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Responses to Ockhamist Theology in the Poetry of the 'Pearl'-Poet, Langland, and Chaucer.

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RESPONSES TO OCKHAMIST THEOLOGY IN THE
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Responses to Ockhamist Theology
in the Poetry of
the Pearl-poet, Langland, and Chaucer

A Dissertation

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Louisiana State University and
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in

The Department of English

by
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ABSTRACT

An important product of the nominalist-realist debate of the fourteenth century was a renewed interest in the theology of grace and merit. For Ockham and his followers, since "real" knowledge of God through natural reason was impossible, God seemed to transcend his creation so absolutely that his ways might become incomprehensible to man. This, added to the fourteenth-century interest in voluntarism, led to the further inference that God could use his absolute power to overrule what he had ordained. Accordingly, all man could do was offer his good works to this omnipotent judge in the hope that he might receive mercy. Some nominalist theologians even suggested that God could, by his absolute power, elect a sinner whose merits had not been dignified by sanctifying grace. To conservative followers of Augustine such as Bradwardine and Wyclif, this was rank Pelagianism. They fought the "Modern Pelagians" so zealously that they gravitated to the opposite extreme, contending that no act could be truly meritorious without God's direct participation through grace. Thus, while the nominalists exalted divine omnipotence in order to free man, conservative Augustinians used the same starting point to argue that God gave
man whatever merits he might have.

There is considerable evidence that the impact of this dispute was widespread, notably among the principal poets of the time. In the Cotton Nero A.x manuscript, for example, *Pearl* features a debate over grace and merit, with the conclusion that God elects the sinner through grace; the sinner does not elect God by his own merits. *Purity* balances this with a complementary doctrine of merit, stressing man's responsibility to perform good works if he would be saved. But *Patience* illustrates, through the story of Jonah, how man is ultimately dependent upon God's absolute power. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a reconciliation of these doctrines crystallizes around the hero, who commits serious sin but yet is willing, finally, to cooperate with grace and reinstate himself in divine favor. Then *St. Erkenwald*, perhaps by the same author, relates a legend which elsewhere in medieval poetry sanctioned man's power to appeal to God by good works alone, but which here confuses the issue by stressing man's powerlessness without divine grace.

*Piers Plowman* treats basically the same problems in an extended dialectic in which *Will*, man's faculty for moral action, searches for the means to earn salvation. The doctrinal issues are defined in the *Visio*, especially in the pardon scene, and the *Vita* dramatizes *Will*'s efforts to learn how he may reach God in terms of grace and merit.
Chaucer, unlike these other two poets, avoids the risks of their often exciting doctrinal experiments and opts rather for a moderate view of the God-man relationship. Both in *Troilus and Criseyde* and several important *Canterbury Tales*, he expresses confidence in human nature, though stressing the need for divine providence to direct man's actions, and assures us that God will not use his absolute power to overrule or contradict the covenant with man.

Chaucer's contribution to the controversy, then, was to show that there is a viable alternative between the extremes of the Ockhamists and the Augustinians, whereas many writers tended to polarize the dispute into these two positions alone.

The conclusion that this dissertation seeks to support, therefore, is that this great intellectual debate was not confined to the universities or the monasteries, but stimulated the imaginations of the most distinguished poets of the time to produce some of their finest works.
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Chapter I: God and Man in the Fourteenth Century

Very little is now known about the development of ideas in the fourteenth century, even though an enormous amount of medieval scholarship has been accomplished in the last hundred years. Most histories of philosophy or theology afford this period scant attention, little more than a superficial glance at this "intermission" between the great cultural explosions of the high Middle Ages and the Italian Renaissance. The reason for this is not far to seek. Protestant scholars have usually scorned the later Middle Ages, with its ecclesiastical corruptions and the decline of scholastic theology, except where they could find a "forerunner" of the Reformation to come.¹ Catholic philosophers, inspired by Leo XIII's famous encyclical Aeterni Patris (1879), have concentrated awesome energy in reconstructing the system of St. Thomas Aquinas, with the result that we probably understand his works today better than his contemporaries.

¹For a very lucid overview of the whole historical problem of the "forerunner," see Heiko A. Oberman, Forerunners of the Reformation (New York, 1966), esp. pp. 3-49.
Some scholars have also attended to St. Bonaventure, Duns Scotus and, more extensively, St. Augustine; but the vanguard of the twentieth-century revival of Scholasticism, led by men like Jacques Maritain, Etienne Gilson, and Anton Pegis, has championed St. Thomas. This has produced an extreme emphasis on the thirteenth century as a time of creative growth, the pinnacle of medieval civilization. Conversely, since the most important thinkers of the fourteenth century criticized and eventually destroyed the syntheses of Thomas and Bonaventure, this later period has been characterized as a "decline," promoting the disintegration of Scholasticism into endless sterile subtleties.

In this spirit, one of our most distinguished medievalists, Etienne Gilson, has described William of Ockham as an "apprentice sorcerer" who unleashed vast destructive powers to corrode "the golden age of Scholasticism," without creating any positive synthesis of his own. Such an attitude,

2 I am not minimizing the contributions of such distinguished thinkers as Gabriel Marcel, Maurice Blondel, Karl Rahner, or Teilhard de Chardin, but they represent reactions against the mainstream of modern Catholic thought.

3 A notable exception is the great scholarship of the late Philotheus Boehner, O.F.M., who helped to overcome our ignorance of Ockham in many important books and articles. See, for example, his Collected Articles on Ockham, ed. Eligius Buytaert, O.F.M. (St. Bonaventure, N.Y., 1958). A good measure of Fr. Boehner's influence is the remarkably knowledgeable and balanced account of Ockham's philosophy by Frederick Copleston, S.J., in the third volume of his History of Philosophy (Westminster, Md., 1952).

especially since it is widespread, has fostered little interest in the problems, the controversies, the intellectual concerns of the fourteenth century. Yet this very century not only destroyed confidence in the past, but also made positive contributions of its own, not the least of which is a philosophic ground favorable to the growth of modern science. The fourteenth century also went far beyond just dissolving the Thomistic union of faith with reason: it promoted the growth of a profound mysticism, a renewal of Augustinian thought, and the main doctrinal issues of the Reformation. In the following discussion, therefore, most of our attention will be directed toward the positive aspects of fourteenth-century thought.

The chief issue between the thirteenth- and fourteenth century schoolmen is over the relation between philosophy and theology, which is in turn part of the larger debate between realism and nominalism. Following a tradition set by Augustine and Anselm, Bonaventure and Thomas were realists: they began with the common supposition that there is an absolute order in extramental reality which the mind is capable of understanding, at least in part, by conforming itself to that order. In spite of the differences in neo-Platonic or Aristotelian influences on their thought, these realists all agreed that a man's ideas provided an accurate description of the world around him. Anominalist, or conceptualist, such as William of Ockham argued rather that the
mind receives some primitive sense-knowledge from the extra­
mental world, but then the mind orders such data into its
own patterns, patterns which have no absolute claim on truth,
but which are nevertheless valuable because they lead to
probable statements about reality. The implications of this
innovation in the theory of knowledge are extremely far-
reaching. If we apply it to our knowledge of God, for
example, then where the realist has insisted that he can
reach certitude about God's existence, the nominalist will
contend that God's existence is at best probable. What is
at issue here is natural theology itself: whether man can
infer God from examining the structure of his own thought-
processes, as Augustine claimed, assuming that this leads us
back ultimately to the God from whom all human knowledge
originates;\textsuperscript{5} or whether man can, as Thomas contended, infer
God from our experience with the world around us, reaching
by analogy from secondary causes to the First Cause.\textsuperscript{6} Great
as the differences between the Augustinians and Thomists
often were, both groups regarded such a natural theology
necessary to Christian philosophy. William of Ockham re-
plied for the nominalists that (1) only those mental proces-
ses which draw directly from sense experience are legitimate,

\textsuperscript{5}See, for example, the \textit{De Magistro}, which is devoted en-
tirely to this process.

\textsuperscript{6}See, for example, the \textit{Summa Contra Gentiles}, Bk. I, ch.
10 f.
or at least have a valid claim to being true; and (2) God and man are so totally different that there can be no meaningful analogy between them. By this two-part criticism, Ockham cut the believer off from rational demonstrations of God's existence and thus, a fortiori, from the possibility of any knowledge of God through human means. With this dismantling of Christian philosophy, faith and reason tended more and more to go their separate ways. Faith came to rely ever more heavily on Scripture, as with the Lollard movement, or to develop its own psychological resources, as with the mystics. Reason, no longer the dutiful handmaid of theology, began a more modest exploration of natural experience, refining its logical techniques and assisting in the laborious birth of modern science.

One of the best illustrations of the consequences of the nominalist divorce of faith from reason is fourteenth-century voluntarism. Voluntarism, with its insistence on the superiority of will over reason, came as a direct refutation of Thomistic rationalism. For St. Thomas, man may ascend to God through reason. Both God and man share in being, and so there is an analogy between them which is sufficient for Thomas to postulate a natural law that binds both man and God immutably together. Such a view of the God-man

7 Copleston, III, 66 f.
8 Copleston, III, 90 f.
relationship was repugnant to the English Franciscans, particularly Duns Scotus and William of Ockham. Though himself a realist, Duns prepared the way for Ockham by his notion of being as univocal, in a sense, and not analogous. But even more important than this distinction, in terms of the direction fourteenth-century thought would afterwards take, was Duns' conception of God's will. For Thomas, God's will is knowable through the natural law implanted in creation, though he does allow that there are some few things which are revealed exclusively in Scripture. Duns admits that God has revealed something of himself in the order of his creation, but this does not mean that we can thereby deduce God's will from what he has willed. For behind these manifestations of God's power, his potentia ordinata, there remains his transcendent will as it is in itself, his potentia absoluta, which is by its very nature unknowable to man. With Ockham, and even more drastically with his followers, these ideas were to take a radical course. For Ockham, as we have seen, God can be known only by faith since nominalist logic renders the God of philosophy a mere concept, subject to the same laws of probability as other concepts. This engenders scepticism everywhere in the fourteenth century, a scepticism that is deepened by a new approach to God's potentia absoluta. In Ockham's effort to free God's will from

\[9\] Copleston, II, pt. 2, 241-257.
any restraints whatsoever, he even claims that God's poten-
tia absoluta may override or contradict his potentia ordi-
nata. Acts are no longer good or evil in themselves
according to natural law, as St. Thomas had taught, but
derive their moral value solely from God's will. Thus, God
can overturn the natural law, the product of his potentia
ordinata, and by his potentia absoluta will that a man
commit murder or adultery. If God were to do this, then
such acts would become morally good, simply because God's
will is the only criterion for good and evil.\textsuperscript{10} The only
action that Ockham considers necessarily evil is not loving
God, for not even God can ask us not to love him without
contradiction.\textsuperscript{11} Here again, the attitude fostered by such
reasoning is markedly sceptical: man is cut off from God by
the very arguments used to exalt the divine nature. By
asserting that we cannot know either God's existence or his
will with certainty, the Ockhamists introduced into the
fourteenth century a bewildering world of possibilities to
displace the comforting certainties of the thirteenth
century.

The next stage of this movement is even more signi-
ficant for medieval culture because it enters the sacred
realm of theology itself. Their radical stress on God's

\textsuperscript{10} Copleston, III, 116.

\textsuperscript{11} Quodlibeta, III, Q. 13; reprinted by Philotheus Boehner,
O.F.M., in his edition of Ockham's Philosophical Writings
freedom forced the nominalist theologians to formulate an equally radical explanation of the nature of man and his relation to God. Thus, releasing God from the restrictions of traditional moral law implied a similar release for man, with the result that just as man was freer than before, so also could he be less certain than before about the proper (or improper) way to gain salvation. In this new condition of uncertainty old questions clamored for new answers: what is human merit? how could fallen man be justified? what is the relation between divine grace and human freedom? could God's potentia absoluta predestine a sinner to glory or a righteous man to damnation? These are the great questions of the fourteenth century, and the measure of their significance is that they shaped Christian thought, both Catholic and Protestant, for the next several hundred years.

II

The orthodox tradition on these questions was first firmly established by St. Augustine in the early fifth century. In his writings against the Manichees, Augustine sought to vindicate God from the charge that he is responsible for evil in the world. Thus, in De libero arbitrio, Augustine insists that "all things are to be praised for the very fact that they exist; for by the very fact that

\[12\text{ Trans. Anna S. Benjamin and L. H. Hackstaff (New York, 1964).}\]
they are, they are good" (3.7.71). For to claim that God could create something that is evil would seem to challenge either his omnipotence or his love toward his creatures. The solution, as Augustine later summarized it in his *Confessions*,¹³ is that evil is not a substance at all:

Therefore, all things that are, are good, and as to that evil, the origin of which I was seeking for, it is not a substance, since, if it were a substance, it would be good. For it would either have to be an incorruptible substance (which is the highest form of goodness) or else a corruptible substance (which, unless it had good in it, could not be corruptible).

(Bk. VII, ch. 16)

The source of evil, then, is man's perverse will turning away from God to the pleasures of this world: from *caritas* to *cupiditas*, a favorite theme of Augustine's. In terms of human actions, this means that actions are either good or evil as they turn toward or away from God, that is, they are good or evil in themselves, not because God wills them so. Human freedom is necessarily implied in the belief that man is morally responsible for his actions, so that man is always free to commit sin, though this does not mean that man is always or necessarily able to perform meritorious works, as we shall see. God gave man free will so that he could freely choose God, but Augustine qualifies this by adding that sinning is a misuse of such freedom (*De libero arbitrio*, 2.1.5-6). Where, then, does man learn what he ought to choose? Augustine answers this with his famous and extremely

influential doctrine of illumination. God not only transcends the world in the sense that he does not partake of its imperfections, but he has chosen to implant himself in some mysterious way in the soul of man. Thus, as the De Magistro extensively argues, we find God by withdrawing, one stage after another, from the external world and travelling inward. As we proceed away from sense data and progressively more and more into the realm of abstraction, we are moving away from the mutable, corruptible world and toward eternal truths, leading ultimately to the supreme truth that is God. In this sense, God is the divine magister who illuminates our minds with his sacred truth. But not all men are capable of perceiving this illumination or, having perceived it, able to live their lives according to it. For just as all good flows from God, so also man cannot by his own efforts will any good without God having first moved him toward that good. And this introduces Augustine's doctrine of grace, which has had such far-reaching influence that all subsequent discussions of grace, works, freedom justification, and predestination by both Catholic and Protestant theologians have been dominated by his formulations.

14 This is one of Augustine's clearest descriptions of his theory of illumination.

15 Confessions, Bk. VIII, ch. 5; De libero arbitrio, 3.18. 177 and 179; De doctrina Christiana, 4.16.33.
Throughout most of his career as bishop of Hippo, Augustine was embroiled in controversy with the Pelagians. Pelagius, a British monk who spent some time in Augustine's area while on his way to the East, developed a doctrine based on the efficacy of works. Though Pelagius himself did not go to the extremes of many of his followers, his thought was generally interpreted as arguing that man could merit salvation by his own good works. For Pelagius, this presupposes that man must have been justified—that is, redeemed from utter depravity in original sin—through Christ's coming, but Pelagius contended that from this point on man's works could themselves be meritorious, without the infusion and continuing habitus of sanctifying grace. Despite the moderation of Pelagius' views when compared to those of some of his followers, his doctrine of works was repugnant to Augustine, whose whole experience of sin and conversion contradicted Pelagius. All of Book IX of the Confessions, for example, describes tellingly the agonies of a man who desires to love God and do God's will, yet is unable to do so by his own power. Thus, for Augustine, the question is not merely that all good works stem ultimately from God, as we have already seen, but that a man cannot perform morally good works without first being moved toward them by grace. Everywhere in Augustine grace is a condition sine qua non for acts to have merit. Just so, in a long petition to God in the Confessions, Augustine remarks that "if a man recounts
to you all the real merits he has, he is only telling you of your gifts to him" (Bk. IX, ch. 13); and farther along he adds the important qualification that "My good deeds are your work and your gift, my evil deeds are my faults and your punishments" (Bk. X, ch. 4). Still more emphatic is the following passage from the Retractions, written at the end of his long career:

Since, as we have said, all goods—whether great, intermediate, or lowest—are from God, it follows that the good use of free will, which is a virtue and is numbered among the great goods, is also from God. Then I proceeded to speak of the wretchedness most justly inflicted upon sinners, from which they can be freed only by God's grace; since man could fall by will, that is by free choice, he could not rise again. To the wretchedness of a just condemnation belong the ignorance and difficulty from which every man suffers from birth. No man can be freed from this evil except by the grace of God. By denying the effects of original sin, the Pelagians refuse to account for the wretchedness that results from man's just condemnation.  

One question remains: granting that man's works can merit salvation only after receiving grace to elevate them to a level fully pleasing to God (meritum de condigno, in scholastic terminology), can man act in such a way as to merit this grace (meritum de congruo)? For Augustine even the good works that a man performs, such as praying, in order to merit grace are themselves prompted by a precedent grace. Here again, the reason for the doctrine is rooted in his own experience of sin and conversion, as is quite clear in this selection from the Confessions:

16 In Benjamin and Hackstaff, p. 158.
I call upon you, my God, my mercy, who made me and did not forget me when I had forgotten you. I call you into my soul which you are making ready to receive you by the longing which you yourself inspire. Do not forsake me now that I call upon you; for before I could call upon you at all, you were ahead of me; by all sorts of voices and in all kinds of ways over and over again you pressed yourself on my attention, so that I might hear you from far away and be converted and might call upon you who were calling me. . . . and in everything I did that deserved well, you were ahead of me, so that you might give the due reward to the work of your own hands, the hands that made me.

(Bk. XIII, ch. 1)

Such a view does require that man perform good works, in spite of its stress on God's role in the process. For a man must cooperate with the first grace given to him (initium fidei) by showing God through his actions how much he desires to merit the further gift of sanctifying grace. Thus, there are four stages in this movement toward God:

(1) God makes available the grace needed to move a man toward him (gratia gratis data); (2) the sinner may then respond by performing actions that can earn further favor with God (meritum de congruo); (3) God may choose to justify him by infusing into his soul the habitus of sanctifying grace (gratia gratum faciens); and (4) the man may now perform works, elevated by such grace, that can fully merit his salvation (meritum de condigno).

These issues continued to be debated even long after Augustine's death, but it is a sign of his authority as the Doctor of Grace that his views prevailed. They were ratified by the Sixteenth Council of Carthage (418), Popes Innocent I and Zosimus, the definitive Indiculus of St. Prosper.
of Aquitaine, and the Second Council of Orange (529), whose pronouncements were confirmed by Pope Boniface II on January 25, 531, and have been considered the definitive statement of orthodoxy ever since. The influence of Augustine in each case is clear, as the following example from a decree by the Council of Carthage illustrates:

> Whoever says that the grace of justification was given to us so that grace could facilitate our fulfilling what our free will is ordered to do, as if to say that, if grace were not given, it would be possible but not easy to obey God's commandments without that grace: let him be anathema.

(TCT 529, Denz. 105)

Soon, a new qualification was introduced by the semi-Pelagians, who proposed that while God's grace is required for *meritum de condigno*, a man could merit *de congruo* without being first prompted by grace. Here again, the official Church upheld the teaching of Augustine, as in this decree by the Second Council of Orange:

> If anyone argues that God awaits our will before cleansing us from sin, but does not profess that even the desire to be cleansed is accomplished through the infusion and the interior working of the Holy Spirit, he opposes the Holy Spirit speaking through Solomon: "The will is prepared by the Lord" (Prov. 8:35, Septuagint). And he opposes the Apostle's salutary message: "It is God who of his good pleasure works in you both the will and the performance" (Phil. 1:13).

(TCT 544, Denz. 177)

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Evidently, then, while medieval thought in other areas is generally an amalgamation of diverse elements, in theology, the "queen of sciences," the authority of Augustine dominates everyone's thinking. This is nowhere more clear than in the doctrine of grace.

The teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas, as expressed in the third book of his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, and then more precisely in the later *Summa Theologiae*, represents a continuation of the Augustinian tradition with one important qualification. By explaining Augustine's doctrine of grace in the context of an Arab-influenced Aristotelian system, Thomas seemed to some of his contemporaries to have violated, or at least compromised, the traditional teaching. Actually, many of these suspicions were unfair, but it is impossible to understand the reasons why his critics in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries construed Thomas' ideas as they did, except in terms of Bishop Etienne Tempier's condemnation of various Arabian-Aristotelian propositions in 1277 as a "correction" of philosophical vagaries at the University of Paris.\footnote{See David Knowles, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), pp. 272-275 and *passim*.} The Arabian philosophers who developed Aristotle's thought during the Middle Ages, particularly Avicenna and Averroes, had frozen his cosmology into a rigid hierarchy of causes extending from the First Mover to man. This causality was extremely deterministic, even
to the point of denying any freedom whatsoever to man. As a consequence, since almost all the texts and commentaries on Aristotle had come to Paris from Arabian sources, any attempt to explain man's relation to God in terms of a First Mover either was, or at least seemed to be, colored by Arabian determinism.

In Thomas' explanation of the need for grace to precede meritorious works, we therefore see implications that go beyond Augustine, resulting from the different metaphysical framework Thomas employed. This is quite evident in the following passages from the *Summa Theologiae*:¹⁹

Man's nature may be looked at in two ways: first, in its integrity, as it was in our first parent before sin; secondly, as it is corrupted in us after the sin of our first parent. Now in both states human nature needs the help of God, as First Mover, to do or will any good whatsoever. ... But in the state of integrity of nature, as regards the sufficiency of operative power, man by his natural endowments could will and do the good proportioned to his nature, which is the good of acquired virtue; but he could not do the good that exceeded his nature, which is the good of infused virtue. But in the state of corrupted nature, man falls short even of what he can do by his nature, so that he is unable to fulfill all of it by his own natural powers.

(Q. 109, art. 2)

and then again,

... since God is absolutely the First Mover, it is by His motion that everything seeks Him under the common notion of good, whereby everything seeks to be likened to God in its own way.

(Q. 109, art. 6)

¹⁹From Anton C. Pegis, ed. *Introduction to Saint Thomas Aquinas* (New York, 1948). All quotations from Thomas will be from this edition.
Thomas seems honestly laboring to express Augustine's fundamental position on grace and merit, but the form he uses carries far different philosophical suggestions. For where Augustine makes us aware of the struggle, the anxiety, the conflict, Thomas speaks of the sense in which secondary causes can become efficient causes only at the instigation of the First Cause. And where Augustine writhes in the torments of a sinner whose deepest experience has taught him the paradox of grace and freedom, Thomas reduces this to a principle of metaphysics: *Quidquid movetur ab alio movetur*. His contemporary critics diagnosed this as the "infection" of Arabian determinism.

But before we look into some of these criticisms and reactions, there is another important point in Thomas' teaching that warrants attention. On the subject of *meritum de congruo*, Thomas allows greater flexibility than Augustine had and thus opens the way for more radical innovations by fourteenth-century thinkers. Thomas is, nevertheless, quite orthodox in maintaining that a man cannot merit *de congruo* unless he is first moved by grace (*ST*: Q. 112, art. 2), but he opens new possibilities when he argues that a man can, by his good works, *merit de congruo* different proportions of sanctifying grace than might be given another man whose *de congruo* merits had been less:

Now as regards the first magnitude, sanctifying grace cannot be greater or less, since, of its nature, grace joins man to the highest good, which is God. But as regards the subject, grace can receive more or less
inasmuch as one may be more perfectly illumined by the light of grace than another. And a certain reason for this is on the part of him who prepares himself for grace; since he who is better prepared for grace receives more grace. Yet it is not here that we must seek the first cause of this diversity, since man prepares himself only inasmuch as his free choice is prepared by God. Hence the first cause of this diversity is to be sought on the part of God, who dispenses His gifts variously, in order that the beauty and perfection of the Church may result from these various degrees; even as He instituted the various conditions of things, that the universe might be perfect.

(Q. 112, art. 4)

Though remaining impeccably orthodox, Thomas has introduced a new element here in trying to explain how it is that some men receive greater measure of sanctifying grace than others. While not returning to the semi-Pelagian view that man merits sanctifying grace de congruo, Thomas argues that the proportions of sanctifying grace a man receives depend on the works he performs. Thomas no doubt would have shuddered at some of the later developments of meritum de congruo, but he could not have denied that his cautious half-step beyond Augustine provided the direction for less orthodox departures a century later.

Perhaps the most distinguished of Thomas' early critics was the English Franciscan John Duns Scotus. Duns attacked Thomistic rationalism and asserted the priority of will over reason in both God and man. This led, as we saw earlier, to Duns' distinction between God's potentia absolute and potentia ordinata. Thus, because God could, at least theoretically, override his ordinances by virtue of his absolute freedom, not only was Thomas' natural theology
weakened, but also the whole direction of the discussion of merit, grace, freedom, justification, and predestination began to change. Actually, Duns himself appears never to have explicitly contradicted accepted teaching. He holds, for example, that all meritorious actions must be preceded by grace ("per adjutorium gratiae datum") and rules out even the semi-Pelagian exaggeration of man's natural powers ("actio meritoria non est in potestate nostra nec naturalibus meremur, quod erat error Pelagii."). But there remains an ambiguity in his teaching, unintended perhaps, but an ambiguity nonetheless. For if God can reverse his own ordinances through his potentia absoluta, then God could at least conceivably elect a man to glory who had merited de congruo but did not have the habitus of sanctifying grace required ordinarily for meritum de condigno. It is only fair to point out here that Duns himself never raised this point; but his followers did, and this is what interests us here. Consequently, Duns holds a middle place in the development we are tracing: himself orthodox, he prepared the way for the most unorthodox speculations on grace and merit of the fourteenth century.


Following Duns Scotus in the first part of the fourteenth century came his Franciscan confrère William of Ockham, a thinker of great power, range, and subtlety, but one whose ideas became so controversial that they have often been distorted and are not sufficiently understood even today. The principal source of misunderstanding, even among modern scholars, lies, I think, in the methods that Ockham employed. For he began as a logician, one of the most brilliant of all time, and brought his logical techniques to bear in developing his highly original theology. As we saw earlier, one of Ockham's foremost contributions was to divorce faith and revelation from the dependence they had on reason in earlier Christian philosophy, particularly that of St. Thomas. A rationalist theology was the worst of impieties, so far as the Franciscan Ockham was concerned. What I should like to propose here, then, is the thesis that Ockham's often quoted extreme voluntarism is really a brilliant reductio ad absurdum of rationalist theology and, as such, does not represent Ockham's true theological position. Once he had established his framework of voluntarism, he showed (1) how insufficient was the theology of his adversaries, and (2) how insufficient was reason itself when turned loose in areas that properly belonged to faith and

22Cf. note 3, above.
revelation. But Ockham had a positive and, on the whole, orthodox theology of his own to offer, which has almost invariably been ignored or confused with his negative criticism of other men's views.

Specifically, Ockham radically emphasizes the **potentia Dei absoluta** as so totally free from the present order of creation and moral law that God could contradict the laws he has ordained in, say, Scripture. If, for example, God were to order a man to commit fornication, far from being a sin, this would become a meritorious act (Sent., III, q. 12 AAA). Next, Ockham insists that free will is the only real determinant of merit because either with or without grace what is willed will be good or evil according to the disposition of the one who is willing (Sent., I, dist. 17, q. 2 C). Applying his famous principle of economy—"Ockham's Razor" (**pluralitas non est ponenda sine necessitate**)—he next slices away at grace. Grace need not initiate an act for man to **merit de congruo**, as Augustine had argued, because God can accept an act which was not subsequent to grace if he so wills by his **potentia absoluta** (Sent., III, q. 8 C). Similarly, in the case of sanctifying grace, God could choose to accept a man who had not received this **habitus** that Augustine believed necessary for **meritum de condigno** for, once again, God's **potentia absoluta** could dispense with such a condition.

