# *PIERS PLOWMAN* AND PROBLEMS IN THE PERCEPTION OF POVERTY: A CULTURE IN TRANSITION

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I wish to dedicate this essay to the memory of Elizabeth Salter, outstanding medievalist and most generous of teachers and friends: this piece of work originated in the last discussions I had with her before her tragic, early death in 1980.

The chief aim of this essay is to increase our understanding of *Piers Plowman* and its author's problems by focussing on a set of his preoccupations which can be loosely grouped under the heading "problems of poverty". These preoccupations demand a movement between attention to the text, its historical moment, and long term cultural changes in which Langland participated. His discourse, as I have argued before, is fundamentally exploratory, one in which conclusions are risked, tested out, and often shown to be premature, one-sided or mistaken; assumptions made, brought to light and later rejected or developed in fresh perspectives.[1] The poem's modes of writing and organisation are essential to the ways in which Langland remains open to diverse and opposed ideological tendencies in late medieval England. So the specificity of the text's "minute particulars" and its movements must be respected. Yet to grasp the meaning of his treatment of the materials he is working into his poem, such as his treatment of poverty and related issues, we have to attempt to activate for ourselves the contexts within which his discussion moves. For any remotely adequate understanding of Langland's particular meanings will involve at least some recovery of the forms in which he encountered the problems and materials which obsess him. The critic's task is thus far from simple and really demands a supersession of certain divisions of "discipline" in our educational institutions - between, for instance, specialists in social history, history of ideas, economic history, discourse analysis of the kind being developed by Gunther Kress and Roger Fowler, literary criticism. Perhaps the ideal here would be more collaborative work, more collaborative projects. Certainly, I am especially conscious of the way in which the problems I am currently addressing would be best faced in such collaboration, and have read with admiration, and drawn heavily on, the work currently being done on attitudes to the poor and poverty by such continental historians as Geremek, Lis and Soly, Mollat and Schmitt.[2] Attitudes to the poor and ideologies concerning poverty provide major insights into the mentalities prevalent in particular societies and offer a significant record of important social and cultural transitions.

## I

Before discussing *Piers Plowman* I will attempt to outline the contexts within which Langland's treatment of poverty (and related issues) moves, and within which its implications emerge. First, I will offer an inevitably schematised account of what I call "traditional" attitudes to poverty and the poor, that is, "traditional" by the time Langland was writing. Then I shall sketch what I call the "newer" ethos evolving during the later Middle Ages, in pre-Protestant Europe. It is important to recall that in Langland's world both "traditional" and "newer" forms, however contradictory, were alive and part of a historical process whose outcome had obviously not been revealed to contemporary human beings.

In the "traditional" ethos riches are viewed with grave suspicion, even by the possessing classes who simultaneously enjoyed and defended their wealth. Henry of Lancaster's confessions in his *Livre de Seyntz Medecines* are a good and easily accessible example of this, and Jesus himself, of course, gave the rich plenty of cause for guilt and massive anxiety concerning their prospects of salvation - "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God."[3] In traditional thought poverty is neither a vice nor the product of God's special disfavour. If the poor accept their poverty they are in a virtuous, holy state created by God, one which not only guarantees the salvation of the poor but provides a vital instrument in the rich man's bid for salvation through charity - not an inconvenient set of ideas for the "traditional" possessing classes, of course.[4] But developments in Christian piety, culminating in St Francis, had gone beyond this position to maintain that absolute poverty is the very hallmark of Christ, the apostles and his contemporary manifestation. To St Francis any poor man, even an idle beggar, bears the special merits of the poor and stands for Christ - hence his attempt to approach the poorest not as condescending donor but through a shared way of life - "Let them [the friars] be happy to associate with humble and insignificant people, the poor and the weak, the sick, the lepers, and the beggars on the roads."[5] As for work in "traditional" orthodoxy, it was commanded to fallen men by God (Genesis 3.19) and its ends were to avoid idleness, to provide self-discipline and to procure necessities. Prayer, liturgical activities, spiritual works in general were habitually seen as achieving the ends of work in a higher mode than direct activity in the basic processes of material production and exchange. And framing the tradition were the utopian demands of Jesus we shall find Langland turning to at a decisive moment in *Piers Plowman*: "be not solicitous for your life, what you shall eat, nor for your body, what you shall put on. Is not the life more than the meat and the body more than the raiment? Behold the birds of the air, for they neither sow, nor do they reap nor gather into barns: and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not you of much more value than them?" (Matt. 6.25-6).[6]

Because the issue of "beggars" and the able-bodied poor allegedly reluctant to work was to become so important from at

least 1300 to the 1834 Poor Law, and was already proving highly perplexing to Langland, I will exemplify what I take as a "traditional" position. It had been lucidly formulated by Clement of Alexandria (who died before 215) in a work on *The Rich Man's Salvation* (the key *difficulty* in "traditional" commentary on such matters). Writing in an urban milieu, he gives his view on whether the Christians with possessions should evolve a discriminatory charity:

> Do not yourself decide who is worthy and who unworthy, for you may happen to be quite mistaken in your opinion; so that when in doubt it is better to do good even to the unworthy for the sake of the worthy than by being on your guard against the less good not to light upon the virtuous at all. For by being niggardly and by pretending to test who will deserve the benefit and who will not, you may possibly neglect some who are beloved of God, the penalty for which is eternal punishment by fire.[7]

This accords rather well with the attitude expressed by Jesus: "Give to every one that asketh thee: and of him that taketh away thy goods, ask them not again" (Luke 6.30) - an attitude of unconditional generosity. Nor was it absent from disputes on poverty, begging and almsgiving in Langland's period. For example, it can be found in Richard of Maidstone's *Protectorium Pauperis* (1380), a Carmelite friar's response to the newer Christian ethos I shall describe in a moment. Richard notes the relevance of Jesus's command in Luke 6 and observes that it is a sin even to complain about beggars, warning against scrupulous inquiry into the exact position of beggars. Such prying, he maintains, is diabolic arrogance, lessens the merit of giving and imposes a trial on the recipient - one of the deliberate aims of discriminatory almsgiving in the newer ethos, of course. Christ did not, he points out, exclude sinful people from alms.[8] But Richard was primarily concerned to defend his own vocation of voluntary poverty and he is conscious that "traditional" positions here were likely to meet intense hostility. Was it now the salvation of the poor that might need sustained defence rather than the salvation of the rich?

