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PIERS' APPLES: SOME BERNARDINE ECHOES IN *PIERS PLOWMAN*

By MARGARET E. GOLDSMITH

In 1965 Edward Vasta put forward the theory that "the spiritual basis" of *Piers Plowman* has its roots in the mystical tradition, and particularly in the teachings of Bernard of Clairvaux. Subsequent critics have not, in the main, endorsed Vasta's thesis, and with good reason. His conclusion that the function of Piers in the poem is equivalent to that of the Bride of Christ in Bernard's sermons on the *Canticum Canticorum* is startling, to say the least.¹ Both writers treat of divine love, but Langland completely avoids the erotic metaphors of the *Canticle*, and his whole endeavour has a social and political bent which seems remote from Cistercian mystical experience. Yet, Langland does name Bernard as an authority to be listened to, using the voice of the Dreamer's own soul, Anima. Studying Bernard's sermons with *Piers Plowman* in mind, I have come to think that Langland was indeed influenced by them, though in ways other than those Vasta postulates and by passages not used in his study. To demonstrate direct influence is obviously a difficult task, since, as Vasta himself recognised, "Bernard's influence on the later Middle Ages was so pervasive as to be difficult to isolate" (p.67). Moreover, as no details of Langland's life are recorded, we do not know what centres of learning he could have visited; the extent of his reading must therefore be inferred chiefly from intrinsic evidence in the poem. Given that this is so, any attempt to identify the immediate sources of particular passages is inevitably speculative in approach. In my recent study of the figure of Piers,² I proposed that one might begin with the hypothesis that the thinkers whom Langland quotes and praises by name were *in fact* important influences upon his religious formation, and not merely authorities routinely quoted from preachers' handbooks, collections of *sententiae*, and the like. The inclination of many critics has been to assume that the poet, like his fictional Will, was deeply suspicious of learning and never sat down to serious reading, gathering his ideas from the flotsam of topical debate and from anthologies. Since the long narrative essentially traces the gradual education of Will, he has to be presented as ignorant and none too quick on the uptake, and the autobiographical viewpoint almost persuades the reader that Langland, too, is as ignorant as his dream-persona, though the early speeches of Lady Holy Church show plainly that he is not. Later in this article I shall consider some aspects of his attitude to knowledge: as a preliminary, it is instructive to note that passages which openly express doubt about the usefulness of knowledge

also include quotations from both Augustine and Bernard. There could be some ironical intent (as has been argued), but not necessarily so, since both these earlier scholars themselves discuss the value of knowledge gained from books, and express their reservations about it. I start from the supposition that Augustine's theory of the soul's quest for Truth was the main conceptual source for the skeletal plot of Will's pilgrimage, and I propose here to call attention to some contributions made by Bernard to the theory of that quest, pointing out some interesting details of thought and imagery shared by Langland's poem and some of the sermons.

Many of the biblical metaphors given dramatic life in the poem, such as the sowing and harvesting, the spiritual fruit, the image of oneself in the mirror, the wounded traveller on the road of life, and the uphill climb to the holy city, are commonplaces of the homiletic tradition, the transmission of which to Langland would usually be impossible to trace. Occasionally, however, one comes across a striking detail amidst the patristic elaboration of these metaphors. Such details as Gregory's *linguæ vomere* 'by the plough-share of the tongue'³ or Augustine's *extirpator silvæ* 'the rooter-up of weeds'⁴ (who is clearing the ground for the tree of charity) so appropriately fit into the allegorical action of *Piers Plowman* that it is reasonable to assume direct inspiration, unless some intermediate authority can be found. On other occasions, an unexpected turn of thought in an authority cited by Langland, matching a similar movement in the poem, suggests that he had that particular source in mind. When striking detail and train of thought come together, both in the poem and in a much-read sermon by an influential writer, we may reasonably speak of a probable source; and from that source we may be able to supply connections which Langland expected his readers to make between his allusive references and the allegorical action. I think we can elucidate much that is mystifying in Will's dream of the Tree of Charity and the Annunciation, and in what follows in B Passus XVI, by proceeding in this way. The intense compression of once-familiar patristic teaching in this part of the poem demands some explication today, as is evident from the incomplete and inconsistent interpretations offered by the editors and critics. In the body of this paper I shall adduce some passages from Bernard's sermons which the editors have either missed or discounted in their explanatory notes, with the aim of shedding light on the structure and meaning of B Passus XV-XVII in the context of Will's search for Truth.

Before I embark on this, it may be useful to observe what it is that Langland expressly takes from Bernard's teaching, noting particularly the original context of the two quotations from Bernard's writings impressed on the Dreamer in B Passus XV. The first quotation Langland ascribes to Bernard is not verbatim, and might be drawn either from memory or from another writer's slight distortion of Bernard's words:

"*Beatus est*", seith Seint Bernard, "*qui scripturas legit Et verba vertit in opera fulliche to his power.*"⁵

The second quotation, preceded by Langland's Englishing of its sense,

follows on the first. It comes, however, from a quite different piece of writing, a sermon *In Ascensione Domini*:⁶

Coveitise to konne and to knowe science
 Putte out of Paradis Adam and Eve
*Sciencie appetitus hominem immortalitatis gloriam
 spoliavit.* (B XV 60-3a)

Both the quoted thoughts are commonplace enough, and Pearsall in his edition of the C-text (which repeats the passage in Passus XVI, 221-4a) marks the first as coming to Langland "probably through an intermediary",⁷ and suggests that the second was "of general currency".⁸ Indeed, at first sight there appears to be no reason to link either thought with the specific context of the original composition to which it has been traced. The *Tractatus de Ordine Vitae* in which the "Beatus est . . ." quotation occurs teaches young monks to avoid bad habits and listen obediently to their superiors. It seems to say nothing at this point which would have put it into Langland's mind as he was composing B Passus XV - and yet, if one reads on in the tract, one comes unexpectedly upon a tree planted in the soil of the heart, from which will grow fruit to restore the soul and fill it with God.⁹ It is not Langland's tree of B Passus XVI: it has a different root (faith), a graft (fear of the Lord) and various fruits. Nonetheless, one can see why this rather undistinguished tract might catch the attention of a poet already evolving his own image for the next passus: the possibility of direct recollection of Bernard's words is somewhat enhanced.

