

Learning from Langland: theo-poetic resources for the post-Hind landscape

Submitted by Helen Mary Burn, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Research in Theology, June 2011.

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Abstract

In the last ten years the Church of England has tried, by means of two reports leading to what I term the ‘Hind settlement’, to re-configure its provision of theological education. The tensions generated by the attempt to hold together different discourses and to impose regional re-organisation in the context of complex developments both in higher education and in patterns of lay and ordained ministry form the basis of my critique of Hind. I argue that Hind’s recourse to the image of the ‘body of Christ’ in the service of an instrumentalist model of ministry exposes inadequacies of a theological anthropological, Christological and ecclesiological nature. I identify a medieval text, *Piers Plowman*, as a conversation partner which offers a different way of negotiating an analogously difficult set of issues around learning, discipleship and power. My hermeneutical approach to the poem sees its primary impetus as arising from the constant interplay between the experiences of daily life and the attempt to work out a personal and social understanding of salvation.

By comparing the ways in which Hind and Langland explore learning as measurable progress, and lay and clerical models of learning, I propose that *Piers Plowman* offers some valuable resources to the next stage of the Hind process. Not only does the poem foreground the chaotic co-existence of multiple voices in a marketplace of competing definitions of learning, and acknowledge the recalcitrance of communities when presented with opportunities to change, but it also, in the figure of Piers, hints at the possibility of going beyond the lay/clerical impasse. The poem’s recognition of sin and the need for repentance, in contrast to Hind language of management and effectiveness, and its requirement of the reader to participate in the making of new meaning, present an ongoing challenge to a culture of ‘learning outcomes’.

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Abbreviations

CATS	Credit Transfer and Accumulation Scheme
EDF	Education for Discipleship
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
Hind One	<i>Formation for Ministry in a Learning Church</i>
Hind Two	<i>Shaping the Future</i>
RTP	Regional Training Partnership
WEMTC	West of England Ministerial Training Course
YLS	Yearbook of Llangland Studies

Introduction

The word ‘learning’ has been much used in the world of theological education in the Church of England over the last decade. In particular, it has been used in conjunction with two other words: the word ‘Church’, as in reference to ‘a learning Church’; and the word ‘outcomes’, where ‘learning outcomes’ have been set down for programmes of ministerial training.¹ Yet the meaning of the word ‘learning’ is far from self-evident; it forms part of a range of discourses in the worlds of business, management and government policy as well as those of education, and its ubiquity renders it multivalent. It is a word which has come to have such a wide scope that any usage requires careful analysis and interrogation.

In this thesis, I am going to analyse and interrogate models of Christian learning that are influencing policy in the Church of England in the early twenty-first century, and to assess their adequacy. More precisely, I am going to conduct a detailed analysis of two reports, *Formation for Ministry in a Learning Church* (Hind One) and *Shaping the Future* (Hind Two). I will begin by placing them in context. Definitions of learning are neither value-neutral nor apolitical. Learning always takes place within, and is shaped by, a particular socio-economic and cultural context, and Christian understandings of learning are no exception. Christian identity is formed through constant negotiation with both tradition and context, and thus any official church statement at any given point as to what constitutes meaningful learning and how that may best be enabled and organised is caught up in a complex nexus. Thus my exploration of the Hind reports’ theology of learning will involve ascertaining where it is situated within contemporary debate about learning, vocation and

¹ *Formation for Ministry in a Learning Church*, Ministry Division of the Church of England, Church House Publishing, 2003.

the role of institutions of higher education; where it sits in relation to a complex polity involving central Church structures, dioceses and colleges of Higher Education/Further Education; and how and in what way its particular emphases are rooted in Christian theology and tradition. There is, after all, no such entity as an abstraction called ‘theological education’ whose content and ethos can be decided in a vacuum, only its historically and culturally conditioned embodiments in a state of constant adaptation to changing contexts. That adaptation involves an ongoing interplay between the church’s understanding of its mission and ministry, the form its theological education – both lay and ordained – takes, and the social structures within which the church finds itself and which in turn shape it profoundly.

The Hind process can be understood as an attempt to reach a workable settlement for the Church of England’s provision of theological education in the midst of the complex and fast-changing context of the early twenty-first century.² This settlement seeks a degree both of theological consensus and of institutional reconfiguration. It invokes the idea of a ‘learning Church’ where all parts contribute to the effective activity of the body, and where ministerial education has clear outcomes. It advocates regional re-organisation and a spirit of co-operation between different partners, including dioceses, courses, colleges and Higher Education Institutions.³

² I have used the language of ‘settlement’ and ‘settling’ from discussions of Scriptural Reasoning where a settlement is defined as a ‘workable arrangement in which all the presently available pieces have been placed together, with no loose ends.’ See Mike Higton and Rachel Muers, *The Text in Play: Experiments in Scriptural Reasoning*, forthcoming.

³ This is pointed out clearly in the Preface to Hind One: ‘Of course, none of this will work unless everyone involved is willing to move into a more collaborative, partnership-oriented way of thinking and working.’ Hind One, p. viii.

My thesis is, in part, an attempt at a judgement as to the adequacy of that settlement, its strengths, omissions and elisions. I focus on the judgement of the *theological* adequacy of that settlement, and my primary concern is with theologies of learning, and how they reflect deeper issues of epistemology, theological anthropology and ecclesiology, and the lived experience of human subjects. Yet that should not be taken to mean that my thesis is motivated primarily by *conceptual* concerns: the impetus for such a study arises from my own role as a theological educator, dealing not only with concepts and models but with human beings training for ministry in the Church of England, in all their situatedness, complexity and difference.

However, this thesis does not simply identify problems with the Hind settlement, but more urgently, it seeks new resources to bring to the post-Hind landscape – and with the help of those resources seeks to set out a different way of reaching a settlement. It has become apparent during the course of writing that what is now required is not so much a critique of Hind as a requiem, followed by the pursuit of a very different *kind* of settlement. The primary resource I have chosen is a surprising one which requires some explanation: it is *Piers Plowman*, a fourteenth century poem, which I will introduce more fully in Chapter Two. I have chosen *Piers Plowman* for several reasons. Firstly, it was written at a time of change and uncertainty which has some parallels with our own, however distant, and it deals with issues of power, the privileging and corruption of certain discourses, and the nature of discipleship, as they manifest themselves in the daily working life of English society. Albeit that the late fourteenth century was a very different time to our own, it will be shown that the world of the poem contains significant elements which have some connection to those with which that Hind wrestles, not least a concern with definitions of learning and discipleship. Secondly, *Piers Plowman* is a text which is highly conscious of

competing discourses and definitions of learning and which finds ways of both acknowledging them and transcending them.

The heart of the thesis is therefore a dialogue between two different texts and two different contexts – the textual and socio-cultural worlds of *Hind* and *Langland*. As the *Hind* reports reflect the discourse of a certain section of western culture in late modernity, so *Piers Plowman* draws on, re-defines and resists certain languages of learning which were current in late fourteenth century England. The differences between these two periods are considerable and need to be respected, and I am not suggesting that fourteenth century ideas can be transposed into a twenty-first century context.⁴ Nevertheless, the fact that there are certain similarities between the materials with which *Piers Plowman* settles and the material with which the *Hind* process settles allows the conversation to proceed. The fact that the poem does not settle in the same way that *Hind* does calls the inevitability of the *Hind* settlement into question, and challenges us at least to ask whether an alternative, more *Piers*-like route towards settlement might be possible in the present.

I will begin in Chapter One with an analysis of the context in which *Hind One* was written and the ways in which its use of the word ‘learning’ is both caught up in, and tries to remain distinct from, contemporary definitions. An understanding of the report’s educational and theological underpinning will then emerge. Three aspects of the *Hind*

⁴ David Lawton writing on literary history and cultural studies, puts it thus: ‘Absolute cultural relativism is a hermeneutic impossibility: we help construct the Others of the past, not only the medieval Other but the medievalist Other, and they cannot therefore be exclusively Other. If this is so, our best resource may be a version of the hermeneutic circle in which we consciously bring our modernity into dialogue with our understanding of the medieval.’ David Lawton, ‘Analytical Survey 1: Literary History and Cultural Study’, in Wendy Scase, Rita Copeland and David Lawton (eds.), *New Medieval Literatures* 1, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1997, pp. 237-269, p. 240.

settlement will be described and evaluated: its regional agenda; relationships between theological education and higher education provision; and the desire to extend lay learning. Beyond its overt educational agenda I will also examine the ways in which Hind One's rhetoric functions to make it a particular kind of learning experience for the reader.

In Chapter Two, I introduce *Piers Plowman* and, by means of a close reading of the Prologue of the B text, identify ways in which the poem foregrounds debates about learning and power. I discuss the scholarly construct of an opposition between scholastic and monastic understandings of the purpose of learning in the late fourteenth century, in order to demonstrate how *Piers Plowman* can be understood both as illustrating the potential conflict between these models, and also as offering a way of transcending it.

Chapters Three and Four go on to explore how the Hind settlement deals with its own set of tensions as it tries to hold together the language of ministerial formation with that of formal accredited learning, and the learning of the whole people of God with the particular training needs of the ordained. In both chapters, a close reading of the Hind reports is followed by a critical analysis of sections of *Piers Plowman*. In Chapter Three, I will offer an interpretation of the poem as the hermeneutical journey of the learning self, an approach which avoids having to read the progress of its protagonist as either a shift from intellectual to affective learning, or as the achievement of measurable progress according to any spiritual or ethical scheme. In Chapter Four, I will argue that despite its rhetoric of a 'learning church', the Hind settlement perpetuates a clerical model of learning, and suggest that in the figure of Piers, Langland finds a means of breaking down the lay/clerical divide.

Chapter Five will take as its focus a single image, central to both texts: that of the body, which includes both the embodied human subject and the social and ecclesial body. The conversation between Hind and Langland will be extended as the chapter asks what the respective roles which the metaphor of the body plays within the narrative and argument of each text might tell us about underlying notions of learning, Christian identity and life together. By analysing the use in Hind One of a particular metaphor, that of the church as the body of Christ, and juxtaposing it with Langland's presentation of individual and ecclesial life, I will propose that those who decide policy in the Church of England need to reintegrate the discourses of human embodied experience with those of corporate efficiency.

In Chapter Six the thesis turns to the post-Hind landscape and its vulnerability to a market-driven model of educational provision. It will conclude that a different kind of settlement requires a way of using language which is characterised by attentiveness, by openness to multiple perspectives, and by the recognition and transformation of the complexity of lived experience. *Piers Plowman* offers such a language as a resource to a church seeking to negotiate a new settlement.

Chapter One: The Hind Settlement

This chapter sets the Hind settlement in its wider context, both within the historical development of theological training in the Church of England and the challenges of the present. It describes and evaluates three dimensions of the Hind settlement: its impetus towards regional re-organisation; its configuration of relationships with Higher Education; and its intention to widen the scope of learning beyond the ordained. Having assessed the challenges to the Hind proposals, the chapter offers a theological critique of the reports' use of the language of effectiveness.

Introducing Hind

The report *Formation for Ministry in a Learning Church* (2003) is a 196 page A4 document, also available electronically. It is divided into nine chapters, outlining proposals for the re-organisation of theological education in the Church of England, in consultation with ecumenical partners. Its successor, *Shaping the Future*, appeared in 2006, and contains the complete set of learning outcome statements for ordained ministry within the Church of England to which ordination-training courses must work. It describes itself as a follow-up to Hind One and consists of the presentation of the reports of four Hind task groups.⁵ Both reports are clear that they do not wish to focus exclusively on training for ordination, as though specialist knowledge is reserved for the elite few, but on being 'a learning Church'. To that end, proposals for programmes for Education for Discipleship, and Reader/Preacher ministry, are outlined in *Shaping the Future*.⁶ Both documents provide a theological

⁵ *Shaping the Future*, Church House Publishing, 2006, Preface, p. v.

⁶ Education for Discipleship is a programme of lay study for all Christians, whose goals, ethos and criteria are set out on pp. 6-8 of *Shaping the Future*.

rationale for their proposals, Hind One in its third chapter and Hind Two in the Introduction to Part 3 (pp. 59-63).

Hind One did not emerge in a vacuum: its predecessor, *Managing Planned Growth*, did much of the preliminary calculation which led Hind to the conclusion that wholesale re-organisation of theological education provision was needed. In terms of the impetus to manage human resources more effectively, Hind One is also indebted to the 1995 Turnbull Report *Working as One Body* (indeed, as will be explored in Chapter Five, Hind borrows from Turnbull one of its central images, that of the body). Hind One arrived at a particular point in the Church's provision of ministerial training and theological education more broadly, and faced an array of challenges which it sets out clearly in Chapter 2: 'The issues that have driven our work'. At the time of writing, the Church was experiencing a severe financial squeeze, and reviewing training provision was one part of a wider response to this.

In order to understand the pattern of training provision which Hind One addresses, it is necessary to provide a brief outline of the development of theological education in the Church of England.

Church of England theological training past and present

The involvement of the Church in education within England has a long history, stretching back to the time when monasteries and cathedral schools were the main providers of education, and involving the foundation and growth of Oxford and Cambridge universities.⁷

⁷ For a detailed account, see Nicholas Orme, *Education and Society in Medieval and Renaissance England*, Hambledon Press, London and Rounceverte, 1989; *Medieval Schools*, Yale University Press, 2006.

Fluctuations in theological training since the Reformation and the relationship of Church provision to the universities have been well documented by Rosemary Day.⁸ A significant development was the foundation of theological colleges in the period 1833-1881, in part as a response to the increasing ‘secularisation of English education and a move to train more dedicated and worthy clergymen.’⁹ The model of training offered by the new colleges was initially very much what Robert Towler and Anthony Coxon call a ‘closed’ model, whereby the individual leaves the world as a lay person, and returns after time spent in an alternative community as a different and special person: a priest. Time at college socialised the individual into a particular social role. The ecology of training underwent another change more recently in the 1970’s with the emergence of part-time regional training courses which arose to cater for increasing numbers of people who were offering for non-stipendiary ministry or who, for family reasons, were not able to re-locate to a residential theological college for two or three years.¹⁰ During the 1990’s, in response to the report *Stranger in the Wings*, another layer of training provision was added alongside colleges and courses in the shape of various diocesan (as opposed to regional) schemes for training locally deployed priests and lay ministers. Each of these training providers continues to have a particular history, ethos, identity, and relationship with other constituencies, both within the wider Church of England and ecumenically.

⁸ Rosemary O’Day, *The English Clergy*, Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1979.

⁹ Robert Towler and Anthony P.M. Coxon, *The Fate of the Anglican Clergy*, Macmillan, London, 1979, pp. 23-4.

¹⁰ In Towler and Coxon’s terms such courses operate according to an ‘open’ model whereby, because there is no withdrawal from the world, the purpose of training is ‘the acquisition of defined knowledge, skills and information, all of which are tested and certificated at the end of the course.’ Towler and Coxon, op. cit., p. 20. They posit that the fundamental differences between ‘open’ and ‘closed’ training lead to very different understandings and practices of ordained ministry, and to different attitudes towards training.

The Hind settlement: regions

Hind One identifies as a cause for concern the scattered and uncoordinated nature of theological education, as evidenced by the fact that by the turn of the twenty-first century there were twelve theological colleges, fourteen regional courses, and a further nineteen diocesan schemes for training ordained local ministers.¹¹ Alongside these statistics Hind provided figures representing the distribution of Methodist and United Reformed Church trainee ministers, and concluded that there was a need both to work with ecumenical partners, and to increase regional groupings under one umbrella where too many small courses existed in isolation. Not only was there a financial incentive to review provision with a view to eradicating unnecessary duplication, but it had become clear that existing provision had grown up in a somewhat haphazard way. The report observes at 2.12 that ‘looked at as a system as a whole, the smallness of most of our establishments and the lack of co-ordination between them raises serious organisational and educational issues.’ It concludes that there is thus an ‘urgent need for the Church of England to make much better use of its scattered training resources.’¹² This includes the financial implications of having so many small courses, where larger units would save on administration as well as having the educational benefits of larger staff teams.

It is as the solution to the problems and challenges outlined above that the idea of Regional Training Partnerships (RTP’s) is put forward by Hind One in Chapter 6 of the report. What is envisaged is the coming together of different institutions within a region with a degree of convergence regarding curriculum and resourcing. The three main arguments presented in 6.27 are: the principle of subsidiarity (building on government policy regarding regions as

¹¹ Hind One, pp. 149-151.

¹² Hind One, p. 20.

retaining local connection whilst being structurally workable); the potential to develop specialisms according to regional context; and the building up of regional identity as students train with others from their own and nearby dioceses. The importance of regional partnership is re-affirmed in several places in *Hind Two*, on pp. 34-37 and 42-46 (in relation to training for the Methodist Preacher and Anglican Reader role), and on p. 61 in the context of Initial Ministerial Education (IME). *Hind Two* acknowledges ‘the frustrations that come from a fragmented and incoherent provision’ and ‘the pressures and difficulties that come from attempting to do everything in very small institutions’, arguing that implementing the proposals made in *Hind One* will result in provision which ‘will constitute a continuous and coherent personal and ministerial development process.’¹³

That such an idea is capable of producing new partnerships and patterns of training is illustrated by the production of a third volume in the *Hind* series, entitled *Drawn Together*, which was disseminated by Ministry Division in 2008, and which declares that it is to be received not as a blueprint for other regions but as ‘an encouragement and an example of good practice’, offering insights into how ‘positive responses to the challenges we face enable the release of fresh energies in support of the mission and ministry of Christ.’¹⁴ The production of this document suggests a recognition of the diverse ways in which centrally produced proposals may be worked out in different contexts, and the multiple nature of its authorship affirms the perspectives of a range of voices in an ongoing discussion.

¹³ *Hind Two*, p. 61.

¹⁴ *Drawn Together*, Ministry Division of the Church of England, Church House Publishing, 2008, p. vii.

The challenge to the Hind regional settlement

However, despite the positive rhetoric of *Drawn Together*, the Hind project of regional co-operation has not proved uniformly capable of implementation. The proposed re-organisation confronted at the outset a set of interconnected problems to do with the dispersed authority structures of the Church of England. The first was to do with the fact that the regions as decided by the Regions Task Group did not necessarily reflect geographical realities and allegiances, and required the co-operation of diocesan bishops in order to work.¹⁵ Some regions worked hard towards common validation of courses and greater sharing of resources, whilst others struggled to find any common focus.¹⁶

Secondly, standing as a challenge to any centrally devised solution is the fact that there is no commonly held ‘ethos’ of theological education within the Church of England, let alone such a thing held in common with other denominations (‘ecumenical partners’).

Theological education, as David Kelsey points out, does not exist as a disembodied abstract, but in the form of institutions and communities of teaching and learning: always concrete, always situated, always particular.¹⁷ It is the stubborn persistence of particularity within a wider national picture which in part gives rise to the problems that have arisen in trying to implement Hind’s proposals.

¹⁵ The proposed regions are set out in a bulletin of 27 May 2004, ‘Regional training partnerships offer creative potential’, to be found at http://www.cofe.anglican.org/news/regional_training_partnerships_offer_creative.html. Accessed on 15.3.2011.

¹⁶ For example, the website for the Eastern Region Training Partnership has a clear statement of purposes and principles (<http://www.ertp.org.uk/about-us/>). Other regions, such as the south west, have found other ways of continuing to serve geographically distinct areas and dispersed populations.

¹⁷ Kelsey, *To Understand God Truly*, Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1992, p. 16.

Thirdly, this particularity is manifested in the existence of multiple independent institutions with their own systems of trusteeship and governance. Each college and course has a particular history and construal as to what constitutes theological education in its context and tradition, and is responsive to local and national change.¹⁸ From their very foundation colleges have had affiliations with particular constituencies within the Church of England, such that models of training correspond to understandings of ordained ministry, and reflect different presuppositions.¹⁹ In terms of educational method, those theological colleges which are affiliated to research-based Universities such as Oxford and Cambridge find themselves operating in a different context from those regional courses whose programmes are validated by ‘new’ universities with a more vocational emphasis. Context helps shape ethos insofar as course and colleges are bound to the requirements of their validating institutions, as well as to national bodies such as the Quality Assurance Agency, and the Ministry Division of the Church of England.

¹⁸ Students experience training in a variety of ways according to the particular ‘learning pathway’ on which they find themselves. Even the names of the regional institutions which are involved in this process imply different models: for example, the West of England Ministerial Training Course as opposed to the South East Institute for Theological Education. Right from the outset there is a confusion of terms which opens up wider pedagogical questions as to the respective implications and expectations of ‘training’ as opposed to ‘theological education.’

¹⁹ For example, colleges with an Evangelical foundation, such as Trinity College, Bristol, and Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, articulate their self-understanding in language which differs from that of an Anglo-Catholic foundation such as St Stephen’s House or an ecumenical foundation such as Queens’ Birmingham. The Wycliffe Hall website states: ‘The 1877 Trust deed of Wycliffe Hall, signed by all members of the Hall Council, emphasises a Protestant interpretation of the Thirty-Nine Articles, atonement, justification, the sacraments, priesthood and the Bible.’ <http://www.wycliffehall.org.uk>, accessed on 22.4.2011. St Stephen’s House, in contrast, states on its website that it was ‘founded in 1876 by members of the Tractarian movement and has stood, ever since, in the catholic tradition of the Church of England.’ <http://www.ssho.ox.ac.uk>, accessed on 22.4.2011. This gives some indication of the diversity of provision.

One factor which increases the complexity is, as indicated above, the fact that theological education is inextricably intertwined with HE provision, both historically and practically. Since the education reforms of the nineteenth century and the establishment of national regulation, the Church of England has found ways of working with the national systems, and has kept some of its own foundations, such as the fourteen-strong Cathedral Group, within the mainstream of HE. Thus there has been a close relationship within English education between Church and State provision, with complex funding arrangements enabling schools and colleges to retain a distinctive Church status. It is within this context that theological education exists in England, in a relationship with the state which is different from, for example, the United States or Europe. The institutions addressed by Hind are independent colleges and courses, funded by the Church of England and training its ministers on behalf of the Church as a whole. However, these bodies have responded to the demand for training to be accredited by an HE institution, and thus are already in relationship with those larger validating bodies. Because of the closeness of this relationship, theological education is closely bound up with trends in HE as a whole. It is to these that we now turn.

The Hind settlement: Higher Education

Hind One appeared at a time of rapid change and expansion in HE. The policy of the 1997-2010 Labour administration to enable access to higher education for an ever greater percentage of young adults, and the increased funding of vocational degrees, were two

factors in the proliferation of provision during that period.²⁰ In addition to the widening of access to higher education, definitions of learning and knowledge have been undergoing a shift as we move into the third millennium. The characteristics of this change are outlined by the authors of *The New Production of Knowledge* which sets out the conditions of the new 'knowledge economy' characterised by lifelong learning and work-based learning requiring very different models of delivery and methodology from traditional university-based disciplines: it is transdisciplinary.²¹ The knowledge economy has been described as

a hierarchy of networks, driven by the acceleration of the rate of change and the rate of learning, where the opportunity and the capability to get access to and join knowledge intensive and learning-intensive relations determines socio-economic position of individuals and firms.²²

Put more simply, it is a version of human capital theory where economic success depends on intellectual capital, particularly the kind of knowledge generated in the workplace.²³

Information technologies have enabled learning to take place in more dispersed ways, but the more radical shift is away from understanding knowledge as something conveyed in a conventional teaching situation, to the work place as 'a site of knowledge production.'²⁴

²⁰ For a more detailed summary of changes in HE which led to the current situation, see Peter Scott, *The Meanings of Mass Higher Education*, The Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press, 1995.

²¹ Michael Gibbons, Camille Limoges, Helga Nowotny, Simon Schwarzmann, Peter Scott, Martin Trow, *The New Production of Knowledge: The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies*, Sage, London, 1994. For a critique of Gibbons, see Michael A. Peters, 'Higher Education, Development and the Learning Economy', *Policy Futures in Education*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 2006, pp. 279-291.

²² J. Houghton and B. Sheehan, *A Primer on the Knowledge Economy*, Centre for Strategic Economic Studies, Victoria University, Melbourne, 2000, p. 11, quoted in Peters, op. cit., p. 285.

²³ For a fuller definition of the knowledge economy in relation to public policy, see the Department for Education and Employment's Green Paper 'The Learning Age', HMSO, London, 1998.

²⁴ 'This new knowledge is conceptualised as practical, interdisciplinary, informal, applied, and contextual rather than theoretical, disciplinary, formal, foundational and generalisable,

As new modes of knowledge production and distribution have developed, universities have faced competition from other providers of knowledge and training, and have responded to market forces by diversifying their own provision.²⁵ One consequence of this has been that HEI's have been encouraged to develop collaborative partnerships with other training providers, including courses providing ministerial education. This has had some interesting consequences for theological education. Ministerial training courses have often been required to adapt their language of self-description to conform to prevailing funding trends, and as smaller partners, have needed considerable agility to manage their relationship with the larger institution of which they are an expendable part.²⁶ On the other hand, there are potential benefits (not least financial) to partnerships with those HEI's which encourage vocational learning and which enable more praxis-based models of theological education to

and suggests that relevance no longer equates with the 'application' of knowledge to the workplace, but instead, the workplace itself is seen as a site of learning, knowledge and knowledge production.' Lyn Brennan, 'Integrating Work-based Learning into HE', University Vocational Awards Council website, http://www.uvac.ac.uk/downloads/0401_publications/int_wbl.pdf. p8. Accessed on 15.3.2011.

²⁵ Evidence of the importance of the knowledge economy is widespread in policy documents over the last ten years. Part of the agenda is to do with how best to 'cluster' 'knowledge capital activities', and regional planning is one of these, with a vision for universities acting as focal points for a range of dispersed learning within their part of the country. The OECD document of 2001 'Cities and Regions in the New Learning Economy' and 'Universities and Regional Development: A Overview' are just two examples at the policy level of this trend. It is interesting that Hind has also picked up on the notion of regionalisation.

²⁶ One example would be the relationship between the University of Gloucestershire and the West of England Ministerial Training Course. Because the University's foundation deeds emphasise its Christian roots and the need to provide Christian teaching, it has been deemed advantageous for it to keep WEMTC within its structures. In 2008, the possibility of funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) for an employer co-funded Foundation Degree in Theology and Christian Ministry moved the relationship into a new phase, with WEMTC staff becoming part-employed by the University. The HE cuts and cap on student numbers in the academic year 2009-10 led to the University reversing the decision, making the staff formally redundant, and returning the WEMTC course to 'Collaborative Partner' status.

flourish. The changing face of knowledge production may be good news for the Church, giving it an opportunity to get away from centralised, top-down programmes of education and training and to explore other models. It may be that emerging models of the relationship between professional context and the learning required for successful reflective practice, will provide the Church with new ways of configuring its own educational processes and programmes.²⁷

It is within this context that Hind One promotes relationships between HEI's and Church training provision as being both necessary and desirable. Section 2.17 of Hind One outlines the nature of this partnership, interpreting it as a creative symbiosis. The report sets out the case for continued co-operation in the following terms:

Just as the Church, although not of the world, is inescapably in the world, the theological community cannot live in isolation. As a community of learning and understanding it must share with the academy; as a community of service it must be deeply engaged with the life and needs of society; and as a community of mission it must know and understand the world in which it has to reveal the world to come.

Hind One also offers a cautious rationale for seeking public funding for ministerial training:

However, as part of our work, we wish to consider whether public funding might more generally be available to support the Church's training enterprise and if it

²⁷ There is a great deal of research into work-based learning as institutions and practitioners try to evaluate its effects. The Higher Education Academy's final report on Work-based Learning can be found at http://www.asetonline.org/documents/wbl_illuminating.pdf. Material on the University Vocational Awards Council website includes proceedings and publications from the 2007, 2008 and 2009 Work-based Learning Futures Conferences, exploring such issues as *Learners, Knowledge, Power and the University* (2007). *Work-based Learning Futures I*, D. Young and J. Garrett (eds.), University Vocational Awards Council, Bolton, 2007, contains a number of articles which are very relevant to ways in which ministerial education is being forced to think about its own goals and ethos.

would be right to seek such funding. We do this partly because of the many links we already have with higher education and because, aware of the increasing financial demands on the parishes arising from taking responsibility for clergy stipends and pensions, it would be irresponsible not to look into the possibilities for public funding for ministerial education.²⁸

The challenge to the Hind HE settlement

One way into challenging the Hind settlement with HE is by picking up the final sentence of the paragraph quoted above and subjecting it to more careful scrutiny. Logically, it does not follow that reluctance on the part of parishes to pay their quota means that it would be ‘irresponsible’ not to seek public funding for ministerial education (though the report at this point very carefully speaks of looking into the possibilities rather than committing to partnerships with HEI’s). There is a range of possible responses to financial pressure, of which seeking funding for theological education from other sources is only one. The report at this point elides the moral implications of what is being suggested and draws on an uneasy pragmatism to make the case for public funding, a move which makes courses and colleges potentially dependent on sudden shifts of policy and which runs the risk of following trends without much theological discernment.²⁹

²⁸ Hind One, 2.22.

²⁹ A good example is the instruction from the Ministry Division in 2008 for course and colleges to move towards provision of Foundation Degrees because of the discovery that ministerial training was eligible for new HEFCE Foundation degree funding. This backfired when in 2009-10 the HE cuts meant that courses which had changed to offer Foundation Degrees found themselves facing reduced funding.

This highlights one area of potential difficulty in the relationship between the HE sector and the Church, but beyond the scramble for funding lie deeper questions about their ultimate compatibility. It cannot be assumed that close relationships with the academy – by which Hind One means institutions of HE – are inevitably as straightforward a benefit to all concerned as the report would have its readers believe.³⁰ Nor is this anything new: Christian theology has been in constant dialogue with ‘the academy’ since the first centuries, and has both affirmed and critiqued it at different times.³¹ One deeply suspicious reading comes from Gavin D’Costa who challenges the assumption that the modern university is a benign host for theological endeavour in its deepest and truest sense. Although his thesis is primarily to do with the place of theology faculties within universities, it acts as a warning to those who would embrace closer bonds with HE without a careful look at the underlying educational assumptions which dictate the place which theology is able to have. D’Costa sees university study of theology as having become assimilated by alien methodologies and philosophies:

³⁰ It is instructive to remember Adolf von Harnack’s argument for keeping theology within the university during the years of the Weimar Republic on the grounds that such an arrangement avoided narrow partisan seminaries, provided well-trained, intellectually sophisticated clergy, and kept important Christian knowledge alive. Karl Barth’s 1922 challenge ‘The Word of God and The Task of Theology’ raises some points which are still worth pondering about the prophetic vocation of theology and the dangers of identifying theology as a contributor to any project of national progress. For a discussion of von Harnack and Barth, see Thomas Howard, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006, Chapter 6.

³¹ See for example Andrew F. Walls ‘Christian Scholarship and the Demographic Transformation of the Church’ in Rodney L. Peterson with Nancy M. Rourke (eds.), *Theological Literacy for the Twenty-First Century*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2002, pp. 166-183. Walls contends that the Church has a long history of reformulating its understanding of the Gospel within new cultural contexts and intellectual frameworks and proposes a threefold process by means of which Christian scholarship borrowed from its Greek intellectual heritage in the writing of Paul, underwent a process of critiquing that heritage, affirming some parts and rejecting others in the work of Justin Martyr, and reached a kind of synthesis in Origen whereby Greek thought categories were re-imagined and made compatible with Christian doctrine and Scripture. Thus the academy was absorbed and converted during the early centuries.

Theology and philosophy's mediating role to discern the telos and unity of the different disciplines has almost disappeared, so that fragmentation, competitive professionalism and utilitarianism in the universities have no check.³²

A more generous reading comes from Mike Higton, whose article 'Can the University and the Church Save Each Other?' suggests a more mutually enriching relationship.³³ Higton argues that the Church can be saved from the danger of instrumentalisation – the desire to make all learning serve a practical purpose, be it mission or responding to a local context – by the University's continued insistence on the 'disruptive strangeness' of the sources of that learning in Scripture and the tradition.³⁴ Recovering learning as a contemplative rather than instrumental discipline is a task where both Church and academy can help each other in the face of the secularising pressure to make learning a product:

In other words, academic study, if it is *good* academic study, is formational – spiritually formational. It plays a part in the process by which we are properly disillusioned, in which our self-understanding and understanding of the world are brought up against that which is beyond them and broken open for the sake of new, truer growth. The quality of academic study is so caught up with questions about overcoming pride and security and delusion that we might say that a good academic

³² Gavin D'Costa, *Theology in the Public Square*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2005, p. 19. From a Catholic perspective, D'Costa can see no future for theology within the university, because the epistemological precondition for theology is the community of the Church and the Spirit, with prayer as its heartbeat, and he ultimately concludes that only a Catholic University can enable such a vision.

³³ Mike Higton, 'Can the University and the Church Save Each Other?', *Crosscurrents*, Spring 2005, pp. 42-53.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

training might at the same time be a training in some of the virtues that an instrumentalized Church most needs.³⁵

Neither D’Costa nor Higton deal with the fact that when we refer to ‘the academy’ or to ‘the university’, we are no longer talking – if we ever were – about one recognisable entity with a shared epistemological understanding. The so-called ‘new universities’ and the Russell group universities increasingly have different emphases, attract different kinds of student, and construe learning in different ways. It seems likely that the kind of contemplative, responsive and responsible study which Higton commends will come under increasing pressure to justify itself in terms of instrumental outcomes in the light of the 2010 Browne Report into HE funding.³⁶

Whilst it seems clear that the Church of England retains a commitment to partnership and co-operation with the academy, and that there are persuasive arguments for the continuation of this relationship, it is likely to come under increasing pressure as the 2010 HE cuts begin to bite and fee structures change in the light of the Browne Report.

The wider Hind context: changes in the Church of England

The impetus behind Hind One is, as has been shown, the desire to reconfigure the fragmented nature of current theological education provision. The wider context of changing patterns of ministry in the Church of England also plays a part in this project.

Towler and Coxon comment that ‘it is not possible to say unequivocally whether a change

³⁵ Ibid., p. 52.

³⁶ ‘Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education’, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2010, available at www.independent.gov.uk/browne-report, accessed on 21.4.2011.

in the conception of ministry is leading to a change in training, or whether a change in training is engendering a new idea of ministry.’³⁷ What is clear is that a combination of factors has been at work to encourage – and in some case, to force – changing models of ministry within the Church of England. These include the impact of reports such as *Mission-shaped Church* (2004) which calls for an agenda of mission rather than maintenance; a reduction in stipendiary clergy due to financial constraints and the amalgamation of parishes into multi-parish benefices spread over sizeable geographical areas; and a shift towards a theology of the shared ministry of all the baptised rather than the ordained minister being the focus of ministry in a parish or community. All of these developments have led to a process of re-definition as to the role of the ordained, and thus to a re-evaluation of the purpose and structure of theological training. Pre-Hind, training institutions seeking re-validation from the Ministry Division had to provide a rationale for their course in response to three questions designed to ensure that training is designed to meet the challenges of the contemporary church and its context.³⁸ The situation which formed the backdrop to the publication of *Hind One* was characterised by rapid change in patterns of ministry, increasing anxiety about declining numbers of churchgoers, and financial pressure – a situation which remains very similar in the post-Hind landscape.

The Hind settlement: ‘learning Church’

Hind says very little in direct response to these factors, but they are nonetheless significant in understanding the importance of re-thinking the aims and practical provision of theological education. The idea of a learning Church is what Hind offers as its contribution:

³⁷ Towler and Coxon, op. cit., p. 121.

³⁸ The three questions cover the mission of God in the world; the kind of ministers needed to help enable this mission; and thus the kind of training required to equip such ministers.

By its very calling the Church is invited ever deeper into the worship of God, service to the world and renewal of itself through worship and learning. If it is to flourish it will have to become more fully a learning Church – a body that promotes a dynamic and reflective discipleship for all its members.³⁹

Here the ‘dynamic and reflective discipleship’ of all its members is related to the Church’s flourishing – indeed, must be promoted as essential to it. The worship and mission of the church is dependent on the health of the members. This vision is developed more fully in Hind Two, the introduction to which states that Education for Discipleship (EDF) is about ‘the churches’ commitment to resourcing the laity for their life in the world’ rather than focusing on ‘church-based ministry.’⁴⁰ The EDF section of this second report articulates its underlying principles on pp. 6-7 and affirms the importance of individual and corporate discipleship, shared mission and lifelong learning. The criteria and methodology set out on pp. 7-8 reinforce this emphasis and offer a vision of learning for all which involves valuing life experience and engaging with the world as well as the Church.

The challenge to the Hind ‘learning Church’ settlement

The idea of a ‘learning Church’ is one which it would be difficult to fault on broad theological or ecclesiological grounds. However, as will be explored in more detail in Chapters Three and Four, once the concept begins to be unpacked, and issues of funding and power begin to emerge, questions about what constitutes learning and who defines it cannot be avoided.

³⁹ Hind One, 4.1.

⁴⁰ Hind Two, p. 3.

Reading Hind: rhetoric and response

I have outlined the main features of the Hind settlement: its agenda of regional reconfiguration; its decision to continue to work closely with HEI's; its promotion of a 'learning Church' rather than simply a well educated clergy. I have also suggested some of the obstacles which have prevented its proposals being smoothly implemented. As a next step, I want to look more closely at Hind One and to outline the way in which the rest of the thesis will proceed.

In the Introduction, I suggested that Hind One has a difficult task in that it tries to reconcile various different discourses, one example being theological language and the language of management. In expanding on that observation in the light of my description of its settlement, I want to go further and argue that Hind One tries to harmonise some incompatible positions and to elide some contradictions, and that it is possible to detect places where this occurs through basic discourse analysis.⁴¹ I intend to work in the course of this thesis with three particular tensions which inform the Hind project. They are as follows: firstly, language to do with the formal accreditation of learning, including the provision of grids of staged development, in tension with the less measurable notion of formation as a journey which does not proceed consistently. Related to this is the report's stated desire to provide both flexibility in training which recognises the ordinand as an individual, and the establishment of bounded criteria which need to be met for professional progression. Secondly, the report exhibits tensions between a model of ministry as the

⁴¹ I want to operate with a hermeneutic of retrieval as well as of suspicion, and to resist taking an entirely deconstructive approach; critical discourse analysis confronts the reader with his/her own location with regard to the power issues of a text, and as someone who is professionally responsible for responding to Hind's proposals, I am part of the institutional structures it represents and addresses.

discharge of recognisable and measurable professional duties, and ministry as ‘inhabited wisdom.’⁴² Thirdly, and most obviously when comparing Hind One and Hind Two, there is tension between the concept of education for discipleship for all, of being a ‘learning Church’, and the continued priority (financially and in terms of time and energy) of training and resourcing the ordained.

Hind One does often not voice these tensions explicitly, since its prevailing rhetorical strategies are those which assume assent to self-evident statements and proposals. Hind Two works in a slightly different way, with differences in its range of vocabulary and tone, and is more concerned to name some of the tensions as well as to allay fears (it is also written in the context of emerging patterns of non-compliance with the regional emphasis of Hind One). Chapters Three and Four will examine these tensions in greater detail; the purpose of the following section is to articulate a more general unease with some aspects of the reports’ rhetoric and to establish the claim that this unease indicates more fundamental problems.

The language of effectiveness

One of the pressures facing both Church and academy is the pressure to take an instrumental view of their role and vocation. In suggesting a different resource – *Piers Plowman* – as a way of challenging the Hind settlement, I am responding to what I perceive as certain dangers in the discourse of Hind One. As one example of the tendency of Hind One to echo an instrumentalising agenda, I will briefly analyse its use of the words

⁴² For a reflection on this tension, see Christopher Britain, ‘Can a theology student be an evil genius? On the concept of habitus in theological education’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* Vol. 60, No. 4, 2007, pp. 426-440.

‘effective’ and ‘effectiveness.’ I perceive two problems with the adoption of the discourse of effectiveness within the report: firstly, as I will demonstrate, if effectiveness is not defined, then both the logic and the integrity of a discourse which employs it as a key term will be undermined. Secondly, I want to suggest that there is a potential theological and ecclesiological problem with the discourses of effectiveness and efficiency, both because Christian ministry is difficult to evaluate in those terms and also because ultimately what is being subjected to such criteria is the work of God.⁴³

There is no shortage of concrete examples of the vocabulary of efficiency in Hind One. One instance of the report’s lack of clarity as to the way in which the word ‘effective’ is used, and the sequence of unsubstantiated claims it initiates, is in Chapter 7:

We believe that the ordained ministry is a distinctive gift to the Church. It follows from this that *the Church of England is right to invest significantly in high-quality and cost-effective training of the clergy*. Further, given that the clergy are a very large proportion of the deployable leadership resources of the Church, it again seems entirely right to invest substantially in their training, both initial and continuing training. Most organizations have come to the view that training should not be seen as a drain on resources, but as an opportunity for strategic investment for the sake of the organization as a whole – in our case for the good of the Church and its mission.⁴⁴

⁴³ The assessment of such effectiveness has long been recognised as problematic. See, for example, Allen Nauss, ‘Problems in Measuring Ministerial Effectiveness’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* Vol.11, No. 2, 1972, pp. 141-151. Nauss identifies primary and secondary criteria to do with observable behaviour and observable consequence, acknowledging the vexed question of who should establish the criteria: church officials, seminary staff, or congregations.

⁴⁴ Hind One, 7.2.

This paragraph displays many of the stylistic features of Hind One as a whole. It assumes the reader's assent, based on the logical way in which the argument is put forward: 'we believe... it follows from this... further, given that... it again seems entirely right... most organisations have come to the view that...' There is no room for dissent or for questioning an assumption such as the desirability of the clergy remaining such a large proportion of the deployable leadership resources of the Church. Problems arise also with vocabulary, for example use of 'cost-effective' alongside 'high-quality', where it is not clear whether it is the process – excellent training provision – or the product – an effective minister – which can be demonstrated to be cost-effective.

'Effectiveness': a theological critique

In an article expounding his reservations about the use of aims and objectives in pastoral care, Stephen Pattison outlines a more general critique of the underlying assumptions of management models and language, warning that 'adoption of aims and objectives is often the way that the rationalising worldview is incarnated at a very basic level.'⁴⁵ They are 'the sign, sacrament and symptom of a whole way of looking at the world that finds its full embodiment in the ideal type of the modern, rationally managed organisation.'⁴⁶ He identifies seven social factors which help to explain the ubiquity of the language of aims and objectives, which include: economic constraints; the need for available resources to be used purposefully and the concomitant need to measurable goals and criteria for success to ensure that resources are being used effectively; the need for accountability; and a turn to

⁴⁵ Stephen Pattison, 'Some Objections to Aims and Objectives', G.R. Evans and Martyn Percy (eds.), *Managing the Church?*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 2000, pp. 128-52, p. 130.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

the consumer so that purchasers and users of services know what to expect and are sure that it will meet their needs.

Whilst acknowledging that much of this is useful and positive, Pattison identifies several areas of concern, one of which is the way in which fellow providers become competitors defending their market niche, and another to do with the way on which the identification of observable skills and competencies to equip a person to perform a particular role is 'clearly value-laden and ideological. It requires some individuals to conform to the implicit values of a hierarchically-constituted standards authority which will mould individuals according to its own, immediately perceived needs and values.'⁴⁷

As a counter to the shortcomings and dangers of a utilitarian model of human organisation, Pattison offers some theological perceptions focussing on the mystery and uncontrollability of creation; the status of others as brothers and sisters rather than clients; the need for mistakes in a graced universe; and finally, the thought that 'God is not a manager – therefore there is hope!' The alternative approach (in this instance, to pastoral care) which Pattison offers, is what he calls 'symbolisation' – 'helping people discover and explore symbols that give space, hope and purpose.'⁴⁸ Rather than trying to control and foreclose the world with aims and objectives, he seeks a way of opening up meaning in a way which enables people to experience life as a whole rather than the world as fragmented. He concludes:

It would be a mistake for this particular Christian activity [pastoral care] to try to resolve or decode its central generative symbols into programmes of universal

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 137.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 144.

service provision. This would exclude the critical and fertile excess of meaning that can emerge from symbols and which might inspire generations yet to come.⁴⁹

Although Pattison is writing about pastoral care, much of what he says could be applied to approaches to education which adopt the language of organisational management. What is useful in his alternative to the culture of efficiency is the acknowledgement of the need for mistakes, the ability to view the world as a theatre of error in a way which does not thwart the loving purposes of God. The tightly defined learning outcomes of Hind Two leave little scope for error on the part of the trainee minister, little sense that ministry might be either an adventure or a wilderness; rather, it will be purposeful, controlled, externally defined and monitored, and unending.⁵⁰ The recurring language of equipping reinforces this sense.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 149.

⁵⁰ This point is made by Susan F. Parsons in the Editorial to *Studies in Christian Ethics* Vol. 21, No. 1, April 2008, p. 6: 'such a way of thinking produces the people the system requires for its efficiency, enforcing conformity to the same standards and punishment for the odd ones out.'

⁵¹ '1.3 We make proposals to provide high-quality training for the clergy that will *equip* them to offer vibrant and collaborative spiritual leadership and to empower a vocationally motivated laity – and, thereby, to promote and serve God's mission in the world.'
'3.4 While improved catechesis and adult education in parishes are also necessary, the role of the clergy is central. As a result methods of training should be suitable to encourage a disposition towards collaboration and to *equip* candidates with the skills needed for it.'
'3.26 These theological themes lead us to believe that a key pursuit for ministerial training should be a holiness that seeks to maintain the integrity and effectiveness of the Church. If we seek to participate in and embody a ministry that belongs to Christ himself we can only pursue the highest standards of faithfulness of discipleship, spiritual wisdom, commitment to common life and deep wells of motivation. As we seek to *equip* the ordained to fulfil their responsibilities within the Body we will guard against incompetencies and complacencies which undermine the creativity and harmony of the whole people of God. Thus, a key theological theme that should inform training is that *the ordained ministry should be marked by the holiness that Christ gives to his Church.*'
'3.35 The underlying motive for all training should be to *equip* the people of God to witness more effectively in this age to the reality of the age to come. The emphasis therefore should be on learning to serve the world for God's sake rather than merely the institutional task of running the Church.'

At both a theological and an ecclesiological level, the notion of efficiency is problematic. On the one hand, that represented by the biblical wisdom literature, human models of efficiency and productivity are not to be rejected but taken seriously. This strand of the Jewish and Christian tradition asserts that as created beings, humans are given the capacity to order their affairs such that they run with the grain of the God-given moral order. Business deals, social organisation, crime and punishment: none of these is outside the sphere of human life lived under God. Thus it may be perfectly possible theologically to endorse and celebrate the new technologies and new models of educational opportunity which characterise the ‘knowledge economy’ (and equally possible to critique them). However, the reliance on the language of efficacy and efficiency in Hind is open to theological interrogation. It is problematic insofar as Hind applies it indiscriminately to institutional structures and to the church’s mission and ministry. Institutions should be governed well, and resources stewarded competently. Yet there is a fundamental theological problem with the concept of ‘efficient’ mission or ‘efficient’ ministry’ – even, I would argue, with ‘efficient’ training. Ultimately the criterion of efficiency can be applied neither to God nor to the church. Indeed, the church must be one of the most inefficient ways in which to accomplish the salvation of the world, judged according to human notions of effectiveness.

Effectiveness, competence and the discourse of Hind One

It is particularly in the context of methods of teaching and assessment which are competence-based that the language of effectiveness is found, and where effectiveness is defined in terms of competence being achieved and seen to be achieved. Testing and assessment in such a model become the drivers of learning and performance, and efficiency

becomes a priority. Such an education-work nexus runs the risk of producing an instrumentalist understanding of education. The danger is of reducing the purpose of education to the production of a workforce with the skills to fit the roles decided for them by those with the greatest control over the economy.

What I believe to be happening within the discourse of Hind One is a process which is well described by Leesa Wheelahan in the course of her Bernsteinian analysis of competency-based training in Australia.⁵² Wheelahan describes a process which begins with the existence of a broad policy context – in this case, the agenda of the Hind One working group. The remit of such a group at its broadest is termed its ‘regulative discourse’. The group needs an explicit ‘instructional discourse’ by means of which to convince its readers of the reasonableness and validity of its proposals. To achieve this, there is a two-stage process. The first stage is recontextualisation, where ideas and concepts from other domains are selectively appropriated and made a part of the instructional discourse. In the case of Hind One, the language of effectiveness, competence, professionalism, learning outcomes, have all been borrowed from educational trends outside the Church and reassembled within the discourse of the report. Key terms from the world of HE have been recontextualised and made part of the fabric of Hind. The second stage Wheelahan calls ‘realisation of the instructional discourse’ – the way in which such discourse is always embedded in the regulative discourse. This takes us full circle to the agenda of the agency in question, in this case, the Hind working group. This agenda, this ‘regulative discourse’, is always shaped by external forces and models. In the case of Hind, these external constraints and parameters are many and various. One is to do with the need to respond to changes in patterns of

⁵² Leesa Wheelahan, ‘How competency-based training locks the working class out of powerful knowledge: a modified Bernsteinian analysis’, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 28, No. 5, Sept 2007, pp. 637-651.

ordained and lay ministry. Another is related to financial difficulties and potential shortfalls in budgets, and a concomitant pragmatic need to get funding by maintaining good relationships with bigger institutions, and thus being eligible for possible Government funding. Another is a wider expectation from society that professionalism is desirable and needs to be achieved through appropriate accredited vocational qualifications. It is inevitable that a report will reflect the agendas of those who have commissioned it; what interests me is the co-existence of different levels of discourse which suggest an uneasy synthesis of ideologies and models.

This co-existence is well illustrated by an extract from 3.26:

a key pursuit for ministerial training should be a holiness that seeks to maintain the integrity and effectiveness of the Church. If we seek to participate in and embody a ministry that belongs to Christ himself we can only pursue the highest standards of faithfulness of discipleship, spiritual wisdom, commitment to common life and deep wells of motivation. As we seek to equip the ordained to fulfil their responsibilities within the Body we will guard against incompetencies and complacencies which undermine the creativity and harmony of the whole people of God. Thus, a key theological theme that should inform training is that *the ordained ministry should be marked by the holiness that Christ gives to his Church.*

In this passage, holiness is connected with the integrity and effectiveness of the Church. Yet it is not clear in what this effectiveness subsists. The Church's holiness – maintained by the holy lives of its ordained ministers – may not lead it to be 'effective', however that term is defined; it may witness to the holiness of God, but whether that will result in a surge in church attendance, or any other marker of 'effectiveness', is not clear. The passage goes

on to use language of participation and embodying as a step in a carefully built up argument which proceeds thus: we need to train ministers to enable the Church to be more holy; their ministry is a participation in the ministry of Christ, because the Church is his body; therefore those in charge of training need to ensure that ministers do not, by incompetence or complacency, upset the balance of the Body. Holiness, participation and the body of Christ are all important and profound concepts for Christian life and ministry; what I will suggest in later chapters, and particularly in Chapter Five, is that they are in danger of being used alongside a language of efficiency which compromises their meaningfulness.

This brief analysis reveals that there are cracks in the texture of Hind's prose and of the Hind settlement as a whole, and it is these cracks which I will go on to prise open in the next chapters. I will use my chosen text *Piers Plowman* both as a lever and as an example of a text which deals with a complex and difficult set of issues in a very different way, naming and incorporating contradictions and tensions rather than avoiding them.

Summary

In this first chapter I have introduced Hind and explained the context in which it emerged. I have indicated the way in which it has tried to make a settlement which takes account of the complexity of that context, and suggested ways in which the settlement is inadequate, theologically and practically. I have briefly introduced *Piers Plowman* as the resource I will be using to indicate what an alternative settlement might look like. In the next chapter, I will outline in greater detail my reasons for that choice.

Chapter Two: *Piers Plowman* as conversation partner

I indicated in the previous chapter that I have chosen an unusual text as a conversation partner by means of which to assess Hind and its heirs. The purpose of this chapter is threefold: to introduce Langland's poem; to expand on the reasons for using it to suggest alternative theological resources for a different kind of settlement; and to suggest some contextual points of connection in terms of contested models of learning in the fourteenth century.

Piers Plowman: Introducing the poem

Piers Plowman is an alliterative poem about 6500 lines in length written in the late fourteenth century. It exists in three main versions, the A, B and C texts, and its textual history is complex.⁵³ For the purposes of this thesis, I am using A.V.C. Schmidt's 1982 version of the B text.⁵⁴ The B text is divided into twenty sections or *passus* (steps), preceded by a Prologue. It incorporates many Latin words and phrases, as whole lines or parts of lines, making it a macaronic text.⁵⁵

The poem is a series of waking and dream vision experiences which follow the narrator, Will, as he seeks truthful living at a personal, socio-political and ecclesial level. There are

⁵³ For a summary of this, see L. David Benson, 'The Langland Myth' in Kathleen M. Hewett-Smith (ed.), *William Langland's Piers Plowman: A Book of Essays*, Routledge, London and New York, 2001, pp. 83-99.

⁵⁴ William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, A Complete Edition of the B text, edited by A.V.C. Schmidt, Dent, London, Everyman's Library, reprinted with revision and corrections, 1982.

⁵⁵ Schmidt discusses Langland's use of Latin on pp. xxx-xxxii of his Introduction to the B text. For further scholarly comment see John Alford, 'The Role of the Quotations in *Piers Plowman*', *Speculum* Vol. 52, No. 1, Jan 1977, pp. 80-99.

several parallel strands which are intertwined throughout the poem: the biblical narrative from Fall to the return of Antichrist in the last days; the earthly life of the protagonist, Will, who ages during the course of the narrative; the development of the role and significance of Piers himself; and the shape of the agricultural and liturgical year. *Piers Plowman* opens with Will's vision of a field full of folk, follows him as he observes the antics firstly of the court, and then of Piers the ploughman attempting to set up a perfect community, and continues as he embarks on a series of encounters with learned figures who give bafflingly multiple definitions of what it means to learn well and live well. It ends with Will finally opting to belong to the church, followed by a vision of ecclesial disintegration and the departure of the voice of Conscience to seek truth in the world.

The first seven passus of *Piers Plowman* focus on the social world in which the narrator finds himself and in which his desire for truth is set. After his vision of the field of folk in the Prologue, the Dreamer is given an interpretation of the allegorical landscape by Holy Church in Passus B1, and the nature of the spiritual quest of the poem is set out. Will falls on his knees and begs her to help him:

Thanne I courbed on my knees and cried hire of grace,
And preyed hire pitously to preye for my synnes,
And also kenne me kyndely on Crist to bileve,
That I myghte werchen His wille that wroughte me to man. (B1.79-82)

(Then on bended knee I cried to her for mercy
and begged her piteously to pray for my sins,
and also to teach me properly ('kindly') to believe in Christ,
that I might do the will of him who created me a man.)

Holy Church's response is as follows:

Whan alle tresors arn tried, Truthe is the beste.

Lereth it this lewed men, for lettred it knoweth –

That Treuthe is the tresor the Trieste on erthe. (B1.135-7)

(When all treasures are tried, Truth is the best.

Teach it to uneducated men, for the educated know it –

that truth is the choicest treasure on earth.)

Will objects:

‘Yet have I no kynde knowynge,’ quod I, ‘ye mote kenne me better

By what craft in my cors it comseth, and where.’

(Yet I have no ‘natural understanding’, you must teach me better

by means of what power in my body it arises, and in what part of it.’)

He is told:

It is a kynde knowynge that kenneth in thyn herte

For to love thi Lord levere than thiselve,

No dedly synne to do, deye theigh thou sholdest-

This I trow be truthe; (B1.142-5)

(It is a ‘natural understanding’ that instructs your heart

to love your Lord more dearly than yourself,

to commit no mortal sin, even in the face of death – this I swear is truth.)

This exchange sets up one of the poem's central tensions: the tension between different ways of knowing and enacting spiritual truth. The next six passus, covering scenes at court and the ploughing of the half acre, are a series of demonstrations of the difficulty of acting well in accordance with truth, and the ease with which falsehood infiltrates the structures of public life. This first section of the poem presents a social landscape of considerable complexity, and the second half of the poem seeks ways in which this complexity can be ordered and understood so that Will can find a way to live with spiritual integrity in a such a context. One way to understand the middle section of the poem, therefore, is as a process of trying out different schemes and organising concepts in an effort to bring order to the inner and outer unruliness Will experiences. In Passus 8-12 Will re-visits the issues raised in his opening conversation with Holy Church and probes more deeply into the problems of right belief and right practice. This central section wrestles at length with questions of formal learning and its relationship with embodied wisdom, and I will explore some aspects of this in greater depth in Chapters Three and Four. The point to note in a general outline of the poem's progress is that Langland's method is to set up a series of debates about models of learning which question the relationship between study and holiness, truthful speech and truthful praxis.

In choosing *Piers Plowman* as a resource for a different kind of settlement I am arguing that both its content and style are significant. John Bowers asks what difference it makes that Langland should explore his thinking about himself, his society and his God through the form of dream visions rather than in an analytic treatise, and concludes that a treatise would come to a conclusion whereas the poem does not, and that that dissatisfaction with

answers 'represents a real refusal, or failure, on the author's part to commit himself to any decisive formulation.'⁵⁶ This lack of commitment may, as Bowers implies, be read as a failure of nerve, a frustrating inability to settle for a workable way of understanding and living the Christian life. I read it rather as an invitation to the complexity of trying to work through an understanding at a personal, social and theological level, a refusal to simplify in a way which then excludes or ignores those things which do not fit.⁵⁷ This is a theological and pedagogical issue, insofar as the reader responds to the text as one sharing a journey and being asked to wrestle with meaning.

I will begin to substantiate this claim with a brief look at the Prologue, since it is here that Langland sets out some of the concerns which he goes on to explore in greater depth and detail in the rest of the poem. Having indicated in Chapter One that programmes of learning can never be separated from issues of power, even in an ecclesial context, I will show that Langland's awareness of this becomes immediately apparent as the poem opens. Langland approaches issues of power not only in terms of the poem's content, for example in the depiction of social hierarchies and figures of authority, but also by means of his own equivocal authorship. The poem is immediately and explicitly concerned to undermine any notion of a monological address to the reader; rather, the reader is drawn into the process of interpretation and making meaning from the outset.

⁵⁶ John Bowers, *Langland's Fictions*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993, p. 109.

⁵⁷ Daniel W. Hardy's frequent references to the complexity of God's ways with the world lead him to suggest that these ways should be dynamically understood rather than in terms of fixed orders: 'Fixities are more like the capturing of the rhythms of movement in static forms than as the primary characteristic of the 'nature' and interrelation of God, human beings and nature.' Daniel W. Hardy, *God's Ways With the World*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1996, p. 70.

The Prologue: learning, power and language

The Prologue serves to introduce the poem both in terms of theme and style. The first 110 lines are a catalogue of the mass of humanity gathered in the ‘field of folk’: rich and poor, tradesmen and beggars, hermits, friars, pardoners. Description is interspersed with some scathing asides about how temporal and ecclesial power is managed, and a new development in the discussion about power and social order is signalled by the entry of the king at line 112.⁵⁸ An early indication of Langland’s concern with the politics of learning, and the power dynamics at play in establishing a dominant narrative of what is acceptable learning and utterance, takes place in the incident in which the king is addressed by firstly a lunatic, then an angel, and finally by the ‘goliardeis’ (B Prol.112-145).⁵⁹ This brief scene, which is explored more fully below, is followed by the parable of the belling of the cat (lines 146-208). The Prologue then returns to a description of the bustle of daily life and commerce in the ‘field of folk’.

Langland introduces at this early stage in the poem a note of ambiguity about sources of authority, including his own as poet/dreamer/bystander. He calls into question both the conduct and trustworthiness of the pope and his officers, and that of the king and commons. The instability of the relationship between Christ and his earthly representatives is hinted at in lines 100-110, when the narrator reflects on the power given to the pope to ‘bynden and unbynden’ and on the responsibility for salvation mediated through cardinals, whose role it

⁵⁸ Spiritual and temporal power were configured in complex ways in Ricardian England. For an analysis of how Richard II sought to legitimate his authority by invoking a spiritual dimension to kingship, see Lynn Staley, *Languages of Power in the Age of Richard II*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, Philadelphia, 2005.

⁵⁹ The ‘goliardeis’ has no simple translation. Schmidt renders it as ‘buffoon’. The tradition of satiric poetry in Latin produced by wandering ‘goliards’ is explored most fully in Helen Waddell, *The Wandering Scholars*, Constable, London, 1927.

is to open and close the gates of the kingdom. The narrator declares that he will not find fault with the way in which the cardinals elected the pope since all was carried out according to the demands of love and learning – ‘in love and letture the eleccion belongeth’ (B Prologue. 110). The words ‘love’ and ‘letture’ are blandly alliterated, as if no-one could contest their compatibility, and then immediately undercut by the abrupt shift in the next line:

‘Forthi I kan and kan naught of court speke more.’

(therefore I can and cannot say more about the court.)

Thus begins a process of interrogation of the uses to which the Church puts learning, and of the relationship of learning to a life of love, and thus begins also a pattern of uncertainty as to the stance and reliability of the narrative voice. Tone is hard to judge; the reader is unsure as to where irony lurks and where not. An equivocal note is introduced to the narrative, and some of the characteristics of the poem as a whole begin to appear: wordplay (for example the punning on cardinal), a feature of the poem which A.C. Schmidt and Mary Clemente Davlin expound in detail; the instability of the narrative voice; the various other voices which make pronouncements, the truth or untruth of which we have to judge for ourselves.⁶⁰ In part this drawing back from a position of outright criticism of king or pope is to do with the political climate of the time, when between 1378-1406 there were

⁶⁰ These characteristics are explored in depth by A.V.C. Schmidt, *The Clerkly Maker*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1987; Mary Clemente Davlin, *A Game of Heuene*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1989. For an analysis of wordplay in the B Text, see Bernard F. Huppe, ‘Petrus id est Christus: Word Play in *Piers Plowman*, the B text’, *ELH* Vol. 17, No.3, Sept 1950, pp. 163-190.

constraints from both the Church and the crown on what could be written and preached.⁶¹

In part it is also a feature of Langland's distinctive pedagogy.

Following this brief disavowal of responsibility for questioning the probity of cardinals comes a cameo depicting in microcosm the estates of medieval society: knights, clerks and plowmen, presented as a harmonious hierarchy.⁶² The introduction here of Kynde Wit and Clergie establishes learning in its broadest social sense. Learning is not merely the individual acquisition of wisdom or knowledge, but it is introduced here in the context of national social organization, of the estates and their right functioning. However, no sooner has this reassuring picture been drawn than the bizarre interruption of lines 123-145 occurs, followed by the fable of the rats, which paints a much more sombre picture of the dynamics of royal power. A lunatic (speaking 'clergially') utters sentiments that sound suspiciously sane, if rather elaborately alliterated, causing the reader to wonder in what his madness subsists.⁶³ One possible answer is that since he asks God's protection on the king; it is perhaps his naivete about the realities of power that defines him as insane. An angel then

⁶¹ James Simpson, 'The Constraints of Satire in *Piers Plowman* and *Mum and the Sothsegger*', in Helen Phillips (ed.), *Langland, The Mystics and the Medieval English Tradition*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 11-30, p. 18. Simpson traces the development of ecclesiastical legislation designed to outlaw Lollardy and to discourage criticism of the clergy, dating the B text of *Piers Plowman* as having been written just as this developed into a time of active repression. Other poems of the time deal with the sense that satire is dangerous and that those in authority do not want to hear truth spoken, for example *Mum and the Sothsegger*, using particular poetic strategies to get the point across. See also Helen Barr, *Signes and Sothe: Language in the Piers Plowman Tradition*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1991, and Barr's essay 'Piers Plowman and Poetic Tradition' in *YLS* 19, 1995, pp. 39-64.

⁶² For an analysis of the poem suggesting that Langland ultimately reinforces and sacralises the estates, see Alan J. Fletcher, 'The Social Trinity of *Piers Plowman*', *Review of English Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 175, 1993, pp. 343-361.

⁶³ For some suggestions as to the significance of the lunatic, and the changes made in the C text, see David Burnley 'Langland's Clergial Lunatic' in Helen Phillips (ed.), *Langland, the Mystics and the Medieval Religious Tradition*, op. cit., pp. 39-55.

speaks in Latin, calling the king to judgement, a judgement which is echoed by the *goliardeis*, and then ignored by the people.⁶⁴ They cry in Latin: '*Precepta Regis sunt nobis vincula legis!*' – and again the narrator distances himself from a definitive interpretation, saying in the shrugging parenthesis of line 144: 'construe whoso wolde' ('let whoever wishes make sense of it'). An opportunity to probe more deeply into the networks of mutual obligation that make up the relationship between King and people, and the ultimate source of the authority of law, is passed over. Or rather, the questions are obliquely continued in the tale of the belling of the cat which follows, which also concludes with a fearful parenthetical disclaimer:

(What this metels bymeneth, ye men that ben murye,
Devyneyen – for I ne dar, by deere God in hevene!) (B Prologue. 209-210)

(what this dream means, merry men,
work out for yourselves – for I don't dare to, by dear God in heaven.)

The use of Latin in this passage by both the angel and the people highlights access to discourses of power. The angel's words, we are told, are in Latin:

for lewed men ne koude
Jangle ne jugge that justifie hem sholde,
But suffren and serven (B Prologue.129-131)

(for unlearned men did not know
how to dispute and discriminate the arguments that would vindicate them,

⁶⁴ For further exploration of the *goliardeis* and the wisdom/folly of speakers in the poem, see Gillian Rudd, *Managing Language in Piers Plowman*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1994, Chapter 1.

but only how to suffer and serve)

It is not clear whether ‘for’ in this context means ‘so that’ or ‘because’: it could be that the use of Latin is to prevent the *lewed* from disputing what is said, and represents a deliberate withholding of meaning and nuance. In that case, the line would imply approval of this policy of obfuscation, given that the vocation of the *lewed* is to serve and suffer. It could also be that the line should be read ironically, exposing the arrogance of the view that the truth cannot be understood, disputed or uttered by those who are not fluent in Latin, and that they are thus doomed to a life of passive servitude. The response of the commune is hardly in their best interests: they invoke a principle of absolute kingly authority which gives the king power to do whatever he pleases, and it can be no accident that the parable of the rats follows. One possible deduction from this would be that the *lewed* people are not only ignorant but contribute to their own oppression by their misplaced use of a Latin tag, leading to the conclusion that the hegemony of Latin effectively disempowers the mass of common people.

