

**‘Pilgrims Were They All?
Aspects of Pilgrimage and their Influence
on Old and Middle English Literature’**

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ABSTRACT

Pilgrims are so frequently encountered in the pages of medieval literature that their presence (and significance) can easily be overlooked. Moreover, the visiting of holy places formed such an integral part of medieval religion that critics often assume it to have constituted the primary meaning of pilgrimage in medieval thought. Pilgrimage is consequently treated as a given fact of medieval life, a pious exercise which some writers, more creative than the rest, chose to craft into an image of life and inward growth. The reality is more complex and fascinating by far. Pilgrimage, as understood by the medieval church, was not a monolithic concept but a mosaic of ideas which had evolved through the centuries, the product of both syncretism and heated debate.

In order to assess the use which individual authors made of the pilgrimage motif it is essential to establish the range of concepts which they inherited. This study therefore charts the development of Christian pilgrimage through the Bible, the writings of the Fathers, the influences of classical pagan religion and the impulses of popular devotion, before tracing the ways in which the resulting multiple meanings of pilgrimage were incorporated into the spirituality and literature of the Anglo-Saxons. It then re-examines the use of this multi-faceted image in selected Middle English texts. In the process several key perspectives emerge, chiefly the pre-eminence of the concept of life as pilgrimage and the existence within it of three strands which the Church has struggled to reconcile through the centuries: interior, moral and place pilgrimage. These perspectives, together with a clearer understanding of the manner in which different modes of pilgrimage combine and conflict with one another, offer new approaches to particular problems of interpretation, such as the role of the *Parson's Tale* and the apparently contradictory attitudes to pilgrimage manifested in *Piers Plowman*.

PREFACE

At nyght was come into that hostelrye
Wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye
Of sondry folk, by aventure yfalle
In felaweshipe, and *pilgrimes were they alle*.

(Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, Prologue, 23-27)¹

Her is non hoom, her nis but wildernesse:
Forth, pilgrim, forth! Forth beste, out of thy stal!
Know thy contree, look up, thank God of al;
Hold the heye wey and lat thy gost thee lede,
And trouthe thee shal delivere, it is no drede.

(Chaucer, *Balade de Bon Conseyl*, 17-21)

Pilgrims, historical and fictional, devout and fraudulent, are so frequently encountered in the pages of Middle English literature that it is easy to take their presence, and their significance, for granted. Moreover, the visiting of holy places, whether local shrines or the distant sites of Europe and the Holy Land, formed such an integral part of medieval religion² that critics often assume it to have constituted the primary meaning of pilgrimage in medieval thought.³ Pilgrimage is consequently treated as a given fact of medieval life, a straightforward, pious exercise which some writers, more creative than the rest, chose to craft into an image of life and inward growth. On closer examination,

¹ All quotations taken from the *Riverside Chaucer*.

² See Hall (1965) and Sumption (1975).

³ Howard (1980), 11; Thus James Simpson commenting on *Piers Plowman*, VI, 102-4, remarks: 'Departing' for pilgrimage is constituted by staying at home, and continuing to work; Langland has subverted the model of his narrative *by creating a new meaning* [my italics] for 'pilgrimage,' directly

however, it becomes clear that the reality is more complex, and more fascinating, by far.

The etymology of the terms *pilgrim* and *pilgrimage* indicates the breadth of meaning which these words have acquired over the centuries. The Latin *peregrinus* (*per*, through + *ager*, field, country, land) denoted a foreigner, an alien, one who is on a journey, and *peregrinatio* the state of being or living abroad. *Peregrinus*, however, was also used in the Vulgate translation of the Bible to render the Hebrew *gur* (sojourner), and the Greek *parepidemos* (temporary resident), both terms which carried an additional connotation signifying the special relationship of the people of God to the world around them. As Christian pilgrimage to holy places developed in the fourth century, so the term took on a third sense within Christian thought, describing a traveller with a particular religious goal. In Old English, *peregrinus* and *peregrinatio* were rendered by *elpeodig* and *elpeodignes*. The *Toronto Concordance to Old English* entry for *elpeodig* includes: 1. foreign, alien. 1.a.i. exiled (voluntarily, usu. as a religious duty). 1.a.vi. figurative, of man in the earthly world; alien, foreign. 2.a. foreigner, alien, one who is abroad. 2.a.iii. of man on earth probably in sense resident alien, foreign resident. *Elpeodignes* is defined as: 1. travel or residence abroad; exile (from one's own country); especially voluntary exile or pilgrimage. 2. Figurative of life on earth as time of exile from heaven.⁴

In the centuries following the Conquest, *elpeodig* was succeeded by *pilgrim* (from the Old French *pelegrin*).⁵ The *Middle English Dictionary* records a wide range of meanings for *pilgrim* including: 1.a. A person who travels to a holy place; 1.b. A traveller, a wayfarer; 2. An alien, a foreigner, a stranger, a sojourner; an exile for the

opposed to *the normal meaning* of the word, which involves leaving home' Simpson (1990), 71.

⁴ Healey and Venezky (1986-). See also Smithers (1957), 151.

⁵ See *OED*.

Christian faith; 3. *Fig.* A man or soul as an alien, a sojourner, traveller, or pilgrim; esp. one whose home or destination is heaven, etc.⁶ This semantic range needs to be carefully borne in mind in the examination of Middle English texts. Pilgrimage is often described both in terms of a literal journey and as a lifelong spiritual experience but it is by no means always immediately clear which is considered to be the metaphor and which the reality. Writers such as Chaucer, Langland, the *Pearl*-poet and Hilton reveal a range of attitudes to pilgrimage, which contain many variations and even apparent contradictions.

Pilgrimage is therefore a concept at once commonplace and curiously elusive and its use in medieval literature raises many questions. Chaucer's Parson and the Wife of Bath take the same road to Canterbury but are they in fact on the same journey? How does her experience of 'wanderynge by the weye' (*Gen. Prol.* 467) relate to his vision of 'parfit pilgrymage' (*Parson's Prol.* 50)? How radical is Langland's use of pilgrimage in *Piers Plowman*? What relationship does the pilgrimage of de Deguileville's Dreamer bear to his monastic calling? Could anchorites and mystics, physically confined but spiritually unfettered, be engaged in the most authentic pilgrimage of all?

The idea of journey was exploited by many medieval writers, offering as it did a framework within which characters could encounter new people and places, and explore not only new surroundings but also new levels of understanding and self-knowledge. A geographical journey, therefore, was frequently understood to represent, or at least run in parallel with, moral or spiritual progress. The use made of pilgrimage in particular, however, was the result of a unique interplay between theological principles, popular practice and authorial intent. Pilgrimage, as understood by the medieval church, was not a monolithic concept but a mosaic of ideas which had evolved through the Christian

⁶ *MED.*

centuries: the product of both syncretism and heated debate. Pilgrimage to holy places was by no means universally approved and was by some regarded as actually harmful to the spiritual life.⁷ It offered to medieval writers, therefore, an image familiar to all, yet capable of a wealth of differing interpretations. In order to assess the uses which they made of this image, it is necessary first to examine the spiritual inheritance which shaped their understanding. This approach, however, has been strangely lacking in medieval literary criticism. Much criticism has been based upon unquestioned assumptions about the medieval practice of pilgrimage to holy places,⁸ occasionally supplemented by insights from the discipline of social anthropology.⁹ There has been little or no attempt to examine the origins and development of the pilgrim motif or to understand why there are tensions to be observed between exponents of different modes of pilgrimage. Such theological and historical analysis is vital if literary criticism of such texts as the *Canterbury Tales* and *Piers Plowman* is to be soundly based and distortion of the evidence avoided.

The first objective of this study has therefore been to establish the different elements which comprise the mosaic which is medieval pilgrimage, beginning with an examination of the origins and early development of Christian pilgrimage. There are four chief elements to be considered in such a survey: the theology and practice of pilgrimage in the Old Testament, the emphasis on the pilgrimage of life revealed in the New Testament, the influence of pagan religion and the debates within the Early Church prompted by the rapid growth of the cult of the saints and the development of holy

⁷ Constable (1976) examines the practical and spiritual arguments against participation in pilgrimage which were put forward in the Middle Ages, many of which reflect earlier debates.

⁸ Critics have mainly depended on Sumption (1975) which though it contains much valuable information about place pilgrimage does not address the wider context of the multiple understandings of pilgrimage current in medieval spirituality.

⁹ See Chapter IX: I. A. below on the application of the work of Victor Turner to the *Canterbury Tales*.

places. Not only can these elements be observed interacting with one another; they can also be seen to exercise considerable influence on medieval writers. The creative force of Old Testament models of exile, wandering and sojourning can be clearly observed in Old and Middle English treatments of the stories of Adam, Cain and Satan, Abraham and the people of Israel.¹⁰ The same themes were foundational to the concept of life as pilgrimage which features strongly in the New Testament and patristic writings¹¹ and is subsequently explored in many medieval texts. What I term 'life pilgrimage' can be seen to comprise a detachment from worldly values,¹² a commitment to moral obedience¹³ and a heartfelt desire to reach the heavenly homeland, characteristics appropriate to those who know themselves to be strangers and pilgrims in the world. The city of Jerusalem, portrayed in the Psalms as the place where God dwelt and in the New Testament as the location of Christ's death and resurrection, is seen to be the antetype of the heavenly city of the Book of Revelation, where all those engaged in the pilgrimage of life will eventually find their true home.¹⁴

This emphasis on life as pilgrimage which dominated the teaching of the Church during the first three centuries of its existence was challenged in the fourth century, as the newly-converted Emperor Constantine and his mother Helena set about establishing Palestine as a Holy Land, with Jerusalem, the city formerly scorned by Christians,¹⁵ at its heart. The development of Christian holy places, together with the parallel (and closely-related)¹⁶ growth of the cult of relics, aroused considerable resistance as

¹⁰ See Chapter V.

¹¹ See Chapter II.

¹² See Hebrews 11

¹³ As advocated in I Peter 2.11.

¹⁴ See Chapter XI.

¹⁵ See Chapter III.

¹⁶ See Chapter IV.

profound theological questions were raised. If some places were considered especially holy, then other places must be less so. Could it really be claimed that an omnipresent God was more accessible in Jerusalem or Bethlehem than anywhere else?¹⁷ Was a journey to a holy place, what I term 'place pilgrimage,' a deeply-rewarding spiritual experience or a waste of time and money? Was the cult of the saints an aid to piety or a dangerous distraction from the worship of God? The questions were fundamental – and (a fact which is of prime importance for this study), they were in the final analysis incapable of resolution. There were, it seems, different kinds of spiritual journeys and few, if any, could reconcile their differing demands. These tensions, dating from the earliest days of Christian pilgrimage to holy places, are identical to those which are to be observed in Middle English literature. Moreover, I believe that there are particular parallels between these two contexts. Although the difficulties inherent in reconciling different understandings of pilgrimage never completely disappear during the intervening centuries, it is nevertheless fair to say that they assume a fresh vigour and relevance in England on the eve of the Reformation.¹⁸

A related development, which raised equally pertinent questions for the later Middle Ages, was the emergence of monasticism as a specialised form of the pilgrimage of life: the abandonment of worldly pleasures in order to seek the presence of God on earth and citizenship of the Jerusalem on high. The notion of the monastic calling as a form of voluntary exile is firmly stamped upon medieval literature.¹⁹ The early characteristics of the monastic movement, such as the desire to withdraw from this world in order to seek the next, the literal migration to the desert, which later became the spiritual inspiration for Celtic peregrini and the anchorites of medieval England, the emphasis on inner

¹⁷ See Chapter III. 2.

¹⁸ See Part III, Introduction on Lollard opposition to pilgrimage.

¹⁹ See Chapter X.

growth which characterised the solitaries and early coenobites of the Egyptian desert and Judean wilderness and later developed into fully-fledged mysticism – all these can be seen to undergird the spirituality of the English Church from the seventh century onwards. Yet, as with place pilgrimage, these forms of what I have designated ‘interior pilgrimage’ were not immune from controversy. Not only do Langland and Chaucer satirise the out-working of the monastic ideal in their own times but the development of lay piety in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries also calls into question the whole necessity of complete withdrawal from the world. Hilton’s *Mixed Life* (written c. 1370) seeks to combine attributes of the active and contemplative lives, and Margery Kempe, a would-be contemplative determined to stay on the move, exemplifies the tensions involved in seeking to combine interior and place-pilgrimage.

The second aim of this study has been to trace the manner in which these multiple interpretations of pilgrimage were incorporated into the spirituality of the Anglo-Saxon Church and to examine their influence upon Old English literature. It is broadly true to say that the two traditions of spirituality which shaped the English Church, the Celtic and the Roman, also represented two different modes of pilgrimage. Both were committed to moral and interior aspects of the pilgrimage of life; both practised forms of place pilgrimage. In the Celtic Church however, the practice of *peregrinatio pro amore dei* emphasised the *leaving* of one’s home and community, following the model of Abraham, who ‘went out, not knowing whither he went’ (Hebrews, 11.8). Place pilgrimage in the Roman Church was also an expression of voluntary (if often temporary) exile²⁰ but was more clearly linked with *going to* a particular place, often Rome itself and included a wider range of motives such as the acquisition of knowledge or relics. Despite the readiness with which both interpretations of place pilgrimage were adopted by the Anglo-Saxon Church, it remains true that the dominant theme in Old

²⁰ For example Benedict Biscop and Wilfrid. See Chapter VI.

English poetry and prose is that of life as pilgrimage. Working from the principle, derived from my study of biblical and patristic writings, that life pilgrimage is not a single idea but a cluster²¹ of related concepts, I have re-examined a number of Old English poems, setting them against the understandings of pilgrimage displayed in homilies, hagiographies and other texts produced in Anglo-Saxon England.

The third section of this study is devoted to examining the ways in which selected medieval texts employ concepts of pilgrimage. As in Old English literature, so in the writings of Middle English authors, the theme of the pilgrimage of life is surprisingly dominant. My survey of the historical and theological heritage of medieval writers indicates that within the general concept of life as pilgrimage there are three main strands:

- i. **Interior Pilgrimage**, which roughly corresponds to the Contemplative Life and includes monasticism, anchoritism, meditation and mysticism.
- ii. **Moral Pilgrimage**, which corresponds to the Active Life, manifesting itself in a life of daily obedience to God in the place of one's everyday calling and a commitment to avoid, in particular, the pitfalls of the Seven Deadly Sins.
- iii. **Place Pilgrimage**, which includes journeying to saints' shrines or other holy places to secure forgiveness for specific sins or more general indulgences, to seek healing and other material benefits, to learn and to express devotion.

There is also an observable oscillation between emphasis on a relationship with God

²¹ I am indebted to the work of Gardiner (1971) and Smithers (1957), in developing a clearer understanding of the pilgrimage concept. See Chapter I. C.

which is independent of place, and a desire to establish holy places where the presence of God may be experienced in a particular fashion. This process is discernible in both Jewish pilgrimage, as the Exodus experience is followed by the establishment of Jerusalem as the place where God dwells, and in Christian pilgrimage, as from the fourth century onwards an emphasis on being pilgrims and strangers in daily living is modified by the rapid growth of place pilgrimage. Neither of these shifts is absolute and a degree of fluidity remains throughout. What is significant for medieval literature is the tendency throughout the Christian centuries for the life pilgrimage model to be, at least in part, subverted by the practice of place pilgrimage, and the countervailing tendency for it to be strengthened by an emphasis on moral pilgrimage and interior pilgrimage. Thus, as has already been indicated, it is crucial that the varying importance attached by Middle English writers to these different models of pilgrimage should be assessed in the context of an *ongoing* pilgrimage debate. This study seeks to demonstrate that the tensions and contradictions apparent in the use of the pilgrimage motif in Middle English literature are not primarily attributable to the idiosyncrasy, heterodoxy or originality of individual writers²² but to factors which have always threatened the precarious harmony between moral, interior and place pilgrimage.²³ Recognition of this fact, together with a clearer understanding of the manner in which these different modes of pilgrimage both combine and conflict with one another, offers the opportunity to reassess the use of the pilgrimage motif in key Middle English texts and to suggest new approaches to particular problems of interpretation, such as the relevance of the *Parson's Tale* and the apparently contradictory attitudes to pilgrimage manifested in *Piers Plowman*. Since it is clearly impossible within the scope of this thesis to cover all the texts which could be relevant to a survey of this kind, I have therefore selected for discussion texts which are central to the canon, which date from the late-fourteenth and

²² Simpson (1990).

²³ See Chapter III, Conclusion.

early-fifteenth centuries, which were originally written in English²⁴ and which contain substantial unresolved problems connected with the image of pilgrimage.²⁵ These texts are *Piers Plowman*, the *Canterbury Tales*, *Pearl*, a selection of anchoritic and mystical writings and the *Book of Margery Kempe*. Since each of these texts in itself represents a vast field of scholarly endeavour I have further refined my task by focusing on a number of areas in which the historical and theological perspectives which I have identified offer a key to interpretation and elucidation. These areas are the tensions between life pilgrimage and place pilgrimage and in particular the conflict between stability and mobility, the deeply-rooted connection between life pilgrimage, the sacrament of Penance and the Seven Deadly Sins, the relationship between person and place, the positive and negative symbolism of the desert,²⁶ and the idea of pilgrimage as a series of concentric or interlocking circles holding together moral pilgrimage, interior pilgrimage and place pilgrimage within the overarching image of the pilgrimage of life. The final chapter offers an overview of the use of literal and metaphorical pilgrimage within Middle English literature through a detailed examination of one of its most frequently-occurring motifs: the journey to Jerusalem. Whilst this approach clearly leaves vast areas of territory uncharted, I believe it is essential to take a broad view of the pilgrimage motif in medieval literature if its major elements are to be understood and its complexity and richness are to be appreciated.

²⁴ This necessarily excludes devoting more than passing attention to the *Pilgrimage of the Lyfe of the Manhode*, the anonymous fifteenth-century Middle English prose translation of de Deguileville's *Le Pèlerinage de la vie humaine*.

²⁵ I have for these reasons largely ignored the twelfth-century Latin pilgrim plays which have been treated at length by Gardiner (1971).

²⁶ In the introduction to his study of the wilderness in Christian thought, George Williams states: 'We shall find that in the positive sense the wilderness or desert will be interpreted variously as a place of protection, a place of contemplative retreat ... We shall find that in its negative sense the wilderness will be interpreted as the world of the unredeemed, as the wasteland.' Williams (1962), 5.

Acknowledgements

This study has much in common with its theme. Embarking upon a project of such magnitude has frequently evoked images of Bunyan's most famous work and I am deeply grateful to all who have helped and encouraged this pilgrim on her way.

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Like Bunyan's pilgrims, I have not had to travel alone. I have instead been sustained by the love, prayers and practical support of my friends and family. In particular I wish to acknowledge the many contributions made by my mother, the patient (even cheerful) tolerance with which Luke and Ben have borne their mother's preoccupation with the Middle Ages, and the loving companionship and constant encouragement of my husband Stuart, my fellow pilgrim through life.

PART I

THE ORIGINS AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN PILGRIMAGE

The Law of Moses required all who desired to be holy to speed from all directions to one definite place; but, I, giving freedom to all, teach men not to look for God in a corner of the earth, nor in mountains, nor in temples made with hands, but that each should worship and adore him at home.

Eusebius (d. c. 342)¹

O you who fear the Lord, praise Him in the places where you now are. Change of place does not effect any drawing nearer unto God.

Gregory of Nyssa (c. 330-c. 395)²

Others only hear but we both see and touch.

Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 320-?386)³

What are God's first words to Abraham? "Get thee out of thy country and from

¹ *Dem. Ev.* 1.6.40, cited Walker (1990), 73. The quotations with which this section opens illustrate the shift in Christian attitudes towards place pilgrimage which (together with the resulting controversy) emerges during the fourth century AD. Due to limitations of space, quotations from patristic writers are given in translation only unless the vocabulary and phrasing of the original are of particular significance.

² Gregory of Nyssa, *Epistle* 2.

³ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.* 13.22. Cyril, as Bishop of Jerusalem, had a vested interest in the promotion of the idea of the 'Holy City.' See Walker (1990).

thy kindred unto a land that I will show thee” ... Can we suppose a Christian's education complete who has not visited the Christian Athens? ... The Briton ‘sundered from our world,’ no sooner makes progress in religion than he leaves the setting sun in quest of a spot [Jerusalem] of which he knows only through Scripture and common report.

Jerome (330/347-420)⁴

Introduction: the evolution of pilgrimage

The history of Christian pilgrimage is in many ways akin to the life-story of a great river; its primary source can be identified with comparative ease but that is very far from being the whole story. There are other smaller tributaries to be identified and the very passage of the river through different types of terrain results in the collection and subsequent deposition of local material along the way. Neither the river nor the countryside through which it passes remains the same. In the same way Christian pilgrimage owes its character not only to the writings of the Old and New Testament but also to the practice of polytheistic religions, the development of the Christian cult of the saints, the deliberate strategy of a converted Roman Emperor and the instinctive desire of many unsophisticated believers to feel themselves literally ‘in touch’ with God and His saints.

Inevitably this process of growth and syncretism produced a number of built-in tensions with which Christian thinkers continued to grapple over the centuries, as the church spread and encountered fresh cultures. As the quotations with which this section opens illustrate, the fourth century AD saw the emergence of conflicting attitudes towards the practice of place pilgrimage, attitudes which the Church did not find easy to reconcile.

⁴ Jerome, *Letter* 46. 2, 9, 10.

Was pilgrimage to be understood as a metaphor for the whole of life, an inward spiritual journey or a literal visit to a geographical site, whether near or far away? Were there in fact 'holy places', where particular blessings were to be obtained, or was God equally accessible to believers wherever they might be? Was the actual process of travelling meritorious, unnecessary, or even dangerous? Would a visit to the earthly Jerusalem be of value in gaining access to the heavenly city? Should Christians seek material benefits such as physical healing from the intervention of the saints or fix their eyes solely upon eternal rewards, despising earthly suffering?

Such questions surface again and again in the writings of theologians and in attempts to reform and guide popular religion. Most importantly for the purposes of this study, they were still largely unresolved by the period which saw the production of the *Ancrene Wisse*, the writings of the mystics, *Piers Plowman*, the *Canterbury Tales* and *Pearl*. Pilgrimage to holy places was one of the practices attacked by the followers of John Wyclif,⁵ precisely because its multi-faceted nature made it so vulnerable to misinterpretation and abuse. An examination of the theological and historical development of pilgrimage is therefore vital, because it is in the complex origins of pilgrimage that an explanation of the rich diversity and frequent contradictions observable in the use of the pilgrimage motif in Middle English literature is to be found.

⁵ See Chapters VIII and IX.

CHAPTER I

THE THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF PILGRIMAGE IN THE BIBLE

*Du scealt oðerne eðel secean,
wynleasran wic, and on wræc hweorfan
nacod niedwædla, neorxnawanges
dugeðum bedæled* (Genesis, 927-30)⁶

I have made my vows to the Lord ... leaving, like Abraham, my kinsfolk and my father's house. (Eddius Stephanus, *Life of Wilfrid*)⁷

Bi þis wilderness wende ure lauerdes folc as exode teleð toward
te eadii lond of ierusalem ... Ant 3e mine leoue sustrenn wendeð
bi þe ilke wei toward te hehe ierusalem (Ancrene Wisse, IV)⁸

1. THE OLD TESTAMENT – EXILE AND PROMISED LAND

The biblical view of the history of mankind, inherited⁹ by medieval writers and

⁶ *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* (my italics).

⁷ *Life of Wilfrid*, Chapter 4 in *Age of Bede*.

⁸ *Ancrene Wisse* (ed. Tolkien), 101/16-18.

⁹ Since the object of this study is to examine the influence of biblical ideas on Middle English literature it is not my intention to discuss issues which properly belong to Old Testament scholarship, such as the literary origins of the text. My concern is with the biblical text as transmitted to the medieval church; quotations from the Bible are therefore taken from the Vulgate and the Douay

theologians, is essentially a tale of tragic loss and renewed hope, of dispossession and the quest for restoration. The Old Testament provides a world-view which not only explains the present plight of humanity but offers the possibility of change. A clear set of causal relationships is established through the individual narratives contained within the Book of Genesis: disobedience and rebellion result in exile from God's presence and exposure to the rigours of a fallen world: repentance and submission to God's will are the only route to restoration. This pattern is taken up and expanded in the New Testament where participation in the salvation won by Christ on the Cross is often modelled as a journey,¹⁰ a process of following the Saviour through an alien and often hostile world in an attitude of constant penitence and obedience. The Bible, therefore, can be seen to promote a general understanding of life as exile and salvation as journey. In addition, the Bible, as received by the medieval Church, offered a complex network of internal referencing and allegorical interpretation as Old Testament characters and events were given new significance within the doctrinal framework of the New Covenant. Through this process and the subsequent labours of patristic and medieval commentators, a number of key figures and events in both the Old and New Testaments were identified as particularly striking examples of rebellion and obedience. The prominence given to their individual stories reinforced the general message of the scriptures as they were presented as warnings and examples for those who came after them. It is some of these figures and events, those of particular relevance to medieval English texts, which I wish to examine.

translation, as these are closest to the texts with which medieval writers would have been familiar.

¹⁰ For example John 14:6: 'Ego sum via (I am the Way)' and Mark 8:34: 'Si quis vult post me sequi deneget se ipsum et tollat crucem suam et sequatur me (If any man will follow me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me).'

A. Satan

In medieval chronology, though not in the biblical narrative,¹¹ the first story is that of Lucifer or Satan, whose fall from grace was attributed to his excessive pride in his God-given beauty and his overweening ambition to supplant God himself:

quomodo cecidisti de caelo lucifer qui mane oriebaris...
qui dicebas in corde tuo
in caelum conscendam super astra Dei exaltabo solium meum...
ero similis Altissimo
verumtamen ad infernum detraheris in profundum laci

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, who didst rise in the morning?
And thou saidst in thy heart: I will ascend into heaven.
I will exalt my throne above the stars of God...
I will be like the most High...
But yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, into the depth of the pit.

(Isaiah 14:12, 13, 14, 15)

Satan's expulsion from heaven was viewed by medieval writers not only as a supreme example of the horrors of exile but as an event which loosed a malignant, vengeful force upon the world, intent upon ensuring that humankind should share the same miserable plight.¹²

¹¹ The story of Lucifer and the fallen angels was pieced together by the Fathers of the Church from scattered biblical allusions (including Isaiah 14:12-15 and Revelation 12:7-9)). Lucifer ('lightbearer') became Satan ('adversary').

¹² See Chapter V: 1. A. i.

B. Adam and Eve

In the early chapters of the Book of Genesis the story of Creation is followed all too swiftly by the account of the Fall. Adam and Eve, the parents of the human race, having been persuaded to defy God's command by the treacherous serpent, forfeit the joys of the earthly Paradise and are sent into exile. Their descendants are shown inheriting a world still beautiful but now haunted by the inevitability of death and decay.

maledicta terra in opere tuo...
spinas et tribulos germinabit tibi...
in sudore vultus tui vesceris pane donec
revertaris in terram de qua sumptus es ...
emisit eum Dominus Deus de paradiso voluptatis...
eiecitque Adam et conlocavit ante paradism voluptatis
cherubin et flammeum gladium atque versatilem
ad custodiendam viam ligni vitae

Cursed is the earth in thy work ...
Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee...
In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread till
thou return to the earth out of which thou wast taken...
And the Lord God sent him out of the Paradise of pleasure...
And he cast out Adam; and placed before the paradise of pleasure
Cherubims, and a flaming sword, turning every way,
to keep the way of the tree of life.

(Genesis 3:17, 18, 19, 23, 24)

This image of exile from the presence of God and deprivation of eternal life is one of

the most powerful in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, overshadowing the whole history of humankind and forming the backdrop to the drama of redemption and the long journey towards restoration.¹³ Medieval tradition asserted the continued existence of the Earthly Paradise¹⁴ but even if it were to be discovered, the way was known to be barred: there could be no return for the descendants of Adam, tainted as they were by original sin. Their hope lay elsewhere.

C. Cain

The second act of the human tragedy played out in these early chapters of Genesis makes it clear that not only does the sin of Adam and Eve distance human beings from God but that the sinful tendencies which their offspring inherit also distance human beings from one another.¹⁵ Cain's murder of Abel produces a new punishment which could be described as 'internal exile.' Human beings as a group have been exiled from the presence of God; now Cain and others who commit particularly heinous crimes¹⁶ are to suffer exile within exile, banished from home and kindred.

vagus et profugus eris super terram

a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be upon the earth

(Genesis 4:12)

¹³ See Ladner (1967) and Gardiner (1971).

¹⁴ See Pearsall and Salter (1973), Chapter III and Chapter X on *Pearl* below.

¹⁵ 'When the first couple eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they become, not divine as the serpent had promised, but truly human. True humanity from that point on is characterized by an alienation from other humans, from the natural world and from God.' Gunn and Fewell (1993), 110.

¹⁶ It is significant that in the Old English poem *Beowulf* Grendel is identified as belonging to the seed of Cain. See Chapter V: 1. A. i.

The stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel are foundational to the perceived spiritual dilemma which runs throughout the biblical narrative. Humankind's alienation from God results in a dual tension; human beings are in the world but not of it; condemned to live in an environment which is not their true home. Cut off from God as a result of sin, man is depicted as doubly an alien and a stranger:¹⁷ at home neither in a fallen world

Incola ego sum in terra non abscondas a me mandata tua.

I am a sojourner on the earth: hide not thy commandments from me.

(Psalm 118:18)

nor in the company of God:

Peregrini enim sumus coram te et advenae sicut omnes patres nostri

For we are sojourners before thee, and strangers as were all our fathers.

(1 Chronicles 29:15)

Choices constantly face those who would restore their relationship with God: obedience means not only a rejection of sin but also a willingness to detach oneself from earthly ties. This requirement for a radical shift in allegiance and perspective is

¹⁷ This dual alienation is echoed in 2 Corinthians 5:6 in which the apostle Paul declares that 'while we are present in the body we are *absent from the Lord*, a phrase which the Vulgate renders as *peregrinamur a Domino*. An Old English homily comments: 'Cwæð se apostel be ðan, sanctus Paul: Dum sumus in corpore peregrinamur a Domino, swa lange swa we bioð an þyssum deaðlicum life 7 on þyssum mennisc[c]am gecynde swa lange we bioð elðeodige fram ussum dryhtne.' *Vercelli Homilies*, XIV. 23-26.

exemplified in the stories of Abraham and the exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt.¹⁸

D. Abraham the sojourner¹⁹

Significantly, the Old Testament narrative, in the form familiar to medieval writers, identifies the first step towards the establishment of a distinctive people of God with a command to undertake a journey into the unknown with God. The book of Genesis states that Abraham, a figure of profound importance to both Jews and Christians, was called to leave his home and go out in search of another land, promised by God but as yet unspecified.

dixit autem Dominus ad Abram
egredere de terra tua et de cognatione tua ...
in terram quam monstrabo tibi

And the Lord said to Abram:
Go forth out of thy country, and from thy kindred,

¹⁸ These motifs occur often in Old and Middle English literature. See for example the *Old English Exodus* (Chapter V below), the use of Abraham as an example by exponents of both Celtic and Roman forms of place pilgrimage (Chapter VI below), and the journey to the Promised Land as a model of the anchoritic life in *Ancrene Wisse* (Chapter X below).

¹⁹ The identification of Abraham as a 'sojourner' in both the Old and New Testaments supplies an important element in the subsequent understanding of pilgrimage. The Hebrew *gur*, translated in the New Testament as πάροικος, resident alien, carries the connotation of a foreigner, someone making a stay in a country not his own; whereas 'nomad' is used of those who move from place to place, usually within a prescribed area, in search of pasture. See Barclay (1964), 284

and come into the land which I shall shew thee.²⁰

(Genesis 12:1)

Abraham's semi-nomadic way of life as presented in Genesis, is literally that of a sojourner (Hebrew *gur*), as he moves from place to place to pasture his flocks. The Promised Land, which it is said will stretch 'from the river of Egypt even to the great river Euphrates' (Genesis 15:18), is subsequently described as '*terram peregrinationis tuae*, the land of your sojournment' (Genesis 17:8). Moving around the land which his descendants will one day colonise, Abraham remains a stranger rather than a conqueror. When, following the death of Sarah at Hebron, he tells the Hittites:

Advena sum et peregrinus²¹ apud vos.

I am an alien and stranger among you.

(Genesis 23:4)

he is stating a simple fact. Yet, at a spiritual level, Abraham is also a prototype pilgrim who has been willing to leave his home in search of the place to which God is calling him and to sacrifice short-term benefits for long-term rewards. This is the way in which Abraham's actions were later interpreted by the Christian Church. St John Chrysostom (c. 347-407) in his *Homilies on Genesis*, commented:

Let us in turn imitate this and go forth from the affairs of the present life with enthusiasm and relish, and travel to heaven. It is possible, you see, if we are

²⁰ Henry Carse comments: 'It is interesting that the Promised Land ... is not designated as 'holy' in Genesis. For Abraham, the sanctity of the way lies in the hearing and in the response of the traveler.' Carse (1994), 17.

²¹ LXX renders this πάροικος και παρεπιδημος, terms picked up again by the New Testament writers. See section 2.C below.

willing, to take the road for that goal while still living here when we perform deeds worthy of heaven,²² when we are not caught up in the affairs of the world, when instead of chasing after the empty glory of this life we rather scorn it and devote ourselves to longing after that true and everlasting glory.²³

Abraham's daily journeying with God, together with his willingness to sacrifice his only son,²⁴ made him an exemplar of faith and obedience not only for Jews but also for Christians. His life story, together with that of the other patriarchs, was crafted by New Testament and patristic writers into a continuing metaphor of the spiritual life. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in a passage fundamental to the ongoing development of the pilgrimage motif, interprets the experience of these Old Testament figures as models for all Christians to follow:

fide qui vocatur Abraham
oboedivit in locum exire quem accepturus erat in hereditatem
et exiit nesciens quo iret...
iuxta fidem defuncti sunt omnes isti non acceptos repromissionibus
sed a longe eas aspicientes et saluntantes
et confitentes quia peregrini et hospites sunt supra terram

By faith he that is called Abraham,
obeyed to go out into a place which he was to receive for an inheritance:
and he went out not knowing whither he went.

²² Chrysostom makes it clear that living as a citizen of heaven has strong overtones of moral obedience for those engaged in the pilgrimage of life, a theme developed by both Langland and Chaucer. See Chapter IX: 2.A. below.

²³ Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 37.14.

²⁴ Genesis 22.

All these died according to faith, not having received the promises,
but beholding them afar off and saluting them
and confessing that they are pilgrims and strangers on the earth.

(Hebrews 11:8,13)

Henry Carse points out that this passage, 'the most explicit paeon to Abraham's faith in the Christian scriptures,'

puts all the emphasis on the original journey-in-faith of Abraham... Neither [the testing of Abraham through the sacrifice of Isaac] nor circumcision ... is the reason for God's blessing on the People of Abraham. That blessing comes precisely because 'they acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on earth ... seeking a homeland' ... In short, Abraham's descendants, both physical and spiritual, are seen primarily as a Pilgrim People; this is the essence of their faith.²⁵

Abraham, the epitome of faith, appears frequently in Middle English texts such as *Piers Plowman*²⁶ and the religious drama.²⁷ Abraham the prototype pilgrim is evoked by representatives of both Roman and Celtic spirituality to justify their particular forms of place pilgrimage. Thus Eddius Stephanus, biographer of St Wilfrid (634-709), a powerful figure within the developing English Church, writes that the saint refused to be deflected from a pilgrimage to Rome, declaring:

²⁵ Carse (1994), 18-9.

²⁶ Compare *Piers Plowman*: 'thanne mette I with a man ...and Abraham he highte' ... "I am Feith," quod that freke' (XVI. 172, 173, 176).

²⁷ See for example the Brome *Sacrifice of Isaac* and the Chester *Abraham and Isaac*.

I have made my vows to the Lord ... leaving, like Abraham, my kinsfolk and my father's house to visit the Apostolic See²⁸

while a tenth-century Irish writer explains the motivation of the Celtic *peregrini* in very similar terms:

Now the good counsel which God enjoined here on the father of the faithful is incumbent ... on all the faithful; that is to leave their country and their land, their wealth and their worldly delight for the sake of the Lord of the Elements, and to go into perfect pilgrimage in imitation of him.²⁹

E. Through the Wilderness to the Promised Land

The account of the history of the people of Israel provided by the remaining books of the Pentateuch continues the pilgrim motif. The descendants of Abraham are forced to 'sojourn' as slaves in Egypt and their eventual deliverance under the leadership of Moses is followed by a prolonged period in the wilderness, which is presented as a place of testing.³⁰ It is also, however, a place where they experience God's presence, symbolised by the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, and learn God's commandments. This positive view of the desert is seen in retrospective comments in the prophetic books of the Old Testament:

ego lactabo eam et ducam eam in solitudinem

²⁸ *Life of Wilfrid*, Chapter 4 in *Age of Bede*.

²⁹ *Old Irish Life of St Columba*. Cited Henry (1966), 30.

³⁰ Christ's forty days of fasting, prayer and overcoming temptation in the Judean wilderness (Luke 4) were thought of as analogous to the forty years spent by the people of Israel in the deserts of the Sinai.

et loquar ad cor eius ...
iuxta dies anscensionis suae de terra Aegypti

I will allure her and will lead her into the wilderness:
and I will speak to her heart ...
according to the days of her coming up out of the land of Egypt
(Hosea 2:14-15).

This perspective also lies behind the identification of the wilderness as a place of spiritual growth which is evident in the Desert Fathers of the fourth century, the Celtic *peregrini* and the anchorites and mystics of the later Middle Ages in England.³¹ George Williams finds in the Old Testament

four concepts or motifs, which we shall find recurring in various combinations throughout post-biblical history: (a) the wilderness as a moral waste but a potential paradise, (b) the wilderness as a place of testing or even punishment, (c) the wilderness as the experience or occasion of nuptial (covenantal) bliss, and (d) the wilderness as a place of refuge (protection) or contemplation (renewal).³²

³¹ See for example *Ancrene Wisse* (ed. Tolkien) IV, 101/10: 'Wildernesse is anlich lif of ancre wununge'. See Chapters II, VI and X below.

³² Williams (1962), 18. Interestingly, in recounting the darker side of the wilderness *topos*, Williams notes that 'for the indigenous Canaanites the desert was peopled with dragons, demons and monsters of the night. And the Hebrews, settled in their midst, inevitably assimilated some of the native mythology and cultus ... there were ... the howling dragon and monster (*tan, tannin*), the winged female night monster (*lilith*), which entered Hebrew demonology during the Babylonian exile.' This view of the wilderness as the abode of such dark forces is echoed in the *Lives* of the Desert Fathers, who went out into the desert to do battle with demons who frequently appeared in the form of monsters

The journey of the Israelites, like that of Abraham, is measured in spiritual growth, not merely in geographical progress. Indeed only those who meet God's requirements of faith and obedience are allowed to enter the Promised Land; the remainder die in the wilderness. The centrality of obedience (the reversal, in effect, of the sin of Adam and Eve) is marked by the warning that even when they have reached Canaan, secure tenure will remain conditional upon submission to God's commandments: rebellion or apostasy will bring defeat by their enemies and even the prospect of exile.

nisi custoderis et feceris omnia verba leges huius ...

et timueris nomen eius gloriosum et terribile hoc est Dominum Deum tuum...

sicut ante laetatus est Dominus super vos bene vobis faciens vosque
multiplicans

sic laetabitur disperdens vos atque subvertens

ut auferamini de terra ad quam ingredieris possidendam

If thou wilt not keep, and fulfil all the words of this law

and fear his glorious and terrible name: that is the Lord thy God...

as the Lord rejoiced upon you before doing good to you, and multiplying you

so he shall rejoice destroying and bringing you to nought, so that

you shall be taken away from the land which thou shalt go in to possess.

(Deuteronomy 28:58, 63)

It is made clear that it is not enough to travel physically towards the Promised Land;

(as in the *Life of St Anthony*). In Anglo-Saxon England the fens seem to have functioned as an equivalent to the desert. St Guthlac wrestled with demonic monsters on his island near Crowland and in *Beowulf* the monster Grendel is also said to be a fen-dweller. See Chapter V.

what is required of the people of God is a spiritual journey worked out in a life of ongoing obedience and moral transformation. It is also clear that the concept of dual alienation, evident in the Psalms cited earlier, is fundamental to the identity of the Israelites. The covenant with God entered into by the people of Israel offered the possibility of resolving the alienation from God brought about by the Fall but also implied a further alienation, this time from those who worshipped the *deos alienos*, strange gods, forbidden in Exodus 20:3. Followers of the true God were not to integrate with the followers of the *Baalim*, the indigenous gods of the land of Canaan.³³ When, as frequently happened, the Israelites strayed and betrayed their special status, judgement loomed and true penitence was required to bring about restoration. The prophetic books are full of warnings of the dangers of disobedience and presuming upon the privileges bestowed by God upon his people.

It would be hard to exaggerate the importance of the Exodus motif in Christian thought. The long journey through the wilderness towards the Promised Land was interpreted by theologians, preachers and writers alike, as a paradigm of the Christian journey through a fallen world towards the heavenly homeland,³⁴ a view which strongly colours the Old English *Exodus*³⁵ and undergirds much later medieval spirituality.³⁶

³³ There was inevitably some degree of syncretism. See Chapter III: 1.A.

³⁴ 'It is a fact that the entire history of the Hebrew people, and in particular its wanderings, symbolized the march of the Church towards the heavenly Jerusalem which is the true Promised Land.' Leclercq (1982), 133.

³⁵ See Chapter V: 1.A.ii. below.

³⁶ See for example Chaucer's *Balade de Bon Conseyl*: 'Her is non hoom, her nis but wildernesse' *Riverside Chaucer*.

F. Pilgrimage within the land

The Exodus is commemorated within the Jewish faith in the three great pilgrimage festivals: Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. Ironically, these celebrations of the experience of being God's people on the move came to be celebrated in a fixed spot: the city of Jerusalem. For with the gradual establishment of the people of Israel in the Promised Land came also the development of place pilgrimage. The Book of Psalms, so deeply woven into the spirituality of the medieval church,³⁷ reflects the extent to which Jerusalem became³⁸ a unique symbol of the relationship between God and his people. It was in Jerusalem that the Ark of the Covenant rested as a symbol of God's presence and it was to Jerusalem that pilgrims made their way to worship. The Psalms of Ascent (119-133 [120-134]), reflect the emotions with which pilgrims travelled to the city of David, now also the city of God, to worship, to offer sacrifices, to petition and to give thanks. Psalm 119 [120] expresses the longings of one living among an alien people:

heu mihi quia incolatus meus prolongatus est
habitavi cum habitationibus Cedar
multum incola fuit anima mea

Woe is me, that my sojourning is prolonged!
I have dwelt with the inhabitants of Cedar:

³⁷ See Chapter VII: 5.

³⁸ For the process by which Jerusalem achieved this status see Chapter III: 1. A.

my soul hath long been a sojourner.³⁹

(Psalm 119 [120]:5, 6)

Psalm 83 [84] describes an intensely emotional⁴⁰ response to the place where God is believed to dwell:

Quam dilecta tabernacula tua Domine exercituum
desiderat et defecit anima mea in atria Domini
cor meum est caro mea laudabunt Deum viventem

How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!
My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord.
My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God.

(Psalm 83 [84]:1)

Later the psalm speaks of the blessings and trials of pilgrims and the sense of anticipation that God will reveal himself to them in the place which he has chosen.

benedictione quoque amicietur doctor
ibunt de fortitudine in fortitudinem
parebunt apud Deum in Sion

³⁹ St Jerome comments in his *Homilies, On the Psalms*, 41: “Woe is me that my sojourn is prolonged!’ This is the plaint of the lover of Christ who wants nothing of the body, who is detached from the world and longs for heaven.... ‘My sojourn,’ not my dwelling. ‘My sojourn,’ for in the present world we have no lasting dwelling place; we are pilgrims. That is why the apostle says: ‘as strangers and pilgrims’ (I Peter 2:11). See also Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job*, XVIII, 48.

⁴⁰ It is useful to compare this intense expression of devotional fervour with the responses of medieval Christian pilgrims such as Margery Kempe and the companions of Felix Fabri. See Chapter XI below.

For the lawgiver shall give a blessing;

they shall go from virtue to virtue: the God of gods shall be seen in Sion.

(Psalm 83 [84]:8)

Jews who were subsequently deported to other countries or migrated for economic reasons continued to be bound in affection and loyalty to the land, and to Jerusalem in particular, by the ongoing observance of this pilgrimage.

It can be seen from this brief survey that the Old Testament narrative furnishes the concept of pilgrimage with several strands of significance. The Fall of Man and the subsequent exile of Adam, Eve and their descendants place human beings in an imperfect, insecure world in which the transience of human life and achievement contrasts sharply with the eternal verity of God's word:

omnis caro faenum et omnis gloria eius quasi flos agri...

vere faenum est populus

exsiccatum est faenum cecedit flos verbum autem Dei nostri stabit in aeternum.

All flesh is grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of the field...

Indeed the people is grass.

The grass is withered and the flower is fallen: but the word of our Lord endureth for ever.

(Isaiah 40: 6, 7-8)

The life of Abraham models a perfect balance between literal and spiritual journeying: as he moves out in obedience to seek the land of Canaan, so he grows in spiritual understanding and experience of God. Due to their disobedience, the Israelites who are delivered from Egypt experience a prolonged time of testing in the wilderness:

geographically they are tantalisingly close to their goal; spiritually they are judged unready to enter into the promised haven until their period of refining is complete. The experiences of Abraham and the events of the Exodus both model a particular kind of pilgrimage characterised by insecurity and open-endedness, in which to journey obediently is in itself to encounter God. For those who settled in the land, on the other hand, pilgrimage to Jerusalem became a formalised religious exercise which focused on the joy of arrival,⁴¹ a life journey in miniature, which offered the possibility of a significant encounter with God when the destination was reached. When exile was experienced, the symbolic pilgrimage to the city of David acquired an enhanced emotional and spiritual significance bound up with the identity of the people and their place in the purposes of God. Jews might, through force of circumstances, settle away from the land but without Jerusalem and at least the possibility of visiting the city, they could never be complete. Jewish spirituality had shifted from a relationship with God which was independent of place, to one which linked the presence of God with a particular city and place of worship. Henry Carse points out evidence of unease about this development, citing 2 Samuel 7:6,7, where the author depicts God's reaction to David's desire to build a temple in Jerusalem:

I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day... In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word ... saying, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?'

Carse comments: 'A tension, then, appears in the theology of pilgrimage, even in the

⁴¹ Henry Carse suggests that 'The sacred nature of the Holy City also answered the human longing for a social resolution of the loneliness and suffering of wandering' Carse (1994), 23.

period of its scriptural foundation.⁴² As early as the Old Testament, therefore, two differing, and not entirely compatible, forms of pilgrimage can be discerned. There is, however, as there is in later terminology, an etymological harmony between the two modes of pilgrimage. Abraham, the sojourner, left an indelible stamp upon the vocabulary and concept of pilgrimage for the Hebrew word for pilgrimage, *magur*, is derived from *gur*, the word applied so often to the patriarchs. In Jewish thought, therefore 'pilgrims are by definition "sojourners," a people en route.'⁴³ The foundation of potential opposition between place pilgrimage and the pilgrimage of life has, however, already been laid.

2. THE NEW TESTAMENT – THE PILGRIMAGE OF LIFE AND THE HEAVENLY HOME

A. Jesus the pilgrim-stranger

Much of the action of the Gospels reflects the importance of Jerusalem in the religious and cultural life of the Jewish people of the early first century AD. Jesus himself is taken to Jerusalem as a baby to be presented in the temple and he is recorded as joining his parents on one the annual pilgrimages to the city when he was twelve years old. Later he is shown visiting the city during the great festivals and singing the pilgrim psalms. For all the importance of Jerusalem as a place, however, the emphasis of the New Testament is quite clearly on spiritual rather than physical pilgrimage. Jesus, as the incarnate Word, is presented as having voluntarily entered this world of exile in order to bring about reconciliation between mankind and God.⁴⁴ He is therefore a

⁴² Carse (1994), 23-4.

⁴³ Jeffrey (1992), 255.

⁴⁴ John 1. 1-12.

pilgrim-stranger, a fact underlined by the peripatetic nature of his ministry.⁴⁵ His battle against Satan takes him into the desert, where he overcomes temptations similar to those which defeated Adam.⁴⁶ On the Emmaus road he is taken for a stranger to Jerusalem by two of his own disciples, an incident which was later given enhanced significance in medieval pilgrim plays.⁴⁷ When he returns to his home in heaven, it is having opened the way for his disciples to eventually join him there. Jesus himself, therefore, is presented as being a stranger in the world which he had created. It is logical, therefore, that in the epistles directed to those who were seeking to follow his example, the concept of sojourner-pilgrims should have been adopted as a fruitful metaphor for the difficult relationship between Christians and the world in which they lived.

B. Transience and judgement

A closely-related concept is the Christian belief in the transience of this present world. Foundational to the teachings of Jesus were the possibility of salvation and the certainty of judgement. Salvation would be offered for a limited period only; then Christ would himself return as judge (Matthew 25: 31-33). His return would be sudden (Matthew 24: 36-44) and cataclysmic (2 Peter 3: 10-13). Christians needed therefore to keep in mind the essential transience⁴⁸ of this world and its joys. Though the beauty and glories of the world were not denied (they had after all been created by God), the epistles were

⁴⁵ Matthew 8. 20: 'The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.'

⁴⁶ Luke 4. See Williams (1962), 23, who speaks of the 'conviction that the second Adam in the wilderness had reversed the consequences of Adam's temptation in Paradise.'

⁴⁷ See Gardiner (1971) and Holloway (1988), both of whom see the Emmaus theme as of considerable importance in the medieval understanding of pilgrimage.

⁴⁸ A theme which figures significantly in Old English poetry and prose (see Part II below) and in Middle English texts. See Chapter IX below and Mogan (1969).

unanimous in their warnings against *investing* in such temporary pleasures:

praeterit enim figura huius mundi

the fashion of this world passeth away.

(1 Corinthians 7:31)

exortus est enim sol cum ardore et arefecit faenum

et flos eius decidit

et decor vultus eius deperiit

ita et dives in itineribus suis marcescet

for the sun rose with a burning heat, and parched the grass;

and the flower thereof fell off, and the beauty of the shape thereof perished.

so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.

(James 1:11)

et mundus transit et concupiscentia eius

qui autem facit voluntatem Dei manet in aeternum

And the world passeth away, and the concupiscence thereof.

but he that doth the will of God, abideth for ever.

(1 John 2:17)

The language used hints at the paradox underlying the Christian perspective: it is the apparently fixed, reliable, material world which is in fact transient, 'passing away'. The believer, called to pursue the intangible benefits of obedience⁴⁹ is the one who will

⁴⁹ The necessity of obedience as a mark of returning to God is the central characteristic of what I term

abide. A similar confidence is expressed in Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians:

We are confident, and have a good will to be absent rather from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

(2 Corinthians 5:8)⁵⁰

C. Pilgrims and citizens of heaven

The Letter to the Hebrews makes the point explicit. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the writer states, sojourned⁵¹ in tents, a symbol of impermanence, in order to inherit a city whose solid foundations and design speak of security and permanence.

fide moratus est in terra repromissionis tamquam in aliena
in casulis⁵² habitando cum Isaac et Iacob coheredibus repromissionis eiusdem.
expectabat enim fundamenta habentem civitatem
cuius artifex et conditor Deus

moral pilgrimage. It is constantly reiterated in Middle English penitentials, treatises such as Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* and sermons and is an important theme in *Piers Plowman* and Chaucer's *Parson's Tale* (see Chapter IX).

⁵⁰ Walter Hilton incorporates this text and his own application into his *Mixed Life*: 'Seynt Poul seip þat as longe as we aren in þis bodi, we are pilgrimes fro oure lord; þat is we aren absent from heuene in þis exile. We goo bi troupe, not bi sizt; þat is we lyuen in troupe, not in bodili feelynge' *Mixed Life*, 45/525-9.

⁵¹ The Greek verb παρourkeiv, 'to live as a resident alien, where one is not a citizen, abroad' (Kittel (1965), V. 843) is also the word used of Abraham in LXX. The full force of Hebrews 11:9a reads 'By faith he dwelt as a foreigner without rights of citizenship in the land of the promise as in a land not his own.' Wuerst (1947), 202.

⁵² *In casulis*, translates Gk εν σκηναῖς, in tents.

By faith he abode in the land of promise, as in a strange country
dwelling in tents, with Isaac and Jacob, the co-heirs of the same promise.
For he looked for a city⁵³ that hath foundations;
whose builder and maker is God.

(Hebrews 11:8-10)

In the life of Abraham and his fellow patriarchs the characteristics of true servants of God are set out for imitation: it is impossible for them to be more than sojourners on earth because they are citizens of another place.⁵⁴ William Barclay defines the *paroikos*, the resident alien, as

a man who came to stay in a place without being naturalised. He paid an alien tax; he was a licensed sojourner. He stayed in some place, but he had never given up citizenship of the place to which he truly belonged.⁵⁵

This was a situation familiar to the Jews of the Dispersion, who for a variety of reasons, political and economic, knew what it was to live outside their homeland.

⁵³ The concept of the heavenly city as the long-term destination of the Christian is repeated in Hebrews 13:14 where the writer urges his readers to share the 'reproach' borne by Christ, reminding them: *non enim habemus hic manentem civitatem sed futurum inquirimus* (For we have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come).

⁵⁴ Chrysostom comments on this passage in his *Homilies on Hebrews*, XXIV, 73-4: 'The first virtue, yea the whole of virtue is to be a stranger to this world, and a sojourner, and to have nothing in common with things here but to hang loose from them, as from things strange to us ... [Abraham] built no splendid houses, he enjoyed no luxuries, he had no care about dress, which are all things of this world; but lived in all respects as belonging to this city yonder.'

⁵⁵ Barclay (1964), 284.

William G. Johnsson, in his discussion of the pilgrimage motif in Hebrews, identifies a group of associated words, each of which supplies important information about the mosaic which is pilgrimage:

We here meet definite terminology which bears on the discussion of pilgrimage: παρικήω (v 9 = “to inhabit, live as a stranger”), αλλοτριος (v 9 = “strange, alien, hostile, enemy” - even though it was the land of promise!), εκδεχομαι (v 10 = “to expect, wait”), πορρωθεν (v13 = “from a distance”), ζενος (v 13 = “stranger, alien”), παρεπιδημος (v 13 = “exile, stranger”), πατρις (v 14 = “homeland, fatherland”), κρειτων (v 16 = “better”), πολις (v 16 = “city”), μισθαποδουια (v 26 = “pay, wages, reward”), περιερχομαι (v 37 = “go around, go from place to place”), πλαναω (v 38 = “to wander”), and επαγγελια (vv 13, 39 = “promise”).⁵⁶

As I shall demonstrate, this cluster of associated ideas is of considerable significance in the interpretation of medieval literature. In his seminal articles on the *Wanderer* and the *Seafarer*, G.V. Smithers drew largely from patristic writings and Old English homilies

a chain of associated notions ‘Adam the exile from Paradise’ / ‘the beginning of the seven ages of the world with Adam’ / ‘the last day of the world and the Day of Judgement’ / man’s return to his hereditary home in heaven.⁵⁷

F. C. Gardiner developed this analysis further, referring in particular to the Letter to the Hebrews and suggesting that later writers such as St Augustine, Gregory the Great, Alcuin and Anselm let the theme of the pilgrimage of life, ‘emerge from a cluster of key

⁵⁶ Johnsson (1978), 241.

⁵⁷ Smithers (1957), 149.

words, each of which anticipates and complements the others through the evocative and associative power of ideas and words.⁵⁸ These key words he lists as: pilgrim, exile, journey, heavenly fatherland, desire and hardship, and he proceeds to focus upon the desire for heaven manifested in commentaries, letters and the Latin and English pilgrim plays. Whilst acknowledging the valuable insights of both Smithers and Johnsson, I would like to suggest that the pilgrimage *topos* they analyse is of greater antiquity, more broadly-based and more far-reaching in its influence than they indicate. As can be seen from Johnsson's analysis of Hebrews 11, the 'cluster of key words' (to adopt Gardiner's useful phrase) should include exile, living as a pilgrim/stranger, expectation, desire for the heavenly homeland and the search for the security of the eternal city. To these I would wish to add the idea of faith expressed through venturing into the unknown (11:8), willingness to relinquish transient human riches (11:25-26), and an important link between rejection by and of the world and wandering in desert places (11:38).⁵⁹ These ideas are not only largely derived (as I have shown) from the Old Testament but are also echoed in other New Testament texts such as 1 Peter and the Second Letter of Paul to the Corinthians. Since the Letter to the Hebrews was not, in the opinion of modern scholars, written by St Paul as Gardiner suggests, this makes the acceptance of the concept of life pilgrimage in the New Testament even wider than he supposes. Moreover, I would suggest that the essential interdependence of this cluster of images makes it likely that the use of one or more of them, whether in a sermon, commentary, poem or prose work, frequently signals the presence, whether implicit or

⁵⁸ Gardiner (1971), 12.

⁵⁹ Basil the Great (c. 330-379), the organiser of Eastern monasticism, shows clearly the perceived link between this passage and life in the desert: 'I am living ... in the wilderness wherein the Lord dwelt ... Here are teachers and prophets, "wandering in deserts, in mountains, in dens, and in caves of the earth". Here are apostles and evangelists and the life of monks, citizens of the desert' *Ep.* XI. III. Cited Williams (1962, 39). On the positive role of the desert in Christian spirituality see Chapters II, VI and X.

explicit, of the others.⁶⁰

The image of the city and citizenship, which neither Smithers nor Gardiner develops, had a particular resonance within the context of the Roman Empire, combining as it did elements of status and responsibility. The New Testament taught that Christians enjoyed the privilege of adoption into the household of God and into citizenship within his kingdom (Ephesians 2:19). This new status, however, had radical implications. Like those Roman citizens who lived in colonies scattered across the Empire, Christians had to combine life amongst people of other creeds and lifestyles with a constant awareness of their true homeland and allegiance (Philippians. 3:10). Out of the twin concepts of the sojourner-pilgrim and the citizen of a distant, greater homeland, therefore, the New Testament writers fashioned an image which combined the promise of future security with a challenge to present behaviour. Faith in God's promises of blessings to come would inspire willingness to make sacrifices in the present. Pilgrims en route to heaven would be enabled to remain impervious to sufferings or abuse. Like the heroes of faith listed by the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews, they would be content to be aliens on earth if thereby they might win citizenship in heaven.

et confitentes quia peregrini et hospites⁶¹ sunt supra terram
qui enim haec dicunt significant se patriam inquirere
et si quidem illius meminissent de qua exierunt
habebant utique tempus revertendi
nunc autem meliorem appetunt id est caelestem
ideo non confunditur Deus vocari Deus eorum
paravit enim illis civitatem.

⁶⁰ See Chapter V.1.

⁶¹ Gk. ζενοι και παρεπιδημοι, strangers and temporary residents.

and confessing that they are pilgrims and strangers on the earth.
For they that say these things do signify that they seek a country.
And truly if they had been mindful of that from whence they came out,
they had doubtless time to return.
But now they desire a better, that is to say a heavenly country.
Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God;
for he hath prepared for them a city.

(Hebrews 11: 13-16)

As present and future citizens of heaven, then, their conduct must be governed by standards higher than those obtaining around them. The writer of the First Epistle of Peter urged his readers (the *parepidemoi*, of the dispersion)⁶²

Carissimi obsecro tamquam advenas et peregrinos
abstinere vos a carnalibus desideriis quae militant adversus animam.

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims,⁶³ to refrain
yourselves from carnal desires which war against the soul.

(1 Peter 2:11)

This warning, linking pilgrim status with a need for constant vigilance and obedience, underlies the particular relationship between the *topoi* of the pilgrimage of life and the Seven Deadly Sins which appears in so many Middle English texts.⁶⁴

⁶² 1 Peter 1:1. 'Christians are presented as men who have no country of their own on this earth; they are simply temporary residents ... Their alien status emerges clearly in the fact that they belong to the *διασπορα*, the Jewish concept being applied to Christians.' Kittel (1965), 65.

⁶³ Gk. *παροίκους και παρεπιδημους*.

⁶⁴ See Chapter VIII:3 on *Piers Plowman* and Chapter IX:2.A on the *Canterbury Tales*.

D. The New Jerusalem

In the Epistles the bare mention of a future home is sufficient; it was left to the writer of the Book of Revelation to attempt to paint the glories of the city to which pilgrims were travelling. Writing to churches which faced persecution and temptations to compromise, he conjured up a glittering picture of the New Jerusalem⁶⁵ and the saints rejoicing within the security of its walls.

et absterget Deus omnem lacrimam ab oculis eorum
et mors ultra non erit neque luctus neque clamor neque dolor erit ultra
quae prima abierunt...
et duodecim portae duodecim margaritae sunt per singulas...
et platea civitatis aurum mundum tamquam vitrum perlucidum.

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes:
and death shall be no more; nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any
more;
for the former things are passed away...
And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, one to each...
And the street of the city was pure gold, as it were, transparent glass.
(Revelation 21: 4, 21)

The city, as envisaged by the Apostle, offered peace, comfort and healing in the presence of God, an appropriate goal for weary, foot-sore pilgrims, scarred by the trials and temptations of a world in which they could no longer feel at home. It was a picture which gripped the minds of Christian writers during the succeeding centuries. The promise and allure of the heavenly homeland is apparent in patristic sermons, treatises

⁶⁵ On the importance of the description of the city in *Pearl* see Chapter X:3.

and letters⁶⁶ and is woven into a surprising number of Old English poems and prose texts. Middle English artists and writers were equally gripped by the splendours of the heavenly city and the prospect of eternal security. The message of the New Testament helped to shape a world view which set earthly exile against heavenly citizenship, temporary suffering against eternal joy. The decision to live as a penitent, obedient pilgrim on earth would be amply recompensed in the heavenly Jerusalem. That is why an evocation of the joys of the heavenly city makes such an appropriate ending to the *Parson's Tale*, a text which advocates just such a life of moral pilgrimage:⁶⁷

ther joye hath no contrarioustee of wo ne grevaunce; ther alle harmes been passed of this present lyf; ther as is the sikernesse fro the peyne of helle; ther as is the blisful compaignye that rejoysen hem everemo, everich of otheres joye; ther as the body of man, that whilom was foul and derk, is moore cleer than the sonne; ther as the body, that whilom was syk, freele, and fieble, and mortal, is inmortal, and so strong and hool that ther may no thyng apeyren it; ther as ne is neither hunger, thurst, ne coold, but every soule replenyssed with the sighte of the parfit knowynge of God.

(*Parson's Tale*, 1076-79)

⁶⁶ See Gardiner (1971).

⁶⁷ See Chapter IX:2. A.

CHAPTER II

CONCEPTS OF PILGRIMAGE IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Uton we hycgan hwær we ham agen,
ond þonne gepencan hu we þider cumen.

(*Seafarer*, 117-8)¹

Her is non hoom, her nis but wildernesse:
Forth, pilgrim, forth! Forth beste, out of thy stal!
Know thy contree, look up, thank God of al.

(Chaucer, *Balade de Bon Conseyl*, 17-21)²

Introduction

As will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters, the idea of life as pilgrimage is fundamental to Anglo-Saxon and later medieval spirituality. Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to claim that the spiritual landscape of the Middle Ages was largely shaped by the ways in which this concept was developed and expressed during the early centuries of the Church. This chapter, therefore, offers a brief survey of the centrality of this theme in patristic writings, particularly in the work of St Augustine of Hippo, who exercised such a profound influence on the English Church. It illustrates the repeated insistence of the early Fathers on the need for a life of daily obedience, a concept which I have termed moral pilgrimage and which plays an important role in *Piers Plowman* and the *Canterbury Tales*. It also traces the origins of a particularly radical application of life pilgrimage, the movement to the desert,

¹ *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*.

² *Riverside Chaucer*.

which brought into being the monastic orders and was still functioning as a powerful model of interior journeying in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

1. LIFE PILGRIMAGE IN EARLY PATRISTIC WRITINGS

In discussion of the history of the pilgrimage motif much attention has rightly been given to St Augustine's exposition of the concept of the Church as a pilgrim people in the *City of God*. However it is important to recognise that the New Testament emphasis on the identification of Christians as citizens of heaven and pilgrims travelling to the heavenly homeland is mirrored in the writings of many of the Early Fathers,³ who evidently regarded this concept as fundamental to the understanding of the Christian life. Thus the *Letter of St Clement* (Bishop of Rome c. AD 90-99) to the Corinthians opens with this greeting:

The Church of God which dwells as a pilgrim (παροικουσα)⁴ in Rome to the Church of God in pilgrimage at Corinth.⁵

In the *Letter of Barnabas*, written early in the second century, the writer exhorts his readers to undertake a journey which is clearly moral and spiritual in its nature:

If anyone wishes to follow the path to the appointed goal let him be zealous in what he does. This, then, is the knowledge given to us to walk in this path: Thou shalt love thy Creator, thou shalt fear thy Maker, thou shalt glorify Him who redeemed thee from death. Thou shalt be simple in heart and generous in

³ Ladner (1967). 237 observes: 'The topoi of *xeniteia* and *peregrinatio*, of pilgrimage, of homelessness, of strangeness in this world, are among the most widespread in early Christian ascetic literature.'

⁴ The same phrase is used in greetings to churches in the *Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians* and *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* in *The Apostolic Fathers*.

⁵ *The Apostolic Fathers*.

spirit. Thou shalt not join those who walk in the way of death ... You shall not take evil counsel against your neighbour ... you shall not commit fornication...

(*Epistle of Barnabas*, Ch 19)⁶

The second-century *Letter to Diognetus*, possibly the earliest extant work in defence of Christianity, echoes the words of the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews:

[Christians] live each in his native land but as though they were not really at home there [lit. as sojourners, παροικοί]. They share in all duties as citizens and suffer all hardships as strangers (ζένοι). Every foreign country is for them a fatherland (πατρίς) to them, and every fatherland a foreign land ... They dwell on earth but they are citizens of heaven.

(*Letter to Diognetus*, 5)⁷

The *Shepherd of Hermas* (c120-154) contains a rebuke to those who invest in worldly, transient goods, rather than in eternal treasure:

You know that you servants of God are living in a foreign country, for your city is far from this city. Now, if you know the city in which you are eventually to dwell, why do you secure fields, rich establishments, houses and superfluous dwellings?

(*Parable 1:1*)⁸

Origen (c.185-c.254) compared the journey of the Christian soul to God with the pilgrimage of the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land:⁹

⁶ *The Apostolic Fathers.*

⁷ *The Apostolic Fathers.*

⁸ *The Apostolic Fathers.*

When the soul sets out from the Egypt of this life, that it may hasten on to the land of promise, it necessarily proceeds by those stages which have been prepared with the Father from the beginning. I believe that the prophet, mindful of them, said, "These things have I remembered, and I have poured out my soul, because I am going to the place of the wonderful tabernacle, to the house of God ... The same prophet also says in another place: Much has my soul wayfared. Understand, then, if you are able, what these wayfarings of the soul are, in which it weeps over itself at length with a certain groaning and sorrow. But the understanding of these things dims and grows dull until it itself [the soul] makes its pilgrim way. Then indeed it shall be thoroughly instructed, and it shall indeed understand what was the reason for its wayfaring, when it has entered into its rest, namely into the paradise which is its fatherland.¹⁰

The Treatises of Cyprian, bishop of Carthage 249-258, show a concern to emphasise both the transience and imminent end of the present world:

Whatever is born degenerates with the old age of the world, itself, so that no one should marvel that everything in the world has already begun to fail, when the entire world itself is already in a decline and at its end.

*(To Demetrian, Ch 4)*¹¹

⁹ Williams notes: 'The baptismal theology and practice of the ancient Church was everywhere based upon the identification of the new Christian Israel with the people of the Old Covenant, who passed through the Red Sea and the wilderness of Sinai to the Promised Land' Williams (1962), 29.

¹⁰ *In Num.* 27.4. Cited Ramsey (1993), 63.

¹¹ Cyprian, *Treatises*.

Behold, the world is tottering and collapsing and bearing witness to its ruin, not now through age but through the end of things.

(*On Mortality*, Ch 25)¹²

Again Christians are visualised as strangers and foreigners, in exile from and longing for their homeland:

We should reflect constantly that we have renounced the world and as strangers and foreigners (*hospites et peregrinos*) we sojourn here for a time. Let us embrace the day which assigns each of us to his dwelling, which on our being rescued from here and released from the snares of the world, restores us to paradise and the kingdom. What man, after having been abroad, would not hasten to return to his native land?

(*On Mortality*, Ch 26)

The insistence of Christians on their alternative citizenship fell oddly on pagan ears. Eusebius records that Pamphilus, a Christian martyr, made such a claim while undergoing interrogation at the hands of a Roman governor called Firmilian in 310.

[Firmilian] ... next asked him what his city was. But the martyr let fall a second expression in harmony with the former one, saying that Jerusalem was his city - meaning to be sure, that one of which it was said by Paul: But the Jerusalem that is above is free, which is our mother ... This was the one he meant. But the other had his thoughts fixed on the world here below, and enquired closely and carefully as to what city it was, and in what part of the world it was situated.

(*Martyrs of Palestine*, 11. 9,10)¹³

¹² Cyprian, *Letters*.

The puzzled governor is said to have concluded that the Christians had ‘established a city somewhere at enmity and hostile to the Romans’ but failed to elicit any further details of the mysterious threat.

The concept of the Christian as a citizen of heaven and hence a stranger within the world functioned not only as source of encouragement in times of persecution but as a challenge to the daily lifestyle of Christians. St John Chrysostom (d. 407), commenting on the third chapter of St Paul’s Letter to the Colossians, urges his readers:

Let us consider how [Paul] wishes them to be strangers to the present life. His purpose is not to have them emigrate somewhere far from this world, but while they go about in the midst of it, he would have them act as strangers to it. He would have them shine like stars and by their actions prove to the infidels that they have changed their citizenship to another country.

(Baptismal Instructions: No 7:23.)

Here we have a continuation of the exhortation to a life of moral pilgrimage which was outlined in the Second Letter of Peter and supported by many other New Testament passages. The metaphor of the Christian as pilgrim and stranger in the world therefore was well established in early church writings and would continue to motivate and inspire; there were, however, a growing number of believers for whom it had more radical implications.

2. ASCETICISM AND THE GROWTH OF MONASTICISM

The ascetic movement which gathered momentum from the middle of the third century onwards was, to a large degree, a product of the widespread sense of

¹³ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History and the Martyrs of Palestine*, 385.

alienation felt by Christians. The conviction that their true status was that of 'pilgrims and strangers' in this world impelled many to renounce earthly ties and pleasures in order to pursue the spiritual goals which they saw set out in the New Testament. According to the *Life of St Anthony* written by St Athanasius (328-373), the saint was moved to embark on a life of asceticism by hearing words from Matthew's Gospel: 'If thou wilt be perfect, sell all that thou hast and give it to the poor; and come follow me and thou shalt have treasure in heaven (Matthew 19: 21)'.¹⁴ Anthony is said to have insisted that there was no need to travel in order to find God because the Kingdom of God was within the human heart. Yet his own quest for perfection led him to withdraw to the desert, a move which represented both a retreat from materialism and a commitment to engage in spiritual warfare with the demons who are subsequently said to have afflicted him.¹⁵ This move was profoundly influential in the formation of the monastic ideal which was eventually transmitted to the West. Boniface Ramsey comments:

Inasmuch as Athanasius meant the *Life* of his hero to be a sort of model, he included in it certain themes that he understood to be characteristic of monastic life ... The first of these, which runs through the whole biography, is the notion of the life of the monk as a spiritual journey, which is reflected in Anthony's own progress from his native village through various stages to the Inner Mountain, a place deep in the Desert. This movement, from civilisation to an almost absolute solitude, is symbolic of the journey of the individual, the monk, from exteriority to an increasingly profound

¹⁴ Athanasius, *Life of St Anthony*, 19. On the influence of the *Life of Anthony* on the Anglo-Saxon saint Guthlac see Chapter V.