23 **The text I am using is Guillelmus de Occam, O.F.M., Opera Plurima** (Lyon, 1494-96; facsimile, 1962, by the Gregg Press Ltd., London).
This was the first article in Ockham's theology condemned by the papal commission at Avignon in 1326. Finally, and most reprehensible of all to the commission at Avignon, Ockham asserted that God's potentia absoluta could even reject a man who had done good works and accept a sinner. Up to this point, Ockham appears to have violated the official and ordinary teaching of the Church on every point. Why, then, did Ockham not consider his theology of grace and freedom heretical, and how could his fellow Franciscans have regarded him with such esteem? In answering this, we must bear in mind that the real issue here is whether or not Ockham violated orthodox teaching, not how amenable his views might be to one or another individual or tradition. The reply, I submit, is that Ockham's opponents took his arguments literally and out of context. He did not contend that God ever did or would order a man to commit sin; nor did he argue that God actually did dispense with grace. Ockham's argument that God's potentia absoluta is indeterminate, infinitely free, and unknowable is merely a strategy to expose the weaknesses in a rationalist theology, which necessarily assumes that God's absolute power and his ordained power are one and the same. Such rationalism was repugnant to the

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25 Article 3; Pelzer, p. 253.
Franciscans, who saw in it an attempt to scale God down to human understanding. Asserting the potentia Dei absoluta was, therefore, simply an emphatic way of dramatizing how far God's nature transcended man's puny efforts to reach him.

Ockham's technique was so unconventional that it was misinterpreted, but his intentions were manifestly orthodox. His argumentative method, the reductio ad absurdum, was so successful that his opponents and even some of his followers did not see that his absurd caricature of God actually caricatured man's attempts to reach God by natural means. But to argue, as the magistri at Avignon did, that Ockham sought to overthrow God's potentia ordinata and the present moral order is to neglect the whole positive side of his theology. For Ockham insisted again and again that a virtuous will is one that conforms, so far as possible, to the divine will. And how may men know the divine will? Through God's revelation (potentia ordinata). From this point Ockham goes on to say that while God's will may be free from necessity, he has willed that in the present order we choose what he has willed. Thus, a wrong act is wrong because "it would be elicited contrary to the divine precept and the divine will" (Sent., III, 8.13 C). And again, an act is either evil or it is "intrinsically and necessarily virtuous stante ordinatione divina" (Sent., III, 8.12 CCC). Even when he argues that good works are required for merit,
he is careful to explain that (1) God is under no compulsion to accept them, and (2) this does not exclude a need for grace, but only the likelihood that a man could merit salvation by grace without good works (Sent., I, dist. 41, q. 1). Ockham was, however, much more cautious than many of his followers. A good example of one of these is Robert Holcot (d. 1349), another Englishman, who developed some of the radical tendencies in Ockham's thought. In his Commentary on the Sentences, Holcot also uses the principle of economy to slice out what seems unnecessary to him in the doctrine of grace and merit, seen from the perspective of God's potentia absoluta. Thus, God could dispense with the necessity for sanctifying grace and even accept purely natural actions as worthy of heaven (Sent., I, q. 1, art. 4). Here we see the Ockhamist use of potentia Dei absoluta, which was by this time becoming conventional, but Holcot went even further by claiming that good dispositions and good works can by their own merits earn salvation if God chooses to accept them (Sent., I, q. 1, art. 5 and q. 4, art 3). Holcot does attempt to protect himself by granting that God must accept a man's works in order for them to earn meritum de condigno, but this still allows natural actions an intrinsic value that is totally foreign to Augustine or Thomas Aquinas. The importance of Holcot's attitude lies in this:

26See Gordon Leff, Bradwardine and the Pelagians (Cambridge, 1957), pp. 216-227 for pertinent passages from this text.
while never denying the validity of the present moral order or God's potentia ordinata, he opens the new possibility that even without grace, the sacraments, or even the Church, God could elect a sinner if he wished to do so. Moreover, even when he does return to the potentia Dei ordinata and the law of revelation, Holcot introduces interpretations that would have horrified Augustine. An instance of this is Holcot's answer to the question, "Can man assisted by grace earn eternal life by his own full merit (ex condigno)?" in his Super Libros Sapientiae:

Now as to the original question, we can answer that the statement, man assisted by grace can earn eternal life by his own full merit, can be understood in two ways. It can be understood according to the natural value of man's action or according to its contracted value. Man would earn salvation according to natural value if his merit were, by its very nature and existence, such that eternal life would be suitable payment for it. According to contracted value, the value of one's merit would be determined by legal arrangement in the way that a small copper coin which, in natural value, has not the same weight or worth as a loaf of bread is assigned this value by the law of the land.

Now if we understand man's merit according to the first interpretation, the natural goodness of our works does not earn eternal life fully (de condigno) but only partially (de congruo), since it is appropriate that if a man has done all that he can with his finite resources God should reward him with His infinite resources.

But according to the second understanding of merit we can say that our works are fully worthy of eternal life, not because of any merit inherent in the acts themselves but because of grace, since our Lord has established that he who does good works in a state of grace shall receive eternal life. Therefore, through the law and grace of our ruler Christ we merit eternal life by our own full merit (de condigno).27

It is true, of course, that Holcot carefully preserves the

27 Reprinted in Oberman, p. 143.
need for grace for actions to merit salvation under the present contract, but he has introduced qualifications of his own here. First, where is Augustine's *initium fidei*, which had been everywhere preserved among orthodox thinkers and had, as we have seen, become an article of faith? Second, has the emphasis not shifted here from God to man? Grace is, to be sure, necessary for *meritum de condigno*, but the stress here is on the need for good works on the part of man. Now while this does not absolutely contradict Augustine and orthodox teaching, we can see here the development away from grace and toward the efficacy of works which Eradwardine was to call "Modern Pelagianism." This tendency is even more obvious when, later on in the same work, Holcot asserts that "according to God's established law the pilgrim who does whatever he can to dispose himself for grace always receives grace." 28 Or again, in his Commentary on the Sentences, he claims that a contrite sinner can, by his sincere disposition alone, merit justification in the sense that God will respond to such human goodness by then electing the sinner to glory (*Sent.*, IV, q. 1, art. 8 CC).

Still more extreme is the position taken by Adam of Woodham, an English Franciscan who studied under Ockham at Oxford, and who acclaimed his master as "brother William

28 Oberman, p. 149.
Ockham, a Minor by his Order, but a major by the perspicacity of his genius and the truth of his teaching.29 Yet Adam clearly goes beyond his master in his teaching on merit and grace, beginning with the now common proposition of God's transcendently free potentia absoluta. Adam claims that this potentia Dei absoluta can accept a sinner without any supernatural gift of grace preceding such acceptance. The only thing that matters is that God wills to accept the sinner, for whatever reason, not that the sinner does or does not have sanctifying grace (Sent., I, dist. 17, q. 1).30 Adam does add that God has ordained the requirement of precedent grace, but his insistence on divine freedom is so strong that it suggests little confidence in any stable relation between God and man. This becomes clear when Adam argues that God can exercise his potentia absoluta to accept a sinner who, far from just lacking grace, is in a state of mortal sin (Sent., I, dist. 17, q. 3). On the other hand, a man can merit God's acceptance de congruo because he is capable of this by his very nature, independently of grace (Sent., I, dist. 1, q. 10). Thus, where Augustine had taught that God rewards his own gift in us when we perform good works, Adam now claims that God rewards our actions for themselves. Adam never formally rejects the traditional

29Quoted by Gilson, p. 500.
30Original texts in Leff, pp. 241-254.
doctrine of grace as such, but what remains in his system is an immediate confrontation of the divine and human wills, a confrontation for which the *habitus* of grace has become irrelevant. As in Ockham, then, the attempt to assert God's freedom, even over the ordained moral law, has led to asserting an equally radical human freedom, a freedom from the necessity of grace as man stands alone with his works before God.

The growth and popularity of Ockhamist theology was extremely widespread, first in England and at Paris, and then elsewhere on the continent. It would be impossible to document all of the evidence of this spread, but perhaps one further example will help to show its pervasiveness. Uthred of Bolden (C. 1315-97), a little-known teacher in a provincial English priory, was censured by a commission appointed by Archbishop Langham for, among other things, holding some extreme Ockhamist views. Uthred had read theology at Oxford and absorbed the ideas and controversies of his day, without offering much of his own that was original. He probably would never have come to Langham's attention except that he became embroiled in a conflict with a Dominican named William Jordan over a novel theory of Uthred's on final "clear vision" afforded a sinner before death.

When the commission decided to investigate Uthred's ideas, however, it saw fit to look into some of his statements about God's power, man's freedom, grace, merits, and justification. As recorded in Article XIV of the commission's report, Uthred claimed that grace is not an entity in itself, but rather a "relation" between God and man. Further, coming more directly to the point, the commission censured his opinions that men could merit eternal life ex puris naturalibus (Article XVII), that human nature possessed all the powers needed for salvation (Article XIX), and that a sinner always has the power to regain grace (in the sense of a proper "relation" to God) in this life (Article XX). These propositions are so clearly unorthodox that it is no surprise that they were firmly censured, but it is a sign of the pervasiveness of such ideas that Uthred was only investigated by a local commission. The implication of this is obvious: the papal commission at Avignon had time only for really important and original heresies, not for an obscure monk who taught ideas that were already widespread.

The Church's magisterium was, nonetheless, clearly moving to bring pressure against at least the most extreme Ockhamist tendencies; and the response from orthodox professional theologians, scholarly magistri at Oxford, was not long in coming. It is also quite worth noting, I think, that the conservative reaction was essentially a return to
Augustinian theology on all fronts. Thus, Richard FitzRalph (C. 1300-60), who read theology at Oxford during the early enthusiasm for Ockhamism, remained a solid Augustinian and later became a defender of conservative theology as the Bishop of Armagh. On the relation of works to grace, for example, FitzRalph criticizes the Scotist-Ockhamist emphasis on the role of will in merit and, though not excluding free will, he maintains that grace must first move the will to seek the good before a man can perform meritorious actions (Sent., I, q. 12, 84 rb). Further, FitzRalph reverses the Ockhamist tendency toward overstressing *meritum de congruo*, arguing that man's free will cannot generate grace by its own good actions; only God can create grace in man (Sent., I, q. 11, a.2, 77 vb). Generally, however, FitzRalph did not engage significantly in the controversies over grace and merit, nor was he a thinker of great power or originality. For such power and originality we must turn to the greatest adversary of Ockhamism in the whole period, Archbishop Thomas Bradwardine (C. 1290-1349), whose *De Causa Dei contra Pelagium* did more than any other single force to reassert the Augustinian doctrine of grace. His place in the thought-contest of the age is perhaps best summed up in his own description of his days at Oxford during the first

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32 The best full-length study, with pertinent passages from original texts, is Gordon Leff's *Richard FitzRalph, Commentator of the Sentences: a Study in Theological Orthodoxy* (Manchester, 1963).
I was at one time...while still a student of philosophy, a vain fool, far from the true knowledge of God, and held captive in opposing error. From time to time I heard theologians treating of the questions of grace and freewill, and the party of Pelagius seemed to me to have the best of the argument. For I rarely heard anything said of grace in the lectures of the philosophers, except in an ambiguous sense. But every day I heard them teach that we are the masters of our own free acts, and that it stands in our power to do either good or evil, to be either virtuous or vicious, and such like. And when I heard now and then in church a passage read from the apostle, which exalted grace and humbled free-will—such, for instance, as that word in Romans, ix.16, "Therefore it is not in him that willeth, nor in him that runneth, but in God that sheweth mercy", I had no liking for such teaching, for towards grace I was still graceless. I believed also with the Manichaeans that the apostle, being a man, might possibly err from the path of truth in any point of doctrine. But afterwards, and before I had become a student of theology, the truth before mentioned struck upon me like a beam of grace. It seemed to me as if I beheld in the distance, under a transparent image of truth, the grace of God as it is prevenient both in time and nature to all good works—that is to say, the gracious will of God, which pre­cedently wills that he who merits salvation shall be saved, and pre­cedently works this merit in him,—God, in truth, being in all movements the primary Mover. Wherefore also I give thanks to Him who freely gave me this grace.

In rather dramatic fashion, this sums up the conflicting forces of a whole age, here battling within the same man. Since their effects were so far-reaching, it will be worth our while to look at Bradwardine's views in some detail.

His first point is that all good works, including any a man might perform, come from God and can in no sense

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33Quoted by Herbert B. Workman, in John Wyclif: a Study of the English Medieval Church, I (Oxford, 1926), 120-121.
be attributed to man himself (De Causa Dei, p. 307). This leads quite naturally to the inferences that (1) God is the sole agent in effecting a man's salvation (De Causa Dei, p. 247), and (2) God alone moves the elect toward good actions since such actions cannot follow from one's own natural inclinations (De Causa Dei, p. 319). Going even further, Bradwardine in effect rules out meritum de congruo altogether: not only are good works performed independently of God impossible, but even good works prompted by precedent grace cannot merit sanctifying grace since for Bradwardine this would imply that man could control God (De Causa Dei, p. 325). There is no half-way point in justification. A man is either accepted by God or he is not: his actions either merit de condigno or they do not merit at all. To allow man an opportunity to cooperate with God's first grace and thus earn the further gift of sanctifying grace, which was the position of Augustine, was out of the question for Bradwardine because this would suggest some claim that man might have on God. Consequently, in his efforts to vindicate the necessity of grace from the teachings of the "Modern Pelagians," Bradwardine violated orthodox doctrine by the opposite extreme: where his opponents stressed meritum de congruo, and therefore free will, over meritum

34 All quotations and citations of De Causa Dei are from the only printed edition, Henry Savile, ed. (London, 1618).
de condigno. Bradwardine insisted so heavily on the priority of grace and meritum de condigno that he excluded meritum de congruo altogether, denying any independent value to human acts. This may perhaps become clearer with an example. Bradwardine's theology eliminated the value of contribution. If a man committed a sin and, at the prompting of God's grace, became genuinely sorry for his sin and prayed earnestly for forgiveness and reinstatement in God's good (sanctifying) grace, this in traditional doctrine would be meritorious de congruo and likely to lead to God's acceptance. Bradwardine excluded this possibility from his system, arguing that this would suggest a proportion between man's acts and God's. Only faith, the effect of grace not its cause, can justify the sinner; works are irrelevant in Bradwardine's system ("sed sola fide sine operibus praecedenti sit homo justus" [De Causa Dei] p. 394). The importance of this innovation has been well assessed by Gordon Leff:

Bradwardine has reached the point in his doctrine of grace where its entirely supernatural and unmerited character allows of no human action. He marks a break in kind, not merely in degree: for it is a logical extension of his own teaching either to transfer belief into a personal and emotional experience, as Luther did; or, on the other hand, to establish a theocracy on the certainty of God's predetermined will, such as Calvin was to found.

The more immediate effects were no less profound, as we shall now see in the controversial careers of Thomas

35 Leff, Bradwardine, pp. 85-86.
Buckingham (c.1300-c.1356) and John Wyclif (d.1384).

Buckingham's early work, represented by his *Commentary on the Sentences*, shows a radical Ockhamist tendency that often goes beyond even Robert Holcot or Adam of Woodham. On the subject of works, for example, Buckingham claimed that man could be good by nature without any *habitus* of sanctifying grace (*Sent.*, q. 6). He, like the other Ockhamists, used God's *potentia absoluta* to destroy any fixed moral relation between God and man, but he went further than most of the others by arguing that (1) grace and sin could coexist in the same soul, and (2) grace does not insure charity nor sin demand damnation (*Sent.*, q. 6). Faced with such indeterminacy, even a man in mortal sin could merit salvation *de congruo* if God chose to accept him (*Sent.*, q. 3, art. 2). This is Ockhamism pushed to the extreme, but Buckingham has not yet said his last word. Soon after Buckingham produced this early work, Bradwardine's *De Causa Dei* appeared and transformed the whole debate. One way that we can measure Bradwardine's effect on his contemporaries is to note the change in Buckingham's later work, the *Questions*.37 This tract was conceived as a response to

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Bradwardine, but it quite significantly does not revert to Buckingham's earlier opinions. The Questions reveals a very moderate Augustinism, carefully rejecting Ockham on the one side and Bradwardine on the other. Buckingham now taught that grace always precedes merit and that good works cannot by themselves satisfy God, but only after they have been elevated by grace (meritum de condigno). Still, he was also careful to preserve the value of man's free will, arguing that a man's disposition toward grace and the quality of his works may merit God's favor de congruo, though they are not themselves (naturaliter) sufficient for justification. The moderation of these views, therefore, is a tribute to the influence of Bradwardine who, though himself as extreme in one way as the Ockhamists were in another, so strongly reasserted Augustinian theology that he made a via media such as Buckingham's possible by the middle of the fourteenth century.

The last figure we shall consider here was perhaps the most vigorous mind of the latter half of the century, John Wyclif. Wyclif also participated in the conservative response to Ockhamism and, as Thomas Netter of Walder reported, "his disciples called him John son of Augustine." Besides this adherance to Augustine, Wyclif placed great value on Bradwardine and FitzRalph, whom he cited often as

38 Quoted by Workman, I, 119.
contemporary authorities against their common opponents.

his opposition to the "Modern Pelagians" on questions of

grace and merit is accordingly severe, as is evident in the

following passage from De volucione Dei:

Yet it would be heretical and utterly profane to say

that in God's co-operation with man through his grace,
man's acts are naturally prior to and more important
than those of God through grace; but this is what seemed
good to the Modern Pelagians to say, that man may pos-
sibly act without God's cooperating with him. And con-
cerning this they suggest that grace is an absolute and
self-sufficient quality, so that by God's absolute, but
not by his ordained power, man can merit without it.
And so they are ridiculously compelled to say that a
man naturally performs meritorious acts before God works
in him, on the ground that such acts can only be done
by that man...and so, according to such people, man
could act without the grace of God working in him.39

As J. A. Robson points out, "However suspect other features

of Wyclif's theology might be, his doctrine of grace was im-
peccably orthodox."40 The only thing that is "suspect" here

is the premise from which his doctrine of grace is deduced,
his extreme predestinarian view of God's relation to man for
which he has become so famous in doctrinal history.

With Wyclif we come to the end of our examination

of this long controversy, and it now remains to show how
widely these ideas influenced the intellectual milieu of the
fourteenth century as a whole. In such a project, it would
be wrong to assume that because this was a theological

39 Quoted by Robson, p. 211.
40 Robson, p. 209.
dispute, it was therefore too abstruse or too divorced from their everyday concerns to interest laymen much, if at all. We must be careful not to infer a disinterest in technical theology in the fourteenth century from our experience of such a disinterest in a later age. William of Ockham, in a famous protest, once complained that Oxford theologians were constantly besieged with arguments and opinions from laymen and old women on such questions as necessity, contingency, and God's power. These theological disputes were not confined to musty libraries or stuffy lecture halls, but were among the most pervasive intellectual interests of the later Middle Ages. The following chapters will examine much of the best poetry of the fourteenth century, none of which was written by Oxford schoolmen, but all of which shows how deeply the controversies over grace and merit affected the ideas and values of the age.

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41 Guillelmi de Ockham Opera Politica, III, ed. H. S. Offler (Manchester, 1956), 231.
Chapter II: The Pearl-Poet

A decade ago, it might have been necessary at this point to justify the analyses we are about to begin by arguing that, at least for medieval poetry, a study of theological doctrine is legitimate as literary criticism. Perhaps the question of how far a critic may extend his sphere into the area of "ideas" has not yet been settled, but judging from the kinds of studies of medieval literature that have appeared since the early 1950's, the question no longer seems particularly important, at least to medievalists. Whatever one may think of the exegetical method developed by Robertson, Huppe, Kaske, and others, it has excited such lively controversy and renewed such interest in the study of patristic and medieval theology among literary scholars that The Well Wrought Urn has largely been abandoned for the Patrologia Latina, and Archetypal Patterns in Poetry for the Vulgate and the Glossa Ordinaria.

1This method has been described in, for example, Dorothy Bethurum, ed. Critical Approaches to Medieval Literature (New York, 1960). A recent judicious evaluation may be found in Paul Beichner, C.S.C., "The Allegorical Interpretation of Medieval Literature," PMLA, LXXXII (March, 1967), 33-38.
There is little reason for worry that stylistic criticism will be neglected, however, because of the growing interest in medieval rhetoric, long the province of a small band of scholars armed with the texts in Edmond Faral's *Les Artes Poétiques du XIIe et du XIIIe Siècle*, and now available to the nonspecialist as a result of the recent translation of Geoffrey de Vinsauf's indispensable *Poetria Nova*. Still, even writers concerned primarily with stylistic analysis can scarcely afford to insulate medieval poets, even for the sake of critical method, from the intellectual and cultural elements of the medieval synthesis that the poetry struggles to articulate. For poetry, no less than the encyclopedia or the *summa*, reflects the passion of the Middle Ages to unite all areas of human experience into a single, comprehensive system. This may seem foreign to our twentieth-century mind, which attempts to divide experience into specialized compartments for scientific analysis, and which has labored to divorce art from life, at least in several notable cases. But to apply this bias to fourteenth-century poetry would render sympathetic analysis impossible. With this in mind, the intent of this chapter, as well as of succeeding chapters, is to search out the responses in several important poems of the later fourteenth century to

2 (Paris, 1924).

3 Trans. Margaret Nims (Toronto, 1967).
the controversy over grace and merit described in the first chapter.

Most scholars now agree that the Pearl-poet wrote all of the poems found in the Cotton Nero A.x manuscript, and there is increasing evidence that he may have written St. Erkenwald as well.\(^4\) This makes for a convenient assumption because we can now study these poems as a group, but unity of authorship is not absolutely essential to the thesis I shall try to prove here. All that is necessary to assume is that these five works exhibit a general similarity of language and style, and that they are roughly contemporary with one another. Beyond this, all five poems provide extensive evidence of interest in the same intellectual problems and remarkable agreement on approaches to these problems.

Most interpretations of Pearl in the past have focused on such questions as the nature and subject of the allegory,\(^5\) the genre to which the poem belongs,\(^6\) the jewel


\(^5\)Useful summaries of various theories regarding allegory may be found in E. V. Gordon, ed., Pearl (Oxford, 1953), pp.xi-xix and xxvii-xxix; and John Conley, "Pearl and a Lost Tradition," JEGP, LIV (1955), 332-347.

\(^6\)This is an old controversy which is not yet dead, as Dorothy Everett's intelligent analysis shows. See the essay on Pearl in her Essays on Middle English Literature, ed. Patricia Kean (Oxford, 1955).
symbolism, and the rhetorical function of the narrator. Each of these has proved valuable in helping us to a better understanding and appreciation of the complexity and richness of the poem, and it is not my purpose to challenge any of them here. Surprisingly, there has been little discussion of the doctrinal questions raised by the poem, and I have not been able to find any thoroughgoing effort to relate the debate between the dreamer and the pearl-maiden to the contemporary debate over grace and merit.

Many years ago, there was a theory, proposed by Carleton Brown and supported by Walter Greene, that the narrator of Pearl is orthodox and the maid heretical in their views on the equality of heavenly rewards. Brown argued that the poet "is laboring to prove that, since salvation is not a matter of merit but of grace, even a baptized child dying in infancy will receive in the heavenly kingdom


9This is not to say, however, that no one has commented on this at all. See the pointed, though general, remarks in William H. Schofield's English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer (London, 1906), p. 101; and see Dorothy Everett's essay (cited in note 6, above).

a reward equal to that of the Christian who has lived a life of righteousness and holy works."\(^{11}\) This is, according to Brown, a revival of the Jovinian heresy and represents a doctrine strongly opposed by all orthodox theologians of the Middle Ages. Interestingly, he uses Bradwardine as his standard of contemporary orthodoxy: "It will be observed that the objections raised by the father to the notion that a baptized child will receive equal reward with an adult entirely coincide with the views of Bradwardine—in both, even the same verse of Scripture is appealed to."\(^{12}\) 

Thus, the dreamer, who loses his argument with the heretical maiden, provides a target through which the poet can also strike Bradwardine.

Soon after Brown published his theory, Jefferson E. Fletcher rejected it,\(^ {13}\) pointing out evidence in the poem of a hierarchy in heaven (lines 885-888 and 1119). Such a hierarchy depends on the common distinction between the objective reward that is given equally to all the elect and the subjective enjoyment of that reward, which differs from one individual to another according to their different merits. Fletcher sums up his argument by observing that the

\(^{11}\) Brown, p. 132.

\(^{12}\) Brown, p. 136.

\(^{13}\) "The Allegory of the Pearl," JEGP, XX (1921), 1-21. Another important defense of the poet's orthodoxy is René Wellek's "The Pearl: An Interpretation of the Middle English Poem," Studies in English, IV (1933), 1-33.
... is not concerned to edit the social register of paradise. He is discussing only one issue in the problem of the divine reward of merit, namely, the comparative worth for salvation of the vicarious merit of Christ's sacrifice and of the direct individual merit of good works; and he decides in favor of the former. The example of the little child, born in the faith and dying after baptism, is simply an extreme cas au vif of one saved by vicarious merit solely. This seems to have solved the problem for scholars interested in the Pearl-poet's doctrine of grace, if we may judge by the absence of any further studies that might have added new insights into the dispute.

There is, nevertheless, another perspective from which we may view the question. Neither Brown nor Fletcher allows for an interaction between grace and meritorious works; they both split the problem in half, as if grace and works were mutually exclusive, and it were possible to choose only one or the other. But this is a false dichotomy. Orthodox tradition from Augustine onward recognized a connection between grace and works, a connection so intimate that one is fruitless without the other. Thus, a more satisfactory account of the significance of the debate in Pearl will have to begin with the central issue of that debate: whether grace or works is more important in meriting salvation.

Fletcher, p. 19.
Of the two, the poet does place greater emphasis on grace than on works, but only because the case is extraordinary to begin with. The issue is not whether grace is required for salvation—both the dreamer and the maiden agree that it is—but whether works are needed to complement the power of grace in order to merit God's acceptance de condigno. The conclusion that "be grace of God is gret innogh" does not exclude the value of works; it merely confirms the Church's traditional teaching that the saving grace of baptism (gratia gratum faciens) is sufficient to justify a child who has not yet had the chance to perform good works before dying. We may well ask, however, why the poet chose the extreme case that he did. Considering the fourteenth-century interest in the relation between grace and merit, this question is crucial in understanding both the poem and its place in late medieval thought.

Placed in this context, Pearl dramatizes a debate, similar to the Scholastic disputatio, between the Ockhamist tendencies of the dreamer and the Augustinian conservatism of the pearl-maid. His stress on the importance of works leads to a doctrine of meritum de congruo, at least in some places in the poem, which she, with her overwhelming emphasis on grace, tends to ignore, if not actually to eliminate. Further, the contemporary distinction between potentia Dei absoluta and potentia Dei ordinata underlies
the arguments presented on both sides of the debate.

Even before the debate gets under way, moreover, there are clues to the dreamer's Ockhamist leanings. In the fifth stanza, for example, he describes the predominance of his will over his intellect and rational Christian teaching, thus introducing us to his voluntaristic scheme: 15

Before pat spot my honde I spenned
For care ful colde pat to me ca3t;
A deuely dele in my hert denned,
Da3 resoun sette myseluen sa3t.
I playned my perle pat her wat3 spenned
Wyth fyrce skylle3 pat faste fa3t;
Da3 kynde of Kryst me comfort kenned,
My wreiched wylle in wo ay wra3te.  
(49-56)

After meeting Pearl, the dreamer assumes, on the basis of sense experience, that she exists as a physical reality. This may reflect the empirical bias of Oxford nominalism, but whatever its source the maid chides him for it:

Dou says dou trawe3 me in bis dene,
Bycawse dou may wyth y3en me se.  
(295-296)

No doubt, these passages can be explained in other ways, but when we see the further evidence of the dreamer's Ockhamist tendencies, it seems not too far-fetched to see in the lines quoted above a preparation for the theological position of the dreamer.

Be this as it may, the Pearl goes on to be much more specific in her criticism:

15All quotations are taken from Gordon's edition (cited in note 5, above).
'I halde þat iueler lyttel to prayse
Dat leueþ wel þat he seþ wyth yȝe,
And much to blame and vn cortayse
Dat leueþ oure Lord wolde make a lyȝe,
Dat lelly hyȝte your lyf to rayse,
Dat þe fortune dyd your flesch to dyȝe.
Se setten hys wordeþ ful westernays
Dat leueþ nobynk bot þe hit syȝe.
And þat is a poynþ o sorquydryȝe,
Dat vche god mon may euel byseme,
To leue no tale be true to tryȝe
Bot þat hys one skyl may dem.