These questions lead us inevitably into the issue of Langland’s mixing of Latin and the vernacular within the poem, and its importance in the context of his exploration of what constitutes true learning. At certain key moments the use of Latin assumes a heightened significance; another example is the conversation between Piers and the priest in the pardon scene in B7.105-148 which will be discussed more fully in Chapter Four of this thesis.

When themes of importance such as the rightful nature of rule and the relationship of the law to the king and the people are at stake, or what kind of pardon can be offered to the labouring poor, the issue of language looms large. Langland’s pattern of mixed semi-macaronic allows for a constant interplay between Latin and English which enables the

juxtaposition of different vocabularies and grammars in ways which reflect the co-existence of multiple sub-cultures of learning in late fourteenth century England.⁶⁵ Truth may be spoken in either tongue, as may falsity; discernment is required to tell the one from the other. Thus the issue of language, one which will be further developed throughout this study, is explicitly foregrounded by Langland in the Prologue, and is a means of exposing contested socio-political and theological issues.

Juxtaposed in the Prologue are a vision of how things should be ordered, with the estates making up a social order of mutual obligation and responsibility, and a depiction of how in fact they function in practice. The checks and balances to power seem not to work, leaving the commune at the mercy of the king. Passus 2-4 are a further satirical commentary on the corruption and abuse of learning which characterizes the world of court and business, as will be explored more fully in Chapter Six of this thesis. Rather than setting up a framework for a theology of learning or an epistemological foundation for the rest of the poem, the Prologue establishes the need for the reader to pay careful attention, to work at interpretation and pick up hints of multiple meanings through wordplay. It also establishes the socio-political world in which the subsequent action unfolds.⁶⁶ Most importantly, it sets up the conditions for learning, whereby there is a disjuncture between the objectified systems of meaning which define the social world of the late fourteenth century and the experience of the individual observer, who sees inconsistencies and problems. It is this

⁶⁵ See Schmidt, *The Clerkly Maker*, Chapter 3; John A. Alford, 'The Role of the Quotations in *Piers Plowman*', *Speculum* 52, 1977, pp. 80-99.

⁶⁶ For further analysis of the Prologue and its themes, see P.M. Kean, 'Love, Lawe and Lewte in *Piers Plowman*', in Robert Blanch (ed.), *Style and Symbolism in Piers Plowman*, The University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville, 1969, pp. 132-155.

experience of alienation as the poem's narrator stands outside the action, which precipitates his own journey of learning.⁶⁷

Having indicated the complex and multi-layered way in which Langland introduces issues of learning, power and language in the Prologue, I will now turn to the broader socio-political and intellectual context out of which the poem arises and which it both reflects and critiques. Just as the Hind reports emerge out of wider debates to do with the purpose of education and learning, so *Piers Plowman* is in part the product of tensions to do with changing patterns and understandings of education and vocation in late medieval England.

Learning in fourteenth century England: monastic and scholastic approaches

An initial point of connection between Hind and Langland can be made by observing how fourteenth century Europe was in the midst of a longstanding debate about the purpose of learning which can in part be understood as tension between 'monastic' and 'scholastic' models of the relationship between spirit and intellect, of the place of learning in the search for God. These categories do not correspond exactly to the Hind language of formation and accredited learning, but they are evidence of the existence of similarly conflicting understandings. *Piers Plowman* speaks into a context where the kind of education provided by the cathedral schools in the preceding centuries was giving way to a range of alternatives, as the emergence of universities and of scholasticism as an approach to

⁶⁷ This chimes with Peter Jarvis' observation: 'The possibility of learning occurs, paradoxically, when that support [legitimizing institutions or persons] is weakened or withdrawn, or when someone perceives inconsistencies, distortions, or inadequacies in the socially constructed meaning system.' Peter Jarvis, *Paradoxes of Learning*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1992, p. 175.

learning challenged certain assumptions about the purpose of theological study and its method.⁶⁸ As with Hind, this debate did not take place on a theoretical level remote from issues of politics, money and power, but was embedded in the developing socio-economic, ecclesiastical and secular structures of its time.⁶⁹ Thus Langland's context, though very different from that of Hind, generates a similar need to navigate through some complex issues about Christian learning and discipleship.

One helpful place to begin in characterising this wider context and the existence of potentially conflicting models of learning within it is with the work of Jean Leclerq. Leclerq acknowledges that 'the problem of the connections between "cloister" and "school", symbolising two approaches to truth, has very ancient origins: it is almost as old as monasticism itself, and we even find some of its roots in St Augustine.'⁷⁰ He sketches out a progression whereby between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries monastic *and* scholastic becomes monastic *or* scholastic, and finally monastic *versus* scholastic, concluding that the real problem is 'how to fit 'monastic within scholastic' and 'scholastic within monastic.'⁷¹ As recent scholars have argued, the creation of a binary opposition between monastic and scholastic understanding and method is not as clear cut as it has sometimes been made to appear. However, despite the fact that they are oversimplified categories, it is helpful before returning to *Piers Plowman* to outline the contours of the debate between 'monastic' and

⁶⁸ For a detailed history of the cathedral schools, see C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1994.

⁶⁹ For a socio-economic exposition of the relationship between intellectual life and changing social structures, see Jacques LeGoff, *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*, Blackwell: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1995. LeGoff's thesis is that 'the scholastic evolution was inscribed within the urban revolution of the tenth to thirteenth century', op. cit., p. xiv.

⁷⁰ Jean Leclerq, 'Monastic and Scholastic Theology in the Reformers of the Fourteenth-Sixteenth Century,' in E. Rozanne Elder (ed.), *From Cloister to Classroom*, Cistercian Studies Series: No. 90, Cistercian Publications Inc., Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1986, p. 178.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

‘scholastic’ and to attempt a working definition of each term. I will draw on the work of Jean Leclerq and Beryl Smalley as representative of a scholarly narrative which contrasts monastic and scholastic models of learning, and then turn to the more nuanced account given by Mike Higton as a way of opening up the issues. I will then discuss where *Piers Plowman* stands in regard to these categories.

Definitions of monastic and scholastic spirituality and learning tend to focus on two areas: goal and method. In terms of goal, Leclerq’s study of the monastic model identifies learning and literacy as having a particular purpose, that of enabling monks to participate in *lectio divina*, rather than knowledge being an end in itself. For Benedict, says Leclerq, ‘study is ranked as one means, within a framework of others, to the end, which is eternal life.’⁷² Leclerq outlines what he sees as the major points of contrast between the emphases of the scholastic and monastic approaches by comparing Peter Lombard’s method in the *Prologue on St Paul* with Bernard of Clairvaux’s *Sermon on the Song of Songs*.⁷³ Lombard’s aim, contends Leclerq, is to acquire knowledge by solving problems that arise in the objective evaluation of different authorities; his method is the *quaestio*, using clear distinctions and definition of terms. Bernard’s aim, by contrast, is spirituality rather than learning, with desire and experience as crucial parts of the process. This is a familiar contrast in introductions to the theology of this period, and points up a key area of tension, that of the respective roles of intellect and emotion, will and desire, reason and passion.⁷⁴ Scholastic learning is often presented as operating at a metaphysical level, placing little emphasis on subjective experience and rendering the study of Christian faith and theology

⁷² Jean Leclerq, OSB, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, London, SPCK, 1978, p. 29.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, Chapter One.

⁷⁴ See for example, Gordon Leff, *Medieval Thought from St Augustine to Ockham*, Penguin, London, 1958.

more impersonal. Unlike the monastic tradition, it is seen as lacking an avowed eschatological or ecclesiological dimension, its purpose being the systematic development and dissemination of a particular approach to theological knowledge.⁷⁵

Beryl Smalley puts forward a similar opposition between monastic and scholastic goal and method. She identifies a splitting apart of religious writing and learning into scholastic and monastic approaches, which were undergirded by very different epistemological assumptions.⁷⁶ Smalley's account traces the beginnings of a separation between 'scholastic' and 'monastic' models of learning back to the twelfth century when intellectuals flocked to the schools and biblical studies remained in the cloister, thus opening up a gap between the scholar and the monk, between learning and teaching on the one hand, and prayer and contemplation on the other.⁷⁷ One major work of this period which seeks to reconcile the life of a religious and a scholar is Hugh of St Victor's *Didascalion*. Smalley describes his mission as being 'to recall rebellious learning back to the scriptural framework of *De Doctrina Christiana*.'⁷⁸ Interestingly, it is Hugh's restoration of the importance of the historical sense of Scripture as opposed to adopting an interpretive scheme which focuses

⁷⁵ For an introductory appraisal of scholasticism see Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology*, Third Edition, Blackwell, Oxford, 2001, pp. 36-39.

⁷⁶ Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, Blackwell, Oxford, Third Edition, 1983. A similar split is identified by Ivan Illich, who laments the decline of the monastic way of reading in which the scriptural text functioned as a vineyard or garden, and its replacement by ways of reading which turn it instead into 'a treasury, a mine, a storage room – the scrutable text.' Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1993, p. 95. Illich contends that 'the way of life of the monks in their prayerful search for wisdom did not become the model for universal literacy; rather, the way of life of scholastic clerks did.' *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁷⁷ Or as LeGoff puts it: 'thus the holy ignorance party pitted the school of solitude against the school of noise, the school of the cloisters against the school of the town, the school of Christ against that of Aristotle.' LeGoff, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁷⁸ Smalley, *op. cit.*, Chapter 3, 'The Victorines', p. 89.

on the ‘spiritual sense’ which Smalley emphasises as his main contribution.⁷⁹ Hugh seeks to hold together the literal and allegorical levels of Scripture, to emphasise the inseparability of knowledge and virtue, and to maintain the importance of the godly life alongside godly learning. Smalley concludes that Hugh’s project was too ambitious and that by the end of the century his more intellectual approach had been overtaken by a mystical, anti-scholastic current, whilst in the schools, theology was becoming separate from exegesis.⁸⁰

This narrative sees the rise of scholasticism as presenting a threat to older monastic models; Bernard of Clairvaux’s disputes with Peter Abelard are cited as evidence of a monastic distrust of both the method and goals of scholasticism, a fear that the process of disputation might come to overshadow the intimacy with God which is the rightful end of all learning. Bernard’s words are taken as a warning of the danger of a certain kind of enquiry being destructive of mystery: ‘This sacrament is great; it must be venerated, not scrutinised.’⁸¹ However, as LeGoff reminds us, these disputes also reflect wider social changes during the period. He argues that the cities of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries drew the liberal and the mechanical arts together into a common dynamic unity, which was followed by a split as a ‘division arose between the world of scholars and the world of practitioners, the scientific and the technical worlds.’⁸² Throughout *Piers Plowman* we witness the struggle to draw these two worlds back together. LeGoff also explores the phenomenon of the

⁷⁹ Smalley attributes this to his interest in history and the sacramental trend of his thought. She sums up his approach thus on p. 102: ‘Hugh’s philosophy teaches him to value the letter. It does not teach him to regard the letter as a good in itself. His great service to exegesis was to lay more stress on the literal interpretation relatively to the spiritual, and to develop the sources for it.’

⁸⁰ Smalley, p. 102.

⁸¹ Quoted in Morton Bloomfield, *Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth Century Apocalypse*, Rutgers University Press, 1961, p. 253.

⁸² LeGoff, op. cit., p. 128.

goliard or intellectual vagabond, ‘fruit of that social mobility characteristic of the twelfth century’, whose satirical, antipontifical stance made him a potential threat to the established order.⁸³ In many ways, Langland and his fictional narrator are heirs of this tradition – as we have seen, a goliard appears in the Prologue to signal the disruptive existence of such voices. The point to be noted here is that the debate did not take place only at an abstract level of metaphysics and epistemology, but was rooted in social practices, economic shifts and changing centres of power.

The work of LeGoff reminds us that monastic and scholastic models cannot be discussed without considering the social and political fact of the development of the universities during this period, and their rootedness in growing urban centres and a model of face-to-face teaching. The professor was not an isolated figure withdrawn in a private study space, but a teacher in a culture of vigorous oral debate as well as intense scrutiny of texts. Students were drawn to the intellectual stimulus of the ‘schools’, which at the same time developed to serve both the church and the realm. Mike Higton writes of the University of Paris that ‘the university that emerged was “rooted in utilitarian soil”, serving the ecclesiastical, governmental and professional requirements of society.’⁸⁴ This increasing influence was not without its ambivalence; alongside the embrace of university education as increasing learning and benefiting both the church and the realm was the more cautious approach of Grosseteste and Colet who doubted that clerics could serve two masters.⁸⁵

⁸³ LeGoff, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

⁸⁴ Mike Higton, *A Theology of Higher Education*, OUP, Oxford, forthcoming, p. 29 of typescript. For evidence of the way in which this developed at Oxford, see for example Guy Fitch Lytle ‘The Careers of Oxford Students in the Later Middle Ages’ in James M. Kittelson and Pamela J. Transue (eds.), *Rebirth, Reform and Resilience*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, 1984, pp. 213-253.

⁸⁵ The appropriateness of a university education for those to be ordained has been something of a vexed question ever since. See in particular Rosemary O’Day, *The English*

Monastic and scholastic approaches to learning were thus in a dialectical relationship with socio-political developments, and the debate between them was played out in parishes and pulpits as well as in the schools and the cloister. In the late fourteenth century the rise of both anti-intellectualism and anti-clericalism was one sign of the tensions between the universities and the monasteries.⁸⁶ One factor in the resentment expressed towards the Franciscan and Dominican orders was the fact that they, with their commitment to poverty and mendicancy, came to hold the most important university chairs within a generation of their founding.⁸⁷ At parish level, competition as to who was the primary teacher of the flock broke out between the secular clergy and the friars, driven by the economic implications of divided loyalties. The issue of teaching and learning involved other controversial issues, such as that of clerical dominium and priestly control over the sacrament of penance.⁸⁸ Wendy Scase points out that in an atmosphere of anticlericalism ‘clerical learning was not just part of the pastoral care issue, but became linked with all aspects of clerical dominium.’⁸⁹

Clergy, Leicester University Press, 1979, for an account of the relationship between universities and dioceses of the Church of England from this period concerning clergy education and training.

⁸⁶ This is documented by Wendy Scase, *Piers Plowman and the New Anti-clericalism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989. Scase traces this tension in Chapter One, outlining how the late fourteenth century in England saw the publication of a series of sermons and arguments from both sides.

⁸⁷ Scase cites the conflict in the mid-thirteenth century at the University of Paris when friars wanted to claim the status of ‘master’.

⁸⁸ Part of Richard Fitzralph’s argument was that the friars’ vows of evangelical poverty were broken both when they interfered in the relationship of obligation and payment between the parish priest, the penitent and God by acting as confessors, and when they acquired masters’ degrees.

⁸⁹ Scase, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

Beyond the monastic/scholastic divide

It is convenient to use ‘monastic’ and ‘scholastic’ as a shorthand for some of the tensions that shaped understandings and practices of learning, discipleship and vocation in the late fourteenth century. However, too easy a binary distinction needs to be challenged; there is a constant temptation to categorise and simplify when dealing with complex and shifting terms which relate to complex processes, and that any summary such as this runs the risk of ignoring those texts and writers who do not fall neatly into either category.⁹⁰ There are two main ways in which I will challenge the accounts of Leclercq and Smalley: firstly, as Mike Higton has argued in his account of the establishment of the University of Paris, the development of new methods did not mean that goals about learning as a means of union with God had been entirely rejected. For example, to present Peter Abelard as an absolute contrast to Bernard is not the only interpretation of his stance.⁹¹ Secondly, definitions of monastic learning which focus on Bernardine affective spirituality ignore other strands of monastic learning, which focused on chronicle and memory as much as desire and will, and thus the definition of monastic models of learning needs to be expanded and its complexity acknowledged. I will outline some of these parallel strands as they are evident in *Piers Plowman*.

⁹⁰ Daniel W. Hardy comments on this western habit of thinking in dualities which arises through a process of differentiating two things, moving to a sharp distinction between them and then to an opposition. Other ways of structuring understanding are in part the subject of this thesis. Daniel W Hardy, ‘The Future of Theology in a Complex World’, p. 32, in *God’s Ways with the World*, T&T Clark Ltd, Edinburgh, 1996. The medieval ‘world’ was likewise a complex one onto which we map binary schemes at our peril. David Kelsey in the Epilogue to *To Understand God Truly* makes an attempt to reframe some binaries whilst acknowledging that ‘conceptual capacities’ are necessary for emotional life as well as for critical reflection. See p. 262 of Kelsey, op. cit.

⁹¹ For the case for Abelard as a theologian who sought to unite *scientia* and *sapientia* rather than dividing them, see Eileen Kearney ‘Scientia and Sapientia: Reading Sacred Scripture at the Paraclete,’ in *From Cloister to Classroom*, op. cit., pp. 111-29.

Higton's re-drawing of the lines of the debate can be summed up in the following sentence: 'University reason emerges not *over against* Christian devotion, but *as a form of* Christian devotion.'⁹² His model is intended to disrupt the opposition between devotion and reason by arguing that study can also be the practice of meditation/meditation. He cites Anselm of Canterbury as a monastic contemplative whose works are 'steeped in practices of prayerful meditation, but which are also exemplary practices of devout reasoning.'⁹³ He argues that the struggle of meditation is a spiritual struggle, a discipline of attentiveness: 'Reason seriously practised is a means by which the reasoner is called out of himself; it waits humbly upon an articulation that it cannot simply invent, attending to an ordering in things that is understood as God's good gift.'⁹⁴

Speaking of a 'monastic' model of spirituality and learning as though it was a unified and widely agreed entity does not do justice to the range and richness within different parts of that tradition. For example, by juxtaposing Bernard and Lombard, Leclercq seeks to highlight key distinctions between two approaches to spirituality and to understanding God; however, one could question the choice of Bernard as somehow representative of 'monastic' spirituality, since Bernard's affective approach is not typical of all branches of monastic spirituality. Indeed, Morton Bloomfield argues that Bernard marks a watershed in monasticism, a turn to affective intimacy as against an older, more historically focused monastic emphasis. Bloomfield sees Langland as being very much within this older tradition which continued into the fourteenth century alongside a more affective

⁹² Higton, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

spirituality.⁹⁵ Even within a tradition that can be broadly labelled ‘monastic’ there are differences of emphasis, between, for example, the Victorines and William of St Thierry, which develop into the different attitudes to love and learning in such fourteenth century mystics as Richard Rolle and Walter Hilton.⁹⁶ Similarly, there were varieties of scholasticism; James Simpson points to the existence of a debate within scholasticism itself as to the purpose and methods of theological study, citing as an example Alexander of Hales, the introduction to whose *Summa Theologica* has a lengthy discussion as to the nature of the teaching of theology, arriving at some nuanced conclusions as to the ends and means of true theological learning which attempt to integrate loving and knowing.⁹⁷ As Bernard McGinn points out, ‘the contrast between the older forms of theology practiced in the monasteries and the new theology of the urban schools were real, but there was also significant interaction between the two.’⁹⁸ Thus it can be seen that the late fourteenth century continued rather than initiated a debate about Christian learning which was more complex than a straightforward opposition between ‘monastic’ and ‘scholastic’ models. Both monasticism and scholasticism were varied and multi-stranded traditions, and there was considerable overlap between the two.

⁹⁵ Morton Bloomfield, *Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth Century Apocalypse*, Rutgers University Press, New Brnswick, 1961, Chapter Two.

⁹⁶ See Denis Reveney, *Language, Self and Love*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2001, for a discussion of these different emphases.

⁹⁷ For further discussion of Alexander of Hales and those theologians who do not subscribe to an Aristotelian model of logic at the heart of theology, see James Simpson, ‘From Reason to Affective Knowledge: Modes of Thought and Poetic Form in Piers Plowman’, *Medium AEvum*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 1986, pp. 1-23.

⁹⁸ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism, 1200-1350*, The Crossroad Publishing Co., New York, 1998, p. 3.

'Piers Plowman' and the monastic/scholastic divide

I will now return to *Piers Plowman*, a text which reflects and re-casts many aspects of the debate outlined above. I will examine those traditions on which the poem draws in terms of its choice of genre and method, and how its eclectic range enables it to speak into its complex context.

One way in which *Piers Plowman* can be located within the 'monastic' tradition is according to Langland's choice of genre. Bloomfield contends that as friar-theologians began to dominate in the Oxford colleges, so the monastic writers struck back by writing chronicles and histories. In Bloomfield's reading of the poem, *Piers Plowman* can be understood as drawing on an older monastic sense of chronology and eschatological vision far more than it does on either the affective spirituality of fourteenth century monasticism in the tradition of Bernard of Clairvaux, or that of the Franciscans (as Bloomfield observes, friars come out of the poem much worse than monks). Bloomfield takes this a step further in his identification of Langland, like Wyclif and Hus, as fundamentally an apocalyptic writer, with 'apocalyptic' in this sense meaning a concern with the establishing of the Kingdom of God on earth and social perfection, rather than individual union with the divine: '*Piers Plowman* is first of all socially oriented – that is, apocalyptic in its view of perfection.'⁹⁹ Bloomfield points out that it is the Church that Piers seeks to save, not Will, indicating that the concern of the poem is less an individually focussed salvation than an eschatological renewal of society. This interpretation would put Langland much closer to

⁹⁹ Bloomfield, op. cit., p. 105.

the Lollards than the mystics.¹⁰⁰ The subsequent work of Kathryn Kerby-Fulton extends Bloomfield's premise and describes a sophisticated and detailed context of reformist apocalypticism as the background to *Piers Plowman*, with a focus on clerical reform and spiritual renewal.¹⁰¹ Her summary of the genre as a combination of 'reactionary indignation' about the present alongside 'unflagging hope for large scale renewal' certainly fits a great deal of *Piers Plowman*.

In terms of method, *Piers Plowman* shares some similarities with that branch of monastic tradition which Leclercq identifies as encouraging monks to become 'living concordances', those who had memorised huge amounts of the Bible and who loved to engage in the spontaneous play of associations, similarities and comparisons.¹⁰² Leclercq describes monastic exegesis as arising from a mystical conception of Scripture whereby Scripture is a means of salvation and of immediate personal value for life now; Scripture is interpreted by Scripture, the letter by the letter. In part this derives from the fundamentally figural way of reading which characterises monastic exegesis, the development of which has been traced by Erich Auerbach.¹⁰³ What is significant in terms of the world in which *Piers Plowman* is written is the similarity between some of what Leclercq defines as 'monastic', and Langland's use of Scripture, his playful juxtapositions of verses and words, his search for a 'kynde knowynge' rather than scholastic proofs. To that extent, Langland may be read within the tradition of monastic exegesis and deep knowledge of liturgy. Not only that, but

¹⁰⁰ This approach is developed by David Aers in *Faith, Ethics and Church: Writing in England, 1360-1409*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 2000, especially Chapter 3, 'Justice and Wage-labour after the Black Death: some Perplexities for William Langland'.

¹⁰¹ Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism in Piers Plowman*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, p. 5.

¹⁰² Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, op. cit., p. 96.

¹⁰³ Erich Auerbach, *Scenes in the Drama of European Literature*, Manchester University Press, Chapter One, "Figura".

some of the ways in which *Piers Plowman* functions as a linguistic journey may draw on the mnemonic techniques discussed by Mary Carruthers in *The Craft of Thought*, where chains of association, elaborate punning and creative etymology were longstanding ways of creating internal mental structures for the recall of information and the creation of new patterns of spiritual meaning.¹⁰⁴

However, as well as exhibiting many of the emphases and characteristics of monastic writing and learning, *Piers Plowman* also demonstrates an awareness of the debates taking place in the Schools. There are several dimensions to this within the poem: recurring themes which reflect wider scholastic debate; particular passages which draw on the language of metaphysical speculation to make a point; and satirical episodes which offer a critique of figures who betray the learning of the schools by their arrogance and lack of common courtesy.

One theme which can be interpreted as reflecting broader scholastic debate is the poem's underlying anxiety about salvation, an anxiety which Janet Coleman traces to debates among the "moderni" as to how certain a person could be of God's mercy when God is not forced by necessity to save him.¹⁰⁵ The challenge of nominalism, and scepticism as to the extent to which human beings can fathom divine justice, form the background to this unease. The name of the poem's protagonist, Will, is also significant in the context of scholastic analysis of volition and cognition. The presence in the poem, albeit in a somewhat confused and unsystematic fashion, of theories of the freedom and instability of

¹⁰⁴ Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998.

¹⁰⁵ Janet Coleman, *English Literature in History 1350-1400*, Hutchinson, London, 1981. In Chapter 6 Coleman addresses the way in which the debate about Dobet and Dobest in *Piers Plowman* reflects scholastic debates about the difference between God's notion of just reward and human notions, and the scope of human reason.

the will, of desire and action, of the way the mind works and how it may attempt to align itself with the divine will and mind, is evidence of Langland's ability to draw in whole areas of contemporary debate.¹⁰⁶ Connected with this, and explored most explicitly in the central section of the poem, are the conversations Will has with various personified faculties such as Thought and Wit, Kynde Wit, Reason and Imaginatif, conversations in which various scholars have traced evidence of aspects of contemporary metaphysical debate.¹⁰⁷

As well as this more sustained engagement with intellectual issues, Langland draws on scholastic categories of thought in occasional passages and images, perhaps most famously in the grammatical image of the two infinites as a way of describing Dowel and Dobet at B13.127-8. The metaphor occurs in the scene where Will, Patience and Conscience dine with the learned Doctor, a scene which, in Anne Middleton's words, 'abounds in odd terms, university wit and learned analogies.'¹⁰⁸ This episode is a good example of Langland's juxtaposition of different modes of apprehending truth, setting Patience at one extreme and the Doctor at the other, with mediating figures such as Clergie and Conscience in between. It also illustrates the sharp satirical edge which characterises Langland's depictions of

¹⁰⁶ For a full discussion of how Langland explores the scope of the will, see John Bowers, *The Crisis of Will in Piers Plowman*, The Catholic University of America Press, 1986. Bowers writes on p. 54: 'Without a prior tradition crediting *voluntas* with cognitive and rational powers, Langland would probably not have been able to conceive of a psychological allegory built around an active, argumentative, multi-faceted character named Will.'

¹⁰⁷ See for example Gerald Morgan 'The Meaning of Kynde Wit, Conscience and Reason in the First Vision of *Piers Plowman*', *Modern Philology* Vol. 84, No. 4, May 1987, pp. 351-358; Britton J. Harwood, *Piers Plowman and the Problem of Belief*, in particular Chapter 3.

¹⁰⁸ Anne Middleton, 'Two Infinites: Grammatical Metaphor in *Piers Plowman*', *ELH* Vol. 39, 1972, pp. 169-88, p. 169. Middleton writes: 'In this academic setting, he [Will] jousts irritably with the intellectual powers of the world and receives, as does the reader, a graduate education in the complexities of his allegorical quest.' *Ibid.*, p. 169.

representatives of both the scholarly and fraternal communities; in B13, the Doctor's greed and hypocrisy are bitterly noted by Will at B13.77-9, immediately preceded by a cutting judgement on the preaching of the friars at B13.73-5. Critique is not reserved for one group or the other; all come under scrutiny to see whether their practice matches their statements of intent.

Conclusion

We have seen that *Piers Plowman* is a poem enmeshed in its own particular socio-historical setting, one which is very different from Hind, and where definitions of learning are contested. As the analysis of the Prologue has shown, the poem exhibits a complex choreography of power, language and learning and brings to the reader's awareness the multiple layers of discernment required to make sense of life in the 'field of folk.' Part of the complexity of the poem's context is the tension between different models of learning, which can be configured as a tension between scholastic and monastic traditions. *Piers Plowman*, as has been shown in the final section of the chapter, contains elements of both these traditions in a complex interplay. The poem draws from the monastic tradition a delight in Scripture, quoting texts both from Scripture and the fathers of the church as a means of argumentation, and playing punningly with the scriptural text in order to generate new spiritual meaning. It is also self-consciously learned in ways that derive from the scholastic method, with its protagonist explicitly interrogating some of the theological and philosophical questions of the day. Langland both reflects and attempts to negotiate the tension between the two models, drawing on both in his quest for truthful Christian living. His recognition of the limits of thought does not lead him to reject cognitive effort in favour of an alternative model of affective piety; rather, he remains insistent as to the

necessity of both, despite their inadequacies. It is this dynamic which will be explored more fully in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Learning and progress

Introduction

In Chapter One, I identified a series of tensions within the Hind reports to do with conflicting models of Christian learning and formation. In Chapter Two, I described the tension between monastic and scholastic models of learning in the late fourteenth century, and I will now begin to establish some more explicit points of connection between Hind and Langland. In the following two chapters, I will track the Hind tensions as they relate to analogous tensions in *Piers Plowman*. I will begin each by outlining the nature of a particular tension that I identify in Hind, before turning to *Piers Plowman* and showing how Langland wrestles with a similar (though not identical) tension in his contemporary intellectual and theological context. This will be followed by close analysis of some sections of *Piers Plowman* in which Langland negotiates his response to that context by drawing on a different set of theological resources from those employed by Hind.

The first tension in Hind One with which I will engage is a model of learning as measurable progress towards set outcomes, as opposed to a more flexible notion of ongoing formation. The second is Hind's stated aim of learning for all versus the continued emphasis, not least expressed in financial terms, on the equipping of the ordained. In *Piers Plowman* I see the first of these being played out in the tension within the poem between intentional learning and aimless wandering, the second in the relationship between official figures of instruction and ecclesial status and the figure of Piers and in the ways in which the word 'clergie' is used. In this chapter I will approach the first of these tensions by exploring the relationship between 'learning' and 'formation' in the poem. I will do this in two ways: firstly, by assessing how Langland constantly constructs and deconstructs schemes of measurable

progress through his handling of the concepts of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest (Do well, Do better and Do best). Secondly, I will turn to the learning subject and examine whether and how Will can be said to grow and learn during the course of his encounters and experiences, and how helpful it is to construe his learning in terms of a shift from an intellectual to an affective approach. I will draw some conclusions as to how Langland deals with the impulse to measure spiritual progress, and what alternatives he offers to an outcome-driven attaining of competences. I will then put forward my own hermeneutical model of how the poem resolves the tension between progress and formation.

Hind: accredited and measurable learning or formational journey?

In Chapter Two, I established that learning, in the monastic tradition, was concerned with a very particular kind of formation – a vocational formation in the sense that the monk was called both to personal holiness and to live out a vocation in community. It is perhaps not surprising that Hind, with its desire to hold onto the quasi-monastic ethos of Church of England theological colleges (where most of its authors were trained), is keen not to let go of the importance of a formational process which arises in part from a corporate experience of prayer and learning, and in part from an emphasis on personal holiness. Equally evident in the report is the desire for theological education to reflect standards of academic excellence as exemplified by the HE sector (where, again, its authors were also educated). The tension between these two approaches is not, as we have seen, altogether new. Learning in the fourteenth century scholastic tradition trained students in a particular style of intellectual inquiry and argumentation for a university career. Communities of scholarship grew up which explored difficult issues of philosophy, metaphysics and theology with no obligation to make their conclusions accessible to those beyond their

walls. A tradition of research and intellectual rigour grew up which attracted many, who then had to work out how a Christian vocation might sit with being a university master, as fell to many Franciscans and Dominicans: a tension which has not disappeared.¹⁰⁹ Thus formal learning in fourteenth century England was not an uncontested area, and it is in this context that I will turn to a conversation between Hind and *Piers Plowman*, asking how each text configures the tension between learning as formation, and learning as the acquisition of certain kinds of knowledge or steps towards a goal.

Hind makes wide use of language to do with the formal accreditation of learning, and includes the provision of grids of staged development.¹¹⁰ It could be argued that a model of learning as the staged attainment of measurable outcomes is potentially in tension with the less quantifiable notion of formation as a journey which does not proceed consistently.¹¹¹ This is not an issue unique to Hind or to theological education, but an area of concern reflected in wider debates in contemporary education expressing anxiety about an under-valuing of what the learner is becoming rather than what they know or can be shown to know.¹¹² It also reflects a sense that ‘not knowing’ may be as important as knowing, and

¹⁰⁹ A number of recent publications explore the nature of the vocation of the University-based theologian: Gregory L. Jones, and Stephanie Paulsell (eds.), *The Scope of our Art*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2002; Rodney L. Peterson with Nancy M. Rourke (eds.), *Theological Literacy for the Twenty-First Century*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2002; Stanley Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today*, Labyrinth Press, Durham, North Carolina, 1988; Gavin D’Costa, *Theology in the Public Square*, Blackwell, 2005; Andrea Sterk (ed.), *Religion, Scholarship and Higher Education*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 2002.

¹¹⁰ Hind One, pp. 55-56, and Hind Two pp. 68-72.

¹¹¹ For a detailed discussion of the way in which the term ‘formation’ has developed and is used, see Lisa M. Hess, ‘Formation in the Worlds of Theological Education: Moving from “What” to “How”’, *Teaching Theology and Religion* Vol.11, No.1, 2008, pp. 14-23.

¹¹² See for example ‘An ontological turn for HE’, Gloria Dall’Alba and Robyn Barnacle, *Studies in Higher Education* Vol. 32, No. 6, December 2007, pp. 679-691. The authors draw on Bourdieu to critique the epistemology underlying the notion of transferable skills, believing it de-contextualises such knowledge from the practices to which it relates.

that part of the remit of HE is to confront students with the unsettling fact of the human condition as one of finiteness and limit.¹¹³

This tension between different models of learning can be traced back to antiquity, and thus the writers of Hind are not unique in trying to reconcile different approaches.¹¹⁴ That a process of trying to hold together different positions took place as the report was being written is documented in Gary Wilton's article tracking the changes which took place in successive drafts.¹¹⁵ Wilton takes as the basis for his analysis two different models of theological education ('Athens' and 'Berlin') most fully documented and presented by David Kelsey.¹¹⁶ Put at its simplest, the Athens model has as its key aspiration the formation of character in its broadest sense – personal, public and political – which is consonant with the Greek notion of *paideia*. The Berlin model is based much more on the centrality of both rigorous critical scholarship, on the one hand, and professional training on the other. Wilton argues that Hind One exhibits tensions between these two models, and traces their development from ACCM 22 and through the various draft stages, identifying ways in which the balance swings from an Athens to a Berlin model and back again He

'Knowing is always situated within a personal, social, historical and cultural setting, and thus transforms from the merely intellectual to something inhabited and enacted: a way of thinking, making and acting.' Ibid., p. 682.

See also, from a virtue ethics perspective, W. Jay Wood's *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous*, Apollon, 1998, which offers a model for holding together intellectual and personal moral formation.

¹¹³ As argued by Darlene L. Bird, 'Theology and the Outcomes-Based Curriculum: the Value of "Not Knowing"', *Discourse* Vol.5, No. 2, The Higher Education Academy, Spring 2006, pp. 49-56.

¹¹⁴ See for example Martha Nussbaum, 'Aristophanes and Socrates on Learning Practical Wisdom', *Yale Classical Studies* 26, Jeffrey Henderson (ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980, pp. 43-97.

¹¹⁵ Gary Wilton, 'From ACCM 22 to Hind via Athens and Berlin: A Critical Analysis of Key Documents Shaping Contemporary Church of England Theological Education With Reference to the Work of David Kelsey,' *JATE* Vol. 4.1, 2007, pp. 31-47.

¹¹⁶ David Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1993.

makes a convincing case for this process, and suggests some reasons for it: different approaches within the Church between those who deliver theological education in courses, colleges and schemes, and those designing it at the Ministry Division level; incompatibility between the Church of England's aims in its theological education, and the 'QAA driven subject area benchmarks of the maintained HE providers.'¹¹⁷ Although the tensions with which I am working do not map precisely on to the Athens/Berlin axis, Wilton's article provides an important conceptual tool for those who are working in the sector and reinforces the case I am making by its identification of fault-lines and internal debate within the Hind process.

Hind: measurable learning

Hind One is open about having made a shift in emphasis as a result of criticism:

In its interim report, our working party tried to put forward an integrated view of preparation for ordained ministry, encompassing its formational, educational and training strands. However, it became clear through consultation on the interim report that we have been perceived as being more interested in academic attainment than in the formation of the person for ministry... In this draft final report we have taken this point very seriously and have addressed the issue of formation directly (see 4.2–10 below) and in the report as a whole. By this means we have sought to present an integrated and balanced view of preparation for ordained ministry.¹¹⁸

All fears were not, however, allayed; in 2003, when Hind One appeared, the main initial criticisms were still made on the grounds that the report laid too much emphasis on

¹¹⁷ Wilton, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

¹¹⁸ Hind One, 2.3.

formally accredited learning. One of Ian Paul's criticisms of Hind One is the way in which it appears to equate 'learning' with 'formal education'. He identifies a danger of focussing on the intentional and formal aspects of ministerial training at the expense of recognising intentional but informal processes such as mentoring and apprenticeship: 'these are the ways of learning that have disappeared from secular training in the drive to expand higher education.'¹¹⁹

There is some substance to Paul's charge that learning tends to be equated with formal accreditation, as evidenced in 1.29.v:

Gaining academic awards has encouraged learning among candidates and lays foundations for further learning. While being a significant call on staff time it has raised standards in the delivery of training and contributed to a sense of professionalism.

This statement raises more questions than it answers: it assumes a direct equation between learning and the gaining of academic awards; it claims that standards have been raised but does not specify how or according to what criteria; it invokes the notion of professionalism, which, as will be explored further in Chapter Five, is a contested concept when it comes to theological education. This is an example of Hind One making confident assertions which leave no space for dissent but which on closer examination beg multiple questions.

¹¹⁹ Ian Paul, 'The Hind Report on Theological Education: Reviewing Progress', www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/news/2005/20050722hindreport.cfm?doc-119. Paul adds: 'The language of learning and of education still appears to be confused; if we are to use the language of the church as a "school of theology" we need to be extremely careful what we mean by this. Interestingly, the confusion between learning and study here parallels the questions being asked of the Government's policy in the expansion of higher education.' Accessed on 10.3.2008.

The report is keen to address concerns about too close a dependence on the potentially problematic outcomes and methods of HE which it concedes ‘can appear relativistic, value-free or uncommitted’, contrasting them with the values and qualities the church seeks to foster: those of ‘godly wisdom, passionate engagement, discipleship and holiness.’ The challenge is to reconcile the frameworks within which HE operates and the *telos* of ministerial training, and Hind uses the language of ‘congruence’ in its explanation of how this can work: ‘Our aim is to show that the Church’s language of levels and thresholds is congruent with the language and expectations of these sectors, with whom the churches will be cooperating.’¹²⁰ Thus Hind One finds a way, rhetorically at least, of reconciling the church’s values with those of HE assessment statements.

Hind One’s commitment to the notion of identifiable stages of development in terms of preparation for ordained ministry is spelled out more fully in 5.3:

The proposed framework for ministerial education has two main components:

- a) *agreed phases of development in a formational journey*, which are marked by specified levels of achievement in ministerial education, from initial exploration of vocation, via entry into training, ordination itself, title post and on into ministry;
- b) *a statement of expectations for ministerial education* that would indicate *the qualities and learning expected of candidates* at the important ‘thresholds’ of entry into training, ordination and further phases of ministry or appointment to a post of responsibility.¹²¹

Its authors note that judgements always have to be made about those in training, such that it is better for the criteria to be explicit and transparent than implicit, and as a principle this is

¹²⁰ Hind One 5.16 iv, p. 56. The use of Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme points (CATS) is also defended at 5.20.v, p. 60.

¹²¹ Hind One, p. 47.

hard to refute. Problems arise because the report constantly wants to have its cake and eat it: to insist that development can both be measured and resists measurement. The substance of my critique is not the fact that tensions exist, rather the ways in which Hind sidesteps them.¹²²

Hind: formation

Formation is a much-used term in ministerial education, and the subject of several studies in the last twenty years.¹²³ A key declaration in Hind One is the following explanation of the centrality of formation, made in the context of the identification of all ministry as Christ's ministry:

It is important not to see formation merely as a process of moulding. Formation for ministry, like Christian formation as a whole, must take its tone from Paul's expression in Galatians 4.19 where he describes himself as being 'in travail until Christ be formed in you'. It is rather a matter of being conformed to the pattern of Christ and his ministry. As such it is a creative process initiated and sustained by God and is inseparable from the call to sacrifice and the cross that are implied in

¹²² One work which employs a method similar to my own is Duke Maskell and Ian Robinson's *The New Idea of a University*. Maskell and Robinson critique contemporary trends in HE by unpicking the rhetoric of policy pronouncements, exposing their vacuity by showing their poor and illogical use of language, and by comparing them with examples of literature which educate the reader differently and hold up a different model of what it means to learn. By juxtaposing detailed textual analysis of *Pride and Prejudice* and the *Dearing Report*, they endorse the former as a positive model of learning and subject the latter to ridicule.

¹²³ See for example Andrew Mayes, *Spirituality in Ministerial Formation*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2009, which suggests six models of theological education: praxis, paideia, ascesis, scientia, Wissenschaft and formation. Mayes argues that the formation model is in the ascendant and that educators should continue to develop its potential as a means of integrating theoria and praxis, intellect and affect. See also Jeff Astley, Leslie Francis and Colin Crowder (eds), *Theological Perspectives on Christian Education: A Reader in Theology and Christian Education*, Gracewing, Leominster, 1996.

Christ's call to 'Follow me'. While we are rightly concerned with the knowledge, skills and competences needed for the exercise of ministry, these alone can feed a kind of triumphalism which belies the heart of the gospel and discourages collaboration. It is also important not to understand formation as being concerned solely with questions of spirituality and discipleship which is then added as a third element alongside 'education' (= academic study) and training (= learning skills for ministry). Rather 'formation' should be seen as the overarching concept that integrates the person, understanding and competence.¹²⁴

Formation is thus presented as the 'overarching' concept which can reconcile and harmonise all the parts and provide a category that can render different models compatible. Section 4.2-10 of Hind One explores the notion of formation further, introducing some important theological concepts: formation FOR something specific – the service of the Church and INTO something – the holiness which Christ gives to the Church.¹²⁵ Thus formation encompasses elements both of personal transformation and holiness, and also a representative role to grow into and towards. Furthermore, the report argues that formation is an ongoing and dynamic process 'in which the candidate moves between gathered and

¹²⁴ Hind 3.11.

¹²⁵ 4.2: 'Thus, any view of the nature of formation for ministry will be dependent on prior assumptions about the nature of ministry. In the light of our reflections on ministry in Chapter Three, we regard ministerial formation as development towards the role of particular responsibility for enabling and ordering the Church's life, under God. Thus, it is formation in the holiness which Christ gives to the Church, in enabling the vocation of the Church as a whole which it receives from Christ and in enabling the missionary endeavour in the name of Christ.' 4.6: 'The term 'formation' is at the best a convenient short hand. It alludes to elements of *transformation*, the Spirit of God at work in fallible human beings, *forming* Christ in them. At the same time, candidates put themselves at the service of the Church, and participate in a process of being *conformed* to the public role of: prayer, within the Church's life of worship; acting as a spokesperson on behalf of and to the Church; continued theological and ministerial learning, not least to support a ministry of teaching, preaching and interpretation; leadership of the Christian community in its calling and in its service to the wider life of the community.'

dispersed settings of the Church's life, and, under supervision, is helped to grow towards the role of the ordained, defined above in terms of service, holiness, vocation and mission.¹²⁶ There is a recognition that formation cannot be circumscribed, and that it will take place in a range of contexts.

The report thus builds up a rich picture of formation, invoking a range of theological elements.¹²⁷ However, some questions remain. Firstly, the desire for order means that the notion of Christ being formed in ordinands is never presented as being anything other than straightforward. Hind One tends to move straight on from any theological pronouncement to its next point without pausing to allow such statements to expand out of the tight bands of the report's point by point structure. The possibility that for 'Christ to be formed' in those training might involve ordinands in radically subversive behaviour rather than obedient compliance is not entertained. Secondly, the question still remains as to how Hind One deals with the unpredictability of the formational journey, the subversive nature of discipleship and calling, and the extent to which it defines formation as preparation for a professional role. Formation does have genuine content for Hind One: there is an acknowledgement that it may spill across the bounds of formal training and learning, that it is a lifelong process. However, it is unclear how compatible the organisational meta-language of quality assurance is with the messiness, human unpredictability and radical

¹²⁶ Hind One, 4.9. The passage continues thus: '(i) Formation is a dynamic and continuing process. It is dynamic in that it is a creative process initiated and sustained by God, to which the candidate, and later, minister is invited to respond. It is continuing, in that it cannot be confined to the period of formal training, having roots in the candidate's earlier and continuing discipleship and goes on in ministry. (ii) Formation takes places in a range of settings, and not just in the intentional communities of training institutions, however vital the latter are for this purpose. Ministerial formation takes place: in Christian life in the world; in the parish or church setting; in college, course or scheme, both in their gathered and dispersed modes; not least, in ordained ministry itself.

¹²⁷ For further evaluation of the Hind definition of formation, and a comparison with recent Non-Conformist, Catholic and Orthodox statements, see Mayes, *op. cit.*, chapters 3 and 4.

open-endedness of the journey of discipleship, and this will be explored further in this chapter. There is a fundamental tension between the discourse of Hind and a theology of learning which is anything other than instrumental and functional.¹²⁸ There is also the danger, raised by Monica Furlong, that eccentrics, trouble-makers and prophets in the Church will no longer have meaningful influence, because the learning-outcome led processes of selection and training will eliminate them in favour of those who are managerially inclined, biddable and ready to comply with the spirit of the age.¹²⁹

Learning and formation: a summary

On the one hand, the message comes across clearly in Hind One that learning can be measured, assessed, and ordinands permitted to proceed to the next stage of training. On the other, there is an effort to make the learning outcomes holistic and not to restrict them to conventional curriculum areas.¹³⁰ The nine learning outcome areas (vocation, ministry within the Church of England, spirituality, personality and character, relationships,

¹²⁸ Mayes notes the same tension on pp. 52-3 of *Spirituality in Ministerial Formation*., op. cit.

¹²⁹ Monica Furlong, *C of E: the State It's In*, Hodder and Stoughton, 2000, p. 262: 'The question must be whether, in the direction in which the Church is moving, it will have room for those gifted creatively, as opposed to good at organization, and whether it will not miss a great deal if it loses them, men and women, who have a vision of life that goes beyond efficiency, targets and goals.' Furlong earlier states on p. 250 that it seems 'that the job can now only be done by those who are natural organizers, and it is worrying to think of the degree to which this must exclude visionaries, dreamers and muddlers-through, who might have other gifts to bring to the role. Obsessionals rule, OK? At least for as long as they don't crack up under the strain.'

¹³⁰ See for example the statement at 5.15, p. 55: 'Thus, recommending a candidate to a bishop will be far more than assessing the measurable and will continue to depend on discernment of calling, tested in relationships within communities of worship. At the same time something can be said that can be publicly owned. To give an example: while it would be inappropriate and impossible to measure a candidate's prayer life, it is possible to describe how a candidate is maintaining a life of prayer through attendance at corporate worship and a pattern of personal devotion.'

leadership and collaboration, mission and evangelism, faith, and quality of mind) are introduced in Hind Two by means of a re-affirmation that ‘the heart of theological education is not coverage of a set of subjects or achievement of particular qualifications, but the development of character within the context of the Church’s life.’¹³¹

It is easy to dismiss attempts to set down goals and to establish criteria for successful Christian learning and ministry, and it is not the aim of this thesis to deny the validity of such attempts.¹³² What it does seek to do, in the light of the collapse of the Hind settlement and for the sake of finding better ways in to the future, is to detect the places in the two reports where difficulties arise because of the ways in which language is used to smooth over incompatibilities. The Hind settlement does not resolve the tension I have described but seeks to hold together several different models of learning.¹³³ Trying to create a unity out of different understandings and practices is a priority for Hind One, as its use of the image of the body, explored in Chapter Five, further demonstrates. The problem is not the attempt in itself to try and hold terms and concepts together; indeed it could be argued that

¹³¹ Hind Two, p. 64. This is one of several examples of Hind Two offering reassurance that the Church has not simply identified its aims as being those of theological study.

¹³² The authors of *The Naked Parish Priest* observe: ‘Some readers might understandably bridle at what might be construed as an over-simple analysis that attempts to reduce priestly ministry to a commercial transaction, as if some simple numerical yardstick can measure success and failure in religious ministry. It is readily acknowledged that success in a religious context is notoriously difficult to gauge, as may be understood had any of Jesus’ disciples been asked immediately following the crucifixion about their leader’s success. Nonetheless, few would deny the importance of trying to determine whether this or that course of action leads to the building up or breaking down of the Christian community. To that extent, therefore, some attempt to appraise whether one practice rather than another is more successful in achieving a desired objective appears to be legitimate, if only on the principle that some theory is better than no theory.’ Stephen H. Loudon and Leslie J. Francis, *The Naked Parish Priest*, Continuum, London and New York, 2003, p. 176.

¹³³ Mayes puts it thus on p. 53 of Mayes, op. cit.: ‘the difficulty in relating a fluid and dynamic concept as formation to prescriptive academic requirements is revealed in the debate over competencies.’

such a project is integral to the task of theology.¹³⁴ It is also true, as John Bright points out, that there will always be a tension for theological educators between ‘the intellectual canons of scholarship and the practical concerns of vocational training.’¹³⁵ What I have begun to open up is the danger of ignoring a clash or of resolving it in dishonest ways.

I want now to move the argument forward by exploring an alternative textual response to the existence of different perspectives: that of allowing them to dialogue with one another rather than ignoring the points where they collide or merely assuming their compatibility. I will move into analysis of a text which finds imaginative ways of acknowledging different perspectives, naming the tensions they create and proposing resources to enable the Church to confront them. The text is *Piers Plowman*, the context late medieval England.

One obvious objection to using *Piers Plowman* as a conversation partner with Hind is precisely that it is a medieval text. The pedagogical debates of the pre-modern world cannot be simplistically mapped onto such categories as David Kelsey’s Athens/Berlin pairing to produce an equivalent late medieval contrast between an Athens-based model of *paideia*/formation and a ‘*Wissenschaftlich*’ concern for academic achievement and accreditation.¹³⁶ Clearly it would be foolish to assume that any kind of blueprint could be

¹³⁴ David Tracy states that ‘of all the disciplines, theology is that one where action and thought, academy and church, faith and reason, the community of inquiry and the community of commitment and faith are most systematically brought together.’ David Tracy, ‘On Theological Education: A Reflection’ in Rodney L. Peterson with Nancy M. Rourke (eds.), *Theological Literacy for the Twenty-First Century*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, UK, 2002, pp. 13-22.

¹³⁵ John Bright, ‘The Academic Teacher and the Practical Needs of the Clergy,’ *Theological Education* Vol.1, No.1, Autumn 1964, reprinted in *Theological Education* January 2009, pp. 14-128. Bright speaks of not one simple tension ‘but a whole interlocking complex of tensions’ (p. 118), concluding on p. 123 that it simply has to be lived with.

¹³⁶ Wilton, op. cit.

lifted from a fourteenth century text in Middle English and put into the language of learning outcomes; whatever the reason for Langland's writing of *Piers Plowman*, it was not to address the adequacy of the Hind settlement. However, as Caroline Walker Bynum points out, there are fruitful ways of allowing medieval texts to dialogue with those of our own time, so long as we heed some key warnings: 'so long as we reason by analogy rather than merely re-writing or rejecting, the present will help us see past complexity and the past will help us understand ourselves.'¹³⁷ We cannot examine the past by assuming that its specific questions or their settings are the same as the present; 'what may, however, be the same is the way in which a question, understood in its context, struggles with a perduring issue.'¹³⁸ As Langland struggles with the categories of his world, it is possible to see how some of his methods and ideas might resource the Church of England in our contemporary context.

Piers Plowman: learning, progress and 'doing well'

In the Hind report, I identified a tension between a model of learning which is articulated in terms of grids of qualities and competences that clergy should be expected to demonstrate at various points in their training, and a model which speaks in terms of a more open-ended formational journey. *Piers Plowman* resists all attempts at neat methodological definition, but nonetheless, in terms of the way it enacts the tension between seeking answers and allowing openness to experience, the text offers several ways of holding the two together. In the next section of this chapter I will look in more detail at one framework which Langland employs to try and contain definitions of learning and render them manageable,

¹³⁷ Carolyn Walker Bynum, 'Why All the Fuss About the Body? A Medievalist's Perspective', *Critical Inquiry* 22, 1995, pp. 1-33, p. 31.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

and the ways in which it is qualified and ultimately subverted by the constant untidy eruption of experience.

One of the recurring motifs of the poem which gives it some cohesion is the search for the triad Dowel, Dobet and Dobest (Do-well, Do-better and Do-best). Since many manuscripts observe the Dowel, Dobet, Dobest sub-divisions it is worth looking at these organising concepts more closely in order to see whether they provide any kind of viable framework for understanding questions of learning and progress. One purpose of such a sequence of doing well, better and best could be an attempt to order into a systematic structure a progressive hierarchy of virtuous living, a blueprint for the Christian life which will ensure salvation and lead to truth.¹³⁹ I will thus explore and evaluate the ways in which the triad functions within the poem.

The first important context in which the idea of Dowel appears is in Passus 7, the scene of the tearing of the pardon, where the priest translates the Latin '*Et qui bona egerunt ibunt in vitam eternam*' as 'Do wel and have wel, and God shal have thi soule' ('Do well and have well and God shall Have thy soul'). This statement triggers a theological and spiritual debate about the respective roles of right belief and right action which signals the start of the second section of the poem. Will's reflections on Dowel in the last section of Passus 7 (lines 168-201) show him wrestling with the balance between the need for right action, as represented by 'Dowel', and the unmerited forgiveness and mercy of God. The pope has the power to grant pardon such that through the offices of the church the mercy of God is

¹³⁹ Mary Carruthers maps out some key critical interpretations of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest as she sets out her own case for the poem's focus being primarily epistemological and the Dowel triad an unstable device. Mary Carruthers, *The Search for St Truth*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1973, p. 7.

effective for sinners; yet to depend on such institutional assurances is ‘nought so siker for the soule, certes, as is Dowel’ (B7.181) (not so certain for the soul, to be sure, as Do-well).

Dowel is invoked in the final part of the passus as the evidence of a life which is a practical outworking of goodness and virtuous action as opposed to a dependence on indulgences, pardons and the like. Will affirms the importance of Dowel at this early stage of the poem, exhorting all Christian to pray for the grace,

er we go hennes,

Swich werkes to werche, while we ben here,

That after our deth day, Dowel reherce

At the day of dome, we did as he highte.’ (B7.198-201)

(before we depart,

to do such deeds while we are here,

that after our death, Do-well can say on our behalf

at the Judgement Day that we did as he commanded.)

Dowel, then is clearly connected to practical action, an outworking of faith which renders it genuine and acceptable to God, and whose advocacy will be required on the day of God’s judgement.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Robert Worth Frank Jr. sees Dowel as the key term which is to be understood as living the good life by obedience to the law of love. He argues that previous critics are wrong to see the triad as a set of terms with fixed meanings and that Dobet and Dobest are ‘rather divisions of the generic term “Dowel.”’ Robert Worth Frank Jr., *Piers Plowman and Salvation*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1957, p. 36. Frank structures his text around Dowel, Dobet and Dobest even as he acknowledges their instability and Langland’s ultimate abandonment of them.

The mention of Dowel in the priest's pardon is the catalyst for Will to set out to seek the whereabouts of Dowel at the start of Passus 8. This is the beginning of his encounters with a bafflingly plural set of definitions. As he seeks a way of formulating the requirements of God in terms of belief and practice, he asks the advice of a sequence of figures: Thought (B8), Wit (B9), Clergie (B10) and Imaginatif (B12). These figures have different kinds of authority, and are in part representative of the faculties of the human mind. Thought offers him a definition of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest in B8.79-129, followed by a further version from Wit in B9.200-207, and yet another from Clergie in B10.220-325. Will's encounter with Imaginatif in Passus 12 yields another partial definition which gets sidetracked – as so often in the discourse of the personified faculties of the mind in these middle passus – into discussion about other matters. These definitions all have a slightly different emphasis, but all variously engage with the social outworking of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest. Will asks whether they can be equated with estates in society (B10.328); with attitudes of love, longsuffering and forgiveness to be cultivated in the individual believer (B12.28-34); and with theological understanding, such that they are about believing the teaching of the Church, following it and teaching it to others (B10.245-258; B13.115-117).¹⁴¹

In Passus 9 definitions of Dowel are developed further when Wit directs Will to the castle of Kynde, and the passus concludes with the following summary from Wit:

¹⁴¹ William Elford Rogers argues that it is not fruitful for the reader to collect definitions of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest 'in the hope that somehow the cumulative wisdom of the human faculties will suggest some essential core that corresponds with Langland's definition.' William Elford Rogers, *Interpretation in Piers Plowman*, Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C., 2002, p. 210. Rogers' approach to the poem has many similarities with my own, though I do not share his conclusion that a hermeneutical reading requires that both world and self are to be read as texts. Rogers sees the poem's abandonment of attempts to define Dowel, Dobet and Dobest as an acknowledgement of the 'problem that definition happens only within the boundaries of some language, some particular interpretive system, and all interpretive systems are provisional, limited by the needs and compulsions of the interpreters who make and use them.' Elford Rogers op. cit., p. 210.

Dowel, my frend, is to doon as lawe techeth.
To love thi frend and thi foo – leve me, that is Dobet.
To yyven and to yemen bothe yonge and olde,
To helen and to helpen, is Dobest of alle.
And thus Dowel is to drede God, and Dobet to suffre,
And so cometh Dobest of bothe, and bryngeth abdoun the mody –
And that is wikked wille that many werk shendeth,
And dryveth away Dowel thorough dedliche synnes.’ (B9. 200-207)

(Do-well, my friend, is doing as the law teaches.
To love your friend and foe – believe, me, that is Do-Better.
Giving and caring for both young and old,
Helping and healing, is Do-best of all.
And thus Do-well is to fear God, and Do-better is to suffer,
And so Do-best arises from both, and brings down the proud one –
That wicked will that harms many a good work
And drives Do-well away through deadly sins.)

Wit’s words here explicitly invoke the role of the will, and it is important to note that at this point the poem has entered what is sometimes referred to as the dream of the inward psychological journey, Passus 8-12, where Langland uses a series of personifications to explore the cognitive processes of the mind.¹⁴² Will, his protagonist, meets with Thought and Wit, then later with Kynde Wit, Reason and Imaginatif. The thinking, acting self is

¹⁴² The seminal discussion of this section remains Joseph Wittig, ‘*Piers Plowman* B, Passus IX-XII, Elements in the Design of the Inward Journey’, *Traditio* Vol. 28, 1972, pp. 211-80.

inseparable from the more abstract debates of this section; what it might mean to ‘do well’ can only be understood by engaging with actual spheres of practical action, and through the struggle – at once cognitive, spiritual and affective – to discern, and respond rightly and truly to, God’s demands.

‘Dowel’ and the role of study

Thus Wit’s words, quoted above, foreground the role of the will in the search for truth. Yet no sooner has Will received this formula than it is immediately undercut by Dame Studie, who chides Wit for casting his pearls of wisdom before the swine that is Will, and who suggests in her ensuing speech that study is abused and left unrelated to acts of mercy, thus emptying it of its true purpose:

God is mucche in the gorge of thise grete maistres,
Ac amonges meene men hise mercy and hise workes.’ (B10.66-67)

(God is much in the throats of these great masters of theology,
but it is among humble people that his mercy and actions are to be found.)

and again:

Clerkes and othere kynnes men carpen of God faste,
And have hym mucche in hire mouth, ac meene men in herte.’ (B10.69-70)

(Clerks and other men of that sort talk readily about God,
and have him constantly on their lips, but the humble have him in their hearts.)

The poem returns often to this anxiety about the abuse of study, whereby the gift of learning intended for the increase of charity has become instead an occasion for clever speech unsupported by virtuous living.¹⁴³ Studie's words present us with an opposition between theological learning which does not lead to transformed praxis, and the instinctive but uneducated impulse of charity shown by the 'lewed' and 'meene'. Will himself is troubled by what he sees as the counterproductive nature of study, as evidenced in his long anti-intellectual diatribe in B10.369-472 arguing from Scripture and reason for the priority of ignorance over learning. The poem sets up a recurring dilemma: that of the exemplary lives of the 'meene men' cited by Dame Studie who are rebuffed by the supposedly learned (as, for example, Piers is by the priest in Passus 7, and Patience by the Doctor in Passus 13), and the difficulty of rescuing learning from its debased forms as described, for example, in B11.303-313. It is only when the poem moves into a more exemplary and parabolic phase from Passus 16 that Will begins to get beyond this impasse.¹⁴⁴

One way of understanding the existence within the poem of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest is their function as an accessible formula for Will to hang on to in the early stages of his search for truth, a set of comparative verbs made into nouns waiting to be filled with practical content. If Will can get hold of the right definitions, he will have greater confidence in the possibility of his own salvation and of the potential reform of society. Not only that, but the search for Dowel, as well as being to do with learning and charity, is intimately connected with questions of vocation. This can be seen in Passus 12 when Will

¹⁴³ See also, for example, B13.77-84; B10.51-63, 103-116.

¹⁴⁴ Gay Clifford sees this as a result of the limitations of the central section of the poem, where 'what is allegorised is a mistaken fragmentation of the pursuit: the Dreamer is trying to learn the nature of Truth through various single faculties', which has the effect of separating and objectifying aspects of the protagonist's character. Gay Clifford, *The Transformations of Allegory*, Routledge and Keegan Paul, London and Boston, 1974, p. 6.

interrogates Imaginatif. In this scene, Imaginatif accuses Will of dabbling in ‘verse making’ (Schmidt’s translation) when he could be praying for those who provide his daily bread:

for there are bokes enowe

To telle men what Dowel is, Dobet and Dobest bothe,

and prechours to preve what it is, of many a peire freres. (B12.17-19).

(for there are enough books

telling men what Do-well is, and Do-better and Do-best too,

and preachers to prove what it is, many of them pairs of friars.)

This rebuke suggests that there are plenty of definitions of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest on offer; the problem is not with finding the right definition, but with the challenge of turning such knowledge into a life lived in conformity to its demands and the choosing of a vocational path which enables its benefits to be spread and shared. Will’s response is firstly to justify his versifying as a valid undertaking by citing the advice of Cato to his son, suggesting that such play with words is compatible with a clerkly calling and a means of rightful amusement and restoration (B12. 21-22). He then goes on to complain that if he had the right definition of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest he would have vocational certainty and stability; he would do nothing but pray all day, pausing only to eat and sleep (B12.25-28). This response confronts us with one of the poem’s central paradoxes: vocation is not an end point in a search for meaning, but the context in which that search continues to be pursued.

This passage typifies the ambiguity of the poem as a whole with regard to schemes that seem to promise predictable progress in the Christian life. On the one hand, structures such

as Dowel, Dobet and Dobest appear to fulfil an important function for those who seek to discern their true vocation and live lives which embody truthful discipleship. Will refines his definitions as he listens to a wider range of voices giving him advice. On the other hand, the importance of the Dowel structure diminishes after the end of the middle section, suggesting that it has given way to, or been transformed by, other ways of experiencing and configuring the process of learning to be a disciple.

There are two important moments which move on the exploration of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest from being just a set of techniques or ideals for Christian living. One is the introduction and development of the idea of *kynde knowynge*, the other the arrival of Piers into the poem offering a way of understanding which transforms the learning process.

When Will meets Thought and is offered a rather elaborate explanation of the inter-relationship of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest at B8.79-108, his response is to declare that he seeks

more kynde knowynge...

How Dowel, Dobet and Dobest doon among the peple' (B8.111-112).

(more 'natural' knowing

how Do-well, Do-better and Do-best do among the people)

The significant phrase *kynde knowynge*, often seen as a key term in the spiritual growth of Will and the epistemological movement of the poem as a whole, will be explored in more

detail later in the chapter.¹⁴⁵ The importance of its relationship to Dowel, Dobet and Dobest is not in the nature of a challenge to their adequacy, rather *kynde knowynge* is introduced as a mode of apprehending and realising them. What Dowel means ‘doon among the peple’ is crucial. It is this desire which drives the poem; Will refuses to be content with neat formulae or abstract definitions, but seeks to know how core Christian principles are worked out in the concrete material circumstances of ordinary people’s lives.¹⁴⁶

Another key development in the multiplying of definitions of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest occurs in Passus 13, and the definitions expand their range of meaning from this point onwards. In this Passus, Will has been invited to a feast, along with Patience and Conscience, as the guest of a Doctor of Divinity. At the feast, after the Doctor of Divinity has given his terse summary at 13.115-117, Clergie changes the parameters of the debate by introducing Piers, explaining that he (Clergie) and his seven sons (the seven liberal arts of the curriculum?) can no longer give a simple answer since Piers

hath impugned us alle,

And set all sciences at a sop save love one;

And no text taketh to mayntayn his cause

But *Dilige Deum* and *Domine quis habitabit*;

¹⁴⁵ See Mary Clemente Davlin, ‘Kynde Knowynge as a Major Theme in *Piers Plowman*’, *Review of English Studies* Vol. 22, No. 85, 1971, pp. 1-19; James Simpson ‘The Role of *Scientia* in *Piers Plowman*’, in Gregory Kratzman and James Simpson (eds.), *Medieval Religious and Ethical Literature*, D.S. Brewer, 1986, pp. 49-65; James Simpson ‘From Reason to Affective Knowledge: Modes of Thought and Poetic Form in *Piers Plowman*’, *Medium Aevum* Vol. 40, No. 1, 1986, pp. 1-23; Britton .J Harwood, ‘Langland’s Kynde Knowynge and the Quest for Christ’, *Modern Philology* Vol. 80, No. 3, 1983, pp. 242-255.

¹⁴⁶ This concern with ‘the peple’ is echoed in Trajan’s speech in Passus 11. Trajan, the voice of someone who was saved by God’s mercy because of his life of practical goodness, makes explicit the need for a connection between learning, loving and being rooted in concern for ‘the peple’. All learning must be undertaken ‘for love of Oure Lord and the bet to love the peple’ (B11.173-4).

And seith that Dowel and Dobet arn two infinites,
Which infinites with a feith fynden out Dobest,
Which shal save mannes soule- thus seith Piers the Plowman. (B.13.123-129).

([Piers] has impugned us all
and declared all branches of learning as valueless except for love;
the only text he uses to support his position is
Thou shalt love the Lord thy God and Lord, who shall dwell in thy tabernacle?;
And says that Do-well and Do-better are two parallel lines
which, with the help of faith, lead to Do-best,
which will save man's soul- that's what Piers the Plowman says.)