The sermon from which "*Sciencie appetitus . . .*" is taken has more in common with this part of *Piers Plowman* than the title would suggest. I note particularly Bernard's peculiar use of the metaphors of ascending and descending. He imagines Lucifer's 'mountain' of Isa. xiv 13 as a mountain which Adam was trying to ascend in his desire to be like a god, knowing good and evil (cf. Gen. iii 5). Adam's ruinous fall thence is equated by Bernard with the 'descent' from Jerusalem to Jericho of the traveller in the Samaritan parable.¹⁰ Addressing his hearers as sons of the wounded traveller, Bernard exhorts them, while their bodies are on this toilsome pilgrimage of life (*in hac ærumnosa peregrinatione*), to enter in thought into their own hearts, there to find Christ. Adapting the words of Ps. iv 3 and Ps. lxxiii 7-8, he unites this 'ascent' within the heart with the transfiguration of Christ in the soul:

Vos autem, filii hominum, filii hominis qui descendit
 de Jerusalem in Jericho, filii hominum usquequo
 gravi corde? Ascendite ad cor altum, et
 exaltabitur Deus. Hic est enim mens, in quo
 transfiguratur Christus. (PL 183.313)
 (And you, sons of men, sons of the man who descended
 from Jerusalem to Jericho, "O sons of men, how long
 will you be heavy of heart"? Rise up "to the height
 of your heart, and God will be exalted". For this
 is the soul, in which Christ is transfigured.)

Thus, in Bernard's mind, a man who rejects the temptation to grasp at knowledge to advance himself can begin the climb back to Jerusalem from Jericho, on the road where the Samaritan will succour him, and as he ascends he will find himself innerly transformed and Christ present in his heart. Though none of the components of this exhortation is exclusive to Bernard, it is evident that, if Langland did read the sermon from which he quotes at B XV 63a, he could have found there a *schema* for Will's inner dream and his subsequent journey to Jerusalem with the Samaritan (reversing the downhill route to Jericho implied in the gospel story of the wounding of the traveller).¹¹

I turn now to Bernard's general teaching on knowledge, which has several points in common with the instruction given to Will by his interlocutors. Langland's opinion of "konnynges clerkes" appears to be low (cf. B X 454-5), though he constantly quotes scholars to support his arguments. An important quotation used to direct Will in the middle of his pilgrimage is Scripture's "*Multi multa sciunt et seipsos nesciunt*" (B XI 3),¹² which has long been recognised as the opening sentence of the *Meditationes piissimæ de cognitione humanæ conditionis*, formerly ascribed to Bernard.¹³ Critics have shown that Langland's treatment of Will's spiritual journey follows lines laid down in this treatise. In view of this fact and the concern with *sciencie appetitus* in Bernard's Ascension sermon, it may prove useful to look also at Bernard's two sermons on the subject of knowledge in the series *In Cantica Canticorum*. Sermons XXXVI, XXXVII and XXXVIII expand the doctrine summed up in Scripture's quotation from the *Meditationes piissimæ*. Bernard, like his predecessor Augustine, is uneasy about encouraging academic learning: it can too easily be pursued for the sake of fame or to make money. However, he concludes that learning is not to be despised if it is pursued in a spirit of charity.¹⁴ This being said, one must value the study of oneself more highly still. The theory behind this rather startling evaluation is that the soul by coming to know itself truly begins to see the Image of God in which it was made.¹⁵ Continuing his theme in Sermon XXXVII, Bernard presents knowledge and ignorance in terms which, if applied to Will's case, explain why the Dreamer, avidly desiring to know Truth, makes a false move, for which he is rebuked in B Passus XV and again in Passus XVI. The same sermon provides doctrine which might explain the change which has come over the ploughman Piers in Will's second vision of him.

Bernard, deliberately recalling the repentance of the Prodigal Son by his use of the phrase *reversus in se* (cf. Luc. xv 17),¹⁶ says that a man who 'comes to himself', seeing himself as he truly is, may be so ignorant of the nature of God's goodness that he can fall into the irremissible sin of despair. Yet this dangerous ignorance cannot be remedied by a direct searching-out of heavenly things: a soul which tries to approach the majesty of God may be 'overwhelmed by glory'. Will the Dreamer, it will be remembered, looking into his heart and communing with his soul, makes the mistake of trying to remedy his ignorance by curious questioning first of Anima, and later of Piers. He is rebuked by Anima with the same scriptural text as Bernard uses for his argument in Sermon XXXVII:¹⁷

Sic qui scrutator est maiestatis opprimitur a gloria.
(Prov. xxv 27; cf. B XV 55a)

It is only a few lines later that Anima urges Will to take note of what Bernard says about acting on the scriptures. Later in the poem, after his encounter with Piers, Will does follow the Prodigal's humbler path, offering himself as a servant to the 'Samaritan', and in colloquy with him repairs his ignorance of God's merciful nature (cf. B XVII 86 and 229).

