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The Narrative of Salvation and Ritual Re-Presentation in Piers Plowman

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ABSTRACT

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Scholarship on *Piers Plowman* has consistently overlooked the rich depth of meaning concerning the Eucharist that Langland provides in the final few passus. The poem examines a broad view of salvation history that encompasses the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and the advent of Christ and the Church while simultaneously presenting the narrative of one's personal salvation that runs parallel with the discussions of literal salvation history. Both of these narratives, historical and personal, culminate in the poem with Christ's sacrifice on the cross, which is re-presented at every Mass by Christ's Eucharistic presence. Within the text, Piers acts as an evolving allegory that takes on different facets of salvation, from Christ to Peter, which then leads to Piers becoming a central Eucharistic figure that also renders all of salvation history liturgically present by the consecration of bread and wine into Christ's body and blood. Thus, the personal narrative of salvation intersects with the broader, historical narrative by the connection of Christ's Church and the sacraments therein, specifically the liturgically real presence of Christ in the Church's sacrament of the altar.

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William Langland's fourteenth-century masterwork of allegorical poetry *Piers Plowman* illustrates various facets of medieval religion, and through the recurring dream visions of the protagonist Will, the narrative seeks to answer Will's query of what salvation requires, portraying his discoveries as a journey segmented into 20 total passus (steps) in the B-text. The four passus of *Piers Plowman* with which this thesis will concern itself, from Passus XVI to Passus XIX, encompass the entirety of salvation history, from the Old Testament patriarchs to the contemporary medieval church of Langland's day. After the protagonist Will has searched far and wide for Do-Well, Do-Better, and Do-Best, he finally comes across the character of Faith, a meeting that initiates the final leg of his dream-vision journeys. In these final passus, the poem increasingly focuses on the entirety of the soteriological narrative, specifically how the individual's personal history of salvation overlaps with the grander arc of biblical history. Yet, in the poem as well as in the broader Christian life, the figure of Christ and the types of Christ that the work uses are at the center of proper Christian salvation and praxis. Langland's work acts as a visualization of the medieval Christian understanding of what I will call "liturgical realism," or the idea that liturgical ritual can and does reify that which it signifies. Just as Will sees Christ before his eyes at Mass, the common layman can as well, and the poem manifests this image by depicting Will's evolving understanding of salvation history, Christ's purpose, the Church, and the liturgy. Hence, the passus of Will's journey, the steps leading to the summit of knowledge, become the passus that the reader takes in furthering their own understanding. The poem does not merely reflect the surrounding church culture into the structure of the work, but rather the poem reveals integral theological points necessary to the full comprehension and appreciation of the Christian life, that of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the ongoing presence of Christ in the Church's hierarchy. Thus, a full analysis of the Eucharistic and ecclesiastical

implications of salvation history as presented in *Piers Plowman* reveals Langland's concern with an intimate Christological connection between the average believer and God in the Church. The final passus highlight the continuing journey of salvation on both a literal, historical level and a tropological level, and as such, the poem presents an intricate web of symbology, culminating in the liturgical realism of the Eucharist, that links all aspects of the Christian life to their inception on Calvary and thereby Jesus Christ himself.

Many critics have discussed the liturgy in *Piers Plowman* to the exclusion of direct examinations of Langland's Eucharistic understanding. Mary Clemente Davlin, in examining within her literature review the work of her fellow Dominican Fr. Conrad Pepler, asserts that the poem "dramatizes the liturgy and invites contemplation of its inner meaning" and is especially focused on seeing God "in relationships which are public and open though deeply personal" (127, 125). In his examination of the similarity between choral traditions and *Piers*, Bruce Holsinger explains "one of the central tenets of medieval liturgical commentary was that it constitutes an earthly embodiment of salvation history" and gave the created world a liturgical role (108-109). In other words, Holsinger notes that medieval thought believed the entirety of the created world, not just those present at the Mass, has its purpose directed to the celebration of the liturgy upon the liturgy's commencement, and all earthly effort must be focused upon properly completing the Mass, forgetting all else. Thus, Davlin begets the notion of *Piers* as a fundamentally liturgical and devotional text, and with Holsinger's point in mind, my assertion that Langland's use of allegory creates a liturgical ritual capable of reifying salvation history has historical grounding. As to what Langland's use of liturgy looks like within the text, Raymond St-Jacques argues that the entire work can be read as the liturgical year playing out and renewing each Advent: "Langland's poem, like the liturgy, has come full circle, ending as it began with a

pilgrimage; we are left with the thought, which the liturgy repeats every year through its cyclical structure, that this pilgrimage will only lead to many more like it until, in death, the pilgrim finally reaches the home of the Father" (387). Conor McKee responds, however, that the poem is far more interested in a "lifetime of devotional practice" that centers on liturgical timescales that are "bound together by allegory; constantly evolving symbolic relationships intertwine sacred history and the present moment," and he asserts that Langland draws inspiration from the exegetical traditions of the liturgy to understand this temporal framework (363, 360). I concur with McKee's critique of St-Jacques and his understanding of *Piers* as a devotional text, but I believe there is a central framework within the poem, that of the Eucharist, that already unites all of these disparate ideas and does not require liturgical exegesis.

Specific discussions of the Eucharist and Langland's explication of the liturgy together are largely absent from the scholarship on the poem, with the notable exception of Jennifer Garrison and David Aers's readings, which are in contest with one another. For Garrison, Langland's Eucharistic portrayal is concerned with the communal unity of the Church, and by the liturgical presentation of the Eucharist, the members of the community can be sacramentally bound to one another. Since my argument also deals particularly with the Eucharist as the summation of the Christian faith in *Piers*, Garrison's work is therefore quite important, for it provides a foundation for my discussion of the topic. In contrast, Aers asserts that Langland "consistently resists any separation between sacramental theology, the current ecclesiastical polity, and eschatology" (Aers 41). More than that, Aers argues that Langland consistently "refuses to prolong discussion around the presence, around the consecration, around the metaphysics and physics of substance and accidents" (49). In Aers's reading, Langland does not disagree with a substantial presence of Christ in the Eucharist but sees the Eucharist as a vehicle

for social cohesion first and foremost. Garrison agrees with Aers that Langland is preoccupied with how the Eucharist binds the Christian community together. However, she counters, correctly, that Langland does not sidestep the contemporary discussions of the Real Presence as Aers argues (Garrison 82). Rather, the understanding of the sacramental reality of the Eucharist is integral to understanding Langland's argument for social unification in the Eucharist, that Langland's interest in community and the Real Presence "stems from his sense of the inseparability of the two" (82). In Garrison's estimation, Langland believes individual piety can be useful but is ultimately "skeptical of any spirituality that totally neglects communal worship" (90). Communal worship, centered on the Eucharist, binds together the mystical and sacramental body of Christ, and the final few passus present the failure of the Christian community to realize this.