¹⁵ Compare Chapter I: 1.E on attitudes to the desert.

interiority,¹⁶ a journey that is not made without painful opposition from demonic forces.¹⁷

Those who joined Anthony in the desert were described in *The Lives of the Desert Fathers* as 'true servants of God. They do not busy themselves with any earthly matter or take account of anything that belongs to this transient world. But while dwelling on earth in this manner they live as true citizens of heaven' (*Prol.* 5).¹⁸ Athanasius wrote that 'the desert was populated with monks who left their own people and registered themselves for citizenship in heaven.'¹⁹ The anonymous *Life of Pachomius*, written around the end of the fourth century describes the monastic life as a journey to the East (Paradise): 'If one journeys well and with fear, once one has arrived at the east he finds the Saviour on his throne, and all around him are hosts of angels and eternal crowns, and they crown the one who journeys to him well.'²⁰ Two strands of ascetic observance merged during the fourth century: the anchoritic or solitary life and the coenobitic life of the monastery. Both would profoundly influence the spirituality of the English Church. Figures such as St Anthony, St Paul the Hermit and St Mary the Harlot were the heroes and heroines of the solitary life, whose example inspired the Anglo-Saxon saints Cuthbert and Guthlac, and who were regarded as role models for the anchorites of the later Middle Ages. Ann Warren points out that:

The primary symbol of the cell ... was that of the desert. The medieval anchorite's refuge, nestled against the village church, drew the recluse back

¹⁶ See Chapter X. 1A and 2A.

¹⁷ Ramsey (1993), 151.

¹⁸ *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*

¹⁹ Athanasius, *The Life of St Anthony*, 14.

²⁰ *V. prima gr. Pachomii*, 140. Cited Ramsey (1993), 152.

in time to the desert caves of the Egyptian saints: St. Anthony ... St Paul of Thebes ... and St Mary the Egyptian. These were the primitive, half-mythic, half-historic forbears of the medieval recluse and the legends of their lives established the frame of the paradigmatic journey to heaven which found its central image in the desert motif.²¹

Not all had the stamina or temperament to be solitaires. Others needed companions on their spiritual journey and so communities sprang up sharing a common rule of life²². Both forms of life, however, continued to represent a form of earthly exile for those whose goal was heavenly citizenship. Jean Leclercq outlines the logic behind the identification of the monastic life with the pilgrim ideal:

On voit combien aiment cette peregrination ascétique pouvait aboutir à la vie monastique: l'étranger qui s'en va devient non seulement un pauvre, un homme obligé aux privations et à la pénitence, mais un solitaire: il s'est isolé, dans le monde comme dans un désert. Et le plus souvent il part, de fait, dans le désert. Cette pratique explique tout un aspect du monachisme antique. Il est des textes, dans *les Vies des Pères*, où la vie parmi les moines d'un désert d'Egypte est définie comme une pérégrination. Les grands exemples qu'on invoque pour justifier cette méthode de sanctification par l'exil et l'isolement sont ceux des Patriarches, du Seigneur Jésus, des Apôtres et des Disciples. Particulièrement fréquent est le thème d'Abraham.²³

Chitty, in describing the monks of the Judean wilderness, links the symbolic importance of Jerusalem with the concept of monasticism as voluntary exile:

²¹ Warren (1985), 9.

²² See Lawrence (1984), Ch 1.

²³ Leclercq (1964), 43.

Jerusalem, at the head of the wilderness, conjures up another element in the monastic vocation – that of ζενιτεία, or physical exile. It is to Jerusalem first that those look who have heard the call of Abraham: ‘Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will show thee.’ Twice at least that verse is actually quoted in the biographies of the Judean monks. It could well have been in every one of them.²⁴

St Jerome, writing c. 373 to a friend who had exchanged the ascetic life for service as presbyter in his home town, highlights the element of exile which he sees as undergirding the monastic life, asserting that ‘a monk cannot be perfect in his own country.’²⁵ He also weaves a pattern of connections between the desert, the place of voluntary exile within exile, and opportunities to anticipate the joys of heaven:²⁶

O desert, bright with the flowers of Christ! O solitude whence come the stones of which, in the Apocalypse, the city of the great king is built! O wilderness, gladdened with God’s especial presence! ...Does the boundless solitude of the desert terrify you? In the spirit you may walk always in Paradise.²⁷

Physical withdrawal from city or town to the desert, together with the severing of family and community ties, was seen as a sure route to spiritual rewards, both in this life and in the world to come. Yet Jerome could be flexible in his application of the

²⁴ Chitty (1966), 14.

²⁵ Jerome, *Letter XIV*, 7.

²⁶ See Chapter X: 2 B on the theme of anticipation.

²⁷ Jerome, *Letter XIV*, 10. Williams (1962) 39, comments: ‘It was among the hermits and monks that the biblical sense lived on of the ambiguity of the wilderness of Sinai and the wilderness of Jordan, the wilderness of temptation and the wilderness which is a provisional paradise with saints and beasts

concept of withdrawal. Speaking of a young girl whose lifestyle in many respects anticipates the anchoresses of the Middle Ages, he claims 'Shut up in her narrow cell she roamed through paradise...she sought her delight in solitude and found for herself a monkish hermitage in the centre of busy Rome.'²⁸

The monastic life, whether solitary or coenobitic, soon came to be seen as the highest calling for a Christian, a status which it would continue to enjoy for the next millennium. As persecution faded, so the monk inherited the mantle of the martyr, that supreme example of the citizen of heaven. Ironically those who retreated to the deserts of Egypt and Palestine themselves became in time objects of pilgrimage, as visitors to the Holy Land such as Egeria²⁹ sought out living manifestations of holiness, and others sought to share their life. The aspirations expressed by Basil the Great were shared by many:

I read the Gospel, and I saw there that a great means of perfection was the selling of one's goods, the sharing of them with the poor, the giving up of all care for this life, and the refusal to allow the soul to be turned by any feeling of sympathy to things of this earth. I prayed that I might find some one of the brethren who had chosen this way of life.³⁰

Yet the implications of the admiration afforded to ascetics raised troubling questions about the status and heavenly prospects of ordinary Christians who could not or would not withdraw from the world. The fact that the concept of life pilgrimage remained available to those in secular life and was not entirely usurped by the

in harmony, obedient unto Christ.' The sense of restored harmony with creation is also reflected in the lives of the Celtic saints.

²⁸ Jerome, Letter XXIV, 3,4. See McNamara (1984).

²⁹ Egeria visited Palestine between 381 and 384. See *Egeria's Travels*.

³⁰ Ep. 223 (c. 370). Cited in *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, 23.

monastic movement, was due in no small part to St Augustine of Hippo, whose vision of the Church as pilgrim in the world was large enough to encompass and inspire both callings.

3. THE CONTRIBUTION OF ST AUGUSTINE: THE CHURCH AS A PILGRIM PEOPLE

St Augustine of Hippo (354-430) bequeathed to later generations both an intensely emotional, even mystical,³¹ personal response to the prospect of the pilgrim's heavenly goal and a carefully-reasoned analysis of the Church's pilgrim status in the world. In his *Confessions*, he offers a glimpse of the experience of 'interior' pilgrimage, focused upon desire for God and the glories of the heavenly Jerusalem:

O luminous and perfectly formed dwelling place, I have loved thy beauty and the dwelling place of the glory of my Lord, thy Maker and possessor! For thee may my pilgrimage sigh, and I ask Him who made thee to possess me also in thee.

(*Confessions*, XII. 15)³²

I shall go into my own little room [i.e. his heart] and sing love songs to Thee, groaning unutterable groanings during my pilgrimage, recalling in my heart the Jerusalem to which my heart has been uplifted, Jerusalem my homeland, Jerusalem my mother, and Thee ruling over it, enlightening, its Father, Protector, Spouse.

(*Confessions*, XII. 16)

³¹ On the mysticism of St Augustine see TeSelle (1984). Compare Rolle and other English mystics. See Chapter X.

³² Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*.

Although Augustine was himself strongly influenced by the ideals of asceticism and the monastic vision, his experience as a bishop impelled him to take seriously the needs of ordinary Christians as they too sought to find their way to heaven.³³ In *The City of God* (composed between 413 and 427), Augustine sought to explain the ongoing tensions experienced by Christians as they sought to relate to the world around them. Writing soon after the sack of Rome by the Goths in 410 AD, he faced a challenge to account for the apparent decline in the fortunes of the Roman Empire since the adoption of Christianity. Roman religion had always contained a strong pragmatic element, the role of the gods being to protect Rome and ensure prosperity (this pragmatism seems to have played some part in Constantine's own conversion, just as it would in the conversion of Anglo-Saxon kings such as Edwin of Northumbria).³⁴ In the era before the conversion of Constantine, Christians had frequently been persecuted precisely because their refusal to sacrifice to the gods was felt to endanger the welfare of the state; even in the subsequent 'Christian times' doubts still lingered about the commitment of Christians to the society in which they lived. Augustine answered the challenge by reversing its underlying premise: the vital question was not, 'How successful was Christianity in protecting and prospering the Roman Empire?' but, 'How could the members of the City of God who happened to be living within that empire so relate to its structures that their pilgrimage to heaven might be facilitated rather than impeded?' What was required was to recognise the pre-eminence of the 'glorious city of God', the dual reality of which Augustine promised to describe 'both as it exists in this world of time, a stranger among the ungodly, living by faith, and as it stands in the security of its everlasting seat' (*City of God*, Book I: Preface).³⁵

³³ 'For Augustine the ordinary Christian was no more remote from grace and salvation than the monk or ascetic. All are called to pursue perfection, none attain it here.' Markus (1990), 65.

³⁴ See Dyas (1997a), Chapter I.

³⁵ Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*.

This dual perspective was vital. The eventual triumph of the City of God was assured, but the struggles of its members whilst still pilgrims and strangers on the earth were all too real. Writing not only as a philosopher but as a bishop, Augustine needed to steer believers through a variety of hazards and spiritual snares. Christians faced not only hostility and arguments but the temptation to conform and compromise. The presence of many within the Church who had joined it for reasons of expediency rather than conviction threatened to undermine commitment and encourage attachment to the material benefits of this world. In Augustine's view, these philosophical and pastoral problems could both be resolved by the same proposition: there were, he maintained, not one but two cities,³⁶ one earthly, one heavenly, one bounded by the limitations of this world, the other illumined by an eternal perspective. The first created her own gods for her own ends, the second was created by the true God to glorify himself. Though both cities experienced alike the blessings and afflictions of human life they did so 'with a different faith, a different expectation, a different love, until they are separated by the final judgement, and each receives her own end, of which there is no end' (Book XVIII:54). Until that judgement came it would not be possible to differentiate with certainty between the citizens of one realm and the other. Even the visible church contained its share of tares and there was, according to Augustine, the possibility of discovering fellow-members amongst apparent enemies (Book I: 35).

During the course of his reflections on the scriptures, Augustine concluded that whilst mankind was designed for a social life, men and women could never find the peace or order they needed in a society torn and marred by sin. Nevertheless, he did not advocate withdrawal to the desert, as did some of his contemporaries, but a cautious engagement with society which never lost sight of the standards and responsibilities of heavenly citizenship. For Augustine, therefore, the image of the

³⁶Bourke (1995), 293, sees the concept of the two cities as originating in the Psalms.

City of God ‘on pilgrimage in this world’³⁷ provided a model which could be used to address many of the issues which he and his audience faced. Those who are merely sojourners on the earth are in his view able to regard both blessings and misfortunes with the detachment of men and women whose true long-term ambitions lie elsewhere:

The whole family of the servants of the supreme and true God has its consolation, which never disappoints, which does not depend on hope in shifting and transitory things; and those servants have no reason to regret even this life of time, for in it they are schooled for eternity. They enjoy their earthly blessings in the manner of pilgrims [*tamquam peregrina*] and they are not attached to them, while these earthly misfortunes serve for testing and correction.

(Book I: 29)

Citizens of the heavenly kingdom still need to make use of earthly things but they must do so

like a pilgrim [*tamquam peregrina*] in a foreign land, who does not let himself be taken in by them or distracted from his course towards God, but rather treats them as supports which help him more easily to bear the burdens of ‘the corruptible body which weighs heavily on the soul.’

(Book XIX:17)

Augustine was too wise to despise the world, its beauties and its pleasures which were, after all, created by God. What he urged upon his fellow pilgrims was a sense of perspective and the ability to differentiate between ‘use’ and ‘enjoyment’:

³⁷ A theme taken up by Bede. See Chapter VI.

We should use temporal things, rather than enjoy them, so that we may be fit to enjoy eternal blessings, unlike the wicked, who want to enjoy money, but make use of God, not spending money for God, but worshipping God for money.

(Book XI:25)

Self-interest was the basic motivation of the earthly city:

We see then that the two cities were created by two kinds of love: the earthly city was created by self-love reaching the point of contempt for God, the Heavenly City by the love of God carried as far as contempt of self.

(Book XIV:28)

The good make use of this world in order to enjoy God, whereas the evil want to make use of God in order to enjoy the world.

(Book XV:7)

Members of the earthly city suffer not only from a mistaken belief that God can be manipulated but also from short-sightedness, clinging to earthly joys 'as though they were the only joys (Book XV: 15).

Since, according to Augustine's thesis, the two cities had existed since the creation and fall of the angels, their development could be discerned throughout the history of mankind. The story of Cain and Abel offered considerable scope for allegorical interpretation:

Natus est igitur prior Cain ex illis duobus generis humani parentibus,

pertinens ad hominum civitatem; posterior Abel ad civitatem Dei ... cum primum duae istae coeperunt nascendo atque moriendo procurrare civitates, prior est natus civis huius saeculi; posterior autem isto peregrinus in saeculo, et pertinens ad civitatem Dei ... Scriptum est itaque de Cain, quod condiderit civitatem (*Gen*, iv. 17): Abel autem tanquam peregrinus non condidit.³⁸

Now Cain was the first son born to those parents of mankind, and he belonged to the city of man; the later son Abel, belonged to the City of God... When those two cities started on their course through the succession of birth and death, the first to be born was a citizen of this world, and later appeared one who was a pilgrim and stranger in the world, belonging as he did to the City of God... Scripture tells us that Cain founded a city,³⁹ whereas Abel, as a pilgrim, did not found one.

(Book XV:1)⁴⁰

Cain's murder of Abel was motivated, according to Augustine, by 'the diabolical envy'⁴¹ that the wicked feel for the good simply because they are good, while they themselves are evil (Book XV:5). After the death of Abel, his place in the line of descent of the righteous was taken by Seth. Augustine proceeds to trace (at some length) the interwoven history of the descendants of Cain and the descendants of Seth. Noah is cited as a righteous man and the symbolism of the ark explained:

[Noah] was perfect, not as the citizens of the City of God are to be made perfect in the immortal condition in which they will become equal to the

³⁸ *P.L.* 41, 437-38.

³⁹ See 1.A. i.

⁴⁰ Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, 596.

⁴¹ The envy which is attributed to Cain is echoed in Grendel's attitude to the inhabitants of Heorot in the Old English poem *Beowulf*. See Chapter V.

angels of God, but as they can be perfect during their pilgrimage on earth... Without doubt [the ark] is a symbol of the City of God on pilgrimage in this world, of the Church which is saved through the wood on which was suspended 'the mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.'

(Book XV:26)

For Augustine the epoch of Abraham marked a new era in the story of the City of God: 'From that time onwards our knowledge of that City becomes clearer and we find more evident promises from God which we now see fulfilled in Christ' (Book XVI: 12). As he traces the history of the pilgrim City of God, Augustine draws out lessons of warning and encouragement for contemporary Christians. There will always be opposition and persecution but suffering is permitted by God for a purpose: 'Without a doubt, the providence of God provides her with the consolation of prosperity so that she is not shattered by adversity, and with the discipline of adversity so that she is not corrupted by prosperity' (Book XVIII: 51). This will be the experience of Christians until the end of time:

In this manner the Church proceeds on its pilgrim way in this world, in these evil days. Its troubled course began not merely in the time of the bodily presence of Christ and the time of his apostles; it started with Abel himself, the first righteous man slain by an ungodly brother; and the pilgrimage goes on from that time right up to the end of history, with the persecutions of the world on one side, and on the other the consolations of God.

(Book XVIII:52)

Augustine's lengthy reasoned exposition of the pilgrim status of the Church and its members is of considerable importance given the widespread influence of his writings in subsequent centuries. The twin themes of the two cities and the pilgrim

status of Christians were also taken up and developed by Caesarius of Arles (c 470-542), archbishop in Gaul 502-542:

Duae sunt civitates, fratres carissimi: una est civitas mundi, alia est civitas paradisi. In civitate mundi bonus christianus semper peregrinatur; in civitate paradisi civis esse cognoscitur ... Peregrini esse debemus in hoc saeculo, ut cives esse mereamur in caelo. Qui amat mundum, et civis esse vult in mundo, partem non habet in caelo; in hoc enim probamus, quod peregrini sumus, si patriam desideramus. Nemo se circumveniat, fratres dilectissimi, christianorum patria in caelo est, non est hic.⁴²

There are two cities, dearest brethren: the one is the city of the world, the other the city of paradise. The good Christian ever journeys in the city of the world, but he is recognised as a citizen of the city of paradise... We ought to be pilgrims in this world, in order that we may merit to be citizens in heaven. If a man loves the world, and wants to be a citizen of it, he has no place in heaven, for by the fact that we long for our true country we prove that we are pilgrims. Let no one deceive himself, beloved brethren; the true country of Christians is not here, but in heaven.

(Sermon 151, 2)⁴³

Caesarius incorporates into his argument Christ's injunction⁴⁴ to follow the narrow way: 'leave the broad way on the left which drags you to death, and cling to the narrow path on the right which happily leads you to life' (Sermon 151. 5). He also

⁴² Caesarius of Arles, *Sermones* 151. 2.

⁴³ Caesarius of Arles, *Sermons*.

⁴⁴ Matthew 7:13,14: Intrate per angustam portam quia lata porta et spatiosa via quae ducit ad perditionem et multi sunt qui intrant per eam quam angusta porta et arcta via quae ducit ad vitam et pauci sunt qui inveniunt eam.

echoes the phraseology of the First Letter of St Peter and the Letter to the Hebrews, adding a very practical application:

I beseech you, brethren, let us live in this world *just as strangers and pilgrims* [my italics]. By almsgiving let us store up for the eternal country whatever we acquire as the result of some work or a fair business transaction or service in a just war. With the exception of daily nourishment and simple clothing, what is left should not be consumed by dissipation in this exile and earthly sojourn, but should be transmitted to our true country through the exercise of mercy. We are travelling a journey, brethren.

(Sermon 151. 8)

The concept of life pilgrimage also features significantly in the thought of Gregory the Great (c. 540-604), the pope who dispatched Augustine of Canterbury on his mission to the Anglo-Saxons and whose writings were held in great esteem by the English Church. In his commentary on the Song of Songs, Gregory wrote of the exile endured by the human race since it was ‘expelled from the joys of paradise and came into *the pilgrimage of this present life*’ [my italics].⁴⁵ In his discussion of the Book of Job, Gregory asked:

But what People is ‘on travel’ in this world, but that which hastening to the inheritance of the Elect knows well that it has its native country in the heavenly world, and expects that it will there find its own the more, in proportion as here it reckons all things that pass away to be unconnected with itself? Thus the ‘pilgrim People’ is the number of all the Elect, who accounting this life a species of exile to themselves, pant with the whole bent

⁴⁵ P.L. 79. 471.

of the heart after their native country above; of which persons Paul saith, And confessed *that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth* [my italics].

(*Moralia in Job*, Book 18)⁴⁶

In a letter of consolation to a bereaved friend he commented:

Peregrinatio quippe est vita præsens; et qui suspirat ad patriam, ei tormentum est peregrinationis locus, etiamsi blandus esse videatur.⁴⁷

This present life is indeed a pilgrimage and he who longs for the fatherland, for him the place of pilgrimage is torture, even though it appears enticing.

From the examples examined above it can be seen that the primary New Testament understanding of pilgrimage as a journey through life remained dominant in the writings of the early Fathers. In time this concept was transmitted to the Church in England, not only through the biblical text but also through the comments of writers such as St Augustine and St Gregory, whose influence on the Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Church was considerable. The cluster of ideas found together in the Letter to the Hebrews,⁴⁸ such as living as pilgrims and strangers and seeking the heavenly homeland, was further interpreted and developed, becoming part of the thought patterns of later generations. From the late third century onwards, however, the idea of place-orientated pilgrimage began to take hold within the Church and the fourth century saw a development of pilgrimages to the Holy Land and the shrines of saints which would also profoundly affect the understanding of pilgrimage within the medieval Church. From focusing almost entirely on holiness of life and the journey to the heavenly Jerusalem, the Church gradually came to accommodate the idea of

⁴⁶ Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job*..

⁴⁷ *Ep. LXXV. P.L. 77. 1175.*

⁴⁸ See Chapter I:1.C.

pilgrimage to holy places upon earth. In order to appreciate the significance of this major shift in Christian thought (and the complexities which it brought into the use of pilgrimage as a literary image), it is necessary to examine both Jewish and pagan beliefs about sacred places and to trace the effects of the conversion of Constantine and the growth of the Cult of the Saints.

CHAPTER III

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN HOLY PLACES

Pilgrymes and palmeres plighen hem togidere
To seken Seint Jame and seintes in Rome;
Wenten forth in hire wey with many wise tales
And hadden leve to lyen al hire lif after.

(*Piers Plowman*, Prol. 46-9)¹

Nowhere have I received the grace of God in so large
a measure as I did in the place where our redemption
was wrought.

(Felix Fabri)²

Introduction

The sharply-differing attitudes towards pilgrimage to holy places revealed in the excerpts from medieval authors which this chapter is headed, need to be placed in a wider context if they are to be fully understood. For the question of whether certain places could be considered holy, that is offering particular access to or special revelations of God, did not originate in the fourteenth century; it was a problem with which the Christian Church had wrestled throughout the centuries and which has never been completely resolved. An examination of the history of the Church reveals an ongoing process of oscillation between an emphasis on the omnipresence of God and the belief that visiting special places would result in special blessings. Within this overall discussion however, there have been two particular periods when a major re-evaluation of the arguments have taken place. These periods are the fourth century in Palestine and the period leading up and including the Reformation in Western Europe.

¹ William Langland; *The Vision of Piers Plowman*..

² *The Book of the Wanderings of Felix Fabri*.

The former involved a decisive shift towards the development of place pilgrimage within Christianity; the latter marked a rejection of a practice seen as corrupt and liable to undermine true devotion. The roots of the tensions observable in medieval English attitudes to pilgrimage lie therefore in the extraordinary events of the fourth century which witnessed the initiation of a network of holy places which would spread from the Holy Land throughout Europe. It is the purpose of this chapter to chart the origins and implications of this development.

All religions have a strong concept of sacred place and many elements of this concept are held in common. Harold Turner describes four universal characteristics of the sacred place: its function as the centre of life; its capacity to mirror a more perfect realm; its role as a meeting point for deity and mankind; the location of the cult object which symbolises and embodies the divine presence.³ As we have seen in Chapter I, the Old Testament narrative charts a perceptible shift from the pilgrim journeys of Abraham and the Exodus community towards a new focus upon worshipping and encountering God in a given place, namely the city of Jerusalem. In the New Testament, however, we see a reversal of this process and a strong move away from attitudes to place inherited from Jewish tradition. For three centuries the Church focused predominantly upon God's presence with his people wherever they might be, looking for comfort and inspiration to a heavenly rather than an earthly Jerusalem. Thus Origen (d. c. 254) commented

If, then, the whole earth has been cursed in the deeds of Adam ... it is plain that all parts of the earth share in the curse, and among others the land of Judea; so that the words, 'a good land and a large, a land flowing with milk and honey,' cannot apply to it, although we may say of it, that both Judah and Jerusalem were the shadow and figure of that pure land, godly and large, in the pure region of heaven, in which is the heavenly Jerusalem. And it is in reference to

³ Turner (1979), Ch 1.

this Jerusalem that the apostle spoke.

(*Against Celsus*, Bk VII, XXIX)⁴

Like Judaism, however, Christianity was susceptible to external influences. With the conversion of Constantine in AD 312 and his subsequent strategy of 'reclaiming' pagan and Jewish sacred sites,⁵ Christian thinking on holy places underwent a major shift, though not without considerable debate and dissension. The outcome was a new sacred topography which radically transformed the experience of Christians⁶ yet at the same time opened the door to beliefs and practices which sat uneasily with the doctrine of the apostles.

The relationship between pilgrimage, understood as a life journey towards heaven, and the pilgrimages to holy places which grew in popularity from the fourth century onwards, was from the outset, therefore, both uncertain and complex. A detailed examination of the evolution of that relationship (and the unresolved tensions which were built into it) is essential if we are to fully appreciate the multi-faceted view of pilgrimage which was in time transmitted to the medieval church and which so profoundly influenced the imaginations of medieval writers.

1. THE JEWISH BACKGROUND

A. Holy city, holy land

tabernaculum testimonii fuit patribus nostris in deserto...
quod et induxerunt suscipientes patres nostri cum Iesu
in possessionem gentium ...
usque in diebus David qui invenit gratiam ante Deum
et petiit ut inveniret tabernaculum Deo Iacob

⁴ Origen, *Writings*.

⁵ Such as Mamre. See Taylor (1993), Chs 4 & 13.

⁶ See Markus (1990), Ch 10.

Salomon autem aedificavit illi domum
sed non Excelsus in manufactis habitat...
dura cervice et incircumcisi cordibus et auribus
vos semper Spiritui Sancto resistitis sicut patres vestri et vos
quem prophetarum non sunt persecuti patres vestri
et occiderunt eos qui praenuntiabant de adventu Iusti
cuius vos nunc proditores et homicidae fuistis

The tabernacle of the testimony was with our fathers in the desert...
Which also our fathers, receiving, brought in with Jesus [Joshua]
into the possession of the Gentiles...
unto the days of David, who found grace before God
and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.
But Solomon built him a house.
Yet the most High dwelleth not in houses made with hands...
You stiff necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears,
you always resist the Holy Ghost. As your fathers did, so do you also.
Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?
And they have slain them who foretold of the coming of the Just One;
of whom you have been now the betrayers and murderers.

(Acts 7:44-48, 51-2)

These words, taken from the speech attributed to Stephen, the first Christian martyr, show him attempting to defend himself before the Jewish Sanhedrin against accusations that he 'never stops speaking against this holy place (*adversus locum sanctum*) [i.e. the Temple in Jerusalem]' (Acts 6:13). The main thrust of Stephen's response was a refocusing of attention: from a place to a person. The Temple might house a symbol of God's presence amongst His chosen people but Jesus Christ was that presence made flesh and the Jewish authorities had refused to recognise him. The account in Acts indicates that Stephen's argument was violently rejected and his death

was followed by a general persecution which led to an exodus of Christians ('all except the apostles' Acts 8:1) and a steady movement outwards to towns and cities throughout the Roman Empire. This enforced propulsion into the wider world, together with the re-evaluation of Jewish tradition which provoked it, reinforced the shift away from place which would characterise Christian thought for the next three centuries. Henceforth Jerusalem was neither theologically necessary nor practically feasible as the ongoing headquarters of the infant church.

The radical nature of this development should not be underestimated. From the call of Abraham, the point at which the history of Israel as a nation can be said to have begun, the concept of the land had been central to the relationship between the Israelites and their God.⁷

dixit autem Dominus ad Abram
egredere de terra tua et de cognatione tua
et de domo patris tui
in terram quam monstrabo tibi

And the Lord said to Abram:
Go forth out of thy country, and from thy kindred,
and out of thy father's house,
and *come into the land which I shall shew thee* [my italics].

(Genesis 12:1)

Robert L. Wilken identifies the promise of the land:

as a primal motif uniting the entire biblical narrative. The promise to Abraham and his descendants appears early in Genesis, punctuating the stories of the

⁷ Davies describes the emphasis on the land in Judaism as 'one of the most persistent and passionately held doctrines with which the Early Church had to come to terms.' Davies (1974), 5.

patriarchs; it gives energy and purpose to Exodus, a book about the formation of a people in quest of their land, and is the foundation of the covenant as set forth in Deuteronomy. It is the *raison d'être* of the book of Joshua which recounts the conquest of the land of Canaan.⁸

Possession of the land was a continuing metaphor of the blessings associated with the people's relationship with God; exile from the land was interpreted as a sign of judgement consequent upon the breaking of that relationship through sin.

With the conquest of the land came the annexation of Canaanite sanctuaries and the incorporation of some of the attributes of the Baalim, particularly that of providing material blessings, into the worship of Yahweh.⁹ Though these sites were probably identified as sacred by the Canaanites because of their fertility or the presence of some natural feature, the religion of Israel required a more direct link with their deity. Turner¹⁰ comments:

For Israel these [Canaanite sanctuaries] could only be legitimated by some theophany of their own god, Yahweh, and so we have a whole series of what Pederson has called 'consecration legends' describing the experience not only of Jacob [at Bethel] but also of Abraham at Shechem, Isaac at Beersheba, Jacob at Peniel and others.¹¹

⁸ Wilken (1992), 4.

⁹ Davies (1974), 12.

¹⁰ Turner (1979), 17.

¹¹ A similar transformation of pre-Christian sites into Christian shrines with associated legends took place as Christianity spread across Western Europe and into the British Isles.

B. The significance of Jerusalem-Zion¹²

During the reign of King David, Jerusalem, hitherto a Canaanite stronghold poised between the Northern and Southern kingdoms, became both the religious and political centre of the nation. The Second Book of Samuel relates that following the capture of the city (c. 1000 BC) from the Jebusites (2 Samuel 5:6-9), David moved the Ark of the Covenant, the chest containing the tablets of the Law, to Jerusalem where in time his son Solomon built the first temple to house it. Wilken points out the significance of this step:

The ark was the symbol of God's presence in the midst of Israel, and with its removal to Jerusalem God's presence was no longer portable; holiness was now bound to place.¹³

As part of the reforms carried out during the reign of Josiah (628-609 BC), the supremacy of Jerusalem was consolidated and the pattern of Jewish pilgrimage to Jerusalem reaffirmed, as the city was identified with the centre of worship specified in Deuteronomy 16:16:

tribus vicibus per annum apparebit omne masculinum tuum
in conspectu Domini Dei tui in loco quem elegerit

¹² Zion was originally the name given to a fortified hill-top within the city-state of Jerusalem and came to signify God's holy hill (Psalm 2.6). Zion was frequently used as a synonym for Jerusalem and its people (Isaiah 1:27), particularly in the context of eschatology (see Dictionary of NT Theology V 300, 313-9) and of experiencing the presence of God. 'If one examines the use of this loan-word one finds it particularly frequently where the emphasis is on the cultic location as a sacral *focus where the presence of Yahweh is felt* [my italics]. "Going up to Zion" is the same thing as "going up to the Lord" (Jer. 31:6.).' Kittel (1965), 326. On the interpretations of Jerusalem in Middle English literature see Chapter XI.

¹³ Wilken (1992), 9. Henry Carse sees this development as a 'paradoxical volte-face, an abandonment of the desert, and a focusing of the entire pilgrimage ethos on a single holy city, Jerusalem' Carse (1994), 21.

in sollemnitate azymorum et in sollemnitate ebdomadatum
et in sollemnitate tabernaculorum

Three times in a year shall all your thy males appear
before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose:
in the feast of unleavened bread, in the feast of weeks,
and in the feast of tabernacles.

According to the psalms, God himself had chosen Jerusalem-Zion.

elegit Dominus Sion elegit eam in habitationem sibi

the Lord hath chosen Sion: he hath chosen it for his dwelling.

(Psalm 131:13)

The city was described as God's throne (Jeremiah 3:17), a holy city (Isaiah 46:13) and God's holy mountain (Psalm 2:6). Israel was the centre of the earth (Ezekiel 38:12) and Jerusalem the centre of Israel (Ezekiel 5:5).

There was a darker side to the image of Jerusalem revealed in the writings of the prophets: judgement was to fall upon the city because it had turned away from God and his ways. To lose Jerusalem was the greatest disaster which could befall Israel, symbolising as it did not only a political calamity but a rift in their relationship with God. The destruction of Jerusalem and the deportations from the land, which took place in the eighth and sixth centuries B.C., were signs of God's rejection of a faithless people. Yet exile only heightened awareness of the significance of Jerusalem; moreover the prophets indicated that judgement would not mean the final doom of the city; instead Jerusalem would be purified through suffering and restored to holiness and God's favour (Joel 3:17).

The eschatological vision of Jerusalem which emerges from the Old Testament establishes the city as a place of pilgrimage where all nations could find salvation:

verbum quod vidit Isaias filius Amos super Iudam et Hierusalem
et erit in novissimis diebus praeparatus mons domus Domini
in vertice montium
et elevabitur super colles et fluent ad eum omnes gentes
et ibunt populi multi et dicent venite et ascendamus ad montem Domini
et ad domum Dei Iacob et docebit nos vias suas et ambulabimus in semitis eius

The word that Isaias the son of Amos saw, concerning Juda and Jerusalem.
And in the last days the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be prepared
on the top of mountains,
and it shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it.
And many peoples shall go, and say: Come and let us go up to the mountain of
the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob;
and he will teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths.

(Isaiah 2:1-3)

From the temple will flow rivers which will bring healing to the nations (Ezekiel 47:1-12; Joel 3:18; Zechariah 14:8).

C. The Apocalyptic Vision of Jerusalem

The apocalyptic writings of Judaism developed the vision still further. A belief emerged in a pre-existent, heavenly Jerusalem which would descend to earth at the end of the age (4 Esdras 13: 35-6). The new Jerusalem-Zion described in the Book of Tobit anticipates the vision of the holy city in the Book of Revelation:

luce splendida fulgebis et omnes fines terrae adorabunt te
nationes ex longinquo ad te venient

et munera deferentes adorabunt Dominum in te
et terram tuam in sanctificatione habebunt...
portae Hierusalem ex sapphyro et zmaragdo aedificabuntur
et ex lapide pretioso omnis circuitus murorum eius
ex lapide candido et mundo omnes plateae eius sternetur
et per vicos eius alleluia cantabitur

Thou shalt shine with a glorious light: and all the ends of the earth
shall worship thee. Nations from afar shall come to thee:
and bring gifts: and shall adore the Lord in thee:
and shall esteem thy land as holy....

The gates of Jerusalem shall be built of sapphire, and of emerald,
and all the walls thereof round about of precious stones.

All its streets shall be paved with white and clean stones:
and Alleluia shall be sung in its streets.¹⁴

(Tobit 13: 13, 14, 20-2)

2. THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE EARLY CHURCH

For Stephen and his companions in the fledgling church, composed as it was of Jewish followers of Christ, to disregard the overriding Jewish sense of place was a step of considerable theological and emotional significance. An examination of the Gospels shows that whilst Jerusalem's place in the religious life of the nation makes it the necessary setting for Christ's sacrificial death for mankind, the Evangelists are conscious of the darker side of Jerusalem's history.¹⁵ It is shown as the city over which Jesus weeps (Luke 19:41) because, (as the speech attributed to Stephen points out), it is rejecting him as it had rejected the prophets before him. Judgement is predicted, and those who had seen Christ die could not feel that judgement undeserved.

¹⁴ Compare Revelation 22.

¹⁵ See Walker (1996) and Peters (1985).

The fact that the message of Christianity soon leapt the racial barrier and spread to the Gentiles inevitably weakened the hold which the city and the land held upon the newly-emerging church. The New Testament writers continued to value and cite the great figures of the Hebrew scriptures but they drew from their works and actions lessons which could be applied by believers of any nationality in any location. Above all, the Christian faith was about a direct relationship with God, mediated not through temple sacrifice but through the presence of God's Holy Spirit with the believer wherever he or she might be. Thus experience of God could in no way be limited by place. Interestingly, this development can be seen to reverse the shift within Judaism from the wilderness experiences of Abraham and the Exodus community towards the establishment of place pilgrimage focused on the temple in Jerusalem.¹⁶ This growing sense of detachment can only have been confirmed by the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in AD 70 and the razing of the entire city following the Bar Kochba revolt in AD 135. Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, writing at the beginning of the fourth century, states that many Christians survived the former disaster by fleeing to Pella and subsequently returned to Jerusalem.¹⁷ The second revolt however provoked a more thorough determination on the part of the Roman authorities to deal with Jewish dissent. An edict was issued excluding Jews from Jerusalem, the city itself was renamed Aelia Capitolina and a temple to Venus constructed upon the Temple Mount. Jerusalem was in effect obliterated and a pagan city rose in its place. According to Eusebius, Jewish-born Christians were forced to leave Jerusalem at this point and 'the church in the city was now composed of Gentiles.'¹⁸ Joan Taylor suggests that some ethnically-Jewish Christians may at this point have abandoned Jewish praxis altogether and thus contrived to remain in Aelia under a new 'Gentile' identity.¹⁹ Whilst dismissing the theory that a 'Jewish-Christian' church, committed to the observance of Mosaic law,

¹⁶ A further shift, exactly mirroring that contained within Judaism, would in due course take place within Christianity.

¹⁷ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.5.

¹⁸ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.6.

¹⁹ Taylor (1993), 43.

survived to preserve an unbroken tradition of Christian holy places, Taylor does not rule out some continuity between the 'Jewish' church in Jerusalem before 135 AD and the 'Gentile' church which continued to exist in the re-named city. Occasional references to the presence of Christians in Jerusalem during the next two centuries survive: Eusebius writes of bishop Narcissus presiding over a synod at the end of the second century (5.23), and of the appointment of Alexander to succeed him in 211 (6.8).¹⁹ Though Jerusalem continued to be an object of interest to both Jews and Christians, it was her downfall rather than her former glories which preoccupied those who climbed the Mount of Olives to look down upon the city. Jews went there to mourn the ruined temple, Christians to observe how God's judgement had fallen upon those who had failed to respond to the Messiah. Pionius, a contemporary of Origen, speaking just before his martyrdom in Smyrna, recalled 'I saw the land which until now has borne witness to the wrath of God.'²⁰ Jerusalem, therefore, was for the early church a place which had lost the special status it had enjoyed within Judaism. It functioned as a warning rather than as an inspiration, a city rejected by God rather than a city where he was to be encountered. The focus of the Church now was upon experiencing the presence and guidance of God throughout the world. The Book of Acts in its account of the manifestation of the Holy Spirit even among the despised Gentiles (Acts 10) makes it plain that the early Christians, like the people of God travelling through the desert to the Promised Land,²¹ claimed a relationship with God which was independent of place.

3. THE PAGAN BACKGROUND

As Christian missionaries fanned out across the Roman Empire, they found themselves engaging in dialogue not only with Jews but also with active adherents of the many polytheistic cults which are collectively described as pagan religion. These cults had a

²⁰ *Mart. Pionii* iv. 18. Cited Taylor (1993), 313.

²¹ See Chapter I: E.

very strongly developed sense of place;²² frequently a particular spot, such as a mountain, cave or spring, was recognised as having an inherent sacred quality and a shrine established there. Sabine MacCormack cites Virgil's account of Evander showing Aeneas the site of Rome in which the still wooded Capitol is said to fill the local country people with dread since the hill is believed to be inhabited by a god, possibly Jupiter:

hinc ad Tarpeiam sedem et Capitolia ducit
aurea nunc, olim silvestribus horrida dumis.
iam tum religio pavidos terrebat agrestis
dira loci, iam tum silvam saxumque tremebant.
'hoc nemus, hunc' inquit, 'frondoso vertice collem
(quis deum incertum est) habitat deus; Arcades ipsum
credunt se vidisse lovem, cum saepe nigrantum
aegida concuteret dextra nimbosque cieret'

(Vergil, *Aeneid*, 8. 347-54)²³

MacCormack goes on to observe:

as Vergil describes it, there was initially no story and no event attached to the site of the Capitol that made it holy. Rather the stories, the sacred tales of Jupiter were brought by newcomers from Arcadia... But originally the holiness had been impersonal and inherent in the place, in nature.

²² 'Pilgrimage was rooted in a fundamental religious fact: the gods appeared at particular places and locales... religion in the ancient world was wedded to place.' Wilken (1992), 104.

²³ MacCormack translates this passage: '[Evander] led Aeneas to the place of Tarpeia and the Capitol, which is now golden but was then dark with forest undergrowth. Even then a fearful dread of the place pressed on the timid countryfolk, even then they trembled at the forest and the rock. "This grove," Evander said, "this hill with its wooded peak is inhabited by a god, but by what god is unknown. The Arcadians believe that they have often seen Jupiter himself shaking the darkening aegis in his right hand as he stirred up the stormclouds"' MacCormack (1990), 10.

Pilgrimage to such shrines was a popular and well-developed activity.²⁴ Pilgrims were prompted to undertake their journeys by the search for healing or guidance,²⁵ and the need to fulfil vows²⁶ and offer thanks, all motives which would in time be absorbed into the practice of Christian pilgrimage and become highly influential in medieval Christianity. Robin Lane Fox stresses the need felt by pagan worshippers to appease gods who could become 'touchy' if neglected:

Any account of pagan worship which minimizes the gods' uncertain anger and mortals' fear of it is an empty account. This fear did not preclude thanksgiving, but thanks, in Greek prayer, were interwoven with ideas of propitiation. These ideas centred on the offering of gifts.²⁷

Ferguson describes the *ex voto* offerings at the temple of Aesclepius at Cos in terms which anticipate the practice at medieval shrines such as that of St Thomas at Canterbury:

Custom called for a gift of thanksgiving to the god for the healing... a work of art showing the god and his family or the scene of the cure, an inscription commemorating the cure and/or the offering that was brought, a literary piece... or a reproduction of the part of the body that was healed.²⁸

²⁴ 'Long before Christian pilgrimages, pagan townsmen walked or rode a fair distance to rural festivals on their country properties or further still to recognised shrines in holy places.' Lane Fox (1986), 41.

²⁵ Pilgrims travelled to the shrine of Aesclepius where in their sleep they were said to find healing and enlightenment. See Piehler (1971) and Spearing (1976).

²⁶ The implied reason for the journey of Chaucer's pilgrims was: 'The hooly blisful martir for to seke/That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.' (*Gen. Prol.* 17,18). The salutary tale of Jordan Fitz-eisulf, told in the stained glass of Canterbury Cathedral, makes it clear that like the ancient gods, St Thomas appreciated such attentions.

²⁷ Lane Fox (1986), 38.

²⁸ Ferguson (1987), 176.

Civic delegations as well as individuals sought favours and direction through oracles such as those at Delphi and Claros, a custom which flourished anew in the second century A.D.²⁹ Great cities looked to their gods for protection and prosperity and were at pains to offer due honour to all deities who might have favours to bestow. It was when faced with an audience from this background, that St Paul is recorded combining a tactful approach to pagan religion with arguments very similar to those which Stephen had addressed to the Jewish Sanhedrin:

viri athenienses per omnia quasi superstitiosiores vos video
praeteriens enim et videns simulacra vestra
inveni et aram in qua scriptum erat ignoto deo
quod ergo ignorantes colitis hoc ego adnuntio vobis
Deus qui fecit mundum et omnia quae in eo sunt
hic caeli et terrae cum sit Dominus non in manufactis templis inhabitat

Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are too superstitious.
For passing by and seeing your idols,
I found an altar also, on which was written: *To the unknown God*.
What therefore you worship, without knowing it, that I preach to you:
God, who made the world and all things therein,
He being Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands.

(Acts 17:22-24)

This diplomatic approach was moderately successful and others, including the Roman missionaries to Anglo-Saxon England, would use it in the future³⁰ to stress the

²⁹ 'Whilst Christians travelled to the Holy Land and marvelled at God's wrath against the Jews, pagan choirs were travelling yearly to Claros, to sing and see their delegates 'enter' the temple tunnels.' Lane Fox (1986), 180.

³⁰ Compare Gregory the Great's instructions to Augustine of Canterbury. See Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, I. 30.

continuity between pagan aspirations and Christian revelation. According to the account in Acts, however, not all Paul's audiences overlooked the implications of his assertion that the Christian God did not live in man-made shrines.³¹ In Acts 19, Christian preaching is represented posing as a direct threat to the local Ephesian cult, its shrine and those whose livelihoods depend on it. A local silversmith complains:

non solum Ephesi sed paene totius Asiae Paulus hic suadens avertit
multuum turbam dicens
quoniam non sunt dii qui manibus fiunt
non solum autem haec periclitabitur
nobis pars in redargutionem venire
sed et magnae deae Dianae templum in nihilum reputabitur
sed et destrui incipiet maiestas eius
quam tota Asia et orbis colit

This Paul, by persuasion, hath drawn away a great multitude, not only of Ephesus, but almost of all Asia, saying:

They are not gods which are made by hands.

So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought,
but also the temple of Diana shall be reputed for nothing!

Yea and her majesty shall begin to be destroyed,
whom all Asia and the world worshipping.

(Acts 19:26,27)

³¹ Sabine MacCormack (1990), 12-13, cites the inclusion of a similar argument in a dialogue between a Christian and a pagan, written c. 200. Marcus the Christian rejects the customs of pagan religion asking, 'What temple can I build for God seeing the whole universe, which is his creation, cannot hold him? And shall I... enclose within one small building a power of such majesty? Should God not rather be worshipped in our mind and consecrated in our innermost heart' (Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 6. 1-3).

In pagan cults, 'the gods were known through their images,'³² which were honoured in the Greek world on their festival days when the people processed, sang and sacrificed in their honour.³³ Statues of the gods were believed to function not only as symbols of their presence but as channels of their power, a power rejected by Christians as demonic. For the next three centuries Christians would endure torture and death rather than conform to communal pressure and sacrifice to such gods. Their determined opposition to practices which they regarded as idolatrous, together with the associated concept of shrines and holy places,³⁴ survived persecution. Ironically, it would in time be undermined by the conversion of a Roman Emperor.

4. EARLY VISITORS TO PALESTINE

Records of Christian visitors to Palestine during the first three centuries A.D. are sketchy but it would appear that their interest in the land was primarily theological and historical and that their journeys were inspired by the desire to visit the Christian community and to make learned enquiries, rather than by any concept of seeking out places of special sanctity for the purpose of worship. The earliest recorded visit is that of Bishop Melito of Sardis. He travelled to Palestine around 170, seeking information about the 'number and order' of the 'ancient books.' A report of his visit is contained in a letter quoted by Eusebius:

³² Lane Fox (1986), 66.

³³ Ignatius of Antioch converts this aspect of pagan worship into an image of life for the Christians in Ephesus: 'You are all pilgrims in the same great procession, bearing your God and your shrine and your Christ and your sacred treasures on your shoulders, every one of you arrayed in the festal garments of the commandments of Jesus Christ', *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 9 (*The Apostolic Fathers*).

³⁴ For example, Origen (*Against Celsus*, Chs XXXIV and XXXV): 'We do not ask the question, 'How shall we go to God?' as though we thought that God existed in some place. God is of too excellent a nature for any place: he holds all things in His power, and is Himself not confined by anything whatever...

We have no need to visit the oracles of Trophonius, of Amphiaraus, and of Mopsus, to which Celsus would send us, assuring us that we would there 'see the gods in human form'... For we know that these are demons... shut up by their base desires in prisons, which the Greeks call temples of the gods, but which we know are only the dwellings of deceitful demons' Origen, *Writings*..

When I visited the east and arrived at the place where it all happened and the truth was proclaimed, I obtained precise information about the Old Testament books and made out the list which I am now sending you.³⁵

The motivation for his journey was apparently scholarship rather than devotion. He is not recorded as showing any interest in the sites; indeed he wrote elsewhere: 'The Jerusalem below was precious but it is worthless now because of the Jerusalem above.'³⁶ Eusebius also records that around AD 210 Alexander, who would become bishop of Jerusalem, 'journeyed from Cappadocia, his original see, to Jerusalem, in order to worship³⁷ there and to examine the historic sites.'³⁸ Origen, who returned to Caesarea from Alexandria in the 230s and founded a school there, visited a number of sites, in an 'investigation (*historia*) of the traces.'³⁹ Joan Taylor categorises such visitors as scholars rather than pilgrims:

'A *historia* was a sort of learned tourism, a grand 'study tour'; the word crops up frequently in the writings of Eusebius when he mentions Christian visitors prior

³⁵ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.26

³⁶ *Pascal Homily*, 45 P.G. (1857-), 24, 693-706. Cited Wilken (1992), 147-8.

³⁷ Literally 'to pray'. This has been variously interpreted by scholars. Peter Walker comments, 'Here for the first time the germinal idea of pilgrimage, the conjunction of place and prayer can be sensed' Walker (1990), 12; Joan Taylor draws a different conclusion: 'At first sight this may imply that some kinds of 'holy places' existed to which Alexander could go to pray, but in fact Eusebius makes it clear that there was only one: the Mount of Olives (*Dem. Evang.* vi. 18.23; *Onom* 74. 16-18). For certain Christians, this hill had something of the holiness of the former Jewish Temple... Nevertheless, the divine was not intermixed with the material in any inherent or inseparable way. The Mount was not holy simply because it had been touched by Jesus as if by a magical wand... Christians did not just pray here, but could pray anywhere... What is missing in these early accounts of Christian visitors is any sense that biblical sites were seen as appropriate places for prayer because of their special, intrinsic holiness.' Taylor (1993), 312.

³⁸ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.11.

³⁹ *Commentary on John* 1.28. Cited Taylor (1993), 311.

to the Constantinian developments... A *historia* was not a pilgrimage. Jerome elucidates the motives for such a trip thus:

In the same way that they who have seen Athens understand the Greek histories better, and they who have sailed from Troy through Leucaten, and from Acroceraunia to Sicily, and from there to the mouth of the Tiber understand the third book of Virgil, so he who has contemplated Judea with his own eyes and knows the sites of the ancient cities, and knows the names of the places, whether the same or changed, will regard scripture more lucidly (*Praef. in Lib. Paralip.*)

By Jerome's day, of course, this scholarly interest had become amalgamated with the general idea of what it meant to be a pilgrim, but prior to the fourth century an interest in history and literature appears to have been the only real motive for Christians visiting Palestine.⁴⁰

For the first three centuries of the Church, therefore, Jerusalem appears to have functioned more as a site of (limited) historical interest rather than of devotional significance. The Jews, having suffered ferocious retribution at the hands of the Romans for their nationalistic aspirations, seem to have played down their past associations with the city; Christians looked for leadership to Caesarea, Antioch, Alexandria and Rome.⁴¹ Taylor concludes her examination of the archeological and literary evidence thus: 'There is no evidence at all that Jewish-Christians, or any other kind of Christians, venerated sites *as sacred* [my italics] before the beginning of the fourth century.'⁴²

⁴⁰ Taylor (1993), 311.

⁴¹ 'With the decline of Jerusalem, Palestine lost its religious heart and much of its religious character. Palestine in the third century with Caesarea as its capital was quite a different place from Judea in the first century centred on Jerusalem. Economically it was poor; and its religious significance had been eclipsed. Ecclesiastically it counted for little; theologically it counted for less.' Walker (1990), 14.

⁴² Taylor (1993), 295.

How, then, was a religion 'highly inhospitable to the idea of holy places' transformed into one which had by the end of the fourth century become 'highly receptive'?⁴³ The external catalyst was the conversion of the Emperor Constantine; the internal shift in conviction was substantially aided by the development of the cult of the martyrs.⁴⁴ Eusebius (c 260-339), Bishop of Caesarea and historian of the early centuries of the church, was an eyewitness of the radical changes which occurred as Constantine took control of the empire and deliberately promoted the ancient land of Israel as the centre⁴⁵ of the spiritual universe and thus a magnet for pilgrims from all corners of the Christian world. Whatever the motivations which brought earlier travellers to the land of Palestine, it was the century which followed the conversion of Constantine which witnessed the full blossoming of place-orientated pilgrimage and the incorporation of many of the elements which would form the experience of the medieval pilgrim.

5. THE 'HOLY LAND' AND PILGRIMAGE AFTER 325

The early writings of Eusebius show no sign of the far-reaching developments which were to take place within his lifetime. Instead, he voices views which descend in a direct line from the teachings of the New Testament:

The Law of Moses required all who desired to be holy to speed from all directions to one definite place; but, I, giving freedom to all, teach men not to look for God in a corner of the earth, nor in mountains, nor in temples made with hands, but that each should worship and adore him at home.⁴⁶

⁴³ Markus (1994), 259.

⁴⁴ [See Chapter IV.

⁴⁵ It had long been a part of Jewish belief that the land of Israel was the centre of the world and Jerusalem the centre of Israel (Ezek 5:5: 'ista est Hierusalem in medio gentium posui eam'). This idea is given full expression by Cyril of Jerusalem: 'This Golgotha is the very centre of the earth' (*Catech.* 13:28) and became a commonplace of medieval thought. See French (1992), 45ff.

⁴⁶ *Demonstratio Evangelica* 1.6.40. Cited Walker (1990), 73.

Biblical sites were undoubtedly of interest to Christians (indeed Eusebius produced a biblical gazetteer, the *Onomasticon* - later translated and amended by Jerome); but it was in scripture rather than in the precise locations mentioned in the biblical text that mankind encountered God. Eusebius was at pains to differentiate Christian theology and practice from those of both Judaism and paganism. In Jesus Christ, he maintained, God was not restricted to any particular location but available to all men wherever they were.⁴⁷ Eusebius, bishop of the neighbouring city of Caesarea, saw no justification, ecclesiastical or theological, for according special status to Jerusalem. Peter Walker comments:

Eusebius' attitude towards Jerusalem was quite clear... The events of the New Testament, far from affirming the holiness of Jerusalem, only revealed its unholiness, its capacity to reject its Messiah. Moreover, the dramatic and decisive events of AD 70 confirmed that the city had received a divine judgement... In contrast to Judaism, therefore, there was no place in Christianity for a devotion to Jerusalem or a belief in its inherent holiness... Nor should Christians suppose that Jerusalem would play a special part in God's future purposes, especially at the time of the Second Coming. The New Testament instead, encouraged Christians to focus their spiritual attention on the heavenly Jerusalem (Gal.4.26; Heb.12.22), for this heavenly city now fulfilled all that the earthly city of Jerusalem had been intended to signify.⁴⁸

In the newly-converted Emperor Constantine, however, Eusebius encountered an irresistible force for change. It was customary for Roman emperors to erect sacred buildings and Constantine was no exception. The buildings which he commissioned, however, were not temples but churches and shrines dedicated to Christ and the martyrs. His new Christian capital of Constantinople was dedicated to 'the martyrs'

⁴⁷ 'Eusebius thought holy places were what Jews and pagans had; Christians, he thought, knew better.' Markus (1994), 258.

⁴⁸ Walker (1990), 40-1.

God.’⁴⁹ Moreover, with the conversion of Constantine the land of Palestine was suddenly for the first time under Christian control and the potential of Jerusalem, hitherto ‘venerated more as a symbol of the Jerusalem above than as a historical site or spiritual center in its own right’⁵⁰ was realised. Although the Emperor was never able to visit Jerusalem as a pilgrim himself, he ordered an extensive building programme to be undertaken there and his mother Helena⁵¹ was instrumental in the ‘recovery’ of a number of important Christian sites. Magnificent churches were built on the site of the ‘re-discovered’ tomb of Christ, on the Mount of Olives, in Bethlehem and at Mamre, a site associated with Abraham which had previously been sacred to both Jews and pagans. Eusebius cites a letter in which Constantine writes with considerable enthusiasm of the discovery of the Tomb:

I have no greater care than how I may best adorn with a splendid structure that sacred spot, which, under Divine direction, I have disencumbered as it were of the heavy weight of foul idol worship; a spot which has been accounted holy from the beginning in God’s judgment, but which now appears holier still, since it has brought to light a clear assurance of our Saviour’s passion.⁵²

Continuing signs of theological reservations have, however, been detected in the attitude of Eusebius towards these unprecedented developments. Walker suggests that a clear distinction remained between the position of the scholarly theologian and the enthusiastic layman who now ruled the Empire:

⁴⁹ Eusebius, *Works*, III, 48.

⁵⁰ Wilken (1992), 88.

⁵¹ The Elene of the Old English poem. Although there is no historical evidence linking Helena with the Invention of the Cross (see Hunt (1982), 28-38), legends associated with her were popular into the Middle Ages and her example greatly encouraged the development of Holy Land pilgrimage.

⁵² Eusebius, *Works*, III.30.

For Eusebius a 'holy cave' seems to have been but a form of description; for Constantine a 'holy place' implied a form of devotion. In Eusebius' understanding these places had more to do with the vindication of past biblical history and prophecy than with prayer in the present.⁵³

No such doubts seem to have troubled Cyril (c. 320-?386), Bishop of Jerusalem from around 350. His *Catechetical Lectures* stress the uniqueness of the experience which Jerusalem offered to Christians: 'Others only hear but we both see and touch.'⁵⁴

Others however were beginning to come to 'see and touch' also. The earliest surviving pilgrimage narrative is that written by an anonymous pilgrim, who arrived from Bordeaux in 333 to explore the land of the Bible. His extensive travels in Palestine are presented in a terse series of notes covering sites of both Old and New Testament significance.

Inside Sion, within the wall, you can see where David had his palace... As you leave there ... down in the valley on your right you have some walls where Pontius Pilate had his house, the Praetorium where the Lord's case was heard before he suffered. On your left is the hillock Golgotha where the Lord was crucified, and about a stone's throw from it the vault where they laid his body, and he rose again on the third day. By order of the Emperor Constantine there has now been built there a 'basilica' - I mean a 'place for the Lord' - which has beside it cisterns of remarkable beauty and beside them a bath where children are baptised.⁵⁵

The proliferation of sites identified with Biblical events now continued apace. Since the events of the Old Testament were held to prefigure those of the New, sites of

⁵³ Walker (1990), 112.

⁵⁴ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.* 13.22.

⁵⁵ In *Egeria's Travels*, 155-6.

spiritual significance abounded, even if some were of doubtful provenance. Where authentic monuments were lacking, imagination filled the gap, just as the later apocryphal writings supplied those details in the lives of Jesus, Mary and the Apostles, about which the canonical scriptures were silent. The same occurred with the holy places, where the curiosity of pilgrims created ever-richer details of meaning to invite pious contemplation. For instance where in 333 C.E. the Bordeaux Pilgrim had seen the tomb of Rachel near Bethlehem, some 250 years later Antoninus of Piacenza noted that only a few steps separated this tomb from the spot where Mary had rested on the flight to Egypt.⁵⁶

The pilgrimage narrative of Egeria,⁵⁷ a traveller from the West who visited the East between AD 381 and 384, combines unbounded enthusiasm for Biblical information with indications of a more devotional approach to the sites. This text, though unfortunately incomplete, reveals a number of significant elements which had been incorporated into Holy Land pilgrimage in the preceding decades: visits to holy people as well as places made holy by Biblical associations; the importance of worship at holy sites; the veneration of relics; the intense emotions triggered by a combination of recollection and place; and the particular spiritual blessings which pilgrims acquired through their labours. A striking feature of Egeria's narrative is its focus on meeting 'holy men,'⁵⁸ the monks who act as guides and offer hospitality to pilgrims:

That day we came across more of the monks... By this time... we had seen all

⁵⁶ MacCormack (1990), 26.

⁵⁷ See *Egeria's Travels*, 235-9 for the identification of the pilgrim and the date of the journey.

⁵⁸ 'Holy places and holy men gave the East a double attraction for the Western Christian, and most of the travellers described in the second half of the fourth century sought out both. They would see the holy places of Palestine with their great churches. They would see the *martyria*, which by then lay in profusion along routes which, less than a century before, had appeared simply pagan. But they would also be within reach of living heroes of their faith, whose discipline, holiness and sufferings had rendered them famous throughout the Christian world.' *Egeria's Travels*, Intro. 14

the holy places we had hoped to visit... and we had visited all the holy men who lived there.

(Egeria's Travels, 5:10, 11)

Although Egeria's primary concern is to glean information about the Biblical sites and transmit it to her 'sisters' (5:8), she also places considerable emphasis on worshipping God at the sites she visits. As she views Mount Sinai, she is told that 'It is usual for the people who come here to say a prayer when first they catch sight of the Mount of God' (1:2). In the cave of Moses, 'on the very spot!' (3:6), she and her companions listen to readings from the 'book of Moses' and receive Communion. The reading of appropriate passages from the Scriptures is very important to Egeria:

Wherever we arrived, I wanted the Bible passage to be read to us. (4:3)

It was always our practice when we managed to reach one of the places we wanted to see to have first a prayer, then a reading from the book, then to say an appropriate psalm and another prayer. (10:7)

Egeria also provides an insight into the more formal liturgy which was being developed at the holy sites in Jerusalem, describing in detail the services for Holy Week, the veneration of the Wood of the Cross, and the heightened emotion⁵⁹ aroused by recollecting Christ's betrayal and death at the very sites at which they were believed to have occurred:

When everyone arrives at Gethsemane, they have an appropriate prayer, a hymn, then a reading from the Gospel about the Lord's arrest. By the time it has been read everyone is groaning and lamenting and weeping so loud that people even across the city can probably hear it all...

⁵⁹ This response puts the later reactions of Margery Kempe into perspective.

The bishop's chair is placed on Golgotha Behind the Cross (the cross there now), and he takes his seat... there is brought to him a gold and silver box containing the holy Wood of the Cross... As long as the holy Wood is on the table, the bishop sits with his hands resting on either end of it and holds it down, and the deacons round him keep watch over it. They guard it like this because what happens now is that all the people, catechumens as well as faithful, come up one by one to the table. They stoop down over it, kiss the Wood, and move on. But on one occasion (I don't know when) one of them bit off a piece of the holy Wood and stole it away, and for this reason the deacons stand round and keep watch in case anyone dares to do the same...

At midday they go before the Cross... the whole time between midday and three o'clock is taken up with readings. They are all about the things Jesus suffered... It is impressive to see the way all the people are moved by these readings, and how they mourn. You could hardly believe how every single one of them weeps during the three hours, old and young alike, because of the manner in which the Lord suffered for us.

(Egeria's Travels, 36:3; 37:1, 4, 5, 7)

Participation in the Holy Week services, as described by Egeria, was a considerable test of endurance, as were many of her visits to individual sites (3:2). Pilgrimage meant undertaking arduous and frequently dangerous journeys. Pilgrims also faced real dangers. Egeria mentions the presence of an armed escort when passing through the 'danger areas' (9:3) during her visit to Egypt and Syria and the journey to and from the Holy Land was full of hazards. Such willingness to endure discomfort and danger, combined with the spiritual blessings acquired by the experience of visiting the land of the Bible caused pilgrims to be held in high esteem on their return home.

Egeria's account reveals an approach to pilgrimage closer to the experience of the medieval pilgrim than that of the Pilgrim of Bordeaux. Closer still is the description

of the pilgrimage undertaken by Paula (c. 386), written some twenty years after the event by her spiritual mentor St Jerome:

[Paula] entered Jerusalem... she started to go round visiting the places with such burning enthusiasm that there was no taking her away from one unless she was hurrying on to another. She fell down and worshipped before the Cross *as if she could see* the Lord hanging on it. On entering the Tomb of the Resurrection she kissed the stone which the angel removed from the sepulchre door; then like a thirsty man who has waited long, and at last comes to water, she faithfully kissed the very shelf on which the Lord's body had lain. Her tears and lamentations there are known to all Jerusalem - or rather to the Lord himself to whom she was praying...

[In Bethlehem] she entered the Cave of the Saviour, and saw the holy Inn of the Virgin, and the Stable ... Then she solemnly declared in my own hearing that, *with the eye of faith, she saw* a child wrapped in swaddling clothes, weeping in the Lord's manger, the Magi worshipping, the star shining above, the Virgin Mother, the attentive foster father; and the shepherds coming by night to see this word which had come to pass ... and the young children murdered, and Herod in a rage, and Joseph and Mary fleeing to Egypt [my italics].⁶⁰

Wilkinson notes that 'at the two most important points in her itinerary [here and in the Cave of the Nativity] Paula is described as visualising the biblical events commemorated.'⁶¹ This anticipates the spirituality of Ailred of Rievaulx in his *De Institutione Inclusarum* and the Pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, both texts encouraging readers to undertake journeys of the imagination and enter into the events of the Bible; It also marks an interesting parallel to the experiences claimed by Margery Kempe.

⁶⁰ Jerome, Letter 108, *To Eustochium*.

⁶¹ *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, 49 n. 29.

Jerome is writing a eulogy of Paula herself but his enthusiasm for her emotionally-charged approach to the holy sites appears to be considerable. In his earlier letter to Marcella (AD 386), urging her to forsake life in Rome and to join her friends in the Holy Land, Jerome had argued strongly against the older view that the land of Palestine had been under a curse since the crucifixion of Christ. The letter cites the prototype pilgrim, Abraham, as an example: 'What are God's first words to Abraham? 'Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred unto a land that I will show thee' (*Letter* 46.2)⁶² Jerome also uses more recent examples, speaking of the 'bishops, martyrs and divines' who have come to Jerusalem 'from a feeling that their devotion and knowledge would be incomplete and their virtue without the finishing touch, unless they adored Christ in the very spot where the gospel first flashed from the gibbet' and asks 'Can we suppose a Christian's education complete who has not visited the Christian Athens?' (*Letter* 46. 9). Jerome is careful not to make his claims for the Holy Land too exclusive, conceding that 'In speaking thus we do not mean to deny that the kingdom of God is within us, or to say that there are no holy men elsewhere.' He does not hesitate, however, to affirm its pre-eminence in the spiritual life:

we merely assert in the strongest manner that those who stand first throughout the world are here gathered side by side... Every man of note in Gaul hastens hither. The Briton 'sundered from our world,' no sooner makes progress in religion than he leaves the setting sun in quest of a spot of which he knows only through Scripture and common report.

(*Letter* 46. 10)

Christians, it seems, should travel to the Holy Land not only to learn at the very fount of Christianity but to experience its truth with an mystical intensity which Jerome seems to imply is impossible elsewhere.

⁶² Jerome, *Letters*.

Will the day never come when we shall together enter the Saviour's cave, and together weep in the sepulchre of the Lord with His sister and with His mother? Then shall we touch with our lips the wood of the cross, arise in prayer and resolve upon the Mount of Olives with the ascending Lord. We shall see Lazarus come forth bound with grave clothes... We shall sing heartily, we shall weep copiously, we shall pray unceasingly. Wounded with the Saviour's shaft, we shall say to one another: 'I have found Him whom my soul loveth; I will hold him and will not let Him go.'

(Letter 46.13)

The arguments and the emotional force of the letter are apparently beyond question, yet elsewhere Jerome betrays an ambivalence which occurs in the writings of a number of the Fathers⁶³ on the subject of place-orientated pilgrimage. In a letter written c. 395, approximately half-way between Paula's pilgrimage and his own approving account of it, Jerome uses arguments which cancel out or even reverse those which he offered to Marcella some nine years earlier, in his anxiety to dissuade Paulinus from undertaking a visit to Palestine.

What is praiseworthy is not to have been at Jerusalem but to have lived a good life while there. The city which we are to praise and to seek is not that which has slain the prophets and shed the blood of Christ, but that which is made glad by the streams of the river, which is set upon a mountain and so cannot be hid, which the apostle declares to be a mother of the saints, and in which he rejoices to have his citizenship with the righteous.

I do not presume to limit God's omnipotence or to restrict to a narrow strip of earth Him whom the heaven cannot contain... Access to the courts of heaven is as easy from Britain as it is from Jerusalem: 'for the kingdom of God is within you.'

⁶³ See for example the arguments of Gregory of Nyssa cited below.

Nothing is lacking to your faith although you have not seen Jerusalem ... I am none the better for living where I do.

(Letter 58. 2,3,4)

It is possible that Jerome may have been motivated largely by a reluctance to receive this particular visitor but there are clearly well-rehearsed arguments ready to hand which he employs with apparent conviction. In fact Jerome's seemingly contradictory pronouncements on the value of visiting the holy places and the place of such pilgrimages in the Christian life reflect a wider debate which accompanied the developments in the practice and understanding of pilgrimage which took place in the fourth century. Francine Cardman lists four main types of argument which emerge from these discussions:

The first is an argument about the nature of God and God's relation to place; the second a moral argument about the significance of Christian life and virtue as opposed to the importance of place; the third an apologetic argument based on the witness of the holy places; and the last an argument from what might be termed 'sacramental imagination'⁶⁴

Gregory of Nyssa (d. c. 394) describing a visit to the leaders of the Church in Jerusalem, speaks of the joy of seeing the 'holy places' (*loca sancta*),⁶⁵ yet also notes that even the spot which has 'received the footprints of life' (*locus ipse qui sanctum vestigium verae vitae suscepit*)⁶⁶ is not free from the wickedness which afflicts the rest of the world. Another letter, written soon after Gregory's return from Palestine, contains fully-fledged criticism of the growing practice of pilgrimage:

⁶⁴ Cardman (1982), 19.

⁶⁵ P.G. 1015C.

⁶⁶ P.G. 1015D.

When the Lord invites the blest to their inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, He does not include a pilgrimage to Jerusalem among their good deeds; when He announces the Beatitudes, He does not name amongst them that sort of devotion.

What advantage moreover is reaped by him who reached those celebrated spots themselves? He cannot imagine that our Lord is living, in the body, there at the present day, but has gone away from us foreigners; or that the Holy Spirit is in abundance at Jerusalem, but unable to travel as far as us.

Before we saw Bethlehem we knew His being made man by means of the Virgin; before we saw His Grave we believed in the Resurrection from the dead.... O ye who fear the Lord, praise Him in the places where ye now are. Change of place does not effect any drawing nearer unto God.

(Epistle 2)

Gregory voices concern, not only about the theological questions raised by place-orientated pilgrimage, but also about the moral dangers posed by the very process of travel. Far from aiding those who have undertaken to follow the ascetic life, such journeys are liable to undermine them: 'This matter, when closely looked into, is found to inflict upon those who have begun to lead the stricter life a moral mischief.' The exigencies of travel, he argues, make it impossible to keep the sexes apart:

For instance it is impossible for a woman to accomplish so long a journey without a conductor; on account of her natural weakness she has to be put on her horse and lifted down again; she has to be supported in difficult situation ... the proceeding cannot help but be reprehensible ... whether she leans on the help of a stranger, or on that of her own servant, she fails to keep the law of correct conduct.

Holy places were not necessarily inhabited by holy people (Gregory and Jerome both comment on the sinfulness of the population of Jerusalem)⁶⁷ and fellow travellers were not always edifying companions. As the popularity of Holy Land pilgrimage increased, so pilgrims of less obvious spirituality than Paula began to appear. Jerome professed himself scandalised by the activities of an anonymous female traveller:

I have lately seen a most miserable scandal traverse the entire East. The lady's age and style, her dress and mien, the indiscriminate company she kept, her dainty table and her regal appointments bespoke her the bride of a Nero or a Sardanapallus.⁶⁸

It is impossible to determine how much of this attack was prompted by unease at the prospect of independent female travel and it is certainly the case that during succeeding centuries female pilgrims featured as particular targets of anti-feminist writers.⁶⁹ In the growing numbers who came to Palestine, however, there were undoubtedly those whose motives were mixed and those for whom pilgrimage to a place was not simply an aid to a lifetime pilgrimage to heaven but was in danger of becoming a substitute for it. As 'devotional tourism'⁷⁰ grew, so local people responded to the demand for 'spiritual souvenirs' for pilgrims to take home,⁷¹ and opportunities for the fraud and exploitation later so evident in the medieval relic trade began to emerge.

⁶⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *Select Writings*, Ep. 2. Jerome, *Letter* 58. 4, speaks of Jerusalem as a 'populous city with court and garrison, with prostitutes, playactors and buffoons.' Walker (1990), 19, comments that both Jerome and Gregory could depict [Jerusalem] as the 'sin city' of their day, 'in no way different from any other city in the world.'

⁶⁸ Jerome, *Letter* 54.13.

⁶⁹ A tradition which Chaucer seems to have employed in his creation of the Wife of Bath. See Chapters IX and XI.

⁷⁰ Markus (1994), 261.

⁷¹ Hunt (1982) looks at this development in Chapter 6: 'Relics, Tourism and Wealth.'

Within a short time both the blessings and the perils of place-orientated pilgrimage were becoming increasingly apparent. However sincere the devotion of an Egeria or a Paula, Christian leaders were still not always entirely comfortable in their minds about the shift in focus which was taking place in Christian spirituality. A religion built on the understanding that God was invisibly present with and in his people wherever in the world they might be, was reverting to an orientation to 'place' which inevitably brought with it conflicting ideas and practices. What had been purely spiritual began to contain a strong material element. Moreover this phenomenon was not restricted to the land of the Bible; with the development of the cult of the saints and the multiplication of their shrines, place-orientated pilgrimage was spreading rapidly throughout Christendom.

CHAPTER IV

THE INFLUENCE OF THE CULT OF THE SAINTS

He who cures, lives. He who lives is present in his Relics.

Apostles and Martyrs cure and wash away sin.

(Victricius of Rouen, *De Laude Sanctorum*, 11)¹

... to Caunterbury they wende,

The hooly blisful martir for to seke,

That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.

