

A STUDY OF THE VISION TRADITION
IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE
WITH SPECIFIC APPLICATION TO THE PEARL

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

THERESE COYNE, R.S.M.

1974



This is to certify that the

thesis entitled

A Study of the Vision Tradition in
Medieval Literature with
Specific Application to The Pearl

presented by

Sister Therese Coyne

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Ph.D. degree in English

Major professor

Date December 16, 1974

00100

~~200 8-2-7~~

2

2.1.1.1

2.1.1.2

2.1.1.3

2.1.1.4

2.1.1.5

2.1.1.6

2.1.1.7

2.1.1.8

2.1.1.9

2.1.1.10

2.1.1.11

2.1.1.12

2.1.1.13

2.1.1.14

2.1.1.15

ABSTRACT

A STUDY OF THE VISION TRADITION IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE WITH SPECIFIC APPLICATION TO THE PEARL

By

Therese Coyne, R.S.M.

The Pearl, a fourteenth century poem written in the dialect of the North-West Midlands of England, has a considerable body of criticism surrounding it. Although the criticism ordinarily refers to the poem as a dream vision, The Pearl contains passages which indicate strongly that the unknown author was working out of a tradition which existed side by side and intertwined with that which fostered the dream vision convention. I use the term vision tradition to designate this parallel development.

In naming a second tradition, I propose a real difference between a "dream" and a "vision." After establishing the basis on which The Pearl can be considered a vision, I pursued internal evidence of the poem to relate it to ecstasy, to vision per se, to mystical contemplation, and to spiritual marriage.

The methods and techniques used in this investigation are as follows. Careful reading of scriptural and patrological texts established the existence of visions in the canonical and extra-canonical literature of early Christian times. Moreover, common commentaries on the scriptural texts were found in the Glossa Ordinaria. The glosses led to the discovery and careful reading of Saint Augustine's basic treatment of the

125

1

2994

.....

References

— 199 —

25-031

254

535

152

335

1997

330

100

100

10

100

13



1

whole subject of visions in the twelfth book of De Genesi ad litteram.

The understanding and discussion of visions in the context described were found to continue through the whole of the Middle Ages in the writings of the mystics. In particular, St. Gregory the Great and St. Bernard of Clairvaux were studied because of their great influence from the time of Augustine until the composition of The Pearl. In addition, extra-canonical literature was discovered to be a major conduit of the vision tradition, especially in the very influential Visio Pauli. Minor works and further writings of medieval mystics were also examined.

In addition, a study of the meaning of the state of ecstasy was pursued since the vision in The Pearl is indicated as having occurred in this state. Stress was placed upon the work of Joseph Maréchal called The Psychology of Mysticism in this part of the thesis.

Finally, since there are explicit references in The Pearl to the idea of spiritual marriage, this concept was traced from its scriptural beginnings through the major work of Bernard of Clairvaux on the subject.

The last section of the study applied the implications of the vision tradition upon the understanding of The Pearl to some of the chief modern criticism of the poem.

The major data used were the poem, The Pearl; the Vulgate version of the Bible which is the major source of the poem; the Glossa Ordinaria in the Patrologia Latina; the works of St. Augustine, St. Gregory, and St. Bernard of Clairvaux, especially with reference to visions; the relevant extra-canonical visions; and the modern criticism of The Pearl.

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

The major findings of this study propose, first of all, that The Pearl should be read as a poem which records the experiences of a Visionary and not of a dreamer. Second, the poem is a product of a long tradition of the use of visions in sacred and profane literature. This tradition involved a knowledge of ecstasy and its relationship to visions, especially the relationship of visions to the gift of mystical experience. The meaning of The Pearl is enriched when it is considered as a product of a mystical age.

Another major finding of this study is the need for a more precise use and differentiation of the words "dream" and "vision" - in regard to many works of the Medieval period. Considerable confusion exists in some major criticism because this distinction is not recognized.

Finally, reading The Pearl as a product of an age in which ecstasy, vision, mystical contemplation, and spiritual marriage were living realities enables the reader to perceive the poem on its own terms and as a product of its own age. Such interpretation helps the reader recognize that part of the richness and depth of the poem comes from the probability that the Visionary of The Pearl was in actual contact with sacred realities and that his broken, sorrowing spirit was healed explicitly because of his vision experience.

A STUDY OF THE VISION TRADITION
IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE
WITH SPECIFIC APPLICATION TO THE PEARL

By

Therese Coyne, R.S.M.

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English

1974

693315

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It gives me a great deal of pleasure to have the opportunity to formally acknowledge the encouragement and help of Kathleen Healy, R.S.M., teacher and friend.

Professors William W. Heist and John A. Yunck have generously acted as readers of this dissertation. I thank them for their interest and criticism.

Professor Arnold Williams has been a catalyst in my intellectual and personal growth because he cares for learning, continually pursues knowledge, and shares his wisdom both spontaneously and joyfully. I am indebted to him for the inception and completion of this study. I thank him for his patient help, and his perceptive encouragement that led me to develop my best potential.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
I. ECSTASY AS IT OCCURS IN SCRIPTURAL AND MYSTICAL SOURCES WITHIN THE VISION TRADITION	9
II. VISIONS IN SCRIPTURAL AND APOCRYPHAL SOURCES AS THEY CONSTITUTE THE VISION TRADITION	41
III. CONTEMPLATION IN MYSTICAL SOURCES AS A CONDUIT OF THE VISION TRADITION	85
IV. MYSTICAL MARRIAGE AS AN EXPRESSION OF UNITIVE ENCOUNTER WITH GOD AS IT OCCURS IN SCRIPTURAL, EARLY CHRISTIAN AND MYSTICAL SOURCES IN THE VISION TRADITION	115
V. IMPLICATIONS OF THE VISION TRADITION ON THE UNDERSTANDING OF <u>THE PEARL</u> : TOWARD A TEXTUAL READING AND APPRECIATION	139
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	156

100

101

102

103

104

105

106

107

108

109

110

111

112

113

114

115

116

117

118

119

120

INTRODUCTION

The Pearl is preserved in a single manuscript - MS. Cotton Nero A.X. - in the British Museum. The manuscript itself is not later than about 1400, and the poem is generally dated in the second half of the fourteenth century. The poem has been discussed for its elegiac, allegorical, symbolic, theological, scriptural, courtly and poetic qualities. Its allusions to the Roman de la Rose, Boccaccio, Dante, Chaucer and the Vulgate have been noted. New criticism has delved into the meanings of specific words; historical criticism has viewed it as a reflection of the fourteenth century and even as a preview of the Reformation; psychological criticism has analyzed the "I" of the narrator and described him as everything from a bereaved father to a nun in her relationship to the Lord; the school of biblical exegesis or allegoresis has ferreted out "meanings" upon "meanings" for the work; and critics generally have used their specialized tools to define more or less conclusively the communication of the poem. In the end, the poem itself has resisted final definition and has simply continued to be in its richness and fullness always more than the sum of all its explications.

In adding to the existing collection yet another "reading" of the poem, my purpose has not been to provide that definitive reading, nor necessarily to displace the already existing critical opinions. Rather, I have discovered that the unknown author of The Pearl has in his work some highly suggestive passages which indicate that he was working

out of a tradition which existed side by side and intertwined with that which fostered the "literary" dream vision convention. I use the term vision tradition to designate this tradition.

In naming a second tradition, I am indicating that there is a real difference between a dream and a vision. "'Dream' may be defined as a series of thoughts, images, or other mental states, which are experienced during sleep."¹ A vision, however, "in the older use of the word. . . is the conception of images presented to the more or less abnormal states of consciousness, and generally produced by supernatural agency."² The essential difference in addition to the source of the dream or vision is that a dream always occurs in sleep while a vision may or may not. Part of the problem lies, of course, in terms. "The term vision or dream literature is applied generally to narrations that use dreams or visions as an artistic device."³ And the term "dream vision" is used to indicate those occurring both in sleep and in waking hours.

The major difficulty with the usage of the term dream vision, of course, is that it suggests that dreams and visions are the same thing. The point of this work is that The Pearl is a vision, not a dream. In order to keep the differentiation clear, I will use the terms "dream,"

¹J.G. James, "Dream," Dictionary of the Apostolic Church, ed., James Hastings, I, 313.

²J.G. James, "Vision," *ibid.*, II, 643.

³G.M. Liegly, "Vision (Dream) Literature," New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967.

"dream tradition," and "dream literature" to designate works in the tradition of the Roman de la Rose and the Book of the Duchess.

In investigating the possibility that a vision tradition existed, it has never occurred to me to deny or obscure the very real influence of, for example, the de Lorris section of the Roman de la Rose on The Pearl. Neither has it appeared that the vision tradition existed in a vacuum and did not enter the literary stream by way of the dream tradition, so-called, or any other number of ways. I have simply ascertained that an intensive study of certain medieval traditions leads to a firm conviction that they have entered both explicitly and implicitly into the final product of the poet. Applying the results of this study to the poem has made for a richer as well as clearer understanding of what the poem communicates. Beyond this point, I am more than willing to allow the work to mean, that is, to be in its totality.

The vision tradition described above is found most explicitly in the poem in the passages dealing with the Visionary's⁴ entry into and passage out of the vision itself.

To speak, first of all, of the entry of the Visionary into the vision, it is strikingly apparent that this is not the usual entry into a literary dream. Reference to three conventional pieces of dream literature will make this difference graphic.

⁴Visionary is the word which will be used to designate the personage in The Pearl who narrates the story and experiences the vision.

In The Romance of the Rose,⁵ The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man,⁶
and Chaucer's The Parliament of Fowls,⁷ the respective narrators definitely fall asleep. De Lorris records:

When I the age of twenty had attained--
The age when Love controls a young man's heart--
As I was wont, one night I went to bed
And soundly slept. But then came a dream
Which much delighted me (ll. 14-18)

Lydgate translates de Deguileville as saying:

Vp-on a nyht I lay and sclepe
Drempte, (yf ye lyst to lere,)
A wonder dreame, in tyme yffere.
(ll. 214-216)

And Chaucer's narrator tells us:

But fynally, my spirit at the laste,
For wery of my labour al the day,
Tok reste, that made me to slepe faste,
And in my slep I mette, as that I lay,
How Affrican
(ll. 92-96)

On the other hand, the Visionary of The Pearl reports that after meditating rather emotionally on the lost precious "pearl" which could drive away his sorrow and lift up, exalt, his happiness and well being,

I slode vpon a slepyny-slaȝte...
Fro spot my spyryt þer sprang in space;
My body on balke þer bod in sweuen.
(ll. 61-62)

⁵Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, trans. Harry W. Robbins (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1962).

⁶Englisht (sic.) by John Lydgate from the French of Guillaume de Deguileville (London: EETS, 1899-1904), Vols. LXXVII, LXXXIII, XCII.

⁷Ed., F.N. Robinson, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1957).

100

101

102

103

104

105

106

107

108

109

110

111

112

113

114

115

116

117

De Lorris', Lydgate's, and Chaucer's narrators, as noted above, all go peacefully to rest; they **fall** into a natural nocturnal sleep and then dream. The Visionary of The Pearl, however, "fell into a sudden onset of sleep."⁸ I suggest that although the word slepyng is used, it has another meaning because it is combined with sla₃te and because of the information conveyed in line 61.

First of all, sla₃te has the usual meaning of "a violent or sudden blow."⁹ Thus it can be implied that the state into which the Visionary fell was not analogous with natural sleep. It was more a state of bodily unconsciousness produced by the "sudden blow" which might be more likely to occur during the time of the intense mourning of the Visionary. Or, following the OED which has the meaning of "spell of sleep" for l. 59, it can be described as a state which is a "spell" not at all analogous with natural sleep. The above gloss of Gollancz negates the possibility of "spell" being interpreted here as natural sleep.

Moreover, lines 61-2 indicate that the spirit of the Visionary "sprang into space" while his body remained on the mound. The movement of the spirit out of the body into space is neither a description of ordinary sleep nor of a dream in sleep - especially when it is indicated that the body remained behind in an unconscious state. The total description, however, is a very usual one, as will be illustrated below, of

⁸Gordon, p. 49, note 59.

⁹Sir Israel Gollancz, ed., Pearl: an English Poem of the XIVth century (London, 1921; rpt. New York: Cooper Square Pub., 1966), p. 11, note 59.

a person who is experiencing a vision in the state of ecstasy.

I suggest, therefore, that line 59 should be read as the description of the Visionary moving from the conscious state of the normal human condition to the ecstatic state of one who is experiencing a vision.

The contrast between The Pearl Visionary's entrance into the world of his vision and that of the narrators of the conventional dreams quoted above is one premise upon which the reading of The Pearl and the reality of a vision tradition different from the literary dream tradition is based. It is possible to speak of the experience of the Visionary of The Pearl as a vision more related to the experience of St. Paul on the road to Damascus than to that of the reader of "Tullyus" in The Parliament of Fowls.

The endings of the different literary works cited above also give evidence that we may be dealing with another tradition in The Pearl.

In The Romance of the Rose, the narrator achieves his object, the Rose, and simply awakens.

This, then, is how I won my vermeil Rose.
Then morning came, and from my dream at last I woke.
(ll. 21779-21780)

The narrator in de Deguileville's work in like manner awakens at the end of a dream experience motivated by the fear of the personified Death swinging his scythe at him.

And gan so streytly me coharte,
That the soule mot departe.
And, such a feer anoon me took,
Out of my slep that I a-wook.
(ll. 24829-24832)

Chaucer's narrator simply comes to the end of his experience with the birds and awakens.

And with the shoutyng, whan the song was do
That foules maden at here flygt away,
I wok, and othere bokes tok me to,
(ll. 693-695)

However, the Visionary of The Pearl is so enraptured by the sight of his Pearl within the heavenly Jerusalem that

Delyt me drof in y₃e and ere,
My mane₃ mynde to maddyng malte;
Quen I se₃ my frely, I wolde be pere,
By₃onde þe water þa₃ ho were walte.
I þo₃t þat nobyng my₃t me dere
To fech me bur and take me halte,
And to start in þe strem schulde non me stere,
To swymme þe remnaunt, þa₃ I þer swalte.
Bot of þat munt I wat₃ bitalt;
When I schulde start in þe strem astraye,
Out of þat caste I wat₃ bycalt:
Hit wat₃ not at my Prynce₃ paye.

Hit payed hym not þat I so flonc
Ouer meruelous mere₃, so mad arayde.
Of raas þa₃ I were rasch and ronk,
3et rapely þerrine I wat₃ restayed.
For, ry₃t as I sparred vnto þe bonc,
þat brathþe out of my drem me brayde.
þen wakned I in þat erber wlonk;
(ll. 1153-1171)

Thus, The Pearl Visionary awakens from his "drem" (i.e., vision - Gordon, p. 127) not because it is completed as Meun's and Chaucer's are or because the dreamer is frightened as in de Deguileville out of Lydgate. The Pearl Visionary awakens; he is not permitted to cross the stream from the earthly Paradise into the heavenly Paradise because in so doing, he would cross from life through death, to life. And,

more to the point, he would **experience**, i.e., know God, face to face in the Holy City. And, if this **had happened**, he could not have lived again on earth. It is not the time, **however**, of the Visionary's death: he is not yet ready for the face of God; nor is mystical rapture the point of the vision which is the poem.

Now, in pursuing the "if," "why," " " and "wherefore" of The Pearl as a vision, internal evidence leads me to study it in relationship to ecstasy, to vision per se, to mystical contemplation and to spiritual marriage. In the appropriate places, more detail will be added to these concepts merely named here. Finally, I think it is possible to believe that the Visionary spoke literally when he called his experience a veray avysyoun (l. 1184) and acted, therefore, as a changed man (ll. 1206-08).

100

101

102

103

104

105

106

107

108

109

110

111

112

113

114

115

116

117

118

119

120

121

122

123

124

I. ECSTASY AS IT OCCURS IN SCRIPTURAL AND MYSTICAL SOURCES WITHIN THE VISION TRADITION

The starting point for the development of the thesis that The Pearl is a product or culminating point of a long vision tradition is with the concept of ecstasy. The word ecstasy from the Greek word ekstasis means literally "the state of standing out from." It signifies "being outside one's self," a movement beyond and "outside the limits of the individuality," produced by deep emotion.¹ The word describes a displacement; in the sense indicated here it means a psychic displacement and designates a state in which the consciousness is absorbed in emotional or mystical experience.² Literally, according to Strong,³ the word derives from ex histemi meaning to stand out or from.⁴ As ekstasis it acquires the shading of a displacement of the mind. Evidence that the Visionary of The Pearl did not literally fall asleep but experienced an ecstasy is found in lines 61-65 in the poem.

Fro spot my spyryt þer sprang in space;
My body on balke þer bod in sweuen.
My goste is gone in Gode₃ grace
In auenture þer meruayle₃ meuen.
I ne wyste in þis worlde quere þat hit wace . . .

¹A. Closs, "Ecstasy," New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967. Hereafter referred to as NCE.

²M.R.E. Masterman, "Ecstasy (In the Bible)," NCE, 1967.

³James Strong, The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible.

⁴Entires nos. 1611, 1839, 1537, and 2476.

It is possible to label this **experience** ecstatic because of its similarity to St. Paul's as found in the **Second Letter to the Corinthians**.

Si gloriari oportet (non expedit quidem:) veniam autem ad visiones et revelationes Domini. Scio hominem in Christo ante annos quatuordecim sive in corpore nescio, sive extra corpus nescio, Deus scit, raptum hujusmodi usque ad tertium coelum. Et scio hujusmodi hominem sive in corpore, sive extra corpus nescio, Deus scit: Quoniam raptus est in Paradisum et audivit arcana verba, quae non licit homini loqui.

II Cor. 12:1-4 (Vulg.)

If I must glory (it is not expedient indeed) but I will come to the visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ about fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I know not, or out of the body, I know not; God knoweth), such an one rapt even to the third heaven. And I know such a man (whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell. God knoweth): That he was caught up into paradise, and heard secret words, which it is not granted to man to utter.

II Cor. 12:1-4 (Douay)

This particular account of an ecstatic experience interested early scriptural commentators so that several glosses on the passage are found in the Glossa Ordinaria.⁵ By looking at these, it will be possible to enlarge upon our definition of ecstasy, as well as to show that this kind of state is one most conducive to the experience of visions.

The first gloss is on the words sive in corpore, sive etc. It reads as follows:

⁵Migne, Patrologia Latina, Vols. CXIII, CXIV. Hereafter the Glossa Ordinaria is referred to as G.O.; the Patrologia Latina is referred to as P.L.

Hoc ignoravit Apostolos, utrum quando raptus est, in corpore fuerit anima, an omnino de corpore exieret, adeo ut mortuum corpus jaceret, an secundum modum alium quemdam viventis corporis ubi anima fuerit, mens ejus ad videnda vel audienda ineffabilia illius visionis accepta sit. Et quia hoc in certum erat, ideo forsitan dixit, sive in corpore, sive extra-Raptum. Contra naturam elevatum.

G.O. in P.L., Vol. CIV, col. 568.

This the apostle did not know, whether when he was caught up, the soul was in his body or entirely out of his body, so that the body lay as if dead; or whether, according to another manner of understanding, somewhat of a living body where the soul was, but the mind was taken away to see and hear the ineffable things of the vision. And because this was uncertain, therefore perhaps he said, whether in the body or out of the body. Caught up: raised up against nature.

Saint Augustine theorizes on this same subject in the following:

Nesciret . . . utrum quando in tertium coelum raptus est, in corpore fuerit, quomodo est anima in corpore, cum corpus vivere dicitur, sive vigilantis, sive dormientis, sive in ecstasi a sensibus corporis alienata; an omnino de corpore exierit, ut mortuum corpus jaceret, donec peracta illa demonstratione membris mortuis anima redderetur, et non quasi dormiens evigilaret, aut ecstasi alienatus denuo rediret in sensus, sed mortuus omnino revivisceret Sed quia ipsa a corpore alienata, utrum omnino mortuum corpus reliquerit, an secundum modum quemdam viventis corporis ibi anima fuerit, sed mens ejus ad videnda vel audienda ineffabilia illius visionis arrepta sit, hac incertum erat, ideo forsitan dixit, Sive in corpore sive extra corpus, nescio, Deus scit.

G.O. in P.L., XXXIV, 458 and de Gen. ad litt., Book XII, Sec. 5, par.14.

He did not know whether, when rapt to the third heaven, he was in the body, as the soul is in the body when the body is said to live, be it of one awake or of one asleep, or when in ecstasy the soul is alienated from the bodily senses; or whether his soul had altogether gone forth from his body, so that the body lay dead, until, when the revelation was over, his soul was restored to the dead members; so that he did not awake as one asleep,

nor as one alienated in ecstasy, return to his senses; but as one dead come to life again. But because, when his soul was alienated from his body, it was uncertain whether it left his body quite dead, or after some manner of a living body, the soul was there, but his mind carried away to see or hear the unspeakable things of that vision - for this reason, perhaps, he said, "Whether in the body or out of the body, I know not; God knoweth."

(de Gen. ad litt. XII, 5, 14).⁶

The early commentators called Paul's experience in Corinthians an ecstasy; and the wording of lines 61-65 of The Pearl seems an echo of the state described in these two glosses.

Scripture tells of a similar experience by St. Peter:

Postera autem die iter illis facientibus, et appropinquantibus civitati, ascendit Petrus in superiora ut oraret circa horam sextam. Et cum esuriret, voluit gustare. Parantibus autem illis, cecidit super eum mentis excessus: Et vidit coelum apertum, et descendens vas quoddam, velut linteum magnum, quatuor initiis submitti de coelo in terram. In quo erant omnia quadrupedia, et serpentina terrae, et volatilia coeli. Et facta est vox ad eum: Surge Petre, occide, et manduca. Ait sitem Petrus: Absit Domine, quia nunquam manducavi omne commune, et immundum. Et vox iterum secundo ad eum: Quod Deum purificavit, tu commune ne dixeris. Hos autem factum est perter: et statim receptum est vas in coelum.

Acts 10:9-16 (Vulg.)

And on the next day, whilst they were going on their journey, and drawing nigh to the city, Peter went up to the higher parts of the house to pray, about the sixth hour. And being hungry, he was desirous to tastesomewhat. And as they were preparing, there came upon him an ecstasy of mind. And he saw the heaven opened and a certain vessel descending, as it were a great linen sheet let down by the four corners from heaven to the earth. Wherein were all man-

⁶Trans., Dom Cuthbert Butler in Western Mysticism, 3rd ed., p. 51.

ner of four-footed beasts, and creeping things of the earth, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him: Arise, Peter; kill and eat. But Peter said: Far be it from me; for I never did eat anything that is common and unclean. And the voice spoke to him again the second time: That which God hath cleansed, do not thou call common. And this was done thrice; and presently the vessel was taken up into heaven.

Acts 10:9-16 (Douay)

Verse 10 is critical to the whole case for the existence of visions as a tradition because the key word excessus translates the Greek ekstasis. In Chapter 11 Peter speaks again of the experience narrated in the previous chapter.

Ego eram in civitate Joppe orans, et vidi in excessu mentis visionem

Acts 11:5 (Vulg.)

I was in the city of Joppe praying and I saw in an ecstasy of mind a vision

Acts 11:5 (Douay)

In both versions Peter's experience is described as ekstasis.

Saint Chrysostom in a homily on the Acts asks the question, "What means this expression (ekstasis) 'trance'? Rather there was presented to him a kind of spiritual view: the soul, so to say was caused to be out of the body."⁷

The editor notes that the question was asked "because the word also, and more commonly, means the being beside one's self, amazed or stupefied by excess of grief. Chrysostom explains that it denotes the

⁷"Homily XXII (Acts 10:1-4)," in Vol. XI of The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ed. by Philip Scaff, trans. by J. Walker, J. Sheppard, and H. Browne, p. 143.

being rapt out of the bodily consciousness: it was not that Peter was out of his mind but his soul out of his body . . . Peter, in his trance (ekstasis) was strictly cognizant, so as to report what he has seen and heard, and to be sensible of what the things shown were symbolical."⁸

It seems to me that Chrysostom's explanation answers the basic question regarding in what mode of existence visions may occur. It explains, almost in modern psychological terms, the disposition of the levels of the person undergoing such an experience.

Therefore, if ecstasies are a mode of consciousness in which visions take place, this is the vital connection that they have with what we are calling the vision tradition. And we will pursue the study of ecstasy further because, as noted above, it is the state in which the Visionary in The Pearl experiences his visions.

There is another scriptural passage about Paul which, while it does not contain the word ekstasis, obviously refers to the same sort of experience. It can validly be used to expand our understanding of ecstasy as a state in which visions occur.

I am referring, of course, to the account of Paul's conversion which is actually recorded three times in Acts. (Acts 9:3-19; 22:6-16; and 26:12-18). The pertinent verses are as follows:

Et cum iter faceret, contigit ut appropin-
quaret Damasco: et subito circumfulsit eum
lux de coelo. Et cadens in terram audivit
vocem dicentem sibi: Saule, Saule, quid

⁸Philip Schaff, *ibid.*

me persequeris?

Acts 9:3-4 (Vulg.)

And as he went on his journey, it came to pass that he drew nigh to Damascus; and suddenly a light from heaven shined round about him. And falling on the ground, he heard a voice saying to him: Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

Acts 9:3-4 (Douay)

Factum est autem, eunte me, et appropinquante Damasco Media die, subito de coelo circumfulsit me lux copiosa: Et decidens mihi: Saule, Saule, quid me persequeris?

Acts 22:6-7 (Vulg.)

And it came to pass as I was going, and drawing nigh to Damascus at mid-day, that suddenly from heaven there shone round about me a great light: And falling on the ground, I heard a voice saying to me: Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

Acts 22:6-7 (Douay)

In quibus dum irem Damascus cum poteste, et permissu principum sacerdotum, Die media in via, vidi, rex, de coelo supra splendorem solis circumfulsisse me lumen, et eos, qui mecum simul erant. Omnesque nos cum decidissemus in terram, audivi vocem loquentem mihi Hebraica lingua: Saule, Saule, quid me persequeris? Durum est tibi contra stimulum calcitrare.

Acts 26:12-14 (Vulg.)

Whereupon when I was going to Damascus with authority and permission of the chief priest, at mid-day, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me, and them that were in company with me. And when we were all fallen down on the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me in the Hebrew tongue: Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the goad.

Acts 26:12-14 (Douay)

Paul's falling to the earth prior to hearing a voice or seeing a vision has somewhat the same tone about it as do the more explicit New Testament accounts cited above. At the very least, it can be said that what Paul was experiencing was so profound that it caused an ecstatic-like state to be thrust upon his person. In any case, if this was true ecstasy or not, this motif of falling prior to a vision experience certainly enters into many works which could be labeled as under the influence of the vision tradition. Lines 61-65 of The Pearl, as quoted above, repeat this sequence as does the opening of the Divine Comedy. Other instances of this convention will be cited further on.

The continued use of ecstasy as a way into the place where visions occur appears in another set of sources which, while by no means as reliable or important as canonical scripture, were immensely popular. I speak of the extra-canonical or New Testament "apocrypha."

Take, for example, the entry of the narrator into his vision in the "Shepherd of Hermes."

After some time, while I was going to Cumae,
and glorifying the creation of God, for its
greatness and splendour and might, as I walked
along I became sleepy. And a spirit seized me
and took me away through a certain pathless
district through which a man could not walk,
but the ground was precipitous and broken up
by the streams of water. So I crossed the river,
and came to the level ground and knelt down
and began to pray to the Lord and to confess
my sins. Now while I was praying the Heaven
was opened, and I saw that woman, etc.⁹

⁹Vision 1, chap. I, verses 3, 4 as cited in The Apostolic Fathers,

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

Admittedly this entry into the vision is not unambiguous; a case could be made for the occurrence of the vision in sleep as in ecstasy. However, the "seizing" of the narrator by the "spirit" does contain the element of ecstasy we noted above. Moreover, it definitely is in the tradition which produced the opening of The Pearl.

Another early work, this time the first Acts of the Martyrs, contains an implication of ecstasy. It is in "The Passion of Perpetua and Felicita." Of particular interest is the martyrdom of Perpetua itself. The account tells of her being tossed and gored by a very fierce cow. She rises afterwards and "bound up her disheveled hair; for it was not becoming a martyr to suffer with disheveled hair, lest she should appear to be mourning in her glory."¹⁰ At this point, she raises her companion Felicita to her feet and they both stand by a certain catechumen, Rusticus. The account continues as follows:

...and she, as if aroused from sleep, so deeply had she been in the Spirit and in an ecstasy... began to look round her, and to say to the amazement of all, 'I cannot tell when we are to be led out to that cow.' And when she had heard what had already happened, she did not believe it until she had perceived certain signs of injury in her body and in her dress, and had recognized the catechumen. (Ibid.)

The "eye-witness" to Perpetua's ecstasy can give us no indica-

trans., Kersopp Lake, ed. by T.E. Page, E. Cupps and W.H.D. Rouse, II, 7-8.

¹⁰ Chapter VI, cited in The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325, trans., R.E. Wallis, III, 705.

tion as to where Perpetua's spirit rested or where she was while her body was so tormented. The report that she was in ecstasy, nonetheless, is another instance of the continuing echoes which bridge the tradition of ecstatic visions from the scriptural to the medieval ages.

So far, we have attempted to show the similarity between the Visionary of The Pearl and two biblical figures, Peter and Paul. This similarity consists of a seizing of their spirits which transports them to a state in which visions occur. This state is defined as ecstatic. We have also noted the use of ecstasy as a mode in which visions occur in some extra-canonical New Testament works.

During the centuries following Apostolic times, some of the major writers in the mystical tradition theorized about the ecstasy in which visions occur. The next chapter contains a definition of this tradition and a discussion of its relationship to visions in general. If we may extrapolate here, however, and simply state that these writers were interested in ecstasy, we may be able to deepen our understanding of the concept in the context we have established of biblical and extra-canonical sources.

To discuss this concept of ecstasy, the following premise is stated: Mysticism is a real way to know God; it does not need to involve any abnormal manifestations; and it finds its reason for being in the Holy One perceived.