In B Passus XVI, Piers in his turn tries to curb Will's curiosity, at the same time giving him teaching about God's love. The one-time ploughman here shows knowledge as yet beyond Will's capacity to apprehend. How is it that Piers has gone so far ahead of the Dreamer in the journey towards Truth? Pertinently to this new vision of the ploughman, the sermon I have been adducing to explain aspects of Will's desire for knowledge also develops the topics of knowing oneself and coming nearer to God in the metaphorical language of sowing and harvesting and receiving fruit. Thus the sermon, like the poem, effectively brings together the Prodigal coming back to himself from "the lond of longynge"¹⁸ (cf. B XI 9) and the Ploughman who, having sown in tears, now lives in hope of the fruits of his labours. The theme of 'knowing oneself' as a step on the way to knowing God is expressed by Bernard in the Psalmist's words about 'sowing in tears':

Quisquis itaque vestrum post illa amara et lacrymosa
conversionis suæ primordia respirasse in spem atque
in quoddam serenum supernæ consolationis pennis gratiæ
sublevatum se evolasse latatur; is profecto jam metit,
suarum recipiens fructum temporaneum lacrymarum; et
ipse vidit Deum et audivit vocem dicentis: Date ei de
fructibus manuum suarum (Prov. xxxi 31). Nam, quomodo
non vidit Deum, qui gustavit et vidit quoniam suavis
est Dominus? . . . O quam verus est sermo qui in
Propheta legitur: Qui seminant in lacrymis, in
exultatione metent (Psal. cxxv 5). Ubi breviter
comprehensa utraque cognitio est: et nostri quidem
in lacrymis serens; quæ autem Dei, metens in gaudio.

(PL 183.972)

(And so, whoever of you, after the bitter and tearful beginnings of his conversion, has the joy of breathing in hope and being raised on the wings of grace into the clear sky of heavenly consolation, is actually now reaping the harvest and receiving the fruit of his early tears. He has seen God and heard the voice say "Give to him of the fruit of his hands" (Prov. xxxi 31). For how can it be that he has not seen God, he who has tasted and seen how sweet the Lord is [cf. Ps. xxxiii 9]? . . . How true is the saying to be read in the Prophet: "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy" (Ps. cxxvi 5). In that brief saying each kind of knowledge is comprehended: that of ourselves, sowing in tears, and that of God, which causes the reaping in joy.)

Readers of *Piers Plowman* will recall that when Piers was last seen by Will he was vowing to plough in prayers and penance (cf. B VII 120-1). When he reappears in B Passus XVI it would seem that he has passed through the bitter first stages of conversion and now has a knowledge of God which gives him hope. Thus, according to the Bernardine doctrine, he has gone ahead of the erratic Dreamer, who also wishes to 'taste and see how sweet the Lord is', but without following the path of contrition.

The Piers of B Passus XVI is an enigmatic figure: he has been portrayed first as an individual person living his life, and secondarily as a representative of mankind moving towards salvation in the whole course of history. What I have said above about conversion applies to Piers as an individual soul turning from 'the world'; but concurrently the dream-history has reached the era of the prophets, the era of hope. Piers guides Will in this Passus by means of teaching and by mysterious actions in the manner of the Old Testament prophets.

The means Langland employs to convey Piers' new understanding to Will is his description of the different aspects of the Tree of Charity and the extraordinary activity that goes on in and around the tree. I have already published my belief that Langland drew on several patristic authorities in creating this composite emblem, among whom, in my view, Augustine in his *Tractatus in Epistolam Iohannis* is the most important.¹⁹ I now want to add another piece to the pattern of conceptual sources for the tree, by suggesting that Bernard provided Langland with the notion of an apple tree bearing fruits which signify, in the moral sense, good works, and, in the allegorical sense, good people.

I find my evidence in a rather unlikely place: namely, *Sermo LI in Cant.*, of which the text is *Fulcite me floribus, stipate me malis, quia amore languo*, 'Sustain me with blossoms, surround me with apples, for I languish with love' (Cant. ii 5): an unlikely place, in that the love-sickness of the Bride longing for her absent beloved seems remote from the feelings of impulsive Will and sturdy Piers. And yet, what text would be more likely to be in the head of a medieval poet meditating upon *caritas* than *quia amore languo*? If Langland turned to this sermon for Bernard's ruminations upon this familiar text, he would find that by the second paragraph Bernard has dismissed from his mind the lovesick girl of the surface meaning and is intent on discovering hidden spiritual significance in the blossoms and fruit which the scriptural speaker so desires:

Nunc jam spiritualem fructum, qui in ipsis est, spiritu duce veritatis tentemus eruere. Et si communis Ecclesia sanctorum hic recipitur loquens, nos in floribus fructibusque designati sumus; sed et quique conversi de sæculo in toto sæculo. In floribus quidem novella et tenera adhuc incipientium conversatio demonstratur, in fructibus vero proficientium fortitudo et maturitas perfectorum . . . Si autem secundum moralem sensum in una anima vis tibi utraque hæc assignari, et flores videlicet, et fructus: fidem

florem, fructum actum intellige. (PL 183.1025)
 (Now, led by the spirit of truth, let us try to educe the spiritual fruit which is in these things. And if it be taken that the Church of the community of saints is here speaking, we ourselves are signified by the blossoms and fruits, and not only we, but those who have been converted from the world throughout the ages of the world. In the blossoms are set forth the still new and tender converted life of beginners, and in the fruits the strength of the more advanced and the ripeness of those who are perfect . . . But if you want me to follow the moral sense and give you the significance of both blossoms and fruit in regard of the single soul, then understand the blossom to be faith and the fruit to be works.)