I substantially agree with Garrison's argument, but I still believe the connection can go yet further. Garrison's work centers on the role of the Eucharist in social unification by the Real Presence, which sets the stage for my own critical analysis. Surely, the Eucharist binds together the contemporary Christian community, yet it also binds together the whole of salvation history. Christians within the community unite with each other, those in their parishes and even those across the world, and they unite with the polyvalent reality of Christ and his salvific fulfillment of the Old Testament. Moreover, they unite with all of the Christians who preceded them in the faith. The Eucharist, then, becomes for Langland more than the thread that ties peasant to king; it ties the earthly sojourner to the heavenly resident, the Christian layman to the Jewish prophet.

FIDES ET RATIO: ABRAHAM AND THE JOURNEY OF FAITH

The discussion of the Tree of Charity at the beginning of Passus XVI provides a foreshadowing of the remaining passus through a diegetically prophetic dream; most importantly, the Tree establishes the beginning of sin and the need for Christ. After Will hears the name of Piers Plowman, he falls into another dream. This time, the dream centers on the Tree of Charity, which lies in a "gardyn" that "God made hymselve," and Piers's explanation of such (B.16.13). The Tree itself serves as a symbol of the triune nature of God, as Piers expounds to Will, and the Tree's fruits are the righteous biblical figures of the pre-Christian era, they who have grown from the roots of God's love in the Old Testament. The inciting incident occurs, then, when Piers shakes the Tree to try and allow the fruit of the tree to fall, and while the fruit fall, the devil rushes to gather "hem alle togideres, bothe grete and smale – / Adam and Abraham and Ysaye the prophete, / Sampson and Samuel, and Seint Johan the Baptist" (B.16.80-82). The devil's theft of the fruit leads to the need for the Son to "jouke in [Mary's] chambre" [rest in Mary's chamber] and then "juste therefore, and bi juggement of armes, / Wheither sholde fonge the fruyt – the fend or hymselve" [therefore joust, and by judgment of arms, / Decide which should seize the fruit – the fiend or himself] (B.16.92, 95-96). Hence, the garden of the Tree of Charity can be associated with the Garden of Eden, for both are the site of the initial corruption of order that leads to the need for Christ's incarnation. Following the timeline of narrative salvation established by the following vignette including "Feith," which will be discussed below, Will's dream can be seen as an extended version of the protoevangelium in Genesis 3:15. However, the more important aspect of the Eden allusion is the implication for what Christ allows the Christian through his salvific grace. With the fruit of the Tree of Charity stolen from the "gardyn" of a man's "Herte," one does not have access to the virtue of charity at all

(B.16.15). Locked out of one's own heart, there is no true charity grown, for even the righteous products of charity before Christ are cast into "*Limbo Inferni*" [*Limbo of Hell*], though the garden is still rightfully God's (B.16.84). Thus, Christ's sacrifice is necessary to undo the original sin of Adam in the literal narrative of salvation history, but in the text's analogy of Eden to the heart of the individual, a representation of exile from one's own interior life appears. To once again be able to enter and enjoy the fruits of the Tree of Charity and escape the pains of inferno, one must look forward to Christ and his "juste" in Jerusalem. The foreshadowing in the protoevangelium of Passus XVI accomplishes this by hinting at the joust to come, and the lament of Abraham, who embodies the theological virtue of faith, of those righteous now stuck in his bosom from this fall reiterates the point (B.16.253-269). The individual Christian, like the telescopic figure of Abraham, must understand their inability to enter heaven or gain any virtue except through the work of Christ accomplished on the cross.

With the entry of disorder into the world by the initial theft from the Tree of Charity, the Christian journey that seeks to rectify this disorder through the power of Christ can properly begin with the theological virtue of faith. Both the grander narrative of spiritual disorder in humanity's relationship to God as a whole and the individual narrative of spiritual disorder within the Christian's life are expressed in the poem by amalgamating the virtue of faith and Abraham, the father of faith, into one multifaceted symbolic entity. Following this discourse on the Tree of Charity at the beginning of the passus, Will stumbles upon Abraham, who calls himself "Feith," on a "myd-Lenten Sonday" (B.16.176, 172). The specific mention of "myd-Lenten Sonday" places the textual narrative within the liturgical year, specifically within the preparatory season of Lent, and this detail, therefore, adds a liturgical dimension to the tropological facet of the text, which will be touched upon in greater detail later. Abraham, in his

explanation of his purpose, attempts to explain the doctrine of the Trinity to Will, and his pedagogical process relies on a fundamental claim of Christian orthodoxy: that reason and nature reveal God to some degree. To explain to Will the Trinitarian formula in a simple manner, Abraham describes Adam and Eve begetting children: "And thus is mankynde or manhede of matrimoyne yspronge, / And bitokneth the Trinite and trewe bileve" [And thus is mankind or manhood from matrimony sprung / And betokens the Trinity and true belief] (B.16.209-210). Abraham argues that the expression of marital love parallels the eternal expression of divine love, but in an even greater assertion, he argues that marriage inherently points to orthodoxy, or "trewe bileve." The procession of the Holy Spirit from the love of the Father and the Son mirrors the creation of new life from the father and mother, and from this parallelism, Abraham asserts the evidential nature of orthodoxy within the world. As "Feith," Abraham's claim aligns with the beginning of knowledge in the Christian journey, that of natural law. The doctrine of natural law precluding ignorance of a basic framework of orthodoxy, even to pagans and Gentiles, is found explicitly in St. Paul's letter to the Romans: "Because that which is known of God is manifest in them. For God hath manifested it unto them. For the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made; his eternal power also, and divinity: so that they are inexcusable" (Douay-Rheims, 1:19-20). Hence, Abraham's discussion of faith begins with the underlying assumption that "trewe bileve" can be known without the need of private revelation. The salvation narrative of the individual, then, begins in much the same way, for the underlying foundations of faith are that of the natural world, according to the father of faith. The process of procreation required for the propagation of the human race is simultaneously one of the most powerful tools in the propagation of understanding the true nature of the Godhead. In Paul and Abraham's estimation, the world's processes are a

sign of a signified divinity, and therefore, they reflect the Trinitarian nature of the divine. Signs, however, need a signified, and the signified, the "trewe" God, becomes the aspect of theology unknown to human reason unless by revelation.