The second member of the premise is, of course, our point of departure. Mysticism does not need to involve any abnormal manifesta-

tions but it can, and has, involved them. One of these manifestations is ecstasy.

At least one author¹¹ identifies the essential phenomenon of mysticism with what is called ecstasy (defined as a state in which all communication with the external world is interrupted). Maréchal, however, reminds us that several mystics claim to have realized the mystical communication without breaking contact with the external world.¹² William James, moreover, is quite emphatic in insisting that the phenomena associated with mysticism - visions, verbal and graphic automatism, levitation, stigmatisation, the healing of disease, etc. - ". . . have no essential mystical significance, for they occur with no consciousness of illumination whatever, when they occur, as they often do, in persons of non-mystical mind."¹³

If we allow a rather eloquent mystic, John Tauler (1300-1361), to speak of the essence of the state he experienced, we perhaps come closer to the mystery than the psychologists are able.

The spirit is transported high above all the faculties into a void of immense solitude whereof no mortal can adequately speak. It is the mysterious darkness wherein is concealed the limitless Good. To such an extent are we admitted and absorbed into some-

¹¹Boutroux in La Psychologie du mysticisme, p. 6, quoted in Joseph Maréchal, Studies in the Psychology of the Mystics, trans., Algar Tharold (London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, LTD., 1927), p. 102.

¹²Maréchal, op. cit., p. 139, note 83.

¹³Varieties of Religious Experience (London, 1904), p. 408, note 2.

thing that is one, simple, divine, illimitable, that we seem no longer distinguishable from it. I speak not of the reality, but of the appearance, of the impression that is felt. In this unity, the feeling of multiplicity disappears. When afterwards, these persons come to themselves again, they find themselves possessed of a distinct knowledge of things, more luminous and more perfect than that of others . . . This obscurity is a light to which no created intelligence can arrive by its own nature. It is also a solitude, because this state is naturally unattainable.¹⁴

Maréchal reiterates several of Tauler's points in the following:

It would seem, indeed, that the mystic, wholly absorbed in his sublime vision, loses the feeling of human personality and at the time makes no conscious return to his acts. In fact there is often revealed a relative unconsciousness which is not the cessation of all intellectual activity, but the supreme reduction - momentary, moreover - of the multiplicity of acts to unity, and consequently of the perceived distinction of object and subject.¹⁵

Now it is necessary to discuss the physical ramifications of ecstasy as a para-physical state concomitant with the essence of mysticism of pure contemplation. Maréchal considers physical ecstasy as "a feeble adaptation of our somatic mechanisms to the excessive central supertension of high intellectual contemplation."¹⁶ And he finds it a problem because of the absence in the subject of any trace of "discur-

¹⁴Tauler, "First Sermon for the Second Sunday after Epiphany" quoted in A. Poulain, The Graces of Interior Prayer, trans. from 6th ed. by Leonora L. Yorke-Smith (London, 1912), p. 120.

¹⁵Marechal, p. 120.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 177.

1955

1956

1957

1958

1959

1960

1961

1962

1963

1964

1965

1966

1967

1968

1969

1970

1971

1972

1973

1974

1975

1976

1977

1978

1979

1980

siveness, spatial imagination or reflex consciousness. And the disconcerting question arises: after images and concepts and the conscious Ego have been abolished, what subsists of the intellectual life? Multiplicity will have disappeared, true, but to the advantage of what kind of unity?"¹⁷

He posits then three solutions to the problem of ecstasy:

1. The absence of multiplicity in ecstasy is only apparent.
2. The negativity of ecstasy is total unconsciousness.
3. Ecstasy is the synthesis of an empirical negativity and a transcendent positivity.¹⁸

Maréchal then eliminates the first solution by admitting the absence of all quantitative and conceptual multiplicity in the explicit content of ecstasy.¹⁹ Secondly, he qualifies the total unconsciousness of the second solution into a "more rightly called subconsciousness, not disintegrated but gathered together and directed. The only kind of unconsciousness admissible in the explanation of ecstasy (we speak of the ecstasy of the great mystics) would be, on any hypothesis, a 'polarized unconsciousness,' the religious value whereof might be very considerable."²⁰

¹⁷Maréchal, p. 185.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 186-190.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 189.

²⁰Ibid., p. 190.

The first element of the third solution, the "empirical negativity," occurs as a result of "the leaving aside of imagery and spatiality, the absence of enumerable multiplicity." The negativity of ecstasy is, in a word, "the cessation of conceptual thought."²¹

The "transcendent positivity," on the other hand, is the affirmation that "this cessation of conceptual thought is not total unconsciousness, but rather an enlargement, an intensification, or even a higher form of intellectual activity."²²

"Now these two affirmations are contradictory . . . [yet] . . . the human intelligence is able, in certain conditions, to attain an intuition which is proper to itself, or, in other words, that the intelligence, instead of constructing its object analogically and approximately from materials borrowed from the sensibility, can sometimes attain that object by an immediate assimilation . . . [now] . . . intuition means the immediate assimilation of an object and a knowing subject, according to the possibilities of their respective natures. Now, in the special case of the intelligence, this object can only be defined as an ontological absolute; it is Being."²³

In this very technical light, ecstasy ceases to be a less than totally human act, a "feeble adaptation of our somatic mechanisms to

²¹Maréchal, p. 194.

²²Ibid.

²³Maréchal, pp. 194-195.

the excessive central supertension of high contemplation" and becomes, instead, the state in which the most totally human approach, nay, experience of absolute truth occurs.

This modern technical explanation of ecstasy leads us directly into the most important explanation of the phenomenon, that made by St. Augustine. We have already quoted from Augustine in the scriptural consideration of this subject; now a closer examination of his theory is in order.

The main source for this information is in the twelfth book of de Genesi ad litteram; "it is a psychological discussion arising out of St. Paul's description of his great mystical experience."²⁴

Saint Augustine defines ecstasy as follows:

Quando autem penitus avertitur atque abripitur animi intentio a sensibus corporis, tunc magis ecstasis dici solet. Tunc omnino quaecumque sint praesentia corpora, etiam patentibus oculis non videntur, nec ullae voces prorsus audiuntur . . . (de Gen. ad litt. XII, 12, 25)
Quapropter cum rapitur anima in ea visa quae spiritu cernuntur similia corporalibus, ita ut omnino a sensibus corporis avertatur amplius quam in somno solet, sed minus quam in morte . . . (Ibid., XII, 26, 53)²⁵

When the attention of the mind is wholly turned away and withdrawn (penitus avertitur atque abripitur) from the bodily senses, it is called an ecstasy. Then whatever bodies may be present are not seen with the open eyes, nor any voices heard at all (de Gen. ad litt. XII, 12, 25).

²⁴Butler, p. 50.

²⁵P.L., XXXIV, 463, 476.

It is a state midway between sleep and death:
The soul is rapt (rapitur) in such wise as to
be withdrawn (avertatur) from the bodily senses
more than in sleep, but less than in death
(de Gen. ad litt. XXVI, 53).²⁶

The causes of ecstasy are stated as follows:

Ecstasis namque est mentis excessus: quod
aliquando pavore contingit; nonunquam vero
per aliquam revelationem alienatione mentis
a sensibus corporis, ut spiritu quod demon-
strandum est demonstratur. (Enar. in Psalm lxvii, 36)²⁷

Ecstasy is a departure (excessus) of the
mind, which sometimes happens by fright,
but sometimes by some revelation, through
an alienation of the mind from the senses
of the body in order that to the spirit may
be shown what is to be shown.²⁸

In a fully religious ecstasy the subject ". . . abreptus a sen-
sibus corporis et subreptus in Deum . . . et redditus mortalibus mem-
bris" (Sermon lli, 16).²⁹ The subject ". . . is withdrawn from
the bodily senses and is carried away unto God and afterwards restored
to his mortal members."³⁰

In addition to the comment on II Cor. 12:2-4 which is quoted
earlier in this chapter, Augustine comments on the same text in the Liber
de Deo (Ep. cxlvii) which throws light on Augustine's psychological

²⁶Quoted in Butler, p. 50.

²⁷P.L., XXXVI, 834.

²⁸Quoted in Butler, pp. 50-51.

²⁹P.L. XXXVIII, 360.

³⁰Quoted in Butler, p. 51.

ideas of ecstasy.

Deinde potest movere, quo modo iam ipsa Dei substantia videri potuerit a quibusdam in hac vita positis, propter illud quod dictum est ad Moysen: Nemo potest faciem meam videre et vivere, nisi quia potest humana mens divinitus rapti ex hac vita ad angelicam vitam, antequam per istam communem mortem carne solvatur. Sic enim raptus est, qui audivit illic ineffabilia verba quae non licet homini loqui, ubi usque ad ea facta est ab huius vitae sensibus quaedam intentionis aversio, ut sive in corpore sive extra corpus fuerit, id est utrum, sicut solet in vehementiore exstasi, mens ab hac vita in illam vitam fuerit alienata manente corporis vinculo, an omnino resolutio facta fuerit, qualis in plena morte contingit, nescire se diceret. Ita fit ut et illud verum sit quod dicum est: Nemo potest faciem meam videre et vivere, quia necesse est abstrahi ab hac vita mentem quando in illius ineffabilitatem visionis adsumitur, et non sit incredibile quibusdam sanctis nondum ita defunctis, ut sepelienda cadavera remanerant, etiam istam excellentiam revelationis fuisse concessam.
(Par. 31)³¹

The question may be raised, How the Very Substance of God could have been seen by some while still in this life,--unless it be that the human mind may be divinely rapt from this life to the angelic life, before it be separated from the flesh by ordinary death. So was he rapt, who heard unspeakable words that man may not utter, where to such a degree occurred a withdrawal of the attention from the senses of this life, that he declared he knew not whether he was in the body or out of the body; that is, whether as is wont to happen in a more vehement ecstasy, his mind was alienated from this life to that, the bond with the body remaining; or whether there was a complete severance, as happens in real death. Thus it comes about

³¹Ed. Goldbacher, 'Corpus Viennense' quoted in Butler, p. 58, footnote 1, par. 3.

that that is true which was said: No one can see My face and live, because the mind must be withdrawn from this life when it is carried away to the ineffableness of that vision; and also, that it is incredible that even this transcendent revelation has been granted to certain holy men not yet dead in the full sense that they continued to be corpses for burial.³²

In these two passages (from de Gen. ad litt., XII, 5, 14 and Liber de Vivendo Deo, Ep. cxlvii), Augustine draws a distinction between the soul (anima) which during an ecstasy remains in the body, and the mind (mens) which is withdrawn from the bodily senses. This, of course, is the same distinction as noted in the gloss on pp. 10-11. In most of the places that deal with the phenomena of ecstasy, it is the mind that is said to be alienated from the body; but in some it is the soul or even the person. The passages just cited are, according to Butler, the ones in which Augustine " . . . strives with most precision to attain to scientific accuracy . . . and the ones most in harmony with the data of psychology. According to it Augustine's idea of what takes place in ecstasy is an alienation of the mind from the bodily senses, but not of the soul from the body."³³

The more important side of ecstasy, that is, content or what takes place in this state, will be handled below within the section on visions as such. Another prime contributor to the mystical tradition in

³²Par. 31, quoted in Butler, pp. 57-58.

³³Butler, p. 51.

the late Middle Ages is Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. The following prayer is a summary of his **attitude towards** the mystical experience:

. . . tu vero, chare Timothee, in mysticis contemplationibus, intenta exercitatione, et sensus relinque, et intellectuales operationes, et sensibilia, et intelligibilia omnia, et ea quae sunt et quae non sunt universa, ut ad unionem ejus, qui supra essentiam et scientiam est, quantum fas est, indemonstabiliter assurgas; siquidem per liberam et absolutam, et puram tui ipsius a rebus omnibus avocationem, ad supernaturalem illum caliginis divinae radium detractis omnibus et a cunctis expeditus, eveheris.

(De myst. theol., c. 1)³⁴

Do thou, O dear Timothy, by thy persistent commerce with the mystic visions, leave behind both sensible perceptions and intellectual efforts, and all objects of sense and intelligence, and all things both not-being and being, and be raised aloft unknowingly to the union, as far as is attainable, with Him who is above every essence and knowledge. For by the resistless and absolute ecstasy in all purity, from thyself and all, thou wilt be carried on high, to the superessential ray of the divine darkness, when thou hast cast away all and become free from all.³⁵

Although the "negative way" of Dionysius's thought does not directly enter into the material compressed into The Pearl, it is the basis for a large body of mystical writing. And, as is evident in the prayer quoted, there is acceptance of ecstasy as a state in which the mystical experience can occur. Thus the via negationis is yet another carrier of the tradition from Paul to The Pearl.

³⁴P.G. III, 998-999.

³⁵De myst. theol., c. 1, trans. by C. Poulain, 134, quoted in Maréchal, p. 119.

100

101

102

103

104

105

106

107

108

109

110

St. Gregory the Great was the recognized master of mysticism from his day (540-604) through the five centuries of the early Middle Ages. Although he does not theorize about ecstasy to the extent that Augustine does, "the ideas thereon of any practical mystic, as Gregory pre-eminently was, must needs repay study and prove a valuable contribution to the psychology of religious experience."³⁶

St. Gregory uses the word 'rapt' (rapere, rapi) in speaking of a soul in contemplation or a mystical state; he also speaks "of the soul being borne out of itself, or above itself, or above the world, or being carried beyond the confines of the flesh."³⁷ Surely such terminology implies somewhat the same concept of ecstasy which we have been tracing. A presentation of some other quotations from Gregory is perhaps the best evidence.

Per contemplationem super nosmetipsos tollimur.

Anima fit super semetipsam.

Carnis claustra transgrediens super semetipsam ire conatur.

Extra carnis angustias sublevati.

Extra mundum, extra carnem fieri.

Mens superior existat mundo . . . extra mundum fuit.

Mens stare diu super semetipsam non potest.

³⁶Butler, p. 83.

³⁷Ibid.

Contemplativae . . . super semetipsam
animam rapit.

(P.L. LXXVI, 956)

Super se interius rapti, in alto animum figunt.

(P.L. LXXV, 706)

By contemplation we are lifted up above ourselves.

(Hom. in Ezech. I. iii. I)

Our mind becomes above itself.

(Dial. ii. 35)

The mind, passing beyond the barriers of flesh,
endeavors to go above itself.

(Mor. x. 31)

We are lifted up outside the confines of the flesh.

(Ibid., x. 13)

I strove daily to become outside the world, out-
side the flesh.

(Ep. 1. 5)

The mind becomes above the world-- outside the
world.

(Dial. 11. 35)

The mind cannot stand for long above itself (in
contemplation).

(Mor. v. 57)

Contemplation ravishes (rapit) the soul above
itself.

(Hom. in Ezech. II. ii. 13)

Caught up inwardly above themselves, they
fix their mind on high.

(Mor. vii. 53)

St. Gregory also has a relevant gloss on the words from St.
Peter's ecstasy, "He returned to himself." He discusses them in con-
nection with the same words used of the Prodigal Son.

Duobis modis, Petre, extra nos ducimur: quia aut per cogitationis lapsum sub nosmetipsos recidimus, aut per contemplationis gratiam super nosmetipsos levamur. Ille itaque qui porcos pavit, vagatione mentis et immunditia sub semetipsum cecidit; iste vero quem angelus solvit, ejusque mentem in exstasim rapuit, extra se quidem, sed super semetipsum fuit. Uterque ergo ad se rediit, quando et ille ab errore operis se collegit ad cor, et iste a contemplationis culmine ad hoc rediit, quod in intellectu communi et prius fuit . . . hunc contemplationis ardor in altum rapuit, se procul dubio se reliquit.

(Dial. 11. 3)³⁸

In two ways we are led out of ourselves: either by sinful thoughts we fall below ourselves, or by the grace of contemplation we are raised above ourselves. The Prodigal fell below himself; but Peter, whose mind was rapt in ecstasy, was out of himself indeed, but above himself. Each "returned to himself" - the former when, conscience smitten, he forsook his evil ways; the latter when from the height of contemplation he returned to the normal state of intellect as before. When the ardour of contemplation bears one aloft, he leaves himself beneath himself.

(Dial. 11. 3)³⁹

In Dial. 11. 35, St. Gregory describes St. Benedict's great mystical experiences. This reference is important here because St. Gregory formulates a theory in explanation of such experiences. The vision is described as follows:

Cumque vir Dei Benedictus, quiescentibus adhuc fratribus instans vigiliis, nocturnae orationis

³⁸P.L., LXVI, 158.

³⁹Quotations from Gregory are found in Butler, pp. 83-84. Butler, however, denies that Gregory ever wrote meaningfully about ecstasy or experienced it. (See esp., p. 85)

empora praevenisset, ad fenestram stans, et omnipotentem Deum deprecans, subito intempesta noctis hora respiciens, vidit fusam lucem desuper cunctas noctis tenebras effugasse, tantoque splendore clarescere, ut diem vinceret lux illa quae inter tenebras radiasset. Mira autem res valde in hoc speculatione secutus est: quia, sicut post ipse narravit, omnis eliam mundus velut sub uno solis radio collectus, ante oculos ejus adductus est. Qui venerabilis Pater, dum intentam oculorum aciem in hoc splendore coruscae lucis infigeret, vidit Germani Capuani episcopi animam in sphaera ignea ab angelis in coelum ferri.

(Dial. 11. 35)⁴⁰

Butler's somewhat free translation is as follows:

While Benedict was standing at the window of the tower, beseeching Almighty God, suddenly, at dead of night, looking out he saw that a light shed from above had dissipated all the darkness of the night, and was shining with such splendour that the light that had shone forth amid the darkness surpassed the day. And a very wonderful thing followed in that spectacle: for, as afterwards he himself narrated, the whole world, gathered as it were under one ray of the sun, was brought before his eyes. And while he fixed the steady gaze of his eyes in this splendour of the shining light, he saw the soul of Germanus, bishop of Capua, carried to heaven by the angels in a fiery ball.

And the theory Gregory develops is as follows:

Animae videnti Creatorem angusta est omnis creatura. Quamlibet etenim parum de luce Creatoris aspexerit, breve ei fit omne quod creatum est; quia ipsa luce visionis intimae mentis laxatur sinus, tantumque expanditur in Deo ut superior existat mundo. Fit vero ipsa videntis anima etiam super semetipsam; cumque in Dei lumine rapitur super se, in interioribus

⁴⁰
P.L., LXVI, 198.

ampliatur; et dum sub se conspicit exaltata,
comprehendit quam breve sit quod compre-
hendere humiliata non poterat. Vir ergo Dei,
qui intuens globum igneum, angelos quoque
ad caelum redeuntes videbat, haec procul-
dubio cernere non nisi in Dei lumine poterat.
Quid itaque mirum si mundum ante se collectum
vidit, qui sublevatus in mentis lumine extra
mundum fuit? Quod autem collectus mundus ante
eius oculos dicitur, non caelum et terra con-
tracta est, sed videntis animus est dilatatus,
qui in Deo raptus videre sine difficultate potuit
omne quod infra Deum est. In illa ergo luce
quae exterioribus oculis fulsit, lux in interiore
mente fuit, quae videntis animum quia ad superiora
rapuit, ei quam angusta essent omnia inferiora mon-
stravit.

(Dial. ii. 35; ed. Mittermuller, 1880)⁴¹

To the soul that sees the Creator every created
thing is narrow. For however little it be of the
light of the Creator that it beholds, all that is
created becomes to it small: because by the
very light of the inmost vision the bosom of the
mind is enlarged, and it is so expanded in God
that it is above the world. But the seer's soul
itself becomes also above itself, and when in
the light of God it is rapt above itself, it is
broadened out interiorly; and while raised aloft
it looks downwards, it understands how small
is that which in its lowly estate it could not
understand. Therefore the man of God, who,
looking on the fiery globe, saw also angels re-
turning to heaven, assuredly could see these
things only in God's light. And so, what won-
der is it if he saw the world gathered together
before him, who, being raised up in the light of
his mind, was out of the world? And that the
world is said to have been gathered before his
eyes, it is not that the heaven and earth were
contracted, but the seer's mind was enlarged,
who, being rapt in God, could see without dif-
ficulty all that is beneath God. In that light,
therefore, which shone on his outward eyes,

⁴¹Quoted in Butler, p. 87, footnote 1.

there was a light in his inward mind, which,
by ravishing the seer's mind to things above,⁴²
showed him how small were all things below.

Finally, Butler concludes from this last quotation that Gregory never represents St. Benedict as being carried away by ecstasy because he called out three times at the height of his vision. I do think that although Gregory may not have described ecstasy as directly or explicitly as, say, Augustine, he certainly continued the vocabulary and the concept that visions occur in some ecstatic-like state into the early Middle Ages. Terms such as ecstasy in their purity must be allowed to mean more ambiguously, less scientifically in the milieu which was the Middle Ages. A twentieth century scientific definition, such as the one applied by Butler, distorts this ambiguity. This ambiguity itself does not in any way destroy the basic premise of this study. It does, however, show that the tradition gained and lost meanings.

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, there was a marked revival of mystical religion. St. Hildegarde (1098-1179), a German abbess and prophetess, Richard of St. Victor (died c. 1173), and St. Bernard (1091-1153) are the chief exponents.

St. Hildegarde's account of her visions will be considered more in detail below. Richard of St. Victor left us three stages of mystical apprehension which he explained as follows. First, there is a dilation of the mind when it realizes its own capacity for a wider and more wonderful

⁴²Quoted in Butler, pp. 86-87.

span of existence. Second, there follows an uplifting of the mind into things above itself which is the essence of prayer. Finally comes a snatching away or "alienation" of the mind to another sphere of reality, which constitutes ecstasy.⁴³

St. Bernard is the dominant figure in twelfth century religious life. In his treatment of the state of ecstasy, he uses the familiar word excessus, or the verb mente excedire. This is taken from St. Paul: "Sive mente excedimus, Deo; sive sobrii sumus, vobis."⁴⁴ (II Cor. 5:13)

Butler maintains that when this Scripture uses mente excedire, it does not mean ". . . anything of the nature of full religious ecstasy."⁴⁵ At this juncture, it seems essential to reiterate that, although I do not seriously question Butler's more expert understanding of the full implications of the subject, my point is much simpler. A tradition in which ecstasy, of one kind or degree or another, is put forth as the state or mode in which visions occur, can be traced through the mystical tradition into the fourteenth century. Therefore, the following excerpts from Bernard are given as evidence for this point only - reserving judgment on the quality of ecstasy herein recorded.

Proinde et ego non absurde sponsae exstasim
vocaverim mortem, quae tamen non vita, sed vitae

⁴³ Developed in his three works Benjamin Minor, or The Preparation of the Soul; Benjamin Major, or Contemplation; and the Four Degrees of Burning Love. Evelyn Underhill, Mystics of the Church, p. 80.

⁴⁴ Butler, p. 115.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

eripiat laqueis . . . Inter medios namque laqueos in hoc vita inceditur, qui utique toties non timentur, quoties sancta aliqua et vehementi cogitatione anima a semetipsa abripitur; si tamen eousque mente secedat et avolet, ut et hunc communem transcendat usum et consuetudinem cogitandi . . . Quid enim formidetur luxuria, ubi nec vita sentitur? Excedente quippe anima, etsi non vita, certa vitae sensu, necesse est etiam ut nec vitae tentatio sentiatur . . . Bona mora quae vitam non auferit sed transferit in melius, bona, qua non corpus cadit, sed anima sublevatur. Verum haec hominum est. Sed moriatur anima mea morte etiam, si dici potest, angelorum, ut praesentium memoria excedens, rerum se inferiorum corporumque non modo cupiditatibus, sed et similitudinibus exultat, sitque ei pura cum illis conversatio, cum quibus est puritatis similitudo. Talis, ut opinor excessus aut tantum, aut maxime contemplatio dicitur. Rerum etenim cupiditatibus vivendo non teneri, humanae virtutis est, corporum vero similitudinibus speculando non involvi, angelicae puritatis est. Utrumque tamen divini muneris est, utrumque excedere, utrumque te ipsum transcendere est, sed longe unum, alterum non longe . . . sed nondum elongasti, nisi et irruentia undique phantasmata corporearum similitudinum transvolare mentis puritate praevaleas. Hucusque noli tibi promittere requiem. Erras si citra invenire te existimas locum quietis, secretum solitudinis, luminis serenum, habitaculum pacis. Sed da mihi qui illuc pervenerit, et incunctantur fateor quiescentem . . . atque hic vere in solitudine locus et in lumine habitatio . . . Puta ergo in solitudinem hanc secessisse sponsam, ibique prae amoenitate loci inter amplexus sponsi suaviter obdormisse, id est in spiritu excessisse . . . Profecto ne inquietae adolescentulae audeant levi ex causa evocare dilectam a tam reverendo collegio, cui absque dubio toties admiscetur, quoties contemplan-do excedit.

(Cant. lii, 4-6)⁴⁶

I may then, without any absurdity, call the ecstasy (ekstasis) of the Bride a death, but one which delivers her not from life, but from the snares of life. For in this life we proceed in the midst of snares; which,

⁴⁶ P.L., CLXXXIII, 1031-1032.

however, are not feared as often as the soul, by some holy and vehement thought, is carried away out of itself (a semetipsa abripitur), provided that it so far departs in mind and flies away (mente secedat et avolet), that it transcends its usual way of thought. For how should impurity be feared, where there is no consciousness of life? For when the soul is transported (excedente anima), though not from life, yet from consciousness of life, the temptations of life cannot be felt. It is a good death which does not take away life, but changes it into something better, by which the body does not fall, but the soul is elevated.

This is a death which is the lot of men. But may the soul die the death also, if I may so speak, of the angels; that, departing from the memory of things present, it may divest itself not only of the desires but of the images of things below and corporeal, and may have pure commerce with those with whom is the image of purity. Such transport (excessus) alone, or in the highest degree, is named contemplation. For while alive not to be held by the desires of things is the part of human virtue; but in the processes of thought (speculando), not to be enveloped by the images of bodies is the part of angelic purity. But both are by divine gift, both are 'to be transported,' both are to transcend yourself; but one a long way, the other not long. You have not yet gone a long way unless you are able by purity of mind to fly over (transvolare) the phantasmata of corporeal images that rush in from all sides. Unless you have attained to this, do not promise yourself rest. You are mistaken if you think that short of this you find a place of quiet, secret solitude, serene light, a dwelling of peace. But show me him who has arrived thither, and I will straightway confess that he is enjoying rest (quiescentem). This place is truly in solitude, this dwelling is in the light. Suppose, therefore, that the Bride has withdrawn into this solitude, and there through the delightfulness of the place has sweetly gone to sleep in the embrace of the Bridegroom, that is to say, has been transported in spirit (as in an ecstasy). . . . As often as the Bride is transported (excedit) in contemplation, so often is she associated

100

100

100

100

with the august company of the blessed spirits.
(Cant. lli, 4-6)⁴⁷

The words ekstasis, excessus, mente excedere, abripere,
avolare, transvolare, and transcendere carry the weight of the argument
well enough for our purpose.⁴⁸

Bernard's use of the word rapere and rapi will also be illustrated
to show yet another use of the notion of seizing in a rather violent way
which, as we have noticed before, is part of the tradition.

. . . si quando per excessum rapi in illam contingat,
digitus Dei est iste, dignanter levans hominem non
hominis temeritas insolenter Dei alta pervadens.
(Cant. lxii. 4)⁴⁹

. . . ad tertium puritas rapit, qua ad invisibilia
sublevamur.
(de Grad. Hum. 19)⁵⁰

(Hoc posteriori genere) contemplationis rapi
desiderat anima perfecta in cas issimos amplexus
Sponsi sui . . .
(Serm. de dev. lxxxvii. 2)⁵¹

In hoc arcanum et in hoc sanctuarium Dei si quem
forte vestrum aliqua hora sic rapi et sic abscondi
contigerit, ut minime avocet aut perturbat vel sen-
sus agens, vel cura pungens, vel culpa mordens,
vel ea certe, quae difficiliter amoveantur, irruentia
imaginum corporearum phantasmata: poterit quidem

⁴⁷Quoted in Butler, pp. 115-116.

⁴⁸Butler points these words out but uses them to maintain that the
ecstasy is mental and not physical, p. 116.

⁴⁹P.L., CLXXXIII, 1078.

⁵⁰P.L. CLXXXII, 952.

⁵¹P.L., CLXXXIII, 704.

hic, cum ad nos redierit, gloriari et dic re:
Introduxit me rex in cubiculum suum.
 (Cant. xxiii. 16)⁵²

Butler's idiomatic translation clarifies the meaning of these passages in English:

If ever it befall one to be rapt by transport
 to the contemplation of God's majesty, that
 is the Finger of God, not the temerity of man.
 (Cant. lxii. 4)

Purity carries us off (rapt) to contemplation,
 whereby we are lifted up to things invisible.
 (de Grad. Hum. 19)

The perfect soul desires to be rapt by contemplation
 to the chaste embraces of her Spouse.
 (Serm. de dev. lxxxvii.2)

If it have ever befallen one of you at any time to
 be rapt and so hidden in the secret sanctuary of
 God, as not to be called away or disturbed by the
 needs of the senses, or by the sting of some care,
 or the pang of some sin, or, what is with greater
 difficulty kept off, the intruding phantasmata of
 bodily images; such an one, when he comes back
 to us, will be able to glory and to say: "The
 King hath brought me into his bedchamber."
 (Cant. xxiii. 16)⁵³

(in contemplatione) interdum exceditur et seceditur
 etiam a corporeis sensibus, ut sese non sentiat
 quae Verbum sentit. Hoc fit cum mens ineffabili
 Verbi illecta dulcedine, quodam modo se sibi furatur,
 imo rapitur atque elabatur a seipsa, ut Verbo furatur.
 (Cant. lxxv. 13)⁵⁴

(In contemplation) In the latter kind of travail

⁵² P.L., CLXXXIII, 893.