I note here certain fundamental similarities between Bernard's allegorical treatment of the blossoms and apples of the biblical text and Langland's various descriptions of his allegorical Tree of Charity. First, Bernard thinks of the flowers and fruit as co-existing and maturing on a growing tree (which is certainly not implied in the original text). Next, he has given the imagined apple-tree two different significations, one moral and one related to salvation-history. In the moral sense, the blossom stands for the faith which initiates good works. In the allegorical sense, the budding and ripening fruit represent all the people who have turned from carnal to spiritual life in both present and past times. Thirdly, it will be observed that three stages of growth in spiritual perfection are associated with the maturing fruit. I do not suggest that Langland has simply transferred Bernard's imagery as it stands to the opening of B Passus XVI, but it will be evident that the germ of the three aspects of Piers' apple-tree, which bears virtuous works, virtuous souls (showing three - though different - stages of maturity), and, lastly, virtuous men of earlier ages, can be found here. Other authorities, I believe, suggested to Langland the various elaborations which make the Tree of Charity such a complex emblem, and for these I refer the reader to my *Figure of Piers Plowman*, pp.58-71.

Since the *Canticum Canticorum* and Bernard's exposition of it are usually, and rightly, associated in people's minds with mystical love, it is important to notice that the paragraph which contains this allegorizing of the apples is primarily concerned with *good works* arising from a true faith: i.e. Bernard is writing about charity in action, rather than charity in contemplation. He does expressly distinguish (in the sermon which precedes the one I have just quoted) the two manifestations of charity: *Est charitas in actu, et est in affectu*. Expanding on this distinction, he quotes I Jo. iii 18:

*Opere, inquit, diligamus et veritate: quod videlicet
 moveamur ad bene operandum magis quodam vivida veritatis
 impulsu, quam sapida illius charitatis affectu.*

(PL 183.1022)

("Let us love," he says, "in deed and in truth": that is to say, let us be moved to do well rather by the vigorous impulse of truth than by the relishing of a feeling of charity.)²⁰

He follows his amplification of this precept with rather different teaching about *charitas affectualis*, which, he says, can bring to a soul such knowledge of God as is possible on earth, together with a true knowledge of the self (as undeserving of love without God's grace).²¹ In *Piers Plowman*, the emphasis is on *charitas in actu*: Dowel, Dobet and Dobest obviously require 'doing' rather than simply experiencing 'charity' inwardly, and the Tree scene is full of vigorous action in the cause of charity. It is not easy for the poet to dramatize the inner changes in Will and Piers, but, when we consider this teaching of Bernard's about 'knowing oneself' in relation to *charitas affectualis*, we find a key to what Langland is signifying in the scene between Will and his guide in B Passus XVI.

The most unexpected feature of the Tree scene is the groaning and grieving set off by Will's desire to taste the 'savour' of an apple. I think we can now see in Will's unsatisfied longing the wished-for *sapidæ charitatis affectus* Bernard describes, in its personal and historical implications. By the pun on 'savour' and 'saviour' Langland is able to suggest every man's longing 'to taste and see how sweet the Lord is', and also concurrently to bring to mind Adam's *felix culpa* (cf. B Passus V 484). Though Adam's reaching for knowledge, symbolised by the apple, brought pain and death into the world, it also brought about the incarnation of the Saviour. Will the Dreamer's desire for instant knowledge of the 'savour' of Piers' apple follows the example of Adam rather than the advice of his mentors, and thus sets off again the consequences of the Fall. These are: the penalties of life under the Law, the dominion of Death, and the triumph of the Devil; but in the branches of Piers' tree Langland places the prophets and *figuræ Christi* who presage the coming of incarnate Charity. In this piece of symbolic action the Dreamer sees the old Adam *in himself* as he expresses his inborn but inordinate desire to know the nature of God.

In the moral aspect of the Tree scene, Piers' defence of his growing fruit against the marauders needs no explanation. In the allegory of salvation-history, however, his actions are strange, in that he seems to be damaging the tree in his charge. If we interpret his role in this dream as comparable with that of the often wrathful and punitive Old Testament prophets, we can match his cryptic response to Will's questioning with various god-given mysterious gestures recorded of Moses, Nehemiah, and possibly also of Elisha, which coalesce as prophecy of the coming of Christ to overthrow Death and the Devil and to raise the dead. I have discussed the figural actions of Moses and Nehemiah in this context in the book cited above.²² I now wish to add Elisha's sending of his staff (as an earnest that the dead will be raised) to the other figural actions mimed by Piers as he takes hold of the "pil" to strike out against the Devil and rescue the souls of the dead. In view of the way Bernard recalls Elisha when he is meditating on the power of the Saviour, I now think it likely that Langland also has

that prophet's figural staff in mind. The Dreamer has reached a stage of revelation in which he is able to see Truth in enigmatism (cf. B XV 162a). The presence of Jesus himself is needed to infuse meaning into the enigmatic actions of his guide, and the dream-revelation predictably moves to the Annunciation and the life of Jesus as healer and conqueror of Death. When Bernard, rather to his own surprise, found himself thinking of Elisha's staff while composing *Sermo XVI in Cant.*²³ on the healing power of Jesus, he went on to weave this particular prefiguring of the raising of the dead into a sermon on contrition, which ends with a recall of the divine Samaritan's healing oil and wine, His descent into hell to free the captives, and an address to the Saviour as *Sapientia*. I would hesitate to say that Langland draws directly on this sermon, but I think it gives the modern reader some insight into the unexpressed rationale of the sequence of events in *Piers Plowman* which starts with Piers seizing the staff *Sapientia Dei*, follows with Christ's miracles of healing and raising the dead, takes Will on the Samaritan's road, and ends with his vision of the Harrowing of Hell.