The emerging "new" ethos shows signs that orthodox Christian ideology was shifting to embrace changing attitudes to wealth. Perhaps some of the most obviously striking texts are the ridicule of poverty and glorification of the affluence and occupation of Florentine merchants by some early fifteenth century humanists, Poggio's *On Avarice and Luxury*, Palmieri's *The Civic Life* and Alberti's *The Family*, for example.[9] Less blatant, but perhaps more significant, are the assumptions behind Pope John XXII's attack on the Franciscan ideas about poverty, and FitzRalph's polemics, exactly contemporary with Langland. In the Bulls *Ad conditorem canonum* (1323), *Cum internonnullos* (1323), *Quia quorumdam mentes* (1324) and the longer, confirmatory *Quia vir reprobus* (1329) John made the renunciation of possessions absolutely irrelevant to the

highest form of Christian life. Despite the concentration on legal arguments (as those over *ius utendi* and *usus facti*) John clearly upgrades the valuation of possessions, property and dominion. God himself instituted property and dominion ("non commune") in paradise, before the fall, and himself instituted private property before any human legislator. John denied the traditional claim that "abdicatio proprietatis et dominii sollicitudinem excludit", pointing with some justice at the state of the Franciscan order. And he argued that the incarnate Christ held legal rights, dominion over temporal goods, and possessions (Judas's bag, for instance).[10] Gordon Leff's summarising comments are very much to the point:

> The virtues of material poverty were brushed aside as irrelevant to evangelical perfection . . . With *Quia vir reprobus* the Pope's *volte face* from his predecessors' sanctification of poverty to his own glorification of property was complete . . . Lordship not renunciation was the badge of the apostolic life.[11]

Richard FitzRalph, in Trevisa's translation of *Defensio curatorum*, goes beyond John in drawing out the implications of such arguments. Like the condemned William of St Amour, and John XXII, he treats material need as a main temptation to sin, claims that Christ himself never had the need to beg, and identifies perfection and possessions, emphasising that "prestes þat schulde be most parfite of life, schulde haue possessiouns". In Paradise FitzRalph finds evidence that God favours possessions and wealth, "plente of good, & catel, meble and vnmeble". Poverty, not property, is the product of the fall and sin ("pouert is þe effect of synne"), whereas: "riches is good hauyng & worþi to be loued of God, for he is richest of alle, & pouert is contrarie & ys priuacioun of riches". The conclusion is, "þanne pouert is euel".[12]

FitzRalph also seems to show at least some signs of what looks like a new work-ethic in which the production of material goods, material work, seems to become glorified as an end in itself. His version of Eden involves an attitude to work more usually associated with the Protestant epic *Paradise Lost* than with medieval, Catholic priests:

> in þe first ordynaunce of man God ordeyned hym so þat anoon as man was made, God put hym in Paradys for he schuld worche & kepe Paradys; so hit is writen in þe begynnyng of Hooly Writ. Hit semeþ me þat þere God tauȝt þat bodilich werk, possessioun and plente of riches & vnmebles, & warde & keping þereof for mannes vse, schuld be sette to-fore beggerie; for god sett man in Paradys for he schuld worche. For man schuld kepe paradys as his owne & haue þere plente of good, & catel, meble & vnmeble . . . .[13]

Disciplined work for the accumulation of "worldli goodes" is so pleasing to God that it will even be rewarded among the reprobate. While systematic study of the precise contexts, nature and incidence of the emergence of this ethos in the later Middle Ages is still much needed, its presence is indisputable, as the recent work of continental historians like J.-C Schmitt makes plain enough.[14]

It is hardly surprising that in such an ethos attitudes to the poor should undergo change in the directions revealed by Mollat, Schmitt and the scholars mentioned previously. The period which was witnessing a "desacralisation" of poverty saw increasing numbers of wandering labourers and paupers, the creation of changing economic circumstances and structures.[15] Ruling groups seem to have responded to this situation with hostility and fear, lumping together all those not obviously physically disabled as able-bodied beggars. The problem for the possessing classes became to do just what Richard of Maidstone was still calling sinful and diabolic arrogance: to draw a simple division between the "deserving" poor who should receive alms and the "undeserving" poor who should be treated as a threat to public order and production, subjected to the controls of an embryonic social security police. The conflicts here were related to those between employers and labourers over wages, as testified by the many ordinances attempting to freeze wages *and* prevent social mobility (which could benefit labourers against employers' economic interests), in different countries and towns through western Europe from the middle of the fourteenth century.[16] Once again FitzRalph expresses the newer ethos in his *Defensio Curatorum*:

> Holy Write seiþ þat þe pore schal be hated of his neiȝbore. [Proverbs 14.20]; miche more a begger schal be hated of his neiȝbore . . . for skilfullich euereche man schal raþer help hym-silf þan anoþer.

This would have surprised St Francis and most "traditional" Christian moralists, but FitzRalph is unembarrassed. He even turns Christ's demand that those with possessions should feast not well-to-do neighbours and friends but the poor (Luke 14.12-14) into a lesson from Jesus on the need to draw a clear cut distinction between "deserving" and "undeserving" poor - "pore men þat beþ stalworþe and stronge schulde nouȝt be cleped to þe feeste of beggers, for þei mowe quyte hit wiþ her trauail".[17] A reading of the New Testament congenial to the "new" ethos is being forged. And it is in this context, one which included both Richard of Maidstone and Richard FitzRalph, that Langland encountered what was now the *problem* of the poor.

## II

I will begin this discussion of *Piers Plowman* with a group Langland introduces at the beginning of his poem, one he calls "wasters" and "beggars" (Pr. 20-2, 40-5).[18] On their first

appearance these terms are used to depict able-bodied people who refuse to join those who worked "ful harde" and played very rarely (Pr. 20-2), choosing instead to become wandering beggars. Langland presents such beggars not only as acting out of a perfectly free choice but as prospering materially through their begging, inhabiting pubs and willing to supplement their income by theft (Pr. 40-5). It is in this perspective that Langland has us meet the *bête noire* of law-and-order propagandists of the later fourteenth century, as of the sixteenth century - the able-bodied beggar as a demonic antithesis of the "new" ethos discussed above, the sinner who rejects the discipline of obediently productive work and its ethos. Langland's text does provoke at least one question here: in a society which according to his own account[19] is led by thoroughly ungenerous possessing classes, who actually contributes with such unconditional generosity to these hordes of gluttonous vagrants jollying it up around his England? Langland's reticence here may prove to involve a rather uncritical readiness to impose an increasingly fashionable stereotype on to a disturbing phenomenon mentioned earlier - the increasing numbers of landless, mobile lower class people no longer incorporated into traditional rural or urban social organisation. One should ask here whether Langland was substituting ideological stereotype for imaginative engagement and conceptual distinctions which might enable someone to distinguish between diverse causes pushing able-bodied people on to the roads and into mendicancy.[20] I think, in his own dogged way, Langland came to recognise the relevance of such questions to his project, as we shall see in due course.

