the 'flesh' or the manhood of Christ, and his

divinity, showing an awareness of earlier exegetical debate. This Chalcedonian

orthodoxy may have been encouraged by the alliterative possibilities of 'flesshe' and

'fere', it is very striking that, when called upon to actually describe his emotions, the

voice of Jesus speaks in a manner that distantiates his speaking position from

occurrences in his material body, referring always to a fear felt in his 'flesshe'.[308] The

Pauline dichotomy of spirit and flesh could also be said to be operating alongside, if

not standing in for, the distinction between the divine and the human nature or will in

Christ. Or, if we turn back to the sacramental contexts we have already identified, this

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[306] Clifford Davidson, *From Creation to Doom* (New York: AMS Press, 1984), p.99; *Festivals and Plays in Late Medieval Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p.152; Woolf (1973), p.236.

[307] See Gondreau, p.30; Peter King, 'Emotions in Medieval Thought' in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Emotion*, ed. by Peter Goldie (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp.167–87.

[308] Compare the *Passion de Gréban*: 'la fraelle char la redoubte et sautelle/et tant la craint que n'a mais la voix…tant crant ma senssualité'; ed. by Jodogne, ll.3681–82, p.248.

syntactic distantation could be another form of *ostensio*: the emotive, suffering flesh could be seen as being 'held up' or held out, like the eucharistic host, as an icon and sacrament through which the whole divine reality could be grasped.

The York Play, along with N-Town and Towneley, takes inspiration from Luke to introduce a divine agent or messenger. Whether it is, as in Towneley, God-in-Trinity or, as in N-Town and York, an angelic messenger, this intervention of an exterior divine force tends to externalize or 'dramatize' the properly internal hypostatic tension of Jesus' divine and human being. Interaction with either the impassible Godhead or the pure intellect of the angelic also represents as an exterior drama the conversion of the flesh by the rational will, through the assimilation of the knowledge of the logic of salvation each presents. However, the York Play is unique in carrying Christ's fear through this intervention and beyond: the affect outlives his resolution to turn towards the cross.

> Now if my flessh ferde be, fadir, I am fayne
> Þat myne angwisshe and my noyes are nere at an end
>
> (28.123–24)

And again to the disciples, Jesus in fact returns to the precise wording of his second prayer,

> My flesshe is full ferde and fayne wolde deffende

> Full derfely my ded schall be dight.

> (28.130–31)

Unlike Jerome's dominant exposition of Jesus' fear as *propassio*, an affect that only 'begins' before it is suppressed by his right willing and the control of reason, this fear remains and is even taken to the cross by Christ as part of his humanity.

Where, as described in Luke's gospel, Jesus sweats blood, in the York version this too appears to be specifically a symptom of his fear.

> My flessh is full dredand for drede
>
> For my jorneys of my manhed,
>
> I swete both water and bloode.

> (28.48–50)

Describing his condition with these words especially suggests that Jesus' Gethsemane experience is proleptic, or even in some sense anticipatory, of his Crucifixion. In John 19.34 both water and blood come from Christ's pierced side, *exivit sanguis et aqua*; these elements suggest the exculpatory water of baptism and the blood of his sacrifice, as well as liturgical celebration of the Eucharist as a re-presentation of that continuously offered salvation. Here in the York Agony it is in continuity with Christ's fear that his flesh bleeds, a cause as inseparable from its consequence as his human suffering on the cross is from the blood he sheds there. That Christ sustains his fear, in fact his capacity to bring all of human emotion—as opposed to divine

dispassion—through the whole of the passion sequence thus suggestively integrates it into the logic of salvation.

The emphasis on, and high status given to, Jesus' fear also has consequences for his disciples' modes of prayer and affectivity. Although the York Play episode is entitled 'The Agony in the Garden' in modern editions, its title in the short pageant list, 'Capcio Christi orantis [in montem]', suggests Christ's state of prayer is an important aspect of how the episode was understood. From Origen onwards commentators derived an ideal of prayer or precepts for praying from Christ's prayer in Gethsemane.[309] The surviving manuscript of Play 28 in the York Cycle is missing a leaf, breaking off the play at a point where the disciples have—uniquely to English cycle plays—responded to Jesus' instruction to pray by asking that he might teach them a specific prayer to 'mirthe vs or mende vs' and have been promised teaching and reassurance that will lead them 'from bale to blisse' (28.31, 35). They are expecting a specific prayer; it is possible that the writer here integrated Christ's instruction of the disciples in the mode and words of proper prayer that gives us the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6; Luke 11) which does not appear elsewhere in the York Plays. This may have been suggested by the presence of a phrase similar to the penultimate petition of the Lord's Prayer in the scriptural account of Gethsemane ('orate *ut non intretis in tentationem*', Mark 14.38, Matthew 26.41, a line that early

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[309] See above, n.244.

commentators certainly related to this prayer) [310] – and referenced in York as deliverance from *fandynge* (testing). [311]

If Play 28 has been assigned the transmission of the *paternoster*, the universal prayer of medieval lay piety, this emphasizes the York Gethsemane's association with the pedagogy of prayer and invites us to read the role of fear here as part of the proper attitude for human oblation. Here, as again in the N-Town version, the disciples' sleep is associated with their failure to pray and feel the watchful fear of coming temptation modelled by Christ. The disciples sleep a slumber desperately at odds with Christ's wakeful urgency and his desire they pray 'prestely' and be 'wakand alway' (28.10– 11). In contrast to this, in Chester, and as we shall see in Towneley, the disciples apparently sleep *due* to their fear. However, in York they sleep for want of fearful apprehension— 'þe passioun of me in mynde hase no more'. Co-feeling with Christ would have led them to 'haue waked…mildely [mercifully] with me': once more here fear and pity are inseparable (28.67, 75).

There are a number of proleptic elements in this York play. From the apostle James' words, 'Qwat way is he willid in þis worlde wyde/ Whedir is he walked, estewarde or weste?' (28.17–18), it seems that it must have been York's practice that Jesus be actually or conceptually hidden from the disciples whilst remaining within the audience's view. This applies the lesson of wakeful fear to the audience by staging a prolepse of the disciples' post-Crucifixion, then post-Ascension state – and hence speaks to the condition of humanity as a whole in the in-between time that follows

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[310] Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, p.302.
[311] *York Plays*, 28.12, p.230.

and precedes *parousia* – when they will be deprived of Christ's full visible presence, reliant on faith.

Against the order of the Gospels (where it follows the Last Supper), the Mount of Olives episode in York also concludes with Christ's prediction of the disciples' flight after his death, 'for all ʒoure hartely hetyng ʒe schall hyde ʒou in hy' (28.140). To speak of the disciples' 'hot' hearts is to use a physiological image that, in humoral terms, suggests courage and boldness – which will fail them – whereas fear is associated with cooling and constriction.[312] The fearful timidity of the scriptural image of the sheep's scattering is greatly amplified:

> Lyke schepe þat were scharid away schall ʒe schake,
>
> Þer schall none of ʒou be balde to byde me þan by.
>
> (28.141–42)

Jerome viewed Peter's bold pronouncement that he would not forsake Jesus as indicative of his powerful faith conquering 'temerity'. The *Glossa ordinaria* adopts Jerome's solution to the riddle of Peter's confidence versus Christ's fear ('Petrus inferior non timet … sed Christus timet'): precisely because Christ better understands the power of death, he fears it more.[313] However in the York play Jesus counters Peter

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[312] The passions, since constituted by the humours, shared their characteristics of heat and cool, wet and dry. See Aquinas, *ST* I.II.44.1.

[313] *Glossa ordinaria*, Matthew 26.37, *PL* 114, col.170a; Ambrose, *Of the Christian Faith*, II.5.41–44, pp.228–29; see Lombard, *Sentences*, 3.15.1, pp.614–15; 3.17.3, pp. 626–627.

and the disciples' insistence on an impassive, even Stoic, fidelity. Jesus associates it with excessive confidence, describing it as 'swilke bostyng'; 'kene carpyng', an overboldness that is in contrast to his own ostentatious fear (28.147–48). Crucially the placement of this exchange *after* the disciples' slumber in Gethsemane, suggests, as in N-Town, that they sleep not from an excess, but from a deficit of what Christ is feeling in anticipation of his death on the cross – they have not yet, but will, be shaken by an authentic experience of fear. We might say, then, that in York fear is related to a whole nexus of human virtues embodied in the figure of Christ and expressed in his words to the disciples: faithful alacrity, humility before God, pity, and compassion. To deny fear, this suggests, is to seek a 'superhumanity' as distant from the incarnate divine as from the human.

The emotional expansion of the York Gethsemane episode must owe something to the increased affectivity of devotion in the later medieval period; however, critics have too simplistically associated what they read as a 'purely human' Christ with that 'affective' tradition. On the one hand, the earlier Middle Ages, often associated with a more 'fearsome' vision of Christ, seems much more able accept a human and fearing Christ than some cruder accounts of Christology have suggested.[314] On the other hand, the later medieval Christ whose affectivity and

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[314] Clifford Davidson contrasts the humanity of the York Gethsemane Christ to the 'early medieval' Christ understood as an entirely brave and heroic figure, citing the warrior of the *Dream of the Rood*: *From Creation to Doom*, pp.98–102; *Festivals and Plays*, pp.152–3. However, the Christ of *Dream* shows his steadfast courage on Calvary, not the Mount of Olives. A counter-example is the powerful fear of the ninth-century chieftain-Christ of *The Heliand: the Saxon Gospel*, ed. by G. Ronald Murphy (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp.155–58.

humanity is vastly enhanced is not for all that robbed of his fearsome divinity, as the York Cycle itself demonstrates.

For the Agony with its fearing Christ is followed almost immediately in Play 28 by a Jesus who himself is the object of fear. At the moment of his arrest, as at the Harrowing of Hell or the Transfiguration, he appears bedazzlingly bright, leaving his would-be captors temporarily terrified:

> I Judeus   I am mased almost in mayne and in might
>
> II Judeus   And I am ferde, be my feyth, and fayne wold I fle.
>
> (28.264–65)

This terrible and glorious theophany is in powerful counterpoint to Christ's previous subjection to fear and his construction as an object of pity and compassion. However even in the Agony his 'Behold!' to the disciples did not lack terror, since the suggestion that the disciples may 'behold' because they are 'dene', worthy, relates their viewing to a more fearful side of eucharistic reception and to Judgement. Paul proscribes reception for the unworthy (1 Corinthians 11.27), and many 'host miracles' centered on the distinction of the unworthy and the worthy recipient. The terror of the two Jewish soldiers who come to arrest Jesus suggests not just fear, then, but also discernment. In the York Doomsday Play it is precisely Christ's wounded body that 'judges' the souls destined for hell; for in his vulnerable humanity he accuses all failure of charity and mercy as a crime against his own person. Hence we see that the

Christ who is filled with human fear is inseparable from the Christ who, as divine, is

truly terrible, in anticipation of what is described in York as a *dies timoris*:

> Þe *day of drede* to more and less,
>
> Of ire, of trymbelyng, and of tene
>
> (47.241–42)[315]

Yet even this fear in the face of finality, judgement and death is not a depth of human

feeling unsounded by Christ himself. The fear Christ experiences in the York version

of Gethsemane must be seen in the context of the unveiling of the paradoxical glory

of Christ's truly suffering humanity, to which attention is drawn as a mediating

symbol of his nature, in the context of a play aspiring to shape devotional responses in

newly dramatically paradoxical directions.

F. THE TOWNELEY-WAKEFIELD VERSION

The Towneley manuscript contains an early- or mid-sixteenth century performance

script of a play cycle, at least a portion of which relates to the 'plaie commonlie called

Corpus Christi' performed in the manor of Wakefield since the late medieval

period.[316] As we have seen, in the Chester version fear is at once affectively restrained

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[315] *York Plays*, p.449.

[316] Apparently revived under Mary Tudor and perhaps under Elizabeth I—with modifications—until its probable suppression in 1576. *The Towneley Plays*, ed. by Martin Stevens and A.C. Cawley, 2 vols, EETS SS 13–14 (Oxford: Oxford University

and doctrinally necessary. In York the striking elaboration of Jesus' physiologically expressed, quaking terror holds out the humanity of Christ as an icon of redemptive power and the disciple's sloth and boast as antitypes to fearful pity and humility. The Towneley depiction of Christ's fear is unique in its anxio-depressive character. The play specifically emphasises a tradition of reflection around the sin of *acedia* and its relation to the overextension of fear in its engagement with the paradox of a faithful fear.

The account of Christ's fear in Gethsemane forms part of play 20 of the Towneley-Wakefield Cycle, a single play covering material allotted to three plays in York. It is itself a collation of different stanza styles and source materials suggesting two or perhaps three separate originals, including perhaps York itself.[317] Whilst the verse here does not show the bravura verbal facility of the Wakefield Master which distinguishes some of the 'Towneley' plays, its placement and weaving into the whole may be his work, as elsewhere he manages tonal contrast.[318] The prosodic form, end-rhymed quatrains of five-syllable lines, abbreviates thoughts which are drawn out into textured patterns of threes and twos in the five-line alliterative stanzas of York. This contributes to an overall sense of taut, still control, as if keeping the articulation of fear in a rational grip embodied by the tight verse form.

Press, 1994). All citations from this edition, Play 20, pp.227–51. See Peter Meredith, 'The Towneley Cycle', *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. by Richard Beadle and Alan J. Fletcher (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), pp.134–62.

[317] Meredith, pp.135–36.

[318] As in the Judgement (Play 30, pp.401–25), where the measured, plain discourse of Christ himself contrasts with the complexity of the devil's rhymes.

Towneley's continuity between Last Supper and Gethsemane scenes again introduces Christ's fear in the context of the reassurances derived from John's farewell discourse (John 14). However, Towneley's straightforward enunciation of the threefold prayer contrasts with Chester's attempt to portray a more knowing and confident Christ and its calque of the high-priestly prayer. Instead, the threefold repetition of Jesus' words, pleading and obedient, therapeutically repeats and reasserts the possibility of the coexistence of the fearful doubt and the hopeful, faithful obedience.

Jesus' prediction of the disciples' scattering and Peter's claim that he will not betray Christ are here—unlike in York—placed scripturally, preceding Gethsemane and Jesus' words of comfort:

Iesus

Forsothe, Peter, I say to the,

In so great drede shall thou be broght

That, or the cok haue crowen twyse,

thou shall deny me tymes thre.

Petrus

That shall I neuer, Lord, iwys;

Ere shall I with the de.

Iesus

Now loke youre hartys be grefyd noght,

nawthere in drede ne in wo.

(20.450–57)

Towneley, in speaking not just of Peter's coming denial but his fear, draws attention again, as in York, to the contrast between Peter's false over-confidence and Christ's frank fear. However here Christ's agony *follows* rather than *precedes* the first intimations of Peter's wrong emotions. Gethsemane subsequently appears as the therapeutic response to these warnings. Jesus' words 'now loke youre hartys be grefyd noght, / nawthere in drede ne in wo' suggest a balance of both acknowledging and moderating the fear that is to come.

The description of affective states is highly distinctive in Towneley. Both Christ and his followers' fear is associated with the sin of *acedia* (itself in cousinship to extremes of fear and despair) or its sometime-synonym, *tristitia*, and perhaps with the humoral temperament of *melancholia*. On Christ's second return to the disciples he relents into sympathy and compassion, understanding their somnolence as consequent to their distressed state:

> Ye slepe, brether, yit I see;
> It is for sorrow that ye do so.
> Ye haue so long wepyd for me
> That ye are masyd and lappyd in wo.
>
> (20.540–43)

Only Luke suggests the disciples were sleeping out of sorrow, 'dormientes prae tristitia' (Luke 22.45). In Towneley's version sorrow plays a key part as Jesus bemoans that his disciples are 'masyd' (distraught, frightened) and 'lappyd in wo' (beset by sorrow). This also parallels the disciples' state with the dual aspect of Jesus' own in Matthew and Mark: 'coepit pavere et taedere' (began to fear and to be heavy) or 'contristari et maestus esse' (became very sorrowful and gloomy).

The disciples have here fallen into sleep due to an excess of emotional turmoil, more specifically a combination of fear and sorrow. This corresponds strongly to vices and maladies of disposition associated with the sin of *acedia*, sometimes called *sleuthe* in the vernacular – a barrenness or lack of application towards the good that could express itself physically and was increasingly defined by physical torpor. There was a tradition of citing the sleep of Christ's followers in Gethsemane when discussing *acedia* caused by 'dolor ingens'.[319] *Acedia* as a sin has monastic origins as a particular kind of aversion or tedium felt towards spiritual labour. It comes to often replace Gregory the Great's *tristitia* in lists of the seven major or 'deadly' sins, and to retain an association with depression of the spirit, so that later writers can treat *acedia* and the humoral disposition *melancholia* as synonymous. Scholastic theologians describe *acedia* as 'the inappetence of spiritual good'. In vernacular texts, pastoralia and poetry where it appears as *sleuthe*, it comes to have a closer association with its physical expression, becoming increasingly

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[319] Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), pp.73–74, quoting Richard Wethershed's *Summa brevis*, MS BM Royal 4.B.VIII, fol. 229r.

connected with sleep in the popular imagination, evolving towards the 'lazy' idea of sloth we have today. A*cedia*, *tristitia* and fear have a strong relationship, with *unboldenesse* or *drede* frequently appearing as a consequent vice or branch of *acedia*, and *anxietas* and *angustiae*, for example, appearing as component parts of sorrow.[320] Here fear appears as bound up with a malady of inappetence and incapacity towards the good.

The extremes of sinful *acedia* and *tristitia* were associated with *wanhope*, the state of desperation in which all hope and sense of God's mercy was lost. Jesus directly warns his disciples against this consequence in Towneley:

The feynd ful fast salys you,

In wanhope to gar you fall.

(20.530–31)

This state could also be associated with 'fole ferveur', or an over-exaggerated religious zeal, such as we might see Peter as having displayed in his assertion that he will not abandon Christ's side.

Christ's affectivity in Towneley's Gethsemane also has a melancholic tonality that corresponds to that of the disciples in its association with the *acedia-tristitia*

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[320] See Wenzel, pp.78–83; on fear and melancholy see *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva*, ed. by Jennifer Radden (Oxford; New York, Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.10–12,18; see also *Saturn and Melancholy*, ed. by Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl (London: Nelson, 1964), ch.2, pp. 67–123 (fear and melancholy, pp.82–84, 115, 117).

complex. Here his 'tristis est anima mea usque ad mortem' is translated with an

almost lyric delicacy:

My sawll is heuy agans the deth

And the sore pynyng

(20.521–22)

The choice of 'hevy' (sluggish, sorrowful) amongst other possible renditions of *tristis*

is highly original.[321] It associates Jesus' mood with the disciples' despondent torpor.

In Jesus' final affective self-description this weighed-down, fearful and melancholic

disposition recurs:

Thou comforte me that am drery

(20.551)

The multiple resonances of 'drery' include sorrow, fear and slowness or

inappetence.[322] This renders Jesus' sorrowful apprehension a dark foreboding, with a

strong undertow of a certain slowness or weariness of spirit. *Acedia*, or *sleuthe* was

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[321] Compare *sori*, *sorful*, 'sanz confort', *sorweful* in, respectively, the *Northern Passion*, ed. by Frances A. Foster, EETS OS 183 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co.; H. Milford for Oxford University Press, 1913–30), p.108; the *Southern Passion*, l.1084, ed. by Beatrice Daw Brown, EETS OS 169 (London: H. Milford; Oxford University Press, 1927), p.39; *Cursor mundi*, l.1601, II, p.892; the *Wycliffe Bible*.
[322] *MED*, 'drery (adj)'.

directly associated with all these adjectives used by Jesus of himself: with a slow

languor or 'hevynesse' with an apprehensive sorrow or 'drerynesse', with fear or

'unboldenesse'.[323] The author of Towneley further implies the association of Christ's

despondency with malady in the rendition of the 'spiritus promptus est sed caro

infirma':

> My goost is prest therto
>
> My flesh is *seke for fere*
>
> (20.534–35)

Here 'caro infirma', elsewhere read as a connatural weakness of the flesh or as

addressed, not to Christ at all, but to his all-too-human followers, is rendered as an

exaggeratedly apprehensive disposition that amounts to physiological imbalance or a

kind of sickness.

Aquinas opposes sloth to charity and defines it as a vice of the intellectual

appetite, the failure to take delight in the divine good: understood in this sense in its

'perfection' as a mortal sin *acedia* could not be predicated of the Son of God.[324] But

elsewhere Aquinas attests that Christ's dismay, sorrow and fear refer to lesser,

temporal goods – his and others' pain to come – rather than an inappetence towards

the good in itself.[325] He also allows that Christ's sorrow can extend to the 'sensuality

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[323] Wenzel, pp.80–82.
[324] Aquinas, *ST*, III.35.
[325] Aquinas, *ST* III.15.6.

alone' as incipient rather than perfected, and be a source of sorrow and distress

precisely 'because of the opposition between spirit and flesh' and due to the bodily

hardships involved.[326] However, in the dramatic context, the tight restrictions of such

scholastic definitions cede to the enacted ambiguity of an emotional experience whose

complex shading defies either/or understandings. What the scene renders strongly is

Christ's participation in human despondency: incapacity to obey the divine will

rooted in a reluctance and dark anxiety worsened by physical hardship.

Tropologically, Towneley can be read as a staging of possible responses to the threat

of *acedia*: the disciples' abandonment to torpor contrasting with Christ's reflection of

the advice that had applied since John Cassian—to re-engage in spiritual tasks, as

Jesus does to prayer, and await refreshment.[327]

However, we should also note that in Towneley Jesus does not just castigate

the disciple's 'wrong' emotion, for on his second return to them his critique of their

slumber ceases. Instead he directly identifies their sorrow with compassion: 'ye haue

so long wepyd for me' (20.542). It is *here* that Christ, as we described above, speaks

of disciples' fear and sorrow in a way that echoes the scriptural account of his own. In

verbally entwining their affectivities, the author anticipates emotively the

identification with human nature and suffering which the incarnation is and the

passion completes.

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[326] Aquinas, *ST* I.II.84.4, III.35.3.
[327] Cassian, *Institutes*, 10.22, ed. by Boniface Ramsey, Ancient Christian Writers 57 (New York: Newman Press, 2000), pp.232–33.

