

Essays in Medieval Studies 2

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page 107**The Eremitic Ideal and the Dreamer's Quest in *Piers Plowman*****James E. Hicks**

E. Talbot Donaldson observes in *Piers Plowman: The C-Text and Its Poet* that few social groups escape Langland's censure. Donaldson subsequently devotes some attention to particular occupations in the "fair felde ful of folk" which provoke Langland's indignation. After discussing ecclesiastics, minstrels, and beggars, Donaldson inexplicably dismisses Langland's hermits in a summary manner. He concludes that Langland's invective against recluses stems either from eremitic experiences in Langland's life which continue to elicit vituperation or from the breach between the ideal of the Desert Fathers and the practice of contemporary hermits (128). Although Donaldson notes the disparity between the eremitic ideal and the customs of contemporary hermits, he overlooks Langland's attempt to connect the traditional eremitic ideal and the Dreamer's quest in *Piers Plowman*.

Recognizing that the eremitic ideal exists in real life as another attempt to glorify God, inventing the Dreamer's search for truth as a literary creation to emphasize every Christian's pursuit of bliss, Langland unites the time-honored eremitic ideal of ascetism, bodily mortification, and pious devotion to the Dreamer's quest, and intensely personal, penitential, self-critical search for eternal reward in *Piers Plowman*. Langland understands that true hermits embark in real life on an unique spiritual journey to serve

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God, which Walter Hilton ably describes in *The Desert of Religion*:

A solitari here: hermite life i lede,

For ihesu loue so dere: all flescli lufe i flede;

þat gastli comforthe clere: þat in my breste brede,

Might me a thowsande 3eere: in heuenly strengthe haue stedd. (Comper xix)

Langland also knows that the Dreamer purposefully wanders through the world on his individual search for Christian virtue, which Richard Rolle of Hampole passionately depicts as a mystical union with Christ:

Ihesu my luf my ioy my reste,

þi perfite luf close in my brest

þat I þe luf & neuer reste

and make me luf þe of al þinge best,

and wounde my hert in þi luf fre

þat I may regne in Joy eurer more with þe. (Comper 318)

Expressing the idea that sincere hermits in real life and the literary Dreamer select essentially the same path to truth, Langland, like Hilton and Rolle, delineates incorruptible hermits and the fictitious Dreamer pursuing Christian self-knowledge and redemption.

Langland recognizes that holy hermits and the Dreamer undertake an arduous struggle to comprehend the profound nature of God's love. Amid the confusion of worldly disorder, Langland laments that the eremitic ideal, like

so many other ideals in the late fourteenth century, no longer illuminates man's moral vision. Since the eremitic ideal and the Dreamer's quest in *Piers Plowman* reflect every Christian's perpetual pursuit of truth, Langland challenges not only the corrupt hermit's mockery of the customary eremitic dress, but quite expressively attacks the unfaithful hermits' stubborn unwillingness to labor or to perform charitable deeds, the false hermits' aimless wandering, and the unchaste hermits' lechery throughout the search for salvation.

The Dreamer alludes to the traditional eremitic dress in the beginning of *Piers Plowman*. At the onset of the quest for truth, the Dreamer plainly states:

Y shope me into shroudes as y a shep were;

In abite as an hermite, vnholly of werkes,

Wente forthe in þe world wondres to here

And say many sellles and selkouthe thynges. (Prol 2-5)

Because sheepskin is the customary eremitic dress and devout hermits often give spiritual direction, the Dreamer selects an appropriate attire as he starts on his journey to truth (Anson *Call* 164 and 166). Like a gentle lamb, the Dreamer suggests that he intends to walk meekly among the wolves of this wretched world. Unlike a false recluse, the Dreamer criticizes himself, confessing that he lacks good works to his spiritual credit, as he

begins his wandering in the world to search for truth. Unobtrusively announcing the dominant themes of the pilgrimage to truth and the quest for Dowel, the Dreamer becomes a spiritual, pilgrim to everlasting Christian knowledge.