Piers, who has been absent for several passus, tantalisingly re-appears by name at the point where love is being advanced as the all-sufficient principle for interpreting the Dowel triad. Love's overarching role is reinforced in Passus 16, where the Tree of Charity scene takes place (and where the Dowel triad is absent), and takes over from Dowel, Dobet and Dobest in the next two passus. However, just as the reader might think that the triad has been forgotten or superseded, it is cited again in Passus 19 when Conscience introduces a new dimension, that of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest being understood in terms of salvation history: Dowel is incarnation and the human name of Jesus (B19.115-123); Dobet is Jesus' earthly ministry of healing and feeding the hungry as Son of David (B19.124-183); Dobest is the giving of authority to Piers to absolve sin and to administer pardon, and the ascension of Jesus ready for the Last Judgement (B19.183-199). This is the B text's last mention of the Dowel triad, and by this point it has come to acquire more and more meaning as the poem has progressed, adding new layers as the parallel narratives structures have unfolded (the

waking life of Will; the biblical story climaxing in the harrowing of hell; the journey away from and towards Piers). It mirrors a movement whereby incarnation becomes the primary lens through which meaning is given to human life and salvation.

The concept of Dowel is not simply part of a scheme for virtuous Christian behaviour, but is part of the lexicon of satirical poetry contemporaneous with Langland.¹⁴⁷ Langland was not alone in complaining about social ills through the medium of poetry, and much of the satirical poetry of the time deals with the issue of trying to establish clear standards of truth-telling and conduct.¹⁴⁸ Thus the desire to set down what it might mean to do well, do better and do best reflects more than Langland's own preoccupations, or a concern with theological categories; truth is more than a question of personal piety but of the integrity of the social, political and ecclesiastical order. Coleman makes the point that 'contemporary grievances united spiritual and social abuses in a general condemnation of the age, and social abuses were argued from religious standpoints just as religious abuses were condemned from social and political positions.'¹⁴⁹ *Piers Plowman* locates itself within a tradition of tackling wider social questions by its choice of the language of doing well, and by the ways in which it subjects that language to constant interrogation and re-definition. The ambiguity and circumlocutions of the poem are in part a response to the danger of too much 'truth-telling' in the atmosphere of the late fourteenth century.

¹⁴⁷ See for example the poems in James Dean's edition of *Six Ecclesiastical Satires*, TEAMS Middle English Series, Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, 1991. *Piers the Plowman's Crede* picks up the idea of a poor man's search for truth in the face of the failure of the friars to offer him any learning worth having.

¹⁴⁸ Coleman notes that in *Mum and the Sothsegger*, to do well 'is to air arguments and grievances over current social abuses and to do so publicly.' Coleman, op. cit., p. 111. See also Helen Barr, *Signes and Sothe: Language in the Piers Plowman Tradition*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1991.

¹⁴⁹ Coleman, op. cit., p. 61.

Dowel, Dobet, Dobest: a summary

Langland's restless poem explores the notion of development in part through the notion of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest. The poem both reflects and resists some of the prevailing understandings of its day, refusing simply to endorse a set of stages through which the pilgrim disciple may move on the way to a vocational or spiritual goal.¹⁵⁰ Schemes such as Dowel, Dobet and Dobest do not reflect any absolutes but rather act as containers for a series of complementary and non-hierarchical insights into the rich realities of discipleship and God. The Dowel triad shifts and undergoes constant re-definition. It serves as a kind of heuristic tool, a means of interrogating various understandings and theological positions, rather than as a set of meanings which can be mapped in any fixed way onto ways of living (for example the active, contemplative and mixed life; three estates; three stages in salvation history). Thus Dowel, Dobet and Dobest are fluid in terms of content and helpful as a way of articulating the possibility of progression in the Christian life, not absolutes which correspond to states, lifestyles or theological principles. This fluidity and multiplicity of meaning is an example of Langland's particular theological poetics. Although he positions himself more as a satirist than a mystic, Langland shares with a spiritual writer such as Julian of Norwich an impulse to pile up words and images in a way which is not strictly logical, creating a surplus of meaning which defies schematising.¹⁵¹ This is not a strategy of despair at the impossibility of knowing anything about God, but an

¹⁵⁰ Such works as Walter Hilton's *Ladder of Perfection* offer an 'ascent' model of spiritual growth. For a detailed analysis of texts which encouraged lay piety, see Nicole Rice, *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature*, Cambridge University Press, 2008.

¹⁵¹ Denys Turner in *The Darkness of God*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, describes what he calls the cataphatic impulse in mystical theology as being 'metaphor-ridden' and 'linguistically overburdened', citing Julian's writing as 'a verbal riot, an anarchy of discourse in which anything goes,' p. 20.

acknowledgement of the ultimate inadequacy of language even as we are forced to employ all its resources in our attempts to speak of God and God's ways in the world. Thus Langland allows the Dowel triad to contain all the meanings it acquires as the poem unfolds, whilst not confining it to any of them.

It is important to note that within the poem there is never any explicit rejection of the Dowel triad. Nor is it part of any final conclusion as to how faithful living is to be achieved; it is a tool of exploration along the way, yielding different definitions according to who Will speaks to, but not ultimately capable of delivering transformational insight and action.¹⁵² What transforms are the moments when Will is shown something beyond his powers of analysis and intellection; it is 'only the vision of something absolutely outside his own experience that enables the Dreamer to break out of the limitations of isolated individual effort to a more valuable kind of action.'¹⁵³ The most sustained example of this is the events of Passus 18, where Will is presented with not only the passion and harrowing of hell but the subsequent glimpse of a possible spiritual and intellectual reconciliation between different interpretative positions in the conversation between the four daughters of God. As Gay Clifford comments, 'As the dreamer becomes more aware of what he should be looking for, so the figure that is the object of that quest is transformed.'¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Those scholars who see the poem as achieving a degree of progress would disagree. See for example Goldsmith: 'The Dobest which he has been seeking through the three Vitae has been revealed as the life of true love. In earthly affairs this means living in hope, not in fear, of the coming of the kingdom, holding to the confidence of a will conformed to the will of God.' Margaret Goldsmith, *The Figure of Piers Plowman*, D.S. Brewer, 1981, p. 89. See also Coleman, op. cit. p. 242: 'The relation bet doing well, doing better and doing best in *Piers Plowman* can be seen as a vernacular expression of a hierarchy of deeds beginning with the purely natural ability to follow the teaching of the creed and the works of mercy and thence proceeding to those acts gradually informed with charity or divine grace, ending with the reception and aid of the grace that saves.'

¹⁵³ Gay Clifford, *The Transformations of Allegory*, op. cit., p. 61.

¹⁵⁴ Clifford, op. cit., p. 30.

This leads us into the next stage of the discussion about measurable progress: its relationship within the poem with the less predictable and tidy process that we might call formation. As I have shown, schemes which seem to promise a stable sequence of learning and competence falter in *Piers Plowman* as other kinds of knowing assume importance and as the knower changes the terms of the knowing s/he seeks. It is time now therefore to turn to the knowing self, the learning agent, within the world of the text, and to establish the contours of its formational journey.

Will's progress

In this section, I will explore the ways in which the process of acquiring knowledge and wisdom forms the seeker after truth by examining the kind of progress undergone by the poem's protagonist, Will. Throughout the poem Will wanders rather than marching purposefully; he seeks help and advice from various personified figures but never receives a definitive formula; he does not make 'progress' in any obvious way. I will explore the theory, advanced by a number of scholars, that the poem's progress can be understood in terms of a shift from mere intellectual knowledge or *scientia*, in favour of a more affective wisdom or *sapientia*. Although I will propose a different way of understanding the poem's internal dynamic, I will explore the ways in which the *scientia/sapientia* pairing can be understood as a variation of the scholastic/monastic tension described in Chapter Two, and its continuing resonance for tackling the Hind tensions. I will then put forward my own argument for a different kind of integration of knowledge and wisdom, experience and context.

The existence of variant manuscript traditions of the B text has led to several different editions which reflect the perceived organising principle of the poem of its particular editors. Thus before it is possible to speak of progress in *Piers Plowman*, it is necessary to acknowledge the inevitable interpretive role played by particular editors. Schmidt challenges Skeat's division of the B text into Visio (Prologue and Passus 1-7) and Vita (Passus 8-20), a division which persists in much scholarly writing and which is seen as one which helps to make structural sense of the shift from the socially located narrative of Passus 1-7, with its scenes in the court and out on the half-acre, to the 'inner journey' of Will's search for true learning by means of encounters with various figures such as Studie and Clergie.¹⁵⁵ Schmidt also counsels caution in making too much of the sub-divisions, which are present in some manuscripts, of Passus 8-20 into three: 8-14 'Dowel'; 15-18 'Dobet'; and 19-20 'Dobest.' Salter and Pearsall, in their introduction to the C text, propose that these sub-divisions can be functionally understood as introducing (C 1-10/B1-8); exploring (C11-17/B8-14); confirming (C 18-21/B15-18); and concluding and initiating a new beginning (C22-23/B19-20).¹⁵⁶ Both Schmidt, and Salter and Pearsall, see the poem as being driven more by a continuous development of themes and held together by the devices of quest/journey, dream and waking action, than by any straightforward narrative progression.¹⁵⁷

One way to interpret this lack of obvious progression is to see it as reflecting and embodying an open-ended understanding of spiritual growth whereby the individual soul is

¹⁵⁵ Schmidt, p. xxi-xx. Schmidt's challenge is that there is no evidence for such a division in the B manuscripts.

¹⁵⁶ Elizabeth Salter and Derek Pearsall, *York Medieval Texts, Piers Plowman*, Edward Arnold, London, 1967, p. 29. They also warn that 'it would not be sensible to try to make a very precise scheme of those headings'.

¹⁵⁷ See Salter and Pearsall, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-36, for a summary of some issues of the poem's form and structure.

always journeying onwards in a dynamic way as opposed to achieving some state of static bliss.¹⁵⁸ Rather than spiritual ‘progress’ being like ascending the rungs of a ladder, as one strand of the contemplative tradition implies (for example, Walter Hilton, Richard of St Victor), the Langlandian version of progress is more like a series of spirals: open-ended, restless, concerned to find a way of loving and living which engages to the full with the concrete materiality of the world. I will suggest at the end of this chapter that the best way to understand this is by means of the dynamic of the theological reflection cycle; other scholars have other ways of construing it: Piagetian stages of development;¹⁵⁹ the trinitarian restoration of the divine image in history and the individual soul;¹⁶⁰ the three aspects of the Augustinian will (learning, feeling and acting);¹⁶¹ a Freudian journey;¹⁶² a recurring process of the arousal and frustration of desire.¹⁶³ My reading of the poem assumes the subversion

¹⁵⁸ See for example Stephen Manning, ‘Langland and the Tradition of Spiritual Growth’, YLS 7, 1993, pp. 77-95. Manning summarises ways in which Dowel, Dobet and Dobest have been interpreted and concludes on p. 82 that ‘Langland’s constant defining of terms thus has a parallel in those writers like Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa who use what we might call an open-ended system indicating constant growth.’

¹⁵⁹ Stephen Manning, ‘William Langland and Jean Piaget’ in *Allegoresis*, ed J. Stephen Russell, Garland, New York and London, 1988, pp. 89-106.

¹⁶⁰ Anna P. Baldwin, ‘The Tripartite Reformation of the Soul in *The Scale of Perfection, Pearl and Piers Plowman*, in Marion Glasscoe (ed.), *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1984, pp. 136-149.

¹⁶¹ John M. Bowers, *The Crisis of Will in Piers Plowman*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 1986, p. 45

¹⁶² Joan Heiges Blythe’s Lacanian reading of the text as psychoallegoresis sees the progress of the poem as being driven by a problems with relating to the Father (symbolised by the Tower in the Prologue), a tension between the realm of desire and the Law-of-the-Father. She reads the tearing of the Pardon as the action of an angry father destroying and invalidating the poem. The positive psychological resolution comes from Will’s alignment with the Son, accepting his humanity, being accepted into community, and being able to express love through language. By the end Will has interiorised the Son-Piers as desire – the object has become the subject himself. Christ who works his mercy through ‘all my wordes true’ psychologically validates the desire of the poet to express love through transforming words. Joan Heiges Blythe, ‘*Transitio* and Psychoallegoresis in *Piers Plowman*, in Stephen J. Russell (ed.), *Allegoresis: The Craft of Allegory in Medieval Literature*, Garland, New York and London, 1988, pp. 133-155.

¹⁶³ Nicolette Zeeman, *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006. Zeeman’s dynamic of desire, ever frustrated and

of the search for a controlling scheme, not because Langland anticipates postmodern anxieties about metanarratives but because he refuses to ignore those elements of experience which do not fit. The text is continually interrupted by figures who disrupt whatever coherence the narrative might have had, for example Haukyn in Passus 13 and 14, whose vivid and dysfunctional presence introduces a whole set of issues to do with making a living beyond the cloister and whose situation challenges the adequacy and application of the formulations of personifications such as Patience. Relinquishing closure and control over meaning is an expression both of humility and of faith; in poetic terms, Langland exemplifies this both by allowing the poem to become overcrowded and overloaded with multiple signifiers, and in the way in which he depicts Will's wrestling with meaning giving way to surrender and acceptance of the imminence of death, whilst the poem's quest continues as Conscience sets off once more to find Piers.¹⁶⁴

Integral to any discussion of learning or progress is the question of the progress of Will, the poem's protagonist. It is through the dreams and waking interludes of Will that the reader experiences the poem's narrative, as Will makes his unsteady journey through the landscape of 'Middelertne', encountering personified faculties and engaging in dialogue with them, seeking Piers, and finally taking refuge in Unitee (the Church) after a buffeting from Elde (Old Age). One question which such a narrative structure invites is whether the

leading to renewed desire, comes closest to my own reading of the poem's structure in terms of a recapitulating dynamic rather than a thematic or psychological journey of progress. Schmidt compares aspects of the poem's circularity with that of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Schmidt, p. xxiii).

¹⁶⁴ Curtis Gruenler describes this as 'the poetics of enigma' in his article 'How to Read Like a Fool: Riddle Contests and the Banquet of Conscience in *Piers Plowman*,' *Speculum* Vol. 85, Issue 03, pp. 592-630. On p. 592 he writes: 'In Langland's hybrid contest, the contestants become not merely characters but representations of modes of discourse. The winner is the enigmatic mode itself: this scene uses riddling as a form to intensify the poem's focus on a pervasive poetic mode oriented toward open-ended interpretation of mystery.'

protagonist has learned anything, has acquired any wisdom, has undergone any kind of transformation between the poem's beginning and end.¹⁶⁵ It is important to look at Will as well as at categories which define and measure learning, as a way of affirming that the church is made up of human learners rather than constituted by some abstract entity called learning. Will is a learner, and it is through the narrative that evolves around his erratic wanderings that any more general conclusions about learning may be gleaned.¹⁶⁶

Dealing with the notion of formation and individual progress in a poetic text in the wake of postmodern critical theory is a complex task, since postmodern readers have to confront the fact that 'Will' is a textual construct rather than an agent or subject, and cannot thus be said to 'learn' anything or to be 'formed' in any way. This critical position is expounded pre-eminently by David Lawton in his article 'The Subject of *Piers Plowman*', and in its wake I attempt here to find a model for understanding Will's journey in a way which tries to be faithful to the text whilst taking seriously postmodern theories of the subject.¹⁶⁷ For the purposes of the first part of this section, I assume a Ricoeurian second naivete when it comes to talking about the literary construct termed 'Will'. There can be no return to speaking about him as though he had a psyche that can undergo a transformative experience

¹⁶⁵ Medieval understandings of the framework in which this might take place are very different from postmodern ones; genres such as the courtly romance have highly stylised conventions of progress towards the goal of love's consummation, and satire and religious poetry likewise share some common assumptions about the eternal destiny of each human being and the demands of God upon the whole of life. *Piers Plowman* itself, as an alliterative satire, is located within a poetic tradition, with its own ideas of what might constitute moral or spiritual progress.

¹⁶⁶ This way of approaching the poem is reinforced by Sarah Tolmie's Wittgensteinian reading which insists on the importance of phenomenological reality for the poem, such that it models 'not what it is like to read the world from some anagogic remove, but what it feels like to be in it...For Langland the world is cognitively and existentially encountered, not rhetorically created.' Sarah Tolmie, 'The Book of the World as I Found It: Langland and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, *Exemplaria* Vol. 20, No.4, Winter 2008, pp. 341-360, p. 351.

¹⁶⁷ David Lawton, 'The Subject of *Piers Plowman*', *YLS* 1, 1987, pp. 111-30.

within the poem. However, without some shorthand for exploring the shifts of perspective in a poem which uses a first person narrator, there is not much of a role for the literary critic – or the theologian – other than the task of deconstruction. In referring to Will, therefore, I understand him to be a convenient means for Langland to indicate the dimension of subjective experience in a text which has ambitions to be much more than a meandering spiritual autobiography or pedagogical treatise.¹⁶⁸ More than that, Will's role in the structural impetus of the poem is a dialogical one, such that he is frequently the site of struggle between a multiplicity of viewpoints and positions, in turn involving the reader in a game of discerning and choosing which discourse is the right one.¹⁶⁹

There is a range of scholarly interpretations of the trajectory of Will's journey in *Piers Plowman*. These form a spectrum, with a straightforward reading off of Will's experiences as a lesson in individual spiritual formation and enlightenment at one end, and complete suspicion of any such project at the other, based on doubts as to the possibility of texts establishing stable narrative presences which can be said in any way to learn, think, act or exist. The seminal article at one end is Joseph Wittig's 'Elements in the Design of the Inward Journey', first published in 1972, which has a range of more sophisticated successors such as Davlin, Simpson and Carruthers.¹⁷⁰ Towards the far end is Lawton's

¹⁶⁸ For a critique of structuralist and New Historicist approaches which miss the point about the importance of the subject as the poem's only locus of change, see Tolmie, *op. cit.*, pp. 343-347.

¹⁶⁹ Harwood uses Bakhtin's term 'heteroglossia' in his analysis of the way in which Langland resists the ways in which literacy potentially suppresses playing with multiple voices (Harwood, *Piers Plowman and the Problem of Belief*, *op.cit.*, p. 23). A full-scale interpretation of *Piers Plowman* according to Bakhtinian dialogism would make for interesting reading.

¹⁷⁰ Joseph Wittig, 'Piers Plowman B, Passus IX-XII: Elements in the Design of the Inward Journey', *Traditio* 28, 1972, pp. 211-80.

article 'The Subject of *Piers Plowman*', outstripped in its reluctance to attribute subjectivity to Will by the likes of such full blown deconstructionists as James Paxson.¹⁷¹

The 'kynde knowynge' debate

One of the areas which forms part of this critical debate is around the significant phrase *kynde knowynge*, which as I indicated earlier, has been the focus of a number of critical articles and books.¹⁷² In brief, a number of scholars have identified within the poem a tension between different ways of knowing, variously designated by paired oppositional terms such as logos/verbum (Rudd), scientia /sapientia (Davlin, Simpson), scholastic method/lectio divina (Harwood), cognitive/affective (Simpson again). Their interpretations trace, convincingly and with close textual reading, a process whereby Will undergoes a salvific shift from dependence on an inadequate mode of seeking God, from a reliance on faculties within the mind and external sources which he misunderstands or misappropriates, to a more affective, intuitive, communally focused understanding which frees him from the faulty approaches he has tried earlier in the poem. According to such readings, instead of futile arguments at a purely intellectual level, indulged in as an uncommitted wanderer, he undergoes a process of transformation during the Inner Dream sequence, beholds Christ and Piers, and finally joins the Church as a penitent sinner.

¹⁷¹ James Paxson, 'Inventing the Subject and the Personification of Will in *Piers Plowman*: Rhetorical, Erotic, and Ideological Origins and Limits in Langland's Allegorical Poetics', in Kathleen Hewett-Smith (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 195-231.

¹⁷² See Mary Clemente Davlin, 'Kynde Knowynge as a Major Theme in *Piers Plowman*', *RES* Vol. 22, No. 85, 1971, pp. 1-19; James Simpson 'The Role of Scientia in *Piers Plowman*', in Gregory Kratzman and James Simpson (eds.), *Medieval Religious and Ethical Literature*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1986; James Simpson 'From Reason to Affective Knowledge: Modes of Thought and Poetic Form in *Piers Plowman*', *Medium Aevum* Vol. 40, No. 1, 1986, pp. 1-23; Britton .J Harwood, 'Langland's Kynde Knowynge and the Quest for Christ', *Modern Philology* Vol. 80, No. 3, 1983, pp. 242-255.

I want to look in greater detail at three examples of this approach, starting with that of Britton J. Harwood in *Piers Plowman and the Problem of Belief*. Harwood's thesis is that the dynamic of *Piers Plowman* 'arises with a problem of belief and that the perspective and material shift as the poem turns from one mode of knowing/knowledge to another.'¹⁷³ He traces Will's failure through the Visio, concluding that what Will requires is 'not moral direction but a perception of reality that makes sense of the inadequacy of Reason', then tracking his progress through the action of the Third Dream.¹⁷⁴ My contention is that the problem in *Piers Plowman* is not that of belief, but of integrating social reality, inner personal spiritual reality, and scriptural truth; of getting those horizons to merge and mesh even if only sporadically and in a way that cannot be sustained. In other words, the 'problem' of the poem is at a hermeneutic rather than an existential or epistemological level.¹⁷⁵

The problem I have with Harwood's interpretation is its narrowly focused individualism, as though the changes that take place within Will are concerned more with his inner re-alignment than with any wider social commitment. The assumption is that the poem deals with the problem of belief in a way which is personal and private; the long central sections where the narrative turns inward as Will speaks with the faculties of his human mind provides the main focus for Harwood's analysis. He grounds it convincingly in the climate of intellectual and epistemological uncertainty post-Ockham, but the social engagement of the poem is absent. The inner dream cannot be taken in isolation; it only has validity in the context of the dynamic of the poem as a whole, which is to keep moving between

¹⁷³ Harwood, *Piers Plowman and the Problem of Belief*, op. cit., p. 31.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁷⁵ William Elford Rogers also argues for the poem's central problem being hermeneutical in *Piers Plowman and Interpretation*, op. cit.

‘introspection’ – a language of mental or psychological exploration rather than the creation of a persona with any history or distinguishing characteristics – and observation of, and participation in, the surrounding social world. The question the poem is asking, it seems to me, is what kind of ‘knowing’ is adequate to encompass both? Harwood approaches this issue by proposing that the growth of literacy signals a fundamental shift in the way in which learning is structured and experienced, away from what he calls ‘the parataxis of story’ towards ‘the kind of integration epitomised by a mathematical equation’, and that *Piers Plowman* can be read as a text trying to resist the dominance of scholastic ways of knowing in favour of a kind of learning more akin to *lectio divina*.¹⁷⁶ This is a plausible theory in itself, as long as the above caveats are borne in mind.

Challenging Harwood’s position is the study by Pamela Raabe which critiques those who construe Will’s progress according to a logically worked out scheme of intellectual enlightenment. For Raabe, such intricate readings of Will’s progress miss the point entirely: the key to the poem and to any ‘progress’ made by its protagonist is simply faith, where the answer sought is known from the beginning. Will ‘discerns it, not through the temporal process of his studies and experience, but in a single moment of perception.’¹⁷⁷ She cites Augustine’s idea that the teacher does not actually teach anything, but only recalls to the mind of the student the truth already within, stating: ‘since divine grace alone can awaken the knowledge of Christ, there can be no linear, developmental course of instruction at the climax of which this awakening can be guaranteed.’ Like the hermeneutical circle, the event of conversion transcends logic.¹⁷⁸ Raabe draws heavily on Augustine’s *Confessions*

¹⁷⁶ Harwood, op. cit., p. 20.

¹⁷⁷ Pamela Raabe, *Imitating God: the Allegory of Faith in Piers Plowman B*, University of Georgia Press, Athens, 1990, p. 71.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

as a template for *Piers Plowman* and claims that, like the older Augustine, the narrator stands outside the narrative until the moment when Will accepts faith and ceases to be wilful.¹⁷⁹ Raabe's approach re-defines progress as something unpredictable and paradoxical enabled by a leap of faith, and which really only happens towards the end of the poem as Will allows grace to work within him.

Raabe's reading has the virtue of challenging over-complicated approaches, and she raises some valid questions about one critical tendency to project modern difficulty onto the poem in a way which fails to respect its pre-modern epistemological foundations.¹⁸⁰ The key to the poem in her view is neither the discovery of a logical progressive order, nor the evidencing of a lack of progression as witness to Langland's own frustration and disbelief, but the notion of paradox: the life of fallen humanity is time-bound, but the world is governed by a timeless divinity. The only escape, for modern readers as for Will, 'from time into Unity, the only bridge over the gap between tenor and vehicle, is the leap of faith.'¹⁸¹ Raabe proposes that the whole poem is based on Kynde's paradoxical statement, 'Learn to love.'¹⁸² Will, she claims, 'does not "learn" to love; he simply knows it.'¹⁸³ The paradoxical circularity of faith itself is represented by the structure of the poem itself. Although Raabe presents a convincing account of the poem as informed by an Augustinian semiotics, her eagerness to compare Langland with Augustine can lead her to overstate her case; *Piers Plowman* is not the *Confessions* re-written for a medieval audience. It is an alliterative satire, a piece of 'public poetry' in the vernacular, where the journey of the

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁸⁰ 'It was the failure of earlier attempts to find some unifying order in the poem that led critics to seek significance in its disorder, where Will's frustrated quest for meaning seemed invitingly to mirror their own.' Raabe, op. cit., p. 5.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 62.

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 99.

protagonist is just one strand of a multi-layered narrative. Multiple accounts of what it might mean to learn and to love are present in the poem; Raabe suggests that it works like one of Jesus' parables, whereas I would want to argue that it works more like the Bible as a whole in its holding together of different perspectives and understandings, played out both in the real events of historical time and in eschatological time. Whatever else a parable is, it is not primarily an extended narrative, and Langland chose to write a lengthy poem encompassing both narrative and allegorical/figural elements, social satire and intellectual questioning.¹⁸⁴

The third scholarly approach which I will consider is that of James Simpson, two of whose articles I will discuss. The first, 'Desire and the scriptural text: Will as reader in *Piers Plowman*', has much to commend it to theological educators. Simpson's thesis is that Will traces the growth of a reader: from passively receiving texts mediated by the institution of the Church, to an academic, rational deployment of Scripture, then moving (after a period of radical disillusion with scriptural reading) to an affective, dynamic and sophisticated practice of biblical reflection.¹⁸⁵ Simpson's interpretation is attractive, particularly in the nature of the trajectory it presents with its idea of reaching a stage of higher reflection

¹⁸⁴ Despite being able to trace certain points of connection and difference, no single category adequately 'places' *Piers Plowman* within its fourteenth century context. One way of tracing how it was understood and read is by observing how it was distributed, and with what other texts it was grouped and thereby generically associated. From its manuscript history, we can see that *Piers Plowman* was understood in various ways in terms of genre, and indeed was grouped with the *Lay Folk's Mass Book*, *Handlyng Synne*, and *Pricke of Conscience*, but also with *Mandeville's Travels* and *The Siege of Jerusalem*. For further detail, see Anne Middleton, 'The Audience and Public of *Piers Plowman*' in David Lawton (ed.), *Middle English Poetry and Its Literary Background*, D.S Brewer, Cambridge, 1982, pp. 101-123, and C. David Benson, *Public Piers Plowman*, Pennsylvania State University Press, Philadelphia, 2004, Chapters 1 and 2.

¹⁸⁵ James Simpson, 'Desire and the Scriptural text: Will as reader in *Piers Plowman*', in Rita Copeland (ed.) *Criticism and Dissent in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, pp. 215-243, p. 227.

which unites love and learning. It shares some similarities with faith development theories of James Fowler.¹⁸⁶ My concern would be that it presupposes a progression from passive receipt of authoritative texts to a more individual appropriation of them which may reflect the priorities of modernity rather than those of Langland's pre-modern context.

The second article I will consider is noteworthy in that it links progress and poetics in a way which looks forward to my own argument in Chapter Five. In 'From Reason to Affective Knowledge: Modes of Thought and Poetic Form in *Piers Plowman*' Simpson argues that 'the idea of God develops in the poem from that of 'Truthe', known partially to the intellect, to that of 'Kynde', which is known through the experience of the Will.'¹⁸⁷ Simpson's thesis is that 'certain theologians writing in an Augustinian tradition of an affective, sapiential theology establish a correlation between cognitive and rhetorical categories, and that this correlation provides a theoretical perspective from which we can understand the formal, poetic changes in *Piers Plowman*.'¹⁸⁸ By asserting the interconnectedness of subject and discourse Simpson raises an issue which goes beyond the issue of Will's progress to the significance of the mode of discourse employed to describe it.¹⁸⁹ Simpson takes his argument in this article beyond what Will learns or fails to learn to the way in which the poem itself changes its mode of expression in order to draw the reader into a changed state of apprehension, arguing that there is a congruence between the

¹⁸⁶ James Fowler, *The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, Harper and Row, New York, 1981; 'Faith Development at 30: Naming the Challenges of Faith in a New Millennium', *Religious Education* Vol.99, No.4, Fall 2004, pp. 405-421.

¹⁸⁷ James Simpson, 'From Reason to Affective Knowledge: Modes of Thought and Poetic Form in *Piers Plowman*', *Medium Aevum* Vol. 55, No. 1, 1986, pp. 1-23, p. 7.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁸⁹ This will become important in Chapter Five, and has a bearing on the mode of expression employed by Hind, which veers uneasily between different discourse worlds – that of managed, outcome-led learning and that of spiritual formation – without finding a means of integrating them.

epistemological change undergone by Will as he moves from a cognitive understanding of his quest for truth to a more affective one, and the rhetorical form taken by the poem. Simpson contends that the modes of poetry become more ‘sapiential’ after Will has discovered the limitations of academic learning:

the logic of rhetorical change follows that of epistemological change; as the poem exhausts the capacities of the analytical, rational faculties of the soul, so it moves to the affective faculty of the soul, the will, and with this movement the modes of the poetry themselves change to become *metaphoricus, symbolicus, parabolicus*. As the formal modes of the poem change to ‘inform’ the will, so too, in short, does the poem itself take its own, poetic form; in so doing, the poem as a whole offers us meaning of a poetic, non-affirmative kind, distinct from any affirmative statements of meaning in the poem.¹⁹⁰

Simpson’s observations indicate not only the importance of what is said, but how it is said. Although my reading of the poem resists a straightforward *scientia-sapientia* axis of progress, Simpson’s close analysis of the ways in which the poetry changes as Will’s understanding grows highlights an area of great importance. The new awareness which Simpson identifies in Will is reflected in and signalled by a move to different and more allusive poetic modes drawing on metaphor and symbol. If truth cannot be reached or encompassed by assertions alone, the indeterminacy and mystery of *Piers* may be one way in which an incarnational understanding of truth can be suggested and encountered. Beyond a literary critical analysis of this shift lies a theological point about the nature of the

¹⁹⁰ James Simpson, ‘From Reason to Affective Knowledge: Modes of Thought and Poetic Form in *Piers Plowman*’, op. cit., p. 20.

relationship between God, the world and language.¹⁹¹ The implications of this will be further explored in Chapter Five of this thesis.

Beyond the 'kynde knowyng' debate

So far I have identified ways in which *Piers Plowman* raises, but does not resolve in any simple way, issues to do with the shape and purpose of the journey of Christian discipleship. Much of Will's journey is that of a wanderer unattached to the institutional church, unclear in his purpose and resistant to schemes which promise truth and salvation. It is in part because the questions he needs to ask keep changing that answers prove elusive, and in part because he keeps encountering the stubborn realities of social and religious life in fourteenth century England which then require a new set of responses. Will continually comes up against questions to do with the goal of learning and the extent to which it can be encouraged or controlled by formal study and criteria decided by ecclesiastical authorities; to do with the relationship between different kinds of learning and knowing, and their social and spiritual value.

The brief summary above of three scholarly interpretations of the kind of learning undergone by Will brings out the complex nature of the poem's journey. There are places in the text where the debate about the value of learning is explicit and vigorous, as well as places which offer more allusive and figural ways of suggesting alternatives to a scholastic/monastic, *lered/lewed* binary. In the light of these critical readings which see Will's progress in terms of a fundamental shift in his way of thinking and responding to the

¹⁹¹ Daniel W. Hardy speaks of seeking a creative poesis 'by which we may fully participate in the work of the Trinitarian God in our interweaving...the truth of this poesis is God's performance of the truth...it is an active truth, active everywhere, working to bring all things, including our understanding and actions, into its movement.' Daniel W. Hardy, 'The Spirit of God in Creation and Reconciliation,' p. 70, in Hardy op. cit.

world, I want now to propose my own model of learning and progress within the poem. My reading of the poem is not according to a movement from one kind of ‘knowing’ or learning to another, however that movement is configured, but rather in terms of a reflective process of drawing on many kinds of knowing in response to new forms of experience and encounter, resulting in a new set of encounters and new ways of learning. Will’s wanderings lead him to a range of meetings with personified figures who present him with yet another set of explanations and events, each one interpreted in the light of previous ones. My intention is to demonstrate that Langland seeks to integrate different kinds of knowing rather than prioritising one over against another, and that ‘learning to love’ describes this process rather than being a rejection of intellectual in favour of affective knowing. Both learning and acting in the world are passionate activities; Piers’ statement that he knows Truth ‘as kyndely as clerik doth hise bokes’ (B5.537) is an important affirmation of this.¹⁹²

The hermeneutical journey of the learning self

What follows is based in part on the work of Hans Georg Gadamer in *Truth and Method*, in particular Chapter Four ‘Elements of a Theory of Hermeneutical Experience.’¹⁹³ Gadamer’s argument works at a number of levels which undergird different elements of this thesis.

Firstly, I draw on his hermeneutic of understanding a text from the past, which involves not

¹⁹² When asked whether theological education was too focussed on the cognitive as opposed to doing and feeling, Edward Farley responded: ‘I think it’s an unfortunate dichotomy. Genuine knowing is always driven by passion. Without a passion we won’t submit ourselves to what it takes to really know something. Plato called this passion eros. Most people’s knowing is already oriented by a passionate involvement in the world – it’s already a matter of flesh and blood, of struggling with life’s challenges.’ ‘Toward Theological Understanding: An Interview with Edward Farley,’ *The Christian Century*, February 4/11/98, pp. 113-115 &149.

¹⁹³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Second Revised Edition, Continuum, London & New York, 2004.

an assimilation of two different ‘horizons’ separated by a great gulf, but a dynamic process of openness to both.¹⁹⁴ Understanding for Gadamer is not merely a reproductive but also a productive act.¹⁹⁵ Secondly, of relevance to my approach to Langland’s poem is Gadamer’s argument that the foundation of hermeneutics for the human sciences is what Gadamer terms legal hermeneutics, whereby understanding, interpretation and application are all integral parts of the hermeneutic process: ‘All reading involves application so that a person reading a text is himself part of the meaning he apprehends. He belongs to the text that he is reading.’¹⁹⁶ Thirdly, Gadamer’s emphasis on the role and nature of experience in the process of understanding informs the way in which I read *Piers Plowman*.

My methodology for reading *Piers Plowman* and for using it to dialogue with Hind is a version of the hermeneutical circle, known variously as the pastoral cycle or theological reflection cycle, which is used in theological education as a means of enabling students to develop as reflective practitioners.¹⁹⁷ It is a means of integrating different discourses, of bringing different horizons alongside for mutual illumination. The cycle (as Laurie Green argues, best understood as a spiral, since it is not a self-enclosed process but rather one that leads on to further action) is a means of responding to experience by undergoing a process

¹⁹⁴ ‘There is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons that have to be acquired. Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves.’ Gadamer, op. cit., p. 305.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 296.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 335.

¹⁹⁷ I use the term ‘hermeneutical circle’ here interchangeably with the theological reflection cycle following the example of Anthony J. Clarke in his exploration of film and theological reflection in a pastoral setting in Chapter 5 of *Flickering Images* (Anthony J. Clarke and Paul S. Fiddes, *Flickering Images*, Regent’s Study Guides, Smyth & Helwys, Macon, Georgia, 2005). Clarke sets out a methodology for taking film as a starting point for practical theology not unlike the one I am using in relation to studying *Piers Plowman* in the context of theological education.

of exploration, theological reflection and action.¹⁹⁸ The situation or problem presents itself, not in a vacuum but in all its social complexity, an issue which spans a range of dimensions of human life. The reflective cycle first explores in some depth the horizon of the issue, gathering details and data, filling out context. At the next stage, theological reflection, the resources of Scripture and tradition, as well as the wisdom of the world, are brought to bear on the matter, illuminating it, challenging received opinion, opening up the issue to new insights. Whatever action then issues will result in a changed situation, which is then a re-entry point in to the spiral. There is always a sense that working through the cycle is a dialogical process rather than a means of reinforcing certain beliefs or replacing them with others. At its heart is a dynamic whereby the self is in dialogue with scripture, tradition, reason, and itself – its various inner faculties. External and internal authorities put forward their contributions to the debate, and the student attempts to attend to, and order them, in ways that lead towards not just greater competence, but deeper understanding and transformed behaviour.¹⁹⁹

The circle or spiral is used in many disciplines and is not unique to theological study and teaching.²⁰⁰ What it aims to do as a tool is to enable the material context, the ‘thick’ description of a situation, the story of a community or individual (though there is really no such thing as the isolated autonomous self in this understanding) to be brought into conversation – into transformative encounter – with, for Christians, Scripture, tradition and reason. Although it acknowledges the situatedness of the individual or group undertaking

¹⁹⁸ Laurie Green, *Let's Do Theology*, Mowbray, 1990, especially Chapter 2.

¹⁹⁹ For a discussion of the different ways in which the theological reflective process can be understood and practised, see Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods*, SCM, London, 2005.

²⁰⁰ *The SCM Study Guide to Theological Reflection*, Judith Thompson, with Stephen Pattison and Ross Thompson, SCM, 2008, gives a useful summary on pp. 21-22.

the reflection, and aims to break open complacent certainties by means of encounter with God through reason, Word and Spirit, it has been critiqued as potentially reinforcing the prejudgements which are brought to a situation rather than challenging them.²⁰¹

The circle/spiral draws on many levels of experience: the personal, the wider social context, insights from many intellectual disciplines, and the horizon of otherness which is represented by Scripture. The personal – the horizon of the self – is an unavoidable given, but it is not the determining, limiting point of ultimate reference. As has begun to be evident, *Piers Plowman* reflects this balance of elements, taking not the form of a treatise, sermon or third person narrative based on an Everyman figure, but rather shaping its narrative around the wandering life of its suggestively named first person narrator. Part of the richness of its poetic texture is the presence of a narrator who makes comments, has mood swings, wakes and dreams, sees visions and seeks truth. Will in part generates the action, yet in part is passive, falling asleep and being addressed by others, witnessing the actions of others. The shape of a human life forms the trajectory of the poem, albeit very loosely. Thus the poem affirms that experience of the learning subject, however constructed, remains an important part of any debate about learning.

What makes the reflective cycle a particularly appropriate and illuminating way of approaching *Piers Plowman* is that the poem is itself a text which attempts to hold together multiple perspectives and narrative voices. Langland is concerned with individual salvation,

²⁰¹ For a critique of the reflective cycle as used in theological education see David Willows, *Divine Knowledge*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2001, especially pp. 129-132 where he critiques Thomas Groome's praxis-based 'two horizons' model. Willows' accusation that such an approach privileges the 'absorbing horizon of present experience' does not do justice, in my view, to the weight which the reflective cycle gives to the breaking in of the divine in the dialogical process.

the social order, ways of learning and the status and benefits of learning. The text works as a series of spirals, never reaching an end, by means of the juxtaposition of multiple voices and horizons. Thus, in terms of its own structural dynamic and method, *Piers Plowman* demonstrates a process of engagement and reflection which in many ways follows the shape of the reflective cycle.²⁰² Merely by looking at the first few Passus, it is possible to identify structural patterns which involve a process of observing, stepping back to analyse and attempts to draw on Scripture and tradition to come to a better understanding of what a good response might be to social and ecclesiastical problems and abuses, to personal questions about the goal and means of faithful discipleship. The social realities of late fourteenth century England are the starting point: the field full of folk, seen through the inevitably ‘situated’ eyes of the narrator, and the antics of the court. The narrative persona, Will, then withdraws to seek a different perspective on what he has seen as he meets and speaks with Holy Church, in the course of which conversation various other authorities are invoked. The action moves back to the court and the antics of Meed, introducing conflicting voices and discourses as any univocal attempt to make sense of things breaks down.²⁰³ The traditional division of the B text into Vision and Vita, alluded to earlier in this chapter, acknowledges that a shift occurs at Passus 8 into a more sustained theological reflection on the preceding narrative. When the poem is seen as a whole, Passus 18 is the moment in the

²⁰² There is support for this view from Piero Boitani in *English Medieval Narrative in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 1982, where he writes on p. 81: ‘Philosophically, *Piers Plowman* is a spiral that tends towards the knowledge of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest’. Boitani goes on to propose that rather than the poem working on a Socratic or dialectical model, ‘its logic is more akin to that of Jesus in the Gospels.’

²⁰³ It is significant that Will spends the poem constantly asking questions, and it is this process which has the potential to open him up to what he does not yet know. For an account of the importance of questions in a Gadamerian hermeneutics of education, see Charles Bingham, ‘The Hermeneutics of Educational Questioning’, *Educational Philosophy and Theory* Vol.37, No.4, 2005, pp. 553-565.

reflection stage when there is a breakthrough into fresh understanding, which eventually results in the action of Will joining Piers in Unitee in Passus 20.

A case could thus be made for interpreting the overall structure of the poem as following the stages of the reflective cycle, though that that might be a little too convenient and tidy. What I think can be claimed with some validity is that what drives the movement of the poem within each passus as well as the poem as a narrative whole, is the impetus continually to juxtapose horizons of meaning and worlds of discourse in order to maintain a dialogue between the spiritual and the material, the church and the world, the divine and the human.²⁰⁴ Thus the cycle/spiral model is a helpful way of approaching the poem's internal structure. The cycle is primarily a tool for living, not an ontological or epistemological scheme, and similarly, *Piers Plowman* can be read as an example of an ongoing hermeneutical process in the broadest sense of the word – a making sense by bringing together horizons and generating new ways of understanding and being in the world.²⁰⁵ This way of reading the poem helps to avoid two dangers: on the one hand, the risk of trying to identify a linear scheme of progress/revelation/spiritual development in the poem, and on the other, a reading which sees the poem as admitting epistemological defeat as it deconstructs itself and loses confidence in the capacity of language to convey truth. There is always dynamic movement within the reflective cycle, but there is never a fixed point of arrival; it is a process which engages with a range of content, but which cannot end until

²⁰⁴ Working from a more psychological perspective, Nicolette Zeemann in *Piers Plowman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, identifies the poem's structure as being driven by a dynamic of desire, loss and increased desire – a recurring process rather than thematic development. In seeing the poem's internal logic in terms of restless cycles Zeemann's work has connections with the hermeneutical approach I take.

²⁰⁵ For a discussion of the resources that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics can bring to teaching theology, see Donna Teevan, 'Philosophical Hermeneutics and Theological Education', *Teaching Theology and Religion* Vol.3, No.2, 200, pp. 62-70.

learning ceases. The poem ends with the narrator near the end of his life, but not having given up the process of interpreting experience according to the hermeneutical model described.²⁰⁶ Whatever the issues over authorship, perhaps if Langland did compulsively revise his poem over a lifetime, this was not so much a reductive activity as a means of continued theological reflection; the same goes for the scribal comments and marginalia as its textual history unfolded away from initial authorial control.²⁰⁷

Thus, both as a way of understanding the structure and method of the text itself, and as a way of enabling it to dialogue with my own context, I propose that the reflective cycle is a useful methodological tool for reading *Piers Plowman* and for enabling the poem to speak into the contemporary Hind/post-Hind context. I will now do two final things: look at how the poem deals with the notion of experience; and take two examples of mini-spirals to illustrate my argument.

Experience in Piers Plowman

I want to examine one of the most contested aspects of the reflective cycle, that of the place accorded to experience within the learning process it enacts. Contrary to the views of its critics, I do not believe that the reflective cycle privileges experience over tough intellectual engagement: its purpose is to integrate the two and to generate new insights and actions as a

²⁰⁶ Gadamer writes: ‘Thus experience is experience of human finitude. The truly experienced person is one who has taken this to heart, who knows that he is master neither of time nor the future...experience teaches us to acknowledge the real... the genuine result of experience... is to know what is. And that is our finiteness.’ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, op. cit., p. 351.

²⁰⁷ Helen Barr, *Signes and Sothe: Language in the Piers Plowman Tradition*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1991, traces the implications of the composition and transmission of *Piers Plowman* in a chirographic culture.

result.²⁰⁸ My contention is that one of the strengths of *Piers Plowman* is the seriousness with which it takes experience through its use of the first person narrator, a device which enables more abstract ideas and concepts to be encountered and explored with reference to the social worlds in which they have consequences.

The concept of experience, says Gadamer, ‘seems to me to be one of the most obscure we have.’²⁰⁹ That does not prevent him from going on to outline the place of experience in his hermeneutical scheme, and his argument contains some important foundations for my reading of *Piers Plowman* in relation to learning. Firstly, his insistence on the dialectical nature of experience: that it involves the one having the experience in a change which then gives him or her a new horizon within which new experiences will take place. Secondly, his insight that it is negation which stimulates true experience by confronting the person with a lack or challenge: ‘experience is initially always experience of negation: something is not what it is supposed to be.’²¹⁰ For Gadamer, as I believe for Langland, ‘the dialectic of experience has its proper fulfilment not in definitive knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself.’²¹¹ The struggle for Will is one of constant re-orientation, so that he can be open to new experience and truly encounter what is being offered. As Gadamer says, ‘the hermeneutical consciousness culminates not in

²⁰⁸ I have deliberately focussed on one version of the reflective cycle, mindful of the many different structures which practical theologians have devised to describe the kind of correlational or hermeneutical approach I have used. A summary of some of these, including those of Edward Farley, James Whitehead and Thomas Groome, can be found in Don Browning’s article ‘The Revival of Practical Theology’, *The Christian Century*, February 1-8, 1984; <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1373>. Accessed on 2.2.2011.

²⁰⁹ Gadamer, op. cit., p. 341.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 349.

²¹¹ Ibid., p. 350.

methodological sureness of itself, but in the same readiness for experience that distinguishes the experienced man from the man captivated by dogma.’²¹²

Starting with experience, as the reflective cycle does, raises certain questions about learning.²¹³ As Jennifer Moon points out, ‘it is not possible to predict exactly what “experience” is being perceived by the learner,’ since all learners come to situations with their own prior knowledge and experience, and will construe a practical activity, a lecture or an event in different ways – after which their representation of the experience will add another layer of complexity.²¹⁴ The fact that *Piers Plowman* is a fictional text which presents to the reader a series of ‘experiences’ – intellectual, affective, physical – undergone by a persona called Will, further adds to the complexity. Yet within its own framework of meaning generation, Langland’s poem does, I believe, contribute importantly to an understanding of the place of experience in the reflective cycle.²¹⁵

One way in which Langland establishes a category which can be understood to contain some of what is meant by ‘experience’ is through the recurrent use of the concept of *kynde* within the poem. As Nicolette Zeeman puts it, Langland’s *kynde* is ‘rationally systematic, but also sensorily apprehensible; it is powerfully ‘experiential’ in its impact and has effects

²¹² Ibid., p. 355.

²¹³ As discussed by Jennifer A. Moon in Chapter 3 of *Reflection in Learning and Professional Development*, RoutledgeFalmer, Abingdon, 2005.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 23. Moon observes on p. 22 that ‘meaningful experience will rarely comprise one element, such as pure activity.’

²¹⁵ Although theological reflection is always undertaken by subjects, they are not its sole focus, and I do not read *Piers Plowman* as primarily a solipsistic creation engaged in the subtle self-justification of its author. By drawing on a theology of the subject which does not ignore the fact that Will is a textual construct, nor that pre-modern and postmodern epistemologies are not identical, a conversation is possible between the nexus of understandings of human agency and identity that inform the fiction that is Will, and the very different nexus which underlies assumptions about the ‘spiritual formation’ of individuals in contemporary ministerial training.

of immediacy, demanding a response that is willed, engaged and active; it often figures as the exemplary, that which is ‘seen’.²¹⁶ Zeeman sees the poem as balancing human and divine, given and revealed truths, by means of the two concepts *kynde* and *clergie*. I want to take her insight a stage further in this section by applying it to my hermeneutical reading of the poem. Another way in which Langland represents ‘experience’ is through the eruption into the poem of exemplary figures such as Haukyn and Trajan, who generate theological reflection by the insistence of their presence in the poem. In Haukyn’s case, as will be further discussed in Chapter Five, the embodied nature of experience is stressed constantly. Experience, then, in *Piers Plowman*, is about more than sections of narrative which can then be said to give rise to reflection, such as the example of Will musing on his encounter with Wit, or the headlong action of Passus 2-7 which then gives way to the ‘inner dream cycle’ of Passus 8-14. It is also about a conceptual dimension of the poem – the recurrence of *kynde* and all that *kynde* teaches, which is not restricted to formal learning or revealed truth – and episodes where exemplary figures such as Haukyn foreground the embodied life in the world which is the starting point for, and context of, the journey of discipleship.

I will briefly explore these two dimensions as they appear in the patterning of the poem as a whole. Firstly, I will look at the role of *kynde*, and then at the episode with Trajan. Finally, I will present two examples of the way in which within a particular passus, the stages of the reflective cycle can be seen to provide the structuring pattern which shapes the impetus of the narrative.

²¹⁶ Zeeman,, op. cit., p. 157. Zeeman’s fifth chapter, ‘Seeing and Suffering in Nature’, advances a sophisticated argument as to the connection between late medieval understandings of the educative function of nature, a focus on the exemplary, embodied life, and theories of imaginative writing which draw on textual ‘seeing’.

Kynde: a bridging concept

At its simplest, Langland's notion of *kynde* acts as a bridge between God and world he has made.²¹⁷ Taking on human nature connects God and humans at the deep level of *kynde*.²¹⁸ This is of critical importance to the poem, which develops a sophisticated theology of God as creator and the world as created, and thus of the dignity and importance of human experience. This sounds deceptively straightforward, but as Hugh White points out, Langland's multivalent use of *kynde* has no precedents or parallels in the contemporary literature (though it shares some similarities with Julian of Norwich). Langland thus breaks new ground in his particular construal of *kynde* and the importance he gives it as a term which can connect disparate areas of understanding and experience.²¹⁹

White tracks four major areas where notions of *kynde* are explored: the concepts of *Kynde Wit*, *kynde knowynge*, *Kynde* as God, and being *kynde*. Between them these deal with the faculties of the human mind and their relationship to the organisation of human society; the extent to which 'natural' insights and impulses are God-given; the relationship between Nature and the Christian God; and the bond between humanity and God, and human beings with one another, through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. All of these are connected with

²¹⁷ For detailed exploration of the role of *kynde* in the poem see Teresa Tavormina, *Kindly Similitude*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1995; Hugh White, *Nature and Salvation in Piers Plowman*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1988.

²¹⁸ A.V.C. Schmidt refers to the 'boldness of Langland's attempts to render man's sense of divine nature (*Kynde*) through our quotidian awareness of natural processes (*kynde*).' A.V. Schmidt, 'Elementary Images in the Samaritan Episode of *Piers Plowman*', *Essays in Criticism* Vol. 56, No. 4, pp. 303-323.

²¹⁹ Andrew Galloway explores the socio-political implications of the increasing use of the concept of *kyndenesse* in 'The Making of a Social Ethic in Late Medieval England: From *Gratitudo* to "Kyndenesse"', *Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol. 55, No. 3, July 1994, pp. 365-83.

what it means to learn, and are part of the complex way in which Langland represents a process of reflective learning throughout *Piers Plowman*.

The first point at which I want to pick up White's analysis is his observations on the narrative events of Passus B20, in particular his interpretation of Kynde's injunction to 'lerne to love...and leef alle othere' at line 208. White interprets this dialogue in the light of the train of events which have led up to it, namely Will's brush with Old Age and Death, and sees it as uniting several meanings of *kynde* as experience: 'death guarantees proper knowledge which is...natural knowledge because it derives from the realm of *kynde*. The realm of *kynde* contains the essential experience, ie suffering and death, to help us know what true joy is.'²²⁰ He suggests that this belated capacity on Will's part to be able to seize the advice he is given, to act on it and to enter Unitee, may be because 'Will is now, as he has not always been, actually suffering, evidently deeply immersed in the flow of natural experience, rather than merely looking on, that the lesson which presents itself carries conviction – it has been learned on the pulses.'²²¹

White's interpretation gives value to the meaningfulness of life lived in the world, and thus validates the process enacted by the poem of undergoing experience and reflecting on it in order to generate meaning. *Piers Plowman* is a text which constantly and restlessly attempts to generate meaning, and which ultimately asserts that the created world is a place of

²²⁰ White, op. cit., p. 56. Similarly, on p. 81: 'We have seen that Langland appears to value experience as an aid to spiritual progress, and behind the placing of the injunction to love in the mouth of Kynde may lie a feeling that the experience of passing through life towards death is a stimulus to love.'

²²¹ Ibid., p. 58. White reiterates this on p. 82: 'it is no longer a matter of learning through observation, but through the living of one's *kynde* course. We might say that a *kynde* knowing regarding the necessity of loving has been achieved through experience, a knowing *kynde* both in the sense of "proper" and of "naturally derived"'.

potential encounter with the creator, albeit in ways which are often hard to grasp.²²² The site where meaning is to be found is the God-given experience of common life and the ensuing process of reflection and response.

An exemplary figure: Trajan

Thus Langland's recurring use of *kynde* establishes the importance of lived bodily experience for understanding and loving God and others, but he also offers the reader several 'exempla', miniature portraits which reinforce the sense that theories need to be complemented by, and tested in the face of, 'real' human examples. Different ways of understanding are juxtaposed within the poem, often confusingly.²²³ One way of expanding understanding in the middle sections of the poem is to engage with the speaking voice of someone beyond the faculties of the mind which constitute Will's interlocutors during this part of the poem. Both Haukyn and Trajan fulfil this function, and I will focus on Trajan because of the way in which his appearance foregrounds and reinforces some of the questions to do with learning around which the poem circles obsessively, and also because of the vigour with which his speaking voice breaks into the narrative at a point where it is in danger of getting stuck. By restoring a dialogical dimension to the debate with the introduction of Trajan, Langland opens up the poem and confronts the reader with a

²²² Oliver Davies in *The Creativity of God*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, begins his search for a new way of configuring the relationship between creator and creature with the statement on p. 3: 'It is through the generation of meaning that we come to be at home in the world.'

²²³ Zeeman sees two forms of understanding being figured in the poem in terms of a broad opposition between a heard and personified revelatory word (Clergie and Scripture) and experiential visions of exempla (the Dream of Fortune, the appearance of Trajan, the Vision of Kynde). 'Langland moves to and fro between these two highly permeable categories, charting between them a series of partly overlapping contrasts, which he works in different combinations: grace and moral effort, teaching and experience, having and seeing, learning and the unlearned, 'having' and 'not having.' Zeeman, op. cit., p. 201.

disconcerting ‘exemplum’ who complicates rather than clarifies the question as to whether it is better to be learned or unlearned.²²⁴

Trajan’s appearance in B11.140- 318 needs to be put in context. It comes in what Schmidt calls Vision Three, the Inner Dream section, after Will has been rebuked by Scripture.²²⁵ The Third Vision (B.8-12) is the one which most explicitly deals with the search for true knowing, where Will consults his inner faculties as well as external authorities. Much writing on *Piers Plowman* sees these Passus as illustrative of Will’s wrong emphasis in his quest, an over-reliance on the intellectual and cognitive dimensions of faith which reveals a spiritual immaturity.²²⁶

B.11 opens with Scripture’s rebuke to Will: ‘*Multi multa sciunt et seipsos nesciunt*’. The learning process must involve self- knowledge as well as the acquisition of doctrine. Scripture is responding to Will’s diatribe at the end of B.10, where he critiques instruction and book-learning. Will speaks from B10. 369-473, piling up reasons and examples where the unlearned have a better chance of salvation than the learned. At B10. 440 he plays his trump card, that ‘Clergie of Cristes mouth comended was it nevere’, and reinforces his argument by quoting Augustine to prove that learning is an obstacle to faith and that the poor and simple have a more constant and efficacious faith. This impassioned speech gets short shrift, one explanation being that it is because Will’s motives for delivering it are

²²⁴ Nicolette Zeeman suggests that Trajan is presented as ‘unmediated by texts and scholarship – he is exemplary, experiential.’ Nicolette Zeeman, ‘The Condition of Kynde’ in David Aers (ed.), *Medieval Literature and Historical Inquiry*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 2000, pp. 1-30, p. 11.

²²⁵ Schmidt, B-Text, Introduction, p. xxv-xxvi.

²²⁶ See for example Gillian Rudd, *Managing Language in Piers Plowman* D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1994, Chapter 14.

impure, his understanding partial. He is still angry forty years later when next he encounters Scripture preaching:

Ac the matere that she meved, if lewed men it knewe,
The lasse, as I leve, lovyen thei wolde
The bileve of Oure Lord that lettred men techeth. (B11.108-110)

(But the matter that she put forward, would, if they knew it,
make unlearned men love less
the faith of our Lord that educated men teach)

Will's reaction to Scripture's sermon is similar to Piers' 'tene' at the Pardon- the words seem harsh and holds out no firm grounds for hope. Into this impasse pops Trajan, a strange voice interrupting the narrative, exploding out with a barrage of plosive 'b' sounds and delivering a speech full of the key words of the poem: clergie, clerks, love, lewte, lerning. Trajan's speech is one stage in what has become an ongoing debate about learning, and not only breaks the sterile deadlock between Will and Scripture but also introduces an experiential dimension. Trajan declares that he was saved

withouten syngynge of masses,
By love and by lernyng of [my] lyvyng in truthe. (B11.151-152).

(without the singing of masses,
by love and by learning to live in truth)

The crux of his speech comes at lines 172-4:

'Lawe withouten love,' quod Troianus, 'ley ther a bene-

Or any science under sonne, the sevene arts and alle!
But they ben lerned for Our Lordes love, lost is al the tyme,
For no cause to cacche silver therby, ne to be called a maister,
But al for love of Oure Lord, and the bet to love the peple' (B11.172-4)

('Law without love,' said Trajan, 'is not worth a bean.
Nor is any science under the sun, the seven arts and all the rest.
Unless they are learned for our Lord's love, the time is wasted,
likewise if the motive is to obtain money or to be called a master;
rather, all for the love of our Lord, and in order to love the people better.')

The phrase 'lerned for Oure Lordes love' has multiple meanings, including both the idea of learning in order to further that divine love, and embarking on learning as a response to that love. Again in line 174, 'for love of oure Lord' has dual possibilities of both motive – learning arising out of love for God – and also learning as giving expression to and adding to a love for God: neither solely to earn love nor to express it, to gain it nor to increase it. Learning without the right motivation and right outcomes is worthless, and learning is not ultimately for the purpose of gaining either prestige or money; by inextricably linking learning, by alliteration, with 'For love of oure Lord', Langland signals the connection which is at the heart of the poem. It remains for the succeeding passus to develop what this love might look like through the Good Samaritan, the Tree of Charity, and the visitation of *Kynde* in Passus 20.

Trajan's speech contains other significant themes. Firstly, it invokes the notion of all humanity being 'bretheren as of oo blood, as wel beggeres as erles' (B11.199), recalling

Piers' words in B6.207 when he is asking Hunger's advice about how to be both firm and compassionate towards those who cannot or will not work. This sense of kinship – also evoked by Langland's cumulative use of *kynde* – between human beings, and between human beings and God, is the basis of spiritual and social life, and is here affirmed by a figure who is not a conventional authority. Related to that, and with a Christological foundation, is the passage's exposition of the meaning of poverty, where lines 184-188 introduce the notion of Christ pursuing us in poor man's apparel. Thus Trajan has plenty to say about learning, and rather than condemn it outright – as Will has been doing at the end of Passus 10 – puts it in the wider context of love. The ten commandments written by God's finger, he tells us, were an expression of love. Truth and love have priority over *clergie* and 'konnyng of lawes' (B11.165) Truth here is equated with an experienced act of mercy, not an abstract standard.²²⁷ Trajan extrapolates from experience and derives his theology from the fact of his undeserved salvation.

The internal hermenutical dynamic of the poem

In making the case for reading *Piers Plowman* as a text whose internal dynamic is that of a dialogical process of action and reflection, I have demonstrated how the category of experience is represented by and explored through both the concept of *kynde* and the use of exemplary figures such as Trajan. I will now go on to develop the claim I make about the poem's structure following the stages of the reflective cycle. Not only can the poem as a

²²⁷ Andrew Galloway makes the case for Trajan as a liberatory figure who is saved by his 'adherence to truth defined in opposition to law or institutional ritual.' Andrew Galloway, 'Making History Legal: *Piers Plowman* and the Rebels of Fourteenth Century England', in Kathleen M. Hewett-Smith (ed.), *William Langland's Piers Plowman: A Book of Essays*, Routledge, London and New York, 2001, pp. 7-39. Although I disagree with Galloway's Statement that Trajan represents an understanding of salvation in terms of self-definition and rupture from institutions and traditions, his insight that Trajan acts within the poem as a prototype and archetype of Jesus in enacting a liberating movement, is helpful.

whole be read as an extended piece of theological reflection, but its internal dynamic consists of a series of mini-cycles or spirals. I will give two examples which serve to illustrate the primary impetus of the poem.

My first example is the episode after the tearing of the Pardon in Passus 7, where Will engages in a spell of theological reflection, starting at the point where he wakes (he has been asleep since the start of Passus 5) at line 140. In his waking state he reflects:

Many tyme this metels hath maked me to studie
of that I seigh slepyng – if it so be myghte.’ (B7.144-5)

(Many times these dreams have caused me to ponder
what I saw when I was sleeping – if it might be so.)

This last qualifier, casting doubt on the reliability of the dream and the process of reflecting on it, is reinforced at line 149 where Will issues another disclaimer:

Ac I have no savour in songewarie, for I se of ofte faile;
Caton and canonistres conseillen us to leve
To sette sadnesse in songewaries – for *sompnia ne cures*. (B7.149-151)

(But I have no taste for interpreting dreams, because I see that often it fails:
Cato and canon lawyers advise us to refrain
from taking dream interpretation seriously – for *Take no account of dreams*.)

This analysis of an experience corresponds exactly to the exploration stage in the reflective cycle, where the subject stands back from what has happened in order to tease out its

strands and establish what explanations may provide a different perspective to illuminate or challenge the initial reaction. Will here draws on the wider wisdom of the world (Cato, in this instance) to question the accuracy of dreams and his own capacity to interpret them well. How is he to understand the dream-vision he has just experienced? Having brought the advice of Cato and canon-lawyers to mind, he then turns to Scripture as he enters the theological reflection stage of the cycle, citing the examples of Daniel and Joseph who both were encouraged to take dreams seriously and who, by acting on their interpretations, had a profound effect on the social order and the fate of nations.

Having been encouraged by these scriptural examples to take dreams seriously (typically, an extra level of complexity is added to the reflective process by the status within the poem of the original 'experience' as a dream – another of Langland's techniques for distancing the narrative from being any kind of straightforward depiction of lived reality), Will returns to the perplexing issue of the giving and rejection of the pardon. The next stage of the cycle, the generating of new insight and a fresh response, takes the form of Will resolving to go and seek Dowel, and this is the impetus which initiates the next passus, which begins

Thus robed in russet I romed aboute
Al a somer seson for to seke Dowel,
And frayned ful ofte of folk that I mette
If any wight wiste wher Dowel was at inne.(B8.1-4)

(Thus robed in coarse cloth I roamed about
all of a summer season seeking Do-well,
and often inquired of people I met
if anyone knew where Do-well dwelled.)

Thus this short passage in Passus 7 can be seen as an excellent example of an internal cycle or spiral, with Will's subsequent waking interlude (until B8.70) illustrating how it is then worked out in the search for Dowel, which then itself generates a further spiral.

The reflective cycle: hearing the voices of experience in Passus 19

My second example of the way in which the poem's forward impetus arises from the process of testing hard-won theological principles by confronting them with new concrete realities comes from near the end of the poem. Passus 19 is a long and multi-faceted section of the poem, starting with Conscience's explanation of the names of Jesus (19.26-199), followed by the descent of the Holy Spirit on Piers and his giving of gifts to all members of the 'comune'. Grace then appoints Piers his procurator and reve:

'My prowor and my plowman Piers shal ben on erthe,
And for to tilie truthe a teeme shal he have.' (B19.262-4)

('Piers shall be my purveyor and my plowman on earth,
and he shall have a team (of oxen) to cultivate truth.')

Piers then proceeds to plough and sow with his allegorical team of oxen (Augustine, Ambrose, Gregory and Jerome), sowing seeds of prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice, and in lines 321-330 Grace advises Piers that he will need somewhere to keep the seed corn. The barn/Unitee/ Church is thus constructed, again out of allegorical materials, and Grace and Piers then depart 'as wide as the world is'

to tilie truthe

And the lond of bileve, the laws of Holy Chirche.'(B19.335-6)

(to till truth

and the land of belief, the laws of Holy Church.)

With the departure of Piers and Grace, opposition mounts immediately to the ploughing project, and Conscience decides that they need to retreat into Unitee, for

we beth noght of strengthe

To goon again Pride, but Grace were with us. (B19.360-1)

(we are not strong enough

to withstand Pride unless Grace were with us.)

Conscience offers the Eucharist to the community gathered in the barn, the offer being open to those

that hadde ypaied

To Piers pardon the Plowman, *redde quod debbes* (B19.392-3).

(those who had paid what they owe to Piers the Plowman)

This condition provokes a storm of protest, signalled, as in the Trajan incident, by some blunt interpolations:

'Ye? Baw!' quod a brewere, 'I will noght be ruled,

By Jesus! For al youre janglynge, with Spiritus Iusticie,

Ne after Conscience, by Crist! While I kan selle

Bothe dregges and draf, and draw at oon hole
Thikke ale and thynne ale: that is my kynde,
And noght hakke after holynesse- hold thi tonge, Conscience!’ (B19.399-404)

(‘Yeah? Stuff that!’ said a brewer. ‘I won’t be ruled
By Jesus! by the spirit of justice despite all your arguing,
nor according to Conscience, by Christ, as long as I can sell
both dregs and draft [ie both the sediment and the liquid at the bottom of the ale
cask], and draw
thin and thick ale from the same hole; that is my nature,
not grubbing about for holiness – shut up, Conscience!’)