(301-312)

She is, of course, censuring his scepticism again, but this
time she raises a new point. Is the dreamer, she asks, one
of those moderni doctores who would argue that God is so
completely free of his contract with man, established de
potentia Dei ordinata, that he cannot be relied on? that
he could, de potentia Dei absoluta, even lie to man? Such
radical suggestions were not unusual in the fourteenth
century, as the evidence presented in Chapter I shows.

By way of contrast, she constantly reaffirms the
stability of the present moral order, as in stanzas 26, 29,
38, and 42. She never rejects the concept of potentia Dei
absoluta, but at the same time she insists that God would
never in fact violate what he has ordained as the proper
relation between himself and man:

Deme Dryȝtyn, euer hym adyte,
Of þe way a fote ne wyl he wryþe.

(349-350)

Turning this argument to his own advantage, the dreamer
suggests that her account of her state in heaven implicitly
accuses God of violating the covenant with man, of being unjust in rewarding the maid as he has:

'That cortaysé is to fre of dede,
3yf hyt be soth bat þou coneȝ saye.
þou lyfed not towȝ 3er in ourȝ þede;
þou cowpeȝ neuer God naȝper pleȝ ne pray,
Ne neuer naȝper Pater ne Crede;
And quen mad on þe fyrst day!
I:may not traw, so God me spede,
Dat God wolde wryȝe so wrange away.
Of countes, damysel, par ma fay,
Wer fayr in heuen to halde asstate,
Oper elleȝ a lady of lasse aray;
Pot a quene! Hit is to dere a date.'
(481-492)

Confused and upset, the dreamer has three alternatives open to him at this point: (1) Pearl is misrepresenting herself, though this would be hard to accept when he is faced by evidence to the contrary; (2) a child who has not earned any merit could become a queen in heaven; (3) God has, by asserting his potentia absoluta over his potentia ordinata, overturned the usual standards of justice. His problem, of course, is that he does not want to accept any of these.

In her reply, Pearl reassures him that God's word and God's justice are absolute:

'Der is no date of hys godnesse,'
Den sayde to me þat worþy wyȝte,
'For al is trawþe þat he con dresse,
And he may do nopynk bot ryȝt.'
(493-496)

This contrasts sharply with the Ockhamist contention that God could, de potentia Dei absoluta, even will that a man sin against the present moral law. Against Ockham's view that God's will is the sole determinant of what is right or
wrong, the maiden insists on a fixed moral order which binds
God as well as man. But even Bradwardine never would have
tolerated such a restriction of God's freedom, though he
would have agreed with her on the absoluteness of divine
justice.

To support her case, she next leads into the heart
of the poem, the parable of the workers in the vineyard.
Just as the men who came to work for the shortest time were
paid equally with those who labored through the heat of the
day, so also she, who lived only a brief life on earth, has
been justly rewarded in heaven along with men and women who
suffered through long lives. The important thing, from her
point of view, is not whether a man does or does not per­
form good works because no man's behavior is sufficiently
meritorious to meet the full standard of God's justice
(meritum de condigno) by his own efforts (ex puris natura­
libus):

'More haf I joye and blysse hereinne,
Of ladyschyp gret and lyue3 blom,
Den alle be wy3e3 in be worlde my3t wynne
By be way of ry3t to aske dome.
(577-580)

While the dreamer cannot very well attack the parable it­
self, he shifts his tactics and produces a Scriptural text
of his own to support his side:

Then more I meled and sayde apert:
'Me þynk by tale vnresounable.
Godde3 ry3t is reddy and euermore rert,
Oper Holy Wryt is bot a fable.
It is true, as we have seen, that all medieval theologians gave some place to man's works in salvation. The real difference between Ockham and Bradwardine is not that one favored and one opposed the value of works; it is rather that Ockham emphasized man's potential for meriting salvation de congruo, while Bradwardine virtually eliminated all but meritum de condigno. In the passage just quoted, it is impossible to be certain about which kind of merit the dreamer is attempting to describe here. If God "quyteʒ vchon as hys desserte," how do we define the conditions under which a man's works may merit such reward? What is man's "desserte"? Does the dreamer mean that his actions may have intrinsic value such that God will "quyte" him for them (ex natura rei debita), or does God simply honor his commitment to reward a man to whom he has given the grace to merit heaven (ex debito iusticiae)? The dreamer's statements are not entirely clear on this point, but we may infer from his interest in the quantitative relation between works and rewards that he is in any event unwilling to dispense with works. Furthermore, his
assumption that there is, or should be, a balance of payments between man and God implies that human actions have value independently of God's participation or partnership in them through grace (auxilium gratiae). Though the dreamer does not appear to realize it, this borders suspiciously on Pelagianism.

Pearl has already taken care to preserve meritum de congruo, as against Eradwardine's tendency to ignore it in his system:

 Dy prayer may hys pyte byte,  
 Dat mercy schal hyr crafte3 kype.  
 (355-356)

But at the same time, she has also ruled out the possibility that men's works merit salvation "Ey be way of ry3t" (580). While meritum de congruo may be possible, granting the goodness and mercy of God, only meritum de condigno offers real security that one will actually be among the elect. This leads logically to her response to the dreamer:

 'Of more and lasse in Gode3 ryche,'  
 Dat gentyl sayde, 'lys no joparde,  
 For per is vch mon payed inlyche,  
 Wheber lyttel ober much be hys rewarde;  
 For pe gentyl Cheuentayn is no chyche,  
 Queber-so-euer he dele nesch ober harde:  
 He laue3 hys gyfte3 as water of dyche,  
 Ober gote3 of golf bat neuer charde.  
 Hys fraunchyse is large bat euer dard  
 To Hym bat mat3 in synne rescoghe;  
 No blysse bet3 fro hem reparde,  
 For pe grace of God is gret inoghe.  
 (601-612)

What matters here is not that the rewards given to men are equal, but rather that God has chosen to give rewards at
all. Man has no claim on God by "ry3t." Only God's free gift of sanctifying grace (gratia gratum faciens) can justify the sinner and make him acceptable to God. This is what Pearl shares with those who have been saved after having lived much longer than she: justifying grace alone raises man out of the massa perditionis. This is proved from the fact that even those who have this gift of grace are constantly slipping back into sin. If God were to judge men by their works alone, no one would be saved. Thus, she claims, the dreamer's objection is not to the point:

But now pou mote3, me for to mate,  
Dat I my peny haf wrang tan here;  
Dou say3 dat I bat com to late  
Am not worby so gret fere.  
Where wyste3 pou euer any bourne abate,  
Euer so holy in hys prayere,  
Dat he ne forfeited by sumkyn gate  
De mede sumtyme of heuene3 clere?  
And ay be ofter, be alder bay were,  
Day laften ry3t and wro3ten woghe.  
Mercy and grace moste hem ben stere,  
For be grace of God is gret inno3e.  
(613-624)

It is impossible that there be any real congruity between man's faltering actions and God's justice, and so it is necessary that man be elevated to a state of grace (habitus gratiae) in which he may meet the standards that God has committed himself, de potentia Dei ordinata, to accept as full (de condigno) merit.

In the following three stanzas, the maiden describes
how man first fell through Adam's sin, thus requiring the justification brought about by Christ in order to be capable of *meritum de condigno*. She is quite careful to point out that, even now, God's good will is necessary for such merit to be achieved at all, thereby excluding semi-Pelagianism:

> Now is ther no3t in be worlde rounde
> Bytwene vus and blysse bot þat he wythdro3,
> And þat is restored in sely stounde;
> And þe grace of God is gret innoghe.

(657-660)

Even so, she is willing to allow a place to *meritum de congruo*. A man in the state of sin may, through contrition and repentance, perform well enough that God will send him grace (*gratia gratis data*) to prepare himself for the sacramental grace of penance that will restore the sinner to God's friendship (*gratia gratum faciens*):

> Grace innogh þe mon may haue
> Þat synne þenne new, jif hym repente,
> Bot wyth sor3 and syt he mot hit craue,
> And byde þe payne berto is bent.
> Bot resoun of ry3t þat con not raue
> Saue3 euermore þe innosent;
> Hit is a dom þat God neuer gaue,
> Þat euer þe gyltley3 shulde be schente.
> Þe gyltyf may contryssyoun hente
> And be þur3 mercy to grace þry3t.

(661-670)

Here, as well as in the following stanza, Pearl distinguishes between two kinds of sinners: (1) those adults who, having committed sins by their free will, may only be admitted back into saving grace through God's generosity, not by right; (2) those children who, though they share in the
general fallen state of man, have not performed any evil works by the time they die and are, therefore, "ay saf by ry3t" (684). The point is that the "innocents" of the second group are in a special class of their own, one to which it is irrelevant to apply the question of merit at all. The maiden presupposes that, having been justified by the purifying waters of baptism, such children have all that is required for salvation. Any merits on their part, were they capable of meritorious works, could not do any more toward their being saved than baptism has already done, de potentia Dei ordinata. This may take care of her own situation, but her function in the poem takes her much further. She has not only to convince the dreamer of the justice of God's ways of dealing with man; she has also to teach a doctrine of grace and merit that will include him as an adult as well.

For a man who is not one of the "innocents," it is possible that he cooperate with God's will, as this has been described for man, de potentia Dei ordinata. Thus, the man who wishes to be among the righteous should do what he can to avoid sin:

'The ry3twys man also sertayn
Aproche he schal pat proper pyle,
Dat take3 not her lyf in wayne,
Ne glauere3 her nie3bor wyth no gyle.

(685-688)

But she also qualifies this, once again, by pointing to the impossibility of a man, even a very good man by ordinary
human standards, earning a heavenly reward by his own merits alone:

"Anende ry3twys men jet sayt3 a gome,
Dauld in Sauter, if euer 3e sy3 hit:
"Lorde, by seruautnt dra3 neue r to dome,
For non lyuyande to be is justyfyet."
Forby to corte quen þou schal com
Ðer alle oure causeʒ schal be tryed,
Alegge þe ryʒt, þou may be innome,
By þis ilke spech I haue asspyed.

(697-704)

This is a doctrine so important in her theology that the maiden does not seem to tire of repeating it: man has no claim on God, but God has chosen to extend to his wayward creatures the free gift of sanctifying grace. Even though man may apply for divine mercy by offering his works as a sign of his good will, these may not justify him. Only the grace which God has committed himself to provide to the righteous man is sufficient to merit heaven (ex debito iusticiae rather than ex natura rei debita). Thus, though she has been careful to allow some place to works in the salvation of adult Christians, the exigencies of her subject lead her to give far greater emphasis to grace than to works. In order to defend her own state in heaven, she has had to argue that grace may save a baptized Christian independently of works. Now, the logic of her position forces her to admit the same of adult salvation: works have some place, ill-defined though it may be, but in the judgment of God grace alone suffices.

The dreamer, however, is either unable or unwilling
to accept this teaching. For after seeing a vision of the New Jerusalem, he tries to swim the river separating himself from the heavenly city. This is a direct attempt to seize salvation by an act of the human will, which is out-and-out Pelagianism. Only after he has failed does the dreamer finally recognize the folly of his action. Man's works are—not only in theory, but also in practice—in incapable of earning what does not belong to him by right. Only by humbly submitting himself to God's will, which has already expressed its gratuitous liberality toward man, may the dreamer have genuine hope of reward:

To þat Prynceʒ paye hade I ay bente,  
And þerned no more þen watʒ me gyuen,  
And halden me þer in trwe entent,  
As þe perle me prayed þat watʒ so pryuen,  
As helde, drawen to Goddez present,  
To mo of his mysterys I hade ben dryuen;  
Eot ay wolde man of happe more hente  
Þen moʒte by ryʒt vpon hem clyuen.  
Þerfore my ioye watʒ sone toriuen,  
And I kaste of kytheʒ þat lasteʒ aye.  
Lorde, mad hit arn þat agayn þe stryuen,  
Ober proferen þe oʒt agayn þy paye.  
(1189-1200)

The dreamer has at last come around to Pearl's point of view. Works are, in spite of the prevailing Ockhamist teachings of the day, ultimately irrelevant if it is not the "Prynceʒ paye."

In all this, then, there is clear evidence of the poet's response to the fourteenth-century debate over grace and merit. Though it would surely be a grave injustice to the poet to reduce his marvelous poetry to a prosaic dis-
discussion of theology, it is not possible to understand the
dialectic tension which organizes the poem except through
its central doctrinal theme. Nor would it be possible to
understand how Pearl is itself a significant contribution
to the controversy, steering as it does a course between
the extremes of Ockham and Bradwardine. Like both of these
thinkers, the Pearl-poet stresses the ultimate power and
authority of the divine will: but unlike Ockham, he rejects
works as either justifying in themselves or even likely to
evoke God's acceptance, de potentia absoluta; and unlike
Bradwardine, he is willing to grant limited value to
meritum de congruo. The poem is nevertheless, basically
conservative in its overriding emphasis on God's grace,
though this may be attributed partly to the subject of the
poem and not to the poet himself, as his other poems show.

Norman Davis claims that Pearl "differs consider-
ably" from the other poems in the manuscript-group, and
he is quite right if we consider stylistic matters alone.
But an investigation of the thematic content of these poems
reveals a striking coherence in the development of the
doctrine of grace and merit through them all. The rest of
this chapter, therefore, will examine the ways in which
the doctrine presented in Pearl receives further qualiﬁ-
cation and refinement in Purity, Patience, Sir Gawain and
the Green Knight, and, because of mounting evidence of
common authorship, St. Erkenwald.

16J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon, ed. Sir Gawain and
The old interpretation of *Purity* as a collection of poetic glosses on several disconnected Biblical narratives has long since been overturned by Gollancz and Menner, but the full extent of the poem's thematic unity has yet to be understood. Among others, one of the most important themes in the poem is its doctrine of works, which nicely balances the doctrine of grace in *Pearl*. But even though the poet places a greater emphasis on works in *Purity* than in *Pearl*, it is also clear here that such good works derive their motive and value from prevenient grace. Thus, while *Pearl* develops the theme "be grace of God is gret innogh," *Purity* complements it by dramatizing the importance of man's response to God, thereby preserving a delicate balance between the two.

Accordingly, in the parable from Matthew describing the guests at the wedding feast, the poet finds in the clothes of the guests a symbol for the good works a man must "wear" if he is to be acceptable to God:

```
Wich a m  benne by wede3 bou wrappe3 be inne,
Dat schal schewe hem so schene, schrowde of be best?
Hit arn by werke3 wyterly, pat bou wro3t haue3,
& lyued wyth pe lykyng pat ly3e in pyn hert,

Dat po be frely & fresch fonde in by lyue,
& fetyse of a fayr forme to fote & to honde,
& sypen alle pyn oper lyme3 lapped ful cleene;
Denne may bou se by sauior & his sete rych.
```

(169-176)

This is not yet sufficiently precise for us to determine whether these good works that the Christian must "put on" in order to be acceptable to God are (1) merita de congruo, prompted by gratia gratis data and generously accepted (ex natura rei debita), or (2) merita de condigno, possible only through gratia gratum faciens and accepted according to the divine contract with man (ex debito justiciae).

The poet begins to clarify his position for us further on when, commenting on the Flood, he remarks that good works are valueless unless a man has been lifted out of sin by grace:

For is no segge vnder sunne so seme of his crafte,
If he be sulped in synne bat sytte vn-clene;
On spec of a spote may spede to mysse
Of be sy3te of be souerayn bat sytte3 so hy3e.

Absolute sinlessness is necessary for divine acceptance and, since a man in sin might merit de congruo but not de condigno, the poet is evidently commenting on the requirement for man to meet the full standard of God's justice only through meritum de condigno.

In the very next section of the poem, however, the poet hastens to protect himself from the extreme of Bradwardine, pointing out that a man may also merit de congruo. For at least in certain cases when one's heart is "honest and hol," God may choose to extend his generosity to the sinner:

& pere he fynde3 al fayre a freke wyth-inne
Wyth hert honest & hol, bat hapel he honoure3.
and again,

\begin{align*}
\text{Alle byse ar teches & tokens to trow vpon set}, \\
&\text{& witnesse of pat wykked werk, & be wrake after} \\
&\text{Dat oure fader forberde for fylpe of pose ledes:} \\
&\text{Denne vch wy3e may wel wyt pat he be wlonk louies.} \\
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
&\text{& if he louyes clene layk pat is oure lorde ryche,} \\
&\text{& to be coupe in his courte pou coueytes penne,} \\
&\text{To se pat semly in sete & his swete face,} \\
&\text{Clerrer counsayl con I non, bot pat pou clene worpe.} \\
\end{align*}

The poet follows this up, clarifying his doctrine of \textit{meritum de congruo} even further, by drawing an analogy with Jean de Meun's section of the \textit{Roman de la Rose}. How should a man behave in order to win God's grace? He should act toward God as a lover does toward his lady in order to win her favor: try to imitate her actions so that she will love her suitor for his likeness to herself. So also with God, who is likely to reward a "suitor" who strives to imitate the behavior of Christ:

\begin{align*}
&\text{For so Clopyngnel in be compas of his clene Rose,} \\
&\text{Der he expoune3 a speche, to hym pat spede wolde,} \\
&\text{Of a lady to be loued,—loke to hir sone} \\
&\text{Of wich beryng pat ho be , & wych ho best louyes,} \\
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
&\text{& be ry3t such in vch a bor3e of body & of dedes,} \\
&\text{& fol3 be fet of pat fere pat pou fre haldes;} \\
&\text{& if pou wyrrkes on pis wyse, pa3 ho wyk were,} \\
&\text{Hir schal lyke pat layk pat lyknes hir tyle.} \\
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
&\text{If pou wyl dele drwyedrytyn penne,} \\
&\text{& lelly louy py lorde & his leef worpe,} \\
&\text{Denne confourme be to Kryst, & be clene make,} \\
&\text{Dat euer is polyced als playn as pe perle seluen.} \\
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
\text{(1049-56)}
\end{align*}

It is important to notice here that there is no reference to God's cooperation with man during the process of the "courtship;" nor is there evidence that a man's behavior
could have a full claim on God's acceptance. In terms of
the analogy itself, God's will is, like a beautiful
woman's, the sole determinant of success in the relationship.
All a man may do is to offer his sincere efforts, which
are meritorious *de congruo*, and hope that the divine will
may prove less capricious than a lady's.

Carrying this doctrine a step further, the poet
argues that even Christians who have lost sanctifying grace
through their own sinful actions are not altogether lost.
A repentant sinner, by virtue of his sorrow for his past
behavior, may merit (*de congruo*) the grace (*gratia gratis
data*) to motivate him to receive the sacrament of penance.
If he so chooses, this will restore him to God's friendship
(*gratia gratum faciens*) and permit him to earn merit (*de
condigno*) toward his salvation:

> Hov schulde pou com to his kyth bot if pou clene were?
> Nov ar we sore & synful & sovly vch one;
> How schulde we se, þen may we say, þat syre vpon throne?
> 3is, þat mayster is mercyable, þæþ pou be man fenny,
> & al to-marred in myre whyle þou on molde lyuyes;
> Þou may schyne þur3 schryfte, þæþ þou haf schome
> serued,
> & pure þe with penaunce tyl þou a perle worpe.
> (1110-16)

This is, moreover, completely a matter of man's free choice.
There is none of Bradwardine's or Wyclif's predestinarian
theology in Purity: man's ultimate election or rejection
by God is simply not an issue here. What is significant,
according to the poet, is that man is, *de potentia Dei ordi-
nata*, free either to apply for God's mercy or to turn away
toward "ober goddes" (1161-68 and 1225-32). Yet even this freedom, one of the absorbing interests of the poet, does not obviate his belief that all goods, including meritorious works, flow ultimately from God in some mysterious fashion:

Who-so wolde wel do, wel hym bityde,
& quos deth so he dejyred, he dreped als fast;

Who-so hym lyked to lyft, on lofte wat3 he sone,
& quo-so hym lyked to lay, wat3 lo3ed bylyue. (1647-50)

Thus, the poet may not escape the fourteenth-century voluntarism that balanced an emphasis on man's will with an even greater stress on God's will, the final criterion of all value. With this in mind, the poet ends his work with a prayer for grace, which he implies is a condition sine qua non for a man to do well:

Dat we gon gay in oure gere, his grace he vus sende,
Dat we may serue in his sy3t, ber solace neuer blynne3! (1811-12)

Such was the pressure on religious thinkers of the time that such a poem as Purity, concentrating as it does on man's response to God through works, had to conclude with this reassurance that the poet's attitudes toward grace were, after all, thoroughly orthodox.

Turning now to Patience, 18 we see still another representation of the late medieval conflicts over God's

18 Edited by Israel Gollancz (London, 1913). All quotations are from this edition.
will, man's freedom, grace, and merit. For Jonah, the principal character in the poem, is a rebel, again and again questioning the ways of God toward men. Consequently, while The Pearl presents the case for justifying grace and Purity for good works, The Patience explores the complicated theology of divine willing—the grand passion that sooner or later seduced all the best minds of the fourteenth century.

In the first part of the narrative, Jonah seeks to escape the power of God's will by fleeing his responsibilities. Then, when God searches him out even on the high sea, far from his native land, and thrusts him into the "hell" of the whale's stomach, Jonah finally turns submissively toward God, praying for release. Such a release, however, involves nothing less than God, de potentia absoluta, overruling his just punishment of Jonah, which had been willed de potentia ordinata. For the poet clearly states that, to save Jonah from inevitable death, God must suspend natural law:

> For nade he heuen-kyng, þur3 his honde myȝt, Warded þis wrecy nam in Warlowes gutteȝ, What lede moȝt lyue bi lawe of any kynde, Dat any lyf myȝt be lent so longe hym wyþ-inne? (257-260)

It may be, as I shall argue here, that this section of The Patience is an allegory of man's relation to God; or more specifically, an allegory of the sinful man requiring justification. Man has chosen to alienate himself from God's friendship, and God has justly abandoned him to the
"hell" of the whale's belly. The only hope that man has left is to pray that God might withhold vengeance, over­
ruling the ordinary standards of divine justice:

& ber he lenged at be last, & to be Lede called:--
'Now, Prynce, of by prophete pite bou haue!
Da3 I be fol & fykel, & falce of my hert,
De-woyde now by vengaunce, pur3 vertu of rauthe;

Tha3 I be gulty of gyle, as gaule of prophetes,
Dou art God, & alle gowde3 ar graybely pyn owen;
Haf now mercy of by man & his mys-dedes,
& preue be ly3tly a lorde in londe & in water.'

(281-288)

Realizing that his own merit cannot measure up to the stan­
dard of God's expectations, Jonah beseeches God to assert his potentia absoluta to "de-woyde" his punishment. Thus, according to the poet, the sinner may be condemned de poten­
tia Dei ordinata, yet his situation is never hopeless so long as he can appeal to the potentia Dei absoluta:

& 3et I sayde, as I seet in be se-bopem,—
"Care-ful am I kest out fro py cler y3en,
& deseuered fro by sy3t, 3et surely I hope
Efte to trede on by temple, & teme to by seluen."

(313-316)

And even more pointedly, he is sure that such an appeal will be granted by the all-merciful God:

'Dou schal releue me renk, whil by ry3t slepe3,
Dur3 my3t of by mercy, pat mukel is to tryste.

(323-324)

Without further qualification, this could well be the Pelagian doctrine that Bradwardine accused the Ockhamists of holding. For it is fundamental to Ockhamist theology, as we have seen in Chapter I, that works which could at best only merit de congruo could be accepted de potentia Dei
absoluta if God were favorably disposed toward the sinner. But the poet here guards Patience against such a charge by almost immediately adding that works without grace (habitus gratiae) are incapable of rising above sin:

I haf meled wyth by maystres mony lone longe day,
Bot now I wot wyterly, þat þose vnwyse ledes
Dat affyen hym in vanye & in vayne þynges,
For þink þat mountes to noȝt, her mercy forsaken. (329-332)

Jonah is only saved, presumably, because he sees the error of his disobedience and the need to repent. Still, the doctrine of grace is somewhat ambiguous. Does the poet suggest that even those whose lives are dedicated to "vanye" might, like Jonah, also appeal to the ultimate court of God's mercy and potentia absoluta? The poet does not explicitly say so, but the logic of his position thus far would seem to commit him to such a notion of meritum de congruo in spite of his effort to affirm his orthodoxy on grace.

In the next major section of the poem, Jonah temporarily repudiates what he has just learned from his own experience with God's infinite mercy. For when the people of Nineveh, who have incurred the divine wrath, make the same prayer that Jonah had made earlier—that they be saved from God's judgment against them—they appeal to the potentia Dei absoluta. Thus, their king argues,

What wote oper wyte may, þif be wyȝe lykes,
Dat is hende in þe hyȝt of his gentryse?
I wot his myȝt is so much, þaȝ he be mysse-payed,
Dat in his mylde amesyng he mercy may fynde.

& if we leuyn þe layk of oure layth synnes,
& style steppen in be sty3e he sty3le3 hym seluen,  
   He wyl wende of his wodschip, & his wrath leue,  
   & for-gif vus his gult, 3if we hym God leuen.'  
(397-404)

The people then respond to their king's urging, and we may  
measure the success of their good works of "penaunce" (not  
the sacrament, since this is an Old Testament event) by  
the following comment:

Denne al leued on his lawe & laften her synnes;  
Par-formed alle be penaunce pat be prynce radde;  
& God purʒ his godnesse forgef as he sayde;  
Đaʒ he ōber bihyʒt, wyth-helde his vengaunce.  
(405-408)

This is, as in the case of Jonah's rescue from the whale,  
an explicit affirmation of the doctrine that meri\textit{tum de  
congruo} may so appeal to God's generosity that he may elect  
sinners, \textit{de potentia absoluta}. Whether this is actually  
Pelagian is, for our purposes here, less important than  
the fact that conservatives like Bradwardine and Wyclif  
interpreted it as such. Furthermore, as we have seen  
earlier, this combination of meri\textit{tum de congruo} with the  
emphasis on God's \textit{potentia absoluta}—that is, God's freedom  
to transcend even his own ordinances and judgments—was  
characteristic of the Ockhamist theologians of the four-  
teenth century.

Jonah demonstrates that he has not yet learned his  
lesson, however, and rages against God for being merciful  
toward the sinners of Nineveh. The final section of the  
poem, then, serves to teach Jonah once again not to question
God's will and reiterates Jonah's own moral responsibilities. Accordingly, God chastizes him:

"Herk, renk, is bis ry3t so ronkly to wrath,
For any dede hat I haf don o|>er demed pe 3et?"  
(431-432)

God's infinitely powerful, infinitely free will, whose ways so far transcend man's understanding that it is idle to question them, is the sole criterion of value, the sole determinant of what is right or wrong. This is the teaching of Ockham and, a century and a half later, of Luther as well. While Patience seems dwarfed in the company of these two giants in Western thought, it nevertheless contributed, however modestly, to the tradition that linked the two.

At first reading, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, the final poem in the manuscript, may not appear to fit into the thematic development we have been tracing through the other poems. Sir Gawain is the greatest courtly romance in English, and our interest in its vivid action, its remarkable descriptive imagery, its skillful adaption of Old French rhetorical patterns, its "luf-danger," and its famous plot construction, which is perhaps unsurpassed by anything else in medieval literature except Dante's Commedia—all these have obscured the serious theological implications in the poem. Only recently have scholars begun to explore such problems as the two confession
scenes, 19 the precise nature of Gawain's sin, 20 and the problem of grace and merit, 21 though this last point has not yet received sufficient attention. It seems appropriate, therefore, to continue the work of these scholars by investigating the relation of Sir Gawain to the contemporary dispute over will, merit, and grace.