The Dreamer of the *Visio* who wanders about the world seeing many strange and marvelous things differs immensely from the Dreamer of the *Vita* who purposefully seeks Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest to understand eternal truth. The Dreamer assumes a different attire to symbolize the dramatic change in his moral understanding and spiritual state. When the Dreamer departs on his quest to find Dowel, the Dreamer dresses "yrobed in russet" (X 1), a coarse reddish-brown cloth, usually associated with eremitic attire, to represent the solitary nature of his search and the roughness of his immortal soul. At the Feast of Patience and the Meeting with *Activa Vita*, the Dreamer, dressed in "manere of a mendenaunt" (XV 3), appears in beggar's clothing to reflect his spiritual hunger and poverty. At the Harrowing of Hell, the Dreamer again wears a penitential garment of rough wool and water-soaked shoes which indicate his physical hardships and the weariness of his flesh on his quest to Dobet. Yet the Dreamer shows he knows too little about his spiritual condition when he remarks that "wolleward and watschoed wente y forth aftur / As a recheles renk þat recheth nat of sorwe ..." (XX 1-2). Finally, at the Founding of Holy Church, the Dreamer throws off his previous attire and dresses as the true wedding guest who enters into communion with Christ: "Thus

y wakede and wrot what y hadde ydremed / And dihte me derely and dede me to kyrke" (XXI 1-2).¹ Casting off the coarse wool clothing of the solitary quester who lacks Christian fellowship, the completely penitent and fully awake Dreamer now dons Holy Church's white linen to symbolize his joyful membership in the community of God's virtuous saints (I 3).² The Dreamer, who earlier pleads Holy Church for knowledge of how to distinguish truth from falsehood (II 4) initially dresses as a recluse in order to enjoy the necessary freedom to pursue the quest for truth.

Hermits freely serve God according to individual conscience. Because of their freedom of choice, they enjoy more personal liberty than others in the "fair feld ful of folk." Even though the Church seeks to license hermits, especially hermits who leave a cloistered order, they remain too independent for such unnecessary bureaucratic approval (Anson *Quest* 242). True hermits need no license to practice their vocation: they owe their allegiance only to God. Like the seventy-two whom Jesus appoints or the true apostles of Christ, true hermits go meekly as lambs among the wicked.³

In contrast to true hermits, false hermits, like false prophets, deceive the faithful by diverting them from the path of

righteousness and by corrupting the truth embodied in the living examples of holy hermits, such as John the Baptizer, a patron saint of recluses, who wears a hair shirt and eats only grasshoppers and honey;⁴ or St. Stephen of Muret who disfigures his nose by kneeling with his face

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to the ground in extreme devotion to prayer (Anson *Call* 164-65); or anonymous hermits who stand in freezing water to mortify their bodies against the fires of lust (Anson *Call* 164). By donning the traditional sheepskin and wandering among the Christian flock, false hermits avoid the obligation of work and escape from the bonds of social responsibility.

Since no religious restrictions or social expectations are binding on hermits, the Dreamer perceives that eremitic pretenders live, like true parasites, upon the worldly labor of others. The Dreamer observes the corruption of the truth which holds that all men must work:

Grete lobies and longe þat loth were to swynke

Clothed hem in copis to be knowe fram othere

And made hem self hermites, here ese to haue. (Prol 530-55)

Observing false hermits hiding behind their habit to evade their responsibility to work, the Dreamer learns from Reason and Repentance that "lewed ermytes" slothfully indulge their appetites (V 4; VI 368). The Dreamer later receives instruction from Piers the Plowman and Truth that if given the opportunity to select either asceticism and temperance or physical comfort and gluttony, false recluses, like most men, undoubtedly would choose personal ease and immoderation.

Like Reason and Repentance, Piers the Plowman shows the Dreamer that hermits, too,

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must work for their livelihood. At the Plowing of the Half-Acre, Piers the Plowman concretely demonstrates that recluses contribute to their own subsistence:

For a potte ful of potage þat Peres wyf made

An heep of eremytes henten hem spades,

Sputeden and spradden donge in dispit of Hunger.

They coruen here copes and courtepies hem made

And wenten as werkemen to wedyng and to mowyng

Al for drede of here deth, such dundes 3af Hunger. (VIII 182-87)

Piers the Plowman also teaches the Dreamer that true hermits, unlike gluttonous recluses who wastefully squander their food, practice self-denial or bodily mortification by eating only once a day. Underscoring the virtue of temperance for the Dreamer's benefit, Piers the Plowman declares that "ankerus and eremytes ... eten but at nones" (VIII 146).⁵ He holds up the ideal of eremitic temperance for the Dreamer's spiritual edification. Truth likewise assists the Dreamer to understand eremitic deception and man's seemingly insatiable desire for easy gain. She identifies eremitic impostors for the Dreamer, thereby enabling him to know falsehood. Confirming the Dreamer's initial observation about false recluses at the onset of his quest for truth, Truth points accusingly at deceitful hermits who stubbornly refuse to work:

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Ac these ermytes þat edifien thus by the heye weye

Whilen were werkemen, webbes and taylours
And carteres knaues and clerkes withouten grace,
Holden ful hungry hous and hadde mucche defaute,
Long labour and litte wynnynge, at the laste they aspyde
That faytede in frer clothinge hadde fatte chekes. (IX 206-11)[6](#)

Harboring some sympathy for unfortunate workmen or members of religious houses struggling against hunger, Truth objects to the deceit of the wasteful pretenders. Truth also teaches the Dreamer to know the false roaming hermits who fail to perform charitable deeds.

In order to foster the Dreamer's spiritual growth, Truth vigorously attacks false hermits who wander and beg wherever people congregate. She sees false recluses for what they really are despicable nuisances, like thieves who treacherously pursue their livelihood or idlers who slothfully utter obscenities in taverns. Moreover, she seems to associate false hermits with the Lollard poor priests, false shepherds who led the faithful flock into a wilderness of falsehood. For the Dreamer's benefit, Truth chides these eremitic imposters who aimlessly roam the countryside:

Ac eremytes at inhabiten by the heye were
And in borwes among brewesters,

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and beggen in churches

Al þat holy ermytes hatede and despisede,
As rychesse and reuerences and ryche mene almesse,

This lollares, lache-drawers, lewede ermytes

Coueyten þe contrarye, for as coterelles they libbeth. (IX 189-94)

Truth then points out to the Dreamer that holy hermits should dwell as solitary recluses "that wonede whilom in wodes with beres and lyons" rather than wandering along the public road or assembling in taverns (IX 197). Truth holds that true recluses retire to their cells instead of roaming aimlessly; Truth holds that true hermits deny their flesh and renounce material wealth instead of pledging themselves to brewers or coveting rich men's money. Furthermore, Truth understands that true hermits love God and serve their neighbor; Truth understands that true hermits practice charity.

Unlike false recluses who linger beside the highway or the Dreamer who begins his quest "vnholly of werkes," holy hermits accumulate many charitable deeds to their spiritual credit. Despite the fact that true hermits repudiate their relationship with the world, hermits more often than not diligently assist their neighbors.[7](#) Hermits act as guides for lost travelers or offer their cells as hostels to weary pilgrims. Hermits frequently engage in valuable service to the same community which they reject. They work as bridge keepers or burn fires at night along the coast

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to warn sailors. Wise and respected hermits, like Walter Hilton or Richard Rolle, give advice to the spiritually troubled or the worldly inexperienced. Serving as a living example of charity to all Christians, true hermits benefit the community near them through charitable deeds.

Truth, Thought, and Free Will all acknowledge to the Dreamer that every Christian must perform acts of charity. Addressing the merchants directly, Truth seems to rehearse the charity of faithful hermits. Truth concretely advises the wealthy Christian:

And wyckede wayes with here goed amende
And brugges to brokene by the heye wayes
Amende in sore manere and maydones helpe,
Pore peple bedredene and prisoned in stokkes
Fynde hem for goes loue, and fauntkynes to scole
Releue religion and renten hem bettere.... (IX 31-36)

In a more abstract manner, Thought instructs the Dreamer that Dowel animates every Christian. Thought teaches the Dreamer to speak only the truth, live by his own labor, love his neighbor, and deny the appetites of his flesh:

Ho is trewe of his tonge and of his two landes

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And thorw lele labour lyueth and loued his emcristene
And therto trewe of his tayl and take but his owene
And is nat dronklewe ne dedeynous.... (X 77-80)

Like Truth and Thought, Free Will informs the Dreamer that charity becomes the key to eternal salvation. Revealing to the Dreamer the power of divine love, Free Will instructs the Dreamer that the Tree of Charity bears Christ's redemptive fruit:

Loue God for he is goed and grounde of alle treuthe;

Loue thyn enemye entierly, goddes heste to fulfille;

Loue thyn frende þat folleweth thy wille, that is thy fayre soule. (XVII 141-43)

Truth, Thought, and Free Will explicitly state that all Christians bear the obligation to practice *caritas* throughout the quest for everlasting life. Truth, Thought, and Free Will logically advise the questing dreamer that truth, the greatest of all treasures (I 81), lies in charity, whose good works pave the arduous path to God with love.