Finally, in Towneley God-in-Trinity himself appears to rehearse an acccount of Christ's coming Passion as part of the necessary mechanism of atonement. He tells us that *comfort* for Christ's sorrow is provided as these 'thyngys that fell by *reson*' (28.553), a claim to rationality that is reinforced by the particularly prosodically correct quatrains in which it is expressed. This dogmatic content thus appears as a rational therapeutic intervention against affective extremes. However, what God-in-Trinity actually expresses is the classically paradoxical doxa of Christianity, its 'reason' articulated as an unreasonable riddle: 'to that a chuld might be borne/Of a maydyn, and she wemless, /As cleyn as that she was beforne, / As puryd syluer or shynand glas', a child who would both die and rise again. These words of *Trinitas* prepare the way for the deception carried out on Satan by Christ's arrival in hell as true man and true God, the only key to fit the devil's lock: 'When oone is borod, all shall owtt' (20.578).[328] In this cycle, God's knowing choice to enact the redemption is partly expressed by a dramatic representation of God-as-Trinity, physically separate from God-as-Christ.

In Towneley, then, Christ moves through an arc in which he first exhorts the disciples to wakefulness and co-suffering; then, resigning himself to the singleness of his task, is moved to an emotional compassion that accompanies his redemptive participation of their suffering fear. The imperatives and adverbs of speed and urgency, and the firm assertion of knowledge of the Father's will (combined with the

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[328] On this doctrine and Middle English Literature, see C. William Marx, *The Devil's Rights and the Redemption in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995).

appearance of God-in-Trinity), interplay with a deep dejection that has a strong undercurrent of incipient *acedia*. Towneley contains a particularly poignant specific mirroring of affectivity that stages Christ's participation in human emotion, even as that human emotion reaches depths that edge it towards sin. He partakes, very precisely, the terms of the disciples' emotional suffering in dejection and heaviness. But even by this participation he also extends the promise of comfort beyond their emotional nadir.

G. THE N-TOWN VERSION

The version of Christ's Gethsemane fear found in the N-town Passion Play, one element of a late fifteenth-century East Anglian compilation, is again unique.[329] If John's gospel influences Chester, whilst Towneley represents a minimal and York a maximal synthesis of all the gospel accounts, N-Town can be placed under the sign of the Gospel of Luke and the reference to Gethsemane in Hebrews 5.7,[330] with the addition of a unique role for extra-biblical material from the Legend of Seth. Both in this play and the play of the Last Supper, the N-Town Passion communicates a particular emphasis on fear's place in the reception of the Eucharist, dramatically extending the suggestions of York. N-Town Play 28 situates the paradox of hope and

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[329] All citations from *The N-Town Play,* ed. by Stephen Spector. For how this compilation differs from the 'cycles' see Alan J. Fletcher, 'The N-Town Plays', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre*, ed. by Richard Beadle and Alan J. Fletcher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp.183–210.

[330] See pp.146–49 above.

drede in relation to the sacrament, and to God himself, within Christ's own fear. This involves a staging of Jesus' agony through the ritual frame of the Eucharist that assimilates Christ's self-offering of fear to his full self-offering at the Passion. This points towards the liturgical theatre of the Church as the continuing therapy for fear's experiential transformation.

From the outset in the N-Town Passion Play, fear has been pointedly identified as one half of an affective relation to the divine that can only be expressed in terms of the paradoxical reconciliation of 'hope and fear'. The prologue related by John the Baptist asserts the importance of fear to walk the middle way of salvation between 'presumption' and 'despair':[331]

> Þe pathe þat lyth to þis blyssyd enherytawns
>
> Is hope and drede, copelyd be conjunccyon.
>
> Betwyx þese tweyn may be no dysseruerawns,
>
> For hope withoutyn drede is maner of presumpcyon;
>
> And drede withowtyn hope is maner of dysperacyon.
>
> So these tweyn must be knyt be on acorde.
>
> (26.156–62)[332]

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[331] A dialectic throughout Christian tradition, for example, Augustine, Sermon 87.10 in *Sermons*, ed. by Michele Pellegrino, et al., 11 vols (New York: New City Press, 1990–7), III, p.413.
[332] *N-Town Plays*, p.251.

The dialectic between these apparent opposites of hope and fear is constantly in view over the course of plays 27 and 28. In N-Town this is focused especially on the mystically twofold character of the sacrament of the altar, understood as a cup of blessing and cup of trembling with both salvific and damning consequences, to be approached with dread yet taken in hope. N-Town develops the scriptural and dramatic conjuction of Last Supper and Gethsemane to a new level. If Play 27's Last Supper has a particular, and fearful, emphasis on the circumstances under which one should receive the eucharistic bread, Play 28 complements this by presenting a fearful Christ, whose own paradoxical self-performance is a participatable bridge between divine foreknowledge and human terror.

The N-Town Last Supper gives the most strikingly literal evocation of the eucharistic liturgy of all the remaining English cycle dramas. Where elsewhere the disciples eat the Passover lamb, here Christ identifies the bread and wine he offers as displacing the paschal feast, develops a spiritual and allegorical gloss on the old rite, and uses the words of institution from the ordinary of the Mass. The disciples apparently receive one by one in the manner of a communion rather than gathered around the table.[333] It has frequently been alleged that fear of reception of the Eucharist had reached feverish pitch in the later medieval period, which is supposed to explain the increase in frequency of spiritual, rather than physical, communion.[334]

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[333] See Penny Granger, *Drama and Liturgy: The N-Town Play in Medieval East Anglia* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2009), p.27.

[334] Elizabeth Saxon, 'Carolingian, Ottonian and Romanesque Art and the Eucharist', in *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Ian Christopher Levy, Gary Macy and Kristen Van Adsall (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp.251–324 (p.280); Thomas M. Izbicki, 'Sin and Pastoral Care', in *The Routledge History of Medieval*

However, the specificity with which N-Town evokes the eucharistic liturgy provides a setting within which to treat fear's place in eucharistic reception, staging Peter and Judas as counter examples of correct and incorrect, worthy and unworthy communion, perhaps working to allay such fears.

In this scene, the allegorical instructions given by Jesus for eating new Passover food contain an intriguing echo of humoral theories of medicine as model and metaphor for the role of fear in eucharistic reception. Indeed, the prologue of the play had already deployed a redolently medicinal word, *conjunction*, in describing the dual path of hope and fear, suggesting an analogy with medical treatment by the administration of balancing concoctions.[335] The body of the lamb is to be eaten with another 'conjunction' of opposing spiritual attitudes, figured as traditional Passover foods: 'sweet breads' of love and charity and 'bitter herbs' of contrition for sin, fear of one's own sinfulness (27.253–54). Peter does indeed describe his reception of the 'delycyous mete', the bread that is Christ's body, as mingled with the 'byttyr contrycyon' of his internal fear and sorrow (27.445, 8). Mary Carruthers has described how it is a quality of medieval 'sweetness' to contain the bitter insofar as it refers to something that is wholesome, balanced in flavor and affect.[336] In Christ's

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Christianity: 1050-1500, ed. by R.N. Swanson (Oxford: Routledge, 2015), pp.147–58 (p.149); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p.58; G.J. Snoek, *Medieval Piety from Relics to the Eucharist* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp.52–53.

[335] See *MED*, 'conjunccioun', 2. On the widespread use of medical language in medieval pastoral care, see Joseph Ziegler, *Medicine and Religion c.1300. The Case of Arnau de Vilanova* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

[336] Mary Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp.90–92.

description of the eucharist, the bitterness of fear also *contributes* towards the savour

of the whole, as it balances the temperament of the recipient. Eucharistic meat, as

both sustenance and medicine, fits with both the physiological work of bodily

conservation, *similia similibus*, and that of medical cure, *contraria contrariis*. The

wholeness of sweetness is like the wholeness of hope or of love, that both opposes

and contains its opposite. Peter's attitude is one of appropriate fear, of

acknowledgement of unworthiness and hence of proper reverence; and yet at no point

does this fear push him away from receiving this 'awngellys mete' (27.439). Correct

reception of the Eucharist, then, takes the form of the bitter-sweet, a conjunction that

is medicinally dependent on the recipient being affectively prepared.

By contrast, Judas' lack of fear leads him to live out 1 Corinthians 11.29,

eating and drinking to damnation (27.455–56). His false reception of the bread and

wine is part of the proleptic drama of Christ's self-offering at the Last Supper. Just as

Judas fearlessly approaches to receive the bread with false words on his lips: 'Lord,

thi body I wyl not forsake' (27.452), so he will approach Christ in Gethsemane with a

false sign and declaration of recognition and love. Conversely, his betrayal in

Gethsemane is enacted as a moment of reception, including Judas' parody of an

elevation prayer to the host 'Welcome, Jesu, my maystyr dere' (28.101). In both the

Last Supper and the Betrayal the embrace of Christ's presence and sacramental real

presence is again like an encounter with the finality of Judgment. So, whilst Peter's

'bittersweet' reception, balanced as it is between fear and hope, is healing and brings

life, that of Judas is damning; as he eats the bread he is suddenly joined by a 'devyl'

whose arrival suggests the proximity of death, and whose gleeful celebration of Judas'

now-determined destiny uses formulations about crowning and a place at his side that darkly parody Jesus' promises of heavenly reward (27.468, 478). Peter models a reception that is worthy precisely because it is imbued with a sense of fear and commensurate contrition. This might have comforted those in the audience who felt unworthy to take communion, and the play itself seems to encourage reception as it stages a medieval Eucharist where all receive in both kinds. Even here, of course, the examples of Judas and Peter are overshadowed by Christ—who goes on also to appear as a eucharistic recipient in Play 28.

N-Town's Jesus is an exceptionally prophetic figure, heavy with a foreknowledge that holds an immediate fearful import for himself and the world. Play 27 begins with Jesus' doom-laden prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem that will ensue upon his death. This casts an urgent shadow of fear, 'trobyl and gret grevauns' (27.14) over the whole play, which then concludes with Jesus already, as he prepares to leave for Gethsemane, overcome by a visible terror: 'My flesch for fere is qwakyng fast' (27.571). In between, the N-Town Christ displays unique foreknowledge, repeatedly speaking of his task as the fulfillment of prophecy (27.541, 28.3–4, 28.67–68).[337] In common with Chester, this integrates John's portrayal of Christ's humanity as transparent to his divinity: a Christ who knows and wills his coming suffering, as in his final consent given to the Father's will:

> I shal fulfylle the prophesye
>
> And sofre deth for mannys trespace.

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[337] Granger, *Drama and Liturgy*, pp.51–52.

(28.67–68)

At the same time, foreknowledge here could be seen as enhancing apprehension as Jesus predicts Judas' betrayal, his own unparalleled suffering, and the disciples' fear and flight.

N-Town juxtaposes Jesus' foreknowledge, with all its potential for hope, with an equally fully expressed fear, uniting elements we have seen in Chester and York. This is a continuous dialectic, rather than a diachronic movement from fear to certainty, indecision to conclusion. Fear lies alongside hope, as even in Christ's words immediately precedent to his falling to the ground in prayer he establishes his resurrection and return:

> Þe tyme is come þat I must gon
>
> For to fulfylle þe prophecye
>
> Þat is seyd of me, Þat I xal dey,
>
> Þe fendys power fro ȝow to flem;
>
> Weche deth I wole not deney
>
> Mannys sowle, my spovse, for to redeem.
>
> (28.3–6)

Here, and elsewhere, N-Town's articulate, didactic Christ displays a 'performative distance', offering an explanatory prologue to his affective enactment:

> In peynys for hym my body schal schake,
>
> And for love of man, man xal dey.
>
> (28.15–16)

In this, N-Town, if less markedly than Chester, emphasises Christ's knowledge and consent, rendering his altruistically directed actions and passions here didactic and tropological. This of course aligns with the broad consensus of scholastic theologians from the twelfth century onwards that Jesus' fear is at once human and voluntarily assumed, rather than just necessary. However, there remains an empathetic distance also in that Jesus' foreknowledge is precisely this, something expressed as a matter of knowledge and not volition: 'Wech deth I wole note deney' (5).

N-Town's Christ also undergoes a very fully expressed fear and pain, something that continues to increase over the course of his three prayers. The initial assertion of his submission to God's will in prophetic vein is not re-stated, but rather the prayer for deliverance is continuously amplified across each successive octave. His 'shaking' and 'quakyng' here must, as with York's 'dideris and daris', have suggested a concomitant expression in the actor's body, which crescendos to a physical earthquake of movement through Jesus' body:

> My flesch qwakyth sore for fere and peyn
>
> …
>
> My flesche quakyth in ferful case
>
> As þow þe joyntys asondre xuld schake.

…

Delyuere me, fadyr, fro þis peyn,

Weche is reducyd with ful gret drede

…

I swete both watyr and blode.

(28.20, 43–44, 47–48, 50)

In N-Town, as in York, the disciples appear to have a deficiency of compassionate fear rather than, as in Towneley, being overcome by an excess of affect. Christ accuses his followers of not quite managing to walk the path of 'hope and drede' because they do not feel the urgency of fear ('Of my deth ȝe are not agast', 27.35), failing to model an affective solidarity the dramatist might also desire from the audience.

The two unique elements from Luke's version of Gethsemane – Jesus' agony of bloody sweat and the descent of the comforting angel – come together in N-Town's Play 28 under the sign of Christ's sacrificial priesthood. Christ's fearful *hematodrosis*, mentioned only briefly in York, is presented here as anticipatory sacrificial and salvific self-offering, as fraction and outpouring of the two elements of his body and blood, aligned with the Passion proper. The Agony forms a bridge between what has been called the 'reverse typology' of Jesus' proleptic but nonetheless efficacious enaction of his self-offering at the Last Supper and its fulfillment with the Crucifixion. In N-Town, the metaphorical cup of Mark and John's gospel becomes a literalized *calix*, containing a host, brought by the angel repeating Jesus' words of

institution. This draws us into a complex eucharistic image which gives us a

paradoxical explanation of the place of fear, understood both as a part of Christ's self-

offering and cured by it.

In N-Town, Christ's interior *agon* is depicted as not just the anticipation but

the intiation of his self-offering, as the blood and water begins to flow from his body

even before it is physically drawn forth by the nails, crown of thorns and spear. Jesus'

words move from the future to the present tense:

>   The watyr and blood owth of my face
>
>   Dystyllyth for *peynes þat I xal take*
>
>   (28.40–41, second prayer to the Father)
>
>   It is not for me, *þis peyn I lede*
>
>   But for man I swete bothe watyr and blode.
>
>   (28.51–52, third prayer to the Father)

The suggestive unity between Jesus' suffering on the cross and in the garden gives a

high place to the assumption of fear as part of Christ's saving work. The imagery first

of Christ's body literally breaking apart ('As þow þe joyntys asondre xuld schake',

28.44) and then of the bloody sweat's 'distillation' through skin (28.41) points

towards the Eucharist: first to fraction, the divided and shared body of Christ, and

secondly, with the medical associations of the verb *distillen*, to a healing liquid.[338]

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[338] *MED*, 'distillen', 2, 4.

This latter connotation of healing is reinforced by references in N-Town to the apocryphal legend of Seth. Jesus' self-exegesis, which we saw in the play of the Last Supper, continues as he offers a fresh figuration of the new paschal sacrifice:

Þe oyle of mercy is grawntyd playn

Be þis jorné þat I xal take.

(28.9–10)

The 'oil of mercy' refers to a legend found first in the Gospel of Nicodemus.[339] The oil is an Edenic remedy distilled from the Tree of Life and sought out by Adam when he is ill and fearful of death. The oil is refused to his son Seth when he seeks it at the gate of the Garden, but the archangel Michael there promises it will be granted to the righteous at the end of days. Seth is sometimes also granted a vision of the infant Jesus at the top of the Tree as the source of the 'oil of mercy'.[340] The legendary material invoked by N-Town's Jesus suggests that we view the Agony as a symbolic fulfillment of this promised *panacea*, and in doing so to view Christ as both new Seth and new Adam, whose journey (one meaning of *jorné*, 28.10) of a life both innocent and perfect, in the opposite direction to Seth's, permits him, like Adam, to receive the

[339] The legend enters later medieval tradition through the *Descensus ad inferos* incorporated with the Acts of Pilate into the Gospel of Nicodemus. See 'The Auchinleck *Life of Adam*', ll. 387–490 and 'Canticum de creatione', ll.535 – 852 (l.784), in *The Apocryphal Lives of Adam and Eve*, ed. by Brian Murdoch and J.A. Tasioulas (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), pp.50–53, 80–89; see also *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in Literature*, ed. by David Lyle Jeffrey (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), pp.695–96.
[340] See *Cursor mundi*, ll.1237–1400 (ll.1341–4), I, pp.79–89 (p.85).

healing 'oil of mercy' on the behalf of his children—humanity. Crucially, drawing on this legendary material allows the playwright to give the Garden of the Agony an elevated symbolic significance, taking the place of Calvary as the antitype of Eden, the site of the fall into sin. The 'oil of mercy' is thus strongly linked to blood and water that is already beginning to flow in the bloody sweat, as well as that contained in the chalice brought by the angel whose arrival dispels Christ's fear. This cup literalizes, as was iconographically widespread, that which Christ asks to have taken from him and which he asks the disciples if they can join him in drinking—the cup of his death on the cross.[341]

Play 28 thus offers a form of 'repetition' of the Eucharist so explicitly depicted in Play 27. Using the same logic of recollection and recall Jesus applied to his disciples as he attempted to comfort them from oncoming fear, the Angel gives him the cup representing his own institution of the Eucharist, a sacrament of reassurance; he even uses the words of institution:

> This chalys ys thi blood; this bred is thi body
>
> For mannys synne evyr offeryd shal be.
>
> (28.61–2)
>
> This is my body, flesch and blode
>
> (27.449)

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341 Matthew 26.39, Mark 14.36, Luke 22.42. A cup in fact not mentioned in the N-Town play before the angel's 'chalys with an host therin' appears in the rubric.

Jesus, going apart to pray, appears in this dramatic rendition as at once priest, victim and communicant. The appearance of chalice and host in the hands of an angel as he kneels in supplication creates a tableau of the celebrant's position after the elevation, genuflecting before the altar.[342] However at the same time, and especially in N-Town's version with its hematidrosis, his bloodied body is already that with whose substance the eucharistic host is one, and the entire act is already the self-offering the Eucharist participates. And yet at the same time the presence of the chalice and host in the hand of an angel, and his kneeling position, place Christ in the role of recipient, like one of the desert saints miraculously brought the sacrament in the wilderness – a parallel made in a contemporary dipartite altarpiece.[343] As Jesus kneels in contemplation of the elements and in communion with his Father, there is never a moment of physical reception (that would be a paradox too far) so that, conversely to the general reception of the Last Supper, this is a high-priestly moment of spiritual reception. Jesus appears as at once High Priest, victim and humble medieval layperson receiving the 'communion of the eyes'.

The Agony in the Garden, a moment of intense affective and psychosomatic experience in Jesus' own coming suffering, provides a powerful parallel with the experience of the lay devout. This is enhanced by the liturgical aspect of the chalice so popular in iconography and found here in dramatic form. The angel offers comfort to Christ as if he is a layperson, reassuring him by describing the endless offering within *ecclesia*, 'discipulis and al presthood' (28.66), of his sacramental body, just as

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[342] See figure 12.
[343] See figure 13.

a layperson might be assured of the clergy's sacramental offering on his behalf. Here, then, Christ's fearful prayer takes on a status as of preparation for eucharistic reception, as the cup itself continues to hover between fearful and hopeful sign.

At the heart of Christ's sacrifice is the encounter without division of fear and hope. All that Christ *undergoes*, which is especially here his fear and terror, the cup of his suffering, he is then shown again under the aspect of, *as* the cup of blessing. His very dereliction and fear 'usque ad mortem' is shown again to him as a 'present' against *drede* (28.54–55), and as the oil of mercy. The N-Town Play draws out, in other words, the metadramatic patterning that we saw as a possibility for all the versions. Here, through the eucharistic frame, Christ's 'performance' of fear is integrated into his assumption of humanity's sins and flaws as part of the continued liturgical 'theatre' of the Eucharist understood as a therapeutic context for experiencing and offering up fear.

III.   CONCLUSION

The cycle drama of late medieval England yields subtle and diverse presentations of Christ's fear that unite in assigning it intensity and prominence. The originality of each perspective on fear affirms the drama as a vehicle for theological expression, supporting the claim made above that despite the relative scarcity of treatments of drama as vernacular theology the plays embody theological and devotional subtlety. This chapter has also tried to sustain my probing of the contours and dominance of a posited dominant late-medieval 'affective theology' or 'spirituality'. On the one hand,

these plays certainly explore, guide and shape affect. However, the exemplary affects

here are demonstrably various in kind and degree, and, the 'affective' label risks

failing to fully describe what we have brought out of the drama in terms of the

resonances of its performative, ritual-liturgical and eucharistic facets and its

interaction with varieties of doctrinal orthodoxy. An 'affective' emphasis on the

human Christ suffering from fear does not, for example and supremely here, mean the

elimination of the divine Christ who will also exercise judgement. Nicholas Love's

Mirror of the Blessed Life of Christ, often viewed as a classic of affective piety, asks

the reader to 'depart in manere for þe tyme þe miht of þe godhede fro þe kyndely

infirmite of þe manhede' to focus devotionally on the latter.[344] What we see in the

cycle drama contrasts with such an injunction, holding in paradoxical tension or

continuity aspects of human identification and divine difference. In Chester, a less

'affective' tonality does not mean the dilution of the theologically neccesary,

paradoxical affectivity of Christ as source of redemptive power and possibility. A

fearful and a fearsome Christ are held together in the York plays. In Towneley, a

subtle engagement with the negative over-extension of fear emphasises Christ's

healing participation in disrupted affect. The relationship, exemplary and salvific,

between Christ's fear and human fear illuminates a paradox, that the elevation of the

place of affect is always also that of the superseding of the moral-therapeutic with the

gracious-redemptive. On the one hand, in the drama, Christ's fear is a powerful

vehicle of legitimation of, comfort for, and therapy of diverse experiences of fear in

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[344] *Mirror of the Blessed Life*, p.161.

the face of the divine will, from trembling terror to something approaching depressive angst. On the other hand, it is a sacramental breaking-through and transformation of that fear, asking us to move beyond imitation into sacramental participation. The dramatic context of Gethsemane also provides a tropological and anagogical application of this fear by reference to that of the disciples, enhanced by the fluidity of boundaries between spectator and actor, which allows an audience to identify with the experiences of Christ and the apostles. The drama does indeed model human possibility, but not without a serious acknowledgement of limit. The sacramental possibilities of such mediation and participation come to their culmination in the explicitly sacrificial and liturgical aspects of the N-Town version. Here, the Agony is given its fullest eucharistic resonance and so fear is explicitly linked to the redemptive work of the Passion and its therapeutic re-presentation in the gift of the sacrament. Within this context, both hope and fear are appropriate; fear is at once intimate, necessary, transformed and redeemed.