Before proceeding to this theme, which is really secondary in Sir Gawain in a way that it was not in the other poems in the manuscript, it is necessary first to understand what I take to be the primary theme of the poem, the moral conflict between caritas and cupiditas. This conflict takes place on three levels: (1) the supernatural powers of the Virgin and Morgan la Fey, both struggling to win Gawain; (2) the materialistic values of courtly society in opposition to the moral idealism of Christianity; (3) the contradiction within Gawain himself, produced by his having uncritically accepted irreconcilable value systems, which he only gradually becomes aware of in the poem. All three are, of course, related in the sense that their common point of reference is Gawain himself, but it is


important for us to recognize also that the poet goes beyond the psychological limits of Gawain's personality to a criticism of the value-structure of the late medieval world. For Gawain, thus understood, is everyman, or at least what everyman might be, granted Gawain's intelligence, sensitivity to moral issues, and experience.

Shortly after being welcomed into Bercilak's castle, Gawain is escorted to a bed chamber whose lavish decoration signals the temptation to cupidity to come:

\[\text{... a bryȝt boure, per beddyng watz noble,} \]
\[\text{Of cortynes of clene sylk wyth cler golde hemmez,} \]
\[\text{And couertorez ful curious with comlych panez} \]
\[\text{Of bryȝt blaunder aboue, enbrawded bisydez,} \]
\[\text{Rudelez rennande on ropez red golde ryngez,} \]
\[\text{Tapitez tyȝt to be woȝe of tuly and tars,} \]
\[\text{And vnder fere, on þe flet, of folȝande sute.} \]
\[(853-859)\]

During the three temptation scenes, which are set in this "bryȝt boure," Gawain slowly comes to understand the conflict between the values of "cortaysye" and charity (e.g., 920-927 and 1774-76). It is important to recognize here that there are two really distinct temptations: (1) the beheading game, instigated by Morgan la Fey to humiliate Arthur through his most chivalrous knight; (2) the sexual temptations by Lady Bercilak, who was prompted by her husband to try to seduce Gawain, as we learn at the end of the poem (2358-63). These two plots account for Gawain's two

\[\text{22 All quotations are from the Tolkien and Gordon edition, as revised by Davis; see note 15, above.}\]
sins, his virtual adultery with his host's wife and his 'cowarddyse and couetyse" in taking the green girdle and breaking the pact with Bercilak. Further, as we shall examine in greater detail later, the two plots also necessitate the two confessions, one to the priest for his sin against chastity, and the other to Bercilak-Green Knight for his "sin" against the chivalric code. Both of these plots thus describe Gawain seduced to cupiditas, what Augustine defined as an excessive concern for one's physical state here in this world, but only the bedroom scenes involve any direct violation of the Christian code as such. The importance of this has been generally overlooked in the past, and since the moral issue in these scenes will be crucial to our study of grace and merit in the poem, let us glimpse briefly into the actions and implications of this plot.

Contrary to common Christian teaching, Gawain sins against chastity by allowing himself to be exposed to the proximate occasion of sin on the second and third mornings. On the first day, Gawain may be excused on the ground that he could not have known that Lady Bercilak was coming to his chamber, but this is not true on the succeeding mornings. Gawain is trying to play a dual role here: he strives to avoid actual physical intercourse with her, yet at the same time his vanity over his "cortaysye" will not permit him to send her away. When he goes so far as to
actually kiss and embrace her as the two lie together in his bed on the third day, special grace from the Virgin Mary—and this grace alone—keeps Gawain from culminating the affair. But what is essential to keep in mind here, what virtually never has been recognized in print, is that such action on Gawain's part is itself mortally sinful; indeed, it is scarcely less sinful than the physical act of adultery would have been, according to the standards of the time as represented in Chaucer's Parson's Tale. Perhaps even more significant, however, is the dubious morality of the host and his wife. They cannot claim immunity from criticism by claiming to have been under Morgan's influence in this plot, for it was their own idea to test Gawain's chastity. Bercilak and his lady are, in the moral structure of the work as a whole, a court panderer and his courtesan trying to destroy a Christian soul under the guise of love and openness. It is not possible to investigate all of the implications of this here. All we may conclude at this point is that the poem is organized around a searching analysis of the contradictory values that existed side by side, usually without question, in late medieval society.

The primary theme is in turn related to a secondary one, the problem of grace and merit. For just as all of the major action of the poem dramatizes the conflict

between caritas and cupiditas, so also now we must ask how a Christian may avoid sin and merit salvation. Furthermore, we must try as well to discover the relationship between Sir Gawain and the other poems in Cotton Nero A.x in terms of this same theme.

Despite Gawain's ability to act as an ideal Christian knight, seen again and again in the poem, we are never permitted to overlook his dependence on God. In many cases, this is done simply by little reminders that Gawain is only capable of such success "as God wyl" (549, 592-593, 737-739, 773-776, 1063, 1967, 2208-9, 2480). But more significant, to take one example, is the following passage describing Gawain's prayer for deliverance from the wintry wilderness through which he has been traveling:

And perfore sykyng he sayde, 'I beseche pe lorde, And Mary, pat is myldest moder so dere, Of sum herber þer heȝly I myȝt here masse, Ande þy matynez to-morne, mekely I ask, And þerto prestly I pray my pater and aue and crede.'
He rode in his prayere, And cryed for his mysdede, He sayned hym in sypes sere, And sayde 'Cros Kryst me spede!'

Nade he sayned hymself, segge, bot pryde, Er he watz war in þe wod of a won in a mote, Abof a launde, on a lawe, loken vnder boȝez Of mony borelych bole aboute bi þe diches: A castel þe comlokest þat euer knyȝt aȝte. (753-767)

The poet is obviously suggesting an almost automatic cause-effect relationship between the prayer and God's response.
Presumably, Gawain might have wandered all night amid the snow drifts and icicles if he had not called upon God's mercy.

Far more important, however, is the divine intervention, through Mary since Gawain is her knight, in the third bedroom scene. In this case, the poet is quite insistent that Gawain could not have saved himself by his own effort. He has allowed his passion such liberty that only a special act of potentia Dei absoluta can save him from further sin:

Gret perile bitwene hém stod,  
Nif Mare of hir knyʒt mynne.  
(1768-69)

Again, when his guide tempts him not to go to the green chapel to keep his appointment, Gawain reaffirms his complete dependence on the absolute will of God:

Ful wel con Dryʒtyn schape  
His seruauntez for to saué.  
(2138-39)

Such an attitude is quite reminiscent of Patience, with its concern for how God controls the destinies of his creatures so absolutely that he may even overturn his own laws to save them if he wishes. Gawain expresses the same faith here, faced as he is with the extraordinary threat of the Green Knight, as did Jonah, who was also threatened by an unusual peril in the whale's belly. Gawain even repeats his affirmation of faith in God's potentia absoluta before arriving at the green chapel:
So far, his own actions do not seem to count for much, at least in contrast to God's omnipotent will.

This does not mean, however, that Gawain has no responsibility of his own. The poet reminds us at several crucial points that Gawain must work to merit the grace he needs. No one knows the ways of the divine will; all a man can do is to try to do well. By thus offering his good works to God, a Christian may hope for some reward:

De kny3t mad ay god chere,  
And sayde, 'Quat schuld I wonde?  
Of destines derf and dere  
What may mon do bot fonde?'

(562-565; cf. 2208-11)

Gawain is not talking here about a blind, impersonal Fortune, but rather about man's need to act in order to try to shape his own destiny, as far as possible. This is more clearly defined, and more clearly related to meritum de congruo, in the description of how God preserved Gawain from death or injury during his journey:

Nade he ben du3ty and dry3e, and Dry3tyn had serued,  
Douteles he hade ben ded and dreped ful ofte.

(724-725)

To be sure, God does assist Gawain, and without that assistance Gawain would not have survived. But we also learn that Gawain's own actions merited that assistance, even that the divine aid would not have come at all had it not been for his efforts. The same point comes up once more in
his initial rejection of any presents from the lady:

And he nay pat he nolde neghe in no wyse
Naufer golde ne garysoun, er God hym grace sende
To acheue to be chaunce pat he hade chosen pere.  

(1836-38)

The fact that he later does accept the girdle is irrelevant to the doctrine presented here. The poet's point is that, while Gawain's success depends on God's grace, this grace itself depends on Gawain proving himself worthy of it, or meritum de congruo.

Later, when he is about to leave Bercilak's castle to seek the Green Knight, Gawain speaks of how a man must act in order to earn his heavenly reward:

3if pay for charyté cherysen a gest,
And halden honour in her honde, þe hapel hem ȝelde
Dat haldez þe heuen vpon hyȝe, and also yow alle!  

(2055-57)

This speech, part of his expression of gratitude for the hospitality he has received, could well be taken as a gloss on the parable of the Good Samaritan. He interprets his hosts' motive as charity, and whether it was that or not is beside the point. Charity, he reasons, has a claim on God, who will reward it with salvation—or at least this is what Gawain hopes. Thus, in this as in the preceding cases, the poet promotes a doctrine of meritum de congruo, based on the belief in man's ability to perform good works and God's willingness to accept them.

The corolary to this is, of course, that man can also use his freedom to fall from grace. An instance of
this occurs on the evening of the second day. Gawain now cannot help but know the lady's intention to seduce him, but he is willing to play his game of "cortaysye" with her nonetheless:

    Such semblaunt to bat segge semly ho made
    Wyth stille stollen countenaunce, pat stalworth to plese,
    Dat al forwondered watz be wy3e, and wroth with hymseluen,
    Bot he nolde not for his nurture nurne hir a3aynez,
    Bot dalt with hir al in daynté, how-so-euer pe dede turned
towrast.  (1658-63)

Disturbed though his moral sensibilities are, Gawain chooses to continue in his courtly role no matter what the consequences might be.

Finally, the poet clearly seems to intend that we admire Gawain as a model Christian knight, one in whom we may see homo viator struggling along the perilous route to the heavenly Jerusalem. Just as the doctrine of works in Purity balances the insistence on grace in Pearl, so also the view we have of man's will in Sir Gawain complements the overwhelming significance of God's will in Patience. This does not mean that the Gawain-poet has polarized the doctrine of works and grace into a two-valued option, implying that man can function altogether without grace. Man's will, in Sir Gawain, may choose evil by virtue of its freedom (liberum arbitrium), but it cannot likewise choose the good without some assistance from God. This is somewhat
complicated because God's assistance, in the form of grace, differs in kind and function at different points in the poem. In the early action, before the second and third temptation scenes, Gawain enjoys a state of sanctifying grace (*gratia gratum faciens*), in terms of which his actions may merit God's attention *de condigno*. But after Gawain, fully realizing the consequences of his action, turns toward satisfying his own desires in opposition to charity, the only grace available to him—the only grace that could coexist with sin—is a free gift by which God prods the sinner to repent (*gratia gratis data*). The poet does allow considerable scope to *meritum de congruo*: more than in *Pearl*, though perhaps less than in *Purity* and *Patience*.

The only problem that remains, so far as this analysis is concerned, is with the two confession scenes. Some have argued that the first (sacramental) confession is false, but this assumes that Gawain's cowardice with the green girdle is mortally sinful, thereby invalidating his confession to the priest (1876-84). This assumption is not supported by the text, however, since there is no mention whatsoever of the content of Gawain's discussion of his sins with the priest. Judging from his relief after receiving the sacrament (1885-88), and from the poet's statement that the priest "asoyled" the knight (1883), it seems more
reasonable to believe that the confession includes at least all mortal sins that the knight had committed. From what we have seen, these would include his behavior with his host's wife on the second and third mornings. But would he have had to confess taking the girdle? Two factors argue against it: (1) his confession would not seem to be valid if a serious sin were omitted, yet his subsequent actions show that he consistently resolves to use the girdle; (2) there is no necessary reason to conclude that such an act was a serious violation of the Christian moral code. Gawain's "sin" in using the girdle is more understandably a violation of the knightly code of honor, an interpretation which is borne out by the fact that he confesses this "sin" to a fellow knight rather than to a priest (2374-88). Furthermore, the Green Knight clearly recognizes it as such when he "absolves" Gawain (2393-94), and this makes it easier to understand the otherwise puzzling amusement at Arthur's court when Gawain relates his experience to them. Would the court have laughed so heartily over Gawain's admission that he had committed a mortal sin and then made a mockery of the sacrament of penance? Would Gawain's fellow knights have decided to wear green sashes to memorialize such blasphemy? Confronted with these questions, it seems reasonable to conclude that (1) Gawain sinned with the lady, even though he had grace available to him; (2) God freely chose to save Gawain from further sin,
even when the knight did not in any sense merit that grace; (3) Gawain did cooperate with God's grace, except during the second and third bedroom scenes; (4) he restored himself to God's favor through sacramental confession; (5) he did, nevertheless, break his social contract with Bercilak, though Bercilak's action toward him was really far worse; (6) Gawain and Bercilak resolve this difficulty by mutually confessing to each other at the end.

Turning from Sir Gawain, which is impeccably orthodox even by Bradwardine's rigid standards, to St. Erkenwald, we find ourselves confronted with a most perplexing doctrine of grace and merit. I do not wish to enter into the authorship question here, and I am not taking up St. Erkenwald because of any conviction that its poet was the same as the one who wrote the poems in Cotton Nero A.x. It is enough that the work was composed in the same dialect area at roughly the same time as the others, since this by itself provides interesting room for comparisons of doctrinal themes. Also, the poem raises an argument which nicely complements those we have already seen, and which very strikingly parallels a vital point in Piers Plowman, which is the subject of the next chapter.

St. Erkenwald relates the story of a good pagan who is saved even though he is outside the Church, the usual avenue of salvation. This would seem to be a case of meritum de congruo, which is accepted as justifying the
sinner, de potentia Dei absoluta, though there is some question about this. In spite of the fact that the narrative takes place in England, its source was apparently the Trajan-Gregory story, which will be analyzed in some detail in Chapter III. Nothing could have been more explosive in the fourteenth century, for this is precisely the sort of thing that Bradwardine and other conservatives were howling against as "modern Pelagianism." The poet does take some steps to guard against this charge, especially by using the miracle to glorify God's omnipotence rather than man's natural abilities.

When the citizens of London encounter the miraculously preserved corpse, they call for their bishop, St. Erkenwald. Erkenwald prays for the grace to learn the secret of the miracle, which obviously could come about only through a suspension of the potentia Dei ordinata, and for his piety and persistence he receives this grace (126-127). The bishop uses the opportunity to teach his people about the potentia Dei absoluta:

'Hit is meruaile to men, pat mountes to litelle Toward pe prouidens of pe Prince pat Paradis weldes, Quen hym luste to vnlouke pe leste of his my3tes.

Bot quen matyd is monnes my3t, & his mynde passyde, And al his resons are to-rent, & redeles he stondes, Ðen lettes hit hym ful litelle to louse wyt a fynger Ðat alle pe hondes vnder heuen halde my3t neuer.

All references are to Israel Gollancz, ed. St. Erkenwald (London, 1922).
Contrary to what we might expect, Erkenwald sounds like Bradwardine here. Works, he claims, have absolutely no intrinsic value, and man's salvation depends on the divine will, which is not only infinitely powerful but infinitely incomprehensible to man's feeble understanding. All we may do is to pray that we are among the elect and then hope that God has been generous to us, undeserving though we are.

When the corpse begins to speak, it accounts for its marvelous condition by assuming that God must have willed the miracle because he loves the justice that the magistrate practiced in life:

"Nay, bishop," quoth that body, "enbawmyd was I neuer, Ne no monnes counselle my clote has kepyd vnwemmyd; Bot pe riche kynge of reson, pat euer ri3t alowes, & loues al pe lawes lely pat longen to trouthe;

& moste he menskes men for mynnynge of ri3tes, Den for al pe meritorie medes pat men on molde vsen; & if renkes for ri3t bus me arayed has, He has lant me to last pat loues ry3t best."

There is a peculiar inconsistency here, which is characteristic of the poem as a whole. On the one hand, the corpse claims that God has exercised his potentia absoluta to preserve the body and, further, that God did so because he "loues ry3t best." On the other hand, however, man's actions
seem incapable of earning God's favor *ex natura rei debita*. Yet if this is so, what is the source of that "ryȝt" which attracted God's mercy? The poet seems to affirm and deny the possibility of *meritum de congruo* at the same time.

The difficulty is partly overcome when Erkenwald, interested in the possibility that this righteous pagan might have been saved, asks where his soul now is. The corpse replies that its soul is suffering in the outer reaches of hell; it had not been released when Christ harrowed hell because the man in life had not been redeemed through baptism (283-300). Then the corpse excludes the possibility of *meritum de congruo* altogether, at least for unbaptized men:

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Quat wan we with oure wele-dede pat wroghtyn ay riȝt,
Quen we are dampnyd dulfully into be depe lake,
& exiled fro pat soper so, pat solempe fest,
Der richely hit arne refetyd pat after right hungride?
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(301-304)

this does much more than simply reject the radical tendencies implied in, say, *Patience*. The corpse, whom we may take as the poet's spokesman, virtually denies the possibility of man approaching God at all except through *meritum de condigno*. This is underscored by the saving effect of the baptism in Erkenwald's tears (321-332), a device which serves as a rather artificial *deus ex machina* and only compounds the doctrinal confusion.

In attempting to teach a doctrine of grace that allows, like Bradwardine, only for *meritum de condigno*, the
poet has made a very poor choice in his exemplum of St. Erkenwald. The nature of the story itself, with its associations with the Trajan-Gregory myth, was to uphold the possibility of meritum de congruo even for a good pagan as a glorification of God's infinite mercy and absolute power. Thus, the very material itself was intractable, considering the purpose to which the poet tried to put it. Whether or not he could also have written the great poems in Cotton Nero A.x is perhaps an unanswerable question; at least the evidence we have seen here is not conclusive. What is important is that St. Erkenwald represents an extremely conservative reaction against Ockhamist theology and, in its somewhat confusing use of the Trajan-Gregory motif, prepares us for the eminently more successful handling of the same problems, both doctrinal and artistic, in Piers Plowman.
Chapter III: Piers Plowman

Piers Plowman has long stimulated scholarly efforts to settle its authorship and editorial problems, but after many years most of the same controversies are still with us, and it does not appear likely that they will be solved in the near future. In the past few years, more and more scholars have turned rather to the poem as a poem, especially to its complex structure, rhetoric, and doctrine. Of these three, doctrinal questions have attracted most attention since Piers Plowman is primarily, if not exclusively, a religious poem.

Various theories about theological content have emerged: the Wells-Coghill-Chambers argument that Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest correspond to the active, contemplative, and mixed lives defined in popular mystical writings;¹ the Meroney-Donaldson theory that the three "lives" are rather the mystic's purgative, illuminative, and unitive states;²


R. W. Frank's rejection of all such elaborate "parallels" in favor of reading the development from the Visio through the Vita as the Christian pilgrimage toward salvation; and Morton Bloomfield's attempt to show in the poem a monastic philosophy which promoted an apocalyptic view of life, rather than either mysticism or concern with salvation as such. As a result of these and other less well known studies, we have learned a great deal about the poet whom, for the sake of convenience, I shall call William Langland here, and about his spiritual and intellectual responses to the stormy religious life of the fourteenth century. But so far as I know, no one has yet placed Langland or his poem in the context of the debate we have been following for the last two chapters, and yet I feel that the relation between grace and merit is the central doctrinal theme of Piers Plowman.

In this chapter, I shall argue that Will, man's faculty for action, takes part in a complicated moral struggle in which the Christian soul seeks salvation. The poem is not, however, an allegory of salvation as such because Will has not completed his journey at the end of the poem. But he has learned how he may be saved. In the Visio, Will has learned how to act to gain Piers'

3Piers Plowman and the Scheme of Salvation (New Haven, 1957).
pardon, though the pardon itself raises the most puzzling questions of the poem. In an effort to answer these questions, he turns inward, as Augustine taught, to examine his various faculties and spiritual resources. After long wrangling over the problem of grace and merit, the problem of how to do well raised by Piers' pardon, Will learns complementary doctrines from Imagination and Patience, which show how a Christian must act in order to do well. From this point on, Will learns how to live an even more perfect life by modelling his life, with God's grace, on Christ's life of true charity. Finally, Will investigates how it is best for a Christian to live, to carry out one's charitable mission in union with others in the Church. Throughout the poem, then, the most important question is always how a man may merit salvation, that is, what works he should perform and how God's grace may influence them.

The field full of folk pictures the active life of the bustling, workaday world. As such, it introduces that section of the poem most explicitly concerned with the performance of good works. In Passus I,\(^5\) Holy Church sets forth a doctrine of works in response to Will's question, "How I may saue my soule" (E.I.84), which provides a doctrinal basis for the Visio as a whole. In traditional

\(^5\)The text I am using for this analysis is the E-version as printed in Walter W. Skeat, ed. The Vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman, in Three Parallel Texts. 2 vols. (Oxford, 1886).
Augustinian fashion, Holy Church points out that God begins the process of man's salvation by providing the initial grace which prompts man to seek him (E.I.136-144 and 161-164). Seemingly good works are valueless, therefore, unless one first has the grace of charity (E.I.178-187). But where does a man first acquire charity? Holy Church replies that

For-thi this wordes • ben wryten in the gospel,  
*Date et dabitur vobis* • for I dele 3ow alle.  
And that is the lokke of loue • and latethoute my grace,  
To conferthe the careful • acombred with synne.  
Loue is leche of lyf • and nexte owre lorde selue,  
And also the graith gate • that goth in-to heuene;  
For-thi I sey as I seide • ere by the textis,  
Whan alle tresores ben ytryed • treuthe is the beste.  
(B.I.198-205)

This is quite Augustinian. What we give out of charity returns to God what he first gave us, the initial grace to seek him, perform meritorious works, and earn further grace:  
*"Date et dabitur vobis."* To sum up, prevenient grace prompts charitable works, which in turn "lateth oute" further grace to "conforte the careful • acombred with synne."

In terms of the fourteenth-century controversy over grace and merit, Langland in the first passus strikes a traditional balance between works and grace, which prepares us for what will follow. For in the remainder of the Visio he will concentrate chiefly on one side of the scale, that of works, and the doctrinal importance of Passus I is to acquaint us with both sides of the balance, so that his emphasis on works in the next six passus may not be
interpreted as Pelagian.

In Passus II Meed appears, dressed out in all the brilliant finery of \textit{cupiditas}:

\begin{quote}
Purfiled with pelure \textit{\textbullet} the finest \textit{\textbullet} upon erthe, 
Y-crownede with a corone \textit{\textbullet} the \textit{\textbullet} kyng hath non better. 
Fetislich hir fyngres \textit{\textbullet} were fretted with golde wyre, 
And there-on red rubyes \textit{\textbullet} as red as any glede, 
And diamentz of derest pris \textit{\textbullet} and double manere safferes, 
Orientales and ewages \textit{\textbullet} enuenymes to destroye. 
Hire robe was ful riche \textit{\textbullet} of red scarlet engreynd, 
With ribanes of red golde \textit{\textbullet} and of riche stones; 
Hire arraye me rauysshed \textit{\textbullet} suche ricchesse saw I neuere. 
\end{quote}

(E.II.9-17)

The contrast between Meed and Holy Church appears quite clearly in the following lines in which Holy Church describes herself:

\begin{quote}
Mi fader the grete god is \textit{\textbullet} and grounde of alle graces, 
0 god with-oute gynnynge \textit{\textbullet} and I his gode dougter, 
And hath 3oue me mercy \textit{\textbullet} to marye with my-self; 
And what man be merciful \textit{\textbullet} and lelly me loue, 
Schal be my lorde and I his leef \textit{\textbullet} in the hei3e heuene. 
And what man taketh Mede \textit{\textbullet} myne hed dar I legge, 
That he shal lese for hir loue \textit{\textbullet} a lappe of caritatis. 
\end{quote}

(E.II.29-35)

These two figures represent opposing value systems, parallel to Augustine's two cities, which introduce the allegorical struggle for control of man, both as an individual and as he lives in community with other men.

Interpretations of Passus II through IV have usually explored the social, political, and topical aspects of the allegory, and it is not my intention here to displace or devalue any of these. The temptation to search for
contemporary allusions is great and sometimes rewarded, but I wish to focus rather on the psychological allegory in these passus. For just as the struggle for the king's favor has broad political and social significance, this same struggle mirrors the tensions within everyman as he tries to work out his salvation.

On the "level" of psychological allegory, the king represents man's will, free to turn one way or another, free to choose good or to choose evil. Against Meed and her party Langland places Conscience and Reason, whose partnership, he suggests, is absolutely necessary if the will is to have sound guidance (B.III.282-283 and IV.4-5, 42-43, 190-195). Neither one is complete without the other, but together they can reveal Christian values and recommend to the will good works over the falseness and cupidity of Meed. Further, the allegory here stresses man's natural abilities to deal with temptation and overcome sin, though this is not Langland's final word on this matter. Up to the conclusion of Passus IV, Langland has been working out an answer to Will's question asking Holy Church how he might discover Truth: "3et mote 3e kenne me better,/By what craft in my corps • it comseth and where" (B.I.136-137). Will has now learned that man's natural powers to discover truth and avoid sin are Conscience and Reason. Yet these are by themselves insufficient to earn salvation, as we shall see more clearly later on. To conclude that Will could find the
fullness of grace through Reason and Conscience alone would be out-and-out Pelagianism.

In Passus V, the poet presents the confession of the seven deadly sins, deservedly one of the most famous passages in Middle English literature. Reason prepares for the confession by explaining how man's perverse will may choose evil and thus draw down God's wrath (B.V.12-20). Yet even this must be qualified. In the confession of Avarice we learn, as in Patience, that God's potentia absoluta can overrule even the just punishment due a man for committing deadly sin (B.V.286-291 and 453-455). Here, again, is evidence of the fourteenth-century insistence on divine freedom, a freedom even to override the Law, which by implication makes God's supremely free will the only criterion of value.

Next comes the resolution to seek Truth, a journey that all the folk realize must be aided by Grace (B.V.517-519) since "there was wy3te non so ays • the wey thider couthe" (E.V.520). After rejecting a pilgrim as a guide, the crowd meets Piers, who stresses the need for good works in meriting salvation:

'Peter!' quod a plowman • and put forth his hed,
'I knowe hym as kyndely • as clerke doth his bokes;
Conscience and Kynde Witte • kenned me to his place,
And deden me suren hym sikerly • to serue hym for euere,
Bothe to sowe and to sette • the while I swyneke myghte.
I haue ben his folwar • al this fifty wyntre;
Bothe ysowen his sede • and sued his bestes,
With-inne and with-outen • wayted his profyt.
I dyke and I delue • I do that treuth hoteth;
Some tyme I sowe • and some tyme I thresche,
In tailoures crafte and tynkares crafte • what Treuthe
can deuyse,
I weue an I wynde • and do what Treuthe hoteth,
For thou3e I seye it my-self • I serue hym to paye.
Ich haue myn huire of hym wel • and otherwhiles more;
He is the pretest payer • that pore men knoweth;
He ne with-halt non hewe his hyre • that he ne hath
it at euen. (B.V.544-559)

Such emphasis on works could be quite misleading if this
speech were divorced from its place in the passus as a whole.
For Piers next describes "Truth's path," which involves an
inward journey, as in Augustine and Bonaventure, away from
the world of external action, along a path that leads to
Truth's palace where Grace is the gatekeeper (B.V.604).
Only if Grace grants an entrance may one travel into the
innermost recesses of his own soul to find Truth (E.V.614-
617). Still, even if a man does discover Truth, he may
not be perfectly secure in his possession while yet in this
life because he always has the freedom to choose a lesser
good than God. If a man were to make such a choice, he
would be cut off from Truth and Grace, without the power
to reenter the palace unless God, through a special act
of divine will, elected to extend grace to the sinner
(B.V.618-626). Once again, this is an instance of Langlands
interest in the absolute power of God, repeated soon after-
ward (B.V.638), which becomes still more important in the
discussion of grace and merit later on in the \textit{Vita de Dowel}.
Here, too, we may see an early example of another theme
that will prove increasingly important as the poet develops his doctrine of grace, the misuse of indulgences. At the end of Passus V, a pardoner and a prostitute, unwilling to trust in Christ and Mary's mercy, go to fetch a box of indulgences (B.V.648-651). This is, as the context shows, a futile attempt to compel God's grace, even in the absence of good works. Such a view of man's relation to God, was, as we saw in Chapter I, what prompted fourteenth-century voluntarists, radical Ockhamists and conservative Augustinians alike, to insist on the transcendence of potentia Dei absoluta over potentia Dei ordinata. Despite their opposition on other points, both groups joined in censuring the assumption that man could get some "hold" on God in order to achieve salvation.