Reading through Bernard's sermons, one is struck by the general interweaving of Old Testament and parable events with expression of the writer's own personal experience (in this case, of contrition). No doubt through meditation on the liturgy, the events of the gospel and their precursive *figurae* seem part of the inner life of the speaker. This is particularly to be remarked in respect of his attitude to the Annunciation, an attitude which sheds light on Will's dream-experience of this momentous happening.

Having given us the prophetic emblem of the Tree, Langland indicates with the phrase *plenitudo temporis* (B XVI 93) that the Messiah is about to appear. More surprisingly, the Holy Spirit, speaking through the mouth of Gabriel, is reported as saying:

That oon Jesus, a justices sone, most jouke in hire
chambre. (B XVI 93)

The terrestrial atmosphere created by "a justice(s) sone" and the verb "jouke" (used of birds perching) prepares the reader for the appearance of the humanly-limited *Filius*, previously presented through the non-human symbol of the staff Piers grasps. There seems to be some audacity in adding in this way to the sacred words of the salutation but Langland could have found authority for the pun which unites *Filius* and *Sol Justitiæ* in Bernard's *Sermo XXXIII in Cant.*, which includes the words *sol justitiæ per archangelum Gabrielem nuntiatus est terris*. Bernard, having (ordinarily enough) compared the time of the old kings and prophets to the 'night', and the day when Christ rose from the shadow of death to the 'morning', goes on to speak of an *aurora*, a 'dawn-light', appearing at the Annunciation:

Fuit namque quaedam hujus aurora diei, ex quo sol
justitiæ per archangelum Gabrielem nuntiatus est
terris, et Virgo Deum in utero de Spiritu Sancto
concepit, et peperit Virgo, ac deinceps, quoad in

terris visus est, et cum hominibus conversatus est.

(PL 183.953)

(For there was a dawning-light of that day from the time when the Sun of Justice was announced to the earth by the archangel Gabriel, and the Virgin conceived God in her womb through the Holy Spirit, and the Virgin gave birth, and thereafter until He was seen on earth and lived among men.)

The commonly-used title of Christ, *Sol Justitiæ*, is taken from the final prophecy of the Messiah in the Old Testament:

Et orietur vobis timentibus nomen meum sol
justitiæ, et sanitas in pennis ejus.

(Mal. iv 2)

Malachi's prophecy images the coming of the Saviour as a sunrise, and with the words *in pennis ejus* creates a picture of the sun spreading its wings to fly up like a bird: when the wings are spread in the sky there will be healing for mankind. Later writers therefore use the phrase *sol justitiæ* to connote both enlightenment and healing when the Son of God shall descend and then rise again like a bird. (The English bibles translate 'Sun of Righteousness', but it is important for Langland's associated pun on 'joust' and 'just' that we note the Latin word here.) The Boy who next comes into Will's dream has to learn the art of healing while He waits for the Friday when he will "juste" in Jerusalem and make "day of nyght". Both the idea that Jesus chose to learn by experience²⁴ and the idea of Justice itself 'just-ifying' are to be found elsewhere in Bernard's sermons.²⁵ It is possible, but in my view unlikely, that Langland independently arrived at the conjunction of thoughts and images in this scene. I think it worthwhile to consider further the connotations which *sol justitiæ* had for Bernard and to associate them with the enlightenment of Will the Dreamer in the scenes that follow.

Bernard uses the phrase *sol justitiæ* several times with personal reference. The most pertinent of these references comes in *Sermo XXXI in Cant.*, which on general grounds one would have expected to engage Langland's attention if he saw it. It is headed *De excellentia divinæ visionis*, and it touches the theme of *Piers Plowman* at many points, bringing together the teaching on knowledge associated with Prov. xxv 27 (already discussed above, in relation to B XV 55a) and the enlightenment spreading from the Sun of Justice. In this sermon Bernard compares the capacity of the clear healthy eye to take in sunlight with the ability of the soul to see God: because the soul is not perfectly pure and healthy it cannot look on the Sun of Justice as He is.²⁶ The implication for Will the Dreamer is that as his visions of Christ come nearer and nearer to the inapprehensible Light he is himself making spiritual progress towards perfection. From the moment when the Sun of Justice is heralded, Will is shown sharing the gradual revelation of the supernatural being of Jesus with those who walked the earth with Him, until eventually his vision is of the Light which surrounds the

redeemed souls, as Peace sings of the sun:

"Clarior est solito post maxima nebula phebuis
Post inimicicias clarior est amor." (B XVIII 410a)

The rising of the Sun of Justice is specifically related to the hallowing of those who are preparing to celebrate Christ's nativity, in Bernard's *Sermo V in Vigilia Nativitatis Domini*, and there he uses the familiar imagery of cultivating fruit for the practice of righteous living, and stresses the need for the Sun:

Hodie enim justitia colitur, cras respondebit: hodie exercetur, cras fructificabit. Alioquin quod non seminaverit homo, nec metet. Nec enim tunc videbit majestatem, qui contempserit interim sanctitatem: nec orietur ei Sol gloriæ, cui Sol justitiæ ortus non fuerit: nec illucescet ei dies crastina, cui non luxerit hodierna. (PL 183.107)
(Today 'justice' is cultivated, tomorrow it will yield its return; today it is tilled, tomorrow it will bear fruit. But what a man has not sown, he will not reap. For he will not then behold glory who has in the meanwhile despised holiness: and the Sun of Glory will not rise on him on whom the Sun of Justice has not risen, nor will tomorrow's day shine on him whom today's light has not illumined.)

Putting together the teaching of these two passages, one may reasonably infer that Langland's pun in "a justice(s) sone" is essentially significant in the conceptual structure of this part of the poem. By ignoring the pun as they do, the modern editors miss the important allusion to the hope now opening out for Will as individual pilgrim (and its relation to Piers' 'fruit'), as well as the more obvious allusion to the ending of the historical era of prophecy.