(*Canterbury Tales*, General Prologue, 16-18)

The cult of the saints is of importance in the development of Christian pilgrimage for two main reasons. Not only did the growth of the cult of the martyrs and confessors facilitate the initial acceptance of the idea of Christian holy places, but their shrines, and those of their successors, provided the majority of pilgrimage centres in the Middle Ages and thus strongly coloured the medieval understanding of pilgrimage.²

1. SAINTS AND MARTYRS

Christian theology did not accept the concept of inherent holiness which marked the recognition of sacred places in pagan tradition.³ Christians were, however, prepared to honour people. For a place to be recognised as holy within Christian thought, therefore, required a specific association either with one of the three persons of the Trinity (usually Jesus Christ) or with a person whose relationship with God had endowed them

¹ Cited Hillgarth (1969), 22-5. Victricius (c. 330-c. 407) was Bishop of Rouen from c. 389.

² See Sumption (1975) and Brooke (1984).

³ In practice they often took over sites of pre-Christian origin.

(and hence their relics) with a particular sanctity. The growth of the cult of the saints and the multiplication of their shrines was therefore of crucial importance in the development of the practice of place-orientated pilgrimage, since it was the perceived presence of the saints through their relics which drew pilgrims and helped to establish a 'new sacred geography.'⁴

The emergence of the cult of the saints involved a series of shifts in Christian thought and practice, not all of which went unopposed. In the New Testament the word 'saints' (Gk. *hagioi*) had been used in a general sense of all Christian believers, as in the *Letter to the Philippians* which was addressed 'To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi' (Phil. 1:1). By AD 200, however, the word was already being employed in a more restricted sense. Problems of post-baptismal sin in the church had led to doubts about the readiness of some to proceed directly to the presence of God upon death and thus prompted the development of the doctrine of purgatory. The church therefore prayed for the souls of the departed.⁵ Martyrs (Gk *martus*, witness), however, were another matter. Those who had died bearing witness to their faith in Christ had, by their very manner of death, demonstrated their fitness to enter heaven and the church could be assured of their sanctity. The *Book of Revelation* placed in a special category those who had been beheaded *propter testimonium Iesu* (for the testimony of Jesus) (Revelation 20:4). Martyrs, it appeared, required no intercessions on their behalf from the church on earth; indeed it would not be long before their mediation was being sought in heaven.⁶

⁴ Markus (1990), 153.

⁵ Tertullian writes: 'We make offerings for the dead on their anniversary to celebrate their birthday [of eternal life] *De Corona*, 3, in *Disciplinary and Moral Works*. Cyprian (1984), I. 2, speaks of sacrifices being celebrated for the repose of the brethren.

⁶ Dix comments: 'When Origen in Egypt came to write the first Christian technical treatise *On Prayer* c. A.D. 231, he could take it for granted, rather than argue, that the angels and saints pray for us in heaven, and that it is lawful and usual for Christians to pray to the saints and to thank them for benefits received through their intercession (*de Oratione* xi; xiv)' Dix (1945), 346.

Persecution and martyrdom were facts of life from the earliest days of the Church. The *Book of Acts* records the death of the first martyr, Stephen, noting that ‘Godly men buried Stephen and mourned for him’(Acts 8:2). By the time of the martyrdom of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna in AD 155, it seems that the Jews were aware that the relics of executed Christians were liable to become a focus for popular devotion. The *Martyrdom of St Polycarp* hints at the theological confusion and devotional tensions to which the natural reverence felt for the martyrs would give rise. The Jews requested the Governor not to release Polycarp’s body lest the Christians should ‘abandon the crucified one and begin to worship this man,’ a suggestion indignantly refuted by those who compiled the *Martyrdom*:

They did not know that we can never abandon the innocent Christ who suffered on behalf of sinners for the salvation of those in this world who have been saved, and we cannot worship any other. For we *worship* Him as the Son of God, while we *love* the martyrs as disciples and imitators of the Lord.

(Ch. 17)⁷

Clearly this distinction was not immediately apparent to outsiders and the possibility that Christians themselves might fall into the trap of worshipping the martyrs remained a matter of concern during succeeding centuries. Polycarp's friends eventually succeeded in obtaining his remains.

We took up his bones, more valuable than precious stones and finer than gold, and put them in a proper place. There as far as we are able, the Lord will permit us to meet together in gladness and joy and to celebrate the birthday of his martyrdom, both in memory of those who fought the fight and for the training and preparation of those who will fight.

(Ch. 18)

⁷ In *The Apostolic Fathers*.

The ongoing inspiration provided by a martyr such as Polycarp was ensured by the annual celebration of his 'birthday' and the physical focus provided by his burial place. Recording such 'birthdays' became a matter of importance. A century later (c 250) St Cyprian wrote, 'Mark the days on which they depart, that we may celebrate their memories.'⁸ From this practice developed the observance of saints' days and the offering of votive masses in their honour. By AD 400 the most important saints had won a regular place in the eucharistic prayers of the church. During the age of the martyrs, canonisation was 'a spontaneous act of the local community'⁹ but as time went on some form of regulation became necessary. The Fifth Council of Carthage held in 401 stipulated that proper authentication must be forthcoming or the altars dedicated to saints would be destroyed. Bishops and councils took an increasingly important role in the process of canonisation, although the first papal canonisation did not take place until 993.¹⁰

After the conversion of Constantine and the resultant decrease in martyrdoms, new concepts of sainthood flourished. From the second century onwards it had been suggested that confessors (that is those who were willing to die but had not in fact been called upon to shed their blood) need not be classed as inferior to the martyrs and as martyrdoms became rare, honour was also paid to outstanding ascetics, bishops, missionaries and defenders of the faith. Works such as the *Life of St Anthony* by St Athanasius and the *Life of St Martin* (bishop of Tours 371-97) by Sulpicius Severus, which would influence hagiography for centuries to come,¹¹ showed their subjects as not only holy but able to work miracles for those who sought their help. Thus the supply of saints continued to grow apace and their role as intercessors became more

⁸ Cyprian, *Letters*, 12. 2.

⁹ Kemp (1948), 7.

¹⁰ Kemp (1948) outlines the development of the process of canonisation.

¹¹ Including the writings of Bede and *Felix's Life of Guthlac*. See Chapter V.

clearly defined. As friends of God while on earth, they could logically be expected to have particular influence with Him in heaven. Cyril of Jerusalem's lectures on the Eucharist state: 'Then we commemorate also those who have fallen asleep before us, first Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs, that *at their prayers and intercessions God would receive our petition* [my italics].'¹²

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF SHRINES

St John Chrysostom (d. 407), in a series of baptismal instructions, also written shortly before the end of the fourth century, shows how high the expectations of those who visited the martyrs' tombs had risen, in terms of both spiritual and material benefits:

God has given us the relics of the holy martyrs, although he has taken their souls to Himself... But even to this day *he has left us their bodies* to give us the exhortation and encouragement we need ...

Beloved, when you stand beside these tombs and your mind considers that this whole throng hastens with such speed to gather here that they may clasp the dust and reap the blessing which comes from these tombs, how will your mind fail to be lifted aloft ...

Since we realise how free [the martyrs] are to speak, *let us always have recourse to them and accept the help which they will give*. Men who have the freedom to speak to an earthly king can win many great benefits to help those who have recourse to them. Because of their sufferings, these blessed martyrs who have won the freedom to address the king of heaven will be all the more able to win for us the greatest blessings, if only we do our fair share...

Let us have continuous recourse to them as to physicians of the spirit. It was for this reason that the good Master has left their bodies with us, that we might stand beside their tombs and clasp them with the whole strength of our soul,

¹² *Catechetical Lectures* V.9 in Cyril of Jerusalem, *Works*.

and in this way get from them the greatest healing for our illnesses of soul and body. For *if we stand beside them with faith, whether our sickness be of the body or of the soul, we will not leave their tombs without the healing of which we stood in need* [my italics].¹³

The tombs of the saints represented the point at which heaven and earth intersected: the saints being capable of simultaneously enjoying life in heaven and being present in their relics¹⁴ for the benefit of the faithful. Thus an inscription from the tomb of Martin of Tours reads: 'Here lies Martin the bishop, of holy memory, whose soul is in the hand of God; but he is fully here, present and made plain in miracles of every kind.'¹⁵ Such cults were initially of only local importance but during the fourth century the practices of translation and invention led to rapid expansion. Since Constantinople, the 'new Rome' built by Constantine, had no martyrs comparable with those of Rome, the bodies of St Timothy and St Luke were moved there in 356-7. In the West, the force of Roman law and Christian teaching opposed both translation and the dismemberment of bodies but such objections were often outweighed by the demands of popular piety. In 386, St Ambrose, prompted by the people of Milan, instituted a search for suitable relics for the dedication of his new basilica¹⁶ and the bodies of two hitherto obscure martyrs, St Gervasius and St Protasius, were 'discovered' and duly installed under the altar. Relics of these two saints, in the form of objects such as cloth which had been in contact with the bodies, were widely distributed among the churches of Gaul. In 396, Ambrose dispatched an even greater gift to the Gallic city of Rouen: the relics of thirteen saints.

¹³ Baptismal Instructions VII: 1, 3,4,5 in Chrysostom (1963).

¹⁴ Brown (1981), 88, comments 'The *praesentia* on which such heady enthusiasm focused was the presence of an invisible person. The devotees who flocked to Rome to the shrine of St Lawrence... were not merely going to a place; they were going to a place to meet a person - *ad dominum Laurentium*.'

¹⁵ *Les inscriptions chrétiennes de la Gaule* 1:240, cited Brown (1981), 4.

¹⁶ The practice of incorporating relics into the altars of churches was to become commonplace and in 787 AD the Second Council of Nicea made it mandatory for the dedication of new churches.

The ecstatic welcome accorded these relics in a sermon-treatise by Bishop Victricius, demonstrates how deeply the cult of the saints had touched the emotions. He stresses the bond forged by the presence of the saints between believers living in a more peaceful age and the Church's heroic past:

We are taught, beloved brethren, by the present increase of spiritual benefits, that we belong to the mercy of God and the omnipotence of the Savior. We have seen no executioners, we have not known swords drawn against us and yet we set up altars of Divinity. No bloody enemy assails us today yet we are enriched by the Passion of the Saints. No torturer has stretched us on the rack yet we bear the Martyrs' trophies. No blood is shed now; no persecution pursues us yet we are filled with the joy of those that triumph...

Stretched out on the ground, and watering the earth with our tears, let us call out with one voice, so that you [the Saints], *who inhabit forever the Holy Relics*, may purge our bodies...

Let no one, deceived by vulgar error, think that the truth of the whole of their bodily Passion is not contained in these fragments of the Just and in this apostolic consecration. We proclaim, with all our faith and authority, that there is nothing in these Relics that is not complete... It is absolutely certain that our Apostles and Martyrs have come to us with all their powers...

I touch remnants but I affirm that in these Relics perfect grace and virtue are contained... He who cures lives. He who lives is present in his Relics. Apostles and Martyrs cure and wash away sin.

(*De Laude Sanctorum*, 1, 6, 9, 11)¹⁷

¹⁷ Hillgarth (1969), 22-5.

The fact that many relics were secondary or fragmentary in nature did not therefore diminish their efficacy in the eyes of churchmen such as Victricius. Kemp comments:

In effect in this treatise Victricius lays down the main lines on which the theology of the cult of the saints and of relics was to develop. The saints are to be venerated for their holiness which, through intimate union with the Godhead, enables them to become channels of grace to the faithful. Further, soul and body are so closely joined together that the relics of a saint, particles of his body, or objects which have been in contact with him, become as it were sacraments, material signs through which this grace is conveyed. This it would seem is the theological explanation and defence of the cult of relics.¹⁸

The logic was plain: where the relic was, there the saint was also; where the saint was, men and women could come to avail themselves of the saint's power to help and heal.

Such developments did not go unopposed either by those who objected on the grounds of custom and decency or those who voiced strong theological objections. Amongst pagans the rise of the cult of relics provoked a 'deep religious anger.'¹⁹ Julian the Apostate (Emperor 361-3) complained, 'You keep adding many corpses newly dead to the corpse of long ago. You have filled the whole world with tombs and sepulchres.'²⁰ The repugnance felt by pagans at the breaking down of the barrier between the living and the dead which Roman law had carefully maintained is evidenced in Julian's criticism of the Christian practice of carrying relics in procession:

The carrying of the corpses of the dead through a great assembly of people, in the midst of dense crowds, staining the eyesight of all with ill-omened sights of

¹⁸ Kemp (1948), 5.

¹⁹ Brown (1981), 6.

²⁰ *Contra Galilaeos*, 335C. Cited Brown (1981), 7.

the dead. What day so touched with death could be lucky? How, after being present at such ceremonies, could anyone approach the gods and their temples?²¹

Ironically the objections voiced by Vigilantius, a Christian cleric from Gaul, included the charge of pagan practice and sub-Christian teaching. His views, which appear to have won some support, were fiercely refuted by Jerome whose treatise *Contra Vigilantium* was written in 406. According to Jerome, Vigilantius denied 'that religious reverence is to be paid to the tombs of the martyrs,' asked 'Why do you kiss and adore a bit of powder wrapped up in a cloth?' and complained:

Under the cloak of religion we see what is all but a heathen ceremony introduced into the churches: while the sun is still shining, heaps of tapers are lighted, and everywhere a paltry bit of powder, wrapped up in a costly cloth, is kissed and worshipped. Great honour do men of this sort pay to the blessed martyrs, who, they think, are to be made glorious by trumpery tapers, when the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne, with all the brightness of His majesty, gives them light.

(*Against Vigilantius*, 4)²²

Vigilantius also apparently argued that 'the souls of the Apostles and martyrs have their abode either in the bosom of Abraham, or in the place of refreshment, or under the altar of God, and that they cannot leave their own tombs and be present where they will.' Jerome, writing with all the venom at his command, rejects the accusation that the martyrs are being worshipped, demanding: 'Madman, who in the world ever adored the martyrs?'²³ He makes the traditional (but by no means universally observed) distinction

²¹ *Epistulae et Leges*. Cited Brown (1981), 7.

²² Jerome, *Letters*.

²³ Jerome, *Letters*.

between *latria* (worship) which was due to God alone and *dulia* (veneration) which may properly be accorded to the saints. He also argues that their influence cannot be restricted:

Will you put the Apostles into chains? So that to the day of judgement they are to be kept in confinement, and are not with the Lord, although it is written concerning them, 'They follow the Lamb, whithersoever he goeth.' If the Lamb is present everywhere, the same must be believed respecting those who are with the Lamb. And while the devil and the demons wander through the whole world, and with only too great speed present them everywhere; are martyrs, after the shedding of their blood to be kept out of sight shut up in a coffin, from whence they cannot escape? You say, in your pamphlet, that so long as we are alive we can pray for one another; but once we die, the prayer of no person for another can be heard... If Apostles and martyrs while still in the body can pray for others, when they ought still to be anxious for themselves, how much more must they do so when once they have won their crowns, overcome and triumphed?

(Against Vigilantius, 6)

Significantly it is Jerome's defence of the cult, rather than the attack mounted by Vigilantius, which has survived. The cult of the saints was clearly meeting a need, offering a tangible bridge between a visible, troubled world and an unseen powerful God. The saint frequently assumed the role of protector towards individuals and communities (a role which pagan deities had occupied in earlier times). There was, in Peter Brown's phrase, 'even something cozy about the cult of the martyrs,'²⁴ especially when the patron saints or saints were 'locals': fellow citizens on earth as well as in heaven. A bishop of Turin declared

²⁴ Brown (1981), 61.

Though we should celebrate, brothers, the anniversaries of all the martyrs with great devotion, yet we ought to put our whole veneration into observing the festivals especially of those who poured out their blood in our own home town [domiciliis]. Though all the saints are everywhere present and aid every one, those who suffered for us intervene for us especially. For when a martyr suffers, he suffers not only for himself, but for his fellow-citizens... So all the martyrs should be most devoutly honoured, yet specially those whose relics we possess here. For the former assist us with their prayer, but the latter also with their suffering. With these *we have a sort of familiarity*: they are always with us, they live among us [my italics].

(Maximus Taurin, *Sermo* 12. 1-2)²⁵

Even St Augustine moved from caution to enthusiasm and the account which he gives in the *The City of God* (Book XXII) of miracles wrought through relics provides valuable evidence for the spread and acceptance of the cult. The views of Augustine are of particular significance to this study because of his lasting influence on the church which would be founded among the Anglo-Saxons by his namesake, Augustine of Canterbury. Augustine indicates the existence of localised cults such as that of the Twenty Martyrs 'whose memory is cherished in our part of the world' (XXII: 8) and of the miracle-working relics of Protasius and Gervasius, the otherwise unknown figures whose hiding place was revealed in a dream to St Ambrose. In addition, Augustine refers to the translation of the relics of St Stephen, the power of which was not only demonstrated to those present at the shrine (interrupting Augustine himself in mid-sermon) but was capable of transference to garments placed upon the shrine which were subsequently used in healings elsewhere (Book XXII:8). There is also an intriguing account of the actions of a former tribune called Hesperius, who was in possession of earth from Jerusalem which he used to ward off the attacks of evil spirits.

²⁵ Cited Markus (1990), 143.

His problem solved, he offered the earth which Augustine describes significantly as '*sacred earth* taken from Jerusalem, *where Christ was buried and rose again on the third day,*' to be buried on the site of a new place of worship. This place is now described by Augustine as a 'sacred spot' and a miracle of healing promptly occurs there. Augustine has accepted the possibility of transferring spiritual power via objects from one place, made sacred by its associations, to another many miles away. Augustine favours the recording and proclamation of such events and notes in passing that, 'At Hippo we have started the practice of reading to the people the accounts of those who receive such blessings (Book XXII: 8).' He is saddened that such stories are unlikely to have the wider currency they deserve. Such miracles, Augustine contends are superior to anything allegedly performed in pagan temples. He is anxious, however, to define the place of the martyrs in the worship of the church:

We Christians construct, in honour of our martyrs, not temples, as if to gods, but memorial shrines, as to men who are dead, but whose spirits are living with God. We do not in those shrines raise altars on which to sacrifice to the martyrs, but to the one God, who is the martyrs' God and ours; and at this sacrifice the martyrs are *named*, in their own place and in the appointed order, as men of God who have overcome the world in the confession of his name.

(Book XXII:10)

Augustine was speaking as a theologian and choosing his terms with care; it is doubtful whether all those who flocked to the shrines of the saints appreciated such subtleties. Whether worshipped or venerated, however, the martyrs held a unique place in the life of the Church. They were the heroes of a glorious past; a past which the post-Constantinian Church needed to keep in mind. It was the affection in which they were held and the inspiration which their example provided which opened the way for the cult of the saints to develop and the resultant network of holy places to spread throughout the Christian world. Places might not be holy in themselves, but holy people, could, it seems, make them so.

It would be hard to over-estimate the importance of the cult of the saints and its subsequent influence on Christian spirituality and worship, not least in the church which was to be planted among the English. It is noteworthy that among the essentials of church life, dispatched, according to Bede, by Gregory the Great (Pope 590-604) to St Augustine of Canterbury, were 'relics of the holy Apostles and martyrs'²⁶ presumably for use in dedicating churches. Gregory is also said to have advised that

the temples of the idols among the people should on no account be destroyed. The idols are to be destroyed, but the temples themselves are to be aspersed with holy water, altars set up in them, and relics deposited there.²⁷

Whether this approach achieved enhanced spiritual understanding or merely resulted in a degree of syncretism is difficult to assess. Some scholars feel that the cult of the saints, with its emphasis on prayer for material benefits, such as healing and protection, has always owed much to pre-Christian practice. Certainly in medieval England the passionate and frequently uncritical devotion offered to the saints opened the door to all manner of abuses and, since possession of relics meant profit for those whose community they graced, there were substantial temptations to indulge in fraud and exploitation. Holiness did not always beget holiness.

3. CONCLUSION: THE MEANINGS OF PILGRIMAGE

In this section I have sought to demonstrate that the views of pilgrimage which eventually formed part of the inheritance of the medieval church in England were not

²⁶ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, I. 29.

²⁷ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, I. 30. The shrines of Christian saints were often deliberately established in places where pagan gods had been worshipped. Wilson cites the example of St Babylas, whose cult was introduced at Daphne in the mid-fourth century 'in order to oust the oracle of Apollo which indeed fell silent as a result' Wilson (1983), 2.

only complex but also contained inherent tensions and even contradictions. Christian concepts of pilgrimage did not develop in a vacuum. Instead, they emerged partly in accordance with, and partly in reaction to the Jewish heritage of the Early Church. Christians were also influenced, despite themselves, by pagan traditions of pilgrimage, particularly those associated with healing shrines, which inevitably came into the church with Gentile converts, the most prominent of whom was the Emperor Constantine himself.

It has also become apparent that from the Old Testament onwards there have been multiple interpretations of the concept of pilgrimage and an ongoing series of shifts of emphasis between one model and another. The Jewish practice of pilgrimage essentially moved from the idea of wilderness-journeying to focus on a fixed holy place. Christianity initially reversed this shift and the New Testament view of pilgrimage as a metaphor for the Christian's journey through exile in this world to the heavenly homeland offered a clear-cut and powerful perspective on human life. It was frequently re-iterated by the Fathers and proved a fruitful image in the hands of medieval writers. It was, however, vulnerable to amendment precisely because it set forth such a high ideal of continuous obedience and because it was essentially a concept to be understood rather than a specific activity to be carried out. The place-orientated pilgrimages which multiplied so quickly during the fourth century ideally formed a part²⁸ of that longer eternal journey. Pilgrims came to the Holy Land to confirm with their own eyes the truth of the Bible, to have their hearts uplifted by worship at the sacred sites and to visit those whose way of life manifested holiness to a special degree. Similarly visitors to the mushrooming shrines of the saints looked for encouragement from the example of the heroes of the faith and aid in heaven from those whose lives on earth had proved them to be friends of God.

²⁸ 'The pilgrimage, along a particular route to a particular destination, was the reduced image and the symbol of the pilgrimage towards his final destination which the Christian's whole life was meant to be; and his arrival a foretaste of the final end of that journey.' Markus (1990), 151-2.

Yet it did not prove so easy to reconcile long-term and short-term pilgrimage in practice, except perhaps for those who were truly saintly themselves. The rise in place-orientated pilgrimage and the growth of the cult of the saints which took place from the fourth century onwards were both part of a subtle change of emphasis which was taking place within Christian spirituality. Wilken notes that a

new tactile piety that attached itself to things, to bones and relics, to places and shrines, to sacred books, even to liturgical implements like chalices and veils, was evident all over the Christian world. In a letter to Theophilus, pope (patriarch) of Alexandria, Jerome urged that all who minister at the altars in the church show proper reverence for the 'accessories' used in the liturgy. These things, he writes, are not 'lifeless and senseless things devoid of holiness; from their association with the body and blood of the Lord they are to be venerated with the same awe as the body and blood themselves.'²⁹

Thus Paulinus of Nola wrote of Holy Land pilgrimage:

No other sentiment draws men to Jerusalem but the desire to see and touch the places where Christ was physically present, and to be able to say from their very own experience: We have gone into His tabernacle, and have adored in the places where His feet stood.³⁰

The relics of the saints were seen not only as repositories but as channels of holiness: 'When one touches the bones of a martyr, one shares in the holiness which is present in

²⁹ Wilken (1992), 115.

³⁰ Paulinus of Nola, *Letters*, 49. 14.

the grace inhering in the body.³¹ The desire to see and touch was so strong that it overcame the traditional aversion to the bodies of the dead, a reversal noted in his own experience by Gregory of Nyssa.³² A religion built on the understanding that God was invisibly present with and in his people wherever in the world they might be, was reverting to an orientation to place which inevitably brought with it conflicting ideas and practices. What had been purely spiritual began to contain a strong material element.

In addition the twin developments of place-orientated pilgrimage and the increasing importance of the saints posed a potential threat to the scale on which the Christian life was to be lived. The rising profile of saints as intermediaries between a holy God and sinful human beings was paralleled by a danger that pilgrimage to an earthly goal could obscure or even undermine the longer-term goal of reaching the heavenly Jerusalem. Both trends may have reflected genuine piety but they also offered the possibility of a kind of spiritual reductionism as the demands of a direct relationship with God and the requirement to make the whole of life a continual pilgrimage were gradually scaled down to something a little more manageable. The invisible became visible, tangible; the benefits sought were as often material as spiritual; the distance travelled could be measured in miles rather than in personal growth. It is small wonder that from time to time these newer standards were questioned and that tensions persisted. It was, however, the very complexity and multi-faceted nature of the pilgrimage motif which made it such a rich resource for medieval authors. In the next two sections of this study I will examine some of the ways in which the idea of pilgrimage is used in Old and Middle English texts.

³¹ From a pseudonymous homily found among the writings of Basil (*Homily on Psalm 115.4*). Cited Wilken (1992), 115.

³² P.G. 46. 740B. *Encomium on St Theodore*.

PART II

THE EXILE AND THE HEAVENLY HOME: PILGRIMAGE IN OLD ENGLISH LITERATURE

Forþon cnyssað nu
heortan gepohtas, þæt ic hean streamas,
sealtyþa gelac sylf cunige;
monað modes lust mæla gehwylce
ferð to feran, þæt ic feor heonan
elþeodigra eard gesece.

(*Seafarer*, 33b-38)¹

Introduction: The Importance of Pilgrimage in Old English Literature

The lengthy critical debate which has surrounded the Old English poem known as the *Seafarer* provides striking evidence of the need to clarify the various meanings of pilgrimage inherited and experienced by the Anglo-Saxon Church. All interpretations of the poem with a claim to completeness must seek to explain the lines cited above and many such explanations have indeed been advanced during the last century.² Yet scholars are still divided about the true significance of the Seafarer's journey: was it a literal voyage across the sea to other lands,³ an image of the Christian's passage through life⁴ or even both at the same time?⁵

¹ My italics. All quotations taken from *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* unless otherwise stated.

² See *Old English Elegies*, Introduction.

³ See Whitelock (1950).

⁴ See, for example, Ehrismann (1909) and Smithers (1957).

⁵ Pope (1974); *Old English Elegies*, Introduction.

Such questions cannot be answered satisfactorily without a wide-ranging examination of the multi-faceted view of pilgrimage inherited by the Anglo-Saxon Church and of the use made of the pilgrimage motif by other Anglo-Saxon poets.⁶ The need for such a survey is, however, far greater than the requirement to elucidate a single poem. All too frequently the presence of this image has been overlooked or taken for granted and its breadth and richness have gone unrecognised. So fundamental is it to contemporary Christian thought and so ubiquitous its use in Old English literature that it can fairly be described as *the* key under-girding image of Christian poetry and prose in the period from the Conversion to the Norman Conquest.

The importance of the concept of the pilgrimage of life, for theologians and poets, was two-fold. It explained the general history of mankind⁷ from the expulsion of Adam from Eden to the final Judgement; and it contextualised the individual histories of men and women seeking to turn involuntary exile on earth into a purposeful spiritual journey.⁸ As I shall demonstrate, the concept of pilgrimage as mankind's journey through life to the heavenly home was in fact so deeply embedded in the minds and imaginations of those who produced Old English poetry and prose that it was possible for it to be widely used without explanation or amplification. Thus in the Old English *Exodus*, the poet assumes that his audience will understand the parallels to be drawn between the Israelites' journey through the desert and the spiritual journey made by the Christian to the heavenly homeland, whereas in contrast the author of the Middle High German *Exolied* does feel the need to provide such an explanation.⁹

⁶ As far as I am aware, no previous survey covers all this ground.

⁷ For example Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, Bk XV, Ch 1.

⁸ Thus *Vercelli Homily XVI*: Ac utan we gemunan hu ure ylðran, þa ærestan men, þurh hwylc þing hie ða eadelican life forworhton on neorxnawange, ða dryhten hie ærest æt frymðe in gesette ... 7 nu se man se ðe þæt þenceð, þæt he of þysse gehrorenlican worulde þone heofonlican rice begite, he ðonne sceall callinga oðerne weg gefaran 7 oðrum dædum don ... þonne sceolan we þone weg eft gefaran to heofona rice 7 to þam heofonlican ham. *Vercelli Homilies*, 273/177-9, 184-6, 196-7.

⁹ See Green (1966). I am indebted to Prof. Peter Lucas for drawing my attention to this point.

Central to this survey is the fact, apparent from the examination of Biblical and early Christian writings in Chapters I and II, that within Christian theology the idea of pilgrimage is inextricably entwined with the related concepts of mankind's present exile on earth, prospective citizenship of the heavenly homeland, the transience of earthly pleasures and the eternal joys of the Heavenly City of Jerusalem. Pilgrimage therefore should not be viewed as a single image, based on one type of human activity, but as a group of tightly-knit images which make a number of profound statements about the human condition. The essential interdependence of this cluster¹⁰ of images is a crucial factor in assessing the extent of the use of the life pilgrimage motif in Old English literature. Each element in the cluster only makes sense if the others are accepted and the use of one in a poem or prose work frequently signals the presence, whether implicit or explicit, of the others.¹¹ In order to become a pilgrim in the New Testament sense, an individual must first have recognised that mankind is in a state of spiritual exile and accepted that earth can only be a temporary resting-place; only then is it logical to respond with a commitment to live as one seeking a different goal.¹² To embark upon life pilgrimage is necessarily to adopt the view that earthly pleasures and achievement are transitory and to learn to reflect on human experience in the light of the coming Judgement. I hope to show some of the ways in which the close theological connections between these concepts can be seen to inform modes of poetic expression in a number of Old English poems. Many critical studies have tended to concentrate on patristic writings,¹³ with only occasional examples cited from Old English texts. I shall therefore seek to demonstrate from works produced during the Anglo-Saxon period

¹⁰ I have borrowed and expanded a term used by Gardiner in discussion of medieval pilgrim plays Gardiner (1971). See Chapter I above.

¹¹ Unfortunately the text of the *Ruin*, which deals with the theme of transience, is incomplete, but it is possible that it too might have contained references to eternal security and the heavenly home as do the *Wanderer* and the *Seafarer*.

¹² As in Hebrews 11.

¹³ For example Smithers (1957) and Smithers (1959).

the extent to which the pilgrimage motif and its associated images were actually used by Anglo-Saxon writers.

It is, moreover, the case that in the context of Old English poetry the theme of exile had a particular resonance and a number of poems reflect the harsh reality of separation,¹⁴ whether caused by strife, loss of a lord or the punishment of crime. In secular terms, this was a state to be feared and mourned, since the loss of relationship and community signified the loss of security and significance. Whilst it did not reject the importance of relationships and community, Christianity offered a perspective which transcended earthly gain or loss and offered comfort to all exiles whether voluntary or the victims of circumstances.¹⁵ A number of Anglo-Saxon poems, therefore, can be seen to make creative use of the tensions and paradoxes involved in seeking to reconcile present loss and renunciation with the hope of eternal joy and security. The spiritual pilgrimage of Christians through the world was by definition arduous; the perspective which sustained them was, therefore, in constant need of re-affirmation and re-articulation. The results can be clearly seen in the poetry and prose of Anglo-Saxon England.

In this section I intend firstly to establish the widespread acceptance of the idea of life pilgrimage in the extant poetry and prose; secondly to examine the evidence for Anglo-Saxon practice of place pilgrimage; and finally to consider how these findings may shed fresh light on the *Seafarer* and the *Wanderer* in particular.

¹⁴ For example, the *Wanderer*, *Resignation*, the *Husband's Message*, the *Wife's Lament*. Anne Klinck *Old English Elegies*, 225, sees 'the sense of separation' as the 'essential element of elegy.'

¹⁵ As in the *Wanderer*. See Chapter VII.

CHAPTER V

FROM EXILE TO ETERNAL HOME: THE PILGRIMAGE MOTIF IN OLD ENGLISH POETRY AND PROSE

He us onlȳsde ond us lif forgeaf
heofonliche ham.

(Dream of the Rood, 147-8)

1. OLD ENGLISH POETRY

Any attempt to survey the use of particular themes in Old English poetry is inevitably beset by problems of dating. I therefore propose to group the poems to be examined by category, rather than by date, in order to demonstrate the presence of the idea of life pilgrimage as an underlying theme in a number of different types of poem.

A. Scriptural poetry

i. Exiles and wanderers¹⁶

In Christian thought, there are two chief categories of exile.¹⁷ The first is involuntary exile, which is a punishment for disobedience. The second is voluntary exile, which signals a desire to achieve spiritual restoration through total commitment to the will of God. To be in exile, therefore, may signal either great culpability or great sanctity.¹⁸ The former condition is associated chiefly with three prototypical Biblical figures of

¹⁶ Magennis (1996), 149, notes that 'the narratives of the Old English biblical poems all concern themselves in some way with the theme of dislocation, which finds its archetypal form in the banishment of Adam and Eve from paradise at the beginning of human history.'

¹⁷ See entry on 'Exile' in Jeffrey (1992).

¹⁸ Thus Grendel and Guthlac both dwell in the isolation of the fens but for very different reasons. See below.

exile: Satan, Adam and Cain, all three of whom are considered in the Old English poem known as *Genesis A*.¹⁹

Satan

In his highly-influential *Moralia in Job*, Gregory the Great described Satan as *alienus*, the stranger,²⁰ and the Old English poet is similarly concerned to emphasise not only the presumption which caused Satan's downfall but the state of exile which forms the major element of that downfall. Satan's rebellion against God is punished by banishment from the realm of heaven, expulsion from his erstwhile homeland:

Sceop þam werlogan
wræcligne ham weorce to leane,
helleheafas, hearde niðas...
æðele bescyrede
his wiðerbreccan wuldor gestealdum.

(*Genesis*, 36-8, 63-4)

The repeated play on *ham* and *eðel* in the early part of the poem underlines the significance of home and homeland in the mind of the poet and in the theological sub-structure of the story. There is an implicit irony in the fact that Satan's quest for a *ham* and *heahsetl* in the heavenly kingdom has resulted in the loss of the home which he already enjoyed by God's grace. Dissatisfaction has bred disobedience and the outcome is that contradiction in terms, a *wræcligne ham* (37). Satan is henceforth literally a 'lost soul',²¹ expelled from his native land like any rebellious Anglo-Saxon thane, his sense of loss and the hopelessness of regaining the longed-for home feeding a desire for

¹⁹ Doane assigns *Genesis A* to the eighth century (*Genesis A*, 36-7).

²⁰ Gregory the Great (1845), 12.36.41.

²¹ For the contribution of exile to the characterisation of Satan see Section B ii. The fact of his exile is also used against Satan by the saints (e.g. *Andreas* 1380-2).

revenge.²² The exile, banished without hope of return, is a dangerous creature, a point made also by the Beowulf-poet in his depiction of Grendel (*Beowulf*, 86-9).

Adam and Eve

Once the rebellious angels have departed, the peace of the heavenly homeland, the *wuldres eðel* (83) is restored. The pattern of ambition, disobedience and dispossession (a sequence all too familiar in Anglo-Saxon society) is, however, repeated in the case of Adam and Eve. Succumbing to the desire to be 'as gods' (Genesis 3:4), they also receive a sentence of exile, a state which they will bequeath to all their descendants.²³

*Pu scealt oðerne eðel secean,*²⁴
wynleasran wic, and *on wræc hweorfan*
nacod niedwædla, neorxnawanges
dugeðum bedæled

(*Genesis*, 927-30)

Gesæton þa æfter synne sorgfulre land,
eard and eðyl unspedigran
fremena gehwilcre þonne se frumstol wæs
þe hie æfter dæde of adrifen wurdon

(*Genesis*, 961-64)

²² The point is made also in *Genesis*, 356-7: Is þæs ænga styde ungelic swiðc/ þam oðrum ham þe we ær cuðon/ hean on heofonrice.

²³ Compare *Vercelli Homily XI*: 'For þæs ærestan mannes synnum, Adam[e]s, we wurdon aworpene of neorxnawanges eðle 7 on þa wræcworuld sende, 7 we swa synon on þyssum middangearde swa we her nænig eðel ne habbað.' *Vercelli Homilies*, 223/46-8.

²⁴ Compare *Blickling Homily II*: 'we synd on þisse worlde ælpeodige, & swa waeron sibbon se æresta ealdor þisses menniscan cynnes Godes bebodu abræc; & forþon gylte we wæron on þysne wræc-sip sende, & nu eft sceolon oþerne eþel secan.' *Blickling Homilies*, 23.

This new home is a bleak and frightening place,²⁵ but as exiles Adam and Eve are in a different category from Satan. His sentence is irrevocable whereas their banishment, though long and dreary, yet contains, (as a Christian audience would have been aware), the hope of ultimate redemption. With the Harrowing of Hell, an event which features strongly in Old English poetry and prose,²⁶ the process of exile would be reversed and Adam and Eve be admitted to the heavenly homeland. It is noteworthy that in *Genesis B* Adam is provided with a speech which at once articulates a desire to make amends and hints at the idea of voluntary exile, perhaps even a penitential pilgrimage,²⁷ as part of the process of restoration:

Gif ic waldendes willan cuðe,
hwæt ic his to hearmsceare habban sceolde,
ne gesawe þu no sniomor, þeah me on sæ wadan
hete heofones god heonone nu þa,
on flod faran, nære he firnum þæs deop,
merestream þæs micel, þæt his o min mod getweode,
ac ic to þam grunde genge, gif ic godes meahte
willan gewyrcean.

(*Genesis*, 828-35)

Cain

The third negative example of exile is Cain:²⁸ like Adam a human being; like Satan, envious, rebellious, and destructive. The punishment for murder is not death but banishment; the sentence passed on Cain is, in effect, exile within exile, alienation not only from God but from human society as well:

²⁵ Magennis (1996), 148-9, highlights the manner in which the poet contrasts the secure environment of Paradise with the new landscape and unsettled climate of the place of exile.

²⁶ See for example the Exeter Book *Descent into Hell*, *Christ III*, *Christ and Satan*, *Blickling Homily VII* and the Old English version of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*.

²⁷ On penance and *peregrinatio* see Chapter VI: 2 below.

²⁸ See Chapter I: I C above.

ƿu ƿæs cwealmes scealt
wite winnan and on wræc hweorfan,
awyrgeð to widan aldre...

ƿu scealt geomor hweorfan,
arleas of earde ƿinum, swa ƿu Abel wurde
to forhbanan; forƿon ƿu flema scealt
widlast wrecan, winemagum lað.

(*Genesis*, 1013-5, 1018-21)

According to the *Vulgate* text, Cain is not to become a *peregrinus* but a *vagus et profugus* (*Genesis* 4:14), a wanderer without purpose or direction. The horror of this sentence is made clear in the speech which the Old English poet supplies to Cain:

ƿu to dæge ƿissum
ademest me fram duguðe and *adrifest from*
earde minum.

(*Genesis*, 1031-3)

Cain departs, '*wineleas wrecca*' (1051): an exile without hope of return, bereft of homeland, kinsmen and spiritual hope.²⁹

The figure of Cain cast a dark shadow over Old English literature: to understand the theological and sociological significance of his 'double exile' is also to recognise the implications of the lineage attributed to Grendel in *Beowulf*.³⁰

²⁹ This model of exile as punishment was an important element in the administration of penance. The Irish Penitential of Columban (c. 600) states that a murderer who after ten years in exile fails to make reparation to the parents of his victim, 'shall never be admitted to his own country but shall be like Cain a vagabond and a fugitive on the earth.' McNeill and Gamer (1965), 252.

³⁰ Whitelock (1951), 13 points out that in Felix's *Life of Guthlac*, the saint addresses the devils who torment him as the seed of Cain.

wonsæli wer weardode hwile,
 sibðan him scyppend forscrifan hæfde
 in Caines cynne. Þone cwealm *gewræc*
 ece drihten, þæs þe he Abel slog;
 ne gefeah he þære fæhðe, ac he hine feor *forwræc*,
 metod for þy mane, mancynne fram.
 Þanon untydras ealle onwocon,
 eotenas ond ylfe ond orcneas.

(*Beowulf*, 104-12)

Grendel is placed here in a long line of exiles, human and supernatural, whose sentence offers no prospect of reprieve. By linking Grendel with Cain, the poet not only endows his monster with cosmic stature as a player in the age-long dramatic conflict between good and evil, but also clothes him with the bitter characteristics of the outcast, the exile without hope of restoration. By suggesting not only human³¹ but demonic³² attributes the poet also evokes the brooding envy which characterises Satan and his followers elsewhere in Old English poetry.³³ Grendel's attack on Heorot is motivated by anger and resentment and it is significant that Hrothgar's *scop* is portrayed singing the story of the Creation of mankind and of the perfect world which Adam and Eve were to lose. Grendel, we may infer, hates Heorot because it represents the home which he will never have and because there is heard the song of that earlier home which all have lost. Moreover the dwelling place³⁴ given to Grendel may well have more

³¹ Andy Orchard comments: 'Of all the monsters, it is Grendel who is most consistently depicted in human terms, particularly in the constant evocation of exile imagery to describe his plight' Orchard (1995), 30.

³² On the use of *aglæca* (monster, demon, fiend) of Grendel see Orchard (1995), 33.

³³ See Section B.ii on *Christ and Satan*.

³⁴ '[Grendel's] dwelling-place is described by a bewildering number of terms (*mearc*, *moras*, *fen*, *fæsten*, and *fifelcynnes eard*) which have as their common feature their remoteness from human habitation.' Orchard (1995), 59. Hugh Magennis comments: 'The wilderness is a dimly made-out

Christian elements than have been recognised, for it seems to have much in common with the monster-haunted wilderness places of Jewish tradition and the battle-grounds of Christian ascetics.³⁵ The unknown wastelands where Grendel prowls are the same fenlands in which Guthlac fights the fiends³⁶ and they stand in the same relationship to normal human habitations as the fallen world does to the lost delights of Eden.

Andy Orchard, in his discussion of the monsters of the *Beowulf*-manuscript, sets Grendel in the broader context of patristic commentary on the fate of Cain:

Grendel is a true heir of Cain, who, as the *Beowulf*-poet tells us (lines 109-10), was exiled for his crime 'far from mankind' (*feor ... mancynne fram*), and both Stanley Greenfield and Joseph Baird have stressed the importance of such exile imagery in the poet's depiction of Grendel. Such a view was fully sanctioned by patristic commentary: according to the Septuagint (Genesis IV. 16) Cain was driven from the face of God into the land of Nod (*Naid*), where the Vulgate simply makes him an 'exile' (*Profugus*). In his interpretation of the passage Bede addresses both readings, and reconciles them through the traditional Hebrew etymology of *Naid*, enshrined by Jerome, as 'movement or fluctuation' (*motus siue fluctuatio*)³⁷ Bede goes on to conclude, following Isidore, that Cain was to be for ever unstable and wandering of uncertain abode' (*Cain instabilis semper et fluctuans atque incetarum sedium esset fucturus*).³⁸

From the standpoint of patristic exegesis, Cain and his descendants also introduce another strand into the complex pattern of exile, pilgrimage and homeland: they build

place of threat and exile: it was to the wilderness that Cain was consigned – 'westen warode' – and the dragon which afflicts Beowulf's people lives 'on þære westenne' Magennis (1996), 130.

³⁵ See Chapter I:1.E and Chapter II: 2.

³⁶ See Section 3 on Guthlac.

³⁷ See Newton (1993), 142-4, on similarities.

³⁸ Orchard (1995), 61.

an earthly city (1057). For St Augustine this was an action charged with significance:

Now Cain was the first son born to those two parents of mankind, and he belonged to the city of man; the later son, Abel, belonged to the City of God... When those two cities started on their course through the succession of birth and death, the first to be born was a citizen of this world, and later appeared one who was a pilgrim and stranger to the world, belonging as he did to the City of God... by grace a pilgrim below, and by grace a citizen above... *Scripture tells us that Cain founded a city, whereas Abel, as a pilgrim, did not found one* [my italics].

(*City of God*, Bk. XV, Ch 1)

Cain and his line, therefore, also represent those unspiritual men and women who refuse to live as pilgrims in the world and choose instead to invest in earthly security.

ii. Strangers and pilgrims

Noah and Abraham

In the later part of *Genesis*, the poet focuses on two outstanding examples of positive exile, Noah and Abraham, whose lives model both the obedience and the ultimate reward of the pilgrim. Each leaves the apparent security of home at God's command in order to reach a place of greater blessing. Noah heeded the warning that his community lay under judgement and entered the Ark (later adopted as a symbol of the Church),³⁹ leaving the seeming safety of dry land to embark on a hazardous journey which would eventually bring him to rest in a restored homeland:⁴⁰

³⁹ See 1 Peter 3:20-21. St Augustine commented: 'Without doubt this is a symbol of the City of God on pilgrimage in this world' Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, Bk XV, Ch 26.

⁴⁰ Jarvis (1993), 63, comments: 'Noah's exile is a mirror image of Cain's exile; the positive to its negative. Cain's exile is bleak, unending, isolated and sinful; Noah's exile is God-given and for a significant purpose.'

þe is eðelstol eft gerymed,
 lisse on lande, lagosiða rest
 fæger on foldan. Gewit on freðo gangan
 ut of earce, and on eorðan bearm
 of þam hean hofe hiwan læd þu
 and ealle þa wocre þe ic wægþrea on
 liðe nerede þenden lago hæfde
 þrymme geþeahtne *þriddan eðyl*

(*Genesis*, 1485-92)

The phrase '*þriddan eðyl*' has proved difficult to interpret. In his edition of the poem Doane comments:

þridda eðyl is the big problem, since what it might be referring to is unknown. But grammatically, if it is nom., it must be appositive to *lago* and refer to the sea; however this leaves no object for *hæfde*, implying the necessity of emending *þrymme* to acc. pl. It is simpler to accept Grein's *þriddan*, making *eðyl* the object of *hæfde*. In this version, the 'third home' must be the earth, which the sea now covers, but why it is the *third* home is difficult to tell. Holthausen suggested a series, 'heaven, earth and hell,' Kock, *PPP* 15, 'heaven (air), earth and ocean (water),' but these are arbitrary. Marckwardt-Rosier call attention to two quotations in B-T, p 1069: 'Heofonwaru and eorðwaru, helwaru þridde;' 'On nanum heolstrum heofenan, opþe eorþan, opþe sæ þriddan.' if the reading *þridda eðyl*, 'the sea' could be accepted, the problem would be resolved: the first home was the Paradise of Adam, the second the Earth of Seth, the third the Sea that bore up Noe. In any case the poet had something quite specific in mind and it is wrong to dismiss *þridda(n)* as 'meaningless' (Krapp) or attempt to amend it away.⁴¹

⁴¹ *Genesis A*, 273-4.

The broader theological perspective of life pilgrimage may, however, help to elucidate this hitherto puzzling phrase. Viewed in this context, heaven is the first homeland from which Satan was expelled (and which Christian pilgrims are exhorted to seek);⁴² the second homeland is Paradise, from which Adam, Eve and their descendants have been excluded through sin; and the *þriððan eðyl* is earth, the *oðerne eðel* to which Adam and Eve were despatched in lines 927 and 962. Humankind may still aspire to heaven, or be condemned to hell;⁴³ meanwhile earth is their place of exile, a temporary homeland which must be renounced if they are to reach the permanent joys of heaven, the homeland for which they have been intended since before the Fall.

Abraham, the prototype pilgrim described in Chapter I,⁴⁴ is also called to leave his native land and travel in faith:

Gewit þu nu feran and þine fare lædan,
ceapas to cnosle. Carran ofgif,
fæder eðelstol. Far, swa ic þe hate,
monna leofost, and þu minum wel
larum hyre, and þæt land gesec
þe ic þe ælgrene ywan wille,
brade foldan.'

(*Genesis*, 1746-52)

The journey from Egypt to the Promised Land

Abraham and Noah both appear again in the Old English *Exodus* but here the main

⁴² See for example *Vercelli Homilies*, XI. 55-7.

⁴³ *Blickling Homily II* comments 'forþan gylte we wæron on þysne wræc-siþ sende, nu eft sceolon *oþerne eðel secan*' [my italics] *Blickling Homilies*, 23.

⁴⁴ Chapter I:1.C above.

focus is on another positive example of exile: the people of Israel en route from Egypt to the Promised Land. From the opening lines onwards the poet signals clearly that the journey to be described is capable of more than one level of interpretation. The poem opens with a confident statement about the reward to be enjoyed by the blessed in heaven after their *bealusiðe* (journey of sorrow):

Hwæt! we feor ond neah gefrigen habað
ofer middangeard Moyses domas,
wræclico wordriht, wera cneorissum -
in uprodor eadigra gehwam
æfter bealusiðe bote lifes,
lifigendra gehwam langsumne ræd -
hæleðum secgan.

(*Exodus*, 1-7)

Lucas, following Sedgefield, interprets this as

a double reference (1) to the journey of the Israelites through the wilderness to the promised land, and (2) to the journey of man through life to the heavenly home.⁴⁵

This dual perspective is reinforced throughout the poem.⁴⁶ The Israelites are exiles (137b) and travellers, both literally and metaphorically.⁴⁷ They are leaving the alien land

⁴⁵ Exodus (1994), 75ⁿ. See also Helder (1994), who also explores the typological connections between the Promised Land of the Israelites and the heavenly homeland of Christians.

⁴⁶ Lucas Exodus (1994), 92ⁿ compares the use of *lifweg* in this poem with the use of the same term, which he links with Christ's statement 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life' (John 14:16), in the *Dream of the Rood*, 88-9.

⁴⁷ On the use of sea-imagery to describe the journey see Chapter VII:4.

of the Egyptians, which in so much patristic teaching represented the pagan world,⁴⁸ and setting out at God's command to seek their true homeland.⁴⁹ As William Helder points out, the poet repeatedly highlights this theme:

When he adds that Moses was instrumental in restoring the sons of Abraham to their homeland “*omwist eðles Abrahames sunum*,” 1.18), the author maintains the typological perspective he has established (cf. Galatians 3:7-29). He does the same subsequently whenever he mentions Abraham or alludes to the concept of the homeward journey.⁵⁰

Abraham too is characterised as an exile: *He on wræce lifde* (383), and the poet subsequently extends the analogy to include his audience in a passage of commentary which also incorporates the associated elements of earthly transience, future judgement and the eternal joys of heaven.⁵¹

Bis is læne dream
wommum awyrged, *wreccum* alyfed,
earmra anbid. *Eðellease*
þysne gystsele gihðum healdað
murnað on mode...

⁴⁸ See for example Augustine of Hippo, *De Doctrina Christiana*, II, Ch XV.

⁴⁹ ‘The one general allegory that would cover the events of the poem is the equation of the Israelites journey from Egypt to the Promised Land with the journey from earthly exile to the heavenly home’ Cross and Tucker (1960), 123.

⁵⁰ Helder (1994), 195.

⁵¹ ‘The audience is encouraged to recall the transitory nature of joys in the world, the superior rewards in heaven to be granted to the Christian faithful, and the accompanying day of universal judgement ... In contrast to the material prosperity promised to (and attained by) Israel at 564b, as Christians we wander anxiously, mourning our spiritual exile in a world that is a lodging-house in misery.’ Garde (1991), 48.

Eftwyrð cymð,
 mægenþrymma mæst, ofer middangeard,
 dæg dædum fah. Drihten sylfa
 on þam meðelstede manegum demeð
 þonne he soðfæstra sawla lydeð,
 eadige gastas, on uprodor,
 þær bið leoht and lif, eac þon lissa blæd.

(*Exodus*, 532-6, 540-6)

Abraham, Moses and the people of Israel en route for the Promised Land thus become figures of encouragement and challenge for all Christian pilgrims who seek the way to the eternal homeland.

iii. Temporary exile (penance)

Woven into the narrative of *Daniel* are two accounts of temporary involuntary exile, each of which is interpreted as a punishment from God but not as permanent rejection. The opening lines of the poem, which have no parallel in the *Vulgate*, make plain the link between obedience to God and possession of the Promised Land: as long as the people maintain *hiera fæder wære* (10) (presumably the covenant made with Abraham in Genesis 15) then they will remain secure in God's affection and protection. The audience are also reminded that it was God who guided these *elðeodigum* (38) to take possession of the city of Jerusalem and their *eðelland* (39). Now apostasy leads to mass deportations into exile in Babylon and aliens govern their erstwhile homeland, *eðne eðel* (78). The poet does not labour the point at this stage; evidently he can assume sufficient familiarity with these concepts for the audience to draw its own conclusions about the spiritual connections between obedience and homeland, apostasy and exile.

Later in the poem the *Prayer of Azarias* reiterates the connection between exile and failure to follow a holy way of life. This, once more, is a connection not made in the *Vulgate*:

We ðæs lifgende
 worhton on worulde, eac ðon wom dyde
 user ylðran; for oferhygdum
 bræcon bebedo burhsittende,
 had oferhokedon halgan lifes.
 Siendon we towrecene geond widne grund,
 heapum tohworfene, hyldelease;
 is user lif geond landa fela
 fracoð and gefræge folca manegum,
 þa usic bewræcon to þæs wyrrestan
 eorðcýninga æhta gewealde,
 on hæft heorugrimra, and we nu hæd enra
 þeowned þoliað. Þæs þe þanc sie,
 wereda wuldorcýning, þæt þu us þas wrace teodeð.

(*Daniel*, 295-308)

Temporary exile, therefore, is viewed as a tool employed by God in order to bring his recalcitrant people to their senses, a discipline for which Azarias is able to give thanks.

With the exile of Nebuchadnezzar we see the pattern repeated, this time in the life of an individual suffering from overweening pride, strongly reminiscent of that shown by Lucifer. Nebuchadnezzar's dream is, according to the interpretation offered by Daniel, a warning that his sin will cause God to send him *wineleasne on wræc* (568), a phrase which the poet adds to the Vulgate account. Significantly it is the king's pride in the *city* which he has created and which he views as his place of security which provokes God's judgement. The Vulgate description of the city, *quam ego aedificavi in domum regni*, becomes in the Old English poem Nebuchadnezzar's *eard and eðel*, a phrase which is reminiscent of the ambitious plan responsible for Lucifer's expulsion from heaven. The punishment visited upon Nebuchadnezzar is insanity, a condition which

doubly alienates him from human society. For seven years he wanders in the wilderness, the *winburge cyning* (621) reduced to the status of *wundorlic wræcca* (633). The word *susl*, used three times (520, 620, 653) of the punishment meted out to Nebuchadnezzar, can also carry the connotation of penance⁵² and this would appear to be the light in which the poet views the temporary states of exiles suffered by the nation of Israel and the Babylonian king.

B. Devotional poetry

The poems in this section, though varying considerably in subject matter and style, are all designed to enhance the spiritual experience and responsiveness of their audience. As with the scriptural poems examined in the previous section, there is an underlying dependence upon and frequent reference to the concept of life pilgrimage. Again and again poets employ the cluster of associated ideas described at the beginning of this chapter to move and motivate their audience, highlighting the glories of the heavenly home, underlining the bitter misery of spiritual exile and exhorting all who hear to abandon transient earthly pleasures and pursue the pathway to eternal joy.

i. Christ

The series of *Exeter Book* poems collectively known as *Christ* offer interesting examples of the manner in which the theological understanding of the world as a place of exile and pilgrimage can be seen to shape both poetic form and content. In a study of *Christ I*, the *Advent*, Greenfield observes that

a minor theme runs through the poem, a theme reflecting the Christian tradition of man's life as a spiritual exile from Heaven, Eden, and the natural bond with his Creator. And it is this theme which harmonises the separate lyrics of the poem; for it provides, in the bass as it were, a commentary on the necessity for

⁵² See Frantzen (1983) and Chapter VI: 2.

Christ's incarnation.⁵³

Greenfield suggests that the poem presents a number of phases of exile, each related to a period of salvation history:

1) the expulsion of man from Paradise - man's initial exile from his heavenly and earthly home; (2) mankind in a state of despair after the Fall, crying for salvation; 3) the exiles in Limbo awaiting the Harrowing of Hell; 4) the scattering of the flock after the Crucifixion; 5) man's present (i.e., eighth-century) state of spiritual exile.⁵⁴

The last of these images, expressing as it does the voices of the poet and his contemporaries, demonstrates incontrovertibly that the doctrine of exile was not only known to the Anglo-Saxon Church but had also become a matter of deep-rooted spiritual experience:

Habbað *wræcmæcgas* wergan gæstas,
hetlen helsceaþa, hearde genyrwad,
gebunden bealorapum. Is seo bot gelong
eall æt þe anum, ece dryhten.
Hreowcearigum help, þæt þin hidercyme
afrefre feasceaft, þeah we fæhþo wið þec
þurh firena lust gefremed hæbben.
Ara nu onbehtum ond usse yrmþa geþenc,
hu we tealtrigað tydran mode,
hwearfiað heanlice.

(*Christ*, 363-72)

⁵³ Greenfield (1989), 197.

⁵⁴ Greenfield (1989), 198.

It is also noticeable that the poet carefully alternates expressions of the miseries of exile with glimpses of hope in the form of references to the heavenly homeland. Thus, in his elaboration of the second antiphon, he speaks of God as the one who opens the *eadga upwegas* which lead to life, before turning to a description of the unhappiness of those cut off from heaven:

gedo usic þæs wyrðe, þe he to wuldre forlet,
þa we heanlice hweorfan sceoldan
to þis enge lond, *eðle bescyrede*. (30-2)

The third antiphon provides a reminder of the joys to be experienced in ‘*sancta Hierusalem ... Cristes burglond*’ (50-1).⁵⁵ Later the poet returns to the plea of the exiles:

Forþon we, nergend, þe
biddað geornlice breostgehygdum
þæt þu hrædlice helpe gefremme
wergum wreccan (261-4)

Heaven is identified, in the account of Isaiah’s vision, as *ecan ham* (305) and in the subsequent section as Christ’s *æþelan ham* (350). Such glimpses of glory make more poignant the sufferings of those wandering *heanlice* (372). The poem concludes with an exhortation to seek the reward which awaits the faithful, entrance at last

in þam eðle þær he ær ne cwom (436)

⁵⁵ ‘The earthly city of Jerusalem, freed by Christ, is also a symbol of the heavenly Jerusalem, the reward given to man by Christ. The longing of the patriarchs and prophets for the coming of the Messiah is made one with the longing of the Christian for his home in heaven.’ Raw (1991), 233.

The twin concepts of exile and heavenly homeland can be seen, therefore, to undergird the structure of the first part of the *Christ* sequence. Even more striking, in my view, is the fact that throughout the sequence it is possible for the poet(s) to draw upon the cluster of images associated with life-pilgrimage in order to explain key doctrines. This is particularly apparent in *Christ III (The Judgement)*. The lost Paradise is described as *gæsta eþel* and mankind's present 'home' as *uncuðne eard*. Both the rationale and the cost of Christ's Incarnation are explained in terms of an exchange of 'homelands': Christ has partaken of the suffering which prevails in mankind's homeland in order that human beings should be able to share the joys of heaven:

Ic wæs on worulde wædla þæt þu wurde welig in heofunum,
earm ic wæs on *eðle þinum* þæt þu wurde eadig on *minum*.

(*Christ*, 1496)

Christ has died upon the Cross

forþon þe he wolde þæt we *wuldres eard*
in ecnesse agan mosten.

(1202-3)

an explanation which is echoed in a later passage:

Ic onfeng þin sar þæt þu moste gesælig
mines eþelrices eadig neotan

(1460-1)

The Judgement itself is presented in terms of determining the eternal home of those who stand before God. Angels and devils are differentiated:

swa him is *ham* sceapen

(897)

It is also emphasised that after death the spirits of humankind will have to remain

hamfæst, dwelling in their appointed homes, that is the places to which their actions have decreed that they should belong:

Þæt we magon eahtan ond on an cweþan,
lifes wisdom, foloren hæbbe,
se þe nu ne giemeð hwæþer his gæst sie
earn þe eadig, þær he ece sceal
æfter hingonge *hamfæst* wesan (1549-53)

Heaven is, quite simply, a homeland without end, without suffering or sorrow:

Ðæt is se *epel* þe no geendad weorþeð,
ac þær symle forð synna lease
dream weardiað.....
Nis þær hungor ne þurst. (1639-41, 1660)

In both *Christ* II (797-849) and *Christ* III (1555-1590) the themes of transience and judgement are interwoven. In particular the eternal nature of the punishment meted out to the sinner is contrasted sharply with the fact that the Holy Spirit has been lost to him through sins committed *on þas lænan tid*. (1558). This phrase is repeated in line 1588 where it is contrasted with *þa halgan tid* when the righteous will receive their reward.

ii. Christ and Satan

Although this is sometimes classed as a scriptural poem, I have chosen to highlight its devotional intention, which relies heavily upon the twin images of home and homeland. Indeed the poem could as well be entitled *Heaven and Hell* since Christ is essentially presented as the victor who leads mankind to the heavenly home and Satan as the defeated rebel who condemns his followers to eternal exile. *Christ and Satan* contains three passages designed to warn would-be spiritual pilgrims against the sins of presumption and rebellion. The first consists of a long, bitter tirade from the fallen

Satan (36-50, 81-188). These speeches present Satan not primarily as the enemy of mankind, but as an exile,⁵⁶ a dreadful example of the fate of those whom God rejects. Satan is portrayed lamenting lost status and pleasures:

Hwær com engla ðrym,
þe we on heofunum habban sceoldan?
Þis is ðeostræ *ham*.

(*Christ and Satan*, 36-8)

and bewailing the glories of heaven from which he is forever excluded:

Eala drihtenes þrym! Eala duguða helm!
Eala meotudes miht! Eala middaneard!
Eala dæg leohta! Eala dream godes! ⁵⁷

(*Christ and Satan*, 163-5)

Viewed in the wider context of the exile/pilgrimage motif these passages can be seen to bear a curious and complex relationship to the laments expressed in the *Wanderer* (34-44; 92-109) and the *Seafarer* (80-102). All are exiles; all are deprived of former joys and allegiances. In the two 'elegies,' however, the speakers bewail both the comforts

⁵⁶ Compare the characterisation of the demons in Old English Saints' *Lives*. See Section 3. Johnson (1994), 168-174, sees a 'potential vagary' in the poet's description of Satan as at once bound in chains and wandering in exile. He attributes the imagery of captivity to Christian teaching (e.g. Revelation 20:1-3) and the idea of Satan and his followers wandering the paths of exile to Germanic tradition. There is, however, as we have seen, a strong Christian tradition of demons wandering the desolate places of this world and assailing God's people. It is also noteworthy that in the Book of Job 1:7 Satan is presented as 'going round about the earth' and 'walking through it.'

⁵⁷ Commenting on the 'hopeless exile' to which Lucifer and his followers are condemned, Hugh Magennis notes the way in which the poem contrasts 'the desolation of Satan's hell with the perfection of heaven. Heaven is a splendid city ... set in a wide and pleasant kingdom ... It is surrounded by bright walls ... suggesting both splendour and security' Magennis (1996), 40.

which they have lost and the essential transience of those comforts. Satan's grief, in contrast, is intensified by a partial inversion of the *Ubi sunt topos*: the joys which he has forfeited are not transient but eternal;⁵⁸ it is in fact not the joys which are lost, it is Satan himself. The poet constantly reinforces this perspective, peppering the whole section with references to home, homeland and exile:

Pis is *deostræ ham* (38)

me *bættran ham*

for oferhygdum æfre ne wene (49-50)

ðeos earme heap

þe ic hebbe *to helle ham* geledde (87-8)

Nu ic eow hebbe *to hæftum ham* gefærde

alle of earde. (91-2)

Is ðes *atola ham*

fyre onæled. (95-6)

Is ðæs *walica ham* wites afylled (99)

ic moste in ðeossum *atolan æðele* gebidan

hwæt me drihten god deman wille,

fagum on flora. Nu ic feran com

deofla menego *to ðissum diman ham*. (107-10)

Ne ðurfon we ðes wenan, þæt us wuldorcynning

æfre wille *eard* alefan,

æðel to æhte, swa he ær dyde (114-6)

Forðon ic sceal hean and earm hweorfan ðy widor,

waadan *wræclastas* (119-120)

alæded fram leohte in þone *laðan ham*. (177)

⁵⁸ Frey (1963), 301, comments: 'The passionate regret here is not, like the wanderer's, for wine-cup or warrior, but for the conditions of heaven. This, after all, is the essence of Satan's exile condition: total alienation from the sublimest spiritualities and constant recollection of them.'

sceal nu *wreclastas*
settan sorhgcearig, siðas wide. (187-8)

The point of this long catalogue of vain regrets and recrimination becomes clear in lines 193-223 when the poet exhorts his audience:

ceosan us *eard* in wuldre mid ealra cyning cyninge,
se is Crist genemmed...
Pær is brade lond,
hyhtlicra ham in heofonrice,
Criste gecwemra. Uta cerran þider
þær he sylfa sit, sigora waldend,
drihten hælend, *in ðæm deoran ham*. (203-4, 214-8)

This combination of *exemplum* and exhortation is repeated in lines 224-314. The fallen angels review their doomed attempt to usurp God's kingdom and express their longing for the homeland they have lost. Significantly they comment that the fact of their exile is known far and wide (256-7). As David Johnson observes:

This lament is brought to a close in an extremely affective (and potentially unorthodox) way when Satan wonders:

Hwæder us se Eca æfre wille
on heofona rice ham alefan
eðel to æhte, swa he ær dyde? (277-9)⁵⁹

Once again the audience, who know well that the fallen angels are indeed doomed to eternal exile, are urged to take a different path:⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Johnson (1994), 165.

⁶⁰ Raw (1991), 232, comments; 'Before [man] lies a choice: on the one hand the misery of hell, presented in terms of exile from the joys of God's court in heaven - an image with powerful

gearwian us togenes grene stræte

up to englum...

Taceð us se torhta *trumlicne ham*

beorhte burhweallas.

(286-7, 293-4)

A third example of exile through disobedience is provided by the souls rescued by Christ in the Harrowing of Hell, an event defined by the poet as the restoration of humankind to their heavenly homeland:

Hwearf þa to helle hæleða bearnum,

meotod þurh mihte; wolde manna rim,

fela þusenda, forð gelædan

*up to eðle.*⁶¹

(398-401)

Once again the stress is on heaven as the longed-for home (502-4), which Christ has made available (551-2) and for which redeemed souls eternally give thanks (657-8).

iii. The Phoenix

A comparison of the Old English *Phoenix* with the Latin poem by Lactantius reveals that the Anglo-Saxon poet significantly develops the idea of the return of the Phoenix to his homeland, making it a key element in the allegorical interpretation of the original legend. A single use of *patria* in the Latin poem is expanded to provide a network of references to *eðel*, *eard* and *eðellond*.

associations for a society of which the centre was the lord's hall - on the other, the bright city of God with its royal throne (285-97). Again and again the reader is reminded that he should learn from Satan's fate (193-208) and that he should thank Christ for freeing him from prison and leading him back to his true home (549-54).'

⁶¹ This phrase is repeated (551-2).

oppæt fyrngesetu⁶²
 agenne eard, eft geseceð (263-4)
 Donne afysed bið
 agenne eard eft to secan. (274-5)
 seceð on wynnum,
 eadig eþellond. (278-9)
 Þonne duguða wyn
 of þisse eorþan tyrf eþel seceð. (348-90)

That this pattern of imagery is not accidental is made clear by the interpretation of the allegory which the poet himself supplies:

Swa þæt ece lif eadigra gehwylc
 æfter sarwræce sylf geceoseð
 þurh deorcne deað, þæt he dryhtnes mot
 æfter geardagum geofona neotan
 on sindreamum, ond siþþan a
 wunian in wuldre weorca to leane.
 Þisses fugles gecynd feal gelices
 bi þam gecornum Cristes þegnum
 beacnað in burgum, hu hi beorhtne gefean
 þurh fæder fultum on þas frecnan tid
 healdap under heofonum, ond him heanne blæd
 in þam uplican eðle gestrynap. (381-92)

As in *Guthlac B*, the loss of homeland which Adam and Eve endured (411-3) is set

⁶² 'The poet had the allegorical interpretation in mind - man regaining his old home from which he had been expelled at the time of Adam and Eve; e.g. *ealdcyðþu* (435). The *fyrngesetu* are to be contrasted with the *sorgfulran gesetu* (417), the home of Adam and Eve in this world after they had been expelled from paradise.' Phoenix (1964), 75ⁿ.

against the prospect of restoration made possible by Christ (417-23). As in *Christ and Satan* the vision of the heavenly home is used as an inducement to men and women to make the right choice and take up their pilgrimage. The righteous, because they have chosen obedience to God above the joys of *his lænes lif* (481) are assured of a *place in wuldres byrig* (475):

þus eadig eorl ecan dreames,
heofana hames mid Heahcynning
earnað on elne

(482-4)

Their use of the enforced period of exile, *wræchwile* (527), on earth will ensure their vindication on the Day of Judgement. Once again we see the elements of the ‘pilgrimage cluster’ being used as a devotional tool: the enforced exile of Adam and Eve, the theme of earthly transience and the inevitability of the Day of Judgement are set against the bright vision of the city on high where security and unfading joys await the faithful traveller.

iv. Dream of the Rood

At first sight the *Dream of the Rood* may seem to have more in common with place pilgrimage and the cult of relics than with the concept of life pilgrimage. Yet the focus ultimately is not on the Cross itself but on the salvation which it has made possible. The climax of the poem makes it clear that the poet has the vision of the celestial homeland strongly in mind and that the role of the cross is to open to mankind the *lifes weg*⁶³ (88) which will lead them to heaven:

Fleming has suggested that lines 131-3 portray the dreamer as a ‘lordless man, a traditional elegaic exile.’⁶⁴ Whether or not this is the case, the conclusion of the poem

⁶³ Compare *Exodus* (Section 1.A.ii.).

⁶⁴ Fleming (1960), 45.

unmistakably moves the emotional focus from earth to heaven, from *þyssan lænan life* (138) to the joys of the *heofonlicne ham* (148)⁶⁵ which Christ won for mankind on the Cross and to which he led those rescued from Limbo (150-156). The poem concludes with the Son of God returning triumphant *þær his eðel wæs* (156). As Michael Swanton comments in his introduction to the poem:

The theological structure is therefore brought to a rapid and triumphal conclusion as Christ together with the visionary and the whole company of saints ascend to their heavenly eðel in a final eschatological conclusion.⁶⁶

Once again therefore the devotional intent of the poem can be seen to be undergirded by the vision of the heavenly homeland and its inspirational strategy as the arousal of the sense of spiritual exile on earth, the recognition of the transience of earthly life and the willingness to embark upon the journey to heaven. As in each of the devotional poems examined here, the message, implicit and explicit, is clear: if men and women are to avoid permanent exile from the presence of God then they must choose to become citizens of heaven and faithfully walk the pilgrim way to the celestial city.

C. Saints' Lives

Old English Saints' Lives clearly demonstrate the adoption of the concept of life pilgrimage into Anglo-Saxon Christian thought. The treatment of physical and spiritual exile in these poems operates at several levels but the primary view of exile which they present is not negative but positive, as individuals willingly renounce their earthly homes and security as part of the process of journeying towards the heavenly homeland.⁶⁷ Ranged against these imitators of Abraham⁶⁸ are spiritual opponents, who

⁶⁵ Huppé (1970), 112, comments: 'it is toward the vision of the native land of heaven that the poem has moved from the beginning.'

⁶⁶ [*Dream of the Rood*, 1987 #58], 78.

⁶⁷ Jarvis (1993), 87, comments on this distinctive approach to exile in the *genre*, observing that 'those

also function as negative *exempla*, such as the banished, rootless demons who torment Guthlac and attempt to divert martyrs such as Andrew and Juliana from their path to heaven.

Of particular interest to this survey, since they deal with a local saint and thus demonstrate the way in which biblical and patristic ideas were integrated into Anglo-Saxon Christian culture, are the two Old English poems which deal with the life of the Anglo-Saxon saint Guthlac (b. 673). These reveal an undergirding framework of linked pilgrimage-related elements which provide both the context and the motivation for the saint's battle of faith. The saint is a voluntary exile, in the line of Abraham and Noah; his fenland refuge is the Anglo-Saxon equivalent of the Judean wilderness⁶⁹ or the Egyptian desert;⁷⁰ his demonic assailants⁷¹ are involuntary exiles, homeless wanderers, whose strategy focuses upon persuading him to return to his earthly home and thus to lose the joys of heaven. Here we see a clear example of the need to recognise the presence of the underlying cluster of pilgrimage-related images, since unless the particular significance of home and homeland is acknowledged, the whole thrust of the spiritual conflict will be missed.

The opening section of *Guthlac A* is constructed upon the essential contrast between the abiding glories of the *halgan ham* (10), the heavenly home where the blessed soul,

who devote their lives to God welcome their exile rather than lamenting it.'

⁶⁸ On Abraham see Chapter 1. D.

⁶⁹ *Guthlac A* (333, 356) places Guthlac 'on þam anade (desert).'

⁷⁰ In Felix's *Life of Guthlac* the saint is said to have been inspired to seek the desert (*eremus*) by reading of the early solitaries: 'Cum enim proscorum monachorum solitariam vitam legebat, tum inluminato cordis gremio avida cupidine heremum quaerere fervebat' (For when he read about the solitary life of monks of former days, then his heart was enlightened and burned with an eager desire to make his way to the desert) (XXIV) and demons attempting to deceive him cite the examples of the Desert Fathers of Egypt: 'famosi illi monachi habitantes Aegyptum (XXX) [Felix, 1985 #100]. See Magennis (1996), Chapter 8.