⁵³ Quoted in Butler, pp. 116-117.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Butler, p. 117.

it sometimes happens that the soul is so transported
out of itself and detached from the senses, that,
though conscious of the Word, it has not conscious-
ness of itself. This is the case when the mind is
drawn on by the ineffable sweetness of the Word,
and, as it were, is stolen from itself; or, rather,
it is rapt and abides out of itself to enjoy the Word.
(Cant. lxxxv. 13)⁵⁵

The most pertinent question to be asked here is what the tradition has to do with the poem, The Pearl. We have already stated in several places that lines 61-65, especially, of the poem are rather surely proof that the Visionary of the poem was seized into ecstasy and did not merely fall asleep. The fact that he experiences visions within this state in the main portion of The Pearl seems to be very much in keeping with what happened to Paul and Peter as recorded in the scriptures as well as being the experience of several "semi-fictional" personages in the extra-canonical texts considered. Moreover, major religious figures of the early and high Middle Ages, namely Augustine, Gregory, and Bernard, have written about the ecstatic state explicitly and almost in modern psychological terms in the case of Augustine, and implicitly and less directly in the cases of Gregory and Bernard. All three, however, have continued the tradition down into the age where the Pearl poet would have most probably grappled directly or indirectly with the idea. That he did is evidenced in lines 61-65 most especially and probably also in line 1088:

So watz I rauyste wyth glymne pure.

This line is particularly significant because of the presence of

⁵⁵ Quoted in Butler, p. 113.

1992

229

1992

2000

2019

1. **Introduction**
 2. **Methodology**
 3. **Results**
 4. **Discussion**
 5. **Conclusion**
 6. **References**
 7. **Appendix**
 8. **Index**
 9. **Table of Contents**
 10. **Figure 1**
 11. **Figure 2**
 12. **Figure 3**
 13. **Figure 4**
 14. **Figure 5**
 15. **Figure 6**
 16. **Figure 7**
 17. **Figure 8**
 18. **Figure 9**
 19. **Figure 10**
 20. **Figure 11**
 21. **Figure 12**
 22. **Figure 13**
 23. **Figure 14**
 24. **Figure 15**
 25. **Figure 16**
 26. **Figure 17**
 27. **Figure 18**
 28. **Figure 19**
 29. **Figure 20**
 30. **Figure 21**
 31. **Figure 22**
 32. **Figure 23**
 33. **Figure 24**
 34. **Figure 25**
 35. **Figure 26**
 36. **Figure 27**
 37. **Figure 28**
 38. **Figure 29**
 39. **Figure 30**
 40. **Figure 31**
 41. **Figure 32**
 42. **Figure 33**
 43. **Figure 34**
 44. **Figure 35**
 45. **Figure 36**
 46. **Figure 37**
 47. **Figure 38**
 48. **Figure 39**
 49. **Figure 40**
 50. **Figure 41**
 51. **Figure 42**
 52. **Figure 43**
 53. **Figure 44**
 54. **Figure 45**
 55. **Figure 46**
 56. **Figure 47**
 57. **Figure 48**
 58. **Figure 49**
 59. **Figure 50**
 60. **Figure 51**
 61. **Figure 52**
 62. **Figure 53**
 63. **Figure 54**
 64. **Figure 55**
 65. **Figure 56**
 66. **Figure 57**
 67. **Figure 58**
 68. **Figure 59**
 69. **Figure 60**
 70. **Figure 61**
 71. **Figure 62**
 72. **Figure 63**
 73. **Figure 64**
 74. **Figure 65**
 75. **Figure 66**
 76. **Figure 67**
 77. **Figure 68**
 78. **Figure 69**
 79. **Figure 70**
 80. **Figure 71**
 81. **Figure 72**
 82. **Figure 73**
 83. **Figure 74**
 84. **Figure 75**
 85. **Figure 76**
 86. **Figure 77**
 87. **Figure 78**
 88. **Figure 79**
 89. **Figure 80**
 90. **Figure 81**
 91. **Figure 82**
 92. **Figure 83**
 93. **Figure 84**
 94. **Figure 85**
 95. **Figure 86**
 96. **Figure 87**
 97. **Figure 88**
 98. **Figure 89**
 99. **Figure 90**
 100. **Figure 91**
 101. **Figure 92**
 102. **Figure 93**
 103. **Figure 94**
 104. **Figure 95**
 105. **Figure 96**
 106. **Figure 97**
 107. **Figure 98**
 108. **Figure 99**
 109. **Figure 100**
 110. **Figure 101**
 111. **Figure 102**
 112. **Figure 103**
 113. **Figure 104**
 114. **Figure 105**
 115. **Figure 106**
 116. **Figure 107**
 117. **Figure 108**
 118. **Figure 109**
 119. **Figure 110**
 120. **Figure 111**
 121. **Figure 112**
 122. **Figure 113**
 123. **Figure 114**
 124. **Figure 115**
 125. **Figure 116**
 126. **Figure 117**
 127. **Figure 118**
 128. **Figure 119**
 129. **Figure 120**
 130. **Figure 121**
 131. **Figure 122**
 132. **Figure 123**
 133. **Figure 124**
 134. **Figure 125**
 135. **Figure 126**
 136. **Figure 127**
 137. **Figure 128**
 138. **Figure 129**
 139. **Figure 130**
 140. **Figure 131**
 141. **Figure 132**
 142. **Figure 133**
 143. **Figure 134**
 144. **Figure 135**
 145. **Figure 136**
 146. **Figure 137**
 147. **Figure 138**
 148. **Figure 139**
 149. **Figure 140**
 150. **Figure 141**
 151. **Figure 142**
 152. **Figure 143**
 153. **Figure 144**
 154. **Figure 145**
 155. **Figure 146**
 156. **Figure 147**
 157. **Figure 148**
 158. **Figure 149**
 159. **Figure 150**
 160. **Figure 151**
 161. **Figure 152**
 162. **Figure 153**
 163. **Figure 154**
 164. **Figure 155**
 165. **Figure 156**
 166. **Figure 157**
 167. **Figure 158**
 168. **Figure 159**
 169. **Figure 160**
 170. **Figure 161**
 171. **Figure 162**
 172. **Figure 163**
 173. **Figure 164**
 174. **Figure 165**
 175. **Figure 166**
 176. **Figure 167**
 177. **Figure 168**
 178. **Figure 169**
 179. **Figure 170**
 180. **Figure 171**
 181. **Figure 172**
 182. **Figure 173**
 183. **Figure 174**
 184. **Figure 175**
 185. **Figure 176**
 186. **Figure 177**
 187. **Figure 178**
 188. **Figure 179**
 189. **Figure 180**
 190. **Figure 181**
 191. **Figure 182**
 192. **Figure 183**
 193. **Figure 184**
 194. **Figure 185**
 195. **Figure 186**
 196. **Figure 187**
 197. **Figure 188**
 198. **Figure 189**
 199. **Figure 190**
 200. **Figure 191**
 201. **Figure 192**
 202. **Figure 193**
 203. **Figure 194**
 204. **Figure 195**
 205. **Figure 196**
 206. **Figure 197**
 207. **Figure 198**
 208. **Figure 199**
 209. **Figure 200**
 210. **Figure 201**
 211. **Figure 202**
 212. **Figure 203**
 213. **Figure 204**
 214. **Figure 205**
 215. **Figure 206**
 216. **Figure 207**
 217. **Figure 208**

1. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1997; 277: 103-107.
 2. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1997; 277: 108-112.

100

100

1. ☐ 2. ☐ 3. ☐ 4. ☐ 5. ☐ 6. ☐ 7. ☐ 8. ☐ 9. ☐ 10. ☐ 11. ☐ 12. ☐ 13. ☐ 14. ☐ 15. ☐ 16. ☐ 17. ☐ 18. ☐ 19. ☐ 20. ☐ 21. ☐ 22. ☐ 23. ☐ 24. ☐ 25. ☐ 26. ☐ 27. ☐ 28. ☐ 29. ☐ 30. ☐ 31. ☐ 32. ☐ 33. ☐ 34. ☐ 35. ☐ 36. ☐ 37. ☐ 38. ☐ 39. ☐ 40. ☐ 41. ☐ 42. ☐ 43. ☐ 44. ☐ 45. ☐ 46. ☐ 47. ☐ 48. ☐ 49. ☐ 50. ☐ 51. ☐ 52. ☐ 53. ☐ 54. ☐ 55. ☐ 56. ☐ 57. ☐ 58. ☐ 59. ☐ 60. ☐ 61. ☐ 62. ☐ 63. ☐ 64. ☐ 65. ☐ 66. ☐ 67. ☐ 68. ☐ 69. ☐ 70. ☐ 71. ☐ 72. ☐ 73. ☐ 74. ☐ 75. ☐ 76. ☐ 77. ☐ 78. ☐ 79. ☐ 80. ☐ 81. ☐ 82. ☐ 83. ☐ 84. ☐ 85. ☐ 86. ☐ 87. ☐ 88. ☐ 89. ☐ 90. ☐ 91. ☐ 92. ☐ 93. ☐ 94. ☐ 95. ☐ 96. ☐ 97. ☐ 98. ☐ 99. ☐ 100. ☐

22

•

1

10

7.

the word rauyste. The OED identifies this word as one form which the modern word ravish took during the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries.

The source of the word is identified as from the French raviss, lengthened stem of ravir, to seize, take: pop. Latin rapire, classical Latin rapere.

Now this same source records under listing 2b that the word had the meaning, "to carry away (esp. to heaven) in a mystical sense; to transport in spirit without bodily removal." The word in the context of The Pearl is quoted in the OED under meaning 2c, "to transport with the strength of some feeling, to carry away with rapture; to fill with ecstasy or delight; to entrance."

In this chapter, we have surveyed briefly the understanding of the state of ecstasy as it was probably known to the author of The Pearl. The point to be stressed is that the experience of the narrator of the poem is not one of falling asleep but of ecstasy. This gives us one bit of evidence that The Pearl is not a dream like the Roman de la Rose or The Book of the Duchess, but a real vision.

II. VISIONS IN SCRIPTURAL AND APOCRYPHAL SOURCES AS THEY CONSTITUTE THE VISION TRADITION

Edgar Hennecke in speaking of apocalypses makes a useful differentiation. He sees apocalyptic visions as taking place either in dreams or in ecstatic visions. He adds that eventually the apocalyptic vision takes place only through visionary rapture (which is equated with ecstatic vision). Thus he finds in the Apocalypse or Book of Revelations only ecstatic visions and no "dream visions."¹ The principal point of this paper is far from a discussion of visions in apocalypses. However, the recognition of at least two kinds of visions operating in biblical times strengthens the case for the existence of a vision tradition separate to some degree from the dream tradition in literature.

Moreover, the term ecstatic vision may be useful for carrying the connotation of a vision which occurs in a state of ecstasy. There is evidence of both ecstatic visions and those not occurring in a state of ecstasy in the tradition we are tracing. The citation of relevant scriptural glosses as well as some examples from extra-canonical sources will lay the foundation for some of the implications which visions came to carry with them into the mystical and literary traditions.

But before pursuing the main line of thought, it is necessary to take a step backward and explain why this study starts with Christian times and will not reach back beyond them in any profound manner. This

¹New Testament Apocrypha, Vol. I: Gospels and Related Writings, ed., R. McL. Wilson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press), p. 583.

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

is not to say that visions began in the Christian era; the present point of departure is not a starting point which neglects or negates a pre-Christian vision tradition. It is significant that the use of visions was given a further valuation in light of the Christian experience that is germane to all efforts from Christian times. The validity of starting from this point is evident when one considers that Christianity negates nothing of human experience but puts into historical time that which was before only archetypal. And, moreover, "for the believer the new meaning eclipses all the others; it alone valorized the symbol, transfigured it into revelation."²

Mircea Eliade has developed this concept in some depth, and it is possible to speak of visions within his framework with some interesting results. First of all, Eliade discusses the "primary experience of sacred space."³ He defines it as the primitive religious man's acceptance of a hierophany, that is, a "manifestation of sacred reality"⁴ which becomes concretized in a particular place or space. This sacred manifestation which is equivalent to power and, in the last analysis, to reality constitutes a break in the homogeneity of space.⁵ This break is symbolized by an opening through which passage from one cosmic region

² Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1959), p. 11.

³ Ibid., p. 58, Emphases are Eliade's.

⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 12 and 37.

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

to another is made possible -- from heaven to earth and vice versa, and from earth to the underworld. Communication with heaven is expressed by one or another of certain images, all of which refer to the axis mundi, for example, a ladder (Jacob's), a mountain (Moses'), a tree (Adam and Eve's, Thor's), a vine, etc. Around this cosmic axis lies the world (our world); hence the axis is located "in the middle" at the "navel of the earth"; it is the "center of the world."⁶

This break in space or center of the world is not geometrical space, but existential and sacred space. Therefore, it has an entirely different structure than a physical one. It admits of an infinite number of breaks and hence is capable of an infinite number of communications with the transcendent.⁷

Ancient temples were actually built with an opening in the roof to symbolize the break through from plane to plane, in other words, communication with the transcendent one. Judaism inherited this ancient Oriental conception of the temple as the copy of a celestial work of architecture and believed that the Heavenly Jerusalem was created by God at the same time as Paradise, hence in aeternum. Thus the city of Jerusalem was only an approximate reproduction of the transcendent model. Christian basilicas, and later cathedrals, take over and continue these symbolisms.⁸

⁶Eliade, p. 37.

⁷Ibid., p. 57.

⁸Ibid., pp. 57-58.

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

It is possible that another receptor of the primitive concept of sacred space was the vision itself. For visions are hierophanies, manifestations of the sacred; they are creators of order out of chaos (the Annunciation, the Magi's choice of a different route home, Joseph's flight to Egypt with Mary and the child, the conversion of Saul); and they are definitely means of communication with the transcendent being. It is possible to say that the Incarnation, the supreme hierophany, created in time a new navel of the earth. Thus a close examination of visions of particular persons is logical, if the persons are closely related to the prime hierophany and if the visions they receive really do color the subsequent literary and non-literary vision tradition. These persons are the apostles Peter and Paul. Paul was born Saul of Tarsus; he is the apostle born "out of time" who delivered the Christian "good news" to the Gentiles. His own writings (especially the second letter to the Corinthians) and writings about him (The Acts of the Apostles) have pointedly influenced Christianity on the one hand, and the expressions which this new religion acquired, especially in the mystical tradition, on the other. We shall turn then to a more detailed study of Peter's and Paul's visions as the embodiment of the primitive conception of sacred space as further valorized by the Christian experience. These initiate, or, at least, are conduits for some of the same traditions present in visions and dream visions of fourteenth century England.

As with the study of ecstasy, we turn first to Paul's major ec-

2010

22 23

33.

• • •

1

•

•

200

•

•

static vision which is recorded in II Cor. 12:1-4.⁹ Glosses on the passage add to our information about visions which take place in an ecstatic state.

A gloss by Theophanes on Raptus est reads as follows:

Ipsius vide summam demissionem et humilitatem quomodo tanquam de alio haec recenseat: de hoc enim, inquit, gloriabor. At cujus gratis (si alius raptus est) gloriaris? Itaque haec de seipso dicit. Arcana verba. Intimationem de secreta Dei essentia, quasi per verba.

G.O. in P.L., CXIV, 568.

See (or note) the great lowering and humbling of himself, how he recounts these things as if about another: of this, he says, I shall glory. For whose favor, (if another was caught up), do you glory? And so, he says these things about himself. Secretive words. Intimations of the secret essence of God, as it were through words.

The fact that an ecstatic vision can lead to a real encounter with the Lord is evident here. The commentator's insistence that Paul himself experienced the secret essence of God leads to this conclusion. This point gains importance also when the insistence on knowledge as a result of ecstatic vision is noticed not only in scripture but also in the mystic tradition. In this latter case, the terminology may change to mystical rapture or complete union with the one or infused contemplation, but the result is the same.

It should be stated here, also, that II Cor. 12:1-4 gives a location to ecstatic visions. Besides reminding us of Eliade's conception of

⁹ See page 10, above.

sacred space, it gives rise to the following commentary which also emphasizes that an ecstatic vision can be unitive.

The gloss is on usque ad tertium coelum.

Id est, ad cognitionem Deitatis. Primum coelum est aereum; secundum, firmamentum; tertium spirituale, ubi angeli et sanctae animae Dei fruuntur contemplatione.

G.O. in P.L., CXIV, 568.

That is, to a knowledge of the Deity. The first heaven is the air (lower atmosphere); the second, the sky (firmament); the third is spiritual, where angels and holy persons delight in the contemplation of God.

Now, Chrysostom's gloss, quoted and explicated above in regard to St. Peter's ecstatic vision,¹⁰ certifies that the experience can be communicated to other human beings after the receptor is returned to his pre-ecstasy state. This is not true, however, with all ecstatic vision experiences. St. Paul was able to tell others of his sojourn in Arabia only in the most general terms. This difference here may have to do with the fact that St. Peter's gained knowledge was intimately connected with a specific change of policy in the early Church, whereas Paul's had more to do with the growth of his personal spirit which would ultimately infuse Christianity.

There are further implications to be drawn from Peter's ecstatic vision¹¹ as an examination of two glosses, both by Rabanus Maurus, will point out. The words in superiora are the subject of the glosses.

¹⁰ See pp. 13-14.

¹¹ See p. 13.

Pro in superiora, alia littera habet, in caenaculum, et bene: quia gentilis populus est quasi superior domus: Synagoga vero est infra, quia mundo immersa.

G.O. in P.L., CXIV, 451.

Instead of "higher parts," another reading is "in an upper story or room" and well said: Because the Gentile people is, as it were, a higher house: the synagogue in truth is below, because it is immersed in the world.

Dicens in superiora significavit Ecclesiam, relicta cupiditate terrenorum, conversationem in caelis habituram.

G.O. in P.L., CXIV, 451.

Saying "in the upper parts" he means the Church, which having left behind the desire of earthly things, was going to have its dwelling in heaven.

The evident interest in just where Peter's vision occurred seems to echo Eliade's concern for sacred space. The vision takes place high in the house, in the upper room, where Peter could contact the transcendent one who was up even higher. The axis mundi here may be said to be created in the hierophany itself which took place, as the second gloss indicates, in heaven. A reference to Paul's vision placed it in heaven too, specifically in the third heaven. In any case, a cosmic break in the continuum of space occurred in and above the house which lodged Peter who prayed (communicated with) the transcendent one in an ecstatic vision, participated in on another plane, that is, in heaven.

In the last chapter we suggested that Paul's initial encounter with Christianity on the road to Damascus had something of the ecstatic about it. The encounter itself may be classed as a vision. As part of

this vision Christ instructs Paul:

. . . Surge, et ingredere civitatem, et ibi dicetur
tibi quid te oporteat facere.

Acts 9:6 (Vulg.)

. . . Arise, and go into the city, and there it
shall be told thee what thou must do.

Acts 9:7 (Douay)

Rabanus Maurus comments on the word ingredere:

Ingressurus civitatem terretur ne sanctis tris-
titiam inferat, dehinc Dominus jubetur ingredi,
ut fidem discat quam impugnaverat.

G.O. in P.L., CXIV, 448.

About to enter the city, he fears that he will
bring sadness to the saints; for this reason the
Lord commands him to enter, so that he may
learn the faith which he had persecuted.

This gloss presents some of the effect that Paul's experience may have had on him immediately. It frightened him because he was being asked to turn his life around. Peter's experience at Joppa, discussed above, also led to a drastic re-ordering of priorities because he opened the Church to the non-Jewish people as a direct result. It seems, then, that the vision experience may change the attitudes and life of the receptor. This result enters the tradition in many literary visions.

In the following verse, the writer continues his narrative of the aftermath of Paul's vision.

Surrexit autem Saulus de terra, apertisque
oculis nihil videbat. Ad manus autem illum
trahentes, introduxerunt Damascum.

Acts 9:8 (Vulg.)

And Saul arose from the ground; when his eyes
were opened, he saw nothing. But they lead-

ing him by the hands, brought him to
Damascus.

Acts 9:8 (Douay)

Rabanus Maurus' gloss on the words apertis oculis is noteworthy.

Ostenditur ei in corpore quod prius patiebatur
in anima: Sicut enim apertus oculus sine visu,
sic lex inutilis sine fide Christi.

G.O. in P.L., CXIV, 448.

It is revealed to him in the body what first
he had suffered before in the mind; just as an
open eye without sight, so, in the same way,
the law was useless without faith in Christ.

The commentator here is underlining a psychological truth. We
come to know something first; later we are able to feel or experience and
eventually assimilate, in a totally human way, the implications of our
new knowledge. Thus Paul needs three days of blindness plus fourteen
years in Arabia to become the Paul with whom we are most familiar. In
the same way we can watch Dante's pilgrim grow in knowledge and then
experience, so that the personage of the Paradiso is a much matured ver-
sion of the one of the Inferno.

Bede also glosses the words apertis oculis.

Oculis non posset rursus bene videre nisi
prius excaecatus, et propriam sapientiam,
quae turbatur excludens, fidei se committerat.

G.O. in P.L., CXIV, 448.

He was not able to see well again until he was
first blinded, and shutting out his own wisdom
which disturbed him, he committed himself to
faith.

Paul gains insight into his vision because his physical sight
is absent for a time. His three days of blindness allow the Light to pene-

trate him. Therefore, it is not surprising that Paul's internalizing of his experiences takes place in the dark; nor is it abnormal in any sense that within the literary tradition of the dream vision, the visions often become or are identified with dreams, which occur in another form of blindness, that of sleep.

Acts 9:9 reads as follows:

Et erat ibi tribus diebus non videns, et non
manducavit, neque bibit. (Vulg.)

And he was there three days, without sight,
and he did neither eat nor drink. (Douay)

Rabanus Maurus glosses this verse in such a way as to add substance to our remarks concerning the benefit of blindness to Paul.

The gloss is on tribus diebus:

Apparet quod per triduum caecatus lucem gratiae
expectabat, non torpens otio, sed illustratus
a Deo coelestia rimabatur. Credibile est quod
etiam eo tempore dispensationem Evangelii
edoctus sit.

G.O. in P.L., CXIV, 448.

It appears that having been blinded for three days, he was waiting for the light of grace; not resting as in idleness, but having been illuminated by God, he was tested by heavenly things. It is to be believed that even in that time, he may have been taught the dispensation of the Gospel.

A further gloss on the words non videns indicates the didactic importance of Paul's vision. Didacticism is a familiar aspect of The Pearl.

The gloss says:

Quia non credebat Deum tertia die resurgendo
mortem vicisse, suo exemplo instruitur, qui
tenebras tridui luce reversa mutavit.

G.O. in P.L., CXIV, 448.

Because he (Paul) did not believe that God
conquered death by rising on the third day,
he was instructed by his own example, light
having been restored on the third day.

Rabanus Maurus glosses non manducavit from the same verse
as follows:

Hoc animae suae acciderat, quae cibum interiorem
non habuerat et potum. Ex inedia autem corporis
et siti ostenditur animam indigentem satiari oportere.

G.O. in P.L., CXIV, 448.

This had happened to his own soul which had not
had interior food or drink. From the hunger and
thirst of the body, it is shown how an undeserving
spirit ought to be satisfied.

In addition to the didactic aspects of this gloss, it can be
pointed out that the symbolism which is rampant in medieval visions is
probably as old as visions themselves. The implied comparison of body/
spirit with food/spiritual food is metaphorically understandable and en-
riching. It tells us, also, that the early Christians regarded the anima
as worthy and needful of strengthening as the corpus.

The narrative in Acts continues by introducing a new personage,
Ananias.

Erat autem quidam discipulus Damasci nomine
Ananais: et dixit ad illum in visu Dominus:
Anania. At ille sit: Ecce ergo, Domine.
Acts 9:10 (Vulg.)

Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

named Ananias. And the Lord said to him in a vision: Ananias. And he said: Behold I am here, Lord.

Acts 9:10 (Douay)

The Latin visu translates the Greek horama from horaō¹² meaning to stare at, that is, to discern clearly. By extension the word has been used to mean to attend to. This same root is present in verse 9 above and in verse 12 which reads:

Et vidit virum Ananiam nomine, introeuntem
et imponentem sibi manus ut visum recipiat.

Acts 9:12 (Vulg.)

And he saw a man named Ananias coming in, and he put his hands upon him that he might receive his sight.

Acts 9:12 (Douay)

It can be said then that the vision of Paul and the one of Ananias were experiences by which they came to discern something clearly. And Paul's lack of sight in verse 9 indicates not only physical blindness but psychological and spiritual blindness as well. Paul, in verse 9, cannot yet discern the truth clearly.

To turn once again to the narrative line in the ninth chapter of Acts, Christ answers Ananias' fears about confronting Paul by telling him that Paul is his chosen instrument. Ananias goes to Paul and addresses him as the Lord commanded and touches him. With the falling of scales from Paul's eyes, his vision is restored.

Et confestim ceciderunt ab oculis ejus tamquam
squamae, et visum recepit: et surgens bap-

¹²Strong, nos. 3705, 3708.

tizatus est.

Acts 9:18 (Vulg.)

And immediately there fell from his eyes as it were scales, and he received his sight; and rising up, he was baptized.

Acts 9:18 (Douay)

Bede glosses ceciderunt as follows:

Serpentis corpus squamiis tegitur, etc. usque
ad quod lumen recepit in mente.

G.O. in P.L., CXIV, 448-449.

His body was covered with the scales of the serpent, etc., until he recovered the light in his mind.

The implication here is that Paul's pre-conversion state was analogous to that of the serpent of the temptation. There is also implied the concept that light can be recovered in one's mind or spirit -- again the almost pun-like insistence on the relationship of sight and insight. Visions unfailingly end in insight.

Rabanus Maurus, in a gloss on the same word, reports:

Quod cadunt squamae, similitudo est interioris
visionis renovatae de legis velamine.

G.O. in P.L., CXIV, 449.

The fact that the scales fall, is a similitude of the interior vision freed from the veil of the law.

The likeness is of the interior insight and the covering on the law. The law cannot be known if it is covered over; Paul cannot know the truth until the covering of old attitudes and beliefs is removed and grace can provide him with insight. Implied in this quotation, also, is the rending of the veil (velum) in the Temple during the crucifixion, which signifies

the superseding of the Law.

Rabanus Maurus is, of course, completing the analogy he began in the gloss on Acts 9:8¹³ in which he said that the law is useless without faith. The removal of the covering of the Law is, by implication, the development of the knowledge of the spirit as opposed to the mere letter of the law. The covering of the Law is likened to the actual physical scales which were covering Paul's eyes and preventing him from seeing. The removal of the scales refers to the change of attitude which Paul underwent when he "lost" his prejudice against the Christian community and "gained" knowledge of its real import. In other words, this imagery reinforces our premise that as a result of this experience, Paul changed his point of view. The Visionary of The Pearl undergoes an analogous change of attitude regarding the salvation of little children.

In Acts 9:27, Barnabas in presenting Paul to the apostles tells them that Paul has seen the Lord -- another indication of the realness of the experience of visions. And, moreover, the verb chosen to indicate the seeing has implications which further substantiate our growing understanding of visions as total experiences. The text reads:

Barnabas autem apprehensum illum duxit ad
Apostolos: et narravit illis quomodo in via
vidisset Dominum, et quia locutus est ei, et
quomodo in Damasco fiducialiter egerit in
nomine Jesu.

Acts 9:27 (Vulg.)

But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the

¹³See above, pp. 48-49.

apostles and told them how he had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken to him; and how in Damascus he had dealt confidently in the name of Jesus.

Acts 9:27 (Douay)

The Latin vidisset translates the primary verb eidō which Strong notes is used only in certain past tenses. These have the meaning of seeing figuratively or literally and, by implication, in the perfect tense only, mean to know.¹⁴ The verb in question is in the perfect tense. Thus Paul did not merely see the Lord; he gained a knowledge of him.

In Chapter X of the Acts the reader is exposed to other visions -- this time those of Cornelius and Peter. These are especially relevant because of the use of the word trance, that is, ecstasy, in regard to them. The text follows:

Vir autem quidam erat in Caesarea, nomine Cornelius, centurio cohortis, quae dicitur Italica. Religiosus, ac timens Deum cum omni domo sua, faciens eleemosynas multas plebi, et deprecans Deum semper: Is vidit in visu manifeste, quasi hora diei nona, Angelum Dei introeuntem ad se, et decentem, sibi, Corneli. At ille intuens eum, timore correptus, dixit: Quid est, Domine: Dixit autem illi: Orationes tuae, et eleemosynae tuae ascenderunt in memoriam in conspectu Dei.

Acts 10:1-4 (Vulg.)

And there was a certain man in Caesarea, named Cornelius, a centurion of that which is called the Italian band; a religious man, and fearing God with all his house, giving much alms to the people, and always praying to God. This man saw a vision manifestly, about the ninth hour of the day, an angel of God, coming in unto him, and saying to him, Cornelius. And, he, beholding him, being seized with

¹⁴Strong, no. 1492.

fear said: What is it, Lord? And he said to him:
Thy prayers and thy alms are ascended for a
memorial in the sight of God.

Acts 10:1-4 (Douay)

Rabanus Maurus comments on Is vidit by insisting that Cornelius' experience happened neither in the night nor in a dream. He also insists that Cornelius' vision was modeled after those of Peter and John.

Non in nocte non in somnis, quia Gentiles grosso
sensu, etc. usque ad sicut prius in Petri et
Joannis exemplo ostensium fuit.

G.O. in P.L., CXIV, 450.

Thus, by the time of this gloss, some recognition of visions as realities which occur and are different from dreams in sleep or other happenings in the night is apparent.

A subsequent gloss on verse 7 continues this distinction in a different way.

Et cum discessisset Angelus, qui loquebatur illi,
vocavit suos domesticos suos, et militem metuentem
Dominum ex his, qui illi parebant.

Acts 10:7 (Vulg.)

And when the angel who spoke to him was departed,
he called two of his household servants, and a
soldier who feared the Lord, of them that were
under him.

Acts 10:7 (Douay)

Non ait, cum evigilasset Cornelius, quia ei nec
per somnium, nec in exstasi, sed manifeste an-
gelus visus est.