As we turn to *Piers Plowman*, we will focus on the more collective contexts adumbrated in this chapter in the judgement-aspect of eucharistic reception, of judgement and apocalyptic fear. We also see the poem's author engaging deeply with the Christological material of these plays (though not especially with Christ's fear), since in this poem the redemptive overcoming of fear is the 'always already' of the theological double-vision, always already and not yet, which keeps fear a part of penitential work.

Figure 1: The Hours of Queen Elizabeth, London, BL Add Mss 50001, fol 10b

Figure 2: The Bedford Hours, London, BL Add Mss. 18850, fol 208

Figure 3: The Taymouth Hours, London, BL Yates-Thompson 13, fol. 118.

Figure 4: The Taymouth Hours, London, BL Yates-Thompson 13, fol. 118v.

Figure 5: London, BL Harley 5319, fol 113v.

Figure 6: Sandro Botticelli, Agony in the Garden, Capilla Real, Granada.

Figure 7: London, BL Harley 2982, fol. 16.

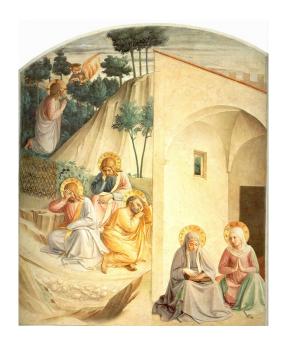*Figure 8: London, BL Harley 3000, fol. 44v.*

Figure 9: Fra Angelico, Agony in the Garden, c. 1450, Museo de San Marco, Florence.

Figure 10: Agony in the Garden, Prado, Madrid.

Figure 11: New York, Morgan Library and Museum, Jean Poyer, Hours of Henry VIII, MS H.8.

Figure 12: Masaccio, Agony in the Garden and Communion of Saint Jerome,

Altenburg, Lindenau-Museum.

CHAPTER FOUR: PIERS PLOWMAN AND FEAR

I. INTRODUCTION

A. WHY PIERS PLOWMAN?

The hermeneutically elusive dream-vision *Piers Plowman* continues to represent the richness and subtlety of vernacular orthodoxy within which this thesis has been following the thread of a theology of fear. Under the umbrella of its allegorical penitential quest-journey it brings together many of the elements treated elsewhere in this thesis. The celebrated comment that *Piers Plowman* resembles a 'commentary on an unknown text' might helpfully give way to the suggestion this 'unknown' text is fourteenth-century life itself, in all its complex, multi-layered, oral and literate texture.[345] *Piers* integrates aspects of pastoral discourse, religious drama and a form of narration of the devout self of the kind we saw in Julian of Norwich's *Revelations*. It can also appear socially and politically diverse: at once elusive against, and summative of, its cultural-historical context, its author irreducible to one faction or

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[345] Morton W. Bloomfield, *Piers Plowman as a Fourteeenth-Century Apocalypse* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1963), p.132. Recently explicated by Andrew Cole, 'Commentaries on Unknown Texts: On Morton Bloomfield and Friedrich Nietzsche', *YLS*, 25 (2011), 25–35.

position and yet flickering between the guises of many.[346] This destabilization is not for some kind of subversive end in itself:[347] this chapter argues with Anne Middleton that Langland wishes to assist a 'full subjective repossession and communal renewal' of existing discourses.[348]

Piers offers a mediation between spiritual autobiography and a more didactic content that is celebratedly under a constant process of reassessment.[349] The poem brings together reflections on themes already treated – fear's contribution to and simultaneity with the knowledge and love of God, and its redemption through Christ – within the perspective of the final, collective fear of apocalypse and judgement. It at once proffers a particular account of the role of fear in the personal journey of one pilgrim-self, Will (Langland's chrétien quelconque), and at the same time a more general narration of the role of judgement and apocalyptic fear in Christian society more generally. Within the apocalyptic frame penitential or 'individual' and political or 'collective' fears, as well as hopes for reform, meet, framed as contiguous and intermeshed discernments. Whilst studies of Langland's apocalypticism,[350] his

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[346] As James Simpson says, 'the meaning of the poem lies less in the conservative or the more dissenting positions … than in the movement between them'; Piers Plowman: An Introduction to the B-Text (New York: Longman, 1990), p.249.

[347] See David Lawton, 'The Subject of Piers Plowman', YLS 1 (1987), 1–30.

[348] Anne Middleton, 'The Audience and Public of Piers Plowman' in Middle English Alliterative Poetry and its Literary Background, ed. by David Lawton (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 1982), pp.101–23 (p.121).

[349] Middleton, 'Audience and Public', p.121.

[350] Bloomfield, Fourteenth-Century Apocalypse; Pamela Gradon, 'Langland and the Ideology of Dissent', Proceedings of the British Academy, 66 (1982), 179–205; Richard K. Emmerson, 'Or Yernen to Rede Redels? Piers Plowman and Prophecy', YLS 7 (1993), 27–76; Robert Adams, 'Some Versions of Apocalypse: Learned and Popular Eschatology in Piers Plowman' in The Popular Literature of Medieval England, ed. by Thomas J. Heffernan (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press,

balance of justice and mercy,[351] and his poetics of crisis exist, and some work has been done on particular sections,[352] no critic has hitherto sought to give an overall account of his theological approach to religious fear.

B. A POETRY OF CRISIS?

William Langland's *Piers Plowman* is a satirical dream-vision poem that identifies a terrifying state of material and spiritual crisis in fourteenth-century England: the nexus of circumstances which, as we saw in the introduction to this thesis, justify for many the characterisation of the late-medieval period as an 'age of fear'. However, critical accounts of crisis in the poem have sometimes argued that this is also embodied in the poem in the form of a crisis to which poem and poet succumb artistically, spiritually, and politically. Long ago, in his *Poetry and Crisis in the Age of Chaucer* Charles Muscatine argued that the poet's combination of idealism and realism does not hold. He alleged that Langland asserts an ideal orthodoxy that sets to one side the circumstances of economic, natural, social, ecclesial and intellectual crisis against which it is upheld; the poet-dreamer is also so implicated in this crisis that he is eventually overwhelmed by a failure that is both *in* and *of* the narrative of

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1985), pp.194–236; Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Piers Plowman and Reformist Apocalypticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Unversity Press, 1990).
[351] Myra Stokes, *Justice and Mercy in Piers Plowman: a reading of the B-Text* (London: Croom Helm, 1984); Simpson, *Piers Plowman,* see esp. p.130; pp.246–51.
[352] Megna, 'Dread, Love and the Bodies of *Piers Plowman*'.

the poem, at once aesthetic and ideological.[353] Similarly, John Bowers' *Piers*

Plowman and the Crisis of the Will argues that the poet depicts 'a world in turmoil'

under the burden of a 'litany of disasters' including Black Death, the Great Schism,

the Hundred Years' War, Lollardy and the Peasants' Revolt, alongside an intellectual

crisis of 'medieval scepticism'. These debates are embodied in the volitional

dilemmas of the poet-dreamer, whose own crisis reflects the general one, centring on

the sin of *acedia* and the incapacity to act. Bowers finally claims that Langland is

pessimistic about the possibility of a solution at the level either of the individual or of

Christian society.[354] Anne Middleton argues that the poem is structured by the more

creative iteration of combative episodes; episodes of crisis and struggle for authority

she partly traces to 'fear…about the status and integrity of imaginative literature

itself'.[355] David Aers' early work on *Piers Plowman* recounts the poet's negotiation of

crisis as an affirmation of orthodox ideology that near-involuntarily negates itself in

the face of his 'courageous total engagement' with present incapacity.[356] Aers' more

recent account of the poem pushes this further, from a 'dialectic' whose radicalism is

not necessarily with the author towards a more intentional 'revolutionary'

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[353] Charles Muscatine, *Poetry and Crisis in the Age of Chaucer* (Notre Dame, ID: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972), pp.14–25, 106–9. See also Stanley B. James, *Back to Langland* (London: Sands, 1935), pp.32–34 who, whilst trumpeting a return to the pre-Reformation reformism of *Piers*, nonetheless argued that the poem was an aesthetic and to some extent ideological 'failure' whose artistry subsided under the pressure of its high aims.

[354] John Bowers, *Piers Plowman and the Crisis of the Will* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), pp.1–2, 61–77.

[355] Middleton, 'Narration and the Invention of Experience' in *The Wisdom of Poetry: Essays in Early English Literature in Honour of Morton W. Bloomfield*.

[356] David Aers, *Chaucer, Langland and the Creative Imagination* (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1980, see chs 1 and 2, esp. pp.37, 42, 61.

interpretation of the poet's critique of the vices of the contemporary Church and the

breakdown of the moral order. Assigning to Langland a radical, anti-institutional

ideology here also attributes to him a deep pessimism about the possibility of

resolution in the poet's lifetime or even in this world.[357] Aers rightly joins others,

notably Robert Adams and Richard K. Emerson, in rejecting the desire of some critics

– most recently Kathryn Kerby-Fulton – to associate *Piers Plowman* with a form of

apocalyptic meliorism, or world-bettering theology, that leads them to connect him

with more or less unorthodox, utopian, currents in apocalyptic thought.[358] However,

this reading will counter both his early analysis of the final *passus* as the 'desperate'

outcome of the contradictions he analyses and, in his later work, as the apotheosis of

the Church's self-negation.[359]

I wish to counter readings, which, Middleton excepted, argue for a poem that

either pessimistically comprehends or, only partially at its poet's will, reveals

irresoluble crisis to contest instead that Langland's *Piers Plowman* is a consciously

crafted poem of crisis, espousing an apocalyptic spirituality of fearful, yet hopeful

urgency as the tonic he applies to himself and his age. The broadly apocalyptic setting

of Langland's allegorical satire emphasises the unveiling of self and society in the

light of judgement, arousing a fear that is at once personal and collective, but also one

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[357] Aers, *Beyond Reformation: An Essay on William Langland's Piers Plowman and the End of Constantinian Christianity* (Notre Dame, ID: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), esp. pp.151–72; see also Aers, 'Piers Plowman: Poverty, Work and Community' in *Community, Gender and Indidividual Identity* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.66.

[358] Emmerson, 'Or Yernen to Rede Redels?'; Robert Adams, 'Learned and Popular Eschatology; Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism*.

[359] Aers, *Creative Imagination*, ch.3, see p. 67; *Beyond Reformation*, pp.145–72.

which hopes to draw dynamic reform, interior and exterior, out of crisis. Langland's poem contains the paradox of medieval experience in the *medium aevum*, after the first and before the second coming of Christ. This is both a time of fear and already the time of fear's expulsion, one in which redemption has been achieved but 'we are still not saved' (Jeremiah 8.20), and yet where judgement and salvation are promised within the duration and process of time itself. This spirituality understands human experience as lived out in Augustine's 'sixth age' of the existence of God's people, a time that is ever more the last, running from first to second Advent.[360]

But this is not equivalent to the kinds of prophetic calculation and chiliastic expectation which Langland tends to parody, except insofar as he draws on their strong sense of *exspectatio* and passionate attention to reading the signs of the times. Rather, the apocalyptic spirituality of Langland's *Piers Plowman* embraces, and embodies for its reader, a positive state of fear as an intensified sense of the present significance of human experience, thought and action. This is very much like Giorgio Agamben's idea, in his reading of the Pauline corpus, of 'messianic time' as opposed to eschatological time: not the 'end of time' but the 'time of the end'.[361] The space of Langland's poem delineates a time in which redemption and penitence are made possible. Hence, in the C-version he describes a hope for his poem as the penitential coextension of his life: 'that all tymes of my tyme to profit shall turn' (C.VI.92–101).

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[360] See Augustine, *Letter 199 to Hesychius* in *Letters 156-210*, ed. by Roland J. Teske, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21ˢᵗ Century* (New York: New City Press, 2004), pp.327–54 (p.339).
[361] Giorgio Agamben, 'The Time that Is Left', *Epoché,* 7.1 (2002), 1–14; *The Time that Remains: a Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. by Patricia Dailey (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), pp.62–78.

Whilst Langland indeed embodies the causes and effects of this crisis in the person of

his dreamer, he nonetheless crafts a poem that is deliberately and indeed hopefully

therapeutic: articulating his own version of the positive and continuous role of fear. I

align myself with more optimistic readings of Langland's purpose: on the one hand

the early readings of J.S. Wittig and Clemente Davlin, which develop its orthodox

account of the possibility of a deeply experiential perfection rather than knowledge

absorption;[362] and, more recently, some of Anne Middleton's work alongside that of

Nicolette Zeeman, James Simpson, and Emily Steiner, which recognises crisis and

dialectical tension in the poem as the model of an ongoing Christian work of

necessarily unfulfilled desire and knowledge; cycles of repentance and reform; rather

than prematurely anticipating a finally eschatological and collectively realised

perfection of *ratio* and will.[363]

Hence Langland's poem constitutes further evidence in the argument of this

thesis that Middle English texts, and even especially those associated with an

'optimistic' incarnational vernacular theology, articulate a positive view of devotional

fear. This sense of urgent intimacy is the antidote to the various forms of nihilism and

subsumation to intermediate ends of this-worldly reward that sever humanity from its

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[362] Joseph S. Wittig, 'Piers Plowman Passus IX–XII: Elements in the Design of the Inward Journey' *Traditio* 28 (1972), 211–80; Clemente Davlin, 'Kynde Knowyng as a Major Theme in *Piers Plowman* B', *Review of English Studies*, 22 (1971), 1–19.
[363] Simpson, *Introduction to the B-Text,* see pp. 248–51; Nicolette Zeeman, *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Middleton, 'Audience and Public', see pp.115–16; Emily Steiner, *Reading Piers Plowman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Steiner emphasises the intellectual exploratory qualities of Langland's mode, finding its call for reform within orthodoxy authentic and finding the final passus more irresolute and comic than desperate or revolutionary, see pp.223–28.

true ends. *Drede* is understood as a state of emphatic, tensive and dynamic awareness of God and self, part of a presentation of judgement as fear and hope in Christ that never precludes mercy. *Drede* holds out a cure both to false comfort and the threat of despair. Langland appropriates the paradoxical heart of medieval Christianity and presents a new, richly multi-layered, phenomenological and theological account of fear.

C. Fear in the Poem

Langland's treatment of fear has overlapping epistemological, penitential, and metaphysical dimensions. This chapter will begin with an exploration of the portentous, ambiguously satirical and apocalyptic scenes which open the poem, setting up a state of *drede* about individual and collective salvation that runs through the whole. Langland here already delineates two states of negative and positive 'fearlessness', the former associated with *acedia* and a moral anarchism oscillating between presumption and despair; the latter with a radical openness to grace, divine direction and the possibility of mercy. The poet then turns from this opening to depict a complex and imperfectly sequential process of transformation and conversion for the poet-dreamer, in which right fear features as mode and content of Will's learning to love.

The quest-form of the poem involves goals of personal and collective perfection: the search for the personified Dowel, Dobet, Dobest, the search for a 'fynding' for the Friars and a justification for the poet's own vocation, and finally the

search for 'Piers' whose human and Christic identity is the mysterious key to the whole. Penitentially speaking, fear is a therapy for the poet-dreamer's own tendency towards *acedia* and apathy. In Will's intimidating encounters with embodiments of authority such as Holy Church and Dame Study, the affective experience of fear powerfully marks the successive encounters that make up the poem's pilgrimage. A blindsiding structure of rebuke, disruption and supersession associated with the awe and threat of their *personae* keeps both dreamer and reader in a state of amazement and bemusement.

However, the poem increasingly unveils Will's supposedly 'ethical' quest to have a 'metaphysical' solution, in the prevenient actions of Christ in salvation history and their participation. Woven into Langland's intensely christological poem is its revelation of the radical transcendence of fear as effected by Christ in the passion and to be fulfilled in his second coming, the fulfilment and resolution of divine justice and mercy. In the figure of Piers Plowman, uniquely poised between ideal and divine humanity, Langland explores simultaneously the metaphysical reality of Christ's incarnation and action and its ethical and moral consequence.

I explore these themes through fresh readings of the Prologue, the Pardon sequence of Passus VII, the Crucifixion vision of Passus XVIII to XIX and the final apocalyptic sequence. Across these episodes Langland is exploring fear in terms of the continued relation of justice and mercy and the nature of the passage from the Old to the New Covenant, from law to grace, from fear to love. In the Harrowing as a radical re-imagining of Judgement, the possibility of fear's banishment comes precisely through Christ's identification with fear and suffering. This involves Will's

closest identification with Piers, and his most powerful moment of *metanoia*. I argue that its resolution points towards the inclusion and assumption of fear into redemptive purpose, as Langland unveils the 'riddle' of Piers' role and nature, which both anticipates and demonstrates the participative consequence of Christ's actions.

However, the close of the poem is a reassertion of the present role of fear and the *kairos*, the meaningful temporality, of the apocalyptic moment, with an intensified scene of apocalyptic crisis for the contemporary Church. This is the affirmation and culmination of Langland's radically orthodox apocalyptic spirituality. In B Passus XX the negative forces of penitential inattention and recklessness are ever more definitely unveiled in a final battle that pits them against proper *drede*. This remains a passus of fear and hope, as Langland espouses an Augustinian apocalypticism whereby world-worsening and world-bettering are bound up in one another, rather than an alternative version of Augustinianism that is understood to be necessarily pessimistic or opposed to reform.[364] And, although the poem leaves its narrative any many questions open, I argue it does stage a final moment of proper *drede* for Will, suggestive of the therapeutic value of the poem as a whole.

D. A NOTE ON THE B-TEXT

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[364] See pp.294–302 below.

This exploration of fear in *Piers Plowman* is based on the B-text of the poem,

drawing on A and C versions as casting supplementary light on B.[365] Some recent

scholars have chosen to give precedence to the later C-version, out of respect for what

they consider to be Langland's 'final' text.[366] However, the B-text is a finished poem

which also boasts a widespread existence in manuscript form, a circulation which may

be a testimony to the poet's at least temporary willingness to view this as a full

expression of the work. The later C-version did not 'take over' from B in the

fourteenth- and fifteenth-century public sphere; rather all appear to have circulated

simultaneously and even been subject to scribal recombination: the very latest

versions are in fact copies of the shorter A-version.[367] I concur with Emily Steiner in

the view that B offers the most 'formally and intellectually experimental' version of

the poem overall.[368] Although it is in many ways newly adventurous, C also shows a

tendency, frequent enough to affect a reading of the poem, to clarify and pin down

aspects of Langland's allegorical expression. The B-version, the first of the longer

versions, not only expresses a full and discrete instance of the poet's reflections on his

role and place in his own times; it is also marked by difficult, ambiguous moments of

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[365] I will be using Schmidt's Everyman edition of the B-Text as the most readily
accessible form of the poem alongside occasional reference to his parallel-text; see
The Vision of Piers Plowman, ed. by A.V. C. Schmidt (London: Dent, 1995) and
Piers Plowman: A Parallel-Text Edition of the A, B, C, and Z versions (Kalamazoo:
Medieval Institute Publications, 2008); C-Text references will be to *Piers Plowman: a
new annotated version of the C-Text,* ed. by Derek Pearsall (Liverpool: Liverpool
University Press, 2008); other editions as cited.
[366] For example, Derek Pearsall, Andrew Cole, Anne Middleton, Ralph Hanna and
David Aers.
[367] Ed. by Schmidt, *Parallel-Text*, pp.2–3.
[368] Emily Steiner, *Documentary Culture and the Making of English Medieval
Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.2.

crisis such as the tearing of the Pardon, a scene that plays a key role in my argument about the role of fear in this version of the poem. It will be clear, then, that a focus on fear shapes my interest in the B Text, the more crisis-ridden and difficult form of *Piers Plowman*.

However, C represents an authorial re-reading of the poem that can contribute to delineating points in B, especially the C-account of Rechelessnesse, which illuminates and expands Langland's subtle account of the role of a positive fearlessness in B. Finally, the very fact of the poem's existence in multiple versions affirms my account of the poem as an evolving confessional and penitential-devotional undertaking, whose dynamism and mutability is a consequence of Langland's view of its relevance for, and potential therapeutic impact on, the reformation of self and society.

II.   THE PROLOGUE AND APOCALYPTIC FEAR

To follow the poet-dreamer, Will, Langland's *alter ego*, from the Prologue through the poem's initial *passūs* is to pursue a journey from reckless fearlessness into fear. His intitial May-time, carefree persona is undermined by a gradual unveiling of himself, his setting and his dream as portents of ultimate judgement. The Passus I encounter with Holy Church involves fear and initial penitential humility in the first steps in the process of the poet-dreamer's epistemic and spiritual quest.

The dreamer-poet of *Piers* enters the poem in far from fearful mood. The Prologue evokes the temperate clime of early summer, a May morning, time and

season associated with carefree youth and its undirected desire for love.[369] His casual

donning of 'shroudes' suggests a gaming, pastoral disguise (B.Prol.2), and his

impulse to wander, with its avowedly vague intent, 'wondres to here' (B.Prol.4)

dissociates his strolling from any fixed goal, obligation or anxiety. It also signals

receptivity to the unexpected and marvellous, including true vision, though this is

somewhat belied by its casual expression and association with the ambiguous stuff of

romance 'a ferly, of Fairye me thoghte' (B.Prol.6). This language is redolent with

errance of chivalric romance – with its openness to providential hazard – or mystical-

eremitical (perhaps Richard Rolle's) gyrovagrancy in improvised habit,[370] but at the

same time his casual costuming is antithetical to either the solemnity of a knight's

arming or the assumption of a religious habit. The dreamy youth is so far from fear

that he can easily, unreflectively fall into sleep. Put together, these characteristics also

evoke a tradition of entertaining literary fiction and its audience, possibly offering an

uneasy mirror for the actual reader or listener of the poem.

However, this carefree carapace belies a subtext replete with fears for the wary

reader, some inherent in the dreamer-poet's very fearlessness itself. The 'softe' season

of love also suggests the pull of undirected erotic desire. Summer, in similar

prologues featuring pastoral wanderers, can imply the approaching harvest season and

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[369] See Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*, l.49, ed. by.
Armand Strubel (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1992), p.44.