I come now to a larger sense in which Bernard's *Sermo XXXI in Cant.* appears to be a conceptual source for Langland's poem. This is the only sermon in the series upon which both Vasta and I, from our different standpoints, agree in including as evidence. Bernard, using Prov. xxv 27 as Anima does in the poem, teaches that Truth will not be found by enquiry or by reasoning, but by *being true*. After the passage on the clear eye and the Sun of Justice which I quoted above, he warns his hearers to approach that majesty with respect and awe, continuing:

Nec locis sane accedendum, sed claritatibus.²⁷
(PL 183.941)

It is difficult to offer a translation of these words, because the whole theory of the spiritual pilgrimage is packed into them, and any translation must be inadequate. Eales' version, quoted by Vasta, has "He is not to be approached by a change of places, but by an increase of excellences" (Eales, IV, p.202). This captures

the moral sense of *claritatibus* and, one might say, could serve as a summary of the plot of *Piers Plowman*: the vain hope of reaching Truth through a geographical pilgrimage had to give way to "an increase of excellences": Dowel, Dobet and Dobest. But Bernard's language is more evocative than this, since *claritatibus* by its echo of a *claritate in claritatem* (II Cor. iii 18) also carries the concept of the brightening of the Image of God in the seeker. Thus Eales' translation, like the editors' comments on "a justice(s) sone", transmits the moral point deprived of its special religious significance.

It is of particular interest that Bernard, earlier in this same sermon, identifies the Sun of Justice with the *denarius* of the gospels which is offered to all - a reference to Matt. xx 9.²⁸ The *denarius*, which I have discussed more fully in *The Figure of Piers Plowman*, is a symbol which carries associations of debt and reward, important for our understanding of the relationship between *reddere quod debes* in the poem and the progress of Will. The patristic images of the Sun and the Coin are not dominant in the surface matter of *Piers Plowman*, because Langland is portraying an errant Will and a corrupted contemporary church from which Piers, the *forma justitiæ*,²⁹ has disappeared. Yet, unless we can envisage the awesome ideal, the magnitude of that corruption will not register with us, and the moral argument loses what should give it its force.

The sermon I have just quoted is by no means addressed solely to those who aspire to a special mystical relationship with God in this world, as Vasta implies in his study (p.108). Bernard uses the comparative *clarior* and the superlative *clarissimum* to indicate the stages of progress towards God, but he explicitly says that to be *clarissimum* and 'to see Him as He is' cannot come about until the soul is completely purified in heaven.³⁰ Similarly, Langland's superlative Dobest connotes an ideal perfection which must be Will's goal, though it is beyond his earthly reach. Truth cannot be seen as He is by an earthbound soul, but there is a sense, as Bernard believes, in which the questing soul may come into the presence of Truth. The doctrine is expressed in *Sermo XXXIII in Cant.*, which I have been quoting on the Annunciation, and it suggests the way in which the Dreamer's deep longing could be assuaged. In this sermon Bernard contrasts the 'noonday' sustenance received by the souls in Paradise with the spiritual nourishment available to those still on earth. Truth, he says, is set before him as food, *sed in sacramento*.³¹ He uses the traditional concepts of 'letter' and 'spirit' in explaining that both scripture and sacrament have to be infused by the Spirit before they can nourish the soul: without the Spirit, they 'bring death in the tasting'. If Langland held this view, the sequence set off by Will's overwhelming desire to taste the 'savour' of Piers' fruit is explicable. After the Sun of Justice has risen before his eyes, the Dreamer is "housled" on Easter Day and has his vision of Piers Plowman "right lik in alle lymes to Oure Lord Jesus" (cf. B XIX 9): under the guidance of Piers, he has come as close to Truth as his spiritual state allows. After this, the vision of Grace coming into the world gives promise that knowledge of Truth will be spread universally,

but the last *Passūs* of the poem show instead the wretched falling-off for Will and his companions when Truth's sacraments, the means of grace, are defiled by hypocrites and cheats who care nothing for Piers, Grace's steward on earth. The conclusion of the poem and its culminating attack on false friars might seem bathetic and somewhat parochial were it not for the belief which Bernard puts into words in the quoted sermon. The significance of the false friar's 'salve' (cf. *B Passus* XX 337) as the spiritually lethal substitute for the salve of the Samaritan and its relation to the pilgrim's hunger for Truth become more clearly apparent when we adduce the Bernardine doctrine.

The value of Bernard's sermons as a key to understanding the tenor of Langland's poem is not, of course, proof that he read those sermons at first hand. Much of the teaching about self-knowledge and the restoration of the soul, about 'letter' and 'spirit' and the rising of the Sun of Justice, was of venerable age before Bernard began to write, and could have reached the poet in many different voices. However, I would suggest that on the particular points of the tree in the heart, the apples who are holy men, and the reported words of Gabriel the correspondence of the two writings is so remarkable that the onus falls upon the unconvinced critic to find other, closer, or more likely correspondences than these if he wishes to maintain that Langland did not read Bernard and derive inspiration from him.