Truth acknowledges the eremitic desire for solitude in the quest for salvation, but she also recognizes the hermits' lonely struggles in the wilderness against the devil and their own human frailty. She indicates that the eremitic life remains a spiritual ideal in real life. Because hermits possess more freedom and

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mobility than others, Truth realizes that hermits encounter more temptations to sin. On the other hand, Truth knows that the individual Christian must follow his own free will and conscience to God's eternal blessing.

Truth understands that hermits freely determine the course of their vocation according to their conscience. Insisting that true hermits maintain themselves only to worship and to glorify God, Truth acknowledges that some hermits live by their own labor while other hermits receive charity. Alluding to the infinite variety of eremitic life, Truth believes that faithful hermits provide a living example of prudence and temperance. She rehearses to the Dreamer that upright hermits disclaim their worldly inheritance and reject their physical desires to be faithful to their vocation.

Summe hadde lyflode of his lynage and no lyf elles

And summe lyuede by here lettrure and labour of here handes

And somme hadde foreynes to frendes þat hem fode sente

And briddes broughte somme bred þat they by lyuede.

Althey holy ermytes were of heye kynne,

Forsoken lond and lordschipe and alle lyknges of body. (IX 198-205)[8](#)

Truth appreciates the eremitic toils of fortitude, for true hermits struggle alone in their perpetual contention against the world, the flesh, and the devil without the comfort of

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Christian fellowship. Truth witnesses if hermits leave their cells and wander in the world, then they promptly encounter the snares of the devil. Consequently, she urges true hermits not to wander, but to reside in their cells and to repudiate their bodily appetites, which the Dreamer observes first hand at the beginning of his quest for salvation:

As ankeres and eremites þat holden hem in here selles,

Coueyten no3t in contreys to cayren aboute

For no likerous liflode here lycame to plesse. (Prol 30-32)

Since holy hermits should only travel as pilgrims, Truth attacks lewd hermits who lurk in the taverns with Gluttony or who aimlessly roam the highways. Truth reveals to the Dreamer that wandering hermits pose a real social concern and religious problem.

The wandering hermit, even as a pilgrim, exhibits his human weakness. Lacking Christian companionship, vulnerable to the natural elements, and deprived of sensory stimulation, sexually starving hermits live in constant dread of God's righteous indignation. Renouncing the sins of the flesh, hermits still retain their imagination and their ability to recall a sensuous past. Although true hermits struggle to reject bodily pleasures in their search for eternal grace, unholy hermits seek to gratify their carnal desires, as the Dreamer indicates at the start of his quest for truth: "Ermites on a hep with hokede staues / Wenten

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to Walsyngham, here wenches aftir ..." (Prol 51-52). Carrying the crooked staff, a symbol of the eremitic vocation, unholy hermits ironically undertake their pilgrimages to the shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham to satisfy their licentious appetites, to participate in an imminent debauch rather than to worship at a venerated shrine. Lewd hermits tumble down a rakish path to eternal ruin.[9](#)

Completely aware of the difficulty of the eremitic spiritual journey, St. Jerome knows that the hermits' wanderlust underscores the recluses' human frailty. Revealing the effects of sensory deprivation and overwhelming frustration experienced by the weary eremitic life, St. Jerome plainly describes his own reaction to isolation in the wilderness: "Ipsam quoque cellulam meam quasi cogitationum consciam pertimescebam et mihimet iratus et rigidus solus deserta penetrabam" (Ad Eustochium *Ep.* XII 7.3). In addition to boredom and desperation, St. Jerome remembers his sexual fantasies which torment him in the desert. He recalls: "Ille igitur ego, qui ob gehemae metum tali me carcere ipse damnaueram, scorpionum tantum socius et ferarum, saepe choris itereram puellarum. pallebant ora ieiuniis et mens desiderii aestuabat in frigido corpore et ante hominem suum iam carne praemortua sola libidinum incendia bulliebant" (Ad Eustochium *Ep.* XII 7.2). St. Jerome eventually suppresses his tumultuous passion with self-flagellation, continued fasting, and prayer to fulfill the arduous demands of the eremitic ideal.

Ultimately dependent upon Scripture, enlightened by selected passages from St.