⁷¹ On the link between the wilderness and demonic monsters see Chapter 1 .E.

having experienced the final ‘journey’ through death, will dwell in cities which never decay, and the waning beauties of a world moving steadily towards dissolution (37bff). The poet sets the stage for Guthlac’s own battle of faith by establishing the gulf between those for whom earthly wealth is of paramount importance (62-3) and the saints who choose to work towards citizenship of an eternal homeland, knowing that

þæt se eðel ece bideð

...þæs deoran ham.

(*Guthlac*, 67, 69b)

In particular he cites the example of those *anbuendra* (88), hermits or anchorites, who choose to live *on westennum*, in desolate places (81), braving the assaults of evil spirits.

According to Felix’s Latin prose *Life of Guthlac*, upon which both poems draw to varying degrees, the former Mercian noble was converted through reflecting on the deaths of his ancestors, first entering the monastery of Repton and subsequently withdrawing to the wilderness of the Lincolnshire fens. The *Guthlac A*-poet presents the saint’s transition from secular life to monasticism as an entering into life pilgrimage as earthly power is renounced in favour of a home in heaven:

hu Guðlac his in godes willan

mod gerehte, man eall forseah,

eorðlic æpelu, upp gemunde

ham in heofomum. Him wæs hyht to þa,

sippan hine inlyhte se *þe lifes weg*

gæstum gearwað.

(95-101a)

Guthlac’s choice of the wilderness, together with the accounts of his battles with the forces of evil, places him in the direct line of descent from the Desert Fathers and the

account by Felix is evidently influenced by the *Life of St Anthony*.⁷² Here again we see the concept of 'exile within exile.' The whole of the fallen world represents exile from heaven but within the world are desolate places to which outcasts are expelled or to which saints choose to go in order to do battle with the forces of evil and pray for their fellow men and women.⁷³ The fens in which Guthlac and Grendel dwell are to the normal seats of human habitation what earth is to the lost Paradise: places of banishment and deprivation.

It is noteworthy that, as in *Christ and Satan*,⁷⁴ the demons are repeatedly defined in terms of their exiled state, which for them is a negative spiritual marker. They are described as *wræcmæcgas* (231, 558) and Guthlac himself constantly uses the fact of their irreversible banishment against them:⁷⁵

Gefeoð in firenum, frofre ne wenað,
þæt ge *wræcsiða* wyrpe gebiden. (508-9)

Sindon ge wærlogan, swa ge *in wræcsiðe*
longe lifdon. (623-4)

The fens have been their temporary resting-place, a refuge which Guthlac is determined to wrest from them:

⁷² 'It is certain that Felix knew the *Life of St Anthony* and there is no reason why Guthlac himself should not have known it... Felix's *Life of Guthlac* ... is a remarkable instance of the absorption of Christianity into Anglo-Saxon society. It is created out of the worlds of Germanic heroes and East Mediterranean hermits. Without either it is inconceivable.' Mayr-Harting (1991), 239. On St Anthony and the Desert Fathers see Chapter II. 2. above.

⁷³ Compare *Blickling Homily III*, 29 which argues that Christ himself voluntarily faced temptation in the Judean wilderness in order to deliver Adam from exile: 'forþon he wolde ... Adam gefreolsian of þam langan wræce'

⁷⁴ See Section 1. B. ii. Also *Guthlac B* where they are described as those who *wræcsið wepan* (1074).

⁷⁵ Also true of spiritual battles in two other Old English Saints' Lives. See *Andreas*, 1380, and *Juliana*, 260a, 351a.

Her sceal min wesan
 eorðlic eþel, nales eower leng. (260-1)

For their part the demons clearly recognise the spiritual journey represented by Guthlac's move to the fens, *ana fram eþele* (277), and their attacks are focused on hope that the desire for human love will make him renounce his calling and return to his earthly home (353-5). Guthlac's whole motivation however is based on a revelation of the earth's transience (119-120) and a passionate commitment to seeking a *ham in heofonum* (98), and it is this perspective which is seen to sustain him in times of temptation:

to þam betran ham
leomum inlyhted to þam leofestan
ecan earde, þær is eþellond
 (Guthlac, 654-6)

Fittingly, the poem concludes with a description of the joys which await faithful souls, such as Guthlac, when they reach the heavenly Jerusalem, a passage clearly designed to encourage the audience to follow the saint's example:

Him þæt ne hreoweð æfter hingonge,
 ðonne hy hweorfað in þa halgan burg,
 gongað genunga to Hierusalem,
 þær hi to worulde wynnum motum
 godes onsyne georne bihaldan.⁷⁶ (811-5)

⁷⁶ 'The first part of *Guthlac*, *Guthlac A*, ends with an image of the heavenly Jerusalem to which the saint goes after his eremitic life on earth ... paradoxically, however, *Guthlac A* also employs the image of the city in connection with Guthlac's fenland retreat ... Guthlac's dwelling place becomes a reflection of the heavenly glory on which the saint's mind is fixed' Magennis (1996), 41.

Guthlac B, a poem largely concerned with the death of the saint, is structured around the contrast between Adam's expulsion from Paradise (852-70), that *leohtan ham* (834), which resulted in the exile of humankind, and Guthlac's journey towards the glories of heaven:

on longne weg
to þam fægran gefean forsið minne,
on ecne eard

(*Guthlac*, 1180-2)

The final section of the extant poem offers an insight into the relationship between Christian doctrine and human grief, which is of relevance to both the *Wanderer* and the *Seafarer*.⁷⁷ Rosemary Woolf comments:

the final elegiac effect derives from the fact that the poem seems to end, not with the joyful description of Guthlac's body being borne to heaven by angels, but with the lament of his servant, who speaks in the role of the bereaved retainer ... Without *Guthlac B* we might well have assumed that the Anglo-Saxon melancholy sensitivity to transience and the Christian confidence in the Resurrection were at least poetically irreconcilable. But *Guthlac B* shows that, on the contrary, the ideas did not need to be kept separate lest they should obscure or diminish one another, but could be combined in such a way that each served to make the other more poignant.⁷⁸

The Old English poetic accounts of Guthlac reveal an Anglo-Saxon saint consciously acting out in his life the transformation of exile into pilgrimage, a process which also characterised many others of the period. The Latin *Lives* of Cuthbert and Columba, of

⁷⁷ On the *Wanderer* and *Guthlac B* see Chapter VII: 3.

⁷⁸ Woolf (1966), 58

Boniface, Willibald and others show how widespread were the convictions which motivated Guthlac in his fenland retreat.⁷⁹ Moreover, although there are only occasional references to exile or homeland in other Old English poetic versions of saints' lives, there is an underlying perception linked with their status as pilgrims which affects the dynamic of the dramas portrayed. In *Andreas* and *Juliana*, for example, the saints concerned may, through their poverty (*Andreas*) or their exposure to persecution (*Juliana*) appear to the outside world as outcasts and strangers, deprived of the protection of kin and all too vulnerable to attack. The underlying reality of which the saints themselves are fully aware is that they are in fact the ones who enjoy true security as children of God and citizens of an enduring homeland. From this position of strength they are able to ward off the demonic adversaries who would divert them from their journey to the heavenly home which awaits them.

2. THE THEME OF LIFE PILGRIMAGE IN ANGLO-SAXON

PROSE

Further evidence of the deep-rooted influence of the concept of life pilgrimage upon Anglo-Saxon thought is to be found in both Anglo-Latin and Old English prose writings of the period.

A. Anglo-Latin

The Latin writings of Aldhelm (d. c. 709), Bede (d. 673-735) reveal how swiftly the concept of life as a pilgrimage was adopted into the vocabulary and thought-patterns of the English Church. Aldhelm, in a phrase which anticipates the theme of the Middle English *Pearl*, addressed his Latin treatise *de Virginitate* to 'Pearls of Christ, jewels of Paradise and participants in the celestial homeland'⁸⁰ and in a letter to the abbots of

⁷⁹ See Chapter VI.

⁸⁰ Aldhelm, *Prose Works*, 132.

Wilfrid, condemned worldly men as ‘exiles from God’s teaching.’⁸¹ The writings of Bede demonstrate the extent to which the idea of life pilgrimage undergirded his thinking. Not only does the idea of the heavenly homeland appear several times in letters cited in his *Ecclesiastical History*⁸² but as Benedicta Ward observes, his homilies and biblical commentaries reveal a fundamental reliance upon this concept:

When [Bede] wrote about Christian life it was always as a pilgrimage towards the homeland of heaven.⁸³

Bede’s commentaries on the Bible are full of this perspective of life as a pilgrimage towards the real homeland.⁸⁴

In his *Commentary on Ezra*, Bede interprets the Temple which Solomon built in Jerusalem as ‘a figure of the holy universal church .. a part of it is still in pilgrimage, a part already free from the hardships of pilgrimage and reigning with him already in heaven.’⁸⁵ Bede writes of believers struggling to achieve eternal joys: ‘As long as they are in their body they recognise that they are on a journey and [absent] from their fatherland.’⁸⁶ The first Epistle of Peter is seen as relevant to all those who, like the Psalmist,⁸⁷ can describe themselves as ‘dwellers on earth and travellers like our

⁸¹ Aldhelm, *Prose Works*, Letter XII

⁸² See for example Gregory’s letter to King Ethelbert Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, i. 32; Honorius’ letter to King Edwin (ii. 17) and the letter attributed to Abbot Ceolfrith (v. 21).

⁸³ Ward (1990), 78.

⁸⁴ Ward (1990), 106.

⁸⁵ *Commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah*, 241-2. Cited Ward (1990), 73. Bede is drawing here on the image of the church on pilgrimage as developed by Augustine of Hippo. See *City of God* Book XV and Chapter II: 3 above. Benedicta Ward comments that ‘The ideal of the two cities, inextricably linked until the end of all things, the completing of the city of God, fill these treatises’ Ward (1990), 74.

⁸⁶ Bede, *Homilies on the Gospels I*, Homily II, 15.

⁸⁷ Psalm 38:12

fathers'⁸⁸). Bede also draws the traditional parallel between the journey of the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land and the journey of Christians to 'the dwelling-place on high' (2:9).

Latin Saints' Lives similarly reveal a profound understanding of life as pilgrimage and, as in Bede's *Death Song*, death is frequently presented as the final journey which leads to the longed-for homeland.⁸⁹ Thus Alcuin wrote of St Willibrord passing 'from this place of pilgrimage to the eternal country,'⁹⁰ a phrase echoed by Adomnan in his account of the death of St Columba: 'crossing over to the heavenly country from this weary pilgrimage.'⁹¹ Similarly, Willibald's *Life of St Boniface* depicts the martyr, 'his pilgrimage accomplished with mighty effort, sitting 'in the heavenly Jerusalem.'⁹²

B. Old English

Extant Old English Homilies, dating from later⁹³ in the Anglo-Saxon period, also draw freely on the cluster of images associated with the theme of life pilgrimage. *Blickling Homily II* warns: 'we habbað nedþearfe þæt we ongyton þa blindnesse ure ælpeodignesse,'⁹⁴ adding a reminder of the traditional explanation for mankind's present state:

we send on þisse worlde ælpeodignesse; we synd on þysse worlde ælpeodige,
& swa wæron sibbon se æresta ealdor þisses menniscan cynnes Godes bebodu

⁸⁸ Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 69.

⁸⁹ 'Fore thaem nedifaerae naenig uuiurthit,' *Bede's Death Song*, 1.

⁹⁰ *Anglo-Saxon Missionaries*, 18.

⁹¹ *Adomnan's Life of Columba*, 528.

⁹² *Anglo-Saxon Missionaries*, 148. The actual journeys made by these saints are addressed in the following section.

⁹³ Both the *Blickling* and *Vercelli* collections of homilies are usually assigned to the tenth century.

⁹⁴ *Blickling Homilies*, 23.

abræc; & forþon gylte we wæron on þysne wræcsip sende, & nu eft sceolon oþerne eðel secan.

Homily V emphasises the contrast between the transitory pleasures of life on earth⁹⁵ and the eternal joys of heaven:

we witon þæt ælc wlite & ælc fægernes to ende efstep & onetteþ þise weorlde lifes.

Cuplice þæt wuldor þysses middangeardes is sceort & gewitende; Drihtnes wuldor þonne, & his rice þurhwunap on ecnesse.⁹⁶

Vercelli Homily XI is based on a sermon by Caesarius of Arles (c. 470-542).⁹⁷ It is, however, noteworthy that the Anglo-Saxon writer omits the military imagery which Caesarius uses in the middle of this passage, choosing to highlight only the pilgrimage motif. The homily offers a concise summary of the pilgrimage topos, encompassing the reasons for mankind's exile,⁹⁸ the life of pilgrimage, the vision of the eternal homeland and the heavenly city of Jerusalem:

For þæs ærestan mannes synnum, Adam[e]s, we wurdon aworpene of neorxnawanges eðle 7 on þas wræcworuld sende, 7 we swa syndon on þyssum middangearde swa we her nænig eðel habbað. Be ðon Paulus se apostol cwæð: '*Dum sumus in corpore peregrinamu[r] a domino*'. He cwæð, *sanctus* Paulus: 'Þended we bioð on lichoman, we bioð [el]þiodige fram Gode'. We magon heonon us geearnian þone ecan eðel 7 þone soðan gefean. Ne magon we þæra

⁹⁵ See also *Blickling Homily X*.

⁹⁶ *Blickling Homilies*, 57, 65.

⁹⁷ *Sermo ccxv*. See Chapter II above.

⁹⁸ A similar account appears in *Vercelli Homily XIV*, where the homilist continues: 'Hwæt [is ð]is deadlice lif elcor nymðe hit is se weg þe we sculon [on] fa[ra]n ... swa to [ecum lif]e 7 to ecum gefean, swa to ecum deaðe to ecre forw[yrde]' *Vercelli Homilies*, XIV. 26-7, 29-30.

ægðer her on worulde agan, ac we sculdon on þære toweardan gesittan þat us is on eðle gehealdan... Utan we nu forð tilian þæt we geearnian þæt we becuman moton gesæliglice to þam ecan 7 to þam ealdorlican eðle... þær ure biðaþ ure ceasterliode... þær is sio wundorlice ceaster Hierusalem... For þan, men þa leofestan, þa hwile þe we her lifigende [sien], utan we us biddan Godes mildheortnesse ... þæt we ma lufien þone ecan eðel þonne þis andwearde lif.⁹⁹

This passage, coupling as it does an evocation of the lasting joys of heaven with the exhortation ‘Utan we nu forth tilian’ bears a marked resemblance to the concluding lines of the *Seafarer*.¹⁰⁰

Uton we hycgan hwær we ham agen,
ond þonne geþencan hu we þider cumen,
ond we þonne eac tilien, þæt we to moten
in þa ecan eadignesse,
þær is lif gelong in lufan dryhtnes,
hyht in heofonum.

(*Seafarer*, 117-122)

Like the *Blickling Homilies*, those contained in the Vercelli manuscript contain frequent allusions to the transience of life: Homily X contains a version of the *Ubi sunt* topos adapted from Isidore of Seville’s *Synonyma*, Book II¹⁰¹ and includes a promise

⁹⁹ *Vercelli Homilies*, XI. 46-54, 55-7, 59-60, 82-5.

¹⁰⁰ Compare also the exhortation of Gregory the Great translated in King Alfred’s rendering of *Gregory’s Pastoral Care*: ‘ðylæs hie lufigen ðas elðiodignesne ofer hiora ægenne eðel, & hior[a] mod eal ahon on ðæt ðe him her gelæned bið’ *King Alfred’s West-Saxon Version*, Chapter L.

¹⁰¹ See also the exhortation in *Vercelli Homily XXI*: ‘uton gan þurh Godes wegas. þat synt soðlice Godes wegas: riht geleafa ... forhogung hwilwendys wuldres 7 gelustfullung þæs heofonlican eðles’ *Vercelli Homilies*, XXI. 48-9, 53-4.

by Christ to reveal the *heofonlicne weg*¹⁰² and provide eternal rewards to those who turn to him:

For þam iorðlicum ic sylle þa heofonlican, for þyssum [h]wilendlicum þa ecan,
for þyssum lænan life þæt unlæne, for þyssum uncorenan life þæt gecorene, for
þyssum earmlican life þæt eadige.¹⁰³

¹⁰² *Vercelli Homilies*, X. 253.

¹⁰³ *Vercelli Homilies*, X. 245-246.

CHAPTER VI

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PLACE PILGRIMAGE IN THE ANGLO-SAXON CHURCH

889. In this year no journey was made to Rome.

*(Anglo-Saxon Chronicle)*¹

Introduction

In addition to a strong emphasis on life as pilgrimage, the Anglo-Saxon Church also inherited a complex set of attitudes towards geographical or place pilgrimage. The Celtic and Roman traditions to which Anglo-Saxon Christianity was indebted had much in common² but also differed considerably in their organisation and practice.³ Both revered the relics of saints and counted certain places holy on the grounds of their associations with people and events; both used geographical pilgrimage as a form of penance. The Celtic Church, however, stressed the value of exile for its own sake, emphasising the spiritual significance of *leaving* home and homeland and journeying with God into the unknown; while the Roman Church placed greater emphasis on *journeying to* specific destinations for specific reasons: to learn, to visit the shrines of saints, to do penance or to evangelise.⁴ These twin strands, gradually woven into the life of the emerging Anglo-Saxon Church, resulted in attitudes and

¹ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

² See Hughes (1987).

³ 'Monasticism did not come to the British from Rome. On present evidence, it seems most likely that it reached the Celtic world from the eastern Mediterranean via Gaul' Evans (1985), 79. On hermits in Anglo-Saxon England see Clayton (1996).

⁴ Thus Boniface (d. 754), who became Archbishop to the Germans, described himself as an exile in Germany (*exulum Germanicum*) and gave *timor Christi* and *amor peregrinationis* as the motivations for his mission Boniface, *Letters* 30 and 94.

practice which would significantly influence the spirituality and literature of succeeding centuries.

1. STRANGERS: PEREGRINATIO PRO AMORE DEI

In both Roman and Celtic Christianity the monastic life was viewed as a form of pilgrimage, involving as it did the leaving of home, kindred and earthly possessions.⁵ In the Roman Church it was, however, usually a 'stationary' pilgrimage, in which the monk, nun or anchorite, once having left their home, essentially remained fixed in their chosen community or hermitage in order to focus upon their interior spiritual journey.⁶ The *Rule* of St Benedict of Nursia, which was addressed to those 'who would hasten to the heavenly country' (*ad patria festinans*) (Ch 73), stressed the value of stability and condemned the *Gyrovagues*, monks who 'spend their whole lives wandering from province to province' (Ch.1). The form of monasticism which Irish missionaries brought to England was, in contrast, less structured and more mobile in character. Strongly influenced by the example of the Desert Fathers,⁷ Irish monks sought out desolate places in which to pray and do battle against the forces of evil. Ireland denied them the deserts to which the hermits of Egypt and Palestine had retreated, so they launched forth in small boats to seek 'deserts in the ocean.'⁸ The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records that in 891:

Three Irishmen came to King Alfred in a boat without any oars, from Ireland whence they had stolen away because they wished for the love of God to be on pilgrimage (*hi woldon for Godes lufan on elpiodignesse beon*), they cared not where. The boat in which they set out was made of two and a half hides,

⁵ See Chapter II:2.

⁶ See Chapter X on stationary or interior pilgrimage in later medieval spirituality.

⁷ See Mayr-Harting (1991), 78-93 and Hughes (1959), 321.

⁸ 'Herimum in ociano laboriose quaesivit' *Adomnan's Life of Columba*, I.6. The beehive huts in which they lived and prayed can still be seen clinging to the rocky islands, such as Skellig Michael, which lie off the west coast of Ireland.

and they had taken with them provisions for a week.

(*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 891).

This was ‘perfect pilgrimage’ as explained by a tenth-century Irish writer, departure without hope of return, following the example of Abraham:⁹

The Lord Himself gave this friendly counsel ... unto Abraham ... that he should leave his own country ... and that he should go for his pilgrimage into the land which God would show him, to wit, the Land of Promise ... Now the good counsel which God enjoined here on the father of the faithful is incumbent ... on all the faithful; that is to leave their country and their land, their wealth and their worldly delight for the sake of the Lord of the Elements, and to go into perfect pilgrimage in imitation of him.¹⁰

Early Irish monasticism was characterised by this mobility, a characteristic which Dorothy Whitelock¹¹ saw as the driving force behind the Seafarer's statement:

gielleð anfloga,
hweteð on hwælweg hreþer unwearnum
ofer holma gelagu. Forþon me hatran sind
drytnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif,
læne on londe.

(*Seafarer*, 62-66a)

Kathleen Hughes also writes of the ‘typical restlessness of the early Irish saint, constantly moving from place to place, reminding himself *that here he had no*

⁹ See Chapter I.

¹⁰ *Old Irish Life of St Columba*. Cited Henry (1966), 30.

¹¹ Whitelock (1950).

continuing city [my italics].'¹² Irish pilgrims were to be found scattered throughout Europe, many such as Columbanus exercising a considerable evangelistic influence in the process.¹³ Given the widespread influence of Irish Christianity in the seventh-century and early eighth-century,¹⁴ it is not surprising that a considerable number of Anglo-Saxon Christians seem to have followed their example. Bede records a number of English converts who lived lives of literal exile and it is noteworthy that the motivating force was the leaving of home in search of salvation; their subsequent choice of occupation, whether as hermit, traveller to a shrine or missionary, was a secondary matter.¹⁵ This is evident in Bede's account of Egbert, an Englishman who had taken a vow 'that he would live in exile (*peregrinus uiuere*) and never return to his native island, Britain.'¹⁶ While living as an exile in Ireland 'so that he might reach his heavenly fatherland (*pro adipiscenda in caelis patria retulimus*)',¹⁷ Egbert considered whether he should preach the Gospel to unreached areas of Germany or journey to Rome 'there to visit and worship at the shrines of the blessed apostles and martyrs of Christ.' In the event divine intervention caused him to stay in Ireland but it is clear that once the principle of exile had been adopted, the actual place of exile could be varied.

Ironically Bede's expressions of approval were being offered at a time when wandering Irish *peregrini* were already becoming less welcome abroad. Kathleen Hughes suggests that the English may in fact 'have had an important influence in

¹² Hughes (1960), 143.

¹³ See for example Bede's account of the two Hewalds, *Ecclesiastical History*, v.10.

¹⁴ 'It is apparent from Bede, H.E. III, 27, that for seventh-century England Ireland was the land of instruction and spiritual guidance ... the two nations formed a kind of religious and cultural commonwealth' Henry (1966), 37.

¹⁵ 'Their object in leaving their own country had not been to be missionaries but pilgrims.' Leclercq, Vandenbrouke, and Bouyer (1968), 35.

¹⁶ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 27.

¹⁷ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, v. 9.

changing the continental attitude to Irish pilgrims,'¹⁸ particularly as Boniface and others sought increasingly to apply Roman methods of diocesan organisation both in England and on the Continent. As Church authorities sought to check the activities of these self-determining wanderers, the force of Irish monasticism gradually flowed into different channels. By the ninth century:

the nature and consequences of pilgrimage had altered. The perpetual pilgrim to the continent was now usually the ambitious scholar with a definite object in view ... The old-style religious, ascetic conception of pilgrimage finds its clearest historic expression during this period in the hermit poetry: 'All alone in my cell', sings a ninth-century poet, 'such a pilgrimage would be dear to my heart'. The motive of pilgrimage overseas had always been the complete abandonment of earthly ties in pursuit of heaven, and when this ascetic ideal became difficult to realise abroad, men turned to a life of religion at home ... It is the anchorites who are, in fact, the spiritual heirs of the seventh-century pilgrims.¹⁹

In the history of Irish and English practice of *peregrinatio pro amore Dei* we see a particularly close interchange between the concepts of life and place pilgrimage. For the Celtic Church total commitment to a life-long pilgrimage to heaven was, as we have seen, frequently equated with a literal life of exile, modelled on the anchoritic experience of the Desert Fathers who left home and community to contemplate eternity in their tiny cells. At its most disciplined, this peripatetic life possessed a certain quality of constant commitment, which Jean Leclercq has described as '*stabilitas in peregrinatione*.'²⁰ When physical travel became more difficult, Celtic monks retained the essence of the pilgrimage ideal: detachment from this world in order to pursue an inner spiritual journey. It was this latter expression of pilgrimage

¹⁸ Hughes (1960), 145.

¹⁹ Hughes (1960), 148.

²⁰ Leclercq (1961), 51.

which was to characterise the monasticism of the later Middle Ages and which Dom Jean Leclercq characterises in its turn as '*peregrinatio in stabilitate*.'²¹

2. EXILES: THE PRACTICE OF PENANCE

Although in a broad sense all expressions of Celtic *peregrinatio* can be said to have had a general penitential connotation, as responses to the sinfulness which characterised the descendants of Adam, some voyages and journeys into exile were undertaken specifically as penance.²² Adomnan's *Life of Columba* notes the example of a homicide and oath-breaker who visited the saint and declared that he had made the long journey in order to expiate his sins in pilgrimage, *ad delenda in peregrinatione peccamina longo fatigatum itinere*.²³ Tradition holds that the saint himself left Ireland for the journey which took him to Iona, on the orders of his confessor following an unseemly battle.²⁴ The Celtic system of private confession and penance was highly-developed.

For the use of the priest-confessors, handbooks were compiled which prescribed the appropriate penance for every conceivable sin. The most usual penalties were fasting, vigils, prayers, tears and almsgiving, all of which could be performed in private, though for the graver sins, especially homicide, the penalty would involve exclusion from the community - in effect, exile.²⁵

The *Penitential of Cummean* (c. 650) orders that

²¹ Leclercq (1961), 51.

²² 'Irish lives of saints and popular tales make numerous references to penitential pilgrimages ... The *Penitential of Columban* in prescribing perpetual pilgrimage likens the penitent to Cain who became a "vagabond and a fugitive upon the earth."' McNeill and Gamer (1965), 34.

²³ *Adomnan's Life of Columba*, 420.

²⁴ Henry (1961, 32-3).

²⁵ Hopkins (1990), 41.

5. He who commits murder through nursing hatred in his mind, shall give up his arms until his death, and dead unto the world, shall live unto God.

6. But if it is after taking vows of perfection, he shall die unto the world with perpetual pilgrimage.²⁶

A set of Irish Canons from a Worcester Collection (c. 1000) condemns the murderer of anyone attached to a bishop:

to go on perpetual pilgrimage, or, more mildly, on a pilgrimage of thirty years; he shall live without flesh and wife and horse, on dry bread, and with meagre clothing and shall not stay for two nights in one house save only in the principal festivals or if sickness lays hold of him.²⁷

Here indeed is the mark of Cain, the homicide, perpetual outcast and wanderer. Irish penitential practice was highly influential in the English Church²⁸ and it is evident from the manner in which Old English literature interpreted the stories of Satan, Adam, Cain and Nebuchadnezzar, how firmly established was the link between sin and exile. English law codes, such as those of Aethelred and Cnut also use exile as a punishment for serious crimes:

Gyf hwa weofodþen afylle, sy he utlah [outlaw] wið God 7 wið men, butan he þurh wræcsið þe deppor gebete.

*(Laws of Cnut)*²⁹

One significant effect of the decrease in the practice of literal exile, described by

²⁶ McNeill and Gamer (1965), 107.

²⁷ McNeill and Gamer (1965), 426.

²⁸ See Mayr-Harting (1991), 257-60.

²⁹ *Councils and Synods*, 491.

Kathleen Hughes,³⁰ appears to have been that the penitential aspect of exile came to supercede the ascetic motivation which had characterised the early Celtic *peregrini*. Literal exile, for the later medieval church, therefore, tended to carry more negative connotations.³¹

3. PILGRIMS: THE CULT OF THE SAINTS

A letter written by St Jerome, urging friends to visit the 'holy' land of Palestine, asserts: 'The Briton 'sundered from our world,' no sooner makes progress in religion than he leaves the setting sun in quest of a spot of which he knows only through Scripture and common report.'³² However adventurous the journeyings of Christian Britons may have been, (and there is only fragmentary evidence on this point), it is undeniable that, through the work of St Augustine of Canterbury, Theodore of Tarsus and other missionaries sent from Rome, the Anglo-Saxon Church developed a strong sense of belonging to the wider Christian world. Moreover, Anglo-Saxon Christians demonstrated a remarkable commitment to visiting the holy places of Christendom.³³ They travelled in order to learn, to do penance, to visit the shrines of the saints and often to die in their sacred neighbourhood. These geographical pilgrimages and the convictions which inspired them exercised a considerable influence upon Old English poetry and prose.

Firstly, pilgrims travelling to Rome and other places on the Continent acted as a crucial conduit for classical culture and learning.³⁴ Eddius Stephanus' *Life of Wilfrid*

³⁰ Hughes (1960), 148.

³¹ See Jotischky (1995).

³² Jerome, *Letters*, XLVI.

³³ Illustrated by the entry in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for 889 which records the (clearly unusual) circumstance that 'in this year no journey was made to Rome.' For examples of the many pilgrims who made their way to Rome see Moore (1937), Colgrave (1969) and O Carragáin (1994).

³⁴ 'The Anglo-Saxon pilgrimages to Rome undoubtedly exercised a potent influence upon the cultural development of Britain ... Bede was able to quote from such classical authors as Virgil,

provides an interesting example of the range of benefits which were to be derived from such journeys. The 'youthful Wilfrid,' associated at the time with the Celtic monastery at Lindisfarne, is said to have been inspired to visit the See of St Peter 'believing that he would wash away every trace of sin thereby and receive a great blessing.'³⁵ On his journey to Rome, Wilfrid refused an invitation to remain in Lyons, stating: 'I have made my vows to the Lord ... leaving, like Abraham, my kinsfolk and my father's house to visit the Apostolic See, there to learn the laws of ecclesiastical discipline so that our nation may grow in the service of God' (Ch 4). Once in Rome, Wilfrid 'passed many months in visits to the shrines of the saints,'³⁶ acquired a teacher in the person of Boniface the Archdeacon, and eventually returned to England laden with 'the holy relics he had collected in Rome' (Ch 5).

Benedict Biscop, founder of the monasteries of Wearmouth-Jarrow where Bede would develop his remarkable life of scholarship, made no fewer than five visits to Rome and Bede, in his *Lives of the Abbots*, relates that Biscop effected a remarkable transfer of knowledge and skills to his homeland. The 'spiritual treasures' with which he returned included 'a great mass of books of every sort' and 'an abundant supply of the relics of the blessed apostles and Christian martyrs'³⁷ (Ch 6), the chief cantor of St Peter's, who 'taught the monks at first hand how things were done in Rome' (Ch 6), 'many holy pictures of the saints' (Ch 6), and 'a set of pictures ... to show how the Old Testament foreshadowed the New' (Ch 9).

Wilfrid and Benedict Biscop were only two of many English pilgrims who made their

Ovid, Pliny the Younger and Horace, thanks to the many pilgrimages of the indefatigable Benedict Biscop.' Moore (1937), 84-5.

³⁵ [Age of Bede, 1983 #43], *Life of Wilfrid*, Ch 3.

³⁶ Colgrave (1969), 160, identifies two mid-seventh century pilgrim itineraries which outline the route Wilfrid would probably have taken.

³⁷ O Carragáin (1994), 5, notes that 'the relics themselves, at this period, would not have been actual parts of bodies but cloths or other objects which had touched the shrines of the saints, or oil from the lamps before the shrines.'

way to the city whose streets were 'made sacred by the presence of St Peter's body.'³⁸
The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* relates that a number of Anglo-Saxon kings left their thrones and went to Rome to die there:

688. In this year king Caedwalla went to Rome and received baptism at the hands of Sergius the pope Ine succeeded to the kingdom of Wessex after him, and reigned twenty-seven years: afterwards he went to Rome and remained there until the day of his death.

702. In this year Coenred succeeded to the Mercian kingdom.

709. Coenred went to Rome and Offa with him: Coenred was there until his life's end.

726. In this year Ine went to Rome.

Bede comments that Ine travelled:

ad limina beatorum apostolorum ... cupiens in uicinia sanctorum locorum ad tempu peregrinari in terris, quo familiaris a sanctis recipi meretur in caelis.

to the threshold of the blessed apostles ... desiring to spend some of his time upon earth in the neighbourhood of the holy places, so that he might be thought worthy to receive a greater welcome from the saints in heaven.³⁹

a statement which demonstrates his own conviction of the sanctity which the presence of the saints conferred on particular places,⁴⁰ even though David Rollason has

³⁸ *Lives of the Abbots*, Ch 2 in *Age of Bede*.

³⁹ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, v.7.

⁴⁰ Bede also uses the phrase *loca sancta* in his description of pilgrimages for example in his *Ecclesiastical History*, iv.5; v.19 and in *De Locis Sanctis Libellus*, where he describes the journey of Arculph, Bishop of Gaul, who 'from a desire to see the holy places, left his native country, and went to the Land of Promise' (*desiderio locorum sanctorum patriam deferens, terram repromissionis*

questioned the pious motives of the kings involved, suggesting that their abdications may in fact have been imposed by political enemies.⁴¹ Bede's comment that 'at this time many Englishmen, nobles and commons, layfolk and clergy, men and women, were eager to do the same thing'⁴² indicates the popular enthusiasm which led to the establishment of the *Schola Saxonum*⁴³ a place where pilgrims could live a life of perpetual exile near the tombs of the saints, which was sufficiently important to give its name to the area where it was situated.

Some of the many pilgrims to Rome also ventured even further afield. In an account of the life of St Willibald, written by Huneberc, an Anglo-Saxon nun of Heidenheim, the saint is said to have persuaded his father to 'abandon his native country and to accompany him as a pilgrim to foreign parts.'⁴⁴ Willibald's motive was to detach his father 'from the pleasures of the world, from the delights of earth and from the false prosperity of wealth.' After a year in Rome, Willibald desired to go on pilgrimage 'to a more remote and less well-known place.'⁴⁵ The detailed account which he appears to have dictated to Huneberc is the only extant eighth-century narrative of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, packed with geographical, historical and devotional information. The introduction stresses that Willibald saw the 'very spot where the holy cross of our Lord was found' (165) and the 'very hill whence our Lord ascended into heaven' (167).

Not only did the English adopt with enthusiasm the cults of foreign saints, visiting their shrines and acquiring their relics; they also lost little time in establishing saints

adiit) Bede, *Complete Works* IV. 442.

⁴¹ Rollason (1989), 124-5. Moore (1937), 46, notes that Wilfrid had also hoped to end his days in Rome.

⁴² Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, v.7.

⁴³ Documented by Moore (1937). Mentioned twice in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

⁴⁴ *Anglo-Saxon Missionaries*, 157.

⁴⁵ *Anglo-Saxon Missionaries*, 159.

and martyrs of their own.⁴⁶ The tomb of St Alban, a British martyr of the Roman period, was venerated in the time of Bede and the cult of Oswald, a prototypical Anglo-Saxon saint and hero, developed rapidly with healings reported from places sanctified by association with him.⁴⁷ Healings were expected of saints, both before and after their deaths: healings from sickness and release from the penalties of sin. Columba is said to have brought healing to a man who touched the hem of his cloak⁴⁸ Bede's *Life of Cuthbert* relates a number of healings brought about through contact with the saint's relics (Chs 43-6) and Alcuin's *Life of Willibrord* tells how penitents' chains were broken at the saint's tomb.⁴⁹ As part of the propagation of such cults, saints' *Lives* were produced both in poetry and prose.⁵⁰ The Cult of the Cross, stimulated by Arculf's *De Locis Sanctis*, by the 'discovery' of a fragment of the true cross in Rome in 701 and by later gifts of relics to Alfred and Aethelstan,⁵¹ was influential in the creation of *Elene* and the *Dream of the Rood*. *Vercelli Homily XII* urges its audience:

we sculon beran usse reliquias ymb ure land, þa medeman Cristes rodetacen
þe we Cristes mael nemnað ... Eac we sculon beran oðre halige reliquias, þæt
syndon haligra manna lafe, hyra feaxes oððe hyra lices dæl oððe hrægles.⁵²

and *Homily XX* encourages visits to shrines.

⁴⁶ See Rollason (1989). For examples of collections of relics see the Athelstan and Leofric Donations [*Anglo-Saxon Prose*, 1979 #101], 14-21.

⁴⁷ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, iii.9-13.

⁴⁸ *Adomnan's Life of Columba*, 314.

⁴⁹ *Anglo-Saxon Missionaries*, 19.

⁵⁰ Colgrave (1969), 55, suggests that Felix's *Life of Guthlac* formed part of an attempt to make his shrine into a place of pilgrimage.

⁵¹ See *Dream of the Rood*, 42-52.

⁵² *Vercelli Homilies*, XII. 16-17, 28-30.

Not all relics, however, were accepted at face value. The correspondence of Boniface includes a letter which he wrote to the Pope, alerting him to the character of a purveyor of 'relics of extraordinary but rather suspect holiness.'⁵³ Nor were pilgrimages always considered wise or profitable, especially those which involved long and dangerous journeys. Although Boniface himself encouraged Abbess Bugga to consider the time for contemplation which a pilgrimage to Rome (83-4) would bring,⁵⁴ he also wrote to Cuthbert, Archbishop of Canterbury advising the English Church authorities

to forbid matrons and nuns to make their frequent journeys back and forth to Rome. A great part of them perish and few keep their virtue. There are many towns in Lombardy and Gaul where there is not a courtesan or a harlot but is of English stock. It is a scandal and disgrace to your whole Church.⁵⁵

Pilgrimage had always held considerable physical dangers for men and women⁵⁶ but the moral dangers outlined here were a particular threat to those religious who had renounced the world. Similar questions about the propriety of pilgrimages had surfaced in the fourth century⁵⁷ and would surface again in the fourteenth. Alongside such practical objections there were also well-worn spiritual questions which required consideration. Did geographical pilgrimage necessarily confer spiritual benefits and were the potential benefits worth the possible risks entailed? A ninth-century marginal

⁵³ *Anglo-Saxon Missionaries*, 109.

⁵⁴ Boniface's reasoning recalls the flight from the world expressed in the movement to the desert which began in the fourth century: 'It would seem to me better, if you can in no wise have freedom and a quiet mind at home on account of worldly men that you should obtain freedom of contemplation by means of a pilgrimage.' Boniface, *Letters*, XIX.

⁵⁵ *Anglo-Saxon Missionaries*, 133.

⁵⁶ See the *Life of Boniface* in *Anglo-Saxon Missionaries*, 38 and the *Hodoeporicon of St Willibald* which speaks of the 'grievous perils of the sea and the manifold difficulties of travel in a foreign land' *Anglo-Saxon Missionaries*, 158.

⁵⁷ See Chapter II.

note on an Irish manuscript summarised the dilemma succinctly:

To go to Rome
Is much trouble, little profit;
The King [of heaven] whom thou seekest there,
Unless thou bring Him with thee, thou wilt not find.⁵⁸

How could members of monastic orders, in particular, reconcile journeying to Rome with the *stabilitas* required by their calling? Éamonn O Carragáin suggests that one of the functions of the Ruthwell Cross⁵⁹ (on which was inscribed lines from the *Dream of the Rood*) may have been to serve as a kind of substitute for the Rome-pilgrimage and the knowledge of the wider church which it conferred on those who undertook it.⁶⁰ Bede himself, living in a period when journeys to Rome were not uncommon, takes, in O Carragáin's opinion,

a balanced view of Rome pilgrimage. He thought that journeys to Rome were necessary for some so that others could stay at home in peace and get on with the life of contemplation ... that foretaste of heaven celebrated in the Canon of the Mass.⁶¹

Bede, then, seems to have considered that pilgrimage to holy places, while valuable

⁵⁸ W. Stokes and J. Strachan, *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus II*, 296. Cited Hughes (1959), 316.

⁵⁹ Which he dates to the second quarter of the eighth century O Carragáin (1994), 31.

⁶⁰ 'So that members of a small isolated monastery would always be reminded, as long as they lived under its protecting shadow, that physical pilgrimage was unnecessary; that the best preparation for the last pilgrimage [death] was to soldier on faithful to their vow of *stabilitas*. O Carragáin (1994), 38.

⁶¹ O Carragáin cites Bede's comments on the labours of Benedict Biscop: he travelled to so many places beyond the sea, so that we, feasting on the all riches of saving knowledge, can remain quiet within the enclosure of the monastery and can serve Christ in confident freedom (*Homilies on the Gospels* i. 132) O Carragáin (1994), 39.

for the knowledge which it could contribute, was essentially secondary to the interior pilgrimage to which he and other monks were committed. The survey of Old English poetry and prose which I have presented indicates that the extant literature embodies a similar set of priorities, valuing pilgrimage to holy places but above all communicating the importance of the concept of life pilgrimage to the heavenly home. The idea of life as a pilgrimage had been absorbed deep into the spiritual consciousness of the English: how that pilgrimage was to be expressed in terms of time and space would prove fruitful matter for preachers and poets to debate for centuries to come.

CHAPTER VII

THE WANDERER AND SEAFARER RECONSIDERED

The theme of exile has long been recognised as an important component of a number of the poems usually classed as Old English 'elegies.'¹ What has become clear, however, from the survey above, is the extraordinary extent to which the concepts of exile and homeland rapidly became associated in Anglo-Saxon thought with Christian concepts of spiritual exile and the life of pilgrimage, and the profound spiritual resonance which words such as exile, stranger, home, homeland, city and journey would have therefore contained for a contemporary audience. Setting individual poems against the usage of the pilgrimage motif, which can be observed in other writing of the period brings into focus aspects of their intention and construction which may otherwise remain obscure. In the *Wanderer* and the *Seafarer* in particular, it is possible to observe the creative interaction between secular and spiritual understandings of exile, the nature of security, and the priorities which human beings should observe as they make their way through the trials of this world.

1. THE *WANDERER* AND THE *SEAFARER*: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

The *Wanderer* and the *Seafarer* are similar in terms of situation, in so far as both are presented as personal accounts of lonely exile, and in terms of resolution, in that both ultimately point to the security of the heavenly homeland as the proper goal for humankind:

Wel bið þam þe him are seceð,

¹ See Frey (1963), Goldman (1979), *Old English Elegies*, Introduction; Morgan (1990).

frofre to fæder on heofonum, þær us eal seo fæstnung stondeð.

(*Wanderer*, 114-5)

Uton we hycgan hwær we ham agen,
ond þonne gepencan hu we þider cumen,
ond we þonne eac tilien, þæt we to moten
in þa ecan eadignesse,
þær is lif gelong in lufan dryhtnes,
hyht in heofonum.

(*Seafarer*, 117-122)

Both poems, therefore can be seen to tap into the essential understanding of earth as exile, life as pilgrimage, and heaven as mankind's true home. Viewed against the rich complexity of the pilgrimage motif, however, the chief difference in the orientation and purpose of the two poems becomes clear: the *Wanderer* is an involuntary exile whose story offers a perspective on life to those enduring the enforced vicissitudes of human experience, whereas the *Seafarer* provides encouragement for those who have already chosen God's path of self-sacrifice, but are finding the going tough.

2. THE *WANDERER* AND LIFE-PILGRIMAGE

The *Wanderer* is presented as a man who has lost both his lord and his place within the community and whose wanderings are caused by what are essentially human factors: bereavement and the desire to seek a new human relationship to replace that which has been lost. This could be described as purely *horizontal exile* as the *Wanderer* moves across the face of the earth in search of human society (23-7). Although his exile is involuntary, it does not appear to have any particular overtones of penance; his experience is a reflection of that of Adam, forced to endure the harsh tribulations of a post-Paradise world, rather than that of Cain the outcast, whose descendants hate the community they have forfeited.

The poem lays great emphasis on the value of wisdom and the importance of a man containing his griefs until he has discovered a remedy. This is not simply an example of a secular stoical approach to life but an established theme in Christian teaching. The apostle James suggested that Christians should be slow to speak in anger or complaint (James 1:9) and the Psalmist refused to express his anger at the unfairness of life until he had reached an understanding of God's purposes (Psalm 72). The clear implication therefore, of the revelation of suffering embodied in the first part of the poem, is that the speaker has resolved the problem of human suffering and is thus able to communicate both his own predicament and the spiritual perspective which now enables him to endure it. That perspective is founded upon the dual perception of the transience of life (a key element of the pilgrimage cluster) contained in lines 89-109 and the contrasting security to be found

on heofonum, þær us eal seo fæstnung stondeð.

(*Seafarer*, 115)

The clear implication of the *Ubi sunt* passage and the lines:

Her bið feoh læne, her bið freond læne,

Her bið mon læne, her bið mæg læne,

eal þis eorþan gesteal idel weorþeð!

(108-10)

is that the objects of his *horizontal* quest, a generous lord, the joys of the hall, the companionship of kinsmen, are all seen in the light of history as tragically vulnerable to forces beyond man's control. Even if he were to succeed in his search, such things could not in reality offer any lasting security. All earthly comforts are transient and his experience is but one example of the greater truth that the whole world is steadily declining. His gaze therefore shifts from the horizontal to the vertical plane. If there is

no security, no lasting home on earth, there is however the prospect of comfort laid up in heaven. There, as the homilies and other poems make clear, human beings who turn their hearts to God will find all the comforts which they have learned to value on earth: a sense of belonging as citizens of heaven, a home which is eternally secure, fellow-citizens with whom to share promised joys, and a lord who will never forsake them. The wanderer, therefore, has faced the spiritual challenge which Adam and Eve, those first human exiles, have bequeathed to all their descendants: like Abraham he has converted involuntary exile into a purposeful pilgrimage towards heaven.²

3. THE *WANDERER* AND *GUTHLAC B*

As has already been observed,³ there are strong similarities between the *Wanderer* and the final section of *Guthlac B*, in which the servant laments his lost lord:

Ellen biþ selast þam þe oftost sceal
 dreogan dryhtenbealu, deope behycgan
 þroht þeodengedal, þonne seo þrag cymeð,
 wefen wyrdstafum. Ðæt wat se þe sceal
 aswæman sarigferð, wat his sincgiefan
 holdne biheledne. He sceal hean þonan
 geomor hweorfan. Ðam bið gomenes wana
 ðe þa earfeða oftost dreogeð
 on sargum sefan.

(*Guthlac*, 1348-1356)

The saint's servant is, so to speak, a Wanderer in the making, whose final speech (though the text is incomplete at this point) hints at a life of desolation during which

² See Chapter I: D.

³ See Chapter V: 3.

he will have to go through the process demonstrated by the *Wanderer* if he is at last to join his earthly lord in the heavenly home which Guthlac has entered. In this brief episode we see that it is possible for human grief and knowledge of Christian life-perspectives to co-exist in the same poem.⁴ Guthlac's servant is well instructed in the concept of life pilgrimage (1076-1093) and the heavenly hope to which his master has attained; yet his grief, at least initially, dominates his life alone. It is, therefore, perfectly consistent for the speaker in the *Wanderer* to have embarked upon his enforced lonely exile with such mixed feelings and to have come to a resolution of his situation through reflection on the world and the truths revealed by its Creator.

4. LAND AND SEA IN THE PILGRIM LIFE: THE *SEAFARER* AND THE OLD ENGLISH *EXODUS*⁵

Scholars who argue for an allegorical interpretation of the *Seafarer* frequently cite patristic and homiletic references to the sea in order to support their case. The fact that the conclusions which they draw from such allusions vary considerably⁶ is hardly surprising, given the vast elemental character of the image concerned and the fertile exegetical imaginations of the Fathers and subsequent preachers. More important for the study of the *Seafarer* is the fact that none of the parallels adduced corresponds closely to the poem,⁷ since they all equate the sea with the world in general, often focusing on the necessity of being safe within the ship of the Church, and identifying waves and storms with the temptations and uncertainties which beset the Christian. These interpretations cannot fit the context of the *Seafarer* where there is no particular emphasis upon the vessel in which the Seafarer voyages and the contrast is

⁴ Woolf (1966), 58.

⁵ This section appeared in *English Language Notes*, XXXV, 2, December 1997: 1-9.

⁶ See for example Smithers (1957), Smithers (1959); Osborn (1978); Vickrey (1982); Holton (1982).

⁷ This point is recognised by Anne Klinck in the introduction to her edition of the elegies, *Old English Elegies*, 38.

not between safety within the ship and perils without, but between a supposedly carefree existence on land and a far from comfortable life of sea-travel. The 'world' in the *Seafarer* is made up of both land *and* sea and the clearest statement of motivation in the poem implies a profound contrast between the two states of spiritual being which they represent:

gielleð anfloga,
hweteð on hwælweg hreþer unwearnum
ofer holma gelagu. Forþon me hatran sind
dryhtnes dreamas þonne þis deade lif,
læne on londe.

(*Seafarer*, 62-66a)

Here the paradoxical phrase *deade lif* recalls the reminder given by St Paul to the church at Ephesus:

et vos cum essetis mortui delictis et peccatis vestris
in quibus aliquando ambulastis secundum saeculum mundi huius

And you, when you were dead in your offences and sins
Wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world
(Ephesians 2: 1-2)

Why, however, should spiritual death and transience be associated with the land in particular? A striking parallel to this apparent use of land and sea to indicate spiritual status is to be found in the Old English *Exodus*. As Peter Lucas observes in his edition of the poem,⁸ the Egyptians, the enemies of God, are referred to as *landmenn* (179) whereas the Israelites, on their way through the desert to the Promised Land

⁸ Exodus (1994), 104. See also Cross and Tucker (1960), 125.

are called *saemen* (105). Indeed the central section of the poem is dominated by what Irving calls an 'extraordinary extended metaphor,'⁹ which portrays the Israelites 'sailing' across the desert. A key to the interpretation of this unlikely image is provided by the parallel use of *ingefolc* (142) to describe the Egyptians and *wraecmon* (137) and *edellease* (139), for the people of Israel. The Egyptians remain in their native land; the Israelites become wanderers. The contrast, comments Lucas, 'implies that the Egyptians will never embark on the voyage to the heavenly home but will be confined in hell.'¹⁰ This implication is certainly borne out by events. In the first part of the poem the Egyptian *landmenn* are apparently more powerful and secure than the Israelite *saemen* who are on the move, facing unknown perils in obedience to the call of God. The moment of judgement, however, (in this case the crossing of the Red Sea), reveals who is approved by God and who will perish. Thus the story of the Exodus is placed firmly in the context of the pilgrim calling of the people of God by the Anglo-Saxon poet. Exile from Eden¹¹ and alienation from God was the common punishment for sin visited upon Adam, Eve and all their descendants; pilgrimage, that is a voluntary leaving of one's home, was the response subsequently required of Abraham¹² and his descendants¹³ if a new relationship with God were to be established. As we have seen, the imagery and vocabulary of exile and pilgrimage subsequently adopted by New Testament writers,¹⁴ became a commonplace in patristic and homiletic material,¹⁵ and was one of the dominant images of the Christian

⁹ *The Old English Exodus*, 74.

¹⁰ *Exodus*, 104.

¹¹ Genesis 3:23-4

¹² Genesis 12:1: 'And the Lord said to Abram: Go forth out of thy country, and from thy kinsmen, and out of thy father's house, and come into the land which I shall show thee.'

¹³ The apostle Paul regards Christians as spiritual descendants of Abraham. See Romans 9:6-8.

¹⁴ For example I Peter 2:11: 'I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims (Vulgate: *advenas et peregrinos*), to refrain yourselves from carnal desires which war against the soul,' which links the pilgrimage of life with moral obedience. Also Hebrews 11: 8-16.

¹⁵ As in Cyprian, *On Mortality*, Ch 26: 'We should reflect constantly that we have renounced the

life used within the Anglo-Saxon church.¹⁶ Of particular interest to students of the *Seafarer*, however, is the apparently eccentric use of sea-imagery to describe the progress of the Israelite exiles across the desert. The fact that the people of Israel are here identified not merely as *wraecmen* but as *saemen*, argues a strong link in the mind of the Exodus-poet between the concept of being God's obedient people on the move and sea travel. As far as I am aware, no clear patristic source for this particular equation has been identified.¹⁷ Its use, both in Exodus and the *Seafarer* could, however, be a logical development of the broader concept of pilgrimage expressed in the Letter to the Hebrews, in which the patriarchs are described as dwelling in tents, symbols of impermanence, in order that they may eventually dwell in an eternal city 'whose builder and maker is God.'¹⁸ St John Chrysostom saw in Abraham, Isaac and Jacob models of detachment from the present world:

Prima est virtus, atque adeo universa virtus, esse in hoc mundo hospitem et peregrinum, et cum iis quae hic sunt rebus et negotiis nihil habere commune, sed ab eis pendere tamquam ab externis

The first virtue, yea the whole of virtue is to be a stranger to this world, and a sojourner, and to have nothing in common with things here but to hang loose from them, as from things strange to us.¹⁹

Those who have given their allegiance to this world dwell in cities, symbols of earthly security, and enjoy all that earth has to offer; those who follow God live in tents,

world and as strangers and foreigners (*hospites et peregrinos*) we sojourn here for a while.' Cyprian, *Treatises*.

¹⁶ See for example Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, v. 21; *Blickling Homilies*, XXIII; *Vercelli Homilies*, XIV.

¹⁷ See *Old English Exodus*, 74.

¹⁸ Hebrews 11:8-10. See Chapter I: 2. C.

¹⁹ Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews*, 473-4. See Chapter I: 2.C.

symbols of impermanence, and suffer deprivation. It is possible that this understanding informs the description of the land-dweller in the *Seafarer* 28-9:

se þe ah lifes wyn
gebiden in burgum,²⁰ bealosipa hwon,
wlonc ond wingal

The other two allusions in the *Seafarer* to those who live on land are also concerned with ease and comfort:

þæt se mon ne wat
þe him on foldan fægrost limpeð,
hu ic earmcearig iscealdne sæ
winter wunade wræccan lastum

(*Seafarer*, 12-15)

þæt se beorn ne wat,
esteadig secg, hwæt þa sume dreogað
þe þa wræclastas widost lecgað.

(*Seafarer*, 55-7)

On each occasion the point of the reference is that the land-dweller does not comprehend the life of the seafarer. Scholars have often been reluctant to assume that these allusions to life on land contain an element of criticism²¹ yet the comparisons with *Exodus* would suggest that this is in fact the case. The land and the city,

²⁰ *burg* (city, fortress) is used to translate *civitas* in the prose versions of the psalms in the *Paris Psalter*.

²¹ Thus Campbell (1973), 239, comments: 'There is nothing pejorative in the picture of the man on land.' See also *The Seafarer*, 37ⁿ.

therefore, can be seen to represent worldly security, comfort and enjoyment; the sea, that most unpredictable of elements, symbolises commitment to travel and abandonment to the will of God. This contrast is further reinforced in the *Seafarer* by the description of the land-dweller as *wlonc ond wingal* (29). Anne Klinck, in her edition of *The Old English Elegies*, points out that

the word *wingal*, “flushed with wine”, occurs also in *Daniel* 116 (*þa onwoc wulfheort* [Nebuchadnezzar], *se ær wingal swæf*), where it is clearly pejorative... The second element, *gal*, “wanton, lascivious” certainly has a bad connotation. Cf. *symbelgal* (*Judgement Day I* 79), *medugal* (*Daniel* 702 and *Judith* 26), *meodugal*, *-gales* (*Fortunes of Men* 52 and 57). In all these examples the *-gal* words indicate wanton self-indulgence ... In *Seafarer*, the word *wingal* suggests a heedless delight in earthly pleasures.²²

Such ‘heedless delight in earthly pleasures’ would precisely describe the human being concerned only with the present transient world and hence deaf to the call to follow the pilgrim route to the heavenly city. The use of *wlonc*, ‘proud, splendid,’ also probably carries negative connotations, since pride²³ has never been considered a Christian virtue. Lines 106-7 carry twin concepts, their message reinforced by the parallelism of form, which summarise the contrast between believer and unbeliever.

Dol biþ se þe him his dryhten ne ondrædeþ; cymeð him se deað unþinged.
Eadig bið se þe eaþmod leofaþ; cymeð him seo ar of heofonum

(*Seafarer*, 106-7)

²² Old English Elegies, 131. See also Woolf (1975), 204.

²³ As in these verses from the Magnificat: ‘[God] hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart. He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble.’ Luke 1:51,52. Also relevant is James 4:6: ‘God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble.’

Grace is for the humble and true humility grows from a recognition of the truth about God and oneself. If 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom' (Psalm 110.10), then lack of spiritual understanding is not only unfortunate but dangerous. Viewed from the perspective of the Scriptures and the teachings of the Fathers, the land-dweller, in his comfortable ignorance, is not a neutral figure, but one who risks eternal condemnation.

The choices represented by the seafarer and the land-dweller form part of the tradition inherited by the Anglo-Saxon Church, which can be traced from the *Letter to the Hebrews*, through the writings of St Augustine, Caesarius of Arles and Gregory the Great and which saw the Christian, like the Israelite before him, as the *viator*,²⁴ the one who has no continuing city, no obvious security in this world. Thus St Augustine wrote:

Scriptum est itaque de Cain, quod condiderit civitatem (*Gen.* iv. 17): Abel autem tanquam peregrinus non condidit.²⁵

Scripture tells us that Cain founded a city, whereas Abel, as a pilgrim, did not found one.

(*City of God*, Book XV:1)

The message was reiterated by Caesarius of Arles:²⁶

Peregrini ese debemus in hoc saeculo, ut cives esse mereamur in caelo. Qui amat mundum, et civis esse vult in mundo, partem non habet in caelo; in hoc enim probamus, quod peregrini sumus, si patriam desideramus.²⁶

²⁴ See Ladner (1967), 233-9.

²⁵ *P. L.*, 41, 437-38.

²⁶ *Sermones* See Chapter II: 3.

We ought to be pilgrims in this world, in order that we may deserve to be citizens in heaven. He who loves the world and wishes to be a citizen in the world has no place in heaven; for by this we prove that we are pilgrims, if we long for our homeland.²⁷

Gregory the Great, whose writings profoundly influenced the Anglo-Saxon Church wrote:

Quis autem in hoc mundo peregrinatur populus, nisi qui ad sortem electorum currens, habere se patriam novit in coelestibus; et tanto magis se illic sperat invenire propria, quanto hic cuncta quae praeterunt esse a se deputat aliena?²⁸

But what People is 'on travel' in this world, but that which hastening to the inheritance of the Elect knows well that it has its native country in the heavenly world, and expects that it will there find its own the more, in proportion as here it reckons all things that pass away to be unconnected with itself?²⁹

This is the view of life held by the speaker in the *Seafarer*. He is aware of the delights of creation but knows that they can become distractions. Signs of spring are for him also signs of the world's progress towards final dissolution:

Bearwas blostmum nimað, byrig fægriað,
wongas wlitigiað, woruld onetteð.

(*Seafarer*, 48-9)

²⁷ Cacsarius of Arles, *Sermons*.

²⁸ *P. L.* 76, 577.

²⁹ Gregory the Great, *Morals in Job*, Book 18.

He must renounce the transient joys of life on land in order to seek the eternal joys of heaven:

Uton we hycgan hwær we ham agen,
and þonne gepencan hu we þider cumen.

(*Seafarer*, 117-8)

In both the Old English *Exodus* and the *Seafarer*, therefore, land and sea can be seen to be imbued with considerable spiritual significance, the former representing worldly joys and security, the latter signifying abandonment to the will of God. Such, according to the Fathers, was the choice facing all who would follow the way of Christ.³⁰ In allegorical terms it seems that the Christian *viator* became in Anglo-Saxon thought a Christian seafarer. Such an allegorical interpretation does not exclude the possibility that this particular pilgrim through life may also have been a literal *peregrinus* in the Irish tradition,³¹ who chose to live out the metaphor by placing himself literally at the disposal of God and the currents of the sea.

5. 'TO BE A PILGRIM': THE *SEAFARER* AND THE PSALMIST

Most recent scholarship has concluded that the Old English poem known as the *Seafarer* describes the experience of a pilgrim, though opinions remain divided on the question of whether that pilgrimage is to be understood literally,³² figuratively,³³ or on

³⁰ For example, Caesarius of Arles: 'If a man seeks happiness in the world he will not possess it in heaven.' *Sermons*, 151.

³¹ Thus the Irish *peregrini*, described in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entry for 891, who came to King Alfred in a boat without any oars: '*forþon þe hi woldon for Godes lufan on elþiodignesne beon, hi ne rohton hwær* (they wished for the love of God to be on pilgrimage, they cared not where)' *Two Saxon Chronicles Parallel*.

³² Whitelock (1950).

³³ Ehrismann (1909); Arngart (Anderson) (1937); Smithers (1957), Smithers (1959).

both levels at once.³⁴ This consensus, however, still leaves a number of the poem's difficulties unresolved, particularly those of its structure, *genre* and tone. Is the structure of the *Seafarer* that of a homily, with *exemplum* followed by exhortation? Do the apparently sudden shifts in mood reflect different speakers, as was once suggested,³⁵ or a single speaker reflecting on past emotions? Can the expressions of misery and of apparent envy of those whose life is less arduous, really be consistent with the life of a Christian pilgrim committed to serving God? Or is the speaker perhaps a reluctant traveller, a penitent sentenced to compulsory exile as a consequence of committing a particular sin?³⁶

Various attempts have been made to fit the *Seafarer* into a genre which would make sense of its apparent inconsistencies. Thus, for example two editors of the poem, Ida Gordon³⁷ and Anne L. Klinck,³⁸ regard it as an elegy; Rosemary Woolf argues that it belongs to the genre of *planctus*³⁹ and John C. Shields considers it a *meditatio*.⁴⁰ Yet, although they may have contributed to the content of the poem, none of these forms entirely solves the problems of structure and tone outlined above. There is, however, another possible source, curiously neglected in *Seafarer* scholarship, which would at once supply a model for the pattern of experience described in the poem and demonstrate how such varied emotions could be consistent with the life of one living as a spiritual pilgrim in the world. That source is the Book of Psalms, that most familiar and pervasive of influences in the life of the medieval Christian, used constantly in worship and almost certainly memorised in part or as a whole by anyone possessed of the degree of Christian instruction demonstrated in this poem. Deeply

³⁴ Pope (1974).

³⁵ Suggested among others by Pope (1965) who later withdrew the theory Pope (1974).

³⁶ Vickrey (1982).

³⁷ *The Seafarer*.

³⁸ *The Old English Elegies*.

³⁹ Woolf (1975).

⁴⁰ Shields (1980).

woven into Anglo-Saxon spirituality, the Psalms not only offer a model more fundamental and accessible than some of those suggested elsewhere, but contain patterns of spiritual and emotional expression markedly similar to that found in the *Seafarer*. It is to the Psalms, I would therefore suggest, that the *Seafarer* owes much of its structure, tone and content and it is in the Psalms that answers to some of its problems may be found.

The Psalms have long been associated in Christian tradition with both literal and metaphorical pilgrimage.⁴¹ The *Psalms of Ascent* (119-133) were originally designed to provide comfort and inspiration for Jewish pilgrims bound for Jerusalem, and the whole Psalter was adopted as a channel of expression for the Christian believer bent on seeking heaven. Thus the words of Psalm 119:

heu me quod incolatus meus prolongus est
habitaui cum habitantibus Caedar
multum incola fuit anima mea
Woe is me, that my sojourning is prolonged!
I have dwelt with the inhabitants of Cedar.
my soul long hath been a sojourner.

(Psalm 119:5,6)⁴²

⁴¹ It is interesting to note that the *First Epistle of Peter*, another book of the Bible particularly associated with the concept of life as a pilgrimage, also contains in its fifth chapter a number of ideas which appear in conjunction in the *Seafarer*: exhortation to resist the devil (v 9, *Sea*, 76) and exercise humility (v6, *Seafarer*, 107); acknowledgement of the suffering required of Christians and the promise that God will provide grace (v9-10 *Sea*, 107) and steadfastness (v 10, *Sea*, 108). Andrew Galloway (1988) notes that this passage is found in two tenth-century English manuscripts of the *Rule of St Benedict* but does not relate it to the references to these virtues in the *Seafarer*.

⁴² The text used in this section is that of the Roman Psalter Psalter (1953), that most likely to have been used in England at the time in question. I am grateful to Dr Richard Marsden for advice on this point.

were interpreted by St Jerome as the cry of the metaphorical pilgrim, ready to turn from earthly pleasures in search of God:

‘Woe is me that my sojourn is prolonged!’ This is the plaint of the lover of Christ who wants nothing of the body, who is detached from the world and longs for heaven.⁴³

The *Psalter*, therefore, was a book eminently suited to pilgrims. It is noteworthy that Bede's account of the conversion of Egbert⁴⁴ to a life of literal exile couples his commitment to *peregrinatio pro amore Dei* with a second vow to recite the entire Psalter every day. If the Psalms were an essential tool for the literal exile, they were also an indispensable guide for the Christian committed to a life of spiritual pilgrimage and thus constantly seeking to interpret and endure the tribulations of daily life in a fallen world.

During the early centuries of the Church the Psalms came to hold a unique place in individual and corporate devotion,⁴⁵ an emphasis handed on to the Anglo-Saxon Church by both Roman and Celtic missionaries. Around the end of the fourth century Chrysostom had testified to the pre-eminent role of the Psalms in Christian education: ‘O marvellous wonder! Many who have made but little progress in literature, many who have scarcely mastered its first principles, have the psalter by heart.’⁴⁶ The early monks of Egypt had practised constant repetition of and meditation upon the Psalms,⁴⁷ a custom imitated by Celtic Christianity and demonstrated, according to

⁴³ Jerome, *Homilies*, Vol. II.

⁴⁴ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, iii.27.

⁴⁵ See Lamb (1962).

⁴⁶ *De Poenit. Hom. vi.* Cited Lamb (1962), 30.

⁴⁷ Chitty (1966), 73, cites the exhortation of the Palestinian monk Epiphanius (367-403): ‘The true

Bede, in the lives of both Aidan⁴⁸ and Cuthbert.⁴⁹ Bede also notes the priority accorded to the use of the Psalter by Augustine of Canterbury and Gregory the Great⁵⁰ and Benedicta Ward comments that for Bede himself: 'the knowledge of the Psalter by heart was natural, one psalm learned and repeated after another: in this he and Ceolfrith were typical rather than exceptional.'⁵¹ The Psalter was, moreover, not only a devotional but also an educational tool; memorising the psalms was one of the early tasks set for pupils in Anglo-Saxon monastic schools.⁵² The Christian Latin poems with which the *Seafarer* and other Old English elegies are compared could have been accessed only by using a knowledge of Latin gained by first memorising the Psalms.

It is also noteworthy that the Psalms have transferred successfully from culture to culture precisely because they not only express praise to God but give a voice to the individual believer oppressed by trouble, doubt, fear and frustration. In his *Enarrationes in psalmos*, a commentary known by Bede,⁵³ St Augustine of Hippo encouraged his audience to enter into such expressions of feeling:

si orat Psalmus, orate; et si gemit, gemite; et si gratulature, gaudete; et si sperat, sperate; et si timet, timete. Omnia enim quae hic conscripta sunt, speculum nostra sunt.⁵⁴

If the Psalm prays, you pray; and if it laments, you lament; if it rejoices, you

monk should have prayer and psalmody in his heart without ceasing.'

⁴⁸ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 5.

⁴⁹ *Life of Cuthbert*, Chapters 5, 16 in *Age of Bede*.

⁵⁰ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, i. 26, 27.

⁵¹ Ward (1991), 5).

⁵² See Lapidge (1986), 5-6.

⁵³ Laistner (1935, 237-66).

⁵⁴ *P.L.*, XXXVI. *Ennaratio in Psalmum XXX, Sermo III*.

rejoice, and if it hopes, you hope; if it fears, you fear. For all things written here are our mirror.⁵⁵

Bede responded to this approach to the Psalms in a commentary of his own:

If any oppressive sorrow has come upon you, either by an injury brought on by others ...or by an overwhelming domestic loss, or if you grieve for any reason at all... pray with psalms to the Lord lest the sadness of the world which is death swallow you up.⁵⁶

Bede not only used the words of the psalms himself in this intensely personal way but also encouraged others to do the same:

he popularised their use by composing a new kind of prayer from them in his abbreviated psalter... he selected verses from each psalm which could be used as direct prayer or praise, as food for meditation, pleas for mercy, protest, contrition, or adoration and exultation.⁵⁷

A similar sense of personal identification with the experiences described in the psalms is reflected in the introductions to the Old English prose translations of the Paris Psalter.⁵⁸

Dysne þriddan sealm Dauīd sang þa he fleah Absalon his sunu, and seofode þa yrmðe to Drihtne. Swa deþ ælc þæra manna þe þisne sealm singð; his sylfes

⁵⁵ *Discourse on Psalm 30*. Augustine of Hippo (1961), Vol. 2, 44.

⁵⁶ Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 60-1.

⁵⁷ Ward (1991), 10.

⁵⁸ These introductions are based on *In Psalmorum Librum Exegesis*, a work mistakenly attributed to Bede which may be a product of seventh-century Ireland. See Bright and Ramsay (1912).

earfoðu, ægðer ge modes ge lichaman, he seofað to Drihtne.⁵⁹

David sang this third psalm when he was lamenting Absalom his son, and he bewailed his misery to the Lord. Everyone who sings this psalm does likewise: *he laments his tribulations, of either mind or body, to the Lord* [my italics].⁶⁰

Not only in patristic writings therefore, but also in Anglo-Saxon England, the Psalms were viewed as offering a forthright, and often dramatic channel for the expression of intensely-personal experience of the kind presented in the *Seafarer*.

The Anglo-Saxon Church can thus be seen to have inherited and practised an approach to the Psalms which made familiarity with their content and identification with their perspectives extremely likely for anyone with the degree of Christian understanding revealed in the *Seafarer*. Moreover many Psalms reveal a common sequence of thought which is of particular relevance to the poem. Modern form criticism has identified a group of Psalms, comprising a substantial proportion of the whole, which have been designated 'Psalms of Individual Lament.'⁶¹ Klaus Seybold describes the characteristics of this group thus:

Among the components of these prayers are the invocation, the *representation of self (depiction of misery)*, requests, combined with *expressions of confidence*, arguments to motivate God's intervention, *declarations and vows of thanks and praise* ... the oracle of salvation, or affirmation of answered prayer causing the worshipper's *sudden change of mood in the middle of the psalm-prayer*. The number of possible combinations of these elements is inevitably large, since in the majority of cases it is not a question of

⁵⁹ *Liber Psalmorum*.

⁶⁰ *Alfred the Great*, 54.

⁶¹ Gunkel (1967); Mowinckel (1992); Westermann (1981).

stereotyped prayer formulae, but of *biographical (i.e. contemporary) testimonies* [my italics].⁶²

As Seybold indicates, not every psalm in this category follows an identical pattern but the common elements are clear and the resemblance to the *Seafarer* striking, particularly since it too is presented in the form of a biographical testimony: *Mæg ic be me sylfum soðgied wrecan*. It is useful, therefore, to compare the structure of the *Seafarer*, with that of the considerable number of these psalms⁶³ in which the speaker outlines his suffering (often commenting on the fact that those who do not fear God appear to be prospering), reminds himself of God's goodness, and comes to the point of reaffirming a spiritual perspective which he then encourages himself and others to follow. This sequence can be observed in Psalm 72:

Quam bonus deus Israhel his qui recto sunt corde
mei autem paene moti sunt pedes paene effusi sunt gressus mei
quia zelauit sum in peccatoribus pacem peccatorum uidens
quia non est declinatio mortis eorum nec firmamentum in plaga eorum
in laboribus hominum non sunt et cum hominibus non flagellabuntur...
et dixi ergo sine causa iustificauit cor meum
et laui inter innocentes manus meas et fui flagellatus tota die...
existimabam ut cognoscerem hoc labor est ante me
donec intrem in sanctuarium Dei et intellegam in nouissima eorum...
in uoluntate tua deduxisti me et cum gloria adsumpsisti me
quid enim mihi restat in caelo et a te quid uolui super terram.

Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

⁶² Seybold (1990), 116.

⁶³ See for example Psalms 3, 5, 6, 21, 24, 27, 30, 31, 37, 38, 41, 42, 50, 54, 55, 58, 60, 63, 68, 69, 70, 72, 76, 101, 129, 142.

But as for me my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had almost slipped.

For I was envious of the unrighteous, when I saw the tranquillity
of the ungodly, for they do not consider their death...

They do not share the distress of men nor will they be scourged like other
men...

*Therefore in vain have I cleansed my heart and washed my hands in
innocence and have been chastised all the day...*

I have thought to understand this but it was hard in my eyes until I went into
the sanctuary of God, then I understood their end...

You lead me in your counsels and afterwards receive me in glory...

Whom have I in heaven but you, and with you I desire nothing [else] on earth.