This vigorous cameo, reminiscent of the struggles Piers has with the idlers and wasters in Passus 6 during the ploughing of the half-acre, reminds us, as does that earlier Passus, that ideals always have to confront the reality of human resistance and non-learning. The brewer has no intention of conforming to this new way of living. In the light of the events of Passus 18, and Conscience’s careful exposition of the significance of these titles at the beginning of the Passus, it is a bitter irony that he swears first by Jesus and then by Christ; such an oath negates itself by its refusal to equate Christ with conscience, Jesus with justice. The connection is rejected outright; it is pronounced mere ‘janglynge’, idle and content-less, in the face of the realities of trade and business. A fundamental challenge to all that has been established and built up is issued here: not only does the brewer sever the connections between Christ and conscience, but he defies the deep meaning of ‘kynde’ which the poem has painstakingly explored as being the connecting point between divine and human action and character. ‘Kynde’ in this passage is claimed by the brewer as meaning no more than

an assertion of his sinful opportunistic nature; to 'hakke after holynesse' is the unnatural course. Conscience's prescription for a new quality of communal life is rudely rebuffed.

It is worth asking why Langland causes the poem to implode at this point. Perhaps he is wanting to ask whether whatever vision and learning Will has undergone, whatever transformative authority Conscience and the cardinal virtues can bring, will be robust enough to withstand the challenge posed by the brewer. It is my thesis that the seeming descent of the poem once again into chaos in the last two Passus, returning us to much the same world which we inhabit in the first seven Passus, is evidence of Langland's commitment to the challenges of lived experience and his refusal to impose an idealistic solution onto the intractable problems of his day. There is no metaphor, no allegorical structure, strong enough to hold the centre – just the presence/absence of Piers, who holds some kind of key to understanding and meaning, but who is not a clear-cut signifier. This is where Langland's honesty acts as a refreshing counterbalance to the Hind assumption that metaphors such as the body or the Spirit will suffice to unite people. No matter what is offered or imposed by Conscience, left in charge in the absence of Piers, there will be opposition. Langland refuses to suppress those voices of dissent which really do exist, and allows them to erupt into the poem and put in question the neat systems of salvation and institutional organisation that idealists have put in place for the best and truest of reasons.

The poem's stubborn contention throughout is that transformation takes place not merely at the level of an individual's spiritual journey, at the level of officially sanctioned theological understanding, or by the imposition of laws, ecclesiastical or secular. Langland is interested in praxis in its full Freirian sense of critical reflective thought followed by action, and it is

here, at the point of a potential shift, that the poem strikes a pessimistic note as the community fails to embrace it.

It is after the brewer's interruption and Conscience's impassioned response that the *vicory* chimes in:

'I am a curatour of Holy Kirke, and cam nevere in my tyme
Man to me that kouth telle of Cardinale Vertues
Or that accounted Conscience at a cokkes fethere!' (B19.413-5).

('I am a curate of Holy Church, and never in my time
has anyone appeared who was able to explain the cardinal virtues
or who valued Conscience at a cock's feather!')

The *vicory* picks up the notion of cardinal virtues and runs with it, reprising the punning on the Latin root *cardus* (hinge) which was introduced in the Prologue to make a serious point. If people are to judge the importance and integrity of cardinal virtues, how can they separate their true meaning from their corrupted expression in the decadent lives of those who bear the title 'cardinal'? He goes on to praise Piers as against the representatives of the ecclesiastical structure, who seem not to care about the common people. His final observation is that concepts such as conscience and cardinal virtues do not mean much to ordinary people; in fact, they become distorted and debased, so that prudence becomes guile and

Ech man subtileth a sleighte synne to hide,
and colareth it for a konnyng and a clene lyvyng. (B19.460-1)

(each man devises a stratagem to hide sin
and disguises it as a wise act and clean living.)

It is not clear whether the *vicory* is simply stating how he perceives the situation, or whether he is cynically endorsing it.²²⁸ He is a mixture of idealism and realism: a *lewed* cleric who perhaps sees more truly than some who are more *lered*. But his honesty opens the way for the lord (lines 462-467) and the king (lines 469-479) to state their own cynical positions as regards the relative weight of ultimate values and political expedience. The lord corrupts the ideas of intelligence and fortitude into sleight of hand and coercion; the king re-defines justice as his freedom to make and impose whatever laws he pleases. He invokes the notion of the body politic:

for I am heed of lawe:

For ye ben but membres and I above alle.

And sith I am youre aller heed, I am your aller heele,

And Holy Chirches chief help and chieftayn of the commune.(B19.472-475).

(for I am the head of law:

you are only members and I am above you all.

And because I am head of you all, I am protector of you all,

and the main helper of Holy Church and chief of the community/commune.)

²²⁸ Goldsmith sees him as a positive figure, someone 'who lives according to the pattern of charity which is the Image of God, and like the true son of Piers he is he will 'Lat God yworthe.' Margaret Goldsmith, *The Figure of Piers Plowman*, D.S Brewer, Cambridge, 1981, p. 90. A.V. Schmidt cites the vicory in Passus 19 as the voice of experience, of clerkly scepticism as against authority, but wonders whether this is a sterile position because it refuses to learn out of loss of faith in the possibility of learning. Schmidt contends that Langland's own position can only be construed by setting the ideal language of Conscience in dialectical relationship with the actual speech of the vicory. A.V. Schmidt, *The Clerkly Maker*, DS Brewer, Cambridge, 1987, p. 121.

This abuse of the image of the body is symptomatic of the breakdown which occurs from this point in the poem; language is twisted, meaning re-defined according to the self-interest of the speaker. From this point on, the brave new world of the post-resurrection, post-Pentecost Church and society falls apart bit by bit. This passage represents an ironic inversion of the reflective cycle, in that the outcome is not fresh insight from Scripture which issues in reformed life, but rather fragmentation and the rejection of transformation. Nonetheless, it is still evidence of Langland's poetic *modus operandi*, and shows its versatility.

Summary

This chapter has suggested some ways in which *Piers Plowman* explores the nature of the journey of discipleship and Christian learning. As I indicated in Chapter One, I do not believe that Hind addresses such questions at a deep theological level, but rather assumes them at an institutional level along the following lines: learning will be good for the Church, giving people greater confidence in their faith; the learning that candidates for ordination undertake will be visible in their attaining the specified outcomes required for their vocational progression. The Hind reports embody a monological pedagogy, as their visual appearance and layout as texts suggests. The Learning Outcomes equate stages of learning and formation with the assumption of greater degrees of institutional responsibility, and the dominant rhetorical strategies neither leave space for the reader to disagree nor invite theological engagement beyond the set parameters of the re-organisation agenda. Langland's Dowel, Dobet and Dobest are neatly echoed by Hind's progression in the Learning Outcomes to reflect three professional stages to aim for: 'at the point of selection',

‘at the point of ordination’, and ‘at completion of IME and, in addition, in order to be licensed to a post of incumbent status or equivalent responsibility.’ In this scheme, Dobest means being appointed as an incumbent, or at least as having satisfactorily completed three years of post-ordination training, much of it structured around providing evidence of levels of competence.²²⁹

In the light of the inadequacy of the Hind settlement, I have drawn on *Piers Plowman* to propose a learning process which offers a different way of configuring issues of learning and progress. I have demonstrated that one of the poem’s constant concerns is with the nature of true learning: the extent to which learning should base itself on formal teaching and on schemes of progress, as opposed to a more experiential and praxis-oriented pattern.²³⁰ I have argued that Langland seeks to integrate different kinds of knowing rather than prioritising one over against another, and that ‘learning to love’ describes this process rather than being a rejection of intellectual in favour of affective knowing. I have shown that rather than reading the poem according to a resolution of this tension in favour of one side or the other, a more fruitful way to understand its dynamic is by means of the hermeneutical process exemplified by the reflective learning cycle. The process by which new learning and new experience re-situate the learning self and act as a catalyst to an

²²⁹ William Elford Rogers describes the dreamer’s confusion as arising because ‘he hypostasises Dowel, making the verb (a relation) into a noun (a substance), assuming that Dowel is some thing to be known “objectively” as an object, as opposed to some relation to be known pragmatically by living certain practices.’ William Elford Rogers, *Piers Plowman and Interpretation*, The Catholic University of America, Washington D.C., 1992, p. 201. By expressing competences as nouns, the Hind Learning Outcomes run the same risk.

²³⁰ Susanne Johnson makes the point: ‘Christian formation is not best mapped by structurally invariant, linear and hierarchical stages. Rather it has to do with how, over a lifetime, the toal self acquires its basic identity, decisive content and dominant orientation under the impact of the Christian story.’ Susanne Johnson, ‘Education in the Image of God,’ in Jack L. Seymour and Donald E. Miller (eds.), *Theological Approaches to Christian Education*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1990, Chapter Seven, pp. 124-140.

active response and thereby to new experience, is central to my reading of *Piers Plowman* and to my understanding of theological education.

Chapter Four: lay and clerical learning

Introduction

This chapter will focus on the second of the tensions I identified in the Hind project: the way in which affirmations of lay learning are undermined by the continued prioritising of priestly education and training. The issue of the distinctiveness of clerical and lay roles and callings, and the learning appropriate to each, is one with which the Church of England is struggling, and it is not surprising that the Hind reports express some of the inconsistencies which characterise Church of England pronouncements and practice. I will demonstrate how these are reflected in Hind, looking particularly at the relationship between Hind One and Hind Two. The tensions I have suggested are not explicitly addressed in the reports; rather, they underlie the uneasy juxtaposition between the discourse of the Education for Discipleship section of Hind Two and the effectiveness agenda of Hind One.

I will begin by setting out a broad account of current tensions in Church of England thinking and praxis with regard to learning, lay and clerical, and then establish the ways in which Hind reflects, and tries to navigate a way through, these tensions. Contested areas include questions as to the sort of learning which is appropriate for contemporary Christians, lay and ordained, and the nature and ethos of central provision for, and monitoring of, such learning. With specific reference to Hind, there is also a question mark as to how the democratising rhetoric of education for discipleship actually plays out in

dioceses and parishes, and whether financial provision for lay learning matches the stated desires of the writers of the report.²³¹

The chapter will then go on to examine the ways in which *Piers Plowman*, arising out of a very different socio-cultural context, demonstrates a comparable unease about, and desire to hold together, formal and informal learning, the discipleship of lay people and the learning required of clergy. I will place the poem in its late fourteenth century context amidst the vigorous debate about lay and ordained calling and status which was being conducted at various levels, including in mystical writing and praxis, Lollard pedagogy, and the emergence of vernacular theologies. Langland's wrestling with what it means to learn and to live rightly in lay and ordained contexts is played out in the ways in which he uses the word *clergie*, which in conjunction with related terms such as *Studie* and *theologie* contains a range of meanings which map the complexity of the issues. I will consider how Langland addresses the problem of what it means for *clergie* to be extended beyond the ranks of the ordained, what it means to be lay and learned, at a time when such notions were politically and theologically contested. As with the theme of measurable progress versus formation explored in Chapter Three, the conversation between Hind and *Piers Plowman* will set the contemporary debate in a wider historical frame. Without falsely conflating the two situations and contexts, the setting alongside each other of fourteenth and twenty-first century arguments about lay and clerical learning will demonstrate both

²³¹ There is also the issue, in an era of economic cuts, of which clergy are going to have most money spent on their training and according to what criteria. In a letter of 8 February 2010 to principals of ministerial training institutions and Hind regional contacts, David Way wrote : 'we realise that it is important to give colleagues the opportunity to discuss the "recruitment and deployment" paper which is on its way to the House of Bishops in May. This will be the main item on this occasion, along with some first thoughts on how the Church may best choose those who should be enabled to do more expensive training routes.'

that this is not a new dilemma, and that resources from the past are available to pose awkward questions and undo easy assumptions in the present.

The Hind context: ecclesiological models for lay and ordained identity

It is worth stating at the start of this chapter that the binary lay/clerical is not an unproblematic one. The categories ‘lay’ and ‘ordained/clerical’ have not always existed and are not theologically stable.²³² Although detailed discussions of theologies of priesthood and the laity are beyond the scope of this thesis, the focus of which is learning and formation, it is important to acknowledge the interconnectedness of models of learning and definitions of ministry. What a person might need to know or learn according to their lay or clerical calling, and who might decide that, is the subject of this chapter.

Within the Church of England a range of understandings of lay/clerical exists, reflecting an ongoing discussion as to the role of the ordained minister in the context of the whole people of God and in relation to the laity.²³³ At one end of the spectrum is the model of the priest as set apart, as Christ’s ‘vicar’, and at the other, a model which emphasises the ministry of all the baptised and which understands priesthood as being a representative rather than an ontologically distinct ministry. As will become clear, the existence of different understandings is not a new phenomenon; similar debates were conducted the late fourteenth century, and understandings and practices of ministry have continued to be

²³² As Ann Astell points out, the definition of ‘laity’ is ‘multiple and shifting, depending on the contrastive term with which it is paired.’ Ann W. Astell (ed.), *Lay Sanctity, Medieval and Modern*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 2000, p. 2.

²³³ Some of the process by which the laity became a separate category is traced in the essays in *The Layman in Christian History*, Stephen Charles Neill and Hans-Ruedi Weber (eds.), SCM, London, 1963.

contested ever since the Reformation.²³⁴ I will outline the contours of the debate as it is presently manifest in order to understand and evaluate the ways in which Hind tries to harmonise different strands and to relate them to the question of learning.

Inevitably, what follows will involve a simplification of what is a complex range of theological understanding and practice, and it needs to be constantly borne in mind that ideal types are never found in pure forms. At one end of a spectrum comes what can be described as a more Catholic model of priest/laity, characterised by a particular Christology and ecclesiology.²³⁵ Its premise is that the starting point for defining the Church is as Christ's body, with the priest as representing Christ in a particular way. In this understanding, the Church is a means of salvation rather than a human institution, and the fact that it is ordained by God means that its life and ministry are always fundamentally the same, expressed through a hierarchy of offices. Much Catholic ecclesiology would fall into this category, as articulated by a theologian such as Yves Congar, whose book on the laity assumes the Church's ontological priority.²³⁶ As far as the Church of England is concerned,

²³⁴ There has been particularly vigorous debate about this within the Catholic Church in the last seventy years or so, with a number of scholars seeking to hold together a Catholic ontology of the Church with a less hierarchical model of ministry. See for example Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis*, Orbis, Maryknoll, 1986; Max Thurian, *Priesthood and Ministry*, Mowbray, London, 1983; Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church*, SCM, London, 1990.

²³⁵ Stephen Pickard suggests that this model draws heavily on Christology, in contrast to more fluid models which are based on pneumatological or Trinitarian understandings, in *Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry*, Ashgate, Farnham, 2009. See for example p. 39: 'Where ministry is developed in relation to Christology the differentiation and authority of ministerial office is accentuated. This is the strength of this approach. But the danger is over-differentiation and closure in relation to other ministries... Ministry tends to get sucked up into a Christologically determined ministerial office focused on the clergy.'

²³⁶ Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, Revised Edition, Geoffrey Chapman/Cassell, London, 1985. For a discussion of how Catholic priests understand the lay-clerical distinction, see Chapter Eight of Stephen H. Loudon and Leslie J. Francis *The Naked Parish Priest*, Continuum, London and New York, 2003. Loudon and Francis acknowledge the shift that has taken place since the Second Vatican Council's document *Lumen Gentium*

there are several factors undergirding an ecclesial ordering which makes a firm distinction between clerical and lay identity. One is the Church of England's commitment to the threefold order of bishops, priests and deacons as enshrined in Article 36 of the Articles of Religion. Another is a longstanding tradition which understands priesthood in sacerdotal terms, the priest being the intermediary between God and the people. Another is the re-emergence in the twentieth century of a Eucharistic focus, which in this model is expressed in the assumption that priesthood is necessary for there to be Church because the community can only be truly gathered by a Eucharistic minister.²³⁷

In terms of an understanding of learning, this model would see clergy as requiring very particular kinds of training and formation which set them apart from the laity and which will prepare them for an ontologically distinct life and ministry. A Roman Catholic seminary would be a good example of this 'closed' model where ordinands are formed according to a concept of priestly character by being withdrawn from the world. It is evidence of how much the emphasis has changed within the Church of England that in those colleges in the Anglo-Catholic tradition where such a view might be expected to find expression, there is instead a much greater emphasis on training for public ministry within the context of the ministry of all the baptised.²³⁸

and the decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, though they do raise the question as to 'whether it is expediency driven by the fall in priestly vocations rather than theological conviction of the proper role of the laity that drives this process.' Louden and Francis, p. 75.²³⁷ For example, the Diocese of Gloucester's paper of 2010 'Effective Ministry in Every Parish' was originally entitled 'A Parson in Every Parish', on the basis that the Eucharistic community gathered round the ordained representative minister was the key to ecclesial and missional renewal.

²³⁸ So, for example, the College of the Resurrection at Mirfield in its website section 'Formation':

God is at work in the lives of the baptized, filling us with the Holy Spirit and uniting us with Christ, "*the power and the wisdom of God*" (1 Corinthians 1:24). Ordained ministers are *first of all* members of the baptized People of God, and so

This phenomenon reflects the fact that the second half of the twentieth century has seen the emergence within the Church of England of a different set of understandings which emphasise the ministry of all the baptised and which offers a re-definition of the role and function of the ordained. The World Council of Churches' document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* marks a significant articulation of this shift, and is cited with approval in the Church of England Faith and Order Group's 2007 document *The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church*. One issue for those ecclesiologists who wish to affirm the ministry of the laity is how to retain a distinctive role for ordained priestly ministry without either on the one hand re-establishing models which appear unhelpfully hierarchical, or on the other removing any such distinctions and rendering the notion of ordained priesthood redundant. There is a range of different solutions to this problem, all of which generate their own problems and questions. Robin Greenwood in *Transforming Priesthood* derives a representative theology of priesthood from a form of social trinitarianism, and in *Transforming Church* goes on to relate such a model to quantum field theory and Gestalt theory.²³⁹ Stephen Pickard, in his detailed survey of models of collaborative ministry, proposes a 'relational ontology of orders' which contrasts the notion of 'setting apart' with 'setting in place'.²⁴⁰ *The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church* sets out a missional

the programme of formation which the College offers ordinands is a programme of transformation in Christian life. At the same time, ordinands are preparing to put themselves at the service of the Church not only in a ministry which is rooted in baptism, but also in diaconal and priestly ministry. For this reason, ministerial formation needs to be focused in a particular way which will form and equip ordinands for the new public and representative roles to which they are being called. This too is the work of God in us.

The college website is <http://www.college.mirfield.org.uk>, accessed 21.4.2011.

²³⁹ Robin Greenwood, *Transforming Church*, SPCK, London, 2002, Chapter 2, 'Seeing the Whole'.

²⁴⁰ Stephen Pickard, *Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry*, op. cit., Chapter 10, p. 154.

model of ministry which retains an important place for the ordained as well as affirming the gifts of all, and suggests restricting the word 'ministry' to public representative roles with ordained ministry distinguished by virtue of its being for life.²⁴¹ All of these represent different responses to the challenge of reconciling inherited institutional structures with a recovery of a more empowered theology of the laity, and all can be subjected to critique.

Some fundamental characteristics of theology and language at this end of the spectrum are found in one of Greenwood's recent works, which reiterates the idea of Trinitarian perichoretic relationality as the basis for Christian community and for the holding together of 'radical difference in dynamic unity.'²⁴² The key is 'discerning a connection between the practice of Church and the communion of diversified connectedness that is the trinitarian life.'²⁴³ A particular ecclesiology is suggested by the predominant metaphors used, which are dynamic, fluid and relational, suggesting a model of church which ascribes value to participation and relationships rather than to institutional structures. Alongside this are a number of other models and metaphors: community, *koinonia*, *diakonia*, friendship, dance,

²⁴¹ Church of England Faith and Order Group, *The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church*, 2007, Chapter 4:

However, when a ministry is entrusted to an individual in a form that is permanent and lifelong, public and representative, by a solemn liturgical action of the Church, we call that an 'ordained' ministry. Ordination carries a lifelong calling and permanently identifies the recipient. It shapes that person's identity, both to himself or herself and to the world. Ordination creates, in its intention, a ministry that is universally acknowledged and interchangeable – a ministry that is in principle recognizable throughout the universal Church – rather than a local or even national office. And it brings a ministry that relates to all three dimensions of the Church's task – to the word, the sacraments and pastoral care and oversight – not simply to one or two of these components. Ordination involves a comprehensive ministry, carried out in the public eye, universally recognized and a lifelong identity.

The online document is at <http://www.churchofengland.org/media/36098/missionmin.rtf>, accessed on 21.4.2011.

²⁴² Robin Greenwood and Caroline Pascoe (eds.), *Local Ministry: story, process and meaning*, SPCK, London, 2006, p. 5.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

never-ending journey, shalom, kingdom, flourishing, performance. The logical ecclesiological conclusion for Greenwood is that the Church is not a static given, rather, that ‘the continual process of finding how to be Church actually is Church. An inherent and perpetual characteristic of Church is the dissatisfaction that reformulates its own practice.’²⁴⁴ This model, in the words of Daniel Hardy, defines the Church according to what it does, locating God’s being in God’s working and is driven ‘by a passionate conviction that the being of the Church (its form) *becomes* real as it acts effectively (its functions) in and through people toward particular ends (its goal), in what is a generative dynamic.’²⁴⁵ This second model understands both Church and ministry in a different way from the first, is impatient of perceived clericalism and Episcopal clinging to control, and seeks to re-define church in more fluid ways.²⁴⁶ Inevitably, to describe this model in such terms is to flatten out the nuances and to risk setting up a stronger opposition that exists in practice.

Some of those who embrace this position share particular understandings of learning as being ‘not the privileged preserve of grey scholars and gifted teachers’ but rather ‘a many-sided, mutual and transformative process’ where all are ‘called to be the faithful in the critical knowing and preserving of a heritage and to be active in the communication of its wisdom.’²⁴⁷ Greenwood’s insistence on learning not being the possession of the clergy is echoed by Martin Oxley and Anne Tomlinson, who lament the way in which theological education has become ‘the main legitimator of ecclesial inequality, creating a sense of disempowerment among the non-ordained members of the *laos* and militating against a

²⁴⁴ Greenwood and Pascoe, op. cit., p. 4.

²⁴⁵ Daniel W. Hardy, ‘Afterword’, in Greenwood and Pascoe, op. cit., p. 138.

²⁴⁶ In Chapter Five I will explore the significance of the language and metaphors through which different understandings are presented.

²⁴⁷ Greenwood and Pascoe, op. cit., pp. 14-15.

round-table ecclesiology.²⁴⁸ As is clear, there is a tendency to create an oppositional rhetoric of ‘us’ and ‘them’ which then leads to labels such as ‘grey scholars’ (above), and simply plays on stereotypes.²⁴⁹

One example of the way in which these different understandings have played themselves out within Church of England polity is in the emergence of the Local Ministry movement, which largely represents the less clerical end of the spectrum.²⁵⁰ During the 1980’s and 1990’s, increasing numbers of dioceses set up Local Ministry schemes where ordained local ministers (OLM’s) were trained alongside lay peers and the language of collaborative ministry assumed prominence in programmes of study and lists of ministerial competence.²⁵¹ Understandings of the relationship between clerical and lay came under scrutiny as parishes negotiated new ways of sharing ministry. This greater sensitivity about not assuming clerical dominance is reflected in two recent books on priesthood: Christopher Cocksworth and Rosalind Brown’s *Being a Priest Today* and John Pritchard’s *The Life and Work of a Priest*, both of which illustrate the desire to hold together a range of traditions and understandings, and present priesthood in ways that include facilitating the ministries of others.²⁵²

²⁴⁸ Martin Oxley and Anne Tomlinson, ‘Congregational learning in Shetland, Scotland,’ in Greenwood and Pascoe, op. cit., p. 29.

²⁴⁹ A similar example of rhetorical overstatement, this time in defence of a high doctrine of the Church, is Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank’s *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions*, SCM, London, 2010.

²⁵⁰ A sense of the flavour of Local Ministry as an ideology and discourse, and also of the extent to which it sees itself as having transformed or failed to transform the clerical paradigm, can be gained from the 2006 collection of essays *Local Ministry: story, process, meaning*, op. cit.

²⁵¹ The report *Stranger in the Wings* gives the rationale for OLM training and ministry.

²⁵² John Pritchard, *The Life and Work of a Priest*, SPCK, London, 2007; Christopher Cocksworth and Rosalind Brown, *Being a Priest Today*, Canterbury Press, Norwich, 2006. It is interesting that Michael Ramsey’s *The Christian Priest Today* (1972, re-printed by SPCK in 2008 with a foreword by John Pritchard) continues to be widely read and,

Another expression of the desire to hold on to a range of understandings is the emergence of the language of a ‘mixed economy’ of ministry, coined by Rowan Williams in response to the 2004 Mission-shaped Church report, and which has become part of the vocabulary of ecclesiological rationales for promoting ‘fresh expressions of church.’²⁵³ Fresh Expressions, an initiative which arose out of Mission-shaped Church, seeks to establish new communities or congregations which may look very different from traditional forms of church and which are established primarily for the benefit of those who are not members of any church. Fresh Expressions does not take as its starting point a given structural model of church order or office, rather locates its ecclesiological underpinning in theological principles such as incarnation, mission and gospel. The existence of ‘alternative ways of being church’ on the agenda of students training for ministry, lay or ordained, highlights the need for continued thinking through the issues currently surrounding priesthood, leadership, mission and parish, and demonstrates the complex ways in which those issues are being embodied in practice.

This brief sketch forms an important backdrop to Hind, though the majority of Hind contributors were not from either sector. It demonstrates that the Church of England is a rich ecology made up both of constituencies whose model of learning is self-consciously

Amazon informs, is frequently bought with the former two texts. Rowan Williams’ 2004 lecture ‘“The Christian Priest Today”’: lecture on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Ripon College, Cuddesdon’, is an important reflection on the ongoing conversation, to be found at <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/1185>, accessed 24.11.2010.

²⁵³ The theological underpinning and ecclesiological implications of Fresh Expressions are explored in Steven Croft (ed.), *Mission-shaped Questions*, Church House Publishing, London, 2008. Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank’s critique of Fresh Expressions, *For the Parish*, SCM, London, 2010, received a robust response from Graham Cray in the Church of England Newspaper of Friday November 12th 2010, reiterating commitment to the notion of the mixed economy. It can be accessed at <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/news/cen/202011/parish>.

radical and which is couched in the language of *koinonia* and kingdom, and constituencies which are more institutionally conservative.²⁵⁴ This co-existence also explains another unresolved tension within Hind; on the one hand, the use of the transformation language of Local Ministry in its proposals for Education for Discipleship, and on the other, the use of the body as a metaphor in a way which is more akin to a traditional model, asserting truths in the context of a more hierarchical corporate self-understanding.

As with all models, the positions outlined above are crude indicators of poles on what is a spectrum of understanding and practice. They might seem only to be of concern to those who make decisions at diocesan and national level, but I suggest that they are experienced and expressed on courses where, for example, candidates for ordination and Reader ministry train alongside one another, and in parishes where different expectations emerge as to the role and status of the priest with regard to lay colleagues. One small piece of evidence that tensions still exist around lay and clerical self-understanding and status is a series of articles published in the Church Times in August 2009. Entitled ‘Egg-sucking for Grandmothers’, the series proceeds in the form of a number of ‘lessons’ to clergy, giving them advice on how to prioritise personal prayer, and how better to manage their time. After the title of the first article comes the sub-title, ‘Clergy ought to know about private prayer. Often they don’t, says an experienced layman.’ To coin a term used by Fiona Somerset with reference to provocative fourteenth century texts, this is a piece of deliberate extraclergial authorial self-positioning.²⁵⁵ The status of the article as a ‘lesson’ begs some

²⁵⁴ For a more detailed exploration of an ecclesiology of ministry and an analysis of the last fifty years, see Stephen Pickard, *Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry*, Ashgate, 2009.

²⁵⁵ Fiona Somerset, *Clerical Discourse and Lay Audience in Late Medieval England*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, in particular pp. 12-13: ‘[writers of controversial works] distance themselves from the institutional clergy they criticise and ally

questions, especially in the light of the author's anonymity. If this is a 'lesson', then the one giving it is in the role of teacher, and there is no reason why clergy should not be reminded of core elements of their vocation by lay or religious contemporaries. Yet the language of 'lesson', with its mixture of distancing irony and assumption of superiority, makes it unclear how the tone of the article, and the relationship between author and clergy, should be read.²⁵⁶ The article, and the subsequent correspondence it engendered, is one example of continued internal debate over issues which the rhetoric of reports cannot entirely suppress.

Hind, the 'learning church' agenda and lay learning

It can be seen from this introduction that the writers of the Hind reports are trying to shape policy in the context of an ecology of education and training provision informed by multiple understandings of the roles of lay and ordained people. This is a difficult task, and the report seeks to engage not only the theology but also the polity of theological education, which means that simple ways forward are unlikely to do justice to the complexity of local situations. In terms of the models I have outlined, both reports stress that the whole people of God, by virtue of their baptism, are called to play a part in the mission of God and to

themselves with the laity, yet continue to employ the kinds of sophisticated argument that grant them clerical legitimacy. They take, that is, an extraclergial position – presenting themselves as outside the clergy, yet if anything more ostentatiously learned than a typical clerical writer.'

²⁵⁶ There was reaction in the following week's letter's page, where the two printed letters were given the editorial heading 'Does the life of a priest, for the laity, pass all understanding?' (Church Times, 28th August 2009, p. 11). This was in itself an interpretation of a sentence in one of the letters suggesting that the article 'falls into the trap of over-simplifying a life that the author cannot fully understand.' The heading inflames the debate by its ironic application of the words of the blessing – '[peace] which passes all understanding' to the somewhat lesser mystery of offices within the Church. This reinforces a perceived gulf between lay and ordained, and although a trivial editorial decision in itself, is indicative of a continued unease about the acceptability of lay critique of the clergy, about who holds the true learning which enables the Church to be holy and prayerful, and about the purpose and work of the clergy.

exercise Christian ministry. This is very much the language currently used by the majority of theological colleges and courses. As a consequence, learning should be the ongoing experience of every Christian disciple, and programmes of theological education should not be restricted to those training for, or engaged, in, licensed ministry.²⁵⁷ Indeed, theological education is for all, including the laity, as the Hind language of a ‘Learning Church’ makes clear.²⁵⁸

Hind Two deals with the lay implications of being a ‘learning Church’ and sets out guidelines for Reader ministry and proposals for a national system of educational programmes under the heading ‘Education for Discipleship’ (EFD). It is a more hybrid document than Hind One, and the EFD section introduces more explicitly the discourse of the adult education/local ministry wing of the Church of England.²⁵⁹ The aims and theological presuppositions of this section of Hind Two are clearly articulated and attempt to hold together formal learning and practical discipleship, the latter being defined as a ‘whole life-response to Jesus Christ’, the goal of which is ‘to grow ever more Christ-like in every aspect of life’ and the focus of which is ‘the service of God and his mission in the world.’²⁶⁰ The authors are keen to stress that discipleship is not to be understood either as

²⁵⁷ For example, the Cranmer Hall website states that it offers ‘tailored patterns of formation and training for ordained ministry in the Church of England and the Methodist Church as a foundation for lifelong learning: ordained ministry which focuses and enables the service of the whole people of God in worship and mission.’ The college website is <http://www.dur.ac.uk/cranmerhall>, accessed on 2.4.2010.

²⁵⁸ This language was still current five years after the first report was published, with a 2009 conference of three significant networks – those responsible for Lay Ministry training, diocesan Adult Education advisers, and course and college staff – meeting under the title ‘Learning Church’ to discuss shared practice and common goals. This was a practical attempt to break down the barriers (perceived or real) between those engaged in training ordinands and those responsible for lay training at diocesan or national level.

²⁵⁹ Hind Two is made up of three separately authored sections, Part 3 of which re-visits Hind One.

²⁶⁰ Hind Two, p. 4.

some kind of preliminary stage prior to ‘ministry’, or as conforming to certain patterns of behaviour laid down by an external human authority. Rather than understand discipleship in terms of ordained ministry, which limits it, discipleship involves the Church dispersed in the world rather than the Church gathered together, and as such needs to enable disciples to become more Christ-like human beings and thus more ‘effective signs of God’s kingdom and rule.’²⁶¹ Thus the aim is that ‘learning connects with life experience and ministry and mission on the ground.’²⁶²

Hind Two sets out a vision and method for EFD which is collaborative, non-hierarchical, dialogical and accessible to all. There is a recognition that hierarchical structures tend to lead some people being valued more than others, and that the role of Christian education is not to reinforce but to break down such barriers.²⁶³ The tension in the Hind settlement arises most obviously at the point where the rhetoric of ‘a learning Church’, with its assurances that learning is not the privilege of the few, meets the financial reality which is that the vast majority of resources are still going to be channelled into programmes of training for ordained ministry. Hind Two names the issue on p. 16, noting ‘with disappointment’ the fact that EFD falls outside the central funding scheme which pays for the training of ordinands such that it will be left to local partnerships to provide resources.²⁶⁴

²⁶¹ Ibid., p. 5.

²⁶² Ibid., p. 5.

²⁶³ Hind Two, p. 7. See also underlying principle vi on p. 6: ‘The Church is resourced by the mutuality of learning between public ministers (lay and ordained) and the rest of the people of God.’

²⁶⁴ Hind Two, p. 16.

The seeds of this disappointment are, I contend, contained within Hind One itself, despite its good intentions, and it is to Hind One that I will now turn. The title – *Formation for Ministry in a Learning Church* – makes explicit the desire for the training of public ministers to be understood in the wider context of the vocation of the whole Church. It would be hard to disagree with its vision of dynamic and reflective discipleship for all its members; what is not so clear is the means by which this may be achieved.

From the outset, Hind One affirms need for ministerial formation and training to be understood in the context of the whole people of God, stating a conviction that ‘good clergy formation both depends on and helps secure learning across the Church as a whole.’²⁶⁵ The Preface makes it clear that ordination needs to be seen in the light of the calling and gifting of the whole church for mission and ministry, on the basis that the Church is ‘a single body with many members and an infinite variety of gifts supplied by the Holy Spirit.’²⁶⁶ In 1.3 the report develops these claims and links them with the mission of God, proposing that high quality training for clergy will equip them ‘to offer vibrant and collaborative spiritual leadership and to empower a vocationally motivated laity – and, thereby, to promote and serve God’s mission in the world.’²⁶⁷ Having established this as a principle, Hind one goes on to tackle the current state of affairs, which is that there is a ‘fault line between pre-ordination training and other forms of adult learning in the Church’ and uneven provision for the formal education of the laity.²⁶⁸ In the summary of issues which constitute the

²⁶⁵ Hind One, Preface, p. vii

²⁶⁶ Hind One, Preface, p. viii.

²⁶⁷ Hind One, 1.3. This is further reinforced at 1.26 (v): ‘Equipping Christians for lay discipleship is a very important part of the Church of England’s training provision and any proposals for the training of the clergy will have to take it fully into account.’

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 2.7, 2.8.

working group's agenda at 2.23, the priority of better co-ordinated lay learning is stated yet again.²⁶⁹

It is thus clear that the desire for a 'learning Church' is a consistent theme within Hind One. The theological basis of ordained and lay identity and role is tackled in Chapter Three:

This report is primarily about the initial ministerial education of the clergy in the wider context of a learning Church. It therefore concerns the knowledge and skills, and the habits of understanding, devotion and practice needed in the ordained clergy. This in turn presupposes some understanding of the meaning of ordination and of the nature and purpose of the ordained ministry of the Church.²⁷⁰

The report goes on at 3.3 to try and disentangle the perceived synonymity between theological education and ordination training, rejecting a narrow definition of theology as simply 'knowledge about God' in favour of 'knowledge of God', which opens theology up as being vital for every Christian and inseparable from practices of faithful discipleship. At 3.4 it goes on to make the case that 'the theological heart of ordination training should reinforce a sense that the clergy belong to the Church and are not apart from the rest of its members.' It cites New Testament models of the Church as being relational and implying

²⁶⁹ 2.23 (iii) considering how to set ministerial education for the clergy within the context of a coordinated provision for adult learning and training in the Church – IME and CME for clergy and Readers, training for other lay ministries and formal theological education for lay discipleship;
(iv) promoting a country-wide initiative for formal theological education for lay people and for a range of lay ministries, while enabling potential candidates for ordained ministry to embark on basic studies in Christian theology and issues about ministry before they enter training.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 3.1. 3.2 adds: 'Although it has not been the task of this working party to produce a comprehensive theology of the ordained ministry, we draw attention to the need for greater clarity within the Church of England on a number of these matters if any lasting rational solutions are to be found.'

mutual belonging (living stones, vine and branches, body of Christ), and on this basis argues that the foundations of the theological expertise of the ordained ‘lie in the common faith of the people of God and should be developed as part of the whole Church’s commitment to learning and being equipped for service.’ The clergy are essential for collaborative ministry.

This positive declaration is followed by the making of a distinction between the truth that ‘all Christians participate intimately and intrinsically in the royal priesthood of the Church’ and the fact that ‘the Church from New Testament times onwards has recognized a distinctive ministry as among the constitutive elements of the Church.’²⁷¹ The report continues at 3.25 to affirm a balance between the fact that ‘the ordained have special responsibilities that contain functional, representative and symbolic aspects’ and that the Church as the Body of Christ involves different elements working ‘harmoniously together, confidently and collaboratively’, in order to manifest the ministry of Christ to the world.

Two vital functions of the ordained ministry are defined as its standing ‘in intimate relation to the ordered nature of the Church’ such that it ‘is one of the instruments for pointing the Christian community to its foundation “on the apostles and prophets”’, and its ‘distinctive role in guarding and promoting the vocation of the Church, for instance in guarding and promoting the four marks of the Church as one, holy, catholic and apostolic.’²⁷² Lay and ordained share the same mission, but in different ways:

the ordained ministry exists within and not apart from the common royal priesthood of the people of God, who themselves derive their primary responsibility from their

²⁷¹ Ibid., 3.19, 3.20.

²⁷² Ibid., 3.27, 3.28.

call to participate in Christ's ministry serving God's purposes in the world – itself a world without meaning except as God's creation, oriented towards the fulfilment of God's reign.²⁷³

As has been demonstrated, Hind One goes to some lengths to ground its vision of a learning Church theologically and ecclesiologically, not least in the three principles which emerge from Chapter Three: that ministry should be marked by the holiness that Christ gives to the Church; that ministry seeks to express and fulfil the vocation of the Church; and that the mission of God shapes the Church and its ministry. Chapter Four recapitulates the theme:

the older model of formation in a community solely devoted to priestly or presbyteral formation has, in practice, been giving way to a model that emphasizes the education of the whole people of God. Within this latter model ordinands both share in learning with other learners and also have parts of their training devoted solely to them.²⁷⁴

There is no doubt that the report commits itself to the idea of lay and clerical learning and ministry as of equal worth and importance. Where the problem arises is in the fact that Hind One does not acknowledge the hidden tensions in its vision of a learning Church, and in particular the financial utopianism of its dream of investment in high quality lay education. My criticisms of Hind One are fourfold: firstly, its rhetoric hides the gaps in its argument. Secondly, it fails to look beyond a primarily clerical paradigm, missing the opportunity to engage with thinking about the learning of the whole congregation – the emphasis is still on the selection, training and monitoring of individuals. Thirdly, it assumes that a top down approach will work and that telling lay people that they need to

²⁷³ Hind One, 3.13.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 4.2.

learn will generate a desire for the kinds of learning that are offered. The power dynamics of this are problematic, to say the least. Fourthly, by conflating the status of ordained ministry with the language of professionalism, as it does in several places, the report drives another wedge between lay and ordained and introduces another complicating factor. I will illustrate each of my four points with close reference to the text.

Hind: rhetorical features

Firstly, Hind's rhetorical sleight of hand. Hind One is not able to commit itself consistently to one clear understanding of lay and ordained learning, and the rhetorical means by which this tension is elided are now familiar. For example, in the 'theological' chapter, Chapter Three, we are given an ecclesiological and Christological foundation for the claim that we must be a learning church at 4.2, which offers a definition of theology as 'the possession of Christians because they are "in Christ."' The argument then proceeds by using the example of Jesus preparing the Twelve for their ministry by proximity to himself to argue that 'discipleship today is typically learnt in a community environment by people committed to his fellowship and hence to fellowship with each other.'²⁷⁵

The choice of the word 'possession' strikes an odd note (4.1 states that 'learning is a task and gift for the whole people of God,' where although the use of the word 'gift' is theologically an improvement, its being preceded by the word 'task' betrays the purpose-driven Hind agenda). Theology has become the property of the church, to be dispensed to members. Implicit in 3.6 is a model of ministry and of learning which is potentially very different from the accredited pathways for individuals which Hind goes on to spell out: the apprenticeship model of Jesus and his disciples. Yet the paragraph then shies away from the

²⁷⁵ Hind One, 3.6.

implications of the example of Jesus and his followers for the way in which Christian learning might best be structured. It takes Jesus and the Twelve (though this in itself begs some questions as to the selection of one ‘inner’ group of disciples) and uses them to illustrate the benefits of a community environment in which discipleship can flourish. This move elides both the potential of the model as an alternative way of training a group of people (practical mission and apprenticeship to a ‘master’, no HEI in sight), and also sidesteps the power relationships which exist in the church, where rhetoric of a fellowship of equals cannot ignore the fact that the ordained are being trained to play particular roles within the life of the church. In institutional life, some people are appointed to train others, and it is disingenuous to invoke the model of Jesus and his disciples and then imply that its only relevance is in terms of a model of fellowship.

Another example of the way on which Hind rhetoric glides smoothly past potential obstacles comes in the section headed ‘The Church as a school of theology’ where the report states that it wants resources for ordination training to be ‘set within the context of the whole Church growing in faithful understanding of God.’ This is followed by the bland assertion that ‘practical benefits to be derived from this may include increasing the level of understanding among the generality of Christians’, one by-product of which could be the raising of the ‘average standard among those embarking on formal periods of preparation for ordination.’²⁷⁶ The idea that there should be a greater convergence between the learning of the whole people of God and that of those to be ordained is a principle which sounds right. Yet it is not clear that there really is such a smooth continuity between ‘the whole Church growing in faithful understanding of God,’ and the Church’s structures for

²⁷⁶ Hind One, 3.5.

providing ordination training. How this vision might be achieved in practical and financial terms is left to Hind Two to work out.

Hind: the clerical paradigm

My second criticism of Hind One is that it does not go nearly far enough in re-thinking models of theological learning and the whole people of God. Although parishes and congregations are mentioned as contexts where all may learn together (for example at 3.7, 4.1), the emphasis seems very much still to be individuals going on courses, albeit courses which are made accessible to lay learners. In that sense, despite the rhetoric of learning Church, there is still an expectation that the ordained are being prepared for fairly conventional leadership roles.

In the Epilogue to his survey of theological education David Kelsey issues four warnings, the first of which is to avoid defining the end of theological education as the training of the clergy. He exhorts his readers to look carefully at ‘the conceptuality that is taken for granted by all parties to a debate’, and in particular to examine ‘the contrast terms everybody seems to have agreed to use.’²⁷⁷ By constantly using lay and ordained as contrast terms, Hind reinforces a distinction however much it protests an equal valuing of each. Despite referring frequently to the whole people of God, the unit of training is always conceived as being the individual. Hind One seems unaware that there are other approaches to considering where the focus of theological education and formation might lie, and perpetuates a clerical paradigm despite its desire to see learning extended.

²⁷⁷ David Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1993, p. 229.

The phrase ‘the clerical paradigm’ is one which is associated with debates about the focus and purpose of theological education, and draws on a seminal essay by James F. Hopewell.²⁷⁸ Hopewell’s thesis, arising in a US context but still applicable here, is that seminary training focuses on the individual, whereas the aim should be to develop the congregation rather than just the minister, in order that the task of becoming a redemptive community might be the responsibility of all. His ideas have been taken up in subsequent discussions.²⁷⁹ If a shift towards a model which took the congregation seriously were to be made, it would have huge implications for theological education in its widest sense, not least because it would take the emphasis off the accredited learning pathways of individuals and find new modes of delivery and definition. As Stanley Hauerwas observes, ‘to make the congregation a central concern in seminary education...cannot but be a new pedagogical strategy which requires that we examine the assumption that theology is from beginning to end a form of practical knowledge.’²⁸⁰

An entirely negative reading of the Hind reports would be that they are continuing to promote a kind of theological learning which fits a traditionally conceived clerical paradigm, albeit one which has been partially translated into a discourse of outcomes and effectiveness and which is to be made available to lay people on a limited budget. By choosing this approach, it could be argued, Hind is bypassing and ignoring patterns of

²⁷⁸ James F. Hopewell, ‘A Congregational Paradigm for Theological Education’, *Theological Education* Vol. 21, No.1, Autumn 1984, pp. 60-70. Hopewell’s argument was developed in Joseph C. Hough, Jr., and Barbara G. Wheeler (eds.), *Beyond Clericalism*, Scholars Press, Atlanta, Georgia, 1988.

²⁷⁹ See for example John Dreibelbis and David Gortner, ‘Beyond Wish Lists for Pastoral Leadership: Assessing Clergy Behaviour and Congregational Outcomes to Guide Seminary Curriculum’, *Theological Education* Vol. 40, 2005, pp. 25-49. For a more general exploration, see Thomas R. Hawkins, *The Learning Congregation*, Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1997.

²⁸⁰ Stanley Hauerwas, ‘Clerical Character’ in *Christian Existence Today*, The Labyrinth Press, 1988, p. 128 (footnote).

Christian learning which begin with congregation and community rather than with the selection of individuals to embark on learning pathways. In a sense this is inevitable, since the Hind settlement is an attempt to rationalise existing resources and institutions whose *raison d'être* is clerical, and the fact that it articulates theological ambitions for the learning of the whole Church is commendable. Hind's aim that excellent training of clergy will bring benefits to the whole Church is not in doubt; nevertheless, the fact that the authors of Hind do not attempt any fundamental re-conceptualisation of terms and models is a missed opportunity.

Hind: a top down approach

Related to this is my third criticism, that Hind One feels like a top down initiative. The suggestion that we need to be a learning Church has been taken by a small group, and it is no accident that the Hind reports are known by the name of an individual Bishop, seldom by their full official titles. Despite the Hind working party having consulted widely, as asserted in the Preface, it feels as though, in the course of re-designing ordination training, its authors have hit upon the idea that learning is for everyone and proceeded, via a theological rationale for such a view, to advocate shared provision and a new ethos. There is no acknowledgement of the existence of any differently expressed desires for learning, or different models of community, spirituality and worship, which might already be emerging from below. Significant lay initiatives with the potential to change institutional culture and self-understanding do exist, but are often viewed with a degree of suspicion; the response to initiatives such as Fresh Expressions and Emerging Church by Church of England bishops

can be seen as another instance of the clerical hierarchy attempting both to affirm and to maintain control of lay movements.²⁸¹

Top down approaches to learning are in danger of alienating the learner. Had the authors of Hind consulted John Hull's *What Prevents Christian Adults From Learning?*, they might have paused to consider what kinds of ideological conditions enable adult learning. Hull warns of the danger of perpetuating 'the idea of an unlearning Christ who is the image and incarnation of an unlearning God, and is the model or pattern for the unlearning believer.'²⁸² Hull goes on to suggest that the church is often ordered such that the learner is thought of as being in a passive role, inferior to the teacher, as though 'the higher you go up the church hierarchy the less you have to learn and the more you have to teach.'²⁸³

This is not just a question of institutional management but of fundamental theological understanding involving Christology and ecclesiology. The nature and purpose of lay learning is not clearly defined by Hind One, and the emphasis of Hind on the lifelong learning of clergy is less about an adventurous partnership with a learning Jesus than an exercise in technologies of competence and risk management.²⁸⁴ As David Moss points out, three out of the five reasons given for assessment of curates' competence and formation are to do with institutional governance and an ethos of self-governance rather than arising from a sense of the unpredictable journey of mutual learning on which curates embark as they

²⁸¹ Michael Perham and Mary Gray-Reeves's book *The Hospitality of God: Emerging Worship for a Missional Church*, Seabury Books, 2010, is an excellent example of such episcopal affirmation within a firm ecclesial structure.

²⁸² John M. Hull, *What Prevents Christian Adults From Learning?*, Trinity Press International, Philadelphia, 1991, p. 201.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

²⁸⁴ It is hard to see where there is space for Andrew Mayes' vision where 'Teachers stand before students not as professionals having all the answers but as fellow pilgrims, explorers and companions asking similar questions.' Mayes, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

are ordained.²⁸⁵ Technologies of learning function as a means of assessing employability, and the learning process is circumscribed by pre-determined objectives in the form of gridded learning outcomes, and evidence-based systems of accountability. Moss's Foucauldian critique is perhaps overstated in parts, but in terms of the kind of learning that Hind proposes, it exposes some uncomfortable contradictions.²⁸⁶

Hind: being 'professional'

My fourth criticism of Hind One in terms of the way in which it understands lay and clerical learning and identity focuses on its use of the language of professionalism.²⁸⁷ At its broadest, this language reflects an assumption that, alongside lawyers and doctors, ministers are needed for the well-being of society, which may not be self-evident in post-Christendom England. More narrowly conceived, the professional education of clergy is understood in terms of equipping individuals to fulfil the expectations of congregations. Hind One invokes both of these models in different places. It is clear about its desire to produce a professional standard for ordained ministry. Throughout the report, reference is made to the expectations of those within and without the Church which are driving the reforms, such as the assertion that 'the Church and our society rightly have high

²⁸⁵ David Moss, 'Towards an Ethics of Theological Formation', paper delivered to the Exeter University Theology and Religion Research Seminar, 17th November 2010.

²⁸⁶ Hull expresses the ideological paradox thus: 'Christians obediently follow a man who himself obediently followed no one. They believe in a system at the centre of which is a man who broke with the system which he inherited. Christians hold in doctrine what Christ expressed in miracle. Christians become followers of the imaginative and creative Jesus by carefully suppressing innovation and creativity.' Hull, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

²⁸⁷ The idea of professionalism, also fits within the Athens/Berlin axis, but this time focussing not on the role of *Wissenschaft* (in Hind terms, accredited learning) but on the other feature of Berlin, that of professional training. Kelsey traces this to Schleiermacher, who justified the inclusion of a theology faculty in the University of Berlin on the grounds that ministers were being professionally educated to play an important role in society.

expectations of the training of ordained ministers.²⁸⁸ At 2.21, Hind One states that ‘there is a demand from congregations and from parishioners for ministry exercised to a professional standard’, citing the trend for professions such as nursing and teaching to become graduate professions as a good reason for clergy to adopt a similar standard. Failure to move in this direction would, indeed, be ‘anomalous’.²⁸⁹

Hind One thus accepts that ordained ministry needs to be a graduate profession, because people expect it to be, in line with other professions. Yet the report does not discuss the basis of this assumption, simply asserts it. As Raf Vanderstarten points out, the desire to be seen as being a true professional is a modernist aim: ‘full professional status is described as an end-state that some occupations have not yet achieved.’²⁹⁰ He goes on to argue that the idea of ‘professions’ referred originally to those occupations such as law, medicine and theology that relied on university-based knowledge systems, as distinct from those based in crafts and trades.

Within the world of theological education there have been some significant voices raised to question the theological appropriateness of the ‘professionalisation’ of the clergy. Stanley Hauerwas defines the key question as being to do with ‘what ethic is already being taught through our attempt to professionalise the ministry’ and concludes that it is the culture of the ‘expert’, the one who can meet consumer demand because of his or her specialist skills

²⁸⁸ Hind One, 1.1.

²⁸⁹ Hind One, 2.21

²⁹⁰ Raf Vanderstaeten, ‘Professions in organisations, professional work in education’, *British Journal of Sociology* Vol.28, No. 5, Sept 2007, pp. 621-635.

and knowledge.²⁹¹ The danger of this is that it deskills those who in this model are placed in the role of clients/consumers, and who are not qualified to criticise the experts. This has obvious implications for the ordained and the laity as part of one learning church; if the ordained have professional status as a result of their superior learning and training, where does this leave the balance of power in the relationship? Hauerwas' point is that the language of professionalism is not an innocent invocation of certain standards of behaviour and competence, but the tip of a much bigger iceberg (much as Pattison argues about the language of 'effectiveness' and 'efficiency').²⁹²

A similar suspicion about the concept of professionalism is voiced by Ivan Illich, who critiques the illusions it fosters which encourage people to believe that they require the expert services of the 'professionals' to resolve their problems within a consumer matrix:

A profession, like a priesthood, holds power by concession from an elite whose interests it props up. As a priesthood provides eternal salvation, so a profession claims legitimacy as the interpreter, protector and supplier of a special, this-worldly interest of the public at large.²⁹³

Illich tackles the way in which language undergoes a shift which reflects this unhealthy passivity, referring to 'the illusion that those activities we designate by intransitive verbs can be indefinitely substituted with institutionally defined staples referred to by nouns. Education replaces 'I learn'; health care replaces 'I heal'; TV replaces 'I play'.²⁹⁴ Does 'Education for Discipleship' replace 'I am following Jesus'? Illich's book describes its aim as being 'to sound a clarion call for professionals to stop making a monopoly of their

²⁹¹ Stanley Hauerwas, 'Clerical Character' in *Christian Existence Today*, The Labyrinth Press, 1988, p. 138.

²⁹² Stephen Pattison, *The Faith of the Managers*, Cassell, London and Washington, 1997.

²⁹³ Ivan Illich, *Disabling Professions*, Marion Boyars, London, 1977, p. 17.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

vocations and for people to be more discriminating in their choice of alternatives.²⁹⁵ His words, it seems to me, are a warning to the Church to think carefully about what the implications for the baptised vocation and ministry of all Christians the ‘professionalisation’ of the clergy might be in our present context.²⁹⁶

I have indicated some of the areas where the Hind reports are trying to hold together and harmonise different models of learning and ministry, and suggested that there is no clear consensus in the Church of England as to the theological validity and institutional implication of any lay/clerical distinction. I have demonstrated that there is a difference of emphasis between the Hind One language of professional clergy training and Hind Two’s insistence on discipleship as a whole life response to Christ in its own right. In order to widen the terms of the debate, I will now turn to the very different context of the late fourteenth century and examine how Langland, by rehearsing many of the anxieties of his time about what was appropriate for lay people in terms of access to theological learning, offers both analysis of some longstanding problems, and a possible way forward.

Lay and clerical in the late Middle Ages

I have established that lay and clerical are potentially problematic terms in our own time. Going back to the late fourteenth century, if we define lay as against clerical, the laity (though there is a distinction within this between, for example, knights and lay commoners, the latter always ending at the bottom of whatever ladder of social hierarchy one constructs) are those whose sphere of work is the world: agriculture, chivalry, governance, commerce.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 9-10.

²⁹⁶ For further analysis of the implications of clergy professionalism see Anthony Russell, *The Clerical Profession*, SPCK, London, 1980.

This seems clear and straightforward, drawing on the theory that feudal society in England understood itself to be based on the three estates: those who fought, those who prayed and those who worked.²⁹⁷ However, it may be as much a convenient construct now as then, belying the complex areas of overlap. This raises historiographical questions around the interpretive tools we use when dealing with the past and the ways in which they shape our understanding. One way to approach the lay/clerical divide in relation to the fourteenth century is to see it as part of a wider set of binaries which help to simplify and bring into focus certain features of late medieval life.²⁹⁸ As Miri Rubin suggests, certain schools of scholarship have established such binaries as lay and clerical, elite and popular, urban and rural, and these have structured research.²⁹⁹ This has been a necessary stage, but scholars now, she suggests, are ‘conquering the territory between poles, beginning to unravel the mediations, the contracts, the interdependencies, the shared symbolic worlds between

²⁹⁷ This can be configured slightly differently as a division into lay, clerical and religious, with knights in the first category, parish and secular clergy in the second, and the orders of monks and friars in the third. Astell refers to the ‘late medieval tendency to draw a correspondence between the three traditional states (lay, clerical and religious), the three ‘lives’ (active, mixed and contemplative) and the three degrees of holiness (Do-Wel, Do-Bet and Do-Best). Astell, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

²⁹⁸ See Brian Stock, *Listening for the Text*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1996, ‘Introduction: Orality, Literacy and the Sense of the Past.’

²⁹⁹ Such binaries are prone to multiply in discussion of medieval texts, and Derek Pearsall argues for a revision of their continuing currency in historical thinking in the light of recent scholarship. See his Introduction to *Learning and Literacy in Medieval England and Abroad*, Sarah Rees Jones (ed.), Brepols Publishers n.v., Turnhout, Belgium, 2003.

The assumption that there were clear-cut distinctions between literacy and illiteracy has been challenged by Franz H. Bauml, ‘Varieties and Consequences of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy’, *Speculum* Vol. 55, No. 2., April 1980, pp. 237-265. On p. 246 Bauml makes the case for three socially conditioned and socially functional modes of approach to the transmission of knowledge: the fully literate person; the individual who relies on another’s literacy; and the illiterate without the need or means of such reliance.

Recent scholarship has explored ways in which these binaries were continually subverted or transcended. See for example John H. Arnold ‘A Man Takes an Ox by the Horn and a Peasant by the Tongue’: Literacy, Orality and Inquisition in Medieval Languedoc’ in *Learning and Literacy in Medieval England and Abroad*, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-48. Also Britton J. Harwood ‘Dame Study and the Place of Orality in Piers Plowman’, *ELH* 1990, pp. 1-17. Langland, as the rest of this chapter will demonstrate, contributes to this process of subversion and re-definition in a range of ways in *Piers Plowman*.

them... clerical and lay surely must be otherwise articulated to contain the initiatives of perfection which swept men and women in the central and later Middle Ages into groups such as beguines, humiliati and tertiaries.³⁰⁰ The division between clerical and lay status was being challenged in the late fourteenth century in a number of ways, and it is in this context that Langland makes his own contribution to the debate, situated firmly in the complex space between poles which Rubin describes.

Lay learning and discipleship in medieval Europe

If there was ever an assumption that learning was for the ordained and that lay people should passively consume what was handed on to them, it was subverted by a number of lay movements in medieval Europe. As Andre Vauchez puts it,

The recurrent theme is the struggle, never entirely successful, of the Christian laity to carve out for themselves a religious role that would concede some spiritual dignity to the circumstances and concerns of their daily lives: marriage, work, civic life, even war.³⁰¹

Bernard McGinn traces the upsurge in expressions of lay devotion and learning to a twofold impetus arising from the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. He identifies a ‘bottom up’ movement centred on the idea of the *vita apostolica*, characterised by a shift from inward-looking community to outward-looking encounter with the world. This, he contends, was

³⁰⁰ Miri Rubin, ‘Medieval Bodies: Why Now, and How?’ in Miri Rubin (ed.), *The Work of Jacques Le Goff and the Challenges of Medieval History*, Boydell, Woodbridge, 1997, pp. 209-219, p. 218.

³⁰¹ Andre Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1993, Preface, p. xi.

crucial for later medieval spirituality.³⁰² Penance, poverty and preaching were its three main components (that they still had popular currency in succeeding centuries can be seen in *Piers Plowman*), and the search for an evangelical model of the apostolic life involved numbers of wandering preachers with large lay followings. The fear of unregulated preaching and emergence of new religious orders created a constant tension as those who, like Peter Valdez, effectively found themselves as leaders of lay movements, had to choose whether to gain approval from the Pope or risk being judged heretical. As with any bottom-up initiative (if McGinn's interpretation stands), freedom from institutional hierarchies had to be balanced with the risk of deviation from sound teaching and, in twenty-first century parlance, lack of accountability.³⁰³

Alongside the lay, vernacular *vita apostolica* movement, McGinn contrasts the pastoral reforms of the Fourth Lateran Council which were a more top-down initiative, 'a "descending" effort of the official clerical hierarchy to encourage a more fervent Christianity among their flock.'³⁰⁴ The fourth Lateran Council produced a set of Constitutions which were designed to improve the learning and preaching ability of the clergy, and by this means to enhance the discipleship of the laity (though this always runs the risk of seeing the laity as the objects of the pastoral care of the clergy).³⁰⁵ Numerous

³⁰² Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 1998, Introduction, in particular pp. 3-7.

³⁰³ Current 'mission-shaped' initiatives in the Church of England with the 'Fresh expressions' label encounter similar tensions. Debates as to who is permitted to preach and what constitutes preaching also find parallels in contemporary Church of England practice. See for example the Bishop of Gloucester's Occasional Paper on Worship Leading.

³⁰⁴ McGinn, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

³⁰⁵ Some of the practical outcomes of the Fourth Lateran Council are documented by Leonard E. Boyle, O.P., in 'The Fourth Lateran Council and Manuals of Popular Theology' in Thomas J. Heffernan (ed.), *The Popular Literature of Medieval England*, University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville, 1985, pp. 30-43.

guides for clergy were produced, with help for sermon preparation, and confession was linked with receiving the sacrament so as to provide more opportunities for instruction.³⁰⁶

Lay Learning: negative appraisal

Evaluation by scholars of these reforms and their subsequent developments falls into two camps: those who interpret lay initiatives as struggling to be more than ways of reproducing models of clerical learning and spirituality, and those who view the period as being a time of vigorous and vibrant growth in new forms of lay piety. On the negative side are scholars such as Vauchez and Nicholas Watson who argue that any top-down approach means that the laity are regarded as the recipients of the learning of the clergy rather than as those who generate meaning and theological insight from their own perspective and in their own terms. Vauchez articulates this in his summary of the later centuries of the period:

[most people] seem to have remained relatively indifferent to the religious programme that the clergy was trying to draft for them, a programme that was essentially an imitation of clerical practices and spirituality. In fact, everything seems to have been done as if the ultimate goal of catechesis was the clericalisation of the laity, not its advancement.³⁰⁷

This is a significant observation, suggesting as it does that ‘top down’ reform in the Middle Ages led to a clericalisation of the laity rather than the development of a distinctively lay spirituality or any concept of mutual learning. Vauchez defines this clericalisation in terms

³⁰⁶ See for example John Mirk’s *Instructions for Parish Priests* in E. Peacock (ed.), EETS 05; also John Shinnors and William J. Dohar (eds.), *Pastors and the Care of Souls in Medieval England*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1998. Maria Raskolnikov describes manuals of *sowlehele* playing both a descriptive and normative role in the psycho-spiritual relationship between priest and layperson in *Body Against Soul*, The Ohio State University Press, 2009.

³⁰⁷ Vauchez, op. cit., p. 105.

of the application of a model of living and praying developed by and for an educated, office-holding ecclesiastical elite to people whose life experience demanded a different kind of spirituality.³⁰⁸

Vauchez' judgement on the Fourth Lateran Council reforms is part of a wider interpretation of the development of the laity in the later Middle Ages, one for which he uses the metaphor of a thaw followed by a re-freeze. Throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, he identifies the removal of some key obstacles which had until then blocked lay access to an authentic religious life. One was war: the Church not only sanctioned but sanctified it through the Crusades. The second was manual labour, which came to be seen more and more as something intrinsically valuable and virtuous.³⁰⁹ The third was sex, as it became acceptable to be married and continent. This was the thaw. The re-freeze he sees as taking place throughout the fourteenth century, with the condemnations of the Beghards and Beguines from 1316-1323 signalling a new hardening of attitudes whereby the poor were increasingly viewed with suspicion, and flight from the world reasserted itself as the path to holy living. His conclusion is not cheerful: late medieval culture, 'torn between a Church in the process of clericalisation and a society just beginning to become secularised, proved unable to define a particularly Christian usage of the world for those living in it.'³¹⁰

Whatever the validity of such a general judgment, Vauchez' pessimistic evaluation does have some resonances with *Piers Plowman*, particularly the poem's struggle to 'define a

³⁰⁸ Something of this frustration is expressed by Hind Two, where the EFD authors constantly stress the validity of lay discipleship in its own right and seek a bottom-up model even as, ironically, the whole initiative and its name – Education for Discipleship – has come from above.

³⁰⁹ Though for the continuing ambivalence in attitudes towards the medieval peasant, see Paul Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant*, Stanford University Press, California, 1999.

³¹⁰ Vauchez, p. 267.

Christian usage of the world for those living in it.’ The field of folk with which the poem opens is not an illusory realm to be transcended but the place where salvation is to be worked out.³¹¹

Irrelevance and lack of awareness of the spiritual needs and resources of life in ‘the world’ is one charge; clerical attempts to control and foreclose lay piety is another. A politicised laity with confidence in their capacity to understand spiritual things and to generate their own insights into both social organisation and its theological underpinning was seen as a potential threat. In analysing texts from the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century, Nicholas Watson detects a desire to keep lay people in their place. Watson argues that in the Prologue to Nicholas Love’s *Mirror of the Blessed life of Jesus Christ*, Love sets out a series of binaries: on the one hand, the Bible, clerical learning, intellectual and theological complexity, spiritual maturity, advanced religious contemplation, Latin, and the divinity of Christ, and on the other, lay ignorance, intellectual simplicity, spiritual childishness and carnality, meditation, English, and Christ’s humanity. Watson sees this set of contrasting terms as having specific educational implications, establishing (and reinforcing, since Archbishop Arundel endorsed Love’s text) a hierarchy whereby the ‘lewed’ were to be passive and infantile, receiving the nourishment dispensed by the literate clergy. Watson goes on to argue that the use of the vernacular in *Piers Plowman* undoes those distinctions,

³¹¹ Anna Baldwin comments that ‘where Hilton looked for a contemplative charity in the soul, stirring it to love God above all, Langland is describing a practical charity, which makes men resemble Christ by behaving like him.’ Anna P. Baldwin, ‘The Tripartite Reformation of the Soul in *The Scale of Perfection*, *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman*’, in Marion Glasscoe (ed.), *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, D. S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1984, pp. 136-149, p. 146.

as well as making a theological point about incarnation by insisting on the fact of Christ's humanity involving him taking on the language of common people.³¹²

Watson goes so far as to argue that English is defined as the 'kynde langage' of England, functioning 'as a marker of universality very different from that attributed to Latin', the language of privilege and hierarchy.³¹³ He stresses the importance of writers like Langland in getting away from the notion that the vernacular was for simple people only, those incapable of higher thought processes and with basic spiritual needs which could be fulfilled by passive reception of the words of the clergy. Thus the spiritual is the political; Watson interprets Walter Hilton's Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* as a politically conservative text which 'discourages speculation, advocating a cultivated inner life of the feelings, not the reason... a scrupulously unpolitical version of the eremitic "ladder of holiness" which sets out to be 'a quasi-official statement of what was deemed appropriate for laypeople to believe'.³¹⁴ Although this may be a distortion of the deeper politics of mystical writing, which potentially can encourage resistance to unjust structures in the world, I agree with Watson that Hilton and Rolle's tendency not to engage with the world as a meaningful sphere of God's activity restricts their scope and encourages an individual pietism which is ultimately limited.