[370] Nicolette Zeeman, 'Tales of Piers and Perceval: *Piers Plowman and the Grail
Romances*', *YLS*, 22 (2008), 199–236, suggests the relationship between the
uncertainty of chivalric *aventure* and *errance* and the structure of Piers. On the
relationship to Rolle, see Ralph Hanna III, 'Will's Work' in *Written Work: Langland,
Labor and Authorship*, ed. by Steven Justice and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Philadelphia:
Univeristy of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), pp.23–56 (pp.28–51).

hence coming judgement.[371] Other poems in the Midlands alliterative tradition pair such a *chanson d'aventure* opening with socioreligious satire, hints of a judgement or apocalyptic setting and unstable, even potentially criminal, narrator-poets.[372]

The dreamer-poet's self-description also suggests a figure whose reliability is in doubt, and who may even himself be an apocalyptic sign of the times. His dressing 'as an heremifte unholy of werkes' (B.Prol.3), the false assumption of religious garb, is associated with characters who embody guile and hypocrisy. In the fourteenth-century the image of the false apostle was deeply interwoven with contemporary anticlericalism, and behind this the apocalyptic antifraternalism that involved identifying the friars as the Gospel's *pseudoprophetae* and forerunners of Antichrist, which appeared in the writings of William of St-Amour, Rutebeuf and the *Roman de*

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[371] For example, *De die iudicii* (late 600s/early 700s), ed. by J. Fraipont in *Opera rhythmica*, CCSL 122, IV (Turnhout: Brepols, 1955), pp.439–44 ; *Judgement Day II* (c.950) ed. by Graham Caie (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000); *Ecloga Theoduli* (10th century, later medieval schoolroom text), ed. by R.P.H. Green (Reading, Berkshire: Department of Classics, University of Reading, 1980); a comical contrast is *Apocalypsis Goliae* (1100s), ed. by Karl Strecker (Rome: W. Regenberg, 1928); finally *Somer Soneday* (1300s), ed. by Thorlac Turville-Petre in *Alliterative Poetry of the later Middle Ages: an anthology* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), pp.140–47.

[372] For example, *Somer Soneday*, *Wynnere and Wastoure* and *Parlement of the Thre Ages*. On the alliterative tradition see Hanna, 'Will's Work', pp.46–52. *Wynnere and Wastoure* is set within a frame of imminent apocalypse including emphases common to both: the cooling of charity, significantly the rise of falsehood and deceit (ll.5–6), and acccusations against false entertainers and poetic making. The frame of battle also recalls a Last Judgement and apocalyptic tournament fields such as in Huon de Meriz' *Li Tournoimenz Antecrist*. In all of these poems the carefree-yet-unstable narrator, and in *Parlement of the Thre Ages* a poacher, who, like Will, goes in disguise, encounters chilling sights which assist in bringing him to a sense of an ending. *Somer Soneday*'s with an encounter with inconstant Fortune and her wheel; *Parlement of the Thre Ages* figures of age and death and final hunting horn blowing a last trump (l.656 p.62).

la Rose.[373] Will, describing himself both in the hermit's short woollens and clerical

'long clothes', associates himself with both the pseudo-apostolic and the pseudo-

eremitic.[374] The line 'in shroudes as I a shep were' also seeds an ambiguity as to

whether he is sheep or shepherd, in one sense appropriate for a figure whose identity

lies uncertainly between the professed and the unprofessed.[375] This comparison

however also evokes both the 'lambs' Christ calls his disciples to be and the very

commonplace satirical trope of the wolf in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7.15). The

ambiguity here also suggests, with sinister effect, a shepherd so bad as to be

rapacious, wearing the skin of his slaughtered sheep.[376] Langland presents his poetic

alter ego as an unstable, potentially pseudo-eremitic, pseudo-prophetic and hence

[373] See William of St-Amour, *De periculis novissimorum temporum*, ed. by G. Geltner (Paris; Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2008); *Roman de la Rose*, ll.11010–984 (pp.588–640); Rutebeuf 'Leçon sur Hypocrisie et Humilité' ll.223–238, pp.276–78. See Wendy Scase, *Piers Plowman and the New Anticlericalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; Richard K. Emmerson and Ronald J. Herzman, 'The Apocalyptic Age of Hypocrisy: Faus Semblant and Amant in the Roman de la Rose', *Speculum*, 62 (1987), 612–34.

[374] See Matthew 7.15 on pseudoprophets who appear as lambs but are wolves, Luke 20.14-21.4 'Attendite a scribis qui volunt ambulare in stolis' (scribes who like to walk around in long robes).

[375] This point is argued back and forth in commentaries and criticism, the assumption by most being that it has to be either one or the other. See *Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. by Walter W. Skeat, 2 vols (London: N. Trübner, 1867–85), II, p.2; *Piers Plowman*, ed. by Elisabeth Salter and Derek Pearsall (London: Edward Arnold, 1967), p.61; *The Prologue and Passus I-VI of the B-Text*, ed. by J.A.W. Bennett, p.80; ed. Schmidt, *Parallel-Text*, p.305; *Piers Plowman*, ed. by Derek Pearsall (London: Edward Arnold, 1978), p.27; Dee Dyas, 'A Pilgrim in Sheep's Clothing? The Nature of Wandering in *Piers Plowman*' *ELN*, 39.4 (2002), 1–12. The sheepskin also anticipates the pilgrimage Will is unknowingly commencing on to discover the garb of the lamb: that, as Christ clothed himself in humanity, humanity can clothe itself in divinity. See Julia Bolton Holloway, *The Pilgrim and the Book: a study of Dante, Langland and Chaucer* (New York: P. Lang, 1987), pp.4, 90, 107.

[376] See Ezekiel 34.3; *Apocalypsis Goliae*, ll.33–34, p.22;

even 'antichristic' narrator whose fearless irregularity is itself a fearful portent.

Beneath the blithe exterior of Will's fearlessness deep reasons for which fear might be

personally salutary and collectively immediate, are protruding for the reader already

to grasp.

The contemporary apocalyptic-satirical poem, the *Simonie*, overtly bemoans

an incapacity to experience salutary fear, when, in the face of contemporary

agricultural disaster and dearth 'and yit unnethe any man dredeth God the moore'

(l.420); 'Ac so is al this world ablent, that no man douteth sinne' (l.473).[377] In *Piers*

Plowman the exploration of this dangerous absence of fear is achieved through a

satirical narrative of crisis juxtaposed with the penitential identification of dreamer-

poet with precisely the circumstances of that unrecognized crisis. This dual strategy of

at once satirising and self-identifying with rife hypocrisy places him in the tradition of

figures such as Jean de Meun's *Faux Semblant* and Rutebeuf's *Hypocrisie*,[378] whose

'false' identities testify a self-awareness of the instability or even dubiety of speaking

poetic or moral truth which, at the same time, in its acknowledgement of personal

limitation, may break through to a new 'truth' of the fallen condition. The truest-

speaking man is the one who can most fully see that he is a hypocrite, just as in the

end the most hopeful man may be the one who fears himself.

Will's dream provides material to awake him to fear: a conspectus of

humanity as he knows it, wandering from their various callings and the virtues, their

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[377] *The Simonie* in *Medieval English Political Writings*, ed. by James M. Dean
(Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), pp.193–212 (pp.208, 210).
[378] See n.333 above.

misbehaviour accumulating to an apocalyptic pinnacle: 'the mooste mescheif on molde is mountynge up fast' (B.Prol.67) The setting of the first vision is also already sharply reminiscent of a fearful landscape of judgement: present mixity and mobility is set starkly against two static features, tower and prison. The effect deliberately mirrors the parish church 'doom' painting, a piece of ecclesiastical scenery painted across the chancel arches or on board behind the roods of innumerable medieval churches in England from at least 1100. Christ sits in judgement at the apex of the arch whilst at the north higher and south lower positions respectively, appears heaven as a turreted city and hell as a black pit or maw.[379] This is remarkably similar to the 'tour on a toft' and the 'deep dale' and 'dongeon' described in *Piers* (B.Prol.14–15), which in C become more explicitly the dwellings of Truth and Wrong or Death.[380] On such a proscenium arch sinners and saved, angels and demons, were aligned on either side, but would also from any point within the body of the nave effectively frame the mingled congregation below. Before the advent of regimented kneeling or sitting, the standing crowd of bodies – who might also be engaged in more secular activities – becomes a part of the judgement scene, as do the figures who make up Langland's 'felde of folke'. Characteristically, Langland's visionary mysticism maps onto mundane lived experience and includes a cross-over with liturgical experience in the parish church, which in Passus XVIII and XIX he will explicitly inhabit as a space of

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[379] For example, St. Andrew's, Chesterton, Cambridge; St. John the Evangelist, Corby Glen, Lincolnshire (the nave also features paintings of true and false shepherds, misidentified as simple Nativity shepherds); St. James the Great, South Leigh, Oxfordshire.

[380] This parallel is also suggested by C. David Benson, *Public Piers Plowman* (University Park, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press), p.175.

vision. The dreamer-poet's carefree search for 'wondre' and 'ferly' is answered with this fearful view of contemporary society against the revealed and ever-present backdrop of judgement ultimacy.

Staging Will's personal ambiguity against the backdrop of judgement germinates the seeds of anxiety in the Prologue. The 'folke' include many of false or uncertain vocation who have particular (and punning) physical characteristics that will be increasingly associated with the poet across the poem: 'gret lobbies and longe that lothe were to swynke/ Clothed hem in copes to ben knowen from othere/ And shopen hem heremytes hire ese to have' (B.Prol.55–57).[381] With this indictment of the failure to work, the dreamer-poet's gazing into the waters now calls to mind self-love, sleep and sloth; the lack of care with which he dons clothes proper to a vowed vocation similarly suggests a careless attitude towards calling and labour. We have cause to fear *for* the dreamer, in his lack of fear, as well as to fear him as a portent of the apocalypse, the gathering malign forces of which he may already have, wittingly or unwittingly, aligned himself with. In the dramatic shift of tone and with the multiple figures with whom the reader or hearer might identify, there is much opportunity to become uneasy as to our own motivation. As Andrew Galloway puts it:

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[381] B.VII.70, B.XV.152, C.V.24; for instances of authorial signature (amongst which this scene is surprisingly not included) and the poet-dreamer's characteristic physical shape, see Anne Middleton 'William Langland's 'Kynde Name': Authorial Signature and Social Identity in Late Fourteenth-Century England' in *Literary Practise and Social Change in Britain*, 1380–1530, ed. by Lee Patterson (Berkeley; Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), pp.15–82 (31, 56, 80–2).

From its first dozen lines, whose strategy is to suggest both a narrator's and a reader's shared wonder, shock, or unexpected broadening of social, intellectual and historical vision, through its last words ... the poem presents a mode of journeying that continually threatens to disrupt and demolish familiar settings and structures for the reader and narrator, as rapidly as it deftly invokes them.[382]

III.   LEARNING TO FEAR: PASSUS I-V

Will's reiterated encounters with prosopopaeic authority figures frequently take place under the banner of fear. This *drede* corresponds as antidote to the 'signal sin' Bowers associates with Will, that of *acedia* or sloth.[383] As we saw in Chapter Three, medieval theorization of *acedia* associated it with both fearing too much *and* fearing too little, an entwined pairing of excessive nonchalance and despair explored over the whole of *Piers Plowman*: in the personification Sleuthe, Haukyn, C's Rechelesnesse and in Will himself.

Will's initial encounter with Holy Church models the stimulus a positive wonder and fear might have – in a way that is, however, not regained until much later in the poem. The figure of *ecclesia* inspires considerable fear and moves Will to pleading supplication (B.I.10–11, B.II.2). This terror felt before the bride of Christ is

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[382] Andrew Galloway, *Penn Commentary on Piers Plowman. Volume 1: C Prologue–Passus 4; B Prologue–Passus 4; A Prologue–Passus 4* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), I, p.16.
[383] Bowers, pp.61−77.

commingled with, and plays paradoxically against, a recognition of her beauty: 'I was

afered of hir face, *theigh* she fair were' (B.I.10). This combination of attraction and

dread recalls a whole tradition of encounter with goddesses and allegorized

abstractions, both classical and medieval, in which overwhelming beauty induces a

kind of fear.[384] However, Will's response emphasises the opposition of the two with

the conjunction *theigh*, indicating that he is afraid *in spite of* her beauty. The internal

and initial rhyme of 'fair' and 'afered' at once underlines the antithesis and, in the

word 'fair' suggests at once Holi Church's benignity and her moral dimensions of

justice.[385] Intimations of judgement and mercy mingle in her fearful fairness, to be

unpacked as the poem continues.[386]

The fear Holy Church inspires at once provokes penitence and inaugurates

inquiry. Will's responses, both in action and word, suggest repentance, even if they

may lack deep, experiential knowledge of what requisite contrition and penitence will

mean. He asks for Holy Church's 'mercy' repeatedly (B.I.11, B.II.2) and falls to his

knees, assuming the posture of a penitent (B.II.3). Fear's initial stimulus to humility

and penitence is, as we have seen, a commonplace. However, Will's penitential

exclamation is accompanied by the first of what will prove to be his relentless, urgent,

and sometimes sceptical questions: 'Mercy, madame, What may this be to meene?'

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[384] See, for example, the ferocity of Lady Philosophy and Boethius' awe and
amazement, 'obstupui', in Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, in *The Theological
Tractates*; *The Consolation of Philosophy*, ed. by H.F. Stewart, E.K. Rand and S.J.
Chester (London: Heinemann, 1973), pp.130–435 (pp.132–34). See also Steiner,
Introduction, pp.24–25.
[385] *MED*, 'fair (adj.)'.
[386] Compare Dante's reaction to Beatrice and her 'pietade acerba', Dante, *Purgatorio*,
30.32–84, ed. and trans. by Robin Kirkpatrick (London: Penguin, 2007), pp.282–85.

(B.I.11). This combination of attraction and repulsion, of shrinking desire and forward-pushing discovery, recalls a particular emotional response that Aquinas terms *admiratio.*

Admiratio, in Aquinas' thought, is an amazement that can be positive or negative, an affective response to something beyond the scope of perception and intellection, an initial judgement of incomprehensibility, immensity or rarity that inaugurates the desire to learn, and moreover includes and involves learning already in the recognition of disjuncture.[387] When the object of this response is bad in itself, this response is a sub-species of fear, but remains inaugural to wisdom and inquiry, and even a source of delight.[388] Aquinas discusses *admiratio* as a cause of pleasure in *ST*, I.II.32 and as a sub-type of fear in *ST*, I.II.41. In I.II.32 he synthesizes the scriptural truth of fear's place at the beginning of wisdom with the Aristotelian role for wonder as at the outset of philosophy, via a calque of Proverbs 9.10 (Psalm 111.10): 'admiration principium sapientiae' (*ST* I.II.32, ad.8) that implicitly analogises *timor domini* with *admiratio*.[389] This balances Aquinas' continued emphasis on the elevation of *ratio* (reason) as a way to God, as part of his acknowledgement of the complex collaboration of affect, intellect and volition in spiritual life. Aquinas argues for *admiratio*'s high status despite its potential implications of ignorance, or incomplete knowledge. Awe-struck wonder is not just incipient knowledge but rather bears the additional meta-knowledge and meta-delight of being able to perceive the

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[387] 'Admiratio […] est delectabilis inquantum habit desiderium addiscendi causam, et inquantum admirans aliquid novum addiscit', *ST*, I.II.32.8, *ad* 1.

[388] *ST*, I.II.41. 4, *ad* 4.

[389] *ST*, I.II.31.8.

saturated, excessive nature of its object, in the enhancing light of the possibility of its absence. Even when the object of *admiratio* is not pleasurable Aquinas suggests it might open out onto deeper enjoyment, emphasising, as Langland will later, the co-implication of *wele* and *wo* and the logic of contraries: fearful wonder, or *admiratio*, brings greater joy: 'it is more delightful to be delivered from great danger, because it is something wonderful'.[390] Aquinas' exploration of *admiratio* demonstrates an understanding of the epistemological value of fear; its role in acquiring a deeply-rooted, cognitive-affective truth. In theorizing an innate value to the incipient nature of this amazement, Aquinas explores the value of the incomplete and the questing. Hence the example of Aquinas' reflections demonstrates that, seen from the perspective of scholastic philosophical theology, Will's amazement in the face of his encounters and visions can be seen as a fearful step towards wisdom.

In the Prologue Will had appeared closer to *curiositas* than *admiratio*, evincing a deeply placid pleasure at the 'murye' current of the stream's mirror-surface. However, the vision of the liminal space of the *felde* with its implacable *teloi*, and its parallel in the dual aspect, terrible and beautiful, of Holy Church herself, prompt the fearful amazement that is an immediate spur to inquiry and hence the pilgrimage to Truth. In Will's vision of the *felde*, flaws and sins unthinkingly embedded in his behaviour and that of those around him are suddenly yet perplexingly revealed. His initial response is indeed to find it incomprehensibly other, and in some respects terrifying. Even Will's meta-knowledge of lack is a fresh asset

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[390] *ST*, I.II.32.4, *resp*; *Piers Plowman* B.XVIII.410-14.

as he shifts from complacency and even narcissism to a radical new vision that plummets him into a state of questing ignorance that simultaneously announces fresh insight. Holy Church disseminates both fear and hope – for she also promises 'To conforten the carefulle acombred with synne' (B.I.203). To be 'carefulle', or frightened, is however associated with deeper self-knowledge than the complacent and careless self-fashioning that was suggested by the opening images of the prologue, as Will slung on a habit without thought as to the associated rule of life and its consequent obligations. Will was in a fearless state, but also an ignorant state: his entry into fear and quest for the 'Tour of Truthe' seem to accompany each other, in line with Aquinas' developments of Aristotle's thought on the subject.[391]

However, at the same time, even Will's initial and incomplete self-regard in the mirror of the stream triggered the poet-dreamer's deeper and growing self-knowledge and penitential action. Will is aroused from the doze of moral apathy through the very sleep that is its outward sign, within a dream that awakens his conscience, just as his lightly donned habit has the capacity to become fully embedded *habitus*. This paradox speaks of Langland's deeply 'kynde' theology whereby the very circumstances of sin become those of salvation, and a prevenient grace is constantly operating. It also suggests an ongoing role for a certain form of spiritual 'recklessness' as an openness to divine gift and purpose, with which the poet's emphasis on curative *drede* is in frequent dialectic.[392]

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[391] Andsee Plato, *Phaedrus* 251b, 254c, ed. by Cooper, pp.528, 531.

[392] Especially in the transmutation of Recklessness from B.X.34–36 to the extensive portrayal in C.XI.193–XIII.133, where the personification gravitates towards representing and articulating a positive sense of fearlessness as a lack of solicitude.

IV.   FEAR AND THE TEARING OF THE PARDON

Every critic to read *Piers Plowman* has recognised in the Pardon sequence a pivotal importance that nonetheless hinges on an enigmatic difficulty. Baldly speaking, critics have differed on whether Piers' radical response to the documentary form of the Pardon obtained by or through Truth, which in the A and B versions includes its physical tearing, is an 'acceptance' or a 'rejection'—and if so of what—or, as shall be argued here, in some sense both. Readers have differed on where Piers' emotion is directed (towards priest or Pardon, 'true' or 'false', the expected or the actual sense of the Pardon) and in what the emotion of 'pure tene' consists.[393]

and openness to divine gift and grace associated with spiritual poverty and with the best aspirations of mendicant spirituality. See Lawrence M. Clopper, *Songes of Rechelesnesse: Langland and the Franciscans* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997), p.225.

[393] The literature on the Pardon is huge. Briefly stated in terms of significant contributions: R.W. Chambers, 'Long Will, Dante and the Righteous Heathen', *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association*, 9 (1923), 50–69 (pp.50–53) and 'Inconsistencies between the A- and B-Text of Piers Plowman', *London Medieval Studies* 1 (1937-9), 29–37; Nevill Coghill, 'The Character of Piers Plowman as considered from the B-Text', *Medium Aevum* 2 (1933), 108–35 (pp.117–18*)* and 'The Pardon of Piers Plowman', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 30 (1944), 303–57; John Lawlor, 'Piers Plowman: The Pardon Reconsidered' *MLR*, 45.4 (1950), 449–58; Robert W. Frank, 'The Pardon Scene in Piers Plowman' *Speculum* 26.2 (1951), 317–31 and *Piers Plowman and the Scheme of Salvation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), pp.25–29; Burrow, 'The Action of Langland's Second Vision'; Rosemary Woolf, 'The Tearing of the Pardon' in *Piers Plowman: Critical Approaches*, ed. by S. S. Hussey (London: Methuen, 1969), pp.50–75; Elizabeth Kirk, *The Dream Thought of Piers Plowman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), pp.71–101; Mary Carruthers [Schroeder], 'The Tearing of the Pardon' *Philological Quarterly* 49 (1970), 8–18 and *The Search for St Truth* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp.69–77; Aers, *Piers Plowman and Christian Allegory*, pp.121–31; Denise Baker, 'From Plowing to Penitence: Piers Plowman and

Yet even otherwise contrary positions have consistently acknowledged that this paradoxical pivot, which closes the *visio* of the field and pilgrimage and opens the *vita*, or search for Dowel, refers to some kind of 'supersession'. Piers' paradoxical *volte face* has been read as representing, participating or modelling a range of transitions on the larger plane of Christian epistemology, experience and history: from material to spiritual—away from the marketed indulgence of the Church to, on the one hand, a pardon earned by works;[394] and, on the other, the grace of sufficient forgiveness in the atonement that underpins it;[395] from the active to the contemplative life;[396] from the Old to the New Covenant, from law to grace;[397] from the pre-Christian to the Age of the Church;[398] from a 'Pelagian' or 'semi-Pelagian' reliance on works to the 'Augustinian' operation and cooperation with grace;[399] and the

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Fourteenth-Century Theology, *Speculum* 45.4 (1980), 715–25; Robert Adams, 'Piers' Pardon and Langland's Semi-Pelagianism', *Traditio* 39 (1983), 367–418; James Simpson, *Piers Plowman: An Introduction to the B-Text* (New York: Longman, 1990), pp.76–80; Alastair Minnis, 'Piers' Protean Pardon' in *Translations of Authority in Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), ch.3, pp.68–89; Steiner, pp.137–38; Zeeman, *Discourse of Desire*, pp.14–17.

[394] A dominant position since R.W. Chambers; developed as a sufficient reading by Frank; recurrent in every critic following; see Burrow, Carruthers, Simpson and Susan McLeod, 'The Tearing of the Pardon in *Piers Plowman*', *Philological Quarterly*, 56.1 (1977), 14–26. Minnis, pp.88–89 suggests the 'anti-indulgence' reading may have gained dominance through the continued influence of Protestant re-appropriation of Langland.