Reason alone cannot get one to proper faith, for Abraham stresses that the greater knowledge of God, of how he acts in the world and how he reveals himself, can only come from divine interaction with humanity, apart from knowledge discerned from pure reason. The sign of creation does indeed point to the signified of the divine, but God lays the semiotic groundwork, as man cannot connect God to the Father unless told that they are able. Abraham points to the importance of such signification by explaining that he knew God "by his blasen" which has upon it "[t]hre leodes in oon lyth, noon lenger than oother," [three soldiers in one cohort, none longer than another] named "*Pater*," "*Filius*," and "Holi Goost" (B.16.179-188). As Abraham goes on to say and as previously discussed, the fact that there is a God can be seen through one's reason, and even the fact that there is a triune God is reasonable, as Abraham asserts. However, the aspects of God -- of his being the triune God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- can only be seen through how God reveals himself, in this case the image upon his "blasen." The signified of God can be known apart from God in the same way that one can see a chair but not know the word "chair," but to refer to God's triune aspects requires God's revelation. Abraham reaffirms this point by noting, "And there hym likede and lovede, in thre (leodes) hym shewede" [And there he loved and took pleasure, revealed himself in three persons] (B.16.201).[1] God appears in three persons where he "likede" and "lovede," so the Trinity is not something immediately apparent. The text offers several analogies to understanding the Trinity and how one is to view it correctly or at least proficiently, but Abraham makes the unique assertion that marriage "bitokeneth" an

[1] I thank and credit Holly Johnson for this translation.

orthodox position of the Trinity. However, Abraham makes this assertion already following his interaction with the "thre leodes." Hence, while God as a concept is certainly knowable by reason alone, the Trinity is merely reasonable, not something to be reasoned to. Put another way, Abraham claims it is clear that God operates in three because the basic building blocks of human existence, the familial unit, is a representation of the threefold love of the Trinity, but Abraham could not have reasoned to the Trinitarian doctrine without having the revelation of meeting the "thre leodes." Thus, the faith of Christian orthodoxy is a mixture of personal experience and divine communication, both equally reasonable but the latter not able to be reasoned to. Due to the multifaceted symbolism of Abraham as both embodied faith and the literal historical figure of Abraham, the character acts as a compound lens, by his use of Christian theology, to reveal the relationship between the historical faiths of Old Testament and New Testament praxis.

Abraham, within history, is the beginning of God's covenantal relationship with humanity, but by his anachronistic understanding of Christian theology, he becomes for Langland the broader figure of the beginning of every Christian's relationship with God. Continuing his discussion with Will, Abraham explains the promises made to him by God because of his faith, and he concludes this explanation with an anachronistic use of the *Magnificat*, referencing himself and Christological prophecy: "*Quam olim Abrahe promisisti et semini eius* / And siththe he sente me, to seye I sholde sacrifise, / And doon hym worship with breed and with wyn bothe" [*Which he once promised to Abraham and his seed* / And afterwards he sent me, to say I should sacrifice, / And worship him with both bread and wine] (B.16.242-244). The presence of the Magnificat in the speech of the first of the Old Testament patriarchs telescopes the two covenants, old and new, into one harmonious "Feith" with the center placed firmly on Christ. Mary, the original speaker of Abraham's quotation, presents Christ as the

fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises at the advent of Christ's incarnation, and in the past, Abraham looks forward to said promises. Here, the centrality of the Eucharist in this anticipation appears, for Abraham juxtaposes his prophetic, diegetic foretelling with the Lord's command that he "sacrifise, / And doon hym worship with breed and with wyn bothe." The reference to the sacrifice of Melchizedek in Genesis 14 looks forward to the priesthood of Melchizedek foretold in Psalm 110 and fulfilled in Christ's priesthood within the Church. Thus, the reference to a "myd-Lenten Sonday" centers all of these disparate pieces on the cohesive understanding of Abraham as a symbol of the Christian everyman. In faith, the Christian recognizes Christ as the fulfillment of the Abrahamic prophecies, first by natural reason and then by revealed truth as Abraham had done, and then, the Christian is commanded to worship and sacrifice to the Lord with "breed and with wyn." The tropological journey must begin with faith to understand the Lord and then lead to the worship and sacrifice of the Lord through the Mass, which is the continuation of the covenantal harmony that Abraham establishes by telescoping his actions with the Marian exclamation of Christ's coming. As this whole conversation is placed within Lent, the foretelling of Abraham looks forward to Christ's sacrifice and the liturgical re-presentation of Calvary that is proffered at every Mass, just as the individual Christian is called to prepare themself for the coming crucifixion at the height of the liturgical year. Yet before proper participation can begin, a proper understanding of why Christ's sacrifice was truly necessary must precede the cross, and accordingly, Will must interact with the remaining theological virtues.

Gaudium et Spes: Love and the Reordering of Virtue

As the narrative progresses into Passus XVII, the text continues the analogy between the theological virtues and the three stages of God's revelation to man to emphasize the necessity of Christ within both the narrative of the text and salvation history more broadly. Within this passus, Will meets the character of Moses, the biblical Jewish hero now rendered as an allegorical representation of the theological virtue of Hope, carrying two stone tablets with the Mosaic Law written upon them. As previously mentioned, Paul undercuts his Jewish interlocutors in Romans by pointing out that Abraham did not need the Mosaic Law to be justified. So too, within the narrative framework of the passus, the question of justification in light of the Law needs to be answered, for Will inquires of Moses, "What neded it thanne a newe lawe to brynge, / Sith the firste suffiseth to savacion and to blisse?" [What need was it then to bring a new law, / Since the first suffices to salvation and to bliss?] (B.17.31-32). There is an inherent tension, seemingly, in God's plan to institute the "newe lawe" of Moses when God was able to save those who repented by faith already. Will's protest that the "newe lawe" "telleth noght of the Trinite" adds the further wrinkle of why God seems to reveal himself in different ways at different times (B.17.34). The text answers this question by juxtaposing Will's dismissal of Hope as superfluous with a retelling of the parable of the Good Samaritan, this time witnessed diegetically by Will but still clad in the discussion of the theological virtues and salvation history. As in the biblical story, an incapacitated man left on the side of the road is passed over by two figures and saved by a third, but in Langland's rendition, the first two are Faith and Hope, played by Abraham and Moses respectively. Hope, "that hadde so ybosted / How he with Mosys maundement hadde many men yholpe" [that had so boasted / How he with Moses's commandment had many men helped], ultimately fails to do what he knows is required of him

by the Law, and Faith, that had saved many before, is equally unable to help the incapacitated man (B.17.60-61). Thus, the man can only be saved by the Samaritan, a Christ figure who enters the scene riding on mankind's horse "*Caro*," who explains that the cure for the man's ills is for him to be "baptised as it were" in "the blood of a barn born of a mayde" [the blood of a baby born of a maiden] (B.17.108, 94-95). Accordingly, love, most specifically the sacrificial and incarnational love of Christ, is the key to salvation. The man, injured by the "Outlawe" that hides in "*Inferno*," is a stand-in for humanity in general, so the text asserts that Faith and Hope, in terms of rectifying the injury of sin, have no power (B.17.103, 109). They are superseded by Love, the love of Christ, and they cannot function apart from love. Yet the text does not impugn the former two, but rather, the Samaritan commands them "excused," for "hir help may litel availle" [their help is little advantage] (B.17.91). Hence, looking to the beginning of the passus and Will's dilemma, the text has now shown that Faith, at least Faith exclusively, was not what saved souls nor was adherence to "Mosys maundement." Extrapolating to the narrative of salvation, the argument further asserts that any saved before Christ was sacrificed within time were ultimately saved by that same sacrifice. As Christ's necessity becomes apparent at the macroscale of salvation history, his necessity at the microscale of the individual Christian also comes into focus by the figure of the Samaritan.