After the Prologue Langland reveals a world permeated by market relations and antagonistic to his own most firmly held convictions.[21] As soon as he tries to imagine a reformation of this world (IV. 171-VI. 320) he faces the issue of work and "wasters", raised explicitly by Reason (V. 24-5, 33), who assumes that able-bodied indigent people (typically labelled "wastour") must be malicious and should be beaten if they do not "reform". This assumption is developed during the famous passage on the deadly sins in his world, as once more Langland associates these groups with pubs and gluttony (Pr. 22-3, 40-3: V. 298-356, 376-7). Langland figures Glutton and his companions exclusively through labourers and artisans (cobblers, warrener, tinker, tinker's knaves, servants, road sweepers, diggers, rat-catchers, rope-makers, dish-seller), with one clerk from the local church, and the location is the pub. As I have already remarked, Langland's view of the possessing classes was not a flattering one, but I think that at this point his vision only notices lower class people because his attention is as much on work as on distinctly religious conversion. The brewers' drinking place represents a milieu in which the desublimation of the high-culture and its discourses takes place, in which an alternative service to those of the official religion is created:

> There was lauȝynge and lourynge and "Lat go þe cuppe!"
> Bargaynes and beuerages bigonne to arise,
> And seten so til euensong and songen vmwhile
> Til Gloton hadde yglubbed a galon and a gille.

> Hise guttes bigonne to goþelen as two gredy sowes;
> He pissed a potel in a paternoster while,
> And blew þe rounde ruwet [horn] at þe ruggebones ende
> That alle þat herde þat horn helde hir nose after
> (V. 336-43)

Obviously enough, the farting here contrasts with Hope's "horn of *Deus tu conuersus viuificabis nos*" (see V. 506-7), and the singing in the pub contrasts with the saints' singing later in the Passus (V. 508-9). The contrast is doubtless what critics conventionally classify as satire, directed against base and irreligious plebeians. Quite so. But the poetry simultaneously sets up something other than the official culture's straightforward scheme of condemnatory judgement, a feature generally evaded in the classification "satire". The text includes the projections of a bodily, profane counter-culture in which pissing and vomiting directly comment on the official culture's "*euensong*" and "*paternoster*", just as later in the Passus "tales" and "rymes of Robyn Hood" replace holy-days and fast-days of the Church (V. 376-7, 395-6, 402, 404).

I think Langland's writing about the favoured location of "wasters" and "beggars", in the Prologue, increases our understanding of the function served by the category "waste" in his milieu. "Wasters" resist the pieties of the official culture, they desublimate its most exalted ideals in blasphemous parody, and, crime of all crimes, they are allegedly antagonistic to any work ethos supported by employers.

Langland decides to develop his engagement with this nexus of problems in Passus VI. There the Christian ploughman, perhaps a proto-yeoman emerging from an increasingly stratified village society, sets about organising the material production, allegedly within the traditional tripartite, organic ideology cherished by the poet. I have recently written about the breakdown of Piers's enterprise and the multiplicity of meanings this has for Langland's favoured ideology, and here I want to focus on one aspect of this breakdown, the problems, to use Langland's terms, of wasters, bold, big beggars, and the unfortunate needy.[22]

The context of these terms is the ploughman's alliance with the knight against "wasters". Who exactly are these "wasters" here? Most explicit is who they are *not*: they are not the subservient "pouere men" who offer the knight presents for just dealing (bribes, Piers makes clear, VI. 37-44); they are *not* the impotent disabled; and they are *not* workmen who work flat out "to plese Perkyn the plowman" and who will be rewarded with employment in "heruest tyme" (VI. 107-14). They are, in fact, those workmen who after an initial burst of labour withdraw to the alehouse and "holpen ere þe half acre wiþ 'how trolly lolly'." (VI. 115). They are thus people who reject labour discipline and any form of regular work ethic, people for whom work is no more than a means to acquire wages for immediate enjoyment of material comforts offered in the pub. Langland's response is to have an angry Piers warn them that when they are in need they will be starved to death - unlike the obedient workers these will doubtless not be "hired þerafter" (VI. 117-20, 114).

According to Tierney's account of canon law, this goes beyond its teachings, and it seems that Langland's imaginative engagement with problems of production relationships in his society pushes him and his ploughman towards the "new" ethos concerning work and poverty. It is thus hardly surprising that immediately after the Ploughman's angry warning the poet presents another example of the classic stereotypes of the increasing groups of vagrants in later medieval Europe. The writer shows them all as frauds pretending to be the "deserving" poor but unambiguously work-shy scroungers (to use a characteristic term from the fully-fledged ethos, now not so new). Interestingly enough, Langland presents *these* groups as appealing to the traditional ethos in which mendicant poor have a role as privileged mediators of God's blessings (VI. 121-8). This merely encourages the author to reassert the simple, two-term classification mentioned before - *either* impotent and disabled, in which case "deserving" poor, *or* fraudulent scroungers, able-bodied *beggars, wasters, in which case deserving starvation or*, as here, most minimal subsistence rations (VI. 130-44). Writing and classifying of this kind encourages readers to restrain openness and sympathy towards able-bodied but indigent people; it encourages the kind of self-righteous suspicion towards them which was condemned by Clement of Alexandria, Richard of Maidstone and others; and it confirms convenient stereotypes which legitimate both the material position of the possessing classes and their hostility to vagrant, "undisciplined" poor. There is, we note again, no attempt to imagine the histories and forms of life of indigents who do not fit the simple dichotomising classification, and this limitation is a sign that at this stage of his poem Langland was moving into the ambience of the "new" ethos.