[395] Coghill, 'The Character of Piers', p.117; 'The Pardon', pp.318–19.

[396] Chambers, p.120; Coghill, 'The Pardon', p.322; Lawlor, p.454; E. Talbot Donaldson, *Piers Plowman: The C-Text and its Poet* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), pp.161–68.

[397] Carruthers, 'Tearing of the Pardon'; Lawlor, pp.456–58; Kirk, pp.88–101.

[398] Katherine B. Trower, 'Temporal Tensions in the *Visio* of Piers Plowman', *Mediaeval Studies*, 35 (1973), 388–408.

[399] Baker, 'From Plowing to Penitence'.

reverse.[400] I join my voice to those who assert the paradox of a double and contrary

motion of acceptance and rejection in Piers' response to the Pardon, in which

judgement justice is the gateway to atonement mercy, and the law is superseded as

well as fulfilled through the law.[401] I concur with Rosemary Woolf that the scene is a

'literary image of redemption'.[402] Christ's willing self-offering is an acceptance (of

death, of sin, of fear, of justice) in which overturning, and so rejection, is implicit.

Piers' passion and action, from a poetic standpoint, do adumbrate and anticipate the

later depiction of Christ's banishment of fear in the Crucifixion and Harrowing. At

the same time, Piers is here a human person, even if one who, as he enters into

'Dowel, Dobet, Dobest' must, in so doing, model the saving actions of his Redeemer

because he participates in them. The scene retains a tropological and anagogical

significance inseparable from its Christological allegorical one: this is a literary image

of participation in the atonement through the penitential modelling of the shattering,

'foolish', logic of redemption. With Woolf, Elizabeth Kirk and Britten J. Harwood, I

view the Pardon sequence as the depiction of a transformation possible to the human

person: it is 'where divine and human suffering meet'.[403]

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[400] Adams, 'Pier's Pardon'.

[401] A resolution first adumbrated by Rosemary Woolf in reconciling the 'contrary' positions of Lawlor and Coghill. This is suggested in the interpretations of James Simpson, Elizabeth Kirk and Britten Harwood. See also John A. Alford, 'The Design of the Poem' in *A Companion to Piers Plowman*, ed. by Alford (London: University of California Press, 1988), pp.29–65 (p.44) and Steiner, *Documentary Culture*, pp.140–42.

[402] Woolf, 'The Tearing of the Pardon', p.56.

[403] Harwood, p.140.

The short Pardon is a terrifying and shocking interpolation in the poem, disclosing a stark statement of final division, an apocalyptic unveiling of future final judgement that is precisely the opening and closing strategy of the whole poem. In one sense, at the level of theological abstraction, there is nothing to contradict the conditional terms of Pardon described through Truth at the opening of Passus VI in the short documentary Pardon that Piers then unfolds. The initial passage describing the Pardon proffered or commissioned by Truth does not describe an unconditional mercy—grace will accompany works, and it is those who collaborate in action and intention who will earn remittance—

> Alle lybbing laborerers that liven by her hones
>
> *That trewlich taken and trewlich wynnen*
>
> *And lyvven in love and lawe,* for here lower hertis
>
> Hadde the same absolucioun that sent was to Peres
>
> (B.VII.61–64)

However this does not negate the contradistinction between the two.[404] Theological 'knowledge', as the poem has consistently reiterated, cannot be known merely in this flat and abstract way.[405] The shocking disjuncture between the two Pardons points to

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[404] As Carruthers does in her earlier article, 'The Tearing of the Pardon', p.9.

[405] On which tradition of stressing the transition from the 'merely' intellective to the affective-sapiential, see especially Wittig, 'Piers Plowman Passus IX–XII: Elements in the Design of the Inward Journey'; Davlin, 'Kynde Knowyng as a Major Theme'; James Simpson, 'From Reason to Affective Knowledge', *Medium Aevum*, 55.1 (1986), 1–23.

the importance of dialectically transformative experience in the map the poet plots. The first passage restates the potential for redemption held out through the atonement, which Truth's 'purchase of a Pardoun' (B.VII.3) must indeed subtly reference.[406] It is comforting in that it emphasizes the collusion of grace with its ground in the good lives of those pursuing active, largely lay vocations. Whilst this figurative Pardon berates exploitative lawyers and beggars who pretend to indigence, it states its case positively when compared to earlier social visions, emphasizing comfort and envisioning the cohesive and loving community. Its positivity is enhanced by the connotation of legal 'guarantee' and indulgence remission, drawing on the *thesaurus mystica* of redeeming love, that the *pardoun* image implies.[407] Explicit promises are made against terror: the merchants who practice charity are informed that the Archangel Michael will personally attend their deaths, preserving them from fear of the devil; they respond by weeping for joy (B.VII.34–38).[408] The Pardon allots an especially radical, yet orthodox, 'option for the poor' who freely merit absolution by their suffering alone (B.VII.99–105). In C, notably, the conditions of pardon for the episcopal life particularly stress the abandonment of worldly fears, an indication Piers appears to then embrace (C.X.14, 17).

The priest's reaction to the short Pardon text's vision of the economy of mercy itself suggests the need for a restatement of the nature of divine judgement. It is the

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[406] Carruthers, 'Tearing of the Pardon', p.11; Coghill 'The Character of Piers', p.116.
[407] See Minnis, pp.68, 82.
[408] Michael is often seen as a guardian of the human soul, mediating and intercessing between him and judgement at death and Doom. Richard F. Johnson, *The Archangel Michael in Medieval English Legend* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), pp.71–99.

priest's assumption that he is to be presented with a lengthy, paragraphed, Latin

document—of whose interpretation by Piers he is suspicious—that results in his

reading of this metaphorical pardon as a papal plenary pardon.[409] In such a document

he might expect to find the detailing of particular exemptions or relief from

purgatorial punishment granted for money or spiritual deeds. What is found, however,

is in contradistinction, if not contradiction, to both his envisioning of it as a particular

material or historical pardon and also to a complacent picture of the accessibility of

forgiveness.

What Priest and Piers find is the Judgment clause of the Athanasian Creed.

This catapults the poem out of the dense ethical and social picture of the present day

towards the harsh bifurcation of the Day of Doom.

> *Et qui bona egerunt ibunt in vitam eternam*
>
> *Qui vero mala, in ignem eternum*
>
> [Those who have done good things will go into eternal life
>
> Those who have done bad things will go into eternal fire]
>
> (B.VII.110a–b)

These words, taken from Jesus' own description of Final Judgement (Matthew 25.46),

were said weekly at Prime within the creedal narration of salvation history. In this

two-line rendition their bifurcationary import, sheep from goats, becomes even more

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[409] See Frank, pp.317–31.

evident. As John Lawlor says 'its effect is to bring … [human] frailty out of the realm of ambiguity into the steady light of Divine Justice … Its impact is as sharp and terrible as a [double-edged] sword-stroke'.[410] The field of folk is seen, once more, from a radical and judgemental perspective that provides no explicit guarantee for lives of intermingled sin and virtue or lives rebought through later acts of charity. Critics have differed in seeing this 'dowel' as impossible perfection,[411] or, on the contrary, as including a kindly but invisible 'third term' of penitence.[412] Without refuting the idea that, when we view the poem as an organic and transformative whole, the reality of penitential 'dowel' becomes clearer, I would want to stress the immediately contradictory and discontinuous *impact* of the statement: an impact Langland designedly achieves. Lawlor speaks of 'terror'; Woolf of 'intense shock'; Simpson of the 'frightening' effect.[413] The poem moves swiftly from an emphasis on mercy already purchased, to this stark re-exposure to judgement and the implication that, in the narrative course of the poem, the reader has not not yet been fully shown or begun to merit Christ's redemptive participation of humanity's sinful condition. This reflects the painful condition of the *medium aevum* with which Langland is so deeply engaged. The choice of a creedal clause severed from its full context, and so from the narration of the atonement, points to a requisite interpretative participation to reconstitute its terms. This requirement to 'fill in' the text, and indeed to live out its

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[410] Lawlor, p.455; see Woolf, 'Tearing of the Pardon', p.65.
[411] See Coghill, 'The Pardon', p.320 and Baker, p.720.
[412] For the latter position, Traugott Lawler, 'The Pardon Formula in Piers Plowman: Its Ubigiquity, its Binary Shape, its Middle Term', *YLS*, 14 (2000), 117–52.
[413] Lawlor, p.451; Woolf, 'Tearing of the Pardon', p.65, Simpson, *An Introduction,* p.83.

silent middle term—which must, however, remain silent—itself allegorizes one of

Langland's enduring concerns in the difference between a passive, inert and

uncatalysed knowledge and *kynde knowing* that both grasps, and models, the absent

'[Christus] Qui passus est pro salute nostra: descendit ad inferos: tertia dei resurrexit a

mortuis' (Christ who suffered for our salvation: descended to hell; on the third day

was born again from the dead) of the later, absent, clause of the Creed.

The priest's flawed reaction to the *pardoun* is contained both in his 'Peter, I kan

no pardon fynde!' (B.VII.110) and in his 'version' of its Latin. These reactions

indicate why the dialectical move of the short Pardon's fearful shock is necessary.

The priest, finding 'no pardoun', shows himself incapable of relating his version of

the economy of mercy to the divine justice restituted in Christ: so revealing that his

version of this economy lacks any sense of earned *dowell* as well as any sense of

eternal life as a divine gift restored by Christ's self-offering. His vernacular rendition

of the text of the Pardon suggests the limits of his vision of merit:

'Do wel and have wel, and God shal have thi soule,

Do yvel and have yvel, and hope thow noon oother

That after thi deeth day the devel shal have thi soule!'

(B.VII.112–14)

'Thi deeth day' and the traditional deathbed arrival of the devil translate final

collective judgement into individual judgement on the point of death.[414] This

emphasises private consequence of works rather than collective justice and mercy

beyond the frame of personal history in the wisdom of God. Failing to see beyond the

individual deathbed—at which he presides as the giver of the last rites—arguably

reduces mercy and justice to controllable, and indeed marketable, elements under the

remit and judgement of clerical authority. His language for the text adopts a register

of purchase and possession, of 'having', not present in the Latin. Simpson says the

priest looks for a 'comforting document' not the 'frightening truth'.[415] However, the

Priest's expectation would also exile real hope, since he stubbornly refuses

relationship between the possibility of remittance of sin and just consequence, which

Christ did not reject but embodied to achieve the former. The priest blocks off the

possibility of what Traugott Lawler calls the 'third term' of penitence: 'Do yvel and

have yvel and *hope thow noon other*/ That after thi deeth day the devel shal have thi

soule' (B.VII.113–14). His role anticipates that of the friars who, equally, are more

concerned with disseminating immediate reassurance and achieving worldly reward

than administering the more painful, fearful medicine of authentic penance and

absolution.

    'And Piers for pure tene pulled it atweyne' (B.VII.116). Modern translations

have consistently interpreted Piers' 'pure tene' to signify anger.[416] Critical responses

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[414] Bloomfield first remarked the eschatological emphasis on final collective
judgement in the original Latin pardon, pp.115–16.
[415] Simpson, *An Introduction*, p.74.
[416] Translated as 'sheer anger, vexation' in *Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. Schmidt,
p.118; 'wrath' by Donaldson, p.119.

have been more various: from Chambers' 'anger and distress'[417] to Coghill's

'disappointed mortification'[418] and Adams' 'righteous indignation' or 'pique'.[419]

More recently however critics have begun to stress suffering, pain and anguish.[420]

Indeed 'tene' has primary senses of injury and affliction, as illustrated earlier in the

poem (B.VI.135, C XIV.7).[421] It can also specifically refer to the affliction of

hopeless fear, a sense surely to the fore if Piers' is an orthodox reaction to the stark

presentation of judgement.[422] It appears elsewhere in Middle English literature in a

dyad with fear, as a facet of emotional pain and suffering directed penitentially:

'Feare and tene she was in, / Mornyng, sorowyng, euyr in drede, / To opteyne the loue

of Ihesu'.[423] I propose that Piers' *tene* has this suffering, contritional connotation:

contrition being precisely the single 'feeling' in which shame, fear and sorrow

combine, and are yet oriented towards hope.[424]

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[417] Grief united to wrath in the face of the failure of the priest to see the true pardon the text sets out; see Chambers, 'Long Will', pp.52–3.
[418] Coghill, p.117.
[419] Adams, 'Piers Pardon', pp.368–9, 379.
[420] Steiner speaks of 'incredulity and anguish' but towards the priest, not the Pardon, p.138; Margaret Goldsmith notes the ambiguities, also suggesting the possibility of a contrite sorrow, *The Figure of Piers Plowman: the Image on the Coin* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1981), p.43. Zeeman views this 'tene' as a suffering anguish at the circumstances of sin, *Discourse of Desire*, p.16.
[421] *MED* 'tene, n. (2)', 2, 3c and e.
[422] Simpson describes 'profound anxiety', *Introduction*, p.83. Adams suggests its consequence on labourers in the half-acre might be one of 'wholesome spiritual fear', 'Piers' Pardon', p.417. Will shows soteriological fear at B.XIII.270.
[423] *George Ashby's Poems,* ed. by Mary Bateson, EETS ES 76 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1899; repr. 1965), p.236.
[424] As we saw in Chapter 1, there were disagreements about whether fear could be seen as merely a preliminary to contrite sorrow, or as sufficient for attrition; as here, this is an attempt to separate what 'causes' from what 'comprises' sorrow; see Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, p.238.

I concur therefore both with those who emphasize the personal dimension of Piers' response *and* those who suggest his initial emotion is on behalf of an incorrigibly sinful society.[425] On the one hand, Piers is a model of the fearful penitent whose reaction is paralleled by a number of instances of fearful penitential conversion and departure in the poem.[426] In the excoriating light that reveals present inadequacy he embraces a life of intensified self-awareness and devotion: 'preyeres', 'penaunce' and abstinence, simultaneously throwing himself upon God's mercy like the birds of the air and the lilies of the field (B.VII.117–29). This holds out a tropological model for fear in the sinner, but its allegorical setting also declares it as a continuation of the pilgrimage to Truth. We have already been told that Piers' pilgrimage, of which this is a further development, will be *on behalf of* the folk in the half-acre (B.VI.63–4). Piers' emotion in the face of the Pardon text's staging of judgement therefore includes grief at the priest's reaction and its evidence that the priest, and society, have too easily accepted the public administration of a shallow comfort—which he responds to with a sudden access of penitential anguish and salutary fear.

It is significant that the same phrase, and presumably the same emotion, 'pure tene', recurs when Piers encounters the devil seeking his fruits at the Tree of Charity.[427] In this context 'pure tene' is a terrible anguish, a fear on behalf of the fruit of the tree and fear in the face of death; this too is a model of Christ's compassionate suffering for humanity. Indeed, in B.XVI Piers with his *pyle* assaulting the *limbus*

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[425] Lawlor emphasises this fearful self-reproach, pp. 451–2.
[426] Sloth, B.V.442–7; Wit, X. 140–44; Will himself, B.XI.112–18, B.XX.199–203 and even Conscience, B.XX.380–86.
[427] Woolf, p.72.

inferni visually prophesies Christ at the Harrowing, bearing a staff like the long-tailed cross with which Christ is often depicted wedging open the mouth of hell (B.XVI.84–89). But in Passus VII, Piers' action already subtly evokes this divine compassion: his *tene* is at once compunctive terror and terrible pity. In pulling the Pardon 'atweyne', he does indeed, as Carruthers suggests, evoke the type of Moses breaking the Tablets and the rending of the Temple veil.[428] This brings to bear the paradoxical movement between law and grace, justice and mercy completed in the atonement. Piers embraces judgement and undergoes fear: his suffering anguish undertakes the law in order to fulfill it, a law which retains its severity only if it is really impossible for anyone to 'do well'. But in doing well, in embracing salutary, penitential fear on behalf of the community, Piers breaks this impossibility open. In accepting the severity of the Pardon, he also rejects it.

So Piers' fearful anguish, as a response to the statement of the Pardon, acknowledges, just as Christ does in the face of death, the dark injustice of the 'Devil's Rights' over God's children just as much as the sequence of the Harrowing does. The 'contrary' motion of contrition responds fearfully to the contemplation of its sins in the face of divine justice but nevertheless retains hope and dismisses despair. It is for this reason that immediately after the tearing of the Pardon Piers speaks Psalm lines which suggest the exorcism of a compulsive terror:

> *Si ambulavero in medio umbre mortis*

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[428] See Carruthers, 'Tearing of the Pardon', p.10.

Non timebo mala, quoniam tu mecum est

[Even if I walk amongst the shadows of death

I will not fear evil, because you are with me]

(B.VII.116–17, Psalm 23.4)

Here is one form of the positive 'recklessness' which Langland develops later in the poem, the abandonment of anxiety and worldly concern in favour of reliance on God.[429] In this sense his rending of the Pardon *is* a rejection of overweening judgement fear: 'I will not fear evil' surely includes the *mala* of the temptation of too much fear as well as fear of punishment. The tearing of the Pardon indicts the avoidance of fear in the complacencies of the contemporary Church but it also 'rends' the fearful statement that can view 'sheer justice' without mercy.[430] It rends, if you like, the idea of a division between judgement and mercy, through an act that mysteriously looks like both judgement—nullifying a document pardon—and reprieve—nullifying a text of judgement.

'Positive' readings of the rending of the Pardon have tended to emphasize these redemptive possibilities. Steiner compares the Pardon to the indenture, the tearing of which legal document is its enaction and the co-implication of actants.[431] This also suggests the covenantal, and eucharistic possibilities of the tearing. The gates of hell, but also Christ's own body, and so the Host, are riven. Sacramental

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[429] See B.XIV.33 and, crucially, the speech attributed to Recklessness and greatly expanded in C on spiritual and apostolic poverty, see n.333 above.
[430] Simpson, p.76.
[431] Steiner, *Documentary Culture*, pp.140–42.

paradox also contains something 'broken' that heals precisely through being torn: the body of Christ and the Host. I would endorse readings that emphasize the casting here of Piers, typologically, in a Christic light, whose response to the sheer judgement of souls is self-offering in a new, suffering and penitential labour. He fears *for* his 'folke', and this very fear becomes part of the offering in a labour of kenotic and penitential 'becoming nedy' associated with incarnation elsewhere in the poem (B.XX.41-50).[432]

Here the textual paradox of the Pardon's acceptance and rejection finds further illumination through recalling that at the Final Judgement humankind was imagined in the late Middle Ages as being judged precisely by Christ's mercy. No better illustration can be shown than the cycle Judgement plays, in which Jesus' self-offering and love, as shown in his displayed wounds and his words from the Beatitudes, indict those who have failed to respond to and enter into this love. Hence those critics are in a sense correct who have suggested that Piers' tearing even *intensifies* the Judgement significance of the words of the Pardon in the face of the priest's desire for comfort without consequence, and his refusal to respond to its call to judgement and fear. Piers, if we imagine him tearing the two-line pardon along its horizontal axis, dramatically foretells the separation of those who '*mala* [*egerunt*]' from those who '*bona egerunt*'.[433] In so doing, the tearing's double significance powerfully relates to that of the Eucharist, where the breaking of the Host also implies

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[432] That is to say the 'lacuna' created by rebuke and frustration described by Zeeman becomes, by its nature as offering, the very means to, rather than just the gap for, the 'explicit possibility of spiritual love'; see Zeeman, *Discourse of Desire*, p.17.
[433] Lawton, p.420.

this double interpretation: the mercy and love of the fracture of Jesus' offered body; anagogically, the separation of the saved from the damned. It is not inconsistent to argue that Piers' fearful anguish and self-offering, insofar as they model those of Christ, replace the judgement dichotomy of the opening with the single face of a suffering Judge.

To sum up: this reading remains one in which Piers models human penitential fear as that fear participates in the new order carved out by the atonement. We can see Piers' 'pure tene' as a compunctive, but also a compassionate, fear. Such a fear constitutes a suffering, transformative response to the reality of judgement that reaches towards Langland's extended emphasis on reforming the image of God in humanity whilst also modelling, and so narratively prefiguring and salvifically participating in, the atonement that makes this transformation possible. The tearing of the Pardon is, firstly, Langland's rendition of how the finality of judgement fear catalyses spiritual metanoia in the righteous person, of which Piers is here the example. Here, being brought to the edge of despair *is* the gateway to being freed by hope. Secondly, it depicts fear as both caused by and, in experience, mysteriously superseding the curtailed vision of justice-without-mercy; this corresponds to the relationship between the law and grace. Thirdly, in its close correlation of such fear with pitying fear and salvific suffering, and through typological clues, Langland relates this penitential rejection-through-acceptance of fear to the atonement. Poetically precedent yet really subsequent to that banishment, the possibility of the fruition of Piers' terror into resilient faith renders him an icon of a new order. If

penitential fearful compunction is in the *medium aevum* practiced already as a

participation of Christ's reconciling action, even fear will never be the same.

V.   FEAR'S BANISHMENT: THE CRUCIFIXION AND HARROWING OF HELL,

PASSUS XVIII – XIX

Passus B.XVIII, which depicts the Crucifixion and Harrowing of Hell, is the

optimistic, fear-banishing centre of Langland's poem.[434] The movement from the Old

to the New Law anticipated in the Pardon scene finds its fulfillment here as Christ's

victory is enacted in dramatic chiaroscuro; against the fearful 'dark dongeon' of hell's

punishment and banishment; against the most pugnacious source and lord of fear,

Death. The apparent irreconcilability of justice and mercy finds its sole answer in

Christ's satisfaction: an act of sheer love which the embrace of the Four Daughters of

God, personifications of Truth, Peace, Mercy and Righteousness, celebrates and

participates in. Langland's depiction of the Harrowing *adventus* also expressly figures

and foretells the Second Coming,[435] and hence reaches even beyond the inconclusive

end of the poem as the nearest depiction of Last Judgement – which it represents

through the universal liberation of the souls from the *limbus patrum*. This is the final

transfiguration of the terrifying bifurcation of judgement and, in a poem so engaged

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[434] On the optimism and centrality of this *passus* and its conclusion, see Frank,
Scheme of Salvation, p.94; Bloomfield, pp.125–6; Alford, 'Design of the Poem', p.57.
[435] On this as the apocalyptic climax of the poem see Douglas Bertz, 'Prophecy and
Apocalypse in Langland's *Piers Plowman', B-text, Passus XVI-XIX', *Journal of
English and Germanic Philology* 84 (1985), 313–38; Jill Mann, 'Allegorical
Buildings in Medieval Literature', *Medium Aevum* 63.2 (1994), 191–210.

with the fearful sense of an ending, it provides a breath-taking revelation of mercy.[436]

However, at the same time the *passus*' juxtaposition of dark and light embodies the

idea – eventually placed in Peace's mouth at the centre of the atonement debate – that

the experiential undergoing of mutually illuminating *wele* and *wo* is the pattern of

Christic and Christian experience.[437] If Passus B.XVIII depicts an originary

banishment of fear at the moment of Christ's universal sacrifice moreover, Will's

oneiric-liturgical experience reflects this gracious prevenience. It submits his agency

to a larger order, as his progress through the *passus* is powerfully elided with Christ's

own and with the cosmic-terrestrial movement from fear to hope.