The tropological significance of Love's supremacy in the order of soteriology becomes evident when examining the role that the Samaritan plays for the two prior virtues and taking into account Passus XVII's reference to Eucharistic participation in the sacrificial love of Christ. In the plan of individual salvation, the Samaritan explains that, after the fettering of Satan, Faith will "be forster here and in this fryth walke / And kennen out comune men that knowen noght the contree" [be forester here and walk in this forest / And lead out the common men that do not

know the country] and Hope, now an innkeeper, "shal lede hem forth with love, as his lettre telleth, / And hostele hem and heele through Holy Chirche bileve" [shall lead them forth with love, as his letter tells, / And lodge them and heal them through faith in Holy Church] (B.17.113-114, 118-119). By the victory of Love over Satan, Faith and Hope are now ordered as caretakers until the Samaritan can "come ayein" with the blood of the "barn" earlier referenced (B.17.121). Placed within the context of salvation history, this is an allusion to the eschaton, when Christ will come once more, and until that time, "Holy Chirche" serves as an inn. Yet, on the tropological level, the text comments on the daily practice of the Christian faith. Faith leads one out of the "fryth" where bandits, otherwise known as sins, are liable to maim, as they did the man on the side of the road in the parable of the Samaritan, and brings one to the inn where the Samaritan had taken the wounded man to be healed. Faith guides one to the truth, and Hope allows one to remain in said truth and recover from the injuries begotten in the "fryth" by "bileve" in the Holy Church. The functions of Faith and Hope are now ordered to the ultimate end of the return of the blood of the "barn." One may, and should, read this not only in light of the eschaton but in the sacramental light of the Eucharist, for the Samaritan explains that the injured cannot be fully healed unless "he have eten al the barn and his blood ydronke" [he has eaten all of the child and drank his blood] (B.17.98). Those in the inn of Holy Church wait for Christ to "come ayein" in glory, surely, but they also wait for the blood of the "barn" that is sacramentally present. Therefore, Faith and Hope are ordered to waiting for the embodiment of Love in Christ, both in sacramental species and in eschatological end. The sacrifice of Christ that the Samaritan speaks of as salvific is made present to the residents of the inn at every Mass, and the intricate weaving of the text's analogies reaffirms that the Abrahamic covenant and Mosaic Law's purpose is fulfilled in that one sacrifice as well.

The telescoping of the Old and New Testament by Hope's carrying of glossed commandments forwards a similar idea of condensing salvation history to the same effect. The two commandments, "*Dilige Deum et proximum tuum*" [*Love God and your neighbor*], are accompanied by the additional gloss of "*In hiis duobus pendet tota lex et prophetia*" [*On these two hangs the whole law and the prophets*] (B.17.12, 15). Both citations are actually from Matthew 22:37-40 and are Christ's summation of the two greatest commandments, which he then explains as encompassing all other commandments. By the rendering of the Decalogue in Christ's framing of love, the poem forwards the hermeneutic of reading Old Testament revelation in light of the New Testament as necessary to understand the reasoning behind why the Old Testament needed to exist in the first place. The "*lex et prophetia*" had to precede Christ so that Christ could reveal their true meaning, proving his own status as divine. Moreover, the "*lex et prophetia*," as embodiments of the Mosaic covenant, must be now ordered to the love that Christ embodies, just as the Samaritan orders Faith and Hope to their proper ends in salvation. Hence, the tropological message underlying the moral law of the Old Testament, that the love of Christ truly compels adherence to "Mosys maundement," follows from the citation of Christ's summation of the Jewish law's purpose. The moral Jewish law, that of loving God and neighbor, is still necessary in the Christian life, for its precepts order one to Christ because Christ, who is Love itself within the text, is the ultimate summation of the law. By his answer to Will's quandary of whether one should trust following the law or holding orthodox beliefs, the Samaritan confirms Love's place as the fundamental virtue in the Christian life that drives all others: "Sette faste thi feith and ferme bileve; / And as Hope highte thee, I hote that thow loyve / Thyn evenecristene everemoore eveneforth with thiselve" [Set fast your faith and believe faithfully; / And as Hope urges you, I bid that you love / Your fellow Christians for evermore as

yourself] (B.17.134-136). In the Samaritan's paradigm, one must both hold "faste thi feith" and do "as Hope highte thee" because, ultimately, those two commands properly followed lead to the love of one's "evenecristene." Thus, the Samaritan answers Will's either-or question with a both-and, for to achieve the necessary salvific love that properly orders Faith and Hope, faith and hope must already be present and active in the spiritual life. As in the personal narrative of salvation, Faith, begun by the Abrahamic covenant, and Hope, begun by the Mosaic covenant and its promise of a Messiah, begin the tropological journey, but they must ultimately be read through the lens of Christ as pointing to Christ.

Ad Vesperum Demoritabur Fletus: The Centrality of Christ Crucified

The concept of the New Testament both completing and requiring the Old Testament returns in Passus XVIII with the crucifixion of Christ serving as the climax of the final several passus and the retelling of salvation history therein. After Will witnesses Christ's execution, the "blynde Jew Longeus" is made to "justen with Jesus" by spearing him on the cross (B.18.82). As the spear pierces Christ's side, his blood "sprongen doun by the spere and unspered the knyghtes eighen" [sprang down by the spear and opened the knight's eyes], and Longeus falls to his knees crying, "Soore it me athynketh! / For the dede that I have doon I do me in youre grace. / Have on me ruthe, rightful Jesu!" [It pains me to think! / For the deed that I have done I entrust myself to your grace. / Have pity on me, rightful Jesus!] (B.18.86, 89-91). I am unable to discover any prior reference to Longinus as a Jew in any criticism, so this may be a Langlandian invention. Even if not so, Longinus's depiction as a Jew reframes the entire scene as a collision between the Old and New Covenants. Longeus, the "champion chivaler" of the Jews as Faith calls him, serves as the stand-in for the assumed superiority of the Mosaic law in salvation, the same

superiority that Hope claims in Passus XVII by possessing the tablets of the Law (B.18.99). Reified into the stabbing of Christ, the text now has the Old Covenant killing Love, as it were, for the Law is unable to save by its own power. Yet, the blood of Christ, the sacrificial love that was foreshadowed by the Samaritan, heals Longeus of his infirmity of body but also of soul, for he now cries mercy to Christ, recognizing him as Lord. The Eucharistic parallels from Passus XVII would then carry here as well, for the blood of the "barn" which baptizes and heals is rendered as it truly is, the literal participation in Calvary. Eyes now opened, Longeus proclaims Christ true to his word and therefore the fulfillment of the prophecies that Faith and Hope spoke of in the preceding passus, so as Faith and Hope are ordered to the will of Love, the textual basis of Faith and Hope, and their embodied counterparts of Abraham and Moses, are once again confirmed as prefiguring the necessity of Christ. With this in mind, the Passus begins another discourse on the question of why the Old Testament is necessary, but to fully understand the tension in the discourse, we must return to the idea of reason apart from revelation.