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Jerome's *Epistles*, explicitly sanctioned by St. Benedict's *Rule*, exemplified by the *Legenda Aurea* which derives from the *Vitae Patrum*, and daily witnessed by the perseverance of dedicated hermits, the eremitic ideal professes the repudiation of the world and the flesh and the fiend in real life.¹⁰ Eschewing material riches, physical comfort, and the snares of the devil, the eremitic ideal embraces very distinctive attire, seclusion, and poverty. Absolutely committed to an individual vocation of solitude and repentance through prayer and fasting, totally owing an allegiance only to God, the eremitic ideal underscores a sole trust in God's mercy, saving grace, and abundant providence, as Free Will appropriately instructs the questing Dreamer of *Piers Plowman* by holding up the eremitic ideal for his moral improvement and spiritual enlightenment.

Free Will teaches the Dreamer that holy recluses accept whatever God provides them. Repeating that honest hermits pursue their vocations without wandering from their cells or begging for food, Free Will contends that true hermits, unlike wasteful eremitic impostors, live alone in the wilderness and depend solely on divine providence. Directing the Dreamer's attention to the righteous hermits' trust in God and God's help, Free Will cites significant hermits, stresses the importance of work, and reiterates man's absolute dependency on God's providence. Thus, for the Dreamer's spiritual edification, Free Will instructs him at great length:

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Holy writ witnesseth þer were suche eremytes,
 Solitarie by hemsulue in here selles hyuede
 Withoute borwyng or beggyng bote of god one,
 Excepte þat Egide a hynde oþer-while
 To his selle selde cam and softred by mylked.
 Elles foules fedde hem in frythes þer they wonede,
 Both Antony and Arseny and oþer fol monye.
 Paul *primus heremita* hadde yparrokedede hym sulue
 That no man myhte se hym for moes and for leues;
 Foules hym fedde....
 Paul aftur his prechyng paniars he made
 And wan with his handes all þat hym nedede.
 Peter fischede for his fode and his fere Androwe:
 Som they sode and som they solde and so they lyuede bothe.
 Marie Maudeleyne by mores lyuede and dewes;
 Loue and lele byleue held lyf and soule togyderes.
 Marie Egipciaca eet in thritty wynter
 Bote thre litle loues and loue was here soule.
 Y can nat rykene hem ri3t now ne reherse here names

That lyueden thus for oure lordes loue monye longe 3eres

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Withoute borwyngge or beggyngge ...

And woneden in wildernesses amonges wilde bestes.

Ac durste no beste byte hem by day ne by nyhte

Bote myldelyche when þey metten ruden lowe chere

And faire byfore tho men fauned with þe tayles.

Ac bestes brouhte hem no mete bute onliche þe foules

In tokenyngge þat trewe man alle tymes sholde

Fynde honest men and holy men and oþer rihtfole peple. (XVII 6-34)

Alluding to the *Legenda Aurea* or the *Vitae Patrum* or even both works as "holy writ," Free Will cites the early Christian desert dwellers, St. Giles the hermit, St. Anthony, and St. Arsenius, and correctly names St. Paul of Thebes as the first hermit. Free Will also lists three of Christ's true apostles, Paul, Peter, and Andrew.¹¹ Relying on legend, Free Will rehearses that the biblical Mary Magdalene retreats to La Saute-Baume in the mountains of Provence to obtain pardon for her sins, for Free Will knows that Mary Magdalene, like John the Baptizer, is a patron saint of recluses. Free Will concludes the eremitic catalogue by citing as an example of the eremitic ideal for the questing Dreamer St. Mary of Egypt who retires to the wilderness in penance for a sinful life.

Throughout the eremitic catalogue, a literary creation, Free Will emphasizes the perpetual quest for penance, the necessity of work, the importance of self-help, and trust in

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God's providence themes which the Dreamer repeatedly encounters on his search for truth. Since no uniformity of eremitic life exists, Free Will implies that the scope of the eremitic vocation ranges from simple abstinence to extreme self-denial, therefore affirming the significant role of conscience in the Dreamer's quest for salvation. After Reason, Repentance, Piers the Plowman, and Truth teach the Dreamer to know false hermits, then Free Will, the suitable instrument of conscience, instructs the Dreamer through the examples of holy hermits to know the true eremitic ideal. Free Will yokes the eremitic ideal to the lives of the apostles by explicitly stating that true hermits practice apostolic devotion to their vocation and to Christ.