Langland acknowledges that the ploughman's controls and ethos are fiercely resisted by lower class groups whom he again labels "wasters". These people, who tell Piers "go pissen with his plowȝ", are wage-labourers who experience work as involving a basic conflict of interest between themselves and those who control and own agricultural products and beasts ("þi flour and þi flessh", VI. 152-8). The ploughman calls on the secular elite to impose work discipline, but in Langland's view the "wasters" of the 1370s were getting around the repressive labour legislation (e.g. VI. 168, 317-18), and his only hope becomes one centred on the possibility of a subsistence crisis which would force working people into the kind of disciplined and docile labour force required by Piers and the knightly class (VI. 171-8). In this context questions of "charity" take on obvious economic as well as moral significance. We watch the transformation of traditional charity into a discriminatory instrument of poor relief under lay control (Piers is unequivocally a *layman* in Passus V-VII),[23] an important part of the new ethos and its realisation. Alms-giving had to be adapted to a system demanding a disciplined and reliable work-force which was nevertheless increasingly composed of formally "free" and landless wage labourers. The solution proposed here by Hunger is to allow recalcitrant able bodied people just enough to keep alive, that is, to preserve the work-force - "lat hem ete wiþ hogges" (VI. 181) - but not enough for any independence of the employers. Langland

allows himself the pleasure of imagining the success of this approach as he depicts hungry "wasters", vagrants and the pseudo-disabled immediately turned into fanatically dedicated workers, all content to work for subsistence wages and ready to receive any bonuses with unquestioning gratitude (VI. 183-201). We glimpse a vision of the new work ethos triumphant over rebellious labourers and, so, over all social and economic difficulties. Truly, an employer's utopia!

But Langland was too profoundly wedded to traditional ideology to be happy with this solution. He now has Piers note that the reformed "wasters" actually work solely "for defaute of foode" in totally impersonal and fundamentally antagonistic production relations. This was a state of affairs quite uncongenial to traditional ideology in which, as Piers recalls, *all* people, regardless of their apparent worth,

> are my blody breþeren for god bouȝte vs alle;
> Truþe tauȝte me ones to louen hem ech one
> (VI. 207-8)

He is not sure that the solution centred on hunger and forced labour is compatible with Christ's stance in the gospels. Hunger assures him that it is, using the distinction between "Bolde beggeris" and the impotent, deserving poor (VI. 212-28). Still Piers is not convinced - "Miȝte I synnelees do as þow seist?" (VI. 230). Hunger's reply aims to alleviate such moral anxieties and makes the surprisingly confident claim that,

> The freke þat fedeþ hymself wiþ his feiþful labour
> He is blessed by þe book in body and in soule
> (VI. 251-2)

Theologically this seems crudely pelagian, but what interests me about it here is the unqualified claim it makes for religious salvation through productive labour: orthodox Christianity, we see, was to adapt to the employers' changing needs and ethos.

Langland, however, was sure that wage labourers would continue to resist, and he again presents their outlook as one in which work is solely a means to immediate material enjoyment (VI. 229 ff.). As soon as enough resources for physical gratification are earned the labourers revert to being "wasters", vagrants, beggars and, as bad, aggressive militants who reject the employers' wage offer and wage freezes:

> And þo nolde Wastour noȝt werche, but wandred aboute,
> Ne no beggere ete breed þat benes Inne come,
> . . .
> Laborers þat haue no land to lyue on but hire handes
> Deyneþ noȝt to dyne a day nyȝt olde wortes.
> May no peny ale hem paie, ne no pece of bacoun,
> But if it be fressh flessh ouþer fish yfryed,
> And þat *chaud* and *plus chaud* for chillynge of hir mawe.
> But he be heiȝliche hyred ellis wole he chide;

. . .
He greueþ hym agayn god and gruccheþ ageyn Reson,
And þanne corseþ þe kyng and al þe counseil after
Swiche lawes to loke laborers to chaste.
(VI. 302-18)

Langland attributes the source of rebellion to *landless* labourers, that is, to workers most obviously dependent on market incentives and instabilities, and he presents them as dissociated from any particular community. He also shows that their opposition to the employers and their legislation merges with an opposition to official religion, and that "employers" includes the more powerful peasants such as the supervising ploughman. Furthermore, rightly or wrongly, he shows the rebellion grounded in an individualist, pragmatic consumer's ideology which is worlds apart from the utopian Christian communism attributed by contemporaries to John Ball.[24] Their demands are for the best price they can gain from immediate market circumstances - an outlook as alien to "traditional" ideology as to the newer ethos, but one which was to have a long life before it in working class organizations within capitalist societies. Finally, the passage and its contexts let us see once more how the categories "waster" and "beggar" are evolved as moral ones to be used against those who reject the employers work ethos and interests for their own.

It is hardly surprising that a writer who wished to support traditional versions of social organisation should see market-centred social relations and the contemporary practices of wage labourers as dissolvents of fundamental pieties and forms of life. But there is an irony here. In opposing what he takes to be the subverters of "tradition", the poet attacks lower class reactions to changed circumstances, and he attacks these reactions by deploying a work ethos and moralising vocabulary which is the *employers'* response to new circumstances, a response which will help them to benefit as much as possible from these circumstances. The development of a self-righteous, moralistic language of attack on unemployed and/or mobile working people resistant to employers' terms was one element in the development of an ethos appropriate to capitalist societies. Little could have been further from Langland's overall values than to contribute to the evolution of such an ethos, yet at this point his poem was coming to do so.

Piers's frustration at the problems encountered in social production, a frustration shared with his creator, leads into the long gloss on two lines of the Athanasian creed in Passus VII.[25] During the gloss Piers tries once more to resolve his attitudes to the poorer groups in his world (VII. 61-106, 130-6). The employers' ideal labourers, with their "lowe" hearts and loving devotion to obedient work, present no problem to Piers (61-4), however poor they may be. The problems once again circle round those labelled "beggars". While the position taken up has already been met and discussed, Langland's way of putting the issues here clearly shows that he is drawn to conflicting ideologies. On the one hand there is the "new" Christian ethos, significantly enough represented by the *pagan* Cato: he advocates careful probing into

the motives and means of those seeking material aid (72-5). But on the other hand is the contradictory tradition represented here by St Gregory and St Jerome, one I represented earlier from Clement of Alexandria and Richard of Maidstone:

> Ac Gregory was a good man and bad vs gyuen alle
> That askeþ for his loue þat vs al leneþ:
> *Non eligas cui miserearis ne forte pretereas illum*
> *qui meretur accipere,*
> *Quia incertum est pro quo deo magis placeas.*
> For wite ye neuere who is worþi, ac god woot who haþ nede.
> (VII. 76-8)

This demand for unconditional charity is rooted in Jesus's command at Luke 6.30, but it is profoundly uncongenial to the newer ethos outlined earlier and making its existence felt within *Piers Plowman*. The gloss too shifts from this stark position to the more comfortable pastime of exhorting labourers to be content with minimal subsistence rations and to enjoy reading saints' lives (84-8). This shift leads into an attack on beggars, introduced with the assertion, worthy of FitzRalph, that the Bible "banneþ beggerie", supported by a comic abuse of a line from Psalm 37 (VII. 88). All the generosity and modesty called for in the tradition just represented by Gregory is now brushed aside, as "beggerie" is simplified, stereotyped and assaulted in ways we have encountered earlier in the text and which were to lead an extremely long life in our culture (VII. 90-3):

> For þei lyue in no loue ne no lawe holde.
> Thei wedde no womman þat þei wiþ deele
> But as wilde bestes with wehee worþen vppe and werchen,
> And bryngen forþ barnes þat bastardes men calleþ.