In Passus VI, Fiers offers to act as guide for the pilgrims seeking Truth, but he first insists on working his field and asks that they help him. Though not claiming that works are sufficient in themselves, Piers underscores their importance as preparation for a journey to God. Before leaving his family, however, he first makes out his will. The will is rather ordinary, except for the disposition that "he shal haue my soule • that best hath yservued it" (B.VI.89). How can God be said to have deserved a man's soul? This could mean either that God has "won" man's soul by the atonement or that man, represented here by Piers, may condescend to award his treasure to a worthy God.
It may be that Langland intended neither of these, though
the first is obviously more likely than the second. Inter­
estingly, the same line in the C-text clarifies the point:
"He shal haue my soule • that alle soules made" (CIX.96).
Such a change sharpens the doctrine of man's relation to
God, a procedure which is, as Donaldson and others have
shown, typical of the C-poet's caution in doctrinal matters.

The Visio ends with the much disputed pardon scene,
which Chambers has called "the most difficult thing to un­
derstand in the whole poem."6 The pardon "a pena et a culpa"
is actually granted by Truth at the beginning of Passus VII:

    Treuthe herde telle her-of • and to- peres he sent,
    To taken his teme • and tulyen the erthe,
    And purchased hym a pardoun • a pena et a culpa
    For hym, and for his heires • for euermore after.
    And bad hym holde hym at home • and eryen his leyes,
    And alle that halpe hym to erie • to sette or to sowe,
    Or any other myster • that my3te Pieres auaille,
    Pardoun with Pieres plowman • treuthe hath ygraunted.
    (E.VII.1-8)

The pardon that Truth has "purchaced" is man's redemption
through Christ's atonement. As a result of the grace which
Christ has made available to man, a man may now merit sal­
vation by performing good works. Since this could, however,
be interpreted as semi-Pelagian, Langland goes on to point
out that a charitable man is merely paying back what God
had first given him (B.VII.80), and the man who thus merits
does so, at least in this context, as a Christian in the
state of sanctifying grace (gratia gratum faciens):

6Chambers, p. 118.
Alle lybbyng laboreres • that lyuen with her hondes,  
That trewlich taken • and trewlich wynnen,  
And lyuen in loue and in lawe • for her lowe hertis,  
Haueth the same absolucioun • that sent was to Peres.  
                                           (E.VII.62-65; italics mine)

Lest there be any further doubt here, Langland in this passage is discussing *meritum de condigno*, though his over­riding emphasis on the value of works might lead the unsus­pecting reader to think that *meritum de congruo* were really the subject.

Next comes an actual reading of the pardon, which is composed of two lines from the Athanasian Creed:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Et qui bona egerunt, ibunt in vitam eternam;} \\
\text{Qui vero mala, in ignem eternum.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[(E.VII.111-112)\]

The priest comments that this is not a real pardon at all because it does not follow the formula prescribed for such a legal document, and Piers "for pure tene • pulled it atweyne" (E.VII.116). At this point, most critics side with Piers, arguing that the ensuing dispute between Piers and the priest illustrates how shallow, vain, and pretentious this priest is—a symbol of the empty legalism in the late medieval Church. Some, siding with Coghill,⁷ claim that Piers' anger is directed against the pardon itself. The point is a vital one, chiefly because one's reading of this passage will determine how the rest of the poem may be in­terpreted. For the issues that arise here provide the

motive behind the various discussions in the *Vita de Dowel*, as we shall see later on.

What most readers seem to ignore is that Langland goes on to side with the priest:

And al this maketh me on this meteles to thynke;
And how the prest preued no pardoun to Dowel,
And demed that Dowel indulgences passed,
Biennales and triennales and bisschopes lettres,
And how Dowel at the day of dome is dignelich vnderfongen,
And passeth al the pardoun of seynt Petres cherche.
(E.VII.167-172)

Here is no criticism, none of the scorn that we see in those passages in which Langland excoriates a corrupt clergy. Thus, to infer that Piers' anger is directed against the priest is to ignore the evidence of the poem itself. If such were the case, if the priest were the object of the plowman's "tene," then we must conclude that Piers has lost Langland's sympathy at this point, perhaps even that he is being satirized here. But this, too, contradicts the evidence. What about the obvious sincerity of Piers' resolution to do well in the future? Is this confused? No, we must clearly look elsewhere for the target. But what about the pardon itself? Surely Piers is disappointed with it? Such a view is tempting, but it fails to account for the absurdity of making Piers angry with the Athanasian Creed and for Piers' subsequent resolution to follow it.

Perhaps a more satisfactory explanation would be that Piers is angry with himself for misunderstanding the
true nature and value of the pardon. Up to the priest's reading of it, Piers has assumed that he has acquired a legal document which will assure him of salvation. The document itself, however, simply explains the consequences of doing well or of doing evil, which is merely to remind Piers of his relation to God. The whole section of the creed, from which the lines in the pardon were taken, reads as follows:

As a rational soul and flesh are one man, so God and man are one Christ. He died for our salvation, descended to hell, arose from the dead on the third day, ascended into heaven, sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty, and from there he shall come to judge the living and the dead. At his coming all men are to arise with their own bodies; and they are to give an account of their lives. Those who have done good deeds will go into eternal life; those who have done evil will go into everlasting fire.

This is the Catholic faith. Everyone must believe it, firmly and steadfastly; otherwise, he cannot be saved.8

Clearly, any prescription to do good works which is extracted from this Creed must also allow for the Creed's insistence on grace. This, then, explains the reference to the pardon having been "purchased" by Truth: "He died for our salvation." Such a reminder makes Piers, we may suppose, painfully aware of both his ambiguous insistence on works and his assurance that the pardon gave him some legal "hold" on God's acceptance. His quotation from the psalm, as his

"tene" is vented, reaffirms the need for grace as a condition for God's friendship and protection. The works he now resolves to perform are quite different from those involved in plowing his half-acre:

'I shal cessen of my sowyng,' quod Pieres. 'and swynk nouȝt so harde,
Ne about my bely-joye • so bisi be namore!
Of prayers and of penaunce • my plow shal ben heraftre,
And wepen when I shulde slepe • though whete-bred me faille.
\( \text{E.VII.117-120} \)

Previously, Piers' works were good \textit{ex puris naturalibus}, with no clear relation to grace or merit as such. Now, he decides to perform acts of piety which are more clearly suited to saving his soul, that is, to \textit{meritum de condigno}.

Toward the end of the passus, Langland goes to great lengths to explain how doing well is much more important than accumulating indulgences since without good works such indulgences are worthless:

\textit{Theigh 3e be founde in the fraternete} • of alle the foure ordres,
And haue indulgences double-folde • but if Dowel 3ow help,
I sette 3owre patentes and 3owre pardonz • at one pies hele!
\( \text{E.VII.192-194} \)

Much better were it for man, according to Langland, to seek God's assistance in the hope that God may then accept him, permitting works capable of meriting \textit{de condigno}. This is only possible, however, if God first gratuitously chooses to extend grace to the sinner (\textit{gratia gratis data}):

\textit{For-thi I conseille alle Cristene} • to crye god mercy,
And Marie his moder • be owre mene bitwene,
That god gyue vs grace here • ar we gone hennes,
Suche werkes to werche • while we ben here,
That after owre deth-day • Dowel reherce,
At the day of dome • we dede as he hi3te.
(E.VII.195-200)

As the *Visio* ends, we can already see the direction the *Vita* will take as the exposition of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest. Both Piers and Will have learned that (1) works may be valuable in attracting grace (*meritum de congruo*), but (2) such works are insufficient by themselves without an infusion of divine grace, and (3) Dowel (*meritum de condigno*) supersedes any puny human effort to bind God in a legal contract which would force him to elect a sinner regardless of actual merit. Yet for all that, Will still does not know how a Christian may do well. This now becomes his next goal.

Following Piers' example, Will turns away from the active, external world and begins an inward journey to find out what help his various faculties and spiritual resources may be able to provide. Before he begins this journey, however, he first meets two Franciscan Friars, Masters of Theology such as those who dominated Oxford in the fourteenth century. Will debates these masters on the question of how man may avoid sin, thus introducing one of the main themes of the *Vita de Dowel*. The friars argue that although no man may avoid committing some venial sins, God's grace will help a good man to keep from mortal sin. A man may, nevertheless, choose sin and cut himself off from God because
he has been created free, free even to misuse his freedom:

God wole suffer wel thi sleuthe • 3if thy-self lyketh.
For he 3af the to 3eres3yue • to 3eme wel thi-selue,
And that is witte and fre wille • to every wy3te a porcioun,
To fleghyng foules • to fissches & to bestes.
Ac man hath moste thereof • and moste is to blame,
But if he worche wel ther-with • as Dowel hym techeth.

(B.VIII.51-56)

So far as this goes, there is nothing clearly unorthodox in the friars' teaching. It does, however, seem to give greater prominence to man's will than to grace in the scheme of salvation. Grace is a "help" in avoiding serious sin, but willing good works is a condition sine qua non for positive merit. Will does not understand all the implications of this yet, and so he cannot be said to learn much from the friars. But he has been introduced to the problem that will occupy him through the next seven passus.

The first figure that Will meets in his inward journey is Thought, who represents merely the ideas that Will has already developed up to this point. Little wonder, then, that Thought cannot be of much service in directing Will to Dowel. Accordingly,

Thanne Thou3t in that tyme • seide thise wordes,
'Where Dowel, Dobet • and Dobest ben in londe,
Here is Wille wolde ywyte • yif Witte couthe teche hym,
And whether he be man or no man • this man fayne wolde aspye,
And worchen as thei thre wolde • this is his entente.'

(B.VIII.122-126)

Wit, man's natural faculty of intelligence, carries Will somewhat further by outlining the nature of man as created
by God (Kynde):

And that is the castel that Kynde made • Caro it hatte,
And is as moche to mene • as man with a soule;
And that he wrouȝt with werke • and with worde bothe,
Thorugh myȝte of the maieste • man was ymaked.

Inwit and alle wittes • closed ben ther-inne,
For loue of the lady Anima • that Lyf is ynempned;
Ouer al in mannes body • he walketh and wandreth,
Ac in the herte is hir home • and hir moste reste.
Ac Inwitte is in the hed • and to the herte he loketh,
What Anima is lief or loth • he lat hir at his wille;
For after the grace of god • the grettest is Inwitte.

While Wit never loses sight of the importance of grace, as
in the last line of the passage quoted here, his primary
interest, an analysis of human nature, leads him to concen­
trate principally on man's natural faculties, especially
Inwit. This sets the tone for Wit's definition of Dowel,
Dobet, and Dobest (B.IX.94-97) as very practical activities
which evoke a loving response from God:

To alle trew tidy men • that travaile desyren,
Owre lorde loueth hem and lent • loude other stille,
Grace to go to hem • and agon her lyflode.

Wit does not explain such a relation to God as meritum de
congruo, but this is, by definition common among all late
medieval thinkers, precisely what he has introduced here.
No mention is made here of prevenient grace, only God's
pleasure with the efforts of "alle trew tidy men." Nor does
Wit explain whether God has, de potentia ordinata, committed
himself to reward man's behavior in any form of legal con­
tract. So far, it is impossible to tell whether or under
what conditions a man might merit de condigno; or, indeed,
whether man may not be faced with the uncertainties of *potentia Dei absoluta* such as the "modern Pelagians" described.

In an effort to clarify these questions, if not fully to answer them, Wit tells Will at the end of Passus IX that

Dowel, my frende, is to don as lawe techeth,
To loue thi frende and thi foo leue me, that is Dobet.
To 3iuen and to 3emen bothe 3onge and lode,
To helen and to helpen is Dobest of alle.
And Dowel is to drede god and Dobet to suffre,
And so cometh Dobest of bothe and bryngeth adoun the mody,
And that is wikked Wille that many werke shendeth,
And dryueth away Dowel thorugh dedliche synnes.'
(E.IX.199-206)

Unfortunately, the doctrine set forth here is not as carefully stated as we might wish. What, for example, is the "lawe" that governs Dowel? Is this the law described in Scripture, by the Church, natural law, or perhaps all three? Even assuming that Will can learn what law to follow, is doing well merely following a set of legal prescriptions? Is love, or charity, reserved exclusively for Dobet? If so, as seems suggested here, does this mean that a Christian may be saved without charity, that is, by doing no more than avoiding those sins proscribed by the law? Finally, if a "wikked Wille" can perform mortal sin and thereby "dryueth away Dowel," does this imply that Dowel can be achieved by a good will that follows the law? To this last question, at least, there is an answer implicit in Wit's speech. For if Dowel is driven away by "dedliche synnes,"

then it must presuppose a state of grace of some sort (auxilium gratiae). But what sort of grace is this, gratia gratis data, which might permit meritum de congruo, or gratia gratum faciens, through which God would accept Dowel as meritum de condigno? These are not idle questions nor vain sophistry. On the answers to these questions would depend the whole issue of orthodoxy or heresy in fourteenth-century theology.

Happily for Will, who might otherwise have been left in this befuddlement, Wit has Study for a wife. She launches into a diatribe against intellectual pride that seeks to question God:

I have yherde hiegh men • etyng atte table,
Carpen as thei clerkes were • of Cryste and of his mistes,
And leyden fautes vppon the fader • that fourmed vs alle,
And carpen a3eine clerkes • crabbed wordes;--
"Whi wolde owre saueoure suffre • suche a worme in his blisse,
That bigyled the womman • and the man after,
Thorw whiche wyles and wordes • thei wenten to helle,
And al her sede for here synne • the same deth suffred?
Here lyeth 3owre lore• • thise lordes gynneth dispute,
"Of that se clerkes vs kenneth • of Cryst by the gospel;
Fillius non portabit iniquitatem patris, &c.
Whi shulde we that now ben • for the werkes of Adam Roten and to-rende? • resoun wolde it neuere;
Vnusquisque portabit onus suum, &c."
(B.X.101-112)

Dame Study goes on to cite Augustine, arguing that a man ought not question the ways of God; he should rather submit himself humbly to the ultimately inscrutable divine will and praise what he cannot understand:
For alle that wilneth to wyte • the weyes of god al-
migty,
I wolde his eye were in his ers • and his fynger after,
That euere wilneth to wite • whi that god wolde
Suffre Sathan • his sede to bigile,
Or Iudas to the Iuwes • Iesu bytraye.
Al was as thow wolde • lorde, yworschiped be thow,
And al worth as thow wolte • what so we dispute!
(B.X.122-128)

It hardly need be pointed out, after what we have already
seen in the first two chapters, that this is yet another
instance of the fourteenth-century tendency to denigrate
reason in matters of faith, the pure credibilia that tran-
scend human comprehension and depend ultimately on potentia
Dei absoluta. Here, too, we should note the predestinarian
implication in Study's speech: all human events, even those
which we condemn, have been ordained by God. Since no
Christian should, according to Study, question God's will,
this means that the divine will becomes the sole criterion
of value—a concept familiar in much of the radical theology
of the time. Above all, the study of theology does not lead
to scientific statements of fact; its sole value lies in
its ability to communicate values, especially the value of
charity:

Ac Theologie hath tened me • ten score tymes,
The more I muse there-inne • the mistier it semeth,
And the depper I deuyne • the derker me it thinketh;
It is no science for sothe • forto sotyle inne;
A ful lethly thinge it were • 3if that loue nere.
Ac for it let best by Loue • I loue it the bettre;
For there that Loue is leder • ne lacked neuere grace.
(B.X.180-186)

Study, like Wit, does not have the answer that Will is
seeking, but she can at least set Will on the right path.
Man's natural intelligence and its application in study may not discover Dowel by themselves, and so the lady sends Will on to Clergy and Scripture.

Shortly after Will has introduced himself to them, Clergy points out that many points of faith, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, cannot be grasped by human reason, not even by so learned a man as Augustine (B.X.245-248). This has the effect of reinforcing Study's teaching, as well as precluding any exaggerated expectations Will might have of the insights Clergy and Scripture can provide. But Will, we soon learn, is really less interested in what they teach him than in making a point of his own. When Scripture explains how difficult it is for a rich man to be saved, Will rises in argument:

'Contra,' quod I, 'bi Cryste · that can I repreuе, And preue it bi Peter · and bi Poule bothe, That is baptized beth sauf · be he riche or pore.'

(B.X.345-347)

This begins a discussion of grace and merit which will extend on through the rest of this passus and will not be resolved until the end of Passus XIV. Since it is the fulcrum on which the whole poem balances, it will deserve rather close attention.

The point Will is making, in the style of the Scholastic disputatio, is that baptism and mere membership in the legal framework of the Church are sufficient to merit the grace required for salvation. Such a narrow,
legalistic doctrine of grace seems based, at least partly, on Wit's teaching that Dowel is "to do as lawe techeth," which we have already seen above. Scripture responds that the law alone does not justify sinful man:

Ac Crysten men withoute more • may nou3t come to heuen, For that Cryst for Cristen men deyde • and conferred the lawe, That who-so wolde and wylmeth • with Cryste to aryse, Si cum Christo surrexistis, etc., He shulde louye and leue • and the lawe fulfille. That is—"loue thi lorde god • leuest aboue alle, And after, alle Crystene creatures • in commune, eche man other;"

And thus bilongeth to louye • that leueth to be saued. (B.X.253-259)

The law which Christ "confermed" is nothing so simplistic and mechanical as Will, here a medieval Pharisee, would construe it to be. The law is the law of love, and it is this that a Christian must live if he would be saved. Against this, Will next leads forth the old argument that extra ecclesiae nulla salus. This is an ancient doctrinal formula, used continually by popes and councils throughout the Middle Ages and preserved by the Councils of Trent, Vatican I and, in our own time, Vatican II--though with differences in interpretation.9 For his part, Will interprets it literally, pointing to the cases of Solomon and Aristotle, both of whom are damned even though they were good men:

9See, for example, Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, cap. 2, a. 14; and cf. Vatican I's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ, cap. 6 and 7.
For Salamon the sage · that Sapience tau3te,
God gaf hym grace of witte · and alle his godes after,
To reule the reume · and riche to make;
He demed wel and wysely · as holy writte telleth.
Aristotle and he · who wisset men bettere?
Maistres that of goddis mercy · techen men and prechen,
Of here wordes thei wissen us · for wisest as in here 
tyme,
And al holicherche · holdeth hem bothe ydampned!

(B.X.379-386)

This is a telling point, and he hastens to reinforce it
by showing how certain great sinners were saved because
they received the grace to draw them into the Church
Triumphant:

On Gode Fridaye I fynde · a feloun was ysaued,
That had lyued al his lyf · with lesynges and with 
therfte;
And for he biknewe on the crosse · and to Cryste 
schrof hym,
He was sonnere saued · than seynt Iohan the baptiste,
And or Adam or Ysaye · or eny of the prophetes,
That hadde yleine with Lucyfer · many longe 3eres.
A robber was yraunceouned · rather than thei alle,
With-outen any penaunce of purgatorie · to perpetuel
blisse.

Thanne Marye Magdaleyne · what womman dede worse?
Or who worse than Daulid · that Vries deth conspired?
Or Poule the apostle · that no pitee hadde,
Moche crystene kynde · to kylle to deth?
And now ben thise as souereynes · wyth seyntes in
heuene,
Tho that wrou3te wikkedlokest · in worlde tho thei 
were.
And tho that wisely wordeden · and wryten many bokes
Of witte and of wisdome · with dampned soules wonye.

(B.X.414-429)

The reason for Will's adherence to the law as a means to
salvation is now becoming clear. Man lives in a world of
uncertainties: good men go to hell and sinners go to hea-
ven, if God so chooses. Faced by such a prospect, Will
cleaves to the law because it has been instituted de
potentia Dei ordinata and offers a measure of security, though even this security is threatened:

There are witty and wel-libbynge • ac her werkes
ben yhudde
In the hondes of almi3ty god • and he wote the sothe
Wher for loue a man worth allowed there • and his lele werkes,
Or elles for his yuel wille • and enuye of herte,
And be allowed as he lyued so.  

(B.X.431-435)

Angry and confused, Will ends this passus with a long anti-intellectual tirade (E.X.442 ff.), which signifies how little he has accomplished toward reaching some genuine understanding of Dowel. This anxious, frustrating search, Anselm's "fides quaerens intellectum," should not be passed over quickly by the modern reader, who is eager to get on to something more suited to his twentieth-century taste. Langland would not have devoted so much of his energy to writing this account of Will's perplexed quest for Dowel were it not that this is, doctrinally at least, the heart of the poem.

At the beginning of Passus XI, Scripture upbraids Will for his arrogance: "multi multa sciunt, et seipsos nesciunt" (E.XI.2). Will has gone too far. He has assumed that because he cannot fully grasp the mysterious workings of grace, all theology is therefore nonsense. This is a reversal of the way intellectual pride usually operates: in order to condemn human reason, Will uses his own reason as an absolute standard. Accordingly, Scripture abandons him for a while to Fortune. Will eventually sees the error
of following Fortune and her ladies, but when he goes to confession he returns to his old argument concerning baptism as a guarantee of salvation, though now admitting the value of contrition:

Baptizing and burying • both ben ful nedeful,  
Ac moche more merytorie • me thynketh it is to baptize.  
For a baptized man may • as maistres telleth,  
Thorough contricioun come • to the heigh heuene;  
\text{sola contricio delet peccatum.}  
Ac a barne withoute bapteme • may nouȝt so be saued;  
\text{Nisi quis renatus fuerit ex aqua, &c.}\)  
Loke, je letted men • whether I lye or do nouȝte.  
\text{(B.XI.78-83)}

At this point, Lewte enters and, in his function as Good Faith,\textsuperscript{10} leads Will back to Scripture, who preaches on the text about the many who were called but few chosen. This, predictably, once again raises Will's anxiety over the question of predestination, and we now learn that he insists on baptism and church membership as conditions \textit{sine qua non} for salvation (\textit{extra ecclesia nulla salus}) in order to re-assure himself that he is one of the elect:

\begin{quote}
Al for tene of her tyxte • trembled myn herte,  
And in a were gan I waxe • and with myself to dispute,  
Whether I were chosen or nouȝt chosen; • on Holicherche I thouȝte,  
That vnnderfonge me atte fonte • for one of goddis chosen;

For Cryste cleped vs alle • come if we wolde,  
Sarasenes and scismatikes • and so he dyd the Iewes,  
\textit{O vos omnes scicientes, venite, &c.;}\)  
And badde hem souke for synne • saufly at his breste, 
And drynke bote for bale • browke it who so myȝte.  
'Thanne may alle Crystene come,' quod I • 'and cleyme there entre
\end{quote}

By the blode that he bou3te vs with and thorne
baptesme after,
Qui crediderit & baptizatus fuerit, &c.
For though a Crystene man coueyted his Crystenedome
to reneye,
Rigtfulliche to reneye no resoun it wolde.
(B.XI.110-121)

Significantly, this goes beyond any similar claims that
Will has made thus far. Not only does baptism serve to
clear a man's way to salvation, but we now find that, once
baptized, it is impossible for a man not to be saved. A
Christian may commit many sins, but by virtue of his baptism
his reason and conscience will eventually lead him to seek
God's mercy. Though he may be "in purgatorie to brenne"
(B.XI.128) as punishment for his sins, even "to the daye
of dome" (B.XI.129), his soul will not be damned.

Will's emphasis on man's contractual relation to
God seems to bind the divine will, de potentia Dei ordinata,
and to limit man's freedom. A Christian may perform evil
works such that he will merit punishment, but he is not free
to choose his own damnation. On God's side, man is predestined
by the divine will to heaven if he is a baptized
Christian, regardless of what works he may perform. In
terms of grace and merit, this means that meritum de congruo
is virtually eliminated and meritum de condigno is assured
by contract. Such a position, however, violates much that
was dear to the fourteenth-century religious mind. While
Bradwardine or Wyclif, for example, would agree with Will
in his doctrine of predestination and his virtual exclusion
of *meritum de congruo*, even they would not allow God's will to be bound in such a servile fashion. Much less the *moderni doctores*!

Langland cannot, therefore, allow Will's argument to go by unopposed, and almost immediately an adversary arises who throws the whole discussion into a turmoil once again. Replying to Will's and Scripture's use of authorities, Trajan bursts in:

'Jee! baw for bokes! 'quod one • was broken oute of helle,
Hiȝte Troianus, had ben a trewe knyȝte • toke witnesse at a pope,
How he was ded and damned • to swellen in pyne,
For an vnchristene creature; • --'clerkis wyten the sothe,
That al the clergye vnder Cryste • ne miȝte me cracche fro helle,
But onliche loue nad leaute • and my lawful domes.
Gregorie wist this wel • and wilned to my soule Sauacioun, for sothenesse • that he seigh in my werkes.
And, after that he wepte • and wilned me were graunted Grace, wyth-outen any bede-byddyng • his bone was vnderfongen,
And I saued, as ȝe may se • with-oute syngyng of masses,
Ey loue, and by lerynge • of my lyuyng in treuthe,
Erouȝte me fro bitter peyne • there no biddyng myȝte.'
(E.XI.135-147)

Here is a clear exception to Will's generalizations about baptism and the Church. Trajan, in a situation remarkably similar to that in *St. Erkenwald*, is granted a special grace sufficient to save him even after he had died and his soul gone to hell. No doubt, St. Gregory's prayers had the effect of bringing Trajan's case up for appeal before God, but Trajan makes quite clear that his good works, not the prayers of any pope, were sufficiently meritorious to evoke
God's mercy:

'Lo, 3e lordes, what leute did • by an emperoure of Rome,
That was an vncrystene creature • as clerkes findeth in bokes.
Nou3t thorw preyere of a pope • but for his pure treuthe
Was that Sarasene saued • as seynt Gregorie bereth witnesse.

(E.XI.148-151)

Contrary to Will's earlier argument, then, this proves the efficacy of meritum de congruo in attracting God's generosity. Trajan's good works were good in and of themselves and thus earned (ex natura rei debite) merits which, though not meeting the full standard of divine justice (de condigno), God could accept by virtue of his potentia absolute. Conversely, it is equally true that even for those within the legal framework of the Church, salvation is not guaranteed without good works on the part of man: "Lawe withouten loue. . .leye there a bene" (E.XI.165).

Lewte next steps in to support and expand Trajan's argument in a long speech (E.XI.148-310), adducing still more evidence, as in the following lines:

For what euere clerkis carpe • of Crystenedome or elles,
Cryst to a comune woman seyde • in comune at a feste,
That fides sua shulde sauen hir • and saluen hir of alle synnes.

(E.XI.210-212)

This emphasis on faith and love prepares us for the resolution of the problem, which begins in the next passus.

It would be difficult to determine which is the most important passus in the poem, but a very good case
could be made out for Passus XII. Imagination, the mind's synthetic power in medieval psychology, is the principal speaker here and represents the highest authority within man to guide Will. Imagination's importance has already been established by Study, who foretold that he is the one who will finally sort out Will's intellectual problems (B. X.115), particularly those dealing with grace and merit.

Imagination begins by noting the limitations of the human mind, compared with the great power of God's grace:

Clergye and Kynde Witte · comth of siʒte and techynge,  
As the boke bereth witnesse · to buirnes that can rede,  
Quod scimus, loquimur; quod vidimus, testamur.  
Of quod scimus cometh clergye · and connynge of heuene,  
And of quod vidimus cometh kynde witte · of siʒte of dyuerse peple.  
Ac grace is a gyfte of god · and of gret loue spryngeth;  
Knewe neuere clerke how it cometh forth · ne kynde witte the weyes,  
Nescit aliquis vnde venit, aut quo vadit, etc.  
(B.XII.66-71)

This does not, however, have the same anti-intellectual intent that we saw in Will's discouraged speech at the end of Passus X. Imagination wishes only to stress the overriding significance of grace and man's inability ever to understand its workings. But he goes on to qualify this, as Will had not done, pointing out that learning is necessary in order to know how to do well:

11 Bloomfield, pp. 170-174.
Learning, then, is a necessary adjunct to grace. No man may find his way to the faith of the Church, there to find the treasures of grace needed to merit salvation *ab condigno* unless he first has learned the way from the books that clerks have written under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Toward the end of this speech, however, Imagination's claim that the Church is "the coffre of Crystes tresore" seems to agree with Will's earlier argument that *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. But it is important to note that Imagination does not say that a non-Christian cannot be saved, only that the man who comes "to Crystendome" can thereby receive saving grace.