To bolster the previously developed idea of needed revelation over pure human reason, the introduction in Passus XVIII of the traditionally-known "daughters of God" – Mercy, Peace, Truth, and Righteousness – derived from Psalm 84:10, after Christ has died and gone to harrow hell within the narrative, begets a theological discourse on the logical possibility of Christ remitting due punishment. As previously mentioned, Will asserts to Hope that it makes little sense that one would need both a salvific law and a salvific faith, and he frames that, "right so, bi the roode, reson me sheweth / It is lighter to lewed men o lesson to knowe / Than for to techen hem two, and to hard to lerne the leste!" [just so, by the cross, reason shows me / It is easier to laymen to know one lesson / Than to teach them two, and too hard to learn the least!] (B.17.40-42). Will, understanding he has divinely given reason "bi the roode," would assert that the

reasonable thing, and therefore the Godly thing, would be to not confuse people with complex doctrine and complicated moral theology. The argument of whether learning a complex theology of two whole concepts is truly reasonable or not is ultimately not the question, but instead, the question is whether reason can give Will the answer in the first place. Considering that Will comes to the incorrect conclusion and the Samaritan reveals that both orthodoxy and orthopraxis are necessary, the text calls the effectivity of reason into question. The same argument replays in Passus XVIII between the two teams of Mercy and Peace, Truth and Righteousness. Arguing over whether God even has the ability to save humanity from the certain damnation of hell, Truth and Righteousness assert that God's perfect justice would preclude him from such a show of clemency, and like Will, they buttress their points by claiming reason is not on their interlocutors' side. Truth calls Mercy's argument "a tale of waltrot" [a tale of nonsense], and Righteousness incredulously exclaims to Mercy, "What, ravestow? … [O]r thow art right dronke!" [What, are you mad? … Or you are quite drunk!] (B.18.142, 187). Again, the incorrect position frames itself as the logical and sensible one, contrasting itself with the supposedly insane propositions of God's plan of salvation. And again, the purportedly logical position falls short of God's salvific plan in reality. The understanding that the text begets, then, is that human reason cannot capture the fullness of divine reason. Both Will and Righteousness point to a form of rationality to undergird their incorrect theological beliefs, not to show that reason is itself a problem but rather to show that reason alone cannot be the sole source of knowledge concerning the divine. The outcomes of Will and Hope's discussion and the arguments of Truth and Righteousness show God's ways are not irrational but only inaccessible to pure reason. Put another way, one cannot philosophize until they reach the incarnation and crucifixion. The focus on revelation over pure reason matches the growth in the spiritual life of reliance upon God in a

more complete manner, and the text ensures that the point returns multiple times to solidify the reliance one must have on divine institution over human intuition.

Returning to the question of why the Old Testament was necessary if a faithful love of God was all that God needed, Passus XVIII moves on to an argument over whether Christ can truly overrule the justice that the Old Testament embodies, and this culminates in the more fundamental answer to Will's earlier inquiry of why the Law was necessary. The two characters of Righteousness and Truth argue with Peace and Mercy over whether Christ will truly harrow hell and save mankind. The former two assert that, by reason, it is certain that man must be damned. For God gave Adam the stricture against the forbidden fruit, and Adam, knowing well the consequences, damned himself anyway by partaking of it (B.18.190-195). However, Peace counters that man had to fall so that God could manifest the goodness of God's plan: "Forthi God, of his goodnesse, the firste gome Adam, / Sette hym in solace and in sovereyn murthe; / And siththe he suffred hym synne, sorwe to feele" [For your God, of his goodness, the first man Adam, / Set him in solace and in supreme happiness; / And after he allowed him to sin, sorrow to feel] (B.18.217-219). Without the fall of the "firste gome," mankind would never experience the mercy of God, and without the mercy of God, one cannot truly know God in his fullest, best sense. Moreover, the beauty of Christ's sacrifice and the love that he shows, a continual preoccupation of the final four passus, would not be shown on the cross, meaning God could not show the greatest extent of his love. The concept of the Fall as a negative necessity leading to a far greater eventual solution is known historically as the *felix culpa*, or happy fault. Liturgically, the *felix culpa* is most associated with the *Exultet* sung during Easter Vigil, where it is found explicitly, so within the liturgical framework of the narrative, the argument in the text comes near the exact point in the Christian life in which this idea is reiterated yearly (Sarum Missal

272).[2] Hence, Peace places this argument at the central point of the entirety of Will's questioning in Passus XVII: why does God's plan include different covenants and different beliefs at different times? Christ's sacrifice centers the debate upon himself by revealing it was all to facilitate the world's reception of Christ's grace. The reason the Jews had to be blinded to the full truth, as it were, was so that Christ could reveal it to them by his redemptive death. Similarly, individuals must first be in ignorance and have God reveal himself to them, else they would never realize they were first ignorant. Both Righteousness and Will wrongly claim rationality as to why they can deny the teachings of or salvific nature of Christ; thus, the poem asserts that it is not within pure reason that God's love can be known. Rather, it is an experiential knowledge that must be prepared for and received from God himself.

Ad Matutinum Laetitia: The Liturgy and Reliving Salvation

The experiential knowledge of the believer culminates in the proper participation of the liturgy of the Mass and most explicitly the Eucharist, for within the theological underpinnings of the last several passus, the Eucharist truly is that which it signifies: the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary for the salvation of sins. The Eucharistic sacrifice allows the participants access to the one historical sacrifice via a reenactment of the event at every liturgy. The interweaving of the dream narrative and the external world at the end of Passus XVIII provides one striking source of such temporally disconnected participation. After the dialogue between the pairs of Mercy and Peace, Righteousness and Truth, they conclude that Christ must have indeed been able to harrow

[2] The connection with the *felix culpa* to the *Exultet* in *Piers Plowman* is also found in Hugh White's "Langland, Milton, and the Felix Culpa," which was itself responding to another explication of the *felix culpa* found in Arthur Lovejoy's "Milton and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall." Historical information on the connection to the Easter liturgy, such as the possibility of it appearing as early as the fourth century in the Gallican sacramentary, can be found in Lovejoy's work (Lovejoy 170-171).