There is no awareness of inadequacies in the accusation that *because* there is more physical deformity among beggars than others it *must* be the effect of malicious self-injury (93-7), nor any imaginative exploration of the concrete situation of "beggars", nor any acknowledgement of the need for more diversified categories than those of big, bad beggars and the deserving, impotent "Blynde and bedreden" poor (VII. 100-6). The tradition represented by Gregory is submerged in the ethos expressed by Cato, and this, I believe, holds for the dominant movement and ideological tendencies of Passus V-VII. Langland had been seriously affected by the newer ethos.

Reasonably enough, there has been considerable commentary on Langland's attitudes to the friars, Adams most recently identifying his position very closely with that of William of St Amour and FitzRalph.[26] But it is worth noting that at this point Langland did not launch into one of his many assaults on contemporary friars. Had he wished to develop the new ethos, one coming to dominate these Passus (V-VII), he could have brought forward a friar to represent traditional defences of mendicancy and charity to able bodied beggars and linked official voluntary poverty with able

bodied "wasters" and demonic beggars (joining William of St Amour, FitzRalph and an increasing number of writers in the later Middle Ages).[27] But Langland did nothing of the sort. Instead he did something antithetical.

He *began* a dramatic disengagement from the newer ethos emerging both in his culture and in his own text. Piers's pardon is exposed as a fantasising gloss on two lines of the creed, and Piers undergoes a religious conversion entailing a major change in orientation "herafter" (VII. 122-5). In self-justification he invokes Jesus's own utopian denunciation of any form of work ethic (Matthew 6. 25-34, Luke 12. 22-31):

> And but if luc lye he lereþ vs anoþer
> By foweles þat are noȝt bisy aboute þe bely ioye;
> *Ne soliciti sitis* he seiþ in þe gospel
> And sheweþ vs by ensample vs selue to wisse.
> The foweles in þe firmament, who fynt hem at wynter?
> When þe frost freseþ fode hem bihoueþ;
> Haue þei no gerner to go to but god fynt hem alle.
> (VII. 129-35)

This is not only a generalised upgrading of the contemplative life, so often discussed by commentators: in context it is a massive retreat from the dominant tendency in the ethos of Passus V-VII. The terms of *that* tendency would positively encourage the followers of Jesus's teaching to be charged with the hackneyed accusation "wasters", "able-bodied beggars", "scroungers". It could provoke a FitzRalphian commentator to recall Pope John XXII's arguments that renunciation of dominion and possessions is the cause of more "solicitude" rather than less, or could even stimulate a counter-exegesis of the gospel texts more in accord with the newer ethos. For example, the famous late medieval preacher Geiler claims that Jesus's utopian words here are actually an *attack* on the idle who will not work. He arrives at this startling interpretation by saying that the birds of the air do all in their power to get food from early morning onwards, and that Jesus is telling men to do likewise, that is to work hard.[28] Far from resorting to such exegetical stratagems, Piers lets Jesus's text stand against his own previous approach, and as his development in the poem conveys plainly enough, his creator sanctioned this move. He did so, in my view, because he grasped that the dominant tendency of Passus V-VII could be promoting an ethos in which productive work and the employers' imposition of labour-discipline was becoming the *official* goal and informing end of human existence. The much abused wage-labourers, wasters or vagrants and the hiring, controlling employer and legislator might actually be wedded in a diabolic unity which foreshadowed the destruction of the traditional ideology Langland wished to perpetuate and impose. Piers's and Langland's retreat is well-motivated, and it is generally sustained for the rest of the poem, though not without some inconsistencies.

The disengagement from the prevailing ethos of Passus V-VII leads into a changed perception of poverty, the poor, and work.

This stimulates some extremely powerful writing in a very different mode to the earlier hostile stereotyping of mendicants, and it can be represented by the following passage:

> For muche murþe is amonges riche, as in mete and cloþyng,
> . . .
> Ac beggeris aboute Midsomer bredlees þei soupe,
> And yet is wynter for hem worse, for weetshoed þei gange,
> Afurst soore and afyngred, and foule yrebuked
> And arated of riche men þat ruþe is to here.
> Now, lord, sende hem somer, and some maner ioye,
> (XIV. 157, 160-4)

There are a number of memorable statements of this kind between Passus X and XV, attributed to different speakers and all carrying the imaginative authority of the poet's most fully engaged work.[29] Without any sentimentalisation they force readers to shift outside the ethos in which able bodied vagrants and beggars are swiftly classified as drunken scroungers or wasters. Such poetry evokes the physical state of miserable indigence and the stigmatisation to which its victims were increasingly subject. Indeed, passages like this challenge the newer ethos and the poet's own stereotyped treatment of vagrants earlier in the poem. For he himself had joined the employers and "foule yrebuked / And arated" the itinerant poor. Here there is no question of a searching means test, nor is there any suggestion that most mendicants are skivers who should be put to work, nor that work is the prime end of existence and the key to human identity or value, nor that the poor are simply instruments through whom the rich can purchase paradise. Such passages constitute a magnificent poetic achievement, a memorial to an outlook that was already being pushed into cultural and political marginality.

The attitudes in such passages are inseparable from Langland's increasing emphasis on the unity of Christ and the poor. Contemporary indigents now become the especial images of Christ in the present. This as noted earlier, is a hallmark of an ethos being superseded in the later Middle Ages. It inspires some of Langland's most passionate utterances:

> For oure Ioye and oure Iuel, Iesu crist of heuene,
> In a pouere mannes apparaille pursueþ vs euere,
> And lokeþ on vs in hir liknesse and þat wiþ louely chere
> To knowen vs by oure kynde herte and castynge of oure eiȝen,
> Wheiþer we loue þe lordes here bifore þe lord of blisse;
> (XI. 185-9)

The verbs' tense here fuses time past and time present in a way which forces the contemporary application of salvation history. This is characteristic of Langland's realisation of central elements in Christian theology, but we should not miss its cultural resonance in the debate on poverty.[30] Langland affirms the unquestioning, unconditional generosity so alien to the newer ethos and to much in the poem's earlier Passus. God is apparently very

much present in history, but not in the employing classes or their work ethos. Langland even reinterprets the Martha and Mary story to make Mary represent not the official contemplative life but the state of poverty which God praises as the better part (XI. 250-5). Little could be more alien to the standpoint represented by FitzRalph.