³¹² Nicholas Watson, 'Conceptions of the Word: The Mother Tongue and the Incarnation of God,' in Wendy Scase, Rita Copeland and David Lawton (eds.), *New Medieval Literatures*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1997, pp. 85-124.

³¹³ Nicholas Watson, 'Visions of Inclusion: Universal Salvation and Vernacular Theology in Pre-Reformation England,' *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27, 1997, pp. 145-187, p. 170.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 146-7.

Lay learning: the positives

Those scholars who see the development of lay piety in the period in a more positive light include Margaret Aston, Eamon Duffy and Miri Rubin. In response to interpretations which reinforce the perceived gulf between elite and popular religion Eamon Duffy argues for the emergence of the Book of Hours as ‘a bridging text, holding together rather than polarising the conventions of lay and clerical piety, the belief systems and devotional practices of educated and ignorant, rich and poor, orthodox and marginal.’³¹⁵ Duffy points out that although their contents were derived from the liturgy, they ‘also contained Latin and vernacular prayers much more directly reflective of lay concerns and aspirations.’³¹⁶ This is very much within the mainstream of clerical models of piety.³¹⁷ Duffy does raise the question as to whether the greater emphasis on individual prayer undermined corporate worship in the parish, but overall he affirms a positive overlapping between lay and clerical religious practice.

A more nuanced positive perspective is also offered by Miri Rubin, who argues for the development of a different model of learning, as exemplified by the Lay Folks’ Catechism of 1357, which was less about the acquisition of theological knowledge and understanding than about cultivating a particular spirituality:

³¹⁵ Eamon Duffy, ‘Elite and Popular Religion: The Book of Hours and Lay Piety in the Later Middle Ages’, *Studies in Church History 42: Elite and Popular Religion*, Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory (eds.), The Ecclesiastical History Society, Boydell, Woodbridge, 2006, pp. 140-161, p. 142.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 141

³¹⁷ A comparable phenomenon would be the publication by SPCK of the *Prayer Book for Lay People* in 2008. The book was advertised in the Church Times on 21st November 2008 with the strap-line: ‘Now lay people can have their own prayer book at home.’

The aim of manuals for the laity...was to build a horizon of images, a vocabulary of association, which would conjure each other, a train of symbols which followed from recurrent visual stimuli created by ritual or private reading.³¹⁸

Not only, in Rubin's argument, were lay people encouraged in a particular direction via guidebooks containing prayers and inculcating a set of ideas and practices, but there was also a need to anchor doctrines in the experiences of the everyday. Rubin suggests that this was done by means of the genre of the exemplum, widely used in sermons and popular literature.³¹⁹ Exempla, with their vivid vernacular energy, are not the product of scholarly culture, and they also played a role in forming lay spirituality.

Margaret Aston also construes things more positively, identifying a dialectical process in the late medieval church whereby lay demands and devotional activity did have an effect on the organised church: 'The religion of the people always amounted to a great deal more than a vulgarised reflection of the clerical elite, and the fact that some of these initiatives were declared heretical tells more of weakened church structures than it does of the nature of popular piety.'³²⁰ Rather than there being an unbridgeable gulf between clerical and popular practice and piety, Aston sees popular religious movements in the later Middle Ages as reflecting 'the interactions between two worlds: the clerical literate and the illiterate secular.' Although we only have records of the latter mediated through the writings of the former, Aston believes that the call for the renewal of the church came as much from below as above, such that it is possible to see this as

³¹⁸ Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, p. 105.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 108: 'Yet, whatever the effort put into teaching from parochial guidebooks which respected the basic doctrines and prayers, the effective dissemination of a set of ideas, symbols and practices could be achieved only through penetration into the domain of the daily, the usual, the habitual, through the demonstration of its relevance to the experiences which large groups of people lived.'

³²⁰ Margaret Aston, *Faith And Fire*, Hambledon Press, London and Rio Grande, 1993, p. 1.

very much the age of the laity...In a variety of ways, through the pious expressions and foundations of the orthodox and in the clamorous demands of the unorthodox, by retreating from the world and by trying to take it over, the lay people in the later middle ages made themselves and their religious needs more known.³²¹

Aston identifies the heart of popular religious movements as the search for direct spiritual experience rather than a desire for new organisational forms, building on a radical belief that gospel truths of evangelical poverty were given to the simple with an immediacy arising from experience rather than formal learning. Absolute poverty was a challenge to the organised church.³²² Aston indicates a situation which has some resonances with our very different age when she writes that ‘where ecclesiastical reformers were worried and tentative (admitting abuse and suggesting the need for more instruction) popular heretical movements pointed to radical solutions’, such as declaring that the only true image of Christ was man himself and that the only true form of pilgrimage was that ‘to poor men.’³²³

Vernacular theologies

Out of this melting pot of spiritual aspirations emerged what has become known as ‘vernacular theology’, a term coined relatively recently, and described by Bernard McGinn as ‘a more diffuse and ambiguous term than even the monastic theology that has been the

³²¹ Ibid., p. 23. Another location for the development and celebration of lay spirituality was the mystery plays.

³²² We see how this dilemma exercises Langland constantly in *Piers Plowman*, for example in B14.

³²³ Aston, op. cit., p. 24. A similar argument is put forward by Tony Corbett in *The Laity, the Church and the Mystery Plays*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2009. Corbett sees the mystery plays as an expression of ‘popular religion’, defining this on p. 31 as ‘the religion of the populace, the religion of the laity rather than the clergy’ which attempted to ‘escape the strictures of official church control, procedures or leadership and was a joyous, orthodox, alternative spirituality.’

subject of so many disputes.³²⁴ McGinn defines its primary distinguishing mark as ‘linguistic expression in the medieval vernacular tongue’, pointing out that the language in which any form of reflection comes to birth is an essential part of its being.³²⁵ He sees a continuity between vernacular theology and scholastic and monastic theology in that all three tried to hold together, in different ways, a deeper understanding of Christian faith and the love of God and neighbour; the differences lie ‘not only in audience, but also how it organised and presented its teaching.’³²⁶ Vernacular theology is expressed in literary genres such as sermons, poems, and dream visions, and in the words of Vincent Gillespie, its strength and resourcefulness ‘emerges precisely from its ability to recombine a wide spectrum of cognate theological discourses robustly and flexibly available in the mother tongue.’³²⁷

The use of the vernacular often acts as a microcosm for the wider struggle over lay and clerical identity, and one example is the Oxford debate as to the desirability of translating theological material, including the Bible, into the vernacular.³²⁸ In an article to which scholars have been responding ever since, Nicholas Watson outlines the major questions of the debate as being:

³²⁴ Bernard McGinn (ed.), *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics*, Continuum, New York, 1994, p. 6. The Introduction is called ‘Meister Eckhart and the Beguines in the Context of Vernacular Theology.’

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³²⁷ Vincent Gillespie ‘Vernacular Theology’ in Paul Strohm (ed.), *Middle English*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2007, pp. 401-420, p. 403.

³²⁸ See Daniel Birkholz, ‘The Vernacular Map: Re-Charting English Literary History’ in *New Medieval Literatures* Vol. 6, David Lawton and Wendy Scase (eds.), Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 11-78; Nicholas Watson, ‘Censorship and Cultural Change in Late Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel’s Constitutions of 1409,’ *Speculum* Vol. 70, No.4, October 1995, pp. 822-864.

the nature and capacity of English; the nature and capacity of the (mostly but not exclusively lay) readership of vernacular theology; the definition of truths that are “necessary” to know; and the role of the clergy as communicators or, alternatively, guardians of knowledge.³²⁹

Watson sums up the tensions thus: ‘pastoral concern for the laity is in an ambiguous relation to fear and contempt of the “populus vulgaris” and their desire to encroach on clerical turf.’³³⁰

Piers Plowman itself is within a tradition of vernacular theology which emerged in the fourteenth century and which included Julian of Norwich’s *Revelations of Divine Love*.

Gillespie asserts that the poem

enacts the moment in the literary history of medieval England when hermeneutic skills in the production and navigation of interior spiritual landscapes began to pass over from the ecclesial and clerically directed world of anchoritic and monastic readers to the much less securely regulated and less stable world of lay spiritual ambition.³³¹

In the wake of the two-stranded programme of reform following the Fourth Lateran Council, a rich mixed economy developed which included a range of vernacular theologies

³²⁹ Watson, op. cit., p. 846. Further writing on vernacular theologies includes Fiona Somerset and Nicholas Watson (eds.), *The Vulgar Tongue*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2003; Mishtooni Bose ‘Vernacular Philosophy and Making Orthodoxy’ in *New Medieval Literatures*, Vol. 7, David Lawton, Wendy Scase and Rita Copeland (eds.), Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 73-99.

³³⁰ Watson, op. cit., p. 844. Gillespie sums up the issues in a similar vein: ‘[the] anxiety here is that foolish and naïve reading of sophisticated and challenging scriptural and theological texts will generate error and heterodox belief, and that the institutional Church will lose its pastoral role as the centre of communal life and the source of communal belief, and its sacramental role as dispenser of grace and as vehicle for personal and collective salvation.’ Gillespie, op. cit., p. 412.

³³¹ Gillespie, op. cit., p. 407.

taking a variety of forms. It would be a mistake to characterise the period as being entirely dominated by a male clerisy to the extent that all other voices were stifled; *Piers Plowman* represents a tradition of challenge to any such possibility and draws together a number of strands of vernacular theology as they had developed by the late fourteenth century. Lay voices are heard within the poem, and in the figure of Piers Langland experiments with a model for discipleship who has both lay status and Christological significance.³³² The poem reflects debates familiar to anticlericalists and Lollards as well as employing devices and topoi from contemporary satire.

There are two important expressions of lay spirituality on which I want to touch before going on to examine in greater depth Langland's particular contribution to the lay/clerical debate. Both sit in complex relationship to ecclesiastically sanctioned sources of authority, and both resulted in some clashes with the church hierarchy; neither was confined to the laity. The two are mysticism and Lollardy, both of which were subversive in different ways of the lay/clerical divide. Each is a major focus of research in its own right, and can only be sketched out briefly here in the context of the chapter as a whole.

Mysticism and lay love and learning

Medieval mysticism covers a wide spectrum of movements and individuals who found different ways of negotiating their relationships with the church hierarchy, of reaching a wider audience through the written word, and of modelling lifestyles which conformed to

³³² Gillespie also sees Will as bridging the lay/clerical gap: 'As a cleric in minor orders, poised liminally between clergy and laity, Will's journey towards truth is at once a profound and challenging exercise in what Barbara Newman has recently called 'imaginative theology' and a progressive and sequential dramatisation of the difficulties and rewards of vernacular theology.' Gillespie, op. cit., p. 408.

their ideal of the first apostles. In the late twelfth century the idea that withdrawal from the world was necessary for true mystical experience was challenged as a succession of groups and individuals such as the beguines attempted to live outside the cloister and to insist that God could be found in the everyday experiences of the secular world. To some extent the mystical life was democratised and secularised at this time. Where the lives and texts of mystics are significant in my study is in their creation of a discourse not controlled by the (male) church or university hierarchy and existing in uneasy relationship to it, offering a space where those who had had little voice – often uneducated lay women – could develop new versions of authority. In this space – contested, shifting, often subversive – relationship between practical discipleship and Christian learning is explored in some intense and idiosyncratic ways.³³³

In terms of this chapter, the issue is the extent to which mystics and their writings enabled people to grapple with the challenge of creating new forms of holy lay life. My question is whether they were sufficiently world-affirming to do more than model yet another kind of elitist withdrawal, albeit one available to women and lay people. Vauchez does not believe that they did, concluding in the chapter ‘Mystical Sanctity at the time of the Avignon Papacy’:

The saintly woman became the last resort of the Church in the crisis that was shaking theological systems and institutions. Their prestige was momentarily reinforced as a result. But in the end, the lay condition was devalued by this

³³³ For a more detailed summary of medieval mysticism, see Bernard McGinn, ‘Love, Knowledge and Mystical Vision in Western Christianity: Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries’, *Church History* 56, p. 24.

evolution toward a conception of Christian perfection that was increasingly alien to temporal realities and life in society.³³⁴

Lollards, lay people and learning

A fear of lay people taking control of their own spiritual development and understanding of Scripture underlies the reactions of the Church hierarchy to Lollardy in the late fourteenth century, and thus makes Lollardy a useful case study in illustrating some of the dynamics of the lay/clerical issue.³³⁵ Lollardy was a complex phenomenon, with its origins in an academic context which then gathered momentum as a popular movement. Its spread, Janet Coleman argues, was largely due to the fact that Wyclif ‘combined theological, political and popular radicalism in a single programme of reform that was not only intellectually unified but also appealed beyond university circles.’³³⁶ Various studies of Langland have attempted to ascertain the nature of the poem’s relationship with Lollardy, and I will not repeat them here.³³⁷ It is however, necessary to establish which features of the wider Wycliffite and Lollard controversy inform the lay/clerical debate in *Piers Plowman*, and

³³⁴ Vauchez, p. 6.

³³⁵ A series of measures was issued between 1382-1409, of which the 1401 statute *De Haeretico Comburendo* provided for the burning of heretics. Archbishop Arundel’s *Constitutions* of 1407-9 attempted to control vernacular translations of the Bible and to prohibit unlicensed lay preaching. Scholars differ as to the extent to which the *Constitutions* were enforced and thus the effect they had; Mishtooni Bose, for example, argues that episcopal registers suggest only patchy enforcement, in Chapter Three, ‘Religious Authority and Dissent’, in Peter Brown (ed.), *Companion to Medieval Literature and Culture c1350-c1500*, Blackwell, 2007, pp. 40-55. For a contrasting view, see Nicholas Watson ‘Censorship and Cultural Change in Late Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel’s *Constitutions* of 1409’, *Speculum* Vol. 70, 1995, pp. 2-64.

³³⁶ Coleman, op. cit., p. 9.

³³⁷ See for example the special edition of the YLS 17, 2003, with ‘Langland and Lollardy’ as its theme; Christina von Nolcken’s article ‘Langland and Lollardy’ in the YLS 2, 1988, pp. 71-102; David Lawton ‘Lollardy and the *Piers Plowman* Tradition’ in *Modern Language Review* 76, 1981, pp. 780-93.

these cover several inter-related areas to do with hermeneutics, pedagogy, church order, and language. I will deal with each of these in turn.³³⁸

Firstly, hermeneutics. Central to what Kantik Ghosh calls Wycliffe's reclamation agenda was the project of reclaiming the Bible from a discourse of glossing, 'from contemporary academia and Church and the hermeneutic practices institutionalised therein.'³³⁹

Ghosh argues that Wycliffe's dislike of metaphor is because metaphor 'foregrounds the constructedness of linguistic meaning' where Wycliffe wants to stress the fixity and stability and determinateness of biblical meaning so that the Bible becomes a coherent system of signifiers informed by an accessible and clarifying divine will.' This impulse towards a hermeneutic which renders the scriptures as straightforwardly understood according to the literal sense raises as many questions as it resolves, as Ghosh acknowledges.³⁴⁰

Secondly, learning and pedagogy. One distinctive feature of Lollardy with regard to learning was its insistence on the capacity of the common people to read and understand the Scriptures in the vernacular. The General Prologue to the Lollard Bible, which was widely and systematically reproduced, insists that all that is required for a right understanding of

³³⁸ Kantik Ghosh identifies three central elements to the Wycliffite agenda: liberating the Bible from corrupt academia; making the Bible accessible to a non-learned readership; and returning to the primitive simplicity of the early church. Kantik Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 1. I am interpreting the phenomenon of Lollardy more widely as it shaped lay understandings in the four areas I have identified.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

³⁴⁰ 'By its unprecedented placing, at the centre of a scrutiny which was both academic and popular, of learned discourses of hermeneutic engagement with the most important text of medieval culture, it radically problematised issues fundamental to the very definition of Christianity, and to the perceived validity of the social, political and intellectual discourses traditionally enjoying its sanction.' Ghosh, p. 15.

the Scriptures is a right disposition of the heart.³⁴¹ Lollard literacy was an aspect of the movement's perceived sedition, since by removing the controls on the reading of Scripture, control over its interpretation was put under threat. Rita Copeland points out that Lollard dissent specifically identifies itself with particular pedagogical models and practices, from the production of vernacular translations and commentaries to the elaboration of teaching programmes and local projects of 'literacy acquisition.'³⁴² As she makes clear, this is a political act because 'pedagogy is the most political and politicised of discourses: the classroom is the theatre of political discipline and – in organised and even non-organised forms of resistance – of counter-discipline.'³⁴³

Thirdly, Lollardy had important implications for church order. Helen Barr points out that *Peirce the Ploughman's Crede*, a poem contemporary with *Piers Plowman*, ends with a ploughman standing in a field reciting the Creed in English, sending a clear message that 'authority is wrested from the representatives of the institutionalised church and vested in the words of a member of the laity.'³⁴⁴ Wyclif's writing explicitly challenged the structure of the church and the scope of its temporal dominion; popular Lollardy was a threat because it replaced the clerical hierarchy as the source of spiritual authority with universal lay access to Scripture in the vernacular. Barr again: 'The definition of true holy church as the congregation of the faithful predestined for salvation seriously weakened the

³⁴¹ *The General Prologue to the Wycliffite Bible*, extract 1.15 in Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor, Ruth Evans (eds.), *The Idea of the Vernacular*, University of Exeter Press, Exeter, 1999, pp. 24-32.

³⁴² Rita Copeland 'Childhood, Pedagogy, and the Literal sense: From Late Antiquity to the Lollard Heretical Classroom', *New Medieval Literatures* Vol. 1, 1997, pp. 125-156.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

³⁴⁴ Helen Barr, *Signes and Sothe: Language in the Piers Plowman Tradition*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1991, p. 49.

importance of the material church on earth as a site for authorised meanings.³⁴⁵ Fiona Somerset likewise identifies one problem with Wycliffite tracts as being that they had ‘the potential to redistribute intellectual capital by teaching lay audiences information previously inaccessible to them,’ the ultimate result of which might be the “disendowment” of previously exclusively clerical intellectual skills.³⁴⁶

Fourthly, the phenomenon of Lollardy raised questions about language and discourse; not only how the Scriptures were to be interpreted and by whom, but the language in which debate about religious truth was to be conducted. Barr’s claim that the key tenets of Wycliffite thought ‘struck at the heart of institutionalised control over discursive practices and positions’ well sums up what was at stake. During the period 1370-1430 theological debate – for example, debate about the Eucharist – moved from Latin to the vernacular, raising all sorts of questions about the appropriateness of its being conducted in the unsophisticated language of the laity.³⁴⁷ Thus the superiority of Latin as the language in which the central mysteries of the Christian faith should be expressed and defined began to be challenged, and as a counter-balance to the clerical monopoly on doctrine, Lollardy developed what Anne Hudson calls its own ‘sect vocabulary’: a certain set of recurring words and phrases which constitute a counter-discourse to that of official ecclesiastical discourse.³⁴⁸

Lollard ideas and praxis are important in any discussion of *Piers Plowman* and lay/clerical distinctions, not least because they highlight issues of language and discourse and insist on

³⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 99.

³⁴⁶ Somerset, *Clerical Discourse and Lay Audience*, op. cit., p. 5.

³⁴⁷ Aston, op. cit., Chapter Two: ‘Wycliffe and the Vernacular.’

³⁴⁸ Anne Hudson, ‘A Lollard Sect Vocabulary’ in *Lollards and Their Books*, Hambledon Press, London, 1985.

asking what kind of language best represents and embodies truth about God. Lollardy reminds us of the danger that ecclesiastically sanctioned forms of learning and scholarship may result in meaning being controlled by the clerical few. Metaphor and sophisticated figural language may become elitist and put the text beyond the interpretive reach of the ‘unlearned.’ The Lollard response to this danger was to try and reclaim the literal sense of Scripture as being truth, and to develop a vernacular counter-discourse. Langland, as we shall see later in this chapter, takes a very different approach to some of the same issues of language and meaning, celebrating the polysemic nature of language as a means of truth-telling rather than seeking to reduce words to their literal meaning – if such a thing is ever possible.³⁴⁹ The poem’s macaronic form means that it refuses to be placed as either ‘lered’ or ‘lewed’, but holds both in tension.³⁵⁰ Another aspect of this balance is *Piers Plowman*’s particular relationship with its audience, seeking to address not an elite readership but the ‘commune’ as a whole in a manner characteristic of a genre identified by Anne Middleton as ‘public poetry.’³⁵¹

Piers Plowman finds its place among the range of vernacular literary responses to the complex context outlined above. Langland engages with the various strands of that context in multiple ways in the course of the poem, and it is to the poem itself and its engagement

³⁴⁹ Barr *Signes and Sothe*, op. cit., develops this point in detail in Chapter Two.

³⁵⁰ For a discussion of the structural and theological purpose of the Latin quotations in *Piers Plowman*, see John A. Alford, ‘The Role of the Quotations in *Piers Plowman*’, *Speculum* Vol. 52, No.1, January 1977, pp. 80-99.

³⁵¹ Anne Middleton, ‘The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II,’ *Speculum* Vol. 53, No. 1, 1978, pp. 96-112. Middleton argues that in contrast to the privatised love narratives of courtly romance, the outward looking, worldly focus of poets such as Gower, Chaucer and Langland engages with the historical realities of social duty, responsibility and reform. The existence of a varied readership for *Piers Plowman* and its grouping with a range of other manuscripts is in itself evidence of a breaking down of the lay/clerical division.

with the question of clerical and lay learning and authority that I will now turn.³⁵² I will examine the way in which Langland's use of the different meanings of *clergie* enables him to tease out some of the questions to do with clerical and lay status; explore how the figure of Piers is able to break down that particular binary; and propose that careful attention to language is seen by Langland as a key part of the clerkly task.

Piers Plowman: Clergie

I indicated in my introduction to the chapter that Langland's use of the word *clergie* is central to exploring how he tackles issues of lay learning. In its fourteenth century context, *clergie* is a word with a threefold meaning, which the Concise Dictionary of Middle English gives as: the clergy; the clerical profession; book-learning.³⁵³ Thus the clerkly estate is to do with a particular kind of learning within late feudal society, such that definitions of learning itself, and of those whose estate in society is to acquire and pass on learning, are conflated in the word *clergie*.

Fiona Somerset highlights the centrality of these relationships in *Piers Plowman*, pointing out the difficulty of establishing one clear Langlandian perspective: 'The poem that provides the most sustained vernacular consideration of the terms and possibilities of 'lewed' and 'clergie' in late medieval England is at the same time extraordinarily circumspect about the position from which it views them.'³⁵⁴ Not only is there explicit discussion within the poem as to the merits of learning and the capacity of those charged

³⁵² For further discussion on the importance of Langland's engagement with issues of learning, see John A. Alford, 'Langland's Learning', YLS 9, 1995, pp. 1-8.

³⁵³ A.L Mayhew and Walter W. Skeat (eds.), *A Concise Dictionary of Middle English*, Kessinger Publishing, 1988, p. 151.

³⁵⁴ Somerset, *Clerical Discourse and Lay Audience*, op. cit., p. 22.

with its dissemination to live up to their responsibility, but the form of the poem itself enacts a problematic relationship with *clergie*; it both subverts and reinforces its own clerkly status by using the vernacular whilst revealing knowledge of scholarly debate.³⁵⁵

Somerset again:

the poem's discontinuous narrative of multiple subjects recurs again and again to the problem of what it means for the "lewed" (lay/uneducated/stupid) to have "clergie" (clergy/learning), and finally its reflections on this point lead the poem as close as it ever gets to reflecting on its own project of disseminating "clergie" in the vernacular to an unprecedented audience.³⁵⁶

Thus the poem's engagement with issues of *clergie* works on multiple levels, and the final section of this chapter will explore what this richness offers to contemporary forms of debate within the Church of England.

Clergie comes into play in three main ways within the poem. Firstly, and most obviously, *Clergie* appears as a personification, briefly in the Prologue and then again in B10. In the latter instance, he interacts with Will as part of a sequence of encounters with figures from

³⁵⁵ The harrowing of hell scene and the subsequent meeting between the four daughters of God provide us with several glimpses of Langland's own education and the way in which he incorporates it into his re-telling of the great narrative of cross and resurrection. As Jill Mann points out, the writing of Cato, whose proverb about the beguiling of the beguiler is cited at B18.355, was part of the basics of a medieval education. Similarly, B18.410-14 is a quotation from another core text, Alan of Lille's 'Parabolae'. Mann sees Langland's use of these school boy proverbs as demonstrating 'the union of the clerkly and the experiential' in a medieval context where 'learning epitomised experience and experience validated learning.' Jill Mann, ' "He knew Nat Catoun": Medieval School-Texts and Middle English Literature,' in Jill Mann and Maura Nolan (eds.), *The Text in the Community*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 2006, p. 66. The right use of *clergie*, as exemplified here, involves the making of connections which illuminate both doctrine and experience, which enable the narrative of salvation to meet the worlds both of formal learning and of daily social life. *Piers Plowman* does not set out to overturn or undermine established Christology or ecclesiology; what it does is to re-imagine them in a way which potentially subverts institutional understanding and practice.

³⁵⁶ Somerset, op. cit., p. 18.

whom Will seeks guidance. Secondly, in more fragmented and ambivalent ways, references are made to *clergie* as a kind of learning, often with an awareness of its political positioning and implications. Thirdly, *clergie* as a designation of those in holy orders recurs in the form of the various clerical figures who appear in the poem and who at times are subject to stinging critique. I will deal with each of these manifestations of *clergie* in turn

Clergie: the personification

Clergie comes into play as a personification in Passus B10, in a scene within the middle section of the poem, during which Will is seeking guides in his quest for Dowel, Dobet and Dobest. One aspect of this section of the poem is Will's wrestling with *clergie*, with his attempt to separate the benefits and importance of learning from the shortcomings of actual members of the clergy. Part of the texture of the poem is the challenge of discerning whether Will's remarks at any given point are a function of his own spiritual immaturity or whether they contain a valid critique. At the start of B10 Will, who has been listening to the teaching of Wit throughout B9, meets and is harangued by Dame Studie who then sends him to Clergie, her cousin, married to Scripture. When Will asks directions, he is given a set of allegorical instructions beginning thus:

‘Aske the heigh wey,’ quod she,’ hennes to Suffre-
Bothe-wele-and-wo, if that thow walt lerne.’ (B10.159-60).

(‘Ask for the highway,’ she said, ‘from here to ‘endure
both plenty and suffering’, if you want to learn.’)

Already there is a sense that *clergie* is not mere book-learning but something that requires a particular disposition to learn and to endure difficulty.

Clergie, who finally speaks from line 230-327, begins by putting discussion of belief into the context of corporate institutional faith:

‘It is a commune lyf...on Holy Chirche to bileve

With alle the articles of the feith that falleth to knowe.’ (B10.230-231)

(‘It is a way of life common to all to believe in Holy Church

along with all the articles of faith which it is proper to know.’)

In the passage that follows Clergie is not merely the mouthpiece of the clergy as an estate, rather a thoughtful commentator on the interrelationship between belief, the practical Christian life and its corporate dimension. He is aware of the problematic dynamic between formal learning and the accessibility of faith to all:

‘All the clerkes under Crist ne koude this assoille,

But thus it bilongeth to bileve to lewed that willen dowel.

For hadde nevere freke fyn wit the feith to dispute,

Ne man hadde no merit, myghte it ben ypreved:

Fides non habet meritum bi humana racio prebet experimentum.’ (B10.245-248)

(All the clerks under Christ could not explain this,

but belief belongs to the uneducated who desire to do well,

for no one has ever had an intellect fine enough to demonstrate the truth of faith by argument,

nor would it be to anyone's merit if it could be tested:

'no merit attaches to believing those things that human reason can put to the test of experience.')

Clergie spends a considerable amount of space in the passage warning Will – who at this stage in the poem is a fierce critic of others – about the dangers of being too quick to condemn, twice citing the Matthean proverb about the one with a log in his own eye seeking to remove the mote from the eye of another (B10.261-63; B10.274-5).

His advice seems to be that those who criticise negligent priests should take care that they are themselves beyond reproach:

'Forthi, ye correctours, claweth heron, and correcteth first yowselve,

And thane mowe ye manliche seye, as David made the Sauter:

Existimasti inique quod ero tui similes: Arguam te,

Et statuam contra faciem tutam.

And thane shal burel clerkes ben abashed to blame yow or to greve,

And carpen noght as thei carpe now, and calle yow doumbe houndes' (B10.281-285)

(Therefore, you who correct others, get hold of this and correct yourselves first, and then you can say courageously, like David who wrote the Psalter,

Thou thoughtest unjustly that I should be like to thee; but I will reprove thee, and set before thy face.

Then uneducated clerks will be ashamed to blame you or trouble you and won't talk as they do now, calling you dumb dogs.)

The fact that clerks are capable of referring to the laity as ‘dourme houndes’ does not suggest a relationship of mutual respect, rather one of contempt, and it is whilst acknowledging this that Clergie urges critics of the clergy to take responsibility for their own spiritual standing.

With a nostalgic reference to the calm of the cloister, Clergie sets up a contrast between an ideal vision of a harmonious learning community:

‘al is buxomnesse there and bokes, to rede and to lerne’ (B10.300)

(‘all is obedience there, and books for reading and learning’)

and the current situation where Religion ‘is a rydere, a romere by streets’ (a rider, one who wanders the streets). Clergie articulates an awareness which recurs elsewhere in the poem of the complex socio-economic changes which threaten a conservative model of religious organisation and which potentially undermine *clergie* itself: all will be devalued by being sucked into the new economic order, which Langland presents not so much as an order as the sanctioning of unfettered greed and the corruption of central spiritual concepts (see for example Passus 2 and 3 where the dealings with Lady Mede unfold). As I discuss elsewhere, Langland depicts the ways in which new economic energies are changing social relations through embodied encounters.³⁵⁷

Will’s anti-clerical diatribe in B10.369-472 provides the counter-voice to the reasonable words of Clergie. In rebellious mode, Will quotes Scripture to prove that Christ never

³⁵⁷ For an analysis of money, gender and language in Piers *Plowman*, see Diane Cady, ‘Symbolic Economies’, in Strohm, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-141.

commanded *clergie* (B10.439-449). His denunciation builds up to a climax in lines 455-472 as he passionately refutes the value of *clergie*, defined by him as sterile dependence on books in opposition to the pure faith and practice of the unlearned:

Arn none rather yravysshed fro the right bileve
Than are thise konnynge clerkes that konne manye bokes,
Ne none sooner saved, ne sadder of believe,
Than plowmen and pastours and povere commune laborers,
Souteres and shepherdes- swiche lewed juttres
Percen with a Paternoster the paleys of hevne
And passen purgatorie penaunceleess at hir hennes partyng
Into the blisse of paradys for hir pure bileve,
That inparfitly here knewe and ek lyvede. (B10.454-462)

(No one is more likely to be seduced away from orthodox faith than these clever clerks that know lots of books; and no one is sooner saved or more constant in belief than ploughmen and herdsmen and poor common labourers, cobblers and shepherds – such ignorant people pierce the palace of heaven with an ‘Our Father’ and pass through purgatory without punishment when they die into the bliss of paradise because of their sheer faith, even though their knowledge and life here were imperfect.)

The alliterative line here comes into its own as the plosive ‘p’ sounds build up to express Will’s indignation, culminating in the image of the simple prayer piercing the palace of

heaven. That Langland does not necessarily endorse Will's sentiments becomes apparent in Scripture's scornful response at the beginning of B11: '*Multi multa sciunt et seipsos nesciunt.*' ('Many people know many things but do not know themselves.') Without greater self-knowledge, it is implied, Will's position is mere bravado and defence against the hard work of self-examination. Yet the passion of the poetry at the end of B10 suggests a tension which is not easily resolved.

This tension is re-visited in B13 when Will, Conscience and Patience dine with the Doctor of Divinity, whose lack of spiritual credibility reinforces the anti-clerical undercurrent which is never far from the surface. Clergie reappears, and adds another layer of complexity by failing to conform to any stereotype which might reinforce notions of the futility or corruption of learning. When asked to contribute his definition of Dowel, Dobert and Dobest after the Doctor of Divinity has offered his, Clergie gives a reply which points forward to the re-definition of such schemes in the person of Piers:

For oon Piers the Plowman hath impugned us alle,
And set alle sciences at a sop save love one;
And no text ne taketh to mayntene his cause
But *Dilige Deum* and *Domine qui habitabit*;
And seith that Dowel and Dobet arn two infinites,
Whiche infinties with a feith fynden out Dobest,
Which shal save mannes soule – thus seith Piers the Plowman. (B13.123-129)

(For one Piers the Plowman has impugned us all,
and disregarded all branches of learning except love alone;
and he takes no text to support his cause

but *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God and Lord who shall dwell in they tabernacle;*
and says that Do-well and Do-best are two infinites,
which infinites with the help of faith will discover Do-best,
which will save man's soul – that's what Piers the Plowman says.)

The concept of *clergie*, it seems, is relativised by Piers, and Clergie is both aware of the fact and embraces it. Piers is not presented as an upstart rival, but as an equal whose insight is welcomed and taken seriously. Throughout this scene, as John Burrow notes, Clergie is presented as being more flexible and open than one might expect.³⁵⁸ Despite his initial scepticism when Conscience announces that he is leaving with Patience to learn more by means of being a pilgrim – he offers to expound the Scriptures to Conscience if it is more learning that he desires (B13.183-187) – and despite Conscience's parting shot that he would rather 'have patience parfitliche than half thi pak of bokes' (B13.201), they part on good terms. It seems that each is able to acknowledge the value of Patience's pilgrimage and their own respective roles within the wider project of reforming all of society.³⁵⁹ The passage exemplifies the poem's ongoing tension between affirming and challenging *clergie* as Will attempts to establish how *clergie* fits within the pilgrim quest for truth and right living. These scenes illustrate well the dialogical dynamic of the poem's exploration of the issues surrounding lay access to, and articulation of, spiritual truth.

³⁵⁸ John Burrow, *Langland's Fictions*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993, p. 53: Burrow sees Clergie in this scene as being 'aware of the learned disciplines that he represents, and open to voices from beyond their range.'

³⁵⁹ Burrow, op. cit: there is 'no question of a triumph for Clergy here: Conscience, as he sets off with Patience, carries the poem with him. Yet neither is Clergy a mere clerical organisation man, for established learning does have its part to play. The fiction here perfectly expresses both sides of the case.' Burrow's thesis is that Langland is most effective in holding together the tension of different ideas when he enacts them fictionally, as in the B13 leave-taking scene, rather than when he has a character discuss them in a more abstract way (see p. 4).

Clergie: the idea and practice of learning

This outline of the role played by the personified figure of Clergie leads us into the wider definition of *clergie* not as a partisan voice representing the interests of one estate but as a much broader conceptual category. *Clergie* as a concept plays a key role in the poem, and the lexical cluster clerk/clerkly/clergie/clergial recurs throughout. A.V.C. Schmidt's *The Clerkly Maker* explores many aspects of *clergie* through the interpretive lens of the poet as both literary maker and member of the estate of clergy.³⁶⁰ A good deal of Schmidt's book is to do with the idea of 'makynge' – of the right use of words and with the social responsibility attendant upon the writer, themes taken up in a number of scholarly works.³⁶¹ Schmidt, an editor of successive versions of the B text, uses his detailed knowledge of the text to make connections between different groups of words and to draw out their ethical and theological significance, as for example in his analysis of the words 'construing' and 'kenning.' Part of the clerkly vocation is to handle words well and truthfully, and Schmidt sees this as one of the poem's preoccupations. As a 'clerk' himself, Langland is interrogating his own vocation and what its right fulfilment might look like.³⁶²

³⁶⁰ A.V.C. Schmidt, *The Clerkly Maker*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1987.

³⁶¹ See for example Gillian Rudd, *Managing Language in Piers Plowman*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1997; Stephen Justice and Kathryn Kirby-Fulton (eds.), *Written Work*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1997.

³⁶² This is explored in detail in Anne Middleton, 'William Langland's "Kynde Name": Authorial Signature and Social Identity in Late Fourteenth-century England' in Lee Patterson (ed.), *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain, 1380-1530*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1990, pp. 15-82. Middleton posits that part of the poem's complexity and richness comes from the extra dimension which is the self-positioning of Will throughout. Will is presented as a semi-clerical figure but his own status vis a vis *clergie* in all its range of meanings is unclear.

The poem uses different techniques in its handling of *clergie* in the Visio and the Vita. In the Visio, there are frequent satirical mentions of clerks and their shortcomings, as will be shown in more detail in the next section, and there is relatively little discussion of *clergie* as a more abstract concept. In the Vita, however, there is a turn towards more conceptual debate, and from B8 onwards *clergie* appears more as an issue to be interrogated than as a social category to be satirised. This is apparent in B10, as has already been observed, and can be observed again in B12, where Imaginatif devotes most of B12.64-295 to a defence of *clergie*. The section opens with an acknowledgment both of the importance of *clergie* and its limitations:

‘Clergie and kynde wit cometh of sighte and techyng,

As the Book bereth witnesses to burnes that kan rede:

Quod scimus loquimur, qod vidimus testamur.

Of *quod scimus* cometh clergie, a konnyng of hevене,

And of *quod vidimus* cometh kynde wit, of sighte of diverse peple.

Ac grace is a gifte of God, and of greet love spryngeth;

Knew nevere clerk how it cometh forth, ne kynde wit the weyes:

Nescit aliquis unde venit aut quo vadit &c.

‘Ac yet is clergie to comende, and kynde wit bothe,

And namely clergie for Cristes love, that of clergie is roote. (B12.64-71)

(Learning and native wit come from observation,

as the Book bears witness to those who can read:

‘we speak what we know, and we testify to what we have seen.’

Learning comes from ‘what we know’, a knowledge of heaven,

and from 'what we have seen' comes native wit, from the observation of various people.

But grace is a gift of God, and springs from great love;
no clerk ever knew its origins or native wit its ways:

But thou knowest not whence he cometh and whither he goeth.

But yet both learning and native wit are commended,
and particularly learning for the love of Christ, who is the source of all true learning.)

This is a balanced account of the origins, role and scope of *clergie*, followed up as an illustration with an interpretation of the story in John of the woman taken in adultery. In Imaginatif's version, 'Crist of his curtesie thourgh clergie hir saved' (B12.77) (Christ out of compassion saved her through learning). Imaginatif argues that when Jesus wrote on the ground, those who accused the woman knew themselves to be more guilty than she was, such that 'the clergie that there was comforted the woman' (B12.81) (the learning that was there comforted the woman). Thus *clergie* brings both challenge and comfort. Imaginatif goes on to affirm the value of *clergie* and *kynde wit*

as mirours to amenden our defautes,

And lederes for lewed men and for lettred bothe. (B12.95-6)

(as mirrors to mend our faults,

and leaders for uneducated and educated alike.)

The purpose of Imaginatif's speech, as he makes clear in B12.156-9, is to correct Will's outburst about the redundancy of learning. He goes on to illustrate his assertions about the

value of learning with a story of the two men who fall in the Thames, one of whom has learned to swim, the other who has not.³⁶³ Again the limits of *clergie* are stressed as Imaginatif proceeds to describe Kynde as the one who alone can answer questions beyond the human capacity for knowing (B12.225-235), whilst reinforcing the necessity of learning and its benefits (B12.270-74). This is the Passus which most explicitly addresses *clergie* in a positive way, drawing out its different aspects and putting it in the context of other human faculties such as kynde wit.³⁶⁴

Clergie: positive force within the poem

Clergie is thus more than a synonym for learning in the abstract. Nicolette Zeeman, who stresses the positive value placed on *clergie*, argues that as Langland uses it, it is equivalent to the Latin term *doctrina*: ‘It refers to the revealed and its dissemination, and does so in pastoral and pedagogic terms. It represents a structure of understanding and practices that includes diverse members of the church and cuts across many levels and practices of faith.’³⁶⁵ Zeeman interprets *clergie* as encompassing both Christian teaching and the exemplary life, arguing that its range of possible meanings enhances its effectiveness as a term which crosses the Latin/vernacular divide: ‘In fact, given that most teaching was performed orally, the linguistic dimension of *clergie* may cement this pedagogic connection;

³⁶³ For a more detailed discussion of the role of Imaginatif, see Ralph Hanna III, ‘Langland’s Imaginatif: Images and the Limits of Poetry’, in Jeremy Dimmick, James Simpson and Nicolette Zeeman (eds.), *Images, Idolatry and Iconoclasm in Late Medieval England*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, pp. 81-94. See also Hugh White, ‘Langland’s Imaginatif, Kynde and the Benjamin Major’, *Medium Aevum* Vol. 55, No. 2, 1986, pp. 241-248, and Mary Carruthers, ‘Imaginatif, Memoria, and “The Need for Critical Theory” in *Piers Plowman* Studies’, *YLS* 9, 1995, pp. 103-120.

³⁶⁴ For an analysis of Kynde Wit, see Gerald Morgan, ‘The Meaning of Kynde Wit, Conscience and Reason in the First Vision of *Piers Plowman*’, *Modern Philology* Vol. 84, No.4, May 1987, pp. 351-358.

³⁶⁵ Nicolette Zeeman, *Piers Powman and the Medieval Discourse of Desire*, op. cit., p. 142.

clergie may be an especially apt term for the mediatory ‘word’ of Christian teaching, disseminated by clerks with their Latin language.³⁶⁶ Zeeman notes *Clergie*’s association with Scripture, seeing them as an important pair:

Langland’s *clergie* and *scripture* refer primarily to ‘Christian teaching and its texts’; they represent a pastorally and practically oriented Christian *doctrina* that demands willed assent and active participation from the individual. *Clergie* and *scripture* can involve advanced contemplation and theological scholarship, but they need not, as once again Langland’s terminology is inclusive, cutting across institutional divides.³⁶⁷

Zeeman makes a persuasive case for *clergie* as a uniting term which can bridge the learned and unlearned divide. Her approach emphasises the practical pedagogical dimension which is never far from Langland’s mind.³⁶⁸ Acknowledging that practices of Christian teaching and learning were a source of anxiety, she discusses the ways in which related terms such as *sapientia*, *disciplina*, *doctrina*, ‘represent widespread medieval theories about continuities of practice between scholars, teachers and the laity.’³⁶⁹ *Clergie* encompasses all of these dimensions and keeps them in play within the poem, refusing to be restricted to formal learning undertaken by one estate. In Zeeman’s reading, Will’s ambivalence towards *clergie* is part of the poem’s dynamic of loss and desire, a way of subjecting the categories of volition and cognition to constant examination and of exploring the ways in

³⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 139.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 132.

³⁶⁸ For example, Zeeman disagrees with the argument that the poem’s middle section is best understood as anti-institutional critique; rather, ‘the terms and figures with which Langland represents understanding derive primarily from psychology and the phenomenology of practical and personal experience in the world.’ Zeeman, op. cit., p. 23.

³⁶⁹ Zeeman, op. cit., pp. 135-6. See also Zeeman, ‘“ Studying” in the Middle Ages – and in *Piers Plowman*’, *New Medieval Literatures* Vol. 3, 2000, David Lawton, Wendy Scase, Rita Copeland (eds.), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, pp. 185-212.

which the will oscillates between embracing and avoiding the object of its desire. In this reading, the problem is not *clergie's* incapacity to enable the will to act ethically and desire rightly, but the will's tendency to sin in the form of avoiding the hard work of study, discipline, and self-knowledge.

Clergie: of limited use

Clergie is also interpreted as a key conceptual category by Britton J. Harwood, who is more interested in *clergie* as an epistemological category than as an estate/vocation. In an early article Harwood focuses on what he terms the poem's 'Third Vision' (B8.67-B12.293) whose theme he identifies as ways of knowing. He interprets *clergie* in terms of *allegoria*, a faculty which makes connections and which is conscious of similitudes, a kind of philosophical concept with which Langland experiments in the poem's epistemological quest.³⁷⁰ *Clergie*, in this reading, should be the power which unlocks the Scriptures, as it has its roots in Christ's love.

Harwood argues that despite its potential, *clergie* is ultimately of little benefit to Will: 'like reason, wit, thought, study and kind knowing, clergy as a mode of knowledge does not – at last on his own admission – offer the dreamer the vision of God.'³⁷¹ Harwood traces this to a wider cultural and epistemological shift whereby (partly as a result of Ockhamist nominalism) allegory has lost its capacity to reveal Christ. A way of knowing which depends on similitude depends on clergy themselves performing the deeds of love which open up the allegorical sequence to Christ himself. When this fails, and when confidence in

³⁷⁰ Britton J. Harwood, "'Clergye'" and the Action of the Third Vision in *Piers Plowman*, *Modern Philology* Vol. 70, No. 4, May 1973, pp. 79-90, p. 283.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

the existence of universals is undermined, *clergie* loses its capacity to lead to Christ. In his later *Piers Plowman and the Problem of Belief* Harwood develops this argument, whilst tracing *clergie*'s power as a concept, particularly in Imaginatif's speech in B12.

Harwood's insights, although they tend to ignore the poem's insistence on being rooted in human social structures, are valuable in that they emphasise the importance of the poem's epistemological dimension. As I will go on to argue, it is not primarily the category of *clergie* itself which enables Langland to transcend the lay/clerical binary, but the creation of the figure of Piers himself and his capacity to hold together the various meanings of *clergie*. Where this assumes epistemological importance is in the fact that Langland chooses to embody this insight within the poem in the form of a human signifier rather than a conceptual category, as will be explored more fully towards the end of this chapter. It is Piers who, as the ultimate metaphor, enables the lay/clerical division to be collapsed and re-visioned.

Clergie and the clergy in Piers Plowman

The problem with construing *clergie* as a conceptual category capable of resolving various theological and epistemological dilemmas is that it fails to take into account the problem of the clergy themselves, to which the poem obstinately returns. *Piers Plowman* is ambivalent about the ordained clergy and relevance of their learning to the needs of those lay people who, like Haukyn the Active man in Passus B13 and 14, struggle to be disciples in a world which offers no easy answers. This ambivalence is apparent from the Prologue onwards, where alongside the relatively positive figure of *Clergie*, Langland includes a number of anti-clerical asides, and throughout the poem clerical figures are the subject of satirical

attack (for example, the grotesque Doctor of Divinity in B13) as well as speaking a certain amount of sense (as does the ‘lewed vicory’ in B 19).³⁷²

The first area of unease about the clergy concerns the way in which they have become a financial drain on the laity. One of the reasons for anti-clerical feeling in the 1380’s was the debate about clerical dominium, which was linked to disputes about the desirability of evangelical poverty.³⁷³ At B Prol.116 Clergie is introduced as a personification of the clerical estate alongside the other representative figures of the king and knighthood. The clergy, the knights and the king are described as arranging the social order such that the common people must provide for them, in which context the labour of the plowman is mentioned (B Prol.116-120).

The Kyng and Knyghthod and Clergie bothe
Casten that the Commune sholde hem communes fynde.
The Commune contrived of Kynde Wit craftes,
And for profit of the peple plowman ordeyned
To tilie and to travaille as trewe lif asketh. (B Prol. 116-120)

The King and knighthood and Clergie both
Arranged that the Commons should provide food for them.
The Commons devised skills by means of natural sense/native wit,
And established ploughmen for the good of all the people

³⁷² For a more in-depth discussion of critiques of the clergy, see Wendy Scase, *Piers Plowman and the New Anti-clericalism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989. Also pertinent is Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Reformist Apocalypticism and Piers Plowman*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, which argues for *Piers Plowman* sharing certain generic qualities with reformist prophecy, in particular its concern with the reform of the clergy.

³⁷³ See Scase, *op. cit.*, Chapter 4: ‘Charity: the ground of anti-clericalism.’

To till and labour as an honest life demands.

Langland does not commit himself at this point in the poem to any more explicit criticism than the sly hint indicated in the pun on Commons and commons and the implication that common life has as its end provision for knights and clergy by means of agricultural labour. The passage could be read as a straightforward endorsement of a conservative feudal order.

Langland's critique does not extend to arguing that clerics should hold no possessions; rather he contents himself with some fairly standard jibes throughout the first four passus at greedy clerks who seek their own comfort or advancement rather than the common good. Various orders of clergy are targets of criticism, for example parish priests complaining that they want an easy life in London (B Prol. 83-86), and bishops abandoning their duty to serve the poor in order to curry favour in the capital (B Prol.87-99). These are instances of vocational failure through the lure of money or preferment; more insidious are the descriptions of a large scale corruption of those holding clerical office by the personified figure of Meed (see Chapter Six for a fuller exploration of the role of Meed). When at B3.11-15 Clergie gives permission for everyone at Westminster to comfort Meed and to legitimate her, clerks are among those who come to cheer her up, declaring

‘For we ben thyne owene

For to werche thi wille the while thow might laste.’ (B3.27-8)

(for we are your own

for you to work your will on as long as you are here.)

‘Werche’ and ‘wille’ function within the poem as key indices of right volition and praxis; to pledge them to Meed is a clear betrayal of clerical calling. Meed rewards the clerks, saying,

‘Shal no lewdnesses lette the clerke that I lovye,
That he ne worth first avaunced for I am biknowen
Ther konnynges clerkes shukl klokke bihynde.’ (B3.32-4)

(No ignorance will hold back the clerk I favour;
he will find advancement on account of my influence,
while more learned clerks limp behind.)

This forms part of the pattern of the first four passus whereby Meed attempts to corrupt both language and learning until challenged by Conscience in B3.120-169.³⁷⁴

Examples of critical comments on the clergy and their conduct are thus not difficult to find in the *Visio*, but they also occur in the *Vita*, albeit with a somewhat different focus. One of the most sustained critiques of clergy conduct comes from *Dame Studie* in B10, where a series of accusations are made about their failings: they are making a mockery of theological dispute while the poor sit neglected and hungry at their gate (B10.51-61); they lack sincerity, in contrast to the humble in heart (B10.59-70); they cause people to lose their faith (B10.103-116). This could be seen merely as echoing hostile sentiments which

³⁷⁴ David Aers sees some of the tension arising due to the incompatibility of the conventional model of church and society with the emerging economic order. In B2, for example, Aers interprets the narrative as depicting the church being secularised as it takes on the market practices and competitive outlook of the emergent economic matrix of the late fourteenth century. Aers, *Chaucer, Langland and the Creative Imagination*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1980.

were current, were it not for the fact that such importance attaches to *clergie* within the poem. It matters that *clergie* in all its range of meanings is being truthfully practised and embodied. Schmidt expresses it thus:

In an ideal state of affairs, learning may be sought and applied out of love of God and one's neighbour, since the prime aim of study, affirmed by Holy Church and echoed by Kynde (1.142-3; 22.208) is nothing other than to learn to love ... But as the poem shows insistently through such representative figures as the priest (B7), minorites (B8), the Doctor (B13), the 'lewed vicory' (B19), the friar confessors in B3 and 20, the clergy as a collective entity have forgotten their true 'root', Christ, and though themselves 'the roote of the right feith' have become 'roten' with hypocrisy and greed (B15.100-101). The result is a fissure between 'signifier' and 'signified', between the Church's learning and its love, between *veritas* and *caritas*, which prevents the Clergy from becoming the 'sign' or sacrament of Christ, from bearing leaves of 'lele wordes' and 'the fruyt Charite' (B16.6,9).³⁷⁵

This diagnosis of the problem – a breakdown between the ideal of *clergie* and the conduct of its actual practitioners – is echoed in the work of Wendy Scase on anticlericalism. Scase argues that, in the wake of the continued shortage of priests who were able to carry out the catechetical and pastoral requirements set down by the Fourth Lateran Council, the clerical monopoly on learning began to loosen, such that a gap arose between the two meanings of *clergie*: that referring to the second estate, and a developing usage meaning literacy and learning more generally. She cites the events of Passus 20 of the B text where it is the infiltration of Unitee by a deceitful friar which causes the breakdown of church order and impels Conscience to leave in search of Piers, deducing from this that 'preparation and

³⁷⁵ Schmidt, *The Clerkly Maker*, op. cit., p. 85.

access to saving grace is enabled less by that ‘clergie’ from which priests are drawn, than by that ‘clergie’ which is reading and writing.³⁷⁶ Her conclusion is that a poem such as *Piers Plowman* represents a new usurpation of priestly power, where the individual penitent who can read can access, through his or her devotional literacy, the disciplines of contrition and examination of conscience without the mediation of a priest.³⁷⁷

I do not read *Piers Plowman* as being as radical as Scase suggests in its challenge to priestly power, though it is possible to see how Langland’s widening of the scope of *clergie* could lead to the conclusion she proposes. In particular, I would contest the idea that *Piers Plowman* proposes an individualistic alternative to corporate spiritual teaching and learning. The problem is not the priestly/clerical role as such; Langland rather reconfigures and deconstructs what the priestly role might look like in a church made new when he puts Conscience in charge of Unitee in B19. Conscience seeks to draw the community together by offering the Eucharist but his appeals for commitment to right conduct within the social body and affirmation of belonging to the body of Christ meet with rejection from all three estates (the brewer, the vicory and the king).³⁷⁸ There is no sense that, left to their own devices with no mediating clerisy, lay people would be spiritually self-sufficient; rather, it is disobedience, the impulse to fragmentation and a reluctance to make daily life the arena in which transcendent truth is actualised, which undermines every effort to build the social body as the body of Christ. To pin the blame on the clergy for this state of affairs is too simplistic, and is a trap which Langland avoids. What remains unclear at the end of the

³⁷⁶ Scase, p. 40.

³⁷⁷ Scase, p. 46.

³⁷⁸ Jennifer Garrison argues that this rejection is a sign that they ‘refuse to recognise their role in the Eucharist’s signification and to transform their own divided social body into the perfect reflection of the unified body of Christ.’ Jennifer Garrison, ‘Failed Signification: Corpus Christi and Corpus Mysticum in *Piers Plowman*’, YLS 23, 2009, pp. 97-123, pp. 122-3.

poem is the possibility of any institutional solution to the fundamental problem of human sinfulness.

Clergie is a term with multiple dimensions, and a key concept in understanding how lay/clerical tension is explored within the poem. I have discussed how *Clergie* as a personification is a relatively positive figure; how *clergie* as a category is constantly re-defined, debated and interrogated; and how criticism of clerical conduct is employed to expose widespread vocational failure rather than to condemn the concept of the clerkly calling as such. I now will turn to the second of Langland's means of exploring the lay/clerical binary: his creation of the figure of Piers.

The figure of Piers: blurring the boundaries, embracing the tension

The particular aspect of Piers on which I will focus is the way in which he combines and conflates lay/clerical categories and offers an implicit critique of that particular binary. Langland does not offer either a theological or ecclesiological resolution to the lay/clerical tension, but instead creates and develops the figure of Piers, in relationship with whom Will grows and is inspired to change. Piers is a fluid signifier; an imaginative construct. He is a kind of third term rather than a logical compromise between divine/human, lay/clerical oppositions. As I will argue more fully at the end of this chapter and in the final chapter, Langland's decision to present a human figure, albeit a somewhat mysterious one, as a means of holding together seemingly irreconcilable theological ideas and social realities, is characteristic of his incarnational impulse; the figure of Piers, as Elizabeth Kirk puts it,

helps Langland 'to pull into a coherent pattern a group of themes and images so his audience can think about them experientially not as abstracts.'³⁷⁹

I will explore Piers' particular significance for the establishment of an alternative to the categories 'lay' and 'clerical' in three ways. Firstly, I will outline the sequence of Piers' appearances in the poem and the way in which more and more layers of meaning accrue to him as it unfolds. Secondly, I will explore three facets of Piers as a signifier: his social status and significance as a ploughman; his identification with Christ; his role as leader of the Church in B.19-20. Thirdly, I will suggest what importance Langland's depiction of Piers has in resolving debates about lay and clerical learning and identity.

The development of Piers: a summary

Piers is first introduced in B5 after the confessions of the deadly sins, when the pilgrims, rushing forth to seek truth with zeal but little direction, ask whether anyone can tell them the way to truth. The first person they meet is ostentatiously bedecked with the accessories of the professional pilgrim (B5.516-524), and is comically unable to recall anyone who has ever sought truth in the course of a pilgrimage. It is at this point that Piers puts himself forward. The speech that follows suggests that Piers' vocation to sow and till the earth is given by, and performed in the service of, truth who, Piers says,

is the presteeste paire that povere men knoweth;

He withhalt noon hewe his hire that ne hath it at even. (B 5.551-2).

(is the promptest paymaster that poor men know;

³⁷⁹ Elizabeth D. Kirk, 'Langland's Ploughman and the Recreation of a Fourteenth Century Metaphor', YLS 2, 1988, pp. 1-21, p. 14.

he never withholds his hire from the one who has no work as evening approaches).³⁸⁰

The pilgrims offer to pay Piers to lead them, presumably recognising his integrity, but he refuses and launches into an elaborately allegorical set of directions to truth (B5. 566-600). Langland introduces here some of the key themes that will be developed in the middle and later stages of the poem, one of which is the issue of where truth is to be found. Piers' speech encompasses a range of understandings of truth and its whereabouts: there is a powerful ethical dimension, signified by the names of the various features of the landscape ("Beth-buxom-of-speche", "Stele-noght" and "Sle-noght") ("Be-obedient-of-speech", "Don't-steal", "Don't-kill"); there is a doctrinal and penitential dimension, as signified by the requirements of belief and penance to enter the 'court as cler as the sonne' (B5.585). Whatever other meanings may attach themselves to Piers over the course of the poem, this initial appearance locates him both in the socio-economic nexus of Langland's day, and in its ethical and religious debates.

Piers' first words are the claim that he knows truth 'as kyndely as clerc doth hise bokes' (B5.538). This combination of words signals some important aspects of Piers' role. *Kynde*, as we saw in the previous chapter, is a key concept for Langland, not least in relation to Will's quest for 'kynde knowing', and the sense of *kynde* as the ontological link between God and human beings through Christ taking on our *kynde*. The fact that Piers knows truth *kyndely* is not here contrasted with an antithetical and artificial kind of knowing which characterises clerks and books; on the contrary, clerks' knowing of their books is presented

³⁸⁰ This last statement recalls the image of God the good landowner of the parable in Matthew 20.1-16, and thus places both God and truth in the real realm of human labour and wages, as well as having an allegorical level of meaning.

as being as natural as Piers' experiential way of knowing truth through honest labour and obedient discipleship. Here in this short phrase Langland offers us a glimpse of a harmony between different ways of knowing and learning rather than an opposition.³⁸¹ Harwood echoes this when he insists that 'theoretical knowledge' and 'love' are not opposing forces within the poem, but that a particular kind of knowing is required to reconcile them, namely knowing the person of Christ.³⁸² This knowing is neither simply cognitive nor affective, but integrates both, and the figure of Piers is part of Langland's poetic realisation of this truth.

Passus 6 sees the pilgrimage to truth translated into the ploughing of the half-acre, an ambiguous shift which is neither entirely a realisation of the original spiritual goal nor its contradiction.³⁸³ Piers organises his workforce in conjunction with the knight, who attests to his authority (B.6. 21-23). Piers and the knight establish a covenant (B6.25-33) that the knight will protect the church and Piers from harm, human and animal, while Piers sows and ploughs for both. Piers adds another clause – the knight must embrace and commit to Truth in all things. They must have a shared goal and values even as they play their particular parts in the social contract.³⁸⁴ Piers exhorts the workers to hard work and clean

³⁸¹ Sister Mary Clemente Devlin's article 'Kynde Knowyng as a Major Theme in *Piers Plowman*', *Review of English Studies* Vol. 23, No. 85, 1971, p. 1, footnote 3, suggests that this line defines truth as 'he who can be known by experience.' If this experience can be taken to include clerkly learning and to encompass cognitive as well as affective 'experience', then this insight is helpful.

³⁸² Britton J. Harwood, 'Langland's Kynde Knowing and the Quest for Christ', *Modern Philology* Vol. 80, No. 3, 1983, pp. 242-255.

³⁸³ This shift has generated various readings drawing theological conclusions about what the move from literal pilgrimage to ploughing the half acre says about the means of working out our salvation. See for example Denise M. Baker, 'From Plowing to Penitence: *Piers Plowman* and Fourteenth Century Theology', *Speculum* Vol. 55, No. 4, 1980, pp. 715-725.

³⁸⁴ This can be read as evidence of Langland's idealising view of feudal society, a society that is beginning to break down with changing labour patterns and the emergence of a middle class who do not fit the existing pattern of estates. Alan J. Fletcher puts forward the

living in a speech at B6.37-54, which contains many similarities with sermons of the time, such that the putting of such familiar pulpit clichés in the mouth of a working class ploughman begins to establish Piers as something more than his mere appearance; we have here a clue that he is a ‘foundation readied to support an edifice of interpretative possibility.’³⁸⁵

I will deal in greater detail with the project of the ploughing of the half-acre in Chapter Five; it is sufficient at this point to note that here Piers is presented as a figure wrestling with the difficulties of overseeing the complex interplay of practical agricultural labour and the ethical and spiritual dimensions pertaining to the conduct of the workforce. He is located firmly in the labour issues of Langland’s time, representing an integration of practical and spiritual as he declares his intention to

Worshipe therwith Truthe by my lyve,
And ben His pilgrim ate plow for povere mennes sake,
My plowpote shal by my pikstaf, and picce atwo the rotes
And helpe my cultor to kervve and clense the furwes. (B6.101-104)

(Worship Truth by my life

And be his pilgrim at the plough for poor men’s sake.

My plough-pusher shall be my pikestaff, and separate the roots

view that although the dreamer ‘actively questions the social constructs that faith gives rise to, exposing their shortcomings relative to the absolute perfection of the ideal from which they have in principle grown, the ideal itself transcends scrutiny and in so doing returns readers of the poem to a profound orthodoxy.’ Alan J. Fletcher, ‘The Social Trinity of *Piers Plowman*’, *Review of English Studies* Vol.49, No.175, 1993, pp. 343-361, p. 344. He contends that because Piers’ shifts of identity in the course of the poem involve him as knight, priest and labourer, the ‘social trinity’ of the three estates is sacralised and authorised.

³⁸⁵ Fletcher, op. cit., p. 353.

And help my fore-iron to cut and clean the furrows.)

The next significant catalyst to the narrative comes in B7 when Piers is presented with a pardon from Truth by a priest, whose rudeness leads to a verbal conflict between the two which highlights the tensions I have identified as clustering around definitions of *clergie*. The Passus opens with an affirmation of Piers' manual labour and community role:

Treuthe herde telle herof, and to Piers sente
To taken his teme and tilien the erthe,
And purchaced hym a pardoun *a pena et a culpa*
Fro hym and for hise heires for everemoore after;
And bad hym holde hym at home and erien his leyes,
And alle that holpen hym to eryl, to sette or to sowe,
Or any maner mestier that myghte Piers availe –
Pardon with Piers Plowman Truthe hath ygraunted. (B7.1-8)

(Truth heard about this, and sent a message to Piers
to take his team and till the earth,
and obtained an absolute pardon
for him and his heirs ever after;
and told him to stay at home and plough his fallow lands,
and to all those who helped him to plough, to plant or to sow,
or to do any task to assist Piers –
Truth granted them a pardon along with Piers Plowman.)

The pun on ‘teme’ in line 2 (the word ‘teme’ can refer to the theme of a sermon as well as to a team of oxen) invokes at the outset the various metaphorical layers associated with ploughing. Those working with Piers on the business of literal ploughing are eligible for Truth’s pardon (as is reinforced in lines B 6.60-63 and 98-104). The virtuous nature of honest toil seems to be a given, and a vision of social cohesion and harmony to have been safely established, when the narrative is interrupted at line 105 by a priest, who insists on reading the pardon so that he can explain and translate it for the benefit of the presumably illiterate Piers. The content of the pardon proves problematic; it is a blunt extract from the Athanasian Creed rather than a more explicit reassurance of salvation.³⁸⁶ Piers’ initial reaction is to announce his intention to replace literal ploughing with prayer and penance (B7.118-121).³⁸⁷

What is significant in the ensuing confrontation between Piers and the priest – the layman and the cleric – is the struggle for authority: when Piers quotes Luke’s Gospel, the priest’s patronising response elicits a terse rejoinder:

‘What!’ quod the preest to Perkyn, ‘Peter! As me thynketh,

Thow art lettred a litel – who lerned thee on boke?’

‘Abstynence the Abbesse,’ quod Piers, ‘myn a.b.c. me taughte,

And Conscience can afterward and kenned me mucche moore.’ (B7.131-134)

³⁸⁶ Margaret Goldsmith has a useful summary of scholarly positions on the meaning of the pardon on p. 43 of *The Figure of Piers Plowman*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1981.

³⁸⁷ There is a wide range of critical interpretation of these lines. For contrasting arguments see Robert Adams, “Piers’ Pardon and Langland’s Semi-Pelagianism,” *Traditio* 39, 1983, pp. 367-418, and David Aers, *Chaucer, Langland and the Creative Imagination*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1980. Aers sees Piers’ declaration as an example of the temptation ‘to withdraw from the complex field of social practice to a supposedly transcendent spiritual individualism,’ part of a tendency to try ‘to solve profound contradictions in the worlds of work, social theory, ethics and religion, contradictions dramatically enacted in the poem, by substituting comforting fantasies.’ Aers, op. cit., p. 23.

(‘What!’ said the priest to Piers, ‘Peter! I do believe
that you have some education – who taught you to read?’
‘Abstinence the Abbess,’ said Piers, ‘taught me my abc,
and Conscience came afterwards and taught me much more.’)

As Somerset puts it:

In reply to the priest’s challenge to the discrepancy between Piers’ ‘lewed’ status and his assumption of a learned role, Piers affirms an ethical commitment rather than giving the information about his education we would need in order to account for the learning he has just displayed.³⁸⁸

The confrontation continues, and becomes more explicit in its invocation of social estate as

Piers appears to be transgressing boundaries related to *clergie*:

‘Were thow a preest, Piers,’ quod he, ‘thow myghtest preche where thow sholdest
As divinour in divinite, with *Dixit insipiens* to thi teme.’