hell and save mankind, and this realization brings Truth to sing a "*Te Deum Laudamus*" and the newly-introduced character of Love, separate from the Good Samaritan which embodies the theological virtue of love, to chant "*Ecce quam bonum et quam iocundum*" [*Behold how good and pleasing*] from Psalm 132 until the church bells of Easter morning are rung (B.18.424, 426-7). With the sound of Easter morning bells, Will awakens and rushes to his family to say, "Ariseth and go reverenceth Goddes resurexion, / And crepeth to the cros on knees, and kisseth it for a juwel! / For Goddes blissede body it bar for oure boote" [Rise and go reverence God's resurrection, / And creep on knees to the cross, and kiss it for a jewel! / For God's blessed body bore it for our salvation] (B.18.429-431). The unbroken liturgical narrative is unmistakable, for Will begins Passus XVIII on "*Ramis palmarum*," the Sunday preceding Good Friday; witnesses Christ's crucifixion; and now awakes to the sound of Easter Sunday morning bells to reverence Christ's "resurexion" (B.18.6). The historical and narrative experience of Will lines up the liturgical experience of the Church in the external world, revealing the intimate connection between the liturgy and the constant cycle of re-presenting Christ's sacrifice anew through the Mass. The Mass allows worshippers to be truly present at the sacrifice of Calvary and to experience the resurrection as active participants by partaking of the glorified body of Christ. In fact, the participation in the Mass is exactly what follows Will's urging of his family, that they must "reverenceth Goddes resurexion," for at the beginning of the subsequent passus, Will explains, "Thus I awaked and wroot what I hadde ydreamed, / And dighte me derely, and dide me to chirche, / To here holly the masse and to be housled after" [Thus I awoke and wrote what I had dreamt, / And tenderly prepared myself and brought myself to church, / To hear Holy Mass and be communed after] (B.19.1-3) The juxtaposition of the resurrection and the attendance at Mass solidifies the narrative continuity of Passus XVIII's focus on the literal crucifixion and

resurrection of Christ, as in that which occurred within history, and the liturgically, participatory crucifixion that becomes present at Mass, which commemorates both the crucifixion and the resurrection by sacrifice and communion respectively. Additionally, the attendance at Mass reframes as particularly liturgical the "*Te Deum Laudamus*" and quotation from Psalm 132 recited by Truth and Love at the denouement of Passus XVIII, the former being a common staple of liturgical celebrations and the latter being a celebration of gathering in unity. The connection between unity and liturgical worship becomes even stronger when we consider that the Church's name in the following passus becomes "Unite – Holy Chirche in Englissh" (B.19.331). Moreover, the liturgical realism is accompanied by a very insistent Eucharistic realism, for the poem continually reinforces the connection between the Eucharist and the literal presence of the body and blood of Christ.

The beginning of Passus XIX provides a clear presentation of the Eucharist as a literal presentation of Christ's body, and it allows the poem to reframe the historical presentation of Christ's sacrifice within Passus XVIII as one that points forward to a liturgical representation of the one, same sacrifice. In Passus XIX, as Will attends Mass, he falls asleep, and within his dream, he sees "Piers the Plowman was peynted al blody, / And com in with a cros bifore the comune people, / And right lik in alle lymes to Oure Lord Jesu" [Piers the Plowman was painted all bloody, / and came in with a cross before the common people, / And just like in all limbs to Our Lord Jesus] (B.19.6-8). As the Mass proceeds, Christ appears as he was when he was about to be crucified, as if he were walking the *Via Crucis* in Jerusalem, but instead of approaching Calvary, he approaches the altar of the church, surrounded by the "comune peple." Again, the poem reiterates the point of Christ becoming truly present to believers, the "comune peple," within the context of the liturgy, and not only that but he comes in the form of a sacrifice as he

did on Good Friday, now under the species of the Eucharist. Upon the opening of Passus XVIII, the narrator describes Christ's entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, but he is confused by Christ's appearance since he looks like Piers. Will asks Faith, "Is Piers in this place?" (B.18.21). Faith winks at him and responds, "This Jesus of his gentries wol juste in Piers armes, / In his helm and in his haubergeon, *humana natura*" [This Jesus because of his nobility will joust in Piers's arms, / In his helm and in his coat of mail, *human nature*] (B.18.22-23). Thus, the Piers-Christ duality seen in the performance of the Mass at the beginning of Passus XIX is a reinforcement of the presence of the hypostatic union of body, blood, soul, and divinity that is claimed by the doctrine of transubstantiation. The detail that Christ comes in the form of Piers cements the fact that a physical body is present, for within the context of Passus XVIII, Christ's incarnation and Piers as ideal human nature are linked. Christ, taking on human form, appears in the flesh to be sacrificed at both Calvary, in Passus XVIII, and the Mass, in Passus XIX, inextricably linking the two in an eternal and simultaneous moment made real by the Eucharist. Of course, the only way that Will in Passus XVIII is able to recognize the true identity of Christ in Piers' armor is through the help of Faith, who cries out, "*A! Fili David!*" at the sight of the rider into Jerusalem (B.18.15). Even this detail is given a liturgical dimension by the reference to Faith crying out "in a fenestrye" [in a window] (B.18.15). The laity at a Mass would be cordoned off from the sanctuary within the church by a rood-screen that had holes to see through, and from those holes within the screen, a layperson could see the priest performing Mass, consecrating the bread and wine.[3] With this in mind, Faith crying out "Son of David!" from behind this

[3] Eamon Duffy's *The Stripping of the Altars* provides more in-depth explanation and historical context to what purpose these screens served within medieval English churches, though at a slightly later time period. For just a sample of this extra detail, Duffy writes that the "liturgy in the chancel, therefore, especially the main Sunday Mass, was viewed through the arches of a screen dominated by the Crucifix as the focus of universal history, and when at the climax of the Mass the laity raised their eyes to see the elevated Host, they also saw the great Rood, a conjunction that texts like the *Lay Folk's Mass Book* underlined" (157).

"fenestrye" at the sight of Christ who lies hidden under a different appearance is a clear connection to the lived reality of a layperson using the eyes of faith to see Christ hidden under the Eucharistic species. Christ's presence within the church brings up the final issue of the last two passus, for the presence of Christ is only made possible by the mediation of the Church on Earth in place of Christ's ministry.