G.O. in P.L., CXIV, 450.

This is not to say, in regard to Cornelius' staying
awake, for he was neither in sleep nor in ecstasy;
yet the angel was seen manifestly.

This commentary implicitly distinguishes Cornelius' vision from

a dream which occurs in sleep, and, further, also from an ecstatic vision which, as we have noted, applies to Peter's vision which comes immediately after Cornelius' in Acts. Cornelius' vision is perhaps a corporeal vision in Augustine's terms.¹⁵

In a later passage, Acts 12:7, a whole new dimension is added to the concept of vision. This verse describes Peter in prison where he experiences a vision during which he is led out of the place of captivity. His response follows:

Et Petrum ad se reversus, dixit: Nunc scio vere quia misit Dominus Angelum suum, et eripuit me de manu Herodis, et de omni expectatione plebis Judaeorum.

Acts 12:7 (Vulg.)

And Peter coming to himself said: Now I know in very deed that the Lord hath sent his Angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectations of the people of the Jews.

Acts 12:7 (Douay)

A gloss on Ad se reversus states:

A culmine contemplationis ad hoc reversus est, quod in intellectu communi prius fuit.
G.O. in P.L., CXIV, 454.

From the peak of contemplation, he is returned to the present, to that state in common understanding where he was at first.

The striking thing here is the identification of the state of ecstatic vision with contemplation. This latter concept is one which will bear much investigation not only as to its identity, but as it exists in

¹⁵See below, p. 99 ff.

the writing by and about the mystics. For it seems likely that the mystical tradition carried as part of its make-up, the tradition of visions. A development of this aspect will be presented below.

In this same vision to Peter in prison, an angel stands by Peter and a light shines in the room to awaken the sleeping apostle. (Acts 12:7) A gloss on the word light (lumen) in this verse points out the selective aspects of the vision -- that is, the fact that visions are intended for certain people, and other people, even though they are physically present, do not experience them. This quality of the vision also occurs in Paul's on his way to Damascus; the soldiers accompanying him did not see the Lord. The gloss on Peter's vision follows:

Signum praesentiae angeli Dei cuius praesenti soli
Petro lumen praebebat, nec aliis refulgebat.
G.O. in P.L., CXIV, 454.

The light showed the sign of the presence of the
angel of God only to Peter, not to the others.

In a kind of transposition of the theme of the relationship between sight and insight, we read in Acts 13:11 that one Bar-Jesus became blind because he would not believe Paul. Paul says in part:

Et nunc ecce manus Domini super te, et eris
caecus, non videns solem usque ad tempus.
Et confestim cecidit in eum caligo, et tenebrae,
et circuiens quaerebat qui ei manum daret.
Acts 13:11 (Vulg.)

And now behold, the hand of the Lord is upon
thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the
sun for a time. And immediately there fell a mist
and darkness upon him, and going about, he
sought some one to lead him by the hand.
Acts 13:11 (Douay)

Another theme is repeated in the description of Paul in Acts 13:47.

Sic enim praecepit nobis Dominus: Posui te in
lucem gentium, ut sis in salutem usque ad ex-
tremum terrae.

Acts 13:47 (Vulg.)

For so the Lord has commanded us: I have set
thee to be the light of the gentiles; that thou
mayest be for salvation unto the utmost part of
the earth.

Acts 13:47 (Douay)

The lumen (light) which is applied to Paul looks back at the title given to Christ in the gospels, Light of the world. It also emphasizes the sight/insight theme in a particularly potent way. The Latin lumen translates the Greek phōs from the obsolete phas meaning to shine or make manifest, especially by rays; it also carries the meaning of luminousness which in its widest application can be natural or artificial, abstract or concrete, literal or figurative.¹⁶

In the sixteenth chapter of Acts we read that Paul had a vision which occurred in the night.

Et visio per noctem Paulo ostensa est, etc.
Acts 16:9 (Vulg.)

And a vision was shown to Paul in the night, etc.
Acts 16:9 (Douay)

This quotation re-introduces the theme of sight/blindness in addition to recalling that, within the tradition, visions did occur in the mode of sleep.

Augustine has a very interesting gloss on visions which occur

¹⁶Strong, no. 5457.

in sleep. It is in reference to Gen. 2:21 and out of the main stream of our interest, but carries the imprint of one of the most influential of all commentators and the developer of the theory of visions which we still have.

Immisit ergo Dominus Deus soporem in Adam:
cumque obdormisset, tulit unam de costis ejus,
et replevit carnem pro ea.

Gen 2:21 (Vulg.)

Then the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon
Adam: And when he was fast asleep, he took
one of his ribs, and filled up flesh for it.

Gen. 2:21 (Douay)

The gloss is on the words immisit ergo Dominus.

Non possunt haec corporeis oculis videri.
Sed quanto quis a visibilibus ad secreta in-
telligentiae quasi obdormiendo secesserit,
melius et sincerius videt, et. usque ad et
Ecclesiae referenda.

G.O. in P.L., CXIII, 89-90.

These things cannot be seen with corporeal eyes.
The further one departs from visible things to
the hidden things of the understanding as in
sleeping -- the better and more clearly he sees.

This illustration is included to re-iterate from another angle that dreams as well as ecstatic visions can lead to clearer understanding -- that the results of visions are not necessarily controlled by the mode in which they occur.

In Acts 22:6, Paul retells his conversion story for the benefit of the people of Tyre. In so doing the writer has developed even further the implications of light. In 22:9, for example, we find:

Et qui mecum erant, lumen quidem viderunt . . .
Acts 22:9 (Vulg.)

And they that were with me saw indeed the light . . .

Here Paul is differentiating his experience from that of the soldiers who accompanied him to Damascus. The soldiers saw only the light -- the sign of the vision -- not the vision itself. This light sign seems to join with the cloud covering the mountain where Moses' hierophany occurred and, perhaps, the light which prostrated Peter, James, and John at the Transfiguration.

In verse 11, Paul continues and says:

Et cum non viderum prae claritate luminis illius, etc.
Acts 22:11 (Vulg.)

And whereas I did not see for the brightness of
the light, etc.

Acts 22:11 (Douay)

So the theme of blindness resulting from the intensity of the light is introduced. Of course, Paul is also implying, on another level, that a vision of the Lord by a human person may result in blindness or death. In the literary vision tradition, this issue is frequently broached by various writers. The Pearl poet's pilgrim, although he gazes at the Lamb, sees only the outward signs of divinity, not the Son of God himself. Thus, he can return to normal life.

Paul, before Agrippa, uses the lumen in yet another sense. He is speaking of his mission.

Aperire oculos eorum, ut convertantur a tenebris
ad lucem, et de potestate satanae ad deum, ut
accipiant remissionem peccatorum, et sortem

inter sanctos per fidem, quae est in me.
Acts 22:18 (Vulg.)

To open their eyes, that they may be converted from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and a lot among the saints, by the faith that is in me.

Acts 22:18 (Douay)

Thus, conversion to the truth is one from darkness to light: Satan is darkness; God is Light; reception and acceptance of the Light results in forgiveness of sins and a permanent place in sacred space because of faith. Verse 23 continues:

Si passibilis Christus, si primus ex resurrectione mortuorum, lumen annuntiaturus est populo, et gentibus.

Acts 22:23 (Vulg.)

That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first to rise from the dead, and should show light to the people, and to the gentiles.

Acts 22:23 (Douay)

Ultimately, then, the Light emanates from the risen Christ.

Another record of a Pauline personal ecstasy follows:

Factum est autem reverti mihi in Jerusalem, et oranti in temple, fieri me in stupore mentis.

Acts 22:17 (Vulg.)

And it came to pass, that as I was come again to Jerusalem, and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance.

Acts 22:17 (Douay)

It is noteworthy that, although the Vulgate uses stupore mentis instead of excessus, as above, the original Greek word is ekstasis. The difference in Latin word choice does not create a real difference in meaning.

Yet another vision is recorded in Acts 23:11:

Sequenti autem nocte assistens ei Dominus, ait:
Constans esto: sicut enim testificatus es de me
in Jerusalem, sic te oportet et Romae testificari.
Acts 23:11 (Vulg.)

And the night following the Lord standing by him,
said: Be constant; for as thou hast testified of
me in Jerusalem so thou must bear witness also
at Rome.

Acts 23:11 (Douay)

This vision is interesting because it is more like Cornelius' vision than the one recorded in Acts 22. Paul's usual visions are manifestations of the Lord by which experience, that is, knowledge is gained. This one, however, is more like a message. Thus, some visions have nothing of the ecstatic about them.

Paul before Agrippa reports that Christ in his initial vision to Paul said in part:

Sed exsurge, et sta super pedes tuos: ad hoc
enim apparui tibi, ut constituam te ministrum,
et teste eorum, quae vidisti et eorum, quibus
apparebo tibi.

Acts 26:16 (Vulg.)

But rise up, and stand upon thy feet; for to this
end have I appeared to thee, that I may make thee
a minister and a witness of these things which
thou hast seen and of those things wherein I will
appear to thee.

Acts 26:16 (Douay)

From this report, it seems that the primary purpose of Paul's initial vision was not for Paul alone, but for those he would serve. However, the teacher-servant must first possess the faith he would propagate. Paul would be an instrument through which life would flow to others.

10-10-10

10-10-10

10-10-10

10-10-10

10-10-10

10-10-10

10-10-10

10-10-10

10-10-10

10-10-10

10-10-10

10-10-10

10-10-10

10-10-10

10-10-10

10-10-10

10-10-10

His visions are a source of the grace which is dispensed through him.

Strong¹⁷ records that the optomai from which Jerome translates the apparui of the Latin is by definition to know and the apparebo translates a past tense of eidō meaning to know. Thus Paul puts these words into the mouth of Christ: "to this end have I manifested (made known) myself to thee . . . and of those things wherein I will reveal (make known) to thee."

The use of the vision as a literary device can be found in the early Christian writings outside of commentaries or glosses on specific scriptural passages. The existence of these writings and the widespread popularity of some of them points, once again, to a vision tradition. An indication of some of the more important of these writings is our next topic.

One of the earliest of these extra-scriptural works is the apocryphal apocalypse usually called "The Shepherd of Hermes." Part of this work seems to go back to the time of Clement I, a first century bishop of Rome; and the later section is attributed to the reign of Pius I whose pontificate fell within 140-150 A.D.¹⁸

Of more importance to our subject than the early date of the extant incomplete Greek text, two Latin and one Ethiopic version of the work, is the fact that this book of revelations takes the form of a series

¹⁷ Strong, nos. 3700, 1492.

¹⁸ Johannes Quasten, Patrology: Vol. I: The Beginnings of Patristic Literature (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1950), p. 92.

Page 10

Page 11

Page 12

Page 13

Page 14

Page 15

Page 16

Page 17

Page 18

Page 19

Page 20

Page 21

Page 22

Page 23

Page 24

Page 25

Page 26

Page 27

Page 28

Page 29

Page 30

of visions. It is important to note that in this very early work, the agents of the revelations are two heavenly figures -- neither of whom are Christ or God. The first figure is an old woman who is a physical representation of the Church. In the course of the first part, she gradually casts off her signs of age and emerges in the fourth vision as a bride, one of the elect of God. In the fifth vision of the work, an angel of penance in the guise of a shepherd appears to the narrator. It is from this second figure that the work gets its title.¹⁹

The dogmatic and ethical teachings of the Shepherd are not important to our consideration. The point is that very early in the Christian tradition, the vision, as a form by which man communicated with personages of heavenly origin to receive revelations, explanations and commands, is a viable form. The fact that the personage of the first four visions becomes a bride figure makes her a possible precursor for the Pearl Maiden herself.

Jerome states that "The Shepherd of Hermes" was almost unknown in the West; therefore the extent to which it was known in the middle ages is debatable.

Another interesting example of vision literature from the very early Christian era is "The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas" from the first Acts of the Martyrs.²⁰ This account gains authenticity for its early

¹⁹Quasten, I, pp. 92-94.

²⁰Ibid, p. 181.

100000

100000

100000

100000

100000

100000

100000

100000

100000

100000

100000

100000

100000

100000

100000

readers because the largest part of it is purported to be Perpetua's own diary which she left in her own hand.²¹ Moreover, there is some evidence that some of the chapters and the editing were done by Tertullian himself.²² St. Augustine is at pains to tell his readers that these Acts are not on the same level as the canonical scriptures.²³ The necessity of such a warning attests to the popularity of the work.

In the work, Perpetua asks for her first vision. She does so because she knows herself to be one who "was privileged to converse with the Lord."²⁴ That Perpetua was mystic can easily be implied from such a statement. Perpetua has several more visions in which she learns in beautifully wrought symbolism of her own impending martyrdom, and of the salvation of her brother whom she sees in a pool of water. Her companion Saturus also records a vision.

St. Augustine puts this apocryphal work in the tradition of ecstatic visions with the following commentary:

"Where was she when assaulted?" cried Augustine, referring to this incident when wild bulls tore her. She appeared to know nothing about it and asked when she was to have her tussle with the wild cow. To her surprise she was told it was all over and could not believe it till she looked down and

²¹Wallis, trans., "The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas," in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Chap. 1, par. 1.

²²Quasten, I, 181.

²³De anima et eius origine, I, 10, 12, quoted in Quasten, I, 181.

²⁴Wallis, trans., "The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas," Chap. 1, par. 3.

saw her torn body and bleeding wounds.
 And torn by so furious a wild beast, without feeling her wounds, after that furious combat, she asked when it would begin? Why did she not see what all the world saw? What did she enjoy who did not feel such pain? By what love, by what vision, by what potion was she so transported out of herself, and as it were, divinely inebriated, to seem without feeling in a mortal body?²⁵

Yet another work of interest to this study is attributed to Clement, who, traditionally, is a friend of Peter and his successor as Bishop of Rome. It is the Pseudo-Clementine described by Quasten as "a comprehensive novel with a didactic purpose whose protagonist is Clement of Rome."²⁶ This narrative in the last analysis is merely an introduction to the missionary sermons of St. Peter of which twenty are extant. Of these, Homily 17, Chapters 14-19, are especially to our point because herein St. Peter homilizes on the value and authenticity of visions.²⁷

However, "the writer . . . seems to have had no intention of presenting his statements as facts; but, choosing the disciples of Christ and their followers as his principal characters, he has put into their mouths the most important of his beliefs, and woven the whole together

²⁵Sister Sylvia Mary, *Pauline and Johannine Mysticism* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964), p. 39.

²⁶Quasten, I, 114.

²⁷"The Clementine Homilies: Homily 17, Chapters 13-19" in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, VIII, 321-324.

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

by a thread of fictitious narrative."²⁸

In the homily under discussion, Simon Magus plays the questioner to Peter. Simon maintains that one can learn more surely from a vision than from seeing with one's own eyes and hearing with one's own ears. His argument is that a vision or apparition doesn't merely present an object to view, but inspires him who sees it with confidence, for it comes from God.²⁹

Peter replies that the opposite is true because an evil demon or a deceptive spirit may pretend to be from God in a vision. Simon then maintains that only the just have true visions. Peter calls this false and at first backs down from proving it to Simon because of the latter's ignorance.

Then, in Chapter 16, Peter proves his argument by maintaining that a just man does not see God face to face and live.

Et Petrus: Mei, inquit, sum memor, quod promiserim ostendere, et ea de re absque Scripturis ac per Scripturas demonstrationem exhibere. Et nunc loquentem audi. Novimus multos (si quidem aequo animo accipis, alioquin astantes iudices habeo) idolorum cultores et adulteros ac omnimodo peccatores conspexisse visa atque vera somnio, nonnullos vero daemonum visiones. Non enim dico a mortalium oculis videri posse incorpoream Patris aut Filii Speciem, quia maximo lumine resplendet. Unde ab homine in carnem converso non cerni, non est invidentis Dei, sed miserantis. Nam qui viderit, vivere non potest. Luminis quippe exsuperantia

²⁸Thomas Smith, "Introduction to Pseudo-Clementine Writings," in Ante-Nicene Fathers, VIII, 73.

²⁹"The Clementine Homilies," Chap. 13, p. 322.

cermentis dissolvit carnem, praeterquam si Dei ineffabili virtute caro vertatur in luminis naturam, quo possit lumen videre, a carne. Nam Patrem intueri absque conversione, ad solum Filium pertinet. Ad justos autem non simili modo. In resurrectione enim mortuorum, quando corporibus mutati in lumen erunt angelis aequales, tunc poterunt cernere. Denique et si angelorum aliquis, ut videatur ab homine, missus fuerit, mutatur in carnem, ut per carnem cerni possit. Incorpoream siquidem virtutem non solum Filii, sed nec angeli nemo potest cernere. Sin vero nonnullus visionem conspexerit, mali daemonis eam esse intelligat.

P.G., II, 398-399.

And Peter said: "I remember that I promised to prove this point, and to give my proofs in regard to it from Scripture and apart from Scripture. And now listen to what I say. We know that there are many (if you will pardon me the statement; and if you don't, I can appeal to those who are present as judges) who worship idols, commit adultery, and sin in every way, and yet they see true visions and dreams, and some of them have also apparitions of demons. For I maintain that the eyes of mortals cannot see the incorporeal form of the Father or Son, because it is illumined by exceeding great light. Wherefore it is not because God envies, but because He pities, that He cannot be seen by man who has been turned into flesh. For he who sees God cannot live. For the excess of light dissolves the flesh of him who sees; unless by the secret power of God the flesh be changed into the nature of light, so that it can see light or the substance of light be changed into flesh, so that it can be seen by flesh. For the power to see the Father, without undergoing any change, belongs to the Son alone. But the just shall also in like manner behold God; for in the resurrection of the dead, when they have been changed, as far as their bodies are concerned, into light, and become like the angels, they shall be able to be seen by flesh. For no one can see the incorporeal power not only of the Son, but not even of an angel. But if one sees an apparition, he should know that his is the apparition of an evil demon.³⁰

³⁰"The Clementine Homilies," Chap. 16, pp. 321-323.

Peter's final conclusion in Chapter 19 is that Simon has not really seen the Lord because his actions belie him.

Itaque si tibi etiam Jesus noster in viso conspectus apparuit ac locutus est, tanquam adversario iratus, ideo visa et insomnia, vel quoque per extrinsecas revelationes dissevit. An vero potest aliquis per visionem institui ad doctrinam? Quod si dicas posse, quare per annum integrum cum vigilantibus permanes collectus est Dominus? Et quo pacto tibi hoc ipsum credamus, quod tibi apparuerit. Et quo modo tibi apparuerit, cum contraria illius doctrinae sentias? Sin vero ab illo per unam horam visitatus ac edoctus, factus es apostolus, voces illius praedica, illius scita interpretare, illius apostolos ama, mihi qui cum eo versatus sum ne bellum indicas. Nam contra me, firmam petram et Ecclesiae fundamentum, adversarius restitisti. Nisi esses adversarius, profecto de me detrahens, praedicationem meam probris non insectareris, ut qui dico quae ipse astans a Domino audivi, non credar, quasi scilicet condemnationem merear, quamvis laudari debeam. Aut si me reum dicis, Deum qui mihi Christum revelavit accusas, et in eum qui me propter revelationem beatum praedicavit inveheris. Sed si quidem vere cupis adminiculari veritati, primum a nobis disce, quae nos ab eo didicimus, et factus veritatis discipulus fias noster adiutor.

P.G., II, 402-403.

If, then, our Jesus appeared to you in a vision, made Himself known to you, and spoke to you, it was as one who is enraged with an adversary; and this is the reason why it was through visions and dreams, or through revelations that were from without, that He spoke to you. But can any one be rendered fit for instruction through apparitions? And if you will say, 'It is possible,' then I ask 'Why did our teacher abide and discourse a whole year to those who were awake?' And how are we to believe your word, when you tell us that He appeared to you? And how did He appear to you, when you entertain opinions contrary to His teaching? But if you were seen and taught by Him, and became His apostle for a single hour, proclaim His utterances, interpret His sayings, love His apostles, contend not with me who companied with Him? For in direct opposition to me, who am

a firm rock, the foundation of the Church, you now stand. If you were not opposed to me, you would not accuse, and revile the truth proclaimed by me, in order that I may not be believed when I state what I myself have heard with my own ears from the Lord, as if I were evidently a person that was condemned and in bad repute. But if you say I am condemned, you bring an accusation against God, who revealed the Christ to me, and you inveigh against Him who pronounced me blessed on account of the revelation. But if, indeed, you really wish to work in the cause of truth, learn first of all from us what we have learned from Him, and, becoming a disciple of the truth, become a fellow-worker with us."³¹

The brief excerpts from The Pseudo-Clementines exhibit a continual interest on the part of the early Christians as to how God reveals himself to men and whether a man may see God and live. Implicitly, we are already face-to-face with the medieval critic's problem. In The Pearl, the Visionary does not see God and lives; the Dante of The Divine Comedy sees God and lives to tell of his pilgrimage but not of the experience of God directly.

As interesting as these early writings have proved to be, the one to which we should give most of our attention, the one which most surely is the center of the vision tradition from the fourth to the fourteenth century is the Visio Pauli, called by James The Apocalypse of Paul.³²

This work has been given various titles throughout its history. Theodore Silverstein, who did a major study of the various extant texts

³¹"The Clementine Homilies," Chap. 19, pp. 323-324.

³²The Apocryphal New Testament, trans. M.R. James (1924; corrected Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1953).

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

containing the poem, calls it the Visio Sancti Pauli.³³ Finally, St. Augustine refers to it as the "Revelation of Paul" in his condemnation of it.

Silverstein states that the Apocalypse of Paul was written in Greek, probably by an Egyptian of as early as the third century. It was reissued some time after 388 with a preface that sought to support the authority of the book by relating the story of its miraculous discovery in Tarsus. The chief sources of the work are the apocalypses of Peter, Elias, Zaphariah; much of the content of them is transmitted in the Apocalypse of Paul.³⁴

The importance of this work increased from the eighth century so that it became one of the chief formative elements in the development of the later legends of Heaven and Hell which culminated in the Divine Comedy of Dante who seems to have known some form of the Apocalypse at first hand. There are echoes of it in the works of Chaucer who was influenced directly through the Purgatory of St. Patrick, its English-Irish pendant.³⁵

Its widespread influence can also be measured by the number of earlier medieval visions in which its influence is perceptible, sometimes faintly, often very plainly indeed. Another measure of its influence is

³³ Visio Sancti Pauli: The History of the Apocalypse in Latin Together With Nine Texts (London: Christophers, 1935).

³⁴ Silverstein, p. e.

³⁵ Ibid. M.R. James cites a particular instance of the influence of the Apocalypse on the Divine Comedy. In an early canto of the "Inferno," (II, 28) Dante mentions the visit of the "Chosen Vessel" to Hell -- an undoubted allusion to the Apocalypse.

1000

1000

1000

recorded in the constant opposition it met from ecclesiastical authorities.

Sozomen, for example, is quoted by James as saying:

The book now circulated as the Apocalypse of Paul the apostle, which none of the ancients ever say, is commended by most monks; but some contend that this book was found in the reign we write of [Theodosius]. For they say there was found underground at Tarsus of Cilicia, in Paul's house, a marble chest, and that it was this book. However, when I inquired about this, a Cilician, a priest of the Church of Tarsus, told me it was a lie. He was a man whose gray hairs showed him to be of considerable age, and he said that no such thing had happened in their city and that he wondered whether the tale (or the book) had not been made up by heretics.

Ecclesiastical History, vii, 19.³⁶

And Saint Augustine in reference to II. Cor. 12:20 in his Tractatus

Joannes XCVIII, Chap. XVI, par. 8,³⁷ condemns it soundly.

Quamquam et inter ipsos spirituales sunt utique aliis alii capaciores atque meliores; ita ut quidam illorum ad ea pervenerit quae non licet homini loqui. Qua occasione vani quidam Apocalypsim Pauli, quam sana non recipit Ecclesia, nescio quibus fabulis plenam, stultissima praesumptione finxerunt; dicentes hanc esse unde dixerat raptum se fuisse in tertium coelum, et illic audisse ineffabilia verba quae non licet homini loqui (II Cor. 12:2, 4) Utcumque illorum tolerabilis esset audacia, si se audisse dixisset quae adhuc non licet homini loqui: cum veno dixerit, quae non licet homini loqui; isti qui sunt qui haec quideant impudenter et infeliciter loqui?

P.L., XXXV, 1885.

. . . Although even among the spiritual themselves there are some, doubtless, who are of greater capacity and in a better condition than others; so

³⁶ Quoted in James, p. 525.

³⁷ Cited by Silverstein, p. 4; Migne, P.L., XXXV, 1885.

that one of them attained even to things of which it is not lawful for a man to speak. Taking advantage of which, there have been some vain individuals, who, with a presumption that betrays the greatest folly, have forged a Revelation of Paul, crammed with all manner of fables, which has been rejected by the Orthodox Church; affirming it to be whereof he had said that he was caught up into the third heaven, and there heard unspeakable words "which it is not lawful for a man to utter." Nevertheless, the audacity of such might be tolerable had he said that he heard words which it is not yet lawful for a man to utter; but when he said, "which it is not lawful for a man to utter," who are they that dare to utter them with such impudence and non-success?³⁸

The very number of the objections to the work indicates the strength of its appeal.³⁹ Moreover, it is related in content to the homilies of Origen (Psalmos, V) and Marcarius of Egypt (#XXII) on the fate of souls at death, as well as to the "Revelation of Esdras," and to a direct source of the "Apocalypse of the Virgin," and perhaps in part to the Slavonic Enoch. It seems, finally, to have influenced the Testament of Abraham as well as several of the visions that were current in the West during the late Middle Ages. Therefore, it linked the other-world lore of the first Christian centuries with that of the twelfth to the fifteenth.⁴⁰ And, finally, right to the point of this study, within three cen-

³⁸Quoted in A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, VII, 380.

³⁹Silverstein, note #14, p. 93, cites Fabricus, Codex apocryphus Novi Testamenti (2nd ed., Hamburg, 1719), I, 943-953, as bringing together many of the objections in a convenient collection.

⁴⁰Silverstein, p. 3.

turies of the time of its re-issue (after 380), it had penetrated to England where Aldhelm echoes the traditional disapproval, not without a little regret.⁴¹

The Apocalypse appealed not because of its style which is described as ill-proportioned and full of repetitions, nor because of its originality -- its author seldom rose above a blundering and barely disguised plagiarism, but for its contents. It is the most inclusive of the apocalypses, seems the most reliable, and is of the greatest interest to the living as to the conditions of existence in other worlds.⁴²

Silverstein concludes part of his study by saying:

Whatever the reasons and circumstances the Apocalypse was in fact successful, especially in western Europe. Here, at first in the long texts which preserved with some fullness the contents of the fourth century original, and later in a group of abbreviated reductions, its career proceeded without interruption for more than a thousand years. The simplest indication of this continuity is to be found century by century in the evidence of texts and manuscripts or of⁴³ references in various ecclesiastical writings.

It seems evident, therefore, that the Apocalypse of Paul, a basic vision in structure, informed the literary tradition of which The Pearl is one culmination. To apply a general statement of James, one may conclude that this bit of apocrypha "exercised an influence (wholly disproportionate to [its] intrinsic value) so great and so widespread, that no

⁴¹ De laudibus virginitatis in P.L., LXXXIX, 721-722.

⁴² Silverstein, p. 5.

⁴³ Ibid.

11.000

11.000

11.000

11.000

11.000

11.000

11.000

11.000

11.000

one who cares about the history of Christian thought and Christian art can possibly afford to neglect it."⁴⁴

The Apocalypse itself begins with the expected quotation from

II Cor.:

. . . but I will come to the visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ about fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I know not, or out of the body, I know not: God knoweth), such an one rapt even to the third heaven. And I know such a man (whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell; God knoweth): That he was caught up into paradise, and heard secret words, which it is not granted to man to utter.

II. Cor. 12:1-4 (Douay)

Paragraphs one and two deal with the finding of the text as indicated in the quotation from Sozomen.⁴⁵ An interesting note of this section records that the shoes of Paul were found in the box with the revelations. Paragraph three records instructions given to Paul to speak to the people of the outcries of all created things against them. The sun, moon, stars, sea, waters, and earth each appeal to God against men. The text is interspersed with answers from God to the effect that:

I know all things, and there is none that can hide himself from his sin. And their ungodliness do I know; but my holiness suffereth them until they turn and repent. But if they return not unto me, I will judge them.⁴⁶

Paragraphs seven to ten instruct the people to bless the Lord

⁴⁴ James, "Preface," p. xiii.

⁴⁵ See above, p. 73.

⁴⁶ James, p. 528, par. 6.

at the

the

and

in the

as of

in the

the

the

the

the

the

the

the

the

the

the

the

and relate the visits of angels to God to report on men -- both the good and the evil. The next section (11 to 18) tells of the Narrator's being caught up by an angel and carried to the third heaven, to view the deaths and judgments of the righteous and the damned.

The following section (19 to 30) details Paul's views of the "places of the righteous." He passes with an angel guide through the gate on which the names of the righteous are embossed in gold. Enoch greets Paul at the gate and Elias salutes him. In paragraph twenty-one, Paul learns that he may not reveal what he sees and hears in paradise: " . . . and I heard there words which it is not lawful for a man to utter . . ." ⁴⁷ Then the angel shows him what he must relate and tell openly. This concerns the land of promise of the beatitudes to which the souls of the righteous are sent for a time after death. He learns that at the second coming of Christ, the first earth will be destroyed and Christ will come to dwell in the land of promise. This land flows with milk and honey and the trees bear fruit in clusters of ten and twelve. To the virgins and those who afflict themselves for the name of the Lord, God will give a seven-fold greater reward.

Next, the Narrator is taken by means of a golden ship to the city of Christ, the familiar one of Revelations with twelve gates and four rivers. At the entrance to this city, Paul and his guide pass the souls of the righteous proud who humble themselves continually waiting for the

⁴⁷James, p. 536.

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

28

29

30

31

32

33

34

35

day of Christ. Paul meets also the prophets, the children slain by Herod, and the entertainers of strangers: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Lot, and Job. In the center of the city, Paul sees David leading the singing of all present in continuous "Alleluias."