Imagination clarifies his position by referring to the case of the Good Thief:

The thef that had grace of god • on Gode Fryday as thow speke,
Was [saved], for he selte hym creawnt to Cryst on the crosse • and knewleched hym guulty,
And grace axed of god • that to graunten it is redy
To hem that boxomeliche biddeth it • and ben in wille
amenden hem.

(B.XII.192-195)

The Good Thief was, of course, not a baptized Christian,
nor was he one of the righteous Jews of the Old Testament.
God chose to elect him simply because he "boxomeliche"
asked for forgiveness for his sins and "ben in wille
to amenden hem." This is a clear case of meritum de congruo.
Because of the intrinsic goodness of his actions, the Good
Thief has been accepted de potentia Dei absoluta. Still,
he had the special opportunity, not afforded to many other
good non-Christians, of being physically present with Christ
and able to seek his mercy directly. What, however, of the
case of Trajan? Imagination answers this by pointing out
that Trajan, too, merited God's favor de congruo:

And riʒt as Troianus the trewe knyʒt • tilde nouʒt depe
in helle,
That owre lorde ne had hym lijʒtlich oute • so leue I
the thif be in heuene.

(B.XII.210-211)

Significantly, the two scriptural texts that Imagination
cites to support his position are "quia reddit unlicuique
iuxta opera sua" (B.XII.213) and "Quare placuit, quia voluit"
(B.XII.216). The first explains how, according to the
Psalmist; God rewards men justly according to their works,
and the second, used by Imagination as a gloss on the first,

12 In the Vulgate these are Ps. 51: 13 and Ps. 134: 6.
Both texts are slightly changed by Langland, though he does
preserve the essential meaning.
voices the Psalmist's humble submission before God, whose will is supreme in all things. Of all the passages in Scripture he might have quoted here, these perhaps most clearly illustrate the influence of fourteenth-century voluntarism on Langland's poem.

Even so, the cases of Trajan and the Good Thief had already been reviewed earlier, and it is therefore not surprising to find Imagination supporting the view offered by Lewte. But Imagination does not stop here. He goes so far as to suggest that even Aristotle, Socrates, and Solomon could have accumulated such meritum de congruo as to be raised up to heaven, de potentia Dei absoluta:

'And where Aristotle be sauf or nou3t sauf - the sothe wote no clergeye,
Ne of Sortes no of Salamon - no scripture can telle.
Ac god is so good, I hope - that sitth he gaf hem wittis
To wissen vs weyes there-with - (that wissen vs to be saued,
And the better for her bokes) - to bidden we ben holden,
That god for his grace - gyue her soules reste;
For lettred men were lewed men 3ut - ne were fore of her bokes.'

(E.XII.268-274)

Predictably, Will balks at such an argument;

'Alle thise clerkes,' quod I tho - 'that on Cryst leuen,
Seggen in her sarmones - that noyther ne Iewes,
Ne no creature of Cristes lyknesse - with-outen Crystendome worth saued.'

(B.XII.275-277)

Considering the medieval respect for authority and tradition, this would seem, perhaps, to conclude the dispute. Still,
Imagination presses on,

'Contra,' quod Ymagynatyf tho • and comsed for to loure,
And seyde, 'saluabitur vix justus in die iudicij. Ergo saluabitur,' quod he • and seyde namore Latyne.
'Troianus was a trewe kny3te • and toke neuere Cristendome,
And he is sauf, so seith the boke • and his soule in heuene.
For there is fullyng of fonte • and fullyng in blod-shedyng,
And thorugh fuire is fullyng • and that is ferme bileue;
Aduenit ignis diuinus, non comburens, sed illuminans, etc.
Ac trewth that trespassed neuere • ne transuersed a3eines his lawe,
But lyueth as his lawe techeth • and leueth there be no bettere,
And if there were, he wolde amende • and in suche wille deyeth,
Ne wolde neuere trewe god • but treuth were allowed;
And where it worth or worth nou3t • the bileue is grete of treuth,
And an hope hangyng ther-inne • to haue a mede for his treuthe.

(E.XII.278-289)

Two points are especially noteworthy in this speech. First, Imagination draws the inference from 1 Peter 4: 18 that since the Just man will scarcely (vix) be saved on Judgment Day, this means that the Just man---that is, one whose works and motives are good, but who has not received a gift of grace---will be saved. Langland lends additional authority to this inference by placing it within the Scriptural quotation ("Ergo saluabitur"), even though it does not appear in the Vulgate from which the rest of the text is taken.\(^\text{13}\) For

\(^{13}\) The Vulgate reads, "Et si justus vix salvabitur, impius, et peccator ubi parebunt?" Actually, St. Peter's point is the opposite of what Langland makes it out to be.
readers who were not careful enough to check the source, however, this would seem unimpeachable evidence to support Imagination's argument. His second major point is that there is a special kind of baptism, a "fullyng" of fire, that comes from believing in and following the truth revealed to a man, whether this be Christian truth or not. So long as a non-Christian believes that his own law is good and that there is none better, God will, according to Imagination, reward such a man. The alternative is unthinkable: it is not possible that a "trewe god" would not extend to the righteous non-Christian "a mede for his treuthe."

With this speech Langland ends Passus XII and Imagination vanishes. To sum up what progress has been made in defining a doctrine of grace and merit, we can recognize in Imagination's teaching a strong emphasis on meritum de congruo, based on the premise that good acts deserve some reward (ex natura rei debita) from a just God, and on God's willingness to elect a man who has not fulfilled all the literal requirements of ordained law. Imagination had already protected himself in advance by stressing the importance of grace (B.XII.66-71; quoted above p. 111), but this is virtually lost now in the overwhelming emphasis in the latter part of the passus on man's natural ability to merit God's acceptance. As it stands, this position is, if not outright Pelagianism, at the very least strongly colored by
the Ockhamist tendencies in much fourteenth-century theology.

But though Imagination may have said his last word, Langland has by no means said his. The remainder of the Vita de Dowel should be read, I feel, as a qualification of Imagination's partial description of Dowel. By himself, Imagination has given us only half of the truth about God's relation to man, expressed in terms of grace and merit, and Langland now goes on to present Haukyn, the active man, in order to explain the discipline a Christian must ordinarily undergo if he wishes to win divine favor.

In Passus XIII, Will encounters Conscience and Patience, whom Conscience decides to join in a pilgrimage to find Dowel. Together Patience and Conscience meet the personification of activa vita, one Haukyn, and point out to him how his clothes are covered with the filth of the seven deadly sins, which are then described at considerable length. Prevailing upon him to repent, Patience agrees to explain the good Christian life to him in Passus XIV. Thus, as Imagination had earlier explained the value of a man's good works in meriting salvation, so now Patience goes a step further by showing how an active life may, or may not, lead to merit. Haukyn represents the everyday Christian who, though blessed with the grace of baptism as Aristotle and Trajan were not, has not lived up to his obligations to God and, through his love for God, to be charitable.
toward his neighbor. Haukyn has devoted himself instead to satisfying selfish desires, but he is not entirely or irredeemably lost. He may yet be saved if he renounces cupiditas for caritas, according to Patience in a famous speech on the meaning of poverty:

"Paupertas, quod Pacience • 'est odibile bonum, Remocio curarum, possessio sine calumpnia, donum dei, sanitatis mater; Absque solicitudine semita, sapiencie temperatrix, negocium sine damno; Incerta fortuna, absque, solicitudine felicitas.\" (E.XIV.275 ff.)

Poverty is not so much an economic state, as we would use the term in modern times, but rather a spiritual state. It is truly a "donum dei" in directing the vision of the Christian to see that the things of the world, though not evil in themselves, tempt him to turn inward, to glut his own selfish tastes as Haukyn had done, rather than inspire him to lead a Christian life of love for others. Thus, to live a life of patient poverty does not imply living from hand to mouth in a dreary slum area, dressed in filthy rags; nor is it the poverty that the friars falsely claim to live amid actual splendor. True poverty, taken here as a Christian virtue, the epitome of Dowel, is a proper regard for the things of the material world as things to be used but not coveted. The Christian should always aspire to charity, which is actually man's loving return to God of the grace that God first extended to him. This is Patience's
argument, then, an argument derived from Augustine's doctrine of the two loves in De Genesi ad litteram (XI.xv.20) and De civitate Dei (XIV.28).

In terms of grace and merit, Passus XIII and XIV set forth an exposition of how a man in active life may, though living in a state of mortal sin, receive the free gift of grace (gratia gratis data) that will prompt him to repent (meritum de congruo), seek reentry into a state of sanctifying grace (gratia gratum faciens), and thereby live the virtuous life of patient poverty that will earn God's acceptance (meritum de condigno). In spite of whatever radical tendencies may have sprouted from time to time in Langland's mind, he was quite careful to balance them by such securely orthodox doctrine as we see here.

Passus XV is transitional. Anima appears to warn Will against intellectual pride again, perhaps as a corrective against taking Imagination too seriously:

'Thanne artow inparfit,' quod he · 'and one of Prydes kny3tes;
For such a luste and lykynge · Lucifer fel fram heuene:
   Ponam pedem meum in aquilone, et similis ero altissimo.
It were a3eynes kynde,1 quod he · 'and alkynnes resoun,
That any creature shulde kunne al · excepte Cryste one. (B.XV.50-53)

This caution becomes even more specific further on in the same speech (B.XV.68-77), when Anima directs the accusation of intellectual pride against those priests—"freres and fele other maistres"—who are more interested in the
abstractions of theology than in practicing Christian values. By this time, Will asks what charity is (B.XV.145), and the discussion which ensues extends through the whole of the Vita de Dobet.

Anima informs Will that, first of all, God's grace is necessary for a man to live a life of charity (B.XV.245). Next, Anima shows how the Church has been corrupted and is in a state of decline (B.XV.337-348), such that faith alone may now have to save the common people: "That sola fides sufficit • to saue with lewed peple" (B.XV.382), though the Church is still the proper means of conveying charity and grace to men:

And so it fareth by a barne • that borne is of wombe, 
Til it be crystened in Crystes name • and confermed of 
the bisshop, 
It is hethene as to heueneward • and helpelees to the 
soule. 

(E.XV.448-450)

Aside from the question of the proper means for transmitting grace, however, Anima is quite insistent that grace must assist man if he is to ascend to God:

When the heye kynge of heuene • sent his sone to erthe, 
Many miracles he wrou3te • man for to turne; 
In ensaumple that men schulde se • that by sadde resoun 
Men mi3t nou3t be saued • but thoruʒ mercy and grace, 
And thoruʒ penaunce and passion • and parfit bylef; 
And by-cam man of a mayde • and metropolitanus, 
And baptised and bishoped • with the blode of his herte 
Alle that wilned, and wolde • with inne-wit by-leue it. 

(E.XV.539-546)

Man's own efforts ("sadde resoun") may not earn heaven; only through mercy, grace, and faith can a man be justified.
Anima's teaching, therefore, expresses a clear doctrine of *meritum de condigno*, which seems to serve no purpose in the larger context of the poem as a whole other than providing, or restoring, a balance between *merita de congruo* and *de condigno*.

Anima does not, however, fall into the trap of gravitating to the extreme of Bradwardine in his reaction against Ockhamist theology. Free will is clearly given an important role in salvation in the description of the Tree of Charity in Passus XVI. Charity, Anima points out, grows in man at the instigation of grace, and man's soul, the "land" in which the Tree of Charity is planted, is leased to *Liberum-Arbitrium* (*B.XVI.13-17*). The tree is protected by three supports ("pyles"): the power of God the Father, the Passion of Christ, and man's free will, which is the "lieutenant" of the Holy Spirit (*B.XVI.46-47*). Thus, while the tree of grace may first have been planted by God, it must now be cultivated by man. For when man is threatened by temptation, he must use *Liberum-Arbitrium* to reach for the grace of the Holy Spirit that will help him to avoid sin and lead a good life:

> Ac whan the Fende and the Flesshe • forth with the Worlde  
> Manasen byhynde me • my fruit for to fecche,  
> Thanne Liberum-Arbitrium • laccheth the thridde plante,  
> And palleth adown the pouke • purelich thorw grace  
> And helpe of the holy goste • and thus haue I the maystrie.  
> (*B.XVI.48-52*)
Anima does not have the same Ockhamist tendencies that Lewte and, even more so, that Imagination displayed. Instead, Anima preserves the need for a helping grace from God (gratia gratis data) more clearly than they, but without polarizing the dispute by insisting that man's efforts are irrelevant.

In the remainder of Passus XVI and throughout Passus XVII, Will meets the three theological virtues that enable a man to do—Faith, Hope, and Charity. He learns that Faith and Hope are useless without Charity (B.XVII.88-93), through which the Christian may be justified by the grace of Christ's passion and death (B.XVII.94-101). Then, the Samaritan, who represents ideal charity, presents analogies to explain what man must do in order to earn this justifying grace. The Holy Spirit (caritas increata) will only ignite with the flame of grace (caritas creata) those men who have proved themselves worthy (B.XVII.217-230 and 244-256). No man is completely worthy of meriting salvation (de condigno) without God's assistance, and the good works that a man does offer to God only return the gifts that God had already given him (B.XVII.266). On the other hand, man's actions can, if sins against charity, "quench" the grace of the Holy Spirit in the sense that man has been created free to will even his own moral destruction (B.XVII.269-275). Yet for all this, there is always the possibility that God might
choose, *de potentia Dei absoluta*, to save a sinner whose merits were only partial (*de congruo*) and themselves incapable of reaching the full standard of God's justice (*de condigno*):

'I pose I hadde synned so • and shulde now deye, And now am sory, that so • the seint spirit agulte, Confesse me, and crye his grace • god, that al made, And myldliche his mercy axe • myȝte I nouȝte be saued?' '3us,' seide the Samaritan • 'so wel thow myȝte repente, That riȝtwisnesse thorw repentance • to reuȝte myȝte turne.

(B.XVII.293-298)

So strong is the fourteenth-century interest in preserving God's *potentia absoluta* that even in an orthodox discussion of grace and *meritum de condigno* it is impossible for Langland not to allow, in extreme cases, the possibility that God will supersede his ordinances to save a sinner.

The *Vita de Dobest* ends after Langland's masterful handling of the Harrowing of Hell in Passus XVII, which dramatizes the role of Christ in man's justification. This leads logically into the final question of where man may obtain the needed grace, the principal subject of the *Vita de Dobest*. While fully admitting the deficiencies of the institutional Church, Langland suggests that Dobest is ideally the life of grace and charity in the Church. For after Christ arose from the dead and showed himself to the apostles, he explained to them the life of Dobest:

And whan this dede was done • Dobest he tauȝte, And ȝaf Pieres power. • and pardoun he graunted To alle manere men • mercy and forȝynes,
Hym myȝte men to assoille • and of alle manere synnes,  
In couenant that thei come • and knowleche to paye,  
To Pieres pardon the Plowman • redde quod debes.  
(B.XIX.178-182)

Even more emphatically, Grace (the Holy Spirit, or gratia increata) goes on to explain the precise nature of this new contract between man and God, claiming that all "grace cometh of my ȝȝfte" (B.XIX.248), and conferring legal stewardship upon the Church, represented here by Piers:

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

Grace then gives Piers four sturdy oxen, the four evanglists, and four large bullocks, the four great Western Fathers, for his "teme." But all is not well. The Anti-Christ appears in Passus XX, and the Church is unable to protect itself against his onslaught because of weakness and dissension within. Finally, Conscience goes in search of Piers, praying for grace, as the poem ends:

'Ei Cryste,' quod Conscience tho • 'I wil become a pilgryme,  
And walken as wyde • as al the worlde lasteth,  
To seke Pieres the Plowman • that Pryde may destruye,  
And that freres hadde a fyndyng • that for nede flateren,  
And contrepleteth me, Conscience; • now Kynde me auenge,  
And sende me happe and hele • til I haue Pieres the Plowman!'  
And sitthe he gradde after grace • til I gan awake.  
(B.XX.378-384)
Taken as a whole, *Piers Plowman* is a long investigation of the relationship between God and man. In the course of the poem, Langland takes up several subjects which are not pertinent to this analysis, but the doctrine of grace and merit is, as we have seen, one of his main concerns. Langland does not opt for one extreme pole or the other in the fourteenth-century controversy between conservative Augustinians and radical Ockhamists, nor does he try to avoid the problem altogether or pass it off in a few facile lines. The poem may perhaps be read as an extended dialectic in which various positions are allowed to present themselves and to oppose one another, with the hope that out of this opposition would come some resolution of the problem of grace and merit. Though it would be unrealistic to push it too far, the general outline of this dialectic seems to follow a definite pattern. The *Visio* serves to define the doctrinal problem and to raise the questions that the *Vita* will attempt to answer. After the issue of Piers' pardon, the search for Dowel is basically a search for ways in which a man may merit salvation, with *meritum de congruo* getting most of the attention. In the section on Dobet, the search concentrates more heavily on *meritum de condigno*, though the value of man's will and his works are also accounted for. Finally, Dobest represents how man may ideally merit salvation (*de condigno*) through the
offices of the Church, whose power has been established de potentia Dei ordinata. Piers Plowman is thus not only an important Middle English poem: it is just as significantly a contribution to late medieval thought.
Chapter IV: Chaucer

Many scholars have studied Chaucer's philosophical and religious thought, but their labors have generally been confined to three areas: his use of Boethius' *De consolatione philosophiae*, his possible sympathy with Wyclif and the Lollards, and his indebtedness to certain Church Fathers for some of his poetic themes and for the techniques of patristic exegeses. No one has yet investigated in detail Chaucer's relation to the great intellectual crises of his own time, however, and the much-needed study of


3For this approach in general, see the references listed in Chapter II, note 1. For two of its most successful applications to Chaucer, see D.W. Robertson, Jr., *A Preface to Chaucer* (Princeton, 1963) and Bernard F. Huppe, *A Reading of the Canterbury Tales* (Albany, 1964).
his place in fourteenth-century thought remains to be written.

Virtually everyone claims that Chaucer is securely orthodox, though at the same time frequently critical of various malpractices in the late medieval Church. This judgment is confirmed when we examine his position on grace and merit. He avoids the stimulating speculations of the Pearl-poet and Langland, which are sometimes perilously close to heresy, and seems reluctant to question traditional doctrines, though he often makes use of them in his poems. If we wished to compare him with an important fourteenth-century philosopher or theologian, we could probably find no one more suitable than Richard FitzRalph. For like FitzRalph, Chaucer avoids the extremes of either the Ockhamists or the conservative Augustinians in favor of a safe middle ground between the two. This does not mean, of course, that Chaucer followed FitzRalph's teaching on any specific issue to which we can point with confidence, but rather that both men succeeded in contributing to the great debate over grace and merit without becoming directly involved with the principal disputants or proposing creative new positions of their own.

The aspect of the problem of grace and merit that seems to have interested Chaucer most is the question of future contingents. This had long been an issue in medieval philosophy, one which Chaucer was evidently familiar with
through reading Augustine and Boethius, but it took a novel turn in the fourteenth century. Basically, the question asks what the relation is between God's foreknowledge, from all eternity, of every action that man will perform and man's capacity to act as a free moral agent. In terms of grace and merit, the issue is whether man's merits are determined by God's grace or, conversely, man may in some fashion merit salvation by exercising free moral choice. Bradwardine and Wyclif, as might be expected, insisted on a strict doctrine of predestination, virtually excluding any real merit on man's part, because they considered this necessary to preserve their doctrines of divine omnipotence and the absolute requirement of grace for salvation. On the other side, the Ockhamists chose to soften the traditional insistence on divine foreknowledge in order to promote their doctrines of God's absolute power, including the power to change his mind about how future events should work out, and of man's hope for salvation through *meritum de congruo*. Although Ockham himself never went so far, some of his followers, such as Buckingham and Adam of Woodham, speculated that God did not know all future events with absolute certainty.

4Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians*, pp. 103-109; Robinson, pp. 201-207.

We could assume *a priori* that a man of Chaucer's learning and interests would have been aware of this controversy, but the point is put beyond question by his own statement in the *Nun's Priest's Tale:*^6

> But what that God forwoot moot nedes bee,  
> After the opinion of certein clerkis.  
> Witnesse on hym that any parfit clerk is,  
> That in scole is greet altercacioun  
> In this mateere, and greet disputisoun,  
> And hath been of an hundred thousand men.  
> But I ne kan nat bulte it to the bren  
> As kan the hooly doctour Augustyn,  
> Or Boece, or the Bisshop Bradwardyn,  
> Wheither that Goddes worthy forwityng  
> Streyneth me nedely for to doon a thyng,—  
> "Nedely" clepe I symple necessitee;  
> Or elles, if free choys be graunted me  
> To do that same thyng, or do it noght,  
> Though God forwoot it er that I was wroght;  
> Or if his wityng streyneth never a deel  
> But by necessitee condicioneel.  

(VII.3234-50)

Though in the very nest line he refuses to take a stand of his own—"I wol nat han to do of swich mateere" (VII.3251)—the passage quoted is sufficient to prove both that Chaucer knew of the fame of this debate and that he clearly understood its implications. Still, it is one thing to be aware of a well-known dispute, even to have some knowledge of the various positions, but it is quite different to be fully familiar with the actual writings of the men involved. One has only to think of how many of our own contemporaries comment, apparently with great erudition, on such subjects as

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existentialism, Freudian psychology, or Bonhoeffer's theology who have never read any primary texts by an existentialist, Freud, or Bonhoeffer. Similarly, it is impossible for us to know how much first-hand acquaintance Chaucer had with the works of Bradwardine, Wyclif, Ockham, Buckingham, and other controversialists of the time. Very little has actually been done on this subject by modern scholars, except for the brief, random comments such as we find in Patch's and Bloomfield's articles on Troilus and Criseyde. Since Chaucer himself makes no further specific allusions beyond the one quoted above, we must go to his works themselves to see what evidence they may yield.

The question of divine providence and human freedom, another way of stating the problem of grace and merit, comes up again and again in Chaucer. In the Knight's Tale, for example, after Palamon has been released from prison, Arcite tries to assuage his grief at his own plight in the following speech:

Allas, why pleynen folk so in commune
On purveiaunce of God, or of Fortune,
That yeveth hem ful ofte in many a gyse
Wel bettre than they kan hemself devyse?
Som man desireth for to han richesse,
That cause is of his mordre or greet siknesse;
And som man wolde out of his prisoun fayn,
That in his hous is of his meyne slayn.
Infinite harmes been in this mateere.

We witen nat what thing we preyen heere:  
We faren as he that dronke is as a mous.  
A dronke man woot wel he hath an hous,  
But he noot which the righte wey is thider,  
And to a dronke man the wey is slider.  
And certes, in this world so faren we;  
We seken faste after felicitee,  
But we goon wrong ful often, trewely.  

(I.1251-67)

Man, Arcite argues, may wish one thing or another, and he may sometimes achieve and sometimes fail in his expectations. But man is blind to what is truly best for himself; this can be decided by God alone. Already we may see a suggestion of the kind of realism we usually associate with Augustine and his many followers in the Middle Ages. All things are known eternally in the divine mind, and what happens here on earth is simply the working out of what has existed as idea in God, who is outside of time.

But such a position inevitably leads to complications, and Chaucer does not fail to point these out. Palamon, though free to return to his own country, may not remain to seek Emelye's love. Thus, for him, the seeming good of his liberty is actually evil:

Thanne seyde he, "O cruel goddes that governe  
This world with byndyng of youre word eterne,  
And writen in the table of atthamaunt  
Youre parlement and youre eterne graunt,  
What is mankynde moore unto you holde  
Than is the sheep that rouketh in the folde?  
For slayn is man right as another beest,  
And dwelleth eek in prison and arrest,  
And hath siknesse and greet adversitee,  
And ofte tymes gilteles, pardee.  
What governance is in this prescience,  
That gilteles tormenteth innocence?  
And yet encresseth this al my penaunce,
That man is bounden to his observance, 
For Goddes sake, to letten of his wille, 
Ther as a beest may al his lust fulfille. 
And whan a beest is deed he hath no peyne; 
But man after his deeth moot wepe and pleyne, 
Though in this world he have cate and wo. 
Withouten doute it may stonden so. 

(I.1303-22)

This raises a new problem: if God's foreknowledge is the ultimate cause of all events in his creation, then God would appear to be the source of evil. Augustine had writhed in uncertainty over this same point, the biggest single factor impeding his conversion to Christianity for several years. He records his anxiety in the *Confessions*, and the solution he offered in *De libero arbitrio*, written shortly after he embraced the faith, remained the orthodox standard in the Church throughout the Middle Ages and even beyond. However, the problem was raised anew by the conservative Augustinians in the fourteenth century, as it was to be raised again in the seventeenth century by conservative Augustinians. For if, in order to combat the Ockhamists, Bradwardine's "modern Pelagians," it seemed necessary for conservatives to stress the overwhelming power of divine grace, then the consequent lessening of human freedom placed the responsibility for evil back on God. This is the significance of Palamon's comments on God's "eterne graunt," which causes "greet

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8 Especially in Bk. V, ch. 10; Bk. VII, ch. 3 and ch. 12.
9 See 3.7.71; 1.16.115; 2.19.199.
adversitee" for even "giltelees" men. Some might reply that Palamon is, after all, a pagan and could not be expected to achieve Christian insight into the problem. But such a reply would not explain the obviously Christian reference to punishment in the afterlife toward the end of the passage. Such punishment is inexplicable if God is the source of evil, and if man is incapable of acting as a free moral agent. Far from being "pagan," this is a very neat reductio of Bradwardine's doctrine of grace. Still, Chaucer refuses, as in the Nun's Priest's Tale, to press his point any further:

The answere of this lete I to dyvynys,  
But wel I woot that in this world greet pyne ys.  
(1.1323-24)

This is an interesting instance of Chaucer's strategy when advancing arguments that might prove theologically controversial. He seems to withdraw in favor of the "dyvynys," but at the same time he has clearly articulated the outlines of his argument.

Finally, we come to the famous speech of Theseus at the end of the tale. This has long been associated with the alleged "influence" of Boethius on Chaucer, a relationship that I feel has been greatly exaggerated and perhaps just as greatly misunderstood. Chaucer does indeed fairly closely paraphrase part of the De consolatione philosophiae in this
speech, as he also does in several other poems, but this is not sufficient ground for inferring that Chaucer was always approving of what he found in his source, or that he was slavishly following Boethius' ideas without seeing in them fourteenth-century implications which Boethius could not have foreseen. It is difficult, for example, to see how Chaucer could have missed the significance for his own times of the following lines from Theseus' speech:

> What maketh this but Juppiter, the kyng,  
> That is prince and cause of alle thyng,  
> Convertyng al unto his propre welle  
> From which it is dirryved, sooth to telle?  
> And heer-agayns no creature on lyve,  
> Of no degree, availleth for to stryve.  
> (I.3035-40)

Theseus then goes on to recommend a very specific course of action for man to follow, which closely parallels Bradwardine's doctrine of grace and *meritum de condigno*:

> Thanne is it wysdom, as it thynketh me,  
> To maken vertu of necessitee,  
> And take it weel that we may nat eschue,  
> And namely that to us alle is due.  
> And whoso gruccheth ought, he dooth folye,  
> And rebel is to hym that al may gye.  
> (I.3041-46)

Man may be at times so perverse that he "gruccheth," but his salvation rests in his passive submission to God's will. There is no suggestion here of man's own merits, only of the power of God's grace. This is even more evident in Theseus' conclusion:

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10Boethius, ii, m. 8; iv, pr. 6; m. 6; iii, pr. 10.
What may I conclude of this longe serye,
But after wo I rede us to be merye,
And thanken Juppiter of al his grace?

(I.3067-69)

None of Chaucer's alert contemporaries could have been deceived by the reference to Jupiter in the context of such a discussion. This is clearly the Christian God we are dealing with: the Lord of History, who works all things to his will by virtue of his grace, who has known all things from all eternity, and who may freely choose to extend his grace to whom he wishes. This is the God of Archbishop Bradwardine.