(Psalm 72. 1-5, 13, 16-17, 24-25)

Here the Psalmist is addressing precisely the questions which must inevitably trouble any pilgrim: is my journey, are my sacrifices worthwhile? Why do those who invest in this world (such as the land-dweller in *Seafarer* 28-9 etc) appear to prosper, while those who obey God endure suffering? The answer comes through adopting the perspective of eternity and weighing earthly trials against the prospect of eternal security. Similarly, Psalm 101 opens with a dramatic first-person account of suffering and ends with a confident assertion of the security to be found in God:

defecerunt sicut fumus dies mei et ossa mea sicut in fruxorio confixa sunt
similis factus sum pelicano in solitudine factus sum sicut nocticorax
in domicilio

dies mei sicut umbra declinauerunt et ego sicut faenum arui

tu autem Domine in aeternum permanes et memoriale tuum in saeculum saeculi

initio terram tu fundasti Domine et opera manuum tuarum sunt caeli

ipsi peribunt tu autem permanes et omnia sicut uestimentum ueterescent

et sicut opertorium mutabis ea et mutabuntur

tu autem idem ipse es et anni tui non deficient
filii seruorum tuorum inhabitabunt ibi et semen eorum in saeculum saeculi
diregetur.

My days are vanished like smoke: and my bones are grown dry like fuel
for the fire...

I am become like to a pelican of the wilderness: I am like a night-
raven in the house...

My days have declined like a shadow, and I am withered like grass.
But thou, O Lord, endurest for ever: and thy memorial to all
generations...

In the beginning, O Lord, thou foundedst the earth: and the heavens
are the works of thy hands.

They shall perish but thou remainest: and all of them shall grow old
like a garment...

But thou art always the self-same, and thy years shall not fail.

The children of thy servants shall continue to dwell here:
and their seed shall be directed for ever.

(Psalm 101. 4, 7, 12, 13, 26, 27, 28, 29)

This progression from suffering to reflection on God's eternal attributes to reaffirmation of faith is also markedly similar to that seen in the *Seafarer*. The apparent contradictions and sudden shifts of mood which have long perplexed modern readers of the poem may, therefore, be explicable as the reworking of a pattern of spiritual reflection made familiar through constant repetition of the Psalms in worship, public or private. I would suggest that the *Seafarer* is, like many of the Psalms, composed not of two but of *three* sections: the statement of a problem, a re-examination of the speaker's dilemma in the light of certain spiritual perspectives, and a resolution of his internal conflict. Thus the *Seafarer* opens (lines 1-33a) with a vivid

account of the afflictions suffered by the speaker (the cost of a life of obedience to God), including a sideways glance at those on land who do not share his plight. He then (lines 33b-102) voices his desire to go on journeying and examines the factors which make the prospect both fearsome and desirable, observing the essential transience of the world, the weakness of man, and the powerlessness of riches to help the soul. Finally (lines 103-24) he asserts the greatness of the Creator and exhorts his audience to join him in seeking the heavenly home.

In addition to providing a possible model for the *Seafarer*, the *Psalms* may also help to explain the tone of the poem. John Vickrey comments that in lines 1-33 the *Seafarer* 'implies unmistakably that he was weary not only in body but also in spirit' and argues that if the speaker was a pilgrim 'he might be expected to think not of his miseries but of his joys of the spirit.'⁶⁴ This, however, is to ignore the evidence of the *Psalms*. Like those who produced the *Psalms*, the *Seafarer* is committed to following God but, like them and many a believer since, he has moments when the path of obedience seems unbearably painful and the apparent prosperity of the spiritually-heedless hard to bear. These inevitable fluctuations in spiritual confidence help to account for the tone of the poem without necessarily calling into question the underlying commitment of the speaker.

In the *Psalms*, the overall context in which the doubts and fears of the speaker are voiced is one of faith and commitment. Within this framework it is permissible to question God's actions and rail against present suffering and apparent injustice. The object of the exercise is to examine problems and to work towards a resolution of internal spiritual conflict in the light of God's goodness and long-term purposes. If the *Seafarer* is in fact the expression of a spiritual crisis resolved, following the model of the *Psalms*, then the apparently sudden and contradictory changes of mood become more intelligible. No one could guess from the early verses of *Psalms* 3, 6 or 21 that

⁶⁴ Vickrey (1982), 60.

the speaker will conclude with wholehearted expressions of confidence in God, but such is their outcome. Nor are expressions of sorrow and pain confined to the seven Penitential Psalms.⁶⁵ Suffering in the life of the servant of God can be a consequence of obedience as well as a punishment for sin since 'many are the afflictions of the righteous' (Psalm 33:19). It is not therefore necessary to conclude with Vickrey that the Seafarer must be 'a sinner not a pilgrim.'⁶⁶

Thus the Psalms have a claim to be considered as a major influence on the otherwise problematical sequences of thought,⁶⁷ swift mood changes and emotional intensity of the *Seafarer*. They can also, I believe, be shown to underlie much of the content of the poem. Following Kenneth Sisam,⁶⁸ Psalm 48:7-8 is usually cited in order to explain lines 97-102 but there are many other possible echoes which, through the constant repetition of the Psalter in Christian worship, could have become part of the thought patterns of the poet. As has already been indicated, a considerable number of psalms contain intensely personal expressions of anxiety, hardship and complaint similar to those voiced in the opening section of the *Seafarer*. Thus the Psalmist states:

alienus factus sum fratribus meis et peregrinus filiis matris meae

I am become a stranger to my brethren: and an alien to the sons of my mother.
(Psalm 68:9)

⁶⁵ Psalms 6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129, 143.

⁶⁶ Vickrey (1982), 59.

⁶⁷ In view of the attention devoted to the use of the connective *forþon* in the *Seafarer*, it is interesting to note its frequent use in the prose and verse paraphrases of the *Psalms* contained in the *Paris Psalter* (*Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, Vol V). See for example Psalms 72 and 101.

⁶⁸ Sisam (1945).

while the Seafarer portrays himself as *winemægen bidroren* (16a) and *ne ænig hleomæga* (25b). The Psalmist describes the pride and prosperity of those who ignore God (Ps. 72:3-12; Ps. 9: 4-6); the Seafarer comments:

him gelyfeð lyt, se þe ah lifes wyn
gebiden in burgum, bealosipa hwon,
wlonc ond wingal, hu ic werig oft
in brimlade bidan sceolde.

(*Seafarer*, 27-29)

If the desire expressed in lines 33b-38:

Forþon cnyssað nu
heortan gepohtas, þæt ic hean streamas,
sealtyþa gelac sylf cunnige;
monað modes lust mæla gehwylce
ferð to feran, þæt ic feor heonan
elpeodigra eard gesece.

(*Seafarer*, 33b-38)

represents the speaker's reaffirmation of his commitment to God's will, then line 47

ac a hafað longunge⁶⁹ se þe on lagu fundað

may be nothing more than a description of spiritual motivation. Those who undertake such a voyage, aware of the tribulations it will bring, must be possessed by a profound yearning for God of the kind voiced in Psalm 83:3

⁶⁹ See Swanton (*Dream of the Rood*, 136, note 126) on the spiritual significance of *longunge*.

concupiuit et defecit anima mea in atria Domini
cor meum et caro mea exultauerunt in Deum uiuum

my soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord
my heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God

A similar expression of desire for God may be implicit in lines 58-62a and F.N.M. Diekstra cites Psalm 54:7 in his discussion of this passage:⁷⁰

quis dabit mihi pinnas sicut columbae et uolabo et requiescam

Who will give me the wings like a dove, and I will fly away and rest.

The Psalms contain numerous reflections on the transience of life and the limitations of earthly wealth, cautionary statements which the Psalmists use to reinforce their commitment to God. Such statements as these may well undergird *Seafarer* 67-71:

ne aemulatus fueris eum qui prosperatur in uia sua...
pusillum adhuc et non erit peccator

Envy not the man who prospereth in his way...
For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be.

(Psalm 36:7,10)

quis est homo qui uiuet et non uidebit mortem

Who is the man that shall live, and not see death?

(Psalm 88:49)

⁷⁰ Diekstra (1971).

In addition to the verses from Psalm 48 cited by Sisam in elucidation of the *Seafarer* 97-102, there are further verses from the same psalm, reflections on the inevitability of death even for the great and powerful, which may lie behind lines 80-96:

uiderit sapientes morientes simul insipiens et stultus peribunt
et relinquent alienis diuitias suas
et sepulchra eorum domus eorum in aeternum
tabernacula eorum in generatione et progenie inuocabunt nomina eorum
in terris ipsorum

he shall see the wise dying: the senseless and the fool shall perish together.
And they shall leave their riches to strangers
And their sepulchres shall be their houses forever.
Their dwelling places to all generations: they have called their lands
by their names.

(Psalm 48: 11,12)

Significantly, a number of ideas appear in similar combination in both the Psalms and the *Seafarer*. Thus meditation on suffering in Psalm 76 drives the speaker to reflect on former days, much as in the *Seafarer* 80ff. Again, in Psalm 145 the warning not to put one's trust in princes (v 3) is followed by this assertion:

Beatus cuius Deus Jacob adiutor eius
spes eius in Domino Deo ipsius
qui fecit caelum et terram mare et omnia quae in eis sunt

Blessed is he who hath the God of Jacob for his helper
whose hope is in the Lord his God,

who made heaven and earth and all that things that are in them.

(Psalm 145: 5,6)

Similarly in the *Seafarer* the statement

eorþan indryhto ealdað and searað,
swa nu monna gehwylc geond middangeard.

(*Seafarer*, 89-90)

is succeeded by the confident declaration

Micel biþ se meotudes egsa, forþon hi seo molde oncyrræð;
se gestapelade stiþe grundas,
eorþan sceatas ond uprodor.

(*Seafarer*, 103-5)

Condemnation in line 106 of the folly of the man who does not fear God (compare Psalm 52:1: Dixit insipiens in corde suo non est Deus - The fool said in his heart 'There is no God') is succeeded⁷¹ by a section which makes reference to a number of Christian virtues including humility, steadfastness, faith, self-control, faithfulness to vows and purity:

Dol biþ se þe him his dryhten ne ondrædeþ; cymeð him se ðeað
unþinged.
Eadig bið se þe eaþmod leofaþ; cymeð him seo ar of heofonum;
meotod him þæt mod gestapelað, forþon he in his meahte gelyfeð.
Stieran mon sceal strongum mode, ond þæt on stapelum healdan,

⁷¹ The parallelism of form in lines 106 and 107 is strongly reminiscent of that used in the Psalms.

ond gewis werum wisum clæne.

(*Seafarer*, 106-110)

These are all qualities held up for emulation in the Psalms:

cor mundum crea in me Deus et spiritum rectum innoua in uisceribus meis

create a clean heart in me, O God and renew a steadfast spirit within me

(Psalm 50: 12)

and commended to those who would seek God's presence:

quis ascendit in montem Domini

aut quis stabit in loco sancto eius

innocens manibus et mundo corde

qui non accepit in uano animam suam

nec iurauit in dolo proximo suo

who shall ascend unto the mountain of the Lord;

or who shall stand in his holy place?

The innocent in hands and clean of heart;

who hath not taken his his soul in vain

nor sworn deceitfully to his neighbour.

(Psalm 23: 3-6)

Is it not possible that the presence of these many verses of different psalms carefully woven into the text of the *Seafarer* owes something to the abbreviated form of the Psalter, initiated by Bede which contained a selection of verses designed to express the needs of the human heart? Benedicta Ward in her discussion of Bede and the

Psalter has noted that St Godric, the hermit of Finchale, used a copy of the abbreviated psalter and that a note attached to a Durham copy of the psalter suggests that it should also be used by lay people

who have worldly business, who lie in sickness, who undertake long journeys, sail in ships or go to war; they sing this psalter assiduously and they gain thereby the heavenly kingdom.⁷²

The *Psalter*, therefore, was a book eminently suited to pilgrims. Moreover, its constant use in the liturgy and its role in shaping the spirituality of the Anglo-Saxon Church, make it not only an appropriate but also a credible source for the *Seafarer*. Recognition of the evident influence of the Psalms upon the poem, both in shaping many aspects of vocabulary and content and in supplying a model of spiritual reflection and submission, makes possible the resolution of a number of the poem's difficulties, particularly those of structure and tone. If the thought-patterns of the *Seafarer* echo those of the Psalmist, then the integrity of the surviving text is vindicated and the content of the poem established as entirely consistent with the life of a Christian pilgrim, whether the pilgrimage concerned is literal, metaphorical or both.

Conclusion

Throughout this survey of Old English poetry and prose I have sought to demonstrate that the Anglo-Saxon Church inherited from its Roman and Celtic roots a rich and complex range of attitudes towards life and place pilgrimage. The understanding of life as pilgrimage, in particular, can be seen to have exercised a profound influence on the literature of the period. The practice of place pilgrimage strengthened bonds with other areas of the Christian world and, through the journeys of Wilfrid, Benedict

⁷² Ward (1991), 14.

Bishop and many others, greatly enriched the culture of Anglo-Saxon England. Through their willingness to undertake exile as a literal interpretation of the idea of life pilgrimage, Celtic monks and Anglo-Saxon missionaries spread the news of the Christian faith. The cult of the saints grew substantially and English shrines began to appear. Sometimes place pilgrimage was seen to enhance that longer journey to heaven; sometimes it was condemned as dangerous and distracting. The tensions which manifested themselves in the Bible and in the Early Church can therefore also be seen to have been transferred to the Anglo-Saxon Church; in due course, they would form a vital element of the attitudes to pilgrimage manifested in Middle English literature.

PART III

‘PARFIT PILGRYMAGE’ OR MERELY ‘WANDERYNG BY THE WEYE’? LITERAL AND METAPHORICAL PILGRIMAGE IN MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE.¹

Introduction: Continuity and Controversy

Pilgrymes and palmeres plighen hem togidere
To seken Seint Jame and seintes in Rome;
Wenten forth in hire wey with many wise tales,
And hadden leve to lyen al hire lif after.

(Piers Plowman, Prologue, 46-9)²

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.

(Canterbury Tales, Parson's Prologue, 48-51)

Unravelling the precise significance of pilgrimage in texts such as *Piers Plowman* and the *Canterbury Tales* has long been a problem for readers of Middle English literature. All attempts at interpretation have, moreover, been significantly impeded

¹ Some of the material included in the following chapters formed part of a paper read to the third *Congreso Internacional de Estudios Jacobeos - Santiago, Jerusalén, Roma*, (Compostela, 1997) which will be published in the proceedings of the conference.

² All quotations taken from *William Langland: The Vision of Piers Plowman. A Critical Edition of the B-text* unless otherwise indicated.

by the lack of any thorough-going analysis of the various understandings of pilgrimage transmitted to late medieval spirituality. My approach, therefore, has been based upon the fundamental requirement to establish the concepts inherited by medieval writers before attempting to assess the way in which such writers chose to use them. The preceding chapters have demonstrated that the attitudes towards pilgrimage developed during the early centuries of the Church were subsequently incorporated into Anglo-Saxon spirituality and exercised considerable influence on the tone and content of Old English literature. These attitudes, more complex in nature and more profoundly riven by inherent tensions than literary critics have generally acknowledged, in turn formed a significant element in the spiritual inheritance of the later Middle Ages. Although the Norman Conquest marked an abrupt (if temporary) hiatus in the development of English as a literary language, it did not materially alter the spirituality of the English Church. In the centuries following the Conquest the practice of journeying to saints' shrines and to the Holy Land, already so well-established in Anglo-Saxon England, grew steadily in popularity,³ fuelled by the introduction of indulgences, the growing interest in the humanity of Christ and a very human desire to see the world.⁴ Indulgences, introduced in 1095 by Pope Urban as an incentive to prospective crusaders, had, by the late-fourteenth century, become an integral part of place pilgrimage. Pilgrim narratives record the precise amount of remission from punishment offered in each holy place, carefully noted by conscientious pilgrims such as Margery Kempe and William Wey.⁵ Saints' cults blossomed and relics multiplied, partly it would seem, in

³ See Grabois (1985) on Anglo-Norman pilgrimage to the Holy Land and the growth of interest in the Holy Land during the reign of Henry I. See also Hamilton (1994), who describes the growth and influence of Western pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Brooke (1984) and Sumption (1975).

⁴ See Zacher (1976).

⁵ See also Capgrave, *Ye Solace of Pilgrimes*, on indulgences to be gained in Rome and Fabri, *Book of the Wanderings*, on those available in Jerusalem.

response to consumer demand.⁶ A desire to understand more of the Biblical narrative and to experience, even at the remove of centuries, the events of Christ's Nativity, Passion and Resurrection, drew many to the Holy Land, despite the hazards of the long and difficult journey. Felix Fabri cites the example of St Jerome and the theological insights gained even by laymen who have visited Palestine, in explaining his own 'fever of longing' to visit the Holy Land:

If the great St. Jerome ... thought it right that he should visit the holy places, that he might better understand the Holy Scriptures, what wonder is there if I ... should try by the same means to gain some little knowledge of the Holy Scriptures ... Since unlearned laymen return theologians from the holy places, there can be no doubt that clerks in orders and men of some small learning will return learned to no small degree.⁷

Popular commitment to place-pilgrimage reached new heights and remained a central part of medieval Christianity until the very eve of the Reformation. Eamon Duffy notes that

Though the heyday of the great national shrine at Canterbury was perhaps over by the fifteenth century ... there is plenty of evidence that regional and local shrines, as well as the classic pilgrimages to Rome, Jerusalem and Compostela, remained the focus of devotion up to the very moment when they were outlawed.⁸

Yet questions remained about the desirability, even the validity of this practice. The concept of the pilgrimage of life, so clearly manifested in the writings of the Early

⁶ See Geary (1978) and Brooke (1984).

⁷ Fabri, *Book of the Wanderings*, 2-3.

⁸ Duffy (1992), 191

Church⁹ and the poetry and prose of Anglo-Saxon England,¹⁰ surfaced in the later Middle Ages with a new vigour and, I would suggest, with a particular relevance. The Christian practice of place pilgrimage, criticised from its very inception,¹¹ once again became the subject of fierce debate. The English philosopher and theologian, John Wyclif (c. 1330-84) wrote little directly on the subject of pilgrimages and veneration of saints' images¹² but his teaching was the foundation upon which the Lollards rested their opposition to practices which they regarded as theologically unsound and morally dangerous.¹³ Firstly, there was no merit in so-called 'holy places:

Alas what woodnes is þis to boost of hooli placis, and we ouresilf to be suche viciouse foolis. Lucifer was in heuene, and þat is moost hooli place but for his synne he fel to helle; þe place myȝt nat holde him.¹⁴

Secondly, travelling to such shrines was, Lollards alleged, a pretext for immoral behaviour and a misuse of human energy and resources:

Fore men cannot haunt hore leccherie at home as þei wolden, for drede of lordis, of maystris and fro clamour of nezeboris, þei casten many dayes byfore and gederen what þei may, sore pynyng hemsilf to spare it, to go out

⁹ See Chapter II.

¹⁰ See Chapters V, VI, VII.

¹¹ See Chapter III.

¹² [Hudson, 1985 #178], 126, n2, comments that 'pilgrimages and images are probably the two topics on which most frequently unorthodox opinions were expressed by Lollard suspects.'

¹³ Aston (1984), 189 discusses the popularisation of Wyclif's concerns. Anne Hudson notes that 'the Lollards went further than Wyclif, in their rejection of priestly office, for instance, or in their opposition to images and pilgrimages; but the seed of their ideas can always be found in Wyclif.' *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, 9.

of þe cuntry in pilgrimage to fer ymagis, and lyuen in þe goinge in leccherye, in glotenie, in drunkenesse ... and veynly spenden hore good and leue þe trewe labour þat shulden do at home in help of hemsilf and hore nezeboris.¹⁵

Thirdly, and most importantly, in Lollard thought true pilgrimage was a moral journey of obedience, lived out day by day in the calling assigned by God:

I clepe hem trewe pilgrymes trauelynge toward þe blis of heuene whiche, in þe staat degree or ordre þat God clepþ hem to, buisien hem feiþfuli, for to occupie alle her wittis, bodili and goostli, to know treweli and to kepe feiþfulli þe heestis of God, hatynge euere and fleyngge alle þe seuene dedli synnes Of þese pilgrymes I seide whateuer good þouzt þat þei ony tyme þenken, what vertues worde þat þei speken, and what fructuouse werk þat þei worchen, euery such þouzt, word and werk is a stap noumbrid of God toward him into heuene.¹⁶

Here was a controversy which powerfully focused the spiritual concerns of a rapidly-growing pious laity, intent not only on finding a sure route to heaven but also on experiencing the presence of God in this world.¹⁷ Not only Wycliffite but also orthodox¹⁸ voices raised doubts about the value of place pilgrimage when set against a life of devotion to God in the place of one's calling. At issue here were the vexed relationship between physical and spiritual journeying, the tenuous connection of the tangible to the eternal and the elusive link between holy places and the holy person

¹⁴ *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, 117.

¹⁵ *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, 86. Compare *English Wycliffite Sermons*, 355: 'now pilgrimage is mene for to do lecherye.'

¹⁶ *Two Wycliffite Texts*, 61-2.

¹⁷ See for example Hilton, *Mixed Life*. See also Zacher (1976), 53ff and Constable (1976).

¹⁸ See Owst (1961).

of God. Monastic orders, anchorites and mystics generally regarded stability,¹⁹ not mobility, as the essential pre-requisite for spiritual progress; the relics which multiplied (and travelled) throughout Christendom were often of doubtful provenance and disputed spiritual value;²⁰ and, most telling point of all, was not God equally available to those who sought him wherever they might be? These concerns inform the writings and fuel the creativity of Middle English writers such as Langland, Chaucer, Hilton and the *Pearl*-poet.

The aims of the chapters which follow are two-fold. Firstly, there is a need to recognise that the tensions and contradictions apparent in the use of the pilgrimage motif in Middle English literature are not primarily attributable to the idiosyncrasy, heterodoxy or originality of individual writers but to factors which have always threatened the precarious harmony between life and place pilgrimage.²¹ Pilgrimage in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was not, as many commentators tend to assume, a single universally-approved religious activity comprising the visiting of holy places, but a series of inherited concepts, some complementary, some contradictory, with which preachers, pious lay people and poets wrestled alike. It was this rich and diverse heritage which informed the choices made by medieval writers as they selected and shaped their material and which needs to be acknowledged if we are to appreciate their work more fully. Secondly, I hope to demonstrate that an understanding of these widely-varying interpretations of pilgrimage can not only offer fresh perspectives on well-known Middle English texts but also shed new light upon particular problems of interpretation, such as the relevance of the *Parson's Tale* and the apparently contradictory approaches to pilgrimage in *Piers Plowman*.

¹⁹ See Constable (1976).

²⁰ See Geary (1978).

²¹ See Chapter III.

CHAPTER VIII

PIERS PLOWMAN

Introduction

Most critics of *Piers Plowman* would agree that pilgrimage motifs play a significant role in the poem.²² There is, however, rather less agreement about the interpretation of these motifs and about the manner in which the poet chooses to employ them. Different modes of pilgrimage appear to sit uncomfortably together and Will's apparently erratic pursuit of spiritual enlightenment can seem clumsily contrived and fraught with contradictions. In *Piers Plowman: the Field and the Tower*, Priscilla Martin comments that 'the sequence of pilgrimage, ploughing and pardon look less like progression than a series of false starts.'²³ Some readers have also found it deeply unsatisfactory that the poem ends not with a resolution of the Church's woes but with yet another pilgrimage.²⁴ Many of these difficulties, however, can be reduced, if not totally resolved, if it is accepted that the whole poem is structured around the pilgrimage of life,²⁵ a concept to which Langland²⁶ demonstrates a deep commitment. Within this framework, false starts, interruptions, distractions and temptations can be seen, not as evidence of confused or ill-conceived literary

²² Salter (1969), 4, refers to the 'many pilgrimages which we make throughout the poem.'

²³ Martin (1979), 51-52.

²⁴ See Muscatine (1972), Ch. 3 on criticisms of the structure and purposefulness of the poem.

²⁵ Compare Wenzel (1973), who maintains that only Passus V depicts the pilgrimage of life. Simpson recognises the biblical background of images such as the 'tour on a toft (*Prol.* 14) in which Truth lives but focuses on social aspect of its setting Simpson (1990), 33.

²⁶ I accept here the usual identification of the poet. See Kane (1965).

strategies but as essential components of the metaphor of journeying.²⁷ Pilgrims travelling to Rome, Compostela and Jerusalem during this period were conscious that there would be many problems to be overcome before they reached their goal and that they would in all probability take wrong turnings, experience attacks by thieves, and grow weary and discouraged.²⁸ Small wonder, then, if the lifelong pilgrimage of humankind were to be characterised in similar fashion.²⁹ Christian tradition has never depicted the pilgrimage of life as a straightforward movement from Place A to Place B and we should not expect Langland to do so either. His reading, his observation and his own life-situation would all have taught him that it is one thing to determine to journey to heaven, quite another to find the way day by day. If Langland was indeed a cleric in minor orders, with a wife and family, committed to praying for the souls of others,³⁰ then he would have daily lived out in his own experience the conflicting demands of the world and the spiritual realm. Neither celibate, nor safely confined within a monastery or anchorite's cell, he would nevertheless, if his claim in the C-text is to be taken seriously, have constantly spent time on his knees face to face with eternity. Such a man would not have been inclined to produce a facile, over-simplified allegory of humankind's journey through a fallen world.

Moreover, Langland, like other medieval writers, had at his disposal a number of theological interpretations of the pilgrimage of life, together with a series of images in which those interpretations could be clothed. Since human exile on earth was the product of disobedience, any desire to reach the heavenly homeland must involve not

²⁷ 'Such form as [the poem] has mirrors life most closely – wandering, searching, progressing and then apparently retrogressing – the life of a man continuously in search of living as God would wish him to live.' Evans (1969), 246.

²⁸ See Fabri, Casola and *Western Pilgrims*.

²⁹ As in *Ancrene Wisse* and de Deguileville's *The Pilgrimage of the Lyfe of the Manhode*.

³⁰ This is to adopt a straightforward reading of the 'autobiographical' passage in the C-text (V, 45-8).

only dealing with sin but also a commitment to future obedience, worked out in the place of one's calling.³¹ Life pilgrimage, therefore, could be expressed in terms of playing one's ordained role in society as well as in moral living. In addition, human sin not only caused physical exile from the Garden of Eden but also spiritual separation from God. Journeying to heaven was, in essence, journeying back to God. It was however also considered possible to achieve reconciliation to and (to a certain extent) union with God while still on this earth. 'Interior pilgrimage', journeying inwards to encounter God within one's own heart and soul, was also an objective of the life pilgrim.³² The pilgrimage of life, therefore, could manifest itself in moral living, in faithfully discharging one's vocation and in internal spiritual growth. In theory all these expressions of life pilgrimage could operate simultaneously as the Christian sought to travel through time towards the heavenly kingdom in a state of moral readiness for judgement and also to move closer to God within the sanctuary of his or her own soul. In real life, however, the Christian pilgrim was still trapped in a fallen world, confronted by sin, vulnerable to temptation³³ and often unable to clearly discern the voice of God. Progress therefore was frequently unsteady, even erratic, plagued by lapses, misunderstanding and falls from grace – in fact much like that demonstrated by Langland's Dreamer. The pilgrim's great enemies were the sins³⁴ which threatened to divert him from his chosen pathway; his great hope the grace of forgiveness, ministered in the Middle Ages through the sacrament of Penance. Woven into Langland's narrative are constant reminders of these truths. His Dreamer is an example of fallen human nature, who manifests genuine spiritual longing, coupled with an innate human tendency to stray from the straight and

³¹ As in *Piers Plowman*, VII 234-5 and XIX 224-50.

³² See Salter (1969), 85-90 on the connections between mystical writings, especially those of Walter Hilton, and *Piers Plowman*.

³³ Even anchorites as the writer of the *Ancrene Wisse* points out *Ancrene Wisse* (edited Tolkien), IV. 92/24-25: 'Se þe hul is herre se þe wind is mare þron.'

³⁴ As in I Peter 2. See Section 3.

narrow. He, like the poem's audience, is in constant need of restoration and redirection. The world portrayed by Langland is one which by its very nature obscures spiritual reality; it is also one in which the goal of life pilgrimage can never be completely realised. Inextricably entwined with the concept of life pilgrimage is the transience of human society and of the physical world in which we live.³⁵ Will cannot be completely enlightened within the scope of the poem, nor can the Church or society be totally restored, since these, according to the Biblical narrative are matters which await the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. If Will's quest remains unfinished it is because it cannot be otherwise while he remains in this imperfect world. Muddled Langland's poem may sometimes appear; theologically incoherent it is not.

1. PILGRIMS AND WANDERERS

In a somer seson, whan softe was the sonne,
I shoop me into shroudes as I a sheep were,
In habite as an heremite unholy of werkes,
Wente wide in this world wondres to here...
I was wery [of]wandred and wente me to reste
Under a brood bank by a bournes syde;
And as I lay and lenede and loked on the watres,
I slombred into a slepyng, it sweyed so murye.
Thanne gan [me] to meten a merveillous swevene –
That I was in a wilderness, wiste I nevere where.
As I biheeld into the eest an heigh to the sonne,
I seigh a tour on a toft trieliche ymaked,
A deep dale bynethe, a dongeon therinne,
With depe diches and derke and dredfulle of sighte.

³⁵ See Chapters II and III above.

A fair feeld ful of folk fond I ther bitwene –
Of alle manere of men, the meene and the riche,
Werchyng and wandryng as the world asketh.

(Prologue 1-4, 7-20)

The last line of this familiar passage makes an assumption which has not, as far as I am aware, aroused critical comment.³⁶ Yet why should ‘the world’ *ask* (require)³⁷ men and women to wander?³⁸ The need to work hard to earn daily bread was part of the punishment visited upon Adam, Eve and their descendants following the Fall³⁹ but why should wandering also be considered an appropriate or necessary activity? The reason, I suggest, is also linked to the Fall and to the widely-accepted concept (fundamental to the idea of life pilgrimage) of this present world as a place of exile. Wandering, in Langland’s analysis of human society, appears to function as a highly significant spiritual indicator. The inhabitants of the ‘feeld ful of folk’ are frequently defined in terms of their stability – or lack of it.⁴⁰ ‘Ancres and heremites that holden hem in hire selles’ (29) are praiseworthy; those who ‘cairen aboute’ (30) are not. Others characterised by mobility include deceitful, violent, gluttonous ‘bidderes and beggeres’ (40), lying ‘pilgrymes and palmeres’ (46), wanton ‘heremytes’ and ‘hire wenchis’ (53-4), and negligent, avaricious ‘parisshe preestes’ (83) and ‘bisshopes’ (87) who abandon their appointed responsibilities for more lucrative pursuits in

³⁶ Jenkins (1969), 126, describes the inhabitants of field as acting ‘with regard only do the laws of this world’ but does not explain why wandering should be a response to those laws.

³⁷ *Asken* v. 7. Of things: to require as appropriate or necessary; require, demand, call for *MED*.

³⁸ Defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as ‘to roam, ramble, go idly or restlessly about; to have no fixed abode’ *OED*.

³⁹ Genesis 3.

⁴⁰ Two versions of the Wyclifite Bible cited in the Middle English Dictionary bring out the instability of the wanderings to which Cain is condemned: a1425 (c1395) *Wbible* (2) Gen.4:14: Cayn seide to the Lord. ‘Iol to dai thou castist me out. . .and Y schal be vnstable of dwellyng [*WB*(1): vagaunt] and fleyng aboute in erthe’ *MED*.

London.⁴¹ Du Boulay interprets the poet's apparent preference for stability as an illustration of the medieval concern for social order⁴² but the tone of Langland's comments seems rather to focus on the existence of an underlying spiritual malaise.⁴³ Wandering is presented here both as a manifestation of mankind's lostness and as a product of human sin.⁴⁴ This becomes even more apparent if we examine the introduction of the narrator in the opening lines of the *Prologue*, which in the B-text reads:

I shoop me into shroudes *as I a sheep were*,
In habite as an heremite unholy of werkes,
Wente wide in this world wondres to here.

(*Piers Plowman*, *Prol.* 2-4)

A number of editors⁴⁵ and commentators⁴⁶ have chosen to interpret 'sheep' as 'shepherd', less on etymological grounds⁴⁷ than for the lack of a logical explanation of this puzzling phrase. Malcolm Godden acknowledges that 'some'⁴⁸ manuscripts

⁴¹ Later in the poem Langland also attacks monks who leave the cloister. See Langland (1995a), X, 295-315.

⁴² 'Langland's mentality could only be happy with a society composed of ordered degrees and fixed numbers.' Du Boulay (1991), 6.

⁴³ These two explanations are not of course mutually exclusive.

⁴⁴ This negative view of wandering anticipates the cancellation of the pilgrimage in Passus VI.

⁴⁵ See *The Vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman*, II, 2.

⁴⁶ Godden (1984), 129. Salter (1969), 14, n4, accepts the shepherd reading without comment. See also Hill (1993), 68.

⁴⁷ Schmidt chooses 'sheep' not 'shepherd', 'for which no lexical support exists' *Langland: The Vision of Piers Plowman*, 363. See also Bennett's comments (*Langland Piers Plowman*, 80, n 2). A further argument for the rejection of the 'shepherd' interpretation is the fact that later in the poem Langland speaks of 'Shipmen and shepherdes, that with ship and sheep wenten' (XV 360).

⁴⁸ In fact most manuscripts read *sheep, shep, shepe*.

read *sheep* meaning sheep' but dismisses this as 'a less likely reading.'⁴⁹ Referring to 'the poet's opening description of himself dressed as a shepherd and as a hermit'⁵⁰ he comments:

To dress as a shepherd is to take on the role of one of the world's workers (and this is perhaps even true if we take shepherd as a metaphor for pastor, a spiritual teacher of the flock); to take on the garb of a hermit is to reject the world in favour of a spiritual isolation and dedication.⁵¹

Will, however, is not a priest, nor a pastor nor an apostle⁵² but, as we see in Passus I, someone who at this point needs to *learn* the truths which Holy Church imparts. Moreover he is not claiming the merits of a hermit life as described by Godden. Rather he is equating his actions with those of a *heremite unholy of werkes*. If we examine Langland's criticisms of such people in the Prologue we see that their lack of holiness consists of *wandering away* from the life of sanctified stability (53-4) demonstrated by true anchorites and hermits (25-31).

Attempts to maintain the 'shep (sheep) reading have been tentative and not particularly satisfactory within the context of the poem. The most thoroughgoing examination of this textual conundrum has been provided by David Mills:

⁴⁹ Godden (1990), 25 n14.

⁵⁰ The narrator only states that he is dressed *as* a sheep and *as* a hermit but a number of recent articles have taken the hermit identity literally. See Justice and Kerby-Fulton (1997).

⁵¹ Godden (1990), 30.

⁵² Lawrence M. Clopper suggests that *sheep* signifies apostle, since Christ sent out his followers as 'lambs among wolves' (Matt. 10:16), but also questions whether Will is 'as false an apostle as he is a hermit.' Clopper (1997), 156-7. It is however inappropriate to see Will as any kind of apostle, false or otherwise.

The physical comparison, *as I a shepe were*, is a grotesque and suggests the uneasy awareness of the absurdity of his position, considered objectively, which the Dreamer shows elsewhere ... But although the Dreamer may often seem comic, there is a serious overtone in his absurdity. Here *shepe* suggests a number of wider meanings:

OED 2a in allusions to

- a) the sheep's timidity, defencelessness, inoffensiveness, tendency to stray and get lost.
- b) the fabled assumption by a wolf (or other beast of prey) of the skin of a slaughtered sheep.
- c) the division into 'sheep' and goats' at the Last Judgement.

OED 4. In biblical and religious language (as collective plural) to persons, in expressed or implied correlation with *shepherd*.

The obvious sense here, stressed by Robertson and Huppé, is the 'wolf in sheep's clothing' which is suggested by the reference to dress and the outward similarity to a hermit. Yet at the same time the idea of a 'lost and straying sheep' is present in the reference to wandering, and perhaps against it stands the idea that the Dreamer wishes to be a 'sheep' as opposed to a 'goat', one who is among God's chosen and will be saved.⁵³

In fact, in the context of *Piers Plowman*, the 'obvious sense' proposed by Robertson and Huppé,⁵⁴ is not obvious at all. On the contrary it is dangerously misleading.⁵⁵

⁵³ Mills (1969), 185-6.

⁵⁴ See also Carruthers (1973).

The expression 'wolf in sheep's clothing' derives from the warning given by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount:

Adtendite a falsis prophetis qui veniunt ad vos in vestimentis ovium.

Beware of false prophets who come to you in the clothing of sheep.

(Matthew 7:15)

Similar warnings against false teachers who will attempt to destroy the Christian flock are given in Acts 20.19 and 1 John 4.1. The expression was used in the later fourteenth and early fifteenth-centuries⁵⁶ but in no way can it be considered applicable to the *persona* of the Dreamer as presented in the poem. We have already established that the Dreamer is neither priest, nor pastor nor spiritual teacher.⁵⁷ Still less can he be categorised as a false teacher, one who deliberately and destructively seeks to deceive and lead others astray, since his quest from Passus I onwards is to grasp Truth. Surely it is more likely that *sheep* here simply⁵⁸ signifies spiritual lostness and lack of direction, a state highly appropriate to one who personifies sinful humankind.

⁵⁵ Kirk (1972), 19, accepts this view, taking it as evidence that 'the Dreamer's search is undertaken under a sign of contradiction and is associated with both good and evil by specifically religious standards. The Dreamer is by his own choice both pilgrim and pariah.'

⁵⁶ The *Middle English Dictionary* cites *shep* 6. (d) (c 1384) W. Bible(1) Mat. 7.15 'Flee fro fals prophetis, the whiche cummen to 3ou in clothingis of sheepis, bot wythynne thei ben rauyshynge wolues' *MED*.

⁵⁷ See Justice and Kerby-Fulton (1997).

⁵⁸ Bloomfield (1961), 25 and Justice (1993), 99 see Will as an example of the *gyrovagus*, 'the wandering monks that Saint Benedict condemns for their failed obedience' Justice (1993), 99, but this, once again, seems to be investing the *persona* of the Dreamer with an unduly narrow and negative identity since he is not a monk deliberately rejecting his vow of stability but a representative of lost humankind in general.

Although Mills does make reference to the notion of a 'lost and straying sheep,' he fails to take account of the broad-based biblical justification for applying such an interpretation to this passage. The identification of sinful, exiled humanity as lost sheep is evident both in the Old and New Testaments. In Psalm 118:176 the Psalmist declares 'erravi sicut ovis quae periit' (I have gone astray like a sheep that is lost) and Isaiah 53: 6 acknowledges:

omnes nos quasi oves erravimus unusquisque in viam suam declinavit

all we like sheep have gone astray, every one hath turned aside into his own way.

In the New Testament the parables of the Good Shepherd (John 10) and the Lost Sheep (Luke 15), together with Peter's reminder to his readers that 'you were as sheep going astray' (1 Peter 2:25) demonstrate the continuing strength of the image. Why then should the narrator not be presenting himself at the beginning of the poem as a lost sheep, wandering through the world and hence in need of rescue and redirection?⁵⁹ This alternative interpretation is supported by examples cited in the *Middle English Dictionary*, in which the *only* reference to the possibility that *shep* might in fact mean 'shepherd' is cited in connection with this very passage:

5. ? A shepherd; ? a sheep, used fig.: one who wanders or goes astray.

In the context of *Piers Plowman* the suggestion that sheep is indeed used figuratively of one who wanders or goes astray is self-evidently both theologically and structurally compatible with the world-view expressed throughout the poem. Will's

⁵⁹ It is interesting to note that both *Piers* and *Imaginatif* quote from Psalm 23, a psalm which expresses the security of a sheep which is safe in the shepherd's care.

goal when in 'sheep mode' is to seek 'wondres,'⁶⁰ which may indicate that he is suffering from *curiositas*, an attitude of mind which medieval spirituality regarded as inherently sinful.⁶¹ It is only when his wanderings have wearied him (7) that he sleeps, thus becoming stationary and receptive to divine revelation.⁶² He then perceives the world as a spiritual wilderness,⁶³ in which others wander as he does, and becomes aware of the two destinations to which life on earth may lead: the tower of Truth and the dungeon. As the process of revelation begins, he manifests a combination of spiritual eagerness and ignorance which is mirrored in the would-be pilgrims of Passus V. 510-4. Significantly they in their turn will be described as 'wandering aimlessly'⁶⁴ 'like beestes' (V. 514), a line which recalls the sheep image of the *Prologue*.

The descent of Holy Church from the tower of Truth and her comments to the Dreamer underline the poet's use of mankind's spiritual exile on earth as the framing

⁶⁰ Cooper (1987), 77, comments: 'it is undirected wandering, not yet a pilgrimage in any literal or spiritual sense.'

⁶¹ See Zacher (1976).

⁶² 'Slepynge, hadde y grace/ to wyte what Dowel is ac wakyng neuerel' *Langland Piers Plowman: A Parallel Edition*, C-text XIII, 215-16. Salter (1969), 61, quotes Walter Hilton (*Scale* II. 40): 'The more I sleep from outward things, the more wakeful I am in knowing of Jhesu and of inward things. I make not wake to Jhesu, but if I sleep to the world.' On inner spiritual journeying through dreams and visions see Chapter X.

⁶³ Bennett comments: '*wildernes*: lexically = wild, uncultivated land, in which a traveller might lose his way ... but allegorically the word early took on the scriptural overtones that are still present in the opening sentence of *Pilgrim's Progress*. The Old Testament archetype is the wilderness through which the children of Israel journeyed to the promised land as the Christian pilgrim journeys through the world.' *Langland Piers Plowman*, 82 n 12:

⁶⁴ Schmidt's translation of *blustreden* in *Langland: The Vision of Piers Plowman*.

device of the poem. Here we are given a brief glimpse of the heavenly Jerusalem,⁶⁵ the ultimate goal of the pilgrimage of life, followed by an insight into an eternal perspective to which human beings on their own cannot attain:

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

(*Piers Plowman*, 5-9)

The problem illustrated by the inhabitants of the *feeld* is not their busyness as such, since properly-directed hard work is commendable, but the fact that their energies are totally absorbed by the *maze*.⁶⁶ They are oblivious to the existence of heaven,⁶⁷ mankind's true homeland and, totally preoccupied with the rewards which earth offers, they fail to respond to the God who has in fact arranged for their needs to be supplied (I. 18, 19).⁶⁸ Holy Church's explanation that mankind was created 'to worshiþe hym therwith *the while that ye ben here*' signals the temporary nature of human life of earth and recognition of the transience of earthly gain implies the need for those engaged in the pilgrimage of life to use temporal goods properly. This is why Mede will be portrayed as so dangerous, because she has the power to distract

⁶⁵ Described initially as a tower on a hill (Prol. 14) and subsequently as a castle on a mountain (I. 1-4). The tower is the dwelling place of Truth, the mountain is Zion upon which is built the city of God. On the relationship of these passages to the picture of the heavenly city in the Book of Revelation, see Chapter 11: 3. A. See also Davlin (1993).

⁶⁶ The Z-text Prol. 98, has 'body to plesse' (*William Langland: Piers Plowman. A Parallel Edition*).

⁶⁷ The Z-text reads 'They an no ward to the hil that on hey stands' i.e. the hill on which stands the tower of Truth (*William Langland: Piers Plowman. A Parallel Edition*, Prol. 99).

⁶⁸ Du Boulay (1991), 4, interprets this as a comment on irreligion in society.

human beings from the greater rewards which await them in heaven. Augustine of Hippo had warned explicitly against becoming ensnared by material pleasures: 'In this mortal life we are like travellers away from our Lord: if we wish to return to the homeland where we can be happy we must use this world, not enjoy it.'⁶⁹

Holy Church, here the eternal, perfected Christian community rather than the flawed pilgrim church, provides an outline of biblical history and offers a summary of the way to salvation, a summary which anticipates both Piers' directions to Truth (VI. 560-608) and the contents of the pardon which Truth sends to Piers (VII. 1-111):

Ac tho that werche wel as Holy Writ telleth,
And enden as I er seide, in truthe, that is the beste,
Mowe be siker that hire soule shul wende to hevene,
Ther Treuthe is in Trinitee and troneth hem alle.

(*Piers Plowman*, I. 130-3)

This, in essence, is the concept of the pilgrimage of life, a commitment to obeying the will of God in this world in order to win a place in heaven. This concept, I suggest, is fundamental to any interpretation of *Piers Plowman*. The poet has chosen to set his poem within a context of wandering and spiritual exile and to provide a narrator who, sheep-like, is patently in need of help and guidance if he is to be saved.⁷⁰ The introduction of the theme of life pilgrimage at the very beginning of the

⁶⁹ Augustine of Hippo, *De Doctrina Christiana* 1. 9. See also Chapter II above.

⁷⁰ Martin (1962) states 'In *Piers Plowman* Wil is obviously characterised as a wanderer' (543) and concludes that 'Langland's satire is so violent and uncontrollable that it overruns and consumes his form. That is, though Langland uses the mode of wandering to dramatise Wil, the figure with whom we are to identify ourselves, he nevertheless authorially satirizes wanderers and wandering throughout the poem.' (544). This failure to observe the significance of Will's change from wanderer to spiritual pilgrim leads Martin to conclude mistakenly that Langland's opposition to all forms of wandering renders the poem confused and causes it to fail, at least in part.

poem has three significant consequences. Firstly, it supplies a thread of spiritual consistency⁷¹ which runs through succeeding episodes. The 'anti-wandering' tenor of the Prologue anticipates the re-direction of the pilgrimage in Passus V, the working of the Half-acre in Passus VI and Truth's instructions to remain at home in Passus VII. Moreover, the characteristics of the true spiritual pilgrim are shown to be a desire to return to God and a corresponding willingness to learn obedience. However confused and erratic the Dreamer's progress, these elements remain in some degree; the theme of obedience in daily life serving to undergird and link together the apparent changes of direction, disputations and encounters which form such a substantial part of the poem. Not only does the idea of 'life pilgrimage' form a consistent thread in Langland's approach to spirituality, it also provides a framework which offers a theological rationale for the state of the world as Will perceives and experiences it. If life on earth represents spiritual exile and distance from God, then it is only to be expected that human society should manifest corruption and confusion. Prey to the wiles of the devil and ill-equipped to discern right from wrong, human beings are all too susceptible to the onslaughts of the Seven Deadly Sins. Even the Church is vulnerable to attack and will often disappoint those in search of truth. Finally, the changing nature of the Dreamer's quest – from a purely human desire to seek 'wondres' to a life-long search for salvation - illustrates the journey of every 'life' pilgrim. Schmidt, in identifying Will's quest as a key structural principle of the poem, suggests that by the end of the narrative Will has become identified with Conscience.⁷² If this is so then the Dreamer, like Abraham and all true pilgrims before him, has succeeded in transforming aimless wandering into purposeful pilgrimage.⁷³

⁷¹ There is an observable patterning of experience which can be seen in the ways in which the experience of the wider groups of would-be pilgrims in Passus V echoes that of Will. See Section 2.

⁷² *William Langland: The Vision of Piers Plowman*, xxxi). Also Carruthers (1973), 10 and Simpson (1990), 242-3.

⁷³ On the focus on the person of Piers see Section 4.

2. MODES OF PILGRIMAGE

Part of the fascination (and the frustration) of reading *Piers Plowman* derives from the complex patterns of pilgrimage which are laid one over another like a series of transparencies. The poet is presenting the lifelong pilgrimage of a representative individual, which itself has a number of manifestations such as the quest for spiritual understanding, the ongoing struggle for moral reformation and the growth of inward desire for God, all of which are set against the temporal device of a human lifetime. Yet he is also outlining the journey through space and time of the Pilgrim Church.⁷⁴ This too is expressed in multiple images, since the poem embraces not only the linear journey of the Pilgrim Church from the joy of its inception in the Book of Acts to the onslaughts it is destined to suffer in the Last Days, but also the circular movement of the life of the contemporary Church, charted in the passage of the liturgical calendar. A particular problem arises in Passus V-VII where concepts of place pilgrimage and life pilgrimage collide and a large measure of confusion has resulted, not only among the characters represented in the narrative but also among critics who have sought to interpret the poet's purpose. There can be no doubting Langland's fierce disapproval of the majority⁷⁵ of those who journeyed to 'holy places.'⁷⁶ In the *Prologue* he characterises those who travel to Rome and Compostela (two⁷⁷ of the greatest shrines of Christendom) as liars⁷⁸ and hypocrites:

⁷⁴ See Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* and Chapter II above.

⁷⁵ With the possible exception of penitential or permanent pilgrimage. See IV. 127-133 where Reason decrees that 'no man go to Galis (the shrine of St James at Compostela) but if he go for evere' and to allow the 'penaunt for his sins' to travel abroad unhindered.

⁷⁶ 'Langland, to put it bluntly, though he believed in sermons and confessions, did not believe in pilgrimages' Burrow (1965a), 252.

⁷⁷ Use of the term *palmer* may indicate that he also had Jerusalem in mind. Certainly the palmer of V. 515-531 had travelled to the Holy Land.

⁷⁸ An accusation later levelled at Patience when dressed as a pilgrim (XIII 178).

Pilgrymes and palmeres plighen hem togidere
To seken Seint Jame and seintes in Rome;
Wenten forth in hire wey with many wise tales,
And hadden leve to lyen al hire lif after.

(*Prol.* 46-9)

Reason's sermon contains an explicit condemnation of such vain practices:

And ye that seke Seynt James and seyntes of Rome,
Seketh Seynt Truthe, for he may save yow alle.

(*V.* 56-7)

and the superficiality of Avarice's intention to go on pilgrimage to Walsingham is unmasked as his lack of true repentance becomes apparent. Those who are moved by the sermon to join the general pilgrimage are portrayed as brute beasts, devoid of wisdom, their impulse to travel in search of Truth only demonstrating their very ignorance of his nature:

A thousand of men tho thrungen togideres,
Cride upward to Crist and to his clene moder
To have grace to go [to] Truthe – [God leve that they moten!]
Ac there was wight noon so wys, the wey thider kouthe,
But blustreden forth as beestes over ba[ch]es and hilles.

(*V.* 510-14)

Good intentions, it seems, are not enough. Their encounter with a 'professional' pilgrim, his hat laden with the emblems of Assisi, Compostela and Rome, only highlights the futility of physical movement without inner spiritual journeying:

thei a leode mette

Apparailled as a paynym in pilgrymes wise...
 An hundred of ampulles on his hat seten,
 Signes of Syse and shelles of Galice,
 And many a crouch on his cloke, and keyes of Rome,
 And the vernicle bfore, *for men sholde knowe*
And se bi hise signes whom he sought hadde...
 ‘*Ye may se by my signes* that sitten on myn hatte
 That I have walked ful wide in weet and in drye
 And sought goode seintes for my soule helthe.’

(*Piers Plowman*, 515-6, 520-4, 529-31)

The spirituality which this man represents is evidently concerned with externals⁷⁹ and open to charges of superficiality and even complacency. Moreover, it quickly emerges that although dressed *in pilgrymes wise* and (by his own account)⁸⁰ a prodigious traveller, he is no true pilgrim for he has no dealings with Truth. It is at precisely this point, when the superficiality of place pilgrimage has been most ruthlessly exposed, that the figure of Piers Plowman is first encountered. To a marked degree the experience of the Dreamer in the Prologue and Passus I has been repeated in the lives of the group of would-be pilgrims. Reason, like Holy Church before him, has awoken a desire to seek Truth; both have insisted upon the need for a life of obedience to God’s commandments. Yet those who have heard their call require further guidance if they are to find the way to salvation. The palmer, the ‘place pilgrim’ cannot provide direction for he lacks spiritual integrity. Set against

⁷⁹ Burrow (1969), 115, notes that Langland ‘expresses the palmer’s preoccupation with external matters by second half lines which add fussy and pointless little physical details.’

⁸⁰ It has to be remembered that pilgrims of this kind are reputed to lie (*Prol.* 46-9 and XIII).

him is a figure whose daily life is a demonstration of obedience to Truth⁸¹ and who therefore knows him as naturally and as intimately as 'clerc doth hise bokes' (V. 338). Surely it is no accident that the palmer, the representative of a discredited system of 'place-pilgrimage,' and Piers, the embodiment of the concept of 'life pilgrimage' are thus set alongside one another⁸² at this crux in the poem, as repentant human beings are seeking to discover the way to God.

In Passus V-VII Langland not only reveals the inadequacy of place pilgrimage but also explores the varied elements contained within the concept of pilgrimage of life. The would-be seekers after Truth are seen to be labouring under a basic misapprehension, namely their instinctive belief that he is to be discovered in some distant geographical location and that, therefore, physical journeying must be an essential element of their quest. This misapprehension is challenged as Piers reveals both that Truth can be found within the human heart and that he is to be served within the ordinary community. The route to Truth outlined by Piers (V. 560-608) requires humility, willingness to obey God's commandments⁸³ and conversion to a changed life (*Amende-yow*) if the soul is to be admitted through the gate once slammed shut behind the departing Adam and Eve. The wicket gate is not in this context primarily the gateway to Eden but to the state of which Eden itself was only a representation, the presence of God.⁸⁴ Mankind has been exiled, not just from a

⁸¹ It has often been noted that Piers is a working man and that his activities cover a wide range of occupations. What is emphasised in this passage, however, is the fact that all his work is done with reference and in obedience to Truth (V. 540-550). Piers represents the man whose daily life is entirely tuned to the service of God. It is therefore not surprising that he should know the way to Truth.

⁸² Burrow (1965a), 253 comments that the palmer 'represents the business of worldly pilgrimage, and so stands to be contrasted with Piers the representative of true or spiritual pilgrimage.'

⁸³ Raw (1969), 144 points out that the 'highway to truth' combines Old and New Testament elements.

⁸⁴ 'Since, therefore we must enjoy to the full that truth which lives unchangeably ... our minds must be purified so that they are able to perceive that light and then hold fast to it. Let us consider this process of cleansing as a trek, or a voyage, to our homeland; though progress towards the one who is

physical location but from communion with God. Piers, therefore prescribes an 'interior pilgrimage,' an inner process of cleansing and reformation which will make possible an encounter with God within the human soul.⁸⁵ Piers' use of place pilgrimage terminology to express the well-established image of inward spiritual journeying has caused much debate among modern critics⁸⁶ but it seems likely that it would have been both familiar and easily intelligible to a medieval audience.

Critics have tended to interpret the ploughing of the half-acre as either an interruption⁸⁷ of the pilgrimage to Truth or as a substitute⁸⁸ for it. I wish to suggest that it is in fact a perfectly consistent *parallel* expression of the same pilgrim journey towards God. The repentant sinner who follows the pathway advocated by Piers will find that God has taken up his proper place as ruler of the human heart. But, as the account which Piers has given of himself indicates, such inner spiritual growth must be expressed in actions. In inviting the pilgrims to join him in ploughing the half-acre, Piers is offering them an opportunity to serve God in society, to manifest the obedience which his own life demonstrates,⁸⁹ and thus to learn to know Truth better.⁹⁰ This aspect of the exercise is underlined by the instructions which Piers gives the knight, which include the injunction 'mysbede noght thi bondeman ...

ever present is not made through space, but through goodness of purpose of character.' [Augustine, 1995 #99] I X.10.

⁸⁵ Compare Hilton (1991), II, 21 and Bonaventure (1978), 7.1, where the interior Jerusalem is an anticipation of the heavenly Jerusalem on earth. See Chapters X and XI below.

⁸⁶ Elizabeth Salter (1969) describes this 'road to St Truth' as 'circular' since it ends in their own hearts but this produces an unnecessarily complicated image for what was a straightforward, if difficult, inward journey.

⁸⁷ See Dunning (1969).

⁸⁸ Burrow (1965a), Godden (1990), 47.

⁸⁹ Raabe comments: 'true pilgrimage is what all people do in their daily labors when they do them out of love and faith.' Raabe (1990), 43.

⁹⁰ See the promise of Christ in John.14: 16.

though he be thyn underlying here' (VI. 45-6). Significantly the knight assents 'by Seint Jame,' an oath evoking the teaching of the Epistle of St James which strongly articulates the need to respect and care for the poor. It is clear from other references in the poem that this epistle, with its central thesis that 'faith without works is dead' (2.20), significantly influenced Langland's exploration of the concept of the pilgrimage of life. In Passus IV. 113-127, Reason places the need to care for the poor (and for religious to remain at prayer in their cloisters), alongside a condemnation of pilgrimage to the shrine of St James in Galicia.⁹¹ Like Truth, St James, is to be encountered through obedience to his teaching rather than by visiting his shrine.⁹²

The quest to meet God in the human heart is thus in no way displaced by the engagement with the demands of community which the ploughing of the half-acre represents.⁹³ Such engagement, however, inevitably brings problems since both human nature and the natural world have been profoundly affected by human sin. The pilgrimage of life, whether expressed in terms of service of moral reformation, spiritual enlightenment or service within the community, is shown by Langland to be fraught with difficulties and obstacles. This fact may account for the somewhat fragmentary expression of different aspects of life pilgrimage which can be observed in Passus VI and VII. Priscilla Martin comments that 'Pilgrimages and quests are begun with great determination but abandoned or discontinued,'⁹⁴ but I would

⁹¹ Schmidt comments 'Seint James should be "visited" not through (repeated) visits to his shrine at Compostela ... but through the works of charity specified in his own definition of "Religion clean and undefiled ... to visit the fatherless and widows (James 1:27)' *William Langland The Vision of Piers Plowman*, 423.

⁹² See also the description of Charity going 'on pilgrimages/Ther poore men and prisons liggeth, hir pardon to have (XV. 182-3) and C V. 122-3.

⁹³ Godden (1990), 42 suggests that 'the religious pattern turns out to be only a validating metaphor for a fundamentally secular activity' but I would argue that the overall structure of the life pilgrimage motif demonstrates that the 'secular activity' is in fact a part of religious experience.

⁹⁴ Martin (1979), 52

suggest that this statement fails to differentiate between the different types of pilgrimage considered by the poet. Only the practice of pilgrimage to holy places is actually discredited or abandoned; the series of metaphorical pilgrimages described in Passus V-VII represent a succession of shifts in interpretation⁹⁵ and changes of emphasis within a consistent over-arching concept of life pilgrimage. A brief outline of the main events of this section of the poem may help to identify the factors involved:

1. The would-be pilgrims search for Truth (V. 510ff).
2. The palmer is shown to be ignorant of Truth (V. 532-6).
3. Piers claims to know Truth through everyday obedience (V. 537-550).
4. Piers describes the route to Truth (moral and interior pilgrimage) (V. 560-629).
5. Piers invites them to join in working the half-acre, thus providing an opportunity to fulfil their responsibilities to God and their neighbours (VI. 3ff)
6. Piers takes the implements of his calling as his 'pilgrim uniform' (VI. 57-64).⁹⁶
7. Piers makes his will:

Now I am old and hoor and haue of myn owene
 To penaunce and pilgrimage I wol passe with thise othere. (VI. 83-4)
 Resolves to be Truth's 'pilgrym atte plow for pouere mennes sake' (VI. 102)⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Burrow (1965a), 267 identifies these shifts as substitutions prompted by the poet's misgivings yet concludes that 'the vision would have been a poorer thing if Langland had not interfered as he did.'

⁹⁶ While the B-text reading is somewhat ambiguous: 'I shall apparille me in pilgrymes wise/ And wende with yow I wile til we fynde Truthe' (VI. 57-8), the C-text places the emphasis clearly on obedient living: 'Y shal parayle me ... in pilgrimes wyse/And wende with alle tho þat wolden lyue in treuthe.' *William Langland Piers Plowman: A Parallel Edition* VIII. 56-7.

8. Piers and the pilgrims face problems caused by sin and fallen world. (VI. 105ff).⁹⁸
9. Truth hears 'thereof' (which presumably means the suffering and struggles which Piers and the pilgrims are enduring) and sends a pardon together with instructions to remain where they are and extend the work.
10. Pardon and interpretation. Piers tears the pardon and vows to be less concerned about his 'belly' and more about penance etc.

It is important to recognise that here Langland is offering both an individual and a social view of life pilgrimage. It also needs to be remembered that at this stage in the poem, Piers is not identified as St Peter or Christ but as an ordinary human being who has turned from sin to a life of obedience, a Christian pilgrim journeying to heaven. Such teaching and direction as Piers is able to give to others comes from his own experience of Truth and is offered with a sound seasoning of common sense. He is portrayed suffering the effects of a fallen world and moving through different stages of his own life pilgrimage. In his prime he is active in serving his neighbour through honest labour; as old age approaches he makes his will (possibly in preparation for the final pilgrimage of death)⁹⁹ and finally, having had his commitment to stability affirmed by Truth, he devotes himself increasingly to self-denial.¹⁰⁰ Labouring increasingly in prayer and penance, he is resolved to spend the remainder of his life on earth in the service of Truth. Each pilgrimage vow which

⁹⁷ Burrow (1965a), 259, recognises this commitment to what I have termed moral pilgrimage: 'I hold, then, that Piers and his faithful followers ... are on the highway to truth ... when they stay at home labouring in their vocations and helping their neighbours.'

⁹⁸ Significantly 'Wastour wandren aboute' (300).

⁹⁹ Compare *Everyman*, 68 where God tells Death: Go thou to Everyman/and show him in my name/A pilgrimage he must on him take/Which he in no wise may escape. *Three Late Medieval Morality Plays*.

¹⁰⁰ Piers is speaking of a new commitment to self-denial ('my belly'), not of abandoning the labour for others which has been his calling

Piers makes is qualified by a parallel statement which makes it clear that his commitment is to be fulfilled within his present location.

The pardon which Truth sends¹⁰¹ is patently not an ordinary indulgence since it is addressed not only to Piers himself but also to his heirs for ever.¹⁰² It seems rather to serve as a gloss on the truths communicated by Holy Church¹⁰³ and Reason and as an amplified set of guidelines for those engaged in the pilgrimage of life. Just as Piers discards the outer form of pilgrimage while maintaining the underlying spiritual imperative of living as a citizen of heaven, so he tears up the written pardon while maintaining the hope which Truth intended to communicate. Significantly, in view of the emphasis on wandering with which the poem opened, the Psalm from which Piers quotes expresses the security of a sheep which has found a shepherd.¹⁰⁴ The Dreamer's interpretation of this scene would appear to be sound. Short-cuts, whether expressed in terms of geographical pilgrimages or pardons, are not so 'siker for the soul' as Do-well, a lifetime devoted to God. The Dreamer therefore counsels all Christians to ask God for grace, 'swiche werkes to werche, *the while we ben here*,' advice which emphasises the transience of human life on earth.¹⁰⁵ In the *Vita* the Dreamer's parallel journeys continue, as he simultaneously searches for the truth and experiences the temptations and trials of life on earth. Once again the conflict between mobility and stability is highlighted. As in the *Visio*, enlightenment comes

¹⁰¹ Those to whom it is addressed have passed through the experience of contrition and confession and are thus presumably in the stage of penance (and amendment of life).

¹⁰² There may be an early tentative indication here of further facets of Piers: he told to plough the earth with his team; the priest uses the oath 'Peter!' twice and the Dreamer refers to 'al the pardon of Seint Petres cherche.'

¹⁰³ The details of the pardon as outlined by Piers refer back to the description of Charity given by Holy Church (I. 148ff).

¹⁰⁴ See also XII.291 on Psalm 23.

¹⁰⁵ Compare I. 160. Piers' wife is called 'Werch-whan-tyme-is.' (VI. 78).

to Will, not as a result of his travels through the world but through revelation granted when he is stationary. Elizabeth Salter identifies this process as

The spiritual sleep into which the contemplative is admitted so that he may receive illumination: 'Ego dormio, et cor meum vigilat' [Canticles V.2]... The Englishman, Walter Hilton, commenting in Langland's day on the same spiritual processes, provides us with a passage which has more relevance than any other 'dream-literature' of the period to this sleep which can capture the poet's senses as he prays or kneels at mass... 'The more I sleep from outward things, the more wakeful I am in knowing of Jhesu and inward things. I may not wake to Jhesu, but if I sleep to the world (Scale. 2.40).¹⁰⁶

Sleep as a metaphor of spiritual activity is clearly capable of a range of interpretations but I would suggest that within *Piers Plowman* it functions as a (somewhat extreme) illustration of the spiritual truth which Langland elsewhere makes explicit, that physical movement is neither necessary nor even helpful to the process of spiritual growth. Passus X continues this point with criticism of those religious who have abandoned the monastic life of *peregrinatio in stabilitate*¹⁰⁷ for a more mobile involvement in the affairs of the world:

Ac now is Religion a rydere, a romere by stretes,
A ledere of lovedays and a lond buggere,
A prikere [up]on a palfrey fro manere to manere.

(*Piers Plowman*, X. 305-7)

¹⁰⁶ Salter (1969),

¹⁰⁷ Leclercq (1961), 50-1. See also Chapter X:1.

The true nature of the pilgrim life is examined from a different angle in Passus XI with an exposition of the significance of Christ's appearance on the road to Emmaus:¹⁰⁸

Why I meve this matere is moost for the povere;
For in hir liknesse Oure Lord ofte hath ben yknowe.
Witnesse in the Pask wyke whan he yede to Emaus-
Cleophas ne knew hym noght, that he Crist were,
For his povere apparaille and pilgrymes wedes ...
And al was ensample, for sooth, to us synfulle here,
That we sholde [lowe be] and loveliche of speche,
And apparaille us noght over proudly¹⁰⁹ – for pilgrymes are we alle.
(XI. 230-34, 238-240)

The fact that all humankind are pilgrims, either voluntary or involuntary is once again used as the under-girding motivation for a life based on biblical values.

From Passus XVI onwards the pilgrimage of the Dreamer is interwoven with the journey through time of the Pilgrim Church, culminating in the attack by Antichrist (aided by the Seven Deadly Sins)¹¹⁰ and the friars' successful suppression of Contrition. Neither the Dreamer nor the Church has reached the end of their respective pilgrimages and Conscience's desperate resolve to set out upon yet another quest has been seen by readers as a muddled end to a somewhat confused poem. Yet in terms of biblical teaching and in particular of the image of the pilgrimage of life, such an ending is both theologically sound and spiritually

¹⁰⁸ See Gardiner (1971).

¹⁰⁹ This comment indicates an inherent conflict between the pilgrimage of life and Pride leading to outward ostentation. See Section 3 on the Seven Deadly Sins.

¹¹⁰ See Section 3.

realistic. Will cannot find his ultimate goal, the tower of Truth, until he has undertaken the last pilgrimage, the journey through Death.¹¹¹ The trials of the Pilgrim Church will not be over until Judgement Day when all true pilgrims will find their home in heaven. The purpose of *Piers Plowman* is to expose the transience of the present world and to explore the difficulties and dangers involved in journeying towards the tower of Truth. Like the man who directs another seeker towards Jerusalem in Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*,¹¹² Langland has not yet reached the heavenly city himself; he only knows that the journey, though hard, is worth the making.

3. THE PILGRIMAGE OF LIFE AND THE SEVEN

DEADLY SINS

The *topoi* of the Pilgrimage of Life and the Seven Deadly Sins¹¹³ are so familiar to readers of medieval literature that little if any¹¹⁴ attention has been paid to the significance of the fact that they are so frequently found in combination. In the early thirteenth-century *Ancrene Wisse*, the anchoresses are warned that the road to the heavenly Jerusalem lies through a wilderness where the Sins lurk ready to attack:

Ant 3e mine leoue sustren wendeð bi þe ilke wei toward te hehe ierusalem, þe kinedom þe haueð bihaten his icorene. gað þah ful warliche. for i þis wilderness beoð uuele beastes moni. Liun of prude. Neddre of attri onde. Vnicorne of wreaððe. Beore of dead slawðe. Vox of 3isceunge. Suhe of

¹¹¹ See *Everyman*, 68-9 (*Three Late Medieval Morality Plays*).

¹¹² Hilton, *Scale of Perfection*, 2.21

¹¹³ On the general history of the Sins see Bloomfield (1952).

¹¹⁴ See Wenzel (1973), who mentions this connection but does not suggest reasons for it.

3iuernesse. Scorpiun wið þe teil of stinginde leccherie ... Her beoð nu o rawe itald þe seouen heaued sunnen.¹¹⁵

When Guillaume de Deguileville's pilgrim sets out on his journey towards the heavenly Jerusalem in *The Pilgrimage of the Lyfe of the Manhode*, he finds himself likewise under attack from the Seven Deadly Sins, who are described in the Middle English version of the text as 'þese olde theeves, espyowresses (waylayers) of pilgrimes' (4833-5).¹¹⁶ The first of these adversaries, Sloth, reveals that she is 'wyf to þe boucher of helle, þat lede hym bi cordes þe pilgrimes þat I may areste and bynde bi þe feet as þouh it were swyn' (3832-4). The importance of the threat posed by the Sins is indicated by the fact that their varied assaults occupy over a quarter of the text. Similarly, in the *Scale of Perfection*, Walter Hilton, adopting the pilgrimage to Jerusalem as a metaphor for the anchorite's spiritual journey,¹¹⁷ warns:

You are now on the way and know how you shall go. Now beware of enemies that will be trying to hinder you if they can, for their intention is to put out of your heart that desire and that longing that you have for the love of Jesus, and to drive you home again to the love of worldly vanity... These enemies are principally carnal desires.

(*Scale*, 2.22)

Chaucer's Parson, having declared his aim of showing the way to the 'Jerusalem celestial,' proceeds to outline the path of penitence including a detailed exposition of the Sins.¹¹⁸ As I shall demonstrate, Langland's own exploration of the pilgrimage of life is strongly coloured by descriptions of the Seven Deadly Sins and the spiritual

¹¹⁵ *Ancrene Wisse* (edited Tolkien), 101/10-11, 16-24.

¹¹⁶ de Deguileville, *The Pilgrimage of the Lyfe of the Manhode*. See also Bloomfield (1952), 229-233.

¹¹⁷ Hilton, *Scale*, 2.21ff.

¹¹⁸ See Chapter IX.

threat which they pose to the would-be citizen of heaven. This repeated pattern of combination and interaction would suggest that medieval writers regarded the subject of the Seven Deadly Sins not merely as a convenient literary *topos*¹¹⁹ but as a subject of considerable theological and spiritual importance which formed an integral part of any through-going exposition of the pilgrimage of life.¹²⁰

The literary patterning evident in the texts cited above is undergirded by a theological connection which goes back to the New Testament. The First Letter of Peter, strongly characterised by its use of the pilgrim image,¹²¹ contains the following exhortation, which evokes the vulnerability to attack of the traveller in an alien land:

Carissimi obsecro tamquam advenas et peregrinos abstinere vos a carnalibus
desideriis quae militant adversus animam

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, to refrain yourselves

¹¹⁹ Wenzel (1988), 169, speaks of Langland's imaginative use of 'such theological or moral set pieces, as the seven deadly sins' but I would suggest he is also working within a tradition which already assigned a dramatic role to the sins within the pilgrimage of life.

¹²⁰ Compare the *Castle of Perseverance* (*Medieval Drama*) in which the Sins systematically assault the Castle in which *Humanum Genus* takes refuge. Like *Piers Plowman* this text upholds the importance of the sacrament of Penance and like the *Parson's Tale* it warns of the uncertainties of delaying repentance until the point of death.

¹²¹ See Chapter II.

from carnal desires which war against the soul.

(1 Peter 2:11)¹²²

During succeeding centuries writers and preachers sought to identify, describe and codify these 'carnal desires' in order to enable Christians to avoid, overcome and, when necessary, confess them. This process was given considerable impetus by the IVth Lateran Council of 1215, which made annual confession mandatory in the Western Church.¹²³ An understanding of the nature of the Seven Deadly Sins was essential for confessor and penitent alike. These sins were the enemies which could drag the soul from the pathway to heaven; every Christian therefore needed to learn to recognise them and the temptations which they brought. In a survey of the contribution of Gregory the Great to the classification and understanding of the Sins, Morton Bloomfield comments:¹²⁴

Mortal man's proper home is paradise ...and with God's grace and God's justice he tries to win it through the pilgrimage of life... We struggle with the devil to win freedom from the world of evil desires. To regain our original goal and our original selves we have the help of Jesus, through the Church and the Sacraments; but we must cooperate by holding the world in contempt, by despising worldly values... [Gregory's] analysis of sin is noteworthy and it is his reorganisation and presentation of the cardinal sins in the *Moralia*, that became classic for the Middle Ages. The fight with sin is the first and most difficult of all the tasks for the Christian pilgrim. The road of *ascesis* can be traversed only by conquering the sins; but *before they can be conquered they must be known* [my italics].

¹²² This passage is used in *Ancrene Wisse* to introduce Section V on Penance.