Indeed, Langland's reaffirmation of what I have labelled "traditional" ethos and ideology has quite obvious affinities with St Francis's distinctive version of Christianity.[31] One recalls how when St Francis found a friar

> abusing some idle beggar who had asked for alms, he rebuked him [the friar] on the grounds that any poor man stood in the place of Christ. He said . . . 'He who curses a poor man, does an injury to Christ, because he bears the noble sign of him who made himself poor for us in this world.'[32]

In Franciscan piety the closest followers of Christ must follow his call to the rich man in Mark 10, renounce all material goods, and, as Piers promises to do in Passus VII, or as Patience and Anima do in Passus XIV and XV, trust in God to provide. Langland's affinities with this tradition, however incompatible with so much in Passus V-VII, are further highlighted by his explicit admiration of absolute, voluntary poverty, the most odious doctrine to William of St Amour, FitzRalph and the propagandists of the "new" ethos. The highest, most meritorious perfection is seen in him who "for goddes loue leueþ al and lyueþ as a beggere", one,

> þat possession forsakeþ
> And put hym to be pacient and pouerte weddeþ,
> The which is sib to god hymself, so neiȝ is pouerte.

The speaker is Patience and certainly not subjected to critical undermining by Langland (see XIV. 258-73). As some commentators have noticed, the poet here seems to invite our recollection of St Francis's marriage to holy poverty as the expression of an ideal state,[33] whereas to William of St Amour, rehabilitated in the newer ethos, such voluntary poverty was a mortal sin, because it encouraged a deviation from justice.[34]

Langland shows signs of self-conscious self-criticism towards his own earlier tendencies in the poem by setting up Haukyn as the questioning antagonist to this Franciscan tradition (XIV. 35, 102-3, 274-5). Haukyn is presented as a follower of the *earlier* Piers, (the Piers of Passus V-VII, before the conversion at the close of Passus VII), and an advocate of hard, productive labour and its exaltation (XIII. 230-46, 250-4, 260-70). Through him Langland shows how thoroughly secularising market energies can be legitimised and glorified. Haukyn is "Actif", a baker and a tradesman, the antithesis of "wasters" and beggars attacked earlier in the poem. He explicitly hates all idleness (XIII. 238), produces commodities essential to the community (XIII. 238-43, 260-70), and earns his

livelihood in the "swete" of his brow (XIII. 260). This ethos, Langland shows, is congruent with a mentality and practice which quite subverts the traditional ideologies he wishes to affirm.[35] In this connection it is significant that by the end of the poem Langland no longer presents the collapse of his cherished social and religious ideals as primarily due to lower class resistance to the legitimate work ethos of pious employers. Instead he carefully attributes the collapse to the demonic development of market energies and relations, especially embodied in small scale commodity producers prepared to *work* regularly and very hard for material benefits. Beggars, even possibly "unjust" beggars, and wasters are now seen as constituting a peripheral problem, and one which must be treated in the light of the most traditional teaching grounded in Jesus's own demands about unconditional generosity (Luke 6.30). The transformed Piers rejects all solutions to contemporary production problems put forward in the new ethos, however attractive they had seemed earlier, and he rejects the increasingly repressive evolution of charity into a self-righteous, disciplinary poor relief (XIX. 434-6).

If I am right in this description of the development of *Piers Plowman*, then what, it may be asked, of the controversial figure of *Need* in Passus XX?[36] My own view is that this confirms Langland's rejection of the "new" ethos that had nearly absorbed his ploughman's vision, and his own. In XX. 4-22 Need berates the author (or the "Will" who purports to be the author) for feeling such shame (abundantly expressed in the poem) at his voluntary dedication to a pursuit of religious understanding and conviction in preference to conventional work in the field of production - guilt at being an able-bodied vagrant. Now Langland uses Need to reaffirm the *rights* of those in need, in contrast to the ethos which advocates prying means tests and a poor relief which is a component of labour-discipline rather than part of the pursuit of holiness and the imitation of Jesus.[37] The glorification of Need at XX. 35-47 is utterly coherent with a major strand in Passus X-XX which we have discussed. There Langland identifies Jesus with the indigent, the contemporary indigent with Jesus, and emphasises that the highest form of Christian life is in a voluntary poverty attempting an imitation of Christ's own voluntary impoverishment. This voluntary poverty is both a theological one, a self-emptying of the deity in identification with humanity, and a social one, a divine identification with the dispossessed. Need then applies this to Will's own career, reassuring him that there is indeed some justification for his own refusal to work so long as he takes no more than he needs for survival - following, in fact, the ascetic path of St Francis and the hermits praised in Passus XV (XX. 9, 11, 48-50).[38]

All this gives us one of the perspectives from which we must assess Langland's criticism of the friars. Instead of collapsing Langland into FitzRalph and William of St Amour, we must give full weight to his praise of voluntary poverty, his celebration of the poor Christ and of St Francis, together with the shift in poetic treatment of beggars indicated above. This helps us see how the late medieval friars are attacked from a stance which is very different to FitzRalph's, however many particular complaints over

abuses are common to Langland, FitzRalph and a satiric anti-mendicant tradition with its roots in William of St Amour.[39] They are *not* attacked for following a mistaken ideal or for misunderstanding Christian doctrine on the respective merits of poverty, riches and dominion, such as that enunciated by John XXII. Far from it, the predominant line of attack after Piers' conversion, as Skeat so long ago noted, is that they are apostates to the traditional valuation of absolute voluntary poverty in the pursuit of holiness and the imitation of Christ.[40] As Need tells Conscience, correctly enough in terms of Langland's vision of the late medieval Church and its friars:

> þei come for coueitise, to haue cure of soules.
> And for þei are pouere, parauenture, for patrymoyne hem failleþ,
> They wol flatere to fare wel folk þat ben riche.
> (XX. 233-5)