The *Knight's Tale*, however, is still a fairly early work in the Chaucer canon, and his views on grace and merit, providence and freedom, expanded and became more complex as his understanding of the problem deepened. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, which comes from roughly the same period in Chaucer's career, we already see some diversity in his approach developing. The most famous discussion of the problem of providence and necessity comes in Book IV, after Troilus has learned of his reversal of fortune. Pandarus, ever sanguine, tries to reason his friend out of his despair by arguing that man does have some control over his own destiny:

Thenk ek Fortune, as wel thiselven woost,
Helpeth hardy man to his enprise,
And wayveth wrecches for hire cowardise.

(IV.600-602)

Pandarus is for action, which of course implies a certain measure of freedom with which action could be meaningfully
performed. Not long after, however, Troilus responds with his speech on necessity, perhaps the most often quoted passage in the poem.

Troilus begins by presenting his own position before going on to consider possible objections and alternatives:

"For al that comth, comth by necessitee:
Thus to ben lorn, it is my destinee.

"For certeynly, this wot I wel,"he seyde,
"That foresight of divine purveyaunce
Hath seyn alwey me to forgon Criseyde,
Syn God seeth every thyng, out of doutance,
And hem disponyth, thorugh his ordinaunce,
In hire merites sothly for to be,
As they shul comen by predestyne.
(IV.958-966)

As with the Knight's Tale, Chaucer is once again following a passage from Boethius rather closely, but this should not blind us to the fact that Chaucer was writing such a passage in the fourteenth century. In his own historical context, Chaucer could not have written Troilus' speech without understanding its implications as a comment on the fourteenth-century debate over grace and merit, no matter what his literary "source" may have been. This is unmistakable as Troilus goes on to say,

"Eut natheles, allas! whom shal I leeve?
For ther ben grete clerkes many oon,
That destyne thorugh argumentes preve;
And som men seyn that, nedely, ther is noon,
But that fre chois is yeven us everychon.
O, welaway! so sleighe arm clerkes olde,
That I not whos opynyoun I may holde.
(IV.967-973)

11Boéthius, v, pr. 2 and 3.
Aside from the rhetorical deception (Chaucer knows full well which "clerkes" Troilus will favor in this dispute), Troilus does establish two sides to the argument. The first side, that of the predestinarian theologians such as Bradwardine and Wyclif, is set forth as follows:

"For som men seyn, if God seth al biforn,
Ne God may nat deceyved ben, parde,
Than moot it fallen, theigh men hadde it sworn,
That purveiace hath seyn before to be.
Wherfore I sey, that from eterne if he
Hath wist byforn oure thought ek as oure dede,
We han no fre chois, as thise clerkes rede.

"For other thought, nor other dede also,
Myghte nevere ben, but swich as purveyaunce,
Which may nat ben deceyved nevere mo,
Hath feled byforn, withouten ignoraunce.
For yf ther myghte ben a variaunce
To writhen out fro Goddis purveyinge,
Ther nere no .prescience of thyng comynge,

"But it were rather an opynyoun
Uncerteyn, and no stedfast forseynge.

(IV.974-989)

The real motive behind this argument is a desire to preserve the doctrine of God's eternal omniscience, to protect God from the moderni, even if this means eliminating "fre chois." It is well for us to recall here that some of the more extreme Ockhamists, notably Euckingham and Adam of Woodham, were willing to take the other half of the God-man relationship, limiting God's foreknowledge in order to preserve man's freedom. The next lines could not, perhaps, be a more explicit condemnation of their position unless Troilus had identified them by name—which surely would have been odd for an ancient Trojan warrior to have done:
And certes, that were an abusioun,
That God sholde han no parfit cler wytynge
More than we men that han doutous wenynge
But swich an errour upon God to gesse
Were fals and foul, and wikked corsesdstnesse.

(IV.990-994)

Thus does Troilus dispatch the problem of future contingents. Chaucer, of course, enjoys the protection of the rhetorical device of using Troilus to voice these opinions. No one could accuse this amiable diplomat of holding a potentially dangerous opinion in his own time, nor can we in ours facilely attribute the same to the poet behind the character in the poem. Still, Chaucer's contemporaries, at least those who were well read and sensitive to the chief ideas of the time, must have recognized his cunning adaptation of the debate over grace and merit to the artistic structure of his poem.

Another problem remains, however, since both the *Knight's Tale* and *Troilus and Criseyde* deal with pagans. We might well ask how grace and merit can be considered a serious doctrinal theme in these poems if their central characters are never represented as having direct knowledge of the Christian faith, and if, as unbaptised heathen, they might not receive the grace ordinarily required for salvation. In *St. Erkenwald* and *Piers Plowman*, as we have seen, the issue of good pagans was sometimes raised in the context of the debate over grace and merit. Some thinkers could appeal to the *potentia Dei absoluta* to accept the *de congruo*
merit of a righteous pagan as sufficient for salvation, but such a teaching at least bordered closely on Pelagianism. Chaucer skillfully avoids the problem by neither awarding his good pagans heaven nor condemning them to hell, thus safeguarding his religious orthodoxy and not alienating his readers' sympathy for these characters at the same time. This is the compromise of the tactful artist, not the boldness of the searching critic. Such, on this level at least, is the difference between Chaucer and Langland.

Toward the end of the *Knight's Tale*, for example, we meet the following account of Arcite's death:

His spirit chaunged hous and wente ther,  
As I cam nevere, I kan nat tellen wher.  
Therfore I stynte, I nam no divinistre;  
Of soules fynde I nat in this registre,  
Ne me ne list thilke opinions to telle  
Of hem, though that they writen wher they dwelle.  
Arcite is coold, ther Mars his soule gye!  
(I.2809-15)

Chaucer refuses to discuss the issue, even to present the opinions of others on the subject of the final disposition of souls. He merely consigns Arcite's soul to Mars, rather than to one of the angels, and retreats behind his now familiar rhetorical pose: "I nam no divinistre." Still, he does allow that God will send his love, or grace, to those who merit it, observing that this is the reason for Palamon's final happiness with Emelye:

And God, that al this wyde world hath wroght,  
Sende hym his love that hath it deere aboght;  
For now is Palamon in alle wele,  
Lyvynge in blisse, in richesse, and in heele,
And Emelye hym loveth so tendrely,
And he hire serveth al so gentilly,
That neuer was ther no word hem bitwene
Of jalousie or any oother teene.

(I.3099-3106)

Palamon has not simply earned Emelye; he has merited God's favor (de congruo), and God in turn has elected to reward Palamon with "Lyvynge in blisse." It would be tempting to take this suggestion and apply it to Arcite as well, arguing that if one can merit God's good will, perhaps the other might also. This could, I suppose, admit the inference that God would, de potentia absoluta, possibly elect Arcite on the basis of meritum de congruo—except that Chaucer has already refused to entertain this possibility himself.

The case of Troilus and Criseyde is rather different. A great deal has been written about Chaucer's contrast between earthly and heavenly love, especially by critics trying to reconcile the structural problem in the poem. The first four and a half books of Troilus seem, according to this view, to represent one ethos, while the "palinode" at the end suggests quite another. This seems to be the familiar theme of caritas versus cupiditas, which pervades so much medieval literature. In spite of its popularity in recent years, this attempt to explain the poem remains quite unsatisfactory because, even though Chaucer does define the limits of human love by contrast with God's love, he never

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12 See Augustine's De Genesi ad litteram, 11.15.20; and also De civitate Dei, XIV, 28.
condemns Troilus for loving as he did, nor does he categorically condemn earthly love *per se*. After all, for Troilus at least, human love is more than the "feyned" emotion that Chaucer contrasts with Christian charity. Troilus operates within the only context he knows, and for him, unlike Criseyde, Pandarus, or Diomede, love has a spiritual quality that transcends sexual experience alone. Troilus' conception of love comes, in fact, as close to the Christian concept of *caritas* as was theologically tenable without a special infusion of grace from the Holy Spirit.

In terms of a theology of grace and merit, this high, though non-Christian, ideal of love has several very interesting implications. First, Chaucer uses the Christian doctrine of God's conversion of man through grace as a model to emphasize the dignity of Troilus' love. In Book III, as a comment on the joyous union between Criseyde and himself, Troilus celebrates the cosmic power of love:

"Love, that of erthe and se hath governaunce,  
Love, that his hestes hath in hevenes hye,  
Love, that with an holsom alliaunce  
Malt peples joyned, as hym lest hem gye,  
Love, that knetteth lawe of compaignie,  
And couples doth in vertu for to dwelle,  
Eynd this acord, that I have told and telle.  
"That that the world with feith, which that is stable,  
Diverseth so his stowndes concordynge,  
That elementz that ben so discordable  
Holden a bond perpetuely durynge,  
That Phebus mote his rosy day forth brynge,  
And that the mone hath lordshipe over the nyghtes,—  
Al this doth Love, ay heried be his myghtes!"
"That that the se, that gredy is to flowen,
Constreyeth to a certeyn ende so
His flodes that so fiersly they ne grown
To drenchen erthe and al for evere mo;
Al that now loveth asondre sholde lepe,
And lost were al that Love halt now to-hepe.

\[\text{(III.1744-64)}\]

It is hard to see how this could be either ignored or explained away as *cupiditas* in any serious, thoroughgoing analysis of the poem. Troilus, pagan though he may be, has a distinctly spiritual understanding of love as the great cosmic force that binds all the diverse elements of the universe into a coherent whole. Further, he goes on to point out that God extends his love to all his creatures in order to convert them by its power and bind them in a new moral relationship:

\["\text{So wolde God, that auotour is of kynde,}
That with his bond Love of his vertu liste}
To cerclen hertes alle, and faste bynde,
That from his bond no wight the wey out wiste;
And hertes colde, hem wolde I that he twiste
To make hem love, and that hem liste ay rewe
On hertes sore, and kepe hem that ben trewe!"

\[\text{(III.1765-71)}\]

The sentiment expressed here, though paraphrased from a passage in Boethius,\(^{13}\) has its roots in Augustine and the Platonic tradition. Here is Augustine's God, who seeks out his creatures because of his perfect love for them, so that he might "cerclen hertes alle, and faste bynde." Accordingly, Chaucer and his fourteenth-century readers could scarcely have failed to recognize the implicit conception of grace

\(^{13}\text{Cf. note 10, above.}\)
in Troilus' "hymn."

Next, the narrator goes on to reveal how Troilus, as a result of his internal, spiritual conversion, has been energized to perform meritorious works:

In alle nedes, for the townes werre,
He was, and ay, the first in armes dyght,
And certeynly, but if that bokes erre,
Save Ector most ydred of any wight;
And this encrees of hardynesse and myght
Com hym of love, his ladies thank to wynne,
That altered his spirit so withinne.

(III.1772-78)

These actions are, of course, to be expected of a knight who lives up fully to the chivalric code, and as such they might seem by themselves to have little moral value, at least from a Christian point of view. But these are not the only manifestations of his conversion. Even more significantly, the narrator also observes that

And moost of love and vertu was his speche,
And in despit hadde alle wrecchednesse;
And douteles, no nede was hym biseche
To honouren hem that hadde worthynesse,
And esen hem that weren in destresse.

(III.1786-90)

Besides these clearly charitable attitudes and actions, we even learn how Troilus has now become able to purge himself of sin:

And though that he be come of blood roial,
Hym liste of pride at no wight for to chace;
Benigne he was to ech in general,
For which he gat hym thank in every place.
Thus wolde Love, yheried be his grace,
That Pride, Envye, and Ire, and Avarice
He gan to fle, and everich other vice.

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(III.1800-6)
The Christian doctrine of grace is so obvious in this passage that it hardly need be pointed out. According to orthodox tradition, as we have seen in earlier chapters, the sinner may be reclaimed by God's loving grace (gratia gratis data), in terms of which the man may perform naturally good works that merit God's further favor, ex natura rei debita, in the form of justifying grace (gratia gratum faciens) with which the converted sinner can perform supernaturally good actions. In the passage just quoted, Troilus does perform such supernaturally good actions for, as Augustine constantly pointed out, he could not avoid sin without the libertas that comes only from God's special infusion of grace. This raises a rather disturbing problem since Chaucer has attributed to Troilus actions that could not, according to orthodox doctrine, be performed by anyone who had not already been baptized. To argue that Troilus could do so without the sacrament is Pelagian; to argue that he received a special dispensation, de potentia Dei absoluta, as did the magistrate in St. Erkenwald and Trajan in Piers Plowman, is to agree with the Ockhamists that a good pagan could earn justifying grace through meritum de congruo. Chaucer, as we might expect, refuses both alternatives. He sidesteps the whole issue, or at least the responsibility for answering it, by attributing these passages to his

*Enchiridion*, 30-32.
literary source: at the very end of the section, he lays it all in the hands of "myn auctour" (III.1817).

At the end of the poem, finally, Chaucer reminds us of the orthodox position on grace and merit: only through union with Christ, presumably in the Church, may we aspire to God's love and respond by works that may achieve *meritum de condigno*:

O yonge, fresshe foldes, he or she,
In which that love up groweth with youre age,
Repeyreth hom fro worldly vanyte,
And of youre herte up aasteth the visage
To thilke God that after his ymage
Yow made, and thynketh al nys but a faire
This world, that passeth soone as floures faire.

And lovethe hym, the which that right for love
Upon a crois, oure soules for to beye,
First starf, and roos, and sit in hevene above;
For he nyl falsen no wight, dar I seye,
That wol his herte al holly on hym leye.
And syn he best to love is, and most meke,
What nedeth feynede loves for to seke?

(V.1835-48)

There is nothing original here, nor, perhaps, do we have a right to expect some startling new doctrinal speculation from Chaucer at this point. Against the Ockhamists he expresses confidence in the *potentia Dei ordinata*: God will not, as some of the radicals claimed, use his *potentia absoluta* to overturn or contradict what he has ordained because "he nyl falsen no wight." At the same time, Chaucer draws a contrast between *caritas* and *cupiditas*, between Christ's redemption and "feynede loves." He reinforces this distinction by condemning the religious rites of the pagans of ancient Troy:
Lo here, of payens corsed olde rites,
Lo here, what alle hire goddes may availle;
Lo here, thlse wrecched worlde appetites;
Lo here, the fyn and guerdon for travaillé
Of Jove, Appollo, of Mars, of swich rascaille!

(V.1849-53)

Many critics have recognized the problem with this "pallinode," some arguing that it introduces an inconsistency in the ethical stance of the poem as a whole; and others replying that such a moral judgment as Chaucer makes at the end is implicit in the poem from the very beginning.

Neither group manages to solve the difficulty altogether and so, while I have no pretensions to answering the question to everyone's satisfaction here, I would like to put it in a different light than has usually been offered.

It seems inconsistent with the high conception of Troilus' spiritual love that we saw earlier to argue that this, like the obviously "feynede loves" of Criseyde and Diomede, is rank cupidity and deserves Chaucer's condemnation.

15For example, C. S. Lewis' famous comment in The Allegory of Love (Oxford, 1936): "We hear the bell clang; and the children, suddenly hushed and grave, and a little frightened, troop back to their master" (p.43).


at the end. The same patristic tradition that censured cupidity also recognized that the pagans were, like Christians, under divine providence and sometimes showed remarkable witness to God through philosophical insight or leading excellent lives. Augustine, for example, carefully allowed that some of the pagans might even be a source of divine revelation, though obviously of not equal authority with the Scripture. And so there was a clear precedent for Chaucer, if he wished to follow it, to glorify the high spiritual values of a good pagan while at the same time lamenting that same man's inability to share in the Church Triumphant. Chaucer achieves this delicate balance, I think, by a very subtle rhetoric.

After the "palinode," Chaucer neatly dodges responsibility for applying its sententia to Troilus by once again retreating behind his literary source:

Lo here, the forme of olde clerkis speche
In poetrie, if ye hire bokes seche.
(V.1854-55)

By this device, Chaucer may disavow any charge that he has personally censured the love of the very man whom he had earlier praised so highly. Further, it is interesting to note the final disposition of Troilus' soul, which is here so specifically described, and contrast it with the indefiniteness of Arcite's afterlife in the Knight's Tale. Troilus,

18De doctrina Christiana, 2.18.28.
unlike Arcite, is much more clearly a moral hero as well as a valorous knight. Pandarus even says of him that he might become a great saint, using language which has obvious Christian reference:

Lat nat this wrecched wo thyn herte gnawe,  
But manly sette the world on six and seveme;  
And if thow deye a martyr, go to hevene!

(IV.621-623)

But Chaucer, as a Christian who wishes to preserve his orthodoxy, may not send Troilus to heaven. The extra ecclesia nulla salus concept was still much too strong in Christian thought to allow any but the most daring thinkers to speculate beyond it. So, as usual, Chaucer evades the issue by granting Troilus the reward of ascending to the eighth sphere after death. This is really an ambiguous solution, however, since there was no allowance for such an afterlife in the Christian theology. But it is poetically appropriate to reward Troilus in this fashion for the good life that he has led, and it is theologically shrewd to place him in a non-Christian "heaven."¹⁹ In terms of the doctrine of merit, Chaucer could not really have represented Troilus as receiving meritum de condigno, but he did show Troilus performing good works that would merit, de congruo, some sort of divine favor. Thus, for the half-merit of the pagan Troilus, Chaucer hits upon the answer of the half-reward of

the eighth sphere. Nor was this apparently a casual choice so far as Chaucer was concerned, for there is good evidence that, since the stanzas describing Troilus' "salvation" (V.1807-27) do not appear in the alpha-text of the poem, he only made this decision after careful study and deliberation. Such an addition also improves the structure of the poem, at least from the perspective of its doctrine, because without it there is a very clear contradiction between the way in which Troilus has been treated throughout most of the poem and Chaucer's moral conclusion. Thus, while we may not applaud him for any stimulating new insights into the problem of grace and merit, we must admire Chaucer's artistic ingenuity in solving this problem in *Troilus and Criseyde*.

Interesting as these speculations about poems treating good pagans may be, it is when we turn to his good Christians that we clearly see Chaucer's doctrine of grace and merit. Several of the *Canterbury Tales* deal directly with this doctrine and here, as in the poems we have already considered, Chaucer is always cautiously conservative. Though he seems at times to lean toward Bradwardine, he never goes to the predestinarian extremes of the Doctor Profundus. Chaucer evidently has no sympathy with the radical Ockhamists, but at the same time he avoids gravitating to the opposite pole in the dispute. For Chaucer, God indeed

20See Robinson's note, p. 912.
must send man grace as a prerequisite for any meritorious works that might earn eternal salvation. Still, man has a responsibility to God as well, to respond freely and lovingly to the gift of grace and, with its help, both to avoid sin and to live a life of charity and submission to God's will.

Chaucer perhaps never comes closer to Bradwardine's teaching on grace than in the Man of Law's Tale, with its long description of how Custance endures unbelievable hardships with Christian submission of her will to God's providence, assisted as she is by divine grace. After the slaughter of the party from Rome, for example, she is put into an open, rudderless boat to be set out to sea, and her prayer sums up her attitude throughout the poem:

She blesseth hire, and with ful pitous voys
Unto the croys of Crist thus seyde she:
"O cleere, o welful autur, hooly croys,
Reed of the Lambes blood ful of pitee,
That wessh the world fro the olde inquitez,
Me fro the feend and fro his clawes kepe,
That day that I shal drenchen in the depe.

Victorious tree, proteccioun of trewe,
That oonly worthy were for to bere
The Kyng of Hevene with his woundes newe,
The white Lamb, that hurt was with a spere,
Flemere of feendes out of hym and here
On which thy lymes feithfully extenden,
Me kepe, and yif me myght my lyf t'amenden."
(II.449-462)

This kind of prayer was quite common, of course, in the Middle Ages, and the only thing distinctive about it from our point of view here is that Custance, bereft of any power
to save herself, places herself utterly in the hands of God. This implies an attitude toward grace and merit which goes beyond the immediate, literal circumstances of Custance in the story. She represents the type of the good Christian, faced with the many adversities and uncertainties of life in this world, who must rely on divine grace rather than human merit in the hope of ultimate salvation. Such a reading is supported by Chaucer's explanation of why Custance did not perish at sea or, earlier, at the feast:

Men myghten asken why she was nat slayn
Eek at the feeste? who myghte hir body save?
And I answere to that demande agayn,
Who saved Danyel in the horrible cave
Ther every wight save he, maister and knave,
Was with the leon frete er he asterte?
No wight but God, that he bar in his herte.

God liste to shewe his wonderful myracle
In hire, for we sholde seen his myghty werkis;
Crist, which that is to every harm triacle,
By certeine meenes ofte, as known clerkis,
Dooth thyng for certein ende that ful derk is
To mannes wit, that for oure ignorance
Ne konne noght knowe his prudent purveiance.
(II.470-483)

God is all-powerful, and he may extend the power of his grace to those whom he favors, even if this means performing miracles in their behalf. Further, it is unwise to speculate rashly about how God may execute his will—an interesting comment on the many fourteenth-century speculations of this kind—since it is enough to know that what happens is a result of God's having willed it. This is all that concerns Custance, and this, by extension, is all that need
concern us as well. Chaucer never says that Custance does not have a will of her own, or even the freedom to disobey God, but he does place such a heavy stress on providence and grace that any question of freedom and merit seems almost irrelevant. If this were all of Chaucer’s poetry that survived, we would probably quite reasonably describe him as a follower of Bradwardine today. But we do have other poems about Christians caught in times of extreme crisis, and their responses, while not in any sense diminishing the importance of grace, illustrate how much value Chaucer was willing to assign to human action.

The Tale of Melibee is almost the direct opposite of the story of Custance. For the allegory of Melibeus dramatizes the importance of man’s free choice, under the guidance of Prudence, to regain Christian wisdom, or sapientia (Sophie). Accordingly, Prudence describes how Melibeus came to be attacked and his daughter Sophie wounded in the first place:

Thy name is Melibee, this is to seyn, 'a man that drynketh hony.' Thou hast ydronke so muchel hony of sweete temporeel richesses, and delices and honours of this world,/ that thou art dronken, and hast forgeten Jhesu Crist thy creatour./ Thou ne hast nat doon to hym swich honour and reverence as thee oughte,/ ne thou ne hast nat wel ytaken kep to the wordes of Ovide, that seith, 'Under the hony of the goodes of the body is hyd the venym that sleeth the soule.'/ And Salomon seith, 'If thou hast founden hony, ete of it that suffiseth;/ for if thou ete of it out of mesure, thou shalt spewe,' and be nedy and povre./ And peraventure Crist hath thee in despit, and hath turned away fro thee his face and his eeris of misericorde;/ and also he hath suffred that thou hast been punysshed in the
manere that thow hast ytrespassed./ Thou hast doon synne agayn oure Lord Crist; for certes, the three enemies of mankynde, that is to seyn, the flessh, the feend, and the world,/ thou hast suffred hem entre in to thyn herte wilfully by the wyndowes of thy body,/ and hast nat defended thyself suffisantly agayns hire assautes and hire temptaciouns, so that they han wounded thy soule in fyve places;/ this is to seyn, the deedly synnes that been entred into thyn herte by thy fyve wittes./ And in the same manere oure Lord Crist hath woold and suffred that thy three enemys been entred into thyn house by the wyndowes,/ and han ywounded thy doghter in the forseyde manere./

(VII. 1410-26)

There is here, to be sure, some emphasis on grace, especially in the suggestion that Christ has withdrawn his favor from Melibeus. But the most important point is that Melibeus, a free moral agent capable of performing God's will to the extent that he knows it, has deliberately allowed himself to wallow in the "honey of the world, thereby losing God's support and falling into sin. In this passage by itself, however, there is some uncertainty over the kind of merit that a man may earn and the species of grace required for such merit. If, for example, Melibeus had defended himself sufficiently against temptations from the world, the flesh, and the devil, could he have avoided sin? Would such a defense have required prevenient grace, or is God's friendship contingent upon man's actions? The answer to these questions is not long in coming: "For the victorie of batailles that been in this world lyth nat in greet nombre or multitude of the peple, ne in the vertu of man,/ but it lith in the wyl and in the hand of oure Lord God Almyghty"
(VII.1656-57). It is unthinkable that Chaucer give any other answer because all orthodox Christians since the time of Augustine had insisted on making all merits depend ultimately on the will of God. But it is also important to point out that Chaucer allows man as large a measure of freedom as possible within the general context of grace, certainly much more than Bradwardine allowed, or even Chaucer himself in the Man of Law's Tale. In fact, the whole allegory of the Tale of Melibee implicitly demands a doctrine of human merit based on an understanding of man as a free moral agent. Otherwise, it is hard to see the artistic function of Prudence in the tale, or even to see why such a story would have any reference to the virtue of prudence at all.

In the Friar's Tale, too, there is a clear emphasis on man's freedom to make responsible moral choices, on the basis of which his soul will finally be saved or damned. Again and again, the devil points out to the corrupt summoner that he may not take anyone who performs some sinful, or perhaps seemingly sinful, action to hell. It is necessary first to determine the subjective guilt of the man, to learn if he really intends to turn away from God and lose his soul in sin. Only if a man is subjectively, as well as objectively, guilty of serious sin, may the devil then claim his soul. This is equally true of the carter, who curses his horses without really intending what he says
(III.1542-70), and of the summoner, whom the devil tells

> Now let us ryde blyve,
> For I wole holde compalgnye with thee
> Til it be so that thou forsake me. (III.1520-22)

Thus, man's moral freedom is preserved here: the devil may accompany the sinner only so long as the sinner himself allows. At any point, presumably, the summoner may "forsake" the devil and turn back toward God. But when his final opportunity to do so does come, he chooses to go to hell with the devil rather than to let the widow keep her pan (III.1630-33).

All this is perfectly in keeping with the teaching of the friars in the fourteenth century, for the Franciscans had always been the champions of the theology of their brother William of Ockham. But the climate of opinion had so developed by the end of the century that this friar, though clearly preaching a doctrine of man's freedom—perhaps even of the summoner's capacity to return to God's favor through *meritum de congruo*—feels compelled to conclude his tale with an orthodox description of man's ultimate need for divine grace in the scheme of salvation:

> Waketh, and preyeth Jhesu for his grace
> So kepe us fro the temptour Sathanas.
> Herketh this word! beth war, as in this cas:
> "The leoun sit in his awayt alway
> To sle the innocent, if that he may."
> Disposeth ay youre hertes to withstonde
> The feend, that yow wolde make thral and bonde.
> He may nat tempte yow over youre myght,
> For Crist wol be youre champion and knyght. (III.1654-62)
This is probably as far as one might safely go toward affirming man's freedom in the stormy religious atmosphere of the time when Chaucer was writing this tale. Man has the power to resist temptation and sin, but he has this power because, as in *Piers Plowman*, Christ will be his knight. Finally, in terms of its position on grace and merit, the *Friar's Tale* seems quite appropriate to the character and religious order of its teller, thus adding another point in favor of the argument that there is a dramatic suitability here between tale and teller.

The *Summoner's Tale*, which follows immediately, also presents an interesting view of Chaucer's attitude toward grace and merit. The glib and avaricious friar in this story raises a point which was becoming increasingly disturbing to conscientious men in the later Middle Ages. The friar, in his attempt to extract as much money as he can from the people he is visiting, asks for offerings for masses, trentals, and other prayers that the community of friars would perform on behalf of the souls of others. Up to a point, this practice had long been endorsed in the Church, but many friars had begun to claim that their prayers and masses could control God's will and give the sinner on whose behalf they were said a guarantee of salvation:

The clennesse and the fastynge of us freres
Maketh that Crist accepteth oure prayeres.

(III.1833-34)
This is obviously incompatible with the fourteenth-century insistence on the potentia Dei absoluta; in fact, such a view of man's control over God was the principal reason why the potentia Dei absoluta became such a prominent issue in late medieval theology in the first place. Chaucer's position here and in the Pardoner's Prologue and Tale is quite characteristic of his time, as we saw in Piers Plowman (e.g., B.V.648-651), and would become increasingly common in the next century, finally becoming one of the central arguments of the Reformation.