Up to the close of the preceding *passus* Langland has continued to explore

and exploit an oscillation between Christian hope and fear. In the as-yet-obscure

space Langland creates in B.XVII prior to the revelation of atonement in B.XVII, this

oscillation remains ambiguous: there is the possibility of the fostering of a salutary

fear and a penitential response, but there is also the danger of either spiritual torpor or

despair, the two contraries to a good fear. At the opening of the *passus* Will's waking

moments show him poised ambivalently in a way that permits him to stand for all of

sinful humanity and for all three of these possibilities: salutary fear, torpor, or despair.

Whichever of these we apply, the main narrative of the *passus*, with its revelation of

the overwhelming gratuitousness of the atonement, now places the individual Will in

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[436] Carruthers, *Search for St Truth*, p.146; Robert Adams, 'Langland's Theology' in *A Companion to Piers Plowman*, ed. by John Alford (Berkeley, CA; London: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 87–114 (p.104); Benson, 'the poet choses to include the scene of hope and exclude the one of despair', *Public Piers Plowman*, pp. 79-81.
[437] On this logic see Zeeman, *Piers Plowman*, for example pp.39–40, 187–200, 272; Derek Pearsall, 'Necessity of Difference', pp.155ff.

a totally relative light; the divine fulfillment of action in history has the capacity to heal the aporia that every state represents. This openness of the text is a ground of its therapeutic possibility as a penitential companion.

In Passus B.XVII the unearned mercy shown to the *semivyf* by the Samaritan sits alongside the Samaritan's long speech reiterating the conditionality and the justice of divine grace (B.XVII.253a, 296–8). The Samaritan explains that, like the *glede* or ember-spark of fire in a taper, the Holy Spirit in humankind, the grace of mercy, cannot take full flame without the fuel and oxygen of a right spirit of charity and humility (B.XVII.215–264a); he describes works here as flowing from, rather than defining, the *kyndenesse* that comes from the participation of grace. Moreover, he hints at the optimistic soteriology to come, for those who die in moral 'debt' will find a mysterious excess: 'Mercy for his mekenesse wil make good the remenaunte' (B.XVII.242). And yet we then swing back to *drede* as the Samaritan's words become ever more firm in the face of Will's question about final repentance: 'it is selden y-seye … any creature that is coupable afor a kynges justice / Be raunsoned for his repentaunce there alle resoun hym dampneth' (B.XVII.305–307). Here the Samaritan enunciates a classic quandary: one who does not fear early, but fears late in time, will find herself so overwhelmed by precisely that fear that she refuses God's relief: we recognise this as *wan-hope*, the literal crepusculation of the light of mercy (B.XVII.311–15).[438] The Samaritan's parable of how one can be driven fully out from the homely shelter or mercy by the blinding 'smoke … and smolder' (B.XVII.347) of

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[438] See *Pricke of Conscience*, III, pp.321–2.

incapacity for kyndenesse, even where fleshly frailty, misery and malady have not

done it, closes the *passus* on a dark, fearful note of abandon and exile.

The dreamer-poet who appears again in the waking world at the beginning of

Passus XVIII might have stepped straight out of this parable, and out of the shelter of

mercy.[439] He is a shirtless and soggy-toed *lorel*, one who has been *i-loren*,

dispossessed; hence a word that can be used of a beggar but also of one damned

(B.XVIII.1–3).[440] Indeed Will's state as depicted here is deeply and deliberately

ambivalent, suggesting the proximity, as we have said, of overstatements and

understatements of salutary fear, as well as the incompletion of that salutary fear

itself, seen in a penitence as yet uncatalysed by full *kynde* knowledge of the stakes

and outcome of the atonement. Bowers argues that he is suffering from *acedia*, and

suggests that Will is in a spiritual torpor that is 'one step away from despair'.[441]

Carruthers, in contrast, reads the passage in an inverse sense and emphasizes Will's

true penitence.[442] I would argue that Barney is closer to the truth when he speaks of a

'richly multivalent … state of flux'.[443] This 'reccheles renk that recceth of no wo'

(B.XVIII.2) might be a careless, fearless, ne'er do well, whose sleep is sloth, lazily

avoiding the penitential season (B.XVIII.4). This might also suggest the abandonment

to despair and overstated *tristitia* that sees no future transformation possible. But it

might also suggest a barefoot penitent for whom, whilst he undergoes this-worldly

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[439] Barney hints at this, *Penn Commentary*, V, p.8.
[440] *MED* 'lorel, n.' and 'lesen, v. (4)'. Bowers, p.153.
[441] Bowers, pp.152–54; Tamburr, p.146.
[442] Carruthers, *Search for St Truth*, p.138.
[443] Barney, *Penn Commentary* V, p.7.

tribulation, worldly suffering has become as nothing; whose sleep is that of prayer and openness to vision, from one world-weary in a positive sense.[444] Will's rough, shirtless garb vacillates here, as elsewhere, between an aspirationally religious habit or penitential hair-shirt and something more like Will's original hypocritical hermit's habit, suggesting rather the *distance* from rule and obedience, or the visible evidence of sin carried by the fallen human image (B.Prol.2–3). The use of comparisons and similitudes, '*lyk* a lorel', '*as* a reccheles renk', intensifies these uncertainties.

The spiritual subject Langland proposes indeed seems to be an optical illusion, poised on a knife edge that enables us to see him both as in need of spiritual awakening and as the proper liturgical and ecclesial penitential subject who *nonetheless* cannot go further without the influx of grace: a grace, already given in history, that must be re-inhabited, known *kyndely* through the narrative mimesis that effects the further unveiling for participation of the atonement. The ambiguity hints at the possibility that these extremes of penitent and sinner are potentialities and appearances within every human being. This may be partly because of the way that Langland is writing a version of his mutating self – unrepentant dreamer-narrator *and* penitent poet – into the poem. But it is also because Langland has written the quandary and the capacity of fallen nature into the figure of Will; in this figure we see the conflicted directionality of both the Pauline 'wills' – a vision of man *simultaneously* in a state of sin's imprisonment and sin's redemptive possibility.[445] And of course the text is in turn a mirror for the penitential orientation of the reader

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[444] Donaldson, pp.171–2; Clopper, p.225.
[445] See Zeeman, *Discourse of Desire*, pp.76–78.

whose 'will' determines her reading, that is, a reader always open to transformation by re-reading and re-orientation, a reader whose sinfulness is never fully irredeemable or redeemed.

The context, explicit and implicit, of Will's vision in B.XVIII is the elaborate and dramatic liturgies of Palm Sunday, Holy Week and the Easter Vigil.[446] Will presents as 'without' in his gyrovagrant ambivalence, yet, when he dreams, he is within the ark of the Church in its sacramental and liturgical life. This dream-mediated yet externally-produced experience of the Easter liturgy is the context of Will's emergence as a transformed subject. Passus B.XVIII embraces the necessarily paradoxical liturgical experience of Holy Week, where the narrative and mimetic content, the re-undergoing of the events *prior* to the atonement, are played against the present knowledge of redemption. Here we have Palm Sunday's welcome of the King in Glory, where the gates to the earthly Jerusalem recall those of the Heavenly Jerusalem and also the gates of hell; here we also have Good Friday's deep somberness and abstention and yet its adoration and hymnody of the 'sweetest wood' of the cross, viewed already as the new tree of life mounted by the *redemptor orbis*, saviour of the world. Karl Tamburr has shown how the figuration of Harrowing was present in these liturgies, and this is vividly played out in *Piers Plowman*. The

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[446] See *The Sarum Missal*, ed. by J. Wickham Legg (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916), pp.92–7 and Henry John Feasey, *Ancient English Holy Week Ceremonial* (London: Baker, 1897), pp.53–83. Karl Tamburr demonstrates that the Palm Sunday liturgy carried a double sense of entry into Jerusalem and Harrowing of Hell in *The Harrowing of Hell in Medieval England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2007), pp.4–13; Raymond St-Jacques finds numerous Easter liturgical sources for the motif of the battle between life and death, in 'Langland's Christ Knight and the Liturgy', *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa* 37 (1967), 146–58.

doctrine of the Harrowing of Hell spatializes atonement, in its movement down and up, from light to dark, imprisonment to liberation: opening up the event of Christ's death and resurrection into a journey that enables visionary and liturgical participation. The 'reply' that Will's vision makes to him as a penitential subject *is* such a participation in the journey from 'wo' to 'wele'. Notably, when the fourteenth-century nuns of Barking Abbey had a Harrowing *ludus* composed for them, the play, which involved the nuns themselves in the parts of the trapped and liberated souls of the *limbus patrum*, was designed to stir them from what the abbess described as a widespread *acedia*.[447] As Peace will go on to argue, it is only by going down into the darkness of hell, that one becomes able to truly see the sun of salvation.

This begins at the moment of Christ's death,[448] when Langland depicts the physical world itself exhibiting fear's physiological symptoms: its systole, pallor and tremble: 'The daie for drede withdrowe and derke bicam the sonne; / The wal wagged and clef and al the worlde quaved … The erthe to-quasche and quoek as hit quyk were' (B.XVIII.60–61, 64). Never has death been more terrifying than at this moment when it closes the eyes of the 'lord of lyf' (B.XVIII.59). The whole natural order participates in this terror, as Langland expands on the account of cataclysmic earth tremor in Matthew 27.51–52 and echoes Romans 8.22–24 where creation groans in co-suffering with Christ but also in hope for release. The trembling of the earth, in the

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[447] Ann Faulkner, 'The Harrowing of Hell at Barking Abbey and in Modern Production' in *The Iconography of Hell* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992), pp.141–57 (p.141).
[448] The account of the Passion itself echoing the inclusion of the Matthew Passion in the Palm Sunday liturgy; see *Sarum Missal*, p.97.

Old Testament, is usually associated with awe and terror at divine action or judgement. This New Testament fear however is empathetic, compassionate sorrow, as Book's later intervention makes clear: 'The erthe for hevynesse what he wolde suffer / Quaked as quyk thyng' (B.XVIII.247–48). This is a geophysical synecdoche of the Harrowing itself, opening the earth and the grave where Christ's suffering opens death and hell (B.XVIII.62). And 'we too groan' (Romans 8.23): Will is in harmony with the sympathetic cosmic response as he too 'withdraws' to the dark realms of hell for 'fere of this ferly [wonder]' (B.XVIII.110–11). This participation, as Mary Carruthers points out, is also the high point of his figural assimilation to Christ, which makes this moment of Will's fear the 'highest point of his comprehension in the poem'.[449] As Christ's light appears on the horizon Will's 'fere of this ferly' is punningly and chiastically transformed in the mouth of Truth: 'Ich have ferly of this fare [matter]' (B.XVIII.125). In the mouth of Truth terror is already transmuting to wonder, 'afered was she nevere' (B.XVIII.123). And wonder, in Mercy's mouth, is swiftly transformed again to joy: 'Have no merveille, quod Mercy, myrthe it betokeneth' (B.XVIII.127).

The debate of the Four Daughters of God intervenes between the Crucifixion and the Harrowing of Hell as the apex of the discursive unveiling of the reconciliation of justice and mercy, grace and the law, Old and New Testament. Staging this debate, a narrative derived from the allegorical development of Psalm 84.10–11,[450] at the

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[449] Carruthers, p.141.

[450] See Hope Traver, *Four Daughters of God* (Brynn Mawr, PA: Bryn Mawr College, 1907); Mattias Tveitane, 'The Four Daughters of God: A Supplement', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 81.4 (1980), 409–15; *The Middle English*

Harrowing is unique for the tradition as known elsewhere in Latin and Middle English literature and iconography. The debate usually features at moments of theological decision or judgement. Most commonly, following the indications of a sermon by Bernard of Clairvaux,[451] it is placed in the context of a conciliar decision prior to the Annunciation;[452] less commonly it is placed at the moment of particular judgement and soul-weighing, as in Guillaume de Deguileville's *Pèlerinage de l'Ame*, which Langland probably knew.[453] However, in Hugh of St Victor's earlier although considerably less influential psalm commentary, it is suggestive that the events take place in a temporally less certain time: before the second coming, and as a description of the enablement of the access to mercy that is the state of the world following the first coming.[454] We might compare Deguileville's other adoption of the motif in the *Pèlerinage de Jésus Christ*, where although the Daughters' debate precedes Jesus' conception, their final reconciliation is saved for after the Resurrection.[455] Langland's placement of his Four Daughters between the Crucifixion and the Harrowing here suggests the liturgo-theological paradox we have already explored, whereby a grace

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Translations of Robert Grossteste's Chateau d'Amour, ed. by Kari Sajavaara (Helsinki: Societé Neophilologique, 1967), pp.62–90.

[451] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermon on the Annunciation*, I, in *Sancti Bernardi opera*, ed. by Jean Leclercq, Charles Hugh Talbot and Henri Rochais (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1968), V, pp.13–29.

[452] Prior to Langland, are the N-Town *Parliament of Heaven* I, pp.111–16; *Cursor Mundi* ll.9517–52, II, pp.548–50; *Le Château d'Amour de Robert Grosseteste évèque de Lincoln*, ed. by Jessie Murray (Paris: Champion, 1918).

[453] Dorothy L. Owen, *Piers Plowman: A Comparison with some Earlier and Contemporary French Allegories* (London: University of London, 1912), pp.124–5; Burrow, *Langland's Fictions*, Appendix A, pp.113–18.

[454] Traver, *Four Daughters*, pp.12–15. Hugh of St Victor, *Adnotationes elucidatoriae in quosdam psalmos David*, II, 63, in *PL* 177, cols.623c–35d.

[455] Traver, *Four Daughters*, pp.70–78.

already achieved, and already in some sense connatural, must nonetheless be inhabited and *kyndeliche* known. I argue that the recapitulatory and 'ex-temporal' quality of his debate parallels liturgical recapitulation and temporal simultaneity, the already-not-yet that requires the re-visitation of the fearfulness of Christ's death and the fearfulness of judgement in order to access the deepest reality of the hope for salvation. Here, intervening between Christ's Crucifixion and his coming in glory, the poem stages a final moment of oscillatory uncertainty and fear, when Truth and Righteousness restate the originary fall as irredeemable sin and punishment: '*in inferna nulla est redempcio*' (B.XVIII.149a). On the other hand, Stephen Barney is right that this is a 'leavening' moment. Truth's blustering language, 'hold thi tonge! it is but trufle', and Righteousness's vulgar, scolding tone, 'What, ravestow?... or thow art right dronke', recall the comic castigation of earlier female figures of authority and contrast against the gentle aspect and the playfulness of the apparently younger daughters (B.XVIII.165). Righteousness and Truth speak with posturing certainty, whilst Peace and Mercy frame their nonetheless sure statements in the language of prayer and faithful expectation (B.XVIII.151, 202), but Righteousness' and Truth's words of past conviction ring hollow against the words of present experience and future hope. It is as if such fearful rhetoric cannot hold in the clear light of the dawning day.

That the portrayal of the Harrowing is delayed for this debate is also an example of a recurrent practice in the poem of suspending expected progress. Insofar

as the Harrowing typologically represents the second coming,[456] this interruption also

appears as a figure-in-brief for the *medium aevum* which Langland is continuously re-

representing, in *felde*, in pilgrimage. This interruption of narrative progression by

dialectic and debate suggests a return to the space of experience, the gaining of *kynde*

knowyng and the suffering-undergoing of human nature and of sin. In line with this,

the speeches of Peace, Mercy and Book emphasize experiential undergoing, the

importance of the humble evidence of eye and heart in the homeopathic healing of

like by like (B.XVIII.151–61), or the mutual illumination of *wo* and *wele*

(B.XVIII.202–28). This vernacular poetic theology is accompanied by a faith in

simple narrative story: the freshness of romance *aventure* in the unfinished story of

Christ's wondrous birth, his conquests and his love-letter of pardon. Although

Langland's account of the Crucifixion emphasizes triumph and reconciliation, and not

the agonized sorrow of a tradition of affective devotion, a corporeal identification

with Christ's humanity is not absent, if we reflect on Will's pained waking

moments.[457] But this can also be seen in the words of Peace that identify the suffering

atonement of God-become-man with all of human experience—from 'hoet hunger'

and the 'sourness' of death (note the sensory, tangible and tasteable, language). In this

way fear, seen as part of this human intermediacy, is not simply erased in the light of

the Crucifixion but rather presented with new value, and made available for the poet-

dreamer and reader's participation. When Truth, submitting, concludes 'Suffre we!'

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[456] See especially Mann, pp.206–7.
[457] See Barney, Carruthers, etc.

(XVIII.260) the word *suffre* is not used lightly, and summates the state of faithful endurance and expectant openness to revelation this represents.

The Harrowing of Hell in Passus B.XVIII is the soteriologically optimistic apex of the poem.[458] This narrato-dramatic moment puts a vertical motion of rescue through the horizontal dichotomization of Judgement, another imaginative possibility for the line torn through the middle of the Pardon. 'Wo' illuminates 'wele', in Peace's logic; light to dark, as the Christ who has suffered appears at his brightest in the stygian blackness of hell. This soteriological optimism reaches its highpoint in the account of Judgement Christ offers after the journey down to hell (B.XVIII.366–417). He describes his atonement in terms that stress its continuous merciful action. At the general resurrection, he astonishingly claims, *no-one* who shares his nature (and so is one of the 'brethren of blood') and who has been baptized will remain in hell (B.XVIII.378–79), since any scrap of contrition, repentance or restitution ('be it any thing yboughte', B.XVIII.389) will be grounds for his 'mercy thorugh rightwisnesse' (B.XVIII.390), mercy through justice. The C-Text expands hope further: affirming that through the atonement many of those who are 'halue-bretherne'—that is to say united to his sacrifice by their shared human nature, although not through participation in Christ's death through baptism, will also be saved (C.XX.434–37)— and one C manuscript reading even implies full universalism.[459] The B-text returns to

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[458] See Watson, 'Visions of Inclusion'; Derek Pearsall cautions against extracting doctrinal conclusions from a questing text in 'The Idea of Universal Salvation in *Piers Plowman* B and C', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 39.2 (2009), 257–81.

[459] Replacing 'hole bretherene' for 'half bretherne' at C.XX.419.

the '*nullum malum impunitum*' of the earlier *passus*, but supplies Lawler's 'missing third term' in securing the justice of 'no evil (person) unpunished' through the clean washing of purgatory, without mentioning hell (B.XVIII.391–93). The field's dark *dongeon* is suddenly illuminated with hope of release – perhaps it is only prison indeed and not an oubliette of eternal damnation.

Yet Pearsall is right to note in this speech the 'repeated moments of hope and promise halted and reversed' that he finds characteristic of the whole poem.[460] Langland's Christ remains an awe-ful 'kyng of kynges' whose images are coloured by a potential darkness: the cup of the new wine he imagines draining is that of his loving sacrifice, but it is also the vintage pressed from the dreadful grape harvest of sinners described in the book of Revelations (Revelations 14.20). The first image Langland uses to express Christ's mercy is equally dark: a gallows and final reprieve given to one already half-dead ('It is noght used on earthe to hangen a feloun / Ofter than ones' (B.XVIII.381). Christ does not quite deny that a time shall come when 'doom to the deeth dampneth alle wikked' and he emphasises the restraint of the law (B.XVIII.386–87). In the C-Text there may be some soteriological softening towards non-Christians, but the lack of a mention of purgatory (C.XX.434–36) harshens the statement and there is an additional restatement of divine anger: vengeance on the wicked and 'kene ire' (436). In fact, the reader's encounter with this poetically imagined Christ permits precisely the two-edged sword of a Judgement meeting: if mercy and salvation are discernible here even to the worst sinner with an ounce of

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[460] Pearsall, 'Universal Salvation', p.276.

hope or potential for conversion, the recalcitrant does truly encounter a figure who exercises a fearful justice.

Fear's negative reign was the impenetrability of sin, the period when, as the Samaritan said, there was no possibility of traversing the territory of the world without deadly peril overtaking one (XVII.204–7). Now 'peece thorw pacience alle perilles stoppeth' (XVIII.415) and indeed fear, like all woe, submits its meaning to the logic of the *felix culpa*; it is now seen as a contrary to love, whose truest *telos* is to be found in its capacity to illuminate by contrary experience: '"After sharpe shoures" quod Pees, "most sheene is the sonne"' (XVIII.409).

The very last lines of Passus XVIII, spoken by Will to his wife and daughter, suggest the banishment of fear through fear. The Cross they creep to kiss, which bore Christ's body '*afereth* the Fende, for suche is the myghte/ May no grysly gost glyde there it shadweth' (XVIII.430–31). Bowers helpfully illustrates the kinds of problems that modern critics still have with the treatment of fear in medieval texts when comments that this attachment to the cross 'smacks of primitive fetishism, Christianity as folkish superstition'.[461] In fact 'grysly ghost' and 'fearsome spirit' evoke the terrible claim of death and punishment on humanity. Up until now, we have seen a dramatic enactment of Christ's coming as the dawn rays of the rising sun. However here the cross 'shadweth' and it 'afereth the Fende' because it casts a divine claim even *on the darkness*: there is nothing to fear even from death and hell, and this is what hell's ruler fears most.