¹²³ See Boyle (1985) and Shaw (1985).

¹²⁴ Bloomfield (1961), 60.

Although Gregory was writing primarily for a monastic audience, the widespread popularity of his work helped to establish this view of the Sins within the general theological and devotional tradition.¹²⁵ Medieval sermons include frequent warnings about the particular danger posed by the Seven Deadly Sins to those engaged in the pilgrimage of life:

Ich gode cristen man oweth to be a pilgrime goinge into hevenly Ierusalem.¹²⁶

He that is a pilgrym comen into a strange land where many theves and robberes beth, that nyght and day awayteth suche pilgrymes ... Him nedeth busiliche studie and thinke how he myghte scape her hondes.¹²⁷

[synne] lettys us to goye þe ryght wey to heven¹²⁸

The Middle English *Weye of Paradys* uses the image of a rich man who rides out a journey:

He goth or passeth by a gret valey into a gret wyldernes and falleth among many theues that throwe hym to the erthe vnder his hors and t[a]lken fro hym his hors, his sadel, his bridel, and al that he hath, and spoilen hym al naked and take fro hym al his godes. And 3it more, thereto they zeuen hym manye woundes and lete hym as good as half ded...This world is the vale ful of wretchednesses of tribulaciones, be whyche euerij man goth and passeth the wey where the theues ben that wayten the weye and that dyspuylen euerij

¹²⁵ Bloomfield (1952), 72.

¹²⁶ Sermon by Richard Alkerton (1406). Cited Owst (1961), 104.

¹²⁷ MS Harley 45, fol. 160b. Cited Owst (1961), 106.

¹²⁸ *Middle English Sermons*, 104/12.

man whenne they conne not helpen himself or defende. The seuen dedly synnes arn the theues that assayle[n] the [ryche] man that is on horsback and that dyspoylen hym of his goodes, 3if God ne helpe hym not.¹²⁹

This penitential manual goes on to define the manner in which the various Sins strip the Christian of the attitudes, virtues and actions which are required for the journey. Restoration is possible only through the sacrament of penance.

This background helps to explain Haukyn's lament in *Piers Plowman* that 'Synne seweth us evere' and his wish that after his baptism he had been 'deed and dolven for Dowelis sake' (XIV 320-3), since he would thus have avoided the perilous struggle with sin which threatens his prospects of salvation. I suggest that it also explains Langland's marked preoccupation with the Sins and the significant role which they play in *Piers Plowman*. It is plain from sermons, spiritual treatises and penitential guides that the medieval Church sought to identify and describe the Seven Deadly Sins for two main reasons: to equip the Christian to overcome the temptation of straying from the 'weye to heven' and to encourage fallen sinners to avail themselves of the benefits of the Sacrament of Penance, the only means by which they could be restored to the prospect of salvation. Langland's deployment of the Sins in *Piers Plowman* echoes these aims and is more widespread than has generally been noted. We have already observed that the theme of life pilgrimage appears first, not in Passus V, as is often assumed, but in the *Prologue*; the same is true of the Seven Deadly Sins. The view of the world vouchsafed to the Dreamer through his dream-vision, uncompromisingly reveals the influence of the sins upon human behaviour. Gluttony (22, 43) is seen as destructive both to the community and to the individual soul and the superficiality of Pride in outward appearance (23) is set alongside the eternal value of the inner life of 'preires and penaunce' (25). Sloth (45) and Lechery (54, 77) characterise secular and religious mendicants while Covetousness

¹²⁹ *Weye of Paradys*, 25-7.

undermines the integrity of friars, pardoners and parish priests alike (61, 81, 86). In Passus I Holy Church explicitly notes the dangers of Gluttony (Lot) leading to Lechery in the life of Lot (I. 27-33), Pride bringing about the downfall of Lucifer (126-7), and Covetousness in the life of parish-priests. Asked to define Truth, she neatly points out that deadly sin is more to be feared than death itself:

It is a kynde knowynge that kenneth in thyn herte
For to loven thi Lord levere than thiselve,
No dedly synne to do, *deye theigh thou sholdest*

(Piers Plowman, I. 142-4)

The charter, marking the marriage of Mede to False in Passus II, once again analyses the problems of human society in terms of the Seven Deadly Sins:

And Favel withe his fikel speche feffeth by this chartre
To be princes in Pride, and poverté to despise...
And the erldom of Envye and [Ire] togideres..
The countee of Coveitise ...
... al hem I graunte...
[With] al the lordshipe of Leccherie...
Glotonye he gaf hem ek and grete othes togidere...
Til Sleuthe and sleep sliken hise sydes.

(Piers Plowman II. 79-80, 84, 86, 87, 93, 99)

Having thoroughly established the reality of the presence of these Sins in the world and their insidious power to undermine even those dedicated to the religious life, Langland's presentation of the Sins broadens to encompass not only the threat of sin but also its remedy. Much of the description of the Sins until this point has emphasised their horizontal dimension – the destructive effect which they have on

human relationships and the dynamic of society; now the vertical dimension is foregrounded. The scene between Mede and the friar in Passus III functions as a negative prefiguring of Repentance's deft and completely orthodox handling of the confessions of the Sins. The point of the scene is not only to expose the venality of the friar but to highlight the eternal consequences of evading the true purpose of the Sacrament of Penance. Mede's offer of engraved windows in return for easy absolution for those guilty of lechery ('It is synne of the seuene sonnest relessed' III. 58) is followed by an authorial warning that those who thus display their Pride (66) and avoid confessing their 'coueitise' (68) will find that they have no place in heaven (72).¹³⁰ Passus IV offers further glimpses of the Sins (32, 35, 70) and includes Reason's vision of a society in which the effect of the Seven Deadly Sins is reversed:

Til Pernelles purfill be put in hire hucche...

Til clerkene covetise be to clothe the povere and fede

(*Piers Plowman* IV. 116, 119)

This passage has clear links to the portrayal of the Sins in the Prologue as does Reason's sermon in Passus V which links sin, judgement (present and future) and the need for repentance. Reason speaks of interim judgement:

thise pestilences was for pure synne

(*Piers Plowman* V. 13)

and warns that the uprooting of mighty beeches and oaks in a recent gale, (an image of the impermanence of worldly strength) is a sign of judgement yet to come:

dedly synne er domesday shal fordoon hem alle.

(*Piers Plowman* V. 20)

¹³⁰Mills (1969), 194, dismisses this as a 'trivial comment.'

He castigates Wastour (24),¹³¹ Pernele (26-7)¹³² and others and his words, together with those of Repentance, induce remorse in the narrator and move the Sins to confession. The subsequent exposure of the nature and intractability of the Sins is well known but needs to be examined within the overall context of the poem, particularly its portrayal of the pilgrimage of life. Malcolm Godden regards the presentation of the Sins as running counter to the 'optimism about natural man manifested in the scheme of the vision,'¹³³ yet, as we have seen, the ubiquitous presence of the Sins has been carefully woven into the very fabric of human society. The poem's audience are therefore by this point already fully aware of the dominant role of the Sins within a fallen world. What the confession scene demonstrates is the deep-rooted hold exercised by the Sins upon human nature and the struggle which individual Christian believers face if they are to escape their clutch and successfully complete the journey to heaven. It also emphasises, through the exchanges with Repentance, the probing which is necessary if the Sacrament of Penance is to be efficacious. In *Everyman* Shrift is described as 'the mother of salvation' (552) as the representative of mankind contemplates the final 'pilgrimage' of death. In the *Scale of Perfection* Hilton declares that those who have been 'reformed by the sacrament of penance' can be sure that they are on the road to the heavenly Jerusalem (Scale II. 21). This truth is further demonstrated in the fourth vision. When Patience and Conscience set out as pilgrims they immediately encounter Haukyn, representative of all those involved in the 'active life,'¹³⁴ whose coat (and character) are deeply stained by the Seven Deadly Sins.

¹³¹ Compare *Prol.* 22.

¹³² Compare *Prol.* 23-4.

¹³³ Godden (1990), 43.

¹³⁴ Hussey (1969), 22 sees Haukyn as 'a kind of synthesizing character ... only gradually is he led to desire eternal values rather than temporal ones.' See Godden (1984), 139ff, on confusion over the

covetousness which is endemic in a fallen world. Temptation by the Deadly Sins and the emasculation of the penitential system go hand in hand in Langland's writing. We have already examined the scene in Passus III in which Mede subverts the friar and it is apparent that much of Langland's criticism of the friars is motivated by his belief, a view which he shared with Chaucer,¹³⁵ that the friars were undermining the whole system of penance and thus undermining the whole process of salvation. In Passus XI Will himself is misled by assurances that the friars will arrange easy absolution for him and thus falls prey to the blandishments of worldly lust (XI. 52-60). In Passus XIX Piers builds the church and Grace provides

A cart highte Cristendom to carie home Piers sheves,
And gaf hym caples to his carte, Contricion and Confession.

(Piers Plowman, XIX. 333-4)

The threat by Pride and his 'grete oost' to destroy the church is articulated in terms of an attack upon the integrity of the penitential system:

Confession and Contricion, and youre carte the Bileeve
Shal be coloured so queyntely and covered under oure sophistrie,
That Conscience shal noght knowe by Contricion
Ne by Confession who is Cristene or hethene.

(Piers Plowman XIX. 349-352)

The final attack upon the Church is mounted in Passus XX by Antichrist and the 'sevene grete geaunts' (XX. 215) who are the Deadly Sins. We witness the onslaughts of Lechery, Covetousness, Pride, Sloth and Envy before Conscience admits the friars who deal the most deadly blow of all. Contrition is lulled into slumber and the people no longer 'drede' sin.

¹³⁵ Chaucer's friar was likewise an 'esy man to yeve penaunce' (*Gen.Prol.* 223).

It is evident from this survey that the threat posed by the Seven Deadly Sins and the need to maintain the integrity of the sacrament of Penance were matters which greatly exercised Langland and which strongly influenced his presentation of the pilgrimage of life. He writes as an orthodox Christian of his time, concerned to expose evils which threaten to undermine the function of the Church, yet it seems likely that he would have agreed with the assertion of the Lollard William Thorpe: 'I clepe hem trewe pilgrymes trauelynge toward þe blis of heuene ... hatynge euere and fleyng alle þe seuene dedli synnes.'¹³⁶

4. PERSON AND PLACE

The final resolve expressed by Conscience:

I wole bicomme a pilgrym
And walken as wyde as the world lasteth
To seken Piers the Plowman.

(*Piers Plowman*, XX, 381-3)

encapsulates a spiritual concept which is central to the development of the pilgrimage motif in *Piers Plowman*: the priority of person over place. It is a significant characteristic of Christian thought that places have been made holy only by association with a holy person. Initially the person concerned was God himself though, since the New Testament taught that God was equally available to all who called upon him, there were always those who questioned whether it was necessary to travel to another geographical location in order to encounter him.¹³⁷ The

¹³⁶ *Two Wycliffite Texts*, 62.

¹³⁷ See for example the comments of Jerome and Gregory of Nyssa (Chapter III above.)

emergence of the cult of the saints¹³⁸ acted as a spur to the growth of place pilgrimage, as popular religion increasingly focused upon those who were believed to act as mediators between sinful human beings and an increasingly remote, holy God. This development held twin dangers, which were recognised and addressed by spiritual writers through the centuries. Would the saints usurp the place which God should hold in the devotion of the faithful? Would the popularity of journeying to holy places divert Christians from seeking to experience God in their daily lives? Such questions were live issues in the later fourteenth century as not only Lollard but also orthodox preachers raised concerns about the motivation of some pilgrims and the efficacy of their pilgrimages. The Dominican preacher John Bromyard criticised those who travelled to the Holy Land 'out of a certain curiosity or spirit of amusement, with the intention of returning, so that they can narrate what they have seen and heard, in boastful fashion among their neighbours.'¹³⁹ Archbishop Fitzralph of Armagh, preaching on All Saints' Day, 1356, noted:

a certain danger from the veneration of images which some frequently and wrongfully called by the name of those they are intended to represent, such as St Mary of Lincoln, St Mary of Walsingham, and so forth; since St Mary, the Mother of God, is above in heaven, and never in those places ... Wherefore those who venerate such images for their own sake and make offerings to them to procure healing or benefits of some kind appear to be true and potent idolators.¹⁴⁰

Thomas á Kempis not only warned of the dangers of succumbing to *curiositas*, 'It is curiosity and the love of novelty that takes men to see such things, but they return

¹³⁸ See Chapter III.

¹³⁹ Owst (1961), 333.

¹⁴⁰ Owst (1961), 141.

with little harvest in the way of improved lives,¹⁴¹ but focused instead on the presence of God in the sacrament of the Eucharist: 'Many people go running off to various places to see the relics of the saints ... Yet here before my eyes on the altar, you, my God, are present yourself, holier than all the saints.'¹⁴² Lollards opposed the practice of place pilgrimage as theologically misguided and spiritually dangerous:

Bes pilgrimadis and offeryngis semen brouzte vp of cautelis [tricks] of þe fend and hes coueytouse and worldly clerkis, for comunely sicke pilgrimadis ben mayntenynge of lecheris, of gloterie, of drunkenesse ... and worldly vanytes.¹⁴³

Langland's poem addresses these issues head-on, denouncing the seeking of saints' shrines and recommending instead the pursuit of Truth, that is God himself. The initial stages of the Dreamer's search for Truth is motivated chiefly by the desire to escape the consequences of sin and to win salvation and is somewhat intellectual in character. With the appearance of Piers the Plowman, however, the Dreamer's quest gradually takes on more of a personal character. The evolving figure of Piers offers in turn a guide (V-VII), an instructor (XVI), an example (the Good Samaritan in XVII) and a saviour (XVIII). In Passus XV he is identified as '*Petrus, id est, Christus*' (XV. 212) without whom Charity can never be known, the human embodiment of Truth, who makes visible the character of God.¹⁴⁴ The Dreamer's search now becomes focused upon the person of Piers (XVI. 167-71), whose very name evokes an emotional response similar to that offered to Christ in the late Middle Ages:¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ Thomas à Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*, Bk IV. I.

¹⁴² Thomas à Kempis, *Imitation of Christ*, Bk IV. I.

¹⁴³ *Selections from English Wycliffite Writings*, 86.

¹⁴⁴ Compare John 14: 9 'He that seeth me seeth the Father also.'

¹⁴⁵ Martin (1979), 55 comments that 'the absences of Piers, the yearning for Piers convey, more than satisfaction could, his meaning in the poem'.

‘Piers the Plowman!’ quod I tho, and al for pure joye
That I herde nempne his name anoon I swowned after,
And lay longe in a loue-dreem; and at laste me thoughte
That Piers the Plowman al the place me shewed

(*Piers Plowman*, XVI. 18-21)

As Schmidt observes, Will’s quest for Piers fuses with that of Hope and Faith for Jesus,¹⁴⁶ and the Piers-Christ-Good Samaritan figure dominates the subsequent drama of salvation. Against this background it is evident that Conscience’s decision to seek Piers is not merely a search for ‘that fit ecclesiastical authority symbolised by the ploughman.’¹⁴⁷ He is no longer looking for answers in a system or temporal structure which can be corrupted; his needs and those of the Church can only be met by a person.

Conclusion

In an article entitled ‘The Pilgrimage of Life as a Late Medieval Genre,’ Siegfried Wenzel suggests a number of elements which, in his judgement, would characterise such a form.¹⁴⁸ These are:

1. use of the dream vision
2. the entire action appears as extensive action narrated in the Pilgrimage of Life appears as an extensive answer to man’s question, ‘What must I do to save my soul?’

¹⁴⁶ William Langland : *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, xliv.

¹⁴⁷ Knight (1969), 307.

¹⁴⁸ Wenzel (1973), 377-8.

3. the remainder of the poem consists of the Dreamer's quest for the goal, comprising both instruction (including a confrontation with vice) and a more positive journey in which he makes progress.
4. the Dreamer's concern with his own aging
5. the use of personification allegory
6. the inclusion of much if not all medieval catechetical instruction, structured with the help of the pilgrimage metaphor.

Wenzel himself dismisses *Piers Plowman* as a candidate for such a genre on the grounds that the use of the allegorical pilgrimage in Passus V 'forms only part of the larger structure.'¹⁴⁹ On the basis of the features which I have noted in this chapter, I would suggest that this exclusion is unwarranted. The contrast between wandering aimlessly through the world and purposeful (if not perfect) pilgrimage towards the 'tour on the toft' which is apparent from the *Prologue* onwards suggests that the whole poem is in fact set within the context of life pilgrimage. The peculiar textual problems manifested by *Piers Plowman* mean that any such suggestion must of necessity be tentative, yet there it is also true that the apparent lack of a neat conclusion to the text combined with its continual readiness to explore fresh avenues are, in themselves, appropriate reflections of the nature of life pilgrimage. And life pilgrimage is unquestionably Langland's main concern. This brief re-examination of *Piers Plowman*, in the light of the multiple meanings of pilgrimage established earlier, has revealed with marked clarity Langland's commitment to the primacy of moral obedience within the pilgrimage of life and his sustained antagonism towards journeying to holy places. Langland, it is clear, regards seeking holy places as a substitute for living as a Christian at home and seeking saints as substitute for seeking God himself.

¹⁴⁹ Wenzel (1973), 371.

CHAPTER IX

THE CANTERBURY TALES

Bifil that in that seson on a day,
In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay
Redy to wenden on my pilgrymage
To Caunterbury with ful devout corage,
At nyght was come into that hostelrye
Wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye,
Of sondry folk, by aventure yfalle
In felaweshipe, and *pilgrimes were they alle*
That toward Caunterbury wolden ryde.

(*Canterbury Tales, Prologue, 23-27*)

Introduction

'Pilgrimes were they alle' announces Chaucer blandly as the pilgrim-narrator (he of the self-professed *'devout corage'*) and his fellow-travellers encounter one another *'by aventure'* at the Tabard Inn and promptly resolve to journey together to Canterbury. Nothing could be more simple – or, in the event, more productive of critical dissension. Indeed as the *Prologue* unfolds and the web of prologues and tales reveals more of the tellers, the text itself prompts a multitude of questions about this apparently straightforward statement. What significance are we to read into Chaucer's use of the term 'pilgrim'? Are all these 'sondry folk' in fact engaged upon the same kind of journey? Should the pilgrimage to Canterbury be taken as anything more than a convenient narrative framework against which to set a wide-ranging collection of tales? And what does the *Parson's Tale* have to do with the lively, even bawdy, tales which precede it?

In their attempts to answer these questions, critics have drawn on the social¹ and political² history of the period, patristic commentaries,³ religious treatises⁴ and many other contemporary sources.⁵ Their conclusions differ but two undisputed facts remain. The pilgrim identity of Chaucer's characters is thrust upon the poem's audience before either their carefully-crafted portraits or their interaction can identify them to any degree as individual people.⁶ They are, first and foremost, pilgrims, whatever that term may prove to mean. Moreover, it is the pilgrimage undertaking which forms these chance-met '*sondry folk*' into a group, bound together by a common goal and, at least in theory, by a common motivation, though in fact this is implied rather than stated.⁷ The pilgrimage initiates, sustains and focuses the interaction through which past history and present intention are revealed and judged.⁸ The concepts of pilgrim and pilgrimage, therefore, remain of considerable significance in any serious consideration of the *Canterbury Tales*. They have been placed in the foreground by the poet himself.

Yet having established pilgrimage as the context of his poem, Chaucer subsequently appears to treat the subject in a somewhat cavalier fashion. In the most commonly accepted plan of the tales,⁹ the geographical progression of the pilgrims towards the

¹ Mann (1973); Strohm (1989).

² Knight (1986a).

³ For example Robertson (1962), Jeffrey (1979).

⁴ Wenzel (1971); Wenzel (1974); Patterson (1978).

⁵ Such as place pilgrimage narratives. See Howard (1980).

⁶ See Mann (1973) on general estates characteristics.

⁷ Seeking the saint 'that hath hem holpen' is a motive associated with pilgrimage to Canterbury in general but not actually ascribed to these particular pilgrims. See Section 1B.

⁸ See Section 1. A.

⁹ That of the Ellesmere manuscript. The textual problems associated with the *Canterbury Tales* inevitably complicate any assessment of authorial intention or attempts at interpretation. It is impossible to be certain of Chaucer's final design for the work (if indeed he had arrived at such a

shrine of Becket is only sketchily indicated,¹⁰ the plan of tale-telling to while away the journey is either radically pruned or collapses under its own weight,¹¹ and the final speaker, the Parson,¹² appears to hijack the whole enterprise, metaphorically re-routing his companions to a new destination. As a pilgrimage set within a specific geographical context, therefore, this journey lacks verisimilitude; as a narrative it seems to lack shape and, as a work by a Christian poet, it raises complex questions about its own religious seriousness. All of these difficulties can, I suggest, be illuminated at least in part by placing the *Canterbury Tales* in the context of the multiple meanings of pilgrimage which have been identified and illustrated in the preceding chapters of this thesis. Most critical discussion of the poem has tended to revolve around an implied conflict between the easy-going, entertainment-packed excursion to Canterbury enjoyed by a very mixed group of travellers and the austere, single-minded, penitential preparation for heaven recommended by the Parson. Such discussion has also tended to be linked, whether explicitly or implicitly, to consideration of the Retraction and the issue of Chaucer's own attitude towards fiction in general and his own work in particular.¹³ The categories employed in these discussions of pilgrimage have however been over-restricted and have tended to set up false dichotomies. The various meanings of pilgrimage available to Chaucer and his contemporaries were capable of more subtle interpretation and conjunction than is usually acknowledged. I intend to demonstrate that Chaucer was not forced, nor is he forcing his audience to choose between place pilgrimage and life pilgrimage - between, as it were, Canterbury and the New Jerusalem. It is my contention that he

decision) nor is it essential for the purposes of the present discussion to attempt to make any such judgement.

¹⁰ Dean (1989), 71-2: 'We hear little about the pilgrimage itself after the *General Prologue* - a few place names along the way and perhaps an allusion to the breeches of St. Thomas in the *Pardoner's Tale*.'

¹¹ See Owen (1977) and Pearsall (1997) on possible schemes for the tales.

¹² The *Parson's Tale* is generally accepted as the final tale.

offers instead a third way, which is neither world-denying nor sin-affirming, a way which corresponds to a marked degree with that advocated by Langland in *Piers Plowman*.¹⁴

1. THE PILGRIMAGE FRAME

It is evident from earlier chapters of this thesis that Chaucer, like other writers of his time, inherited a wide spectrum of views concerning pilgrimage, some supporting an accommodation between life and place pilgrimage, others regarding the latter as spiritually undesirable if not actually dangerous. Moreover, his own period was marked by a growing unease about the practice of pilgrimage to holy places, and in particular to the shrines of saints.¹⁵ It is impossible that Chaucer should have been unaware of this unease, since not only did he have friends among the Lollards¹⁶ who so vigorously denounced place pilgrimage, but he almost certainly knew¹⁷ Langland's poem *Piers Plowman*, with its scathing denunciations of those who travelled to holy places¹⁸ in one form or another. It is, therefore, not acceptable to assume, as many critics appear to do, that just because the practice of journeying to holy places was a commonplace of medieval religion, a pilgrimage made an obvious choice of setting for Chaucer's story collection. Boccaccio¹⁹ and Sercambi²⁰ also

¹³ Cooper (1983).

¹⁴ See Chapter VIII above.

¹⁵ See Davis (1963), Chapter 2.

¹⁶ Such as Sir John Clanvowe, author of *The Two Ways* - see Scattergood (1967). See also MacFarlane (1972).

¹⁷ See Cooper (1987).

¹⁸ See Chapter VIII: 2 above.

¹⁹ 'Chaucer stresses mobility much more than Boccaccio who keeps his people in one place all the time, and more than Sercambi who does make his characters wander, but the stories are always told at night when they have stopped ... Mobility, both social and geographic, is a key motif in the tales.' Knight (1986a), 160.

²⁰ See Bryant and Dempster (1941).

used journeys as frames for their story collections but these portray ‘involuntary’ movement away from plague-stricken cities rather than a voluntarily-undertaken expedition towards the shrine of a saint. Chaucer could also have chosen a spiritually ‘neutral’ journey as setting without embroiling himself in the controversies surrounding pilgrimage. For Chaucer to set his tales within the frame of a pilgrimage to the shrine of St Thomas at Canterbury, which though still popular was becoming a particular target of Wycliffite complaints,²¹ would have been an act of highly uncharacteristic literary naivety, unless he fully intended to exploit the tensions which such a setting would evoke.²² This surely is no accident.

What then were Chaucer’s reasons for choosing a pilgrimage to a holy place as setting for his work and for selecting Canterbury in particular as his pilgrims’ destination? In this chapter I wish to suggest that, in employing a pilgrimage frame for his narrative, while also using the prologues and tales to reveal the everyday lives of his pilgrims, Chaucer was seeking to establish a particular correlation between place pilgrimage and the pilgrimage of life, that the presentation of the pilgrims’ quest to encounter a saint becomes a commentary upon the reality of their desire to encounter God, and that the function of the *Parson’s Tale* is in fact to re-iterate a well-established association between the pilgrimage of life, the Seven Deadly Sins and the Sacrament of Penance, an association which is not only fore-shadowed in the preceding tales but can also be observed in the other texts considered in this section.

A. The choice of pilgrimage as setting

Any assessment of Chaucer’s use of a pilgrimage as frame for his story collection

²¹ See Section B below.

²² ‘In framing his great fiction in the historical pilgrimage to the shrine of St Thomas at Canterbury, Chaucer was framing it in the institution that was the single most conspicuous target of religious dissenters of his day.’ Fleming (1985), 152.

must take into account the literary scope offered by such a device, the historical records of contemporary pilgrimage practice and the theological implications of the way in which this particular pilgrimage is presented. A number of critics²³ argue that in selecting a pilgrimage setting, Chaucer is exploiting what has been described as the *liminoid*²⁴ function of pilgrimage: the manner in which pilgrims of varying rank or background, united by their common purpose, enter into a state of *communitas*²⁵ and are (to a degree) freed to interact on terms of greater equality than would normally be the case. The use of these concepts in Chaucer criticism builds upon the work of social anthropologist Victor Turner who argues that pilgrimage is *antistructural* in its effects, temporarily freeing participants from the hierarchical roles and relationships which characterise them in everyday life before returning them, changed by their experience, to their previous setting. It therefore subverts rather than reinforces normal social patterns. In applying Turner's analysis to the *Canterbury Tales*, Frederick B. Jonassen states that pilgrimage 'exhibits liminality because the pilgrim is one who renounces, at least temporarily, his everyday role or status.'²⁶ He quotes Turner's assertion that

When one goes on pilgrimage one is not only moving from profane to sacred space and time ... one is also moving away from a social life in which one has an institutionalized social status ... One is moving *into* a different kind of

²³ For example Holloway (1987), xix, xx. and Jonassen (1991).

²⁴ Turner defines *liminality* as 'the state and process of mid-transition in a rite of passage. During the liminal period the *liminars* (the ritual subjects in this phase) are ambiguous, for they pass through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state,' Turner and Turner (1978), 249. He suggests that pilgrimage represents a form of escape from normal social responsibilities and pressures, Turner and Turner (1978), 7.

²⁵ In Turner's model *communitas* 'transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structures and institutionalised relationships' Turner (1969), 128.

²⁶ Jonassen (1991), 5.

social atmosphere ... stripped of status, role-playing attributes, corporate group affiliations, and the like.²⁷

Jonassen goes on to argue that, though Chaucer introduces each pilgrim by occupation: 'they are liminal because they are no longer primarily a miller, a man of law, a franklin, a prioress, or a manciple; all are levelled as religious penitents united on a spiritual journey.'²⁸ Such uncritical and inflexible applications of Turner's theories to Chaucer's narrative strategy seem to me to be flawed on several grounds. Firstly, Turner's work has been largely based upon observation of modern day pilgrimage practices and it is not necessarily appropriate to read back all of his conclusions into a medieval text. Secondly, his model has been challenged by other social anthropologists working in the field, among them Michael Sallnow and John Eade,²⁹ whose observations suggest other interesting avenues for exploring Christian pilgrimage which may be of value in medieval studies.³⁰ Thirdly, and most importantly, while the pilgrimage setting is obviously of value as a literary device

²⁷ Jonassen (1991), 5.

²⁸ Jonassen (1991), 8.

²⁹ 'Turner's model has been subjected to a number of theoretical critiques ... and has been tested in a variety of field settings... In none of these cases did the investigator find support for the theory; to the contrary, a recurrent theme throughout the literature is the maintenance and, in many instances, the reinforcement of social boundaries and distinctions in the social context, rather than their attenuation or dissolution. This is not to say, of course, that some of the features and conditions glossed by the term 'communitas' will not be found in some cases... it is the determinism of the model which limits its usefulness, for the necessary alignment of pilgrimage and anti-structure not only prejudices the complex character of the phenomenon but also imposes a spurious homogeneity on the practice of pilgrimage in widely differing historical and cultural settings.' Eade and Sallnow (1991)4-5.

³⁰ 'The sacred centre can assume many forms. The thrust of our analytic endeavour should not be towards ever more inclusive ... generalisations but towards the examination of the specific peculiarities of its construction in each instance. We suggest that the triad of 'person', 'place' and 'text' might provide the co-ordinates for this task as far as Christian pilgrimage is concerned.' Eade and Sallnow (1991), 9. See Chapter XI below.

which allows Chaucer to assemble and describe representatives of a number of social classes upon a single stage,³¹ it does not appear that his object in so doing is to *distance* them from their social roles and responsibilities. In fact, the converse is nearer to the truth. Chaucer uses the frame to enable the pilgrims to relate to one another but in such a way as to *highlight* and reveal the social backgrounds from which they come and therefore the responsibilities which they bear. As Jill Mann has demonstrated,³² Chaucer draws heavily upon estates satire in the presentation of his characters. It is important to recognise that such estates satire necessarily presupposes generally-acknowledged responsibilities which pertain to each estate. The portrait of each pilgrim thus not only evokes a particular role in society but also invites a judgement about how well this particular representative carries out his or her professional responsibilities. This is exemplified in the apparently straightforward presentation of the ecclesiastical figures in which Chaucer, in fact, invites judgement by conjuring up a parallel image of what the life and character of each *should* be. The Monk, by quoting his monastic forebears so dismissively, evokes the true monastic ideal as practised by Benedict, Augustine, Bede or Aelred; all greater men than he. Behind the Friar, himself vowed to the mendicant life, stands the infinitely more dynamic and attractive figure of St Francis, whose calling was specifically to identify with the beggar and serve the leper,³³ two classes which this friar is at pains to avoid:

He knew the tavernes wel in every toun

³¹ Lawton observes that the use of pilgrimage in the *Canterbury Tales* 'is the best possible solution to the question of social context: how to gather together in one place a sufficient social range of prospective tellers, as warranted by the different genres and styles of the tales, Lawton (1987), 26. This however is to view the pilgrimage frame as pretext rather than context.

³² Mann (1973).

³³ Service of lepers and beggars was crucial to the spirituality of St Francis and a key element in the vocation of his followers. See Bonaventure's *Life of St Francis*.

And everich hostiler and tappestere
Bet than a lazar or a beggestere;
For unto swich a worthy man as he
Acorded nat, as by his facultee,
To have with sike lazars aqueyntance.

(*Gen. Prol.* 240-5)

Only the Parson, faithful in pursuit of his duty, oblivious to the call of more profitable sinecures, gives the lie to the estates caricature.³⁴

The combined effect of the descriptions in the General Prologue and the pilgrims' self-revelations is to suggest not so much an escape from everyday life as an implicit analysis of everyday reality, similar to that provided in *Piers Plowman* through the description of the 'feeld ful of folk'³⁵ and the confessions of the Seven Deadly Sins. The interaction of the pilgrims on the journey to Canterbury can therefore be seen to function as a revelation of the true state of their daily pilgrimage through life. Some of those on the Canterbury road are escaping responsibility; some, like the Parson, are integrating place pilgrimage into a daily life of obedience. When the Parson's Tale is reached, it is thus already apparent how many of these pilgrims badly need his instruction if they are eventually³⁶ to reach the heavenly Jerusalem.³⁷ I would

³⁴ The Parson largely defined by negatives, presumably in reaction to estates satire. See Mann (1973). Kane (1984), 102-3, states: 'The good Parson of the pilgrimage ... answers in every excellence of character and conduct, detail by minute detail, to estates criticisms of ignorant and bad parish priests.'

³⁵ See Cooper (1987), 74 on the similarities between Chaucer's Prologue and the A-text of *Piers Plowman* in particular.

³⁶ For what I consider to be the correct perspective on the Parson's directions to the heavenly Jerusalem see Section 2.A.

³⁷ William Thorpe asserts that many pilgrims were indeed ignorant of basic Christian doctrine: 'For, as I wel knowe, siþ I haue ful oft assaied, examyne whoeuere wole and can twenti of þese pilgrikes, and þere hulen not be founded ofte þree men or wymmen among þese twentii þat knowen þrifili oon

argue, therefore, that Chaucer's use of a pilgrimage frame does not merely represent the adoption of a convenient literary device but instead seeks to establish a close correlation between life and place pilgrimage. Pilgrimage to holy places, properly undertaken, functioned as a microcosm of life,³⁸ requiring a desire to seek God, penance, and self-discipline. A sermon from the *Liber Sancti Jacobi* (c. 1145) warned that visiting the shrine of St James at Compostela would not automatically win pilgrims salvation. Their attitude must be right, their pilgrimage austere and they must be willing to undergo a complete moral reformation:

If he was previously a spoliator, he must become an almsgiver; if he was boastful he must be forever modest; if greedy, generous; if a fornicator or adulterer, chaste; if drunk, sober ... from every sin which he committed before his pilgrimage, he must afterward abstain completely.³⁹

A proper attitude towards pilgrimage thus reflected a proper attitude towards life. When Chaucer's pilgrims are seen to be selfish, greedy, boastful or drunk, they are therefore revealing their lack of spiritual understanding in general. The very practice of a spiritual discipline such as pilgrimage lays bare the reality of human life, some attaining what is required of them, others lamentably (and unrepentantly) falling short. Jonassen, following Turner, sees the '*communitas*' of the pilgrim group creating unity as all those who participate in the Canterbury expedition 'are levelled as religious penitents united on a spiritual journey.'⁴⁰ This, however, also seems to run counter to Chaucer's literary intention, since the behaviour of his pilgrims

hest of God, neiþer cunnen seien þe Pater noster, neiþer þe Aue neiþer þe crede in ony manere langage.' *Two Wycliffite Texts*, 63.

³⁸ This I believe is the essential theological relationship between life and place pilgrimage throughout the period covered by this study.

³⁹ Cited Sumption (1975), 125.

⁴⁰ Jonassen (1991), 8.

frequently invites questions about their penitence, unity and spirituality. In addition to being dramatically far more satisfying, Chaucer's depiction of spiritual incompatibility, rivalry, and disagreements is closer to pilgrim group-dynamics as revealed in the narratives of experienced travellers such as Margery Kempe⁴¹ and Felix Fabri.⁴² Pilgrims who fell into company on the road or during a sea voyage had to face the fact that some of their companions might well turn out to be spiritually unsympathetic, temperamentally incompatible or simply dishonest. Moreover, it is not easy to determine to what extent these 'sondry folk' fallen 'by aventure' into 'felaweshipe' should in fact be treated as a group. In a comparison of the prologues to *Piers Plowman* and the *Canterbury Tales*, Helen Cooper comments:

[in Chaucer] the group of pilgrims is immediately divided up into its constituent members, and the resulting sense of individuals with their own individual interests rapidly dominates over any sense of a common goal. For Langland's characters within Will's dream, the movement is just the opposite, from diversity to unity.⁴³

In fact the pattern of the two prologues is possibly more similar than she allows. Chaucer's pilgrim group is presented as being a group only by accident, their initial semblance of unity being based upon the fact that they happen to be riding in the same direction rather than as a result of any deep-rooted spiritual bond. Moreover, no defining action takes place before their portraits shift the focus to their individual roles and status within society and their agreed programme of story-telling in fact serves in many respects to reveal their differences, separated as they are by the barriers of class and the effects of sin. It is arguable that they only become a true pilgrim group as they listen together to the Parson's exhortation on the subject of sin

⁴¹ *The Book of Margery Kempe*.

⁴² Felix Fabri, *The Book of the Wanderings*.

⁴³ Cooper (1987), 78

and penance, much as Langland's characters become pilgrims as they respond to the preaching of Reason and Repentance (*Piers Plowman* V). Travelling together on the road to Canterbury does not in itself make Chaucer's characters a pilgrim group any more than Langland's 'field ful of folke' are united by the mere fact of their wandering through the world side by side; both need to understand and accept the need to transform their erratic progress through life into a clearly-focused spiritual journey.

The historical fact that pilgrims were prompted to visit shrines by an extremely wide range of motives⁴⁴ supplies Chaucer with a rich vein of ambivalence, which feeds the comic potential of his narrative. The opening lines of the General Prologue, for example, are shot through with ambiguity. The spring-time setting has been interpreted as a hint that natural rather than spiritual urges may be prompting these pilgrims to take to the road;⁴⁵ yet springtime was the time for pilgrimage, especially for journeys to Compostela and the Holy Land,⁴⁶ so that travellers might be able to return before late autumn storms made sea voyages even more dangerous. The greatest crowds of Jerusalem-bound pilgrims always assembled in Venice between Easter and Ascensiontide. The finer weather would also have offered the first opportunity for pious vows, made to saints such as Becket during winter trials and illness, to be fulfilled (*Gen. Prol.* 15-18).

This springtime expedition may, therefore, be entirely innocent of worldly motives. There are, however, further questions which require consideration. The narrator makes a point of praising the comfortable lodgings provided by the Tabard Inn (28-9) yet pilgrimage was supposedly an austere, penitential exercise. These Canterbury

⁴⁴ See Davies (1988) and Sumption (1975).

⁴⁵ Zacher (1976), 92.

⁴⁶ The *General Prologue* (13) mentions *palmeres*, that is pilgrims bound for Jerusalem and other destinations overseas.

pilgrims propose to travel on horseback (27), whereas ‘serious’ pilgrims walked. Is there a question mark over the seriousness of these pilgrims? Are they intended to illustrate some of the abuses of place-pilgrimage listed by the (orthodox) Dominican preacher John Bromyard?

There are some who keep their pilgrimages and festivals not for God but for the devil. Those who sin more freely when away from home or who go on pilgrimage to succeed in inordinate and foolish love – those who spend their time on the road in evil and uncharitable conversation may indeed say *peregrinamur a Domino*: they make their pilgrimage away from God to the devil.⁴⁷

Such questions raise the issue of Chaucer’s attitude towards place pilgrimage and in particular the reasons which may have prompted the choice of Canterbury as his pilgrims’ stated goal.

B. The choice of Canterbury as destination

And specially from every shires ende
Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende
The hooly blisful martir for to seke,
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.

(*Gen. Prol.* 15-18)

Why Canterbury? Why St Thomas? There were four great shrines in Western Christendom during the fourteenth century: Jerusalem, Rome, Compostela, and

⁴⁷ *Summa Praedicatorum*, I. 6. Cited Davies (1988), 83. Such accusations could well have been levelled at the Wife of Bath. See Martin (1996), 38 and Chapter XI below.

Canterbury.⁴⁸ All were popular with English pilgrims. Why then did Chaucer select Canterbury?

Firstly, and most obviously, because of its status. If Chaucer wanted to choose an English shrine the pre-eminence of Canterbury and its martyred saint was unquestioned, though St Cuthbert still held sway in the far north of England. The popularity of Becket's resting place was attested by its affluence. Ronald Finucane comments that 'Becket's golden bejewelled memorial at Canterbury ... was one of the greatest concentrations of portable wealth in England.'⁴⁹ Moreover, for a cultured English audience Canterbury would have combined fame and familiarity, together with a certain cosmopolitan quality,⁵⁰ since it attracted considerable numbers of pilgrims from France and other parts of Europe, many of them of high degree.⁵¹

The second reason, I suggest, is that like the other three major shrines,⁵² the appeal of Canterbury sprang from a particular individual. As we have seen, in Christian thought places are made holy through association with a person, either God himself or one of his saints.⁵³ In speaking of the development of the cult of the saints, Peter Brown comments: 'Pilgrims did not just go to a place, they were going to a place to meet a person.'⁵⁴ In the *Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer makes it clear that this is true of his pilgrims also. It is the 'hooly blisful martir' they seek; and there is no doubting the extent to which the personality of Becket dominated his cult. He was a very human saint; indeed it seems possible that it may have been his

⁴⁸ Davies (1988), 75.

⁴⁹ Finucane (1977), 29.

⁵⁰ Ward (1987), 89.

⁵¹ Finucane (1977), 124-26.

⁵² Ward (1987), 110.

⁵³ See Chapter IV.

⁵⁴ Brown (1981), 88.

perceived humanity as much as his sanctity which made his cult so popular. A twelfth-century account from the Canterbury miracle collection describes the healing of a Norwich girl when her father appealed to Becket on the grounds of services rendered to the saint in more humdrum days:

Then he said, "O St. Thomas, martyr of God, return me now my service. Now I really need you. Once I served you diligently before you were exalted with this world's honors. Return to me my service! Remember, blessed martyr, how you were sick long ago in Kent in Turstan the clerk's house and what good service I gave you there. You could not touch wines, or spirits, or beer, or any other strong liquor, and I used to scour the whole neighbourhood to find you whey to drink ... Then you had only one horse and I had charge of that too. Return me my service, bearing in mind all the trouble I bore waiting on you" When he had repeated "Return me my service" so often that hoarseness shut his windpipe, the pity of the martyr assented to the prayers of the suppliant and, *so that he would not appear ungrateful for all his services*, he restored his daughter to her previous health [my italics].⁵⁵

Here human honour, as much as Christian compassion, seems to have dictated the saint's response.

Becket was no textbook saint, marked out from childhood by precocious piety⁵⁶ but an undeniably worldly man who became a champion of the church and died resisting royal authority. The former Chancellor and Archbishop had himself struggled with the conflicts of the world and the church, just as many of Chaucer's pilgrims do and as Chaucer and his audience would also have done. He was not noted for his humility, either in life or in death. Those who sought his favours needed to make

⁵⁵ Shinnars (1997), 171.

sure that the saint's beneficence was suitably acknowledged and rewarded. As the thirteenth-century windows in the Trinity Chapel of Canterbury Cathedral make clear, even Thomas's friends were not immune from his displeasure if they failed to bring appropriate thank-offerings for answered prayers.⁵⁷ Pilgrimage to Canterbury therefore must often have been prompted as much by prudence as by piety. As much as any saint of the Middle Ages Thomas is the powerful patron, exercising influence, commanding respect and submission even from those who still held authority in this world and, of course, bringing prosperity to his shrine. A very mixed character, a curiously worldly saint; an appropriate choice then for a very mixed, frequently worldly, assemblage of pilgrims to visit.

The third reason for Chaucer's selection of Canterbury as the pilgrims' goal may well have been the fact that the cult of St Thomas highlighted not only the virtues but also the weaknesses of the practice of place pilgrimage. While Chaucer does not offer overt criticism of pilgrimage to holy places, there is, nevertheless, an implied critique of such practices running through the portraits in the Prologue and subsequent revelations about the motivation and behaviour of his pilgrims. As has been demonstrated in earlier chapters of this thesis, questions about the desirability and potential dangers of pilgrimage date back to the very inception of the practice within Christianity.⁵⁸ During the intervening centuries there was particular concern about the risk of increased temptation to immorality, the fact that those vowed to the priesthood or the monastic life sometimes used pilgrimage as an excuse to see the

⁵⁶ Unlike for example his northern 'rival' St Cuthbert. See *Age of Bede*.

⁵⁷ See Dyas (1997a), 127-8. Benedicta Ward notes that 'Canterbury was a shrine at which cures happened; but even more it was a centre for pilgrims who offered thanksgiving for cures elsewhere in the name of the martyr.' Ward (1987), 101. Compare the motivation of pilgrims to pagan shrines such as that of Aesclepius at Cos. See Chapter III.3.

⁵⁸ See Chapter III above

world,⁵⁹ and the misunderstandings which might exist in the minds of pilgrims about the relationship between visiting holy places and the need for a daily life of obedient devotion. Thus the Council of Chalon in 813 warned that

There are priests, deacons, and other clerics who live negligently thinking that they can free themselves from sin and perform their ministry by going to these places. There are laymen who think they either sin or have sinned with impunity because they visit these places for prayer.⁶⁰

Concern about the participation of monks and nuns in place pilgrimage was largely founded upon the belief that the monastic life was already a form of exile, pursued in stability⁶¹ and that the leaving of the cloister, unless in the most exceptional circumstances⁶² represented an undermining of the spiritual journey already undertaken.⁶³ St Anselm, while Archbishop of Canterbury, forbade a monk to visit Jerusalem citing the pope

who ordered with his great authority that monks should not undertake this journey except for a religious person who may be useful in ruling the church of God or instructing the people, and this only with the advice of and in obedience to his superior.

⁵⁹ Jocelyn of Brakelond speaks of the Bishop of Ely proposing 'certain decrees against the black monks, holding forth about their wandering off to the shrines of St. Thomas and St. Edmund on the pretext of pilgrimages' Brakelond, *Chronicle*, 54.

⁶⁰ Cited Constable (1976), 128.

⁶¹ See Chapters II and X.

⁶² The *Regularis Concordia*, 8, stated that: 'The brethren shall not *gad about* visiting the properties of the monastery unless either great necessity or reasonable discretion require it'.

⁶³ Geoffrey of Vendome: 'We should not stray from the journey of our profession to make a journey to Jerusalem.' Cited Constable (1976), 134.

and the Cistercians in the twelfth century decreed that a monk who went to Jerusalem or on another pilgrimage was 'to leave his own house and be sent to another without hope of return.'⁶⁴ The high profile given by Chaucer to the Monk and the Prioress, together with the conspicuous omission of true religious virtues in their portraits, draws attention to the fact that they, of all the pilgrims, have least justification for their participation in the journey. Whereas they might, though with some considerable difficulty, have won permission to visit Rome to discharge business with the papacy or Jerusalem in the interests of greater understanding of the scriptures, what possible reason can there be for them to be on the road to Canterbury?

Gregory of Nyssa, writing in the fourth century, observed that even the city of Jerusalem was full of 'Adultery, theft, idolatry, quarrelling, murder'⁶⁵ and concern about the moral risks run by Anglo-Saxon pilgrims to Rome, especially women, were voiced by St Boniface⁶⁶ in the eighth century. Later male writers saw women less as prospective victims than as willing participants in amorous adventures away from the restraints of husband and local community. The Knight of La-Tour Landry tells the cautionary tale of a young wife, who having embarked upon a pilgrimage with her lover, a young squire, fell ill and was cured only after she had repented her immoral intentions. Her story is presented as 'a good Ensampl / how me ought not to goo to hooly pylgremages for no foolysse playsaunces / but only for the dyvyne seruyse and for the loue of god.'⁶⁷ Chaucer's presentation of the Wife of Bath, with her unashamed admission that her many pilgrimages,⁶⁸ like her visits to her own

⁶⁴ Constable (1976), 138

⁶⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, Letter 2.

⁶⁶ *Anglo-Saxon Missionaries*, 133. See Chapter VI: 3.

⁶⁷ La Tour Landry, *Book of the Knight of the Tower*, 58/27-29.

⁶⁸ In a warning which might have been expressly directed at the Wife of Bath Thomas à Kempis remarked that 'Many people go running off to various places to see the relics of the saints ... It is

parish church, are largely prompted not by devotion but by amorous intent,⁶⁹ thus draws on a cliché of anti-feminist satire, which in questioning the motivation of women pilgrims, also casts doubt upon the practice of pilgrimage itself.

Curiously no specific motive is attributed to Chaucer's pilgrims,⁷⁰ only a general inference that like most pilgrims of the time they are travelling to Canterbury in connection with physical healing (*Gen. Prol.* 15-18). This too was an area of controversy. An emphasis on material benefits as an outcome of pilgrimage was initially a pagan rather than a Christian characteristic⁷¹ and there were those who felt uneasy about such a premium being placed upon what were after all temporal rather than specifically spiritual benefits. William Thorpe criticised pilgrims whom he saw as not only ignorant of the rudiments of the faith but misguided in their motivations:

And as I haue lerned and also I knowe sumdel bi experience of þese same pilgrimes, tellinge þe cause whi þat manye men and wymmen now gon hider and þider on pilgrymage, it is more for þe helpe of her bodies þan for þe helpe of her soulis, more for to haue richessis and prosperite of þis world þan for to ben enrichid wip vertues in her soulis, more for to haue her worldli or fleischli frendschipp þan for to haue frendschip of God and of hise seintis in heuene.⁷²

curiosity and the love of novelty that takes men to see such things, but they return with little harvest in the way of improved lives, especially when they embark on such visits thoughtlessly and with no real sorrow for sin.' Thomas à Kempis, *Imitation*, Bk IV. I.

⁶⁹ On the implications of the description of the Wife of Bath for Chaucer's attitude to place-pilgrimage see Chapter XI below.

⁷⁰ With the exception of the Knight. The description in the *General Prologue* (77-8) suggests that he is making the customary pilgrimage to give thanks for his safe return from crusading.

⁷¹ See Chapter III above.

⁷² *Two Wycliffite Texts*, 62.

The *Parson's Tale* also suggests that physical health and spiritual wellbeing are not always entirely compatible:

Now for to speken of goodes of nature, God woot that somtyme we han hem in nature as much to oure damage as to oure profit./ For as to speken of heele of body, certes it passeth ful lightly, and eek it is ful ofte enchesoun of the siknesse of oure souls. For, God woot, the flessh is a ful greet enemy to the soule, and therfore, the moore that the body is hool, the moore be we in peril to falle.

(*Parson's Tale*, 457-9)

The author of the thirteenth-century *Ancrene Wisse* also saw real spiritual value in earthly suffering:

Gað nu þenne gleadluker bi strong wei bi swincful toward te muchele feaste of heouene ... Betere is ga sec to heouene þen hal to helle ... Euch worltlich was hit is godes sonde.⁷³

Physical suffering may, therefore, actually promote spiritual *sikernes*,⁷⁴ a concept familiar from the teaching of the apostle James:

Count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations [trials]; Knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience, and patience hath a perfect work; that you may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing.

(James 1. 2-4)

⁷³ *Ancrene Wisse* (ed. Tolkien) IV. 98/ 18-19, 22, 6. In *The Pilgrimage of the Lyfe of the Manhode*, 180/ 13, illness is the messenger who reminds people of Penance.

⁷⁴ Compare Gray (1986), 220. In *Fasciculus Morum*, 139, sickness is described as the 'fetter of Christ, with which he binds those he loves.'

The quest for physical healing on earth was, therefore, not necessarily regarded as compatible with the quest for the heavenly Jerusalem.

Canterbury, because of its claims and its riches, seems to have been especially vulnerable to the criticisms of reformers such as Thorpe, who also objected to the waste of resources involved in such journeys, such as ‘spendynge her goodis vpon vicious hosteleris and vpon tapesters,’ and complained in particular about the conduct of Canterbury pilgrims:

I knowe wel þat whanne dyuerse men and wymmen wolen goen þus aftir her owne willis and fyndingis out on pilgrymageyngis, þei wolen ordeyne biforehonde to haue wip hem boþe men and wymmen þat kunnen wel synge rowtinge songis, and also summe of þese pilgrimes wolen haue wip hem baggepipes⁷⁵ so þat in eche toun þat þei comen þoru3, what wip noyse of her syngynge, and wip þe soun of her pipinge, and wip þe gingelynge of her Cantirbirie bellis þese maken more noyse þan if þe king came þere away wip his clarioneris and manye oþer mynstrals.⁷⁶

And Thomas? Pilgrims were beckoned to Canterbury by a very strong personality. When they arrived they would have been confronted by a shrine of dazzling splendour.⁷⁷ Fr. Simon Fitzsimon, who visited Canterbury en route to the Holy Land in 1322, described the body of Thomas lying in a ‘case made of most pure gold and adorned with innumerable precious stones, with shining pearls like unto the gate of Jerusalem.’⁷⁸ To behold such riches must indeed have seemed like a foretaste of the glories of heaven. Yet it was only a foretaste and the one whom pilgrims sought

⁷⁵ Compare the description of the Miller (*Gen. Prol.* 565-6).

⁷⁶ *Two Wycliffite Texts*, 64.

⁷⁷ Very similar to the present-day appearance of the shrine of St James in Compostela.

⁷⁸ *Western Pilgrims*, 3.

only a servant.⁷⁹ The Parson in his *Prologue* and *Tale* makes the point very clearly. Their true goal was to meet a person, 'oure sweete Lord God of hevene that ... wole that we comen alle to the knoweleche of hym' (*Parson's Tale*, 75), to attain the glories of heaven and then, and only then, to enjoy full physical and spiritual health. How much of what I have outlined in this section was a result of Chaucer's deliberate planning is, of course, impossible to know, but it seems that it can hardly be an accident that Canterbury and its blissful martyr make such perfect foils for the Person whom all true pilgrims seek and the Place where the benefits of his friendship are to be fully enjoyed.

2. THE ROLE OF THE *PARSON'S TALE*

It is fair to say that the *Parson's Tale* remains something of an embarrassment for Chaucerian studies. Some critics ignore it altogether;⁸⁰ others regard it as a regrettable blemish on the career of a gifted writer,⁸¹ while a third group acknowledge its (limited) virtues but insist that it should not be accorded greater significance than the other tales: 'The Parson's Prologue does indicate some kind of conclusion, even though Chaucer does not in fact say that the pilgrimage has reached Canterbury; but the tale is no more than another genre, another attitude to life to be set beside the others.'⁸² In contrast a significant number of commentators, including

⁷⁹ Although some of his devotees were not afraid to make comparisons between the martyred archbishop and Christ: 'Writers compared the blood of the martyr to the blood of Christ, 'the lamb of Canterbury' to the 'lamb of Bethlehem', and said that water and blood from the side of Christ on the Cross (John 19:34) was parallel to the water and blood of St Thomas.' Ward (1987), 102.

⁸⁰ It is, for example, omitted from Ellis (1986). Moreover there is no separate edition or translation available.

⁸¹ Aers (1980), 108-110.

⁸² Cooper (1983), 54.

Baldwin, Howard, Rogers,⁸³ Ruggiers, Patterson and Wenzel, regard the *Parson's Tale* as an important key to the interpretation of the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole. Unfortunately they differ in their understanding of what that interpretation should be. Baldwin saw the *Parson's Tale* 'as a commentary on the action'⁸⁴ but Siegfried Wenzel, though supporting a very high view of the Parson's Tale, is more restrained in defining its relationship to the rest of the tales:

Coming at the end of the string of tales, and introduced by rhetorical and fictional markers that set it apart from the preceding stories and give it a special standing, the Parson's Tale presents not just another aspect of reality and human behaviour, but a higher one. I am firmly convinced that Chaucer, too, saw life steadily and saw it whole, and that in the wholeness of his vision the Parson's Tale is the final step. The tale clearly does not lend itself to being used as a moral gloss or blueprint which retrospectively furnishes direct and specific comments on each pilgrim and the secondary fictional characters of his or her tale. But it does serve, in a more general, comprehensive, and basic way to reaffirm the values and norms that were implied in the earlier storytelling and to make them explicit.⁸⁵

His claims for the status of the tale are, moreover, somewhat undermined by the subsequent admission that 'such an exalted view of the function intended for the Parson's Tale, is, unfortunately, not supported by its form.' Lee Patterson though

⁸³ Rogers (1986), 121: 'The Parson's Tale more than any other, provides us with a system of categories to understand all human experience.'

⁸⁴ Baldwin (1955), 100.

⁸⁵ Wenzel (1981), 97-89. 'The Parson's Tale is clearly and explicitly placed as the climax of a long poem.'

agreeing that the Parson's Tale transcends the views of life presented by the earlier storytellers,⁸⁶ rejects outright

the assumption that Chaucer wrote the *Parson's Tale* as a pointed commentary on the preceding pilgrims and their tales ... In the whole of the *Parson's Tale* there is not a single line that can, in my view be taken as applying to a single pilgrim. And to read the tale retrospectively is to misunderstand its most important characteristic, its generality ... The *Parson's Tale* is not irrelevant to what precedes it but it is no more relevant to that than to anything else.⁸⁷

Ironic readings of the tale have also been proposed⁸⁸ and rejected.⁸⁹ Even a post-modern reading of the tales can only suggest that to choose any interpretation of this conundrum is 'to chese amys.'⁹⁰ It might, one feels, be simpler for everyone if the tale simply did not exist. As Rodney Delasanta comments: 'No part of the Canterbury Tales has been so unloved as its ending.'⁹¹ The emerging textual evidence, however, increasingly indicates that the *Parson's Tale* is indeed a force to

⁸⁶ Patterson (1978), 370.

⁸⁷ Patterson (1978), 369.

⁸⁸ See Finlayson (1971), Kaske (1975).

⁸⁹ Wenzel refutes the ironic reading of the poem by Judson Boyce Allen, together with what he describes as the 'perspectivist' interpretations of Finlayson and Kaske: 'There is an element in these views which I find quite unsatisfactory: they fail to take into account the introduction to the Parson's Tale. I would argue that the prologue to the Parson's Tale is wrought in such a fashion as to deny that the following tale is of the same moral validity as its predecessor, no less and no more. On the contrary, Chaucer seems to endow the 74 lines introducing the tale with rhetorical pointers that clearly prepare the reader for something of higher significance than what has gone before.' Wenzel (1981).

⁹⁰ See also Delasanta (1978).

⁹¹ Portnoy (1994), 291.

reckoned with – and accounted for. Due to the work of Patterson, Wenzel and others, the content and the form of the Parson's Tale have become clearer. The purpose and function of the tale within the overall context of the *Canterbury Tales* however, remain matters of dispute. There has been a great deal of discussion in general terms about concepts of life pilgrimage and place pilgrimage within the *Canterbury Tales* but much of this debate has been stronger on positing literary solutions than on accurately establishing the theory and practice of contemporary spirituality. As a result of these omissions, several misleading perspectives on the Parson's Tale have been accepted and transmitted from one study to another. These include the repeated suggestion that in the Parson's Prologue and Tale the pilgrims are required to choose between place pilgrimage and life pilgrimage; an insistence that place pilgrimage, like life-pilgrimage, was essentially viewed as a one-way exercise and a failure to recognise the deeply-rooted three-way relationship between the Seven Deadly Sins, Penance and the Pilgrimage of Life, which makes the Parson's Tale a highly suitable message for those who will return home⁹² to continue their daily journey to heaven.

A. The siker wey

In the early decades of the twentieth century, critics such as Manly⁹³ regarded the *Parson's Tale* as an interloper, unfortunately included by a misguided compiler searching for a suitable ending to Chaucer's great work. Subsequent textual research has concluded that the tale was in fact carefully crafted by Chaucer himself from various sources⁹⁴ and that it belongs to a very specific genre. Lee Patterson, in his

⁹¹ Delasanta (1978), 240. 'Lawler (1980), 147: 'The Parson's Tale makes most readers close the book before the book closes.'

⁹² See Section 2.B.

⁹³ Manly (1931), 616. In a more recent study, Alastair Minnis (1984) also questions the status of the *Parson's Tale*.

⁹⁴ The *Summa de poenitentia* of Raymund of Pennaforte, the *Summa Vitiorum* (in the versions known as *Primo* and *Quoniam*) and the *Summa virtutem de remediis anime*. See Petersen (1973), Wenzel

extensive and highly-influential analysis of the *Parson's Tale*, argues that it should be grouped, along with the *Clensyng of Mannes Soule*, *The Weye of Paradys* and the *Boke of Penance*, as a 'manual for penitents,'⁹⁵ the kind of material which would have enabled lay men and women to make full confession of their sins:

The Parson's Tale is thus not merely one among the many different sorts of religious writing typical of fourteenth-century England; far less is it what it is so often called, 'a typical medieval sermon.' It is an instance of a clearly defined and recognizable genre, the manual intended exclusively for penitential use.⁹⁶

Patterson sees the four texts which he groups together as more restricted in scope than other similar works⁹⁷ such as John Myrc's *Instructions for Parish Priests*, *Handlyng Synne*, *Jacob's Well* and the *Book of Vices and Virtues*, since they do not include more general teaching material such as the Ten Commandments or the Lord's prayer:

Their concern is not with a life of moral struggle and aspiration, but with the justification of sin through penance, and their matter is fitted securely within a penitential perspective that guarantees its relevance. The very organization of the text, in other words, is a source of persuasion.⁹⁸

(1971) and Wenzel (1974). Wenzel (1982), 252, comments: 'It is accurate to say, I believe, that in writing [the *Parson's Tale*] Chaucer translated substantial sections from the identified sources. But it is equally accurate to point out that in doing so he not only worked selectively but also made changes and additions which reveal intelligence, purposiveness, and a fairly exact familiarity with the pastoral-theological thought and language of his time.'

⁹⁵ Patterson (1978), 338.

⁹⁶ Patterson (1978), 339.

⁹⁷ For full list see Patterson (1978), 340.

⁹⁸ Patterson (1978), 339.

The Parson's Tale is in fact even more restricted than the others, since the *Weye of Paradis* contains additional didactic material and the *Boke of Penance and the Clensying of Mannes Sowle* offer guidance for both priest and penitent. Chaucer's treatise, (significantly, I would suggest), is geared exclusively to the needs of the penitent,⁹⁹ lay or clerical. Patterson's implied division between concern with a life of moral struggle and the process of justification, however, does not do justice either to the concept of repentance or to the text of the *Parson's Tale* itself. The Parson himself comments that although he has not included the text of the Ten Commandments in his treatise, the pattern of daily obedience which they outline is woven into his teaching: 'Natheless, I hope to God, they been touched in this tretice, everich of hem alle' (*Parson's Tale*, 957). True repentance, as the Parson himself makes clear, involves not only sorrow for sin but also a determination to avoid it in the future:

Seint Ambrose seith that Penitence is the pleynynge of man for the gilt that he hath doon, *and namoore to do any thyng for which hym oghte to pleyne ...* Penitence, with certeyne circumstances, is verray repentance of a man that halt hymself in sorwe and oother peyne for his giltes. And for he shal be verray penitent, he shal first biwaylen the synnes that he hath doon, and stidefastly purposen in his herte to have shrift of mouthe and to doon satisfaccioun, *and nevere to doon thyng for which hym oghte moore to biwayle or to compleyne, and to continue in goode wkrkes, or elles his repentance may nat availle. For, as seith Seint Ysidre, "He is a japere and a gabbere and no verray repentant that eftsoone dooth thyng for which hym*

⁹⁹ Ruggiers (1965), 90 describes the *Parson's Tale* as 'a treatise of instruction for the priest dealing specifically with the sacrament of penance' but Wall suggests that 'the *Parson's Tale* bears the marks of having been adapted for the *lay penitent* who is to make his confession.' Wall (1986), 189.

oghte repente.” Wepyng and nat for to stynte to do synne, may nat awayle.

(Parson's Tale, 83, 85-90)

The Parson's purpose in his tale is not merely to explain sin so that it may be correctly confessed: it is to explain¹⁰⁰ sin so that it may be avoided. Confession without true intention to resist temptation in the future not only invalidates the sacrament of penance but leaves the individual in a position of great spiritual danger:

But nathelees, men shal hope that every tyme that man falleth, be it never so ofte, that he may arise thurgh Penitence, if he have grace; but certainly it is greet doute. For as seith Seint Gregorie, “Unnethe ariseth he out of his synne, that is charged with the charge of yvel usage.” And *therefore repentant folk, that stynte for to synne and forlete synne er that synne forlete hem, hooly chirche holdeth hem siker of hire savacioun.* And he that synneth and verailly repenteth hym in his laste, hooly chirche yet hopeth his savacioun, by the grete mercy of oure Lord Jhesu Crist, for his repentaunce; *but taak the siker way.*

(Parson's Tale, 90-93)

The choice is clear. Continue in a life of sin and hope that at the last you may yet scrape into heaven through the mercy of God. Or take the sure route. The *siker*¹⁰¹ way is to choose a life of penitence and obedience to God: it is in fact to live, as the first epistle of St Peter advises, as strangers and pilgrims in the world, avoiding the sins which war against your souls. Here Chaucer's Parson is very close to

¹⁰⁰ Patterson (1978): 'In the *Parson's Tale* sin is not merely identified and reprehended but explained.'

¹⁰¹ The *Middle English Dictionary* offers the following meanings for *siker*: 1(a) Free from danger, not at risk, in safety, safe; (b) of an action or a course of action: undertaken in safety, not attended by risk; (c) spiritually safe; in the way of salvation, conducive to spiritual safety, not dangerous to the soul, prudent.

Langland's narrator as, having witnessed Piers Plowman's efforts to work out the moral and spiritual implications of a life of pilgrimage on earth, he ponders the relationship between indulgences, memorial masses and Dowel:

Al this maketh me on metels to thynke-
And how the preest preved no pardon to Dowel,
And demed that Dowel indulgences passed,
Biennals and triennals and bisshopes lettres,
And how Dowel at the day of dome is digneliche underfongen,
And passeth al the pardon of Seint Petres cherche.

(Piers Plowman, VII.168-173)

Will's assertion that to trust in triennals and other such devices 'is noght so *siker* for the soule, certes, as is Dowel' (VII. 181) prefaces an appeal to those who would avoid the demands of a daily life of obedience:

At the dredful dome, when dede shulle rise
And comen alle bfore Crist acountes to yelde-
How thow laddest thi lif here and hise lawes keptest
And how thow didest day by day the doom wole reherce

(Piers Plowman. VII. 188-191)

All the alternatives upon which unregenerate medieval sinners might rely are firmly rejected in favour of a life of obedient service while earthly life endures:

A pokeful of pardon there, ne provincials lettres,
Theigh ye be founde in the fraternite of alle the fyve ordres
And have indulgences doublefold – but Dowel yow helpe,
I sette youre patentres and youre pardon at one pies hele!

Forthi I counseille alle Cristene to crie God mercy,
And Mary his moder to be oure meene bitwene,
That God gyve us grace here, er we go hennes,
Swiche werkes to werche, the while we ben here,
That after oure deth day, Dowel reherce
At the day of Dome, we dide as he highte.

(*Piers Plowman*. VII. 192-201)

This insistence that the only *siker* way through life is to act out the daily moral dimension of life pilgrimage is, as we have seen, highly characteristic of Langland. Another voice commending a sure route to the bliss of heaven is found in the *Boke of Penance*:

Forþi to wend þe seker way
It es gude we do penance ay.
Els haue we noght us with to were
Bifore criste þat rightwis demere.

(29222-5)¹⁰²

Walter Hilton, introducing his discussion of ‘interior’¹⁰³ pilgrimage, sees a similar reassurance to be gained from submitting to the sacrament of Penance:

The beginning of the highway along which you shall go is reforming in faith, grounded humbly in the faith and the laws of holy church, as I have said before, for trust assuredly that although you have formerly sinned, *you are on the right road, if you are now reformed by the sacrament of penance according to the laws of holy church.*

(*Scale* 2. 21)

¹⁰² *Cursor Mundi*, Vol IV.

This sense of spiritual security, *sikernes*, deriving from a commitment to constant penitence and obedience is just what the Parson is suggesting to his fellow pilgrims. I have made this point at some length because so much Chaucer criticism, whatever its attitude towards allegorical interpretation, gives the impression that with the entry of the Parson into the tale-telling arena his audience are suddenly confronted with a choice between continuing towards Canterbury or heading straight for the heavenly Jerusalem, almost as if the two cities stood side by side ready to receive the weary pilgrims that very night.¹⁰⁴ Such readings however misrepresent the relationship between the pilgrimage of life, sin and penance. This tale may be set within sight of the walls of Canterbury but the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem are still some way off. The Parson is not at this moment preparing his audience for death but for life; not administering the last rites but recommending the kind of penance undertaken annually by all serious Christians before they took communion at Easter. The Prologue and the opening section of the Tale set out clearly his aims and intentions. His prayer is that he may show his audience

the way, in this viage
Of thilke parfit glorious pilgrymage
That highte Jerusalem celestial

(*Parson's Prol.* 49-51)

The *way* here is the road taken by Christians on their journey through life to the heavenly city. The pilgrimage called 'Jerusalem celestial' means the process of travelling along that road until the city is reached. The Parson's advice is addressed to those who '*thurgh synne hath mysgoon fro the righte way of Jerusalem celestial*'

¹⁰³ In the context of the anchoritic life. See Chapter X.

¹⁰⁴ See 2.C.

and the *wey* he offers within the tale, is the path of Penitence which will enable all who take it to regain the right road, the life of obedience to God.

This is the context in which the Parson's teaching on Penitence and the Seven Deadly Sins is set: the journey through life to the heavenly city.¹⁰⁵ Information about the Seven Deadly Sins and the appropriate *remedia* is essential for any would-be pilgrim since it is 'thurgh synne' that they will be enticed away from the road to heaven:

Soothly synnes been the weyes that leden folk to helle (141)

and it is through the *remedia* that they will be able to overcome their innate tendency to sin. Although the image used differs slightly from that employed in the *Weye of Paradis*¹⁰⁶ the essential concept is the same: the Seven Deadly Sins are the instrument the Devil uses to seduce the flesh and promote allegiance to this world rather than to the world to come. The intrinsic connection, both theological and practical, between the pilgrimage of life, the Deadly Sins and the sacrament of Penance can be observed in other significant medieval spiritual writings. In his discussion of temptation, the author of the early thirteenth-century *Ancrene Wisse* warns his audience that as they travel through the wilderness of the world towards the heavenly Jerusalem, the Seven Deadly Sins, in the guise of wild animals¹⁰⁷ lie in wait ready to attack them. Later he prefaces his teaching on penance with a

¹⁰⁵ Compare Lille, *The Art of Preaching*, Chapter XXX: On Remorse and Contrition: 'There are four states of affection by which the mind of the righteous man is wholesomely stricken with remorse. The first is the memory of past deeds. The second is the consideration of his pilgrimage in this life. The third is the remembrance of his own sins. The fourth is the desire for his heavenly home.'

¹⁰⁶ See Chapter VIII: 3.

¹⁰⁷ *Ancrene Wisse* (ed. Tolkien), 101/10-11, 16-24. This theme also appears in *Sermo de Poenitentia*. See *Weye of Paradys*, Intro. 74.

discussion of the pilgrimage of life, comparing the labour invested by place-pilgrims in seeking 'the bones of a single saint' with the dedication of those who engage in the pilgrimage of life, going towards heaven 'to become saints themselves.'¹⁰⁸ In the *Weye of Paradis* the Sins are portrayed as thieves¹⁰⁹ who waylay and rob the traveller,¹¹⁰ much as in Deguileville's *The Pilgrimage of the Lyfe of the Manhode* the Sins¹¹¹ attack the pilgrim on his way to the heavenly city. In both works the pilgrim is restored through penance.

The message therefore is clear: Christians travelling through the wilderness of this world towards the heavenly city stray from the right road through succumbing to the Seven Deadly Sins and regain it through the sacrament of Penance.¹¹² Moreover, as the Parson constantly stresses, true repentance brings not only forgiveness but the grace to live henceforth in obedience:

The sixte thyng that oghte moeve a man to contricioun is the hope of three thynges; that is to seyn, foryifnesse of synne, *and the yifte of grace wel for to do*, and the glorie of hevene, with which God shal gerdone man for his goode dedes.

(*Parson's Tale*, 283)

¹⁰⁸ *Ancrene Wisse* (ed. Tolkien), VI. 178/13-17, 20-25.

¹⁰⁹ *Weye of Paradys*, 25-7.

¹¹⁰ Compare Malory, *Morte d'Arthur* Bk 13. II where the Seven Deadly Sins are shown attacking knights engaged on quests.

¹¹¹ Described as 'pese olde theeves, espyowresses (waylayers) of pilgrimes' *de Deguileville, The Pilgrimage of the Lyfe of the Manhode*, 4833-5. See Ch VIII:3.

¹¹² Compare *Tale of Melibee*, 1886-7: 'For doubtles, if we be sory and repentant of the synnes and giltes which we han trespassed in the sighte of oure Lord God,/ he is so free and so merciabile/ that he wole foryeven us oure giltes and bryngen us to the blisse that nevere hath ende.'