‘Lewed lorel!’ quod Piers, ‘litel lokestow on the Bible:

On Salomons sawes selden thow biholdest –

Eice derisores et iurgia cm eis ne crescent &c.’ (B7.135-138)

(‘If you were a priest, Piers,’ he said, ‘you might preach where you chose
as an expositor of divinity, with ‘The fool hath said’ as your theme.’

‘Ignorant wastrel!’ said Piers, ‘you don’t pay much attention to the Bible;
you seldom look at Solomon’s sayings –

Cast out the scoffer, and contention shall go with him.’)

³⁸⁸ Somerset op. cit., p. 27.

Suddenly Piers is able to hold his own in theological dispute by quoting Scripture in Latin. Although it could be argued that this shows that a lay person is capable of quoting Scripture as a weapon in an argument, and thus possesses learning, the dispute between Piers and the priest is ultimately a reductive kind of exchange. At this point in the poem Langland has not yet worked out how to get past a point-scoring confrontational model which only reinforces antagonism rather than overcoming lay/clerical categories. What is enacted in this confrontation is clash between two definitions of learning which could be summed up as theoretical/practical, clerical/lay, or intellectual/experiential – in more modern terms, University education versus the ‘university of life.’ Yet these are inadequate and simplistic oppositions, with which Langland is not content to settle – had he been, the poem could have ended here with the vindication of the poor but spiritually wise ploughman and the exposure of the learned but shallow priest.³⁸⁹ Langland resists such a foreclosure of the debate, instead taking the poem in a new direction in the next Passus, the start of the Vita, as he interrogates models of learning and allows them to unfold in all their contextual complexity.

Piers disappears for a time after Passus 7, during which part of the poem the focus is more on Will’s inner debates, and then reappears as a guide to Will at the Tree of Charity in B16. His reappearance and enhanced significance are anticipated in B15 when Will is told by Anima that no-one can see Charity without the help of Piers (B15.196). Will asks whether clerks who keep Holy Church know Charity, and is told:

Clerkes have no knowynge...but by werkes and by wordes.

³⁸⁹ A.V.C.Schmidt contends that the clash does not ‘emblematised the gap between educated cleric and ignorant layman but that between a ‘carnal;’ and a ‘spiritual’ understanding of religious truth.’ Schmidt, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

Ac Piers the Plowman parceyveth moore depper

What is the will, and wherfore that many wight suffreth. (B15.198-200)

(Clerks don't know anything except by words and works.

But Piers the Plowman perceives more deeply

what is someone's will, and thus the cause of much suffering.)

Therefore by colour ne by clergie knowe shaltow hym nevere,

Neither thorough wordes ne werkes, but thorough wil oone,

And that knoweth no clerk ne creature on erthe

But Piers the Plowman – *Petrus, id est Christus*. (B 15.209-212)

(Therefore you shall never know him by means of outward appearance or learning,

Neither through words or works, but through will alone,

And that is known to no clerk or creature on earth

Except Piers the Plowman – *Petrus, id est Christus*.)

When Will hears Piers' name at B16.18-19 he swoons with joy, and wakes to find Piers with him. From this point on, Piers becomes again an actor in the narrative. His action in hitting the devil at B16.86-7, a recapitulation of his angry gesture of tearing the pardon in B7, is the catalyst for the annunciation story, in the unfolding of which he plays an indirect part. Piers is next referred to in B18, when Jesus jousts in his armour in order to fetch Piers' fruit which the devil has claimed (a reference back to B16.79-85). Will has a glimpse of him at the opening of B19 when he sees Piers 'peynted al bloody', coming in with a cross before the congregation 'right lik in alle lymes to Oure Lord Jesu.' (B19.6-8) Tantalisingly,

the connection is not spelled out any further. Piers is mentioned again from B19.163, when he becomes conflated with the apostle Peter; Langland begins by describing Peter's role in the resurrection story, and simply substitutes Piers' name at B19.184 as he continues the narrative. Power is given to Piers to absolve, to bind and unbind, and Will watches as the Pentecostal Spirit falls at B19.202-207. In the remainder of the poem it is Piers who attempts to get the Church off to a good start, who mysteriously leaves at B19.335 with Grace 'to tilie trithe', leaving Priesthood as overseer (B19.334), and who is sought by Conscience in the poem's closing lines.

Amidst the different thematic strands in which Piers is involved, the three main forms his identity assumes – ploughman, Christ-figure, Peter – serve a way of focussing his significance. I will deal with each in turn.

Piers as Ploughman

In terms of his crossover status between lay and clergy, Piers' identity as a ploughman is no accident; as Margaret Goldsmith demonstrates, the ploughman is used as a symbol of the preacher by Gregory the Great and Augustine, and thus already has an allegorical dimension.³⁹⁰ As B6 indicates, ploughing was a complex social, economic and communal activity, and Piers' identity as a ploughman is important in those terms, not just for its allegorical significance.³⁹¹ As Goldsmith states:

³⁹⁰ Margaret Goldsmith, *The Figure of Piers Plowman*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1981.

³⁹¹ Further discussion of the social status of the ploughman in the late fourteenth century is found in Judith M. Bennett 'The Curse of the Plowman' in YLS 20, 2006, pp. 215-226, and in Kirk, op. cit.

For a discussion of how the metaphor of ploughing was used in Lollard discourse, see Shannon Gayk, "'As ploughmen han preued": the alliterative work of a set of Lollard sermons,' YLS 20, 2006, pp. 43-65.

However intellectual many of his concerns, his [Langland's] thought was radically incarnational enough to start where human society itself starts, with the plow and the labour of those who use it. He did not have to abandon his roots in clerical learning to do so; quite the contrary.³⁹²

Being part of the earthed social realities of England at a particular period in history is a crucial aspect of Piers' identity. There is an interpretive stance which sees the poem, and Piers, proceeding along a course which replaces the literal with the spiritual: literal ploughing redefined in terms of spiritual pilgrimage, the ploughing of the half acre fulfilled in the ploughing of B19, where Piers ploughs and sows with his metaphorical team of doctors of the church, building the church rather than growing food for the community.³⁹³ I would resist any reading which devalues the necessity for taking human labour seriously as a godly calling; Langland's Piers may acquire increasingly divine traits as the poem goes on, but at no point does Langland imply that literal ploughing has been superseded by its spiritual equivalent. Piers incorporates both, and layers are put on layers more according to the model of a palimpsest than a linear typological type-fulfilment structure. Piers' roles co-exist rather than succeeding one another.³⁹⁴

³⁹² Goldsmith, p. 19.

³⁹³ See for example Denise N. Baker 'From Plowing to Penitence: *Piers Plowman* and Fourteenth Century Theology,' *Speculum* 55 Vol.4, 1980, pp. 715-725. Goldsmith also embraces a figural reading: 'The structure of the poem accords best with a figural reading of the Visio. That is to say, the ploughing and harvesting can be read literally as mundane and proper social activity, good and profitable in itself, but at the same time it can be interpreted as a figure for human life "under Adam", which can be morally good and yet unsatisfying to the soul.' Goldsmith, op. cit., p. 34.

³⁹⁴ Goldsmith, op. cit., uses the word 'figure' to describe how Piers functions within the poem, explaining that 'a figural interpretation allows that he has a role as a real plowman, but one whose actions and words carry figurative meaning of which he and his companions are not aware, or only partially aware.' Goldsmith, p. 35.

Closer to my own reading than that of Goldsmith is that of Elizabeth Kirk who when discussing the statement in B15.209-12 ‘*Petrus id est Christus*’, sums it up as

a kind of triple oxymoron...the line equates not two but three antithetical elements, three levels of reality, three modes of discourse: the colloquially named and realistically occupied ploughman; Peter the founder of the Church and prototype of the Pope; and the second person of the Trinity...

...This epitomises the larger oxymoron of the poem’s structure...three highly disparate kinds of authority are juxtaposed in the poem’s chameleon hero: the experiential authority of the worker on whose labour all the rest of society depends; the intellectual and sacramental authority of the medieval church; and the Word which was God and was with God.³⁹⁵

Kirk’s phrase ‘triple oxymoron’ comes closer to Langland’s characteristic narrative mode than does a neat figural mapping according to an ascending scale of significance from earthly ploughman to Christ-figure. Piers is not a consistent signifier, but an example of Langland’s ‘additive and associational’ thought processes.³⁹⁶

Piers and Christ

In the second half of the poem, as I have indicated, Langland takes Piers in a somewhat different direction. In addition to his status as a ploughman, he becomes associated with two other (lay) figures, Jesus and Peter. This next section will explore how Langland is able

³⁹⁵ Elizabeth Kirk, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.

³⁹⁶ Pearsall coins this phrase in a discussion of Christ’s speech in the Harrowing of Hell section of B18, describing it as ‘very Langlandian. It has the characteristic backwards and forward, sidling and spiralling movement, and the characteristically frequent use of coordinating conjunctions. They signal the essentially additive and associational process of Langland’s thinking, which I take to be the antithesis of dialectic.’ Derek Pearsall ‘The Idea of Universal Salvation in *Piers Plowman B and C*’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 39:2, Spring 2009, pp. 257-281, pp. 275-6.

to overcome the lay/clerical binary despite the potential dangers of identifying Piers with Jesus, and to create a new figure of redeemed and redemptive humanity.³⁹⁷

The identification of Piers with Jesus is fluid and understated, with the figure of Jesus introduced in B18.10 as ‘oon semblable to the Samaritan, and somdeel to Piers the Plowman’ (‘one who looked like the Samaritan, and also a bit like Piers Plowman’). When Will asks whether Piers is there, the riddling reply is that Jesus is jousting in Piers’ armour, in the mail coat of human nature (B18.22-23).³⁹⁸ The connection between Christ’s divinity and humanity is spelled out, for example in B18.376-7:

‘Ac to be merciablen to man thane, my kynde it asketh,
For we beth bretheren of blood, but noght in baptisme alle.’ (B18.376-7)

(‘But to be merciful to man then, my nature demands it,
for we are brothers through the human nature we share, though not all [are brothers]
through baptism.’)

Jesus and Piers are not merged, despite Will’s momentary confusion at the start of B19;

Jesus remains ‘other’, not identified with Piers to the extent that his divinity is humanised,

³⁹⁷ One of the dangers that Stephen Pickard discusses in his analysis of ways of configuring the relationship between the ordained and the laity, and in understanding how the ordained priesthood is related to the general priesthood of all Christians, is that of an over-reliance on a Christological model of priesthood. Pickard observes that as soon as Christ is made the model for priesthood, a wedge is driven between clergy and laity in an ecclesiological version of Nestorianism, with two priesthoods operating, one ‘from above’ and one ‘from below.’ Pickard, *op. cit.*, p. 111. Langland avoids this danger by refusing to equate Piers with Christ in any consistent way, though it could be argued that the Christological emphasis of the poem’s soteriology downplays pneumatological and Trinitarian models in ways which limit its scope.

³⁹⁸ Jesus’ joust is against the devil for the reclamation of Piers’ stolen fruit (the gifts of the Tree of Charity which need to be restored).

nor Piers' humanity divinised. It is the lexical clusters around blood/brethren, kind/king/kin, which enable each to reflect the other and which act as the means of bridging the gap between divinity and humanity, whilst allowing to each its integrity and difference.³⁹⁹

Langland's identification of Piers with Jesus could have translated Piers into a symbol of priesthood and thus cancelled out his lay status. It could also have translated him across various other binaries such as human/divine, but Langland keeps both sides of the binary in play at once.

Piers/Peter

I claimed earlier that Piers progressively acquires and holds together a range of roles and meanings rather than shedding some and gaining others, a claim which is borne out by the events of Passus 19, a Passus which is especially relevant to the lay/clerical debate. It is in this section of the poem that the Piers-Peter link is made most explicit, and yet remains open-ended; Piers does not become a clerical figure but continues to express his spiritual leadership in ploughing. B19.183-191 makes it clear that Christ invests Piers with the powers that traditionally were given to Peter:

And whan this dede was doon, Dobest he thoughte,

And yaf Piers power, and pardon he grauntede:

To alle maner men, mercy and foryifnesse;

To hym, myghte men to assoille of alle manere synnes,

In covenaut that thei come and kneweliche to paye

To Piers pardon the Plowman – *Redde quod debes*.

³⁹⁹ Eammon Duffy traces this Christological emphasis on Jesus' relationship to humanity as kindred and brethren to Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, Book 2, Chapter 19. Eammon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1992, p. 235.

Thus hath Piers power, be his pardon paied,
To bynde and unbynde bothe here and ellis
And assoille men of alle synnes save of dette one. (B.19.183-191)

(And when this deed was done, he thought of Dobest,
and gave Piers power, and granted pardon:
mercy and forgiveness to all kinds of men;
to him men might be absolved of all their various sins
on condition that they come and meet the terms
of Piers Plowman's pardon – *Pay what thou owest*.
Thus Piers had the power, his own pardon being paid,
To bind and unbind both here and elsewhere
and to absolve men of all sins except the obligation to make satisfaction.)

Langland has not forgotten his vision of a social order that will reflect humanity living in obedience to God, and thus the gifts that Grace goes on to bestow on the community as a whole in B19.216-259 are earthed in practical social living: labour, craft, learning. It is a holistic vision of Pentecost, a vigorously un-clerkly model of church and society. Grace proclaims Piers' role within this newly founded community:

‘For I make Piers the Plowman my procuratour and my reve,
And registrer to receive *redde quod debes*.
My prowor and my plowman Piers shal ben on erthe,
And for the tilie truthe a teme shal he have.’ (B19.260-263)

(‘For I make Piers Plowman my agent and reeve

and registrar to receive what is owed.

Piers shall be my purveyor and plowman here on earth,
and to till truth he shall have a team.’)

Piers ploughs with his allegorical oxen, the four fathers of the church; sows the seeds of virtue that Grace gives him; founds the church, and continues the work of tilling and harvesting. Although the community he founds does not set itself up in explicit opposition to contemporary ecclesiastical structures, it is hard to avoid the sense that Piers as a leader is a far cry from the Pope. His leadership does not involve conventional hierarchies or badges of office but is presented as a true manifestation of the apostolic life.⁴⁰⁰ Towards the end of the passus the lewed vicory describes a Piers who is still a lay hero rather than a clerical figure:

‘Right so Piers the Plowman peyneth hym to tilye

As well for a wastour and wenches of the stewes

As for hynself and hise servants, save he is first yserved.’ (B19.437-9)

(‘In the same way Piers Plowman makes the effort to plough

for wasters and prostitutes

as well as for himself and his servants, except that he is served first.’)

⁴⁰⁰ Pamela Gradon makes the point that the semiotics of Piers can be read in the light of Wycliffite understandings of priesthood, whereby the priest is a surrogate of Christ’s humanity, such that Piers can be both a ploughman and Christ. Pamela Gradon, ‘*Piers Plowman and the Ideology of Dissent*’, in J.A. Burrow (ed.), *Medieval English Literature*, Oxford University Press/The British Academy, 1989, pp. 179-205. Aers and Staley also make the point that being Christ-like according to a Lollard model might mean imitating a prophetic, vernacular and mobile presentation of the Gospel – in other words, a troublesome Christ. Aers and Staley, *The Powers of the Holy*, op. cit., p. 44.

Abruptly, just when it seems that Piers' symbolic role is becoming more definite and identifiable, he disappears, departing with Grace to travel 'as wide as the world is' (B19.335), leaving Conscience in charge for the remainder of the poem. Although he is still present insofar as others name him and cite his instructions, he vanishes beyond the text to remain an elusive possibility. After the social and ecclesiastical breakdown of B20 the poem ends with the quest for Piers, with Conscience declaring his determination to 'have' Piers – not to find or know him but to 'have' him.⁴⁰¹ After his identification with Peter, it is especially shocking to find that Piers has departed and that his importance for the church has not thereby diminished; he is still needed, and it is not obvious what validity the church has without him.

It is of utmost theological importance that Piers is not 'in' the Church, still guarding Unitee, at this point, but is mysteriously elsewhere, not held within the institutional structures which he has helped to build and with which he in some sense is identified. Christ present and incarnate in the world is beyond the walls of the Church, always summoning. Yet equally importantly, it is not Christ himself whom Conscience seeks, but Piers, as Aers puts it, the 'symbol and lens' through which at different times Will and others are able to perceive Christ as present.⁴⁰² The quest for Piers at this point is the quest for an embodied spirituality which can engage with the urgency of the situation with real authority, and he is to be found outside the Church.

⁴⁰¹ Goldsmith suggests that 'to "have" him means infinitely more than becoming a labourer,' rather it is to do with 'Langland's insistence that religious and poetic language must be holistic and inclusive of all the non-negotiable conditions of life in history, just as Christ cannot become incarnate to rescue mankind without ... jousting in the armour of Piers Plowman.' Goldsmith, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁴⁰² David Aers, *Piers Plowman and Christian Allegory*, Edward Arnold, London, 1975, p. 88.

In B19 and 20 then, Piers is neither lay nor clerical, but transcends both categories. It is not obvious how Piers can be both lay and priestly, how he can hold together the ecclesial weight of Peter's role and his status as plowman without the connections falling into a structure of type-fulfilment and thus undercutting his continued lay status. What I am suggesting is that it is by an imaginative and poetic move that Langland is able to transcend the binary which he encounters in the question of lay/ordained. By both making Piers a lay person and by associating him with church leadership, he changes the terms of the debate. In the figure of Piers, lay-ordained categories lose their power to define in an either/or way. By conducting the debate at the level of metaphor, Langland is able to suggest a vision beyond either/or. Indeed, as the next chapter will argue, the use of metaphor is central to how relationships between church, world and ministry can be re-visioned. Language limits or expands possibility. By reaching beyond abstract conceptual categories and embodying a new possibility in the figure of Piers, Langland is pointing to a different set of epistemological possibilities. The shift into a figure who can combine seemingly incompatible sets of definitions enables Langland to hint at a possibility that embraces contraries.⁴⁰³

The importance of Piers

I have described the role that Piers plays in the poem which bears his name (a name which had a significant afterlife) and his importance in breaking down and re-defining ideas of clerical and lay status and learning.⁴⁰⁴ He simultaneously embodies the three identity sets I have outlined: ploughman, Christ-figure and Peter/head of the Church. As I have indicated,

⁴⁰³ In commenting on the poem's structure and lack of logical progression, John Burrow points out that 'each term points inwards, towards a spiritual centre whose position is suggested, as the poem's title implies, by the figure of Piers the Plowman.' Burrow, op. cit., p. 27.

⁴⁰⁴ For the ways in which Piers' name reappears in various literary and political contexts, see Sarah A. Kelen, *Langland's Early Modern Identities*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2007, especially Chapter 2, 'A Proliferation of Plowmen'.

although figural readings shed important light on aspects of the poem's modus operandi, ultimately they render it too tidy.

One of the reasons why Piers is so important within the poem is because he signifies Langland's refusal to offer the reader either an intellectual or an institutional solution to the problems of his day. Piers does not manage to steer the church through the dangerous waters which threaten to engulf it; he leaves, and is tantalisingly to be sought in the world. Piers is not an 'answer' to anything. He is a fictional device, a nebulous figure, an overdetermined signifier. The crucial point is that Langland chooses to present whatever 'answer' to the issues he confronts in the form of a person and a relationship, not an abstraction. Piers represents a way of seeing and loving: experiential, earthed, theologically resonant. It is a way of being a disciple which is communally conceived, not individualistically construed, as Boitani points out.⁴⁰⁵ Langland's poetic approach to complex questions by means of an ambiguous figure such as Piers is also pedagogically important, inviting the reader to pause, reflect and speculate and involving her as an agent of discovering and making meaning.⁴⁰⁶ Throughout the poem the reader is not presented with ready made answers but has to take part in the work of interpretation, and reading the figure of Piers is no exception. To the objection that this is demanding and difficult, the response is that one of the qualities a poem like *Piers Plowman* offers to a very different age is precisely its difficulty. The language – and it is best read in the original Middle

⁴⁰⁵ Piero Boitani says of Piers: 'he is characterised as a ploughman and thus represents the economic fulcrum of medieval society, but he is also a former servant of Truth, Christ, Peter, and a pontiff, and is therefore again a figure in which the social and the individual are inextricably interwoven.' Piero Boitani, *English Medieval Narrative of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982, p. 76.

⁴⁰⁶ Mary Carruthers explores the purpose of the tropes *obscuritas* and *pictura* with reference to *Piers Plowman* in "'Allegory Without the Teeth": Some Reflections on Figural Language in *Piers Plowman*', YLS 19, 2005, pp. 27-43.

English – forces us to confront the otherness of the time in which it was written. But even in a translation, it is a difficult poem because of the demands Langland places on the reader, demands which themselves reflect the nature of discipleship, lay or ordained.⁴⁰⁷

Conclusion: Langland, Hind and ‘the clerkly calling’

This chapter has juxtaposed two texts which in different ways respond to contested questions about the role of lay and ordained within the Church, and the learning appropriate to each. It has set each text in its context, and looked closely at the particular attempts of each to resolve a longstanding theological and ecclesial dilemma. I have suggested that Langland makes a unique contribution to the debates that were being expressed in a range of late fourteenth century vernacular texts through his use of the figure of Piers, who subverts the lay/clerical distinction. In Piers, secular labour and spiritual leadership become indivisible.

The question arises as to what currency the insights I have identified might have beyond the poem and its medieval context. Langland’s investment in the elusive figure of Piers and his restless probing of the meanings of *clergie* can, I believe, help the post-Hind world to find new ways of dealing with lay and clerical learning, albeit in indirect ways. What is gained from detailed engagement with *Piers Plowman* is less a sense that there are close parallels

⁴⁰⁷ As Rowan Williams says of Augustine: ‘conversion does not signify an end to the chaos of human experience, it does not make self-understanding suddenly easy or guarantee an ordered or intelligible life. What is changed in conversion is the set of determinants within which the spirit moves; and these may be as inaccessible to the mind as they were before. Thus the confidence of the believer never rests upon either his intellectual grasp or his intellectual control of his experience, but on the fidelity of the heart’s longing to what has been revealed as the only finally satisfying object of its desire.’ Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, second revised edition, 1990, p. 76.

between Langland's situation and our own, than a recognition that we need a comparably complex level of understanding of, and negotiation with, contested categories such as lay and clerical. In our own situation the clergy-laity divide is not a neat reality; it is not that we lack theological distinctions and role definitions, but that these are always in a process of being re-thought. Neat and permanent role descriptions are staging posts in an ongoing journey of negotiation rather than fixed absolutes, and one positive response to the Hind settlement may be to pause the discussion and agree to sit light to the lay/clerical distinction for a while. Caring for and nurturing parishes and communities as complex organisms rather than isolating certain members for endless appraisal and scrutiny might enable a shift in focus. Reports need not define the parameters of imagination; there are other horizons than the organisational logistics of training provision that can be opened up, other surprising ways of seeing faith, discipleship and labour which may come from unexpected sources, the equivalent of Piers' half-acre or the field of folk. Langland's abrupt gear changes and juxtapositions remind us that we are always dealing with complex multiple perspectives which require us to move beyond simplistic univocal response.

Related to this is Langland's insistence that a vital dimension of *clergie* is a right use of language, a careful attention to the theological freight words carry. This offers a challenge to the contemporary Church of England, including those who write its reports: the challenge of engaging both with our own tradition and with the complexities of our culture in a language which goes beyond contemporary management discourse or the re-cycling of outworn metaphors. Such an engagement requires a particular understanding of how vocation and the use of language are interconnected. It is here that Langland has something to contribute in his conviction that part of the 'clerkly' calling is a wrestling with language

to avoid falsifying experience and spiritual truth.⁴⁰⁸ The poem presents a fundamental contrast between ‘lele wordes’ and ‘bele paroles’ (trustworthy words and smooth-sounding utterances). The alliterative line itself binds two half lines by means of alliteration, which sets up particular connections between alliterating words: either an ironic clash of dissimilarity, or a coming together of different truths, a device which foregrounds the need for readers to weigh utterance carefully to discern truth.⁴⁰⁹ Irrespective of labels such as lay and clerical, Langland presents this need to use and receive language with discernment as a common human responsibility, to be exercised for the spiritual and social well-being of all.

It would be hard to know how to construct a Learning Outcome which had to do with attention to language, responsible handling of metaphor and wrestling with the difficulty of finding the right words in a semantic universe every bit as slippery and treacherous as the one Anne Middleton describes Langland as inhabiting.⁴¹⁰ That such an ability is vitally needed is reinforced by Rowan Williams:

There has to be in every priest just a bit of the poet and the artist – enough to keep alive a distaste for nonsense, cheapness of words and ideas, stale and predictable

⁴⁰⁸ For critical work in this area, see Mary Clemente Davlin, *A Game of Heuene*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1989; Gillian Rudd, *Managing Language in Piers Plowman*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1994.

⁴⁰⁹ Schmidt asserts that: ‘Langland’s great strength as a poet ... (a product of his being a clerk as well as a maker) is that he does not confuse the ‘right’ use of a word with its ‘true’ meaning. The meaning of a word is its use in the language...even if there are no ‘true’ meaning to which a word like *commune* can be compelled to conform, there may be a ‘right’ use, a use that makes for life in accordance with Truth. Right use is the *lele* use of language.’ Schmidt, *The Clerkly Maker*, op. cit., p. 124.

⁴¹⁰ Anne Middleton describes Langland’s as a voice ‘which positions both itself and its audience rhetorically within the slippery and treacherous moral and semantic universe it represents.’ Anne Middleton, ‘Acts of Vagrancy: the C Version “Autobiography” and the Statute of 1388,’ in Stephen Justice and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (eds.), *Written Work*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1997, pp. 257-8. Gillian Rudd in *Managing Language in Piers Plowman* writes: ‘In *Piers Plowman* the quest for salvation provides a framework for Langland’s illustration of how our reactions to language and knowledge interact to shape, if not actually dictate, the sort of understanding we achieve.’ Rudd, p. ix.

reaction. And this is a crucial part of being visibly a sign of what and where the Church is, the Church which is called to live ‘in’ the truth. So for the priest there is, as I’ve said, an urgent practical responsibility not to be so driven by what present themselves as duties and tasks that there is no time for this sort of education of seeing and listening, maintaining literacy in human reality.’⁴¹¹

‘Maintaining literacy in human reality’ well describes the impetus of Langland’s poem. It is to the ways in which the discourse of reports such as Hind encourage or inhibit such literacy that I will turn in the next chapter.

⁴¹¹ Rowan Williams, ‘The Christian Priest Today’, text of lecture delivered 28 May 2004 on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Ripon College Cuddesdon, p. 4 of 8 of the online text, accessed on 21.4.2011 at <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/1185>.

Chapter Five: Learning and the Body of Christ

Introduction

In previous chapters I have outlined how I understand *Piers Plowman* to be located within late fourteenth century debates about learning and Christian discipleship, and how some of the tensions within Hind One can be mapped on to similar concerns about the status and purpose of theological education in Langland's poem. This chapter will take as its focus a single image, central to both texts, that of the body, covering both the embodied human subject and the social and ecclesial body. By focusing on a single metaphor, I will extend the conversation between Hind and Langland, asking what the respective roles which the metaphor of the body plays within the narrative and argument of each text might tell us about underlying notions of learning, Christian identity and life together.

This chapter will also extend the argument of the thesis as a whole. By focusing on and analysing the use in Hind One of a particular metaphor, that of the Church as the body of Christ, it will argue that one way forward for the Church of England as a report-producing, policy-making institution is by a reintegration of the discourses of human embodied experience with those of corporate efficiency. This chapter suggests that one way of doing this is by means of retrieving and reinvesting the body metaphor with richer and fuller meaning.

In this chapter I will describe how Hind One uses the image of the body and how it functions within the text. I will undertake a rhetorical, theological and social anthropological critique of Hind body language, and indicate the need for a retrieval of a richer range of aspects of embodiment. As a resource for this recuperative project, I will

analyse sections of *Piers Plowman* which suggest different ways of understanding the body and explore what they have to say about the fallible human body, the ecclesial body, and the incarnate body of Jesus. The possibilities offered by *Piers Plowman* of re-connecting theological anthropology, ecclesiology and Christology are proposed as a means of moving towards a different kind of settlement post-Hind.

Learning, the body of Christ and Hind: the rhetoric of the effective body

Part of the aim of the Hind settlement is to bring about greater unity in a context of fragmented training provision, and it seeks this end by making proposals for greater institutional co-operation and convergence, and by the provision (or imposition) of a set of common learning outcomes for ordination training. Unity is both theme and goal in Hind, and as early as the preface to Hind One, an image is introduced that is to recur at key points in the text: that of the body, and more specifically, that of the Church as the body of Christ: ‘Fundamentally, this is a theological issue; it is about the nature of the Church as a single body with many members and an infinite variety of gifts supplied by the Holy Spirit.’⁴¹²

This is the report’s preferred image for the Church as an organisation: a unified, single organism, different parts working together. It is in the explicitly theological Chapter Three, headed ‘Some theological priorities’, that the most extensive development of the body imagery unfolds. At its introduction, we are reminded both that ‘the body can only be spoken of in conjunction with its crucified, risen and exalted head, present through his Spirit’; that ‘properly understood, this model is a guarantee of a diversity of functions’; and

⁴¹² Hind One, p. viii.

that ‘it is ultimately an eschatological image, “the body of him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:23).’⁴¹³ The result is that the Church is described as being organised as an organic body on the principle that ‘all parts of the body relate to each other and to the whole’, each member having a different role and function, such that ‘the body as a whole only functions effectively when all contribute in a vital way to its totality and completeness.’⁴¹⁴ At 3.23 Hind One goes on to talk of the ‘organising principles’ of the body which give it structure, order and coherence, citing Christ himself as providing the ‘fundamental vivification’ through the Holy Spirit, and making a careful case for the particular role of ordained ministry in 3.24.

In this section, it is interesting to note the lexical context in which body language is introduced. In 3.22, the words ‘organised’, ‘organisation’ and ‘organic’ are used within the same sentence, all in connection with the idea of the body. The body model is held up as ‘guarantee’ of diversity of functions, where members can only ‘properly’ understand themselves in a particular inter-relationship. Members are defined by ‘functions’ and ‘roles’ within the body, where bodies are defined in terms of organising principles that give coherence and structure. Despite the use of the word organic, what comes across is a functional model of the body, as something there to execute certain functions ‘effectively’ (the problematic nature of a discourse of ‘effectiveness’ was touched on in Chapter Two of this thesis).

I will begin to unpack the Hind body language by identifying three areas of difficulty, and employing a different critical tool in order to illuminate each issue. The first difficulty is at

⁴¹³ Hind One, 3.21.

⁴¹⁴ Hind One, 3.22.

the level of rhetoric, where the language of the body moves between different frames of reference, and I will be using the linguistic analysis of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in order to examine this in more detail. The second difficulty is a theological and exegetical one and requires some exploration of the resources of New Testament scholarship. The third difficulty concerns the absence in either report of any acknowledgement of the gender implications of body language and how that impacts on actual practice. Thus my third tool is a feminist and Foucauldian critique of language and bodies which opens up bigger socio-political questions about the politics of body language and its concomitant practices. Finally, as I examine the ways in which Hind Two reprises and develops Hind One's body language, I identify a mis-match between the language of the body and the actual accountability structures of the Church of England, which leads to the question as to why Hind body language has not succeeded in ensuring compliance from some members of the theological education community. I draw on Jerome Neyrey's social-scientific approach, using the work of Mary Douglas, as a way of making sense of this problem.

Lakoff and Johnson – by what metaphors does Hind One live?

The first method I will employ in order to analyse Chapter Three of Hind One in greater depth is derived from Lakoff and Johnson's theory of metaphor as expounded in *Metaphors We Live By*.⁴¹⁵ Their stance within the world of philosophical linguistics and in particular their experientialist theory of truth and its implications for theology are beyond the scope of this thesis. What I draw from their work is their insistence on the centrality of metaphor in human understanding, and their contention that metaphor is fundamental to the structuring of our conceptual systems and everyday activities. The metaphors we use shape our

⁴¹⁵ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1980, edition with 2003 Afterword.

understanding and our actions, and Lakoff and Johnson demonstrate that rather than metaphor being merely a literary device, our very thought and language structures assume connections between different areas of experience. Engaging in close reading of texts which have status as official pronouncements is an important way of revealing internal contradictions and thus discerning underlying values which may be at odds with the official position.⁴¹⁶

The explanatory power of Lakoff and Johnson's theory in relation to Hind consists in providing a means of interrogating the way in which the report selects its metaphors and makes them determinative of the ways in which theological education can then be understood. As Lakoff and Johnson point out, any metaphor highlights certain similarities between two areas of experience, and in the process hides and downplays others. I want to analyse the Hind choice and use of 'the body' as the key metaphor for the Church, and to explore what is highlighted and what is hidden by choosing to put this metaphor at the heart of the explicitly theological section of the report. This section is a deconstructive exercise undertaken with an ultimately constructive purpose: to go beyond critique to explore the possibility of re-investing the image with meaning.

In Lakoff and Johnson's terms, THE CHURCH IS A BODY is a both an ontological and a structural metaphor. It is ontological, since it defines the Church as an entity, and structural in that one kind of thing or experience – being the Church – is metaphorically structured in terms of another, using the same natural dimensions of experience in both. If the Church is

⁴¹⁶ An example of such astute close reading is Geoffrey Hill in his *Collected Critical Writings*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008, in particular 'Of Diligence and Jeopardy', 'Keeping to the Middle Way' and 'Redeeming the Time.' Hill uses close reading to expose inconsistencies which are indicative of intellectual dishonesty.

a body, there are various stages and aspects of that metaphor which can be worked through, what Lakoff and Johnson call the metaphorical entailments. The stages Lakoff and Johnson identify for a typical structural metaphor would be participants, parts, stages, linear sequence, purpose, causation. So if the Church is a body, the participants are the members, limbs and organs; the stages would be the performance of certain actions leading to good outcomes; the purpose would be the maintenance of health, or effective bodily action, and the causation the instructions and desires of the brain or neural centre.

The writers of the report have given thought to the entailments of the metaphor they have chosen. In the section starting at 3.21, the church can be understood to be like a body because:

It is a living organism

It is a single organism

It has many parts

The parts need to work together

The parts have different functions

The parts are inter-dependent

The health of the whole depends on the right functioning of all the parts

It has certain organising principles

Some parts order the whole in particular ways

Particular gifts are given to different parts

These are the aspects of the metaphor which the report highlights. To train for ministry is to prepare to play a particular role within the body, which requires that all parts should work together for the health of the whole. The choice of this metaphor seeks to avoid

individualism and to promote the corporate dimension of call, vocation and training. No part may claim either superiority nor an independent existence. There is much that is positive in this emphasis, not least in emphasising the mutual belonging and interdependence of lay and ordained (3.23).

However, in analysing the body metaphor, and in focusing on certain entailments as listed above, a question that needs to be asked is what is hidden or suppressed in this metaphor to do with the human body. The body ages, gets sick; the body produces waste; the body bleeds; the body is gendered; the body has a sexual identity; the body gives birth, changes, rests, sleeps, wakes, has rhythms. It seems that none of those aspects of the metaphor are included in the list of acceptable characteristics. This body is not a body as we know bodies. By using a metaphor in a way which elides its physical earthiness, the notion of body has been re-defined. We are not talking about a body in an entirely recognisable human sense, but in some other sense.

I suggest that those elements that have been omitted are not just incidental, redundant parts of a metaphor which would undermine its coherence and consistency. I believe that within the rhetorical structure of Hind One, the selection of metaphorical entailments is deeply suggestive of the theology and ecclesiology of the report as a whole. THE BODY IS A MACHINE is clearly not what the writers are wanting to suggest, since they are clear that this body is a living thing. However, there is an odd choice of vocabulary where paragraph 3.23 refers to Christ as providing the body's 'fundamental means of vivification', the little-used Latinate word distancing the reader and undercutting any immediacy. The subsequent sentence then refers to other 'agencies' – a curiously disembodied and functional word. I suggest that no substantial difference would be made to the paragraph if THE BODY IS A

MACHINE was substituted for THE BODY IS A LIVING ORGANISM. The image of the body works here by suppressing a range of facets of bodiliness, and focuses on orderly interdependence of parts.⁴¹⁷ Ministry in this model becomes the execution of tasks which serve the whole, carried out by efficiently ordered parts, as 3.25 reinforces:

Thus it is the work of Christ that is exercised in ministry. The biblical motif of the Church as the 'Body of Christ' presupposes that different elements will work harmoniously together, confidently and collaboratively, in order to manifest that ministry to the world.⁴¹⁸

Hind body language: context and history

What makes the Hind use of the body image more disturbing is the fact that the Church of England has been here before. The report's use of the image of the body echoes the Turnbull Report of 1995, sub-titled 'Working as One Body', whose remit was to 'review the central policy-making and resource direction machinery of the Church of England.'⁴¹⁹ G.R. Evans offers a thoughtful critique of the Turnbull Report's ecclesiology, identifying some problematic mixing of discourses as it 'places secular and spiritual, temporalities and spiritualities, side by side as though they were parts of the same system with priorities which need not be incompatible'.⁴²⁰ Evans observes that the language of corporateness cannot be univocally understood in a context where the business world employs notions of 'corporate image' and 'corporate identity', and sees a danger of Turnbull's use of it

⁴¹⁷ It is noteworthy that Thomas Hawkins identifies the need for organic rather than mechanistic models of learning and church life in Chapter Three of *The Learning Congregation*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1997, pp. 41-42.

⁴¹⁸ Hind One, 3.25.

⁴¹⁹ *Working as One Body*, Church House Publishing, 1995, Preface.

⁴²⁰ G.R. Evans, 'The Ecclesiology of the Turnbull Report', in G.R. Evans and Martyn Percy (eds.), *Managing the Church?*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 2000, p. 97.

overriding patterns of ‘collegiality’ and ‘*koinonia*’ by taking on more of the modern understandings of corporate life and organisation.⁴²¹ Evans is unconvinced that the report has given sufficient weight to a theological understanding of the Church’s ‘order’, which is to do less with whatever structures are adopted at any given time in history and more with the heart of the Church’s being and identity, its ‘esse.’⁴²²

The Turnbull Report resulted in some significant changes to the Church of England’s organisational structure, and drew criticism from various quarters, including the Independent newspaper, which led with an article headlined ‘Welcome to the world of Jesus plc.’⁴²³ The substance of this particular attack was twofold: firstly, the Church of England is not best understood as an organisation but a ‘coalition of interests held together in an armed neutrality’, such that at the level of working realistically within an inherited polity, the report is misguided.⁴²⁴ Secondly, the church should focus on ‘nurturing its corporate spirituality as much as its managerial efficiency’ (though it is not clear whether the writer believes that efficiency and spirituality are inevitably incompatible). The use of the word ‘corporate’ in this context is especially telling, since it functions in the sentence in such a way as to suggest both a business and an ecclesiological frame of reference. The article rests on some unexamined assumptions about both the Church and the effects of management theory, but highlights in a more popular form some of the anxieties voiced by Evans.

⁴²¹ Ibid., p. 99.

⁴²² Ibid., p. 101. Evans also notes on p. 99 that ‘the headship of Christ is also conspicuously underplayed in the report.’

⁴²³ *The Independent*, November 29th 2005.

⁴²⁴ Ibid. David Holloway’s critique makes a similar point about the inappropriateness and unworkability of the Church of England trying to move towards being a regulatory agency. <http://trushare.com/06NOV95/NO95TURN.htm>, accessed on 21.4.2011.

Hind picks up the body imagery from Turnbull without any significant shift in how it is employed. The most sustained piece of close reading of Turnbull is Richard H. Roberts' essay 'Ruling the Body: the care of souls in a managerial church,' where many of the rhetorical characteristics I have identified in Hind are also picked up by Roberts.⁴²⁵ Roberts's observation that 'there is an odd juxtaposition of a mechanical, functional language and the organic, theologically derived imagery of the "body"' could apply as much to Hind as to Turnbull. Roberts introduces a metaphor of his own to express his dislike, describing the text as having 'the marks of skilful surgery directed towards the creation of a single-headed creature from diverse and contrasting raw materials'; he expands this further as he describes 'sutures' between two levels of discourse to create a 'monstrous' effect.⁴²⁶ Roberts' critique of managerialism in both this essay and in a companion piece, 'The end of the university and the last academic', is thoroughgoing in its application both to the academy and the church. His criticism of the direction in which the Church of England is moving involves several inter-related ideas. Firstly, he sees 'the pursuit of institutional and organisational efficiency' as counter to the central tasks of ministry (prophetic interpretation and effective pastoral care, neither of which can be achieved by Quality Assurance, benchmarking and the like); he foresees priests being 'locked into the performance and quantitative measurement of a grid of pre-determined, benchmarked outcomes' which are a thin disguise for episcopal power (what he refers to as 'an ecclesial Panopticon of other-and-self-administered appraisal.'⁴²⁷ This is, Roberts believes, part of a wider trend towards a technology of efficiency, a process whereby 'local

⁴²⁵ Richard H. Roberts, *Religion, Theology and the Human Sciences*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 171, 176, 164.

cultures are captured, rationalised, regulated and redirected by managers who then present their reconstruction of reality to be accepted and “owned” by operatives.⁴²⁸

Roberts tends to fall victim to his own rhetorical exaggeration, and gives less space to the genuine tensions within either academy or church, and to the possibilities which still exist for subversion and resistance, than to a grim diagnosis of all that is wrong. However, it is depressing that despite the existence of a number of thoughtful and measured critiques of Turnbull, Hind uses many similar strategies and exhibits the same mixture of discourses and a similar ‘carefully wrought rhetorical structure... in which the ‘shape’ of the text is reminiscent of that of a well-planned liturgy.’⁴²⁹ This suggests that the authors of Hind were either unaware of, or took no account of, the reservations expressed by Roberts and others.

The organisation as body

Martyn Percy’s critique of *Working as One Body* focuses less on deconstructing the report’s rhetorical strategies and more on exploring three areas of concern it raises. These are the way in which it sees ecclesial power being handled; its distorted vision of episcopacy which conflates the bishop with the head of an organisation, whereas the Head of the Church is Christ; and wider questions of theology and ecclesiology. Like Roberts, Percy questions why the report chooses body metaphors: ‘the notion of a body always invites deferment to a head in contemporary thinking, since we are used to imagining our personal centre as somehow being cognitive – in the mind. Thus, a hegemony naturally

⁴²⁸ Ibid., p. 162.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., p. 169.

arises when this image is overplayed or used extensively; perhaps other metaphors might counteract this?'⁴³⁰ Percy summarises his critique thus:

Working as One Body, because it lacks an organic dimension to its interpretation of embodiment, effectively creates the machinery in which decisions and people are processed in the interests of efficiency. The lack of humane, alternative-symbolic and mystical visions of the Church plays into the hands of capitalist philosophies and rhetoric which have done so much to dehumanise our society.⁴³¹

Percy's comments highlight a major problem with the use of body language in Hind: the way in which body is used both as a theological and an organisational image in ways which are consistently in a managerial rather than a theological key.⁴³²

The difficulty of finding a language in which to talk about the church on both an organisational and theological level is something with which the Church of England has been struggling during the latter half of the twentieth century. Ranson, Bryman and Hinings put the issue succinctly in their 1977 volume *Clergy, Ministers and Priests* when, employing a sociological vocabulary, they describe the key issue as being 'the extent of correspondence between a particular religious symbol system and a particular

⁴³⁰ Martyn Percy, 'Bureaucratic ideology in established religion' in *Power and the Church*, Cassell, London, 1998, pp. 121-140, p. 126.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁴³² The authors of *Hind One* in a footnote to 3.16 justify their choice of the body model thus: 'Despite abuses and misunderstandings of this model (especially in the interests of 'integrist' and top-down structures of Church organization), the language and imagery of the Body can, with these safeguards, reinforce both the christological and pneumatological nature of ministry as well as drawing attention to its corporate (and hence collaborative) character.' *Hind One*, p. 192.

organisational pattern.⁴³³ Their work, published over thirty years ago, identifies a number of problems which the Church of England is still trying to resolve, not least the difficulty of reforming structures. Ranson et al map the general contours of the problem thus:

It is in the nature of organisations based in belief systems that the actual structure and operation of the organisation should reflect those beliefs. In this sense the organisation is an operationalisation or structural expression of the belief system. In an economic organisation the concern is with efficiency. In a religious organisation the concern is with symbolic appropriateness.⁴³⁴

The question the authors then go on to ask is whether the Church's criterion for organisational evaluation has shifted from 'symbolic appropriateness' to 'logico-experimentality'.⁴³⁵ It is my contention that Hind One represents another attempt by the Church of England to try and combine these two approaches and discourses, and that the way in which the body is employed as an image in Chapter Three is illustrative of this urge. It is possible that a fundamental category error is being made in mapping New Testament body imagery onto an institution like the Church of England, whose polity does not lend itself to body language in any coherent way ('episcopally led, synodically governed' does not imply the kind of organic unity the body image evokes). The Church of England's organs of governance and the connections between them would be better characterised by imagery to do with branches of the same plant than to limbs and organs working in harmony.⁴³⁶

⁴³³ Stewart Ranson, Alan Bryman, Bob Hinings, *Clergy, Ministers and Priests*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1977, p. 98.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁴³⁶ Martyn Percy puts it this way: 'Recognising that the body has power leads to an appropriate directional plurality for the Church and the realisation that the dispersed nature

Scripture and the body

In looking at Hind body language and the uses to which it is put, it is necessary briefly to trace its roots in the New Testament. Hind One first mentions the body image as one of several images which are to do with mutual belonging and relationship: ‘The New Testament models of the Church are characteristically relational and imply mutual belonging: for example, spiritual stones in a living temple, the vine and the branches, the body of Christ.’⁴³⁷ These images are chosen for their capacity to reinforce an idea of an overall unity with diverse roles within it, but a closer look reveals that they do not function in the same way, nor do they have the same metaphorical entailments. Johannine vine and branch imagery cannot be mapped directly onto body of Christ imagery on the basis that they have interdependence in common. When at 3.21 Hind One cites the image of the body as typical, it highlights three aspects of the image:

first, that the body can only be spoken of in conjunction with its crucified, risen and exalted head, present through his Spirit; second, that properly understood, this model is a guarantee of a diversity of functions; and third, that it is ultimately an eschatological image, ‘the body of him who fills all in all’ (Ephesians 1:23).⁴³⁸

This is the second reference to Ephesians 1.23 (the first is at 3.13), and is the only New Testament passage cited by Hind with reference to the body. Ephesians 1.23, like Colossians 1.18, is not about the internal ordering of the church, but about the cosmic

of the Church’s power is really only focused in the dynamic and economic Trinity. In other words, development comes in mutual and open relationships that empower by gift, sacrifice, trust, service and otherness.’ Percy, *Power and the Church*, op. cit., p. 130.

⁴³⁷ Hind One, 3.4.

⁴³⁸ Hind One, 3.21.

relationship between Christ as head over the cosmos and the Church. The use of head and body language in this verse has moved on from its use in 1 Corinthians 12.12-27 or Romans 12.4-5, when it is applied to the identity and composition of the local church and the diversity and interdependence of its members.⁴³⁹ Body as local church with the head as just another member has developed into the cosmic Christ who fills the universe and the church. In identifying body imagery as having multiple dimensions the report opens up the possibility of allowing the image to unfold in all its richness and to offer a challenge to the discourse of managing outcomes; what happens instead is that Ephesians 1.23 is used as a gesture towards an eschatological understanding of church without resourcing practical policy in any obvious way.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁹ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary, Ephesians*, Dallas, Texas, 1990, p. 71. 'By the time of Colossians and Ephesians the term "the body" has become an explicit description of the universal Church as distinct from the more local application of the image in 1 Corinthians 12 or Romans 12. In fact, of the many references to the "body" in Colossians and Ephesians only two explicitly retain the original comparison involving the interdependence of the parts of a social organism' The point in this passage is not how the church is ordered: 'The Church is nothing in itself. It is a special community only because Christ is its head and his presence fills it.' Lincoln, *op.cit.*, p. 80.

⁴⁴⁰ With a similar lack of consistency, Hind One approvingly cites John T. Robinson's essay 'Kingdom, Church and Ministry' at 3.12 and 3.16, but ignores his analysis of body language in relation to the church. John T. Robinson's *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* takes as its starting premise the desirability of people choosing interdependence rather than independence: 'solidarity is the divinely ordained structure in which personal life is to be lived.' (John A.T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology*, SCM, London, 1952, p. 9.) Yet Robinson refutes any idea that Paul's body language in 1 Corinthians is to be applied in any straightforward way to group behaviour: 'When Paul took the term *soma* and applied it to the Church, what it must have conveyed to him and his readers was ... something not corporate but corporal. It directed the mind to a person; it did not of itself suggest a social group.' (Robinson, p. 50.) Robinson quotes Michael Ramsey as saying that 'to call the Church the body of Christ was to draw attention to it not primarily as a collection of men, but primarily as Christ himself in His own being and life' (*The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, p. 35). Consequently, says Robinson, we must beware of speaking of the 'metaphor' of the Body of Christ: 'to say that the Church is the body of Christ is no more of a metaphor than to say that the flesh of the incarnate Jesus or the bread of the Eucharist is the body of Christ. None of them is 'like' His body...each of them *is* the body of Christ.' (p. 51) Furthermore, Robinson suggests that the best translation of 1 Corinthians 12.27 is 'Ye are the body of Christ and severally membranes thereof –

Since a complete analysis of body imagery in the New Testament is beyond the scope of this thesis, my focus is on the ideological dimension of body of Christ language in Scripture.⁴⁴¹ In order to see how Scripture could have informed the Hind settlement in more creative ways I will briefly introduce a different perspective on body language via Yung Suk Kim's work on the politics of the metaphor of Christ's body in Corinth. Suspicion about issues of power is a feature of recent Pauline scholarship, and there is a range of interpretations as to the ways in which body metaphors are used in the Corinthian correspondence as part of a rhetorical strategy to re-establish control.⁴⁴² By applying Kim's argument to the current politics of ecclesial body language I aim to retrieve the subversive potential of the body image and to release its capacity to renew the institution.

definitely NOT 'members': Paul's 'underlying conception is not of a supra-personal collective, but of a specific personal organism.' (Robinson, p. 51).

⁴⁴¹ Here Dale Martin's question about body language is pertinent: 'How does it intersect, challenge, or protect the structures of power in any given society?' Dale Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1995, Postscript, p. 251. Martin concludes thus on p. 251: 'If this study has led us to examine the often unrecognised implications of our own constructions of the bodies of ourselves and others, then some purpose will have been served by our attempt to enter the Corinthian body.'

⁴⁴² Margaret M. Mitchell, for example, argues that Paul uses the body metaphor much as it was used in the ancient world to reinforce his exhortation to unity: *Paul and The Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1991, pp. 157-164. Elizabeth Castelli, reading Paul through the lens of Foucault, is predictably suspicious of the body image, seeing it as underwriting a corporate understanding of social formation and hierarchy which is ultimately a closed system and which has to do with power relations. On p. 131 she asserts: 'This drive toward the transcendent ideological focus is located within the movement toward institutionalisation, toward a monolithic structure with a singular truth attached.' Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Imitating Paul*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1991. In contrast, Richard B. Hays argues that Paul is primarily stressing the value of interdependence and diversity: Interpretation Series, *First Corinthians*, John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1997, pp. 213-221.

Kim's thesis is that when Paul speaks of the body of Christ he is suggesting more than organisational unity.⁴⁴³ Kim identifies three problems with the way in which the metaphor is sometimes read and used: that it is used as a boundary marker which excludes those on the margins and renders others as 'no bodies'; that as body language comes to signify belonging, so a narrow and closed definition of the community takes hold; and that this impedes an ethical way of reading the "body of Christ" both within the believing community and in wider society. Kim's alternative is to read "body of Christ" as a dynamic rather than a static metaphor, one which emphasises diversity rather than unity, and one whose origins lie in identification with Christ crucified. Kim's project is to enable the reader to re-imagine the body of Christ through Christ crucified, a body 'in radical association with the broken bodies in the world.'⁴⁴⁴

In contrast to this crucicentric impetus where the body of Christ is about the union of each believer with Christ, Kim presents body language in the Deutero-Pauline letters as functioning 'as a metaphor for something "built" (an *oikodome*), an institution metaphorised as a sort of organic whole.'⁴⁴⁵ The later letters, he argues, are 'based on a metaphor of membership in a social body, drawing on a high Christology with Christ as head, a hegemonic body politic.'⁴⁴⁶ In 1 Corinthians, however, the body of Christ becomes 'a central expression of Paul's theology of the cross, his ethics of radical participation in

⁴⁴³ Kim goes so far as to assert that 'over-use of the "ecclesial-organic" approach condones, or understands Paul as advocating, a dominant ideology of hierarchical unity, an ideology promoted by the Greco-Roman rhetoric of *homonoia*.' Yung Suk Kim, *Christ's Body in Corinth*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2008, p. 1.

⁴⁴⁴ Kim, op. cit., p. 31. On p. 36 Kim states: 'Whereas the dominant ideology in society generates a centripetal force of hierarchical unity, Paul's theology of 'in Christ' is centrifugal, acting as a force for God's love for all people – especially for the downtrodden.'

⁴⁴⁵ Kim, op. cit., p. 65.

⁴⁴⁶ Kim, op. cit., p. 68.

Christ's death, and his hermeneutics of chosen marginality.⁴⁴⁷ Although Kim at times draws too sharp a contrast between 1 Corinthians and Ephesians and Colossians, and does not deal with the Foucauldian critique of Paul's calls for unity in Corinth offered by critics such as Elizabeth Castelli, his construction of an alternative way in which to read the body metaphor resonates with my own call for a recovery of its missing entailments. Body language as a way of speaking of being drawn together into Christ's death and resurrection and embracing the folly of the cross has much to offer those entering training for ministry, or indeed as a foundation for any kind of Christian learning.⁴⁴⁸

Embodiment, gender and power

Lakoff and Johnson's work from the perspective of philosophical linguistics has enabled me to identify where certain entailments of the body metaphor have been lost or suppressed in Hind, and to formulate some of the report's resultant theological weaknesses. I have tracked a consistent thread of critique since the publication of the Turnbull Report, and suggested some of the dangers of conflating theological and organisational metaphors. By drawing on the work on Kim I have indicated a theological alternative to the reading of the

⁴⁴⁷ Kim, p. 67. On p. 74 Kim adds that 'being united in the same mind and the same purpose is not a matter of belonging to an ecclesiastical body, but rather is a matter of having a mind and purpose framed by the same gospel that does not empty the cross of Christ of its power.'

⁴⁴⁸ A similar re-working of the image of the body is offered by William T. Cavanaugh: 'the Body of Christ is not just centripetal: we are united not just to God, as to the center, but to one another. This is no liberal body, in which the centre seeks to maintain the independence of individuals from each other, nor a fascist body, which seeks to bind individuals to each other through the centre. Christ is indeed the Head of the Body, but the members do not relate to one another through the Head alone, for Christ himself is found not only in the center but at the margins of the Body, radically identified with the "least of my brothers and sisters"... with whom all the members suffer and rejoice together (1 Corinthians 12.26).' William T. Cavanaugh, 'The City: Beyond Secular Parodies' in *Radical Orthodoxy*, John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward (eds.), Routledge, London and New York, 1999, pp. 182-200, p. 196.

body metaphor as one of organisational hierarchy and proposed instead a way of reading the body both as the site of individual commitment to and identification with the crucified Christ, but also as enabling diversity within the Christian community rather than imposing unity. My final problematisation of the body metaphor arises from insights from feminism and Foucault and deals with issues of gender and power.

Ways in which the body is both understood and used in metaphor are always embedded in social practices and relationships of power. The body is not so much an object or a mechanism as a relation within a complex system of networks: political, sexual, spiritual.⁴⁴⁹ As ways of understanding the body change, so the symbolic uses to which it is put will change, in a dialectical relationship. Thus, although the image of the Church as the body of Christ may seem to be a timeless one, it will acquire different implications as it picks up ideas of body in succeeding centuries.⁴⁵⁰ Sociologists of the body are agreed that the experience and symbolic dimensions of embodiment have changed since St Paul took up and re-worked the image of the corporate body in 1 Corinthians, though they divide and name key epochs in slightly different ways.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁹ Thus Michel Feher's observation that 'the history of the human body is not so much the history of its representation as of its modes of construction', Introduction to *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, Michel Feher with Ramon Naddaf and Nadia Tazi (eds.), Urzone Inc., New York, 1989.

⁴⁵⁰ For example, Peter Brown points out that 'the late antique body was embedded in a cosmic matrix in ways that made its perception of itself profoundly unlike our own.' Peter Brown, *The Body and Society*, Second Edition, 2008, Introduction, p. xlv. See also Dale Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, op. cit.

⁴⁵¹ For a reading of the way in which the political use of bodily metaphors from Greco-Roman antiquity change on their journey from Corinth to the high middle ages via the Carolingian period, see Jacques Le Goff, 'Head or Heart? The Political use of Body Metaphors in the Middle Ages' in Feher et al, op. cit., pp. 12-27. For more general sociological discussion of historical changes, see Chris Schilling, *The Body and Social Theory*, Sage, London, 1993; Brian Turner *The Body and Society*, 2nd Edition, Sage, London, 1996; John O'Neill, *Five Bodies*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1985; Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body*, Methuen, London and New York, 1984.

One problem with the metaphor of the body is, as Moira Gatens points out, there is no such thing as the human body, only male and female bodies: ‘discourses which employ this image of the unified body assume that the metaphor of the human body is a coherent one, and of course it’s not... the neutral body assumed by the masculine state is implicitly a masculine body.’⁴⁵² It is possible that the same kinds of process Gatens describes in the development of the imaginary of the socio-political body, configured by men as primarily a male body governed by male norms, have also shaped the development of the institutional church such that ecclesiastical body language is irretrievably patriarchal and male.⁴⁵³ At the theological level, there are various moves that can be made to counter such a charge.⁴⁵⁴ However, if we are dealing with ways in which institutional structures reflect and reinforce theological assumptions, there is no avoiding Gatens’ challenge. The Anglican Communion as a whole, and the Church of England, is confused about gendered bodies and the Body of Christ. Unity, authority and embodied sexuality seem inextricably linked in problematic ways.⁴⁵⁵ The Hind report is resolutely asexual in its description of learners, ordinands and disciples, which may not be the best way of facing and articulating wounds in the body, or of acknowledging that understandings of learning may not be gender-free.

⁴⁵² Moira Gatens, ‘Corporeal representation in/and the body politic’ in *Imaginary Bodies*, Routledge, London and New York, 1996, p. 24.

⁴⁵³ ‘The political body was conceived historically as the organisation of many bodies into one body which would itself enhance and intensify the powers and capacities of specifically male bodies.’ Gatens, op. cit., p. 71.

⁴⁵⁴ For example, Gavin D’Costa in *Sexing the Trinity* insists that the church must not ‘perpetuate an idolatrous homosexual symbolic’ and proposes the Marian church as the counter to the Body of Christ.

⁴⁵⁵ The document ‘True Union in the Body’ is a good example of how ‘body’ alludes both to the Anglican Communion as a corporate entity and to sexual partnership.

Elizabeth Castelli sees the problem of corporate imagery as being to do with power rather than gender, arguing that the dominant image of the body to describe social and political structures can be traced back to Aristotle, who ‘sees it as a hierarchical-organic model which inscribes a naturalness within socially-constituted relationships’, implying that social order is self-evidently a unity, a closed system with no loose ends, no remainder.⁴⁵⁶ Castelli argues that all social formation is complex and plural, rooted in diverse interests and needs, such that the argument for and imposition of a model of unity ‘often only masks the interestedness of the positions held by the dominant members of the group. Group unity rewrites the perspective of the dominant in the group as the perspective of the entire group; competing discourses are replaced by a univocal discourse.’⁴⁵⁷

This possibility needs to be taken into account, and there are places in *Hind Two*, as I demonstrate below, where the discourse spills over into a frustrated desire to impose unity. It would be foolish to deny altogether Foucault’s insights about ways in which practices of power derive authority from the construction of truth and themselves reinforce those truths by the business of producing texts and social practices to legitimate them. However, I find Castelli’s relentless suspicion problematic in itself. It is possible to read the language of both Paul and the authors of *Hind* as arising from anxiety, frustration and rapid change than as a bid to erase difference.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁶ Elizabeth Castelli, *Imitating Paul*, op. cit., p. 130.

⁴⁵⁷ Castelli, op. cit., p. 132.

⁴⁵⁸ A more nuanced account of how relationships between the imagining subject and the wider social and cultural body can be mapped is found in Paula M. Cooley, *Religious Imagination and the Body*, Oxford University Press, 1994, which acknowledges on p. 5 that ‘the more we understand about the body and the role it plays as object of and vehicle for the social construction of reality, the clearer the inseparability of knowledge, value and power becomes.’

Hind Two: the follow-up

Part Three of Hind Two begins by offering five images which go some way towards providing a broader and more dynamic set of models of the Church and ministry than its predecessor: the Church as that which exists for mission as a fire exists for burning; as the body of Christ; as participation in the life of God; ministry as radical discipleship; and the Church as a formative faith community. Hind Two consciously re-visits the metaphor ‘Church as the body of Christ’ but employs a subtly different vocabulary, beginning with Hind One’s diagnosis of ‘a number of critical fractures’ and describing its prescription/vision as ‘more holistic.’⁴⁵⁹ It goes on to assert that

participation, collaboration and integration are key terms which flow from a vision of the Church as the Body of Christ in which the limbs are bound together, not by proximity or convenience, but by the ligaments and sinews of consciously chosen collaboration within the economy of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁶⁰

The development of the body image attains a much greater physicality here than anything in Hind One; however, it serves a particular rhetorical agenda in this context.

The Introduction to this section of Hind Two strikes a quietly aggressive tone. If there is such a thing as ‘consciously chosen collaboration,’ there is, by implication, conscious rejection of that collaboration. The hidden agenda here is that one organ of the body is demanding compliance from unruly members through some not very subtle rhetorical devices: ‘Reconfiguring relationships between dioceses/districts/synods and theological institutions is not simply a pragmatic proposal, but an outworking of our essential

⁴⁵⁹ Hind Two, p. 59.

⁴⁶⁰ Hind Two, p. 59.

interdependence in the Body of Christ.’ This assertion equates assent to the biblical image of the church as the body of Christ and its dimension of interdependence with compliance with the Hind RTP agenda, which is theologically untenable. Those who, for whatever reason, have not got themselves into RTP’s, may simply have a different understanding of what it means to be part of the body. There is no space for such a view in the report, however; the authors’ syntax becomes more tightly controlled and controlling. Having claimed that the report ‘embodies and discloses beliefs about the nature of ministry, the nature of Church and the mission of God in the world,’ the rhetoric here betrays a frustrated desire to coerce others into a vision and re-structuring of provision which ignores those parts which do not fit and applies theological pressure to shame them into conforming.

It is this determination to use the body metaphor to demand compliance with a central agenda which I believe undermines Hind Two. There is a sense in which this demand reflects a wider trend in what John O’Neill describes as ‘administered’ societies, where experts function on behalf of the mass of those they serve and end up adopting a bureaucratic discourse which alienates them from the reality of those very people’s daily lives. O’Neill suggests that:

The rationalisation of the administered society requires that political discourse be problem-specific and subject to decisionistic or calculative reasoning. In turn, the very scientificity of the language and reportage of the social sciences contributes to the administrative effort to manage behaviour and institutions according to standards of modern efficiency. The latter, however, are ill-suited for dealing with the daily experience of unemployment, ignorance and teenage suicide and

pregnancies which falls upon families, churches, and local agencies that must cope as best they can.⁴⁶¹

O'Neill's analysis identifies one of the difficulties of the Hind settlement, namely that the messiness of the local becomes removed from the reasoned discourse of the centre. The centre cannot understand why the members are refusing to co-operate, while the members are baffled by the lack of awareness of local realities at the centre. This is both a theological and an organisational issue.⁴⁶²

Mutual incomprehension between the centre and the local is one way of describing the impasse in which the Hind settlement found itself even as Hind Two was being written. A social anthropological model is a helpful tool for understanding this more clearly. Jerome Neyrey's paper 'Body Language in 1 Corinthians' draws on the work of Mary Douglas as a means of exploring Paul's conflict with the Christians in Corinth. Douglas' model is a way of understanding any bounded system by means of tracking the correspondence between attitudes towards the physical body and the structures making up the wider social body.

Using Douglas's model, Neyrey interprets Paul's teaching on the nature of community life

⁴⁶¹ John O'Neill, *Five Bodies*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1985, p. 78.

⁴⁶² Another provocative contributor to the discussion is Stanley Hauerwas, whose essay 'What Could it Mean for the Church to Be Christ's Body?' from *In Good Company*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1995, raises questions about what body language might and might not mean politically. So, for example, the observation on p. 27 that 'the church is always tempted to imitate the habits of those in power' and the statement on p. 26: 'I seek, therefore, not for the church to be a community, but rather to be a body constituted by disciplines that create the capacity to resist the disciplines of the body associated with the modern nation-state and, in particular, the economic habits that support that state.' Hauerwas goes on to draw on Reinhard Hutter's contrast between a utopian and a pneumatological eschatology: 'The first follows the logic of modern politics, in which the implementation of the end defines the success of the political agents, the second follows the logic of the Spirit, where the ends are embodied in the means in such a way that "success" is defined only by the specific nature of certain ends... What is crucial to acknowledge is that the church's "success" can never be made intelligible independent of Jesus Christ's crucifixion and resurrection and God's eschatological reality in the Holy Spirit.' Hauerwas, op. cit., p. 30.

as being congruent with his teaching on the conduct of the physical body, since in both instances there is an emphasis on maintaining boundaries and purity through rigorous self-discipline (what Douglas calls 'strong group' values). The Corinthians, in contrast to the ideal Paul holds up, are in this scheme a 'weak group' who are apt either to regard the body as a means to an end, or to consider it to be have little relevance on the basis that true life is spiritual. The tension arises because their self-understanding clashes with Paul's idea of how they should function corporately and corporeally as Christians.