If all we were interested in in this chapter were defining and illustrating Chaucer's place in the controversy over grace and merit, we might now turn to the Parson's Tale and conclude our discussion. But there is an extremely fascinating point that remains. Chaucer uses his views on grace and merit in a series of the Canterbury Tales, uniting them in a thematic "group" similar to his treatment of marriage. The tales involved--those by the Clerk, Franklin, Physician, and Second Nun--all present women in very adverse circumstances and all dramatize how these women respond to their suffering in ways that bear directly on the problem of grace and merit.

The Clerk's Tale has long been relegated by many Chaucer critics to that limbo where his least successful works have been consigned. Though there is some evidence that the tale is being taken more seriously in recent years,
most readers seem embarrassed by the submission of Grisilde to her maniacally overbearing husband Walter. The typical defense has been that the medieval mind would more readily have accepted the story and more enthusiastically have praised its heroine than we, with our modern attitudes toward female equality and the rights of wives in marriage. This is not a particularly strong argument, however, because even in the Middle Ages there was a strong tradition favoring the equality, sometimes even the superiority, of women, as we may see in such diverse works as *Pearl*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *The Book of the Duchess*, *The Parliament of Fowls*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The Knight’s Tale*, *The Franklin’s Tale*, *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*, and *The Second Nun’s Tale*. None of the heroines in these works exhibit the same behavior as Grisilde, though several of them are also subjected to great suffering under conditions of extreme adversity. Part of the problem in understanding the Clerk’s Tale is, I think, that we have taken it too literally. The case for its place in the "marriage group" presupposes a literal interpretation of Grisilde’s actions as the Clerk’s response to the Wife of Bath, but if the tale were viewed in another manner, as an allegory of a Christian’s ideal


22This was first proposed, as far as I know, by George Lyman Kittredge in his famous article, "Chaucer’s Discussion of Marriage," *MP*, IX (1911-12), 435-467.
behavior when faced with a conflict between God's will and man's desire, much of the difficulty for the modern reader evaporates.

The evidence of the poem itself points away from a literal interpretation. Toward the end, after Walter has finally satisfied himself that Grisilde is perfectly submissive, the narrator comments on the ironic difference between patient Grisilde and the world of everyday human beings:

This world is nat so strong, it is no nay,
As it hath been in olde tymes yoore,
And herkneth what this auctour seith therfoore.  

(IV.1139-41)

Grisilde is not a "real" wife who has been arduously, even cruelly, tested by her husband, a woman who bears cheerfully even the seeming murder of her children, allows Walter to displace her in favor of a young bride, and eagerly helps to make the arrangements for the wedding of his second wife. Such a Grisilde would be incomprehensible to "real" readers, medieval and modern alike. But Grisilde is, according to the Clerk, rather a female Job. Her significance transcends her circumstances: she is more than just the suffering wife of Walter; Grisilde is the type of the Christian struggling with the problem of evil and finding meaning in her world by submitting patiently to the potentia Dei ordinata. These are, I realize, strong claims for Grisilde, but it is Chaucer himself who first invites the comparison with Job:
This reference to Job does not, of course, make Grisilde out to be nothing more than a stylized personification of "humblesse;" rather it indicates the theological dimensions of her literal actions and renders them meaningful. For if we cannot sympathize with a wife who lets her husband badly mistreat her, we can respond to her, as Christians, in terms of the abstract virtues that she represents. In case we were in doubt as to what these virtues are, they are made quite explicit at the end of the tale:

This storie is seyd, nat for that wyves sholde Folwen Grisilde as in humylitee, For it were inportable, though they would; But for that every wight, in his degree, Sholde be constant in adversitee As was Grisilde; therfore Petrak writeth This storie, which with heigh stile he enditeth.

For, sith a womman was so pacient Unto a mortal man, wel moore us oghte Receyven al in gree that God us sent; For greet skile is, he preeve that he wroghte. But he ne tempteth no man that he boghte, As seith Seint Jame, if ye his pistol rede; He preeveth folk al day, it is no drede,

And suffreth us, as for oure excercise, With sharpe scourges of adversitee Ful ofte to be bete in sondry wise; Nat for to knowe oure wyl, for certes he, Er we were born, knew al oure freletee; And for oure beste is al his gouvernaunce. Lat us thanne lyve in vertuous suffraunce.
According to divine providence, including God's eternal foreknowledge of how she would act, Grisilde is tempted to rebel against the "sharpe scourges of adversitee." In submitting to her husband, however, she is ultimately submitting to the potentia Dei ordinata, which is responsible for her "exercise." Walter is, perhaps unknowingly, the agent of providence in proving the moral heroism of his wife. Still, we are reminded several times that such "humblesse" is not ordinarily possible for women to achieve by their own merit (de conatu), but only through a special gift of grace that gives them the capacity for such meritum de condigno (e.g., IV.206-207, 395, 821-822). In this perspective, then, Grisilde no longer appears as a static, two-dimensional, unbelievable character for whom we must make awkward apologies. She now emerges as a potent moral force, idealized in her but present in the rest of us in some degree, through which Chaucer allegorizes his doctrine of providence and freedom, grace and merit.

In the Franklin's Tale, Dorigen behaves quite differently than Grisilde. Both are similar in being good wives, but as a "heathen" (V.1293) Dorigen does not have the same grace as Grisilde to carry her through her suffering. Dorigen, too, is faced with evil. Her husband has gone to sea, and as she looks at the sharp rocks along the coast she fears that his ship will be lost and he drowned:
Dorigen is very much troubled by the problem raised by divine providence, for this seems to make God responsible for evil. She is unwilling, or perhaps unable, to resign herself to the potentia Dei ordinata with the calm and resolute faith of Grisilde. Dorigen does not want to leave everything to God; she longs to exert some control over the direction of her own destiny, even if this may be at odds
with eternal providence. Accordingly, in her speech quoted above, in her bargain with Aurelius (V.989-998), and finally in her brooding over suicide as the only way out of her predicament (V.1355-1456), she judges experience by her own needs and desires without ever rising, as Grisilde did, to a higher moral vantage point from which her petty, though human, selfishness would appear irrelevant. She does know something of the laws of nature, enough at least to realize that Aurelius has somehow altered natural law by making the rocks "disappear" (V.1345), but she has not moved beyond mere scientia to the Christian virtue of sapientia, which flows from sanctifying grace (gratia gratum faciens). For as Augustine taught, in a doctrine that shaped much of medieval thought, empirical knowledge is worthless unless a man has the wisdom, through grace, to understand the ultimate significance of the data being considered.\(^2\) Put another way, this means that even a good person like Dorigen may learn a great deal about the world about her, but without the wisdom of Christian faith what she knows may be confusing, disconnected, and frustrating. It is this distinction, I think, that finally separates Dorigen from Grisilde in Chaucer's overall view of man's relation to God. Unlike Grisilde, Dorigen may not merit (de congruo) the

\(^{23}\)De Trinitate, 12.15.25.
special grace of divine wisdom; this grace is reserved for those who have been freely elected by God and have responded with the "humblesse," idealized in the Clerk's Tale, which constitutes *meritum de condigno*.

On the other hand, Chaucer does not make of "humblesse" a merely passive resignation to fate. There is no real virtue where virtue has been untried, but similarly there is no virtue in someone who is not free to make moral decisions or refuses to take a responsible role when faced with temptation. Grisilde and Dorigen, for better and worse, do function as moral agents with definite values and the courage to try to choose what they think is right. But what about Virginia in the Physician's Tale? She is virtuous in the way she has led her life up to the time of the story (VI.105-117), but she does not appear to take a real part in the decision to sacrifice her rather than let her fall into the hands of Apius. When her father announces his decision, she simply asks,

"Goode fader, shal I dye? Is ther no grace, is ther no remedye?"

(VI.235-236)

And when he replies that there is no other remedy but to kill her, she simply requests a few minutes to grieve and then submits herself to his will:

"Blissed be God, that I shal dye a mayde! Yif me my deeth, er that I have a shame; Dooth with youre wyl, a Goddes name!"

(VI.248-250)
It is important to observe here that she does her father's will, not her own, because this clearly sets Virginia apart from Grisilde and Dorigen. Further, there is a curious inconsistency in the morality in the tale. The narrator concludes with the following comment on the villains:

\[
\text{Heere may men seen how synne hath his merite.}
\]
\[
\text{Beth war, for no man woot whom God wol smyte}
\]
\[
\text{In no degree, ne in which manere wyse}
\]
\[
\text{The worm of conscience may agryse}
\]
\[
\text{Of wikked lyf, though it so pryvee be}
\]
\[
\text{That no man woot therof but God and he.}
\]
\[
\text{For be he lewed man, or ellis lered,}
\]
\[
\text{He noot how soone that he shal been afered.}
\]
\[
\text{Therefore I rede yow this consell take:}
\]
\[
\text{Forsaketh synne, er synne yow forsake.}
\]

(VI.277-286)

This is conventional enough as an affirmation of man's ability to avoid sin by resolute use of his free will. What does seem odd, however, is that Chaucer makes such an affirmation at the end of a poem which portrays the almost total passivity of Virginia. Oddly, too, Chaucer never praises her as a Christian, even though her allusion to Jephthah's daughter would have been impossible for a pagan Roman (VI.240), and in spite of the fact that her speech quoted above (VI.248-250) appears explicitly Christian. Perhaps Chaucer avoids elevating her to the status of a virgin martyr because of the dubious morality of her sacrifice. While the Church has always cherished her martyrs, no orthodox thinker has ever condoned, or even allowed, suicide as a legitimate means of avoiding sin. Virginia tries to give her sacrifice validity by drawing a parallel between herself
and Jephthah's daughter, but this does not really absolve her because the Church Fathers sternly condemned Jephthah's action as thoughtless, irresponsible, and seriously sinful. So, finally, we are faced by Virginia, who has, like other Chaucerian heroines, been thrust into severely trying circumstances by divine providence, has the capacity as a Christian to face her trial courageously, as pointed out in the conclusion to the tale, and passively cooperates in her own voluntary death. It is impossible to say that Virginia achieves *meritum de condigno*, nor does Chaucer or his narrator claim that she does. As a consequence, we may be left dissatisfied with this tale, for which we need attempt no apology, because of its sterile characterization and muddled morality.

The *Second Nun's Tale* is another attempt to portray a virtuous Christian woman beset with the cruelties of living in pagan Rome, and here the moral vision of the *Canterbury Tales* once again clears. The story itself is quite unremarkable as an example of the medieval genre of a saint's life. Cecile, we learn early in the tale, is "fulfild of Goddes yifte" (VIII.275), and this is what gives her the power she has to convert her husband and his brother so easily. Later, when she is faced with a choice between renouncing her faith or embracing martyrdom, she joyfully

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accepts her death and even preaches to her oppressors a sermon describing their idolatry of false gods:

"Ther lakketh no thyng to thyne outter yfin
That thou n'art blynd; for thyng that we seen alle
That it is stoon,—that men may wel espyen,—
That ilke stoon a god thow wolt it calle.
I rede thee, lat thyh hand upon it falle,
And taste it wel, and stoon thou shalt it fynde.
Syn that thou seest nat with thyne eyen blynde.

"It is a shame that the peple shal
So scorne thee, and laughe at thy folye;
For communly men woot it wel overal
That myghty God is in his hevenes hye;
And thiese ymages, wel thou mayst espye,
To thee ne to hemself mowen noght profite,
For in effect they been nat worth a myte."

(VIII.498-511)

Like Dorigen, these pagans cannot pierce beyond empirical knowledge to apprehend the reality of God through Christian wisdom. Cecile does, of course, have this grace, and the grace also to face horrible torture and eventual death with extraordinary courage. This is evidently a special gift from God, as we see in his suspension of natural law, de potentia Dei absoluta, in order to preserve her from the flames (VIII.519-522). After her death, Pope Urban officially recognizes her special favor from God, an implicit recognition that her merita de condigno were sufficient to earn her salvation, by elevating her to the rank of a saint and erecting a church in her honor (VIII.547-553). What emerges from this tale of a great virgin martyr, then, is what Chaucer seems to have been describing in the Clerk's Tale, the Franklin's Tale, and, less successfully, the
Physician’s Tale. Man exists under the ultimate governance of divine providence, but from a Christian point of view he has both the freedom and the responsibility to do his best, with the grace that God grants him, to avoid sin and perform works of positive merit. Grisilde and Cecile thus represent the ideal response to God’s will, while Dorigen wilfully tries to take things into her own hands, and Virginia is so blankly passive that she becomes an accomplice in her own slaughter.

Finally, nonetheless, we must come to the Parson’s Tale for Chaucer’s clearest, most definitive statement about the problem of grace and merit. Man has used his natural powers to rebel against God, the Parson tells us, and this is why no man may redeem himself unless he is first sacramentally united with Christ (X.260-282). This presupposes that fallen man is not capable of *meritum de condigno* without prevenient grace:

And heerof seith Seint Peter: "Ther is noon oother name under hevene that is yeve to any man, by which a man may be saved, but onely Jhesus."

*Nazarenus* is as mucche for to seye as "florisshynge," in which a man shall hope that he that yeveth hym remissioun of synnes shall yeve hym eek grace wel for to do. For in the flour is hope of fruyt in tymse comynge, and in foryifnesse of synnes hope of grace wel for to do. / "I was atte dore of thyn herte," seith Jhesus, "and cleped for to entre. He that openeth to me shal have foryifnesse of synne./ I wol entre into hym by my grace, and soupe with hym," by the goode werkes that he shal doon, whiche werkes been the foode of God; "and he shal soupe with me," by the grete joye that I shal yeven hym.

(X.287-290)
God calls out to man in an invitation to share in the divine life (initium fidei), and the man who answers the call may merit (de congruo) the further grace (gratia gratum faciens) to perform good works, "which werkes been the foode of God" (meritum de condigno), earning his salvation by meeting the full standard of God's justice (ex debito iusticiae). But if a man should not accept the invitation of grace, or should fall back into sin after receiving it, then his good works that he performed both in and out of the state of sin are impotent to save him:

Soothly, the goode werkes that he hath lost, outher they been the goode werkes that he wroghte er he fel into deedly synne, or elles the goode werkes that he wroghte while he lay in synne./ Soothly, the goode werkes that he dide biforn that he fil in synne been al mortefied and astoned and dulled by the ofte synnyng./ The othere goode werkes, that he wroghte whil he lay in deedly synne, thei been outrely dede, as to the lyf perdurable in hevene.

(X.232-234)

This closes the possibility of a man achieving "lyf perdurable in hevene" through meritum de congruo alone, as many Ockhamists argued was possible, de potentia Dei absoluta. It is also interesting that Chaucer's Parson expresses complete confidence in the potentia Dei ordinata, in terms of which he may be sure of the doctrine of grace and merit that he is teaching. On the other side, however, Chaucer avoids polarizing the argument so that a denial that meritum de congruo may earn salvation contains also, as in Bradwardine, an implicit denial of the value of meritum de
congruo itself. For the Parson goes on to qualify his position:

For certes, in the werkynge of the deedly synne, ther is no trust to no good werk that we han doon bi forme; that is to seyn, as for to have therby the lyf perdurable in hevene. But natheles, the goode werkes quyken agayn, and comen agayn, and helpen, and availlen to have the lyf perdurable in hevene, when we han contricioun. But soothly, the goode werkes that men doon whil they been in deedly synne, for as mucche as they were doon in deedly synne, they may nevere quyke agayn. For certes, thyng that neuer hadde lyf may nevere quyken. And natheles, al be it that they ne availlé noght to han the lyf perdurable, yet availlé they to abegge of the payne of helle, or elles to geten temporal richesse; or elles that God wole the rather enlumyne and lightne the herte of the synful man to have repentaunce; and eek they availlé for to usen a man to doon goode werkes, that the feend have the lasse power of his sould. And thus the curteis Lord Jhesu Crist ne wole that no good werk be lost; for in somwhat it shal availlé.

(X,240-246)

Therefore, while a man's works, good though they might seem, are "dede" if performed in a state of sin, we also have the assurance that "no good werk be lost; for in somwhat it shal availlé." The Parson is defining an extremely subtle line here between two complementary positions: on one side, he wishes to stress the need for sanctifying grace to earn meritum de condigno, but on the other side he tries to give as much scope to meritum de congruo as possible without drifting into Ockhamism. He solves the problem very neatly by allowing that a sinner may, because Christ is so perfectly "curteis," hope that he will be rewarded in some way—perhaps by attracting further grace—though not in his
present state having the capacity to earn his salvation. In this way, Chaucer, through his Parson, does succeed in affirming the orthodox tradition on grace and merit, difficult though this was in the uncertain theological milieu of the fourteenth century.

Chaucer's interest in the controversy is, as we have seen, beyond any reasonable question. But at the same time, Chaucer was not one to enter upon the more dangerous and exciting speculations that we have found in the works of the Pearl-poet and Langland. This does not mean, of course, that he was a coward, lacking the moral fiber to choose between the conservatives and radicals of his time. Chaucer did not hesitate to point an accusing, often mocking, finger at people and institutions in his society that he found hypocritical or corrupt. In religious matters, he frequently satirized a venal friar or the downright criminality of summoners and pardoners. But he never seems, at least in his surviving poetry, to have seriously questioned the doctrinal foundations on which his faith was built. For him, as for many another in the moderate, orthodox late medieval Church, it was enough that God had revealed his instructions to man. And for Chaucer, as for FitzRalph before him, this was a source of confidence and security, not the bewildering, sometimes terrifying sense that one gets from reading the fourteenth-century theology of God's
potentia absoluta. Though the boldness of other thinkers was at times more exhilarating, it would be a mistake to conclude that Chaucer and those like him did not also contribute significantly to late medieval thought. Chaucer had no grandiose pretensions about his role, however, and he summed up his own aims in the modest words of his Parson:

And Jhesu, for his grace, wit me sende
To shewe yow the wey, in this viage,
Of thilke parfit glorious pilgrymage
That highte Jerusalem celestial.

(X.48-51)
Chapter V: Conclusions

After pursuing the argument of this dissertation through four chapters, I would now like to look back over the material covered and try to draw some general conclusions. Before doing so, however, there is a question of methodology that must be clarified. A great deal of facile nonsense chokes the learned journals every year with claims that one writer or "source" has in some important way "influenced" another writer's work, while little or no consideration is given to the implications that underlie such a judgment. It is necessary, of course, for the literary historian to construct patterns by which the relation between one poet and another may be understood, but we badly need criteria for deciding what is going to count as evidence of such a relation. It is not possible, I submit, to "prove" this kind of a connection by any conclusive logical demonstration. All inferences regarding causal connections are probable at best, even when clearly based on observable phenomena, and the risks increase when the subject matter under investigation does not submit to objective verification, as in virtually all literary studies.
This does not mean that because there are risks in literary history and criticism, we should therefore avoid these disciplines altogether, but rather that we should be aware of their tentative nature. In drawing my conclusions here, therefore, I make no claim that they are in any sense final, though their probability has, I think, been established by the evidence that we have seen.

The first chapter describes the origins and development of the late medieval controversy over grace and merit. Ultimately, this controversy is rooted not only in dogmatic theology, which is obvious enough, but just as importantly in the epistemological dispute of the time. For the nominalists, who insisted that only sense experience is "real" knowledge, and all attempts to move beyond it are only probable at best, theology as a rational, scientific discipline ceased to have value. According to this position, it is impossible to have any certain knowledge about God, except what he has revealed to man, and even this is open to question when the concept that God can overturn his ordinances by his absolute power is introduced, as it was in the fourteenth century. The result of this uncertainty, as we have seen, was that several thinkers began to argue that this very uncertainty left man with a free hand to try to appeal to God by his own merit, even without the help of sanctifying grace. All of this appeared ominously heretical to conservative followers of Augustine, however, because
they insisted that all truth is immutable since it emanates from the divine mind, that God would never violate his covenant with man, and that no truly meritorious actions could be performed by fallen man without the uplifting influence of prevenient grace. Heresy charges flew wildly through the overheated religious atmosphere of the time, and scarcely any important writer in England or on the Continent failed to get drawn into the conflict and to take some kind of stand, if only by implication. To be more specific, radicals such as Ockham, Buckingham, Adam of Woodham, and Uthred of Boldon were investigated by various ecclesiastical authorities for Pelagianism in supporting nominalist doctrines; conservatives such as Bradwardine and Wyclif went so far in the opposite direction that they bordered on heresy themselves; and those who wished to find some safe ground in the middle chose, like FitzRalph, to reiterate a safely traditional doctrine that added nothing original to the controversy, but did have the value of providing security in a rather insecure age.

Among the literary figures of the time, the *Pearl*-poet employed the question of grace and merit as the central doctrinal theme of *Pearl*. The debate between the dreamer, who has obvious Ockhamist tendencies, and his conservative *Pearl leads ultimately to the conclusion, convincing even the dreamer, that the "grace of God is gret inoghe." Human
merits cannot, without God's prevenient grace, make a direct claim on salvation; only God may choose who will be saved, as well as the nature and time of this salvation. Still, this doctrine of grace is complemented by the corresponding doctrine of merit in *Purity*, the next poem in the Cotton Nero A.x manuscript. For *Purity* dramatizes man's power to respond to God, to exercise his moral freedom to earn God's favor, as in the allegory of the clothes that the wedding guests must wear to the feast. But lest this seem to give too much prominence to man's own merits and his own natural powers, there is the reminder in *Patience* that man may misuse these powers, as Jonah did, and that God finally controls the destinies of all men through his absolute power, which transcends mere human understanding. This is in turn balanced by the final poem in the manuscript, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Here we learn that man's will is capable of choosing evil by virtue of its freedom, but it is not also capable of choosing the good without the assistance of divine grace. Gawain did, after all, commit serious sin with Lady Bercilak, even though he had sufficient grace to avoid his sin. God chose, however, to save Gawain from further sin, even though the knight did not merit such grace. Still, Gawain did cooperate with this grace and reinstate himself in God's favor through sacramental confession, though the resolution of the social "sin" of keeping the green girdle is reserved for the meeting between Gawain and Bercilak
at the end. Finally, St. Erkenwald presents a special difficulty in using the Trajan-Gregory legend, which ordinarily argued for *meritum de congruo* as a means to salvation (as in *Piers Plowman*) and rejecting such merit here in favor of a muddied doctrine of *meritum de condigno*. As an extremely conservative reaction against Ockhamist theology, St. Erkenwald represents still another alternative in the dispute over grace and merit.

*Piers Plowman*, on the other hand, brilliantly dramatizes the complicated moral struggle of Will, man's faculty for moral action, in his search for the means to salvation. In the *Visio*, Will learns how to gain Piers' pardon, and this first section of the poem serves to define the doctrinal problem, raising the basic questions that the *Vita* will try to answer. After the pardon scene, the search for Dowel is essentially an attempt to find out how a man may merit salvation, with *meritum de congruo* receiving the principal attention. In the section on Dobet, the search focuses more on *meritum de condigno*, though we are never permitted to forget the value of man's free response to divine grace. Finally, Dobest illustrates the best way for a Christian to earn salvation (*de condigno*) through his active participation in the Church, whose authority comes from God, *de potentia ordinata*. Taken as a whole, *Piers Plowman*, including its revisions, is an extended dialectic in which various positions on grace and merit are examined in an effort
to struggle toward some resolution to this difficult problem.

Not all poets reflect their interest in the controversy in the same way, however, and Chaucer takes a position similar to that of FitzRalph in reaffirming a safe, middle-of-the-road orthodoxy without contributing any of the exciting, sometimes dangerous, speculations of the Pearl-poet or Langland. For Chaucer, as seen most clearly in the Parson’s Tale, rejected both the extremes of Ockham and Bradwardine, though his doctrinal conservatism made him more sympathetic to Bradwardine than the radical “Modern Pelagians.” Again and again, in such diverse works as Troilus and Criseyde, the Knight’s Tale, the Man of Law’s Tale, the Clerk’s Tale, the Franklin’s Tale, and several other lesser poems, Chaucer stresses his confidence in God’s providence, the need for grace to merit salvation, and his assurance that God will not violate the covenant with man through potentia Dei absoluta. Although this may not have the flair or the boldness of some of the more radical medieval thinkers, we must remind ourselves that this, too, contributed significantly to the controversy over grace and merit. For Chaucer’s position was the one which was ultimately to prevail, at least in the Catholic theology of the Council of Trent, as well as in some of the more moderate Protestant systems such as that of Arminius. Without the many writers of Chaucer’s doctrinal persuasion, this moderate tradition might have died, drowned in the storm of religious strife in
the next two centuries.

It seems safe to conclude, therefore, that the debate over grace and merit went far beyond the academic halls of the universities or the monastic cloisters. Serious men of ideas, sensitive to the theological issues of their time, could not ignore this debate or fail to participate in it in some way. The Pearl-poet, Langland, and Chaucer were not professional theologians or university professors, but they became involved in this great issue nevertheless. Because they were poets, they chose to enter imaginatively into the various doctrinal positions and to dramatize the implications of each as it might be "lived" in the world of poetic fiction. In adopting this mode of expression, they lost some of the precision of scholastic logic, of course, but they also gained something that the schoolmen might not otherwise have achieved: these poets made it possible to feel the abstractions of theology, rather than merely think them. As a consequence, the Pearl-poet, Langland, and Chaucer made a great contribution to the serious thought of their time by articulating, each in his own way, a profound interest in the great debate over grace and merit.
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Appendix: A Glossary of Medieval Theological Terms

Since many of the terms used in late medieval theology once had clear, precise meanings that are no longer familiar except to specialists in doctrinal history, the following glossary has been added to facilitate understanding the technical terms used in this dissertation. I do not, however, claim to offer a comprehensive listing here, and readers who wish to pursue these and other definitions further should consult Heiko A. Oberman's "A Nominalistic Glossary" in his *Harvest of Medieval Theology* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), pp. 459-476, and the relevant articles in the *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*.

Acceptatio ("acceptation"): God's free act of electing a sinner (justification), who may then perform works that earn *meritum de condigno*.

C(h)aritas creat(a) (*created grace*): the Holy Spirit's gift of sanctifying, or justifying, grace.

C(h)aritas increata (*uncreated grace*): the Holy Spirit.

Ex deito iusticiae ("owed according to justice"): the principle that once God has freely bound himself, *de potestia Dei ordinata*, to accept a sinner, this man's good works will earn *meritum de condigno* according to the covenant to which God has bound himself.
Ex natura rei debita ("owed according to the nature of the act"): the principle that some acts, prompted initially by divine grace, have such intrinsic value that they will always earn merit of some sort, whether the agent is in a state of grace (cf. meritum de condigno) or not (cf. meritum de congruo).

Ex puris naturalibus ("through purely natural abilities"): the concept that man has the natural power to perform certain actions without any special gift of grace, though it never excludes the general influence of divine providence.

Gratia gratis data ("grace given gratuitously"): according to some writers, this is a state of grace that precedes and invites the sinner to move toward sanctifying grace through earning meritum de congruo, which will in turn be likely to persuade God to accept the sinner; other theologians use this term only to designate the gift by which God gives some the power to convert others to the faith; in both cases, this grace can coexist with sin in the soul of the recipient.

Gratia gratum faciens ("grace making one worthy of favor"): this is the state of sanctifying grace which makes a sinner fully acceptable to God and motivates the recipient to do good (de condigno) works; this grace cannot
exist together with sin in a man's soul.

Habitus gratiae ("habit of grace"): the state of sanctifying grace which justifies the sinner and makes him acceptable to God.

Initium fidei ("beginning of faith"): a term in Augustine's theology to designate the time when, after a long struggle, the sinner receives the gift of grace which impels him to embrace the Christian faith.

Meritum de condigno ("full merit"): merit which meets the full requirement of divine justice because it has been earned in a state of gratia gratum faciens.

Meritum de congruo ("partial merit"): merit which may attract God's generosity, even for a man in a state of sin, to the extent that God may choose to give the sinner a gift of justifying grace.

Potentia Dei absoluta ("the absolute power of God"): the omnipotence of God which, regardless of the ordained moral order, is completely free of all restrictions except the law of contradiction.

Potentia Dei ordinata ("the ordained power of God"): the power of God that is known to man through natural law and divine revelation, including the covenant with man to which God has bound himself.
VITA

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Date of Examination: July 19, 1968