Sections thirty-one to forty-five record the visit of Paul to Hell. Here he sees a river of fire in which condemned sinners are immersed more or less fully. This river contains those who were "neither hot nor cold" among others. The river of fire flows over the men and women who did not trust; the devils choke priests who did not fulfill their ministries, and stone iniquitous bishops; the defiled virgins have red hot chains on their necks. Opening a well sealed with seven seals, Paul views those who denied the humanity of Christ and His presence in the Eucharist; this is a spot of unbearable stench. The archangel Michael comes into Hell and Paul prays for the condemned souls; his prayer is answered by Christ who gives the tormented souls rest on each Sabbath.

The last section of the Apocalypse (paragraphs forty-five to fifty-one) relates Paul's second vision of Paradise. This time he is shown the primordial garden, and is hailed by the Virgins, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the twelve patriarchs, Moses, twelve Old Testament martyrs, Lot, Job, Noe, Elias and Eliseus. He is then commanded to make known his revelations to men.

At least one of the extant versions of the Apocalypse has Paul meeting Zacharias, John the Baptist, Abel, and at the end, Adam. The text is completed with a doxology.

1.000

1.000

1.000

1.000

1.000

1.000

1.000

1.000

1.000

1.000

1.000

The Apocalypse of Paul as a conduit of the vision tradition takes us into the time of the composition of The Pearl. It is, as we mentioned above, the center of the vision tradition from the fourth to the fourteenth centuries. Other conduits of the vision tradition exist in the scriptures -- especially those surrounding the conversion of Paul, glosses written on these passages, and in many extra-canonical works of the early Church. We have examined only a select few of the latter.

It is appropriate at this point to stop and summarize some of the conventions of this vision tradition.

One point basic to all the others we have discovered is that visions are viewed as actual manifestations of sacred realities; and, therefore, may involve real encounters between a heavenly personage and a live human being. At times this personage is Christ himself and the meeting so intense that words cannot be written to describe the communion which takes place. At other times, as in The Pearl, the receptor of the vision experiences truth in the guise of another personage, the Pearl Maiden. The extra-canonical works mentioned in this section give special evidence that this form of encounter was part of the long tradition.

And, although the Visionary of The Pearl does look at the Lamb in the heavenly Jerusalem, he does not see, that is, experience the person of the Lord as does Paul in his conversion vision. I have reached this conclusion regarding the Visionary because his attention is too easily moved from the Lamb back to the Pearl Maiden.

Delit þe Lombe for to deuise
 Wyth much meruayle in mynde went,
 Best wat₃ he, blyþest, and moste to pryse,
 þat euer I herde of speche spent;
 So worþly whyt wern wede₃ hys,
 His loke₃ symple, hymself so gent.
 Bot a wounde ful wyde and weete con wyse
 Anende hys hert, pur₃ hyde torente.
 Of his quyte syde his blod outsprent,
 Alas, þo₃t I, who did þat spyt?
 Ani breste for bale a₃t haf forbrent
 Er he þerto hade had delyt.
 The Lombe delyt non lyste to wene.
 þa₃ he were hurt and wounde hade,
 In his sembelaunt wat₃ neuer sene,
 So wern his glente₃ glorious glade.
 I loked among his meyny schene
 How þay wyth lyf wern laste and lade;
 þen sa₃ I þer my lyttel quene
 þat I wende had standen by me in sclade.
 Lorde, much of mirþe wat₃ þat ho made
 Among her fere₃ þat wat₃ so quyt!
 þat sy₃t me gart to þenk to wade
 For luf-longyng in gret delyt.

(ll. 1129-1152)

In addition, the Visionary plunges into the river to be with the Pearl

Maiden and not the Lamb.

Delyt me drof in y₃e and ere,
 My mane₃mynde to maddyng malte;
 Quen I se₃ my frely, I wolde be þere,
 By₃onde þe water þaz ho were walte.
 I þo₃t þat nobyng my₃t me dere
 To fech me bur and take me halte,
 And to start in þe strem schulde non me stere,
 To swymme þe remnaunt, þa₃ þer swalte.

(ll. 1153-1160)

In other words, The Pearl has to do with a man who learns to deal with
 the loss of a creature, but not with one who is seized into a direct em-
 brace of the Creator of that creature. The absence of mystical rapture
 does not make his experience less real, vital or important. Knowledge

Page 1

Page 2

Page 3

Page 4

Page 5

Page 6

Page 7

Page 8

Page 9

Page 10

Page 11

Page 12

Page 13

Page 14

Page 15

of the Lord gained through creatures is not less valid than that acquired through direct experience. The latter kind is usually reserved for the after life and, according to all the mystics, it is given only as a pure gift in this life.

Second, visions in this early tradition are "localized" in sacred space or St. Paul's third heaven of the contemplation of God. Thus the setting of The Pearl is not just the garden, with all its many-faceted implications; neither is it just the heavenly city of Jerusalem. It is the garden where God walked with Adam because the Pearl Visionary walks with a guide who leads him to the knowledge of the Lord. It is the Jerusalem which has existed in aeternum because the Jewish belief that it was created with the prelapsarian garden of Genesis is part of the literary tradition through the descriptions in Revelations and St. Paul's record of his own visions which are so influential in the total tradition. It is, of course, also Dante's garden, which is to say the earthly paradise. The Pearl and The Divine Comedy are both inheritors of a long list of implications which found their way into the vision tradition.

Third, persons who receive visions are viewed as people of very changed attitudes -- Peter and Paul -- as a result of vision experiences. The changed attitudes result from insight, symbolized in the light-darkness motif noticeable in many places and the blindness-sight interpretations of Paul's experience. This change of attitude is quite definitely present in the post-Visionary of The Pearl. He goes from a position of one who is irreconcilable to the loss of a child and thus

1870

1871

1872

1873

1874

1875

1876

1877

1878

1879

1880

1881

1882

1883

skeptical and doubting about the very salvation of small children, to the position of a man who has worked through his sorrow of loss on all levels of his person, and can accept it psychologically and spiritually -- that is, in a totally human way. He has passed successfully through the trauma of a shock and incomprehensible sense of loss, to one of hope. He is changed utterly. He will not, as a result, convert the Gentiles, or radically alter the structure of a major institution. He does, however, pray, "Now al be to þat Prynce₃ paye." (l. 1176) The beauty of individual reconciliation need not suffer in comparison with that of a Paul.

Then again, commentaries on scriptural visions were often used as didactic tools. While certainly not the only or most important contributor of the didactic element to the medieval tradition, the vision tradition did carry this aspect within it. Thus the parables of the workers in the vineyard and the pearl of great price, added to the direct instruction of the Visionary on the salvation of young children and their place in the Heavenly Jerusalem which together form a large part of the total poem, are in the full stream of a tradition which has didacticism as a prominent element.

Implicitly, also, from the early Christian sources of the vision tradition, comes a recognition that some visions are ecstatic, others occur in dreams, and still others occur without spiriting the receptor into a state of ecstasy, that is, without the individual's really losing contact with the world of earth. It seems clear that the entry of The Pearl visionary into the garden is through ecstasy as was discussed above.

100

101

102

103

104

105

106

107

108

109

110

111

So The Pearl is an ecstatic vision; however, the "wakned" (l. 1191) of the Visionary includes the use of the word "drem." (l. 1170) Gordon glosses this last word with the second meaning of "vision." The Middle English Dictionary⁴⁸ lists as under the second meaning of drem, 1. (a) a vision experienced in sleep, a dream, and under 2. (a), a vision and gives l. 790 of The Pearl as an example of its use:

b apostel hem segh in gostly drem

Finally, to turn away for a moment from the specific work in question, there are several facets of the vision tradition present in this early material which it is important to mention because they become even more prominent in the mystic tradition. These are, first of all, the early recognition of the relationship possible between a seer of visions and a mystic. St. Augustine's comment on Perpetua and the gloss on Peter's ecstasy are both rather explicit about this.

There is, in addition, mentioned briefly in the Pseudo-Clement extra-canonical homily, the existence of what becomes an increasingly important controversy among the mystics, that is, whether or not it is possible to see God and live. The Pearl poet, I believe, avoids this problem because of the visionary's more explicit interest in the creature rather than the Creator. Dante's avoidance of an "awakening" scene in his great vision may very well be connected with this facet of the tradition.

⁴⁸Hans Kurath and Sherman A. Kuhn (Ann Arbor, Mich.: The University of Michigan Press, 1959).

11-15-

11-16-

11-17-

11-18-

11-19-

11-20-

The last note that it seems important to make at this juncture is a re-iteration of the pervasive influence of the Visio Pauli in the medieval world. I make this point again because it contains in some fashion most of the so-called apocryphal material which was so fascinating to the people and so condemned by the Church authorities. This extra-canonical account of Paul's ecstatic vision is a definite conduit of the vision tradition.

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

III. CONTEMPLATION IN MYSTICAL SOURCES AS A CONDUIT OF THE VISION TRADITION

We have discussed ecstasy as a para-physical state in which a vision, a supernatural encounter between a creature and a heavenly personage, can occur. It now remains to relate contemplation, especially as it occurs within the mystical state, to ecstatic visions.

Mystical contemplation is a name for the supreme knowing or experiencing of the Lord by a personage gifted with an ecstatic vision. In commenting on a particular gloss of St. Peter's vision,¹ it was noted that the state of ecstasy in which St. Peter found himself was called contemplation; so the term has tradition behind it. Perhaps mystical contemplation is best defined as "an experimental knowledge of God."²

Now, within the writings of the mystics, the para-physical vision state is given some notice. Therefore, an historical overview of the mystics most influential and most relevant to medieval literature will deepen our awareness of the vision tradition in another facet of medieval life. For, to state what must almost be a truism, the religious or sacred writings of this period influenced and were influenced by their counterparts in the secular sphere -- if, indeed, this kind of artificial distinction was made by medieval man at all.

Be that as it may, it seems important to define mysticism also.

¹In regard to Acts 12:7, see above, p. 57.

²U. Aumanon, "Contemplation," NCE, 1967.

1962

1963

1964

1965

1966

1967

1968

1969

The relationship between it and mystical contemplation will become apparent immediately. "Theologia mystica est experimentalis cognitio habita de Deo per amoris unitatis complexum." (Mystical theology is knowledge of God by experience, arrived at through the embrace of unifying love.)³ Corbishly's explanation of the definition merits quotation also.

There are three points to notice: 1) the use of the term mystical theology . . . associates the mystical state with, while distinguishing it from, natural theology, which enables man to arrive at some knowledge of God by natural reason; also from dogmatic theology, which treats of the knowledge of God arrived at by revelation. (2) We do come to know God through mystical theology. (3) This knowledge is obtained not by intellectual processes but by the more direct experience implied by the term "unifying love."⁴

A twentieth century writer, Evelyn Underhill, who studied the mystical state and the mystics themselves for many years, arrived at the following interpretation of the mystical experience:

The Thomistic philosophy of Maritain and the psychological researches of Maréchal, tend to support . . . [mysticism as an] . . . activity of the transcendental self; genuinely supernatural, yet not necessarily involving any abnormal manifestations, and linked by the ascending "degrees of prayer" with the subject's "ordinary" religious life.⁵

³ Jean Gerson, quoted by T. Corbishly, "Mysticism," NCE, 1967.

⁴ Ibid., p. 175.

⁵ Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness, 11th ed. (London: Methuen and Co., 1949), p. x.

This same author insists, however, that

though the mystic life means organic growth, its first term must be sought in ontology [science of being or reality] . . . For the real sanction of that life does not inhere in the fugitive experiences or even the transformed personality of the subject; but in the metaphysical object which that subject apprehends.⁶

And Friedrich von Hugel posits two doctrines concerning mysticism which add further to our understanding. He maintains that though mysticism is an essential element in full human religion, it can never be the whole content of such religion. It needs to be embodied in some degree of history, dogma, and institutions if it is to reach the sense-conditioned mind. He maintains further that any antithesis between the religions of "authority" and of "spirit" or between the "Church" and the "mystic" is false. Each requires the other . . . "It is the 'inclusive' mystic, whose freedom and originality are fed but not hampered by the spiritual tradition within which he appears, who accepts the incarnational status of the human spirit and 'can find the inward in the outward as well as the inward in the inward,' who shows us in their fullness and beauty the life-giving possibilities of the soul transfigured in God."⁷

Our study, then, starts from these premises. Mysticism or mystical contemplation is a real way to know God; it does not need to involve any abnormal manifestations; it finds its reason for being in the Holy One who is perceived; and it can and does exist within organized

⁶Underhill, p. viii.

⁷Quoted in Underhill, pp. ix-x.

2000

2001

2002

2003

2004

2005

2006

2007

2008

2009

2010

2011

religion or the Church.

Because we are pursuing this subject so as to arrive at a better understanding of visions, per se, some further elaboration of the second premise stated above is in order. Let us turn then to the psycho-physical accidents which often accompany the mystical experience.

Mystical phenomena in Christian spirituality are the internal and external manifestations that ordinarily proceed from the authentic mystical activity of a soul (concomitant mystical phenomena) and the extraordinary graces, Charisms, or miracles that sometimes accompany mystical activity but are not essentially related to mystical operations as such (charismatic mystical phenomena).⁸

Concomitant mystical phenomena are called ordinary mystical phenomena and are supernatural quoad substantiam; charismatic mystical phenomena are called extraordinary and are supernatural quoad modum.⁹

Visions are classed as charismatic phenomena and are defined as "the perception of an object that is naturally invisible to man."¹⁰ Visions may be divided into corporeal (perception by bodily eyes), imaginative (result of a phantasm in the imagination), and intellectual (result of intelligible species impressed on the intellect).¹¹ These divisions, standard in the twentieth century, were originated by St. Augustine.

⁸ N. Lohkamp, "Mystical Phenomena," NCE, 1967.

⁹ R. Garrigou-Lagrange, Christian Perfection and Contemplation, (St. Louis, 1937), pp. 235-238.

¹⁰ N. Lohkamp, p. 173.

¹¹ Ibid.

101

102

103

104

105

106

107

108

109

110

111

Augustine's work is seminal to the whole vision tradition as will be discussed below.

Corporeal and imaginative visions may be caused by some natural power or by the devil, and therefore such possibilities must be investigated. Intellectual visions could not be caused immediately by the devil, who has no direct access to the human intellect, but they could proceed from a natural or a supernatural cause.¹²

The recognition that all visions are not necessarily true, that is, from God, leads us naturally into some examination of them in terms of psychology. This section is not intended as an anachronistic addition to the medieval authors under consideration, but rather as added insights into the phenomena in question. The literature stands on its merits with or without our explanation; our exposition from a twentieth century point of view, however, may enable us to receive more confidently and clearly the communication which the medieval author sent out. Moreover, such an inquiry may prove to point out the wisdom of intuitive psychology present in medieval literature which does not pale in sight of our modern scientific schematized psychology.

To continue, then:

A religious phenomenon, e.g., a vision, if it sometimes closely resembles, apart of course from the difference of object, an ordinary psychological fact, presents when defined and intensified, exceptional, even abnormal considerations which tend to assimilate it to pathological facts. But . . . this analogy is

¹² N. Lohkamp, p. 173.

purely superficial, for, on a closer examination, the strangest mystical phenomena appear to be co-ordinated under points of view which have nothing to do with delirium, and moreover prolong themselves in a very consecutive manner in practices and enterprises of high moral value most justifiable from the point of view of one who admits the fundamental truths of religion. We may add that the appearance of these strange phenomena is allied, more often than one may think, with a perfect psychological equilibrium, and on occasion with a most remarkable practical sense. Here, then, are facts (sudden conversions, illumination, visions, ecstasies, clairvoyance, temptations, etc.) which do not easily enter our scientific framework . . . mystical phenomena seem to depend on the circumstances of their appearance on an influence which surpasses and dominates our known physiological and psychological laws.¹³

Maréchal here is admitting the real limits of the science of psychology. Because it is a science, it limits itself to phenomena and thus will never give us more than a partial view of reality. ". . . it reaches the relative aspect only of the real."¹⁴ And, most emphatically

. . . miracles and direct communication with God in ecstasy and the supernaturality of religious acts, cannot be taxed a priori with impossibility . . . because God, the first cause, is not controlled in his action by the determinism of empirical causality which has no absolute value.¹⁵

In other words, the presence of para-physical phenomena in or around a mystical experience does not, from a psychological point of view, validate or invalidate the true experience. Psychology works only

¹³ Joseph Maréchal, S.J., Studies in the Psychology of the Mystics, pp. 28-29.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 43.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 48.

100

101

102

103

104

105

106

107

108

109

110

111

112

with phenomena, not with a faith experience.

Now it is also possible to examine these para-physical phenomena from the viewpoint of the mystic. What does the receiver of the experience sense? How does this experience differ from that of ordinary prayer?

Father Augustin Poulain explains it this way. "God is not satisfied merely to help us to think of him and to remind us of his presence (as in the recollection inherent in ordinary prayer); he gives us an experimental intellectual awareness of his presence."¹⁶

If the fundamental mystical phenomenon is then the intuition of God as present, the remainder of the phenomena, such as physical ecstasy, suspension of the senses, sensible or imaginary visions, interior words, levitations, miracles, clairvoyance, and so on -- are pure accessories which may or may not accompany the fundamental state and the immediate cause of which may be diverse.¹⁷

In summary, then, our inquiry into the mystics and their writings as to how they explain or discuss visions is undertaken from the premise that mysticism is the immediate intuition of God by the soul and that this high contemplation implies a new element, qualitatively distinct from the normal psychological processes and from ordinary grace: the active non-symbolic presentation of God to the soul, with its psy-

¹⁶The Graces of Interior Prayer, p. 64.

¹⁷Maréchal, p. 102.

chological correlative.¹⁸

A great mass of material could be quoted to trace the continuation of the vision tradition in mysticism. An attempt has been made to treat the most important, that is, the most influential sources. In structuring this study, it has become apparent that the

great periods of mystical activity tend to correspond with the great periods of artistic, material, and intellectual civilization. As a rule they come immediately after, and seem to complete such periods; those outbursts of vitality in which man makes fresh conquests over his universe apparently producing, as their last stage, a type of heroic character which extends these victories to the spiritual sphere. When science, politics, literature and the arts -- the domination of nature and the ordering of life -- have risen to their height and produced their greatest works, the mystic comes to the front; snatches the torch and carries it on. It is almost as if he were humanity's finest flowers; the product at which each creative period of the race had aimed.¹⁹

The first great mystical period immediately followed the initiation of the Christian era. As such, it held as inheritance the mystical tradition of the Old Testament, especially that of the literary prophets from Amos onward which reached a culmination in first and second Isaiah. In these prophets, ecstasy, visions, hearing of supernatural voices, and performance under interior compulsion of bizarre symbolic acts hold a prominent place. And a pattern or "initiation" rite of some sort became established, as, for example, in Isaiah 6 where one may trace the pro-

¹⁸ Maréchal, p. 199.

¹⁹ Underhill, "Appendix," p. 453.

phet's progression from realization of revelation of an ineffable Reality through unmeasured awe and adoration of this Reality in the created universe -- the Holy, Holy, Holy proclamation -- to the prophet's experience of his own nothingness in the face of the Almighty, to his cleansing pain before this truth, to his final immediate sense of vocation and self offering, his personal response.²⁰

Saint Paul as the possible "first" mystic of Christianity broke entirely new ground insofar as he is the unique link between the primitive apostolic experiences of Communion with the Risen Jesus and the still continued Christocentric mysticism of the Church. His years in Arabia, evidently a period of self-conquest from the evidence in Romans, were accompanied by the development of visionary and ecstatic tendencies which the circumstances of his conversion prove St. Paul to have possessed.

The other major figure in the initial period to have developed like tendencies is, of course, the author of the Book of Revelation. The constant influence of this work goes without mentioning. The vision in The Pearl of the heavenly Jerusalem is right out of Revelation.

The second stream of mysticism evolved around Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-220) and his pupil Origen (c. 183-253). In the course of his writings on the ascent of the soul to God, Origen speaks of what he calls the "gift of visions." Quasten²¹ remarks on the clarity of this

²⁰ Underhill, p. 31.

²¹ Johannes Quasten, Patrology, II, 98.

1000
1000
1000
1000
1000

statement and concludes that Origen realized purpose and value of the gift of visions from his own experience. To Origen, such visions consist of "illuminations in prayer and reading of the Scripture, which reveal divine mysteries."²² Moreover, the more these spiritual favors increase, the higher the spirit climbs, until it reaches Mount Tabor.

Verum non aequaliter omnes qui vident illuminatur a Christo, sed singuli secundum eam mensuram illuminantur, qua vim luminis recipere valent. Et sicut non aequaliter oculi corporis nostri illuminantur a sole, sed quanto quis in loca altiora con-scenderit, et ortum ejus editioris speculae intuitionem fuerit contemplatus, tanto amplius et splendoris ejus vim percipiet et caloris: ita etiam mens nostra quanto altius et excelsius appropinquaverit Christo, ac se viciniorem splendori lucis ejus objecerit, tanto magnificentius et clarius ejus lumine radiabitur . . . Si vero etiam talis quis fuerit, ut possit et in montem ascendere cum eo sicut Petrus, et Jacobus, et Joannes, iste non solum Christi lumine, sed etiam Patris ipsius illuminabitur voce.

(P.G., XII, 131-132)

Yet not all who have sight are illuminated by Christ in equal measure; each has illumination in proportion as he has capacity to receive the power of the light. The eyes of our body do not receive the light of the sun in equal measure, but the higher the levels to which one climbs, the more lofty the view point from which one watches the vista of the sunrise, the larger is one's sense of the power of the sun's light and heat. So it is also with our spirit; the higher and the further it goes in its approach to Christ, the more nearly it exposes itself to the glory of His light, the more finely and splendidly is it illuminated by His radiance . . . And if a man be even so advanced as to be able to go up with Him to the mount, as Peter, James and John, He shall have the illumination not only of the light of Christ but even of the very Father's voice.

(Gen. Hom., 1, 7 SPCK)

²²Johannes Quasten, Patrology, II, 98.

The purpose of such visions is to fortify the soul against future afflictions [ut anima post haec pati possint acerbitam tribulationem et tentationum], (Cant. 2, 171). They are the oases in the desert of suffering and temptation. Origen does not fail to caution against paying too much attention to such experiences of sweetness. Even they can be used by the devil: [cavendum est et solícite agendum, ut scíenter discernas visionum genus], (Num. hom., 27, 11).²³

Some mention must be made here of the great pagan philosopher Plotinus (A.D. 205-c. 207). Although his mysticism owes nothing directly to the Christian religion, which is never mentioned in his works, his intellectual constructions are made the vehicle of mystical experience. His disciple Prophyry has left it on record that on four occasions he saw his master rapt to ecstatic union with "the One." For Neoplatonism taught the existence of an Absolute God, the "Unconditioned One" who might be known in ecstasy and contemplation.²⁴

Moreover, Augustine borrowed heavily from Plotinus; the Christian who wrote under the pseudonym of Dionysius the Areopagite "attempted to Christianize Neoplatonism"; and it is not coincidental that Neoplatonism and Christianity in the third century came together and influenced each other because Origen and Plotinus were products of the same Alexandrian school.²⁵ In fact, Katsaros and Kaplan maintain that

²³Quasten, II, 98.

²⁴Underhill, "Appendix, " pp. 455-456. See also Maréchal, op. cit., for a more detailed interpretation of Plotinus, p. 178; and Knowles, The English Mystical Tradition, p. 22.

²⁵Thomas Katsaros and Nathaniel Kaplan, The Western Mystical Tra-

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

1000

"Plotinus' uniqueness lies in the fact that he went beyond philosophy and developed a full-fledged, pure mysticism which became the basis for all future mystical thought in the Western World."²⁶

A rather pointed example of the influence of Plotinus can be seen in the following quotation in which Augustine is describing the desirability of the beatific vision:

For that vision of God is a beauty of a vision so great, and is so infinitely desirable that Plotinus does not hesitate to say that he who enjoys all other blessings in abundance, and has not this is supremely miserable.

City of God, Bk. X, Sect. 7²⁷

The religious experiences of the early monks of the desert, especially St. Anthony, constitute what may be called the third period of mysticism. It is, however, Augustine, the great commentator on St. Anthony, who inaugurates and brings to fruition the major mystical writings of the early Church.

Augustine was, first of all, a natural mystic who left us in the Confessions one of the most marvellous records in history of the transformation of a soul by the grace of God. In addition, he brought Greek thought and religious feeling into the main stream of Christian mysticism. The major sources for Augustine's thoughts on mysticism are, according

dition (College and University Press: New Haven, Connecticut, 1969), I, 157-167.

²⁶Ibid., p. 148.

²⁷Quoted on p. 160 of Katsaros and Kaplan.

to Butler:

Confessions, VII, 16, 23; IX, 23-25; X, 65;

Enarratio in Psalmum xli (heb. xlii);

de Quantitate Animae, 74, 75, 76;

de Genesi ad litteram, XII;

Ep. cxlvii de Videndo Deo;

c. Faustum, XXII, 52-58;

de Civitate Dei, SIX, 1, 2, 19;

Sermons, ciil., civ.²⁸

Augustine's definition of contemplation is directed primarily at an attempt to describe the lot of the blessed in heaven.

Serenum atque rectum aspectum in id, quod videndum est, dirigere.

(de Quant. Anim., 75)²⁹

It is the directing a serene and straight look on the object to be looked at.³⁰

However, he does not limit the beginnings of contemplation, or glimpses or intuitions of divine things, to the next life. Thus he says:

. . .in choata vero contemplatio maneat donec venio, perficienda cum venero.

P.L., XXXV, 1974.

Contemplation is only begun in this life, to be

²⁸Butler, p. 20.

²⁹Quoted in Butler, p. 26, footnote 1.

³⁰Butler's translation, p. 26.

100

101

102

103

104

105

106

107

108

109

110

111

112

113

114

115

116

117

118

perfected in the next.

(Tract. in Ioan., cxxiv, 5)³¹

Augustine expressed the same idea in his often repeated phrase:

Quia fecisti nos ad te, et inquietum est cor nostrum,
donec requiescat in te.

Conf. I, i, in P.L., XXXII, 661

Thou has created us for Thyself, and our heart is
restless until it rests in Thee.

"The twelfth book of the incomplete de Genesi ad litteram, which is primarily concerned with St. Paul's vision when he was rapt to the third heaven, is also a basis for a discussion of visions in general in terms of principles being laid governing also ordinary perception and cognition."³²

Some rather detailed attention will be paid to this vision theory of Augustine because literally nothing new has been added to the theory since. Scores of mystics and non-mystics have quoted it since the fourth century; Thomas Aquinas quotes it word for word in presenting it as basic in the Summa and elsewhere; and the latest edition of the New Catholic Encyclopedia accepts it as standard without even mentioning Augustine by name. More to our point, Augustine's ideas were well known to Gregory and Bernard of Clairvaux as well as to lesser lights in the centuries immediately preceding The Pearl. And, strikingly, there is some evidence that Boethius' extremely influential Consolations of

³¹Butler's translation, p. 27.

³²Butler, p. 36.

1945

[illegible]

2

• • •

$$\vdots$$

Philosophy is constructed along the lines of Augustine's theory.³³

Augustine, in the twelfth book of de Genesi ad litteram, distinguishes three kinds of perception, or, more exactly to use the author's words, objects perceived or visions. He calls them corporeal, spiritual or imaginary, and intellectual.

Corporeal visions are the perception of actual physical things; spiritual (imaginary) visions are the perception of images in the memory or imagination; intellectual visions are the perception of the objects of the pure intellect.³⁴

Augustine exemplifies his three kinds of perception with the following illustration. If a person reads the Commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," the corporeal perception is of the letters themselves; the spiritual (imaginary) is the image of the absent neighbor; and the abstract idea of "love" constitutes the intellectual vision.³⁵

In another place, Augustine distinguishes between wisdom and science: "To wisdom pertains the intellectual cognition of things eter-

³³ Charlotte C. Morse of Yale University in a paper delivered May 1, 1973, at the Eighth Conference on Medieval Studies, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, suggested that the various books of The Consolations of Philosophy represented Augustine's corporeal, imaginative, and intellectual visions in application. Even if Augustine's work was not a conscious source for Boethius, it may help explain why the Consolations became so potent a model for the development of medieval vision and dream vision literature. Seeming to express St. Augustine's theory as well as its own explicit message, it enjoyed redoubled authority and naturally exercised wide influence.

³⁴ de Gen. ad litt., XII, 6-9, 15-20, in Butler, p. 36.

³⁵ de Gen. ad litt., XII, 6, 15; XI, 22, in Butler, p. 36.

to 50

to 60

to 70

to 80

to 90

to 100

to 110

to 120

to 130

nal: to science the rational cognition of things temporal."³⁶ Augustine groups corporeal and spiritual (imaginary) visions as the objects of science because they both are visions of changeable things. He calls intellectual visions wisdom because they are visions of eternal things. Moreover, in true intellectual visions, the visionary is not liable to error because what he intellectually sees is true.³⁷

Augustine names the objects of intellectual visions as the mind itself; every good virtue of the soul -- charity, joy, peace, longanimity -- by which it draws near to God; and finally, God Himself.³⁸

The following is a more detailed account of the objects of intellectual visions.

Sic etiam in illo genere intellectualium visorum alis sunt quae in ipsa anima videntur, velut virtutes . . . ipsae intellectualiter videntur . . . Aliud autem est ipsum lumen, quo inlustratur anima, ut omnia vel in se vel in illo vera citius intellecta conspiciat. Nam illus iam ipse Deus est, haec autem creatura, quamvis rationalis et intellectualis ad eius imaginem facta, quae cum conatur lumen illud intueri palpitat infirmitate et minus valet. Inde est tamen quidquid intellegit sicut valet. Cum ergo illuc rapitur et a carnalibus subtracta sensibus illi expressius visioni praesentatur, non spatiis localibus, sed modo quodam suo, etiam supra se videt, quo adiuta videt quidquid etiam in se intellegendo videt.