The concepts of grid and group are key to Douglas' model. 'Group' refers to the experience of a bounded social group, and 'grid' to rules which relate one person to another.⁴⁶³ She expands these categories by introducing a further distinction between high 'grid' and low 'grid, terms 'referring to the degree of assent given to the norms, definitions and classifications of a cultural system.' High 'grid' indicates a high degree of fit or match between the individual's experience and societal patterns of perception and evaluation.⁴⁶⁴ Low 'grid' is a corresponding low degree of fit between individual experience and wider social assumptions and practices. It is when 'group' and 'grid' structures clash that dissonance is felt. Neyrey's use of this social-scientific model sheds interesting light on 1 Corinthians, and the model can also be usefully applied to the wider context out of which Hind One and Two emerge and which they seek to address. The Church of England is not, organisationally or theologically, what in Douglas' terms could be called a 'strong group' (if so, it would be characterised by much tighter structures and boundaries). Although it includes individuals and congregations which exhibit those characteristics, as an organisation it is much nearer to being a 'weak group.' When a 'strong group'

⁴⁶³ Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, Routledge, London, 2003 (1970), p. viii. When strong grid and strong group are found together, relationships are clearly ordered and bounded.

⁴⁶⁴ Jerome Neyrey, 'Body Language in 1 Corinthians', *Semeia* 35 (1986), pp. 129-170.

pronouncement comes down from on high, one which does not fit with weak group expectations, there is trouble.

Another of Douglas' paired categories, smooth/shaggy, also goes some way towards understanding resistance to Hind. 'Smooth' describes a system where group ideals are clear, roles are defined and ladders of authority are clearly understood and observed; 'shaggy' denotes a culture of greater individualism, involving critiques of the system, and a lesser commitment to roles and structures. One of the problems Hind has encountered has been a clash of cultures, where 'smooth' language has emanated from Church House, only to be received by 'shaggy' practitioners. Because the Church of England is not structured in a way which makes enforcement of policy easy, there is no straightforward way of moving the conversation on.

A way forward: the transformation of the body metaphor

Lakoff and Johnson claim that metaphors play a central role in the construction of social and political reality: 'People in power get to impose their metaphors'.⁴⁶⁵ Although there is some truth in this, this statement underestimates the capacity of those who are on the receiving end of dominant discourses to subvert them, to work with alternative metaphors or to re-invest existing ones with new meaning, especially in the context of the Church of England which has few mechanisms to enforce conformity. It is easy to exaggerate the negative effects of the Hind settlement and to imply that its imposition of a reduced and dangerously one-dimensional metaphor of the Church onto those who read and implement its proposals has undermined the mission of the Church of England. That this is not the case

⁴⁶⁵ Lakoff and Johnson, op. cit., p. 157.

is illustrated by the unfolding of events since 2003. Some regions, as indicated in Chapter Two, have found creative ways of working together and used the report as a catalyst for new co-operative ventures. Others have either fought or ignored Hind. There is a sense in which subsequent reports have sought to reinforce the message of Hind One whilst attempting to adopt a more conversational tone and a wider range of theological metaphors.

The Church has routinely employed metaphors for its own life, for the life of the individual disciple, and for the nature of God, which highlight particular aspects and suppress, hide and avoid others.⁴⁶⁶ I suggest that despite the potential of its body language to suggest otherwise, Hind One tends to conceive of learning and ministry in primarily functionalist terms. The remaining chapters of this thesis explore ways in which a richer metaphorical field is critical to re-ignite imagination.⁴⁶⁷ The official pronouncements of the Church of England are in danger of becoming metaphorically impoverished by their reliance on discourses of competence, performance, outcomes and management. My thesis is that unless we restore a greater depth, imagination, creativity and beauty to our thinking about training, theological education and ministry, we will be evacuating our tradition of its symbolic content and will have little that is distinctive to offer the world. Balancing institutional responsibility with theological integrity is a complex task; my aim is not only to deconstruct but also to discover a more honest institutional self-understanding and a

⁴⁶⁶ For a wider exploration of religious metaphor, see Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language*, SCM, London, 1983; Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1985.

⁴⁶⁷ Martyn Percy in 'A Theology of Change for the Church' (Evans and Percy, op. cit., pp. 174-188) employs three metaphors which he sees as having more theological potential than that of the body: the Church as extended family; as an organism; and as a community of blessing. He begins by experimenting with the image of the Church as living membrane, allowing for an interpermeability between the body of Christ and the wider world, identifying the image as enabling a kind of ecclesiology which is closely related to a particular Christology.

more theologically integrated discourse which will prevent a further shift towards an instrumentalist understanding and polity.

The means by which I will undertake the constructive task of offering possible alternatives is twofold. In the remainder of this chapter, I will demonstrate how *Piers Plowman* draws on Christ's body in ways that develop the body as a much more theologically rich – and problematic – concept than the Hind report allows, and argue that the Church of England needs to have its range of metaphors disrupted and de-centred by the kind of poetic and radically incarnational model of learning, discipleship and life together in Christ which Langland offers. In Chapter Six, I will move to a broader discussion of ways in which theological educators could begin to re-think their models, and propose that human fallibility and error could be embraced within the grace of God rather than controlled or eliminated.

Learning, the body of Christ and Piers Plowman

In the first part of this chapter, I have argued that the Hind report's use of the metaphor of the body is inadequate in several ways: that it is functionalist; that it does not take seriously enough the subversive Christological implications of being the 'body of *Christ*'; that it is static and lacks an eschatological dimension; that it ignores issues of both gender and power; and that it is predicated on the structural maintenance of an institution rather than on a theological understanding of the relationship of parts to the whole and the divine to the human. This in part arises from the difficult task Hind sets itself of trying to encompass theological, educational and strategic elements. The Church as the body of Christ could be a potentially fruitful metaphor to integrate these elements, but my analysis suggests that as

a deep symbol of shared human life under God, corporate imagery has been captivated by other ideologies and rendered incapable of meaning what the authors want it to mean. One of the premises of this thesis is that premodern texts can help in the project of retrieval if they are read carefully and with an awareness of their very different contexts.⁴⁶⁸

I now want to turn to Langland and the use in *Piers Plowman* of the body as a metaphor for Christian life together and for the institutional church. I will argue that the symbol of the body needs to be reclaimed on three levels: the personal (including theological anthropology), the ecclesiological/institutional, and the Christological. In looking at each of these, *Piers Plowman* will be drawn on as a resource and as a way of retrieving some aspects of the image of the body which have been lost in the Hind discourse. Firstly, I will consider the embodied nature of human experience, including the reality of sin, suffering and human frailty, by looking at two different passus: the ploughing of the half acre in B6, and the figure of Haukyn in Passus 13-14. Ideals about the harmonious working of the body politic and the possibility of virtuous mutual interdependence come unstuck when the appetites of real human bodies intrude, as Piers discovers, and as Haukyn illustrates.

Secondly, I will analyse some aspects of Passus 20 which indicate how Langland uses body imagery to articulate a sense of total ecclesiastical breakdown; rather than the image of the body offering instrumental optimism, it is used to diagnose deep-seated problems in vivid terms. Thirdly, I will consider how Langland's portrayal of Christ-like discipleship draws

⁴⁶⁸ Kathryn Tanner, 'Shifts in Theology over the Last Quarter Century', *Modern Theology* 26:1, Jan 2010, pp. 39-44, p. 42: 'The widest possible historical knowledge of the various permutations that the Christian symbol system has taken in its complicated alignments with social forces for both good and ill allows the constructive theologian to be better positioned to intervene in the current situation adroitly, effectively, responsibly, with suggestions for both rethinking Christian claims and reconfiguring their import for human life. Knowledge of how Christians have made socio-political judgments at other times and places, on the basis of their own often refigured sense of what Christianity is all about, proves invaluable when tackling the issues of one's own time and circumstance.'

on a more rich and integrated Christology than Hind exhibits by looking at the ways in which the poem presents Christ. Before embarking on some close reading, it will be important to set *Piers Plowman* in its context as regards notions of ecclesiology, authority and the body politic.

Medieval ecclesiology and the body of Christ

As indicated earlier, there is broad consensus that the medieval period construed the body and the embodied subject differently both from the baroque/Renaissance age, and also from the post-Enlightenment industrial capitalist world (the question as to whether or not there is a new state called post-modernity remains unresolved). Ian Burkitt, drawing on Bakhtin's work on Rabelais, charts a shift from the 'open' or 'grotesque' medieval body to the 'closed' body of modernity. In the former understanding, 'the body is not seen as a private possession but a universal, lived phenomenon, represented in everyone.'⁴⁶⁹ A combination of social changes such as the centralisation of the nation state and concomitant shifts in forms of ideological control, and a growing divide between mind and body, lead, in Burkitt's account, to the tendency in modernity 'towards seeing the body as a mechanism which can be understood, repaired and made to work effectively.'⁴⁷⁰ In the fourteenth century, the language of embodiment and the idea of the church as the body of Christ were still part of a unified symbolic system, whereas twenty-first century corporate language is part of a very different symbolic structuring of the world.⁴⁷¹ In comparing the use of a

⁴⁶⁹ Ian Burkitt, *Bodies of Thought*, Sage, London, 1999, pp. 46-7.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-8.

⁴⁷¹ Miri Rubin puts it like this: 'In the Middle Ages the language of religion provided a language of social relations and of a cosmic order; it described and explained the interweaving of natural and supernatural with human action, in a paradigm which from about 1100 was one of sacramentality, with the eucharist at its heart. An ethical world was

theological metaphor in a fourteenth century text with one from the twenty-first century it is useful to be aware of such shifts in understanding, and to be aware of the difficulty of trying to use body language in an uncritical or ahistorical way to talk about Christians learning and living together.⁴⁷²

Exploring body language from a distance of centuries also foregrounds issues of power. Rubin notes that ‘acknowledging the essential indeterminacy of symbols is a concomitant of an investigation of the working, and the unmaking, of power, since it is through power that attempts to fix meaning are made.’⁴⁷³ The ideological dimension of body language cannot be elided, as is acknowledged by Sarah Beckwith as she explores the image of Christ’s body as a symbol shaping and shaped by the social vision of the religious culture of the late Middle Ages in England.⁴⁷⁴ Her thesis is that ‘Christ’s body was the arena where social identity was negotiated, where the relationship of self and society, subjectivity and social process found a point of contact and conflict.’⁴⁷⁵ Although Christ’s body is

constructed through this language.’ Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 1.

⁴⁷² It is important to keep in mind Caroline Walker Bynum’s observation: ‘There is something profoundly alien to modern sensibilities about the role of the body in medieval piety.’ Caroline Walker Bynum, ‘The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages’, in Michel Feher et al, *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, op. cit., pp. 160-219, p. 161.

⁴⁷³ Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, op. cit., p. 8.

⁴⁷⁴ Sarah Beckwith, *Christ’s Body*, Routledge, London and New York, 1993. Beckwith comes to medieval texts as a cultural anthropologist, exploring symbols within the context of the social relationships which they both define and reflect. This approach is echoed in the Introduction to Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (eds.), *Framing Medieval Bodies*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 1994, which claims on p. 5 that the ‘body was a privileged site, vehicle and metaphor of political struggle.’ It is also interesting, in the light of Hind use of the image of the Body, to note Kay and Rubin’s observation on p. 3 that poststructuralists interpret the traditional concept of the *body* in the singular as ‘a cover for masculinist privileging of the male embodied subject.’

⁴⁷⁵ Beckwith, *Christ’s Body*, op. cit., p. 23, in Chapter Two: ‘Christ’s Body and the Imaging of Social Order’. The significance of Corpus Christi processions is noted by Beckwith.

‘ostensibly an image of the unity of Christian society, the strain in the model, and the questioning to which it is put, the different, conflicting uses which agents use it for, are easily apparent.’⁴⁷⁶

Use of the image of the body is inevitably political; it can, as Beckwith points out, be used simultaneously as an image of subordination and resistance to social hierarchy, and becomes ‘the focus for the democratising, lay tendencies of medieval piety... an unstable image, a site of conflict where the clerical and the lay meet to fight it out, borrowing from each other’s discourses.’⁴⁷⁷ We see this tension in *Piers Plowman*, where Langland wrestles with bodies, their needs and desires, and the form a saved body might take individually and corporately. Michel Camille notes that despite the ideal of organic order expressed in works such as John of Salibury’s *Policraticus*, images of the body which were excluded by the Church re-surface in the marginalia of manuscripts in the form of the monstrous, the excremental and the sexually bizarre.⁴⁷⁸ Langland’s poem tries to hold this range of bodiliness together rather than excluding or hiding; he insists on an embodied hero, Piers, who wrestles with the stubborn and uncontrollable bodies of his fellow-workers in ploughing the half-acre. In the poem, human bodies and the social body are called to reflect ultimate spiritual values, but this vision seems unrealisable and constantly falls apart.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 26. Beckwith cites as an example Bishop Despenser’s commissioning of a painting of the scourging of Christ, and the complex relationship the scene represents between resistance to and acceptance of punishment as reflecting corresponding social strains.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 32.

⁴⁷⁸ ‘The metaphorical power of the body to stand for ‘any bounded system’ was never more relevant than during the Middle Ages when it served as the locus of a variety of social displacements, intensely-felt religious practices, medical and philosophical debate as well as courtly self-fashioning.’ Michael Camille, ‘The image and the self: unwriting late medieval bodies’ in Kay and Rubin, op. cit., pp. 62-99, p. 77.

⁴⁷⁹ It is interesting to compare Langland’s approach to the body of Christ, the body politic and human bodies with Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt’s account of Julian of Norwich in

What I will examine is how body language in *Piers Plowman*, arising as it does out of, and in response to, the very different cultural and symbolic context just outlined, can contribute to the retrieval of a more adequate theology of embodiment for the heirs of Hind.

Real bodies, real people: Piers Plowman and the embodied subject

Piers Plowman emphasises the priority of the embodied subject first and foremost by means of its narrative form. Issues of education, ethics and politics are approached through the dream experiences of the protagonist; the first person form does not reduce the scope of the poem but rather reminds us that abstractions are only ever encountered by and instantiated in human persons. Will is not just a soul or mind, as is vividly demonstrated by the description of the physical assaults Elde (Old Age) makes on him in the final passus (B20.183-198). Nancy Bradley Warren identifies a genre in late medieval writing that she calls life writing, in which she includes Julian of Norwich's *Showings* and *Piers Plowman*, and suggests the following as being qualities of the genre: 'an incarnational poetic, a commitment to incarnational epistemology, a performative imperative, an 'I' paradoxically individual and plural at once.'⁴⁸⁰ Warren defines an incarnational epistemology as one which understands 'bodies as the site of and means to knowledge of self and others, both

Julian of Norwich and the Mystical Body Politic of Christ, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1999. Bauerschmidt's presentation of Julian as 'one who theologically imagines the political' (p. 3) could apply equally, though in a different way, to Langland. Where Langland differs from Julian is in his conflation of the crucified Christ with a common labourer – though this is not unconnected with Julian's parable of the lord and the servant – and his insistence on locating his 'theo-drama' in concrete context of agricultural life in the fields and villages of fourteenth century England.

⁴⁸⁰ Nancy Bradley Warren, 'Incarnational (Auto) Biography' in Paul Strohm (ed.), *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature: Middle English*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2007, pp. 369-385, p. 32.

divine and human', and she sees the textual corpus as playing its own part in the process of the reader re-embodying what has been read.⁴⁸¹

Because the poem is so rooted in embodiment it can be difficult to select any particular passage as explicitly emphasising the irreducibility of real people with real bodies, but I will focus on two sections of the poem: the ploughing of the Half Acre in B6, and the scenes in B13 and 14 with Haukyn the Active Man.

The ploughing of the Half-Acre: embodied pilgrimage

Passus B6 describes the re-direction of the pilgrims' quest into the joint enterprise of ploughing Piers' half-acre. After delivering a long speech to the knight about their shared values, Piers re-defines his pilgrim status in terms of leadership of the group of labourers:

[He] caste on [hise]clothes, yclouted and hole,
[Hise] cokes and [hise] coffes for cold of [hise] nailes,
And [heng hise]hoper at [his] hals in stede of a scryppe:
'A bushel of bred corn brynge me therinne,
For I wol sowe it myself, and sithenes wol I wende
To pilgrymage as palmeres doon, pardon for to have.' (B6.59-64)

(He put on his clothes, patched and whole,

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., p. 374. See also her comment on p. 378 about B11.1-3: 'Here Piers Plowman encompasses the epistemological trajectory of an 'I', a trajectory in which the body is always implicated, and it translates embodied knowledge into a textual corpus that strives to breach the boundary between the body of the text and the body of the reader, to become "reincarnated" in readers.'

his leggings and mittens for his cold finger-nails,
and hung his seed-basket at his neck instead of a scrip:
'Bring me a bushel of seed-corn to put in there,
for I will sow it myself, and afterwards I will go
on pilgrimage as palmers do, to obtain pardon.'

Piers' leadership role involves tackling the most obdurate aspects of social organisation and human resistance to reform. The expression used in B7.115 when Piers tears the pardon, 'in pure tene', is used also in B.6.117 when he encounters the idleness of those who refuse to join in the common enterprise (and again in B.16.86 when he initiates the Incarnation by grabbing the second prop of the tree of charity). Wasters and idlers threaten to undermine the whole enterprise, their falseness characterised by their misuse of language: they complain to Piers and 'preyde hym of grace' – the word grace appears three times in lines 123-127 – all in the context of the pleading of the fake beggars. Grace is used as a cheap word for getting something for nothing, a cynical appeal to Piers to let them get away with their deception; at the end of the poem, in despair as the Church has been taken over by impostors, Conscience leaves to seek Piers, crying after Grace. The reality of divine costly grace and its cynically invoked counterpart, human indulgence of the sin of others, are juxtaposed throughout the poem. Piers here invokes Truth as his criterion of judgement, having been warned about wasters, and tells them: 'Truthe shal teche yow his teme to drive' (B6.136). The pun on team and theme (as in a preacher's theme for a sermon) recurs here, indicating that true belief and genuine hard labour for the common good come from the same source.

The ideal of providing for everyone's spiritual and bodily needs by common labour does not turn out to be easily realised. Despite the social contract between Piers and the knight, and the knight's use of law to keep the rebels in line (B6.164-9), the disobedient element will not be so easily drawn into conformity. Piers has to have recourse to the harsh teaching of Hunger, whom he summons in lines B6.172-3. After drastic measures, Piers asks Hunger's advice about how to keep everyone working:

Now wolde I wite of thee, what were the beste,
And how I myghte amaistren hem and make hem to werche. (B6.210-211)

(Now I want to know from you what is the best [thing to do],
and how I might govern them and make them work.)

Piers is not simply exercising power, but attempting to be faithful to the statement he makes in B6.207-9: the people are his 'bloody bretheren, for God boughte us alle' (blood brothers, for God bought us all). Truth has taught Piers

to loven hem ech one
And to helpen hem of alle thing, ay as hem nedeth.

(to love each one
and to help them in everything as they have need.)

This is both the basis of society as Christianly understood, and the source of the dilemma: how it is that people can be organised for the common good, in love, when they are sinful and recalcitrant. Hunger's response reveals the same root attitude of Christian charity, telling Piers to support the injured both 'for Cristes love of heven' and 'for so lawe of

kynde wolde.’ It is both natural and pleasing to God (arising from the love of Christ, and for the sake of that love) to share with those who cannot fend for themselves.

Hunger proceeds to teach Piers, employing a method typical of the poem: Scriptural examples and injunctions, an appeal to Kynde Wit, the convergence of all the available sources of authority with a generous dash of common sense and dietary advice (B6.260-274), leading Piers to respond enthusiastically, ‘By Seint Poul...this arn profitable wordes!’ (‘By Saint Paul, these are profitable words!').

Unfortunately, once Hunger has been invited he proves reluctant to leave, and grows out of control, reducing the people to semi-starvation. The Passus ends in an apocalyptic warning, and it is never clear how Piers manages to call off Hunger and restore balance. The Passus takes refuge in threats of doom and famine unless God has mercy, resorting to a totally different discourse from that of the socially engaged conversations of Piers, the knight and Hunger. One possible explanation for this abrupt shift at the end of B6 is that Langland is struggling with his mode of representation at this point in the poem. In a detailed discussion of this section, Kathleen Hewett-Smith suggests that

Langland’s representations of working poverty on the half-acre resist complete allegorical sublimation and disrupt the authoritative allegorical framework of the scene, frustrating its attempts to privilege figural over literal, abstract over concrete modes of understanding.⁴⁸²

Because Langland chooses to depict the real historical conditions of his day we are forced simultaneously to pay attention to the literal level of the sign, the reality of hunger and subsistence agricultural economy, and also to the allegorical level: ‘in short, the subject of

⁴⁸² Kathleen M Hewett-Smith, ‘Allegory on the Half-Acre: the Demands of History,’ in YLS 10, 1996, pp. 1-22, p. 4.

poverty involves the poem in an intense confrontation with its own modes of referentiality.⁴⁸³ There is a connection between this observation and my interpretation of the importance of Piers in the previous chapter whereby the literal is not subsumed by the allegorical, humanity not replaced by divinity. Social life simply is lived as embodied reality, and cannot be transcended; this passus demonstrates that it is difficult even for it to be redeemed.

B6 reminds the reader that schemes of moral improvement, social cohesion or salvation are always vulnerable to the forces of appetite and sloth and the other deadly sins, to embodied forms of resistance which call for an embodied response.⁴⁸⁴ What heals the beggars and gets everyone working is the presence of Hunger and the need to work (B6.183-198); without the threat of starvation they become demanding and discontented (B6 302-319). Labour, vocation, spiritual truth, social structures and physical desires and limitations are inextricably linked. I will return to this in relation to Hind later in the chapter.

Haukyn: the inescapable nature of embodiment

The second example of Langland's awareness of the burden of embodied human life and its potential redemption is the character of Haukyn, who appears in Passus 13. The poem is in the middle of its difficult central section at this point, during which Will is wandering from person to person seeking and rejecting guidance. He has just attended a banquet with the

⁴⁸³ Ibid., p. 1.

⁴⁸⁴ Hunger's response is vividly described: 'Hunger in haste thoo hente Wastour by the mawe / And wrong hym so by the wombe that al watrede hise eighen. / He buffeted the Bretoner aboute the chekes / That he loked lik a lanterne al his lif after. / He bette hem so bothe, he brast ner hire guttes.' (B6.174-178). (Hunger then in haste grabbed Waster by the stomach, and squeezed his belly so hard that his eyes watered. He buffeted the Breton around the cheeks so that he looked like a lantern all his life after. He beat them both so much that he almost burst their guts.)

Doctor of Divinity, which Patience and Conscience have left in order to pursue their pilgrimage. The Doctor has proved to be too self-satisfied to provide any spiritual guidance and so they set forth, Patience carrying the pilgrim provisions of

sobretee and simple speche and soothfast belive

To conforte hym and Conscience if thei come in place

There unkyndenesse and coveitise is, hungry contrees bothe. (B13.217-219)

(sobriety and simple speech and steadfast belief

to comfort himself and Conscience if they came to a place

where unkindness and covetousness dwell, both hungry countries.)

Thus equipped, they travel talking together of Dowel (B13.220), when they meet a scruffy figure who turns out to be Haukyn. The juxtaposition of the self-righteous Doctor and the seller of wafers, tainted by his proximity to doubtful economic practices, recalls Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the publican. Immediately the well-trained, idealistic duo of Conscience and Patience are confronted with the uncomfortable reality of unredeemed bodiliness.

Haukyn is described initially as a minstrel (B13.224) whose other name is *Activa Vita* – someone who hustles for a living.⁴⁸⁵ His self-description is full of negatives (twelve in lines 230-235), suggesting that he defines himself in terms of lack, and having to make up for

⁴⁸⁵ Maura Nolan describes Haukyn as 'part allegorical figure, part Will's alter-ego (as a minstrel, Haukyn represents the obverse of the poet as theologian)' in 'The Fortunes of *Piers Plowman* and its Readers', YLS 20, 2006, pp. 1-41, p. 19. Nolan interprets Haukyn within the terms of her essay as representing a challenge to the place of work/works in the scheme of salvation; he is 'a discourse of productivity that privileges work at the expense of ethics and judgement... the emblematic figure for the failure of humans to grasp the role of works in "doing well".' Ibid., p. 21.

lack through activity in order to survive in a competitive world. Haukyn is associated from the start with work and workers, those who are close to the earth. As one of the most stubbornly physical characters in the poem, with his dirty coat and flood of information and anecdote about his doings, Haukyn may well represent a stage in the poem's exploration of what 'works' signify in the spiritual economy, but he also reminds us of the inevitably material context of all spiritual life and growth. Bread, the product he sells, is earthed in human communities of labour, and in processes of production which are flawed.

Haukyn uses the word bread (*payn* and *breed*) or wafer twelve times in his first 55 lines; bread is a real product, not just a symbol, and must be worked and sweated for (B13.260-261). At no point does Langland make any explicit association between Haukyn's trade and the Eucharist, but the emphasis on bread makes it possible for a reading of Haukyn to be taken a step further to suggest an interconnection between the well-being of the social body and that of the individual. The Eucharist – about which Langland has very little explicit to say – is a sacrament which is not about transcending bodiliness, but about the incorporation of the divine into humanity and humanity into the divine. Langland's choice of Haukyn's occupation could be read as an oblique reflection on the symbolic resonances of bread, bodily life and Christian corporate identity.

The Haukyn material splits into a number of sections: Haukyn's account of his job (B13.224-270); a description of his coat and a judgement as to his moral standing (B13.273-314); an account of his unavailing attempts to wash his coat on many occasions (B13.315-14.15); Conscience and Patience's instruction on how to keep it clean (B14.16-96); Patience's discourses on Charity and poverty (B14.99-319); Haukyn's response (B14.320-332). The account Haukyn gives of himself is of someone is uncommitted to

anything beyond survival by means of cheating and boasting. Like the Seven Deadly Sins in B5, who are vividly concretely realised and whose deeds are socially specific and recognisable, rather than presented as moral abstractions, Haukyn's dubious business practices and moral misdemeanours are all described in detail. Sin is defined in social as well as personal ways, as the sin of individuals warps and fragments the social fabric of which they are a part. The primary way in which this is explored is through the symbol of Haukyn's coat. Initially its stains are revealed to include those of pride and scorn; what seems to underlie these symptoms is a deeper cause: that of 'wilnyng that alle men wende he were that he is noght' (B13.279) ('wanting all men to believe that he is what he is not'). This fundamental deceit, expressed in constant efforts to impress, is at the heart of Haukyn's conduct, and is viewed unsympathetically by Will. Haukyn's self-aggrandising boasting is described with satirical sharpness in B13.280-312. He represents a corruption of love and learning; his only 'werkes' and 'wordes' in line 311-2 are those he utters to flatter and to enhance his image, and the 'werkes' mentioned again in B13.347 and 350 signify not virtuous deeds but illicit sex. (As was noted in Chapter Three, werkes and wordes signify actions arising from and matching right belief, and their reduction to empty tokens suggests the beginnings of moral and social breakdown). When Haukyn looks more closely at his coat, the stains are seen to be far more wide-ranging (B13.318-405) A whole anatomy of sin follows: through false and untrustworthy speech (B13.315-330), to contempt for Christ's healing, a seeking of substitutes and a lack of commitment of anyone or anything (B13.330-341). After this come lechery (B13.343), covetousness and 'unkynde desiring'(355), leading to cheating and dishonesty.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸⁶ Nicholas Watson comments that the cloak's filthiness exposes 'the full extent of modern society's complacent over-reliance on its sacral identity as the Body of Christ.' Nicholas Watson, '*Piers Plowman*, Pastoral Theology and Spiritual Perfectionism: Haukyn's Cloak and Patience's Pater Noster', YLS 2007, Vol. 21, No.1, January 2007, pp. 83-118, p. 111.

The description is interspersed with Haukyn's unashamed account of his own deceit, for example at B13.370 where he describes ploughing dishonestly and thus stealing his neighbour's soil, and cheating his neighbours for profit. It is noteworthy that he experiences the frustration of not being able to win games of one-upmanship in vividly embodied terms:

And whan I may noght have the maistrie, swich melancholie I take
That I cache the crampe, the cardiacle som tyme,
Or an ague in swich an anger, and some tyme a fevere
That taketh me al a twelvemonth, til that I despise
Lechecraft of Oure Lorde and leve on a wicche,
And seye that no clerke ne kan – ne Crist, as I leve –
To the Soutere of Southwerk, or of Shordych Dame Emme,
And seye that [God ne] Goddes word gaf me nevere boote,
But through a charme hadde I chance and my chief heele. (B13.333-341)

(And when I don't come out on top, I come down with such melancholy
that I get cramp, sometimes heart pains,
or an ague that comes on violently, and sometimes a fever
that afflicts me for a year, until I despise
our Lord's healing and believe in a witch,
and say that no clerk has knowledge – not even Christ, I believe –
like that of the Southwark Cobbler or Dame Emma of Shoreditch,
and say that God's word never gave me any remedy,

Haukyn's state, he argues on p. 113, 'is that of the Christian community as a whole in the absence of the idealised straightforwardness of Piers' relationship with the divine: a state, at best, of spiritual uncertainty.'

rather I had luck and health through a charm.)

The physical and spiritual are here interconnected in a vividly dysfunctional way.

The climax is 383-398 where at church Haukyn is unable to mourn for his sins due to being preoccupied with business deals – ‘goode’ rather than ‘God.’ The consequence is that that in line 406-7 Haukyn falls into ‘wanhope’ and sloth due to not mourning for his sins, coming to hate mention of holy things. At the start of Passus 14, Conscience asks Haukyn why he doesn’t wash his cloak, and the simple answer is that it gets stained by his family and servants such that try as he might, he cannot keep it clean:

And kouthe I nevere, by Crist! Kepen it clene an houre,
That I ne soiled it with sighte or som idel speche,
Or thorough werk or thorough word, or wille of myn herte,
That I ne flobre it foule fro morwe til even. (B14.12-15)

(And I never could, by Christ, keep it clean for an hour
without soiling it by sight or some idle speech,
or through work, or through word, or my heart’s will –
without sullyng it foully from morning till night.)

Conscience offers a solution to this heartfelt spiritual dilemma, in the form of a set of spiritual prescriptions structured round Dowel, Dobet and Dobest. Contrition, followed by grace and goodwill, then cleansing from unkind works, will, Conscience assures Haukyn, guarantee the lasting cleanness of his coat. Patience offers an alternative to worrying about making a living: the spiritual nourishment of the Lord’s Prayer and a long speech in praise of poverty. When Haukyn very reasonably asks Patience what poverty really means

(B14.274), he initially gets an obfuscatory response in Latin which is then expounded in English. Poverty is a good because it rebuffs pride; Patience's 'nine points of poverty' speech simply brings Haukyn into despair at ever being able to manage to live in such a way. Patience refuses to acknowledge the exigencies of physical existence, spiritualising human embodied life in a way which proves unattainable for someone like Haukyn.⁴⁸⁷

Haukyn finally comes to a point of grief and penitence – crucial signs for Langland that a person is making spiritual progress (though Will has not yet made such a turn). B14.320-332 describes Haukyn's tearful admission that it is simply very hard to avoid sinning, building up to the statement

'I were noght worthi, woot God,' quod Haukyn, 'to werien any clothes,
Ne neither sherte ne shoo, save for shame one
To covere my careyne.' (B14.329-332)

('I am not worthy, God knows,' said Haukyn,
'to wear any clothes, nor shirt nor shoes, other than for modesty
and to cover my corruptible body.')

There are echoes here of Luke 15, where the younger son, soiled by his menial work among the pigs, rehearses the speech of unworthiness that he will make to his father; however, Langland's narrative simply leaves Haukyn stranded as the next dream sequence unfolds

⁴⁸⁷ David Aers sees Patience's solution as inadequate in that it 'merely substitutes figurative food for material food socially produced...he thus evaporates historical existence and the complex life-processes the poem habitually engages with....A wave of the wand dissolves the fundamental and essential worlds of work and human relationships, so vividly present in the poem and so perplexing.' Aers, *Langland and the Creative Imagination*, op. cit., p. 29.

and deposits the Dreamer in the company of Anima in the next passus. There is no reassuring embrace or statement of forgiveness.

The episode with Haukyn points up some key insights into what it means to be an embodied person caught up in specific socio-economic practices which make virtuous living difficult. Sin and virtue cannot be separated from the multi-dimensional nature of embodied existence. In Haukyn some of the multiple layers of the symbol of the body are explored and their tensions exposed. In Mary Douglas' terms, Langland is writing in the context of a culture which is strong group, high grid. Although Langland's concerns are not bodily purity and the policing of boundaries in any explicit way, he writes from within a set of social structures where there are links between personal bodily conduct and the well-being of the social body. Thus, in the depiction of the seven deadly sins, the sins are conceived of in terms of the social breakdown they cause rather than shown from a psychological and individual perspective. Similarly, Haukyn is a figure whose account of his lifestyle, and dialogue with Patience, touches on a network of symbolic meanings of the body, from his own excesses of greed and lust, through the bread he sells, through to the effects of his behaviour on the rest of the community and on his own spiritual state. Langland insists on the real material factors which are part of human existence and which mean that labour and discipleship cannot be understood in isolation from their socio-political context. All Christian life and ministry has to negotiate these dimensions of embodied existence, and Haukyn reminds us of that.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁸ David Brown points out that bread 'is...not a harmless or innocuous metaphor. It speaks both of physical hunger and of a social world transformed. So a eucharist that takes such imagery seriously is inherently a summons to hope and to change.' 'Bread and the Dynamic for Social Change' in *God and Grace of Body*, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 145.

Real bodies, real people: Hind

In drawing on Lakoff and Johnson's work on metaphor, I expounded earlier in the chapter the idea of the missing entailments of a given metaphor. In the case of the body as a metaphor for the church, I pointed out that some important entailments of bodiliness are missing in the Hind use: mess, pain, gender to name but three. I have suggested that the figure of Haukyn can offer some clues as to ways in which the reader can restore some missing dimensions of the Hind theological anthropology. Initially it seems that Haukyn has only negatives to offer: the sinful body, the shamed body, physical responses to frustration and temptation.

This, however, is of profound importance. Embodied human beings experience pain, breakdown, failure, hunger; gender, sexuality, greed, need. They arrive in parishes as human beings in family networks including children with ADHD, elderly parents with Alzheimers hundreds of miles away, uprooted teenagers. Those who minister within the body of Christ bear their own brokenness and reflect the brokenness of Christ's body. This element of need, thirst, brokenness and vulnerability needs to be retrieved if ministers and disciples are to avoid feeling they must measure up to the corporate brand.⁴⁸⁹ A report cannot attempt to measure or prescribe such aspects, and within its remit Hind Two is careful to contextualise its recommendations and to steer away from suggesting that its aim is the creation of corporate clones. However, I would want to see a theology of the suffering and vulnerable human body which could inform a richer and more paradoxical ecclesiology. Ecclesial body language is inextricably bound up with language about real

⁴⁸⁹ It is significant that for both Langland and Julian, Christ's suffering of thirst is seen as being of theological importance; it is a sign both of his embodied humanity and of his divine desire for humans to be reconciled and drawn into the life of God.

bodies and therefore must include vulnerability, pain, mess and difference. There needs to be a theological, spiritual and ecclesiological space for failure, pain and weakness in ministry which has a Christological foundation – the kind of space Paul suggests in 2 Corinthians.⁴⁹⁰

This space is not a counter-space which denies the rightful desire for the formation of ministerial character, the need for accountability or the responsibility of those shaping policy in theological education to provide guidelines. It is rather a space alongside these which acknowledges complexity and makes room for those aspects of bodiliness which the rhetoric of the report elides. It is a space where woundedness, sin and healing can be spoken of, where neither progress nor ministry are measurable, and where scars need not be concealed.⁴⁹¹ It is a space which names the difficulty of finding a language for life together which is both honest and hopeful. It is also a space where those who are wounded can be

⁴⁹⁰ It is interesting to note that most studies of Paul's language of the body focus on 1 Corinthians, whereas I see 2 Corinthians as being an equally important resource for those entering ordained ministry.

⁴⁹¹ Michael Arditti's novel *Easter* is one attempt to imagine and fictionally realise such a space, a space of pain, rejection and redemption. Part of the novel (pp. 21-32, 231-242) describes a set of stations of the cross which foreground the issue of AIDS, drawing on the slogan 'The body of Christ has AIDS.' The stations are visceral and shocking, depicting Jesus as a man dying of AIDS, reviled and tormented. The final station, Jesus being laid in the sepulchre, shows Christ's body 'tossed into a pit of jumbled limbs and tangled torsos which lie like the parody of an orgy.' Different characters experience the stations differently; Trudy, scarred by her experiences in the Second World War, sees Jesus as a concentration camp victim. Joe, a man with AIDS, in his reflection on the scene believes that the artist is not depicting 'an eternal Good Friday, but an alternative Easter Sunday. The mass grave will people the kingdom of heaven. The intertwined corpses will furnish the composite soul. Christ can no longer be confined to a single body. The resurrection of one requires the resurrection of all.' Through describing the embodied lives of his characters, and not shying away from their sexuality, disability and doubt, Arditti pushes the idea of the body of Christ about as far as it can go. Michael Arditti, *Easter*, Arcadia Books Ltd, B format edition, 2008.

heard and their wisdom attended to rather than their being the recipients of the wisdom of the professionally competent.⁴⁹²

The space I am suggesting is also a space of transformation, of lack and anxiety into joyful gratuity, celebrating God's incorporating of human bodies and bodiliness into the Trinitarian life.⁴⁹³ Rather than body language signifying an anxious controlling of resources, or institutional maintenance, there might be a retrieval of the analogical sequence described by Eugene Rogers whereby 'Christ enters a series in which Jesus is the body of Christ and the believer is the body of Christ, the church is the body of Christ and the bread is the body of Christ, on until the body of Christ is the body of God.'⁴⁹⁴ The body of the minister need not be defined by self-control, self-management and the achieving of outcomes, but in terms of a bigger dynamic of self-donation shared with all the baptised and described by Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt thus:

the body clothed in glory is an open body. It is a body that has been pierced by the Spirit. It is a body that can no longer clearly distinguish between self-love and love of neighbour, or even love of enemy. It is a body that cannot but help be at the disposal of the neighbour in need.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹² For a further discussion of this, see Mary Grey, 'Disturbing the Wise? Or the Wisdom of the Disturbed? Liberating Truth and Theological Education' in ed. Stephen Barton, *Where Shall Wisdom be Found?*, T&T Clark Ltd., 1999, pp. 335-347. Grey posits that feminist epistemology is an epistemology of the broken body.

⁴⁹³ This space is indicated by a text such as Stephanie Paulsell, *Honouring the Body*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2002. Chapters on 'Awakening to Sacred Vulnerability' and 'Honouring the Suffering Body' build up a picture of interdependence, as expressed on p. 12: 'Our fragile bodies require communal attention, and so honouring the body is a shared practice, one for which we need each other in profound ways.'

⁴⁹⁴ Eugene F. Rogers Jr., *After the Spirit*, SCM, London, 2006, p. 143.

⁴⁹⁵ Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, 'Being Baptized: Bodies and Abortion' in Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2000, pp. 250-262, p. 261. Earlier in the article (p. 254) Bauerschmidt contrasts the liberal self and the baptised self as having radically ways of living: 'The

I have established that what is central to Langland's vision is the inevitability of bodies, the reality of physicality, and the importance of this for any 'spiritual' truth. The poem is always anchored in the world of hunger, need, old age and labour, and God is linked with our physicality by virtue of having voluntarily experienced it and become incarnate. This theological point is of central importance to the poem and needs to be incorporated into contemporary ecclesial policy and practice.

Ecclesiology and the body

This next section of the chapter will move beyond individual bodies to discuss to what extent the body metaphor can be retrieved on an ecclesiological level. I will draw on *Piers Plowman* to suggest some alternative ways of using body language which describe ecclesiastical problems in terms of sickness and healing rather than inefficiency and reorganisation. I will also propose that the poem offers the possibility that the institution cannot and does not contain the mobile and dispersed risen body of Christ.

The body as a metaphor for either Church or the social order is not one which Langland employs explicitly; image clusters which recur in the search for ways to understand and experience salvation and the common life are rather those of pilgrimage and ploughing.

However, in the final two passus, Langland engages at an explicitly ecclesiological level as he describes the construction, siege and eventual infiltration and corruption of Unitee, the

virtuous liberal self would be one that possesses the habits and dispositions necessary to police its body-space in such a way as to attain the "propensities he or she strives to realize." Baptism requires a different account of the self and its virtues because it requires a different account of bodies – both individual and corporate. The baptismal "body-space" is not a self-inclosed private domain. It is something shared because it is something surrendered to the Spirit of God.'

barn he uses as a symbol for the Church. Unitee is built by Piers in B19 at Grace's suggestion as a place to store his seed, and Grace provides the foundation in the form of Christ's cross, then building walls out of his passion and suffering and finishing it off with a roof of Holy Writ (B19.322-330). The remainder of the poem describes a succession of attacks and attempted invasions of Unitee, with Conscience left to rally the community and counter Pride's forces as best he can. B19.362-383 sees a successful revival within, only to be undermined by the refusal of the brewer to take seriously the outworking of the cardinal virtues, and a more general mutiny. B20 resumes the pattern with the arrival of Antichrist and his raising of an army to overthrow Unitee.⁴⁹⁶

The one source of hope as this assault gathers momentum is the 'fooles' who refuse to welcome the fiend and his entourage of friars (B20. 61-63), and there is also some resistance from the mild and holy who defy false comfort from whatever source.

Conscience invites the fools into the Church, which becomes the centre of resistance to

⁴⁹⁶ Passus 20 begins with the interruption of the narrative flow for the first fifty lines with the appearance of Need, and a speech from him about temperance and the spiritual significance of being needy. The notion of need is picked up again when Antichrist appears at B20.53-55 and turns the crop of truth upside down, making 'fals sprynge and sprede and spede mennes nedes.' It seems that one of the strategies of Antichrist is to convince people of spurious needs, creating what James Alison would call patterns of mimetic desire which lead to murderous envy and competition. (For the fullest exposition of his mimetic theory, based on Rene Girard, see James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong*, Crossroad, New York, 1998.) In many ways *Piers Plowman* is an attempt to grapple with the same issues that Alison tackles: the search for a theology and spirituality which can deal with the seemingly intractable patterns of self-destructive human social and interpersonal relationship. In the scenes with Haukyn Langland anatomises this condition most fully, and Haukyn stands for the human being caught in this cycle of mimetic desire, as has been explored more fully in the previous section. A combination of need, disordered desire and social and spiritual breakdown is unfolding yet again, despite the victory of Passus 18. Aers states: 'In Langland's terms, the collective rejection in Passus 19 and 20 displays a terrifying rejection of the final goal disclosed by the Good Samaritan, by the life of Christ and the salvific promises he makes in the harrowing of hell. The Church, the ark of salvation, is now assimilated to the brewer's community.' David Aers, *Faith, Ethics and Church: Writing in England, 1360-1409*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 2000, p. 74.

what is going on outside.⁴⁹⁷ It is less a harmonious body than a besieged and desperate group who have to ask Kynde to defend them ‘for Piers love the Plowman.’ Kynde obliges, and from lines 80-105 sends a sequence of disasters – much as Hunger wreaks havoc when summoned by Piers to instil some discipline in B6.171-330 – and decimates the population. Kynde desists, but the ravages of plague do not result in chastened reformed behaviour, rather an increase in vice (B20.110-175), causing Conscience to enlist the services of ‘Elde’ (old age). It is at this point that the narrative of Will and that of the church in time and history converge and Will chooses to enter Unitee (B20.212-3) after he has been severely assaulted by Elde.⁴⁹⁸

The sick body

The passage at which I will look in detail is Passus 20.295-end, the final section of the poem, which is presented as the siege and fall of Unitee.⁴⁹⁹ Langland’s chosen metaphor in this passage for the problems that assail the Church is that of sickness.⁵⁰⁰ There is

⁴⁹⁷ Of there being only fools left in the final Passus, Mary Clement Davlin comments that ‘the paradox of Will’s life is seen here in the paradox of the Church: cleverness and learning are not enough; only the loving folly of wisdom remains faithful in a corrupt society.’ ‘Kynde Knowyng as a major theme in *Piers Plowman B*’, op. cit., p. 16.

⁴⁹⁸ Ralph Hanna III points out that Will’s entry into Unitee, which is filled with fools, is a move which ironically undercuts and re-frames all his striving for knowledge and wisdom during the poem. Ralph Hanna III, ‘School and Scorn: Gender in *Piers Plowman*’, *New Medieval Literatures* Vol. 3, 1999, pp. 213-227.

⁴⁹⁹ As Salter and Pearsall point out, the final scene in Passus 20 takes the traditional form of a psychomachia, but Langland adapts the form in a range of ways. (*Piers Plowman*, Elizabeth Salter and Derek Pearsall (eds.), Edward Arnold, London, 1967, p. 175. This is an edition of excerpts from the C text, the final section of which (C23.51-386) is almost identical to the B text Passus 20.) It is a dynamic passage with stylistic similarities with parts of the first seven passus of the poem, where vivid set-pieces, such as the Seven Deadly Sins in Passus 5 and Mede at court in Passus 2 and 3, work on a number of allegorical levels and create narrative momentum through the interplay of characters/personifications and situation.

⁵⁰⁰ When something goes wrong at ‘grid’ level in a time of social change, argues Mary Douglas, people experience society ‘as a system which does not work. The human body is

precedence for such a choice: one of the main images of the Fourth Lateran Council's promotion of confession and penance was that of the priest as a skilled physician whose wisdom in drawing out the nature of sin and in giving advice would enable healing. Personal and corporate spiritual health are intimately connected in the sacrament of penance, since it is only by acknowledging sin that transformation can occur. Sin, confession, healing and transformed practice are inextricably connected.⁵⁰¹

The first time that a need for medical help is articulated is at line 305, after many wise teachers have been 'woundede wel wikkedly' in skirmishes with Hypocrisy and his accomplices (B20.302-4). Conscience seeks a doctor (B20.305) – the word used is 'leche', which has resonances with earlier sections of the poem, in particular Passus 16, in the scene with the Tree of Charity where it is used of Jesus and his healing ministry in B16.105-119, culminating in a description of him as 'leche of lif and lord of high hevene' (B16.119).⁵⁰²

the most readily available image of a system.' (p. xii) Douglas goes on to say: 'It is essential for us to understand what bodily symbols are dominating the social life and so the minds of our thinkers and spokesmen today.' We can only do that by paying attention to language: 'otherwise the physician has no way of inspecting the subjective basis of his diagnosis. For his favourite view of the human body and the way he sees good and evil in bodily and spiritual terms will affect his choice of physic.' Douglas, *op. cit.*, p. xiv.

⁵⁰¹ Angela Tilby points out that there is an echo of the Good Samaritan in the paralleling of the pouring of oil and wine on the wounds of the injured with the ministry of the priest to the penitent. Angela Tilby, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, SPCK, London, 2009, p. 27.

⁵⁰² Not only is it used of Jesus, but it is also applied to Piers, who, we are told 'lered hym [Jesus] lechecraft, his lif for to save, / That though he were wounded with his enemy, to warisshen hymself' (B16.104-5) ('taught him [Jesus] the art of healing, to save his life, so that if he were wounded by an enemy, he could cure himself). This adds a new dimension to the bond of *kynde* between God and humanity, without reducing Jesus to being merely mortal. Jesus has demonstrated his authority over death and hell in B18, pointing up the contrast between death and life when he tells Satan, 'That art doctour of deeth, drynk that thow madest! / For I that am lord of lif, love is my drynke, / And for that drynke today, I deide upon erthe. (B18.365-7) (You who are doctor of death, drink what you have made! For I who am lord of life, love is my drink, and for that drink today I died on earth.) It is the lord of life and 'leche of lif' who is needed in Passus 20 to heal the deathly damage being done to the church through the multifaceted attacks. William Elford Rogers connects this with the theme of learning: 'Piers, as the principle that directs the will to cultivate charity in

Langland develops the scope of the allegory by introducing the idea that the injured are ‘thorough synne ywounded’ (B20.306); the sins are connected with the besiegers at the gate, specifically named as hypocrisy, tittle-tattle, covetousness and Unkyndenes. Rather than simply receiving battle wounds from external forces, there is the implication that being attacked by such forces takes its toll in terms of the effects of committing the sins which assail body and soul; in some sense the sins and their effects become internalised and expressed in physical sickness. The cure is thus clearly repentance and penance, and Conscience appoints a suitable doctor at once, and s/he sets to work: ‘Shrift shoop sharp salve’ (B20.307) (Shrift prepared a strong ointment). The abrupt sequence of short vowel sounds, the crisp alliterating ‘p’ and ‘s’ sounds, convey the quick no-nonsense response of Shrift. A link is made with Piers; the way to solve the problem and heal the sickness is confession and pardon. The pardon referred to here is the one Piers offers which combines individual responsibility – *redde quod debbes* – with the assurance that payment has been made for sin. This is the mature position about sin, contrition and forgiveness at which the poem has arrived by this point.⁵⁰³ It is associated with Piers because, as has been explored in Chapter Four, Piers’ identification with the liberative and salvific effect of Christ’s death and harrowing of hell has been established by the fact of Jesus jousting in Piers’ armour. Piers now stands for the living out in human obedience of all that Jesus has done and made possible.

Conscience has identified the solution – healing repentance and penance – and the poem could have ended here with the acceptance of his diagnosis. But Langland makes a different

the human heart, teaches the humanity of Jesus how charity may operate in a fallen world as “lehecraft.” William Elford Rogers, *Piers Plowman and Interpretation*, The Catholic University of America, Washington D.C., 1992, p. 256.

⁵⁰³ See David Aers, *Piers Plowman and Christian Allegory*, Edward Arnold, London, 1975, Chapter Five, section III for a fuller exposition of this point.

choice. At B20.310 the language changes to soft alliterating ‘s’ and ‘l’ sounds, for Langland a sure indicator of falseness; people find Shrift too rough and seek a softer surgeon; should they invite Friar Flatterer who knows more about medicine by far? Again Piers is invoked by Conscience, as being the best healer (B20.319-322), reinforcing the sense that Piers throughout Passus 20 stands in part for God-given qualities that the Church needs. Yet having expressed this confidence in Piers and the inadequacy of other help, Conscience, inexplicably, sends for the friar at B20.323, and the sickness is not healed but exacerbated, since Friar Flatterer comes ‘for profit and for helthe’ – a not very subtle pun on profit. Although Peace conducts a spirited rebuttal at the gate, by line 355 the friar is within, partly as a result of Hende-Speche’s naive optimism about an eventual reconciliation between the opposing parties. The build-up to this point is achieved by a sequence of errors of judgement by various office holders in Unitee, which becomes conspicuously disunited as the crisis worsens. Conscience entrusts Contrition to the friar, and again the body imagery serves to convey a range of meanings. Contrition has had his dressings on too long, making his wounds sore, but the friar merely teaches him to cease to notice by whispering empty consolations. B20.370 marks the climax of this corrupting process: Contrition has been made so comfortable that he has forgotten how to cry and weep: he ‘lith adreynt’ (lies drowned/in a stupor), incapable of recognising sin (B20.378). Sin is no longer dreaded; the friar has ‘enchanted’ the folk with his medicine (B20.379-380). The wounded body, sore with sin, in a hideous parody of the Good Samaritan, is not healed but made to believe itself well.⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰⁴ Passus 17 contains another passage where images of sickness, healing and salvation are conflated in the person and action of a mysterious Christ-like figure. The Samaritan, another polyvalent figure, explains to Will that the wounded man cannot be healed by any ‘medicine under molde...so festred be hise woundes / Withouten the blood of a barn born of a mayde.’ (B17.93-5) He must be ‘bathed in that blood, baptised as it were’, plastered with the child’s penance and passion, and eat and drink his body and blood. The Samaritan

The healing that was hoped for has been corrupted into a complacent refusal to acknowledge the reality of sickness, and the metaphor has nowhere to go. Langland has left himself few options: he has either reached a dead end and can kill off his first person protagonist, or else will need to move to a last judgement, a second coming of Christ, or similar apocalyptic flourish to end the poem. What happens in the last seven lines of the poem is that Conscience leaves:

‘By Crist!’ quod Conscience tho, ‘I wole bicombe a pilgrim,
And walken as wide as the world lasteth,
To seken Piers the Plowman, that Pryde myghte destruye,
And that freres hadde a fyndyng, that for need flateren
And countrepledeh me, Conscience. Now Kynde me avenge,
And sende me happe and heele, til I have Piers the Plowman!’
And siththe he gradde after Grace, til I gan awake.’ (B20.381-387)

(‘By Christ!’ said Conscience then, ‘I will become a pilgrim
and walk to the ends of the earth
to seek Piers Plowman who might destroy Pride
and ensure that friars are properly endowed and don’t need to flatter to get money
and who oppose me, Conscience. Now Kynde avenge me
and send me luck and health until I have Piers the Plowman!’

says that after three days, things will change for the better; those who are too sick to take in Faith’s teaching will be led into Holy Church and lodged and healed, until he (the Samaritan/Christ figure) returns to ‘conforten alle sike that craveth or coveiteth it and crieth thereafter’ (B17.123-4) (to comfort all the sick that want or desire it and ask for it). This conflating of salvific figures – Christ-Piers-the Samaritan – has been explored in Chapter Four of this thesis.

And he cried out after Grace, until I awoke.)

This final speech by Conscience is a good example of the urgency and vividness of the Passus as a whole. It takes the form of a series of impassioned declarations, with the word ‘and’ repeated at the start of five out of seven lines, piling up connectives to suggest haste and decision. His explosive: ‘By Crist!’ is more than just an exclamation here; the notion of acting in the power and name of Christ has been given content by all the preceding Passus, especially 18 and 19. Conscience’s existence only has meaning with reference to Christ and in Christ, and the bursting out of this cry recalls him to his vocation. Holding the Church together has ceased to be the priority; he will set off as a pilgrim to find the source of help – Piers/Grace – wherever he/it is to be found out in the world. The scope of the poem suddenly expands as Conscience decides to ‘walken as wide as the world asketh’. Any conventional narrative closure we might have expected – the return of Christ in glory, the Last Judgement – is subverted by the unexpected departure of Conscience to look for Piers. There is no clear victory for virtue and goodness, rather an indication that the struggle will be transposed into a new journey.⁵⁰⁵

From body to pilgrimage: forging a new metaphor

Conscience’s departure signals a switch of metaphor. The image of the church as a sick body, attended to by those who refuse to recognise its wounds and to treat them appropriately, has broken down. The only remaining option is to embrace a new metaphor.

⁵⁰⁵ In comparing *Piers Plowman* with the work of Dante, the Gawain poet, and Chaucer, Richard Barnes writes: ‘Langland denies us any such closure, not by design, because design is prior, but by being the kind of person he was. And not because he was withholding anything but because he was giving – repeatedly – all he had.’ Richard Barnes, ‘Langland’s Stance and Style’, *YLS* 9, 1995, pp. 19-31, p. 31.

Conscience takes up the trope of pilgrimage to describe his mission to restore the Church by finding Piers (Piers himself sets out on a pilgrimage earlier; now he has become the focus). As Dee Dyas points out, the ‘complex patterns of pilgrimage in *Piers Plowman* are laid over one another like a series of transparencies’ and include ‘the representative individual on a quest, and the journey through space and time of the Pilgrim Church.’⁵⁰⁶ Like the figure of Piers, the concept of pilgrimage is re-defined and re-configured as the poem progresses in its erratic way, so that at the end the meanings coalesce in this final journey of Conscience, re-capitulating the other kinds of pilgrimage and signifying a process which cannot end in human time and history. As an image for the church, pilgrimage is both more unstable and more dynamic than that of the Body, and less easy to reconcile with institutional stability and continuity.

In abandoning the institutional church as a sick body beyond help and healing, Langland makes a poetic decision with disturbing implications. It is clear that to remain within Unitee – the name has become a travesty – can lead only to spiritual apathy and death, such are the power and skill of the forces infiltrating it. The shift from institutional body to individual pilgrimage hints at a tension which the poem never quite resolves, that between the individual spiritual quest and the social demands of Christian living in the world.⁵⁰⁷

Conscience has to become ‘an isolated wanderer’ in order to forsake collusion with what the church has become, but it is precisely this lifestyle – that of a wanderer – about which

⁵⁰⁶ Dee Dyas, *Pilgrimage in Medieval Literature 700-1500*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 2001, p. 154.

⁵⁰⁷ David Aers identifies a tension for Langland as to what form of life best answers to the demands of faithful Christian living in the world, concluding that in the end Will ‘remains isolated ... with a disintegrating Church under Antichrist’s forces, still asking how to combine the evangelical commands to love with a licit way of obtaining the necessities of embodied life in this community.’ David Aers, *Faith, Ethics and Church: Writing in England 1360-1409*, D.S. Brewer, 2000, p. 71.

the poet expresses ambivalence elsewhere.⁵⁰⁸ As long as Will wanders he is in danger from many sides; his final decision to go into Unitee is important insofar as it acknowledges that salvation is not an individual quest but a corporate way of living. Yet the poem ends where it began – with the individual quest and with this dilemma: if the Church is the body of Christ, at what point does it become necessary to leave it in order to pursue the truth of Christ?

The conclusion to *Piers Plowman* highlights the difficulty of both honouring the integrity of the individual journey, and of affirming the foundation of Christian identity as being membership of the Body.⁵⁰⁹ This is a problem which is equally acute in our own time, and which manifests itself in particular ways in a training context. The language of personal journey clashes with that of coming under institutional authority, and ecclesiologies strain to cope. Ultimately the only choice Langland seems to offer is one between individual pilgrimage or institutional destruction, despair and demise, with no option in between.

What the end of the poem offers the Hind settlement is a confrontation with three areas that we would rather avoid. The first is the problem of holding together an idealised ontological view of the church with its frustrating, disunited reality.⁵¹⁰ Lady Holy Church, with whom Will talks in B1, represents an ontological view of the church, providing teaching on truth

⁵⁰⁸ For a further exploration of this idea, see Ralph Hanna III, 'Will's Work' in Stephen Justice and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (eds.), *Written Work*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997, pp. 23-66.

⁵⁰⁹ Bauerschmidt makes the important point that salvation is social not individual – rather 'it is incorporated into the polity defined by the incarnation of Christ and the Gospel he proclaimed.' Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, 'Julian of Norwich – Incorporated', *Modern Theology* 13:1, January 1997, pp. 80-97, p. 82.

⁵¹⁰ Stephen J. Kruger sees the end of the poem as depicting 'a tension between Christian ideals and the hard, corporeal facts of life, a tension that pulls the church – the marriage of abstract doctrine with the fallible custodians of doctrine – apart.' Stephen J. Kruger, 'Mirrors and the Trajectory of Vision in *Piers Plowman*, *Speculum* Vol.66, No.1, January 1991, pp. 74-95, p. 93. Kruger observes that the challenge of reconciling doctrinal truth and concrete reality is also one that confronts the Christian poet.

and salvation with absolute authority. Unitee, the besieged barn in B19 and 20, made up of fallible people and under constant attack from within and without, presents a very different face of the church: a fractured and fractious entity whose members are not willing to instantiate unity through repentance, restitution and receiving the sacrament.⁵¹¹ Although Langland makes no attempt to hold the two together, these two contrasting visions of the church frame the poem and offer a reality check: does the view from below look anything like the view from above? Those training for any kind of ministry, or engaged in Christian learning, will need to confront this dilemma at some point and to be theologically resourced to cope with the fallible church encountered in 1 and 2 Corinthians as well as the ontological church of Ephesians 1.23.⁵¹²

Related to this dilemma is the difficulty of holding together ‘my journey’ and the corporate reality of Christian ecclesial life, aware of the possibility that the two may at times come into conflict. The poem leaves us with this problem (though it is Conscience who leaves Unitee, not Will), again without suggesting a solution. An undue emphasis on the skills and formation of the individual during training runs the risk of giving insufficient weight to the ecclesial ecology of which individuals are a part, and thus may not prepare those in training for a ministry of mutual learning, disappointment and starting again. The final challenge, one which will be explored further in the next section, is that of the whereabouts of Christ in the church and the world. The poem ends by suggesting that Piers – and by implication, a

⁵¹¹ Jennifer Garrison, ‘Failed Signification: Corpus Christi and Corpus Mysticum in *Piers Plowman*’, YLS 23, 2009, pp. 97-123.

⁵¹² Gavin D’Costa offers one way of living with this tension in *Sexing the Trinity*, SCM, London, 2000, Introduction, p. xix: ‘it is worth remaining in such a disfigured body, for the Christian tradition also affirms that salvation comes into the world through disfigured bodies, that are glorified by God: in the unmarried pregnant Jewish girl Mary; in her son, hanging crucified on a cross; and in the lives of women and men who become co-redeemers with the triune God.’

key means of encountering Christ – is beyond the walls of Unitee.⁵¹³ We are left asking where the body of Christ is to be found.

Hind, Piers Plowman and the sick body

In the above analysis of Passus 20 I have demonstrated how Langland uses body language to describe the state in which the Church finds itself, and how he expresses this using language of sickness and healing. I have proposed that by entering the world of the poem, the reader may draw on Langland's depiction of the ailing Church attended to by false doctors and so retrieve some aspects of the body metaphor which are missing in Hind. The Hind body imagery derives from a discourse of modernity, presenting the efficient body which needs to be managed – even as clergy stress hits record levels and the bodies of ministers are registering and expressing sickness and exhaustion.⁵¹⁴ Provision of workshops and sessions on managing stress (or time) can feel like a desperate bid to keep the workforce functioning. As long as real bodies are elided in the use of Body imagery, the problem will remain.

⁵¹³ For further reflection on the whereabouts of Jesus, see Graham Ward, 'The Displaced Body of Jesus Christ' in *Radical Orthodoxy*, John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward (eds.), Routledge, London and New York, 1999, pp. 163-181.

⁵¹⁴ Michael Hanby warns of where a market model ultimately leads: 'since they reproduce their kind, become ill, and die, our bodies, too, are like the past. They are obstacles which the market must overcome by subordinating them to its brutal demands.' Michael Hanby, 'Interceding: Giving Grief to Management', in Hauerwas and Wells (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, op. cit., pp. 237-249, p. 240. Hanby commends intercession as an alternative to managerial discipline as a 'sharing in the grief and powerlessness that inevitably attends out lives in time. This grief and hope, which are denied by managerial discipline, then characterise how we most fully live out our identity as creatures and how as creatures called to witness to the goodness of both God and the world, we embody God's commitment to the world in Jesus.' Hanby, op. cit., p. 246.

The use of tropes of sickness in organisational and political contexts is complex and open to ideological manipulation.⁵¹⁵ I would certainly not want to suggest that future Church of England reports develop the body metaphor by adopting metaphors of disease as a way of apportioning blame or justifying cuts. Langland does not use metaphors of sickness to target or scapegoat certain groups within society, rather as a way of indicating the importance of contrition and needing to know our need of healing. What is important as we recover this lost entailment is the way in which notions of sickness and healing take us into a major image cluster in the tradition and retrieve something compassionate, rich and dependent on God. Looking beyond *Piers Plowman* to the wider medieval penitential tradition, it is significant that imagery around sin, sickness and healing is often intensely focused on the crucified body of Jesus.⁵¹⁶ A profound connection is made between the broken and wounded body of Jesus and the spiritual healing of the one who contemplates and shares his suffering. Suffering bodies are not shameful evidence of failure but can be transformed through identification with Christ. Rather than this nexus of bodies, wounds, salvation and identification remaining at an abstract level, it is intensely somatic and gendered, with the body of Jesus acting as both female and male.⁵¹⁷

I am not suggesting that late medieval affective piety is a prescription for the challenges of the early twenty-first century; nevertheless, the devotional emphasis on the body of Jesus might have something to offer in the creation of the different space which I am proposing.

⁵¹⁵ See Susan Sontag's essay 'Illness as Metaphor', Allen Lane, 1978, and Andreas Musolff's 'Metaphor in the History of Ideas and Discourses: How Can We Interpret a Medieval Version of the Body-State Analogy?' in Andreas Musolff and Jorg Zinken (eds.), *Metaphor and Discourse*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2009, pp. 233-247.

⁵¹⁶ One obvious example is Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love*. A range of others are cited in Kay and Rubin, *Framing Medieval Bodies*, op. cit.

⁵¹⁷ See Caroline Walker Bynum's seminal study *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1982.

It would mean we could see failure and inefficiency – and growth and success – in a different way and with a different Saviour and way of being saved.⁵¹⁸ The discourse of reports seems to stifle and repress such language, such that it is hard to envisage how theological education could acknowledge some of the some hidden dimensions I have outlined. Perhaps a start would be the introduction of a more provisional note into the confident lists of positive qualities which are listed in the Learning Outcomes. Those about to be ordained would thus be expected to demonstrate the following: ‘Are aware of their own frailty and dependence on the grace of God; of being part of a body which is fallible; can articulate an understanding of ‘the Body of Christ’ which takes into account both embodied human life and includes suffering and death; can cherish their own and others’ bodies.’⁵¹⁹

The body of Jesus: Christological resources

My final section in this chapter is to do with re-connecting ecclesiology and Christology in ways which can generate richer understanding and practice. The first part of the *Piers Plowman* section drew on the figure of Haukyn to argue that through Langland’s depiction the reader might arrive at a richer and more earthed theological anthropology as a means of seeing learning and discipleship in less functional ways. The second part examined how the language of sickness and healing might function as alternative imagery for the state of the church, and I suggested at the end of that section that the recovery of some of the aspects of

⁵¹⁸ Martyn Percy observes that ‘An incarnate, ambiguous and susceptible body that risks failure may be able to serve society far better than a clearly defined community that is rationalised, strong and sharp.’ Percy, *Power and the Church*, op. cit., p. 132.

⁵¹⁹ Of relevance here are the words of Rowan Williams: ‘the communion of Christians is a flawed and often profoundly unimpressive thing as a historical reality. Discovering the gospel, and thus the Church’s mission, involves us in repentance. The first image to be shattered is that of the ‘successful’ Church.’ Rowan Williams, *Open to Judgement*, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1994, p. 262.

the suffering body of Jesus might allow the church to admit to its fallibility and woundedness as a counter to tendencies to see struggles in terms of problems to be managed. I now want to move on to explore further ways in which a richer Christology might be a way of expanding and retrieving the metaphor of Church as Christ's body.