Doing well is vital since sinful men will lose 'the goodnesse of glorie, that oonly is bihight to goode men that *labouren and werken*.' (250) There is still work to be done in this world and specific groups within society such as lords (753), knights (768)¹¹³ and merchants (776) are given instruction about their responsibilities. That the Parson's message is indeed designed to transform everyday life is underlined by his insistence that repentance of the kind he urges must not be postponed till the approach of death. Those who might risk such a delay are encouraged to meditate on the insecurity of human existence: 'He shal thynke that oure life is in no *sikernessee*, and eek that alle the riches in this world ben in aventure and passen as a shadwe on the wal' (*Parson's Tale*, 1068). Earthly life, and worldly prosperity offer no lasting security but in heaven there is not only 'sikernessee from the peyne of helle' (1077) but freedom from sorrow, strife, sickness and hunger. There the 'blisful compaignye' (1077) are united in joy and every soul 'replennysed with the sighte of the parfit knowynge of God' (1079). This is the ultimate security to which human beings can aspire, the *sikernessee* of heaven and the sure way; the *siker wey* to reach that haven is the route which the Parson recommends, a true pilgrim life of penitent obedience:

This blisful regne may men purchase by poverté espiritueel, and the glorie by lowenessee, the plentee of joye by hunger and thurst, and the reste by travaille, and the lyf by deeth and the moritficacion of synne.

(*Parson's Tale*, 1080)

¹¹³ Compare *Piers Plowman* VI. 24-32.

B. Pilgrimage - a one-way journey?

Any discussion of Chaucer's intended structure or structures for the *Canterbury Tales* inevitably involves some degree of interpretation of the pilgrimage frame.¹¹⁴ Did Chaucer ever intend to depict a return journey to Southwark or were his pilgrims always on a one-way ticket?¹¹⁵ How did medieval pilgrims regard the process of journeying to holy places? Much recent discussion has leant heavily¹¹⁶ upon Donald Howard's assertion in *The Idea of the Canterbury Tales* that

medieval pilgrims conceived of and experienced a pilgrimage as a one-way journey; the return was a mere contingency. This was not metaphor or topos, but the source of the metaphor and topos: it was their *idea* of a pilgrimage.¹¹⁷

Howard bases this assertion largely upon the relationship between literal and metaphorical pilgrimage and on place pilgrimage narratives, particularly those which describe travel to the Holy Land. Howard's survey offers, however, a somewhat one-sided view of place-pilgrimage which should not be seen as automatically applicable to the *Canterbury Tales*, since there are significant differences between the texts and experiences which he cites and the type of journey which Chaucer's pilgrims undertake.

¹¹⁴ Howard (1976), 28-30, asserts that there are 'Strong reasons for saying that Chaucer never had any idea of depicting the return journey.' See also Owen (1977).

¹¹⁵ This question has implications for interpretations such as that of Knight: 'The route of the pilgrims from Southwark to Canterbury is the exact reverse of that taken by the revolutionaries [of 1381]. Knight (1986a), 158.

¹¹⁶ Thus Derek Pearsall, citing Howard, comments: 'When one speaks of a pilgrimage as an allegory of the journey of human life, from the earthly city to the heavenly city, one does not speak or think of the going home that follows the pilgrimage.' Pearsall (1997), 33.

¹¹⁷ Howard (1976), 30.

In *Writers and Pilgrims*, Howard quotes the Desert Fathers and Celtic *peregrini* as examples of those who embarked upon 'one-way' journeys, that is exile without hope of return. He suggests that place pilgrimage, though focusing upon a particular destination, was also essentially a 'one-way' journey, citing the dangers of overseas travel and the fact that many Crusaders, for example, died in the East or chose never to return home. The examples which he gives, however, are not only from earlier periods in the history of pilgrimage than that of Chaucer, but also represent very specialised approaches to the subject. As has been demonstrated earlier in this thesis,¹¹⁸ the approach of the Desert Fathers and their spiritual imitators, the *peregrini*, was to focus upon departure and exile, rather than the seeking of a sacred place. This form of pilgrimage was strongly discouraged in Western Europe after the ninth century¹¹⁹ and only penitential pilgrimage of a type which involved a judicial sentence of exile was subsequently regarded in this light. It is often said that 'all pilgrimages were penitential' but this statement can be misleading. All pilgrimages were ultimately motivated by consciousness of sin and the desire to draw closer to God and many were prompted by the desire to obtain indulgences, but not all were penitential in the narrow, judicial sense of the term.¹²⁰ The Crusades, likewise, were a very specialised form of pilgrimage, fuelled by the promise not only of indulgences, but also by a more worldly desire for conquest. War, illness and the opportunity to serve in the Crusader states, delayed or prevented the return of many who had taken the cross. It was not, however, a typical pattern for place pilgrimage of the type in which Chaucer's pilgrims are engaged.

Howard argues that since most extant place-pilgrimage narratives focus on the journey *to* the holy place, the 'habitual way of experiencing a pilgrimage' was thus

¹¹⁸ See Chapters II and VI.

¹¹⁹ Constable (1976), and Hughes (1960).

¹²⁰ See Davies (1988).

as a one-way journey, a concept reinforced by the metaphorical meaning which place pilgrimage had acquired:

from early times [pilgrimage] had the metaphorical significance of a one-way journey to the Heavenly Jerusalem: the actual trip was a symbol of human life, and the corollary, that life is a pilgrimage, was a commonplace.¹²¹

His argument, I suggest, not only ignores evidence about the spiritual part which home-coming did in fact play in journeys to holy places, but confuses the relationship between life and place pilgrimage. The *Service for Pilgrims* contained in the *Sarum Missal* includes no fewer than five separate references to the home-coming of the prospective pilgrim:

V. The good angel of the Lord accompany thee;

R. And dispose thy way and actions aright, that thou mayest return again to thine own place with joy.

Collect:

O God ... we beseech thee that thou wouldest grant unto these thy servants ...that having prosperously accomplished the course of their appointed journey, they may return unto their own homes; and having been received back in safety, may pay due thanks unto thy name.

Receive this scrip ... that thou mayest be found worthy both to reach in safety the threshold of the saints ...and that when thy journey is finished thou mayest return to us in safety.

¹²¹ Howard (1980) 11.

Receive this staff ... that thou mayest again return to us in joy.

May [God] send his angel Raphael to be thy guardian in thy pilgrimage ... to bring thee back again in safety on thy return to us.¹²²

Lincoln Guild records show that guild members were not only required to support those who went on pilgrimage but also to share in their home-coming:

If any brother or sister wishes to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, every brother and sister shall give him one penny; if to St James's or to Rome, each shall give a halfpenny, unless he likes to give more; and the pilgrim shall be accompanied outside the gates of the city. And when he returns, and his fellows know it, they shall go and meet him, and go with him to the mother church.¹²³

It is also important to bear in mind that (as I have shown earlier) the pilgrimage of life predates the idea of place pilgrimage in Christian thought and practice. The latter grew up as one means of enhancing the life-long journey, functioning as a journey within a journey which, correctly viewed, would inspire them anew to the daily task of walking with God. Though travel was always risky and pilgrims often did make their wills before leaving, place pilgrimage was not in the time of Chaucer inherently a one-way process but rather a round-trip which usually saw the pilgrim return to his or her home community, cleansed, inspired and encouraged to pursue with greater devotion the pilgrimage of life in terms of obedience and faithfulness to their everyday calling. Had it not been so there would not have been such a thriving trade in secondary relics, which symbolised the transference of the power of the saint back

¹²² *Sarum Missal* 167, 168, 169, 173.

¹²³ *English Gilds*, 172.

into the home community,¹²⁴ and in pilgrim badges which signalled the status acquired by the traveller as he or she returned home.¹²⁵ Returning pilgrims also sought to recreate the essence of their experience through building places of worship in their home communities,¹²⁶ including copies of holy places which they had visited. The most frequently copied site was the Anastasis Rotunda of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, which inspired the building of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Cambridge among others. Another twelfth-century Holy Sepulchre copy, the Baptistery in Pisa, was described by the Bishop of Pisa as the 'Gate of Paradise.'¹²⁷ Robert Ousterhout describes these copies as re-creating 'the spiritual presence of the original':

For the faithful the copy had an icon-like value, and it would have been considered a conduit of the Tomb's life-giving power, effecting miracles, cures and aid in salvation. Thus the creation of one pilgrimage could become the object of another.¹²⁸

When considering place-pilgrimage narratives, Howard focuses largely upon those which deal with journeys to the Holy Land and concludes that, with the exception of Felix Fabri (who travelled to the Holy Land in 1480 and 1483), 'most writers barely mention [the return journey] and some do not even do that homecoming did not fit the idea of pilgrimage.'¹²⁹ This he takes as evidence that pilgrims essentially conceived of their journey as one-way. His thesis ignores the fact that many of the

¹²⁴ See Sumption (1975) and Hahn (1990).

¹²⁵ Many such badges were buried with pilgrims.

¹²⁶ Luttrell (1990) includes the text of the application made by an Englishwoman, Isolda Parewastell, to build a chapel to the Virgin on her return from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

¹²⁷ Ousterhout (1990b), 115.

¹²⁸ Ousterhout (1990b), 118.

¹²⁹ Howard (1980), 47, 49.

extant narratives, particularly those which deal with the Holy Land, are essentially guides, which naturally focus on the unknown difficulties of the outward journey, since the return was merely a matter of retracing one's footsteps. A pilgrim itinerary from the 1420s¹³⁰ having outlined the return journey from the Holy Land comments:

And for it is the comyn waie,
From England to Rome, I will not saie:

The concluding lines of his narrative seem to imply a parallel between his safe return to England and the hope of a safe arrival in heaven:

The praie ne to the Lord of myghtes most
That brought this Pilgryme to Engeland cost ...
And when we oute of this word schull wende,
The joye of heven he us sende:
That is my praior, and schal be aie,
We may be saved at Domesdaie:
And so to his blis he us bringe.¹³¹

More local pilgrimages do not seem to have generated such texts. Significantly, Howard himself failed to find any accounts of the Canterbury pilgrimage from which he concludes that 'it must have been too familiar to deserve written accounts and the route too easily followed to require an itinerary.'¹³² There are, however, indications even in texts dealing with the Holy Land, that pilgrimages were seen as fitting into the everyday life of the pilgrim. Felix himself went to learn more of the Scriptures in order to improve his ministry of preaching. The text of William Wey's visit to the

¹³⁰ Probably 1422 or 1423. See *Two Pilgrim Itineraries*.

¹³¹ Hakluytus, 571-2.

¹³² Howard (1980), 16-17.

Holy Land may not cover the return voyage but there is evidence that, before departing, he secured agreement from no less a person than Henry VI that upon his return he would resume his position (and income) as a fellow of Eton College, a fact that indicates that he for one saw this journey as part of his everyday life.¹³³ Howard is so dismissive¹³⁴ of Margery Kempe, whose book antedates Fabri's account by some sixty years, that he fails to note the way in which her pilgrimages are woven into her relationship with her home community. When she returned from Jerusalem, Margery not only went to make a thank offering at Norwich and to share some of the fruits of her visit with a local Vicar, but also had to face accusations of immoral behaviour which speak eloquently of underlying antagonism to the idea of women undertaking pilgrimages at all (I 43). Margery's book also illustrates the need to differentiate, as Howard does not, between the significance attached to local and long-distance pilgrimages. Margery settled her affairs before leaving for the Holy Land (I. 26) but visited many English shrines without any such formalities. Evidence from other sources, such as the *Paston Letters* indicates that local pilgrimages were indeed fitted into normal life on a fairly pragmatic basis:

From the Earl of Oxford: To ... Ser John Paston, knyght

I comaund me to you and hartely thank you for your hawkes and also for your storkes whiche I vndirstond that ye haue sent vnto me ... acertenynge you that I wolde be right glad to se you in these parties. Neuyrtheles I trust in short tyme, doing my pilgrimage to Walsingham, to se you in tho parties.¹³⁵

¹³³ The King's letter reads: 'Wee ... have licensied hym to execute his said peregrinage, and wol that at suche tyme as he shall retourne unto our College that he be accepted there as a Felawe of the same ... and that the yerely pension with other Deutes growing unto hym during his said peregrinage ... be kept to his propre use unto his said Retournynge' Wey, iii-iv.

¹³⁴ Whom he describes as 'quite mad – an incurable hysteric with a large paranoid trend' Howard (1980), 34-5. See Chapter X: 2 on Margery Kempe.

¹³⁵ *Paston Letters*, Part II, 484.

It is this down-to-earth, everyday approach to place pilgrimage which seems to fit most closely with the Canterbury pilgrimage as Chaucer presents it. He even takes pains to set this particular journey within the context of his pilgrims' lives. For the Knight it marks the customary thanksgiving for a safe return from the Crusades and for the Wife of Bath, yet another entertaining interlude in her restless existence. None of the pilgrims gives the impression that they are journeying away from their everyday lives as they travel towards Canterbury. This is a short-term expedition to a local shrine, not a grand metaphor for life. It may, therefore, be possible on the basis of manuscript evidence or literary conjecture to determine the evolution of Chaucer's intentions for the structure of the Canterbury Tales. What we cannot do is say that, in terms of medieval theology or popular practice, the pilgrimage to Canterbury was of its very nature a one-way journey.

C. Modes of Pilgrimage: Opposition or Integration?

It is in the nature of the construct that the Parson concludes the tales of a journey whose destination becomes thereby neither Southwark nor Canterbury, but the Holy City of Jerusalem.¹³⁶

The selection of the last speaker ... leads to a change of guide, which further coincides with a redirection of the pilgrims' goal from earthly Canterbury to heavenly Jerusalem.¹³⁷

No longer can the pilgrimage frame associate itself with the fiction about a particular company bound on a temporally specific journey. The company is now humankind, no longer the pilgrims of the *The General Prologue* ... and

¹³⁶ Baldwin (1955), 84.

¹³⁷ Wenzel (1981), 94.

the goal is not Canterbury but “*thilke parfit glorious pilgrimage / That highte Jerusalem celestial.*”¹³⁸

The above examples illustrate the tendency in Chaucer criticism to assume that a radical shift of direction takes place during the *Parson's Prologue* and that the Canterbury pilgrimage is totally superseded by the newly-introduced goal of the heavenly Jerusalem. Yet all of these comments ignore what the Parson actually says. His offer is

To shewe yow the wey, *in this viage*,
Of *thilke* partfit glorious pilgrimage
That highte Jerusalem celestial.

(*Parson's Prol.* 49-51)

That there is a difference between the two forms of pilgrimage is indicated by the use of *this* and *thilke*;¹³⁹ that they are not necessarily in opposition but are capable of integration¹⁴⁰ is signalled by the Parson's claim that they will be taught the way *in this viage*. Moreover, such a polarisation of destinations is neither necessary to Chaucer's structure nor true to medieval understandings of pilgrimage. As I have already established, there were two main views of pilgrimage available to Chaucer and his contemporaries. The first regarded pilgrimage to holy places as theologically unsound, since God was equally available to all people everywhere; as spiritually

¹³⁸ Lawton (1987), 14.

¹³⁹ Compare *Gen. Prol.* 723-4: 'And after wol I telle of our viage/And al the remenaunt of our pilgrimage.' Is Chaucer himself implying that he has more than one kind of journey in mind?

¹⁴⁰ Patterson's interpretation hints more at the possibility of integration: '[The Parson] gives not so much directions to the heavenly Jerusalem as the prior and more radical knowledge that 'this viage' itself, the specific journey to Canterbury, can be so undertaken that it can itself become a 'parfit

unhelpful, since it was better either to continue in one's daily life of service or prayerful contemplation; and as morally dangerous, since the traveller was exposed to a wider range of temptations and was free of the normal constraints imposed by society. The second saw the different interpretations of pilgrimage as mutually supportive and capable of reconciliation. In this latter view, pilgrimage to holy places could assist spiritual growth through prayer, penance and the contemplation of evidence of God's grace at work. This, I suggest, is the Parson's view of the matter, since he is not only taking part in a Canterbury pilgrimage but mentions with approval the practice of pilgrimage as an expression of true penitence (105). I have already indicated that the role of the Parson's Tale is to offer a spiritually-secure route through life, rather than immediate preparation for death, which is after all the only way of actually entering the heavenly city. He is not counselling a withdrawal from the world but equipping his audience to live in the world in such a way that they will indeed reach heaven rather than be led by sin to hell. He is thus offering the means to utilise place pilgrimage properly, lifting their eyes from the prospect of contemplating the saint in his shrine to a vision of God in heaven. The matter of his tale, which, though it is unlikely to be of Chaucer's invention, is certainly the result of his selection and shaping, first establishes heaven as the pilgrims' long-term goal, then turns to the daily pattern of obedience and repentance which forms the way there, concluding with a final, motivating glimpse of the joys which await the faithful pilgrim. Robert Boenig¹⁴¹ describes the *Parson's Tale* as neither 'mystical' nor 'visionary,' yet the final lines suggest something of the warmth of devotion associated with the contemplative life.

Chaucer presents the Parson himself as a role model for an integrated life of teaching and service, 'riche of hooly thoght and werk', who practises what he preaches and

glorious pilgrymage,' a pilgrimage which does not merely lead to but in fact constitutes – 'is highte' – 'Jerusalem celestial.' Patterson (1978), 379.

¹⁴¹ Boenig (1995), 39.

whose 'bisynesse' is to 'drawen folk to hevene by fairenesse' (*Gen. Prol.* 519-520). Here we have the same kind of commitment to the pilgrimage of life as that exemplified by Piers Plowman. Unlike Langland, however, Chaucer does not reject place pilgrimage out of hand. Instead, he places it in the larger context of earthly life, marred by transient relationships, trials and uncertainties, yet also holding out the prospect of the eternal security of heaven.

3. FROM PROLOGUE TO PARSON'S TALE:

PILGRIMAGE AND THE TALES 'IN BETWEEN'

If pilgrimage itself, as an informing *concept* (rather than simply a mechanism for gathering storytellers together) is persuasive in relation to the beginning and end of the poem, it accounts less persuasively for what passes in between.¹⁴²

Everybody agrees that the *Canterbury Tales* has a coherent beginning and end, but the large undistributed middle remains to challenge the ingenuity of the exegete.¹⁴³

If the role of the *Parson's Tale* is essentially to integrate various understandings of pilgrimage, what then is the place of the tales which precede it? Many answers to this question have been offered and debated.¹⁴⁴ Their function, I suggest, is straightforward yet profound, for they depict the everyday world through which the pilgrim must journey towards the heavenly home with both its attractions and its flaws clearly displayed. The tales and their prologues are lively and witty, full of

¹⁴² Blamires (1987), 5.

¹⁴³ Patterson (1978), 372.

¹⁴⁴ Patterson (1978) summarises a number of views on the relationship between the *Parson's Tale* and the other tales.

humour and colour; yet into them are woven a number of 'pilgrimage cluster' concepts, such as transience, sin, judgement and the precarious nature of human achievement. The blend of fun, honour, bawdiness and betrayal reveals the tensions between human aspirations and the realities of a fallen world, the affirmation of human life shadowed by the theme of mutability, and constant reminders of the transience of human existence and the frailty of human pleasures. It is not necessary to trace detailed links between the Parson's Tale and the other tales to see the connection. The tales, simply by presenting the excitement and the insecurity of being human, demonstrate the need for the kind of eternal *sikernes* which the Parson's Tale, with its emphasis on the *lif perdurable*, offers to those who know that death, unfaithfulness and the unpredictability of Fortune threaten even their greatest triumphs. The strong sense of the transience of earthly pleasures derives from the recurring themes of the closeness of death, both physical and spiritual, the reality of human suffering and the unreliability of human love. There are in fact very few tales through which the dark thread of death does not run, whether they are heroic or comic in tone. In his discussion of the very first tale, Edward Irving comments:

Death certainly plays a major role in the *Knight's Tale*, where an unforgettable and truly central image is the *taas*, the tangled heap of dead bodies that the *pilours* or plunderers paw their way through and from which they rip the nearly dead Palamon and Arcite.¹⁴⁵

It is in fact the contemplation of the reality of death ('ther lyvede never man', he seyde/In al this world, that som tyme he ne deyde') which prompts Egeus to declare

This worlde nys but a thurghfare ful of wo,

¹⁴⁵ Irving (1995), 45. Irving also comments: 'In actuality disorder and violence are everywhere in the Knight's Tale, built into the very nature of things as in *Beowulf*' (48).

And we been pilgrymes, passynge to and fro

(*Knight's Tale*, 2847-8)¹⁴⁶

and to expound upon the transience of this world in a passage which recalls the *ubi sunt* laments which appear in Old English poetry.¹⁴⁷

The grete tounes se we wane and wende

Thanne may ye se that al this thyng hath ende. (3025-6)

Such solemnity sits well with a heroic theme; yet as we turn to the boisterous *Miller's Tale* we find that even in *fabliaux* the idea of death, particularly sudden death, plays an important role in the plot. Not only is the carpenter the more ready to believe in Nicholas' illness because his own mind has been running on the frailty of human life:

This world is now ful *tikel, sikerly*¹⁴⁸

I saugh today a cors yborn to chirche

That now, on Monday last, I saugh hym wirche

(*Miller's Tale*, 3428-30)

¹⁴⁶ Kolve suggests that here Chaucer is presenting a limited, pre-Christian view of life Kolve (1984), 156-7.

¹⁴⁷ This point is made by Irving (1995), 58. See also Westlund (1964), 534. The *ubi sunt* formula also appears in the Parson's Tale: 'Where been thanne the gaye robes, and the softe shetes and the smale shertes?' (197).

¹⁴⁸ An interesting conjunction of ideas which suggests that the only sure thing about this world is its insecurity.

but the ever-present threat of God's judgement¹⁴⁹ lends credibility to the Clerk's deception. As the Reeve introduces his response, he too refers to the fact, expounded in the Fathers,¹⁵⁰ that from the moment of birth, death is coming closer:

For sikerly, whan I was bore, anon
Deeth drough the tappe of lyf and leet it gon,
And ever sithe hath so the the tappe yronne
Til that almoost al empty is the tonne.

(Reeve's Prologue, 3891-4)

Even the comic confusion of the end of the tale rests in part, as Robert Boenig has pointed out,¹⁵¹ on the parodying of a devout death-scene. Death, it seems, is almost everywhere in the *Canterbury Tales*. The *Friar's Tale* concerns a Summoner snatched away without warning to hell, and the *Summoner's Tale* includes the death of a baby. The Clerk in his *Prologue* pauses to muse on the deaths of Petrarch and Lignano:

But Deeth, that wol nat suffre us dwellen heer
But as it were a twynklyng of an ye,
Hem bothe hath slayn, and alle shul we dye

(Clerk's Prol. 34-6)

and omens of death weigh heavily on the mind of the hero of the *Nun's Priest's Tale*. Even the squeamish Prioress relates a tale of bloody murder, while the exuberant

¹⁴⁹ Emmerson and Hertzman (1988), 406n.

¹⁵⁰ For example Augustine: 'For no sooner do we begin to live in this dying body than we begin to move ceaselessly toward death... the whole of our life is nothing but a race towards death.' Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, Bk XIII. Ch 10.

¹⁵¹ Boenig (1995), 48-9.

*Wife of Bath's Prologue*¹⁵² not only records the deaths of five husbands but acknowledges the sad truth that the beauty and vitality with which she has secured her triumphs are waning fast:

But age, allas, that al wole envenyme,
Hath me biraft my beautee and my pith.

(*Wife of Bath's Prologue*, 474-5)

The *Pardoner's Tale* has been described as

a narrative fraught with the mystery of spiritual as well as physical death, with the mystery of man's innate evil and of God's inexorable justice.¹⁵³

There is real suffering in these tales, its poignancy intensified by the fact that it is so often inflicted by those from whom love, protection and loyalty should be expected. Thus in the *Man of Law's Tale*, Constance is subjected to an unwanted marriage by her parents and twice exiled by successive mothers-in-law, while in the *Clerk's Tale* Griselda endures endless cruel tests at the hands of her husband. Love, it seems, offers no more security than life. Infidelity is rife,¹⁵⁴ no relationship is safe, no marriage sacrosanct.¹⁵⁵ Good women are oppressed, bad women betray their husbands; both sexes are portrayed as lecherous and predatory.¹⁵⁶ Even the seemingly idyllic partnership of Dorigen and Averagus is made vulnerable by Dorigen's fear for her husband's safety and the opportunism of Aurelius. Such fears were not without foundation for even if, by chance, your loved one is neither

¹⁵² The *Wife of Bath's Tale* is a story of rape and the threat of capital punishment.

¹⁵³ Ruggiers (1965), 126. See also Emmerson and Hertzman (1988), 420.

¹⁵⁴ For example the *Miller's Tale*, the *Shipman's Tale* and the *Merchant's Tale*.

¹⁵⁵ Despite the Christian teaching about monogamy and fidelity it was an age when family life was often brief and fragile. See Du Boulay (1974), 452.

¹⁵⁶ For example the figures of January and the Wife of Bath

faithless, nor inclined to make unreasonable demands, they may yet be snatched from you by death, as Constance discovered following her reunion with Alla:

But litel while it lasteth, I yow heete,
Joye of this world, for tyme wol nat abyde;
Fro day to nyght it changeth as the tyde...

For Deeth, that taketh of heigh and logh his rente,
When passed was a yeer, evene as I gesse,
Out of this world this kyng Alla he hente.

(*Man of Law's Tale*, 1132-4, 1142-4)

The picture painted by the tales, therefore, simply reflects the realities of medieval life, both positive and negative. Interwoven with the threads of humour, romance and unabashed sexuality are the darker strands of betrayal, greed, illness, violence and judgement. The *Parson's Tale* requires no other setting to give it significance. Nor is there any need to postulate an intricate pattern of influence either from the tales to the Parson's Tale or vice versa. There are, of course, echoes to be detected, since the conversation and interaction of the pilgrims inevitably reveal the characteristics of the Deadly Sins which influence human nature and the Parson presents an analysis of the nature and effect of those same sins. There is, however, no tidy pattern to be observed nor should we expect one.

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4. Conclusion

Many critics feel that with the *Parson's Tale* and the *Retraction*, the *Canterbury Tales* comes not merely to an end but to a 'dead end', with a rejection of life and literature, fun and fiction.¹⁵⁷ Thus Derek Pearsall comments:

¹⁵⁷ See Patterson (1978); Cooper (1983), 207 speaks of the Parson's Tale as 'a blind alley.'

The finality of the Parson's Tale is the finality of a terminal illness: you are going into a hospital where you will die; various things will be done to you; you will never come out. There is no doubt either about the finality of the Retraction. It is the final act of *The Canterbury Tales*, the act of contrition which answers the urgent call for penitence at the end of the Parson's Tale, and it is ostensibly the final act of Chaucer's poetic career, in which, symbolically, he unwrites those of his writings that have to do with sin, that is, with earthly desires or matters. It is not just the closure of a fiction but the denial of fiction and of any non-doctrinal value that might be attached to it, and the exit from the world of fiction-making.¹⁵⁸

Pearsall in fact argues that the ending, as he describes it, was superseded by a later plan which included a return journey to Southwerk and a four-tale per pilgrim structure. This 'new' scheme he sees as involving 'a healthily unspiritual view of pilgrimages' which includes thinking of 'coming back and having prizes and celebration dinners.'¹⁵⁹ As I have indicated earlier, I do not see the *Parson's Tale* as signalling a withdrawal from life, nor do I feel that there would necessarily have been anything unspiritual, either in having in mind the return journey or in celebrating with a feast. If the *Parson's Tale*, as I have suggested, offers a means to integrate the moral pilgrimage of daily life and the seeking of holy places into the longer journey to the heavenly city, then there is no need to see the alternative structures proposed by critics as fundamentally irreconcilable. Whether Chaucer intended his narrative to conclude as the pilgrims neared Canterbury, or whether he intended to bring them back triumphantly to the Tabard Inn before they returned to their homes, does not in fact make any difference from the perspective of medieval

¹⁵⁸ Pearsall (1997), 34.

¹⁵⁹ Pearsall (1997), 36. Derek Brewer, commenting on an earlier version of this view sees it as over-ingenious Brewer (1998), 274-8.

spirituality. The ending of the *Canterbury Tales* does not mark an end to living either for the characters within the fiction or for the fiction's audience. Both have a long journey still ahead but the Parson offers not only guidance through the difficulties but inspiration to keep moving in the right direction. In their study 'The *Canterbury Tales* in Escatological Perspective,' Emmerson and Hertzman comment that

the *Canterbury Tales* does not conclude, as do *The Pearl* and the *Commedia* with a vision of the New Jerusalem or a journey into Paradise¹⁶⁰

yet the Parson does in fact provide a description of the New Jerusalem, which though brief, fulfils the same function as the vision of the city in *Pearl*: to make the recipient want to reach heaven and be willing to change their way of life accordingly. This is not 'passionless piety'¹⁶¹ but a word-picture carefully constructed to move and motivate.

Sympathetic readings of the *Parson's Tale* have been undermined by the apparent rejection of fiction indicated in both the *Parson's Prologue* and the *Retraction*. Critics unwilling to believe that Chaucer could really have intended to jettison his most splendid creations, have in their turn rejected¹⁶² what Chaucer does in fact appear to have written. Yet if the *Parson's Tale* is not, as I have argued, as world-denying as many perceive, then perhaps the *Prologue* and the *Retraction* are not as much of a threat to the idea of fiction as has been feared. The Parson in his *Prologue*

¹⁶⁰ Emmerson and Hertzman (1988), 415.

¹⁶¹ Lawton (1987),

¹⁶² Emmerson and Hertzman (1988), 411, cites Acers (1980) as an example of 'critical refusal to deal both seriously and sympathetically with the *Retraction*.'

rejects fables, that is stories which contain falsehood,¹⁶³ in favour of 'moralitee and vertuous mateere,' a not unreasonable stance for a preacher to take. He encourages his audience to review their lives and work and to ask mercy for all that has fallen short of perfect obedience to God's standards. He also notes that they should recall their failures not for 'delit'(134)¹⁶⁴ but for repentance. Chaucer in the *Retraction* reviews his own work as a writer and apparently feels that some parts of it are more acceptable to God than others. He does not reject all his Canterbury Tales, only those 'that sownen into synne' and it is possible that as a writer possessed of moral awareness, he may have wondered if characters such as the Wife of Bath had not in fact achieved a vitality and stature which would make an audience unduly sympathetic to their misdemeanours. Certainly either Alisoun of Bath or Alisoun of Oxenford makes a far more dynamic figure than the worthy Griselda. The problem of making virtue as exciting as vice is that which Milton faced in *Paradise Lost*. His response, therefore, is in effect a review of his own earthly pilgrimage and in Mark Allen's summary, 'a recognition of the flaws in all earthly activity.'¹⁶⁵ John Wall likewise sees the form of Chaucer's *Retraction* as

both sincere and adequate exactly because Chaucer, by profession a writer, makes a responsible distinction between all his works: some are unarguably edifying but the secular works will always be that same fallible mixture of good and evil which we have seen portrayed in the 'synful folk unstable' (VII [B2] 1877) of the pilgrimage. Chaucer the writer as penitent acknowledges

¹⁶³ *Parson's Prol.* 30-34. The Parson is citing 1 Timothy 1.4; 4:7 and 2 Tim 4:4 in which the apostle is concerned about false teaching, which will lead believers astray. Falsehood is not necessarily the same thing as fiction.

¹⁶⁴ 'Looke he that thilke remembraunce ne be to hym no delit by no way but greet shame and sorwe for his gilt' *Parson's Tale*, 134. This contrasts with the Wife of Bath's remembering which is marked more by self-congratulation than by signs of remorse.

¹⁶⁵ Allen (1987), 96.

firmly that his works are the best he was capable of and yet *must* be flawed because of 'worldly vanitees.' In that sense only does he disown his works.¹⁶⁶

This perspective on the ending of the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Retraction* is, I believe, consistent with the spiritual understanding which undergirds the whole of the work. Chaucer's approach to both Christianity and creativity tends towards inclusivity rather than exclusivity, yet it is clear that he is intensely aware of tensions in both these spheres. In so far as any medieval writer was able to do, he achieves a degree of harmonisation between the different understandings of pilgrimage current at the time, while remaining aware that neither the world of fiction nor the world of human endeavour can in the end match the world that is yet to come.

¹⁶⁶ Wall (1986), 191.

CHAPTER X

INNER JOURNEYS

There is no need to run to Rome or Jerusalem to look
for [Jesus] there, but turn your thought into your own
soul where he is hidden.

(*Scale*, I, 49)¹

Fro spot my spyryt þer sprang in space;
My body on balke þer bod. In sweuen
My goste is gon in Godez grace.

(*Pearl*, 61-3)²

Introduction

In examining the meanings of pilgrimage in Middle English texts, I have thus far concentrated in the main on the relationship between moral pilgrimage and place pilgrimage, and the outworking of this relationship in the writings of Langland and Chaucer. There is, however, a third strand of the pilgrimage motif clearly discernible in medieval literature: the paradox of inner journeying or 'interior' pilgrimage, in which progress can only be made by staying still. This particular aspect of pilgrimage plays a significant role within monasticism, anchoritism, mysticism and meditation and is of considerable importance in the consideration of texts such as the *Ancrene*

¹ Since the projected edition of the *Scale* by the Early English Texts Society is not yet complete, I have used the modern English rendering of Cambridge University Library MS. Add. 6686 and MS. Harley 6579, the manuscripts chosen for the forthcoming editions of Book I and 2 Hilton (1991).

² *Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*.

Wisse, þe Pilgrimage of þe Lyfe of þe Manhode,³ *the Scale of Perfection*, *Pearl* and the *Book of Margery Kempe*.

The forms taken by inner journeys were many, including prayer, dreams, visions and the sanctified use of the imagination. Those who advocated such journeying within the soul commonly insisted that physical stability, together with a corresponding degree of detachment from the world around, was a pre-requisite for spiritual growth. The theological basis for such an approach was of long standing and, for its proponents at least, its logic was unassailable. As has been demonstrated in the earlier chapters of this thesis, the primary justification of Christian place pilgrimage was the desire to encounter the person whose presence made the place holy. Yet New Testament and patristic writers repeatedly asserted the omnipresence and universal accessibility of God through the Holy Spirit. If, as must ultimately be the case for all Christians, God was the primary person sought, a different kind of journey of encounter was surely indicated. Monks, anchorites mystics and lay people,⁴ therefore, were encouraged to withdraw from the world around them in order to travel inwardly. They did so in varying degrees and using different strategies and the extant accounts of their responses reveal the extraordinary flexibility with which different writers employed the linked motifs of exile, pilgrimage and longing for the heavenly Jerusalem.

It is evident, therefore, that within medieval spirituality, interior pilgrimage and the popular practice of place pilgrimage stand at opposite ends of the pilgrimage spectrum, with the daily life of obedient service advocated by Langland in between. It was of course quite possible to weave together adjacent strands of the pilgrimage motif. Just as some people sought to combine place pilgrimage and moral obedience, so others attempted to fuse the Active Life of moral pilgrimage with the inner journeying of the

³ The anonymous fifteenth-century Middle English prose translation of de Deguileville's *Le Pèlerinage de la vie humaine*.

⁴ See Hilton's *Mixed Life*.

Contemplative Life.⁵ Few, however, sought to reconcile all three. The most notable exception in the context of medieval English literature was the irrepressibly spiritually-ambitious Margery Kempe, whose achievements in this area will be considered in due course.

1. *PEREGRINATIO IN STABILITATE*: THE CLOISTER AND THE CELL

From its very beginnings in the deserts of Egypt and Judea,⁶ the monastic life had been regarded as a form of exile,⁷ a particular expression of the pilgrimage of life. Men and women left their homes, families and communities and entered upon a life of deprivation in this world in order to become citizens of the world to come. This movement was characterised by a rejection of the values of human society and a willingness to venture (quite literally in the early days) into the desert. Like Abraham⁸ they responded to the call to leave their homeland; like Moses and the people of Israel⁹ they travelled through the wilderness to the Promised Land; like Jesus¹⁰ they faced temptation and spiritual struggles in the desert. The fame of the Desert Fathers spread into Western Europe inspiring not only the Celtic *peregrini* who sought their own 'deserts in the ocean'¹¹ but the coenobitic orders developed by St Benedict and others.¹²

⁵ In the *Fire of Love* Ch 21, Rolle states that this is impossible but Hilton encourages it Hilton (1986).

⁶ See Chapter II: 2.

⁷ 'Depuis ses origines, le monachisme avait été considéré par certains de ses représentants, et des plus authentiques, comme une forme d'exil.' Leclercq (1964), 35.

⁸ See Chapter I: 1.D.

⁹ See Chapter I: 1.E.

¹⁰ Luke 4.

¹¹ Adomnan, *Life of Columba*, I.6. See Ch. VI.

¹² See Lawrence (1984).

An essential feature of this highly-specialised pilgrim life was stability, stability of purpose, matched increasingly by stability of location. The *peregrini* who travelled extensively across Europe during the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries, were committed to the paradoxical principle which Jean Leclercq has described as *stabilitas in peregrinatione*.¹³ As the first millennium drew to its close, the pendulum was shifting towards the literal stability exemplified in the Benedictine Rule: monasticism became instead a life of *peregrinatio in stabilitate*:

L'institution cénobitique apparaissait comme permettant à tous, et même aux plus ardents, à ceux qui jadis fussent partis en de lointain déserts, une synthèse supérieure de tous les éléments inclus dans la traditionnelle pérégrination: le monastère pouvait être pour tous un désert où l'on reste stable avec un esprit d'exilé. On avait jadis pratiqué une *stabilitas in peregrinatione*; on découvrait maintenant une *peregrinatio in stabilitate*.¹⁴

From the twelfth century onwards came a growth in the number of anchorites, who in many respects inherited the mantles of both the Desert Fathers¹⁵ and the Celtic *peregrini*. Their interpretation of stability took the most extreme form possible as they

¹³ Leclercq (1961), 51. Constable (1976), 131, points out that 'even the highly individualistic Irish monks were expected to seek the permission of their superiors before setting out as *peregrini*. There are many stories in the *Lives* of the Irish saints about would-be pilgrims who were dissuaded from leaving by holy men or angelic visitations and about devils who sought to persuade monks to leave their monasteries.'

¹⁴ Leclercq (1961), 51.

¹⁵ Warren (1985), 8-9, comments: 'The cell itself, that place from which the anchorite could not venture, was invested with many overlapping meanings. It was a version of the desert home of the first Christian anchorites, the arena of spiritual warfare, a place for contemplation ... The anchorite's cell would be both the site of the devil's attack as well as the mountain of contemplation. It was a new version of the desert cave.'

were literally walled into a cell¹⁶ to explore their inner journey with God, their bodies stationary that their spirits might roam free from worldly contamination or distractions. Their motivation was a refined version of that which drove place pilgrims; here, at least in theory,¹⁷ there was no seeking of material benefits but simply a desire for God and a longing to reach the heavenly Jerusalem.

A. Monasticism as pilgrimage

The concept of monasticism as a specialised form of the pilgrimage of life generates both positive and negative outcomes in Middle English texts. In *De Pilgrimage of þe Lyfe of þe Manhode*,¹⁸ as in the French text from which it is derived, the would-be pilgrim twice comes to grief as he seeks to journey towards the heavenly Jerusalem, first in his encounter with the Seven Deadly Sins and then as he attempts to cross the sea of the world. It is at this point of need that the Ship 'cleped Religioun' is presented as a costly, yet sure and swift way for the pilgrim to reach the heavenly Jerusalem:¹⁹

þe wey is lasse and michel shortere to go bi to þe citee þer þou woldest go to.

(*De Pilgrimage of þe Lyfe of þe Manhode*, 6689)

If into Jerusalem hastliche þou wolt go, þou mustest entere hider in and logge in oon of þes castelles, eiper of Cluigni [Cluny] or of Cistiaus [Citeaux] or in anooper ... Alle ben defensable and stronge for to keepe þerinne boþe body

¹⁶ See Warren (1985), Ch. 4.

¹⁷ It is possible to argue that for some at least the monastic life represented a certain security in terms of provision of home and food.

¹⁸ Written, according to the text: 'for good pilgryme þat in þis world swich wey wole holde, þat he go to good hauene and þat he haue of heuene þe joye (7296-7).' See de Deguileville, *De Pilgrimage of þe Lyfe of þe Manhode*; Tuve (1966), Ch. 3, Henry (1986a), Henry (1986b).

¹⁹ Henry (1986b), 232, points out that this is one of the short cuts mentioned at the outset of Book I.

and soule.

(6749-6754)

Though the pilgrim is warned that Penitence will feature large in life on board ship, he is still glad to embrace the offer. His attempt to journey through the world has hardly been a resounding success:²⁰

‘Lady,’ quod I, ‘short wey is good for a recreaunt [defeated] pilgrime, and recreaunt I am and trauailed.’

(6695-6)

His answer illustrates the common medieval perception that the pilgrim life in the everyday world was spiritually more hazardous than life in the cloister, which offered a measure of protection from temptation.²¹ The point is reiterated by Grace Dieu:

It is bettere þan bi swymmynge: þei ben in perile, þilke þat passen bi swymmynge.

(6756-7)

The ship metaphor echoes the motif of *peregrinatio in stabilitate*. Having entered the vessel, the pilgrim in one sense remains stationary as he is carried across the sea. In another sense, however, he is made to progress in spiritual understanding and discipline, experiencing the Gryselichhede of Helle [Horror of the pains of Hell], submitting to Obedience and realising that the way to the heavenly city lies through

²⁰ Henry (1986b), 229, summarises the pilgrim’s progress thus far: ‘He has no steady road: once out of the church, he finds his path only to lose it at once, to be confronted without warning, by the Sea of the World, bumble about, and apparently succeed in landing only on the shore he originally left (6649).’

²¹ See Dyas (1997a), 105-8.

Wilful Pouerte, the voluntary renunciation of all that ties human beings to the present world:

[Wilful Pouerte] singeth ... þat she hap nothing aboute hire þat shal withhold
hire to passe to þe citee þere she wolde go to.

(6876, 6883-4)

In many monastic texts commitment to physical stability is equated with obedience. In theological terms the disobedience and consequent exile of Adam and Eve is thus reversed as individuals accept voluntary exile, either within their own country or abroad, as a part of their willingness to submit to God. *The Rule of the Master* and the *Rule of St Benedict* both²² categorise monks according to their commitment to these twin ideals. There are two types of good monks: Coenobites and anchorites, both committed to obedience and stability; and two types of bad monks: the worldly and the wanderers. In reality, of course, the principle of *stabilitas* was frequently honoured more in the breach than in the observance and there is documentary evidence of many attempts, by both Councils of the Church and individual monastic leaders, to correct the tendency of religious to wander outside their cloisters.²³ Of particular concern was the question of place pilgrimage. While it was accepted that some monks and nuns occasionally needed to travel, either to conduct essential business or when directed to move from one community to another, influential figures such as Anselm and Bernard of Clairvaux consistently opposed the idea that those vowed to a life of monastic pilgrimage should be permitted to leave the cloister to engage in pilgrimage to holy places. Leaving aside such pragmatic considerations as the increased risk of exposure to temptation, arguments tend to focus on the relationship between the heavenly and the earthly Jerusalem, which functioned as the archetype of place pilgrimage. Anselm,

²² The relationship between these texts is still a matter of scholarly discussion but it is significant that condemnation of Gyrovagues is one of the sections common to both.

²³ See Constable (1976).

for example (writing c.1086), urged a young man who was planning to visit the earthly Jerusalem 'to put aside the Jerusalem which is now the vision not of peace but of tribulation and begin the way to the heavenly Jerusalem which is the vision of peace.'²⁴ In similar vein, Geoffrey of Vendôme urged: 'we should not stray from the journey of our profession in order to make a journey to Jerusalem.'²⁵ Bernard of Clairvaux goes even further by asserting that the cloister itself prefigures the heavenly Jerusalem.²⁶ Writing of a cleric who has become a monk instead of travelling to the earthly Jerusalem, he states:

Philippus vester, volens proficisci Ierosolymam, compendium viae invenit, et cito pervenit quo volebat ...Stantes sunt iam pedes eius in atriis Ierusalem ... Ingressus est sanctam civitatem ... Et si vultis scire, Claravallis est. Ipsa est Ierusalem, ei quae in caelis est.²⁷

Your Philip, wishing to set out to Jerusalem, found a short cut and quickly arrived where he wished to go His feet are already standing in the courts of Jerusalem ...He has entered the holy city ... And if you wish to know, this is Clairvaux. She herself is Jerusalem, the one which is in heaven.

Elsewhere he reiterates his understanding of the monastic life as 'a *peregrinatio* in which the monk travelled with his heart while remaining stable with his body'.²⁸ 'It is the

²⁴ Anselm, Letter 117 in *Opera Omnia*, ed. F.S.Schmitt. Edinburgh, 1946-61. Cited Constable (1976), 133. See Chapter III: 5 for the arguments put forward by Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth century.

²⁵ *PL*, 157, 162BC. Cited Constable (1976), 134.

²⁶ Leclercq, (1982), 68-9: St Bernard defines the monk as a dweller in Jerusalem: *monachus et Ierosolymita*. Not that he must be bodily in the city where Jesus died ... For the monk this might be anywhere. It is particularly in a place where, far from the world and from sin, one draws close to God ... The monastery is then *a Jerusalem in anticipation* [my italics].'

²⁷ Letter 64 in Bernard of Clairvaux, *Letters*.

²⁸ Constable (1976), 136 n41. See also Leclercq (1964), 82-4.

vocation of a monk to seek not the earthly but the heavenly Jerusalem, and he will do this not by setting out on his feet but by progressing in his dispositions.²⁹

Such exhortations put into context the less flattering profiles of monasticism presented by Langland and Chaucer. It is noteworthy that both use the image (possibly first employed by Athanasius in his *Life of St Anthony*),³⁰ of the monk out of the cloister being like a fish out of water, suggesting that they are deliberately evoking the central importance of *stabilitas* within the monastic calling. Langland's criticism is overt,³¹ Chaucer's is veiled but equally damning.³² Both these monks are hunters,³³ an activity which involves illicit roaming across the countryside; Chaucer's Monk is engaged, as is the Prioress, on a place pilgrimage which, though ostensibly a pious act, in fact contravenes his very identity as a religious. Recognition of such overt disobedience in the realm of place pilgrimage prompts a re-examination of the quality of their life pilgrimage in terms of obedience and spirituality, areas in which both also clearly fall short. Monastic attitudes to place pilgrimage, therefore, can be seen to function in the writings of Chaucer and Langland as highly significant indicators in exposure of the failings of the ecclesiastical establishment. Thus the two most senior Church figures within the *Canterbury Tales* stand exposed, just like the unashamedly-worldly Wife of Bath, to the charge of 'wandrynge by the wey'.

B. Enclosure as journey

The anchoritic life is the ultimate expression of voluntary exile coupled with physical *stabilitas*. In the early days of the monastic movement the terms anchorite and hermit

²⁹ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Letters* 431.

³⁰ Written c. 360.

³¹ *Piers Plowman*, Passus X. 295-315.

³² *Canterbury Tales*, *Gen. Prol.* 165-297.

³³ Chaucer's use of the term *outridere* (*Gen. Prol.* 166) also serves to underline the fact that the Monk all too frequently is to be found outside rather than inside his monastery.

were virtually interchangeable since the activity (*anachorein*, to withdraw) was almost always linked to one particular location, the *eremos* or desert.³⁴ In medieval English spirituality however, anchorite came to mean one whose pilgrimage through life was bounded by physical enclosure. Until the end of the twelfth century anchorites had most frequently been attached to monasteries but from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century they often settled in towns, close to churches, hospitals or town gates.³⁵ The exile which they experienced, the wilderness to which they retreated, were not physical but spiritual. Though the actual distance traversed may have been small, their enclosure signalled a decisive movement as they renounced attachment to the world in favour of an existence 'lived out in the presence of God alone.'³⁶

Throughout anchoritic writings there is a strong sense of leaving the familiar and the comfortable in order to venture into the wilderness with God, of being called away from the world in which humankind is presently exiled, in order to seek the true homeland. Richard Rolle (b.c.1300), writing to a nun recently enclosed as an anchoress, promises:

And if þou have sorowe for þi synnes, and for þou ert swa lang in exile owte of þi contre, and forsakes þer solace of þis lyfe, þou sal have for þi sorow þe joy of heven.³⁷

In a passage borrowed from Bernard of Clairvaux, the author of *Hali Meïðhad* describes this fallen world as a *lond of unlicnesse*,³⁸ that is a land wholly unlike

³⁴ See Warren (1985), 8.

³⁵ See Leclercq (1987), 69-70.

³⁶ Leclercq (1987), 73.

³⁷ Rolle, *Form of Living*, x. 154-7 in *English Writings*.

³⁸ 'What can be a clearer sign of her heavenly origin than that she retains a natural likeness to it in the land of unlikeness, than that as an exile on earth she enjoys the glory of the celibate life, than that she

heaven, in which the virgin, though an exile on earth, may yet live as if already a citizen of heaven:

ant i þis worlt þet is icleopet 'lond of unlicnesse' edhalt hire burde in [licnesse]
of heouenlich cunde, þah ha beo utlahe þrof ant i licome of lam; ant in bestes
bodi neh liueð heouene engel.

(*Hali Meidhad*, 6/15-18)

The theme of anticipation of the life of heaven³⁹ is given concrete form in a passage which envisages virgins as already inhabiting Sion, that is the heavenly Jerusalem:⁴⁰

meiden stont þurh heh lif i þe tur of Ierusalem. ... of þet Syon ha bihalt al þe
worlt under hire; ant þurh englene liflade ant heouenlich þet ha lead, þah ha
licomliche wunie upon eorðe, [ha stiheð gasteliche], ant is as i Syon, þe hehe
tur of heouene.

(*Hali Meidhad*, 2/9-13)

This use of the idea of Sion has a curious duality. The maiden looks down from her tower on those who, by abandoning purity, have distanced themselves from God. Her own commitment to virginity (and possibly to enclosure as well)⁴¹ has made her an exile from the world. At the same time, however, the tower is presented as the safe place from which the less pure have exiled themselves. Nicholas Watson points out the

lives like an angel in the celibate body.' Bernard of Clairvaux, *Works*, Vol 3, 79. This theme, which is also used by William of St Thierry can be traced back to Plotinus. See *Hali Meidhad* Introduction and note to 6/15-16.

³⁹ See [*Hali Meidhad*, 1982 #90], Introduction, xxviii-xxx and section 2B below.

⁴⁰ Compare *Ancrene Wisse* III 90/6: 'ȝe beoð in ierusalem.'

⁴¹ Bella Millet suggests that the text may be addressed to anchoresses or nuns. See *Hali Meidhad*, xxii-xxiii.

paradox:

Since [*Hali Meidhad*] presents virginity as a tower or fortress which the worldly are so foolish as to leave, the anchorage comes implicitly to represent that tower and is thus no longer a place for those who have forsaken the world but on the contrary a place that the world has forsaken. This is a static image ... instead of telling the reader to opt out, it adjures her not to opt in.⁴²

In anchoritic texts images of exile frequently double as images of constraint. Not only do anchorites experience literal imprisonment within a confined space but it is also noticeable that those who write for their guidance and encouragement constantly employ metaphors of confinement. As Watson also notes: '*Ancrene Wisse* is dominated by images of enclosure or fixity – wombs, bodies, crucifixions, walls, castles.'⁴³ Yet the thrust of these images is not negative but positive; the chamber where the anchoress is confined, which must constantly be guarded from external assault, is also the place where God will come to her and she will experience a foretaste of heaven.⁴⁴

The thirteenth century *Ancrene Wisse* repeatedly employs pilgrimage imagery, though the precise point of the metaphor changes according to the context. In the section on Temptation, the author weaves together the concept of anchorites as the spiritual descendants of the Desert Fathers and the Exodus motif of the people of Israel travelling towards the Promised Land. As in the monastic writings examined earlier in this chapter, the attention of these stationary pilgrims is repeatedly directed towards reaching the heavenly Jerusalem:

⁴² Watson (1987), 142

⁴³ Watson (1987), 138

⁴⁴ *Ancrene Wisse* (ed. Tolkien), 21/18-23.

Wildernesse is anlich lif of ancre wununge ... Bi þis wildernesse wende ure
 lauerdes folc as exode teleð toward te eadi lond of ierusalem ... Ant 3e mine
 leoue sustren wendeð bi þe ilke wei toward te hehe ierusalem... gað þah ful
 warliche. for i þis wildernesse beoð uuele beastes moni. Liun of prude. Neddre
 of attri onde. Vnicorne of wreaððe. Beore of dead slawðe. Vox of 3isceunge.
 Suhe of 3iuernesse. Scorpiun wið þe teil of stinginde leccherie.

(*Ancrene Wisse*, 101/10-11, 16-24)

Pus mine leoue sustren i þe wildernesse þer 3e gað in wið godes folc toward
 ierusalemes lond. (108/19-20)

It is interesting to note that the author explicitly links resistance to the Seven Deadly Sins with the idea of the pilgrimage through life.⁴⁵ The image is given additional force through the association of the desert with demons and monsters who oppose God's servants.⁴⁶ The theme of pilgrimage is also woven into the sections on Confession and Penance. The power of confession to redeem the sinful soul is likened to the entry of the people of Israel into the Promised Land: 'Schrift reaueð þe feond his lond. 'þ is þe sun fule mon. & al todriueð chanaan [Canaan] þe feondes ferd of helle' (*Ancrene Wisse* V. 155/2-4). In introducing the section on Penance, the author refers his audience to St Peter's exhortation to those engaged upon the pilgrimage of life: 'Ich hal si ow he seið as elpeodie & pilegrimes. 'þ 3e wiðhalden ow from fleschliche lustes þe weorrið a3ein þe sawle' (VI. 178/6-8) and compares the motivation and rewards of those who travel to holy places on earth and those whose goal is heaven:

þis beoð hali men þe þah ha beon i þe world, ha beoð þrin as pilegrimes. &
 gað wið god liflade toward te riche of heouene. & seggeð wið þe apostle. Non
 habemus hic manentem ciuitatem, set futurum inquirimus ... ah habbeð hare

⁴⁵ Including a description of the appropriate *remedia*. Compare the *Parson's Tale* (Chapter IX: 2A).

heorte eauer toward heouene. & ahen wel to habben. for oðer pilegrimes gað
muche swinc to sechen ane sontes banes as sein Iames oðer sein giles. Ah þeo
pilegrimes þe gað toward heouene. ha gað to beon isontet. & to finden godd
seolf & alle his hali halhen.

(*Ancrene Wisse*, VI. 178/13-17, 20-25)

Here however, the pilgrim model, though expressive of detachment from the world, is insufficient to convey the fullness of the anchoritic calling. The author of the *Ancrene Wisse*, here as elsewhere, is following St Bernard,⁴⁷ who suggests that there are in fact three stages of detachment from the world: pilgrimage, death and crucifixion. Pilgrims, though dedicated to their task, are still capable of falling prey to distractions and making but slow progress with their journey; the life of the anchorite requires that its proponents be not only detached from the world but dead to its call and even capable of rejoicing in the experience of crucifixion. Such experiences of joy in the anchoritic life stem from experiencing the presence of God, and thus anticipating the glories of heaven. The reason the anchorites are wooed away from the world is to meet with God. The ‘desert’ of the anchorhold is thus seen to function in the same positive sense as the wilderness in which God wooed the people of Israel:⁴⁸

Broht tu haues me fra þe world to bur of þi burðe. steked me i chambre ...A

⁴⁶ See Chapter I: 1.E.

⁴⁷ See *Ancrene Wisse* (ed. Shepherd), Appendix, for a translation of the text of Bernard’s *Seventh Sermon in Lent* (PL 183. 183-6).

⁴⁸ ‘I will allure her and will lead her into the wilderness: and I will speak to her heart’ (Hosca 2:14-15). See Chapter I. 1.E. ‘If the anchoress repudiates the world, physical comfort and the pleasure of sexual intimacy, and engages in a heroic and anxious struggle against her own sinful nature and the promptings of the devil, she does so not only for the hope of a high heavenly reward ... but for a union with Christ, her beloved, which begins here in this life.’ [*Anchoritic Spirituality*, 1991 #18], Intro. 24. Compare Hilton: ‘Your state requires you to be contemplative – for that is the purpose and intention of your enclosure’ Hilton, *Scale*, 1.3.

swete iesu mi liues luue wið blod þu haues me boht.. & fram þe world þu
haues me broht.

(*Wohunge of Ure Lauerd*, 572-5, 587-90)

Yet in these early writings, such as *Ancrene Wisse* and the Katherine Group texts, the experience of inner encounter with God still remains on the whole somewhat embryonic.⁴⁹ For a fuller development of the meaning of 'interior' pilgrimage we must turn to the mystics of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

2. MYSTICISM: SEEKING THE INTERIOR JERUSALEM

There is no need to run to Rome or Jerusalem to look for [Jesus] there, but turn your thought into your own soul where he is hidden.

(*Scale of Perfection*, I.49)

Than owre lorde opennede my gastly eyenn and schewyd me my saule in myddys
of my herte. I sawe my saule swa large as it ware a kyngdom ... my though it was
a wirschipfulle cite. In myddys of this cite sittesoure lorde Jhesu.

(*A Book of Showings to the anchoress Julian of Norwich*, Short Text, 268)

It is generally agreed that the writings of the Middle English mystics represent a further stage along the road which the anchorites and spiritual writers of the twelfth⁵⁰ and thirteenth centuries had already begun to explore.⁵¹ In some respects, and this is

⁴⁹See Dinzelbacher (1987) and Watson (1987) of the differences between the experiences described in anchoritic texts of the thirteenth century and those of the mystics of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

⁵⁰ Dinzelbacher (1987), 120-5, notes aspects of mystical experience emerging in twelfth-century writers such as Christina of Markyate, Ailred and Godric, which include a 'turning of the individual to its own interior, the 'loving relation to Jesus', and 'emotional reaction ... at contact with the divine.'

⁵¹ There has been much discussion about the differences in content and spiritual expectation of earlier anchoritic texts and later mystical writings. There are also differences of opinion about which writers are

particularly evident in the writings of the Cloud-author (well-known for his anxiety lest unsuitable persons should gain access to his teachings),⁵² they become more exclusive. In other ways they seem to reflect something of the growing desire of the laity to be able to experience God more directly.⁵³ To read the work of Rolle, Hilton, the *Cloud*-author, Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, is to become aware of the tremendous range of personalities and mystical approaches which existed in this period – and of the variety of ways in which the pilgrimage motif is employed. Rolle encourages those who wish to draw close to God to meditate upon the Passion of Christ, visiting through the imagination the events and places which feature in the biblical narrative. This type of meditation, also encouraged by the Pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditations on the Life of Christ* is itself a kind of *peregrinatio in stabilitate*, a place pilgrimage of the mind, which is designed to evoke the emotion, compunction and desire to imitate Christ which should also accompany a literal visit to the Holy Land. It is this route which is taken by Julian of Norwich as her expressed desire ‘to haue bene that tyme with Mary Mawdeleyne and with others ... that I myght haue sene bodylye the passion of our Lord’ is fulfilled through visions of the Crucified Christ rather than through travelling to the site of the Crucifixion. For Rolle and Julian such meditations on God’s revelation form a vital part of the spiritual route to be taken; for the *Cloud*-author, on the other hand, true spiritual journeying is described in terms of the *via negativa*, a process of *moving away* from all that is known in order to encounter the one who is beyond human thought. Walter Hilton offers a middle way, quick to warn of the dangers of spiritual excess, yet writing with a kind of controlled

entitled to be called mystics. Examination of the pilgrimage concept within these various texts offers, I suggest, an opportunity to trace the extent to which this concept provides a common theme, together with insights into the different ways in which this motif could be employed.

⁵² *Cloud of Unknowing*, 2/19.

⁵³ Watson (1987), 134-7 observes that late medieval English spirituality is ‘a spirituality of ascent or progress,’ ‘almost exclusively a spirituality of the interior life’ and yet is ‘in another sense relatively unspecialised, making little distinction between the solitary, the monastic and the secular life.’

passion which is extraordinarily powerful, about the possibility of encountering God within the inner reaches of the soul. Passion also characterises the *Book of Margery Kempe*, though control is not such an obvious feature of Margery's response to God. Many have dismissed or marginalised Margery's *Book*; yet there are core elements of her approach to life which have more in common with other, more structured, mystical writers, than might be supposed. Placing the works of such a disparate group of writers within the framework of the pilgrimage motif provides valuable insights into their common heritage, bringing to the fore three elements which are both deeply-rooted in biblical and patristic tradition and highly characteristic of the later middle ages: interiorisation, anticipation and the prioritisation of person over place.⁵⁴

A. The interior Jerusalem

In exploring the relationship between place pilgrimage and the inner spiritual journeys experienced by writers such as Rolle, Hilton and the Cloud-author, Victor and Edith Turner observe: 'Pilgrimage may be thought of as extroverted mysticism, just as mysticism is introverted pilgrimage. The pilgrim physically travels a mystical way; the mystic sets forth on an interior spiritual pilgrimage.'⁵⁵ An insistence on the interior nature of spiritual journeying is indeed intrinsic to medieval mystical writings.⁵⁶ In his influential treatise, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, Bonaventure (c.1217-74) describes the stages of 'interior progress' (*gradus interiores*)⁵⁷ by which the individual may arrive

⁵⁴ All of which can be observed in Pearl. See Section 3.

⁵⁵ Turner and Turner (1978), 33-34.

⁵⁶ Dinzelbacher (1987), 120, speaks of the 'turning of the individual to its own interior.' Jeffrey comments: 'The goal of the mystics, briefly put, is to be so carried out of the physical world in the *ecstasis* of contemplation that the soul enters into an inner and utter communion with God, an "inexpressible foretaste of eternal sweetness," as Rolle says. The experience is profoundly emotional and interior.' *The Law of Love*, 16.

⁵⁷ Bonaventure: *Itinéraire*, I.1

at the 'interior Jerusalem' (*in interiori Hierosolyma*).⁵⁸ The treatise draws heavily upon Biblical images of exile and pilgrimage, exodus and promised homeland.⁵⁹

We shall be true Hebrews passing over from Egypt to the land promised to their fathers (Exodus 13:3ff); we shall also be Christians passing over with Christ *from this world to the father* (John 13:1). (I. 9)

By the staff of the cross he passes over the Red Sea, going from Egypt into the desert, where he will taste the *hidden manna*; and with Christ he rests in the tomb as if dead to the outer world but experiencing, as far as is possible in this wayfarer's state, what was said on the cross to the thief who adhered to Christ; *Today you shall be with me in paradise.*' (VII. 2)

The soul, by entering into itself, enters the heavenly Jerusalem, where beholding the choirs of angels, it sees in them God.' (IV. 4)

This inward movement described by Bonaventure, founded upon prayer, holiness of life and meditation,⁶⁰ lies at the heart of the experiences outlined by Richard Rolle⁶¹

⁵⁸ Bonaventure: *Itinéraire*, VII.1

⁵⁹ 'The Latin term *itinerarium*, which could be rendered by the English "itinerary," in Bonaventure's day meant what pertains to a journey in general, a plan for a journey or a description of a journey; in ecclesiastical terminology it also meant a prayer for a safe journey or a pilgrimage to, or a description of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. In his title Bonaventure seems to include all of these meanings symbolically, since they are all contained in some way in the piece itself.' Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey*, Intro. 21.

⁶⁰ We must first pray, then live holy lives and thirdly concentrate our attention upon the reflections of truth. By concentrating there we must ascend step by step until we reach the height of the mountain *where the God of gods is seen in Sion*. Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey*, I.8.

⁶¹ '[Rolle] throughout his works associates the solitary life with the interior life of the spirit; in his model the hermit's conversion from the world is a turning from flesh to spirit, and from outer to inner.' Watson

and Walter Hilton. Both, like Bonaventure, see the mystical life as a steady ascent but, while Rolle believes that only those committed to the solitary life are able to enjoy such communion with God,⁶² Hilton, writing nearly half a century later, is more flexible in his approach. His *Mixed Life* offers advice to a layman on combining elements of the Active and Contemplative lives and in the second book of the *Scale of Perfection* he also seems to open up the way of contemplation to a wider audience.⁶³ This apparent liberality also marks a shift towards greater interiorisation, since Hilton seems to be less concerned with physical detachment from the world than with an all-absorbing spiritual focus upon the desired goal. He deals in considerable depth with the inherent sinfulness of the human heart, pointing out in Book I that to be enclosed is not in itself to be free from sin. His thorough-going exposition of sin is matched with a persuasive account of the efficacy of penance and a powerful exposition of interior pilgrimage⁶⁴ as a inverted image of the pilgrimage to the earthly Jerusalem:⁶⁵

There is one way ... anyone who takes and keeps to it shall come to the city of

(1989), 136.

⁶² 'The harmony between Rolle's sense of himself and of other hermits as specialists of the inner life and his evangelistic desire to share his knowledge breaks down in the insistence that the spiritual life at its highest is practised only by hermits.' Watson (1989), 142.

⁶³ John Clark in his introduction to the *Scale* notes a 'shift of emphasis between the two books; *Scale* I envisages the contemplative life as the preserve, in principle, of those vowed to the contemplative religious state, while *Scale* 2 sees 'contemplation' or (as it is there called) "reforming in feeling," as something to which every Christian should aspire, whatever his or her state in life' Hilton (1991), 19-20. This shift in emphasis opens the way for someone like Margery Kempe to explore new ways of integrating mystical experience into life in the wider world.

⁶⁴ This conjunction of themes mirrors the three-cornered relationship between the Seven Deadly Sins, Penance and the pilgrimage of life *topos* observed earlier in *Piers Plowman* and the *Canterbury Tales* (see Chapters VIII and IX above).

⁶⁵ Hussey (1989), 121, when speaking of compilations which include extracts from the mystics, comments that 'the pilgrimage to Jerusalem from *Scale* II became something of a fifteenth-century classic.'

Jerusalem, and never lose his life or be slain or die of want. He would often be robbed and badly beaten and suffer great distress on his journey, but his life would be safe...

Whatever you hear, see or feel that would hinder you on your way, do not willingly stay with it ... but always go forth on your way and think that you want to be in Jerusalem. ... If men want to delay you with stories and feed you with lies, trying to draw you to pleasures and make you leave your pilgrimage, turn a deaf ear and do not reply, saying only that you want to be in Jerusalem. The beginning of the highway along which you shall go is reforming in faith ... you are on the right road if you are now reformed by the sacrament of penance...

Just as a true pilgrim going to Jerusalem leaves behind him house and land, wife and children, and makes himself poor and bare of all that he has in order to travel light and without hindrance, so if you want to be a spiritual pilgrim you are to make yourself naked of all that you have ...

You shall within a short time come to the city of Jerusalem. (2.21)

Do not believe [your enemies]. Say nothing else but that you want to have Jesus and be in Jerusalem ... Keep on your way to Jerusalem. (2.22)

When you are in this darkness you are much nearer Jerusalem than when you are in the midst of that false light ... the desire to love Jesus, felt in this darkness, kills all sins ... then you are fast drawing near to Jerusalem. You are not there yet, but before you come to it you will be able to see it from afar, by the small sudden gleams that shine through little crannies from afar. (2.25)

There is a curious tension involved in Hilton's use of this extended pilgrimage metaphor. So vividly realised are the incidents and attitudes which he selects⁶⁶ from the experiences of place pilgrims that the *exemplum* is in danger of overshadowing, or

⁶⁶ Accounts of pilgrimages to holy places, such as those of Felix Fabri and Margery Kempe, suggest that

even contradicting the application. Hilton's general attitude towards visiting holy place is less than positive. Not only does he insist that travelling to 'Rome and Jerusalem' is unnecessary (1.49); he also suggests that place pilgrimage represents an easier option than living a life of charity, that is pursuing a life of moral pilgrimage of the kind advocated by Langland: 'There is no difficulty in ... going to Rome and Jerusalem on your bare feet ... But it is a very difficult thing for someone to love his fellow Christian in charity' (1.65).⁶⁷ Yet for all its potential ambiguity, the power of the pilgrim image in this context is unmistakable, communicating in poetic yet intensely practical form the essentials of the journey: the distractions which will beset those in search of God, the need for single-mindedness and perseverance, and, above all, the need to be possessed by an overwhelming desire to reach the goal. To reject physical journeying is only half the story; what Hilton puts in its place is a journey in which every positive characteristic of the place pilgrim is taken and set alight with a burning desire for God.⁶⁸

B. Anticipation

A striking element of the spirituality of Rolle, Hilton and the other English mystics is the temporal duality of their ambitions and experiences, a factor noted by Marion Glasscoe who speaks of

the mystics' witness that true human fulfilment is the concomitant of what is experienced as a spiritual journey to a goal beyond time that is occasionally anticipated and known in time, the element within which our curiously mixed physical and spiritual natures cohere and mature. They convey a double sense

this is a somewhat idealised summary.

⁶⁷ Compare Gregory of Nyssa and Jerome (Chapter III. 5).

⁶⁸ As another great English mystical writer of the period made clear, echoing the words of St Augustine and St Bernard, it is to be 'ronne by desires, not by pases of feet.' *Cloud of Unknowing*, 112/14.

of experience: that of a linear process; but also of an eternal state of being which informs and transcends it, and which is accessed within the structure of human nature, itself programmed with a restlessness that can be assuaged by nothing less.⁶⁹

The mystics, therefore, are prepared, as pilgrims and strangers on earth, to travel the long road to heaven; yet they also wish, through their interior journeying, to be allowed to experience something of heaven in the present. Rolle in his *Incendium Amoris*, speaks of his initial astonishment that such a thing could be possible: 'I had never thought that *we exiles* could possibly have known such warmth,'⁷⁰ yet his own experience leads him to urge others to enjoy such foretastes of the heavenly homeland:

And þi thoght sal al be on Jhesu, and so be receyved aboven al erthly thyng, aboven þe firmament and þe sternes, so þat þe egh of þi hert mai loke intil heven.⁷¹

Hilton speaks of the contemplative being 'illuminated by the grace of the Holy Spirit to see intellectually the Truth, which is God, and also spiritual things, with a soft sweet burning love for him' and encourages the belief that 'the beginning of this contemplation may be felt in this life' though 'the fullness of it is kept in heaven.'⁷² In *Eight Chapters on Perfection* he outlines five stages of contemplation, the fifth being 'whanne a man ... is reised up to þe biholdyng of heuenli þingis. And þanne feelip

⁶⁹ Glasscoe (1993), 4.

⁷⁰ Rolle, *Fire of Love*, Prol.

⁷¹ Rolle, *Ego Dormio*, 259-262 in *English Writings*. Similarly in *Angels' Song*, 15, Hilton comments: 'Þis wondyrful onyd may nougt be fulfilled parfitely, contynuelly, holyly in þis lyfe for corrupcion of þe flesche, bot anly in þe blis of heuen.' *Yorkshire Writers*, 176.

⁷² Hilton, *Scale*, 1. 8. Compare Adam of Dryburgh. See James Hogg who quotes Adam's insistence that 'the life of the cell is as essential to the interior life as water is to fish and shecpfold to sheep' and notes

and perseyueb he a glymerynge of heuenly blis' (Chapter IV).⁷³ For the *Cloud*-author, such experiences are more rare and rarified, yet none the less real:

þan wil he sumtyme parauenture seend oute a beme of goostly lizt, peersyng
þis cloude of vnknowyng ... þan schalt þou fele þine affeccion enflamid wip
þe fiire of his loue, fer more þen I kan telle þee, or may, or wile, at þis tyme.⁷⁴

C. The priority of person over place

Though Bonaventure speaks of seeking an 'interior Jerusalem' it is clear that in this context, as in the Psalms which Bonaventure expounds, that Jerusalem is of importance only as the place in which God is to be found.⁷⁵ The goal of the contemplative is quite definitely not a place but a person:⁷⁶

According to our spiritual proposition, Jerusalem is as much to say *sight of peace* and stands for contemplation ... for contemplation is nothing other than a sight of Jesus, who is true peace.' (2.21)

Hilton's statement makes apparent a simultaneous correspondence and contradistinction between place pilgrimage and interior pilgrimage. As we have seen,

his claim that 'he who lives in the cell lives in heaven' Hogg, 1989 #400], 75.

⁷³ Hilton, *Eight Chapters on Perfection*.

⁷⁴ *Cloud of Unknowing*, 62/14.

⁷⁵ Bonaventure states: 'we must ascend step by step until we reach the height of the mountain *where the God of gods is seen in Sion* (Ps. 83.8)' Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey*, I.8. Compare Hilton: 'the God of gods shall be seen in Syon. ...he shall give gifts of grace to his chosen souls ... through which grace they shall profit and grow from strength to strength till they come to Syon; that is until they come to contemplation, in which they shall see the God of gods. Hilton, *Scale*, 2.19.