(de Gen. ad litt., XII, 31, 59)³⁹

³⁶de Trin., XII, 25, in Butler, pp. 36-37.

³⁷de Gen. ad litt., XII, 25, 52, in Butler, p. 37.

³⁸de Gen. ad litt., XII, 24-50 in Butler, p. 37.

³⁹Quoted in Butler, p. 55, footnote 1.

Among the intellectual objects of vision, some are seen in the soul itself, as the virtues: . . . these are intellectually seen. Distinct, however [from things intellectually seen], is that Light Itself, whereby the soul is so enlightened that it beholds, whether in itself or in that Light, all things truly the object of the intellect. For that Light is God Himself: but the soul, although rational and intellectual, is a creature made after His image, which when it endeavors to fix its gaze on that Light, quivers through weakness and is not able. Yet still thence [i.e., from the Light] is whatever it intellectually perceives as it is able. When it is borne away thither, and withdrawn from the bodily senses [i.e., in ecstasy], it is more expressly presented to that vision, not in local space but in some way of its own, even above itself it sees That by help of which it sees whatever it intellectually sees even in itself.⁴⁰

"This passage seems to show that in an ecstasy of the intellectual order, the soul not only sees 'in' the divine Light, but in some ways sees that divine Light which is God Himself."⁴¹

Augustine does not use the phrase "union with God" to describe what he calls intellectual vision. However, any number of quotations from his works describe what later mystics call Union.

Thus when "in a flash of thought he touched the Eternal Wisdom," he declares:

"Were this prolonged, and the vision ravish and absorb and wrap up its beholder in inward joys, so that life might be forever like that one moment of understanding; were not this the entry into the joy of Heaven?"

(Conf., IX 25)⁴²

⁴⁰Butler's translation, pp. 54-55.

⁴¹Butler, p. 55.

⁴²Ibid., p. 46.

Now, Augustine also discusses what takes place in ecstatic vision, what takes place in mind and soul during it, based on this distinction of three kinds of perception or vision.

Frequently in ecstasy it is a case of the second kind of vision, the "spiritual" (imagery) as in St. Peter's vision, when he saw the sheet let down from heaven, with four-footed beasts and creeping things; but sometimes it is a case of the third, or intellectual, the soul being raised to the realm of things purely intellectual (*intellegibilia*).⁴³

The twofold kind of vision in ecstasy is brought out also in the following:

Ecstasy is an alienation of the mind from the senses of the body, that the spirit of a man taken up by the divine Spirit may be free to attend to the receiving and beholding images: as to Peter was shown the sheet let down from heaven. . . (Or) the mind may be so affected that it comprehends not images of things, but beholds the things themselves as wisdom and justice are intellectually seen, and every unchangeable and divine species (i.e., "idea" in the divine mind) -- ita mens afficitur ut non rerum imagines coniecturali examinatione intelligat, sed res ipsas intueatur, sicut intelligitur sapientia et iustitia onmique incommutabilis et divina species.

(*De diversis Quaest. ad Simplicianum*, ii Quaest. i. I)⁴⁴

Porro autem si quemadmodum raptus est a sensibus corporis, ut esset in istis similitudinibus corporum, quae spiritu videntur, ita et ab ipsis rapiatur, ut in illam quasi regionem intellectualium vel intellegibilium subvehatur, ubi sine ulla corporis similitudine perspicua veritas cernitur, nullis opinionum falsarum nebulis offuscatur, ibi virtutes animae non sunt operosae ac laboriosae . . . Una ibi et tota virtus est amare quod videas et summa felicitas habere quod amas. Ibi enim beata vita in fonte suo bibitur, unde aspergitur aliquid

⁴³ Commentary by Butler, p. 52.

⁴⁴ Butler, p. 52, footnote 1.

huic humanae vitae . . . Ibi videtur claritas domini non per visionem significantem sive corporalem sive spiritalem, sed per speciem non per aenigmata, quantum eam capere humana mens potest, secundum adsummentis Dei gratiam, ut os ad os loquatur Deus ei quem dignum tali conloquio fecerit, non os corporis, sed mentis, sicut intelligendum arbitror, quod de Moyse scriptum est.

(de Gen. ad litt., XII, 26, 54; ed Qycha, "Corpus Viennense")⁴⁵

If, as one is rapt from the senses of the body, so as to be among those images of bodies which are seen by the spirit (imagination); in the same way may one be rapt from them also, so as to be lifted up into that region of intellectual or intelligible things, where without any image of body the perspicuous truth is perceived and is obscured by no mists of false opinions; there the virtues of the soul have no scope for their operations or labours: for neither is there lust to be restrained by temperance, nor adversities to be borne by fortitude, nor iniquity to be punished by justice, nor evils to be avoided by prudence. There the sole and all-embracing virtue is to love what you see, and the supreme happiness to possess what you love. For there the blessed life is drunk at the fountain head, whence there drop some sprinklings on this human life, that amid the trials of this world one may live with temperance, fortitude, justice, and prudence. Since it is for the sake of attaining unto that where will be an untroubled quiet, and an ineffable vision of truth, that the labour is undertaken of restraining oneself from pleasure, and enduring adversities, and helping the needy, and resisting deceivers. There is seen the brightness of the Lord, not by any symbolic vision, whether corporal or spiritual (imaginary); but by "species," not by enigmas (aenigmata), in so far as the human mind can grasp it, according to the grace of God who takes hold of it, that God may speak mouth to mouth to him whom He hath made worthy of such colloquy: not the mouth of the body, but of the mind. [just as, I think what was written about Moses must be understood.]⁴⁶

⁴⁵Quoted in Butler, p. 53, footnote 1.

⁴⁶Butler's translation, p. 53.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
61
62
63
64
65
66
67
68
69
70
71
72
73
74
75
76
77
78
79
80
81
82
83
84
85
86
87
88
89
90
91
92
93
94
95
96
97
98
99
100
101
102
103
104
105
106
107
108
109
110
111
112
113
114
115
116
117
118
119
120
121
122
123
124
125
126
127
128
129
130
131
132
133
134
135
136
137
138
139
140
141
142
143
144
145
146
147
148
149
150
151
152
153
154
155
156
157
158
159
160
161
162
163
164
165
166
167
168
169
170
171
172
173
174
175
176
177
178
179
180
181
182
183
184
185
186
187
188
189
190
191
192
193
194
195
196
197
198
199
200
201
202
203
204
205
206
207
208
209
210
211
212
213
214
215
216
217
218
219
220
221
222
223
224
225
226
227
228
229
230
231
232
233
234
235
236
237
238
239
240
241
242
243
244
245
246
247
248
249
250
251
252
253
254
255
256
257
258
259
260
261
262
263
264
265
266
267
268
269
270
271
272
273
274
275
276
277
278
279
280
281
282
283
284
285
286
287
288
289
290
291
292
293
294
295
296
297
298
299
300
301
302
303
304
305
306
307
308
309
310
311
312
313
314
315
316
317
318
319
320
321
322
323
324
325
326
327
328
329
330
331
332
333
334
335
336
337
338
339
340
341
342
343
344
345
346
347
348
349
350
351
352
353
354
355
356
357
358
359
360
361
362
363
364
365
366
367
368
369
370
371
372
373
374
375
376
377
378
379
380
381
382
383
384
385
386
387
388
389
390
391
392
393
394
395
396
397
398
399
400
401
402
403
404
405
406
407
408
409
410
411
412
413
414
415
416
417
418
419
420
421
422
423
424
425
426
427
428
429
430
431
432
433
434
435
436
437
438
439
440
441
442
443
444
445
446
447
448
449
450
451
452
453
454
455
456
457
458
459
460
461
462
463
464
465
466
467
468
469
470
471
472
473
474
475
476
477
478
479
480
481
482
483
484
485
486
487
488
489
490
491
492
493
494
495
496
497
498
499
500
501
502
503
504
505
506
507
508
509
510
511
512
513
514
515
516
517
518
519
520
521
522
523
524
525
526
527
528
529
530
531
532
533
534
535
536
537
538
539
540
541
542
543
544
545
546
547
548
549
550
551
552
553
554
555
556
557
558
559
560
561
562
563
564
565
566
567
568
569
570
571
572
573
574
575
576
577
578
579
580
581
582
583
584
585
586
587
588
589
590
591
592
593
594
595
596
597
598
599
600
601
602
603
604
605
606
607
608
609
610
611
612
613
614
615
616
617
618
619
620
621
622
623
624
625
626
627
628
629
630
631
632
633
634
635
636
637
638
639
640
641
642
643
644
645
646
647
648
649
650
651
652
653
654
655
656
657
658
659
660
661
662
663
664
665
666
667
668
669
670
671
672
673
674
675
676
677
678
679
680
681
682
683
684
685
686
687
688
689
690
691
692
693
694
695
696
697
698
699
700
701
702
703
704
705
706
707
708
709
710
711
712
713
714
715
716
717
718
719
720
721
722
723
724
725
726
727
728
729
730
731
732
733
734
735
736
737
738
739
740
741
742
743
744
745
746
747
748
749
750
751
752
753
754
755
756
757
758
759
760
761
762
763
764
765
766
767
768
769
770
771
772
773
774
775
776
777
778
779
780
781
782
783
784
785
786
787
788
789
790
791
792
793
794
795
796
797
798
799
800
801
802
803
804
805
806
807
808
809
810
811
812
813
814
815
816
817
818
819
820
821
822
823
824
825
826
827
828
829
830
831
832
833
834
835
836
837
838
839
840
84

3.6

115

re

22

—

1

1

The final question which must be explored in regard to visions concerns Augustine's discussion of whether a man may see God and live. Augustine does see this as possible as can be verified by reference to the quotation from Liber de videndo Deo (Ep. cxlvii), cited above on p. 23. However, seeing God is not the usual end of contemplation; it is not obtained in all ecstasies; it is not a constant facet of the mystic experience as the following verify.

There is another life which is immortal, in which there are no ills. There we shall see face to face what here is seen in enigma, even when great progress has been made in contemplating truth.

(Tract. in Joan., CXXIV, 5)

In this life contemplation is rather in faith, and with a very few through a mirror in enigma, and, in part, in some vision of unchangeable Truth.

(de Cons. Evang., I, 5)⁴⁷

As F.H. McDudden shows in his Gregory the Great,⁴⁸ "his (Gregory's) theology is little more than a popularization of that of Augustine," which he presented in the form that remained current throughout the early Middle Ages, so that the staple theology of those ages was in the main that of St. Augustine as diluted by St. Gregory.

Gregory was the recognized master of mysticism from his day (540-604 A.D.) through the five centuries of the early Middle Ages. Moreover, "along with St. Augustine and pseudo-Dionysius, he was St. Thomas' principal authority over the range of subjects comprised under

⁴⁷Butler, p. 61.

⁴⁸McDudden, II, 293, 468, in Butler, p. 25.

1977

1978

contemplation and contemplative life."⁴⁹

Gregory's teachings on mysticism are not in separate texts but are part of the following works:

Morals on Job: v. 52-66; vi. 55-61; vii. 40, 50; x, 31; svii. 88-90; xxiii. 37-43; xxiv. 11, 12; xxi. 99-102.

Homilies on Ezechiel: I. iii. 9-14; V. 12, 13; II. i. 16-18; ii. 7-15; v. 8-20.

Pastoral Rule: I. 5, 6, 7; II. 5, 7.

One of his descriptions of contemplation follows:

Prius a mentis acie exurente trisitia interposita malorum caligo detergitur, et tunc resplendente raptim coruscatione incircumscripti luminis illustratur. Quo utcunque conspecto, in gaudio cuiusdam securitatis absorbetur, et quasi post defectum vitae praesentis ultra se rapta, in quadam novitate aliquo modo recreatur. Ibi mens ex immenso fonte infusione superni roris aspergitur; ibi non se sufficere ad id quod rapta est contemplatur, et veritatem sentiendo videt quia quanta est ipsa veritas non videt.

(Mor. xxiv. 11)⁵⁰

The intervening mist of evils is first washed away from the eye of the mind by burning sorrow; and then it is illumined by the bright coruscations of the unencompassed Light flashing upon it. When this is in any way seen, the mind is absorbed in a sort of rapturous security; and carried beyond itself, as though the present life had ceased to be, it is in a way remade in a certain newness [it is refreshed in a manner by a kind of new being: Oxf. Lib.] There the mind is besprinkled with the infusion of heavenly dew from an inexhaustible fountain; there it discerns that it is not sufficient for that to which it has been carried, and from feeling the Truth, it sees that it does not see how great Truth itself is.⁵¹

⁴⁹Butler, p. 65

⁵⁰Quoted in Butler, p. 74, footnote 2.

⁵¹Butler's translation, p. 74.

As to the physical side of contemplation and ecstasy, the ideas of a great practical mystic such as Gregory are a valuable contribution to the psychology of religious experience.

St. Gregory habitually uses the word "rapt" in speaking of the soul in contemplation.⁵² Key quotations from his writings illustrating this point were mentioned on p. 28.

As we noted above, Gregory describes Benedict's vision in such a way as to represent him as retaining full possession of his mind and external senses, and as in no way carried away by ecstasy -- but it is a vision. This denial of ecstasy confirms that view expressed, that all psycho-physical phenomena were outside of Gregory's horizon.

Finally, Gregory, contrary to Augustine, taught that God cannot be seen or known as He is by mortal man in this life. This view is in accordance with ordinary theology in the West. Therefore, although for Augustine it is an ecstasy that is the highest and most spiritual experience that can fall to the lot of man, as St. Paul's, "wherein he knew not whether he was in the body or out of the body"; for Gregory it is no more than the spiritual commonplace of dying to the lust and pleasures of this world.⁵³ This watering down of Augustine's conceptions would open wide the gate to the Vision of God to almost all comers in the spiritual life. It also seems that it might also provide a philosophical basis for

⁵²For rapere, rapi, see above, p. 28.

⁵³Butler, pp. 91-92.

1938

1939

1940

1941

1942

1943

1944

1945

1946

1947

the use of visions in a literary tradition -- if such a basis were ever desired.

As we noted in the first chapter, there was a marked revival of mystical religion in the twelfth century under the leadership of Hildegard, Richard of St. Victor and, especially, St. Bernard. An example of Hildegard's visions is the following:

They are pictures . . . seen within the mind "neither in dream, sleep, nor any frenzy," involving no hallucination and never interfering with her outward sight. "I did not see these things with the bodily eyes or hear them with outward ears, but as I behold them according to God's will, openly and fully awake, considering them in the full light of the mind, eyes and ears of the inner man. How is this? It is hard for carnal man to understand . . . When fully penetrated by my light I said many things strange to those who heard them."⁵⁴

(Scivias)

Richard's three stages of mystical apprehension have already been outlined.⁵⁵ An important additional item in Richard's work is his insistence that true contemplation is given or infused.

St. Bernard, founder of Clairvaux, is, of course, the dominant figure in twelfth century religious life. He says that he who loves indeed will desire, beyond vision, the penetration of God into the very ground of his heart; and the earnest of this experience is to be its practical effect. His doctrine is found in the eighty-six sermons on the Canticle of Canticles.

⁵⁴Quoted in Underhill, pp. 77-78.

⁵⁵See above, pp. 33-34.

100

101

102

103

104

105

106

107

108

109

110

111

112

113

114

115

116

117

Bernard distinguishes two kinds of contemplation, that of the intellect and that of the heart.

Cum enim duo sint beatae contemplationis excessus,
in intellectu unus, et alter in affectu; unus in lumine,
alter in fervore; unus in agnitione, alter in devotione . . .

P.L., CLXXXIII, 1018.

There are two kinds of transport (excessus) in holy contemplation: the one in the intellect, the other in the heart (affectus); the one in light, the other in fervour; the one in discernment, the other in devotion.

(Cant., xlix, 4)⁵⁶

"St. Bernard dwells chiefly on the 'contemplation of the heart' and it is in this that he principally places the mystic experience, or, as it is otherwise called, the state of passive union."⁵⁷

St. Bernard likens contemplation to the sleep of the soul in the arms of God; but it is a deep sleep, alive and watchful, which enlightens the inward senses [magis istius -- modo vitalis vigilque supor sensum interiorem illuminat] -- a sleep which dulls not the senses but ravishes them. (Cant., liii, 2, 3)⁵⁸ Here we are taught that Bernard's contemplation is no "quietism" although images and sense perceptions are eliminated and the faculties of the mind reduced to silence; the soul itself is full of light and operating with an intense activity. And it is in Bernard that the imagery of "spiritual marriage" as a metaphor for the relationship be-

⁵⁶ Butler's translation, p. 102.

⁵⁷ Butler, p. 102.

⁵⁸ Revera enim dormitio est, quae tamen sensum non sopiat, sed abducatur. P.L., CLXXXIII, 911.

1000

1000

1000

1000

tween God and the soul in the highest kinds of mystical contemplation is found fully developed.

Bernard agrees with Gregory, in opposition to Augustine, that God cannot be seen in his essence by a man in this life.

Et nunc quidem apparet quibus vult; sed sicuti vult, non sicut est. Non sapiens, non sanctus, non propheta videre illum, sicuti est, potest, aut potuit in corpore hoc mortali.

P.L. CLXXXIII, 911.

God now appears as He wishes, not as He is. No wise man, no saint, no prophet, is able to see Him as He is, nor has been able to in this mortal body.

(Cant., xxxi, 2)⁵⁹

As regards psycho-physical concomitants, there is no evidence that the phenomenon depicted is other than mental. The words he uses are the familiar excessus which translates ekstasis and the verb mente excedire. Finally, Bernard characterizes the knowledge of God in contemplation as follows:

Dormiens in contemplatione Deum somniat; per speculum suquidem et in aenigmate, non autem facie ad faciem interim intuetur. Tamen sic non tam spectati, quam conjectati, idque raptim et quasi sub quodam coruscamine scintillulae transeuntis, tenuiter vix attacti ardescit amore . . .

P.L., CLXXXIII, 862.

The soul slumbering in contemplation dreams God; for through a mirror and in an enigma, and not face to face, does it behold Him; and it warms with the love of something conjectured rather than seen, momentarily, as if in the flash of a psssing spark, and touched scantily

⁵⁹Butler, p. 119.

189000

189100

189200

189300

189400

189500

189600

189700

189800

189900

190000

190100

190200

190300

190400

190500

190600

190700

190800

190900

191000

191100

191200

191300

and barely . . .

(Cant., xviii, 6)⁶⁰

In limiting my treatment of visions within the mystic tradition to the recognized masters, SS. Augustine, Gregory, and Bernard, I recognize that I am speaking only of a main stream of mysticism which is in Butler's terms "pre-Dionysian, pre-scholastic, and non-philosophical" in regard to Bernard and Gregory; Augustine, of course, is neo-Platonic. It is also a stream which is quite different in tone from a type which abounds in revelations and visions and which appeared with St. Gertrude and the two Mechtildes in the century after St. Bernard. "They are the recipients of communications and messages, seers of pictorial panoramic visions. And from that time forth these elements have tended to enter more and more into the experiences of Catholic mystics, and have almost come to be identified with mysticism itself."⁶¹

Examples of this newer stream would give further evidence that the poet of The Pearl came from an environment fed by a tradition very aware of visions. They would not, however, as far as I can ascertain at this point, add anything of substance to the vision tradition formed from scriptural and mystical sources. I mean that additional examples would be no more than additional -- quantitative and not qualitative.

So, arbitrary as the decision may be, I have decided to make the applications possible to The Pearl from this highly selective set of

⁶⁰ Butler's translation, p. 120.

⁶¹ Butler, p. 126.

samples

100101

special

man C

mad g

to say

and in

room

allow

to be

pro

the

for

in

1

examples. One more comment may add some weight to this decision. It is obvious that the tone of the great fourteenth century vision poems, especially The Pearl and the Divine Comedy, is much closer to an Augustinian classicism than a Margery Kemp romanticism, to coin two very broad generalizations.

The most obvious kind of conclusion to draw from this section is to say that the vision(s) of the narrator of The Pearl are probably corporeal and imaginative rather than intellectual. The latter is eliminated on the grounds that the visionary never did see God. Therefore, I posit the following very tentative hypothesis.

The general movement of the visionary in The Pearl may be seen to follow the corporeal type of vision, through the imaginative, and approach the intellectual type.

In fit II, for example, the narrator's vision is entirely corporeal, physical in St. Augustine's terms. In fit III, he only starts to expand from the mere corporeal as he begins to imagine what is beyond his immediate surroundings.

Forþy I þoȝt þat Paradyse
Wat3 þer ouer gayn þo bonke3 brade. (ll. 137-138)

It is only as he begins to desire to see beyond the river that he sees the Pearl Maiden.

More meruayle con my dom adaunt:
I se3 by3onde þat myry mere
A crystal clyffe ful relusaunt;
Mony ryal ray con fro hit rere.
At þe fote þerof þer sete a faunt,
A mayden of menske, ful debonere; (ll. 157-162)

1915

1916

1917

1918

1919

1920

1921

1922

1923

1924

1925

1926

At this point, as at the beginning of the vision as such, he takes a backward step as he contemplates this imaginative vision - once again in corporeal terms (ll. 177-240). Fits V-XV (ll. 241-912) comprise the debate section of the poem. Then, having reconciled himself to much that the Pearl Maiden would teach him, the narrator again moves beyond the present, tangible reality and seeks to know if there is more beyond.

Haf 3e no wone3 in castel-walle,
 Ne maner þer 3e may mete and won?
 þou telle3 me of Jerusalem þe ryche ryalle,
 þer Daud dere wat3 dy3t on trone,
 Bot by þyse holte3 hit con not hone,
 Bot in Judee hit is, þat noble note. (ll. 917-922)

And in line 973, the Pearl Maiden leads him to where he can see more. "If I þis mote þe schal vnhyde, . . ." Perhaps we can say to where his imaginative vision could become intellectual. It is highly significant that line 985 reads: "As John þe apostel hit sy3 wyth sy3t." The narrator and the author are telling us that this indeed is a vision like to St. John's.

In the initial appearance of the city, the narrator again reverts to what may be called his third corporeal vision as he explains in detail the physical aspects of the city (ll. 989-1092). Then, in another movement into what may be called another imaginative vision, he sights his Pearl Maiden again and watches the activity of the Blessed. It is here that we see the closest approach to an intellectual vision as the narrator describes the worship of the Lamb and the delight and wonder within himself.

Jan, 1890

maise

Ed. 1890

1890

1890

1890

1890

1890

1890

1890

1890

1890

Delit þe Lombe for to deuse
 Wyth much meruayle in mynde went.
 Best wat₃ he, blypest, and moste to pryse,
 þat euer I herde of speche spent;
 So worply whyt wern wede₃ hys,
 His loke₃ symple, hymself so gent. (ll. 1154-56)

Then, however, when he makes the movement to join the throng, it is because

My mane₃ mynde to maddyng malte;
 Quen I se₃ my frely, I wolde be þere. (ll. 1154-56)

And the vision is over.

In suggesting that Augustine's types of visions are present in The Pearl, I am aware that Augustine's description of corporeal and imaginative visions are as much a psychological interpretation of how man comes to know something as they are an explanation of visions as such. I still find it valid to posit Augustine's vision theory as a possible explanation for what is happening within The Pearl.

Finally, some individual points will be made here that are relevant to the vision tradition as described in this chapter.

The second stanza of the poem sets a reflective mood which might be interpreted as a kind of meditative reflection which so many of the great mystics have insisted on as a preparation for any kind of unitive or ecstatic experience.

Also, line 63,

My goste is gon in Gode₃ grace

lines 193-94,

Perle₃ py₃te of ryal prys
 þere mo₃t mon by grace haf sene,

lines 965-968,

þat schene sayde: þat God wyl schylde;
þou may not enter wythinne hys tor,
Bot of þe Lombe I haue þe aquylde
For a sy₃t þerof þur₃ gret fauor

contain the traditional belief that all true mystic experience is a pure gift of God and not something a man can work for.

Lines 99-100 and 133-136 certainly seem an echo of Paul:

þe derþe þerof for to deuyse
Nis no wy₃ worþe þat tonge bere₃.

More of wele wat₃ in þat wyse
þen I cowþe telle þa₃ I tom hade,
For vrpely herte my₃t not suffyse
To þe tenþ dole of þo gladne₃ glade;

Finally the name Jerusalem, in line 952, is interpreted as meaning "a vision of peace,"⁶² and the post-ecstatic visionary describes his own experience quite bluntly as a true vision.

In þis veray avysyoun!
(l. 1184)

⁶²Gordon, p. 77, n. 950-952.

1. MS
WITH
AN

essay

and C

line 1

the MS

tion

the me

with 1

map

as a

of w

the

the

13

17

21

25

IV. MYSTICAL MARRIAGE AS AN EXPRESSION OF UNITIVE ENCOUNTER WITH GOD AS IT OCCURS IN SCRIPTURAL, EARLY CHRISTIAN AND MYSTICAL SOURCES IN THE VISION TRADITION

The fourth element present in The Pearl which, together with ecstasy, vision and mystical contemplation, forms the vision tradition is the concept of spiritual or mystical marriage. This idea is not present in The Pearl in any experiential way, that is, the reader does not watch the Visionary reach closer and closer union which culminates in direct union with the Lord, or mystical marriage. Rather mystical marriage is the metaphor which illustrates the state of the Pearl Maiden in union with the Lord in the Heavenly Jerusalem. Ultimately, the source for this imagery is in Revelation 21 and 22, and the raiment of the Pearl Maiden as a bride in Revelation 19. However, the richness and full implications of what the Pearl Maiden has become and of what, at least by implication, the Visionary could experience is found in the full tradition of the use of the analogy, that is, from the faint stirrings in Hosea through the major Canticle of Canticles or Song of Songs. The symbolism is part of the mystical tradition in many centuries since Saint Bernard explored the implications and applications of the Old Testament epithalamium to the individual soul's relationship with God.

We shall discuss this tradition and follow it with some important passages from Bernard which illustrate the tradition as the Pearl poet probably knew it. Finally we shall try to elucidate some of the key passages of The Pearl itself using the implications of the tradition.

gins p

Esse, O

interpret

re follo

ives b

er to t

times

news

Israel

super

points

first

ness

The marriage metaphor to express the relationship between God and his people Israel is used in the Old Testament. The prophecy of Hosea, or Osee, is the earliest biblical instance of this motif. "The interpretation of the opening chapters [of Hosea] is much disputed, but the following seems most probable: Hosea has married a wife whom he loves but who deserts him; his love remains, however, and, having put her to the test, he takes her back. The prophet's sad experience becomes a metaphor for Yahweh's dealings with his people. Chapter two draws the moral and at the same time provides the key to the whole book. Israel, the bride of God, has become a faithless harlot, has aroused the anger and jealousy of her divine husband. God's love remains; he will punish her, but only to bring her back and restore her to the joys of their first love."¹

An excerpt from chapter two will confirm the ease and naturalness with which the metaphor developed.

Quia dixit: Vadam post amatore meos, qui dant panes
mihi, et aquas meas, lanam meam, et linum meum,
oleum meum, et potum meum.
Propter hoc ecce ego sepiam viam tuam spinis, et sepiam
eam maceria, et semitas suas non inveniet.
Et sequetur amatore suos, et non apprehendet eos; et
quaeret eos, et non inveniet; et dicet: Vadam, et revertar
ad virum meum priorem, quia bene mihi erat tunc magis
quam nunc.
Et haec nescivit, quia ego dedi ei frumentum, et vinum,
et oleum, et argentum multiplicavi ei, et aurum, quae
fecerunt Baal.
Ideirco convertar, et sumam frumentum meum in tempore
suo, et vinum meum in tempore suo. Et liberabo lanam

¹"Introduction to the Prophets," Jerusalem Bible, p. 1135.

meam et linum meum, quae operiebant ignominiam eius . . .

Et visitabo super eam dies Baalim, quibus accendebat incensum, et ornabatur in aure sua, et monili suo. Et ibat post amatores suos, et mei obliviscebatur, dicit Dominus.

Propter hoc ecce ego lactabo eam, et ducam eam in solitudinem, et loquar ad cor eius.

Et dabo ei vinitores eius ex eodem loco, et vallem Achor, ad aperiendam spem; et canet ibi iuxta dies iuventis suae, et iuxta dies ascensionis suae de terra Aegypti.

Et erit in die illa, ait Dominus: Vocabit me vir meus, et non vocabit me ultra baali.

Et auferam nomina Baalim de ore eius, et non recordabitur ultra nominis eorum.

Et percutiam cum eis foedus in die illa, cum bestia agri, et cum volucre caeli, et cum reptili terrae; et arcum, et gladium, et bellum, conteram de terra, et dormire eos faciam fiducialiter.

Et sponsabo te mihi in sempiternum; et sponsabo te mihi in iustitia, et iudicio, et in misericordia, et in miserationibus.

Et sponsabo te mihi in fide; et scies quia ego Dominus. Et erit in die illa: Exaudiam, dicit Dominus, exaudiam caelos; et illi exaudient terram.

Et terra exaudiet triticum, et vinum, et oleum, et haec exaudient Iezrahel.

Et seminabo eam mihi in terra, et miserebor eius quae fuit Absque misericordia.

Et dicam Non populo meo: Populus meus es tu;

Et ipse dicet: Deus meus es tu.

(Osee 2:5-9, 13-24 Vulg.)

. . . she said: I will go after my lovers, that give me bread, and my water, my wool, and my flax, my oil and my drink.

Wherefore behold I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and I will stop it up with a wall, and she shall not find her paths.

And she shall follow after her lovers, and shall not overtake them: and she shall seek them, and shall not find, and she shall say: I will go, and return to my first husband, because it was better with me then, than now.

And she did not know that I gave her corn and wine and oil, and multiplied her silver, and gold, which

they have used in the service of Baal.

Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in its season and my wine in its season, and I will set at liberty my wool, and my flax, which covered her disgrace . . .

And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, to whom she burnt incense, and decked herself out with her earrings, and with her jewels, and went after her lovers, and forgot me, saith the Lord.