VI.   FEAR IN THE FINAL PASSUS

A. Langland and 'Augustinian' Apocalypticism

Despite this bright apex, *Piers Plowman* ends with a crescendo of still-penultimate terror and crisis, making manifest the apocalyptic implications of the poem thus far. As we argued in the introduction to this chapter, Langland's apocalyptic spirituality situates the world contemporary to him within a movement of crisis-judgement-vindication already in some sense begun.[462] This follows a Christian tradition of *exspectatio* that intensifies rather than subsumes the 'not yet' of this-worldly existence, simultaneous hope and fear. I will argue that Langland espouses an Augustinian dialectical tension in which 'worsening' and 'bettering' cannot be separated, since the very undergoing and experience of fearful crisis, for Church and reader, is what must catalyse reform and transformation. The intensification of fear in Passus XX in the final urgency of crisis both narrates and performs fear's role in confronting the collective and individual problems of complacency and despair,

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[462] Barbara Nolan perhaps comes closest to giving this account of Langland in *The Gothic Visionary Perspective* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp.205–58, and her review of David Aers, *Chaucer, Langland and the Creative Imagination* in *Speculum*, 58 (1983), 139–41. On the three-fold drama of 'crisis-judgement-vindication' see Bernard McGinn, 'Early Apocalypticism' in *The Apocalypse in Renaissance Thought and Literature,* ed. by C.A. Patrides and Joseph Wittreich (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 2–39 (p.10); on the spirituality of apocalypticism see McGinn 'Introduction', *Apocalyptic Spirituality*, Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1979), pp. 12–16.

optimistic and pessimistic nihilism. The centrality of fear to the final *passus* of the poem once again affirms that fear's role in *Piers* is not merely as an initial compunction subsumed within a larger gradually progressive pastoral agenda. Fear's part in self-knowledge, societal critique, and as an impetus for reform means that it has a continuous place in Will's and the poet's personal and political spirituality. Langland's apocalyptic close underlines the message of the Pardon text that it is only by holding on to the fearful historicity of final general eschatological judgement, and by continuing to acknowledge the finitude and yet contributing significance of individual and *saeculum*, that generative transformation, and so hope for that self and that *saeculum*, arises. Langland's critique of a de-clawed penitence, lacking the perspective of final *drede* and collective responsibility, continues to play out through the increasingly antichristic figures of the (probably Franciscan) friars who appear at the end of the poem. At the local level of the poem, fear continues to catalyse the penitential *metanoia* which the poet-dreamer undergoes at the heart of Passus XX. Whilst Will and society remain only imperfectly reformed, the penitential attitude of Conscience with which the entire poem ends models a state in which holy *drede* and the desire for Christ's coming are one.

The contested topic of Langland's apocalypticism, which entails differences of opinion over the extent reform is attained or possible at the close of the poem, rests on a misleading dichotomy of 'optimistic' versus 'pessimistic' apocalypticism. The identification of his work with meliorism, expectation of this-worldly transformation before the end, is expressed most significantly in the foundational work of Morton Bloomfield and in the more recent scholarship of Kathryn Kerby-Fulton. Both

scholars trace possible heritages relating Langland's apocalypticism to the 'radical' eschatology of Joachim di Fiore and especially his Spiritual Franciscan successors, which posited a third 'age of the spirit' with which the growth of the two orders of friars was associated.[463] The counter-view, that Langland's apocalypticism is 'orthodox', 'Augustinian' and 'pessimistic' – less-than-literally imminent, expecting no this-worldly achievement and emphasizing eschatological fulfilment – can be found in the work of Richard K. Emmerson, Douglas Bertz and to a lesser extent Robert Adams.[464]

I argue that Langland's apocalypticism is indeed 'Augustinian', but not in the sense of the dominant consensus that this entails a 'historical pessimism', a flattened, conservative, individualised and spiritualised apocalyptic.[465] An account of Augustine as the archetypal anti-millenarian who announces the death of the world and history

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[463] Bloomfield, *Fourteenth-Century Apocalypse*, pp.125–6 and passim; Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Piers Plowman and Reformist Apocalypticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Unversity Press, 1990); Pamela Gradon, Langland and the Ideology of Dissent', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 66 (1982), 179–205.

[464] Bertz, 'Prophecy and Apocalypse', pp.313–38; Emmerson, 'Or Yernen to Rede Redels?', pp.27–76.

[465] Augustine is the negotiator of a dying cosmos for Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* ([1969] rev. ed., Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), for example, pp.316–17; R. A. Markus paints him as the archetypal anti-millenarian thinker, with a radical historical agnosticism, in *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp.43–44. This view is thoroughly adopted by medievalists such as Marjorie Reeves, Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, Robert Lerner, and Paula Friedrikson, to cite a few examples: Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp.296–97; Kerby-Fulton, *Piers Plowman and Reformist Apocalypticism*, p.4; Lerner 'Refreshment of the Saints', p.97; Paula Fredriksen, 'Tyconius and Augustine on the Apocalypse' in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp.20–37.

has obscured the apocalyptic vision that permeates his entire thought, and the dynamic vision he has of the final days. Marjorie Reeves spoke strikingly of Augustine's 'world grown old whose only significance lay in the miracle of a new growth in Christ happening in its moribund carcass'.[466] However for Augustine, and many traditions of Christian history pursuant on him, it was precisely this growth that mattered. The phrasing can be inverted: Augustine's vision is that of a world now oriented entirely towards new growth in Christ and the building of the City of God.[467] This accompanies an account of his *City of God* as apocalyptic in vision and structure: its acknowledgement of present mixity and penultimacy, the Church in pilgrimage, is set against a powerful projection of the final reality of the eschatological two cities.[468] Augustine seeks to unveil, with the help of scripture and reason, the existence (if not

[466] Marjorie Reeves, *Joachim of Fiore and the prophetic future* ([1976] rev. ed, Stroud: Sutton, 1999), p.2.

[467] Augustine is neither anticorporeal nor antimaterial: see his account of the bodily resurrection and celebration of the beauties of nature and culture in Book XXII of the *City of God*. The Christian should not reject the world but maintain the *ordinate caritas*, the hierarchy of affection; see Brown, *Augustine of* Hippo, p.328. On a more materially positive Augustine see Rowan Williams, 'Politics and the Soul: A Reading of the City of God' in *On Augustine* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2016), repr. from *Milltown Studies* 19/20 (1987), 55–72. In fact, it is Joachitism that, downplaying Christocentrism and emphasizing perfection as the spiritualized and contemplative, is the decorporealising and spiritualizing force.

[468] Harry O. Maier 'The End of the City and the City without End: The *City of God* as Revelation' in *History, Apocalypse and the Secular Imagination: New Essays on Augustine's City of God*, ed. Mark Vessey, Karla Pollmann and Allan D. Fitzgerald, O.S.A. (Bowling Green, OH: Philosophy Documentation Centre, 1999), pp.153–64 (p.155). The *City of God* was increasingly widely disseminated in the later Middle Ages, and translated into French by Raoul de Presles in the second half of the fourteenth century. Charity Cannon Willard, 'Raoul de Presles's Translation of Saint Augustine's *De civitate dei*', in *Medieval Translators and their Craft*, ed. by Jeanette Beer (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1989), pp.329–46.

the identity) of the 'two streams' of good and evil running mixed in the river of life.[469] This is the apocalyptic vision of the author of Revelations:

> What was not yet separated in place, he separated in understanding, he separated in the sight of his heart. And he saw two multitudes, the believers and the unbelievers.[470]

The present life, for Augustine as for Langland, is a hidden battlefield of good and evil which prepares for the terms of the final days. Even Augustine's orthodox rejection of a calculable imminence embraces Gospel paradox to emphasize a continuously intensifying expectation: these are 'the very last days, we act in the very last hour just as the apostles were … those who lived … before us were living in the last times even more, and we ourselves are yet more'.[471] His emphasis on first coming over second – his belief that the 'zenith of history had been achieved in the coming of Christ' as Kerby-Fulton puts it – can be overstated, since he sees it in the light of one continuous and as yet incomplete advent.[472] We remain in the zenith of history, then, rather than nostalgic for it.

The hardening of good and evil, the commencement of judgement and the unveiling of the final Church, is a condition of the sixth and present age as itself a part of the apocalyptic period. Augustine's exegesis of the binding of Satan (Revelations

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[469] Augustine, *City of God,* XXII.24, trans. Dyson, pp.1159–64.

[470] Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 14.8, in Fathers of the Church 79, trans. by John W. Rettig, p.72

[471] Augustine, *Letter 199, ed.* Teske, p.339. Moreover, intensified expectation is even the consequence of ignorance of the day or hour (Matthew 24.34).

[472] Augustine, *Letter 199,* ed. Teske, p.347.

20.1–3) as the founding of the Church rather than some utopian or chilastic moment in the apocalyptic timetable has been read as an 'anti-apocalyptic' move. However, Satan's binding is also for Augustine the occasion for the intensification of wickedness and the building towards the final opposition of evil and good:

> When [the devil] is excluded from doing harm to believers, he begins to take possession of the ungodly all the more completely.[473]

Augustine's apocalyptic presentism is a mentality which, far from *flattening* history, can rather be read as intensifying historical significance. Judgement and separation begin even now, in the sixth and final age, and will climax in the unbinding of Satan and the coming of Antichrist, which will continue to be the occasion of conversion and growth as well as final apostasy.

Both Augustine and Langland espouse an ecclesial Christocentrism that emphasises the possibility of growth and reform in the continuity of the body of Christ in the world. In both, an apocalyptic timetable of intensifying crisis is accompanied, and even necessitates and reveals, the strengthening of the good. An 'orthodox' 'Augustinian' apocalyptic eschatology can also be radical, visionary and reformist.[474] Whilst rejecting any pneumocentric 'third age', or chiliasm, this would

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[473] Augustine, *City of God*, XX.8, trans. Dyson, p.985.
[474] See Henri De Lubac's account of Savonarola as a similarly reformist Augustinian, in *La Postérité Spirituelle de Joachim de Flore* ([1979–81] repr. Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2014), pp.172–73. This reaction makes sense, since Langland's critique of mendicancy, as we saw in the Prologue, adopted the topoi of anti-Joachite apocalyptic antifraternalism.

nonetheless allow for a transformation within the course of history that may not be

legible in the terms of history, but which remains Christological. Even orthodox

theology could posit a brief 'refreshment of the saints' and so a this-worldly hope that

post-dates Antichrist, despite the fact this is more usually associated with 'radical'

thought; as Lerner says, popular and literary forms of apocalyptic 'chiliasm' are in

fact evidence of a 'deep structure' of Christian hope for some connection between the

saeculum and what is to come rather than necessarily revolutionary hopes or covert

millenarianism.[475]

Langland's deployment of the style and substance of a 'popular', broadly

utopian apocalypticism (as represented by the Sibylline oracles and the apocalypse of

Pseudo-Methodius) cannot be dismissed. His prophetic passages promising perfect

kingship and the dispossession of the corrupted Church convey in riddling shorthand

a symbiosis of properly eschatological expectation and reformism.[476] As Adams has

argued, the rule of an ideal king, whether Piers or David, that the poem periodically

announces in every case points to guidance under Christ.[477] This is both the occluded

condition of humanity that the poem works to reveal, and something which

humankind can personally and collectively work to participate in, as Passus VII and

XIX at least briefly depict in their visions of shared and charitable labour within the

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[475] Robert Lerner, 'Refreshment of the Saints: The Time after Antichrist as a Station for Earthly Progress in Medieval Thought', *Traditio*, 32 (1976), 97–144; 'The Black Death and Western European Eschatological Mentalities,' *American Historical Review*, 86 (1981), 533–52 (pp.551–2)

[476] The main passages are B.X.317–329; B.III.284–330; B. VI. 319-29; See also Pearsall, *C-Text*, pp.36–37.

[477] Adams, 'Some Versions of Apocalypse', pp.194–236.

ideal, Pentecostal, Church. Christ is both not yet here and already accessible, both more and less historical than any last world emperor or perfect pre-Antichrist king. Only through Christ, and the human nature transformed by Christ that is gradually revealed to Will can he and all humanity 'lerne to love' (B.XX.208). To fail to acknowledge both the 'not yet' of this and the 'already' would be to locate hope in an ideal uninformed by Christ.

Augustine's account of the final days of the Church in Book XX of the *City of God* gives us a model against which to hold Langlandian apocalyptic discourse in Passus XX. Augustine's vision of the end involves the intensification of darkness, fear, and crisis with the coming of Antichrist; but it is precisely this hardening that is also the height of the Church militant's glory, and its increasing convergence with the Church triumphant. Moreover, the Church continues to grow in the midst, and even as a consequence of, its trial and tribulation.[478] Langland's blending of final with contemporary crisis in *Piers Plowman* reflects Augustine's sense of the last times as the conclusive manifestation of that which the Christian apocalyptic gaze can already begin to discern. This is yoked to the hope and belief he shares with Augustine that even this *novissimum* will continue, right up to the *parousia*, to be a time for conversion and transformation.

Piers Plowman's apocalyptic perspective is inherently both 'pessimistic' and 'optimistic': the crisis of the end of time is at once the terminus of terrestrial human effort and also the achievement or *incipit* of its completion and coronation with the

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[478] Augustine, *City of God*, XX.8, trans. Dyson, pp.985–86.

coming of Christ in glory and the foundation of the New Jerusalem.[479] In Passus XIX

and XX Langland envisions a scenario in which the imminence of final crisis implicit

in the initial *visio* has intensified and darkened. In Passus XIX both good and evil

come to clarity, unveiling the *telos* of the ambiguous figures of the Prologue. The

Unity of the Church built from the timbers of Christ's cross and the mortar of mercy

is complemented by the cohesion of the forces of evil, which takes on the metaphor of

a massed army for the first time: 'Pride gadered hym a greet oost' (B.XIX.341).

Langland's apocalyptic conclusion shares the intense and kairotic temporality of

Augustine's vision of the end and his sense that transformation is only possible

through Christ and participation in his saving grace. Langland's especially capacious

understanding of the ecclesial body, as demonstrated in the breadth of the Pentecostal

gifts to include all craft and calling within society, and the lengths to which he takes

inclusion in his soteriology, adds a fresh dimension to that possibility for growth.

This account of the end of the poem is very different from those which have

seen in it despair of the contemporary Church, most recently David Aers' *Beyond*

Reformation, which concludes that Langland here depicts the breakdown of the

sacraments, virtues, religious language and institutional Christianity.[480] In my view,

the visionary standpoint of apocalyptic crisis and breakdown in *Piers Plowman*

remains satirical-visionary rather than satirical-historical: that is to say, Langland's

apocalyptic expectation is real but, for that very reason, not crudely literal; for it

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[479] Richard K. Emmerson, *Antichrist in the Middle Ages*: *A Study of Medieval Apocalypticism, Art and Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), p.200; see also Adams, 'Langland's Theology', pp.103–4.
[480] Aers, *Beyond Reformation,* pp.91–171.

embraces an unknowable proximity and an Augustinian apocalypticism according to which its scenes of judgement and the final battle are also new beginnings. To read this apocalyptic eschatology satirico-historically and pessimistically as Aers does is to render its already-not yet apocalyptic perspective finite, and to resolve prematurely what remains open because still *in time*, a time of hazard and opportunity intensified by the apocalyptic gaze. In my view there is no evidence in the poem for a total rejection of ecclesiastical structures, but rather the recommendation of a poorer, more Christ-centred Church and a recalibration of boundaries between the laity and the clerical hierarchy.

In Passus XX Langland's visionary imagination moves swiftly forwards to the unbinding of Satan. Aers is right that, as he envisions the loosing of the final Antichrist and his appearance at the head of the gathered forces of evil, it becomes evident that the true *ecclesia* as it currently stands would contain only 'foles'. Meanwhile the clergy and friars flock to where 'Antecrist had thus soone hundreds at his baner' (B.XX.69).[481] As Augustine argued, this 'seduction' is both the beginning and the continuation of judgement itself.[482] The Pardon formula's confrontation of the reader with judgement fear now inhabits the narrative and historiated shape of the poem to disclose a new clarity of this-worldly division. This is at once more terrifying and, in its very powerful urgency, a stronger spur to reform and transformation.

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[481] However, David Aers views the 'church of the foles' as more of a final rebuke to Will's version of the Church than I do; see *Beyond Reformation*, pp.125–6.
[482] Augustine, *City of God*, XX.19, trans. Dyson, pp.1010–11.

The orthodox picture of the very end had always included a theme of internal hypocrisy and apostasy, derived from the *pseudoprophetae* and *pseudochristae* who will perhaps even deceive the *electi*, as in the apocalyptic texts of Matthew 7 and 24, and the figure of the false prophet described in Revelations.[483] Hence even the corruption of the earthly Church in this *passus* can be seen through the lens of the paradox of optimism and pessimism that characterises apocalyptic thought. This is not incompatible with Augustine's emphasis on the final glory of the Church in tribulation, but rather the occasion for the emergence of the invisible orientations of the two cities:

> If he had never been loosed his malign power would have been less plainly apparent, and the endurance of the Holy City would have been less thoroughly proved in its great faithfulness.[484]

Without the cohering of Antichrist the true holiness of the 'foles' would not be tested and revealed. So, too, in the poem apocalyptic penultimacy and fear are still proffered as the circumstance of possibility for transformation and conversion, generated precisely from the intensity of tribulation and suffering.

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[483] Matt 7.15–16; Matt 24; Rev 16.13, 19.20, 20.10. Hildegard's *Scivias* (3.11.105–20) envisions *Ecclesia* giving birth to Antichrist; see Kerby-Fulton, *Piers Plowman*, pp.31–5. See n.314 above for the development of this theme of apocalyptic hypocrisy after the emergence of the friars and in Rutebeuf and Jean de Meun, especially Emmerson and Herzman, pp.612–13.

[484] Augustine, *City of God*, XX.8, trans. Dyson, p.984.

What is nonetheless striking about Langland's vision is his refusal to shield the reader from the penultimacy of fear, or to culminate in the statements of triumph found in Augustine's *City of God*, whose final book describes the eternal happiness of the saints: instead Langland keeps us at the penitential brink; as Anne Middleton says of the whole poem, 'transformation is postponed for the sake of ours'.[485]

Whilst the Church Langland depicts may currently be reduced to the true piety of the 'foles', it continues to also hope for new growth, even at the end: 'cry we to alle the commune that thei come to Unite' (B.XX.78). This growth is found in Will's repentant conversion (XX.185–213), but, I propose, also in Conscience's departure to seek Piers who is still doing the work of grace in the field of belief. Conscience's new pilgrimage is part of the continuing growth of the Church in the field of the world that will not be over until the *eschaton* (XIX.332–34, XX.380–86). In Augustine's *City of God* the tested Church, the Church of the End, will indeed have the capacity to grow when, perhaps even because, the devil is unbound.[486] This would seem to be borne out in what happens to Will at the heart of the *passus*, in which his growth happens paradoxically out of the midst of an old age that is both his and that of the world.

This transformation comes, not in spite of the fearful conditions of the end, but in the final, and clearest, demonstration of true fear's proximity to hope and false fearlessness' proximity to despair. B.XX articulates the powerful and recurrent theme of the dangerous replacement of salutary fear, self-knowledge and the horizon of judgement by temporary this-worldly comfort: this latter abandon, as in the case of

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[485] Middleton, 'Audience and Public', p.121.
[486] Augustine, *City of God*, XX.8, trans. Dyson, p.984

the C-version's depiction of Recklessness, is intimately linked to despair. In B.XX, as

has been true to a lesser extent throughout the poem,[487] representatives of

contemporary wickedness are shown to be those who fail to fear God, the Church and

their sins. As all the threats adumbrated in Passus II come to pass, the forces of

Antichrist gather under the banner of the chief deadly sin, Pride. This militaristic

advance, led 'boldely' by the chief of the deadly sins, Pride (B.XX.70), contrasts with

the *retreat* into Unity of the 'foles', suggesting the contrary embrace of Pride's

antidote, salutary fear and its corollary dependence on God: 'crye we to Kynde that he

come and defende us' (B.XX.76).

When, in response, Kynde, God's natural power, intensifies the terror of the

apocalyptic scenario through the apocalyptic three horsemen, the forces of plague and

death expressed in a scene of war, it leads to a brief gain because the forces of

Antichrist are affected by fear of 'deeth that is dredful to undo us alle!' (B.XX.89).

Their inadequate response recalls the dependence of the contemporary Church on a

secular economy of cheapened 'mercy', as earlier described in the Pardon scene, here

explicitly reduced to the personified Comfort (B.XX.182). Salutary spiritual *drede* is

rejected entirely as the powers of evil fling themselves into a perverse carnival.

Irrepressible 'Life' is the last incarnation of Recklessness:

> 'Heel and I,' quod he, 'and Hieghnesse of Herte
>
> Shal do the nought drede noyther Deth ne Elde,

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[487] For example, in those who represent worldly wisdom, B.IV.37a, B.X.81; unrepentant sins, C.VI.273–77, C.VII.70; *wastours*, C.VIII.159.

And so foryete sorwe, and yve nought of synne.'

(B.XX.153–55)

When Sloth, the sin that has been so powerfully associated with the concerns and character of the poet-dreamer, appears, it is given a clear pedigree for the first time (B.XX.156–62). Fulfilling earlier indications in the poem, spiritual torpor is the child of 'Life' and 'Fortune': the result of reckless abandonment to the ways of the world. The relationship Langland posits between this pseudo-joyful recklessness and dismal desperation is shown here in that the bride of Sloth *is* Wanhope. Swiftly, carnival turns to horror. Wanhope becomes a David playing Goliath's role, from whose sling emerges 'Dread-of-Despair' casting a nuclear winter on a twelve-mile radius (XX.156–64).

In a contrasting but parallel paradoxical lineage, it is from Old Age that *hope* will emerge: since only Elde can accomplish the *impossibilia* and 'afere Wanhope' (XX.166). Life desires an artificial and technologized sustaining of youth that hovers ever on the edge of despair precisely because it defines its enjoyment by the worldly experience of vitality. Fearing the symptoms more than the condition, he seeks placatory comfort in a medical doctor and his drugs and prescriptions rather than *Christus Medicus*:

Lyf leeved that lechecrafte lette shulde Elde

And driven awey Deth with dyas and dragges.

(B.XX.169, 173–74)

For Langland those who have spiritual fear are those who undergo tribulation and yet 'no mischief dredden' (B.XX.65), that is to say, they fear God, but they also show hope in the face of the growing strength of wickedness; they refuse to be dislodged by material terrors, in contrast to those who fail to fear God and as a result put themselves in thrall to worldly fears (VI.273–77). Langland dramatizes the conception of natural fears as salutary when he imagines Conscience leading the 'foles' of Unity whilst sounding the horn that calls for the fearful forces of Kynde, Death, Plague and Famine to enact their positive role as instrumental in defeating evil and encouraging repentance (B.XX.76–89).