Throughout *Piers Plowman*, Langland treats contemporary friars as an essential symptom of the way religion is being absorbed into the cash nexus of the market. Need's mockery in the following lines is again not against voluntary poverty but against these people's travesty of it, a sarcastic reminder of ideals the author cherishes (XX. 236-41). Langland's own solution to this contemporary reality he finds so uncongenial is a *compromise*. He had to acknowledge that in his own culture the ideals of St Francis seem more and more hopelessly anachronistic, the vision of the pauperised Christ, present in the contemporary indigent, waning and even directly challenged.[41] In the spirit of compromise with intractable social reality he advocates that modern friars be given "a fynding". This, he claims, might dissuade them from treating the sacrament of penance as a commodity for exchange in the market. Langland's point is that modern friars do not have the spiritual commitment to endure genuine material need and the rigours of an imitation of Christ which would indeed involve destitution. This is not an ideal solution for Langland, but the best he can hope for given his sense that the friars are profoundly incorporated in the market, in a manner that is antithetical to St Francis's own extreme hatred of all commercial relations. As I have argued elsewhere he presents friars as especially dynamic agents in the urban economy, a group embodying the absorption of religion into a world increasingly moulded by market relations and the ethos of the market: in this presentation, it seems that he was neither incorrect nor idiosyncratic.

This almost concludes my assessment of the overall treatment of poverty and related issues in *Piers Plowman*. I just wish to make two further points. The first is that while I believe this essay demonstrates a decisive ideological rupture at the end of Passus VII, with regard to the subject under discussion there are signs that Langland still wavered. For example, in Passus XII Imaginatif announces that Jesus was not born in a beggar's cottage but "in a Burgeises place, of Bethlem þe beste" (XII. 146-7). This might be taken as a sanctifying glorification of wealthy and

bourgeois property, Imaginatif correcting the neo-Franciscan voices in the poem and pushing towards the "new" ethos. But in fact even Imaginatif does *not* sustain this stance. Instead he treats possessions as "combraunce" and supports the critique of the rich expressed so powerfully in Passus X and XIV (XII. 45, 151-4, 238-68). If a passage like this represents an inconsistency after the end of Passus VII I think its grounds are not obscure. Langland, as we saw, had been strongly drawn towards the "new" ethos when he addressed himself directly to the crisis in contemporary relations of material production in Passus V-VII, and it would hardly be surprising if despite self-criticism on that score there should still be occasional manifestations of that ethos, increasingly prevalent in late medieval culture.[42]

The final point I wish to make is that *Piers Plowman* actually conveys the doomed, anachronistic nature of the neo-Franciscan attitudes Langland revivifies and cherishes after the ploughing episode in Passus VI-VII. This is not only done by presenting contemporary friars as incorrigibly incorporated in urban and mercantile life. Certain vital evasions which I discussed in *Chaucer, Langland and the Creative Imagination* contribute to this effect. Langland's committed and often powerful poetic revitalisation of traditional ethos towards poverty and related issues continually dissolves the drastic social and economic problems so disturbing to him, his contemporaries, and, indeed, to his own poem. In the recent book just mentioned I illustrated this process from the treatment of patient poverty in Passus XIV and XV, and there is no need to repeat the case I made there. The relevant point about that case here is that the poetry shows us how Langland's passionate recreation of traditional and Franciscan ethos in these areas constantly leads to an imaginative *withdrawal* from the field of material production at the basis of all human spiritual life as of all human relations. He may now attack Haukyn's work ethos, penetrating its ultimately irreligious tendencies, and he may now exalt voluntary poverty, the itinerant poor and the image of Christ the pauper. But he cannot poetically embody, or even imagine, an alternative *social* and ecclesiastical order to the dynamic market society and culture he realises so impressively in *Piers Plowman*, a culture antithetical to his most cherished values but, as we saw, one which had also profoundly affected his own consciousness and his great work.

NOTES

1 D. Aers, *Piers Plowman and Christian Allegory* (London, 1975) chapter 5, and D. Aers, *Chaucer, Langland and the Creative Imagination* (London, 1980) chapters 1-3.

2 B. Geremek, "La lutte contre le vagabondage à Paris aux XIV$^{e}$ et XV$^{e}$ siècles", in *Ricerche storiche ed economiche in memoria di Conrado Barbagallo* (volume 2, Naples, 1970) pp.211-36; C. Lis and H. Soly, *Poverty and Capitalism in Pre-Industrial Europe* (London, 1979) chapters 1-3; *Études sur l'histoire de la pauvreté jusqu'au XVI$^{e}$ s.*, ed. M. Mollat, 2 vols. (Paris, 1974); M. Mollat, *Les Pauvres Au Moyen Age* (Paris, 1978); J-C. Schmitt, *Mort d'une hérésie* (Hague, 1978).

3 Ed. E.J. Arnold (Oxford, 1940): the gospel text quoted here is Mark x, 25. See D.L. Mealand, *Poverty and Expectation in the Gospels* (London, 1980), esp. chapters 3 and 4.

4 Commonplace enough - good examples from Bishop Brinton in G.R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit* (2nd ed. revised, Oxford, 1966) pp.560-1 (see chapters 6 and 9 *passim*).

5 Translated in L.D. Sherley-Price, *St. Francis of Assisi: his life and writings* (London, 1959) p.212; see M.D. Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty* (London, 1961).

6 See too Luke xii, 22-4.

7 *The Rich Man's Salvation* in *Clement of Alexandria*, ed. and tr. G.W. Butterworth (Cambridge, Mass., 1968) pp.260-367, here 341: see too M. Hengel, *Property and Riches in the Early Church* (London, 1974).

8 In his indispensable study of canonical theory Brian Tierney shows this attitude is *one* strand, preserved by way of St John Chrysostom's attack on discrimination, in competition with another favouring discrimination: *Medieval Poor Law* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1959) pp.54-9. Richard of Maidstone's text is printed in *Carmelus* 5 (1958) pp.132-80: here see pp.139-44, 167-8, 178-9: for the warnings against prying discrimination pp.141-3.

9 On these figures see Q. Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge, 1978) I, p.74. Such attitudes are present in William of St Amour and his followers, such as Jean de Meun, but the significant point here seems to be that such attitudes were not widely developed outside the mid-13th century Parisian conflicts until the mid-14th to 16th century: see M-M. Dufeil, *Guillaume de Saint Amour* (Paris, 1972) pp.358-62, 260-87; J.C. Schmitt, *Morte d'une hérésie*, pp.55-60.