Therefore, behold I will allure her, and will lead her into the wilderness; and I will speak to her heart.

And I will give her vinedressers out of the same place, and the valley of Achor for an opening of hope: and she shall sing there according to the days of her youth, and according to the days of her coming up out of the land of Egypt.

And it shall be in that day, saith the Lord, that she shall call me: My husband, and she shall call me no more Baali.

And I will take away the name of Baalim out of her mouth, and she shall no more remember their name.

And in that day I will make a covenant with them, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of the air, and with the creeping things of the earth: and I will destroy the bow, and the sword, and war out of the land; and I will make them sleep secure.

And I will espouse thee to me for ever: and I will espouse thee to me in justice, and judgment, and in mercy, and in commiserations.

And I will espouse thee to me in faith: and thou shalt know that I am the Lord.

And it shall come to pass in that day: I will hear, saith the Lord, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth.

And the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil, and these shall hear Jezrahel.

And I will sow her unto me in the earth, and I will have mercy on her that was without mercy.

And I will say to that which was not my people: Thou art my people: and they shall say: Thou art my God.
(Osee 2:5-9, 13-24 Douay)

The wedding imagery of God's love for his people is taken up by

Jeremiah, the second part of Isaiah and, in its most influential form,

The Song of Songs. "The full Hebrew title is 'The Song of Songs, which

Islam

the

wood

literary

inner

man

among

these

one

are

era

in

the

co

2

S

I

is Solomon's.' The first half is a periphrastic Hebrew way of expressing the superlative, hence the meaning is 'the best of songs' . . . The second half of the title is generally considered by modern scholars as a literary device whereby the poem is attributed to Solomon in the same manner as the book of Wisdom is attributed to him, though written at a much later date. Its canonicity has always been recognized by the Church. Among the Jews there were some doubts in the first century A.D., but these were dispelled in the Synod of Jabneh [or Jamnia] (c. A.D. 100), chiefly by the authority of R. Aquilia who said, 'All the Hagiographra are holy, but the Canticle is most holy.'²

Among modern interpreters, The Song of Songs is regarded generally as an erotic poem with or without a higher aim of describing love in its purest form or of extolling the excellence of monogamy and conjugal fidelity. The Fathers of the Church, however, were so strongly convinced of the spiritual meaning that they ignored the literal sense. The strongest argument for admitting a higher and spiritual sense in the Song is the tradition which, as we have seen, existed in Ezekiel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Osee representing Yahweh's relation to Israel as a marriage.

Interpreters from Hippolytus to modern times have applied the analogy to the union of Christ with the Church. The basis for such an interpretation is provided by the New Testament.

²P.P. Saydon, rev. by G. Castellino, "Song of Songs" in A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture, ed., Rev. Reginald Fuller, Rev. Leonard Johnston, Very Rev. Conleth Kearns (1953; London: Nelson, 1969), pp. 522-33.

In the New Testament, Jesus applies the title of Bridegroom to himself when John the Baptist's disciples question why Christ's disciples were not fasting as they did.

And Jesus said to them: Can the children (attendants) of the bridegroom mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they shall fast.

Mt. 9:15

This imagery is used again in the parable of the marriage feast beginning, "The Kingdom of heaven is likened to a king, who made a marriage for his son . . ." (Mt. 22:2), and climaxes in the exhortation that all guests at a wedding feast are to wear wedding garments.

In the parable of the foolish and wise virgins (Mt. 25:1-13), commentators tend to identify the Bridegroom with Christ and the Bride with the Church.

This is one of Paul's favorite themes as evidenced in 2 Cor., 11:2:

For I am jealous of you with the jealousy of God. For I have espoused you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

This extended meaning, that is, the identification of the bridegroom with Christ and the bride with the individual soul, may have come into common use in the Middle Ages through Origen's Commentary on the Canticle, translated by Rufinus.³

[Tertio vero expositiones] loco introducamus animam, cujus omne studium sit conjungi et consociari verbo Dei, et intra mysteria sapientiae ejus ac scientiae

³Butler, p. 110.

velut sponsi coelestis thalamos intrare, cuique animae praesentia etiam ipsius munera data sunt, dotis scilicet nomine. Sicut enim Ecclesiae dos fuit legis et prophetarum volumina, ita huic lex naturae et rationalis sensus ac libertas arbitrii dotalia munera deputentur. Habens autem haec dotis suae munera, sit ei primae eruditionis doctrina a monitoribus doctoribusque descendens. Sed quoniam in his non est ei plena atque perfecta desiderii sui et amoris expletio, deprecetur ut mens ejus pura et virginalis, ipsius verbi Dei illuminationibus et visitationibus illustretur. Cum enim nullo hominis vel angeli ministerio divinis sensibus et intellectibus mens impletur, tunc ipsius oscula verbi Dei suscipere sese credat Propter haec ergo et hujusmodi oscula dicat anima orans ad Deum: Osculetur me ab osculo oris sui. Dum enim incapax fuit, ut ipsius Verbi Dei caperet meram solidamque doctrinam, necessaria suscepit oscula, id est sensus ab ore doctorum; ubi vero sponte jam coeperit obscura cernere, enodare perplexa, involuta dissolvere, parabolas et aenigmata, dictaque sapientum compententibus intelligentiae lineis explicare, tunc jam oscula ipsius sponsi sui, id est Verbi Dei, suscepisse se credat. Ideo autem oscula pluraliter posuit, ut intelligamus uniuscujusque obscuri sensus illuminationem, osculum esse Verbi Dei ad animam perfectam delatum. Et secundum hoc forte dicebat prophetica et perfecta mens: Os meum aperui et attraxi spiritum. Os autem sponsi intelligimus virtutem Dei, qua illuminat mentem, et velut sermone quodam amoris ad eam facto, si tamen capere mereatur tantae virtutis praesentiam, incognita quaeque sibi et obscura manifestat, et hoc est verius propiusque, et sanctius osculum, quod a sponso Dei verbo porrigi dicitur sponsae, purae scilicet animae, et perfectae.

(Bk. I, Sect. 37, in P.G., XIII, 85-86)

Let us bring in the soul whose only desire is to be united to the Word of God and to be in fellowship with Him, and to enter into the mysteries of His wisdom and knowledge as into the chambers of her heavenly Bridegroom; which soul has already received His gifts - that is to say, her dowry. For, just as the Church's dowry was the volumes of the Law and the Prophets, so let us regard natural law and reason and free will as the soul's betrothal gifts. And let the teaching, which comes down to her from her masters and teachers, following on these

gifts of her natural endowment, be to her for her earliest instruction. But, since she does not find in these the full and perfect satisfaction of her desire and love, let her pray that her pure and virginal mind may be enlightened by the illumination and the visitation of the Word of God Himself. For, when her mind is filled with divine perception and understanding without the agency of human or angelic ministration, then she may believe she has received the kisses of the Word of God Himself.

For this reason, then, and for the sake of these kisses, let the soul say in her prayer to God: 'Let him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth.' For as long as she was incapable of receiving the solid and unadulterated doctrine of the Word of God Himself, of necessity she received 'kisses,' that is, interpretations, from the mouth of teachers. But, when she has begun to discern for herself what was obscure, to unravel what was tangled, to unfold what was involved, to interpret parables and riddles and the sayings of the wise along the lines of her own expert thinking, then let her believe that she has now received the kisses of the Spouse Himself, that is, the Word of God.

Moreover, the plural, 'kisses' is used in order that we may understand that the lighting up of every obscure meaning is a kiss of the Word of God bestowed on the perfected soul. And it was perhaps with reference to this that the prophetic and perfected soul declared: "I opened my mouth and drew breath."

And let us understand that by the 'mouth' of the Bridegroom is meant the power by which He enlightens the mind and, as by some word of love addressed her so she deserved to experience the presence of power so great - makes plain whatever is unknown and dark to her. And this is the truer, closer, holier kiss, which is said to be granted by the Bridegroom-Word of God to the Bride - that is to say, to the pure and perfect soul . . .⁴

⁴Origen, The Song of Songs: Commentary, Book One, in The Song of Songs Commentary and Homilies, trans. and annotated by R.P. Lawson. Vol. 26 of Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation, ed. by Johannes Quasten and Joseph C. Plumpe (Westminster, Maryland, The Newman Press, 1957), pp. 60-62.

side is

Jan, 1

Jan. 1,

11. Ho

side n

non a

exper

cond

imag

the

fire

oil

of

s

e

The idea that Jesus Christ is the bridegroom and the soul the bride is found in Augustine (Tract. 2 in Epist. Ioan., Tract. 8 in Epist. Ioan., Psalms 57 and 64, De Symb., lib. 2, cap 32, and De Verb. Apost., ser.31, cap. 68), and at least once in Gregory (Hom. in Ezech., II, iii, 8). However, it is in the mystical tradition proper that the bridegroom-bride relationship is applied to Christ and the individual soul with elaboration and deep exploration of the possibilities of expressing a mystical experience in terms of human love and the marriage consummation and bond.

Evelyn Underhill finds it is "natural and inevitable that the imagery of human love and marriage should have seemed to the mystic the best of all images of his own 'fulfillment of life'; his soul's surrender, first to the call, finally to the embrace of Perfect Love. It lay ready to his hand; it was understood of all men; and, moreover, it certainly does offer, upon lower levels, a strangely exact parallel to the sequence of states in which man's spiritual consciousness unfolds itself, and which form the consummation of the mystic life."⁵

The first to give utterance to the realities of the mystical experience in terms of a sublimated human love was Plotinus.

So we always move around the One . . . When we do, we attain the end of our existence, and our repose, and we no longer sing out of tune, but form in very truth a divine chorus round the One.

In this choral dance the Soul sees the fountain of life

⁵ Mysticism, pp. 136-137.

and the fountain of Spirit, the source of Being, the cause of Good, the root of Soul. These do not flow out of the One in such a way as to diminish it; for we are not dealing with material quantities, else the products of the One would be perishable, whereas they are eternal, because their source remains not divided among them, but constant. Therefore the products too are permanent, as the light remains while the sun remains. For we are not cut off from our source nor separated from it, even though the bodily nature intervenes and draws us towards itself, but we breathe and maintain our being in our source, which does not first give itself and then withdraw, but is always supplying us, as long as it is what it is. But we are more truly alive when we turn toward it, and in this lies our well-being. To be far from it is isolation and diminution. In it our Soul rests, out of reach of evil; it has ascended to a region which is pure from all evil; there it has spiritual vision, and is exempt from passion and suffering; there it truly lives. For our present life, without God, is a mere shadow and mimicry of the true life. But life yonder is an activity of the Spirit, and by its peaceful activity it engenders gods also, through its contact with the One, and Beauty, and Righteousness, and Virtue. For these are the offspring of a Soul which is filled with God, and this is its beginning and end - its beginning because from this it had its origin, its end because the Good is there, and when it comes there it becomes what it was. For our life in this world is but a falling away, an exile, and a loss of the Soul's wings. The natural love which the Soul feels proves that the Good is there; this is why paintings and myths make Psyche the bride of Cupid. Because the Soul is different from God, and yet springs from him, she loves him of necessity; when she is yonder she has the heavenly love, when she is here below, the vulgar. For yonder dwells the heavenly Aphrodite, but here she is vulgarized and corrupted, and every Soul is Aphrodite.⁶ This is figured in the allegory of the birthday of Aphrodite, and Love who was born with her. Hence it is natural for the Soul to love God and to desire union with Him, as the daughter

⁶The Aphrodite referred to by Plotinus is the Greek goddess of love and beauty regarded usually as the daughter of Zeus and Oceanid. As such, she would be roughly equivalent to the Word in the Christian Trinity. The analogy of the two Aphrodites is found in Plato.

of a noble father feels a noble love. But when, descending to a generation the Soul, deceived by the false promises of a lover, exchanges its divine love for a mortal love, it is separated from its father and submits to indignities; but afterwards it is ashamed of these disorders and purifies itself and returns to its father and is happy. Let him who has not had this experience consider how blessed a thing it is in earthly love to obtain that which one most desires, although the objects of earthly loves are mortal and injurious and loves of shadows, which change and pass; since these are not the things which we truly love, nor are they are good, nor what we seek. But yonder is the true object of our love, which it is possible to grasp and to live with and truly to possess, since no envelope of flesh separates us from it. He who has seen it knows what I say, that the Soul then has another life, when it comes to God and having come possesses him, and knows, when in that state, that it is in the presence of the dispenser of true life, and that it needs nothing further. On the contrary, it must put off all else, and stand in God alone, which can only be when we have pruned away all else that surrounds us. We must then hasten to depart hence, to detach ourselves as much as we can from the body to which we are unhappily bound, to endeavour to embrace God with all our being, and to leave no part of ourselves which is not in contact with him. Then we can see Him and ourselves, as far as is permitted: we see ourselves glorified, full of spiritual light, or rather we see ourselves as pure, subtle, ethereal, light; we become divine, or rather we know ourselves to be divine. Then indeed is the flame of life kindled, that flame which, when we sink back to earth, sinks with us.

Why then does not the Soul abide yonder? Because it has not yet wholly left its earthly abode. But the time will come when it will enjoy the vision without interruption, no longer troubled with the hindrances of the body. The part of the Soul which is troubled is not the part which sees, but the other part, when the part which sees is not reason, but something greater than and prior to reason, something presupposed by reason, as is the object of vision. He who then sees himself, when he sees will see himself as a simple being, will be united to himself as such, will feel himself become such. We ought not even to say that he will see, but he will be

that which he sees, if indeed it is possible any longer to distinguish or imagine two things; he becomes another, he ceases to be himself and to belong to himself. He belongs to Him and is one with Him, like two concentric circles; they are one when they coincide, and two only when they are separated. It is only in this sense that the Soul is other. Therefore this vision is hard to describe. For how can one describe, as other than oneself, that which, when one says it, seemed to be one with oneself?⁷

At the height of this period of mysticism, in the twelfth century, The Canticle of Canticles had many commentators. This book, indeed, provided a wonderful theme for mystical thought. The writers of the twelfth century, for whom realities only counted in so far as they held hidden some divine teaching, were passionately attached to the great symbolism of the most excellent of Canticles.⁸

Richard of St. Victor has given us one of the most detailed applications of the symbolism of marriage to the strivings of the spirit of man. The work is De Quator Gradibus Violente Charitatis.⁹ He divides the striving into four steps. He calls these steps the betrothal, the marriage, copulation and child bearing. [In primo gradu fit desponsatio, in secundo nuptiae, in tertio copula, in quarto puerperium . . . De quarto dicitur, Concepimus, et quasi parturivimus et peperimus spiritum (Isa.

⁷Plotinus, Ennead, VI-IX, 9, in The Philosophy of Plotinus, trans., William Ralph Inge, 3rd ed. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1948) pp. 191-193.

⁸Pierre Pourrat, pp. 63-64.

⁹P.L., CXCVI, 1207.

26

27

28

29

30

31

32

33

34

35

36

37

38

39

40

41

42

43

44

45

46

47

48

49

50

xviii, 26).]¹⁰ Underhill explains the four stages by describing the betrothal as the soul "thirsting for the Beloved; the Spirit comes to the soul, and seems sweeter than honey." It is conversion, the awakening to mystical truth; the kindling of the passion for the Absolute. "Then the Soul with pertinacity demands more": because of her burning desire she attains to pure contemplation, and so passes to the second degree of love. In this she is "led in bridal" by the Beloved. Ascending "above herself" in contemplation, she "sees the Sun of Righteousness." She is now confirmed in the mystic life; the irrevocable marriage vows are made between her spirit and her God. At this point she can "see the Beloved," but "cannot yet come in to Him." In Richard's "third stage," however, that of union, or wedlock, it is clear that the soul enters upon the "unitive way." She has passed the stages of ecstatic and significant events, and is initiated into the Life. She is "deified," "passes utterly into God, and is glorified in Him"; is transfigured, he says, by immediate contact with the Divine Substance, into an utterly different quality of being. In the fourth degree, the Bride who has been so greatly honoured, caught up to such unspeakable delight, sinks her own will and "is humiliated below herself." She accepts the pains and duties in the place of the raptures of love; and becomes a source, a "parent" of fresh spiritual life. The Sponsa Dei develops into the Mater Divinae Gratiae. That imperative need of life, to push on, to create, to spread, is here seen operating in

¹⁰P.L., CXCVI, 1216.

the spiritual sense.¹¹

"The interpretation of the Cantic, most commonly known in the twelfth century, is that of St. Bernard. According to him the bridegroom is Jesus, the bride is the Church and the fervent soul, the companions of the bride are those souls, still imperfect, which aspire to the rank of brides, the friends of the bridegroom are the angels.¹² Before becoming a bride it is necessary to begin by being the companion of the bride; the exercises of asceticism, in fact, must precede the sweetness of mystical union. In his commentary, the Abbot of Clairvaux also deals fairly often with Christian mortification, with the destruction of vice and the development of virtue, in a word, with that which the companion of the bride must do in order to become herself a bride and enjoy the mystical embrace of the bridegroom."¹³

Saint Bernard is explicit from the beginning of his commentary that his subject is marriage as an analogy of union of the soul and God. He says:

Excellit in naturae donis affectio haec amoris,
praesertim cum ad suum recurrit principium, quod
est Deus. Nec sunt inventa aequae dulcia nomina,
quibus Verbi animaeque dulces ad invicem expri-
merentur affectus, quemadmodum sponsus et spon-
sa: quippe quibus omnia communia sunt, nil pro-
prium nil a se divisum habentibus. Una utriusque
haereditas, una domus, una mensa, unus torus,

¹¹Underhill, pp. 139-140.

¹²St. Bernard, Sermons I, 8; VIII, 8; XIV, 5.

¹³Pourrat, pp. 65-66.

una etiam caro.

P.L., CLXXXIII, 807.

Among all the natural endowments of man love holds first place, especially when it is directed to God, who is the source whence it comes. No sweeter names can be found to embody the sweet interflow of affections between the Word and the soul, than bridegroom and bride. Between these all things are equally shared, there are no selfish reservations, nothing that causes division. They share the same inheritance, the same table, the same home, the same marriage-bed, they are flesh of each other's flesh.

(Sermon 7: II, 2)

In the eighty-third sermon of his Commentary, Bernard is particularly eloquent on the glories of spiritual marriage. I will quote a large portion of the sermon because it summarizes the thought of the most influential author on the subject of spiritual marriage, and because it will serve as a firm basis for comments about the tradition as they appear in The Pearl.

Jam vero animae reditus, conversio ejus ad Verbum, reformandae per ipsum, conformandae ipsi. In quo? In charitate.

Talis conformitas maritat animam Verbo, cum cui videlicet similis est per naturam, similem nihilominus ipso se exhibet per voluntatem, diligens sicut dilectia est. Ergo, si perfecte diligit, nupsit. Quid hac conformitate jucundius? quid optabilius charitate, qua fit ut humano magisterio non contenta, per temet, o anima, fiducialiter accedas ad Verbum, Verbo constanter inhaereas, Verbum familiariter percuncteris, consultesque de omni re, quantum intellectu capax, tantum audax desiderio? Vere spiritualis, sanctique connubii contractus est iste. Parum dixi contractus: complexus est. Complexus plane, ubi idem velle, et nolle idem, unum facit spiritum de duobus. Nec verendum ne disparitas personarum claudicare in aliquo faciat convenientiam [alias, conniventiam] volun-

tatum, quia amor reverentiam nescit. Ab amando quippe amor, non ab honorando denominatur. Honoret sane qui horret, qui stupet, qui metuit, qui miratur: vacant haec omnia penes amantem. Amor sibi abundat, amor ubi venerit, caeteros in se omnes traducit et captivat affectus. Properrea quae amat, amat, et aliud novit nihil. Sponsus et sponsa sunt. Quam quaeris aliam inter sponsos necessitudinum vel connexionem, praeter amari, et amare? . . .

Deus, qui ait: Si ego pater, ubi est honor meus? Verum id Pater. Sed, si sponsum exhibeat, puto quia mutabit vocem, et dicet: Si ego sponsus, ubi est amor meus? Nam et ante ita locutus est: Si ego Dominus, ubi est timor meus? (Malach. I, 6) Exiget ergo Deus timeri ut Dominus, honorari ut pater, et us sponsus amari. Quid in his praestat, quid eminet? Nempe amor. Absque hoc et timor poenam habet, et honor non habet gratiam . . . Sed horum neutrum acceptabit Deus, si melle amoris condita non fuerint. Is per se sufficit, is per se placet, et propter se. Ipse meritum, ipse praemium est sibi. Amor praeter se non requirit causam, non fructum. Fructus ejus, usus ejus. Amo quia amo; amo, ut amem. Magna res amor . . . Solus est amor ex omnibus animae motibus, sensibus atque affectibus, in quo potest creatura, etsi non ex aequo, respondere auctori, vel de simili mutuam rependere vicem. Verbi gratia, si mihi irascatur Deus, num illi ego similiter reira car? Non utique, sed pavebo, sed contremiscam sed veniam deprecabor . . . Nunc jam videas de amore quam aliter sit. Nam, cum amat Deus, non aliud vult quam amari: quippe non ad aliud amat nisi ut ametur sciens ipso amore beatos qui se amaverint . . .

Purus amor mercenarius non est. Purus amor spe vires non sumit, nec tamen diffidentiae damna sentit. Sponsae hic est, quia hoc sponsa est quaecunque est. Sponsae res et spes unus est amor. Hoc sponsa abundat, hoc contentus et sponsus. Nec is aliud quaerit, nec illa aliud habet. Hinc ille sponsus, et sponsa illa est. Is sponsis proprius est, quem alter nemo attingat, nec filius quidem . . . Sponsi amor, imo sponsus Amor solam amoris vicem requirit et fidem. Liceat pro inde redamare dilectam . . . Quidni ametur Amor?

Merito cunctis renuntians affectionibus aliis, soli et tota incumbit amor, quae ipsi respondere amor habet in redhibendo amore. Nam et cum se totam effuderit in amorem, quantum est hoc ad illius fontis perenne profluvium? Non plane pari ubertate fluunt amans et Amor, anima et Verbum, sponsa et sponsus, Creator et creatura, non magis quam sitiens et fons. Quid ergo? peribit propter hoc, et ex toto evacua-
biur nupturae votum, desiderium suspirantis, amantis ardo, praesumentis fiducia, quia non valet ex aequo currere cum gigante, dulcedine cum melle contendere; lenitate cum agno, candore cum lilio, claritate cum sole, charitate cum eo qui charitas est? Non. Nam, et si minus diligit creatura, quoniam minor est; tamen si ex tota se diligit, nihil deest ubi totum est. Propterea, ut dixi, sic amare, nupsisse est: quoniam non potest sic diligere, et parum dilecta esse ut in consensu duorum integrum stet perfectumque connubium. Nisi quis dubitet, animam a Verbo et prius amari, et plus. Prorsus et praevenitur amando, et vincitur. Felix, quae meruit praeveniri in tantae benedictione dulcedinis! Felix, cui tantae suavitatis complexum experiri donatum est! quod non est aliud, quam amor sanctus et castus, amor suavis, et dulcis; amor tantae serenitatis, quantae et sinceritatis; amor mutuus, intimus, validusque, qui non in carne una, sed uno plane in spiritu duos jungat, duos faciat jam non duos, sed unum, Paulo ita dicente: Qui adhoeret Deo, unus spiritus est.

(I Cor. vi, 17)¹⁴

The return of the soul is its conversion, that is, its turning to the Word; to be reformed by Him and to be rendered conformable to Him. In what respect? In charity. It is that conformity which makes as it were, a marriage between the soul and the Word, when, being already like unto Him by its nature, it endeavors to show itself like unto Him by its will, and loves Him as it is loved by Him. And if this love is perfected, the soul is wedded to the Word. What can be more full of happiness and joy than this conformity? What more to be desired than this love, which makes thee, O soul, no longer content with human guidance, to draw near with confidence thyself to the

¹⁴ P.L., CLXXXIII, 1182-1184.

Word, to attach thyself with constancy to Him, to address Him familiarly and consult Him upon all subjects, to become as receptive in thy intelligence as fearless in thy desires? This is the contract of a marriage truly spiritual and sacred. And to say this is to say little; it is more than a contract, it is embracement (complexus). Embracement surely, in which perfect correspondence of wills makes of two one spirit. Nor is it to be feared that the inequality of the two who are parties to it should render imperfect or halting in any respect this concurrence of wills; for love knows not reverence. Love receives its name from loving, not honouring. Let one who is struck with dread, with astonishment, with fear, with admiration, rest satisfied with honouring; but all these feelings are absent in him who loves. Love is filled with itself, and where love has come it overcomes and transforms all other feelings. Wherefore the soul that loves, loves, and knows nought else. They are Bridegroom and Bride. What other bond or constraining force do you seek for between spouses than to be loved and to love? . . . God says: If I be Father, where is My honour? He says that as a Father. But if He declares Himself to be a Bridegroom, will He not change the word and say: If I be Bridegroom, where is My love? For he had previously said: If I be Lord, where is My fear? God, then, requires that He should be feared as Lord, honoured as Father, but as Bridegroom loved. Which of these three is highest and most to be preferred? Surely it is love. Without it fear is painful and honour without attraction . . .

Neither of these will He receive if it be not seasoned with the honey of love. Love is sufficient by itself, it pleases by itself, and for its own sake. It is itself a merit, and itself its own recompense. Love seeks neither cause nor fruit beyond itself. Its fruit is its use. I love because I love; I love that I may love. Love, then is a great reality . . . It is the only one of all the movements, feelings, and affections of the soul in which the creature is able to respond to its Creator, though not upon equal terms, and to repay like with like. For example, if God is wroth with me, may I similarly be wroth with Him? Certainly not, but I shall fear and tremble and implore pardon . . .

But how different is it with love! For when God loves, He desires nought else than to be loved, because He loves us for no other purpose than that He may be loved, knowing that those who love Him become blessed by their love itself . . .

Love that is pure is not mercenary; it does not draw strength from hope, nor is it weakened by distrust. This is the love of the Bride, because all that she is is only love. The very being of the Bride and her only hope is love. In this the Bride abounds; with this the Bridegroom is content. He seeks for nothing else; she has nothing else. Thence it is that He is Bridegroom and she is Bride. This belongs exclusively to a wedded pair, and to it none other attains, not even a son. The Bridegroom's love, or rather the Bridegroom who is Love, requires only love in return. How could Love not be loved?

Rightly then does she renounce all other affections, and devote her whole self to Him alone Who is Love, because she can make a return to Him by a love which is reciprocal. For even when she has poured her whole self forth in love, what would that be in comparison to the everflowing flood of that Fountain? Not with equal fullness flows the stream of love from the soul and the Word, the Bride and the Bridegroom, the creature and the Creator. What then? Shall the desire of her who is espoused perish and become of no effect, because she is unable to contend with a Giant who runs His course, to dispute the palm of sweetness with honey, of gentleness with the lamb, of brilliance with the sun, of love with Him Who is Love? No. For although, being a creature, she love less, because she is less; nevertheless if she loves with her whole self, nothing is wanting where all is given. Wherefore, as I have said, to love thus is to be wedded [nupsisse]; because it is not possible to love thus and yet not to be greatly loved, and in the consent of the two parties consists a full and perfect marriage [connubium]. Can anyone doubt that the soul is first loved, by the Word, and more dearly? Assuredly it is both anticipated in loving and surpassed. Happy the soul whose favoured lot it is to be prevented with the benediction of a delight so great. Happy the soul to which is granted to experience the embracement [Complexus] of such sweetness, which is nought else than a love holy and

chaste; a love sweet and delightful; a love as serene as it is sincere; a love mutual, intimate, powerful, which not in one flesh, but in one spirit joins together two, and makes them no more two, but one according to St. Paul: 'He that is joined to God is one in spirit.'

(Butler's trans., pp. 111-113)

In the eighty-fifth homily, Bernard develops the idea of a spiritual marriage into that of spiritual fruitfulness.

In the latter kind of travail it sometimes happens that the soul is so transported out of itself and detached from the senses, that, though conscious of the Word, it has no consciousness of itself. This is the case when the mind is drawn on by the ineffable sweetness of the Word, and, as it were, is stolen from itself; or, rather, it is rapt and abides out of itself to enjoy the Word. The mind is affected in one way when it is rendered fruitful by the Word, and in another when it enjoys the presence of the Word. In the one, necessity of its neighbor importunes it, in the other the sweetness of the Word entices it. And, indeed, a mother has joy in her offspring; but a bride has greater joy in the embraces of her spouse. Dear are children, the pledges of affection; but kisses give greater joy. It is a good work to save many souls; but to be transported and to be with the Word, that is far more delightful. But when does that happen to us, or how long does it endure? Sweet is that intercourse; but how seldom does it occur, and for how brief a time does it last. And this is the final reason for which the soul seeks the Word; namely, that it may find delight through enjoying Him.

What is it to enjoy the Word? I reply: Let that be asked rather from him who has had the experience. Even though it were given to me to have that experience, how can you think it possible that I should explain that which is incapable of being put into words? . . . it has been permitted to me to have had that experience; it is not at all permitted to me to express it in speech.

(Cant., lxxxv., 12-14)¹⁵

¹⁵Butler, pp. 113-114.

In the introduction to this chapter, I stated that the theme of spiritual marriage as used in The Pearl underlies the description of the Pearl Maiden (as she exists in the Heavenly Jerusalem) and not the Visionary. I may add also that the poet does not present this concept to us in dynamic form; we do not watch the Maiden reach and consummate her union with the Lord. Rather it is her dress and certain of her answers to the narrator's questions which indicate that the tradition of spiritual marriage is present in the poem.

The white dress of the Pearl Maiden is definitely that of a bride while reflecting the fashion of the day of the poet, as Gordon has pointed out. Moreover, it is the symbolic raiment of the Bride of Revelation 19 who is the Church. (Both dresses are of finest linen.) In other words, the Pearl Maiden is presented visually as a bride; the first level of vision, the physical, presents her in this way from the moment the Visionary first spies her at the foot of the cliff to the last moment when he rushes into the stream in a futile effort to join her. She is always present to him as a Bride.