In this *passus* we are both within the work of God in history and the work of Nature in man's lifetime. The apocalyptic microcosm of Will's own life illustrates the conversion through salutary fear that is a function of the intense experience of penultimacy that Langland has generated. As Life (appropriately) departs, the allegory shifts back into the psychomachia; Elde leapfrogs Will in his wake and robs him of his hair (B.XX.192), fulfilling the prophecy of Recklessness that repentance's time is the point of old age's natural tonsure (B.XI.195). The dreamer, still seemingly outside Unity, appears as one who remains suspended between the forces of Antichrist and the body of the Church – since it is Conscience's defender, Old Age, who launches the attack. As Death draws near it is fear which causes him to ask for mercy:

And Deth drowgh neigh me: for drede gan I quake,

> And cried to Kynde, 'Out of care me brynge!'
>
> (B.XX.200–201)

The poet-dreamer then asks that Kynde 'awreke' him, and Kynde replies:

> 'Yf thow wilt ben y-wroken, wende into Unite,
>
> And hold the there evere tyle I sende for the,
>
> And loke thow cone somme craft ar thow come thennes.'
>
> (B.XX.204–206)

To be 'awroken' here, and to ask that Kynde 'awreke' him, should be related to Conscience's 'Kynde me avenge' at the close of the poem. In translation both are sometimes rendered as a reference to *vengeance*,[488] however Schmidt and Pfrenger suggest that in both cases the sense of Middle English 'a-wreken' is closer to that of rendering (punitive) justice.[489] So in what sense, and on whom, does the poet-dreamer wish to be 'y-wroken'? Pfrenger has demonstrated that by this point in the poem the whole concept of retributive justice has been re-founded on a merciful footing by Christ, arguing that righteousness and mercy may now agree. Schmidt alternatively suggests that vengeance on Elde alludes to a fitting preparation for death, which presumably frustrates the power of old age in transcending it in spiritual progress. So

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[488] Donaldson, p.355.
[489] See Schmidt, pp.726, 720 and Andrew Pfrenger '"Now Kynde me Avenge": Emotion and the Love of Vengeance in *Piers Plowman*', *Chaucer Review* 50.1 (2015), 55–87 (84–85).

I would argue that the sense of 'yf thow wilt been y-wroken' is 'if you will be reconciled through justice to God'; it alludes to punishment *for Will*, in the sense that penitence and purgation do justice to sin (B.XVIII.390).[490] And indeed the immediate consequence is that Will is assigned penance and achieves reconciliation and re-entry into the corporate body of the Church. He then lives out his purgatorial sentence 'throw Contricioun and Confessioun tyl I cam to Unite' (B.XX.213).

Confronting the fear of Death makes it possible for Will to ask God for penance, in a repetition of the penitential fear that we have seen have an effect on the poet-dreamer more than once in the course of the poem. But here in the context of the final vision of history and in the context of his own life-history it seems to have more significance. Unity, the sacramental and social life of the ecclesial body, whence fearful compunction and fear of sin in self-knowledge has finally led him, is to be a school of charity 'tyl I sende for the':

Conseille me, Kynde,' quod I, 'What crafte is beste to lerne'

'Lerne to love,' quod Kynde, 'and leve all other.'

(B.XX.204–208)

Strikingly, this is the first, and last, word God speaks directly to Will in the poem. Speaking in his aspect of divine disclosure in the world, Kynde, God points once

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[490] *MED*, 'awreken, v.' 1b.

more to the lessons that can be learnt from experience, as we saw in the Four

Daughters of God episode above**.**

However, *Piers Plowman* remains a poem about a collective problem, one that

any amount of personal penance will not solve: and a final assault led by Sloth is yet

to come. Conscience's castle is under attack not just by the sinning laity but by its

own priests and prelates. This is an allegory that has a double reading: the attack

represents the contempt the clergy and fraternal orders show towards their (personal)

consciences as well as the damage they do to the Church and the consciences of the

penitents of the *commune* (B.XX.221–23). Langland clearly believes that it is the

friars who are primarily responsible for the radical absence of *drede* that brings such

torpor and despair. They are brought in by Conscience here in the presently

unfulfilled hope that they might trigger the real grasp of spiritual *drede*: 'That Lyf

thorw his lore shall leve Coveityse / and be adradde of Deth, and withdrawe hym fram

Pryde' (B.XX.351–52).[491] But 'Sire *Penetrans-domos*' and his like continue to stand

for cheap comfort and covetousness-driven derision for penitential fear. This pardon

without fear is a parody of the redemptive mercy in which it should participate,

because it does not, as Christ did, face up to and confront death in all its terror. So,

unstimulated by fear, 'Contricioun hadde clene foryeten to crye and to wepe /And

wake for his wykked werkes' (B.XX.369–70). The kind of 'comfort' the friars offer

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[491] It has been alleged that the enabling of the friars' entry by Conscience reveals him as a flawed figure: see Sarah Wood, *Conscience and the Composition of Piers Plowman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.104. However in fact Conscience seems to have a genuine hope for a charism for the friars: in fact, it is partly in pursuit of their 'fyndyng', both material provision and spiritual role , that Conscience departs at the close of the poem.

is, again, a parody of the earned 'confort' for the 'careful' proffered through Christ's love (B.I.203). It is unsurprising, then, that having rendered their sick patients 'careless' in the most negative sense, it is again *sleuthe*, so deeply associated with lack of right *drede*, and Pride, companion of lack of humility, who come in to the attack. The final plight of the gathered Church of Unity at the very close of the poem is in fact a careless sleep, paralleling that on which the poem opened:

> [Contricioun] 'lith adreynt and dremeth' Seyde Pees, 'and so do many other.
> The Frere with his phisik this folke hath enchaunted,
> And doth men drynke dwale: thei drede no synne.'
> (B.XX.377–79)

Conscience's ensuing actions accord rather precisely with those taken by the sin of Sloth in response to the instructions of 'Vigilate', who, following his despairing swoon, 'bidde hym of grace' and told him to go on pilgrimage (B.V.440-48). The final scene of the poem is once again about the two interrelated poles of carelessness and carefulness.

Conscience's departure from Unity allegorically illustrates this prominent problem for the Church: the absence and ignoring of conscience, and so the absence of self-castigation, awareness of sin, and its rejection in fear. However, just as with Piers' tearing the Pardon, this departure is also a paradoxical gesture: in performing the conditions of sin, it becomes a penitential gesture of healing, a turn by Conscience towards the true arbitrator of conscience: '"By Crist!" quod Conscience tho, "I wole

bicome a pilgrim"' (B.XX.381). Conscience rather underlines and participates in the Church's penitential forms than abandons them. So, in the practice of ritual penitence, the sinner might perform her absence from and separation from the Church as Unity, either by going on pilgrimage or through temporary exclusion from the sacrament or the church body; indeed, even the confessional enunciation of sins can be seen as an articulation of the degree to which the sinner has alienated herself from the Church. But at the same it is precisely these performances that enact the reorientation towards unity and union, just as Conscience here also does. Conscience embodies a state of eschatological *exspectatio*, the state of tensed hope that includes fear and eschatological expectation 'as wide as the world lasteth' (B.XX.382), a phrase that deliberately contains an ambiguity of geographical and temporal extent.

Sleep has had an ambivalence or a double valence in the poem – it is also the realm of vision and growth, which is itself, as with all dream-vision, a double for the space of the textual composition itself. It can be understood as a double of the *regio dissimilitudinis*, the world as a space of seeing, yet seeing that is dim, in figures and riddles.[492] And yet by the close of the poem the figure of sleep has listed firmly towards the negative, privatory associations in which it models an unconcern for self, God or world; a negative recklessness which stands for the torpor of contrition and conscience untouched by the drede that must be the other half of a true hope or a true love.

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[492] The 'apeiros anomoithos' or 'land of unlikeness'; see Plato, *Statesman*, 273d, ed. Cooper, p.315; Plotinus, *Enneads*, 1.8.13, trans. by Stephen MacKenna, ed. by John Dillon (London: Penguin, 1991), p.67; Augustine, *Confessions* 7.10, trans. by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.123.

Hence the dreamer's final waking might be another reason to be hopeful about the conclusion of the poem. Here Conscience's cries do finally have an effect. The voice of Conscience, like that of the archetypal prophet of Christ John the Baptist, 'clamans in deserto', awakes from his long and intermittent vision the dreamer, who, perhaps importantly, remains within the Barn of the Church. Whatever the revelations he has received over the course of the poem, his dreaming began with a careless, fearless, reckless and slothful sleep, and this stupor was an icon for the blindness of his own times to their own faults. It is, we must hope, from this sleep that he has finally been awakened:

And sitthe he gradde after Grace *til* I gan awake (B.XX.385).

VII.   Conclusion

The explorations of *drede* in *Piers* are sophisticated and convoluted, ample evidence of the rich engagement with the theological place of fear in this late medieval vernacular masterpiece. In *Piers Plowman* a fearful, penitential alertness, with consciousness of ultimate and proximate judgement, is the circumstance for personal and collective-ecclesial and social reform. This runs, not despite, but rather in concord with its radical assertions concerning mercy and salvation. It emerges alongside a narrative revelation of the assurance of prevenient grace and mercy, in such a way as neither to assert the passivity nor the predominance of the individual will. In *Piers Plowman* a moral-tropological exploration moves towards Christological and

metaphysical understanding of the correct place for fear and its relationship to love. From the outset, we can see Langland exploring with unparalleled subtlety the dialectic of the 'careful' and the 'careless' in their positive and negative aspects. On the one hand, fear is an essential component of fully embodied, penitential knowledge of self and world. On the other hand, there is a positive faithful abandonment to prevenient grace and divine merciful purpose. Will, the dreamer-poet, is an exemplar of the reckless, careless penitent, a figure redolent of apocalypse whose fallible, semi-eremitic journey through the twists and turns of the poem embodies a sometimes misdirected desire, characterised necessarily by his own *lack* of perfected moral qualities, and especially by an apparent lack of fear in his *acedia*. Will is journeying imperfectly, in a spiralling fashion that nonetheless circles ever more closely around the possibility of a figure of merciful justice and true reconciliation through solidarity, which is Piers the Plowman and his capacity to shade into Christ. Whilst the Pardon scene apparently represents a reassertion of the importance of judgement fear, its tearing by Piers is both a human and a Christic response to the fear it inspires, as he is drawn into a compunctive and penitential journey through the contritional pain it appears to seed in him. Hence this scene embodies reflection on the importance of maintaining judgement fear in the 'medium aevum' in which penitential participation in the continuing drama of salvation involves an important place for fear in the always-already-not-yet of salvation, and extends Piers' figuration of the penitent who undergoes fear and Christ as its redeeming participant.

The apex of *Piers Plowman*, with the crucifixion and harrowing of hell, is the clearest enunciation of the gracious action of God that freely compensates for human

lack. This responds to the 'open' penitential condition of Will, who embodies simultaneously the apparent opposites of too little and too much fear. Christ's presence in the continuing life of church and sacrament then provides a context of penitential participation into which the poem calls the reader. The intense hope and joy that is the reconciliation of the Four Daughters and the release of the inhabitants of the 'limbus patrum' presents within history a testimony to the action of divine mercy-in-judgement. The banishment of the fear of death, sin and hell is not their exclusion but rather precisely their *inclusion* in the narrative which has only a happy ending.

In the final passus the fearful reading mode generated by the frame of crisis and apocalyptic penultimacy is powerfully reasserted, but in the light of a penitent Will now apparently open to true conversion. I argue that this is presented as the circumstance of possibility for transformation and conversion, generated precisely from the intensity of tribulation and suffering. This transformation comes, not in spite of the fearful conditions of the end, but through them in the final, and clearest, demonstration of true fear's proximity to hope and false fearlessness' proximity to despair. To grasp the scope of salvation is to embrace a particular tensive fear that refuses a falsely transcendentalising eschatology or a fully immanent hope based in this-worldly reform. It embraces the horizon of judgement as neither purely this-worldly and individual, and so reducible to a private and immanent economy of proximate comfort, nor purely other-worldly and transcendently unrelated to the shape of the present church and world and the soul in peregrination. In this *passus* we are both within the work of God in history and the work of Nature in man's lifetime.

The apocalyptic microcosm of Will's own life illustrates the conversion through salutary fear that is a function of the intense experience of penultimacy that Langland has generated.

CONCLUSION

Perfect love casts out fear; fear is the beginning of wisdom. To look at Middle

English understandings of fear is to hold together medieval aspirations to human

capacity for transcendence – salvation, glory, complete eschatological reconciliation

and perfection in love – and medieval rootedness in, and resourcing from, the realities

of human incapacity. There are fair reasons to associate certain aspects of fourteenth-

century English religious imagery and discourse with a 'salutary' terror; and indeed

this has been one points of origin for this thesis' search for a Middle English account

of the role of *drede*. However, a role for fear in devotion, spirituality and their related

theologies does not run *contra* the incarnational and affective emphasis that many

recent scholars, discussed in the Introduction, have assigned to the fourteenth century.

This role for fear can in fact be seen to accompany a powerful belief in natural

capacity. Human fear is part of this natural capacity, entwined, paradoxically, in the

'incapacity' of the condition of nature as that of post-lapsarian weakness and

sinfulness, and exists 'in the gap', in the discernment of distance between the real and

ideal. However, at the same time, late-medieval vernacular theology is also embracing

the possibility of a paradoxical closing of that gap in the discernment of fear's *telos* in

love. If the circumstance of relation between God and humanity is for the Middle

Ages this circumstance of redeemable fallenness, then the originary instance of fear,

as imagined in the *Book of Vices and Virtues*, when Adam hides himself from God in

the Garden of Eden immediately following his fall from grace, is already an instance

of fear as a spiritual gift, leading him back towards divine love.

A word that has come up again and again in this thesis is that of 'experience'. The texts we have been discussing are united by their emphasis on the experience of religious fear. For to 'drede' God is in the most primary sense to *experience* him. This is not necessarily a rational orientation towards God, or even a consciously affective one. It is by a following through of that fear, a submission to *that* fear and its illumination of the lack inherent in the self (as with Langland's *nede*, and his stress on the Middle English verb *suffren*, to undergo, to experience, to suffer), that we begin to apprehend those forms of undergoing and submission which are neither passive nor active, but rather the shaping experience of fear. The experiential-sapiential, as opposed to the rational assimilation of knowledge, characterizes all these texts in that they are in every case an invitation to participate the affective and theological possibilities they explore. To recognize the 'beyond' and the 'other' of God from the creaturely perspective is to distinguish and 'know' God and self, in a certain cognitively negative sense. It brings together what it is to know and to feel. Fear grounds the love with which it is intertwined, in the earthly, creaturely circumstance in which salvation is played out; as Julian of Norwich suggests, fear also forms love for its continuing dynamism in the eschaton.

This thesis has shown that reflection on the role of fear in the love of God was deeply embedded within vernacular theology of the later Middle Ages. Examining this internal discourse and debate powerfully cuts across the once-regnant historical 'big picture' we described in the Introduction, which, at its most extreme, depicted a primitive and irrational medieval layperson caught in coercive fear-structures. By framing an account of *drede* from the perspective of writers, readers, performers and

hearers of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Middle English I have sought to illuminate alternative discussions that are aware of the danger of wrongly or too strongly-held fears, and yet deeply committed nonetheless to the place of fear in the spiritual economy.

In Chapter One, an engagement with some catechetical texts demonstrated that theorizations and descriptions of fear as a gift of the spirit worked alongside a defense of the vernacular to illuminate the paradox of fear's 'humble' but essential status. I would connect this to what Nicholas Watson identifies as a 'third current' of vernacularity, where a new, internal rather than 'top-down', privileging of the lay and active life in the wake of Lateran IV, is engaged with a valorization of the vernacular closely tied to a hypostatic theology stressing Christ's kenosis as revelatory of his divinity.[493] Whilst Watson does not write about fear, and, as we have seen, tends to emphasise a certain 'positivity' and optimism, its valency as humble and initatory locates it well within the paradoxes of humility and elevation he associates with this kenotic vernacularity. This collection of texts which privilege *drede* are carving out accounts of holiness which push back against either a science or an affective *gnosis* of divine experience and alignment, privileging experientially and prayerfully-derived wisdom, located in a specific, often quotidian context. We see in Julian and *Contemplations* how this can *accord* with later medieval affectivity, which by no means stresses only upbeat moods, all the while also demonstrating a meta-reflective, doctrinal and instructive accompaniment to that tradition of piety.

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[493] Watson, 'Conceptions of the Word', pp.110–22.

The *Speculum* accords fear a paradoxically central place in its account of virtuous sapience. The *Contemplations* builds an account of a democratically accessible, active, and moral holiness which annexes the territory of high degrees of love that are explored very differently by the new contemplatives, such as Richard Rolle. In Chapter Two, Julian's *Revelations* are shown to be a striking culmination of such possibility. Her role for *drede* keeps in play both 'humble' and 'high' degrees, in a continuous earthly dialectic which leads to her exposition of the dual apotheosis of love and fear, and hence space for an 'eschatological' understanding of fear. With Julian of Norwich the inherited Latin theological tradition, with its schematic taxonomies of degrees of fear, is modified in such a way as to assert a more circular and simultaneous, not gradated, experience of *drede*. Throughout, stressing the contribution made by the literary vernacular, we see how the form and figurative aspects of these texts, not formally conditioned by the structural limitations of scholastic texts, open new possibilitiess.

I spoke briefly in the Introduction of at least some contemporary scholastic directions that emphasized the power and arbitrary will of God, and of a mode of 'Augustinianism' that certainly eventually grew into a Protestant definition of fear's positive role as the despairing precondition of receptivity to grace. The role of fear as part of the human experience of weakness as nonetheless latent potency comes especially into focus in the context of Christ's fear in its exemplary and redemptive dimensions. Reading together the Gethsemane episodes of the cycle plays in Chapter Three shows how fresh and diverse Christology was being accomplished through the medieval vernacular stage. Christ's fear, most explicitly associated with his agony in

the Garden of Gethseane before his Passion, had been a contested subject in the theological tradition, engaging with questions about his epistemic and affective capacities, and where the latter might broach an inappropriate sin. These episodes also demonstrate how central the therapeutic and sacramental model of Christ's participable affectivity was to the medieval vernacular theology of fear. This same Christological emphasis resonates through *Contemplations of the Dread and Love of God*, Julian's *Revelations*, and *Piers Plowman*, suggesting that many vernacular theological accounts of the role of fear rely on the redemptive possibility for human passions held out by doctrines of fall and redemption.

In the reading of *Piers Plowman* in Chapter Four, we see the conscious appropriation of fear as a dynamic spiritual state and corrective, in a way that is not simply aligned with institutional control, conservatism and restraint but, rather with an orthodox reformism and penitentialism. Once again, fear remains central in a text characterized by a 'positive' and incarnational theology, an optimistic soteriology and a powerful vision of human capacity. We saw how the poem's approach to fear necessarily involves a theological 'double vision', in which, as in Julian, Christ's salvific overcoming is both foregone and to come. This is magnified, and given a very collective and socially instantiated spin by Langland's apocalypticism, which provides a proximate horizon of fear as a dynamic force with the potential to reform individual and society. This reading demonstrates that fear for the self and for society was an intense driving force in reformist social critique, as well as containing its own account of the devotional and pentitential role of fear, and of the dialectic of fear and hope, in the counterpoised knowledge of mercy and judgement. Moreover, once again

the emphasis, as with our other vernacular texts, is on an experiential and invitatory visionary form which suggests a kind of participation that is both affective and intellectual, a sapiential mode of experiential undergoing rather than a rational or contemplative assimilation of spiritual knowledge.

There are a number of avenues for research that this thesis opens up without directly exploring, in the role of fear in other contemporary texts and contexts. I have shown that love and fear are deeply interwoven, and that vernacular poetry freely engages with properly theological themes. Whilst beyond the scope of this thesis in breadth of period and diversity of literary language, one important and unexplored context is that of the place of fear in contemporary chivalric discourse and romance, both Old French and Middle English. Romance and chivalric texts – most usually clerically-authored texts for secular contexts – proffer ethical treatments of fear and courage where chivalric *mores* engage in potential clashes with the emphases of Christian theology. In these ambiguously 'secular' texts, there are many opportunities for examining the play of chivalric valour and honour in relation to the themes of humility and holy *drede* with which this thesis has dealt.[494] This is true from Chrétien de Troyes' ambigious, amphibious clerical-secular romances to the work of the *Gawain*-poet and the didactic romance of the later fourteenth and the fifteenth century. Moreover, in the realm of *fin'amor*, in trouvère and sacred lyric, but also in

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[494] Barbara Newman's *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular against the Sacred* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), emphasises the counterpoint of sacred and secular, and the difficulties of interpretations this produces, as the primary reading context of the Middle Ages, and invites us once again, against the anti-Robertsonian current, to reading romance with theology in mind.

Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, there exist clear parallels between religious and 'secular' discourses of love, fear and loss. This exploration of the entanglement of fear and love in the later-medieval religious experience may lead to more discoveries about the place of fear in medieval culture understood more widely.
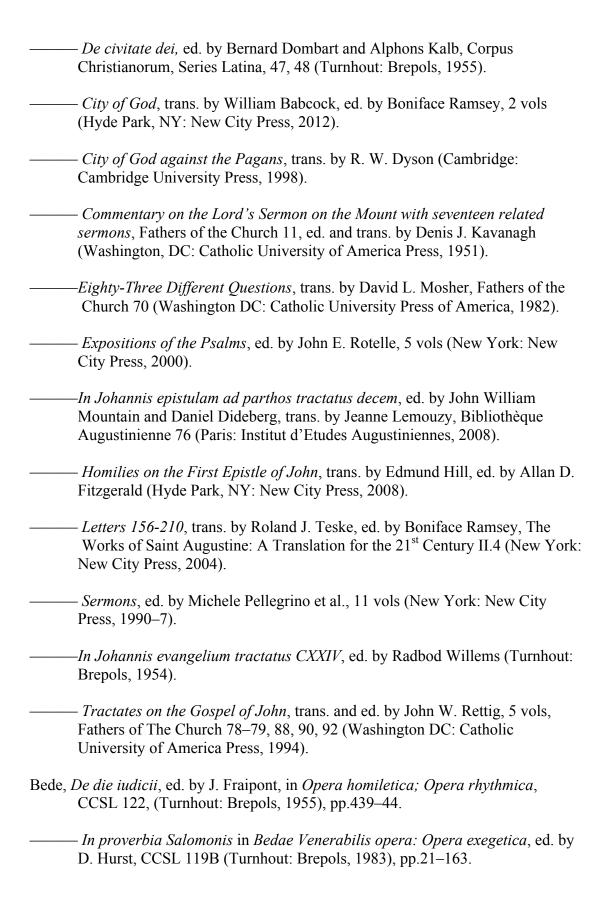
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