10 *Bullarium Franciscanum*, ed. I.H. Sbaralea and C. Eubel, vol. 5 (Rome, 1898): on the pre-lapsarian state and God's creation of private property after the fall see especially pp.422-4, 439-41 (*Quia vir reprobus*): quoted here from pp.422, 421; on Christ, pp.441-3; see also on Christ and apostles, *Quia quorumdam mentis*, pp.244-5, 275-9.

11 G. Leff, *Heresey in the Later Middle Ages*, 2 vols. (Manchester, 1967), I, 247, 248, 249; see I, chapter 2 *passim*, and Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty*, chapter 10.

12 I use the English translation of FitzRalph's *Defensio Curatorum* in *Dialogus*, ed. A.J. Perry, EETS, OS 167 (1925) pp.83-5; 31, 80; the attraction FitzRalph ("Saint Richard" - see A. Hudson's example in *Journal of Theological Studies*, 23 (1972) p.73) held for the Lollards needs examination in this context. On FitzRalph, see Katharine Walsh, *A Fourteenth Century Scholar and Primate* (Oxford, 1981), especially chapter 5 on "the mendicant controversy".

13 FitzRalph, p.71; cf. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*, pp.555-7.

14 See especially, Schmitt, *Mort d'une hérésie*, pp.152-7, 162-73, 182-91.

15 On economic change and impoverishment, see Lis and Soly, *Poverty and Capitalism*, chapters 1 and 2, and the historians cited in note 2; there are, however, real problems in establishing any precise chronology and giving adequate acknowledgement to regional variations - cf. C.C. Dyer, *Lords and Peasants in a changing society* (Cambridge, 1980) pp.349-54, 110-12.

16 Lis and Soly, *Poverty and Capitalism*, pp.33-52, 231-4; Mollat, *Les Pauvres*, p.350; B.H. Putnam, *The Enforcement of the Statute of Labourers* (New York, 1908).

17 FitzRalph, pp.83, 89: see too the transformation of Jesus's command to the rich young man to sell all and give to the poor, p.91.

18 All references to Langland's poem are to *Piers Plowman: the B version*, ed. G. Kane and E.T. Donaldson (London, 1975); when the C version is referred to the text used is D.A. Pearsall's edition (London, 1978). On beggars in *Piers Plowman*, B and C versions, see E.T. Donaldson, *Piers Plowman* (New Haven, 1949) pp.130-6. The most relevant essay to the present one is probably R. Adams, "The Nature of Need in *Piers Plowman*", *Traditio* 34 (1978) pp.273-301, in which the author attempts to argue that "Langland never shifts his basic principles on the issues associated with poverty" and that these principles are unequivocally and unquestioningly those of FitzRalph and William of St Amour. My own views, as will emerge, are very different.

19 For example, X. 13-116.

20 See B. Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law*, pp.112-19.

21 Aers, *Chaucer, Langland*, chapters 1-2.

22 Aers, *Chaucer, Langland*, chapter 1. On stratification see the studies by Z. Razi, *Life, Marriage and Death in a Medieval Parish* (Cambridge, 1980) and E.B. Dewindt, *Land and People in Holywell-cum-Needingworth* (Toronto, 1972).

23 See, among many illustrations, VI. 17-32, 91-3; V. 546-8, and Aers, *Piers Plowman and Christian Allegory*, chapter 5, and *Chaucer, Langland*, chapter 1.

24 See *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381*, ed. R.B. Dobson (London, 1970) pp.136-7, 370-1, 374-5 and R. Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free* (London, 1973) pp.213-15, 221-4, 227-30.

25 On the Pardon, see Aers, *Chaucer, Langland*, 20-23 and for a relevant

comparison of B and C versions here, Donaldson, *Piers Plowman*, pp.130-36.

26 Adams, *op.cit.* in note 19 above. For a different view, in my own opinion nearer the mark, see M.W. Bloomfield, *Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth-Century Apocalypse* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1961), especially p.72.

27 See authorities cited in note 2 for exemplification.

28 For the sermon in question, used in a different context, see E.J. Douglas, *Justification in Medieval Preaching* (Leiden, 1966) pp.144-5. Also on Geiler, Schmitt, *Morte d'une hérésie*, pp.185-87.

29 Further examples, X. 59-66, 83-9, 205-7, 361-7; XI. 176-91, 243-5; XIII. 438-43; XIV. 109-25, 160-80, 213-15; XV. 244-8, 342-3. See too C addition, IX. 70-97.

30 See too XI. 199-204, 232-78.

31 The most sustained attempt to read *Piers Plowman* as an unequivocally and consistently Franciscan poem is by Guy Bourquin, *Piers Plowman*, 2 volumes (Lille and Paris, 1978), especially pp.291-4. 328, 379-84, 399, 419, 649-52, 666, 693-736.

32 Translated in Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty*, p.59.

33 *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. A.V. Schmidt (London, 1978) p.343; Bourquin, *Piers Plowman*, p.419.

34 *De quantitate eleemosynae quaestio*, in *Op.om.* (Constantiae, 1632), 76-7.

35 On Haukyn in this context, Aers, *Chaucer, Langland*, pp.27-9.

36 For the literature on this figure see the article by Adams, cited in note 19, and also Bourquin, *Piers Plowman*, pp.328, 722.

37 On such rights, see for example, St Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, II-II. 66-7: note the careful qualifications at lines 11-16, 18-20, 22, overlooked by Adams (*op.cit.*, in note 19 above).

38 While Langland calls for evangelical missionary activity overseas, in Passus XV, he seems to place little special emphasis on preaching, and so encourages the unjustifiable identification of the friar's vocation and the hermits.

39 M-M. Dufeil, *Guillaume de Saint Amour*, pp.295-324, 352; also J. Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire* (Cambridge, 1973) pp.37-54, 226-33.

40 *Piers the Plowman*, ed. W.W. Skeat, 2 volumes (1886; Oxford, 1968), II. p. 212.

41 See L.K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (London, 1978), chapters 9-12; and writings in note 2.

42 The C version needs examination in the perspectives outlined in the present essay (see Donaldson, *Piers Plowman*, pp.130-36), and the lengthy addition at C IX. 70-161 would require detailed attention. This important passage

includes a legitimation of able-bodied lunatic mendicants, not only because they are God's minstrels-fools-prophets, but also because they are totally free of any material self-interest and accumulation, unlike "lewede ermytes" and "beggares with bagges". The passage which begins with a concrete and powerful meditation on the deprivation of "pore folk in cotes", expresses an outrage at the transformation of Franciscan ideals and does not, finally, revert to the kind of work ethos manifested in B V-VII.