Hoc Est Corpus Meum: Binding and Loosing

After Christ completes his mission on Earth and the Easter season finishes, the narrative of Passus XIX turns to the liturgical event of Pentecost and the mission of the Church on Earth in the absence of Christ's personal leadership, and through the changing symbolism of Piers the Plowman in the poem, the new role of the Church appears. After explaining Christ's presence at Mass, Conscience tells Will that "[Christ] yaf Piers power, and pardon he grauntede" [Christ gave Piers power, and he granted pardon] so that all people who seek forgiveness might "come and kneweliche to paye / To Piers pardon the Plowman – *Redde quod debes*" [come and pay knowledge / To Piers pardoner the Plowman – *Pay what you owe*] (B.19.184,187-8). Piers, who had previously been the symbol of human nature that Christ took on to save humanity, now becomes within the narrative of salvation history Piers's etymological namesake, St. Peter and the first pope, within the narrative of salvation history. Christ establishes Piers, who previously served as a figure of Christ, to perform the salvific role of receiving penance for sins, and thereby, Conscience directly links the authority of Christ with the authority of the papal office, since Piers now takes on the role of St. Peter. The Church, with the pope as its head, becomes the new body that Christ inhabits so that he can perform the necessary work of salvation. The specific papal nature of the position Piers fulfills appears with the reference to his bestowed

ability to "bynde and unbynde both here and ellis," a reference to the Catholic-held belief that Jesus gave specific authority to St. Peter, as recorded in Matthew 16:19, which supersedes that of the other apostles (B.19.190). Grace, introduced by Conscience, reiterates in specific, organizational terms the vicarious position of Piers in place of Christ: "For I make Piers the Plowman my procurator and my reve, / And registrer to receyve *Redde quod debes*. / My prowor and my plowman Piers shal ben on erthe" [For I make Piers the Plowman my procurator and my reeve, / And registrar to receive *Pay what you owe*, / My overseer and my plowman Piers shall be on Earth] (B.19.260-262). The word "procurator" carries the meaning of something like "agent" or "advocate," but it also holds the more powerful connotations of "regent" and "governor" (*MED*, procurator). Similarly, the title of "reve" bestows upon Piers the duty of "managing the lord's demesne farm" (*MED*, reve). Thus, the idea is clear within the text that Piers, who has morphed from Christ into Peter, carries on the authority of Christ, and as Piers is the head of the church of Unity, the passus naturally asserts that following the decrees of Unity is tantamount to following the decrees of Christ himself. Christ is present sacramentally in the church, and he is present authoritatively in the office of Piers Plowman, that is of St. Peter's chair.

Now that Unity is established as following Christ, the text turns to the discussion of what adherence to said authority looks like. The continued repetition of the phrase, "*Redde quod debes*," links the authority of Unity and Piers with the practice of the faith that leads to a proper Christian life. Conscience reveals the presence of spiritual dangers like the Antichrist and Pride, and he exhorts "all Cristene peple / For to delven and dyche depe al about Unitee" [all Christian people / To delve and dig a deep ditch all around Unity] so that all Christians have "[r]epentenden and refused synne" [repented and refused sin] (B.19.365-366, 372). The common

people have a distinct role in the protection of the Church, then, for the enemies, that being sin, can only be repelled by each Christian's devotion and contrition. To shore up these defenses, the common people must turn to Unity for the sacrament of reconciliation to cleanse them of their sins, and in this act, the laypeople become better defenders of Unity, which when defended can continue offering the cleansing sacrament of reconciliation. Thus, there is a symbiotic relationship of laity and clergy: one is sustained by the other in so much as the former protects the latter by the latter's facilitation. A holy laity makes a "Holy Chirche," the text suggests. The point is formulated by Conscience in detail as, "Some [Christians] thorugh bedes biddynge and some thorugh pilgrimage / And othere pryve penaunces, and some thorugh penyes delynge" [Some through saying prayers and some through pilgrimage / And other private penances, and some through almsgiving]; through these devotions, the laity can make "Unitee Holy Chirche in holynesse stonde" [Unity Holy Church to stand in holiness] (B.19.379-80, 384). Thus, the Christian life is comprised of a multitude of devotional practices designed to edify the Church as a whole. The acts of the Christian life strengthen the individual Christian, and the individual Christian becomes more capable of resisting the assaults of Pride. When the individual assents to and joins with the greater whole of "Unitee Holy Chirche," the Church is then, by associative property, more capable of resistance. The act of self-edification then edifies all others by the connection of "Holy Chirche."

Along this unifying line of thinking, the absolution of the individual Christian is then the absolution of the entire Church, for as there are fewer and fewer members stained by sin, the Church is less vulnerable. Hence, Conscience calls for all Christians to "*Redde quod debes*" (B.19.394) or else be denied Holy Communion. Here, the repeated phrase of "*Redde quod debes*," most associated with the authority of Piers, enters the practical level of the individual

Christian. Piers, and thereby the Church, is the minister by which one can pay their dues to God through the sacrament of reconciliation and penance thereafter for the sins they have committed. Through this compilation of imagery, the role of the priest in confession becomes viewed in its true Christological light. The priest, a minister of the Church, acts in the authority of the bishops and the authority of the Church headed by Piers. However, the further image of Piers in place of Christ carries the continued authoritative image of Christ into the sacrament of reconciliation, for the priest acts both in the authority of the Church and the God who subsists within said Church. He acts both *in persona Christi* and *in persona ecclesiae*. The importance of the connection between Christ's mystical and sacramental body to the Christian life becomes further explicated by Conscience's commands to the faithful to receive Christ's body. Garrison argues, "For Langland, the power of the Eucharist lies in its unification of the two halves of the allegorical sign: the material appearance of bread unites with Christ's body, and the consecrated host that signifies the Christian community becomes one with that community through eucharistic reception" (104). Thus, Christ manifests in the Church just as Christ manifests in the communion bread during the liturgy, and this is accomplished by the Church's reception of the paramount sign of Christian unity: the consecrated host. However, the reality of the Church, often appearing for Langland as un-Christlike, does not present an insurmountable obstacle to the text's reading of the Eucharistic effect on the Church.

The discrepancy between the idealized Christian community, that which pays back what it owes, and the failed community presented within the poem, that which refuses to pay its debts, itself does not present a negation of the ideal. By the character of the vicar, Passus XIX makes the necessary distinction between the ideals and the actuality of the Church's functions, for he cannot see such distinctions and so fails to unite himself to the metaphysical reality of the

Church. After Conscience calls the Christian community to receive Holy Communion, a "lewed vicory" stands to object to being united to Unity, and he instead points at faults within the fourteenth-century hierarchy (B.19.413). Most pertinently, the vicar cries, "So blessed be Piers Plowman, that peyneth hym to tilye" and "God (the Pope amende), that pileth Holy Kirke" [So blessed be Piers Plowman, that pains himself to till … God (forgive the Pope) that plunders Holy Church] (B.19.441, 446). The vicar makes the crucial distinction between Piers, who is the ideal of the papal office, and the actual reality of the "Pope," who robs from "Holy Kirke;" he understands that the ideal authority of Piers which stands as "reve" does not disappear because of the misbehavior of the one who fills Piers's office. Why, then, is this still a failure of distinction? As Garrison notes,

> To some extent, the vicar recognizes literal-mindedness as a fault when he points out that the commons 'counten ful litel / The counseil of Conscience or Cardinale Vertues / But if thei sown, as by sighte, somewhat to wynning' (B.19.455-57). However, the vicar places the blame for such materialism almost entirely on the church hierarchy's corruption rather than on individual Christians. The vicar refuses to recognize the ideal of Unity – the vision of what the Church ought to be – and rejects the Eucharist along with the very idea of transcendent meaning. (102)

The fundamental issue with the vicar's interpretation is that he believes there is a rupture between the power of the ideal, which is epitomized in the Church's ability to provide the body of Christ in the Eucharist, and the material reality of the Church because of the moral failings of the hierarchy, a rupture that is irreconcilable. Garrison also points out that Langland would have almost certainly agreed with the vicar's concerns about the worldliness of the clergy, but there is a key difference between acknowledging the failures of the clergy at moral teaching and denying

the sacramental efficacy of the clergy at presenting the needed metaphysical unity that the Eucharist provides (102). Hence, the poem takes great pains to shore up the authority of the Church in its ideal form but leaves room for the necessary criticism of the clergy's behavior, making certain rhetorical moves to ensure the latter does not abrogate the former.