True hermits in real life and Langland's literary Dreamer seek self-knowledge, absolution from sin, and God's amazing grace. Throughout a perpetual, personal quest for God's blessing, wise hermits and the Dreamer in *Piers Plowman* learn to distinguish continence from incontinence, contrition from recklessness, truth from folly. As clean sheep among lewd goats, holy-minded hermits and the Dreamer clearly stand apart from the sinful, wasteful impostors who refuse to practice prudence, temperance, fortitude, and charity in the "fair feld ful of folk." Since conscience determines both the eremitic call and the Dreamer's life-work, devout hermits and the Dreamer appropriately discover Christian bliss through Free Will, while Reason, Repentance, Piers the Plowman, and Truth point their fingers accusingly at false, despicable hermits for the Dreamer's ghostly benefit. In their quests for life everlasting, faithful hermits and

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the Dreamer over and over encounter the censure of unholy hermits, because there is a gulf between the eremitic ideal and the practice of contemporary hermits in real life, between the real world and the literary word, which Langland unites in *Piers Plowman*.

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Notes

1. "Intravit autem rex ut videret discumbentes et vidit ibi hominem non vestitum veste nuptiali et ait illi amice quomodo huc intrasti non habens vestem nuptialem at ille obmutuit tunc dixit rex ministris ligatis pedibus eius et manibus mittite eum in tenebras exteriores ibi erit fletus et stridor dentium multi autem sunt vocati pauci vero electi" (Matt. 22: 11-14).
2. "Gaudeamus et exultemus et demus gloriam ei quia venerunt nuptiae agni et uxor eius praeparavit se et datum est illi ut cooperiat se byssinum splendens candidum byssinum enim iustificationes sunt sanctorum" (Apoc. 19: 7-8).
3. "Ite ecce ego mitto vos sicut agnos inter lupos" (Luke 10: 3). "Adtendite a falsis prophetis qui veniunt ad vos in vestimentis ovium intrinsecus autem sunt lupi rapaces" (Matt. 7: 15). Calling the Lollard poor priests "wolves in sheep clothing," Archbishop Courtenay issues a similar warning to all Christians (Workman II 204). Truth employs the same metaphor in *Piers Plowman* in an attack on bishops who fail to protect their flocks from falsehood: "For many wakere wolues ar wroken into they foldes ..." (IX 259). Truth knows that false prophets, like false recluses, pervert the Christian's endless quest for salvation.
4. "Et erat Iohannes yestitus pilis cameli et zona pellicia lumbos eius et lucustas et mel silvestre edebat" (Mark 1: 6).

5. Piers the Plowman seems to echo St Jerome's explicit comment on bodily mortification: "De cibis uero et potu taceo, cum etiam languentes aqua frigida untantur et coctum aliquid accepisse luxuriae sit" (Ad Eustochium *Ep.* XII 7.2).
6. Although many hermits dress as Friars, Richard Rolle cautions recluses not to assume the habit of a religious order: "The hermit shall have as clothing, according to the ruling of the bishop in whose diocese he resides....He must take care not to adopt the habit of any religious order ..." (Anson *Call* 164).
7. The following eremitic deeds of charity can be found throughout both of Anson's works.
8. Truth refers to the Desert Fathers in this passage; cf. XVII 6-34.
9. At the conclusion of the third day in *The Decameron*, Dioneo graphically depicts the lust of the hermit Rustico for the naive but carnal-minded Alibech in the wilderness of the Thebaid Desert. Although Rustico plunges into lechery because of his proud desire to confront temptation, Dioneo affirms the eremitic ideal in his tale: "Those best serve God who fly furthest from the things of this world, like the hermits who had departed to the solitudes of the Thebaid desert" (Boccaccio 237).
10. Jer. 9: 1-21 Ps. 55: 3-9; 1 Kings 19: 1-9; Mark 1: 2-6; Mark 1: 35; Mark 6: 31-32; and Luke 4: 1-2. Ad Eustochium *Ep.* XII 7.2-3. Kock 4 and 55. *Legenda Aurea* XV,

XXI, LVI, XCVI, CXXX, and CLXXVIII. Nicholas Von Flue, a Swiss hermit also known as "Bruder Klau," reportedly fasts for twenty years, from 1467 until his death in 1487 (Anson *Call* 168).

11. Like Langland's Free Will, Chaucer associates the hermit St. Paul of Thebes with St. Paul the Apostle. Chaucer writes in *The Pardoner's Prologue*: For I wol preche and begge in sondry landes; / I wol nat do no labour with myne handes, / Ne make baskettes, and lyue therby, / By cause I wol nat beggen ydelly (443-46). St. Paul the hermit is a basket-weaver; St. Paul the Apostle is a tent-maker. See Hemingway.