Second, the Visionary, on a deeper level, asks her two very significant questions. Perhaps the two are only one in reality: that of identity. The first question is asked at the beginning of the dialogue or debate in which the Pearl Maiden leads the Visionary to understanding and acceptance. It is a simple question: What kind of life do you lead?

Bot now I am here in your presente,
I wolde bysech, wythouten debate,
3e woulde me say in sobre asente

What lyfe ₃e lede erly and late.
(11. 389-392)

In other words, we would say, taking into account the serious context of the question, what have you become?

The Pearl Maiden answers unequivocally that she has become the Bride of the Lamb. He called her to marriage and now she is wholly his and possessor of all his inheritance.

Now wost wel when þy perle con schede
I wat ₃ong and tender of age;
Bot my Lorde þe Lombe þur ₃ hys godhede,
He toke myself to hys maryage,
Corounde me quen in blysse to brede
In lenghe of daye ₃ þat euer schal wage;
And sesed in alle hys herytage
Hys lef is. I am holy hysse:
Hys prese, hys prys, and hys parage
Is rote and grounde of alle my blysse.
(11. 411-420)

At the end of the debate or dialogue, the narrator again asks the question and again gets a like response. He phrases the question differently, but the information wanted is the same. What office of place do you have in the court of heaven, he inquires. This again can be read as: What have you become?

Breve me, bry3t, quat Kyn offys
Bere ₃ þe perle so maskelle ₃?
(11. 755-756)

She responds with the same answer in a more extended form than the first time with a direct quotation from the Song of Songs. She says she is the Bride of the Lamb and recounts his calling her in the words of the Bridegroom of that great Song:

He calde me to hys bonerte:
 "Cum hyder to me, my lemman swete,
 For mote ne spot is non in þe."
 He gef me my₃t and als bewte;
 In hys blod he wesch my wede on dese,
 And coronde clene in vergynte,
 And py₃t me in perle₃ maskelle₃.
 (ll. 762-768)

Moreover, the Pearl Maiden picks up a key word from her answer, lemman (beloved, Lover), and uses it again in ll. 794, 805, and 829.

Finally in section XIV, the narrator asks who is the Lamb that has called her to be wife above so many others greater than she? She answers in the words of Revelation and places herself among the 144,000 who follow the Lamb wheresoever He goes.

The narrator finally does realize her identity because he refers to her as one chosen to enter Christ's bridal chamber in l. 904.

To Kryste₃ chambre þat art ichose.
 (l. 904)

Therefore, one of the dimensions of the Pearl Maiden is that of participant in a spiritual marriage as implied from the Song of Songs through Old Testament and New Testament times and brought to full flower with Bernard's great commentary at the height of a great age of mysticism.

A perfected soul in Bernard's affective language is a Bride of the Word. The perfected daughter of a bereaved father in the fourteenth century is pictured in just the same terms. The symbolic language of the mystics in talking of souls who gain a real knowledge of God while alive, is used by a man who has a vision of a loved one who is dead and

gone to God. He returns, however, to tell his tale. What other words can he use but the words of the mystics themselves who have been to heaven, ravished to sacred space, have encountered the Lord and have been changed utterly for the experience?

exper

the pr

more

ment

lect

per

ges

ou

dr

A

i

V. IMPLICATIONS OF THE VISION TRADITION
ON THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE PEARL:
TOWARD A TEXTUAL READING AND APPRECIATION

This paper starts from a hypothesis regarding the nature of the experience which the main personage of The Pearl enjoys. I work from the premise that within the poem itself certain lines, parts of lines, and, more importantly, certain attitudes express the presence of several elements which are not part of the dream tradition. I suggest this, not because I would deny the very real influence of the dream tradition in the poem, but because I see in the poem certain characteristics which, I suggest, form another tradition. In the introduction to this paper I pointed out some definite features of The Pearl which were not present in such dream literature as the Roman de la Rose, The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man, and The Parliament of Fowls. Specifically, I indicated that there is a difference between a dream and a vision and that The Pearl is a vision and not a dream at all. Therefore, I call The Pearl a product of the vision tradition.

The presence of such a tradition as I describe does not provide the definitive reading of The Pearl. I believe, however, that it puts the modern reader more in touch with what one can assume about the medieval author who wrote it. Besides taking for granted that a very real tradition was present to him from the dream tradition, I postulate that the elements of the vision tradition were as present and as important an influence, even though these characteristics are very foreign to the modern reader.

point of

in this

not fa

us the

his a

"pea

slee

thi

thi

m

s

I will, first of all, gather together the textual evidence for this point of view. The first, and, perhaps, most convincing characteristic in this vision tradition surfaces because the Visionary of The Pearl does not fall asleep and dream a dream. The Visionary, on the contrary, tells us that in the midst of a "fierce" inner argument between his reason and his affections -- regarding the acceptance of the loss of his child, his "pearl" -- he fell upon the ground and slipped into a sudden spell of sleep.

Taking into consideration the lines which immediately follow this statement, which describe what I identify as ecstasy, I suggest that perhaps the Visionary was struck to the ground in somewhat the same manner as Saul of Tarsus was struck from his horse. For the next lines seem to me a direct echo of Paul's description of one of his vision experiences. They are:

Fro spot my spyryt þer sprang in space;
 My body on balke þer bode in sweuen,
 My gost is gon in Gode₃ grace
 In auenture þer meruayle₃ meuen.
 I ne wyste in þis worlde quere þat hit wace . . .
 (ll. 61-65)

Paul says in II Cor. 12 that he knows a man in Christ who was rapt to the third heaven. And he repeats, "whether in the body, I know not, or out of the body, I know not; God knoweth." And Augustine, in commenting on this quote, concludes that Paul uses this phrase because he did not know if his spirit was literally out of his body when he experienced his vision(s). The author of The Pearl has simplified the mat-

ter for us; he clearly explains that the spirit left the body of his Visionary behind. My point here is that the statement of Paul and Augustine's gloss on it could be background material for the fourteenth century poem. Now, line 64 uses the word "aventure"; this reminds us immediately of the great popularity of The Visio Pauli which claimed to tell of the adventures of Paul when he was in the third heaven. Of course, of these "adventures," Paul himself reports "That he, Paul, was caught up into Paradise, and heard secret words, which it is not granted to man to utter (II Cor. 12). The Pearl Visionary echoes this also in ll. 99-100.

þe derþe þerof for to deuyse
Nis no wy₃ worþe þat tonge bere₃.

Yet another very interesting echo of Paul is found very early in the poem. The phrase occurs in lines 31-32 and reads:

þer hit doun drof in molde₃ dunne;
For vch gresse mot grew of grayne₃ dede.

Paul said it this way:

Insipiens, tu quod seminas non vivificatur, nisi prius moriatur. Et quod seminas, non corpus, quod futurum est, seminas, sed nudum granum, ut puta tritici, aut alicuius caeterorum.

I Cor. 15:36-37 (Vulg.)

Senseless man, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die first. And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not the body that shall be; but bare grain, as of wheat, or of some of the rest.

I. Cor. 15:36-37 (Douay)

It seems to me that this bit of scripture may be one statement of the theme upon which the whole of the poem is built. I say this because the Visionary of the poem does, in the course of the narrative, al-

low his

side o

the fr

the de

In the

vision

Peter

Nike

lust

in t

ec

o

B

C

low his hard core of sorrow and non-understanding to be buried. The attitude of the Visionary can be said to die in the course of the poem, as the fruits of his sorrow, the growth of understanding and acceptance of the death of a loved one, are in truth the results of his vision experience. In the course of this paper, I have remarked more than once that a real vision experience leaves the visionary utterly changed. I have cited Peter and Paul as the prime examples of changed personalities. I would like to suggest that the Visionary of The Pearl can be included in this illustrious company at least for his change of viewpoint which is so marked in that controversial 101st stanza of the poem.

Now, since the Visionary of The Pearl can be thought of as an ecstatic Visionary, I was not too surprised to discover in the poem traces of the contemplative mystical spirit that infused the era from Augustine to Bernard and beyond. Specifically, I mention again the growing awareness on the part of the Visionary that the physical sights of the sacred space wherein his vision takes place dazzle his eyes, but the insights which he gradually gains are those which satisfy his spirit. This movement is somewhat synonymous with the movement of the mystic going as it does from the physical to the more spiritual, from the things of the earth to those of the spirit. Finally, the height of mystical contemplation is given flesh in the poem in the person of the Pearl Maiden. The details of her dress, her position in the procession of the 144,000 who follow the Lamb wheresoever he goes and, especially, her precise identification of herself as a Bride of the Lamb makes her a dramatic explanation of that

very pos

claims

God as

She cl

to

h

e

n

very popular medieval concept of the mystical marriage. She not only claims to be his Bride, but she dramatically in l. 859 claims to know God as she is known by Him.

We þurȝoutly hath cnawyng.

She claims also the pledge of Gal. 4:7.

You are no longer a slave but a son. And since
you are a son, you will receive the heritage of a son.
(Douay)

He toke myself to hys maryage,
Corounde me quene in blysse to brede
In lenghe of daye₃ þat euer schal wage;
And sesed in alle hys herytage
Hys lef is. I am holy hysse:
(ll. 414-418)

Interestingly enough, the Visionary, himself, does not proceed to union with the Lord which his Pearl Maiden exemplifies. Neither does he ascend to what Augustine would call an intellectual vision, a direct encounter of the Lord. His vision is of a perfected creature, not of the Creator. Therefore, as I have noted above, he does not see the Lord essentially, or face to face. He sees the iconographic signs of the Lamb but not Christ. In addition to the Visionary's greater interest in the Pearl Maiden than the Lamb, we can also quote the words of the Visionary himself as an indication of this point:

. . .drawen to Godde₃ present,
To mo of his mysterys I hade ben dryuen.
(ll. 1193-94)

Another item of interest comes in here when we remember that this is how the poet answered or, maybe, avoided the controversy of his day concerning the ability of a man to see God and live.

come to

other

teen

hav

tic

W

tr

c

f

Finally, the return of the Visionary's spirit to his body seems to me to strengthen the case for his having had a vision and not a dream.

For ry₃t as I sparred vnto þe bonc,
 þat brathþe out of my drem me brayde.
 (11. 1169-1170)

The vision ends abruptly and the Visionary "wakes up" in the other garden. But he goes on to accept his loss in peace.

Implicitly, I believe that the existence of The Pearl in fourteenth century England is one indication that the four characteristics I have enumerated -- ecstasy, vision, mystical contemplation, and mystical marriage -- were living ideas of concern to people of the time. Moreover, I have been able to show that each of these components of the vision tradition was rooted in the Apostolic Church and had a more or less continuous history as accepted, or, at least, controversial ideas in the course of the centuries.

The understanding of ecstasy, for example, derives from the Biblical accounts of the ecstatic experiences of Paul, Peter and the author of the Book of Revelations. Paul's conversion experience proved to be a particularly rich source of information -- perhaps because the author of the Acts retold the story three times and, indeed, punctuated the growth of the infant Church from the upper room of the Last Supper to the center of the western world, Rome, with re-tellings of this experience. From these accounts, it is possible to gather conventions concerning ecstasy which occur again and again through the ages. The falling to earth prior to the seeing of his initial vision of the Lord is a good exam-

the The V

experience

place in

text of

numeric

so as

need

stacy

by

rel

D

re

ple. The Visionary of The Pearl does this very thing before his vision experience.

Further it is possible to cite many instances of visions taking place in ecstasy from the extra-canonical books. I have cited the Shepherd of Hermes and the First Acts of the Martyrs as two examples out of a number in this source.

The complex question of the veracity of ecstasy is next broached so as to indicate that visions or communications with heavenly personages need not take place in the para-physical state of ecstasy, but that ecstasy may be a component of this experience.

It is also possible to trace the presence of visions in ecstasy by consulting theoretical statements explicating them. The citation of relevant texts from Augustine's de Genesi ad litteram, from Pseudo-Dionysius, from Gregory the Great, and from Bernard are included as representative major statements on the question.

Visions, of course, can be traced from the same biblical sources because Peter's and Paul's experiences were ecstatic visions. Comments on these visions reveal that the early church accepted them as viable vehicles of encounter. It is also possible to cite indications that there was much interest in the sacred space in which visions occurred. Glosses on Paul's "third heaven" point this out and the popularity of the Visio Pauli reveals the great extent of the interest within the vision tradition.

The results of visions also proved to be a point of interest, especially to the commentators on Paul who find a great amount of specula-

impossibility

semantic

invariant

the word

of the

The st

proom

ditio

emp

tra

of

tr

tion possible on the blindness/sight experience of this Apostle. The dramatic quality of this component of visions underlies the change which invariably happens to seers of visions.

From other comments on the same material, it is obvious that the understanding of a visionary is much closer to essential knowledge of the heavenly person encountered than it is to mere intellectualization. The statements of the Pearl Maiden regarding her knowledge of the Bridegroom seem a real example of this concept working within the vision tradition.

Once again, a number of examples from extra-canonical works emphasizes the widespread interest in visions as well as continuing the tradition through the centuries. The Shepherd of Hermes, "The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas," The Pseudo-Clementine Homilies and the central Visio Pauli are the examples I included.

It seems quite possible that this interest in and speculation on visions and their import was also conveyed through the practice of and interest in contemplation centered in the mystical movement. The truth of this as a possible human experience can be at least partly verified by reference to the psychology of the mystics, and to the direct statements on this gift from the author of Revelation, Paul, Origen, Plotinus, Augustine, Gregory, and Bernard. The centrality of Augustine's statements is apparent and his three kinds of visions are tentatively applied to parts of The Pearl.

Finally, the unitive effect of visions as mystical marriage is

examined

identifies

tion of t

metapho

until tr

of The

an un

the e

itse

in

o

c

examined because the guide-leader figure of The Pearl, the Pearl Maiden, identifies herself with the Bride figure present in the metaphoric explanation of the soul's relationship to its creator. There is no doubt that this metaphor is present in tradition at least from the time of the Book of Osee until the time of St. Bernard's great sermons and is an explicit ingredient of The Pearl besides being an implicit part of the vision tradition.

The existence of a vision tradition seems to add some depth to an understanding of The Pearl as well as to the bulk of the literature of the age. A look at some of the criticism and scholarship on The Pearl itself will perhaps help us to hear the poet's communication better.

Recognition that The Pearl is a vision is certainly not an original interpretation of the poem. Many critics refer to the whole poem, or parts of it -- for example, the time spent in the company of the Pearl Maiden, or more narrowly, the sight of the new Jerusalem -- as a vision. However, these same critics also call the personage of the poem a dreamer. I do not find any clarifying statement which distinguishes between a dream and a vision, which I hold makes a real difference in explicating the poem. Neither do I find any statement which suggests that what is happening is that a vision is occurring in sleep. What results seems to me to be at least a lack of exact usage of words, and may even indicate that these critics do not recognize that the typical poet of the Middle Ages would almost certainly understand that there is a real distinction between what we see in a dream -- which today we would probably call the creations of our subconscious -- and what we see in a vision -- which

are real u

communic

ben with

are not

all, I a

tion th

are el

putth

eleg

feig

kin

we

d

i

is a real understanding gained because we have been gifted with a true communication with a person who is not alive on earth. The dream comes from within; the vision from without.

In reviewing some of the criticism connected with the Pearl, I am not attempting to deal with all categories of this criticism. First of all, I am going to refer only to more recent criticism, under the assumption that the more important critical problems raised by the earlier critics are either reviewed or reworked in the later criticism. Moreover, I am putting aside completely the question of The Pearl being an allegory or an elegy. I find it a false question. The poem is elegiac whether it is feigned or not. The poet uses the occasion of death to talk about all kinds of related human concerns. It is in the tradition from which Milton was to write his "Lycidas," which all readers recognize is less about the dead man than it is about Milton's responses to death in general. What is more important than the question whether the poem is an elegy or not is the method the poet used to convey his poem, for, if we can come to understand his method, the meaning will become clearer. Now, the poet used the vision tradition, not the dream tradition exclusively. Modern criticism needs to recognize the difference between the two traditions and to stop using them interchangeably -- to the ultimate further mystification rather than explication of the Pearl.

Marie Hamilton¹ comes very close to the tentative stance I have

¹"The Meaning of the Middle English Pearl" in Sir Gawain and Pearl: Critical Essays, ed. by Robert J. Blanch (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966) pp. 37-59.

given in

treacher

ing-dea

over, s

both th

the m

in co

vinc

plac

of

to

a

taken in some of her details, as, for example, when she says that the dreamer indicates that the fragrance of the herb garden produced a "sleeping-death" or trance whereby he was granted the vision (p. 50). Moreover, she adds that the man was granted the mystical slumber which is both the sign and herald of spiritual illumination (p. 52). She even calls the man "ecstatic" in his awakening and says that he had an "adventure in contemplation" which reached his apex and served its purpose by convincing the dreamer (my emphasis) that the Redemption had indeed taken place and his soul has shared in it (p. 55).

From my premise this statement is somewhat ambiguous because of the use of the term dreamer. I think that the fact that the commentators in the Glossa Ordinaria were very careful to indicate that Peter was awake during his Joppa experience and that he slept when the messenger angel delivered him from prison could be taken as partial evidence that the medieval man would have distinguished the experiences in a dream from those in a vision -- even though he used the words interchangeably as the entry in the MED indicates.

Hamilton's use of the word trance (a possible English translation of ekstasis) and ecstatic are, again, not explained. It may be that she is aware of the rich tradition of this concept, but she gives no statement to this effect.

D.W. Robertson in "The Pearl as a Symbol,"² speaks consistent-

²In The Middle English "Pearl": Critical Essays, ed. by John Conley (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970), pp. 18-27.

of the C

of the Pe

science

the nec

Once a

ing; h

is be

aga

the

"F

a

e

ly of the dreamer of the poem and then states: "His vision (my emphasis) of the Pearl is a device by means of which the poet may impress upon his audience, the members of which are in the same situation as the dreamer, the necessity for regaining and maintaining a life of innocence" (p. 25). Once again this terminology confuses the issue; the narrator is not dreaming; he is experiencing a vision.

Even more confusing is Johnson's statement³ that ". . . the poem is basically a dream or vision allegory in the popular medieval tradition." Again, no explanation of terms; then, he calls the narrator "dreamer" all the way through the article, but when speaking of the new Jerusalem says: "He (the dreamer) is allowed to gaze upon it briefly . . . This ecstatic and genuinely moving descriptive passage, the climax of the vision (my emphasis) . . ." (p. 31). Moreover, he calls the major section of the poem, the central 91 stanzas, a vision; and dwells on the dreamer's (my emphasis) ever increasing desire to cross into greater beauty and says "the feeling is, in fact, the mystic's wish for union with the perfect, the desire to attain to a state of perfection" (p. 36). My point is simple: Johnson gives the narrator of The Pearl all the participation he wants in the mystical tradition without defining him and his experience as exactly as this tradition allows. The use of the word "Visionary" here would include the whole theological tradition barely hinted at by Johnson.

³Wendell Stacy Johnson, "The Imagery and Diction of The Pearl," *ibid.*, pp. 27-49.

S

location

operator

relatively

unit

human

this

only

best

time

time

W

a

Q

Stanton Hoffman gives in his criticism⁴ what I find a good explication of the poem. He quotes the lines (63-64) which record the narrator's spirit leaving his body and says: "This is the theme of spiritual adventure, the journey of the soul as it goes forth seeking for a truth . . . The poet's spirit is instructed and if we learn something also of man's fate -- something beyond the specific incident of the poem -- it is, I think, a sign of the poet's success, for this poem answers not only for the child's death, but in all its extended meanings, for our own deaths" (p. 102). I believe if this explication were tied in with the mystical tradition it would even more concretely be dealing with the theme of the poem on its own terms. For the instruction is a growing experience within a vision. Hoffman's extension of the implications of the experience are given even more weight if the original specific example, the *Visionary*, has been utterly changed by a vision!

Herbert Pilch⁵ provides me with more evidence of one of my points when he says: "the motif of the heavenly vision is also known to us from numerous legends of the saints such as the Vision of St. Patrick's Purgatory, and the Vision of Tundale" (p. 183). He goes on to try to distinguish the place of Pearl in the tradition surrounding the Roman. His conclusion is that the Pearl poet uses the dream convention but makes a distinction between his poem and the conventional content of this genre.

⁴"The Pearl: Notes for an Interpretation," *ibid.*, pp. 86-102.

⁵"The Middle English Pearl: Its Relation to the Roman de la Rose," *ibid.*, pp. 163-184.

Here

relocated

that the

Wells

direct

even

would

ca

it

is

"He re-interprets its values and places them within the bounds of a theological poem of consolation" (p. 183). Finally, Pilch recognizes that the "literary dream" already existed in the prophetic poetry of the Welsh (Myrddin) and in the Old English Dream of the Rood (p. 184). The direction of Pilch's scholarship is very attractive; with the addition of even more ancient biblical sources, the most probable milieu of the Pearl would become even more apparent.

Louis Blenkner in "The Theological Structure of the Pearl,"⁶ calls the Pearl: "a carefully structured poetic account of a spiritual itinerary culminating in an ecstasy of mystical contemplation" (p. 221). He also notes that the "poet shifts from one set of conventions to another (from those of patently fictional, secular love visions to those of religious vision considered unquestionably authentic in the Middle Ages)" (p. 222). He further describes the awakenings as " . . . exhibiting the traditional characteristics of a contemplative returning from mystical rapture -- sighing, bodily faintness, sorrowful longing after the vanished vision, and humble submission to the will of God" (p. 224). Then, again in the confused pattern we have noted above, Blenkner concludes that the profound psychic change from secular to religious point of view is because of a dream (p. 225). Once again, inexactitude of terms makes the explication less meaningful than it could be.

Spearing⁷ has a statement in his article which has given me

⁶In Conley, pp. 220-271.

⁷"Symbolic and Dramatic Development in The Pearl," *ibid.*, pp. 122-148.

added insights into the poem. " . . . the whole force and poignancy of the poem derives from its basic structure as an encounter involving human relationships" (p. 101).

It seems to me that the center of the poem -- the debate or didactic passage -- is essentially contemplative because the experience of the Visionary in that section is one of growing understanding that God's justice is infinitely more generous than man's mercy. This "knowing" about the Lord is the result not only of the Pearl Maiden's logic but more essentially of her person. I believe that the change of attitude of the Visionary, his growth in understanding, comes about because of the presence of the Pearl Maiden, because of her inter-relating with the Visionary -- not because she is knowledgeable. The guide leader here conveys herself as the essential person who replaces the loss of the Visionary, not by taking the loss away but by revealing that the loss is only loss in time -- in eternity the "seed" of loss grows into complete "fruition" which is union with the Infinite One.

I quoted Hamilton above as saying that the dreamer learned what redemption was, and that it applied to him. I agree essentially with the statement, but would like to phrase it differently. I believe that the Visionary received an essentially mystical gift by which he came to an understanding of who Christ is by an intimate encounter with a Bride who is one with Christ.

The fact that the Visionary does not see the essential face of God in the Lamb is attributed by Spearing (p. 117) to the dreamer's lack

of path

of the

deep

re of

the

the

pre

G

to

o

a

of patience. It is the conclusion of an argument which traces the growth of the dreamer's understanding as being parallel with the deeper and deeper meanings which the symbol of the pearl acquires in the narrative -- he calls it a "synthesis of symbol with drama." Therefore, he says that the dreamer does not make the complete identification of the Pearl with the Lamb and thereby does not see in the stone "the ground of its own preciousness"; he does "not achieve the mystical experience of seeing God in a point." I am in agreement with this viewpoint, but I would tend to think that the Visionary does not see God because the whole tradition out of which his creator comes, that is, his poet, was not presenting an intellectual or completely unitive vision such as Paul's or Dante's. He was presenting a corporeal vision which took on imaginary or spiritual overtones but never really reached intellectual depth. The Visionary sees the Creator in the creature; he experiences Christ in the more usual or human way -- in another person. This encounter is not unitive perhaps because the poet would have him live and tell his tale completely without resorting to a multi-foliated rose or to silence to explain the experience. Perhaps the poet believed with Gregory and Bernard that this experience would result in death -- perhaps the poet was choosing a side in the controversy itself.

Whatever the reason, the experience is not that of a soul married to the Lord. However, the Pearl Maiden's presence is a living example of what a Bride of Christ is -- so the poem does not lack, in one sense, the complete mystical experience. We do see the results of it in

the perfected girl of the elegy. Her sorrowing father does not reach perfection but his "seed of sorrow" is planted in fertile ground which yields in stanza 101 the peace of a man who has allowed the Lord to reign in Him as He can in a live human personality.

It seems to me that what the poet is essentially doing is expressing a basic truth in a metaphor. The basic truth may have something to do with the potentiality of man. It certainly has to do with the universal human problem of the mystery of loss and death; and with the universal problem of how a good God permits evil and suffering. It is essentially a metaphor for the truth which the man in the gospels discovered which led him to sell all he had to buy the pearl of great price. Or it may be an incomplete but somewhat satisfying answer to why the seed must die to bear fruit.

I posit this kind of conclusion very tentatively. I think the truth of it arises from the beginning of an understanding of the profoundly rich tradition which 1400 years of Christianity produced. The limitations of the conclusion or any conclusion are that the poem can not be explicated from the point of view of any one set of characteristics. The poem itself is as profound as the long tradition from which it arises. All criticism of the poem ultimately will not equal the work of art which is The Pearl. I recommend, however, that we recognize the richness and the depth which occur because the poem is an expression of the medieval understanding of and/or experience of the mystical tradition.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

"Apocalypse of Paul." The Apocryphal New Testament. Trans. M.R. James. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1924.

Aumanon, J. "Contemplation." New Catholic Encyclopedia. 1967.

Bernard of Clairvaux. On the Song of Songs I. Trans. Kilian Walsh. Shannon, Ireland: Irish University Press, 1971.

The Bible. Douay-Rheims Version.

The Bible. Jerusalem Version.

The Bible. Vulgate Version.

Blanch, Robert J., ed. Sir Cawain and Pearl: Critical Essays. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966.

Butler, Dom Cuthbert. Western Mysticism: The Teaching of Augustine, Gregory and Bernard on Contemplation and the Contemplative Life. 3rd ed. London: Constable, 1967.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. "The Parliament of Fowls." The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer. Ed. F.N. Robinson. 2nd ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1957.

Gloss, A. "Ecstasy." New Catholic Encyclopedia. 1967.

Conley, John, ed. The Middle English "Pearl": Critical Essays. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970.

Corbishly, T. "Mysticism." New Catholic Encyclopedia. 1967.

de Lorris, Guillaume, and Jean de Meun. The Romance of the Rose. Trans. Harry W. Robbins. New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1962.

Eliade, Mircea. The Sacred and the Profane. Trans. Willard R. Trask. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1959.

- Garrigou-Lagrange, R. Christian Perfection and Contemplation. St. Louis, 1937.
- Gollancz, Sir Isaac, ed. Pearl: An English Poem of the XIVth Century. New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1966.
- Hastings, James, ed. Dictionary of the Apostolic Church. 2 vols. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915-1918.
- Hennecke, Edgar. New Testament Apocrypha. Ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher. Trans. R. McL. Wilson. 2 vols. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963.
- James, William. Varieties of Religious Experience. London, 1904.
- Katsaros, Thomas, and Nathaniel Kaplan. The Western Mystical Tradition. New Haven, Conn.: College and University Press, 1969.
- Kurath, Hans, and Sherman A. Kuth. The Middle English Dictionary. Ann Arbor, Mich.: The University of Michigan Press, 1959.
- Liegly, G.M. "Vision (Dream) Literature." New Catholic Encyclopedia. 1967.
- Lohkamp, N. "Mystical Phenomena." New Catholic Encyclopedia. 1967.
- Lydgate, John. The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man: Englisht (sic.) by John Lydgate from the French of Guillaume de Deguileville. Early English Text Society 77, 83, 92. London: EETS, 1899-1904.
- Maréchal, Joseph, S.J. Studies in the Psychology of the Mystics. Trans. Algar Tharold. London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, Ltd., 1927.
- Masterman, M.R.E. "Ecstasy (In the Bible)." New Catholic Encyclopedia. 1967.
- Migne, Jacques Paul, ed. Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Graeca. 161 vols. Paris: J.P. Migne, 1863-1891.
- _____. Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Latina. 221 vols. Paris: J.P. Migne, 1863-1891.
- Morse, Charlotte C. "Saint Augustine's Theory of Visions and the Consolation of Philosophy." (Unpublished paper.)
- Quasten, Johannes. Patrology. 3 vols. Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1950.

- Quasten, Johannes and Joseph C. Plumpe, eds. Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation. 37 vols. Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1946.
- "The Shepherd of Hermes." The Apostolic Fathers. Eds. T.E. Page, E. Cupps, and W.H.D. Rouse. Trans. Kirsopp Lake. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1913.
- The Pearl. Ed. E.V. Gordon. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1953.
- Plotinus. "Ennead, VI-IX." The Philosophy of Plotinus. Trans. William Ralph Inge. 3rd ed. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1948.
- Poulain, Augustin. The Graces of Interior Prayer. Trans. Leonora L. Yorke-Smith. London, 1912.
- Pourrat, Pierre. Christian Spirituality. 2 vols. Trans. W.H. Mitchell and S.P. Jacques. Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1953.
- Roberts, Alexander, and James Donaldson, eds. The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers of the Church Down to A.D. 325. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1951.
- Saydon, P. "Song of Songs." In A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture. Eds. Reginald Fuller, Leonard Johnson, and Conleth Kearns. 2nd ed. London: Nelson, 1969.
- Schaff, Philip, ed. A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. 14 vols. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1956.
- Silverstein, Theodore. Visio Sancti Pauli: The History of the Apocalypse in Latin Together with Nine Texts. London: Christophers, 1935.
- Strong, James. The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible. New York: Eaton and Mains, 1890.
- Sylvia Mary, Sister. Pauline and Johannine Mysticism. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964.
- Underhill, Evelyn. Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness. 11th ed. London: Methuen and Co., 1949.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIV. LIBRARIES



31293104024371