The allegorical understanding of Piers the Plowman as both Christ and Peter allows Christ to continue his work on Earth through the Church, and by the allusions within Passus XIX to the entirety of church history from the narrative of Pentecost to the contemporary medieval church, the work assigns God-given value to the patristic tradition. After Christ ascends, the Holy Spirit is sent down at Pentecost to give Piers "and to hise felawes" the knowledge of "alle kynne langages," and Conscience bestows on "*Spiritus Paraclitus*" the title of "Grace," who serves as "Cristes messager" (B.19. 202, 204, 208, 209).[4] Grace, then, bequeaths the Church "[*d*]*ivisiones graciarum*," [divisions of graces] and to Piers, he gives "foure grete oxen" named "Luk," "Mark," "Mathew," and "Johan" so that they can "tilie truthe" [till truth] (B.19.263-267). Here, the poem establishes the Apostolic Age through another agrarian conceit, agrarian imagery being common to the entire poem. The Holy Spirit descends upon the apostles, granting them the grace to "tilie truth," meaning they have a divine authority from "Cristes messager" to speak for God. Important to recall, Piers already has this authority from Grace as his "procurator" and his "reve," so Piers, in the form of a "reve" and embodying Peter specifically, is given these "oxen." Piers is to look over the fields of Grace, who, as the Holy Spirit, is truth itself, and Piers must now till them with the Gospels in order to beget further truth, which should be understood as scriptural doctrine. Moreover, Grace also bestows Piers with "foure stottes – / All that hise oxen

[4] After Christ ascends, the Holy Spirit is sent down at Pentecost to give Piers and all his fellows the knowledge of all kinds of languages, and Conscience bestows on the *Holy Spirit* the title of Grace, who serves as Christ's messenger.

eriede, thei to harewen after" [four horses – / All that his oxen tilled, they are to harrow afterwards], and their names are "Austyn, and Ambrose another, / Gregori the grete clerk and Jerom the goode" [Augustine, and Ambrose another, / Gregory the great cleric and Jerome the good] (B.19.269-270, 271-272). The four great doctors of the Western Church follow the four divinely inspired authors of the Gospels as simply another step in the process of salvation history before the seeding process can even begin. The parallel structure of Grace's gift of the four Gospels and the four doctors shows equal importance of scripture and patristic tradition to "tilie truth," and furthermore, the poem asserts both are from the same source and received in the same manner. Of course, harrowing merely refines the work already done by plowing, but both the oxen and horses are given to Piers before he receives the cardinal virtues, meaning the fullness of the Christian faith can only be discovered by both scripture and the further refinement of scripture found in the patristic tradition. Otherwise, the seeds of cardinal virtue that will grow into the proper practice of the faith will not be able to grow as effectively or at all. Again, the fusion of imagery that the character of Piers embodies, of both Christ and Peter, means the work of the Church in producing the harrows of "*Vetus Testamentum et Novum*" is simply the continuation of salvation history that began with Faith in Passus XVI (B.19.276). Therefore, participation in the Church is a participation in the Apostolic Age, Christ's life, and even the Old Testament. This liturgical and ecclesiastical re-presentation of history permeates the entirety of the final passus and ties together the various threads of Christian participation.

Unum Corpus Sumus in Christo: Liturgical Realism and History

The final several passus ultimately illustrate how aspects of the salvation narrative touched upon are made real through participation in the liturgical life of the Church, and by this

participation, the individual themself becomes a part of salvation history. As Mircea Eliade argues, "Every ritual has the character of happening *now*, at this very moment. The time of the event that the ritual commemorates or re-enacts is made *present*, re-presented so to speak, however far back it may have been in ordinary reckoning" (392). With Eliade's formulation in mind, the re-presentative character of the Mass in *Piers Plowman*, illustrated most blatantly within the poem by the appearance of the Piers-Christ at Mass in Passus XIX, carries with it the entirety of the salvation narrative that the poem explicates by the ever-evolving meaning of Piers the Plowman. At the beginning of Passus XVIII, Christ appears in the likeness of the Samaritan and "somdeel to Piers the Plowman" so that he might suffer in said likeness on the cross for the sake of salvation (B.18.10). The collection of images that Christ expresses also then expresses the entirety of all that I have discussed. In Passus XVII, the Good Samaritan orders the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants to their proper ends of love, and Piers, evolving from a stand-in for idealized human nature, becomes the figure of both Peter and the Church as a whole. When in Passus XVIII Christ is sacrificed, he carries the latent denotations of the Samaritan and Piers as well. Calvary therefore properly orders the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants to their proper ends, and Calvary becomes a figure for the Church as a whole.

All of this is possible because of Christ's reappearance in Passus XIX at the Easter Mass attended by Will, for Christ, under the species of bread, enacts the sacrifice of Calvary once more. Since the original Calvary holds these extensive meanings in the poem, the Eucharistic sacrifice must also share in the symbolism of the Good Samaritan and Piers. Hence, every Mass brings to fulfillment the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, extending a connection from the worship of the New Covenant to the Old Covenant, and it presents the work of the Church as a whole as a sign of unity throughout space and time. Garrison's insight that Langland sees the

Eucharist as inherently communal is certainly true, but even greater still, I posit that Langland sees the Eucharist as communal for the entirety of the Church's history. If one is connected to Piers who is himself connected to Christ, one also participates in the sacrifice of Calvary. The Gospel writers and Church doctors, who are the oxen and horses of Piers's field, must be represented at Calvary. The Old Testament patriarchs and prophets must be represented at Calvary. And the laity in communion with Piers, the office of pope, must then appear as well, for they comprise the strength of Unity, which is the mystical body of Christ that is stewarded by Piers. Thus, the poem reveals the intimate connection between any Christian and the Church's work as a whole by the figure of Christ linking all of history together in the ritual re-presentation of the one same sacrifice on the cross.

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