⁷⁶ As Hussey points out, the mystics described what they did as 'contemplation' Hussey (1989), 109. The object of their contemplation was God.

the desire to encounter a person was fundamental to the Christian understanding of place pilgrimage. To journey to the earthly Jerusalem was in essence to journey to the place on earth where God was most especially present. Hilton's stress on the etymology of the name brings out the true nature of both the earthly and the heavenly Jerusalems as settings in which God is to be contemplated and worshipped. At the same time it suggests the irrelevance of physical travel in such a quest. Dinzelbacher notes that 'The characteristic feature of the later mystics is the ecstatic meeting with God, rather than the ecstatic visit to eschatological spaces (which exist in their spiritual world as well but are clearly of less importance).'⁷⁷

D. Margery Kempe: a model of integration?

The *Book of Margery Kempe* has intrigued and infuriated modern critics,⁷⁸ just as its heroine seems to have intrigued and infuriated her contemporaries. The work claims to be a 'short tretys and a comfortabyll for synful wrecchys' (Proem), charting the spiritual journey of one who moves from a condition of going astray and experiencing spiritual instability to commitment to the way which would lead her to the joys of heaven:

this creatur whych many yerys had gon wyl [wayward] and evyr ben unstable
was parfythly drawen and steryd to entren the wey of hy perfeccyon.

(*Book of Margery Kempe*, Proem, 18-19)⁷⁹

Yet the text, produced according to the Proem under circumstances of considerable difficulty, is neither a saint's life,⁸⁰ nor a treatise on the mystical way such as those

⁷⁷ Dinzelbacher (1987), 125.

⁷⁸ See McEntire (1992b), Introduction.

⁷⁹ Quotations taken from *The Book of Margery Kempe* (ed. Staley).

⁸⁰ See Szell (1992), on parallels between the *Book* and female saints' *Lives*.

produced by Rolle or Hilton.⁸¹ Its unique character derives largely from the fact that, although it is written in the third person, the narrative voice is in fact that of the chief protagonist, Margery herself.⁸² Hagiographic texts, though always shaped by a specific agenda, usually claim a measure of detachment since they are presented as biographies rather than as autobiographies. In Margery's *Book*, however, we are apparently offered an 'inside' view of how the world appears to the one struggling to achieve sanctity, a self-portrait of a would-be saint. Before accepting the lessons which the *Book* claims to impart, it is therefore necessary for the reader to evaluate the one whose experiences are portrayed. It is for this reason that the majority of those seeking to interpret Margery's *Book* have focused upon the problem of understanding Margery herself, together with her relationships with the wider community. Like these critics, I too wish to concentrate upon the figure of Margery as presented in the text. Unlike many of these critics, however, I wish to suggest that the most useful key to the interpretation of Margery's character and conduct lies not in seeking to identify physiological or emotional diseases from which she may have suffered,⁸³ but in the various understandings of pilgrimage which were available to her and which, I believe, shaped her curious history.

The remarkably frank account contained in the *Book of Margery Kempe* outlines the history of a proud, ambitious woman, daughter of one wealthy tradesman and reluctant wife of another, whose life was changed by a combination of illness and spiritual revelation. Urged on by the glimpse of heavenly joy which she received in a dream (I. 3), Margery expressed her passionate longing to encounter God in a tireless round of pilgrimaging as she visited Canterbury, Compostela, Rome, Assisi, Jerusalem and

⁸¹ In fact as Atkinson observes Margery 'meant her book to be a witness, not a theological treatise' Atkinson (1983) 24

⁸² I disagree with Lynn Staley, who in the introduction to her edition of the *Book of Margery Kempe*, 8-10, differentiates between Kempe the narrator and Margery the fictional heroine.

⁸³ Though these may have been a contributory factor in the expression of her spirituality.

many other holy places 'for gostly [spiritual] helth'(I. 10). Not for Margery the quiet of the cloister or the anchorite's cell: indeed Maureen Fries, in comparing her with Julian of Norwich, comments that the two resemble 'constant motion opposed to complete stasis.'⁸⁴ Margery's earnest desire for 'hy contemplacyon' (Proem) resulted in visions, conversations with Christ and his mother and noisy fits of weeping. These became more pronounced when she journeyed to Rome and Jerusalem and, not surprisingly, made her an uncomfortable travelling companion. Yet Margery's narrative, for all its apparent self-promotion and lack of order,⁸⁵ reveals two elements which make her an important figure in the discussion of the pilgrimage motif and its various strands of meaning: a refusal to recognise boundaries and a surprising degree of spiritual integration. There is, I believe, an innate order to Margery's life but one which is not immediately apparent to the modern reader. The tendency, observable in both those who would dismiss her mystical pretensions⁸⁶ and those who would defend her as a proto-feminist, to focus on the perceived disorderliness of her behaviour, has acted as a barrier to understanding what she was seeking to achieve within her own terms of reference.

There have been many attempts to analyse Margery and her behaviour and assess her status within the mystical tradition.⁸⁷ She has been dismissed as 'quite mad,'⁸⁸ and described as an example of 'hysterical devotionism' whose case illustrates 'social and sexual repression in the later medieval world.'⁸⁹ There have also been suggestions

⁸⁴ Fries (1984), 229.

⁸⁵ Both in terms of structure and in terms of the behaviour depicted within it.

⁸⁶ Knowles, (1961), 148, concludes that her book 'has little in it of deep spiritual wisdom and nothing of true mystical experience.'

⁸⁷ McEntire (1992b), Introduction, has a useful summary.

⁸⁸ Howard (1980), 34.

⁸⁹ Weissman (1982), 202. See also Partner (1991), 60-66.

that her behaviour was triggered by a variety of physical and psychiatric problems.⁹⁰ Her approach to spirituality has been written off as bizarre; it has also been recognised, with I believe a considerable measure of justification, as ‘solidly rooted in medieval spiritual traditions.’⁹¹ The influence of the Continental women mystics is clearly of particular significance here.⁹² Margery enters into the biblical narrative as outlined in the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditations*,⁹³ she manifests a gift of tears, like Mary of Oignes (d. 1213);⁹⁴ she undergoes a mystical wedding to Christ like Dorothea of Montau (1347-94) and Catherine of Siena (d. 1380), and fearlessly confronts powerful establishment figures in the manner of St Bridget of Sweden (d.1373).⁹⁵ It is no accident, I suggest, that Margery consistently describes herself as *this creatur*. She is in a sense a construct of all the available spiritual models which her age offered to her – all of them at once and all of them still in embryonic (some would say, ‘half-baked’) form. Yet there is a thread of consistent identity running through Margery’s self-revelatory narrative – and it is the identity of a pilgrim. Margery’s greatest attribute, (and greatest problem) is that she wants to be a pilgrim in every sense of the word. In this sense she is to be regarded not only as an heir to long-established spiritual traditions but as someone who seriously attempted to develop and apply them to her own time and situation. According to her *Book*, she is conscious of the ‘wretchyd wordelys exile’ of humankind (Ch 42) and filled with longing for the ‘blysse of heven

⁹⁰ Such as various forms of epilepsy. Whilst not excluding the possibility that some of Margery’s behaviour may have been prompted by physiological or psychiatric disorders, her *Book* remains a text which presents itself as a work of spiritual value and part of it was apparently preserved as such by the Carthusians.

⁹¹ Armstrong (1992), 17.

⁹² Riehle (1981) explores these connections.

⁹³ Entering into the biblical narrative was supposed to shape the perceptions and spiritual growth of the one meditating; Margery, on the other hand, seems to show a strong disposition to do the shaping, as when she engages in a dispute with the apostles (Ch 73).

⁹⁴ See Atkinson (1983), 31-31.

⁹⁵ Bridget of Sweden, *Liber Celestis*.

(Ch 3). She longs for intimacy with God in this world and her running dialogue with the various persons of the Trinity functions as her personal equivalent of the experiences which Rolle, Hilton and the *Cloud*-author, in their different ways, interpret as progress in inner journeying: anticipations of the joys of heaven vouchsafed to those who are still on the road to the heavenly Jerusalem. As Professor Stan Hussey comments perceptively: '[Margery's] direct access to Christ – in which he often takes the initiative - becomes her way of transcending the world while still remaining in it.'⁹⁶

Margery, as I indicated at the beginning of this chapter, refused to be bound by the conventional wisdom which, in effect, restricted Christians to enjoying at most two out of the three chief modes of pilgrimage: instead she sought to experience a highly-unusual⁹⁷ combination of interior, moral and place pilgrimage. This instinct to integrate rather than select, may be linked with a principle of specifically feminine spirituality suggested by Sandra J. McEntire:

The pattern of female spirituality ... does not divide a woman from herself but integrates her in her very self, including everything that enters her sphere. She strives not so much for perfection as completion. For woman's spiritual journey, union includes all that is homely and earthly as well as the mystic and visionary. It includes her essential nature and the contradictions which have been imposed upon her by her society and culture.⁹⁸

Whether her attitude was due to her gender, temperament, lack of theological understanding or overflowing devotion, Margery's whole tempestuous career was

⁹⁶ Hussey (1989), 118. Dickman (1980), 169 suggests that Margery may have been influenced by the example of St Bridget in seeking a 'way to transcend the world while staying in it.'

⁹⁷ She may be in part following the example of St Bridget who founded a monastic order as well as undertaking place pilgrimages as the result of her visions. See Holloway (1992).

⁹⁸ McEntire (1992a), 54-6.

shaped by her desire to *simultaneously* visit holy places, grow in obedience to God *and* anticipate the joys of heaven through intimate personal encounters with God. It was this very refusal to choose between the traditional pilgrimage options, together with her determination to integrate what many would consider irreconcilable, which made her so difficult for the ecclesiastical establishment to understand and for more conventional Christians to accept. Margery's whole life is characterised by the breaking down of commonly-accepted boundaries; indeed her eclectic spirituality leaves her vulnerable to charges of Lollardry. Her attempts to integrate her experience of God into everyday life are at the root of many of the difficulties which beset her. She shocks clerics through the earthiness of her spirituality yet she also unnerves her fellow pilgrims by taking her spiritual concerns to the dinner table (I. 26). She seeks the counsel of Julian of Norwich; yet her desire for God does not move her to follow Julian's example of enclosure.⁹⁹ Presumably Margery could have opted for an anchorite's cell but she does not seem to view physical enclosure as a necessary concomitant of spiritual journeying.¹⁰⁰ Instead her approach seems closer to Hilton's teaching in his *Mixed Life* and in Book 2 of the *Scale of Perfection*, in that externals are seen as less important than inner motivation.

Margery defied (and continues to defy) classification because she appears to have been either unable or unwilling to acknowledge the problems which had exercised theologians for centuries. The tension between interior pilgrimage and place pilgrimage simply does not seem to exist for her. She cannot perceive any difficulty in taking experiences which were supposed to belong within the cloister or the

⁹⁹ Unlike Dorothea of Montau who after undergoing marriage, child-bearing, a vow of chastity, widowhood and pilgrimage to holy places (all experiences which Margery shared), became a recluse. See Glasscoe (1993), 284-5.

¹⁰⁰ Beckwith (1986), 37 comments, 'Margery was a religious woman who refused the space traditionally allotted to religious women – the sanctuary (or imprisonment) provided by the anchoress's cell or the nunnery.'

anchorite's cell, out on the road with her, as she deals with the stresses of daily life at home in East Anglia, and as she travels far and wide in search of holy places. Strangely enough it is this very lack of perception which gives Margery's life story its integrity and its stability. Stability may seem a curious word to apply to Margery Kempe; yet there is, I believe, a certain propriety in so doing. Of all the pilgrimage narratives which I have examined, it is Margery's account of her life and spiritual experience which comes closest to resolving the tension between physical and spiritual journeying. Firstly, there is an essential continuity in her spiritual life in that the experiences which she undergoes in Compostela, Rome and Jerusalem are merely different in degree, not in kind, from those which characterise her life at home.¹⁰¹ Like Julian, Margery is profoundly affected by meditating on the events of the Passion at home: unlike Julian, she *also* travels to see the setting for herself and weeps and sobs, 'as thow sche had seyn owyr Lord wyth hir bodyly ey sufferynge hys Passyon at that tyme (I. 28).'¹⁰² Her *Book* claims that her desire to know God and to obey him is equally strong in both contexts. When rebuked during her travels abroad for speaking of 'the love and goodness of our Lord, as much at table as in other places,' she replies, 'Owyr Lord almyghty is as gret a lord her as in Ingland, and as gret cause have I to love hym her as ther have as great cause to love him here as there' (I. Ch.26). Secondly, she regards her journey to the earthly Jerusalem as *part* of her life-long pilgrimage, using it as an opportunity for moral and spiritual growth.¹⁰³

Sche had evyr mech tribulacyon tyl sche cam to Jherusalem. And, er sche cam

¹⁰¹ It is noticeable that Margery's account includes little about the experience of travel. She is much more concerned with the spiritual significance of her experiences: 'God drow not hys grace fro hir neithyr in cherch, ne in schip, ne in the see, ne in no place that sche cam to, for evyr sche had hym in her sowle.' *Book* (ed. Staley) II, 3.

¹⁰² The parallel is pointed by the similarity in phrasology: Julian desired 'a bodily sight' of the Passion of Christ (*Book of Showings*, Ch, 2). See Chapter XI below.

¹⁰³ In this respect Margery partakes of the stability of purpose manifested by the *peregrini* of the early

ther, sche seyde to hem þat sche supposyd thei weryn grevyd wyth hir. "I prey yow serys, beth in charité wyth me, for I am in charité wyth yow, & forgevyth me that I have grevyd yow be þe wey. And, yyf any of yow hath anything trespasyd agens me, God forgeve it yow and I do" ... And, whan this creatur saw Jerusalem... sche thankyd God wyth al hir hert, preying hym for hys mercy that lych as he had browt hir to se this erdly cyté Jerusalem he wold grawntyn hir grace to se the blysfyl cité of Jerusalem abovyn, the cyté of hevyn.

(Book of Margery Kempe, I. Ch. 28)

I know of no other contemporary account in English in which the sight of the earthly Jerusalem prompts the pilgrim to pray for grace to see its heavenly counterpart. Moreover, although Margery records and accepts the indulgences on offer at various holy places in Jerusalem, she is told in a revelation that her sins 'wer forgovyn the er thow com her' (I. Ch. 29)¹⁰⁴ and that there is no need for her to travel to Rome or Compostela, 'les than thu wil thin owyn selfe.' When, later, she wishes to return to Jerusalem, she is told that she may worship there in thought just as well as in body. It is clear from this account that, although totally committed to place pilgrimage, Margery does not consider her relationship with God to be dependent upon it. Her visits to Jerusalem, Rome and Compostela, which begin mid-way through her own development, are presented as enhancing her spiritual journey, however strange that journey may appear; they are not regarded as a substitute for it. In this sense she is returning to the understanding of life as pilgrimage which characterised the Early Church,¹⁰⁵ yet also seeking to use place pilgrimage as a means of growth in understanding and devotion.

Margery's attempts at integration expose the tensions which have fuelled the

period.

¹⁰⁴ See also I. Ch 5.

¹⁰⁵ See Chapter II.

pilgrimage debate throughout the centuries. A mobile contemplative, whose visions and piety were as likely to manifest themselves as readily in the market-place as in the Mass, she was also a Martha turned Mary, who yet never quite succeeded in shaking off her worldly responsibilities. Much of the criticism levelled at Margery by recent criticism centres on her supposed exhibitionism; more telling in terms of her multifaceted pilgrim aspirations is the feeling of her contemporaries that she failed to fulfil her moral responsibilities in terms of her calling as a wife (Ch 76). Assessment of Margery's success in combining her pilgrim roles is complicated by modern feminist agendas; yet William Provost may well be correct when he suggests that the 'difference between Margery's troubled and troubling life and Julian's serene one' is more 'a matter of vocation rather than gender.'¹⁰⁶ With her initiation into mystical experience, Margery becomes, in his phrase, 'vocationally bivalent'. Her callings as wife and contemplative are not necessarily in conflict but any attempt to reconcile them will, of necessity, be somewhat unorthodox. In terms of pilgrimage options, Margery is in fact 'tri-valent'. It would not have been impossible for her to combine the Active and Contemplative lives to some degree, as Walter Hilton recommended in his *Mixed Life*; she could also have combined her home life with occasional journeys to holy places. But Margery wishes to withdraw physically and spiritually from her daily responsibilities, she wishes to be chaste, she wishes to spend her time in prayer and she wishes to travel at will. It is therefore possible to see why her attempts at integration could also be read as avenues of escape from her proper responsibilities. It is therefore in the area of moral pilgrimage that Margery is most vulnerable to criticism, yet it is also true, that having determinedly pursued her other pilgrimage goals against all opposition and mockery, in the end she sacrificed the freedom she had won, to return to nurse her ailing husband.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Provost (1992), 11.

¹⁰⁷ It is noteworthy that when Margery expresses concern lest caring for her husband should draw her away from prayer, Christ reassures her of the value of the Active Life (L 76).

Was Margery a true mystic? Her understanding of the technical aspects of mysticism was very limited and her refusal to conform to the accepted parameters of the contemplative traditions would have hardly impressed the *Cloud*-author, or even possibly Hilton. It is, however, widely accepted that her approach was much closer to that of Continental women mystics¹⁰⁸ and she did, according to her Book, receive qualified encouragement from Julian of Norwich. With all her limitations it seems that she had the heart of the matter in her for, like the anchorites and ‘accredited’ mystics examined earlier in this chapter, she found God in her innermost being, she experienced in anticipation the joys of heaven and she focused unswervingly on the person of God. This said, however, I believe that it is more useful to consider Margery as pilgrim rather than mystic; as one whose journey through life sought to embrace and incorporate every possible strand of spiritual experience and whose Book is an attempt to chronicle, explain and justify her approach to living. That she should have failed to reconcile elements which must remain irreconcilable in a fallen world, is unsurprising; what is remarkable is that a woman of her time and class should have conceived such a radical interpretation of what it meant to be both pilgrim and prospective citizen of heaven.

3. *PEARL*

Fro spot my spyryt þer sprang in space;
 My body on balke þer bod. In sweuen
 My goste is gon in Godez grace.

(*Pearl*, 61-3)¹⁰⁹

The Middle English poem known as *Pearl* offers a number of interesting parallels to the examples of interior pilgrimage examined in this chapter for not only is it, as Sarah

¹⁰⁸ Who also crossed boundaries. See Dickman (1984).

¹⁰⁹ *Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*.

Stanbury points out, 'in essence a journey to Jerusalem,' but the narrator journeys in spirit rather than in body, is granted a glimpse of the joys of heaven and moves repeatedly from a preoccupation with place to focus upon a person. The poem is in fact a journey to two Jerusalems: the earthly city where Christ died, and the heavenly Jerusalem where he is revealed in glory. Significantly, the effect of this experience of inner pilgrimage is to enable the Dreamer to recognise his own state of exile and to motivate him to pursue a life of obedience in the hope that he will eventually be admitted to the heavenly city.

Although the principal message of *Pearl* is concerned with interior and moral aspects of the pilgrimage of life, there is throughout the poem a strong sense of place, and, in particular, an exploration of the concept of places as settings for people. The poet constantly plays with the conceit of the appropriate setting for his precious 'pearl,' and each location which he creates is charged with significance. Thus the opening sequence of the poem evokes the atmosphere of a shrine: a burial place imbued with special significance.¹¹⁰ This setting, however, is judged by the narrator as being inappropriate for a 'perle withouten spot' (11),¹¹¹ for despite its beauty the garden is heavy with the scent of mortality. The fragile beauty of flowers and fruit betoken the transience of the present world, while the atmosphere of mourning underlines the temporary nature of human existence. Grieving beside the grave of his infant daughter, whose burial mound he treats almost as a reliquary, the narrator is portrayed as desperately longing for physical closeness to the remains of his lost child and wholly incapable of grasping the spiritual comfort which Christian teaching offers to the bereaved.¹¹² He thus manifests the spiritual alienation which is characteristic of exiled

¹¹⁰ Pearsall and Salter (1973), 103 detects 'a strong sense of enclosure.'

¹¹¹ The wordplay on the different meanings of *spot* underlines the importance of *place* in the Dreamer's consciousness at this point, while also setting up an implied tension between earthly existence and the concept of purity.

¹¹² On the phrase *Kynde of Kryst* see Dyas (1997a), 197-198.

humankind.¹¹³

Like many a medieval pilgrim seeking illumination by the side of a saint's tomb, the narrator therefore experiences a vision, in which he is taught what his natural mind is incapable of comprehending. His body remains by the grave while his spirit journeys 'in godez grace'¹¹⁴ to a place, usually identified as the Earthly Paradise.¹¹⁵ Here grief is temporarily forgotten in wonder, yet even as the Dreamer wanders enraptured through the dazzling landscape, convinced (mistakenly) that he is in heaven, the poet underlines his exclusion from the joys which lie beyond the river:

Bot þe water watz depe, I dorst not wade,
And euer me longed ay more and more.

(*Pearl*, 143-144)

Ad Putter points out the similarities between this section of the poem and the *Roman de la Rose* but also notes that unlike the Dreamer in the *Roman*, 'the dreamer of *Pearl* remains an outsider.'¹¹⁶ This ongoing sense of exile is, however, part of a long-established tradition rather than the inspiration of a particular poet. From a theological perspective it is inescapable: as a sinful human being, still engaged in the journey of life, the Dreamer may glimpse future joys but cannot yet attain them. Nor is the place itself, though comforting, the object of his quest; it is instead simply a new setting for his 'pearl'. The shift from the ephemeral beauty of the garden to the imperishable

¹¹³ Blenkner (1970), 225 cites Hugh of St Victor: 'Man was driven from the face of the Lord, since for his sin he was stricken with the blindness of ignorance'.

¹¹⁴ Boitani (1982), 104, recognises the echoes of 2 Corinthians 12:1-5. This vision seems to be of the type described in the *Chastising of God's Children* as a 'spiritual vision or imaginatif' Chastising (1957), 169.

¹¹⁵ See Pearsall and Salter (1973) Ch 3.

¹¹⁶ Putter (1996), 154.

splendours of 'krystal clyffes' and leaves like 'bornyst syluer' prefigures the transformation which has taken place in the Dreamer's 'lost' child, a transformation which requires a radical re-evaluation of his perspectives on life. Finding the person he seeks proves in fact to be not the end but the beginning of his spiritual journey.¹¹⁷ She is not what he thought her, nor in the end is she the one he should be seeking. Neither the place he is in, nor the person on whom he has built his hopes can in fact meet his needs. Before he is allowed to glimpse the Saviour, however, he must be brought to realise his own spiritual shortcomings. The Maiden therefore begins by rebuking him for setting his heart upon so transient a good as her own mortal self

For þat þou lestez watz bot a rose
þat flowred and fayled as kynde hyt gef;

(Pearl, 269-70)

In condemning his desire to cross the river, she reminds him that he is still a spiritual exile, heir to the consequences of Adam's dismissal from Eden.

þou wylnez ouer þys water to weue;
Er moste þou ceuer to oper counsayl.
þy corse in clot mot calder keue,
For hit watz forgarte at paradys greue;
Oure zorefader hit con myssezeme.

(Pearl, 318-322)

Her own assured status as an innocent throws into sharp contrast the spiritual insecurity of those, like the Dreamer, who have lived long in the world, prey to the

¹¹⁷He remains in the earthly Paradise, in a kind of 'no-man's land' from which he may glimpse but not yet enter heaven.

enticements of sin.¹¹⁸ As always the *Pearl*-poet is concerned to foreground the twin motifs of purity and penance:¹¹⁹

Grace innough þe mon may haue
þat synnez þenne new, ȝif hym repente,
Bot with sorȝ and syt he mot hit craue,
And byde þe payne þerto is bent...
Hit is a dom þat neuer God gaue
þat euer þe gyltlez schulde be schente.
þe gyltyf may contryssyoun hente
And be þurȝ mercy to grace þryȝt.

(661-4, 666-670)

The life of penitent obedience is not here as *siker for the soul* as the Maiden's own innocence but it remains the surest route available to the mass of humanity.

The Maiden's surroundings, appearance, and behaviour all function as markers of the difference between the eternal and the temporal, the soul liberated from sin and the earth-bound mortal, the fully-fledged citizen of heaven and the still-wandering citizen of the world. The resultant gap in perception serves to heighten the poignancy of the encounter between father and daughter:

The painfulness of the Dreamer's encounter with the *Pearl*-maiden arises from the nasty truth that is illustrated by these misunderstandings: that in the course of their long 'meeting' they never really meet. As the Dreamer puts it in a moment of despair, their encounter is *both* a meeting *and* a separation:

¹¹⁸ Blenkner (1970), 230, detects evidence of several of the Seven Deadly Sins in the Dreamer's responses.

¹¹⁹ Compare *Cleanness* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. See Dyas (1997a), Ch. 8.

‘Why schal I bope mysse and mete?’ (329)

The impact of the poem depends upon this simultaneous perception of the close bond they once shared and of the gap that has now opened up between them.¹²⁰

Putter sees this alienation as inevitable:

the *Pearl*-maiden has not only moved to a ‘strange place,’ but has become strange herself. This, of course, is what Christian teaching tells us. People in heaven will no longer be as we knew them on earth. They live in perpetual bliss, unburdened by the miseries that afflict human beings on earth, and no longer conscious of past suffering.¹²¹

The Maiden’s apparent detachment from the problems of her bereaved parent does not necessarily indicate that she is uncaring; care in this context, however, is denoted not by emotion but by education. Having exposed the Dreamer’s state of spiritual exile and enlightened him on the vital subjects of grace and penance, she now broadens his horizons to encompass the two cities of Jerusalem. First, she weaves a glancing reference to each into her discussion of salvation:

“Lorde, quo schal klymbe þy hyȝ hylle,
Oþer rest withinne þy holy place?”
Hymself to onsware he is not dylle:
“Hondelyngez harme þat dyt not ille,
þat is of hert bope clene and lyȝt,
þer schal hys step stable and styлле”:

¹²⁰ Putter (1996), 180.

¹²¹ Putter (1996), 185.

Be innoſent is ay ſaf by ryȝt.

(Pearl, 678-84)

Be Lambes vyuez in blyſſe we bene,
A hondred and forty þowsande flot
As in þe Apocalyppez hit is ſene ...
On þe hyl of Syon ...
Be nwe cyté o Jeruſalem.

(Pearl, 785-7, 789, 792)

In the Old Teſtament Sion was underſtood to be the mountain in Jeruſalem where God made his dwelling;¹²² in Chriſtian thought it alſo ſtood for the heavenly city where Chriſt reigns in glory. What is particularly intereſting in the Maiden's diſcourſe, however, is the way in which the main preſentations of the two cities are both uſed to focus attention on the perſon of Chriſt. The ſignificance of the earthly Jeruſalem in her account is as the ſetting for Chriſt's crucifixion. Her deſcription ſets forth, in emotive phrases reminiſcent of the Paſſion lyrics¹²³ and the meditations of Rolle, the nature and the ſacrificial death of Chriſt:

In Jeruſalem watz my Lemman ſlayn
And rent on rode with boyez bolde ...
Þat watz ſo fayr on to byholde

(Pearl, 805-6, 810)

When her gaze ſhifts to the New Jeruſalem it is the aweſome majeſty and authority of Chriſt which comes into focus (834-840).

¹²² See Chapters I and II.

When her uncomprehending parent confuses the old Jerusalem with the new the Maiden is provided with a useful opportunity to explain the relationship between the earthly and the heavenly cities: the old Jerusalem being the setting where forgiveness was purchased, the new Jerusalem the place where its benefits will be enjoyed.

Of motez two to carpe clene,
And Jerusalem hyzt boþe nawþeles ...
In þat on oure pes watz mad at ene;
With payne to suffer þe Lombe hit chese;
In þat oþer is nozt bot pes to glene
Þat ay schal laste withouten rele.

(*Pearl*, 949-50, 953-6)

The Maiden's descriptions function in much the same manner as the meditations outlined by writers such as the pseudo-Bonaventure and Richard Rolle, operating in the realm of the spiritual imagination. With the Dreamer's own sight of the heavenly Jerusalem, the tone of the poem changes radically. The Dreamer moves in an instant from a position of being taught about the New Jerusalem to seeing it for himself,¹²⁴ from hearing about the Crucifixion to gazing upon the wounds of the Lamb. He is awed by its shining splendour, yet once again the focus is not in fact on the place but on the Person of Christ, for it is his presence which makes heaven what it is:

Of sunne ne mone had þay no nede;
þe Self God watz her lombe-lyzt,
þe Lombe her lantyrne, withouten drede..
Best watz He, blypest, and moste to pryse,
Bot a wounde ful wyde and weete con wyse

¹²³ *Selection of Religious Lyrics*, nos 17-36.

Anende Hys hert, þurȝ hyde torent.

(*Pearl*, 1045-7, 1131, 1135-6)

Here we are close to the immediacy of the mystical experience, as the dreamer is touched by compunction, glimpses and longs to join in the joy of heaven. His continuing spiritual immaturity is revealed by his refusal to accept his present state of exile and by his fruitless attempt to join the heavenly throng. Yet when he wakes to find himself back in the garden, it is the lost vision, rather than his lost child,¹²⁵ which now preoccupies him. Penitent and possessed of a new stability of resolve, he vows himself to a life of obedient journeying to the heavenly city, so that he too may become one of those who rejoice in the presence of the Saviour. His brief foretaste of the joys of heaven is thus seen to motivate a process of moral reformation. Inner pilgrimage becomes in *Pearl* the supreme motivation for the pursuit of the pilgrimage of life.

¹²⁴ On the description of the New Jerusalem see Field (1986).

¹²⁵ See Blenkner (1970), 24.

CHAPTER XI

JOURNEYING TO JERUSALEM: AN OVERVIEW OF LITERAL AND METAPHORICAL PILGRIMAGE IN MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE

For to speke of Ierusalem the holy cytee ...

(*Mandeville's Travels*)¹

Introduction

If one example above all others serves to focus the extraordinary variety which characterises the use of the pilgrimage motif in Middle English literature, it is the idea of journeying to Jerusalem. In medieval spirituality Jerusalem was, in effect, not one city but three, each being the goal of a different mode of pilgrimage. To examine the ways in which medieval writers describe journeying to Jerusalem, therefore, is to gain a valuable overview of the use of the theme of pilgrimage as a whole. It is also a very fruitful exercise, for the idea of Jerusalem served as inspiration for a remarkably wide range of writers. There are a number of extant pilgrimage narratives detailing the journey to the earthly city, which combine piety and practicality in varying degrees.² In both *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman*, the dreamers not only learn in graphic detail of the death of Christ in the earthly Jerusalem³ but are challenged to embark upon lives of moral pilgrimage by their glimpses of the Jerusalem on high.⁴ Even Chaucer's pilgrims,

¹ *Mandeville's Travels*, 54. This work, though 'a compilation at second-hand of other men's travels' containing 'a sufficient number of inaccuracies and inconsistencies to make it extremely improbable that its author ever left his native Europe' (op. cit. Intro. xiv) is relevant to this discussion in that it claims (and through its popularity demonstrates) the fact that 'many men desiren for to here speke of the Holy Lond and han thereof gret solace and comfort' (op. cit. 3).

² See Davies (1992) for an analysis of the different types of material produced by and for pilgrims.

³ *Pearl*, 793-828; *Piers Plowman*, XVIII. 6-91.

⁴ *Pearl*, 960-1194; *Piers Plowman*, I. 1-16.

though ostensibly travelling to the shrine of St Thomas, are urged by the Parson, the spiritual member of the group, to focus on reaching the 'Jerusalem celestial.'⁵ Spiritual writings in prose similarly testify to the abiding fascination exercised by the idea of Jerusalem, *Ancrene Wisse* speaking of the anchorhouse as 'Jerusalem' where the anchoress need never see anything but peace⁶ and Walter Hilton choosing to use the pilgrimage to Jerusalem as a dynamic image of the mystical life.⁷

1. MEDIEVAL CONCEPTS OF JERUSALEM

Such profound preoccupation with the idea of Jerusalem was hardly surprising - Jerusalem, centre of the earth;⁸ Jerusalem, city of David, whose Psalms formed the very backbone of medieval worship; Jerusalem, whose stones witnessed the ministry, death and resurrection of the Saviour and was thus, supremely, the place where the visible presence of God had been made manifest on earth.⁹ Moreover, in Christian theology, the earthly city foreshadowed a yet more dazzling prospect: behind the earthly Jerusalem the devout believer could glimpse, distant but glorious, the holy city described in the Book of Revelation, the new Jerusalem where the Lamb of God reigns in triumph and all Christians find their true home. The earthly Jerusalem was the supreme pilgrimage goal, not only because of its past but because of the heavenly city of which it was both antetype and guarantee.

It is evident, however, that as far as Middle English writers were concerned, belief in a heavenly Jerusalem both stimulated and challenged devotion to the earthly city. This tension was of dual origin, being both an integral part of the spiritual inheritance of the

⁵ *Parson's Prologue*, 51.

⁶ *Ancrene Wisse* (ed. Tolkien), III 90/6: '3e beoð in ierusalem.'

⁷ Hilton, *Scale*, 2. 19-26.

⁸ See French (1992).

⁹ Bernard Hamilton describes Jerusalem as the 'greatest relic in Christendom, for no other place on earth was more hallowed by God's presence than the city where his Son had been crucified and had risen from the dead.' Hamilton (1994), 696.

Middle Ages and an expression of contemporary debate. As I have already established, during this period the general concept of life as pilgrimage encompassed three main strands of expression: interior pilgrimage, moral pilgrimage and place pilgrimage. There had always been questions about the extent to which these various forms of spirituality could be reconciled. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in England, however, these questions multiplied and took on new force. Not only did the followers of John Wyclif begin to query the authenticity of relics and the value of place pilgrimage¹⁰ but the widespread development of lay spirituality¹¹ also prompted questions about modes of spiritual journey such as monasticism and pilgrimage to holy places, both of which could be construed as escapist and both of which were demonstrably open to abuse. Contemporary debate about the relative value of different forms of pilgrimage, intensified by the growth in lay piety, found a particular focus in the multi-layered significance of Jerusalem. Medieval allegorical interpretation offered a four-fold reading of Jerusalem: 'the material Jerusalem is the city placed in Judea, the mystical is the Church, the moral is the faithful soul, the anagogical the heavenly home.'¹² In Middle English texts we see these concepts developed in ways which both complement and contradict one another. Jerusalem can be seen to function not as a single place but as a series of images, each of which develops a different strand of theological understanding and devotional practice. It is, by turns, an earthly city made holy by God, the heavenly city described in the Book of Revelation, the cloister,¹³ and an inner spiritual reality within the soul where God may be encountered. In approaching each text we need to ascertain precisely which Jerusalem is in the writer's mind and how they seek to journey there. Some value highly the practice of travelling

¹⁰ See Part III, Introduction.

¹¹ Fuelled in part by the preaching of the friars and the growth in literacy.

¹² 'Quatuor siquidem civitates in divina Scriptura fuisse perhibentur, quarum unaquacque Hierusalem nuncupatur, id est, materialis et mystica, moralis et anagogica. Materialis Hierusalem est quaedam civitas in Judaea posita, mystica vero est Ecclesia, moralis quaelibet fidelis anima, anagogica coelestis patria.' Hugh of Folieto, *De Claustro Animae*, 4.1, *P. L.*, 176, 1131.

¹³ Thus St Bernard declares of the abbey of Clairvaux as 'She herself is Jerusalem, the one which is in heaven.' Bernard of Clairvaux, *Letters*, 64. See Chapter X 1.A.

to the earthly city; others regard it with deep suspicion. These widely-varying attitudes towards the status of the earthly Jerusalem can only be understood by reference to the deep-rooted and, as I have suggested in this study, fundamentally irreconcilable tension inherited from the early centuries of the Church.

As I have noted earlier, it is a significant characteristic of Jewish and Christian pilgrimage that places have traditionally been made holy only through association with a person.¹⁴ In the Old Testament¹⁵ and the early chapters of the Gospels,¹⁶ Jerusalem was regarded as special because it was the place where God dwelt: “Blessed be the Lord out of Sion, who dwelleth in Jerusalem” (Psalm 134:21). Two main factors prompted a revision of this view within the Early Church. Firstly, the rejection of Christ by the Jewish authorities and the subsequent devastation suffered by the city in AD 70 and AD 135, meant that Christians came to see Jerusalem as an example of a place which had come under the judgement of God.¹⁷ Secondly, the belief that God had sent the Spirit at Pentecost meant that he was now understood to dwell in the Church in every place. There was no longer, therefore, any sense in which God could be said to be especially present in Jerusalem.¹⁸ For the first three centuries of the Church the significance of Jerusalem was thus historical¹⁹ rather than theological or devotional²⁰ and those who travelled there during this period appear to have done so in order to

¹⁴ In pagan religion holiness was regarded as ‘impersonal and inherent in the place, in nature,’ MacCormack (1990), 10.

¹⁵ See Wilken (1992).

¹⁶ See Walker (1996) for an examination of the way this perception changes within the Gospel narratives.

¹⁷ Pionius: ‘I saw the land which until now has borne witness to the wrath of God’ *Mart. Pionil.* iv 18. Cited Taylor (1993), 313.

¹⁸ ‘In contrast to Judaism ... there was no place in Christianity for a devotion to Jerusalem or a belief in its inherent holiness ... The New Testament instead encouraged Christians to focus their spiritual attention on the heavenly Jerusalem (Gal. 4.26; Heb. 12:22) for this heavenly city now fulfilled all that the earthly city had been intended to enjoy.’ Walker (1990), 40-1.

¹⁹ As for example in the visits of Melito of Sardis, Alexander of Cappadocia and Origen. See Chapter III.

²⁰ Walker (1994).

elicit information rather than to encounter God. The pages of the New Testament²¹ and the writings of the early Fathers²² portrayed Christians as strangers and pilgrims on earth, exiled from Eden by Adam's sin and called to citizenship of the New Jerusalem through the sacrifice of Christ. Their priority was not to seek God in any earthly city but to concentrate on a life-long pilgrimage through this perilous world to the homeland of heaven.

In the fourth century, however, with the conversion of Constantine came a reaffirmation of the spiritual significance of 'place,' a development which probably owed something to the pagan background of the emperor.²³ Palestine as a whole (and Jerusalem in particular), was reclaimed as a geographical area, a Holy Land, where God had not only acted in the past but could still be encountered in the present. What Helena did through her 're-discovery' of sites, Constantine through his building programme, and Cyril of Jerusalem through his teaching and development of liturgy,²⁴ was to restore to the earthly Jerusalem a sense of the immanent presence of God. Jerusalem once again came to be seen as a place where a Person could be encountered. The resultant change in the status of Jerusalem was paralleled by the emergence of a network of holy places across Christendom.²⁵ This development, of course, did not go unopposed either at the time or in subsequent centuries.²⁶ What I have termed place pilgrimage was to its supporters a valuable component of the pilgrimage of life. To its detractors it was at best an irrelevance and at worst a dangerous distraction from the true pilgrim life of devotion to God in the place of one's calling. This controversy surfaces many times during the succeeding centuries but never with such force as in

²¹ Hebrews 11: 13-16; 13: 12, 13; 1 Peter 1.1; 2.11.

²² For examples see Chapter II.

²³ 'Constantine brought to Christianity a pagan notion of the sanctity of things and places' Taylor (1993), 308.

²⁴ Walker (1990), 17, 33). See also *Egeria's Travels* for an account of the liturgy which developed under Cyril's guidance.

²⁵ See Markus (1994).

²⁶ See Constable (1976) and Cardman (1982).

late medieval England, where orthodox and Wycliffite voices both raised doubts about traditional practices. Medieval pilgrims travelled to Jerusalem in search of forgiveness and salvation and out of devotion to Christ.²⁷ But could not all these objectives be equally well if not better fulfilled at home? This is a question with which Middle English writers wrestled and which fuelled so much of their creativity. The idea of journeying to Jerusalem, precisely because biblical and patristic writers sanctioned such a wealth of possible interpretations, provided a unique focus for the spiritual debates and tensions of late English medieval society.

2. JOURNEYING TO THE EARTHLY CITY

The Jerusalem pilgrimage was, unquestionably, the most dangerous and the most significant of all place pilgrimages. The concept of a Christian Holy Land promoted by Constantine continued to grip the hearts of believers despite the loss of Jerusalem, first to the Persians in 614 and then to Moslem forces in 638. Throughout the succeeding centuries pilgrims continued to make their way to the holy city. Some appear to have visited the holy places without incident; others lost their possessions and even their lives.²⁸ The sufferings of Christians in and around Jerusalem were used by Pope Urban II in 1095 in proclaiming the First Crusade.²⁹ One account of his speech not only argues the need to protect fellow-believers but also asserts the centrality, geographical,³⁰ spiritual and emotional, of the city of Jerusalem in Christian thought:

Jerusalem is the navel of the world; the land is fruitful above all others, like another paradise of delights. This the Redeemer of the human race has made illustrious by His coming, has beautified by his presence, has consecrated by suffering, has redeemed by death, has glorified by burial. This royal city,

²⁷ See Ward (1987), 124-5.

²⁸ See Peters (1985), Chs 6 and 7.

²⁹ See Hamilton (1994).

³⁰ See French (1992), on the process by which Jerusalem came to occupy the central place in medieval maps.

therefore, situated at the center of the world, is now held captive ... she seeks and desires to be liberated.³¹

The Crusaders won, then lost the city but the pilgrims continued to make the journey, sometimes tolerated, sometimes maltreated by the 'Saracens'³² who feature in so many narratives. Unfortunately there are very few extant accounts in English of pilgrim journeys to Jerusalem during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.³³ A Latin text relates the journey of Simon Fitzsimons, a Friar Minor who, modelling himself on Abraham, set off from Ireland in 1322, full of high-sounding phrases:

Having refused the crown of honour and having removed entirely other annoying things which cause loss of time and which are wont to tighten fetters and beget difficulties, and, wishing to go forth ... from my native land and paternal home, as did of old Abraham ... we set out for the Holy Land.³⁴

After such a high-flown opening, his description of Jerusalem is surprisingly brief and confined to factual information, an attitude which characterises the majority of pilgrim accounts of this period. Although most record the indulgences to be won at particular sites, they show a marked tendency to concentrate on the practicalities of the journey, anxious to warn other travellers of the pitfalls of moneychangers, mouldy food - and marauding Saracens. The *Itineraries* of William Wey, a fellow of Eton College who travelled to the Holy Land in 1458 and 1462, are typical in this respect. He is careful to note the spiritual rewards to be gleaned from the long and hazardous journey:

when wee be passyd that place,

³¹ Krey (1921), 30-32. Cited Peters (1985), 281-2.

³² The term 'Arabs' was usually reserved for the Bedouin. See Peters (1985), 433.

³³ See Schur (1980) for a comprehensive survey of Jerusalem pilgrimage narratives.

³⁴ *Western Pilgrims*, 2. This collection also contains two further accounts by English pilgrims of this period which were also originally written in Latin and which contain similar material.

We shal se Jerusalem in short space.
Then knele wee downe apoun oure kne,
When wee that holy cyte see;
For to all that thydyr come
Ys yeve and graunt ful remmyssioun.³⁵

He is, however, also concerned to warn of the dangers of consuming unfamiliar food:

When ye com to dyuerse havynnys be wel ware of dyuerse frutys, for they be not acordyng to yowre complexioun, and they gender a bloody fluxe; and yf an Englyschman haue that sykenes hyt ys a mervel and scape hyt but he dye thereof³⁶

and to warn that the wine at Ramallah is 'febyl and dere' while that to be had in Jerusalem is 'goyd wyne' but still 'dere.' The highly-informative *Information for Pilgrims unto the Holy Land*,³⁷ which though printed around 1498, drew heavily on earlier accounts, particularly that of Wey himself, also offers a wealth of invaluable advice. The pilgrim should avoid the lowest part of the ship from Venice which is 'ryght evyll & smoulderyng hote and stynkyng,' and instead find a place amidships in order to keep 'his brayne and stomacke in tempre.' That galleys should ever sail safely from Venice to Jaffa seems astonishing if all pilgrims followed the advice to carry not only 'a lytell cauldron,' a 'fryenge panne,' barrels of water and wine, laxatives, restoratives and spices, a cage of chickens and a feather bed.³⁸ Pilgrims should move swiftly on disembarkation at Jaffa to choose the best mule; they should also watch out

³⁵ Wey, 9.

³⁶ Wey, 6.

³⁷ *Information for Pilgrims*. No page numbers.

³⁸ The author (drawing here on the narrative of William Wey) directs the pilgrim to a spot beside St Mark's Church in Venice where not only the said feather bed but also a mattress, pillow, two pairs of sheets and a quilt can be purchased for the grand total of three ducats. What is more, the vendor will purchase back the bed on the pilgrim's return for a ducat and a half 'though it be broke and worn.'

for those Saracens who will ‘go talkyng [with] you [and] make gode chere: but thi woll stele from you yf they maye.’ This delightful work lists the sites to be visited and the pilgrimages to be made but, as with many others of its kind,³⁹ its tone is practical rather than devotional.⁴⁰ The chief exception to this pragmatic rule is the *Book of Margery Kempe*, which is more concerned to chart pathways of the spirit than to offer advice on selecting a docile mule.

3. JOURNEYING TO JERUSALEM IN *PIERS PLOWMAN*, THE *CANTERBURY TALES* AND *PEARL*

A. *Piers Plowman*

It has already been demonstrated in this study that with the exception of the travel accounts and guides described in the previous section, the majority of extant Middle English texts view geographical pilgrimage with considerable suspicion, if not downright disapproval. As we have seen, the harshest criticism is found in *Piers Plowman*, where wandering is viewed as synonymous with sinfulness⁴¹ and pilgrims and palmers are characterised as hypocrites and liars:

Pilgrymes and palmeres pligheten hem togidere
To seken Seint Jame and seintes in Rome;
Wenten forth in hire wey with many wise tales,
And hadden leve to lyen al hire lif after.

(*Piers Plowman*, Prologue, 46-9)

In the poem Langland offers two kinds of journey to Jerusalem. Firstly, in the *Prologue*

³⁹ There are accounts in Latin by pilgrims from other European countries, such as Felix Fabri and Pietro Casola, which have a strong devotional emphasis but these do not come within the scope of this study.

⁴⁰ Duff comments that ‘the name pilgrim hardly seems to apply to the traveller for whose information the book was issued’ *Information for Pilgrims*, Intro. xiii.

⁴¹ Langland is firmly committed to the idea of stability and the need for men and women to serve God in their allotted place in the community. See Chapter VIII. 1.

the Dreamer is confronted with the heavenly Jerusalem,⁴² described initially as a tower on a hill (Prol. 14) and subsequently as a castle on a mountain (I. 1-4) The tower is the dwelling place of Truth,⁴³ the mountain is Zion upon which is built the city of God.⁴⁴ From this symbolic representation of the heavenly Jerusalem descends a 'lovely lady' clothed in linen. Her name is Holy Church, her task to point the Dreamer to the tower where Truth dwells and to teach him the way of salvation. These early passages in the poem are deeply indebted to the picture of the heavenly Jerusalem contained in the Book of Revelation, where God is described as the one whose judgements are 'true and just,' Christ is pictured standing on Mount Zion and the Church, the Bride of Christ, is revealed 'clothed in white linen' (19:8). It is not surprising therefore that the remainder of this complex poem is devoted to teaching about the pilgrimage of life: how to avoid sin, how to live a life pleasing to God and thus to come at last to the heavenly city (I. 130-3).

Ac tho that werche wel as Holy Writ telleth,
 And enden as I er seide in truthe, that is the beste,
 Mowe be siker that hire soule shul wende to hevene,
 Ther Truthe is in Trinitee

(*Piers Plowman* I. 130-3)

Clearly Langland does not believe that geographical pilgrimage is likely to contribute to the longer spiritual journey which every Christian must make. In one of the best-known sections of the poem Reason preaches a sermon on Christian living which explicitly condemns journeying to holy places:

And ye that seke Seynt James and seyntes of Rome,

⁴² Compare the opening vision of de Deguileville's *Pilgrimage of the Lyfe of the Manhood*, which was translated from French into Middle English in the early fifteenth century.

⁴³ The C-text reads: 'And say [saw] a tour [tower], as Y trowed [believed]: Treuthe was thereynne' Langland (1978), *Prologue*, 15. For Truth as a biblical name for God see John 14:6 and Ps. 30:6.

⁴⁴ See Schmidt *William Langland The Vision of Piers Plowman*, 413, n 1.

Seketh Seynt Truth, for he may save yow alle.

(*Piers Plowman* V. 56-7)

Moreover, when his sermon prompts his audience to a mass pilgrimage in search of Truth, no one knows where such a saint is to be found:

There was wight noon so wys, the wey thider kouthe.

(*Piers Plowman* V.513)

Even a professional pilgrim, his hat laden with the emblems of Assisi, Compostela and Rome, who has travelled the Holy Land and visited the shrines of many saints, declares that he has never heard a palmer (a Jerusalem pilgrim) enquire for such a person. Piers the ploughman alone knows the way to Truth's dwelling, a path which leads via the Ten Commandments, to the experience of Love, Penance and Grace (V. 560-608). Truth subsequently sends Piers instructions *not* to travel in search of his dwelling but instead to stay at home and to live out his faith within his calling as a ploughman (VII. 1-8).

It is plain from these passages that Langland regards the visiting of saints' shrines as a substitute for living as a Christian and the seeking of saints as a substitute for seeking Truth Himself. His attitude highlights two of the great tensions in the pilgrimage debate: the danger that within popular spirituality pilgrimage to an earthly goal could obscure or even undermine the longer term objective of reaching the heavenly Jerusalem, and the concern that use of the saints as intermediaries might harm rather than enhance a direct relationship with God.⁴⁵ Langland instead points his audience to the importance of repentance, the dangers posed by the Seven Deadly Sins, and the need to learn the truths of Christian doctrine. As part of the learning

⁴⁵ Jerome felt it necessary to distinguish between the *latria* (worship) offered to God and the *doulia* (veneration) properly accorded to the saints. *P. L.*, 23, 390. The point is also made by the Second Council of Nicea (787).

process the poet incorporates a second journey to Jerusalem, this time a dream visit to the earthly city to witness Christ's sufferings and death (XVII). This witnessing of the Passion narrative is a necessary part of the Dreamer's theological education. In its dramatic presentation and sense of involvement it mirrors the meditations advocated by Richard Rolle⁴⁶ and the author of the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditations on the Life of Christ* among others. The meditative technique of entering into the biblical narrative, and in particular the practice of journeying in the imagination through space and time to witness the crucifixion of Christ, was common in late medieval spirituality and offers an interesting parallel, in its objectives and effects, to the practice of place pilgrimage. Those who desired to enter into the events of Christ's Passion, whether through the use of their spiritual imaginations or by standing in the very spot where the Saviour had suffered, were seeking an immediacy of experience which would enrich and inspire their spiritual journeys. Langland taps into this rich vein of spiritual encouragement in order to move and motivate his audience as they pursue their daily journey to the heavenly Jerusalem.

B. The *Canterbury Tales*

There is no explicit criticism of place pilgrimage in the *Canterbury Tales*, not even from the Parson, who, though accused of Lollard⁴⁷ sympathies because of his dislike of swearing,⁴⁸ shows no Lollard disapproval of pilgrimages.⁴⁹ Yet a thread of implied

⁴⁶ Rolle (c.1300-1349) in his *Meditations on the Passion* speaks as though present in Jerusalem: 'A Lord ... in þis gronyng, and in þis mychel pyne, þou gost owt of Jerusalem toward þi deth. Þe cyte is so noble, þe pupyl is so mychel, þe folke comyth rennyng owt of iche a strete.' Rolle, *English Writings*, 23.

⁴⁷ A term which originally denoted a follower of John Wyclif (c.1330-84) but was later applied to anyone critical of the Church. Lollards emphasised the authority of the Bible and strongly opposed indulgences, pilgrimages, clerical celibacy and the doctrine of transubstantiation. See Part II, Introduction.

⁴⁸ II 1170-77.

⁴⁹ For Lollard objections to pilgrimage see for example *Two Wycliffite Texts*, 1993 #79, 61-4. Thorpe asserts that the majority of pilgrims to earthly shrines are ignorant of the essentials of the faith and that

questioning of this practice can be seen to run through the work, the most obvious examples of this technique being the descriptions of the Monk and the Prioress, both of whom have strayed far from their cloisters, and the inappropriate behaviour of the majority of the would-be pilgrims,⁵⁰ who are shown riding in comfort rather than walking, and indulging in indecorous conversation rather than religious observance.⁵¹ The extent to which Chaucer's presentation of religious and lay participants in the journey to Canterbury corresponds with criticism levelled both by members of the Church hierarchy and Lollard critics⁵² would seem to indicate his own awareness of the potential for abuse in this ostensibly spiritual exercise.

A particular example of the question marks which Chaucer appears to place over the practice of place pilgrimage, and one which is particularly relevant to the role of Jerusalem, is his portrayal of the Wife of Bath who is, significantly, the most widely travelled pilgrim in the *Canterbury Tales*. The journeys attributed to her are certainly impressive. Not only has she been to Rome, Compostela and Cologne but she has visited Jerusalem no fewer than three times, a prodigious feat when the perils described by real-life pilgrims such as William Wey are taken into account. Her journeying, however, is summarised in a phrase which by its nature and context places a question mark over the spirit in which it is undertaken. Inserted between the list of holy places she has visited and a description indicating her disposition towards lechery, comes a line which suggests the use of *double* (if not triple) *entendre*: she knows much, says Chaucer, of 'wandrynge by the weye' (*Prol.* 467). Since the Wife of Bath herself in the *Prologue* to her *Tale* reveals that she uses pilgrimages to look for new lovers (551-7), this line seems to imply that despite the time and effort she has devoted, particularly to travelling to Jerusalem, her journeys lack spiritual direction and presumably spiritual profit. Her supposedly pious activities are in fact

their motivation is 'more to have riches and prosperite of þis world þan for to be enricid wip vertues in her soulis' (63).

⁵⁰ See Chapter IX:1.

⁵¹ See Constable (1976), 130-142.

⁵² On pilgrimage by religious see Chapter X: 1:A; on criticisms of the laity see Chapter IX: 1.

occasions for wandering, a word which, as we have seen in *Piers Plowman*, has a strong connotation of spiritual lostness.⁵³ Her gender is also highly significant in this context. As we have seen, pilgrimages by women had been regarded with suspicion from the creation of the Holy Land onwards.⁵⁴ Jerome, writing in the late fourth century, was scandalised by a female pilgrim whose dress, conduct and companions made her, in his opinion, fit to be 'the bride of Nero;' Gregory of Nyssa voiced similar concerns.⁵⁵ During the Anglo-Saxon period St Boniface, among others, expressed concern lest female English pilgrims fall into immorality. A thirteenth-century poem makes a similar point:

The wayward wife asks leave
to tour the monasteries abroad,
and, entering the brothels,
she frequents them more than the shrines.⁵⁶

Such insinuations, of course, form part of a broader misogynist tradition, yet seem particularly unjust when set alongside the fact that the German traveller Arnold von Harff in his Holy Land narrative seems to have regarded as an indispensable part of a (male) pilgrim's vocabulary the phrase, 'Woman may I sleep with you?' which he helpfully supplies in Greek, Slavonic, Arabic and 'the Jewish speech.'⁵⁷ Chaucer, of course, was using traditional material for his own purposes but it is surely indicative of some reservations towards geographical pilgrimage that he should make the most active 'place-pilgrim' of the Canterbury group a woman, and a woman of unmistakably low morals at that.

⁵³ See Chapter VIII: 1.

⁵⁴ Despite, ironically, the role played by the Empress Helena in the creation of many of the holy places. See Chapter III.

⁵⁵ See Chapter III.

⁵⁶ 'Petit licentiam uxor nefaria/ ut vadat peregre per monasteria,/ et tecta subiens prostibularia,/ plus illa celebrat quam sanctuaria.' Cited Mann (1973), 123.

⁵⁷ Von Harff, 77, 91, 131, 220.

The presentation of Chaucer's pilgrims in the *Prologue* and subsequently through their tales and interaction suggests strongly that participation in place pilgrimage does not of itself effect change. It may, however, provide a context, a space for reflection, in which such change may be more readily experienced. Certainly this appears to be the hope of the Parson, a character to whom Chaucer attributes a rare integrity⁵⁸ and to whom he allocates the concluding tale.⁵⁹ The Parson tells his fellow travellers that he will show them the way

in this viage
Of thilke parfit glorious pilgrymage
That highte Jerusalem celestial.

(*Parson's Prologue*, 49-51)

There are many ways, he says, to the heavenly Jerusalem but the surest is Penitence. He therefore offers them instruction in the practice of penance, including a comprehensive survey of the Seven Deadly Sins. Like Langland, Chaucer thus draws a very close connection between the practice of life pilgrimage to the heavenly city and the value of penance and a life of obedience. Chaucer, however, goes a step further in delineating the joys of the heavenly Jerusalem. In the process he draws an implicit comparison between the short-term benefits to be derived from visiting the shrine of St Thomas, such as the hope of physical healing and a sight of the glittering treasures which adorned the saint's shrine, and the eternal joys which await weary pilgrims as they reach their heavenly goal and gaze upon God himself:

there joye has no contrarioustee of wo ne grevaunce; ther alle harmes been

⁵⁸ The Parson's role in life as described in the *General Prologue* is 'to drawen folk to hevene' (*Prol.* 519)

which makes the stated purpose of his *Tale* particularly appropriate.

⁵⁹ On the position and function of the Parson's Tale see Wenzel (1981).

passed of this present lyf ... ther as the body, that whilom was syk, freele,
and fieble, and mortal, is inmortal ... ther as ne is neither hunger, thurst, ne
coold, but every soule replenyssed with the sighte of the parfit knowynge of
God.

(*Parson's Tale*, 1076-9)

C. *Pearl*

The supreme vision of the heavenly Jerusalem in Middle English literature comes in the exquisitely-fashioned alliterative poem *Pearl*⁶⁰ (c. 1390) which, like *Piers Plowman*, concerns a narrator whose dream journey is intended to inspire him to persevere in his life journey to that eternal city. The poem also offers an intricate exploration of the relationship between person and place, through a series of scene changes, during each of which the focus shifts from a place associated with a person to the person themselves. Grieving beside the grave of his infant daughter, whose burial mound he treats almost as a reliquary or shrine, the narrator is transported in a dream to meet his 'lost' child in person and discovers that she has in fact become a Pearl Maiden, one of the 144,000 virgins who form the retinue of the Lamb of God in the new Jerusalem. Like Holy Church in *Piers Plowman*, the Maiden's function is to instruct. In the process of enlightening her somewhat obtuse parent, she introduces him first to the old Jerusalem, then to the city described in the Apocalypse. Significantly, in both instances the place is important only as a setting for the Lamb of God. It is his glimpse of the Lamb and of the wound He has suffered for mankind which affects the Dreamer most profoundly. When the vision is abruptly cut short, he vows to devote his life to finding the way to the city, so that he too may become one of those who rejoice in the sight of the Saviour.

⁶⁰ Sarah Stanbury asserts that '*Pearl* is in essence a journey to Jerusalem,' Stanbury (1988), 117-31. I suggest that it is in fact a journey to two Jerusalems and that the links and contrasts between the two cities form an important part of the dream revelation. See Chapter X: 3.

4. JOURNEYING TO THE INTERIOR JERUSALEM

A similar pre-eminence of person over place can be also be seen in Walter Hilton's treatise on the contemplative life: the *Scale of Perfection*. Here the pilgrimage of life is expressed in terms of an inner journey of the soul towards what Bonaventure calls an 'interior Jerusalem.'⁶¹ This journey requires constant movement away from sin and towards heaven; this movement is essentially inward.⁶² Hilton, however, chooses to express it in an extended metaphor based upon the geographical pilgrimage to Jerusalem, an image from which he elicits remarkably positive lessons on sacrifice, single-mindedness and security. A pilgrim 'going to Jerusalem leaves behind him house and land, wife and children ... if you want to be a spiritual pilgrim you must make yourself naked of all you have' (2.21). 'If men want to delay you trying to draw you with pleasures and make you leave your pilgrimage turn a deaf ear and do not reply, saying that you want only to be in Jerusalem.' Just as the traveller drawing near to Jerusalem sees 'from afar' small sudden gleams shining from that city, so the contemplative passing through spiritual darkness will experience glimpses of the light of Christ (2.25).⁶³

The goal of the contemplative is, once again, not a place but a person: 'According to our spiritual proposition, Jerusalem is as much to say *sight of peace* and stands for contemplation ... for contemplation is nothing other than a sight of Jesus, who is true peace' (2.21). Despite the positive lessons that he draws from the practice of place pilgrimage, the life that Hilton advocates is based upon spiritual not physical journeying. In the first Book of the Scale he wrote: 'there is no need to run to Rome or Jerusalem to look for [Jesus] there, but turn your thought into your own soul where he is hidden' (I.49). This concept of *peregrinatio in stabilitate*,⁶⁴ woven into

⁶¹ Bonaventure, *Itinéraire*, 7.1.

⁶² As another English mystical writer of the period indicates, it is to be 'ronne by desires, not by pases of feet.' *Cloud of Unknowing*, 112/14.

⁶³ Hilton, *Scale*.

⁶⁴ Leclercq (1961), 51.

the history of monasticism, shaped the lives of most mystics⁶⁵ and anchorites. Thus the longing expressed by the anchoress Julian of Norwich to 'be there' at the Crucifixion was fulfilled not by visiting the sites of the Passion in the earthly Jerusalem, but through revelations granted as she lay on her sick-bed in England.

Thus far it would appear that surviving Middle English literary texts do not incline towards the practice of place pilgrimage, preferring instead to emphasise the pilgrimage of life and, in the case of the mystics, the quest for the interior Jerusalem. Yet as we have seen, there is one English text which seeks to combine the attributes of every kind of pilgrimage, the *Book of Margery Kempe*. Professor Stan Hussey has commented that Margery's *Book* 'reads like a despairing attempt to bring some order to a kaleidoscope of journeys, visions, accusations and sobbings.'⁶⁶ If, however, we place Margery's book against the background of multiple interpretations of pilgrimage, we can see that it is the pilgrimage motif with its various strands of meaning which gives shape and some degree of meaning to Margery's narrative. Defying the conventions of medieval spirituality, Margery is attempting to tap into every strand of pilgrimage spirituality simultaneously, providing herself with an impossible challenge and the world around with a highly-confusing example of religious fervour. Margery, for example, was not alone in reacting with violent emotion to being in the earthly Jerusalem and it is instructive to compare the antagonism which her tears and emotional outbursts have so often provoked, with Felix Fabri's account of a visit to the Holy Sepulchre some seventy years later.⁶⁷ Some members of his group were moved to sob, to cry out, even to fall prostrate on the ground; others stood by and scoffed. There is no doubt which set of pilgrims has Fabri's approval:

I have seen ... dull and unprofitable pilgrims ... not having the spirit of God,

⁶⁵ With the exception of some European mystics such as St Bridget of Sweden who travelled widely.

⁶⁶ Hussey (1989), 117.

⁶⁷ Felix visited the Holy Land in 1480 and 1483.

who stood and smiled mockingly at the prayers, tears, prostrations, beating of breasts and the like, which were done by the rest. What is even more damnable is that these brutish men ... hold such devout people to be fools, hypocrites, vainglorious, deceivers, and brain-sick, and ever thereafter treated them with scorn.⁶⁸

Pious pilgrims such as Fabri were conscious that place-pilgrimage involved several different levels of journeying - physical, emotional and spiritual. Those who merely covered the geographical distance were but 'unprofitable pilgrims,' resembling those condemned by Langland. Those who also journeyed within their souls had much to gain. In this group, it seems, Margery Kempe deserves inclusion. With all her faults, and she herself admitted many, it seems that in terms of journeying to Jerusalem Margery achieved a remarkable degree of integration.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has sought to illustrate some of the many ways in which images of Jerusalem were used in the depiction of literal and metaphorical pilgrimage. One important question, however, has not been addressed. Much modern criticism refers, matter-of-factly, to '*literal* journeys to holy places' and to 'the *metaphor* of life as pilgrimage.' The evidence presented in this chapter, and indeed in this study as a whole, suggests, however, that this perspective may not in fact be in accord with that manifested within medieval spirituality. In the majority of texts which I have examined, the supreme significance of pilgrimage is seen to lie in seeking the New Jerusalem, the eternal reality of which the earthly city is but a shadow. As a thirteenth-century sermon points out:

⁶⁸ Fabri, *Book of the Wanderings* I. 284. 'Vidi namque in omnibus praetactis devotionibus peregrinorum, quod quidam stolidi et aridi peregrini, imo bestiales animales, spiritum Dei non habentes, stabant et cacterorum devotiones, fletus, prostrationes, pectorum punctiones et caetera talia subsannabant et deridebant. Et quod dammnabilius est, isti rudes et coeci omni devotione et affectione vacui, spurcitiis repleti tales devotos judicabant fatuos, hypocritas, ostentatores, fictos et non sanae mentis esse, eosque

Many of us have taken up our cross of penance... intending to go towards that holy celestial Jerusalem. Such are truly pilgrims... This pilgrimage is superior to all other pilgrimages, because it is for its sake that the others are undertaken, and if it is not realised, all the others are of little value.⁶⁹

It would not seem unreasonable, therefore, to suggest that within medieval spirituality, it may in fact have been 'geographical' pilgrimage which was the metaphor, a miniature version of that longer, more complex journey which every soul must choose to undertake.

What then was the value of journeying to the earthly Jerusalem and other holy places?

It is clear from this study that, from the fourth century onwards, there were inherent tensions within the pilgrimage concept as Christians struggled to reconcile aspects of interior, moral and place pilgrimage within an overall commitment to the pilgrimage of life.⁷⁰ The Anglo-Saxon Church can be seen to have absorbed many different interpretations of pilgrimage from its roots in Celtic and Roman Christianity,⁷¹ though in time the emphases of the latter, particularly in terms of pilgrimage to holy places and a geographically-fixed form of monasticism, gained precedence. By the later Middle Ages attitudes towards various modes of pilgrimage were becoming more polarised. Yet, on the very eve of the Reformation, it is possible to observe some kind of resolution of the on-going tensions. Chaucer's fictional Parson and the

postea despectui habebant. Fabri. *Evagatorium*, 239.

⁶⁹ 'Multi nostrum crucem poenitentiae assumpserunt in hac Quadragesima, proponentes ire in illam santam Hierusalem celestem. Tales vere peregrini sunt... haec peregrinatio in hoc excellentior est aliis, quia propter hanc frunt aliae, et si haec non fiat, aliae parum valent.' William Peraldus, *Sermo I dominicae quartae in Quadragesima*; in Guilelmus Alvernus, *Opera Omnia*. Orleans and Paris, 1674, II 50, cited Wenzel (1981), 98.

⁷⁰ See Chapters I-IV.

⁷¹ See Chapters V-VII.

peripatetic Margery Kempe may seem an unlikely combination; yet in both we can detect attempts to reconcile the irreconcilable. The Parson, though adamant regarding the true goal of humankind, is shown conceding that there are many *weyes espirituels* which lead to the city on high.⁷² Margery, though only partially successful in communicating her spiritual desires, sought to avail herself of all the *weyes* which she could access in her quest for the same goal. Underlying both Margery's narrative and the Parson's instruction is a single motivation which, as this study has sought to show, forms an essential element of every type of pilgrimage: the desire to encounter God. For the aim of all true Christian pilgrims was not in the final analysis to see Jerusalem, earthly or heavenly, but to see Jesus. Their supreme goal was not a place but a person. Mystics and contemplatives may have preferred to visit the earthly Jerusalem through meditation alone and to seek an 'interior Jerusalem' where they could gaze upon the face of God in the quiet of their cells. For many others, however, not least among them the redoubtable Margery Kempe, the perils of the voyage from Venice, the trials of the long and weary road from Jaffa and the joy of reaching the city where salvation had been won, served both as paradigm and inspiration, as they too pursued the life-long journey which would bring them at last into the eternal presence of God.

⁷² Chaucer (1988), *Parson's Tale*, 79.

CONCLUSION

At nyght was come into that hostelrye
Wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye
Of sondry folk, by aventure yfalle
In felaweshipe, and *pilgrimes were they alle*.

(Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, Prologue, 23-27)

Cleophas ne knew hym noght, that he Crist were,
For his povere apparaille and pilgrymes wedes ...
And al was ensample, for sooth, to us synfulle here,
That we sholde [lowe be] and loveliche of speche,
And apparaille us noght over proudly – for *pilgrymes are we alle*.

(*Piers Plowman*, XI. 233-34, 238-240)

This study asks a fundamental but hitherto largely ignored question: what precisely did pilgrimage mean to medieval writers? That deceptively simple query has prompted many others. How many meanings might pilgrimage have? Where did these meanings come from? How well did various understandings of pilgrimage combine within medieval spirituality? Who were the true pilgrims - those who sought 'ferne halwes' (*Gen. Prol.* 14), those who withdrew into the cloister or the anchorite's cell, or those who simply walked the path of daily obedience? In order to answer these questions it has been necessary to examine the way in which Christian ideas of pilgrimage came into being, shaped by the Bible, the classical pagan world, the writings of the Church Fathers and the impulses of popular religion. In the process I have identified a number of factors which need to be borne in mind in any discussion of the pilgrimage motif.

Firstly, it has become clear that the *primary* meaning of pilgrimage within Christian thought is concerned with the journey of individual believers through an alien world to the homeland of heaven. Like Adam and Eve, all are involuntary exiles from the joys of Eden; those who wish may imitate Abraham and other biblical figures in choosing to become pilgrims en route to heaven. Through this theological, historical and literary survey, I have demonstrated the

consistent presence and significant influence of the concept of the pilgrimage of life, from the earliest days of the Church through its expression in Anglo-Saxon spirituality and literature, to its widespread use in Middle English literature. The weight of this influence, I suggest, has not always been fully recognised in discussions of Old and Middle English texts. It is evident that the linked concepts of exile on earth and of seeking a homeland in heaven, together undergird a surprising number of Old English poems and prose works. Similarly, Middle English writers exhibit a strong awareness of the life pilgrimage motif which has important implications for the interpretations of their works. As I indicated in my introduction, there has been a strong tendency in discussions of Middle English literature to concentrate upon the practice of place pilgrimage, thus failing to give due weight to aspects of interior and moral pilgrimage which are crucial to the interpretation of texts such as *Piers Plowman* and the *Canterbury Tales*.

Secondly, it is apparent that, within the over-arching concept of life as journey, there are three main elements which have been held in tension (with varying degrees of success) throughout the centuries: interior, moral and place pilgrimage. In attempting to summarise the relationship of these elements it is helpful to regard moral pilgrimage as the core element of the pilgrimage of life, to which some individuals added interior pilgrimage *or* place pilgrimage but very rarely both. During the period under discussion, both interior and moral pilgrimage tended to emphasise physical stability. The former advocated withdrawal from the world that the would-be pilgrim might travel more freely within their spirit; the latter implied an on-going commitment to a particular calling, religious or secular, expressed in daily obedience. Place pilgrimage, in contrast, was essentially about mobility; not only did it remove men and women from their normal context but it also carried an in-built element of physical and moral danger, thus exposing those who undertook journeys to holy places to accusations of irresponsibility, instability and immorality. In theory, place pilgrimage was a valuable way of expressing and strengthening the life pilgrimage of an individual; in practice it was often seen as a distraction from, or a substitute for, real devotion.

Thirdly, there has been through the centuries an observable process of oscillation between these different modes of pilgrimage. It is as if a form of spirituality which advocates the worship of an omnipresent (but invisible) God and the pursuit of a remote (and equally invisible) heavenly goal is constantly subverted and re-orientated by an innate human impulse towards modes of religious expression which are both tangible and quantifiable. Thus there is a persistent tendency to supplement (and, in popular spirituality, almost to replace) a life-long journey to heaven in the company of a God who cannot be seen, with journeys to holy places and prayers to saints whose relics at least can be touched. This tendency manifests itself in a pattern of shifts between an emphasis on journeying into the unknown with God, expressed through a life of daily obedience, and journeying to a holy place in order to meet God either directly or through intermediaries. This is expressed first in the Old Testament narrative in the contrast between the experiences of Abraham and the Exodus journey of the Israelites, and the system of fixed-place pilgrimage, with its emphasis on Jerusalem as the place where God dwelt. In time, the clear emphasis in the writings of New Testament and the Early Church on the omnipresence of God and the moral dimension of life pilgrimage was likewise subtly modified as, from the fourth century onwards, a network of holy places spread across Christendom. Even the Reformation, with its re-affirmation of life pilgrimage and rejection of relics and holy places, was not the last word on this subject, since the last one hundred and fifty years have seen remarkable developments in place pilgrimage, not only within Protestantism, but also amongst those of little or no faith at all.

My object in seeking to establish the theological and devotional heritage of medieval writers has been to facilitate the study of the pilgrimage motif within Old and Middle English literature. The perspectives which I have identified above are, I believe, of value in interpreting and evaluating the use of various pilgrimage concepts in medieval texts and I have sought to illustrate ways in which their application may shed some light on well-worn problems. Such a survey must of necessity be incomplete; such a journey must leave many byways as yet unexplored. This particular pilgrimage can make no claim to completeness; it has merely sought to identify and map some of the roads to be taken.

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