I will argue that ecclesiology is inseparable from Christology, such that 'If the church is the body of Christ, then Christ's way of being should pervade all the limbs and organs in imitation of the divine nature.'⁵²⁰ Being the Body of Christ is thus not about conformity, but about being Christ-like. One way of potentially re-connecting ecclesiology and Christology, and of resolving the gap between Church as Body of Christ/Church as flawed institution is by means of developing what Esther Reed calls a Chalcedonian way of thinking.⁵²¹ Reed's thesis (drawing on the thought of Karl Barth) is that just as Chalcedon insisted on the unity of the two natures of Christ, so ecclesiology must be founded in the same human-divine dimensions since the church understands itself to exist in Christ. Her reminder that 'the church cannot exercise any authority which does not accord with the suffering and renunciation of Jesus' ministry' resonates with my critique of Hind.⁵²²

⁵²⁰ Esther D. Reed, *The Genesis of Ethics*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 2000, p. 190.

⁵²¹ Reed, op. cit., Chapter Four 'Authority and the Church as the Body of Christ', pp. 186ff.

⁵²² Reed, op. cit., p. 204. On p. 234 Reed adds: 'authority in the church should be understood according to a Chalcedonian way of thinking which turns worldly notions of authority upside down, mocks the narrow-mindedness of false piety, and is based on a Eucharistic ethos of thanksgiving, openness and personal fulfilment.' Rees also quotes Basil of Caesarea, whose choice of image and anxiety about the imminent demise of the church anticipate Langland: 'We live in days when the overthrow of the churches seems imminent... There is no edification of the church; no correction of error; no sympathy for the weak... no remedy is found either to heal the disease which has already seized us, or as a preventive against that which we expect. Altogether the state of the church (if I may use a plain figure though it may seem too humble an one) is like an old coat, which is always being torn and can never be restored to its original strength.'

Reed's point is that the church has to refer constantly to the identity and person of Jesus in order to maintain a rightful self-understanding, and this is the focus of my final section. The metaphor of the church as the body of Christ requires that there is a distinctive Christological content to its identity. If we are to get beyond a functionalist focus on the relation of the parts to one another and to the whole for the purposes of fulfilling a task, we will need to shift the emphasis to the nature of Christ, the head. We will need to ask what it might mean to be the body of Christ in the world, and what kind of model of Christ-like being and behaving underpins such a calling, putting the emphasis on Jesus as the one who determines the nature and function of the body rather than allowing organisational language and assumptions to predominate.

For indications of what such a language of Christ and church might look like I turn to the theology of Rowan Williams. Williams is clear both that Christ is the centre of ecclesial identity, and that there can be no triumphalistic identification of the Church with Christ: '[We] have no authoritative holiness of our own, we have no option but to admit the charge. We *are* imposters, travelling in borrowed clothes, under an assumed name, the name of Jesus.'⁵²³ Williams describes the Church as 'the humanity Christ has made possible', having at its heart a participation in the 'Trinitarian pulse' of Christ's ceaseless response to the Father's outflowing life through the Spirit.⁵²⁴ Christ is the key to understanding how the seeming fragmentation of the Church can be read and experienced positively. In his reading of Williams' theology, Mike Higton offers the following summary:

⁵²³ Rowan Williams, *Open to Judgement*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1994, p. 187, quoted on p. 71 of Mike Higton, *Difficult Gospel*, SCM, London, 2004.

⁵²⁴ Rowan Williams, *Ponder These Things*, Canterbury Press, Norwich, 2002, p. 46, quoted on p. 69 of Mike Higton, *Difficult Gospel*, SCM, London, 2004.

The Church is a vast, argumentative and unmanageable collection of readings of Christ: a vast collection of refractions of the light of Christ into the rainbow of billions of diverse faces, each of which helps us by the particular partial light that it reflects to see more of the glory of God in the face of Christ. The Church exists to teach us Christ. And it does this not primarily by being a collection of ways of talking about Christ; it is not as if the Church were simply a collection of theologians, each of whom had an opinion about the implications of the Gospel – but by being a collection of people caught up each in his or her own way in Christ’s life.⁵²⁵

Central to this vision is the idea that the Church can only teach through the paradox of its own imperfection and reliance on Christ:

by pointing away from itself to the transforming, upsetting impact of Jesus – pointing not so much to a stable, achieved religious system as to a disruption which can bring all systems of religious practice and knowledge face to face with a reality that cannot be exhausted by any system.⁵²⁶

Such an ecclesiology and Christology has implications for what it means to learn as Christians, suggesting that:

We teach the Gospel to each other and learn it from each other. We learn to see the face of Christ in the faces of those who share his life, and who share his life with us. And that means also that being called into the life of Christ means being called to

⁵²⁵ Higton, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

⁵²⁶ Higton, p. 69.

become recipients – recipients of the gifts which all the other members of Christ's Church become to us: recipients of what they show us of Christ.⁵²⁷

Higton here suggests that a diversity of perspectives and experiences of Christ, and the willingness to share and to receive those different insights from one another in the context of conversation and encounter, is what enables the Church to be a place of learning. Because our learning arises from and is centred on Christ it is always dynamic and provisional, enabling us to test statements and formulae in the light of who Jesus is and having as its goal leading us into closer communion with Christ through all those others who share his life.

Hind's Jesus, Langland's Jesus

Hind One does not articulate an explicit Christology since it is primarily a practical document setting out proposals for the re-organisation of theological education. Nonetheless, a close look uncovers the implication that the nature and significance of Jesus can be taken as read and ecclesiology assumed to follow from them. The major Christological statement in Hind One comes at 3.16 which affirms 'that all ministry, in and through the Church, is Christ's ministry... ecclesiology flows out of the biblical understanding of humanity created in God's image, transformed and perfected in Christ.'

This sounds theologically incontrovertible, but it must be remembered that the transformation of humanity is not perfected in this life, and that in the meantime ministry is incomplete, imperfect and subject to brokenness. 3.16 goes on to say that the Church

⁵²⁷ Ibid., p. 85.

continues the ministry of Christ, united with Christ. Characteristic of Hind is the kind of circular thinking which the following statement exemplifies:

we regard ministerial formation as development towards the role of particular responsibility for enabling and ordering the Church's life, under God. Thus, it is formation *in the holiness which Christ gives to the Church, in enabling the vocation of the Church as a whole which it receives from Christ and in enabling the missionary endeavour in the name of Christ.*⁵²⁸

What becomes problematic is the lack of Christological content to such assertions. The consequence is that the report then makes a further connection between the body of Christ carrying out the ministry of Christ, and statements of policy intent. This exposes the danger of beginning the thinking process in the wrong place: policy is formulated which will serve the institution, and theology is brought in to reinforce policy. To ask 'What does Christ's ministry look like, given what Christ looks like?' is not the task of the report: it is taken as read that the authors are familiar with all the Christology necessary in order to answer that question. As part of the creation of another space within the Hind settlement, I would want to unbind Jesus from the ecclesial confines of the report and recover, as a resource for ministry, a dynamic, subversive, non-institutional Jesus whose call to discipleship is profoundly social and corporate yet sits light to being ecclesially managed.

Jesus in *Piers Plowman*

Langland resists easy answers, and nowhere presents Jesus as the solution to all problems. Jesus' person and work are explained to Will at various points in the poem, but not in any

⁵²⁸ Hind One, 4.3.

systematic way. Rather, references to Jesus and short passages narrating some aspect of his earthly ministry and saving work, are interspersed in the narrative of the poem as a whole (for example, we have the story of Jesus and the woman taken in adultery in B12.76ff, and reference to his work on the cross at B1.167-74, but nothing sustained until the passage in B16.90-166). The most explicitly Christological section occurs at B19.69-99, in response to a question from Will about the names of Jesus, and covers the coming of the magi, Jesus' earthly ministry, resurrection, the founding of church, ascension, and the still awaited doomsday. The poem does not set out to expound a Christological position, but to explore understandings of learning and salvation through the experiences of Will, in the course of which Jesus assumes an ever greater significance.

I want to select two aspects of the Jesus presented by Langland which can help renew our own understanding. Firstly, there is the radically incarnate Jesus who appears in poor man's apparel, as described by Trajan in B11.230-243. Trajan points out that on the Emmaus road, the disciples did not know Jesus by his clothes or his speech, but by his 'werkes' when he broke the bread. This, says Trajan, is by way of an example to us not to presume to rich attire and lofty speech,

for pilgrymes are we alle.

And in the apparaille of a povere man and pilgrymes liknesses

Many tyme God hath ben met among nedy peple,

That nevere segge hym seigh in secte of the rich.' (B11.240-243).

(for we are all pilgrims,

and in poor man's clothes and the likeness of a pilgrim

God has been found many times among needy people,

whereas no one ever saw him in rich man's clothes.)

In the quest for the authentic apostolic life in the fourteenth century, poverty's status as a way of learning dependence on God and of identifying more closely with Christ is well documented.⁵²⁹ This emphasis on Christ's poverty resonates throughout the poem, and is echoed in B20.40-50 where Will is exhorted to embrace need on the grounds that

he that wroghte al the world was wilfulliche nedy,
Ne nevere noon so nedy ne poverer deide. (B20.49-50)

(He who made all the world was voluntarily needy;
never was there one who died so poor and in need.)

Christ also appears in hidden forms within the poem: the mysterious Samaritan figure of B17, Piers himself.⁵³⁰ Although he transcends ecclesiastical debate and is a deeply unchurchly figure, he is not separable from the institutional context.⁵³¹

⁵²⁹ Though as Margaret Kim notes, Langland refuses to reduce the issue to simple slogans: 'From the poor as a tame projection of dominant-class ideology in Hunger's complementation of Piers' policy, to the needy as activist and outspoken in Need's agency, Langland never ceases to problematise the diverse process and experience of translating poverty into mediations on 'the political.' Margaret Kim, 'Hunger, Need and the Politics of Poverty in *Piers Plowman*', YLS 16, 2002, pp. 131-168, p. 165.

⁵³⁰ Schmidt points out how the use of parhyme in B18.10 – 'oon sembable to the Samaritan, and somdeel to Piers the Plowman' – functions 'to enact the experience of likeness-in-difference in Will's dream of the three-personed figura Christ-Samaritan-Piers.' A.V.C. Schmidt, *The Clerkly Maker*, op. cit., p. 71.

⁵³¹ James Simpson argues that as distinct from the penitential and devotional depictions of Jesus by such of Langland's contemporaries as Richard Rolle, Langland insists on confronting the institutional dimension of Jesus. James Simpson, 'The Power of Impropriety: Authorial Naming in *Piers Plowman*', in Kathleen Hewett-Smith (ed.), *William Langland's Piers Plowman: A Book of Essays*, Routledge, London and New York, 2001, pp. 145-165.

In a culture which construes poverty very differently from the way the fourteenth century interpreted it, it can be difficult to see how the hidden Christ of the poor might resource thinking about theological education. The Hind Learning outcomes mention under ‘Mission and Evangelism’ that at the point of ordination candidates should ‘participate in and reflect on the mission of God in a selected range of social, ethical, cultural, religious and intellectual contexts in which Christian witness is to be lived out in acts of mercy, service and justice.’⁵³² This does suggest that part of the role of the ordained minister is to engage with issues of justice, though the overall emphasis of the outcomes is to do with socialisation into church-based roles. The outcomes also work from the assumption that the minister is always acting from the position of the agent, never being the one acted upon.⁵³³ In a revised set of learning outcomes, I would like to expand this to: ‘candidates should participate in and reflect on the mission of God in a wide range of contexts, reflecting on where Christ is already present in the poor and marginalised, and engaging with the politics of poverty.’ Langland’s closest contemporary allies might be liberation theologians such as Leonardo Boff, whose insights seem not to have percolated down as far as the Hind settlement.⁵³⁴ A greater emphasis on the politics and spirituality of poverty and wealth would broaden the Hind learning outcomes.

The second, related aspect is that of Jesus who identifies with our humanity through the category of *kynde*, the one who takes our *kynde*, is our *kynde* lord, who requires of us in

⁵³² Hind Two, p. 71.

⁵³³ The danger of phrases such as ‘acts of mercy, service and justice’ is pithily identified by William Blake when he writes in ‘The Human Abstract’: ‘Pity would be no more / If we did not make somebody Poor; / And Mercy no more would be / If all were as happy as we.’ The Hind settlement does not engage with such issues; I am suggesting that the politics of ‘acts of mercy’ might bear further scrutiny and in the process enable other dimensions of learning to emerge.

⁵³⁴ Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis*, Orbis, Maryknoll, 1986.

turn true *kyndeness* one towards another. As Chapter Three discussed, the category of *kynde* is what enables Langland to connect the divine, the created order and humanity, and Jesus is central to this. If the poem describes a process of spiritual formation, a particular Christology is integral to its possibility.

Will declares in B15:

Clerkes kenne me that Crist is in alle places;

Ac I seigh hym nevere smoothly but as myself in a mirour:

Hic in enigmatē, tunc facie ad faciem. (B15.161-2)

(Clerks teach me that Christ is everywhere,

but I only ever see him clearly as my own face in a mirror:

Now we see through a glass darkly, then face to face.)

Here the poem makes a deep connection between Christ's humanity and our own, and the possibility that we may come to reflect the being of Christ in our redeemed selfhood. As Daniel Murtaugh puts it: 'Christ in Piers's armor, visible simply as Piers, fills the intersubjective space between God and man and reveals to each his reflected image. From either side of the mirror, in Lacan's words, there is "one recognition, that of Christ."⁵³⁵ Not only do we learn Christ through self-knowledge and through knowing one another, rather than by seeking to transcend selfhood or the social, but these lines also make a crucial epistemological and metaphysical point about how the divine and the human

⁵³⁵ Daniel M. Murtaugh ' "As Myself in a Mirour": Langland Between Augustine and Lacan,' *Exemplaria* 19, No.3, Fall 2007, pp. 351-385, p. 369.

intersect.⁵³⁶ It is, as Murtaugh comments, ‘an audacious poetic gesture to align Will and Christ before their common reflection in the face of a plowman.’⁵³⁷

The centrality of Christ as the one who enables humanity to be restored in the image of God is expounded by Kathryn Tanner in *Christ the Key*. Her first chapter, ‘Human Nature’, sets out the basis on which ‘Christ’s own life provides not just the pattern of a new human way of life for our imitation, but the cause of that pattern in us, by way of the uniting of humanity and divinity in him.’⁵³⁸ Humans are secondary images of Christ the image of God imaging God ‘not by imitating God, but in virtue of the gift to them of what remains alien to them, the very perfection of the divine image that they are not, now having become their own.’⁵³⁹ The result of this oneness is that ‘the humanity that the divine image assumes is itself healed and elevated, shaped and re-formed according to the character of the Word itself with which the humanity of Jesus has been united.’⁵⁴⁰

Tanner’s frequent citations of the early church fathers set up some interesting resonances.

Quoting Gregory of Nyssa:

Ordinary human beings would be the image of God in the strongest sense too, then, not when trying to image the divine image by themselves but instead, when drawing near to the divine image, so near as to become one with it. As Gregory of Nyssa

⁵³⁶ For a detailed exploration of these lines, see Murtaugh, op. cit. Murtaugh draws out the set of connections between Will, Piers and Christ on p. 353: ‘If Will’s face in a mirror adumbrates the face of Christ, and if the face of Christ is visible to Will and to us only as the face of Piers, then Will seeks in Piers a better version of himself, a completion of himself in the perfect law of liberty.’

⁵³⁷ Murtaugh, op. cit., p. 373. For further comment on the significance of the mirror image, see Stephen F. Kruger, ‘Mirrors and the Trajectory of Vision in *Piers Plowman*’, *Speculum* Vol. 66, No.1. January 1991, pp. 74-95.

⁵³⁸ Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 57.

⁵³⁹ Tanner, op. cit., p. 12.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

makes the point: “Now, how can you see a beautiful image in a mirror unless it has received the appearance of a beautiful form? So it is with the mirror of human nature: it cannot become beautiful until it draws near to the beautiful.” Humans have the image of God only by clinging to what they are not – that divine image itself – becoming attached to it not merely physically but in every way possible for them – ideally with purity of attention, full commitment and intense love.⁵⁴¹

This describes what Langland attempts, allusively and elusively, in *Piers Plowman*: the possibility of glimpsing the image of God through those who are becoming identified with Christ and for whom, in Tanner’s language, Christ is not just the paradigm for, but the means of, transformation into the image of God.⁵⁴²

My criticism of Hind is not that it has no understanding of individuals being transformed as Christ is formed in them; it states clearly that Christ is central to personal formation whilst being mindful of the public representative dimension of that formation.⁵⁴³ It is more that the

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., p. 13.

⁵⁴² Ibid., p. 14: ‘Jesus Christ is more than a paradigm for what is involved here; he has become for us the very means.’ Tanner goes further and sees the goodness of embodiment as being essentially Christologically rooted: ‘Only in virtue of the fact that they have bodies can the whole world hope in humans. Humans demonstrate that, appearances to the contrary (especially in the cultural and philosophical milieu of the early church) the material world itself is plastic- by extension just as plastic to divine influence, one might hope, as human lives. God formed humans out of the dust of the earth so that when formed in the image of God humans might show that the earth too can be made over in God’s image: both matter and mind are made for a single grace.’ Tanner, p. 52.

⁵⁴³ Hind One, 4.6: ‘While personal development may well be a welcome, indeed, necessary part of ministerial formation, it is not the goal in itself. The term “formation” is at the best a convenient short hand. It alludes to elements of *transformation*, the Spirit of God at work in fallible human beings, *forming* Christ in them. At the same time, candidates put themselves at the service of the Church, and participate in a process of being *conformed* to the public role of: prayer, within the Church’s life of worship; acting as a spokesperson on behalf of and to the Church; continued theological and ministerial learning, not least to support a

Christological scope of Hind discourse is limited by being based on organisational competence, as we are reminded by the way in which Tanner invokes very different categories such as beauty, love, and purity of attention when referring to the process by which humans, through sharing Christ's humanity, are drawn into the divine life. Such a process cannot be reduced to an assessable learning outcome. In order to encourage those in training to expand their expectations I would want to make two additions to the learning outcomes: firstly: 'are able to reflect on where Christ is to be encountered in the other; ready to be surprised and taken in odd directions by the unpredictable Christ.'⁵⁴⁴ Secondly: 'are able to sit light to notions of performance and priestly success; are able to err, to fail, to be picked up, knowing that Christ is not their line manager but the one who calls them to follow and who has promised to be with them.' Allowing error, fallibility and struggle to be named in the learning outcomes is not to undermine either the status of ministry as Christ's ministry or the nature of the Church as Christ's Body; rather, it enables a richer and more paradoxical Christology, one where

God works to shape human lives together in and through the ineradicably human character of their ordinary lives. God's direction of us through the institution of Christian practices no more has to evacuate those practices of their typically ambiguous, conflict-filled, fully historical character than God's being a human

ministry of teaching, preaching and interpretation; leadership of the Christian community in its calling and in its service to the wider life of the community.'

⁵⁴⁴ Stephen Pickard observes that a managerial model of episcopacy needs to be reformed to include 'the excluded other': 'not only the "other" of the "mission field", to say nothing of the "other" within (i.e. the laity) but also, and no less importantly, "the collective other" who bear the name of Christ but with whom we do not yet share our bread.' Pickard, *Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry*, op. cit., p. 181.

being had to mean exempting Jesus from the vicissitudes and struggles of everyday life.⁵⁴⁵

Summary

This chapter has suggested that if we were to break open the image of the body and allow some of its repressed entailments to humanise the Church of Hind, we might re-discover some important theological resources from the Christian tradition. It also suggests that other images could help us think more creatively: pilgrimage as well as Body; pain and compassion as well as unity and efficiency; sin and contrition as well as re-organisation.⁵⁴⁶

The question as to whether there are other, richer and more helpful ways to understand ‘body’ language with respect to being part of the church and part of the people of God, has engaged with ways in which Langland can challenge our thinking and our praxis. I have suggested that the image of the body can be recuperated by paying attention to real people’s real embodied lives, pains, sufferings and failures; by avoiding the shortcomings of using Paul’s 1 Corinthians language without going to 2 Corinthians; by disentangling corporate management discourse from body language and looking harder at what we are saying and

⁵⁴⁵ Kathryn Tanner, ‘Theological Reflection and Christian Practices’, in Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (eds.), *Practicing Theology*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2001, pp. 228-42, p. 231.

⁵⁴⁶ L. Gregory Jones, pondering the danger of what he calls a ‘relay race’ understanding of theological education with the student as the baton, proposes an alternative metaphor where the minister’s total development is seen ‘as a pilgrimage that wends its way through a complex constellation of communities where practices, beliefs and desires are formed and educated in a variety of ways. What if we did think of the aim of this process not as graduation to pastoral responsibility but as membership in an ever-widening chorus that draws pastors, church members, seminary professors, and everyone else involved into the doxological praise of God.’ L. Gregory Jones ‘Beliefs, Desires, Practices and the Ends of Theological Education’ in Volf and Bass, op. cit., pp. 185-205, p. 188.

why; by putting the emphasis on Jesus as the one who determines the nature and function of the body rather than allowing institutional imperatives to drive language and practice.

Chapter Six: Learning in the marketplace

Introduction

So far, I have established that learning forms part of the contested landscape of contemporary Church of England policy and practice. What it means to learn, how learning can be planned and assessed, and ways in which lay and clerical models of discipleship shape how learning is experienced, continue to be debated. I have claimed that although the Hind process has tried to address these, it has not been able to resolve the difficulties which arise out of the incompatibility of the discourses of management and theology which it attempts to combine, a combination almost forced upon it by its nature as a report. In Chapter Five, I argued that the insufficiency of the Hind resolution is demonstrated by its use of the image of the body as a means of trying to establish both a unified picture of learning and a sense of consensus within the theological education sector. The inadequacy of Hind body language was exposed by the rediscovery of some of the depth and complexity of the body metaphor and its absence from the Hind settlement. Throughout the argument, I have identified ways in which *Piers Plowman*, faced with an analogous landscape of contested concepts, performs a very different kind of negotiation. It holds together in a more complex way a range of discourses about learning, albeit in a way which lends itself far less easily to clear policy decisions.

Church of England committees and producers of reports strive to speak faithfully into the present. To that end documents invoke resonant theological language and imagery in order to reinforce Christian identity, whilst at the same time using the language of their own day and context. A report, by definition, seeks to answer a certain kind of question in a certain

kind of way. The report genre is focused on the delivery of clear practical recommendations and the Hind reports propose a strategy for managing the church's complex training needs in response to the situation as their authors perceive it. The Hind reports seek to define objectives, and to put in place procedures that can ensure the meeting of those objectives. The use of image of the body, and of the language of formation, is evidence of the seriousness with which the Hind settlement takes the Christian theological tradition. Notwithstanding, the anxieties that I have raised throughout this thesis remain: there are important parts of the tradition, often expressed by means of poetry, which are not susceptible to being managed and mapped onto outcomes. The need for a univocal articulation in well-defined concepts of a vision capable of sustaining agreed managerial action is in tension with an account of Christian discipleship which emphasises imagination, reversal, subversion, and the unpredictable presence of God in extra-institutional contexts.

I have hinted at some ways of living with this tension, and I will take these further in my overall conclusion, where I will explore the potential contributions that poetry makes to theological and ministerial understanding and practice. In this chapter, however, I want to engage with the landscape that has emerged in the wake of Hind and in the context of changes in HEI funding by looking at the attempts of providers of theological education to form new alliances in the light of fresh financial challenges. As part of the exploration of the relationship between learning, funding and institutional integrity I will turn once again to *Piers Plowman*, which displays a constant concern with ways in which learning is emptied of its power to transform in the context of changing relationships between learning, power, authority and money in the late fourteenth century. I will then suggest some tentative ways forward into the post-Hind landscape in the wake of the above.

Learning, money and the market

At the time of writing (2011), the Church of England is part of a new set of re-negotiations of relationships with Higher Education Institutions, where financial constraints will again play a part in decisions being made about who is eligible for what kind of learning and at what price. The fear that institutional relationships and training provision are being increasingly driven by market forces is an anxiety which besets theological educators. The 2010 document ‘The Role of the Ministry Division in evaluating new training proposals’ has been widely interpreted by practitioners in the sector as a handing over of structural responsibility for ministerial training to the market. Any course or college can exercise its entrepreneurial prerogative to expand and develop new forms of training regardless of geography, with the likely consequence that larger institutions based in locations perceived as desirable will be a good position to take over smaller ones.

Although the weakening of smaller institutions is also listed as a possible disadvantage, the paper is notable for its lack of attention to the theological implications of the language of strength and weakness. There is no longer even any recourse to body imagery as an exhortation to unity; rather, in a seemingly unconscious parody of Pauline language in 1 and 2 Corinthians, one advantage of the new arrangements is that the ‘strong’ may get stronger while the ‘weak’ are eliminated. By way of contrast, in Paul’s use of the body metaphor, no part is allowed to exercise strength at the expense of those more vulnerable parts. It seems at the least odd that the body metaphor which informed the earlier Hind discourse has now been jettisoned in favour of a very different institutional ethos and set of terms deploying words like ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ with no apparent sense of irony. The logical conclusion, if the original Hind body metaphor is still taken seriously, is that the

proposed de-regulation could allow for the emergence of a new kind of body, one where plurality and diversity have been replaced by a number of large successful ‘brands’.

What I believe this demonstrates is a breaking point in the tension I identified in earlier chapters between managerial and theological discourses in relation to theological education. The specifics of Langland’s situation are very different; nevertheless, there is a similar disquiet about the manipulation of language and the power of money to shape moral decision-making. The section from *Piers Plowman* that I will explore considers some issues analogous to those faced by Ministry Division policy makers, including how the reality of a financial system can be acknowledged and yet prevented from corrupting the bodies with which it has to do. Giving too much power to the market is to risk assessing value in financial terms and to be forced to abandon areas of work which do not give a good return for investment. As Langland vividly depicts, over-reliance on the market can also lead to a lack of transparency as to how deals are struck.

The challenge of Meed

The section I have chosen focuses on the personified figure whom Langland calls ‘Mede’ and concerns the role that Meed (money, financial reward) should play in the life of the court and wider society, interrogating the relationship between justice, obligation and commerce.⁵⁴⁷ B2 begins with Will witnessing the appearance of Meed at the court,

⁵⁴⁷ David Aers explores how the figure of Mede dramatises some of the implications of the changing nature of labour relations in the late fourteenth century and the challenge they presented to the moral tradition that Langland represents. Aers situates Langland within a conservative tradition that draws on interlocking ideas of justice and obligation and which struggles with the new patterns of work and social organisation that began to emerge after the passing of the 1388 statute on wages and labour. Working for wages, and asserting the

beautifully dressed as an anti-type to the Church the bride of Christ, and being given a scathing account of her credentials by Holy Church (B2.20-51). Preparations for the wedding of Meed and False are under way when Theology interrupts at B2.115, saying that Meed deserves a better husband and insisting that they go to London to settle the matter. Everyone sets off, with Meed accompanied by Falsehood and Flattery, figures who are dismissed by the King when they arrive at B2.193. Meed is brought before the king as B3 opens, and she soon makes herself at home in Westminster as its citizens shamelessly woo her (B3.9-100). The king appears at B3.101 to find Meed a suitable bridegroom to make her legitimate; Conscience rejects the request that he should fulfil the role (B3.120-169). A lively dialogue between Meed and Conscience ensues, with Meed defending herself (B3.170-227) and Conscience responding (B3.230-353).

The king opens Passus 4 by ordering Meed and Conscience to be reconciled, whereupon Conscience sends for Reason. As the personified figures ride along together, Conscience warns Reason to avoid ‘oon Waryn Wisdom and Witty his fere’ (one Warren Wisdom and his companion Witty), who plan to intercept Reason for some good advice on how to avoid financial ruin; this is clearly not the sphere in which Reason should be put to work. The rest of the passus records the continued difficulty of restraining Meed, of preventing Wisdom and Wit from operating according to self-interest and greed, and the struggle to adhere to the stern standards of Reason in the face of bribery and factionalism.⁵⁴⁸

right to negotiate those wages, seems to Langland, Aers argues, to open the door to a world where the only criterion for making legal or moral judgements is market forces. This fear of the erosion of bonds of obligation which are not contractually but sacramentally determined is what, Aers argues, underlies the structure of Passus 2-4. David Aers, *Faith, Ethics and Church: Writing in England 1360-1409*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 2000, p. 66.

⁵⁴⁸ For further discussion of the role of Mede, see M. Teresa Tavormina, *Kindly Similitude: Marriage and Family in Piers Plowman*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1995, Chapter 1, ‘The

Meed is thus presented in these passus as being unstable and untrustworthy.⁵⁴⁹ Endeavours by characters such as Conscience and Reason to restrain her meet with only limited success. Two interconnected themes emerge in the passage. Firstly, the importance of a right theological understanding as a means of underpinning and assessing all new alliances between Meed and whoever presents themselves as a potential partner. Scripture needs to be used well if it is not to be abused out of self-interest. Discernment is required to know how and where money is to be used and to maintain awareness of its seductive power. Secondly, fundamental social bonds, represented here by marriage and charity, are endangered by Meed's power. The integrity of these bonds must not, Langland suggests, be debased by self-deception about how money is playing a part in any given relationship, political or personal. Rather than present an argument about abstract ideas, Langland uses marriage as the key image which signifies Meed's fate and purpose, reminding us that what is at stake is not just an ideological debate but a set of transactions and relationships which go to the heart of how human intimacy and social cohesion are formed and sustained.

Langland is not content merely to satirise greed and corruption; he has the wider aim of probing beneath the surface to examine the theological basis of financial ethics. He sets up the dramatic tension as to the fate of Meed by describing the start of her wedding to False at

Marriage of Meed'; C. David Benson, 'The Function of Lady Meed in *Piers Plowman*', *English Studies* 61, 1980, pp. 193-205.

⁵⁴⁹ Diane Cady puts forward the theory that in the Middle Ages, money was associated with women: 'both are supposedly passive and yet potentially powerful; both are unstable and do not hold their 'imprint'; both endanger homosocial bonds; and both are seen as items of exchange.' Diane Cady, 'Symbolic Economies', in Paul Strohm (ed.), *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature: Middle English*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2007, pp. 124-141, p. 126. Cady concludes on p. 135 that '*Piers Plowman* provides a particularly sustained example of both the instantiations among money, language and gender and the projection of social instability onto women.'

2.53, and having Theology interrupt with an objection at 2.115, on the basis that Meed is legitimate and should be married to Truth. Theology's interpolation signals that there is a theological debate to be had about the origins and acceptability of commerce and reward. This debate necessarily involves issues of teaching and learning, for a right understanding of the place of Meed in the purposes of God's kingdom is vital to knowing with whom she should be united and why. Thus at B2.122-4 Theology rebukes the wedding organisers for having ignored the authoritative written text in Luke 10.7 that labourers are worthy of their hire; there is nothing intrinsically wrong with 'mede', and she should not be handed over to be partnered with falsity. Labourers must live, and meed – reward, usually financial reward – is not a concept so debased that it cannot be redeemed. If Scripture commends the need for workers to be paid, we should not be too quick to assume that all financial transactions degrade human encounters and involve deceit and corruption. The law must decide.

This theological dimension is picked up again in Conscience's long speech in Passus 3, where he makes a distinction between two kinds of mede:

There are two manere of medes, my lord, by youre leve.

That oon God of his grace graunteth in his blisses

To tho that wel werchen while thei ben here. (B3.231-3)

(There are two kinds of reward, my lord, by your leave.

There is one that God in his grace grants in [heavenly] delights,

to those who work well while they are her [on earth].)

And

Ther is another mede mersurelees, that maistres desireth:

To mayyntene mysdoers mede thei take ...

... Preestes and persons that plesynge desireth,
That taken mede and moneie for masses that thei syngeth,
Taken hire mede here as Mathew us techeth
Amen, Amen, receperunt mercedem suam. (B3.246-7, 252-4)

(There is another reward that cannot be measured/ is immoderate, which lords
desire:

they take money to support evil-doers ...
... priests and parsons who desire pleasure
and who take payment and money for masses that they sing,
take their reward here as Matthew teaches us:
Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward.)

This not wholly satisfactory separation of the spiritual and material spheres and meanings
of 'mede' (heavenly reward versus earthly reward) is qualified somewhat by Conscience's
subsequent re-definition of the limits and right parameters for meed:

That laborers and lewede taken of hire maistres,
It is no manere mede, but a mesurable hire.
In marchaundise is no mede, I may it wel avowe:
It is a permutacion apertly- a pennyworth for another. (B3.255-58)

(That which labourers and the uneducated receive from their masters
is not reward but the rightful price of their labour.
I declare that commerce is not a matter of reward:
it is manifestly an act of exchange- one pennyworth in exchange for another.)

The poem's acknowledgement of the ambiguity of Meed is important.⁵⁵⁰ Langland does not deny the necessity of systems of mutual obligation that make up the world of economic and social practice, but neither is he naïve about the vulnerability of financial transactions to human greed and self-interest. In our own context, theological education must be funded, staff remunerated and financial agreements entered into. What Langland keeps his readers mindful of throughout these passus is the need for moral vigilance.

Before a new series of searches and dialogue is set in train in Passus 4, the turning point of Passus 3 in terms of the right use of learning comes in the exchange between Meed and Conscience in lines B3.332-353. Meed thinks that she has got the upper hand by quoting Proverbs 22.9, and shows off her Latin to prove that she too can use clerkly discourse:

'I kan no Latyn?' quod she. 'Clerkes wite the soothe!

Se what Salomon seith in Sapience bokes:

That thei that yyven yiftes the victories wynneth,

And mucche worshipe have therwith, as Holy Writ telleth –

Honorem adquiret qui dat munera &' (B3.332-5)

(' I don't know any Latin?' she said. 'Clerks know the truth!

See what Solomon says in his Wisdom books:

That they who give gifts win the victory,

and they obtain much honour, as Holy Writ tells:

⁵⁵⁰ Daniel Murtaugh suggests that Meede is amoral rather than immoral, and that 'as frequently happens with Langland's best personifications, the moral ambiguities of the word are rendered by the ambiguities of the character.' Daniel Maher Murtaugh, *Piers Plowman and the Image of God*, University of Presses of Florida, Gainesville, 1978, p. 41.

he that maketh presents shall purchase victory and honour.’)

Conscience triumphantly out-argues her by pointing out that the second half of the verse undercuts the first, thus rendering her point invalid and exposing the partial nature of her reading. Helen Barr comments that this passage asserts the social importance of reading correctly, such that reading is ‘not a private, recreational activity divorced from one’s responsibilities to the larger community, but an act of labour integral to the fulfilment of one’s social position.’⁵⁵¹ Right reading is bound up with right behaviour, and the verb ‘reden’ can mean to give counsel as well as to read a book. Thus here at the start of the poem Langland juxtaposes two ways of using learning and of understanding its importance within a nexus of social and moral values.

James Simpson compares Conscience and Meed as readers, ultimately finding neither adequate. There are problematic gender issues: for example, can Conscience be seen as representing a clerkly male reading, Meed as an affective female one? Both as represented in Passus 3 prove inadequate – Conscience’s, because it is too hostile to what Simpson calls an affective hermeneutics, Meed’s because the desire her reading fulfils is an egotistic one rather than one related to the common good. Simpson contends that ‘what Langland works towards in *Piers Plowman* is a reading model in which texts must bend to the *best* desires of their readers.’⁵⁵² True knowing and loving involves the right orientation of will and desire, and although such moments of true knowing are rare and brief in the poem, it can be argued that they occur in the later passus (for example, as Will wakes at the end of B18). At

⁵⁵¹ Helen Barr, *Signes and Sothe: Language in the Piers Plowman Tradition*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 1991, p. 23.

⁵⁵² James Simpson, ‘Desire and the scriptural text: Will as reader in *Piers Plowman*’, in Rita Copeland (ed.), *Criticism and Dissent in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, pp. 215-243, p. 229.

this early stage of the poem Langland is still setting up the terms of a debate about learning, and Meed and Conscience can be seen as representing two unsatisfactorily polarised positions: an ideal moral order and an opportunistic materialism driven by egotistic desire. Will's journey of discerning what it might mean to know the truth, to recognise falseness and to embrace a way of knowing and living that will lead to salvation, is still in its early stages, and he has yet to undergo those encounters that will enable it. Here he is a spectator rather than a participant as these two figures play out their agonistic drama; the debate is happening outside him.

Conscience's austere and purist vision is tested and tempered later in the poem: when he meets Haukyn in Passus 13-14, and in Passus 19 and 20 when he is left in charge of Unitee and has to deal with the realities of sinfulness in the midst of a divinely appointed institution. But at this point in the poem there is a gulf between the discourse worlds of Conscience and that of Meed, so much so that it seems they are irreconcilable. The King, at the beginning of Passus 4, orders them to kiss and make up, but Conscience refuses, insisting 'But Reson rede me therto, rather wol I deye' (4.5) ('unless Reason advises me to do so, I would rather die'). That the importance of right learning is central to the issue of who Meed should marry is reinforced by the summoning of Reason by the king in Passus 4 for the purpose of giving counsel on the ruling of the realm, on the forming of a correct alliance for Meed, and in order to consult with Conscience on the matter of how people – both 'the lered and the lewed' – are best to be taught and educated (4.11-12).⁵⁵³

⁵⁵³ Janet Coleman, in making her case for Langland reflecting the theological disputes arising from the theories of the moderni, interprets the presence of both Reason and Conscience as corresponding to Ockham's understanding of the way in which these two faculties work together to enable the will to make choices that are morally correct. Janet Coleman, *English Literature in History 1350-1400*, Hutchinson, London, 1991, p. 246.

Learning and teaching have thus been identified as important in the whole business of ruling rightly, and Passus 5 opens with Reason launching his teaching campaign beyond the world of the court, out in the field of folk (B5.10-12). Despite the solemnity of his sermon, the subsequent responses get completely out of hand, and Reason is left behind in the huge energy of the seven deadly sins and the introduction of Piers. From a top-down model of learning, where Reason admonishes the people on behalf of the King, a bottom-up model emerges with Piers and the labouring people embarking on a journey of repentance and renewal. One of the poem's recurring themes is the inefficacy of exhortations to repentance and virtue when they are imposed on the reluctant and resistant masses (see also B19.399-405 where the brewer rudely rejects the pleas of Conscience). It is never possible within the poem to forget the potential for intransigence of the common mass of humanity; another kind of learning is required than merely being preached to or introduced to the text of Scripture. In this context Piers comes to represent another kind of learning, beginning with the gathering of the people in a shared project of ploughing and communal living, and ending with his identification with Christ.

Not only is learning in danger of being co-opted for selfish purposes of financial gain and thus undermined, but the very basis of human relationship is under threat from Meed, who seems capable of reducing all alliances and bonds to transactions. The main image Langland uses to suggest this is the wedding of Meed. When the king intervenes to find Meed a more suitable husband than False, it seems at first that a positive outcome will result: the king vows to lock up the false suitors (who, in a piece of satire at 2.211-234, flee and are made welcome by various dishonest friars, pardoners and quacks), and at the start of Passus 3, Meed is brought before the king. However, she proves too captivating, and everyone, including the clerks, vow to protect her interests. When a friar approaches her for

a subscription to a church window, Meed is happy to oblige as long as the friar continues to allow lechery:

I wolde noght spare
For to be youre frend, frere, and faile yow nevere
While ye love lordes that lecheris haunten
And lakketh noght ladies that loven wel the same.
It is a freletee of flesh – ye fynden it in bokes –
And a cours of kynde, whereof we comen alle. (B3.51-56)

(I will not hold back
in being your friend, friar, and will never fail you
as long as you love lords who are addicted to lechery
and have plenty of ladies who love the same thing.
It is a frailty of the flesh – there are books about it –
and a natural impulse which we all share.)

This is a skilful anatomy of the corruption both of love and learning at this early stage of the poem. Friendship, love and knowledge are all debased, cynically invoked in a transaction of pure mutual self-interest. The alliterating soft ‘f’ and ‘l’ sounds are an ironic counterpoint to the hard bargain that is in reality being struck, not merely between two individuals, but between hard truth-telling or collusive self-deception with all the social consequences that will have.⁵⁵⁴ Meed’s next utterance at B3.91-2, another sibilant giving of permission for dishonesty guaranteed by ‘love’, will mean increased hardship for the poor

⁵⁵⁴ Barr points out the change in the alliterative pattern when Mede comes to court, from a bare, unadorned style to a more elaborate aa/ax pattern implicitly associating verbal sophistication with corruption. Barr, *op. cit.*, Chapter 2.

as she permits the adulteration of food and the fixing of prices. She instructs the retailers to ‘selle somdel ayeins reson’ (sell something in opposition to reason) – this time undermining the principle of reason held to be a crucial part of the balance of law and obligation.

Langland thus establishes early on in *Piers Plowman* a recurring fear: that words such as love are being emptied of their power, and that language and learning are being used to generate financial profit rather than to promote the common good. The section of the poem I have briefly discussed explores such fears using a range of poetic techniques, including shifting personification, dialogue, and changes of register. Some of the ways in which misuse of language reflects a deeper social and theological crisis are presented by Langland through the way in which the poetic narrative is able to expose fault lines and fissures in characters’ discourse and action. However, Langland is not content with a simple opposition between pure learning and corrupt reward. The search for an appropriate place for reward in relation to learning is enmeshed with the complex ways in which learning’s own nature is explored in the poem. *Piers Plowman* does not yield any straightforward guide as to how to manage the pressing questions of finance and partnership which need to be resolved post-Hind; what the poem does remind us of again is their embeddedness in deeper ethical, socio-political and theological questions. Whereas in Hind the theological discourse is captured by the managerial, in *Piers Plowman* the managerial discourse is being captured by the poetic-theological. The possibility of that move and a reminder of the deeper questions is what the poem offers to post-Hind planning.

Summary

Langland rejects a false separation of worldly and spiritual values and instead seeks a language which will express their potential integration. The question as to which discourse will triumph in the cacophony of the field of folk is one of the poem's recurring preoccupations.⁵⁵⁵ It matters in terms of the integrity of the human self and the moral coherence of the social world of human selves, and it is one of the ways of understanding the poem's impetus. My final chapter contends that the Church of England in 2011 likewise needs to take heed of the competing discourses which seek to dominate Christian learning, and that to avoid any further courtship between Meed and False, attention should be paid to Langland's warning in these early passus of *Piers Plowman*.

⁵⁵⁵ See William Elford Rogers' discussion of the Tower of Babel as a motif in the Prologue on pp. 33-78 of *Interpretation in Piers Plowman*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C., 2002. Rogers writes on p. 78: 'Langland concludes – in a perfectly orthodox manner – that political discourse needs to be taken up into theological discourse. And even when that happens, though a certain clarity of thought might result, no real practical problems are likely to be solved in the social organism. Langland is less interested in reforming the body politic than in deciding what to think about it. It seems strange to say so, but Langland is not, finally, a political poet.'

Conclusion: Taking care of our language

This thesis began with learning. In particular it outlined the context in which theological education has been understood and implemented by the Church of England in the last decade, and described the Hind settlement in terms of its emphasis on the learning of the whole Church, on close relationships with the academy, and on regional re-organisation. Through an analysis of two key documents, *Formation for Ministry in a Learning Church* and *Shaping the Future*, I suggested that the Hind rhetoric of learning is vulnerable to criticism in several areas, in part because a report finds difficulty in holding together policy recommendations with a more dialogical approach to real and diverse situations. Reading Hind has been shown to be a particular learning experience, one where the expectation is assent to propositions rather than engagement in the discovery or making of new meaning.

As a contrast to Hind's textual strategies and ways of negotiating a complex set of issues, I have, over successive chapters, used *Piers Plowman* as a conversation partner. I have indicated the ways in which Langland's poem confronts and works with the problem of competing discourses in the world of the late fourteenth century, and how Langland's constant interrogation of languages of power – spiritual, ecclesial, socio-political – allows him to develop a dynamic of discipleship which is restless and open-ended, bound up with structures of labour and justice and informed by a profound engagement with what it means for Christ to be our kin and kind. By contrasting the Hind Learning Outcomes and their underlying theological assumptions with the model of discipleship and learning undertaken by Will in *Piers Plowman*, I have proposed that trying to assess stages of development runs the risk of substituting organisational effectiveness for the unpredictability of spiritual

growth. In the course of Chapters Three, Four and Five I have identified areas which could inform new directions in the post-Hind landscape: the importance of error, failure and suffering in the journey of discipleship and ministry; the need to go beyond lay/clerical distinctions in thinking about learning; and attending to the metaphors we use and which shape our practice, in particular the image of the Body of Christ.

Several strands related to the use of language come together in this concluding chapter. Chapter Four drew out the centrality of using words well as part of the clerically calling; Chapter Five took that further by examining in detail the implications of using a metaphor such as the Church as the Body of Christ without paying attention to its missing entailments. Chapter Six dealt with the ways in which language, money and power can become interwoven in ways which occlude moral slippage. Throughout I have contended that Langland's impulse constantly to subject utterances to an interpretive check is a vital one for individual and ecclesial integrity, albeit one which is infuriatingly incapable of delivering clear univocal conclusions.

This thesis is not a proposal for introducing more poetry and fiction into the content of the curriculum; that worthwhile work has been done elsewhere.⁵⁵⁶ What it seeks to address as it draws towards a conclusion is the discourse in which policy and decision making is conducted, and to ask whether at that level there is scope for renewal. Facing the challenge of a recovery of theological content in our pronouncements begins by paying attention to language. Stanley Hauerwas puts it thus:

⁵⁵⁶ See for example *Theological Education* Vol.31, No.1, Autumn 1994, an issue called 'Sacred Imagination: The Arts and Theological Education.'

We are as we come to see and as that seeing becomes enduring in our intentionality. We do not come to see, however, just by looking but by training our vision through the metaphors and symbols that constitute our central convictions. How we come to see therefore is a function of how we come to be since our seeing necessarily is determined by how our basic images are embodied by the self – i.e. in our character.⁵⁵⁷

If we accept that language and metaphor are constitutive of the ways in which we experience and respond to the world, we will need to pay more attention to the metaphors we use.⁵⁵⁸ As Hauerwas suggests, this is not purely a matter of semantics but of ethics and character.

Critiques of the church's captivity to certain kinds of language and ways of thinking are not lacking.⁵⁵⁹ It has been my aim throughout this thesis to show that recourse to a particular pre-modern poem can assist in the work of retrieval and reconstruction, and thus contribute

⁵⁵⁷ Stanley Hauerwas in *Vision and Virtue*, 1981, quoted on p. 6 of Eugene Peterson *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1992.

⁵⁵⁸ As Terry Eagleton warns, 'Language also carries with it the continued possibility of reification: the chance that the codes into which reality is ordered, with a consequent dawning of intelligibility and loss of practical immediacy, may become autonomous, manipulating rather than mediating the world. In this condition, signs become fetishes to which living experience is sacrificed.' Terry Eagleton, *The Body as Language*, Sheed and Ward, London, 1970, p. 20.

⁵⁵⁹ See for example Bernd Wannewetsch's analysis of managerialism in the church in *Studies in Christian Ethics*, Vol. 21, No. 1, April 2008. His five theses expose how the language we use reveals who we think we are and what we are doing, such that it is very different for an institution or congregation to see itself as a 'beggar for the gospel's sake' rather than 'a provider of quality goods.' On p. 28 Wannewetsch diagnoses the managerialism of the church as being the product of 'inwardness and commodification', or an inward Romantic hermeneutic rather than a reliance on the external word, such that ultimately the Gospel becomes our core competence, our product. I have not attempted to interpret the church's managerialism according to a Schleiermachieian versus Barthian hermeneutic, although Wannewetsch's argument is an interesting one.

to institutional renewal. In order to establish a more theoretical base for this approach I will make three assertions. The first is that poetry potentially resists the closure of one fixed meaning by enabling multiple layers of interpretation, and that this acts as a reminder of the provisional status of the kind of assertions put forward by reports and policy documents.⁵⁶⁰ Poetry also involves the reader with the text in a particular way which gives the reader a role in making meaning rather than merely being told certain things. The second is that poetry (like prose fiction) is able to convey some of the complexity of lived experience in ways that act as a corrective balance to the inevitable abstractions of reports like Hind. Thirdly, poetry can encourage the kind of attentiveness which guards against the dilution or distortion of language and metaphor. Theological educators and those entering ministry need to be those who are attentive to language in order that faith and discipleship are not reduced to programmes and outcomes, necessary though those may be.

Multiple perspectives and epistemologies of learning

Claims for poetry as a genre are always in danger of becoming presumptuously over-general, and it is as pointers towards important epistemological issues that I offer these three claims for the importance of poetry in the context of practices of Christian learning. David Brown rejects the idea that poetry is ‘necessarily iconoclastic’ in its refusal of closure, preferring to stress its subversive potential in the wider sense that it presents us

⁵⁶⁰ Martyn Percy sees a robust ecclesiology as having room for plural views. Speaking of the Turnbull report, he suggests that the report’s problem is that it is too safe: ‘it is comfortable, secure, down-sized and maximised, and it speaks with one voice. Therein lies its problem. For bureaucracy brings with it the suffocation of diversity, the emasculation of prophecy, and the dubious gift of a tightly controlled denominationalisation to what was once a national church.’ Percy, *Power and the Church*, op. cit., p. 136.

with uncomfortable connections that disrupt any arrogant sense of rightness.⁵⁶¹ It is this capacity which I have identified in *Piers Plowman*, and which I believe is critical for theological education and formation. Jim Rhodes puts it thus:

Unlike the sermon, a poem does not rely on an explicit rhetoric for its (moral) effect. The poem's fiction and verse rhythm enact implicitly what, for the most part, the sermon states flatly... Even when intentionally established in subordination to an ideological superstructure fiction is still inherently subversive of such vehiculation, and betrays that externally imposed purpose by its very nature.⁵⁶²

What is true of a sermon in this statement (I would dissent from this as a definition of how a good sermon works, but that is not the issue here) is also true of a report, whose task is not to play with ambiguity and complexity but to proceed according to formal stylistic conventions which reflect a particular epistemology.⁵⁶³ In contrast, poetry has the capacity to be more epistemologically open and elusive: in Michel de Certeau's terms, to present the reader or hearer with an itinerary rather than a map. Peter Candler's question, 'does the mode of presentation make a difference to the content of the message?', is a critical one for my argument, and Candler's grammar of representation/grammar of participation is one helpful model for spelling out Langland's importance in an epistemology of learning. Candler defines a grammar of representation as being like a map, characterised by method, logic and the spatial grid; it 'assumes that there is no relation between the form of presentation and its content.'⁵⁶⁴ In this grammar,

⁵⁶¹ David Brown, *God and Mystery in Words*, Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 8-9.

⁵⁶² Jim Rhodes, *Poetry Does Theology*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 2001, p. 9.

⁵⁶³ For a more detailed exploration of the epistemological implications of the shift from an oral to a typographic culture, see Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word*, Simon and Schuster, 1967.

⁵⁶⁴ Candler, op. cit., p. 1.

‘the book itself becomes a kind of metaphor for the way knowledge itself works: any science is composed of independent units of thought which can be represented by the nominative noun or by the cartographic table of images.’⁵⁶⁵ Candler contrasts this with a ‘grammar of participation’ which ‘attempts to lead the reader to a goal which is at once textual and ontological.’⁵⁶⁶ For Candler, this is to do with ‘the textual form in which such thought [about God] is made present to the reader, and in the form of Christian pedagogy which understands its task not to be the mere impartation of information about God, but a real leading into the Trinity.’⁵⁶⁷

Staying with Candler’s terms, it is possible to read the Hind tensions as being between these two ‘grammars’. Much of what Candler extols in his ‘grammar of participation’ model resonates with the formation language of Hind, for example the statement that ‘the teaching of Christianity therefore represents a comprehensive “curriculum of persuasion” which is not designed simply to convince that such-and-such is the case, but to transform character and to re-order our loves to the proper object of desire.’⁵⁶⁸ As was explored in Chapter Two, there is within the Church of England a tradition of formation which is familiar with the language of character and the right ordering of desire, which runs in uneasy tension with the language of managing outcomes. The claim I am making here is that poetry has the potential to contribute to that kind of trans/formational process through a dynamic of desire which enables the learner to hold together different insights, a process which also can be seen being worked out in *Piers Plowman*. What Candler states in general terms can be seen to be true of Langland’s poem:

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 23.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 35.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 34.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 60.

Reading becomes the site of theological production in terms of interpretive invention. “Making meaning” then becomes a responsibility of the reader, and not just of the original author. In this way, to read a text emerges as an act of participation in the creative character of authorial intention, an act which is never completed by the author alone, but must be continually finished by the community of interpretation which a text produces.’⁵⁶⁹

It has been my claim in this thesis that Langland’s text continues to produce a community of interpreters for whom creative engagement with his words resources a pedagogy of participation and transformation which, in Candler’s words, ‘aims at the reordering of knowledge and desire, through the participation in the ritualised activity of reading and inscription into the continuing narrative community of interpreters that is the church.’⁵⁷⁰

If poetry then represents a ‘grammar of participation’, it can serve to challenge us when our language is reduced to that of the ‘grammar of representation,’ reminding us of all that cannot be grasped, defined and controlled and opening up a space for different expressions of theological truth. It is valid that programmes of Christian learning should have aims and learning outcomes, but important that these are not presented as being ideologically neutral and that they leave space for a range of understandings. Documents which re-think policy need not be restricted in their imaginative scope to numbered bullet points and grids.

Conveying and transforming the complexity of lived experience

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 9.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 61.

Secondly, and critically for theological education and formation, Rhodes claims that poetry is able to convey and enact the complexity of lived experience:

If, in its own domain, theological discourse is adequate to the task of glossing the Bible, seeking truth, and spelling out doctrine, it characteristically ignores the complex experience of the individual who tries to live out or comprehend in existential terms the principle that is concealed in abstract theological ideal and language.⁵⁷¹

This is an excellent summary of the dilemma which Langland seeks to address by re-creating the complex experience of the individual in the journey of Will. The poetic discourse enables the questing self to be situated within the narrative, to disappear and re-appear, and to draw the self of the reader into the making of meaning. I have suggested in Chapter Two that the lifelong process of ministerial formation can be better understood in terms of a spiral journey than by means of a measurable set of prescribed learning outcomes, and that this reflects the complexity of human life.

Systems and structures – both theological and institutional – are always in tension with the complexities of lived experience, as has been explored earlier in this thesis. This complex lived experience includes the reality of embodiment, as we have seen in Chapter Five, and one possible role of poetry can be to capture and to name some of that complexity. Clearly it is not the sole preserve of poetry to enable this; if all students were required, for example, to read Augustine's *Confessions* before starting training, that would be a good start. My point is that there needs to be a more intentional effort to integrate the discourse of

⁵⁷¹ Rhodes, op. cit., p. 10. Rhodes quotes Wolfgang Iser as saying that 'literature becomes a panorama of what is possible because it is not hedged in either by the limitations or by the considerations that determine the institutionalised organisations within which human life otherwise takes its course.'

pedagogical policy making and that of the messy struggle of discipleship and learning, and that poetry is one medium which can help to bring the two together.

Cultivating attentiveness

My third assertion concerns the capacity of poetry to make us attentive to language and thus to issues of truth. David Mahan's work on poetics of mission asks the question:

What therefore, can poetry teach theological educators as well as their students and readers about creative and , as Lash advocates, "disciplined" speech? How do poets educate the educators on "attentiveness, reverence, and alertness" to language, and the development of creative modes of expression so urgently needed for the Church's public witness in this age? And how does the poetic imagination re-enact the possibilities of that vision in a culture that has grown resistant to it?⁵⁷²

Mahan is concerned to emphasise the importance of poetry in the Church's missional and communicative task, claiming that 'accuracy and the careful study and use of language comprise theological virtues, given language's inherent susceptibility to corruption' and that 'poetry provides a critical site both for exposing these conditions and for negotiating the tensions that arise from them, in the interest of public accountability and, ultimately, of truth telling.'⁵⁷³

Mahan claims that poetry matters to theology 'because it presents the Church with gifts of speech that intersect vitally with its most prominent task: the holding forth of the gospel in

⁵⁷² David C. Mahan, *An Unexpected Light*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series: Pickwick Publications, Eugene, Oregon, 2009, p. 18.

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

ways that enable others to perceive its meaning.⁵⁷⁴ He presents a threefold challenge: finding efficacious speech to engage the attention of people; re-equipping the imagination of non-Christians; equipping the imagination of Christians for the task. Attentiveness to language is not merely a matter of sniffing out falsity or clumsiness, but has the constructive task of awakening the imagination to new possibility which, as Mahan points out, is ultimately part of a missional vision.

I have suggested that the ability to hold together multiple perspectives, to acknowledge the complexity of lived experience, and to be attentive to language, are three important priorities for theological educators and indeed for all Christian disciples. One way of cultivating some of these qualities is by being exposed to and wrestling with difficult texts whose otherness breaks open our received understandings and confronts us with dilemmas both like and unlike our own, forcing us to work at making connections.⁵⁷⁵

Retrieval and recovery: some final hints from Piers Plowman

I have claimed that poetry in general, and *Piers Plowman* in particular, is able both to expose misuse of language and to re-ignite the imagination of the reader. I want to take a final look at one passage in *Piers Plowman* which exemplifies the qualities described above. I am taking B18.110-260; 410-end, to show how Langland is able to create a space where different perspectives are acknowledged and reconciled, where lived experience is drawn

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 3.

⁵⁷⁵ David Jasper puts it thus: ‘The poet speaks in metaphor and analogy; theology itself cannot abandon the language of similitude and speak of the mystery of God in the language of science and analysis, for God is no analysable system. The poet is always there to remind theology of this, and of the reticence, obliquity and indirection of its Truth.’ David Jasper, *The Study of Literature and Religion*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1989, p. 35.

on and transformed in the light of the saving work of Christ, and which ends on a doxological note. Rhodes argues that through the imaginative re-telling of the Four Daughters Legend ‘Langland opens up his text as a space for play and he leaves ample room for readers to form their own judgment of the events described.’⁵⁷⁶

In this passage, the harrowing of hell is interwoven with a debate between the four daughters of God about who is saved. It is a multi-layered narrative, involving both dialogue between the four daughters and Book, and the presence of Will as spectator and final respondent. Mercy and Truth, Peace and Righteousness, form two pairs who interpret differently the events which are taking place in hell. They have a series of vigorous dialogues where they argue about what is happening, and in the course of which they are explicit about the basis of their understanding. Thus Truth dismisses Mercy’s explanation at B18.139-141 as ‘a tale of waltrot!’ (B18.142), citing Scripture to prove that souls in hell stay there for ever; Mercy then draws on experience and reason to refute this claim (B18.151). Peace and Righteousness are similarly at loggerheads in their reading of what is going on (at B18.196 Righteousness accuses Peace of being drunk). Interspersed with the discussion is the narrative of the harrowing of hell; Langland places it within a multiple framework of interpretive possibility. The four daughters come to the realisation that their interpretive stances are not adequate to encompass the action of God in salvation. Lines 260-409 narrate the harrowing of hell; at 410 we return to the four daughters. The scene of their disagreement ends with an embrace, singing and dancing, and dream shifts into waking to the sound of bells on Easter morning, whereupon Will goes to Mass with his wife and child. For a brief moment, the waking world, the liturgical year, the events of the

⁵⁷⁶ Rhodes, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-5.

crucifixion and resurrection, and meta-level soteriological discussion, are integrated into a whole and experienced as such by Will as celebration and affirmation.

Summary

A seemingly inevitable part of institutional life in a bureaucratic age is the production of reports. Even as we produce them, implement and critique them, recognising our embeddedness in the culture they represent, we need to recognise their provisionality and to refuse to allow them to dictate the scope of our thinking and praxis. The language of report writing will always be in danger of assuming a position of linguistic privilege because of its seeming ability to face reality squarely and offer practical managerial solutions. A renewal of the Church's language of report writing is what this thesis is arguing for. Reports represent forays into complex territory which is better represented by the kind of fractured, polyvalent poetry which Langland represents than by the discourse of outcomes and policies. The Church of England and its theological educators need continually to recover retrieve, and integrate into policy documents other modes of discourse which will enable us to articulate a sense of vision and ecclesial identity more deeply rooted in the riches of the Christian tradition. One way that this thesis has proposed is by allowing poetry to open up a different kind of space for exploring ideas of learning and formation. What poetry can do is to free us from the delusion of instrumentalism: that if we have the right outcomes and systems, then we will achieve effectiveness, whatever that may be and however defined. Poetry is subversive of institutional declarations of intent. It foregrounds the slipperiness of language, its ideological freight, and confronts us with a more dialogical way of approaching the world, where we as readers share in the production of meaning rather than merely assenting to or implementing propositions. Rather than settle for parallel discourses

– poetry on the one hand and reports on the other – I am advocating a reform of report writing itself. My suggestions in Chapters Four and Five as to how a set of revised Learning Outcomes might be worded demonstrate that it is possible to re-introduce the language of frailty, failure and provisionality into statements of expectation in a way which acknowledges the reality of ministry on the ground.

From body to market and beyond

The timescale of the writing of this thesis has coincided with a significant shift in the way in which the provision of theological education is understood within the Church of England. The Hind model can be understood as being very much within the mindset of modernity: seeking to create large regional units and appealing to a notion of the body as a well-ordered effective system. At the organisational level, co-operation has been patchy, but the ideological battle has been more or less won insofar as all provision works from and towards the standardised Learning Outcomes, which ensure consistency and conformity to a common set of aims and which every course must evidence if they are to be validated by the Church's processes. Thus Hind has in part achieved its aim: every ordination course, at least, will reference the Learning Outcomes and be shaped to an extent by them. The language of those outcomes will continue to find its way into curriculum design and course handbooks for years to come.

Where Hind has failed to effect the changes it hoped for is in the reduction of the number of providers of theological education: a change in the landscape of college and course provision rather than the content and emphasis of what is delivered. The most recent changes (2011) are evidence of a move into a more market-driven economic model, thinly

veiled by use of the language of mission. Value is placed on being entrepreneurial, innovative and providing value for money. There is an abandonment of the discourse of co-operation and harmony in the body, and an embrace of a discourse of strength and weakness, expansion and closure. Having critiqued the Hind use of body language as potentially coercive and theologically flawed, I do not want to fall in to the trap of belatedly concluding that it was better than what seems to be following it. What is following is the result, I believe, of having repeatedly used worn out symbols without re-imagining them; all that is left is the prevailing imaginary of the age, in this case, the market. If there had been more creative re-symbolising in the course of the Hind process instead of yet another wheeling out of the body metaphor, theological educators might not now be engaged in a series of unedifying manoeuvres to avoid being swallowed up by competing entrepreneurs.

What comes beyond the death of an image? Perhaps its re-birth. The body is dead as a meaningful metaphor for life together in the world of theological education.⁵⁷⁷ The weak are to disappear, the strong to get stronger. Perhaps it is good that this image has finally been exposed as having no more content to offer, as being an empty piece of rhetoric used for too long without thought as to its entailments. Perhaps it is time to reach for another set of images, always being aware of the ‘and is not’ element to any metaphor.⁵⁷⁸

It is not yet clear what will resource the new landscape theologically. But it is vital that it is so resourced. We need more than ever a rich set of metaphors to help our thinking and practice, to move towards an obedient embodiment which draws on the observations of

⁵⁷⁷ See Martyn Percy’s 2011 unpublished paper ‘Working as One Body – Again’ for an effort to resuscitate the metaphor whilst acknowledging how it has been abused.

⁵⁷⁸ For a detailed methodological exploration of the use of metaphor in ecclesiology, see Herwi Rikhof, *The Concept of Church*, Sheed and Ward, London, 1981.

Chapter Five. If we are in a post-Hind landscape which is letting go of the body language of modernity, the answer is not to abandon all attempts to live and work together for the common good by capitulating to a market model which fragments into separate competing entities. One aspect of the body image which needs to be retrieved and re-cast is the idea that learning and discipleship are corporate activities. Despite its institutional body rhetoric, the Hind learning outcomes are almost exclusively individually focussed. A recuperated language of the body might enable us to stop seeing ministry as undertaken by individuals and assessed on an individual basis. Alternatively, other images, such as the vine, may enable different understandings and practices to emerge.⁵⁷⁹

The end of learning

Throughout his poem Langland plays with the paired alliterating terms ‘love’ and ‘learning’, terms which serve as a useful lens through which to examine the complex tensions involved in current understandings and praxis in the Church of England. Although many alternative pairings present themselves – lifelong learning, learning and effectiveness, mission-shaped learning – I believe that the retrieval of these two is the priority of theological educators, undertaken with and alongside communities in the mess and confusion of concrete situations. After all his struggles and debates, at the end of the poem Will is told by Kynde to ‘Lerne to love, and leef alle othere’ (learn to love and leave all the rest) (B20.208).

⁵⁷⁹ Steven Croft’s *Jesus’ People: Where Next for the Church?*, Church House Publishing, London, 2009, takes as its central ecclesial image the Johannine image of the vine and the branches, which may lend itself to a more flexible model of power. If, as Martyn Percy argues, power is best understood as a network of relationships ‘based on the concept of circuits, nodal points and agency’, the vine image may create a more flexible field than the body. Martyn Percy, *Power and the Church*, op. cit., p. 6. As Percy points out, ‘in focusing on agency, structure, organisation and polity, issues of orthopraxy are constantly being pressed.’ Ibid., p. 16. My point is not that the vine may be a ‘better’ image, but that a more attentive use of a range of metaphors is required.

Learning's end for Will is to throw in his lot with the besieged and wounded church and to learn to love: Kynde's words are a summary of what Will has been trying to do all along, rather than a negation of his efforts. It is the pagan Trajan who has reminded Will earlier of the end of learning:

the sevene arts and alle

But thei ben lerned for Our Lordes love, lost is al the tyme,
For no cause to cache silver therby, ne to be called a maister,
But al for Oure Lord and bet to love the peple. (B11.172-4)

(the seven arts and all the rest

unless they be learned for our Lord's love, the time is wasted;
likewise if the motive is to obtain money or to be called a master,
but all for our Lord and in order to love the people better.⁵⁸⁰)

If learning is not to be reduced to a possession, a means of advancement or a gaining of competences dictated by the spirit of the age, it needs to be constantly re-imagined: for our Lord's love and as a means of loving people better.

⁵⁸⁰ Jacques LeGoff's discussion of the change in the use and meaning of the word 'master' is pertinent here. At the beginning of the twelfth century, he contends, 'the *magister* was the foreman, the head of the workshop. The school master was a master like other artisans. His title indicated his function in the workplace. It soon became a title of glory' such that by the fourteenth century '*magister* became the equivalent of *dominus* or lord... thus again knowledge became a possession, a treasure, an instrument of power and no longer a disinterested end in itself.' Jacques LeGoff, *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*, op. cit., p. 126.

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