NOTES

- ¹ E. Vasta, *The Spiritual Basis of "Piers Plowman"* (The Hague, 1965) p.132.
- ² M.E. Goldsmith, *The Figure of Piers Plowman, Piers Plowman Studies II* (D.S. Brewer, 1981).
- ³ See, for discussion of this symbol: S.A. Barney, "The Plowshare of the Tongue: The Progress of a Symbol from the Bible to *Piers Plowman*", *MS 35* (1973) pp.261-93. Also, Goldsmith, *Figure*, p.84.
- ⁴ Augustine, *Tractatus X in Epistolam Ioannis ad Parthos*, ed. J.P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina 35* (Paris, 1902) col.1993f. See also Goldsmith, *Figure*, p.59f.
- ⁵ My quotations of the B-text are taken from the edition by A.V.C. Schmidt (London, 1978). Quotations from Bernard are taken from *Patrologia Latina*, vols. 183 and 184. The translations are my own. In B XV 60-1 Langland adapts *Beatus qui divinas scripturas legens, verba vertit in opera* (*Tractatus de Ordine Vitæ*, PL 184.566) ('Blessed is he who, reading the holy scriptures, turns the words into works').
- ⁶ *Sermo IV in Ascensione Domini*, PL 183.311.
- ⁷ D. Pearsall, *Piers Plowman by William Langland: an Edition of the C-Text*, *York Medieval Texts: second series* (London, 1978) p.270, n. 221-2.
- ⁸ Pearsall, *C-Text*, p.270, n. 224a.
- ⁹ "Primum itaque sincera radix sanctæ fidei in terra humani cordis plantatur: cui inseritur ramusculus ille sanctæ arboris, id est, timor Domini, qui dicitur initium sapientie (Ps. cx 10). Cum hoc incipit, et cum isto ascendit usque ad plenitudinem luminis. Cumque fides plene adulta fuerit, velut quædam magna arbor diversa in se habens poma, ex quibus reficitur anima plena Deo; tunc adhæret ei timor ille castus et sanctus aternæ charitatis, qui permanet in sæculum sæculi (Ps. xviii 10) . . ." (PL 184.575f.)
 ('First, therefore, the sound root of holy faith is planted in the soil of the human heart. On this is implanted a sprig of that holy tree Fear of the Lord, which is said to be the beginning of wisdom. With this it has its beginning, and with this it rises up to the fullness of the light. When faith is fully grown, like some great tree bearing various fruits, from these the soul, filled with God, is restored. Then that chaste and holy fear of eternal charity, which will last for ever and ever, will cling to Him . . .')
 (The sense of *adhæret* here derives from exegesis of Ps. lxxii 28, *Mihi adhære Deo bonum est*. See Goldsmith, *Figure*, p.118, n. 32.)
- ¹⁰ PL 183.311.
- ¹¹ As others have noted, the Samaritan with whom Will travels is journeying on the (uphill) road to Jerusalem when he succours the traveller (cf. B XVII 51-2). In the gospel, the priest, the Levite and the Samaritan are all 'descending' (cf. Luc. x 30-3); the exegetes' identification of the Samaritan with the Saviour required that he and the passers-by were 'ascending' from Jericho. Will's progress in this company is an ascent towards Truth's holy city.

- 12 For an illuminating discussion of the Bernardine view of self-knowledge, see the essay "*Nosce te ipsum: some Medieval and Modern Interpretations*" by J.A.W. Bennett, in *The Humane Medievalist and Other Essays*, ed. P. Boitani (Rome, 1982) esp. pp.138-46. However, Bennett, in commenting on *S. XXXV in Cant.* (p.140), misleadingly implies that Bernard only reads *si ignoras for si ignoras te* in *Cant. i 7*; the thrust of the sermon is as Bennett describes, but the concluding paragraph of the sermon makes clear that Bernard does not want to separate ignorance of the self from ignorance of God: *Audi ergo sponsum liquido et aperte in anima etiam animæ ignorantiam condemnantem* (PL 183.966) ('Listen, therefore, to the Bridegroom clearly and plainly also condemning in the soul an ignorance of the soul').
- 13 See Bennett, "*Nosce te ipsum*", p.145, and the fuller discussion in J.S. Wittig, "*Piers Plowman B, Passus IX-XII: Elements in the Design of the Inward Journey*", *Traditio* 28 (1972) pp.211-80.
- 14 In *S. XXXVI*, having considered the wrong motives which can make men desire knowledge, Bernard concludes that only those who wish to have knowledge in order to do well (*ut bene faciant*) do not abuse knowledge (cf. PL 183.968).
- 15 ". . . in eandem imaginem transformaris de claritate in claritatem, tanquam a Domini Spiritu" (PL 183.970) ('. . . you are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord'). Bernard here uses the words of 2 Cor. iii 18, a verse important for his view of the soul's journey to Truth, as will be shown below.
- 16 This association of 'knowing oneself' with the parable of the Prodigal goes back to Augustine. *S. VIII in Ps. cxviii* associates the pilgrimage of life and the *regio longinqua* of the younger son's self-exile with the many who 'do not know themselves' (cf. *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, CCSL 40 (Turnhout, 1956) p.1686).
- 17 "Desinat proinde, quandiu in terris est, quæ in cœlis sunt curiosius investigare, ne forte *scrutatatrix majestatis opprimatur a gloria*" (PL 183.976) ('Let [the soul] then, as long as she is on the earth, desist from searching too curiously into heavenly things, lest perchance the searcher into majesty be overwhelmed by glory').
- 18 Langland's "lond of longynge" in which the Dreamer dallies is at one and the same time the *regio longinqua* of Luc. xv 13 and, as Bennett translates it, "the Land of the Longing" which suggests the perils of *curiositas*. (See Bennett, "*Nosce te ipsum*", p.145f.)
- 19 See Goldsmith, *Figure*, pp.58-62, and PL 35.1977ff.
- 20 I have tried with the word "relishing" to keep something of the root sense of *sapidus* 'savoury-tasting', which links this view of *charitas* with Langland's fruit of charity and its "savour" (cf. B XVI 74).
- 21 PL 183.1023.
- 22 See n. 19, above.
- 23 *S. XVI in Cant.*, PL 183.849. For Elisha's staff, see IV Reg. iv 29-37.
- 24 On *Cant. ii 9*, Bernard explains the 'wall' and 'windows' as the human nature and the human senses and feelings which Christ took on at the Incarnation:

- "Porro cancellos et fenestras per quas respicere perhibetur sensus, ut opinor, carnis et humanos dicit affectus, per quos experimentum cepit omnium humanarum necessitatum . . . Humanis ergo affectionibus sensibusque corporeis pro foraminibus usus est et fenestris, ut miserias hominum homo factus experimento sciret, et misericors fieret. Sciebat et ante, sed aliter" (*S. LVI in Cant.*, PL 183.1047) ('Then, the lattices and windows through which he is said to look are, as I think, the fleshly senses and the human feelings through which he obtained experience of all human necessities . . . So, he has used the feelings and bodily senses as apertures and windows, so that, being made man, he might know by experience the miseries of men, and become compassionate. He knew them even before, but in another way').
- 25 In *S. XXII in Cant.*, Bernard affirms that Christ is not only *justus*, but *justitia* itself, and *justitia justificans* (cf. PL 183.881).
- 26 Having considered the bodily eye's capacity for looking at the sun, Bernard makes comparison with the Sun of Justice: "Ita et solem justitiæ illum, qui illuminat omnem hominem venientem in hunc mundum, videre in hoc mundo, sicut illuminat, illuminatus potest, tanquam jam in aliquo similis; sicuti est, omnino non potest, tanquam nondum perfecte similis" (PL 183.941) ('So also he who is enlightened by that Sun of Justice which enlightens every man who comes into this world, is able to see Him as He gives light, as being already somewhat like Him; but he is not able to see Him completely as He is, being still not perfectly like Him').
- 27 Bernard here sums up and deepens Augustine's teaching on the pilgrimage of the soul. Discoursing on Ps. cxix 6, *Multum peregrinata est anima mea*, Augustine says: "Ne peregrinationem corporalem intellegeres, animam dixit peregrinari. Corpus peregrinatur locis, anima peregrinatur affectibus. Corpus peregrinatur locis, anima peregrinatur affectibus. Si amaveris terram, peregrinarius a Deo; si amaveris Deum adscendis ad Deum" (CCSL 40. 1785) ('Lest you should understand this to be a bodily pilgrimage, [the Psalmist] said "the soul journeys". The body journeys in places, the soul journeys in feelings. If you have loved the earth, you journey away from God; if you have loved God, you ascend to God').
- 28 In the paragraph that precedes the passage I have quoted in note 26, Bernard says: "Et tunc ille de Evangelio unus omnibus, qui sic vident, denarius redditur (Matt. xx 9) in una specie quæ offertur" (PL 183.940) ('And then, He, as is said in the gospel, is that one *denarius* which is given to all who see Him thus, in the one semblance in which He is presented').
- 29 For a full discussion of the meaning I attach to this term (derived from Augustine), see Goldsmith, *Figure*, pp.16-17 and 26.
- 30 The conclusion of the passage quoted by Vasta, *Spiritual Basis*, p.84, in support of his theory that Langland is describing "the Unitive Life" of the mystics is not included by him. Bernard says: "Qui itaque clarior, ille propinquior; esse autem clarissimum, pervenisse est . . . Sed id tunc, ut dixi (PL 183.941) ('Thus the more pure and glorious [a soul is], the nearer [to God], and to be perfectly pure and glorious is to have come into His Presence . . . But that, as I have said, will be hereafter'). The word *tunc* 'then' has the meaning it carries from the Pauline phrase alluded to, when 'we shall see as we are seen': "Videmus nunc per speculum in ænigmate; tunc autem facie ad faciem. Nunc cognosco ex parte; tunc autem cognoscam, sicut et cognitus sum" (1 Cor. xiii 12). Elsewhere, Bernard makes plain that though perfection must be the goal, complete perfection of the soul is not possible on earth. In *Tract. de Ord. Vit.* (in the chapter which describes the tree of faith) he says that faith and

charity " . . . virum perfectum efficiunt, *quantum possibile est eum perfici in hac vita plena miseris et erroribus*" (PL 184.576) (' . . . make a man perfect, *as far as it is possible to perfect him in this life, full as it is of troubles and strayings*' [my italics]).

31

"Tuta habitatio paradisi, dulce pabulum Verbum, opulentia multa nimis æternitas. Habeo et ego Verbum, sed in carne; et mihi apponitur veritas, sed in sacramento. Angelus ex adipe frumenti saginatur, et nudo saturatur grano; me oportet interim quodam sacramenti cortice esse contentum, carnis furfure, litteræ palea, velamine fidei. Et hæc talia sunt quæ gustata afferunt mortem, si non de primitiis spiritus quantulumcunque accipiant condimentum" (PL 183.952) ('Paradise is a safe dwelling, the Word a sweet food, eternity great wealth beyond measure. I have the Word, but in the flesh; and Truth is set before me, but in the sacrament. An angel is feasted with the richness of the wheat, and filled with the pure grain; but I must needs be content meanwhile with the sacrament as with a husk, with the flesh as with bran, with the letter as with chaff, with faith as with a veil. And such things as these bring death in the tasting, unless they are seasoned, in however small a measure, with the first-fruits of the Spirit').

The 'noonday' sustenance of the souls in heaven (cf. Cant. i 7), fed 'to the full' while they enjoy the full light of the Sun (cf. PL 183.954) is perhaps recalled by Langland at B V 493 (though there are probably also other strands of meaning in "meel-tyme of seintes").